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Wartime collaborationism as a subject of political psychological research: Theoretical approach

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Abstract. The problem of wartime collaborationism remains a pressing concern, particularly in the context of modern conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war. Understanding the psychological and social dynamics that lead to cooperation with occupying forces is a key to preventing these behaviours in the future. The aim of the study was to explore the phenomenon of collaborationism through the lens of political and social psychology and to develop recommendations for prevention and post-conflict reconciliation. The study employed an interdisciplinary approach, combining theoretical frameworks and empirical research from psychology, criminology, law, and history, to analyse different forms of collaborationism and the mechanisms that lead to them. The analysis integrated key psychological concepts including conformity, obedience, groupthink, deindividuation, social identity, diffusion of responsibility, cognitive dissonance, and differential association, to explain how individuals and groups under occupation may come to cooperate with enemy forces, often against their prior values or interests. Special attention was given to the role of educators, whose collaborationist activities can undermine national security and the continuity of civic identity. The article explored the mechanisms through which group dynamics, authority, and social learning contribute to collaborationist behaviour, especially in the context of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, demonstrating how such behaviours can become institutionalised within occupied societies. The findings of this research can be used by professionals in the fields of psychology, law, and security to develop strategies for preventing collaborationism and supporting post-conflict reconciliation

Keywords: groupthink; conformity; deindividuation; social identity; cognitive dissonance; diffusion of responsibility; differential association

INTRODUCTION

During war times, individuals face complex psychological dilemmas, driven by fear, survival instincts, and moral conflict, which may lead some to collaborate with occupying forces. This issue is not only rooted in historical events, such as the Vichy regime during World War II, but continues to manifest in contemporary conflicts. Understanding the psychological mechanisms behind collaborationism is crucial, as it provides insights into both past and present behaviours, illustrating how occupation forces exploit these dynamics to secure compliance. This research explored various historical and modern examples of collaborationism, including the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict, to better understand the psychological factors that shape such decisions during times of war.

The researcher S. Kalyvas (2008) offered a comprehensive framework for understanding the conditions under which individuals may choose collaboration

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over resistance, particularly in the context of civil wars and occupations. This work examined how both structural conditions and individual psychological factors, such as moral conflict and the desire for self-preservation, contribute to collaborationism. S. Kalyvas concluded that while structural factors, such as the level of occupation, certainly play a role, individual choices driven by personal psychology are equally important in determining whether an individual collaborates. R. McDermott's (2015) study on the intersection of political psychology and international conflict highlighted the importance of decision-making under stress and threat. Applying models from cognitive psychology, such as prospect theory, R. McDermott explored how individuals, especially national leaders, make decisions when faced with high-risk situations. His findings suggested that collaborationist leaders, such as Pétain and Quisling, may have been influenced by cognitive biases, such as loss aversion, which shaped their willingness to cooperate with occupying forces.

J. Jackson's study (2003) of post-war France examined the social and political consequences of collaborationism, focusing on the legal and extrajudicial executions of collaborationists. J. Jackson argued that the post-war pursuit of justice, including the execution of those who collaborated, was deeply influenced by emotional reactions such as anger and a desire for retribution. The study provided insights into how the psychological aftermath of occupation and collaboration affects post-conflict societies and their attempts at reconciliation. G. Rose's (2010) research explored the long-term implications of wartime collaborationism, particularly in relation to post-war stability. This study emphasised that understanding the psychological mechanisms behind collaboration is crucial for creating lasting peace and stability in post-war societies. G. Rose's work emphasised that wartime collaborationism should not be viewed solely through a lens of criminality but should be understood as a complex phenomenon influenced by psychological, social, and political factors. The researcher called for a more nuanced approach to post-war justice that accounts for these psychological dimensions.

O. Dzhuzha (2023) examined how the concept of collaborationism has evolved in Ukrainian legislation, highlighting the shift from traditional definitions of treason to a more nuanced understanding of collaboration that includes various forms of cooperation with the occupying forces. This legal approach not only identifies collaboration as a criminal act but also offered a clear categorisation of its various forms, from political to administrative and military cooperation. O. Dzhuzha argued that such legal shifts are necessary to address the changing nature of modern conflicts and the new forms of collaboration seen in the context of Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territories. His work emphasised the importance of distinguishing between different degrees of collaboration to ensure fair and proportional justice in the post-conflict period. Similarly, R. Turchyn's research (2025) on wartime collaborationism in Ukraine during the ongoing Russian invasion underscored the complexity of the issue beyond its legal implications. R. Turchyn adopted a sociological perspective, analysing the social dynamics and motivations that drive individuals and groups to collaborate with occupying forces. The scientist stressed that collaboration is not always a simple moral choice but is often influenced by a range of psychological, social, and economic pressures. According to R. Turchyn, the desire for survival, the fear of retribution, and the impact of propaganda can lead to complex decisions that may not always align with traditional notions of loyalty or betrayal. His analysis provided a valuable framework for understanding how collaborationism can persist even in societies with a strong resistance to occupation.

