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## Local democracy in Ukrainian cities: civic participation and responsiveness of local authorities

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This article examines local democracy in Ukrainian cities from the perspective of the local population, with a focus on citizen participation and city authorities' responsiveness to the concerns of local inhabitants. It draws on a survey of 2000 urban residents in 20 Ukrainian cities with a diversity of population size, administrative status, and geographic location. Correspondence analysis is used to show how different groups of the population are distributed along the two dimensions of responsiveness of local authorities and citizen participation. A typology of four ideal-types of city residents is elaborated: "alienated," "protesters," "compliant," and "interactive." The data reveal remarkably large differences among cities: from four to six of the cities are associated with each of the four typology categories based on the clustering patterns along the two dimensions. The main policy implication of the study is that general measures for local government reform should be combined with targeted measures directed at the various types of challenges experienced in different Ukrainian cities.

**Keywords:** Ukraine; local democracy; participation; responsiveness; governance

### Introduction

The effective functioning of local self-government is considered a key factor of democracy (Melo and Baiocchi 2006). Despite several reform initiatives and at least rhetorical commitment to decentralization reform made by numerous political leaders, Ukraine remains a highly centralized state (OECD 2013), a legacy of the communist era (Illner 1999). In his inauguration speech in July 2014, the country's newly elected president, Petro Poroshenko, highlighted the need to delegate powers from the center to local governments.<sup>1</sup> Not only must meaningful authority be devolved to local units of governance, the local authorities (LAs) must also be accessible and accountable to the local citizenry (Blair 2000). This requires active citizens who make their voices heard, as well as LAs who are responsive to citizens' concerns. Such interaction between citizen participation in political processes at the local level, and the perceived responsiveness of LAs toward their concerns, is the topic of this article.

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The article draws on a large-scale sociological survey among urban residents in Ukraine conducted in July 2014. The aim is first to examine variations in citizen participation and LA responsiveness, as seen from the perspective of local residents in a substantial number of Ukrainian cities. Although we are not in a position to draw firm conclusions about causal effects, we look into associations between these aspects of local democracy and several possible explanatory factors for variation among individuals. Secondly, we explore how public participation in local politics is interlinked with citizens' perceptions of the responsiveness of LAs. Do citizens who participate most actively in local politics also have the most positive perceptions of LAs' responsiveness? Or could there be compensatory mechanisms, whereby people who are less satisfied are more inclined to participate, hoping to change the state of affairs? We also note differences in this respect among the Ukrainian cities studied.

The article is structured as follows. After brief sections on local democracy, on local governance in Ukraine, and on data and methodology, the main substance of the article is devoted to survey findings. This is presented in three sections. In the first, we examine how respondents perceive various aspects of LA responsiveness, and how their perception is associated with attitudes and background characteristics of the respondents. In the second, we examine the patterns of citizens' involvement in local politics. In the third, of the sections that present survey findings, we explore the interlinkages between the two preceding aspects of local democracy and through correspondence analysis we identify the position of various population groups, with an emphasis on variation among the 20 cities covered in the survey. In the concluding section, the complex patterns that emerge from the analysis are discussed in more detail, and policy implications of the findings are suggested.

### **Local democracy and local self-governance in Ukrainian cities**

The local level is an important arena for the practice of democracy. It is at the local level that people encounter concrete social problems, and it is above all there that they expect the delivery of effective policies and solutions (Forbrig 2011). Therefore, the local level has been seen as the key location for the appearance and application of democratic initiatives that can eventually lead to transformation of the social and economic sectors in a state as a whole (see Putnam 1993).

The Ukrainian constitution guarantees the right of territorial communities to deal with local issues directly or through bodies of local self-governance.<sup>2</sup> However, unlike many other Central and East European countries, Ukraine has not undergone comprehensive decentralization reforms since becoming independent in 1991. A law on local self-governance in 1997,<sup>3</sup> granting considerable autonomy and power to local governments, has been followed by *de facto* state centralization since 2000. Decentralization reforms have come to a standstill, sometimes even moving backward (USAID 2014). The 1997 law and the current constitution, however, embody various possibilities for people to participate in decision-making processes – through access to information, individual and collective

proposals, public hearings, local initiatives, general meetings of citizens, bodies of self-organization, and others.

Despite the existence of various forms of citizens' influence on the authorities, a large segment of the population has remained detached from the processes of development, adoption, and implementation of governmental decisions. Moreover, many governmental institutions fail to use the existing potential for involving the citizenry in solving local problems. As a result, and as demonstrated by the country's recent history, low levels of openness, transparency, and responsiveness in government, lack of public access to administrative processes, the absence of effective dialogue between the authorities and the people, combined with a centralized system of power, can lead to conflicts and cause serious problems.

The country's administrative structure has its roots in the local state administration of the Soviet Union. The division of tasks between the central and sub-central levels, and the territorial structure itself, has been and is currently being debated.

Ukraine is a unitary state with a central government and a complex and asymmetric structure that includes three levels of sub-national government. The first of these levels is the regional (*oblast*) level, with 24 *oblasts*, the (contested) Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and two cities with special status – Kyiv and Sevastopol (the latter also contested). At the *oblast* level, two branches of power co-exist: the central government is represented by regional state administrations, and local self-government by regional councils. Regional councils are headed by chairpersons and do not have their own executive bodies. Their executive functions are performed by regional state administrations, whose chairpersons are appointed by the central government. The capital Kyiv also belongs to the first tier of sub-national government, but has an elected mayor and an executive body nominated by the country's president.

The second level consists of 490 districts (*rayon*). The structure of authority and power distribution at this level mirrors arrangements at the regional level: there are district state administrations as agents of the central government and district councils, which, according to the Act on Local Self-Government in Ukraine,<sup>4</sup> “represent the common interests of villages, towns and cities.” Chairpersons of regional and district councils are elected by and among members of these councils which, in turn, are elected by residents of the respective *oblast* or *rayon*.

The third (local) level consists of cities, towns, and villages. They can merge with each other and form special units of local self-government. Depending on what administrative status a city, town, or village has, the center of such a unit is called *miska rada*, *selyshna rada*, or *silska rada*, respectively.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, such units sometimes include local councils (one or several) of settlements that form this unit by themselves. For example, certain *miska rada* can include one or more *miska radas* that represent another city, which is a separate part of this unit, *selyshna radas*, and/or *silska radas*.

The main bodies of local self-government in every city are the city council, city mayor, and an executive committee. The city mayor and members of the city

council are elected on the basis of universal, equal, and direct suffrage by secret ballot every five years. Some big cities can be divided into several boroughs (*rayon v misti*) with their own bodies of local self-government – borough councils and/or executive (administrative) bodies of the all-city council. Ukraine has 111 *rayon v misti*, but not all of them have their own borough councils or executive bodies.

Thus, the administrative status of Ukrainian cities in Ukraine varies significantly (OECD 2013). Formally, there are no sub-ordinal relations between bodies of local self-government at different levels. However, in practice, a high-level council may try to dictate to a lower-level council what to do. In turn, local state administrations create a strict hierarchy and implement the policy of the central government at all sub-national levels.

At the regional and district levels there is a dual model of authority, apparent in tensions between the locally elected authorities and local state administrations appointed by the central government. On the other hand, the absence of executive bodies in regional and district councils sometimes leads to loss of responsibility or responsiveness of authorities as regards to carrying out their functions. This is due in part to a situation in which chairpersons and other high-ranking public officials of state administrations very often combine their position as agents of the central government with their position as members of local councils – virtually accountable only to themselves.

