
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34768/r1.2021.v472.13>

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REGIONAL CULTURES OF UKRAINE AND PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY

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Keywords: poverty, individual blame, social blame, regional culture.

The paper presents pondering on the perception of poverty. Tries to explain when and why people blame the poor for their laziness and the lack of willpower. Interregional variation in the individual blame is explained from the point of view of economic development and local/regional culture. State paternalism, materialism and xenophobia are analysed as the cultural constructs that may influence the popular perception of poverty as a poor's fault – the interregional difference in the individual blame in Ukraine. The data for analysis are taken from the European Value Survey, 2008. It was found that state paternalism is inversely correlated with individual blame except for five northern oblasts of Ukraine, where people higher scored on the state paternalism tend to blame the poor more, not less. The discussion of the result appeals to the rapid economic development of the metropolitan area (Kiev-city) that propels individualism, while the cultural hypothesis emphasises the importance of the history of the relationship with private property.

***Nataliia Pohorila** – Ph. D. in sociology; research interests: regional studies, political culture, social capital.

KULTURY REGIONALNE UKRAINY A POSTRZEGANIE UBÓSTWA

Słowa kluczowe: ubóstwo, wina jednostki, wina społeczna, kultura regionalna

Artykuł przedstawia rozważania na temat postrzegania ubóstwa. Próbuje wyjaśnić, kiedy i dlaczego ludzie obwiniają biednych za ich lenistwo i brak silnej woli. Zróżnicowanie między regionami w zakresie winy jednostki wyjaśniono z punktu widzenia rozwoju gospodarczego i kultury lokalnej/regionalnej. Przeanalizowano paternalizm państwowy, materializm i ksenofobię jako konstrukty kulturowe, które mogą wpływać na powszechne postrzeganie ubóstwa jako stanu zawinonego przez biednego – różnice między regionami w postrzeganiu winy jednostki na Ukrainie. Dane do analizy pochodzą z badania European Value Survey, 2008. Stwierdzono, że paternalizm państwowy jest odwrotnie skorelowany z winą indywidualną, z wyjątkiem pięciu północnych regionów Ukrainy, gdzie osoby z wyższymi ocenami paternalizmu państwowego mają tendencję do przypisywania ubogim większej, a nie mniejszej winy. W dyskusji nad wynikami odwołano się do szybkiego rozwoju gospodarczego obszaru metropolitalnego (Kijów), który sprzyja indywidualizmowi, natomiast hipoteza kulturowa podkreśla znaczenie historii relacji z własnością prywatną.

My interest in poverty perception inspired me to observe a trend in this field which is contrary to the expected. It was assumed that blaming the poor for their possible laziness and financial failures related to the Anglo-Saxon culture of individualism is more common than in Eastern Europe. However, contrary to expectations, in Central and Eastern Europe, the burden of the poor for poverty is more significant. In the 1980s, in Western Europe, blaming the poor for their situation (individual blame) decreased significantly and is now much less popular than blaming the system for poverty (social injustice) (Figure 1). At the same time, the frequency of explaining poverty through social injustice increased in all European countries, and in 1990 it became twice as popular as blaming the individual for their poverty. This change was probably due to the experience of the economic crisis in the 1980s, which hit the UK particularly hard and the rise in structural unemployment. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the level of individualised blame slightly gained popularity, but it still did not reach the level of the 1970s. The general tendency is that individual blame is leftover from the past. Therefore, one may wonder

what tendency should be expected in the post-communist Central and Eastern European countries, which experienced the transformational shock and the period of primary capital accumulation? Are the lasting influences of non-individualist culture stronger than the influence of systemic changes?

