



Babushkas, Ballots, Benjamins, And Bombs.

*The "Democracy vs. Autocracy"
debate amidst the full-scale
Russian invasion of Ukraine*

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Thank you,

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Entering Ukraine

On July 30th, 2023, I crossed the Polish border into wartime Ukraine and packed into a stranger's car heading for L'viv. With the next hour and a half of driving past endless sunflower fields and the occasional roadside explosion mark, I couldn't help but think I had made a horrible mistake. I was wrong; the most impactful experience of my life was just starting. Ukraine had never been at the forefront of my political studies or general interests. Yet, as a true believer in democracy, that quickly changed on February 24th, 2022, when Russia commenced its criminal full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Seeing the Ukrainian people fighting resiliently for freedom and democracy with the odds against them genuinely inspired me. From never missing an episode of the Telegraph's "*Ukraine: The Latest*" to interviewing one of their co-hosts, Francis Dearnley, and then going to Ukraine myself, I became invested in their fight for self-determination. I support Ukraine's fight for survival, along with the expulsion of Russian forces from all Ukrainian territory. I have, however, done everything in my power to attempt to ignore this bias through my time in Ukraine and subsequent research. It is nearly impossible to remove all subjectivity, so I'm acknowledging my position on the conflict here so the reader is aware. I've long wanted to connect my academic interests surrounding regime types with my growing knowledge of the conflict. This research explores how outcomes from the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine can be applied to the "democracy vs autocracy" debate and how Ukraine has outperformed their Russian counterparts politically, economically, and militarily.



Literature Review

Dated Autocratic Advantage Theory

Autocratic advantage theory has two counterparts: dated and contemporary. Dated autocratic advantage theory, belonging to Thomas Hobbes, Plato, and most famously, Alexis De Tocqueville, sees democracy as inferior to the rule of a monarch or philosopher king. Most importantly, it emphasizes that Europe's autocratic monarchies utterly outmatch democratic rule within the international arena.¹ Furthermore, historical political and economic conditions often gave prudence to the idea of a supposed autocratic advantage. For example, following the great depression, Bolshevism and fascism seemed legitimate counter arguments to the liberal free market democracies of the time.² Or China's territorial gains following the Sino-Indian war, which helped support beliefs of autocracy being more "ruthless and decisive."³ As democracy slowly spread across the world, wherever she failed, autocracy attempted to use those moments to gain legitimacy as a better way of organizing society. However, following WWII, most academics seemed to acknowledge the democratic advantage in all aspects of life. In recent years, President Xi's China and Putin's Russia led to a revival of autocratic advantage theorists.

Contemporary Autocratic Advantage Theory

Contemporary autocratic advantage theory, while just as delusional and invalid, emphasizes similar points but seeks legitimization through the existence of President Xi's China and President Putin's Russian Federation. They usually argue four main points: First, autocracies can

¹ Kroenig, Matthew. *The Return of Great Power Rivalry : Democracy Versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the U.S. and China*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pg. 36-38.

² Runciman, David. *The Confidence Trap. 1st ed.* United States: Princeton University Press, 2017. Pg. 79-80.

³ Runciman, *The Confidence Trap*, Pg. 163.

lay out long-term plans and stick to them far easier than democracies. Second, autocracies can take quick, decisive, and bold action, while democracies squabble in Congress or Parliament. Third, autocracies can take the gloves off and be more ruthless when needed, while pesky human rights bind democracies. Fourth, autocratic politics are simple and smooth, whereas democratic politics is an escapade of scandal after scandal.⁴ These advantages mainly connect to a regime's ability to wage war and act on the world stage. Because of this, my paper will address this supposed autocratic advantage and democratic disadvantage in conflict effectiveness. Furthermore, much of the cutting-edge literature surrounding the 'autocracy vs democracy' debate treats democratic advantage as truth.

Position Within the Literature

The literature that I engage with most carefully contends the "democracy vs autocracy" debate requires further explanation beyond simplistic labels but also acknowledges a clear democratic advantage in conflict. These authors see a tendency within the field of international relations to handle "democracy vs autocracy" only by focusing on the differences between the two. They argue we should instead apply practices from comparative politics, which focus on the differences amongst autocracies or democracies separately.^{5 6} Without these nuances we hinder our ability to understand how different authoritarian or democratic regimes make decisions concerning starting and conducting war.⁷ In Allan C. Stam and Dan Reiter's "Democracies at War," they argue democracies have an overall advantage in conflict. Research shows this is

⁴ Kroenig, *The Return of Great Power*, Pg. 38-41.

⁵ Talmadge, Caitlin. *The Dictator's Army : Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes*. 1st ed. London: Cornell University Press, 2015. Pg. 238.

⁶ Weeks, Jessica L. P. *Dictators at War and Peace*. 1st ed. London: Cornell University Press, 2014. Pg. 2-3.

⁷ Weeks, *Dictators at War and Peace*, Pg. 6.

because democracies, more often than not, only enter wars they can win, and their individualistic culture creates soldiers who perform better on the battlefield. Beyond that, they argue democracies do not have the upper hand in conflict because of some supposed economic advantage or democratic fraternity.⁸ However, much of the same literature points to democratic shortcomings, such as in Vietnam or Afghanistan, where Western militaries may have shared operational and tactical successes but strategically failed.⁹ Placing this paper's argument within current literature, I defend the need for nuance in defining regimes and the autocratic tendency to make fast but wrong decisions while challenging that autocracies have more efficient politics and democracies do not win because of economic advantages or democratic fraternity.

