



ENGAGE

Enhance Non-Governmental Actors
and Grassroots Engagement



Re: Civic Engagement Poll – Analysis by USAID/ENGAGE

From: Pact Inc

To: Interested parties

Date: March 5, 2018

Background: This is the second memo in a series based on results from a Civic Engagement Poll commissioned by Pact and conducted by Gfk Ukraine. This memo draws on survey data collected from December 2017 – January 2018.

Purpose: This memo highlights how civil society organizations (CSO) can engage citizens, motivate them to contribute to causes promoted by CSOs, and how to foster change in citizen behavior. The poll informs the USAID/ENGAGE strategy by measuring public attitudes towards civil society, citizen participation, perceptions of the current reform process, levels of civic literacy, and basic values and perceptions.

Summary: The following conclusions are drawn from analysis of the first and second survey:

- 1) Most citizens are politically passive, yet many indicate an interest in engaging in civic activities.
- 2) Citizens are highly selective about their civic engagement. There is more involvement and interest in activities that are local, accessible, not labor intensive, not technical, and not risky. CSOs should focus on lowering the barrier for participation.
- 3) Citizens are more concerned with initiatives that directly affect them. To increase engagement, CSOs should appeal and focus on basic interests, needs, and wants.
- 4) Respondents are more interested in local community issues than large national agendas. There should be broad non-politicized support for local social activism.
- 5) There is widespread distrust and fatigue with political leadership, political parties, and the reform process. Avoid politicizing civic activities in the public eye. CSOs should emphasize connections to community and associate engagement with volunteering and charity.
- 6) Civic awareness is increasing. There is room to improve it in terms of content.

Public Attitudes Towards Civil Society

Approximately one out of two citizens are politically passive. When presented with list of activities concerning issues in their local community, 52% answered, “There is nothing that I am willing to do”. Furthermore, the number of current activists is relatively low (20%).¹ However, a sizable portion demonstrated that they are interested in engaging with at least some civic initiatives.

In tandem with the decentralization reform, political engagement and interest has more promise on the local level. Specifically, citizens known most about, and are most interested in reporting to local administrations about broken roads or other infrastructure, and creating a housing/street/block

¹ An activist is defined as someone who engaged in at least one civil related activity (as listed on the survey) in the last year.

committee. Compared to national politics, citizens care more about local initiatives and projects that affect their daily life.

The interest in improving local infrastructure likely reflects the recent development in decentralization reform. Just in the last year local governments had more responsibility for local services, bigger budgets, and a greater role in serving the needs of their constituents. In 2016, from enlarged local budgets, more than twice the road surface was laid than during the last 2 years.² On the local level, citizens may be perceiving some level of political accountability. The high degree of interest and willingness to get involved locally may demonstrate a developing belief that their political behavior can influence their local community. CSOs should capitalize on local involvement to demonstrate that political activity is not futile.

Interest and participation however, are not uniform across activities. The highest degrees of interest and involvement correlate with those activities that have low barriers and costs to participate. For example, activities that are geographically accessible (housing/street committees and submitting complaints by phone) correlate with high levels of interest. Low labor costs also correlate with interest (attending an assembly). Activities that require knowledge, technical skill, and risk, correlate with low interest and low involvement (commenting on legislation, forming advisory boards, reporting corruption cases)

What explains the selectivity? Although impossible to prove with data alone, a political-economy approach suggests that citizens are selective because they are bound by resources such as time, energy, technical knowledge, and personal capacity. For instance, most activists are older, mid-career, and fully employed. We can hypothesize that although they demonstrate a willingness to get involved with many civic initiatives, their place in life (job, family etc.) expends most of their resources, and thus can only be involved with a few activities. CSOs should thus lower the barrier for participation by making involvement accessible (geographically), covering labor costs, providing technical support, and acquiring some risk on behalf of the citizen.

Citizens are also very specific about which activity they are interested in. 90% of those who are currently active, only get involved with one, two, or three kinds of activities in a year. Interest across activities is also relatively broad and highly specific. Increasing civic engagement across activities thus requires offering the right opportunities to the right people.

