Friend or foe? The Micro Perspectives on

Support for Violent Separatist Rebellion in Ukraine

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Abstract

What compels individuals to provide support to secessionist movements, despite risks to life and livelihood? Why does violence break out in a relatively prosperous region? How do separatist rebellions endure despite deep economic hardships experienced by the populations in such places? This thesis takes up the challenge of assessing Paul Collier's macro-level theory of conflict onset with micro-level interview and social media data. Collier's main argument focuses on feasibility as the main variable which determines conflict onset. However, since the author uses aggregate-level cross-country data causal conflict processes prove to be elusive in his research. This thesis makes use of a unique multi-method approach to analysing qualitative and quantitative data collected at the micro-level to analyse population support for separatist rebellion in the Donbas, Eastern Ukraine. The thesis tentatively validates Collier's findings while contributing new insights not visible at the macro-level of analysis.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is inspired by equal parts pride and heartbreak. The heartbreak came in February 2014 when over 100 Ukrainians lost their lives at the hands of the government of Viktor Yanukovych on the Maidan square in the Ukrainian capital. The immense pride I felt for the brave and tireless Ukrainians fighting on the frozen Maidan served as the inspiration for my return to postgraduate study. I am thankful to CEU's Political Science department for gifting me the opportunity to carry out this research. It has been a year of hard work, great friendships and intellectual stimulation and I am thankful for all of it.

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To the CEU family. What a wonderful institution this is. I feel incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to be a part of it. #IstandwithCEU

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1. Introduction

What compels individuals to provide support to secessionist movements, despite risks to life and livelihood? Why does violence break out in a relatively prosperous region? How do separatist rebellions endure despite deep economic hardships experienced by the populations in such places? In spite of a large volume of literature on conflict outbreak, there is a lack of research focusing on the micro-level of analysis. In this thesis, I examine material and human factors involved in making conflict possible in the context of Eastern Ukraine. The ambition of this thesis is to contribute to understanding how rebel groups garner population support during the outbreak of hostilities and what factors make conflicts more entrenched. I adopt a multi-method approach to this research and employ a unique combination of interviews conducted in the field and quantitative data collected from social media. The resulting conclusions point towards a mixture of economic pragmatism and disinformation as a rationale for the current impasse in Ukraine. The insights shine a light on the complex question of whether the rebels are in fact well-meaning friends or coercive foes to the ordinary people stranded in such extraordinary circumstances.

What seems to matter for conflict feasibility is whether or not money, guns and manpower are available. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler's theoretical work has been particularly influential to such arguments in the contemporary political economy of conflict discourse.[1] Collier appears convinced that material resources are particularly important for conflict outbreak. The

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[1] The three iterations of the authors' research are: Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On economic causes of civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers* 50 (1998): 563–573; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and grievance in civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56 (2004): 563–595; Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Dominic Rohner, "Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 61 (2009): 1-27.

economist recently concluded that "in explaining whether a rebellion occurs, motivating factors are of little importance compared to the circumstances that determine whether it is feasible."[2]

However, cross-country quantitative studies, such as Collier's, not complemented with qualitative case studies are not able to shine a light on causal mechanisms that make conflict feasible. Indeed, the use of aggregate data does not allow for explanations to emerge as to why some individuals and households provide material and human support to their would-be oppressors. In addition, Collier restricts his analysis to factors involved in the outbreak of conflicts. Yet, it is entirely possible that outbreak and entrenchment are path dependent and endogenous processes. Thus, studying the Eastern Ukraine case using qualitative data focused on the micro-level allows for examination of both the outbreak and entrenchment phases of the conflict. The insights gleaned from the qualitative section point to misinformation as an important non-material variable. This finding is picked up in the quantitative section which analyses the themes and characteristics of misinformation around the Donbas conflict on social media.

The Donbas in Eastern Ukraine is the most recent addition to the list of post-Soviet regions with an ambiguous status.[3] This conflict case is selected due its potential to allow for gathering of fresh data owing to its relatively recent outbreak and seeming entrenchment.[4] This is in contrast to other comparable cases such as Transnistria in Moldova or South Ossetia in

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[2] Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns & Votes* (London: Random House, 2010), 134.
[3] South Ossetia in Georgia remains a 'frozen conflict' since declaring independence in 1991. Similarly, Transnistria is unrecognised by any United Nations member state after attempting to secede from Moldova in 1992 while Nagorno-Karabakh is a disputed territory attempting to separate from Azerbaijan.
[4] The hostilities began in April 2014 and are still ongoing.

Georgia, cases that can be deemed 'frozen'. As such, it has the potential to contribute new insights to the origins of the ongoing separatist struggles in other parts of the former Soviet Union.

While the Donbas conflict received a significant amount of attention, its explanations tend to attribute cause either to Russia for its support of the separatists in the region or to emphasise ethnicity and language, predominantly Russian, as the principle driver of the conflict.[5] However, ethnicity and language-related accounts are difficult to reconcile with the fluid nature of ethnic identities in post-Soviet states. Hence, Collier's resource-focused theories are perhaps more useful in this case. This thesis assesses such arguments and contends that ethnicity, language and Russia's backing played a secondary role in conflict onset while economic pragmatism came to the fore. However, there is evidence that Russian support was important in a later phase of the conflict.

I begin the analysis by building a rational choice theory of conflict onset. Collier's work forms the theoretical foundation of this section. The micro-level theory is then unveiled and the Donbas conflict is briefly introduced. The methodology section that follows presents the multi-method approach employed in this research. It elaborates on the design and execution of the interviews conducted in two Ukrainian cities. The qualitative analysis chapter then offers the

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[5] For accounts emphasising ethnicity and Russian support refer to: Anatoly M. Khazanov, *After the USSR: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Victor Kremenyuk, *Conflict In and Around Russia: Nation-Builing in Difficult Times* (London: Greenwood Press, 1994); Martha Olcott, Valery Tishkov and Alexei Malashenko, eds., *Identichnost i konflikt v postsovetskih gosudarstvakh [Identity and Conflict in Post-Soviet States].* (Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center, 1997); Valery Tiškov, *Ethnicity, nationalism and conflict in and after the Soviet Union: the mind aflame,* (London: Sage Publications, 1997); Andrew Foxall, *Ethnic Relations in Post-Soviet Russia: Russians and Non-Russians in the North Caucasus* (Oxford: Routledge, 2015).

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insights from the data collected through the interviews. The final chapter uses big data quantitative techniques to analyse Facebook data and determine themes and terms that each side in the conflict exploits in order to win over and retain their supporters.

This thesis finds cautious support for Collier's greed arguments while contributing new insights which involve the importance of propaganda in gaining support from the general population. The key insight this project offers is that two types of factors are present in the outbreak and entrenchment of the conflict in Ukraine. The pragmatic and rational variables such as those predicted by Collier are key to the onset of violence while irrational reasons, that is propaganda-related, provide an additional spur. The contribution of this thesis is two-fold. The first is theoretical. Many conflict theorists, including Collier, make use of aggregative cross-country data in their research while omitting the micro-level. This thesis focuses on this analysis level and assesses Collier's theory through this lens. The second is methodological, in that, this thesis combines the use of interviews with big data quantitative techniques in order to analyse a different dimension of the Ukrainian conflict.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Secession

While identity, be it ethnic, linguistic or some other, is most often used to justify secessionist movements, more rational economic reasons can reveal true incentives driving separatism. Benedict Anderson proposes the idea of 'imagined' communities where group affiliation is based on an invented identity rather than an objective one.[6] The motives behind secessionist movements should not be taken at face value. As such, Anderson argues that common identity is the outcome of imagination rather than objective social interaction, since people in groups large enough to operate politically are unlikely to know each other or be related.[7] Hence, communities are inventions rather than organically occurring entities.

Along similar theoretical lines, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler contend that "secessionist movements … are typically a recent contrivance designed to support perceived economic advantage."[8] Secession is defined as "the creation of a State by the use of force or threat of force without the consent of the former sovereign."[9] The lack of consent represents a significant risk in undertaking such action, since the sovereign can choose to direct its monopoly of violence against rebellion. Hence, secessionism requires reasons that can appropriately account for it.

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[6] Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism,* (London: Verso, 1991).

[7] Ibid.

[8] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, *"The Political Economy of Secession,"* Centre for the Study of African Economies, University of Oxford and International Peace Research Institute Oslo, (2002): 2. http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.115.7010

[9] James R. Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 375.

2.2 Rational Choice Theory

There is little doubt that Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler's work delineating between greed and grievance factors that lead to violent intra-state conflict has been a highly influential contribution to the discipline of conflict studies. The scholars' analyses have focused the discipline on the economic reasons for conflict outbreak. In their 2004 paper, Collier and Hoeffler concluded that greed attributes provide greater powers in predicting the outbreak of civil wars while grievance indicators add little in the way of an explanation. While the scholars employ sensible variables in their models, some provide more theoretical value than others, if human motivations and opportunities are the focus, as they are in this thesis. Atypically low costs are particularly important if civilian support and recruitment are analysed. In constructing this variable, the authors take low income per capita as indicating low opportunity cost of conflict, poor male secondary school enrolments are said to be emblematic of better opportunities for rebel recruitment, and a reduced rate of economic growth is linked to diminished possibilities to earn an income.[10] All three variables are found to be strongly significant. Further, natural resources are used to operationalise opportunity for rebel financing, although it may also indicate grievances if certain groups are excluded from enjoying their proceeds.[11] Other variables are clearly important but have little to do with civilian support for rebellion.

The scholars' most recent paper on the subject confirms the hypothesis that economic indicators matter to the outbreak of conflict.[12] The feasibility hypothesis proposed by Collier and Hoeffler states that "where rebellion is feasible it will occur" and that "motivation is

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[10] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and grievance in civil war," Oxford Economic Papers 56 (2004): 569.
[11] Ibid., 565.
[12] Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Dominic Rohner, "Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 61 (2009): 1-27.

indeterminate, being supplied by whatever agenda happens to be adopted by the first social entrepreneur to occupy the viable niche, or itself endogenous to the opportunities thereby opened for illegal income".[13] Four sources of grievance are identified – ethnic and religious hatred, political repression, political exclusion and economic inequality.[14] The indicators fail to find consistent statistical significance.

In his book, Collier continues to proclaim that "poor is dangerous."[15] The scholar considers other explanations less powerful in accounting for the outbreak of violent conflict. The type of polity provides poor consistent explanatory power, since Collier finds that democracy in poor countries raises the risk for conflict while in rich countries it is dictatorship that is dangerous.[16] Moreover, Collier argues that "the boundaries of a modern state generally emerged not out of deepening bonds forged out of a primordial ethnic solidarity but as a solution to the central issue of what size of territory was best suited to the creation of monopoly over the means of violence."[17] Hence, there are doubts that ethnicity is decisive. While Collier's work is clearly robust statistically, the difficulty arises when the scholar and his collaborators attempt to explain the routes that account for economic development as the solution for conflict, which is their argument.

An issue with studies such as Collier's is that aggregate-level quantitative rational choice models disregard the complexity of individual motivations while failing to discuss where

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[13] Ibid., 24.
[14] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and grievance in civil war," Oxford Economic Papers 56 (2004): 570.
[15] Collier, *Wars, Guns & Votes*, 125.
[16] Ibid., 132.
[17] Ibid., 169.

players come from or to disaggregate them in order to provide more specificity and contextually.[18] Christopher Cramer argues that these theories reduce the role of the material to the lootability of primary resources and "therefore the profitability at the margin of conflict and violence over co-operation and exchange."[19] Cramer concedes that "agency is involved in the origins of conflict, choices are made and economic incentives do matter as do individuals but they are influenced and operate within specific conditions and social and historical features of change."[20] Accordingly, it is the combination of individual incentives functioning within the bounds set by societal structures that influence whether individuals are compelled to offer support to rebel groups.

There is a link between individual support for rebellion and the broader institutional structures that are created to gain this support. David Keen once described civil war as "the continuation of economics by other means."[21] This notion served as the basis of Karen Ballentine's argument that economic resources may prolong conflict by providing rebels with a source of finance, rather than cause it.[22] This is particularly the case in ethnoseparatist conflicts where legitimacy may be important. Ballentine argues that such conflicts feature greater "coherence, discipline, and population support over time."[23] As such, it is possible that livelihoods are being supported by war and if the satisfaction of economic needs requires acquiescence to a rebel group, individuals may choose to offer their support rather than endanger their survival.

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[18] Christopher Cramer, "Homo Economicus Goes to War: Methodological Individualism, Rational Choice and the Political Economy of War," *World Development* 30, no. 11 (2002): 1846.
[19] Ibid., 1849.
[20] Ibid., 1857.
[21] David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11.
[22] Karen Ballentine, "Beyond Greed and Grievance: Reconsidering the Economic Dynamics of Armed Conflict," in *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance*, Karen Ballentine and Jack Sherman eds. (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Renner, 2003), 265.
[23] Ibid., 271.

It is argued that in war or separatist zones the sources of funding are either 'asset transfers' or external funding since other sources of finance are foreclosed by the collapse of production. Mark Duffield argues that this collapse is brought about by withdrawal of state support or physical destruction.[24] Asset transfers are defined as looting, extortion, pillage and hostage-taking.[25] As Mary Kaldor asserts, the result is "the fragmentation and informalisation of war is paralleled by the informalisation of the economy."[26] Kaldor further points out that a form of political structure is necessary "to embed the new coercive forms of economic exchange, which in turn are required to provide a viable financial basis for the new gangsters/powerholders in the context of state disintegration and economic marginalisation."[27] Consequently, the longer the conflict duration the more requirement there is to offer rational and outwardly legitimate governance structures to the individuals living in conflict zones.

2.3 Public Goods, Poverty and Patronage

Poor public goods provision by central governments can be associated with poverty. In turn, this can strengthen the reasons for civilian support of rebel organisations. Collier proposes that wars "create weakest-link problems in the provision of public goods."[28] The implication is that those most at risk of poverty are the individuals and households who are most easily swayed into supporting rebellions. Similarly, Patricia Justino argues that "access to local resources are more likely to result in forms of 'stationary banditry' where the provision of security, welfare

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[24] Mark Duffield, "The political economy of internal war: asset transfer, complex emergencies and international aid," in *War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses,* Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi eds. (London: Zed Press, 1994), 56.

[25] Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 108.

[26] Ibid., 110.

[27] Ibid., 113.

[28] Collier, *Wars, Guns & Votes*, 138.

… may promote better living conditions among the population."[29] Conceivably then, it can be entirely rational for the local populace to support rebellion since such need satisfaction by a subset of the population most at risk of poverty makes sense.

Relatedly, the shadow economy can also play a part in making conflict feasible. In another paper, Collier models rebellion as a variety of criminal activity and argues that it is analogous to it.[30] The scholar states that when recruits are willing to fight for a cause rather than for their own self-interest, predation may be the sole means by which a rebellion can sustain itself financially."[31] Another way that shadow economies can be related to conflict is through the way the local populace come to rely on employment in such organisations. Thus, it is possible that there is an association between a region's shadow economy and its risk of conflict. Regions where such economies are pervasive generate incentives for rent-seeking.

