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What Political Status Did the Donbas Want? Survey Evidence on the Eve of Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine in February 2022

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ABSTRACT

This article reports original survey data collected in both parts of the divided Donbas region of Ukraine on the eve of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. The research employs a methodological innovation by having the same telephone survey implemented by three different survey agencies: one based in Ukraine, one based in Russia, and one based in the UK. Comparing similarities and differences in results identify key effects induced by the origin of phone calls. The question of preference for final status in Ukraine or Russia was asked in all four samples. Regression model results are very similar for the two samples in the territories of Donbas under Kyiv's control but there are significant differences between the Ukrainian and Russian survey companies' results in the non-government controlled areas. The results reflect a situational response due partly to the origin of the phone calls as well as to important demographic differences in the composition of the sub-samples in a very tense environment that had experienced conflict since 2014.

Introduction

War first engulfed the Donbas region of Ukraine, comprising the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk, in the spring of 2014. By 24 February 2022, the day that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, the region lay divided and scarred by 8 years of fighting. Back in 2014 Vladimir Putin portrayed the Euromaidan mass protests and the resulting regime change in Kyiv as a Western geopolitical conspiracy against Moscow. In actuality, the political shift in Ukraine consolidated a longstanding and growing divergence between its political trajectory and that of Russia (Sasse 2023). Putin used a moment of government turmoil in Kyiv, Ukrainian military

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weakness, and Western unpreparedness in 2014 to seize Crimea and create new facts on the ground in Ukraine. The Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea became the precursors for the ensuing war in the Donbas. As violent pro- and anti-Euromaidan protests unfolded across south-east Ukraine, the distinctive fate of the Donbas region was shaped both by the concentration of Russian intervention in parts of this region and its backing of free lancing separatist opportunists looking to exploit a moment of political uncertainty in connection with President Viktor Yanukovych's flight and the collapse of the region's foremost political party, the Party of Regions (Arel and Driscoll 2023; Giuliano 2018, Arutunyan 2022; Kofman et al. 2017). The resulting phase in Russia's war against Ukraine cost about 14,000 lives until early 2022 and generated an estimated 1.5 million internally displaced people in Ukraine, with another million becoming refugees in Russia (Kudelia 2025; Sereda 2023; UNHCR 2016a, 2016b).

Studying the effects of war, whether directly experienced or indirectly through close proximity, is a difficult domain of research. Not trying to hear the voices of those most affected by the war is ethically problematic and tends to foreground geopolitical assumptions over empirical research. However, it is methodologically and ethically difficult to collect reliable empirical data in a war setting characterized by limited access and traumatic experiences. In the territories no longer controlled by the Ukrainian government, repression and 're-socialization' through passportization (distributing Russian passports to residents of Ukraine), Russian media control, and a new Russian school curriculum, difficulties persist. Wartime propaganda, media disinformation and censorship restrict public discourse and freedom of expression and likely affect responses to survey questions (Hale, Shevel, and Onuch 2018; Gentile, 2023). Over time, the enveloping pressure of war works its way into everyday life and personal routines, politicizing and polarizing as it inflicts great stresses, emotions, and suffering.

This paper is organised around a seemingly simple question: what did the residents of the Donbas want as a political outcome after the de facto division of the region on the eve of Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion? It is far from straightforward to tackle this topic. The very idea of the wider region having a distinctive 'people' aspiring to express their ostensible 'self-determination', or 'Russians' or 'Russian-speakers' ostensibly being targeted by the Ukrainian government was part of what war wrought, and what separatist as well as Russian state rhetoric sought to highlight. Thus, we approach the question with critical awareness that its rhetorical effects are not above the conflict and are part of what was produced by political actors. Survey research in war zones can easily be instrumentalized and de-contextualized. What we are studying are the attitudes of ordinary people caught up within a multi-scalar war that was broadly not of their own making. With our research, we hope to

contribute to a more nuanced discussion of attitudes during war – in Ukraine and beyond.[1]

Using original survey research, this article presents the results of a question on the future political status of the territories often referred to as the 'non-government controlled areas' (NGCA) with a view to Kyiv's loss of control over the territories in the spring of 2014, or the so-called 'People's Republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk, a term used by Russia and local separatists. Learning from our previous opinion research in the Donbas, we arranged to have multiple companies conduct the survey to probe whether there is, in fact, a survey company effect on the results based on the perceptions of the survey companies by the respondents or a *modus operandi* effect based on mobile carriers accessed by the companies. Previewing our results, we found a survey company effect on the statistical relationship underpinning responses to a key question on the preferred final status for the area not controlled by Kyiv. This effect can be considered an extension of the possible respondent and interviewer biases in answers in polling research. This article thus also speaks to the topic of the scope and limitations of public opinion research during war.

Specifically, we report results from simultaneous surveys conducted by a Ukrainian, a Western and a Russian polling agency in the two parts of the divided Donbas region in January 2022. The parallel surveys with identical questionnaires were completed just before the dramatic escalation of violence as a result of the Russian full-scale invasion on 24 February. The public mood that the surveys capture has become part of pre-invasion history. Yet, this comprehensive data collection on the eve of the full-scale invasion provides a rare reference point in the study of the effects of war on political attitudes. In this article, we focus on the responses among the resident population on both sides of the so-called 'line of contact'. Previous rounds of public opinion research on both sides of the line in the Donbas did not attempt the full comparison reported here. Controlling for as many variations in survey design as is possible, the main emphasis in this article is on respondents' views on the future status of the territories outside Kyiv control at a specific and important moment in time.

While we find similar preferences of the respondents in the Kyiv-controlled area of Donbas (abbreviated in line with previous studies as 'government-controlled-areas', GCA) for both Ukrainian and Western survey companies, a stark discrepancy between companies in the overall preferences in the non-government-controlled area (NGCA) is evident where the surveys were conducted by a Ukrainian agency (KIIS from Kyiv) and an independent Russian agency (Levada Marketing Research from Moscow). The views diverge widely on the question of whether the territories need to be re-integrated into the Ukrainian state or annexed to the Russian Federation. Our research demonstrates the variation of public opinion in a war setting which elides clear-cut conclusions in terms of belonging and status preferences over time. Our

research is thus both a corrective to war rhetoric and captures a more diffuse bottom-up perspective of the war reality as it evolved. We proceed as follows; after a brief contextualization of the status issue in Donbas and a careful discussion of the methodological issues and choices in our research, we discuss our main findings in detail and draw preliminary conclusions for survey research in war zones more generally.

