

## Ukraine's Draft Dodger Problem Grows as Russia Gains Ground in War

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**Glenn Greenwald (GG):** So one of the ways that we can actually see some dissent, I guess you can call it, from the war policies of Ukraine, is something you've been reporting on and discussing a lot of and showing videos a lot of, which is the growing number of Ukrainian men who are physically resisting, not just hiding, but when they're found physically resisting the Ukrainian military recruiters who are trying to take them and force them to enlist in the military and then fight in the frontline. There was a BBC report from a month ago or so that said, since the start of the war, something like 650,000 Ukrainian men have left the country, have fled the country, have found a way out of the country, presumably to avoid the war. Do you think that this trend that you're showing is a growing trend among Ukrainian men resisting being drafted? And if so, why is that growing?

**Ivan Katchanovski (IK):** Yes. This is exact; as the videos which you just showed from different regions of Ukraine. One of them was filmed in the native region of Dnipropetrovsk region of southern Ukraine or eastern Ukraine, which is the native region of Zelensky. And another video was from Kiev city. And another video was actually from the Lviv region in western Ukraine, which is a very anti-Russian region. And in all these regions, basically, in all these different locations, people try to escape evasion. They try to avoid evasion specifically because they get caught by the police or by military recruiters on the street. And then they are sent to the frontline without a significant amount of training, without any skills. And many people get killed. So I looked into such evidence. I analysed these videos on social media. I watch hundreds of videos each day, and I only post a very limited amount of the videos because what I find is part of my research. They are just representative videos, which I posted recently and which also received a lot of attention. But I can say that the number of such videos has increased very significantly since the new mobilisation law was announced by Zelensky, two weeks ago. And they show that there is a very significant resistance to mobilisation, to forced mobilisation, to continue this war by people not only in eastern and

southern Ukraine, but also people in western Ukraine and the people in central Ukraine. And this is not only based on the videos, because if you look into statistics, in addition to the number of people which are mentioned in this BBC report, which you cited, 650,000, who actually left Ukraine, actually, according to a statement by a former advisor to President Zelensky, who actually said in one of his media interviews that four and half million Ukrainian men resisted; updating their information in military recruitment offices because they did not want to be called for the military, to be basically conscripted to the military service. So four and half million Ukrainians resisted doing this voluntarily. And now they face very significant punishment in terms of very significant fines and even possibility of confiscation of property and even imprisonment if they continue to not register their information to the military recruitment offices. Just looking at other kinds of sources of information, there was an interview by one of the officials from Lviv region, again in western Ukraine, which is a very anti-Russian region, who said that recently just 2% of people who were actually summoned to military recruitment offices, come voluntarily. So this means 98% of people in the most anti-Russian region of Ukraine do not want to do this. And according to some other information, according to media reports as well, millions of people, more than 1 million people, men of military, are actually now wanted by the police because they also evaded military registrations, they were awaiting to be called to the military service. In addition to this, I just checked my native region of western Ukraine, the Volhynia region, which is very close to Poland and there is this telegram group of people who actually just watched daily announcements about military conscription offices, their location and what they do, in which places they wait and try capturing men for the military service and this a group now has almost 40,000 members, subscribers. So this is just information. So basically this means if you look into the possible number of people who are eligible for military service now in this region, this would mean that at least 25% of men, who are eligible for military service, actually try to escape and avoid the call for such a service, in western Ukraine in this region. But if you're looking at other people who are not subscribed to this telegram channel, but watch this without subscribing or people who maybe I'm doing this as part of their families, so now it's very likely that actually the majority of people and men in western Ukraine actually they don't want to be basically captured and brought to the front line. And I think this is much more significant evidence of actual opinions of Ukrainians compared to what we see in the media and public opinion polls, which are not representative because they are, I think, very biased and just not reliable. And I have a new book which will be published soon, which is an open access book in which I also examine this issue, specifically as evidence of real public opinion and not what is actually presented in the media as basically Ukrainian men and Ukrainians wanting to fight Russia to the last Ukrainian. I think this is actually a view which is expressed by Western politicians. They often use Ukraine, just to fight Russia to the last Ukrainian. And I think this is a very unfortunate situation because this leads to very significant casualties in Ukraine and has devastating effects on Ukraine and Ukrainians.

**GG:** One of the things that amazes me is there's been a lot of reports, even in the Western media, about the political difficulties Zelensky had in expanding the draft mobilisation law. And the age of the draft had been 27, and he lowered it to 25 and even that was very difficult

to pass. It had a lot of political resistance. And then you had an American senator, Lindsey Graham, who's been a very vehement supporter of the war in Ukraine and pretty much a vehement supporter of every war that has ever existed, who went to Ukraine and then came back and he said he was shocked to learn that the draft age was only 27 and then moved to 25. Now it kind of scares me that someone who's been so involved in talking about the war and governing the war in the United States didn't know what you would know even just from reading basic reports. But I think one of the things he was reacting to is that during Vietnam and other American wars, the draft age in the United States was 18. So we were sending 18 and 19 and 20 year old kids over to fight in Vietnam and other wards before that, where the draft was used. Why has the draft age in Ukraine not been lowered to say, 18? Why is it at 27 and now 25 given how difficult it is for Zelensky to get enough people on the front line?

**IK:** I think one issue is the political difficulty because Zelensky can't damage or endanger his reputation or his approval in Ukraine. Because for him, basically the public relation is the most important issue. So he very carefully pays attention to his image and to a lot of his actions dictated by his own view, what would be beneficial to him in terms of public opinion in Ukraine and in the West. So in this case, such a change of the recruitment age, a lower age would not be very popular in Ukraine, and for this reason, Zelensky resisted this for a very long time. But this changed after visits by United States politicians and also the Senator whom you mentioned, and they basically told Zelensky to lower the draft age and he did this is because Ukraine is, what I say is, a client state of the United States, and the United States has a lot of saying and influence in terms of policy of the Ukrainian government. And Zelensky just often follows US policy in this case, and the instructions given by the US politicians. So he kind of just follows this; in this case the lowering of the draft age. But I think another issue is that there is a very small number of people, or men of this age group, eligible for military service in Ukraine, because one of the issues after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a very significant drop in the number of children that people had. And so in this case, the number of people who could be eligible in this age group is much smaller compared to older generations before the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. And, another issue is that a lot of younger people, of this age group, younger than 25 years old, also have exemptions for the military service, because such exemptions are given to students, for instance. So a lot of people who went to universities, or study in universities, are exempt from military service. And I think one of these policies dictated by Zelensky since the start of the war was to ban was Ukrainians from the age of 18 years old to 60 years old from leaving in Ukraine. So now people who are eligible for military service by their age, and not only this goes to people who are 18 years old until 25 years old are not able to leave Ukraine and this is just the result of the policy of Zelensky. And I think there is still a possibility that because of the current situation on the frontline, which has a very negative dynamic for Ukraine because of the military advantage, Zelensky might be forced to even lower the military draft conscription age to much younger age groups, including 18 years old. There are a lot of people, specific in the far right, people who are given interviews in Ukrainian television, they call for this, call openly to Zelensky to lower the draft age to 18 years old. And this is specifically given by people from the neo-Nazi Azov Regiment, or from a far-right sector group and so on. So now they lobby basically or they press Zelensky to lower the draft age.

And I think there is a possibility that he would be forced to do this because now this is a very difficult situation in Ukraine and specifically Zelensky will try to do so, to prevent this defeat. But, basically using again Ukrainians to stop the Russian advance, which will be very difficult to do because Russia has advantage in manpower but also military advantage in weapons.

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