

The Role of Political Parties and Volunteer Organizations in the Process of Shaping Political Identity and Human Rights Protection during Military Aggression

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Abstract

The study examines the role of political entities and volunteer organisations in shaping political identity amidst the Russian military aggression towards Ukraine. The purpose of the study is to determine the influence of political parties and volunteer organisations on the processes of political identity formation and human rights protection during martial law. Sociological, graphical, and comparative methods were used during the study. The findings indicate the increasing significance of Ukrainian citizenship, the strengthening of national identity and the consolidation of civil society in Ukraine amidst Russian military aggression. It was established that there are certain disagreements regarding the support of existing and new political parties. At the same time, a significant number of citizens has an uncertain position on the support of specific political parties or the involvement of volunteer organisations in the activities. The substantial consolidation and expansion of volunteer organisations, coupled with increased confidence in their operations, indicates the culmination of the civil nation-building process in Ukraine.

Keywords: political parties, politics, volunteer organisations, martial law, identity, human rights, Ukraine.

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Introduction

The international community has witnessed numerous disputes within the global environment, spanning from localised clashes to expansive military confrontations. During tumultuous historical periods, society faces questions surrounding political allegiance, ideological orientation, and the essence of national identity. Political parties and volunteer organisations are becoming important players in shaping the political beliefs and commitments of people affected by the war. In the period of modern geopolitical challenges, the study of shaping political identity in the context of military aggression is becoming increasingly relevant (Mankoff, 2022; Ricarte, 2023). This involves considering the complex role of political parties and volunteer organisations in forming political identity.

Political parties, as key actors in any democratic society, play a significant role in times of war. Their participation in shaping political identity is multifaceted and encompasses different approaches to gaining support and loyalty. By disseminating propaganda, harnessing resources, or articulating a particular narrative, political parties have sufficient influence on society's political consciousness (Kužel, 2020; Neudert & Marchal, 2019). In turn, volunteer organisations uniquely contribute to shaping political identity during military confrontation, directly interacting with the affected communities, and offering them various support.

It is crucial to understand the incentives and initiatives that foster political parties and volunteer organisations to shape political identity actively during military aggression. Moreover, regardless of whether they are guided by ideological convictions, strategic considerations, or the desire for social transformation, these underlying motivations influence the rhetoric and behaviour of the main actors.

Thus, exploring the role of political parties and volunteer organisations in shaping political identity during military aggression is an extremely urgent issue for understanding the complexity of modern conflicts. By analysing current interactions, one can understand the mechanisms that mould individuals' political ideologies and affiliations in the face of military upheavals and uncertainty.

The main purpose of the current study is to examine the function of political parties and volunteer organisations in shaping political identity and human rights protection in the context of military aggression.

Literature Review

The impact of military aggression on society is extremely powerful and covers various aspects of life, including the formation of political identity. Understanding how political parties and volunteer organisations influence the

political landscape during conflict is essential to finding the complex relationship between political affiliation and identity development.

Political parties are key players in a country's political life and one of the leading forces that can influence the development of political identity during the war. Parties often adapt their platforms according to the population's key moods, instilling a sense of unity in the face of external threats. By covering the conflict in a way consistent with their narrative, parties significantly contribute to shaping their supporters' political identity (Lee, 2022).

Moreover, the researchers emphasise political parties' role in mobilising citizens through advocacy and communication strategies. During military aggression, parties utilise these tools to create a narrative that defines a national identity, emphasising shared values and common goals. Such a narrative becomes integral to people's political identity when associating with a particular party (Wurst et al., 2023; Vuckovic, 2023).

Volunteer organisations, especially those engaged in humanitarian and defence activities during the war, also play an important role in shaping political identity. The transformational impact of volunteering on people's sense of belonging and loyalty to a particular cause is especially noticeable. As marked by researchers, volunteer organisations often act as catalysts for shaping collective identity, helping to strengthen a sense of solidarity among citizens (Stukas et al., 2015).

There is a link between volunteer organisations and political parties that are oriented towards certain political ideologies in wartime, contributing to the construction of a common political identity and taking an active part in shaping public opinion and promoting the party agenda. Political parties often rely on volunteers to gain candidate support and visibility during elections and to mobilise communities around local events (Lees-Marchment & Pettitt, 2014).

While political parties and volunteer organisations significantly shaped political identities during the war, specific challenges occurred in maintaining a cohesive and inclusive identity. Yang et al. (2016) argue that polarisation is exacerbated when citizens perceive differences in values and goals with political opponents. In nations with excessive polarisation, individuals are compelled to select a faction or establish distinct allegiance with groups (McCoy et al., 2018). Researchers (Vecchi et al., 2021) maintain that polarisation within a country can lead to the exclusion of diverse viewpoints, impeding the progression of a collective identity that transcends individual differences.

Moreover, another challenge to the authentic development of national political identity can be posed by the influence of external actors, such as foreign powers or supranational actors. Research (OECD, 2011; Lee, 2018) shows that

outside interference can manipulate narratives, creating social divisions and undermining efforts to shape a single political identity.

Thus, the role of political parties and volunteer organisations in shaping political identity during the war is multifaceted. Scientific sources reveal the complex nature of parties and volunteer organisations as important channels through which a new social life and personal subjectivity are formed in wartime. The intersection of political parties and volunteer organisations adds complexity to shaping identity, as people find themselves under the influence of both party ideologies and active participation in volunteer activities. However, challenges such as internal polarisation and external interference highlight different dimensions of the nature of shaping political identity during wartime.

