

СОЦІАЛЬНІ РЕАЛЬНОСТІ В ЕМПІРИЧНИХ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯХ

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The Attitude of Ukrainian Student Youth Towards Democracy in Ukraine

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The young generation is often overlooked in scientific discourse, although it is the youth (students) who often play a leading role in political and social change in the country. One such case is Ukraine, where it is the young people who started the largest protests in the country's thirty-year independent history. The presented article is an attempt to characterize the Ukrainian generation of «freedom» (Marzęcki, 2020) (youth people born during the period of Ukrainian independence, that are not impact of authoritarian regime socialization) from a socio-political perspective. The main research goal of this article is an endeavour to fully understand, describe and explain the attitude of the young generation (students) towards democracy (the article also includes comparisons to polish youth). This specific objective was achieved by analysing survey data. On the other hand, specific issues and problems identified at the quantitative research stage were examined based on data collected during in-depth interviews with sixteen students in Ukraine. In this sense, a second important specific goal has been achieved, i.e. diagnosis, description and explanation of behavioural patterns (political activity) dominating the social consciousness of students, which are considered justified and effective in relation to the world of politics. Author himself, conducted qualitative (IDI – 16 respondents) and quantitative research (1043 surveys) on a representative group of youth respondents in Ukraine. Quantitative research has been conducted in fourteen universities, preserving the territorial diversification. The results contained in the summary of the article, however, are not very optimistic. It is safe to say that the democratic system is in crisis, and the revolutionary cycle is still probably not completed in Ukraine.

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Key words: democracy, youth, students, Ukraine, protests, sociological surveys.

Каміонка Матеуш. Ставлення української студентської молоді до демократії в Україні. У статті схарактеризовано українське покоління «свободи», до якого, за визначенням автора, належать молоді люди, котрі народилися за часів незалежності України й на котрих не впливала соціалізація авторитарного режиму, із соціально-політичного погляду. Основна мета цієї статті – спроба повністю зрозуміти, описати та пояснити ставлення молодого покоління (студентів) до демократії. Мету досягнуто шляхом аналізу даних опитування. З іншого боку, конкретні теми та проблеми визначено на етапі кількісного дослідження й вивчено на основі даних, зібраних під час детальних інтерв'ю зі студентами в Україні. На цьому етапі досягнуто другу важливу мету – це діагностика, опис та пояснення біхевіоральних (поведінкових) моделей суспільно-політичної діяльності, що домінують у суспільній свідомості студентів і вважаються виправданими й ефективними щодо світу політики. Проведено якісні (метод IDI) та кількісні (1043 опитування) дослідження репрезентативної групи респондентів студентської молоді в Україні.

Ключові слова: демократія, молодь, студенти, Україна, протести, соціологічні опитування.

Каміонка Матеуш. Отношение украинской студенческой молодежи к демократии в Украине. В статье анализируется украинское поколение «свободы» с социально-политической точки зрения, определения

его как поколения молодых людей, которые родились во времена независимости Украины и социализировались вне влияния авторитарного режима. Основная цель исследования – попытка полностью понять, описать и объяснить отношение молодого поколения (студентов) к демократии. Цель достигнута путем анализа данных опроса, а именно: проводились качественные (метод IDI) и количественные (1043 опрос) исследования репрезентативной группы молодежи в Украине. Конкретные проблемы, определенные на этапе количественного исследования, изучались на основе данных, собранных во время детальных интервью со студентами в Украине. На этом этапе достигалась вторая важная цель – диагностика, описание и объяснение бихевиоральных моделей общественно-политической деятельности, которые доминируют в общественном сознании студентов и считаются оправданными и эффективными в мире политики.

Ключевые слова: демократия, молодежь, студенты, Украина, протесты, социологические опросы.

Introduction

A turbulent history somehow forced Ukraine to abandon the standard social progress characteristic to other countries in the region, at the expense of rapid, significant changes, with a possible cyclical nature. Nevertheless, it was only in the last thirty years, as in other countries of the former Soviet Union, that post-communist Ukraine went through what Taras Kuzio called the «quadruple transformation». This transformation encompassed four major changes: (1) from communism to democracy, (2) from a centrally planned economy to a free market, (3) from being part of an imperial state to building an independent state, and (4) from suppressed national identity to reviving that identity. These changes – in political, economic and social sense – have shown remarkable dynamics in recent years, as confirmed by events on Maidan in Kyiv during the Revolution in Granite in 1990, the Orange Revolution in 2004, and the Dignity Revolution of 2013/2014 (Hankivsky, Salnykova, 2012, p. 26). This article will demonstrate the attitude of Ukrainian youth (students) towards democracy. The data will also help answer the question whether Ukrainian students believe in protests as an influence on politics, when there is an absence of acceptance of the democratic system from their side.