The analyses of empirical data show that a greater percentage of the population from Central and Eastern European countries indicate laziness and the lack of will of individuals as causes of individual blame than in Western Europe (even compared to the level of the 1970s) (Eurobarometer 1976; EVS 1990; 2008) (Figure 1). James Kluegel and his colleagues from the research project “Social Justice and Political Change” (Kluegel and others 1995) noticed that more indications concerned individual and social blame among Central and Eastern Europe respondents. The authors then interpreted it as a sign of immaturity of social perception in post-communist Europe, recently after liberal ideology became popular and the egalitarian-ethical one had not yet lost its strength. However, this explanation was adequate when interpreting the research results in 1991, but it did not fit those of 2008. The tendency of the coexistence of mutually exclusive opinions turned out to be relatively constant – the experience of social inequalities and tensions caused by market development did not contribute to the decline in the popularity of *individual blame*.

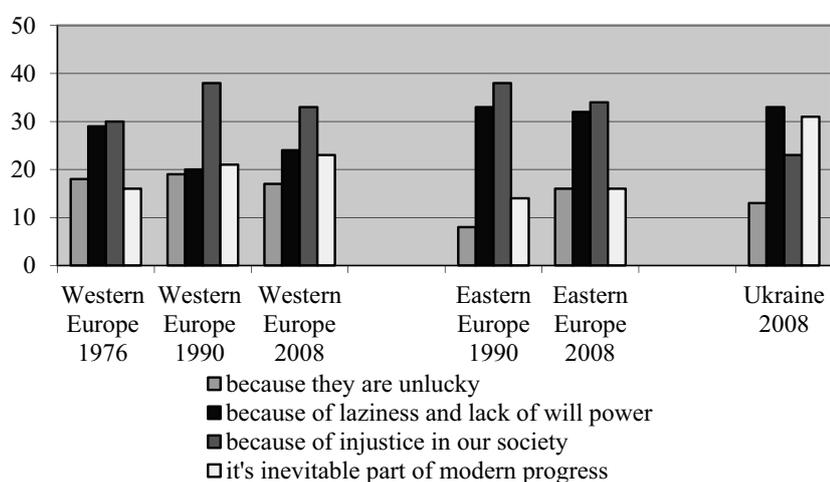


Figure 1. Perception of the causes of falling into poverty, Ukraine and other countries (in %) (Responses to the question: “Why are there people in this country who live in need?”).

Source: European Value Survey 2008, Ukraine.

The analysis of the case of Ukraine seems interesting because the Ukrainian data expose considerable interregional differences along the lines of historical divisions, and the economic indicators undoubtedly differentiate Ukrainian regions less than Ukraine and other countries. Such an analysis will be carried out later in the text.

The article examines the impact of three worldviews on the perception and definition of reasons for poverty: state paternalism, materialism and xenophobia.

The attitude to the state's role in the perception of the poor and poverty is important. The state plays a significant role for aid-dependent members of society, especially in the communist system. Traditionally, it was believed that reliance on state care was especially felt in industrial regions where most large state-owned enterprises were located (in the east of the country). However, in another study, the European Social Survey, in which Stefan Svalfors (2013) examined the attitude of Europeans to the role of states in socially significant matters, the interregional differences were telling. Five aspects were distinguished regarding job security, health care systems, a decent standard of living for the unemployed and the elderly, and kindergartens for children of working parents. The north had the minor pro-state position in contrast to the south, where it was the most pro-state in each of the five aspects.

Preference for materialist and financial perception of the world is called here an indicator of materialism. In Ukraine, little research has been done on the index of materialism; it was measured in different ways. Internationally, Ronald Inglehart's (2000) materialistic-post-materialist life goals index was studied in WVS¹. In the European EVS² study, the Schwartz value scale (Schwartz and Bilsky 1990) was applied, which showed the outstanding European wealth valuation by Ukrainians (Magun and Rudnev 2007). Russell Belek's materialism scales were investigated based on "none-generosity", envy, and possessiveness (Belk 1984). This scale was also tested on the national sample (Pohorila 2019), and significant regional and rural-city differences were shown.

