

The Russian–Ukrainian War as a Social Situation

Mykola M. SLYUSAREVSKYY 

Institute for Social and Political Psychology of the NAES of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine

Svitlana L. CHUNIKHINA * 

Institute for Social and Political Psychology of the NAES of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine

s.chunikhina@ispp.org.ua

Abstract

This article explores the Russian–Ukrainian war as a subjectively perceived social situation, emphasizing psychological dimensions of time (present, past, and future) and their role in shaping individual and collective attitudes. Based on a February 2023 survey of 1,200 respondents in government-controlled regions of Ukraine, four groups were identified according to the subjective length of the "present"—ranging from one year to over ten years. Statistical analysis revealed that a longer subjective present correlates with less negative evaluations of the current situation, a stronger pro-Ukrainian stance, greater resistance to enemy propaganda, and more optimism about the future. Conversely, those with a shorter time perspective expressed lower trust in fellow citizens and supported harsher penalties for collaboration. The findings highlight the role of subjective time in shaping perceptions of the war's causes, course, and possible outcomes.

Keywords: Russian - Ukrainian war; social situation; subjective length of the present; perception; public opinion

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1. Introduction

In studying war as a phenomenon of social reality, research attention is primarily focused on clarifying the causes of wars or the nature of their consequences. The sociopolitical causes of wars are associated with the social consequences of economic difficulties, demographic and environmental problems, the weakness of national and international political institutions, the consolidation of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, and the growth of nationalist sentiments (Levy, 1998; Marullo & Hlavacek, 1992; Roucek, 1946; Stewart, 2002). The most frequently discussed psychological causes of wars are distorted perceptions or stereotypes inherent in leaders or most members of society, inadequate political leadership, political decision-making based on misinformation, excesses of social maladjustment and frustration, frustration, fear, insecurity, uncontrolled aggressiveness, uncritical submissiveness, authoritarianism, conformity, and collective narcissism (Brown, 1969; Hasan, et al., 2020; Money-Kyrle, 2022; Stagner, 1941; White, 1919). Based on research into the causes of military conflicts, psychologically grounded approaches to their prevention are being developed (Kogan, 1976).

The analysis of the social and psychological consequences of wars touches on psycho-emotional problems and related disorders, including the experience of traumatic events by children and adults, military and civilians; rupture of the social fabric, long-term loss of trust

and sense of justice; frustrations; destruction of institutions, forced migration and refugee, aggravation of conflict-causing factors within war-affected communities (Albani et al., 2022; Flaherty & Ivaniuk, 2023; Kravchuk & Khalanskyi, 2022; Kurapov et al., 2023; Moran, 2013; Moses & Holmes, 2022; Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006; Osokina et al., 2023; Palosaari et al., 2013; Pedersen, 2002; Tytarenko & Hromova, 2023; Tytarenko et al., 2024). In recent decades, research into methods and approaches to the prevention, overcoming, or healing of psychological damage caused by war and providing psychological support to the war-affected population during the period of martial law and post-war recovery has been rapidly developing (Vus & Esterlis, 2022). Meanwhile, several researchers note that the inevitable consequences of war can have a positive character: increased social consolidation and solidarity, strengthened identity, and increased resistance of individuals and communities to threats and difficult trials (James, 1911; Ronzhes, 2023).

The study of the causes and consequences of war, however complex and comprehensive, does not provide sufficient data to view war as a holistic and complex phenomenon, a specific social situation in which people live for long months or years and communities form, develop, or decline (Kogan, 1976).

The purpose of this article is to describe the Russian–Ukrainian war as a social situation subjectively perceived by citizens based on data from a survey conducted by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 2023 as part of public opinion monitoring (conducted annually since 1995; Slyusarevskyy et al., 2021).

