

# Analysis: An Era of Responsible Citizenship in Ukraine: Upcoming Reality or Too Far-Fetched Prospect?

## Introduction

It has been two years since Volodymyr Zelenskyi was sworn in as the sixth president of Ukraine. In his speech, he proclaimed: "...Each of us is the President... This is not just mine; this is our common victory... From now on, each of us is responsible for the country that we leave to our children. Each of us, in his place, can do everything for the prosperity of Ukraine"<sup>1</sup>. This confirmed that Zelenskyi is uniquely poised to share the responsibility for the country's future with ordinary Ukrainians. In this way, he ushered in an era of responsible citizenship in Ukraine.

Symbolically, before Zelenskyi, Ukrainian presidents used to assign primary responsibility for the state and a fate of the nation to themselves, or to the president-government-parliament power triangle. For example, Petro Poroshenko positioned exclusively himself as a strong guarantor of the country's integrity, peace and stability. In his inaugural address in 2014, he said, "I become a President to preserve and strengthen the unity of Ukraine. To ensure lasting peace and guarantee reliable security... The Head of State has a wide choice of various instruments to ensure territorial integrity of Ukraine and peaceful life of citizens."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the fourth President Victor Yanukovich declared taking personal responsibility for affairs of the state and urged the power branches to cooperate for the betterment of Ukraine. "I know what to do and how to do it... I call on the Verkhovna Rada to support my efforts to create a transparent, efficient, and accountable system of public administration capable of working with the President in a synchronous manner... Effective cooperation between the President, Parliament and Government will clear the way for rapid economic progress,"<sup>3</sup> underlined Yanukovich, when taking up the post of the President in 2010. It is worth noting that the inaugural speeches of the first three presidents, Kravchuk, Kuchma and Yushchenko, set goals for the nation and state authority, but not for an individual citizen as well.

With a clear intention, Zelenskyi used his Inaugural Address to urge Ukrainians to come together to take responsibility to change the situation in the country, intending to directly tackle the many challenges facing modern Ukraine alongside each and every citizen. For the first time, a Ukrainian president appealed to the individual citizen using a "you" message, not limiting himself to the traditional "we (as a nation)" proclamations." In addition, Zelenskyi's further initiatives confirmed that his inaugural speech was not just words. In June 2020, the President of Ukraine introduced to the Parliament a draft of the "Law on Democracy through an All-Ukrainian Referendum", marking it as "urgent". It was adopted by Parliament in January 2021, making it

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<sup>1</sup> Volodymyr Zelenskyi's Inaugural Address, President of Ukraine's official web-site, May 20, 2019  
<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/inavguracijna-promova-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelensk-55489>

<sup>2</sup> Petro Poroshenko's Inaugural Address, Consulate General of Ukraine in Chicago web-site, June 09, 2014  
<https://chicago.mfa.gov.ua/en/news/23979-promova-prezidenta-ukrajini-petra-poroshenka-pid-chas-ceremoniji-inavguraciji>

<sup>3</sup> Viktor Yanukovich's Inaugural Address, Ukrainska Pravda web-site, February 23, 2010  
<https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2010/02/25/4809133/>

possible for each citizen to directly participate in voting for the Constitution of Ukraine's amendments, issues of national importance, changing the country's territory, etc<sup>4</sup>.

Another initiative triggered by the President was aimed at conducting a nationwide poll of five questions concurrently with the local elections in October 2020. However, it was recognized as questionable from a legal standpoint. Later on, the President's Office acknowledges that while voting will not bear direct legal consequences, the state is determined to "hear its citizens and understand the basic needs of society... This is how true democracy works"<sup>5</sup>. Regarding initiating direct democracy initiatives, the current authorities extend to the people of Ukraine the vote of confidence in their capacity to influence the strategic course of the country's development. In his Address to the Verkhovna Rada on October 20, 2020, Zelenskyi once again reaffirmed that he disagrees that the Ukrainian people are immature and not ready to make decisions and urged Parliament to "finally give Ukrainians a real mechanism to form the main tasks for the government, to influence decisions, to feel their involvement in change"<sup>6</sup>.

