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Entangled fates—the rally effect around Europe due to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered the deadliest escalation of a war in Europe since World War II. There is an extensive literature on the tendency of national leaders to experience a surge of support in times of international crises, which is dubbed the rally around the flag effect. However, much less attention is paid to whether a similar rally effect could be observed around a supranational flag. This study employs a quasi-experimental design to test whether the EU experienced a surge in support due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The results show that a rally around the EU did occur, and that it is best explained by considerations of advantages accorded by a united Europe rather than through the lens of European identity. The study is a cause of optimism regarding the ability of the EU to gain the support of even those who are not emotionally attached to the European project. However, the findings also place the onus on the EU to prove itself a reliable haven from threats for those who put their trust in it, from within and without.

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War in Europe and threatened Europeans

The 24th of February 2022 marked the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, which led to the deadliest escalation of a war since the end of WWII (ECFR, 2022). However, many regard this war not just as an attempt to break the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian spirit, but rather a war against Europe and the West in general (Financial Times, 2022). A well-established phenomenon in the literature is that at the time of international crises, there is a noticeable increase in the approval of national governments, which is dubbed the rally around the flag effect. A prominent example of this effect is the considerable increase in support for US President Bush from around 50% to 90% in the wake of the September 11 attacks (Hetherington and Nelson, 2003). The goal of this paper is to investigate whether the Russian invasion of Ukraine led to a rally effect around the supranational flag of the EU.

The perception of Russian threat to Europe in the wake of the invasion led to the launching of unprecedented sanctions against the Russian regime and economy (Reuters, 2022) and to providing humanitarian and even military aid to Ukraine (Kiel Institut für Weltwirtschaft, 2022), or as epitomised by the words of the president of the European Council: “A threat against Ukraine is a threat against Europe” (European Council, 2023)¹. We expect that this heightened Russian threat would lead the publics in Europe to rally around the supranational European flag. History is littered with examples of regions seeking closer unity in the context of external threats, such as the unification of German states during and after the Franco-Prussian War or the unification of the American states in the Revolutionary War against Britain. Identifying the mechanisms through which citizens support more supranational unity is important to researchers and the general public alike. For the former, it expands the literature of rallying around the flag from the national to the supranational context and contributes to the literature on dynamics of EU polity formation. For the latter, it can help by showing how public opinion shifts among Europeans as a response to external threats. This can help policymakers design more effective policies in times of crisis.

In this analysis, we exploit the fact that the field time for the European Social Survey (ESS) wave 10 in many countries included some months before and after the beginning of the Russian invasion. We use these data for a quasi-experimental design, where respondents who answered the survey directly before and after the start of the war should be quite similar except for the effect of the Russian invasion on their attitudes. The advantage of employing this quasi-experimental design is opening the door for drawing causal conclusions, instead of only uncovering potential correlations in the data. First, we establish the causal effect of the invasion on the attitudes towards European Unification, then we run several robustness and placebo tests. We then proceed to show that political interest, as a proxy for political sophistication, enhances the effectiveness of the treatment, meaning that more politically interested respondents show greater support for European unification due to the war. Additionally, we show that the level of attachment to Europe had no effect on how the threat from Russia changed support for European integration. These results, in combination with the previous findings, show more support for a functionalist understanding of the underlying mechanism, that is to say, that considerations about the benefits of a unified Europe, rather than identity, drove the rally around Europe effect.

The study provides causal evidence that the Russian invasion led Europeans to support a more unified EU, regardless of their emotional attachment to Europe. This shows the strength and resilience of the EU towards external threats, and that even those who are not natural supporters could still see the advantage

conferred by the EU, especially in times of crisis. The results also show how the events happening in Ukraine resonate with the European public; Ukraine holds some important keys to opening the hearts and minds of Europeans to the common European project. Putin has underestimated the EU’s internal and external solidarity in the face of aggression on its borders. However, in congruence with previous findings in the rally around the flag literature, results show that the rally effect was short-lived and support for EU integration returned to pre-war levels after about three weeks of the invasion. Ultimately, it is up to European leadership to continue to earn the support of the public and prove that the European flag won’t let down those who rally around it, be they already on the inside or soon to be.

Rallying around the (supra)nation

The rally around the flag effect was first introduced in the foundational text by Mueller (1970) based on the observation that the president of the United States tended to experience a surge in support during the times of international crises. Mueller (1970) stipulated the conditions for the effect to take place: (1) the event is international, (2) it involves the United States directly, and (3) it should be specific, dramatic, and sharply focused. The rally around the flag could be triggered intentionally by leaders instigating international conflicts in order to distract public attention from dissatisfaction with their rule (Tir, 2010), however, the rally around the flag is used more broadly in the literature to refer to the surge in public approval of national government in the wake of crises, regardless of these crises were instigated by the ruler, such as in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US (Hetherington and Nelson, 2003; Lambert et al., 2011; Lee, 1977).