The third variable to be analysed is the xenophobia index – intolerance to specific categories of the population: in the EVS study, these are "people with a criminal past", "heavy drinkers", "immigrants/foreign workers", "drug addicts", "people of a different race", "AIDS patients", and "homosexuals". This indicator has been observed since the beginning of the European Value Survey in the 1970s. It is the highest among those respondents who listed

¹WVS – World Value Survey.

²ESS – European Value Survey

marginalised social categories as unwanted neighbours. According to the marginalisation theory, the poor are also members of the “marginalised”, “strangers” groups of society, at least for the part covered by the survey study.

The history of Ukraine gives an idea of deeper reasons for the attitude towards poverty than the individual experiences of the transformation in the 1990s. A threat to property rights, experienced several times, could have caused private property, possession of money and objects, wealth and poverty to be interpreted differently than in Western Europe. The deprivation of Kozakam’s autonomy and property rights, the brutal interruption of the rebirth of the peasants after the abolition of serfdom by the Bolshevik Revolution and entirely stopped by Stalinist collectivisation, as well as the failure of reforms in the 1990s, could only increase the feeling of threat to property. Such a lasting experience of the insecurity of property in a country living off agriculture may have formed a resistance to the idea of sharing income with one’s neighbour for fear of another “taking away” the property. Perhaps such attitudes can be described as the “habitus of non-sharing”.

This “habitus of non-sharing” could be captured by the three approaches mentioned above: state paternalism, materialism and xenophobia. Paternalism can mean that the burden of the provision for, above all, the poor is placed on the state. Because the support of the poor belongs to the state, the others should not feel sorry for those who need it because it is not their responsibility. Materialism is strongly connected to the possession of things and money, so diligence is a way to get them. In such a perspective, laziness is condemned. Xenophobia embodies the values of a mainstream industrial type society based on work ethics and consumerism and condemns the marginalised groups that threaten to underpin such a society.

Hypothesis about the influence of regional cultures in Ukraine

Due to the geographical, economic, historical and cultural diversity of Ukrainian regions, this habitus of non-sharing may also be diverse. The data presented below indicate that this is indeed the case.

Figure 2 shows that only the west of the country resembles Central and Eastern Europe regarding the system of the respondents’ indications: the majority – to individual and social blame (nearly 30% each). The rest of the regions show various combinations of voices with no clear dominance of either option. The north and the south have the highest percentages of the population speaking in favour of individual blame. The data about north is fascinating because, together with explaining poverty resulting from

personal failure, individual factors account for the majority (i.e. 64%) of all statements, 1.5 times above the national level (46%). Individual blame here is twice as significant as in the centre of Ukraine (42% and 22.5%). The difference is statistically significant at the level of 1%, also between the west and the east.

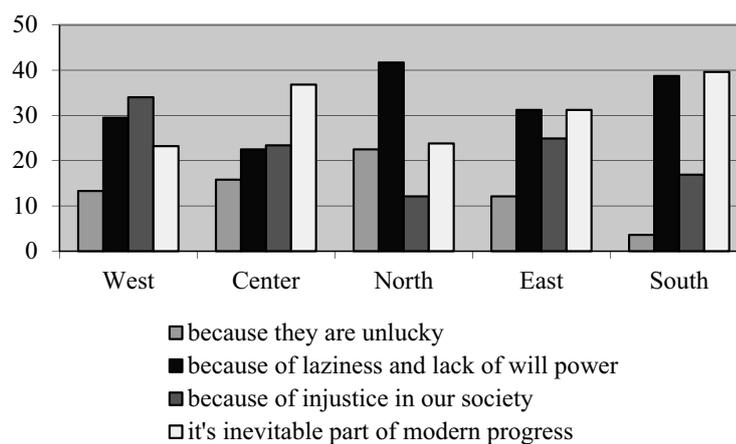


Figure 2. Perception of the causes of falling into poverty. Differentiation by regions of Ukraine, (Responses to the question: "Why are there people in this country who live in need?") (%).

