



**POLES
AT
GUNPOINT
OF
PUTIN'S
PROPAGANDA**

**A survey conducted by
Maison & Partners behalf of
Warsaw Enterprise Institute**



WEI

& PARTNERS
Maison

Warsaw 2022

Introduction

Poland, of all European countries, is considered the most ardent ally of Ukraine with the strongest support for the Ukrainian struggle, and yet, even in Poland, Russian propaganda finds many supporters and followers.

War is not just about clashes between two hostile armies. These are also information skirmishes. The warring states are trying to influence public opinion not only of their own society, but also that of the enemy and its allies. The first type of propaganda is supposed to guarantee high morale and support for further warfare, when, of course, the second type of propaganda is supposed to do the exact opposite. It generates the belief that victory is either impossible or that it is too financially expensive to continue military action – that it is better to surrender or sit down at the negotiating table.

Ever since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, creating a *de facto* separatist movement in the east of the country, not only Ukraine itself, but all of Europe has been targeted by Russian propaganda efforts. The arsenal of these activities ranged from using their own media (e.g. Russia Today), to boosting the message of Russia-friendly so-called favorable idiots, to running troll farms, spreading opinions and facts, or theses pretending to be facts, that were in line with the Kremlin's current narrative line.

Exerting influence on public opinion in democracies has an obvious benefit: politicians make their decisions based on the national feelings of the moment surveyed through polls. Un-

til the full-scale invasion, which took place in February of this year, the Russians had managed to achieve measurable success in the informational war. Among the biggest was convincing parts of Europe that long-term energy cooperation with Russia was feasible. That's why the Nord Stream 2 pipeline was built despite the opposition from countries like Poland. Today – after Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine – hardly anyone believes that energy cooperation with Russia will be feasible anymore, and almost no one thinks it is desirable. However, Russia is actively promoting other messages that are favorable to them, which, if they are accepted, could lead to the cancellation of sanctions imposed on Russia, weaken support for military and financial aid to Ukraine, reduce the scale of support for refugees, and even provoke civil strife over this issue. At the end of the day, effective propaganda can tip the balance of power in Russia's favor.

Ever since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, creating a de facto separatist movement in the east of the country, not only Ukraine itself, but all of Europe has been targeted by Russian propaganda efforts.

In light of the above, the Warsaw Enterprise Institute commissioned the research firm Maison and Partners to investigate the response in Polish society to the theses pushed by Kremlin propaganda. We have singled out eight theses that are in line with the line of Russian propaganda and at

the same time are prevalent in the wider Polish public debate.

And so, as many observers have noted the high correlation between opposition to Covid vaccination and the tendency to blame the West for the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine, we asked respondents whether they agreed that "The war is a liberal conspiracy by Western elites, the same ones who plotted the pandemic." Due to the extreme popularity of the theory of "offensive realism," which proclaims the need for great powers to secure their spheres of influence, we also asked respondents whether they believed that "if it were not for NATO's expansion to the East, Putin would not have attacked Ukraine." In relation to the popular belief in certain circles about the ongoing "Ukrainization of Poland," which is expected to lead to social conflicts out of necessity due to the alleged nationalism of Ukrainians, respondents were also asked whether they agree with the thesis that "we should not help Ukraine until it repents for Wolyn and condemns Bandera." In turn, since economic arguments often come up in the discussion of Polish aid to Ukraine, we asked respondents whether they shared the opinion that "Poland cannot afford having refugees" and that "refugees from Ukraine are actually economic migrants." In addition, we asked about the position of Poles toward a desirable solution to the conflict – should "we stop supplying weapons, because it further expands a conflict we have no connection to"? Should we "promote peace at all costs, even at the cost of Ukraine's territorial concessions to Russia?" We also asked about Poland's desired attitudes toward Russia: should one actually "Not taunt Russia because it has nuclear weapons"?

Specific theses of Russian propaganda do not need to be fundamentally or completely false. Often they can be defended, or bear the hallmarks of a rational argument. The problem, however, is that they are usually based on half-truths, do not take into account the strength of counter-arguments, and are selected to suit the thesis – so as to put Ukraine and the West in a bad light, creating discontent and rebellion in society. Moreover, sharing theses that are in line with the Russian line is not necessarily – and most often – not conscious pro-Russianism. This can be reconciled with condemnation for the war itself and a sincere belief that they are in line with Poland's interests.

