

Olexiy Haran and Maksym Yakovlyev, editors. *Constructing a Political Nation: Changes in the Attitudes of Ukrainians during the War in the Donbas*. Translated by Jarema Hawrylyshyn and Olha Nikolska, Stylos Publishing, 2017. *Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation*, dif.org.ua/uploads/pdf/18212736635aaf8ae4bfc014.12076744.pdf. xvi, 223 pp. Tables. Figures. Appendices. E-book.

In this timely book, editors Olexiy Haran and Maksym Yakovlyev focus on recent trends in public opinion and political reforms in post-Maidan Ukraine. The collection contains seven chapters, along with a preface and an afterword by the editors. Most of the chapters in the volume are level-headed and objective. Several contributing authors go beyond a description of public opinion data and provide explanations behind key trends in public attitudes. This book will be of interest to scholars and students of Ukrainian politics.

Iryna Bekeshkina investigates the complexity of regional divisions in Ukraine (1-33). For years, Ukrainians have been divided over preferences for language and foreign-policy orientation. Today, these divisions are still in place when we compare attitudes in the Donbas with those in the rest of Ukraine. At the same time, socio-economic concerns (for example, economic growth, corruption, and unemployment) remain a priority for Ukrainians in all regions. Bekeshkina suggests that Russia had hoped that “the Russian-language population of the South and East of Ukraine . . . would demand unification of its oblasts with Russia. However, everything turned out exactly the opposite” (31). This observation is largely inaccurate since Russia ultimately refused to annex the territories of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR)/Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR) despite the repeated demands of their residents and rebel leaders to join Russia. The author emphasizes the rise in civic nationalism in Ukraine after 2014, suggesting that by gaining the Crimea, “*Putin lost Ukraine*” (10). Still, part of the Donbas has been largely lost by Ukraine—recent public opinion surveys show that the residents of the DPR/LPR have more trust in their local leaders and in Russia than in the government in Kyiv.

Bekeshkina and Oleksii Sydorchuk analyze transformations in the party system after the Euromaidan (35-62). The previous ruling coalition (the Party of Regions and the Communist Party) fell out of grace with voters during the 2014 parliamentary elections, and two new parties (the Petro Poroshenko Bloc and the People’s Front) gained the majority of seats in the Supreme Council (Verkhovna Rada). The authors note that most of the parties that advanced in the 2014 elections were new in name yet “their leaders had been present in the highest echelons of Ukrainian politics for a long time” (44). The authors also argue that regional variation in party support decreased after 2014, which could point either to the populist nature

of the new parties or to the fact that parties are no longer relying on divisive rhetoric to gain popular support. The local elections of 2015 brought positive changes to Ukrainian politics, such as increased political competition between parties. But the authors also point out the steps that were taken to limit the democratic process within parties, which led to the expanding influence of party leaders. Bekeshkina and Sydoruk note record-low levels of the prestige of, and trust in, political parties after 2014, pointing to the growing disconnect between the interests of parties and the needs of voters in Ukraine.

Ihor Burakovskiy explores economic sentiments in Ukraine in light of the Donbas occupation (63-109). These public opinion trends are important as they can draw attention to viable solutions to the ongoing crisis. Donetsk and Luhansk are the key industrial regions of the country; thus, Ukraine encountered significant economic losses in 2014 when rebels declared the independence of the DPR/LPR. Respondents across all regions, highlighting the sentiments of businesses, believe that an end to the conflict in the east would improve the business climate in the country. Ukrainians believe that the war in the east and the slow pace of reforms are the main reasons for the economic problems faced by the country today. The public is largely pessimistic about the future as “only 9 percent of respondents polled in June 2016 expected an improvement in the material standing of their families . . .” (102). The author discusses future scenarios of the crisis, comparing the costs of the ongoing conflict to the costs of reintegrating the Donbas into Ukraine.