Historical Legacies, Separatist Sentiments and the Status Issue in the Donbas

Today, the Donbas region refers to two administrative regions in Ukraine, Donetsk oblast and Luhansk oblast. Historically, the region of the Donetsk basin also comprised parts of what are now Dnipropetrovsk oblast and Rostov oblast in Russia. The Donbas region became heavily industrialised (coal, steel and manufacturing industries) in the late nineteenth century, a process that embedded the region into wider international linkages. Industrialization intensified further during the Soviet era when it was accompanied by the planned (re-)settlement of Russians and Russian-speakers. These experiences shaped a sense of belonging (Yakubova 2015, as cited in Uehling 2023). This regional identity takes pride in the centrality of the region's industrial labour in the coal mines and iron making factories in building a strong modern state (Gentile 2015a; Gentile and Marcińczak 2012). In Soviet times, this labor was heavily mythologised and celebrated in official regime propaganda, a cult of miners and steelworkers that became codified as the heroic Stakhanovite movement in the mid-1930s in the USSR (Zimmer 2007). Importantly, while the region was predominantly Russian-speaking, the Donbas regional identity before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union was not primarily defined by language, ethnicity or political orientation (Zhurzhenko 2010). Based on anthropological research, Uehling has described it rather as a multiethnic cultural identity based on a strong sense of socialization into a place with a storied past and an enduring self-regard (Uehling 2023).

About 15% of the population of Ukraine was concentrated in the region before 2014; accordingly, the two oblasts had considerable electoral weight in national elections (D'Anieri 2023), and regional oligarchs and economic interest groups have critically shaped Ukrainian politics. However, the sources of the region's economic centrality and prosperity began to shift after the Soviet collapse (Kuromiya 2003) and the reality of gradually losing its position as Ukraine's economic powerhouse is an important factor in the regional population's perceptions of Ukrainian politics (Giuliano 2018; Mykhnenko 2020).

Ahead of the Euromaidan protests of 2013–14, President Viktor Yanukovych was deeply unpopular across the whole country, as he was closely associated with corruption (Motyl and Menon 2012; Onuch 2014). The

Euromaidan did not only take place in Kyiv; there were smaller protest events in other cities, including in the south-east of the country (Onuch and Sasse 2016). They were met by a degree of countermobilization supported by the outgoing Yanukovych regime and Russian security forces and media. Amidst these clashes of interests and ideas, the occupation and annexation of Crimea by Russia in late February to mid-March 2014 widened the space for regional mobilization in the south-east of the country. In the end, different types of mobilization around separatist claims failed in Odesa, Kharkiv and other cities (O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov 2017) but proved more potent in parts of Donbas where the 'independence' of the 'People's Republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk was declared in April 2014.

The entities that emerged in the Donbas legitimized themselves by appealing to a polyglot of historical events and symbols – to Tsarist era symbols and names like Novorossiya, to Cossack settler memory, to early Soviet statelets like the short-lived Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Republic of 1917–18, and to the multi-era Ribbon of Saint George. On 11 May 2014, so-called 'referenda' were held in the territories now under de facto Russian control, asking residents whether they supported the declaration of independence. The Russian wording was ambivalent and annexation not explicitly mentioned, but the goal of creating the appearance of widespread support for secessionism was clear. The Russian state played up the localized quality of the initiative to present plausibility deniability to the international community (Hurak and D'Anieri 2022).

The relative emphasis on Russia's role versus local factors in the early weeks and months of this phase of Russia's war against Ukraine has been debated among scholars, with some stressing the domestic roots of 'insurgency' and 'civil war' (Arel and Driscoll 2022; Katchanovski 2016; Kudelia 2014; Matveeva 2016; Robinson 2016, Kuromiya 2019). Others emphasize external interventionism and Russian imperialism (Bowen 2019; Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018). Most see the complex interplay of both with different relative emphases on the pathways to violence (Giuliano 2018; Kudelia 2016, 2019, 2025; Matsuzato, 2017; Mitrokhin 2015; Kudelia and van Zyl 2019; Popova and Shevel 2024; Sasse 2023; Toal 2017; Wilson 1995, 2016; Zhukov 2016).

There is general agreement on the significance of the Donbas as a distinctive region and longstanding bargaining about its status within Ukraine as a crucial conditioning factor in the accounts of the violence (Gentile 2015b; Giuliano 2018; Risch 2022). Kudelia and van Zyl (2019, 802) go further and argue that 'the strength of regional identity in Donbas facilitated the insurgency' by enabling a more local exclusivist group identity, thus becoming a tool of mobilization for insurgency, and generating legitimacy for new separatist governing structures that proclaimed themselves to be acting exclusively in the interest of the region. Matsuzato (2017) indicates that some of the Donbas elites wanted to use escalating regional tensions to negotiate with Kyiv, but the situation got out of their

control as more radical pro-Russians seized power. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has confirmed beyond any reasonable doubt the presence of Russian military in an active capacity in Donbas after April 2014. The Court also found that the territories of two so-called 'People's Republics' created that month were under direct Russian control 'at least from 11 May 2014' (European Court of Human Rights 2023). By the end of 2014, the 'People's Republics' were presenting themselves as de facto states by holding so-called 'presidential' and 'parliamentary elections'.

While there was always a strain of separatism in Donbas politics, the dominant language of regionalism before March 2014 was centered around ideas of autonomy within Ukraine. There is some evidence that this began to shift in reaction to the change of government in Kyiv after the Euromaidan revolution and the annexation of Crimea. Public opinion polling ahead of the eruption of violence in April 2014 showed that there was more separatist sentiment in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts compared to other regions of Ukraine. According to a KIIS poll (April–May 2014), Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts were the two regions with a markedly higher share than the national average of 7% in support for separatist ideas: just less than a third came out in favour of independence/integration into another state and another 23.5% for more autonomy. By comparison, elsewhere in the southern and eastern regions, only 5–7% supported the former and 7–9.5% the latter option (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology -KIIS 2014a; for a detailed discussion of these figures, see Giuliano, 2015). In a further KIIS poll in April 2014 about a third of the population in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts voiced support for secession from Ukraine, but only a fifth (Donetsk oblast) to a quarter (Luhansk oblast) supported a transfer of power by force to the local administration (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology – KIIS 2014b). Overall, only a minority in the region expressed a range of views and preferences that could be labelled 'separatist' (Haran, Yakovlyev, and Zolkina 2019).

A perception of political and economic neglect on the part of the Ukrainian government towards the region suffering a post-industrial shift played a significant role in the separatist sentiments described above. The fear that closer relations with the EU could hasten the economic decline in the region where economic enterprises were closely integrated into Russian markets was important (Bereskina 1994; Uehling 2023). Relatedly, fears about job losses, salaries and pensions, explain the more hesitant attitude towards closer relations with the EU – a hesitation that does not equate with pro-Russian attitudes or a wish for integration with Russia (Giuliano 2015). The active collusion of local security forces and regional oligarchs with the intervention of Russian military intelligence agents further helps to explain separatist mobilization in the Donbas. Additionally, local and Russian media disseminated the narrative about the so-called 'fascist' post-Euromaidan regime in Kyiv. The regional oligarchs, motivated primarily by business interests, tended

to hedge their bets, keeping options open in multiple directions. Rather than a single causal explanation, it is more appropriate to assess the interacting effects of three factors – the history and identity of the region, the hedging of local elites and the drive of local activists, and the abiding interest and engagement of the Kremlin (Kleparnik 2023).

