The Russia Program at GW

public sociology laboratory

Resigning Themselves to Inevitability

How Russians justified the military invasion of Ukraine (fall-winter 2022)

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Introduction

As of February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared the beginning of what he dubbed the "special military operation" and the Russian Armed Forces invaded Ukrainian territory. What the Russian authorities assumed would be a swift operation soon became a drawn-out, full-fledged war. Many events occurred over the course of the first year of war, keeping Russians in suspense, forcing them to detach themselves from the situation, giving them hope, and then driving them to despair. When we conducted our first interviews in spring 2022, many thought the war would not last long.

Since then, it has become clear that the war will be with us for a while. The daily life of Russian citizens has been invaded time and again by dramatic events. The Russian retreat from the occupied territories, the annexation of new regions, the bombing of Kiev, the first Crimean Bridge explosion, and the "partial mobilization"—to name just a few. Have these events changed the average Russian's view of the war, and if so, how? How did residents of the Russian Federation perceive the "special military operation" more than half a year later? These questions are the focus of the report you see before you.

There are several research teams monitoring changes in Russian perceptions of the war through opinion polls (for example, Russian field and Chronicles). The work they are doing is very important. However, like any research method, surveys have their drawbacks—there are some things they simply will not show. For example, surveys do not always allow us to understand a respondent's attitude towards sensitive or hot-button topics, as sometimes people have a tendency to hide their true views. But more importantly, for Russians largely removed from the political process, perceptions of such politically-charged issues as the "special military operation," war, and military conflict do not fit neatly into the standardized set of coherent positions that a survey is capable of capturing. These perceptions may be complex and contradictory, and in this case, in-depth interviews and long conversations with people allow us to better understand the idiosyncrasies of each viewpoint. To our knowledge, we are the only team that systematically monitors Russian perceptions of the war using qualitative (interview) rather than quantitative (survey) methods.

We released our first analytical report in September 2022. You can read it here (in Russian) and here (in English). In it, we presented the results of our qualitative study through interviews conducted over several months after the start of the war, in March, April, and May 2022. Our interviewees held a variety of opinions on the military conflict—there were those who supported the hostilities in one way or another (war supporters), those who condemned military aggression (war opposers), and those who tried to avoid giving any explicit assessment of the situation (undecided). We compared these three groups of respondents with each other: how they perceive the armed conflict, what emotions they associate with it, and how they consume information, assess the victims of the conflict, discuss the situation with loved ones, reflect on the consequences of the war, and so on. We have also published the results of this research in analytical media outlets, a few examples of which can be found here, here, and here, as well as in scientific journals, such as those found here (in Russian) and here.

The paper you are currently reading is the second analytical report we have published and a continuation of this research. It is based on qualitative sociological interviews with Russian citizens conducted in fall 2022, from 7 to 9 months after the outbreak of the war. We wanted to determine how Russian perceptions of the war had changed during this period. This time, we excluded subjects who consistently opposed the war from the sample and decided to focus our study on the specifics of perceptions held by Russian citizens who did not have an unambiguous anti-war stance.

We conducted 88 interviews, each of which lasted from 30 minutes to two hours (the majority of these interviews were around an hour long). Among them are some repeated interviews—this means we spoke again with some participants from our first wave of interviews, who were classified in spring 2022 as supporters or undecided. When we analyzed the repeated interviews, we also referred back to the subject's first interview conducted in the spring in order to see how the same subject's opinion had changed after over half a year of war. We also conducted new interviews with subjects we had not spoken to before. As in the first wave of research, during our fall session, we found our subjects through advertisements on social media and through snowball sampling. You can read more about our research and data collection methods in the next section.

This time, we decided not to categorize our subjects as "supporters" or "undecided." The fact is, the lines dividing these two camps are becoming increasingly blurred. Of course, there are still staunch supporters of the war who could hardly be called "undecided." But among our subjects are many who support certain aspects of the "special operation," are uncertain about the necessity of others, and flat out disagree with other aspects. Therefore, we group all our subjects together, but at the same time attempt to show the differences between different types of perception of the war.

This report comprises two parts, aside from the introduction, research methods, and conclusion. The first investigates how Russian perceptions of the war had changed more than half a year after it began. In this section, we often compare the first and second interviews taken with a subject in order to show how their views had changed (if at all). We also address interviews with new subjects and illustrate new trends in perceptions of the war that were practically nonexistent in spring 2022. The second part deals with perceptions of the war in fall 2022. In addition to the overall perceptions of non-opponents, we also analyze their reaction to the announcement of "partial mobilization," their emotions surrounding the protraction of the war, how they consume information about the conflict and how they see it ending. In the conclusion, we present the main findings of the study. Some preliminary results of this second phase of the study have already been published in the media, for example here, here and here.

This study was organized by the Public Sociology Laboratory (PS Lab). The PS Lab is an informal research collective that studies politics and society in Russia and the post-Soviet space from a comparative perspective. The Lab has studied the 2011–2013 "Fair Elections Movement," and then the following post-protest local activism in Russia, the Euromaidan and Anti-Maidan Movements in Ukraine, the 2014 Donbas War, and now, Russian perception of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. You can learn more about the PS Lab's work here.

At the same time, the team conducting this research extends beyond the walls of the PS Lab. The interviews used in this report were conducted by (in alphabetical order) Violetta Alexandrova, Serafima Butakova, Kira Evseenko, Svetlana Erpyleva, Oleg Zhuravlev, Sasha Kappinen, Irina Kozlova, Nadezhda Korytnikova, Alexander Makarov, Vadim Maleiko, Natalia Savelyeva, Vladislav Siiutkin, Yulia Strizhenova, and Igor Chernivsky. Analysis of the data and drafting of the report was performed by Maxim Alyukov, Violetta Alexandrova, Serafima Butakova, Alya Denisenko, Svetlana Erpyleva, Oleg Zhuravlev, Sasha Kappinen, Irina Kozlova, Nadezhda Korytnikova, Anatoly Kropivnitskyi, Darya Lupenko, Natalia Savalyeva, Vladislav Siiutkin, Yulia Strizhenova, and Igor Chernivsky. The report was edited by Svetlana Erpyleva and Sasha Kappinen.

This research project has no clients or outside funding. Such a huge undertaking was made possible thanks to the fact that there are so many of us and each understands the importance of determining how war affects our society. We are all employed in different places and have other projects we worked on in tandem with this one. We are all (with the exception of one researcher in Ukraine) Russian citizens with a variety of political views, but all of us oppose the war. We are aware that our view of the situation does not align with the views of many of our interview subjects. We treat their opinions with respect, withholding judgement, and simply describing and analyzing them from an investigative, sociological point of view. This is why there are so many quotes throughout the text: they are direct quotes from our respondents.

We are grateful to Mikhail Oleinikov for formatting the report. We would also like to thank our friends and colleagues who aided us in our search for subjects. And we would like to thank the interview subjects who agreed to speak with us despite the complexity of the topic and the military censorship throughout the country.

Below, we discuss what data we collected, how we collected and analyzed it, and the limitations of our collection and analysis methods.

Data Collection

We felt the acute need for a second stage of research immediately after the "partial mobilization" was declared in Russia. At that moment, the distant war once again (or for the first time) hit home for millions of Russians, invading their everyday lives. Friends, acquaintances, and even strangers on the street began talking—sometimes whispering—about the war again. We all felt like things were changing. Nevertheless, we knew that even the strongest emotions sometimes fade quickly and may not leave significant marks on people's attitudes. Therefore, we decided to wait a few weeks before starting the second phase of our study.

The majority of the interviews used in this study were conducted between October 11 and December 29, 2022. Two subjects were interviewed later, in late January and early February 2023. Most of the interviews were collected in the second half of October and November 2022.

We used several methods to find our respondents.

Firstly, we approached the supporters and undecided respondents whom we spoke with in spring 2022 with a request for a second interview. Around half of them agreed to speak with us again.

Secondly, we put out an advertisement calling for interview respondents on social media—both on the Lab's page and the researchers' personal profiles. In these announcements, we indicated that we are looking for people who did not identify as staunch opponents of the war, as well as those who thought their views on the war had changed a lot over the previous six months (in any direction).

Thirdly, we relied on the snowball sampling method. We asked all our respondents to recommend a few people whom we could contact and also used our own social media pages to search for potential respondents. We reached out to distant relatives, former classmates, childhood friends, and even former respondents from prior research projects. Since there were more than 20 people on our team (researchers and interviewers), we were able to contact a wide variety of unrelated interview subjects.

This time, with rare exceptions, we conducted the interviews over the internet. The first stage of research revealed that the majority of respondents preferred to meet online, since this way it is easier to find time for the conversation and they feel more secure, more anonymous. We asked our respondents to choose which platform was most comfortable for them. Most of the interviews were conducted via Telegram, some through Zoom, and the rest through WhatsApp. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to two hours, but most conversations lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. With respondent permission, conversations were recorded on a voice recorder and then transcribed by a professional transcriber (always the same person).

All interviews were taken anonymously. In some cases, we essentially did not know the real names of our respondents—we only had their contacts and nicknames or online handles. In cases when the names were known to us, we asked the respondents not to say them during the recorded conversation. After the interviews were transcribed, all personally-identifiable information was removed from the transcripts. Recordings and transcripts are stored on a password-protected cloud service that only researchers have access to. When we quote extracts from interviews in the report (and in other publications), we include them in such a way that it is impossible to identify the respondents—we indicate only gender, age, profession, and the date of the interview.

The interviews were conducted either by professional researchers or by volunteers with (or receiving) an education in the social sciences. Most of the volunteer interviewers had prior experience with us—they had helped us collect interviews in the first phase of our research. All volunteers received detailed interview instructions from the project coordinator.

At this stage, we used two different sets of guidelines (lists of main themes/questions) for the interviews—one for repeat interviews with spring respondents, and the other for interviews with new respondents. These guidelines differed only slightly from each another. Both sets of guidelines included questions about changes in perceptions of the war from the moment it started to the moment the interview was conducted; the mobilization; respondents' methods of consuming and sources for information about the war; their conversations with

loved ones about the "special operation"; their attitude towards the protests, both against the war and against mobilization; and about their view of how the Russo-Ukrainian War might play out. The guidelines for interviews with new respondents also included a block of questions about the respondent's political views in general, and in particular, concerning Russian and Ukrainian relations before February 24th, 2022. (We did not ask these questions in the repeated interviews because we had already discussed this topic with respondents in the spring.)

Half of the supporters and undecided respondents with whom we spoke in the spring of 2022 responded to our request to talk to us again. Some we simply could not reach because we no longer had their contact information (we purposefully neglected to save it in order to protect the anonymity of our respondents). Others did not respond to our messages. Some said no—partly because they found our first analytical report "biased." However, many pro-war respondents had a positive opinion about our first report and gladly agreed to speak with us again. For example, one of the respondents called our first report "a breath of fresh air between the propaganda of one side and the propaganda of the other side" (m., age 25).

Finding new interview subjects was not easy. We encountered the same problems in fall 2022 as we had in spring of the same year—many did not want to discuss the war with researchers for various reasons. One person expressed very concrete fears for his own safety, and not even because he did not trust the researchers: "I have nothing to say. No thanks. I still have family in Russia. I have no doubt about the honesty and anonymity of your colleagues, but I also have no doubt about the quality of the secret police's work" (m., age unknown). An acquaintance of one researcher initially agreed to an anonymous interview, then wrote back a week later to cancel. She explained that her husband was adamantly opposed to any interview by phone (or online messenger)—it was not safe. In her words, after having a few phone conversations about certain topics, she had started to hear a noise in the background of all her calls and that "everything was telling her this was bad news" (f., age 33). An acquaintance of a different researcher, on the contrary, called her back in response to a message to explain why she was not ready to talk on the record. According to her, everything leaves a digital trace and it is impossible to discuss such topics now. Her contract with the university had just been renewed, and she was afraid that they might find out about her giving the interview and fire her (f., age 65).

Many believed that such conversations could be potentially dangerous, but they could not (or did not want to) articulate what exactly this danger was. As an acquaintance of one researcher said in her response to our request for an interview: "I would like to help you, but we live in a certain society, one where you don't want to be participating in social surveys. That's all I can say" (f., age 33). Many people simply didn't want to talk about such a complex, incomprehensible, contradictory topic: "The special operation is a difficult topic. A lot of people I know are for it, and just as many I know are against it. So I'm afraid I'm not willing to speak on the topic" (m., age 40). "I don't actually want to talk about that topic. I don't have any answers" (m., age 35). Of course, we also encountered entirely unexpected reactions. For example, a repost of our public call for interview subjects received the following comment: "Honestly, no offense, but offers like this sound like they're recruiting

for the very same sleeper agents. Where the interview turns into something else" (m., aged approx. 20).

Once again, we want to express our gratitude to all those who agreed to talk with us in these difficult conditions. We promise to preserve your anonymity.

Description of Data

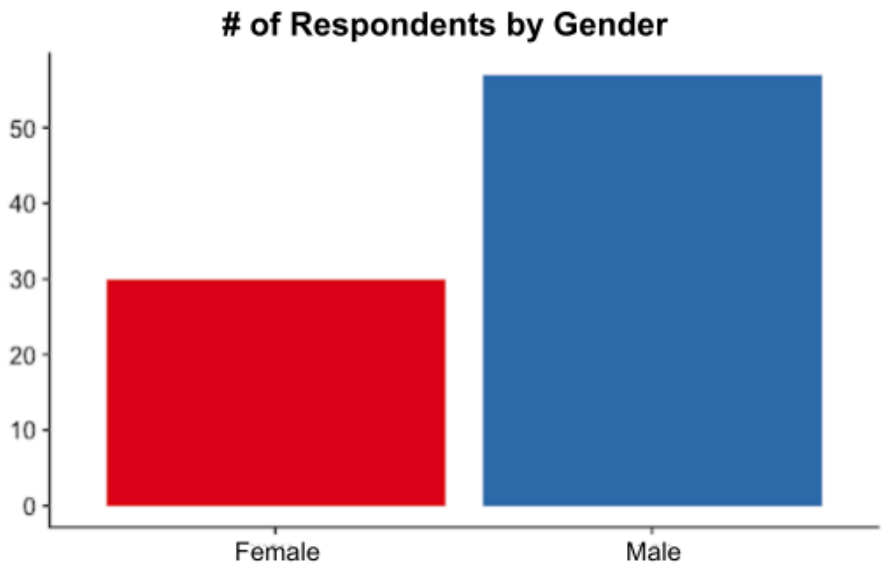
As part of the second phase of our research (in the fall), we conducted 88 interviews with non-opponents of the war; 40 of these were repeat interviews with respondents we had already spoken to in the spring. We were able to speak to 18 out of 29 of the "undecided" subjects interviewed in the spring and 22 out of 40 "supporters" interviewed in the same period. We also conducted 48 new interviews.

Our sample is not representative of the Russian population on the whole—as in the spring, people with a higher degree of education were overrepresented, as were residents of Moscow and Saint Petersburg. This means that it is impossible to say how the "majority" and "minority" of Russians feel about the war based on our data, but it is possible to describe existing attitudes towards the war in society. This description of various attitudes and rationales behind the Russian populace's view of the war does not require hundreds of interviews. Sociologists working with qualitative methods are often guided by the principle of "saturation" when collecting data: as soon as the arguments/reasoning about a phenomenon start to be reiterated within the study and new interviews cease to bring new information, data collection ends. In our data, we see a number of recurring types of reasoning and explanations of the events at hand. These frequently-repeated thought patterns and ways of assessing the war and the course of hostilities allow us to hypothesize about patterns in how different groups of people conceptualize war—mechanisms that lead to one or another type of perception of warfare, casualties, information—despite the disproportionate nature of the sample.

Below, we describe our subject pool according to 5 characteristics: gender, age, education, income, and geographic location. The ratios shown in the graphs below in no way indicate that this is how the gender, age, education, and income of non-war opponents are distributed throughout Russia. On the contrary, it shows the specific makeup of our study sample and the ways in which it is skewed.

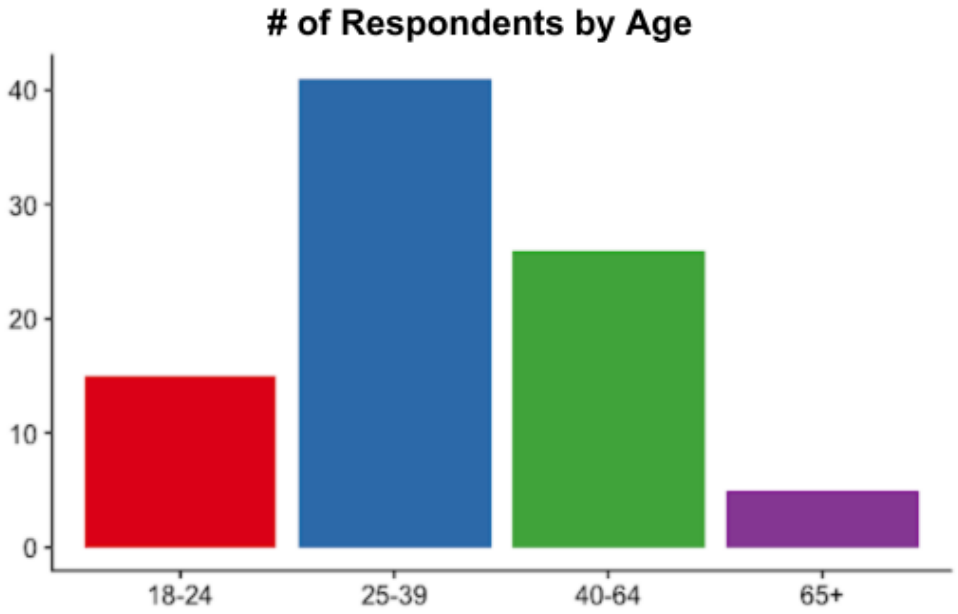
Respondent Gender

Our sample comprised significantly more men than women. This is primarily due to the fact that men are more willing to talk about the war than are women; the latter more often consider themselves incompetent in military-political matters and refuse to be interviewed.



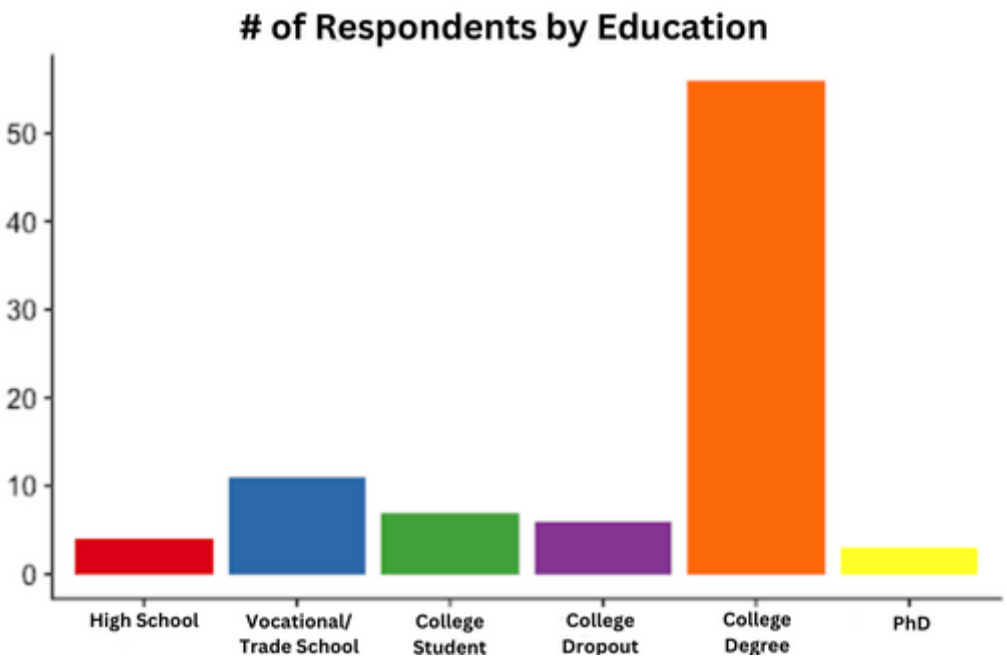
Respondent Age

Almost half of our respondents were between the ages of 25 and 39. There were slightly fewer people under 25 and between 40 and 65. Only a few interview subjects were over 65 years old.



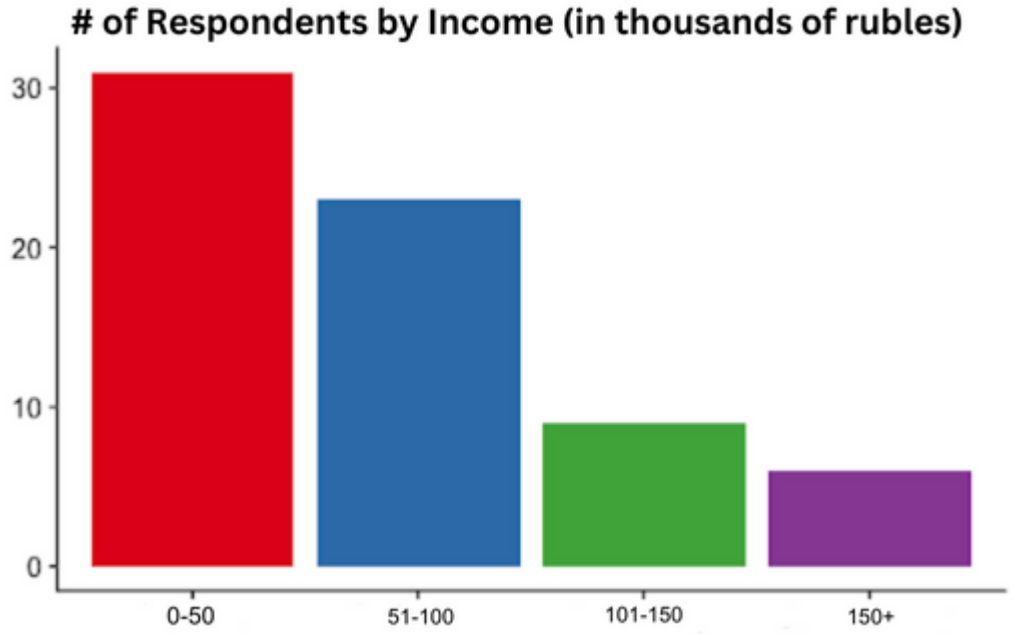
Respondent Education

Our sample contains a disproportionate number of people with higher education degrees. However, a quarter of our respondents were adult Russians who had not received a higher education (that is, those with a secondary, a "specialized secondary" (vocational or trade school), or incomplete higher education degree). Finally, a small portion of our respondents were students and people with doctoral degrees.



Respondent Income

Most of our respondents were mid-level or low-income earners. Slightly more than a third of respondents earned less than 50,000 rubles (approximately US $500) a month, and slightly less than a third earned from 50,000 to 100,000 (approximately US $1,000). The remaining third were those who earned more than 100,000 rubles a month.



Geography of the Study

The map below illustrates the geographic locations of our respondents. In order to protect their anonymity, we did not indicate the smaller cities in which we conducted

interviews—instead, we marked the corresponding capitals of the federal subjects (for instance, Gatchina represents the Leningrad Oblast and Krasnogorsk represents the Moscow Oblast). Our sample is skewed in favor of these two capitals and in favor of the western part of Russia as a whole.

Data Analysis

As in the first report, we processed new data mainly through thematic coding: first, each interview was broken into a set of thematic blocks, and then blocks on the same topic were collected and analyzed. While working on the first part of the report concerning changes in the perception of the war, we often compared relevant thematic blocks from repeat interviews and from initial interviews with the same people.

In the second part of the report, we focused mainly on the interviews we collected in the fall—both repeat interviews and interviews with new respondents—and analyzed the perceptions of the war and practices associated with it without comparing these with spring ones. Each of the five sections in Part Two of the report focuses on a specific topic. We describe differences and patterns we see within each topic: types of rhetorical justifications for war, different ways of emotionally experiencing war, different strategies for consuming information about war, and so on.

Can interviews conducted under military censorship be trusted? We already answered this question in our first report, but we will briefly reiterate here: yes, for several reasons. Firstly, the respondents agreed to the interview voluntarily, and during the interview we created the most comfortable possible atmosphere for conversation. Secondly, the interview itself is a long conversation on various topics, not only about the respondent's attitude towards the war, but also about their experience, emotions, changes in everyday life, and communication with loved ones. Therefore, the respondent's perceptions of the situation, which are sometimes complex and contradictory, become clear after an hour of conversation. Thirdly and finally, the fact that we observed repeated explanations/positions/attitudes across a

number of interviews allows us to capture certain patterns in war perceptions, and individual instances of omission or deception do not affect the overall picture.

Of course, our data and analysis methods have their limitations. As we have already mentioned, unlike representative surveys, qualitative interviews do not lend themselves to speculation about what part of the Russian population perceives events in one way or another. In order to make these speculations, it is necessary to compare the analysis of the qualitative interviews with the results of the representative surveys. Our sample is skewed towards people with higher education from capitals and large cities—it is likely that we are missing some perception types that are characteristic of people from other social groups and from regions that are more geographically remote from the city centers, including regions inhabited by ethnic minorities. We know, for example, that it was in these regions that the truly massive protests against "partial mobilization" were held. In other words, we show some typical ways of perceiving the war in the fall of 2022 and the changes in these perceptions in the seven months since the beginning of the war, but we do not offer an exhaustive description and quantitative assessment of these processes for all Russians.

Part 1. How have perceptions of the war changed (if at all) in fall-winter 2022?

1.1 From disgruntled to loyal: "Stabilization" of perceptions in the first days and weeks

In both the first and second waves of interviews, we asked our respondents to recall and describe moments or periods of time when they experienced the strongest emotions in connection to the war, and also to tell us how and why their attitudes towards the conflict had changed. In both spring and fall, respondents placed particular emphasis on how they experienced the war in its early days. An analysis of respondents' self-reflections shows that the most radical changes among non-opponents occurred within the first days and weeks of the hostilities (somewhat less frequently, within the first one or two months). After that, their attitudes stabilized, and further change usually occurred within a limited range (see section 1.2). In this section, we will focus on this "establishing" stage in the formation of respondent perceptions of the war.

In our previous report, we described the initial reactions to the start of the military conflict in Russia and Ukraine that were typical for different groups of respondents—war supporters, war opponents, and those who were still undecided. Even among strong supporters, only a small portion of the respondents said that they experienced positive emotions at that moment. And only a few said that they had been anticipating the start of the "special operation." For the vast majority of our interviewees in both waves of research—as, apparently, for most Russians in general—the start of the war in Ukraine was an unexpected, discouraging, and out-of-the-ordinary event, the causes, goals, and meaning of which, at least at the initial stages, were unclear. Therefore, in many cases, it took time to form a more or less stable attitude towards the war.

Of course, the strongest negative emotional reactions to the outbreak of the war were observed among the opponents. At the same time, both among supporters and the undecided, we met many people who said that the feelings they experienced at the end of February 2022 were shock and horror. The non-opponents we spoke with during the second wave of the study often shared similar emotions when describing their reaction to the start of the "special operation." So, the experiences of anxiety, fear, excitement, and disorientation in the early days of the war were present regardless of what position a person eventually took.

This in itself is not surprising: as a large-scale event with far-reaching and unpredictable consequences, war is associated with many risks, so concern for one's own future, even among supporters, is understandable. However, the shock and horror, often accompanied by disapproval in its first days and weeks, experienced by those who later began to justify the war, demands explanation. Why did this initial reaction not lead respondents to condemn the war and take an anti-war stance? To answer this question, in the following

section we describe in detail the primary reactions of all respondents from the first and second waves of the study who initially experienced shock and aversion to the conflict, but later did not become opponents of the war.

1.1.1 Initial reactions of non-supporters at the beginning of the "special operation": shock, turmoil, and ethical dilemmas

Many of those who supported or justified the war, or refused to take an unambiguous stance in the interviews conducted in the spring and fall of 2022 describe their emotional state in the first days and weeks of the war as one of shock and inner turmoil:

> "In the initial stages, the main feeling was shock—I couldn't believe I'd lived to see the day." (m., age 40, university administrative worker, November 2022)

> "Of course, for me, it was straight shock. I was really astonished that all this was happening—that was my first reaction, shock and astonishment." (m., age 32, works in high-tech industry, November 2022)

> "When the war started on the 24th, my mother called me early that morning. We live in Belgorod, which, as you know, is on the border with Ukraine. And my mother called and said: 'The war has begun.' And naturally, we were in a stupor, no idea why this was happening. And a strong sense of despair. And this fear, it grew for two or three weeks. It was just unbearably difficult." (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

From the very beginning, the military activities in Ukraine were presented as a "special military operation"—that is, an event limited in time and scale, which was under the full control of the state. Despite this, several respondents independently compared the decision to begin the operation with the pivotal, and in many ways fatal, events of the 1990s: the collapse of the USSR and the outbreak of civil war in the Chechen Republic. These events and the "special military operation" seem to them to be comparable in scale:

> "Well, for the first one or two days, I was a little shocked. The motives weren't immediately clear to everyone, we don't live our lives with consideration of governmental or political matters—we live everyday lives. It was like the decision to dissolve the USSR made without us, like a bolt from the blue. I remember how

Komsomolka put it—'Like a Revolt From the Blue.'[1] This is essentially what my first impression was." (m., age 63, retired, November 2022)

"I was wary because Putin was addressing the citizens directly. You know what I mean, right? Apparently, the situation was such that the president was directly addressing the citizens. Of course, I was afraid! Like when Yeltsin addressed the people in the '90s at the start of the war, that's where we were now—I was experiencing the same thing. It worried me, of course. And then on the morning of the 24th, I wake up at noon, one o'clock and find out that it turns out that Russia has started a war on Ukrainian territory. No, I wasn't scared, I wasn't happy about it, I was just shocked, that's it" (m., age 21, student, October 2022).

Even those who had been following developments in one way or another and had heard of the possibility of an imminent Russian attack on Ukraine admitted that on the eve of February 24th, 2022, they would have considered the possibility of such an attack absolutely incredible and even absurd. On this day, they too experienced shock and horror:

"Yes, I was in shock, because I didn't expect this outcome. In general, I stay away from politics and as a rule don't read that kind of news—I try to remain neutral. But I heard somewhere that everyone seemed to expect this would happen on February 16th. And, consequently, that everyone considered it a joke, no one believed it would happen, it was just American propaganda, and so on. I and most of my friends who discussed it laughed about it. And when it actually did happen on the 24th, yes, my first reaction was shock. I wouldn't say I had any sort of understanding of the situation, I mean, how it would all turn out. But the fact that it had really begun—well, I read about it and thought, 'Wow! That's horrible,' something like that. I was in shock." (f., age 40, project manager, November 2022)

"My friend called from Kiev and said that war had broken out, that he'd woken up to sirens. Naturally, I was in shock, because he and I had discussed the topic before, I basically said that there was no way it could happen, it was all nonsense, just gossip, I didn't believe it. … I laughed about it. I was certain that it was categorically impossible." (f., age 49, works in education, March 2022)

When recalling their emotional state at the moment the invasion began, respondents often used the term "worldview," stating that their "worldview," and not just "world," was

[1] *Komsomolka* (short for *Komsomol'skaya pravda*) was one of the most widely-read newspapers in the USSR. The headline the respondent is referring to is a play on words. In Russian, the phrase "свалиться как снег на голову" (to fall like snow on your head) means "to happen unexpectedly," "out of the blue." In this headline, the word "снег" (snow) was replaced by the initialism СНГ, or the Commonwealth of Independent States in English—an association of former Soviet republics created in 1991 to replace the Soviet Union. In Russian, the word "snow" and the abbreviation "СНГ" are spelled almost the same: they differ by only one letter. The phrase, "like the CIS falling on your head," both visually and acoustically resembles the phrase "like snow falling on your head," and means that the Commonwealth of Independent States "fell like snow on the head" of the Soviet people—that is, it came as completely unexpected.

turned upside down. In this world, war was not supposed to be a way to achieve political goals:

> "When Donbas was recognized, I thought that everything would definitely calm down. When Zelenskyy arrived, I thought so too. In general, I always assumed it would be resolved peacefully. And on February 24th, I was astonished and wondered why everything had gone this way. What a day it was—there were helicopters flying to Kiev all day, starting in the morning, which didn't fit at all into my worldview. I was in a state of shock throughout all of March." (m., age 32, works in high-tech industry, November 2022)

> "My first reaction was a complete lack of understanding of what was going on. And the realization that we, humanity, are living in the 21st century and still operating at such a primitive level, where we solve problems and conflicts not through diplomacy and politics, but through force. The whole world was turned upside down." (m., age 40, university administrative worker, November 2022)

Thus, the events of February 24th destroyed the respondents' basic, fundamental ideas about the reality around them—about what is normal, acceptable, and essentially, what is possible. The events did not fit into the respondents' ideas about ethical norms and came into conflict with their inherent humanistic values. Like the speaker in the last quote, another one of the respondents, a 27-year-old case manager, was shocked that the leadership of his country chose such an aggressive, cruel, and uncivilized method of resolving the conflict:

> "In the early days, I was just horrified by the news I was getting, all this information that was around me. I thought it was just awful what was happening. I didn't expect that in the 21st century, in 2022, I would witness a real war, and that my country would act as the aggressor. Of course, I couldn't imagine this, I was overcome with horror." (m., age 27, case manager, March 2022)

Another one of our correspondents, who after several days of shock and confusion turned into a staunch supporter of the war, admits that he could not imagine that his country would lead an armed attack against a neighboring country, which he, like many people who grew up in the Soviet Union, considered a "brother nation."

> "I was also in shock for the first two days. I was raised well, and when we attacked our brother country, we lived in the same country together for so many years, and suddenly we attacked … When we went to Afghanistan, they [Afghan people] weren't "our people." … When we went there, everyone was calm about it. But when we entered the territory of Ukraine …" (m., age 63, retired, November 2022)

Another respondent, who at the time of the interview refused to give an unambiguous verdict on the war in Ukraine, unequivocally condemned the events from a moral point of view in the early days ("it shouldn't be like this"):

> "My first reaction was that I hoped that it would all come to an end soon, that it was surreal, that it shouldn't be like this, and all countries should try to find some sort

> of quick compromise in all this. In short, I was in shock." (f., age 30, marketing specialist, March 2022)

As we already mentioned above, among not just uncertain respondents, but also consistent supporters of the "special operation," there were those who explicitly objected to the war during the early days of the hostilities:

> "I went through an entire range [of emotions], from hatred for my country to the feeling that I supported it. … I mean, in the beginning I objected to the state's politics. I wished death on Putin. … I believed that we were making a terrible mistake, that we were evil and some kind of … I don't even know. I mean, you understand what I'm saying, right? I think others experienced all these things. You are immersed in guilt, flagellating yourself." (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

> "I was going around, mulling it over in my head and blaming myself for what had happened, that I had a share of the blame as well. … I thought we had gotten here because we had sat back, done nothing. We had allowed our government to behave this way. But this was the tip of the iceberg, and there were deeper reasons." (m., age 32, arborist, December 2022)

As these quotes illustrate, a negative reaction to the military intervention on the territory of Ukraine was sometimes accompanied by a sense of guilt for the actions of the Russian authorities. Another respondent who had doubts about her assessment of the war (despite the claim that she was against the war) also discusses guilt in her interview:

> "I'm against the war, naturally, I feel very sorry for the people who are suffering, because many of us have relatives, friends and acquaintances there. Everyone has someone there. There are few people who have no one in Ukraine. Naturally, I am very worried about these people, I feel a sense of shame, although I'm not sure what personal fault I have in this. Probably the fact that these people stopped being able to sleep in peace, live in peace. And that's my government's fault. So probably something like that." (f., age 49, educator, March 2022)

In other parts of the interview, many respondents admit that if they were the president, they would try to solve the problem of Russian-Ukrainian relations through diplomacy, or, in extreme cases, "bloodlessly," as was done in Crimea. This once again testifies to the fact that they were not staunch supporters of aggressive military measures:

> "Thank God that I'm not at such a high level where I'd have to make those difficult decisions. But, of course, prior to February 24th, I would have made every effort with all governments and diplomats to solve the problem diplomatically, that is, to avoid conflict. But, you see, taking into account the fact that all other parties are not so much interested in this, but are interested in continuing the conflict … That is, all the actions of the Western partners demonstrate that everyone is interested in seeing the conflict develop, in its continuation. I admit that all possible diplomatic avenues have been exhausted. I would try to fight it to the last." (m., age 40, university administrative worker, November 2022)

Between their initial reaction of shock at the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the formation of a supporting stance, justification, or conscious non-involvement, all respondents experienced a period of uncertainty and disorientation. For many, it was accompanied by anxiety, emotional stress, and in some cases, even a temporary break in social interactions. This period, according to the respondents, lasted from several days to several weeks. Our interviewees recall that during this time, they could not fully sleep, eat, or communicate normally with loved ones.

> "I was in hysterics, like all decent people, I was sobbing at the realization that this is how it is." (f., age 52, university lecturer, March 2022)

> "For about two weeks I was in such a state of anxiety, waiting for bad news. … Now, of course, I've gotten used to it, not like at the beginning. Initially, I was really stressed—I couldn't sleep properly, I couldn't eat properly, I was under a lot of stress." (f., age 49, works in education, March 2022)

> "I remember very well how it all happened, how it all began. One of my old friends and classmates called me from Crimea. And she said that troops had been marching through the city for hours. And that her son was on the frontlines near Belgorod. … I was in shock. I probably didn't speak for three days. My daughter called and I said I couldn't talk about anything. <...> Well, emotionally, yes—emotionally, it was very hard to speak. I'm the only Russian in my household, the rest are all Ukrainians. Well, aside from the cat. It's the cat and I and six Ukrainian people."
>
> Q: "Understood. And how did they react?"
>
> A: "The same way. They were in shock, of course, all in shock. I didn't expect it, they didn't expect it. No one expected this decision would be made." (m., age 60, business owner, October 2022)

This evidence suggests that the emotional experiences of our respondents at this early stage can be described by the concept of "ontological alienation" used by social researchers to study the experience of trauma. This state is characterized by the experience of emotional and ideological breaks (as opposed to a sense of continuity), of "falling out" from the world of everyday life and the destruction of habitual routines. All these elements, as we see, are present in one form or another in the experiences of our respondents. This, paradoxically, connects the experiences of non-opponents and opponents of the war.

Even the wording used by some of the non-opponents cited above to describe their initial reaction to the conflict essentially duplicated similar statements made by anti-war respondents. For comparison, here are a few quotes from interviews with those spring wave respondents who consistently spoke out against military action:

> "It was simply crazy. There are simply no words, it was completely surreal. This is worse than fascist Germany, because this was our brother nation. They're essentially like our twin brother." (m., age 38, February 2022)

> "My first reaction was anger, because I didn't understand then and don't understand now how this was possible, that is, how in the 21st century, you can go and attack a neighboring country. I felt anger, hatred for the authorities and everything that was happening." (f., age 18, student, March 2022)

> "First was a terrible sense of shame, the feeling that I was implicated in all this. Terrible shame, I was very ashamed. At first I was crying constantly." (f., age 44, engineer, April 2022)

The sense of shame described in these quotes, the feeling of absurdity in what was happening, the hatred of the authorities and the perception of military aggression as an uncivilized, morally obsolete method of resolving geopolitical differences—we saw all these things in the above quotes, as well as in non-opponents' initial reactions to the news. Even in terms of duration, this initial period of shock and disorientation turns out to be similar for people who subsequently condemned the war and for those who supported it or avoided passing judgement.

