

Ukraine Between Civilizations

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Abstract: This article evaluates Ukraine's changing relations among agricultural settlement, nomadic exchange, imperial government, state formation and contemporary conflict. Its five chronologically ordered sections integrate the illustrated narrative of the Kapranov brothers with the historical synthesis of Kubicek, Sakwa's critical account of the 2013–2014 crisis, and Miller's on-the-ground reporting from 2014 and the full-scale war that began in February 2022. The comparative method distinguishes documented events from the competing explanations assigned to those events. It specifically examines the political organization of Kyivan Rus; the Polish–Lithuanian, Ottoman, Crimean, Habsburg and Russian imperial systems; the Soviet transformation of agriculture and historical memory; the construction of a sovereign state after 1991; and the consequences of armed conflict for civilians, language politics, external military assistance and neighboring borderlands. Rather than assuming either that the invasion had a single external cause or that wartime economic interests prove a staged conflict, the analysis tests propositions against separately identifiable evidence. The result is a historically layered interpretation in which borders, economic interdependence, institutions, language and physical coercion have divergent causal roles. The paper concludes by identifying material gaps in the supplied sources for a full assessment of Moldova, Türkiye, defense procurement and developments in 2025–2026.

Keywords: Ukraine; Kyivan Rus; Crimean Khanate; Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth; Russian Empire; Holodomor; Crimea; Donbas; Russian invasion; geopolitical narratives.

I. Introduction

Ukraine's history cannot be adequately represented as a succession of state borders. Settlement, grain production and livestock economies existed before the emergence of medieval political units, while rivers, coastal commerce and routes across the steppe connected populations whose linguistic, religious and dynastic affiliations were not equivalent to present-day national identities (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023). The first task is therefore chronological discrimination: archaeological cultures are not nations, Ottoman suzerainty is not identical to Russian annexation, and nineteenth-century imperial administration does not automatically predict twenty-first-century military policy.

A second analytical difficulty is the disagreement between historical interpretation and conflict reporting. Sakwa (2015) presents the post-Cold War European security order and incompatible integration projects as central conditions behind the 2014 rupture. Miller (2024) places the conflict in the experiences of journalists, civilians, soldiers, local officials and displaced households across Crimea, Donbas, Kyiv and Mariupol. These sources differ substantially in genre, evidence and scale. Reading one as a replacement for the other produces an incomplete explanation. The same distinction applies to the brief illustrated historical account and Kubicek's much longer political history (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

II. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative, document-based comparative historical design. Four user-provided works constitute the core corpus. Their chapters are compared across five chronological periods and coded analytically for (a) agricultural and trading systems; (b) institutions and changing sovereignty; (c) language and collective identity; (d) forms of coercion and organized violence; and (e) interpretations of external intervention. A statement supported by a monograph is attributed to its author; an eyewitness account is not generalized into a population estimate; and an inference about the motives of governments is identified as an interpretation rather than an observed fact. Selected scholarly publications and primary-source collections provide targeted checks, not a claim to exhaustive systematic review. No original interviews, archival fieldwork, battlefield-data analysis or econometric estimates were undertaken.

The illustrated volume contains compressed maps and narrative captions and is cited without inventing precise bibliographic page references where the digital pagination is unclear. The EPUBs contain chapters, but their reflowable pagination varies by device: author–date citations are therefore used without page numbers except where a stable printed page is independently available. The critical contrasts between Sakwa and Miller are not framed as symmetrical evidentiary accounts: one is a political explanation of the crisis, the other includes

primary reportage of military and civilian experience. The article deliberately treats the existence of the war separately from claims concerning who benefits economically from its continuation.

III. AGRARIAN FOUNDATIONS, STEPPE NETWORKS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF KYIVAN RUS

Section abstract. This section examines early agrarian settlement, pastoral mobility, Black Sea commerce and the emergence of Kyivan Rus while rejecting anachronistic claims about modern national identities.

The illustrated history opens with the Trypillian cultural complex, located across territories now in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania. Its settled communities practised cultivation, animal husbandry and ceramic production; these practices testify to organized material life, not automatically to modern doctrines of equality or collective political sovereignty. The Catacomb horizon belonged to the Bronze Age, with distinctive burials and a substantial pastoral component. The distinction matters because an account that places the Catacomb people in an Iron Age political sequence distorts the chronology of technologies and populations. Kubicek (2023) begins from geography and settlement conditions, emphasizing that the fertile plains made the region valuable to agricultural populations and armies alike. The illustrated synthesis is most useful when its drawings are treated as a narrative aid and its archaeological claims are separated from retrospective ethnic labels (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

The Cimmerians, Scythians and Sarmatians are frequently represented through mounted warfare. Yet pastoral mobility also sustained the transport of goods, circulation of animals and interaction with Black Sea trading towns. Horse-based military advantage and economic interdependence could be mutually reinforcing, rather than alternative modes of life. Scythian groups interacted with Greek settlements through commerce involving grain and other products, while shifting power over transit routes could expose cultivators to violence. The Iazyges, associated with the Sarmatian sphere, later moved towards the Middle Danube and the Roman frontier. Neither a modern border nor a continuous ethnic lineage can be projected upon these migrations. The Kapranov brothers' account of steppe culture is therefore best combined with Kubicek's treatment of geography, trade and the instability of political control (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

Greek trading colonies on the northern Black Sea represented commercial interfaces between maritime and interior economies. Their existence complicates any sharp opposition between settled agriculture and mobile military power. Agricultural surplus could enter wider exchange circuits, and powerful steppe groups could tax, threaten or protect transactions. Roman and later Byzantine interests similarly relied on corridors of movement rather than on a complete or lasting territorial occupation of the interior. The landscape was not culturally empty before medieval East Slavic expansion: local and incoming groups shaped an evolving network of settlement and trade. Historical explanation requires attention to chronology, because accounts of Khazars, early Jewish communities and the later Crimean Karaite population often overlap in simplified popular narratives. Claims of direct, exclusive ancestry remain debated and should not be presented as uncontested genealogical conclusions (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

The Cherniakhiv archaeological horizon is associated with agriculture, pottery, iron use and trading relationships across heterogeneous communities. Archaeological evidence does not establish one single modern ethnicity or state. The upheavals accompanying Hunnic expansion altered political relations and settlement structures but did not literally erase all earlier inhabitants or institutions. Migration, intermarriage and assimilation are more adequate historical categories than wholesale disappearance. The regional history therefore requires differentiated units of analysis: archaeological horizon, population, ruling elite and formal polity. Kubicek's long narrative contextualizes the multiple processes that preceded the emergence of Kyivan Rus; the illustrated source provides a compressed visual trajectory but cannot by itself resolve scholarly arguments about the precise composition of late-antique cultures (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

The Dnipro river system helped connect northern forests, southern steppe and Black Sea exchange, contributing to the importance of Kyiv. The development of Kyivan Rus was neither a simple transplant of an already modern Russia nor an exclusively homogeneous Ukrainian state. Its dynastic relationships, tribute practices, ecclesiastical institutions and commercial routes connected diverse communities and neighboring rulers. The Polans were one important East Slavic component of this political formation, while Rurikid rulers became an enduring dynastic framework. Kubicek (2023) treats Rus as a foundation for subsequent Ukrainian cultural and historical narratives, while also registering the complexity of its formation. A careful analysis resists retroactive ownership claims by modern states: a medieval common inheritance can be interpreted differently without supporting present territorial conquest (Kubicek, 2023; Kapranov brothers, n.d.).

The adoption of Christianity under Volodymyr in 988 and the growth of ecclesiastical institutions expanded links with the Byzantine world. Church organization, writing and legal traditions contributed to durable structures of authority, but their transmission varied across principalities and social groups. The Christianization of Rus was not an instantaneous replacement of earlier beliefs and customs. It also cannot be interpreted as evidence of uninterrupted jurisdiction by any later state. The development of political centers and

systems of tribute brought institutional benefits for some groups while imposing obligations on others. These differences matter for a study centered on autonomy: formal princely rule coexisted with local and communal capacities that cannot be summarized as modern democracy. A historically defensible conceptual vocabulary must describe observable institutions before proposing comparisons with present governance (Kubicek, 2023). Kyivan Rus was bound to Hungary, Bohemia, Scandinavian networks and neighboring principalities through dynastic marriages and commerce. Its fragmentation was not reducible to an abrupt moral failure or foreign conspiracy. Competition among princes, regional economic change and the military influence of peoples on the steppe all affected political relations. The Polovtsians or Cumans, for example, were more than a permanently hostile outside force: their relationships with Rus rulers combined conflict and alliance. The later Codex Cumanicus provides linguistic evidence of a broader Black Sea world, although it postdates important periods of the Rus principalities. Such distinctions caution against teleological accounts that read the medieval period merely as a prelude to modern Russian-Ukrainian confrontation (Kubicek, 2023; Kapranov brothers, n.d.).

