Love or politics? Political views regarding the war in Ukraine in an online dating experiment

Anna Beloborodova

San Antonio, January 2024

What do Russians think about the war in Ukraine?

- Surveys: over 70% support in some polls (time, wording of the question, methods matter) Graph Reliable?
  - Volkov and Kolesnikov (2022), Kizilova and Norris (2022), Chapkovski and Schaub (2022)
- Choices/decisions reveal actionable opinions. Political views do affect lives and decisions.
- Decisions regarding what? Most alternatives / political actions are extremely costly
- Fairly safe area: romantic relationship formation and termination
- Do views regrading the war in Ukraine affect relationship building in Russia? If so, what can we learn about the extent of support for / opposition to the war?

This paper: Summary

- Online dating site experiment
- Create profiles signaling different views regrading the war in Ukraine: "Pro", "Anti", "Neutral" (baseline)
- Collect information on responses, compare the response rates
- Preview:
  - Penalties for displaying pro-war or anti-war positions on a dating profile, 12.5% - 19.6% lower response rates for the "Pro", 15.4% - 16.8% lower for the "Anti"
  - Similar size
  - Age of online daters matters, younger than 34 only penalize "Pro", older - only "Anti"
- Simple model to infer *decision-affecting* views of the respondents

Pic

What can explain differences in behavior?

- Online daters' choices reveal their preferences for particular types of profiles
  - Fisman et al. (2006 and 2008), Belot and Francesconi (2013), Hitsch et al. (2010), and Low (2022)
- Affective polarization: prefer to date those with similar political views and avoid others they disagree with
  - Huber and Malhotra (2017), Nicholson et al. (2016), and Easton and Holbein (2021)
  - Assortative mating on political views factor. Up to 80% of married couples share party identification (between religion and education): Watson et al. (2004), Alford et al. (2011), Iyengar et al. (2018), Hersh and Ghitza (2018)
- Survey evidence supports: polarization across age groups Ages

Alternative explanations / Caveats

- Preference for no political views on dating profiles, dislike of all politics
  - Klar and Krupnikov (2016) and Klar et al. (2018)
  - Easton and Holbein (2021) test for the US, not supported
  - Here age of users matters, not the same individuals avoid "Pro" and "Anti" profiles, not supported
- "Anti" profiles: additional reasons to avoid

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Experimental Profiles

- Large on-line dating site in Russia
- Only female profiles
- Photos: Chicago Face Database, average attractiveness scores between 4.7 and 4.9
- Types main: "Neutral", "Pro", "Anti"
- Three signal types, three faces (Woman 1,2,3), three regions (Neyt et al. (2019) and Neyt et al. (2022))

Experimental Profiles

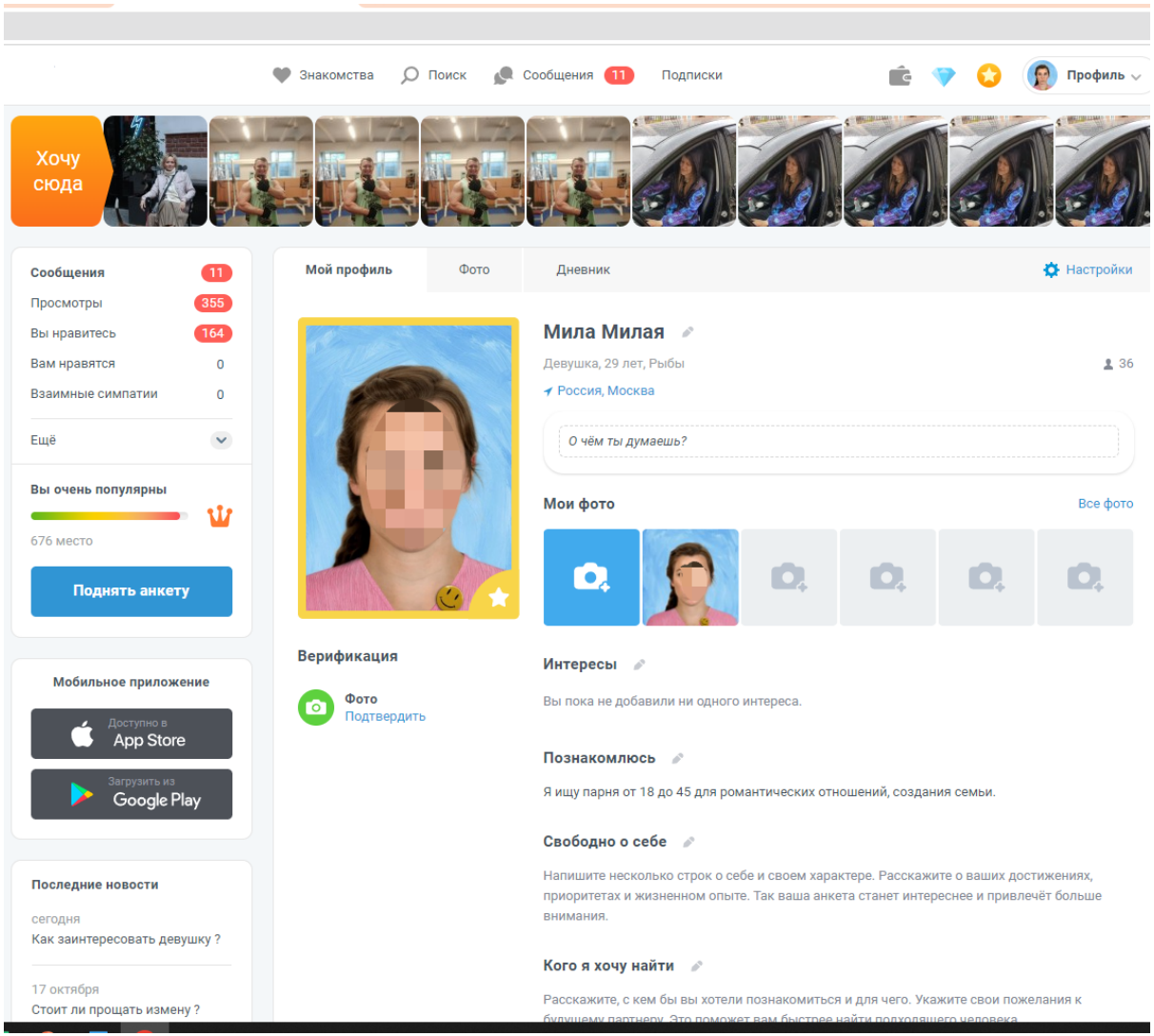
Table: Representation of the randomization process by regions and profile types

Region \Type	**"Neutral"**	**"Pro"**	**"Anti"**	**"Benchmark"**
Moscow	Woman 1	Woman 2	Woman 3	Woman 4
St Petersburg	Woman 3	Woman 1	Woman 2	Woman 4
Sverdlovskaya Obl	Woman 2	Woman 3	Woman 1	Woman 4

- Assumption: men in different regions have similar perceptions of attractiveness of women
- + "Benchmark" Woman 4 same everywhere