The fundamental difference in the behavior of opponents and non-opponents of the war, however, is as follows: while opponents tried to resist growing accustomed to what was happening, non-opponents, on the contrary, began to make active efforts to normalize this new reality.

So, for many non-opponents, the outbreak of the war was a deep shock. This decision, made without their participation, did not fit into their ideas about the boundaries of the probable and the morally acceptable, and did not correlate in any way with their personal interests, needs, or desires. On February 24th, 2022, they all woke up to a new reality, wherein an event that just yesterday had seemed absurd and unbelievable was declared by the state as the only right decision, not subject to discussion (let alone condemnation). At the same time, state propaganda began to vigorously defend Russian military aggression, offering the population a set of rhetorical clichés in order to turn this out-of-the-ordinary situation into a new normal.

As a result, respondents who survived the initial shock and objection to the military aggression, like many of their compatriots, soon began to perceive the war with Ukraine, if not as the new normal, then at least as a justified, inevitable measure. How did this happen? How exactly did the respondents' initial shock and objection to the war transform into support or abstention from judgement?

1.1.2 Reassembling broken worldviews and concern for one's own moral character

Respondents gradually began to work on pulling themselves out of their state of shock and disorientation in order to "return to the world," and in order to do this, they needed to reconstruct it. But instead of condemning, and therefore objecting to the war with Ukraine as something that did not fit into their ideas of the norm (as opponents of the war do), these people, on the contrary, sought to incorporate this event into their updated worldview.

To do this, they began to seek out rational grounds for what had happened. This is how a respondent, who by his own admission could not speak for three days after the start of the war, describes his recovery from this state of shock:

> Q: "And then?"
> A: "Then I started to talk again. What changed? Well, it was irrational. The rationality comes to you, you start to reason things out, naturally. For three days I couldn't think straight, then I started thinking rationally." (m., age 60, business owner, October 2022)

In an attempt to find a reasonable explanation for the shocking event, the respondents borrowed arguments from Russian state propaganda (although their rhetoric does not always coincide with the rhetoric of the state media):

> "Then I simply remembered that Putin had said 'if a fight is inevitable, strike first,' I remember Putin had said this even before. But I needed to understand what this fight was, where it was coming from." (m., age 63, retired, November 2022)

> "At first I was adamantly against the war, I thought that it was absolutely wrong, that this was never the right answer. And then when the shock of the first few days passed, when I started to see what was what … on top of that, the pro-Russian channels were actively covering the events, and learning about this from open sources, not only ours, I understand that in some respect they are right." (f., age 49, educator, March 2022)

At the same time as our previous report, as well as publications based on it have shown, the degree of certainty in the veracity of these arguments varied greatly. The respondents may confidently regurgitate them, and even present them as the results of their own findings, or they may merely express a faint hope that they are true, or express a desire to believe in them.

It is important to note here that the appeal to and appropriation of propagandistic arguments is not at all automatic, but requires certain efforts from our respondents—cognitive, rhetorical, and in some cases even physical—and sometimes ingenuity. These efforts make it possible to overcome the moral conflict and to resolve the ethical dilemmas that we wrote about above.

On February 24th, 2022, the state confronted its citizens with the fact that a military invasion had already taken place. Moreover, it was an invasion of a country that was culturally close to Russia—a country with a huge number of Russian citizens residents at the moment the "special operation" was launched, connected by close familial, friendly, and professional ties.

With the outbreak of war, conceptions of what was possible and permissible were shaken, but this is far from the whole picture. The government's demand to support, or at least refrain from public condemnation of, the attack on their neighbors became for many

Russians a threat to their own moral integrity, to their image of themselves as good people. While adjusting their ideas about the world to correspond to the new reality, respondents at the same time strove to maintain a positive image of themselves.

Below we describe the main techniques used by respondents to fit the war with Ukraine into their new moral order. Each individual respondent employed several of these techniques at once.

"War is bad, I'm not pro-war, but …": Justifying the War

The main technique is attempting to *justify* the war. Justification is a positive verdict, but it is fundamentally different from approval. The very need to justify an action or deed demonstrates that it contains an element of something condemned and morally flawed. Therefore, to justify means to indicate the existence of certain conditions that balance the apparent reprehensibility of an act. From day one, Russian propaganda worked to enumerate the very conditions that would justify the aggressive actions of the Russian government. Our respondents worked to do the same thing, following in the footsteps of the pro-government Russian media.

The logic justifying the war is already contained in the arguments themselves, borrowed by respondents from official sources. We analyzed these arguments in detail from a substantive point of view in our first report. Here, we must note that in all these justifications—the political and economic predestination of the conflict, the provocation of the West/NATO, the advance of the attack on Russia/Donbas, the need to protect the population of Donbas/Russian-speakers in Ukraine, and even reference to some reasons and circumstances unknown to ordinary people—share a common thread. These justifications suggest that Russia's actions were forced and retaliatory. In other words, in all these different versions of events, the Russian Federation was not the instigator of military conflict, but was simply reacting to external stimuli ("we didn't start this war"). In this case, Russia's reaction—in the form of a full-scale military intervention on another country's territory—is not at all the result of a choice from among other equally available options. On the contrary, it is the result of a lack of choice, a lack of alternatives ("we were forced," "we were left with no choice"). Thus, the respondents relieve Russia of responsibility for starting the war. This also allows them to support the "special operation" (or at least refrain from condemning the actions of the Russian authorities in Ukraine), while continuing to insist on the moral unacceptability of war, or acts of aggression and murder themselves:

> "Any decent person, I think, is against war. But, at the same time, I understand that this conflict … is not unwarranted." (f., age 52, university lecturer, March 2022)

> "I, like any sane person, am against killing people, against violence. … Maybe it was a forced measure**.** But I'm not a political scientist, so I don't know." (f., age 30, college teacher, April 2022)

The following statement comes from a respondent who had spent the last hour and a half explaining why a military attack on Ukraine was the only correct decision to which "we were entitled":

> "I also harbor the idea, from a universal, human perspective, that any war is bad. I'm also against war, don't think that I'm pro-war. You didn't get the impression that I was pro-war, did you? I want to understand the [geopolitical] process at play. If you refute the war, then everyone [including Ukraine and NATO] should have refuted it." (m., age 63, retired, November 2022)

As we see, for respondents who support the war, it is very important for them to demonstrate their "normality"—that is, to show the interviewer that supporting the actions of the state does not turn them into bad, aggressive, bloodthirsty people. Therefore, in describing the war as a whole as a morally unacceptable act, respondents are quick to emphasize the fact that there are reasons or circumstances that justify Russia's military actions in Ukraine. Here is how one respondent reasons who believes that the war with Ukraine is a manifestation of the global world crisis:

> "I've already described my attitude**,** my humanity doesn't allow me to accept war or murder, but…First of all, like I said, it's a crisis. Well, what's now being called a crisis." (m., age 60, business owner, October 2022)

This rhetorical device was also used by respondents striving for neutrality who admitted that they did not know the reasons or circumstances behind the decision to invade, but implied (hoped/wanted to believe) that they existed. (For more on this "inferred justification" strategy, see section 2.1.5.):

> "I agree that war is bad, it's terrible, it's shitty. But exactly who is to blame, what led to this, who is more to blame—I believe that this is inappropriate until there is some sort of reliable information." (f., age 49, works in education, March 2022)

This technique allows respondents to remain "decent," "sane" people who do not accept the war as such, but who also do not condemn the "special operation" in Ukraine and, moreover, express support for it:

> "Yes, my position has changed. I won't say that I support military intervention, but as for why it's happening now—I believe there were certain reasons for it. And probably—yes, probably, we should try and strive to somehow solve everything peacefully, through peace talks or something else. But as I understand it, either there was no other way out, or there were things we don't know about and will never know, but there were background causes. That's why it happened like it did. I have a calm attitude towards it now—yes, [the war] exists." (f., age 40, project manager, November 2022)

Even among those who were staunch supporters of the war from the beginning (see a description of different types of non-opponent respondents in section 2.1), people often talked about war as a sad but inevitable outcome of global historical processes:

> "What's happening would have happened sooner or later, unfortunately. In fact, this should have happened based on the events that preceded it, all the

> developments over the past 20–30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union." (m., age 46, business owner, November 2022)

When asked when he thought the war might end, the same respondent made a very familiar moralistic remark:

> "Oof … Well, I really hope it comes to an end as soon as possible. Because there's nothing good [about it]. Only an indecent human being would rejoice about war being waged." (m., age 46, business owner, November 2022)

Thus, while justifying the "special operation" as an inevitable and necessary action, the respondents continued to speak about it in a negative way. For comparison, let us see what approval—which is rare in our sample—and not simply justification of the war, looks like:

> Q: "First question: Tell us how your feelings about the special operation have changed in this time? Were there any moments when you experienced strong emotions, or maybe your feelings changed during the special operation … ?"
> A: "Emotions—of course I feel pride for my country, for Putin's actions, let's just say, for Putin's arsenal. The rest, I don't know what it is. I'm proud, in any case."
> Q: "You're proud?"
> A: "Yes, at the moment—yes. I mean, from the beginning of the special operation." (m., age 68, retired, November 2022)

As we can see, this way of reasoning about the war is fundamentally different from all the previous statements. There are no reservations or regrets, and there is no hint of a need to search for circumstances to justify the war. The respondent speaks about the war in a positive way, without trying to defend his own moral character. It is significant that in his statement the war is not an action that happened almost of its own accord (as all the previous respondents speak about it, without exception), but rather the result of the decisions of a specific person—President Putin.

So, most of our respondents actively sought convincing justifications for Russia's military actions in Ukraine. The following quote aptly illustrates this search:

> "Naturally, it came as a shock to me. For about two weeks I was in such a state of anxiety, expecting more bad news. I read the news endlessly, to this day, searching for something good that would justify the actions of our government. Now, of course, I'm already used to it, not like I was at the beginning." (f., age 49, works in education, October 2022)

This example once again demonstrates that the process of assimilating the official state viewpoint on the war by future non-opponents is not like a "zombie" being "brainwashed" with propaganda. In this case, respondents are by no means passive consumers of propaganda clichés. They actively participate in seeking them out, interpreting them and imbuing them with meaning.

"There is always a war going on": Normalizing the War

The next rhetorical strategy, often used simultaneously with the previous one, is the normalization of war, presenting it as a natural phenomenon. In this interpretation, not only the war in Ukraine, but war in general, starts to be conceived of as an unpleasant and destructive but unchangeable feature of public life: "There's always a war going on."

> "As for how my thoughts developed further, as April, then May came around—I'll say this much: during that period, my opinions fundamentally changed and now I'm not saying I support it—as a matter of principle, I don't support military intervention, but I started to relate to it like it was really happening. And besides, there is war in a lot of countries, there's always someone fighting someone else somewhere, someone attacking, someone killing, someone dying because of it, someone raping, someone robbing, it's just one of the recurrent events that happens in the world." (f., age 40, project manager, November 2022)

Only recently has the concept of war, which was previously deemed unacceptable and unimaginable in our modern world by many respondents, become the norm, while peace is a deviation from it:

> "I understand that it's very simple to say, 'I'm for world peace.' And I am for world peace. And when have we ever seen it? Well, they held out for as long as they could…" (f., age 42, university lecturer, November 2022)

In the next quote, the respondent completely reverses the script on an argument familiar to many interviewees—that war should not exist in the 21st century. From her point of view, there has been continuous war throughout the 21st century:

> "And I won't go into hysterics about the fact that everything should be solved without war. Because nothing is solved without war. For all the time I've lived on this earth, I don't remember a single day without war. There hasn't been one. There's always a war going on, which means it's human nature, since it's always happening. And I, of course, won't go into hysterics about the fact that, well, to put it kind of childishly, that it's the twenty-first century and things should be solved peacefully, but I understand that in the twenty-first century, we haven't seen a single day without war**.** The only question is what are the goals, what's it all for …" (f., age 52, university lecturer, March 2022)

The respondents reject their moral opposition to the war as a display of infantilism (to insist on a peaceful resolution of conflicts is "childish") and narrow-minded perspectives. Wars are constantly being waged and we just don't think about them because they don't concern us personally:

> "Look, listen, war in general, in principle, has been going on for a very long time. This one, that one, constantly, even though we didn't do anything, because we were asleep. … I'm also 32. When you and I were born, there was already a war going on. It was already dying down. You and I have lived through at least 4 wars: the First Chechen War, the Second Chechen War, the Russo-Georgian War, so basically … and besides that, there are still a whole shit-ton of other wars, to put it briefly. …

> It's just that this conflict has a more tangible, global character for us. That's all." (m., age 32, arborist, December 2022)
>
> "This isn't just happening in our country—other military conflicts have happened and are currently happening. It's simply that this time, it touched us directly. Beforehand, I didn't think much about everything that was happening, but now I have to, because it has now affected us all, and we live with the awareness of what is happening." (m., age 40, university administrative worker, November 2022)

The construction "it touched us" once again presents the war as an event for which no one is responsible.

"This is how everyone acts" and "the world is imperfect": Nihilism

Another strategy for coming to terms with war is deciding to lower expectations of the world around you. In this case, coming to terms with the war is accompanied by disappointment in humanistic values as naive and divorced from reality:

> "And I understand the value of human life, and I know that life before this was founded on that, all sorts of social projects, everything was based on the value of a single human life. But now I feel like, in reality, these were always the milestones of history. It has always been that way. And it's just during times of peace that you have the illusion that a single human life has value. But then, when something like this happens, you realize that it was always an illusion, that in fact, we are always living through some kind of historical milestone. Yes, I mean, I'm talking about the inevitability of the Russian Army's involvement in this." (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

As a result, respondents give up faith in their moral ideals and resign themselves to the fact that the world is not as good as they thought it was. Here is how a respondent, who was initially outraged that in the 21st century "humanity" is still "at such a primitive level" as to resolve conflicts through the use of force, describes the change in his perception of the war in Ukraine:

> "Clearly, our real values so far are power, money, and influence. … After a while, I just accepted the current reality that this is how the world has changed." (m., age 40, university administrative worker, November 2022)

For another one of our interviewees, this devaluation of moral ideals was expressed in a change in his negative attitude towards Putin, which had been characteristic for him in the past, towards one of greater loyalty:

> Q: "How has your attitude towards Putin changed from February 24th to today? Has it changed?"
>
> A: "Let's put it this way, while at first I considered him a relatively old man who was a little out of his mind, now, looking at how the world treats us and at the

> actions of other heads of state, I got the impression that he's not the only one in the world like this, and that, apparently, it's normal that people like him are generally the ones in politics, unfortunately." (m., age 25, profession unknown, October 2022)

The aggressive behavior of the Russian government, which angered many of our respondents in the early days of the war, soon began to be perceived as normal, typical ("everyone is bad"), not surprising. The condemnation of these actions in terms of humanistic ideals already seems hypocritical to some respondents:

> "Initially, I was strongly opposed, because our state policy is one that oppresses everything it can, and everything it can't, it recognizes as a foreign agent. But then, after gaining a little understanding of the situation and how other countries have done in their own turn, other military operations, I understood that no one is a saint. So now I take the stance of not being for or against the war, it's a kind of undecided position. … Because initially the rhetoric went that Russia is the aggressor, that it's the only country waging wars of conquest in the 21st century. However, we also had Syria, and on the part of the United States, the war in Iraq and various other conflicts that were never really widely covered. And the global community had virtually no reaction to these events. And here, in fact, the same thing is happening (well, in my worldview), but everyone is up in arms against it. This is strange, it's a kind of hypocrisy, I think." (m., 25 years old, profession unknown, April 2022)

> "… therefore, from the point of view of global geopolitics, all these universal human values are fairy tales, sugar-coated lies. And people have died, and much worse, during peacetime. So it's all relative." (m., 63 years old, retired, November 2022)

With this logic, a world without war is an unattainable ideal, and striving for it is naive and harmful idealism:

> "Well, there's the concept of 'idealism' and there's 'realism.' … And idealism is the right idea, no one will argue against eternal peace for all countries, all races, all people living happily, like in heaven. … But the world isn't that simple. Whoever has the weapons has the power to oppose the law. Well, the world isn't perfect. And that's why Kasparov, a chess player, why he's an idealist in the purest sense of the word? He came up with some incomprehensible scheme in his head, about a free Russia, where they constantly hold a congress of Free Russia in Vilnius. Because Kasparov moves chess pieces. And each chess piece has its own strength, its own capabilities. So to transfer this thinking to society and to think it's exactly the same—it's so naive! The world is much more complicated." (m., age 63, retired, November 2022)

"It has already happened": Resignation

Finally, the last of the frequently encountered strategies that respondents use to integrate war into their worldview and "clear their conscience" is the acceptance of war as a given, as an inherent part of the new social reality, which they have no chance of influencing:

> "I don't support military intervention, these violent measures. But since it already happened, it happened, and there's nothing I can do to influence it." (f., age around 40, profession unknown, April 2022)

> "Yes, you could say that [opinion] has changed from denying the reality of what is happening. And now I perceive reality as it is. As for now? Now I am among the supporters of the special operation. I have come to the conclusion that this conflict was inevitable." (m., age 40, university administrative worker, November 2022)

These respondents do not want to constantly experience negative emotions and be opposed to something that cannot be changed—so they decided to come to terms with the new reality:

> "My negative attitude was about the fact that it had all begun. Then I realized that since it had begun, I needed to somehow resign myself to it, because (a) there's not much that can be done to prevent it and (b) the negative emotions that arise, they interfere with productivity, interfere with the daily course of life." (m., age 24, profession unknown, March 2022)

The rhetorical strategies and methods of reassembling the destroyed worldview described above may be used by respondents at the same time, sometimes even within the same line of reasoning. Here is an example:

> "I see it as something inevitable, and very painful, a very difficult decision, but inevitable. The agreements haven't been respected for a long period of time. And there's the concept of the peacekeepers, you know. We lived a long time without war, thinking we would live like this forever. But it turns out that there is always war, it always exists somewhere on the planet. It has just been far away from us. Or relatively close, but it didn't touch us. Yes, it's terrible, disgusting, but it happened, and we will simply suffer from it for decades. But it happened, it was inevitable. The question is how we cope with it. And I see the participation of the Russian Army in this as something inevitable: disgusting, difficult, but inevitable." (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

In this interview fragment, the recognition of the negative moral status of war ("it's terrible, disgusting") and its inevitability (a justificatory way of talking about war) is complemented by the normalization of war as a natural phenomenon ("there is always war"), as well as an emphasis on its irreversibility ("it happened").

***

So, for many non-opponents of the war, the outbreak caused a deep sense of shock. The war did not fit into their basic ideas of what is normal, possible, and probable. Military

intervention on the territory of a neighboring "brotherly" state contradicted their understanding of morality and ethics.

The state of shock, disorientation, and "falling out" of reality that the respondents experienced in the first days and weeks of the war, their rejection of what was happening from a moral point of view, brings them closer to opponents of the war. Unlike the latter, however, these respondents do not reject war because it doesn't fit into their notion of the norm—on the contrary, they make a conscious effort to normalize it. Although all of them in one way or another turn to state propaganda to justify the war, the assimilation of these arguments does not occur passively, by inertia, as anti-war Russians often imagine, but reflexively. Non-opponents of the war are actively involved in searching for, interpreting, and filling in the meaning of the arguments justifying the war, thereby normalizing it.

In addition, in order to normalize the situation and rebuild their destroyed worldview, non-war-opponents use a number of rhetorical strategies—after all, the support the government demands for an act they deem as morally unacceptable threatens their image of themselves as good people. Thus, an obligatory component of the respondents' reasoning about the inevitability and predestination of war, which until recently seemed absurd and incredible to them, is the clause "I am against war, but …" It allows non-war-opponents to insist on the unacceptability of military aggression as a way to resolve conflicts while not condemning, and sometimes actively supporting, the war with Ukraine. Combining this technique with several other rhetorical strategies allows respondents to remain "decent" and "sane" people without condemning the war.

In this way, support for war is often based not on moral numbness or immorality, but on moral compromise.

1.2. Changes in war perceptions throughout the year

Contrary to the expectations of many supporters, Russia's invasion of Ukraine did not end within weeks or months. The protracted war is creating a new reality before our eyes. The international component of this reality (or at least, the part of it that does not include things going on behind the scenes) is plain to see: it is discussed in the media and in public forums. But less and less is known or understood about what is occurring within Russia and in Russian society. The country is isolating itself from the world, there is no public discussion about the war, and the gap between those who have "left" and the "remaining" is growing. The events taking place on the battlefield, the failures of the Russian Army and the tightening of Western sanctions, the confused explanations of the authorities about why Russia is fighting and the repression the Russian government applies to stifle dissent, as well as the emergence of a new community of "angry patriots" and the polarization of views on war in society—all this is changing society itself and individual people within it. How have perceptions of ordinary Russian citizens, who do not flat out oppose the war in Ukraine, changed in relation to the protraction of the conflict over many long months? This section is devoted to answering this question.

In this section, by comparing the interviews taken in the spring and fall with the same people, we will show: how our respondents' assessments of the military operation have changed (though some did not change); how people justified war in the spring and fall; how old justifications were imbued with new meaning and how new justifications appeared; how the announcement of the "partial mobilization," after which the distant war once again seemed close, affected attitudes towards the military conflict; and how new collective emotions associated with love for one's country were formed in Russian society. Finally, we will reflect on how changes in society and in the lives of individuals contribute to perceptions of the war.

1.2.1 How views of the war both have and have not changed

Based on the results of the spring interviews, we categorized our respondents as supporters of the war, opponents, or those who were undecided about their attitude towards it. In the fall, we did follow-up interviews with the respondents we considered to be either supporters or undecided. A comparison of interviews taken with the same people six months later showed that once their assessment of the war more or less "stabilized" during the first month (see 1.1), it did not change dramatically, with rare exceptions. In other words, as the military conflict continues to drag on, supporters do not become opponents or vice versa. However, the degree or "shades" of support for, or withdrawal from or rejection of the events happening, may change over time.

Staunch supporters: Inspired by the results or disillusioned with the nature of warfare without losing confidence in its necessity

As the war unfolds, its supporters may become either more or less optimistic about what is happening. In other words, their support may become more apologetic or even more critical, depending on how they evaluate the individual components of the events happening—the way warfare is being conducted, the situation on the frontlines, or the personal or social consequences of the "special operation."

Among the staunch supporters are those whose support for the "special operation" was solidified by the idea that it was important and necessary for Russia. This can be seen, for example, in the way supporters evaluate the consequences of the war. In the first wave of interviews conducted in the spring, one of our respondents, a 27-year-old sound engineer who confidently speaks out in support of the war for ideological reasons, at the same time focuses on the negative consequences:

> "In that regard I agree with Gromyko [Soviet politician]. He had a great phrase: 'Better 10 years of negotiations than one day of war.' In that regard I am in complete solidarity with him. So naturally, I'm against this crap, because the consequences are just beginning. And I'm not talking about the dollar rising, or anything like that. No. The whole world now hates our country." (m., age 27, sound engineer, March 2022)

In the repeated interview, however, when responding to the same question, he instead emphasized the positive consequences:

> "Now Russia's becoming a country that's definitely not for the weak, and that pleases me most of all. Whoever wants to can endure anything. And whoever wants comfort, tranquility, coziness—sorry, we're not about that. Is it good or bad? It just is. … Some of the people I know think the same, although they were against this whole thing. But they've somehow worked it out together. And what makes me happiest of all is that we managed not to bicker with each other. We somehow managed to find a common language, because everyone's in the same shitty situation, we need to work through it somehow, something like that. So far, only positive changes." (m., 27 years old, sound engineer, October 2022)

In redoubling their support for the war, people can become more radical and bitter in their view of "opponents" and "enemies," including towards the civilian population of Ukraine. In the first interview with the sound engineer we quoted above, his support for the war was coupled with sympathetic statements addressed to the Ukrainians:

> "I mean, imagine the situation somewhere in Ukraine. Just a simple worker. He does his job, and however Uncle Vova [a clear reference to Vladimir Putin, *ed*.] decides to solve his problems with Zelenskyy is completely tangential to his life. He just comes to work every day. I mean, from your average Joe's point of view, everything that's happening now is a disaster. So, from this point of view, I absolutely agree with ordinary citizens that ordinary citizens shouldn't suffer from all this stuff." (m., 27 years old, sound engineer, March 2022)

In the repeated interview, his sympathetic tone is replaced by an aggressive one:

> "Occasionally I interact with people from over there, but after they write 'Glory to Ukraine!' I cut all ties. Well, it's their right … If they like acting like that, by all means. But then don't go whining about why they're shooting missiles at you, that's all." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

Some staunch supporters of war, on the contrary, became pessimists. Six months later, they began to criticize the course of the "special operation"—they were not happy about the protraction of the conflict, the general disorder in the military, the indecisiveness of Russia's actions, the partial mobilization, and so on. However, these people never ceased to support the idea of the need to continue the war. They seemed to become critical supporters.

For example, one respondent, a Russian nationalist, supported the war because he believed that historically Russian territories (eastern Ukraine) should "return" to Russia. The tone of the first interview, conducted in March, was positive. He welcomed the beginning of the "special operation" with joy, believed that it was necessary, and had a positive assessment of the consequences:

> "Everyone has been trying to persuade our Supreme Commander-in-Chief to launch this operation since November. Well, it's more of a relief that it's finally begun. … The consequences are simple—Ukraine will be accepted into the EU, but only in part. … For Russia, depending on what they give Russia. If they give up the Left Bank, then from the Left Bank on, all of these Russian regions, then this is very good. We'll add

> at least 15 million Russians to the population. In any case, by my estimations, the consequences for both Ukraine and Russia are exclusively positive. … Oh, I'm so happy, of course. The sanctions actually bring me a lot of joy! They did what inconsistent Putin was unable to do. … They finally did it, they'll finally start keeping the money here, building clinics and hospitals here, and so on, getting treatment here, living here, and so on and so forth. It's superbly simple." (m., age 50, circus manager, March 2022)

In the second interview, he hardly talked about why the war was necessary. Instead, he emphasized the need to finish it. The tone of the second interview is pessimistic with a tinge of fatalism:

> "Well they just announced the mobilization … I'm really concerned that this will never end, it's really terrible, people are dying on both sides. … I say that in the grand scheme of things, nothing came of it in the long run … The Kherson Oblast was recognized, but we don't have Kherson anymore. No hint of humanity remains. I say they're going to leave Crimea too. They will agree on some next grain deal and leave Donetsk, surrender, betray everyone. … Yes, naturally, there's a general state of anxiety and depression surrounding it. You can see that it's being drawn out, it's like a dying grandmother … She just lies there and you can't toss her out and nothing can be done" (m., age 50, circus manager, October 2022)

It is important to emphasize, however, that critical supporters, regardless of how pessimistic their assessments of specific details of the situation are, remain supporters of the war with Ukraine as an idea and as a solution—come what may, they remain staunch supporters. Thus, the previous respondent, who likened the "special operation" to a dying grandmother and confessed to constant anxiety and depression because of the war, nevertheless dreams that Russia will take more decisive action on the frontlines and that the war will end in a Russian victory:

> Q: "Has your assessment changed? Do you still hold the opinion that launching the special operation was necessary, or has anything changed in that regard?"
> A: "No, not in—no. I'm more concerned about the pace, that it should be done properly, faster and so on and so on. That's what I think … Well, I'm not a military expert, but I think that it would reduce casualties on both sides. … I gave an example, there's a guy on LiveJournal with the username Bogemik, maybe you've heard of him … He's put it in pretty plain words a few times. He thinks it would be good if the first thing was massive strikes on energy, transport [hubs]. Then a contingent, preferably like a foreign legion, in Kiev, if there's anyone left to negotiate with. Then they sign the surrender, then the police units, and so on." (m., age 50, circus manager, October 2022)

Massive strikes on energy infrastructure and a special contingent to take Kiev are what the dispirited (but staunch) critical supporters are waiting for.

Hesitant supporters: Weary of the war, but continuing to justify it

Just like staunch supporters who turn into optimists or pessimists over time, supporters who are uncertain—hesitant supporters—may experience a slight change in perception of the events in either direction. Some complain about being weary of the war and want it to end as soon as possible and by any means, while others, also complaining of being weary of the war, still believe that it must continue.

An interview with a 34-year-old marketing specialist from Moscow illustrates the former trend quite well. This young man was an opposer before the war—he rallied in support of jailed dissident leader Alexei Navalny, monitored the elections to prevent electoral fraud, and spoke out against the corrupt Russian government. He reacted negatively to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and argued about it with his pro-Russian parents living in Donbas. But the events of February 24th, 2022, radically changed his attitude. He felt that while his country—as well as his family from Donbas—was suffering through these difficult times, he should be with his family and country. In the first interview, taken in the spring of 2022, he stated that he had seen enough war over the past 8 years and had grown accustomed to it, and that the exacerbation of the conflict and its subsequent end was better than a sluggish, "eternal" military conflict. In the repeated interview in the fall, he had come to terms with the growing divergence between his views and the views of his former comrades in the opposition. He had ceased to be "ashamed" of his support for the war and said that he had "established" his pro-Donbas position and "accepted" it:

> "I have definitely become calmer about everything. In the beginning I was in such an agitated state—not negative, but certainly a surge of emotions. Now everything has calmed down. … I'm convinced that I did everything right." (m., age 34, marketing specialist, October 2022)

On the other hand, he shifted the focus of his reflections on the war from trying to explain or justify it to affirming that it must end. Of course, he preferred the ending where Russia wins, but by the fall of 2022 even a Ukrainian victory seemed like a better outcome to him than the prolongation of the military conflict:

> "I want a definitive ending—either Russia wins, which is of course what I want, or Ukraine wins, which I don't want, but no matter what I have [to] come to terms with, at least there will be certainty." (m., age 34, marketing specialist, October 2022)

Moreover, he carefully formulated the following thought: maybe (although it is terrible to imagine) the war was not entirely necessary and the government could have put more effort into peace negotiations:

> Q: "If you were Putin and you could turn back the clock, what would you have done on February 24th and afterwards in terms of relations with Ukraine?"
>
> A: "It seems like they should have made it clear what would happen if the West and Ukraine didn't enter into negotiations—about Donbas, the sanctions, and some other issues. You get the feeling that they wanted all this. You get the feeling that Putin

> wanted war. It could have been a 'Chinese final warning.'[2] The day before, in January, they gave an ultimatum, but it didn't look like something they'd really be able to work with. And then, all of a sudden, the war broke out. I understand, on one hand, the importance of surprise. On the other hand, they could have said: 'If you don't [and come] to negotiations, then we will bomb you, there will be a bloody massacre, we will stop at nothing, we will achieve our goals by war.' They could have started with that, in my opinion." (m., age 34, marketing specialist, October 2022)

In other words, the respondent did not like the prolongation of the military conflict, he wanted it to end, and he was no longer confident about the necessity and inevitability of the beginning of the war, but at the same time, he finally "accepted" his own support for the war, had ceased to be ashamed about his position in front of opposition-minded friends, and in some cases, had even doubled down on his support.

Many hesitant supporters of the war and those whom we called "undecided" in our first report, despite being tired of the "special operation," say that continuing it had since become a necessity ("if you started it, you've got to keep going"). Their perception of the military conflict seemed to be shifting more towards support for Russia's actions, although they had not yet become staunch supporters of the war either. These respondents, despite having a slightly more favorable attitude towards the "special operation" than in the spring, nevertheless continued to express uncertainty about the causes and goals of the war, worried about its consequences, and so on.

For another illustration of this shift, we turn to the spring and fall interviews with a student at a prestigious Moscow university. In her spring interview, she deliberately maintained a neutral stance. She said that she was surrounded by people with different views, which she listened to and could not decide. She did not like the emerging split in society in general and did not want people to fight or sever ties simply because of a distant war:

> "You recently put out a call for research subjects who were undecided in their attitudes towards the 'special operation,' and that's the situation I find myself in. My social circle was split in two essentially equal parts. Some say we should withdraw the troops immediately and put an end to it all. Others say: 'When will they finally open Donbas up to volunteers?' and are preparing humanitarian aid [for Russian soldiers], doing those sorts of things. And the weekend after [the outbreak of the war] a bunch of super excited people from both sides came over to my apartment and I didn't know how I'd manage … Given the fact that everyone had all sorts of different ideas and conceptions, and they all argued their position rather logically, but I try not to take a stance on this issue. … I try very hard to maintain a neutral position. I'm a historian, and I believe that I'm entitled to my own opinion, actually. I guess I can get emotional if a lot of my friends start to take a stand. … But I try to prevent that, because it's already emotional … There are so many people going crazy, I don't want to be one of them." (f., age 21, student, April 2022)

[2] An expression that refers in Russian to a warning that carries no real consequences.

In the repeated interview in fall, she had strayed far from her former neutrality. This shift came about under the influence of her pro-war friends (her anti-war friends had all left Russia). She felt that she should be on the side of those who remained, and ended up leaning towards supporting the war:

> "Many of my friends are for the war. Now I'm interacting with people who aren't exactly pro-war, they wouldn't say that war is awesome. Those who remained, they believe that the war is terrible, but since it has begun, they'll clearly have to participate. At first I thought this was crazy. When two of my best friends from university, very smart guys, said that they were planning on volunteering to go to the front, the first thing I said was: 'Are you crazy? Go see a psychiatrist. You need to be medicated.' Then we talked about it a little, and I found out this meant something to them, because if there is a war, they must protect their country. I tried to maintain my neutral stance, but I failed. … I completely understand why the people who left did, but I'm on the side of those who stayed, and they are ready to go to war if necessary. I can't explain why they feel this way, something to do with patriotism, I guess. If our country is at war, this is very bad, but if we lose this war, it will be even worse. We didn't start it, but we have to end this war." (f., age 21, student, November 2022)

Nevertheless, this respondent cannot be called a war supporter in the strict sense of the word. Firstly, in recognizing her shift from neutrality to support, she is dissatisfied with the changes in her own viewpoint. Her acceptance and support of the war is coerced (which she directly states in the interview - "must," "bad … but it will be even worse"). She would like to remain neutral, and she is afraid that it is becoming more and more difficult to do so:

> "And now you might be doubting who you're with, like I'm doing, but there will come a point, and it's quickly approaching, when you have to say what side you're on. I'm personally very scared of this moment … Now I'm scared that I'll have to choose between people. And I'll probably have to go somewhere because of it. I'm not afraid of NATO tanks in Moscow, because I don't believe it will happen. But people come up to me and ask, 'Where have you donated? Did you read [the independent, foreign-published, online Russian newspaper] Meduza? Are you with us or with them?' This situation is unacceptable and very frightening to me. … And now I'm getting more scared, and spending a couple of years somewhere far away, getting a diploma and being ready to start working, studying, sounds like a good idea, considering that civil war might break out. I'm not ready to choose a side. I'm still young." (f., age 21, student, November 2022)

Secondly, she still does not like the war, wishes "it had never started," and does not see a potentially positive end to this conflict—including if Russia wins:

> Q: "How might the military conflict with Ukraine end and how would you like it to end?"
>
> A: "I would prefer it had never started. That would have been the best option. I've already said that Russia will lose and remain occupied by NATO, but I don't really

> believe that, because I don't understand what NATO wants with Russia. I'm afraid that Ukraine and the Donbas zone might crumble into tiny pieces, not under anyone's control, like in Somalia. There's little pleasure to be gained from this, because territories under no one's control generate huge economic and political problems. On the other hand, if it ends in a Russian victory … I have a friend who's a logistics specialist, and he says that there will be very few people left there, the infrastructure will be destroyed and it will be insanely expensive to rebuild. And who will do this rebuilding is unclear. Technically, it should be young people like me." (f., age 21, student, November 2022)

Thus, on the one hand, this girl had departed from the neutrality she expressed in the spring and had been forced to take "her country's side." On the other hand, she was tormented by this change in viewpoint, which she would prefer not to make, and the war continues to cause her bewilderment and fear. Among those we labeled as "undecided" in our first report are respondents who were largely unhappy with the war. Had their viewpoints changed by fall?

Undecided Opponents: More Frustrated, but Still Undecided

Some respondents who experienced negative emotions surrounding the war in the spring, but nevertheless shied away from taking an unambiguous stance, had begun to perceive the war even more negatively by the fall.

This can be clearly seen in two interviews with a 30-year-old man who worked in the office of a private American company in the spring, and lost his job due to the war (namely, due to the company relocating) during the summer. In the first interview, in the spring, he, like many respondents—and not all of them opponents of the war—gave a negative assessment of the war's mortality rate:

> "One thing is entirely clear: human life is priceless and I think military intervention of any sort is the wrong way. … It is difficult for me to draw any conclusion, to say who's right and who's to blame, but it is quite obvious that any action taken is the result of incompetent work—I mean on the part of the negotiators." (m., age 30, profession unknown, March 2022)

At the same time, he does not assign guilt to any party, and prefers not to give an assessment of who is right or wrong:

> "I'll say right off the bat that my stance isn't the most correct, I think; it's not the most active. My stance is that I objectively realize that I don't know the situation. I am well aware of the saying that history is a political prostitute. … I really do not know where the truth lies. I really can't believe any one person in particular. I know that I am not close enough to the Russian authorities, or to the global authorities in general, to be able to really assess this whole situation. … Now I just realize that my knowledge is negligible. And it is very difficult to draw any conclusions about who is somehow to blame. You yourself, I think, are well aware that many people have

> interests involved. And to say that one side is right and the other is wrong would also be improper." (m., 30 years old, profession unknown, March 2022)

This man opened his fall interview with the words "in general, I was against it then, and my stance remains the same." That being said, as evidenced by his previous quote, he could hardly be called an opponent when it first began. The tone of the second interview was much more depressed than the tone of the first: over the previous six months, the respondent lost his job due to his company relocating, found a new job, and was forced to quit because, under pressure from his girlfriend and mother, he decided to leave Russia after the announcement of the draft. This decision itself was not easy for him—he still felt like a "draft-dodger," someone who runs away from his problems. But even in the fall of 2022, despite the obvious negative turn in his attitude towards the war, he could not definitively be called an opponent. Although he was unconvinced by the explanations offered by the Russian authorities for the invasion of Ukraine, he still admitted that there may be justifications:

> "Maybe there's some sort of positive aspect to all this. Maybe they really did free some people there, maybe they really were being oppressed. I haven't witnessed this myself, but I've heard many times that it's hard for the Russian-speaking population [in Ukraine]. But I wasn't actually there, so it's hard for me to judge. But the number of people who died in the course of all this—I don't think anything can cover that." (m., age 30, profession unknown, temporarily unemployed, October 2022)

Another thing was drawing him closer to the supporter camp—he viewed this conflict as primarily one with the West, and not with Ukraine, one in which Russia is no more to blame (and quite possibly less so) than the USA:

> "While the situation seemed more comprehensible to me before, it seemed like a way for our government to make money, now I see that it's not just Russia that needs it, but also the USA, it's depressing. I don't want to become a pawn." (m., age 30, profession unknown, temporarily unemployed, October 2022)

Thus, in the six months that had passed since the beginning of the war, this respondent developed an even more negative attitude towards the "special operation." Notwithstanding, in the fall of 2022, even after losing two jobs and finding himself immersed in uncertainty in another country, he still had not become a staunch war opponent. He assumed that the Russian leadership had reasons for launching the "special operation" and blamed both Russia and the US.