While most studies investigated the rally around flag in the US (James and Rioux, 1998), the COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for a considerable number of studies into the rally effect in Europe by investigating the public opinion in individual countries towards the national government or the political system (Daniele et al., 2020; Hegewald and Schraff, 2022; Kritzing et al., 2021). These studies probed the rally effect in Europe on a national level; however, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 opened the floodgates of studying the rallying around the supranational European flag. The EU today has advanced significantly beyond its initial form of a framework of easing and coordinating trade into an entity with many state-like features, or in the words of Hobolt and De Vries (2016) that the EU evolved into an “economic and political union with wide-ranging competences”. The competences gained by the EU and its institutions include a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which was formalised in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty and rejuvenated through the formal launching of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in 2017. The growing importance of security in EU politics was not confined to the realm of policy, but extended into high profile proposals and debates regarding the formation of a European army by key EU politicians such as French president Emmanuel Macron, German chancellor Angela Merkel, and president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker (Graf, 2020). Additionally, European integration is commonly framed as a peace project that fostered cooperation and peaceful relations between former warring neighbours (Birchfield et al., 2017). Ultimately, the combination of the evolving state-like features of the EU, growing salience of security cooperation in EU politics, and the image of European integration as guarantor of peace in Europe makes the EU a potential rallying flag at the time of international crisis.

An earlier study, prior to the Russian invasion, investigated the rally effect around Europe in the aftermath of the Paris 2015 and Manchester 2017 terrorist attacks (Nowak, 2019). There was a

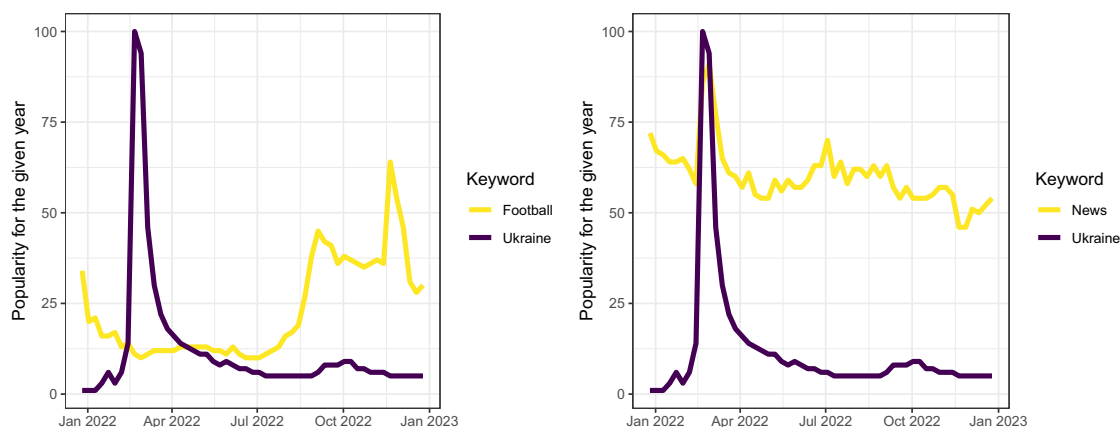


Fig. 1 Global popularity of search terms on Google in 2022.

significant increase in the post-attack reported attachment to the EU in the case of the Paris attacks, but not in the case of Manchester. The author argues that the null finding in the Manchester case could be due to the distant political and cultural role that the UK plays in the EU and due to a desensitising effect that took place after 2015 as many deadly attacks followed across Europe since then. Or it could be because the UK had already voted to leave the EU a year prior and as such, did not consider itself as part of the EU any longer. Another study looked into the rally effect from the 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks, by comparing participants who filled a survey three weeks and one week after the attacks (Kuehnhanss et al., 2021). The authors find an increased attachment towards both Belgium and the EU, but not on the municipality or province level.

The idea of more European unity and integration in the wake of the Russian invasion was seized upon by various authors (Genschel et al., 2023; Truchlewski et al., 2023; Wang and Moise, 2023). The study that most resembles the current analysis was conducted by Steiner et al. (2023). The authors fielded a survey regarding the effect of the Erasmus exchange experience on the students' attachment to the EU project, and coincidentally, the Russian invasion started four days after the beginning of the survey. These respondents were designated as the control group, and the respondents in the 18 days following the invasion were the treatment group. The results showed that indeed the treated group witnessed a significant and robust increase in different positive markers towards the EU. Unfortunately, despite the analysis drawing on observations from 19 countries, 86% of these observations came from Belgium, France, and Germany, and 13 Countries represented less than 4% of the observations. Moreover, Erasmus students represent a unique sample, as they are a lot younger, more educated, and are more informed about the EU than the general population. All in all, the current analysis aims to expand on the findings and address some of the limitations of this study. We aim to provide evidence for the rally around Europe effect with more representative samples of the EU.

The Russian invasion of 2022 arguably meets the criteria for the rally effect posited by Mueller (1970) due to its international and sharp dramatic nature, this is in contrast to other crises faced by the EU such as the so-called Greek debt crisis, which unfolded over years and involved intra-European disputes between creditor and debtor countries regarding responsibility shifting and policy solutions (Frieden and Walter, 2017). An analysis of Google search term popularity in Fig. 1 reveals that at the start of the invasion, global searches for Ukraine skyrocketed. Searches for the keyword Ukraine are shown in purple and are compared to other frequent keywords. Ukraine was relatively more popular than Football—the most popular sport in the world, even with the

FIFA World Cup hosted in Qatar in late 2022. Additionally, searches for Ukraine were even more popular than searches for news, even at the start of the invasion. Taken together, this provides evidence that the Russian invasion was a global phenomenon with a sharp and dramatic nature. Moreover, the state-like features of the EU make it more plausible for the second condition of the rally around the flag effect regarding the crises directly involving the nation to be applicable as well. Hence, we formulate our first hypothesis:

H1: Post-Russian invasion respondents show higher levels of support for European Unification compared to pre-invasion respondents.