As many as 60 percent of Poles are of the opinion that Poland cannot afford for refugees.

We considered that simultaneous belief in at least 4 of the 8 theses we selected means that Russian propaganda strongly influences an individual. And so it turned out that this limit is reached by as many as 34 percent of Poles, and 66 percent agree with up to 3 attitudes out of the 8 presented. Poles strongly agree with the statement that "Poland cannot afford having refugees" – 60 percent. Poles share this opinion. At the same time, it is worth noting that while this attitude favors Putin's policies, it does not necessarily mean being a victim of pro-Russian propaganda, and the motives behind the approval of this thesis may largely be related to other factors (e.g., the downturn in one's own material situation). Poles are least accepting of theses relating to the causes of the war ("If it hadn't been for NATO's expansion to the East,

Putin wouldn't have attacked Ukraine." - 24 percent of those who agree) and the question of helping Ukrainians ("We should not help Ukraine until it repents for Volhynia and condemns Bandera." - 24 percent agreeing). For other attitudes related to the war in Ukraine that are in line with Putin's interests, the level of agreement is observed at around 30-35 percent.

It is exceptionally interesting that the results show significant differences in the proportions of these groups by age. Among younger people (especially 25-34 year olds), one can see significantly greater agreement with attitudes that are in Russia's interest (47% of this group agree with a minimum of 4 statements). However, the least agreement with the theses presented is evident in the oldest group - only 25% of those 55+ agree with 4 or more pro-Russian attitudes. How to explain this? This probably requires in-depth sociological analyses. One can guess that two factors play an important role: younger people spend

more time than older people online, where they may come across Russian propaganda in various forms more often than in traditional media. At the same time, the life experience factor may be important: older people remember, unlike the young, Poland before 1989, when it was within the sphere of Russian influence.

The Warsaw Enterprise Institute believes that ongoing monitoring of public sentiment in the context of the Russian information war and credible countering of Kremlin propaganda is now a challenge facing not only the Polish government, but perhaps especially media providers and companies offering access to social media. It is crucial to avoid the situation that occurred during the pandemic, i.e., to create a feeling that the fight against fake news about the virus restricts freedom of speech and is itself part of a propaganda machine hostile to the society, in that case governments that were at the service of "Big Pharma."



Objectives and methodology of the study

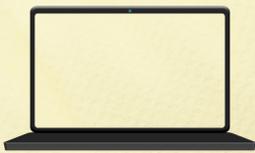
Main objective



The main purpose of the survey was to find out Poles' attitudes about the war in Ukraine:

- **to what extent Poles agree with messages that are in line with Putin's interests.**

Method



The survey was conducted using the **CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview)** method on the Ariadna survey panel as part of a weekly omnibus survey.

Research sample



- **The survey was conducted on a nationwide, representative sample of Poles.**
- **A total of 1,087 people took part in the survey.**
- **Detailed demographic characteristics of the sample are presented on pages 5-6.**