Why This Matters

Some cutting-edge literature explains why this topic matters. Given the United States' current strategy of "building partner capacity" and the generally accepted fact that democracies do not go to war with one another, we can expect future wars to be between one or two autocratic entities.¹⁰ Studying autocratic nuances is vital to preparing for future national defense threats. While this is correct, this paper aims to check the other side of the coin. If autocratic nuance can affect military outcomes, then undoubtedly, democratic difference can also. If our goal is to build up the battlefield effectiveness of fellow democracies, there is a good chance we will face a broad spectrum of institutions. Understanding the relationship between democracy and battlefield effectiveness is vital for the future of American foreign policy.

⁸ Reiter, Dan, and Allan C. Stam. *Democracies at War*. 1st ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. Pg. 183.

⁹ Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*, Pg. 7.

¹⁰ Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*, Pg. 3.

Definitions

Most casual, nonmilitary-focused audiences may not understand a few technical terms when analyzing war and conflict. Especially the descriptions of strategic, operational, and tactical management. While many people would see tactical, for example, as something that 'looks military,' this term is fundamental when understanding combat effectiveness and military tendencies. Tactical management would be the lowest level, the most specific and detailed actions concerning the soldiers on the ground. It is best described as the executive aspect of a military, for example, on the ground realities facing a unit attempting to clear a building.

Operational is in the middle of the military command structure pyramid. That is, the organization and outline for tactical actions. For example, the specific helicopters and armored personnel carriers (APCs) used by a unit. Lastly, strategic, the broadest level of military management, a military's overall long-term goals, for example, the United States' previous doctrine of communist containment. An example of all three would be how someone could argue the United States was operationally and tactically successful in Afghanistan while losing strategically.

Research Design and Methods

Throughout this analysis, I use scholarly sources, daily conflict briefings, and personal experiences in Ukraine. My academic sources range from books surrounding the "democracy vs. autocracy" debate, such as David Runciman's *The Confidence Trap* and Matthew Kroenig's *The Return of Great Power Rivalry*, to books concerning regime type and War, such as Caitlin Talmadge's *The Dictator's Army* and Jessica L.P Weeks' *Dictators at War and Peace*. Concerning Real-time conflict updates, The Telegraph publishes an episode of *Ukraine: The Latest* five days a week, which gives accurate front-line updates along with diplomatic

developments surrounding the invasion of Ukraine. Their hosts, such as Dom Nichols, David Knowles, and Francis Dearnley, mix their military, journalistic, and political backgrounds with highly qualified and relevant guests, creating an environment conducive to learning about the conflict. My time in Ukraine is also a significant part of this analysis. Countless people I met told me stories about Ukraine and its culture as I was experiencing much of it myself. This paper aims to bring back what I learned in Ukraine and apply it to my subsequent research.

Politics:

Introduction

Political differences are at the heart of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict; analyzing these two combating states along their political lines is where we will explore the current 'democratic vs autocratic' debate. Understanding their nuanced differences is vital as we compare how these two nations' political institutions have affected their battlefield abilities. Assigning the label “democracy” to Ukraine and “autocracy” to Russia, without further nuance, ignores the essential political realities of both states. Understanding regime type as a spectrum rather than rigid boxes is vital. Chinese and Russian autocracy look very different, like Danish and Ukrainian democracy.¹¹ This section aims to emphasize the autocratic tendency to make quick but stupid decisions while challenging the ideas of clean autocratic politics and democratic fraternity as a nonfactor in democracies' advantages in a conflict.

Ukraine - Democratic Struggles

The modern history of democracy in Ukraine is tumultuous and often misunderstood by Western audiences. Ukrainian society and its institutions have struggled through the democratization process since the fall of the USSR. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index is a holistic democratic index that uses 60 indicators of pluralism, civil liberties, and political culture to assign nations a democratic ranking of 1 through 10. The Ukrainian democratic ranking has fluttered in recent history. Following the Orange Revolution (2004), Ukraine ranked 6.95, classifying it as a 'flawed democracy.' Then, during the pro-Russian presidency of Viktor Yanukovich (2010-14), their ranking fell to 5.94, which brought them to a 'hybrid regime'

¹¹ Weeks, *Dictators at War and Peace*.

designation. Following the Maidan Revolution, overturning Yanukovich's rigged election, and until the COVID-19 Pandemic (2015-2020), Ukraine's democracy rating steadily increased. Their 2022 report shows Ukraine is ranked 5.42, defining it as a 'hybrid regime.' One should also consider Zelensky's 79% win in the 2019 election.¹² His official policy of "de-oligarchization" started in April 2021, which created a legal definition for the oligarchs and forced those who met it to register as such.¹³ Zelensky was making an apparent effort to combat the oligarchs who had such a tight grip on Ukraine's institutions while also trying not to be interpreted as shutting down political rivals. Zelensky was moving Ukraine in a more democratic direction every day. However, the control of the Oligarch class would not loosen easily and required a massive shock to do so. The full-scale Russian invasion did just that. Putin's brutal mistake only increased democratic sympathies in Ukraine and solidified the country's democratic direction. Helping Ukrainians overcome the issues their democracy has faced in recent history.

Ukraine - Corruption

Ukrainians historically have lacked a state or governing body that genuinely protected their interests. The USSR systemically starved millions of Ukrainians in the Holodomor of 1932-33, and the occupying Nazis were debatably worse throughout World War II. Government institutions have repeatedly let down and oppressed their society, fostering a society with minimal trust or reason to believe in government. For many Ukrainians, taking a bribe or abusing power might have allowed them to feed their family.