Two of the most prominent grand theories of European integration, functionalism and post-functionalism, provide alternative avenues for investigating the potential mechanism behind a rally around the supranational European flag (Hooghe and Marks, 2019). Functionalism suggests that the expected gains in efficiency from more cooperation in Europe pave the road for more support of European integration. Post-functionalism, on the other hand, does not tie support for European integration to certain expected outcomes, but rather views European integration as a conflictual process between different identities, which could also lead to the direction of disintegration. Hence, we investigate whether the potential rally around the European flag flows from functional or post-functional considerations.

This line of reasoning draws from a study by Mader et al. (2023), where they analysed the effect of threat perception on support for European integration on defence policy, and tested whether a functionalist or post-functionalist channel would best explain this support. Along a functionalist reading, threat perception drives respondents to deliberate on the best way to avert such a threat, and many scholars and experts endorse the view that, indeed, European integration better equips Europe in the face of crises. This functionalist perspective for European integration, in the context of the Russian invasion, was also endorsed in the recent work by Truchlewski et al. (2023) and is one of the explanations provided by Steiner et al. (2023) regarding their observed positive rally effect.

Findings by Mader et al. (2023) regarding the role of political sophistication showed that at a high level of political sophistication, increased threat perception was associated with more support for European integration as compared to the support at a low level of political sophistication, which would be expected under a functionalist perspective as more politically sophisticated individuals are expected to be more aware of the advantages provided by a unified Europe in the face of external threats. According to Luskin (1990), interest and intelligence are the two major factors influencing political sophistication. Unfortunately, the European

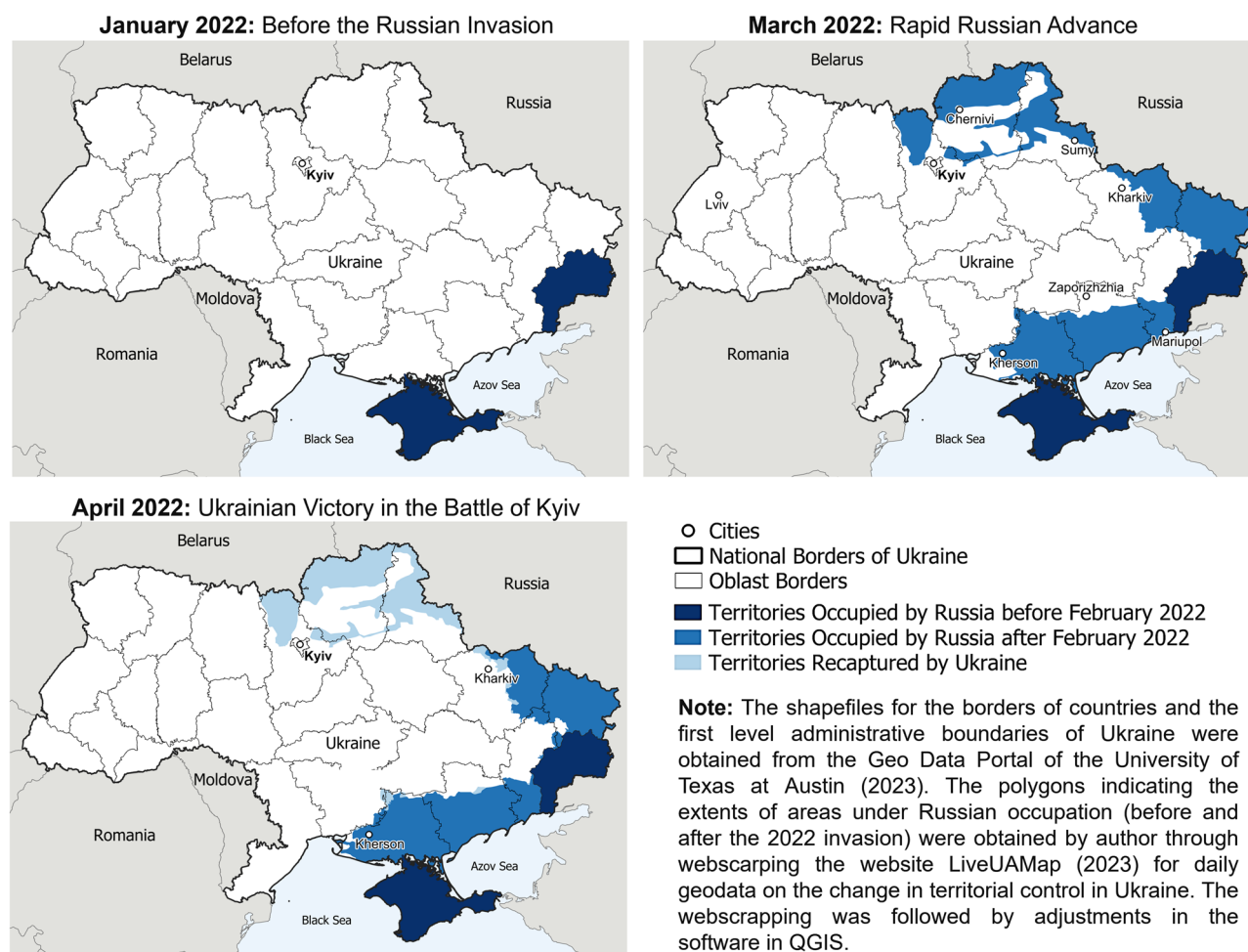


Fig. 2 Change in territorial control in Ukraine before and during the first months of the 2022 Russian invasion.

