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A study of trust and satisfaction with local authorities in Ukraine. The impact of populism

Introduction

Ukraine had experienced major changes of its political system in recent decades, going through the transition from the centralized model of government to the decentralized one. Local self-government is a structure of state government, allowing the residents of a particular territory to take active part in the process of making decisions which affect their everyday life.

In Ukraine, local self-government obtained legal base following adoption of the law “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine” in 2015 (Law of Ukraine dated 05/21/1997).

The reform of local self-government conducted in 2015 was a significant step in the development of local authorities. It involved transition of a major part of powers, financial resources, and decisions onto the local level. Of course, the implementation of the reform did not go without problems. Nevertheless, local authorities in Ukraine continue to develop and play a major role in the life of its citizens. Local communities become active participants of decision-making processes, project development and implementation, which facilitates the strengthening of democratic processes on the local level.

In the course of evolution of local self-government, new challenges arise, among which the penetration of populism into the local authority structures is a major one.

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The article's scientific problem lies in analysis of relationship between the populism influence on local authorities and the role of citizens' trust and satisfaction with this process. Research in this field often centers on interconnections between the government's populist strategies and the population's attitude towards local institutions, and also on mechanisms through which populism can both strengthen and undermine the foundations of democratic government.

Analysis of international practice shows that in the countries experiencing political and economic crises, the growth of populism is often accompanied by the decrease of trust in traditional political institutions. Populists use the people's dissatisfaction, promising quick and simple solutions, which can boost their popularity for a short time. But in the long term, this approach can amplify destabilization and lower the trust in authorities even further.

As regards existing research of this problem, we can turn to international studies and theories, such as the works by Peter Mair (Mair, 2006) and Cas Mudde (Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2017). They show that populism can simultaneously reflect and produce society's dissatisfaction, undermining trust in traditional political institutions and administration mechanisms. These works emphasize the fact that in the context of crises, populists often use simple messages and promises to attract voters, dissatisfied with the incumbent government.

Cas Mudde defines populism as an ideology that opposes 'elite' in favor of 'common people' and analyzes its influence on modern democratic societies and political systems where it is the trust in local authorities that is a cornerstone of the functioning of democracy due to it being a source of legitimacy and administration efficiency. High level of trust facilitates active participation of citizens in political life and strengthens social contract between population and government. Both authors focus on understanding populism's influence on political processes and institutions.

There are also studies concerning populism's influence on the social life of citizens. The article by E. Cardillo titled "The Role of Local Authorities in Opposing Populism Through Social Accountability" (Cardillo, 2023), published in 2023 in the journal *Populism and Accountability: Interdisciplinary Researches on Active Citizenship*, studies potential of local authorities in counteracting populism using mechanisms of social responsibility.

The article studies the way in which local authorities can play a decisive role in promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen involvement as means of counteracting populist narratives and actions. It states that populism often flourishes in an environment of distrust, disenchantment, and predictable lack of reaction of established institutions.

Svitlana Shcherbak studies the Ukrainian case of populism in her article «Studying populism: a theoretical framework and the case of Ukraine». She analyses Volodymyr Zelenskyy's and Petro Poroshenko's electoral results (Shcherbak, 2023) and considers populism as a way of conducting political dialogue which allows expression of various political ideas, from left to far-right views. The author concludes that populism often builds nation identity, turning 'the people' into the key political player, and in the case of Ukraine, Zelenskyy came to power using populist methods, counterposing 'ordinary people' to 'corrupt elites'. Poroshenko, in turn, promoted the concept of the nation

based on common culture and language, which required the unification of society. In other words, one of them pitted 'the people' against 'the elites', and the other one promoted ethno-nationalist concept of nation. But, in any case, it is assumed that all these politicians' actions are a threat to democracy.

However, our research focuses on trust and complacency with local authorities as a marker of the rise of populist practices within government.

In Italy, for example, the Five Star Movement used distrust to traditional parties, promising to fight corruption and establish direct democracy through internet platforms. It resulted in their major election success, which reflects how distrust of the government can facilitate the rise of populism (Casaleggio, 2018).