Source: European Value Survey 2008, Ukraine.

One may wonder whether the reference to regional cultures would help explain the differences in the perception and explanation of poverty. These cultures can show the social and moral climate contributing to the formation of opinions about poverty as one of the themes that evoke emotions while being very publicised.

In the past, the territory of Ukraine had a similar situation to many countries on the frontier of civilisation. Then, a private property had to be defended by the population, often on their own. Cossack teams formed to defend the borderlands of Ruthenia-Ukraine were ready to form state autonomy under the aegis outside the borders of power. Although the Hetmanate, the state of the Cossacks, existed quite a long time ago (16th-18th century) and not for long (150 years) and did not defend the property rights of the bourgeoisie and peasants, these experiences could have a profound impact on historical memory.

There is a wealth of literature on the importance of regional divisions and differences in political awareness and national identity. These are publications in the field of sociology (Khmelko and Wilson 1998; Arel 2006; Stegnyy and Churylow 1998), political geography (Barrington and Herron 2004, Birch 2000) and political science (Pirie 1996, Reisinger, Shulman 2005). This research is valuable because it considers the differences in Ukraine regarding the language used, economic structure, participation of the urban population, political attitudes and voting behaviour. Thanks to this research, we can tell a lot about the cultural and demographic specificity of the regions, especially the opposition between western Ukraine and eastern Ukraine, or the west with the south-central and east.

This opposition is justified from the point of view of both history and contemporary economic processes. The specificity of the north-central region, which includes the land inhabited for the longest by ethnic Ukrainians, with the first attempts to gain autonomy in the Cossack lease, is much less noticeable. The influence of ownership relations history on the awareness of this region's inhabitants has not been studied yet.

Do the indicators explaining the causes of poverty in Ukraine (paternalism, materialism and xenophobia) differ in the regions? The table below shows the differences.

Table 1

Stability over time of some indicators in EVS and WVS, 1995-2008, Ukraine

State paternalism – saved scores of factor analysis of three questions: agreement with statements: “Government ownership of business and industry should be increased”, “State should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for”, “State should control firms more effectively”.			
	1995 (WVS)	1999 (EVS)	2008 (EVS)
West	-	0	0
Center	0	0	0
North	0	0	0
East	0	0	0
South	0	0	0

Materialism (“Here are two changes in our way of life that might take place in the near future. Please tell me for each one, if it were to happen whether you think it would be a good thing, a bad thing, or don’t you mind?” a. More emphasis on money and material possessions – “good thing”)			
West	0	0	0
Center	0	0	0
North	0	+	++
East	0	0	0
South	0	-	-
Xenophobia (“There are various groups of people on this list. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbours? Sum of the mentions “people with a criminal past”, “heavy drinkers”, “immigrants/foreign workers”, “drug addicts”, “people of a different race”, “AIDS patients”, and “homosexuals”).			
West	0	-	+
Center	++	+	-
North	0	+	+
East	-	0	0
South	-	0	0
Eta ²	0.036	0.019	0.012

(++) – in questions about materialism, it means that the index is 10 percentage points higher than the national index; (+) – 7 to 10 percentage points higher; (0) – differs from the national one +/- 1-6 points; (-) means that the index is 10 percentage points lower than the national index; (-) – 7 to 10 percentage point lower. (++) – in the xenophobia index, it means that the index is statistically significantly higher than the average for Ukraine at the level of 1%; (+) – in the xenophobia index means that the index is statistically significantly higher than the average for Ukraine at the level of 5%; (0) – does not differ from the statistically mean; (-) means that the indicator is significantly lower than the average for Ukraine at the level of 5%.

Source: European Value Survey (EVS) and World Value Survey (WVS) – 1995, 1999, 2008.

A visible indicator of paternalism does not differ between regions. The results indicate a more frequent maternal orientation in the north, especially in 2008. The centre had a strong level of xenophobia in 1995, then things changed, and in 2008 it was the west and the north that were the most xenophobic³.