Perception of Current Reforms

Despite the large-scale efforts to reform Ukrainian society, citizens of the country tend to be skeptical and pessimistic toward the reform process. For each reform listed in the survey, there is a sizable portion of the population who are ultimately against their implementation. To note, 26% are against court/anti-corruption reform and 29% are against election reform. About a half of the population is against land and privatization reforms, and one in five (22%) are against all five reforms. The push back against reforms is likely due to a growing unwillingness to endure economic hardship that may have taken place during the immediate period of transition following the Revolution of Dignity. Indeed, comparison across surveys from the USAID/UNITER projects shows that those willing to endure a decline in living standards for reform has fallen in the last three years (27% in 2015, to 19% in 2018).

² <http://decentralization.gov.ua/en/news/item/id/3918>

The average attitude towards specific reforms remains rather ambivalent. Yet people tend to evaluate the progress in the areas of housing and utilities, as well as in energy efficiency more positively than in civil service, education, healthcare, and pensions. Yet the distribution of perceptions of past reforms reveals polarizations and relative mixed perceptions concerning the recently passed legislation.³ For almost all the reforms included in the survey, about 20% of respondents felt that there was no impact. Those who felt like there was an impact in the reform process however, tend to describe reform as either extremely negative or extremely positive.

Medical and pension reform are viewed particularly negative. Approximately 61% of the population believe that medical reform had either no impact, or a negative impact upon the population. Pension reform, receives about 62% negative or non-existent support. Education and civil service were viewed as more ambivalent. Yet again, the distribution of the data reveals that citizens are more split on these issues than the initial analysis suggests. Taking the case of health care reform, approximately 16% of citizens are neutral, while 34% lean positively, and 50% lean negatively. This indicates that the perceptions of reform vary, without a clear indication of whether Ukrainians generally view the reforms as either a success or failure.

Citizens derive their opinions concerning reforms from many sources. TV news remains the major source of information about reforms for most of the population (75% compared to 67% in Sep'2017). However, since 2015, the number of people watching TV news to learn about reforms in the country has declined slightly. Social media as a source for news about reforms has increased to around 37% over the last few years. Notably, people are increasingly receiving information about the reform process through new and unconventional channels such as from friends and colleagues, social media platforms, and the radio.

Civic Literacy

Comparison between the two survey suggests that knowledge of opportunities for civic activism has increased in a relatively short timeframe. In just a few months, awareness, across all initiatives, improved since the first survey September of 2017. Knowledge of submitting formal information requests to state bodies increased 11% (25% to 36%) and awareness about open reports on corruption in the media jumped from 26% to 32%. Increased awareness likely stems from several sources such as media coverage, CSO directed adds/events, and social media. General awareness allows citizens to participate and initiate change in their community and society at large.

Furthermore, most poll participants know of active charity funds (61%) and volunteer groups (58%), which are gaining respect in society.⁴ These numbers have increased dramatically since 2014, when only 32% of citizens knew about charity funds and 42% were aware of volunteer organizations. Awareness of volunteer and charity groups likely increased due to popular coverage in the media of specific issues, such as the war in Donbas and the Revolution of Dignity.

Civil society organizations should continue to increase awareness of initiatives, possibilities for participation, and constitutional rights. About two out of three Ukrainians (65%) do not know about

³ **Pensions** (Law No. 2148-VIII), **Medicine** (Laws No. 2002-VIII, No. 2149-VIII), **Education** (Law No. 2145-VIII), **Civil service** (Resolution No. 644), **Housing and utilities** (Law No. 2019-VIII), and **Housing and utilities** (Law No. 2019-VIII)

⁴ <http://dif.org.ua/article/komu-bilshe-doviryayut-ukrainsi-vladi-gromadskosti-zmi>

their right to defend themselves using the constitution. Knowing constitutional rights has the potential to empower citizens and can establish belief in the rule of law.

Values and Perceptions

Corruption

The poll data suggests that concern with corruption is prevalent among the public. In both waves of the survey, one in two participants cited fighting corruption as one of the 3 most critical issues facing Ukraine today. Citizens not only believe that fighting corruption is important, but 30% also believe that it is the main obstacle that prevents the successful passage of reforms.