Survey length



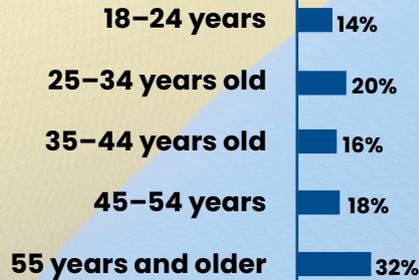
About **3 minutes**

Demographic characteristics of the sample

GENDER



AGE



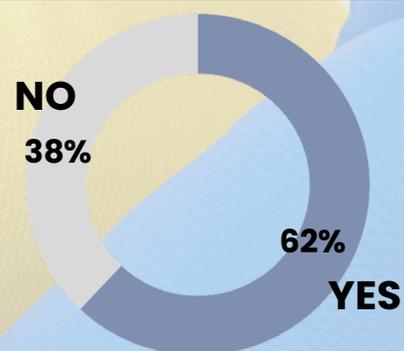
EDUCATION



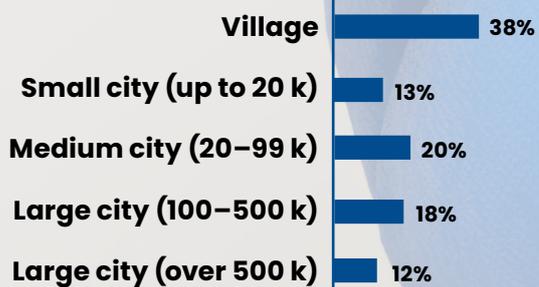
VOIVODESHIP



HAVING CHILDREN



SIZE OF RESIDENCE



Main results

1

Poles most strongly agree with the statement that Poland cannot afford refugees - 60 percent of Poles are of this opinion. At the same time, it is worth noting that while this attitude favors Putin's policies, it does not necessarily mean being a victim of pro-Russian propaganda, and the motives behind the approval of this thesis may largely be related to other factors (e.g., worsening of one's own material situation).

2

Poles are least likely to approve of theses relating to the causes of the outbreak of war ("If it hadn't been for NATO's expansion to the East, Putin wouldn't have attacked Ukraine." - 24 percent of those who agree) and the question of helping Ukrainians ("We should not help Ukraine until it repents for Volhynia and condemns Bandera." - 24 percent agreeing).

3

For other attitudes related to the war in Ukraine, which are in line with Putin's interests, the degree of agreement is observed at around 30-35 percent.

4

76 percent of Poles agree with up to four attitudes out of the eight presented, while 24 percent - with at least five.

5

Moreover, the results show significant differences in the proportions of these groups depending on age. Among younger people (in particular, those aged 25-34), one can see significantly greater agreement with attitudes that are in the interest of Russia (33 percent of this group agree with a minimum of five statements). In contrast, the least agreement with the statements presented is evident among the oldest group - only 17 percent of those 55+ agree with five or more pro-Russian attitudes.

