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RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Russians' Attitudes Towards the War in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused considerable military casualties on both sides and widespread harm to Ukrainian civilians. While polls suggest that a slim majority of Russians endorse the invasion, the factors underpinning this support remain uncertain. We investigated factors associated with support for the war among Russians. In three large, diverse, samples of Russian adults (total $N = 2856$), we extend the dual process motivational model to the context of international warfare, focusing on two key ideologies: right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO). Consistent with polling data, we find that approximately half of the participants support the war. Across studies, RWA, especially its submission facet, emerges as a strong and consistent predictor of increased support for the war in Ukraine. In contrast, the associations with SDO are weaker and more inconsistent, with anti-egalitarianism playing only a minor role in opposing peace efforts. Additionally, factors such as Russian identification, nationalism, group efficacy, war-related misperceptions and collective narcissism also contribute to war support. Our findings suggest that Russian support for the war may reflect broader support for the existing regime with backing for the military intervention serving as a demonstration of loyalty to Vladimir Putin and his government.

1 | Introduction

On 24th February 2022, Russian forces invaded Ukraine, a major escalation in the broader Russo-Ukrainian conflict. The invasion and occupation have resulted in hundreds of thousands of military casualties from both sides (Faulconbridge 2023). In addition, civilians in Ukraine have experienced indiscriminate attacks due to the targeting of populated areas by missiles, rockets and drones. Consequently, many civilian lives have been lost and the humanitarian situation has become dire, with mass migration being observed as Ukrainian people seek safety from the hostilities. In this context, numerous studies have documented the negative psychological consequences of the conflict and the ensuing humanitarian crisis (e.g., Karatzias et al. 2023; Khrushch et al. 2023; Shevlin, Hyland, and Karatzias 2022).

Throughout the invasion, Vladimir Putin's government has increased the penalty for Russians to voice dissent against the war, criminalizing even calling it a war and instead labelling it as a 'special military operation' (Reuters 2022). The imprisonment of opponents to the war and forced mobilization in Russia has encouraged many Russian people to seek refuge in other countries (Reuters 2022). In addition, both Putin himself and state-run Russian media have made numerous appeals to galvanize public support for the invasion. According to multiple public opinion surveys, a slim, but stable majority of Russians support the invasion (Chapkovski and Schaub 2022; Kizilova and Norris 2022; Rogov 2023), even in those surveys that use list experiments to limit vulnerability to judicial pursuit for voicing opposition to the war (Chapkovski and Schaub 2022).

The regime's control of the media environment and suppression of dissent no doubt influence Russian's perceptions of the war, even as the Russian economy sours and the death toll mounts. However, these factors are insufficient for describing *variation* in support for the war in Ukraine. Prior work finds such variation (Chapkovski and Schaub 2022; Kizilova and Norris 2022; Rogov 2023) but is more focused on ways to reduce socially desirable responding (Chapkovski and Schaub 2022; Rogov 2023) or differential non-response (Reisinger, Zaloznaya and Woo 2023). In this paper, we respond to the call for further survey research (Rosenfeld 2023), particularly social and psychological research (Sharafutdinova 2023) on support for the war among the Russian population.

In three large, diverse, samples of Russian adults (total *N* = 2856), we examine the role of two ideologies that have been shown to be strongly linked to sociopolitical attitudes: right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO). RWA captures the desire for an orderly society, manifesting in trust in established religious and political authorities, adherence to longstanding social conventions and norms and antipathy and aggression towards individuals and groups that violate those conventions and norms (Altemeyer 1981, 1988, 2007). SDO captures preferences for group-based hierarchy, both in terms of reifying existing hierarchies and opposing efforts to reduce inequality (Ho et al. 2012, 2015; Jost and Thompson 2000; Pratto et al. 1994; Sidanius and Pratto 2001). Russian leaders (Kuzio 2015, 2016, 2019) and propaganda (Kuzio 2016; Riabchuk 2016) depict Ukraine as a norm-violating outgroup that should rightfully be subordinated. If such discourse is effective (or consistent with Russian people's ideological inclinations), either RWA and SDO or both, may underpin support for the Russian War in Ukraine among Russian people.

1.1 | The Dual Process Motivational Model of Prejudice

The dual process motivational (DPM) model argues that right-wing political orientation and prejudice against various social groups can be explained as a dual function of two ideologies: RWA and SDO (Duckitt 2001; Duckitt et al. 2002; Duckitt and Sibley 2009). These ideologies have distinct motivational origins and do not tend to correlate highly with one another (Dallago et al. 2008; Duckitt and Sibley 2007; Mirisola et al. 2007; Roccato and Ricolfi 2005). However, people high in RWA and SDO often support the same political parties (Satherley, Sibley, and Osborne 2021; Womick et al. 2018), display heightened political conservatism (Harnish, Bridges, and Gump 2018; Wilson and Sibley 2013) and display higher generalized prejudice (Cohrs, Kämpfe-Hargrave, and Riemann 2012; Craig and Richeson 2014; D'amore et al. 2022; Duckitt et al. 2002; Ekehammar et al. 2004; Osborne and Sibley 2017; Osborne et al. 2021; Van Hiel and Mervielde 2005; Whitley 1999; Wollast et al. 2023).

RWA captures separate, but interlocking tendencies to support established political and religious authorities (submission), adhere to existing social conventions and norms (conventionalism) and display antipathy against people who do not uphold these conventions and norms (aggression) (Altemeyer 1981, 1988, 2007). While most investigations of RWA use it as a unidi-

mensional construct, work investigating its dimensionality finds that this tripartite framework fits the RWA scale well (Funke 2005; Mavor, Louis, and Sibley 2010). SDO, by contrast, captures preferences for group-based hierarchy and non-egalitarian intergroup relations (Ho et al. 2012, 2015; Pratto et al. 1994). It can be divided into two dimensions, particularly with the recent SDO_7 scale (Ho et al. 2015): active support for the entrenchment and enhancement of group-based hierarchy (dominance) and opposition to efforts to challenge or flatten existing hierarchies (anti-egalitarianism).

1.2 | Extending the Dual Process Model to War

Research on the dual process model has focused much less on extreme manifestations of intergroup conflict, relative to the types of social issues more salient in the Western nations where most research is conducted (e.g., attitudinal prejudice, social policy attitudes). Nevertheless, there have been some efforts to extend the DPM to contexts of war.

One line of work involves studies with Western samples in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks and later the 'War on Terror'. In general, studies from this period tend to find that RWA has a fairly strong and robust relationship with support for military intervention (Cohrs et al. 2005a, 2005b; Crowson 2009; Dunwoody et al. 2014; Lyall and Thorsteinsson 2007; Jackson and Gaertner 2010; McFarland 2005, but see Heaven et al. 2006). SDO's effects, by contrast, are inconsistent, sometimes positive (Dunwoody et al. 2014; Heaven et al. 2006; Jackson and Gaertner 2010; Lyall and Thorsteinsson 2007; McFarland 2005), sometimes null (Cohrs et al. 2005a; Crowson 2009).

McFarland (2005) goes further to establish the mechanisms by which RWA and SDO are connected to support for the War on Terror. Across two studies, he finds that RWA and SDO are connected to heightened war support via increased blind patriotism. However, there are also separate RWA-specific and SDO-specific paths of influence. Those high in RWA support foreign intervention at least partly from an elevated sense of outgroup threat. By contrast, the SDO-specific pathway does more to remove a source of opposition to war than to motivate affirmative support for it. Those who fear a high human cost of war are less likely to support initiating a war. However, SDO is associated with a lower fear of those human costs.