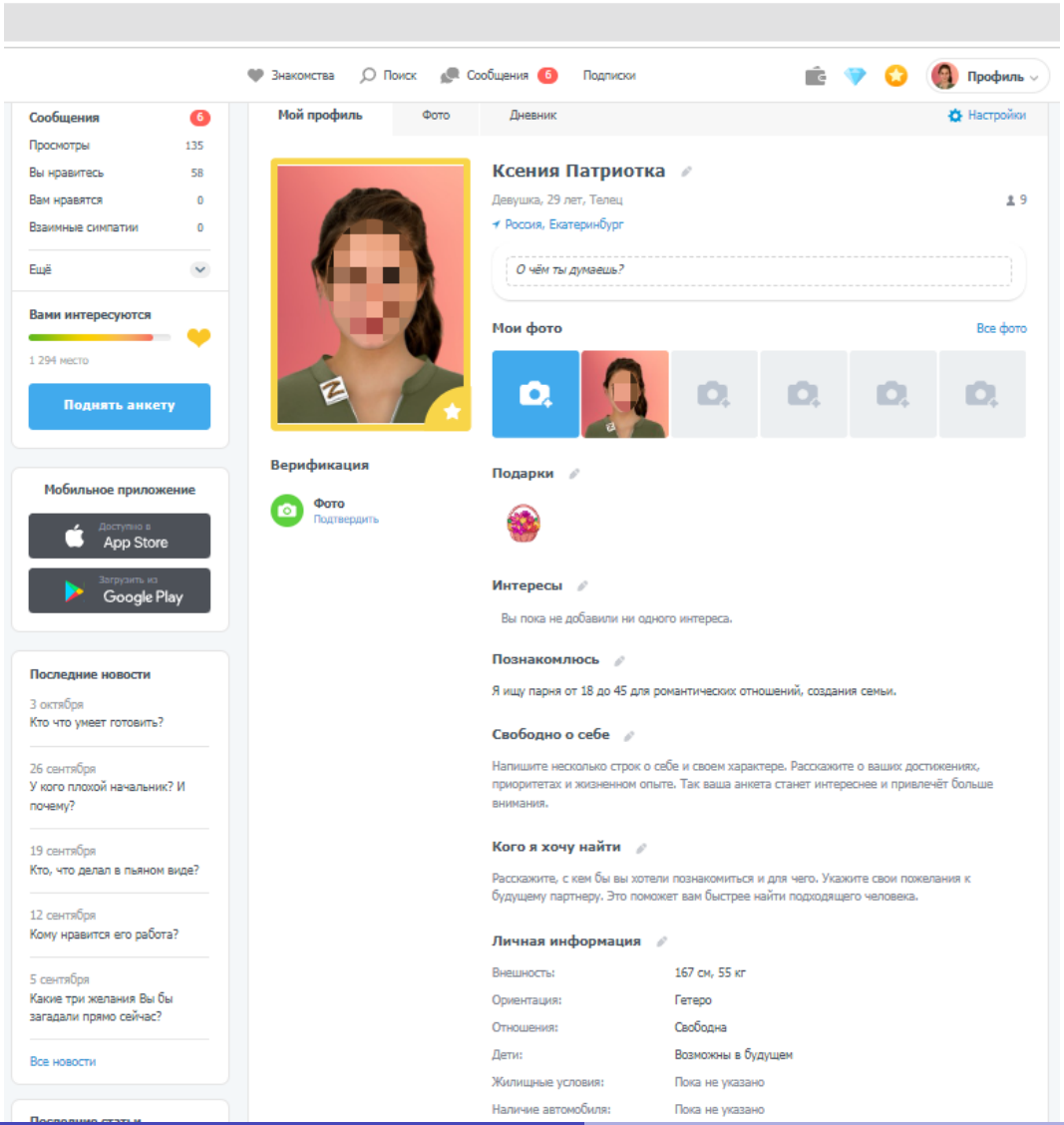
Type signal "Neutral", Woman 1 example

- Photo: Pink shirt, light blue background, smiley face badge/pin
- Name: Mila Milaya (Nice), Sveta Light (Svetlaya),...



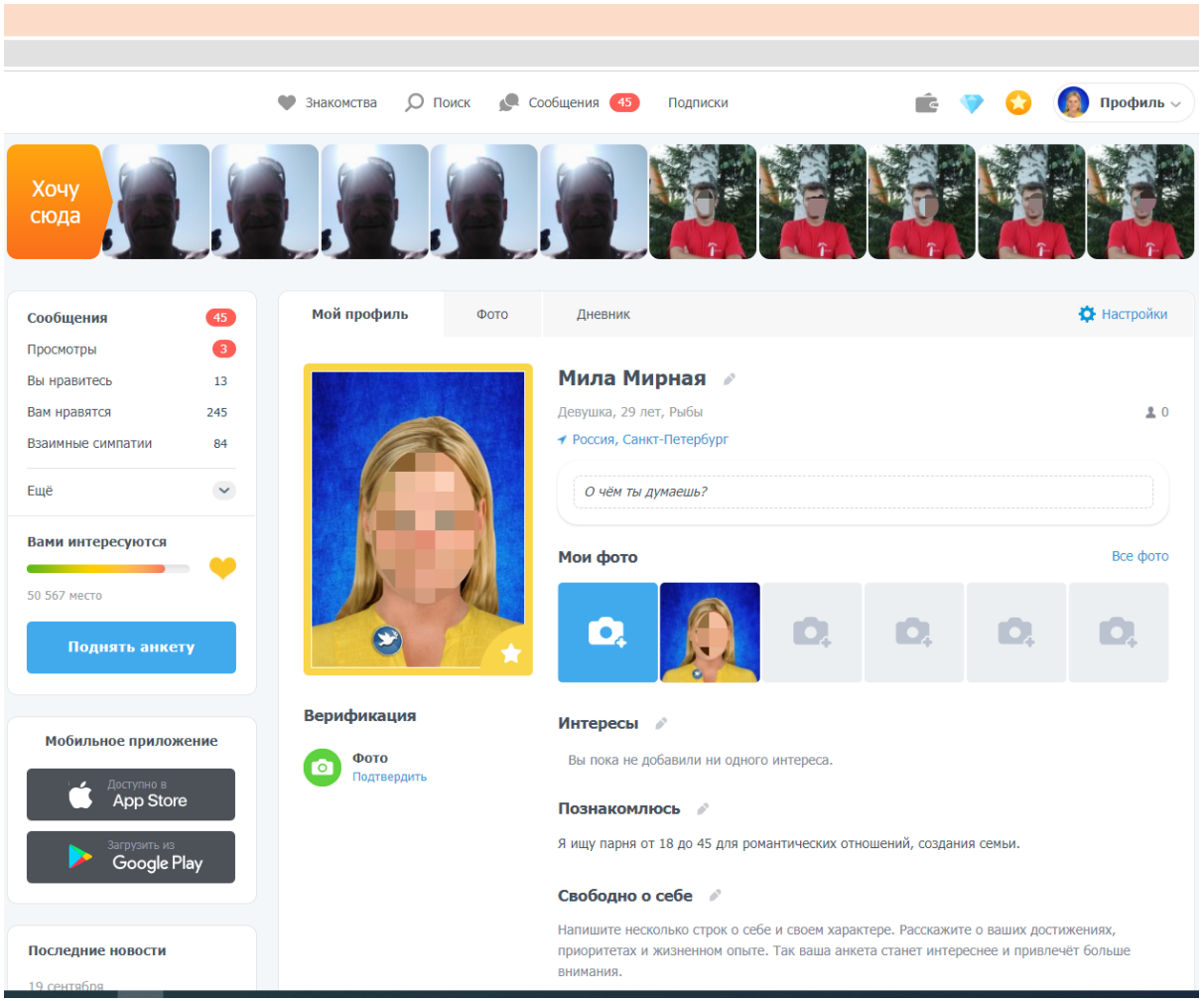
Type signal "Pro", Woman 3 example

- Photo: Military green shirt, pink-reddish background, "Z" badge/pin
- Name: Ksenia Patriot, Zoya ZaNashih (ForOurGuys), ...



Type signal "Anti", Woman 2 example

- Photo: Yellow shirt, deep blue background, dove of peace badge/pin
- Name: Mila Peace, Maria ForPeace,...



DiscussAnti

Experimental Procedure

- Post female profiles (September 19 - October 27)
- Like 250 males between the ages 18 and 45 looking for marriage and recently active (randomization)
- Profile active for 10 days
- On day 10 collect data on responses: views, mutual "likes", messages, ignores/blocks