Social Survey does not offer good measures for political sophistication beyond political interest. As such, we use political interest in this analysis as a proxy for political sophistication. We conduct an additional analysis as a robustness check, where we follow Kölln (2018) in operationalizing political sophistication using political interest combined with education (as a proxy for cognitive capacity). We proceed with the following hypothesis:

H2: Respondents with a high level of political interest show a greater increase in EU support after the invasion as compared to respondents with a low level of political interest.

The second channel is based on a post-functional reading borrowing mainly from Hooghe and Marks (2009). The main argument is that identity can work to offset and even outweigh functionalist pressures. The expectation is that individuals with a weak European identity would withdraw towards the nation and away from European integration in the face of threats, while individuals with a strong European identity would be supportive of European integration in this context. This *inter-group empathy bias* (Cikara et al., 2014) or in-group favoritism and exclusion of the undeserving out-group is a familiar pattern in inter-group dynamics. It is also observed in social psychology research. Perhaps the most famous is social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978). The main argument is that groups seek positive self-identification in comparison to other groups. When groups face an existential threat, they become more biased towards their in-group (Gianakakis and Fritzsche, 2011). This effect is even stronger for those who identify strongly with their in-group (Morrison and Ybarra, 2008). It is therefore likely that those with a strong European

identity will be more threatened by the Russian invasion and support a stronger EU as a way to defend their identity.

H3: Respondents with a stronger attachment to Europe show more increase in EU support after the invasion as compared to respondents with a low level of political interest.

A concern could be raised that the potential rally effect is driven by non-EU member states in the sample. While EU members could already count on the EU to come to their aid politically and economically at the time of crisis (such as the European Union Recovery Instrument after the COVID crisis), non-member countries could perceive themselves to be more vulnerable to external threats, i.e., a belligerent faction could stand to incur fewer costs and risks by encroaching on non-member countries (Fearon, 1995). A functionalist reading renders this possibility more likely, therefore:

H4: Post-Russian invasion respondents show higher levels of support for European Unification compared to pre-invasion, and this effect is higher for non-EU members.

As a further test of the validity of the findings, we investigate a potential implication of the theory; if the rally around the EU is motivated by considerations of the benefits of a unified Europe, then we would expect that if the situation of Ukraine, which was declared an unequivocal ally by the EU, improves on the ground that should reflect on the perceived reliability and the strength of the EU. A fitting point to test this argument is the 4th of April 2022, after the Russian forces completed their withdrawal from the North and the Northeast of Ukraine, as shown in Fig. 2. This marked the Ukrainian victory in the battle of Kyiv and also shut

the door for the possibility of Russia defeating Ukraine in the opening months of the invasion:

H5: Respondents after the 4th of April 2022 show higher levels of support for European Unification compared to respondents before this date.

Data and methods

This paper uses the ESS wave 10, where the survey was fielded in 15 countries some months before and after the beginning of the Russian invasion². This allows for a quasi-experimental design. The design is known as the Unexpected Event During Survey (UESD) (Muñoz et al., 2020). It exploits unexpected events that happen during survey field time to compare people who answered the survey before and after the event to estimate the causal effect of the unexpected event on some outcome. The Russian invasion can arguably be considered an unexpected event. While Western intelligence predicted the invasion quite accurately, it was not taken seriously by many Western leaders (Eckel, 2023). The reasons for this mostly relate to previous failures of Western intelligence agencies to predict events in the Middle East and the Caucasus (Eckel, 2023). However, if the public perceived an invasion to be imminent, this could have changed the values of the dependent variable before the invasion. To test this, we present an analysis of our dependent variable for the control group in Figure A1 in the Appendix. If people anticipated the invasion before it happened and the same theoretical mechanisms were in place, one would expect a greater wish for European unity among respondents. However, no such deviations from the sample mean can be observed in any direction. Additionally, a placebo test is done in Fig. A2, which splits the control group in half using its median and takes the median as a placebo cutoff to test temporal stability of the dependent variable in the control group (Imbens and Lemieux, 2008; Muñoz et al., 2020). No significant effects ($p = 0.69$) are indicated by the placebo war dummy. These results corroborate the claim that respondents in the ESS did not expect the Russian invasion and did not change their attitudes towards European integration before the invasion happened.

To estimate credible causal effects, we compare respondents who took the survey two weeks before and after the invasion. Additional robustness checks changing this time window to 30, 7 and 3 days before and after the invasion are also used to test the robustness of our results. Moreover, a placebo test with the treatment being applied on the 24th of January 2022 (one month before the war) is run to further probe the robustness of the results. To create the control and treatment groups, a respondent participating within the time window *before* the day of the invasion (24.02.2022) is assigned to the control group, and if they participated within the time window *after* the invasion, they were assigned to the treatment group. The variable *War Dummy* was then created that takes the value of 0 for the control group and 1 for the treatment. Table A1 in the Appendix shows the number of observations in the control and treatment groups for the base model (two weeks before and after the war) broken down by country. In total, the sample contains 2434 observations from 15 countries, 8 EU members (two-thirds of the sample) and 7 non-members (one-third of the sample). The eight EU member countries were Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the seven non-members of the EU were either EU candidate countries or have an association/free trade agreement with the EU: Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Israel, Serbia, Switzerland, UK. The start of the Russian invasion did not fall within the fielding time of the ESS survey in other surveyed European countries. About 30% of the observations are from Spain and Poland, so as an additional robustness check, we include a model without these two countries. Finally,

the mean number of observations per country is about 164, with a standard deviation of 152.