The existing legal framework limits the authority of elected bodies at the local level. Furthermore, mechanisms that guarantee that self-governance decisions are in line with legislation remain weak (Chumak and Shevliakov 2009). Moreover, there is not necessarily any correspondence between the legal status of appointed and elected local government bodies and individuals and institutions which hold real power (Kudelia 2012), and Ukrainian cities have seen various forms of power dynamics at play. Many factors – such as high levels of corruption, blurred divisions between politics and business, regional tensions, and lack of trust – determine who has formal power and who has informal influence. A sizable body of literature outlines many weaknesses facing local governance, such as insufficient clarity in the division of powers between LAs and the local bodies of state executive power (Chumak and Shevliakov 2009, 21); insufficient resources allocated to the sub-national levels (OECD 2013, 77); the lack of effective and rational bureaucracy, and the absence of institutional separation between economic and political spheres (USAID 2014, 8); and interference of the local state authorities in the activities of bodies of local self-governance (Babinova 2011, 100). Reforms of the local governance system also need to address the regional tensions that have been inflamed through the ongoing violent conflict in the east of the country. Furthermore, for citizens wishing to get involved in local politics, the lack of transparency in relationships, influences, and decision-making makes it difficult to understand how LAs work.

Babinova (2011) lists five factors that impede citizen involvement in local politics in Ukraine:

(1) The disinclination of power authorities and representatives of power to open their activity to the public; (2) the absence of legislative obligation and responsibility (not only opportunity) for local government bodies to involve the public in decision-making processes; (3) the concern among public servants that citizens, by their participation, will delay the process of decision-making; (4) lack of the knowledge and skills necessary for active participation in Ukrainian civil society; and (5) lack of information about governmental activity.

Despite the many challenges, there are also factors that are conducive to local government reform. The need for reform is recognized by all the major political parties and international donors and advisers, and ranks high on the political agenda of the current leadership. Civil society has been energized as a result of the Maidan uprising, and the people expect and demand change that can affect their lives positively.

On 1 April 2014, the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers approved the “Concept of Reforming Local Self-Governance Territorial Organization of Power in Ukraine.”<sup>6</sup> According to the Concept, not only local (city, town, and village) councils, but also regional and district councils will have their own executive bodies. The document stipulates that authority in the system of local self-government bodies at various administrative-territorial levels should be distributed according to principles of subsidiarity and decentralization. Further, local bodies of self-government are to be responsible to voters and the state. It provides for necessary resources (material, financial, and organizational) to local self-government bodies, improvement of the administrative and social services to be delivered to the population by the authorities, and the implementation of efficient mechanisms of public participation in decision-making processes.

In the first stage of the realization of the Concept (2014), it was planned: (1) to create the legal framework of administrative and territorial division; (2) to ensure the constitutional basis for establishing executive bodies of *oblast* and *rayon* councils; (3) to define the competences of local self-government bodies and local state administrations; (4) to introduce a mechanism of direct popular rule; (5) to improve legal regulation of procedures of general meetings of citizens and provide additional guarantees for the operation of bodies of self-organization; and (6) to create favorable legal conditions for broad public involvement in decision-making by bodies of local self-government. At the time of writing, these ambitious plans have not yet been realized. Decentralization remains rather theoretical, and local government in Ukraine continues to suffer from lack of reform.

### **Data and methodology**

The survey reported in this article was initiated by the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) and organized in collaboration with the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities and the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research within the framework of the project “Evidence-Based Local Government Policy Development in Ukraine,” financed by the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of Norway. Professional pollsters conducted the interviews, with local interview corps throughout Ukraine.

The data were collected in July 2014 in the form of personal interviews in the respondents' homes, using an eight-page questionnaire that could be answered in Ukrainian or in Russian. On average an interview took 30 min. The data were transformed into computer-readable form using advanced statistical software (SPSS).

The two-stage sample was based, first, on purposeful selection of 20 Ukrainian cities, chosen to provide variation in terms of geographic location, population size, and administrative status. The sample included the capital, ten cities of *oblast* significance, and the remaining nine cities of *rayon* significance. Of the latter nine cities, the majority (seven cities) have more than 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>7</sup>

Second, a total of 100 respondents were then randomly selected in each city. The selection was based on quotas for age and gender groups, as well as geographical distribution in the city.<sup>8</sup> In all, 2000 respondents were interviewed. Because of the large number and variation of cities as well as the large number of respondents included, we feel confident that much of the variation among the Ukrainian urban population has been covered.

As in any survey, data reliability is also affected by the response rate. For this survey, the response rate was 37%. The most commonly given reasons for non-response were lack of time (29%), refusal without giving a reason (24%), refusal to open the door (19%), lack of trust in the interviewers (14%), and health reasons (10%). It should be stressed that the survey was conducted at a time when the political situation in the country was particularly tense. Furthermore, the situation differed significantly from one part of the county to another. It is difficult to estimate how much this affected the survey results, and whether it affected results in different cities to differing extents. Anecdotal reports from the interviewers indicate that proximity to military operations, fear of interviewers being recruiters to military service (especially in Berdiansk), and general social unrest may have had a certain adverse effect on people's willingness to participate and to give frank responses. However, the fact that the pollsters were local residents familiar with local conditions, and were not connected with local or national government structures, seems to have provided some reassurance about the impartiality of the survey. Indeed, several respondents expressed appreciation for its timeliness and relevance. On the whole, then, we feel there is good reason to assume that the survey provides a fairly reliable picture of how urban residents in Ukraine perceived local governance at a turbulent time.

The collection, storage, and analysis of the survey data are based on compliance with ethical standards and protection of the rights of the survey participants regarding voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

### **Local authorities' responsiveness to citizens' concerns**

Responsiveness presupposes first that local public servants are accountable to locally elected representatives and, secondly, that elected representatives are

accountable to the local population (Smith 2007, 105). While the first aspect is undoubtedly a challenge in Ukraine, where the division of tasks and responsibilities between state administration and elected representatives is not always clearly defined (Babinova 2011), it is the second aspect that is highlighted here. However, since members of the public are not always able to distinguish between administration and elected council members at the local level, it was decided that the questions asked should refer to “the LAs” in general.

Respondents were asked a series of questions about the responsiveness of the LAs to citizens. The responses give a rather bleak impression of the perceptions of ordinary Ukrainian citizens toward their local government. Figure 1 shows the mean response for each of the items asked, ranging from 1 (disagree completely) to 4 (agree completely). Answers were particularly negative when respondents were asked whether they believed that members of the public can influence decisions of the LAs. Only 1% agree fully and 14% “tend to agree” with this statement, while as many as 42% disagree fully and 36% disagree partly. The remaining 7% either find it hard to answer, or refuse. Respondents are particularly skeptical toward the LAs’ ability to handle financial resources: very few believe that the authorities distribute