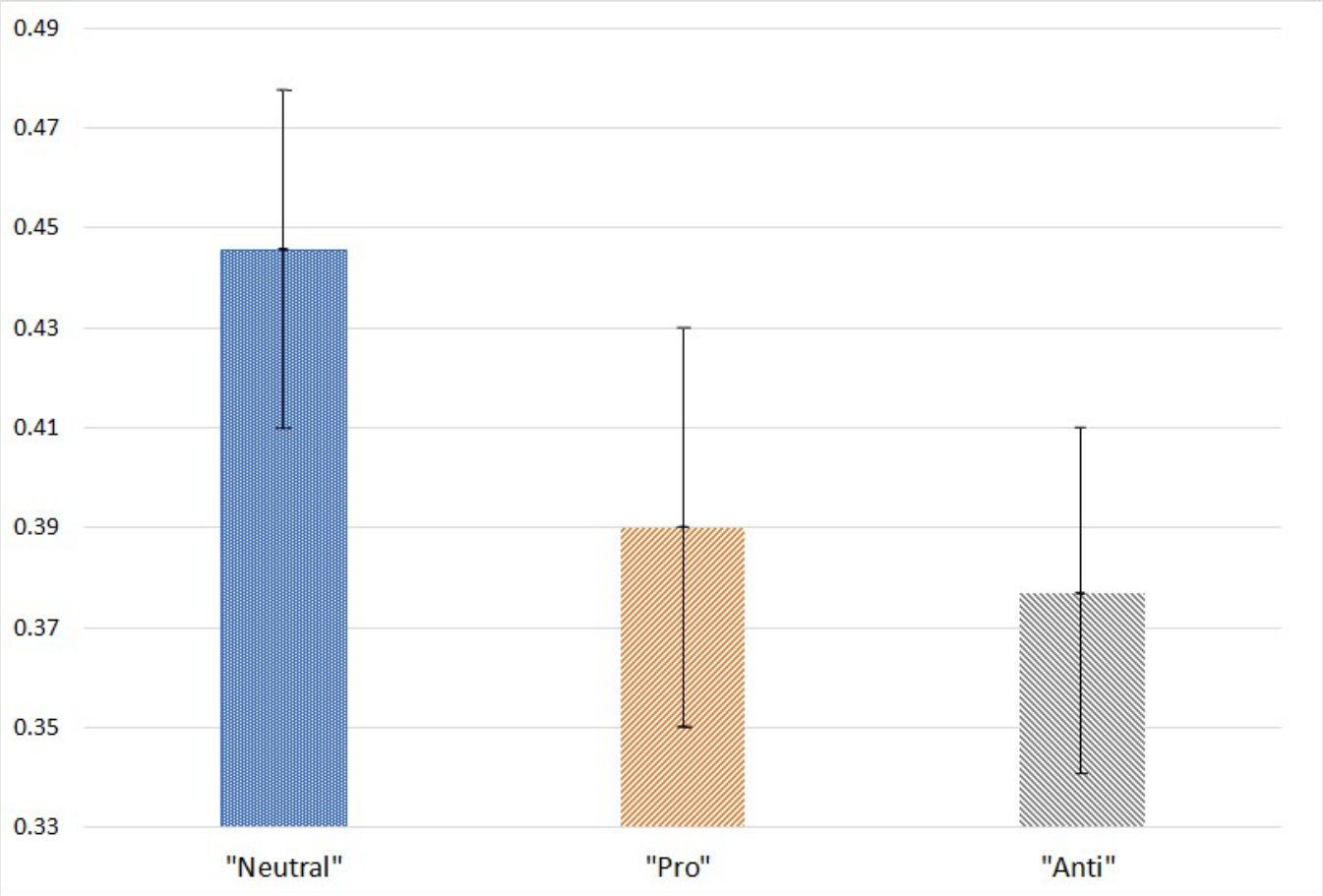
OverTimeLikes

- Woman 2 is "Neutral" in Sverd. obl., men there do not find her as attractive as men in Moscow and St. Petersburg
- Re-post Woman 2 as "Neutral" in Sverdlovskaya Oblast and Moscow

OddsRatios

Results: Proportions

Proportions of positive responses by type: share of male profiles liked by fictitious female profile that responded positively



Results: Proportions

Table: Proportions of positive responses by type, "liked" users

	"Neutral"	**"Pro"**	**"Anti"**
Proportion positive responses, p	0.45	0.39	0.38
Difference		0.056	0.069
p-value one sided, H_0**:** $p_{neut} \leq p_{type}$		0.018	0.005
p-value two sided		0.037	0.009

Results: Regressions

Main sample of liked users: 2,690 observation with 2,186 unique users. DescriptPart

Table: LPM: Probability of positive response

	All	**Ages 18 - 33**	**Ages 34 - 45**
Constant - "Neutral"	0.392***	0.453***	0.375***
	(0.027)	(0.057)	(0.031)
"Pro"	**-0.077*** **	**-0.168*** **	-0.051
	(0.029)	(0.065)	(0.033)
"Anti"	**-0.065** **	-0.059	**-0.070** **
	(0.029)	(0.065)	(0.033)

Conclusion

- Experiment: effects of declared views on the war in Ukraine on the probability of receiving a positive response from potential male daters on a large online dating site in Russia
- Results: penalties for both pro- (12.5% - 19.6%) and anti- war (15.4% - 16.8%) positions, Similar size, Polarization by age of users
- Infer political views of male online daters that affect decision making, assuming that
  - Some users prefer to date those with similar political views and shun those they disagree with - affective polarization
  - "Likes" are costless and reflect preferences: users like all profiles might consider dating
  - $\Longrightarrow$ those not responding to "Anti" profiles are revealing pro-war views. Similar for those not responding to "Pro" Pic

Conclusion

Limitations: observe differences in behavior, but not explanations for them

- Other possibilities: dislike for politics (Klar and Krupnikov (2016) and Klar et al. (2018)), "Anti" profiles avoided for other reasons besides own anti-war views
- Limitations to inference of shares of the online daters with particular views: weak signal, blanket strategy of giving "likes", positive cost of liking profiles
- Cannot extrapolate to general population: specific sample and context Surveys

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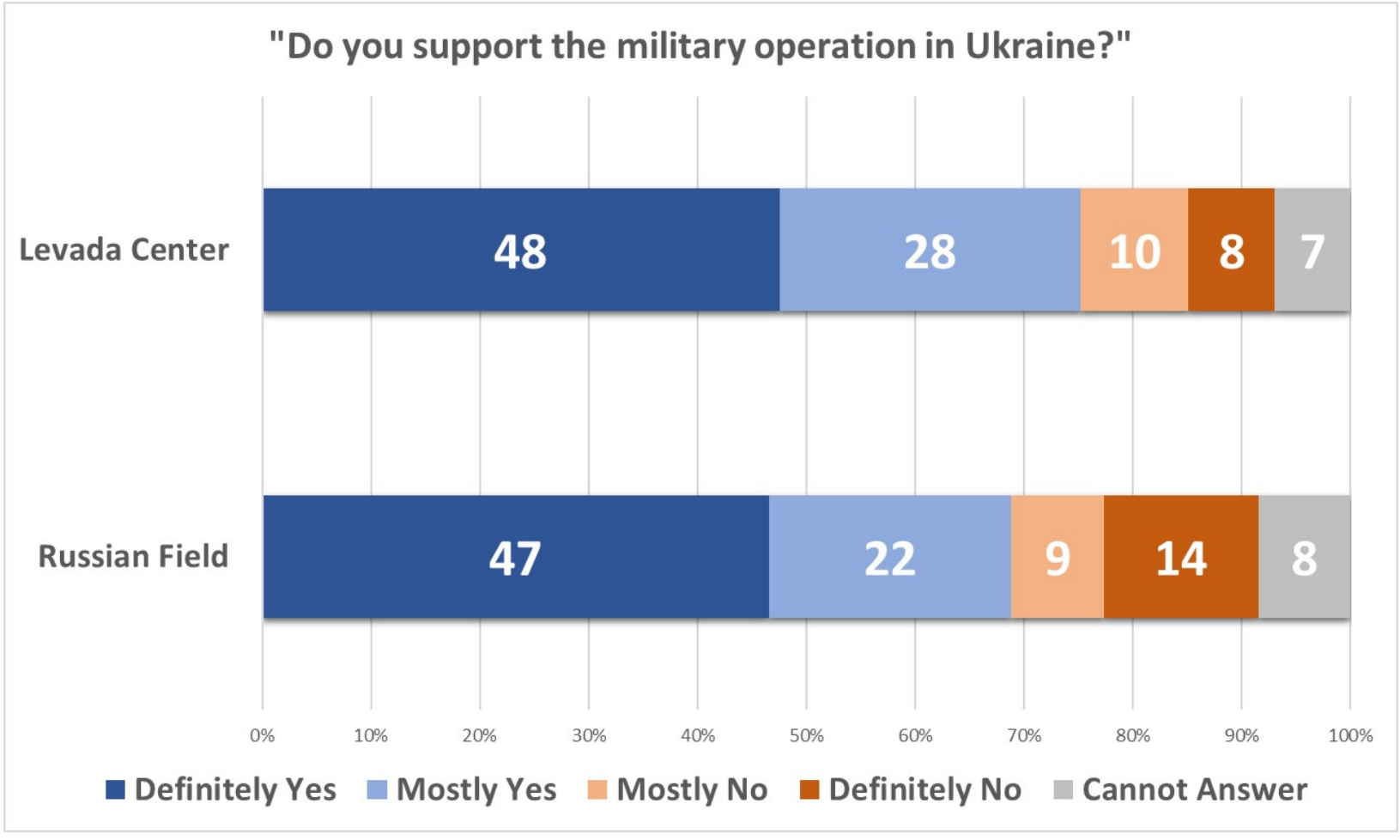
Levada Center vs. Russian Field (RF): distribution of answers to the "Do you support the Russian military operation in Ukraine?" question



