



Armed Violence as a Challenge to National Security: Critical Thinking Perspectives

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to identify the role and skills of critical thinking in the context of hybrid warfare, as well as to explore ways to develop it. The following methods were used in the study: system and complex analysis, structural and functional analysis, historical analysis, analysis and synthesis, critical analysis, conceptual modeling, and generalization of existing knowledge. The findings revealed that conventional approaches to ensuring national security, such as increasing military power, are insufficient in the context of hybrid warfare. It is argued that in order to strengthen Ukraine's national security, it is crucial to adopt new approaches, particularly those focused on developing the intellectual potential of society. The study proves that the purposeful development of citizens' critical thinking can play a key role in increasing Ukraine's resilience to the information and psychological threats posed by hybrid warfare. Critical thinking enables individuals to better identify and resist fakes, propaganda, and manipulation. The practical significance of this study lies in substantiating the strategic importance of critical thinking for Ukraine's national security.

Keywords: information threats, hybrid warfare, social sustainability, information warfare, media ecosystem.

Introduction

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, sparking the most brutal armed conflict in Europe since World War II. This unprecedented act of aggression threatened Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, resulting in millions of

displaced people, countless civilian casualties, and the destruction of entire cities and villages. Traditional security measures proved ineffective in protecting Ukraine from Russia's calculated and brutal assault. Modern warfare poses a significant threat to peace and stability for individual states and the international community. Interstate conflicts, terrorism, civil wars, and other forms of aggression have led to global humanitarian crises, further undermining national security and jeopardizing state sovereignty and the very existence of nations. Therefore, combating and overcoming armed violence is crucial in today's world.

A new comprehensive approach to strengthening Ukraine's national security system during the prolonged war with Russia and its devastating effects is needed. While military strength may protect Ukraine's territory, it alone cannot defeat the aggressor. Modern warfare includes not only weapons but also information manipulation, psychological warfare, and efforts to create social division. Therefore, fortifying the Ukrainian people's spirit, intellect, and ethos is just as crucial as military defense. Cultivating critical thinking among citizens is essential for understanding the complexities of modern warfare and making responsible decisions in the defense of the homeland. Critical thinking allows people to resist information manipulation, debunk enemy propaganda, and evaluate situations objectively. It is a key tool for helping societies overcome threats and make the necessary sacrifices for victory. A systematic development of Ukraine's national security infrastructure is, therefore, essential.

Russia's brutal aggression has, in many ways, fostered Ukrainian national unity and advanced the collective consciousness of the nation. The unprovoked invasion has galvanized the Ukrainian population, strengthening a deep sense of national identity and shared purpose. This common experience of hardship has united citizens across geographical, linguistic, and political divides. Moreover, the war has heightened awareness of the importance of democratic values, human rights, and national sovereignty. However, it is crucial to recognize that while the overall sentiment tends to favor resistance and victory, individual experiences and decisions may vary.

The collective decision to pursue victory is widely supported by Ukrainian society. However, the willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice—risking one's life—is a deeply personal choice. Not everyone may be ready to make such a sacrifice, and individual choices should be duly respected and honored. The collective commitment to Ukraine's future does not diminish the importance of individual autonomy or the right to self-determination. It is essential to examine the relationship between societal decisions and individual choices, as they may not always align perfectly. While Russian aggression has strengthened national unity and awareness among Ukrainians, it is important to acknowledge and respect the diversity of individual experiences and decisions within the broader collective narrative.

The article by V. Humeniuk thoroughly analyzes the experiences of countries that successfully underwent post-war reconstruction, such as Japan, Germany,

and South Korea.¹ The author highlights key factors in their success, including strong political leadership, a clear vision for the future, and a willingness to implement reforms. Special emphasis is placed on the importance of decentralization, transparency, accountability, and capacity building. However, the article does not explore the potential role of critical thinking in analyzing and overcoming the consequences of armed conflict.

In their publication, Postupna and Stepanko examine issues like inefficiency, corruption, lack of coordination, and underfunding in detail.² Yet, they do not address the importance of critically evaluating approaches to reforming the humanitarian sector during armed conflict. Similarly, in Nikitin et al.'s article on the legal and economic foundations of Ukraine's national security, the current state and future prospects are examined in the context of war and economic difficulties. However, the role of critical thinking in developing strategies to strengthen these legal and economic foundations of national security is not discussed.³

Ternavska's study provides a thorough analysis of the war's impact on the legal status of affected individuals and outlines steps the Ukrainian government should take to protect their rights.⁴ The author emphasizes that Ukraine's Constitution and several laws guarantee basic rights for those affected, but the government must ensure adequate humanitarian aid to the displaced, access to healthcare and education, and compensation for war victims. Still, the role of critical thinking in formulating strategies to protect these individuals' rights is not considered.

Lastly, A. Nikitin and coauthors examine the role of law enforcement agencies in securing Ukraine's national and economic stability, looking comprehensively into the issues of corruption, resource shortages, and outdated technologies.⁵

¹ Vasyl Humeniuk, "Foreign Experience of Post-war Transformation of Public Administration and Lessons for Ukraine," *Economy of Ukraine* 65, no. 8 (729) (2022): 34-54, <https://doi.org/10.15407/economyukr.2022.08.034>.

² Olena Postupna and Oleksii Stepanko, "Scientific Research of the Problems of Public Administration in the Humanitarian Sphere of Ukraine: Preliminary Analysis and Generalization," *Bulletin of the National Technical University "KhPI," Series: Actual Problems of Ukrainian Society Development*, no. 1 (2022): 43-49, <https://doi.org/10.20998/2227-6890.2022.1.07>.