The Russian–Ukrainian war included several phases, in particular, the phase of hybrid confrontation or disguised aggression, which was ignored by one part of the Ukrainian society. Moreover, others perceived it as a purely internal Ukrainian conflict or a direct consequence of the mistakes of the Ukrainian leadership. Many citizens perceived this war, from the very beginning, as an existential challenge to the Ukrainian state, a decisive battle for its independence against the imperial encroachment of Russia. Accordingly, citizen understanding of this war should differ significantly depending on whether they perceive it as a natural consequence of Ukrainian history, a result of political mistakes or conspiracy, or an absolute surprise, excess, or fall from normality (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006; Snyder, 2018; Summerfield, 1997). Thus, differences in the perception of war as a social situation are related to the amount of relevant information and the length of the time interval that citizens use when constructing their ideas about war.

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

- 1) There are individual differences in the subjective length of the present time within which the events of the war are perceived and evaluated.
- 2) A broader or narrower subjective horizon of events is associated with more or less favorable evaluations of the present time compared with the past or expected future.
- 3) Ukrainian citizens' perception of the Russian–Ukrainian war as a social situation relates to their ideas about when exactly this situation developed.

2. Methods

In the description of the Russian–Ukrainian war as a social situation, we start from the vision proposed by Romenets (1995): the situation is a chaos of events in which a person tries to navigate through the process of marking, giving subjectively significant meanings to events and

phenomena. The extreme character of the war situation stimulates and activates meaning-making processes in the mass consciousness. With the help of this process, society attempts to master complex and dangerous circumstances, forms an appropriate sociopsychological basis for resistance or surrender, generates strategies and patterns of behavior, and consequently affects the course of the situation. Citizens perceive each social situation through a specific system of meanings that can be revealed (articulated, explained) through sets of judgments presented to respondents within the framework of a representative survey.

Additionally, the theory of the temporal organization of life experience by Polunin (2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b) is an essential methodological basis for the organization of this research. In particular, the author shows that the subjective duration of the present varies in a reasonably wide range. The longer the time interval, the greater the amount of information used for its representation in the cognitive system. The temporal arrangement of experience determines the features of a person's cognitive representation of the actual situation and, ultimately, their behavior. The extent of the present—subjective ideas about when the current situation developed—is essential for describing the Russian–Ukrainian war as a social situation in the refraction of mass consciousness in Ukraine.

Empirical data were collected through a mass survey of citizens, which was conducted by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine on February 17–26, 2023 (at that time, the full-scale phase of the Russian–Ukrainian war lasted exactly 12 months) using the method of face-to-face interviews I. A total of 1,200 respondents were interviewed in the government-controlled regions of Ukraine. Women comprised 54.3% of the sample; the share of respondents under 30 was 20.2% and over 56 years old was 35.7%; and the proportion of persons declaring Ukrainian nationality was 93.2%. The sample represents the adult population of Ukraine, and the sampling error was 3.2%.

To assess the specifics of the respondents' temporal arrangement of the subjective experience of living in the war (the duration of the present), they were asked the following question: "Since when, in your opinion, did the situation in which your life, the life of your relatives and friends, is currently taking place?". Half of the respondents (50.1%) noted that the situation in which they live has existed since 2022, that is, since the beginning of a full-scale Russian invasion. For nearly a quarter of the respondents (23%), the current situation arose in 2014—the year of the end of the Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea, and the beginning of the hybrid phase of the Russian–Ukrainian war. More than 12% of respondents believe that the circumstances of their lives developed in 2019 (the victory of Volodymyr Zelensky in the presidential elections held that year was called an "electoral revolution" by some analysts). Finally, 6.4% of respondents believe the current situation started in 2010. The proportion of respondents who selected the other alternatives was at the sampling error level, and their responses were not considered in the subsequent analysis. The entire distribution of the received responses is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Answers to the Question “Since when, in your opinion, did the situation in which your life and the lives of your relatives and friends are currently going?” in %

Response options	%
from the beginning of this (2023) year	2.3
from 2022	50.1
from 2019	12.3
from 2014	22.8
from 2010	6.4
from 2004	3.5
earlier	2.4
<i>didn't answer</i>	0.3

Based on this distribution of responses, we distinguished four groups of respondents according to their subjective length of the present, the period within which they construct a subjective history of living current events—a year, up to five years, up to ten years, and over ten years.