Theoretical Framework

The Condition of Democracy in Ukraine. It has been more than fifty years since the beginning of the «third wave» of democratization and thirty years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, and the issue of transition from an authoritarian system to democracy and the consolidation of democratic change is still a popular topic among political scientists. Democratic transition and the process of consolidation of democracy are the focus of a separate subdiscipline of political science – transitology and consolidation. Although the process of democratization itself was somewhat inhibited in the first decade of the 21st century (Diamond, 2008), theoretical reflections devoted to the issue returned to favour with the accomplishment of «colourful revolutions» in the post-communist world (Žherebkin, 2009) (eg. the Orange Revolution) and the outbreak of political revolt in North Africa (Way, 2011). Those events influenced the need to analyze the relationships between phenomena and processes occurring in different places and at different times as a foundation for comparative research. They have also found widespread use in research in Central and Eastern Europe on the subject of transition from authoritarianism to democracy. There is also no consensus among researchers about changes in the post-Soviet area. Many researchers distinguish a «fourth wave» of democratization. However, according to Phillip Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, the thesis about the similarity of processes taking place in Southern Europe, Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe (although they did not directly address the changes taking place in the former USSR, e.g. Ukraine), oppose the separation of the «fourth wave» referring to European post-communist countries. P. Schmitter and T. Karl reject both the argument about the simultaneity of changes (democratization, restructuring of the economy, construction of the state), raised by Claus Offe (Offe, 1999), as well as concepts based on the specificity of the form of transition in Central and Eastern Europe, which is also non-interoperable, revolutionary and inconclusive (i.e. it does not necessarily lead to the establishment and consolidation of democracy) (McFaul, 2002). According to P. Schmitter and T. Karl, these differences – in their opinion exaggerated – do not justify the treatment of political processes occurring after 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe as a separate wave of democratization. Although it must be pointed out that the present example of Ukraine as a post-Soviet territory shows its separateness. Thomas Carothers wrote about this in a theoretical dimension, according to which the experience of post-communist countries leads to the questioning of the five basic assumptions of the classical paradigm (Carothers, 2002). Important elements of Ukrainian statehood and the process of

building democracy are revolutions and protests: Student «Revolution on Granite» (1990) (Доній, 1995), «Ukraine without Kuchma» (2000–2001), Students against the unification of universities in Sumy («Revolution on Grass») – May 2004 (Kamionka, 2019), «Uprising Ukraine» (2004), «Orange Revolution» (November 2004), «AntiTabaczna Campaign» (2011) and the «Revolution of Dignity» (December 2013). In the process of disintegration and after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation went through the phases of bifurcation in the years 1990–1991 and 2004–2005. Currently, they are passing them once again, starting from the autumn of 2013. Each time, the Ukrainian people chose one of two possibilities. On the one hand, it was a renunciation of national-governmental values and national-civil ambitions, and on the other – consolidation in the name of national-state defence of the country's sovereignty and civic dignity (Jędraszczyk, 2016, p. 58). The existence of a mechanism described in this way indicates the lack of full recognition of the democratic framework as binding for both members of political elites, and voters. Citizens, for the occurrence of negative phenomena in political and private life, burden the system, not the subsequent ruling teams, and then transfer their dissatisfaction to the street. What is the revolution that has the greatest impact on the hybridization of the political system and the creation of the system: democratization – characterized by democratization, but lack of liberalization (Schmitter, 1995, p. 45–46).

