

Article

Peculiarities of Ukrainians' Approval of Decentralization Reform

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Abstract: Every countrywide reform can always have specific opponents and fans as the changes make people leave their comfort zone. As an example, we have chosen a Ukrainian decentralization reform. Although this local self-government reform can be considered the most successful in our country, the attitude of Ukrainians to the changes has not always been unambiguous. Using taxonomic analysis, the paper calculates the integrated indicator of public approval of decentralization reform in Ukraine based on sociological research for 2015–2020. We have described the features of conducting surveys in different periods and identified the reasons for the emergence of such an attitude to the reform. We have also calculated the weights of the impact of each primary indicator on the integrated indicator, which helped us identify the weaknesses and strengths of the reform in public opinion. Furthermore, the analysis allowed us to reveal and substantiate a set of problems in implementing decentralization reform in Ukraine, and the causes and solutions were worked out for each problem. Finally, we have made a generalized algorithm for the application of the experience of public opinion analysis in planning and carrying out reforms.

Keywords: Ukraine; decentralization; public opinion; taxonomic analysis; integrated indicator; approval of the reform



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1. Introduction

In 2015, local self-government reform was launched in Ukraine, which later became known as the “decentralization reform”. Its key essence was the transfer of power to resolve local affairs to the primary level of self-government—the community. Simultaneously with authority, resources and responsibility for the decision-making efficiency were transferred to the minor local self-government subjects.

For all communities to be financially, professionally, and institutionally capable of performing their functions and tasks, they needed to have a particular demographic, territorial, and industrial potential. In 2015–2019, there was a voluntary unification of small settlements around a more robust center and thus, a united territorial community was created. However, the unification process has not been easy, as the neighboring villages did not always have friendly relations, traditions, and perceptions. Some more powerful communities did not want to unite with economically weak outlying areas, or the community did not want any association.

Therefore, in 2020, those settlements that did not form the unified territorial community were merged based on the established criteria.

During the voluntary amalgamation and after completing this stage of the reform, the public was informed about the decentralization processes, the establishment of new

communities, their successes and problems, local elections, and so on. Thus, the reform, launched in the early post-Maidan period, was practically the flagbearer of all changes in the state after the Revolution of Dignity and an example of a successfully implemented plan. However, unfortunately, it has been the only one so far—the rest of the reforms, such as medical or educational, or police or judicial reforms, have been postponed, reformatted, or stopped altogether.

Changing the established way of life or rules of conduct and setting new requirements often force one to change habits; acquire new knowledge, skills, or abilities; engage in previously unknown activities; or even lose the source of influence and income for individuals or population groups. Based on this, there is a possible situation when the average citizen is wary of reforms, if not very hostile toward them. Alternatively, he or she may associate reform with only positive changes, simplification, and immediate prosperity, here and now.

However, the reform of entire spheres of socio-economic life cannot happen instantly. Even the most successful reforms of leading countries took a long time and were accompanied by specific radical actions that were not perceived at first. It can even be argued that such measures, in addition to the apparent difficulties of institutional change and restructuring, can also elicit a rather emotional reaction. Such a reaction has a “swing” amplitude, alternating with stages of mistrust, rejection, excessive hope (often unreasonably exaggerated), frustration, and, ultimately, adaptation and habituation to change. There is always a certain percentage of people who will enthusiastically and persistently support change and a percentage of people who will strongly oppose any reforms. Moreover, both can be wrong in their judgments without adequately understanding the changes or objective information.

The main goal of our study was to study the public support experience for a reform (on the example of the Ukrainian experience of decentralization reform approval), identify existing problems in its perception by people, and formulate an algorithm to apply the knowledge to improve planning, implementation, and evaluation of future reforms.

In our study, we set the task of summarizing the data on the decentralization reform's approval, the first critical stage of which ended in 2020. In the course of the research, we found that the population of Ukraine has different attitudes to the reform in general and its aspects in particular. Moreover, as it turned out, people's opinions changed over the years and depending on the macro-regions of a multimillion-person state. Furthermore, these changes were not synchronous.

Thus, our study is based on the use of alternating analysis and synthesis methods. To generalize the attitude of citizens toward the reform, we used the method of taxonomy, calculating the integrated indicator of the decentralization approval. However, to identify the existing problems and shortcomings of the reform, we separately considered the components of the integrated indicator and the change in their values. The indicators' marginal values indicated the content of the problems, which we compared with the existing results of statistics and sociological research on related issues.

Identifying a number of problems has shaped our understanding of the importance of using public opinion research in reform implementation and has allowed us to build a generalized algorithm for the practical application of such an experience.

2. Ukrainian Decentralization Reform

The need for decentralization reform has matured in Ukraine since the establishment of its statehood. In 1997, the Ukrainian Parliament—Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine—ratified the ([European Charter of Local Self-Government № 994_036 1985](#)), declaring the need to use European principles and governance standards ([European Charter of Local Self-Government № 994_036 1985](#)). Since then, several attempts have been made to implement decentralization reform, but they have been unsuccessful for various reasons. Only in 2014, after the Revolution of Dignity and the change in government, did the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopt the concept of reforming local self-government and territorial organization of power, which gives a holistic view of the expected changes from decentralization

reform (Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On Approval of the Concept of Local Self-Government and Territorial Organization of Power Reforming in Ukraine” №333-p 2014).

The concept defines the departure from the centralized model of governance in the state, and the main goal of the reform is to create an environment for the development of territorial communities and a transfer of power to the local level, which will create an appropriate resource base for local self-government.

There are two stages of decentralization reform: the first stage in 2014–2019, and the second stage in 2020–2021. The first stage of reform in Ukraine started with the almost simultaneous introduction of administrative and financial decentralization. The reform began by creating a legal framework for the voluntary association of territorial communities with the reorganization of local self-government bodies on a new territorial basis.

The driving force behind the formation of affluent communities was the adoption of the law “On voluntary association of territorial communities” (Law of Ukraine “On Voluntary Association of Territorial Communities” № 157-VIII 2015) and the methodology for the formation of capable territorial communities (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On the Statement of the Methodology of Formation of Capable Territorial Communities” №214 2015).

The law regulates direct inter-budgetary relations of the united territorial communities with the state budget of Ukraine and outlines the principles and scope of providing financial support to the united territorial communities. Furthermore, the method of capable territorial community formation regulates the procedure for developing a long-term plan for community territory shaping and determines the criteria for the capable formation of territorial communities.

The powers of local self-government authority expansion, the financial encouragement of the community voluntary association processes, and the introduction of new types of transfers have created a legal basis for the rapid dynamics of the formation of united territorial communities.

The beginning of the second stage was the approval in 2020 of a new administrative–territorial structure, the definition of administrative centers, and the approval of the territory of territorial communities (Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Concerning the Definition of Territories and Administrative Centers of Territorial Communities” № 562-IX 2020).

The stages mentioned above provide the basis for the next steps in local government reform and should help accelerate related reforms in education, health, culture, and other areas.

Carrying out reforms in the state is always a large-scale development project that involves changes in relationships, rules of conduct, financial flows, legal framework, and often, people’s minds. Accordingly, this change lasts for years and is approved even after the official completion of the reform.

In 2020, a new administrative–territorial system (Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Concerning the Definition of Territories and Administrative Centers of Territorial Communities” № 562-IX and (Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. “On the Formation and Liquidation of Districts” № 807-IX 2020) was approved in Ukraine, and in 2021, all newly formed united territorial communities must move to direct relations with the budget. This has marked the completion of the first and most crucial stage of the local self-government reform in our state—forming new, capable local authorities with the appropriate powers and resources.

However, any reform changes everything in its very essence. These changes force government officials and businesses, or even ordinary citizens, to transform something in their usual behavior, to leave the so-called comfort zone. Furthermore, only this discomfort and inconvenience is felt at first, and the positive consequences of the reform are always a little distant in time. Thus, even if official statistics show an increase in economic indicators (gross domestic product, average wage, income level), people may not yet feel it in everyday

life. Their attitude to the current situation is objectively based on their purchasing power, subjective assessment of well-being, and opportunities to meet needs, hopes, and attitudes.

Ukrainians' support of or opposition to reforms is not just a conditional attitude of people to a certain object over which they have no influence. The people themselves carry out the reform. Citizens who support community unification will be more inclined to compromise and understand each other, try harder to make their newly formed community successful, or even have the zeal to go into politics and work for authorities to carry out such transformations with their own hands.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Decentralization Reforms

The idea of giving power and responsibility to the local authorities is on the agenda in developing countries; therefore, many scientists discuss its peculiarities in their manuscripts and theses. In particular, [Lanzaro and Larraburu \(2021\)](#) studied administrative decentralization in Uruguay and illustrated how political considerations and historical paths influence the structure of the public sector. The authors concluded that the reform happened to be a product of political compromises with many pluralist features, including cooperation with a private sector.

[Gong et al. \(2021\)](#) investigated whether administrative decentralization enhances economic growth in China. The researchers discovered that redistributing authority, responsibility, and financial resources to provide public services among different levels of government led to a 3.3% increase in per capita GDP. Moreover, considering that dividing this responsibility was also changed in Ukraine, we can see an example of the long-term consequences.

[Grillos et al. \(2021\)](#) gave evidence from the Honduran government reform, decentralization, and teamwork in public service delivery. This article in particular examined the impact of decentralization reforms on the work of civil servants in newly formed teams. The authors found a dependence of lower efficiency among such teams in decentralized municipalities compared to centralized ones. This fact was declared as a negative consequence of the reform in the example of the medical sector; however, it can be generalized in terms of public participation in the work of new local authorities, which previously had no such experience. Thus, people's attitudes to reform in general affect their work and the desire to achieve better results.

[Babšek et al. \(2020\)](#) researched administrative reform in Slovenia and specified lawfulness and equality in substantive terms and on a fair trial in procedural terms. The crucial problem is that recognizing participative procedural standards and more flexible legislative processes significantly influences social welfare.

[Elicin \(2020\)](#) declared that decentralization was a significant failure in Turkey. In the early 2000s, a comprehensive administrative reform took place in that country. However, only 10 years after its start, the referendum caused a reversal change, leading to increasingly authoritarian and centralized power. In this context, the author underlined the main problems of the sudden reform redirection and its impact on the local municipalities. [Fandel et al. \(2019\)](#) compared two decentralization policies in Slovakia and the Czech Republic due to their impact on the building order sector. Decentralization policy schemes implemented in Slovakia were based on the principle of voluntary cooperation of municipalities.

In the case of the Czech building sector, the competencies were transferred to the newly created municipalities with delegated or extended competencies. Nevertheless, there are no sufficient differences between country systems, as they both can be considered adequate. [Tolkki and Haveri \(2020\)](#) analyzed four metropolitan areas to compare their governance and state control. The authors focused on political and decentralization aspects to answer how independently metropolitan government can make decisions and perform its tasks.

3.2. Ukrainian Reform

Ukraine has been working on its reform for the last six years now, but the need to start it appeared right after the Declaration of Independence in 1991. After finishing the central part of creating united territorial communities in 2020, new tasks became important—to analyze its achievements, problems, and prospects. On this topic, [Siryk et al. \(2021\)](#) investigated the decentralization of local self-government under the conditions of administrative–territorial reform in Ukraine. The authors aimed to identify areas for improving the effectiveness of the administrative–territorial reform in Ukraine based on assessing the results of its financial decentralization component as the primary influencing factor of the effectiveness of the changes that the locals can immediately notice.

