

THE PROBLEM OF INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN UKRAINE AND EUROPE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Mykola M. Izha, Olena V. Knyazeva, Tatyana I. Pakhomova, Anastasiia S. Klymenko,
Yuliia V. Yevstiunina

Odessa Regional Institute of Public Administration
The National Academy of Public Administration under the President of Ukraine,
65009, str. Genueska 22, Odessa, Ukraine

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Abstract. *This article examines the results of research into the problem of institutional trust, namely: the nature and characteristics of citizens' trust in state institutions, represented by different branches of government; and the general trends of trust in these institutions in Ukraine and in Europe over the past two decades. The results presented will help to clarify and at the same time raise issues related to a better understanding of the nature of public trust, as well as the factors that determine the level of trust in state and political institutions not only in Ukraine but also in other European countries. It should be noted that trust in public institutions is considered by the authors as a basic factor in achieving the goals of socio-economic and political reforms by the state.*

Keywords: *trust, institutional public trust, public authorities, political institutions, level of trust.*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *pasitikėjimas, institucinis visuomenės pasitikėjimas, viešosios valdžios institucijos, politinės institucijos, pasitikėjimo lygis.*

Introduction. Despite the efforts of scientists around the world, it is still unknown how long the pandemic associated with the spread of the COVID-19 virus will last, how it will be overcome, and how the risks of other crises in the economic, political, social and other spheres can be reduced. In order to overcome these crises, governments in many countries have to take unpopular measures of public administration. The effectiveness of these measures depends largely on the level of trust between the institutions of government and society.

The results and depth of the many studies that have already been carried out, along with the high relevance and variety of their findings, indicate that the problem of public trust in political and public institutions has not lost its relevance, especially recently. It is well known that trust is one of the basic factors that determines not only interpersonal, but also social, economic, and political relations at different levels of existence and development of society.

Following the well-known Polish sociologist Peter Stompka (2012), we will consider trust in political and public institutions as one of the varieties of public (institutional) trust. In his work, *Trust as the Basis of Society*, in Chapter 3, "Varieties of Trust," P. Stompka identifies two main

types of trust: interpersonal and social. According to P. Shtompka, when we consider trust in institutions and organizations, “we are already entering the territory of a special kind of public trust, which is defined as public. School, university, army, church, court, police, bank, exchange, government, parliament, enterprise are typical objects of this category. The degree of trust that people give to different institutions differs depending on the society and also changes over time” (Stompka 2012, 119). Another important form of institutional trust, in our view, is procedural trust, which P. Stompka defines as “trust in institutional practices or procedures based on the belief that compliance will have the greatest effect” (Stompka 2012, 119). The author cites examples from the fields of politics and economics: “trust in democratic procedures (elections, conditions of representation, majority voting), which are recognized as the best ways to satisfy the interests of the largest part of the population and achieve the most reasonable compromises in a conflict of interest situation.” In Section 8, “Trust in Democracy,” the author defines trust in the state and its institutions as “public trust or vertical trust, as opposed to the horizontal one existing between citizens” (Stompka 2012, 366). The term *vertical* implies that trust exists between partners at different levels within a defined hierarchy – namely, at the levels of power (p. 366). It should be noted that in the research of civil society and the state, modern researchers distinguish the problems of trust in public authorities (trust in political institutions) and the relationship between institutional trust (the politics of institutional trust) and interpersonal trust as the most important (Lukin 2005; Terin 2018).

Within the framework of the study of political trust, two theoretical traditions of interpretation of have emerged: cultural and institutional.

The cultural theoretical tradition of the interpretation of trust is represented by the theories of political culture (Baker et al. 1981; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). These theories are based on hypotheses of an exogenous nature in relation to the political sphere and the nature of political trust. From a cultural point of view, political trust is the continuation of interpersonal trust, which is formed during the early socialization period and influences further individual evaluations of political institutions. Political trust is seen here as a component of social capital, and interpersonal trust (based on the exogeneity of the origin of political trust) is seen as the basis for building political trust (Keenan 1986; Jowitt 1992; Hedland 1999; Joyce 1984; Fukuyama 1995).

