

# Attitudes and Emotional Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine War among the Israeli Lay Public

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## Abstract

The role of public attitudes toward war in shaping foreign policy is crucial. We explored the association between perceived justifiability of Russia's actions, attitudes toward Israel's policy during the Russia-Ukraine War, and emotional reactions among the Israeli lay public. A cross-sectional study was conducted among 723 participants during one week of the war (13-20 March 2022). Participants completed measures of emotional reactions, perceived justifiability, attitudes toward Israel's policy, and socio-demographics. Emotional reactions were relatively high, perceived justifiability low, and supportive attitudes toward Israel's policy were moderate. Higher emotional reactions were noted among females, older participants, and those not born in Israel, along with lower perceived justifiability and greater support for Israel's policy. Attitudes significantly mediated the relationship between perceived justifiability and emotional reactions. Although the Israeli public is not directly involved, the war has elicited emotional reactions in them. Addressing these negative emotional responses is essential in informing Israel's policy-making.

## Keywords

Russia-Ukraine War, Lay Public, Emotional Reactions, Attitudes, Israel

## 1. Introduction

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 represented a major escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that began in 2014, making it the largest military conflict in Europe since World War II. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine,

which began after Ukraine, declared independence in 1991, intensified notably in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and the emergence of pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine. Geopolitically, the conflict reflects Russia's strategic interests and Ukraine's pursuit of closer ties with the EU and NATO (Csepregi, 2023). Key events leading to the 2022 invasion include ongoing clashes, diplomatic efforts, and international sanctions on Russia. This war has attracted significant international attention and has had far-reaching implications across various spheres, including the world economy, geopolitics, and food security (Pereira et al., 2022). The global stock markets have experienced disruptions of varying degrees (Abbassi et al., 2023a; Boubaker et al., 2022; Deng et al., 2022; Kumari et al., 2023), and specific industries and firms have faced adverse consequences (Abbassi et al., 2023b). Foreign exchange markets (Chortane & Pandey, 2022; Pandey et al., 2023) and the tourism sector (Pandey & Kumar, 2023) have also been significantly impacted. Thus, a variety of nations voted in favor of condemning Russia's invasion, with Israel among them. The Israeli government decided to support the resolution at the UN General Assembly condemning Russian aggression (Shavit et al., 2022).

Israel-Russia relations refer to the bilateral ties between the State of Israel and the Russian Federation. Israel is represented in Russia via an embassy in Moscow, and Russia is represented in Israel via an embassy in Tel Aviv and a consulate in Haifa. These relations have evolved over time, encompassing various aspects such as political, military, and economic cooperation, as well as cultural exchanges<sup>1</sup>. For their part, Israel-Ukraine relations refer to the bilateral ties between the State of Israel and Ukraine. Israel has an embassy in Kyiv. Ukraine has an embassy in Tel Aviv and a consulate-general in Haifa. In recent years, the geopolitical landscape has been significantly influenced by the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 marked a critical escalation of this conflict, catapulting it into the global spotlight and making it the largest military confrontation in Europe since World War II. This war has not only had profound implications on the regions directly involved, but has also reverberated across the international community, impacting various spheres including the world economy, geopolitics, and food security (Pereira et al., 2022). Furthermore, the conflict has sparked intense debates and discussions in nations around the world, including Israel, which has actively engaged in diplomatic efforts to address the crisis (Csepregi, 2023).

However, Israeli citizens' emotional reactions, attitudes, and perceptions of the justifiability of Russia's Ukraine invasion, as well as their perceptions of its consequences, have remained unexplored despite Israel's relationship with both Russia and Ukraine. Investigating these matters is significant given the recognition of armed conflicts as public health crises that necessitate international collaboration and preparedness to address the health demands of affected popula-

<sup>1</sup>The relationship between the two countries has undergone notable developments and challenges, reflecting the complex dynamics in the Middle East and wider international context (Zisserman-Brodsky, 2022).

