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Sociological analysis of the factors influencing citizens' attitudes to local governments in Ukraine

There are at least three points that determine the relevance of the chosen research topic. First, reform-oriented efforts undertaken by Ukrainian power structures need to be evaluated from a sociological standpoint. Second, a number of challenges on this pathway ought to be highlighted. Third, some ways to overcome these challenges should be outlined.

The success of a particular reform considerably depends on the ordinary citizens' awareness of the reform and their willingness to participate personally in the implementation of this reform, thereby changing the country for the better. Such a change can start even in a small locality. Quite a few people in Ukraine still regard the life outside their apartment as something "separate", complaining about "numerous problems" but thinking that they are not in a position to fix any of these problems. There are also people who strongly rely on the President or the Government to enhance the quality of life in their community or even neighbourhood, thus overlooking the role of local authorities in the place where they live¹. However, local governments perform a wide range of tasks — from keeping the streets clean and putting in bike lanes in cities to providing social care and affordable housing, as well as encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting start-ups [Bronshstein & Reichental, 2020; Local Government Association, s. a.]. All this must be taken into consideration when a person decides how to cast his/her vote.

Various criteria can be used to evaluate the performance of local authorities; yet, the quality of public services (such as water and electricity supply, apartment heating, healthcare provision) and that of infrastructure (public transit, road construction and maintenance, telecom networks, etc.) are the most common. Reliable and accessible public services, along with safe and convenient infrastructure, help to meet the needs

1 According to the data of a nationwide survey conducted in 2019, the overwhelming majority of respondents considered the central authorities (and the President in particular) responsible for a state of affairs in Ukraine [Reznik, 2019: pp. 346–347].

of local residents and make them feel comfortable. Of course, developing good infrastructure involves significant costs, but it is the duty of a local government to manage costs, as well as to make the information pertaining to revenues and budget expenditures open to the public.

In the context of our research paper, it makes sense to provide a brief description of key powers and responsibilities of local governments in Ukraine. The municipal authority of the capital city (Kyiv) may serve as an illustration.

The Law “On the capital of Ukraine, the Hero City of Kyiv”¹, stipulates the separation of powers in Kyiv between the legislature (council) and the executive (administration) [The Law of Ukraine № 401-XIV, 1999]. Kyiv City Council (KCC) is a local representative body whose members are popularly elected for a five-year term under a proportional representation system². The Mayor of Kyiv, who is also elected by popular vote, serves as the head of KCC³. Kyiv City State Administration (KCSA) is accountable to Kyiv City Council. The head of KCSA is appointed by the President of Ukraine [Kaidan, 2015].

Kyiv City Council enacts ordinances and resolutions; in addition, they adopt an annual municipal budget and some budget amendments throughout the year. Much of the work of KCC takes place in standing committees that make decisions and deal with specific subjects — such as urban planning, architecture and land use, socio-economic development, energy and utilities sector, environmental policy, education, health care, etc. So far as Kyiv City State Administration is concerned, there are currently over 20 departments. Each one focuses on a specific area (housing, transport infrastructure, social policy, etc.)⁴. District state administrations (geographically, Kyiv consists of ten districts) are subordinate to KCSA. Besides, there are nearly 200 communal enterprises operating in various areas of economic activity (education, social care, communications, the arts culture, sports, etc.), which are subordinate to Kyiv City Council or Kyiv City State administration.

The overall structure of local authorities in the rest of Ukraine is similar to that in Kyiv. For example, there is a city council and an executive committee in other big cities or a village council and an executive committee in villages. Their duties and functions, however, may vary from one locality to another.

For the past few years, a series of reforms have been implemented in Ukraine, which are expected to improve the standard of living and quality of life for ordinary citizens. For instance, the decentralisation reform, which was launched in 2014, aimed

1 The title “hero” was bestowed upon Kyiv (along with other 11 cities and Brest Fortress) in Soviet times for outstanding bravery during World War II.