A second and closely related line of work considers foreign policy orientations more broadly. Rathbun (2020)'s dual process model of foreign policy support argues that RWA and SDO map onto two foreign policy orientations. RWA, which captures motivations for protection, fuels *militant internationalism*, an orientation capturing support for one's country using the threat of force (or force itself) to protect the ingroup (Gravelle, Reifler, and Scotto 2017; Rathbun et al. 2016). People higher in militant internationalism, in turn, tend to support a variety of military interventions (Clements and Thomson 2022; Gravelle, Reifler, and Scotto 2017). SDO, conversely, maps onto a low desire to provide resources to other countries (Cohrs et al. 2005b; McFarland 2005; Osborne and Sibley 2017; Rathbun

2020). As a result, it is negatively associated with cooperative internationalism, an orientation capturing a desire for cooperative horizontal relationships between countries (Gravelle, Reifler, and Scotto 2017; Rathbun et al. 2016). Conversely, those low in cooperative internationalism are less willing to enter into such horizontal relationships and are often more willing to attack other countries (Maggiotto and Wittkopf 1981).

1.3 | Applying the Dual Process Model to the Russo-Ukrainian War

Taken together, existing research suggests that RWA tends to map more strongly onto support for foreign military interventions than SDO. People high in RWA see war as a means to protect the ingroup against foreign threats (Rathbun 2020). By contrast, people high in SDO score higher in nationalism (Osborne, Milojev, and Sibley 2017) and see the dominance of other countries as a means for achieving, maintaining and expanding ingroup dominance. The evidence for the role of SDO in supporting foreign military intervention is less clear-cut (compared to work on the role of RWA), but it seems to predict support for war via reduced sensitivity to ingroup and outgroup casualties (Cohrs et al. 2005b; McFarland 2005). However, existing work applying the DPM to foreign wars tends to tap a limited number of conflicts, particularly the War on Terror, and particularly using American samples. The DPM itself suggests there can be room for both RWA and SDO to affect support for intervention against an outgroup depending on how the group is construed in public consciousness and societal discourse.

Survey work on Russian sentiment regarding Ukrainians has been scant, even prior to the 2022 invasion. In general, the Russian public sentiment towards Ukrainians was fairly positive prior to 2022. Most Russians supported Ukrainian immigration to Russia in 2011, but support they did not extend to people from other origin countries (Bessudnov 2016). They also displayed positive sentiment towards Ukrainians in general even as late as 2019 (Levada 2019).

In contrast, elite discussion of Ukraine has been quite negative (Kuzio 2015, 2016, 2019; Riabchuk 2016), with themes tapping into both RWA and SDO (Kuzio 2015, 2016, 2019). Russian media has repeatedly painted Ukrainians as supporters of fascism and Nazis. Given the Soviet Union's past in fighting the Nazis and the Nazis' prejudice and persecution of Slavic people, such rhetoric can portray Ukrainians as violators of a strong injunctive norm against Nazism that force is needed to quell. This can lead people high in authoritarian aggression to support the war. Since Vladimir Putin has unambiguously led the war effort, those high in authoritarian submission may support the intervention as a means of showing loyalty to Putin. The role of the conventionalism facet of RWA is less clear. However, to the extent that supporting the regime is seen as a social norm, people may support the war to adhere to the norm.

Other propaganda emphasizes Ukraine's status as a subordinate group. Specifically, Vladimir Putin has relentlessly promoted a distorted historical narrative that represents Ukrainians and Russians as part of a unified nation (Kuzio 2015, 2016; Phillips et al. 2024). His objective is to reconstruct the former Soviet Union, aiming to undo what he perceives as the 'greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century' (Putin 2005), referring to the collapse of the USSR during the Cold War. In this context, Ukraine is considered as an extension of Russia. This can take the form of treating the Ukrainian language as a 'corrupted' dialect of Russian (Kuzio 2016), portraying Ukrainian identifiers as a small group artificially different from Russia (Kuzio 2019) and considering Ukrainians as an inferior group that needs and deserves Russia's paternalistic protection (Riabchuk 2016). Such portrayals can lead SDO to be associated with support for the war. People high in the dominance facet might support invasion to entrench the dominance of Russians over Ukrainians. In contrast, we see no reason why Russians high in anti-egalitarianism would inherently support the invasion. However, conditional on the invasion happening, to the extent peace is seen as a move that would reduce Russian dominance over Ukraine, such people may oppose efforts at peace (Gudkov 2016).

At the same time, we might observe divergent patterns in Russia. The DPM was developed in democratic, Western countries in which elites have an electoral incentive to engage in discourse that tracks with public opinion. By contrast, Russia is a strongly authoritarian regime (Barany 2007) that lacks free and fair elections and crackdowns on free expression have only intensified since the invasion began (Reuters 2022). As a result, elite influence might not adequately map on public opinion. Since those high in RWA tend to submit to elite influence, they may acquiesce to propaganda portraying Ukraine and Ukrainians as a threat, and, as a result, RWA would lead downstream to supportive attitudes towards the war. However, most Russians prior to the war saw Ukrainians as equals, not as a subordinate group (Bessudnov 2016; Levada 2019). As a result, combined with the fact that SDO lacks the inherent aspect of submission to authority that RWA contains (Altemeyer 2007), SDO may not predict support for the war nearly as strongly.

2 | Overview of the Three Studies

To examine the relationships between different facets of RWA and SDO and support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we conducted three independent studies. These studies were approved by the institutional review boards of the principal investigators and comply with APA ethical regulations for research on human subjects. All participants gave written informed consent prior to participating. They were recruited anonymously through an online platform to ensure a representative sample of the Russian population based on age, gender and province of residence. All items for which no validated Russian scale was available were translated from English to Russian and then back-translated to ensure construct equivalence (Brislin 1970; Sinaiko and Brislin 1973). Across studies, the questionnaire was divided into two sections: In the first section, participants responded to a series of questions related to the Russian 'special military operation' in Ukraine as well as psychological variables. In the second part of the questionnaire, they filled out demographic measures. Participants were compensated $0.40 for completing the questionnaire. Raw data, syntax, questionnaires and additional elements can be found in the Supporting Information (https://osf.io/n84vb/).

TABLE 1 | Sociodemographic characteristics for the three studies.