[Budnikevich et al. \(2021\)](#) had a closer look at the united territorial communities of Ukraine through sustainable development in the conditions of military actions. Year by year, the reform made a difference between the communities near to and far from the military operations in the eastern part of the country. Here it is crucial to underline that Ukraine has specific conditions and features of everyday functioning, which were discussed, for instance, by [Palermo \(2020\)](#) and [Barrington \(2021\)](#). Decentralization reform leads to enormous autonomy and power for local communities, so much so that it cannot turn to federalism. This is significant in Ukraine's current situation with no capital control over the parts of the country in the South and East. In this case, the problem of the people understanding the role of autonomy, in general, can lead to prosperity on the one hand or separatism on the other. Building a solid nation capable of facing risks in challenging conditions is possible with a powerful national identity. This Ukrainian identity is suitable to increase people's awareness and interest in their country's future.

3.3. Public Opinion

Any changes in the public or private sector depend on the people, as they are the main driving forces, starting reason, and final recipients of all changes. Democratic states always take into account the opinion of residents and citizens. That is why scientists all over the world research public opinion, its impact, and its role. Among them, [Arkorful et al. \(2021\)](#) answered the question of trust and transparency in citizens' participation in local governance. Using the structural equation modeling technique, the authors investigated the connection between decentralization and participation in developing countries.

[Busemeyer et al. \(2021\)](#) searched for new perspectives on feedback effects in public opinion on the welfare state. They showed how the public point of view differs and influences future changes. [Chen et al. \(2021\)](#) modeled the multidimensional public opinion polarization process under the context of derived topics. The authors underlined the Internet's influence on public opinion by formatting polarized groups. These groups influence each other and, in such a way, can make a cumulative effect and considerable changes in total opinion. This makes it a vital task to investigate the factors connected to those changes.

[Di Mauro and Memoli \(2021\)](#) determined the role of public opinion in EU integration through the problems of the refugee crisis. European Union enlargement influences the life of every citizen inside it like a reform, which sometimes can force one into leaving the comfort zone.

[David \(2021\)](#) discussed the role of media use and perceptions of public opinion on political behavior in Israel. The author answered the question of to what extent public opinion perceptions affect individual support and political participation in political action. This study offers a new analytical model for studying activism by independently and simultaneously examining the direct and indirect effects of perceptions of majority support, individual support, and media use on political behavior.

[Alarabiat et al. \(2021\)](#) explored the determinants of citizens' intention to engage in government-led electronic participation initiatives through Facebook. Social networks in general are relatively new ways for authorities to communicate with people. The authors investigated the factors influencing citizens' intention to engage in government-

led e-participation initiatives through Facebook in Jordan. [Lin and Kant \(2021\)](#) and [Cho and Melisa \(2021\)](#) also discussed using social media for citizen participation. [Lin and Kant \(2021\)](#) investigated the role of social media in citizen participation by taking case studies in the Netherlands. They adopted a mixed-methods approach that combines interviews, web scraping, and content analysis to understand the characteristics of social media participation.

[Cho and Melisa \(2021\)](#) studied how a municipal government agency uses social media to communicate citizen coproduction initiatives using the government's official Twitter account in Indonesia. [Danyliuk and Dmytryshyn \(2021\)](#) underlined the local public opinion evaluation's significance in finding the best way to manage the municipal property.

3.4. Taxonomy Analyses

To ensure that all the crucial components were considered, we needed a suitable form to analyze reliable information. [Martinez et al. \(2021\)](#) used taxonomy analysis in deep learning investigation to perform a critical methodological analysis. The authors considered taxonomy the best way to outline a complete vision of their study's topic.

[Andrusiv et al. \(2020\)](#) analyzed the economic development of Ukrainian regions based on the taxonomy method. They underlined that this method allows the object state level to be determined in a broad set of objects and the objects to be ordered according to the growth or decrease of the indicators. Finally, the taxonomy let the authors carry out the comparative analysis within the framework of the proposed model.

[Yakymchuk et al. \(2021\)](#) used taxonomy to assess the information safety of the country. In their paper, every component of informational safety had relevance and indispensability of reinforcing national competitiveness on security foundations. The authors proved, in particular, that each of the components of the state informational security had almost equal input in forming its integral index.

Finally, [Sergiienko et al. \(2020\)](#) described the application of taxonomic analysis in assessing the level of enterprise development in emergencies. In the paper, it is established that the current approaches of the formation of economic analysis in economic activities do not allow for full assessment of the impact of emergencies on the financial conditions of enterprises. Therefore, a taxonomic analysis technique was applied to represent the level of business development mathematically and to identify the most influential factors, including the consequences of emergencies.

3.5. Social Features

Any participation depends on the respondent's level of public interest, empowerment, inclusion, satisfaction, and even happiness. Moreover, this connection has an opposite way—final satisfaction also depends on participation. [Patapas and Diržytė \(2020\)](#) investigated Lithuanian residents' happiness and satisfaction with life in this context. For instance, the authors discovered that the consequences of the Soviet totalitarian regime are still being felt in the country to this day. The results suggest that Lithuanians with a high level of satisfaction with life enter into a higher number and intensity of positive states; they pointed out much greater satisfaction with cultural life, family life, professional and occupational life, spiritual life, psychological state, and material condition; they indicated that there are people they can talk to any time, they take pleasure in spending time with loved ones, and they think that their earnings guarantee their security. People with a high level of satisfaction with life statistically perceive life as significantly more pleasant, valuable, and meaningful. In our view, this paper made us understand that the possibility of influence on the world around us can be arranged in public participation. Moreover, on the other hand, this participation will let positive changes in society happen.

[Anastasiou et al. \(2021\)](#) answered how smart villages can support rural development in Greece. The authors' results suggest that innovation, knowledge, growth, and management impact smart rural planning, and the limited interventions of smart villages in Greece focus on social innovation and local development. [Kinowska-Mazaraki \(2021\)](#) explained

the Polish paradox as going from a fight for democracy to political radicalization and social exclusion. The authors argued that participation in the democratic process is curiously limited in this country. Since Poles have given up more and more freedoms in exchange for promises of protection from different imaginary enemies, including Muslim refugees and the gay and lesbian community, more and more social groups are being marginalized and deprived of their civil rights. In this case, we consider public participation a way to take down fake news and disinformation.

Nishimura et al. (2021) aimed to find out how Portuguese citizens evaluate the Portuguese public administration under the aspects of bureaucracy, organization of human resources, innovation, skills and attitudes of civil servants, and its motivation and recognition, as well as to verify whether there are differences of opinion between respondents working in the public sector and respondents from other sectors. The main findings reveal a still-high level of bureaucracy in the Portuguese public administration and weaknesses in the management of human resources, namely, regarding the motivation and recognition of civil servants.

Finally, Diržyte and Patapas (2020) counted the differences between subjective and objective socio-economic status groups. The study results show statistically significant differences in psychological well-being (psychological flourishing, life satisfaction, happiness, positive and negative emotional experiences) between different income quintile groups, with average psychological well-being constructs in the lowest income quintile being about two times lower than in the highest income quintile. In this context, we consider that public participation can make people equal in their right to arrange their community living without connecting to their income or social class.

4. Materials and Methods

In order to assess the progress of the reform, identify bottlenecks in the perception of change by the public, understand people's attitudes, identify further actions, and make forecasts, sociologists conduct research, meetings, surveys, and other measures to understand the current situation correctly.

From 2015 to 2020, the Center for Social Indicators, commissioned by the Council of Europe program "Decentralization and Local Government Reform in Ukraine" in cooperation and coordination with Council of Europe experts, local government experts, and the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, conducted 5 waves of research into Ukrainians' public opinion on decentralization reform. The first wave of the study was held from September to October 2015, the second wave from October to December 2016, the third wave from October to December 2017, the fourth from November to December 2018, and the fifth from August to September 2020 ([Results of the Fifth Wave of Sociological Research among the Population of Ukraine "Decentralization and Local Government Reform" \(2020\)](#)).

The survey results were grouped across Ukraine as a whole and separately for 4 macro-regions of the country:

1. West—Volyn, Rivne, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ternopil, Zakarpattia, Khmelnytsky, and Chernivtsi regions.
2. Center—Vinnitsia, Zhytomyr, Sumy, Chernihiv, Poltava, Kirovohrad, Cherkasy, and Kyiv regions and Kyiv city.
3. South—Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolayiv, Kherson, and Odesa regions.
4. East—Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv regions.

Each survey was a collection of a large number of questions that reflected both attitudes: the overall need for reform and memorable aspects of its implementation. In general, it can be argued that Ukrainians supported the reform during each of the years of the study period. However, their views changed over time and in the context of the components and aspects of the reform.

In order to get a holistic view of the attitude of Ukrainians to the decentralization reform, we conducted a taxonomic analysis of the results of public opinion polls in this

regard. As a result, the integrated taxonomic indicator gave us an overall value of people's attitude to change both in general (based on the need for reform) and in particular (assessing its successes and failures).

It should be noted that the poll contained various questions about the attitude of Ukrainians to politics, the directions of the community in which changes have already taken place, and ethnic groups or gender equality. However, our task was to study the attitude to the reform, so we formed a bank of questions, choosing those that assessed the aspects of the reform.

In particular, the questions concerned:

1. General need for reform.
2. Awareness of citizens about the powers and resources of the community increasing.
3. Support for the speed of reform implementation.
4. The presence of changes for the better as a result of the reform.
5. The impact of the reform on the general situation in the country.
6. Changes in the quality of services in communities.
7. Evaluations of the work of the local community leader, local council, and executive committee.
8. Awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.

Respondents answered most of the questions, noting their attitude to the essence of the question on a scale:

- Very good;
- Good;
- Neutral;
- Bad;
- Very bad.

In addition, respondents possibly may not have known the answer or had no opinion on the question. If an answer was not given, or had neither a positive nor a negative color, it indicated a neutral or even indifferent attitude. One way or another, this was not an active bad or good assessment, so we did not take such answers into account, considering them not changing total perception for better or worse.

Thus, in the integrated assessment, we considered 10 areas of questions, seven of which had four sub-component assessments. If the respondent assessed the aspect of the reform as good or very good, then such an indicator was considered an incentive, and if as bad or very bad, it was considered a disincentive.

Exceptions were the answers to the questions about the support for the speed of reform implementation, changes for the better due to the reform, and awareness of the plans for and progress of creating united territorial communities.

Therefore, the respondent could consider the speed optimal, or consider it too slow or too fast. Here, a positive response was considered an incentive (support for the reform speed), whereas indicating that it was too fast was identified as a disincentive. The assertion that the reform is moving too slowly indicated the respondent's desire to accelerate it, namely, to support it. Accordingly, we also referred to this indicator as an incentive.

Whether there was a change for the better, the question had only two levels—the presence and the absence of such a change, which determined the incentive or disincentive effect, respectively.

If the respondent answered that he or she was well informed about the plans for and progress of creating united territorial communities, then such answers had an incentive effect on the integrated indicator of attitude to the reform. If, on the contrary, the respondents chose the answer "completely uninformed," then this indicator became a disincentive. Thus, we attributed the person's partial awareness of the plans for and progress of creating united territorial communities as an incentive, as it still showed a certain level of interest in the reform.