Research Objectives

1. Analysis of political parties' role (approaches, influence) in shaping political identity.
2. Examining the volunteer organisations' role (activities, support measures) in the context of political identity.
3. Research the motivations of political parties and volunteer organisations (goals, ideology, influence).
4. Assessing the impact of political parties and volunteer organisations on citizens' political identity in conflict.

The established tasks allow for a thorough understanding of the interplay significance among political parties, volunteer organisations and citizens in shaping political identity and human rights protection amidst military hostilities.

Methods

The study used an approach consisting of the following stages:

- conducting an analysis of ideological importance as regards belonging to Ukrainian citizenship (Razumkov Centre, 2023b);
- identifying the factors that may restrain the desire to emigrate to other countries during the period of military aggression (Razumkov Centre, 2023b);
- identifying intentions to support existing/newly established political parties (Razumkov Centre, 2023a);
- identifying the political entities that possess the requisite sources of power to be deemed suitable for assuming control post-war (Razumkov Centre, 2023a);
- clarifying the presence/absence of political parties that deserve citizens' trust (Dembitskyi, 2023);

- establishing civic identity dynamics of the Ukrainian population (Dembitskyi, 2023);
- determination of changes in the level of human rights protection (Razumkov Centre, 2022);
- defining the civic engagement's role in Ukraine during the war (USAID, 2022; 2023).

The findings of the sociological inquiry were utilised, encompassing numerical surveys of public opinion in Ukraine regarding attitudes towards various political forces and public organisations engaged in volunteer activities, interviews with advocates of various political forces to analyse motivation and self-identification (Razumkov Centre, 2023a; 2023b; Dembitskyi, 2023; USAID, 2023; 2022).

Given the above, the combination of sociological, graphic and comparative research methods made it possible to comprehensively analyse the role of parties and non-governmental organisations in shaping political identities during military aggression.

Results

Political identity is the awareness of one's belonging to a particular political community in the country of residence, which is shaped based on: sharing common political values, beliefs, ideology of a specific community, a sense of belonging to a certain nation or state, support for specific political leaders and organisations. Political identity is closely related to an individual's civic identity, especially during instability, crises, and wartime (Besley & Persson, 2021; Magocsi, 2023).

Drawing upon the above concept and the scientific literature analysed in the study, we comprehensively understand various areas that can impact the shaping of political identity. By the current political identity in the country, we will consider the dynamics of changes in the importance of people's belonging to Ukrainian citizenship (Figure 1). An examination of significance associated with Ukrainian citizenship reveals a notable presence, both in 2015 and 2023, of individuals who take immense pride in their national identity as citizens of Ukraine within its sovereign borders (from 28.7% in 2015 to 70.7% in 2023). Conversely, the number of those with a negative attitude towards this identification is decreasing, especially during wartime (Figure 1). The identified trends demonstrate drastic changes in identification caused by Russian military aggression against Ukraine.

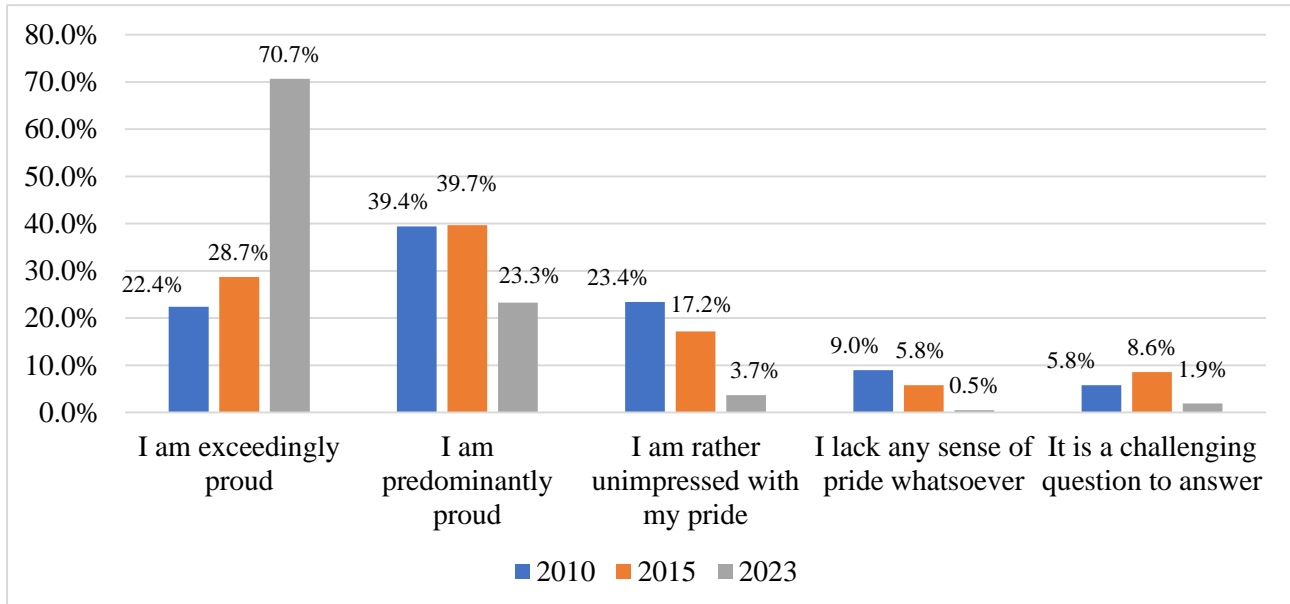


Figure 1. The importance of belonging to Ukrainian citizenship, % among respondents possessing Ukrainian citizenship (Razumkov Centre, 2023b)

The expressions of an individual's civic identity motives also influence their ideological, occupational, and daily conduct and further actions during wartime. Changes in attitudes and approaches to deterrence factors to emigrate to other countries are demonstrated by results that are based on the general state of affairs in the country during the war and citizens' faith in future positive changes (Figure 2). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the present challenging circumstances in Ukraine suits 13.5% of its population. That is, the number of such respondents has increased compared to 2000.