Despite the significant body of research on wartime collaborationism, several key aspects remain underexplored. Specifically, there is a need for further examination of the psychological processes at the mass level, particularly in relation to how entire communities or populations become complicit in collaborationist behaviour. The aim of this research was to examine the psychological mechanisms underlying wartime collaborationism, focusing on both individual and group dynamics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The theoretical and analytical approach was adopted, incorporating both historical and contemporary cases of collaborationism to explore how psychological factors influenced individuals' decisions to collaborate with occupying forces. The existing research, theories, and case studies were systematically reviewed and synthesised to understand the psychological mechanisms behind wartime collaborationism. The focus was on the psychology of small groups and intergroup interactions, as it allowed to analyse how conformity, submission to authority, groupthink, and group polarisation were formed in local communities under occupation, as well as among educators.

The methodology was structured around typological classification: collaborationism was classified according to different types, including involuntary versus voluntary collaboration, servile versus ideological collaboration, and collaboration equated with treason versus legitimate collaboration. This classification helped delineate the various motivations and justifications for collaboration in wartime contexts. Content analysis was used to analyse historical cases, legal frameworks, and contemporary examples, particularly the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, to illustrate how these types of collaboration manifest in modern conflict situations. A central focus of the study was on small group dynamics and intergroup interactions: particular attention was given to how conformity, submission to authority, groupthink, and polarisation emerge in small groups, such as

local communities and educational environments under occupation. This approach enabled the exploration of how individuals within groups may be influenced by the majority or by charismatic leaders, even when such influence contradicts their original beliefs.

To analyse how individuals align with occupying forces, the study applied Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory, which explained how individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. The theories were particularly relevant in understanding how shifts in group identity under threat can lead to collaboration, as individuals may identify with the dominant occupying group for survival or status. The application of cognitive dissonance theory helped explore how collaborationists might justify their actions, rationalising behaviour that conflicts with their prior values or identity in order to reduce internal psychological discomfort. The study utilised groupthink as a method of examining decision-making within groups under stress. This approach highlighted how group cohesion can lead to poor decision-making and irrational behaviour, such as collaboration with the enemy, as individuals seek consensus and avoid conflict within the group. The diffusion of responsibility model was also applied to understand passive complicity: it was examined how individuals, when part of a larger group, may fail to take action or resist, assuming that others will intervene, thus normalising collaborationist behaviour.

The differential association theory was employed to explain how deviant behaviours, including collaborationism, are learned and spread through social interaction, particularly within small groups. The theory emphasises that collaborationism is not an inherent trait but rather a learned behaviour, spread through personal interactions within communities that have already embraced collaboration. The study was grounded in case study analysis, focusing on both historical and contemporary examples of wartime collaborationism, particularly in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. By examining the role of educators and the psychological impact of occupation on communities, the research aimed to highlight the real-world dynamics that influence collaborationist behaviour in occupied territories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The psychological mechanisms of collaborationism: Conformity, obedience, and authority

The research of wartime collaborationism started with an attempt to analyse it through classification of its types. Some researchers subdivided collaboration into involuntary (reluctant recognition of necessity) and voluntary (an attempt to exploit necessity). According to this study, collaboration can be either servile or ideological. Servile is service to an enemy based on necessity for personal survival or comfort, whereas ideological collaborationism is an advocacy for cooperation with an enemy power (Hoffmann, 1968). While others attempted to distinguish between ideological and non-ideological cooperation with the enemy, labelling those who committed it as "collaborators" in the first case and as "collaborationist" in second one (Gordon, 1980). The other approach was to divide the phenomenon into "collaboration equated with treason" and "legitimate collaboration" for survival, as used to describe the cooperation between civilian internees (mostly of American origin) and their Japanese captors in the Philippines (Ward, 2008).

The latter approach corresponds with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), specifically with Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1950), Section III of which allows the occupying state to collect taxes, and in general functioning of education and medical systems, and even courts and law enforcement bodies (though obliges to use the law of the state been occupied in their practice). The further development of the concept of "legitimate collaboration" is heavily undermined by the negative connotation of the term, as since Petain used it in his announcement on 30 October 1940, collaborationism is mostly associated with high treason and political figures (Brook, 2005). Nevertheless, the political psychological mechanisms of wartime collaborationism remain a complex subject for research till today, although the current geopolitical situation and specifically Russian Ukrainian war ongoing since 20 February 2014, provides a lot of material for researchers.

