Reading Orwell in Moscow

Natalia Vasilenok[*]

Stanford University

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Abstract

In this paper, I measure the effect of conflict on the demand for *frames of reference*, or heuristics that help individuals explain their social and political environment by means of *analogy*. To do so, I examine how Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 reshaped readership of history and social science books in Russia. Combining roughly 4,000 book abstracts retrieved from the online catalogue of Russia's largest bookstore chain with data on monthly reading patterns of more than 100,000 users of the most popular Russian-language social reading platform, I find that the invasion prompted an abrupt and substantial increase in readership of books that engage with the experience of life under dictatorship and acquiescence to dictatorial crimes, with a predominant focus on Nazi Germany. I interpret my results as evidence that history books, by offering regime-critical frames of reference, may serve as an outlet for expressing dissent in a repressive authoritarian regime.

1 Introduction

How do moments of political turmoil reshape the ways individuals make sense of their social and political environment? Previous research has documented that experiencing a dramatic event, such as a war, a regime transition, or a natural disaster, often leads to changes in political preferences. For example, losing a loved one on the battlefield may increase support for progressive taxation (Tchaouchev, 2025), whereas surviving a man-made famine can foster intergenerational distrust towards the regime responsible for it (Chen and Yang, 2019b). Less is known about the cognitive processes that connect lived experiences to the formation of political preferences.[1] Addressing this gap, I demonstrate that living through moments of political turmoil can evoke unexpected historical analogies and imbue the ongoing events with new political meaning.

To measure the effect of war on the demand for *frames of reference*, I examine how Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 reshaped domestic readership of books in *history and the social sciences*. By frames of reference, I understand heuristics that help individuals interpret unfamiliar events through *historical analogy*. In this paper, I combine roughly 4,000 book abstracts retrieved from the online catalogue of Russia's largest bookstore chain with monthly reading data from over 100,000 users of LiveLib, the most popular Russian-language social reading platform. For each user, I recorded all books marked as finished between January 2018 and May 2025. Using these data, I find that the start of the invasion prompted an abrupt and substantial rise in domestic readership of books that engage with the experience of a life under dictatorship, acquiescence to dictatorial crimes, and coming to terms with the dark chapters of family and national history. I interpret my results as evidence that the invasion generated a demand for frames of reference critical of the current regime.

To map the space of ideas represented in the Russian book market, I apply a structural topic model to the corpus of book abstracts and uncover three war-related clusters of topics emerging from patterns of word co-occurrence.[2] The first cluster, which I label 'Ideology', appears to promote Russian exceptionalism and justify confrontation with the West, echoing the political rhetoric employed by the Russian regime with respect to its invasion of Ukraine. The second, labelled 'Russian Wars', focuses on military conflicts in which Russia has participated throughout its history, with a particular emphasis on World War II. The third, labelled 'Dictatorship Crimes', examines the acquiescence of ordinary citizens to the crimes of dictatorial regimes, with a predominant, though not exclusive, focus on Nazi Germany, and occurs in a different subset of books than the first two. While the first cluster offers an ideological lens for interpreting the ongoing events, the latter two seem to provide readers with historical frames of reference.

I further show that the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was associated with divergent trends in the prevalence of these topics in the Russian book market. Abstracts of books published from 2022 onward devote, on average, around 2 percentage

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[1]Previous literature has highlighted fairness concerns (Scheve and Stasavage, 2016), blame attribution (Koenig, 2023), or exposure to economic hardships at the time of the event (Lueders, 2024).

[2]In topic modelling, each text is treated as a combination of several topics, whose proportions are estimated from patterns of word co-occurrence. As the model is agnostic to the substantive content of the discovered topics, they must be manually labelled based on in-depth reading of associated words and representative texts. See Section 4.1 for a detailed description of the methodology.

points more attention to 'Dictatorship Crimes' than books published earlier, constituting a 30% increase over the sample mean. In contrast, the prevalence of 'Ideology' decreases by 3 percentage points. There are no significant differences in the prevalence of 'Russian Wars' or non-war-related topics between books published before and after the start of the invasion. The results hold for both the years of earliest and latest prints in post-Soviet Russia, and remain robust to controlling for publisher fixed effects. As the Russian book market remained relatively uncensored after the start of the invasion, I expect that changes in book supply reflect changes in demand.

I then examine whether Russia's invasion of Ukraine shifted readers' preferences towards war-related books. Using data on the reading behaviour of LiveLib users who logged at least one book from the sample of book abstracts, I compare changes in readership of war-related topics to politically neutral ones before and after the start of the invasion, employing both difference-in-differences and event-study approaches. If war-related books acquired new political meaning by supplying historical analogies to the ongoing events, I expect their readership to increase after the start of the invasion.

Comparing books on 'Dictatorship Crimes' to those on 'Ancient Civilizations' — the most comparable topic based on its pre-invasion readership and accessibility — I find that the difference in readership between the two nearly doubled after February 2022, controlling for user and time fixed effects, but had been indistinguishable from zero for more than two years before the invasion. Although I find no immediate response of 'Ideology' books to the start of the invasion, there is a significant but moderate increase in the readership of the 'Russian Wars' cluster. This result suggests an increased interest in historical events, which can provide analogies to contemporary ones, rather than in ideological rhetoric. At the same time, the growth in readership of 'Dictatorship Crimes' significantly surpasses that of 'Russian Wars', increasing by 65% relative to their pre-invasion difference.

Finally, I demonstrate that the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic, uncovered in the sample of book abstracts, is replicated in patterns of individual reading behaviour. Relying on data on almost 10,000 history and social science books logged by at least 10 readers in my sample of LiveLib users, I measure book co-readership with the Jaccard similarity, which captures the extent to which two books are read by the same users relative to the total number of users who read at least one of these books. For each LiveLib book, I compute its average similarity to the set of books assigned to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic and find a substantial overlap between the two. The top 5% of the similarity distribution contains 51% of books assigned to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic, while all of the 25 books with the highest average similarity substantively correspond to the topic. In other words, if a LiveLib user has read a book on 'Dictatorship Crimes', she is likely to read another one as well.

As the average LiveLib user differs from the average Russian across multiple dimensions, my results cannot be expected to generalize to the broader Russian population. First, internet access and peer effects tend to shape individuals' decisions to register on social media platforms. Moreover, individuals who read regularly likely differ from those who do not in terms of their education, occupation, and available leisure time. Finally, LiveLib users who read history and social science books may exhibit a greater interest in politics and be inherently more sceptical of the Russian regime than those who prefer other genres. Even though my results cannot speak to the political preferences

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or attitudes towards the war of the average Russian, they shed light on changes in the demand for ideas among the younger, educated, urban, and economically active groups and suggest that books may serve as an outlet for expressing dissent even in a repressive authoritarian context.

Despite intensified repression in Russia aimed at silencing opposition to the war, it does not appear that it can introduce a considerable selection bias in the study of book readership. Unlike mass media tightly controlled by the regime, the book industry in Russia remained relatively free until recently, a perspective shared by industry insiders (Kharitonov, 2025).[3] Post-publication book bans remained rare, even though their frequency had been slowly increasing over the last decade. Similarly, until late 2024, publishers and booksellers did not face explicit state pressure in the form of arrests or substantial fines. This relative freedom may have allowed publishers to make decisions based on market forces. Although, anecdotally, the start of the invasion brought about a surge in pro-war cultural production, such as patriotic poetry, frontline reporting, and anti-Western philosophy (Pakhalyuk, 2025), my results indicate that the invasion significantly increased public interest in books focusing on the crimes of dictatorial regimes and confrontation with traumatic history, rather than ideologically driven narratives.

This paper contributes to two major literatures. First, it adds to the recently growing literature on the political economy of ideas by examining how new ideas emerge. By ideas, I understand beliefs about how the physical and social world works and ought to work.[4] Previous work has highlighted changes in communication technologies (Chiopris, 2024) and the geographic concentration of idea producers (Mitchell, 2019) as factors conducive to the emergence and diffusion of new ideas. In contrast, I show how ideas that were previously politically neutral can acquire political meaning during moments of political uncertainty by means of analogy.[5]

Second, this paper contributes to the literature on authoritarian information control. Prior research has argued that resilience to authoritarian information control depends on both the awareness of information manipulation and the demand for censored or suppressed content (Roberts, 2020). Awareness of information distortion may provoke aversion towards sources that engage in it (Pan and Siegel, 2020).[6] The lack of such awareness makes the demand for censored information inelastic, keeping it low even among educated and technologically sophisticated social groups, such as college students (Chen and Yang, 2019a). The literature, however, has yet to explain what can shift the demand. My paper demonstrates that a dramatic political event, such as a war, may stimulate public

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[3]On state pressure on mass media in Russia, see, for example, Sanovich, Stukal and Tucker (2018), Rozenas and Stukal (2019), Paskhalis, Rosenfeld and Tertytchnaya (2022), or Otlan, Kuzmina, Rumiantseva and Tertytchnaya (2023).

[4]Here, I follow the definition of a worldview developed by Mukand and Rodrik (2018). As an example, Mokyr (2018) describes the Enlightenment worldview, which posited the possibility of "economic improvement through an aggressive manipulation of natural forces made possible by useful knowledge".

[5]Building on the literature that highlights the importance of written works as a medium for disseminating technological and political ideas across historical contexts (Squicciarini and Voigtländer, 2015; Almelhem, Iyigun, Kennedy and Rubin, 2023; Avetian and Mehmood, 2024; Bai, Jia and Yang, 2024), I show that books continue to play an important role in expressing ideas today.

[6]For example, it has been shown that, between 2013 and 2015, the average consumer of online news outlets in Russia preferred less ideologically slanted representations of sensitive political events (Simonov and Rao, 2022).

interest in topics silenced or avoided by the regime if these topics bear an analogy to ongoing events.

Analogies are particularly appropriate for the study of public sentiment under authoritarian information control. The diffusion of ideas through books depends on a shared contextual understanding between authors and publishers, on the one hand, and the reading public, on the other (Dijk, 1980).[7] Changes in the broader political environment may prompt the political re-interpretation of topics that previously seemed to bear no explicit political relevance, invoking analogies and appealing to emotions and imagination. For these reasons, books have the potential to communicate attitudes towards political events even without explicitly mentioning them. Whereas publishing a book that openly calls for regime change may lead to political prosecution, focusing instead on the history of regime changes may end up being a commercial success.

2   Books and Frames of Reference

Why do we read books? I argue that the consumption of books serves three major functions. First, individuals may derive utility from reading books for leisure. Second, some books provide information which can be used to update beliefs and make real-life decisions, such as how to train for a marathon or where to dine while travelling. Third, books may offer *frames of reference* against which the world can be understood and judged. When confronted with an unfamiliar or unsettling environment, an individual may resort to analogies to impose structure on the unknown by referencing what is already known (Zashin and Chapman, 1974). While most books combine these functions across genres, works in *history and the social sciences* supply frames of reference in the most explicit manner.[8]

Due to its behavioural implications, analogical reasoning is pervasive in politics. Alongside other heuristics, such as partisanship or endorsements, analogies have the power to facilitate decision making under uncertainty. When a similarity is drawn between two events in one domain, analogical reasoning requires inferring their similarity in other domains, such as the set of available actions, the probabilities of their success, and their likely consequences (Steenbergen and Colombo, 2024). Furthermore, once accepted, an analogy compels individuals to also accept its moral or political implications. For these reasons, policymakers have extensively relied on analogies to guide their own decision-making and to justify their decisions to the public — with examples ranging from the Vietnam War (Khong, 1992) to Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Kalhousová, Finkel and Kocián, 2024).

Analogies and, more specifically, historical analogies have been previously studied in relation to their role in fomenting public support for policy decisions. Existing research suggests that invoking a positively perceived analogy can increase support for policy

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[7]For example, to infer that the mysterious disappearances in the haunted flat in Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* allude to the Great Terror, a reader must be familiar with the history of repression in the USSR and the author's relationship with the Soviet state. Otherwise, the novel will read less as a political statement and more as a work of fantasy.

[8]This may help explain why autocrats have historically paid close attention to regulating this type of books — for example, by banning history works (Bai, Jia and Yang, 2024) or rewriting school curricula (Cantoni, Chen, Yang, Yuchtman and Zhang, 2017).

reforms in diverse domains, ranging from health care to foreign policy (Barabas, Carter and Shan, 2020; Blair, Lendway and Schwartz, 2024). Similarly, drawing an analogy with the country's traumatic past, such as the history of state violence, has been shown to increase support for police reform and to promote protest participation (Thaler, Mueller and Mosinger, 2023; Mosinger, Thaler, Garcia and Fowler, 2022). However, studying the effects of analogical reasoning on public opinion typically involves presenting individuals with a set of pre-established analogies, either promoted by politicians and political activists or devised by researchers in a laboratory setting. Much less is known about how new analogies emerge in times of uncertainty and which analogies individuals form and adopt when confronted with an unfamiliar or unsettling environment.

Books in history and the social sciences provide a useful source for studying the emergence of new analogies. When an unexpected political event occurs, whose outcome is still unknown, such as a war or a regime transformation, individuals may turn to history to learn about past events that resemble the ongoing one.[9] For example, after a war breaks out, individuals may start seeking information about previous conflicts. This search for frames of reference is likely to increase the demand for history books, since they offer a natural means of learning about the past.