In addition to the perceptions of the subjective length of the present, we considered respondents' evaluations of the current situation as favorable or unfavorable. For this purpose, the following questions and statements were included in the questionnaire:

1. Are you satisfied with your life in general? Response options: completely satisfied, somewhat satisfied, rather not satisfied, difficult to answer, not at all satisfied.
2. Do you think that before (before the time indicated by you above), the socioeconomic and political situation in which your life was spent was better than now? Response options: definitely yes, rather yes, rather not, difficult to answer, definitely not.
3. Despite everything, events in Ukraine are generally developing in the right direction. Response options: agree, difficult to answer, disagree.

Furthermore, to capture an image of the war, its causes, desired ways of ending it, and consequences from the point of view of international relations, respondents had to choose one of the alternatives (agree, difficult to answer, disagree) in response to the statements presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents' Answers to Statements Presented to Them (by Sample as a Whole, %)

Statement	Agree	Hard to answer	Disagree
The war with which Russia came to us is a continuation of the same genocide of the Ukrainian people that was carried out during the Holodomors	70.9	18.4	10.4
Putin attacked Ukraine to make it a Russian province and Russify us	73.0	18.5	8.4
NATO countries are fighting against Russia at the hands of Ukrainians	18.4	30.6	50.5
Putin launched a military operation in Ukraine because he was afraid of a NATO attack from our territory	20.5	29.6	50.0
The withdrawal of Russian troops from the territories captured on February 24, 2022, will be considered a victory for Ukraine. The return of Crimea and part of Donbas should be sought through further negotiations	30.4	27.8	41.7
It will be legitimate to talk about our Victory in the current war only in the case of the return of all occupied territories, including Donbas and Crimea. The Ukrainian people will not agree to any other interpretation of Victory	61.5	29.4	9.0
We are actively supported by the people of Western countries, forcing their governments to provide us with more significant assistance	64.3	25.7	9.9

Statement	Agree	Hard to answer	Disagree
The full-scale Russian invasion showed that international guarantees do not work; in order to ensure its own sovereignty and territorial integrity, Ukraine must restore its nuclear potential	47.5	33.7	18.7
It is not easy to object to the fact that Russians and Ukrainians are one people	7.8	22.7	69.3
It is a shame that in the liberated territories, traitors and collaborators feel unpunished that the courts let them go	73.8	20.1	6.0
Many see Russian troops as their liberators	14.1	26.9	58.7

The statistical analysis of the collected data was performed with the help of OSA for Windows software by the cross-tabulation method, where the subjective present length (SPL) was considered an independent variable, and the features of the perception of the war (e.g., its causality and scenarios) were considered dependent variables. The significance of the identified relationships between variables was determined by the chi-squared test at no more than 5% (Balanovskyi, 2019).

3. Results

The data presented in Table 2 testify to the fact that Ukrainian society has a consolidated vision of the war as another act (from a historical point of view) of Russian aggression against Ukraine, motivated by genocidal aspirations and aimed at the destruction of both Ukrainian statehood (turning it into a province of the Russian Federation) and the Ukrainian people as such. More than 70% of respondents agree with this interpretation of the motives of the war.

For most respondents, the desired scenario for the end of the war is the return of all occupied territories, including Donbas and Crimea (Institute for Social and Political Psychology [ISPP], 2023). By contrast, the version of the peace treaty that would provide for the withdrawal of Russian troops from the territories captured on February 24, 2022, and would make the return of Crimea and part of Donbas the subject of further negotiations polarizes public opinion: 30% are in favor, nearly 42% are against, and 28% had difficulty answering. The positions on the feasibility of restoring Ukraine's nuclear potential to prevent further acts of aggression were also not unanimous—less than half of the respondents (47.5%) support this idea, and a third (33.7%) had difficulty answering. Society has no certainty about the role of NATO (or the influence of the NATO factor) in the Russian–Ukrainian war. Nearly every fifth respondent agrees with the propositions spread by Russian propaganda that the war began to prevent NATO aggression against the Russian Federation and that NATO troops are fighting in Ukraine with someone else's hands. Approximately a third of the respondents do not have a definite opinion on this matter.