The first approach to the topic under research is phenomena of conformity and obedience. Research on the influence of groups and group norms on the opinions of their members has been ongoing since the 1930s, when experimental methods revealed that in situations of uncertainty, individuals tend to compare and align their own opinions with those of others, generally conforming to the group. M. Sherif (1935) highlighted that the overall system of life orientations formed under the influence of others continues to affect an individual's views and judgments even in the absence of the original source of influence. Although M. Sherif's research did not directly address conformity, focusing instead on the emergence and formation of group norms and various aspects of suggestibility, his experiments demonstrated that the degree of conformity depends both on personal characteristics – such as intellectual development, level of self-awareness, and presence or absence of self-perception defects – and situational factors, such as the importance of the expressed opinion to the individual, its connection to the person's real activities, social ties, and conscious acceptance of group norms and standards.

Experimental research of conformity continued in the early 1950s, particularly exploring group pressure using the "confederate group" method. This led to the conclusion that individuals respond to group opinion

in one of two ways: either disagreement and alienation (nonconformity), or full acceptance (conformity). S. Asch (1955) noted that the degree of conformity was also found to depend on situational factors, group composition, and size. S. Asch's experiments were extended by Crutchfield, who automated the procedure using technical response tools. His study was notable for involving army officers who, believing they were being tested individually, responded in certain ways to the experimenter's questions but changed their answers when they thought others responded differently, aligning with the majority view – even when they clearly disagreed. Interestingly, conformity among army officers (a formal, positively referent group) was significantly higher than among students in S. Asch's experiments: 46% vs. 37% (Crutchfield, 1955). Based on these experiments, modern American social psychology identifies two types of conformity. The first type, normative influence, occurs when individuals conform in order to gain acceptance or approval from the group. The second type, informational influence, happens when individuals conform because they believe that the group possesses more accurate information, particularly in situations where the group is large and unanimous (Aronson, 1972).

Normative influence is tied to group norms, where the majority exerts pressure and its opinion is perceived as the norm. These norms surround individuals from early childhood, teaching them to respect and follow group standards. Informational influence involves changing one's position based on viewing the group as a source of information. While normative influence alters interpersonal relationships, informational influence shapes the individual's desire for a more accurate understanding of reality (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). This aligns with the informational approach to cognitive activity, which suggests that modern individuals cannot verify all incoming information and rely on others' opinions to form a more accurate picture of reality. This leads individuals to reduce dissonance between beliefs, knowledge, and actions by seeking confirming information and avoiding contradictory data (Festinger, 1957). Group pressure experiments continued in America into the next decade, showing that personal principles and values are influenced by leaders' authority and group norms (Milgram, 1963). Although these experiments focused more on obedience, they also demonstrated that conformity significantly affects behaviour, explaining why people in groups may act against their own beliefs, including actions with potentially severe and dangerous consequences for others and society.

S. Milgram's experiments vividly showed that 63% of participants "killed" a confederate with simulated (but perceived as real) electric shocks, obeying the experimenter's instructions despite the confederate's protests and pleas to stop. When S. Milgram modified the experiment, so the confederate complained of a "weak heart" and simulated louder suffering, 65% of new participants again "killed" him, obeying the experimenter. To some extent, obedience and conformity levels can be predicted based on personality type – either authoritarian or innovative. Authoritarian personalities agree with traditional norms, show submissiveness, avoid responsibility, and depend on authority. In contrast, innovative personalities are open to new experiences, seek autonomy, and prefer original, independent solutions (Hagen, 1962). S. Milgram also identified several key factors that influence obedience. One of these factors is the emotional distance from the victim (for example, when the victim was unseen but still audible, participants were more likely to obey). Another important factor is the proximity and legitimacy of authority (when S. Milgram gave orders via phone instead of in person), obedience dropped to just 21%. The institutional authority also played a role, as obedience was significantly reduced (when the experiment was conducted in a provincial setting rather than at Yale University), with obedience dropping to 48%. Finally, the presence of a defiant peer had a liberating effect when two confederates refused to continue, 90% of the real participants also chose to disobey.

A side effect of these experiments was the identification of the "blaming the victim" principle, used by participants to resolve internal dissonance between their actions and beliefs. Participants justified their actions by saying the "victim" was "too stupid and stubborn," rationalising their compliance with the experimenter's instructions to continue the "torture." It's worth noting that S. Milgram's findings were horrifyingly applied in practice. The authoritarian regime of the "Black Colonels" in Greece selected torturers from the most obedient and authority-respecting candidates, gradually training them – first in guarding prisoners, then participating in arrests and beatings, then observing torture, and finally engaging in torture themselves. Through this gradual process, law-abiding individuals were transformed into diligent executioners (Haritos-Fatouros, 1989; Staub, 1992). These behaviors occur because individuals are influenced by the pressure to conform to group norms and the perceived legitimacy of authority, especially in situations where defiance feels risky or morally ambiguous. In the context of wartime occupation, these psychological mechanisms help to explain why collaborationism arises, as people may align with occupying forces to avoid conflict, gain perceived benefits, or rationalise their actions as a means of survival.