What remains unclear, however, is which frames of reference will be considered relevant to ongoing events. The salience of different analogies can be influenced by a combination of factors, such as public discourse about the event constructed by politicians, publishers' efforts to promote books in the market, the availability of books on various topics, or the interests and prior knowledge of readers themselves. A memorable and resonating title may also play a role. For example, *The German War* by Nicholas Stargardt, which examines how the German society responded to World War II, was published in Russian as *The Mobilized Nation* a year before the invasion. Initially unnoticed by Russian readers, it gained momentum after the government announced mass mobilization on September 21, 2022, as shown in Figure C1 in the Online Appendix.

For these reasons, I hypothesize that the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine will increase the readership of war-focused history and social science books. On the one hand, as Russian propaganda has been portraying the invasion of Ukraine as a defensive war against Nazism to the domestic audience (Treyger et al., 2025), heavily relying on World War II narratives, one could expect an increase in the readership of works on military history and ideologically slanted books. On the other hand, the invasion triggered a wave of mass anti-war protests across Russia, which were swiftly suppressed through large-scale repression, as well as dissent-driven emigration of up to a million Russians (Chi et al., 2025). Feelings of guilt and responsibility for one's home country's military aggression against Ukraine, expressed in surveys of Russian emigrants (Sergeeva and Kamalov, 2025), require different frames of reference, which might also be reflected in the patterns of book readership.

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[9]Analogical reasoning is inherently prone to producing bias (Steenbergen and Colombo, 2024), as finding an appropriate analogy to a complex social event is itself a cognitively demanding task. In this paper, however, I am not interested in whether historical analogies serve as efficient heuristics, but rather which analogies become most salient in a given political environment.

3 Data

Uncovering ideas conveyed by books poses several empirical challenges. First, ideas are notoriously difficult to quantify. Existing literature has focused on the emergence of previously unused word combinations that form new concepts in book titles (Chiopris, 2024) or the co-occurrence of specific words in the contents of written works (Almelhem, Iyigun, Kennedy and Rubin, 2023). However, relying on book titles may be too restrictive, as shorter titles may fail to capture more sophisticated ideas, whereas the full texts of recently published books tend to be copyrighted and inaccessible. Second, obtaining reliable readership data is similarly challenging. Online retailers, bookstore chains, and independent book sellers are typically reluctant to share proprietary sales data. Even when such data are available, they fail to capture engagement with alternative reading practices, such as audiobooks, electronic subscription services, borrowing books from libraries and friends, or piracy.

To mitigate these challenges, I rely on two novel data sources. I combine a corpus of abstracts of history and social science books retrieved from the online catalogue of Russia's largest bookstore chain with data on the monthly reading patterns of roughly 100,000 users of the most popular Russian-language social reading platform.

Books Sample: Chitai-Gorod Catalogue

Ideally, one would prefer to have access to the universe of books published in Russia in the years preceding and following the start of the invasion. However, no publicly available registry of all published titles exists. Moreover, according to the annual reports of the Russian Book Union, between 2019 and 2024, approximately half of all titles in Russia were printed in runs of fewer than 500 copies, which suggests a limited public reach. To balance sample size with the relevance of books to the general reading public, I focus on the online catalogue of *Chitai-Gorod* (Read City), the largest bookstore chain in Russia.

In December 2024, I scraped the entire online catalogue of *Chitai-Gorod*, which claims to rank books by popularity based on an undisclosed metric. For computational reasons, for the first 125,000 catalogue entries, I recorded each book's abstract along with book metadata, including the author, publisher, publication year of the edition in stock, the number of copies printed for that edition, and International Standard Book Number (ISBN). In the catalogue, each book is assigned to one or more thematic categories, and I focus on titles listed under 'History and Society'. I then exclude textbooks and educational materials, entries with a missing abstract or publication year information, and duplicates (i.e., earlier editions of the same book listed in the catalogue). This leaves me with 4,302 titles, available for purchase at *Chitai-Gorod*.

The publication year reported in the catalogue of *Chitai-Gorod* does not necessarily indicate the year when the book first appeared on the Russian market, as more successful books tend to be reprinted. To determine the original publication year in post-Soviet Russia, I rely on the online catalogue of the Russian State Library in Moscow. Under the Russian law, a copy of every printed work published in the country must be deposited in the Russian State Library. Using an automated search algorithm, I extracted all entries that matched a combination of book title and author, recording the publication year of the earliest matched edition published after 1990. This approach matched 74% of the

sample. For books not found in the Russian State Library catalogue, I relied on the earliest edition reported on LiveLib (see below), increasing the final match rate to 98%.

Figure C2 in the Appendix demonstrates the distribution of books in the sample by publication year. The purple distribution denotes the publication year of the edition in stock at *Chitai-Gorod* as of December 2024. The distribution is left-skewed leaning towards more recently released books with 50% of the books published from 2022 onward. The orange distribution shows the publication year of the first post-Soviet edition, covering 98% of the original sample for which data are available. This distribution has a heavier left tail. Whereas less than 1% of the most recent editions were published prior to 2010, this is true for 15% of the first editions. Among 4,270 books for which both the first and last publication years are available, 42% have been reprinted in a later year than their original release, implying that a substantial share of books on the market, despite not being the latest release, continue to experience public demand.

Readers Sample: LiveLib Data

To measure readership patterns, I retrieved data from LiveLib, a Russian-language social reading and book cataloguing platform. Founded in 2007, it allows users to log, rate, and review books, functioning as analogue to the international platform Goodreads. According to Similarweb, as of July 2025, LiveLib receives around 80% of its web traffic from users located in Russia, followed by Belarus and Ukraine, which account for about 4% of traffic each. Creating an account on LiveLib does not require users to provide identifying information, such as a legal name or a phone number.

To match the books from the *Chitai-Gorod* sample with entries in the LiveLib catalogue, I first relied on ISBN and, for books that remained unmatched, a combination of the book's title and author. This way, I was able to match 97% of the sample. For each matched book, I recorded the number of users who marked it as read or planned to read, and the average user rating. I then extracted the identifiers of users who had read each book, resulting in a total of 105,215 users. For each of these users, I retrieved the full list of books they have logged on LiveLib between January 2018 and May 2025, along with a logging date, which is publicly displayed on a website as a combination of a month and a year, the user's rating, and book metadata, such as title, author, and thematic category as defined by LiveLib. This procedure resulted in a sample of 96,119 active users who have logged at least one book since January 2018.

For each user, I recorded their registration date on the platform and their self-reported location. The location field contains unstandardized text that may mention a city, a region, a country, or a fictional place (e.g., 'Platonic realm of ideas'). To standardize and extract meaningful geographic data, I resorted to the OpenStreetMap API to match unstandardized entries to precise locations, extracting corresponding administrative names and countries. The location field was available for 46% of users, and I was able to standardize locations for 43%. Among those, 79% are from Russia, 7% from Ukraine, 6% from Belarus, and 2% from Kazakhstan. Almost 77% of all users registered before February 24, 2022.[10]

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[10]Figure C4 in the Appendix plots the dynamics of cumulative user registration between 2007 and 2025 for the entire sample, users located in Russia and Ukraine, and users with unknown location. The patterns across the four groups appear to follow the logistic curve of technology adoption, supporting

The sample of LiveLib users, however, cannot be treated as representative of the Russian population. First, self-selection based on peer effects or internet access, among other factors, drives individuals' decisions to register for any social media platform, including LiveLib. Second, a group of avid readers is likely to be biased relative to the general population in terms of education, residence, income, and available leisure time. Finally, individuals who read books in history and the social sciences may differ from those who prefer different types of books in terms of their occupation and interest in politics.

Although demographic information is not available for LiveLib users, about 48% of those who reported a Russian city as their location reside in the four largest cities — compared to only 15% of Russia's total population.[11] According to a survey studying Russians' reading behaviour, conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) in November 2024, 53% of respondents stated that they had read at least one book in the preceding three months. Comparing respondents who read books to those who do not, I find that readers are more likely to have higher educational attainment with at least an unfinished bachelor's degree, be female, have a high perceived income, be aged between 18 and 38, live in an urban area, and not watch TV, as demonstrated in Figure C5 in the Appendix.[12] Taken together, the average LiveLib user who reads history books appears to be more educated, reside in urban hubs, and be economically more active than the average Russian.

Table B2 in the Appendix reports descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analysis.

4 Empirical Strategy

4.1 Topic Discovery

The first step in studying how Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine affected Russians' reading preferences is to map the ideas circulating in the domestic market for books in history and the social sciences. To that end, I apply a structural topic model to my sample of book abstracts. From the perspective of topic modelling, each text is treated as a combination of multiple ideas, called topics, reflecting the inherent complexity of written works (Grimmer, Roberts and Stewart, 2022). Taking a fixed number of topics as input, the model estimates the probability of a topic being prevalent in a document, which can also be interpreted as the proportion of the text each topic comprises. Topic prevalence, in turn, is based on the presence of words associated with that topic. Since the model remains agnostic to the meaning of words, resulting topics need to be labelled manually based on substantive interpretation of the most representative documents and the most frequent words associated with each topic.

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the validity of the data. Furthermore, the registration dynamics for users from Ukraine appear to flatten out after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, reflecting Ukrainians' willingness to abandon Russian products and the Russian language (Kulyk, 2024), lending further credibility to the sample.

[11]These cities are Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and Novosibirsk.

[12]There is an ongoing discussion in the literature regarding the quality of survey research in authoritarian contexts, in particular, in Russia after the start of the invasion (Rosenfeld, 2023). However, questions about reading behaviour do not appear to be sensitive enough to induce self-censorship or non-participation among the respondents.

Unlike standard topic models, which assume independence across topics, structural topic models explicitly allow for the estimation of cross-topic correlations. On top of that, they incorporate document-level covariates into the process of topic discovery, allowing topic prevalence to vary with these covariates. In the estimation of a structural topic model, I control for *Post 2021*, a dummy variable that takes on a value of one if a book was published starting from 2022 onward.

To determine the optimal number of topics in the model, I aimed to balance three criteria: semantic coherence, measuring whether the same words tend to co-occur within a topic; exclusivity, indicating the extent to which different topics are comprised of distinct sets of words; and overall topic interpretability. I then grouped discovered topics into broader groups based on their correlation structure. Throughout the paper, I rely on the `stm` package in R (Roberts, Stewart and Tingley, 2019).

Has the start of the invasion shifted the distribution of ideas in the book market in Russia? To answer this question, I use the prevalence estimates for the groups of topics obtained from the structural topic model to estimate the following simple regression equation:

$$Pr(Topic)_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Post\ 2021_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{1}$$

where $Pr(Topic)_i$ is the estimate of the topic group j's prevalence in a document i. Here, I measure *Post 2021$_i$* in two ways: first, based on the publication year of the edition currently in stock; second, based on the publication year of the book's earliest edition in post-Soviet Russia. As the dependent variable is itself an *estimate*, standard errors need to be adjusted for the additional uncertainty. To do so, I sample 1000 topic prevalence estimates from the structural topic model posterior and compute the posterior standard deviation of $\hat{\beta}_1$. Finally, if the invasion affected the supply of books, it did so through publishing decisions, implying that the effect of the invasion operated at the publisher level. To account for that, I incorporate the cluster structure into the estimation of the standard errors using the Rubin's rule.

Text Preprocessing

Preprocessing decisions can affect the results of unsupervised learning models, making it crucial to document and, whenever possible, substantiate all preprocessing steps (Denny and Spirling, 2018). Following prior literature, I remove punctuation, numbers, capitalization, and stop words. Similar to other languages, there is no unified and theoretically grounded list of stop words for Russian. Most lists would include prepositions, pronouns, numerals, and copular verbs. I use the list that contains 421 words and overlap it with the full list of prepositions in Russian language.[13] Additionally, I drop non-Cyrillic characters, single-character words, which are often abbreviations, and author names from each abstract. I then perform lemmatization by assigning inflected word forms to their canonical forms.

The language of book abstracts differs from other types of texts in its reliance on a specific vocabulary. First, abstracts aim to delineate a book's target audience. For

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[13]The sources of all data used in text preprocessing are listed in Table B1 in the Appendix.

example, they often state that 'a book is intended for a broad audience of readers.'[14] Second, abstracts summarize the book's contents, which leads to overreliance on reporting language.[15] To capture abstract-specific language, I devise three strategies. First, from each abstract, I remove words that fall within the top 0.5% of the word frequency distribution. Across the entire corpus, the top three words are 'book' (used 5,142 times), 'history' (3,697 times), and 'war' (2,306 times). These words do not seem to provide substantive information about the books' contents, aside from indicating a focus on historical or societal topics, and can be considered stop words. Figure C3 in the Appendix shows 15 most frequent words along with their frequencies.

Second, I compile a list of abstract-specific words by comparing the corpus of book abstracts to the corpus of Russian mass media texts, which covers articles published on the online platforms of the 27 largest Russian mass media outlets between April 2016 and March 2017. I compute each word's relative frequency in the corpus of abstracts compared to the corpus of news and find the median of the frequency ratio distribution. I treat all words whose frequency ratio exceeds the median as abstract-specific. However, some words with high frequency ratios turn out to be infrequent in the corpus of abstracts, contradicting the definition of a stopword. I thus compute the 97.5% quantile of the abstract frequency distribution and exclude the words below this threshold from the list of abstract-specific words.