Regional rent-seeking in exchange for loyalty to the centre is common among the Soviet successor states. Indeed, due to the widespread nature of informal networks in these states, secession may make sense since it can be rationally perceived that the central government is unlikely to provide much benefit to such regions. Libman asserts that regional administrations in post-Soviet countries have often used informal incentives to create corrupt networks and

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[29] Patricia Justino, "Poverty and Violent Conflict: A Micro-Level Perspective on the Causes and Duration of Warfare," *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 3 (2009): 326.

[30] Paul Collier, "Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44, no. 6 (December, 2000): 839-853.

[31] Ibid., 839.

support favoured businesses. [32] Further, the structure of the states' economies make decentralised sources of income important to the livelihoods of the local populations historically. In the case of Ukraine, Anna Reid concludes that the Red Guard coal miners in Donetsk were not concerned who they were governed by since better wages served as their main motivation.[33] Moreover, since transportation infrastructure in many post-Soviet states is underdeveloped and regional markets are segregated from one another, interregional competition is limited.[34] Thus, reliance on regional actors and structures for their livelihoods clearly has an effect on loyalty of the population. Such loyalty is attracted using various means of patronage.

Local-level patronage networks provide a measure of stability and ensure that the local population is provided with essential public goods and resources. Kathryn Stoner Weiss demonstrates, with the case of Russia, that regional governors have control over resources which they can distribute as they see fit.[35] Such resources and their strategic allocation increase the influence of regional authorities while reducing central government's authority. Further, Lucan Way states that one of the legacies of the Soviet era is that in late 1990s as many as 80% of regional and local leaders were natives of the territory they controlled.[36] As a result, local authorities have significant leverage with the citizens of their regions since their livelihoods depend on such authorities.

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[32] Aleksandr Libman, "Cycles of Decentralization in the Post-Soviet Space," *Russian Politics & Law* 48 (2010): 18.

[33] Anna Reid, *Borderland: A Journey Through the History of Ukraine* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 47.

[34] Libman, "Cycles of Decentralization in the Post-Soviet Space,"18.

[35] Kathryn Stoner, "The Management of Territorial Cleavages in Post-Soviet Russia," in *United or Divided: Accommodating Territorial Cleavages in Federal and Unitary States,* Ugo Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo eds. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

[36] Lucan Way, "The Dilemma Of Reform in Weak States: The Case of Post-Soviet Fiscal Decentralization," *Politics & Society* 30, no. 4 (2002): 584.

At the individual or micro level of analysis, there must be incentives for people to support rebellion or at least not oppose it. Elizabeth Wood provides an insightful answer to the question of 'high risk activism', that is individuals gathering to engage in risky, and violent, collective action. Wood argues that selective incentives can serve as the reason why in the presence of high risks and low apparent benefits individuals support conflict.[37] Mancur Olson asserted in his 1965 work 'The Logic of Collective Action' that collective action that carry costs to individuals are unlikely to be sustained, the exception being those initatives where participation is coerced or motivated voluntarily through the provision of "selective incentives" granted to those who participate.[38] The selective incentives argument is in need of an empirical test. It is important to examine whether such enducements were indeed used to attract population support and in turn, make separatism in Eastern Ukraine feasible and enduring.

It is possible that support is not necessary in certain cases and free-riding either results in the failure of a rebellion or it fascilitates rebel success by removing any opposition to it. Stathis Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher show that free-riding can be a reasonable option and can in fact fascilitate success of a rebel movement.[39] This finding highlights the need to define what constitutes partcipation and what specific actors are the focus of this research. This thesis defines the relevant actors as individuals from the population, not considered to be elites or government officials. This does not preclude such actors from assuming positions of power in

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[37] Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ix.

[38] Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), quoted in Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), x.

[39] Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Adam Kocher, "How "Free" Is Free Riding in Civil Wars? Violence, Insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem," *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (January, 2007): 177-216.

a new structure. These actors are distingusihed based on their position in the region prior to conflict outbreak.[40] Participation can be manifested in provision of verbal or material backing, voting in local elections and attending demonstrations in support of the rebels.

2.4 Micro-Level Theory

The pervasive use of macro-level analysis in most political science research can perhaps be blamed for obscuring causal mechanisms. Indeed, it is possible that when insufficient attention is paid to conflict dynamics at the micro-level conflict becomes more enduring and difficult to solve since population support is often particularly vital for its feasibility. The micro-level is defined here as factors influencing individual and household participation in conflict. Thomas Schelling has famously shown that individual choices by self-interested actors lead to unexpected aggregate outcomes.[41] The economist states that "though people may care how it all comes out in the aggregate, their own decisions and their own behaviours are typically motivated toward their own interests, often impinged on by only a fragment of the overall pattern."[42] The implication is that a combination of individual short-term horizons and self-interest results in a macro-level phenomena which is perhaps difficult to understand at that level. Consequently, it is possible to argue that in order to have a greater chance of extinguishing violence, the ability to affect the micro-level dynamics is important.

The feasibility of conflict is not only influenced by macro institutions such as the state or regional groups but also by the ordinary people living in potential combat zones. Collier's

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[40] For example, if an actor is a factory worker but rises to a position of authority in a rebel organization then this actor is relevant to this research.
[41] Thomas Schelling, *Micromotives and Macrobehaviour* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978).
[42] Ibid., 24.

theory can be rendered testable at the micro-level. Patricia Justino's work carries out this operationalisation and discusses the various survival strategies that individuals may adopt, such as looting, fighting, denouncing former friends and neighbours and joining informal exchange networks that deal in legal and illegal resources, all with the aim of avoiding famine and destitution.[43] This indicates that non-participation can indeed be as costly as participation. Further, the endogenous process of socio-economic transformation during the conflict is difficult to understand at the macro level. It is these mechanisms that Collier's theory fails to elucidate.

The impact of conflicts on individuals and households is an appropriate starting point to clarifying the micro-level theory. The influences can be linked to local markets, where prices for basic necessities rise and supply becomes limited.[44] Political institutions can be impacted adversely, hindering the ability to provide public goods and ensure security of the population. Consequently, new structures of governance can develop to fill the vacuum. The ways in which these organisations are structured either improves or diminishes the livelihoods of the population. Organisational structures based on the rule of law and protection of property rights are likely to improve the lives of the individuals.[45] Conversely, those that promote rent-seeking and corruption will result in deteriorating standards of living.[46] Thus, institutional structures

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[43] Justino, "Poverty and Violent Conflict: A Micro-Level Perspective on the Causes and Duration of Warfare," 316.

[44] Jean-Paul Azam, Paul Collier and Andrea Cravinho, "Crop Sales, Shortages and Peasant Portfolio Behaviour: An Analysis of Angola", *Journal of Development Studies* 30, no. 2 (1994): 361–379.

[45] Ana Maria Arjona and Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Preliminary Results of a Survey of Demobilized Combatants in Colombia", unpublished manuscript (2006), Yale University (http://research. yale.edu/stathis/documents/Report5-06.pdf).

[46] Fabio Sánchez and Maria del Mar Palau, "Conflict, Decentralisation and Local Governance in Colombia, 1974–2004", *Households in Conflict Network*, Working Paper 14 (2006) (http://www.hicn.org/papers/wp14.pdf).

may play a role in ensuring population support for nascent regimes which spring up as a result of separatism.

Justino posits that higher levels of population support for armed groups pave the way for successful and durable rebellions.[47] Hence, the question which must be asked is what predicts population support of rebel groups and what accounts for the more entrenched conflicts. In attempting an answer we may take into account the initial endowments of individuals and households prior to conflict outbreak. It is theorised that those in possession of greater material resources are better able to insulate themselves from poverty and destitutions while the poorer households are confronted with greater costs of staying neutral.[48] In addition, the less resourced households are more likely to have more to gain from promises of greater economic gains. Conversely, the richer households likely face greater costs of supporting or participating in a rebellion.

The theoretical framework leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: population support for rebellion increases with opportunity for greater material gains from it by the actors with lower opportunity cost of participation and lower resource endowments prior to its outbreak.

Hypothesis 2: the creation of political institutions capable of providing public goods increases population support for separatism.

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[47] Justino, "Poverty and Violent Conflict: A Micro-Level Perspective on the Causes and Duration of Warfare," 323.
[48] Ibid., 324.

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2.5 Universe of Cases and Background to the Donbas Conflict

The Donbas conflict belongs to the universe of cases which includes other post-Soviet separatist de-facto states. It is a rather small population of cases and includes the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic in Moldova, the Nagorno- Karabakh Republic in Azerbaijan, the Republic of South Ossetia and the Republic of Abkhazia within Georgian borders. [49] The scope conditions that define this universe of cases are their geographic location – Eastern Europe, historical and political background – former member states of the Soviet Union and key political objective – secession from their former sovereign. The Donbas conflict is chosen as the focal point of this study as it is the most recent addition to this population of cases. As a result, there is potential to glean new insights from a fresh set of data and to employ a new methodology to analyse it.

The currently ongoing turmoil in Ukraine can be traced as far back as the Orange Revolution in 2004 when the Donbas presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovych won the election only for the result to be annulled.[50] This episode of instability had the effect of increasing insecurity among the Donbas population, since Yanukovych's Party of Regions strongly held sway over the whole region.[51] Yanukovych did eventually win a free and fair election in 2010. However, the presidency ended in acrimony when protesters again occupied the Maidan square in Kyiv in November 2013 following his decision to abandon negotiations for closer trade ties with the European Union and opening fire on civilian protesters. On February 22, 2014 following the

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[49] Dov Lynch, "Separatist States and Post-Soviet Conflicts," *International Affairs* 78, no. 4 (Octtober, 2002): 831.
[50] For the timeline of events from the time of Ukraine's declaration of independence to separatist rebellion in the east see: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275.
[51] Taras Kuzio, "Rise and Fall of the Party of Regions Political Machine," *Problems of Post-Communism* 62 (2015): 174-186.

death of 88 protesters Yanukovych fled to Russia and Crimea was annexed by Russian troops shortly after. While Russian, Ukrainian and Western authorities were occupied with the Crimea crisis, gunmen captured the administrative buildings in Donetsk and Luhansk in April 2014. It is this conflict which is analysed in this thesis.

Many explanations for the onset of conflict in Ukraine focus on Russian interference.[52] However, a more nuanced analysis can help highlight additional explanations. In his argument against the notion that the conflict is primarily of Russia's making Serhii Kudelia states that Russian special forces arrived between 4 and 6 weeks after the conflict commencement.[53] Further, the annexation of Crimea, while exhibiting parallels, is considered a conflict of vastly different nature. While there is doubtless a link between the capture of Crimea and separatism in Eastern Ukraine, this link is not analysed in this thesis. Indeed, the swift absorption of Crimea into the Russian Federation is emblematic of much greater levels of Russian intrusion and assertiveness, compared to the two Ukrainian self-proclaimed republics.

The conflict in Ukraine can be characterised as inter-state, a war between Russia and Ukraine, or intra-state, a civil war within the borders of Ukraine. There is a debate in the academic circles and media regarding its precise classification. The definitional issue arises as a result of an attempt by scholars to demarcate the totality of the conflict. The interview and other evidence suggest that the conflict at first was very much an intra-state incident and only at a later stage

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[52] See Michael McFaul, "Faulty Powers. Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?," *Foreign Policy* 93 (2014): 167-178; Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely, "Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 28, no. 1 (2015): 1-22.
[53] See 'The Civil War in Ukraine', presentation available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfQ9IgTNu-M, accessed 20 May 2017.

Russia provided the pivotal level of support to the separatists which contributed to conflict entrenchment. Hence, for the purposes of this thesis the Donbas conflict is classified as an internationalised civil war.

3. Multi-Method Research

There is support in the academic community for the use of mixed or multi methods to study violent conflict. Sidney Tarrow states that "a single-minded adherence to either quantitative or qualitative approaches straightjackets scientific progress."[54] Randall Collins further asserts that the complexity of violence and its vast impact are in need of a range of methodological tools in order to generate solutions.[55] Furthermore, Mike McGovern adds optimistically that while "one productive division of labour would have economists identifying the surprising correlations in cross-cultural economic phenomena and anthropologists explaining them, political scientists may be able to do both parts of this process in house."[56] It is such support that has encouraged the use of both qualitative interviews and quantitative big data analysis in this research project.

The distinction between multi and mixed methods is an important one and is in need of an elaboration. Mixed methods research involves 'triangulating' two or more methods in order to describe social phenomena from different perspectives.[57] The multi-method approach focuses on answering different questions about the same phenomena.[58] Since this thesis aims to answer different questions in regard to factors that attract population support, the methodology is multi-method rather than mixed. In this sense, the two main analysis chapters can be treated as two different but overlapping research papers.

[54] Sidney Tarrow, "Bridging the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide in Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 2 (June, 1995): 474.

[55] Randall Collins, *Violence: A micro-sociological Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[56] Mike McGovern, "Popular Development Economics—An Anthropologist among the Mandarins," *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 2 (June, 2011): 345-355.

[57] Jane Ritchie et al., *Qualitative Research Practice* (London: Sage Publications), 40.

[58] Julia Brannen, "Mixing Methods: The Entry of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches into the Research Process," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 8, no. 3 (2005): 173-184.

Each research method is used with its own goals in mind. Kai Thalen posits that since violent action is a result of individual actors' decision, we must get "inside their heads" in order to understand what spurs such action to occur.[59] Thus, the benefit of conducting in-depth interviews is in their ability to trace causal mechanisms behind the outbreak of separatism in Eastern Ukraine. More specifically, the interviews shine a light on the factors which influenced the internally displaced persons (IDPs) to leave their homes and how these individuals came to make these decisions rather than provide support to the separatists. The quantitative part of this thesis offers possibility for insight into themes that are emphasised in order to win support for each side in the conflict. Thus, each method adds a unique and important micro-level contribution to understanding why people may or may not support rebels in the separatist conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

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[59] Kai M. Thaler, "Mixed Methods Research in the Study of Political and Social Violence and Conflict," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 11, no. 1 (2017): 60.

4. Pragmatism of the Working Class: Interview Analysis

4.1 Interview Methodology

There is a debate in regard to the role of the interviewer in generating data when the interview methodology is used. Jane Richie et al. discuss whether knowledge is constructed during the interview or whether it exists and the interview only helps to uncover it.[60] In my case, I focused on asking factual questions and broader questions in addition to those pertaining to the individual's unique experience. This way the resulting data can be compared and common themes extracted in order to process-trace the factors which enabled the separatist movement to unfold. David Silverman proposes three models of interviews - positivism, emotionalism and constructivism.[61] The interviews conducted in this research project are viewed as positivist, in that the interviews are treated as representing accurate and objective account of the separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine.

