

The Zelensky Effect

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Henry E. Hale

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Olga Onuch and Henry E. Hale's *The Zelensky Effect* is part biography of the charismatic president, part sociopolitical history of Ukraine from its 1991 independence to the recent Russian invasion—"more fundamentally about [Zelensky's] country [and] the people who made the man" than it is about his personal life and career.

Onuch and Hale contend that Zelensky's meteoric political rise reflects Ukraine's growing national unity and favorable views towards Euro-Atlantic values and democratic institutions. Indeed, Zelensky's background made him an improbable leader for a country mired in corruption and patronal politics that was manipulated by competing oligarchs. He grew up in the industrial southeast—a Russian-speaking, Jewish, middle-class student with international law aspirations that were subsumed by his extracurricular involvement in a traveling entertainment troupe.

As a singer and entertainer, Zelensky lived in Moscow; later, he became an influential television producer and media executive. His role as a history teacher-turned-president in the comic show *Servant of the People*, which skewered corrupt politicians and oligarchs, led to his all-important media presence and ability to travel around the country on concert tours promoting Zelensky as a fictional presidential figure—and cementing his image in the public mind.

Packed with statistical analysis of polling data, social media posts, articles, and speeches, this book answers many questions about how unified resistance on the ground has repelled the mightier Russian military. It opines about how Ukraine's ethnic, religious, and language divides have been bridged by Zelensky's consistent, calm, trusted messaging and masterful communication skills.

With recommendations of Ukrainian songs, *The Zelensky Effect* reveals a symbolic Ukrainian everyman whose steady presence boosts morale across his diverse country. Though underestimated by Putin, Trump, and other world leaders, Zelensky is just the president needed to create the unprecedented Ukrainian resistance to a Russian invasion.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (March / April 2023)

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