Third, I compute the frequencies of all three-word combinations, or 3-grams, that are formed after the exclusion of baseline stopwords, common words, and abstract-specific words. An examination of the most frequent 3-grams, such as 'contain comment hundred' or 'exert significant influence', suggests their mostly technical nature. Thus, I also drop words that enter 3-grams occurring more than four times in the corpus of abstracts.

As the final step, to reduce the sparsity of the document-term matrix and improve computational efficiency, I exclude all documents that consist of fewer than 15 words, which make up lower 5% of the document length distribution, and all words that appear in fewer than five documents. This leaves me with a sample of 4,028 documents for further analysis.

4.2 Book Readership

I then ask whether Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine reshaped readership in Russia and the relative popularity of various types of books. While I am interested in changes in individual reading behaviour, I expect the invasion to drive these changes through its effect on the salience of *books*. Thus, I estimate the following difference-in-differences-style model, where the unit of observation is a user-date-topic triple:

$$Read_{ikt} = \beta_1 Post\ Invasion_t \times Topic_{ik} + \mu_{ik} + \eta_t + \varepsilon_{ikt} \qquad (2)$$

Here, the outcome $Read_{ikt}$ denotes the share of books for which the prevalence of topic or group of topics k exceeds 50%, relative to all books that user i logged as read in month t, where $k \in \{1, 2\}$, as defined by the structural topic model discussed in Section 4.1. The

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[14]This is reflected in the most frequent three-word combination in the corpus, 'broad audience reader', mentioned 345 times.

[15]The most frequently used reporting verbs in the corpus are 'to devote', 'to recount', and 'to represent'. These rank 26th, 40th, and 71st among the most frequent words in the corpus.

month values range from January 2018 to May 2025. $Post\ Invasion_t$ is a dummy variable that takes the value of one in the post-treatment period, that is, the months following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, starting in March 2022. $Topic_{ik}$ is a dummy variable taking the value of one for $k = 2$, the topic of interest, and zero for $k = 1$, the reference group.

I further control for user-topic fixed effects μ_{ik}, which account for user-specific characteristics, such as logging behaviour, and their time-invariant preferences for each of the topics. Month-year fixed effects η_t account for time shocks affecting all users simultaneously, such as new book releases. After including fixed effects, the coefficient β_1 on the interaction term $Post\ Invasion_t \times Topic_{ik}$ reflects the average *change* in readership rates of the topic of interest relative to the reference topic after the start of the invasion. If positive, it indicates that an increase in readership rates for the topic of interest after the start of the invasion was larger than the corresponding increase for the reference topic.[16]

To ensure consistency of the sample and account for the growing popularity of LiveLib in Russia over time, I exclude users who registered on the platform before the start of the observation window, January 2018. To mitigate attrition, I further exclude users who logged their last book before March 2023, one year into the war. This leaves me with a sample of 26,635 active users. Figure C6a in the Appendix shows the total reading dynamics for all users in the sample, and Figure C6b on the subset of active users as defined above. Although the full sample demonstrates an upward trend in total readership up until 2023, indicating an increase in the user base, readership remains fairly constant in the restricted sample, oscillating around a monthly average of 72,000 logged books.

Some users can misreport their true reading behaviour. For example, one can log all books they have read over their lifetime in the month of their registration on the platform. This is evidenced by the descriptive statistics in Table B2 in the Appendix, where the maximum number of books logged in a month reaches 10,369. To account for misreporting in the most conservative way, I exclude all users whose maximum monthly log exceeds 30. This further reduces the number of unique users in the full sample to 23,911.

I also run Model 2 on three geographically defined samples: all users, users who have not reported their location as Ukraine, and users who reported their location as Russia. In all specifications, I employ two-way clustering of standard errors.

Model Validation

To test for pre-treatment effects, I estimate an event-study model, examining differences in readership rates between the two topics over 6-month periods relative to the 6 months preceding the start of the invasion, from August 2021 to January 2022:

$$Read_{ikt} = \sum_{t=-q}^{-2} \gamma_t Period_t \times Topic_{ik} + \sum_{t=0}^{m} \delta_t Period_t \times Topic_{ik} + \mu_{ik} + \eta_t + \varepsilon_{ikt} \quad (3)$$

Here, $Period_t$ is a dummy variable indicating a period of interest, γ_t is a set of pre-treatment coefficients, and δ_t is a set of post-treatment coefficients. To ensure consistent period length, I limit the analysis to months between February 2018 and January 2025,

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[16]Alternatively, it could also imply that a decrease in readership rates for the topic of interest after was smaller than the corresponding decrease for the reference topic.

amounting to seven full pre-treatment periods and six post-treatment periods. If the two topics followed the same trend prior to the invasion, the coefficients on the set of pre-treatment interactions γ_t should not be statistically different from zero. The coefficients on the post-treatment iterations δ_t, however, should be positive and gain significance. As before, I employ two-way clustering of standard errors.

As both Equation 2 and Equation 3 include the full set of fixed effects, they do not capture the *direction* of change. A positive coefficient on the interaction term could either reflect a larger increase *or* a smaller decrease in readership relative to the reference topic. Nor do they indicate whether the reference category itself experienced a change in response to the invasion. To address this concern, I estimate separate event-study models for both topics without time fixed effects. For a causal interpretation of the conflict effect on topic popularity, the reference topic should show no significant pre- or post-period changes. In contrast, the topic of interest should exhibit insignificant coefficients on the pre-period dummies, and positive and significant coefficients on the post-period dummies.

5 Results

5.1 What Books Are Being Published?

If one were to walk into a bookstore in today's Russia, which books would one find on the shelves devoted to history and the social sciences? To answer this question, I fitted a set of correlated topic models, with the number of topics ranging from 10 to 35, on the corpus of book abstracts from titles in stock in the online catalogue of the largest Russian bookstore chain as of December 2024. The model with 18 topics provided the best balance between semantic coherence and topic exclusivity while avoiding redundant or uninterpretable topics.[17]

Figure 1a presents the distribution of topics across the entire corpus, together with English translations of the three most frequent words associated with each topic. [18] In turn, Figure 1b shows the correlation structure among the topics, indicating those that tend to co-occur within the same documents. Whereas some of the topics, such as 'Royal Families' or 'Culture and Folklore', seem to be primarily oriented towards entertainment and bear no explicit political relevance, others are more directly connected to politics. Among those, two distinct clusters of topics emerge. One cluster can be labelled 'Russian Wars', focusing on the military conflicts Russia has engaged in throughout its history, with a specific emphasis on World War II.[19] The other cluster encompasses the topics 'Geopolitics' (8% of the corpus, making it the most frequent topic), 'Russia and Ideologies', and 'Evil Myths about Russia', and can be broadly labelled 'Ideology'. Many books in this cluster tend to broadcast the ideas of Russian exceptionalism, justify the

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[17]Figure C7 in the Appendix shows the average coherence and exclusivity values for models with varying numbers of topics. The substantive composition of topics tends to remain consistent across models, indicating the robustness of the results.

[18]Section A in the Appendix provides the author's interpretation of each topic and lists the five most frequent words associated with them, translated into English.

[19]In this cluster, I include topics 1 ('Soviet Elites'), 4 ('World War II'), 7 ('Intelligence'), 11 ('Weapons and Armies'), and 18 ('Russian Wars'). Being positively correlated with each other, these topics form a distinct cluster in Figure 1b.

confrontation with the West, and discuss alleged Western propaganda and mass media manipulation. One of the most representative documents is the book entitled *Evil Myths About Russia: What the West Says About Us.*

The prominence of these two clusters reflects broader patterns in contemporary Russian political rhetoric. The narrative of Russian exceptionalism and its value-based antagonism with the West has been steadily solidifying in the official political language over the past two decades (Sakwa, 2017; Laruelle, 2025). Correspondingly, works by notorious historical and contemporary Russian right-wing authors who contribute to this narrative, such as Alexander Dugin, tend to appear in the 'Ideology' cluster. Similarly, the state-promoted perspective on the Great Patriotic War — the term used in Russia to denote the conflict on the Eastern Front of World War II, fought between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany between June 1941 and May 1945 — has been considered by scholars as the foundational myth of the post-war Soviet and then post-Soviet Russian state (Tumarkin, 1995; Markwick, 2012).

Another topic with notable political relevance that stands out in the set of discovered topics, yet remains uncorrelated with the 'Russian Wars' and 'Ideology' clusters, is 'Dictatorship Crimes', which constitutes around 6% of the corpus. Documents with a high proportion of this topic focus on the lives of ordinary Germans during and after the Nazi dictatorship and their acquiescence to Nazi crimes, with a substantial emphasis on the Holocaust. The books with the highest prevalence of this topic are Tova Friedman's and Malcolm Brabant's *The Daughter of Auschwitz* and Horst Krüger's *The Broken House: Growing Up Under Hitler.* Also falling under this topic, though considerably less numerous, are books on early Soviet and Stalinist repression, as well as on other dictatorial regimes, such as North Korea.

This perspective on twentieth-century European history seems orthogonal to the state-promoted narrative with respect to both World War II and the invasion of Ukraine. Neither the Soviet Union nor post-Soviet Russia emphasized commemoration of the Holocaust (Markwick, 2012). Launched at the dawn of the Cold War, Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign downplayed the significance of the Holocaust, portraying the USSR as the main victim of German aggression and severing ties between Soviet Jewry and international organizations (Snyder, 2016). The Soviet reading of World War II appears to have persisted across generations. In a recent survey, fewer than half of Russian respondents listed the Holocaust among core World War II events, even though they completed the questionnaire in English, which might have prompted them to invoke more West-oriented narratives (Abel et al., 2019).

Similarly, Russian political rhetoric has explicitly framed the invasion of Ukraine in historical terms, drawing direct parallels to World War II. The invasion has been justified as the fight against 'Nazism' and the prevention of 'genocide' of the Russian-speaking population allegedly committed by the Ukrainian state (Treyger et al., 2025). While this perspective can indeed be found in some books within the 'Ideology' cluster, the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic is not correlated with either 'Ideology' or 'Russian Wars'. It therefore appears that 'Dictatorship Crimes' invokes a substantively distinct set of ideas in discussing Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.

Does the distribution of topics differ across books published before and after the start of the invasion? Table 1 shows the results of estimating Equation 1, comparing the average topic prevalence across topic clusters for books published before 2022 and from

14
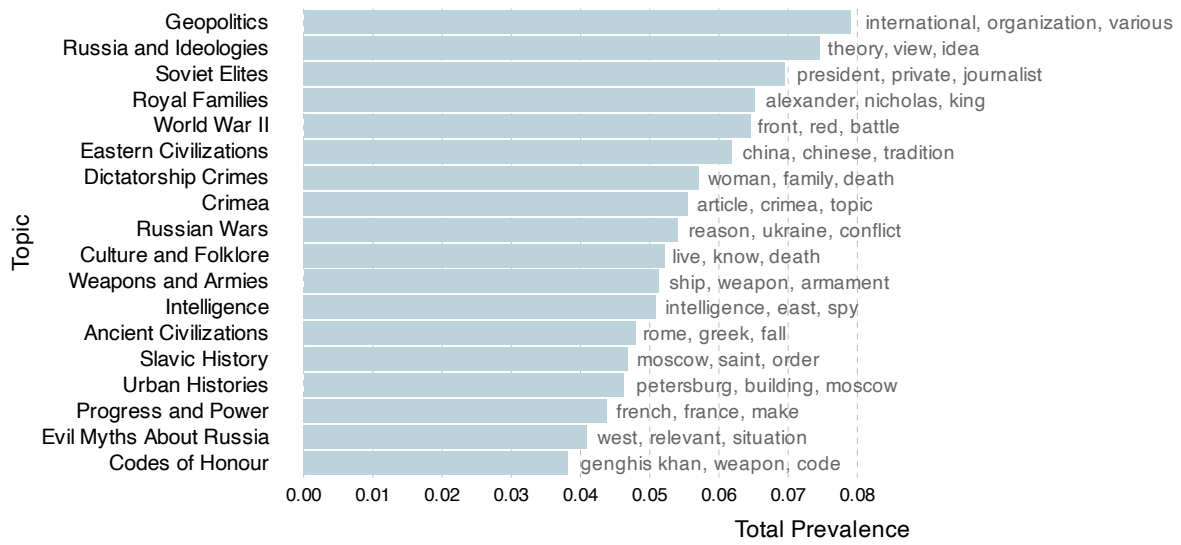
(a) Topic Prevalence

Notes: The figure shows the overall topic prevalence estimated from the correlated topic model with 18 topics, along with English translations of the three most frequent words associated with each topic. Topics were manually labelled based on an in-depth reading of the most representative documents and the most frequent words associated with each topic.
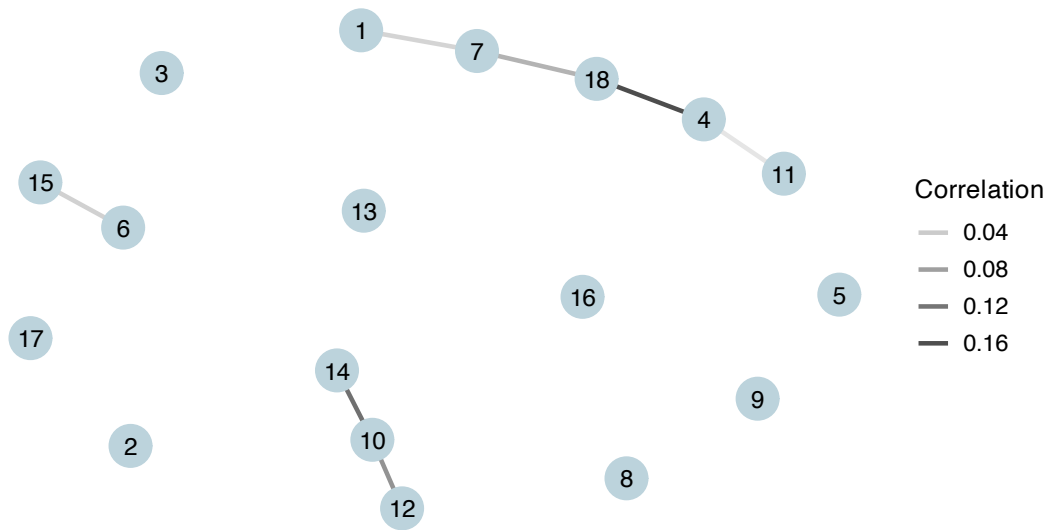
(b) Correlations across Topics

