Journal of European Public Policy

ISSN: 1350-1763 (Print) 1466-4429 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjpp20

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Bjarn Eck & Elie Michel

To cite this article: Bjarn Eck & Elie Michel (28 May 2025): Breaking the stalemate: Europeans' preferences to expand, cut, or sustain support to Ukraine, Journal of European Public Policy, DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2025.2509755

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2509755

JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC POLICY
https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2509755

Breaking the stalemate: Europeans' preferences to expand, cut, or sustain support to Ukraine

Bjarn Eck [a] and Elie Michel [b]

[a]Cevipol, Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Bruxelles, Belgium; [b]FORS, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a turning point for European security. Public support is crucial for sustaining the significant aid European countries have provided to Ukraine. In this article, we focus on two key aspects of public opinion on the war in Ukraine: whether Europeans want to increase, decrease, or maintain current support, and what drives these attitudes. Using survey data from six European countries fielded in June 2024, we find little evidence of war fatigue among the European public. Most respondents express satisfaction with current aid levels, and a narrow majority in most countries even supports increasing aid, while around 10 percent firmly opposes any support. Interestingly, preferences are unrelated to whether a country has been a large or small donor. Furthermore, preferences are shaped by economic evaluations and national identities. Citizens who negatively assess the domestic economy are less supportive of aid, while personal financial concerns have no impact. In addition, citizens with strong feelings of national identity are also less supportive of aiding Ukraine. We discuss the implications of these findings in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the challenges they pose for sustaining public support crucial to European security.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 16 December 2024; Accepted 19 May 2025

KEYWORDS Public opinion; foreign policy attitudes; European security; support for Ukraine; economic concerns; national identity

1. Introduction

The illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and its aftermath have been a watershed moment for European security, with countermeasures taken

CONTACT Bjarn Eck bjarn.eck@ulb.be Cevipol, Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), 50 Avenue Franklin Roosevelt – cp 124, Bruxelles B-1050, Belgium

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2509755.

with unprecedented unity and speed by the European Union (EU). Just three days after the start of the war, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the first-ever EU-joint purchase and delivery of weapons and military equipment to assist Ukraine. European countries have since consistently and incrementally supported Ukraine, for instance delivering weapons initially considered escalatory, such as long-range defence systems and Leopard 2 tanks. At the same time, Ukraine has often indicated that the West is not sending enough aid in order to win the war against Russia.[1]

For European security, it is essential that European countries remain steadfast in their support for Ukraine, especially given that the US weakened its support under the second Trump administration. Domestic public support is one of the key elements to continue assistance to Ukraine. European governments are not only dependent on the public for their electoral success, but they also face questions of democratic legitimacy in their decision to support Ukraine. Continuing this support will become more difficult for governments when public opposition rises. For example, former German chancellor Olaf Scholz has often been portrayed to take into account German public opinion in his cautionary approach to aiding Ukraine.[2] Beyond anecdotal evidence, such patterns resonate with academic scholarship which has demonstrated the importance of public opinion on matters of war and foreign policy (Holsti, 2004). Accordingly, understanding how public support for assistance to Ukraine is shaped and what its main drivers are is essential for the outcome of this war and European security in the long run.

In this article, we therefore address two main questions on European public opinion about support to Ukraine. First, we analyse to what extent European citizens want to increase, decrease, or maintain current levels of their country's support for Ukraine rather than looking at static support (or opposition) to aiding Ukraine. This dynamic approach better reflects existing political debates in Europe, which largely revolve around the question of how much aid should be sent to Ukraine rather than whether Ukraine should be aided at all. Second, we theorise about two factors that should influence public support for aiding Ukraine. Against the backdrop of rising inflation and the electoral success of nationalist challengers to the political mainstream in response, we expect that economic evaluations – both at the individual and the national level – and exclusive national identities should play an important role in shaping public opinion on support for Ukraine.

To address these questions, we analyse survey responses from citizens in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland, collected after the European Parliament elections of June 2024. More than two years into the war, European public opinion about the war should be established, and go beyond rally around the flag effects. We find few signs of a war-weary European public after two years of war. A significant portion of respondents expresses satisfaction with current aid levels, which may however partly stem

from non-attitudes. Furthermore, in most countries, a narrow majority supports increasing aid, though each also has a notable minority of around 10 percent that is firmly opposed to providing any aid. Importantly, differences between countries seem largely unrelated to whether they have been a relatively large or small aid donor thus far.

Furthermore, we find that attitudes are shaped by both economic considerations as well as national identity. With regards to economic considerations, particularly concerns about the domestic economy play a significant role; citizens who believe that the economy is doing worse than last year are more likely to be more sceptical of sending aid to Ukraine. However, there is no systematic effect of individuals' concern over their personal income on support. With regards to identity, we find a clear negative relationship between identifying more strongly with the own country (versus Europe) and support for sending aid to Ukraine.

These findings contribute to the literature in three ways. First, we fill a substantive gap in the literature on foreign policy attitudes by studying European preferences toward a foreign conflict that does not involve boots on the ground. Whereas most of the literature on public attitudes to foreign policy has taken shape in the US (Holsti, 2004), recently more attention has been paid to European citizens, for example on how they perceive integrated EU defence structures (Fernández *et al.*, 2023; Mader, Gavras *et al.*, 2024; Mader, Neubert *et al.*, 2024; Moise *et al.*, 2025; Wang & Moise, 2023). Second, we add to the literature of support for military spending (DiGiuseppe *et al.*, 2023; Fay, 2020; Knopf, 1998; Williams, 2019), by showing that the importance of economic considerations ('guns versus butter') lies mostly at the sociotropic level, and this extends to military spending outside of the domestic arena. Finally, we extend the literature that examines public opinion toward European integration (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016), and show that national identities are not only important for explaining scepticism toward EU integration and specific policy integration (Azrout *et al.*, 2011; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014; Schoen, 2008; Vasilopoulou & Talving, 2019), but even toward matters that are not strictly EU policies but are strongly related to intergovernmental EU decision-making.

We proceed as follows. First, we shortly review the literature on public opinion toward foreign policy and war, after which we present our theory and hypotheses applying to the war in Ukraine. Subsequently, we present our dataset and introduce our measures of interest, and also reflect on the existing aid levels from the different countries to Ukraine. We then move to the analysis, where we first descriptively present our dependent variable, after which we present our regression models explaining the dynamics of support for Ukraine by country. Finally, we conclude, reflect on some of the implications of our findings, and suggest several avenues for future research.

2. European security and public opinion

Seminal studies of public opinion have argued that citizens' preferences on matters of foreign policy and war are unstructured, volatile, and not of significance to elites (Almond, 1960; Converse, 1970). Yet, more recent work has convincingly demonstrated otherwise. Public opinion on matters of foreign affairs and war is rather stable and rooted in ideology (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987), and responds to international events in a rational way (Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992; Shapiro & Page, 1988). More importantly, public opinion on foreign affairs matters to politicians because it matters to voters, particularly in wartime (Gelpi *et al.*, 2009).