Institutional conceptual interpretations of political trust focus on the endogenous nature of trust and the rationality of trust (i.e., its conditioning by internal political factors related to the political and economic course of government and citizens’ assessment of the level of policy effectiveness in the country). The logic behind this approach is that institutional trust is the consequence, not the cause, of effective political institutions. If political institutions operate effectively, they generate trust; otherwise, skepticism and mistrust. Institutional approaches to the definition of trust are presented in the works of such scientists as Rose (1995), Newton (1999), Mutz (1998), Dasgupta and Goyal (2019), Skowronek (1982), Shepsl (2017), and others.

To summarize, we can conclude that the following aspects of institutional trust exist, namely:

- identification with the values or goals of institutions (our president, our army, our science, and the like);
- identification with political leaders who lead or represent institutions;
- possibility of access to the services (resources) of respective institutes, or potential access to them;
- pragmatic assessment of the functions performed by institutions;
- illusions, hopes for benefits, and protection against threats caused by expectations of institutional dysfunctions;

- understanding the cost of compliance and non-compliance with institutional conditions and requirements, willingness to minimize the repressive pressure of the respective institute by recourse to resources of other groups, etc.

The aim of the study. The purpose of our study is to determine the role of institutional trust in the functioning of public institutions in Ukraine and European countries, to analyze the differences of citizens' trust in state institutions of different countries, and to determine how much the level of citizens' trust in different countries depends on their individual characteristics. We have tried to identify the key factors influencing citizens' confidence in political institutions by comparing trends in the level of trust in political institutions in Ukraine and Europe in the context of the laws that operate in high or low confidence countries.

Materials and methods. Over the last 20 years, a large-scale archive of national and international sociological research data has been accumulated, which allows many research problems to be solved.

The European Social Survey (ESS)¹ sociological monitoring project is unique – not only because its organizers received the prestigious Descartes Science Prize in 2005, the first time it had been awarded to research in the field of the social sciences. Nor is it unique because of the dozens of European countries represented by the best specialists in various aspects of comparative monitoring and sociological research who participate in the project leadership, in the committees responsible for the preparation and implementation of monitoring, and in the national coordination structures. The uniqueness of the project is determined, first and foremost, by its rigorous methodological and organizational requirements, compliance with which gives reason to believe with certainty that the data obtained in 29 European countries from the years 2002–2018 open up a real possibility to compare numerous indicators of trust in political and public institutions.

ESS surveys are conducted according to strict international standards. ESS 2002–2019 includes a basic thematic module on various aspects of citizen interaction with political and public institutions. In it, institutional trust and attitudes toward power are measured through the following questions:

(1) “Please tell us how much you personally trust the Parliament... (politicians, police, political parties, the European Parliament, the UN)?” A scale from 0 to 10 is used for answering (0 – *absolutely do not trust institutions*, 10 – *I fully trust*).

(2) “How satisfied are you with the work of the government of the country?” To answer the second question, a 10-point scale is again offered (0 – *completely dissatisfied*, 10 – *completely satisfied*).

We decided to verify this statement based on the results of the European Social Survey. A confidence index (ID) was also used to compare and identify prevailing trends in European countries in the analysis, which was calculated as an average of the scale from 0 to 10.

¹ European social survey // Data and documentation [online]. Accessed: 4.01.2020.