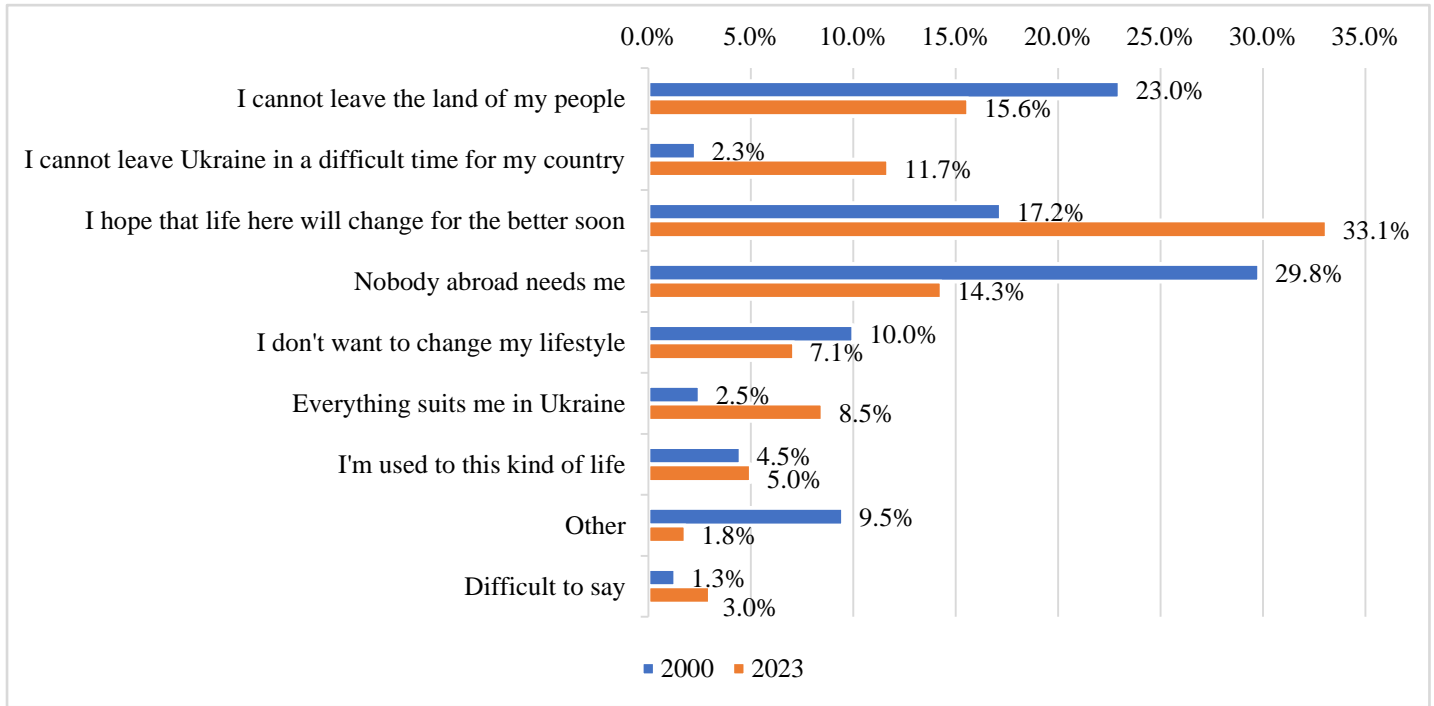


Figure 2. The main reasons that restrain the desire to emigrate, % (Razumkov Centre, 2023b)

Drawing upon society’s need to shape a new political reality under challenging conditions. There is an increasing demand for suitable political entities that accurately represent and execute the requirements of the majority or certain age groups. The strengthening of patriotic sentiments and national identification of citizens entails corresponding changes. Notably, many respondents are ready to support new political projects and political forces. At the same time, a considerable share of those who prefer political parties with some political experience (Figure 3). However, almost a third of citizens do not find their answers regarding political preferences. Such a distribution may indicate both confusion, a certain conservatism of the voters, and the demand for the renewal of the existing political class.

The need for renewal of political forces stems from a shared perspective regarding the conduct of parties, military personnel, volunteers, and civil society organisations. Citizens of Ukraine associate the post-war renewal of the political class primarily with the military, volunteers, and representatives of the intellectual elite (Figure 4). A particularly sceptical attitude was shown regarding trust in the business community during the post-war period of the country’s development.