¹² Democracy Index 2022. Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022.

¹³ Onuch, Olga, and Henry E. Hale. The Zelensky Effect. La Vergne: Hurst & Company, 2022. Pg. 212.

In July of 2023, I worked in Rzeszów, Poland, a town near the Ukrainian border of 200,000 people before the full-scale invasion, which has since taken in upwards of 100,000 refugees. While researching this topic and investigating Ukrainian corruption, someone who works in Ukrainian humanitarian aid told me a story that gave me a new understanding of this culture.

A mother and her son had recently fled Ukraine into Poland. They were setting up their new life, such as finding housing, work, and, most importantly, schooling for her child. In the attempt to sign up for school, however, her son missed the registration date and could not sign up himself. The Ukrainian mother was distraught, thinking her son was not going to be able to attend school that year. Her host family, however, assured her they could quickly meet with the superintendent and get her son enrolled. Which they did, no problem. The mother was ecstatic but kept offering the host family money in return. Not because she felt they should be paid for their time or kindness but because she assumed they must have paid the superintendent to enroll her son late. To her, there was no reality where someone in any position of power would help a family without taking a bribe.

Ukrainian corruption is a real problem; however, the war has significantly impacted its prevalence. Corruption in Ukraine is on its way out the door. It has gained different consequences at every level since the full-scale invasion. Ukraine is fighting for their lives now, and taking a bribe or stealing equipment doesn't just get lost in the fray; it can cost their compatriots's lives. It's also more severe now; corruption limits their ability to join the EU and other European institutions, and Ukrainians realize that.

Ukraine - Civil Society Development

Once the Russian full-scale invasion began, Ukrainian society stepped up en masse, evacuating civilians, delivering aid/equipment, and even fighting the Russians themselves. This explosion in societal participation is a positive for Ukrainian democracy and will undoubtedly contribute to their political civil society in the future. A survey from May and July of 2022 used a nationally representative sample of the Ukrainian population and found that 2% had taken up arms, 3% were involved with civilian resistance, 6% volunteering with the territorial defense, 32% helping in civil society organizations or grass root activities, and 60% giving their own money to support the war effort.¹⁴ In *The Zelensky Effect* by Olga Onuch, she explains, "Hundreds of thousands joined the territorial defense force, millions volunteered in other ways, and hundreds of farmers stole Russian tanks."¹⁵ While in Ukraine, Orest Zub, a Ukrainian front-line videographer and blogger, told me of this national movement. He described his experience in the first days of the full-scale invasion.

With minimal supplies in Ukraine in the early days, Ukrainians had to act fast and play catch up. I drove to Croatia since they had plenty of military surplus stores and equipment for sale. I purchased camping gear and essentials such as sleeping bags with my own money—as well as military equipment like body armor vests, helmets, and hundreds of tactical gloves. I also had personal friends who got mobilized and asked for specific items like boots or tactical cases. What helped was the Ukrainian customs

¹⁴ Onuch, *The Zelensky Effect*, Pg. 14.

¹⁵ Onuch, *The Zelensky Effect*, Pg. 245.

officers were closing their eyes so you could bring anything across the border without taxes.

Ukrainians of all ages and walks of life across the country did the same. The Ukrainian people were determined to help defend their country in any way they could. This determination, paired with economic support from the European Union and allies worldwide, allowed the Ukrainians to survive and succeed.

Ukraine - Democratic Fraternity

Ukraine has seen a massive level of democratic fraternity: support from their fellow democracies. This support has been political backing, humanitarian aid, economic funding, and military equipment. On November 8th, the European Union Commission announced official Ukrainian accession talks will begin in 2024.¹⁶ It is a historic step for Ukraine toward democracy, showcasing the EU's political commitment to Ukraine, a great benefit of democratic fraternity. Concerning military aid, this section of my analysis will consider NATO equipment that is yet to see widespread use or is pending delivery. The NATO weapon systems that Ukraine has used will be discussed in the military section of this paper. NATO heavy armor and air assets have just arrived or will in the future are what will be covered here. The commitment to send these assets to Ukraine and train their soldiers on them is a political statement by NATO just as much as it is an operational gain for Ukraine. For that reason, we will be viewing willingness to send these military assets as a sign of democratic fraternity instead of analyzing their impact on the battlefield since that is yet to be seen.

¹⁶ McGee, Luke. Ukraine is Ready to Start Process of Joining European Union, Commission Says. Atlanta: CNN Newsource Sales, Inc, 2023.

Since the full-scale invasion, the European Union and its member states have sent \$89 billion in financial, humanitarian, military, and refugee aid, while the United States has sent \$76.8 billion.

Some donated military assets include:¹⁷

- 31 Abrams tanks from the United States
- 12 Challenger 2 tanks from the United Kingdom
- 14 Leopard 2 tanks from Germany and 2 from Spain¹⁸
- Pending delivery of 19 F-16s from Denmark with the possibility of 42 more from The Netherlands¹⁹

Without democratic fraternity, Ukraine would not have survived nor seem as capable concerning future counteroffensives. The military assets, general funding, and humanitarian aid have all proved invaluable to the Ukrainians, who successfully defended against the Russians and regained territory.

Russia - Towards Autocracy

Regime type is fluid and everchanging; the Russian Federation is no exception. Looking at Russia's political institutions leading up to and after their full-scale invasion of Ukraine can be difficult, given the nature of the regime. However, by revisiting the Economic Intelligence Unit's

¹⁷ Jonathan Masters, and Will Merrow. "How Much Aid has the U.S. Sent Ukraine? here are Six Charts." Council on Foreign Relations. September 21,.