The stalemate around the Minsk ceasefire talks contributed to the hardening of the ceasefire line that divided the Donbas after 2014 (Fischer 2022). This ceasefire line increasingly became a harder border, which shaped everyday practices, attitudes and identities (von Löwis and Sasse 2021). Moreover, division was entrenched by Russia's active 'passportization' of the local population, a reorganization of the information space and a re-socialization of the population that particularly targeted the younger generation. The Ukrainian government's decision to implement an economic blockade also effectively further reinforced the division. Few people crossed the 'contact line', primarily elderly individuals collecting pension payments on the Kyiv-controlled side. Those individuals with experience in crossing the 'contact line' were shown to be more likely to maintain a sense of belonging to the Ukrainian state (Sasse and Lackner 2019a; Uehling 2023; von Löwis and Sasse 2021).

Survey research in Donbas between 2016 and 2022 collectively showed a gradual reorientation of the local population towards Russia in the areas not under Ukrainian control (O'Loughlin et al. 2021; Sasse and Lackner 2019b). In the Kyiv-controlled areas, about two-thirds of the population clearly identified with the Ukrainian state. But overall, the status issue, in particular the question of which state respondents would want to belong, has also been shown to be less significant to individuals than the question of their economic well-being (O'Loughlin, Toal and Sasse 2022)

The Difficulties of Public Opinion Research in a War Zone

Public opinion research amidst war is characterized by methodological difficulties, ethical issues, and uncertainties about access. Our research in Donbas exemplifies these challenges, but still, in our view, demonstrates the necessity of pursuing this type of research as a potential counterweight to the overwhelming number of statements from politicians and commentators about the alleged wishes of local residents in a war zone – without hearing their voices.

This paper concentrates on public opinion on the status issue in the divided Donbas in January 2022. The subject is particularly difficult for at least four reasons. First, the question of how one labels the war in the Donbas runs the risk of reproducing the language of the war itself when making the survey language non-threatening or neutral for survey respondents in a militarised information space. Phrases like 'separatist', 'pro-Russian', 'the people of the Donbas', or 'the People's Republics' are problematic, and ideas about identity, language, history and region are never innocent or static in times of war

(Marples 2022). Scientific survey data can seriously challenge political narratives, so political actors tend to be hostile to academic work that does not conform to their convictions and they frequently belittle this type of research.

Second, it is extremely difficult to do high-quality scientific research in a war zone. The logistics of surveying are challenging, even more so when traumatic experiences are widespread and, simultaneously, conjectures and conspiracist thinking are rife. All sides are suspicious of companies surveying on the subject, though positions change as territorial control shifts. Research in the non-government-controlled territories was deemed particularly suspect in Ukraine, but since the start of the full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian government, civil society and international actors are actively seeking out information about life under Russian occupation. In addition to the politically sensitive context, COVID-19 also prevented face-to-face polling research, forcing reliance on computer-aided-telephone-interviewing (CATI) survey research. The longer the war in Donbas lasted, the harder the access to the NGCA became, including for non-Ukrainian and non-Russian survey companies. Restrictions on Ukrainian mobile phone network providers by both the Kyiv government and the authorities in the territories on the other side of the 'contact line' can further skew the sampling design and implementation. Moreover, in the absence of reliable statistical data on the local population, especially in the NGCA, the sampling frame based on different data points before and after 2014 is at best an approximation in the context of large-scale displacement.

Third, individuals in a war zone – especially in authoritarian settings – might be reluctant to openly share their views on political issues with interviewers (Bhattacharya 2014; De Juan and Koos 2021; Haer and Becker 2012; Wood 2006). Here, telephone surveys may have a certain advantage, as they limit the direct contact between the interviewer and respondent and may therefore reduce the scope for preference falsification in response to the situation or interviewer effects. It can also be the more ethically sound approach, as a phone call is easier to refuse and to bring to a premature end, thereby giving the interviewee a greater sense of control over the situation. Unlike qualitative work requiring intensive contacts with respondents, phone surveys ostensibly allow more anonymity. Much of the concern and caution about social science in war zones concerns exposure of residents to security forces and possible recriminations for expressing views that run counter to the dominant narrative (Baron and Young 2022; Bhattacharya 2014; Eck 2011). However, using CATI methods to get a more representative random sample does not entirely alleviate these concerns. Using this methodology, the expected low response rate is further reduced in a war zone where people are displaced with their phone access often interrupted or curtailed by government restrictions on mobile phone networks.

Fourth, our survey conducted under the cloud of a pending immediate invasion by over 100,000 Russian troops amassed close to Ukraine's eastern border in January 2022 coincided with heightened uncertainties. The issue of the future status of the territories of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast in Ukraine or Russian may well have been a lower priority for those with first-hand experience of war. Survival issues, in particular socio-economic issues, have been found to be particularly salient and influence the status issue (O'Loughlin et al. 2021).

Surveying in Donbas

Based on previous sampling in the Donbas on both sides of the 'line of contact' in 2016, 2019 and 2020 by the authors (Sasse and Lackner 2019a, 2019b; O'Loughlin et al. 2021), it was evident that answers from residents differed significantly, depending on whether they were living in the GCA or in NGCA. Following a similar procedure of sampling residents of the Donbas region on both sides of the 'contact line' and using the same questionnaire with identical wording, our key aim was to check if responses were consistent both across survey companies and with earlier results generated by somewhat different procedures. Because of restrictions by the Russian government on the Moscow company surveying (precluding such work in the GCA) and also because of the relative abilities of different companies in Ukraine to access phones due to restrictions on cellular companies' coverage, it was necessary to hire different companies who were instructed to follow the exact questionnaire and interviewing protocols and implement the survey at the same time. Sampling was designed to follow a random selection of numbers from the database each company holds. As these databases vary, the samples differ in some respects (see Table 1). While the restrictions on survey companies operating on both sides of the 'line of contact' has obvious methodological disadvantages, the use of different companies is the best possible solution under the circumstances, allowing for an analysis of the relative importance of the provenance of interviewers' calls (i.e. whether the company was calling either from Kyiv or Moscow) on responses, especially to sensitive questions. Many studies of survey methodology focus on biases in responses due to enumerator characteristics, the sequence of questions, the method (in-person, telephone or online), etc. Our use of different companies allows for the consideration of another possible bias: survey company location bias.

Our Donbas survey was completed using three companies. Ideally, for a full experimental comparison, it would have been necessary to task companies from Russia and companies from Ukraine with sampling and interviewing on both sides of the 'line of contact'. In effect, we have been able to implement a partial experiment since a Kyiv-based company operated on both sides of the line of control, while the other two were only able to implement the survey on

Table 1. Demographic characteristics and key attitudinal values of the four samples from the survey companies.