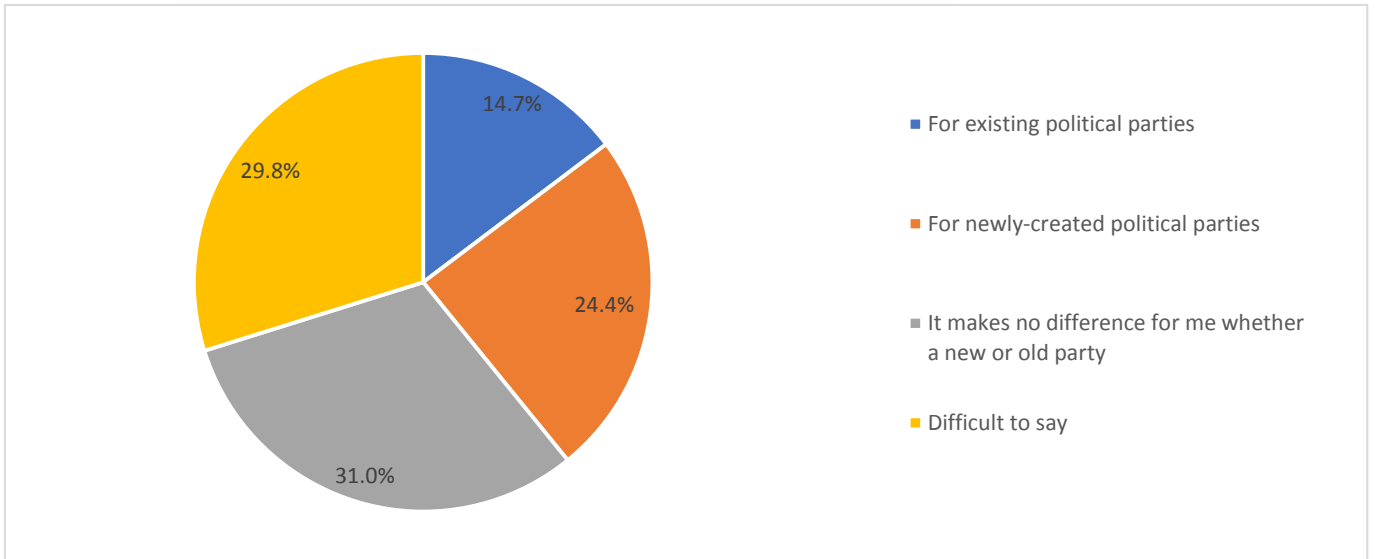


Figure 3. The choices when voting for existing/newly created political parties (Razumkov Centre, 2023a)

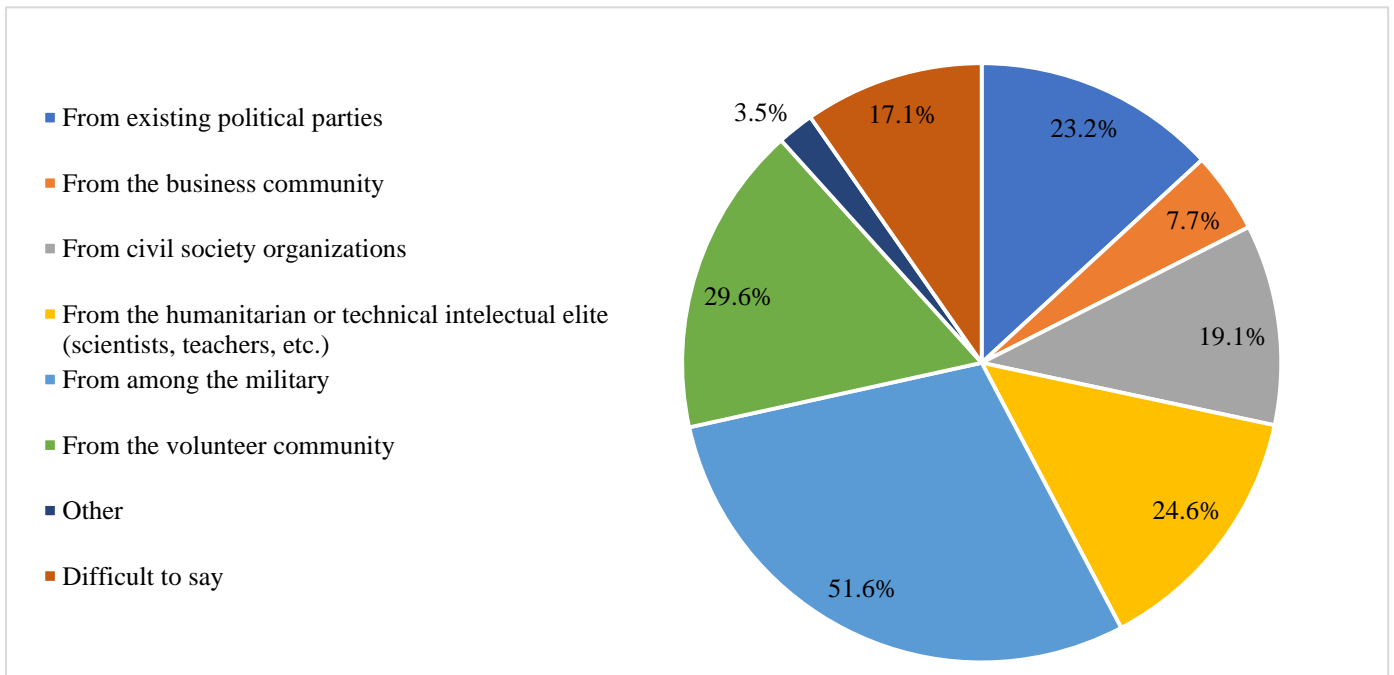


Figure 4. Political force emergence sources that can be entrusted with power after the war, % (Razumkov Centre, 2023a)

The percentage of those who see existing political forces in Ukraine that can be entrusted with power has increased (an increase from 24% in 2021 to 34.5% in 2022) (Figure 5). However, there is a significant uncertainty among citizens who seek political entities that possess the potential to foster trust and contribute to the development of trust and identity.