Maria Zolkina and Haran focus on the major driver of the Euromaidan protests—foreign-policy preferences (111-31). After 2014, support for the Customs Union declined in all regions of the country while support for the European Union increased dramatically in the west and centre of the country. The authors, in exploring public opinion data from the southeast, point to the variation in public attitudes across this region, suggesting that “[t]he results underscored the impossibility of uniting all eastern and southern oblasts into a unified ‘South-East’ macrostructure, as the Russian propaganda machine had insisted” (120). I disagree with this argument. If the whole region were to be united within the same macrostructure, Russian propaganda would help shape public opinion in favour of the Customs Union. One of the first things that the leaders of the DPR/LPR did in 2014 was to restore access to the Russian media and limit exposure to the Ukrainian media. The authors also highlight major changes in public attitudes regarding support of NATO membership. This trend is visible in all regions of the country, including in the Ukraine-controlled Donbas.

Sydorchuk and Marharyta Chabanna explore public opinion regarding the questions of decentralization and the special status of the Donbas (133-

58). Public opinion on decentralization is generally positive, although many Ukrainians are aware of the threats that decentralization may bring, such as the potential for the increased power of local government officials. The authors, in noting that the Ukrainian public is opposed to federalization, seem to suggest that federalization would inevitably lead to the disintegration of Ukraine. This argument lacks foundation since federalization means greater autonomy and the granting of special rights for culturally distinct territories. In 2014, Ukrainians in the east and south were antagonized largely because they feared that the government in Kyiv would undermine their rights as Russian speakers. Federalization could help decrease these tensions and increase loyalty to the government of Ukraine. This chapter also focuses on the positive effects of decentralization on local governments, pointing specifically to an increase in the budgets of local, territorial, communities. The authors note an important paradox: although Ukrainians are frustrated with the lack of influence that they have on local government, they, at the same time, show little interest in political participation.

Zolkina examines public opinion in the Donbas after 2014 (159-82). Although today more residents of the Donbas identify as Ukrainian citizens, half of the respondents still primarily identify with their local unit or region. Language identity is distinct from civic identity and the notion of homeland since numerous Russian-speakers in the Donbas identify as Ukrainians and support the idea of Ukraine as a unitary state. While most residents of Ukraine see peace in the Donbas as a main priority for the Ukrainian government, they do not support the idea of peace at any cost. The idea of giving political concessions to the rebels in hopes of establishing peace finds little support, even among the residents of the Ukraine-controlled Donbas. At the same time, most Ukrainians hope that a resolution of the conflict in the east will return the region to the situation that existed prior to the war. Zolkina offers no explanation as to why the expectations of Ukrainians are so unrealistic. It might be linked to the political rhetoric of leaders who promise to return the Donbas to Ukraine. The majority of Ukrainians (including the residents of the Ukraine-controlled Donbas) also do not believe that granting special status to the DPR/LPR is a viable solution to the crisis. This chapter highlights important public opinion trends in the Donbas, but it lacks data from the rebel-controlled territories and overlooks the displaced residents of the Donbas.

Ruslan Kermach explores public attitudes toward Russia (183-99). He highlights the preconflict period of 2008-13 with its generally stable and positive attitudes toward Russia among Ukrainians. The postconflict period of 2014-17 shows a drastic decline in support for Russia, especially in the west and centre of Ukraine. This decline is linked to Russia's aggression in

the Crimea and the east of Ukraine. At the same time, attitudes toward the Russian people have still been largely positive after 2014. The majority of Ukrainians (with the exception of those residing in the south) believe that the annexation of the Crimea was illegal, and they remain optimistic about the prospect of the Crimea returning to Ukraine.

In the afterword, the editors explore four main alternatives for Ukraine's future policy in the occupied Donbas. They describe the scenarios of soft reintegration and complete isolation and two versions of partial integration. The authors present an insightful analysis of the costs and benefits associated with each scenario proposed for the Donbas. They note that "the liberation of the Donbas by military force is unrealistic so far" (202), suggesting, instead, that a soft power approach linked to democratic reforms and economic stability could help return the Donbas to Ukraine.

This book is important. It helps the reader understand the degree of transformation in Ukraine, both as a state and as a nation, over the past four years.

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