However, research on public opinion on foreign policy and war has predominantly concentrated on American voters, with limited empirical research on European citizens. In the aftermath of political developments in the 1990s that witnessed increased public opposition toward European integration, a large literature emerged that studied its drivers (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016). Within this subfield, a couple of studies investigated public support for European defence integration. In contrast to generic European integration, this policy area generally receives widespread public support (Irondelle *et al.*, 2015; Kentmen, 2010; Mader *et al.*, 2020; Schoen, 2008), although debate exists to what extent this support is sincere or rather superficial as a result of a lack of understanding of defence integration among the public (Brummer, 2007; Schilde *et al.*, 2019).

Although the EU has relatively extensively integrated in the field of defence and security in the past decade,[3] this development has attracted remarkably little politicisation. The illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has shifted this dynamic, bringing discussions on defence integration, and public opinion thereon, to the forefront of the political agenda and academic research. Speaking to the 'external threat hypothesis', several recent studies have shown that perceived security threats among the public, such as the Russian war in Ukraine, elevate support for European defence integration (Fernández *et al.*, 2023; Mader, 2024; Mader, Gavras *et al.*, 2024; Wang & Moise, 2023) as well as the commitment to alliance solidarity within NATO (DiGiuseppe *et al.*, 2023; Graf *et al.*, 2023).

However, few studies have focussed on attitudes toward the war in Ukraine. Descriptive results of support for aiding Ukraine in their war effort reveal that support was generally high in the first year after the outbreak of the war (Thomson *et al.*, 2023), although less risky measures such as humanitarian aid attract higher levels of support than riskier measures such as sending military equipment or even boots on the ground (Stolle, 2024). Within existing work, we notice two key limitations which this study addresses. First, existing studies and surveys measure support for aiding Ukraine *in general*, whereas political debates often focus on whether aid

should be *increased* or *decreased*. This is a fundamental difference as a major policy criticism pertains that the West is doing enough for Ukraine to keep fighting, but not to win the war.[4]

For example, the European Election Study (EES) that was fielded after the European elections in 2024 offered respondents a 5-point Likert scale to indicate to what extent they agreed that 'EU countries should continue providing military assistance to Ukraine' (Figure 1) (Popa *et al.*, 2024). This type of measure provides interesting information about general support, which is relatively high: the average of all countries (red dashed line) lies above the midpoint on the scale (2), which shows consistent support for aiding Ukraine more than two years after the outbreak of the war. It is however more difficult to interpret desired policy change from this measure – especially with regards to a desire in increasing aid. We therefore focus on the question to what extent Europeans want to increase, decrease, or maintain current support levels to provide more nuanced understanding of support for aiding Ukraine that aligns with political debates.

Second, existing work has left unanswered the question of what drives support and opposition for aiding Ukraine. Analyses have mostly pointed toward differences at the country level (Stolle, 2024; Thomson *et al.*, 2023). For example, countries located more closely to Russia seem to be more favourable of supporting Ukraine than countries further away from the conflict, although this relationship is far from perfect.

The EES data are also suitable for studying such differences between countries, which are indeed considerable. In addition to geographic location,

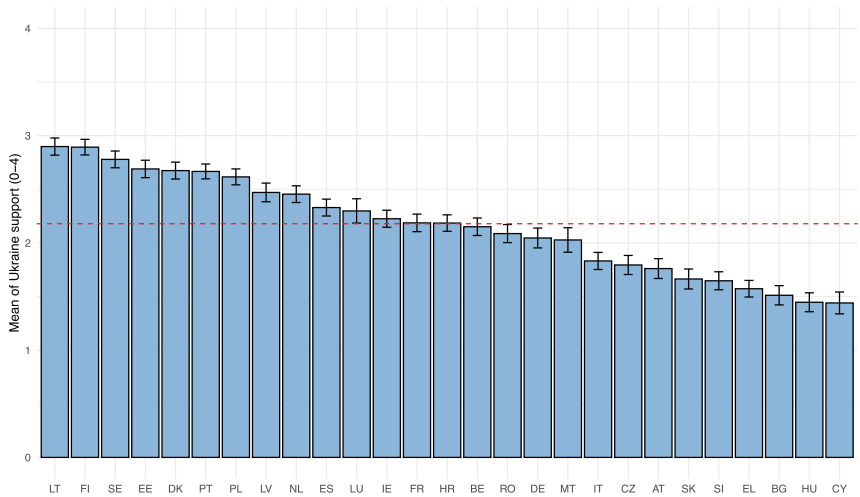

Figure 1. Average support for sending military aid to Ukraine.

Average response to statement *EU countries should continue providing military assistance to Ukraine*. 0 = fully disagree; 4 = fully agree (including 95 percent confidence intervals). The red dashed line indicates the average response across the 27 EU member states.

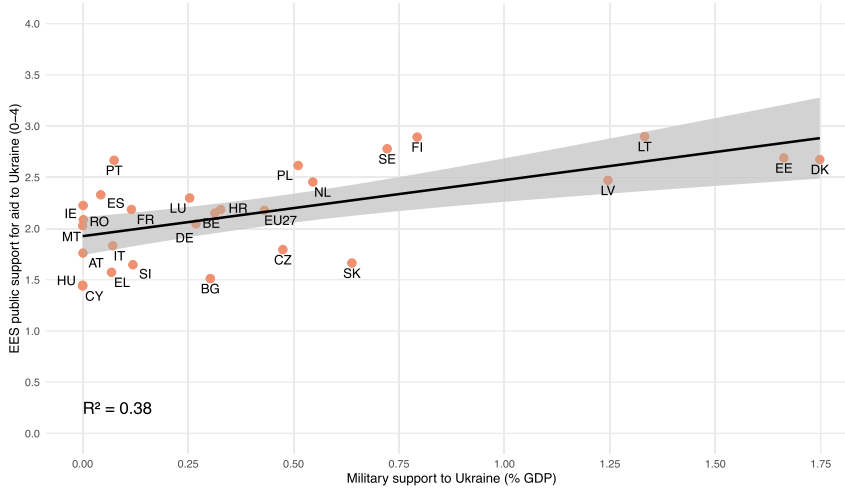

Figure 2. Relationship between public support and policies.

Bivariate regression between mean public support for aiding Ukraine (EES) and current military support policies (% GDP, Kiel Institute data).

there could also be a straightforward policy-public opinion linkage: citizens in countries that send more aid are also more supportive of aiding Ukraine. While long-ranging debates exist about the direction of causality (Page & Shapiro, 1983) – whether public opinion influences policy or vice versa – we do indeed find a positive correlation in Figure 2 between public opinion on aiding Ukraine (EES data) and military support levels per country as percentage of GDP (Kiel Institute data).

Still, Figure 2 also shows that a large amount of variance remains unexplained. This is not only indicated by the R-squared of 0.38, but also by the fact that several countries are clear outliers. We suggest that individual-level drivers should play an important role, which are discarded in aggregate analyses. We therefore lack understanding about which groups in society are more likely to raise opposition to supporting Ukraine once the issue becomes more politicised. In the next section, we point toward two potential individual-level drivers: economic evaluations and national identity.