The main dependent variable in the analysis is the question of whether *European unification should go further or gone too far*, which ranges from 0 meaning *gone too far* and 10 *go further*. As another robustness test, another dependent variable is used whether one *Would vote for [country] to remain/become member of the European Union*, which takes value of 0 for No and 1 for Yes. Several control variables are used, namely, a dummy for gender (1 for female), Left-Right ideological placement (0: left–10: right), age, a quadratic term for age, education based on ISCED classification (7 points), country specific income decile, church attendance, which was recoded so 1 would mean *Never* and 7 would mean *Daily*, and an urbanity index ranging from 1: Farm or home in countryside to 5: big city. Finally, authoritarianism is operationalized through the question of whether it is *Acceptable for a country to have a strong leader above the law*, where 0 means not acceptable at all and 10 is completely acceptable. While this is not the established authoritarianism scale used in social psychology research (Altemeyer, 2004), we believe that it captures some of the variation in authoritarianism as it is similar to some items in the Altemeyer scale. Overall, the sample is quite balanced between the control and treatment in terms of demographic controls, with only minor differences, mainly that the treatment group is slightly more right-wing, has more women, and is more urban. Table A2 and Fig. A3 in the Appendix report these results in more depth. While there are differences between treatment and control groups, one can still get unbiased estimates of the treatment by controlling for these factors in the main analyses (Muñoz et al., 2020).

After running the base model and the series of robustness tests, hence completing testing H1, we use two other variables to test H2 and H3. First, Political interest is recoded so 1 *means not interested* at all and 4 *means very interested*. Second, attachment to Europe is operationalized using the question *"how emotionally attached do you feel to Europe?"*, where 0 means *not at all emotionally attached* and 10 means *very emotionally attached*. As a robustness check, political sophistication is operationalized, following Kölln (2018), as an additive index of political interest and education level, which is obtained by dividing participants into 4 educational level categories, corresponding to quartiles of the years of education distribution.

Results and discussion

Main model and robustness. The results of the base model³ and various robustness tests are shown in Fig. 3 and the full regression tables are presented in Tables A3 and A4 in the Appendix. The treatment coefficient from the base model is shown at the bottom of the plot, and it shows a positive and significant effect. The results show that holding everything else constant, the treatment led to an average increase of 0.46 (p -value < 0.001) in the support for European Unification, which is equivalent to about 5 percentage points increase on the question scale and 10% increase from the average EU support in the control group. This effect size is roughly equal to moving from 5 (centrist) to 0 (left-wing) on the left-right scale in terms of EU support. This provides ample support for H1. The results from the model remain robust when entropy balancing is applied to the control and treatment groups using the R package *WeightIt* (Greifer, 2024). Figure 3 also shows treatment coefficients from three robustness models with a 30, 7, and 3 days time window, and the results remain positive and significant for all three time windows. The coefficient from an additional robustness model without the two largest countries represented in the dataset (Spain and Poland) is also presented, and the results remain significant, and the effect size even

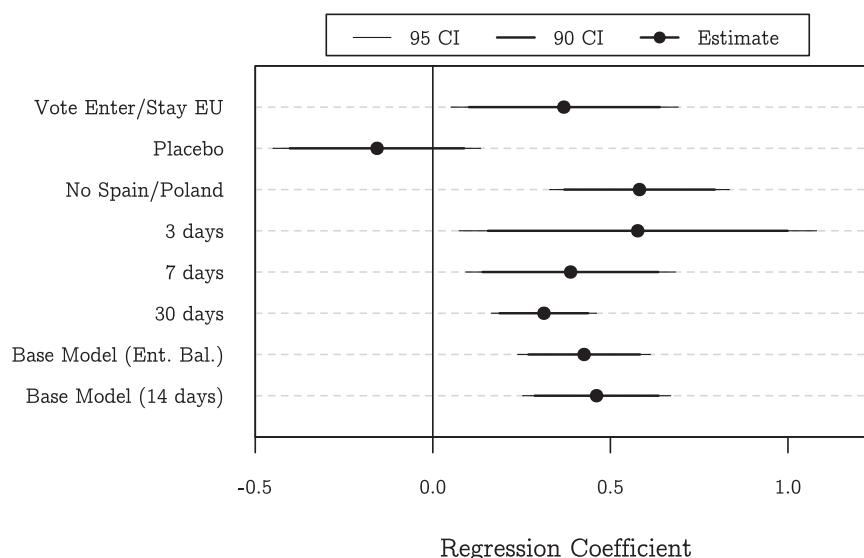


Fig. 3 Regression coefficients for the effect of the Russian invasion on support for European unification.

somewhat increases. The coefficient from a placebo test on 24.01.2022 (one month before the war) shows no statistically significant effect on EU attitudes (p -value 0.29). Finally, At the top of the plot is the coefficient from a logistic regression model with another dependent variable (whether one would vote to enter or stay in the EU), and it was also positive and statistically significant. In summary, these findings present clear and robust support for H1. This indicates that the average preferences for a united EU increased substantially after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the increase in support is substantively equivalent to the effect of shifting from being a centrist to being completely left-wing in terms of EU support.

Interactions with the treatment. The results for interactions with the treatment are provided in Table A5 in the Appendix. For a better understanding of the interaction effects, an average scenario simulation was carried out for each variable using the *Clarify* package in R following the methodology outlined by King et al. (2000), where all variables are set at their mean level while varying the treatment dummy from 0 to 1 and the interaction variable of interest along the range of observed values in the sample. The simulated results are presented in two plots in Fig. 4. The solid lines in the figures represent the control scenario, and the dashed lines are the treatment scenarios. The grey bands show the 95% confidence intervals (the grey becomes darker where the confidence intervals overlap), and at the bottom, the distribution of the interaction variable in the sample is presented in black columns.