	KIIS-GCA	KIIS-NGCA	R-Research GCA	LMR-NGCA
Sample size	1003	1000	1011	1011
Gender (Male and Female percentages)	29.8/70.2	32.5/67.5	45.1/54.9	41.0/59.0
Age (median)	56	64	50	47
Moved since 2014	44.5	42.4	30.9	32.4
Want to move in January 2022	26.5	22.9	25.9	24.1
Total revenue of family				
Not enough for food	19.5	15.6	7.6	5.0
Enough for food - not for clothes or shoes	36.2	34.5	29.2	25.4
Enough for clothes -defer other purchases	27.6	26.5	31.7	43.7
Can buy expensive items (TV, refrigerator etc)	14.0	20.0	22.5	20.3
Can buy anything we want	2.8	3.5	9.1	5.7
Self-rating of current mood				
Wonderful	7.6	10.2	8.8	14.3
Average, steady state	46.6	53.9	47.3	62.1
Experiencing stress or irritation	31.1	22.2	31.9	16.9
Feeling fear or anxiety	14.8	13.7	11.9	6.7
Interest in Political Matters				
Very interested	23.9	21.9	26.9	25.4
Sometimes interested, sometimes not	50.0	39.2	50.0	37.6
Not interested in political matters	26.1	39.0	23.2	26.9
Preferred status in Ukraine (with or without autonomy)	72.8	46.5	72.3	7.2
Preferred status in Russia (with or without autonomy)	2.8	14.8	3.1	70.3
Region (GCA or NGCA) going in the right direction	14.7	25.6	16.0	53.9
Self-identified Ukrainian (citizen or by descent)	66.2	43.9	71.2	11.7
Self-identified Russian (citizen or by descent)	7.3	15.7	0.4	49.5
Identity as a professional or pensioner	12.2	19.0	17.9	15.8
Level of comfort of respondent with the survey				
No anxiety at all	63.1	67.0	51.8	70.8
No anxiety for most of the questions	26.4	20.5	32.7	21.5
Comfortable only with some questions	9.2	8.6	12.8	5.4
Uncomfortable with all the questions	1.3	4.0	2.7	1.8

one side. We thus have two comparative samples in each of the government-controlled and non-government-controlled areas. We hired three companies; in the GCA, we interviewed 2,000 residents (1,000 each for KIIS based in Kyiv and R-Research, an international company based in Western Europe) and in the NGCA we also obtained 2,000 respondents (with Kyiv-based KIIS and Moscow-based LMR polling 1,000 respondents each). The three companies used exactly the same survey instrument of about 25 questions, while following their usual procedures of sampling and phone interviewing. Each company was instructed to introduce the survey request by indicating its scientific purpose and their company name and origin of the phone call (the latter was visible to the respondents anyway). The questions were posed to respondents whose language choice was determined after their response to a greeting that is similar in Ukrainian and Russian. All of the interviews were completed in the period 8–24 January 2022, i.e. in a time of heightened speculation about a possible large-scale invasion by Russian troops assembled on the Russian-Ukrainian border.

Recognizing the impossibility of face-to-face interviewing in the NGCA due to security concerns, the companies employed CATI methods to

achieve a sample as representative as possible. The random digit dialling procedure tries to contact possible respondents but the field reports from the companies show that 60% of the numbers were unreachable either due to changed Sim cards, numbers out of order, or cell company access problems. As is well known among the major survey firms, such as Gallup, a typical successful contact rate for calls is about 7–10% during normal circumstances in a country without security and dislocation concerns (https://news.gallup.com/opinion/methodology/225143/listening-state-telephone-surveys.aspx).

In our surveys, in the government-controlled area, the response rate (number of completed surveys divided by the number of answered phone calls) for KIIS was 5.2% for all phones in both the GCA and NGCA (no breakdown given for the two areas), for R-Research in the GCA 9.9% and in the NGCA, the successful contact rate for LRM was 12.2%. The companies used a quota system for gender, age groups and urban-rural settlements based on the latest population estimates available. However, especially in the NGCA, significant population shifts after 2014 suggest that these population figures are hardly accurate. All three companies 'controlled' the interviews by supervisors randomly re-contacting 20% of the respondents. The average interview length was 12 minutes across all three survey companies. Beyond the practical issues of reaching and enrolling respondents in a phone survey, other questions around social desirability and preference falsification remain for a war zone (Rickard et al. 2023).

As can be seen in Table 1, the characteristics of the four samples differed in some key respects while being comparable in others. Though some variation should be expected due to the different telephone data bases that the companies use, sizeable differences can be seen in the table. Demographic differences are less pronounced than the political preferences about the final status of the region. Partly as a result of war-induced movement, especially to the government-controlled area after stability in the line of control, and partly due to existing population distributions (the large cities of Donetsk and Luhansk remained in the NGCA), large differences in status preferences are evident. KIIS and R-Research report 72.8% and 72.3% voicing preferences for Ukraine in the GCA with only 2.8% and 3.1%, respectively, indicating preferences for Russia. In the NGCA, significant differences between the two samples were recorded. The KIIS sample shows much higher support for a status in Ukraine (46.5%) than the comparative LMR sample at 7.2% with the corresponding percentages at 14.8% and 70.3% preferring a status in Russia. Thus, KIIS and R-Research report almost exactly the same results for the GCA, but in the NGCA, KIIS and Levada report highly divergent percentages. These differences are partly due to demographic differences between the samples since the KIIS respondents in the NGCA sample are older than in the LMR sample, significantly poorer (using a measure of the total revenue of the family),

generally have lower self-reported rating of mood (good to anxious), and are more skeptical of the direction in which the region is developing (Table 1). Additionally, the KIIS sample in the NGCA has many more self-identified Ukrainians (citizens or by descent) at 43.9% compared to the LMR sample (11.7%) and correspondingly, fewer self-identified Russians (15.7% versus 49.5%). One would expect the demographic data to be more similar for the two survey companies; the differences are likely to be partly a result of instantaneous respondent reactions to the origin of the call (Kyiv or Moscow).

Survey Responses on Both Sides of the 'Line of Contact'

The key question we examine here concerns the preferred political status outcome for the NGCA. In our parallel surveys, the question was posed in the following way by KIIS and R-Research: "In your view, what should be the status of certain territories of Donbas that are not controlled by the authorities of Ukraine?". In the NGCA, the reference to the area had to be adapted by LMR interviewers to "... certain territories of Donbas now part of the 'Luhansk Peoples' Republic' or the 'Donetsk Peoples' Republic'. The respondents could choose between five options; a) a special autonomous status within Ukraine; b) part of the Donetsk/Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine without autonomy, as before 2014; c) part of the Russian Federation without a special autonomous status; d) a special autonomous status within Russia; or e) independence. The options of 'hard to answer/difficult to say' and 'refusal' were not prompted by the interviewer but could be given by the respondent.