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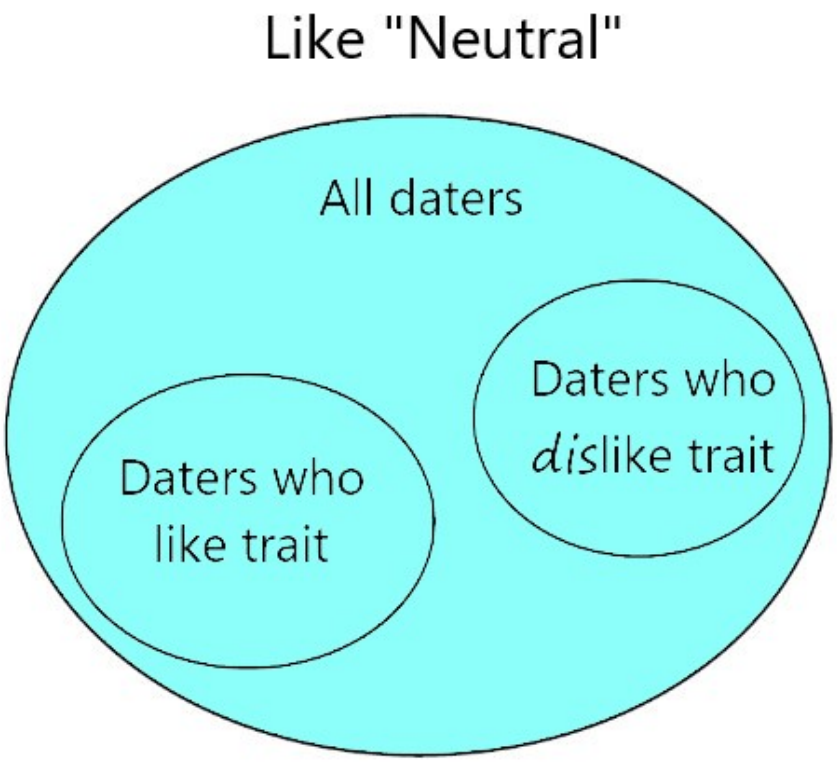
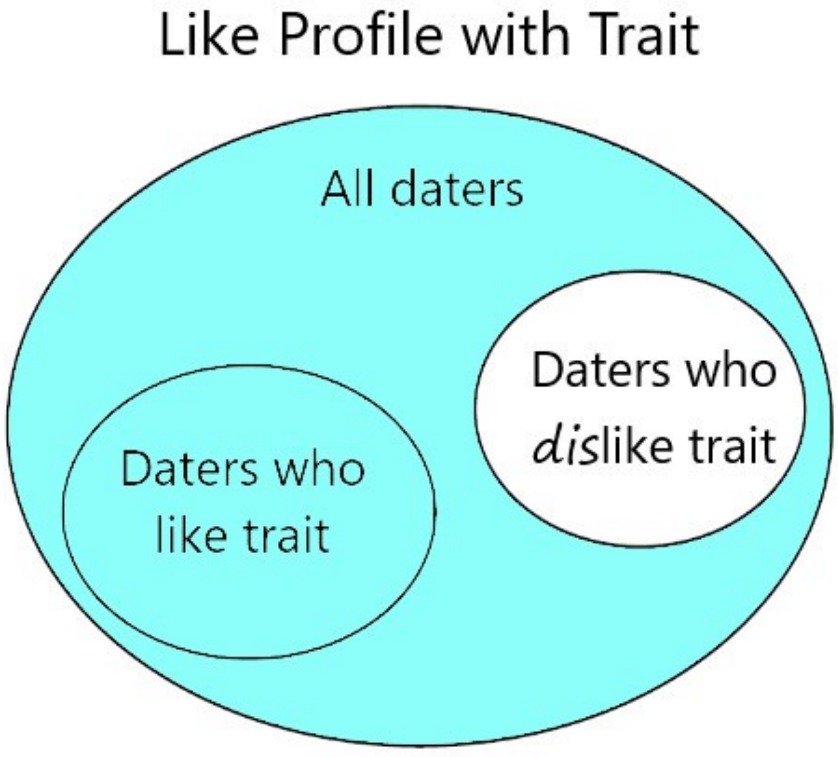
Daters giving "likes" to profiles by type, cost-less "likes"





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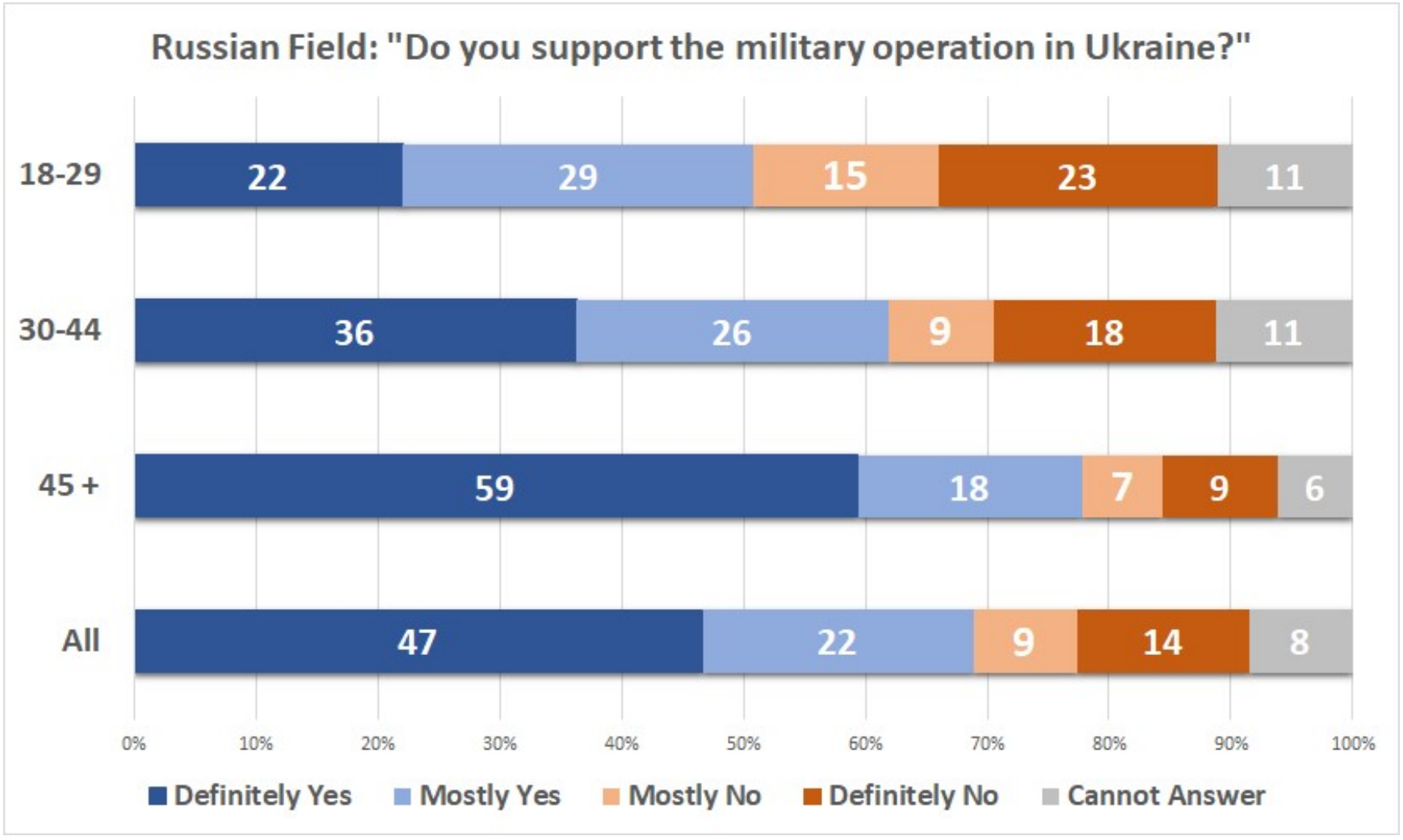

