Civilian Agency and Non-Cooperation in Inter-State Armed Conflict
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Abstract

How and why do civilians refuse cooperation with governments during wartime mobilisation? Research examining civilian cooperation and non-cooperation within conflict studies has largely overlooked the micro-level dynamics of civilian resistance in inter-state war. Addressing this gap, this study uses testimonial data on the lived experiences of Russian civilians who refused cooperation with the Russian state following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The paper develops an argument that manifestations of civilian non-cooperation are shaped by individual and collectivised security seeking behaviour within repressive governance structures. It integrates theories of civilian agency and authoritarian repression. Lived experiences of violent repression both construct the image of the state as a violent institution and inform the efficacy of tactics of resistance, resulting in variation between avoidance, overt-resistance and oblique-resistance behaviours. As an exploratory study, the paper identifies gaps in our understanding and avenues for future research on civilian cooperation and non-cooperation in inter-state armed conflict.

Contents

1. Introduction

On February 24th 2022, Russia's Armed Forces began a full-scale invasion of neighbouring Ukraine, in what President Putin declared was a 'special military operation' to 'demilitarise and denazify' the country (President of Russia, 2022, para. 36). The war has resulted in the deaths of thousands of young Russians mobilised to fight in Ukraine and over eighty-thousand reports of war crimes perpetrated by the Russian Armed Forces (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine *A/77/533*, 2022).[1] While bringing the world back to the brink of great power war and nuclear disaster, the conflict has also further intensified debate about the future of the international rules-based order and the capacity of state actors to enforce it (Acharya, 2022; Heath et al., 2022; Mearsheimer, 2019; Wang & Sun, 2021; Wei, 2022). The aftermath of the invasion was followed by appeals from world leaders to the people of Russia to resist. As Ukraine's President put it in his address on the eve of Russia's invasion: 'Do Russians want war? … the answer depends only on you, citizens of the Russian Federation' (Zelensky, 2022). The invasion did spark civilian backlash across Russia. Protests against the war and military conscription have been violently suppressed and criminalised, while thousands have fled the country escaping conscription (Kremlin, 2022a; OVD-Info, 2022ab; Pavlova, 2022).

The Russian case raises important questions: How and why do civilians refuse cooperation with governments during wartime mobilisation? States depend on the public for resources and manpower to wage war and governments seek to mobilise civilians, to defend state security and achieve their political aims by whatever means they deem necessary (Rozenas et al., 2022; Tilly, 1985; Waldman et al., 2022). Despite this, research examining civilian cooperation and

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[1] Conservative estimates suggest that over three-hundred-thousand Russian and Ukrainian soldiers, along with eight-thousand civilians, have been killed as of April 2023 (UN OHCHR, 2023). An estimated eight-million refugees have fled Ukraine (UNHCR, 2023).

non-cooperation in armed conflict has largely overlooked cases of inter-state war. This study begins to address this gap. Focusing on testimonial data detailing the lived experiences of Russian civilians who resisted the state following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, it identifies factors influencing critical decision-making at the individual level to explain why civilians refuse cooperation with state actors during war-time mobilisation. The paper integrates findings and theories from research on civilian agency in armed conflict and authoritarian repression and argues that civilian behaviour is shaped by security seeking behaviours within repressive governance structures. Lived experiences of violent repression both construct the image of the state as a violent institution and inform the efficacy of tactics of resistance, manifesting in variation between avoidance, overt-resistance and oblique-resistance behaviours.

2. Literature Review: The Empirical Gap in Inter-State Armed Conflict

Conflict research has made significant progress towards understanding civilian behaviour during wartime. Here, non-cooperation is understood as the active refusal by civilians as the active 'refusal to cooperate, either directly or indirectly, with armed organisations' (Masullo, 2021a, p. 1851). Studies within this body of literature have sought to identify factors influencing how civilians make critical decisions affecting their survival and how this translates into behaviours of support, passive-obedience, political contestation or overt-resistance. Studies have largely focused on cases of civil wars (Arjona, 2017; Gade, 2020; Gowrinathan & Mampilly, 2019; Jentzsch, 2022; Kaplan, 2017; Masullo, 2021b; Schubiger, 2021; Shesterinina, 2016) and criminal war (Arias, 2019; Herrera, 2022; Moncada, 2023; Phillips, 2016; Wolff, 2020).[2]

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[2] Specifically, research on a diverse range of intra-state conflict cases has explored factors shaping patterns of civilian migration (Adhikari, 2013; Ibanez, 2009; Lichtenheld, 2020; Steele, 2009; Williams et al., 2012), civilian support and cooperation (Arjona, 2017; Barter, 2012; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008; Kalyvas, 2006; Malthaner, 2015) and the emergence of violent (Blocq, 2014; Condra & Wright, 2019; Costalli & Ruggeri, 2015; Jentzsch,

However, a major empirical gap in the literature on civilian agency in armed conflict is the lack of focus on civilian behaviour in the context of inter-state war, where state actors seek to co-opt and mobilise civilians in support of violence. Governments seek civilians' support to legitimise violent interventions, they enlist civilians to carry out violence (Fewster, 1985; Levi, 1996; Zeiger, 1996) and they demand individuals to commit their lives to the defence of the collective nation.[3] However, in contexts of inter-state war, how civilians negotiate this relationship with the state, why they cooperate and why they refuse, and the behaviours in which this manifests, all remain little understood.

History has demonstrated the importance of civilian support for state actors engaged in armed conflict. Governments dedicate vast resources to secure public legitimacy, as well as mobilise civilians in pursuit of their political aims and the defence of the state (Berinsky, 2007; Gellately, 2001; Johnson & Nichols, 1998; Vultee, 2010). Moreover, empirical research on civilians in armed conflict has highlighted the significant role that civilian support or resistance bears for the dynamics of armed conflict, from shaping governance in conflict settings (Gowrinathan & Mampilly, 2019; Weinstein, 2006) to influencing the intensity of violence on the battlefield and against non-combatants (Hultman, 2007; Kalyvas, 2006; Wood, 2014). Understanding civilian behaviour in inter-state war is thus of key importance for explaining the dynamics of armed conflict.

Explanations for the emergence of civilian resistance against armed groups in the context of civil war have centred on the strength of social cohesion within formal and informal institutions which

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2022; Osorio et al., 2021; Schubiger, 2021; Wolff, 2020) and non-violent (Arjona, 2017; Kaplan, 2017; Ley, 2022; Masullo, 2021a; Vüllers & Krtsch, 2020) forms of collective resistance to armed groups.

[3] Here, civilians are defined as ordinary non-combatants (i.e. with no direct links to state security) living within the borders of a state during armed conflict.

enable civilians to engage in collective resistance (Arjona, 2017; Gade, 2020; Kaplan, 2017; Parkinson, 2013; Petersen, 2001; Wolff, 2020). When armed groups engage in civilian victimisation and exploitative forms of governance this instils grievances that motivate resistance (Condra & Wright, 2019; Kaplan, 2017). However, when it comes to the forms of resistance that emergence, recent studies have argued that ideologies, rooted within the social norms, lived experience and historical memory of communities, influence the methods of contention and resistance that communities develop (Jentzsch & Masullo, 2022; Masullo, 2021a; Osorio et al., 2021; Wolff, 2020).