Clearly, there are limitations to the interview methodology and biases associated with participant selection as well as problems related to the relatively small size of interviews conducted for this research. The interviewees were recruited non-randomly. There is an element of self-selection in this process as only those who agreed to be interviewed participated. Further, the participants were recruited through two NGOs which may also

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[60] Jane Ritchie et al., *Qualitative Research Practice,* 178.
[61] David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 119-132.

contribute to a biased sample. However, saturation, which is a measure akin to the quantitative statistical significance, was achieved. Saturation is defined as "a process in which the researcher continues to sample relevant cases until no new theoretical insights are being gleaned from the data."[62] While reaching saturation does not guard against selection biases, a measure of robustness is obtained.

The interviews were conducted in two Ukrainian cities, the capital Kyiv and the eastern city of Kharkiv, which is located close to the separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. The interview subjects were selected based on their age and gender, with 6 women and 6 men interviewed for approximately one hour each. While 8 interviews took place in Kyiv, the data from Kharkiv reduces the problems of selection bias and skewed sample, and adds a perspective from a Russian-speaking city which is similar in nature to the secessionist regions. I was aided in locating the participants by two NGOs, Crimea Diaspora in Kyiv and Kharkiv Station in Kharkiv. As stated above, there may well be a bias associated with recruiting participants this way. It is possible that the people who agreed to take part in the interviews are systemically similar in some way and therefore will provide skewed results. This is one of the limitations of this research.

The interview participant sample included 6 men and 6 women, aged between 27 and 41, internally displaced from the two separatist regions, Luhansk and Donetsk. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the demographics of the interview participants' sample. The table indicates that there is a bias towards more highly educated individuals, particularly the females where no

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[62] Sarah Elsie Baker and Rosalind Edwards, "How many qualitative interviews is enough. Discussion Paper," *National Centre for Methods Research*, 2012 (Unpublished). http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/

females hold a technical qualification or were employed in a technical occupation. The gender gap in the sample is somewhat representative of the general population of Ukraine since a vast majority (88.6%) of females in the country are tertiary educated compared to 76.5% males.[63] The sample is further skewed towards those aged between 31 and 40, with 8 out of the 12 participants falling into this age group. In addition, Donetsk is overrepresented (8 interviewees). However, with Donetsk being a larger city this is to be expected.

Table 1: Interview participants' demographics

Gender/Age Group	City of Origin		Education		Occupation type	
	Luhansk	**Donetsk**	**Higher/University**	**Vocational/Technical**	**Professional**	**Technical**
Male	2	4	3	3	4	2
25-30	1	1	1	1	1	1
31-40	1	3	2	2	3	1
Female	2	4	6	0	6	0
25-30	1	1	2	0	2	0
31-40	1	3	4	0	4	0

The main idea behind the questionnaire design is to break the conflict into two periods. The pre-separatism period, with the goal of establishing whether there were in fact what Collier calls 'atypically low costs', and the separatism phase, where questions regarding separatist attempts to gain support from the population are asked. I posed questions about possible grievances such as those that may result from discrimination or the central government's mistreatment, perceived or otherwise, of the breakaway republics.[64]

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[63] "Gender Data Portal," *The World Bank.* May 23, 2017. http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/ukraine
[64] The full questionnaire and consent form are presented in Appendix A.

The participants were asked questions grouped by categories. The first group of questions attempts to establish the conditions that pervaded in the Donbas region prior to the conflict outbreak. This section's aim is to establish an individuals' opportunity cost of supporting the separatists and to determine whether any grievances towards the central government or discrimination, be it ethnic or based on language, existed. Furthermore, one question in this section attempts to find out whether a participant's particular community (Donetsk or Luhansk) exhibited a desire for closer relations with Russia. By asking this question last the interview process places focus on more internal factors rather than the influence of Russia since the mention of Russia may steer the whole conversation in its direction thus discounting other equally relevant variables.

The second group of questions refers to the separatist period encompassing the journey from the point of war outbreak to the entrenchment of the secessionist movement in the Donbas. This section is split further into groups of questions concerning the initial period of conflict outbreak and those related to the period of entrenched and more current separatist rule. The key focus of these section is on elucidating whether the rebels attempted to garner population support, and perhaps even participation, and if so, whether they provided incentives to gain it. Questions related to the initial war period establish the way in which livelihoods changed, in a material and institutional sense. These questions also aim to discover strategies the separatists may have employed in order to win support, such as coercion or economic incentives.

Questions associated with the period of entrenched separatist rule aim to find out whether the supply of public goods was disrupted or if the separatists took charge of institutions involved in the satisfaction of basic necessities.[65] In essence, this section seeks to discover the way in which the separatists in Eastern Ukraine have developed their quasi state, what institutions the rebels built and what the attitudes of the population were towards the group. The final question explores whether there was knowledge and acceptance of Russia's apparent involvement in helping to fund the rebel groups in the region.

Coding was used as a way of analysing data. Once transcribed, the interview data was coded thematically with findings emerging naturally based on the data collected. Further, in order to provide a measure of statistical significance (or saturation in qualitative research), frequency of repeated stories and variables was recorded. The analysis section below is a reflection of the themes and findings that were repeated by the majority of the interview subjects. While the interview participants are IDPs, I believe that inferences can be made regarding those individuals who still live in Donetsk and Luhansk.

4.2 Interview Analysis

4.2.1 The Pre-conflict Period

The first section of the analysis deals with accounts of life prior to the outbreak of conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The aim of this discussion is to establish whether people had economic, political and or ethnic reasons for leaving their homes. Each interviewee has consistently and

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[65] Entrenchment is regarded here as manifested by the establishment of political institutions, penal codes and a constitution.

without fail stated that their city, be it Luhansk or Donetsk, prospered before the war. There were plenty of jobs and people lived well enough to be able to afford holidays and even savings. This is clearly confirmed by the rate of growth in the gross regional product, both regions growing by an average of 15% between 2004 and 2013.[66] On a more individual level, in 2013 Donetsk residents boasted the highest average wage of all Ukraine's regions at 3,762 Ukrainian hryvnas per month, higher than in Kyiv.[67] All interviewees described that they left behind houses and apartments they own in their city and moved away with whatever they could carry, thus losing many of their possessions.

The interview evidence substantiates Justino's hypothesis that those with greater material possessions face a greater opportunity cost of supporting the separatists. 11 of the participants interviewed discussed their economic status by highlighting that they owned large apartments and houses. A female interviewee stated that her household's economic position was such that they could afford to travel to the seaside for a yearly summer break. A male participant who worked in a factory stated that his salary was small. This however was the only time that a participant mentioned some hardship in the period prior to the outbreak. Others said that cars and savings were also affordable on their salaries. One limitation of such insights is the absence of a large enough data from individuals who worked for the large industrial complexes that dominated the Donbas. Only two of the participants worked in a factory and even they worked as specialists rather than the more menial workers, who are more likely to be involved in rebellion. However, the analysis of non-supporters is valuable since it also provides a test of

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[66] "Валовий регіональний продукт" (Regional GDP), *State Statistics Service of Ukraine*. May 24, 2017. http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2008/vvp/vrp/vrp2008_u.htm

[67] "Середня заробітна плата за регіонами за місяць у 2013 році" (Average Monthly Regional Wages in 2013), *State Statistics Service of Ukraine*. May 24, 2017. http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2013/gdn/reg_zp_m/reg_zpm13_u.htm

Collier's theory and shows that a higher opportunity cost and greater resource endowment may act as a buffer against forced participation.

Another potential explanation for the mobilisation of population in conflict, and one Collier tests for, is the development or existence of grievances against the central government. While Collier finds little support for such a presupposition, the interviews provide a more nuanced view. The interview data suggests that the construction of grievances against the central government and other parts of Ukraine, in particular Western Ukraine, was a strategy adopted by Yanukovych's Party of Regions. The party exploited such rhetoric in order to maintain electoral control over the region. Every single IDP interviewed stated that the Party of Regions propagated information among the population which contributed to perceptions that 'the Donbas feeds Western Ukraine and the rest of the country'. There is evidence to suggest that such a characterisation is at least partially correct. The Donetsk region features the second greatest contribution to Ukraine's GDP of all regions, close to 165 million hryvna.[68] However, if the corrupt nature of the enterprises in the region is taken into account, the contribution to the national coffers is unlikely to be quite as significant. Thus, combined, relatively stable economic circumstances of the households and the doubts regarding the true contribution of the region to the overall Ukrainian economy, the grievances are likely to involve perceptions rather than facts.

Each interviewee described the ways in which the region prospered prior to the war, while Yanukovych was in power. Five individual participants described the state of the roads in

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[68] "Gross regional product," *State Statistics Service of Ukraine*. May 24, 2017. http://ukrstat.org/en/operativ/operativ2008/vvp/vrp/vrp2008_e.htm

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Donetsk and Luhansk as the best in the country. Five years of the Yanukovych administration brought a brand new airport, stadium and community infrastructure improvements to the region. An interviewee who was a business owner prior to being displaced recounted employing 20 people and enjoying plenty of business growth. In fact, this sentiment was repeated by eleven of the interview participants. Such descriptions are consistent with evidence of patronage employed by Party of Regions in order to secure voting support in Donetsk and Luhansk. As Taras Kuzio asserts, from the ashes of the Ukrainian Communist party, which was banned in 1991 "the supposed party of the downtrodden proletariat, became a satellite of the Party of Regions, a party of crony oligarchs." [69] Kuzio details the way in which privatisations and shadowy deals ensured loyalty and political support. The interview evidence endorses such findings with one male participant from Luhansk, who worked in a factory, outlining that political support at the ballot box was ensured through the use of administrative resources in large factories such as his.

The network that the Party of Regions constructed combined rhetoric which disseminated the idea of great economic burdens shouldered by the Donbas region while receiving little in return, real patronage to industry and fear-mongering. An interviewee, who worked as a journalist, called the structure a 'neo-fiefdom'. The implication is that the industrial complexes grew to be so large, influential and decentralised in regard to their governance that the central government could do little to control them. Indeed, a spate of shady privatisations of the 1990s placed these enterprises into the hands of actors who now control the economic fortunes of the Donbas region and hence control much of its political leanings also.[70] The political economic

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[69] Taras Kuzio, "Rise and Fall of the Party of Regions Political Machine," 175.

[70] For literature on Ukraine's privatisation see: Louise I. Shelley, "Organized Crime and Corruption in Ukraine: Impediments to the Development of a Free Market Economy," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 6, no. 4 (1998): 652 – 654.

structure of the networks in the Donbas ensured that ordinary people's political voices and collective action are easily influenced through threats to their jobs. As one research participant noted, "there was a monopoly on the source of employment."

4.2.2 Pragmatism of The Working Class

In 1908 a French visitor to the town of Makiivka in the Donbas basin described circumstances of the time. "The Makeyevka region is one of the most important in the Donetz Basin which itself is one of the most highly industrialised in Russia. We have here a real feudal system in which the tall chimney has replaced the castle."[71] The historical development of the region is heavily influenced by reliance on the heavy industry. The interview evidence confirms the continued influence of large industrial employers on the lives of ordinary working class people. One interviewer, who was a journalist prior to being displaced, previously resided in Makiivka, and whose husband worked in one of the town's large iron plants highlighted that her family and many of their neighbours relied on the income this and many other industrial complexes provided. Thus, there is evidence that not much had changed since the 1900s, with feudal industrial enterprises being replaced by oligarchic ones.

While specialists were in demand, it is the working class that was the most numerous and therefore most appealed to segment of the Donbas population. Historically, the region relied on migrant labour to build its industry.[72] The influx of migrant workers, first in the 1900s and after the Second World War, brought with it an inflow of outlaws and disenfranchised people

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[71] Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870-1990s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 49.
[72] Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870-1990s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 49

from other regions of the Soviet Union.[73] The historical events dovetail with the interview data. The vast majority of the interviewees explained the rebellion and those engaged in it in terms of their class. "Ordinary workers were at the heart of this conflict", stated one male participant who worked in a factory prior to leaving the area. Stories abound of actors in the conflict rising quickly to take up positions of power in new government structures.

Indeed, one of the research participants explained that the new authorities were fond of promoting the idea that they were people of the same ilk as those who supported them - working class people. The strategy is a winning one as is evidenced by the 2001 Ukrainian census statistics. The overall proportion of the Ukrainian population with higher education (university) is 27%. This statistic is lower in the Donbas region with 25% of the population educated to post-secondary school level. Luhansk features an even lower proportion of educated people, with 22% of the population holding a university degree, according to the census.[74]. Further, the main actors in the conflict, such as Alexander Zakharchenko, the self-proclaimed head of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), was a mine electrician.[75] Others also emerged from relative obscurity.[76] Thus, Hiroaki Kuromiya perhaps expresses it most appropriately by arguing that the residents of the Donbas "fiercely defend their own interests, often behaving like opportunists or mercenaries."[77] The interview evidence supports such a characterisation.

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[73] Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870-1990s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 119.
[74] "All Ukrainian population census 2001," *State Statistics Service of Ukraine*. May 24, 2017. http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/education/Luhansk/
[75] "Ukraine crisis: Key players in eastern unrest," *BBC*. May 25, 2017. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-27211501
[76] Ibid.
[77] Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870-1990s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 334.

The pragmatism of conflict outbreak, as promoted by Collier, is evidenced by the apolitical nature of the population of the Donbas. In 1989, during the tumultuous final years of the Soviet Union the Donbas region experienced an explosion of worker strikes with the lack of consumer goods, low wages and poor housing serving as the main grievances.[78] Yet, the workers had little ambition to create an alternative political movement.[79] Indeed, prior to the vote on Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, one strike leader articulated the situation as the following: "it's all the same to us what language we speak, as long as there is sausage."[80] Such historical attitudes have clearly persisted. All interviewees highlighted that there was little desire by the population to separate from Ukraine since much of the population was not much interested in politics. In response to the question regarding their attitude towards the central government, the standard and consistent response was that collective action would not be feasible in the absence of people's concerns for the loss of their livelihoods and jobs. A woman IDP described it as the "cult of pragmatism".

The pragmatism story does not end there since when it is combined with short-term horizons unintended consequences can result. Indeed, the conflict in the Donbas perhaps has its roots in the constant instability of the region and Ukraine as a country. It is possible to argue that historical instability facilitates decision-making to be based on short-term need satisfaction. Consequently, such short-termism may explain the pragmatic attitudes of the Donbas population. Ten of the interviewees mentioned the influence of the Orange Revolution on expectations of outcomes of this conflict. The evidence points towards the attitude of the

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[78] Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870-1990s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 332.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870-1990s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 333.

population forming around such instability which provides a spur to opportunism. The interview evidence overwhelmingly leads to the conclusion that people underestimated the serious nature of the events and failed to anticipate that this episode of instability would lead to the entrenchment of separatism. The opportunism argument gains further support through a Luhansk interviewee's testimony which described how certain people were paid to protest and to demonstrate support for the nascent Luhansk People's Republic. Such a practice is widespread is Ukraine.[81]

Furthermore, in order to analyse the reasons why some people may have supported separatism during its initial phase a breakdown of the population by age group is illustrative. According to the 2001 Ukrainian census, Donetsk and Luhansk are home to a higher median population age and a greater number of pensioners.[82] Seven of the interviewees stated that the influence of pensioners in legitimating the regime was substantial since they voted in the May 11, 2014 referendum, held to display a quasi-democratic procedure for the establishment of the separatist republics, in great numbers. In fact, the IDPs explained that much of the population in the region, except those forced to vote by their work places and pensioners, missed the importance of the referendum. While it is difficult to verify the numbers who supported the rebels and there are major doubts regarding the fair and free nature of the referendum, there is evidence of genuine support. One participant, who now lives in Kyiv, stated that her grandmother voted in favour of the republic. Further, pension tourism has emerged in the Donbas region, where people receive two pensions, one administered by the separatists and the other they travel to

[81] Andrew Wilson, "The Donbas in 2014: Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but not Civil War," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 4 (January, 2016): 645.
[82] "Average and median age of population (years) by Year, Settlement type, Region, Contents and Gender," *State Statistics Service of Ukraine*. May 24, 2017. http://database.ukrcensus.gov.ua/Mult/Dialog/Saveshow.asp

the Ukraine-controlled territory to receive. Thus, an interviewee described the separatist region as a 'pensioner republic'. This is emblematic of pragmatism and opportunism of the population.