Perceptions of the war change in both directions simultaneously

We have shown above how attitudes towards the war shift in one direction or another—further towards opposition or support. But this change is not always unidirectional. People who are far removed from politics and are not interested in the news may speak about some aspects of the war with indignation and others with approval and support. In a sense, it is as if their views of the situation as changing in both directions simultaneously.

For example, in her spring interview, one 37-year-old small business owner from Moscow both defended and criticized the war, and yet she also refused to take a definitive stance. She liked that Russia is responding to Western threats and demonstrating that it is a force to be reckoned with:

> "Of course it's bad that people are dying over there, and all the casualties and so on. But overall I have the feeling that when Putin is in power, our country is in a pretty strong position globally. … I heard something like the US wanted to plant some sort of warheads somewhere nearby in Ukraine. And maybe this is a precautionary step to defend their territory. I'm very removed from politics. I'm probably saying something stupid. But in my view, if Russia tried to place some sort of warheads nearby in Mexico, in three seconds there'd be fighter jets flying over the country and no one would say a word." (f., age 37, business owner, April 2022)

She is also "offended on Russia's behalf," as the Western world has taken up arms against it, modern brand names have left, and despite the fact that Russia, according to her, is behaving in the exact same way as strong geopolitical players. At the same time, her personal experience suggests that many of the arguments in defense of the war that she hears from TV are unfounded:

> "I liked Kyiv a lot, it was so modern, so much more European than Moscow, that's how it seemed to me. There were all sorts of chic little cafes … It was really cool! And I really liked Odessa, it's got a lot of soul. I was never treated badly for being Russian. And from what I heard, there's a theory that there are Nazis or fascists there who don't like Russians. I don't know. I never felt that once when I was there. In Odessa I was completely alone—I rented an apartment there, walked around by myself, went to different cafes on my own. No one ever said anything about me speaking Russian or being Russian—not a word." (f., age 37, business owner, April 2022)

She also does not understand why the war is necessary—she does not see any potential positive consequences of the "special operation":

> "It seems like this is going to be some long, two-year thing that, most likely, won't end in anything. And Russia's part also isn't clear—I mean, we're taking the DPR [Donetsk People's Republic], the LPR [Luhansk People's Republic] … these are the poorest regions. Why do we need them? Why did we go there? What do we want? It's looking like a very strange military operation. What do we want from them, the Ukrainians? No one understands it."(f., age 37, small business owner, April 2022)

Appealing to both arguments justifying the war and arguments criticizing it, as we see above, she simultaneously refuses to explicitly articulate her own attitude towards the events:

> "I'm convinced that we know 5% of what's going on. And if you work a regular job, if you're not a member of the special services, then I know that everything they're telling us is just a tiny percentage! We see 1 step ahead, while Putin sees 30, and

> Zelensky as well. And all these conversations, discussing, worrying, not knowing what's going on. That's why I don't want to spend energy on it, watching the news clips about the war, how many people died. … If I had the opportunity to somehow influence the situation, if something depended on me, of course I would do everything to stop it. But tying yourself in knots, watching everything, discussing it with everyone—I don't want to do that either. What's the point? My duty is very simple—take care of myself, my family, and my close circle." (f., age 37, business owner, April 2022)

Her indecisiveness is also shown in the way she assesses the consequences of the war: she describes two possible scenarios, one in which Russia flourishes as a result of a "special operation," and another in which Russia folds. In describing them, however, she cannot decide which one is more likely.

It would seem that, six months later, the respondent might be expected to have started to lean in one direction or the other. But this did not happen. Moreover, both her critical attitude towards some aspects of the "special operation" and her sympathy and support for others have become stronger. She began her fall interview with us by saying that she was no longer indifferent—she wanted Russia to act more decisively and respond to the latest threats from Ukraine:

> "Only within the last month, I was a little emotional about the fact that our gas pipelines were blown up. … I know that they were blown up, I know that the Crimean Bridge was blown up. I have this—before that, I didn't care at all, but now it's already—damn it, I wish we had already started to take some action! That's how I feel now. I don't know anything at all, except that we're bombing some infrastructure facilities. Then I got the feeling—let's retaliate, otherwise the whole world will laugh at us, that the huge country of Russia is engaged in such a drawn-out war and losing to tiny Ukraine." (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

Her resentment on Russia's behalf also intensified:

> "Before this, I traveled a lot, but I've always been all about Russia. And now I'm even a little offended that America is fighting simultaneously in 10 different countries, fighting themselves, and it's no issue. But Russia … I don't know if we attacked for the right reasons or not, but the fact that the whole world has united against Russia, the brands have left, companies have left, some work is being done to undermine Russia. I get the feeling that my country is being unfairly bullied. Now I am even more patriotic than ever." (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

At the same time, the announcement of the partial mobilization hit her business hard—she lost both her business partner and some of her clients. It is not surprising that she speaks negatively and even aggressively about the decision to go to war, and as a result, to wage a war for "God knows whom":

> "Can you imagine, they [those drafted] are adult men with children. He can't do a single pull-up and now he's given a gun and sent off to risk his life? For whom? For

> what? I'm not patriotic about that at all, I think it's all complete nonsense. Why, in the 21st century, should someone have to go off and fight for God knows whom? Of course, if I was at risk of being drafted, I'd be gone within 3 minutes." (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

Despite the fact that, in her fall interview, the respondent talked about her "emerging" patriotism and was then immediately indignant about another, nonsensical form of patriotism that she said she did not feel—this was not as much of a contradiction that went unnoticed by her, but rather a discussion of what she saw as two different kinds of patriotism. She wanted her country to be strong and respected, and in this sense, she experienced feelings of patriotism, which before had been alien to her, as someone who thought primarily of herself and her loved ones. At the same time, she did not understand the reasons or goals behind the "special operation" as such, and this sense of meaninglessness became especially acute when the "special operation" changed her own life for the worse. When patriotism turned out to be something other than worrying about the fate of your own country, and instead required obedience to the incomprehensible instructions of the authorities at the cost of one's life, such patriotism turned out to be, of course, not for her.

Thus, along with the greater "politicization" of everyday life—that is, the various ways in which the distant war had permeated into the respondent's life (and those of other apolitical, detached people)—it became more difficult for her to maintain the neutrality that she had tried to adhere to (albeit, not always successfully) in the spring of 2022. The war began to disgust her more and more, affecting her loved ones and her business, but at the same time she reflected more and more on the world's unjustifiably (from her point of view) harsh reaction to Russia's actions, worried more and more about her country, and wanted it to be strong—including at the cost of military operations on the territory of Ukraine.

Exceptions that prove the rule: When views on war change

Interestingly, none of the respondents with whom we were able to speak again in the fall of 2022 had radically changed their views on the war. However, among those with whom we spoke for the first time in the fall, there were several people who told us about significant changes in their attitudes towards the war. Nevertheless, a detailed analysis of these seemingly exceptional cases reveals that they, in a sense, confirm the trends we have described above.

One such interview was with a 39-year-old real estate specialist. He began the conversation by saying that his view of the war had changed. In the first months of the war, in his own words, he turned away from what was happening—he could not understand which side was the truth because of the abundance of conflicting information. Gradually, however, his attitude towards the "special operation" changed for the worse:

> "I'm not a very emotional person. When all of this happened, as usual, you think: 'Well, here we go again,' and I couldn't have a negative or positive reaction to it, because I didn't entirely know what was going on. One person I know demanded

that I condemn it. And I say: 'I still don't understand what happened. What's going on there? Why must I immediately form some sort of concrete opinion?"

Q: "And how would you describe your attitude now that some time has passed?"

A: "Now I have a generally negative attitude towards it. I mean, of course I don't like what's happening." (m., age 39, real estate specialist, October 2022)

Indeed, at the time of the interview, at the end of October 2022, the respondent not only "[didn't] like what [was] happening"—he also did not trust the explanations offered by the state, and the attack on Ukraine seemed to him pointless and unnecessary:

"I don't see any clear motive. That is, I believe that it's a miscalculation, roughly speaking, on the part of our leadership, a lack of professionalism among our diplomats. And the reasons they give on TV, they seem insignificant to me; in other words, I cannot believe them.

Q: "Can you tell me exactly what you find unconvincing in what they say? What reasons?"

A: "That if we didn't attack them, they would have attacked us, that we went there to protect some of our own people. And that's basically it. I don't remember any other specific reason that they broadcast." (m., age 39, real estate specialist, October 2022)

After the announcement of the partial mobilization, the respondent began to experience constant anxiety. His attitude towards the president and the authorities changed for the worse because of the "special operation." He negatively assessed the economic consequences of the war: sanctions, the departure of Western companies, "some of the few in our country who complied with the laws," and so on. His inner circle is anti-war or neutral, but, as the respondent noted, even those who are neutral tend to adopt a more negative attitude towards the situation over time, and his view of the war clearly changed with his view of his surroundings.

But even this respondent did not become a staunch opponent of the war! For example, some of his arguments about the "special operation" are typical of supporters rather than opponents. Thus, while reflecting on the causes of the war, he was still trying to find a justification for the authorities' decision to launch the operation:

"I think that he [President Putin] isn't just pulling decisions out of a hat. I think someone whispered in his ear, riled him up, I don't know. Who does he have there? The Ministry of Defense whispered in his ear, promised mountains of gold if he made this decision. Still, I don't think they really wanted it to come to this." (m., age 39, real estate specialist, October 2022)

Moreover, despite his dissatisfaction with what was happening, he still wanted Russia to win—or, at least, did not want it to lose:

> "But I understand that now, if it [the war] somehow comes to an end, it's going to reflect badly on me. Roughly speaking, I'll have to pay for it. … I'll be forced to pay some sort of indemnity or something. And I'll be accused of something I didn't participate in. … I didn't make the decisions. And I didn't support those who made these decisions, but the blame that will be placed on them will be projected onto me too." (m., age 39, real estate specialist, October 2022)

Another example of an interview conducted in the fall in which the respondent brought up her own changing perception of the war is with a 50-year-old woman from the Leningrad region. (While the city of Leningrad reverted to being named Saint Petersburg following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the surrounding region did not follow suit.) She said that she changed her view of the war not once, but several times. The respondent was never interested in politics and her first reaction to the news of the outbreak of war in February 2022 was one of shock and rejection. But, unlike many supporters of the war, who experienced similar emotions in February and early March, this respondent emphasized that she "was adamantly opposed to it from the very beginning" (f., age 50, profession unknown, December 2022). However, almost all her close friends supported the war. According to the respondent, they began to explain to her that the war was necessary and to acquaint her with pro-war media resources. As a result, the respondent seemed to "surrender" and take the side of her friend group. She even began to search for justifications for the war on her own, and described this search process in the interview ("I calculated that …", "I decided that …"). We learned, for example, that she "calculated" and "decided" that the opponents of the war are people who do not like Russia, people with Western values.

After a while, however, she again began to doubt her own explanation of events. She was saddened by the deaths of soldiers, primarily Russian, and she wondered if the vague, opaque goals of the "special operation" were worth the casualties. Our interview caught her during this period of doubt. She ended the interview with the phrase that at this point, in her opinion, the war should be ended as soon as possible. This interview is interesting, among other things, because her reformulation of her thoughts about the war is based not on her values, but on a pragmatic assessment of the balance of power: since we are losing, the war is unnecessary.

Like the previous respondent, this woman is not a staunch opponent of the war, and perhaps will never be. Her disappointment in the justification of the military actions does not lead her to consider the guilt or, at least, the responsibility of the government of the Russian Federation for the decision to start the war. Her notion of a direct threat to Russia from the United States or the "collective West" is not subject to revision either. It is significant, for example, that before the interview she tries to make sure that the data used in our project will not be sent to America. She is concerned that her words, her doubts, may harm her country.

The interview with the subsequent respondent, however, illustrates how fluid perceptions of war can be when they are ungrounded, when there is no political position behind them. Despite the fact that only a small number of our respondents' perceptions of war fluctuate to such an extent, this respondent's case is still somewhat typical: in a society where politics (and even more so, geopolitics) is not part of life for the vast majority of people, firm stances

on a geopolitical conflict that has suddenly broken out are a rarity. In this sense, the absence of radical changes in the perception of war (when staunch supporters become staunch opponents and vice versa) and instability, and the mobility of the perception of war within certain limits, are two sides of the same coin. In order to be convinced of something and to sway these beliefs to the opposite side, one needs to have beliefs (that is, consistent political views), which most of our respondents do not have. This means that the majority of our respondents (as well as, one can safely assume, the majority of Russians) are uncertain in their attitudes towards the war, which prevents them from becoming steadfast supporters or opponents of the "special operation" (that is, from changing their views radically). Their views are unstable, fluid—certain circumstances may cause them to shift from one side to the other. What these circumstances might be is a matter to be explored.

In other words, these exceptions—instances in which individual views of the war do seem to change—simultaneously prove the rule regarding the trends described above. First of all, they show that even in these few cases, no transformation of staunch supporters or neutrals into staunch opponents (or vice versa) is observed. Secondly, these cases demonstrate the instability and fluidity of perceptions of the war, which are not tied to a consistent political stance and which, to some extent, are characteristic of very many of our respondents—and of Russians in general.

1.2.2 New justifications of the war: Inevitability, "forced hands," and "reverse rationalization"

With the changing reality of the war, one can expect some changes in the justifications for it. And, indeed, our interviews taken in the fall of 2022 show that some justifications that were common in the spring had by then been imbued with new meaning, while others had become marginal or faded into the background, with new ones having appeared in their place. The source of these changes in the way the war was being justified were certainly due not only to the changing reality, but also to changes in the rhetoric used in propaganda. Evaluation of the influence of the latter factor, however, requires a separate study, which we have not yet conducted. Therefore, in our report, we primarily focus on determining what changes have occurred in respondents' rhetoric justifying the war, and describing them in detail. Since there is a large, separate section devoted to the perceptions of war and its justifications (see 2.1), here we will briefly discuss only some of the new justifications for war.

In the fall of 2022, as at the beginning of the war, respondents continued to justify the "special operation" by citing the need to protect the Russian-speaking residents of Donbas and address the threat to Russia from NATO and the West in general. But the content of both these arguments has been expanded.

Thus, when speaking about the threat from NATO or the West, respondents often make two important—and different—clarifications that give different meanings to the confrontation between Russia and the West. And so, some respondents, in using the "Western threat" to justify the war, seem to rob Russia of agency: from their point of view, Russia is not attacking, but rather being forced to defend itself against attacks made primarily by the United States:

Q: "How do you think this will all end? And how would you like it to end?"

A: "… So that Russia is left alone. Well, how does the conflict look, from my side? It was the American side that started this all. So I, of course, am for Russia. …"

Q: "You said that war is started by people. What people, exactly?"

A: "I think it all came from America. Well, our side launched the military operation because we felt threatened, that some sort of threat was coming from over there, so everything was taken further." (f., age 30, surgeon, November 2022)

Q: "And if, on the 24th, Russia hadn't started the war, hadn't deployed troops, then what do you imagine would have happened?"

A: "We would have sent the troops anyway. Our patience is not limitless. We're not attacking, we're defending. If they spread false information that we're the attackers, it's not true." (f., age 56, university lecturer, November 2022)

In their defense of the war as a response to the "threat from the West," other respondents—and sometimes these same respondents as well—on the contrary endow Russia with a sort of "masculine" agency. All the power players have always actively defended their international interests, including through military means, and Russia is just doing the same:

"Well, how do I explain it to you? Just or unjust … We are defending our interests, and we are obliged to do so, that's all. We didn't unleash this war, you must agree. We're responding to events, not starting these events, you must agree." (f., age 56, university lecturer, November 2022)

"Because we have, and I think every government has, its own interests. And every government fights to protect its interests, and many governments fight hard to protect their interests. We are no exception, we are also a country with its own interests, and which has the right to fight for them. And the fact that we took this path—what other path is there? … Shouldn't we have our own interests? Excuse me, look how Turkey fights for its interests! Every small country fights for its interests, starting with Greece, Albania, and so on. … Don't we have interests? We also have our own interests, we are a large country with a difficult climate, nothing grows in our territory, we extract everything through hard work and pay for it all quite dearly. … We have invested so much in Ukraine, we have built all the factories, the roads, everything! There's a huge amount of Russian business there. How is this? In Germany or France, if they had invested so much there, they would have cut throats for every centimeter of land. Yes, I believe that we, as a state, have our own interests. For some reason, people don't accept this, they don't believe that Russia can fight for them—everyone else can, but we cannot." (f., age 52, university lecturer, November 2022)

Thus, these two somewhat opposing arguments become part of the same justification: Russia was forced to "protect itself" in response to provocation from the USA or West, and overall did the right thing, because in order to be strong and prosperous, Russia must defend its interests in the international arena. In both cases, Ukraine is excluded from the explanation of what is happening: it loses its agency and becomes a "puppet" in the hands of stronger players. Of course, we encountered similar arguments in the first interviews, taken in the spring, but they were now being voiced more and more frequently in our fall responses. This was not surprising: this interpretation allowed our respondents, who were observing the prolongation of the war and the increase in civilian casualties, to "pity" the "ordinary Ukrainians," while at the same time supporting Russia's actions.

The argument that the "special operation" is justified by the need to protect the residents of Donbas also became more prevalent. With the annexation of these new territories and the advance of Russian troops far beyond the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, this argument began to include the need to protect the Russian-speaking or pro-Russian population of Ukraine in general:

> "There is an understanding among the people who lived (and live, and will live) in Ukraine—there is Western Ukraine and there is Eastern Ukraine. The Western part has more descendants and nationalities associated with the European states that border it. The Eastern part has more contacts with the Russian Federation. I mean to say, there really is a large Russian population there. This may sound trite, but we do not abandon our own. … We, as people who protect Russians on principle, we took part in this—these are advisers and private military companies that have supported and continue to support the LPR and DPR [Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic] all this time." (m., age 46, business owner, November 2022)

The interviews conducted in the fall of 2022 also revealed several new ways of justifying the protracted military conflict and the growing casualties associated with it. One of these involved presenting the war as some kind of unpleasant, and even catastrophic, natural phenomenon. A natural disaster like this is terrible, it claims human lives, but it is pointless to "oppose" it—we don't oppose floods, hurricanes, or earthquakes. This implies that we must weather the war, as we would a natural disaster:

> Q: "How do you relate to it now? What is your current attitude towards the special operation?"
>
> A: "It's just what is happening. It's just … it's cloudy now. It's just what's happening. There's always someone shooting and being killed somewhere in the world, overall and on the whole. Now it's just close enough that you could drive your car to it." (m., age 42, IT specialist, October 2022)
>
> "How can we respond to the given situation? Anyone knows that you can't just end it in a day, you simply can't. But at the same time, I don't see any results, that in the end we should have—what? What's the grand design? How many of us are in Ukraine, how many are in this Ukraine? What will we do with Ukraine after this? What is all this? I can't envision how things will be. But I understand that it's not

within my power to stop it. … I, like any person, want everything to end quickly, want everyone to sit down, agree, and divide everything up. But I also understand that a lot of people don't want this. It's not dependent on us, even less so on the Ukrainians. So what? So tell me, what is there not to like about the operation? I don't like any of it! But that doesn't change anything." (f., age 52, university lecturer, November 2022)

Presenting the war as a natural phenomenon and describing it as a "given situation" also finally eliminates the issue of identifying who is responsible for starting it. War, like bad weather, happens on its own. Both its end and its beginning lie outside the zone of human influence (or at least, outside the zone of influence of mere mortals).

Another new way of justifying the war is through so-called "reverse justifications." In this case, "reverse" means reversing the logical direction of events. In these justifications, certain consequences and "effects" of the war, such as the aggressive behavior of the Ukrainians or Ukrainian Armed Forces towards the Russians, start to be seen as the causes of the war and become arguments in defense of its necessity. In other words, it is as if the fact that Ukrainian soldiers torture prisoners, Ukrainian acquaintances began to hate Russians, the Armed Forces of Ukraine are bombing border areas, or NATO countries are supplying weapons to Ukraine, are somehow revealing the "genuine," "evil" nature of Ukraine and justifying the Russian attack:

"I have a rather negative attitude towards these pro-Azov people [Azov: a formation of the National Guard of Ukraine, tracing its origins to far-right activist groups] and their attitude towards peaceful citizens. … And the peaceful citizens who lived there are more afraid of the homeland defense, the national battalions, the very same Azov Brigade. They won't do anything but—excuse the expression—screw you over and shoot you in the back. This has been documented. I mean the killing of civilians, simply shooting at children, at women who went out for food, stood up for humanitarian aid for our men. I mean the mortar attacks, shelling houses from tanks. These are all actually proven facts about the national uniformed services of Ukraine's involvement in these atrocities. … And the worst thing, which again confirms why we're involved in this—we are dealing with and fighting against Nazism and fascism, there is video footage of civilians being executed. I mean, the execution of civilians, the murders in these abandoned territories. I mean, this says that we're still fighting on the right side, and that the special military operation was the right choice." (m., age 42, profession unknown, October 2022)

"The guys who went there in the beginning, they didn't really want to go there. But now they want to finish the job. No one even knew that this was actually fascism—we thought that was all over. … Many weren't actually intending to fight, they thought they would just go over there, intimidate, that's it. But when they dug deeper, they found things that even adult men didn't expect. That's why I think that yes, this abscess would have surfaced eventually. I don't think it would have just faded away. Because judging by the way things are going, the conflict would have happened anyway." (f., age 52, university lecturer, November 2022)

An interview with another respondent demonstrates how reverse logic can provide a dynamic type of war support. The following respondent, a young researcher, like many others was in a state of shock in the first month of the war. He did not understand why the "special operation" was necessary and refrained from giving any personal assessments of the situation. However, the events of the war began to draw him in, and he admitted that, when watching the Ukrainians' reaction to the "special operation," he could not but empathize with the Russian side:

> "The first moment [in shaping my viewpoint] was when I watched some video from the Ukrainian side. It was some blogger on YouTube getting ready to meet the Russians in Kyiv with an assault rifle. He probably expected that this would scare people even more, that they'd try to stop the war. But for me, it became a trigger, sort of like, 'Wow …' He was so harsh, swearing, speaking rudely, I didn't like it." (m., age 32, works in high-tech industry, November 2022)

It is the supposedly undignified behavior of Ukrainian citizens that he observes online that begins to establish his sympathy for Russia and convince him of the need for war. Ultimately, he comes to the conclusion that "the tragedy of Ukraine is that it was simply taken under external control, it is not an independent country, they use it as they want," and that "this poses an existential threat to us," meaning that Russia was right to have begun the "special operation."

Thus, the Ukrainians' aggression towards Russians, a *consequence* of Russia's military intervention on Ukrainian territory, is regarded by respondents as unmotivated, asymmetric, and self-generated, as if it arose on its own. Similarly, the preparatory measures taken in Ukraine before February 24, 2022, to prepare for the eventuality of an impending Russian invasion (which was made known to the whole world from an official statement by the US government at the end of 2021) are also considered evidence of Ukraine's participation in some kind of conspiracy and of its government's unfounded aggressive intentions against the Russian Federation:

> "I still kind of think that this is probably how it would have happened anyway [they would have attacked us if we didn't attack them]. Do you know why? I have an old classmate who's fighting over there. And he says that they're very well prepared, they were obviously preparing for this. He talks about the fortifications they built there, the amount of equipment, and that the attack didn't catch them off-guard. That is, they were expecting it. And I have some acquaintances in Kyiv. Basically, they had already left and gone to Paris—or, well, it's not important, to France, and they also told me, probably 2 months before it started, that Russia would soon attack Ukraine. I mean, I said it was completely absurd. Where did they get this from?! What is this nonsense? But nonetheless, that's how it happened. I mean to say, I was honestly surprised that it happened. I didn't expect that something like this could happen. But they were certain. Well, and this is all the information that diplomats and oligarchs flew away from Ukraine on private jets. I mean, it was clearly obvious that, yes, something was in the works." (f., age 49, educator, October 2022)

Finally, one trend we observed back in the spring also intensified by the fall of 2022—justifying the war by presenting it as an inevitable, and even forced step. The idea that the conflict was forced or inevitable is a leitmotif found throughout various arguments in defense of the war: the war is a forced reaction to the threat from the West; we were forced to protect the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine; Russia was forced to attack first, otherwise they would have attacked us; the war was unavoidable, like bad weather; and so on. Conceptualizing the war as an inevitable or forced step again allows people to sympathize with the dead on both sides and to experience negative emotions in connection with the horrors of the war—in other words, to maintain a certain humanistic position without speaking out against the "special operation," and sometimes even while confidently supporting it.

1.2.3 The "partial mobilization" and its effects

Many expected that the announcement of mobilization would change ordinary Russian citizens' view on the "special operation," as it moved the war from a distant battlefield directly into Russian society. However, as our interviews taken in October through December 2022 show, if these expectations were warranted, then it was only to a limited extent. There is a separate section in the second part of this report (see 2.2) devoted to our respondents' reactions to the announcement of "partial mobilization"—so here, without going into details, we will only describe how people's attitudes towards the mobilization affect (or do not affect) their attitudes towards the war as a whole.

On one hand, many of our respondents (none of whom, as we recall, were consistent opponents of the war) experienced different degrees of dissatisfaction about the mobilization, both because it put the lives of their loved ones or themselves at risk, and because the way it was organized and conducted seamed opaque, incomprehensible, and illogical to them. But, on the other hand, while dissatisfaction with the mobilization among staunch supporters (people with a consistent position) often makes them more critical of the "special operation" on the whole, similar dissatisfaction among those who are far removed from politics and much less confident about the necessity of the war rarely transformed itself into criticism, either of the war overall or of individual components of it.

Even among the staunch supporters of the war, there were many respondents who were dissatisfied with the mobilization. Most often, these respondents criticized the "disorder" in the way the draft was carried out: the lack of clear criteria, the conscription of incompetent non-professionals, and the lack of proper supplies or training for recruits. However, some of them also do not relish the idea of being called to the battlefield themselves:

> "I wasn't particularly overjoyed about the news of the mobilization. … From what I know of military dealings, I think that the modern army could do without such an elderly man with modest military experience [referring to himself]. I knew firsthand who commands the armed forces in the DPR [Donetsk People's Republic], in Russia. I didn't want to … I've done everything I could for this cause. I have no intention of helping, let's put it that way." (m., age 43, project specialist, October 2022)

This respondent, although he still supported the war, was disappointed in the way it was being conducted. He admitted that he did not expect the "special operation" to drag on so long or that the Russian Army and its system of management would be so ineffective. The way he justified the war also changed. While in the spring interview he listed in detail all the goals that made the "special operation" necessary, in the fall he justified the "special operation" from the opposite point of view—it is necessary because the Ukrainian regime is even worse than the Russian one. In this sense, his dissatisfaction with the mobilization is organically incorporated into, and influences, his dissatisfaction with the course of the "special operation" as a whole.

Most of our respondents who were staunch supporters of the war also pointed to shortcomings in the way the draft was organized. The following quote from one of these interviews shows how the respondent's criticism of the mobilization was, once again, part of, and influenced by, his frustration with the "special operation":

> "I felt like they're doing everything right. And this continued until some of the screw-ups associated with the mobilization happened. This is where the issue got very interesting. If you can fight with hunks of iron, if you can gather resources and fight with them, then why fight with people? They're basically cannon fodder, to put it plainly. Plus, I know people who have gone to the 'training camps' [with air quotes] for conscripts. A lot of government flaws have surfaced, all this garbage and rubbish—the fact that, in reality, no one is learning anything in these training camps. I happened to see it in a roadside cafe. The TV was on, it wasn't an option to ignore it. And here they were showing something about how awesome the training was going for conscripts, for participating in the hostilities. And just a couple of days prior, I'd called up a friend who was in one of those places in Ulyanovsk. On TV they show one thing, but the reality is completely different. It raises a big question for me. Like, what are they showing us on TV? What are they posting on the internet? And what are the actual facts?" (m., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

In other words, after observing how the "partial mobilization" was organized, this respondent no longer felt that "they're doing everything right." He was disappointed in the Russian leadership, began to criticize televised propaganda, and looked more pessimistically at the consequences of the war. In his case, it was his dissatisfaction with the mobilization that launched the process of disappointment with the "special operation," but—and this is important to understand—this did not stop him from continuing his support.

This link between dissatisfaction with the mobilization and criticism of the "special operation" on the whole (including criticism of the organizers and perpetrators) is nearly absent among respondents who are removed from politics, who hesitantly (and in many ways, were compelled to) support the war or those who refrained from taking a stance. In the first part of this section, we quoted an interview with a business owner from Moscow, whose attitude towards the war had changed almost in both directions at the same time. She had a strong and unequivocal position on the prospect of going to the front: "if I was at risk of being drafted, I'd be gone within 3 minutes" (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022). But her adamant rejection of the draft did not make her an opponent of war. On the contrary, she shared with us that she was becoming more and more offended on Russia's

behalf, that she felt as if everyone was ganging up on Russia, and that she wanted the country to more actively defend its interests, including on Ukrainian territory.

Another respondent, a 34-year-old co-founder of a startup, says she "completely lost it" when she heard the news about the draft being announced. She was anxious and scared:

> "Yes, of course, I was worried that they would take him away, I was worried that my boyfriend would be taken away, I was worried that my close friends would be taken away, because, it's just a common anxiety to have for a person who might leave and never come back." (f., age 34, co-founder of an IT start-up, November 2022)

But then she continues:

> "On one hand, when such things happen, you're very scared that they'll take one of your loved ones and they'll simply die there. On the other hand, when people started swarming to other countries—some to Kazakhstan, some to Turkey, others elsewhere … Honestly, if one of my people started to do this, I'd probably start to respect that person less. It's a very strange, mixed feeling. But still, it's been instilled in all of us since childhood, even the fight with fascist Germany and so on, that we had heroes who went off to war, fought for their homeland, for peace, and so forth. It's actually quite difficult to eradicate it from our upbringing." (f., age 34, co-founder of an IT startup, November 2022)

In other words, the fear of mobilization goes hand in hand with the belief that real men should still go off and fight—including in the current war. And, as expected, this fear does not turn her into a war opponent. She does not cease to consider the "special operation" necessary:

> "We, our country, continue to butt heads, conditionally, with America. … Well, there's no such thing as saying, 'we invaded another country, we are an aggressor country,' and so on—it wasn't a blank slate when we invaded. It's clear that our methods might not be great: the military operation was launched, it's all very unpleasant. But there was never a time (as I imagine) that we were just sitting there and were like, 'Why don't we go to Ukraine and impose our own rules?' I believe that yes, other countries involved also led us to this conflict, to this intervention. It must have been necessary at some point. … It probably didn't just happen for no reason, because we could have done it eight years ago, we could have done it five years ago, but for some reason it happened now." (f., age 34, co-founder of an IT startup, November 2022)

Another respondent, a 23-year-old data analyst, also had a negative attitude towards the draft, not because he was afraid for himself or his loved ones, but because he did not like the potential new casualties that it would lead to:

> "And this [mobilization] didn't provoke any emotions in me at all. I was like, things just got a little worse. And maybe not by much. … But, I think that in general, this new stage of the war won't bring about any good. It will help us a lot on the

> battlefield, as far as I understand, because now there's the contract army, I don't know how many there were in the beginning, according to British and American estimates, it was up to 200,000, against all the mobilized Ukraine forces—a ridiculous figure on this front. That's why things will probably now change in our favor, I think, but it sucks for the country overall. Because how many people will now die in this war …" (m., age 23, data analyst, October 2022)

Along with this, this young man managed to maintain a neutral stance in the spring of 2022, but in the second interview conducted in the fall of 2022, he began to lean slightly more towards supporting the war than before. He did not like the aggressive attitude towards ordinary Russians around the world, was horrified by the Ukrainian military's treatment of Russian prisoners, and lastly, believed that it was too late to retreat:

> "Over time, I realized that all this would drag on for a long time, that it would no longer be possible to just step back and say: 'Sorry, we … Don't beat us. We got a little mixed up.' And I instead began to hold the opinion that we simply shouldn't surrender … Many hold the opinion, saying since we're against the war, then we should just surrender, just like that. I don't believe this. I think that I am generally against the war. But nothing can be done about it now, so then don't give up, at least, since you started it. I mean to say, over time, this is how my position changed. Rather, at some point, I became more supportive of the war." (m., age 23, data analyst, October 2022)

The opposite also occurred: serious doubts about the justification for and inevitability of war might be accompanied by a willingness to let relatives go to the front, such as sons or a spouse. Thus, a 49-year-old educator from Chelyabinsk, who tried to justify the "special operation" in the spring, during her second interview expressed increasing doubt about the idea that the war had happened as a result of concern for the good of the country, and that the decision to start it was the only possible option:

> "How do I say this? 'When the noblemen fight, the serfs' knees start knocking,' as they say. I understand perfectly well that this war is beneficial to someone, and that's absolutely not what we're told. It's just that there are some political benefits for someone. Well, that's my opinion. Maybe it's wrong. I don't know. … I mean, I believe that it was still possible to somehow resolve everything through diplomacy, without unleashing this war, because I feel sorry for the people who are dying, and they are dying in droves. For what? I don't yet know." (f., age 49, works in education, October 2022)

At the same time, when the conversation turned to mobilization, it seemed that she had already come to terms with her son and husband potentially being drafted and sent to the front—that is, with a terrible, catastrophic, but at the same time (in her own view) completely inevitable outcome:

> "Well, probably, if the second wave comes, both my son and husband will probably be taken. I am very afraid of this. Well, in a state of anxiety. Yes …" (f., age 49, works in education, October 2022)

In any case, perceptions of the mobilization and perceptions of war are not directly related. That is, what many observers had expected, which was that this dissatisfaction with the draft would be transformed into dissatisfaction with the war itself, was not occurring.

1.2.4 New patriotism? Not against Ukraine, but for Russia

Above, we described the dynamics of individual perceptions of the war, although many of them are typical and characteristic of the patterns we have observed. Are these same changes taking place on a societal level? Are there new collective feelings, new social phenomena that affect entire social groups?

Based on the interviews we collected in the fall of 2022, we noticed an increase in certain feelings, and even the emergence of new sensations and feelings previously alien to our respondents, associated with attachment to their country, their homeland. It is interesting that these feelings, sometimes vague and not fully articulated, often arose in those who had never thought about such abstract, intangible phenomena as, for example, "homeland." People who were far removed from politics were accustomed to worrying about concrete, rather than abstract, communities—friends, family, relatives.

These new anxieties about the fate of the country experienced by our respondents became evident when comparing the first and second interviews with the same respondents. For staunch supporters of the war, of course, the values of patriotism were nothing new—but they might become fortified. For example, a 46-year-old musician trained in construction from a small Russian city called himself a "pro-Russian person" in the first interview, which is precisely why he supported the actions of the Russian government. Justifying the war, he spoke primarily of the need to protect the people of Donbas from the "Ukrainian regime." In the second interview, when talking about his support for the war, he emphasized the need to defend the homeland:

> "Clearly, human lives are human lives, but defending the homeland from everything that's happening now—this, I think, is the primary task. … I don't want there to be war, but it will be necessary to fight and I'll have to do it. My country will call and I'll go." (m., age 46, construction worker, musician, October 2022)

However, it is even more interesting to observe this dynamic in the examples of respondents who were uncertain and far removed from politics. Many of them not only did not think about abstract values at the beginning of the war, they avoided giving their assessments precisely because the discussion held between opponents and supporters was about political ideas alien to them. But in the fall, sometimes unexpectedly for themselves, they began to talk about these ideas and ideals.

The student from Moscow quoted earlier said in her first interview, in the spring, that she could not—and did not want—to take a stance on the war. She tried not to read the news, and both sides of the conflict evoked in her both sympathy and distrust. She believed that the war did not concern her directly and did not affect her life or the lives of her loved ones, which meant that she was not obliged to have an opinion about it. Within half a year after this conversation, and especially after the announcement of "partial mobilization," more and

more of her anti-war acquaintances were leaving the country and, consequently, her circle was becoming more and more pro-war. This began to affect her perception of what was happening. (See her interview on p. 35.)

These sorts of feelings are born when the rapid politicization of society (meaning here the obligation to decide which side you are on in a complex geopolitical conflict) affects people who have previously been far removed from politics. These people feel they cannot judge the credibility of "political" arguments for or against war, and they distrust propaganda on both sides, but it becomes increasingly difficult for them to remain on the sidelines. In making choices under such conditions, they "cling" to something they can be sure of—for example, their national identity. They seem to be saying: we do not trust anyone and do not understand anything, but we know one thing for sure—we are Russians, not Ukrainians, which means we need to stand by our country. The following interview excerpt illustrates this trend:

> "Then [in the spring interview] you asked what my attitude was towards all of this, and at that time I didn't have any sort of defined position because I didn't know who was right and who was to blame. I couldn't even say if I was for or against it. Now, again, I can't say for certain if I'm for or against it because I don't have enough information, like I said. But in order to resolve my internal dilemma, I came to the simple thought, it has helped me cling on to something, so that I'm not buffeted back and forth—basically, I know that when it comes to these showdowns between countries, these governmental games, there are, in principle, no good guys. In my view, they're all 'bad' in this case. There's bad 'us' and there's bad 'them.' Therefore, I'd rather stick with the bad guys on our side. I'm still a person, living in her own country, who was born here. …"
>
> Q: "Why do you think it's important that you don't drift from opinion to opinion? Why is it important to have a stance?"
>
> A: "Not to have a stance … It just turned out that I couldn't form my own comprehensive opinion on the matter, so this was just to make it easier for me to decide. I need something to cling on to. Since I don't have information, I need to cling to something else." (f., age 34, co-founder of IT startup, November 2022)

Another apolitical respondent, not understanding the causes of the conflict, clings to another obvious thing—only one side has our Russian soldiers on it, they "defend our country" and they are the ones we should support:

> "Why are Russian soldiers dying over there, what for? I don't know what they're told there, they have their own propaganda being spread among the troops. They're told what they're dying for. Each time they go into battle, their boss says: 'We're going off to die for this and that now.' I don't know what they tell them. But for me personally—they're defending my country. We're already in the midst of a conflict that we must take part in. And on our side—it's them, the soldiers. They are on our side in this conflict that they're dying for. The question is—for what? Why did the

leadership of our country unleash this conflict? Such a drawn out one. I don't know." (f., age 37, engineer, on maternity leave, October 2022)

It is worth noting that back in the spring of 2022, in the first months of the war, many respondents who were removed from politics justified the war by saying that they should take the side of their country—"even if it is not right." But by the fall, this justification had been imbued with new, more concrete substance. For example, in the spring, the vast majority of respondents who talked about the need to "be with their country" referred to a statement by actor Sergei Bodrov that they had recently heard "somewhere on the Internet." In other words, in the first months of the war, this justificatory construction appeared in interviews more like a cliché, a ready-made borrowing that the respondents had not yet fully appropriated. In the fall, the same respondents reflected on feelings of attachment to their homeland and patriotism that were new to them. We see this introspection reflected in the words of another respondent:

"I went through the entire spectrum, from hatred for my country to the feeling that I stood by it. … I wished death on Putin. … And my father had a very … Well, let's just say he laid down the facts, as they say these days. He made it very clear to me that the interests of one person (meaning my personal interests), they don't play any role, because you have your people, your homeland. And either you're here, either you act in the interest of your society, or you're cutting yourself off and will live your life like that. … I'm sincere when I say that what's going on is a tragedy. I mean, for instance, I want this war to end. But due to the fact that I understand how much is at stake for our country, naturally, I can't help but want the situation there to be resolved not in favor of Russia, but at least taking into account Russian interests. But, for example, I'm not happy about the fact that civilians are dying. … How do I explain? Well, I'm not happy about what's going on. I'm not happy! It's a painful realization for me that peaceful civilians are suffering hardships. I'm not happy reading news about how many people have died on the Ukrainian side. It doesn't make me happy. It's terribly painful. But since you're taking sides … Well, damn, it's really difficult. It hurts me, I want this to end soon, but in the interest of our country. When you say that, it's kind of a bloodthirsty position, because it's like you want to win. It's like some sort of military slogan, but you understand what's at stake. And there are already so many hardships, that these interests must be taken into account" (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

Contemplation on the fate of the homeland does indeed often serve as a justification for continuing the war—or rather, as an excuse for not advocating an immediate cessation of hostilities at the cost of Russia's defeat. But experiencing new feelings about the fate of the country does not always mean that respondents begin to lean more and more towards supporting the war. For example, one of our interviewees, a 23-year-old journalist, also experienced feelings of patriotism that were new to him:

Q: "Has your attitude towards Russia changed in any way over the past six months?"