The results of these comparisons suggest two competing hypotheses to be tested. A more substantial influence of paternalism on the perception

³It should be noted, however, that the xenophobia index in a given case does not include Jews, a group that is important to Ukraine due to its role in the history of ethnic conflicts in Ukraine. This category of optional responses was only included in the 1999 and 2008 EVS studies and was not taken into account for the sake of comparability. The inclusion of the attitude towards Jews in the xenophobia index in 2008 raised the Eta² ratio to 0.033 and marks the north as the most anti-Semitic region.

of poverty would speak of a greater importance of the Soviet culture. A paternalistic state and a planned economy placed the responsibility for security on the state and treated the causes of poverty as social ones.

The impact of materialism and xenophobia would vary across regions as the indicators of these social characteristics differ. The historical background implies a stronger influence of materialism and xenophobia in blaming the poor for their poverty because the “non-sharing” habitus requires protecting one’s property from possible redistribution attempts. These impacts were analysed using multilevel logistic regression.

Logistic regression results

Multilevel logistic regression (MLA) compares the effects of variables at the individual level with the effects of variables at the macro level. I use the concept of “region” as a territorial community characterised by specific experience, identification, values and behaviour; the inhabitants of the region can create a moral atmosphere that can reduce or eliminate the influence of individual factors such as, for example, ethnicity (Stegniy and Churylow 1998).

In other words, in the light of cultural theory, the influence of the moral atmosphere of the regions may be stronger than the influence of individual conditions. Multilevel logistic regression (MLA) was performed on the 2008 data to test the assumption. The region’s influence was controlled by including 25 circuits (“oblast” as an administrative unit) as a macro-level variable.

The dependent variable was the choice of the answer (zero-one), blaming laziness and lack of motivation as the cause of poverty (option two in answer to the question: “Why are there people in this country who live in need? Here are four possible reasons. Which reason do you consider to be most important?”). The independent variables were such parameters as paternalism, materialism, i.e. the variable “support for the increase in the importance of money in the future”, xenophobia, demographic variables (gender, age, education, income, religiosity). After the analysis at the unit level, it was found out that there was no significant influence of the demographic variables, therefore not included in the final model and not shown in the table below.

Table 2

Results of MLA logistic regression of paternalism, xenophobia and materialism on blaming the poor for laziness and lack of willpower, coefficients, statistical error and significance level ($N = 1073$)

	Model I	Model II	Model III
<i>Individual-level</i>			
Xynophobia	0.067 (0.050)	0.066 (0.050)	0.057 (0.050)
Paternalism	-0.193** (0.070)	-0.169* (0.071)	-0.165* (0.070)
Materialism	0.150 (0.076)	0.155* (0.076)	0.155* (0.076)
Constanta	-1.344** (0.255)	-1.313** (0.249)	-1.250** (0.242)
<i>Regional level</i>			
Paternalism		-0.850* (0.390)	
<i>Random effect</i>			
Intercept	0.533 (0.138)	0.473 (0.131)	0.262 (0.149)
Residual (Paternalizm)			1.603 (0.619)
Log likelihood	-660	-657	-655
Wild X^2	13.25	18.35	16.53

Source: data from European Value Survey 2008, own calculation.

State paternalism turned out to be the most important predictor of individual blame both at the individual and macro level – people with a higher rating of state property showed a lower level of poverty blame on others. Paternalism has also shown a significant influence at the county level – more pro-state administrative units have a lower individual blame level. Materialism is positively correlated with the tendency to blame poverty on the individual level; the factor is significant at the 5% level. Xenophobia has a shallow impact both on the individual and on the administrative units level.