It seems to be like a timely new impetus for uniting citizen efforts under the banner of furthering Ukrainian democracy, especially given that after 30 years of independence, authorities of different political configurations had thus far failed to build a trustworthy and sustainable democracy in Ukraine. While one can observe the dynamic of democratic principles' integration and reform developments within a legal framework, implementation and enforcement are lagging behind. Thereby, a "top-down" approach is not sufficient to drive a democratic change forward if there is neither social demand nor institutional capacity at the local level to implement it, let alone comprehensive stakeholder and citizen buy-in. As is apparent, responsible citizenship could be that missing pillar backing democratic transformation. However, such citizenship grows both from an individual citizen's sense of country ownership and strong community leadership for change.

### **Various Shades of Citizenship: What Kind of Citizen Does Ukraine Opt For?**

*There will be democracy in Ukraine. It is the duty of the state to provide citizens with comprehensive access to information for decision-making... People should influence topical issues for their region and for the whole country. Do this once a week, once a month, or once a year. As much as is needed. - Volodymyr Zelenskyi*<sup>7</sup>.

There is a spectrum of concepts of what responsible citizenship is and what kind of qualities "a good citizen" has. Essentially, ongoing political and societal changes reshape the norms that dictate what it means to be a good citizen, shifting from solely duty-based citizenship (to vote, pay taxes and obey the law) to engaged citizenship (to act independently, be assertive and concerned with others)<sup>8</sup>. Nowadays, to support an effective democratic society, a new kind of "good citizen" is needed. Such a good citizen is actually "three in one": personally responsible

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<sup>4</sup> Ukrainian parliament adopts law on referendum, Ukrinform, January 26, 2021

<https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-polytics/3178426-ukrainian-parliament-adopts-law-on-referendum.html>

<sup>5</sup> Five questions from the president. What does Zelenskyi want from Ukrainians?, Ukraine Crisis Media Center, October 16, 2020, <https://uacrisis.org/en/five-questions-from-the-president>

<sup>6</sup> Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi to the Verkhovna Rada on the Internal and External Situation of Ukraine, President of Ukraine's official web-site, October 20, 2020, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/poslannya-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-do-verho-64717>

<sup>7</sup> Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi to the Verkhovna Rada on the Internal and External Situation of Ukraine, President of Ukraine's official web-site, October 20, 2020, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/poslannya-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-do-verho-64717>

<sup>8</sup> Russell J. Dalton. The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation Is Reshaping American Politics, SAGE publication, 2016, p. 5,26-27.

(acts responsibly, pays taxes, obeys laws), participatory (active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts), and justice oriented (critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes)<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, responsible citizenship affirms the meaningful and constructive role which ordinary people in their personal and professional capacities can fulfill towards the common good by means of practicing a more participatory democracy<sup>10</sup>. In the modern sense, a good citizen should follow the obligations related to the respect of the rights of others, awareness of the issues that affect community life, and participation in democratic processes at the national and community levels. This is perfectly distilled and embedded in the concept of US citizenship rights and responsibilities<sup>11</sup>. It seems that Zelenskyi has a large appetite for treating the Ukrainian citizenship in the same way.

Historically, Ukrainians proved their ability to audaciously defend their rights through revolutionary actions on several occasions but have less ambitiously demonstrated their commitment to democratic processes during routine peacetime levels. However, the task to promote the role of active citizenship beyond the revolutionary moments or election days is exceptionally challenging due to the thus far very slow dynamic of Ukrainians' participation in policy-formation and civic activism, largely due to a long-lasting atmosphere of mistrust of political institutions. In 2019, with the election of Zelenskyi, a majority of Ukrainians at last received the chance to enjoy an authority of their choice, and of, *prima facie*, a new quality. Indeed, the Presidential and Parliamentary elections in 2019 led to a significant surge in public trust in the authorities,<sup>12</sup> namely the President, the Verkhovna Rada, and the Government. Although in 2021 the confidence in all three major political institutions has decreased by more than half from the level in 2019<sup>13</sup>, current authorities have been losing the baggage of trust with a slower tempo than previous political elites.