Mongol military campaigns of the thirteenth century dramatically changed the balance among Rus territories. Their effects were not uniform: cities, principalities and border zones encountered different forms of destruction, fiscal dependence and political adjustment. Some routes and authorities recovered, while new power configurations emerged in western and northeastern lands. Kubicek (2023) traces the resulting reorganization of territories that later entered Lithuanian, Polish and Muscovite spheres. The relevant comparison is institutional, not moral: where did tribute flow, who could choose rulers, and what autonomy remained under changing systems of overlordship? A geographic map can illustrate succession of control, but it cannot substitute for historical explanation of the institutions represented by its colors.

Names such as Rus, Russia, Ukraine and Novorossiia belong to distinct historical contexts; their apparent resemblance should not obscure legal differences. The central methodological hazard is anachronism: treating ancient settlements, trading networks and medieval dynastic structures as if they recognized contemporary sovereign boundaries. The argument for Ukrainian political independence rests on modern historical and legal developments rather than on proof of a culturally uniform population since prehistory. The argument for recognizing shared histories does not, conversely, give a modern state unrestricted authority over its neighbors. Distinguishing cultural inheritance from territorial title makes the long chronology relevant without converting archaeology into propaganda (Kubicek, 2023; Sakwa, 2015).

The first historical period establishes three findings. Agriculture and herding repeatedly coexisted with military and trading mobility; the Dnipro and Black Sea created points of contact across several distinct political worlds; and the emergence of Kyivan Rus involved multilateral processes that resist presentist national simplification. Kubicek (2023) provides the extended history supporting this framing, while the Kapranov brothers (n.d.) contribute an accessible but necessarily selective visualization. Claims about ancient social ethics or the direct modern inheritance of early cultures remain beyond what these sources demonstrate. The transition to later imperial systems must therefore track the mechanisms by which land, revenue, language and allegiance were reorganized, not merely the succession of external rulers.

A historical image compresses diverse evidence into a small spatial arrangement. This is useful for orientation but hazardous for causal explanation. Where the illustrated volume depicts a cultural area or sequence, the surrounding written analysis must ask whether an archaeological distribution is being presented, whether a source establishes a political boundary, and whether the dates reflect scholarly consensus or only the author's chosen periodization. Kubicek (2023) usually provides more extended narrative framing, but his account, too, constitutes a synthesis rather than an archaeological dataset. A careful final publication would make a table distinguishing dates directly stated in the illustrated volume from independently verified archaeological dates. It would also verify the printed edition of the book before claiming exact page-by-page quotations. Such source transparency allows the reader to distinguish a visual interpretive claim from a historically documented change in government. The absence of a secure map legend is sufficient reason to omit a decorative image rather than preserve an attractive but misleading diagram.

It may be tempting to infer that long-distance trade generated stable coexistence. Yet the same route could facilitate tribute extraction, raiding, and organized coercion. Material exchange and political conflict were not mutually exclusive institutional systems. The steppe and littoral were settings of repeated bargaining among mobile military groups, coastal settlements, agricultural producers and successive political authorities. The implication is methodological: explanatory variables must include the security of transport, access to land, the reach of military rulers and the ability of communities to negotiate taxation or protection. Assigning a modern program of peace or collective governance to ancient groups would require different source evidence than the supplied books provide. Modern comparisons can be framed as hypotheses about bargaining and institutional trust, but they should not be treated as results of archaeology. These constraints emerge from a comparative reading of the visually oriented narrative and the larger political history (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

IV. IMPERIAL COMPETITION, COSSACK AUTONOMY AND THE BLACK SEA

Section abstract. This section compares institutions under Lithuania, Poland, Ottoman suzerainty, Muscovy and Russia, emphasizing the changing constraints on Cossack political autonomy.

The incorporation of Ukrainian territories into Lithuanian and Polish political structures occurred across several centuries. The Union of Lublin in 1569 created the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, whose joint institutions were not the equivalent of the present Commonwealth of Nations. The Commonwealth's elective monarchy and parliamentary institutions created participation for privileged estates while excluding much of the peasantry and intensifying conflicts around land tenure and religion. Kubicek (2023) places the rise of the Cossacks amid these social and territorial arrangements. The result was not a binary story of national freedom versus one outside state, but a stratified society in which obligations and opportunities differed sharply by class, region and confession.

Cossack communities emerged within frontier environments shaped by warfare, fishing, trade, seasonal labor and the movement of populations away from established landholding systems. Military organization made them valuable partners and dangerous opponents for neighboring states. Their governance traditions offered forms of participation among recognized members, while excluding other groups and at times reproducing serious social inequalities. The Zaporizhian Sich is thus historically important without becoming a timeless template for democratic inclusion. Kubicek (2023) connects Cossack autonomy with the Commonwealth's tensions; the illustrated history underscores changing alliances and military campaigns. Neither source warrants interpreting every Cossack coalition as the expression of a single continuous national will (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

The Crimean Khanate was an independent dynastic polity that entered Ottoman suzerainty in the late fifteenth century. Ottoman forts and maritime capacities affected Black Sea commerce; Crimean Tatar military structures influenced the politics of the steppe. The Khanate was not merely a passive administrative district of Istanbul, and its relations with Cossack groups included raids, diplomacy and alliances. These shifting relations demonstrate that military opposition did not exclude negotiation between communities. Modern Türkiye, a republic established in 1923, must not be named interchangeably with the Ottoman Empire. Kubicek (2023) gives political context, while the illustrated narrative makes especially clear the multiplicity of powers operating on the northern littoral (Kapranov brothers, n.d.).

Moldavia was important to Ottoman strategic thinking because of access routes, tribute, regional buffers and competition with neighboring powers. Such arrangements were not identical to a unified program of occupation jointly conducted by Russia and Türkiye. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russian–Ottoman wars often placed the two empires in direct military competition. A later discussion of present Moldova needs to separate Bessarabia, the Transnistrian dispute and the distinct autonomy of Gagauzia. The historically established relationship between Ottoman power and Moldavian governance does not itself demonstrate the causes of Moldova's contemporary diplomatic policy (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

Bohdan Khmelnytsky's uprising in 1648 reordered the relationship between Cossack military power and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Social, confessional, elite and military grievances interacted, while violence affected multiple communities. Moscow, Crimea, the Ottomans and other outside actors entered successive calculations of opportunity and security. The resulting Hetmanate expanded some forms of local political initiative while creating new forms of military and social hierarchy. Kubicek (2023) documents the significance of the uprising; treating it only as either a Russian reunion or a fully formed modern independence revolution compresses the varied objectives of its participants.

The agreement associated with Pereiaslav in 1654 remains politically sensitive because later imperial and nationalist histories assigned it sharply different meanings. Its institutional setting involved Cossack elites and the tsarist government, not plebiscitary consent by a modern nation. The subsequent trajectories of autonomy and dependency are therefore necessary to interpret its consequences. Whatever the rhetoric of protection, the key empirical question is how command, taxation, diplomacy and territorial authority changed over time. Kubicek (2023) describes the interaction of Cossack political aspirations and expanding Muscovite power. A serious comparison must identify the agreement's contested terms rather than read the outcome backward as predestined.