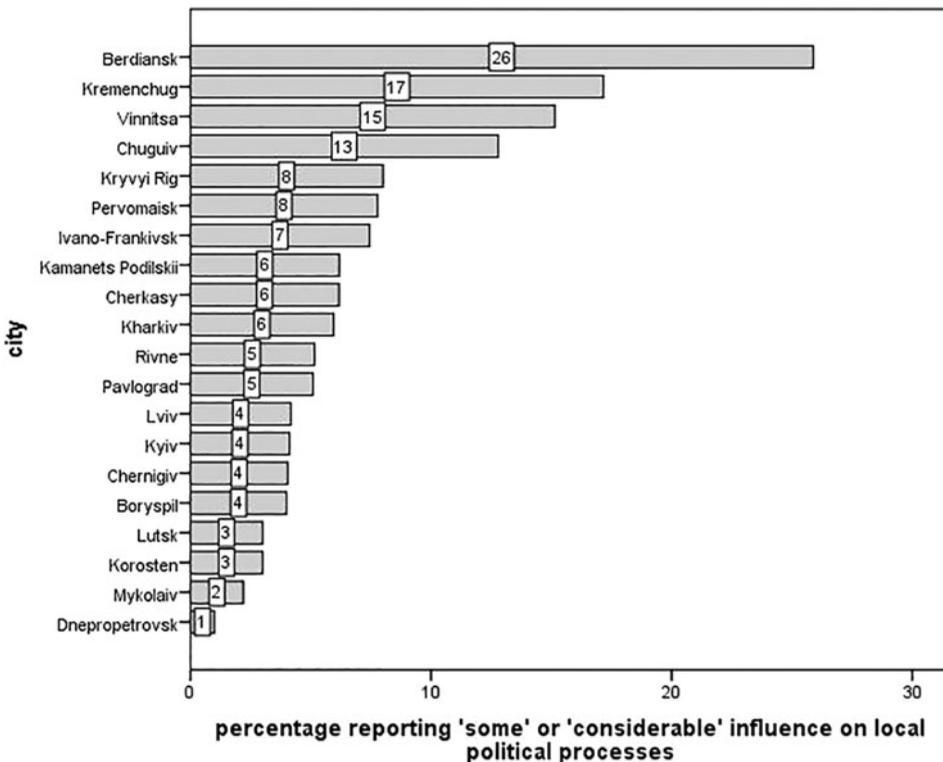


Figure 1. Evaluation of local authorities’ responsiveness. Mean score on a scale from 1 (fully disagree with statement) to 4 (fully agree with statement) ( $n = 1871$ ; responses for “do not know” and “refuse to answer” [varies for the different items] have been removed). Source: AUC Local Democracy Survey 2014.

resources efficiently or inform the public about how they use the money derived from taxes; and many respondents appear to believe that LAs misuse their position for personal gain. Slightly better, though arguably still quite unsatisfactory, performance on the part of LAs is reported when it comes to “generally listening to the opinion of the public” and “informing them about relevant issues.”

Further analysis (reliability analysis) confirmed a very high correlation between the items,<sup>9</sup> making it reasonable to assume that the battery of questions provides a robust and reliable measurement of respondents’ perceptions of the responsiveness of LAs. An index was made, “LAs responsiveness,” ranging from 1 (respondent fully disagrees with all 9 statements) to 4 (full agreement with all items). The mean index score was 2.0, indicating a tendency toward partial disagreement with the listed items.

What factors can explain the individual scores on the index? Regression analysis provides some hints. We performed a linear regression with the index score as the dependent variable, and the following independent variables:

- Level of political activity (index).
- Interest in local politics (four-point scale).
- Trust in societal institutions (index).
- Belief in own ability to influence decision-making (four-point scale).
- Size of city (small,<sup>10</sup> ordinary city, city of regional significance, capital city).
- Region’s political affiliation (whether majority voted for Yanukovich or Timoshenko in the 2010 presidential elections).<sup>11</sup>
- Household standard of living, subjective (four-point scale).
- Level of education (five-point scale).
- Gender.
- Age (in years).

**Table 1** presents the results of the linear regression analysis. The explanatory power of the model is rather strong, indicated by an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.36. This means that as much as 36% of the variation on the index score can be ascribed to the responses to the independent variables in the model. Several of the independent variables have a statistically significant correlation with the dependent variable (responsiveness index) when controlling for the other variables in the model.

The level of trust in a variety of societal institutions is clearly the independent variable in the model with the strongest correlation with people’s perception of the LAs’ responsiveness, as seen by the value of the standardized coefficient. The more people express trust in these institutions, the more are they inclined to report that the LAs are responsive to the needs of the citizens. The link between degree of social trust and evaluation of LAs is hardly a surprising finding, but it is worth noting that Ukraine is among the European countries with the lowest levels of trust in institutions and the government (Zmerli 2012, 120). This may help in explaining the poor evaluation of LA responsiveness as well. What is the cause and what is the effect could be debated, however, since poor responsiveness on the part of government institutions may correspondingly explain the low level of trust expressed by Ukrainians. Of the eleven institutions listed in our survey, highest

Table 1. Multiple linear regression.

	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard error	Standardized coefficient	Significance
Constant	1.23	0.13		0.000
Small city (vs. city of regional significance)	0.15	0.05	0.08	0.001**
Ordinary city (vs. city of regional significance)	0.30	0.03	0.23	0.000**
Capital city (vs. city of regional significance)	-0.16	0.09	-0.04	0.074
Sex (male = low)	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.904
Age group (low = low age)	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.376
Trust index (low = low trust)	0.04	0.00	0.53	0.000**
Political participation index (high = high level)	0.02	0.01	0.08	0.002**
Expressed interest in local politics (high = very interested)	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.156
Subjective living standard (high = high standard)	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.752
Educational level (high = high education)	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.105
Perceived influence on decision-making (high = high influence)	0.01	0.00	0.06	0.015*
Oblast political allegiance (low = support for Yanukovich)	-0.10	0.03	-0.08	0.003**

\*Significant at 0.05 level; \*\*significant at 0.01 level.

<sup>a</sup>Dependent variable is responsiveness index. High value = perceived high responsiveness ( $n = 1944$ ; individuals responding to less than four of the responsiveness items were not included in the regression).

Source: AUC Local Democracy Survey 2014.<sup>a</sup>

trust levels were expressed toward the President of Ukraine, then toward the city mayor, civil society organizations, and, in fourth place, local councils. Thus, it seems LAs on average enjoy somewhat higher trust levels than most other government institutions.

The size and type of the city where the respondent lives have a considerable effect on the score on the dependent variable. Highest responsiveness on the part of LAs is reported in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, but *not* the cities of *oblast* significance or the capital – the two city types where people consider LAs to be least responsive to citizens. However, whether and how size matters is difficult to say, as there could be specific features of the selected cities that explain this variation.

Participation in civil society organizations increases the likelihood of expressing a positive opinion on LA responsiveness. Civic participation can, in addition to trust, be considered a dimension of social capital (Bjørnskov 2006), which appears closely associated with perceptions of LA responsiveness.

However, personal political interest, as expressed subjectively by survey respondents, does not have a statistically significant effect on the responsiveness index score, as shown by [Table 1](#).

The east/west divide has been a recurrent theme in analyses of Ukrainian politics. Our survey results indicate that residence in the western or eastern part of the country has a modest effect on the dependent variable: In Western Ukraine, respondents are slightly more likely to indicate high responsiveness of LAs than are residents in the east. Again, differences are minor, and might perhaps be ascribed to the specific cities included in the survey. Individual cities show great variation among themselves (not shown here), so the inclusion or exclusion of certain cities could have changed the aggregate results slightly.

Yet another independent variable with a statistically significant effect is the respondent's own evaluation of his or her opportunity to influence decision-making locally. The greater this opportunity is perceived to be, the more prone is the respondent to consider LAs to be responsive to citizens' needs.