Topic Labels: 1 – Soviet Elites, 2 – Urban Histories, 3 – Codes of Honour, 4 – World War II, 5 – Royal Families, 6 – Eastern Civilizations, 7 – Intelligence, 8 – Culture and Folklore, 9 – Crimea, 10 – Russia and Ideologies, 11 – Weapons and Armies, 12 – Geopolitics, 13 – Slavic History, 14 – "Evil Myths" About Russia, 15 – Ancient Civilizations, 16 – Progress and Power, 17 – Dictatorship Crimes, 18 – Russian Wars.

Notes: The figure shows the estimated correlations across 18 topics. Correlations smaller than 0.01 have been set to zero.

Figure 1: Ideas on the Market for Books in History and the Social Sciences

Table 1: Topic Prevalence and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

	Dependent variable:			
	Topic Prevalence			
	Dictatorship Crimes	Ideology	Russian Wars	Other
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Published after 2021	0.018***	−0.034**	−0.002	0.018
	(0.006)	(0.015)	(0.029)	(0.032)
Mean of DV	0.06	0.19	0.35	0.4
Standard deviation of DV	0.14	0.26	0.34	0.35
Observations	4,028	4,028	4,028	4,028

Notes: The unit of observation is a book. The dependent variable is the sum of topic prevalence estimates derived from a structural topic model for a given topic cluster. Standard errors, computed using the posterior distribution of the topic prevalence estimates and adjusted for clustering at the publisher level, are shown in parentheses.
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

2022 onwards. In Column (1), the dependent variable is the prevalence estimates for the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic; in Columns (2) and (3), for the 'Ideology' and 'Russian Wars' clusters, respectively; and Column (4) combines the remaining topics. Abstracts of books published after 2021 devote, on average, around 2 percentage points more attention to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic than books published earlier. This constitutes a 30% increase over the sample mean. In contrast, the 'Ideology' cluster becomes significantly less prevalent in books published after the start of the invasion with a 3 percentage point decrease, corresponding to an 18% reduction relative to the sample mean. At the same time, neither the topics in the 'Russian Wars' nor all the remaining topics exhibit a significant difference in prevalence over time. The results hold when changes are traced within the same publisher by including the publisher fixed effects (see Table B4 in the Appendix), and when books are compared based on their first print in post-Soviet Russia (see Table B3 in the Appendix).

5.2 Which Books Get Read?

The results of structural topic modelling suggest that the history and social sciences sections of Russian bookstores began to feature more titles on dictatorships and their crimes following the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These books differ from both works on military history and those promoting the Russian regimes's political rhetoric on Russia's history and the ongoing war.

How popular are these books among the reading public? To answer this question, I focus on books whose abstracts consist of more than 50% of the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic, the 'Ideology' or 'Russian Wars' clusters, or any of the remaining topics. Table 2 reports the average number of readers who logged books as finished or planned to be

Table 2: Which Books Get Read?

	Books (1)	Read 2018–22 (2)	Read Total (3)	Planning Total (4)	Rating Total (5)	Price (6)	Copies (7)
Dictatorship Crimes	126	38.7	191.1	280.3	3.36	903.6	2201.4
Ancient Civilizations	120	31.0	100.7	172.7	3.02	929.1	1914.4
Other	1563	14.3	54.6	104.9	2.82	1023.1	1852.6
Ideology	557	7.5	27.9	60.2	2.23	952.1	1697.0
Russian Wars	1272	2.7	11.3	20.4	1.92	1087.0	1337.9

Notes: The unit of observation is a book, which contains more than 0.5 of a given topic or a cluster of topics. Columns (2) to (5) report data from LiveLib: the average number of users who logged books under a given topic as read between January 2018 and January 2025 or cumulatively at any time on LiveLib, the number of users who marked books as to be read, and the average rating of books, respectively. Column (6) reports the average price in rubles. Column (7) reports the number of printed copies of the edition in stock at *Chitay-Gorod*. The 'Other' category includes all topics discovered by the structural topic model that do not belong to the 'Dictatorship Crimes', 'Ideology', or 'Russian Wars' clusters. The rows are ordered by the number of readers.

read under each of the topics on LiveLib, along with the average user rating, the average price in rubles, and the average print run for the edition in stock at *Chitay-Gorod*.[20] It separately shows the average number of users who logged these books as read in the pre-treatment period, between January 2018 and February 2022.

Among the discovered topics, the highest average number of LiveLib users logged books under the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic as finished or planned to be read. It has also received the highest average user rating of 3.36 out of 5. Although books on 'Ideology' and 'Russian Wars' are 15 times more numerous than those on 'Dictatorship Crimes' in the *Chitay-Gorod* catalogue — 1,829 and 126, respectively — they have roughly one fifth as many readers on LiveLib, receive lower ratings, and have smaller print runs on average. Whereas the average book in the *Chitay-Gorod* sample is printed in approximately 1,700 copies, books on 'Dictatorship Crimes' have a higher than average print run of 2,200 copies, which might indicate their higher commercial success.

Among the remaining topics, 'Ancient Civilizations', dominated by titles on the history of Ancient Rome and Ancient Greece, most closely resembles 'Dictatorship Crimes' in terms of its popularity and public reach.[21] The two topics are statistically indistinguishable across all six variables. In particular, they don't differ in popularity *before* the start of the invasion, and show comparable average prices and print runs, suggesting similar levels of accessibility to readers. However, there is no reason to expect that it would exhibit any systematic response to the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as ancient history is not a politically contentious topic in present-day Russia. Taken together, it suggests that the 'Ancient Civilizations' topic serves as an appropriate comparison group for 'Dictatorship Crimes'.

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[20]Table B5 in the Appendix presents the full set of topics.

[21]The example of a representative document is Douglas Boin's *Alaric the Goth: An Outsider's History of the Fall of Rome*, originally published in English in 2020 and translated into Russian in 2023.

5.3 How Did Readers React to the Invasion?

From 2022 onward, news outlets in Russia have started documenting puzzling changes in domestic book readership. By the end of 2022, historical studies and memoirs exploring the daily lives of ordinary Germans under the Nazi dictatorship had become bestsellers, despite an overall decline in book sales.[22] Indeed, the results of structural topic modelling confirm that books on 'Dictatorship Crimes' occupy a prominent position in the market for books in history and the social sciences in Russia. Did the invasion, then, prompt an increase in readership of such books?

Table 3 reports the results of estimating Equation 2. In Panel A, readership rates for books categorized under 'Dictatorship Crimes', a war-related topic, are compared to those under 'Ancient Civilizations', a politically neutral topic, controlling for user-topic and month-year fixed effects. In Panel B, the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic is compared to the 'Ideology' cluster, and in Panel C to the 'Russian Wars' cluster. Here, books are assigned to a topic if it accounts for more than 50% of the book's abstract according to the structural topic model. Column (1) shows the coefficients obtained on the full sample of active users, Column (2) excludes users who reported Ukraine as their location, and Column (3) focuses on users who reported Russia.

Across all specifications, there is a positive and significant increase in readership rates for 'Dictatorship Crimes' relative to 'Ancient Civilizations'. Both the significance and the magnitude of the effect are robust to geographic restrictions of the sample. According to the most conservative estimates, derived from the sample of users who reported Russia as their location and presented in Column (3), readership rates of books under 'Dictatorship Crimes' increased by approximately 68% in the post-invasion period relative to its pre-invasion mean, controlling for a simultaneous change in the reference topic. Alternatively, this corresponds to a 1.9 times increase relative to the pre-invasion difference of 0.024 percentage points.[23] There is also an increase in the difference in readership rates between books on 'Dictatorship Crimes', on the one hand, and those on 'Ideology' or 'Russian Wars', on the other, albeit of a smaller magnitude, corresponding to an approximately 133% and 65% increase relative to the pre-invasion difference between 'Dictatorship Crimes' and a respective topic.

To what extent can the increase in readership of 'Dictatorship Crimes' books be attributed to the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine? Figure 2 presents dynamic differences in readership rates between 'Dictatorship Crimes' and 'Ancient Civilizations' over 6-month periods relative to the start of the invasion, estimated from Equation 3 using the full sample of active users to maximize statistical power.[24] The reference period, encoded as -1 and denoted with the red dashed vertical line, represents the last pre-invasion period and spans August 2021 to January 2022. While the difference in readership between the two topics remains close to zero in magnitude and statistically indistinguishable from the reference period during the two years preceding it, it starts increasing immediately after the start of the war. The coefficient in the first post-treatment period between February 2022 and July 2022 is not statistically significant, which may

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[22]Natalia Anisimova, "Demand for books on Nazi Germany has soared in Russia", *RBC*, October 21, 2022. https://www.rbc.ru/politics/11/10/2022/63453e5a9a79470cb0ecaffa

[23]The pre-invasion differences are reported in Table B6 in the Appendix.

[24]The results remain robust to dropping users who reported Ukraine as their location.

Table 3: Changes in 'Dictatorship Crimes' Readership Rates and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

	Reference		Dependent variable:	
			Read, %	
		(1)	(2)	(3)
Panel A				
Post Invasion × Dictatorship Crimes	Ancient Civilizations	0.052*** (0.007)	0.051*** (0.008)	0.045*** (0.008)
Panel B				
Post Invasion × Dictatorship Crimes	Ideology	0.033*** (0.006)	0.033*** (0.006)	0.032*** (0.008)
Panel C				
Post Invasion × Dictatorship Crimes	Russian Wars	0.031*** (0.007)	0.031*** (0.007)	0.020** (0.008)
User-Topic Fixed Effects		✓	✓	✓
Month-Year Fixed Effects		✓	✓	✓
Pre-Invasion Treated Mean		0.065	0.065	0.066
Pre-Invasion Treated SD		1.92	1.92	1.94
Geographic Sample		All Users	Not Ukraine	Russia
Unique Users		23,911	23,050	13,101
Observations		2,475,938	2,390,946	1,411,302

Notes: The unit of observation is a user-date-topic triple. The dependent variable is a percentage of books under topic k — defined as books whose abstracts are more than 50% comprised of the respective topic as defined by the structural topic model — relative to the total number of books recorded by the same user in month t. The panel covers the period from January 2018 to May 2025. Standard errors, clustered by user and month, reported in parentheses.
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

partially reflect the time required to read a non-fiction book on an emotionally challenging topic. The coefficients in the subsequent post-treatment periods become statistically significant, with estimates around 0.04 percentage points, and remain so for two years after the first post-treatment period between August 2022 and July 2024.