The Truce of Andrusovo (1667) and the Eternal Peace (1686) entrenched divisions among Ukrainian territories. Competing hetmans looked to Moscow, Poland–Lithuania, Crimea, Sweden and the Ottomans at different moments. Petro Doroshenko pursued Ottoman support, whereas Ivan Vyhovsky advanced the proposed Union of Hadiach in 1658. These experiments show the limits of sovereignty exercised amid stronger surrounding powers. Foreign guarantees sometimes offered survival chances while increasing long-term dependence. The historical record supports this as an institutional risk, but not as evidence that every alliance was fraudulent or that Ukrainian political actors lacked agency (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

The Great Northern War further transformed the region's balance of power. Ivan Mazepa's alliance with Sweden failed with the defeat at Poltava in 1709, a decisive event in the consolidation of Russian imperial

authority. The episode is often mobilized to assign timeless loyalties or betrayals, but its immediate causes lay in changing military resources, elite interests and strategic constraints. The correct unit of historical explanation is a contingent wartime coalition rather than the permanent character of whole populations. As illustrated narratives often condense the sequence, Kubicek (2023) offers useful additional context for the growth of the Russian state and the shrinking autonomy of Cossack political structures.

The sequence of Russian advances in Crimea must be specified: occupation in 1771, the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774 and annexation by Russia in 1783. It would be misleading to combine them as one uninterrupted legal event. The Treaty of Jassy in 1792 extended Russian gains to Yedisán, between the Dniester and Southern Bug. Bulgarians, Germans, Greeks and other settlers later entered southern territories governed within changing frameworks sometimes called Novorossiia. These movements were influenced by warfare, state incentives and the search for security. Some Bulgarians who moved out of Ottoman territories entered a different imperial order rather than simply achieving unconstrained freedom (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

This section identifies competitive imperial governance as a system of fluctuating protections, tribute arrangements, military alliances and territorial acquisitions. Cossack autonomy was genuine but conditional and uneven; Ottoman Crimea and Russia were frequently rivals; and the political forms of the Commonwealth, Hetmanate, Khanate and empire cannot be compressed into a uniform category of foreign rule. The precise chronology of the annexations is necessary for examining modern narratives about Crimea and the Black Sea. The sources support critical comparison of historical institutions, not a causal claim that present Russia and Türkiye follow one secret program originating in the seventeenth century (Kubicek, 2023; Sakwa, 2015).

Treaties made in unequal security environments create evidence of political decisions under constraint, not necessarily unqualified consent by entire populations. The record of shifting Cossack alliances poses a challenge to interpretations that find an eternal natural ally in either Moscow, Warsaw or Istanbul. A political leader's appeal for military support can coexist with an effort to preserve internal administrative power. Evaluation therefore requires the terms of obligation, the duration of troop deployment, the right to appoint officials, fiscal revenue and the conditions under which protection changed to absorption. This is also why historical terminology should avoid the indiscriminate word colonization when the underlying arrangements differed in structure and duration. The most useful comparative historical question is how far an institution could govern its own resources while external armies shaped its choices (Kubicek, 2023).

The late eighteenth-century transformation of the northern Black Sea was not simply a military annexation followed by demographic continuity. Imperial administrations promoted resettlement and established new administrative divisions, while Crimean Tatars and other earlier inhabitants confronted altered political circumstances. Bulgarian migration from Ottoman-governed territories must be interpreted amid the Russian-Ottoman wars and incentives offered by a different empire. Such processes shaped trade, agriculture, language and religious composition, meaning that a later census cannot be used as transparent evidence of a timeless national boundary. This pattern also warns against treating the name Novorossiia as an unchanged jurisdiction from its imperial uses to present political rhetoric. Historical comparison rests on the differentiation of changing administrative territories, voluntary and coerced migrations, and subsequent reclassification of populations (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Kubicek, 2023).

A treaty chronology must distinguish military entry, declared legal status and administrative incorporation. The Crimean Khanate did not acquire the same political status immediately after the Russian occupation of 1771, the 1774 treaty or the annexation of 1783. Each event altered the range of autonomous decisions available to local rulers and communities. Similarly, the acquisition of Yedisán and Bessarabia in different agreements affected different places and populations. The analytic value of those distinctions appears when nineteenth-century or present-day political writers seek to justify territorial claims by invoking an uninterrupted sovereign title. The treaty record instead shows discontinuity, contestation and changing authority. For an academically defensible account, maps should carry a clearly specified date and legal category rather than assign an undifferentiated color to all territories associated with a particular empire. Kubicek's historical account and the supplied illustrated sequence provide a foundation, but any detailed legal claim should also consult treaty texts (Kubicek, 2023; Kapranov brothers, n.d.).

A society may possess a parliament, an elective monarchy or a military assembly while still granting privileges to only part of its population. This is evident in the Commonwealth, which combined sophisticated political institutions with hierarchies of estate and confessional access. Cossack institutions likewise cannot be evaluated solely through their procedures for selecting recognized leaders, because membership and social authority were uneven. The standard of comparison is not whether a past institution resembled an ideal modern democracy, but who could exercise which rights and on what material terms. Restrictions on peasant mobility, competition among armed elites and dependence on protection from outside monarchs all conditioned autonomy. Such analysis gives concrete institutional content to terms like participation, sovereignty and foreign protection, avoiding abstract claims of either historical liberty or continuous oppression (Kubicek, 2023).

V. EMPIRE, LANGUAGE, AGRARIAN COERCION AND SOVIET MODERNITY

Section abstract. This section follows imperial economic and language policies, revolutionary state formation, collectivization and Soviet transformations of public life.

Ukrainian-speaking populations entered markedly different political settings under the Habsburg and Romanov empires. Galicia and Bukovina were incorporated into the Habsburg sphere in the late eighteenth century, while central and eastern territories remained within the changing Russian imperial apparatus. The Austrian Empire dates from 1804 and the Austro-Hungarian settlement from 1867; these institutions should not be projected onto earlier Habsburg dynastic rule. Cultural organizations, confessional networks and schooling developed differently on either side of an imperial border. Kubicek (2023) uses these contrasts to explain why later nationalism did not emerge as one geographically uniform political movement.

The abolition of serfdom in the Russian Empire in 1861 altered legal status but did not resolve unequal ownership and the burden of payments and rural poverty. Land was central to both imperial revenue and political authority. Agriculture remained a material basis of life while changing legal conditions redistributed opportunities among landlords, peasants and state institutions. The historical importance of these differences extends beyond the countryside: demographic growth, migration to cities and expanding literate publics altered the social base of political movements. A purely ideological account would miss these economic constraints. Kubicek (2023) provides the political and social history needed to frame later transformations in the Soviet countryside.

Nineteenth-century Ukrainian intellectual activity linked historical research, folklore, literature and educational activism. Mykhailo Maksymovych, Mykola Kostomarov, Volodymyr Antonovych and Mykhailo Hrushevsky had different disciplinary approaches; they were not all archaeologists. Kostomarov's involvement with the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood connected historical writing to programs concerned with emancipation and cultural development. The Brotherhood was suppressed by imperial authorities in 1847. A source-critical approach distinguishes scholarly reconstruction, contemporary political programs and later national appropriation of earlier writers. Kubicek (2023) and the illustrated volume show the rise of national movements, but the accuracy of particular manifesto claims should be checked against the primary documents before quotation (Kapranov brothers, n.d.).

The history of southern territories includes Crimean Tatar experiences and cannot be exhausted by accounts of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. Ismail Gaspirali's educational and publishing activities connected Crimea to broader Turkic and Muslim reform currents. Schooling, print culture and cultural preservation offered mechanisms of collective organization amid imperial pressure. These developments are not interchangeable with the later politics of the Republic of Türkiye or with the present autonomous status of Gagauzia. Their relevance is analytical: cultural identity and imperial jurisdiction were distinct but interactive dimensions of political life. Kubicek's broader narrative and the illustrated source are complementary, but additional specialist Crimean Tatar sources would be required for extensive treatment (Kubicek, 2023; Kapranov brothers, n.d.).

World War I undermined both Romanov and Habsburg political structures and opened a period of competing republics and military governments. The Ukrainian People's Republic emerged in 1917 and proclaimed independence in January 1918. The Crimean People's Republic was declared in December 1917 amid rapid upheaval. German and Austro-Hungarian intervention followed Brest-Litovsk, and the Skoropadskyi Hetmanate temporarily acquired German backing. Competing Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik forces as well as neighboring states constrained the viability of Ukrainian institutions. Kubicek (2023) makes clear that the outcome was not a straightforward expression of popular political choice but a complex sequence of war, state-building attempts and external interventions.

