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## **Living Next to the “Big Bad Wolf.” Perceived Threat of Military Conflict and its Consequences.**

### Background and Motivation

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine has profoundly altered the sense of security across Central and Eastern Europe (Bartosiewicz et al. 2025, Chudzicka-Czupała et al. 2023, 2025, Wenzel et al. 2024, Wilson & Maceviciute 2025). While Poland remains geographically outside the war zone, its position as Ukraine’s closest NATO neighbour—and its own historical experience with Russian imperial aggression—make the conflict an inescapable reference point in public life. Since February 2022, the war has affected not only foreign and defence policy but also everyday life, shaping people’s attitudes, sense of safety, and social relations (Białek-Szwed & Wójciszyn-Wasil 2024, Kancik-Kottun 2024, Reshetnikova, Sanak-Kosmowska & Wiktor, 2024). Poland has also become home to over a million Ukrainian refugees, which has transformed local communities, intensified public debate about security and solidarity, and deepened the country’s emotional proximity to the war (Barszczewski 2024, Kamionka 2025).

In September 2025, only a week after Russian drones violated Polish airspace, fieldwork for the Polish *Generations and Gender Survey* (GGs-II, wave 1) began. In the context of this renewed geopolitical tension, understanding how proximity to armed conflict shapes subjective perceptions of risk and well-being is more urgent than ever.

### Research Questions

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The study addresses three interrelated questions:

**1. Who is most afraid of the war?**

Which socio-demographic and contextual factors (age, gender, education, place of residence, and family status) are associated with stronger worries about military conflict?

**2. How are such fears linked to broader perceived uncertainty and life satisfaction?**

Are individuals who worry more about military conflict also more pessimistic about the future, less satisfied with life, or less trusting toward institutions?

### 3. **Are these fears related to intentions to move—within or beyond Poland?**

Are higher levels of perceived military threat related to a stronger desire to relocate, either to safer regions within the country or abroad?

We expect to find that women, older individuals, parents of young children and those living in Poland's eastern regions express higher levels of fear of the war. We also anticipate that heightened perceived threat will correlate with lower life satisfaction and a greater inclination to consider mobility. Regional variation may additionally reveal a "border gradient," with fear intensifying closer to the country's eastern frontier.

#### Data and Methods

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The analyses will draw on data from the Polish *Generations and Gender Survey* (GGS). The Polish survey follows the GGS-II Wave 1 core questionnaire and includes several user modules. One of them, *Global Uncertainty and Institutional Trust* (Andersson et al. 2024), provides a unique set of items capturing subjective worries about global threats such as terrorism, climate change, economic crises, and—most relevantly—*military conflicts*. The fieldwork started in September 2025 and is being conducted using a mixed-mode design (CAWI/CAPI) among a nationally representative sample of 8–10 thousand respondents aged 18–59.

The analyses will combine descriptive statistics with multivariate modelling. First, we will examine how fear of military conflict ranks in relation to other global threats. Second, regression models will be applied to identify socio-demographic correlates of higher perceived threat and to verify how fear of military conflicts relates to migration intentions. Spatial variation will be explored using NUTS-3 regional identifiers and measures of distance from national borders, allowing us to test whether proximity to Ukraine or Belarus predicts stronger fear responses or moderates the relationship between experienced worries and migration intentions.

Data collection for the Polish GGS is expected to conclude in April 2026, which will make it possible to present preliminary findings based on the first available data release. These analyses will provide an early insight into how Poles perceive geopolitical insecurity in the immediate aftermath of renewed border tensions.

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