	Study 1 (N = 998)	Study 2 (N = 1025)	Study 3 (N = 833)
Gender (% female)	50.1%	50.1%	49.7%
Age (M, SD)	37.44 (11.30)	37.50 (11.55)	38.04 (10.15)
Education level (%)			
Incomplete secondary	11.5	—	5.0
High school degree	29.3	—	36.7
University degree	59.2	—	58.3
Place of residence (%)			
Town ≤ 100k	24.0	23.1	19.8
City 100–250k	10.9	10.2	10.8
City 250–500k	16.1	17.2	17.7
City 500k–1M	15.8	16.5	19.0
City > 1 M (excluding M and SP)	20.9	19.2	20.6
St. Petersburg	4.4	5.0	5.0
Moscow	7.9	8.8	7.1
Occupation (%)			
State enterprises	—	—	17.3
Private enterprises	—	—	49.7
Mixed ownership	—	—	9.3
Not employed	—	—	23.7

Abbreviations: M, Moscow; SP, St. Petersburg

3 | Study 1

3.1 | Participants

A total of 998 Russian adults aged from 17 to 60 (50.1% female, M_{age} = 37.44, SD_{age} = 11.30) were recruited on 16 December 2022, to participate in a survey. Sociodemographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. Participants were recruited from a well-known Russian web panel, equivalent to MTurk in Russia, which draws from a large pool of Russian crowdworkers. This platform has been commonly used by many researchers (Chapkovski 2023; Gulevich and Osin 2023; La Lova 2023; Morgan et al. 2023) but is currently boycotted and will therefore not be cited in the present work. We used quotas on gender, age, education and province of residence to attain descriptive representativeness. The questionnaire was fully anonymized, and participants had the opportunity to withdraw at any time. Our Russian colleagues, who assisted in study preparation and data collection, could not be properly cited due to a law prohibiting Russian and Ukrainian authors from being listed on the same scientific article (Letter No. 1/2017-24 vid 06.02.2024 by Denis Ihorovych Kurbatov, Deputy of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine). However, after careful discussions, they have been duly acknowledged in the acknowledgment section of this work. This first survey took place in the context of a winter stalemate between Russia and Ukraine.

3.2 | Measures

3.2.1 | Right-wing Authoritarianism

We utilized the validated Russian version of the RWA scale (Gulevich, Krivoshchekov, and Guseva 2022), a translation and adaptation of Altemeyer's main scale (1996). The Russian version comprises nine items with three per dimension (e.g., aggression: 'Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us.'; conventionalism: 'Our country will be destroyed someday if we do not smash the perversions eating away at our moral fiber and traditional beliefs'; submission: 'The established authorities generally turn out to be right about things, while the radicals and protestors are usually just 'loud mouths' showing off their ignorance.'). Participants rated each item on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Totally Disagree*) to 5 (*Totally Agree*). We performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using maximum likelihood estimation to assess the scale's dimensionality in our sample. The hypothesized three-factor model fitted the data well on most metrics and displayed superior fit to a one- or two-factor solution (see Table 2). Each dimension was highly reliable as well: submission: $\omega = 0.90$; conventionalism: $\omega = 0.88$; aggression: $\omega = 0.88$. Submission showed a positive association with conventionalism ($r = 0.73$, $p < 0.001$) and aggression ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, conventionalism and aggression demonstrated a strong association with each other ($r = 0.82$, $p < 0.001$).

3.2.2 | Support for War[1]

Participants' support for the war was assessed using one item: 'To what extent do you support the special military operation in Ukraine?' Responses ranged from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Completely*).

3.2.3 | Peaceful Negotiation

Attitudes toward peaceful negotiation were assessed using one item: ('To what extent do you identify with people who support a peaceful negotiation?') on a scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Completely*).

3.2.4 | Control Variables

We included Russian identification and group efficacy as control variables. Participants' identification with Russian people was assessed using a single item: 'To what extent do you identify with Russian people?' Responses were provided on a scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Very much*). Similarly, group efficacy was measured using one item: 'I think together people who support the military operation in Ukraine will be able to achieve the demands of their movement (e.g., win the war)'. Participants rated their responses on a scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*).

TABLE 2 | Comparisons of concurrent models.

	Model	χ^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	Factor loadings
SDO						
Study 1	—	—	—	—	—	—
		—	—	—	—	—
Study 2	**Two factors (SDO-D vs. SDO-AE)**	**548.71**	**93**	**0.949**	**0.069**	**0.55–0.86**
	One factor (SDO-D and SDO-AE)	1536.88	94	0.838	0.122	0.21–0.86
Study 3	**Two factors (SDO-D vs. SDO-AE)**	**222.58**	**17**	**0.924**	**0.122**	**0.37–0.89**
	One factor (SDO-D and SDO-AE)	288.81	18	0.902	0.134	0.39–0.86
RWA						
Study 1	**Three factors (Sub and Con and Agg)**	**396.11**	**24**	**0.950**	**0.125**	**0.80–0.89**
	Two factors (Sub and Con vs. Agg)	785.92	26	0.898	0.171	0.73–0.87
	Two factors (Sub vs. Con and Agg)	521.83	26	0.933	0.138	0.80–0.89
	Two factors (Sub and Agg vs. Con)	853.55	26	0.889	0.179	0.71–0.87
	One factor (Sub and Con and Agg)	960.16	27	0.874	0.186	0.70–0.85
Study 2	**Three factors (Sub and Con and Agg)**	**383.71**	**24**	**0.961**	**0.121**	**0.81–0.93**
	Two factors (Sub and Con vs. Agg)	837.20	26	0.912	0.175	0.74–0.92
	Two factors (Sub vs. Con and Agg)	757.61	26	0.920	0.166	0.82–0.89
	Two factors (Sub and Agg vs. Con)	751.63	26	0.921	0.165	0.73–0.93
	One factor (Sub and Con and Agg)	1092.87	27	0.884	0.196	0.73–0.88
Study 3	**Three factors (Sub and Con and Agg)**	**92.30**	**6**	**0.922**	**0.131**	**0.33–0.99**
	Two factors (Sub and Con vs. Agg)	95.81	8	0.920	0.115	0.32–0.99
	Two factors (Subvs. Con and Agg)	196.91	8	0.829	0.168	0.31–0.80
	Two factors (Sub and Agg vs. Con)	192.73	8	0.833	0.167	0.32–0.82
	One factor (Sub and Con and Agg)	197.69	9	0.829	0.159	0.31–0.83

Note: The models highlighted in bold represent the best statistical fit.

Abbreviations: Agg, authoritarian aggression; Con, conventionalism; CFI, Comparative Fit Index; DF, Degrees of Freedom; RSMEA, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; RWA, right-wing authoritarianism; SDO, social dominance orientation; SDO-AE, anti-egalitarianism; SDO-D, dominance; SDO-AE, anti-egalitarianism; Sub, authoritarian submission.

3.3 | Results

3.3.1 | Descriptives and Correlations

Table 3 reports descriptive statistics and correlations between all variables, and Table 4 reports the frequencies of individuals supporting the war and peaceful negotiations. Overall, despite legal sanctions from the Russian state for vocalizing opposition to the war in Ukraine, mean support for the war was slightly above the midpoint ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.45$, $p < 0.001$) as well as support for peaceful negotiation ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.36$, $p < 0.001$). Importantly, 52% of Russians who supported the war also opposed peace while 91% of Russians supporting peace were against the war (see Table 4).

The correlations indicate that support for the war had a strong negative association with support for peaceful negotiations. Additionally, support for the war was strongly and positively associated with the conservatism, traditionalism and submission facets of RWA. Support for peace was moderately and negatively associated with each facet of RWA. These findings provide

preliminary evidence that RWA is associated with support for the war.

3.3.2 | Multivariate Analyses

Table 5 reports the results of the regression analysis for support for war and peaceful negotiation, separately. Tables S1 and S2 report the results of regression analyses when using an aggregated RWA measure. As anticipated, the findings indicated that men support the war and oppose peace more than women, older individuals support the war and oppose peace more than younger individuals, and those who identify more strongly with Russian people support the war and oppose peace more than those with weaker identifications. Additionally, the study revealed a significant positive association between group efficacy and support for war but no association with opposition to peace.