The graph in Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses to the question. Key points are the respective totals for the status outcomes and the ratios for

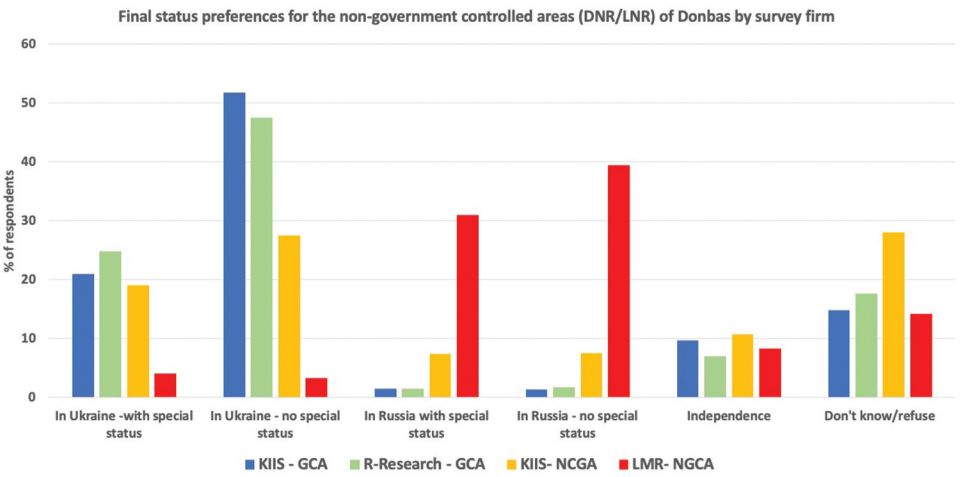

Figure 1. Final status preferences for the non-government-controlled areas of Donbas by survey company (January 2022).

each of the four survey sub-samples. What is evident from the graph is the close correspondence of the preferences in the GCA by respondents who answered the questions asked by KIIS and R-Research, both of which placed calls from Kyiv numbers. In the NGCA, the answers differ significantly between responses to LMR phoning from Moscow and to KIIS phoning from Kyiv. A rational expectation is that professional companies following the same sampling procedures, asking the same questions, and conducting simultaneous surveys in the same region should report results that correspond closely. That is indeed the case for KIIS and for R-Research. What is worthy of close examination are the widely different responses in the NGCA that were reported by KIIS and by LMR. Therefore, any examination of these answers must take into account the disparity in preferences that align with the areas of control, inside or outside the rule of the Ukrainian government.

Weighting the summary results by the most recent population estimates of the respective oblasts and areas of control, we calculate that 49.7% of the 4,025 respondents in February 2022 wished to remain under Kyiv's control, while 22.8% voiced a preference to be controlled by Russia, with another 8.9% saying that they wanted to be independent from both governments. As is usual for a controversial question in surveys in conflict zones, a large number of respondents (18.5%) indicated that they were unable to choose (picking the 'hard to answer' option) or refusing to state their preference. These results from January 2022 are generally in line with our survey in late 2020 on both sides of the 'line of contact' (KIIS in the GCA and LMR in the NGCA) (O'Loughlin et al. 2021). Combining the data on the two sides in 2020 showed that 54.5% preferred the Ukrainian status options, 29.3% the Russian status options, 6.8% expressed a preference for independence, and 18.6% chose to respond 'don't know' or refused to answer this altogether. Thus, it is consistent that just over half of the residents of the whole Donbas region (i.e. all of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts) wanted to remain in Ukraine.

The Role of Identity in Status Preference

While Figure 1 shows the apparent cleavages between the sub-samples on both sides of the 'contact line', responses to the status question are also undoubtedly related to the different demographic characteristics of the samples. We consider the role of (ethno-)national identity of the respondents in this charged political environment, while controlling for numerous other factors that could influence status preferences, including residence on either side of the 'line of contact', the provenance of the interviewers' calls, war experiences, and socio-demographic characteristics.

Responding to scholarly dissatisfaction with the usual self-identification asked of respondents in Ukraine as a forced choice question on *national'nist'*, a Soviet-era category probing parental identity

that blurs ethnic and civic notions (see Kulyk 2016, 2018, 2019) – we asked respondents to self-identify. Our prompt was open and diverse, mentioning not only nationality but also citizenship and profession/occupation as possible identities. The exact prompt read by the interviewer was: 'Identity is associated with the feeling of belonging. For example, a Ukrainian by origin or a Russian by origin, a citizen of Ukraine, a citizen of Russia, an engineer or teacher, and so on. How would you define yourself today?' The answer to this open-ended question was entered by the interviewer and later recoded by us into general categories – Ukrainian (by descent or citizenship – 52% of the total samples), Russian (by descent or citizenship – 18%) and professional identity, including pensioners (16%). These three categories thus accounted for nearly 90% of all self-expressed identities. We employ the Ukrainian and Russian identity variables as main predictors while controlling for other factors and we give special attention to the role of responses to survey company provenance.

The literature on Ukrainian politics over the past three decades has seen a shift from a reliance on census categories (such as the nationality question in the last census of 2001) to a more nuanced understanding that increasingly stresses the significance of civic identity and compound identity measures (Onuch, Hale, and Sasse 2018). This trend has been strengthened since 2014 and especially since February 2022 (Kulyk 2023). Nevertheless, we expect the Ukrainian/Russian identity divide – here explicitly widened to include descent and citizenship – to remain a significant element in driving preferences for final status in Donbas, as it was in earlier studies of the effects of the war on attitudes (O'Loughlin and Toal 2020). In addition to the usual demographic controls (age, gender, family income, and respondent mood), we add controls that reflect the war context between 2014 and 2022. We asked if the respondent's family was exposed to violence (over half said yes), had been forced to move (over one-third answered affirmatively) and if they wanted to move (about one-quarter of the total). We also asked respondents to rate the local situation (on the respective sides of the line, with only one-quarter answering positively) and if they had an interest in political matters (about one-quarter were 'very interested' and about half 'sometimes interested'). Given the sensitivity of many of the questions in the survey, we asked the enumerators to fill out a post-interview rating the respondent's comfort level with these questions. About two-thirds reported no anxiety from the respondents about the questions, with another one-quarter generally comfortable. Only about one in ten respondents was reported as having been uncomfortable while on the phone (Table 1).

To minimize the ratio of missing values in the analyses, many predictors, as well as the preferred status outcomes, are recoded as binary variables. For example, a status in Ukraine (combining the two subcategories with

Table 2. Dependent variable – preferred status in Ukraine.