³ Anatolii Nikitin, Oleksandr Tarasenko, and Oleksandr Dubenko, "Legal and Economic Foundations of the National Security of Ukraine: State and Prospects," *Baltic Journal of Economic Studies* 8, no. 3 (September 2022): 143-153, <https://doi.org/10.30525/2256-0742/2022-8-3-143-153>.

⁴ Victoria Ternavska, "Legal Status of Persons Affected by the Military Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine (Constitutional and Legal Aspect)," *The Scientific-Practical Law Journal "Almanac of Law"*, no. 13 (2022): 331-339. – in Ukrainian

⁵ Anatolii Nikitin, Oleksii Vdovychenko, and Victor Beschastnyy, "The Role of Law Enforcement Agencies in Ensuring National and Economic Security of Ukraine," *Baltic Journal of Economic Studies* 8, no. 4 (2022): 110-116, <https://doi.org/10.30525/2256-0742/2022-8-4-110-116>.

However, the question of how critical thinking could aid in reforming and modernizing the law enforcement system during armed conflict remains unexamined.

In sum, across these and other analyzed publications, insufficient attention is given to the role of critical thinking in addressing the challenges posed by armed conflict for Ukraine's national security. This study will explore that aspect in greater depth. Its purpose is to determine the role and potential of critical thinking in strengthening Ukrainian national security amid the ongoing war with Russia. The research objectives are as follows: to analyze the impact of Russia's armed aggression on Ukraine's national security; to examine the manifestations and consequences of insufficient critical thinking in Ukrainian society; to substantiate the need for developing critical thinking to foster the consolidation of the Ukrainian nation; and to formulate recommendations for strengthening critical thinking in the education system, media, and civil society.

The relevance of this issue arises from the need to rethink approaches to Ukraine's national security in light of the new realities posed by a prolonged war with the aggressor. Only a society with a high level of critical thinking can unite in the face of threats and make the difficult but necessary decisions required for victory.

This study aims to outline the prospects for developing critical consciousness in Ukraine as a strategic resource for enhancing its security and resilience. The findings will contribute to strengthening the national security system in response to the challenges of modern warfare.

Theoretical Overview

Pries provides a detailed analysis of the role of organized violence in Russia's war against Ukraine.⁶ The author notes that Russia's support for Donbas separatists enabled the war, describing this as organized Russian violence against Ukraine's territorial integrity. The war has also intensified organized violence within Ukraine, manifesting in terrorist attacks, hate crimes, and violence by Russian troops against civilians. This violence poses a significant threat to Ukraine's national security, leading to death, chaos, and destabilization. The author emphasizes the need for state action to address organized violence, highlighting the importance of reforming law enforcement, combating corruption, and tackling organized crime. These measures are crucial for minimizing threats to Ukraine's national security arising from organized violence during the ongoing war.

⁶ Ludger Pries, "Organized Violence as a Never-ending Story? Reflections in Light of the Russian Aggression against Ukraine," *Frontiers in Sociology* 7 (August 2022), 95220, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2022.952209>.

Teferra examines the legal framework for the derogation of human rights during armed conflict, focusing on its application in Ukraine.⁷ The author notes that states at war may temporarily suspend certain human rights for national security purposes. However, these restrictions must be governed by principles of necessity, proportionality, and accountability. In Ukraine, military rule has led to limitations on civil liberties, such as freedom of movement, assembly, and information, which were deemed necessary to counter Russian aggression. The author argues that Ukraine must ensure these restrictions do not violate human rights and that they are lifted as soon as the situation improves. Clear regulations on human rights derogation are vital for national security – they allow the state to manage extreme threats while preventing wartime human rights violations. Ukraine must adhere to international standards in this regard.

Haque and colleagues analyze the extensive humanitarian consequences of the war on Ukraine's civilian population and the impact of this catastrophe on the country's national security.⁸ The authors provide statistics on civilian deaths caused by Russian military actions, including the deliberate shelling of residential areas. Over 12 million Ukrainians have been forcibly displaced, creating a significant refugee crisis. The war has also led to severe shortages of food, medicine, and housing in Ukraine. This situation, marked by chaos, suffering, and social instability, directly threatens national security. The authors urge the international community to increase humanitarian aid to Ukraine to help alleviate the crisis. They also recommend that the Ukrainian government actively distribute humanitarian aid to the affected population as a measure to safeguard national security.

Kurylo and coworkers investigate the negative consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine at the individual level,⁹ focusing on how the conflict has hindered personal development and self-improvement under conditions of war and occupation. The researchers propose pedagogical technologies aimed at fostering readiness for self-development, particularly by enhancing critical thinking skills among young people from temporarily occupied territories.

Namwambah's article thoroughly justifies the exceptional importance of critical thinking in comprehensively analyzing a wide range of national security is-

⁷ Zelalem Mogessie Teferra, "Regulating a 'State of Exception' in Times of War: The Legal Regime Applicable to Derogation in Situations of Armed Conflict," *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2023): 253-284, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcsl/krac032>.

⁸ Ubydul Haque et al., "The Human Toll and Humanitarian Crisis of the Russia-Ukraine War: The First 162 Days," *BMJ Global Health* 7, no. 9 (2022): e009550, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2022-009550>.

⁹ Vitalii Kurylo et al., "Pedagogic Technology of Formation of Readiness for Self-Development in Students from the Occupied Territories and Delimitation Line in the East of Ukraine in Conditions of Temporarily Displaced Higher Education Institutions," *Journal of Educational Sciences & Psychology* 11 (73), no. 2 (2021): 39-53, https://jesp.upg-ploiesti.ro/phocadownload/jurnal_2021_2/06.pdf.

sues and developing effective policies.¹⁰ According to the author, critical thinking facilitates comprehensive exploration, risk assessment, and a clear understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships within complex national security threats. It helps individuals avoid biases, stereotypes, and emotional reactions, thus leading to more informed and effective responses to protect national interests. The author argues, therefore, that national security professionals must develop and apply critical thinking skills.