Thus, in the second year of the full-scale Russian invasion, the citizens' consolidated vision of this war as an existential challenge to their physical and political existence, sense of identity, and justice remain. Furthermore, several issues (the role of NATO or the expediency of territorial concessions to the aggressor) regarding which public opinion is uncertain or polarized remain. Therefore, it is advisable to track the existing differences in citizens' perception of war in connection with the temporal perspective they use when interpreting the causes, course, and consequences of the military conflict.

Table 3. Distribution of Answers to Questions Concerning the Evaluation Characteristics of the Situation in Connection with the Subjective Duration of the Present ((SPL), %)

Since when, in your opinion, did the situation in which your life and the lives of your relatives and friends are currently taking place?	SPL	Are you satisfied with your life in general?			Are you satisfied with your life in general?			Are you satisfied with your life in general?		
		Quite + rather satisfied	Difficult to answer	Rather + not satisfied at all	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree	Definitely + rather so	Difficult to answer	Rather + definitely not
from 2022	1 p.	28.2	18.6	53.3	11.1	37.6	51.3	76.9	14.8	8.4
from 2019	≤ 5 p.	37.8	20.0	42.2	15.3	40.4	44.0	67.9	17.1	15
from 2014	≤ 10 p.	31.0	17.1	52	20.8	30.8	48.5	66.6	19.9	13.4
from 2010	>10 p.	33.8	31.0	35.2	8.2	21.9	69.9	53.5	24.7	21.9
In general		31.6	19.8	48.6	13.8	35.3	50.9	69.4	17.8	12.8
		Chi-square 37.860 (5% significance) The degrees of freedom 24			Chi-square 38.549 (5% significance) The degrees of freedom 12			Chi-square 131.262 (1% significance) The degrees of freedom 24		

As mentioned in Methods, the respondents were divided into four groups depending on their subjectively determined length of the present (SPT) in which they exist—within a year, five years, ten years, or more than ten years. As can be seen from Table 3, the citizens who live “in a situation of war”—that is, those who indicated that the current situation has developed since 2022 (the beginning of a full-scale invasion) or since 2014 (the beginning of a hybrid war)—are more dissatisfied with their lives than those who perceive events in a longer time perspective or count the political time from the presidential elections. The respondents who believe that the current situation has been developing since 2019 have the most positive perception of life: in this group, 37.8% were satisfied, which is quite comparable to the proportion of dissatisfied (42.2%). A similar distribution of responses was observed among respondents whose SRT exceeds ten years (33.8% are satisfied to some degree, and 35.2% are dissatisfied with life to some degree). These differences are significant at the 5% level.

Nearly 70% of respondents whose SRT exceeds ten years believe that events in Ukraine are developing in the right direction, which is one and a half times more than among those who measure the present time from 2019 (44%). The differences are significant at the 5% level.

A broader subjective present is associated with a less negative estimate of the current socioeconomic and political situation than in previous periods. Nearly 77% of respondents for whom SDR is measured in years believe that before was better, whereas among respondents with SDR of more than ten years, only slightly more than half believe this. The differences are significant at the 1% level.

Table 4. Distribution of Answers to Questions Concerning the Causes and Course of the War in Connection with SPL (%)

SPL	The war with which Russia came to us is a continuation of the same genocide of the Ukrainian people that was carried out during the Holodomors.			Putin attacked Ukraine in order to make it a Russian province and to Russify us.			NATO countries are fighting against Russia at the hands of Ukrainians.			Putin launched a military operation in Ukraine because he was afraid of a NATO attack from our territory.		
	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree
from 2022	8.2	19.4	72.4	4.4	17.4	78.2	45.3	34.2	20.5	45.4	32.3	22.3
from 2019	5.0	16.4	78.6	4.3	21.4	74.3	56.4	27.1	16.4	49.6	29.8	20.6
from 2014	19.5	18.0	62.5	19.2	19.9	60.9	55.2	26.8	18.0	56.3	24.5	19.2
from 2010	5.5	12.3	82.2	12.3	13.7	74.0	69.9	24.7	5.5	63.0	21.9	15.1
In general	10.4	18.5	71.1	8.4	18.6	73.0	50.8	30.8	18.4	50.0	29.6	20.4
	Chi-square 41.059 (1% significance) The degrees of freedom 12			Chi-square 63.095 (1% significance) The degrees of freedom 12			Chi-square 31.771 (1% significance) The degrees of freedom 12			Chi-square 24.234 (5% significance) The degrees of freedom 12		