However, these findings are primarily rooted in cases of intra-state armed conflict in contexts where sovereignty is fragmented and contested. The character of inter-state conflict differs from civil war in ways that can be consequential for civilian choices. Civil war is 'armed combat taking place within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities' (Kalyvas, 2009, p. 417). Factions form and compete for control of the territory and polity and violence becomes an instrumental means of state-building (Tilly, 1978, 1985). 'Sovereign rupture,' the fragmentation of power and authority, is central (Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl, 2019, p. 1542). The pursuit of security necessitates civilians to make critical choices affecting their survival (Arjona, 2017).

During civil conflict, armed groups are often met with the presence of pre-existing social orders and traditional institutions that allow civilians to organise (Arjona, 2017; Gowrinathan & Mampilly, 2019; Jentzsch & Masullo, 2022; Kaplan, 2017). States possess highly developed institutions, bureaucracies and security architectures to mobilise civilians in service of state security and civilians remain subject to centralised regulatory power. Particularly, modern authoritarian regimes possess advanced technical means to censor and control information. They

possess legal instruments with dismantled accountability for targeted violent repression to coercively induce compliance and prevent the formation of social networks that facilitate collective resistance (Finkel & Brudny, 2012; King et al., 2017; MacKinnon, 2011; Paul & Matthews, 2016; Siegel, 2011). Resistance entails extreme personal risks.

Numerous factors driving civilian engagement in protest have been identified by scholars of social movements, ranging from anger induced by state behaviour, to the efficacy of tactics of resistance and the normative values that communities hold (Jentzsch & Masullo, 2022; Klandermans & Stekelenburg, 2014; Pearlman, 2016; Stekelenburg, 2013; van Zomeren et al., 2004). Governments and civilians act based on mutual expectations of each other's behaviour. Governments seek to deter and prevent dissent, while civilians behave in anticipation of repression (Ritter & Conrad, 2016; Siegel, 2011). In this way, infrastructures of state repression serve, not only to motivate resistance, but to shape the methods of contention which civilians adopt. Modern technologies of repression from mass-surveillance systems to checkpoints have in the context of social movements been found to induce perceived isolation and hopelessness, resulting in an inability to collectively organise, driving support for individualised, violent, resistance over peaceful-collective action (Gade, 2020).

Similar patterns have been observed in past research on civilian resistance to conscription regimes and anti-war movements in western democracies (Churchill, 2012; Cortright, 2008; Foley, 1999; Hagan, 2001; Rutenberg, 2019). For example, draft resisters and participants in the peace movement in the United States during the Vietnam War, often internalised anti-state ideologies based on their experiences of state-violence, including the oppression of ethnic-minorities and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This constructed a view of the state as corrupt and coercive resulting in civilian non-cooperation (Cortright, 2008; Foley, 1999).

The experiences and perceived success of peaceful collective action during the Civil Rights Movement further informed the tactics of nonviolent resistance that peace activists employed (Cortright, 2008).

While some previous studies have addressed civilian non-cooperation and protest in contexts of inter-state war, there are three key limitations of these studies. First, (although this is beyond the scope of this study), they do not examine civilian cooperation and non-cooperation with state actors comparatively, which overlooks the complex factors which differentiate support for war and obedience, with resistance. Second, civilian non-cooperation is often conceived narrowly, as resistance to conscription or political protest, which overlooks broader forms of civilian non-cooperation that seek to overtly or obliquely resist the state or undermine the interests of armed groups (Case, 2019; Masullo, 2021b). Third, these studies are limited to a few examples in western democracies, which despite common instances of violent suppression, are tolerant of freedom of assembly. The nature, experience and memory of repression is distinct from established autocratic regimes, especially those in the post-Soviet republics (Finkel & Brudny, 2012). This study addresses the two latter points.

Given the risks that non-cooperation entails under authoritarian regimes, the emergence of resistance to authoritarian rule is often considered a key puzzle which an extensive body of research has sought to explain (Gehlbach et al., 2016). Studies have made progress towards understanding the emergence and dynamics of civilian resistance under repression (Arendt, 1970; Davenport et al., 2003; Pearlman, 2021; RezaeeDaryakenari, 2021; Ritter & Conrad, 2016; Sutton et al., 2014). However, there is a significant gap in our understanding of why and how civilians resist in cases where the state seeks to mobilise and enlist them in armed conflict, both in terms of the refusal to provide legitimacy to the state and to sacrifice their lives in war.

3. Theories of Civilian Non-Cooperation

3.1 Social Structures and Threat Construction

The importance of social structures and their outputs has been widely recognised within conflict studies. Studies of civilians in armed conflict have highlighted the role of communal social structures in generating social pressures that drive engagement in high-risk mobilisation (Petersen, 2001; Weinstein, 2006), facilitating group-recruitment (Aspinall, 2009; Fujii, 2010; Wood, 2014), shaping the nature of combatant and civilian institutions in armed conflict (Kaplan, 2017; Parkinson, 2013; Staniland, 2012) and guiding the tactics of resistance which groups and individuals support (Gade, 2020; Jentzsch & Masullo, 2022). Social structures also provide access to information that frames threats and informs mobilisation decisions. 'Without an understanding of who is threatened, by whom, and to what extent, individuals have no basis on which to make difficult choices about whether to risk their lives fighting for the group or to pursue alternative options' (Shesterinina, 2016, p. 411).

The pursuit of security is in itself a fundamental need at the core of psychological theories of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2018). At the centre of macro-level theories of political mobilisation is how securitizing narratives induce support and drive action through constructing perceptions of threat (Buzan & Wæver, 2009; Stritzel, 2007). At the micro-level, studies of civilian attitudes and behaviour in civil armed conflict have shown that when civilians experience state violence or witness armed actors engaging in behaviour perceived as threatening, they lose trust, resulting in disobedience and non-cooperation (Condra & Wright, 2019; Gowrinathan & Mampilly, 2019; Masullo, 2021b). The inter-relationship between state violence and civilian distrust has been

found to be statistically significant across both cases of civil war and early-twentieth century inter-state armed conflicts (Grosjean, 2014).

3.2 Individual & Collective Threat Perceptions

Research on micro-level variation in civilian behaviour in armed conflict has highlighted the importance of threat framing within individuals' social environment in producing information asymmetries which drive civilians to engage in differing courses of action. How individuals understand threat both motivates their actions and shapes resulting behaviours. 'Depending on how the threat is perceived—whether toward the self or the collectivity at its different levels—individuals adopt self-to other-regarding roles, from fleeing, to fighting on behalf of the collectivity, even if [the collective] is a weaker actor' (Shesterinina, 2016, p. 411).

However, in the context of authoritarian regimes who employ violent coercion as a tool of governance, the dynamics of security seeking are complex and the psychological dynamics underlying variation between civilian support and opposition remain little understood (Przeworski, 2022). What can be observed is that while repression incentivises others to resist, others may seek to cooperate fearing the consequences of disobedience or seeking protection (Cohen, 2016; Kalyvas, 2006; Rozenas et al., 2022). While social structures play a significant role in threat construction, they can further incorporate ideational processes that shape tactics of non-cooperation. Information asymmetries produced by social structures can be considered central. The threat of violence is perceived differently by individuals who engage in non-cooperation, who internalise a perception of cooperation with the state as detrimental to their own security and that of the greater collective.

It can be predicted that those who, within their social environment, are pushed towards a normative understanding of the threat centred on the greater collective with whom they identify are predicted to choose high-risk forms of mobilisation that serve to protect the collective. In contrast, those to whom the threat is framed as an immediate personal danger are likely to prioritise self-preservation (Shesterinina, 2016).