Populists can reinforce distrust to local authorities by emphasizing their ineffectiveness or corruption and proposing themselves as the agents of change. This desire for simple answers to complex questions can attract voters, disenchanted with the current situation.

This phenomenon that makes emphasis on emotions and desires of the population causes the appearance of both new opportunities and difficulties for administration and maintenance of democratic procedures.

For deeper understanding of the problems associated with the spread of populism, key factors must be analyzed that cause its success among the public.

Factors that facilitate the populism success

Economic inequality, social unrest, and disenchantment with traditional political parties can create a fertile soil for populist movements to flourish. Besides, undermining the trust in established institutions, including national governments, can inflame populist moods on local level even further. In Ukraine, populism can gather strength exactly at times of crisis and war because of increase of public dissatisfaction and instability. Under these circumstances, people can be more inclined to support leaders who offer simple solutions to complex problems, promise rapid changes, or appeal to national sentiments. The reason for it is a demand for security and stability in uncertain times.

Understanding populism in the local context

In essence, populism is most often characterized by the promise to solve the problems and appease common people. Often it represents a simplified view of the problems and offers simple solutions that appeal to the community.

One of the features of local authorities' populism is emphasis on popular but not always realistic promises and measures which can be often aimed at attracting votes and support. Populistic politicians often use emotional rhetoric and promises of quick and simple solutions without paying enough attention to long-term consequences and real effectiveness of the measures proposed. Local authorities' populism can also lead to uneven resource distribution offering privileges to certain groups of citizens to the detriment of others. This can create public and social tensions and undermine public trust in local authorities. In addition, populistic politicians in local authorities can restrict openness and transparency of the decision-making process, weaken the public control institutions and freedom of expressing views. This creates an unfavorable

environment for democratic principles and the principle of constitutional state. On the other hand, populism can stimulate the citizens to participate actively in local affairs and political processes. Citizens can demand greater transparency, openness, and accountability of local authorities' actions, which can improve the quality of decisions being made and facilitate the democracy development on the local level.

Populism often manifests itself through charismatic leaders. One such example of populist manifestations in local authorities in Ukraine is activity of certain political parties or politicians who promise to solve all the problems and satisfy all the demands of their voters without realistic understanding of limitations and difficulties which city or region administration faces. For example, during mayoral or gubernatorial elections, some politicians can make **populistic promises** like raising wages, free services, or building new objects without taking financial or organizational limitations into account. It could be done in order to get voters' support and win the elections, but in the long-term perspective populist promises often become unrealistic or impracticable. Besides, populist politicians can use populist rhetorical style, promises of simple solutions, and criticism of current elites and government. They can focus on emotional aspects and promise 'simple' solutions which are not always based on concrete strategies or analysis of complex problems.

Realizing the influence of populism on local authorities in Ukraine, it is important to delve into a problem of influence of several factors affecting the citizen trust in authorities. If we consider quite a powerful factor of the public satisfaction with the work of local authorities, we can see the connection with the theory of trust in government, offered by Peter Sztompka (Sztompka, 1999).

According to this theory, trust is based on past experience and expectations of future behavior. If actions of the government match the population's expectations and promises, satisfaction and trust increase. Otherwise, the gap between expectations and reality can lead to a decrease in trust and satisfaction levels. Thus, by analyzing the populism dynamic, we reach the key aspect — satisfaction with and trust in local authorities, which is of fundamental importance for social stability and democratic development.

Study of Ukrainian citizens' trust in and satisfaction with local authorities

Right now, under the conditions of war, the topic of trust in local authorities in Ukraine is extremely complex and multifaceted, but no less important. It is common knowledge that war is a crisis event that deeply affects social, political, and economical structures of society. Under these circumstances, the role and influence of local authorities often change significantly and reveal to a great extent the ability to react to crisis situations quickly and efficiently.

The research analyzed hereafter was conducted in cooperation with Factum Group research center from July 15 till August 10, 2023.

The respondents were asked questions related to trust in and satisfaction with the actions of local authorities. Poll method: online survey (CAWI), $N = 400$. Data source: Opinion internet panel, the first access-panel in Ukraine with 350 000+ users.

