

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON THE VALUE FORMATION IN UKRAINIAN SOCIETY DURING THE CRISIS

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Abstract. The study examines the impact of political communication on the formation and transformation of values in Ukrainian society during the crisis caused by Russian military aggression. The aim of the study is to analyze the impact of political communication

on the formation of public values in Ukraine during the current crisis. The analysis of sociological data revealed significant changes in public attitudes and value orientations of Ukrainians after the start of a full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining methods of quantitative sociological public opinion polling, content analysis, statistical analysis, and qualitative evaluation of political messaging strategies. The obtained data indicate a significantly increased support for European integration, increased trust in political institutions, intensified feeling of national unity and cohesion of European integration, and democratic ideals. The effectiveness of the government's multi-channel communication strategy, combining traditional mass media and social networks, was revealed. The study demonstrates regional differences in changes in value orientations, with the greatest increase in pro-European attitudes in the South and East of Ukraine. National stability, European integration, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are defined as key topics of political communication. The study also emphasizes that effective political communication in Ukraine during the crisis contributed to significant transformations of social values. Furthermore, communication proved to be an important tool for mobilizing public support, social cohesion, and strengthening national identity. Recommendations are provided for effective public engagement and promotion of values that strengthen national unity and democratic institutions during a crisis. Further research may focus on the development of strategic ways of supporting positive changes in the post-conflict period.

Key words: *political communication, society, values, crisis, public opinion, national unity.*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *politinė komunikacija, visuomenė, vertybės, krizė, viešojo nuomonė, tautinė vienybė.*

Introduction and literature review

In recent years, political communication and its impact on public values have undergone significant transformations, especially in countries that have faced large-scale threats and major crises. The narratives created and transmitted by political figures significantly influence population cohesion, their unifying actions, and their ability to adapt to complex realities. Ukraine, which is defending itself against Russian military aggression, provides a unique case study for how political messages shape public perceptions, beliefs, and values during an emergency.

The importance of effective political communication in crisis situations cannot be overestimated. In the Ukrainian context, state and civil society organizations faced the need to form effective communication strategies under martial law conditions and pressure from Russia to provide information. Therefore, it was necessary to build a concept of supporting national unity for the domestic audience and consolidate international support globally. Communication is not only a means of disseminating important information but also a tool for mobilizing public support, social unity, and strengthening national identity.

Public opinion is formed in different ways due to the influence of mass media and new media (Klymonchuk et al. 2024), socio-political activity, and the positioning of public organizations (Lukach et al. 2022). It should be noted that in recent years, Ukrainian society has demonstrated significant changes in value orientations. During the crisis, political communication has supported European integration sentiments, increased trust in public authorities, and strengthened national identity. These changes have influenced Ukraine's geopolitical positioning, making it part of the European democratic space. The aim of this study is to analyze the influence mechanisms of political communication on the formation and evolution of public values in Ukraine during the current crisis. The aim was achieved through the fulfillment of the following research objectives:

1. Analyze key themes and narratives that dominated the political communications of Ukrainian authorities since the start of the full-scale war.
2. Evaluate changes in public opinion and value orientations of Ukrainian citizens through comparative analysis before and after the full-scale invasion.
3. Assess the effectiveness of various communication channels and platforms (social media, traditional media, and official state platforms) in disseminating political messages and shaping public discourse.
4. Determine the impact of political communication on strengthening national unity, promoting democratic values, and shaping Ukraine's international image.

The intersection of political communication and public values, especially in times of crisis, is a subject of increasing scholarly interest. The researchers emphasize the critical role of communication during crises, arguing that effective messages can mitigate negative impact and even create opportunities for positive change (Sanjeev et al. 2021). In the context of political crises, the importance of politicians' communication in planning events, managing public perception, and maintaining legitimacy is emphasized (Chukwu 2023).

The researchers (Grossman 2022) examine the unique challenges that war and conflict pose to political communication and argue that the media play a critical role in shaping public understanding of conflict, while political actors compete to control the narrative. In the Ukrainian context, Glapiak (2023) determines how the state's communication strategies have evolved in response to the Russian information war, emphasizing the need for proactive and coordinated messaging.