Paternalism has proved to be the only variable that is “regional culture” in nature, meaning that it significantly impacts when the observation units are “oblasts” rather than respondents. Therefore, the effect of this variable was studied separately on two levels simultaneously to check whether the effect is similar in each region (Model II and Model III). However, a statistically significant residual in Model III shows that the effect of paternalism on individual blame varies across administrative units (oblasts). When the regions were checked separately, it was revealed that five regions of the north are the only ones where the correlation between individual

blame and paternalism is positive, i.e. greater paternalism coexists with higher individual blame.

The results interpretation

The analysis shows that the north of Ukraine is a region distinguished by the strongest degree of blaming the poor and explaining poverty by the actions of individuals (laziness and lack of motivation). The region ranks relatively high on the scales of paternalism and materialism. Due to the history and necessity of defending property rights, the region can be described as the “non-sharing” habitus cradle. The result of the conditions could be highly developed individualism and materialism, which in consequence pushes responsibility for people who cannot cope to the margin and causes reluctance to altruistic actions.

Is there an alternative economic theory to explain this distinction? Does the theory that the systemic change occurs most quickly in the largest metropolis of Ukraine – Kyiv, which is located in the north of the country – explain anything?

Kyiv is considered to be the most lively market for goods, services and finances. Therefore, perhaps the hypothesis of the individual stage of primary capital accumulation would be more helpful. Since the reforms in Ukraine were significantly delayed, it can be assumed that the most developed regions are still in the phase of capital accumulation, which may explain the strong individualism in the perception of poverty.

However, this explanation also presents some difficulties. Why in the towns and villages of Chernihiv, Zhytomyr and Sumy regions, i.e. the northern districts, an individualistic culture typical of a rapidly developing metropolis was to be formed? The basis for answering this question could be provided by statistical data on the nature of employment (including illegal employment) in the inhabitants of northern and central oblasts.

The 2001 census data show that in 5 out of 15 Kyiv regions, 30% of the population commute to work to Kyiv. In the Chernihiv and Zhytomyr region, the share of commuters ranges from 0.5 to 10% of the population. Living family ties between migrants and their families may cause the diffusion of individualistic values. However, checking this hypothesis would require statistical data on migrants’ employment and research on the axionormative orientation of migrant families.

Conclusions

The conducted analyses show the way of building models of explaining the poverty perception by considering regional differences. The increase

in blaming an individual for her/his poor financial condition can be explained by the fact that the region is undergoing a dynamic development of the market economy (the primary capital accumulation phase). Crisis experiences can lower the individual blame rate, but not always. The high individual blame index in Eastern Europe can be explained by the fact that these countries are at an earlier stage of market economy development than Western Europe.

Are there any deeper roots of regional variations in the burden of individual blame? The persistence of individual blame in some regions at a relatively high level can be explained by deeply entrenched traditions of materialism and differences regarding private and state ownership. The unique backgrounds of countries such as Ukraine lies in the fact that regions present traditions that weaken or strengthen individualism concerning wealth, success, failure and poverty.

The limitation of this analysis is the scarcity of comparative data on the perception of poverty in Ukraine. The lack of further data does not conclude the durability of the described differences in the perception of poverty. There is, however, the possibility that the economic and cultural hypotheses may not be tested even if larger samples of value studies become available in the future. The hypothesis of regional cultures is based on the concept of identity and habitus, and empirical research shows the weakness of collective identities in comparison with easily tangible personal parameters: gender, age, income, and position at work. In Elias' terminology, there is the concept of core and peripheral elements of a habitus (Elias 1996). Core elements are less tangible in times of stability, but they become more visible in intense changes or crises because they have a historical background. That is why, perhaps the cited statistical models are pretty weak.

Long-term comparative research is the only tool that would help test the theory of habitus or regional culture. More in-depth studies of attitudes towards material property than those used by Inglehart to analyse materialism-post-materialism would be helpful. This research could provide more information on the meanings attributed to poverty and wealth in countries where social stratification is a recent experience and where the enrichment and impoverishment patterns differ from Western countries.

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