Finally, it is noteworthy that background variables like the age, gender, and educational level of the respondent do not have statistically significant effects on the responsiveness index score, after controlling for all the other variables in the model. The same is the case with respondents' living standards.

### **Political participation: do citizens have a meaningful role in local government decisions that affect them?**

Citizens' participation at the local level may take many various forms. It is common to operationalize the concept by differentiating between community or social participation, usually in the civil society sphere, on the one hand, and political participation in the form of voting, political party, and other political activities on the other. Also, participation is often seen in relation to the broader idea of citizenship, by linking the aforementioned forms of participation to the state (Gaventa and Valderrama 1999). Full citizenship can be realized only if people have opportunities for actual influence on political processes. It is also hard to imagine it being realized without knowledge about – and a certain level of interest in – politics. We chose to concentrate on three aspects of participation. First, we looked at different forms of political participation. Secondly, we asked about membership and involvement in civil society organizations. Thirdly, we asked about (perceived) opportunities to influence politics.

Respondents were asked whether they had participated in various political activities in the past year. The most common form of activity was voting in elections. However, since not all regions of Ukraine organized local elections in 2014, these results cannot be compared among the cities. A better indicator is official election turnout, which was reported to be around 60% in the May 2014 elections.

[Figure 2](#) shows the percentage of respondents that participated in various other forms of political activity locally during the previous 12 months. The most common forms of participation were meetings with representatives of the city council, attending general public meetings, and public meetings with the mayor.

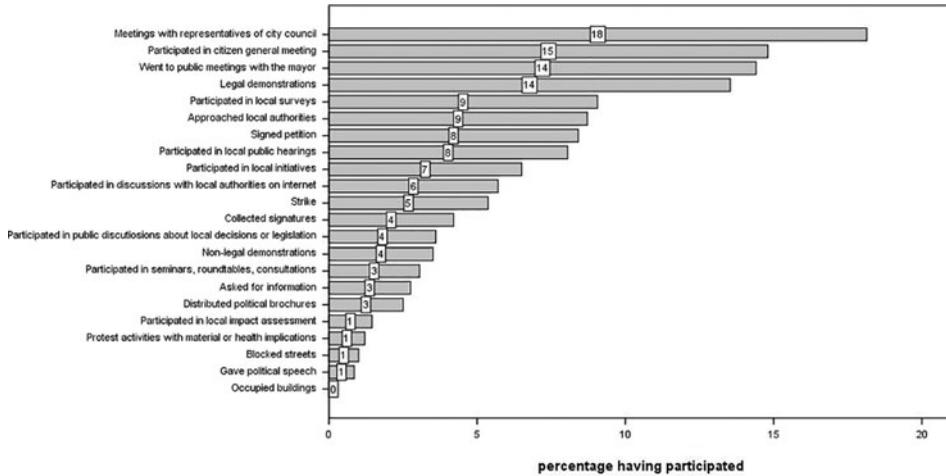


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents having participated in a variety of political activities during the previous 12 months ( $n = 1970$ ; responses for “do not know” and “refuse to answer” [varies for the different items] have been removed). *Source*: AUC Local Democracy Survey 2014.

Thus, it seems the LAs’ mandatory meetings with citizens draw a considerable audience. Legal demonstrations can also be found near the top of the list – as could be expected, in view of political developments in Ukraine in the winter and spring of 2014. However, the more aggressive forms of political activity (blocking off streets, occupation of buildings, protest activities with material or health implications) gathered only a tiny share of the population.

These latter types of participation are not highly correlated with the other types of political activities listed. In constructing a participation index, we decided not to include them.<sup>12</sup> In the political participation index that we constructed (with 18 possible types of activities), more than 60% reported not having participated in any of the listed activities, while less than 10% said they had participated in four or more types of activity.

In addition to the survey, 15 cities provided official statistical information on public participation in their city. Comparative statistical analysis revealed that our survey data yielded higher (sometimes substantially higher) levels of public participation than indicated by official data, including data of the Central Election Commission concerning election turnout. One explanation could be that participation in the survey is strongly correlated with the likelihood of voting in elections and other forms of active participation in the urban communities. An additional explanation could be particularly high levels of activity in Ukrainian cities during the months preceding the survey, which was a turbulent time with major political transformations throughout the country.

Moreover, in some cities, respondents reported that they had participated in various forms of political activity not documented in available official statistics.

For example, in some cities up to 18% reported that they had participated in the promotion of local initiatives, even when city officials denied that there were such local initiatives. This may indicate a different interpretation by the authorities and ordinary residents of some of the terms related to public participation (in this case, “local initiatives”) in decision-making processes. Some respondents tended to apply a free interpretation of these terms, using their own intuitive perceptions rather than strict statutory definitions. By contrast, the data provided by the authorities were largely based on statutory expositions as proclaimed in the law.

Further analysis of the data (not shown here) indicates, not surprisingly, that higher educational levels are associated with higher levels of political participation. Furthermore, people living in the capital and in cities of *oblast* significance tend to be somewhat more politically active than residents of smaller cities. However, we found no statistically significant correlation between gender, age, or subjectively assessed living standards on the one hand, and political participation on the other.

Previous studies of civil society participation in Ukraine have reported an alarmingly low level of organizational membership,<sup>13</sup> also confirmed in our survey. Only 4% of our respondents hold membership in an NGO, and of these slightly more than half said that they participate actively. Other forms of civil society membership that we asked about confirm the same picture (active membership in parentheses): political party 2% (1%); condominium 3% (1%); street/neighborhood committee 1% (1%).

In addition, other types of civil society organizations which had less than 1% membership were listed. Only 9% of the respondents reported any form of civil society membership at all. Civil society membership and activity displayed similar patterns of correlation with other variables, as found for political activity.

However, even if membership levels are low, previous studies have shown that Ukrainians prefer to participate in civil society outside organized bodies, and refer to a relatively wide range of common civil society activities (Stewart 2009). Perhaps our survey data underestimate the true extent of civil society activity in the cities selected. Nor should we underrate the strong social mobilization that has taken place through civil society activity in Ukraine at various crucial junctures of history. Whether civil society in Ukraine should be considered “strong” or “weak” would require a more thoroughgoing assessment than allowed for in this article (see, e.g., USAID 2014; Way 2014).

Whether people choose to participate or not in politics may depend on whether they believe that their participation matters and they have possibilities of influencing politics locally. Such perceptions are not very widespread in the cities surveyed, however. Two-thirds of our respondents felt that they did not have any influence at all on the processes that underlie decisions made at the local level. A further 20% believe that they have some minimal influence, 6% say that they have some influence, and only 1% claim to have considerable influence. There is considerable variation among cities. While 26% of the respondents in Berdiansk say that they have at least some influence on local politics, in Dnepropetrovsk, a mere 1% hold this to be the case (see Figure 3).