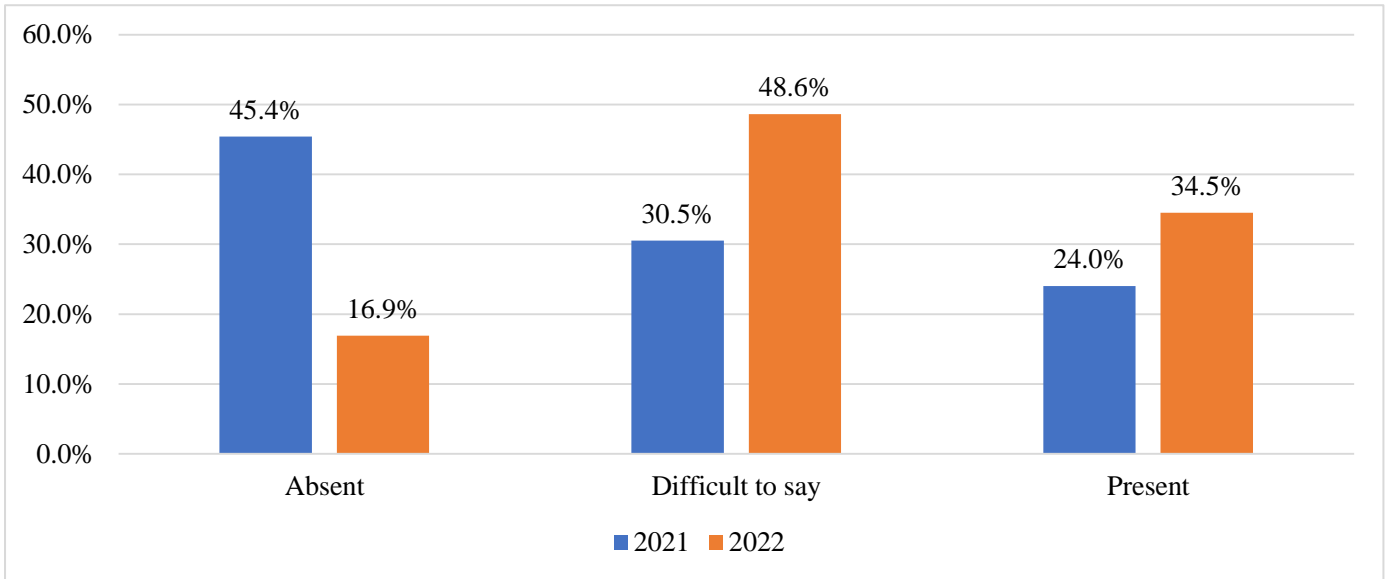


Figure 5. Presence/absence of credible political parties (Dembitskyi, 2023)

The strengthening of civic identity continued its tendency during the war, increasing from 62.6% in 2021 to 79.7% in 2022. The era of national and civic strengthening, spanning from 2015 to the present, has been delineated by the consolidation of national and civic elements due to a monumental conflict. This process has culminated in establishing a cohesive civil nation within Ukraine (Figure 6).

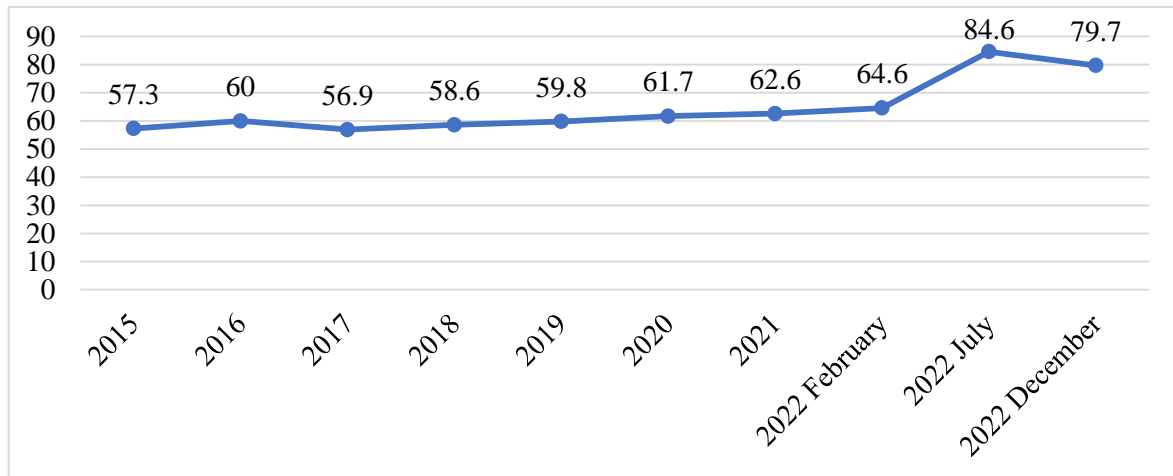


Figure 6. Dynamics of the civic identity of Ukraine's population, % (Dembitskiy, 2023)

A survey of citizens regarding the state of affairs in the observance of rights and freedoms demonstrated that nearly half of the respondents did not perceive significant changes in the implementation of democratic norms, freedoms, and the protection of citizens' rights during times of war (Figure 7).

The volunteer movement in Ukraine has gained significant scale due to volunteer organisations' creation of local and all-Ukrainian volunteer networks. The level of trust in volunteer CSOs has increased significantly: in August 2022, the level of public trust in CSOs was 44%, and in volunteer organisations - 77% (Democratic Initiatives & Razumkov Centre, 2022). 39% of citizens transferred funds to charitable foundations, and another third of citizens provided money and support to affected people. A total of 68% of the surveyed citizens were involved in volunteer activities (Gradus Research Company, 2022).