¹⁸ David Brown, Jake Horton, and Tural Ahmedzade. "Ukraine Weapons: What Tanks and Other Equipment are Countries Giving?" BBC. September 22,.

¹⁹ "How Many F-16 Jets Will Ukraine Get and how Will they Change War?" Reuters. August 23,.

2022 Democracy Index and highlighting a few significant developments from the last 22 months of the war, we can get a solid image of the current Russian political landscape.

Just as Ukraine's history regarding democracy is complicated, so is Russia's concerning autocracy. Following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, many hoped Russia would democratize and join the liberal free markets of the West. This possibility seemed promising as, to the international community, Russia seemed to be liberalizing, even amidst gradual political consolidation by Putin and his cronies. In 2012, when Putin was elected for his third presidential term, it was clear things were changing. Putin quickly passed legislation cracking down on civil society and dual passport holders while also labeling any non-governmental organizations that received funding from outside Russia as "foreign agents." Followed by restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights and freedom of assembly for all Russians.²⁰ Then, stepping up his aggression, Putin occupied Crimea in 2014, the first step of the invasion of Ukraine, which solidified the Russian Federation's anti-western and anti-NATO stance. The Economic Intelligence Unit gives a few factors that might explain why democracy has failed in Russia. Empire state of mind, that is, Russia has for so long been a great empire, and that mindset is not easily lost. Political and institutional legacies: Russian society has long been used to a single strong leader and has little experience with democracy. The trauma zone is the problematic transition from communism with publicly owned institutions to free market liberal democracy. Putin's rise to power, in general, was accepted by the Russian people while he consolidated power, tearing down democratic institutions.²¹ It is clear autocracy was on the rise in Russia, but it has only gotten worse since February 24th, 2022.

²⁰ McFaul, Michael. "Russia's Road to Autocracy." *Journal of democracy* 32, no. 4 (2021): 11-26.

²¹ Democracy Index 2022. Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022.

Russia - Political Consequences

Political plurality, individual freedoms, and the political landscape in general have all gotten significantly worse since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin has deemed the full-scale invasion of Ukraine a "special military operation." Taking it as far as to make it illegal to call it a "war" or "invasion."²² Small protests in Russia following the invasion were harshly crushed, and protestors were arrested. In the coming months, it got worse; Russia's military faced so many casualties Putin felt partial mobilization was necessary, forcing Russians to either flee or prepare to die in Ukraine. Russia's international politics have been affected, too. With the International Criminal Court's conviction of Putin for war crimes, he was forced to cancel a diplomatic meeting in South Africa. Putin claimed he invaded Ukraine to prevent NATO expansion, yet as a direct result of his aggression, Finland joined, and Sweden is an official invitee country. Two militarily neutral countries were unlikely to join NATO before the invasion but specifically joined because of it. Putin's autocratic takeover is in full swing, and people's hopes of a liberal Russia participating fairly in global politics in the near future are crushed.

Russia – Clean and Efficient Autocratic Politics

The idea of "clean and efficient"²³ autocratic politics is far from the truth. There is no better example than the Wager Group's 'mutiny' and their Leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin's subsequent and suspicious death. Made up of recently released convicts given the chance to fight for their freedom, the Wagner Group proved themselves Russia's most capable force. They have committed horrible war crimes, raped and beheaded soldiers while also using barbaric WWI-

²² Onuch, *The Zelensky Effect*, Pg. 238.

²³ Kroenig, *The Return of Great Power*, Pg. 41.

style human waves to capture the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut barely.²⁴ Private military companies (PMCs) offered a unique advantage for the Russian Federation through plausible deniability; that is, PMCs are 'technically' not under the command of the Russian Federation's Ministry of Defense, and therefore, any PMC's actions are not the fault of the Kremlin. This gave the Russians an exportable political suppression and regime protection force for their autocratic brethren around the globe. However, as Russia struggled to keep its ranks alive, the Wagner Group had to be developed into a conventional fighting force, proving more capable than the proper Russian army. This developed into a new challenge for Putin, a sizeable military force headed by a threatening leader with legitimacy in the Russian world, Yevgeny Prigozhin. The Ministry of Defense's solution was a deadline of July 1st, 2023, in which all Wager fighters would have to sign contracts with the Ministry of Defense, and all military assets be turned over. If they refused, which Prigozhin had been threatening, they would be removed from Ukrainian operations. Prigozhin's rhetoric leading up to the deadline got more aggressive, calling top military officials "mentally ill scumbags" and even challenging the basis of the Ukrainian invasion.²⁵ Then, on June 24th, 2023, Prigozhin ordered a column of Wager soldiers to Rostov-on-Don, a major command center for Ministry of Defense operations in Ukraine, taking their headquarters there. At the same time, a second column headed for Moscow. The Wagner soldiers captured the headquarters of Russia's Southern Military district in Rostov-on-Don, yet before the second column could reach Moscow, supposedly a peace deal was brokered by Belarus' dictator Alexander Lukashenko. At least a dozen Russian military personnel were killed, yet all charges against Prigozhin were dropped if Wagner soldiers joined the Russian Defense Ministry and

²⁴ First Thing: Zelenskiy Urges World Leaders to Act Over Beheading Videos; Ukrainian President Calls for Action After Videos Circulated Online Appear to show Soldiers Beheaded by Russian Forces. Guardian News & Media, 2023.