2 In Ukraine, proportional representation was introduced into the local elections as late as October 2020.

3 The Mayor of Kyiv, like those of other Ukrainian cities, is elected as an individual, rather than a representative of a national political party.

4 More information can be found on the website of Kyiv City Council and Kyiv City State Administration (<http://kyivcity.gov.ua>). Annual budget reports are available on the website of the Department for the Economy and Investment of KCSA (<https://dei.kyivcity.gov.ua/content/richnyy-zvit-mkyie-va.html>).

to create an effective and efficient system of local governance by transferring a range of powers, responsibilities and resources from the central government to basic administrative-territorial units called “amalgamated hromadas” [Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, s. a.]. They are also referred to as “united territorial communities” (UTC) or “united local communities” (ULC). The first local elections took place in newly-formed ULCs as early as October 2015, and by June 2020 over 1,000 united local communities had been established.

Obviously, it is a candidate's ability to convince the public that increases their chance of winning the election. Someone who runs for mayor, local councillor or head of ULC for the first time should clearly explain to the voters how he/she can make a difference to their city, town, district or community [Rusiya & Gandaloeva, 2020: p. 95]. As for incumbents, they are likely to get re-elected if the results of their work are positive and visible to most local residents. In other words, “rational, utility-maximising” voter models predominate [Hansen, 1994: p. 1]. Political views or party affiliation does not seem to be of primary importance — for example, the residents of big Ukrainian cities such as Kharkiv and Dnipro (as well as smaller ones like Bucha¹) voted for the same candidate in at least two consecutive mayoral elections. These people belonged to different political parties or were non-partisan; evidently, they won the elections because of having proved themselves to be skilful managers, who know how to run a city and make the residents feel satisfied with their work.

Nevertheless, we should not underestimate some other factors — not only of a socio-economic but also of a sociocultural and psychological nature — which may have an impact on electoral choice too. Politicians use various means to persuade people to vote for them — from distributing free food parcels to seniors, renovating playgrounds and patching potholes during an election campaign to eye-catching billboard advertisements and even celebrity endorsement. So, one should not confuse “one-off” actions (such as repairing a road just before the election) with those aimed at the true improvement of living conditions in a particular city or neighbourhood. On the other hand, there are people who vote for the incumbent despite not being really satisfied with his/her work. Rather, they do so “for the sake of stability” because choosing a “familiar face”, in their view, will not entail any unpredictable change.

Therefore, it is necessary to specify the factors conducive to citizens' satisfaction with local governments and then try to conclude how these factors can determine one's choice in favour of a particular candidate at local elections. For this purpose, we will use the findings of a recent (September–October 2020) nationwide survey. This survey was carried out by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine within the framework of the project “Ukrainian society: Monitoring social changes”. In total, 1,800 persons aged 18 and over, as well as from different socio-demographic groups, were interviewed². The study covered all Ukraine's regions, except for

1 Bucha had been a village and then a small town in Kyiv oblast for decades. In 2007, it gained city status. Bucha is known for good urban planning, environmental policies and comfortable living conditions [“Bucha”, s. a.; Bucha City Council, 2016].

2 The principles of sample design for a survey within this project are thoroughly described in the brochure “Ukrainian society in 1992–2018: Monitoring social changes” [Golovakha, Panina, & Parakhonska, 2019: p. 6].

the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and non-government controlled areas in the East; therefore, the data obtained can be generalised to the entire population of Ukraine.

We will start our analysis from considering Ukrainians' *overall attitude towards local* (municipal and other) *authorities*. As can be seen from Table 1, oblast¹ state administrations were evaluated positively only by 17.9% of respondents, whereas 42.4% of them held opposite views on that issue. Raion state administrations, mayors and ULC heads "scored" a little higher: 27.5% of those interviewed were "somewhat positive" about their work. Nonetheless, negative opinions prevailed².

Table 1

**The answers given by respondents to the question:
"How do you evaluate the work of ... ?" (%)**

	Very positively	Somewhat positively	Do not know	Somewhat negatively	Very negatively	No answer
Raion state administration, mayor of your city / head of ULC	5.3	27.5	30.0	20.3	16.7	0.2
Oblast state administration (OSA)	1.6	16.3	39.5	23.2	19.2	0.2

Source: [Vorona & Shulha, 2020: p. 459].

