

## HOW DOES UKRAINE USE ITS UNIQUE NATIONAL IDENTITY TO JUSTIFY ITS STAND AGAINST THE WAR?

### Introduction

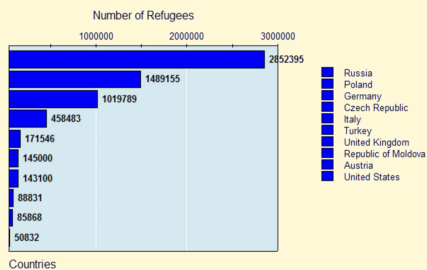
To find out how Ukraine uses its unique national identity to justify its stance against the Russian war of aggression, we take four different perspectives: We look at the History of Ukrainian identity, World War II and the truth about fascism and Nazism in Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees, and how President Zelensky has presented himself in the media as a representative of Ukraine since the beginning of the war. It is necessary to paint a real and true picture. To achieve this, we must recognize and show the complexity of Ukraine. Ukraine has been forced into war. A strong country full of history, unique people, and leaders. We want to make all this visible.

### Refugee Perspective

Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine has caused the largest **refugee crisis** in Europe since World War II. To showcase the impacts Putin's War has had on Ukrainian refugees we have decided to highlight some of their stories below from Tamar Jacoby's book, *Displaced: The Ukrainian Refugee Experience*.

• **Oksana**, an engineer at a national research institute in the provincial city of Pavlohrad, enjoyed all the perks of Ukraine's privileged professional elite, raising her two children—a girl, nine, and a boy, 15—in comfort and security. She lost everything within a matter of days. As Oksana stated in an interview with Jacoby, "The weight of

Ukrainian Refugees by Country

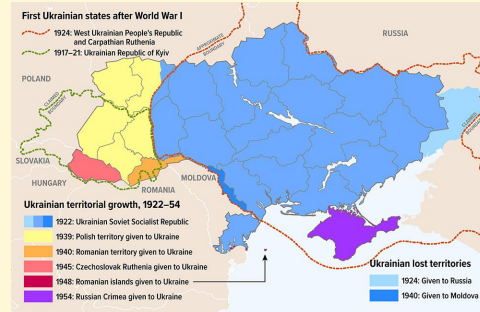


it finally hit me, I'd been a successful professional with an important job. I had wonderful friends. My children were facing a bright future. Now I was homeless, with nothing, on a freezing train, heading to a place where I knew no one."

**Valery** is a technician, and his handicap wife fled the border by squeezing into a car with six others and driving to Poland for 8 hours. At the Polish border, he abandoned his car and walked, pushing his wife's wheelchair, and once they passed the checkpoints, they were surrounded by volunteers who put them on a bus to Kraków. Nothing is easy for Valery. As a foreigner, Valery doesn't know what he doesn't know, and he struggles with little things, like topping up the data plan on his cell phone. His biggest need: if he had a caregiver for even a few hours daily, he could find a job as a technician and start paying his own way.

### Historical Perspective

- The Kievan Rus were a collection of duchies based around Kiev.
- After the Mongol conquest, Ukraine came under the control of Poland-Lithuania until the Khmelnytskyi rebellion forced the creation of a short-lived Cossack state. During the Deluge, and the later Partitions of Poland, Ukraine was split between Poland-Lithuania, Russia, and Austria Hungary. A short lived Ukrainian state was formed after World War I. It would not be until the end of World War II that all of Ukraine was under the control of Moscow.
- During the period of Tsarist and later Soviet rule, Russian became the language of social mobility especially in Eastern Ukraine.
- In the 19th and 20th centuries authors like Taras Shevchenko began writing in Ukrainian in an attempt to reclaim the Ukrainian identity. Tsarist Russia reacted by limiting the use of the Ukrainian language.
- Under Stalin, attempts to suppress Ukrainian identity were taken to a brutal level with the Holodomor targeting Ukrainians



- Language was a politically polarizing issue.
  - About one third of self-identifying ethnic Ukrainians spoke Russian as their primary language according to the 2001 census. Zelensky himself is a native Russian speaker.
- (Image from: Knispel, Sandra. "Fact-Checking Putin's Claims That Ukraine and Russia Are 'One People.'" *University of Rochester News Center (blog)*. University of Rochester, March 3, 2022. <https://www.rochester.edu/news-center/ukraine-history-fact-checking-putin-513812/>)

- The 2014 invasion of Ukraine by Russia was opposed by almost all Ukrainians, regardless of language spoken.
- After the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, many Russian speaking Ukrainians began to speak Ukrainian in order to distance themselves from Russia.

### Anti-fascist Perspective

Russia attempted to justify the invasion by propagandizing that the war is intended for heroic denazification. What is the true situation of the far-right problem in Ukraine?

#### Ukraine's neo-Nazi problem

- Celebration of Nazi collaborators, e.g. Stepan Bandera, as anti-Soviet war heroes
- Apathy: Resists joining the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)
- "Not many of the Azov movement's international allies can boast of, for example, having a political party (National Corps), an erstwhile street paramilitary (National Militia, rebranded as Centuria in 2020)...book clubs and publishing houses, dozens of affiliated initiatives and projects and, of course, a namesake military unit that's an official part of Ukraine's National Guard"– *From the Fires of War*, Michael Colborne

#### Ukraine, anti-fascist

- In the 30 years since Ukraine's declaration of independence, its radical right's rarely won over 3 percent of vote in parliamentary elections
- Zelensky's efforts: passed law against antisemitism, funded memorial at Babyn Yar, suppressed illegal Azov activities
- "Statement on the War in Ukraine by Scholars of Genocide, Nazism and World War II"
- Patriotic stance, not fascist



A mourning ceremony at the Menorah memorial, Mariupol, 2019. Photo by STR/NurPhoto via Getty Images

### Zelensky Perspective

#### Zelensky and the Media

- Zelensky's official Instagram account @zelenskiy\_official has 16.8M followers, giving him a huge audience: he uses it to update the world on the course of the war and to show Ukraine's strength; representing national pride, cohesion, a strong military
- Main pattern in his feed: military sign, camouflage, Ukrainian flag and national colors, Zelensky in his office, with ordinary people, officials, and allies; implying Ukraine's strength, determination, and dominance; emphasizing the importance of Ukraine's national identity within this war
- Self-recorded videos of Zelensky: he is down-to-earth and stands on one level with ordinary Ukrainians; creating a feeling of shared experiences and values
- Zelensky is always wearing an olive-green crewneck with a Ukraine patch: emphasizing him as the head of all military actions; he is fighting for his country; creating a sense of reliability and strong leadership
- Zelensky's media strategy is to build trust: representing a modern leader opposed to Putin; he is with the people, not above them