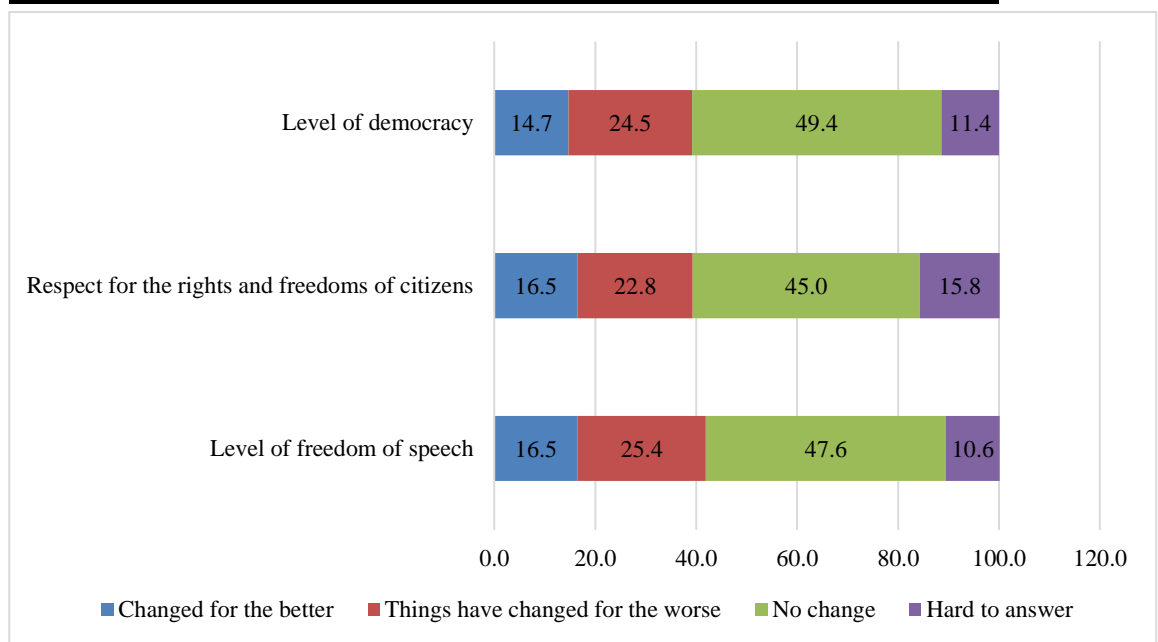


Figure 7. Changes in the situation with respect for the rights and freedoms of citizens compared to the beginning of 2022 (Razumkov Centre, 2022)

Civil society organisations have started many humanitarian initiatives. The importance of volunteering as one of the national identification factors contributed to the intensification of this activity (Figure 8).

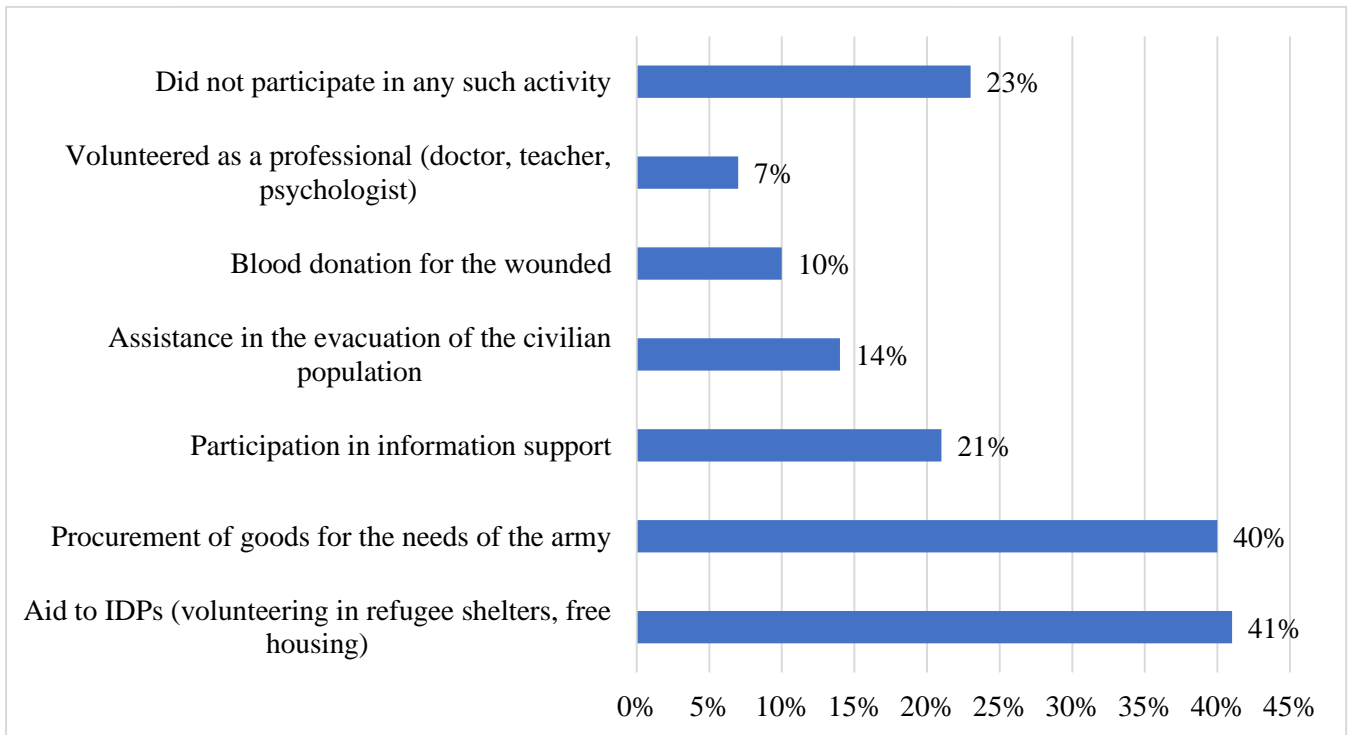


Figure 8. Citizen Participation in Various Types of Volunteer Activities (USAID, 2022)

There have also been changes in volunteer legislation. For example, the Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine “On Volunteering” to Support Volunteering” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2022) promotes the development of volunteer culture among students, facilitates taxation and improves the legal regulation of volunteering. Thus, the historically high scores for the development of civil society organisations in the indicators “Freedom of Association” (5.6) and “Cooperation between the state and CSOs” (5.2), despite the war, remained in 2022 (ECNL, 2023).