tions (Cassar et al., 2021). Moreover, during the war, a study in which nearly one million social media posts from 108 countries were analyzed revealed a notable geographical discrepancy between government positions and public sentiment. However, Israel was not included in this study (Ngo et al., 2022). Investigating the emotional reactions and attitudes of Israeli citizens holds significant importance in comprehending the broader implications of the conflict. By examining the sentiments and perspectives of the Israeli populace, it is possible to gain invaluable insights into the multifaceted dimensions of the ongoing crisis. Understanding how Israeli citizens perceive and respond to the conflict not only sheds light on the immediate impact on their daily lives but also offers crucial perspectives on the broader geopolitical landscape. These insights are instrumental in informing public health strategies, shaping foreign policy decisions, and fostering societal resilience amidst the complexities of the conflict. Consequently, studying Israeli citizens' emotional reactions, attitudes, and perceived justifiability—how justified they consider the actions of the involved parties—of the invasion offers insights into the broader implications of the war for public health, foreign policy, and daily life within Israeli society. In a comparative analysis involving participants from Germany ( $n = 296$ ), Great Britain ( $n = 297$ ), Poland ( $n = 291$ ), and the United States ( $n = 297$ ), it was found that emotional responses to the war were linked with perceived justifiability. Specifically, participants who experienced higher levels of anxiety and anger tended to view the Russian action as less justified and advocated for stronger measures against Russia (Moshagen & Hilbig, 2022). Such research highlights the relevance of examining Israeli citizens' emotional reactions, attitudes, and perceived justifiability of the invasion in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the broader impact and dynamics of the Russia-Ukraine War.

Overall, people are generally ambivalent about war. For some, war represents all that is disturbing and evil in human nature. For others, war is a means of defending a country and attaining freedom, and it is a necessary expression of a nation's power (Aquino et al., 2007). A variety of theories has been utilized in an attempt to answer the question of how people react to war and how they express their support/lack of support for a war. These theories include cognitive theories, which emphasize self-regulatory mechanisms (Bandura, 2017); socio-biological models (Ghiglieri, 1999); situational explanations such as role expectations and life conditions (Milgram, 1974); and overall beliefs and perceptions about the world (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003). In the current study, we relied on the socio-cognitive model (Bandura, 1991) to examine the Israeli lay public's reactions to various actions taken by Russia during its invasion of Ukraine. The underlying rationale for our reliance on the socio-cognitive model is that it emphasizes people's need to resolve two different assumptions regarding a war: the need to maintain a favorable view of the self and the desire to justify/not justify actions that violate socialized self-sanctions against harming others. These assumptions, which include (among others) perceived justifiability and attitudes toward war, may be associated with emotional reactions to the war (Aquino et al., 2007). In

addition, extensive research has consistently revealed that individuals tend to advocate passionately for more severe punishments when they perceive a heightened degree of harm and experience intense moral outrage. This fervor for retributive justice (e.g. Bastian et al., 2013; Darley & Pittman, 2003) and the pursuit of deterrence for both specific and general prevention purposes significantly shape individuals' attitudes toward punitive measures and emotional responses (Twardawski et al., 2020). Accordingly, we hypothesized that perceived justifiability of Russia's actions and attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war would be positively associated with emotional reactions among the Israeli public (H1). In addition, we hypothesized that perceived justifiability of Russia's actions and attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war would predict emotional reactions among the Israeli public (H2).

Bandura's (1991) socio-cognitive model provides a valuable framework for understanding the influence of cognitive processes and social factors on individuals' reactions and attitudes in various contexts. Building upon this theoretical foundation, the aim of our study was to examine the association between perceived justifiability of Russia's actions, attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war, and emotional reactions to the Russia-Ukraine War among the Israeli lay public. By exploring these interconnected factors, we aimed to shed light on how individuals' beliefs about the justifiability of Russia's actions and their attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war contributed to their emotional responses in the context of the ongoing conflict. This investigation aligns with Bandura's (1991) model by recognizing the role of cognitive evaluations, social influences, and emotional reactions in shaping individuals' responses to geopolitical events.

In addition, drawing upon the socio-cognitive model (Bandura, 1991) in the current study, we posit that attitudes have the potential to mediate the association between perceived justifiability on the one hand and emotional reactions to the war on the other. In a similar way, in a recent study whose aim was to investigate how emotions, threat perceptions, and past violence influence foreign policy attitudes, it was found that exposure to violence did not have a direct effect on foreign policy attitudes, but increased hardline attitudes indirectly, through increased anger and threat (Kupatadze & Zeitzoff, 2021). Accordingly, we hypothesized that attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war would mediate the association between perceived justifiability of Russia's actions and emotional reactions (H3).