Undoubtedly, Ukrainian democracy needs responsible, participatory, and informed citizens who are willing and able to take responsibility both for themselves and their communities. It can be claimed that with the new President, political will, an atmosphere of trust in new authorities, and a favorable social environment have coincided, thereby creating a background for more responsible citizenship in Ukraine. In our analysis, we try to examine whether two years under the Zelenskyi presidency resulted in any significant shifts in Ukrainians' attitudes toward their personal and state's responsibilities, civic awareness, civic participation, and engagement. Drawing on the quantitative data analysis, we shed some light on whether new political elites' proclamations and initiatives hold meaning and have had an effect.

As ENGAGE's initial five-year journey ends, we are taking stock of overall lessons on civic awareness and participation in Ukraine over the project's lifetime. In this discussion, we reveal key trends in citizen awareness of and engagement in civil society actions, compare beliefs and opinions of ENGAGE participants with those of a national representative sample population.

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<sup>9</sup> Joel Westheimer, Joseph Kahne. Educating the "Good" Citizen: Political Choices and Pedagogical Goals, 2004 <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1112&context=slcestgen>

<sup>10</sup> Clint Le Bruyns. The Church, Democracy and Responsible Citizenship, Jan 2012, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> The Citizen's Almanac. Fundamental Documents, Symbols, and Anthems of the United States, <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/guides/M-76.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Please refer to the data published by the Razumkov Center on October 11, 2019, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-gromadianamy-sytuatsii-v-kraini-ta-diialnosti-vlady-riven-doviry-do-sotsialnykh-instytutiv-ta-politykiv>

<sup>13</sup> Please refer to the data published by the Razumkov Center on August 10, 2021, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/dovira-do-instytutiv-suspilstva-ta-politykiv-elektoralni-orientatsii-gromadian-ukrainy>

Our analysis relies on two empirical data sources – 8 waves of the Civic Engagement Poll (CEP) and 6 waves of the PACT Activists Survey (PAS). CEP surveys started in August 2017 and continued bi-annually with approximate intervals of 6 months between each wave. PAS surveys started in September 2017, and since wave 2 (August-September 2018) have been roughly synchronized with the waves of the CEP. Below, we note the key take-aways from the separate study, in which a set of logistic regressions were fit to analyze the dependency of engagement on the awareness about participation options and structural (demographic) variables.

### Moving From an Era of Paternalism to an Era of the Responsible and Active Citizenship?

*“Throughout my life, I tried to do everything so that Ukrainians would smile. For the next five years, I will do everything so that Ukrainians do not cry,” - Volodymyr Zelenskyi <sup>14</sup>.*

As much as the President wants to give people a greater sense of ownership and responsibility in providing public goods, the unfortunate reality is that after two years of new political elites in power, the share of people with paternalistic attitudes constitutes a larger share (52%) than those who assign responsibilities for well-being to the citizens themselves. Moreover, the share of people who think that the state should guarantee the well-being of each citizen, employment, and social security has remained rather stable since September 2017 (Figure 1).