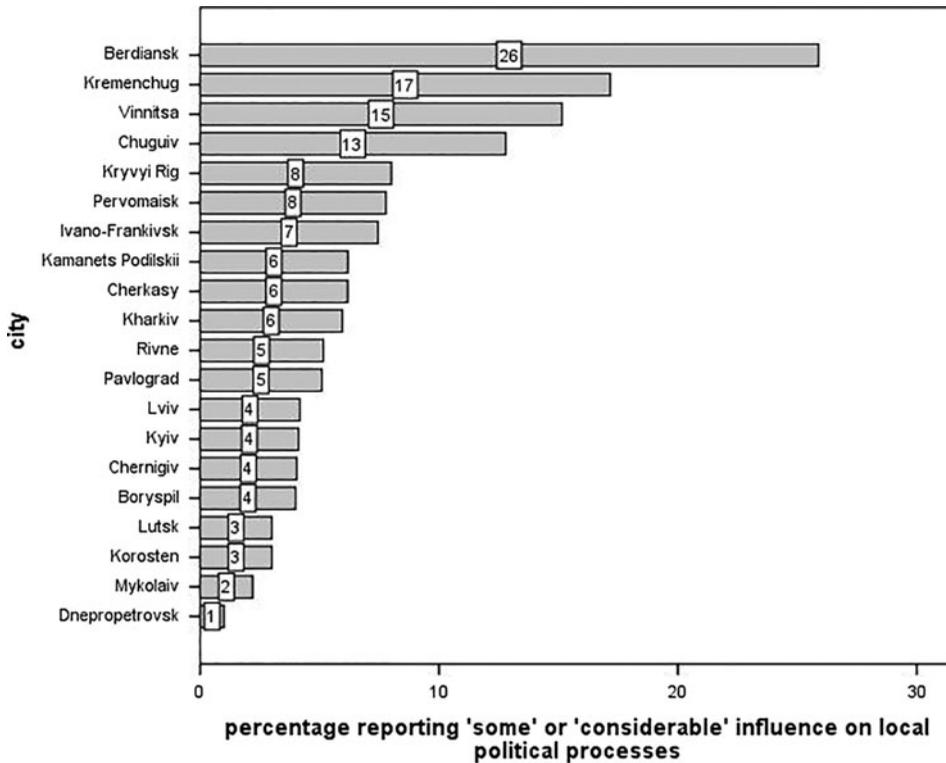


Figure 3. Perceived level of influence on local political processes by city ( $n = 1893$ ; responses for “do not know” and “refuse to answer” [varies for the different items] have been removed). *Source*: AUC Local Democracy Survey 2014.

When people were asked what they saw as the biggest obstacles to having such influence, the following factors were most commonly mentioned:

- My efforts would be useless (36%).
- Lack of time (16%).
- Poor legislative base (15%).
- Lack of knowledge of legislation (12%).
- Not interested in this (11%).
- Threats or resistance from the authorities (7%).
- Lack of like-minded persons (5%).

Thus, respondents give a mixture of individual and structural explanations for why they feel they have little or no influence over local political processes.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the most frequently mentioned obstacle by far is the sense of futility in engaging in political processes. This was confirmed by responses to the question asking whether respondents believe that their opinions are taken into account by the LAs (see Figure 4). We see that more than half the respondents feel that the LAs do not take their opinions into account in decision-making. Around one-third of the respondents are unsure, whereas only 15% believe that their views might be taken

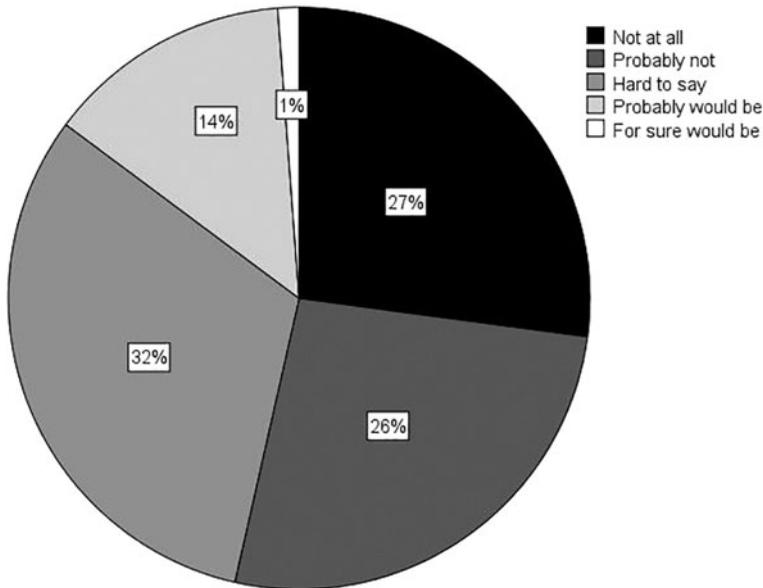


Figure 4. Belief that own opinions are taken into account when local authorities make decisions ( $n = 1944$ ; response for “refuse to answer” (3% in total) has been removed). *Source*: AUC Local Democracy Survey 2014.

into account (a tiny 1% is sure about this). Both reported living standards and the educational level of the respondent show a statistically significant correlation with the responses to this question. The better the living conditions and higher education reported, the more likely the respondent is to believe that his or her opinions will be taken into account.

### Correspondence analysis of civic participation and perceptions of local governance

Correspondence analysis is a data analysis tool that enables underlying structures in a dataset to be revealed. It summarizes the relationship among categorical variables in a large table, and provides a visual presentation that facilitates a holistic interpretation of trends in the data. Categories with similar distributions are represented as points that are close in space, whereas categories with very dissimilar distributions are positioned far apart (Clausen 1998). Correspondence analysis has developed from French social sciences, and many social scientists encountered it the first time in Pierre Bourdieu’s map of distribution of cultural and economic capital in his *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984, 260–263).

Thus far we have examined how people in selected Ukrainian cities perceive various aspects of local governance, as well as their own prospects of participation and being heard. We have found a strong correlation between some variables and a lack of correlation between others.

The underlying patterns in the data are illustrated in the correspondence plot shown in Figure 5. It includes the variables denoting perceptions, actions, and

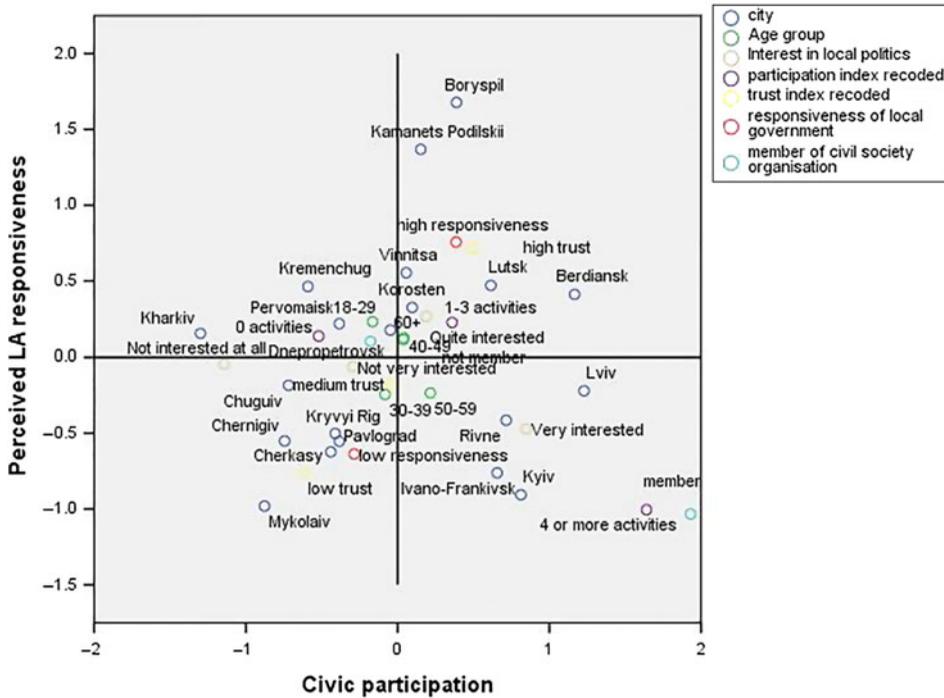


Figure 5. Correspondence analysis.

some key background characteristics (age and gender). Each city from which respondents in the survey have been selected is also included in the plot. As the plot is rather complex, we will go through it step by step.