3.3 Availability: Knowledge, Normative Factors and the Individual

Historical experiences and social pressures can be considered crucial in guiding how individuals evaluate the risks of a given form of non-cooperation and make meaning of their behaviour (Jentzsch, 2022; Masullo, 2021a; Osorio et al., 2021; Wolff, 2020). In their analysis of variation between violent and non-violent collective resistance, Jentzsch & Masullo (2022), posit that the development of tactics of resistance is guided by empirical and normative availability mechanisms rooted within group social contexts. While these mechanisms were developed to explain collective action, they may also have strong explanatory value in explaining individualised decision-making paths. *Empirical availability,* entails that historical experiences provide knowledge related to tactics of resistance and inform a subjective understanding of their efficacy (that a strategy of resistance can achieve a goal). *Normative availability* entails that forms of resistance must be socially accepted and resonate with norms and esteemed values pervasive within a social environment which approve or dissuade given tactics of contention.

How individuals perceive a given situation can be constructed by shared information in diverse forms of social networks, for example, through collective threat framing by others (Shesterinina, 2016), or from media sources that induce emotional reactions (Hsiao, 2018; Pearlman, 2016).

Biographical availability, however, entails that factors guiding individual choice can be rooted in aspects of individuals' lived experience, which provide both grievances and knowledge (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Earl et al., 2017; McAdam, 1986). Specific individuals may form part of marginalised groups or may be the target of repression, either for their political affiliations, or for example, being the target of forced conscription.

Based on these insights from the existing literature, a central prediction that can be inferred is that the social environment in which individuals live exposes them to information and collective threat construction that influences how they perceive the threat they face, driving their motivations for resistance and how they resist. Lived experience and information shared within their social environment provide knowledge and social incentives that guide how they frame risks and evaluate strategies of non-cooperation in terms of efficacy, normative value and risk, thus influencing the tactics of non-cooperation in which they engage.

Indications that would verify these findings would include testimonies from individuals which affirm that over their life-time individuals are exposed to information which constructs a view of the state and its institutions as a source of violent threat. As a result they distrust official government narratives and actively seek alternative information, whereby they construct a perception of the conflict and the state's political aims that contrasts with the securitisation narrative the state employs.[4]

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[4] For detailed information on the theoretical predictions that guided this study, see Appendix.1.

4. Research Design

4.1 Case Selection & Characteristics

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a major geopolitical event with wide ranging implications for global security. It is a case of an established autocratic regime engaging in external armed conflict. Russia itself is also a major innovator and exporter of modern technologies for information control, mass-surveillance and the targeted repression of civilians. Exploring civilian behaviour in this case serves to shed light, not only on how civilians resist cooperation with the state in contexts of 21st Century inter-state armed conflict, but how civilians behave in contexts of modern digitalised state repression.

Two key characteristics are central to the case. First, civilian non-cooperation entails extreme risks of state violence. Memories of state violence run deep in Russia, from censorship and persecution under the Soviet Union, to the violent repression of opposition under Putin's regime. On March 4th, 2022, amendments to Articles 31 and 151 of the Russian criminal code established criminal liability for the 'public dissemination of deliberately false information' about the Russian military, qualified as any information differing from the official reports of Russia's Defence Ministry (Kremlin, 2022a; OVD-Info, 2022a; Pavlova, 2022). On top of pre-existing legislation criminalising unauthorised protest, offences are punishable by fines and prison sentences from two to fifteen years. The laws have served to suppress free speech, shut down independent media, block access to internet platforms, and criminalise all forms of

anti-war protest.[5] Civilians have been targeted for both online and public references to war crimes, battle loses and use of the word war.

The laws are enforced through mass-surveillance and internet tracking, including facial recognition technology to monitor civilians in public space and artificial intelligence designed to track and de-anonymise online anti-war criticism; the creation of what some have termed a 'cyber gulag' (Litvinova, 2023; Razumnaya, 2023). As of May 2023, up to 19,718 have been arrested for anti-war activity, 584 have been prosecuted[6] and 6,839 have been charged with administrative offences, resulting in criminal records (OVD-Info, 2023). Particularly, for military-age males, voicing anti-war criticism not only makes them a target for state violence, but can result in forced enlistment. Following the anti-mobilisation protests in September 2022, men arrested for protesting were served with draft-notices (OVD-Info, 2022b). All forms of civilian dissent against the war constitute high-risks for civilians.

Second, civilians have adopted a range of behaviours of non-cooperation with the state. Non-cooperation can be conceptualised as varying in terms of the level of confrontation and risk (Masullo, 2021b). Based on within case observations, three forms of civilian non-cooperation were identified and categorised based on this typology:

> *(i)* Overt-resistance, entails behaviours which openly resist and contest the legitimacy of the state and undermine the government's political interests. This can include acts of public civil-disobedience or sharing information to discredit the government's narrative of the conflict.

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[5] Foreign-owned social media platforms, including Instagram and Facebook, have been blocked in Russia since March 2022 following a ruling by a Moscow court which ruled that the platforms were responsible for extremist activities (Sauer, 2022). An additional 9,300 news websites are believed to have been blocked by the state internet regulator on the grounds of spreading fake information (Pavlova, 2022).

[6] Prosecutions have been applied retroactively, with civilians facing prison sentences for internet posts from before the invasion (Konstantinova, 2023).

In terms of overt-resistance, civilians undertook a wide range of behaviours of criminalised disobedience. Following the invasion in February and the mobilisation of conscripts in September 2022, peaceful anti-war protests on city streets across Russia were violently dispersed by state security (Meduza, 2022ab; Shamdasani, 2022). Others voiced their opposition via social media. Numerous online petitions against the war attracted millions of signatures, while thousands of posts tagged #NoWar (#нетвойне) were traceable to every region of the country (The Economist, 2022). Those who circulated information critical of the war faced fines, job losses and prosecution for inciting protest (OVD-Info, 2022ab). Others embraced more individualised forms of resistance, with a wave of vandalism and arson attacks against military draft-posts, pro-regime news outlets, and offices of the ruling United Russia party (Karev, 2023; Romashova & Skovoroda, 2022). Those who were caught were prosecuted under charges of terrorism.

> *(ii)* Avoidance incorporates strategies of non-cooperation that involve avoiding confrontation, such as fleeing. It should however be noted that under conscription regimes, fleeing itself is a punishable act of disobedience against the state and thus a means of non-cooperation.

In terms of avoidance, Thousands of civilians have voted with their feet. Since the beginning of the invasion thousands of military age males have sought to hide from conscription, crowding with their families at Russia's borders and airports to flee the country (Chutnekorzhok, 2022). Leaked estimates from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) indicate that as many as four million civilians have fled Russia since the start of the war (The Moscow Times, 2022).

> *(iii)* Oblique-resistance, refers to civilians engaging in disguised forms of non-cooperation which express disobedience but are not overtly related to war dynamics

and fall outside of criminalised behaviour (Masullo, 2021b, p. 903). This may include acts of disobedience such as wearing symbols that express anti-war sentiment.

Oblique-resistance encompassed varying manifestations. From wearing Ukrainian colours in public, to a widespread practice of 'flower protests,' laying flowers at Soviet era monuments of famous Ukrainians, or reducing spending to avoid supporting the war economy (Meduza, 2022c; Tenisheva, 2023).

4.2 Data

Models of civilian behaviour, particularly under authoritarian governance, have come under criticism for an overemphasis on rationality based game-theoretic modelling. They are often biassed by implicit ideological assumptions that fail to understand the complex decision-making processes that underlie civilian cooperation and non-cooperation (Przeworski, 2022). In order to capture the underlying processes that guide decision-making paths, an inductive approach, analysing in-depth qualitative data focused on within case exploration is necessary (Tarrow, 2007).