By drawing on the theoretical foundations outlined earlier, our study seeks to bridge a notable gap in the literature by investigating the influence of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the emotional responses, attitudes, and viewpoints of the Israeli populace. By adopting this approach, we not only align our research with established theoretical frameworks but also tailor our investigation to the unique context of how the Russia-Ukraine conflict shapes perceptions within Israeli society.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participant Selection Criteria

Before initiating the study, clear criteria were established for selecting participants. A cross-sectional survey-based study was designed in March 2022 in response to the emerging military conflict in Ukraine. Authorization was obtained from XXX University's Ethics Committee (approval No. 032203) prior to commencing the study. Participants were recruited via a web-based questionnaire survey conducted through the Qualtrics online platform (<https://www.qualtrics.com/>), with recruitment efforts primarily focused on social media platforms such as Facebook. The introductory page of the questionnaire explicitly stated that proceeding to the questionnaire would signify consent to participate, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation.

### 2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study included 747 Israelis who visited the online survey between March 13 and March 20, 2022, coinciding with the ongoing conflict. Inclusion criteria comprised individuals aged 18 years and above who were fluent in Hebrew. Exclusion criteria consisted of minors (under the age of 18), for whom parental consent would have been necessary ( $n = 14$ ), and participants who did not complete the entire questionnaire ( $n = 10$ ).

### 2.3. Sample Size Determination

To ensure statistical robustness, a minimum sample size of 92 participants was determined based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% sampling error. Additionally, G\*Power 3 (Faul, 2007, 2009) was utilized to calculate the required sample size for a multiple regression analysis with up to five predictors. Assuming a moderate-low effect size ( $f^2 = 0.05$ ), a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.01$ , and a power of 0.99, the analysis indicated that a sample size of  $n = 678$  participants would suffice to meet these criteria.

### 2.4. Participant Demographics

The study ultimately included 723 participants, predominantly female (70.7%), with a mean age of approximately 45 years (range 18 - 81) and an average education level of around 16 years (range 8 - 31). Most participants were married (65.7%), with an average of about two children, and the majority were born in Israel (see **Table 1**).

### 2.5. Measures

We used the same measures that were used in a previous study that explored emotional reactions, perceived justifiability, willingness to host refugees, and the desired severity of sanctions against Russia. The aforementioned study was conducted in four countries: Germany, the UK, Poland, and the United States (Moshagen & Hilbig, 2022).

**Table 1.** Participants' characteristics (n = 723).

<b>Sociodemographic characteristics</b>	
<b>Gender (%)</b>	
Male	212 (29.3)
Female	511 (70.7)
Mean age (SD), range	45.84 (14.55), 18 - 81
Mean number of years of education (SD), range	16.98 (3.37), 8 - 31
<b>Marital status (%)</b>	
Married	475 (65.7)
Divorced	58 (8.0)
Widowed	10 (1.4)
Single	158 (21.8)
Other	22 (3.1)
Mean number of children (SD), range	2.13 (1.37), 0 - 9
<b>Place of birth</b>	
Israel	596 (82.4)
Former Soviet Union (FSU)	66 (9.2)
Other countries	61 (8.4)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Jewish	585 (80.9)
Arab	138 (19.1)

**Emotional reactions** were assessed via different reactions such as anger (e.g. "I feel angry about what's going on in Ukraine", based on Spielberger (1999)); perceived threat ("I feel insecure because of what is happening in Ukraine"); worry ("I'm worried about what's going on in Ukraine"); and three items that examined empathy (e.g. "I try to imagine what the people of Ukraine are going through during this period", based on Čehajić et al. (2009)). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A mean score was calculated, with a higher score indicating more positive levels of emotional reactions (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

**Perceived justifiability of Russia's actions:** This was assessed with eight items measuring the extent to which participants felt that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was justified. Items included reasons (i.e. for the invasion of Ukraine) that appeared in the Russian Declaration of War and other reasons mentioned in different sources (e.g. "The Russian invasion of Ukraine is justified because the world is a place of relentless struggle for power and resources") (Moshagen &

Hilbig, 2022). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). A mean score was calculated, with a higher score indicating higher levels of perceived non-justifiability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

Attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war were assessed with five items (e.g. "My country needs to send weapons to Ukraine") (Moshagen & Hilbig, 2022). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). A mean score was calculated, with a higher score indicating higher levels of supportive attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.79$ ).