Baron analyzes the cognitive processes underlying decision-making, particularly in the context of military conflict where human lives and national security are at stake.¹¹ He notes that wartime stress, lack of information, and pressure often lead to poor, emotionally charged decisions, which can have fatal consequences. To counter this, Baron suggests using critical thinking, alternative analysis, and group discussions to improve cognitive decision-making during wartime. Reducing cognitive biases and improving decision-making is essential for national security, and the author emphasizes that improving the decision-making abilities of defense officials is crucial during conflicts.

Collier explores how critical thinking can support analyzing and countering national security threats, especially concerning armed violence.¹² The author argues that critical thinking enables a comprehensive analysis of armed conflicts and potential escalation scenarios. By analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information, one can better understand the motives and goals of conflicting parties. Effective risk assessment, identification of vulnerabilities, and response planning all rely on critical thinking. It strengthens threat analysis and improves decision-making in preventing and responding to armed violence. Therefore, Collier stresses the importance of training national security professionals in critical thinking.

In summary, this review explores a range of sources that analyze various aspects of armed violence as a threat to national security and the role of critical thinking in addressing it. It examines the impact of organized violence and war on Ukraine's security, the legal regulation of human rights limitations during wartime, and the humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine. Additionally, it highlights the importance of critical thinking and rational decision-making in crafting effective responses to national security threats. Collectively, these works offer diverse perspectives on the challenges of overcoming armed violence through the application of critical thinking.

¹⁰ Tom Destiny Namwambah, "Essentiality of Critical Thinking to National Security," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research* 6, no. 3 (2020): 37-45, <https://socialsciencejournal.in/assets/archives/2020/vol6issue3/6-3-16-592.pdf>.

¹¹ Jonathan Baron, *Thinking and Deciding*, 5th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

¹² Michael W. Collier, *Security Analysis: A Critical Thinking Approach* (Richmond: Encompass Digital Archive, 2023), <https://encompass.eku.edu/ekuopen/6/>.

Methods

Interdisciplinary methods from political science, sociology, and psychology were employed in this study. A systematic and comprehensive analysis was used to examine armed violence as an integral aspect of national security. These analytical methods helped reveal the origins, nature, and implications of armed conflict on national security.

A structural and functional analysis was conducted to define national security, specifically in relation to armed violence. This approach identified key components of the national security system and analyzed their interaction and impact on resilience to armed conflict.

Citizen reactions to armed conflicts and their effect on national sentiment and media literacy were determined through surveys, media, and social media analysis. Historical analysis, both retrospective and comparative, was used to understand the context and evolution of armed violence as a national security threat. This approach allowed for examining past armed conflicts, their causes, and their effects, providing valuable insights for addressing current challenges.

Critical analysis and conceptual modeling were employed to examine critical thinking. This method identified and analyzed specific traits of critical thinking, creating an ideal model that considers its impact on national security.

The analysis-synthesis method was used to explore the relationships between critical thinking, armed violence, and national security. This allowed for the breakdown of complex phenomena into individual components and their examination, followed by synthesizing the knowledge into a cohesive system. The study also utilized the technique of theoretical generalization of existing knowledge, which synthesized modern research on armed violence, national security, and critical thinking to draw well-founded conclusions.

Thus, combining general scientific and specialized political science research methods enabled a comprehensive analysis of the issue under study. Systematic, complex, structural, functional, and comparative analysis methods contributed to a holistic examination of armed violence and its relationship with national security. Political science, historical analysis, and public opinion analysis methods were used to explore the impact of armed violence on various aspects of socio-political life. Additionally, conceptual modeling and critical analysis methods deepened the investigation of critical thinking. The integrated application of these methods allowed for producing objective and reliable results.

Results and Discussion

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, posed an unprecedented challenge to Ukraine's national security. This unprovoked military aggression by Russia threatened not only Ukraine's territorial integrity but also its very existence as an independent state.¹³ The aggressor exploited weak col-

¹³ Nikitin, Tarasenko, and Dubenko, "Legal and Economic Foundations of the National Security of Ukraine," 148.

lective security mechanisms in Ukraine and prepared specific groups of individuals to engage in subversive activities aimed at destabilizing the social order and state structure.¹⁴

In the face of prolonged and exhausting warfare, conventional methods of ensuring national security, such as increasing military strength, have proven insufficient. Modern warfare extends beyond military action, incorporating propaganda, information technologies, and manipulation of public opinion. As a result, in addition to enhancing military defense, a key priority is to strengthen the nation's morale and intellectual capabilities. In this context, developing citizens' critical thinking skills becomes crucial. Critical thinking involves the ability to think independently, logically, and creatively.¹⁵ It allows for objective analysis of information, detection of manipulation and propaganda, and debunking stereotypes. These skills are vital in the conditions of hybrid warfare against Ukraine.

Critical thinking enhances a society's resilience to external information influences. Citizens with well-developed critical thinking skills are better equipped to recognize fake news, propaganda, and manipulations, which complicates the enemy's psychological operations and their influence on public opinion in Ukraine. Additionally, critical thinking fosters societal cohesion during wartime by facilitating thorough analysis of diverse perspectives, helping find compromises, and preventing the polarization of society. This hinders the enemy's attempts to divide Ukrainian society and weaken the state from within.

During armed conflicts, public opinion often sharply polarizes, as different segments of society may adhere to opposing narratives or decisions. Strong emotions surrounding war tend to overshadow reason and objectivity. As Legucka has noted, Russia exploits disinformation to inflame historical, ethnic, and linguistic divides in Ukraine.¹⁶ In such turbulent conditions, critical thinking helps citizens retain empathy, nuance, and ethical judgment. It encourages careful consideration of arguments and principles from all sides.