Data collection centred on gathering testimonies of civilians' lived experiences of non-cooperation in two key time periods; February 24th to the end of March 2022, following the initial invasion of Ukraine, and September 21st to October 30th 2022, when Russia's government ordered the mobilisation of conscripts (Kremlin, 2022b). Both periods were marked by sharp rises in anti-war protests and corresponding waves of migration (OVD-Info, 2022a; Sauer & Roth, 2022; The Moscow Times, 2022).

The data for the empirical analysis comes from two parallel streams: (i) testimonial material documenting civilian experiences of non-cooperation collected from media sources; and (ii) semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher with Russian civilians who refused cooperation with the state. Sequential use of both approaches served to retrieve testimonial material from a larger sample of individuals diverse in terms of age, gender, class and geographic origin within the Russian Federation. While analysis of media sources allowed for the observation of broad patterns across a large sample of civilian testimonies, interviews allowed for open-ended probing which served to fill gaps and test preliminary findings.

(i)   Testimonial Material

The media environment in Russia is heavily repressed. Opposition media maintain contact with journalists inside the country and their published material is a unique source of information on civilian non-cooperation. Media material was gathered by applying key search terms replicated in English and Russian in Google and Yandex search engines. Russian opposition media sources included Meduza, Novaya Gazeta, Novaya Media, Mediazona, V1, RBC and The Moscow Times. Non-Russian media outlets which provided valuable material included the BBC Russian Service and The Guardian. The online archives of opposition media outlets were examined to collect articles related to civilian migration and cases of individuals charged with unauthorised protest, discrediting the armed forces, or terrorism, which were categorically organised within the archives.

Ninety-six news articles with material on 113 individuals were collected. To narrow this sample, only those articles containing detail related to individual decision-making and motivations were retained. The final sample contained thirty-one articles and videos with fifty-seven testimonies. The articles incorporate interview material, links to photos, videos and social media posts, police

statements and records of court testimonies which provided verifiable material on a range of cases, diverse in terms of non-cooperation behaviours, and demographic characteristics.

(ii)   Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six individuals who engaged in non-cooperation. Due to security concerns and access difficulties of the population, a snow-ball sampling method was most appropriate (Parker et al., 2019). Four separate points of entry were utilised to access individuals from diverse social groups which included two networks originating in Moscow, one from St.Petersburg and a third from Yakutia. Personal information that could be used to identify an individual within the wider subject population has been edited. Interviews followed a life history approach, entailing minimal prompting from the researcher (Atkinson, 1998; Bruner, 1987).[7] This allowed for open exploration of individuals' rationalisation of their behaviour and what experience and knowledge they found meaningful in influencing their decision to confront or avoid cooperation with the state.

For the purpose of testing existing theory, some questions were introduced to focus on key aspects of an individual's background and decision-making. First, questions focused on interviewees attitudes towards the regime and the war prior to, and following, the invasion. Often this information was given without prompting. Second, to address how threat perceptions were constructed and how social norms were perceived, the interviewees were asked what experiences shaped their attitudes towards the state. This included questions on what information they received, from what sources, the role of social and normative pressures and how this affected their perception of the Russian state. Third, interviewees were asked about their response to the

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[7] Interviewing techniques such as avoiding prescriptive statements, asking open and critical questions, and probing for detailed answers, were used to elicit in-depth responses and better recollections of memory. For further information on interviewing technique see (Bernard, 2006; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978).

invasion. Questions focused on the motives for non-cooperation. This included, how they understood the meaning of their actions, how they evaluated the risks and framed the threat to them or their collective group, as well as how they understood their behaviour normatively and in terms of efficacy.

Interviews were conducted face to face and via video-calls in May 2023. Informed consent to record and use interview material was received from all interviewees on condition of anonymity. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. In terms of the positionality of the researcher, as a non-Russian Westerner, interviewees were often willing to give highly in-depth and explicit answers to address perceived gaps in the interviewer's understanding. At times there were language related communication barriers, however the approach was to ask for clarification on specific wordings. In a few instances translation software was required for single words.

(iii)   Sample

Testimonies were coded to identify, gender, age, level of income and whether or not individuals had previous experience of protest. In dividing the population in terms of age it was chosen to categorise individuals as minors (<18), or under or over the age of forty. Forty is a key age demographic for two reasons. First, males under forty are required to participate in the military reserve and are liable to conscription. Second, those over the age of forty have lived through the Soviet collapse and the crisis period of the nineties. Pro-regime and militaristic attitudes are highest amongst this demographic (Bækken, 2021; Frye et al., 2017).

The final sample was divided into three groups, based on the categories of overt-resistance (**45**) avoidance (**6**) and oblique-resistance (**12**). The latter group also included individuals whose testimonies expressed anti-regime and anti-war attitudes, but chose to stay in Russia without

confrontation with the state. Cross comparison of testimonies from these groups served to identify which factors produced meaningful variation in civilian choices and behaviour.

4.3 Evaluating Evidence

Content Analysis was carried out with the use of qualitative coding software to manage the large volume of material, ensure traceability and to identify broad patterns in the data.[8] Coding followed the same three-part question based structure outlined for interviews above to identify individuals' attitudes towards the state, the construction of threat perceptions and their behavioural response.

Observable manifestations of theory were translated into indicators and applied as codes. In relation to threat perceptions, indicators included what entity individuals identified as the source of threat (i.e., the state or another external actor), how this was rationalised and whether the threat was framed to a wide-collective, close-collective (i.e., family), or to the individual. Biographical characteristics such as gender, age, financial means, previous experience of protest, experience of state violence, and tendencies towards threat avoidance, risk acceptance and self-sacrifice were coded. A second round of coding followed an inductive process to identify what external and intrinsic factors motivated individuals decision making paths (Elliott, 2018).

4.4 Limitations

Testimonies from both media and interviews constitute evidence focused on individuals' post-hoc rationalisations and the meaning they assigned to their choices and behaviour (Schatz, 2013).

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[8] Atlas.ti 9 was chosen as it can process material in image, audio, and text format. Furthermore, to address analytical biases and avoid expectancy effects, peer-coding of a sample of material can be used to test the replicability of the coding frame and calculate the margin of difference between individuals independently analysing the same content (Atlas.ti, 2022).

Individuals' testimonies of their actions can 'carry deliberate or inadvertent misrepresentations' of their thought processes (Patterson & Monroe, 1998; Pearlman, 2016, p. 888). People may internalise political beliefs and convictions that normatively justify behaviours which were motivated by other factors, such as security seeking (Rutenberg, 2019). Carrying out interviews served to partially address this limitation, allowing the research to probe for critical detail and accurate recollections of memory (Bernard, 2006; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978). Triangulation of evidence between interview and media testimony material with further reading of research on the Russian case served to iteratively re-evaluate findings and critically examine the role of specific factors.

5. Analysis

Table.1 Summary of Frequency Data from Civilian Testimonies

	Male	Female	Age< 18	Age< 40	Age> 40	Previous Experience of Protest	High-Income	Low-Income
Overt-Resistance	22	25	2	21	12	15	3	14
Avoidance	6	-	-	6	-	2	5	1
Oblique-Resistance	7	5	-	4	8	1	2	10
Total (65)	34	31	2	31*	20*	17	13*	25*

* Given the anonymity of personal information, data for all individuals is not complete. For some individuals whose testimonies came from media sources, data such as age and income level were anonymous.