²⁵ Joshua Yaffa. "Inside the Wagner Group's Armed Uprising." The New Yorker (2023).

relocated to Belarus. On August 23rd, 2023, Prigozhin and his top lieutenants died in a plane crash. Even though US intelligence claimed an intentional explosion caused the plane to go down, it's unlikely we will ever know for sure.²⁶ However, it's pretty clear that people who publicly challenge Putin are also unlucky or extremely accident-prone... Autocratic politics are not cleaner or more efficient, especially in the Russo-Ukrainian context. Elections and debates in democratic politics may be messy, but at least they don't involve planes falling from the sky.

²⁶ "Russia Confirms that Yevgeny Prigozhin was Killed in Last Week's Plane Crash." August 27,.

Economics:

Introduction

The Russo-Ukrainian War had deep economic ties, each using differing economic systems. Ukraine has long been far from a laissez-faire bastion of free markets, lacking robust financial institutions and a strict rule of law. In recent years, Ukraine has tried to deregulate and move towards an EU-standard economy.²⁷ Russia, however, remains an autocratic kleptocracy with economic freedom being limited, especially since the full-scale invasion. The literature surrounding the 'democracy vs. autocracy' debate contends democracies don't win wars because of economic advantage or democratic fraternity. This section aims to show how the Ukrainian economy has persevered despite Russian aggression and created impactful innovations on the battlefield and how the international community's economic response towards Russia, which has hindered their ability to fund their aggression, has emphasized the importance of democratic fraternity.

Ukraine - Typical Economic Indicators

The story of the Ukrainian economy since the full-scale Russian invasion is tragic, complex, and filled with examples of Ukrainian resilience. It's important to acknowledge the military realities that have dictated the ability of the Ukrainian economy since February 24th, 2022. First, the conditions of Ukrainian air space, air defense systems, and Russian air capabilities throughout the invasion have had significant economic impacts. In the early stages of the invasion, Ukraine lacked high-tech air defense systems, leaving much of its economic infrastructure vulnerable, allowing Russia to strike Ukraine's economic base in the early days and weeks of the invasion.

²⁷ Manal Fouani. Deregulation and the SDGs in Ukraine.2021.

Ukraine has since been bolstered with state-of-the-art NATO standard air defenses, including the United States PATRIOT air defense system. Even while being outmatched by the Russian Air Force, the Ukrainians have been able to limit Russia's ability to operate within Ukrainian airspace immensely. Russian air assets often launch rockets toward Ukrainian targets from within Russian airspace to avoid being shot down. Even with Ukraine in possession of NATO air defense systems, as seen through the winter of 2022-23, Russia was still able to specifically target Ukrainian infrastructure, including generators, electricity plants, and civilians in general, to hinder Ukraine's economy and attempt to break their will to fight. Second, after pulling out of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, the Russian Federation has created a blockade on all Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea and increased bombardments on the significant port of Odesa. Before the war, 98% of Ukraine's grain exports left from the Black Sea; now, it's impossible.²⁸ Third is the removal of vast amounts of the Ukrainian workforce both to fight the Russian invasion and fleeing destruction. The fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II.²⁹ Ukraine's ability to function as a typical economy has completely been destroyed by the Russian invasion. Because of this, typical economic indicators and standards are insufficient to paint a realistic picture. Nominal GDP will do us little help here; instead, analyzing how economic practices and institutions have handled the invasion will provide an understanding of the Ukrainian economy during the conflict.

²⁸ Russian Blockade of Ukraine Food Exports in Black Sea Port Will have Deadly Consequences for Hunger-Stricken Countries, Warns IRC. Right Vision Media, 2022.

²⁹ Beaumont, Peter. Ukraine has Fastest-Growing Refugee Crisis since Second World War, Says UN. London (UK): Guardian News & Media Limited, 2022.

Ukraine - Wartime Economic Response

Ukrainian society has rallied around its national identity and shown consistent economic innovation in the face of Russian aggression. The civil sector of the Ukrainian economy has positively responded to the Russian invasion. One example is "Путін Хуйлоіс" the name of a beer I had in L'viv, which translates to "Putin [is a] dickhead." Saint Javelin is another excellent example, a company that started in an attempt to raise \$500 for Ukraine by selling meme-style clothing but has since donated \$2.6 million. Ukraine's domestic wartime industry has also seen massive growth. For example, the ever-growing market of first-person view (FPV) drones, with roughly 2,000 independent firms.³⁰ One new product is the newly designed and Ukrainian-made Ratel-S (Honey Badger) kamikaze unmanned ground vehicle. This four-wheel drive FPV drone can drive 24 km/h in a range of 5 kilometers for two hours and climb up to 25cm obstacles while carrying a varying 40-kilogram payload. The Ukrainian Armed Forces also developed and successfully deployed the first weaponized sea based FPV drones in their strikes on the Kerch Bridge in July 2023 and Sevastopol in October 2022.³¹ Lastly, Russian soldiers had to place protective cages on top of their tanks to prevent Ukrainian drone pilots from dropping explosives inside. The Ukrainian economy has adapted and improved the everyday lives of Ukrainian civilians, all while contributing to the Ukrainian Armed Forces' capabilities and affecting the battlefield.

³⁰ Dominic Nicholls, Francis Dearnley, and David Knowles. Ukraine: The Latest. London: Telegraph Media Group Limited, 2023.