There is a pervasive criminality which has enveloped the separatist republics in the Donbas. The illegal activity is used by the rebels and ordinary people. Certainly, there is evidence of natural resources contributing to rebel finance and as such providing a measure of validation to Collier's resource-related argument. A male former Luhansk resident illustrated this by pointing to the prevalence of illegal coal mines, used for both rebel finance and winter heating by the ordinary residents.[83] Interview accounts show that many businesses and homes are nationalised and gifted to key figures in the new separatist regime. Further, another interviewee from Luhansk described how prices on everyday items have risen partly due to bribes that are required to be paid for goods to be allowed to enter the separatist territories by those manning the block posts. Thus, criminality and resources mingle with conflict funding and survival of the ordinary people in a manner which reinforces the situation.

Aside from the opportunist reasons for separatist support, Eastern Ukraine display the curious phenomenon of Soviet nostalgia. Eight of the IDPs discussed their own family members, those from the older generation of Ukrainians, who often perceive the Soviet period as more prosperous. A male participant from Donetsk related the collective action of the people during the Russian spring protests to those that took place during the Soviet times where people lacked any desire to protest but collective action stemmed from coercion, if not by force then by threats

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[83] For more on illegal coal mining see: "Illegal coal mines a 'lifeline' in Ukraine," *Al Jazeera.* May 25, 2017. http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/12/illegal-coal-mines-lifeline-ukraine-2014121494739408490.html

to livelihoods. Such attitudes and the pragmatism of the older generation and the less highly educated individuals who display lower opportunity costs of conflict combine to shine a light on what Collier calls 'weakest-link problems'. Certainly then, those who are at risk of poverty, such as the pensioners, who struggle to provide for their livelihoods from the pensions, are more likely to support rebel groups.

4.2.3 Russia's Influence

The spectre of Russia clearly looms large over the region, economically, linguistically and ethnically. Russia had traditionally been Ukraine's largest trading market accounting for 27% of exports and 37.1% of imports in 2013.[84] Russian is the most prevalent language with 75% of the Donetsk population indicating it as native language, while in Luhansk the figure is slightly lower at 69% according to the 2001 census.[85] The Donetsk region is composed of 57% ethnic Ukrainians and 38% ethnic Russians while Luhansk is inhabited by 58% Ukrainians and 39% Russians.[86] However, while the Russian influence is clearly significant, it is not well established in previous literature whether this is sufficient to induce separatism since the strength of ethnic affiliation is difficult to measure. Stephen White and Ian McAllister's survey of Ukrainians' interpretations of the 2004 Orange Revolution, which pitted supporters of Ukraine's 'western' orientation against pro-Russian forces, suggests that where people lived was a factor in their support or opposition to the events and "not simply an artefact of the

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[84] Yuri M. Zhukov, "Trading hard hats for combat helmets: The economics of rebellion in eastern Ukraine," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 44(2016): 4.
[85] "Language statistics by region," *State Statistics Service of Ukraine*. May 25, 2017. http://database.ukrcensus.gov.ua/MULT/Database/Census/databasetree_en.asp
[86] "About number and composition population of UKRAINE by data All-Ukrainian population census'2001 data," *All Ukrainian population census 2001, State Statistics Service of Ukraine*. May 25, 2017. http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/

cultural identity or social background of the people living there."[87] Hence, interview questions in regard to perceptions of Russia can shine a light on a complex variable such as this.

The IDPs interviewed indicated that there were no conscious attitudes, positive or otherwise, towards Russia. There was never any discrimination against Russian speakers. The language of instruction in all universities of the region was Russian. An interviewee articulated their attitude to Russia as "our neighbour who no one really thought about joining". Such sentiments were shared by all IDPs interviewed. However, one interviewee recounted a particularly revealing case which shines a light on the way that ethnicity is exploited with pragmatic goals in mind. The participant described a story about a friend who was a Donetsk State University lecturer in Ukrainian studies, which involves teaching Ukrainian language and literature to undergraduate students. Once the separatist wave started to overwhelm the Donbas, the lecturer became an avid supporter of Russia and critic of all Ukrainian symbols. The dramatic change is difficult to explain except when explanations are linked to promises by the authorities to raise standards of living and pensions. Further insights are gleaned from tracing the initiation of events in the region.

4.2.4 Russian Spring

The theory provided by Collier lacks discussion of mechanics of conflict since case studies are not a significant feature of the scholar's work. The interview data can help to elucidate such processes. There was little organic desire for separatism in the region prior to the events of the Russian spring, since Russian or Ukrainian ethnic nationalist tendencies were not popular in

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[87] Stephen White and Ian McAllister, "Rethinking the 'Orange Revolution'," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 25, nos. 2-3 (2009): 236.

the region.[88] However, Russia's influence was clearly present. Neo-nazi Russian groups such as the Party of Russian National Unity and Aleksandr Dugin's Eurosianists intervened and fought on the side of the separatists.[89] However, this cannot account fully for the mobilisation of the population in the Donbas, since, as previously stated, Russian support did not arrive until the later stages of the conflict. In addition, the majority of the population is unlikely to be supportive of such radical groups. The interview data illuminates the transformation of the Donbas and the process of conflict entrenchment.

On 13 March, a pro-Ukraine protester was stabbed to death in Donetsk. This event served as an indication that events in the region were spiralling out of control.[90] Further, when Russian flags were raised above the administrative buildings in Donetsk and Luhansk recognition dawned on the interviewees that this event was unlike what happened in the past. Among all of the IDPs interviewed there was disbelief that such a situation could happen in Ukraine. Interestingly, one person interviewed noted that people continued to go to work and live their lives with little regard to the annexation of Crimea or the Maidan events in Kyiv. One person summed up the general attitude of the people in the region as "we do what we must and what will be will be". Most people went to work while protests were ongoing as hard work was greatly respected. Three of the interviewees stated that being a workaholic is a particular characteristic of the people of the region. The implication here is that many of the people in Donetsk and Luhansk, apart from those who were coerced into attending the pro-separatism

[88] Kuzio, "The Rise and Fall of the Party of Regions Political Machine," 175.
[89] "Neo-Nazi Russian National Unity in Eastern Ukraine," *Anton Shekhovtsov blog.* May 31, 2017. http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.co.uk/ 2014/08/neo-nazi-russian-national-unity-in.html, and "Russia's Imperialist Warriors," *BBC*. May 31, 2017. https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=UUXEvIWZcu0
[90] "One dead in Ukraine clash in eastern city," *Reuters*. May 31, 2017. http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-donetsk-idUSBREA2C20Z20140313

protests such as factory workers and pensioners, disregarded the unrest as a temporary episode. This was particularly so prior to the death of the protestor.

Hence, there are doubts as to how widespread the support for the separatists was. There is some indication that local authorities and police actors just changed allegiance as the case of an interview participant's brother, who was part of the region's police, shows. However, all IDPs interviewed stated that there was a lack of mass backing of the rebels. While pensioners and factory employees lent their support, the young population and the local authorities had been caught off-guard. An interviewee asserted that there were many young and able people in her city who could have resisted the rebellion, but they failed to recognise the significance of the events and that they may lead to entrenchment of secessionism. While this is surely a subjective reading of the events, all interviewees professed that the local authorities were either complacent during the initial stages or displayed pragmatic aspirations. Further, the central government in Kyiv presented a picture of uncertainty as to how to respond to the events in Donetsk and Luhansk. A participant from Donetsk travelled to Kyiv for work in April 2014 and witnessed an atmosphere of victory (following the ouster of Yanukovych) and a complete lack of appreciation for the gravity of the situation in the East. This allowed firstly the local rebels to capture the administrative buildings and then, with Russian support, contributed to the conflict's entrenchment.

The interview data offers evidence of ideological coercion. Five of the IDPs described commencement of the unrest by recounting visits by men with guns to their workplace or home. One such encounter took place in an office of a newspaper. The editor was spoken to and allegiance was demanded. When the editor refused to assist the separatists in spreading

untruths, servers and computers were confiscated. Another participant told a story of a visit to their home. The rebels were directed there by information that the inhabitants were opposed to the new authorities and the visit was meant to, at the barrel of a gun, 'right' the views of this household. Hence, the decisive moment when the majority of the research participants realised that they could no longer live under rebel rule is when it dawned on them that their support for Ukraine was dangerous to them and their families. An interviewee detailed a situation when her son began to experience issues at school due to the family's pro-Ukraine views. All interviewees stated that the main reason for leaving was their opposition to the separatist authorities. In this sense, three of the IDPs likened the newly formed republics to North Korea, a totalitarian state where propaganda played an important role in gaining population support. This strand of the argument is picked up in Chapter 5 and analysed using Facebook data.

4.2.5 Separatist State

Conflict entrenchment is associated with creation of structures resembling those of a state as a means of legitimating it. In a sense, such structures amount to a de-facto state defined in the 1993 Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States by the first three of the four criteria – a permanent population, a defined territory and a government – while the fourth, the capacity to enter into relations with other states, such states fail to achieve.[91] That the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics meet the definition of de-facto states is unsurprising. However, as Dov Lynch argues in regard to other post-Soviet separatist states de-facto states may not seek juridical recognition by the international community since their declaration of sovereign is seen as sufficient to legitimate it.[92] Lynch further posits that "popular will is held

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[91] Dov Lynch, "Separatist States and Post-Soviet Conflicts," 834.
[92] Ibid., 837.

up as a key pillar of legitimacy."[93] Accordingly, the Donbas separatist republics' actions can also be assessed through this lens of legitimacy. This argument supports Kaldor's assertion about the necessity of political structures and Ballentine's legitimacy contention.

The republics, while perhaps initially not aiming to create a state, have begun a form of state building once the conflict began to entrench. A former Donetsk resident highlighted that the first institution the DPR created was the Ministry of Social Policy. There was a realisation among the separatists that public goods provision is the simplest way to build loyalty, particularly once Ukraine curtailed its transfers to the region. Hospitals still operate normally and children are invited to summer holiday camps in Russia. The interviewee stated the situation in the region was reminiscent of the Soviet Union. The process of entrenchment is certainly progressing at pace with the populace being encouraged to give up their Ukrainian passports in exchange for a DPR one.

An interview participant from Luhansk has offered insights on the state building mechanics of the Luhansk separatist republic, as a result of spending 18 months in captivity for photographing a civilian house which was later revealed to be a confiscated home to the rebels. While the initial stages (8 months) of her imprisonment were spent awaiting trial, a penal code was adopted firstly from Ukraine and then exported from Russia. The interviewee was eventually charged with 'betrayal of the homeland', despite the obvious fact that her homeland is Ukraine rather than a self-proclaimed republic. The charge was supported by a constitution, a document which consists of 86 articles such as the "Luhansk People's Republic is a

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[93] Ibid.

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democratic, legal, social state" and "all are equal before the law and the courts."[94] Hence, a curious amalgam has emerged – a de-facto state which has some outward features of a democratic (yet unrecognised) state, such as a well-intentioned constitution, but which in reality must rely on the smokescreen of propaganda as a way of reconciling the economic hardships the population live under to pro-republic support.

A large factor in the Donetsk and Luhansk self-proclaimed republics' endurance is their focus on propaganda. Interestingly, only two of the interviewees described physical coercion against civilians. The Luhansk resident who worked in a factory presented a story of his family receiving a visit from the rebels who assaulted his father and himself. The family were then able to escape and drive to the city of Kharkiv, under control of Ukrainian troops. This however was a rare incident and the majority of the coercion is information related. The propaganda, as the interviewees who witnessed it explained, involves glorifying the republic's fighters on billboards, on television screens and in newspapers while magnifying the threat to the Russian-speaking population from the West and the government of Ukraine.

Charles Tilly's conception of a 'racketeer state' is appropriate as "someone who produces danger and, at a price, the shield against it, is a racketeer."[95] One IDP described her recent visit to Donetsk in terms of the propaganda that permeates all media in the city. Giant billboards adorn buildings publicising the republic's fight against Ukrainian Nazism. The radio

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[94] "Временный Основной Закон (Конституция) Луганской Народной Республики, " (Interim Basic Law (constitution) Lugansk People's Republic), *Luhansk Information Centre.* June 1, 2017. http://lug-info.com/documents/one/vremennyi-osnovnoi-zakon-konstitutsiya-luganskoi-narodnoi-respubliki-12
[95] Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter Evans et al. eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 37.

disseminates messages of fascists killing children on the streets of Kyiv. Such strong misinformation rhetoric, broadcast at all hours successfully justifies the military's intrusion into all aspects of the region's inhabitants' lives. The Ukrainian government is not blameless as the military action against the separatists is referred to as the 'Anti-Terrorism Operation' by the government. Such a characterisation may lead to alienation of whole swathes of the population of the region and can itself be considered a form of propaganda. The second part of this thesis aims to produce a way to classify such propaganda and to understand the topics which both the separatist supporters and their pro-Ukrainian opponents discuss.

5. Rhetoric in Eastern Ukraine's Separatist Conflict: An Analysis of Facebook Data

5.1 Introduction

The legitimacy of the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics, if viewed from the pragmatic perspective of Collier, depends on successfully attributing blame for the economic hardships their inhabitants are experiencing to the Ukrainian government. While Collier does not make such an argument explicitly, the interview data points in its direction. Certainly, the Ukrainian government has permitted the propaganda to exploit its actions, by instituting a prohibition on distribution of pensions in the Donbas region as a way of applying economic pressure on the separatists. The gathered interview data suggests that even those who supported neither side or displayed pro-Ukraine tendencies overtime, through the influence of propaganda, became persuaded to back the separatist authorities.