#### D8. With which of the following statements do you tend to agree more?

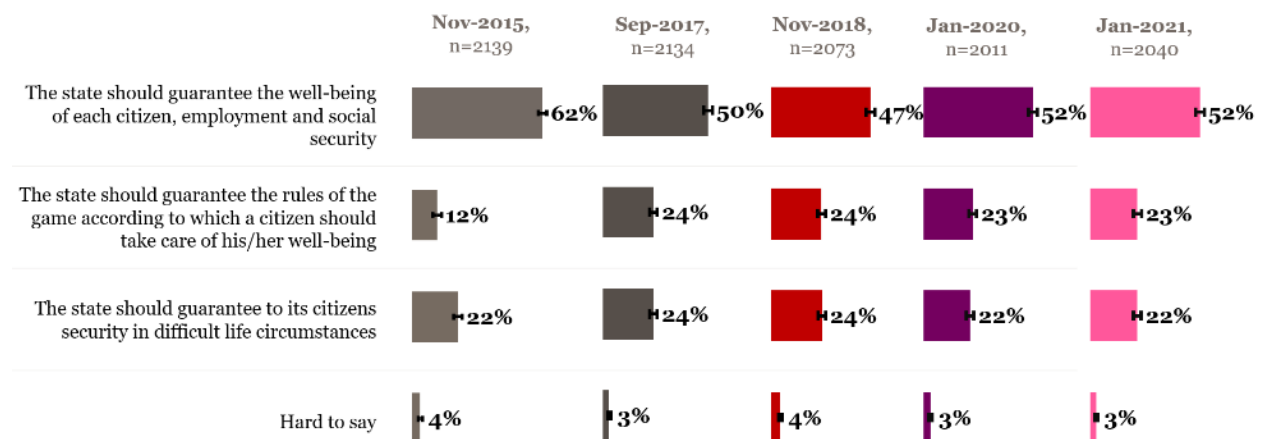


Figure 1. Citizen Attitudes Toward the Role of State in Their Life

According to the last wave of the CEP conducted in Winter 2021, citizens are underwhelmed by the people in power. Despite the assurances of the country’s leader Zelenskyi, the overwhelming majority of citizens believes that the opinion of the general public does not matter for people in power (84%) and that it is not in the power of an ordinary citizen to influence events in the country (80%). In addition, the growing majority of the population tends to agree with the statements about the enrichment of the rich (89%), the carelessness of people in power towards ordinary people (87%), and that people in power make profit on ordinary people (86%) (Figure 2).

<sup>14</sup> Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi to the Verkhovna Rada on the Internal and External Situation of Ukraine, President of Ukraine’s official website, October 20, 2020, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/poslannya-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-do-verho-64717>

## D6. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

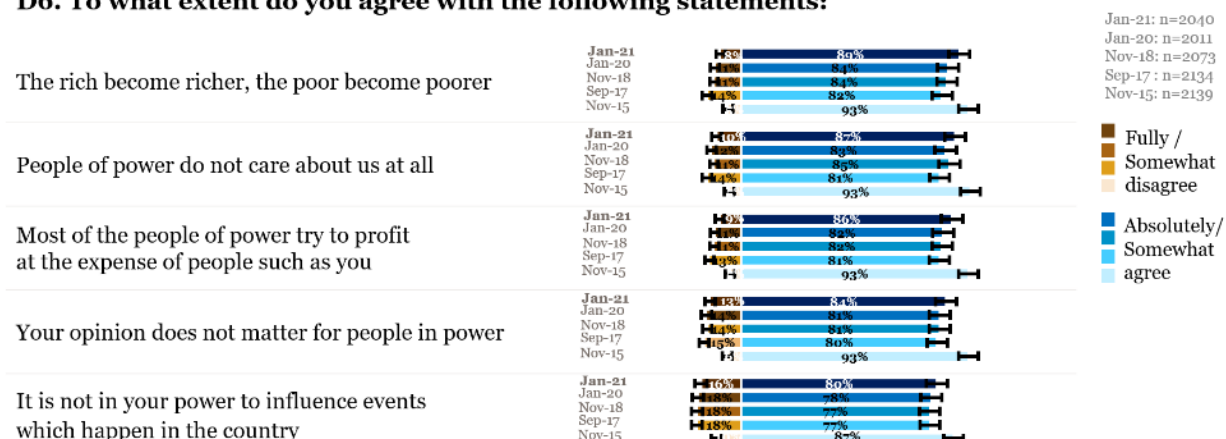


Figure 2. Citizen Opinions About Their ability to Influence Decision-Making and Attitudes of People in Power

It is evident, that in the two years since the new president's arrival and the new government and new Parliament came to power, citizens' paternalistic attitudes and the level of disbelief in their own power to influence decision-making does not seem to have changed much. Moreover, since 2017, the number of active citizens has not increased over time, and a stable 7% of Ukrainians are regularly engaged in their community life. According to the CEP data collected in January 2021, another 26% rarely participate in meetings and activities, and this indicator has remained mostly stable since January 2020. In addition, there is a stable 32% of those who are not engaged due to a lack of interest. The only visible trend since the 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections is that the share of those rarely participating in community life has somewhat increased (from 22% in November 2018 to 26% in January 2021) while the number of those who are not engaged due to lack of interest has decreased from 38% in November 2018 to 32% in January 2021.

