

Special Issue “The War in Ukraine”

edited by Barbara Kuchler

The war in Ukraine has caught the Western world unprepared in several respects, and old questions are being raised in new ways. This seems to be true not only for many political decision-makers, but also for many social scientists, who have often reacted to the war with silence or otherwise have spoken out more as intellectuals and committed participants in a heated public debate than as researchers informed by a specific research perspective. The journal "Soziale Systeme" is planning a thematic issue in which voices from the professional discourse will be collected and sociological views of what is happening will be presented. We welcome both theoretical texts on fundamental issues of war and texts that address specific issues from an empirical research perspective, demonstrating the potential of a particular theoretical perspective. Accordingly, we invite contributions not only from sociology, but also from political science, history, cultural studies, media studies, or legal studies. Questions from the entire spectrum of war studies can be addressed, including—but not limited to—the following sets of questions.

(1) From the perspective of *conflict and escalation theory*, the escalation dynamics between the warring parties can be addressed. How can we understand this disturbingly classical case of an escalation process, with almost textbook-like escalation steps on both sides and also with the typical distortion of perception according to which each party perceives itself as merely reacting and the other party as acting? What efforts are being made to prevent escalation, and how do Western politicians balance the imperative of escalation prevention with other values and priorities? To what extent are the lessons of the Cold War still around, when every politician had their escalation manual under the pillow, and how are these lessons distributed across different types of actors, such as civilian policy makers and military experts? From a perspective of the *sociology of knowledge*, it can also be asked here how social scientific theories of escalation have an impact on actually existing policies and how, in this specific case, the interaction of these two spheres, which have always interacted, is shaped.

(2) From the perspective of *decision theory*, questions arise about the choice of war strategies, and in particular about the possibilities of and obstacles against ending the war. What are the underlying rationales of decision-making and negotiation? How, for example, is a “sunk cost” rationale involved here, or the problem that each party is willing to negotiate particularly when it is in a good military position, which is almost inevitably the case at a time when the other party is not willing to negotiate? How do military and non-military lines

of action (sanctions, supply freezes, etc.) interact in decision-makers' intentions and in actual outcome?

(3) The events in the war zone itself can be described—as far as data are available—e.g., from an *interactionist* or *phenomenological* perspective. How can we understand events on the battlefields, on the front lines, in conquered or recaptured towns? What happens between combatants (official as well as unofficial: regular military, mercenary units, volunteer units, etc.) and between combatants and non-combatants (civilians)? What are the strategies and/or spontaneously emerging dynamics behind committed war crimes?

(4) From a *political theory* or *legal theory* perspective, issues concerning the character of statehood can be addressed. Putin reminds us of the old linkage between state and warfare by resorting to the means of a very classical, interstate war after decades of global dominance of "non-classical" wars. What does this tell us about the unpopular but irrevocable linkage of the power medium to the mechanism of violence? In light of this, how can the role of international law be conceptualized? How do realpolitik/interest politics and value-led or idealistic politics interact, and how is the global political order to be understood in light of this duality?

(5) Considering processes in *broader society*, one can ask about repercussions of the war on social processes behind the lines and also in states that are not directly affected. How do the media react, to what extent do they take on elements of propaganda, to what extent does, e.g., the portrayal of the war reflect classic propaganda schemes (such as moralization, good/evil polarization, taboos, for example, against depicting dead soldiers of one's own side)? How is the public discourse and the general political climate changing, how does it, e.g., reflect the common cleavage between "hawks" and "doves"? What are the effects of the war on economic processes, and to what extent, or in what countries and what sectors, can we speak of a beginning conversion to a war economy? How are civil-military relations changing, and what does this mean for the role of the military in society?

This list shows the diversity of possible perspectives and thus of theoretical-conceptual approaches that can be used in sociological-conceptual reflection. We wish to deliberately allow this diversity of perspectives in order to do justice to the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon and, at the same time, to make the variety of analytical possibilities clear.

Text proposals in the form of abstracts can be sent until May 1st 2023 to the special issue editor Dr. habil. Barbara Kuchler (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, barbara.kuchler@soziologie.uni-muenchen.de). The contributions themselves should be between 40,000 and a maximum of 80,000 characters and should be submitted no later than September 15th 2023. Contributions in English and German are welcome. Publication is planned for the end of 2023.

Information on the desired format of the articles can be found here:

<https://www.degruyter.com/journal/key/sosys/html#submit>