Social identity and collaborationism:
Theoretical perspectives and empirical insights

Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT) were proposed by H. Tajfel & J.C. Turner (1986). Tajfel and Turner in SIT supposed that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups (e.g., nationality, religion, political affiliation) which leads to in-group favouritism, out-group

discrimination and positive distinctiveness. These phenomena are implied by social categorisation (meaning that individuals classify themselves and others into groups), social identification (adopting the identity of the group individual belongs to) and social comparison (when groups are compared by individuals belonging to them to maintain or enhance their self-esteem).

H. Tajfel & J. Turner showed that even arbitrary group assignments led to favouritism and discrimination. This suggests that group loyalty can emerge without deep ideological commitment, relevant to understanding how collaboration can occur quickly under occupation. The scientists emphasised that group identity can override personal identity, especially in conflict. This helps to explain why individuals may commit acts against their own community on the side of aggressor as they start to identify themselves with a new dominant group. They noted that individuals may seek upward mobility by aligning with powerful groups, even if it means betraying former affiliations. J. Turner moved further and in his SCT focused on how individuals shift between personal and social identities depending on context and explained it through depersonalisation (meaning that a person sees oneself more as a group member rather than an individual), normative behaviour (instructing the group member to act according to group norms) and salience of identity (when the more relevant a group identity is in situation, the more it influences behaviour).

Wartime collaborationism can be explained through SIT and SCT perspective as group identity under threat: individuals may redefine their in-group to align with occupying forces if that group offers them security, status, or survival. Also, individuals in the occupied territories are affected by depersonalisation and norm conformity, forcing them to adopt group norms even if they conflict with personal views. Finally, collaborationists themselves may justify their actions by viewing their new group as superior or more "civilised," aligning with SIT's concept of social comparison, this also leads to stigmatisation of resistance movements and former compatriots as "out-groups".

C. Khadka's (2024) study on group behaviour and social identity aligned with the principles of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT), illustrating how in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination emerge in times of conflict. As SIT suggests, individuals derive part of their self-concept from group membership, which leads to loyalty to the in-group and hostility toward the out-group. This process explains how collaboration can occur under occupation, as individuals may shift their identity to align with occupying forces, motivated by security, status, or survival. The study supports SIT's notion of social comparison, where collaborationists justify their actions by viewing the occupying group as superior, and aligns with SCT's concept of depersonalisation, where individuals adopt the norms of the dominant group, even at the expense of their personal values.

The role of groupthink and deindividuation

Groupthink, a term coined by social psychologist I. Janis (1972), occurs when a group makes faulty decisions because group pressures lead to a deterioration of "mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment". Groups affected by groupthink ignore alternatives and tend to take irrational actions that dehumanise other groups. A group is especially vulnerable to groupthink when its members are similar in background, when the group is insulated from outside opinions, and when there are no clear rules for decision making.

I. Janis (1972) identified eight symptoms of groupthink. The first is the illusion of invulnerability, which creates excessive optimism and encourages taking extreme risks. Another symptom is collective rationalisation, where group members discount warnings and fail to reconsider their assumptions. The third is the belief in inherent morality, where group members believe in the righteousness of their cause and ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions. Stereotyped views of out-groups is another symptom, where negative perceptions of the enemy make effective responses to conflict seem unnecessary. Additionally, there is direct pressure on dissenters, where members are pressured not to express arguments against the group's views. Self-censorship occurs when doubts and deviations from the perceived group consensus are not expressed. The illusion of unanimity is another symptom, where the majority's views and judgments are assumed to be unanimous. Finally, self-appointed "mindguards" protect the group and its leader from information that could be problematic or contradictory to the group's cohesiveness, views, and decisions.

When the above symptoms exist in a group that is trying to make a decision, there is a reasonable chance that groupthink will happen, although it is not necessarily so. Groupthink occurs when groups are highly cohesive and when they are under considerable pressure to make a quality decision. When pressures for unanimity seem overwhelming, members are less motivated to realistically appraise the alternative courses of action available to them. These group pressures lead to carelessness and irrational thinking since groups experiencing groupthink fail to consider all alternatives and seek to maintain unanimity. Decisions shaped by groupthink have low probability of achieving successful outcomes. I. Janis (1972) studied such groupthink "fiascos" as US failure to anticipate the attack on Pearl Harbor, the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion, the escalation of Vietnam war, and the ill-fated hostage rescue in Iran. The example of groupthink can be seen in decision of the aggressor state management to start the full-scale invasion against Ukraine in 2022, basing on underestimation of the bravery of Ukrainian nation, willingness

of our foreign partners to assist us and also overestimation of the number of collaborationists on the occupied territories (and territories the invaders thought would be occupied in the very first days of invasion).