A sociological survey of citizens' attitudes to reform indicators assessing the speed of the reform and the work of the head of the community, the local council, and its executive committee was carried out only on the within-country level.

All indicators reflected the share of respondents from the total of 2000 respondents in every year who had chosen a specific indicator to illustrate his or her vision.

Thus, to calculate the country's integrated taxonomic indicator, we analyzed 37 indicators (20 incentives and 17 disincentives), and 21 macro-regions (11 incentives and 10 disincentives).

The division of indicators into incentives and disincentives was the basis for the construction of the so-called benchmark of support for reform, which is a point $Z = (z_1, z_2, \dots, z_m)$, the coordinates of which are calculated with the following formulas (Pluta 1977):

$$z_j = \max_{1 \leq i \leq n} z_{ij} \text{ (incentive)}, z_j = \min_{1 \leq i \leq n} z_{ij} \text{ (disincentive)}, 1 \leq j \leq m.$$

In the next step, we calculated the distances between separate point-units (separate observations in periods) and point Z with the following formula:

$$C_i = \left(\sum_{j=1}^m (z_{ij} - z_j)^2 \right)^{1/2}, 1 \leq i \leq n, \quad (1)$$

and finally, the taxonomic indicator of the support of decentralization reform in Ukraine was calculated with the following formula (Pluta 1977):

$$k_i = 1 - \frac{C_i}{C_0}, 1 \leq i \leq m, \quad (2)$$

where

$C_0 = \bar{C}_0 + 2S_0$ is the general distance between separate point-units and point Z ;

$\bar{C}_0 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n C_i$ is the average distance of C_i ;

$S_0 = \left(\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (C_i - \bar{C}_0)^2 \right)^{1/2}$ is the standard deviation of C_i .

The value of the taxonomic indicator was in the range [0,1], and the closer its value was to 1, the more intensively in support of the reform it was.

The initial data for the calculation of the integrated indicator are shown in Table 1 and the initial data for the calculation of the integrated indicator for macro-regions are shown in Tables 2–5 (Results of the Fifth Wave of Sociological Research among the Population of Ukraine "Decentralization and Local Government Reform" 2020).

Table 1. Initial data for the calculation of the integrated indicator (Ukraine).

№	Indicator	Survey Wave				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Reform is definitely needed.	0.206	0.240	0.195	0.204	0.255
2	Reform is definitely not needed.	0.047	0.052	0.079	0.056	0.067
3	Reform is rather needed.	0.381	0.400	0.388	0.376	0.332
4	Reform is rather not needed.	0.116	0.109	0.116	0.119	0.105
5	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is well known.	0.186	0.168	0.189	0.172	0.196
6	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is totally unknown.	0.159	0.184	0.176	0.164	0.235
7	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is partly known.	0.635	0.627	0.603	0.63	0.543

Table 1. Cont.

№	Indicator	Survey Wave				
		1	2	3	4	5
8	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is almost unknown.	0.019	0.022	0.031	0.035	0.027
9	Reform is implemented at a good speed.	-	0.173	0.211	0.213	0.252
10	Reform is implemented too slowly.	-	0.221	0.198	0.185	0.124
11	Reform is implemented too fast.	-	0.011	0.031	0.009	0.025
12	Reform makes changes for the better.	0.188	0.463	0.43	0.395	0.355
13	Reform makes changes for worse.	0.105	0.047	0.057	0.053	0.085
14	The reform has a certain positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.068	0.094	0.085	0.044	0.087
15	The reform has a certain negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.026	0.012	0.028	0.021	0.026
16	The reform has a rather positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.354	0.393	0.379	0.327	0.282
17	The reform has a rather negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.069	0.043	0.062	0.076	0.072
18	Community services have improved significantly.	-	0.026	0.033	0.028	0.069
19	Community services have deteriorated significantly.	-	0.024	0.034	0.034	0.041
20	Community services have improved slightly.	-	0.219	0.242	0.268	0.244
21	Community services have deteriorated slightly.	-	0.054	0.044	0.054	0.076
22	Very good assessment of the work of the local community leader	-	-	0.086	0.081	0.101
23	Very bad assessment of the work of the local community leader	-	-	0.053	0.062	0.091
24	Rather good assessment of the work of the local community leader	-	-	0.297	0.293	0.272
25	Rather bad assessment of the work of the local community leader	-	-	0.089	0.123	0.122
26	Very good assessment of the work of the local council	-	-	0.048	0.039	0.052
27	Very bad assessment of the work of the local council	-	-	0.062	0.059	0.067
28	Rather good assessment of the work of the local council	-	-	0.248	0.221	0.209
30	Rather bad assessment of the work of the local council	-	-	0.098	0.114	0.132
31	Very good assessment of the work of the executive committee of the local council	-	-	0.033	0.035	0.042
32	Very bad assessment of the work of the executive committee of the local council	-	-	0.049	0.06	0.066
33	Rather good assessment of the work of the executive committee of the local council	-	-	0.199	0.199	0.0171
34	Rather bad assessment of the work of the executive committee of the local council	-	-	0.076	0.107	0.124
35	Good awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities	0.169	0.137	0.157	0.107	0.083
36	Absolute lack of information about the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities	0.252	0.280	0.270	0.263	0.423
37	Partial awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities	0.559	0.548	0.547	0.601	0.436

Table 2. Initial data for the calculation of the integrated indicator (West).

№	Indicator	Survey Wave				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Reform is definitely needed.	0.225	0.269	0.222	0.292	0.345
2	Reform is definitely not needed.	0.054	0.033	0.053	0.037	0.042
3	Reform is rather needed.	0.419	0.419	0.459	0.375	0.358
4	Reform is rather not needed.	0.122	0.094	0.125	0.082	0.114
5	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is well known.	0.221	0.191	0.206	0.193	0.229
6	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is totally unknown.	0.128	0.159	0.142	0.153	0.233
7	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is partly known.	0.632	0.634	0.607	0.614	0.524
8	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is almost unknown.	0.019	0.017	0.045	0.041	0.014
9	Reform makes changes for the better.	0.208	0.400	0.330	0.366	0.409
10	Reform makes changes for worse.	0.116	0.062	0.062	0.056	0.066
11	The reform has a certain positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.060	0.090	0.084	0.057	0.093
12	The reform has a certain negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.016	0.011	0.013	0.021	0.026
13	The reform has a rather positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.419	0.419	0.462	0.419	0.336
14	The reform has a rather negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.067	0.046	0.061	0.047	0.057
15	Community services have improved significantly.	-	0.019	0.017	0.033	0.082
16	Community services have deteriorated significantly.	-	0.030	0.016	0.023	0.034
17	Community services have improved slightly.	-	0.202	0.256	0.316	0.286
18	Community services have deteriorated slightly.	-	0.052	0.046	0.033	0.065
19	Good awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities	0.205	0.157	0.163	0.142	0.075
20	Absolute lack of information about the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities	0.207	0.215	0.253	0.283	0.465
21	Partial awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities	0.570	0.599	0.576	0.553	0.426

Table 3. Initial data for the calculation of the integrated indicator (Center).

№	Indicator	Survey Wave				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Reform is definitely needed.	0.175	0.213	0.186	0.181	0.206
2	Reform is definitely not needed.	0.048	0.053	0.066	0.055	0.081
3	Reform is rather needed.	0.400	0.367	0.366	0.367	0.316
4	Reform is rather not needed.	0.111	0.109	0.126	0.139	0.091

Table 3. Cont.

№	Indicator	Survey Wave				
		1	2	3	4	5
5	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is well known.	0.206	0.138	0.176	0.179	0.168
6	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is totally unknown.	0.160	0.216	0.161	0.138	0.250
7	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is partly known.	0.616	0.618	0.639	0.646	0.552
8	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is almost unknown.	0.018	0.029	0.024	0.037	0.030
9	Reform makes changes for the better.	0.152	0.439	0.482	0.386	0.341
10	Reform makes changes for worse.	0.061	0.049	0.038	0.057	0.072
11	The reform has a certain positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.055	0.059	0.077	0.026	0.093
12	The reform has a certain negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.018	0.013	0.026	0.018	0.033
13	The reform has a rather positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.326	0.335	0.351	0.276	0.263
14	The reform has a rather negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.075	0.031	0.054	0.105	0.078
15	Community services have improved significantly.	-	0.046	0.036	0.041	0.051
16	Community services have deteriorated significantly.	-	0.019	0.015	0.026	0.044
17	Community services have improved slightly.	-	0.222	0.204	0.249	0.264
18	Community services have deteriorated slightly.	-	0.051	0.038	0.058	0.08
19	Good awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	0.183	0.129	0.169	0.101	0.065
20	Absolute lack of information about the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	0.274	0.290	0.194	0.236	0.444
21	Partial awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	0.525	0.550	0.610	0.626	0.416

Table 4. Initial data for the calculation of the integrated indicator (South).

№	Indicator	Survey Wave				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Reform is definitely needed.	0.265	0.267	0.197	0.166	0.204
2	Reform is definitely not needed.	0.047	0.034	0.109	0.043	0.084
3	Reform is rather needed.	0.337	0.478	0.392	0.433	0.348
4	Reform is rather not needed.	0.116	0.12	0.125	0.142	0.110
5	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is well known.	0.175	0.184	0.207	0.125	0.147
6	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is totally unknown.	0.148	0.16	0.173	0.144	0.27

Table 4. Cont.

№	Indicator	Survey Wave				
		1	2	3	4	5
7	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is partly known.	0.661	0.638	0.602	0.700	0.547
8	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is almost unknown.	0.015	0.019	0.019	0.031	0.036
9	Reform makes changes for the better.	0.214	0.554	0.381	0.458	0.322
10	Reform makes changes for worse.	0.161	0.038	0.085	0.048	0.108
11	The reform has a certain positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.112	0.16	0.109	0.050	0.072
12	The reform has a certain negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.049	0.016	0.059	0.022	0.022
13	The reform has a rather positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.348	0.473	0.341	0.320	0.288
14	The reform has a rather negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.069	0.060	0.087	0.052	0.081
15	Community services have improved significantly.	-	0.018	0.050	0.013	0.036
16	Community services have deteriorated significantly.	-	0.028	0.084	0.036	0.037
17	Community services have improved slightly.	-	0.256	0.285	0.280	0.204
18	Community services have deteriorated slightly.	-	0.072	0.052	0.056	0.080
19	Good awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	0.168	0.125	0.152	0.066	0.044
20	Absolute lack of information about the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	0.236	0.294	0.345	0.232	0.430
21	Partial awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	0.586	0.536	0.480	0.668	0.482

Table 5. Initial data for the calculation of the integrated indicator (East).

№	Indicator	Survey Wave				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Reform is definitely needed.	0.138	0.199	0.163	0.158	0.299
2	Reform is definitely not needed.	0.031	0.120	0.104	0.122	0.053
3	Reform is rather needed.	0.334	0.301	0.290	0.297	0.292
4	Reform is rather not needed.	0.116	0.120	0.057	0.102	0.115
5	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is well known.	0.084	0.171	0.158	0.197	0.293
6	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is totally unknown.	0.243	0.195	0.292	0.291	0.130
7	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is partly known.	0.641	0.618	0.503	0.488	0.551
8	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is almost unknown.	0.032	0.016	0.047	0.023	0.026
9	Reform makes changes for the better.	0.193	0.482	0.593	0.416	0.341
10	Reform makes changes for worse.	0.090	0.028	0.044	0.046	0.114

Table 5. Cont.