The interaction event-study model with month-year fixed effects, however, does not indicate the direction of change. For example, it is possible that the start of the war *reduced* readership across all topics, but that the readership of war-related books declined to a lesser extent. To rule out this possibility, I estimate the event-study model separately for each topic, omitting time fixed effects, and present the results in Figure 3. If the start of the invasion prompted the reading public to look for frames of reference in history, one should be able to observe an increase in readership rates for war-related topics after the
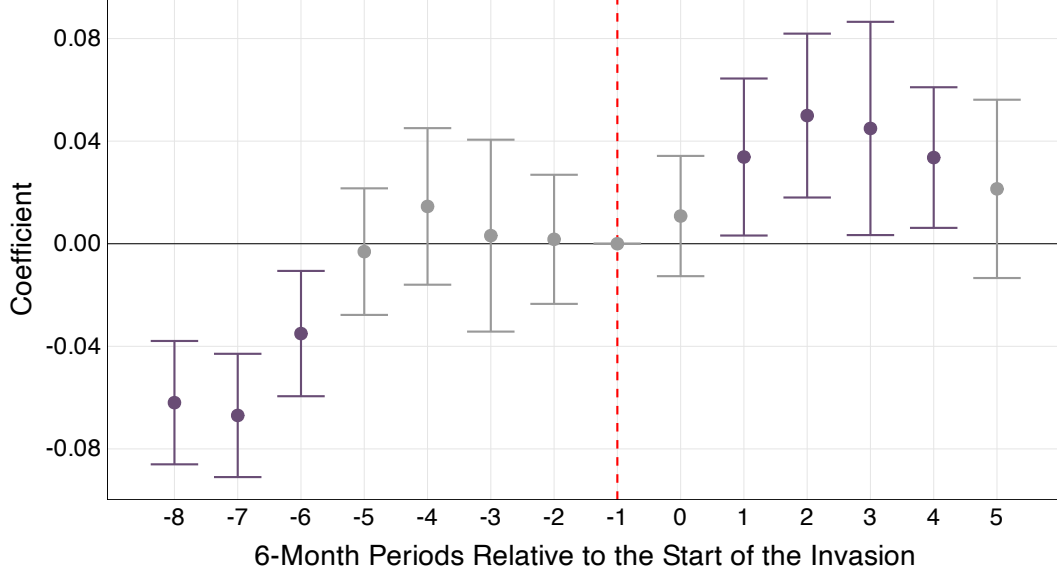
Figure 2: Changes in 'Dictatorship Crimes' Readership Rates Relative to 'Ancient Civilizations' Readership Rates

Notes: The figure reports coefficients on interactions between the topic dummy and the pre- and post-period dummies estimated from Equation 3, comparing readership rates of books on 'Dictatorship Crimes' against those on 'Ancient Civilizations'. The reference period, encoded as -1 and denoted with the red dashed vertical line, spans August 2021 to January 2022. The unit of observation is a user-date-topic triple. The dependent variable is the percentage of books under topic k — defined as books whose abstracts are more than 50% comprised of the respective topic as defined by the structural topic model — relative to the total number of books recorded by the same user in month t. The panel covers the period from February 2018 to January 2025. Coefficients significant at the 5% level are displayed in purple, and insignificant in gray. Standard errors are clustered by user and month.

start of the invasion, but not before. At the same time, politically neutral books should not exhibit a positive response to the invasion.

The estimates confirm the expectation. Whereas there is a visible increase in readership rates for 'Dictatorship Crimes' after the start of the invasion, shown in Panel (a), those for 'Ancient Civilizations' remain stable throughout the entire period, as displayed in Panel (b). A similar pattern is observed for travel books, as categorized by LiveLib, demonstrated in Figure C8 in the Appendix. Whereas there is a steady decline in readership of travel books between 2018 and 2020, which might have been related to pre-pandemic decreases in disposable income and pandemic travel restrictions, it remained stable between 2021 and 2024, exhibiting no observable response to the start of the invasion. In contrast, readership rates for 'Russian Wars', shown in Panel (c), having displayed no trend before the invasion, appear to increase immediately following its onset, albeit with a considerably smaller magnitude than 'Dictatorship Crimes'. Finally, whereas books on 'Ideology' show no clear response to the start of the war, there is a small but significant increase beginning in mid-2023, as displayed in Panel (d).

The results suggest that the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to an increase in domestic interest in war-related topics, but not politically neutral ones. While there appears to be an immediate yet small rise in readership of books on military history and conflicts involving Russia, the increase is much more pronounced for books on the Holocaust, Nazi Germany, and everyday life under dictatorship. I interpret these results
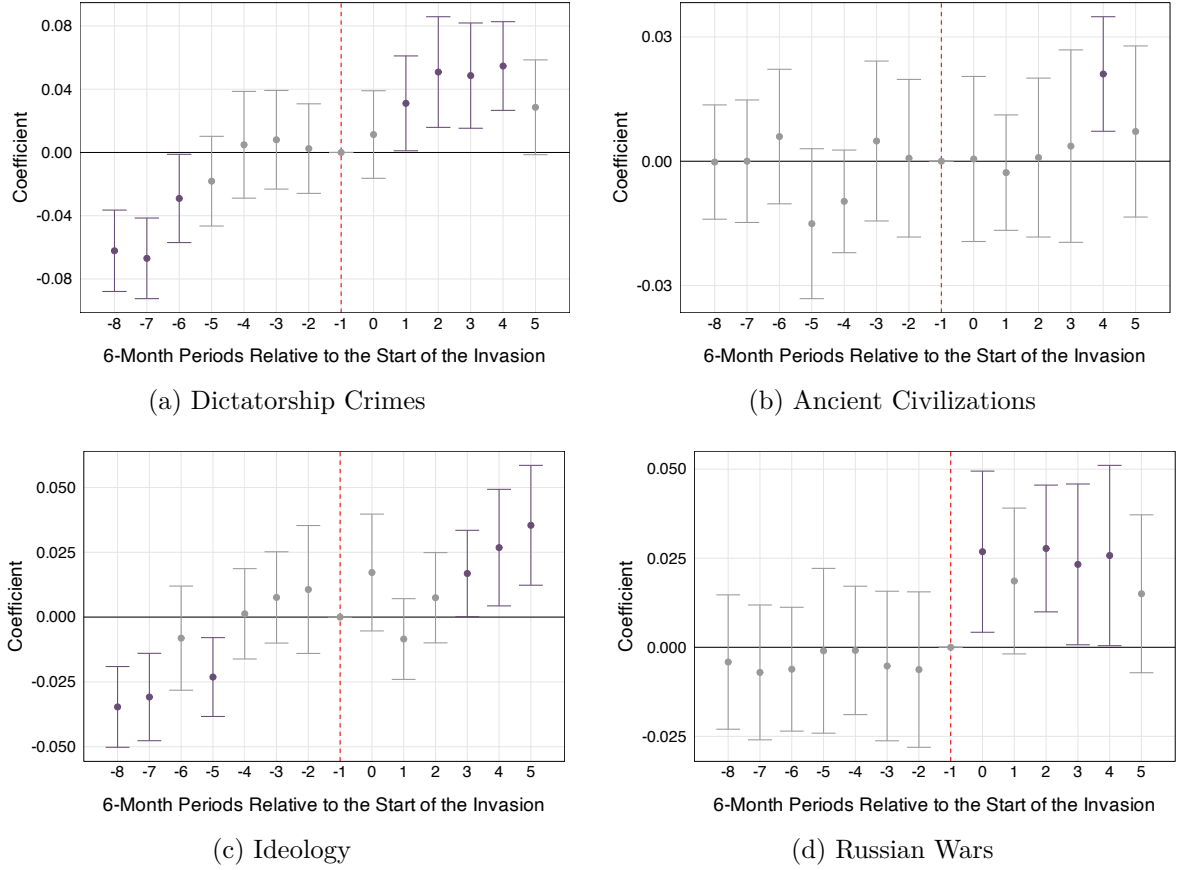
(a) Dictatorship Crimes

(b) Ancient Civilizations

(c) Ideology

(d) Russian Wars

Figure 3: Changes in Readership Rates and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Event-Study Model

Notes: The figure reports coefficients on the pre- and post-period dummies estimated from Equation 3 for separate topics. The reference period, encoded as -1 and denoted with the red dashed vertical line, spans August 2021 to January 2022. The unit of observation is a user-date. The dependent variable is the percentage of books under topic k — defined as books whose abstracts are more than 50% comprised of the respective topic as defined by the structural topic model — relative to the total number of books recorded by the same user in month t. The panel covers the period from February 2018 to January 2025. Coefficients significant at the 5% level are displayed in purple, and insignificant in gray. Standard errors are clustered by user and month.

as evidence that the invasion generated a demand for historical analogies: living during the ongoing war prompts readers to learn more about past ones. Furthermore, I treat the rising popularity of books on dictatorial crimes among LiveLib users as an indication of the emergence of a new frame of reference, which draws an analogy between the experience of living in contemporary Russia and that of living under past dictatorial regimes.

5.4 Topic Validation

Does the reading public in Russia, however, perceive books on 'Dictatorship Crimes' as a distinct group in the book market? Estimated by a structural topic model based on patterns of word co-occurrence in book abstracts, the discovered topics do not account for how readers engage with books in practice. As a result, they may not correspond to

meaningful patterns of reading behaviour. To validate the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic, I rely on readership data from LiveLib, focusing on patterns of book co-readership.

To this end, I extract the set of unique books logged by all users in the LiveLib sample between January 2018 and May 2025, resulting in a total of 671,554 entries. The distribution of readership is highly right-skewed, with approximately 41% of all books logged by a single reader. To improve computational efficiency and focus on titles with non-trivial readership, I restrict the analysis to books with at least 10 readers, which constitute 19% of all titles. Of the 126 books assigned to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic (see Table 2), 67 meet this threshold. For each of these books, I extract the thematic categories assigned by LiveLib — the most frequent being 'Biographies and Memoirs', 'Documentary Literature', and 'History'. I then restrict the full list of books to include only those belonging to these categories, focusing on titles most topically related to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' books, resulting in a subset of 9,935 history-related books.

Using these data, I construct a user-book matrix in which rows correspond to unique users who have read any of the 9,935 history-related titles, columns correspond to books, and entries indicate whether a user has read a given book. This results in a matrix with 84,042 rows and 9,935 columns. Relying on the user-book matrix, I derive a book-to-book similarity matrix using the Jaccard index, which measures the extent to which two books are read by the same users relative to the total number of users who read at least one of them.[25] Finally, for each of 9,935 history-related books, I calculate its average similarity to 67 'Dictatorship Crimes' books, excluding similarity with itself.

Figure C9 in the Appendix demonstrates the distribution of similarity values. It is concentrated around zero, with 50% of titles sharing less than 0.02% of their readership with the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic. In contrast, *The Twins of Auschwitz* by Eva Mozes Kor, whose abstract was estimated to contain 94% of the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic, has also the highest Jaccard similarity of 0.03, implying that, on average, 3% of the combined readership of this book and other 'Dictatorship Crimes' books have read both. Similarly, the top 5% of the similarity distribution contains 51% of books assigned to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic. In other words, 'Dictatorship Crimes' books tend to be read together.

Which other books do users, however, read alongside 'Dictatorship Crimes' books? Table B7 in the Appendix lists the 25 books with the highest average similarity, indicating whether they entered the *Chitay-Gorod* sample and were assigned to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic. All listed books substantively correspond to the topic, focusing on the Holocaust (*After Auschwitz*), the experience of a life under dictatorship (*Defying Hitler*[26]), acquiescence to Nazi crimes (*The Conscience of a Nazi Judge*), and coming to terms with the dark chapters of family and national history (*My Grandfather Would Have Shot Me: A Black Woman Discovers Her Family's Nazi Past* and *An Inconvenient Past: The Memory of State Crimes in Russia and Other Countries*). Most of the books in the *Chitay-Gorod* sample were also assigned to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic; those that were not have an average prevalence of 25% for the 'Dictatorship Crimes'. Therefore, this topic emerges both in the book abstracts and in the observed behaviour of LiveLib users.

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[25]The results are robust to using cosine similarity.

[26]Przeworski (2023) commented on the English edition of this book: "For the despair at the futility of resistance, see Haffner's 1939 memoir, which was horribly mistitled in English as *Defying Hitler*, it was called *Memoir of a German* in the German original."

6 Conclusion

This paper studies the effect of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 on the demand for frames of reference conveyed by history and social science books in Russia. I conceptualize frames of reference as heuristics that help individuals interpret unfamiliar or unsettling events by means of historical analogy. By drawing an analogy between the present and the past, individuals can infer likely outcomes and the moral implications of ongoing events. I thus ask which historical analogies can be found in the books that Russians were reading after the war began. To that end, I examine 4,000 books listed in the online catalogue of Russia's largest bookstore chain, extracting their abstracts and supplementing them with the data on readers who logged these books as finished on LiveLib, a Russian-language analogue of the social book cataloguing platform Goodreads, along with all other books they read, between 2018 and 2025.

A text analysis of book abstracts uncovers three war-related topics in the Russian book market. One provides an ideological lens on the ongoing events, featuring books that promote the Russian regime's rhetoric on its role in the world and its invasion of Ukraine, while the other two appear to offer historical frames of reference: books on military history and books on the crimes of past dictatorial regimes, with a predominant focus on Nazi Germany. Although the first topic remains the most prevalent overall, its share decreases after the start of the invasion. In contrast, books on dictatorship crimes gain prominence and appear to attract the largest readership on LiveLib. I argue that these books do not align with the Russian regime's stance on the invasion, as they highlight events that are largely absent from the regime's political discourse, such as the Holocaust, acquiescence to totalitarian regimes, and mass repression — potentially offering a substantively different interpretation of the invasion. I then provide evidence that the invasion prompted LiveLib users to shift towards books on dictatorship crimes, compared to politically neutral books or the other two war-related topics. Moreover, books on dictatorship crimes appear to cluster in an individual's reading behaviour: users tend to read these books together.

I interpret my results as evidence that the invasion generated a demand for frames of reference critical of the Russian regime among *LiveLib users*. Reading books on dictatorship crimes may prompt readers to draw an analogy between life in contemporary Russia and life under past dictatorial regimes. These results, however, must be treated with caution, as they may not be informative of the broader Russian population. The average Russian reader tends to be more educated and a have higher income than someone who does not read books, whereas the average LiveLib user is more likely to reside in the centers of cultural, social, and political life in the country. Although one could not rule out a possibility that segments of the population that are critical of the regime may be overrepresented among LiveLib users, my results nonetheless suggest that history books may serve as an outlet for expressing dissent in a repressive authoritarian regime.