3. Theory

3.1. Guns versus butter

Theorizing public support for aid to Ukraine is particularly challenging, as it involves a unique scenario where the European public must form opinions on a war in which their own countries are not directly engaged with boots on the ground, unlike recent conflicts such as in Afghanistan. Yet, the outcome of the war is still directly influenced by the decisions of European

leaders, as the successes of Ukraine's military are largely dependent on military aid coming from Western countries.

Given that military aid to Ukraine is advancing the security and military agenda of European countries, we argue that supporting military aid for Ukraine is in essence comparable to support for military spending domestically. Many countries have been donating military equipment from their domestic arsenals to Ukraine, which has accelerated their production as well as military spending. The decision to support Ukraine militarily thus directly pushes European countries to increase military spending.

Accordingly, we draw from the literature on public support for military spending for our first hypothesis. One of the key determinants in the literature on the support for military spending has become famous as the 'guns versus butter' model (Powell, 1993; Whitten & Williams, 2011). Whereas it is crucial for states for the survival within the international system to allocate sufficient funds to their military, this spending is the result of a trade-off with domestic spending, most notably on social security and welfare systems. In other words, the more resources that are devoted to the military, the less resources are left to spend on domestic welfare causes, such as health care, education, and social welfare programs.

This financial trade-off also creates political cleavages over the question of military spending. Political parties that are in favour of welfare redistribution, such as social democrats, are generally less supportive of costly military policies than conservative right-wing parties which put more focus on national security (Koch & Sullivan, 2010; Wagner *et al.*, 2018; Wenzelburger & Böller, 2020). This is reflected in their support bases: citizens with left-wing ideologies or lower incomes are less supportive of military spending, whereas affluent, right-wing individuals are more likely to favour increased spending (Leal, 2005; Simon & Lovrich, 2010). In recent years, direct research on public preferences for military spending has been very scarce, but the few exceptions have provided supportive evidence for the guns versus butter model (Fay, 2020; Lee, 2024).

Since 2022, political debate over the war in Ukraine has been closely tied to economic costs. This was especially evident at the war's onset, when efforts to reduce dependency on Russian gas sparked heated discussions across Europe and triggered sharp increases in energy prices.[5] The general increase of energy prices also stimulated commodity prices in Europe, with many countries witnessing double-digit inflation rates. Recent research has shown that concerns about these energy prices are correlated with more willingness to appease Russia in the conflict (Moise & Wang, 2025). We therefore expect that the considerations related to the trade-off between military spending and using resources for domestic social purposes should also translate to the context of aid for Ukraine. Specifically, we expect that individuals who are concerned about their incomes are more likely to favour reducing aid to Ukraine.

H1: Citizens who are facing economic difficulties are less supportive of increasing their country's aid to Ukraine.

We extend the guns versus butter model also to the country level. Whereas some citizens might not be facing economic hardship individually, they could still be worried about their country's economic development. From the economic voting literature, we know that the state of the domestic economy matters for political outcomes, for example in citizens' decision on who to vote for (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000; Powell & Whitten, 1993). Moreover, research has revealed that national economic evaluations often play a larger role than concerns over personal finances for citizens to determine their vote (Freire & Santana-Pereira, 2012; Singer & Carlin, 2013).

We expect that it is likely that citizens who worry about their country's economy take the aid toward Ukraine into account. Increased military investments are directly paid from a state's budget and thus decrease its leeway to shift resources to other domestic domains. In Germany, for example, aid to Ukraine became more politicised in the summer of 2024 as a result of its difficult budgetary situation, which raised concern over the country's capabilities to maintain its level of support.[6] We expect that national economic considerations should also play a role in the minds of citizens; those who have pessimistic views of the country's economy should be less supportive of aiding Ukraine than those with more optimistic views, regardless of their own financial situation.

H2: Citizens with more pessimistic views of their country's economy are less supportive of increasing their country's aid to Ukraine.

3.2. National versus European identity

Rather than approaching the issue of aid to Ukraine as a simple economic issue, it could also be argued that it relates to transnational solidarity, and is rooted in attitudes toward European integration. More specifically, whereas Ukraine is not an EU member, crucial political justification for sending aid has been that it is a European democracy that deserves European solidarity and support. Discussions about its potential future Union membership have also intensified since the outbreak of the war.[7] When considering their support for Ukraine, European citizens might thus go beyond a simple economic calculation and base their attitudes on considerations of European solidarity rooted in a European identity.

The impact of identities is indeed significant for public support for European integration (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016). More importantly, it is often juxtaposed with more utilitarian economic considerations related to the impact of European integration. Early studies on public support for European integration, especially in response to rising Euroscepticism in the 1990s,

argued that support and opposition toward the EU are shaped by diverging economic benefits of integration both at the individual (Anderson, 1998; Anderson & Reichert, 1995; Gabel, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c; Gabel & Palmer, 1995) and the country level (Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996; Carrubba, 1997; Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993). Later accounts have shifted focus to the importance of identities (Carey, 2002; McLaren, 2002, 2006), reflecting the development of the EU from a merely economic project to a wide-encompassing political entity with far-reaching competences beyond the single market. This approach does not necessarily dispute the explanatory value of economic determinants, but it argues that a sole focus on rational cost-benefit explanations misses an important part of the picture: matters of identity, culture, and nationalism carry more weight in explaining attitudes toward European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009).

Essentially, the identity approach contends that European integration leads to a system of multi-level governance in which nation-states – which have been the core political arena for citizens for decades – shift authority and competences about important aspects of people's lives to a higher level. Therefore, European integration 'undermines national self-determination and blurs boundaries between distinct national communities' (Hooghe & Marks, 2005, p. 423). Since (political) identities in the European continent have been predominantly formed along national lines, they are likely to influence the perceptions of citizens on an institutional project that pools sovereignty and therewith potentially diminishes the opportunities for expressions of these identities, as boundaries between national communities become more blurry.

Accordingly, citizens with strong nationalistic ties are more sceptical of European integration, whereas citizens that identify along European lines are more likely to support it. Time and again, research has shown the importance of national identities with regards to attitudes toward European integration, not only towards generic integration (Clark & Rohrschneider, 2021; Hutter & Grande, 2014; Kuhn & Nicoli, 2020) but also with regards to specific policy domains such as euro membership (Hobolt & Leblond, 2009), economic governance (Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014), and the freedom of movement (Vasilopoulou & Talving, 2019). We also know that nationalist identities play an important role in explaining opposition to European defence integration (Schoen, 2008) and the accession of new member states into the Union (Azrout *et al.*, 2011; Gerhards & Hans, 2011).