## A1. Are you engaged in life of your community (house, street, district)?

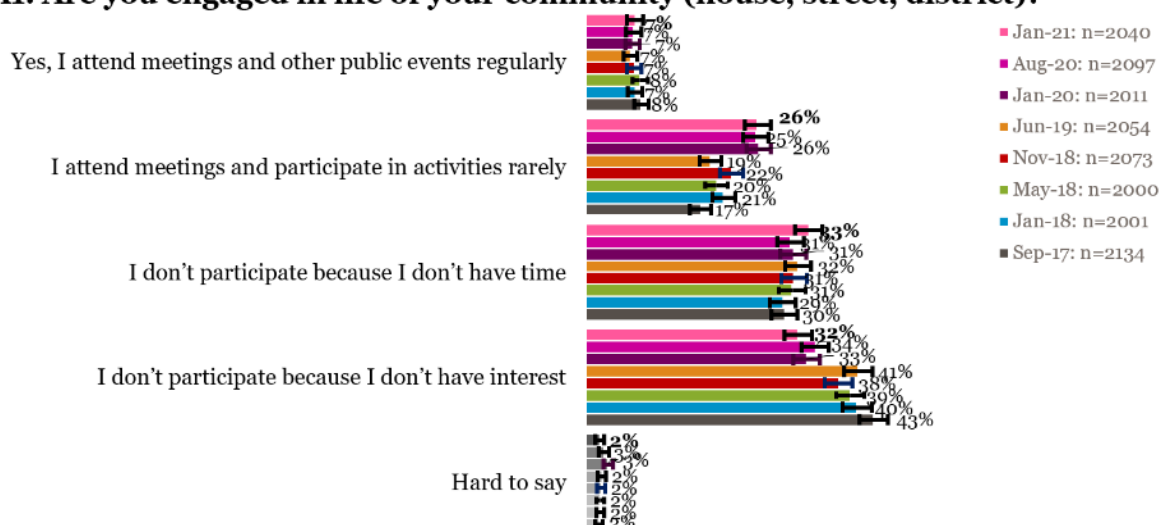
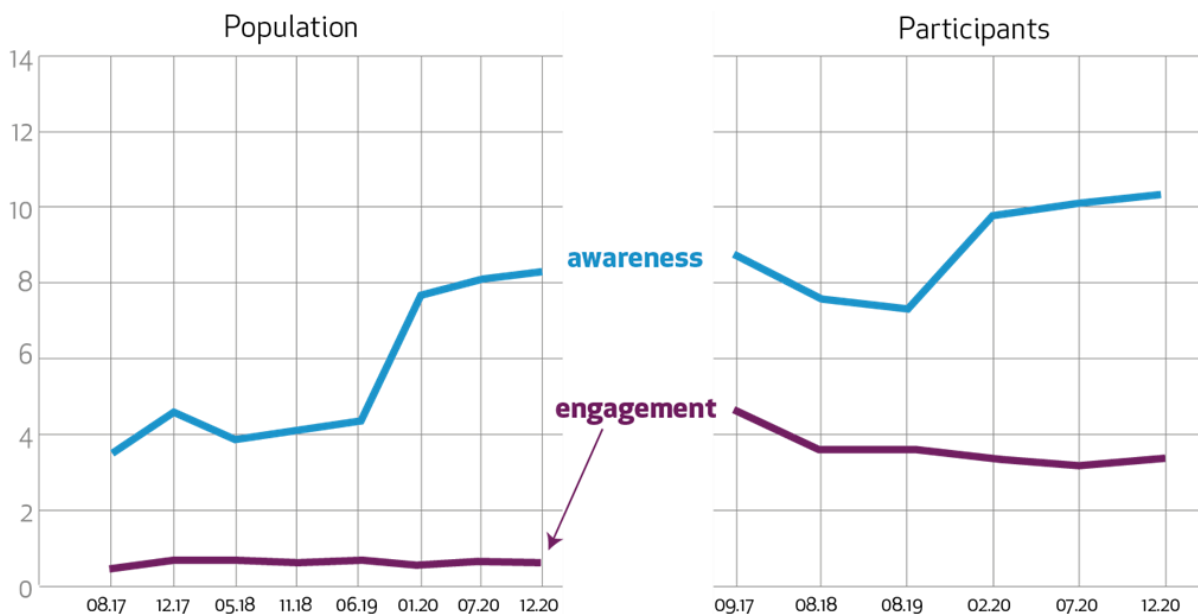