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Appendix to 'Reading Orwell in Moscow'

Natalia Vasilenok

September 19, 2025

A   List of Topics

This section provides an interpretation of the topics identified in the sample of book abstracts using a structural topic model and lists the English translations of the five most frequent words associated with each topic. For details of the methodology, see Section 4.1.

1. **Soviet Elites**

   - *Definition*: This topic features biographies and studies of Soviet and early post-Soviet leaders and political elites.

   - *High-frequency words (English)*: president, private, journalist, leader, government

2. **Urban Histories**

   - *Definition*: Studies on urban history, urban planning, architecture, and city guides.

   - *High-frequency words (English)*: Petersburg, building, Moscow, Sankt, capital

3. **Codes of Honour**

   - *Definition*: Books on this topic discuss military codes of conduct from various countries, such as the Japanese Bushido and the Russian Empire's duelling code.

   - *High-frequency words (English)*: Genghis Khan, weapon, code, duration, sword

4. **World War II**

   - *Definition*: The topic focuses on specific battles, operations, and armies, as well as the memoirs of war participants, with a particular emphasis on events on the Eastern Front.

   - *High-frequency words (English)*: battlefront, red, battle, soldier, Moscow

5. **Royal Families**

   - *Definition*: The topic includes books that explore the private lives of royal families across the world in history and today. A significant portion of these books focuses on the Romanov family.

   - *High-frequency words (English)*: Alexander, Nicholas, king, family, England

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6. **Eastern Civilizations**

   - *Definition*: The topic explores the history and politics of countries situated between the Middle East and the Mongol Empire, from antiquity to the present. It also includes books on the Russian Empire's policies in Central Asia.
   - *High-frequency words (English)*: China, Chinese, tradition, religion, Japan

7. **Intelligence**

   - *Definition*: The topic features books on the international history of espionage, with a focus on World War II and the Cold War. It also features works on the contemporary Russian intelligence service. Some books under this topic seem to be written in a conspiracy-mongering tone.
   - *High-frequency words (English)*: intelligence, East, spy, republic, region

8. **Culture and Folklore**

   - *Definition*: This is a fairly heterogeneous topic that comprises historical and cultural studies of religious and secular holidays, folklore, and national traditions.
   - *High-frequency words (English)*: live, know, death, knowledge, topic

9. **Crimea**

   - *Definition*: This topic explores the history of Crimea's annexation by the Russian Empire and its role in wars waged by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.
   - *High-frequency words (English)*: article, Crimea, topic, extend, cover

10. **Russia and Ideologies**

    - *Definition*: This topic includes works promoting hierarchical and elitist worldviews, anti-globalist agendas, and conspiracy theories.
    - *High-frequency words (English)*: theory, perspective, idea, public, offer

11. **Weapons and Armies**

    - *Definition*: Studies and references on historical and modern weapons.
    - *High-frequency words (English)*: ship, weaponry, armament, cruiser, aircraft

12. **Geopolitics**

    - *Definition*: This topic focuses on international relations, examining Russia's role in the global political and economic order and its own and other countries' foreign policies.
    - *High-frequency words (English)*: international, organization, various, consider, governance

13. **Slavic History**

   - *Definition*: Medieval and early modern history of Russia and Eastern Europe.
   - *High-frequency words (English)*: Moscow, saint, order, Ivan, church

14. **Evil Myths About Russia**

   - *Definition*: This topic focuses on alleged anti-Russian sentiment and Russia's confrontation with the West.
   - *High-frequency words (English)*: West, relevant, situation, profound, picture

15. **Ancient Civilizations**

   - *Definition*: The topic includes books on Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, and nomadic empires, as well as the cultural history of worship and religious rituals.
   - *High-frequency words (English)*: Rome, Greek, fall, Ottoman, sea

16. **Progress and Power**

   - *Definition*: This topic combines books on advances in technologies, both in industry and science and governance and power.
   - *High-frequency words (English)*: French, France, make, technology, discovery

17. **Dictatorship Crimes**

   - *Definition*: The topic primarily focuses on the Holocaust and the lives of ordinary Germans under the Nazi dictatorship, as well as books on the atrocities of other dictatorial regimes.
   - *High-frequency words (English)*: woman, family, death, love, Jewish

18. **Russian Wars**

   - *Definition*: The history of military conflicts involving Russia throughout its history.
   - *High-frequency words (English)*: reason, Ukraine, conflict, defeat, confrontation

B   Tables

Table B1: Data Sources

Description	Used For	Source
Chitay-Gorod catalogue	Books data	https://www.chitai-gorod.ru/catalog/books-18030
LiveLib	Readership data	https://www.livelib.ru/
Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM)	Survey on reading behaviour, November 2024	https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/chtenie-v-ehpokhu-cifry
Russian State Library	First publication year in post-Soviet Russia	https://search.rsl.ru/ru
Stopwords for Russian language	Text preprocessing	Ranks NL
Russian prepositions	Text preprocessing	Wiktionary
Russian mass media corpus	Text preprocessing	Max Fomichev on GitHub

Table B2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	St.Dev.	Median	Min	Max	N
Books Sample						
Words in Abstract	45.4	24.0	42.0	1	257	4,302
Published after 2021	0.6	0.5	1.0	0	1	4,302
Copies Printed	1,694.5	1,915.1	1,200.0	20	40,002	3,770
Price (Rubles)	1,027.3	729.7	839.0	87	9,870	4,001
Reprinted after 2021	0.2	0.4	0.0	0	1	4,270
Users Read	43.9	321.9	2.0	0	11,144	4,201
Users Planning	79.9	346.8	2.0	0	8,312	4,201
Average Rating	2.4	2.0	3.5	0	5	4,201
Users Rated	42.2	311.1	2.0	0	10,920	4,201
Readers Sample						
Registered before January 1, 2018	0.4	0.5	0	0	1	95,913
Registered after February 24, 2022	0.2	0.4	0	0	1	95,913
Active until February 24, 2023	0.7	0.4	0	0	1	95,913
Books Logged, Per Month	1.8	10.0	0	0	10,369	8,153,030
History Books Logged, Per Month	0	0.4	0	0	261	8,153,030

Table B3: Topic Prevalence and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: First Prints

	Dependent variable:			
	Topic Prevalence			
	Dictatorship Crimes	*Ideology*	*Russian Wars*	*Other*
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
First Published after 2021	0.021***	−0.028*	−0.003	0.009
	(0.008)	(0.016)	(0.032)	(0.036)
Mean of DV	0.06	0.19	0.35	0.4
Standard deviation of DV	0.14	0.26	0.34	0.35
Observations	3,939	3,939	3,939	3,939

Notes: The unit of observation is a book. The dependent variable is the sum of topic prevalence estimates derived from a structural topic model for a given topic cluster. Standard errors, computed using the posterior distribution of the topic prevalence estimates and adjusted for clustering at the publisher level, are shown in parentheses.
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

clearpage

Table B4: Topic Prevalence and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Fixed Effects

	Dependent variable:			
	Topic Prevalence			
	Dictatorship Crimes	*Ideology*	*Russian Wars*	*Other*
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Published after 2021	0.011*	−0.024*	0.000	0.013
	(0.005)	(0.012)	(0.020)	(0.025)
Publisher Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean of DV	0.06	0.19	0.35	0.4
Standard deviation of DV	0.14	0.26	0.34	0.35
Observations	4,028	4,028	4,028	4,028

Notes: The unit of observation is a book. The dependent variable is the sum of topic prevalence estimates derived from a structural topic model for a given topic cluster. Standard errors, computed using the posterior distribution of the topic prevalence estimates and adjusted for clustering at the publisher level, are shown in parentheses.
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table B5: Which Books Get Read?

	Books	Read 2018–22	Read Total	Planning Total	Rating Total	Price	Copies
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Clusters							
Dictatorship Crimes	126	38.7	191.1	280.3	3.36	903.6	2201.4
Ideology	557	7.5	27.9	60.2	2.23	952.1	1697.0
Russian Wars	1272	2.7	11.3	20.4	1.92	1087.0	1337.9
Topics							
Ancient Civilizations	120	31.0	100.7	172.7	3.02	929.1	1914.4
Eastern Civilizations	150	18.3	89.9	133.2	2.72	1167.5	1521.4
Culture and Folklore	90	16.9	87.4	166.8	2.89	913.9	2634.8
Codes of Honour	87	11.5	80.8	126.9	3.07	940.2	2039.5
Progress and Power	89	10.0	44.0	92.0	3.06	985.8	2367.7
Urban Histories	117	8.3	28.5	58.4	3.02	1249.3	1835.3
Royal Families	161	6.1	25.3	66.6	2.89	916.2	1934.0
Slavic History	125	13.7	16.6	41.4	2.43	951.0	1546.3

Notes: The unit of observation is a book, which contains more than 0.5 of a given topic or a cluster of topics. Columns (2) to (5) report data from LiveLib: the average number of users who logged books under a given topic as read between January 2018 and January 2025 or at any time, the number of users who marked books as to be read, and the average rating of books, respectively. Column (6) reports the average price in rubles. Column (7) reports the number of printed copies of the edition in stock at *Chitay-Gorod*. The rows are ordered by the number of readers.

Table B6: Pre-Invasion Readership Differences

| | Geographic Sample: | | |
	All Users	Not Ukraine	Russia
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Panel A: Dictatorship Crimes against Ancient Civilizations			
Pre-Invasion Difference Mean	0.021	0.019	0.024
Pre-Invasion Difference SD	2.502	2.496	2.407
Panel B: Dictatorship Crimes against Ideology			
Pre-Invasion Difference Mean	0.022	0.019	0.024
Pre-Invasion Difference SD	2.484	2.499	2.412
Panel C: Dictatorship Crimes against Russian Wars			
Pre-Invasion Difference Mean	0.027	0.025	0.031
Pre-Invasion Difference SD	2.440	2.474	2.351
Unique Users	23,911	23,050	13,101

Notes: The table reports pre-invasion differences in readership rates, computed as a percentage of books under topic k relative to the total number of books recorded by the same user in month t, for books under 'Dictatorship Crimes' against those under 'Ancient Civilizations', 'Ideology', and 'Russian Wars'. The data cover the period from January 2018 to January 2022.

Table B7: Most Similar Books

Title	Author	Dictatorship Crimes (1)	Chitay-Gorod Sample (2)	Average Similarity (3)
The Twins of Auschwitz	Eva Mozes Kor and Lisa Rojany-Buccieri	✓	✓	0.030
Auschwitz Lullaby	Mario Escobar			0.028
My Grandfather Would Have Shot Me: A Black Woman Discovers Her Family's Nazi Past	Jennifer Teege and Nikola Sellmair	✓	✓	0.028
Perpetrators: The World of the Holocaust Killers	Guenter Lewy			0.028
The Little Girl Who Could Not Cry	Lidia Maksymowicz and Paolo Rodari			0.027
Boy From Buchenwald	Robbie Waisman and Susan Elizabeth Mc-Clelland			0.027
999: The Extraordinary Young Women of the First Official Jewish Transport to Auschwitz	Heather Dune Macadam			0.027
The Broken House: Growing up under Hitler	Horst Krüger	✓	✓	0.026
Konrad Morgen: The Conscience of a Nazi Judge	Herlinde Pauer-Studer and J. David Velleman		✓	0.026
A Demon-Haunted Land: Witches, Wonder Doctors, and the Ghosts of the Past in Post-WWII Germany	Monica Black		✓	0.026
The German War: A Nation Under Arms, 1939-1945	Nicholas Stargardt	✓	✓	0.026
Last Stop Auschwitz	Eddy de Wind			0.026
The diary of Eva Heyman	Eva Heyman		✓	0.026
Doctors from Hell: The Horrific Account of Nazi Experiments on Humans	Vivien Spitz			0.025
The Pharmacist of Auschwitz: The Untold Story	Trisha Posner	✓	✓	0.025
Defying Hitler: A Memoir	Sebastian Haffner			0.025
Aftermath: Life in the Fallout of the Third Reich, 1945–1955	Harald Jähner	✓	✓	0.025
An Inconvenient Past: The Memory of State Crimes in Russia and Other Countries	Nikolai Epple			0.024
The Happiest Man on Earth	Eddie Jaku			0.024
Witnesses of War: Children's Lives Under the Nazis	Nicholas Stargardt	✓	✓	0.024
After Auschwitz	Eva Schloss	✓	✓	0.023
Hiroshima	John Hersey		✓	0.023
The Volunteer: The True Story of the Resistance Hero who Infiltrated Auschwitz	Jack Fairweather			0.023
Hitlerland: American Eyewitnesses to the Nazi Rise to Power	Andrew Nagorski		✓	0.023
The Daughter of Auschwitz	Malcolm Brabant and Tova Friedman	✓	✓	0.023
Counts		9	14	25

Notes: The table lists the 25 books with the highest average similarity values based on LiveLib co-readership patterns. Column (1) indicates whether a book was assigned to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic by the structural topic model. Column (2) indicates whether a book was present in the *Chitay-Gorod* sample. Column (3) reports the average Jaccard similarity values computed between each book and the books assigned to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic by the structural topic model, excluding self-similarity.