M. Brown (2022) discussed the psychological mechanisms, including cognitive biases and group dynamics, that influence decision-making during war and conflict. Groupthink can lead to faulty decisions by narrowing the scope of available options and ignoring critical warnings, as seen in historical military failures. This aligns closely with I. Janis's definition of groupthink, where pressures for unanimity lead to a deterioration of critical thinking, and irrational decisions are made, often dehumanising the opposing side. The study emphasised that when groups are cohesive and face high stakes, such as in wartime scenarios, they are particularly vulnerable to these cognitive traps. For instance, I. Janis's identification of symptoms such as the illusion of invulnerability and stereotyped views of out-groups is evident in the decision-making processes that led to the 2022 full invasion of Ukraine, where the aggressor state underestimated the resilience of the Ukrainian nation and the international support they would receive. These factors, compounded by a misjudgement of the collaborationist presence in occupied territories, led to a significant miscalculation, exemplifying the dangers of groupthink in high-pressure, high-stakes situations. This reflects how groupthink's symptoms can distort reality and hinder effective decision-making, especially in military and political contexts.

The concept of deindividuation (Zimbardo, 1969) can explain how anonymity, group pressure, and loss of personal identity in certain situations can lead people to commit actions they would never do individually, as their sense of personal responsibility decreases. It is also worth mentioning that the phenomenon of deindividuation was described long before P. Zimbardo by G. Le Bon (1896), who argued that in a crowd, individual consciousness dissolves, and its place is taken by the "collective soul". People lose their individuality, intellect, and rational thinking, becoming more susceptible to emotions, suggestion, and irrational impulses. The crowd is extremely susceptible to suggestions and uncritically accepts any ideas if they are presented with sufficient force and repetition. Critical thinking is absent. The crowd is intolerant of any doubts or opposition, and its beliefs take the form of dogmas that are not subject to discussion. It tends to obey strong authority. G. Le Bon believed that the crowd always needs a leader who is able to use "affirmation, repetition, and contagion" to influence the masses. Leaders are not necessarily intellectuals but possess a strong will and the ability to influence emotions (Le Bon, 1896).

P.B. Paulus & J.B. Kenworthy (2025) provided insights into how various group dynamics influence deindividuation. The research demonstrated that factors such as group size, density, and the presence of observers can significantly reduce self-consciousness and lead to disinhibited behaviour, aligning closely with the classical effects of deindividuation described by P. Zimbardo (1969). In line with P. Zimbardo's theory, the study emphasises that anonymity and loss of personal identity in group settings contribute to a diminished sense of personal responsibility, prompting actions individuals might not engage in under normal circumstances. This idea of losing one's individuality in the presence of a group also connects with G. Le Bon's (1896) earlier observations, which suggested that crowds are particularly susceptible to emotional influences and irrational impulses, as the collective "soul" of the group overrides individual rational thinking. G. Le Bon's notion of the crowd's tendency to follow strong authority figured who can manipulate emotions resonates with P.B. Paulus & J.B. Kenworthy's (2025) findings, where increased group cohesion and similarity among members intensify the loss of personal identity, leading to conformity and heightened group influence. These dynamics underscored the powerful role of group pressure in shaping individual behaviours and decisions, particularly when individuals feel less accountable for their actions within a crowd.

Group norms and psychological mechanisms triggering collaborationism correspond with the ones affecting and inspiring resistance against invaders. The most notable mechanisms in triggering initial resistance described by R. Petersen (2001) include resentment formation, threshold-based safety calculations, and focal points. Resentment formation is spurred by group status reversals that occur when the occupying power takes over. Threshold-based safety calculations refer to overall level of opposition in society needed to convince individuals that participation is safe, while status considerations describe the positive social standing and respect individuals can garner by joining the opposition, particularly in its early stages. Finally, focal points encompass cultural and historical symbols that are drawn upon to coordinate and rally popular resistance. Turning to the mechanisms that move individuals from unarmed, unorganised opposition to organised, armed opposition), the role of local community becomes critical. Threshold-based safety calculations are now determined at the community level, and community-level norms of reciprocity are needed to draw individuals into active opposition despite the high risks involved. In order to sustain organised rebellion, threats and irrational psychological mechanisms such as wishful thinking, the tyranny of sunk costs, and the value of small victories help convince individuals to stay the course in spite of high costs. However, when the above-mentioned mechanisms are applied to collaborationism with the enemy, a reflection of these dynamics becomes evident: marginalised ethnic and/or political groups may harbour resentment towards the government of the occupied state, threshold-based safety calculations may favour collaboration with the

enemy, and focal points of the marginalised and oppressed minority can significantly differ from those shared by the loyal majority of the population.