Why students? Social sciences began to be interested in revolutions by, among others, student revolts in the USA and Western Europe in 1968 (Chodak, 2012, p. 16). One can also show similarity in the activity of young people: it were the students who were the «flywheel» of the most important political and social events in Ukraine since the beginning of its independence in 1991. Oleksandr Boyko rightly points out that «from the real political knockout, the opposition at the end of 1990 was saved by student youth», which a day later began its «revolution» (the day before October 1, 1990, the opposition announced a general Ukrainian strike, which turned out to be a total disaster, because only 10,000 had joined the strike on a total of 25 million Ukrainian workers) (Бойко, 2003, с. 85). It was a decisive event that took place in the period between the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union that led directly to the independence of Ukraine (Wilson, 2000, p. 171). Nadia Diuk confirms this thesis, writing about the events during the protest of students on «Granite» and «Orange Revolution»: «political events in Ukraine during the last two decades oscillated between conformist views and revolutionary protests. At the same time, they created two of the most popular youth-directed protests that were unique in the region (Diuk, 2012, p. 64). Also during the Revolution of Dignity, students played a key role in its early stage – during rallies in November – and it was the students' beating on November 30, 2013 that ultimately led to the Revolution of Dignity (also called Euro-revolution). The reason why the student protest movement is hardly described is that when it appeared, there was no indication that it could be the precursor of something much larger – during this period only one major national protest took place on November 24. The media coverage of student protests was barely noticeable in this period, and research focused on events on Maidan, which took place only after November 30. As a result, there is no reliable data on the participation of young people in protests during the first nine days when the protest movement was gaining momentum (Junes, 2016, p. 86). Thus, the role of students in the outbreaks of the «Revolution of Dignity» in Ukraine is underestimated, while Tom Junes writes directly that «it began when students went out to the streets to “go to Maidan”» (Джунс, 2016, с. 30). Krystyna Szafraniec rightly notes that «the generation, which has been attributed to the last decades of self-deprecation and political dormancy, which was denied the potential of rebelliousness, grows in the 21st century as the most outraged. Not because it was preparing itself for such a role, or because it was politically manipulated, but because in the young today the contradictions and dysfunctions of the chosen political and economic doctrines and development trends strike the most» (Szafraniec, 2012, p. 101).

Research Methodology

Two methods were used to examine the views on students' attitudes towards democracy and their willingness to participate in lengthy protests. The first method that was used to conduct research among young people was the method of in-depth individual interview (IDI), it is an example of a classical qualitative method. Interviews were conducted among 16 students from various regions of Ukraine, they were academic canters from Lviv (western Ukraine), Uzhgorod (southwestern Ukraine), Nizhyn (northern Ukraine), from Sumy (eastern Ukraine), Pereiaslav (central Ukraine) and from the capital – Kyiv. Students who were interviewed in-depth were randomly selected among the most socially active students in the

examined academic centers. The second method that was used to examine students in Ukraine was a quantitative research method – an auditorium survey among students (full-time studies) of selected universities in Ukraine. In the case of surveys, the research sample consisted of 1043 respondents from Ukraine. Deliberate and random sample selection was used. Universities were selected in a targeted manner to ensure a relatively high level of territorial diversity of the sample. In the random phase, it was a multi-stage sampling. For this purpose, previously defined teams were used whose nature results from the essence of the studied phenomenon. Fourteen universities were selected in a targeted manner to ensure a relatively high level of territorial diversity of the sample, while in the random phase the units of the first degree were departments, the second – institutes/faculties, the third – fields of study, and the fourth – year of study. The qualitative survey questionnaire consisted of 86 questions and metrics, the research was conducted from the second half of 2017 to the end of 2018 in Kharkov, Nizhyn, Kherson, Chernivtsi, Kyiv, Dniepr, Hlukhiv, Poltava, Sumy, Lviv, Odessa, Pereyaslav, Uzhgorod and Vinnytsia.

The main purpose of the author of this article is to attempt to describe and explain the attitude to democracy and «protest» sentiment of Ukrainian youth (students). During the analysis of the collected statistical materials, the following research hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis 1: In the students' opinion, the quality of democracy in Ukraine is low.

Hypothesis 2: Students of Ukraine are ready to participate in lengthy protests.

Research and Discussion: The Attitude of Ukrainian Youth Toward Democracy

In interviews students were asked what democracy means to them. Most of the responses were related to citizens' rights to personal freedom and expression. However, with an emphasis on respect for the rights of other citizens.

Democracy – the freedom and rights of everyone, freedom of speech and thought, without offending the rights and views of others (Student 1 Uzhgorod).

Democracy in my understanding is the possibility of influencing citizens on political and social processes in the country (Student 2 Sumy).

Democracy is the freedom of choice and freedom of every human being, but a freedom that is not meant to violate the freedom of others. It is so that everyone can reasonably do what is not prohibited, but emphasizing the fact that you do not do something to the detriment of other people (Student 1 Lviv).

Democracy is a free man, and as I mentioned before, the freedom of one person begins when the freedom of another person ends (Student 2 Kyiv).

In the students' opinions we could also see the strong links between democracy and civic culture, that should consolidate it.