Critical reflection allows people to acknowledge the validity of opposing viewpoints and find common ground, fostering compromises and reconciliation of conflicting interests. Critical thinking also helps distinguish between significant areas of divergence and simple misunderstandings or prejudices, aiding in conflict resolution.¹⁷ By focusing on shared goals, such as Ukraine's independence, humanitarian concerns, and the rule of law, critical thinking reduces extreme polarization. Furthermore, critical thinking helps individuals recognize and avoid

¹⁴ Svitlana Vovk et al., "Mechanisms of determination of armed violence in the modern world," *Amazonia Investiga* 12, no. 66 (2023), 347-354.

¹⁵ Baron, *Thinking and Deciding*.

¹⁶ Agnieszka Legucka, "Interview with Agnieszka Legucka: The Russo-Ukrainian War Is a Clash Between Two National Armies and Two Global World Views," *Forum for Ukrainian Studies*, May 4, 2023, <https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2023/05/04/interview-with-agnieszka-legucka-the-russo-ukrainian-war-is-a-clash-between-two-national-armies-and-two-global-world-views/>.

¹⁷ Collier, *Security Analysis: A Critical Thinking Approach*.

discourse-polarizing rhetorical tactics, such as emotionally charged language, personal attacks, and false dichotomies, further reducing “us versus them” hostility. Developing “critical, caring, and creative thinking” across the nation is crucial for civic unity and purpose, undermining the aggressor’s ultimate goal – destroying national solidarity.

Critical thinking helps citizens understand that wartime restrictions on movement, assemblies, and information exchange are necessary for safety. By recognizing the importance of these measures, residents are more likely to comply, reducing the potential for social conflict over such issues. This is the third major contribution of critical thinking: its role in helping the public accept extraordinary security measures that limit civil liberties.

In emergencies like the war in Ukraine, governments often impose restrictions on movement, gatherings, communication, and economic activity. Without an understanding of the harsh realities of war, some individuals may view these measures as unjustified violations of their rights, which can lead to tension between the state and certain segments of society. Enemies may exploit this tension to undermine solidarity and governance.¹⁸ However, critical thinking allows citizens to objectively evaluate evidence, context, and principles, making it easier to see that fighting for national survival requires complex compromises between security and freedom. Through critical thinking, individuals can weigh priorities, understand limitations, and consider “contextual moral considerations” when making sacrifices. As a result, measures such as curfews, travel restrictions, bans on public gatherings, censorship, and even martial law become more acceptable after thoughtful, unbiased analysis.

Critically thinking individuals can perceive such temporary measures as difficult but necessary steps to preserve lives rather than reflexively interpreting them as oppression. This helps generate societal cooperation with security policies instead of resistance. Additionally, critical thinking enables citizens to assess whether limitations on civil liberties are justified in a specific context or are excessive, helping strike a balance between necessity and proportionality in crisis management.

Critically minded individuals can thoughtfully demand a review of restrictions that no longer meet the standards of necessity or proportionality as conditions evolve. Critical thinking nurtures civic maturity and psychological readiness to cope with complex decisions in an existential national crisis. This ability allows the public to engage as a partner in discussing and developing security measures for extraordinary situations rather than becoming an antagonistic opponent. Such engagement reduces opportunities for anti-government unrest and instability – outcomes that enemies often seek to incite.¹⁹ Moreover, critical thinking empowers citizens to independently analyze situations and draw conclusions about the optimal strategies for achieving victory in war. It also diminishes feel-

¹⁸ Baron, *Thinking and Deciding*.

¹⁹ Collier, *Security Analysis: A Critical Thinking Approach*.

ings of alienation from decision-making processes and increases trust in the government.²⁰

The fourth contribution of critical thinking to national security is in empowering citizens to independently analyze the military situation and identify optimal strategies for victory. Wartime often requires secrecy, centralization, and restrictions, which can alienate the public and foster distrust of government decisions. Citizens may grow skeptical of political actions and feel excluded from decision-making, especially when reasons are not fully disclosed. However, systematic training in critical thinking enables citizens to evaluate available information independently. Critical thinking allows individuals to rationally assess battlefield events, potential scenarios, and government decisions, even when complete information is lacking. This independent analysis, based on logical interpretation and evaluation, helps build public trust in decision-making. Citizens are better equipped to question state actions and form informed opinions about the competence and integrity of their leaders. Critical thinking helps both the government and citizens understand reasoned premises and decision-making criteria. This alignment of constructive thinking processes again fosters trust and understanding. Authorities can enhance this by clearly communicating their decisions and the rationale behind them. With a shared foundation of critical thinking, “strategic communications” become more transparent, encouraging two-way critical analysis between government and citizens instead of one-sided paternalistic statements. In modern democracies, citizens must develop critical thinking to participate effectively in decision-making processes, strengthening national resilience and solidarity.²¹ Citizens with well-honed critical thinking skills are more likely to volunteer, engage in civic initiatives, and support the military. They understand their vital role in ensuring victory and contributing to the nation’s defense.

Critical thinking encourages civic engagement, volunteering, and support for the military – its fifth key contribution to national security. Advanced critical thinkers recognize their power to influence events and understand how individual contributions, when multiplied across society, create a powerful collective impact. By challenging assumptions and reflecting on their actions, citizens come to realize that their participation or lack thereof directly affects larger societal issues.

Rather than remaining passive observers, critical thinkers actively seek ways to contribute within their capacity. Through independent research, they find opportunities for civic involvement, whether through volunteering, joining civil society initiatives, or advocating for specific causes. This heightened civic awareness becomes especially important during an existential war like Ukraine’s, where total societal dedication is necessary. These citizens understand that

²⁰ Namwambah, “Essentiality of Critical Thinking to National Security,” 39.