Still, one could argue that aid to Ukraine is not a matter of European integration, nor a matter of policy-specific integration. In fact, whether to send support to Ukraine is a national competence. However, this overlooks the fact that aid packages to Ukraine have also been decided upon jointly by EU members, for example through the Commission's Ukraine Facility.[8] It is therefore conceivable that European citizens view assistance to Ukraine, at

least to some extent, as an extension of EU politics, or even that they are unable to keep track of the differences between independent member state aid and joint EU aid. In addition, many of these decisions have developed alongside debates about future Ukrainian EU membership, further intertwining support to Ukraine with increased European integration. Accordingly, we expect that the importance of national identities in explaining opposition toward the EU and EU policies extends to policies that are officially a member state competence, but are strongly related to the policy agenda of the EU – such as aid to Ukraine. Nationalistic citizens could see this aid as eroding national self-determination, given that it involves one's country into an international conflict. In contrast, citizens with stronger European identifications should be more supportive of aiding Ukraine, not only because they are more likely to show solidarity to other European countries but also because they are more inclined to see Russian aggression as a threat to the viability of the European integration project.

H3: Citizens with more nationalist identifications are less supportive of increasing their country's aid to Ukraine.

4. Data, measures, and methods

4.1. Dataset

To explore citizens' support for aid to Ukraine, we rely on a survey that was fielded in six European countries: Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland, between 10 and 24 June 2024, following the European Parliament elections (Faulí Molas *et al*., 2025). We believe that the timing of the survey is particularly suitable to study the correlates of support for aiding Ukraine because rally around the flag effects should have worn off more than two years after the outbreak of the war, and responses are therefore less contaminated by the shock of the Russian invasion. The survey was part of a larger project to study the European elections. It was fielded by Dynata and relied on an online quota sample based on gender, age, region, and education. The final samples consist of roughly a 1,000 respondents per country closely mirroring quotas, which is important considering the (mostly) descriptive nature of our paper.

The country selection ensures contextual diversity of countries within the EU in several ways. It covers countries of different geographic regions of Europe – West (Belgium, Germany, Netherlands), Central/East (Hungary and Poland), and South (Italy), which have diverging historical relationships with both the EU as well as with Russia. Historically speaking, it includes both countries that have been founding members (Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Italy) as well as more recent member states of the EU (Hungary and Poland). This division also aligns in terms of historical ties to Russia; Hungary and Poland were satellite states of the Soviet Union during the Cold War,

whereas Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy are founding members of NATO, shortly joined by the Federal Republic of Germany. Moreover, the dataset includes citizens who live in countries that are net contributors to (Germany, Italy, Netherlands) as well as net recipients from the EU budget (Belgium, Hungary, Poland).

Furthermore, there are also important differences between the countries in their (relative) support toward Ukraine thus far. We believe that this could be important because it potentially influences our responses: countries that have already sent a lot of aid to Ukraine might face a more sceptic public (or minimally reluctant to increase aid beyond what is currently done) than countries that have helped Ukraine to a lesser extent. As we are unable to include this help in our regression models because of the low number of countries, we briefly reflect on this background here.

The Ukraine Support Tracker Database, an initiative of the Kiel Institute for the World Economy provides reliable data on aid levels for Ukraine (Trebesch *et al.*, 2023). This database lists and quantifies all support to Ukraine from 41 Western governments and EU institutions. The most recent version quantifies support between January 24, 2022 and August 31, 2024, distinguishing between military, humanitarian, and financial support.[9] Military support consists of all kinds of weapons or military equipment directly sent to the Ukrainian army. Humanitarian support refers to aid that is targeting the Ukrainian civilian population, such as food and medicines. Finally, financial support consists of direct grants of loans to the Ukrainian government that do not have a clear military or humanitarian purpose.

Figure 3 plots the Ukrainian aid per category in each country (including the EU-27 average to provide a benchmark) relative to GDP size of 2021 (the year

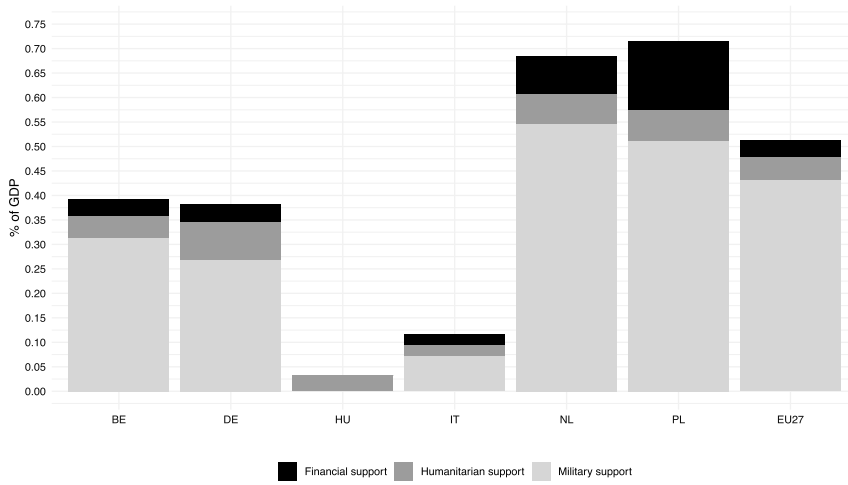

Figure 3. Current aid levels to Ukraine.

preceding the start of the war). Two patterns of aid clearly stand out. First, there is a large difference between countries in relative support. The Netherlands and Poland have sent the largest aid packages with around 0.7 percent of their respective GDP. Hungary and Italy, on the other hand, have sent much lower direct aid to Ukraine, while Belgium and Germany are closer to, but still below the EU-27 average of around 0.5 percent of GDP. Second, countries have spent most of their resources on military aid rather than humanitarian or financial support. This mirrors political debates in Europe, which have largely focussed on determining both the quantity and types of weapons to send to Ukraine to support its efforts in winning the war.

4.2. Dependent variable: support for aiding Ukraine

To measure support and opposition toward aid to Ukraine, we rely on the following question:

> Many European countries have been supporting Ukraine since it was invaded by Russia in February 2022. Some people say that [RESPONDENT'S COUNTRY] should do more to help Ukraine, others say that [RESPONDENT'S COUNTRY] should do less. What describes your position best?

Responses are measured on a 0–10 scale, where 0 means that a respondent wants their country to do less, while 10 indicates a desire for much stronger support. 5 is the midpoint that allowed respondents to indicate satisfaction with current levels of support. Roughly 5 percent of respondents indicated that they did not know, which makes us confident that the question was sufficiently clear to respondents.

The major advantage of posing such question is that it offers respondents not only an option to show dissatisfaction with current aid to Ukraine, but also a *direction* of dissatisfaction. Most survey questions measuring support for aiding Ukraine rely either on static measures (in favour of support yes/no) or on questions related to satisfaction with current government aid. The disadvantage of these questions is the lack of nuance and the disconnection with current political debates. In addition, when a respondent indicates to be dissatisfied with the support to Ukraine, this is not indicative of why. Some citizens might be dissatisfied because they reject sending aid at all, whereas others' dissatisfaction could be rooted in the belief that their country should do more. Finally, respondents that are satisfied with current aid levels and are not eager to change it also have a clear option with the midpoint on the scale.