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the work or your local authorities during the wartime in Ukraine?

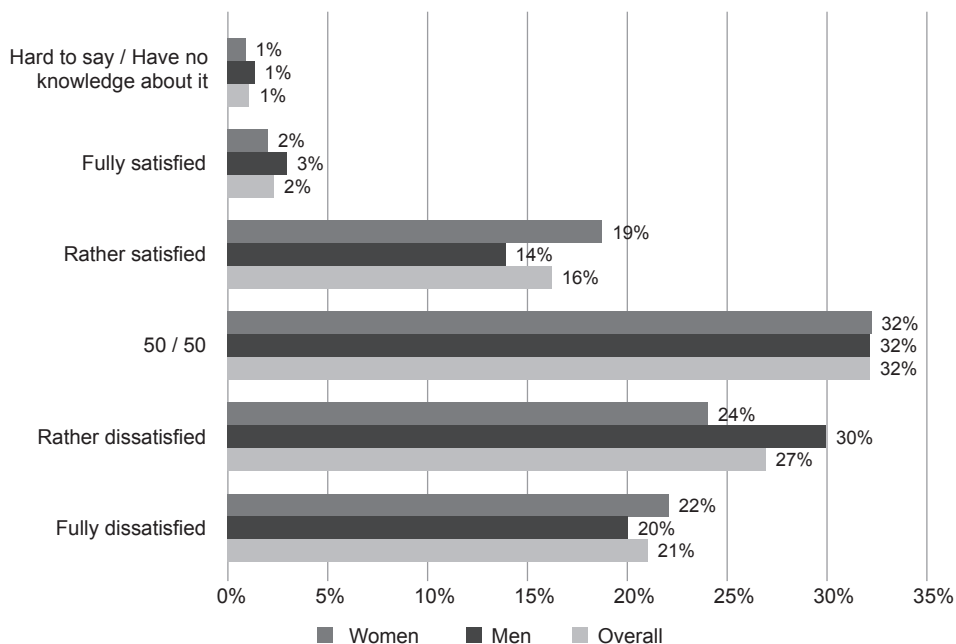


Fig. 1. Satisfaction / dissatisfaction with the work of local authorities during the wartime in Ukraine (distribution by gender)

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the restoration of property and buildings, damaged because of the war/shelling?

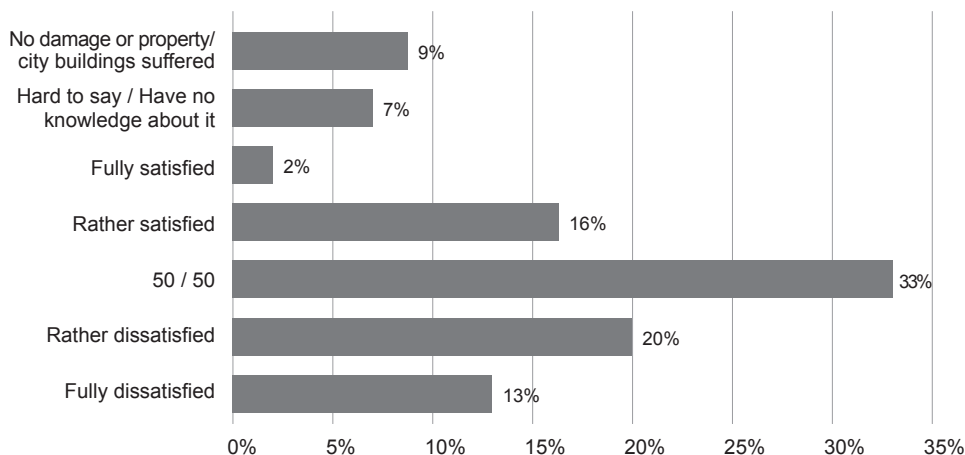


Fig. 2. Satisfaction / dissatisfaction with restoration of property and buildings, damaged because of the war/shelling

As we can see, the greatest problem that the public faces concerning local authorities is the fight against corruption. Regarding this question, half of respondents (50%) were dissatisfied with the actions of local authorities. At the same time, provision of public

Are you satisfied with the work of your local authorities during the wartime in Ukraine in the following aspects?