The establishment of Soviet control reorganized property, education, bureaucracy and channels of political participation. Early Soviet policy at times supported Ukrainian-language administration and cultural activity, but coercive centralization subsequently narrowed the space for autonomous politics. Political institutions formally located in a republic were not necessarily able to determine economic and security policy independently of the union center. This distinction between titular autonomy and effective decision-making becomes important again when considering the constitutional logic of 1991. Kubicek (2023) documents the ideological, economic and institutional transformations of the Soviet decades while separating them from earlier imperial rule.

Forced collectivization, grain procurement and state coercion transformed agricultural production and rural survival. The famine of 1932–1933, known as the Holodomor, caused catastrophic mortality and lasting social consequences. An Elsevier-published retrospective cohort investigation of prenatal famine exposure examined later metabolic-health outcomes; this is evidence about long-term biological associations, not a substitute for the historical research needed to attribute all dimensions of famine policy (Lumey et al., 2015). The Library of Congress catalogs regional Ukrainian archival material concerning the 1932–1933 famine (Pokydenko, 2002). These two sources are complementary: one analyzes a health outcome and the other points to archival documentation. Their claims should not be conflated, and neither warrants minimizing forced rural suffering.

Ukraine experienced multiple occupations, large-scale violence and destruction during World War II. Soviet and Nazi coercion targeted civilians in differing ways, and local political choices were conditioned by shifting military control. Histories of collaboration, nationalism, resistance and mass murder require identification of organizations and time periods rather than collective allegations against a whole population. Kubicek (2023) treats the war as a decisive twentieth-century rupture. The illustrated history covers interwar nationalist and wartime formations, but its condensed presentation requires the longer account to avoid merging diverse armed actors. The subject is especially vulnerable to political instrumentalization in contemporary debates (Kubicek, 2023).

Postwar recovery and Soviet urbanization changed industry, education and the distribution of population. Russian and Ukrainian circulated in different institutional and geographic settings, with uneven political power attached to their use. Late Soviet reforms opened opportunities for renewed public debate about history, language and political representation. The relationship between linguistic practice and allegiance remained more variable than simplified ethnic maps imply: speaking Russian did not automatically entail support for Russian territorial policy. Contemporary research on the Black Sea coast documents complex patterns of Ukrainian, Russian and mixed Surżyk usage, illustrating the limits of treating mother tongue as a single political predictor (Kubicek, 2023; Russian Linguistics, 2022).

The passage from imperial to Soviet government does not make agriculture, education and language peripheral; it makes them central instruments and sites of contested authority. The 1861 reforms, early twentieth-century state formation, collectivization, wartime violence and late Soviet national movements belong to analytically distinct contexts. The evidence supports evaluating institutions through property rights, coercive practices, schooling and effective political participation. It does not support portraying all Ukrainian populations as either perpetual victims without agency or continuous members of a single Russian political community (Kubicek, 2023; Pokydchenko, 2002).

A research article needs to distinguish estimates of excess deaths, documented cases, policy decisions and indirect long-term effects when addressing the famine. Methodological uncertainty about an exact casualty estimate does not render the large-scale catastrophe unproven. Conversely, a study of prenatal exposure and adult disease is not an estimate of all historical casualties. The Elsevier-hosted cohort study is valuable for its defined epidemiological question; the archival bibliography cataloged by the Library of Congress points towards historical documentation that can illuminate policy implementation in a specific region (Lumey et al., 2015; Pokydchenko, 2002). Before quantitative figures enter the manuscript, the final study must identify the population, period, comparison group and statistical method used in each source. This is a necessary corrective to polemics that either inflate or deny violence through unsourced numerical claims.

Institutions preserve evidence unequally. Official archives, community histories, personal letters and postwar commemorations do not always describe the same events in the same vocabulary. That fact is not a license to regard all versions as equally probable. Rather, each documentary tradition has identifiable producers, audiences, moments of compilation and restrictions on what it could record. Comparisons across nineteenth-century intellectual movements, Stalinist repression and late Soviet dissident activity should therefore disclose the types of evidence available for each period. The illustrated source offers a cultural narrative, while Kubicek (2023) provides an encompassing political history. The Library of Congress catalog is a route to collections, not by itself direct verification of every event listed by those collections. Maintaining this distinction strengthens the historical reliability of any commentary on the relationship between public knowledge and state authority.

Schooling and literacy are not intrinsically emancipatory or coercive; their institutional effects depend on who determines curricula, access, language and public employment. Late imperial cultural associations could preserve and develop a vernacular public sphere, while Soviet educational expansion occurred alongside constraints on independent political organization. This duality requires examination of legal rules, staffing, publication, regional policy and the practical ability of citizens to use education for independent participation. The historical sources do not establish a conspiracy of modern states to abolish self-education. They instead show that control over schools and publishing can become a site of conflict when political jurisdictions change. For the same reason, a claim about e-government suppressing independent knowledge cannot be inserted into a historical paper without separate legal and empirical evidence. Kubicek (2023) supplies concrete examples of education in changing state structures, whereas the illustrated narrative invites—but does not prove—broader institutional comparison.

Population totals from periods of famine, mass migration and war are not interchangeable with ordinary census counts. Many changes arise from deaths, border revisions, flight, deportation, changes in statistical categories and unequal opportunities to report identity. It would therefore be unsound to infer a single, precise number of victims or refugees from a general historical narrative alone. Any revised quantitative discussion should specify the relevant denominator, the treatment of missing populations and the distinction between direct deaths and wider demographic losses. A related challenge concerns linguistic data: a person's registered nationality, first language and everyday speech are not the same variable. Recognizing these distinctions is

indispensable when investigating how empires and the Soviet state classified populations and when evaluating modern claims about the legitimacy of territorial change (Kubicek, 2023).

VI. INDEPENDENCE, MAIDAN, CRIMEA AND THE CONFLICT OF INTERPRETATIONS

Section abstract. This section contrasts scholarship on post-Soviet reform, the 2013–2014 rupture, Crimea, Donbas and Russian-Ukrainian language relations.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union created a qualitatively new legal framework. Ukrainian independence was endorsed in a nationwide referendum in December 1991, extending beyond the western regions and involving Russian-speaking citizens. Subsequent state-building faced difficult questions of property allocation, industrial restructuring, corruption, political representation and security orientation. Kubicek (2023) explains how postcommunist reforms produced winners and losers, with outcomes that cannot be reduced to an externally orchestrated civilizational choice. The meaning of independence must therefore be grounded in institutions and voting rather than inferred from medieval language or imperial maps.

The post-Soviet collapse of planning and the emergence of new ownership structures produced substantial economic and social disruption. Large industrial assets, regional patronage and powerful private actors shaped parties, media and public administration. The concentration of wealth influenced political alliances and competing programs of integration with Russia and European markets. These processes are necessary background to the Orange Revolution and the protests of 2013–2014. Kubicek (2023) treats economic transition as a central problem of Ukrainian democracy, not merely as an epilogue to independence. A study of defense-sector profits should similarly distinguish documented financial flows from the mere fact that beneficiaries exist.

The Orange Revolution of 2004 expressed controversy over electoral integrity, political competition and the direction of reform. Its aftermath did not remove regional interests, corruption or institutional weaknesses. Electoral change and government alternation did not produce a uniform electorate, and identities remained internally heterogeneous. The contrast between demands for legal accountability and the concentration of private economic influence provides an important institutional dimension of the later Maidan crisis. Kubicek (2023) situates these events within the difficult attempt to consolidate democratic procedures after Soviet rule.

President Viktor Yanukovich's decision in November 2013 to suspend preparations for an association agreement with the European Union helped ignite the protests that became known as Euromaidan. Public anger also concerned corruption, police violence and the character of presidential government. Sakwa (2015) emphasizes the tension between Russia-centered and European integration projects and argues that international security arrangements contributed to polarization. His causal interpretation is important because it challenges accounts that treat the European orientation as geopolitically cost-free. Yet explanation of background tensions does not establish that public protesters lacked agency or that later military force was legally justified.

The violence and political breakdown of February 2014 generated competing accounts of constitutional legitimacy, the role of protest movements and international involvement. Sakwa (2015) presents the transition as deeply disputed and affected by outside power politics. Kubicek (2023) emphasizes the broader sequence of protest, government breakdown and subsequent political developments. These sources should be compared claim by claim; divergent labels such as revolution, coup and regime collapse do not each constitute an independent factual finding. Establishing legal responsibility requires primary records, judicial material and a clear description of procedures, not a selective use of politically charged nouns.