Political discourse at the institutional level reflects a complex picture of the country's political sphere. It reveals the dynamics of the struggle for power between various political actors and groups of influence, while outlining the key ideological vectors and articulating the interests of specific political forces. Discourse also serves as a powerful tool for shaping public opinion and purposefully influencing the consciousness of specific audiences (Kurmanova et al. 2021, 213). The effectiveness of political communications largely depends on the skillful use of a wide range of verbal techniques, which include both rational argumentation and more sophisticated methods of psychological influence and manipulation of the recipients' consciousness (Golubovskaya et al. 2022, 37).

The Euromaidan revolution of 2013–2014 was a significant turning point in Ukrainian

political communication and value orientations (Sæther 2023, 29), when social media and mass communication networks contributed to the mobilization of protesters and the spread of pro-democratic values. Ukraine's proximity to the European Union (EU) opens up an opportunity to spread EU values as the country strengthens its ties with the West. Identity research demonstrates that Russian military aggression has led to stronger support for EU values in the Eastern and Southern Russian-speaking regions. Regional differences are explained by socio-demographic and linguistic differences (Akaliyski and Reeskens 2023, 523).

The emergence of digital and social media has significantly changed the field of political communication. Researchers emphasize the role of social media technologies (distribution of propaganda, disinformation, and manipulation of mass consciousness) in shaping public opinion and influencing society (Shmalenko and Mitina 2024, 11; Bulbeniuk 2024, 14). Through social networks, politicians formed relevant topics that strengthened national identity, namely the issue of combating Russian aggression, European support, and helping victims of military aggression (Pavliuc 2022). The dynamic development of digital media is also aimed at strengthening Ukrainian national identity in political communications. Ukrainian digital mass media, preserving the traditions of free media, have reached a high level in the analysis of facts that truthfully and adequately reflect the political processes in Ukraine and its participation in international events (Kotišová and van der Velden 2023, 9).

Existing studies provide important information about various aspects of political communication and value changes in Ukraine. But not enough analytical materials have been developed regarding political communication in the value formation of Ukrainian society, where there are rapid changes in values in societies facing existential threats. The study tries to eliminate certain gaps through a comprehensive analysis of the impact of political communication on the values of Ukrainian society during the current crisis.

Methodology

Research design

The research design involved the use of individual results of sociological surveys conducted in several stages during 2022–2024. The procedure provided for the following steps: (1) determining the changes in key value orientations, (2) establishing the frequency of key topics in political communication based on media (TV, press, social networks, Internet portals), (3) determining audience reach and credibility, (4) establishing the level of interest of government institutions in citizens' obtaining more knowledge about politics, (5) finding out the degree of citizen support for political forces; (6) establishing trust in social institutions. This made it possible to conduct a comparative analysis of changes in value orientations, trust in government institutions, support for European integration, and other key indicators. The procedure was finalized by the interpretation of the results

(identification of key trends and changes in social values under the influence of political communication in crisis conditions).

The content analysis of the spread of political messages and the formation of public discourse identified the key directions of value orientations. Secondary sources, including public opinion polls conducted by leading sociological organizations of Ukraine, were analyzed. These include the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), the Razumkov Centre, the Sociological Group “Rating,” and others (Razumkov Centre 2023; Razumkov Centre 2024a; Razumkov Centre 2024b; Razumkov Centre 2024c; USAID 2022; USAID 2023; Sociological Group “Rating” 2023; KIIS 2021; KIIS 2023; KIIS 2024) before and after a full-scale Russian invasion.

Sampling

The research sample was based on data from sociological surveys conducted by leading Ukrainian research organizations. The KIIS survey is a representative multi-stage sample of the adult population of Ukraine (18 years and older) living in the country. The sample population is 1,000 respondents. The statistical sampling error does not exceed 1.4–3.4% (KIIS 2021; KIIS 2023; KIIS 2024). The survey by the Razumkov Centre is a nationwide representative survey. The sample population is 2,000 respondents (over the age of 18) in all regions of Ukraine, with the exception of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The theoretical sampling error does not exceed 2.3% (Razumkov Centre 2023; Razumkov Centre 2024a; Razumkov Centre 2024b; Razumkov Centre 2024c). The survey of the Sociological Group “Rating” included respondents aged 18 years and older in all regions, except temporarily occupied territories of Crimea and Donbas. The sample is representative by age, gender, and the type of settlement. The sample population is 1,000 respondents. The representativeness error of the study is no more than 3.1% (The Sociological Group “Rating” 2023). The results related to the subject of the study were singled out from the general array of the obtained data. The main areas of focus were trust in political institutions, attitudes towards European integration, perceptions of national identity, views on democracy and governance, views on foreign policy, and international relations. A comparative analysis was conducted to study changes in value orientations before and after the onset of the current crisis, which involves identifying significant changes in public opinion and society’s values.