Citizens are not only aware of corruption and its destructive nature, but they also hold high standards for those in public office. In both waves of the survey, a significant majority of citizens believe that giving bribes, unofficial services, or gifts for solving a problem cannot be justified anytime (73%). Similarly, to the Sept'17 survey, a significant majority of the population agrees that the corrupt officials should be removed from the office (83% in Jan'18 vs. 78% in Sep'17)

Citizens also seem to hold themselves to standards when it comes to corruption and bribery. If bribed during an election most citizens (61%) will not vote for a certain candidate if promised to get money for the vote. Another 19% would accept the payment but vote as they please. Yet, about only one in three respondents (38%, comparing to 37% in Sep'17) is ready to report about cases of corruption if they are aware.

Despite this, there is a general sentiment of skepticism towards the political process and solving the issue of corruption. More than half of poll participants believes that most people in Ukraine will try to take advantage of opportunity to resolve the issue using some reward, and that bribery is an integral part of the Ukrainian mentality. At the same time, many remain skeptical of politics as 49% believe that nothing will change.

Elections and Political Parties

According to the poll, support for political parties in Ukraine is spread widely and no party possesses a monopoly of political opinion. Yulia Tymoshenko's All-Ukraine Union ("Batkivshchyna") Party captured 8% of support, the Opposition Bloc 5%, the Party for Life 5%, and the Party of Samopomich received 4 %. All other parties listed in the poll received 3% or less. The legitimacy and effectiveness of each political party remains weak in the public eye, and widespread distrust of political parties not only erodes the legitimacy and effectiveness of the system, but it also creates space for non-parliamentary forces to influence politics.

A sizable portion of the population however, remains apathetic towards the election and dissatisfied with the national government. 24% of Ukrainians remain unsure of who they will be voting for in the coming election. Furthermore, 14% said they would not vote while 16% said that they were against all political parties. This again, suggests prominent levels of dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and ambivalence towards the current regime and the political system itself. Indeed, 66% of those in Ukraine are dissatisfied with the current government, making the political climate is ripe for populism or non-established political forces to emerge.

There is widespread distrust and general fatigue with political leadership, political parties, and the reform process. To remain attractive, CSOs should avoid associating their activities with the current political system. They should emphasize the role of civil society as something “pre-political”, associating it with elements of charity, volunteering, and community spirit.

With elections approaching in 2019, non-partisan CSOs should be supported that advocate voting rights, electoral accessibility, awareness, and participation. CSOs can also serve as neutral watchdogs during the election, helping guarantee that the elections are free and fair. Elections should guarantee that the state represents the interests of as much of the population as possible not just certain individuals or groups that are running the state. CSOs can help ensure that citizens have a voice in the government and the decision-making process as we approach the elections in 2019.

Target Groups

Those who have higher incomes, more education, and live in moral urban settings, are more likely to engage in civic initiatives. These findings confirm much of the academic literature concerning democracy and economic/social development.⁵ Specifically it suggests that individuals with more education are more critical towards non-democratic rule. Second, citizens that have more income are more likely to feel secure enough to defend democracy. Third, because people with more income are more likely to be in formal sector jobs that are independent of state control, they are better placed to stand up against the abuse of power. Indeed, multinomial logistic regression analysis reveals that income level is the most powerful indicator for predicting interest across many activities.

Higher rates of activism are also correlated with older age. There are significantly more people aged 25-44 among current activists comparing to non-activists (39% vs. 28%, respectively). The least active portion of the population are those between the ages of 18-24. In terms of geography, there are more residents in the Southern and Eastern regions of Ukraine who have engaged in one or more activities; while residents of Western region are overrepresented among those who are merely interested in getting involved.

Conclusion

Democratic socialization involves civic education, increased awareness of civic opportunity, and direct involvement within one’s community. In what Alex Tocqueville called the “school of democracy, awareness of civic activism helps citizens internalize democratic values, form bonds of trust, and can help shape future democratic leaders. CSOs have a key role to play in creating the “school of democracy” in Ukraine. They can build this institution by lowering the barrier for involvement, appealing to specific and local interest, not politicizing their agendas, and continuing to push for greater civic education.

⁵ Lipset, Seymour Martin. “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy.” *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 53, no. 1, 1959, pp. 69–105. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1951731.