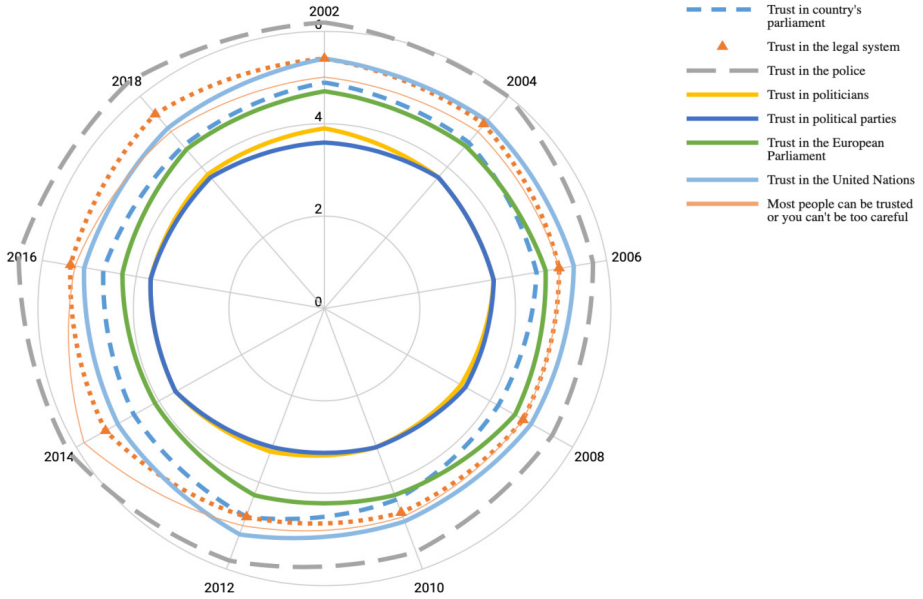


Fig. 1. Political and public confidence radii according to ESS Round 1–9

Source: authors

The empirical analysis begins with a simple description of the averages. Although the figures given in Figures 1–5 depict confidence based on data, and not all countries participated in all rounds of the European Social Survey, they draw a consistent picture.

Figure 1 shows a pie chart – the radii of institutional and generalized trust, built on the basis of average confidence indicators in each round of the European Social Research from 2002 to 2018. The diagram clearly shows that the highest level of trust among the countries participating in the project is enjoyed by the police. The average indicator of the level of police trust for the entire study period was 6 points on an 11-point scale, the maximum level of 6.2 was recorded in 2002, and the minimum of 5.5 in 2008 (see Table 2). The lowest level of trust was enjoyed by political parties and politicians (the average indicator of trust in political parties for the entire study period was 3.5; for politicians, 3.6). Confidence in these institutions noticeably decreased during the 2008–2009 crisis. Next, we will dwell on each institute in more detail.

Table 1. Average indicators of trust level among all countries (ESS Round 1–9, mean)

	Round1 (2002)	Round2 (2004)	Round3 (2006)	Round4 (2008)	Round5 (2010)	Round6 (2012)	Round7 (2014)	Round8 (2016)	Round 9 (2018)
Trust in country's parliament	4.9	4.7	4.5	4.2	4.4	4.8	4.6	4.7	4.6
Trust in the legal system	5.4	5.2	5	4.8	4.7	4.8	5.3	5.4	5.5
Trust in the police	6.2	6	5.7	5.5	5.6	5.8	6.2	6.5	6.4
Trust in politicians	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.6	3.7	3.8
Trust in political parties	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.6	3.7	3.7
Trust in the European Parliament	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.6	4.3	4.3	4.1	4.3	4.5
Trust in the United Nations	5.4	5.3	5.3	5	4.9	5.2	5	5.1	5.1
Most people/general level of trust	5	5	5	4.8	4.8	5	5.8	5.3	5

Source: authors

Parliament. The highest level of confidence of the legislative (representative) branch of state power was most often expressed by citizens of the countries of Northern and Central Europe (see Annex 1). The average index of confidence in national parliaments in Norway, Switzerland, Finland, Denmark and Sweden for the years 2002–2019 was the highest – between 5.9 and 6.4 points. Ukraine, Poland, Croatia and Bulgaria belong to the group of countries with a negative index of confidence in the national parliament. The lowest level of population support in Europe was evidenced in the Ukrainian Parliament (2008–2012 data).

As for the dynamics of the level of confidence, according to the study, there are three clusters of countries (Fig. 1). The first is that where the level of trust had a positive dynamic, namely Lithuania, Norway, the Netherlands, Estonia, and Germany; the second was where the level of trust remained almost unchanged – Belgium, Sweden, and the UK; the third was where the level of trust had a negative dynamic – Ukraine, Greece, Spain, Cyprus, and Croatia.

When analyzing the nature of citizens' trust in national parliaments, many researchers point out that a lack of trust is more common in countries with “new” democracies (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 126–130). One of the reasons for the backlog is the insufficiently effective long-term functioning of democratic political institutions.