Methods

The following methods were used in the study:

- A comparative method to study changes in value orientations before and after the onset of the crisis regarding support for European integration, trust in government institutions, national unity, etc.

- A content analysis to identify the effectiveness of various communication channels (social networks, news sites, television, radio, print media) in spreading political messages
- A sociological survey of public opinion, including region-specific, to identify differences in changes in value orientations between different regions of Ukraine (West, Centre, South, and East)
- A statistical analysis for processing quantitative data obtained from surveys and determining statistically significant changes in the studied indicators

Results

Data processing provides insight into the influence of political communication on the value formation in Ukrainian society during the current crisis. The results are presented in several key areas from different sources. An analysis of public opinion polls before and after the full-scale Russian invasion shows noticeable changes in public values and attitudes (Table 1).

Table 1. Changes in the main value orientations in Ukraine

Value orientation	2022 (%)	2024 (%)	Change
Support for European integration	53.6	79.4	+25.8
Confidence in the President of Ukraine	36.2	49.6	+13.4
Confidence in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine	18.7	19.3	+0.6
Confidence in the Government of Ukraine	21.5	21.6	+0.1
National unity/cohesion	37	44	+7.0
Support for democratic governance	53.6	61.2	+7.6
A positive view of Ukrainian identity	72.9	76.2	+3.3

Source: table based on Razumkov Centre (2024a), Razumkov Centre (2024b), Razumkov Centre (2024c), and KIIS (2024)

The data show significant growth in all measured value orientations, with particularly notable changes in support for EU integration, trust in government, and the importance of national unity. The greatest growth is observed in support for European integration, which indicates a significant strengthening of pro-European sentiments in Ukrainian society as a reaction to Russian aggression and the search for alternative geopolitical landmarks. Confidence in the authorities has increased, which indicates the consolidation of society around state institutions in times of crisis and is associated with effective crisis communication and leadership during wartime.

An analysis of social media data and expert interviews revealed the effectiveness of

various communication channels for spreading political messages and shaping public discourse (Table 2).

Table 2. Consumption of national sources of information

Media	Audience 2022 (%)	Confidence level in 2022 (%)	Audience 2023 (%)	Confidence level 2023 (%)
Social networks	74	60	76	59
News sites	42	54	41	56
TV	36	48	30	49
Broadcast	11	23	10	28
Print media	3	16	3	24

Source: table based on USAID (2022) and USAID (2023)

There is a shift from traditional media to digital platforms, including social media and news sites. The data emphasize the importance of a diversified approach to political communication, with a special emphasis on digital platforms, but not neglecting traditional media, which still enjoy the trust of a large part of the population.

The interest of government institutions in obtaining more knowledge about politics by citizens is presented in Figure 1. The majority of respondents believe that the institutions of power are not very interested or only slightly interested in citizens getting more knowledge about politics. Analyzing Figure 1, it can be noted that government institutions should pay more attention to the political education programs for citizens. Communication on the importance of political literacy for the functioning of a democratic society needs to be improved.