Sociodemographic variables included gender, age, years of education, marital status (married/divorced/widowed/single/other), number of children, place of birth (Israel/Former Soviet Union (FSU)/other countries).

## 2.6. Statistical Analyses

Data were analyzed using SPSS ver. 24. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the participants' demographic characteristics and the research variables. Pearson correlations were calculated to assess the associations between the research variables. The strength of correlation was as follows: 0 - 0.20, weak; 0.21 - 0.50, moderate; 0.51 - 0.80, good; and 0.81 - 1.00, excellent. A multiple hierarchical regression was calculated, with emotional reactions to the Russia-Ukraine War as the dependent variable. Gender (1-male, 2-female), age, and place of birth were entered in the first step, and perceived justifiability of Russia's actions and attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war in the second. The moderated mediation model was analyzed by Hayes' PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017). We used the bootstrapping method to test the significance of the effects. This method produced 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals of these effects from 1000 re-samples of the data. Confidence intervals that do not include zero indicate that effects are significant at  $p = 0.05$ .

## 3. Results

### Emotional Reactions

**Table 2** presents the percentages of participants who did or did not agree with the designated emotional reaction, together with the means and standard deviations for each item. As shown in **Table 2**, participants tended to agree with the statements that reflected empathy toward the Ukrainian people. Yet participants agreed to a lesser extent with the items regarding feeling insecure and overwhelmed.

**Table 3** presents the percentages of participants who did or did not view Russia's actions as justifiable, together with the means and standard deviations for each item. As can be seen, there was a wide consensus among participants, as more than 90% of them had strong views that Russia's attacks were unjustified.

**Table 2.** Emotional reactions to Russia-Ukraine war (n = 723).

Items	Mean	SD	Response	Response
			categories 1 + 2	categories 3 + 4 + 5
I feel angry about what's going on in Ukraine.	4.02	1.08	8.8%	91.2%
I'm worried about what's going on in Ukraine.	4.19	0.96	4.2%	95.8%
I feel insecure because of what is happening in Ukraine.	2.93	1.18	40.2%	59.8%
I try to imagine what the people in Ukraine are going through during this period.	3.95	1.01	7.5%	92.5%
I can sympathize with what the people of Ukraine are going through during this period.	3.64	1.13	16.8%	83.2%
I am emotionally overwhelmed by what is happening to the people in Ukraine.	3.00	1.19	37.8%	62.2%

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree; SD = Standard Deviation.

**Table 3.** Perceived justifiability of Russia's actions (n = 723).

<i>The Russian invasion of Ukraine is justified because...</i>	Mean	SD	Response	Response
			categories 1 + 2 + 3	categories 4 + 5
The world is just a merciless struggle for power and resources.	4.71	0.68	4.9%	95.1%
Russia was threatened and this is a legitimate form of self-protection.	4.66	0.67	6.2%	93.8%
Russia was provoked and had to take action.	4.66	0.69	6.1%	93.9%
Ukraine is simply the inferior state.	4.90	0.34	0.5%	99.5%
It serves to balance power in the world.	4.80	0.52	2.7%	97.3%
It gives Russia the respect it deserves.	4.86	0.41	1.1%	98.9%
Russia has to protect Russian people living in Ukraine.	4.73	0.59	3.7%	96.3%
Ukrainian territory was historically part of Russia.	4.69	0.62	3.8%	96.2%

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree; SD = Standard Deviation.

**Table 4** presents the percentages of participants who did or did not agree with Israel's policy during the war, together with the means and standard deviations for each item. As can be seen, participants were hesitant toward the idea of Israel "taking action" in the conflict, as the mean of the items was slightly below the middle of the scale, and the majority of participants disagreed with the statements. The only exception was the last item (welcoming of refugees), with which the majority of participants agreed.