How stable is this order? Are these results some kind of random aberration? We tested our results using data from other ESS waves from 2002 to 2019 (Table 1). Sets of leaders and outsiders, despite the fact that the list of participating countries differed by year, intersected and yielded similar results for those countries that hit the intersecting part of the sample.

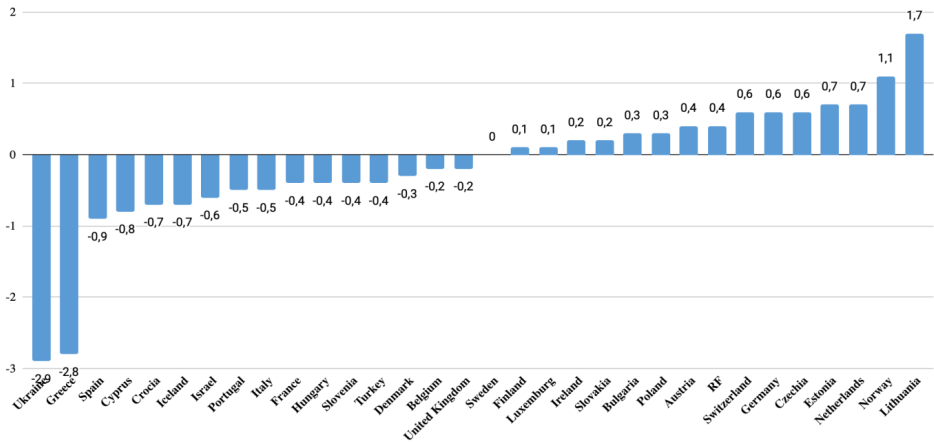


Fig.2. Dynamics of trust in national parliaments among ESS Round 1–9 project participants (difference in scores – 11-point averages – between the first and last survey)

Source: authors

To group countries by level of confidence in national parliaments, we used another indicator: the integral trust indicator for national parliaments, which is calculated as the average of all confidence indicators across the country for all of the rounds in which they participated.

As a result, we see the following picture emerge: Denmark (6.4) and Norway (6.2) lead in the parliament category, followed by Switzerland (6.0) and Finland (5.9) (see Annex 1). The group is bookended by Bulgaria (2.3), Ukraine (2.6), Poland, and Lithuania (3.2).

Thus, we can formulate two preliminary conclusions. First, countries differ greatly in average confidence in national parliaments. Secondly, this distribution seems to be quite stable and almost independent of the year of the survey.

Police trust. In most European countries, police enjoy more trust than other political and public institutions (see Annex 2). The Police Confidence Index demonstrates that the balance of trust and confidence in almost all European countries is positive. Countries such as Finland (8), Denmark (7.8), and Iceland (7.6) have the highest rate, i.e., the police in these countries fully enjoy the mass trust of citizens. A low police confidence index is only observed in three post-Soviet countries – Ukraine (2.5), Bulgaria (3.7), and Russia (3.8). According to the confidence index of law enforcement agencies, Ukraine is at the bottom of the European rating.

It should be noted that, compared to the confidence of national parliaments, most countries participating in the ESS project have a positive trend when it comes to police confidence.

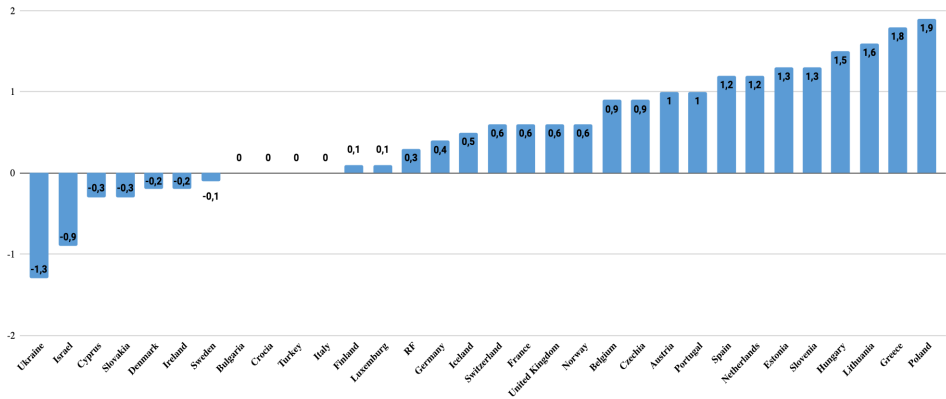


Fig. 3. Dynamics of police confidence among ESS Round 1–9 project participants (difference in scores – 10-point averages – between the first and last survey).