While we argue that this question is a more refined measure to map diverging attitudes to supporting Ukraine, the obvious disadvantage is that it does not allow for measuring different types of support. However, we believe that respondents will mostly look at this question in terms of military aid – the type of aid that has dominated European support thus far as well as the

type that is discussed most vigorously in political debates and the media. Nonetheless, a humanitarian or financial interpretation should not influence our hypotheses in substantial ways. All types of support include financial burdens for the supporting country, and should thus be met with scepticism by respondents facing economic hardship. Similarly, respondents that identify more nationally are expected to show less solidarity, regardless of whether this support is of humanitarian, financial, or military nature. We must also acknowledge that we cannot account for motivational differences in choosing to increase or decrease support; two respondents might choose the same option but have different reasons to do so.

4.3. Independent variables

To measure the impact of economic attitudes, we ask respondents about their personal financial situation as well as their view of the country's economy. At the personal level, respondents were asked how they feel about their household's income nowadays – answer options ranged from 'living comfortably on present income' (1) to 'finding it very difficult on present income' (4). For national evaluations of the economy, we asked respondents how they believe the general economic situation in their country is compared to 12 months ago, for which they could choose from 'a lot better' (1) to 'a lot worse' (5). With regards to national or European identification, we rely on a standardised question from the European integration literature, asking respondents whether they see themselves as European only, as European and their nationality, as their nationality and European, or as their nationality only. We decide to dichotomise this variable, comparing respondents with an exclusive national identity (1) to all others (0). With regards to our hypotheses, all three variables should thus have a negative coefficient: higher values should suppress support to aid Ukraine.

We also control for several variables that we expect to influence attitudes toward aiding Ukraine. As opinions might be informed by government support, we include a party identification variable that categorises respondents into 3 categories: identification with the government (0), no party ID (1), and identification with an opposition party (2). To control for general political behaviour, we include political trust (trust in the national parliament; 0–10 scale), political interest (1–5; ranging from 'not interested at all' to 'very interested'), and left-right self-identification (0 = 'left'; 10 = 'right'). We also control for socio-demographic background by including age (6 categories), education (3 categories), and gender (1 = male).

4.4. Methodology

With regards to our modelling strategy in the regression analyses, we decide to collapse the dependent variable into three categories in light of the goal of

our paper to study dynamic attitudes. Respondents that answered between 1 and 4 are coded as 1 (decrease support), respondents that chose a 5 are coded as 2 (sustain support), and respondents that chose a 6 or higher are coded as 3 (increase support). Given the ordered structure of this categorical dependent variable, we opt for ordered logistic regression models to analyse the data. To account for the variation between countries, we present the results with separate regressions for all countries. We believe that this choice trumps a model with fixed effects per country because it improves transparency. In other words, if one of the variables has no impact on our dependent variable in one of the countries, it would not be hidden in a pooled model.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive analysis

Figure 4 shows the distribution of support for sending aid to Ukraine in each country. Preferences are relatively normally distributed, and the mean response, around 5, is strikingly similar in each country. However, the average response per country obscures several diverging patterns of the data within countries, as well as some differences between countries.

First, the results suggest that after more than two years of daily news about the war in Ukraine, European citizens have not become weary of the war thus far. Were that the case, we would have expected far stronger opposition to European involvement – and thus sending aid – than we find in our

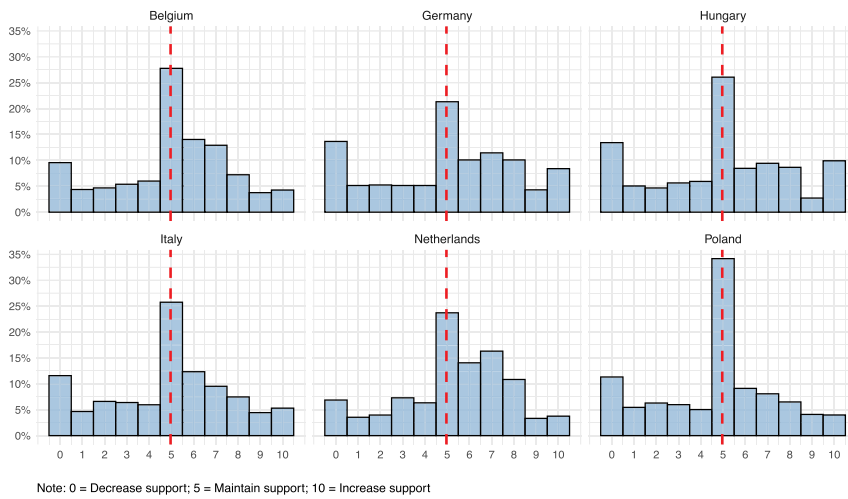

Figure 4. Distribution of responses on sending aid to Ukraine.
The red dashed line indicates the mean value for each country.

data. In fact, in most countries there are more individuals that wish to increase aid than to decrease aid. Figure 4 also shows that about 25 percent of respondents in each country are satisfied with their current government's aid to Ukraine. This figure is slightly higher in Poland, which might be a reflection of the country's high direct support (which comes on top of the large refugee intake). Though the high selection of the middle category on the scale may be an indication of satisfaction, it may also partly stem from the issue's low politicisation before the data collection, which might have hindered citizens from forming clear opinions. Some more detailed analyses (Appendix B.1) partially supports this: we find that respondents who want to increase their country's support to Ukraine are more politically interested than respondents who select the midpoint on the scale. However, compared to respondents who want to decrease aid, we find no statistical difference in political interest for respondents selecting the midpoint.

Furthermore, there seems to be no clear impact of existing aid levels on the attitudes of citizens. For example, Dutch citizens are most supportive of increasing their country's aid to Ukraine, even though their country is already one of the largest donors in this group. Citizens of the lowest contributor member states (Hungary and Italy) are also equally in favour of increasing their country's aid. Finally, a small but significant group of citizens in each country – about 10 percent of each sample – is categorically against any aid to Ukraine. All in all, we conclude that there is a clear polarisation of opinions between citizens in European countries in their support for changing aid to Ukraine, with a slight majority of citizens in favour of increasing aid. At the same time, many citizens are comfortable at present levels, or simply have not made up their minds yet.

5.2. Regression analyses

Table 1 presents the regression models to analyse the factors that influence support for aid to Ukraine by country. The regression models are separated for each country, with standard errors in parentheses. Independent variables are standardised to a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1, such that they can be directly compared (except the binary variables national identity and gender). A variance inflation factor (VIF) test was carried out after a linear version of each model (Appendix A.3), showing no serious multicollinearity issues.

With regards to the impact of the economy, evaluations of the national economy clearly affect attitudes toward supporting Ukraine. In five out of six countries, respondents who believe that the economy is doing worse than last year are less supportive of sending support to Ukraine. The only exception is Hungary, where national economic evaluations do not seem to have any impact on support for Ukraine. We conclude that these results

Table 1. Regression results.