Russian Field: "Do you support the military operation in Ukraine?"
18-29
22
29
15
23
11
30-44
36
26
9
18
11
45 +
59
18
7
9
6
All
47
22
9
14
8
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Definitely Yes
Mostly Yes
Mostly No
Definitely No
Cannot Answer

main

Experimental Procedure

Table: Dates of posting profiles

Region \Type	"Neutral"	"Pro"	"Anti"	"Benchmark"
Moscow	24 Oct 2022	17 Oct 2022	7 Oct 2022	27 Oct 2022
St Petersburg	3 Oct 2022	14 Oct 2022	19 Sept 2022	10 Oct 2022
Sverdlovskaya Obl	20 Sept 2022	6 Oct 2022	10 Oct 2022	14 Oct 2022

Experimental Procedure

Table: Dates of posting profiles

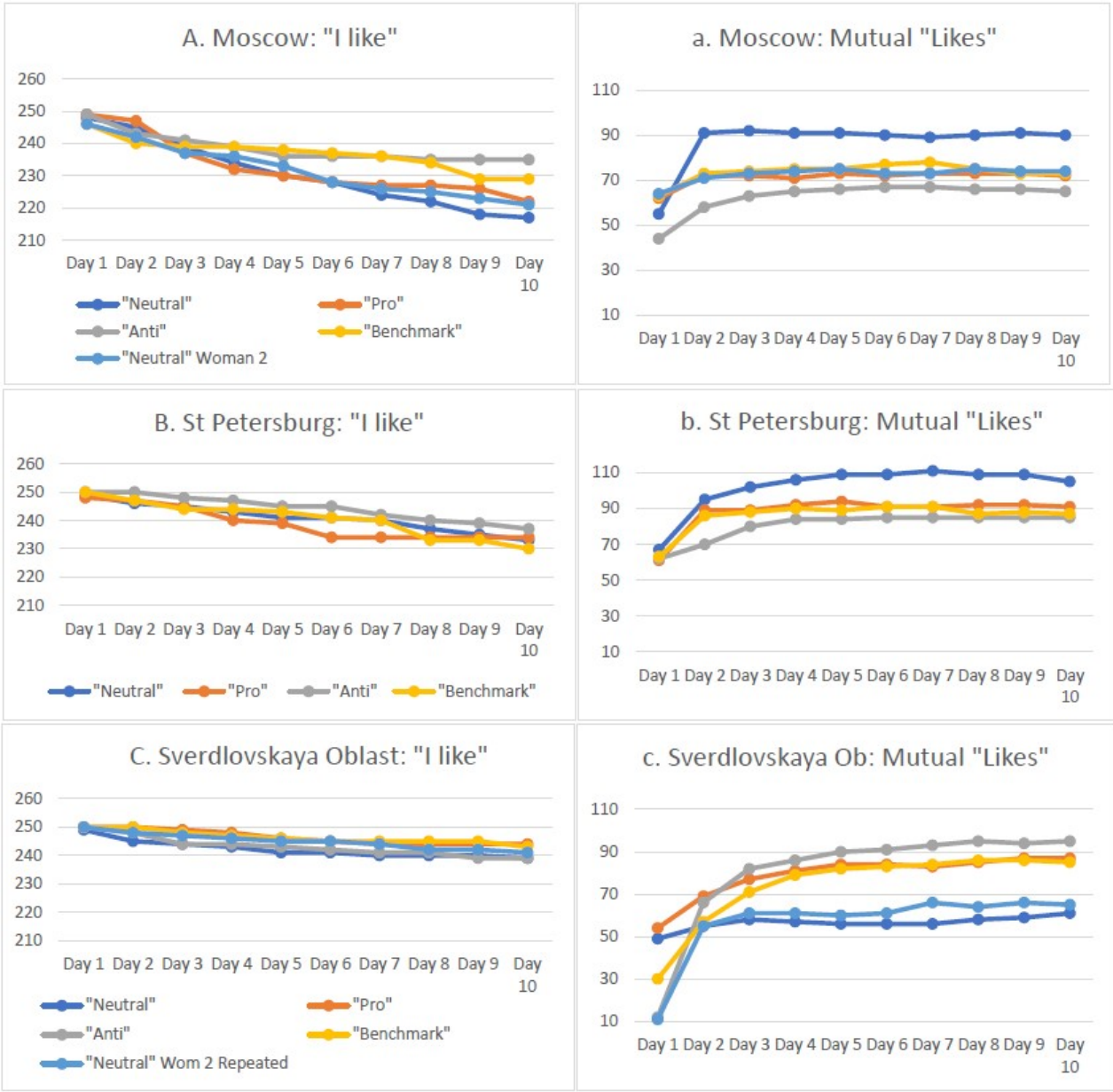
Region \Type	"Neutral"	"Pro"	"Anti"	"Benchmark"
Moscow	24 Oct 2022	17 Oct 2022	7 Oct 2022	27 Oct 2022
St Petersburg	3 Oct 2022	14 Oct 2022	19 Sept 2022	10 Oct 2022
Sverdlovskaya Obl	20 Sept 2022	6 Oct 2022	10 Oct 2022	14 Oct 2022

Experimental Profiles: Signaling "Anti"

- "No war", Ukrainian flag - clear but dangerous signals
- Next best alternative: for peace, colors of the flag indicate pro-Ukraine position
- Is the signal received?
  - Preliminary result show lower response rates to "Anti" profiles
  - Messages (very few) from some users: they interpreted the signal correctly, no misinterpretations

main

Number of male profiles liked and number of mutual "likes" by region and type of profile



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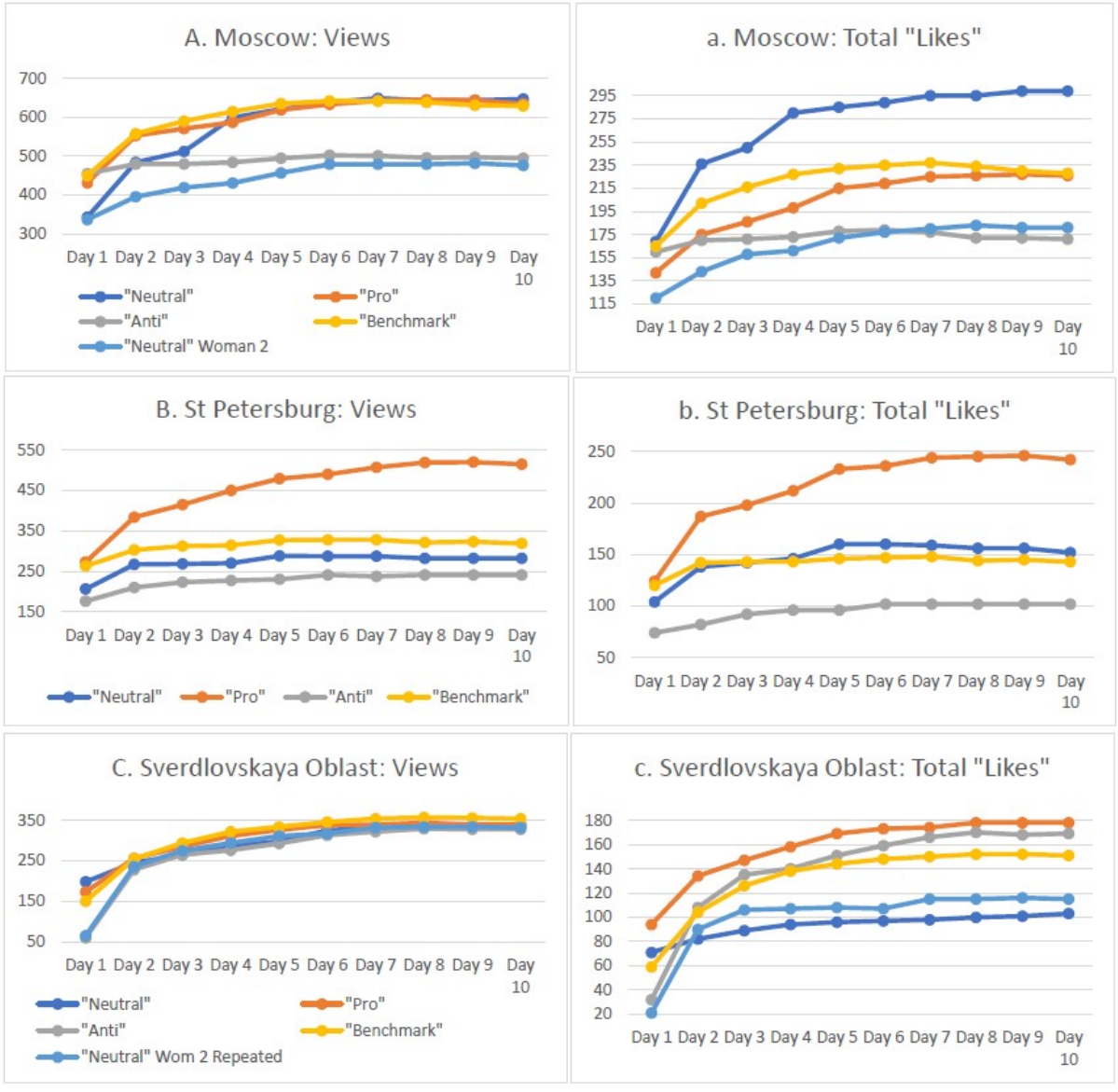
Number of views by all male profiles and number of all "likes" by region and type of profile, all profiles