A: "Yeah, yeah, I think that I've become a huge patriot. I realized that I'll stand with my homeland to the end, no matter what happens, no matter how hard it gets. I'm

> not going anywhere, I will remain Russian, and will be with [my country] til the end. Beforehand, I was more cosmopolitan, in some manner. I mean to say, I didn't consider myself to be a patriot above all else." (m., age 23, journalist, October 2022)

But this experience did not make him a supporter of the war. On the contrary, in the fall of 2022, he saw many negative consequences of the "special operation"—including increased repression, destruction of civil society, and isolationism; he believed that a full-scale war could have been avoided, and described his attitude towards Putin as unambiguously negative.

Another respondent, a 45-year-old logistics specialist from Samara, told us during her spring 2022 interview that she was not that interested in politics, that she did not even pay heed to the beginning of the war. At the time of the interview (at the end of May 2022), she still did not understand the reasons for the war, and she placed the blame for the conflict breaking out on all participants (including, of course, the United States). In the second interview, which took place in the fall of 2022, she admitted that she wanted a speedy end to the war on any terms, that she did not like the annexation of new Ukrainian territories to Russia—that she respected the sovereign right of Ukraine to manage these territories, that she was sorry for the casualties on both sides, and that she thought Russia was no better than the United States, which also defends its interests by military means. In other words, she was moving towards even greater aversion to war. This respondent, of course, took the announcement of the "partial mobilization" poorly, but she unexpectedly admitted that if she were drafted, she would not hide and would go to the front. Here is how she explained this seeming contradiction:

> "Well, if I had been called, I probably would have gone. I wouldn't try to flee somewhere abroad or something like that. But all the same, it's strongly negative [her opinion of the mobilization]. … I would go if I had to, be a nurse or a cook, or wash the dishes, if they draft me—I definitely won't run. … Our people are fighting over there. How could I not go? No matter how negatively I feel, I will go to fulfill my civic duty—not to fight against the Ukrainians, but to help our troops over there, as nursing staff or something. I'm not talking about shooting. No." (f., age 45, transportation logistics specialist, October 2022)

We see that she, too, was experiencing a sense of duty that was partly new for her in relation not only and not particularly to her relatives, but to her country overall. At the same time, this sense of duty and love of country did not force her to justify the war—on the contrary, she found fewer and fewer justifications for the "special operation."

The seemingly paradoxical combination of the growth of patriotic sentiments and the increasingly negative attitude towards the war in general, which we observe in this respondent, is not coincidental. The source of the "new patriotism" in this case is the feeling of solidarity with compatriots who were drawn into a bloody war with their neighbors against their will. As one respondent said, "I wouldn't fight against the Ukrainians [if I were to go to the front], but [I would] help our people." It is telling that some of the respondents who displayed patriotic feelings emphasized that they had a positive attitude towards Ukrainians.

The situation caused by the mobilization (that is, the involuntary recruitment of people to participate in the hostilities) only strengthened this feeling of solidarity and belonging. Under the conditions of a direct threat to the lives of the respondent's personal acquaintances, or even just "ordinary people," with whom the respondent finds it easy to identify, the issue of justifying the authorities' decision to start the war almost fades into the background. For our respondents, the decision to comply with the draft and go to the front was not the result of free choice (despite the liberal media's claims to the contrary). For many, the war with Ukraine is an already established fact beyond their control. And it is a shared misfortune, real and tangible, experienced by all Russians, who must aid each other in this time.

In other words, despite the fact that respondents' newfound attachment to abstract communities such as their country or homeland often goes hand in hand with justification of war (and in turn serves as such a justification), support for military aggression and this new patriotism are still not directly related and do not necessarily coincide. These nascent values of love for their country and patriotism in people previously far removed from political ideologies cannot simply be reduced to their search for justification—it is a broader process, the meaning and consequences of which we have yet to comprehend.

1.2.5 Why is this happening? Mechanisms of change in perceptions of the war

An analysis of the new interviews, especially in comparison with the interviews from the first wave collected in the spring, allowed us to make some assumptions about why our respondents' views on the war did or did not change.

First of all, the main question must be addressed: why did these views not change dramatically? Why did supporters of the "special operation" not become opponents, and vice versa? In a sense, we are dealing with a paradox. On the one hand, people who were apolitical until just recently were rapidly mastering the new military-political reality, as a result of which their views were in continuous development, constantly being refined, amended, and changed. On the other hand, we see that the overall proportions of people in each camp remained stable; there was a certain persistence of opinion. It is possible, however, that this was not so much a contradiction as it was two sides of the same coin. Indeed, when a person is apolitical and rapidly politicized, many new meanings and evaluations of the situation may occur to them. The polarization of opinions, which forces one to choose a side, as well as the lack of political experience and public discussion, cause perceptions of the war to be fluid and mobile, but they only fluctuate within a narrow range. This range is narrow because people who are removed from politics may stick with the perception of war to which they are accustomed and, moreover, are unwilling to adopt a "radical" position and become a unambiguous supporters or opponents. As a result, we observe shades of change and nuance within an otherwise stable viewpoint.

Nonetheless, these shades of meaning do shift, and they shift in different directions. Why? This occurs under the influence of various factors, not all of which we are capable of recording in our interviews. But we are able to see some of these influences—for example, the polarization of opinions on the war within society and the dynamics of personal successes (or lack thereof) in respondents' lives and careers.

One factor causing people to fortify their opinions of the war was the social polarization in various spheres of Russian society. This polarization, as it were, posed the question point-blank: are you for or against the "special operation"? An interview with one of our respondents (whom we have already cited extensively above) vividly demonstrates this effect. This respondent did not have a clear position on the war in the spring, but over time—and this is evident in the second interview with her in the fall—she was moving towards greater support for the war. The fact is that, being a secular woman studying at a prestigious Moscow university, she was inevitably immersed in political discussions. At the same time, being very young and apolitical, she was extremely dependent on the opinions, arguments, and assessments of the people around her.

This reliance on the authoritative opinions of one's acquaintances and friends reveals the mechanism by which polarization affects perceptions of the war. In the first interview, she said that she learned about the beginning of the war from a chat in which her "acquaintances discuss politics." Her wording was eloquent: politics were discussed within her circle, but she did not say "we discuss"— she delegated the agency of assigning political judgement to her "acquaintances," thereby betraying the fact that she is susceptible to their evaluations. In both interviews, she often says that "people come to her house" with different opinions on the "special operation." She worried that these people were arguing among themselves, while at some point, especially after the departure of her anti-war buddies from Russia, her inner circle began to be dominated by war supporters. She often did not even read the news herself, but asked her authoritative acquaintances:

> Q: "What sources do you use to get information about global events? What media sources do you usually use?"
>
> A: "People who follow world news and can somehow filter through, I can turn to them for some of my more specific questions." (f., age 21, student, November 2022)

When speaking about her initial support for the actions of the Russian authorities, she pointed directly to her environment as the source or her viewpoints:

> Q: "Can you remember why you started leaning towards supporting the use of force?"
>
> A: "Probably because of my social circle. I have a lot of guys around me who want to heroically rebuild the world, who might even like to take part in the war themselves." (f., age 21, student, November 2022)

As a result, the polarization of opinion surrounding the respondent draws her in against her will. She confesses: "I tried to maintain my neutral stance, but I failed," and adds, "Now I'm scared that I'll have to choose between people." (f., age 21, student, November 2022) Finding herself between two increasingly divergent poles, she begins to lean more and more towards supporting the war as the most common, dominant opinion, accompanied by the corresponding argument:

> "Many of my friends are for the war … Those who remained, they believe that the war is terrible, but since it has begun, they'll clearly have to participate." (f., age 21, student, November 2022)

It is important to note that in this case the respondent's shift towards supporting the war can be attributed not just to the polarization factor, but also her secure social and economic position in Russian society. The war and the accompanying changes did not undermine her status—she remained wealthy, successful, and privileged, with something left to lose. Perhaps this is also why, amidst this polarization, she chose to support the policy of the Russian authorities in relation to Ukraine.

The personal success factor could also be seen in two other interviews: one with a young man who was becoming more strongly supportive of the war, and the other with a man growing increasingly skeptical about the Russian Army's actions in Ukraine. The first respondent was a staunch, "optimistic" supporter, whom we have cited in a previous section. His support for the Russian Army and government had grown even stronger, his attitude towards Ukraine had become more aggressive—even violent—and he had added the conflict between Russia and NATO to his list of justifications for the war. If we compare his two interviews, it is clear that in the second, his desire to defend his position in society (as well as his social circle's) was bolstered by the idea of protecting his country from the West:

> "If necessary, if some shit starts going down, I have confidence in myself. I'll take a machine gun and I'll mow down the ones who are trampling on us. Without a second thought as to who they may be: an occupier, coming to save us, whatever. I have a mother here, I have my beloved wife, I need to protect them. … If it were my choice, I'd be there [in the war zone], it's just no one took me. And not with the purpose of killing someone, just to protect the interests of my state. It's the only one I have." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

In this second interview, the themes of self-reliance and recognizing one's own agency were also stronger:

> "Now people are starting to see the light a little and understand that no wizard is going to ride in on a white horse. Do you want to live well? Do it yourself. If you try, it'll work out." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

In the time between the two interviews, the respondent was able to quit a job that he hated and find a more compelling position in an area that used to be just a hobby for him: music. The experience of career growth and professional success had reinforced his confidence that the war was driving Russia's economy in the right direction:

> "Although there are these stereotypes, like 'Oh, this was made in Russia …' I wasn't convinced until I tried it myself that they're not just not worse, but in some ways better than the Western stuff. Especially the fact that I learned about these manufacturers from Western sources, and it turns out they're made here, in

> Petersburg, in the same building where *KikoRiki* is animated—my colleagues and I use them all the time." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

And most importantly, the respondent confidently claimed that his position in society was improving:

> "And the strangest thing is that during these six months, my living conditions have only improved. Not only because my salary is growing or something else, but there are glints of other exciting things on the horizon." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

In the case of this respondent, the personal success factor acted in conjunction with the polarization factor. Success was accompanied by secondary socialization in societal institutions dominated by pro-war views that sharply diverge from liberal ones:

> "I started exercising, and what I do is either some kind of military educational institutions, or pro-Russian educational institutions, there's propaganda everywhere and all that. And the men who train, they're patriots, in the good sense of the word—not these sad sack government shills, but decent guys. Well, that definitely influenced me too, at least the idea that you should keep your word—I learned that for myself. But I don't see anything like that on the liberal agenda." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

At the same time, another respondent, who was becoming more critical of the war, criticized it for leading to a violation of the rule of law in Russia, as well as a narrowing of the legal system:

> "We left that Council of Europe. They kicked us out of some other thing. We left the international institutions that we participated in half-heartedly, but they at least forced our institutions in civil society to develop. Now it's all for nothing." (m., age 39, real estate specialist, October 2022)

His interview suggested that he encountered issues and frustrations at work and in life directly due to the lack of legal mechanisms for regulating professional activities:

> "I have a pretty good idea of how our bureaucratic system works. And my personal recipe, so to speak, involves threats and blackmail. And that's how I keep the law, although it seems to me that this shouldn't be the case, as a matter of principle. I mean, if something must be done according to the law, you shouldn't have to threaten or intimidate officials with punishment if they don't comply." (m., age 39, real estate specialist, October 2022)

Thus, we see that societal polarization of opinion and personal success (or lack thereof), which determines the stability of a person's position in society, can work in tandem to influence the dynamics of changing war perceptions. Other factors driving these changes have yet to be explored.

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And so, our repeated interviews with respondents we spoke to in the spring demonstrated that over the previous six months, people's assessments of the war had not changed fundamentally. At the same time, the conclusion to be drawn here is not so simple. We see that shades of opinion, assessment and judgement about the war were constantly shifting and developing. Firm supporters might become more steadfast and aggressive, but sometimes they become more critical and pessimistic. Uncertain supporters might become more frustrated and even desperate, which did not negate their attempts to justify the war and the actions of the Russian leadership and army. Some respondents changed their attitude in two ways: they became both more sympathetic and more critical—in this case, when talking about different aspects of the "special operation." There were exceptions among our respondents that confirmed the rule. Their perceptions of the war could vary greatly, but none of them held full-fledged political positions—the shift they experienced usually occurred within the limits of their contradictory, uncertain assessments.

By the fall, the arguments and justifications for explaining the war and endowing it with meaning became broader and more diverse than they had been in the spring of 2022. Thus, some non-opponents of the war began to use reverse justifications, believing that the reaction or behavior of Ukraine and its allies after February 24th confirmed the necessity of launching the military operation. Others thought of the war as a natural disaster: it is terrible, but there is no point in being "against" it, just as there is no point in being "against" a hurricane or an earthquake. In fall, even more than in spring, respondents emphasized the inevitability of the war and the idea that Russia's hand had been forced. This helped people to maintain an ostensibly humane position in relation to the horrors of war, but at the same time not to oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The "partial mobilization" irritated many, though not all, of the non-opponents of the war, but it had an unexpected effect on their perceptions of it. Respondents who were more politicized, and at the same time more confident in the need for war, transformed their dissatisfaction with the draft into criticism of the way the operation was being conducted. But for the less-politicized, this was not the case—for them, Putin's policy, the war, and the draft existed on different planes.

Finally, we drew attention to the fact that the prolonged nature of the war caused people to discover and rethink their attitude towards their own country. The respondents who had previously been far removed from politics discovered in themselves new feelings of patriotism, attachment to the motherland, and concern about its fate. Often these experiences went hand in hand with justifications for war—but not always. The role that this newfound patriotism among previously apolitical people will play in the future development of events has not yet been determined.

Although our data does not allow us to analyze all the possible factors influencing the dynamics of the perception of the war by Russians, we have already been able to identify some factors. Among them are the social polarization of opinions and an individual's personal and professional success within society. Polarization forces one to pick one assessment and stick to it—to shift more towards either the "for" or "against" camp. At the

same time, privileged people tend to support the war more and more, but those who feel insecurity in their lives are rather more critical. However, these factors influenced our respondents who are educated residents of large Russian cities. Outside of this well-defined social group, the situation may be different.

Part 2. War in Russian life in the fall of 2022

2.1 Features of war perceptions: How do respondents judge, justify, and criticize the war?

This section is devoted to how respondents related to the war six months after it had begun. Awareness of the protracted nature of the hostilities had a significant impact on how people perceived war. Even if their initial ideas about war had changed only slightly, they tended to become more concrete—and this happened for two reasons. On the one hand, the protracted nature of the war had made it more violent and destructive, making it increasingly difficult for people to maintain a neutral position, in both an emotional and a moral sense. On the other hand, the respondents had had more than half a year to think about the war and clarify their opinions on it.

In this report, we have refrained from preemptively dividing respondents into supporters and the undecided. Instead, our analysis of the interviews revealed several more complex perspectives on the war. Below, we briefly describe these types of perspectives, and then talk about each of them in more detail. At the very end, we explain why some (but not all) respondents wanted a victorious end to the war—and how they saw the future after the war.

2.1.1 Types of perspectives on the war

The first stage of our research showed that, as a rule, war supporters were not ardent militarists: they explained that their support for the "special operation" was not because it was desirable, but because it was inevitable. In other words, to be a supporter of the war meant to believe that it was inevitable. As part of the second wave of interviews conducted in the fall, in declaring their support for the war, our respondents spoke not only of its inevitability, but also the need to continue the conflict, since it was already underway, whatever the reasons behind it may be. Based on these two criteria—the idea that the war was necessary and the idea that it must continue—we have identified four types of attitudes towards the war.

First, there are the confident supporters of the war, who insist that it was inevitable and must continue, regardless of the cost and losses, until it ends with a Russian victory. These are the very few respondents who have an integral view of the war—that is, a definite position on it. After more than half a year of hostilities, these people's perspectives did not change, and some even became stronger in their views as their support became more conscious—but this is also precisely why their views of the war became much more critical. These people considered the war to be inevitable and therefore justified, often referring to Putin's words that "if a fight is inevitable, you must strike first," though they might express dissatisfaction with the course and results of the military intervention. While continuing to hold pro-war positions, they felt entitled to criticize the way the war was being conducted.

Second are the hesitant supporters of the war. Respondents in this category also believed that the war was inevitable, but doubted the possibility of a favorable outcome. Without questioning the justifications for the war, they were unwilling to bear the moral burden of supporting its continuation six months later—especially when predictions of a quick victory did not come to pass. Like some of the first-wave respondents, respondents in this group were worried about the prospect of the war becoming even more protracted, which would inevitably lead to an increase in casualties on both sides of the frontline. Unlike confident (and in some ways even overly-confident) supporters of the war, who demanded greater efficiency and conviction in the way the military operation was being conducted, hesitant supporters, on the contrary, felt confused: emotionally, they perceived the frightening reality of war, but at the same time experienced a feeling of helplessness in their inability to influence the situation. These respondents had strong emotions and wanted a speedy end to hostilities. Thus, despite the fact that we conditionally call this type of respondent "hesitant" or "uncertain," we see that it is more difficult for them to adhere to any specific stance in relation to the war. In a sense, they are both supporters and opponents at the same time.

The third type of perspective we observed can be described as "new patriotism" (see 1.2.4). Respondents in this group did not necessarily believe the war was inevitable. Moreover, some were unhappy with the fact that it had begun (and might have even condemned it) in the first days or weeks of the conflict. Like supporters of the war, both the staunch and the hesitant, these "new patriots" experienced shifts in the shades and nuances of their perceptions of the war over the six months of military conflict since the first wave of interviews in the spring, with time for self-reflection and anxiety. Their support for the war was not based on the perceived justice or inevitability of the conflict, but rather on the fact that the war was being waged by their country, Russia.

For some of them, supporting the Russian Army was the duty of a responsible citizen, which must be fulfilled regardless of whether the citizen himself considered this war just. For others, patriotism manifested itself in an unwillingness to witness their country's defeat, which would jeopardize the prospects for its development as well as its moral status in the international field. Among these new patriots were those who subscribed to the idea of the inevitability of war as they began to follow the course of the conflict more and more closely. Thus, from their point of view, the ability of the Ukrainian Armed Forces to successfully resist the Russian Armed Forces confirmed that the Ukrainian authorities had not just been preparing for the war, but had intended to strike the first blow. In general, it is difficult to describe this type of respondent as a "supporter" of the war: after all, many of them would not have wanted the war to start, despite the fact that they wanted Russia to win it once it did start.

Finally, the fourth type is characterized by the desire to maintain a neutral position at all costs. Respondents in this group are unsure of both the inevitability of war and the need for its continuation, even if for the pragmatic reasons expressed by the new patriots. They insist that they do not have enough information to formulate a viewpoint on the war, the course of which they still cannot influence. Unlike confident supporters who seek to win the war, and the new patriots, whose goal is to avoid defeat, representatives of this group perceive war as a given, as a natural element that they have to deal with regardless of their own desires. They were not certain that the start of the war was inevitable, but they clearly understood

that after seven months of hostilities, its continuation had become inevitable, as it became another circumstance that they must deal with in their own lives. Like the hesitant supporters, the members of this group do not have a clear picture of their desired future—some of them would simply prefer to go back to the world that existed before February 24th, although that is impossible.

Both staunch and hesitant supporters were united by the assumption that the outbreak of war was inevitable, which was not shared by the new patriots or the neutrals. On the other hand, the new patriots were closer to the confident supporters, since both of them perceived their desire to see Russian victory as the result of a conscious choice, of taking sides. On the contrary, hesitant supporters of the war and respondents seeking to maintain neutrality explained their attitudes towards the war as a reaction to external events and circumstances. Finally, confident supporters and neutrals tried to avoid moral assessments, which were more common among the hesitant supporters and the new patriots.

2.1.2 "The fight was inevitable": Confident supporters

The first type of perspective is based on the belief that the war was inevitable, determined by the very course of history and "geopolitical wellsprings" (m., age 63, retired, November 2022), or provoked by hostile actions, and therefore justified. We described arguments of this kind in a previous report: the idea of saving the LPR/DPR from the threat of a Ukrainian "invasion," the centuries-old political and cultural conflict between Russia and Ukraine, or the geopolitical competition between the United States and Russia, as well as other great powers, within the context of which the Russo-Ukrainian War is just one episode. Among the respondents with whom we spoke in the fall were those who expressed a similar point of view:

> "What's going on now would have happened sooner or later anyway, unfortunately. Essentially, it had to happen, stemming from all the events that preceded it, all the developments over the past 20 to 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union." (m., age 46, business owner, November 2022)

> "A global military conflict was inevitable**.** It was inevitable, because global tensions have been growing between NATO, Russia, and China, but it is easier to attack Russia, because it is geographically closer. Then it was necessary to act." (m., age 37, marketing specialist, November 2022)

However, while insisting on the inevitability of the war and/or the necessity of starting one, they criticized the way the conflict was developing. Thus, they spoke of lost time—primarily for preparing and conducting the mobilization of troops (see 2.2), but also for the time spent on the "special operation" in general. For example, one of the respondents, who was sure that "NATO started this whole affair just to weaken Russia," saw the problem as the fact that "they missed the moment," which allowed Ukraine to prepare its defense:

> "Throughout the course of the operation, I've been unhappy with a few things. The delays in the progress. … And, of course, there were supply problems. We saw all of

> this, they don't hide it from us. And, unfortunately, we felt it. And now there's the impression that they're waiting for these mistakes to be corrected, the leadership in combat zones is changing. … Donbas, Crimea, all this is an excuse. The true reason lies deeper and earlier in our history. It began in 1986, when [then Soviet Premier Mikhail] Gorbachev began to drive our great country into the ground. When [President Boris] Yeltsin drank everything he could get his hands on. … That was the beginning. February 24th wasn't the beginning. And what happened on February 24th was a necessity. I am more than sure that it was a necessity. … Russia did nothing to start this war. How many persuasions and conversations were there in an attempt to resolve this issue peacefully? … We needed this operation to happen even earlier, because we lost a lot of time in the sense that they managed to set up a line of defense that took months to push back. … And they still say that they didn't want to attack us?" (m., age 69, retired, October 2022)

In a more radical form, the "lost time" argument can extend to Russia's entire post-Soviet trajectory, resulting in the "special operation," which, in the eyes of some respondents, resembles World War I and potentially threatens the very existence of the Russian state if it fails. Other respondents, on the other hand, as if engaging in a polemical debate with other supporters, insist that the time for the "special operation" was chosen as strategically as it could have been. But what is interesting is the fact that they feel the need to argue against this existing internal polemic as a way to respond to criticism:

> "Therefore, a serious decision had to be made, to start this special operation. We weren't ready for it, it was very rushed. In 2014, many people are saying we should have taken the [Ukrainian] cities back then in 2014. Guys, we didn't even have food security in 2014! … And now, when they talk about the fact that we'll retrieve our sovereignty, that it needs to be retrieved, we have a colonial constitution, Putin tried to do this in 2020, but it did not work; elected governors started posturing and were clearly being paid off, all this commotion. And when they started talking about it, everything immediately fell into place. … We are also now in the process of fighting for our sovereignty." (f., age 37, works in real estate, December 2022)

Another criticism of the course of the war involves the official status of the "special operation." In the spring interviews, some war supporters insisted that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was not a war, but a "special operation," since a full-fledged war involves a large-scale use of weaponry and, accordingly, a larger scale of losses. Focusing on the limited scale and technocratic nature of the "special operation," the first wave of respondents sought to avoid the issue of whether the war was just or unjust, along with the need to ascribe some sort of moral judgement. For the respondents with whom we spoke in the fall, the thesis that "this is not a war" was no longer a justification for the "special operation," but rather became part of the criticism. As one of our interviewees put it, the "special operation" entailed solving limited technical problems "through surgical means"; however, the assistance to Ukraine provided by the Western countries no longer fit into this logic:

> "But they called it a special operation, because it's like any other operation: a surgical operation to cut out the tumor, roughly speaking. In fact, that was the task—to cut

> out the tumor, and then everything would go back to normal. But then the Western countries intervened, with such powerful weapons that it was no longer a special operation, a war as a form of assistance, to protect the rights of the Russian world, but in fact, this [with the West] was already underway. … You see, it started not just as a conflict between Ukraine and Russia. If this were so, then our men would have bombed all the cities long ago and captured them. If it were a war, then everyone would have started bombing and so on, indiscriminately, as happens during a war. In war, cities are bombed, not just military facilities. But at first it was intended to be a special operation to surgically remove the thing that's hindering everyone." (m., age 63, retired, November 2022)

Finally, a third type of criticism casts doubt on one of the important justifications for the war often referenced by first-wave respondents: the argument that the "special operation" was a preemptive strike designed to forestall Ukrainian aggression. A number of respondents, without doubting the alleged inevitable nature of the war, regarded the decision to strike first as a mistake. In their opinion, Russia should have waited for a Ukrainian attempt to retake the territories of the LPR/DPR and/or Crimea, in order to maintain moral superiority and gain more confident support for the military operation among its own populace and residents of other countries:

> "Well, we're the aggressors. I believe it was a huge mistake to act first in this operation. We should have waited a little longer, another two months, no more than that. In any case, Donbas would have taken the hit. Of course, it would have been more brutal, but the motivation would have been greater, in terms of the global community understanding who started it first. This would have been better for us. But, unfortunately, we acted first." (m., age 46, business owner, November 2022)

> "Oy, well, things have been boiling up for a long time. … And America benefited from this war. It's the beneficiary here … Of course, it would have been right not to act on provocations, but there was no other way out, that's that." (m., age 32, arborist, December 2022)

As was the case with the "lost time" argument, the fall interviews also contained references to a polemical debate among the war's supporters about the validity of the concept of its being a preventative strike. Thus, one of the respondents mentioned disagreements on this issue between himself and a like-minded peer:

> "I have this friend from university. … He's a supporter. He didn't know how to react, he lamented that we acted first. Evidently, he also believed that this would happen sooner or later. He says: 'I don't like that we struck first. It seems somehow un-Christian.' " (m., age 43, university lecturer, December 2022)

Some respondents who are staunch supporters were willing to discuss the preemptive strike argument, but insisted that they did not have the complete story and relied on the authority of the military:

> "I believe if we hadn't done it at that moment, the threat to us would have been greater. That is, I believe a fight was inevitable. The question was simply whose

territory it would start on. And if we had waited until people were dying in Rostov-on-Don and aggressions over Crimea started up, so that our hands were clean, and we could … So that it would be easier to justify everything that we're doing. But I don't think this is right. There are—yes, even among my acquaintances, there are people who believe that it shouldn't have gone that way. We should have waited for a situation in which our actions would be justified. But I'm not sure it would be better. So I do not presume to make judgements about this, because I think that I lack the professional skills to be able to advise educated military personnel on how they should act. I think they did the right thing." (f., age 41, research associate, October 2022)

The fact that they did not have all the details did not make them any less confident in their support of the war—the confident supporters perceived their stance as the result of a conscious decision that allowed them to come to terms with some of the issues of the war (for example, incomplete information and the moral dubiousness of a preventive strike), and at the same time gave them the right to criticize other problems (for example, military defeats and losses).

Previously, the idea that the war was inevitable had justified the fact that it was started: the inevitable simply happened. Now, in conditions of ongoing, irreversible and unavoidable war, those who supported the idea that the war was inevitable were not just stating or justifying a historical fact, they were speaking of the timing, timeliness, and pace of the inevitable war. And they spoke of it critically.

2.1.3 "It's sad, of course, but that's how it is": Hesitant supporters

Hesitant supporters are respondents who believed at the time of their interview that the war was inevitable, but were dubious about the need to continue the military operation. They described how they were beginning to have doubts and experience anxiety. They were worried about the protracted nature of the war and the number of casualties, as well as the poor decisions of the inept military command—respondents admitted that they experienced difficult emotions and were ready to accept any end result, as long as it was all over as soon as possible.

Thus, respondents said that it was precisely because the war had become so drawn out, that the possibility of facing a second round of military drafts made them feel like the situation was "hopeless,"—they did not expect the war to go on for so long and lead to so many casualties:

> "How do I feel about it? Not very good. Maybe if they had done it all in a month or two, as they had actually planned, then after the fact, I'd say, 'What's done is done.' But now it's a very complicated situation, even at the current stage. You understand, [we need] to put the pressure on. On the other hand, you realize that it's somewhat hopeless, especially considering the rumors that they're preparing for a new round of drafts come the new year." (m., age 23, medical engineer, November 2022)

> "Of course, I wanted this all to end much sooner, but that didn't happen. The whole thing was drawn out. I don't know who's to blame or if anyone's to blame at all. And I feel very bad for the people who are dying on both sides of the front. I feel very bad for the soldiers of the Russian Federation and for the soldiers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. I feel very bad for the peaceful civilian population that ended up in that area. And in one way or another are suffering. Of course, I would like this whole affair to finish as soon as possible. I didn't think it would be this long. It's sad, of course, but that's how it is." (m., 38 years old, profession unknown, November 2022)

It is significant, however, that these doubts and regrets about the course of the "special operation" did not make these respondents unequivocal opponents of the war, and did not lead them to the conclusion that the war was unjustified and should not have been started in the first place. In saying, "It's sad, of course, but that's how it is," our respondent, a 38-year-old engineer, ascribed an emotional assessment to the events that might indicate his moral discomfort. But the way he resolved this discomfort was by stating the inevitability or hopelessness of the situation ("but that's how it is"). The same inevitability and hopelessness ("there was no other choice") also accompanied the confession "of course, it's all terrible," spoken several times in another part of the interview by the same respondent:

> "Military intervention will never seem like the right choice, by definition. That's a fact … Never in the history of humanity. Of course it's terrible. And of course I feel awful for every person killed on both sides. Moreover, regardless of everything, I still consider Ukrainians to be our brothers. And even aside from that, I still feel terrible for all those who have been killed, even more so because their mentality is close to ours, in some way or another, the languages are close—the nationality. Of course, it's all terrible. But there was simply no other choice." (m., age 38, profession unknown, November 2022)

Another respondent, a 37-year-old business owner, described his shock at realizing that the war could have been waged differently ("with hunks of iron"), without sending so many soldiers of the Russian Armed Forces "into the fire." (m., age 37, business owner, October 2022) The respondent was sincerely shocked and alarmed ("of course it's terrible") that his country could treat people this way. He even admitted that maybe there was no need to fight, and cast doubt on the necessity of saving "compatriots" in the LPR/DPR:

> "What's happening is, of course, terrible. Because as it turns out, the war could have been waged in an entirely different manner. It turns out that we could have avoided waging war altogether. Maybe that wasn't possible. Well, I don't know. But at least in the beginning, there was one general throwing throngs of people at them, and I know people who have come home in boxes. But then it turns out that we could have conducted the war with hunks of iron, that … Well, without exchanging human lives. After all, hunks of iron can easily be remade, it's such an easily renewable resource … But people … Well, since every life is precious. But it seems that they threw people into the fire first, like cannon fodder. And after some time, almost six months later …
>
> It turns out that we can fight harder and in other ways. If this war is even necessary at all. Since I can't be 100% certain that I really, actually believe that we needed to act

> in that particular way, that we needed to attack, that we needed to bring in the troops, that the people living there in the DPR and LPR are fellow countrymen. Although we have enough fellow countrymen in other countries. But for some reason they decided to defend these ones. Still unclear on that issue. Okay, let's say they really had to be defended, and we had to fight. Why did we have to fight with our hands?" (m., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

However, outside of this emotional reflection, the respondent admits that he "cannot" say something against the war, and if he is drafted, he will go to war, since you cannot go against "your own":

> "I can't speak or act in any way against it. If they serve me a summons, I'd also go there. I won't be particularly enthusiastic, show some kind of heroism or something like that. Basically, I'd treat it like a job. This is the kind of situation, in my opinion, where we can't go against the masses of our own people (we'll conditionally call them 'our own'), for a number of reasons." (m., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

Hesitant supporters pointed to the same issues as the confident supporters: the number of casualties, the prolonged nature of the conflict, errors made by commanders, and the moral dubiousness of the preventive strike argument. However, while for confident supporters these errors were an excuse to make critical statements about the military-political leadership and calls for more effective conduct of hostilities, for hesitant supporters, all of the above was a source of doubt about the necessity of continuing the war, which (although it was inevitable) had not gone at all according to plan and was not over after a few months. It can be assumed that these people would have been among the confident supporters of the war if the invasion of Ukraine had gone off without a hitch along the lines of the so-called "Crimean scenario," or according to the models of other conflicts in the post-Soviet space, where it was possible to achieve a "freeze" in the status of conflict:

> Q: "… does it seem to you now that it [the war] was justified, or not?"
>
> A: "I don't have an answer to that question. I have always, even when talking with my own friends and family, since 2014, since the signing of the Minsk Agreements, I have only ever been for a ceasefire. We need to at least get closer to the situation in Transnistria. To which my Ukrainian friends and relatives say, 'We are not Moldova, we will not stop shooting' … Do you remember what happened in Tiraspol? Things weren't so simple there either, there were also these clashes. The Russians, thanks to General Lebed, his positions, they quickly pulled the two sides apart, established at least some sort of order, people stopped shooting. The most important thing is that people stop being killed, stop shooting. … That could be the case here, too—the important thing is a ceasefire. But Ukraine said no, we're not like that, we will shoot. … The conditions are the same—to stop shooting, to disengage the troops." (m., age 59, real estate worker, December 2022)

The most characteristic difference between hesitant supporters of the war and their more confident peers is the former's readiness to accept a compromise to end the conflict, even if

"there will be no winning sides here." (m., age 37, business owner October 2022) Although they share in the notion that the war was inevitable and worth supporting, hesitant supporters are not ready to accept the price that would have to be paid for the war to end in a Russian victory. In this sense, the very word "supporters" is applied to them only conditionally, with a number of reservations. Also, unlike confident supporters, they do not view their attitudes towards war as the result of a conscious choice, but see themselves as reacting to circumstances they cannot control ("it's sad, but that's how it is").

2.1.4 "We are already in conflict": New patriots

"New patriots" is what we are provisionally calling those respondents who did not consider the war inevitable at the very beginning, but who gradually found arguments for supporting it. These people may have opposed the war in the first months after it began, but the protracted nature of the conflict had led them to support the war, and also made them believe in the necessity of continuing the war to victory. It is important to note that other types of perspectives do not necessarily exclude patriotism, and reflections on one's love for the homeland is characteristic of more than just supporters of the war. For example, as we show below, respondents striving for neutrality may also interpret their position as patriotic. By calling these respondents "new patriots," we want to emphasize the relative novelty of such reflections for these people themselves (see section 1.2.4).