Within the framework of the survey, respondents were also asked whether they were satisfied with the work of city/town and raion councillors³. According to the figures, around one seventh (15.1%) of those interviewed reported being "somewhat satisfied" and 1.2% were even "completely satisfied". However, 28.6% and 19.8% of respondents were "somewhat" or "completely dissatisfied". Another point worth noting is that over one-third (35.2%) of those surveyed were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" with their local councils. Several explanations of this phenomenon can be given. The respondents might feel dissatisfied with the people they elected, but at the same time be unwilling to say that openly. They might not know what local authorities are supposed to do (or what has been already done in their city/district). Anyway, further research is needed to clarify the situation.

After analysing Ukrainians' satisfaction with local governments in general, we will focus on some particular indicators related to their performance. *Utility service quality* is the first one on the list. Apart from water and power supply, sewerage, as well as waste collection and disposal, these services usually include lift maintenance and repairs, hallway and staircase cleaning, pest control, lawn care, snow removal, etc. Table 2 shows that just over a fifth (22.4%) of those interviewed were on the whole satisfied with utility services, whereas more than twice as many respondents (47.5%) expressed

1 *Oblast* (which roughly corresponds to province) is a sub-national entity in Ukraine. Oblast capitals are usually big cities such as Kharkiv, Odesa, Lviv, Dnipro, etc. Ukraine consists of 24 oblasts, which are subdivided into raions (the latter can be likened to counties).

2 Unfortunately, due to the wording of the question, it does not seem possible to differentiate between a respondent's evaluation of the mayor's performance and that of raion state administration.

3 In most academic papers, newspaper articles, official documents, etc. written by Ukrainians, local councillors are usually called deputies.

dissatisfaction. The rest (29.9% of those surveyed) did not give a definite answer. 31.0% of respondents, answering the question about the condition of their apartment block or yard, considered it satisfactory. 44.3% of those interviewed were either “somewhat” or “completely dissatisfied”, and nearly a quarter (24.5%) found it difficult to answer. From this set of data, it can be inferred that a significant part of Ukraine’s population do not live a comfortable life (in regard to their neighbourhoods).

Table 2

**The answers given by respondents to the question:
“To what extent are you satisfied with ... ?” (%)**

	Completely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Completely dissatisfied	No answer
Utility services	1.7	20.7	29.9	26.9	20.6	0.2
The sanitary condition of your apartment block / the general condition of the yard or nearby area	4.3	26.7	24.5	29.9	14.4	0.2

Source: [Vorona & Shulha, 2020: p. 510].

Now let us consider how Ukrainian citizens feel outside their habitations — for instance, while travelling to work by bus or by car. It is known that poor road conditions and inadequate public transportation not only affect one’s feeling of comfort but also pose a real threat to commuters. The data of “Ukrainian society” suggest that roads in this country are far from being perfect; on the other hand, they are not dilapidated either. 51.6% of those interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with *road construction and maintenance*, but 28.7% of them reported feeling satisfied (see Table 3). As for *public transit*, positive evaluations outweighed, albeit not very significantly, negative ones — 43.5% of respondents were “somewhat” and “completely satisfied” while 34.0% of them were dissatisfied.

Table 3

**The answers given by respondents to the question:
“How satisfied are you with ... ?” (%)**

	Completely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Completely dissatisfied	No answer
Road construction and maintenance	3.3	25.4	19.6	26.8	24.8	0.1
Public transportation	7.3	36.2	22.5	22.1	11.9	0
The work of police department / fight against crime in your locality	1.2	13.9	35.2	26.9	22.7	0.1
Healthcare services	1.7	13.4	24.2	32.9	27.7	0.1

Source: [Vorona & Shulha, 2020: p. 510].