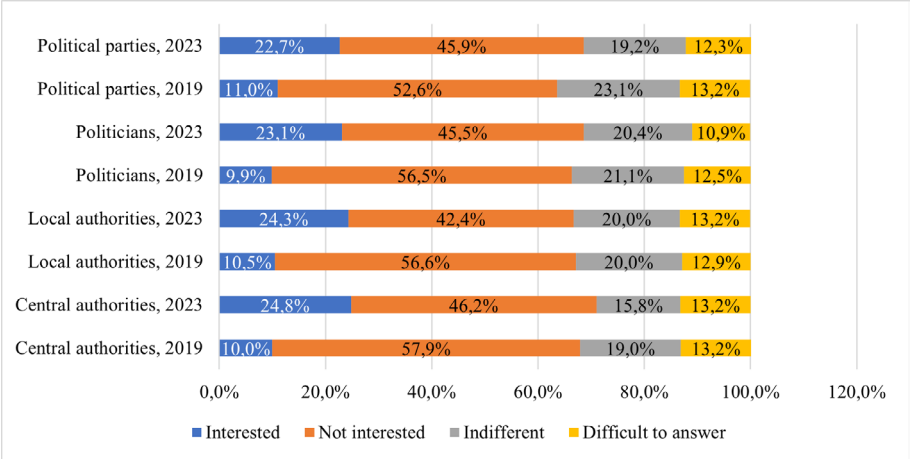


Figure 1. Interest of government institutions in citizens gaining more knowledge about politics

Source: developed by the authors, based on the Razumkov Centre (2023)

Trust in information sources shows a slight decline for most information sources from 2022 to 2023, except for a few categories (Figure 2).

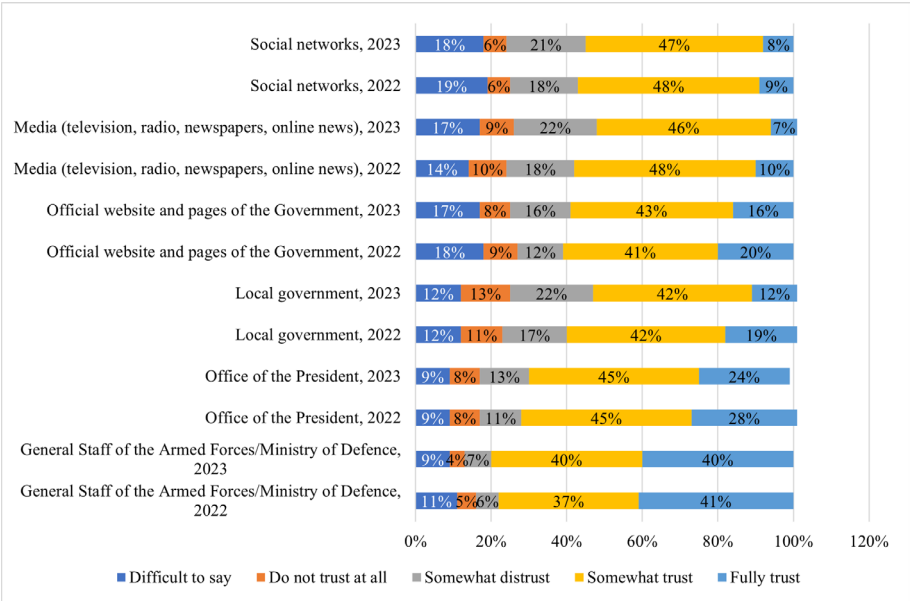


Figure 2. Trust in sources of information, 2022 and 2023

Source: developed by the authors, based on USAID (2022) and USAID (2023)

The general decrease in trust may be related to the duration of the crisis situation and possible “news fatigue.” A high level of trust in national television can be the result of effective crisis communication through this channel. The growing trust in social networks may indicate their growing role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information. The results emphasize the importance of a diversified approach to political communication, taking into account different levels of trust in different sources of information. They also indicate the need for constant monitoring and adaptation of communication strategies according to changes in public trust in different media platforms.

The study identified several key communication strategies that were particularly effective in shaping public values: a consistent message about European integration and reforms, emphasis on shared historical and cultural narratives, regular updates on the military situation and national defense efforts, and promotion of civic activism and volunteering. Content analysis shows that the strategies contributed to the strengthening of national identity, fostering a sense of common purpose, and strengthening democratic values among the Ukrainian population.

Some regional differences in how political communication influenced value orientations were revealed (Table 3).