	BE (1)	DE (2)	HU (3)	IT (4)	NL (5)	PL (6)
Personal economy	0.072	0.049	−0.084	−0.111	−0.190*	−0.160*
	(0.077)	(0.077)	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.078)	(0.073)
National economy	−0.337***	−0.452***	−0.040	−0.258**	−0.378***	−0.426***
	(0.080)	(0.082)	(0.080)	(0.089)	(0.081)	(0.085)
National identity	−0.453*	−0.386*	−0.725***	−0.464**	−0.632***	−0.072
	(0.178)	(0.178)	(0.190)	(0.174)	(0.159)	(0.210)
No party ID	−0.062	−0.233	0.076	0.430	−0.108	−0.294
(ref: government)	(0.184)	(0.208)	(0.211)	(0.220)	(0.185)	(0.255)
Opposition party ID	0.041	−0.467*	0.453*	0.637**	0.039	−0.596**
(ref: government)	(0.169)	(0.189)	(0.210)	(0.220)	(0.205)	(0.224)
Political trust	0.458***	0.848***	−0.023	0.458***	0.690***	0.316***
	(0.087)	(0.090)	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.086)	(0.080)
Political interest	0.236**	0.313***	0.292***	−0.066	0.063	−0.023
	(0.084)	(0.083)	(0.075)	(0.080)	(0.082)	(0.082)
Left-right	−0.002	−0.113	−0.536***	−0.070	−0.360***	0.118
	(0.074)	(0.079)	(0.083)	(0.102)	(0.091)	(0.076)
Education	0.155*	0.052	0.227***	0.136	−0.038	0.081
	(0.074)	(0.074)	(0.067)	(0.075)	(0.081)	(0.073)
Age	0.016	−0.092	−0.056	−0.270***	0.037	0.346***
	(0.073)	(0.076)	(0.067)	(0.075)	(0.081)	(0.075)
Male	0.348*	0.508***	0.142	0.185	0.563***	0.492***
	(0.145)	(0.150)	(0.129)	(0.139)	(0.154)	(0.139)
Log-Likelihood	−795.91	−750	−930.38	−810.72	−714.1	−820.35
Cutoff 1	−0.882	−0.928	−0.595	−0.423	−1.206	−1.024
Cutoff 2	0.473	0.281	0.642	0.834	0.133	0.642
Observations	813	862	945	796	810	809

Note: *$p<0.05$; **$p<0.01$; ***$p<0.001$

largely support H2. On the other hand, personal economic evaluations seem to play a much smaller role in shaping support or opposition for aid to Ukraine. Only in the Netherlands and Poland, the coefficients are negative and significant as hypothesised; suggesting that individuals with more personal economic hardship are indeed less supportive of sending aid to Ukraine. However, in the other four countries, the coefficients do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, and they are even positive in Belgium and Germany. We conclude that H1 is not supported, and that national economic evaluations clearly trump personal economic evaluations. This finding is in line with the literature on economic voting, which shows that evaluations of the national economy play a larger role in vote choice than personal economic evaluations (Freire & Santana-Pereira, 2012; Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000).

The models also indicate that citizens with an exclusive national identity are less supportive of their country's aid to Ukraine. In all countries, the coefficients are negative as hypothesised in H3. The effect sizes differ between countries, however, and the impact of having a national versus a European identity is particularly large in Hungary and the Netherlands, whereas the coefficient is not significant in Poland. Still, the impact of identities is clear, and we conclude that identification at the national level indeed decreases

support for aiding Ukraine. Individuals with an exclusive national identity thus seem to have less solidarity with Ukraine, and this translates in their attitudes toward supporting it in the war against Russia. These results thus provide strong support for H3. Interestingly, an exclusive national identity even has an impact on issues that are not exactly EU policies, yet strongly related to the EU. This extends previous literature that already showed that exclusive national identities are associated with Euroscepticism in general, as well as for specific EU policies (Azrout *et al.*, 2011; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014; Schoen, 2008). With regards to the control variables, particularly political trust is positively related to support for aiding Ukraine, which is most likely partially the reflection of incumbency support. Other control variables show little systematic relationships across countries.

To enhance the interpretability of the results, we plot predicted probabilities of a pooled model with country fixed effects for the variables national economy and national identity in Figures 5 and 6. The figures show the likelihood of choosing preferences toward aiding Ukraine (decrease, maintain, or increase) per level of the independent variable. With regards to national economic evaluations, the effects on decreasing or increasing aid are relatively linear. Compared to economic optimists, respondents become gradually less supportive of increasing aid to Ukraine as their economic pessimism grows. Likewise, they become more supportive of decreasing aid. It also shows that national economic evaluations have little impact on choosing the middle category of maintaining support.

Figure 6 shows the same predicted probabilities for respondents with an exclusive national identity compared to respondents with a national and/or

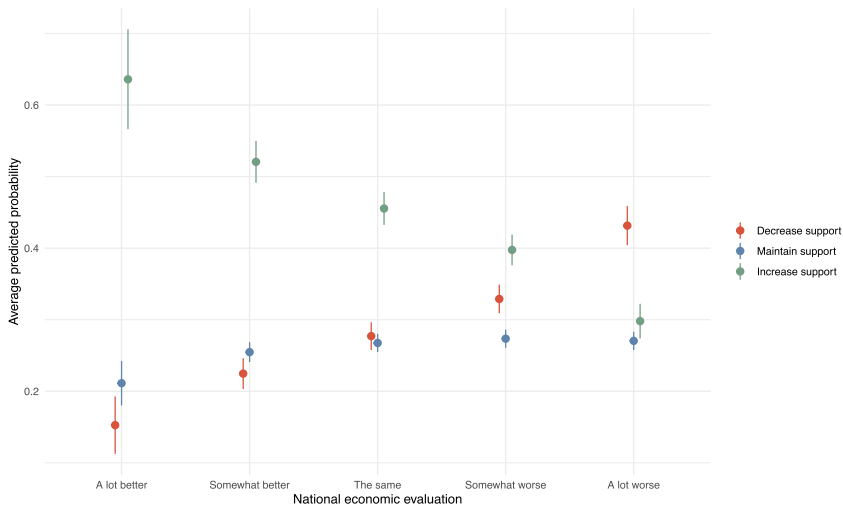

Figure 5. Predicted probabilities for economic evaluations.