> "But for me personally—they're defending my country. We're already in the conflict, we need to participate in it. And on our side—them, these soldiers. They are on our side in this conflict, they're dying for it. Question: why, for what purpose did the leadership of the country unleash this conflict? It's the question hanging in the air. I don't know the answer." (f., age 37, engineer, on maternity leave, October 2022)

The respondent emphasized that she supported the war, despite the fact that she did not like many aspects about it ("I may express displeasure about any individual aspect, but I still support it"). But even then so only as a "law-abiding, honest citizen," she opted for supporting the war, since "the government has decided to do this, and there's no room for discussion with orders":

> "And now I have this stable feeling, and I've pretty much maintained it throughout these six months, which is that I support it on the whole. Because in my view, this is like being law-abiding. In general, I consider myself a law-abiding person, I don't take bribes, I don't steal. I am an honest citizen. And if the government decided that this operation was needed, I don't know, I didn't follow what happened there, what were the prerequisite conditions, what other ways of resolving the situation there were, but basically, the government decided to do this, and there's no room for discussion with orders. They made the decision, so it was necessary. And I will obey, just like that. … I may express displeasure about any individual aspect, but I support it. Well, I support it overall." (f., age 37, engineer, on maternity leave, October 2022)

It is important to note that the respondent made the decision to "obey," despite the fact that before the war, she followed the activities of the Russian opposition and was even affected

by the investigations of Alexei Navalny. The outbreak of the war, however, led her to the conclusion that a man like Putin should be at the helm:

> "But, Navalny's work somehow trailed behind me and got stuck in my mind. But when the special operation started, it became clear that none of this mattered, that during a time of military action, I want someone like [Putin] at the helm. And overall, I'm a supporter. That's it." (f., age 37, engineer, on maternity leave, October 2022)

When describing their position after half a year of war, some respondents openly admitted that they had become "huge patriots," precisely because they saw the war, which was already underway, as a situation of choice, in which there was a need to "support our own" and "stand with the homeland." (m., age 23, journalist, October 2022; see 1.2.4) Thus, in month eight of the war, a 23-year-old journalist who did not support Putin and advocated for civil liberties described his own attitude in this way:

> "Now my attitude is that we need to see it through to the end, in my view, support our own, not abandon them, and try to find some sort of compromise. Well, to put yourself in a comfortable position for negotiating. I mean, to win a military victory, but at the same time to understand that you won't have complete control over the situation. … Yes, yes, I think I've become a huge patriot. I realized that I'll stand with my homeland to the end, no matter what happens, no matter how hard it gets. I'm not going anywhere, I will remain Russian, and will be with [my country] til the end. Beforehand, I was more cosmopolitan, in some manner. I mean to say, I didn't consider myself to be a patriot above all else." (m., age 23, journalist, October 2022)

One of the reasons why the new patriots chose to support the war was the fear of military defeat and its consequences in terms of damage to the Russian population and economy:

> "The war is bad, of course. But the only thing worse than war is losing a war. … Christian values are Christian values, you could turn the other cheek, of course. But if anything happens, we have a larger population in the country and the blow will be more disruptive, and not just the sanctions. If hostilities break out on the territory of the Russian Federation, then many more people will suffer." (m., age 32, bricklayer, November 2022)

In addition to the material consequences of the war, the new patriots were also concerned about the moral consequences, in terms of losing face in the international arena:

> "What I didn't like was that at some points, again, it seemed to me like … Ah, well, like even concerning the explosion on the Crimean Bridge, I was wondering if the leadership would simply sit there and take it, even though we ourselves understood that this blow wasn't just to destroy the bridge or the infrastructure. This, to put it bluntly, is like spit or a slap with a glove to Putin's face, because it's still a symbol, in any case. And so I was wondering: will they sit there and take it? And it turns out that they did not. And in this case, actually, I thought that this was the right thing to do, that they didn't sit there and take it." (m., age 22, programmer, October 2022)

An important aspect of the new patriots' support for the war is their unwillingness to be blamed. Unlike confident supporters, some new patriots were willing to assign blame in their judgements about the war. Realizing that they could also be put in a position of blame, they began to reflect on the criteria of justice in international politics, asking the question: why is it that "it's okay when they do it … but others can't?" (m., 22 years old, programmer, October 2022) For some of the new patriots, the way to resolve this contradiction was by transitioning from a potentially guilty position to one that was less condemned—supporting your country, no matter what:

> "And with every day, you realize that you're not to blame for anything. You don't give orders, you don't say anything, you don't support it with your rubles. Well, no, you pay taxes in any case, of course, which means you support it, but nonetheless. You don't send things to squadrons or anything, ammunition or something like that. But nonetheless, you're considered guilty. And it builds up and builds up and builds up. … It's kind of like, 'it's okay when they do it. But others can't.' And it's frustrating, and it seems to me that these people are starting to support the operation more and more." (m., age 22, programmer, October 2022)

While for confident supporters, the outbreak of war was inevitable, for some new patriots this inevitability was only "revealed" after the fact, after several months of hostilities. Above, we have called this type of justification for war "reverse justification" (see 1.2.2). For example, the unwillingness of the Ukrainian side to lay down their arms and the active resistance led by the Armed Forces of Ukraine was perceived by these respondents as proof of the inevitability of war:

> "Look, you asked me: 'Do you believe in the threat from the Ukrainian side?' Yes, I do. I'll be damned, but I do. On the 24th, I didn't believe in it. But now I do. When all that, everything happened, I believed, I realized that they weren't just sitting on their thumbs over there. They were accomplishing specific things … Some time ago, relatively speaking, a year ago, it would have been complete nonsense to me, even the threat to Donbas was complete nonsense. Like, no way. Well, I doubted it very much." (m., age 60, business owner, October 2022)

These "reverse" arguments in support of the war are not necessarily about Ukraine, but may be related to the feeling that "the whole world is united against Russia":

> "I don't know if we attacked them for the right reasons or not, but the fact that the whole world is united against Russia, the brands left, the companies left, some work is being done to undermine Russia—I get the feeling that my country is being unfairly bullied. Now I am even more patriotic than ever." (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

Without fully buying into the existing justifications for the war, the new patriots arrive at the need to support it, motivated by both moral and pragmatic considerations. Like confident supporters, many of them perceive their support as a conscious choice, but they are inspired not so much by a belief in the inevitability of war as by an unwillingness to face the material and moral consequences of defeat in a protracted conflict.

2.1.5 "I want everything to go back to how it was": In search of neutrality

Respondents in the fourth group did not believe that the war was inevitable. They were also uncertain of the need to continue. Despite this, they could not be called opponents of the war—the idea of neutrality is a major narrative in their interviews in the sense of their having the right not to take any particular position on the war, and they were ready to insist on this right. Thus, one of the respondents claimed that "neutrality" was also an "opinion"—one which, however, did not require the choice of a side:

> "Well, I stated [my] position immediately, that I don't know the whole truth, I will stick to the golden mean. For me, that's also an opinion. Some are for one side, others for the other; I'm for neutrality. Because I really don't know. I didn't start this war, it's not for me to end it." (m., age 34, manager, November 2022)

The final phrase in the above quote is a good illustration of the differences between respondents striving for neutrality and other types of perspectives observed in our data. Confident supporters considered it necessary to end the "war they didn't start" with a Russian victory, no matter how much time and resources it takes. The new patriots were confident that, regardless of who started this war and how, it must end—if possible, in Russia's favor. Finally, even hesitant supporters of the war insisted on the need to end it. Only respondents striving for neutrality simply "washed their hands" of the situation—the politicians who started it will end the war, and it is impossible to influence these processes:

> "Then I got the feeling that it was unlikely to end quickly, that it was a rather long process. And I simply realized that I can't influence it in any way, and I calmed down, and remain in that state to this day**.** … An absolutely neutral stance about the special operation and the negative consequences in everyday life." (m., age 18, student, November 2022)

It is worth noting that we intentionally call this viewpoint "in search of neutrality," and that the respondents are *striving* for it. In this way, we want to emphasize that "neutrality" entails less a defined position in their attitude about the war and more a desire to not hold any position. Over the course of their interviews, these respondents may drift from admitting the fact that the war is unnecessary to listing its positive aspects. In this sense, they are not able to maintain neutrality, but nonetheless continue to strive for it.

While the hesitant supporters and respondents striving for neutrality were united by the emphasis they placed on their inability to influence the surrounding circumstances, hesitant supporters of the war, who were advocating for it to end, experienced strong emotions and moral distress associated with the fact that a protracted war leads to numerous casualties. In contrast, respondents striving for neutrality were more focused on their own daily lives and had given up trying to find an acceptable way out of the situation for themselves. They talked about their "absolutely neutral stance" (m., age 18, student, November 2022) towards the war and how they "do not care" about its political aspects. (m., age 21, student, October 2022) In interviews, these people focused on their own inability to change anything: they called themselves "pawns," "victims of propaganda" (m., age 21, student, October 2022),

and "ordinary people" (f., age 23, student, November 2022), and also expressed a desire to return to the world as it had been before February 24th, knowing full well that this is impossible:

> "You know, I don't give a damn about it, to be honest. Because I believe that we're just ordinary people. We are victims of propaganda. We are all victims of propaganda. We Russians have our own truth, the West has its own. To believe this side or that side, in my opinion, is stupid. We are puppets. That's what I think. Therefore, I absolutely do not care who's to blame for what. These are political matters. I get involved in them, well… <...> Who am I to decide for someone over there, you understand? <...> I want everything to go back to the way it was. For the war to end, for all American brands to return. I wish that everything, all of it, everything would just go back to normal." (m., age 21, student, October 2022)

> "I'm just living my life, I don't plan to live with this shit. I decided the way I was gonna deal with this fucked up situation … I don't want to be in a state of constant collapse, with no desire to live … I'm not interested in that, I have enough of my own problems. Just thinking about it, being anxious … I don't know, I don't give a fuck at all, as long as it doesn't affect me—I don't give a fuck**.** I have enough problems of my own." (m., age 27, oil worker, November 2022)

Respondents' desire to maintain neutrality and distance themselves from politics does not exclude the possibility of seeing their own viewpoint as patriotic. Thus, one respondent calls herself "a person who has always been a patriot of her country," although she did not "sing the anthem around the clock," and "did not vote for Putin," towards whom she is "neutral—he just is and that's all." (f ., age 23, student, November 2022) In an interview, she emphasized that she did not support the "special operation," although she "is sorry that people are dying, no matter what side":

> "Now, [my position] is more or less one of neutrality. As long as it doesn't directly affect me, I pretty much don't care. Well, it's not that I don't care—personally, I feel sorry for everyone: I feel awful for the Ukrainian side and the Russians, I feel bad for everyone. I'm just sorry that people are dying, no matter what side. I don't want this to turn out in Ukraine's favor, or in Russia's favor—I just want everyone to live calmly and peacefully together, that's my overall attitude, but in general, it's all the same to me. … Plus, I'm not really into history, not really into politics, I've never been particularly interested in them, never gone deep into it, I felt like everything was fine with the country. I had no problems, my family had no problems, so it seemed to me that everything was fine, fantastic, I mean, it didn't particularly concern me." (f., age 23, student, November 2022)

Characteristically, when talking about losses and victims, the respondent pointedly refused to take sides and define a potential way out of the situation. Unlike hesitant supporters, whose worries about the victims make them think about specific scenarios (for example, Russian involvement in places like Crimea or Transnistria), her desire "for everyone to live calmly and peacefully" is formulated in an abstract way and refers to the situation before February 24th. Her own observations contradict the idea of the inevitability of war, but she

is ready to admit that Putin could have sufficient reason for starting it, albeit unknown to common folk.

> "To put it briefly, I believe that it was probably a necessity. … Strike first and all that. … I lean more towards the idea that the president knows something that we don't, and that if he started it, that means it was necessary for some reason, which means there was some sort of danger for our country. … If I felt, if I knew about some sort of threat from the Ukrainian side, or from America through Ukraine, then maybe I would have done exactly the same, if I had some confirmed, objective proof. But ideally, I would have tried to make sure that basically none of this happened, basically that the special operation was never launched, because why? We were doing just fine." (f., age 23, student, November 2022)

In other words, doubts about the justification of the war are resolved by assuming that the Russian military-political leadership had reasons to invade Ukraine, although it is impossible to know what these reasons were. Such reasoning was present among many respondents, but it was most characteristic of hesitant supporters and respondents striving for neutrality. Some scholars call this way of reasoning "inferred justification"—people justify war based not on a specific rationale for the decision to start it, but on the belief that such a rationale exists. The inferred justification fits well with the "neutrality" that these respondents are trying to maintain:

> A: "My attitude is the same as it was."
>
> Q: "It hasn't changed?"
>
> A: "I believe … Yes. I have a neutral stance towards everything. I don't want to take sides. I believe that it really couldn't have been otherwise. And I mean those who make the decisions aren't idiots, are they? Really, well, I think at this point they know what they're doing. For sure. It couldn't be otherwise." (m., age 21, student, October 2022)

In summary, one could say that the meaning of the "neutrality" these respondents strive towards is depoliticization—politics is something that "just is, that's it," and therefore does not warrant interest or attention until it begins to affect everyday life. This neutral attitude towards the domestic political situation in the country is extended to the "special operation"—they refuse to condemn or support it, at the same time emphasizing the reactionary nature of their position: "I didn't start this war, it's not for me to end it." (m., age 34, manager, November 2022)

2.1.6 The Russia we will find: War as a chance for renewal

In order to better understand the attitudes of supporters who are certain of the necessity of continuing the war until a victorious end—in our case, those whom we provisionally call confident supporters and new patriots—it is necessary to understand not only how they view the causes of the war, but also their ideas about the future after it ends. This is not about their vision of how they would like the war to end (see 2.5 for more on this), but rather

about their image of the future that may come to pass after, and because of, the war. These visions of the future are largely defined by propaganda clichés, but their specific details vary from individual to individual. Their analysis makes it possible to understand exactly what respondents are pinning their hopes on when they choose to support the war.

Supporters of the war, who are confident in the need to continue it, see the war as a way to defend "their interests" and "their own rules" in the international arena (m., age 37, marketing specialist, November 2022), and this war specifically as an important precedent, proving that such a course of action is still possible:

> "About the attitude towards Russia. … We set a very cool precedent over the past hundred years, when we proved that someone else can set their own rules and defend their interests. We have shown what needs to be done. The attitude towards Russia has not changed much, those who respected us began to respect us more and vice versa. Old hostilities were uncovered." (m., 37 years old, marketer, November 2022)

Other respondents often formulated their expectations of the war "in reverse," based on what they did not like about the pre-war world, including the problems to which the war might be a solution. For example, such problems included: the lack of "true independence" in Russia, the poor socio-economic conditions in the country and the lack of care from the state, as well as the indifference and passivity of Russian society. Thus, one respondent, a 40-year-old university manager, believed that it was thanks to the outbreak of war that Russia was making "claims to true independence," where its government could begin to act "in the interest of our country, and not in anyone else's":

> "Our country's position in the world? I think that we're making claims to our true independence. I mean independence, real independence. … By independence I mean the actions of the leadership of our country, regardless of the opinions of other countries, are not regulated by anyone else and our government acts in the interest of our country, and not anyone else's. … I see the special operation as one of the components of the global restructuring, I see the restructuring of our country, in particular. … For me personally, there is no doubt that Russia must rebuild, and rebuild not with a focus on the West or the East—Russia must focus on itself**.** … It seems to me that our country has all the resources, and the brains, and the territory, and the population to position itself well. We can be absolutely independent. We must draw the right conclusions. We must rebuild our economy, industry, and be as independent as possible from anyone." (m., age 40, university administrative worker, November 2022)

Another respondent, a 25-year-old shift worker who fought in the war in 2022 as a contract soldier, emotionally described his attitude towards the socio-economic situation in the country before the war ("we deserve more") and the low level of state care ("our government doesn't give a fuck about us"). Despite this criticism, with the outbreak of the war, he considered his opinions of the country's domestic issues, coming to the conclusion that only the current government could protect against American influence and "Western propaganda" ("same-sex marriage and all that"), which pose an existential threat:

> "At the time, I felt like, our government doesn't give a fuck about us. I mean they don't even give us a decent salary, let alone anything else. That's how it is, in that way my attitude hasn't changed, it's true. We deserve more, actually. … And Navalny—I used to think, 'Shit, Navalny's a stand-up guy, he's fucking Putin over.' And now it's just, I'm aware of all this from this side and I think—can you imagine if they came to power, and we'd sell out to America, we'd sell them all sorts of weapons, let them into our country, or something like that? That's how I see it. And what would happen then? There'd really be nothing left of us as a people, see for yourself. All this Western propaganda, where fags are walking around hand in hand, kissing. I don't give a fuck about them, these faggots, let them kiss in private somewhere. But out in the open … Our children shouldn't see this, because it's not normal." (m., age 25, shift worker, October 2022)

After the outbreak of the war, the respondent evolved from criticizing the government for specific socio-economic problems (salaries) to supporting it in the face of an ideological threat perceived as existential (the influence of LGBT people as a threat to the people). The war had become a chance to protect our values ("we are the only decent people who still have some spiritual, family, and life values in general," m., age 25, shift worker, October 2022), which are of higher importance than socio-economic factors, as a threat to these values threatens the very essence of Russian existence. For a number of other respondents, the war seemed to be an opportunity to renew and sober up society, including in the literal sense. Thus, one of them stated his belief that the problems in the country should be solved by people, but before the war, people were passive and immersed in their private lives ("TV series and beer"):

> "I'll reiterate again that maybe this policy of indifference we have will come to an end. I regret that this is the way it must end, when it could have been done quite peacefully. Well, you see—so many years of alcoholism, so many years of drug addiction. They seem like mundane things, but they affect the social environment. How do you force a person to work when they have nothing but getting drunk, not a thought in their head? There are millions like that, unfortunately … Everyone is abruptly sobering up. Bombs are dropping, the conflict has begun, and there's no more sitting on the sidelines, whether you like it or not. Maybe we'll learn to value what we have now, that's all. So far, that's the trend I'm seeing." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

For some other respondents, supporting the "special operation" was essential to their future as politically active citizens. Thus, one respondent, who in the past had participated in rallies for Navalny, explained the need to support the war as follows:

> "That paradigm—not my circus, not my monkeys, I don't know anything—it ended on February 24th. Now it doesn't matter if you're for the operation or against the operation, it's going to affect you regardless. When all this is over, it's perfectly rational that those with the right to a voice will be the ones who at least supported it, or if they didn't support it, at least kept their mouths shut" (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

Another respondent was engaged in various civic initiatives and, in his own words, "was deeply involved in the opposition," but with the outbreak of war, he chose to support the "special operation," resigned to the fact that "that's the president we have, that's the commander-in-chief we have, there is nothing I can do about it, but I also don't want to apologize for it anymore." While discussing his view on his support for the war and how he saw it ending, he said the following:

> "I hope this will all come to an end soon, we'll return to peaceful life, we can take up issues of LGBT rights again, troubled youth, and so on. … Incidentally, the sad thing is, I'll be doing this alone, since everyone screwed off to Tbilisi. … As before, the balance of power is in favor of Russia. Until the end of their lives, in fact, there are people who will be deprived of the opportunity to achieve something within the country. You can say anything you like from across the border, but only from inside the country can you make changes, conduct some kind of political activity." (m., age 34, marketing specialist, October 2022)

Finally, in interviews with consistent supporters of the war, multiple times we see the argument that the outbreak of war on February 24th marked the transition to a fundamentally new and improved stage in the history of Russia, and even the world:

> "It's a sort of Rubicon, that's for sure. … That is, the era of hard living I was in is apparently ending. It's ending all over Russia as well. Well, and all over the planet, essentially, but that's a separate issue." (m., age 37, programmer, temporarily unemployed, December 2022)

The examples cited above show that strong support for war is not only built on a belief in its inevitability, but is also fueled by a vision of the desired future that the respondents believe the war will bring. They see the war as a real chance for a new life: "true independence" for Russia will allow people to finally shake off the alcoholic slumber; the war will make people stop being indifferent to each other; and it will enable people to protect themselves from Western propaganda (LGBT) and preserve their own values, or have the opportunity to participate in the country's political life. However, this applies only to that part of the respondents who, in their own words, consciously chose to declare themselves in favor of seeing the war through to a Russian victory. The rest were much more "confused": they were not sure that the war was necessary (even if they sometimes gave arguments in its defense), they could not envision the future after it ends, and many of them were still trying to step back, to avoid assessing the situation.

***

For this reason, a simple division between supporters and the undecided does not capture the full complexity of the opinions of non-opponents in the fall of 2022. Respondents in the second wave evaluated the need to start a "special operation," and the need to continue it, differently, and these assessments might not coincide. Based on these two criteria, we have identified the four types of attitudes.

On one hand, there were confident supporters, who insist on the inevitability of the outbreak of war and the need to continue it to a Russian victory. On the other hand, among the supporters there were also respondents who are sure of its inevitability, but who doubt the necessity of continuing it. These respondents, hesitant supporters, considered the war justified, but were not ready to insist that Russia should continue waging war on moral grounds. The third type of attitude we called "new patriotism." The new patriots did not consider war to be inevitable and were not ready to fully agree with its prevailing justifications, but they were convinced that "it is necessary to finish the war"—both for moral and pragmatic reasons. Although many of them wished the war had not begun, they still wanted Russia to win, fearing the consequences of defeat. Finally, the fourth type of perspective is characterized by the desire to maintain neutrality without taking any definite position in relation to the war. These people were not sure that the war was inevitable, nor that it should be continued to the bitter end. Taking the war as a given, and emphasizing their preoccupation with their own lives, they would rather just return to the world as it was before February 24, 2022, although they understand that this is impossible.

The types of perspectives on the war differ from each other not only in content. New patriots and confident supporters viewed their respective views of the war as the result of a conscious choice. Their support for the war was based on ideas about what the future holds for the country in the event of victory: they hoped for some kind of Russian renaissance, and to gain "true independence" thereby, which would solve the domestic issues that have been building up within the country. On the contrary, hesitant supporters and those striving for neutrality admitted that they formed their attitude towards the war as a reaction to surrounding events and circumstances that they could not change. Finally, the new patriots and hesitant war supporters were prone to moral assessments, which are avoided by confident war advocates and respondents striving for neutrality.

2.2 Mobilization: How people act (or do not act) in response

The announcement of the partial mobilization was a shocking event for many Russians—comparable to the start of the "special operation" itself. In this section, we consider different aspects of how Russians perceived the mobilization. We trace how arguments were constructed to justify the mobilization or to criticize it. When considering critical statements, we pay attention to what exactly was criticized (the very decision to announce the mobilization or the process of its implementation), and whom exactly was criticized. We also show how respondents reacted to the mobilization in situations where it may have affected them personally, or may have affected their relatives and friends. Finally, we discuss how respondents evaluated other people's behavioral strategies in this situation.

2.2.1 Attitudes towards the mobilization: An unpopular decision

On September 21, 2022, President Putin announced the start of "partial mobilization." People who preferred to avoid the topic of the war suddenly realized that it could affect them personally after all. Here is how one of our respondents, a 39-year-old real estate specialist, recalls it:

> "I was probably sitting in the office, and turned on the live news or something like that, and they were announcing it there. I thought, now this is going to directly affect me, too." (m., age 39, real estate specialist, October 2022)

For some respondents, mobilization was the event that turned the distant "special operation" into a real war:

> "Thus, the special operation ended and the war began. War. And the war will be long, the war will be very exhausting and, most likely, it will not be a war with clear winners and losers. Somehow, one way or another, both sides will attribute victory to themselves, and both sides will actually lose a lot, so that's it. And the 'special operation' ended, as it were, and this is already an obvious fact, and there are no people who do not recognize, they say that … After the mobilization, no one is talking about the 'special operation' anymore." (m., age 34, school teacher, October 2022)

For many, the mobilization was an event that it seemed impossible to prepare for in advance—in that sense, the rumors of its approach did not make its announcement any less shocking:

> "I was shaking all over when I heard about the mobilization, because since the beginning of February, everyone has been saying: 'What if there's a draft?! They'll mobilize—and that will be it! This is war!' And now this moment has come—on September 21st, they announced the draft. For me it was … I don't even know … Just imagine: the war has begun! What else can you feel here, if not some kind of fear? That's it! There is no more light at the end of the tunnel. Do you understand? The light has gone out. This is the end! Mobilization!" (m., age 21, student, October 2022)

It is important to note that these same respondents might simultaneously claim that mobilization was inevitable! Our respondents evaluated the war in a similar way when it first broke out: it is a nightmare, but what else can be done?

However, for some of the non-opponents of the war, the mobilization did not come as a shock and did not lead to worries or anxieties:

> "I don't quite understand the psychological anxiety about this [the announcement of the draft]. Apparently, I'm the odd one out here, but I'm not the only one … We have a British company at work and many hid or fled. Some of them jumped ship immediately, some to London, Dubai, Kazakhstan, the majority of them. But not all—I talk to some, we walk around, shrug our shoulders—what's wrong with them? It doesn't make me feel depressed. I don't know, maybe I'm some kind of monster, but the fact is the fact—the draft doesn't scare me. If they take me away, what can I do? I will go." (m., age 34, marketing specialist, October 2022)

Mobilization as a forced measure

Why did mobilization seem inevitable to many respondents, regardless of their emotions about it? Many respondents believed that it naturally followed from the critical situation

that had developed at the front: the failures of the Russian Army on the battlefield, the enemy's advantage in military strength due to NATO assistance, and the fatigue of Russian regular servicemen.

Most respondents agreed that the Russian authorities had a plan for a quick victory over Ukraine, but it failed, and therefore they needed to send new soldiers to the front:

> "No, well, it's like on one hand, it made me tense, but on the other, it was somehow reassuring, because it seemed like they should announce a draft, because everything went south after the retreat near Kharkiv, like that it might be some kind of military defeat, that there was no other option. Because they have already recruited troops … And Wagner is practically recruiting criminals over there. Well, what kind of army is this? It's clear that there are not enough soldiers, personnel units. Well, what else is there to do? How long has mobilization been going on in Ukraine? There they mobilize, they don't mobilize. It seemed that there was no other option." (m., age 39, university lecturer, November 2022)

In trying to explain the need for mobilization, some of our respondents resorted to the same type of argument that they used when commenting on the decision to go to war (and which in section 2.1. we call "inferred justification"): if the leadership of the country made the decision, then it means they had their reasons. At the same time, it turns out to be more difficult to trust in this justification of the authority's actions in this case, especially when the mobilization begins to directly affect respondents' lives:

> "At first, the thought that the mobilization had begun sort of slipped through my mind, and I thought—well, excellent, that's what should be done, not just to defend the country, but to change something, since clearly some action needs to be taken. If the government made this decision, it means it was important and necessary. But then, when it started to affect me directly and they started taking people I know, I thought: 'Is all of this really necessary?' " (f., age 23, student, November 2022)

Many of our interviewees saw the announcement of the mobilization as a necessary step due to the potential threat of the hostilities moving towards the Russian border territories, which must be prevented:

> "It was all implemented logically, the draft. We don't have enough troops there to keep the border in good condition, so they don't climb over into our territory and bomb the Kursk and Belgorod oblasts." (m., age 71, retired, October 2022)

Some attribute this threat to heightened external pressure on Russia due to the war. Since the country now has to confront the whole developed democratic world, many more people are needed to protect its borders:

> "The mobilization? That was to be expected. If the whole world, as they say, 40 different countries, took up arms against Russia, will our contract soldiers alone be able to protect all of enormous Russia? Of course not! Not enough people! Do you understand? Not enough people!" (f., age 70, retired, November 2022)

One way or another, many respondents considered the announcement of the mobilization as a necessary measure the nation was forced to take, however unpleasant, given the situation in which Russia found itself in the fall of 2022.

Criticism of the mobilization: A "belated" decision or violation of the social contract

However, a forced measure does not mean a pleasant or joyful measure. While viewing the mobilization as a necessary solution, most respondents simultaneously criticized it. This criticism could be directed at different aspects of the mobilization: for example, the uncanny timing of the decision to carry it out or the way it was organized. It is important that criticism of the mobilization is voiced by respondents with very different attitudes towards the war, including confident supporters.

Staunch supporters of the war, while considering the mobilization a necessary step, are dissatisfied with the belated, inferior, half-hearted nature of it. These respondents had already been anticipating mobilization in the spring or summer. In their view, mobilization was not an extreme measure, but an indispensable condition for the normal conduct of the war. In this regard, confident supporters of the war often lamented the indecisiveness of the Russian authorities, who announced the mobilization too late, as well as their controversial position regarding the war and victory:

> "I, like the majority of those who are trying to formulate a patriotic, pro-Russian position, don't understand why Russia is acting so mildly. Either this is true weakness and an inability to finish things, or it's a conscious position. If it's a conscious position, then that's great. But if it's because it's impossible, then why the hell did we get into all this? It seems to me that if the mobilization was announced immediately, and full-fledged, full-scale, then we could have finished this whole thing a lot faster." (m., age 34, marketing specialist, October 2022)

Criticizing the government for postponing the draft, confident supporters came to the conclusion that by doing so, the country's leadership demonstrated its inability or even unwillingness "to fight for real":

> "And I think it was done too late, that it should have been done earlier, in order to have a reserve, so that we have troops taking up the rear. That's why I said that if you fight, then you have to fight for real. And if you're not going to, then don't fight at all." (m., age 69, retired, October 2022)

For the same reason, they condemned the Russian government's decision not to declare all-out war on Ukraine, which—especially after the announcement of the mobilization—was perceived by them as a hypocritical half-measure. From the point of view of many confident supporters, the Russian leadership should have either officially declared war and mobilize, or maintained the status of intervention in Ukraine as a "special operation," but then not call ordinary citizens to the front:

> "And most importantly, the people were wildly upset that the mobilization had been rolled out. And the dead have already started flooding in. And there is no war! … And that's it! And everyone's just sitting here. And no one understands where we're

> going or why all this had to start, if we're not fighting. And they kept saying for six months that we would not fight. … Everyone's yelling: 'That's it, guys, you got into the war! Now we have to fight!' And they [the military leadership] don't want to fight." (m., age 34, school teacher, October 2022)

> "I support the concept of the 'special operation.' … But at the same time, I supported it precisely because the special operation was being conducted by professional soldiers—that is, some kind of … not really seizing territory. We were disarming some dangerous radicals in the border zone. … And slipping into war the old-fashioned way means much greater losses, and is very bad overall." (m., age 37, programmer, temporarily unemployed, December 2022)

Most of our respondents, both confident and less-confident supporters of the war and people striving for neutrality (see the classification of respondents in section 2.1), while accepting the necessity of mobilizing, expressed dissatisfaction with the way the process was being conducted:

> "I understand why it's necessary to achieve the goals they've set out on and follow through with the situation—it's necessary, yes. There are not enough people, they've gotten involved in something they can't pull off, made a huge number of mistakes, a huge number of people have died, because the killings occur on both sides. And now one of the logical solutions is to just add more mass. It's tragic, what's happening—the disorder, corruption, chaos, it has been proven once again. To put it bluntly, if you're going to fight, then you should be ready for it. If you're not ready for it or haven't prepared, then don't go off and fight. It's like that …" (m., age 33, profession unknown, October 2022)

These critical and often very emotional comments about the way the mobilization is being conducted may be accompanied by criticism of the inefficiency of the Russian state. One of the main vices of the Russian state that this criticism sheds light on is corruption:

> "Yes! The disorder is horrifying! I mean, they don't know where to send them, what to feed them, they don't have any uniforms. And then this bastard stands up and says, 'Oh, didn't you know, we've had 1.5 million uniform sets stolen.' Right in front of their eyes. And in the pre-war time these uniforms were on [Russian classified advertisements website] Avito for 2,500 rubles [approximately US $25]. And all the rations, uniforms, the Ratnik [combat systems]—all gone! Simply everything! It's appalling! Even if you really are a steadfast patriot, even if you really have that burning inside you, well, you just can't let that happen, gentlemen. You've got jack squat. You're gathering people, even if not to the front, then to the frontline territories … and any other territories! They need food and uniforms! But there are none, and that's it, there's nothing, no way, no how." (m., age 34, school teacher, October 2022)

Dissatisfaction with the state and personal anxieties may also be combined with the criticism of the mobilization process:

> "My mother worked in the military registration and enlistment office. And I know it was complete chaos over there. For me, this is expected. Well, in general, initially

there was a feeling that in general now everyone will be raked up, here. And it was scary, of course, that they might take her husband away, that there was a risk of being left without financial support, that the child could be left without a father, and so on. It was very difficult, of course." (f., age 37, engineer, on maternity leave, October 2022)

However, it is important to note that criticism of the authorities and the declining trust in representatives of state bodies almost never extend to President Putin personally. Thus, the respondents separate Putin from the corrupt bureaucratic state, placing the former over the latter:

"I've noticed that my attitude towards the government has changed for the worse, because military leaders and mobilization centers are not working very well. Apparently there have been a lot of mistakes. And also in terms of the military headquarters, the coordinating government council, and in the economy, they are doing something wrong. My attitude towards the state power has gotten worse, as well as towards the very structure of power, the system."
Q: "That is, your opinion on Putin has not changed, but rather your opinion on the government apparatus has changed?"
A: "Yes. Not because Putin is good, but he isn't responsible for everything. My complaints are more with the system—it's a broader understanding." (m., age 37, journalist, October 2022)

Finally, some apolitical, hesitant supporters of the war, while justifying the decision to announce a mobilization in the early days following its announcement, began to doubt its necessity a little later, when it became clear that, despite the authorities' promises, it might affect their lives and the lives of their loved ones. In this case, the mobilization became a violation of their usual way of life, within the framework of which there was an unspoken agreement between society and power—society doesn't delve into politics, and the government does not delve into the private life and careers of its citizens:

"It's all just nonsense … In my opinion, it's complete nonsense. It should have been done by contractors, hired soldiers. It shouldn't be carried out by an office worker who's been sitting at a computer his whole life. What's the point? He's a grown man, 30 years old, he'll be given a gun and go off somewhere to shoot at the same kind of dude. It's such nonsense, it doesn't sit right with me." (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

"I want to live as long a life as possible, I want to get as many kicks as I can. I want to see a lot of things, have a lot of fun. I don't want to just die in vain for someone else's purposes. I don't want to become someone who takes another person's life. The realization that this is what my state is pushing for doesn't make me happy at all. It's not cool at all." (m., age 30, profession unknown, October 2022)

Many apolitical people who experienced shock at the onset of the war eventually accepted this state of affairs and/or stepped back from the situation, since they could not influence it. By doing so, they hoped to preserve the status quo of the previous two decades: the government is at war, but ordinary people don't get involved and they continue to live their

lives. Therefore, dissatisfaction with the draft, which may suddenly involve ordinary people in the war, who do not have any military experience (contrary to the promises of the authorities), is dissatisfaction with the violation of this unspoken norm by the authorities. According to this logic, if politicians unleashed this conflict, it is they—and not ordinary people—who should participate in resolving it:

> "I think there must have been more compelling reasons for this 'special operation' than simply 'there's nothing fucking better to do.' But my attitude towards it, of course, is negative. Well, it's rational—my friends are being carted off to war. Now if it was the politicians fucking each other over—they gathered 20 people here, 20 politicians there, and whoever won, well good on them. But they're forcing ordinary people to go, and not an army of volunteers, but a draft!" (m., age 22, student, event organizer, October 2022)

One way or another, most non-opponents of the war both considered the mobilization to be a forced, necessary step, and found themselves dissatisfied with many of its aspects. However, as we showed above (see 1.2.3), such dissatisfaction did not automatically entail dissatisfaction with the "special operation" as a whole: attitudes towards the mobilization and attitudes towards war, especially in the case of people who are far removed from politics, could exist almost on different planes.

2.2.2 What can be done? Resigning "to fate," hoping for the best, and avoidance

It is generally accepted that, when faced with the mobilization, Russians either passively accept their fate (this view, in particular, is represented in Levada Center studies), or less commonly, enthusiastically support the decision. While hundreds of thousands of expats and tens of thousands of detained protesters question such generalizations, we do not seek to expose any "wrong" theories. In this section, we attempt to understand and describe the way people think and act when they first face the real possibility of being sent to war or seeing their loved ones there, and whether the reaction to the mobilization was met with enthusiasm, indifference, or protest.

As we showed above, the majority of our respondents, including many critics of the draft, interpreted the announcement of the mobilization as an anticipated measure that the government was forced to take. Many assumed that the escalation of hostilities with a possible transition to Russian territory is only a matter of time, and that sooner or later everyone will be required to participate in the hostilities. People crafted their viewpoints regarding the mobilization based on these expectations.

"Where else is there to go?": Fatalism

Most of our non-opponent respondents did not consider themselves capable of influencing the course of events. They often perceived the draft as a given, as some unavoidable circumstance independent of the will of individual people.

As a result, even those respondents who did not feel any enthusiasm for the prospect of going to the front and did not have confidence in the necessity or purpose of the war,

nevertheless did nothing in response to the announcement of the mobilization. "Where else is there to go?" they say:

> "What do you get? If you don't have a family, then in theory you have nothing to lose, I mean, why wouldn't you go [fight]? … On the other hand, if you have a family, that means you do have something to lose, and you've either got to weasel your way out, or, or …"
> Q: "So essentially, you have not yet decided for yourself what you will do if you receive a draft summons?"
> A: "Why not? I have decided."
> Q: "You've decided you're going?"
> A: "Well [yes], of course. Where else is there to go?" (m., age 39, IT tester, November 2022)

For some, this fatalism was a manifestation of rationality, while others were surprised to discover it in themselves.

Many respondents expected the hostilities to grow and expand, transforming into a "global war" or a war on Russian territory: "Even if I am not called up, the war, unfortunately, may come to us." (m., age 30, metalworker, October 2022) This reinforced their fatalism. Attempts to evade the draft were in this case meaningless, because sooner or later there would be nowhere else to go.

It is important to emphasize that when discussing possible reactions to mobilization (including evasion), respondents always talked only about individual strategies, and never about collective ones. Respondents did not speculate about the possibilities of cooperating with others for passive evasion, active protest, or any other form of collective action in response to the draft.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the mobilization was often thought of in terms of individual destiny and responsibility. Thus, a 56-year-old employee in the field of culture and education from a small town said in her interview that she was very frightened when the mobilization was announced—after all, her only son could have been taken to the front ("I had a panic once when the draft was announced—I thought: 'Oh God, my little Denis will be taken away!'" (f., age 56, university lecturer, November 2022; later, her son reassured her, saying that his workplace promised to give him an "exemption") However, the question of whether she planned to try to somehow prevent him from being drafted (including hiding him or sending him abroad) if her son received a summons evoked not only bewilderment, but also indignation:

> Q: "But aren't there some people leaving due to the draft, so they don't get sent out of the country …"
> A: "Yeah, well, that's just idiotic. You know what that's called? A draft dodger. If you must go, then you must go. Fate will catch up with you anyway … Life will punish you for it. … I'm not hiding him. If this happened, then I would cry, worry, I would pray for him, and this is—there are constantly posts going around, saying like 'pray, send your thoughts and prayers.' Thank you, it saves lives."

Q: "You mean to say that if this happened, you wouldn't interfere?"
A: "Where is there to go? What could I do? No."
Q: "You could …"
A: "I won't do anything. That would be worse, I'd worry even more" (f., age 56, university lecturer, November 2022)

This respondent viewed the idea of avoiding the draft as an attempt to rewrite the fate destined for a particular person—an attempt that, by definition, is doomed to failure. In articulating this idea, she turned to a vivid literary image that illustrates the omnipotence of fate, which cannot be outwitted or deceived:

"Do you remember Pushkin's *The Song of Wise Oleg*? When the wise men predicted that he would 'die by his own horse?' And what happened? He gets off his horse, orders himself food and drink. The horse continues to serve him. And when it dies, he walks over and says, 'Well, look there …' And from the skull of the horse, a snake slithers out and bites the prince, and he dies by his own horse. 'You will die by your own horse.' Just as Pushkin predicted." (f., age 56, university lecturer, November, 2022)

This view of the world transforms the draft from a political decision made by specific people in specific historical circumstances into an act of fate, almost divine predestination, and eventually becomes internalized: you cannot run away from yourself.

A: "Same thing here: Whoever fled … they may have fled to wide open spaces, but in reality, they cannot run from themselves."
Q: "Why from themselves? Maybe they consider themselves hostages in this situation."
A: "They're primarily running from themselves, from the self that didn't go to war." (f., age 56, university lecturer, November 2022)

But still, not all respondents went so far in their fatalistic view of the mobilization. Many simply did not have the material or social opportunities to hide or run away, including abroad, although they allowed themselves such an option under other circumstances. On the whole, however, as we show below, most often our respondents still did not condemn (or, at least, did not strongly condemn) fleeing abroad; however, they did not consider it as a possible personal strategy in response to the draft. This refusal to potentially evade the draft may have been dictated by family circumstances ("I mean, I have an apartment here, everything, friends, family, parents, everything, everything is here, my work. And then I leave for Israel. Well, what do I have there? Nothing at all." (m., age 34, manager, November 2022) It may have been anticipation of financial hardship if they were to move and fear of stigmatization. The combination of a sense of the inevitability of new waves of mobilization and the impossibility of escape reinforced their fatalistic attitude towards mobilization, which determined their inaction in these circumstances.