Table 3. Regional differences in value changes

Region	Support for EU integration (2021–2023)	Confidence in the government (2022–2023)	National unity (2022–2024)
West	+9.5%	-28%	+4.5%
Centre	+4.5%	-26%	+4%
South	+18.5%	-23%	+4%
East	+13.5%	-23%	+5%

Source: table based on Sociological Group “Rating” (2023); KIIS (2021); KIIS (2023); KIIS (2024)

The greatest increase in support for integration into the EU is observed in the South and East. In view of the traditionally pro-Russian attitudes of these regions before the invasion, this indicates the effectiveness of political communication in changing public opinion and value orientations. There is a general decline in trust in the government in all regions, which can be linked to the crisis and possible mistrust of government measures. The growth of national unity is noticeable in all regions, especially in the West and the Center, which may be the result of the state’s efforts to strengthen national identity and counter external threats.

In general, Table 3 demonstrates positive shifts in the value orientations of the population of Ukraine, which is the result of effective political communication and adaptation to new challenges. The effect was most pronounced in regions that traditionally had other political orientations, indicating a shift in public opinion in response to current events and government communication strategies. Although all regions showed positive changes, the

scale of change was generally greater in the South and East—regions that were traditionally considered to be more pro-Russian in the past. The results provide a comprehensive overview of how political communication influenced the values of Ukrainian society during the current crisis. The results demonstrate significant changes in public opinion and value orientations, the effectiveness of various communication strategies, and the crucial role of coherent information exchange in shaping public perception.

Discussion

Significant shifts in value orientations recorded in public opinion polls indicate a fundamental transformation of Ukrainian society. In particular, the sharp increase in support for European integration, trust in the government, and the importance of national unity indicate the consolidation of society around a common vision of Ukraine's future. This is consistent with theories of crisis communication, which claim that external threats can lead to increased internal cohesion and support for government institutions. Research on the transformation of Ukrainian identity during the war confirms the findings regarding the strengthening of the sense of national unity (Glapiak 2023, 25). The research (Sæther 2023, 44; Pavliuc 2023) on the geopolitical orientations of Ukrainians correlates with data on growing support for democratic values and European integration.

The critical role of political communication in maintaining morale, coordinating civilian support for defense efforts, and promoting social cohesion underscores the importance of effective crisis communication. The growing level of trust in government institutions and support for their approach to crisis management testify to the success of communication efforts. The research (Chukwu 2023, 125; Balasubramanian and Fernandes 2022) on the role of leadership communication of politicians during a crisis confirms the conclusions about the importance of consistent and transparent communication of the government.

More significant shifts in the South and East of Ukraine, which have traditionally been considered more pro-Russian, may indicate a reassessment of geopolitical views in these regions as a result of the ongoing conflict. This highlights the importance of adapting communication strategies to regional specifics and historical contexts. The analysis of regional features of political attitudes conducted by a team of researchers (Akaliyski and Reeskens 2023, 528) does not fully confirm the observation of regional variations in changing value orientations. The mentioned work emphasizes a certain lack of acceptance of European values in the Western regions of Ukraine, referring to a significant level of conservative religious views. This issue can be explained by differences in different methodologies used in sociological surveys.

The balance between traditional and new media in spreading political messages is particularly revealing. While the president's televised addresses remain the most trusted source of information, high engagement rates on social media indicate the growing importance of these platforms, especially for younger audiences. This emphasizes the need for a

multi-channel approach to political communication to effectively reach different demographic groups. A study (Kotišová and van der Velden 2023, 10) on the influence of social networks on the formation of public opinion in Ukraine is consistent with the conclusions about the importance of these platforms in political communication.

The analysis of key topics in political communication reveals a clear strategy aimed at strengthening national identity, promoting democratic values, and positioning Ukraine as part of the European community. The effectiveness of such a strategy is reflected in a significant increase in support for European integration and a strengthening of the sense of national identity. The results of the conducted research reveal a deep and multifaceted influence of political communication on the value formation in Ukrainian society during the current crisis.

Research limitations

The results of the study evidence the significant influence of political communication on the value formation in Ukrainian society during the current crisis. Despite the comprehensive approach, the study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

1. The study covers a relatively short period of time since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. The long-term effects of political communication on value formation may differ.
2. Access to some regions, especially the occupied territories, was limited because of the current situation in Ukraine, which could affect the representativeness of the sample.
3. The extreme conditions of war may have led to temporary changes in public attitudes that may not reflect stable, long-term trends.

Although the use of mixed methods increases the reliability of the results, each method has its limitations. For example, public opinion polls may have influenced the current situation, and social media analysis may not have fully covered all demographic groups.