Rather few respondents (15.1%) expressed satisfaction with the work of a *local police department*. Instead, 26.9% and 22.7% of those interviewed were “somewhat” and

“completely dissatisfied”; so, around half of Ukraine’s population may not feel safe and secure enough in their localities.

As far as healthcare institutions are concerned, 27.7% and 32.9% of those surveyed said they were “completely” or “somewhat dissatisfied” with the quality of healthcare services, and just a little over 15% expressed complete or partial satisfaction.

Preschools and *schools* compare favourably to the other institutions mentioned in this research paper: 31.8% of those interviewed reported feeling satisfied with the availability and quality of services provided by kindergartens, whereas 26.3% of them were dissatisfied. The figures for schools were as follows: 36.1% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their services and 24.7% felt dissatisfied. Besides, 33.2% of those interviewed thought that there are not enough *playgrounds* (and sports classes for children either) in their locality.

The data also indicate a high portion of those who gave “ambivalent” responses: 41.8% and 39.1% respectively were “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” with preschool and school services (see Table 4). We may assume that some of these respondents did not have children of school age (or preschoolers) at the time of the survey; therefore, further analysis is required so as to separate their answers from the rest of the sample and to compare new figures with the original ones. This step could allow us to evaluate the work of these institutions more precisely.

Table 4

The answers given by respondents to the question:
“To what degree are you satisfied with ...?” (%)

	Completely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Completely dissatisfied	No answer
Availability, affordability and quality of preschool services	5.2	26.6	41.8	17.6	8.7	0.1
Availability, affordability and quality of school services	5.8	30.3	39.1	16.6	8.1	0.1
The number of playgrounds / the availability and affordability of sports (and other) classes for children	5.7	27.2	33.8	21.4	11.8	0.1

Source: [Vorona & Shulha, 2020: p. 510].

At this point, we have analysed some key figures related to the performance of local governments in Ukraine. We will finish our analysis by considering another essential indicator pertaining to the local authorities’ work, which can be characterised as the ability to communicate effectively with ordinary citizens and be *responsive* to their demands.

The importance of being heard (and listened to) cannot be denied. People need to feel that their opinions are taken into account, that they can apply to a relevant authority and receive help. This gives citizens a sense of dialogue with the authorities.

As the data of “Ukrainian society” show, such a dialogue has not yet been established: only 14.2% of respondents felt “somewhat satisfied” with how local govern-

ments respond to citizens' concerns, but 28.2% and 20.9% of them were "somewhat" and "very dissatisfied" [Vorona & Shulha, 2020: p. 510].

Still, there are some examples of productive communication between local authorities and citizens. The previously mentioned city of Bucha is a case in point. As the Mayor Anatolii Fedoruk remarked, the city administration regularly carries out surveys among Bucha residents in order to get feedback on many important issues concerning the city's community. Survey results are taken into consideration by the authorities and often serve as a basis for their decisions. Such a practice aims to remove most "sharp edges" that may arise [Oliinyk, 2009].

Resident surveys (like those in Bucha) offer an opportunity for ordinary citizens to directly participate in the life of their locality, thereby helping to enhance the quality of life of the people themselves. Surveys of this kind can be conducted within a particular district of a big city as well, and they pursue the same goal.

Citizens can also take part in the life of a city or community by exercising control over local authorities. For example, the above-discussed decentralisation reform has brought into being a new position called "starosta" (which can be translated as "warden") of united local community. A starosta is supposed to represent the interests of community residents. He/she attends city (or village) council meetings [Vrublevskiy, 2018] and deals with major community issues. Thus, the starosta serves as a means of communication between the local government and the residents.

Electing a community warden and endowing him/her with certain responsibilities is an important step towards citizens' participation in local governance, but such a large-scale initiative will take time to achieve measurable results.