Figure 3. The Dynamic of Citizen Engagement into Community Life



While the issue of how much Ukrainian citizens are *responsible* for themselves and *participatory* for the sake of their communities seems to be obvious, it's important to see how well Ukrainians are *informed*, in particular, about the range of opportunities for active participation in the state's affairs, and to see how the level of awareness correlates with the people's willingness to participate. With the aim to trace the impact of awareness on engagement, ENGAGE examined the connections among awareness about 14 options of civic engagement and actual engagement in civic action based on the data of the 8 waves of the CEP and the 6 waves of the PAS. 14 options of civic participation were included in the survey structure. For awareness, the score for the individual respondent was calculated as the sum of 'yes' answers to each question, presenting the score option, and the average of the individual scores was taken to produce an average score for each wave. Similarly, the set of engagement options for the answers "I have done this in the past 12 months" were summed up for each individual and averaged by wave to produce the engagement score.

The analysis points out that engagement scores, which basically show the average diversity of the engagement options utilized by the respondent, stayed the same for the general population. On average, each respondent was engaged into less than 1 out of 14 possible types of civic activity (Figure 4). For the participants' samples, the dynamic was even slightly negative right after the change of political elites in 2019, though for obvious reasons the engagement score was still much higher than for the general population. The situation with awareness scores differs. After an initial stagnation it spiked simultaneously for both the general population and the participant samples. CEP's wave 6 and PAS's wave 4 were polled at roughly the same time, corresponding to the end of 2019 - start of 2020. Contextually one can conclude that the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections stimulated this change and have raised the citizens' interest in options of civic participation. Meanwhile, the average awareness and engagement scores are not strongly correlated, especially taking into account the dynamics of the last 3 waves. This leads to the assumption that awareness of more options for civic participation does not necessarily lead to more active engagement in different civic activities.



*Figure 4. The Scores for Awareness About the Types of Participation and Actual Participation Among Citizens and ENGAGE Participants*

Our analysis revealed that for certain types of activities, namely, public hearings, peaceful assemblies, advisory bodies, information requests, and complaints to state bodies, the engagement rates of ENGAGE participants steadily declined between waves 1 and 3 (September 2017-August 2019). All these activities are related to the direct interaction with state bodies, so it is plausible to assume that declining rates are a symptom of the decreasing trust in government bodies and/or in the possibilities of dialogues between the civil society and the state. Indeed, according to the data by the Razumkov Center, trust in the central government bodies remained low in 2016-2018<sup>15</sup>. Interestingly, increased awareness both among general population and ENGAGE participants is positively correlated with a spike of trust in the government in 2019. This fact demonstrates that higher trust in authorities might be a precondition for raising awareness of participatory opportunities.

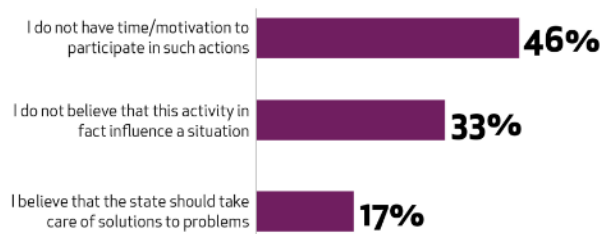
Furthermore, awareness of civic activities seems to be not only a mere indication of knowledge but also a precondition that increases the chances of engagement. Instead, the logistic models for the population samples show that knowledge about certain engagement options (participation in public hearings, peaceful assemblies, reporting on infrastructure issues, and creation of a housing committee) and regions of the participants' residence (Central Ukraine and Kyiv) increase the chances of being an activist. One can suggest that these options of engagement are about more localized issues and/or requiring low commitment engagement. Awareness about electronic petitions and participation in peaceful assemblies significantly increases the chances of the ENGAGE participants being an activist. According to the model for the last wave of the participants' sample, certain combinations of predictors lead to a >90% probability of engagement.