Men in Sverdlovskaya oblast find Woman 2 less attractive

Table: Odds ratios: Comparing response rates to "Neutral" Woman 2 relative to "Benchmark" in Moscow and Sverdlovskaya Oblast

Set of users \OR	**OR in Moscow**	**OR in Sverdl. obl.**	**Log diff.**	**p-value (two sided)**
Users liked by the profile	0.93	0.64	0.38	0.148
Users seeking marriage who viewed profile	0.95	0.65	0.38*	0.091
All users who viewed profile	1.03	0.65	0.47**	0.020

Note: * and ** indicate significance respectively at the 10% and 5% levels.

main

Table: Descriptives Part 1: full sample, users seeking marriage

	Full Sample	Moscow	St. Petersburg	Sverdl. obl.
Number of Obs.	**3246**	**1540**	**941**	**768**
Yekaterinburg				0.73
Paid subscription (Premium)	0.18	0.22	0.17	0.12
Number of photos	3.43 (s.e. = 4.44)	3.67 (s.e. = 4.38)	3.94 (s.e. = 5.54)	2.31 (s.e. = 2.32)
Age	36.74 (s.e. = 5.48)	36.72 (s.e. = 5.42)	37.02 (s.e. = 5.30)	36.43 (s.e. = 5.81)
Height, cm	178.56 (s.e. = 6.95) *(r.r. = 77.3%)*	179.36 (s.e. = 6.77) *(r.r. = 82.7%)*	178.23 (s.e. = 6.57) *(r.r. = 78.5%)*	177 (s.e. = 7.65) *(r.r. = 65.0%)*
Weight, kg	79.87 (s.e. = 11.88) *(r.r. = 68.3%)*	80.64 (s.e. = 11.43) *(r.r. = 72.9%)*	79.98 (s.e. = 11.35) *(r.r. = 68.7%)*	77.73 (s.e. = 13.39) *(r.r. = 58.6%)*
Looking for:				
Woman's age from	25.17 (s.e. = 5.36)	24.91 (s.e. = 5.35)	25.39 (s.e. = 5.28)	25.43 (s.e. = 5.47)
Woman's age up to	40.91 (s.e. = 9.88)	41.08 (s.e. = 10.41)	41.35 (s.e. = 10.42)	40.03 (s.e. = 7.87)
Relationship type:				
Romance	0.57	0.61	0.59	0.48
Not committed	0.21	0.20	0.21	0.22
Other	0.27	0.30	0.26	0.23

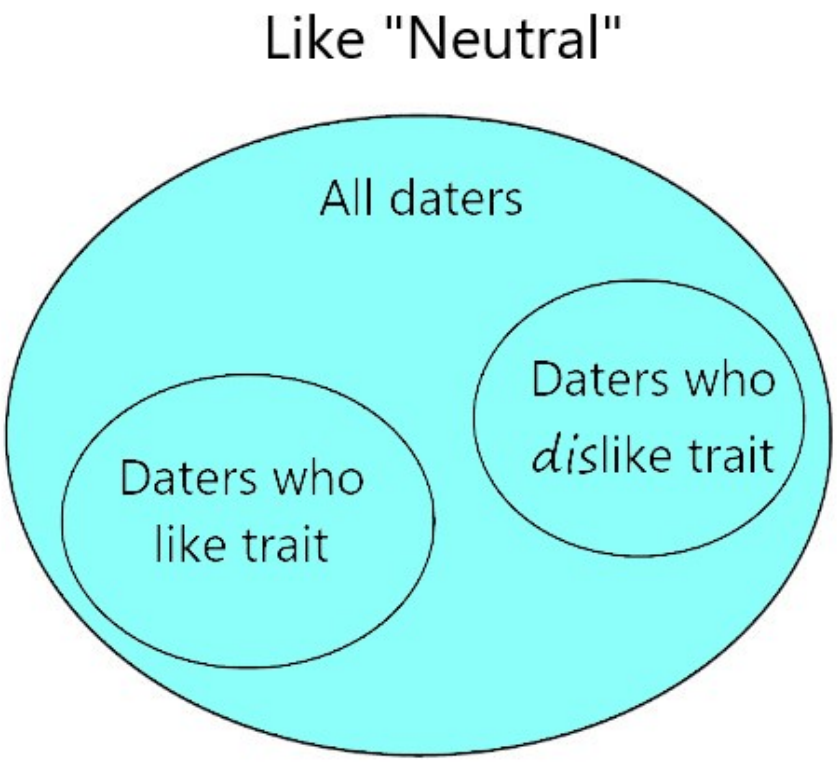
Table: Descriptives Part 2: full sample, users seeking marriage

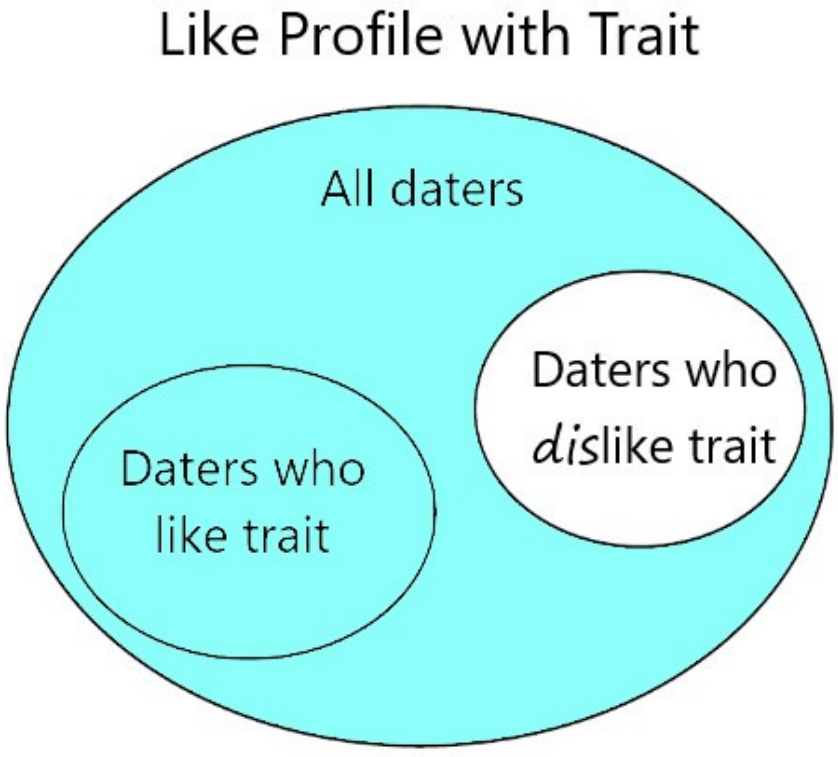
	Full Sample	Moscow	St. Petersburg	Sverdl. obl.
Education	*r.r. = 61.2%*	*r.r. = 65.3%*	*r.r. = 64.5%*	*r.r. = 49.1%*
Secondary or some university	0.12	0.09	0.14	0.19
Vocational	0.21	0.14	0.23	0.32
University/college or higher	0.67	0.77	0.63	0.50
Income	*r.r. = 43.0%*	*r.r. = 45.9%*	*r.r. = 44.3%*	*r.r. = 35.7%*
Low	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.05
Middle	0.56	0.50	0.60	0.65
High	0.40	0.46	0.36	0.30
Children: None	0.77 *(r.r. = 57.3%)*	0.79 *(r.r. = 60.8%)*	0.79 *(r.r. = 60.4%)*	0.68 *(r.r. = 46.5%)*