The key *conclusions* of this research paper are as follows:

1. By and large, Ukrainians do not positively evaluate the work of local governments (especially oblast-level administrations and city/town or raion councilors). Mayors and ULC heads got a little better grades; nevertheless, positive evaluations could not outweigh negative ones. However, as noted earlier, it does not appear possible to discriminate between a respondent's attitude towards the mayor (or the head of united local community) and the raion state administration — owing to a double-ended question used in the survey.
2. The majority of respondents reported feeling totally or partially dissatisfied with utilities, road construction and maintenance; the same goes for the condition of their apartment block or surroundings. Since these areas are what local authorities are supposed to be in charge of, we may assume that there is a link between a person's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the quality of public services and his/her positive or negative evaluation of the authority's performance on the whole. These figures should be taken into consideration when analysing a respondent's other answers concerning local governments (e. g. preference for a particular candidate or trust in governmental institutions), primarily if he/she hesitates to express their opinion openly.
3. Healthcare and the police turned out to be the weakest link: just a little over one (!) per cent of those interviewed expressed complete satisfaction with the local police department's work and a bit more (1.7%) — with the quality of healthcare services. Instead, many respondents (49.6% and 60.6% respectively) were dissatisfied with these two spheres. Needless to say, both the nation's healthcare

system and the police require immediate improvement because they are closely related to human life, safety and security.

4. Preschools and schools earned higher (albeit not significantly) scores: approximately a quarter of those surveyed felt unhappy with their services while about a third were satisfied. On the other hand, around 40% of respondents chose the option “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” (in both questions), which makes it difficult to draw a precise conclusion about how these institutions are performing. Additional analysis is needed to separate the answers of respondents having children under 18 years old from the rest of the sample.
5. At least one half of those surveyed wanted local governments to be more responsive to the demands of ordinary citizens. Therefore, it is crucial that the authorities organise a coherent and constructive dialogue with the public and provide regular feedback to them.
6. What else attracts attention is a substantial portion of respondents without having a strong opinion on the matter. For instance, 39.5% and 35.2% of those interviewed found it difficult to evaluate the work of oblast state administration and local police department; 24.2%, 19.6% and 24.5% of them felt “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” with the quality of healthcare services, road maintenance and sanitary condition of their apartment block (although this is not so hard to notice). At this juncture, we can only speculate why respondents avoided giving a direct answer — whether they felt tired while being interviewed or were not very interested in their neighbourhood’s life at all, or they had not seen any tangible results in terms of the local government’s work. In order to clarify these points and thus to complement the available findings, a series of in-depth interviews or focus group discussions ought to be organised.
7. Finally, it should be underlined that all the data presented reflect the views of Ukraine’s population as a whole. To obtain a more detailed picture, which takes account of a respondent’s age, gender, region of residence and settlement type, further research is required.

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ОЛЬГА БУРОВА

Соціологічний аналіз чинників, що впливають на ставлення громадян до органів місцевого самоврядування в Україні

У статті проаналізовано чинники, що формують ставлення громадськості до діяльності та реформування місцевого самоврядування в Україні. Актуальність теми зумовлена необхідністю з'ясування, наскільки певні чинники впливають на вибір громадян на місцевих виборах до влади в контексті ставлення людей до місцевої влади. У статті детально розглянуто систему управління містом на прикладі Києва та викладено аналіз емпіричних даних останньої хвилі загальнодержавного опитування, яке щорічно проводить Інститут соціології НАНУ “Українське суспільство: моніторинг соціальних змін”. Особлива увага приділяється аналізу набору показників, що стосуються результатів діяльності місцевих органів влади (таких, як робота місцевої поліції, якість медичного обслуговування, освітні послуги в місцевих школах, громадський транспорт, житлово-комунальні послуги, наявність спортивних споруд тощо). Якість послуг, які місцеві органи влади надають мешканцям, визначають їхнє задоволення / незадоволення цими послугами, а отже, ставлення до цієї влади. У статті зроблено висновок щодо кореляції між задоволеністю комунальними послугами та ставленням до місцевої влади. Наведено приклади чинників, які могли б достатньою мірою слугувати показниками

ставлення громадян до влади та самоврядування. Зроблено спробу з'ясувати можливості та способи застосування наведених даних як платформи для подальших дій щодо поліпшення благоустрою міського середовища. Автор доходить висновку, що свідоме ставлення до управлінських рішень та участь громадян у реформуванні організації суспільства мають сприяти покращенню умов життя в Україні.