**Table 4.** Attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war (n = 723).

Items	Mean	SD	Response	Response
			categories 1 + 2	categories 3 + 4 + 5
My own and other countries should send military aid to support Ukraine.	2.18	1.00	71.8%	28.2%
My country should send weapons to Ukraine.	2.55	1.11	50.3%	49.7%
My country should downgrade diplomatic relations with Russia.	2.31	1.04	70%	30%
My country should economically sanction Russia, even when this hurts the economy of my own country.	2.79	1.17	43.1%	56.9%
My country should welcome Ukrainian refugees.	3.95	1.12	10.2%	89.8%

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree; SD = Standard Deviation.

**Table 5** summarizes the means, SDs, and correlates of the study's variables. As can be seen, the mean for the emotional reactions score was 3.62 (SD = 0.84), out of a range of 1 - 5, meaning the emotional reactions score was relatively high. The mean score of the perceived justifiability of Russia's actions was relatively low, and the mean of attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war was moderate. In addition, in support of Hypothesis 1, positive associations were found between all the study variables: 1) perceived justifiability of Russia's actions, 2) attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war, and 3) emotional reactions. Emotional reactions were significantly and positively associated with perceived justifiability and attitudes toward Israel's policy ( $r = 0.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and  $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , respectively). Additionally, a strong significant positive association was found between perceived justifiability and attitudes toward Israel's policy ( $r = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Namely, the less the participants found the war justifiable and the more they were supportive of Israel's policy during the war, the higher they were toward the Ukrainian people.

Further analysis showed that emotional reactions were higher among female participants (mean = 3.68; SD = 0.81) than among male participants (mean = 3.46, SD = 0.87),  $t(711) = 3.17$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ; higher among married participants (mean = 3.69, SD = 0.82) than non-married ones (mean = 3.49, SD = 0.85),  $t(713) = 3.03$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ; and lower for Israeli-born participants (mean = 3.55, SD = 0.82) than participants born in other countries (mean = 3.95, SD = 0.80),  $t(713) = 4.92$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The correlation between age and emotional reactions was significant ( $r = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as was the correlation between number of children and emotional reactions ( $r = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, the correlation between years of education and emotional reactions was also found to be significant ( $r = 0.10$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In light of these findings, we calculated analyses while controlling for gender, age, and place of birth (age was highly interrelated with marital status  $r = 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , number of children  $r = 0.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and

years of education  $r = 0.24, p < 0.001$ ).

*Regression analysis for identifying emotional reactions to the Russia-Ukraine War* (Hypothesis 2). A multiple hierarchical regression was calculated for emotional reactions, with gender, age, place of birth, perceived justifiability of Russia's actions, and attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war as predictors.

In support of Hypothesis 2, the results in **Table 6** reveal significant regression models, with 33% of the variance in emotional reactions being explained in the final model. In the first step, gender, age, and place of birth explained 10% of the variance in emotional reactions. In the second step, the study variables (perceived justifiability of Russia's actions, attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war) added 23% to the explained variance beyond the demographic variables. Emotional reactions were higher for female participants, older participants, and those not born in Israel, with lower perceived justifiability of Russia's actions and higher supportive attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war.

As indicated in **Figure 1**, the direct effect of perceived justifiability on attitudes (Path A) was positively significant [ $B = 0.56, t(715) = 8.93, SE = 0.06, p < 0.001$ ]. The effect of attitudes on emotional reactions (Path B) was also positively significant [ $B = 0.38, t(714) = 10.94, SE = 0.35, p < 0.001$ ], as was the effect of perceived justifiability on emotional reactions (Path C) [ $B = 0.66, t(715) = 10.46, SE = 0.06, p < 0.001$ ]. In support of Hypothesis 3, attitudes significantly mediated the relationship between perceived justifiability and emotional reactions (indirect effect = 0.21, 95% LLCI = 0.14, 95% ULCI = 0.30).