Predictor	Coefficient (B)	Standard error	Exp (B)	Wald test sig.
Ukrainian	*1.051*	*0.130*	*4.260*	*0.004*
Age	0.006	0.003	0.995	0.194
Gender	−0.145	0.119	0.865	0.309
Family Income	0.079	0.116	1.082	0.544
Mood	−0.091	0.085	0.913	0.364
Moved since 2014	0.212	0.163	1.236	0.284
Want to Move	0.150	0.261	1.162	0.605
Suffered in war	0.158	0.082	1.171	0.150
Russian	*-0.950*	*0.191*	*0.387*	*0.016*
Professional/Pension	−0.031	0.069	0.970	0.688
Political Interest	*-0.344*	*0.075*	*0.709*	*0.020*
Region right direction	−0.239	0.245	0.787	0.401
R-Research	*-0.308*	*0.043*	*0.735*	*0.006*
KIIS-NGCA	*0.984*	*0.077*	*0.374*	*0.001*
LMR-NGCA	*-3.075*	*0.184*	*0.046*	*<.001*
Respondent ease	−0.325	0.385	0.722	0.055
Intercept	*2.456*	*0.385*	*11.657*	*0.020*

Nagelkerke pseudo R2 = .500. Relationships significant at the .05 level are in italics and underlined. The KIIS GCA sample is the comparator for the survey company predictors.

Table 3. Dependent variable – preferred status in Russia.

Predictor	Coefficient (B)	Standard error	Exp (B)	Wald test sig
Russian	*1.266*	*0.246*	*3.546*	*0.014*
Age	−0.027	0.015	0.973	0.175
Gender	−0.140	0.080	0.870	0.179
Family Income	−0.101	0.089	0.905	0.342
Mood	0.309	0.134	1.363	0.104
Moved since 2014	−0.007	0.171	0.993	0.971
Want to Move	*0.375*	*0.056*	*1.455*	*0.007*
Suffered in war	*-0.184*	*0.012*	*0.832*	*<.001*
Ukrainian	−0.736	0.289	0.479	0.084
Professional/Pension	0.311	0.269	1.364	0.332
Political Interest	*-0.512*	*0.063*	*0.599*	*0.004*
Region right direction	*1.252*	*0.288*	*3.497*	*0.023*
R-Research	−0.106	0.08	0.901	0.278
KIIS-NGCA	*1.363*	*0.121*	*3.909*	*0.002*
LMR-NGCA	*3.560*	*0.110*	*35.685*	*<.001*
Respondent ease	−0.216	0.160	0.806	0.270
Intercept	0.328	0.736	1.388	0.740

Nagelkerke pseudo R2= .666. Relationships significant at the .05 level are in italics and underlined. The KIIS GCA sample is the comparator for the survey company predictors.

and without autonomy) is coded as 1 (yes) for 50.3% of the respondents, other options as 0. The other dependent variable is a preferred status in Russia (combining the options with and without autonomy) with 22.8% yes and coded as 1, other options as 0. In this recoding manner, the ratio of missing values (using pair-wise deletion) in the models is always less than 7%.

Modeling Preferred Status Among Donbas Respondents

In Tables 2 and 3, we present the results of logistic models that indicate the relationship of the key predictors, Ukrainian and Russian identity (as

defined by the respondents in an open question) to the two main status options, remaining in Ukraine or being annexed to Russia. We highlight the expected correspondence between identity and status ('Ukrainians' for Ukraine, 'Russians' for Russia) and we include the other main ethnic/national identity as a control. While the effect of the survey company provenance is considered in these logistic models by including it as a control, we underline this important effect below in a moderated regression model.

The usual logistic model that tests the effect of a key predictor – here Ukrainian and Russian identity, respectively – is presented in Tables 2 and 3. In both cases, the model fit is good as indicated by the Nagelkerke pseudo R2 values at .500 and .666. (The errors are clustered at the survey-sample level.) The key predictors are both highly significant with the standardized regression coefficients (Beta) more than 4.3 for Ukrainians favouring a status in Ukraine (compared to non-Ukrainian identities) and 3.5 times more for Russians preferring status in Russia (compared to non-Russian identities). The controls generally line up as expected. For the Ukrainian status case, only the self-identified Russian predictor is significant, and, as expected, it is negative. Most other controls are not significant, likely swamped by the two identity variables and the survey company controls. For the Russian status model (Table 3), two controls are significant, for those who said that they have suffered as a result of the war (measured by their self-reported exposure to violence) and those who wish to move. Those who report suffering are less likely to prefer a final status in Russia, but those who express a wish to move are more likely to choose status in Russia.

A prominent feature of both logistic models in Tables 1 and 2 is the highly significant coefficients of the survey company predictors. Using the KIIS-GCA survey as the comparator, the respondents in the LMR survey in the NGCA are strongly opposed to a status in Ukraine in the first model and strongly supportive of a status in Russia in the second model. The other survey in the GCA by R-Research shows mixed results (less pro-Kyiv in model 1 and not significantly different than the KIIS GCA sample in model 2). The KIIS-NGCA sub-sample shows more support for Kyiv in model 1 than the comparator and also more support for a status in Russia in model 2, a reflection of strong pro-Moscow preferences in the NGCA.

Given the strong significant effects of the survey companies in the models of status preference, a more appropriate way to analyze the responses is to use a moderated regression model. In moderated modeling, we consider how the key relationship, in our case the one between preferred final status and identity, is affected by how the respondents viewed the survey companies based on the origin of the calls. In other words, a self-identified Ukrainian in the NGCA would possibly give a different answer to a caller from Kyiv than an enumerator from Moscow, other factors being equal and thus controlled

Table 4. Logistic regression model of preferred status in Ukraine (moderated by survey sub-samples).

Predictors	Coefficient	Standard error	Z	Significance
Ukrainian identity	*0.552*	*0.174*	*3.175*	*0.002*
W1 (R-Research)	*-1.302*	*0.165*	*-7.897*	*0.000*
W2 (KIIS-NGCA)	−0.335	0.185	−1.808	0.071
W3 (LMR-NGCA)	*-3.589*	*0.218*	*-16.485*	*0.000*
Int_1	*0.691*	*0.220*	*3.139*	*0.002*
Int_2	0.331	0.228	1.450	0.147
Int_3	*1.277*	*0.322*	*3.961*	*0.001*
Age	0.002	0.002	0.740	0.489
Gender	*-0.214*	*0.091*	*-2.357*	*0.018*
Family Income	0.052	0.044	1.189	0.235
Mood	−0.011	0.056	−0.191	0.053
Moved since 2014	*0.333*	*0.093*	*3.583*	*0.000*
Want to Move	*0.305*	*0.102*	*2.991*	*0.003*
Suffered in war	−0.068	0.089	−0.763	0.445
Russian identity	*-0.521*	*0.172*	*-3.034*	*0.002*
Professional/Pension	0.181	0.142	1.278	0.201
Political Interest	*-0.296*	*0.061*	*-4.897*	*0.000*
Region right direction	−0.211	0.109	−1.931	0.053
Respondent Ease	*-0.376*	*0.055*	*-6.797*	*0.000*
Constant	*1.914*	*0.382*	*5.089*	*0.000*