These approaches confirm the results of a NGO survey on providing charitable assistance and volunteering during martial law in Ukraine (Figure 9).

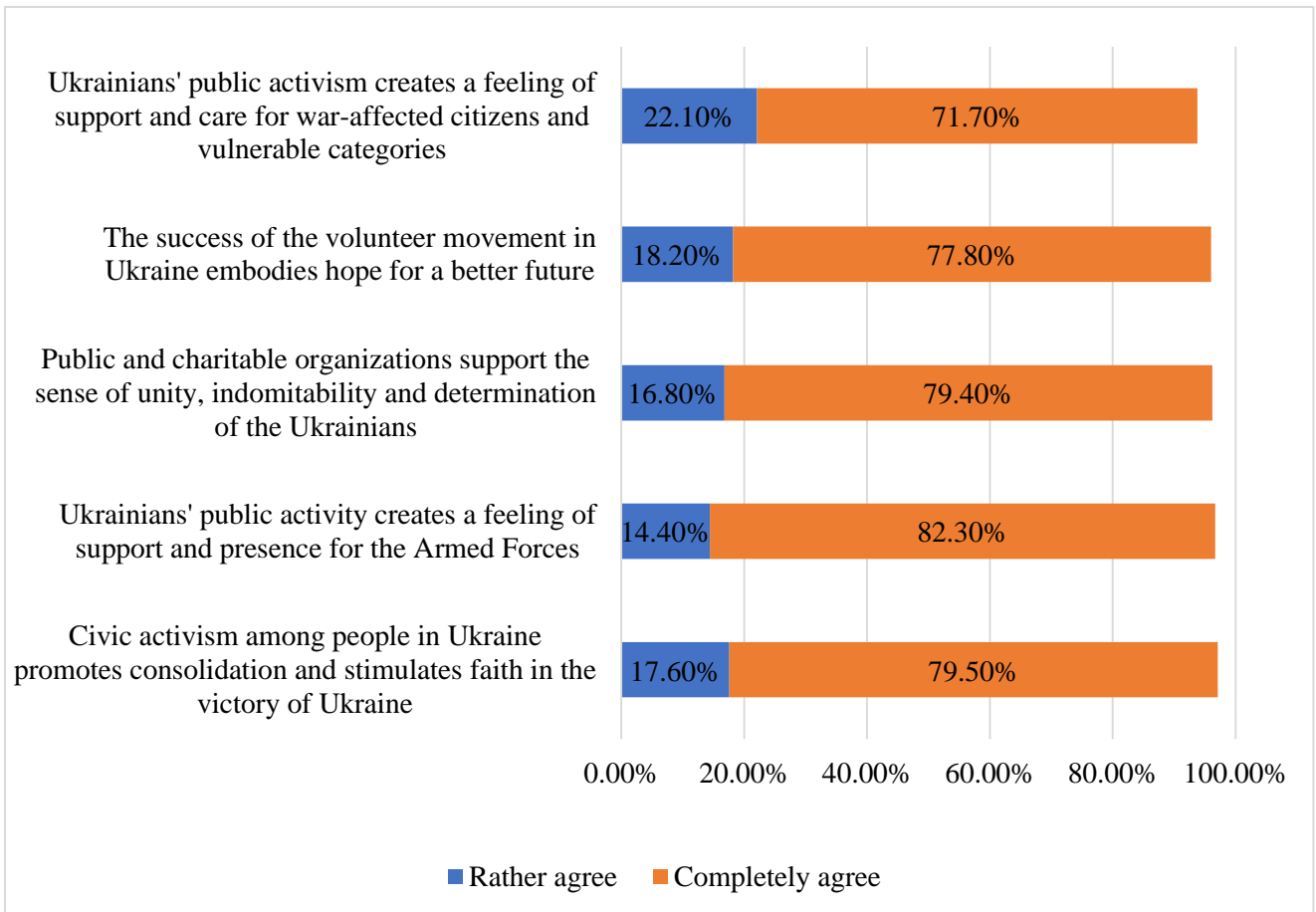


Figure 9. Opinion of NGO representatives on the role of civic engagement in Ukraine during the war (USAID, 2023)

The significance of citizen’s national and patriotic identification has contributed to the notable demonstration of public mobilisation and activation as a reaction to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, it should be noted that, in contrast to the perception of the political environment, where there is a significant part of society with uncertain assessments of political needs, volunteering has become almost the only direction to manifest civic position.

Drawing upon diverse influence assessments of political parties and volunteer organisations, we see society’s transformation during wartime. Amidst the increasing level of citizen identification and the call to bolster the influence of emerging political parties and civil society organisations affiliated with volunteering, a substantial number of respondents find themselves in a state of uncertainty. The former political paradigm no longer suffices. However, the

constituents of the novel political cohort are yet to wield considerable leverage in shaping citizens' identification. In light of the above, this speaks to the intricate societal mechanisms.

Discussion

The study demonstrates the presence of complex processes of political identity formation in Ukraine during the war. The results indicate a significant increase in the importance of Ukrainian citizenship and national identification among citizens with the onset of Russian military aggression. They are a consequence of fundamental transformations in the perception of events caused by the external military threat.

The study focuses on identifying citizens who associate the post-war period with the emergence or dominance of reliable political forces created primarily by representatives of military personnel, volunteers, or intellectual elite rather than business associations.