³¹ Dominic Nicholls, Francis Dearnley, and David Knowles. Ukraine: The Latest. London: Telegraph Media Group Limited, 2023.

Russia – Losing Legitimacy

The Russian economy is often seen as a colossal boogeyman with never-ending oil reserves, allowing the Kremlin to overcome typical economic restraints of autocratic regimes. Russia's destructive policies, combined with the democratic world's economic response to Russia's war of aggression, have begun to hurt the Russian economy. The idea of flexible and mobile autocratic economics in times of war is starting to lose validity, just as the illegal invasion of Ukraine has caused Russia to lose massive amounts of human capital and legitimacy on the international economic stage.

Russia - Brain Drain or Death

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Kremlin's subsequent partial mobilization have come with massive economic consequences. Even with Putin's centralized political power, his regime doesn't have the public support or domestic control required for full-scale mobilization, such as Stalin's ability to mobilize millions of Soviets during WWII. However, even partial mobilization was enough to scare off Russia's brightest and most economically capable. About a million people have fled Russia since the Kremlin announced partial mobilization.³² Young men who do stay, who would typically be spending and working at home, instead are drafted and sent to die in Ukraine. Dom Nichols, former British tank commander, put it best "the babushkas are still there, but the economically active are increasingly to be found in a soggy trench in the Donbas."³³ Furthermore, many Russians abroad who would often bring back bright ideas from their time spent at western institutions now have no reason to return home due the possibility of

³² Dominic Nicholls, Francis Dearnley, and David Knowles. Ukraine: The Latest. London: Telegraph Media Group Limited, 2023.

³³ Dominic Nicholls. Watch: How Putin's Rule Will End as Russia Collapses Around Him | Defence in Depth. London: Telegraph Media Group Limited, 2023. 06:45.

being drafted, and political crackdowns. Russia's economic issues aren't just the "brain drain" Putin created; however, they are also increasingly isolated from the global economy.

Russia - Global Exclusion

Since Russia decided to invade Ukraine, the Kremlin and its cronies have faced numerous economic sanctions, both institutionally and personally. The European Union, United Kingdom, United States, and Canada have all frozen assets belonging to the Russian government and influential Russian oligarchs. Russia has also been kicked off the SWIFT international banking system, which has delayed payments for Russian oil, a massive thorn in the behind of the Kremlin. Energy companies such as Chevron and Exxon have entirely left Russia, bringing with them crucial technological capital while leaving a wake of equipment requiring maintenance they don't know how to do. All this is to say that the efficiency and export profitability of the Russian energy sector have declined since Russia invaded Ukraine.³⁴ Russian everyday life hasn't gone unscathed beyond the energy sector. A shopping mall in Izhevsk has been converted into a weapons factory, some bakers have been forced to start producing drones, Ozon, Russia's Amazon, is employing prisoners, and McDonald's has been replaced by a Russian knockoff "Vkusno & Tochka," which translates to "Tasty and that's It."³⁵ The Russian economy is beginning to show its cracks stemming from the free world's economic response to the invasion of Ukraine. Russia has recently hiked its interest rate to 15%, and the Rubble is hovering around a conversion of 100 to the US Dollar.^{36 37} The economic actions taken against Russia by the

³⁴ Nicholls, Watch: How Putin's Rule Will End, 06:00.

³⁵ Nicholls, Watch: How Putin's Rule Will End, 07:00.

³⁶ Alexander Marrow, Elena Fabrichnaya, and Vladimir Soldatkin. "Russia Hikes Rates to Higher-than-Expected 15% as Budget Pressure Tells." Reuters (2023).

³⁷ Nicholls, Watch: How Putin's Rule Will End, 07:30

international community have hurt their ability to fund their terror in Ukraine. Without this democratic fraternity sticking up for Ukraine's sovereignty, their ability to defend against the Russians would have been significantly impacted.

Military

Introduction

So far, we have analyzed how the Ukrainian democratic political institutions and free market economy have fared against the Russian autocracy and its command-and-control economic model. In some examples, we have touched on military outcomes. Still, this section aims to go further, looking at the current strategic picture of the Russo-Ukrainian war as it relates to the political economy of these two states. This section will also challenge the idea that democratic fraternity is not why democracies win wars and defend the idea that individual democratic soldiers are superior to their autocratic counterparts. It's important to note that the Russo-Ukrainian war is not over. However, my analysis is based on the realities thus far.

Ukraine – Failure in 2014

European and American onlookers will likely say the Russo-Ukrainian war started with the full-scale invasion on February 24th, 2022; however, that is false. The Russian invasion began with the occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014. The international community failed to hold Russia accountable for its aggression against the sovereignty of Ukraine, most obviously confirmed by Russia's subsequent full-scale invasion in February 2022. The Ukrainians themselves failed to defend their territory in 2014 when the Russians took Crimea, yet have done so thus far since the full-scale invasion. Putin's "3-day operation to capture Kyiv" is ongoing 20 months later, with over 300,000 Russian casualties.^{38 39} I asked a Ukrainian official what

³⁸ Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Eric Schmitt and Julian E. Barnes. Troop Deaths and Injuries in Ukraine War Near 500,000, U.S. Officials Say. The New York Times Company, 2023.

³⁹ Paul Sonne, Isabelle Khurshudyan, Serhiy Morgunov, and Kostiantyn Khudov. Battle for Kyiv: Ukrainian Valor, Russian Blunders Combined to Save the Capital. Washington Post, 2022.

changed from 2014 to 2022; he responded, "We were ready." While I won't analyze specific military actions from 2014, understanding the context of where the Ukrainian armed forces have come from is vital. Just like Ukrainian politics and economics, The Armed Forces of Ukraine are undergoing massive change as they fight for their lives.