Log likelihood = 1581.239 df = 19, significance = .000. Nagelkerke Pseudo R2 =.463
Likelihood ratio of highest order conditional interactions (X*W) X2 = 19.18 df = 3 Sig = .003
Int_1, Int_2, Int_3 are the interaction terms for identity and the survey companies (R-Research, KIIS-NCGA and LMR-NGCA, respectively) Variables in italics and underlined are significant at the .05 level.

for. The moderating variable is an interacting third variable in the relationship describing the level of change in the key relationship between dependent and independent variables. Using a moderation model, we examine this survey company effect explicitly and consider if the key relationship between identity and status preference holds in this method. The moderation models were calculated using the PROCESS macro version 4.1 in SPSS version 28 (Hayes 2022). W1, W2 and W3 in the tables indicate the moderating effects for the survey companies.

The results of the moderation model are shown in Tables 4 and 5 and the moderation effects are graphed in Figures 2a and b below. The model parameters show a significant conditional interaction (e.g. moderator of survey company with the predictor Ukrainian identity) for the preferred status in Ukraine model (Table 4 and Figure 2a) ($X^2 = 19.08$ and significance level = .003) but not for the preferred status in Russia model ($X^2 = 4.014$ and significance = .261) (Table 5 and Figure 2a). This comparison indicates that the survey company effect is more evident for self-identified Ukrainians than for self-identified Russians in the Donbas region. Part of this difference here might be that there are relatively few self-identified Russians in the GCA, while self-identified Ukrainians are strongly represented in all sub-samples. As in the logistic models in Tables 1 and 2, the comparator sub-sample for the survey companies is KIIS-GCA.

The Pseudo R^2 in the moderated models (Tables 4 and 5) are similar to the logistic models (Tables 2 and 3). In the first moderation model, for Ukrainian identity as a predictor, there is no significant difference between the KIIS GCA

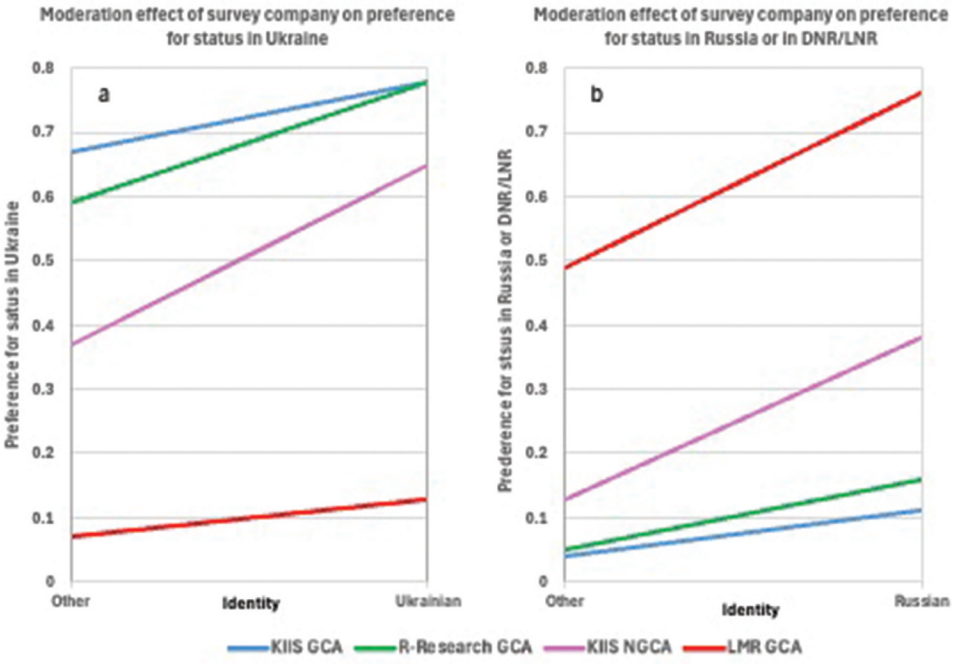

Figure 2. Moderation effects of the interaction of identity and survey company in the GCA and the NGCA of the donbas.

Table 5. Logistic regression model of preferred status in Russia (moderated by survey subsamples).

Predictors	Coefficient	Standard error	Z	Significance
Russian identity	*1.151*	*0.506*	*2.277*	*0.023*
W1(R-Research)	*1.439*	*0.261*	*5.509*	*0.000*
W2 (KIIS-NGCA)	0.063	0.289	0.216	0.829
W3 (LMR-NGCA)	*3.539*	*0.249*	*14.189*	*0.000*
Int_1	0.465	0.538	0.864	0.384
Int_2	0.585	1.312	0.446	0.656
Int_3	−0.078	0.519	−0.149	0.881
Age	*-0.025*	*0.005*	*-5.622*	*0.000*
Gender	−0.161	0.123	−0.149	0.881
Family Income	−0.057	0.062	−0.932	0.351
Mood	*0.265*	*0.081*	*3.274*	*0.001*
Moved since 2014	−0.201	0.127	−1.582	0.114
Want to Move	0.216	0.142	1.523	0.128
Suffered in war	−0.038	0.121	−0.315	0.753
Ukrainian identity	*-0.749*	*0.175*	*-4.268*	*0.000*
Professional/Pension	0.211	0.142	1.523	0.128
Political Interest	*-0.464*	*0.086*	*-5.422*	*0.000*
Region right direction	*1.024*	*0.125*	*8.189*	*0.000*
Respondent Ease	−0.134	0.084	−1.603	0.109
Constant	*-1.209*	*0.546*	*-2.216*	*0.027*

Log likelihood = 1984.471. df = 19, significance = .000. Nagelkerke Pseudo R^2= .626.
Likelihood ratio of highest order interactions (X*W) X^2 = 4.014. df = 3 significance = .261.
Int_1, Int_2, Int_3 are the interaction terms for identity and the survey companies (R-Research, KIIS-NCGA and LMR-NGCA, respectively). Variables in italics and underlined are significant.

and R-Research (both conducted in the GCA) interactions. On the sensitive subject of the final political status for the NGCA, the survey company effect is not important for Ukrainians in the GCA as both companies phone from the same location – Kyiv. However, on the other side of the 'line of contact' in the NGCA, there is a significant moderating effect for both the LMR and KIIS NGCA sub-samples as shown by a strong negative relationship for both W1 and W3 in Table 3. The comparison with KIIS NGCA for both is significant and negative, though not as strong as for the LMR company phoning from Moscow.