²¹ Baron, *Thinking and Deciding*.

Ukraine's victory hinges on their ability to support the military with their skills, resources, and labor.

Critical thinking enables individuals to see how diverse voluntary efforts create a strong social foundation that supports the military. Citizens apply their unique talents to fill gaps, meet essential needs, and strengthen their communities. In times of grave national threat, an active civic spirit and organized resource management are essential for mobilizing society's collective strength and determination. Conscious participation, rooted in thoughtful analysis of societal needs and personal abilities, often becomes the deciding factor in a nation's defense and path to victory.

Widespread development of critical thinking skills drives civic engagement and social cohesion. Critical thinkers understand their roles and seek innovative ways to contribute to national defense and survival. Therefore, developing critical thinking in Ukrainian society is essential to both national security and the country's defense against Russian aggression.

The Role of Critical Thinking in Strengthening Society and National Security: An Integrated Approach to Education, Media, and Civic Engagement

Education and media must take proactive steps to foster critical thinking. Critical thinking should be integral to education. Updating the curriculum to include interactive methods, discussions, and projects is essential. Teaching subjects like logic, rhetoric, and argumentation is crucial for developing critical thinking skills. Teachers also need specialized training to effectively guide students in thinking critically.

Media and news channels play a key role in promoting critical thinking. The media ecosystem should provide meaningful, factual information and diverse perspectives to encourage critical analysis, giving citizens material to ponder. Instead of offering superficial or biased narratives, media outlets must increase high-quality investigative and analytical journalism. In-depth news coverage that provides context, explores complexities, and presents evidence allows readers to evaluate issues critically.

Professional journalistic ethics, accuracy, and impartiality are vital. Fact-checking, transparency in reporting, clear corrections, and the separation of news and opinion should become industry norms, helping media audiences develop skepticism and analytical skills. Media outlets must verify sources, identify biases, and avoid unsubstantiated claims or provocative language to combat disinformation and propaganda. Media literacy and criticism programs can also help audiences evaluate reports and make informed decisions.

According to a survey conducted by UNICEF in Ukraine, 47.7 % of young people verify information obtained from social networks and media (Figure 1). This suggests that while a majority of young people recognize the importance of fact-checking, a considerable portion still does not view it as necessary.

These results demonstrate that young people in Ukraine still require training and increased education on the importance of critical thinking and information verification. As Acomi asserts, critical thinking skills are essential for readers to

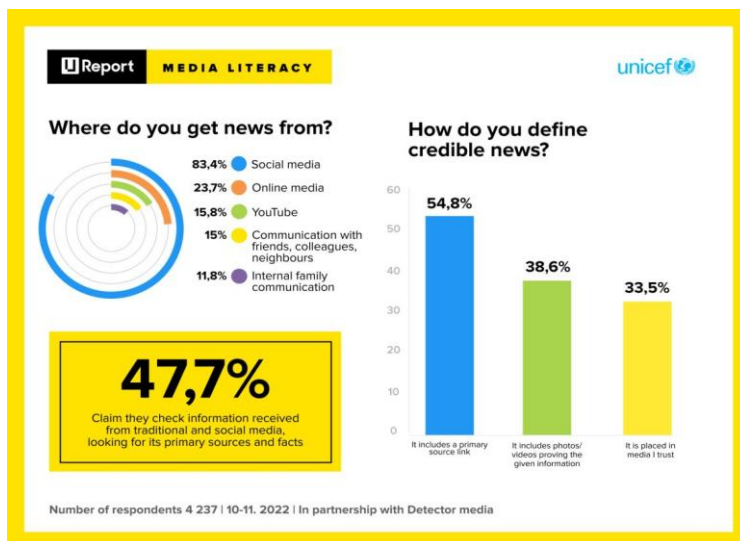


Figure 1: Media Literacy Survey Dedicated to World Media and Information Literacy Week (Source: UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/stories/fakes-or-facts>).

assess media as knowledge sources and to “act wisely in voting, civic participation, and everyday life.”²² Creating a healthy information ecosystem characterized by high standards, transparency, diverse content, and accountability forms the foundation for widespread critical thinking. The quality of public debates and civic engagement depends on the quality of the media, shaping citizens’ views and judgments. Therefore, a top priority should be developing a responsible, professional media that facilitates critical analysis.

Civil society institutions should actively engage citizens through educational initiatives, critical thinking training sessions, open discussion platforms, and the promotion of volunteer initiatives. Implementing these measures will significantly enhance Ukrainian society’s intellectual potential. Citizens with well-developed critical thinking skills will contribute to safeguarding Ukraine’s information security, fostering internal cohesion, and mobilizing human resources for victory. Thus, the development of critical thinking must become a key priority in ensuring Ukraine’s national security in the modern era.

Critical Thinking and National Security: Key Factors in Strengthening Society Against Armed Violence

By improving the detection of disinformation and manipulation, critical thinking helps build a resilient and secure society in the face of armed violence. Critical thinkers can identify logical errors, hidden biases, and targeted misinformation,

²² Nicoleta Acomi, “Digital Citizenship ‘Media and Information Literacy’ Course,” DIGCIT project deliverable, September 26, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7112814>.

strengthening society against propaganda and psychological operations. It contributes by:

- *Improved security threat assessment and situational analysis.* Critical thinking enables evidence-based security analysis, free from bias and emotion, which helps identify and accurately assess threats.
- *Improved decision-making and policy formulation.* Critical analysis supports the development of balanced and well-informed solutions to armed violence, thereby enhancing national security policymaking.
- *Increased social stability.* Critical thinking fosters an understanding of diverse perspectives, enabling society to reach a consensus on external threats and avoid destabilizing disagreements.²³
- *Greater civic engagement, accountability, and oversight.* Citizens with critical thinking skills actively assess government actions, facilitating corruption prevention and ensuring accountability, thus leading to improved governance.
- *Faster learning and adaptability.* Critical thinking equips society with cognitive flexibility, allowing quick adaptation to security challenges and facilitating optimal responses.
- *Innovation in security solutions.* Critical thinking encourages creativity in addressing new threats and challenges related to armed violence.
- *Leadership, strategic planning, and improving coordination.* Critical analysis aids security sector leaders in making complex decisions and improving overall strategies and policies.
- *Psychological resilience during crises.* Critical thinking helps citizens remain composed and psychologically stable during shocks caused by armed violence, reducing panic.²⁴
- *Adherence to fundamental societal values and constructive political processes:* Critical thinking promotes dedication to reason, truth, transparency, and democratic principles, which are essential for maintaining national security.

Thus, critical thinking develops various intellectual traits and competencies in citizens, strategically vital for resisting armed violence and ensuring national security. Developing critical thinking skills should be a top educational and societal priority. A widespread critical thinking skills can significantly strengthen societies facing hybrid threats and empower them to overcome forces that seek to destroy them. The complex security challenges of the Twenty-first century demand not only material strength or coercion but also the full utilization of national intellect through the widespread adoption of critical thinking.

²³ Collier, *Security Analysis: A Critical Thinking Approach*.

²⁴ Namwambah, "Essentiality of Critical Thinking to National Security," 40.

Cultivating critical thinking across society is a crucial long-term investment in fortifying Ukraine's national security in the face of external threats accompanied by propaganda and disinformation. Enhancing citizens' ability for intellectual self-defense weakens the effectiveness of these tactics, which aim to erode Ukraine's social cohesion and values. National security relies not only on military power but also on the population's collective critical thinking and psychological resilience against divisive falsehoods. Just as vaccination protects against viral infections, critical thinking ensures mass protection against the viral spread of malicious deception and misinformation.

Popper thoroughly analyzes the formation of national security policies under conditions of uncertainty and rapid changes in the security environment.²⁵ The author focuses on strategic planning in national security, in contrast to this study, which examines critical thinking in the context of armed violence. Popper highlights that linear national security policy planning approaches are inadequate in highly uncertain and complex security environments. Instead, he proposes an adaptive model based on continuous monitoring, risk assessment, and course correction. According to Popper, this flexible strategy enables agile responses to evolving circumstances. The proposed approach emphasizes adaptive interaction in poorly controlled regions, such as those with weak governance institutions and high uncertainty. In these environments, the author suggests unique methods for communicating and collaborating with local actors. The emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches and the involvement of a wide range of experts in national security strategic planning is particularly intriguing. Overall, his study advances the concept of flexible and adaptive national security policymaking, offering strategic planning recommendations for high-uncertainty situations. Popper does not specifically address armed violence or critical thinking. Thus, the two studies complement each other by addressing different yet interrelated aspects—strategic planning and critical thinking—in the effort to combat armed violence.

Komziuk et al. provide a comprehensive analysis of strengthening Ukraine's national security under martial law.²⁶ Their study also examines national security in the context of armed conflict, which aligns with this work. While this study emphasizes critical thinking, Komziuk and colleagues focus on practical and organizational measures to enhance Ukraine's defense capabilities. Their recommendations span economic, military, social, informational, and other areas. Examples include reforms to the military-industrial complex, improving the effi-

²⁵ Steven W. Popper, "Designing a Robust Decision-Based National Security Policy Process: Strategic Choices for Uncertain Times," in *Adaptive Engagement for Undergoverned Spaces: Concepts, Challenges, and Prospects for New Approaches*, ed. Aaron B. Frank and Elizabeth M. Bartels, RR-A1275-1 (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, July 2022), 287-312, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR-A1275-1.html.

²⁶ Volodymyr T. Komziuk et al., "Promising Directions for Ensuring National Security under Martial Law," *Lex Humana* 15, no. 1 (2023): 509-520, <https://seer.ucp.br/seer/index.php/LexHumana/article/view/2449>.

ciency of Ukraine's armed forces, boosting domestic weapons production, enhancing cybersecurity, reforming intelligence, fighting corruption, and conducting information and psychological operations. The authors adopt an integrated, positive approach to ensuring national security through multiple avenues. They briefly address the role of critical thinking in information security as well. Both studies offer valuable and complementary insights: one focuses on critical thinking in national security, and the other emphasizes practical measures. Combining these practical recommendations with the promotion of critical thinking would most effectively strengthen Ukraine's national security.

Johanson suggests viewing national security as a contextual phenomenon rather than a static one.²⁷ The author emphasizes that national security is influenced by a country's political, economic, and cultural context. This perspective is particularly relevant for small states, which should tailor their security policies to their unique circumstances, threats, and opportunities. Unlike this study, which focuses on critical thinking, Johanson concentrates on issues faced by small states. He correctly asserts that small states cannot solely rely on military power for their security; instead, they should form flexible international partnerships. He advocates prioritizing "network security" over rigid alliances. This emphasis on adapting security policy to changing circumstances aligns well with the flexible thinking concepts presented in this study. While this study emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, Johanson does not specifically address it. Therefore, his research advances our understanding of small-state security, and the critical thinking framework proposed in this study complements his adaptive security policy ideas. Together, these approaches offer a comprehensive understanding of security strategies for small states.