**Table 5.** Correlates between the study variables ( $n = 723$ ).

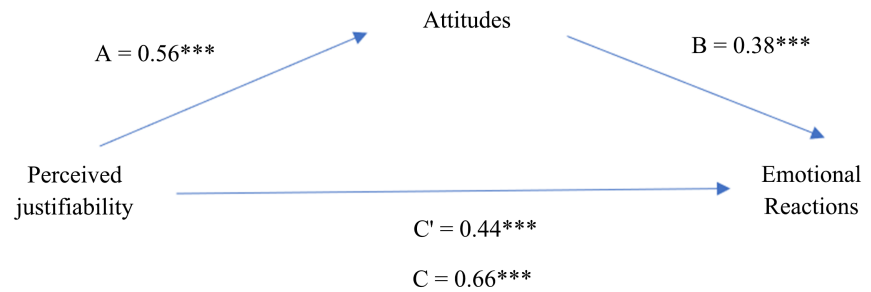
Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Emotional reactions to the war	3.62	0.84	-		
2. Perceived justifiability of Russia's actions	4.74	0.46	0.36***	-	
3. Attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war	2.76	0.81	0.45***	0.31***	-

SD = Standard Deviation; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

**Table 6.** Regression analysis for emotional reactions to the war ( $n = 665$ ).

	B	$\beta$ SE	$\beta$	$t$	R <sup>2</sup>	F model
<b>Step 1</b>						
Gender	0.23	0.06	0.12	3.45**		
Age	0.01	0.00	0.24	6.63***	0.10	25.62***
Place of birth	0.33	0.08	0.15	4.17***		
<b>Step 2</b>						
Gender	0.13	0.05	0.07	2.21*		
Age	0.01	0.00	0.25	7.95***		
Place of birth	0.26	0.07	0.12	3.76***	0.33	66.53***
Perceived justifiability	0.42	0.06	0.22	6.48***		
Attitudes	0.37	0.03	0.36	10.83***		

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.005$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



**Figure 1.** Indirect effect of perceived justifiability on emotional reactions through attitudes. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

## 4. Discussion

In this study, we aimed to explore the association between perceived justifiability of Russia's actions, attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war, and emotional reactions to the Russia-Ukraine War among the Israeli lay public during this war.

The results showed that perceived justifiability of Russia's actions and attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war were positively associated with emotional reactions. That is, the less the participants found the war justifiable and the more they were supportive toward Israel's policy during the war, the higher their sympathetic reactions to the Ukrainian people. Additionally, the results indicated that sympathetic reactions were higher for female participants, older participants, and those not born in Israel, with lower perceived justifiability of Russia's actions and higher supportive attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war. Finally, the results suggest that attitudes significantly mediated the relationship between perceived justifiability and emotional reactions, thus corroborating the three hypotheses.

### 4.1. Emotional Reactions and Empathy

In this study, participants reported relatively high levels of worry, anger, and feelings of insecurity as well as empathy toward the people in Ukraine. This finding stands in line with a study conducted in Germany, the UK, Poland, and the United States, which revealed similar emotional reactions to the war among the lay public (Moshagen & Hilbig, 2022). Indeed, the tragedy of modern war, as is evident in the Russia-Ukraine War, is that most of those killed are civilians (Aquino et al., 2007). In Israel, the media presents scenes of this war almost on a daily basis. In a similar way, among Israeli adults, frequency of news consumption increased significantly during the 2014 Gaza war compared with the pre-war period, and this consumption was associated with anxiety, hyperarousal, and sleeping disorders (Bodas et al., 2015). Exposure to these harsh scenes, depicting civilians who have become part of the war, out of no choice of their own, may evoke negative emotional reactions (e.g. worry, insecurity) alongside empathy. It may also be that because Israel is a country with ongoing conflicts (e.g. the Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the most prolonged historical conflicts, having

gone on for more than fifty years; Bickerton & Klausner, 2018) and with a complicated security situation, Israeli citizens have empathy for those who are under attack.

#### 4.2. Perceptions of the Russian Invasion and Support for Action

The current study showed that participants found that almost none of the reasons for the Russian invasion of Ukraine were justified (the percentage of participants who found the invasion to be justified was negligible). Similar findings also emerged in the cross-national study of Moshagen and Hilbig (2022). Furthermore, in an article that was based on representative sample surveys in the United States and the UK among the lay public, it was found that support for military action was lower when the civilian death toll (projected or actual) was higher (Johns & Davies, 2019). Bandura et al. (1996) claimed that moral engagement is associated with not justifying aggression. Furthermore, it has been claimed that when people can successfully justify aggression, there are theoretical reasons to believe that their self-conception is less likely to be threatened, even if they express support for activities that can harm or even kill other people (Aquino et al., 2007). Our finding supports this notion given that most participants did not find Russia's actions justifiable and reported relatively high levels of worry and anger, which may also be a result of an existential threat.