When I hear democracy, I associate it with the values of the 21st century, the values of the civilized world, the voice of man. Democracy is when a person has wide possibilities. The state participates in these three categories – it issues laws, controls the economic situation and participates in cultural life. And the rest belongs to civil society, and real democracy for me is when there is a strong civil society that is responsible for their actions (Student 5 Nizhyn).

For me, democracy is a whole system of values and views that helps society to develop in a positive direction. It is freedom of speech but not permissiveness. We often confuse these terms, because democracy first and foremost includes the opposition aspect, all sentences must count (Student 1 Kyiv).

There were also students who had negative associations with democracy accusing it of creating chaos in the country.

For me, democracy is chaos. Especially at the moment when we have a hybrid war and when we observe social manipulation. No values come to mind because I think democracy is chaos, people watch TV and think that everything is so beautiful, people have their opinions and can express it freely, and that politicians act according to democratic principles, but in the end, that's actually not the case (Student 1 Sumy).

Democracy is the mother of chaos, the best form of government out of the worst. Now it is like a democracy system in Ukraine. For me, democracy is when a person can express his opinion, this is the most important thing that was not in Soviet times (Student 6 Nizhyn).

The first quantitative question that could illustrate the level of student attitude towards democracy in Ukraine was «How important is it for you that Poland/Ukraine should be governed in a democratic way?

Please rate on the scale below, where '1' means 'not important at all' and '5' means 'very important'. As we can see in table 1, less than half of the respondents (49,9 %) believe (choosing answer 4 or 5) that Ukraine should be governed democratically. This is not important: up to 28,6 % of respondents. As we see, the results of research among Polish students show that in relation to students from Ukraine, more students from Poland think that the state should be on a democratic path. About 25 % more respondents from Poland believe that a democratic government is important. Similar results can be seen in those who chose the «does not matter» answer in Poland: it was only 14,1 %, while in Ukraine it was as much as 28,6 %. The results show that almost half of the surveyed students from Ukraine believe that the country should be ruled in a democratic way, but on the other hand it is almost 1/3 less compared to Polish student youth.

Table 1

The Importance of Democracy as a Way of Governing

<i>How Important is it for You that Poland/Ukraine Should Be Governed in a Democratic Way? Please Rate on the Scale Below, where '1' Means 'Not Important at All' and '5' Means 'Very Important'</i>				
	Does not Matter (1–2), %	Indifference (3), %	Important (4–5), %	Average on a Scale 1–5*
Poland	14,1	11,1	74,8	4,11
Ukraine	28,6	21,5	49,9	3,40

Source. Author's study.

* The higher the average, the greater the democratic nature of the system is for respondents.

The results of the next question clearly show that, especially in the younger generation, a legitimacy crisis of democracy is taking place. To the question «Democracy always has the advantage over all other forms of government», only 34,4 % of youth from Ukraine and 42,8 % from Poland answered affirmative. The result for both Poland and Ukraine is very low, in both cases it is less than half of the respondents. It is worth noting that Poland, however, has more democratic experience, and this result should be relatively higher. It may also worry that 27,9 % of youth in Poland and 24,5 % in Ukraine believe that sometimes undemocratic governments are better. Apart from specific examples, the very taking of such a solution by young people can be dangerous for democracy in these countries. It is also worth emphasizing that 22,6 % of students from Poland and 24,8 % from Ukraine have no opinion on this subject. In the future, these people may be influenced more by anti-democratic ideas.

Table 2

Student Opinions about Democracy, %

<i>Which of the Following Statements about Democracy Are Closest to You?</i>	Poland	Ukraine
Democracy always has the advantage over all other forms of government	42,8	34,4
Sometimes undemocratic governments can be better than democratic governments	27,9	24,5
For people like me, it doesn't really matter if the government is democratic or undemocratic	3,1	5,3
Democracy is a bad form of government	3,6	11,0
Hard to say	22,6	24,8

Source. Author's study.

Students in in-depth interviews were also asked what political system they think Ukraine currently has. Some of the respondents doubted Ukraine was a democratic country.

Democracy...not quite so it can be called. It is such a semi-authoritarian regime (Student 2 Pereyaslav).

It more is a country that strives for democracy. Everything that happens in Ukraine does not yet affect democracy, it happens under the influence of various current factors – miserliness, corruption. In my opinion, Ukraine is a democratic state, but now for only 60 % (Student 5 Nizhyn).

It can be called democracy, but not fully. If we say «democratic state», democracy provides for elections. The elections in Ukraine are there, but the question of what happens next ... distorted democracy, not full (Student 3 Kyiv).