Cognitive dissonance, diffusion of responsibility, and moral disengagement in wartime

Diffusion of responsibility occurs when individuals in a group setting feel less personal accountability for acting, especially in emergencies or morally ambiguous situations. The more people present, the more likely individuals will assume someone else will act, leading to inaction or passive complicity. J. Darley & B. Latané's (1968) study was inspired by the Kitty Genovese murder, where 38 witnesses failed to intervene during a prolonged attack. Their experiments showed that responsibility is psychologically "spread" across the group and social cues from others influence whether a situation is interpreted as requiring action. On the occupied territories it may result in passive complicity of atrocities committed by the occupiers, when individuals don't resist (or even don't admit) war crimes committed by the occupiers, justifying them via psychical constructions of "they just have followed their orders" or "other side was responsible", or even "the victims were punished lawfully". The other side of diffusion of responsibility lies in the direction of above-mentioned S. Milgram's (1963) obedience studies (which J. Darley & B. Latané referenced), where participants inflicted harm under authority, often justifying it by shifting responsibility to the experimenter. When others in group remain silent and passive, individuals interpret the situation as non-critical, reinforcing inaction and normalising collaborationist behaviour.

Y. Ai *et al.* (2024) highlighted how the bystander effect, and consequently diffusion of responsibility, remains prevalent across various helping scenarios, particularly in general assistance situations. The research demonstrated that in these contexts, individuals are less likely to intervene due to the assumption that others will take responsibility. The study also noted that this effect is weakened in extreme or emergency situations, where individuals are more likely to act due to heightened awareness of the urgency and moral responsibility. This aligns with J. Darley & B. Latané's (1968) findings, where the diffusion of responsibility was observed in less critical situations, like the Kitty Genovese murder, where multiple witnesses failed to intervene. The study by Y. Ai *et al.* (2024) further emphasised that in less critical contexts, the presence of others creates a shared responsibility, leading to inaction. However, in high-pressure or urgent situations, individuals are more likely to overcome this diffusion and act.

In the first case, collaborationists may experience dissonance between their moral beliefs and actions (e.g., reporting neighbours, enforcing orders of occupiers, spreading their propaganda). And in attempt to reduce discomfort, they may rationalise their behaviour, starting to think: "I had no choice" or "I was protecting my family". Post-decision dissonance means that after making a choice to collaborate, individuals may enhance the value of their decision and devalue resistance to justify their choice. For example, those who report their neighbours and acquaintances for participation in resilience or join a collaborationist police force may justify their actions by viewing resistance fighters as dangerous or misguided to reduce internal conflict. Avoidance of contradictory information speaks for itself: collaborationists may avoid news, people, or ideas that challenge their actions, as tis selective exposure helps maintain consonance and protects their self-image.

To some extent previous L. Festinger *et al.* (1956) research regarding the doomsday cult, whose leader's prophecy of flood failed. Instead of abandoning their beliefs, the most committed members intensified their proselytising, seeking social support to reduce dissonance. The same pattern can be seen in those collaborationists on the occupied territories, who continued to collaborate with the occupiers even after the latter withdrew from specific territories and it became obvious that their Blitzkrieg-style full-scale invasion failed. Also, the outcomes of L. Festinger & J.M. Carlsmith (1956) next experiment on forced compliance theory can also be applicable. In this experiment participants were asked to lie about a boring task being enjoyable for $1 or $20, and those paid $1 experienced more dissonance and changed their attitudes to believe the task was fun, because the low reward didn't justify the lie. With some rare exclusions (usually limited to top-rank officials who betrayed the state), nowadays collaborationists do not receive enormous payments or much of glory even in the aggressor state society, while been condemned by their compatriots and punished by Ukrainian law-enforcement agencies and courts. Nevertheless, collaborationists adjust their beliefs to align with their actions when external justification (e.g., coercion or reward) is minimal.

The study of A.-M. Bliuc & D. Muntele-Hendreș (2025) illustrated how, during the ongoing war in Ukraine, individuals create narratives that justify aggression and discrimination, thus reflecting moral disengagement and cognitive adaptation. The study revealed how collaborationists, facing dissonance between their moral beliefs and actions, may rationalise their behaviour to reduce discomfort, such as by convincing themselves that they had no choice or were protecting their families. These self-justifications echo L. Festinger's concept of post-decision dissonance, where after choosing to collaborate, individuals enhance the value of their decision and devalue resistance. Similarly, the avoidance of contradictory information helps collaborationists maintain cognitive consonance by shielding themselves from ideas or facts that challenge their actions. A.-M. Bliuc & D. Muntele-Hendreș's (2025) research provided a contemporary empirical example of how moral disengagement mechanisms operate in wartime, showcasing

how narratives of moral superiority and justification of collaboration parallel L. Festinger's theoretical framework on cognitive dissonance and its role in reducing internal conflict during morally ambiguous situations.