#### 4.3. Complex Decision-Making Process

The decision-making process surrounding Israel's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is characterized by its complexity. Despite participants' emotional reactions, as well as their not finding the Russian invasion of Ukraine to have been justified, most participants preferred that Israel not take action in the form of military aid to support Ukraine. They also did not wish to see Israel downgrade its diplomatic relations with Russia or impose economic sanctions against Russia. It is important to note that, on the basis of profound existential concerns, one of Israel's main goals is to maintain good relations with Russia and not jeopardize its ability to continue its military operations in Syria and Iraq (i.e. which are enabled to some extent by Russia) (Bobkin, 2022; Shavit et al., 2022). Indeed, our findings may reflect Israelis' fears that the State of Israel could degenerate into a state of war. Israel has been involved in a number of wars and large-scale military operations since its declaration of independence in May 1948 (Kaiser Jr. & Wegner, 2017). Although there have been multiple civilian demonstrations in Israel in support of the Ukrainian people, as well as calls for a more decisive governmental policy, it seems that when it comes to weapons, war, or sanctions against a great power like Russia, the Israeli public prefers that Israel remain less involved. The concept of "loss aversion", as discussed by Kim (2022), may help explain this perspective; namely, the Israeli public may wish to minimize potential losses rather than pursue gains. Additionally, the historical context of Israel's involvement in wars and military operations since its estab-

ishment likely influences the public's preference for limited involvement and a pragmatic perspective on intervention in conflicts taking place with a major power like Russia. The current study's findings highlight the complex dynamics and considerations involved in decision-making processes vis-a-vis war, emphasizing the delicate balance between emotional reactions, national security, geopolitical interests, historical context, and the concept of loss aversion.

#### 4.4. Attitudinal Mediation and Gender Differences

According to our findings, more than half of the participants reported that they agreed that Israel should welcome Ukrainian refugees, similar to findings from another study (Moshagen & Hilbig, 2022). It should be noted that the issue of Ukrainian refugees is a highly contentious one in Israel, as it brings to the fore the need to choose between Israel's Jewish values and its Jewish identity. In other words, on the one hand, there is an urgent need to save the lives of as many people as possible. On the other hand, Israel strives to maintain its Jewish identity. The findings of the present study add to this discourse by presenting an unequivocal position on the issue of Ukrainian refugees and Israel (i.e. participants were very much in favor of bringing Ukrainian refugees to Israel). Indeed, according to the Population and Immigration Authority (2022), between February 24 (the date of the war's outbreak) and March 22, 2022, 15,243 civilians have come to Israel from Ukraine. Various associations and private individuals in Israel have joined to host and donate to the Ukrainian refugees.

In the current study, emotional reactions were higher among female participants than among male participants. Similar findings were found in a cross-sectional study aimed to evaluate anxiety and depressive symptoms among university students in the Czech Republic following the Russian-Ukrainian War (Riad et al., 2022). Indeed, studies have generally revealed that women experience significantly higher levels of worry and fear than do men (McLean & Anderson, 2009). Furthermore, focusing on others is thought to be part and parcel of women's gender role, and this "other-centered" focus is directly related to empathy (Chen et al., 2014), as reflected in the current study.

Another finding of the current study is that attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war significantly mediated the relationship between perceived justifiability and emotional reactions. This finding suggests that attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war played an important role in influencing the relationship between people's perceptions about whether the war was justifiable and their emotional reactions to it. Given that, to the best of our knowledge, attitudes toward government policy as a mediator of the relationship between perceived justifiability of an invading country's actions and emotional reactions have not previously been examined, more studies are needed to fully understand these pathways.