The correspondence analysis produces two dimensions. The horizontal dimension we interpret as reflecting political engagement and activity levels of the individual. On the left-hand side are people who lack interest in local politics, who report low civil society membership, and who have participated in few political activities. On the right-hand side are the politically active (relatively speaking) citizens, with interest in local politics, and higher-than-average participation levels. We term this dimension “civic participation” (Figure 6).

The vertical dimension can be read as a reflection of the perception of the responsiveness of LAs to the needs of citizens: “perceived LA responsiveness.” In the lower part, we find respondents who perceive the LAs to be unresponsive to citizens (“do not take ordinary people’s opinions into account, misuse their powers for personal gains,” etc.). Those who tend to consider the LAs as being responsive to the needs the citizenry are located at the top end of the plot. This dimension is also associated with the level of institutional trust – as could have been expected, given the strong association between these variables shown in the regression analysis (Figure 7).

It should be noted that the location in the plot gives average positions of the different groups and categories, and may hide considerable internal variation

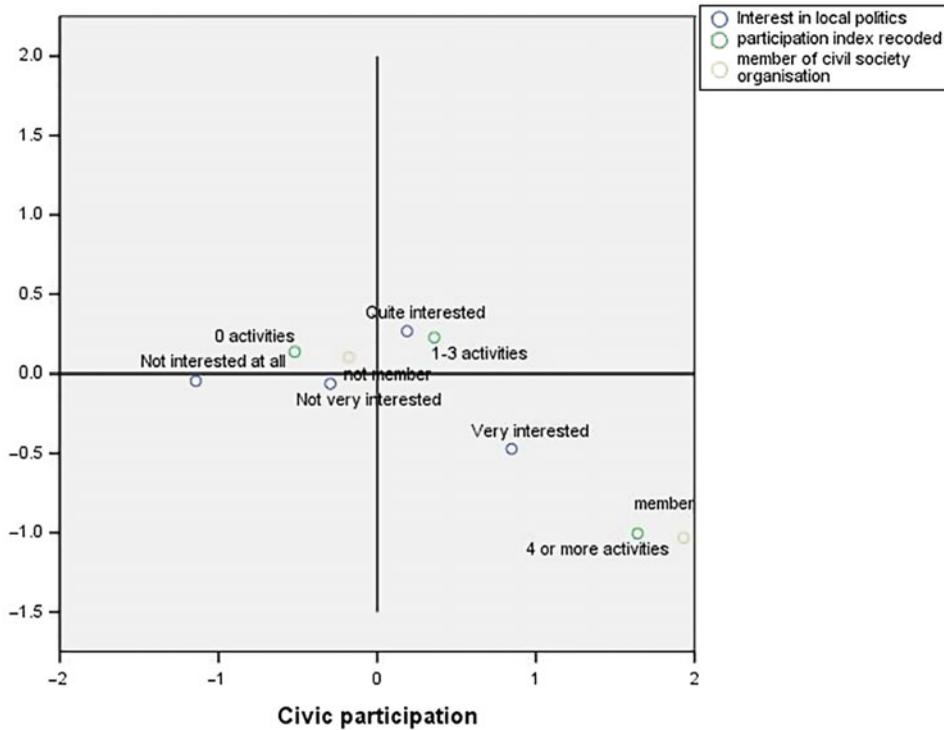


Figure 6. Correspondence analysis: civic participation dimension.

among different categories of respondents. Moreover, an apparently high score on one dimension does not necessarily mean a high score in objective terms, as both responsiveness and engagement levels are low in Ukraine, and the plot reflects relative levels.

Based on the score on the two dimensions we can identify four “ideal types” of citizens (see Figure 8). In the lower left part of the plot, we find the “alienated” ones. These are people who are dissatisfied with the authorities and have low trust in institutions. Still, they do not engage in political or civil society activities and do not follow politics. What it is that alienates people from political life is not evident. It could be their own lack of resources, but it could also be poor governance at the local level, making it impossible to get through to the authorities.

The second type is labeled “protesters” (found at the lower right-hand side). These are people who are not satisfied with LA responsiveness and do not trust institutions. Nevertheless they choose to engage politically and in civil society activities, apparently in order to change the state of affairs. At the top left are people who we could call “compliant.” They are not overly unhappy about the performance of local government, but they are passive and are neither interested nor involved in political or civil society activities themselves. The final type (at the top right) is the “interactive” citizen. These are engaged individuals who interact with

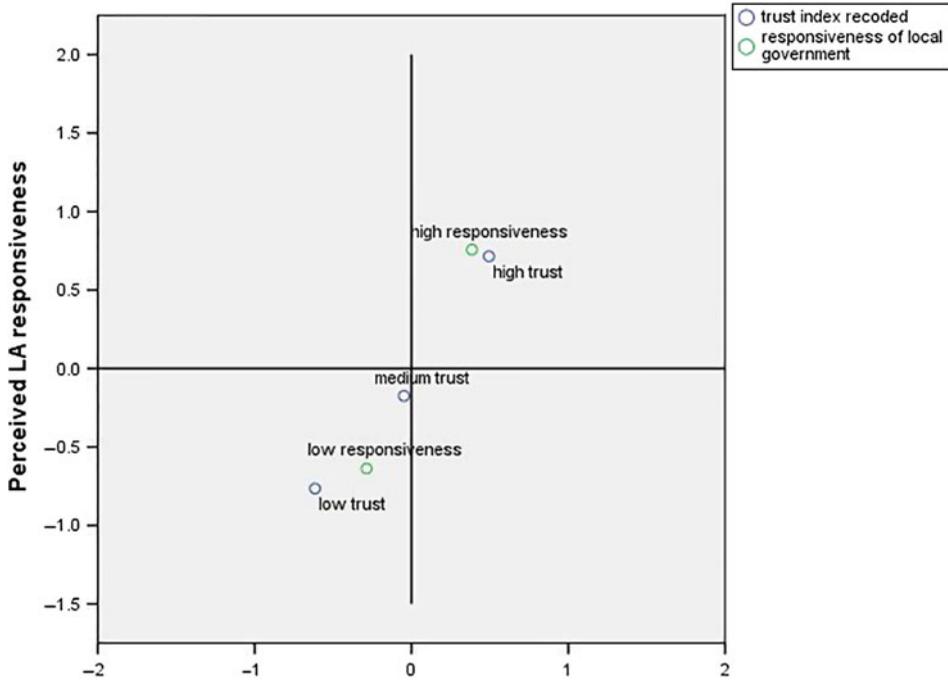


Figure 7. Correspondence analysis: perceived LA responsiveness dimension.