Schmidt analyzes the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies on national security and the rivalry between great powers, which partially overlaps with the themes addressed in this study, as both pertain to national security.²⁸ However, unlike our focus on armed violence and critical thinking, Schmidt's work explicitly examines the technological dimension. He provides an in-depth analysis of how advanced AI technologies can be harnessed to strengthen a nation's defense and security capabilities. At the same time, Schmidt warns that these very AI technologies can threaten national security, as adversaries might use them in cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns. Thus, his research is valuable in exploring the relationship between cutting-edge technologies and national security. It complements this study by offering a technological perspective, while the central focus here is on the human factor – specifically, the role of critical thinking in countering threats.

²⁷ Terence Johanson, "Understanding National Security as Contextual: The Implications for Small State Defence Policy," *National Security Journal* 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.36878/nsj20220712.04>.

²⁸ Eric Schmidt, "AI, Great Power Competition & National Security," *Daedalus* 151, no. 2 (2022): 288-298, https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01916.

Sprincean and coworkers explore the theoretical foundations of promoting human security through mechanisms of the rule of law,²⁹ a topic closely related to this study due to its implications for both national and human security. While the authors focus on legal mechanisms to ensure human security rather than armed violence, they convincingly argue that personal safety hinges on upholding the rule of law, protecting human rights, and adhering to legal principles. Their exploration of institutional, liberal, and constructivist theories provides a comprehensive perspective. However, unlike this study, their work does not emphasize the role of critical thinking. Therefore, their research advances the understanding of human security by highlighting legal mechanisms, which complements the current study's focus. Combining critical thinking with the rule of law can offer a holistic approach to safeguarding human security.

Müller and Richmond examine the relationship between technology and politics within the security realm,³⁰ arguing that technologies play an active role in shaping security from a political standpoint. This topic is relevant to national and human security, similar to the focus of our study. However, while Müller and Richmond focus on technological security rather than armed violence, they correctly highlight that actors can leverage technology to achieve political security goals. They emphasize the need to understand technological development through its political implications. The interdisciplinary approach, incorporating political science, sociology, and the philosophy of science, is a strength of their analysis. However, unlike this study, the authors do not explore the connection between technology and critical thinking. Therefore, their work advances research on security technology policy, complementing this study by adding a technological focus. Both technology and critical thinking are essential for analyzing security issues comprehensively.

Garasim examines the role of public control in preventing penitentiary crime in Ukraine,³¹ arguing that public oversight is a crucial element of the national security system. While this topic overlaps with national security issues addressed in our study, Garasim focuses specifically on the penitentiary system, in contrast to this study's broader focus on armed violence. His integrated approach, combining theoretical and practical mechanisms for public control over penitentiary institutions, is a positive aspect of the work. Garasim rightly emphasizes that public control enhances the transparency and accountability of the penitentiary

²⁹ Serghei Sprincean, Anastasia Catan, and Sanda Țoncu, "Theoretical Perspectives on Promoting Human Security through Mechanisms of the State of Law," *Vector European*, no. 2 (2022): 30-35, https://usem.md/uploads/files/Activitate_%C8%98tiin%C8%9Bific%C4%83_USEM/Vector/Vector_European_2022_2.pdf. – in Moldovan

³⁰ Frank I. Müller and Matthew Aaron Richmond, "The Technopolitics of Security: Agency, Temporality, Sovereignty," *Security Dialogue* 54, no. 1 (2023), 3-20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106221141373>.

³¹ Pavlo Garasim, "The Role and Place of Public Control in the Legal Mechanism for the Prevention of Penitentiary Crime in Ukraine," *Scientific Journal of Polonia University* 55, no. 6 (2022): 145-150, <https://doi.org/10.23856/5519>.

system, which is vital for national security. However, unlike this study, he does not address the role of critical thinking. Thus, his research makes a valuable contribution to understanding penitentiary crime prevention and complements this study by offering a specialized perspective on public control in the penal system. Both approaches can contribute to strengthening Ukraine's national security from different angles.

Arbeláez-Campillo and colleagues explore the role of critical thinking in political participation and discourse,³² emphasizing its importance for the development of democracy. This topic directly intersects with our study, as both analyze critical thinking, though from different perspectives. While Arbeláez-Campillo et al. concentrate on its role in the political sphere, this study examines critical thinking within the context of national security. A strength of their research is the integrated approach, where they analyze critical thinking through various theoretical frameworks, demonstrating its essential role in fostering constructive political participation and high-quality democratic discussions. However, the authors do not address national security or countering armed violence. Thus, by advancing the understanding of critical thinking in politics, their work complements this study.

Li and Liu review cyberattacks and cybersecurity research,³³ exploring various types of attacks, preventive measures, and recent trends in cybersecurity. Their study is particularly relevant in the context of the war in Ukraine, as it considers cyberattacks as a key tool in hybrid warfare. The authors emphasize that cyberattacks pose a serious threat to national security and advocate for strengthening countries' cybersecurity measures. In the context of national security, this research highlights the critical link between cybersecurity and the broader security framework, identifying cybersecurity as a vital component of national defense. In relation to critical thinking, the study is a valuable resource for analyzing the diverse approaches to understanding cyberattacks and cybersecurity. By presenting different perspectives, the authors encourage readers to critically evaluate the issue and form their own reasoned judgments. This complements our study by adding a technological dimension to understanding and countering threats in the digital age.

Dycus and colleagues consider information security issues within the broader context of national security,³⁴ concluding that information security is a crucial element of modern defense strategies. The authors analyze various types of information threats, preventive measures, and counterstrategies, with a particular

³² Diego Felipe Arbeláez-Campillo et al., "Contributions of Critical Thinking as a Form of Participation and Political Deliberation," *Amazonia Investiga* 9, no. 27 (2020): 5-12, <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2020.27.03.1>.

³³ Yuchong Li and Qinghui Liu, "A Comprehensive Review Study of Cyber-attacks and Cyber Security; Emerging Trends and Recent Developments," *Energy Reports* 7 (November 2021): 8176-8186, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.egyrs.2021.08.126>.