Motivation, along with awareness and engagement, appeared to be one of the core elements of civic activism. According to the CEP conducted in August 2020, almost half of the respondents (46%) claim that a lack of time and motivation prevents them from more active engagement in civil initiatives. One in three (33%) does not believe that their participation can make a difference and influence the situation, and 17% of respondents are sure that the state should take care of solutions to problems (Figure 5). Instead, a direct link between a public action and individual/family interest, believing that individual action can make a difference and empathy with other people, are among those motivation factors able to encourage a citizen to take action for common good. It's worth noting that more than a quarter (26.7%) were not able to name any reason that stimulated their engagement at all.

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<sup>15</sup> Please refer to the data published by the Razumkov Center, <https://razumkov.org.ua/en/>

### TOP-3 Demotivation Factors for Engagement



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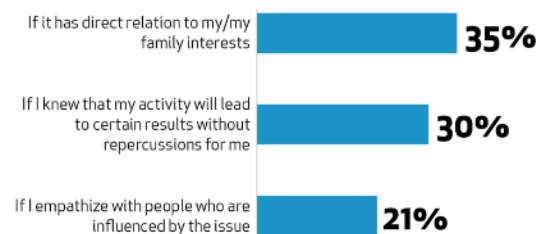


Figure 5. TOP-3 Factors of Motivation and Demotivation for Engagement

Regarding the participants' sample, their motives are more diverse, but three of them stand out: that the goals of the initiative correspond to their personal ambitions (50.36%), that the respondent trusts the leader of the initiative (55.78%), and that participation has no negative consequences for the respondent in the participants' sample (51.58%). Interestingly, empathy with other people and making new connections are twice more likely to motivate the participants of the ENGAGE events compared to the general population.

Consequently, awareness can be seen as an important but not decisive factor for citizen engagement into active action. Therefore, it is not enough to include only the awareness-raising component in a project design. Instead, a range of motivating and demotivating factors influencing citizen behavior should be considered.

### Conclusion

*Every time I remind them that all conditions are created... now there are legislative, operational, material, psychological conditions. And there is no real result yet. - Volodymyr Zelenskyi*<sup>16</sup>.

As is always the case with regard to critical political and social transformation, reforms, and new political approaches, they first require time to occur, drop an anchor in the legislative framework and root in everyday practice before they will be translated to behavioral and attitudinal shifts of the whole of society. That is the case with the initiative of Zelenskyi to drive a more direct and participatory democracy in Ukraine. It is already clear that for citizens to feel like they have an influence on governance, a safe and favorable space for engagement is more crucial than public pronouncements of the President and selective improvements of the legislative basis.

Since 2017, USAID/ENGAGE activities aim to increase Ukrainian citizens' awareness of and engagement in civil society activities at both the national and sub-national levels. Looking at civic engagement behavioral and attitudinal trends, we see that, still, the majority of citizens remain on the margins of the participatory processes, paternalistically waiting for the state to govern the solving of their problems. While civic engagement of Ukrainians rather stagnated in recent years, nowadays we observe a significant leap in awareness about civic participation

<sup>16</sup> Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi to the Verkhovna Rada on the Internal and External Situation of Ukraine, President of Ukraine's official web-site, October 20, 2020,

<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/poslannya-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-do-verho-64717>



options. Therefore, there are ways to involve citizens in managing their community life as we witness growing readiness and interest to learn more about civic activities, opportunities, and CSOs' efforts. It's a matter of time and conscious effort to encourage a growing number of citizens with passive knowledge and instable attitudes toward participation to make it to the big league of civic activism.

In taking stock of the lessons learned from the ENGAGE analysis, awareness and structural factors are not enough to explain why Ukrainians decide to become civic activists. Apparently, the formula for responsible citizenship will incorporate a certain combination of factors, such as responsibility, awareness, and actual engagement. In addition, this issue should be formulated with attention being paid to the relevant intermediate linking ingredients such as trust and motivation. As the analysis of quantitative data from repeated observations of public attitudes and behavior proved, for the purpose of furthering democracy and enhancing peoples' responsibility for themselves and their community, engagement, and viable civic awareness, the activities nurturing active citizenship should be the primary focus of the government, the civil society sector, and all those interested in more responsible citizenship in Ukraine.