Table 5. Distribution of Answers to Questions Related to the Image of Victory in Connection with SPL (%)

SPL	The withdrawal of Russian troops from the territories captured on February 24, 2022, will be considered a victory for Ukraine. Furthermore, the return of Crimea and part of Donbas should be sought through further negotiations.			Our Victory in the current war will be legitimately talked about only in the case of the return of all occupied territories, including Donbas and Crimea. The Ukrainian people will not agree to any other interpretation of Victory.		
	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree
from 2022	44.3	32.0	23.7	5.6	30.5	63.9
from 2019	33.3	27.7	39.0	7.9	35.0	57.1
from 2014	36.0	23.4	40.6	15.7	26.1	58.2
from 2010	51.4	18.1	30.6	13.7	19.2	67.1
In general	41.6	27.9	30.4	9.0	29.4	61.6
	Chi-square 38.885 (1% significance) The degrees of freedom 12			Chi-square 38.046 (1% significance) The degrees of freedom 12		

The different subjective length of the present contributes to the formation of different trends regarding the emotional coloring of the perceived present events compared with the past and the expected future. Accordingly, the perception of the war, its causes, nature, and scenarios of its termination should be excellent.

As can be seen from Table 4, nearly four out of five respondents with the longest SRT (more than ten years) agree that the present war is a continuation of the same genocide of the Ukrainian people that was committed during the Holodomors; only 5.5% of the representatives of this group disagree with this. By contrast, four times more (nearly 20%) of the respondents for whom the current situation arose in 2014 ($SPT \leq 10$ years) did not notice genocidal intentions in the current Russian aggression. The same share of the representatives of this group also disagrees with the fact that the reason for Russian aggression is the desire to Russify Ukraine, making it a Russian province. The differences are significant at the 1% level.

Dramatic differences in the reaction to the statement “NATO countries are fighting against Russia with the hands of Ukrainians” were observed between the respondents with the shortest (one year) and the longest (more than ten years) SRT. Among the former, the share of those who agree with the given statement is 20.5%, and that of those who disagree is slightly more than 45%. Among the other groups, the shares of those who agree and disagree with the statement equal 5.5% and nearly 70%, respectively. The differences are significant at the 1% level. The determination with which the respondents are ready to reject the interpretation of the causes of the war declared by the president of the aggressor country (e.g., he was afraid of a NATO attack from Ukrainian territory and that is the reason he started a military operation) increases as the SRT increases. Among those for whom the situation has been developing since 2022, less than half of the respondents (45.4%) disagree with this interpretation, and among those who think in time intervals of more than ten years, nearly two-thirds (63%) disagree. The differences are significant at the 5% level.

The respondents for whom the SRT exceeds ten years are the most consolidated in perceiving the Victory exclusively as the return of all occupied territories with Donbas and Crimea (Table 5): more than 67% agree with this interpretation of Victory, 13.7% disagree, and 19.2% do not have a clear position. The highest number of uncertain answers (35%) is among respondents for whom the current situation occurred in 2019 ($SPT \leq 5$ years). Compromise options for the end of the war (willingness to consider the withdrawal of Russian troops from the territories captured on February 24, 2022, as Victory) are unacceptable for more than half of the respondents only in the group with SRT longer than ten years. At the same time, 30.6% of them are ready to agree with a compromise interpretation of peace. In the groups of respondents counting the current situation from 2014 to 2019, the proportions of supporters and opponents of this option of ending the war are comparable, although there are more supporters here and there. Among those for whom the situation began in 2022, the readiness to accept territorial concessions from the enemy is the lowest. The differences are significant at the 1% level.