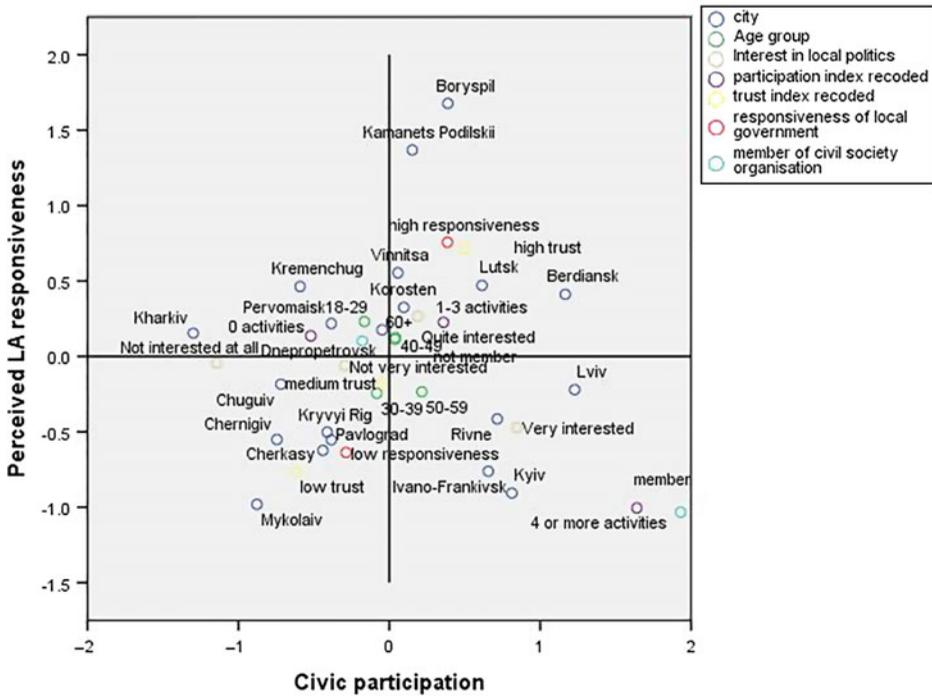


Figure 8. Correspondence analysis: “ideal-types” of citizens.

and tend to respond positively regarding the LAs. They tend to believe in their own efforts and opportunity to affect political processes, and feel they can do this in an environment of at least relatively responsive LAs.

While respondents' gender and age are not associated with high or low scores on the two dimensions,<sup>15</sup> we can note that respondents in the 20 Ukrainian cities surveyed are remarkably scattered around the correspondence analysis plot (see Figure 9). This attests to a very diverse picture, where the LAs are perceived in very different ways by the local population. There also appear to be strikingly different patterns of civic participation in the cities surveyed. From four to six cities are confined within the four different parts of the plot; each is associated with an "ideal-type" citizen (see Table 2).

The cities are not distributed in the plot according to a strict east/west divide. Nevertheless, a fairly strong relation can be observed between civic participation levels and geographical location. Respondents living in the west of Ukraine (in Ivano-Frankivsk, Lutsk, Lviv, Kamanets Podilskii, Korosten, Rivne, and Vinnitsa) tend to demonstrate higher levels of civic participation than do respondents from other cities. We feel that differences in social capital and civic culture between the

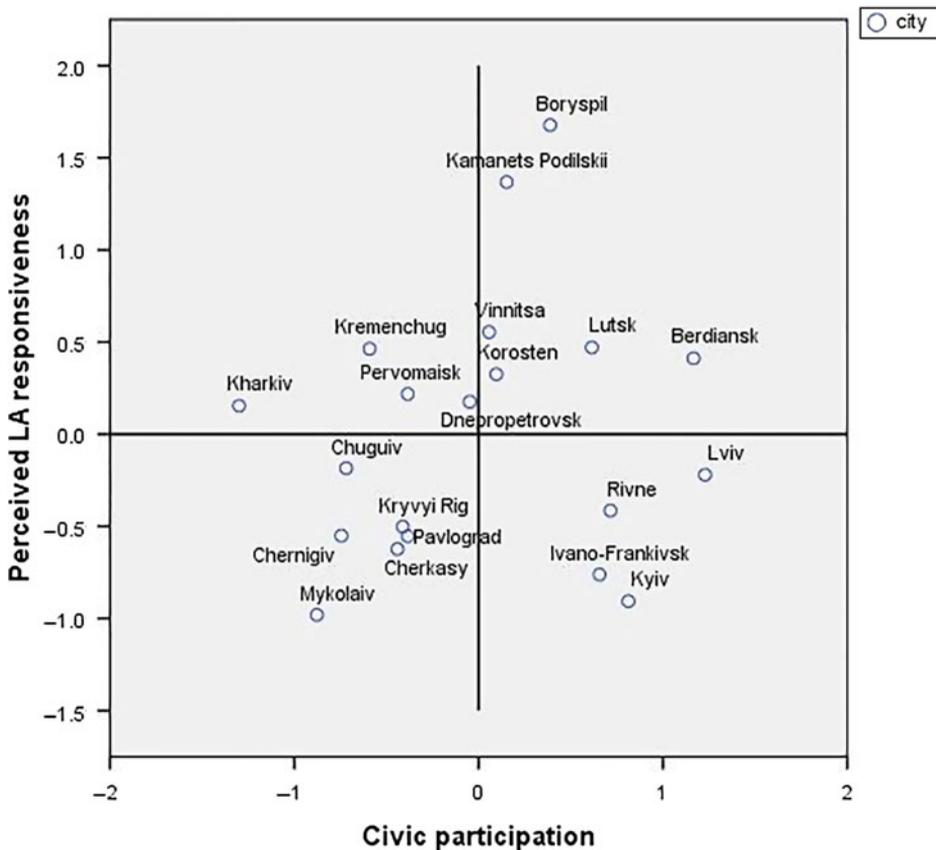


Figure 9. Correspondence analysis: distribution of cities.

Table 2. Patterns of “citizen types” in 20 Ukrainian cities.<sup>a</sup>

Alienated	Protesters	Compliant	Interactive
Cherkasy	Ivano-Frankivsk	Dnepropetrovsk	<b>Berdiansk</b>
Chernigiv	Kyiv	Kharkiv	Boryspil
Chuguiv	<b>Lviv</b>	<b>Kremenchug</b>	Kamanets Podilskii
Kryvyi Rig	Rivne	Pervomaisk	Korosten
Mykolaiv			Lutsk
Pavlograd			Vinnitsa

<sup>a</sup> Identified by correspondence analysis. The most distinctive cases are indicated in bold type.

west and the southeast of Ukraine are likely to be important explanations for this finding, analogous to what Putnam (1993) found in southern and northern Italy.

Furthermore, cities are not distributed according to their size or administrative status. It seems that individual qualities in each city matter, and that local governance in Ukraine should not be considered a uniform phenomenon. Here we cannot go into great detail about specific characteristics of each of the 20 cities studied. However, from qualitative inputs from city representatives participating in project network meetings, we hypothesize that aspects such as social capital, civic culture, social cohesion, and the institutional framework of each city may be of great significance.

### Conclusions and policy implications

Drawing on a survey of 2000 urban residents in Ukraine, this article has examined local government responsiveness in Ukrainian cities from the perspective of the local population. Particular emphasis has been placed on the interlinkages between how people perceive the responsiveness of LAs and their own level of participation in political processes. First, we found that people in general have a rather negative perception of the responsiveness of their LAs. Lack of institutional trust in all types of societal institutions is the single factor with the most negative effect on how people evaluate their LAs. Second, we found very low activity levels among ordinary Ukrainian citizens, in terms of political activity, participation in civil society organizations, as well as perceived influence on local politics. Still, various types of public meetings – a mandatory mode of local governance set out in Ukrainian legislation – stood out as the most-reported form of activity.