When we combined the facets of RWA into a single scale, we found that RWA is positively associated with support for war

TABLE 3 | Corresponding means and correlation matrix of all variables (Study 1).

	Identity	Efficacy	RWA	Aggression	Conventionalism	Submission	Support for war	Peaceful negotiation
Identity	—	0.50**	0.76**	0.67**	0.74**	0.68**	0.68**	−0.46**
Efficacy	—	—	0.54**	0.41**	0.50**	0.58**	0.53**	−0.31**
RWA	—	—	—	.93**	0.93**	0.89**	0.71**	−0.50**
Aggression	—	—	—	—	0.82**	0.71**	0.60**	−0.45**
Conventionalism	—	—	—	—	—	0.73**	0.66**	−0.47**
Submission	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.60**	−0.46**
Support for war	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	−0.67**
Mean	3.43	3.71	3.15	3.25	3.33	2.86	3.06	3.46
SD	1.07	1.62	1.06	1.21	1.16	1.21	1.45	1.36

Abbreviations: RWA, right-wing authoritarianism; SD, standard deviation.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.

TABLE 4 | Frequencies of public opinion.

		Supports war (%)	Neutral on war (%)	Opposes war (%)	Total (%)
Study 1	Supports peace	23.6	46.4	91.0	52.0
	Neutral on peace	24.8	45.6	5.1	23.8
	Opposes peace	51.6	8.0	3.9	24.2
Study 2	Supports peace	36.6	46.9	83.0	53.2
	Neutral on peace	23.9	44.2	7.4	24.1
	Opposes peace	39.5	8.9	9.6	22.7
Study 3	Supports peace	78.2	84.3	90.7	65.7
	Neutral on peace	7.7	9.0	3.1	15.6
	Opposes peace	14.1	6.7	6.2	18.7
Total	Study 1	40.3	26.4	33.3	—
	Study 2	45.5	25.3	30.2	—
	Study 3	64.1	5.9	30.0	—

and negatively associated with support for peaceful negotiations (see Tables S1 and S2 in the Supporting Information). However, when we disaggregated by facet of RWA, we found heterogeneity in results. RWA-submission had a positive association with support for the war and a negative association with support for peaceful negotiations. RWA-conventionalism was significantly and positively associated with support for war but only displayed a marginal negative association with support for peaceful negotiations. RWA-aggression displayed the weakest associations with attitudes towards the war in Ukraine, with no detectable association with war support and a marginally negative association with support for peace.

3.4 | Discussion

Taken together, these results indicate that RWA, and especially its submission facet, is robustly associated with support for the war in Ukraine among Russians. Heterogeneous findings using different facets of RWA affirm the usefulness of dis-

aggregating RWA. However, given the exploratory nature of our analyses, it is important to replicate the effects of RWA and its subscales before forming firmer conclusions about the role of RWA in support of the war. Additionally, Study 1 did not contain measures of SDO. These are issues we remedy in Study 2.

4 | Study 2

4.1 | Participants

Study 2 followed the same recruitment procedures as Study 1. A total of 1025 Russian adults who participated in Study 2 (50.1% Female; M_{age} = 37.50; SD_{age} = 11.55) were recruited to participate in a survey on 23 March 2023. Sociodemographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. This survey was also conducted during a stalemate between Russian and Ukrainian troops. Around this time, several European countries also made agreements to give military aid to Ukraine.

TABLE 5 | Results of the regression analysis for support for war and peaceful negotiation (Study 1).

	B	b	SE	t	p-value	VIF
Support for war						
Constant	−1.527***	0.191	—	−7.981	0.000	—
Age	0.011***	0.003	0.086	3.983	0.000	1.137
Gender	0.378***	0.059	0.131	6.391	0.000	1.027
Education	0.039	0.026	0.031	1.515	0.130	1.036
Identity	0.397***	0.043	0.295	9.188	0.000	2.528
Efficacy	0.122***	0.023	0.136	5.328	0.000	1.607
RWA aggression	0.027	0.044	0.022	0.599	0.549	3.366
RWA conventionalism	0.153**	0.051	0.123	3.006	0.003	4.116
RWA submission	0.365***	0.044	0.282	8.251	0.000	2.856
Peaceful negotiation						
Constant	6.617***	0.238	—	27.818	0.000	—
Age	−0.010**	0.003	−0.084	−2.961	0.003	1.137
Gender	−0.410***	0.074	−0.151	−5.576	0.000	1.027
Education	0.008	0.032	0.006	0.236	0.813	1.036
Identity	−0.231***	0.054	−0.182	−4.298	0.000	2.528
Efficacy	−0.029	0.028	−0.035	−1.021	0.308	1.607
RWA aggression	−0.102	0.055	−0.091	−1.856	0.064	3.366
RWA conventionalism	−0.119	0.063	−0.102	−1.881	0.060	4.116
RWA submission	−0.196***	0.055	−0.160	−3.556	0.000	2.856

Note: Regression analysis indicated that the predictor variables explained a significant portion of the variance in support for war ($R^2 = 0.60$) and peaceful negotiation ($R^2 = 0.30$).

Abbreviations: B, unstandardized coefficient beta; b, standardized coefficient beta; RWA, right-wing authoritarianism; SE, standard error; VIF, variance inflation factor.

*$p \leq 0.05$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.001$.

4.2 | Measures

4.2.1 | Right-wing Authoritarianism

We measured RWA and its subscales the same way as in Study 1. A CFA demonstrated that the hypothesized tripartite structure displayed superior fit to alternative structures (see Table 2). The submission and conventionalism subscales were strongly and positively correlated ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.001$) as were the submission and aggression subscales ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.001$) and conventionalism and aggression subscales ($r = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$). Reliability was excellent for each dimension; submission (ω coefficient = 0.89), conventionalism (ω coefficient = 0.92) and aggression (ω coefficient = 0.93).

4.2.2 | Social Dominance Orientation

We utilized the validated Russian version of the SDO scale (Gulevich, Agadullina, and Khukhlaev 2018), a translation and adaptation of Sidanius and Pratto's main scale (1999). The Russian version comprises 10 items, with five per subdimension, dominance (SDO-D: 'Some groups of people are just more worthy than others'.) and anti-egalitarianism (SDO-AE: 'It would be good if

groups could be equal'. [reverse-scored]). Participants were asked to rate each item on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Oppose*) to 7 (*Strongly Favor*). SDO-D and SDO-AE were moderately and positively associated ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$).

To test whether the two dimensions of SDO were distinct, we performed a CFA. CFA evidenced that the model distinguishing the two dimensions demonstrated greater model fit statistics as compared to the single-factor model (see Table 2), confirming that the two SDO dimensions are related but distinct constructs. Reliability was excellent for both dimensions; dominance (ω coefficient = 0.87) and anti-egalitarianism (ω coefficient = 0.91).

4.2.3 | Support for War

We measured support for the war in the same manner as Study 1.

4.2.4 | Peaceful Negotiation

We measured support for peaceful negotiations in the same manner as Study 1.