Clearly, population support is important. The former Liberian President Charles Taylor famously said that "whenever you are fighting a war, the strength of any revolution, it depends on the manpower, the manner in which you carry out your recruitment … They have to recruit whoever they meet: old people, young people, young girls, young boys. They have to join the revolution and if they refuse to join, it means they are classified as enemies. So you have to compulsorily recruit these people."[96] While Taylor propagated person-to-person recruitment, the manner in which this is carried in the Donbas is through propaganda. Indeed, it can be argued that the importance of civilian support is exhibited by the strength of propaganda in the

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[96] Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (April, 2008): 438.

separatist zone.[97] Hence, the analysis of Facebook data is appropriate in this case. This section builds a predictive model based on terms employed in discussions of pro-separatist and pro-Ukraine Facebook groups. It delineated between topics each group of supporters employs to advance their case, determines the terms which most accurately identify the supporters of each group and makes use of the random forest machine learning algorithm to test the robustness of the predictive model.

5.2 Methodology and Source Assessment

5.2.1 Data Source

This chapter makes use of Facebook to collect posts and user comments on the posts from two opposing groups in the Ukrainian conflict. Facebook is used by a broad range of ages, the majority (79%) are between the ages of 18 and 54 (see Figure A in Appendix B).[98] Facebook however is more popular in Western Europe, North America and Australasia which biases the results towards the 'Western' viewpoint. Further, the use of different social media channels is correlated with socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity as Eszter Hargittai discovered.[99] Hargittai finds that Facebook is more likely to be used by more highly educated individuals.[100] Such a bias may well be more pronounced when Eastern European countries are considered, as the rival social media platform Vkontakte is more widely used. These biases must be taken into account. However, the battle for legitimacy of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's

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[97] Maria Snegovaya, "Putin's Information War in Ukraine", *Institute for the Study of War*, 2015. http://understandingwar.org/report/putins-information-warfare-ukraine-soviet-origins-russias-hybrid-warfare
[98] "Social Media User Statistics & Age Demographics for 2014," *Jetscram.* June 1, 2017. http://jetscram.com/blog/industry-news/social-media-user-statistics-and-age-demographics-2014/
[99] Eszter Hargittai, "Whose Space? Differences Among Users and Non-Users of Social Network Sites," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2008): 276-297.
[100] Ibid., 284.

Republics is also international in nature and hence the use of Facebook can add valuable insights.

The data is collected from two opposing groups. The pro-separatist group 'Truth about situation in Ukraine' is followed by 11,769 users who engage with posts by the administrators by liking and commenting. All posts are highly critical of the Ukrainian authorities. A typical post from this group with comments by the followers is shown in Appendix B (Figure B). The group employs the coat of arms of the separatist republic 'Novorossya' and hence, it can be safely classified as pro-separatist and anti-Ukrainian. The pro-Ukrainian group 'Russia, hands off Ukraine' has attracted 15,134 followers and portrays a heavy pro-Ukrainian bias. A typical post by this group with comments is presented in Appendix B (Figure C).

5.2.2 Data Assessment

Scope and Sampling

The initial idea for this chapter was to sample individuals from the two groups and use their personal data such as education information, occupation and location to predict their support for or opposition to the separatists. However, Facebook has implemented stringent privacy controls and user information is now impossible to collect. Hence, I was forced to resort to classifying each comment based on the language employed. The classification of each post is carried out using topic modelling, an unsupervised quantitative method, in order to understand what terms are most frequently employed by each group and what subject categories the topics fall into. Further, statistical prediction methods are used to predict the position of each post based on the terms used in them.

The dependent variable used in this study is support for either the separatists or the Ukrainian government. The source of comments, either the separatist group or the pro-Ukraine group, is used to construct the response variable. In that, the posts collected from the pro-Ukrainian group are taken as expressions of support for Ukraine and given the score of 0 while the posts from the pro-separatist group are taken as indicating support for the rebels and given the score of 1. While it is possible that certain posts may contradict this classification, as people may write comments in disagreement to the topic of the posts, the results are manually validated for accuracy. Furthermore, the large size of the dataset helps to ensure that such errors are minimised. The explanatory variables will be posts and comments extracted from the two groups.

The scope of the data collection involves two types of data from the two Facebook group pages: posts (i.e. media articles, status updates) by the groups' administrators and comments made on the posts by individual users who belong to these groups. By collecting the two datasets, it is envisioned that a comparison is possible as to the language used and topics discussed by the administrators, who are a very narrow group of users, and ordinary users, who are likely to be broader and perhaps more representative of the general sentiment in the population. Clearly, this sample of users is likely to be somewhat biased towards the younger demographic and most likely to wealthier individuals who possess a stable internet connection. Further, there is no indication of location of the users, since Facebook does not release this information. Hence, it is difficult to establish whether location is an influential factor in support or opposition to the rebels.

Data Generation and Data Quality

Unlike the Facebook newsfeed algorithm, which directs users' attention to content based on their online behaviour (i.e. it is manipulated), in a group all posts are displayed and hence there is a lower chance of technology interfering with what is displayed and shared by users. This in turn helps to improve data generation. The posts are generated by the groups' respective administrators and the comments are posted by individuals who belong to the two groups. This however does not preclude the comments from being generated by paid operatives or automated bots and hence may not reflect the true sentiments of ordinary users. I manually verified 10 commenter profiles for each group. It does not appear that these users are non-genuine, based on an assessment of their profiles for the number of friends they have, their stated location and other posts of personal nature. Hence, it is possible to argue that many of the comments are from true and genuine users.

Data quality is certainly an issue when human input is involved. In this case, there is an added element of language which may impact the quality of the data. Each group's posts are in English. However, the comments could be in Ukrainian or Russian. In the data processing phase of this project any non-English language comments are deleted. This does not influence the quality of the data since non-English comments are in the minority. However, language is certainly a source of bias since posts in English, as opposed to Russian or Ukrainian, may indicate a certain type of user. Another common issue is misspelling which is a difficult issue to solve and may well bias the results if a sizeable number of terms are misspelled. This does not appear to be the case.

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Stability and Time Series Change

Facebook has continually updated the formatting of pages and hence there may be stability issues, in regard to data collection over time. However, 1,215 administrators' posts and shared media are collected between January 2, 2015 to April 11, 2017, thus minimising the number of potential stability and time series changes. Further, since no personal information or other variables are possible to extract and the posting and commenting functionality has existed since the time of Facebook's creation, the changes to the social media platform will not bias the data collection. The use of groups for data collection ensures that Facebook's personalisation algorithm does not selectively filter out comments.

Data Access Location and Format

The data is accessed via Facebook's Graph API.[101] The posts and comments are collected in text format. While there are also hyperlinks that will be collected (since some of the posts by the groups' administrators are either videos or links to other media) these will not be analysed in this research.

Ethics and Privacy

The comments made by all users are personal. However, the groups are public and the comments are visible to all Facebook members. The users are anonymised in any public reporting.

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[101] An API stands for Application Program Interface. it is a set of clearly defined methods of communication between various software components and allows for crawlers as one I use to extract data from a software application such as Facebook. For more see: http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/A/API.html

5.3 Data Collection

Using Facebook's API, two datasets were extracted for each opposing group. While I attempted to collect 3,000 posts from each group, the API only allowed to collect 298 for the pro-separatist group and 917 for the pro-Ukraine group due to restrictions Facebook imposes on scraping data from the network. From these posts, 1,577 comments were extracted for the pro-separatists and 7,656 comments for the pro-Ukrainians. The mismatch in the number of comments to posts is explained by the fact that each post attracted a large number of comments which increased the sample. While the datasets of 9,233 comments may be considered small for a big data project, the number of terms which can be extracted from these comments ensures that the sample is large enough for the purposes of this analysis.

It is important to analyse whether there is a bias towards a few dominant users who comment on many posts and comment most frequently. From the collected data, it is clear that 1,083 different pro-Ukraine group users have commented on the 917 different posts by the administrators. The pro-separatist group's posts attracted posts from 167 different individuals. Hence, a wide range of unique individuals' comments are analysed. The posts and comments collected spanned the period of January 2, 2015 to April 11, 2017. However, for the pro-separatist group the data collected accounted for the period of March 19 to April 27, 2017 while for the pro-Ukraine group represented the much longer period of January 2, 2015 to April 11, 2017. Thus, there may well be a timing effect when the two results are compared, since a longer time period may be subject to a greater influence of different events on what is discussed and shared and the language of such discussions may reflect this.

5.4 Analysis and Results

5.4.1. Text Processing

The text processing stage of data preparation involves eliminating unnecessary and stop words such as 'or' or 'by', punctuation and transforming the remaining terms to lowercase. The collected data was processed into a corpus for each group's administrator's posts and users' comments. In addition to stop words being deleted from the corpus the Table A in Appendix B displays other words which are likely to not be useful in uncovering insights. These words are also removed. In order to create a corpus with the most frequently occurring words, very rare terms are removed. After removing such rarely occurring words (setting the sparsity parameter to 0.996), the dataset is left with 573 terms to analyse for the pro-Ukraine group (see the Document Term Matrix tables in Appendix B).[102] The sparsity parameter refers to the threshold of relative document frequency for a term which helps to tune the corpus to most frequently used and hence useful words. When the pro-separatist group's comments are processed at 0.99 sparsity, 538 terms remain for analysis. I also process the administrators' posts for each group, 550 terms remain for analysis of pro-Ukraine group's posts (at 0.993 sparsity) while the processing of the pro-separatist group's posts leaves 536 terms (at 0.985 sparsity). The high levels of sparsity here indicate that the comments corpora for both groups (both at least at 0.99 sparsity) contain many rare or non-repeating words.

5.4.2 Topic Modelling

Topic models help to automatically discover hidden themes behind text documents by using probabilistic models. David M. Blei explains that topic models "can be thought of as "reversing" the generative process—what is the hidden structure that likely generated the

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[102] Sparsity refers to the rarity level of words to be retained. I.e. sparsity level of 0.996 indicates that only words occurring in 0.4% of the posts are retained. Thus, there is a lot of rare words in these the posts. For more see: https://stackoverflow.com/questions/28763389/how-does-the-removesparseterms-in-r-work.

observed collection?"[103] A topic is defined as "a distribution over a fixed vocabulary".[104] As such, topic modelling allocates similar terms to particular themes and attaches a beta value to each word based on the frequency of its occurrence in a topic. The method is particularly useful for unstructured big data since the themes of such data are significantly less obvious and its volume and unstructured nature make it much more difficult to analyse. The challenge with topic modelling is tweaking the results to produce the most worthwhile insights. The topic models produced in this chapter consist of two topics since this formulation constructs the most coherent insights.

The topic models are produced for each group's comments and administrator's posts and compared. Figures 1 and 2 present the top 20 most frequently used terms for each group for two topics. The insight that are drawn from the models is that each group indeed discusses similar subjects. Topic 2 for the pro-Ukraine administrator posts relates to conversations about the military and action on the battlefield due to the prevalence of such terms as 'soldier', 'military' and 'attack'. For the pro-separatist group, it is Topic 1 which relates to military matters using terms such as 'shell', 'force' and 'source'. While discussion of military topics is sensible during war time, the online rhetoric helps to support the information spread by each group's authorities on the ground. Further, the discourse assists in justifying the importance of military strength which can be used to justify the poor economic conditions of the rebel held territories. Topic 1 for the administrator's posts of the pro-Ukraine group can be grouped as reflections of the Ukrainian government's rhetoric. The use of the term 'terrorist' in particular indicates support for the Ukrainian government's actions in the Donbas. The term 'savchenko'

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[103] David M. Blei, "Introduction to Probabilistic Topic Models," *Communications of the ACM* 55, no. 4 (April, 2012): 80.
[104] Ibid., 79.

or 'freesavchenko' is associated with both the politics and military topics.. Savchenko was a Ukrainian pilot who crashed in the separatist region and was then taken to Russia to stand trial for her supposed incursion into Russian territory.[105] The pro-separatist Topic 2 terms most clear point to politics with such emotive and inflammatory words used as 'junta' and 'fascist'. Further, state-building goals are also promoted via social media. The term 'novorossiya', an invention by Russia's various nationalist groups, is frequently used in the pro-separatist posts.[106] The topic models for the users' comments produces mostly similar results (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 1: Topic model – administrators' posts: Pro-Ukraine group

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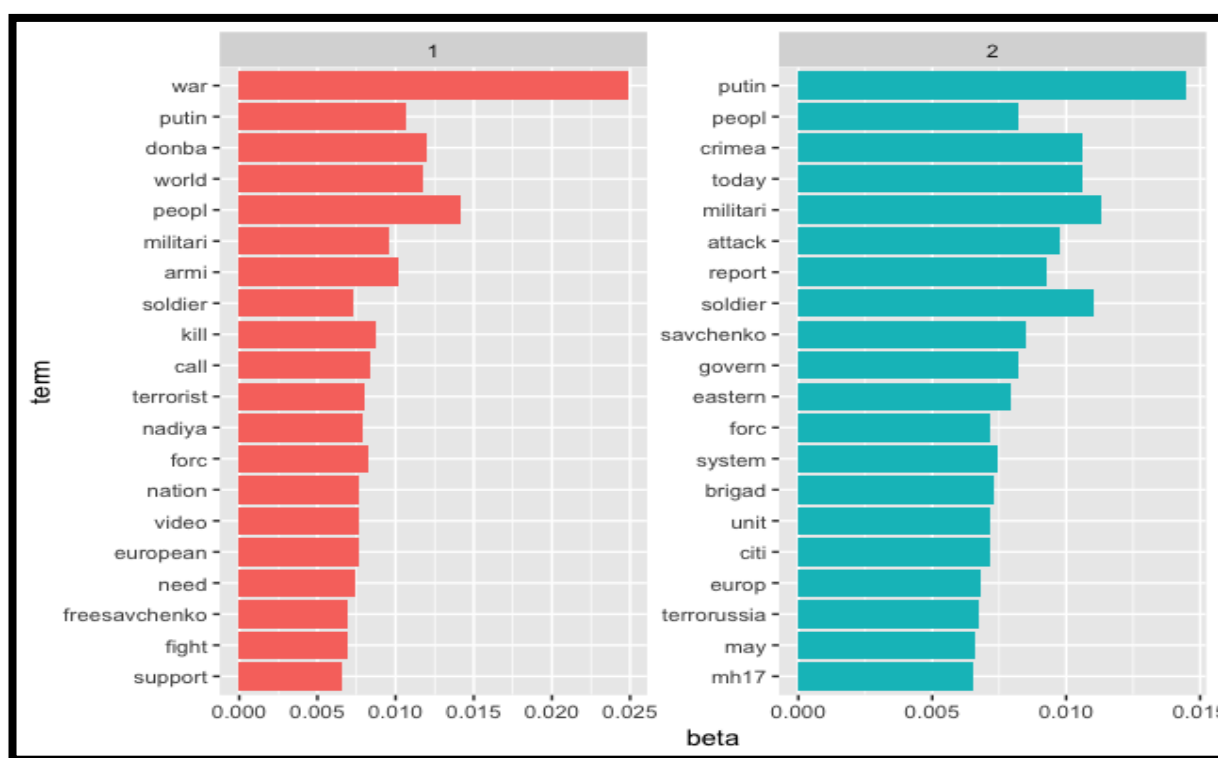
[105] "Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko released by Russia in prisoner swap," *Guardian.* June 1, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/25/ukrainian-pilot-nadiya-savchenko-released-by-russia-in-prisoner-swap-deal

[106] Marlene Laruelle, "The three colors of Novorossiya, or the Russian nationalist mythmaking of the Ukrainian crisis," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 1 (2016): 55-74.