The Russian seizure and annexation of Crimea in 2014 constituted a major territorial change. Miller (2024) reports from Crimea during the voting process under armed control and describes the local conditions that challenged free political choice. Sakwa (2015) provides a different emphasis, stressing Russian strategic concerns and the politics of the change of government in Kyiv. Strategic motive, however, is a different question from the legitimacy of territorial acquisition by armed force. The validity of an argument about perceived security threats cannot be decided merely by its agreement with an account of the referendum; each proposition requires separate evidence.

The 2014 war in Donbas involved separatist organizations, Ukrainian forces, Russian involvement and severe civilian disruption. Miller (2024) offers accounts of particular battles, prisoners, towns and individuals, showing what happened on the ground rather than treating the war as an abstraction. Sakwa (2015) examines the regional political grievances and the contested structure of the Ukrainian state. The studies operate at different evidentiary levels and are strongest when read together. Recognizing political conflicts within eastern Ukraine does not make the destruction of populated areas fictitious, and documenting destruction does not eliminate legitimate investigation of political mistakes and missed negotiations.

The coexistence of Russian- and Ukrainian-language practices cannot be mapped directly onto military loyalty. Ukrainian political leaders and many civilian communities have used Russian in daily communication while supporting an independent Ukrainian state. An empirical study published in *Russian Linguistics* analyzed a survey of 1,200 residents of Ukraine's Black Sea oblasts before the full-scale invasion, finding a complex relationship among declared native language, primary code and childhood linguistic socialization (*Russian Linguistics*, 2022). Another analysis in *Language Policy* examines arguments for and against restrictions on

Russian-language sources in wartime education and research (Language Policy, 2024). These studies support scrutiny of coercive language policies without supporting the proposition that linguistic proximity makes invasion unreal or acceptable.

Diplomatic initiatives after 2014 were designed to contain violence and resolve disputes over security and political status. Disagreement concerned sequencing, ceasefire enforcement, border control, local elections and constitutional arrangements. Sakwa (2015) examines the early negotiations and the broader environment of failed mutual security assurances. Miller (2024) records conditions in communities experiencing continued conflict despite diplomatic processes. A rigorous account should avoid assuming that any one agreement, had it been signed or implemented differently, would necessarily have prevented escalation; counterfactual outcomes cannot be observed. Nevertheless, the record of negotiation remains an appropriate field for evaluating the costs of competing strategic choices.

The independence period reveals that Ukraine's internal political conflicts were genuine and that external pressure also mattered. The evidence supports three distinctions: Russian-language use versus political allegiance; perceived security grievance versus lawful military action; and disagreement over causes versus denial of material violence. Kubicek (2023) supplies institutional history, Sakwa (2015) a critical geopolitical interpretation, and Miller (2024) reporting from affected sites. For a balanced analysis, these are not votes to be counted for competing camps but sources with different methods, dates and potential blind spots.

The titles and methods of the purchased books provide a practical framework for critical comparison. Kubicek (2023) writes a national history across many centuries; Sakwa (2015) emphasizes competing European security projects around the 2014 crisis; Miller (2024) recounts what individuals experienced at specific places and times. A contradiction exists only where two sources make incompatible assertions about the same proposition, population and time. Where one source explains a perceived Russian security concern and another reports a prisoner's experience of violence, the accounts are complementary as evidence of different phenomena even if their larger political framing differs. A serious article should not manufacture a balanced debate by pairing an observed attack with a geopolitical opinion as if these were two equally direct observations. Equally, first-hand reportage cannot decide by itself whether every diplomatic proposal was genuinely viable.

Maps showing a language distribution, administrative boundary and military control answer different questions. Even accurate language maps do not establish a right to annex territory; even accurate military maps do not establish that a population willingly accepted a new political status. Political legitimacy requires rules of constitutional authority, procedural standards and the absence of coercion, among other considerations. The historical experience of shifting frontiers explains why conflicting narratives resonate, but it does not settle the legality of actions in Crimea. A revised article should distinguish contemporary legal judgments and primary institutional documentation from historical explanations of political motives. Sakwa's (2015) interpretation of Russian strategic priorities remains relevant precisely when read as an explanation rather than an evidentiary replacement for contemporary records of armed control.

Regional political variation should not be mistaken for a fixed division into two homogeneous nations. Economic structure, elite networks, historical institutions, generational experience and language all influence political attitudes, often in changing combinations. Ukrainian citizens may prefer close economic ties to Russia without accepting Russian military intervention; conversely, criticism of political leaders in Kyiv does not imply rejection of national independence. Kubicek (2023) documents changing electoral and economic conditions; Sakwa (2015) emphasizes differences in integration preferences. These explanations should be assessed with contemporaneous electoral and survey data rather than transferred without adjustment across 1991, 2004, 2014 and 2022. An article that treats Russian-language use as proof of political loyalty would confuse a social characteristic with a decision about sovereignty.

Where scholarly explanations differ, the manuscript should formulate questions narrow enough to be tested. For the 2014 events, those include the timing of institutional decisions, the presence of armed forces, the terms of negotiations and the documented actions of political organizations. A geopolitical interpretation is supported by evidence of policy priorities, negotiations and strategic planning; civilian testimony supports accounts of lived experience but does not alone determine command responsibility. External influence can be significant without eliminating domestic political agency. The result should be neither false equivalence nor a one-sided account constructed by omitting rival evidence. A transparent comparison identifies the author, date, evidence type and precise proposition at issue before drawing a conclusion (Sakwa, 2015; Miller, 2024; Kubicek, 2023).

Crimea in 2014: from fleet access to territorial control

An analytically useful starting point is to distinguish a leased naval presence from sovereign territorial control. Prior to 2014, agreements with Ukraine governed Russia's Black Sea Fleet presence at Sevastopol. Following the Ukrainian political crisis in February 2014, unmarked Russian forces and Russian military units took control of decisive Crimean facilities, including airports and transport nodes. The subsequent referendum of 16 March took place under these conditions of military intervention, and Russia formalized annexation on 18–21 March. Grant (2017) evaluates that process as annexation following armed intervention; Wilk (2014a) documents the military sequence. Legal annexation by Russian domestic acts did not make the territory internationally recognized as Russian (Grant, 2017).

The geographic stakes were naval as well as symbolic. Sevastopol is a principal Black Sea Fleet base; Russian control of the entire peninsula widened scope for fleet modernization, air defense, coastal missiles, military aviation and maritime surveillance. The Crimea–Black Sea–Turkish Straits–eastern Mediterranean chain provides the spatial logic: it enables maritime deployments and leverage, but transit through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles remains shaped by the Montreux regime and Turkish control of the straits. Thus, the 2014 action was not simply about access to the sea, which Russia already possessed elsewhere, but about basing certainty, force projection and regional balance (Wilk, 2014b; Toucas, 2017; Driedger, 2024).

An additional layer concerns the Kerch Strait, the Sea of Azov and offshore resources. Crimea's occupation and annexation changed Russia's operational position regarding the Kerch approaches and maritime claims. The economic geography of Black Sea energy and gas fields forms a complementary explanation rather than proof of a single underlying intention. Russia's stated historical arguments, its security claims and the documented territorial, naval and energy effects should be distinguished analytically (Grant, 2017; Toucas, 2017; Wilk, 2014b).

Both historical maps below require chronological discipline. The first map from the illustrated history is rich in details of Cossack territories and Muscovite political geography, but it depicts an early modern order—not the 2014 international boundary. The second, taken from the user-supplied extract of a study of Italian imperial history, more clearly conveys the spatial continuity of Europe, the Ottoman sphere, the eastern Mediterranean and northeast Africa. Its historical boundaries cannot be relabelled as a contemporary military map. It provides a geographic frame for the connectivity of the Black Sea and Mediterranean, not direct proof of Russian aims in 2014.



Figure 1. Historical Cossack–Muscovite territorial context, Painted History of Ukraine, p. 33 (historical illustration; not a 2014 political map). Source: user-supplied page 33.