Notes: 1) s.e. stands for standard error of continuous variables; 2) r.r. is rate of response to non-mandatory questions in the questionnaire.

main

Daters giving "likes" to profiles by type, cost-less "likes"





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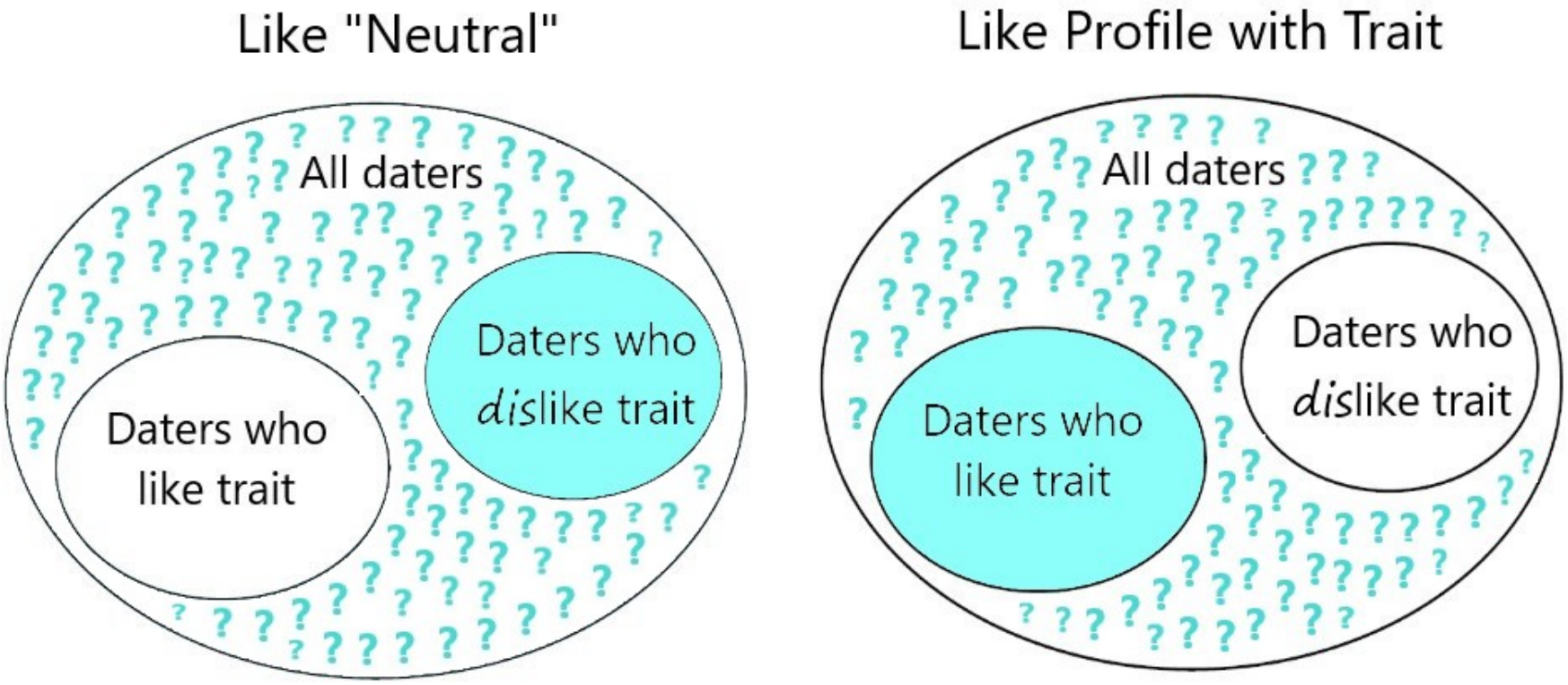
Daters giving "likes" to profiles by type, "likes" are costly



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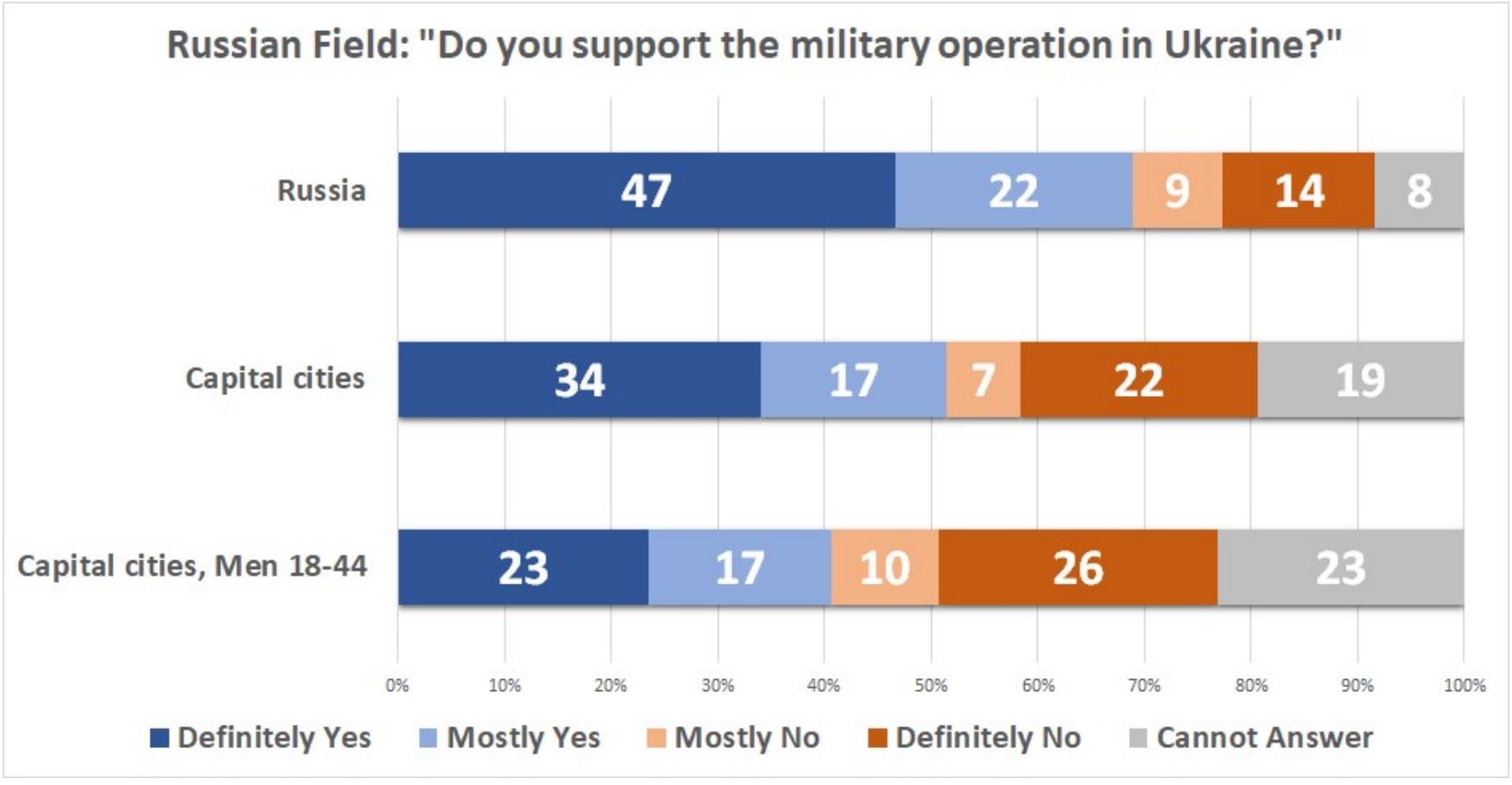
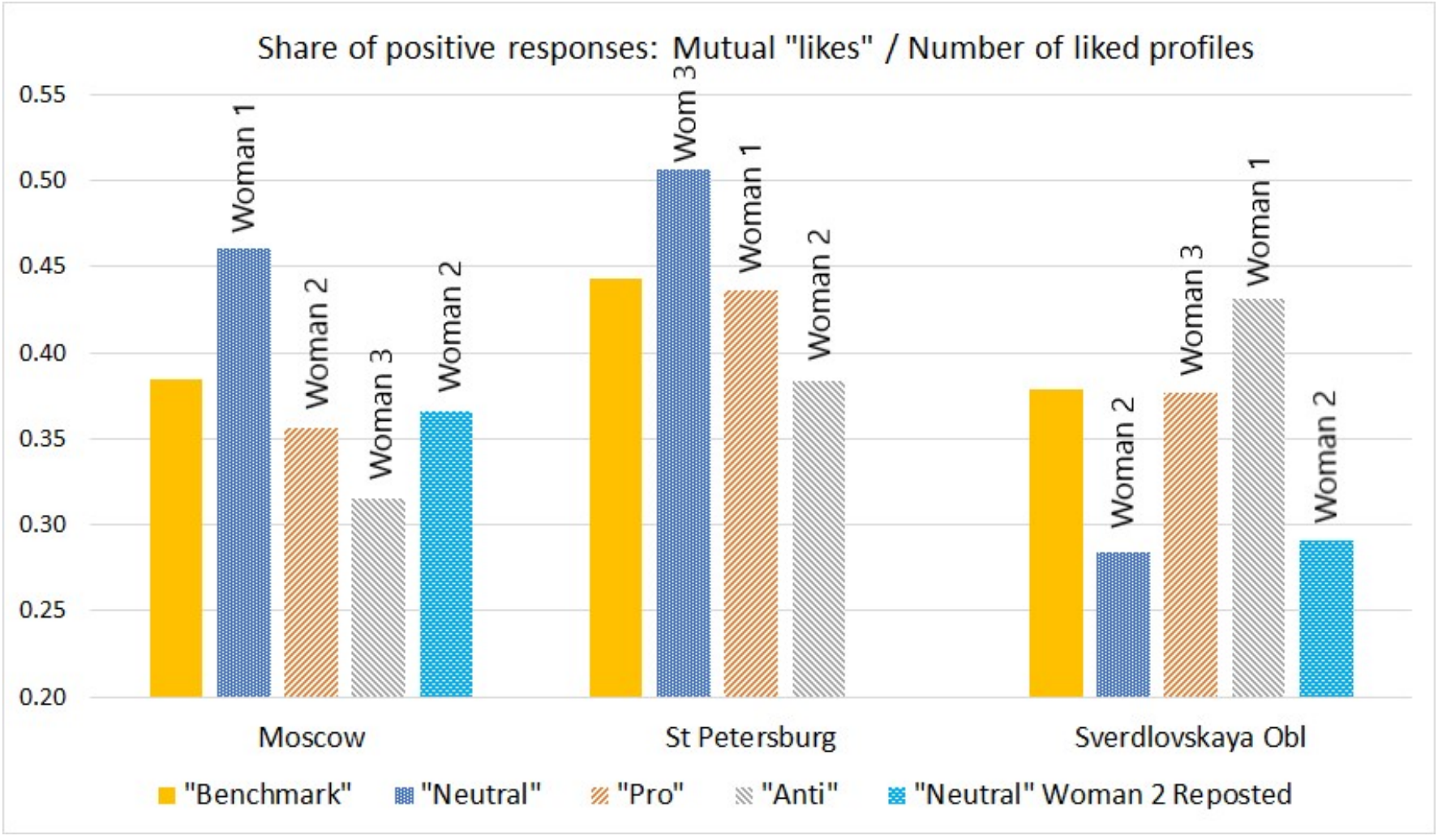