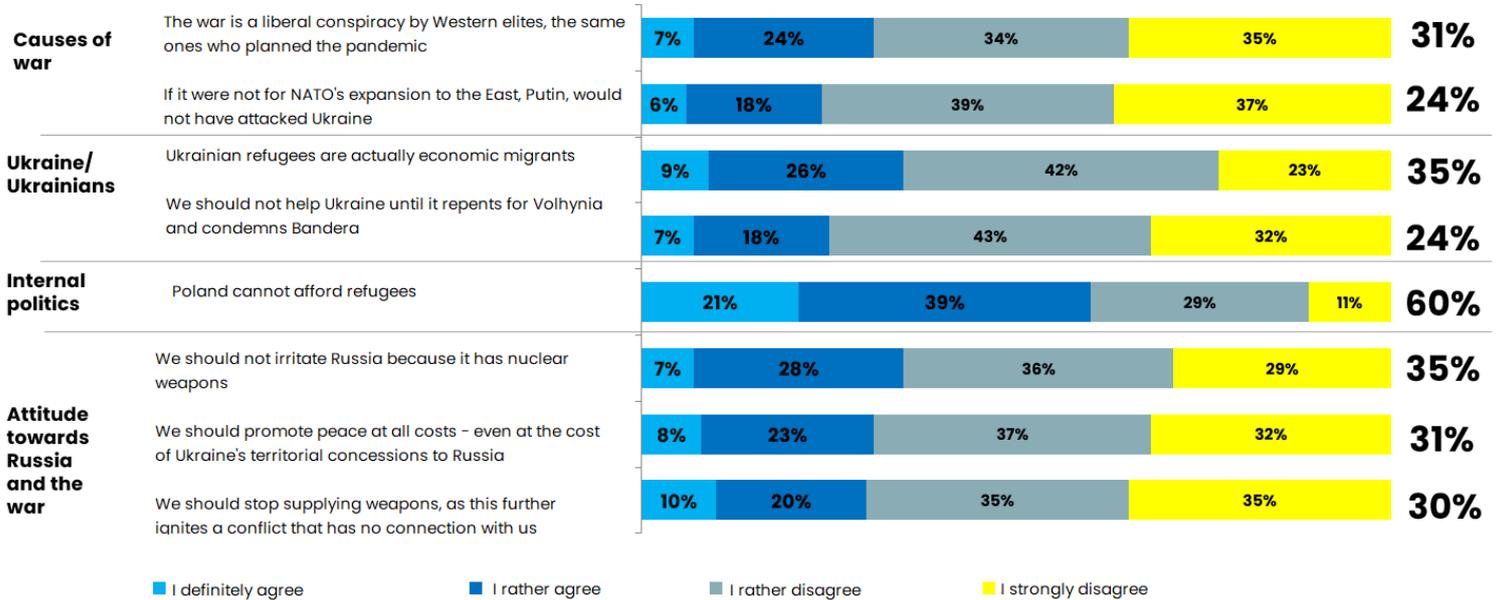
Detailed results

60% of Poles believe Poland cannot afford refugees

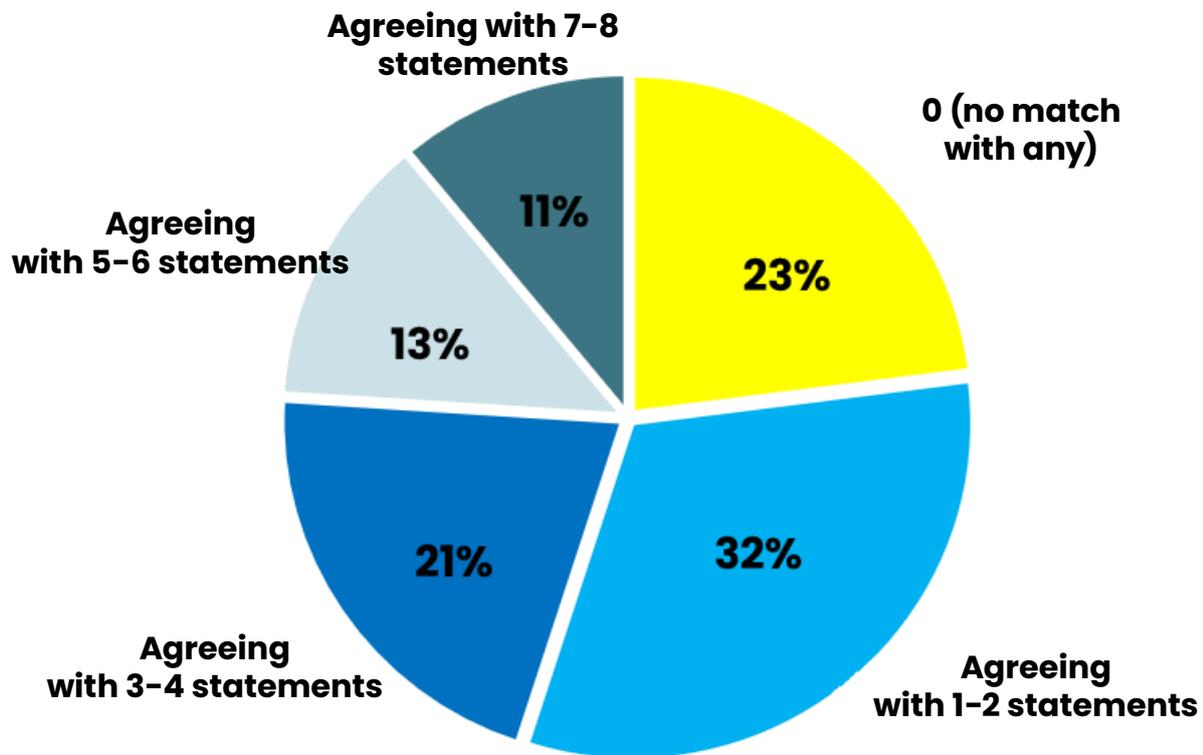


To what extent do you agree with the following statements related to the war in Ukraine?