Figure 2. Historical European–Ottoman–African imperial geography from the user-supplied page 42. Used for geographic context only. Exact book pagination and cartographic credit require verification against the complete Italian colonialism volume before publication.

Visual evidence and comparative interpretation. Figure 1 documents an early-modern territorial representation and must not be read as an eyewitness photograph of the 2014 occupation. Figure 2 is a transregional historical map: its wider spatial framing helps readers locate the Black Sea, Turkish Straits, Mediterranean and northeastern African connections, but does not establish modern military intentions. These two reproductions are the image assets embedded in the recovered manuscript. Additional photographs previously shared in separate conversations cannot be identified reliably from this manuscript alone and therefore are not falsely presented as verified evidence. Each historical reproduction should retain its original legend, attribution, scale and date where available (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; Ben-Ghiat & Fuller, 2005).

Comparative inference: the 2014 annexation consolidated Sevastopol and Crimea as a military platform with access toward the Turkish Straits and Mediterranean. This is an evidence-based assessment of observable strategic effects, not an assertion that a historical map itself demonstrates an undisclosed Russian plan. Driedger (2024) identifies the strategic assets in Sevastopol among Russian decision-makers' high-priority preferences, while differing scholarship highlights competing motives including identity, politics and security. These explanations can coexist and should be tested against contemporaneous decisions and deployments.

In the broader Moldovan–Georgian–Ukrainian comparison, Russia's military presence in Transnistria, military control in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and its seizure of Crimea differ substantially in legal status and chronology. Gagauzia is an autonomous territorial unit of Moldova with Turkish cultural and economic connections and variable Russian political influence; it should not be described as a Turkish military occupation.

A comparative table should therefore classify external influence separately from territorial occupation (Toucas, 2017; Grant, 2017).

Comparative spatial outcomes: Crimea—Russian military seizure and annexation in 2014; Sevastopol naval base and maritime capabilities. Transnistria—unresolved separatist territory and Russian troop presence; no 2014 annexation. Abkhazia and South Ossetia—Russian-recognized separatist entities and Russian military deployments after the 2008 war. Gagauzia—Moldovan legal autonomy; Turkish institutional connections do not constitute territorial occupation.

VII. FULL-SCALE WAR, BORDERLANDS, WAR ECONOMIES AND THE LIMITS OF EVIDENCE

Section abstract. This section assesses the evidentiary status of competing claims about war, military interests and Moldova, distinguishing documented harms from hypotheses requiring new data.

Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Miller (2024) describes the opening battle for Kyiv, attacks on urban areas, movement of civilians and the rapidly changing military situation. These observations provide direct evidence that the war is not simply a staged media performance. The wider causes and choices leading to the invasion remain subjects of political and scholarly dispute, and Sakwa's analysis of 2014 security tensions supplies background rather than a first-hand account of every event of 2022. Assertions about the reality of fighting and claims about strategic motivations must be tested separately, especially when present-day news attention shifts to other conflicts.

Miller's (2024) chapters on Mariupol, its siege and civilian filtering describe different episodes of the urban catastrophe and identify affected people rather than relying solely on official casualty claims. Testimony about a particular family or operation is primary reporting, but it is not a statistical representative sample of all casualties. The correct response is source triangulation, not dismissal of the testimony or its unsupported extrapolation. Future revisions should compare verified casualty and displacement series by defined time intervals and distinguish confirmed deaths from estimates of total deaths. That distinction is especially important for any argument about whether the war has become less visible since attention turned to crises in other regions.

The existence of defense-industry revenue, procurement contracts and political beneficiaries is compatible with the existence of a destructive war; one does not disprove the other. Testing an economic-interest hypothesis would require contract-level data, budget changes, beneficiaries, lobbying activity and documents linking commercial interests to particular decisions to continue fighting. Miller (2024) documents wartime consequences but does not supply a complete audit of the global weapons industry. Sakwa (2015) examines strategic and political determinants but was published before the 2022 invasion. Consequently, neither book alone can establish that the conflict is organized primarily to enrich arms manufacturers. That proposition should be retained as a research hypothesis with explicit evidence criteria, not an empirical conclusion.

Claims that Ukrainian operations are merely symbolic cannot be assessed from isolated footage or from the visibility of attacks in a given news cycle. Military effectiveness must be evaluated through territorial changes, attrition, logistics, infrastructure damage and documented operational objectives, with attention to uncertainties in wartime reporting. Miller's (2024) reporting on Kyiv and other locations describes meaningful Ukrainian resistance and Russian attacks during specific periods. It does not establish the entire effectiveness of operations through October 2026. An updated quantitative section would require reputable, continuously sourced datasets that were not included in the three purchased EPUBs.

The historical relationship between Ukraine and Moldova includes changing border regimes, the nineteenth-century incorporation of Bessarabia into the Russian Empire and later Soviet arrangements. Post-Soviet Moldova's dispute over Transnistria is a distinct conflict with its own legal and military history. The relative caution of Moldova's government in public positioning cannot be equated with absence of Russian influence, but the sources supplied here do not provide a comprehensive contemporary assessment of that government's motives. Ukrainian histories can locate the borderlands geographically; they cannot substitute for Moldovan official documents, foreign-policy analysis and evidence concerning local elections and security arrangements (Kubicek, 2023; Sakwa, 2015).

Gagauzia is an autonomous territorial unit within Moldova with historical and cultural ties to the Turkic world. Türkiye's diplomatic, cultural and development relationships must be examined as a separate category from Russia's military presence and support related to Transnistria. Neither relationship amounts, without further evidence, to joint Russian-Turkish sovereign control over Moldova. Ottoman influence over historical Moldavia, modern Türkiye's engagement with Gagauzia and Russian political leverage operate across different centuries and institutions. The purchased Ukraine-focused books do not constitute adequate primary evidence for a detailed claim about internal Moldovan government control. The article therefore treats the Moldova–Türkiye problem as a specific program of future research rather than an already proven explanation.

Publicly visible narratives change with electoral cycles, international crises and the news priorities of media institutions. A reduction in prominent headlines cannot establish that battlefield violence stopped, and an

increase in coverage does not by itself prove deliberate manipulation by arms producers. The evidentiary problem is measurable: compare an event chronology, independent casualty reporting and media-coverage series for the same intervals. Sakwa (2015) invites attention to framing and geopolitical argument, while Miller (2024) offers accounts useful for checking claims that violence is solely an imagined construct. Their books do not directly quantify global news framing through October 2026, so new research must avoid back-projecting their conclusions.

Displacement, destroyed housing, family separation and adaptations in education and everyday speech are measurable social effects. Miller's (2024) chapters describe how individuals reacted to bombardment, siege and flight. Contemporary studies of language policy underline that the conflict has accelerated linguistic change and sharpened disputes around the public role of Russian (Language Policy, 2024; Nedashkivska, 2026). A Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizen may oppose Russian military intervention, and support for protecting minority-language rights is compatible with a commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty. This complexity should be documented through surveys and legal analysis rather than reduced to slogans about the identities of presidents or whole regions.

Negotiated settlements require comparison of military risks, credible guarantees, sanctions, territorial issues and public consent. A history-centered article can analyze previous failed arrangements and the escalation in 2014 and 2022; it cannot predict negotiating success by repeating an ideological diagnosis. Sakwa (2015) remains relevant for examining the European security architecture, but subsequent changes require new evidence. Nate (2024) addresses the importance of security guarantees in reconstruction, while Miller (2024) shows the lived costs borne during conflict. Taken together, such materials justify serious investigation of diplomatic options, without implying that international negotiations could retroactively make observed deaths or displacements fictitious.

The final section distinguishes established findings, contested interpretations and empirical gaps. The full-scale invasion and severe humanitarian harm are supported by direct reporting. The relative weight of NATO policy, domestic institutional divisions, Russian political choices and economic beneficiaries demands source-specific argument rather than a single-cause slogan. The present corpus does not demonstrate that the war is staged, nor does it offer enough evidence to establish Moldova's present diplomacy as Russian-Turkish co-rule. Its strongest result is an agenda for assessing military procurement, negotiations, language policies and borderland governance using auditable data, archival material and sources from multiple perspectives (Sakwa, 2015; Miller, 2024; Kubicek, 2023).