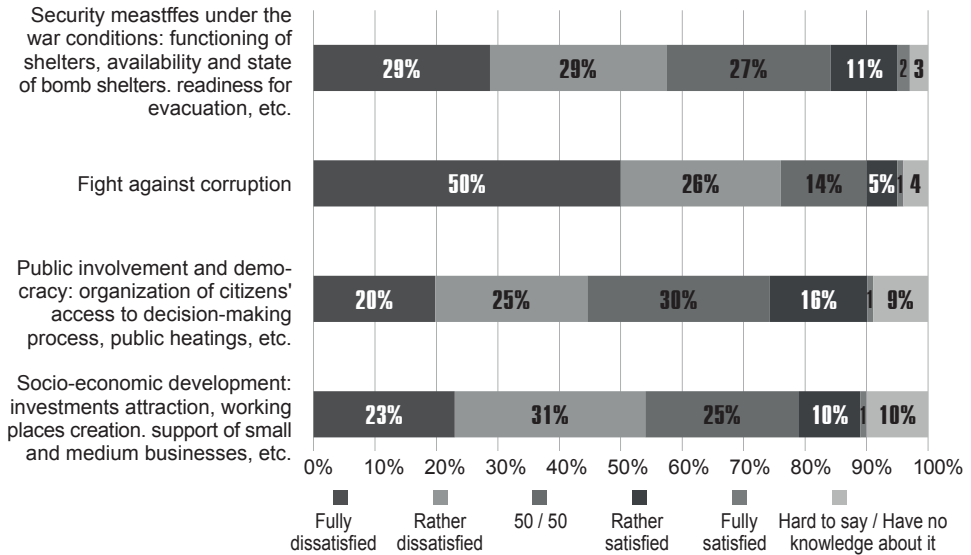


Fig. 3. Satisfaction / dissatisfaction with the work of local authorities on specific aspects during the wartime

security under the current circumstances has insufficient level of organization. It should be noted that less than one third of respondents (29%) are completely dissatisfied with security measures, while only 11% expressed their satisfaction with security measures (see Fig. 3).

Of course, these two indicators could be viewed as a reaction to vivid media coverage of these issues of late, but we can also look at them objectively. Corruption scandals in local authorities and communities arise very often lately, but people don't see the government fighting the local corruption in the least constructively and effectively.

Sometimes all these gaps even show the inability of some communities to provide the citizens with shelters in good condition and take evacuation measures at times of danger. Rebuilding of houses and infrastructure, ruined during the military action, proceeds very slowly if at all. This conclusion is confirmed by answers to the question about rebuilding of damaged buildings. As we can see, only 3% are fully satisfied with how the infrastructure is rebuilt in their town, and one fifth of the respondents (20%) expressed their dissatisfaction (see Fig. 2).

As for the question "Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the work of your local authorities during the wartime in Ukraine?", the data reflect general dissatisfaction of Ukrainian citizens with the work of local authorities during the wartime (see Fig. 1). As for the gender distribution of responses, we see insignificant differences between men's and women's responses that can be associated with different ways of experiencing stress and emotional perception of crisis situations. Women can be more inclined to express and discuss their concerns which can lead to higher rates

of dissatisfaction in surveys. On the other hand, men can be more inclined towards more restrained reaction to the question of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which can explain lower percentage of 'rather satisfied' among them. Besides, social norms and role expectations also can influence the way people respond to the survey and express their opinion of the work of authorities (see Fig. 1).

The problems associated with corruption and security can lead to deepening of distrust of authorities which, according to Robert Putnam's theories of social capital (Putnam, 1993) and Sztompka's fundamental trust theories (Sztompka, 1999), can undermine social cooperation and lower effectiveness of public institutions. This will quite possibly lead to social fragmentation, lowering of public involvement, and decrease in social well-being. That's exactly the breeding grounds that allow populists to develop and permeate local authorities. Analyzing the obtained data with the help of Robert Putnam's social capital theory, it can be argued that slow rebuilding of houses and infrastructure, along with low level of satisfaction with the actions of local authorities, lead to decrease of social capital. This, in turn, decreases trust and cooperation between citizens and government, which weakens social cohesion and slows the renewal process (Putnam, 1993).