#### 4.5. Summary of Contributions to Existing Literature

The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by providing em-

pirical evidence of the association between perceived justifiability of Russia's actions, attitudes toward Israel's policy during the war, and emotional reactions among the Israeli lay public during the Russia-Ukraine War. Our study expands on previous research by examining these relationships in the context of a conflict that indirectly involves Israel. Additionally, we integrated relevant theories, such as Bandura's socio-cognitive model, to enrich the theoretical foundations of our study. Furthermore, the use of advanced statistical techniques, including regression analyses and mediation analysis, enhances the methodological rigor and quality of our findings.

#### **4.6. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study has several limitations. First, it was based on a convenience sample; as such, we cannot determine whether the information is representative of the whole Israeli population. Yet respondents' demographic background variables were similar to those of the general population in Israel at the time of the study (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Going forward, we would recommend that researchers use probability samples with participants from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Second, we have no information about those individuals who declined to participate in the research. Third, we used a correlational design, which limits our ability to present causal associations. Given the dynamic nature of war in general, as well as its ongoing influence, the Israeli lay public's reactions should be examined at different points in time. We would also recommend that further research focus on Israelis who immigrated from Russia and Ukraine in the years prior to the current war, in order to examine their attitudes and emotional reactions in the face of a war that is taking place between their two countries of origin.

In future studies, we would recommend that researchers explore alternative theoretical frameworks (e.g. Stress and Coping model, Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), employ longitudinal designs to capture temporal dynamics, and use representative samples to enhance generalizability. Additionally, examining the attitudes and emotional reactions of immigrants from countries involved in the conflict would provide valuable insights into the impact of their backgrounds. Finally, future studies would benefit from an examination of additional potential mechanisms to explain attitudes and emotional reactions—for instance, political leanings (whether conservative or liberal), perceptions shaped by the media, or personal experiences with war.

#### **4.7. Practical Insights for Addressing Emotional Reactions in Lay People during War**

While this study has its limitations, it offers valuable insights for scholars interested in understanding the interplay between perceptions, attitudes and emotions among lay people during times of war, even when their country is not directly involved. Our findings indicate that although the Israeli lay public is not directly involved, the war has raised emotional reactions among them. Negative

emotional responses (fear, anger) may motivate behaviors (e.g. welcoming refugees from Ukraine; taking part in demonstrations), and it is important to address and legitimize these feelings. The outcomes of this study bear important lessons that can be applied in practical and policy contexts. First, the identification of emotional reactions among the Israeli lay public during the Russia-Ukraine War highlights the need for ongoing scrutiny and monitoring of psychological outcomes during conflicts, even when a country is not directly involved. Standard practices that include prompt targeted mental health interventions to address and legitimize individuals' negative emotional responses should thus be established. Furthermore, our findings underscore the significance of moral engagement and the perception of aggression as unjustified. Policymakers and practitioners can utilize these insights to foster a culture that discourages aggression and promotes peaceful resolutions in conflict situations. For instance, they could develop educational programs and initiatives aimed at promoting empathy, moral reasoning, and nonviolent conflict resolution strategies. Moreover, our study reveals gender differences in emotional reactions and empathy, indicating the need to address the specific emotional needs of different demographic groups during war. Tailoring mental health interventions and support systems that take into consideration gender dynamics and provide targeted assistance accordingly is thus called for. Finally, the majority of participants expressed support for welcoming Ukrainian refugees to Israel. These findings highlight the need for policymakers and organizations to take public sentiment into account and consider implementing refugee integration programs that address both the local population's support and concerns.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we explored in this study Israeli laypeople's perceived justifiability of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, their emotional reactions to the war, as well as their attitudes toward Israel's involvement. The findings showed that participants experienced high levels of worry, anger, and feelings of insecurity, as well as empathy toward the people of Ukraine, findings that are in line with findings from similar studies conducted in other countries. Participants largely found the Russian invasion of Ukraine to be unjustified, and this lack of justifiability was associated with moral engagement and not justifying aggression. That said, most participants preferred that Israel not take any action in support of Ukraine, possibly due to existential concerns and a desire to maintain good relations with Russia. The study also revealed that female participants reported higher emotional reactions and empathy toward individuals suffering in the conflict than did male participants, a finding that is consistent with previous research. Lastly, the majority of participants supported welcoming Ukrainian refugees to Israel, adding to the ongoing discourse surrounding Israel's identity and values.

## Data Availability Statement

The authors have the research data, which are available upon request.

## Conflicts of Interest

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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