Ukraine - Success in 2022

In the earliest hours of February 24th, 2022, the Russian Federation's armed forces began heavily bombarding Ukrainian air defenses, munitions depots, and airfields. Russian tanks and troops crossed through Ukrainian border checkpoints in the south, eastern regions, and most importantly, the northern border with Belarus, aiming for Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital. The Russian plan was to capture Kyiv within three days, assuming former comedian and now Ukrainian president at war Zelenskyy would crack under pressure and flee. Allowing the Russians to install a puppet government quickly and, within weeks, control the entirety of Ukraine. Putin claimed the invasion was nothing but a "special military operation" to "de-nazify" Ukraine and prevent NATO expansion. Putin's plans, however, failed, and his justification is incorrect. Ukraine's president himself, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, is Jewish, and NATO has expanded as a direct result of Russia's aggression, not before it. The Russian invasion's success hinged on capturing Kyiv. The Ukrainians halted the Russian invaders and sent them back to Belarus with their tails between their legs. The Ukrainian victory in protecting Kyiv from the Russian armed forces was due to a mixture of Ukrainian military competence and Russian military incompetence.

Ukraine - Military Competence

Leading up to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, their armed forces made a series of preparations that proved vital in preserving their ability to hold off the Russian orcs, as Ukrainian soldiers call them. The Ukrainians created a two-ringed defense around Kyiv, one in the outer suburbs and the other within the city. The city and surrounding area were also divided "into sectors and assigned generals from the military education centers to lead each area, creating a clear chain of command to which all Ukrainian military units and security services would answer. Tactical decisions would be made immediately by officers on the ground without having to consult headquarters."⁴⁰ This style of military command, where lower-level soldiers can make decisions, indicates how EU and NATO democracies conduct military operations. The Ukrainians began training this way since increased NATO relations following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a direct result of democratic fraternity. This command structure contrasts directly with the top-down style used by Stalin's Red Army and Putin's Defense Ministry. Fighting like a democracy and allowing individuals to make decisions was vital to Ukraine's success in resisting the Russians. Furthermore, Ukraine pre-placed command posts close to areas of likely Russian attack while also moving aviation assets off major airbases to avoid Russian strikes.⁴¹ Ukraine was also rapidly supplied with Javelin anti-armor systems by the United States, which proved invaluable in allowing the Ukrainians to destroy advancing Russian tanks and other armored vehicles.⁴² America's delivery of Javelins, a single man fire and forget anti-armor missile system, in the early days of the full-scale invasion over higher-tech missile systems such as PATRIOT air defenses, show us how unlikely the Americans saw Ukrainian success. The United States,

⁴⁰ Sonne, Battle for Kyiv.

⁴¹ Sonne, Battle for Kyiv.

⁴² Lendon, Brad. Three Weapons that Changed the Course of Ukraine's War with Russia. Atlanta: CNN Newsource Sales, Inc, 2023.

seeing Ukrainian success as unlikely, was weary of supplying the Ukrainians with high-tech weapons they could lose to the Russians. Still, the advantage gained from the democratic fraternity, which provided Ukraine with Javelins, allowed Ukraine to stop the Russian advance. The Russians were stopped and withdrew from their attempt to capture Kyiv, not only because of the bravery and heroics of the Ukrainian defenders or democratic fraternity but also because of the incompetence of the Russian military.

Russia - Military Incompetence

On the side of the Russians, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was littered with strategic, tactical, and operational failures. Strategically, the Russian military was either ignorant of political realities in Ukraine or thought they could overcome them. Russian soldiers thought they were going to be treated as liberators, with Russians heading towards Kyiv on the first few days of the invasion having packed parade uniforms.⁴³ The Russian Federation seemed not to understand that Ukrainians who natively speak Russian, have family in Russia, and maybe even sympathize with Russia politically would be against being invaded and want to remain sovereign Ukrainians. Most obviously, at the strategic and political level, Russia failed to capture all of Ukraine. At the Operational level, the Russian military failed miserably, as they were unsuccessful in capturing Kyiv, lost control of Kharkiv, and are currently losing territory in the eastern regions of the country. The Russian forces failed to make use of combined arms, showing a basic inability in fire and maneuver, instead preferring to bombard Ukrainian towns and cities in an attempt to break morale. They also lacked the number of troops needed to hold territory, especially given the Ukrainian civil resistance. Russia's lack of battlefield adaptability and success was directly

⁴³ Sinéad Baker. Ukraine Said Russian Troops Brought Parade Uniforms to Kyiv, Expecting a Quick Triumph that Never Came. Insider Inc, 2022.

connected to its top-down command style and lack of non-commissioned officers (NCOs).⁴⁴ Tactically, the Russian military broke down once again on the ground, having access to extremely outdated kit and equipment while also committing horrific war crimes. Ukrainian soldiers found Russian bandages from 1978 in an evacuated trench, and the Russian military has made use of T-62 main battle tanks from 1961.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ Russian forces have helped kidnap and extradite upwards of 20,000 Ukrainian children; they have beheaded Ukrainian soldiers and are suspected of systemic sexual and physical abuse.⁴⁷ ⁴⁸ The Russians have been unable to capture Ukraine militarily and have failed at every level in their attempt to do so, at the cost of Ukrainian and Russian lives.