TABLE 6 | Corresponding means and correlation matrix of all variables (Study 2).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. SDO	—	0.84**	00.84**	0.13**	0.12**	0.06	0.18**	0.10**	−0.18**
2. SDO-D	—	—	0.41**	0.29**	0.28**	0.22**	0.32**	0.22**	−0.18**
3. SDO-AE	—	—	—	−0.08*	−0.08*	−0.12**	−0.01	−0.05	−0.12**
4. RWA	—	—	—	—	0.94**	0.94**	0.91**	0.74**	−0.39**
5. Aggression	—	—	—	—	—	0.84**	0.78**	0.67**	−0.36**
6. Conventionalism	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.76**	0.70**	−0.36**
7. Submission	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.71**	−0.35**
8. Support for war	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	−0.50**
9. Peaceful negotiation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mean	2.88	2.96	2.81	4.36	4.56	4.57	3.94	3.17	3.49
SD	1.08	1.29	1.29	1.77	2.00	1.92	1.80	1.45	1.33

Abbreviations: RWA, right-wing authoritarianism; SD, standard deviation; SDO, social dominance orientation; SDO-AE, anti-egalitarianism; SDO-D, dominance; SDO-AE, anti-egalitarianism.

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

4.3 | Results

4.3.1 | Descriptives and Correlations

Table 6 reports descriptive statistics and correlations between all variables. Table 4 reports the frequency of individuals supporting the war and peaceful negotiations. Just as in Study 1, we found that support for the war was slightly above the midpoint ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.45$, $p < .001$), as was support for peaceful negotiations ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.33$, $p < .001$). Again, we observed that 39.5% of Russians supporting the war also opposed peace and 83% of Russians supporting peace opposed the war (see Table 4). Compared to Study 1, which was conducted 3 months earlier, the percentage of participants supporting the war slightly decreased, and the percentage supporting peaceful negotiations slightly increased.

Support for the war and support for peace displayed a moderate negative association. SDO-D displayed small-to-moderate positive associations with RWA-conservatism, RWA-traditionalism and RWA-submission. SDO-AE displayed weak negative associations with all RWA dimensions, replicating previous findings that RWA and SDO tend to describe different kinds of people.

Just as in Study 1, support for the war displayed robust positive bivariate associations with the submission, conventionalism and aggression facets of RWA. Support for peaceful negotiation displayed similarly robust, though weaker, negative associations with each facet of RWA. Support for the war had a modest positive correlation with SDO-dominance but had no detectable association with SDO-egalitarianism. Support for peaceful negotiations displayed modest negative associations with both the dominance and anti-egalitarianism facets of SDO.

4.3.2 | Multivariate Analyses

Table 7 reports the results of the regression analysis for support for war and peaceful negotiation, separately. Tables S3 and S4 report the results of regression analyses when using aggregated

RWA and SDO measures. Just as in Study 1, men supported the war and opposed peace more than women and older participants supported the war and opposed peace more than younger participants.

Similar to Study 1, an aggregated measure of RWA displayed a robust positive association with support for the war (see Table S3) and a negative association with support for peaceful negotiations (see Table S4). In contrast to Study 1, we found more uniform effects of each facet of RWA including positive and significant associations with RWA-aggression, RWA-conventionalism and RWA-submission. However, as with Study 1, the association between RWA-aggression and support for the war was weaker than the associations for the two other RWA facets. Support for peaceful negotiations displayed roughly equivalent negative associations with RWA-aggression, RWA-conventionalism and RWA-submission.

An aggregated measure of SDO did not display any association with support for the war (see Table S3). However, it was negatively associated with support for peaceful negotiations (see Table S4). When we disaggregate by type of SDO, we found that neither facet of SDO was associated with support for the war among the Russian public. When it came to support for peace, however, we found negative associations with the anti-egalitarianism facet of SDO, but no association with the dominance facet.

4.4 | Discussion

Taken together, Study 2 replicated and extended Study 1. Just as in Study 1, we found a robust association between RWA, particularly its submission facet and support for the war (and conversely opposition to peace). However, in contrast to Study 1, we found a more robust role for conventionalism and a significant role for the aggression facet. In contrast, we observed a more muted role for SDO. Neither facet of SDO was predictive of support for war, but anti-egalitarianism was a possible motivator behind opposition to peace.

TABLE 7 | Results of the regression analysis for support for war and peaceful negotiation (Study 2).

	B	*b*	*SE*	*t*	p-value	VIF
Support for war						
Constant	−0.181	0.161	—	−1.120	0.263	—
Age	0.006*	0.003	0.045	2.108	0.035	1.015
Gender	0.367***	0.059	0.127	6.183	0.000	1.102
SDO dominance	−0.009	0.027	−0.008	−0.345	0.730	1.419
SDO anti-egalitarianism	0.002	0.026	0.002	0.089	0.929	1.272
RWA aggression	0.081**	0.029	0.112	2.763	0.006	3.990
RWA conventionalism	0.227***	0.030	0.301	7.486	0.000	3.917
RWA submission	0.306***	0.028	0.382	10.904	0.000	2.964
Peaceful negotiation						
Constant	5.804***	0.206	—	28.154	0.000	—
Age	−0.008*	0.003	−0.069	−2.326	0.020	1.015
Gender	−0.214**	0.076	−0.081	−2.823	0.005	1.102
SDO dominance	−0.012	0.035	−0.011	−0.336	0.737	1.419
SDO anti-egalitarianism	−0.149***	0.033	−0.145	−4.529	0.000	1.272
RWA aggression	−0.093*	0.038	−0.140	−2.475	0.013	3.990
RWA conventionalism	−0.111**	0.039	−0.161	−2.864	0.004	3.917
RWA submission	−0.078*	0.036	−0.106	−2.175	0.030	2.964

Note: Regression analysis indicated that the predictor variables explained a significant portion of the variance in support for war ($R^2 = 0.58$) and peaceful negotiation ($R^2 = 0.18$).

Abbreviations: *B*, unstandardized coefficient beta; *b*, standardized coefficient beta; RWA, right-wing authoritarianism; SDO, social dominance orientation; *SE*, standard error; VIF, variance inflation factor.

*$p \leq 0.05$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.001$.

Nevertheless, some limitations remained. First, to be more confident in our findings vis-à-vis SDO, it was necessary to conduct another study on an independent sample. Furthermore, in both Studies 1 and 2, we have neglected to control for a number of factors that can explain RWA and SDO as well as support for the war. One such factor is nationalism, which among other things, encompasses a belief in the superiority of one's nation and a desire for one's nation to have dominance on the world stage (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989). The dominance aspect of nationalism can overlap particularly strongly with SDO. Fear and threat underlie RWA (Duckitt et al. 2002) but can also potentially reduce support for starting wars abroad (Huddy et al. 2005), which can obscure the role of RWA in war support. People higher in RWA and SDO might believe more in propaganda against outgroups (Braddock et al. 2024), so we also measured misperceptions about the war (Phillips et al. 2024). Finally, people high in RWA and SDO may be more prone to collective narcissism (de Zavala et al. 2009), an investment in an unrealistically positive image of the ingroup contingent on external validation. We controlled for these factors in this final study.

5 | Study 3

5.1 | Participants

This study was preregistered (https://osf.io/gjmyq) and followed the same recruitment procedures as Studies 1 and Study 2.

We recruited 833 individuals to take part in Study 3 (49.7% female, M_{age} = 38.04, SD_{age} = 10.15) on 15 May 2023. Sociodemographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. This survey was conducted towards the end of the stalemate between Russian and Ukrainian troops and at the beginning of the Ukrainian counter-offensive.