³⁴ Stephen Dycus et al., "Information Security in the Context of National Security," in *National Security Law* (Frederick: Aspen Publishing, 2022), 37-72.

focus on the role of information security during wars and crises. Their discussion is particularly relevant to the war in Ukraine, as it considers the use of information technologies as weapons. This article highlights how technologies serve both defensive and offensive purposes in modern conflicts.

Dycus and coauthors provide a comprehensive exploration of the theoretical and practical aspects of information security and an understanding of how these issues affect national security. What stands out is the emphasis on the importance of information security in critical moments, such as wars, showing how such technologies can shape the course of conflict. Its relevance is amplified in the context of hybrid warfare, where cyberattacks, disinformation, and other digital threats play an increasingly significant role. The two studies complement each other by providing both technological and intellectual perspectives on how to enhance information security and national defense.

This review examined studies on armed violence, national security, and critical thinking, including research on technologies and AI, legal mechanisms, small state security, and public oversight. Comparative analysis reveals that none of these studies specifically addresses the role of critical thinking in combating armed violence and enhancing national security. Therefore, this study complements the existing research by addressing critical thinking in the context of armed violence and makes a valuable contribution.

Conclusions

This study analyzed the interconnection between armed violence, national security, and critical thinking, establishing that Russia's full-scale armed invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, presented an unprecedented challenge to the country's national security. Traditional approaches to ensuring national security proved insufficient in prolonged hybrid warfare. Consequently, the need to develop comprehensive, modern strategies to bolster Ukraine's security in these evolving conditions was substantiated.

The study found that fostering citizens' critical thinking can significantly enhance national security. Critical thinking strengthens society's resilience to external informational influences, promotes national unity, improves understanding of necessary rights limitations during crises, and encourages active citizen participation in national defense efforts. To achieve this, the education system should prioritize updating curricula to emphasize critical thinking and ensure teacher training supports this focus. Analytical genres, investigative journalism, and media literacy programs are essential, with rewards for adherence to standards and exemplary media practices.

Civil society initiatives should include awareness campaigns, critical thinking training, and open discussion forums. Volunteer programs that encourage critical thinking should involve civil organizations. The government should pass legislation promoting critical thinking across all sectors and establish a specialized

advisory and coordination body to oversee a national program. These recommendations aim to boost Ukraine's intellectual potential, which is vital for war-time victory and post-war reconstruction.

Therefore, this study emphasizes the vital role of critical thinking in strengthening Ukraine's national security during wartime and offers concrete recommendations for its development. Future research should focus on exploring targeted methods to foster critical thinking across various demographic groups and developing a robust system to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives. Empirical studies on the current levels of critical thinking within different segments of Ukrainian society would be particularly relevant. Such research would help identify critical gaps and inform strategies to address them, enhancing national resilience against military and informational threats.

In conclusion, critical thinking can be defined as a cognitive process through which individuals actively analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to form logical, well-grounded judgments and decisions. This skill enables people to identify biases, assumptions, and logical fallacies in arguments while fostering independent and systematic thinking on complex issues. Critical thinking is essential for making informed decisions and solving problems, and it plays a crucial role in promoting tolerance, understanding, and active civic participation.³⁵

The significance of critical thinking in countering propaganda and disinformation is crucial in today's information landscape, characterized by a flood of misleading narratives. Propaganda and disinformation possess the capacity to manipulate public opinion and influence political decisions, often with harmful consequences. In this context, critical thinking is an indispensable instrument for individuals to effectively navigate the intricate information terrain, enabling them to make well-informed decisions grounded on reliable and accurate sources. By cultivating critical thinking skills, individuals are better equipped to critically assess the validity of information and mitigate the effects of propaganda and disinformation.³⁶

Instructing critical thinking contributes to enhancing the requisite skills by imparting knowledge and nurturing specific mindsets and cognitive patterns. Some individuals may perceive critical thinking as a threat, as it can challenge deeply held beliefs and values. Therefore, it is essential to adopt a sensitive and respectful approach when teaching critical thinking, ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives. This can be achieved by creating a safe and inclusive educational

³⁵ Grzegorz Pochwatko and Lyubov Naydonova, "Mediated Communication and Refugee Resilience: A Social Psychological Model," *Scientific Studios on Social and Political Psychology* 29, no. 1 (2023): 28-37, <https://doi.org/10.61727/ssspj/1.2023.28>.

³⁶ Nataliia Cherepovska, "Media Psychological Features of Youth Patriotism in the Information Age," *Scientific Studios on Social and Political Psychology* 27, no. 2 (2021): 188-200, <https://doi.org/10.61727/ssspj/2.2021.188>.

environment, promoting open communication and discussion, and providing opportunities for students to apply their analytical reasoning skills to real-world issues.³⁷

The application of critical thinking offers numerous benefits for both individuals and society as a whole. It facilitates well-informed decision-making, promotes tolerance and understanding, and encourages civic participation.³⁸ By equipping the general populace with critical thinking skills, we can help cultivate a more informed, accountable, and actively engaged society. The importance of critical thinking is particularly evident in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, as it empowers individuals to comprehend the genuine situation and make informed choices about the future of their nation.

Disclaimer

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³⁷ Iryna Hubeladze, "Community Identity in the Conditions of Interstate Military-political Confrontation: Conceptualization of the Concept," *Scientific Studios on Social and Political Psychology* 29, no. 1 (2023): 10-16, <https://doi.org/10.61727/ssspj/1.2023.10>.

³⁸ Eesha Parasnis, "The Implications of Social Media for Adolescent Critical Thinking from an Information and Advertising Literacy Context: A Brief Review," *The Serials Librarian* 83, no. 1 (2022): 9-15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0361526X.2022.2030850>.

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