A war economy may create firms with sharply increased revenues, governments with stronger bargaining positions and interest groups favoring continued procurement. Establishing the causal role of these benefits is a separate analytical task. Financial flows would have to be traced to particular contracts and decisions, and alternative explanations such as replacement of destroyed equipment and military aid to an invaded country would have to be considered. A testable hypothesis would predict that identifiable commercial beneficiaries influenced defined policy decisions in ways observable in lobbying disclosures, meeting records, votes or procurement terms. None of the three EPUBs supplies a complete causal investigation of this proposition for 2022–2026. Describing this as a research limitation avoids both uncritical dismissal of commercial incentives and the unsupported claim that industrial profit makes a documented armed conflict theatrical.

The proposed comparison with Moldova becomes meaningful when units of analysis are specified. Transnistria involves unresolved separatism, Russian military presence and security arrangements; Gagauzia concerns an autonomous unit and relationships that include Türkiye; the internationally recognized Moldovan state has its own institutions, elections and foreign-policy choices. Indicators might include the legal status of stationed forces, trade dependence, external financial assistance, public opinion, treaty obligations and governmental statements on Ukraine. A plausible geopolitical interpretation should show how these variables interact over a stated period. It cannot infer present-day internal government control from nineteenth-century Ottoman and Russian conflicts alone. This is a significant gap in a Ukraine-centered source collection, and it should be filled with Moldovan and Turkish documentary evidence rather than speculative extension of Sakwa's regional analysis (Sakwa, 2015; Kubicek, 2023).

To evaluate the statement that little is currently happening in Ukraine, the researcher must define both a time window and the dimension of activity. Weekly counts of strikes are different from verified deaths, territorial exchanges, deployments, infrastructure losses and changes in the intensity of international reporting. Each is subject to distinct data-collection limitations. Media exposure is an especially poor substitute for event monitoring because attention can move to another international crisis while hostilities continue. Miller's (2024) earlier reporting establishes specific documented experiences but cannot quantify daily events in October 2026. The latter claim requires independently maintained current datasets, clear source provenance and explicit uncertainty ranges. If those datasets are unavailable, the appropriate conclusion is that the question remains untested, not that battlefield activity necessarily stopped.

Explanations of conflict that emphasize security dilemmas, the failure of diplomacy, ideological preferences and defense-sector incentives are not necessarily exclusive. Their relative causal importance must be established through process tracing and evidence about actual decisions. An actor can pursue what it regards as security while generating insecurity for others; a supplier can profit without originating the war; and a negotiation can fail for reasons not fully visible to observers. These possibilities should lead to explicit counterfactual questions and documentary tests. The methodological advantage of keeping rival explanations open is not indecision but falsifiability: a claim should specify what evidence would count against it. Sakwa (2015) helps identify security arguments, while Miller (2024) helps establish the reality and local impact of military action. Neither approach makes the other unnecessary.

VIII. Results and Discussion

The comparison below operationalizes differences between direct occupation, de facto separatist control, legally recognized territorial autonomy and non-military cultural or economic influence. The distinction is necessary because Transnistria, Gagauzia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Crimea are not legally equivalent entities. In particular, Turkey's cooperation projects in Gagauzia are documented, but they are not evidence of Turkish military occupation (OSCE Mission to Moldova, n.d.; TİKA, 2018; EUMM Georgia, 2024; United Nations General Assembly, 2014).

Table 1. Comparative status of territorial control and external influence (documented situation; not a ranking of legitimacy)

Country / region	Political and legal status	External involvement and mechanism	Key source
Moldova — Transnistria	Separatist de facto authorities; Moldova's internationally recognized territory	Russian military presence and political leverage; OSCE-mediated settlement seeks special status within sovereign Moldova	OSCE Mission to Moldova (n.d.); Government of Moldova (2026)
Moldova — Gagauzia	Autonomous territorial unit under Moldova's 1994 special-status law	Turkish language/cultural affinities and TİKA education/health projects; Russian political/media influence is a separate question; not a Turkish occupation	OSCE Mission to Moldova (n.d.); TİKA (2018)
Georgia — Abkhazia	Breakaway territory within Georgia's internationally recognized borders	Russian armed presence and recognition; EU monitoring mission denied access to region	EUMM Georgia (2024; 2026)
Georgia — South Ossetia / Tskhinvali	Breakaway territory within Georgia's internationally recognized borders	Russian military presence; administrative boundary-line restrictions	EUMM Georgia (2024; 2026)
Ukraine — Crimea	Ukrainian territory occupied and claimed annexed by Russia in 2014; annexation not recognized by UNGA	Russian military control, annexation claim and access restrictions	UN General Assembly (2014); UN University (2026)
Ukraine — other occupied areas	Territories subject to contested military control since 2014, expanded by 2022 invasion	Active warfare, occupation administration and changing frontlines; avoid fixed unsourced territorial percentages	UN University (2026); Miller (2024)
Poland — comparative baseline	Sovereign state without Russian-occupied territory	Regional EU/NATO alignment; external economic and diplomatic relations must not be conflated with occupation	Comparative coding only; requires separate country-specific sources

This table refines the prior Moldova–Georgia–Ukraine–Poland comparison by coding the mechanism of foreign involvement rather than assuming that all forms of influence indicate occupation. Moldova's diplomatic preference for a peaceful settlement does not demonstrate silence: in February 2026 its government publicly reported the resumption of talks between Chişinău and Tiraspol after more than fifteen months (Government of Moldova, 2026).

Table 2. Historical comparison of territorial transformations and their institutional outcomes

Date / period	Moldova / Black Sea borderlands	Georgia	Ukraine	Analytical distinction
16th–18th centuries	Ottoman tributary relations in Moldavia; Russian–Ottoman competition	Varied Ottoman, Persian and Russian influence across Georgian polities	Ottoman–Crimean relationships, Polish–Lithuanian influence and Cossack autonomy	Suzerainty, tributary status and alliances were not identical to modern military occupation
1812	Bessarabia east of the Prut ceded from Ottoman suzerainty to Russian Empire	Expansion of Russian imperial rule across Georgian regions in 19th century	Much of central/eastern Ukraine under Romanov rule	Imperial annexation and administrative incorporation
1917–1945	Change of regimes and contested territorial incorporation; 1940 Soviet takeover of Bessarabia	Short independence followed by Soviet takeover in 1921	National republics of 1917–1921, Soviet incorporation and wartime occupation	Shifting state formation and imperial/Soviet coercion
1991–1992	Sovereign Moldova; 1992 Transnistrian war and enduring separatist control	Post-Soviet secessionist conflicts	Ukrainian independence in 1991	Different post-Soviet security trajectories
2008–2014	Settlement unresolved; 1994 Gagauz autonomy remains within Moldova	War in 2008; Abkhazia and South Ossetia under continuing de facto separation	Crimea occupied/claimed annexed in 2014; Donbas conflict begins	Different territorial and legal mechanisms
2022–2026	Security exposure from nearby war; talks and neutrality/European integration debates	Persistent unresolved territorial disputes	Large-scale Russian invasion, combat and occupation	Comparable security pressures do not establish one continuous conspiracy

A long historical sequence should be treated as a comparison of changing institutions, not as proof of a unified, centuries-long Russian–Ottoman/Turkish agreement. The distinction between the Ottoman Empire and the modern Turkish Republic is essential. The book by the Kapranov brothers provides a visual narrative of Ukraine's early and modern political geography, whereas the Moldova and Georgia columns above rest on separately identified comparative sources (Kapranov brothers, n.d.; OSCE Mission to Moldova, n.d.; EUMM Georgia, 2024).