5.2 | Measures

5.2.1 | Russian Identification

We assessed identification with Russians by adapting one of the dimensions of the Identification with All Humanity Scale (IWAH; McFarland et al. 2012). Participants rated their closeness, commonalities and sense of family with Russians using a scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all close*) to 5 (*Very close*) for ten items (e.g., 'How close do you feel with Russians?', 'How much would you say you have in common with Russians?'). Ultimately, McDonald's omega coefficient was excellent (ω coefficient = 0.92). We only used the items related to Russians as a measure of Russian identification.

5.2.2 | Nationalism

Participants rated their agreement with the statement 'Generally, the more influence Russia has on other nations, the better off they are' on a scale ranging from 1 (*Totally Disagree*) to 7 (*Totally Agree*).

5.2.3 | Feeling of Danger

Participants rated their level of fear concerning different potential events and situations related to the special military operation in Ukraine on a scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all afraid*) to 5 (*Very afraid*) including 16 items (e.g., Considering the situation in the world, how afraid are you: 'That me or my relatives/friends can be mobilized', 'Rockets fall on the place where I live', 'The deterioration of my economic situation'). Ultimately, McDonald's omega coefficient was excellent (ω coefficient = 0.88).

5.2.4 | Group Efficacy

Individuals' belief in the collective capability of their group to achieve its goals effectively was measured using one item: 'I think together people who support the military operation in Ukraine will be able to achieve the demands of their movement (e.g., win the war)'. Participants rated their responses on a scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*).

5.2.5 | Misperceptions

Participants rated the accuracy of several biased statements related to different political beliefs and events (e.g., 'The Ukrainian government is controlled by Nazis.', 'The Ukrainian military was committing genocide in the Donbas.') on a scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all accurate*) to 4 (*Very Accurate*). Ultimately, McDonald's Omega coefficient was excellent (ω coefficient = 0.89).

5.2.6 | Social Dominance Orientation

We assessed participants' attitudes towards social hierarchy and group-based dominance using the SDO7 scale short version adapted from Ho et al. ([2015]). This scale consists of two sub-dimensions: dominance items (SDO-D) gauge beliefs in the necessity of hierarchies with some groups on top and others at the bottom (e.g., 'Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.'), while anti-egalitarianism (SDO-AE) assess attitudes towards group equality (e.g., 'Group equality should not be our primary goal.'). Participants rated each item on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Oppose*) to 7 (*Strongly Favor*). Specifically, we found that dominance was strongly associated with anti-egalitarianism ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$). As in Study 2, employing CFA, we successfully demonstrated that the hypothesized two-factor structure displays a better fit than a single-factor structure (see Table [2]). Ultimately, McDonald's omega coefficient was satisfactory for both dimensions; SDO-D (ω coefficient = 0.72) and SDO-AE (ω coefficient = 0.70).

5.2.7 | Right-wing Authoritarianism

We measured RWA using the Very Short Authoritarianism Scale (VSA scale) developed by Bizumic and Duckitt ([2018]). The VSA scale includes six items and captures three dimensions: conservatism or authoritarian submission (e.g., 'What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity.'), traditionalism or conventionalism (e.g., 'God's laws about abortion, pornography, and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late.') and authoritarianism or authoritarian aggression (e.g., 'The facts on crime and the recent public disorders show we have to crack down harder on troublemakers if we are going preserve law and order.'). All items were rated on a 9-point scale, ranging from −4 (*Strongly Oppose*) to 4 (*Strongly Favor*). As in Studies 1 and 2, relying on a CFA, we successfully demonstrated that a tripartite structure offers a better fit than either a one- or two-factor structure (see Table [2]). Ultimately, aggression and conventionalism demonstrated a moderate positive association ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) as did aggression and submission ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$) and conventionalism and submission ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$). Correlations between both items within each dimension were reasonably strong for submission ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$), conventionalism ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$) and aggression ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$).

5.2.8 | Collective Narcissism

We assessed participants' levels of collective narcissism by adapting the Collective Narcissism Scale developed by de Zavala et al. (2018) to the Russian context. This short scale comprises three items that capture the extent of collective narcissistic tendencies (e.g., 'Russians deserve special treatment.', 'Not many people seem to fully understand the importance of Russia.'). The items were rated on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Totally Disagree*) to 6 (*Totally Agree*). Ultimately, McDonald's omega coefficient was excellent (ω coefficient = 0.90).

5.2.9 | Support for War

We measured support for the war using five items (i.e., 'To what extent do you support the special military operation in Ukraine?', 'Russia is moving in the right direction.', 'The special military operation is necessary to ensure people in Ukraine remain loyal to Russia.', 'The special military operation in Ukraine is necessary to replace the Ukrainian leadership in Kyiv.' and 'The special military operation in Ukraine is necessary to fight back against NATO.') on a scale from 1 (*Totally Disagree*) to 7 (*Totally Agree*). Ultimately, McDonald's omega coefficient was excellent (ω coefficient = 0.91).

5.2.10 | Peaceful Negotiation

We measured support for peaceful negotiations in the same manner as in Studies 1 and 2. However, to stay consistent with other measures, we relied on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Totally Disagree*) to 7 (*Totally Agree*).

5.3 | Results

5.3.1 | Descriptives and Correlations

Table [8] reports the corresponding means and correlation matrix of all variables, and Table [4] reports the frequencies of individuals

TABLE 8 | Corresponding means and correlation matrix of all variables (Study 3).

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Identity	0.55**	0.17**	0.52**	0.56**	−0.14**	−0.11**	−0.15**	0.42**	0.34**	0.30**	0.39**	0.50**	0.55**	−0.05
2. Nationalism	—	0.17**	0.67**	0.68**	0.06	0.07	0.03	0.58**	0.47**	0.40**	0.52**	0.70**	0.72**	−0.19**
3. Fear	—	—	0.10**	0.16**	0.03	0.06	−0.01	0.10**	0.10**	0.10**	0.04	0.23**	0.12**	0.15**
4. Efficacy	—	—	—	0.74**	0.05	0.06	0.03	0.60**	0.49**	0.39**	0.57**	0.65**	0.81**	−0.21**
5. Misperception	—	—	—	—	0.00	0.02	−0.01	0.65**	0.54**	0.42**	0.62**	0.66**	0.81**	−0.20**
6. SDO	—	—	—	—	—	0.92**	0.91**	0.07*	0.11*	−0.04	0.11**	0.13**	0.06	−0.18**
7. SDO-D	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.68**	0.08*	0.13**	−0.04	0.11**	0.16**	0.06	−0.15**
8. SDO-AE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.05	0.07*	−0.03	0.08*	0.09*	0.04	−0.18**
9. RWA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.81**	0.78**	0.81**	0.60**	0.64**	−0.25**
10. Aggression	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.41**	0.58**	0.49**	0.52**	−0.22**
11. Conventionalism	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.40**	0.43**	0.40**	−0.12**
12. Submission	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.51**	0.63**	−0.28**
13. Narcissism	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.69**	−0.18**
14. Support for war	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	−0.27**
15. Peaceful negotiation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mean	4.49	3.21	4.64	3.06	2.74	2.75	2.74	4.84	5.06	4.42	5.03	4.32	4.59	5.15
SD	1.78	0.85	1.94	0.80	1.13	1.25	1.21	1.42	1.70	1.95	1.67	1.69	1.77	1.89

Abbreviations: RWA, right-wing authoritarianism; SD, standard deviation; SDO, social dominance orientation; SDO-AE, anti-egalitarianism; SDO-D, dominance; SDO-AE, anti-egalitarianism.