Ключові слова: суспільство, міська влада, реформи, якість життя, мер, міська адміністрація, територіальні громади, обласна адміністрація, децентралізація

ОЛЬГА БУРОВА

Социологический анализ факторов, влияющих на отношение граждан к органам местного самоуправления в Украине

В статье проанализированы факторы, формирующие отношение общественности к деятельности и реформированию местного самоуправления в Украине. Актуальность темы обусловлена необходимостью выяснения, насколько определенные факторы влияют на выбор граждан на местных выборах в контексте отношения людей к власти. В статье подробно рассматривается система управления городом на примере Киева и изложен анализ эмпирических данных последней волны общегосударственного опроса, ежегодно проводимого Институтом социологии НАНУ "Украинское общество: мониторинг социальных изменений". Особое внимание уделяется анализу набора показателей, касающихся результатов деятельности местных органов власти (таких, как работа местной полиции, качество медицинского обслуживания, образовательные услуги в местных школах, общественный транспорт, жилищно-коммунальные услуги, наличие спортивных сооружений и т.п.). Качество услуг, которые местные органы власти предоставляют жителям, определяют их удовлетворенность / неудовлетворенность этими услугами, а следовательно, отношение к этой власти. В статье сделан вывод о корреляции между удовлетворенностью коммунальными услугами и отношением к власти. Приведены примеры факторов, которые могли бы в достаточной мере служить показателями отношения граждан к власти и самоуправлению. Сделана попытка выяснить возможности и способы применения приведенных данных как платформы для дальнейших действий по улучшению благоустройства городской среды. Автор приходит к выводу, что осознанное отношение к управленческим решениям и участие граждан в реформировании организации общества должны способствовать улучшению условий жизни в Украине.

Ключевые слова: общество, власть, реформы, качество жизни, мэр, городская администрация, территориальные общины, областная администрация, децентрализация

OLGA BUROVA

Sociological analysis of the factors influencing citizens' attitudes to local governments in Ukraine

The paper focuses on the main factors forming public attitudes towards local authorities in Ukraine. The way that a person thinks and feels about a particular politician, an elected official or a local administration largely determines his/her voting behaviour⁷ hence the relevance of the research topic. Local governments are responsible for delivering a wide range of services to citizens; therefore, it makes sense to analyse the citizens' satisfaction with the quality of (and access to) certain services and compare these figures with the overall attitude to local authorities (which can correspond to a respondent's evaluation of the authorities' work in general). The findings of a recent (September–October 2020) nationwide survey titled "Ukrainian society: Monitoring social changes" will constitute an empirical basis for the analysis. The survey, which is annually conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, involves measuring respondents' satisfaction with a number of items related to the performance of local governments (with regard to the respondent's place of residence). These items include utility service quality, road conditions, the availability of playgrounds

and sports facilities, the work of a local police department, the availability and quality of services provided by preschools and schools, the quality of healthcare services, etc., as well the ability of local authorities to respond to the demands of ordinary citizens. The survey participants are also asked to evaluate the work of a local administration or a city/town mayor. The data of "Ukrainian society" for the year 2020 show that the majority of this country's population felt totally or partially dissatisfied with local public services (except for those offered by preschools and schools), and they did not consider local governments responsive to people's demands either. Besides, many respondents gave a negative evaluation to the overall work of local administrations. Drawing upon these data, the author concludes that there is a link between a person's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the quality of local public services and his/her positive or negative attitude towards the local authorities. It is suggested that the obtained results be taken into account when analysing other aspects concerning local governments (e. g. a respondent's trust in governmental institutions), especially if the respondent is not inclined to express his/her opinion openly. Special attention is also given to resident surveys as a tool for improving the well-being and quality of life for citizens and communities.

Keywords: *society, power, reforms, quality of life, mayor, municipal authorities, united territorial communities, local governments, decentralisation*