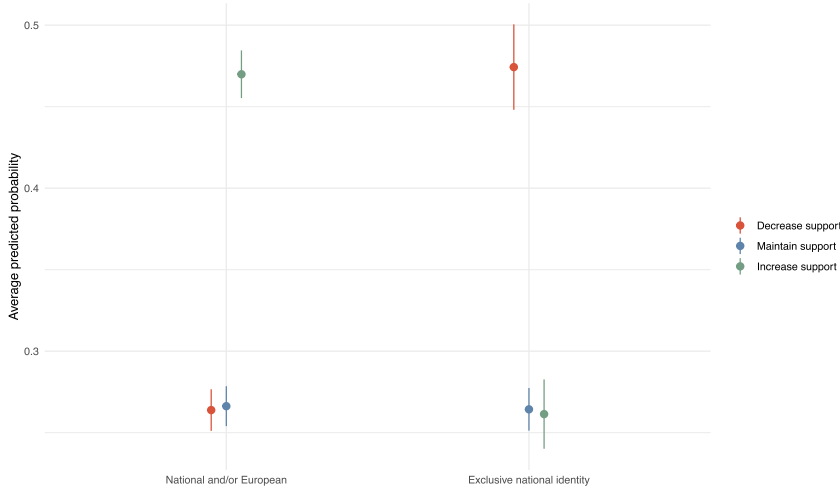

Figure 6. Predicted probabilities for national identity.

European identity. Indeed, respondents with an exclusive national identity are much more likely to support decreasing aid to Ukraine. At the same time, they are much less likely to show a preference for increasing support. When it comes to the middle category, however, we find no meaningful differences: both types of respondents are equally likely to choose to sustain support.

In terms of country variation, Hungary displays a clear deviance in the pattern of most coefficients. For example, it is the only country where national economic evaluations and political trust have, respectively, negative and positive effects on attitudes toward aiding Ukraine. Given that both national economic evaluations as well as political trust are to some extent endogenous to incumbency support (Evans & Pickup, 2010; Hetherington, 1998), we interpret this as a clear indication of Viktor Orbán's critical stance on supporting Ukraine. This also reinforces the idea that there is a linkage between policy and public opinion, with room for European leaders to shape public opinion on this issue. Although Italy has also provided relatively little aid, its government has been much less critical of supporting Ukraine, which explains why we find relatively similar associations among Italian respondents.

Finally, we explore whether the negative effects of pessimistic national economic evaluations on aid to Ukraine are amplified by having an exclusive national identity. In Figure 7, we plot the interaction between both variables and show the predicted probabilities of falling into one of the three categories of preference toward supporting Ukraine. We find no evidence for an interaction effect between these two variables. Europeans with an exclusive national identity are consistently more supportive of decreasing support

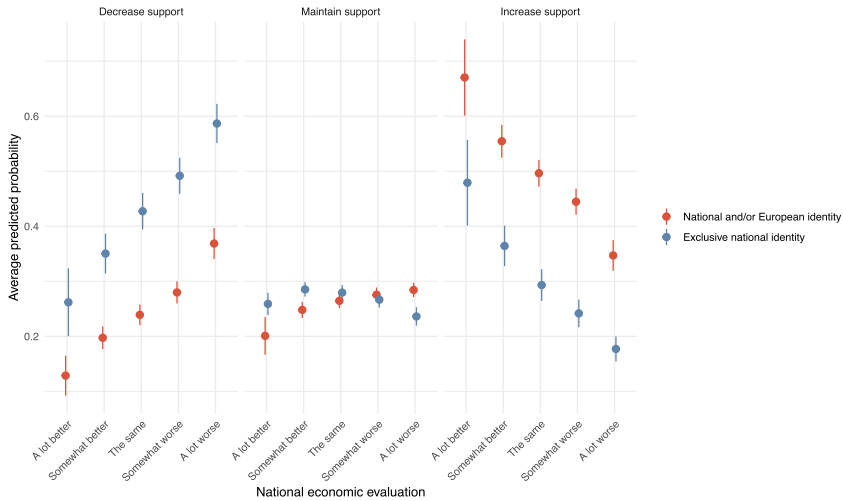

Figure 7. Predicted probabilities for interaction between national economic evaluation and national identity.

to Ukraine and consistently less supportive of increasing it compared to Europeans with more inclusive identities, regardless of economic evaluation.

6. Robustness tests

The downside of our cross-national dataset is that we are limited in making causal claims and that there is a potential for omitted variable bias. We therefore run several additional analyses to scrutinise our findings more thoroughly. First, it could be argued that public opinion towards Ukraine is strongly influenced by party support. For example, radical parties on both the left and the right have been less supportive of sending aid to Ukraine than centrist parties (Fagerholm, 2024; Wagner, 2024; Wondreys, 2023), and in some cases even outright supported Putin in his actions. To control for this, we perform several additional tests. We first add party fixed-effects into the models (Appendix B.2), but we do not find a meaningful change to the results. In Appendix B.3, we also run a model which includes a squared value of the left-right self-placement variable, but we find no evidence for a non-linear relationship. Finally, we compute a variable based on vote choice with 3 categories: radical left (1), radical right (2), and all other votes (0).[10] We indeed find some evidence that radical right voters are less supportive of aiding Ukraine, with negative and significant coefficients in Germany, Hungary, and the Netherlands. Yet, we do not detect this effect for radical left voters, and it also does not substantively change the effects of the main variables of interest (Appendix B.4).

Furthermore, the importance of national identities could be a mere reflection of attitudes toward the EU in general. We therefore perform a stricter test and run a model that includes trust in the European Parliament (Appendix B.5). We find little effects for this variable on support for aiding Ukraine, and it also does not change our main findings.

Finally, we replicate our models while excluding respondents that took the midpoint position on supporting Ukraine (Appendix B.6). This allows for a stricter test of our hypotheses, as it excludes respondents that might not have made up their mind yet and thus only tests the effects of our variables on respondents that would like to change their current government policy toward Ukraine. We recode the categorised variable into a binary one (1 = increasing aid) and run a logistic regression. Although this leads to a substantial drop in the number of observations for each country, we find very robust results: national economic evaluations and exclusive national identities have a clear negative relationship with support for aiding Ukraine.

7. Conclusion

This study analysed how Europeans view the support that their countries are sending to Ukraine. To do so, we rely on a survey that was fielded in 6 European countries in June 2024. We show that a significant size of respondents in each country is generally satisfied with the current levels of support, but that many citizens also prefer to either decrease or increase aid that is sent to Ukraine to win the war against Russia. We find little evidence that citizens use the relative level of current support compared to other European countries as a benchmark for shaping their own attitude. Countries with high current levels of support do not necessarily have a more sceptic public, or vice versa. This implies that countries that are already among the highest European contributors to Ukraine still have leeway to increase support even further without necessary public backlash.

Furthermore, we examined which factors shape support and opposition for aiding Ukraine. Economic evaluations, which have often been part of political discussions on supporting Ukraine, mainly matter at the national level. Individuals with more pessimistic views of the domestic economy are more likely to oppose aid to Ukraine. At the personal level, we find much less systematic evidence for this: concerns about personal income do not translate in more opposition sending aid to Ukraine. Finally, we find a strong predicting role for identities. Individuals with more nationalistic identities are much more likely to oppose aid to Ukraine versus individuals that not only identify nationally, but also with Europe.