Correspondence analysis showed how respondents are clustered along the two dimensions of LA responsiveness and civic participation. Based on position along these two dimensions, a typology of four “ideal-types” of local residents was elaborated: “alienated,” “protesters,” “compliant,” and “interactive.” The data revealed remarkably large differences among the 20 cities. We identified six cities where respondents were clustered in the “alienated” type, another six in the “interactive” type, and the remaining eight were evenly distributed between “protesters” and “compliant.”

Thus, it appears that people differ greatly in their strategies for relating to the LAs. Achieving a thriving local democracy will require more “interactive” citizens who participate and take an interest in decision-making, in a setting where the LAs are responsive to those they are meant to serve. The most uplifting finding from this study is probably that several Ukrainian cities already show signs of such an interactive environment. In other words, the lack of decentralization reform and the rather weak development of civil society have not hindered the development of more dynamic relations between LAs and the citizenry, in certain cities at least. A mixture of civic and political culture, higher levels of social capital, as well as strong local social cohesion are likely factors that can explain why some cities (usually from the western part of the country) seem to have a much more positive environment for local democracy than others.

Respondents in some cities say they are relatively satisfied with their LAs, but instead of personal engagement, they rely on their leaders to be in charge and disconnect themselves from politics (the “compliant” respondents). From the survey data, it appears that outright fear of participation is not a major concern: more common is the feeling that own efforts would not matter and one’s voice would not be heard. Many people opt to focus on their individual and family lives, leaving “dirty politics” to others. This strategy could work fairly well in good times, but might prove risky if the LAs are replaced by leaders less committed to the needs of the people. Such a strategy also neglects important channels of policy feedback from the general public to the authorities.

The “protesters” identified by the survey data might be people who in a situation of high political turmoil have seen a window of opportunity for real political change and replacing their leaders. In the winter and spring of 2013/2014, the Ukrainian people showed that it is possible to achieve substantial political transformation through active participation and protest movements. However, in a country with a “winner-take-all” political culture, most people lack practical experience from involvement in day-to-day management of policy processes, seeking compromises, and achieving results through ordinary political work. It therefore remains to be seen whether this higher political engagement will translate into more active citizen involvement in local politics, and whether new local leaders will prove more responsive to the population.

The most critical situation is found in cities with a local population characterized by what we have called “alienation”: respondents say that the city authorities perform poorly, but the people themselves have neither the will nor the resources to engage in local politics. There seems often to be a vicious circle of poor governance, which reduces trust among the local population, in turn widening the gap between those who govern and those who are governed. With low trust in institutions at the national and local levels, people in these cities have little hope of improvements. And they exclude themselves or are excluded from participation.

What then are the main policy implications of our findings? First, greater attention should be devoted to strengthening local democracy in Ukraine. The general low levels of perceived responsiveness of LAs among urban dwellers must be seen as far from satisfactory, and the low levels of participation and

engagement in local politics are likely to be significant obstacles to well-functioning local democracies.

Second, general measures for local government reform should be combined with targeted measures directed at the various types of challenges experienced in different cities across the country. In some places the focus should be on enhancing responsiveness on the part of LAs through measures such as training of local council members, greater transparency on the use of local government budgets, implementing anti-corruption measures, and so on. In other cities the focus should be on how to increase popular involvement in local-level processes, through measures such as public meetings, public hearings, advisory committees, better media coverage of local politics, encouragement of citizen approaches toward LAs, and the like. Special attention should be devoted to cities faced with the combined challenge of unresponsive local leaders and passive citizens – which, according to our data, make up a considerable share of Ukrainian cities. In such places, it would be useful to promote broad educational and informational campaigns directed toward LAs as well as the general population. The aim of such campaigns should be to enhance public awareness of local democracy and its benefits, fostering a sense of responsibility among residents and LAs alike for their community, and for their city in general.

The third policy implication of our findings would be that intensification of citizens' participation in local politics requires activism on the part of urban dwellers, their aspirations and persistency, as well as relevant activities of the city authorities, their openness and willingness to work together with the public. One example to follow could be Berdiansk (the only city from the south and east of Ukraine found to be “interactive”), which has demonstrated considerable proficiency in communicating with the public through bodies of self-organization and is one of the leaders in Ukraine in this respect. Ideally, judging from survey findings and other information and practical experience, every city should develop its own strategy of community involvement in local governance, providing a holistic approach to addressing this complex issue.

While local government reform in Ukraine has been highlighted on many occasions, by various political leaders and under different political regimes, the concrete outcomes have so far been quite modest. There is now fear that despite Poroshenko's apparent commitment to strengthening the local level and new initiatives toward this end, more attention may be directed toward solving the pressing issues concerning the separatist regions and the serious economic challenges facing the country. In addition, too many national leaders have a vested interest in preserving the high level of centralization of the state which, they seem to believe, gives them more control over regional and local developments.

Whether Ukraine will undertake a comprehensive program for local government reform still remains to be seen. Our survey data have shown that, at the current stage of local government development, there is substantial variation among cities regarding civic participation and responsiveness of LAs. This is a clear indication that the quality of local democracy does not depend solely on

processes and reforms initiated at the central level: local policymakers and the general public may have a crucial and independent impact on the outcomes.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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### Notes

1. Available at <http://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/30488.html> (accessed 19 January 2015).
2. See <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/section/constitutions/country/52> (accessed 23 February 2015).
3. See [http://www.urban.org/pdf/ukr\\_locgov.pdf](http://www.urban.org/pdf/ukr_locgov.pdf) (accessed 23 February 2015).
4. Act on Local Self-government in Ukraine (<http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/280/97-%D0%B2%D1%80>; accessed 4 February 2015).
5. Strictly speaking, in Ukrainian terms *miska rada*, *selyshna rada*, and especially *silska rada* can have two meanings: (1) special administrative-territorial unit, which merges two or more cities, towns, or villages; (2) local council (*rada* means “council”) – an elected collegial body of local self-government.
6. See <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/333-2014-%D1%80> (accessed 4 February 2015).
7. Because the sample was not randomly selected, we cannot speak of a truly representative sample. The 15 cities participating in the Ukrainian–Norwegian project were supplemented with five additional cities so as to yield better representation of geographic, administrative, and size variations among Ukrainian cities in the sample. The survey is based on a sample of *cities*, not rural areas, and is therefore likely to be more representative of urban residents than of the whole Ukrainian population (however, 70% of the total population of Ukraine live in urban areas). For a complete listing of the individual cities see [Figure 3](#) and [Table 2](#).
8. It was particularly difficult to meet the quota for men aged 18–35.
9. Reliability analysis yielded a Chronbach’s Alpha of 0.91.
10. Less than 100,000 inhabitants.
11. It should be noted that this variable could also be interpreted as a south/east–north/west distinction that should not necessarily be interpreted solely as indicating political affiliations.
12. It could be argued that these forms of participation are compensatory: they are more likely to be activated if one has no access or finds other forms of political participation futile. Our reason for not including them in the participation index was, however, to keep it one-dimensional.
13. According to a survey conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (IS NASU 2013), only 3.1% of the adult population of Ukraine had participated in one or more NGOs during the previous 12 months.
14. However, 15% acknowledged that there were no obstacles for them to participate in decision-making processes at the local level.
15. Further analysis (not displayed in the plot) also showed that educational level and reported living standard are only moderately associated with the two dimensions:

living standards mostly with the “LA responsiveness” dimension (people who report higher living standards tend to report higher responsiveness on the part of LAs), while education was more associated with the “civic participation” dimension (people with higher education have higher participation scores).

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