№	Indicator	Survey Wave				
		1	2	3	4	5
11	The reform has a certain positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.036	0.065	0.064	0.058	0.086
12	The reform has a certain negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.024	0.007	0.007	0.028	0.014
13	The reform has a rather positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.306	0.345	0.355	0.287	0.207
14	The reform has a rather negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.055	0.035	0.035	0.100	0.070
15	Community services have improved significantly.	-	0.003	0.030	0.011	0.153
16	Community services have deteriorated significantly.	-	0.015	0.026	0.073	0.055
17	Community services have improved slightly.	-	0.173	0.232	0.199	0.181
18	Community services have deteriorated slightly.	-	0.030	0.044	0.079	0.076
19	Good awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	0.056	0.142	0.124	0.129	0.222
20	Absolute lack of information about the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	0.321	0.362	0.368	0.349	0.264
21	Partial awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	0.575	0.458	0.450	0.504	0.421

5. Results

5.1. Integrated Indicator

At the beginning of the reform, there were a few tangible results in community functioning. However, even communities that were united during the first year of the reform had enough time to develop action plans or implement them fully. Establishing direct relations with the budget, hiring specialists, training them, getting used to new and unusual working conditions, mastering novel functions and tasks, and preparing for and holding local elections is a lengthy process. Thus, in the first waves of the survey, we believe that the answers were based on expectations of results, and in later waves, directly on the results. The integrated indicator obtained in the calculation process is noted in the graph (Figure 1).

Figure 1 also shows that even in the first stage of the reform, when a part of Ukraine was already temporarily occupied and military actions in the Donbas had started, Ukrainians generally supported the reform. Again, the highest level of trust was in the West, and the lowest in the East; the Center and the South were characterized by a nearly average level of support in Ukraine.

If we consider the national tendency, the trend completely coincided with the population's attitude to the reform in the central part of the country. In the West, during the third wave of the assessment (2017), there was a slight deterioration in the assessment; this was more profound in the South. Then the situation improved both at the country level and in terms of macro-regions.

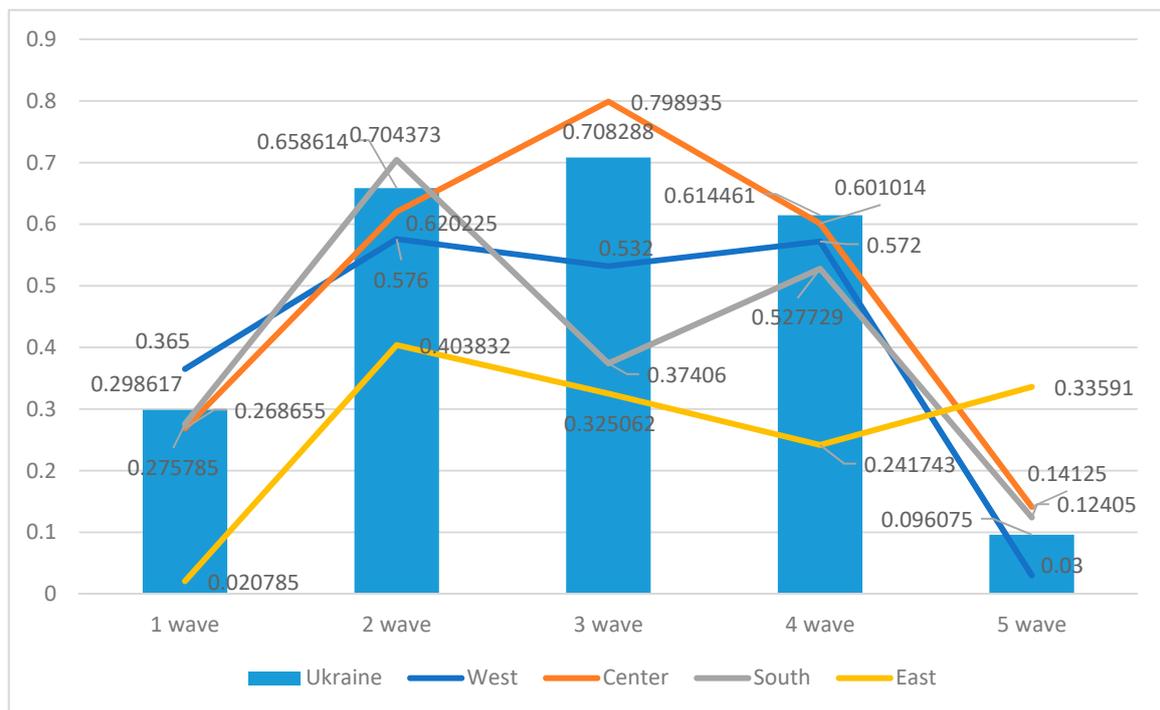


Figure 1. Taxonomic indicator of Ukrainians' attitude to the reform.

5.2. Ukrainian Peculiarities

According to Olena Lytvenenko ([From 15% to 80%: How Support and Confidence in the Reform Have Grown Over the Years of Decentralization \(2020\)](#)), Deputy Head of the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine, the fifth and final wave of the study was conducted in difficult conditions due to a number of factors:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the immediate objective difficulties of conducting the survey caused by quarantine restrictions, we should also take into account the significant social tension of respondents, the growth of depressed moods caused by lockdown (negative news, rising morbidity, anxiety, restrictions on leaving home, closed institutions, insufficient funding for health care, lack of effective drugs and methods of control). Against this background, respondents, probably in a more depressed mood, could have given more pessimistic answers and had negative expectations. Furthermore, the pandemic has highlighted problems in communities, small towns, and unfunded hospitals that were less acute in the past.
2. Political uncertainty related to the preparation for local elections. Elections always bring specific changes to local reality, switch ratings, and balance of power or sympathy. Moreover, in turn, this is incertitude, accompanied by fears and worries about the future of the reform and people's lives.
3. Completing the unification process of territorial communities (in particular, compulsory unification of those settlements that did not unite voluntarily). Specific policy actions in this context, in our opinion, also added to the mood of the respondents, as each community that did not unite voluntarily had its motives and reasons for the delay.

In the context of the last thought, we have a particular vision of developing any reform and promoting changes (Figure 2).

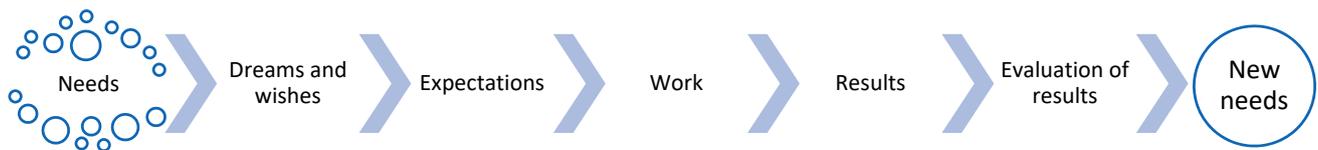


Figure 2. The process of emergence and satisfaction of needs.

First, there are particular needs; dreams and desires are formed, as well as expectations of their realization. When expectations arise, needs are real, and work begins to meet them. This work yields results that are later evaluated. Regardless of the results (positive or negative, or that require some adjustment or change), this will contribute to the emergence of new needs, and the cycle will advance to additional stages.

Here it will also be helpful to note our vision of the need to study the attitude of Ukrainians to the reform of decentralization not only based on answering a direct question about personal opinion about the need for reform. Not all people work in local self-government bodies; are interested in politics, community, and state life; and have the necessary professional knowledge and understanding of the essence, components of the reform, and areas of life that it affects. Therefore, these people may not support the reform as a whole but rather approve of its components, and vice versa. The integrated indicator allowed us to evaluate the answers to the expanded list of questions of sociologists in general.

First, the needs for development and change could be met in the newly formed united territorial communities, which had novel expanded powers and resources for their implementation. Therefore, we will first search for an explanation for the change in the level of approval of the reform in the dynamics of creating such entities.

Let us consider the dynamics of community creation in 2015–2019 (Figure 3) ([Monitoring the Process of Decentralization of Power and Reform of Local Self-Government 2020](#)). As mentioned earlier, in 2020 the communities that had not volunteered before were united.

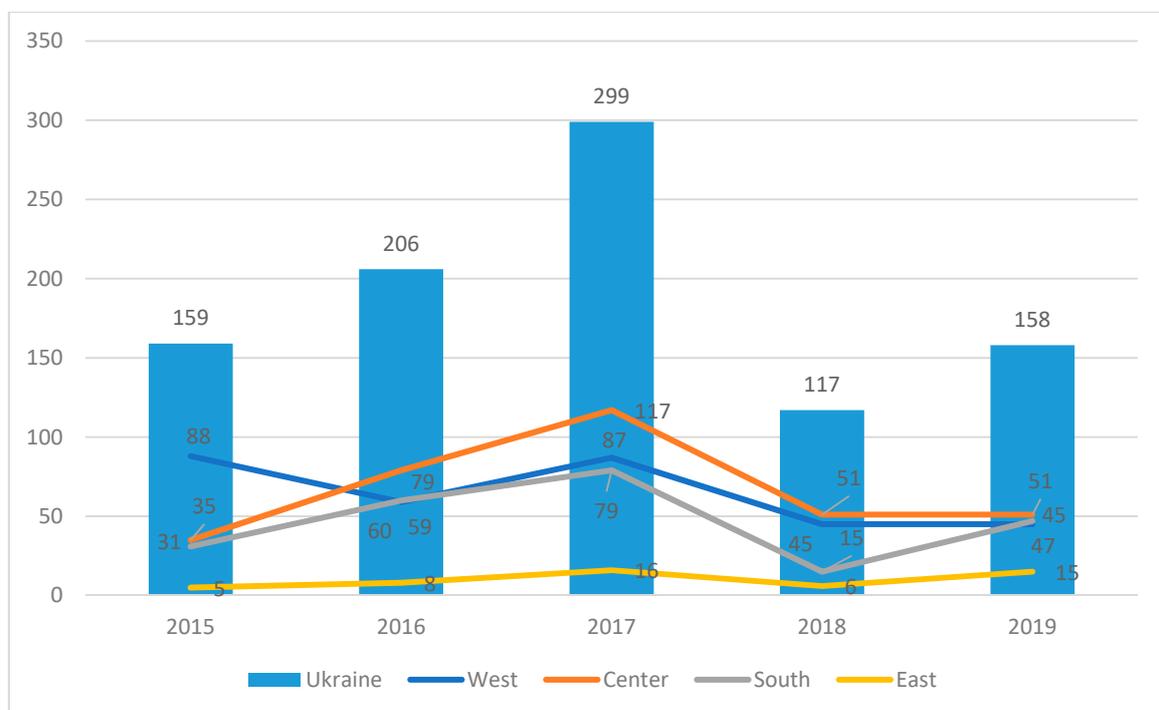


Figure 3. Dynamics of the formation of united territorial communities in Ukraine during 2015–2019, units.