Russian Field: "Do you support the military operation in Ukraine?"
Russia
47
22
9
14
8
Capital cities
34
17
7
22
19
Capital cities, Men 18-44
23
17
10
26
23
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Definitely Yes
Mostly Yes
Mostly No
Definitely No
Cannot Answer

main

Positive response rates, regions: share of male profiles liked by fictitious female profile that responded positively



Proportions of positive responses by type: share of male profiles liked by fictitious female profile that responded positively

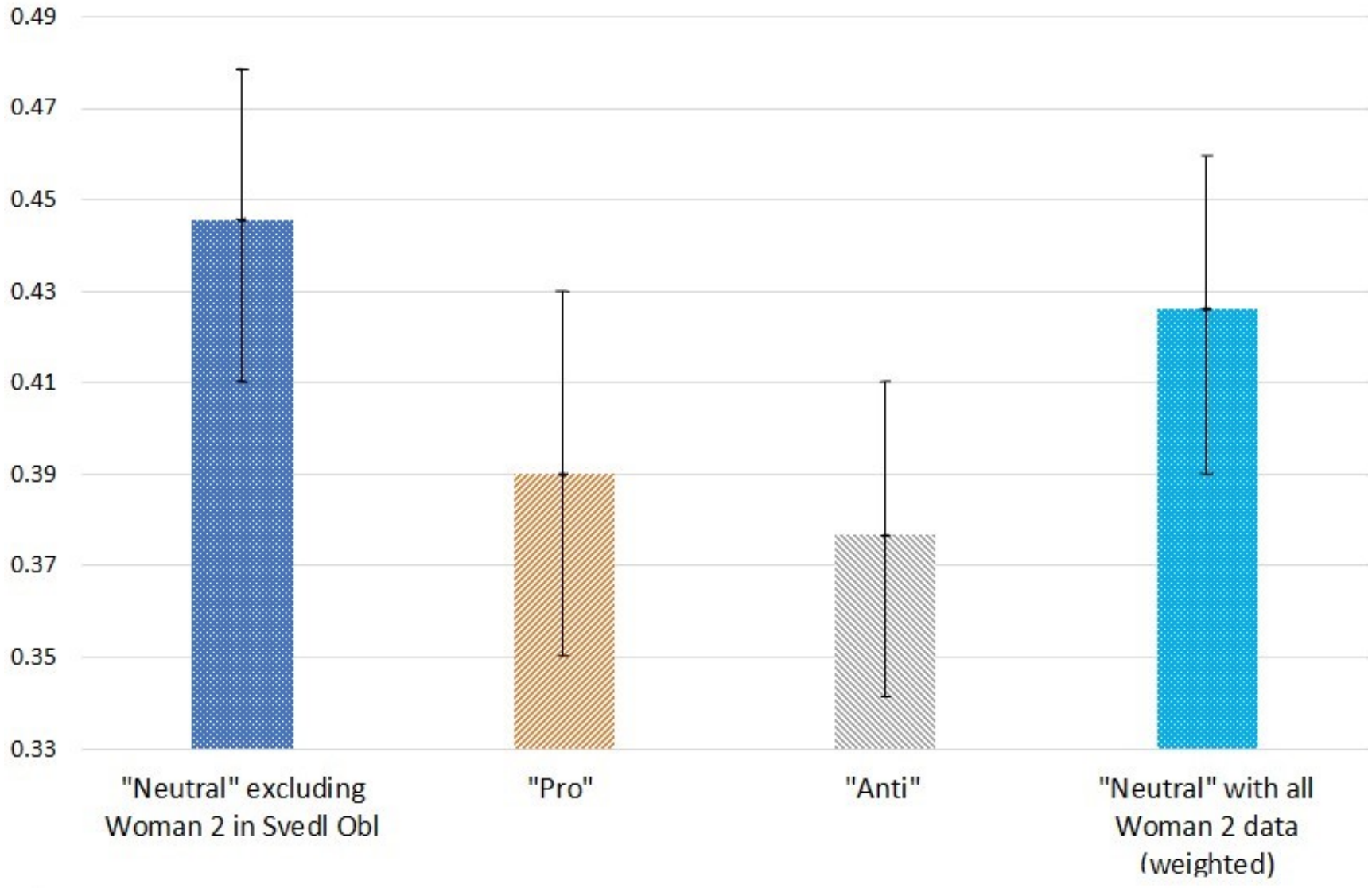


Table: Proportions of positive responses by type, "liked" users, full sample

	"Neutral"	"Pro"	"Anti"
Proportion of positve responses, p	0.43	0.39	0.38
Difference		0.036	0.049
p-value one sided		0.086	0.031
p-value two sided		0.172	0.061