5.1 Collective Threat Framing at the Outset of War

On February 24th, as news channels began to announce the invasion, Russian civilians were quickly overwhelmed with the flood of media traffic pushing conflicting information from both the Russian and Ukrainian governments, media outlets worldwide and civilians on both sides of the border. Images began to appear of the bombing of Ukrainian cities. For many with friends and family in Ukraine there was a rush to contact those on the other side of the border. In Pavel's case,[9] a friend in Kharkiv, Eastern Ukraine, posted on her social media early that morning asking why the power had gone out and what the banging noises were, to which he responded that she was being bombed.

Over the coming days, witnessing the unfolding atrocities carried out in Ukraine instilled distress and moral outrage. Intense anger was directed at the state. For Daria Isakova,[10] an experienced activist who was detained for anti-war protests, her initial reaction to news of the invasion was: '[Go] Fuck yourself, this is the point of no return! …The first couple of days I was in mourning, I cried… It was the same feeling as if someone had died. It was painful. On instagram all stories were about it. It was scary. It was very sad' (Isakova, 2022). Tamara Grodnikova,[11] also an experienced activist who would later picket against the war, said that she had been in denial of what she heard from politicians' speeches in the days preceding the invasion. When the news broke she recalled 'I had a desire to run out into the street, as if I were a person whose house was on fire… I wanted to scream, I wanted to tell people about it, I wanted to stop it! (Rebrov, 2022). Across the testimonies collected in this study, distrust of the Russian state and media were universal. The terms with which they would refer to Russian state-backed media reflected how

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[9] (Interview.3, Male＜40, Moscow)
[10] (Isakova, 2022, Female＜40, Sochi)
[11] (Rebrov, 2022, Female＞40, Volgograd)

they regarded the state's narrative of the conflict, with references ranging from 'lies' (Interview.2) to 'propaganda machine' (Ovsyannikova, 2023). Others referred directly to Putin as a 'tyrant' and a 'criminal' (Nesterova, 2023b). A testimony from an individual working in the media sector stated 'Everyone, without exception, knows that they're lying' (Sivtsova et al., 2022). As a result, many made use of opposition news outlets such as Mediazona and Meduza, and foreign media accessed via the internet. Later, state-media would become one of the targets hit by arson-attacks (Romashova & Skovoroda, 2022).

Distrust of the state was itself unanimous. Without prompting, all interviewees highlighted how they perceived the state and its institutions as violent and oppressive, often communicating their views in strong words. To paraphrase one interviewee, Sasha, 'the government is made of elites who want to control resources and they keep Russia on a low-level of stability to make sure there is no revolution; violence 'is what this government is all about.'[12]

Interviewees made consistent reference to the violent repression of protests and opposition leaders by the regime under Putin in shaping their perception of the state, mentioning how witnessing brutal violence against protestors instilled fear. Importantly, when asked about the threat perceived from Ukraine and the collective west, they highlighted that they knew the government was lying to them, attempting to manipulate fear for support.

However, perceptions were also rooted in personal experiences of state violence. Joma[13] and Dasha[14] both highlighted their interactions with police as part of this. In Dasha's case, childhood memories of her fathers arrest on the street were a traumatic experience which engrained a lasting negative perception of state security. She claimed the purpose of the police is 'to threaten people, to control them and not have chaos. I don't think it is about protection.' Joma described

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[12] (Interview.5, Male＜40, Moscow) For the original statements see minutes 08:10 and 12:56.
[13] (Interview.1, Male＜40, Moscow)
[14] (Interview.6, Female＜40, St. Petersburg)

that amongst his friends in Moscow police extortion was a normalised occurrence: 'when I say that the whole system is corrupt, I don't just mean politicians taking money… It's about the whole system… a good example would be when the police stop you and try to find a reason to take money from you.'

Specifically when it came to the military, others explained how their experiences of military service shaped not only their perception of the army but of the functioning of the Russian state as a whole. Both Pavel[15] and Sasha[16] were young men who had served mandatory military service, placing them at the highest risk of enlistment at the war's outset. Both came from privileged and educated backgrounds, and both would quickly leave Russia in the following weeks. *Dedovshchina,* referring to the systematic abuse and exploitation of soldiers by higher ranking officers, is a known practice which for many in the past has induced fear of military service (Coffey, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2004). However, *Ustavshchina*, the bureaucratic management of military-life, constituted another form of invasive and rigid regulation.

Pavel recalled stories of how 'accidents' (suicides) were dealt with by officers through increasing bureaucratic controls, while Sasha emphasised that deaths of soldiers due to the mis-management of officers were a monthly occurrence. While Putin had promised that only professional soldiers would fight in Ukraine (President of Russia, 2022), Sasha claimed that once he had gotten past the shock of the war, rationally he knew this was not true: 'knowing the state of the Russian army, how it's poorly organised… I was convinced that at some point they would run out of resources… and start mobilising.'

Amongst all of the military-age men from whom testimonies were acquired (34), there was an explicit distrust of the state and a view that the government was sending them to their deaths to

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[15] (Interview.3, Male＜40, Moscow)
[16] (Interview.5, Male＜40, Moscow)

fight an unjust war against a state which to them presented no threat. While Pavel and Sasha are examples of individuals from wealthy backgrounds, these patterns persisted amongst the more economically disadvantaged who were willing to go to extreme lengths to avoid cooperation with the state (Chutnekorzhok, 2022; Grigoryeva, 2022; Otte, 2022).

Kirill,[17] a native of the North Caucasus, stated: 'I'm going to avoid getting conscripted at all costs. If I have to break my arm, I'll do it, if I have to break a policeman's jaw and go to jail, so be it. But I will not become an invader, I will not kill innocent people because a murderous lunatic wants me to… I'm supposed to leave my family – not to defend my home, but to become cannon fodder?' (Otte, 2022).

For military-age males, friends and family encouraged them to flee. Interviewees stressed that others around them actively discouraged their participation in protest while encouraging them to flee the country for their safety. Females who gave testimonies spoke of how they and their family members immediately contacted their fathers and brothers following the invasion, telling them to leave.[18] Journalists who interviewed civilians queued at Russia's borders following the September mobilisation spoke not only to men fleeing, often in groups with their friends, but their parents who had driven them to the border (Chutnekorzhok, 2022; Otte, 2022; Sokolov, 2022).

When we look at non-cooperation more broadly, individuals often claimed that those within their close social networks shared similar views. However, this by no means suggests that all within their environment were against the war. Often close family members or others with whom they interacted were supportive or indifferent towards the conflict. In particular, several testimonies highlighted tense interactions with family members or friends over social media.[19] Part of what

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[17] (Otte, 2022, Male＜40, Moscow)
[18] (Interview.2, Female＜40, Moscow)
[19] (Interview.3, Male＜40, Moscow); (Interview.6, Female＜40, St. Petersburg)

was so shocking in the aftermath of the war was that life largely continued as normal. 'I walked out onto the street… I was expecting people to be there… not in a manner how they would be yesterday…because for me, the whole fucking world changed and I see people living their life, like going to work. Not really bothering with anything.'[20]

What we see from these testimonies is that individuals maintained distrust of the state, which they viewed as violent and kleptocratic. Within their environments these individuals were exposed to anti-regime views. Via media and social networks, they deliberately circumvented state controlled media to access information that was not only critical of the war, but drove them to perceive it as immoral and an exercise of brutal violence by a corrupt regime. Crucially, for them refusal to support or cooperate with the state was not a decision. It was an automatic reaction that served to prioritise their own security. Particularly for military-age males, non-cooperation, despite the risks of criminal prosecution, was crucial for their safety. However, despite heterogeneity between pro and anti-regime views in their social environment, witnessing state violence and lived experiences shaped attitudes towards the state in ways that were crucial in their formation of anti-regime views. They would not believe or fight for a government they did not trust.