For the second moderating model (Table 5), interacting Russian identity and survey company, the trend seen in Table 3 is maintained, with significant differences from the comparator (KIIS GCA) for both the KIIS NGCA sample and the LMR sample in the NGCA. Again, the sub-samples of KIIS and R-Research in the GCA (W2) do not differ significantly. For the controls, in the status in Ukraine model (Table 4), men, those who have moved since 2014 and those who want to move are more likely to prefer Kyiv's control in the Ukraine model. People with low political interest are less likely to prefer a final status in Ukraine and those most ill-at-ease during the survey are also less likely to prefer a status in Ukraine in this model. In both moderating models, the 'out-group' (self-identified Russians – which includes both ethnic and civic identities – in the GCA and self-identified Ukrainians – also defined by ethnic and civic criteria – in the NGCA) show preferences opposite to the 'in-group' (Ukrainians in the GCA and Russians in the NGCA). Age only appears as a significant element in the model for a status in Russia with older people less likely to prefer this option (Table 5). Those who believed that the NGCA was heading in the right direction also preferred a status in Russia and those who were less comfortable during the interview also indicated this preference.

The impacts of the moderating models can clearly be seen in the graphs representing the interactions. The effect of Ukrainian identity (compared to all other identities) on the preferred status in Ukraine across the four sub-samples is shown in Figure 2A. The mean probability, based on the moderation model, of picking Ukraine as the final status is about .75 for self-identified Ukrainians in both KIIS samples, about .65 in the R-Research sample, and about .25 in the LMR sample. One would expect the KIIS NCGA and the LMR sub-samples to show similar results (as is the case for the surveys in the GCA) but there is over a .50 difference in the probabilities. (The moderation model here controls for other factors such as demographic characteristics, war experiences, respondent comfort, etc.).

In Figure 2b as in Figure 2a, the greatest similarity for the relationship between identity (self-identified Russian in this case) and a preference for a final status in Russia is between the samples of R-Research and GCA KIIS. Identifying as Russian in these samples (both conducted in the GCA) only raises the probability of preference for Russia from .05 to .16 and .12, respectively. In contrast to the small difference in the GCA,

identifying as Russian in the NGCA comes with a probability of preferring a final status in Russia of .38 in the KIIS NCGA sample (.15 for non-Russians) and .75 in the LMR sample (.48 for non-Russians). The gap between the KIIS and LMR sub-samples is evident for both the Russian and non-Russian respondents, but the LMR numbers are much higher for both groups. Since other survey respondent characteristics are controlled for, this large difference can be attributed to the respective origins (Kyiv and Moscow) of the calls of the enumerators.

One of the prominent differences between the simple logistic model and the moderated one is that there are now more significant controls. In the model of preference for a status in Ukraine, this option shows a negative relationship for respondents who were more uncomfortable in the interviews, for those who self-reported a more anxious mood, and for those who indicated a greater interest in politics. These predictors are in addition to those in the logistic models (age and self-identified Russian identity). For the model of preference for a status in Russia, respondents who report a more anxious mood and those who believe that their region was going in the right direction indicate a greater preference for Russia, but those who report a greater interest in politics show a negative relationship. Self-identified Ukrainians and older people were less inclined to prefer a final status in Russia.

By taking into account the important effect of how respondents considered the source of the phone call – from either Kyiv or Moscow – we have more accurately represented the nature of this phone call location origin on how respondents framed their answers. The expected relationship between a broadly defined self-expressed identity as Ukrainian or Russian is maintained in all models (logistic and moderated logistic) but the interactions between the identity and survey company predictors must be understood as a major factor in explaining preferences in the war-torn Donbas region prior to February 2022.

Conclusion

Though it had witnessed ongoing clashes for nearly 8 years, the relatively stalemated line in the Donbas region since 2014 was about to change dramatically in the weeks following our survey. Respondents had to be alert to the rising tensions. Answering a question about a final status for the NGCA was undoubtedly made more sensitive by the timing of the survey and the source of the interview phone call. Since earlier work had identified significant variations in preferences that seemed to be related to survey companies (O'Loughlin et al. 2021), our project sought to test this by using different companies to survey on a sensitive subject in a sensitive place at a sensitive time.

The contribution of this article is twofold. First, it advances the methodological discussion about conducting surveys in war zones by probing and demonstrating clear survey company effects on the preferences for the status of the disputed territory, the non-government-controlled area of Donbas. By employing three different survey companies, from Ukraine and from Russia as well as an international one, and having at least two companies implement the parallel survey in the GCA (KIIS and R-Research) and in the NGCA (KIIS and LMR), we gained leverage on the potential effects of survey companies and the origin of their interviewer calls on a sensitive issue like the status of the NGCA. The analysis proceeded in two steps. We first fit logistic regressions and followed with moderated models which allow us to separate out the company effect and trace the interaction between the company and our main predictor, the self-proclaimed identity as Ukrainian or Russian, on the outcome variable, preference for future status in Ukraine or Russia (also in the NGCA). In the GCA, the two survey companies generated similar results; the moderated model substantiates that a self-expressed Ukrainian or Russian identity, defined by us to include both ethnic and civic criteria, has little effect on the status preference (clear majority support for a status in Ukraine). In the NGCA, however, the data from the Ukrainian and Russian survey companies diverge significantly, but the underlying trend is the same: they both show a significant effect of an expression of a Russian identity (ethnic/civic) and a preference for a status within Russia.

Second, our article empirically traces the effect of self-reported identities, captured via an open-ended question rather than pre-fixed and ambivalent categories such as 'nationality' or language, on status preferences. The results in the NGCA showed a strong effect of identity on political preference that also was apparent in the moderated regression model interacting identity and survey company. Overall, our analysis of the immediate pre-invasion Donbas of January 2022 shows a clear interaction between the respondents' self-reported identity, broadly defined, and survey company calling location. Our analysis captures trends in political status preferences 8 years after the start of the war in Donbas and on the eve of the full-scale invasion but does not speak directly to shifts in identity (or the expression of identity in surveys) between 2014 and 2022.

Future research in war zones should take these findings into consideration and attempt to conduct parallel surveys by different companies, ideally in multiple waves in order to be able to track changes over time. A perfect experiment would alternate companies and locations while using the same sampling design and exact questionnaire. Political realities, however, ruled out this option. Indeed, political realities darkened considerably in the Donbas region after February 2022, bringing a fiercer war and more intense violence to long suffering residents whose voices are currently unheard.

Note

1. We are cognizant of the sensitivity of political language regarding the origins of the Donbas war. Probably the most appropriate and neutral term is 'internationalized local conflict' which captures both the local manifestations of the rejection of the post-Maidan government in Kyiv reflected in separatist sentiment and also Russia's role in intervening to ensure separatists' control of a large part of the two oblasts, Donetsk and Luhansk. See Kleparnik (2023) for details on this nomenclature and the scholars in the respective camps, either naming it a 'civil war' or an 'international conflict'.

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