"If necessary, I will go": Defending the homeland and civic duty

Consequently, some respondents decided not to shy away from the draft, not only (and not so much) because of a fatalistic attitude towards the situation, but because they felt the need to defend their country. Respondents called this necessity "duty," "obligation," or "responsibility." Did this mean they greeted the possibility of being drafted with enthusiasm? Not at all. Quite the opposite: "I don't want this responsibility to fall on me, because it's not very cool, but if they call me, I won't run. I'll go to war." (m., age 37, marketing specialist, November 2022) Or, even more succinctly: "My country calls, I go." (m., age 46, construction worker, musician, October 2022)

It is worth noting that many emphasized, firstly, their unwillingness and lack of desire to kill, and secondly, their uselessness on the battlefield as non-professionals. However, they did not conclude from this that they should evade the draft. On the contrary, if the "country calls" even those who are "useless," then it is in danger. "If my country calls me, it means things are really fucked up, so I will have to go." (m., age 38, business owner, December 2022) In other words, fatalism (which was common among most of our respondents) was characteristic even of those who consciously decided to defend their homeland—it was just not their main motive. These respondents also saw no point in avoiding the draft in light of the prolonged nature of the conflict. Even if you can "wriggle out" of the first draft, it does not make sense in the long run. "It's necessary? Then let's go. If they announce a full draft, you won't be able to wriggle out of it then." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

Thus, the words "must" and "necessary" are key to understanding the logic of these respondents. Doing a task "because it must be done" does not imply enthusiasm, but it does not imply avoiding the order either:

> "I'm not saying I'm happy about it; I'm not saying I'm sad about it either. I'm not saying I'd want to go off and kill—no, I'm not a maniac. But if it's necessary …" (m., age 37, profession unknown, October 2022)

However, some respondents explained their reluctance to evade the draft not only by the fact that the country was calling them to help defend it, but also by the fact that their loved ones might be in danger if the hostilities shifted to Russian territory:

> "If a situation occurs when there is a direct threat to me, to my loved ones, to the future of my country, and my participation is needed … Well, it certainly doesn't warm my heart to know that I'd have to fight, to kill someone, no, absolutely not." (m., age 28, graphic designer, October 2022)

The connection between family, homeland, and the escalation of hostilities was most succinctly summarized by one respondent in his description of the "home" that might soon be in danger:

> "Shit, well, I might need to defend my home. I mean, I'll definitely have to, if such a need arises. And now, from the way things are going, it looks like it will come to that." (m., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

"I don't plan to run": Conforming with the law and a challenge to masculinity

Often, however, male respondents explained their reluctance to dodge the draft in terms of negative arguments. The following interview fragment with a 32-year-old laborer from the Moscow region illustrates this pattern well—the reluctance to "run away" from military enlistment officers and the enlistment office and be arrested precedes a positive, meaningful justification for participating in the war.

> Q: "When the mobilization was announced, how did you take the news?"
> A: "Well, I didn't. I sat there, waiting for the draft summons to arrive."
> Q: "And you'd be ready to go?"
> A: "Well, I'm certainly not going to run and get stuck in a jail cell."
> Q: "That is, you'd go, but not enthusiastically. That's what you mean? It's compulsory?"
> A: "I would have to go, of course, yes."
> Q: "Instead of fleeing?"
> A: "Instead of fleeing, yes. … Well, I'd find some sort of purpose in the call, of course, to somehow explain: what's the purpose, for what reason, why?" (m., age 32, arborist, December 2022).

The respondent selected this justification after the fact, in the course of further conversation, and with the help of the interviewer:

> A: "Basically, I do have some sort of explanation."
> Q: "What is it, if it's not a secret?"
> A: "Well, it's that … I want to live peacefully, and for my family to live peacefully."
> Q: "You mean that this would be your contribution to Russia's national security?"
> A: "Yeah, that's probably it. Good answer." (m., age 32, arborist, December 2022)

Respondents primarily associated the justifications for their willingness to go to the front if they received a draft summons with an unwillingness to break the law. However, it can be assumed that in many cases, it was also caused by an unwillingness to deviate from the normative model of masculinity common in Russian society, which dictates that dodging the draft, and even more so, fleeing abroad, is an act unworthy of a real man:

> "I don't have any desire to go fight, but if the draft summons comes, I will go and I will fight, for the simple reason that the country will continue to survive as long as women are ready to give birth and men are ready to fight. It's all very simple." (m., age 60, business owner, October 2022)

Respondents, however, rarely referred to ideas of "how a real man acts" to explain their own strategies in connection with the draft, but often used this criterion to assess the behavior of strangers or acquaintances who had left. (see 2.2.3)

In any case, a variety of ideas about why evading the draft was impossible reinforced the respondents' fatalistic attitudes, which we described above. For example, in the following passage, a 46-year-old researcher justified his willingness to go to war on the grounds that the strategy of evasion did not correspond to his idea of dignified behavior for a person of his age. However, he ended this discourse by emphasizing his fatalism:

> "They call, I go. They don't call, I don't go. I don't plan to flee, I'm a man of a certain age, I'm not a boy on a bike who would go run and hide somewhere. That's the first point. Secondly, I have some sense of civic responsibility overall. … There's such a thing as fatalism. I guess I'm one of those people, a fatalist. God wills, I go. God doesn't will, I don't go." (m., age 46, museum research assistant, October 2022)

It is significant that in this case, a meaningful argument about civic responsibility is again given only after the argument about the unwillingness to hide, to break the law.

"I won't be called": The mobilization is going according to plan

Some respondents decided not to dodge the draft because they believed in the rationality of the government's orders. They expressed confidence or (more often) hope that the mobilization was being conducted according to a well-thought-out plan, and that they, "useless" on the battlefield, would not be drafted. They supported this belief with examples from personal experience or the experience of acquaintances who, for example, tried to sign up to volunteer, but were rejected. When those who were not supposed to be subject to the draft under the presidential decree did receive summons, such respondents interpreted this as having "too many boots on the ground." Sometimes, in the respondents' eyes, these cases ended happily: "Clearly, they had too many boots on the ground, yes. You can't keep track of everything, but people eventually received some discharge papers and were released." (m., age 42, profession unknown, October 2022)

Not all respondents were firmly convinced that the mobilization was being conducted according to the law. Such people expressed this concern in their interviews, but nevertheless tried to "check" with the presidential decree and assess the likelihood of being drafted or receiving a deferral. Some of them hoped for an exemption due to study or work, and some remained unregistered. Sometimes these respondents had considered moving abroad, but in the end, decided to stay:

> "I still am really relying on the education law, which says they won't touch students. Basically, that's how I justified it. I didn't particularly want to leave the country." (m., age 23, medical engineer, November 2022)

> "The military registration and enlistment office can't come to my factory at all, they can't get to me, they're told to fuck off, because this is a dangerous production process and they can't just let any riffraff in." (m., age 27, oil worker, November 2022)

This behavior is somewhere between avoidance and non-avoidance. These respondents did not take specific actions to evade the draft. Nevertheless, hoping that the draft complied with the laws and making sure that their circumstances would protect them, they expected to avoid being called to the front.

"I would go, but…": Passive evasion

Among the non-opponents of the war, there are those who talked about their decision to evade the draft. However, even these respondents were often passive, preferring to solve problems as they arose:

> Q: "Well, have you thought of what would happen if a summons did arrive?"
> A: "Well, I haven't encountered that, so …" (m., age 37, programmer, temporarily unemployed, December 2022)

They did not have a well-thought-out plan of action in case they received a draft summons, but they hoped to come up with one if they did:

> "If it comes to it, I thought about moving from my permanent residence to one of my friends' places, where they definitely wouldn't come. That would just be to buy time, so that if they did suddenly show up, then I could come up with something there, figure it out, come up with a defense plan. Somehow …" (m., age 23, medical engineer, November 2022)

Active draft evasion—for example, emigration—seemed impossible to many respondents, including for financial, social, and psychological reasons:

> "I'd essentially need to change my life completely, lose everything I had before, drastically change my lifestyle. … I think I'm a coward, because I'm afraid to throw away everything I have in Petersburg and go to nothing." (m., age 22, student, event organizer, October 2022)

> "[The idea] of going to Georgia—it only occurred to me for a fraction of a second, because my parents are here, I can't leave them here under any circumstances …" (m., age 27, oil worker, November 2022)

It is telling that the only respondent who emigrated in connection with the draft, firstly, did so under pressure from relatives (mother and female friends), and secondly, spoke of having savings that allowed him to live abroad without working: "I live off the money that I got from building [a house]." (m., age 30, profession unknown, temporarily unemployed, October 2022)

Very few respondents considered the option of actively evading the draft, which implies a readiness to be subjected to criminal prosecution and go to prison.

2.2.3 Respondent attitudes towards those who left and those who remained

It is no secret that through direct control of the media and local officials the Russian political elite portrays a binary, black-and-white picture of Russian citizens depending on how they behaved in response to the draft. Thus, high-ranking officials like Dmitry Medvedev, Ramzan Kadyrov, Vyacheslav Volodin and others accused Russians who left the country after the announcement of the draft of cowardice and betrayal of the homeland. Officials across various levels of government came up with initiatives to deprive those Russians who fled of their citizenship and/or property. At the same time, participants in the war with Ukraine were declared heroes, as role models for the youth, and there were plans to use the

penal code to punish those who insulted them. But did ordinary Russians, who had neither emigrated nor been drafted, consider such black-and-white assessments adequate? How did they view those who been drafted, who did not evade the draft, and those who did evade it, or had even emigrated in order to avoid conscription?

The reality we encountered in the interviews was not only (and not primarily) one of glorification of those who were drafted and condemnation of the defectors. Rather, these were extreme viewpoints not shared by most of our respondents. This does not mean that our interviewees completely refrained from judgement. It would be more accurate to say that most often they declared their indifference to other people's actions, and rather tried to find an explanation for one or another behavior strategy. Ultimately, most of the respondents concluded that the choice to go to war or evade the draft, to stay or to go, was "a personal issue for everyone." Not everyone was trying to influence or was going to influence the decisions of their loved ones, not to mention those of mere acquaintances.

Heroes, villains, or fools? Attitudes towards the decision to go to the front

Our respondents had different views about drafted soldiers making the decision to go to the front (not of volunteers, but rather of those who decided not to dodge the draft after receiving a summons). Arguments in support of compliance were based on the same themes—protecting the family, and the idea and/or notion of duty (and sometimes the material gain of participating in war):

> "Because it really is necessary. And those who go there to the war, to the front, to the line of contact, to me, these people are heroes, because they didn't go to Kazakhstan. They said, 'Yes, I will do my duty. The Motherland said: "We must defend the Motherland," and I went.' For me, these people are heroes." (f., age 37, engineer, on maternity leave, October 2022)

> "I hold a central position in this debate. I'm in the middle. When people go, it seems that some are operating on logic and others on feelings. Those operating on logic are mostly older people, who already have children and grandchildren, who have nothing to lose. They say: 'I will go defend, for which my family will receive a large sum of money.' … Those who are a little younger, they're partially operating on financial considerations, but many are operating on an understanding of the homeland, an understanding of duty. For some—there's a sort of romanticism. … And there are guys who are inspired by this romantic ideal, like, 'Now I will become a fearless soldier.' And they go over there … It's harder to understand from this perspective." (m., age 23, medical engineer, November 2022)

However, it was difficult for other respondents to understand those who go to war for ideological or pragmatic reasons. Such people seemed unnecessarily cruel to them:

> "There are examples of such card-carrying patriots … I've seen people who say, 'My people are going too! Mine are going, I'm going, we're all going!' I was downright shocked, I was scared. I understood that, yes, we certainly need such people in a time like this … But these people are merciless!" (f., age 33, sports instructor, November 2022)

While discussing how her loved ones might act if they were drafted, another respondent, a 23-year-old student, criticized her partner's possible decision to go to the front without her consent. For her, this choice was primarily a choice to neglect family:

> "So he thinks he's needed more over there than here, with me. If he thinks that, then I've got some bigger questions for him. I believe that such decisions should be made by the family, collectively, especially if you live together. If he decided to go without consulting me, I would be very sad." (f., age 23, student, November 2022)

Finally, some respondents did not understand the decision to neglect one's own life in exchange for monetary gain. Such decisions seemed short-sighted to them. In their opinion, these people simply did not know what they were getting themselves into:

> "I have a close friend, she has relatives in the village, in the Moscow region. We discussed the issue directly. She says: 'Can you imagine, I have cousins, brothers who are the opposite, they're like, they're paying 200,000 [rubles; approximately US $2,000], we'll go.' But we considered the fact that they are still young, they're 21, 22 years old, fools, they somehow imagine it all differently." (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

Respondents also noted that participating in the war affects the psyche: "I don't know who it wouldn't break. Well, I don't know, maybe not some criminal thug. … But ordinary civilians—well, this is serious psychological trauma." (m., age 42, engineer, December 2022) This was seen both as a personal danger and as a danger to society as a whole:

> "And yesterday I went to see a friend in N.. He's serving in the army now. I just saw a huge bus full of drafted people. And a bunch of drunk guys came out, who were getting wasted before getting on the draft bus. And it's scary, because you realize that many of these people will be absolutely traumatized forever." (f., age 30 years old, IT editor, October 2022)

In other words, while some non-war-opponents admired the decision of the drafted to go to the front, others rather disapproved of it. It seems that there was no consensus on this issue in Russian society, even among non-war opponents.

Pragmatists, cowards, traitors, or bet-hedgers? Attitudes towards the decision to dodge the draft and emigrate

Despite the fact that a number of high-ranking officials in Russia regularly speak of Russians who did not support the "special operation" as traitors who need to be punished, in his February 2022 address to the Federation Council, Vladimir Putin tried to soften this extreme. And although he himself used the phrase "traitor nationals," he completed the thought by expressing confidence that their "conscience" would catch up to them. Therefore, the characteristics that our respondents attributed to Russians who emigrated to avoid the draft.

Did our respondents express condemnation or a desire to punish those who avoid participating in the war? For the most part, no. Many understood that those who leave the country could be motivated by a desire to save their own lives:

> "I understand those who left. I can't feel contempt for them or anything else, because I understand that everyone just wants to save their own life." (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

Some respondents explained the difference between those who were ready to go to war and "defectors" as the difference in the inherent character traits of both: the former are inherently courageous, while the latter do not possess this quality. Paradoxically, acknowledging the "defectors" and "those who left" as cowards did not cause these respondents to condemn their choice. On the contrary, it was precisely the implied "innateness" of these properties that in this case served as an excuse for them not participating in the war since, by virtue of their constitution, they were simply not suitable for this activity. Since one cannot transform cowards into daredevils, there is no reason to condemn them. One can simply sympathize with them and understand their unwillingness to go to the front:

> "Many have gone abroad. Well, maybe, on the one hand, I think they did the right thing. … Well, they don't have that kind of courage, you understand? They don't have any patriotism, or what? They don't. And so they either stay under the radar, as they say, or go abroad. Well, there are people who lie low and do nothing, but they're not spitting on Putin or Russia. They just don't have that much courage." (f., age 70, retired, November 2022)

As the previous quote shows, the sympathy and understanding of our respondents did not extend to those Russians who criticized Russia and Putin from abroad. And vice versa, those who left because they rejected the war, lacked "courage," or for family or financial reasons, but who do not speak out against Russia from abroad, evoke sympathy. Taken to the extreme, this dislike for those who "spit on" Russia and Putin (f., 70 years old, retired, November 2022) was expressed as a desire to witness their retribution for fleeing during such a difficult time for their country.

> "Now the authorities have some decisions to make about how to deal with this, what the penalties might be, relatively speaking, for fleeing during a difficult time. … Well, basically, people are going to have to decide, really, whether to change citizenship, or return home, or pay for what they did." (f., age 41, research associate, October 2022)

> "Those who left without making much of a stink, I have fewer questions for them. … I can understand them completely." (m., age 23, medical engineer, November 2022)

Thus, many non-opponents were sympathetic to emigration caused by fear, concern for personal and family well-being, and even simply aversion to the war. However, they refused to understand those who leave "loudly," publicly voicing their political position from abroad.

Nevertheless, critics of the war might command the respect of individual (albeit very few) respondents. For example, if they criticized the war while still inside Russia:

> "A person who's in semi-legal hiding, writing articles, reporting, doing research, literally right across the street from the Federal Security Service headquarters—like it or not, you've got to respect it." (m., age 23, medical engineer, November 2022)

In this case, actions that corresponded to a person's proclaimed values inspired respect—after all, these people did not "flee" and were not slinging mud at Russia from a safe distance. Conversely, those who claimed they actively supported the "special operation," but when faced with the risk of being drafted, fled the country or evaded in some other way, deserved condemnation. Respondents pointed out the hypocrisy of such defectors, emphasizing that their actions ran counter to their views and words:

> "I know some who left, maybe a few who left. I'm disappointed in them because before that, they were bearing a patriotic message to the masses. And now it turns out that when things started heating up, they were the first to flee." (m., age 46, business owner, November 2022)

Many respondents also did not have faith in the Russian Army's command, which does not properly care for the safety of conscripted soldiers. And if a country could use its citizens as "cannon fodder," then it was understandable why Russians would dodge the draft:

> "The problem is that, if initially a person is ready to fight, and then he sees what's going on, that at any moment his government might throw him in, I mean, it's not enough to send troops to the front line, if the enemy is going to benefit or it turns out that he's under the command of incompetent leadership that may treat him like cannon fodder." (m., age 40, guide, October 2022)

At the same time, many respondents felt sorry for those who went abroad due to the draft, because these people were losing their home, their homeland, and faced possible financial difficulties and problems reassimilating into their host society afterwards:

> "We see a lot of videos about how people in Kazakhstan and Georgia are treating this situation. They have a negative view of those who fled. I think that the bad thing is not that people are fleeing, but that they'll find themselves in a worse situation abroad than they're in now." (m., age 37, journalist, October 2022)

Our respondents were concerned not only with the well-being of those who had fled across the border, but also about the welfare of their country. Some of these respondents lamented the fact that good, smart, talented people who were professionals in their craft were fleeing Russia, and that the draft was leading to a "brain drain." They believed that the wave of citizens fleeing the draft undermined Russia's reputation both in the eyes of the global community and in the eyes of some Russians (even those who supported the "special operation"). They blamed the state for this. At the same time, they expressed the hope that those who had left would be allowed to return home when the war was over:

> "I hope, you know, good Russian soul, that we take them all back, and that they don't break ties, and that people understand that their home is here, and they can return." (f., age 41, research associate, October 2022)

Among the non-opponents of the war, there were, of course, people who condemned the defectors, although fewer than those who expressed understanding. Many of these respondents perceived the announcement of the partial mobilization as an event that "removed the masks" from those around them, that showed "who is who":

> "It showed who is who. That's the most valuable thing that can be taken from this whole situation. Those who seemed like decent folk turned out to be pussies, who packed their bags at the first sign of danger and got as far away as possible." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

The decision to leave the homeland when it needed its citizens was the primary cause of this condemnation. As one respondent put it, "we have one homeland, and to leave is to betray it." (f., age 60, doctor, November 2022) From the point of view of those condemning the defectors, Russian citizens owe their country for the fact that, before the war, they had been able to live peacefully, work, and practice their hobbies: "I mean, you want to live well here, you want everything to be good, but at the same time, when you're needed, you pack your bags and bail." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

These respondents called defectors who did not have a good understanding of the situation "alarmists" (m., age 46, business owner, November 2022; m., age 38, profession unknown, November 2022), "losers" (m., age 37, profession unknown, October 2022), "cowards" (m., age 24, deputy's assistant, November 2022), and "pussies" (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022). They viewed them as people who were useless and ungrateful to their country:

> "They live here, reap the benefits our country, our society has to offer, but you can't expect any response or help from them, because these people, they're the ones who turn tail at the first sign of trouble. These people aren't put off when you tell them: 'I'll make fun of you, I'll laugh at you for being a coward.' And they say, 'It doesn't matter to me, since I'll be alive and healthy, so what if I'm a coward?' These are the people, the times. I believe that people should go on their own." (m., age 25, shift worker, October 2022)

Another respondent expressed a similar sentiment: defectors were like "whoremongers" who used their country's benefits like they would use women, but were unwilling to be faithful. (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022) "Whoremongers" and "cowards" naturally evoke the contempt of such respondents. Another reason for this contempt was behavior that is unworthy of real men:

> "Some people I know went into hiding, there were cases like that. People are people, people are different. And in these stressful moments, it always becomes clear who is who. … As we say in the yard—those who went to the draft office and those who got drafted, they're good lads. And those who decided to hide themselves are losers. Well, we actually called them another word … basically "homosexual" but starting with an "F," that's what we called them in the yard, the ones who weren't considered good lads. That's it." (m., age 37, profession unknown, October 2022)

Accordingly, those who had fled Russia due to the draft were "dead weight," "growths that needed removing," who interfered with the country and were a joy to finally be rid of:

> "Everyone who was interfering has been cut off. They were cut off, crumbled away, all these Galkins, Pugachevs and Krasovskys [famous artists and journalists who publicly condemned the war], all these … all these unwanted growths have fallen off. … Those who left are mainly those who didn't always have a positive view of the country." (m., age 50, circus manager, October 2022)

At the same time, some respondents expressed their puzzlement at the decision of the defectors to leave the country without even having received a summons. These respondents did not call the defectors "traitors" or "cowards." Their assessments were based not on moral or ideological criteria (as was the case with respondents who strongly condemned defectors), but rather on the idea of common sense, on what is rational behavior and what is illogical. For example, respondents might condemn draft dodgers as those who made the decision to leave based on emotion, panicking "before it was time":

> "My eldest bolted because he fell under the draft … Although again, even those who had special medical dispensations and certificates of deferment, who were working in IT companies, left. Why, even they themselves don't even understand. But it's always been like this—one alarmist, and suddenly this whole environment of fear is created. I don't know where it comes from … Rather, I do know. 'You'll all be dead in two days,' that's it. They were these kinds of characters." (m., age 46, business owner, November 2022)

In contrast to respondents who strongly condemned defectors, these ones evaluated other people's behavior strategies in response to the draft, comparing them not with their imaginary strategies ("if it affected me, I would ..."), but with their real strategies—strategies of inaction ("I won't do anything until I am personally called to the military enlistment office"). They did not understand why people panicked, they were not anticipating being backed into a corner, having a gun placed in their hands and being sent to the front. If one did not want to go to war, it was better to use legal methods:

> "Although I really don't understand people who are leaving for somewhere else. … If you received a summons and didn't serve, then again, you're in category C. You didn't serve, but you're a military man, because you're in the reserves. Just go to the recruitment office, show them, and you'll most likely be released. Well, won't you? If, of course, they don't release you—that's it. Start looking for a lawyer, or complain to all the media sources, and when they notice you, then for sure, they will release you." (m., age 22, programmer, October 2022)

The confidence that this strategy would work often stemmed from the faith some of our respondents had in the rationality of the Russian government's actions and the rule of law, which we have already described above.

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The announcement of the "partial mobilization" in Russia came as a shock, even to many supporters of the "special operation." It turned the "special operation" into a real war, which might then affect ordinary Russians. At the same time, most of our respondents simultaneously criticized the mobilization and found justifications for it. They criticized various aspects of it: its "belated" nature, the chaos in the way it was being conducted, and even the focus on recruiting ordinary people instead of professionals. However, they justify the mobilization as a necessary evil: in light of the failures on the front and the prolongation of the conflict, it is evident that the Russian Army simply lacks human resources. This dissatisfaction with the draft expressed by many respondents, especially those who are far removed from politics, does not automatically lead to criticism of the "special operation" as a whole.

Most of our respondents were united by a fatalistic attitude towards mobilization: whatever will be, will be, and cannot be avoided. Therefore, inaction is a common strategy among non-opponents. Many respondents were ready to go to war if they were called—if they must pay back their "obligation" to their homeland, to defend their country, family, and home. Others hoped to avoid the draft, trusting Putin's decree that only people with combat experience go to the front. But even those who said they would choose to evade when they received a summons took little action to protect themselves in advance. Various financial, social, and psychological factors had become obstacles for them.

From the point of view of respondents who were not against the war, the decision of whether or not to go to war was "a personal matter for everyone." At the same time, the majority of our respondents still admired those who received the summons and went to the front, and only a few condemned them. While admiring the volunteers and draftees, at the same time many respondents admitted that they understood the defectors on a human level, and even those who fled. Only a few condemned defectors and emigrants: either from a moral and ideological standpoint, because they left the country during a difficult time, or from a commonsense standpoint, according to which there is no need to panic before the real danger has come. Nevertheless, our respondents' assessments of those who went to the front, those who stayed behind, and those who left was much more complicated than a black-and-white picture of the situation, in which there are only heroes or traitors to the motherland.

2.3 Emotions: Living through the war

The war that began in February 2022 changed the lives of many Russians—including its emotional dimension. As we showed in our last report and in section 1.1 of this text, the events of February 24, 2022 had come as a shock to many of our respondents, including to non-opponents of the war. In their interviews, they recalled that in the first days of the war they could neither eat nor sleep, and they constantly cried and worried. At the same time, among the supporters of the "special operation" there were those who, in their own words, had taken the outbreak of the war calmly, as a matter of course. In most cases, the emotional state of non-opponents had returned to normal in the spring of 2022: some had become convinced of the necessity of the "special operation," while some had simply decided not to

think about things that were beyond their sphere of influence. However, the "partial mobilization" announced in September caused a new wave of emotions throughout society.

In this section, we take a look at what emotions replaced those experienced by non-opponents in the first months, their emotional reactions to the mobilization, and what events apart from mobilization had an effect on their emotional state.

2.3.1 Fear, anxiety, sadness and pain: Emotions connected to the prolongation of the war

As our interviews demonstrate, the fall of 2022 brought many new emotional experiences to the lives of non-opponents of the war. Some of them were reactions to specific events—mainly, of course, the announcement of the mobilization itself. In addition, the Russian Army's failures on the front, primarily its retreats from previously seized territories, as well as sabotage in the rear (the most striking of which was the first Crimean Bridge explosion), caused emotional responses among many respondents. However, most of the emotions and affects that respondents described were ongoing and/or cyclical—these subside with time and then return again. As one of our interviewees said: "For me, like every escalation of the Ukrainian situation, it generally flares up and then goes back to being healthy. … I get sick in response to these escalations." (m., age 42, IT specialist, October 2022) Setting aside reactions to the mobilization for a moment (there is a separate section devoted to this topic: see 2.2), below we describe the main emotions experienced by our respondents, both short-term and long-term.

Fear and anxiety: Nuclear threats, Russian military defeat, civil war, and an uncertain future

Most of our respondents complained in one way or another about their feelings of fear or anxiety. What were non-opponents of the war afraid of (besides the mobilization itself, which we discuss separately; see 2.2)?

Many were worried about the threat of nuclear war. It is significant that in the spring of 2022, many confident supporters of the war approved of the Russian authorities' militant rhetoric as they threatened the West with the use of nuclear weapons:

> "I also had a positive reaction to it. As soon as our people made the announcement, NATO started singing a different tune." (f., age 72, retired, March 2022)

At that time, fear of nuclear war was primarily characteristic of opponents of the "special operation" and those who were undecided or hesitant. In the fall, however, the situation had changed: even confident supporters of the war, not to mention the others, were wary of the rhetoric of nuclear escalation. "I hope it doesn't come to that" (m., age 39, university lecturer, November 2022) is what most of the second-wave respondents said about the use of nuclear weapons, regardless of their attitude towards the "special operation." Threats of using nuclear weapons, as well as mobilization, which we discuss below, raised the general anxiety levels of our respondents:

> Q: "A lot of time has passed since February 24th. Tell me, how have your feelings towards the 'special military operation' changed since then?"
> A: "From a rational assessment of the situation, nothing has changed, just the level of anxiety has grown due to the constant talk of nuclear war and the number of people being drafted. The only thing that has changed is my anxiety level …" (m., age 37, journalist, October 2022)

Notably, this respondent brought up his fear of nuclear war on his own, without us having to pose specific questions about his emotions or the nuclear threat—this was almost unheard of in the spring interviews. Some respondents even admitted that they were considering a plan of action in case of a nuclear strike: some found out where the nearest bomb shelter was, while others were stocking up on food.

However, even in the fall of 2022, there were many non-opponents who said they were impervious to threats of nuclear weapons. They believed that mutually-exchanged nuclear threats are just an intimidation tactic and should not be taken seriously.

Some non-opponents feared a Russian defeat and/or an outbreak of hostilities on Russian soil, as well as the idea that the war might spill over into a third world war or collapse into a civil war. Thus, one person we spoke with, a 49-year-old educational worker, said that she managed to cope with the shock at the start of the war, but that since then she had acquired a new fear:

> "At first I couldn't sleep or eat, but now I'm used to it. Well, unfortunately, people get used to everything. I'm used to it. Nevertheless, I am afraid that the war will spill over onto Russian territory, our cities will be bombed like the Ukrainian cities now, we'll be hiding from the shelling somewhere, and die because of it. Well, these are the consequences I fear." (f., age 49, educational worker, October 2022)

Another respondent said that he did not want to believe in the possibility that Russia might be defeated, and at the same time admitted that this fear nevertheless crept into his mind, no matter how he tried to drive it out:

> Q: "But you said that it seems like Russia cannot lose, nevertheless?"
> A: "I console myself with the thought that this isn't delusional, not wishful thinking, but more or less an objective view of things. Because sometimes I feel like, maybe the thought of Russian defeat scares me so much that I can't accept it, I don't believe in the possibility of defeat, although in reality, it is entirely possible." (m., age 34, marketing specialist, October 2022)

The fear that the war might cross over into Russian territory was practically absent in the spring interviews with non-opponents. But it was clearly present in the fall: even respondents living in central Russia and the Urals feared that they might need to live in bomb shelters at some point in the future. Such fears were facilitated by the prolongation of the war, news about the shelling of Russian border territories, and the retreat of Russian troops:

> "Then basically some time in the middle of the summer, it let up and became calmer. But then when we left Kharkiv, I suddenly came down with the coronavirus. And the news that we were retreating from Kharkiv, and I was lying there with a fever, and something I … basically a nightmare, it hit me hard, it was just awful. I lay there, suffering. And I was so afraid that they'd leave the Kharkiv area and come over into Russian territory. I was really concerned about that." (f., age 37, engineer, on maternity leave, October 2022)

The Russian retreat from the Kharkiv and Kherson areas evoked a strong response among our respondents, perhaps only comparable to the emotions they felt about the mobilization. In response to these events, our respondents faced the fear that the war would move into Russian territory, concern for the fate of the residents living in the Ukrainian territories that were captured and then given back, and general anxiety.

Another event that frightened some of our interviewees was the first Crimean Bridge explosion:

> "Well, the Crimean Bridge was a symbol. And it was also done symbolically on Putin's birthday. Of course, it seems like we were not safe, it seems like after the Crimean Bridge, this could happen in Moscow and anywhere. Moreover, the Russian people did it. I didn't really delve into details and didn't read any investigatory reports, but what I heard on the news was that there was a person there, either from Rostov, well, basically, that our people were involved in this. And they are ready to organize terrorist attacks against us. And it's scary. I understand that within our population, there are now many people who are against the war, and those who are ready to support Ukraine. And if there are those who are ready to support it even through methods like these, then it's scary." (f., age 41, research associate, October 2022)

The first Crimean Bridge explosion, as well as the retreat of the Russian Army, had proven to be events that demonstrated the capabilities and strength of the enemy, and had contributed to increasing the anxiety of non-opponents of the war—these events made many consider the possibility of a Russian military defeat.

In addition, in the fall interviews, a new fear appeared, which we had not encountered in the spring. The respondents feared that as a result of the defeat (or even without it), a civil war might start in Russia:

> "There's only one thing that scares me (this is the only emotion that arose), and I believe it, honestly, I can't say if it's a good or a bad thing, because it's difficult to compare what's happening here and now, under the current government, and what will be in the future, but if the Russian Federation loses this war, then one of the things that may happen is a civil war. Or, at least, certain events wherein there will temporarily be no authorities, and there will be many groups who want to seize power, then riots, looting, things like that, hunger. Of course this scares me." (m., age 33, profession unknown, October 2022)

Interestingly, in the spring of 2022, when mass protests took place in metropolises across the country (and most of our respondents lived in these metropolises), non-opponents of the "special operation" were not afraid of civil war. Six months later, after the anti-war and anti-mobilization protests had faded away, this fear had risen. In contrast to the fear of defeat experienced across the entire spectrum of non-opponents, it was mainly respondents striving for "neutrality" who admitted their fear of civil war (the types of attitudes are described in more detail in Section 1.2). It is logical to assume that those who had doubts about which side the truth lay on were also less confident in the unity of Russian society—and therefore assumed that contradictions within the country might lead to internal political division and military confrontation.

As expected, our respondents admitted to having not only global fears, but also fears for specific people (for example, their relatives in Ukraine or acquaintances who went to fight in the ranks of the Russian Armed Forces).

Non-opponents were also afraid and anxious about the situation in general: they were afraid to read the news, afraid to think about what would happen next, and so on. As one respondent aptly described it, they experienced a "general state of anxiety":

> "I have more anxiety that this won't ever end. It's awful, people are dying on both sides. … Yes, naturally, there's a general state of anxiety and depression surrounding it. You can see that it's being drawn out, it's like a dying grandmother … She just lies there and you can't toss her out and nothing can be done." (m., age 50, circus manager, October 2022)

Thus, in the fall of 2022, non-opponents most often experienced fear and anxiety. They were afraid of nuclear war, world war, civil war, Russian defeat, being drafted to go to the front (which will be discussed below), and sometimes something vague that plunged them into a "general state of anxiety." Fear and anxiety were also present in the first-wave interviews taken in the spring of 2022. These emotions were among the few that did not subside, but only intensified over time.

Sadness, pain, and pity: The failures of the Russian Army, deaths on both sides of the border, and the prolongation of the conflict

However, in the fall of 2022, non-opponents were not only afraid—they were also sad and expressed their regrets that people were dying. Many of them experienced a whole "gamut of emotions," wherein fear and anxiety coexisted with pain and pity, and these emotions combined made them hesitate and doubt their attitude towards the war:

> "On one hand, it became clearer why everything happened like this, and on the other, it became more frightening and anxiety-provoking. Because when you realize that the scale is different and that we'll actually be involved in the most direct sense, then of course [your attitude] changes. Well, purely from an emotional standpoint, at first we thought it would be quick, we'd endure it. Then we started to realize it was long, painful, and full of loss. I think everyone experienced the whole gamut of emotions, from fear, pity, conviction. Then doubt in the rightness of the situation …

> Sometimes you cry, it's so scary, painful, and bitter." (f., age 52, university lecturer, November 2022)

Respondents also lamented the retreat of the Russian Army from the conquered territories, as well as the fact that the war was raging on and people continued to die. Some respondents specified that they felt sorry primarily for "their own people"—Russian soldiers or people who remained in the territories abandoned by the Russian Armed Forces as a result of the retreat:

> "But we didn't withdraw … Or where did they retreat, near the Kharkov region? There, too, many villages were left and only the 80-to-90-year-olds remained, who said 'we aren't going anywhere, we have nowhere to live, we will die here.' I feel sorry for these people. They voted, and essentially, they thought: 'Yes, they will protect us.' And then the retreat is tough—how did this happen?" (m., age 23, medical lab assistant, October 2022)

Other respondents felt sorry for all the people who suffered from the war on both sides of the front:

> "Of course, like any person, I want the heated phase to end as quickly as possible, because the deaths of civilians, the deaths of soldiers, it all hurts, this grief is tremendous." (f., age 23, engineer, October 2022)

It is important, however, to understand that these emotions, even pity for all the victims of the war, do not compel supporters of the war to become opponents. As one respondent explained:

> "I feel very sorry for those people, but I want this side to win, because for me these are specific people. … That is, Russia is fulfilling its obligations in relation to the LPR/DPR [Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic]. I see it as some kind of inevitable, very painful, very difficult decision, but inevitable." (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

While at the beginning of the war, sadness, pain, and pity were experienced mainly by opponents of the war and those uncertain in their attitude, after half a year of the war, as we can see, the supporters had also learned sadness.

Anger, hatred (rare emotions)

It is worth mentioning that among the confident supporters, there were those for whom the events listed above, such as the first Crimean Bridge explosion, evoked not so much fear or sadness, but anger and hatred:

> "And then you'll see the consequences of the Crimean Bridge strike. … And when afterwards, you see people taking pictures against the background of the stamp of the bridge explosion, when they write 'Ahaha, look what happened! Here we are, but not the Crimean Bridge,' or some such, you start feeling something that's not really

> compassion for people, but something closer to hatred, if not full-on hatred." (m., age 22, programmer, October 2022)

Although our respondents rarely used the words "hatred" and "anger" when describing their emotions, the tone of some interviews with confident supporters was rather aggressive, and seemed even a little more aggressive than it had been in the spring.

Happiness and hope for a better future: Geopolitical shifts and their delayed effects

Interestingly, the second-wave respondents, who were all non-opponents, including some supporters, rarely expressed positive emotions in connection with the "special operation," such as, for example, joy or pride in their country. If our respondents did have something positive to say about the situation, then it was in regard to a change in some established world order:

> "It was frightening, in any case, because war is war. No matter what, it's going to be frightening. But on the other hand, the geopolitical shifts that were occurring in the process of this war have calmed down, and the fact that initially … Basically, there was a sort of breakdown of the current world order, and I'm happy about that, of course. It's one of those cases where right now, it's awful, but in 10 years, we'll be glad that it happened." (m., age 38, profession unknown, November 2022)

Happiness is more likely to be used as a synonym for approval of the president's actions in statements by respondents who are most loyal to the authorities:

> "And he [Putin] now wants to prove to the whole world that we are leaders, that our president will take the flag, the crown. Personally, I'm happy about this, and I fully support our leader." (m., age 46, business owner, November 2022)

As we see, even in this case, this happiness was unrelated to the circumstances at that time, but rather concerned the anticipated future.

In other words, the happiness our respondents experienced bordered on hope. It was not so much a positive assessment of what had happened as it was the expectation of changes for the better in the future. In the spring, only a few had expressed happiness about the situation—but at that time, this happiness could be attributed to events that had already occurred, that had taken place at the front (for example, some respondents had had a positive evaluation of the war at the very beginning, as they thought that it would help liberate the Russian-speaking population of Donbas). In the fall, however, not one of our respondents was happy that the war had started, even if they considered it necessary. In addition, the non-opponents from the second wave may have emphasized that they were not happy about the bombing of Ukrainian cities, and condemned the joy that their acquaintances experienced in relation to it. In general, however, both in the spring and in the fall, positive emotions contrasted with the overall, generally negative emotional character of the interviews.

Calmness, lack of emotion, and rationalization of feelings

Finally, some respondents essentially said nothing about experiencing strong emotions. They might have reported having unpleasant, negative experiences, but they described them in a detached and unemotional way, as if trying to rationalize the processes occurring within them:

> "When some of the Russian troops were left there, the cruiser Moskva was killed, the Ukrainian Armed Forces offensive was—it was not very pleasant. And the Russian authorities' actions didn't inspire very good feelings in me either. Well, overall, the emotions I had were negative, and are getting worse." (m., age 23, medical lab assistant, October 2022)

The same events that evoked fear, anxiety, or sadness in other respondents were simply "not very pleasant" in this young man's words. Respondents of this type often deliberately avoided emotional language when answering questions, trying to present themselves as unbiased, cool-headed observers:

> "Honestly, I didn't feel anything at all. Everything that happened seemed completely logical and natural. The only thing is that it was a bit drawn out and could have been done more competently at some points. But in general, there is absolutely nothing surprising and nothing that could change my mood, cause panic, apathy and all that. I'm perfectly calm." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

We already wrote about a similar trend in our first analytical report: while opponents of the war believed that it was important to continue to feel emotions about war, including in order to maintain humanity and fuel their position, supporters and the undecided often believed that emotions interfere with having an "objective" view of the war and being able to competently assess the situation.