If we compare the graphs in Figures 1 and 2, a specific dependence of public approval of the reform on the speed of creation of united territorial communities can be noticed. By 2017, new communities were actively created in the whole country and its regions; in 2018, the speed of unification decreased, and growth partially resumed in 2019. If we consider the results of the latest sociological survey of Ukrainian public opinion in 2020, then due to the pandemic, the implementation of any measures and decisions, and, consequently, their effect, arose with some objective delay. Therefore, we can assume that in 2020, the positive effect of community unification in 2019 could be less noticeable, and the difficulties and shortcomings more so.

Considering the difference in the attitude of Ukrainians to the reform in terms of macro-regions, it should be noted that some parts of Ukraine, at certain stages already living in the reformed country, unlike others, were still not joint.

The formation of new united communities was rapid in West Ukraine and slower in the East.

Generally, Ukrainians, in our opinion, have always relied too much on the government. For instance, assessing the socio-economic situation in Ukraine, people put the primary responsibility on the government (29.5%), the president (29.2%), parliament (21.3%), and the opposition (1.4%). At the same time, they do not mention their responsibility, their employers', or even local authorities'. ([Socio-Political Situation in Ukraine \(2021\)](#)). It seems easier to complain about the lack of authority, money, opportunities, staff, etc., than to do something; when authority and resources are received, other problems have already arisen—it is challenging to solve problems somehow. It is easy to be an expert in words, but it is much more complicated to find an investor, contact foreigners, win a project competition, convince a group of conservators about change, or even understand many regulations, instructions, methods, rules, and documents.

According to our assumption, the inhabitants of small settlements were suspicious of decentralization because they did not want to be left without their village council but also did not want to give its authority somewhere else. Those settlements that did not become centers of new communities from the merger were afraid to remain on the periphery. If there was a village council before, even if it was poor, it was right there, and now everything would be brought to the center. Rational critical thinking did not work here against the backdrop of distrust of any government. It is better to have a school behind the fence, even though due to the lack of funding there will be objectively fewer opportunities to provide quality education. Uncertainty is always associated with risk.

In the context of the above problem, it would be appropriate to refer to the prominent ideologue and author of the Ukrainian decentralization reform, Director of the Civil Society Institute Anatoliy Tkachuk. In particular, in the process of discussing the problems of decentralization, he expressed the opinion that “the city is so large that it’s the pride hinders the communicating with a small village, and small is so small that it is afraid to be absorbed by the city” ([Cooperation of Urban and Rural Territorial Communities by Experts \(2018\)](#)). Furthermore, Anatoliy Tkachuk also noted several other features and problems of Ukrainians, in particular:

1. Observance of laws by people is more voluntary than unappealable or constant;
2. Regional diversity of Ukrainians due to the formation of regions in several historical periods in different empires;
3. Frequent excessive politicization of local governments at the regional level when political interests prevail over the state;
4. Procrastination in local election appointments, often due to contrived arguments;
5. The formation of insolvent communities violated accepted norms, which later, despite significant efforts, could not become centers of economic growth;
6. Irresponsible choice of leaders of local communities—when people wanted to live according to the new criteria, nevertheless they chose according to the old one;

7. Inconsistency of decentralization reform with the other reforms in the state ([The Author of the Decentralization Reform Anatoliy Tkachuk: “It is Impossible to Change the Constitution Now. If Strengthen the Regions—We will Lose the Country”](#) 2019).

Another explanation for discontentment with implementing the reform is the chronic underfunding of regional development projects (Table 6), ([Law of Ukraine “On the State Budget of Ukraine for 2015” № 80-VIII 2015](#); [Law of Ukraine “On the State Budget of Ukraine for 2016” № 928-VIII 2016](#); [Law of Ukraine “On the State Budget of Ukraine for 2017” № 1801-VIII 2017](#); [Law of Ukraine “On the State Budget of Ukraine for 2018” № 2246-VIII 2018](#); [Law of Ukraine “On the State Budget of Ukraine for 2019” № 2629-VIII 2019](#); [Law of Ukraine “On the State Budget of Ukraine for 2020” № 294-IX 2020](#); [Law of Ukraine “On the State Budget of Ukraine for 2021” № 1082-IX 2021](#)). Communities worked out the development programs and plans, which included addressing critical issues through project implementation. However, the reduction of funding did not allow for the implementation of everything planned. In addition, at every turn, the deputies tried to influence the distribution of funds, including through proposals for project areas. Such a system lowers the transparency and competitiveness of fundraising, helps direct funds to non-priority purposes, and reduces their use efficiency.

Table 6. Volumes of planned and actual funding of regional development projects at the expense of the State Fund for Regional Development as part of the state budget of Ukraine.

Year	Planned Funding	Actual Funding	Actual Share of Planned Funding, in %
2015	5,756,134.351	2,900,800	0.50%
2016	5,756,134.351	3,000,000	0.52%
2017	7,020,241.218	3,500,000	0.50%
2018	8,428,536.343	6,000,000	0.71%
2019	9,083,913.577	7,170,000	0.79%
2020	8,587,461.878	4,900,000	0.57%
2021	9,598,543.124	4,500,000	0.47%

It should also be noted that large-scale changes, like nationwide reforms, to some extent, force people to leave the comfort zone. People have to live in different realities; do something unusual; acquire new knowledge, skills, and abilities; and solve unfamiliar problems. At the same time, it is generally impossible to see a positive effect of the changes in the first stages of the reform, as they can become tangible in months, if not years. Therefore, it is natural to have some intermediate frustration, decreased approval, or simply a decline in zeal over time.

Analyzing the report of the study, the director of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology pointed out that people have conflicting expectations: They hope for accelerated community and state development, but fear corruption due to increased money at the disposal of local officials and the formation of uncontrolled local government ([Results of the Fifth Wave of Sociological Research among the Population of Ukraine “Decentralization and Local Government Reform”](#) (2020)). In our opinion, this result still shows some distance between the government and the community, distrust, and a logical desire for the effective functioning of the control system over the legality of decision-making. Nevertheless, in general, 87% of Ukrainians believe that it is necessary to establish state supervision over the legality of decisions of local governments.

5.3. Measure of the Indicators' Influence

The taxonomic analysis also allowed us to determine the extent of each indicator's impact and the overall support for the reform. To do this, we applied the following formulas (Sergiienko et al. 2020, p. 1334):

$$w_{ij} = 100(z_{ij} - z_j)^2 \left(\sum_{j=1}^m (z_{ij} - z_j)^2 \right)^{-1}, \quad (3)$$

where w_{ij} is the measure of the influence of the indicator in the overall support for the reform for each wave.

The general influence of the selected indicators on the complex assessment of the enterprise development level is defined as the arithmetic mean of calculated shares:

$$\bar{w}_j = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n w_{ij}, \quad 1 \leq j \leq m. \quad (4)$$

The highest level of support for decentralization in Ukraine was determined by the people's view that the reform had improved. Therefore, belief in the need for reform, the normal speed of change, a positive assessment of the work of the executive committee of the local council, and awareness of the progress of the reform had a significant impact. Instead, the statements about the rather good work of the local community leader, and very good and very bad evaluations of the local council's work and its executive committee, had the least impact. Based on the above, it can be concluded that Ukrainians, who believed in the need for reform, mostly gave upbeat assessments of its success, which was associated with the work of the local executive committee council rather than the work of the council or community leader.

Table 7 shows the results of calculations of the impact of each of the basic indicators on the integrated indicator of the attitude to reform in terms of macro-regions.

Table 7. The measure of the impact of each of the basic indicators on the integrated indicator of the attitude to decentralization reform in Ukraine (level of macro-regions).

№	Indicator	West	Center	South	East
1	Reform is definitely needed.	4.098	0.515	0.874	1.985
2	Reform is definitely not needed.	0.083	0.189	0.252	0.753
3	Reform is rather needed.	1.677	0.994	1.212	0.209
4	Reform is rather not needed.	0.385	0.903	0.080	0.395
5	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is well known.	0.476	1.151	0.591	2.185
6	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is totally unknown.	0.576	1.384	0.356	1.947
7	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is partly known.	0.495	0.384	1.405	1.559
8	Information on increasing local powers and resources in the reform process is almost unknown.	0.228	0.079	0.027	0.041
9	Reform makes changes for the better.	3.749	5.698	5.628	6.091
10	Reform makes changes for worse.	0.253	0.107	0.570	0.334
11	The reform has a certain positive effect on the general situation in the country.	0.275	0.856	1.039	0.096
12	The reform has a certain negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.023	0.093	0.097	0.018
13	The reform has a rather positive effect on the general situation in the country.	1.127	0.923	3.085	0.921

Table 7. Cont.

№	Indicator	West	Center	South	East
14	The reform has a rather negative effect on the general situation in the country.	0.061	1.023	0.076	0.161
15	Community services have improved significantly.	1.597	0.122	0.261	2.175
16	Community services have deteriorated significantly.	0.052	0.042	0.124	0.160
17	Community services have improved slightly.	2.588	1.972	0.274	0.288
18	Community services have deteriorated slightly.	0.121	0.127	0.082	0.155
19	Good awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	1.630	1.630	1.220	1.262
20	Absolute lack of information about the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	3.025	3.247	1.760	1.016
21	Partial awareness of the plans for and progress of the creation of united territorial communities.	1.289	2.369	4.790	2.061

For better illustration, we displayed the results in the form of a graph (Figure 4).

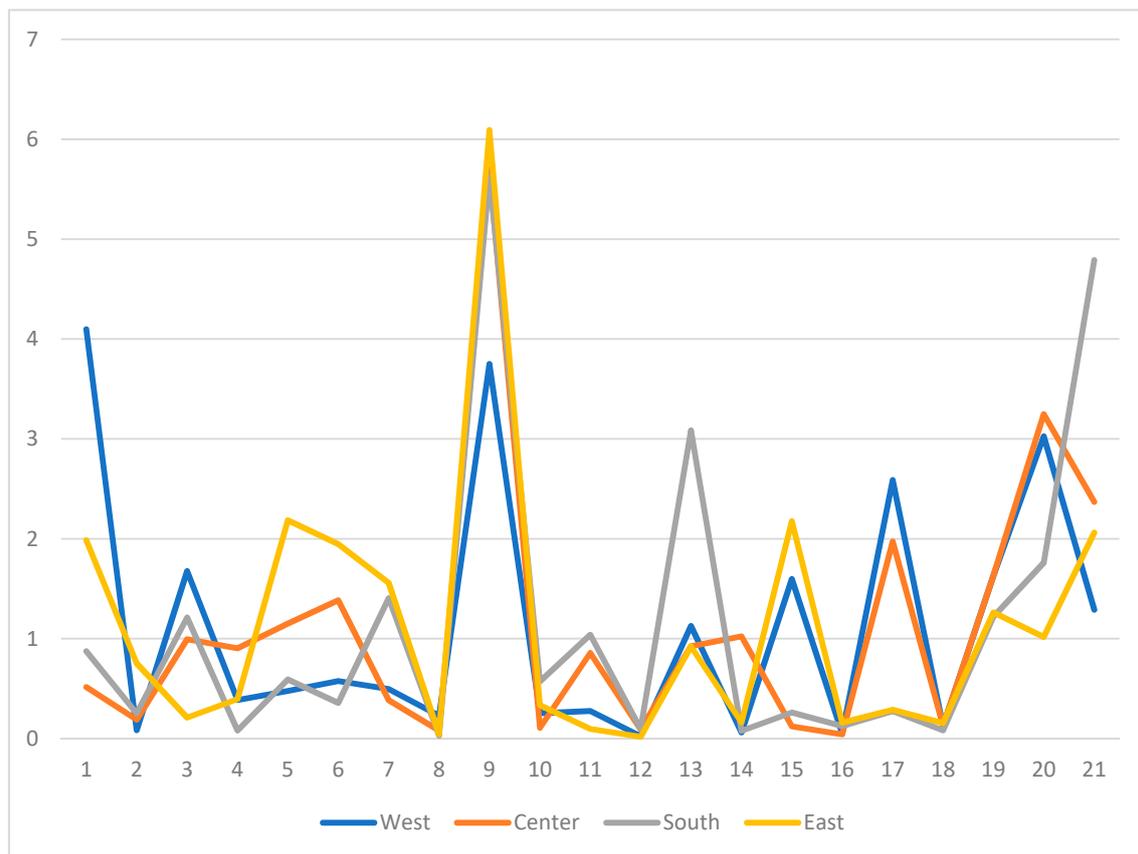


Figure 4. The graphic measure of the impact of each of the basic indicators on the integrated indicator of the attitude to decentralization reform in Ukraine (level of macro-regions).