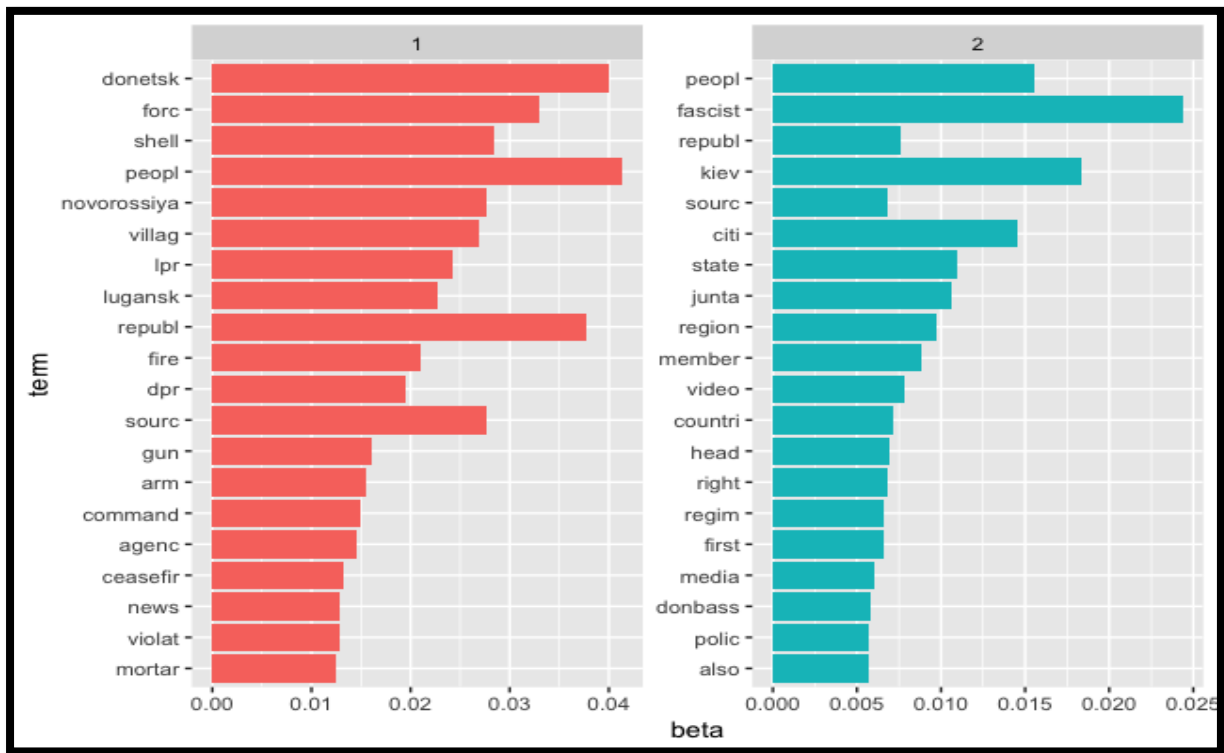**Figure 2: Topic model – administrators' posts: Pro-separatist group**

Figure 3: Topic model – users' comments: Pro-Ukraine group
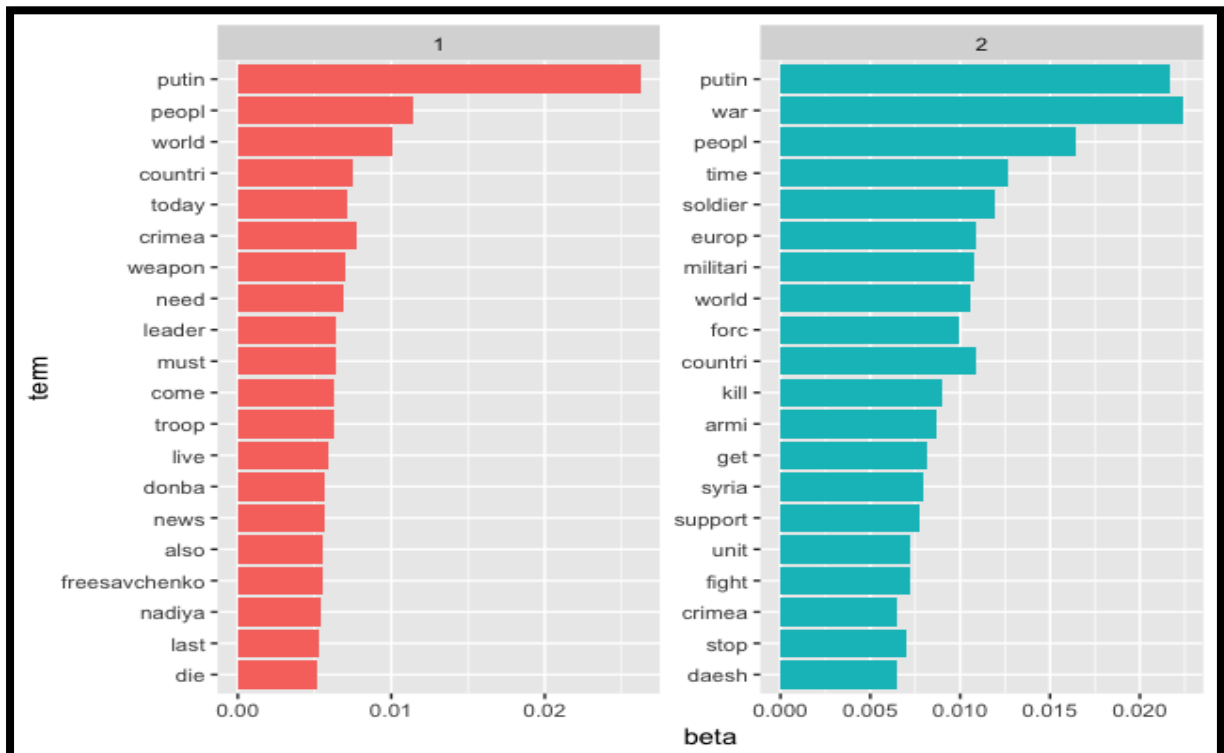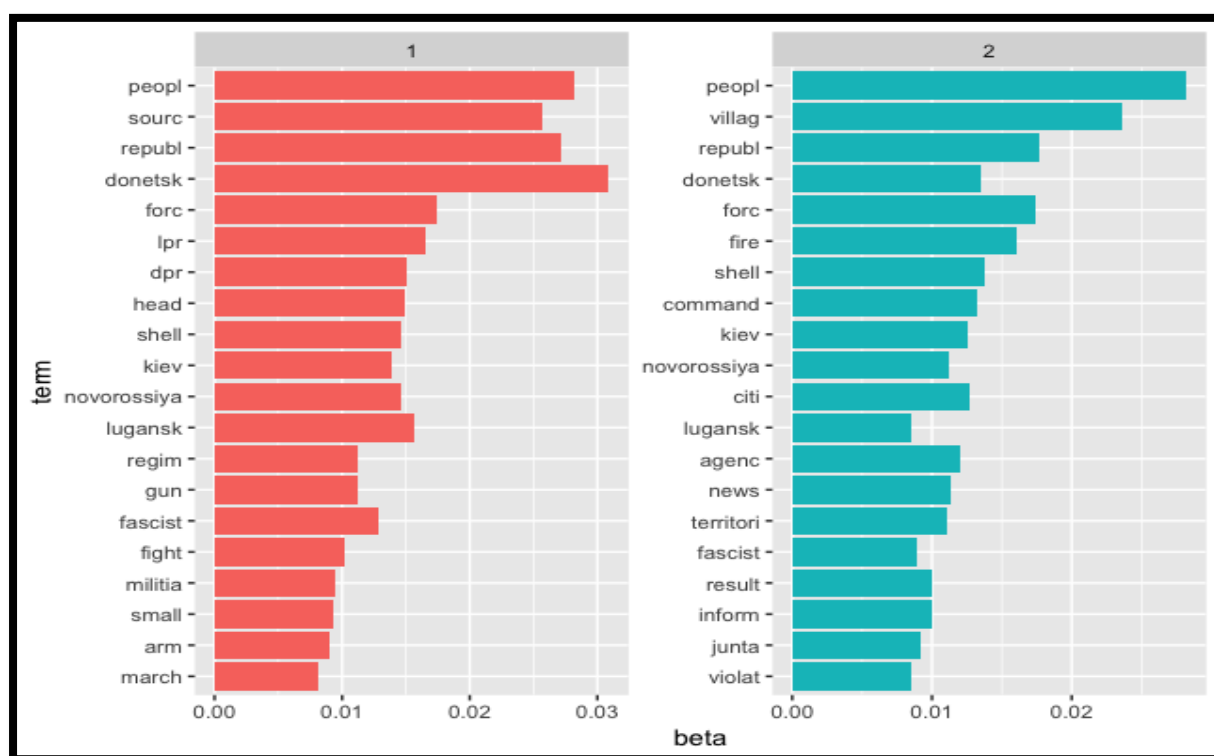
Figure 4: Topic model – users' comments: Pro-separatist group

Figures 5 and 6 below present the most distinct terms used by each group between the two constructed topics. The results confirm the nature of the topics, clearly Topic 1 concerns the military while Topic 2 is associated with more political factors. The distinction is particularly evident for the pro-separatist group which discusses military equipment in some depth, with terms such as '122mm' and 'serviceman'. The pro-Ukrainian administrators' posts are particularly distinctive and easily fall into the categories of politics and military matters. However, the users' comments are far more wide-ranging and the topics are closer together. Interestingly, among the users the term 'daesh' is particularly distinctive which signifies a more internationally focused condemnation of Russia's actions. It can be argued that Collier's pragmatism-related arguments are relevant here since rebel propaganda in particular aims to create an enemy who can be blamed for the destruction of livelihoods and hence justify the reasons why promises of economic gains were never realised.

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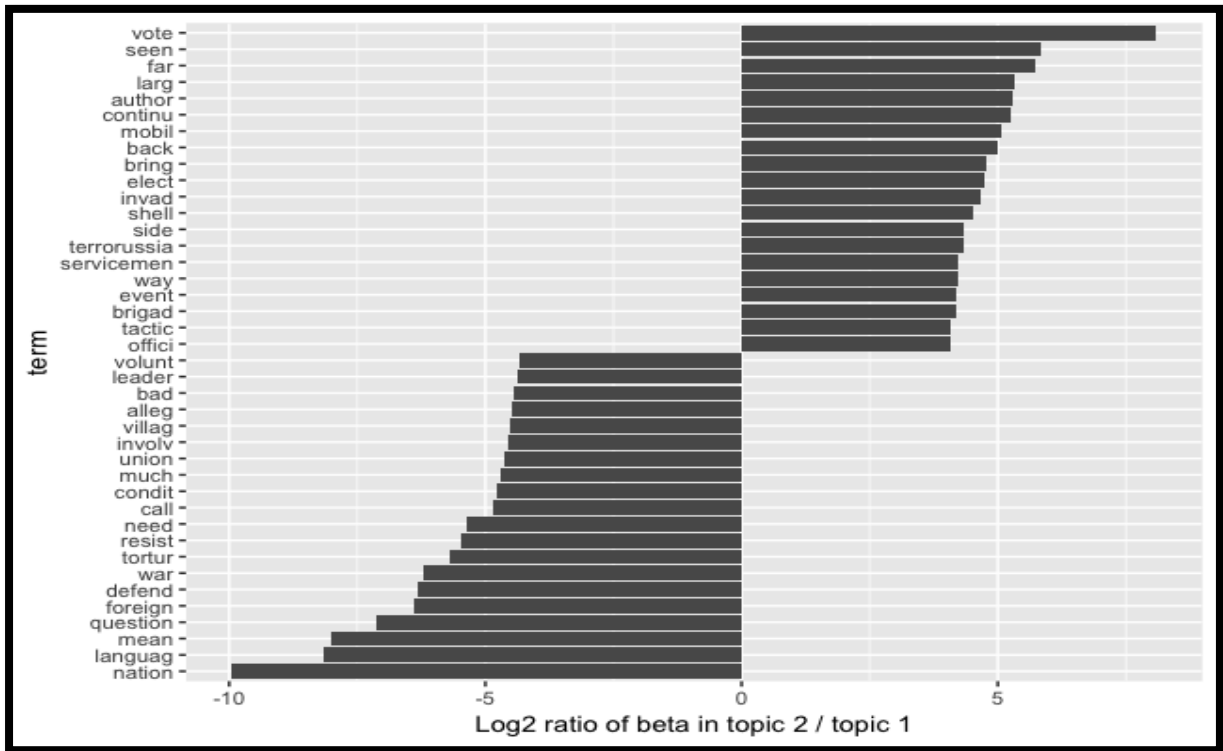**Figure 5: Distinct terms – administrators' posts: Pro-Ukraine group**

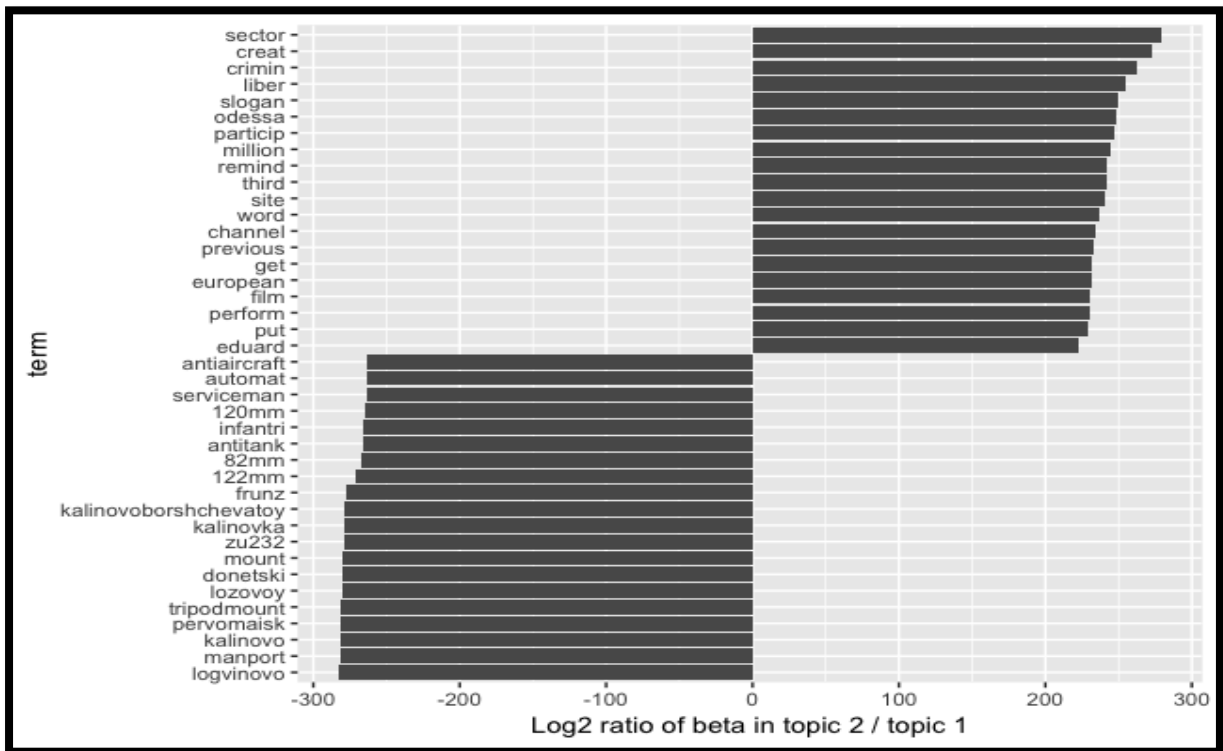**Figure 6: Distinct terms – administrators' posts: Pro-separatist group**