C   Figures

The German War *by* Nicholas Stargardt
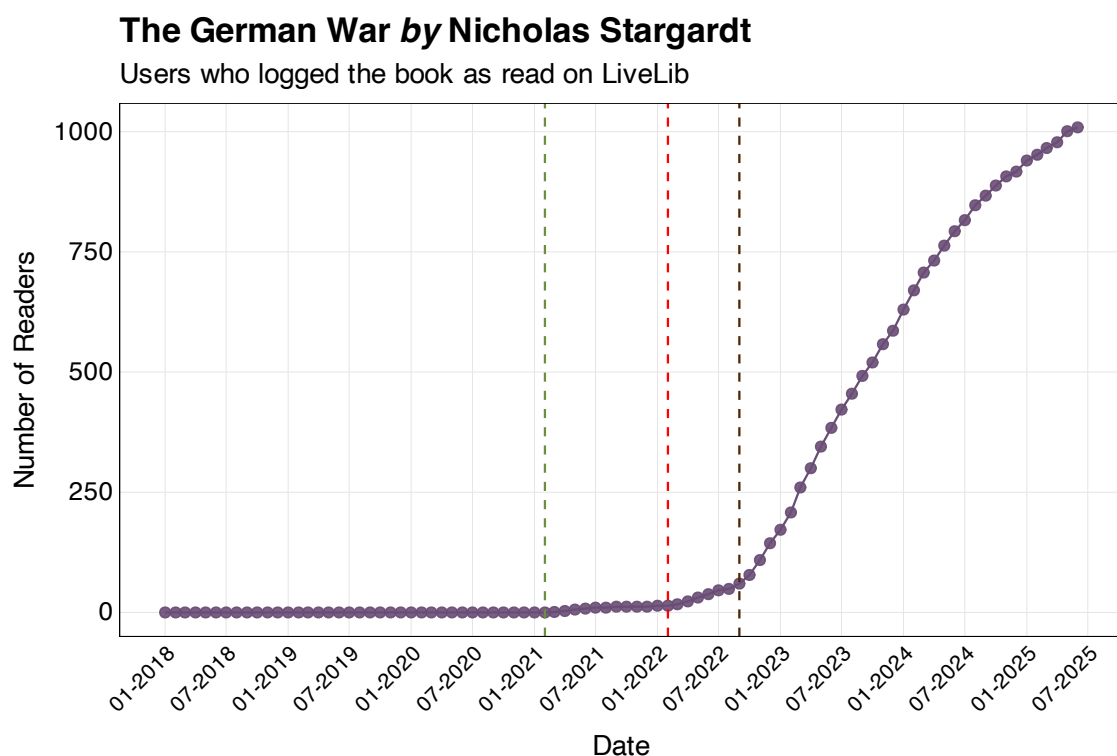
Users who logged the book as read on LiveLib

Figure C1: Search for Frames of Reference

Notes: The figure shows the cumulative number of LiveLib users who logged *The German War* by Nicholas Stardardt (in Russian translation, *The Mobilized Nation*) as finished by a given month. The red dashed line indicates the start of Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the brown dashed line marks the announcement of the mobilization on September 21, 2022. The green dashed line denotes February 2021, the month when the book was published.
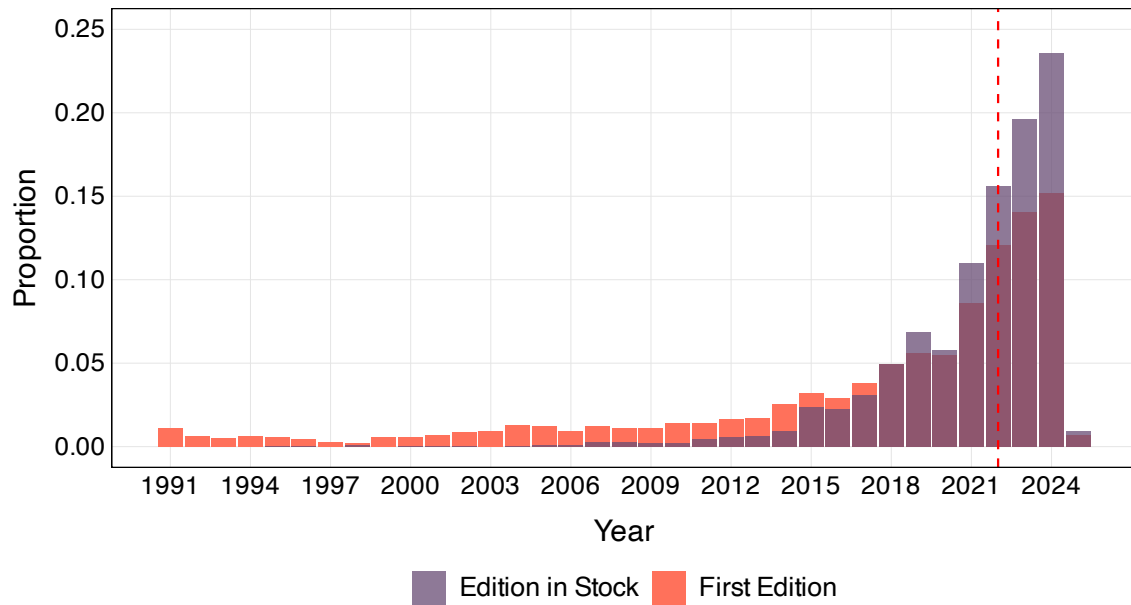
Figure C2: Books by Publication Year

Notes: The figure shows the distribution of books in the sample by publication year. The purple distribution represents the publication year of the edition in stock at *Chitai-Gorod* as of December 2024. The orange distribution represents the publication year of the first post-Soviet edition. Data are retrieved from the Russian State Library for 76% of the original sample and from LiveLib for 22%. The red dotted vertical line indicates the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
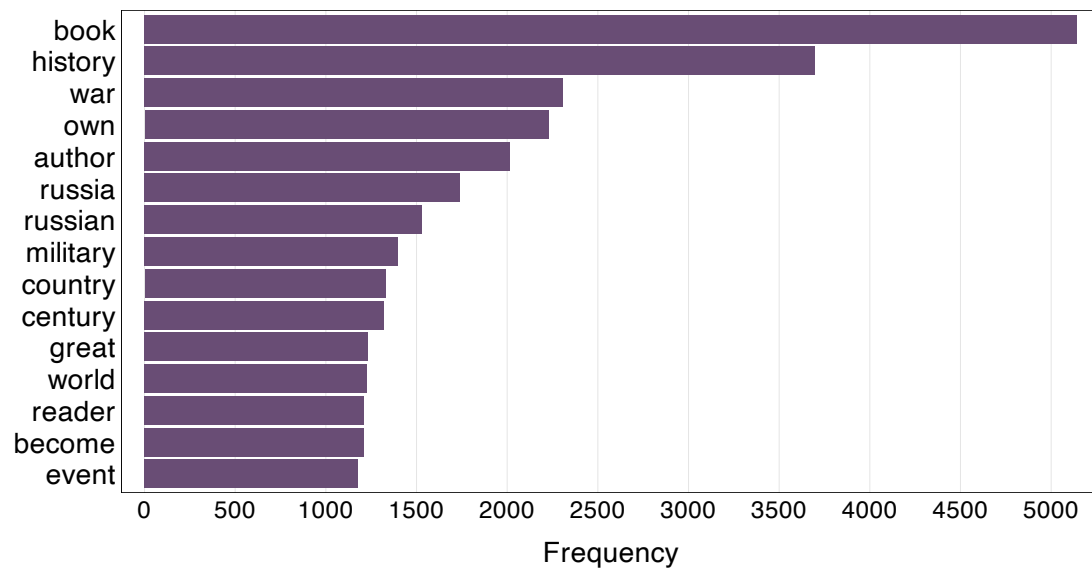
Figure C3: Most Frequent Words

Notes: The figure shows the English translations of the 15 most frequent words across the corpus of book abstracts after the baseline set of stopwords has been excluded.

(a) Full Sample

(b) Located in Russia

(c) Located in Ukraine

(d) Location Unknown
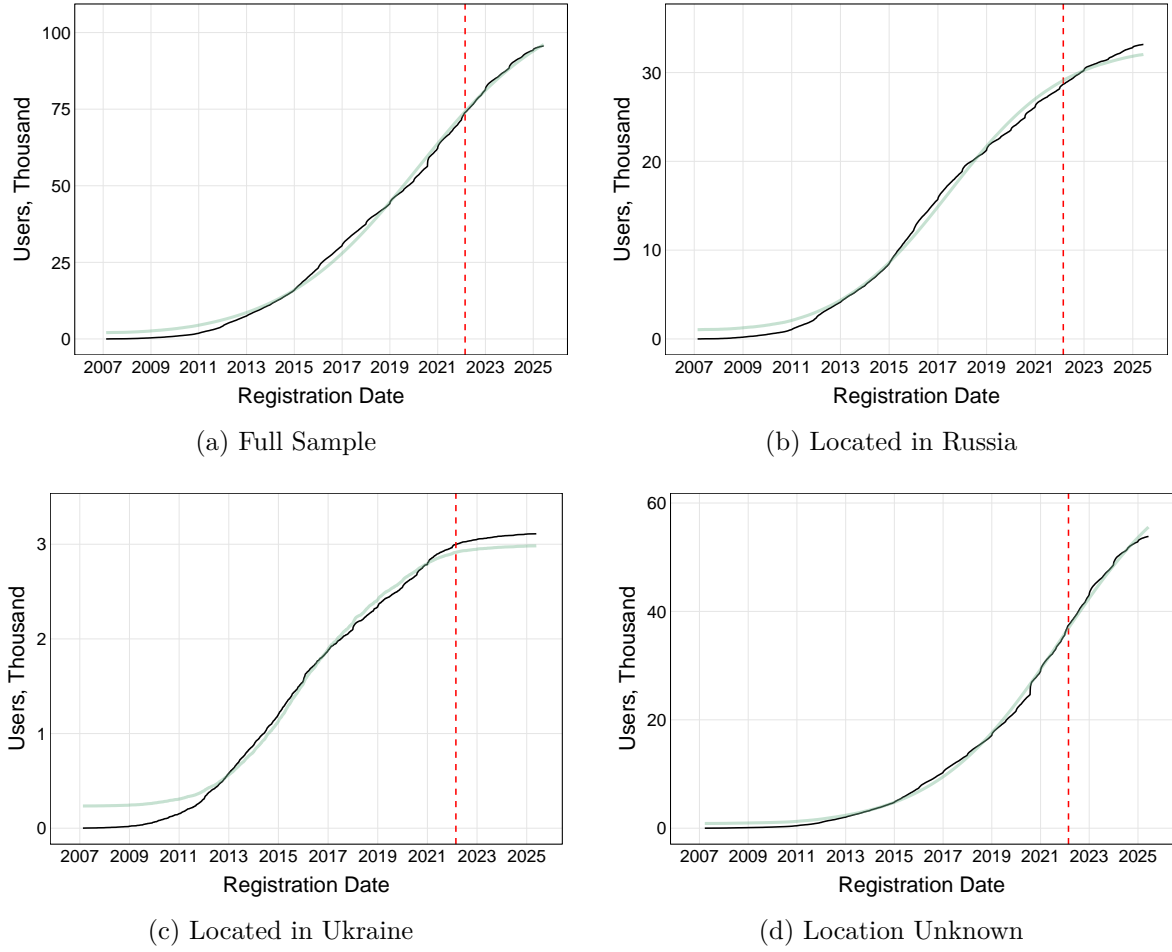
Figure C4: LiveLib User Registration Dynamics

Notes: The figure shows the cumulative daily registration dynamics for the sample of LiveLib users between 2007, when the platform was founded, and 2025, overlaid with the logistic curve fitted to the data (denoted with light green). The red dashed line denotes February 24, 2022, the date of the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Panel (a) represents the full sample. Panel (b) subsets to users located in Russia. Panel (c) subsets to users located in Ukraine. Panel (d) shows users whose location is unknown.