The role of education and group influence under occupation

The criminological theory of differential associations (Sutherland, 1947) is based on the theory of imitation (Tarde, 1892). Unlike G. Le Bon (1896), who focused on the irrationality of the crowd, Tarde emphasised interpersonal interaction and imitation as fundamental elements of social life. Social change and order occur through the diffusion of ideas, beliefs, desires, and habits from one person to another. Imitation can be both conscious and unconscious and often occurs according to the principle of hierarchy: people tend to imitate those whom they perceive as more prestigious, successful, influential, or strong. Tarde distinguished logical imitation, when an individual imitates something that seems logically beneficial or expedient, and non-logical, when imitation occurs without an obvious logical reason, often through emotions or habit (Tarde, 1892). Under occupation, when social norms and structures are destroyed, imitation becomes a key mechanism of adaptation.

People may imitate the behaviour of those who have already started cooperating with the occupying power, especially if this behaviour seems "beneficial" or "safe." This can be imitation of habits (for example, adopting the rules of the occupation administration) as well as deeper ideas (for example, adopting the ideology of the occupiers). G. Tarde (1903) might say that collaborative activity "spreads" through imitation, like a social epidemic. This assumption is based on Tarde's conclusions about the identity of the guilty action of a person and their environment in cases where the environment and the personality of the offender are inseparable (describing what is now called group cohesion). Developing Tarde's ideas, E. Sutherland (1947) developed his own theory of differential associations, which states that a person acquires criminal behaviour not because they have a natural personal inclination, but because they see examples of criminal behaviour in the group to which they belong. Learning criminal behaviour does not occur through mass media or abstract ideas, but through direct communication with other people, and the most significant and effective learning occurs in small groups, such as family, friends, colleagues, neighbours. A person's behaviour is determined by the balance between "definitions" that support breaking the law (positive attitude toward deviant behaviour) and "definitions" that condemn it.

According to N. Djaković & M. Rowlands (2024) the combination of differential associations and personal traits can predict the antisocial behaviour and it can explain why individuals may collaborate with occupying forces. The researchers argued that collaboration is not merely a result of fear or momentary emotional impulse, but rather the outcome of the social environment in which individuals are embedded. The environment (comprising family, friends, colleagues, or groups supportive of the occupier) can create conditions where deviant behaviour becomes normalised. If definitions that favour collaboration or support the occupying power prevail within one's social circles, individuals may be more likely to adopt those views and engage in collaborative actions.

Collaborationism in this context can be seen as a form of deviant and criminal behaviour from the point of view of national legislation and public morality. However, people are not born collaborators; they learn such deviant behaviour, which means that the tendency to cooperate with occupiers is formed through social interactions and learning, in particular through personal contacts with those who already cooperate with the occupiers, or with the occupiers themselves. These can be conversations with neighbours, relatives, colleagues who have already changed their position, or direct interactions with representatives of the occupation administration. People see how others adapt, what advantages they receive, or what punishments they suffer for disobedience, and this affects their own decision. People not only learn what to do according to the instructions of the occupiers, but also why it is "right" or "justified," that is, they assimilate rationalisations and motivations for such behaviour. Under occupation, the family, closest circle of friends, work collectives, and local communities become key centres where attitudes toward the occupiers are formed. If people appear in these small groups who begin to justify collaborative activity, or even encourage it (for example, through fear or benefit), this significantly increases the likelihood that other members of the group will also be inclined to cooperate.

Under the conditions of Russia's full-scale aggression, accompanied by the occupation of significant parts of Ukraine's territory, all types of collaborationism emerge, shaped by the factors mentioned above. However, this issue takes on particular significance in the context of collaborationism committed by educators. Specifically, as of May 1, 2025, there were 2,537 verdicts issued by courts of first instance and 1,895 verdicts and rulings by appellate courts under Article 111-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (2001). Of these, 296 verdicts from courts of first instance and 69 verdicts and rulings from appellate courts concerned precisely the collaborationism in educational sphere (Criminal Code of Ukraine, 2001). The substantial number of criminal proceedings initiated against educators underscores the particular relevance of the issue of wartime collaborationism within the educational sector during the Russian-Ukrainian War, thereby necessitating a nuanced and specialised analysis of its underlying dynamics and implications. Thus, according to the preamble of the Law of Ukraine No. 2145-VIII (2017), education

is the basis of the intellectual, spiritual, physical, and cultural development of the individual, their successful socialisation, economic well-being, a guarantee of the development of a society united by common values and culture, and the state. The purpose of education is the comprehensive development of a person as an individual and the highest value of society, their talents, intellectual, creative, and physical abilities, the formation of values and competencies necessary for successful self-realisation, the upbringing of responsible citizens capable of conscious social choice and directing their activities for the benefit of other people and society, enriching on this basis the intellectual, economic, creative, cultural potential of the Ukrainian people, raising the educational level of citizens to ensure the sustainable development of Ukraine and its European choice.