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. Identity ($M = 3.88$; $SD = 0.79$).

supporting the war and peaceful negotiations. In line with prior studies, recorded support for the war was significantly above the midpoint ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.77$, $p < 0.001$) and so was support for peaceful negotiations ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.89$, $p < 0.001$). Importantly, Russians who support peaceful negotiations significantly increased compared to Studies 1 and 2, regardless of the levels of support for war (see Table 4).

Support for war and support for peace displayed a modest negative association. SDO-D displayed small positive associations with RWA-submission and RWA-aggression, but not RWA-conventionalism. Similarly, SDO-AE displayed small positive associations with RWA-submission and RWA-aggression, but not RWA-conventionalism. This replicated findings from Study 2 and other investigations showing that RWA and SDO are distinct psychological dimensions.

Just as in prior studies, support for the war displayed robust positive bivariate associations with RWA-aggression, RWA-conventionalism and RWA-submission. Support for peaceful negotiation displayed negative, but weaker, associations, with all three RWA facets. Support for the war did not have any bivariate association with either facet of SDO. However, support for peaceful negotiations was negatively associated both with the dominance and anti-egalitarianism facets of SDO.

5.3.2 | Multivariate Analyses

Table 9 reports the results of the regression analysis for support for war and peaceful negotiation, separately. Tables S5 and S6 report the results of regression analyses when using aggregated RWA and SDO measures (additional concurrent models can be found in the Supporting Information).

In contrast to prior studies, older participants did not display greater support for the war than younger participants but displayed greater opposition to peace. Men displayed marginally greater support for the war and significantly greater opposition to peace than women. Consistent with other studies (e.g., Gulevich and Osin 2023) people who displayed stronger identification with Russia displayed marginally greater support for both war and peace than those who displayed weaker identification. Specifically, Gulevich and Osin (2023) found that national identity predicted positive attitudes towards the invasion and the use of nuclear weapons, whereas global human identity was a negative predictor of those outcomes (note that we did not find the latter significant correlation in our data). Nationalism was associated with greater support for the war but was unassociated with support for peace. Fear was unassociated with support for war, but predicted greater support for peace. Group efficacy was associated with greater support for the war, but not associated with support for peace. Misperceptions were similarly associated with greater support for the war and not associated with support for peace. Collective narcissism displayed a strong association with support for the war, but not opposition to peace.

Just as in prior studies, an aggregated measure of RWA displayed robust positive associations with support for the war and negative associations with support for peaceful negotiations (see the Supporting Information). In line with Study 1, we found a robust

TABLE 9 | Results of the regression analysis for support for war and peaceful negotiation (Study 3).

	B	b	SE	t	p-value	VIF
Support for war						
Constant	−1.206***	0.297	—	−4.056	0.000	—
Age	0.004	0.003	0.023	1.394	0.164	1.085
Gender	0.099	0.059	0.028	1.675	0.094	1.070
Education	0.002	0.037	0.001	0.056	0.955	1.048
Identification	0.083	0.048	0.037	1.741	0.082	1.727
Nationalism	0.137***	0.026	0.139	5.302	0.000	2.610
Fear	−0.014	0.036	−0.007	−0.395	0.693	1.143
Efficacy	0.306***	0.024	0.335	12.541	0.000	2.730
Misperception	0.739***	0.063	0.337	11.763	0.000	3.129
SDO dominance	−0.004	0.032	−0.003	−0.140	0.889	1.991
SDO anti-egalitarianism	0.030	0.033	0.020	0.909	0.364	1.920
RWA aggression	−0.008	0.023	−0.008	−0.363	0.717	1.753
RWA conventionalism	−0.019	0.017	−0.021	−1.082	0.279	1.405
RWA submission	0.121***	0.024	0.116	5.069	0.000	2.010
Collective narcissism	0.081**	0.027	0.078	2.971	0.003	2.622
Peaceful negotiation						
Constant	7.379***	0.627	—	11.775	0.000	—
Age	−0.022***	0.006	−0.117	−3.539	0.000	1.085
Gender	−0.401***	0.124	−0.106	−3.222	0.001	1.070
Education	0.028	0.078	0.012	0.362	0.717	1.048
Identification	0.177	0.100	0.074	1.765	0.078	1.727
Nationalism	−0.067	0.055	−0.063	−1.227	0.220	2.610
Fear	0.345***	0.076	0.155	4.549	0.000	1.143
Efficacy	−0.036	0.051	−0.037	−0.708	0.479	2.730
Misperception	−0.096	0.132	−0.041	−0.729	0.466	3.129
SDO dominance	−0.076	0.067	−0.050	−1.122	0.262	1.991
SDO anti-egalitarianism	−0.184**	0.069	−0.119	−2.692	0.007	1.920
RWA aggression	−0.080	0.048	−0.071	−1.682	0.093	1.753
RWA conventionalism	0.024	0.037	0.025	0.657	0.512	1.405
RWA submission	−0.183***	0.050	−0.165	−3.645	0.000	2.010
Collective narcissism	−0.004	0.058	−0.004	−0.077	0.939	2.622

Note: Regression analysis indicated that the predictor variables explained a significant portion of the variance in support for war ($R^2 = 0.79$) and peaceful negotiation ($R^2 = 0.17$).

Abbreviations: *B*, unstandardized coefficient beta; *b*, standardized coefficient beta; *SE*, standard error; *VIF*, variance inflation factor.

*$p \leq 0.05$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.001$.

positive association between RWA-submission and support for the war and a negative association with support for peace. However, there was no detectable role for RWA-conventionalism. Just as in Study 1, we observed that RWA-aggression lacked any association with support for the war, but had a marginal negative association with support for peace. Importantly, it is worth mentioning that when removing control variables, the effects of all three facets of RWA significantly predicted support for war and even greater effects emerged for peaceful negotiations.

As in Study 2, an aggregated measure of SDO did not display any association with support for the war. However, it was negatively associated with support for peaceful negotiations. When we disaggregate by type of SDO, we find, just as in Study 2, that neither facet of SDO was associated with support for war among the Russian public. When it came to support for peace, however, we found negative associations with the anti-egalitarianism facet of SDO, but no association with the dominance facet.

Sensitivity analyses. To address the possibility that our findings are driven by outliers, in line with Leys et al. (2013)'s recommendations, we re-estimated our models removing respondents who had values on any variable in analysis more than 2.5 absolute deviations from the median. This resulted in 0 participants being removed from Study 1, 16 being removed from Study 2 and 231 from Study 3. The most common outliers in Study 3 were unusually low on nationalism, efficacy and support for peaceful negotiations. Removing outliers did not change any substantive results for our predictors of interest. However, we note that in Study 3, removing outliers resulted in the effect of identification on support for war becoming significant (see Tables S11–S14).