Source: authors

Only in two of the surveyed countries – Ukraine and Israel – did the confidence level drop by 1 point, while in the other four countries with negative dynamics the decline was insignificant (see Fig. 3).

Political parties. The confidence rating of politicians was also consistent with the confidence rating of political parties as a whole (see Fig. 3). As in the analysis of trust in political parties, most countries were characterized by a situation where the majority of citizens expressed varying degrees of distrust in their countries.

Negative outliers in the level of trust in political parties also stood out in Eastern and Southern Europe – Latvia (1.6), Bulgaria (1.9), and Croatia (2.1). Positive outliers included the states of Northern and Central Europe – Denmark (5.4), the Netherlands (5.1), and Norway (5.0) (see Annex 3).

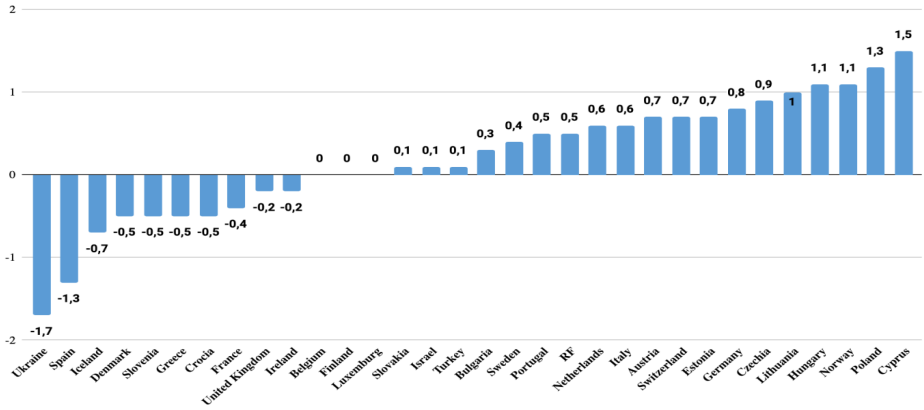


Fig. 4. Dynamics of trust in political parties among ESS 2002–2019 project participants (difference in scores – 10-point averages – between the first and last survey)
Source: authors

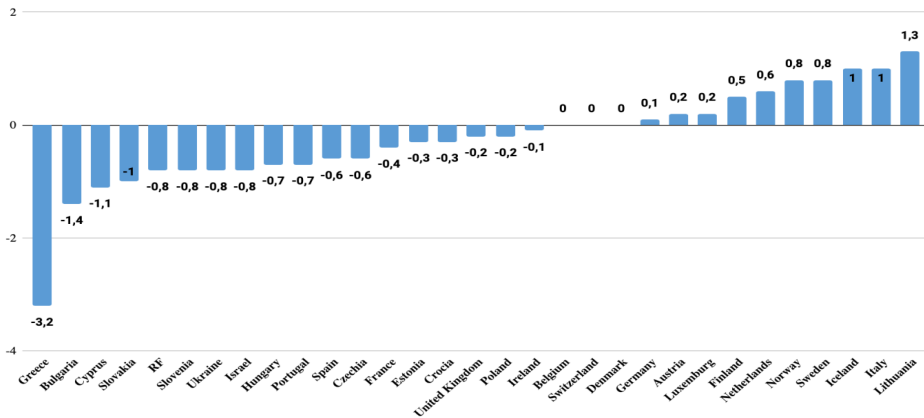


Fig. 5. Dynamics of confidence in the European Parliament among ESS 2002-2019 countries (difference in scores – 10-point average – between the first and last survey)
Source: authors

Figure 5 shows a higher level of trust of Europeans in the UN and the European Parliament than in national parliaments.