Respondents for whom SRT is equal to one year are more confident that Ukraine is actively supported in its resistance to Russian aggression by the people from Western countries (Table 6): nearly 68% agree with this statement, and only 6.3% disagree. Among those who measure the current situation since 2019, twice as many respondents (13.5%) doubt the support of Western societies, and among those for whom the situation began in 2014, 2.5 times more (15.7%). The differences are significant at the 5% level. Respondents with the longest SRT are more radical than others on renewing Ukraine's nuclear potential: 63% support this idea, and only 12.3% are against it. In the remaining groups, the number of supporters of renewing Ukraine's nuclear status is less than half. The differences are significant at the 1% level.

Table 6. Distribution of Answers to Questions Related to the International and Foreign Policy Context of the War in Connection with SPL (%)

SPL	We are actively supported by the people of Western countries, forcing their governments to provide us with more significant assistance.			Full-scale Russian invasion: international guarantees do not work. Ukraine must restore its nuclear potential to ensure its sovereignty and territorial integrity.		
	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree
from 2022	6.3	25.9	67.8	14.7	39.4	45.9
from 2019	13.5	31.9	54.6	18.4	37.6	44.0
from 2014	15.7	21.5	62.8	28.0	26.4	45.6
from 2010	9.6	28.8	61.6	12.3	24.7	63.0
In general	10.0	25.7	64.3	18.7	33.8	47.5
	Chi-square 27.986 (5% significance) The degrees of freedom 12			Chi-square 42.549 (1% significance) The degrees of freedom 12		

Table 7. Distribution of Answers to Questions Concerning the Attitude Toward Representatives of the Aggressor Country in Connection with SPL (%)

SPL	It is not easy to object to the fact that Russians and Ukrainians are one people.			It is a shame that in the liberated territories, traitors and collaborators feel unpunished that the courts let them go.			Many see Russian troops as their liberators.		
	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree	Disagree	Difficult to answer	Agree
from 2022	67.8	25.8	6.4	4.3	17.2	78.4	54.4	27.4	18.2
from 2019	79.4	14.2	6.4	4.3	20.6	75.2	61.0	27.0	12.1
from 2014	65.1	24.9	10.0	11.1	22.6	66.3	65.5	27.6	6.9
from 2010	82.2	11.0	6.8	2.7	26.0	71.2	63.3	23.3	13.7
In general	69.4	22.7	7.9	6.0	20.2	73.8	58.7	27.1	14.2
	Chi-square 25.527 (5% significance) The degrees of freedom 12			Chi-square 32.595 (5% significance) The degrees of freedom 12			Chi-square 26.029 (5% significance) The degrees of freedom 12		

The data presented in Table 7 show that the idea that “Russians and Ukrainians are one people” has been most resolutely rejected by the respondents from the group with SPT longer than ten years; more than 82% of them disagree with this statement. Among the respondents with $SPT \leq 10$ years, the proportion of those who disagree with the statement that Russians and Ukrainians are one people is 65.1%, whereas a tenth of them agree with this opinion. Less than 3% of the respondents from the group with SPT longer than ten years do not agree that the lack of punishment for collaboration and treason is a shame. Among those who believe the situation developed in 2014, this indicator is four times higher at 11.1%.

The respondents who keep track of the current time from 2022 are the most determined to punish collaborators and traitors—more than 78% of them agree that it is a shame to leave such crimes unpunished. Simultaneously, nearly a fifth (18.2%) of the respondents of this group agree that many Ukrainians see the Russian military as their liberators. Among the respondents for whom the current situation began in 2014, half as many (approximately 7%) agree with this statement. All reported differences are significant at the 5% level.

4. Discussion

The temporal dimension of a social situation is a crucial parameter for analyzing the peculiarities of its perception by an individual and its reflection in public opinion. The situation always unfolds in a coordinate system formed by personal-temporal and socio-spatial parameters (Slyusarevskyy, 2019). As a social situation, war involves the organization of life in time and space (Schneider, 1959).