It turned out that our non-opponent respondents rarely experienced positive emotions—even less often than in the spring. They did not rejoice at the deaths of civilians, the bombing of Ukrainian cities, or even the military successes of the Russian Army (which may have been due to the lack thereof). The main emotions experienced in relation to the war in the fall of 2022 were fear, anxiety, sadness, and pain, sometimes diluted with hope that things might change for the better in the future.

2.3.2 It was frightening, but not for long: Emotions related to the mobilization

As expected, the announcement of the "partial mobilization" on September 21, 2022, evoked the greatest emotional response from our respondents. Below, we detail what non-opponents felt when they learned that ordinary citizens might begin being sent to the front, and how they coped with these emotions.

"I was shaking all over" and "I am perfectly calm": Initial reactions

When discussing their initial reactions to the announcement of the "partial mobilization," most of our respondents described exclusively negative emotions, such as fear, fright, panic, anxiety, disappointment, condemnation, indignation, bewilderment, depression, sadness, outrage, a feeling of unpleasant surprise, and shock:

> Q: "On September 21st, the president announced the 'partial mobilization.' Did you hear about it on that day, that particular day? How did you react?"
> A: "I was shaking all over when I heard about the mobilization. Because since the beginning of February, everyone has been saying: 'What if there's a draft?! They'll mobilize—and that will be it! This is war!' And now this moment has come—on September 21st, they announced the draft. For me it was … I don't even know … Just imagine: the war has begun! What else can you feel here, if not some kind of fear? That's it! There is no more light at the end of the tunnel. Do you understand? The light has gone out. This is the end! Mobilization!" (m., age 21, student, October 2022).

It was not the beginning of the "special operation," but the announcement of the mobilization that marked the beginning of the war for this young man. This was typical of second-wave respondents in general: many of them experienced the news of the mobilization as a repeat of February 24th—or as something even more shocking than the outbreak of the "special operation," because this was the moment the war infiltrated their private lives.

Many respondents who did not share anti-war sentiments admitted that they reacted to the announcement of the mobilization with negative emotions of varying degrees of intensity, the most frequent of which were condemnation, outrage, and disappointment. The mobilization came as a disorienting surprise to most of them. Some were unpleasantly shocked by the need to involve the civilian reserves in the "special operation," while others were horrified by the way the mobilization was being conducted:

> Q: "And what did you experience the moment you found out that people were being drafted?"
> A: "Certainly something incomprehensible and unpleasant. There were no good feelings. What good can there be if young people are being drafted? Now many people are saying, and I read on the internet that we have so many weapons, we have so many contract soldiers. Do they really have so few people that they need to draft young men, 18, 19, 20 years old? Think about it: these inexperienced fighters are being sent off God knows where, it's unclear. Now I'm looking and seeing how many coffins they're dragging back, it drives you mad. … To the point of tears, it's one big nightmare. It's a shame that such young people are dying." (m., age 68, retired, November 2022)

There were also those among our respondents who claimed that they did not experience any emotions on September 21, 2022, because they had been expecting something like this for a long time. That being said, in some cases, researchers or their acquaintances had had the opportunity to observe the way these respondents had reacted to the mobilization at the time it was announced and in the first days or weeks afterwards, and it turned out to be far

from "calm." The fact is that sometimes respondents tend to present themselves in interviews as cool-headed, capable of analyzing the course of political events, regardless of their true feelings or fears about the war:

> "As far as the mobilization, nothing surprising. I was sure they would announce it, and for some reason I was sure it would be in summer. It made sense … Apparently, they didn't want to take it all the way, because from a purely strategic standpoint, they should have done it in summer, because there were more complicated things that Russia in particular now has to deal with. There were some strategic, military components that they couldn't handle, and now they're trying to dig themselves out, including through the draft. It should probably have been done over the summer. So the mobilization itself does not bother me much." (m., age 28, graphic designer, October 2022)

Typically, presenting oneself as an "unemotional analyst" was more typical of men than women, probably because society expects cold, rational behavior from men, and some respondents strove to meet these expectations (the relationship between ideas about masculinity and reactions to the announcement of the mobilization are described in section 2.2.3). "Emotionless" respondents often contrasted themselves with their more emotional, less restrained acquaintances, thereby emphasizing their moral superiority and expressing a negative attitude towards the manifestation of emotions in the context of the mobilization and war in general:

> Q: "If you recall that day, September 21st, Putin made a speech that morning announcing the mobilization—can you tell us about that day? What emotions did you experience, what happened?"
>
> A: "I was fine, I was calm—if I'm drafted, I'm drafted. I stay true to my statements, my ideas. If I am a supporter, and I must affirm this through my participation, then I will, if necessary. I took the news perfectly calmly. There were some people I know, of course, who are among the more liberal-minded, they fell into a wild panic, and so on. There's one woman I know, she has a 14-year-old son, and she wants to leave immediately, because they might draft a 14-year-old. It's like people are hysterical." (m., age 40, guide, October 2022)

"Unpleasant, but you get used to it somehow": Emotions after some time

We conducted our fall interviews from mid-October to the end of December 2022, at the earliest a few weeks, and in some cases a few months after the mobilization had been announced. The majority of respondents who experienced strong emotions immediately after the announcement reported that these emotions gradually subsided. Respondents grew accustomed to the new reality and rationalized it:

> "I found out somehow, I don't remember how. Well, it was scary. I realized that now things were getting more serious, it will start to affect normal people. Before that, it was happening somewhere over there, something that might affect the price of some grocery items. Now it has become clear that simple people are going to be

> dragged into all this. Personally, I wasn't happy about it. Well, and I was scared for my own hide too … I remember that my first reaction was that it was so frightening, but that I had to maintain my composure. I considered a plan of action, even. Not anything serious, like a plan of action for how to quickly flee the country or where to hide, where to get medical discharge papers. I was thinking of a plan of action for how to cope with my emotions and how to cope with stress. It consisted of resting, then trying to read something. And that's essentially what I did. And I was able to wrap my head around it a little in time, when there was more information about it. That first day, there wasn't much available. Then it got a little simpler, sort of … Well, the situation never got any better, but you get used to it somehow." (m., age 19, student, November 2022)

On top of this, the background anxiety was not going anywhere. It had been with the Russian people since the beginning of the war. Many of our respondents said that after the mobilization was announced, their anxiety levels rose sharply, but then returned to the levels they had had prior to September 21st:

> Q: "So the mobilization represented some sort of peak in this mood for you? Or no?"
>
> A: "No it … If, let's say, my anxiety has remained at a certain level since I found out about the war. The mobilization was a slight increase in anxiety, and then I went back to the base anxiety level. Like a blip in a heart rate monitor. … Well, I mean it didn't fall back to normal levels, like in ordinary life, but rather to the level where you're on your guard, understanding that some decisions are being made over there, but it's not clear how long this process will take and it's not clear what the final destination is." (f., age 33, sports instructor, November 2022)

The extreme nature of the political circumstances may be cause for a state of ongoing heightened tension, as people are constantly bracing themselves for new shocking events. Uncertainty about how the "special operation" would unfold, as well as the rumors that even citizens who did not fall under the draft were being carted off to war, became a source of constant anxiety for many respondents, or even a trigger for psychological disorders:

> "I was really freaked out when I was thinking about how to make sure I didn't get drafted during the partial mobilization. Then I quickly started reading about whom they'd call up first. I realized that, naturally, they'd call up people who were soldiers, with some sort of military experience. I calmed down a little at the time, but I was still in a panic. And then I learned from people I know that they're calling up people even if they don't have military experience, and I was like, 'Huh? What's going on?' Of course, at that point, it got scary … Not like one of my relatives being called up, I was just scared for my own life."
>
> Q: "This state of fear, does it get worse when you find out that someone you know or someone without military experience is being chosen? Or has everything quieted down, like after the start of the 'special operation?' "

A: “No, no. Of course, when I find out that someone I know or love has been touched by this directly, then the fear is renewed, of course. I don’t know if this is connected to what’s going on, but I’ve slept very poorly for the last week. First, my sleep is very light, I wake up constantly. Beforehand, I would lie down, pass out for the whole night and wake up in the morning. But now my sleep has gotten a little worse. I don’t really have any direct anxieties, I’ve just started sleeping worse.” (m., age 22, student, event organizer, October 2022)

The announcement of the “partial mobilization” also triggered a new wave of people leaving the country. These departures also evoked an emotional reaction from our respondents. Many tried to understand the defectors and those who left, but for others, their actions caused negative or “mixed” feelings (see 2.2.3 for more details).

And so, the majority of our non-opponent respondents experienced strong negative emotions in response to the mobilization—likely even a significant number of those who presented themselves as cool-headed and analytical, for whom “everything was clear” in advance. But these emotions did not stay with people for long: respondents calmed down and acclimatized to the new reality. However, the background anxiety—as well as their denunciation of those who left—stuck with them for a long time.

***

In the fall of 2022, more than seven months after the start of the war, our respondents continued to experience emotions about the event, mostly negative ones. They reacted emotionally to the announcement of the mobilization, as well as to the series of Russian retreats at the front, the first Crimean Bridge explosion, and the shelling of Russian border regions. Despite the fact that our second-wave respondents were those who, in one way or another, supported the war, or at least were not staunch opponents, only a few shared their experiences of joy, hope, and optimism. On the contrary, they talked about how they were afraid, anxious, sad, and in pain. In the analytical report on the results of the first wave of research, we noted that the fear and anxiety our respondents experienced had grown over time, regardless of their attitude towards the war. The fall interviews demonstrated that this trend of growth, which was associated with the prolonged nature of the conflict and the uncertainty of its underlying goals, had continued.

The announcement of the mobilization contributed significantly to this growth in anxiety. At the end of September 2022, many respondents once again experienced the fright, panic, and shock that they had already experienced on February 24th of that year. However, these strong emotions began to soften around October. They were replaced by the ever-present background anxiety and, for some, irritation about fellow citizens who had left the country. In the eyes of some respondents, the new wave of departures in September was a sort of irrational “hysteria,” even while they themselves worried for their own lives or the lives of their relatives.

2.4 Information consumption: What Russians are and are not watching and reading, and why they don't trust these sources

The issue of information consumption and the effects of propaganda was one of the most often-discussed topics with regards to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In the first months of the war, Western journalists and experts emphasized the need to "puncture Russia's disinformation bubble," and governments and civil societies around the world have invested significant resources in projects attempting to undermine the effects of propaganda. A key assumption underlying these projects was the idea that, over time, the increase in information about the destruction in Ukraine, and the deaths of Ukrainian civilians as well as Russian soldiers, would cause Russian citizens to question the credibility of Russian pro-government sources. What did media consumption and views on information about the war in Russia look like in the fall of 2022? How had they changed over more than six months of war? Had alternative sources made propaganda less convincing? In this section, we describe the media repertoires of our respondents, analyze how they perceived information and evaluated its reliability, and how their media consumption practices had changed during the six months after the outbreak of war.

2.4.1 Media repertoires and their components

Which media repertoires—combinations of various sources—did our respondents rely on to obtain information about the war? Among these sources there were TV channels, radio stations, social media sites, and online media and news aggregators, as well as the respondent's inner circle—friends, relatives, and acquaintances with direct access to information about events in Ukraine, or who simply had authority in the respondent's eyes.

Most of our respondents had mixed media repertoires, so they included a variety of sources. Some respondents relied on a television-based repertoire, wherein television plays an important role, but is supplemented by online media or information from close contacts. Others relied on an online-centric repertoire—they either exclusively used online sources and social media, or online sources and social media played a central role for this audience and were complemented by information from significant people in their lives. Only a few of our respondents limited themselves to just watching TV to receive information about events in Ukraine.

Among the social media networks mentioned by the respondents, Telegram was the leader, followed by YouTube, and then other platforms—VKontakte, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitch. In addition to social media networks, some respondents also used online resources and news aggregators (various online media, Yandex.News). The table below lists the main types of sources mentioned by respondents, with examples:

Category	**Example**
Russian television channels	Channel One, Russia-1, Russia-24

Russian pro-government publications	Lenta.ru, Gazeta.ru, RIA Novosti, RT, *Izvestia*
Russian pro-government Telegram channels	The World Today with Yuri Podolyaka, Rybar, Readovka, Kotsnews, Colonelcassad, War Gonzo, Sladkov
Russian pro-government YouTube channels	Stas "Oh, How Simple!"
Russian news aggregators	Yandex.News, Mail.ru News
Russian opposition publications	Meduza, DOXA, *Novaya Gazeta*, TV Rain
Russian opposition Telegram channels	Lentach; Before anyone else. Well, almost.
Social media / YouTube channels of Russian opposition members	Ilya Varlamov, Ekaterina Schulmann, and Michael Naki's channels
Russian-language services of Western publications	BBC Russian Service, Deutsche Welle
Western publications	*The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The New York Times*,
Social media / YouTube channels of Ukrainian public figures	Dmitry Gordon, Oleksii Arestovych, Anatoly Shariy
Ukrainian publications	Strana.ua, UNIAN
Ukrainian Telegram channels	INII, Truexa

2.4.2 "Don't trust and don't verify": Credibility of information and how it is evaluated

How did our respondents assess the credibility of information? Depending on whether they perceived the information as trustworthy or not, it may have affected their views and stances on the war and the situation in the country on the whole. Most of our respondents complained about the lack of credible information and were disappointed with the quality of journalistic content. Many knew that they should be critical of new information, but did not understand exactly how to implement this in practice. For example, one respondent, a 21-year-old student, understood that he needed to compare various information sources and rely on authoritative media. At the same time, in reality, he relied on Google searches and considered the first few links that pop up to be authoritative, without paying any attention to the name of the source or its credibility: "Here, I put 'Putin' into Google. And here, the first few news links—I'm sure they're the most respectable publications, which seem trustworthy to me." (m., age 21, student, October 2022) Since search results depend on many factors, ranging from a person's previous search history to algorithm-influencing bot networks, it can be assumed that users with similar news-reading habits become hostages to

these patterns. Whom did our respondents trust, whom did they not trust, and most importantly, how exactly did they choose the media they consumed?

Total distrust of the media

The majority of our respondents did not trust the media. From their perspective, the media manipulated people in one way or another. Nonetheless, respondents differed from one another in their level of distrust and the practices they developed as a result.

Some respondents believed that the media always manipulates people's minds, regardless of whether the country is in a state of war or peace. In their view, the media by definition is a means of mass influence on people. As one respondent noted:

> "I don't trust any mass media ever—not because of the events in Ukraine, but overall. I just know how the media works. … They cannot be objective, it's impossible." (m., age 28, computer designer, October 2022)

Any media sources were seen by these respondents as instruments used to present events in a way that is beneficial to whoever owns the source. "I don't even know where to turn, where I can learn information from. It seems like everyone is unreliable, everyone's been bought off," said one respondent (f., age 27, architect, October 2022).

Other respondents acknowledged the existence of credible news sources in theory, but did not expect objective coverage from the media during wartime conditions. The war, in their view, was too complicated of a political and social process, and no one provides real information about it to ordinary citizens:

> "Constructing my own arguments on such a meager amount of information—I can only do this from a moral point of view, a universal human point of view. But as for something concrete—no one knows this but the generals who are pushing the buttons." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022)

In addition, because of the difference of opinion in the media, respondents found it difficult to get to the bottom of what was happening. One remarked: "But they're saying one thing and others are saying another. They started counting their chickens before they hatched, and now that it's all started, now we'll see what's what." (m., age 27, sound engineer, October 2022) Another respondent expressed a similar sentiment:

> "It's not that I don't believe the news. But they're saying one thing here, another thing in Europe, and something entirely different in Ukraine. That is, it's hard to know whom to believe in general. If they were saying more or less the same thing, then you might be able to connect some things." (m., age 35, engineer, October 2022)

Thus, the very fact that there were different opinions and competing interpretations of the situation in the information space, both Russian and global and, as a result, the absence of a single monolithic narrative, made them doubt the objectivity of all sources at once.

However, despite the information war and conflicting explanations of events, these people were more inclined to believe that, to some extent, they were able to separate the facts from the manipulation and to construct their own singular worldview. Although we do not know how common this practice was, quotes from some respondents suggested that this process may have been based on the respondent's political position—their own views and "facts" that the respondent already decided they believed in. For example, one respondent, a 28-year-old graphic designer, admitted that when interpreting facts, he proceeded from his "own stance, which no one broadcast to me, no media, no channels." (m., age 28, graphic design, October 2022) The respondent explained that he was sifting information through his already established worldview:

> "For myself, I know who's to blame for this war, for the current situation, why they blew up the Nord Stream [gas pipeline from Russia to Germany] and who's inspiring Ukraine to continue this war, although Ukraine stands to benefit the least from it. And I'm only interested in watching these channels or media to learn about individual events." (m., age 28, graphic designer, October 2022)

Under closer scrutiny, it became obvious that this worldview reiterated some of the main elements of government propaganda. For example, this respondent believed that the war began as an attempt to provoke Russia by the West, which "NATO and the Americans have been engaged in all these years"; that Russia invaded Ukraine because "all these years, Ukraine was the aggressor country in regards to Lugansk and Donbas"; and so on.

Finally, the third group of respondents believed only certain media sources. These were primarily people with a television-based media repertoire. They had their list of pro-government sources that they did not want to change. For example, a 70-year-old retiree noted that her list of trusted sources included several TV programs:

> "Channel One and our local station. … We have this program, *Time Will Tell*, and many politicians and journalists go on it. And then there's *International Review*, and a lot of people present there too." (f., age 70, retired, November 2022)

This respondent also trusted local news sources, since she believed that the information obtained from local channels could be easily verified by comparing it with her firsthand observations:

> "What they're showing on the television, we can compare and contrast all of it. Especially our [local city] programs, we were [there ourselves], we saw what was causing the noise, the uproar, all these arrivals, all of it. And if they're going to tell lies, why would I watch this show? That's why I trust this channel." (f., age 70, retired, November 2022)

Those who relied on a TV-centric media repertoire rarely encountered alternative coverage from online media—hence, they had no reason not to trust the TV. Among these respondents, trust in the media was essentially the result of the conjunction of pro-government narratives and their own personal perceptions of the situation. The principles used by a 37-year-old business owner to evaluate the credibility of the media

illustrated this tendency well. On one hand, this respondent affirmed that he did not trust Russian television:

> "Russian television [has] very little to do with the truth. They show whatever they like." (m., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

On the other hand, the state channels inspired more trust in his eyes than the others did. Yet in continuing to explain the reasons for this trust, he referenced not facts or objective criteria, but rather the Ukrainian media:

> "Have you seen the Ukrainian news? Well, it's just outright lies, in my opinion." (m., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

In other words, the criterion for evaluating the credibility of a source was not how closely it corresponded to reality, but rather the political affiliations of the source—the enemy's media sources can never be trusted, at least not entirely. Moreover, this verification process is largely intuitive—this respondent explained that pro-government sources "simply inspire more trust than the others," (m., age 37, business owner, October 2022) which was evidence that the respondent relied more on intuition.

This intuitive process was illustrated well by our next respondent, a recent graduate of a university outside of Moscow, who was completely apolitical at the time the war was announced. In trying to understand the situation, she first found herself in the Russian liberal media space (Meduza, MediaZona, *Novaya Gazeta*)—popular information sources among the students around her. There, she encountered negative interpretations of the reasons for the "special operation," which blamed the Russian government for instigating a criminal war, and Russian citizens were invited to actively express their disagreement with the actions of the authorities. Her unwillingness to accept this negative and "uncomfortable" version of events was transformed into an "intuitive feeling," which was what she relied upon when calling these sources of information unreliable. As a result, she abandoned these sources in favor of ones that presented the situation in a more advantageous light for Russia:

> "And my intuition told me that there were some discrepancies in the way they (the more liberal media) talked about the situation. And I've already started digging around [for the truth] absolutely everywhere I can." (f., age 23, engineer, October 2022)

This search led her to the official Telegram channels of pro-Russian bloggers and media such as Russia Today, which she described as more "sincere" and "honest," admitting that she simply "wanted to trust" these sources more because they corresponded to her "worldview":

> "Firstly, it seems to me that the position they were expressing regarding the current situation—and not just regarding the 'special operation,' but essentially, the world—it's somehow congruent with my understanding of things, my worldview. That's the first thing, I think, that hooked [me]. And the other was that there were interviews with various people who live there. And I'm watching it like, 'well, that

kind of thing could be faked [in principle], but the people [had] a sort of sincerity … and intuitively I … wanted to trust these interviews more, they seemed more honest." (f., age 23, engineer, October 2022)

Emotional mindsets

Skepticism and the feeling that it was impossible to obtain reliable information about the situation provoked discomfort and negative emotions, and these, in turn, could determine the practices of media consumption. A person who was annoyed by the lack of access to reliable information was more likely to stop following the government's agenda than a person who had a calm mindset towards the situation. Below we describe the different mindsets about the media and the emotions associated with them that motivated people to follow an agenda or, conversely, to disengage from it. Among our respondents, we could distinguish three different mindsets towards information: radical, detached, and analytical.

Respondents with a *radical mindset* reacted negatively and irritably to their inability to obtain credible information and the various conflicting interpretations of the war they encountered. For example, one respondent described his attitude towards television in an aggressive manner, with a lot of abusive terms and complaints about the psychological pressure he faced:

> "I thought that when Maidan ended in 2014, then all this windbaggery on the TV would stop. I can form my own opinion, I don't need this constant pressure. … When I'm out somewhere and this zombie box is switched on, if it's acting on my brain for half an hour, it's hard for me." (m., age 59, profession unknown, December 2022)

This radical mindset and the accompanying irritation often led respondents to reject all media consumption as they tried to avoid discomfort and stay in harmony with themselves. For example, when answering the question about which sources she trusted, another respondent confessed: "I think none at all." (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022) This lack of trusted sources in turn led to disengagement from the information sphere as a whole:

> "I don't know, honestly, which is why I don't watch it. I know that no one will tell the truth, and I start getting worked up about it." (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

Respondents with a *detached mindset* responded to the same discomfort with a loss of sensitivity to events occurring in Ukraine, with apathy, and by distancing themselves. For example, one of them complained that he often did not fully understand the events and processes that were presented in the media:

> "There is information that some kind of law has been passed—that's real information. And the second question is how it will work in practice. What will happen? Who the fuck knows … That's my attitude." (m., age 27, oil worker, November 2022).

In turn, this lack of understanding caused not irritation, but detachment: "I don't take [information] to heart," said this respondent. (m., age 27, oil worker, November 2022) At the same time, these people tried to have at least a superficial understanding of the events, so they did not disengage from the news altogether, but rather limited their consumption of information. Thus, another respondent, a 25-year-old shift worker, spoke of his lack of confidence in the information he received:

> "Anyway, no one knows about everything, and they all lie like hell. I don't trust it." (m., age 25, shift worker, October 2022)

As a result, he continued to follow the events ("news on all areas [of development of the events at the front] I watch on YouTube or read on Telegram"), but limited the amount of time and effort he spent on this ("But I try not to go down a rabbit hole"). (m., age 25, shift worker, October 2022)

Finally, respondents with an *analytical mindset* are comfortable coping with their distrust of information sources. They treat media bias as normal and claim they do not feel strongly about it. One of these respondents, for example, said that "military news will naturally be biased in one direction or another," (m., age 40, guide, October 2022) but at the same time he continued to read and analyze these sources:

> "… but I'm trying to pull just the facts on what's happening. If the troops have retreated, then they have retreated, and there's confirmation of it. No matter what anyone says, a fact remains a fact." (m., age 40, guide, October 2022)

This analysis did not evoke particularly strong emotions in the respondent—even if the information seemed unreliable or biased, he perceived it "without any sort of frenzy, without wild delight." (m., age 40, guide, October 2022) Another respondent emphasized that analyzing information came easily to him:

> "I just try to take something from the information and in my head, I filter out everything that seems absurd to me, that's all." (m., age 30, profession unknown, temporarily unemployed, October 2022)

2.4.3 Six months later: Changes in attitudes towards information and media consumption

Over the more than half a year following the outbreak of full-blown hostilities, respondent media consumption and focus on information pertaining to the events in Ukraine changed several times in response to various key events. A large-scale crisis provokes anxiety and draws people's attention to the media, in which people seek answers to find out what is happening. Over time, this increased focus is replaced by fatigue. Due to the constant focus on the destruction and casualties, the threshold for human suffering is reduced, and intense experiences at the beginning lead to a natural defensive psychological reaction in the form of attempts to limit the influx of negative information. All respondents in one way or another described several stages in the evolution of their focus on the war:

1) *First months of the war (late winter 2022–early spring 2022): increased focus*
This trend was illustrated well by the words of a 19-year-old student. At the beginning of the war, he said, "I subscribed to many channels, turned on notifications, read all the reports to keep informed on what was happening." (m., age 19, student, November 2022)

2) *Positional warfare (late spring–summer 2022): fatigue and distancing*
By the end of spring 2022, the heightened focus on the war gave way to fatigue and apathy. One of our respondents admitted that during this period, "a certain fatigue and apathy set in, I stopped following at some point." (m., age 38, profession unknown, November 2022) This trend recorded in our interviews is consistent with other evidence. TV audience data and studies showed that by the summer, viewership of state-owned TV channels had fallen by almost a quarter, and at the same time, the TV channels themselves had almost halved the amount of content related to the war.

3) *Mobilization (September 2022–October 2022): renewed focus*
It makes sense that the announcement of the mobilization was such a large-scale crisis that it once again drew the people's attention to the news and information about the military operation in Ukraine. As one respondent noted, "after the mobilization was announced, I started to read a few Telegram channels again, including Meduza, as well as a few others, and then the Telegram channel 'Before Anyone Else.' " (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022) Another respondent explained:

> "But in the fall, after summer break, I started paying more attention. This was connected in particular with the partial mobilization, because it involved what developments were happening, how people are being trained, how quickly they get there, what tasks they perform." (m., age 40, university administrative worker, November 2022)

4) *Late autumn–early winter (November–December 2022): return to fatigue and distancing*
Finally, a few weeks or months after the announcement of the mobilization, many informants had once again disengaged from the news cycle. As one respondent noted in November 2022, he was by then following the news rather passively:

> "Now I'm pretty much like, I don't track it purposefully, I just end up on the internet, stumble upon something, then I'll watch it." (m., age 38, profession unknown, November 2022)

Another respondent described the nature of this process as follows:

> "First, people started to panic when the mobilization was announced, then it's all gradually incorporated, people understand that life goes on." (f., age 33, sports instructor, November 2022)

Media repertoires

Despite the fact that most respondents shared a similar pattern of changes in focus on information about the war and media consumption with two peaks (the beginning of the

war and the announcement of mobilization) and two periods of decline (summer 2022 and late autumn 2022), the nature of these dynamics was different between those respondents with television- as opposed to internet-based repertoires. In turn, respondents with an internet-based repertoire fell into two groups, each with different strategies—there are apolitical and more politicized respondents.

Respondents with an online repertoire, previously far removed from politics, noted that at the beginning of the war, they not only started following the news more actively, but also consumed information from ideologically divergent sources. The majority of respondents, even if they supported Russia's actions, did not trust the state media—primarily television. This distrust led them to try to diversify their media repertoire: they begin to include Western, Ukrainian, or opposition sources in the list of information sources they consumed:

> "I try to be as balanced as possible, despite the fact that I still openly support the Russian Federation, in the end. I try to follow all the different reports. If I end up on some Ukrainian Telegram channel, I still look through them, because I want to see a stereoscopic, three-dimensional picture. I try to be objective always. I try not to end up in an information bubble, but to explore all points of view." (m., age 38, profession unknown, November 2022)

Some respondents even noted that they preferred Ukrainian Telegram channels because, unlike Russian ones, they "usually publish information first." (m., age 23, data analyst, October 2022)

However, over time, exposure to opposing explanations of events confused these respondents and they felt that they still could not understand what was really going on in Ukraine. Thus, one of the respondents complained:

> "If some sources say 'we retreated,' others say 'we attacked,' others say 'we bombarded,' and still others say 'we repelled,' it's clear that it's impossible to find some sort of middle ground here." (f., age 24, student, October 2022)

Another respondent described a similar frustration:

> "They say one thing over here, another in Europe, and another in Ukraine. I mean, it's essentially just unclear whom to believe. Therefore, to sum it up, for all this time there still hasn't been any sort of truth. And judging by some snippets, it's like a game of telephone—there's just no point to it." (m., age 35, engineer, October 2022)

At the same time, these respondents became increasingly uncomfortable with the wide range of interpretations of the military operations. "You can't grasp the immensity. That is, to read everything that's written, weeell … It's quite difficult," onee complained (m., age 39, real estate specialist, October 2022) Respondents also complained that this discomfort disturbed their psychological health. According to one, after reading Telegram channels with different ideological alignments, she realized that "I should probably stop, because my psyche can't handle it." (f., age 37, business owner, October 2022)

In response to the multitude of interpretations of the war, some respondents who were more removed from politics relied on the strategy of *full disengagement* and consciously ignored any events connected to the war:

> "I followed [the events in Ukraine], and was interested in the politics, to some extent. Just to the extent that I could stay on top of things, I didn't spend that much time on it. And then came the wall of noise, just a massive quantity of information. And staying on top of things required a lot of time, but I didn't want to have a one-sided view of the situation. And so I decided to just disconnect from the majority of media sources, some authorities (in the information sphere) and simply remain in the dark." (m., age 18, student, November 2022)

Others did not ignore the political agenda completely, but relied on a compromise strategy of limiting their consumption that allowed them to be aware of events in general, but not spend too much time analyzing information. For example, one of the respondents shared that:

> "Once a week I just watch an hourly squeeze from journalists whom I trust, journalists on YouTube, and in fact, everything." (m., 18 years old, student, November 2022)

Finally, some relied on a strategy of disconnecting from the news by relying on *other people*. This support became a kind of coping mechanism developed in response to the confusion and fatigue described above. As one respondent admitted, "I have a certain circle of friends who directly follow and monitor the news. And they periodically inform me of what's happening over there." (m., age 39, real estate specialist, October 2022) Another respondent explained the relationship between confusion and disconnection from others even more clearly:

> "I stopped reading the news completely, if I'm being honest, it scares me to do so, because I don't understand what's going on over there. I have a brother. When I see a terrifying headline, for example, about an explosion or a terrorist attack, I go to him and ask him to explain what's going on. Maybe it's a way of protecting myself, because when my brother retells it, it's not as scary as in reality, because with all the variety of news out there, I don't understand anything." (f., age 21, student, November 2022)

In other words, this respondent depended on the opinion of someone close to her (her brother) in order to assuage the discomfort caused by the various competing interpretations of the war.

Respondents with an internet-based repertoire who were interested in politics also drew their information on the war from a variety of sources, including sources expressing opposing views. Accordingly, more politicized informants also faced the problem of having competing interpretations of the war around them—but responding to it differently.

Some of them adopted a strategy of *active consumption*—they stated that they continued to actively monitor state propaganda and tried to verify the information by comparing it with other sources:

> "They might say one thing on the TV, but the reality might be something else. That's why I watch the Ukrainian channels for comparison. I think, 'I'll see what they say, I'll see what these say, what the others say." (f., age 62, retired, December 2022)

It's difficult to say how often these statements actually translated into real practices. Researchers note that people's claims that they verify information often result from the fact the practice is considered "socially desirable." In other words, for this respondent, acknowledging publicly that she doesn't verify information and takes the media at its word may call into question her own feelings of self-worth, especially in Russia, where the idea that the media is a form of manipulation is considered common sense.

For other politicized respondents, as for many non-politicized ones, the interpretation of events presented by anti-regime sources, which often present Russia's actions in a negative light, started to evoke discomfort. A *polarization of media consumption* occurs, in which respondents exclude anti-regime sources from their repertoire:

> "I gradually started to clean up my Telegram feed, when a channel started to post shameless propaganda**.** On the Ukrainian side, I see an awful amount of clumsy and aggressive propaganda. And I see that the public is happy to accept it all. I see how the entire liberal and Ukrainian public immediately reacts to unverified information from Ukraine, immediately starts reposting, getting scared, condemning Russia." (m., age 28, graphic designer, October 2022)

The discomfort of seeing Russia presented in a negative light is caused not so much by the events covered as by the selection of facts, the language used, and where the emphasis is placed:

> "If the Russian Army bombs Kiev, they'll write about it … with the obligatory abuses typical for them, like 'Russian Army cruelly and senselessly bombs Ukrainian city'—it's always an issue of style. … Why are the bombings cruel and senseless? When they bombed Kiev, they were bombing military facilities and infrastructure, primarily. Is that a fact? It's a fact. They don't write that the 'victims of the Kiev bombings are power generator stations and military facilities.' No, they write 'Russia continues its genocide of the precious unfortunate Kievans.' At the same time, when the Crimean Bridge exploded, what did they write? Not a 'vile, terrible, and cruel terrorist attack committed by the Ukrainian leadership.' They write 'an alleged explosion, the Russian side blames the Ukrainian special services for the Crimean Bridge explosion.' " (m., age 28, graphic designer, October 2022)

In ceasing to pay attention to anti-regime sources, these respondents understood that they were starting to rely on less credible or pro-government propaganda sources. And then they switched on their "internal" methods of verifying these sources—they relied on their own ideas about the sources' biases. As one of our respondents noted, "I'd rather use sources

from the Russian side and try to separate the information from their ideological position." (m., age 37, programmer, temporarily unemployed, December 2022) But since, as we know from other studies, politicized people often interpret facts in ways that support their own views, it is unlikely that this internal bias test can be effective. Moreover, many respondents do not hide the fact that their goal is not at all to check the information for objectivity. They admit that they are willing to put up with an obvious bias if the price is the elimination of discomfort. For example, one of them recalls the global liberal media coverage of the Snake Island incident, after which she started limiting the amount of Western sources she read:

> "There were very loud statements by the ruling elite of Ukraine that this many people were heroically killed. And then it turned out that it was a fake. All the major newspapers repeated it without verifying—for example, the BBC. At that time, I was subscribed to all the liberal media in the world in general—the *Washington Post*, in short, everything, *The Guardian*. … And then, it turns out that all these people, they were alive, and they were simply taken hostage. And nobody wrote about that." (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

As a result, the respondent drew the conclusion that "media sources that I used to respect a lot" also manipulated readers and decided "to stick to [the Russian] side, in order to protect my psyche, and not destabilize it." (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

In the words of another respondent, his position was close to that of the pro-government media, according to which "we are at war with all of Europe on the territory of Ukraine, and this is NATO." (m., age 34, manager, November 2022) Justifying his opinion, he referred not to the veracity of these media sources, but to the psychological necessity of his own opinion:

> "Your brain always needs some theory to cling onto, and yes, mine probably clings to this one more." (m., age 34, manager, November 2022)

These statements demonstrated the respondents' deep level of awareness of the pro-government media's biases. However, despite this, they made the choice to turn to them to get rid of the discomfort that was generated by the conflict between what they believed and what was occurring.

As opposed to respondents with an *internet-based repertoire*, respondents with *television-based repertoires* simply did not face a dilemma in choosing information sources. Because they trusted the TV and did not rely (or at least did not rely heavily upon) online sources, they did not encounter conflicting explanations for events or any discomfort that might lead them to invent different strategies for interacting with information. Although some of them talked about the importance of comparing sources, they rarely talked about their comparison practices in detail or listed specific sources. This suggests that such statements were more like proclamations. For example, one respondent said:

> "I compare the, let's say, official sources, and what I was able to find unofficially. And in principle, they're not so different." (m., age 69, retired, October 2022)

At the same time, he did not explain which sources he was referring to, in contrast to respondents with internet-based repertoires, who often named specific sources.

Respondents with television-based repertoires co-opted the government propaganda's rhetoric about fakes and disinformation as a way to protect themselves from the versions of events presented by online sources that could call their own views into question. "I don't watch any of this fake news on the Internet," explained one respondent (m., age 71, retired, October 2022). When asked if he drew information from the television, another respondent replied:

> "Primarily, yes. Where else? … No, I don't watch news on my phone. … I looked at it, and it's all just complete bupkis. They desecrate Russia, they defile everything." (m., age 68, retired, November 2022).

The rhetoric of disinformation and fake news provided these respondents with explanations that made it easy to question information obtained from online sources in general:

> "[I get my information] from the [TV] news. I don't trust all channels, Telegram channels or things like that. There could be a lot of fake news on there. There aren't that many people going to school for journalism anymore. Why? Because it's easy to be a blogger. I can say any sort of nonsense about anyone and I won't be punished for it. Telegram channels, bloggers—I can say any nonsense and people will believe it. But journalists and the news, they have a responsibility—you'll be sentenced for spreading false information. So I'm going to trust the news, television channels, more than these fakes." (m., age 31, chairman of the city youth council, December 2022)

In other words, respondents with television-based repertoires simply avoided the problem of conflicting narratives, since they either did not encounter them, or if they did, they had a prepared explanation that they were "fake news" or "misinformation," which easily allowed them to ignore criticism of the government's actions.

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Thus, some non-opponents relied on a television-based repertoire—television played an important role, but was complemented by online media or information from trusted acquaintances. The other portion of our respondents relied on an internet-based repertoire—they either used exclusively online sources and social networks, or they also combined information obtained from the internet with information from friends and relatives. In one way or another, our respondents expressed distrust of the media, including Russian sources. But those respondents who relied on a television-based repertoire still tended to trust the media more, as they rarely encountered competing narratives. Distrust was accompanied by various emotional mindsets—the radical mindset, wherein respondents were completely disconnected from the news agenda; the detached mindset, wherein respondents limited their information consumption; and the analytical mindset, wherein respondents manage their emotions and proclaim a "rational" approach to their information consumption.

At the beginning of the war, our respondents paid rapt attention to the media, but by summer, exhaustion had set in. The announcement of the mobilization once again forced non-opponents to actively consume information, and yet by winter they had once again grown weary. Respondents with internet-based repertoires, however, had been trying to consume information "from different angles" for a long time. However, over time, they got tired and uncomfortable with the presence of competing interpretations of the same events surrounding them. Apolitical respondents then limited their news consumption partially or completely and, in some cases, began to rely instead on information received from friends. Meanwhile, politicized respondents ignored this discomfort or deliberately returned to consuming information from exclusively pro-Russian sources (even though they acknowledged that these sources were biased). Respondents with television-based repertoires rarely encountered competing explanations for events. When this did happen, they relieved their discomfort by declaring that conflicting interpretations of the war in online sources were "fake news" or "misinformation."

There is a some diversity of information sources available if one takes into account the full spectrum of the Russian media space, both formal and informal, professional and amateur, though for reasons of government control, this diversity is much more present in online form than it is on television, on the radio, or in print. Despite strict measures to control it, completely limiting the influx of alternative information is simply impossible. Consequently, Russians can be confronted with multiple versions of events that call into question the state propaganda's worldview. Access to this information, however, does not automatically lead former non-opponents of the war to adopt more anti-war stances. Illustrating the "less is more" principle, those audiences that may have reconsidered their views due to the active use of online sources responded to the multiplicity of voices in the media with a set of adaptive strategies that allowed them to get rid of discomfort without reconsidering their views.

2.5 How will it all end?

The question of how the war will end and what its consequences will be for both sides of the conflict is of great concern to many. In this section, we describe the various possible scenarios for the end of the war that our respondents offered. We show how non-opponents saw the future of Russia and Ukraine and the role of Europe and the United States in resolving the conflict.