Conclusions

In Ukraine, local self-government plays important role in democracy development and effective administration on the local level. However, populism in local politics is a major threat to the development and stability of local government.

In Peter Mair's opinion, in Europe moving of parties away from electorate facilitated growth of populism (Mair, 2006). Thus, we can presume that decrease of trust in government facilitates moving of electorate away from government structures, thus facilitating growth of populism. That is why the emergence of trust in local authorities and social institutions is very important for the preservation of democracy. Unfortunately, the empirical data showed that the level of trust in local authorities is quite low in society.

The data on the Ukrainian citizens' trust in local authorities indicate low level of satisfaction with anticorruption measures and security provision during the war. This fact emphasizes the need for deep understanding and adequate reaction to public opinion in order to increase the effectiveness of management and social stability. While analyzing the data, we can see exactly the factors that can precede the populism penetration into local authorities. For example, the citizens' dissatisfaction with the work of local authorities, especially in the moments of crisis, creates a favorable environment for populist politicians.

Populists often use general dissatisfaction and distrust in government to promote their agenda, promising simple solutions to complex problems and appealing to emotions, not reason. This way, a high level of dissatisfaction, especially during the war, can reinforce the influence of populists who position themselves as *vox populi* against the ineffective and corrupt government. This can lead to involvement of those populist leaders in government, which can have long-term consequences for political stability and democratic processes.

Finding out the level of Ukrainian citizens' trust in and satisfaction with local authorities provides us with important guides for assessment of government efficiency under conditions of crisis and war. These findings not only reflect the quality of services and level of cooperation between authorities and population, but are key indicators of social stability and political maturity.

In his studies of social capital, American political scientist R. Putnam emphasizes importance of social connections, trust, and involvement in public life for the functioning of democratic societies and public well-being. Putnam argues that social capital plays a crucial role in the functioning of communities and has substantial influence on economic development, political involvement, and general social well-being. His studies show that democracies and economies function better when there exists an independent and long-lasting tradition of citizen involvement (Putnam, 1993).

Further research should be aimed at studying public opinion about populism penetration into local authority bodies, discovering other factors and systems of influence on its penetration, and elaborating recommendations on preventive measures against penetration of populists into local authorities. Spreading of populist views within local authorities requires the citizens, media, and other interested parties to apply critical thinking and deep analysis. Besides, it is important to understand that populism by itself is not a wholly negative phenomenon. Ability to attract attention to urgent issues, taking common citizens' opinion into account, and their involvement in participation in political process can be useful and important elements of democracy. However, when populism is used to manipulate and restrict rights and freedoms, it becomes a problem for a society. Public discussions and awareness of potential consequences of populism in local authorities can contribute to more responsible and reasonable decision-making, as well as forming of political culture based on long-term interests and well-being of society. We need to broaden, not cease, the dialogue between the public and authorities. And though democracies have mechanisms to counter populism, we agree with such authors as (Urbinati, 2019) and (Shcherbak, 2023), who consider populism a threat to democracies, for in the countries with unstable democracy populism can be quite a dangerous thing.

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ОЛЬГА БУРОВА, ДМИТРО ГЛОМОЗДА

Дослідження довіри та задоволеності місцевою владою в Україні. Вплив популізму

У статті аналізується низка аспектів та чинників, які, на думку авторів, впливають на проникнення популізму у місцеву владу. Саме аспект довіри може впливати на проникнення і збільшення впливу популізму в місцевому самоврядуванні. Автори висвітлюють важливу тему чинників, які могли б сприяти успіху популізму у владі, та вивчають специфіку його проявів на місцевому рівні. Особлива увага приділяється аналізу довіри та задоволеності громадян України роботою місцевих органів влади на базі емпіричних даних, отриманих у співпраці із соціологічним центром «Factum Group».

У статті розглядається популізм у місцевій політиці як явище, яке потребує серйозної уваги та аналізу. Він може мати негативні наслідки для місцевого самоврядування і призвести до політичної нестабільності та недостатньої ефективності рішень, особливо за наявності слабкої демократії.