The analysis demonstrates the ongoing consolidation of civic national identity, accelerated by the war, which essentially entailed completing the process of shaping a civic nation in Ukraine.

The study revealed trends toward large-scale expansion and networking capacity of volunteer organisations based on implementing an individual approach and creating local and national structures. Strengthening cooperation between NGOs and the state and changes in regulations have significantly increased public trust in volunteering compared to other types of civic activity. The role of volunteer organisations as drivers of civic participation and identity is confirmed by citizens' mass involvement in charitable activities.

However, amidst extensive political and national identity and the reinforcement of civic demands, a fairly large part of society remains indifferent to existing and new political parties and volunteer associations. In our opinion, such actions are evidence of complex social transformations that continue to occur during war hostilities.

The study affirms the hypothesis that political crises and the war experience in Ukraine have only strengthened the citizens' overall political unity and identity, including based on various identity factors (language, volunteering, gratitude to the military) (Alexseev, 2015; Kulyk, 2018). The idea that political identities are shaped based on bilateral processes, when the political context shapes identities and vice versa (Wimmer, 2016), is also confirmed in the Ukrainian context during wartime.

At the same time, modern military conflicts are defined by the unique nature of fragmented political identities, which are quite extraordinary and isolated

with intentions to be implemented in sufficiently rigid forms, often requiring international intervention (Kaldor & De Waal, 2020).

The relevant Ukrainian markers identified by sociological surveys have parallels with the most influential narratives of national ideas, in particular, the formation of European states and nations based on society mobilisation (human and cultural resources) and the economy (material resources) to wage war, and the emergence of national identities afterward (Tilly, 2017).

Studies on states' fragility focus on the role of the election in post-conflict settlements, noting the feasibility of holding elections to achieve political stability (Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development, 2018). This opinion can be observed quite clearly in the Ukrainian realities, where the fragmentation of citizens' views regarding certain political parties and significant political uncertainty have been revealed.

Although political parties and volunteer groups largely shape political identity during military aggression, polarisation and uncertainty manifest society's desire for positive change, contrasted with indecisiveness in establishing the existing factors that will contribute to renewal. Given the above, these actions can lead to cross-directions of radical ideologies and volunteer solidarity among citizens. It is important to prevent the situation from recurrence regarding identity formation, as it is seen, for example, by researchers exploring the experience of Somalia and Syria. The conflict in Somalia between 1987 and 1992 marked a significant shift from a modernist state to one characterised by clan-based power distribution within state institutions. During the initial years of the Syrian conflict, both governmental forces and Islamic extremist groups propagated sectarianism, which was financially supported by relevant donors with a focus on utilising violent means (Kaldor & De Waal, 2020). Bosnia and Herzegovina epitomises the transition from civic identities to polarised ethno-political identities (Sasse & Lackner, 2018).

Regarding volunteering, it substantially influenced the citizens' identity amidst the period of military aggression, assuming certain state functions that were temporarily incapacitated in effectively addressing the aftermath of such aggression. Volunteering has become a recognition of social significance, value, and an identification factor with a certain social community (Serbyn & Pastukh, 2022; Bulakh et al., 2017).

In further research, it is expedient to explore the influence of political parties and volunteer organisations on shaping political identity and the promotion of social empowerment and cohesion rather than fragmentation against the background of the armed conflict. In this light, clarifying the role of different actors

in this process and the interaction between the state, public, and individual spheres should also acquire an analytical perspective.

Conclusions

The study revealed the intricate mechanisms of political identity formation in Ukraine amidst the war, manifesting a notable surge in the significance of Ukrainian citizenship and national identification among people since the onset of Russian military aggression. Such findings indicate an alteration of perception that stemmed from an external threat.

At the same time, the study revealed multidirectional trends in society regarding existing and new political forces when a significant number of respondents seek to support new political projects and parties, in contrast to those who prefer parties with previous political experience. However, the coexistence of perplexity, a degree of traditionalism and the call for renewal in political factions obstruct certain participants from identifying their political inclinations amidst the available alternatives. Citizens correlate the present and post-conflict eras with the rise of reputable political parties, with the military, volunteers, and intellectual elite, rather than with the business environment. This increase in the recognition of political parties worthy of public trust borders on the persistence of uncertainty about the expectations of real, reliable political forces. More than half of the respondents did not perceive any changes regarding the protection of rights and freedoms or significant violations of democratic norms. However, some acknowledged a deterioration in the overall human rights situation by the state.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates volunteer organisations' significant manifestation and capabilities based on individual activities and local and national associations. Enhancing collaboration with the government and enhancing legislative frameworks have achieved substantial public confidence in volunteers, surpassing that of other civil society actors. The role of volunteer organisations as drivers of civic participation and solidarity is proved by the large-scale citizens' involvement in charitable activities during the period of military aggression.

Despite the growth of national identification and societal demands, a considerable number of citizens still grapple with uncertainty about placing their trust in political parties and charitable organisations. This phenomenon indicates the unfolding social transformations catalysed by the war's impact.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations should be proposed:

- Political parties should overcome societal polarisation and fragmentation by strengthening a unified national identity by promoting a consolidated narrative based on shared values and interests.

- Ensure broad cooperation between the state, political parties, and volunteer organisations towards strengthening civil society and promoting civic engagement to avoid uncertainty and distrust among citizens.
- Overcome the political alienation of some citizens from existing political forces by revising and updating party programs and methods of communication with voters, increasing openness and orientation towards the real needs of citizens.
- Enhance the role of various actors (state, parties, civil society organisations, volunteers) in shaping political identity and their impact on social cohesion and unity in military conflict.

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