Both elements of the crime of collaborative activity, provided for in Part 3 of Article 111-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (2001), which the legislator has classified as Section I "Criminal offenses against the foundations of national security," encroach on the foundations of national security precisely through their harm to the above-mentioned tasks of education, and are committed by representatives of a specific group – teachers, whose task, among other things, is to educate citizens of Ukraine as honest and full-fledged subjects of the political process in Ukraine, future voters and candidates for elective positions. It is impossible to overestimate the harm caused both by propaganda in the interests of the aggressor state and by the introduction of educational standards of the aggressor state to a pupil or student who is just forming an idea of the form of government, state structure, and state-legal regime in the country, the rights and duties of a citizen, legal consciousness, and civic identity. In fact, the collaborative activity of teachers encroaches on what ensures the existence of our state over time – the succession and reproduction of generations in the civic and socio-political sense. It is difficult to imagine a problem more relevant to the subject (considering it from any of scientific approaches) of political psychology than this.

CONCLUSIONS

The research confirmed that psychological mechanisms, including groupthink, deindividuation, diffusion of responsibility, and cognitive dissonance, are primary factors motivating individuals to collaborate with occupying forces. Groupthink leads individuals to prioritise group consensus over moral considerations, while deindividuation reduces personal accountability, making collaboration easier. Diffusion of responsibility, as seen in the bystander effect, results in inaction or passive complicity, and cognitive dissonance enables individuals to rationalise their collaborationist actions, such as by justifying them as necessary for survival. These mechanisms, in combination with pressures to conform and the desire for social acceptance, illustrate how individuals align with occupying forces, even when it contradicts their prior values or beliefs.

The analysis demonstrated that collaborationism is multifaceted, encompassing involuntary and voluntary forms, as well as servile and ideological motivations. The complex interplay between personal survival, group dynamics, and broader societal influences creates fertile ground for collaborationism, particularly under occupation, when social structures are disrupted. Theories from social psychology, such as deindividuation and diffusion of responsibility, further elucidate how individuals may lose their sense of personal accountability and become more susceptible to group pressures, leading to actions that contradict their prior values and moral beliefs. The research highlighted the role of educators in collaborationism, noting that teachers, as agents of socialisation and civic identity formation, are uniquely positioned to influence the values and beliefs of future generations. Educators who engage in collaborationist activities, either by spreading occupier-imposed propaganda or adopting educational standards of the aggressor state, contribute to undermining national security and societal continuity. This underscores the need for a targeted politico-psychological approach to understanding and addressing the factors driving collaborationism among educators, whose influence extends far beyond the immediate context of occupation.

The study of wartime collaborationism through the lens of political psychology not only deepened understanding of human behaviour in extreme conditions but also provided practical guidance for safeguarding democratic values and national integrity in times of crisis. Future research should focus on examining the long-term psychological impact of collaborationism on individuals' moral recovery and identity reconstruction after conflict.

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Колабораційна діяльність як предмет політико-психологічного дослідження: теоретичні підходи

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Анотація. Проблема колабораціонізму під час війни залишається нагальною, особливо в контексті сучасних конфліктів, таких як війна Росії проти України. Розуміння психологічних і соціальних механізмів, які призводять до співпраці з окупаційними силами, є ключовим для запобігання таким явищам у майбутньому. Метою дослідження було вивчення феномену колабораціонізму через призму політичної та соціальної психології, а також розробка рекомендацій для попередження колабораціонізму та постконфліктної реабілітації. Дослідження застосувало міждисциплінарний підхід, поєднуючи теоретичні рамки та емпіричні дослідження з психології, кримінології, права та історії для аналізу різних форм колабораціонізму та механізмів, що до них призводять. Аналіз включав ключові психологічні концепції, такі як конформізм, підкорення, групове мислення, деіндивадуація, соціальна ідентичність, дифузія відповідальності, когнітивний дисонанс і диференціальна асоціація, для пояснення того, як індивіди та групи під окупацією можуть почати співпрацювати з ворогом, часто всупереч своїм попереднім цінностям чи інтересам. Особлива увага була приділена ролі освітян, чия колабораційна діяльність може підривати національну безпеку та безперервність громадянської ідентичності. У статті розглянуто механізми, за допомогою яких групова динаміка, авторитет і соціальне навчання сприяють колабораціоністській поведінці, зокрема в контексті триваючої російсько-української війни, що демонструє, як такі явища можуть інституціоналізуватися в окупованих суспільствах. Результати цього дослідження можуть бути використані фахівцями в галузях психології, права та безпеки для розробки стратегій запобігання колабораціонізму та підтримки постконфліктного примирення

Ключові слова: групове мислення; конформізм; деіндивідуація; соціальна ідентичність; когнітивний дисонанс; розсіювання відповідальності; диференціальна асоціація