The first feature of this data is that the average level of confidence in the European Parliament, though small compared to the confidence in other institutions, was 4.4 on a 10-point scale, but there were no significant differences in the indicators across countries.

The second feature is that when considering the dynamics of the EP and UN confidence indexes, it can be noted that the number of countries with negative dynamics is almost double

the number of countries with positive dynamics (see Fig. 6). From an institutional approach, this fact appears to represent an unforeseen deterioration in the quality of “exemplary” political institutions.

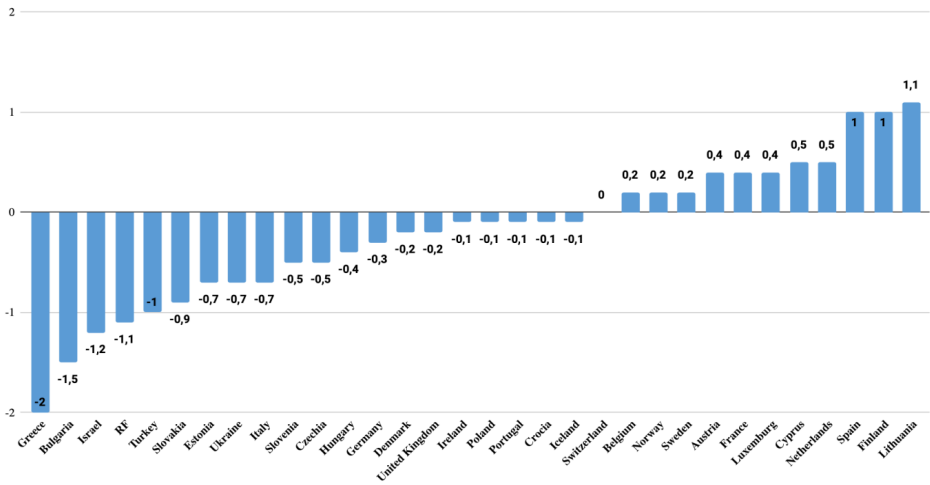


Fig.6. Dynamics of United Nations confidence among ESS 2002–2019 project participants (difference in scores – 10-point averages – between the first and last survey)

Source: authors

Conclusions. The results of our empirical study prove that trust in political and public institutions is rationally justified; it is closely linked to the citizens’ assessment of the work of the institutions. Institutions that work well – the police, the courts, the European Parliament and the UN – build trust; poorly performing institutions – political parties, politicians, and national parliaments – produce skepticism and mistrust. An empirical analysis of the dependence of confidence level on the individual characteristics of respondents in countries in “democratic transit” and in high-trust societies produces the following conclusions.

Institutional trust in these countries is significantly influenced by political and economic factors and, at the same time, is almost unaffected by interpersonal trust or the particularities of the socialization of individuals. The police and the judiciary stand out from other public institutions. In modern, developed societies with dense networks of social ties and voluntary associations, where political institutions (courts, police) work in a way that compels or encourages individuals to behave reliably, responsibly, and in a trusting manner, high levels of all kinds of trust are observed. This in turn has a reverse effect on political institutions. This is the pattern observed in “high-confidence societies.”

All of the above relates to the activities of public institutions to build institutional trust, and mainly involves high-trust societies – that is, Western Europe. Ukrainian society is usually referred to as a low-confidence society. Do high and low trust societies share the same patterns? In our opinion, political trust (or mistrust) is mainly formed by the activities of political institutions

(effective and just, or ineffective and unjust), and people's social characteristics play a lesser role in this.