Recommendations

The results of the conducted research give grounds to note that it is possible to propose several directions in terms of practical aspects. The key should be the development of differentiated communication strategies for different regions of Ukraine, including online media. In order to increase trust in state institutions, it is advisable to develop programs to increase the transparency of the activities of government bodies. In addition, an important step will be the development of a strategy for rapid response to misinformation and the introduction of a system for constant monitoring of changes in public values and the effectiveness of communication strategies.

Conclusions

1. The study demonstrates the comprehensive influence of political communication on the value formation in Ukrainian society during the current crisis. The results show significant changes in public values and attitudes, in particular, increased support for European integration, increased trust in political institutions, and increased importance of national unity. A comparative analysis of public opinion polls before and after the invasion revealed significant changes in public attitudes and values. A significant intensification of pro-European sentiments, national unity, and the level of trust in the authorities indicates the consolidation of society around a common vision of Ukraine's future. Content analysis of political speeches, statements, and publications in social networks showed the dominance of such topics as national stability and unity, European integration, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.
2. So, political communication in Ukraine during the crisis contributed to significant changes in public values and attitudes, which testifies to its importance as a tool for mobilizing public support, social unity, and national identity. It was found that political communication played an important role in rallying the population, shaping international opinion, and strengthening a sense of common purpose and values among citizens. A multi-channel communication strategy that combines traditional media with active use of social networks to reach different demographic groups is effective. Regional differences in the change of value orientations were revealed, which emphasize the need for adapted communication approaches. The obtained results can be used by state authorities, political parties, public organizations, and the media to improve political communication, strengthen national unity, and support democratic processes in Ukraine during the current crisis. Further research may focus on developing strategies to support positive change in the post-conflict period.

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POLITINĖS KOMUNIKACIJOS POVEIKIS VERTYBIŲ FORMAVIMUI UKRAINOS VISUOMENĖJE KRIZĖS METU

Anotacija. Tyrime nagrinėjama politinės komunikacijos įtaka vertybių formavimuisi ir transformacijai Ukrainos visuomenėje per Rusijos karinės agresijos sukeltą krizę. Tyrimo tikslas – išanalizuoti politinės komunikacijos įtaką viešųjų vertybių formavimuisi Ukrainoje dabartinės krizės metu. Sociologinių duomenų analizė atskleidė esminius ukrainiečių visuomenės požiūrio ir vertybinių orientacijų pokyčius 2022 m. prasidėjus visapusei Rusijos invazijai. Tyrime taikomas mišrus metodas, derinant kiekybinės sociologinės visuomenės nuomonės apklausos, turinio analizės, statistinės analizės ir kokybinio politinių pranešimų strategijų vertinimo metodus. Gauti duomenys rodo ženkliai išaugusią paramą Europos integracijai, padidėjusį pasitikėjimą politinėmis institucijomis, sustiprėjusį nacionalinės vienybės jausmą ir Europos integracijos bei demokratinių idealų sanglaudą. Atskleistas vyriausybės daugiakanalės komunikacijos strategijos, jungiančios tradicines žiniasklaidos priemones ir socialinius tinklus, efektyvumas. Tyrimas parodo regioninius vertybinių orientacijų pokyčių skirtumus, o labiausiai proeuropietiškas požiūris auga Ukrainos pietuose ir rytuose. Nacionalinis stabilumas, Europos integracija, suverenitetas ir teritorinis vientisumas yra apibrėžiami kaip pagrindinės politinės komunikacijos temos. Tyrime taip pat pabrėžiama, kad efektyvi politinė komunikacija Ukrainoje krizės metu prisidėjo prie reikšmingų socialinių vertybių transformacijų. Be to, komunikacija pasirodė esanti svarbi visuomenės paramos telkimo, socialinės sanglaudos ir tautinės tapatybės stiprinimo priemonė. Pateikiamos rekomendacijos efektyviam visuomenės įtraukimui ir vertybių, stiprinančių tautinę vienybę ir demokratines institucijas, propagavimui krizės metu. Tolesni tyrimai gali būti sutelkti į strateginių būdų, kaip palaikyti teigiamus pokyčius pokonfliktiniu laikotarpiu, kūrimą.

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