Similar to the country result, in all four macro-regions, the immense contribution to the approval of the reform was made by the respondents’ belief in change for the better (and in the East, it was much more critical than in the West). Belief in the need for reform has also had a significant impact in the West macro-region; absolute ignorance of the plans and the course of the reform had a more significant impact in the West and the center of the country. For the people in the South, the impact of the reform on improving the situation

in the country and partial awareness of its course was essential; the answers regarding the negative impact of the reform on the situation in the country in all macro-regions had the most negligible impact on the final integrated indicator.

5.4. Identified Problems and Ways to Solve Them

The analysis allowed us to identify the existing problems of decentralization reform in Ukraine, reveal the reasons for their emergence, and work out ways to solve them (Table 8).

Table 8. Identified problems of decentralization reform in Ukraine, the reasons for their occurrence, and ways to solve them.

Causes	Solutions
Distrust of the authorities	
Unfulfilled promises and lack of responsibility for failures	Improving public scrutiny of politicians' promises and their implementation
	Increasing public activity, indifference, and interest in the future of the state
	Development and implementation of a mechanism for terminating the powers of officials for populism and a critical level of non-fulfillment of commitments
	Improving the political culture of officials
The habit that power is somewhere far away and is alien	Destruction of Soviet stereotypes
	Promotion of new leaders and their activities
	Dissemination of information about the communities' achievements, fulfilled promises, and successfully implemented projects
	Analysis of the alternative cost of indirect bribery of citizens and harm to the state from populist promises
Low political literacy of the population	Raising people's civic consciousness
	Development of critical thinking in schoolchildren and students
	Introduction of elements of critical thinking in advanced training of employees of local self-government and institutions
	Support for projects to increase the political literacy of the population
Citizens' fear of change	Dissemination of participation of civil society representatives in government bodies, supervisory boards of state enterprises
	Monitoring of fulfilled promises, popularization of successes
	Construction and development of effective public and state control over programs and their implementation
	Strategic long-term planning of government, communities, and state enterprises
The turbulence of economic and political life	Stability of legislation for economic activities
	Promotion of successful reforms in Ukraine and foreign countries, innovations, and their positive effect
Citizens' desire for stability, even if not the most effective	Achieving economic growth
	Formation of a middle class
	Deepening the differentiation of wages depending on the results and development of personality
Conservatism in thoughts and work	Promotion of innovations, support of youth, new ideas, and solutions
	Simplifying and disseminating medical examinations and promoting self-care
Belief in the injustice of life and a sense of hopelessness	Supporting and removing barriers to the dissemination of human psychological assistance
	Promotion of successes, good deeds, positive examples
	Minimization of the figure of Ukraine as an eternal "victim" in school programs and on television

Table 8. Cont.

Causes	Solutions
	Disproportion in regional development
Soviet heritage of the specialization of regions	Effective regional development of regions with lower gross regional product
	Policy opportunities regardless of the place of residence
	Popularization of business development in less economically active territories
	Improving the functioning of the stock market, its effective government regulation, and investor protection
Significant sectoral differentiation of wages	Support for individual farming and agriculture
	Support and promotion of small and medium businesses in communities
	Popularization of life in home country and working for the development of the community as opposed to emigration
	Encouraging financially insolvent communities to merge with others and optimizing the administrative-territorial structure in order to increase the efficiency of regional development
	Reducing gender inequality and increasing tolerance
	Stimulation and popularization of social entrepreneurship development
	Increasing the share of the circular economy

The first problem we found was a distrust of the authorities. This was confirmed by the data of the analyzed sociological study regarding approving the work of the community leader, its council, and the executive committee. Even though few respondents considered bureaucratic actions unsatisfactory, the opposite assessment remained extremely low (the maximum assessment of the community leader as “very good” in Ukraine as a whole did not exceed 0.3, and that of the local council and its executive committee did not exceed 0.05). In our opinion, the higher importance of approving the local leader’s actions may be related to personal acquaintance with this elected person and an inevitable blurring of the work of the council and committee as a set of different people. We consider this problem as being nationwide for Ukrainians. For example, in 2018, Ukraine was the state leader in distrusting the authorities ([World-Low 9% of Ukrainians Confident in Government 2019](#)). This year, only 9% of Ukrainians trusted the government (Figure 5).

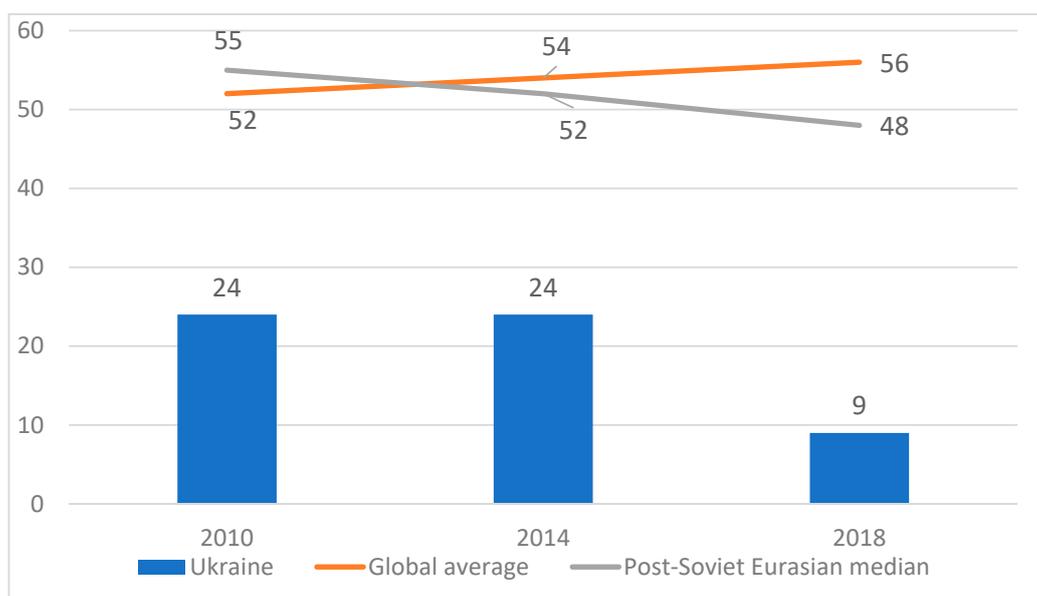


Figure 5. Level of confidence in government.

If we analyze the balance of trust/distrust ([The Level of Trust in the Current Government 2020](#)), then in 2020, only the newly elected president of Ukraine was characterized by a higher level of trust than distrust (49%/39%). However, at the same time, the absolute majority of Ukrainians did not trust other officials or institutions (Figure 6).

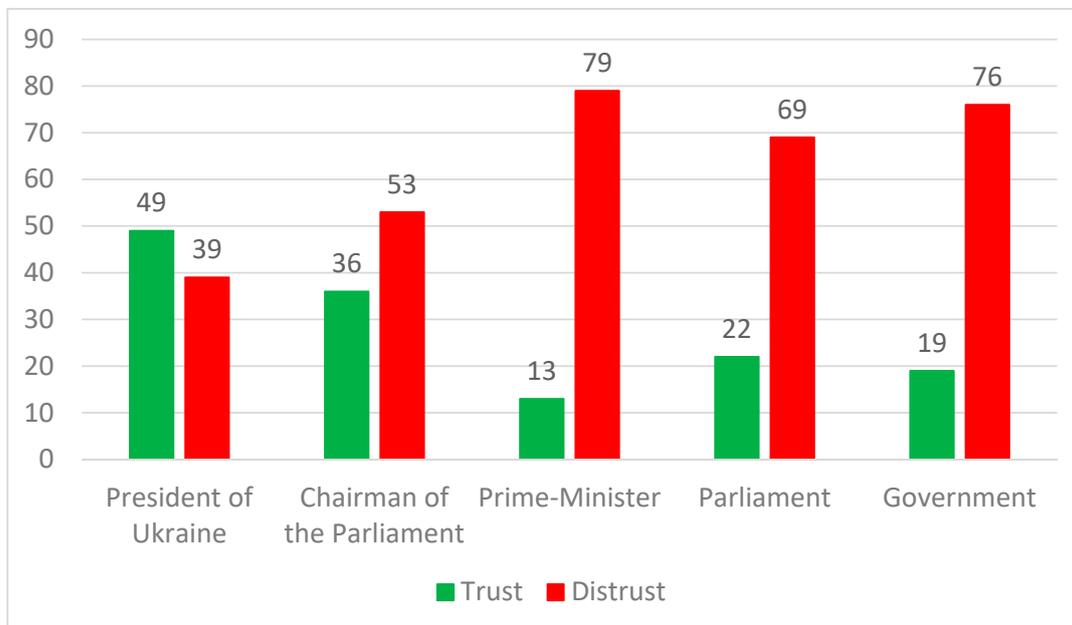


Figure 6. Level of trust/distrust in state authorities.

Ukrainians were pretty pessimistic about their level of household income (Figure 7) ([Distribution of Households by Self-Perceived of Their Income during A Year 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021](#)). For years, almost half of citizens pointed to the impossibility of saving, and 36–44% declared austerity.