We contribute to the literature in three ways. First, we substantively add to the growing literature on foreign policy attitudes among European citizens,

which has been growing since Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Fernández *et al.*, 2023; Mader, 2024; Mader, Gavras *et al.*, 2024; Mader, Neubert *et al.*, 2024; Moise *et al.*, 2025; Moise & Wang, 2025; Wang & Moise, 2023). Second, it has been argued for decades that military spending is to an important extent driven by economic considerations (guns vs. butter) (Fay, 2020; Knopf, 1998; Powell, 1993), but very few empirical analyses of public opinion have directly tested this mechanism at the individual level (DiGiuseppe *et al.*, 2023; Williams, 2019). We show that economic concerns matter, but only at the national level. In addition, we show that the impact of economic concerns extends beyond general military spending and also affects policies that are closely related to defence spending, such as aid to Ukraine. Third, we add to the literature on public support for European integration (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016). This literature has time and again shown that citizens who identify exclusively along national lines are not only less supportive of the European polity, but also of specific EU integration policies (Azrout *et al.*, 2011; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2014; Schoen, 2008; Vasilopoulou & Talving, 2019). We show that even policies that are completely within the authority of member states can yield opposition from voters with exclusive national identities if these policies are decided upon in intergovernmental EU frameworks. By simply having the association of EU politics, these can already face opposition from EU-sceptic citizens.

Our findings have several implications. First, more than two years into the war, despite numerous aid packages from individual EU countries and coordinated efforts through EU mechanisms, we find little evidence that the European public has grown weary of the conflict. In most countries, a majority of respondents is actually in favour of increasing support to Ukraine. Moreover, the fact that a large number of respondents in each country selects the midpoint on the scale might indicate that not all Europeans have developed full opinions on this issue (Sturgis *et al.*, 2014). This would mean that there is room for European elites to shape public opinion – opinion leadership – in favour of policies that they prefer. Either way, it seems that increased politicisation of this aid to Ukraine does not necessarily translate in major backlash against supporting Ukraine as long as European leaders are able to justify their decisions accordingly.

Second, the results show that citizens' personal concerns about their income do not play an important role in their attitudes toward helping Ukraine. Economically, what matters most is their impression of the state of the economy. This means that there is a responsibility for European leaders who want to increase support to Ukraine to explain to their public that aiding Ukraine only absorbs a small fraction of the domestic budget. Furthermore, they might appeal to the fact that aiding Ukraine to win the war is far less costly than letting Russia win, as the latter implies increased flows of refugees, necessary investments in domestic defence, and loss of trade and

investment with Ukraine (Schularick & Binder, 2024). With regards to identities, it seems more difficult to shift these attitudes as they are more stable in nature.

One of the key limitations of this study is that we rely on cross-sectional data, which carries the risk that attitudes toward Ukraine are actually driven by an alternative driver that we cannot account for. For example, we already know that threat perceptions are a strong predictor of public support for unifying European defence industries (Mader, 2024; Wang & Moise, 2023), and recent research suggests that such concerns might actually suppress support for Ukraine (Moise & Wang, 2025). Public support for aiding Ukraine could also be driven by attitudes toward more general aspects of foreign and security policy, such as views on internationalism and military intervention. We hope that this paper stimulates further research into how these factors play a role in relation to economic and identity variables, and is able to use more causal designs.

Another interesting aspect would be to assess to what extent Ukrainian successes and setbacks on the battlefield influence European attitudes toward the war. We know from American literature that governments do not necessarily lose citizen support for their military operations in the event of casualties as long as the public believes that the operation serves a just cause and that it still has enough potential to reach its goals (Gelpi *et al.*, 2009). This seems to be particularly important for the war in Ukraine, as it has often been argued that the West is doing enough to keep Ukraine fighting, but not to win the war. Accordingly, the current aid strategy of European governments might undermine support for continued aid on the long run if setbacks on the battlefield increase.

Notes

1. See, for example: https://edition.cnn.com/2024/09/06/politics/ramstein-austin-zelensky-ukraine-intl/index.html and https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/03/01/ukraine-russia-war-west-weapons-aid-nato/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
2. See, for example: https://www.politico.eu/article/germanys-ukraine-policy-is-incoherent-for-a-reason/.
3. Amongst others, the EU launched two new strategy documents, a Permanent Structured Cooperation, a European Defence Fund, and a Military Planning and Conduct Capability.
4. See, for example: https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/07/12/nato-summit-ukraine-russia-military-war/.
5. See, for example: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/russian-gas-oil-vladimir-putin-war-europe-eu-official and https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/feb/24/gas-and-oil-prices-surge-amid-fears-of-global-energy-shortage-russia-ukraine.
6. See, for example: https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-war-slashes-funds-ukraine-russia-savings-aid-drat-2025-budget-defense-deal/?utm_source=chatgpt.

com and https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/08/19/german-parliamentarians-warn-that-any-fall-in-financial-aid-to-ukraine-would-send-fatal-si?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Although this discussion only unfolded after our data collection, it shows how concerns about the national economy and aid to Ukraine can intertwine. Regardless of whether the discussion about the national economy is salient, however, we believe that it should impact views on aiding Ukraine.

7. See, for example https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/08/european-commission-endorses-membership-talks-with-ukraine-and-moldova.
8. See https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-solidarity-ukraine-timeline_en?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
9. Furthermore, the database also quantifies costs of aid related to taking in Ukrainian refugees, as well as how much each country has contributed to separate EU funds that directly aid Ukraine, such as the European Peace Facility (EPF). We decide to ignore these two categories for two reasons. First, whereas refugee intake can be valuable to Ukraine, we do not think this is direct aid to support the war. For example, Viktor Orbán's Hungary hosts a relatively large number of Ukrainian refugees, but has openly voiced criticism of continuing the war as well as directly aiding Ukraine. In addition, while costs of hosting refugees can be quantified, refugees can also contribute to the host country's economy. For example, 55 percent of Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands had a full-time job 1.5 years after the outbreak of the war (https://nos.nl/artikel/2507050-ruim-helft-oekraiense-vluchtelingen-in-nederland-heeft-een-baan). Second, contributions to the EU budget are already relatively in line with the GDP sizes of the member states, which therefore does not show a large differentiated picture of support via that vehicle.
10. Radical left parties: PTB-PVDA (BE), Die Linke (DE), SP (NL), Lewica Razem (PL); radical right parties: Vlaams Belang (BE), AfD (DE), Fidesz, Mi Hazánk (HU), FvD, JA21, PVV (NL), PiS, Konfederacja (PL); based on PopuList (Rooduijn *et al.*, 2024).

Acknowledgments

A previous version of this paper was presented at McGill University. We would like to thank all participants for their very useful feedback. We are also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their feedback and advice, which greatly improved the strength and clarity of the paper.

Data availability

The replication package can be found at the OSF: https://tinyurl.com/mpmyzpf9.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Bjarn Eck acknowledges funding from the FNRS.

Notes on contributors

Bjarn Eck is a PhD-researcher at the Cevipol research centre of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Department of the Université libre de Bruxelles.

Elie Michel is a senior researcher at the University of Lausanne and at FORS (Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences).

ORCID

Bjarn Eck http://orcid.org/0009-0005-1385-5707
Elie Michel http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2359-6575

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