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Mykola M. Izha, Olena V. Knyazeva, Tatyana I. Pakhomova

INSTITUCINIO PASITIKĖJIMO PROBLEMA UKRAINOJE IR EUROPOJE: LYGINAMOJI ANALIZĖ

Anotacija. Straipsnyje pateikiami institucinio pasitikėjimo formavimosi tyrimo rezultatai, susiję su pasitikėjimo valstybės (viešosiomis) ir politinėmis institucijomis lygio nustatymu ne tik Ukrainoje, bet ir šiuolaikinėse Europos šalyse. Tyrimo kontekste buvo suformuoti uždaviniai, kurie leido nustatyti veiksnius, veikiančius piliečių pasitikėjimo politinėmis institucijomis formavimąsi: tirtas politinių institucijų veiklos efektyvumas; analizuota asmeninė piliečių sąveikos su valdžios atstovais patirtis; identifiukuotas pasitikėjimo valstybe kaip visuma lygis; išsiaiškinta, kaip tas pasitikėjimas gali būti perduotas atskiroms viešosios valdžios valstybės institucijoms. Analizuojant 2002–2018 metų Europos socialinio tyrimo (ESS) nuo pirmojo iki devintojo turo (bangų) duomenis, buvo lyginamas pasitikėjimas Ukrainos ir kitų Europos šalių politinėmis ir viešosiomis institucijomis. Analizė leido aukščiausiu (valstybės) lygmeniu nustatyti veiksnius, kurie gali turėti įtakos valstybės viešajai politikai. Remiantis tyrimo rezultatais, galima pasiūlyti priemones visuomenės pasitikėjimui svarbiausiomis viešosios valdžios institucijomis didinti.

Mykola Izha – Doctor of Political Science, professor, director, Odessa Regional Institute of Public Administration of the National Academy of Public Administration under the President of Ukraine, Ukraine.

E-mail: director@oridu.odessa.ua

Mykola Izha – politikos mokslų daktaras, Nacionalinės viešojo administravimo akademijos prie Ukrainos prezidento Odesos regioninio viešojo administravimo instituto direktorius, profesorius, Ukraina.

E. paštas: director@oridu.odessa.ua

Olena Knyazeva – PhD in Sociology, associate professor at the Department of Regional Policy and Public Administration at the Odessa Regional Institute of Public Administration at the National Academy of Public Administration under the President of Ukraine, Ukraine.

E-mail: knyazeva.elena.mail@gmail.com

Olena Knyazeva – sociologijos mokslų daktarė, Nacionalinės viešojo administravimo akademijos prie Ukrainos prezidento Odesos regioninio viešojo administravimo instituto Regioninės politikos ir viešojo administravimo katedros docentė, Ukraina.

E. paštas: knyazeva.elena.mail@gmail.com

Tetyana Pakhomova – Doctor of Science in Public Administration, professor, chairman of the Department of Regional Policy and Public Administration at the Odessa Regional Institute of Public Administration at the National Academy of Public Administration under the President of Ukraine, Ukraine.

E-mail: tipakhomova@ukr.net

Tetyana Pakhomova – viešojo administravimo mokslų daktarė, profesorė, Nacionalinės viešojo administravimo akademijos prie Ukrainos prezidento Odesos regioninio viešojo administravimo instituto Regioninės politikos ir viešojo administravimo skyriaus pirmininkė, Ukraina.

E. paštas: tipakhomova@ukr.net

Anastasiia Klymenko, PhD in Public Administration, associate professor at the Department of Local Government and Territorial Development at the Educational and Scientific Institute of Public Service and Management at the Odesa Polytechnic National University, Ukraine.

<http://orsid.org/0000-0002-5831-8025>

E-mail: klumenko.a.s@op.edu.ua

Anastasiia Klymenko – mokslų daktarė, Odesos politechnikos nacionalinio universiteto Viešosios tarnybos ir vadybos studijų ir mokslo instituto Vietos valdžios ir teritorinio vystymo katedros docentė, Ukraina.
E. paštas: kllumenko.a.s@op.edu.ua

Julia Yevstiunina – pedagogikos mokslų daktarė, Odesos politechnikos nacionalinio universiteto Viešosios tarnybos ir vadybos studijų ir mokslo instituto Vietos valdžios ir teritorinio vystymo katedros docentė, Ukraina.

Yuliia Yevstiunina, PhD in Pedagogics, associate professor at the Department of Local Government and Territorial Development at the Educational and Scientific Institute of Public Service and Management of the Odesa Polytechnic National University, Ukraine.