The attempt to describe the Russian–Ukrainian war as a social situation presented in this work is based on the concept of the subjective duration of the present. The length of the present varies widely and primarily determines the amount of information used by the subject to build representative models of the current situation and the formation of behavioral reactions and patterns (Polunin, 2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b). As the research data show, at least half of Ukrainian citizens (50.1%) construct subjective representations of the present time (and simultaneously the war situation), operating within the limits of a time range of one calendar year. To some extent, these data echo the data of other social studies, which record the narrowing of the planning horizon of most Ukrainian citizens during a full-scale war (Rating Group, 2023). Nevertheless, other methods of temporal structuring of experience in Ukrainian society determine the subjective length of the present in segments of approximately five, ten, and more than ten years. Thus, we can confirm the first hypothesis formulated for this study about individual differences in the subjective length of the present time, adding this clarification: the broader the subjective horizon of events, the less common it is in Ukrainian society.

The reported individual differences are related to more or less positive evaluations by the respondents of the present time compared with the past or the expected future. The individuals with a longer subjective present evaluate the current situation (compared with past, peaceful years) less negatively than those who interpret the present from a shorter time perspective. It is generally included in the explanation based on the cause-and-purpose concept of psychological time, where psychological time is considered a form of human experience of the structure of cause-and-effect and instrumental-purpose relationships between life events (Golovakha & Kronyk, 2014). Therefore, the second hypothesis is also confirmed.

Finally, this study intended to check whether (and how) Ukrainian citizens' perceptions of the Russian–Ukrainian war as a social situation are related to their ideas about when exactly this situation occurred. The basis for such assumptions is the concept of the situational conditioning of an act, according to which the perception of a situation, in particular a war situation, takes place through the perspective of subjective dimensions of time (present, past, and future) and is represented at the level of individual and collective consciousness in the form of a set of social values, evaluations, and attitudes (Romenets, 1995).

The presented results show that the ability of respondents with the maximum subjective extension of the present to understand the war, based on a broader historical context, is associated with a more categorical (compared with other population groups) pro-Ukrainian position, stronger resistance to enemy propaganda narratives, and lower tendency to pessimism about the future. Citizens, whose subjective present is limited to one year, have a somewhat contradictory perception of the war. They do not have clear and established ideas about the reasons for Russian aggression, which is why they are ready to listen to certain narratives of Russian propaganda in this regard (for example, that NATO is fighting with the hands of Ukrainians). Nevertheless, they may have a lower level of trust in their fellow citizens in matters of stability and resistance to Russian aggression and advocate harsher punishment for crimes of collaboration and treason. It is legitimate to assume that due to the limited amount of information considered by such citizens when forming explanatory models of what happened in February 2022, they may be more sensitive to toxic manipulations (such as “witch hunts”) and other destructive informational influences.

The relevance of this analysis is limited by the fact that the empirical data were collected within the standard monitoring procedure, based on scales and indicators that were not explicitly designed to analyze individual and collective representations of war as a social situation. Therefore, additional research is needed to test the proposed hypotheses and verify the conclusions.

5. Conclusions

The presented study attempts to approach the war as a specific social situation from the point of view of those ideas that represent it in individual and mass consciousness. The content characteristics of such representations were shown to be related to the subjective length of the present, which functions as a cognitive frame for organizing experience.

Four types of organization of the subjective space of the present have been identified (one year, five years, ten years, and more than ten years). It was established that the respondents measure their present time either by the categories of war and peace (respondents for whom the current situation occurred in 2022 or 2014) or by the categories of the political process (respondents who regard the present from the years in of the presidential elections: 2010 and 2019). Measuring the situation with a political yardstick provides an appropriate perspective for perceiving and understanding the war, which can be predominantly mediated by political preferences and attitudes toward the current government. Moreover, from the point of view of public perception, two wars are being waged—the one that began in 2014, the prologue to which was the Revolution of Dignity, and the one that began in 2022, which was a catastrophic surprise for a large part of Ukrainians.

All these considerations do not exhaust the topic of the study of war as a perceived social situation but rather open space for further sociopsychological investigations.

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