5.2 Efficacy of Resistance & Avoidance

Across almost all testimonies there was a pervasive understanding that overt-resistance entailed extreme risks. When individuals recalled why they did not choose to join anti-war rallies, the consistent claim was that the risks of overt-confrontation were too high, and for some the effectiveness of what their sacrifice might achieve, too low.

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[20] (Interview.3, Male＜40, Moscow)

In the cases of Sasha[21] and Ekaterina,[22] both were individuals with previous experience of active participation in anti-regime protests, including the protests in January 2021 against the arrest of opposition-leader Alexei Navalny (Rainsford, 2021). Prior to the invasion, both were acutely aware of the potential dangers of protest. Close family members had tried to convince them not to openly resist the government out of fear of repression.

In the case of the pro-Navalny protests, Ekaterina experienced intense fear over what might happen to her, but a feeling of responsibility to act and extreme anger over the injustice of state violence against the opposition, drove her to accept these risks: 'my anger won over my fear.' Ekaterina witnessed state repression first-hand. A friend was arrested for standing alone in the square with flowers: 'that's when I understood that maybe the time is over to go to protests… because I still want to live. I want my family to be safe and that's why I don't really go there anymore.' While Ekaterina's family had encouraged her to leave Russia, her choice to stay was influenced by her responsibility to those around her and her sense of belonging: 'my home is here.'[23]

For Sasha, his experience of protest brought him to an understanding that overt-resistance was ineffective. After the pro-Navalny protests, his view was that outside of the urban middle-class, many Russians struggle daily to make enough money to survive, 'they do not have the time to think about freedom or democracy, it's irrelevant to their basic needs… for most of the population they are not concerned with what the government does.' Against the smaller population who are willing and able to resist, the government can 'take them down by force and no one will do anything about it.' Others claimed that in the context of the war, protest was

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[21] (Interview.5, Male＜40, Moscow)
[22] (Interview.2, Female＜40, Moscow)
[23] (Interview.2, Female＜40, Moscow)

unfeasible: 'you hold a sign up for ten minutes, and then the police will just drag you off… it's not worth it.'[24]

For others, such as Joma,[25] fear of state repression stopped him from participating in any anti-government protests prior to the war, not only for fear of the consequences this may have for himself, but for his close relatives. The nature of repression in Russia, can be understood as a system of collective punishment, where those arrested are served criminal records, making them, their friends, families and place of work, targets for future legal blackmail (Matthews, 2022; OVD-Info, 2022a). Being arrested posed risks, not only to Joma, but those around him: 'this is the way they get to you… Young people are not afraid to go to jail, but to be the ones who are guilty… and because of them, their parents got taken. That's what's gonna make you stop and not go.' The repercussions of participating in overt-resistance were not merely individual. For Joma, he experienced intense guilt with his decision to leave Russia rather than resist. However, given the risks of protest, as a military-age male, the choice to leave was the only option.

Key elements within these testimonies are not only that individuals experienced intense fear of overt-resistance. They knew their sacrifices would achieve nothing. Another significant element is that in the past, anger had motivated overt-resistance. However, fear of collective punishment, inherent in the nature of state repression, prevented them from accepting the risk. Avoidance became the only means of non-cooperation.

5.3 Overt-Resistance: Engaging in High-Risk Mobilisation

Amongst the forty-five testifiers who engaged in some form of anti-war protest, longstanding perceptions of corruption and violence stood at the centre of their motivation. Rather than any

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[24] (Interview.3, Male＜40, Moscow)
[25] (Interview.1, Male＜40, Moscow)

external actor, they perceived the threat they faced to be from the Russian state itself. They highlighted how they were driven to act by extreme moral outrage, triggered by images of the violence they saw against civilians in Ukraine which further fuelled existing grievances. Many testimonies hinted at our directly mentioned focused on a compulsion to act in defence of the collective. Most were cognisant of the extreme risks that overt-resistance entailed. A central feature of their testimonies were that the pro-regime attitudes of others in their environment appeared to further entrench their grievances and motivate overt-resistance. However, the actions they undertook were influenced and constrained by the feasibility and risks they were willing to accept.

From February to March, thousands gathered on city streets to protest against the war. In the cases of Dasha and Daria Isakova, both participated in anti-war protests, drawn by what they had believed was to be a popular uprising. For Dasha,[26] previous experience of protest had made her aware of the risks, including how friends had suffered life-impacting consequences. Dasha's family and friends in her native Krasnodar, were critical of her anti-regime, at times referring to her as a 'traitor.' She moved to St.Petersburg where she found a more accepting social environment amongst liberal students. However, the images she saw on social media and conversations with friends brought her to protest. 'I knew that I couldn't do anything by myself, but I thought that there were a lot of people who were coming to the squares to protest, and I wanted to be a part of this, my friend was the same… but I was angry.' After witnessing violence at the rallies in St.Petersburg she left Russia.

For Daria,[27] despite being from a government connected family, which disdained and suppressed her anti-war views. She developed anti-regime views after witnessing violent persecution by the

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[26](Interview.6, Female＜40, St. Petersburg)
[27](Isakova, 2022, Female＜40, Sochi)

autonomous-government in Chechnya. When she decided to attend an anti-war protest in Sochi the day after the invasion, she claimed 'I naively thought that tomorrow Putin would be overthrown.' At Sochi's main square she saw the few that had shown up were already being taken away. 'Of course, I'm not suicidal. I looked at it and decided to go.' Daria organised another protest on April 17th with leaflets containing digital links to anti-war information.[28] Within minutes of laying out her sign Daria's protest ended. Her and the others were quickly arrested. After her interrogation, video confession and release, Daria's father kicked her out of the house. The legal charges which she expected would pursue her lead her to feel forced to leave Russia (Isakova, 2022).

Amongst those that protested it is clear that they internalised a collectivised sense of responsibility, with violence in Ukraine striking a moral-chord. After protests were violently dispersed, others sought alternative means of voicing their opposition through individualised forms of resistance. However, a key pattern that emerged across several testimonies, was that activists often felt pushed towards high-risk strategies of overt-resistance when they felt surrounded by others who supported the regime and the war. Their anger and the indifference of others drove resistance.

Denis Bushuev[29] a seventeen year old, was taken by the police and fined ₽50,000 (€560) for holding a sign on a main city street reading 'no to war, no to madness.' Given his age, Bushuev was aware he would likely escape punishment. 'I had been thinking about going out for a very long time, for three months I doubted everything, it's worth it - it's not worth it. Then I realised that I still could not be silent. And there is nothing like that. I don't lie to anyone… I understood that there is such a repressive law and that I could well be fined, I was ready for this. I didn't

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[28] See: https://telegra.ph/Pora-chto-to-menyat-04-09
[29] (Vasiliev, 2023ab, Male＜18, Nizhny Novgorod)

think that such a noise would immediately begin: they would start dragging all sorts of things to the commission.' Those around him berated him for his actions, including staff at his school, who blasted him with propaganda justifying the war. His friends had told him his actions were pointless (Vasiliev, 2023ab).[30]

For some there were clear examples of how past-experiences weighed on their moral judgments. Mikhail Simonov,[31] a 63-year old railway worker, was sentenced in March 2023 to seven years after the FSB alleged he was spreading fake information online via VK, discrediting the armed forces. Simonov had no dependents and claimed that he had no fear, as there was no one who needed him. In Simonov's testimony he claimed that everyone he knew from his girlfriend to his friends supported the war, and to his shock, had asked him to remove his posts. Asked about his motive, Simonov answered: 'the understanding that human life is priceless.' His normative stance was impacted by enduring memories: 'my mother was still a little girl in besieged Leningrad. She told how she carried her parents who had already died on a sled along the Neva to bury them, how she later experienced this terrible Great Patriotic War, and hoped that this was the last. Such words are still spinning in my head' (Nesterova, 2023b).