The left plot shows the interaction between the treatment and attachment to Europe. In line with H3, there was no statistically significant change in EU support along the entire range of attachment to Europe, where EU support at low attachment to Europe ($=0$) increased by 0.51 and at high attachment to Europe ($=10$) by 0.42, which is 0.09 difference (with a p -value of 0.81); There was a minor insignificant decrease in change in EU support at highest level of attachment to Europe compared to the lowest level. These results are contrary to the polarising effect that follows from a post-functionalist explanation; therefore, we reject H3. The right plot shows the interaction between the treatment and political interest. Unlike the case of attachment to Europe, the effect of the treatment increased as political interest increased, where at low political interest ($=1$) there was no significant difference between the treatment and control support for EU

(first difference 0.24, p -value 0.2), but at high political interest ($=4$) support for the EU increased by 0.73 (p -value < 0.001). Hence, we fail to reject H2, and this finding remained robust in the political sophistication model, where there was no significant increase in EU support at low political sophistication (first difference 0.3, p -value 0.16) and a significant increase at high political sophistication (first difference 0.64, p -value 0.01).

While not directly concerned with our hypotheses, we run additional robustness checks by interacting the war treatment with people's individual support for democracy and authoritarianism. While the current findings indicate that the rally around the EU was not driven by European identity, the Russian invasion of Ukraine could be viewed as an assault on the values of liberal democracy that unite Ukraine and the EU. Hence, the rally effect could have taken place around the values of the EU. If this line of argument is valid, then we would expect that strong democrats and non-authoritarians—who embody the values of the EU—would be more likely to rally around the EU compared to non-democrats and authoritarian individuals. The results for these interactions are visible in Fig. A4 in the Appendix. The figure shows clear non-effects of authoritarianism and democratic values on how the invasion influences support for the EU. In plain terms—people valuing democracy do not become more supportive of the EU after the invasion compared to those who do not value democracy. In a similar vein, authoritarians do not become more or less supportive of the EU after the invasion compared to their non-authoritarian counterparts.

Ultimately, the invariant reaction based on European identity, authoritarianism and valuing democracy, combined with the positive effect of political interest on the treatment, gives more support to a functionalist explanation behind the rally effect around Europe after the war. The functionalist readings of the results are in-line with previous findings by Mader et al. (2023), where individuals with strong and weak European identities were both more in support for European security integration as their level of threat perception increased, and that the effect of threat perception on security integration was moderated by the individual's level of political sophistication. Further confidence in the robustness of the current results is attained by showing that the treatment (start of the Russian invasion) had no direct effect on either political interest or attachment to Europe, as summarised in Table A6 in the Appendix.

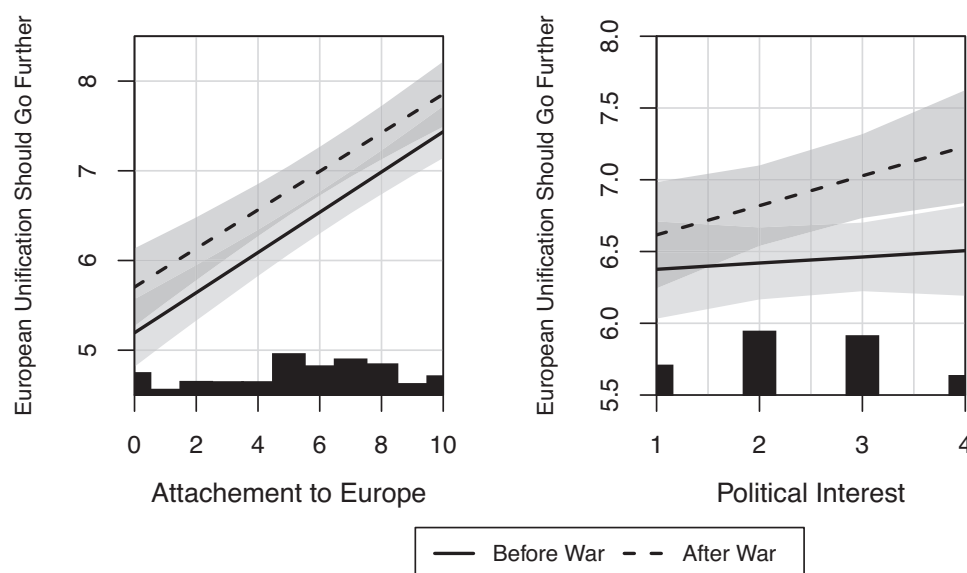


Fig. 4 Simulating the effect of political interest and European identity on the treatment.

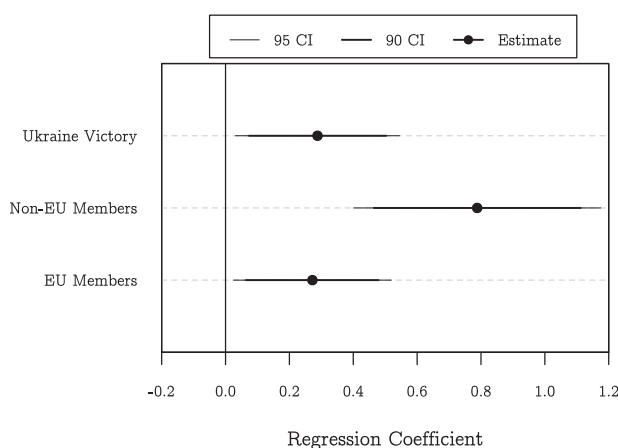


Fig. 5 The effect of the Russian invasion conditional on EU membership and the effect of Ukrainian victory in the battle of Kyiv.