Table 3. Research matrix for social and economic comparison: evidence needed before quantitative inference

Dimension	Moldova / Transnistria / Gagauzia	Georgia / disputed territories	Ukraine / occupied territories	Required measurement
Education and language	Gagauz autonomy, Turkish-backed projects; compare Russian/Romanian/Gagauz instructional access	Georgian-language access and school mobility across boundary lines	Ukrainian/Russian language policies, displaced students and schooling access	School enrolment by language and region; access interruptions; dated primary datasets
Health	Gagauzia's TİKA-supported regional hospital; compare access across Nistru	Boundary-line effects on healthcare mobility	Damage, displacement and healthcare access in occupied/frontline regions	Facility-level service capacity, WHO/health-ministry time series
Transport and access	Cross-Nistru crossings and checkpoint restrictions	Administrative boundary lines and movement	Crimea and occupied-zone checkpoints, rail	Crossing rules and verified travel-time data,

		restrictions	and road interruption	not invented averages
Communications	Media and digital-service languages, signal access	Information circulation across disputed areas	Connectivity and wartime communications restrictions	Regulatory texts, operator coverage and independent measurements
Agriculture and trade	Market access across Nistru, crop supply chains and customs	Trade corridors intersecting disputed territories	Grain exports, Black Sea ports and farmland disruption	FAOSTAT, UN Comtrade and transport data with explicit reference years
Defense economy	Procurement, bases and external security assistance	Defense spending and security assistance	Arms procurement and manufacturing contracts	SIPRI, national budgets and company disclosures; distinguish expenditure from profiteering
Turkish relations	TİKA cooperation in Gagauzia; explicit support for Moldovan state institutions	Bilateral trade and diplomacy; assess separately	Black Sea diplomacy and bilateral trade; assess separately	Treaties, trade values and official statements for each distinct relationship

Table 3 is a measurement framework, not a report of already calculated statistics. It preserves the user's prior macro/micro categories—education, health, transport, communications, society and trade—while explicitly identifying data still needed. Reporting fabricated cross-country numbers or directly comparing nonaligned wartime surveys would undermine replicability. Any subsequent quantitative version should attach a specific period, denominator, source and coverage limitation to each indicator.

Cartographic policy. The illustrated maps in *Painted History of Ukraine* remain valuable for historical territorial claims and questions arising from the original user synthesis, but their low-resolution reproduction makes many labels difficult to read. For the comparative geographic overview, a clean, high-resolution transregional map should be used instead. The previously supplied map from the Italian-colonialism research materials is a design and legibility reference, not evidence of Ukrainian territorial boundaries or a replacement for the historical Ukrainian maps. Its precise page, permission to reproduce, projection and date must be checked before inclusion. No unverified map is inserted in this manuscript.

Comparing the four source types yields five substantive findings. First, the relation between agriculture and power changes through identifiable institutions: pastoral trade, estate ownership, serfdom, collectivization and post-Soviet property regimes. Second, the experience of autonomy was uneven: the medieval polity, Cossack Hetmanate, Soviet republic and post-1991 state are not instances of one unchanged constitutional entity. Third, language and territory have repeatedly been politically mobilized, but the capacity to speak Russian is not equivalent to an endorsement of contemporary Russian territorial claims. Fourth, Sakwa's geopolitical arguments and Miller's conflict reporting illuminate different aspects of 2014–2024 rather than canceling one another. Fifth, neither wartime profiteering nor shifting media coverage establishes the claim that the 2022 invasion was staged (Kubicek, 2023; Sakwa, 2015; Miller, 2024).

In contrast with an exclusively geopolitical explanation, the historical account reveals domestic social differentiation, varying regional institutions and repeated institutional failures. In contrast with an exclusively national-resistance narrative, it shows that governments and populations within Ukrainian territories have made conflicting choices under pressure. Both conclusions follow from comparing distinct episodes, not from presuming equal moral or legal status for acts of armed intervention (Kubicek, 2023; Sakwa, 2015).

IX. Supplementary comparative lens: Strongmen (2018)

Prashad's edited collection *Strongmen: Putin, Erdoğan, Duterte, Trump, Modi* (OR Books, 2018) offers a deliberately partisan, literary-political comparison of personalistic leadership and political imagery across five countries. Its relevance here is as a comparative interpretive framework—not as primary documentation of Russian military operations, Ukrainian attitudes, or the 2022–2026 war (Prashad, 2018). Contents of the OR Books edition (chapter titles and authors):

Introduction: "The Return of the Monster" — Vijay Prashad, pp. 1–12.
 "Trump: A Fable" — Eve Ensler, pp. 13–24.
 "Modi: The Vanity of the Tyrant" — Danish Husain, pp. 25–50.
 "Erdoğan: A Normal Man" — Burhan Sönmez, pp. 51–66.
 "Putin: So Sexy It Hurts" — Lara Vapnyar, pp. 67–78.
 "Duterte: Nada in the Heart of Bluster" — Ninotchka Rosca, pp. 79–102.
 "About the Contributors" — pp. 103–104.

The comparative argument should concentrate on three questions: how leader-centered imagery is constructed; how nationalist rhetoric represents political opponents and external enemies; and how such rhetoric interacts with actual governmental institutions and coercive capacities. Prashad's introduction sets an explicitly critical frame; Ensler's fable, Husain's literary treatment of Modi, Sönmez's account of Erdoğan, Vapnyar's discussion of Putin's cultivated masculine image, and Rosca's analysis of Duterte's media persona illustrate distinct genres of political critique rather than a standardized cross-national dataset (Ensler, 2018; Husain, 2018; Sönmez, 2018; Vapnyar, 2018; Rosca, 2018).

For the Ukraine–Crimea discussion, Vapnyar's chapter adds a source on representations of Putin's masculinity and publicity; Sönmez's chapter provides a point of comparison concerning Erdoğan and political legitimacy. Neither chapter supplies direct evidence that Russia and Türkiye jointly control Moldova, that military strategy was determined by image-making, or that the 2014 annexation was lawful. Such claims require independent official, legal and empirical sources. The essays, published in 2018, cannot by themselves establish the causes or consequences of the February 2022 full-scale invasion (Vapnyar, 2018; Sönmez, 2018; Grant, 2017; Miller, 2024).

Interpretive boundary: Transnistria and the Georgian separatist regions involve distinct Russian military and political mechanisms; Gagauzia remains a Moldovan autonomous unit and is not occupied by Türkiye. Historical imperial maps cannot be used to collapse those legal and political distinctions (OSCE Mission to Moldova, n.d.; EUMM Georgia, 2024).

Comparative chronology: 1783—Russian annexation of Crimea from the Crimean Khanate; 1812—Russian annexation of Bessarabia east of the Prut; 1917–1921—revolutionary Ukrainian governments and successive wars; 1991—Ukrainian, Moldovan and Georgian independence from the Soviet Union; 1992—Transnistrian war; 1994—Gagauz autonomy within Moldova; 2008—Russian–Georgian war; February–March 2014—Russian takeover and purported annexation of Crimea; 2014—war begins in Donbas; 24 February 2022—Russia launches a full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Kubicek, 2023; UN General Assembly, 2014; OSCE Mission to Moldova, n.d.; EUMM Georgia, 2024).

The two incorporated visual reproductions are historical illustrations, not current satellite images or photographic proof of contemporary troop positions. The first should accompany discussion of Cossack–Muscovite relations; the second should accompany the Crimea–Sevastopol–Black Sea–Turkish Straits–Mediterranean spatial argument. Their historical value lies in visualizing relative locations and past political geographies, not in attributing intentions to current governments. For any later image, record source creator, date, publication, permission and geographical scope before publication.

X. Photographic and cartographic source-critical note

Edition note: page spans follow the OR Books 2018 edition indexed in JSTOR, DOI 10.2307/j.ctv62hfk9; page numbering may differ in other formats.

XI. Conclusions

Ukrainian history is best explained as the interaction of productive landscapes, commercial corridors, changing imperial jurisdictions, local initiatives and coercive military power. No single historical epoch supplies a continuous authorization for present territorial claims. The 2014 conflict and the invasion of 2022 require analysis that separates the material record of violence from competing accounts of state responsibility and the policy choices of outside powers. The supplied books permit such a comparison, but their unequal periods of coverage constrain any conclusions about late-2025 and 2026 developments (Kubicek, 2023; Sakwa, 2015; Miller, 2024).

XII. Future Research

A further investigation should obtain verified data on defense procurement and lobbying; compare month-by-month deaths, displacement and infrastructure damage against changes in media attention; analyze primary evidence on negotiations; and undertake a separate case study of Moldova, Transnistria and Gagauzia. The Turkish role in Gagauzia and Russian involvement in Transnistria must be tested against distinct institutional records. Historical maps from the supplied illustrated volume should be used only if their territorial

keys, dates and resolution are adequate; the map of the Italian empire in Ben-Ghiat and Fuller (2005), intended for a separate Horn of Africa study, is not suitable for a Ukraine-specific territorial claim.

References

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