Figure 7: Distinct terms – users' posts: Pro-Ukraine group
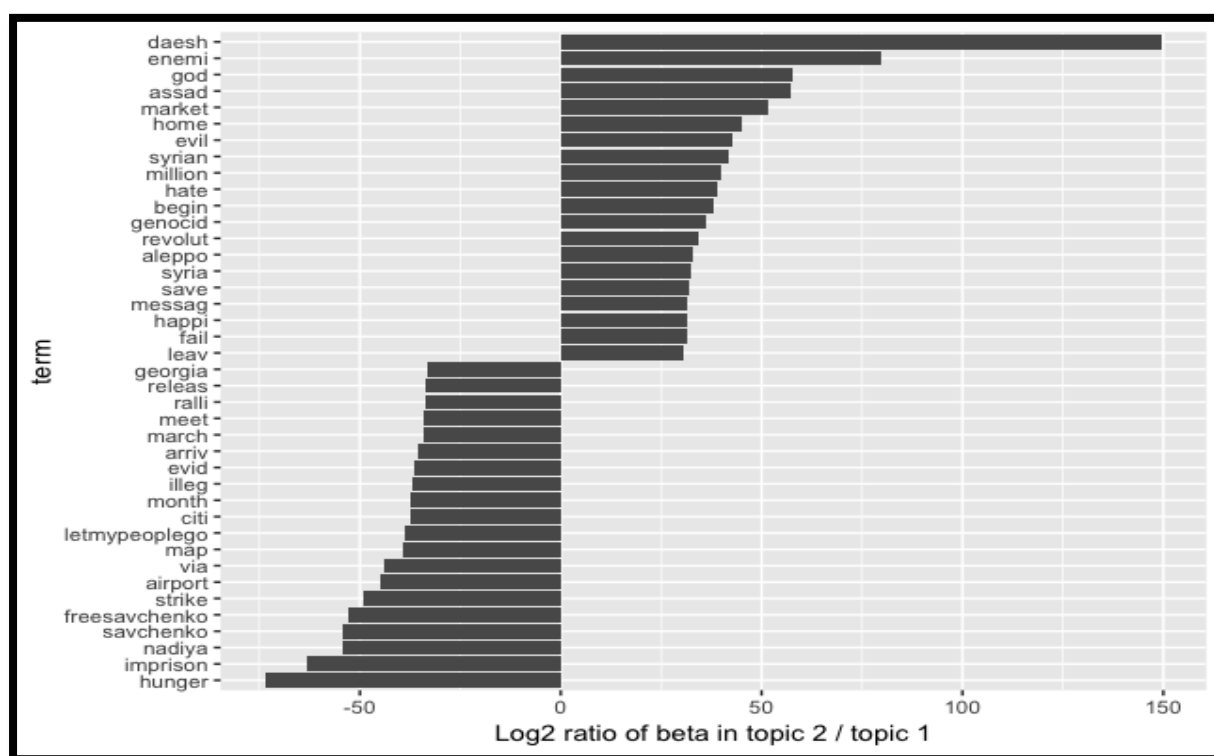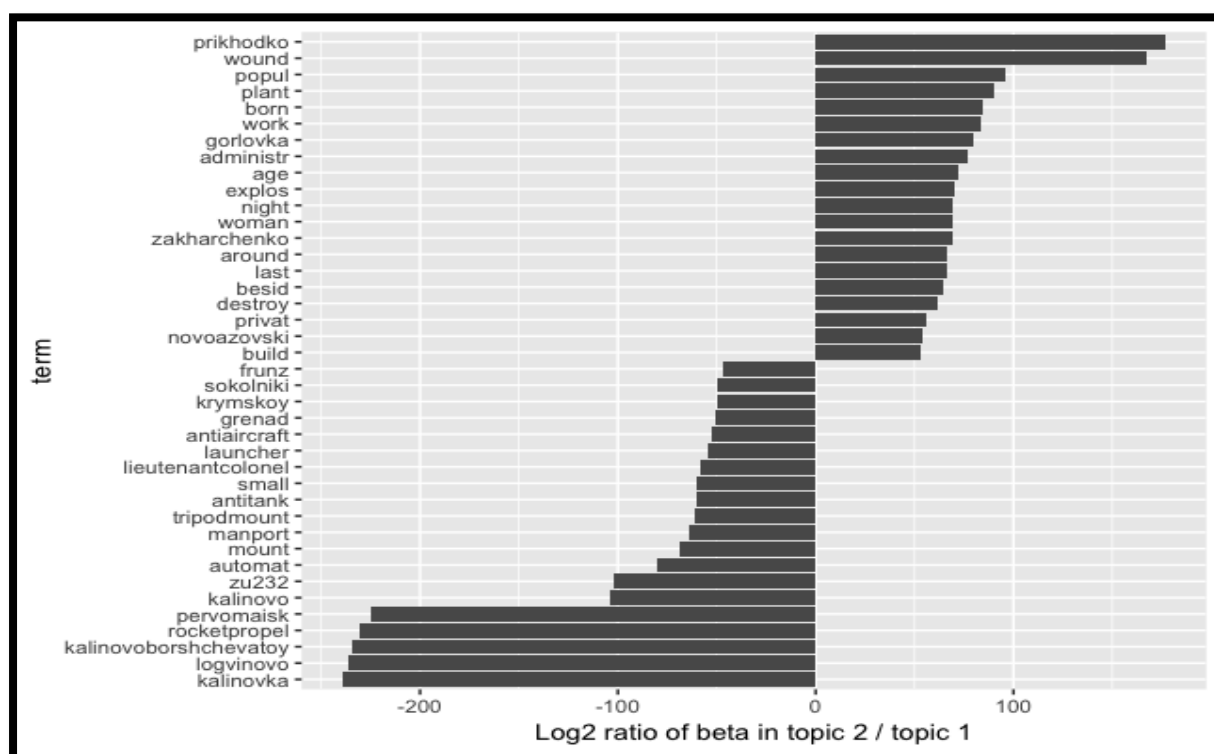

Figure 8: Distinct terms – users' posts: Pro-separatist group

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5.4.3. Prediction

This part of the chapter employs the classification and regression decision tree (CART) and random forest algorithms to devise a model for classifying each comment. This method provides another way to identify important terms relevant to each group's rhetoric. A decision tree allows for the classification of an observation, into pro-separatist or pro-Ukraine in this case. The tree describes a sequence of decisions that results in an outcome.[107] Random forests are an extension of decision trees and help to improve prediction accuracy by building many trees and taking an average of their prediction errors. A random forest of 100 trees is built for this research. Only the comments from users are used for prediction. The datasets for the two groups are combined and a response variable is added to each comment based on its origin, the comments extracted from the pro-separatist group are given a score of 1 while the pro-Ukrainian comments are marked as 0. After removing rare terms (at 0.996 sparsity), the resulting corpus contains 726 terms.[108]

In order to fit a CART decision tree, the dataset is split into training (70%) and test sets (30%). This allows for prediction testing as a way of increasing predictive accuracy on unseen data. By splitting the dataset, it is possible to treat the training set as the sample and the test set as the unseen data. The decision tree produced using the training dataset is presented in Figure 9. The tree displays a meaningful classifying model with the lower branches, 'fascist', 'nazi' and 'junta', particularly insightful. It is clear that posts that use these terms are most likely to be supportive of the separatists. The result is verified with manual checks of posts on each page, with many of the pro-separatist comments using these terms while no pro-Ukraine comments employ such language. The top branch term 'source' is used in a wide range of posts such as

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[107] Hal R. Varian, "Big Data: New Tricks for Econometrics," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28, no. 2 (Spring, 2014): 3-28.

[108] See Appendix Figure B for Document Sparsity Matrices.

"This report summarizes the open source investigations into the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH17)." Hence, on its own the term is not particularly meaningful since it mostly identifies a source of information or attributes blame, such as in the following post: "because the source of threats for France and Ukraine is the same." The decision tree model, when fitted to the test set, achieves an accuracy rate of 90%. This compares favourably to the baseline accuracy of 83%, based on random guessing that a comment is pro-Ukrainian each time.[109]

Figure 9: CART decision tree classifier model

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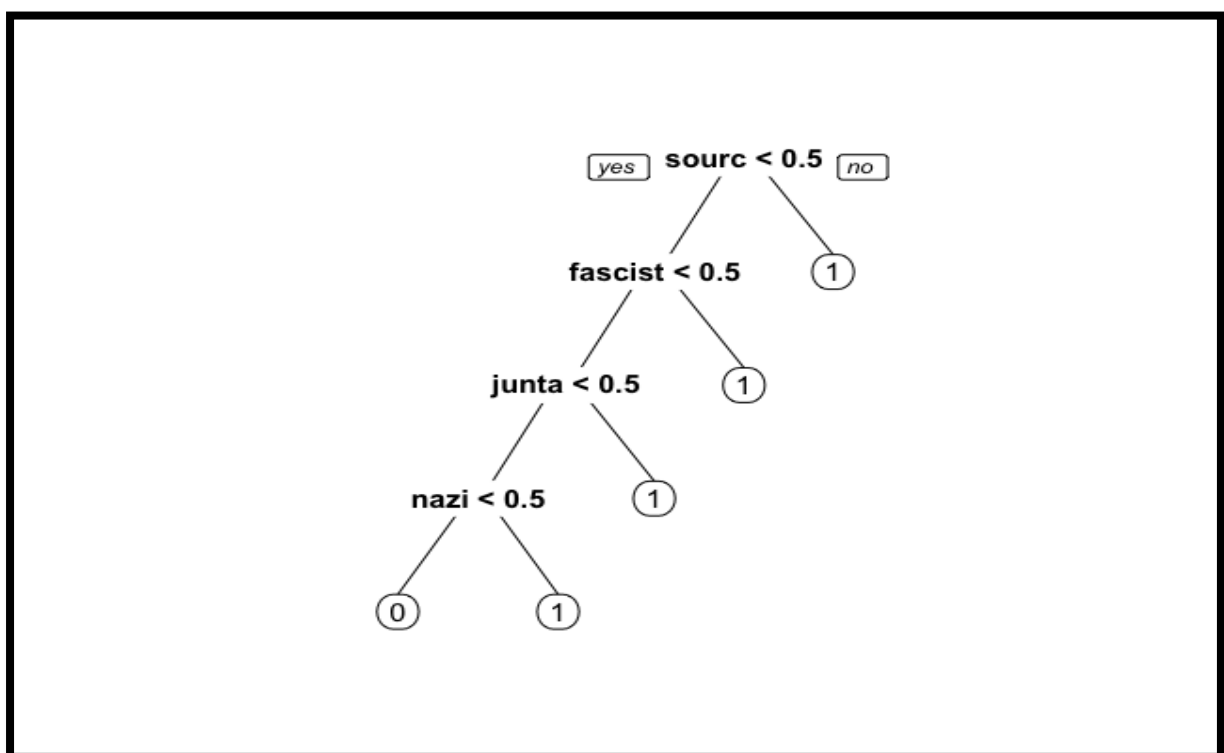
[109] In order to further measure classifier performance a receiver operating characteristic plot is produced (Appendix Figure 13). The area under the curve is the best measure of classifier performance. This value is calculated as 0.73 for this decision tree, higher than random guessing which would produce an AUC of 0.5. It is often possible to improve classifier performance by using random forests which build many trees and reduce mean squared error. After building a random forest of 100 trees, a performance improvement is obtained. The prediction accuracy rises to 92%, an improvement from 90% and the AUC score to 0.79 from 0.73. Figure 14 in the Appendix displays this improvement in AUC graphically.

Table 2 presents the top 10 most important terms used in predicting either support or opposition to the rebels sorted in order of importance. Unsurprisingly, the terms identified by the CART decision tree feature highly in this table.

Table 2: Variable importance

Term	Importance Coefficient
nazi	24.84
fascist	16.17
putin	14.20
kiev	10.44
famili	9.56
crimea	9.48
democraci	9.34
soon	8.04
poroshenko	7.17
war	6.90

6. Conclusion

This thesis has found tentative support for Collier's rational choice argument for the outbreak of conflict. Pragmatism has contributed to separatism in Eastern Ukraine. The interview analysis chapter has offered qualitative data as evidence in support of hypothesis 1 which posited that population support for rebellion increases with opportunity for greater material gains from it by the actors with lower opportunity cost of participation and lower resource endowments prior to its outbreak. The conducted interviews suggest that pensioners and those endowed with less resources displayed a lower opportunity cost of participation in conflict while those with greater monetary reserves were able depart the separatist zones.

While there was no mass mobilisation of the populace in the Donbas conflict, selective incentives were clearly important. Indeed, as the interview data indicates, pensioners in particular were promised higher standards of living. Participation in the Eastern Ukrainian rebellion is manifested in the provision of verbal or material backing, voting in local elections and attending demonstrations in support of the rebels. The selective incentives explanation as proposed by Olson and elaborated by Wood are conceived as mostly voluntary. However, the Donbas case shines a light on mobilisation strategies that involve economic coercion. As an interviewee articulated "the monopoly on the source of employment" in Donetsk and Luhansk, where large industrial complexes predominated, elicited population support for the rebels through threats to livelihoods. Such evidence tentatively validates Collier's 'weakest-link problem' in conflict, whereby to those most at risk of poverty through unemployment and to those who rely on government transfers the costs of non-participation are unacceptably high.

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While hypothesis 1 is substantiated somewhat, the pragmatism of the working classes is historically conditioned. In this sense, Cramer's assertion that individuals "are influenced and operate within specific conditions and social and historical features of change" is borne out in this analysis.[110] The historical instability of Ukraine since the Orange Revolution of 2004 likely promoted the use of short-term opportunistic strategies within the Donbas population. As is evident from the interviews, few people anticipated the conflict to become entrenched, an attitude based on previous experience and the need for immediate material returns. A further argument in favour of the Donbas population's pragmatism is its apolitical nature and ambivalence to being defined by a particular ethnic group, either Russian or Ukrainian.