Однією з основних проблем популізму є його фокусування на короткострокових, популістських обіцянках та риториці замість довгострокового планування та реального розвитку. Це може призвести до необгрунтованого витрачання ресурсів та утворення залежності від зовнішніх фінансових джерел, що може негативно вплинути на стійкість місцевої економіки. Крім того, популізм може підважувати принципи демократії та правової держави.

У контексті академічного аналізу вивчення впливу популізму на рівні місцевого врядування має критичне значення. Цей аналіз ґрунтується на працях Р. Патнема та П. Штомпки. У контексті теорії П. Штомпки розглядається питання довіри до влади та її (довіри) важливості для соціальних інститутів. Р. Патнем робить наголос на тому, що демократії та економіці у суспільстві працюють краще, коли є залученість громадян. Саме залученість і вплив громадян на місцеву владу уможливилися в результаті процесу децентралізації. Тож проаналізовані вище розвідки забезпечують розуміння того, які тенденції можуть впливати на соціальні процеси та суспільне життя. Дослідження цих аспектів дає змогу виявити ефективні механізми протидії потенційним загрозам популізму, що є важливим для оцінки загальних перспектив розвитку держави та її соціальної стабільності. Щоб подолати окреслену проблему, потрібна активна участь громадян, зміцнення інститутів громадянського суспільства, розвиток критичного мислення і принципів відкритості та прозорості.

Емпіричні дані показують низький рівень довіри у багатьох аспектах, що стосуються роботи місцевої влади. Тож можна припустити, що це призведе до високого рівня популізму. На-

явність популістських лідерів у владі потребує окремих розвідок, але досить зрозуміло, що із кожним роком присутність популістів у владі зростає внаслідок самої специфіки явища популізму.

Ключові слова: довіра, задоволеність, децентралізація, популізм, політичні партії, місцева влада, соціологічна теорія довіри за Штомпкою

OLGA BUROVA, DMYTRO HLOMOZDA

A study of trust and satisfaction with local authorities in Ukraine.

The impact of populism

The article analyzes a number of aspects and factors that, in the authors' opinion, influence the penetration of populism into local government. It is the aspect of trust that can influence the penetration and even greater influence of populism in local self-government. The authors highlight such important topics as the factors that would contribute to the success of populism and the specifics of its manifestations at the local level. Special attention is paid to the analysis of trust and satisfaction of Ukrainian citizens with the work of local authorities, based and analyzed on empirical data obtained in cooperation with the sociological center «Factum Group».

The article considers populism in local politics as a phenomenon that requires serious attention and analysis. It can have negative consequences for local self-government and lead to political instability and insufficient effectiveness of decisions. One of the main problems with populism is its focus on short-term, populist promises and rhetoric instead of the need for long-term planning and real development. This can lead to unjustified spending of resources and creating dependence on external financial sources, which can negatively affect the sustainability of the local economy. In addition, populism can undermine the principles of democracy and the rule of law.

In the context of academic analysis, studying the impact of populism at the local government level is critical. This analysis is based on the works of R. Putnam and P. Sztompka. In the context of P. Sztompka's theory, the issue of trust in government and its importance for social institutions is considered. R. Putnam emphasizes that democracies and economies in society work better when there is citizen involvement. It was the involvement and influence of citizens on local government that became possible as a result of the decentralization process. Thus, these studies provide an understanding of what trends can affect social processes and public life. The study of these aspects makes it possible to identify effective mechanisms for counteracting the potential threats of populism, which is important for assessing the general prospects for the development of the state and its social stability. To overcome this problem, active participation of citizens, strengthening of civil society institutions, development of critical thinking and principles of openness and transparency are needed.

In the future, we need further research on the aspects of influence and raising questions about other factors and systems of influence on the appearance of populists in local authorities, in order to know what local authorities should pay attention to in order to strengthen trust and resist the spread of populism. Which, as the authors note, are mutually dependent processes.

Keywords: trust, satisfaction, decentralization, populism, political parties, local government, Sztompka's sociological theory of trust