5.4 | Discussion

Taken together, once we added controls for factors that confound the relationships between RWA and SDO and support for the war, a concrete picture emerged. Across studies, the most robust association between RWA and support for the war (and opposition to peace) came from its submission facet, not its conventionalism or aggression facets. The dominance facet of SDO remained largely unassociated with attitudes towards the war, but anti-egalitarianism played a role in fostering opposition to peace now that the war had started. Additionally, factors such as Russian identification, nationalism, group efficacy, war-related misperceptions and collective narcissism also contributed to war support.

6 | General Discussion

In this paper, we took up the call to understand the basis for Russian attitudes towards the war in Ukraine. Using three independent and nationally representative surveys of the Russian public, we examined the roles of multiple psychological constructs including two of the most researched sociopolitical ideologies in the literature—RWA and SDO—in shaping public opinion on both the war and the possibility of peaceful negotiations.

Across three studies, our findings were largely consistent. Both RWA and SDO shaped support for the war, albeit in different ways. RWA, and authoritarian submission, in particular, was associated both with support for the war and opposition to peaceful negotiations. While the authoritarian aggression and conventionalism facets of RWA displayed positive bivariate associations with war support and peace opposition, they did not tend to explain unique variations in attitudes towards the war above and beyond authoritarian submission. SDO, and in particular its anti-egalitarianism facet, did not explain unique variation in support for the war, but had a negative association with support for peaceful negotiations.

On the one hand, the fact that a strong bivariate association between RWA-Aggression and war support disappears in multivariate analysis is surprising. It easily follows that a variable indexing appetite for punishing norm violators would lead people to support the war, one of the most punishing acts a nation can take against another. It could be that those with such an appetite are also the type who submit to their leaders. The finding

that authoritarian submission has the most consistent role in explaining war support dovetails with the finding that those high in RWA supported the War on Terror, in part, because they displayed elevated support for President Bush (Cohrs et al. 2005b). In a similar vein, Russians high in authoritarian submission may display their loyalty to Vladimir Putin through agreeing with his aims (Altemeyer 1981, 1988, 2007), whatever they may be. Thus, Russians seem to support the war, not because of some inherent aggressive tendencies, but because they abide by their leader's political goals. This is not the only possible takeaway. One could also argue that supporters of the war came to display enhanced support for their leader (Lambert et al. 2010). Cross-sectional data alone, unfortunately, cannot distinguish between these two explanations. Future work would benefit from using longitudinal data.

The more muted pattern for SDO aligns with and extends previous findings from American samples during the War on Terror. In the American samples, high SDO essentially performed a negative function. It did not, by itself, come with increased support for the war. Rather, SDO comes with reduced consideration of human costs that would lead one to oppose the war. Our samples show that SDO, particularly anti-egalitarianism, plays a similar negative role. This may go to the roots of the anti-egalitarianism facet itself. This facet does not capture the desire to subjugate others, but reluctance to change a hierarchical status quo once it is in place. In essence, this tendency manifests par excellence in war. Anti-egalitarianism may not predispose someone to support a war. However, the prospect of peaceful negotiations could involve concessions that reduce Russia's current power (Ho et al. 2012, 2015; Jost and Thompson 2000), and this is unacceptable to someone high in anti-egalitarianism.

More intriguing, though, is the lack of evidence that the dominance facet has any bearing on Russians' attitudes. The path from a desire for enhancing hierarchy to support for subjugating a smaller country is intuitive. However, there might be a few things at play. First, it could be that the war is not thought of, primarily, as a quest for dominance. Even though propaganda might portray Ukrainians as weak, corrupted and small (Kuzio 2016, 2019), the war itself might be portrayed more as a desire for national enhancement or Russia defending itself against NATO (Putin 2005). A second possibility is that the dominance facet among subordinate groups does not necessarily correspond to a desire for ingroup dominance (Jost and Thompson 2000). Rather, it could entrench support for an advantaged group's dominance. It may be that those high in the dominance facet who see Russia as dominant internationally might be ardent supporters of the war, but they are countervailed by others who see Western powers as dominant internationally, who would oppose the war. A third possibility is that until recently, Russians largely saw Ukrainians as friendly peers (Bessudov 2016; Levada 2019). As a result, those high in dominance might still not think of Ukrainians as a natural target for subjugation. Future work would do well to distinguish between these possibilities.

Importantly, our work demonstrates that factors such as Russian identification, nationalism, group efficacy, war-related misperceptions and collective narcissism also contribute to support for the war. These findings are consistent with existing literature (e.g., Gulevich and Osin 2023; Phillips et al. 2024). Similarly, fear played a role in increasing support for peaceful negotiations,

highlighting the impact of emotions in driving antiwar actions (Grigoryan et al. 2024).

There are a number of limitations to our analyses. First, while our surveys capture meaningful variation in Russian public opinion on the war, it is likely that observed support for the war is higher than actual support. Voicing opposition to the war is a punishable felony in Russia, and while responses were anonymous, some respondents likely falsified their preferences for their own safety. While this may not change observed associations between variables to a large (but unknown) extent, the effect is likely non-zero. Second, our surveys are cross-sectional, meaning that we cannot isolate the causal effects or causal priority of RWA and SDO. It is quite possible that the threat of war might be driving up authoritarianism (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005) and SDO (Morrison and Ybarra 2008). Third, our surveys do not test possible mechanisms by which RWA or SDO lead to support for the war. One possible mechanism is that RWA predisposes people to believe misperceptions supplied by elite propaganda, and these misperceptions, in turn, enable war support (Phillips et al. 2024). To fully examine this possibility, future work, provided it is safe to do so, should experimentally test the role of elite messaging in affecting RWA's relationship with war support. By contrast, SDO might lack effects because elite messaging has not successfully portrayed Ukrainians as a subordinate group among most Russian people. Having established the nuanced nature of the direct effects in the current study, future research on the mechanisms underlying them would be fruitful.

We also believe these findings are only a first step in understanding the aetiology of support for the war. While our focus is on psychological variables, there is necessarily an interaction between elite discourse and psychological predispositions. Predispositions do not necessarily lead to specific political attitudes in a vacuum. Rather, people are exposed to elite discourse that links predispositions and attitudes (Converse 2006; Johnston, Lavine, and Federico 2011). Our studies only tap three time periods and are therefore limited in how much they can assess the role of discourse. Future work linking more frequent survey data with messaging from official and popular unofficial sources can shed light on this interplay.

6.1 | Conclusion

Our findings, across three nationally representative samples of the Russian public, suggest a number of worthy observations. First, even though the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a clear act of aggression against an outgroup, authoritarian aggression does not appear to drive support for the invasion. Instead, submission to established authorities, with the most clear authority in Russia being Vladimir Putin, has the most explanatory power. Such a finding underscores the utility of separating facets of RWA and SDO when examining their effects on political and social attitudes. Second, even though the invasion of Ukraine could be viewed as an act of dominance on the part of a larger power against a smaller country, it also does not drive much support for war. Instead, in the same way that people high in anti-egalitarianism might not support the KKK but oppose affirmative action, those high in anti-

egalitarianism might not have been particularly supportive of the war, but reluctant to support peace now that war is the status quo.

Endnotes

[1] As a general note, we word the invasion as 'special military operation' because it is illegal in Russia to call the invasion of Ukraine a war or an invasion (Reuters 2022). We do not support the use of such euphemisms as a means to shield from the atrocities of the invasion, but use these words to protect those fielding and taking the survey.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.