EU membership and Ukrainian victory. The coefficients for the effect of the treatment for EU and Non-EU members and the effect of Ukrainian victory in the battle of Kyiv are shown in Fig. 5, and the complete regression results are reported in Table A7 in the Appendix. At the bottom of the plot is the treatment coefficient for the model only containing respondents from EU countries, and the coefficient is positive and statistically significant, however, this coefficient is much smaller compared to the coefficient for non-EU member countries (0.27 as compared to 0.79), which is in line with hypothesis H4. This finding could be explained in accordance with “deterrence theory” in international relations, which posits that high costs of aggression deter foes from belligerence, and alliances are one way of signalling these high costs (Snyder and Diesing, 1977). Alliances also make war less likely because they impose peacetime costs on members, which signals commitment (Morrow, 1994). Long-standing members of an alliance, thus, could be more satisfied with the level of deterrence achieved by their peacetime signalling, while aspiring members would be more eager to join the alliance as their immediate way of signalling the high costs of aggression. Another factor contributing to the relative increase of EU support among non-members of the EU flows from the theory of political

opportunity structures for social mobilisation (Tarrow, 1988), where non-member countries could obtain additional motivation to demand further European unification as crises create political openings that make previously unattainable goals (like EU membership) more realistic.

Returning to the main results in Fig. 5, we can see that the top coefficient in the plot is the effect of the treatment with the Ukrainian victory in the battle of Kyiv. The coefficient is positive and statistically significant, supporting H5 regarding the increase in the rallying effect around Europe when the benefit of being an EU ally is shown on the ground. As a robustness check, adding four countries that were removed due to a lack of observations had virtually no effect on the results, as reported in Table A7. Further robustness checks that were not reported here for brevity showed that moving the date of the victory by one day in the past or up to less than a week in the future (allowing time for news about the victory to penetrate the public) still results in a significant coefficient with a similar effect size, although at certain days the coefficient was significant only at the 90% level. Based on these findings, we fail to reject H5 and find support for the rallying effect of the success of Ukraine provides to the reliability of its EU ally.

Disaggregating the rally effect over time and space. To test how the attitudes towards EU integration evolved over time, we interact the war treatment dummy with the date of when the survey was started by the respondent. The results are shown in Fig. 6. The full regression coefficients are in Table A8 in the Appendix. There is no interaction effect between time and the 14 day treatment ($p = 0.97$), however, there is a significant negative interaction between time and the 30 day treatment ($p = 0.006$). The negative interaction term suggests that the effect of the Russian invasion on European unity decreases over time. The EU support returns to pre-war levels at around 21 days after the invasion. This is why there is no significant interaction in the 14-day treatment condition. The results suggest that while the Russian invasion of Ukraine increased support for European unity, the effects are not long-lived and are present for around 3 weeks after the invasion.

We additionally test our argument by dividing the sample into three regions: Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Southern Europe + Israel. Western countries are classified as Belgium,

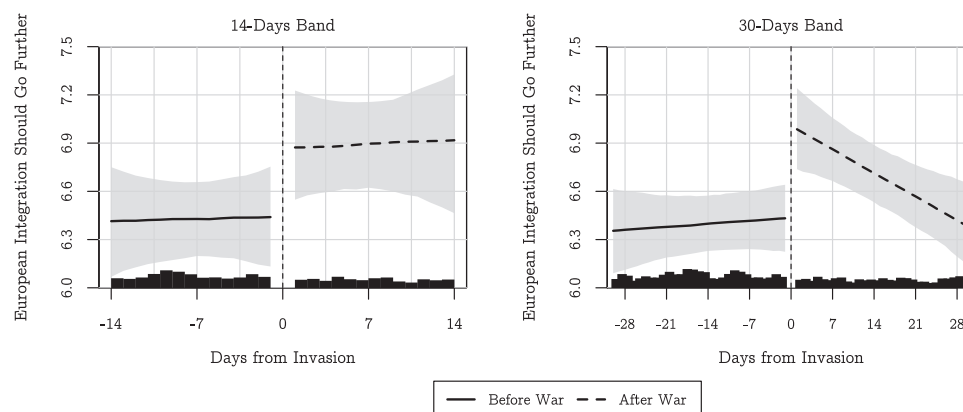


Fig. 6 The effect of the Russian invasion conditional on time with 14 and 30 day bandwidths.

Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Norway. Eastern countries are classified as Serbia, Poland, Montenegro and North Macedonia. For Southern states, we take Southern European countries like Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain, and add Israel due to it being closest geographically to these countries. Table A10 in the Appendix shows the effects by region with a 14-day bandwidth. The regressions show that the invasion most strongly affected support in Eastern Europe (coefficient 0.679, $p = 0.01$), followed by Southern European states and Israel (coefficient 0.395, $p = 0.003$). The results for Western Europe are the weakest (beta coefficient 0.382, $p = 0.06$). A very similar result is shown in Table A11 in the Appendix where we run the same analyses with the 30-day bandwidth. Overall, the findings appear intuitive as the Eastern European countries in the dataset are the closest to Russia and, as such, might be the most threatened by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Conclusion

If the Russian war against Ukraine were a novel, perhaps *A War of Surprise* would be a fitting name. Not just because the start of the war caught almost the entire world by surprise, but for all the surprises that followed: that Kyiv did not fall in three days or a week or months, that the EU stood united in delivering a wave after wave of sanctions, that Germany announced its *Zeitenwende* and has become the biggest provider of military aid to Ukraine after the United States. Nevertheless, another surprise of this war is opening up the door for an academic enquiry into the rally effect around the supranational European flag, a topic that is yet to be thoroughly covered in the literature. In this study, we contribute to the literature on the rally effect on a supranational level by exploiting the fielding time of the European Social Survey to carry out a quasi-experimental design. The results indicate that the rally around the EU followed the expectations of a functionalist account of the rally effect, as identity did not cause the polarising effect of a post-functionalist reading. The results also indicate that, especially in countries that are yet to be EU members, they see the benefits in European integration in the time of crisis. Further confidence in the findings was gained by testing an implication of the results, namely, that the success of Ukraine on the ground was another rallying force around the EU.

This study does come with some important limitations. A large amount of the observations come from Spain and Poland—two countries, whose citizens are among the strongest supporters of the EU in the dataset. To address the potential bias from these two countries, we carried out several robustness checks and showed that the results are robust while excluding Spanish and Polish respondents. Additionally, it is important to note that these effects are rather short-lived. The initial increase in the support for

European unification decreases over time. Furthermore, many complex phenomena, like European identity, political sophistication and authoritarianism, are measured by only one item. These measurements most likely do not fully account for the complexity of these concepts. Finally, while our results are balanced and robust in the aggregate, due to sample size issues, we cannot make confident inferences on the individual country level.

As such, there are many avenues for further research. Scholars could use datasets that are more balanced and include more European countries to measure the effects of Russia's war on Ukraine. They could also utilise present data to develop a more sophisticated time-lapse of how public opinion towards the EU evolved over time. Additionally, surveys that have better items for European identity and political sophistication could be utilised to analyse how these complex phenomena relate to support for European integration after the start of the war. Moreover, individual country studies with representative samples could also be used to ascertain whether the invasion increased support for European integration in individual countries. Finally, there is a debate in the literature regarding why crises in general lead the public to rally around their national leaders. One of the proposed general drivers of the rally effect is the lack of criticism from the media (and opposition figures) as they take the line of the government and convey the image of a unified national front (Groeling and Baum, 2008). While the sudden and dramatic nature of the war would make the perception of the events less susceptible to pre-packaged media narratives, especially at the days immediately following the start of the war, the findings of this analysis could serve as an impetus for studying the role of the media in steering support for the EU over time or for a comparative study regarding the effect of media coverage on the rally around the EU during different crises.

The findings contribute to our understanding of the potential of events outside the EU in influencing the European integration process and the potential mechanisms by which these events change the attitudes of individuals in Europe. In the end, while the EU is said to be in a state of *Permacrisis*, the response to the Russian invasion from the EU and its' citizens in favour of a more unified Europe that includes Ukraine seems to be a healthy sign of not shying away from facing the challenges of a more complex world. EU supporters and detractors alike seem to understand the value of the project and are more likely to want to expand it when confronted with an outside threat to a friendly neighbouring country. The current moment is almost unparalleled in modern history for European leaders to prove those who rally and fight for Europe right.

Data availability

The data, and code used to produce the results of this article are available in a public GitHub repository:<https://github.com/>

ukraine-entangled-fates/ukraine-entangled-fates). The raw data could be downloaded free of charge from the data portal of the European Social Survey, Wave 10.

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Notes

- 1 The heightened threat perception was also shared by European citizens. A YouGov poll in eight EU countries in May 2022 showed that among the top four concerns reported by participants were Russian threats of 1) nuclear weapon usage, 2) chemical weapon usage, and 3) military action aimed at one's country, with the other top concern being costs of living and energy prices (Krastev and Leonard, 2022).
- 2 The data, and code used to produce the results of this article are available in a public GitHub repository here: (<https://github.com/ukraine-entangled-fates/ukraine-entangled-fates>).
- 3 We also run the model individually for each country in Table A9 in the Appendix. The coefficients for almost all countries are in the expected direction. The UK and Italy have negative coefficients, which are not statistically significant. However, the small sample size for some individual countries prevents us from making country-level inferences. Spain and Poland, whose respondents make up a large part of the respondents, do provide us with some insights. The effects for Spain are not significant, while being significant in the Polish case at the 90% level ($p = 0.088$). Its stronger effect for Poland as compared to Spain could be due to Poland's proximity to Ukraine and Russia.

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Author contributions

The corresponding author prepared the introduction, processed the raw data, conducted the main analyses, produced main results, contributed to the literature review and robustness check, prepared Figs. 2, 3, 4, and 5, and Tables A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, and A7. The second author contributed to the framing, literature review, research design, robustness checks and conclusion, and prepared Figs. 1, A1, A2, A3. The two authors reviewed the manuscript and collaborated virtually equally on preparing the responses for the revision.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors. The study is based on publicly available European Social Survey data. The European Social Survey adheres to the Declaration on Professional Ethics of the International Statistical Institute and has established a Research Ethics Board to oversee ethical standards in its research activities. More information can be accessed on the website of the European Social Survey: <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about/research-ethics>.

Informed consent

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Additional information

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