Dependent Variable:
Reading at Least One Book in the Three Months Before the Survey
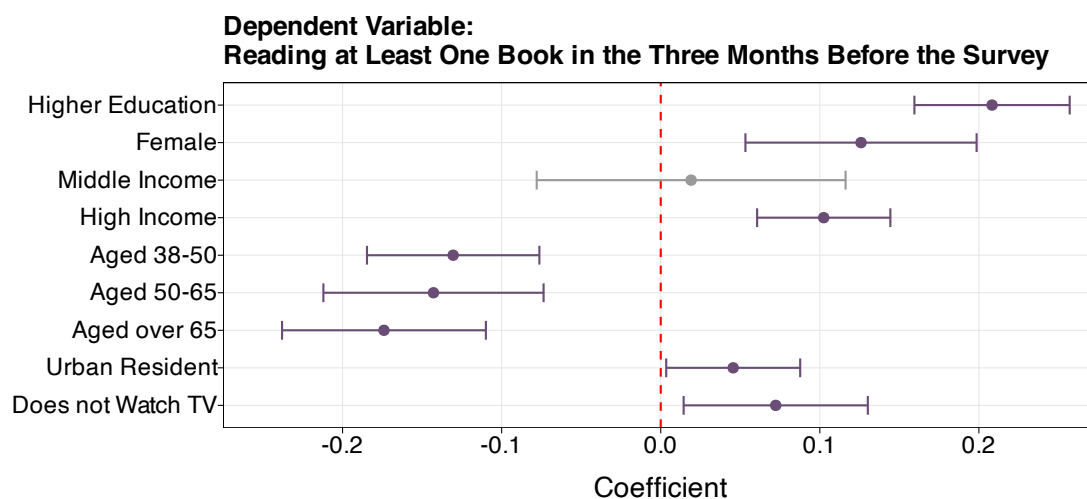
Figure C5: Comparing Readers to Non-Readers

Notes: The figure shows the coefficients, along with 95% confidence intervals, from a linear regression of a binary variable indicating whether a respondent had read at least one book in the three months preceding the survey on a set of demographic variables, controlling for district fixed effects. The data come from a phone survey conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) in November 2024, with a sample size of 1,600 respondents.
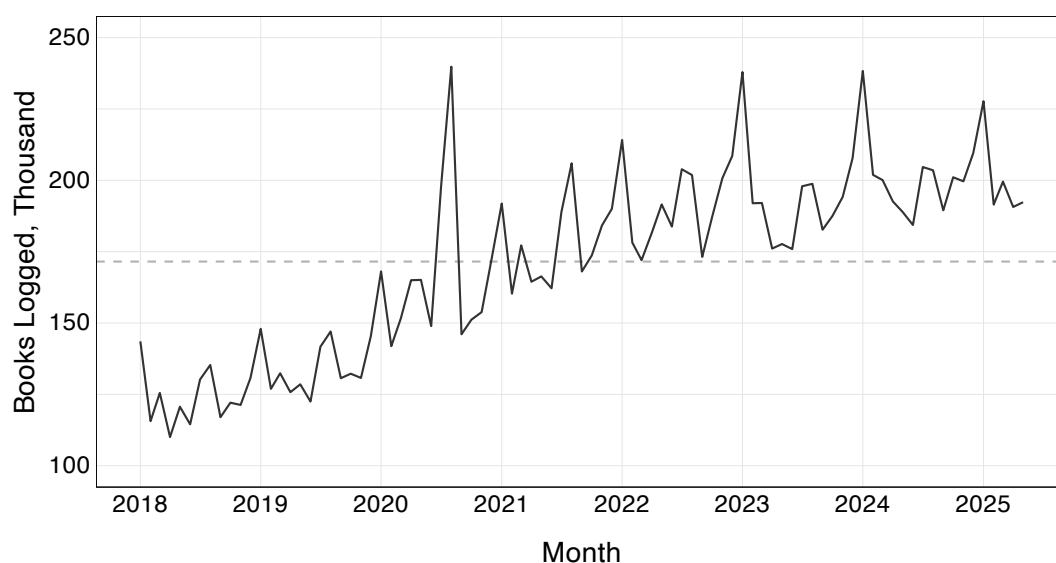
(a) All Users

Notes: The figure shows the total number of books in thousands recorded as read on LiveLib each month between January 2018 and June 2025 by all users in the sample. The dashed light gray line represents the average.
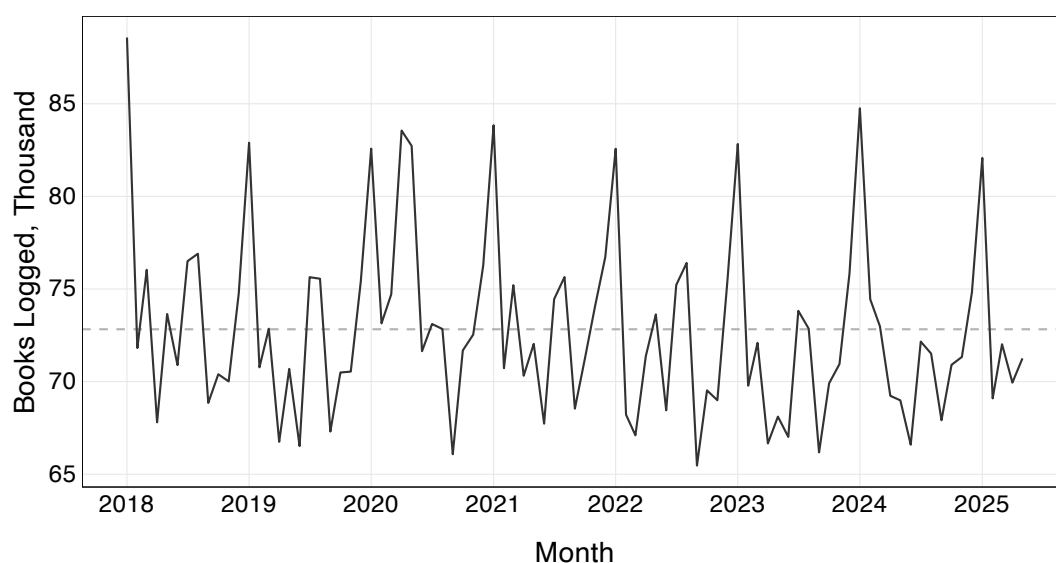
(b) Active Users

Notes: The figure shows the total number of books in thousands recorded as read on LiveLib each month between January 2018 and January 2025 by users active throughout the observation period. I define active users as those who registered on the platform before the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and who logged at least one book beginning in March 2023, one year into the war. The dashed light gray line represents the average.
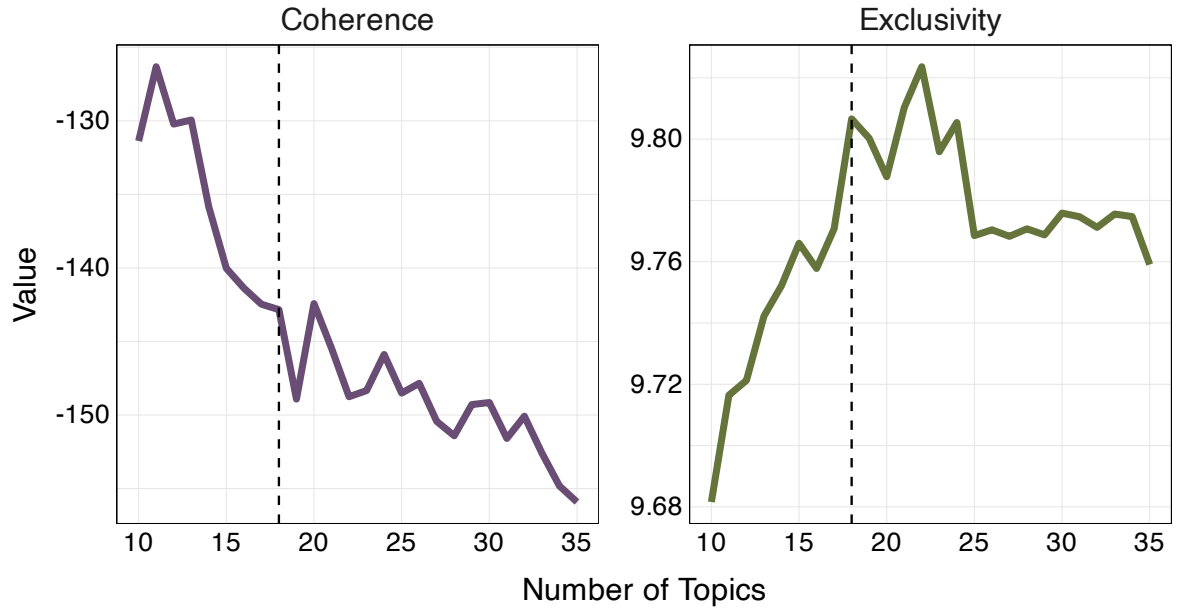
Figure C6: Data Validation: Readership Patterns

Figure C7: Choosing the Number of Topics

Notes: The figure shows the semantic coherence and exclusivity values for a correlated topic model fitted with a number of topics ranging from 10 to 35. The dashed black line indicates the chosen number of topics.
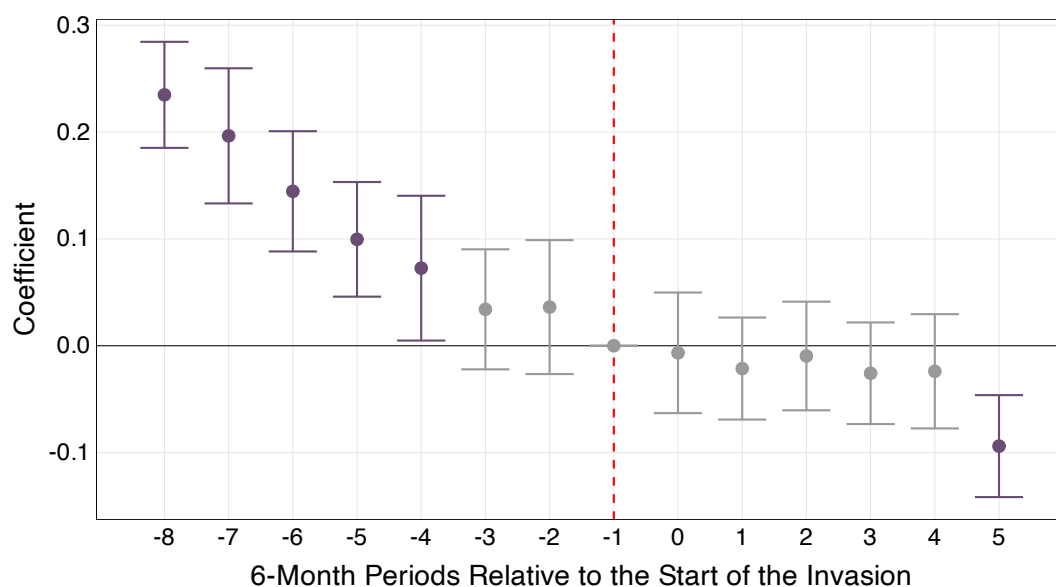
Figure C8: Changes in Readership Rates for Travel Books and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Event-Study Model

Notes: The figure reports coefficients on the pre- and post-period dummies estimated from Equation 3 for travel books, as defined by LiveLib. The reference period, encoded as -1 and denoted with the red dashed vertical line, spans August 2021 to January 2022. The unit of observation is a user-date. The dependent variable is the percentage of travel books relative to the total number of books recorded by the same user in month t. The panel covers the period from February 2018 to January 2025. Coefficients significant at the 5% level are displayed in purple, and insignificant in gray. Standard errors are clustered by user and month.
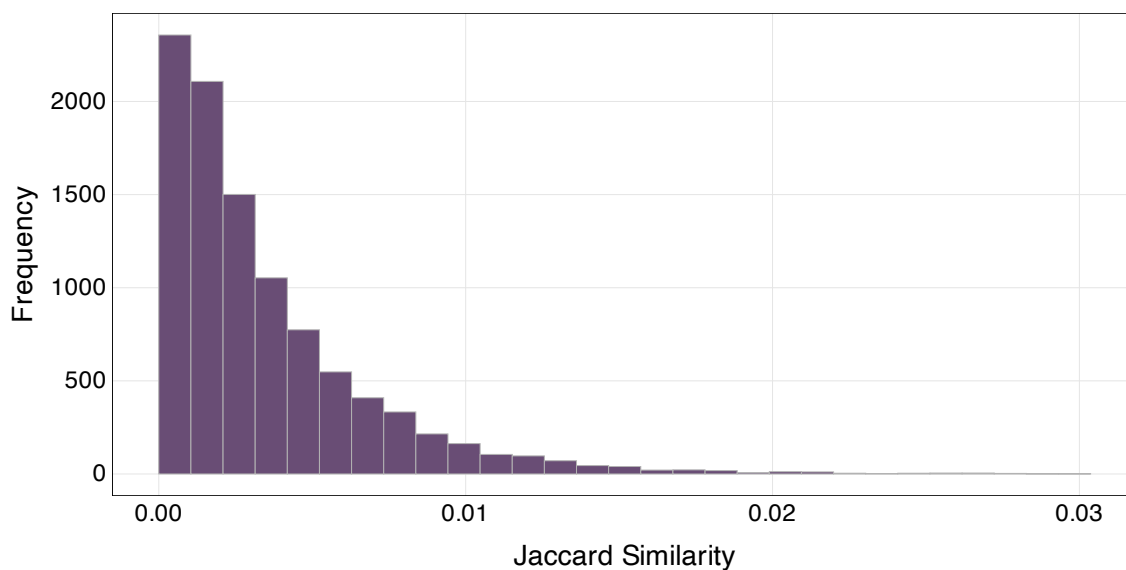
Figure C9: Topic Verification: Jaccard Similarity

Notes: The figure shows the distribution of average Jaccard similarity values, computed between each of the 9,935 history-related titles extracted from LiveLib and 67 books assigned to the 'Dictatorship Crimes' topic by the structural topic model in the *Chitay-Gorod* sample. All books included in the calculation had at least 10 readers on LiveLib between January 2018 and May 2025.