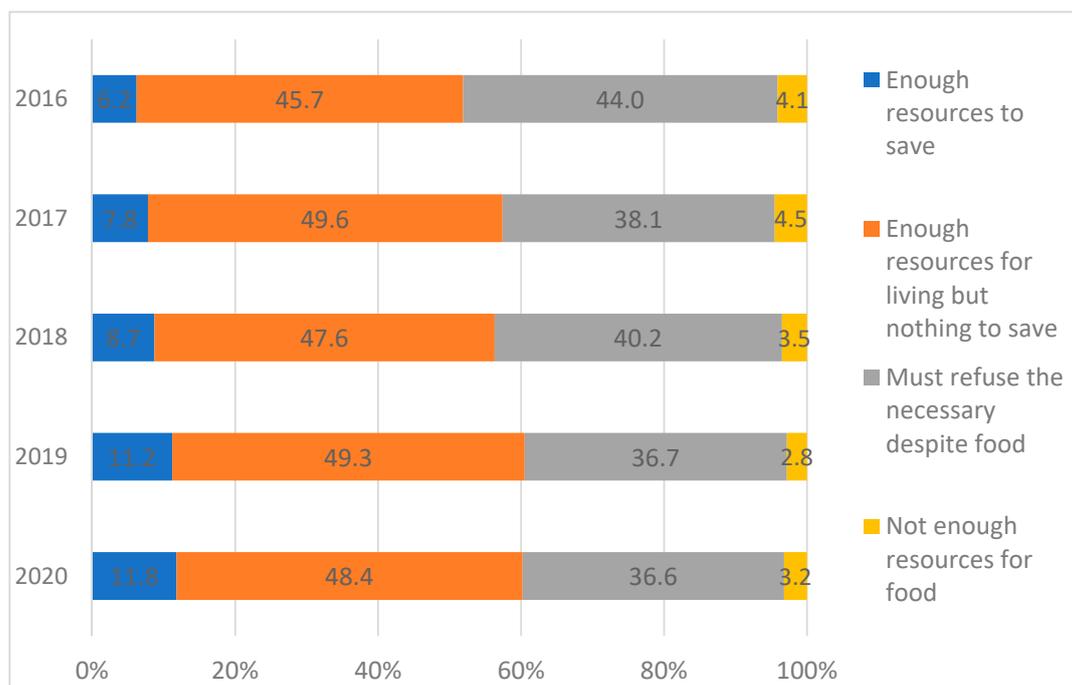


Figure 7. Distribution of households by self-perceived of their income during a year.

Moreover, about half of Ukrainians did not expect improvements, and about one-third expected deterioration (Figure 8), ([Distribution of Households by Self-Perceived of Their Income during A Year 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021](#)). At the same time, according to Table 1, only a quarter of citizens believed that decentralization reform was much needed. Thus, the exact total number of people during 2015–2020 considered the decentralization reform absolutely unnecessary or rather unnecessary.

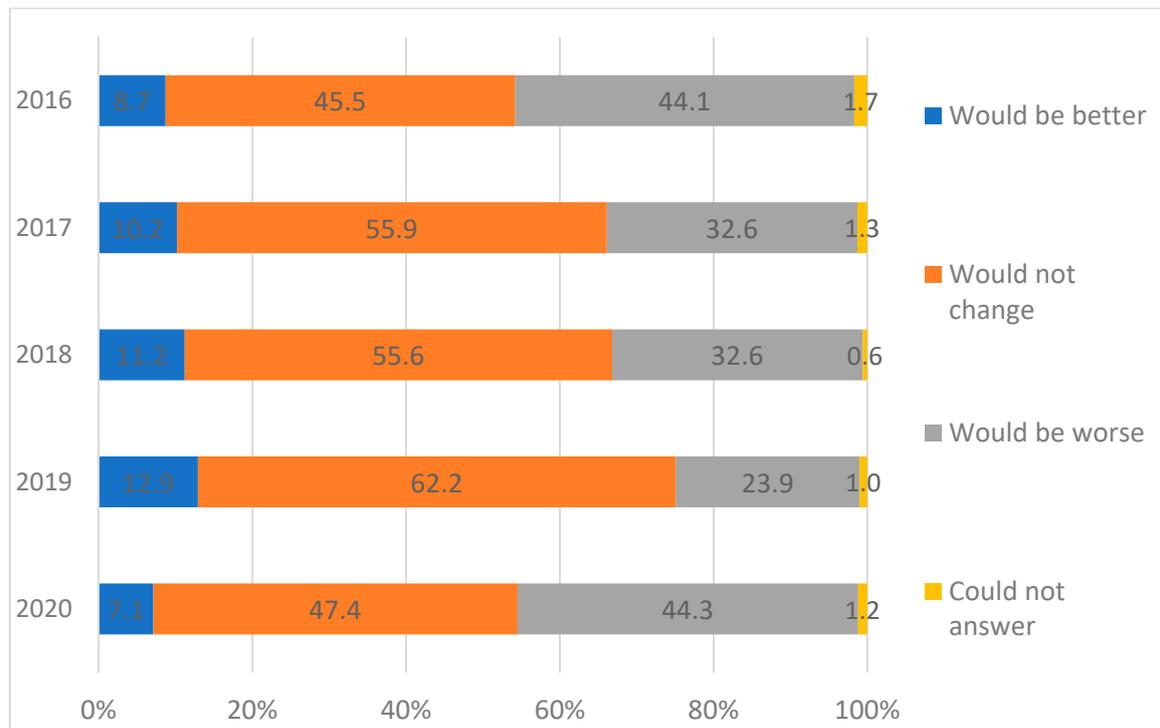


Figure 8. Economic expectations of households regarding the changes in their material situation for the next 12 months.

The next problem that was identified was the significant differentiation of regions by the level of development. To prove this statement, we turn to the statistics of gross regional product in terms of regions of Ukraine in 2019 (Figure 9), ([Gross Regional Product 2019](#)) and statistics of industrial production (sales of industrial goods) in a similar context (Figure 10), ([Volume of Industrial Products Sold by Region 2019](#)). The initial data for Figures 9 and 10 can be found in Appendices A and B respectively. For better clarity, we plotted these data on a map using the Datawrapper resource ([Datawrapper 2021](#)).

If we compare Figures 9 and 10, we can see that the production levels of regional products and sales of industrial goods were practically superimposed. Thus, we have a more industrially developed East, and a less developed West, Center, and South (except for the centers of macro-regions: Kyiv (capital) in the center, Lviv (regional leader) in the West, and Odesa (regional leader) in the East). On the other hand, regions that gravitated to the country's center were characterized by an average level of development. This fact is related to both the preservation of industrial production and the population density of these regions.

Gross regional product

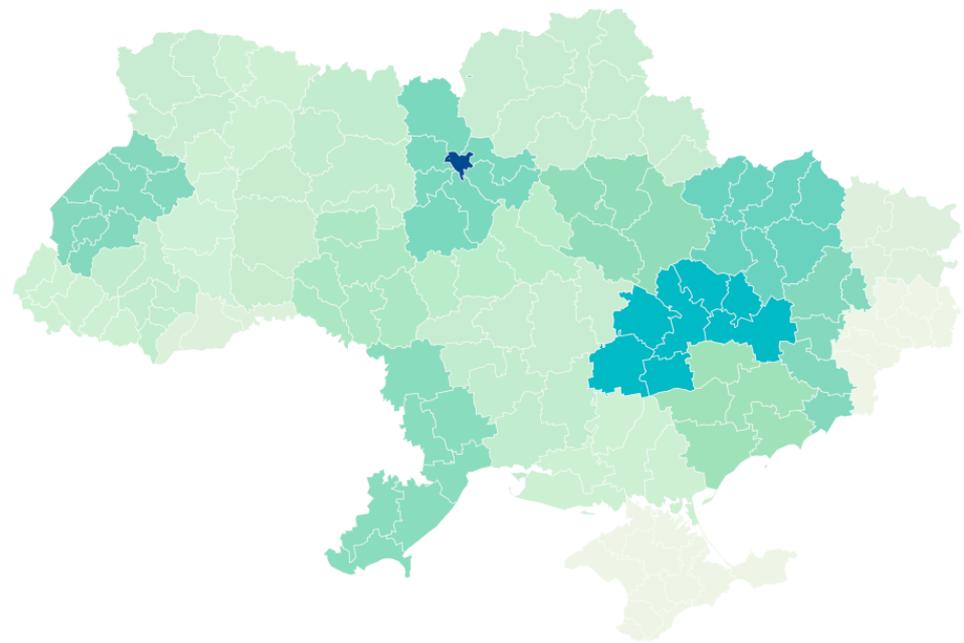


Figure 9. Gross regional product in 2019, million UAH.

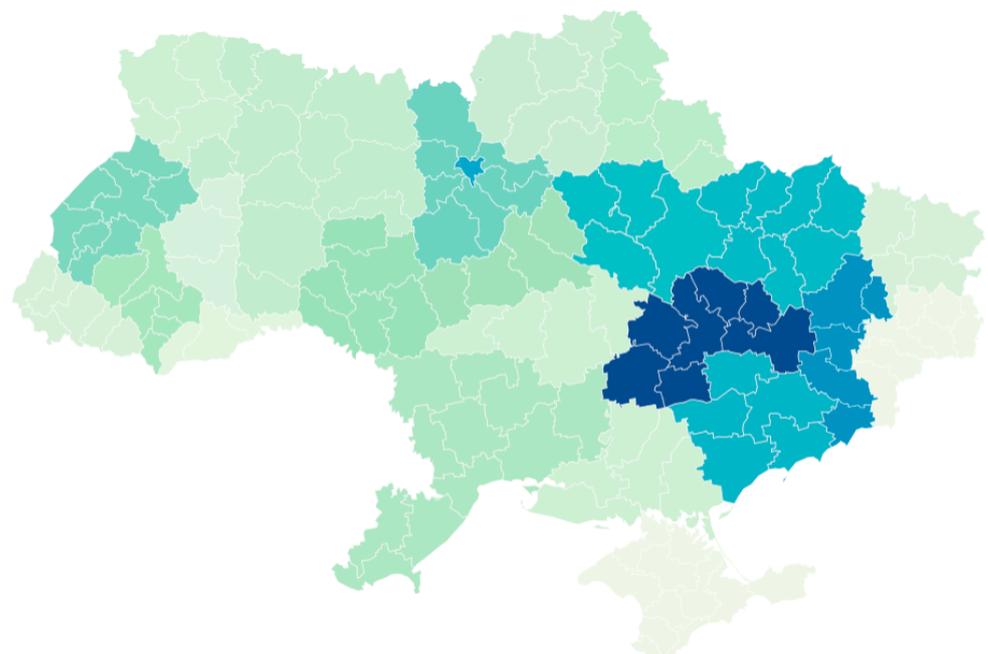


Figure 10. The volume of industrial products sold by region in 2019, million UAH, excluding VAT and excise.

5.5. Application of the Experience of Public Opinion Analysis in Planning and Carrying Out Reforms

The study showed us that the level of support for reform, in general, can vary considerably both in terms of different periods of research and in terms of regions of a multimillion-

person state. People's desire to implement such reforms depends on how the population perceives the implementation of the reforms and how clearly they understand the necessity and importance of them. The more a person supports change, the higher their willingness is to change themselves and make those changes in their lives and community life. Eventually, such people will have a higher propensity to get a local government job or participate in political life as a voter or candidate.

Thus, we consider the public opinion study, which directly relates to the reform, one of the critical keys to changes' success. Therefore, research and analysis of public opinion are necessary to accompany all stages of implementation of reforms, from conception and planning to studying the consequences of already-implemented reforms.

Figure 11 shows the actions that we consider appropriate to implement for future reforms in Ukraine or similar reforms in other countries.