⁴⁴ Jones, Seth. *Russia's Ill-Fated Invasion of Ukraine: Lessons in Modern Warfare*. Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022.

⁴⁵ Plummer, Kate. *Heavy Losses Force Russia to Rely on 60-Year-Old Tanks*. London (UK): Independent Digital News & Media, 2023.

⁴⁶ "Injured Russian Soldiers Forced to use 50-Year-Old Bandages made in Ukraine." London (UK): Express Newspapers PLC, 2022.

⁴⁷ Barber, Harriet. *Castration, Gang-Rape, Forced Nudity: How Russia's Soldiers are using Sexual Violence to Terrorise Ukraine*. London: Telegraph Media Group Limited, 2022.

⁴⁸ Katya Pavlevych. "Tens of Thousands of Ukraine's Children have been Kidnapped — It's Time for Action." September 14th,.

Conclusions

The Debate

"Democracy vs Autocracy" is an age-old debate by philosophers such as Plato and Alexis de Tocqueville to my peers and me at Colorado College today. Most Western scholars would agree that since the end of World War II and the fall of the USSR, liberal free market democracies have prevailed. That's not to say democratic societies and governments aren't capable or guilty of periods of domestic oppression, global imperialism, slavery, racism, and sexism. Still, it is to say democracy has been the best way to limit those atrocities and is by far the best system given the alternatives. The Ukrainian people have been trying to join the democratic club. Unfortunately, Vladimir Putin has been consistently trying to keep Ukraine within the Russian sphere of influence and away from the EU and NATO. Despite his best efforts, the Ukrainian people displayed their commitment to democracy in the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2014 Revolution of Dignity. They continued their quest towards democracy, all while Putin consolidated power domestically and isolated himself on the global stage. Ukraine and Russia, two historically and culturally intertwined states, developed differing political identities. This didn't fit into Putin's vision, and on February 24th, 2022, The Russian Federation launched a vicious and criminal full-scale invasion of their sovereign neighbor, Ukraine.

Political, Economic and Military Outcomes

Since then, the Ukrainians have prevailed, saving their nation, now actively gaining back territory. Throughout this paper, I discussed how Ukraine has prevailed politically, economically, and militarily over the Russians. Politically, the Ukrainians have consolidated political differences, rallied behind President Zelensky, and developed a robust civil society

while inching closer than ever to the EU and NATO. The Russians, however, are fleeing mobilization and losing their freedoms while Putin's political enemies fall from planes. Economically, Ukraine has suffered from Russian bombardments, but through domestic resilience and international aid, their civil and military sectors are flourishing and impacting the battlefield. The Ruble has plummeted in Russia, and interest rates have just been raised above expectations. Most Western firms have pulled out of Russia, bringing human capital and leaving behind a neutered energy sector. Militarily, in the early days and weeks of the invasion, the Ukrainians heroically rose in defense of their country as they were rapidly armed with American Javelin and Stinger anti-armor systems, allowing them to hold back the Russians. At the same time, the Kremlin's forces are committing horrid war crimes and are failing to show basic operational and tactical competency. Russia has failed to take Ukraine as it thought it could.

Back to the Literature

This study has emphasized a few ideas from relevant literature. First, there is a need to be specific when discussing "democracies" and "autocracies," as those are often generalizations that ignore essential nuances. The terms themselves aren't problematic; I use them countless times in this study; instead, they are meaningless without a deeper explanation of the type of democracy or autocracy we are discussing. Second, the belief that autocracies can make quick decisions, which are often horrible mistakes, and how democratic societies' individualist culture fosters superior soldiers. My analysis also contests ideas from relevant literature. These assertions are that autocracies have cleaner domestic politics and that democracies do not win wars because of some economic advantage or democratic fraternity.

Putin's decision to invade Ukraine was a mistake. They have failed to take over Ukraine, had 300,000 casualties, and isolated themselves to a point where they are increasingly being considered a vassal state of China rather than an equal. On the battlefield, countless examples of Ukrainian operational and tactical superiority over their Russian occupiers have emphasized the idea that democratic soldiers fight better. Russia and Ukraine have similar cultures and histories, yet the society with more freedom outperforms the other. The Ukrainian domestic economy has been heavily affected by the full-scale invasion yet continues to serve the Ukrainian people, even causing innovation responsible for battlefield success, without Ukraine's economic resilience and access to aid to and from fellow democracies. Democratic fraternity is my most emphasized idea from contemporary literature, just as it is the most critical dynamic of Ukraine's political, economic, and military success thus far. The democratic world has supported Ukraine with political commitments and invitations to its institutions. Ukraine's allies' economic response towards Russia has undeniably hindered the Kremlin's ability to afford the ongoing conflict. The most significant difference made by Ukraine's acceptance into the frat of democracy is their gain of military aid and training. The Armed Forces of Ukraine's successful conversion to a NATO command structure and heroic usage of Javelin anti-armor systems made every difference in their defense of Kyiv and Ukraine's existence as American foreign policy continues to emphasize "building partner capacity," It is increasingly important to understand how both autocratic and democratic regimes' nuances affect military capabilities.

Слава Україні! Slava Ukraini!

There is a long way to go toward the complete liberation of all Ukrainian territory, and the tragedy of civilian and military casualties is almost incomprehensible against the backdrop of

modern history. Yet democracy is prevailing; the Ukrainians are fighting for democracy and winning. Citizens of countries who have aided Ukraine should be proud of the lives our nations have helped save. We gave Ukraine the ability to punch their Russian bully square in the face; we should do everything in our power to let them finish the job.

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