Ekaterina Selenkina[32] and Sasha Skochilenko,[33] are cases of experienced protestors who under conditions of harsh repression pursued innovative means of individualised protest. On June 1st, 2022 (Children's Day in Russia), Selenkina spent an hour walking through the Moscow-Metro with a baby doll soaked in blood while loudly shouting facts about child deaths in Ukraine.

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[30] A transcript of the conversation is available at (Vasiliev, 2023b).

[31] (Nesterova, 2023b, Male＞40, Moscow). His posts on social media platform VK included: 'Killing children and women, we sing songs on Channel One' (a major state-run television news broadcaster) and 'Russian Pilots Bomb Children,' accompanied with a photo of the destroyed Mariupol theatre (Nesterova, 2023b).

[32] (Selenkina, 2022, Female＜40, Moscow)

[33] (Meduza, 2022b, Female＜40, St.Petersburg)

Selenkina expected to be arrested, but managed to escape. Asked why, she said 'It's not like I made that decision. I don't see it as possible. I don't have any other thoughts. I don't know how to ignore the war'... 'it is important to maintain the feeling that war is not normal' (Selenkina, 2022). While she received encouragement from some, what she found striking was how others who witnessed her protest expressed fear.

Skochilenko was prosecuted in April 2022 for spreading fake information after she had already been arrested and fined for attending an anti-war rally on March 3rd. She spread facts violence against civilians in Ukraine printed on price-tags left on products in the supermarket where she worked. She told the court 'there are still a lot of people who don't know what a miracle life is…and that violence is not a solution.' A friend said of her that 'as a person with a conscience, she could not help but react' (Meduza, 2022b). Skochilenko's method of protest was shared over social media and as a result was replicated by others across the country (Serafimov, 2022).

Since February 24th 2022, ninety-four military enlistment posts and government offices were hit by arson attacks (Romashova & Skovoroda, 2022). Testimonies were retrieved for four of those who perpetrated these acts. In all except for one, there was no expressed intention to avoid harm to others and violence was felt to be justified. However, ultimately these attacks were both anger fueled and were seen to bear efficacy in what individuals claimed was overt-resistance in defence of the collective. Alexei Rozhkov,[34] a 24 year old shop-assistant, was arrested after throwing a Molotov cocktail into a military enlistment office on March 11th, two weeks after the invasion of Ukraine. He was the third to carry out an arson of this type; a tactic which he learned of via social media. Rozhkov, like others, experienced intense anger against the state following the war and the attitudes of those around him who had directly discouraged him from discussing the war. During interrogation Rozhkov told local police: 'my peers are dying in Ukraine like cannon

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[34] (Romashova, 2023, Male＜40, Berezovsky-Sverdlovsk Oblast)

fodder, and no one cares about it.' Rozhkov believed that his actions would serve to protect others by destroying draft records. He stood by the claim that what he had done 'saved lives' (Romashova, 2023).

5.4 Staying-Behind and Oblique-Resistance: 'How not to betray yourself' [35]

While many chose either to overtly-resist or flee the country, for others these options were unfeasible due to the sacrifice and financial resources they involved. Many were held back by responsibilities to those around them,[36] while others saw no opportunity for a life outside of Russia or feared that war had turned the world against them (Meduza, 2022ac). However, amongst those that stayed many held anti-war sentiments, and felt compelled to express opposition oblique-resistance.

Even forms of low-confrontation resistance were perceived by all to carry extreme risks. The laws were both invasive and arbitrary. A significant example was the story of a thirteen-year-old girl whose father was prosecuted after school staff reported that she had drawn a pacifist picture in class. It is stories of this type which instil fear. When the court announced that the father had escaped house-arrest, civilians attending the proceedings applauded (Konstantinova, 2023; SOTA, 2023; Trevelyan, 2023). Such demonstrations of public support for victims of the state recurred in numerous cases (Meduza, 2022b; Nesterova, 2023ab).

Oppression comes not only in the form of state violence, but the prevalence of pro-war views within their surroundings, which further undermines the will and perceived efficacy of resistance. In Ekaterina's testimony,[37] she compared her experience of living in Moscow since

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[35] The quote comes from an opposition newspaper headline (Meduza, 2022c).
[36] (Interview.2, Female＜40, Moscow)
[37] (Interview.2, Female＜40, Moscow)

the war's beginning to living in George Orwell's *1984*: 'So many of them are like this. Sometimes I think maybe they are pretending because they are scared of having a different opinion… It's evil, but most of them are really getting aggressive… Sometimes, I'm trying to calm myself down and I tell myself they are just scared.'

Despite negative social pressures reported by many, civilians adopted silent forms of protest, from wearing anti-war symbols (green ribbons), to defacing enlistment posters or Z symbols.[38] For some, speaking openly about the war in private settings has become an act of resistance, which also carries fear: 'of course, it's scary, but it's better to suffer for honesty than not to have a conscience' (Meduza, 2022c). A woman from St. Petersburg claimed 'when I realised I was threatened for my anti-war position, I became afraid for my three younger children. What would happen to them if I was taken by the police?... I openly say that I am categorically against war; I keep conversations on the topic of war with outsiders, during which I ask uncomfortable questions. For myself personally, I try not to allow the war to become a backdrop' (Meduza, 2022c).

A consistent element throughout these statements is that The social structures in which they are embedded provide information and experience that drive their will to resist, but also oppressive social pressures which undermine their perceived agency and capacity to resist. The invasive nature of state repression and the prevalence of regime support with their environment means that contesting the state is seen as both ineffective and entailing unacceptably high-risk. Both to

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[38] Z, denoting *Zapad* (West), became a universal pro-war symbol after it was painted on Russian military vehicles in Ukraine to distinguish them from the Ukrainian army's identical military hardware (Matthews, 2022). In some cases, testimonies identified the prevalence of the Z symbol in public spaces as something they found both shocking and oppressive. For some, this further contributed to their will to lash-out and openly express their views to others (Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, 2022; Vasiliev, 2023c). A common practice has been to paint lines through Z symbols, making them into Swastikas (Meduza, 2022c).

them and those around them. However, they remain unable or unwilling to leave. However, their grievances against the state motivate them to express opposition through oblique-resistance.

6. Discussion

Returning to the central question, how and why do civilians refuse cooperation with governments during wartime mobilisation? The evidence presented suggests that security seeking played a central role. How individuals constructed the threat they faced based on their lived experience both drove them to non-cooperation and shaped the behaviours which they undertook.

Within the analysis, three major patterns emerge. First, all those who engaged in non-cooperation had, based on a combination of secondary knowledge and lived experience, internalised distrust of the state. Experiences of state violence and knowledge of corruption were formative. They instilled distrust that led them to refuse the state's narrative of the conflict and actively seek alternative information. Not only did they refuse the state's war narrative, but they came to frame the state as the source of threat.