N=1087



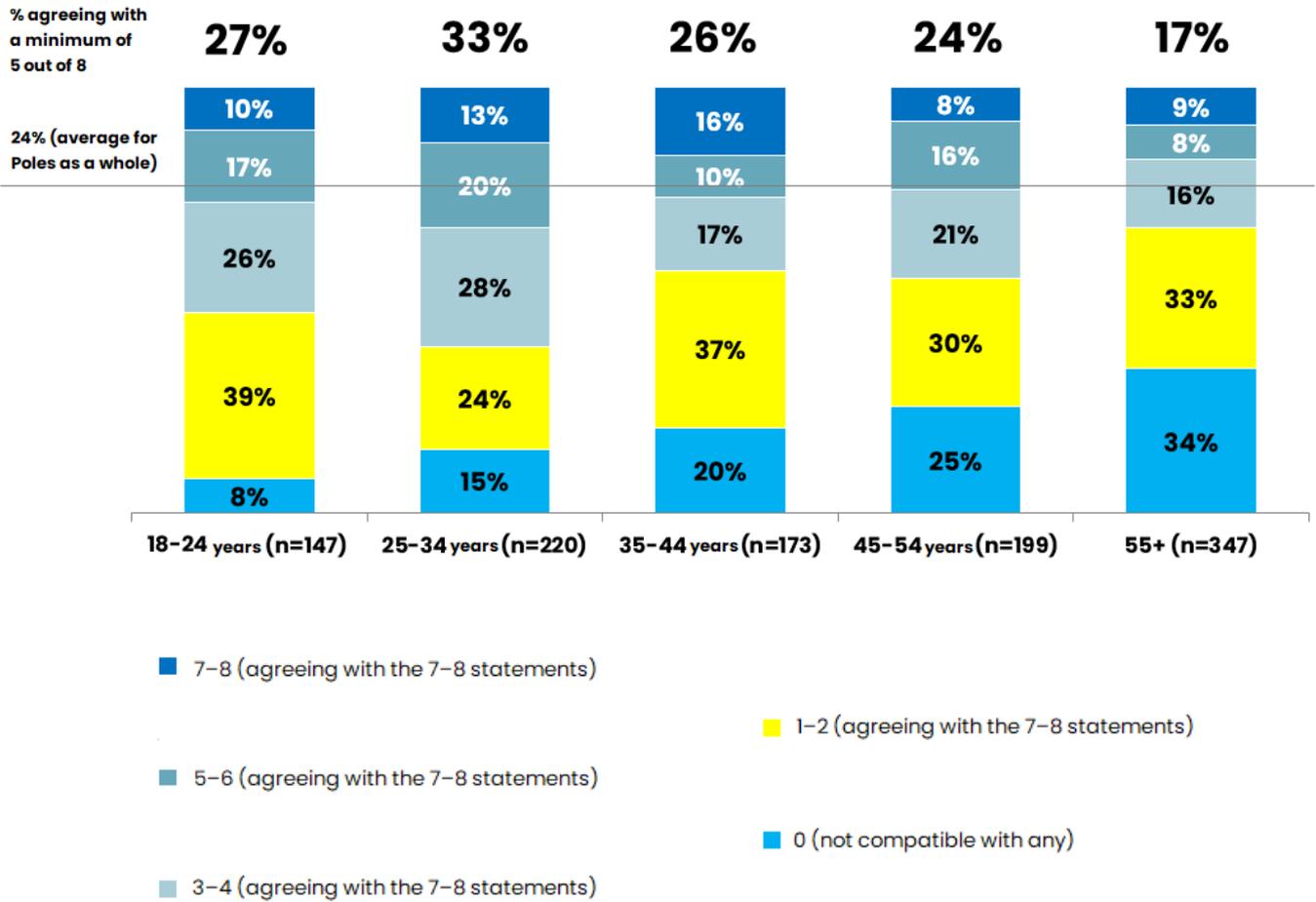
More than half of Poles agree with up to two statements (out of eight), while about 1/4 agree with at least five of the eight statements.



- 23 percent of Poles disapprove of any of the statements about the war in Ukraine being in line with Putin's interests.
- The largest group of Poles (32 percent) expresses their approval towards 1 or 2 attitudes, while 21 percent - towards 3-4.
- 24 percent of Poles agree with at least 5 of the 8 statements, including 11 percent admit that all or almost all of the theses surveyed agree with their opinion.



Among the younger ones, a stronger degree of agreement with the statements can be seen than among the older ones.



Among younger people (especially those aged 25-34), one can see a significantly higher percentage of people agreeing with at least five of the eight surveyed attitudes regarding the war in Ukraine (33 percent among 25-34 year olds vs. 24 percent among the general Polish population). On the other hand, among the oldest, one observes significantly the lowest degree of agreement (7 p.p. less than among the general population of this age group agree with five or more theses).



**Author of the composition:
Anna Sleszyńska**

**Photos: Canva.com,
Unsplash.com, cover photo: tvn24.pl**

Fonts used: Poppins, Staatliches



**Warsaw Enterprise Institute
Al. Jerozolimskie 30/7
00-024 Warsaw**