Most of our respondents, regardless of the way they perceived other aspects of the war, had rather pessimistic views of the future. They believed that no matter how the war ends, it will not benefit anyone. Some of them found it difficult to imagine specific scenarios for the end of the conflict. Many said that it was very difficult to answer the question about the future of the conflict. In contrast to the first months, when there was still a glimmer of hope for the swift resolution of the "special operation," after seven to nine months of war, the future by then seemed neither joyful nor certain.

The possible endings to the war suggested by our respondents could be provisionally divided into desirable/optimistic (how the respondents would like the war to end), and realistic (ranging from more or less optimistic to more or less pessimistic).

2.5.1 Desired scenarios: Peace on Russian terms

The most desirable outcome for the end of the war is a swift end to the military activities and transition to peace talks, with consideration of Russia's interests as a minimum and agreeing to all Russia's terms at the maximum. Respondents suggested that this would finally restore the peace—an end to the violence, people will stop killing each other and dying, and Russia will be reunited with the "fraternal people of Ukraine." Part of this scenario is the well-being of all—not just the citizens of Russia and Ukraine, but also those in Europe (who, according to many, are also suffering from the war):

> "Russia will stop sending people over there and dying in another country's territory. The LPR/DPR [Luhansk People's Republic/Donetsk Peopple's Republic] will finally become (and have already become) a part of Russia, will stop living in this 'gray zone' on the map, being subjected to shelling, and so on. These poor grandmothers will crawl out of the basements, and will finally be able to sit quietly on their benches. That is, I still hope that … Lord, I want world peace, but you understand that, in short … I want Russia to win, but in such a way so that the lives of other people who also became involved in this conflict will also somehow be improved**.** That is, what we are seeing there now, I would like if that wasn't going on at all, because people shouldn't be eating insects, they just shouldn't … I don't know what … What do they do? Heat their houses to 16 degrees and so on." (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

Russia being able to keep the occupied territories is an important component of the desired outcome for the war. At the same time, opinions about which territories need to be preserved, and which can be sacrificed, differ. Some believe that Crimea would be sufficient, while others believe that all the newly annexed lands should be kept. For many, a Russian retreat behind its former territorial borders seems unthinkable:

> "Another point—unfortunately, at the phase we are in right now, we just can't, in principle, can't stop it all by saying to ourselves, 'Okay, let's get this over with, we'll take this, and the rest is for you. Or we will give you everything.' It won't work like that anymore." (m., age 46, business owner, November 2022)

> "It is necessary, in my opinion, to finish this already, to support our own people, not to quit. And try to find some compromise—well, to put ourselves in a comfortable position for negotiating—that is, to win a military victory, but at the same time understand that there will be no complete control over the situation. And you just need to find the most advantageous position so that we can finish this saga already." (m., age 23, journalist, October 2022)

Many respondents, regardless of their level of support for the war, mention compromise as the desired scenario (because it also seems more realistic in the current situation). However, as a result of this compromise, Russia should keep, as the previous respondent says, its leverage. It is no longer possible to simply retreat, in the views of non-opponents of the war, because too much time has passed since the beginning of the invasion, and Russia has suffered many losses—economic, political, and human:

> "I think … the way I see it, if Ukraine wins back these territories, it will be a complete failure for our country. And that's not considering the lack of new acquisitions, resources, and so on and so forth, including human resources. And there's also the sanctions, crisis, boycotts, and so on. If we captured the entire country, it would at least be some compensation." (m., age 18, student, November 2022)

The fate of the inhabitants of Donbas in these scenarios deserves its own place in the discussion. When talking about the reasons the war began, most respondents listed the need to protect the Russian-speaking population of this region of Ukraine as their main argument. However, when answering the question about desired (or even realistic) outcomes for the end of the war, concern for the population, which has suffered for eight years (according to respondents) from aggression from the Ukrainian authorities, fades into the background, if not completely vanishes. Consolidation of territorial acquisitions becomes the main concern, while our respondents mostly recall the fate of the inhabitants of these territories as a secondary thought, or fail to mention it entirely:

> "It would probably make sense to me (it's very difficult for me to judge now), that since all this has happened, they'd leave it like it is … Honestly, I thought that it would only concern Luhansk and Donetsk: they were the only places being factored in. And then it turned out to be even more land. And since all sorts of crap has gone down there, let them leave these with Russia, and then things will calm down, they won't be building bases near Russia. … I would say that this is very primitive reasoning, but let's just leave each other alone, well, precisely on the condition that there will be no bases, no threats to Russia, as they tell us." (f., age 33, sports instructor, November 2022)

> "Ideally, in order to not avoid being completely disgraced, one can dream that the working borders that exist now, where the line of conflict is, that they'll be recognized as real boundaries, then everything would be fine. We can write off all frozen assets for the restoration of Ukraine, and we can start our own restoration. That would probably be the ideal option, that's now being arranged by those at the top. … We take everything we have within the current borders, we never raise the issue again, we hold some kind of nationwide, planetary referendum, that yes, the LDPR—it's definitely always been Russia, it's always been Russians, it's just ours Eastern Slavs." (m., age 23, medical engineer, November 2022)

What future awaits Ukraine if the war ends in Russia's favor? Respondents describe several different scenarios. First, Ukraine may cease to exist as a state as part of its territory comes under Russian control, and part is divided among other countries (for example, Poland). Another option is Ukraine fracturing into several parts, only one of which will continue to

exist as Ukraine. In both cases, the lines of division, in the eyes of our respondents, run primarily along ethnic boundaries, separating Russians (Russian-speaking, Slavs) from people with a different mentality:

> "From my point of view, it would be optimal if Ukraine was divided either into two or three pieces. One where the Russian population lives, where people self-identify first and foremost as Russians … These boundaries are drawn very clearly there. … I mean to say, there's one strip that's Russian-speaking, one strip that's 50-50, and one that's Ukrainian-speaking. I don't know if they deleted that map from Wikipedia, but it was very clearly delineated, even before the conflict. You must understand, it's being decided now on the battlefield anyway. And it's unlikely we'll get back those parts that Russian troops didn't set foot on**.** Very unlikely." (m., age 42, IT specialist, October 2022)

Secondly, Ukraine may be completely occupied by Russia. In this case, Russia will be able to have direct control over the degree of "fraternal" feelings and friendship. One respondent offers Belarus as an example, in order to demonstrate how Ukraine may once again be a "brotherly country" to Russia:

> "[It would be great] if Ukraine was really a brotherly nation, it would be like Belarus. I mean, I've been to Belarus many times. I like Belarusians a lot. I wouldn't say that Belarus is an entirely separate country. … That old man they've got, who everyone … they yell at him, but at the same time we also said about you that people disappear there too, and he remains in power, and isn't giving it up to anyone. It's a strict system … But at the same time it's clean, orderly, well, and people are working, and in principle, they exist together as a people. And it's very different from … I mean, Belarus—they're their own people with their own culture, their own history. It's Belarus. And I don't think that Russia is directly putting pressure on them or anything. It's even a nice place to visit." (m., age 34, manager, November 2022)

Some (but few) say that after Russia "liberated" the Ukrainian territories (from Ukraine), people living in these territories should be able to choose themselves with whom they want to side and under what conditions they want to continue living:

> "Well, if the republics want independence, then give them independence. If they want to be part of another state, they can join them, let them be there. How else? It is imperative that there's a change in government. Because the old one certainly won't be able to rule over whatever's left of the country after the regions have split off or something else. And they will be removed quickly. So, I mean, in any case, as happens elsewhere, and has always happened: the government will be replaced, that's one thing, and there will be some territorial claims, plus or minus, back and forth, and that's the second thing." (m., age 35, engineer, October 2022)

Many respondents are confident in the fact that the Ukrainian territories that remain under Russian control will be revived, since the Russian government will be taking care of them. That being said, even when talking about the necessity of maintaining the new territory, some respondents are dubious that Russia needs these territories, primarily because reviving

and restoring them will require a large amount of resources and might undermine the Russian economy:

> "What I really don't understand here is why we need these territories. Well, I understand why we need these territories—so that America does not set up some kind of labs there, in these territories, with some kind of weapon in them, really, on the border with Russia. Well, something … We don't have any money anyway. Right? And now we're taking one more territory in order to cultivate and sponsor them too. Well, somehow to me, it's … Shit, I'm scared for the country's economy, do you understand?" (m., age 21, student, October 2022)

If Ukraine continues to exist, then in order for the desired scenario for the end of the war to become possible, according to our respondents, the government must change. Many believe that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky represents the main obstacle to peace. In addition, the Ukrainians themselves must change—get rid of the influence of propaganda that turns them against Russia, abandon their nationalism, and rethink their past:

> "I would like Ukraine to be left all on its own, and to see what has happened to it in these 30 years. 'All on its own' means that it should keep the territories where there are actually people living who dream of an 'independent Ukraine.' Now I really don't know what those territories are. I was sure before that it was the Kharkiv Oblast, then the Odessa Oblast, the Nikolaev Oblast. Now I don't know. It seems like in the Kharkiv Oblast, everyone is looking at Russia and thinking: "Fuck all of you!" I have no idea. But nonetheless, I'd like it if Ukraine was left all on its own, and had an honest dialog within the country. How did we get here? I don't think that the powers in Ukraine are ready to start this dialog at this point." (m., 43 years old, university lecturer, December 2022)

And finally, the desired outcome of the war is impossible without NATO and America retreating. For Russia to win, it must "drive out the West":

> "[We need] for them to leave us, Russia, alone. How does this conflict look from my side? The American side started it all." (f., age 30, surgeon, November 2022)

> "I hope that the conflict will be resolved in such a way so that Russia's interests, namely Ukraine not becoming a part of NATO, not having a heavily-armed and absolutely militarized state that, for the last eight years, has been completely focused on waging war, the construction of bunkers near the LPR/DPR [Luhansk People's Republic/Donetsk People's Republic]—it will all stop." (f., age 30, IT editor, October 2022)

When describing their desired scenarios for how the war might end, respondents mentioned many factors that might influence the final outcome of the conflict. These factors were: weather conditions in winter in Europe and how European states would handle heating and electricity supplies with reduced use of Russian energy carriers; the results of the US elections in November 2022, because a Republican victory might affect the volume of arms supplies to Ukraine; and so on. According to the majority of the respondents, the outcome of

the war will depend more on the decisions and actions of third parties, namely European states and the United States, rather than on Ukraine's actions. These "third parties" are the ones with whom Russia should negotiate peace (because Zelensky is incapable of negotiating and only America or Europe can force him to start negotiations, or because he does not really decide anything). But these are the same powers that should organize a truce and sit the other parties down at the negotiating table:

> "I would like it if tomorrow, the shooting stopped and someone sat our presidents down, I don't know who—the Chinese, the Indians, the pope—sat them down in one room together, and that they didn't leave until they figured something out. The main thing is that they stop shooting." (m., age 59, profession unknown, December 2022)

Many respondents, when discussing their desired outcomes, immediately mention their more realistic scenarios, comparing and contrasting the two, because they do not consider their desired scenarios feasible:

> "Well, there's the optimistic outlook and the pessimistic one. … The optimistic one is that the heads of state will sit down, communicate, put an end to the hostilities, come to some sort of compromise, some sending people over there to die. This is optimistic, of course, like a fairy tale. But something tells me that this won't happen …" (m., age 22, student, event organizer, October 2022)

Other respondents, on the other hand, begin to discuss their realistic outlooks *instead* of offering their desired, ideal scenarios for how the war could end (even when answering a direct question about these). They seem simply unable to think of a "good" end to the war. This assumption that the desired scenarios are unrealistic, as well as many respondents' inability to describe a possible desirable end to the war in general, indicates an important characteristic of this war. Despite the fact that, according to polls, support for the "special operation" remains high, the way people respond to this question of how the war may end shows that this support is forced: for many, a Russian victory is not a reason for joy, but a necessity (more on this in the next subsection).

2.5.2 Realistic scenarios: Prolonged conflict

One of the most important components of the "desired scenario" is that the war ends in the near future. The prolongation of the conflict is precisely what respondents fear and do not want. However, as many of them point out, this is likely to happen. The prolongation of the conflict, isolation and economic losses, tensions within the country, and even a full collapse—these are the scenarios that even non-opponents of the war see as realistic.

In many interviews, the end of the war is described as distant or even impossible. War is becoming the norm for Russians. Many respondents believe that any peace negotiations or military interventions that do not end with Ukraine conceding and its territories being annexed or divided may cause the hostilities to resume in the future: "If we do not defeat Ukraine and much more now, then in 20 years, our children will go to war." (m., age 19, student, November 2022)

In some respondents' view, even if peace negotiations do take place at some point and the war ends, the tension between the countries will remain, as well as the danger of renewed conflict:

> "Maybe some way, somehow, the governments will be able to agree among themselves, although I also can't imagine how this could even be possible. All the same, some kind of hatred will remain. So I don't think this would be the end of it at all. That is, even if all parties agree to some kind of reconciliation, Russia will still expect a dirty trick from Ukraine, America, or someone else. And Ukraine will fear for all its life that Russia will try the same thing again. That is, there will be no trust between people, between countries. And, maybe, someone will decide to start something again, like getting ahead of the curve. Of course, I would like it all to end peacefully somehow." (f., age 23, student, November 2022)

Another possible scenario described by respondents was the transition from the acute phase to a "frozen conflict," which might lead to terrorist attacks on Russian territory:

> "I think that after the new year, most likely, more precisely, in spring, the positional warfare being waged in the territories they're in now will end. And there will be more economic and political pressure, and possibly, terrorist attacks on our soil." (m., age 37, journalist, October 2022)

One of the most pessimistic scenarios is a nuclear war:

> "Anything could happen—freezing the conflict could lead to nuclear war. We don't know how events will unfold." (m., age 24, deputy's assistant, November 2022)

Finally, the war may not just be prolonged—if Russia is unable to maintain control over Ukrainian territories and Russian troops are forced to retreat, then "the war will spread to Russian soil and we'll have to defend Russia here." (m., age 26, sign language interpreter, October 2022)

One of the most frightening aspects of the conflict being prolonged for our respondents is the uncertainty. Therefore, for some of them, even a Russian defeat seems a more acceptable option than a situation with "no war, no peace":

> "I can only say what I can see happening. I don't see different scenarios. There is the scenario of a prolonged conflict, the hostilities freezing, something neither here nor there. This would be the saddest outcome for me, it's the one I want the least. I want it to end with something definite—either Russia wins, which I certainly want, or Ukraine wins, which I don't want, but which I will have to deal with, but at least there will be certainty. Naturally, I would like Russia to win in the foreseeable future, the next one or two years." (m., age 34, marketing specialist, October 2022)

If Russia loses, most respondents believe that this will lead to catastrophic consequences for the country. They will affect both the country's position in the international arena, as well as

the situation within the country. Russia will suffer the same fate as Ukraine would if Russia were to win: the country's territory will be divided among other states and the state will break up into separate parts. Russia will become so weak that it will have to submit to the will of other countries:

> "Russia is losing, and it will be very difficult for Russia, it will simply be crushed, not just with sanctions, the territories will also be divided, all the consequences. If Russia wins? It will be bad for Ukraine. For me, as a resident of Russia, it is preferable that Russia wins." (m., age 24, deputy's assistant, November 2022)

In the event of a loss, the country will face economic decline, a redistribution of power and social instability—the "second nineties," which for many embody the most difficult and humiliating period in recent Russian history:

> "If we lose this war, then there will be a tough redistribution of power and something like the '90s—of course, not so blatantly, and in a different format, but the essence is the same: the redistribution of power and the elites squabbling amongst themselves, which will be supplemented by increased economic crisis and sanctions. We will be crushed under the heels of either Western or Asian states. I cannot say that we will become a puppet state, but more submissive and not free. … We are already heavily dependent on the economic one, but on the political one, we are still free in our actions." (m., age 19, student, November 2022)

The horror of Russia's defeat is therefore associated not so much with the fact that it will lose the occupied territories, but with the threat to its own integrity, independence, and prosperity. That is why we often observe the following paradox: even respondents who are critical of the war and speak out against it because of the victims and destruction it brings, still want Russia to win, because its defeat means the end of the country for them.

However, in realistic/pessimistic scenarios, even a Russian victory does not save the country from a domestic crisis. This crisis does not lead to the disintegration and economic collapse of the country, as in the case of defeat; however, it also has a social dimension associated with the deterioration of the situation within the country, and a foreign policy dimension associated with international isolation and the reputation of being an aggressor:

> "We have a nuclear dome: a system that [in case of] defeat will cover the whole world in nuclear warheads. Consequently, in this regard, I think we will be victorious in any case, one way or another, that in any case we will have a victory, one way or another. The question is simply: at what cost, and what will our reputation be coming out of it? I could act like a child on the playground, piss everyone off, and say that I'm a winner. But at the same time … Who am I, in that case? I have defeated smaller countries by simply being stronger. And the question is, what's next? Okay, so we win. I say, I have more questions. We defeat Ukraine. We have broken relationships with everyone. Everything is fucked up. … And globally, I personally don't give a shit. But as a citizen, I would not want to go to another country and hear from some fag that I'm an aggressor. Despite the fact that I am against this whole war, I will still be to blame. Because I am Russian. … Here, in

> any case, whatever the situation, it will be [bad] for Russia … Russia will not be captured, the country is too big, there are too many people and too many weapons. But the question is simply—victory: what is it all for? What does it look like and at what cost? And what do we all get from this? What is the point?" (m., age 34, business owner, October 2022)

For our respondents, a deteriorating situation in the country, even in the case of a Russian victory, entails a worsening economic situation and internal conflict—both between the authorities and society, and between ordinary citizens, for whom the end of the war will bring new problems:

> "Because, no matter how sad it is, I wish all the best to my country in every possible way, but if all this [Russia's victory] succeeds, then the system will shut down entirely. And people will start robbing their own, because the whole goal is centered around the idea that someone needs to be robbed. If you can't rob your neighbors, then you'll rob your own to build up strength, and then, with the rising costs, we will rob everyone we can reach. If we establish a shaky kind of peace now, or even have a triumphant victory, people will start cannibalizing their own. Whether we win or lose, we will all pay for it anyway: with our taxes, our rights, benefits, and so on." (m., age 26, sign language interpreter, October 2022)

> "I'm faced with one question: am I for Russia or not? For me, there are no other questions. Whether these politicians are good or bad, the people remain. … But we can be passionate people—I'm afraid that these clashes may start first of all in people's heads, with each other. And then it might result in riots. For example, we know that the greatest violence comes after the war, when wounded soldiers return home. We don't know how these soldiers will return, how people's worldview will have changed over there. And these draft-dodgers can come back, the ones who left in large numbers." (m., age 21, student, October 2022)

A survey conducted by Russian Field in December 2022 demonstrates the following paradox: while 45% of those polled said they supported conducting the "special operation" and 44% said that they would like to move to peace negotiations, ***fully 70%*** noted that if Putin signed a peace agreement tomorrow, they would support the decision. Our interviews show that the prolongation of the conflict seems like both the most realistic and the least desirable outcome. At the same time, even those who are critical of military operations believe that a Russian defeat will lead to the collapse of the country.

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For the majority of respondents, despite the fact that they are not unequivocal opponents of the war, their main desire is the cessation of hostilities, and the sooner the better. Many see a Russian victory in this situation as a necessity. Of course, there are those who want victory because they believe that it will benefit both Russians and residents of other countries, primarily Ukrainians living in the territories occupied by Russia. At the same time, however, most of our respondents want Russia to win, simply because defeat is synonymous with a catastrophe that will change Russia forever. With the exception of the small number of those

who believe in optimistic scenarios for the end of the war, and leaving aside desirable but hardly feasible scenarios, even a Russian victory for many respondents is associated with a deterioration of both the situation inside Russia and its position in the international arena.

Conclusions

In this analytical report, based on the results of a qualitative sociological study, we examined the attitudes of Russians towards the protracted military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. We wondered how the inhabitants of the Russian Federation perceived the "special military operation" more than six months after it began. We also wanted to understand whether the views of ordinary Russians on the war were changing over time, and if so, how.

This is our second wave of research into Russian perceptions of the war. The results of the first wave of the study, conducted in the spring of 2022, can be found here.

The data that we relied on in the second wave were sociological interviews with Russians from different regions, of different backgrounds and different views, who did not consider themselves unequivocal opponents of the war. We collected these interviews in the fall of 2022, more than seven months after the start of the "special operation." We conducted 88 interviews, 40 of which were repeated interviews with respondents whom we had already spoken to in the spring of 2022.

Our analysis of this data led us to the following conclusions:

- While in the spring of 2022, non-opponents of the war could be conditionally divided into supporters and undecided, six months later, this division had lost its meaning. Of course, among the non-opponents of the war there were still its staunch supporters and those who had doubts about their own support, but the majority of respondents supported some aspects of the "special operation" and were dissatisfied with others. In other words, they were both supporters of the war and opponents of it at the same time. Moreover, these respondents supported the war passively, joylessly, as a necessary evil, which in an ideal situation, they would prefer to avoid.

- Respondent perceptions of the war often changed significantly in the first month of the war. After that, and all the way until the end of 2022, Russians' views of the war did not change dramatically—supporters did not become opponents, and vice versa. At the same time, perceptions of the war remained unstable and fluid, with nuances that were constantly in flux. In a society in which politics is not a part of most people's lives, there can be no firm stances in relation to recently erupted geopolitical conflicts. For the majority of our respondents (and, as one might assume, for the majority of Russians), their perceptions of the war are both "uncertain" (preventing them from becoming unambiguous opponents or supporters of the "special operation," even if their views of how it is going change radically) and "unstable," contradictory, and mobile: they may shift towards one side or the other, depending on the circumstances.

- Many Russians experienced shock when the "special operation" began on February 24, 2022. They could not imagine how a Russian attack on Ukraine could be possible. Military aggression against a "brotherly nation" conflicted with their moral standards, and the state's demands that civilians support it contradicted their idea of themselves as good people. Surprisingly, opponents and non-opponents of the war often had similar experiences in the first few days. The shock gradually wore off for those respondents who eventually became non-opponents, however. Using a number of rhetorical strategies, they convinced themselves of the inevitability of a "special operation," while continuing to insist on the unacceptability of military force as a way to resolve conflicts. This allows non-opponents to support the actions of the authorities, while remaining "decent," "sensible" people. But they still do not feel joy in connection with the war. On the contrary, the longer it drags on, the more negative emotions dominate. In the fall to winter of 2022, most respondents experienced fear and anxiety as the military conflict continued on. This fear intensified when the mobilization was announced on September 21, 2022, but then once again faded into an itching, generalized background anxiety a few weeks later.

- It may seem that the mobilization, which forced ordinary Russians to relive this intense fear for their own lives and their loved ones, could affect their willingness to support the war. However, this did not happen. For many respondents who are far removed from politics, their dissatisfaction with the mobilization did not extend to the "special operation" as a whole—for them, Putin's politics, war, and the mobilization exist on different planes. In general, the majority of respondents, while criticizing the mobilization, simultaneously found ways to justify it as a sad but necessary measure. With the failures on the front and the protraction of the conflict, the Russian Army simply does not have enough manpower. Non-opponents of the war viewed the mobilization through a lens of fatalism: they believe whatever will be will be and cannot be avoided.

- In the late fall to early winter of 2022, non-opponents of the war could be divided into four groups:

    1) First of all, these are those who were confident in the need to both start the war and continue it to a victorious end.
    2) Secondly, there are those who believed in the necessity/inevitability of starting the war, but did not want it to continue.
    3) Thirdly, there are those who, on the contrary, did not consider the beginning of the war inevitable or necessary (and who would prefer that it had not started), but who are convinced that "it is necessary to finish the war."
    4) Fourth and finally, there are those who were still trying to maintain "neutrality"—they were not sure that the war was inevitable, nor that it should be continued to the bitter end, but they were trying to step back from evaluating it and simply live their own lives.

- New justifications for the war emerged in the fall to winter of 2022. Many respondents borrowed arguments from government propaganda (we need a separate study to understand exactly how this happens), but endowed these with various meanings and used them in different ways. Most significant among them were, first of all, *reverse justifications* (the aggressive reaction/behavior of Ukraine and its allies following February 24th somehow affirm the correctness of the decision to launch the "special operation"); and secondly, presenting the war as a natural disaster (it is terrible, but there is no point in being "against" it, just as there is no point in being "against" a hurricane or an earthquake). Non-opponents of the war continued to emphasize its inevitable nature, the idea that Russia was forced to begin or continue the war. This helped people to maintain a humanistic stance towards the horrors of war, but at the same time not to oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

- As was true at the beginning of the "special operation," in the fall to winter of 2022, non-opponents of the war did not trust the majority of the media. Many of them tried to consume information about the "special operation" from a variety of sources for a while, but were uncomfortable with being constantly confronted with competing explanations for events. They then limited their consumption of news about the war or deliberately decided to consume only pro-Russian sources, even while recognizing their bias. Thus, access to alternative information did not automatically lead non-war opponents to adopt more anti-war views. People responded to the multitude of voices in the media with a set of adaptive strategies that allowed them to put an end to their discomfort without making them reconsider their views.

- In the fall to winter of 2022, non-opponents of the war found the protraction of the conflict to be the most realistic, and at the same time the least desirable scenario for how events would unfold. The main wish expressed by non-opponent respondents was, paradoxically, that the war would end, albeit preferably under conditions that are favorable to Russia. But these people wanted a Russian victory not because they believed that it would bring about positive change, but rather because a loss seemed like a bigger catastrophe. This is more evidence that a significant amount of support for the war in modern Russian society is passive support. Non-opponents would prefer that the war never started and want it to end, and even a Russian victory is just the lesser of two evils for them.

Our research shows the complex and heterogeneous nature of Russian support for the war. It also allows us to debunk some of the notions about non-opponents in Russia that are common in the West or among anti-war Russians. That is why, below, we give our answers to frequently asked questions and common opinions about perceptions of the war among the part of the Russian population that remains loyal to the government.

If Russians aren't protesting the war, does that mean they're okay with it?

We should start with the fact that a minority of non-war opponents with whom we spoke in fall-winter 2022 could be called active and consistent supporters. These were most often highly politicized people who were monitoring Russo-Ukrainian relations long before the start of the "special operation." They were confident in the correctness of the decision to initiate hostilities in Ukraine and in the need to continue them. They could clearly see the goals and objectives of the "special operation" and considered it beneficial to the future of Russia. They were not opposed to an escalation in the hostilities and a transition from a "special military operation" to a full-fledged war. They insisted on the need to hold the territory that had already been gained and advance the Russian Army deep into Ukraine. To them, the mobilization was a necessary measure for Russia's victory. Although they criticized certain aspects of the way the military operation was being conducted and accused the Russian leadership and officials of incompetence, they nevertheless continued to associate the war with their hopes for a Russian "revival," for the Russian state to gain new status on the world stage and, ultimately, to improve life within Russia.

The majority of our interviewees, most of whom are ordinary, non-politicized Russians, did not have solid, consistent positions regarding the war. Their reasoning about the war was full of internal contradictions and doubts. By repeating propaganda arguments defending the "special operation," they sought to convince themselves of their veracity, without being fully persuaded. By appropriating one of these arguments, they override others. They were often completely limited to the timid hope that there must have been some reason for starting the war, even if it was unknown to them. The war almost never evoked any positive emotions in them. They felt a constant background level of anxiety, lamented the deaths of people on both sides, and did not envision any positive prospects for their lives or the life of the country, even if Russia wins. They wanted the war to end as soon as possible (preferably on Russia's terms), but they did not believe that this was possible. Most of them did not have a clear image of the future and it was difficult for them to imagine a positive outcome of this war—they would prefer that the war had not started at all. Among most of our respondents, support for the war, or refraining from condemning it, was largely the result of their own sense of inability to somehow influence the situation. This pessimistic attitude was noticeably more pronounced than it was in the spring of 2022, when many non-opponents still had hopes for an early end to hostilities. In other words, no, many Russians, including those who are not opposed to the war, are far from satisfied with the situation.

If many people do not adhere to consistent stances and are contradictory in the way they express themselves, does that mean that support for the war results from a lack of critical thinking skills?

For most Russians, the issue of "fascist" Ukraine and the threat from NATO did not exist before the beginning of the "special operation" (with the exception of those who had personal ties to Donbas—but these were the people who usually became consistent, staunch supporters of the war). The widely discussed idea of Russian military intervention in the territory of Ukraine and the possibility of a full-scale war with Russia's neighbors seemed like a fantasy to them. They had no claims to Ukraine as a nation.

February 24, 2022 took many Russians by surprise and was deeply shocking for them. They were not ready to be forced to choose a side in a large geopolitical conflict. They grew up in

a depoliticized society, lived private lives, and were not interested in politics. They had no experience in evaluating the structure of society and the state, or Russia's relations with other countries. With the onset of war, they were rapidly immersed in a completely new, unfamiliar, and incomprehensible reality for them, which they tried hard to understand. Accordingly, the lack of consistency in their perception of the war comes as no surprise, and is not the consequence of a lack of critical thinking. We are witnessing the process live as people's views on previously distant phenomena are being formed.

Moreover, there is plenty of other evidence of our respondents' ability to think critically, and even creatively. For example, many of our interviewees engage directly in polemical discourse with the anti-war arguments expressed by their fellow citizens. This makes their statements complex and internally dialogic. Similarly, our respondents often learn propaganda arguments not automatically, but through rhetorical effort and ingenuity. The lack of critical thinking is a stereotype that hinders rather than helps us understand how support for the war functions.

But nevertheless, they internalize and repeat propaganda clichés, albeit "creatively"—why can't support for the war simply be explained by the effects of zombifying propaganda?

First of all, because perceptions of the war consist of more than just arguments in defense of the war. They also have emotional content, and this does not always resonate with the agenda of Russian state propaganda. Our respondents try to justify the war, but they also share their fears and anxieties about it. These fears and anxieties, experienced by them alone or with their loved ones, are part of their attitude towards the "special operation." They are afraid of the uncertain future, an insurmountable rift within society, they are afraid of never finding a common language with their loved ones, and even afraid, like Ukrainians today, of being forced to huddle in bomb shelters. These experiences, which in general, contradict the propagandistic view of the war, make up a large part of Russian perceptions of the war.

Secondly, because the most important effect of propaganda is not so much the fact that it imposes a certain view of the war, but rather the fact that it makes people believe that the truth is inaccessible in principle, and, therefore, there is no point in wasting time looking for it. Thus, for example, when our respondents consume information from multiple sources and encounter opposing explanations for events, they do not question Russian propaganda clichés, but come to the conclusion that none of these versions should be trusted. When faced with a multitude of voices, which causes discomfort, they choose Russia's side, not because they believe the propaganda explanations of the war, but because, for example, the "untruth" spread by their country is closer to them than the "untruth" spread by someone else. Thus, propaganda is effective not so much in convincing Russians that this is the only correct interpretation of the situation, but in creating passive support for the war, based on total distrust and the conviction that it is impossible to have an independent view of the situation.

How can anyone continue to justify the war in light of all the deaths it has caused? Your respondents (like most Russians) are insensitive, heartless people who don't give a damn about other people's problems.

There certainly are those among our respondents who welcomed the war with enthusiasm and who, in spite of everything, continue to be convinced that it was the right choice. There are those among them who treated the war with indifference, and who try not to think about what is happening until it affects them directly. However, these respondents are in the minority. Most of our interview subjects were not just frightened by the news of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but also experienced serious moral turmoil. The shock, bewilderment, and issues with sleep or performance that our respondents described suggest that it was clear to many would-be non-opponents that something was wrong. Some of them even condemned the war (and the actions of the government) in early days. In other words, their first perceptions of the "special operation" were similar to those experienced by opponents of the war. In the eyes of many Russians, the state committed an act of military aggression that ran counter to their Soviet moral maxims (as long as there's no war), and even turned out to be directed at the "brotherly" people, a country with which many have friendly, professional, and familial ties. The state's demand that citizens support the attack on Ukraine plunged many people into a moral conflict for some time.

However, in the case of the future non-opponents of the war, these moral feelings and humanistic values did not transform into an assessment or a stance, as happened with those who began to condemn the war. On the contrary, many non-opponents deliberately dismissed these feelings as insignificant, immature, infantile, irrational. While continuing to regard the war as something terrible and experiencing exclusively negative emotions in connection with it, including sympathy for victims on both sides, the respondents begin to justify the actions of the state. They use rhetorical strategies that allow them to side with Russia and feel bad for ordinary Ukrainians at the same time. These Russians view the Ukrainians as victims of Western propaganda and a puppet Ukrainian government rather than as enemies. The "special operation" is more and more understood by non-opponents as a war with the hostile West, which provoked a conflict between the two Slavic peoples and the "fight with Russia, down to the last Ukrainian." Thus, our respondents are not insensitive, heartless people—on the contrary, they make considerable efforts to reconcile their pain with the reality of war. Justifying the "special operation" as a forced measure allows them to maintain a humanistic position without speaking out against the war, and sometimes while actively supporting it.

Still—aren't they personally responsible for justifying the war? These are conscientious adults who voluntarily support Russia's military aggression.

For the majority of our respondents, support for the war is not a consequence of their conscious political position. It is passive and reactive. It does not stem from their interests, needs or moral principles (on the contrary, it contradicts them in many ways). It does not guide their behavior in their everyday lives. It is a depoliticized kind of support.

The depoliticization of mass support for war is particularly evident in two new trends in the way it is justified, namely, reverse rationalization and conceptualizing the war as a natural disaster. When justifying the war in spring, respondents rarely referred to examples from their own life experiences (including because their personal experience of visiting Ukraine and communicating with its inhabitants largely contradicted the official story that the country is completely fascist). Propaganda arguments about the need to launch the "special

operation" concerned processes that were too abstract and far removed from the lives of ordinary people, so it was not easy to appropriate them in full. As a result, over time, respondents turn from arguments in support of the war to the effects and consequences that the war produced. This is how reverse justifications are born: the special operation must be necessary, since Ukrainian bombs are falling on our border territories, and the West is supporting the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Moreover, the war itself becomes more substantial and material over time, becoming a part of the surrounding reality (although so far, most Russians are still separated from the war by the screen of a smartphone or TV). During these months, some Russians also gain experience with Ukrainian relatives and acquaintances and observe a deterioration in their attitude towards Russian citizens. These incidents also begin to confirm the inevitability of war. Thus, the war begins to justify itself.

The depoliticized nature of war support is also evident in the reaction of non-opponents to the decision of their fellow citizens—including acquaintances, relatives, and friends—to evade the draft and/or leave the country. Contrary to the condemnation expected from supporters of the war, many respondents treat these departures with understanding, believing that the decision to go or not to go to war is "a personal matter for everyone." Those who leave the country for personal reasons and do not express their disagreement with the war receive sympathy from these respondents. Thus, people's reaction to the military draft is still evaluated from a depoliticized place in their private lives.

Finally, one of the most important components of the depoliticized support for the war in Ukraine is a lack of understanding of who is responsible for the start of the war and the course it is taking. Respondents' growing conceptions of the war as "weather outside the window," a natural phenomenon that occurs on its own, and is "only" a manifestation of global processes and crises, the tide of which cannot be resisted, deprives the Russian leadership of the status of decision-making entities. This inability to identify the responsible parties also entails the inability to direct their accumulating discontent and exhaustion from the war at anyone. It is telling that none of our non-opponent respondents, no matter how critical they are of the situation, consider President Putin personally responsible for it. The figure of the president simply disappears from respondents' discourse about the war in Ukraine.

Their answers to direct questions about attitudes towards the Russian government show that it has little to do with their attitudes towards the war and mobilization. Some non-opponents of the war, in reflecting on its causes, argue in absentia with the viewpoints of their anti-war-minded acquaintances or relatives, who believe that the war is the realization of Vladimir Putin's personal ambitions. They reject this version as absurd and continue to search for explanations of the war as a necessary and inevitable event. In the eyes of our respondents, even the way the "special operation" ends does not depend on Putin and his entourage (few people believe in the possibility of peaceful negotiations in the near future). It depends on the actions of the West, the margin of safety of the Ukrainians, and the combat capabilities of the Russian Army. And since the latter now largely consists of ordinary Russian citizens, the responsibility for the outcome of the war falls on their shoulders.

In light of this, staunch supporters of the war, whose support for military aggression against Ukraine is a full-fledged political position, seem like the biggest critics of the military and

political leadership of the country. They do not hesitate to criticize the failures of the military command at the front or the organization and conduct of the draft. They may criticize the government for delaying the announcement of the mobilization, and even the decision to start a full-scale invasion (which, according to such respondents, should have been carried out as early as 2014). In their interpretation, the outbreak of war is not an abstract, impersonal phenomenon, but the result of the actions of the government, which they generally approve of. This approval, however, is not a reason for them to support all the actions of the state. They have their own ideas of how the war should develop, and use this as a foundation to judge the events taking place at the front and within the country. Counterintuitively, active and consistent supporters have the largest protest potential.

Thus, support for the war by ordinary, apolitical Russians in the fall to winter of 2022 remained depoliticized in nature. In a society where war is the official doctrine of the state, you don't need to step away from your apoliticality in order to express support for the war. But you do in order to become an opponent. Since Russian society has been in a state of depoliticization for the past 20 years (in part thanks to the consistent efforts of the authorities), expressing an anti-war stance requires a person to overcome inertia and make efforts to break free from a state of apoliticality.

The problem, then, is not that many of those who support the war lack the capacity for compassion or critical thinking. Passive support for the war is largely the result of a lack of experience in political life, as well as the inaccessibility for most Russians of social structures and institutions where people could unite on the basis of common views. All this is necessary so that individual moral feelings about the war are not rejected, but, on the contrary, could be turned into a conscious political position.

"Isn't the sheer amount of death, destruction, and suffering that the war has brought a reason for you to condemn it?" anti-war Russians ask their compatriots. "Isn't that enough to say that war is a crime?" Our research shows that, in fact, it is not enough. What opponents of the war view as an individual (and morally tinged) human reaction is in fact the result of the influence of social forces.

Passive support is support nonetheless. Why bother with shades of nuance?

Yes, of course, even compulsory, inertia-based, and in some sense, unprincipled support for the war is not entirely harmless. This is the kind of support that ultimately contributes most to normalizing the war and upholding the status quo. However, our research allows us to see that the massive support for the war in Russia is primarily a consequence of the structure of society and the government established within the country (including by the hands of those in power) over the past decades. With the onset of war, Russians, who have been living in a depoliticized authoritarian state with destroyed public institutions for so long, became hostages of this system and were unable to condemn the state's decisions which ran counter to most of their interests. In a sense, we can distinguish two levels at which people who passively support the war evaluate what is happening: a socio-political level, where they can be easily swayed, insensitive, and cynical; and a personal level, where they remain human.

This knowledge is also important in the context of the discussion of collective responsibility, on the basis of which many political decisions are now made at the international level. Under a different social structure, many of the uncertain, reluctant supporters of the war could well turn out to be opponents. This, on the one hand, once again demonstrates to us how much power society has over the individual, and on the other hand, gives some hope that in the event of a change in the socio-political situation, a significant segment of the support for the war may quickly transform into condemnation.