Second, the nature of repression as collectivised punishment and the perceived prevalence of pro-regime support, were key factors that undermined the efficacy of resistance. For many, the time to protest ended when they witnessed the repression of protests and saw friends taken by riot police.[39] The extreme risks that overt-resistance entailed as well as it's inefficacy, meant that resistance was perceived as futile. Prioritising the protection of close friends and family became the priority. Despite this, individuals are driven to invent oblique-forms of non-cooperation. which they understand as a When both structural and social repression makes other means of non-cooperation unfeasible, they still seek to invent means to dis-obey.

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[39] See Isakova, 2022; Interview.1; Interview.2; Interview.5; Interview.6.

Third, in relation to pre-existing theories of civilian strategy in war, these findings affirm that security seeking is the central driver of civilian behaviour, but that normative pressure can incentivise individuals to engage in self-sacrificing behaviour (Pearlman, 2016). Amongst those that engaged in overt-resistance what set them apart from others was that they internalised extreme anger based on the corruption of the state, the violence carried out in Ukraine and the negative social pressures of others around them. Strong moral drives pushed them to assume greater levels of risk and commit to their cause. Social media played a particular role in proliferating material that instilled emotional reactions as well as sharing innovative tactics of resistance. These patterns provide some evidence for the role of empirical and normative availability in shaping the means of contention. However, when examining behaviour at the individual level, elements of individuals' lived experience that shape both threat perceptions and risk acceptance were consistently pervasive.

These findings suggest that civilians' lived experience of repression shape their view of the state as a threatening actor. Intrinsic moral drives inflamed by anger over state violence motivate resistance. However, variation in behaviour between overt or oblique-resistance and avoidance are shaped by security seeking behaviours within repressive governance structures. Collective forms of punishment served to increase the risks of participation and further deter overt-resistance. Those who avoided or engaged in oblique-resistance saw the threat they faced and the effectiveness of resistance as entailing unacceptable risk of harm to them and those around them. The choice to stay and engage in oblique-resistance can be understood in terms of the lower individualised threat civilians faced and the personal and financial limitations which restrained them.

In terms of the role of social structures in threat framing (Petersen, 2001; Shesterinina, 2016), these findings show a complex picture. Many faced exposure to mixed pro-regime and anti-regime constructions of the threat in their environment and received both negative and positive social pressures associated with resistance. For some the contradictory or indifferent attitudes of others further motivated them to engage in acts of overt-resistance. For others, the prevalence of pro-regime support in both close networks and public space was something that discouraged resistance. However, individuals consistently identify anti-regime grievances related to moral pressures that motivate non-cooperation. These are rooted in both witnessing violence and in lived experiences of state corruption.

As of May 2023, collective resistance to the war in Russia has not succeeded. This acquires new meaning when the testimonies presented here are compared with cases of civilian support and cooperation. Testimonies from civilians who openly support the war (Burtin, 2022; Matthews, 2022) and Russian soldiers who have fought in Ukraine,[40] show that many widely accept and aggressively defend the Kremlin's narrative of the war. Often, they do not deny the violence of the state, nor its corruption, but maintain that the violence that the state exercises in Ukraine is just.

The nature of support and fear in established autocracies is said to compel civilians to 'act as if' they believe (Wedeen, 1998). However, as Matthews (2022) writes, for Russians 'the problem was not one of access to the truth. The truth doesn't make you free if you don't want to hear it'... 'propaganda relied on consent.' They 'chose to believe the narrative that validated them, not the one that humiliated them' (p.253-254). Security seeking can be viewed as central to

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[40] Interviews with Russian soldiers have been published by Russian state media. However, captured Russian soldiers were also given interviews in Ukraine. See; Berezkin, 2022; Kryukov, 2022; Littau, 2023; Rozhansky, 2022; Shamak, 2022; Vetrov, 2023.

non-cooperation. However, the question remains, why do some break with ritualistic obedience, while others become radicalised in their support for the state?

7. Conclusion

This study has explored a key gap in conflict research, examining civilian agency and non-cooperation in the context of wartime mobilisation in a 21st century autocracy. A central point of conclusion is that non-cooperation was understood by civilians in terms of security seeking, where civilians identified the state as the primary source of threat. These views were constructed through their knowledge and experience of state violence and corruption which entrenched fear and moral grievances. In particular, lived experience of repression generated expectations of state violence and shaped how civilians understood the risks of non-cooperation and the strategies they chose. These findings are consistent with expectations based on previous studies of civilians in intra-state armed conflict. However, the nature of the sovereign state's capacity for invasive surveillance and collectivised forms of punishment served to diminish civilians' capacity to resist.

In offering an explanation of how perceptions that drive security seeking behaviour are constructed among civilians, these findings bear significance for understanding the micro-level dynamics of civilian non-cooperation in armed conflict and how security seeking drives interact with normative values. Translating these findings to the macro-level may help to explain the evolution and outcomes of armed conflict. In particular, this study offers insights into modern authoritarian politics which explain why domestic pressure and civilian resistance against the war has failed to succeed in Russia.

In terms of the limitations of this study, in-complete testimonies, a consequence of using secondary media material, serve as a limitation of the evidence that may omit important confounding factors. The micro-level dynamics of various behaviours of non-cooperation warrant further exploration which could be undertaken through a mixed-methods approach to identify and test broad-patterns and behavioural dynamics. A further limitation of this study is that it does not examine why some cooperate with the state while others refuse. A future avenue of research would be to compare decision-making processes between those who engage in cooperation and non-cooperation across cases of both offensive and defensive inter-state war. For example, comparing civilian cooperation and non-cooperation in the cases of Russia and Ukraine.

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9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix.1: Preliminary Predictions & Observable Indicators

Based on the approach outlined by Thistoll et al., (2016) this study's initial proposal developed theoretical expectations and indicators in order to test how existing theoretical insights would translate into the context of inter-state armed conflict. The value of this being to assess how the context of inter-state armed conflict differs from previously explored contexts of intra-state war. The below discussion outlines preliminary predictions which guided this study.

Observable manifestations that would constitute strong evidence would include statements from civilians that frame their choice to engage in non-cooperation based on a perception of the state as inherently violent. This is rationalised based on past experiences of state violence. For them during wartime mobilisation, cooperation with the state in terms of support or enlistment would constitute a personal danger to them or those around them. As a result they frame the choice to engage in non-cooperation in terms of personal security.

Individuals may give statements that affirm the importance of their past experience or memories shared by others in informing how they evaluated the risks of overt-confrontation. They may in turn give statements that show they experienced strong normative pressures from others within

their social environment that weighed on their decisions and pushed them towards a given course of action, for example the choice to avoid violence, or flee for self-preservation.

It would also be expected that the strategies of non-cooperation that individuals pursue depend on how the threat is framed to the individual and the collective with which they identify. Whereas they become cognisant of strategies of non-cooperation and their normative value via their social network, intrinsic motivations, related to the drive to act on their values, motivates engagement in higher-risk confrontational behaviour. Individuals would highlight how social pressures from others around them influence how they perceive the threat, which they frame in terms of the individual or a greater collective, and they would in-turn frame how perceived responsibilities to their personal security, or that of others influences the level of risk they are willing to accept.

They may rationalise that they face a primarily individualised threat based on the information they receive and features of their biography that inform risk perception, resulting in avoidance behaviours such as migration that seek to maximise safety. In contrast, those who engage in overt-resistance against the state, such as attending protests or undertaking other criminalised behaviours, may frame their behaviour in terms of a perceived responsibility to the greater collective.