The chapter shows that the initial period of conflict outbreak is associated with entrenchment, where the lack of opposition allowed nefarious actors and eventually Russia to exploit the circumstances in the Donbas. The interview evidence allows for a conclusion to be drawn that the apolitical nature of the population of Eastern Ukraine represents a form of freeriding. Thus, as a result of Ukraine's historical instability starting during the Orange Revolution or perhaps even earlier, there is cautious proof that the majority of the population failed to recognise the serious nature of the conflict and therefore failed to oppose the separatists.

Pragmatism however fails to fully account for the existence of Soviet nostalgia among the population of the region. It is unclear whether such a phenomenon precedes the outbreak of conflict or is a consequence of the living standards declining during the entrenchment phase. Further research should seek an answer to this question, as a way of offering further insights

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[110] Christopher Cramer, "Homo Economicus Goes to War: Methodological Individualism, Rational Choice and the Political Economy of War," 1857.

to Collier's economic argument. Moreover, entrenchment has brought with it a concern that status quo allows certain groups to profit from it. In addition to the rebels, actors in Ukraine may also benefit. The current Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is one of the owners of a factory producing military equipment which the Ukrainian Army is mandated to purchase.[111] While this research analysed the separatists primarily, future research should devote attention to the profiteers on the Ukrainian side.

This thesis also finds tentative support for hypothesis 2 which states that the creation of political institutions capable of providing public goods increases population support for separatism. The establishment of the Ministry of Social Policy as one of the early steps in separatist state-building speaks to two insights. The first is that state building was clearly under way and the second suggests that the self-proclaimed republics sought population support by initiating the provision of public goods. The creation of passports and the widespread use of the term Novorossiya further indicate entrenchment. The rational factors associated with the conflict's endurance phase are supported by propaganda as a means to reconciling the reality of dwindling livelihoods with the necessity to maintain population support.

Chapter 5 offered an analysis of propaganda employed by the separatists and the Ukrainian supporters. This chapter produced a way to classify Facebook comments based on their language and terms used. While the decision tree method produced the most sensible visual representation of the most important terms, the random forest algorithm produced the most accurate prediction. Thus, random forest should be the method employed for future

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[111] See: http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/01/22/the-oligarch-president-of-ukraine/#arvlbdata

classification tasks of a dataset such as this. In turn, topic modelling is useful in understanding the terms that distinguish separatist supporters from those of the Ukrainian government. Terms such as 'junta', 'fascist' and 'nazi' are clearly verifiable representations of this support. The models presented in this chapter demonstrate the level of inflammatory rhetoric required in order to overcome people's rational objections and gain their backing. This suggests that Collier's economic argument is overly simplistic and people's rationality can be overcome with persistent misinformation.

There are limitations to the findings in this thesis. It does not assess whether Russia's actions were deliberate or it was emboldened by the power vacuum in Ukraine. Instead, it argues that the initial stages of the outbreak of conflict had internal origins and should be analysed as such. It is however a firm belief of the author that the entrenchment phase was clearly influenced by Russia's presence and support. Further, while the interviews were conducted with those who departed the separatist region, their views, as former residents, have been extrapolated to others in the area. This may be a source of error. However, since the interviewees came from a range of backgrounds, both cities and displayed different levels of education, the bias is unlikely to be of significant concern.

In addition, the population of the region has shrunk considerably as is evident by the 2 million refugees the conflict has created.[112] Hence, a part of the argument is perhaps that population support is important at the initiation of conflict, while the later stages may well be substantially influenced by population outflows which makes support less vital. Future research should shed

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[112] "Ukraine," *UNHCR*. June 1, 2017. http://www.unrefugees.org/where-we-work/ukraine/

some light on this question. Further avenues for research should also engage in comparative studies of the post-Soviet separatist states as a way of generalising wider than the current case study.

The unique contribution of this research is in its micro-level test of aggregate-level theory using multiple research methods. The analysis of Collier's theories using micro-level interview and social media data produces a measure of robustness to the scholar's work. However, only at this level it is possible to understand the causal processes responsible for making the conflict in the Donbas feasible while discovering the importance of historical conditions and the significance of misinformation in overcoming individuals' rationality. In order to take this methodology forward, other conflict theories should be tested at both meso and macro levels should tested using multi-method approaches such as the one utilised in this thesis. The analysis of micro-level phenomena has policy implications since it is at this level that greatest impact on human lives can be made and hence go some way towards solving conflict impasses.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A: Interview participant consent form and questionnaire.

PROJECT: Friend of foe? The Micro Perspectives on Support for Violent Separatist Rebellion in Ukraine.

Consent Form

I confirm that I understand the information in this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions from the organizer. YES NO

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any explanation. YES NO

I understand that I have the right to decline to answer particular question(s). YES NO

I consent to being audio-taped or for detailed notes to be taken during the interview. My participation should not lead to any potential harm or discomfort or any benefit. YES NO

Participation will not affect my assessments. YES NO

The results of the project may be published but my anonymity will be preserved. YES NO

I agree to take part in the above study. YES NO

Name of participant _____

Name of Researcher: Oliver Vovchenko

Date_____

1 copy for participant; 1 for the local research organizer.

Objectives of the study

● To understand what choices people have in regard to ensuring their survival in separatist regions

● To determine what makes people either support the rebels or leave their homes

● To gather information about how people provide for their livelihoods in the separatist regions

Introduction

Consent ☐

Purpose of the Study ☐

Confidentiality ☐

Duration ☐

How the interview will be conducted ☐

Warm-up ☐

IDP Interview: Discussion Guide

"Good morning. I am Oliver Vovchenko, MA student from the Political Science Department at CEU in Budapest.

Thank you for the time that you are dedicating to me and to the project. You have been asked because your point of view is important and extremely relevant for the purpose of my study. I am aware you must be busy and I appreciate your time. This interview should take approximately 1 hour.

Before we begin, I would like to explain the project, what I will be doing with the information you provide to me and how the data from this interview will be processed. This interview is being conducted for the purpose of my Master thesis. What I am interested in is your experience and how you came to the decision to leave your home, what your life was like before the conflict and what options you had before arriving at your decision. The purpose of this discussion is to understand how civilians make a living in war zones and what factors make them either support or oppose rebels in conflicts such as the one in Eastern Ukraine.

For the purpose of the project, I will record this discussion. The recording will be confidential. The tapes will be kept safely in accordance with research governance policies of my home university, CEU. Moreover, collected data will be anonymized, therefore it will not be possible to trace any of your comments during the discussion.

Do you have any questions for me at this point?

(ACTIVATION OF RECORD)

WARM – UP

Demographic Details Questions

1. City   of   Origin
   _____
2. Education _____
3. Age
   _____
4. Gender: F   M
5. Household,   kids,   wife   etc -
   _____

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KEY QUESTIONS

Pre-Conflict Period

Focus: economics, jobs, government support, attitudes towards central govt (grievances?), attitude towards Russia.

Goal: to establish the opportunity cost of participation/rebel support.

1) What was your life like before the war? What was your main occupation? Was it a stable job? Did your family live in the area also?
2) Was the living you made enough to lead a decent life? What would you say your economic position like? What is a decent life to you?
   (**Probes**: savings, owned a flat, studying)

3) In general, were salaries and pensions paid and on time? Were there job opportunities?
4) What was your attitude like towards the central government?
   a. In general, how did you view the central government?
   b. What was your feeling about the region's contribution in terms of its economy to the overall Ukrainian economy?
      (**Probes**: coal and industry)
   c. How did the people you knew (i.e. your neighbours, co-workers) view the central government? In terms of provision of public services or treatment of the Donbas region and its people.
      (**Probes**: contribution of the region to the overall Ukrainian economy and what the region got in return)

5) What was the attitude towards the central government after the revolution? Were there fears that Russian ethnicity was under attack? Do you identify with Russian or Ukrainian ethnicity or is this not an important identifier for you? Did this identification change during the war?
6) In general, what were people's attitudes towards Russia before the war? What was important about the region's relationship with its neighbour, Russia?
   (Expected time: 30 mins)

War Period

Focus: how rebels operate and what incentives there may have been for people to support them. Were the rebels attempting to gain support from the local people?

The initial period just before the separatists took over

1) How did the initial stages of the war affect your life? Job, education, services usually provided by the government?
2) When did you leave the conflict zone?
3) What changed after the rebels came?
4) In genereal, what were the initial most visible changes that affected you that occurred when the separatists took over?
5) Was there exclusion of certain people from work or services based on their support or opposition to separatists?
6) Was there a way that separatists attempted to force people into supporting them? Either with economic tools or violence?
7) Was there any discrimination based on some characteristics? Like if people spoke a different langauge or were a different ethnicity?
8) Did you see violence against civilians? If so, what was the reason for this in your view/experience?
   (expected time: about 20 minutes)

Separatist rule

1) How difficult was it to ensure that your basic needs were satisfied during the conflict? What were your options to ensure this satisfaction? Did you lose your job?
2) How did people in your neighbourhood deal with attempting to cope with living in a conflict zone? How did they make a living? Was there support for the separatists?
3) Did the separatists provide any services or public goods? Schooling, or health services etc. Was schooling affected by the war?
4) Were there people who openly welcomed the separatists and supported them?
5) Do you think the war would have been possible without Russia's help?
6) What is the general feeling among the population about where the funds for rebellion come from? If Russia is the answer, what is the attitude of the people about this source of finance?
   (expected time: about 20 minutes)

CLOSING QUESTION

After leaving the war zone, has there been a change in attitude towards what is happening in the Donbas? With the influence of Ukrainian media and being in Ukraine.

THANK YOU

Your story has been very insightful and interesting. I would like to thank you for your participation. If you need any other information, please feel free to write to me. I will leave you my contact details. (expected time: about 2 minutes)

Total = 50- 55 minutes

Appendix B: Facebook Analysis Supplementary Figures and Graphs.

Figure A: Facebook users' age demographics

Facebook - 1.2 Billion Users

Facebook Age Demographic	Number of Users	Percentage of User Base
13-17	9.8 Million	5.4%
18-24	42 Million	23.3%
25-34	44 Million	24.4%
35-54	56 Million	31.1%
55+	28 Million	15.6%

Figure B: Typical post by the pro-separatist Facebook group 'Truth about situation in Ukraine'

Truth about situation in Ukraine
11 hrs ·

http://www.stalkerzone.org/resident-odessa-region-faces-10.../

Resident of the Odessa Region Faces up to 10 Years in Jail for Selling Soviet Flags

Translated by Ollie Richardson 16:20:49 29/04/2017 timer-odessa.net Employees of the SBU, police, and one of the "patriotic" organizations in the...

STALKERZONE.ORG

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➤ Share

😠👍 24   Chronological ▾

4 shares

View 2 more comments

Zeki Sönmez Down with fascism
Like · Reply · 10 hrs

Erik Buff Crazy nazis
Like · Reply · 3 hrs

Figure C: Typical post by the pro-Ukraine Facebook group 'Russia, hands off Ukraine'

Russia, hands off Ukraine shared Edmond Huet's post.
2 February · ✳

Edmond Huet
1 February · 🌐

"If Russia stops fighting, there will be no more war. If Ukraine stops fighting, there will be no more Ukraine and then no more Europe".

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➤ Share

👍😢❤ 106   Top comments ▾

Write a comment...   ☺

Iza Đæ Totally agree that if Ukraine stops fight, there will no more Ukraine .   ✕
But a arrogance to say if Ukraine stop fighting there will be no more europe.
Arrogance, feeling of superiority was what made Ukraine scream last 50 years
that Ukraine was better a... See more
Like · Reply · 👍1 · 3 February at 11:03

Ken Pillay Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed for espionage and
treason but Russia kept the bomb plans ??
Like · Reply · 2 February at 20:43

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Table A: Common words removed from corpus

for	ukrain
next	ukrainian
while	will
russia	one
russian	day
ukraine	two
good	say
now	past
just	time
use	said
year	told
hour	april
2017	make
don't	2015
like	know
new	see
want	can

Table B: Pro-Ukraine group comments

Document Term Matrix (documents: 7656, terms: 573)
Non-/sparse entries: 41302/4345586
Sparsity   : 99%
Maximal term length: 37
Weighting   : term frequency (tf)

Table C: Pro-separatist group comments

Document Term Matrix (documents: 1577, terms: 538)
Non-/sparse entries: 28365/820061
Sparsity   : 97%
Maximal term length: 21
Weighting   : term frequency (tf)

Table D: Pro-Ukraine group posts

Document Term Matrix (documents: 836, terms: 550)
Non-/sparse entries: 7721/452079
Sparsity   : 98%
Maximal term length: 13
Weighting   : term frequency (tf)

Table E: Pro-Ukraine group posts

Document Term Matrix (documents: 297, terms: 536)
Non-/sparse entries: 8811/150381
Sparsity   : 94%
Maximal term length: 21
Weighting   : term frequency (tf)

Table F: Combined groups comments corpus

Document Term Matrix (documents: 9233, terms: 726)
Non-/sparse entries: 75011/6628147
Sparsity   : 99%
Maximal term length: 37
Weighting   : term frequency (tf)

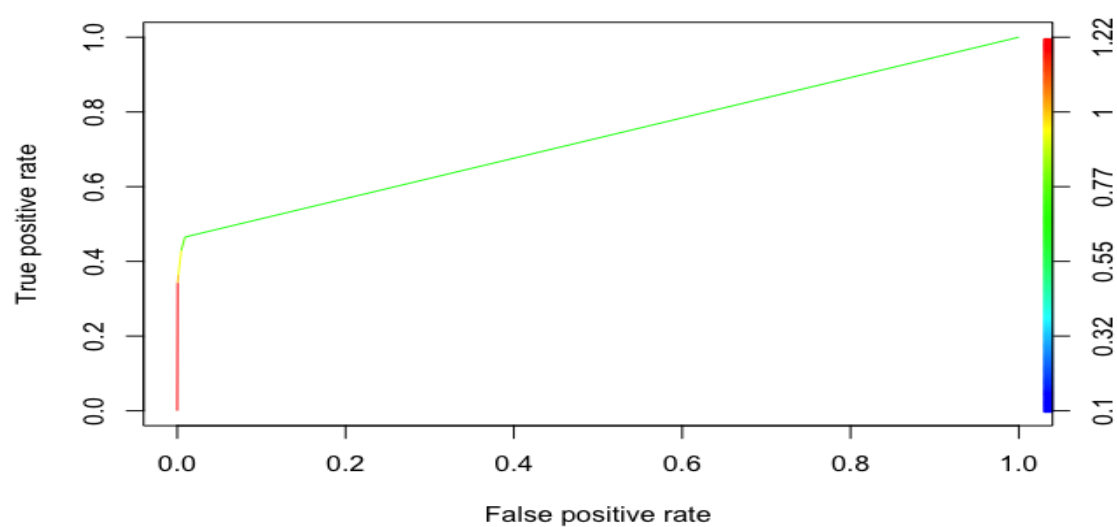**Figure D: ROC curve to assess classifier performance**

Figure E: ROC curve to assess random forest classifier performance

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