Often in the answers, the reason for the lack of full democracy in Ukraine was both internal factors (incorrect elections, corruption etc.) and external factors such as war.

It depends on what aspect we are talking, if not at all, I would say that it is at a crossroad between democracy and ... I am not saying authoritarianism, but something in this direction. This means that on the one hand, society is democratizing itself and does not want to adopt authoritarian concepts and influences. But from another side we can see that the Soviet footprint remains, which despite the will is accepted by society, but at the same time the same people express their opinions about belonging to democracy. A very difficult question, especially since the war is on. Society is now radicalizing and it is impeding democracy building (Student 1 Kyiv).

In general, yes, there is democracy in Ukraine, because there can be no such thing as perfect democracy. But I'd rather answer this question by comparison. Depending on which country we compare Ukraine with, like Russia or North Korea, of course all countries in the world are democratic ... (Student 1 Lviv).

There were also affirmative answers. Where students clearly convinced that Ukraine is a democracy. But also these students still pointed out, that it is not a full democracy.

Not 100 %, but I think Ukraine can be considered, as democratic state (Student 2 Sumy).

Ukraine is a democratic state, even a very democratic one. Now people say everything they think, maximum of everything. Theoretically, they can go to jail for harsh expressions, but in most cases people are not afraid and speak (Student 6 Nizhyn).

Students were also asked if they think the political system in Poland / Ukraine could be considered as democratic. The results differed significantly for both countries. 9,1 % in Poland and 2,3 % in Ukraine answered definitely yes. Rather yes: 43,8 % in Poland and 29,6 % in Ukraine. Together, those two responses tell if students assess the system in their country as democratic – Polish students 52,9 %, and Ukrainian – 31,9 %. 29,3 % of Polish youth and as much as 46,2 % of students from Ukraine had the opposite opinion on this topic (adding no and rather not). 17,8 % of Poles and 21,9 % of Ukrainians answered that it's difficult to say. The fact that such a large number of people was unable to answer, may be the result of both a lack of interest in political issues and fatigue of this topic.

Table 3

Opinions on Democracy in Poland and Ukraine, %

Do You Think that the Political System in Poland/Ukraine can be Considered Democratic?	Poland	Ukraine
Definitely yes	9,1	2,3
Rather yes	43,8	29,6
Rather no	23,5	34,7
Definitely not	5,8	11,5
Hard to say	17,8	21,9

Source. Author's study.

Attitude to democracy and a lack of faith in its mechanisms may cause a lack of interest in democratic influence, for example, through elections. That's why student were asked about youth readiness for long-term protests (fig. 1). «Difficult to say» was chosen by 43,3 %, 20,1 % of students answered «no», while as many as 36,6 % of respondents answered affirmative. Thus, these data support hypothesis 2, which was that students from Ukraine are ready to participate in long-term protests.

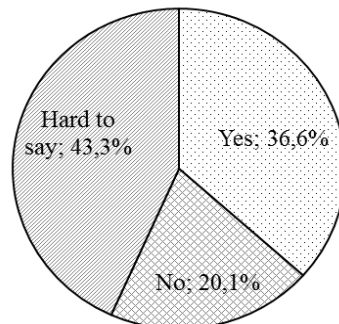


Figure 1. Readiness of Ukrainian Youth for Long-Term Protests

Source. Author's study.

Conclusions

Students clearly believe that the system in Ukraine is not fully democratic. This is also confirmed by the rankings of Ukraine where it is classified by the Economist Intelligence Unit in Democracy index 2019, as a hybrid regime¹, as well Freedom House 2020 report score Ukraine as Transitional or Hybrid Regime². In addition, studies show that a large percentage of students do not believe that democracy is the best system for Ukraine. Less than half believe that Ukraine should be governed democratically. This may suggest that, especially for post-communist countries, there are authoritarian sympathies in the new generation. This may be related to a lack of confidence in politicians, but also to the uncertain international situation (conflict in eastern Ukraine). Thus, hypothesis 1 was confirmed. Hypothesis 2 was also confirmed, only 20,1 % of the surveyed youth does not consider participating in long-term protests. 36,6 % sees it as a possibility, which is a very large number, and that may suggest that the revolutionary cycle to create a democratic system in Ukraine has not yet been completed. Young people do not fully believe in democracy, this may affect their propensity to protest as a manifestation of their rights and influence over the state.

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¹ *EIU Democracy Index 2019 – World Democracy Report*, retrieved May 5, 2020 from <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>.

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