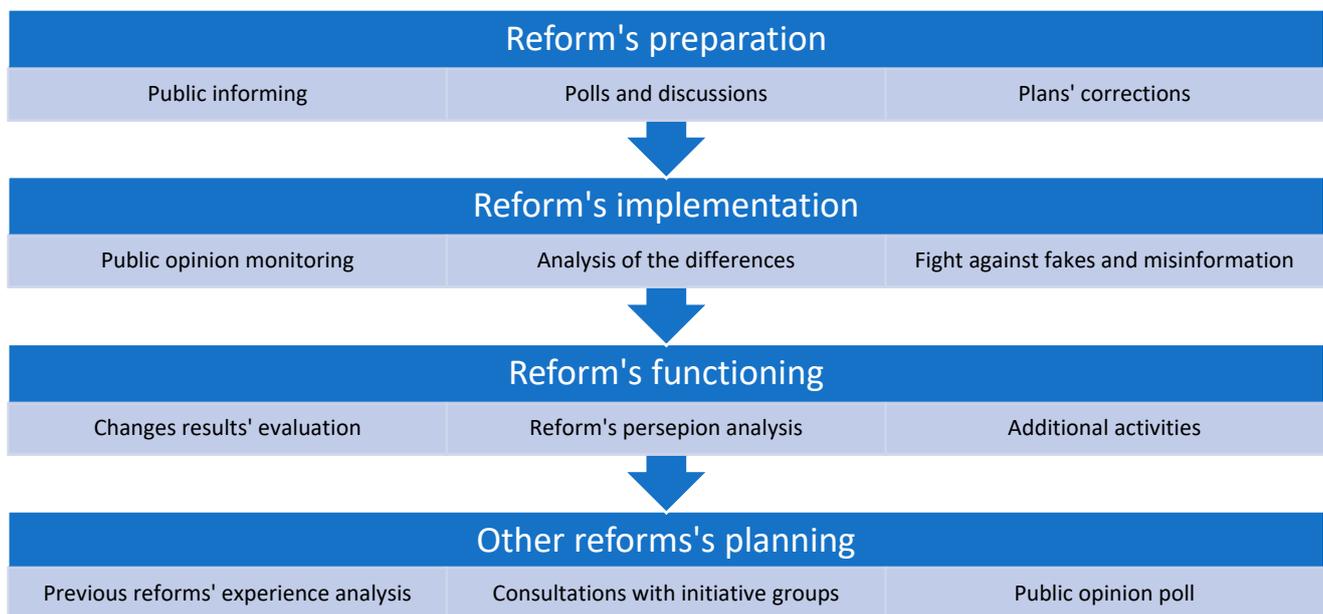


Figure 11. Application of the experience of public opinion analysis in planning and carrying out reforms.

In order to gain public support for reform, people must first be fully informed of existing plans. Moreover, it is not superfluous to explain the need for reform, the changes that the reform should bring, and the positives of such changes in the long run. It will be interesting to conduct an initial survey of people's attitudes to such changes. It should include identifying problems, the vision for their solution, and an assessment of the prospects for solving such problems. The poll will not necessarily lead to a radical change in the plan, as the public may initially not accept the reform due to a lack of understanding of its essence or insufficient awareness of the content of the changes. In addition, the initial stage of reform planning may also indicate existing miscalculations or shortcomings in the construction of the reform program. The most active communities or regions can be selected to implement a pilot project, i.e., an experiment to implement a planned reform in a limited smaller area.

At the reform's implementation stage, we consider it expedient to constantly monitor changes in public opinion. Here fake news and misinformation about changes or their potential consequences may spread. Reformers will also receive the first intermediate results of the reform, which may deviate from the planned program. Then the program will need to be reviewed.

Once the key reform measures are implemented, the reform will start working in real time. Public opinion research during this period will help understand people's attitudes to change when it has already taken place. At this stage, the first brief will be summed

up, and the results will be analyzed. In the event of significant deviations from the desired result, specific additional measures may be taken, including establishing support structures, changes in regulations and management procedures, streamlining relations between partners, strategy development, and planning future measures in the context of reform. In addition, the fight against fake news and misinformation can continue at this stage if ideological opponents of change produce them.

Eventually, with modern global realities, the endless growth of needs, and the emergence of new technologies, one way or another there will be a need for other reforms in related fields or areas. If the reform is planned, it is advisable to invite the ideological instigators of the previous reform, and people who have experience in reform activities and have overcome difficulties. These people can either work in a new reform team or act as advisers and consultants. In addition, a public opinion poll will potentially better regulate the reform process to find a better pace of reform.

Thus, the experience of the reform, together with the population's support and the desire for change, can dramatically improve the living conditions of people, business management, and the overall state functioning. Furthermore, the locals' positive perception of such changes will increase the efficiency of the measures taken.

6. Discussion

The study showed us that the level of support for a reform, in general, can vary considerably both in terms of different periods of research and in terms of regions of a multimillion-person state. People's desire to implement such reforms depends on how the population perceives the implementation of reforms and how clearly they understand their necessity and importance. The more a person supports change, the more willing they are to change themselves and make those changes in their lives and community life. Eventually, such people will have a higher propensity to get a local government job or participate in political life as a voter or candidate.

Thus, we consider the public opinion study, which directly relates to reform, one of the critical keys to the change's success. Therefore, research and analysis of public opinion must accompany all stages of implementation of reforms, from conception and planning to studying the consequences of already-implemented reforms.

Many Central and Eastern European countries have implemented their reforms by overcoming the resistance of the post-communist past, which has had an impact on the current state governance, its communities, and public service sectors. Modern European countries have mostly passed the stage of local self-government reform faster than Ukraine, and now they continue improving the existing systems' functioning. At the same time, the experience of appealing to public opinion could contribute to the sectoral reforms of Ukraine's neighbors. In particular, [Kučerová et al. \(2020\)](#) divided two significant periods of the Czech Republic's life into state socialism (1948–1989) and post-socialist transformation (1990 until today). In terms of the example of educational sectoral reform, the authors studied the approval of decentralization processes in the post-socialist transformation period. According to the authors, many reform steps were not effectively communicated to teachers or the public or understood by them. The reforms were poorly implemented, discontinued before completion, or too often revised.

[Vitálišová et al. \(2021\)](#) researched stakeholders' participation in local governance in the Slovak Republic and showed that active participation in governance directly determines its quality. Thus, by studying 100 local self-governments in 2009–2011 and 286 municipalities in 2011–2013, the authors proved the importance of building good relations with stakeholders and establishing the most active cooperation to achieve good regional development results.

[Qarri et al. \(2012\)](#) considered partnerships with community-based organizations, public and private colleges, universities, public school teachers, public health departments, and community leadership training an essential point of administrative changes in Albanian public policies.

Thus, we may conclude that all reforms are made by people and for people. This is a point one should never forget.

7. Conclusions

From the analysis, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. The study of the degree of public awareness in the course of reforms and assessing their attitude to change is crucial in decision-making, because the reforms themselves are implemented to improve the lives of people and society. The approval of reforms helps to increase the level of understanding of the changes, support for them, and the desire to make efforts to bring about the reform's success. On the other hand, properly understanding the reasons and factors for opposing reforms allows a number of measures to be taken both to eliminate them and to properly inform the public about the content or need for change.
2. Ukrainians generally approve of decentralization reform, although their attitudes have fluctuated over the years. This fact, in our opinion, is associated with fear of change and distrust of the authorities, and the change in attitude was mainly due to changes that have occurred as a result of the reform.
3. The population of Ukraine is divided in its attitude to decentralization reform in terms of macro-regions. Given the fact that Ukraine is a multimillion-person nation with people living in a large area, such a situation, in general, cannot be considered extraordinary. In addition, the attitude toward reform is influenced by differences in the level of development of regions, differences in people's mentality, and successes and failures of novice communities.
4. At the end of the reform, the level of its support decreased both at the country level and in terms of macro-regions. This fact, on the one hand, is a threat to the further success of a reform; however, on the other hand, it can be explained by the argument that no reform immediately brings tangible positive results. At the same time, until there is solid evidence of success, in the first years after the reform is completed, the population faces changes that often force it to step out of the comfort zone. Thus, these conditional compromises and concessions on the part of the population with a certain lag are ahead of the positive effect of such changes. This allows us to hope for a further increase in the level of approval for reform in Ukraine in the medium term.
5. Assessing the attitude of Ukrainians toward reform helps to identify bottlenecks, shortcomings, and advantages of change, allowing them to more effectively plan and build a strategy for the future. The main problems we see are in the people's fear of change, distrust in authorities, and disproportionate regional development.
6. The European Parliament in its resolution from February 11, 2021 ([European Parliament Resolution of 11 February 2021 on the Implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine \(2019/2202\(INI\) 2019/2202\(INI\)\)](#)), named the decentralization reform in Ukraine one of the most successful reforms in the country. This can be considered an outstanding achievement of Ukrainians because, along with recommendations for monitoring progress in other areas of national reforms (the justice sector, anti-corruption, state-owned enterprises, corporate governance, and energy reforms), European Parliament called for the details of decentralization reforms to be studied closely and to use it as a successful case for other countries. Moreover, the resolution urges Ukraine to complete the decentralization reform in a broad and open dialogue, particularly with local self-governments and their associations; it suggests developing and implementing other crucial reforms in close cooperation with civil society. Thus, it is essential to note the involvement of the public in the reforms as a critical guarantee of their success in the long run. Its experience can be used in the implementation of other reforms in our country and similar reforms abroad. Due to this, we have developed an algorithm that includes the application of the experience of public opinion analysis in planning and carrying out reforms. It includes the

measures that can be taken in four stages (reform preparation, implementation, and functioning as well as planning more reform after).

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Appendix A

Table A1. Initial data for Figure 9 *.

		<i>million UAH.</i>
Macro-Region	Regions	Gross Regional Product
West	Volyn	75,620
	Rivne	67,363
	Lviv	214,400
	Ivano-Frankivsk	86,679
	Ternopil	57,140
	Zakarpattia	61,325
	Khmelnysky	83,006
	Chernivtsi	41,660
Center	Vynnytsia	129,097
	Zhytomyr	85,267
	Sumy	75,827
	Chernihiv	77,981
	Poltava	187,289
	Kirovohrad	73,066
	Cherkasy	103,466
Kyiv	218,647	
	Kyiv city	949,566

Table A1. Cont.

<i>million UAH.</i>		
Macro-Region	Regions	Gross Regional Product
South	Dnipropetrovsk	390,342
	Zaporizhzhia	155,158
	Mykolayiv	92,427
	Kherson	61,939
	Odesa	197,153
East	Donetsk	204,893
	Luhansk	40,291
	Kharkiv	247,596

* Data exclude the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, and temporarily occupied territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Appendix B

Table A2. Initial data for Figure 10 *.

<i>million UAH, excluding VAT and excise</i>		
Macro-Region	Regions	Industrial Products Sold
West	Volyn	31,606.1
	Rivne	42,807.0
	Lviv	105,286.7
	Ivano-Frankivsk	66,820.5
	Ternopil	20,756.6
	Zakarpattia	23,958.5
	Khmelnysky	43,323.8
Center	Chernivtsi	13,629.2
	Vinnytsia	81,494.0
	Zhytomyr	45,480.5
	Sumy	48,304.0
	Chernihiv	34,283.4
	Poltava	168,530.6
	Kirovohrad	32,255.6
South	Cherkasy	73,771.0
	Kyiv	120,769.8
	Kyiv city	232,979.5
	Dnipropetrovsk	454,124.0
	Zaporizhzhia	195,079.2
East	Mykolayiv	62,068.0
	Kherson	30,574.4
	Odesa	61,408.1
	Donetsk	283,946.0
East	Luhansk	21,908.5
	Kharkiv	185,639.2

* Data exclude the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, and temporarily occupied territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

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