

THE IMAGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE DURING THE WAR: THE VIEW OF THE CREATIVE CLASS

Denys YAKOVLEV, *Doctor of Political Science,*
National University "Odesa Law Academy"
e-mail: yakovlevdenys@gmail.com,
ORCID: 0000-0003-2828-4669

Hanna TRUSHEVYCH, *PhD in Political Science,*
Odesa I.I. Mechnikov National University
e-mail: trushevych@onu.edu.ua,
ORCID: 0000-0002-3793-1074

Summary

The study analyzes the results of a survey of representatives of the creative class in Odesa. The researchers conducted one of the first such studies in Ukraine. The findings show that creative class residents of Odesa consider Volodymyr Zelenskyy to be a legitimate president, despite the fact that his official term in office has ended, as stipulated by the Constitution of Ukraine. The level of trust in the president among Ukrainians fluctuates, but the majority of Odesa residents confirmed their trust in the current president. Experts would advise the president to improve his work in the following areas: human resources policy, fighting corruption, the situation at the front, domestic policy, assistance to the military/veterans, foreign policy, and the return of prisoners of war. Odesa's creative class respondents were divided on the justified expectations from the president's image in 2024 compared to 2019. The majority of respondents believe that the president has remained a populist and that he is a democratic leader, but shows some signs of authoritarianism. Respondents associate V. Zelenskyy with the image of the "President of War," consider him a "charismatic leader," "not a politician," "a servant of the people," and "the people's chosen one." The results of the study also show that representatives of the creative class notice changes in the president's image: a tired look, a "military" style of dress, improved communication skills, emotionality, rigidity in decision-making, fewer hand gestures, and a confident gait.

Keywords: *creative class, middle class, President of Ukraine, elections, image, democracy, war, political leadership, Ukrainian society.*

The relevance of the study lies in the fact that the creative class is the driving force behind democratic transformations in Ukraine. It fully fulfills the functions of the middle class in terms of modernization. At least in terms of establishing electoral democracy, the creative class has made a choice: "It is largely thanks to the middle class that Ukraine has been at the forefront of the post-Soviet democratic transformation. Yes, one should not underestimate the role of the middle class in the Ukrainian political Maidans – the "Orange Revolution" (2004) and the "Revolution of Dignity" (2013–2014). These events twice radically changed the political course of the state in the direction from authoritarianism to democracy, at least to electoral democracy. After overcoming the political crisis and the opposition coming to power (in 2005 – President V. Yushchenko, and in 2014 – P. Poroshenko), the activity and cohesion of the middle class was not enough to put pressure on the government to implement market economic reforms. The middle class has always made a democratic political choice" [10]. Among all the challenges facing Ukrainian society, the main one is countering Russian aggression. Here, the creative class also plays a titular role. The creative class in Ukraine is the driving force behind democratic processes in politics and the economy. Without exaggeration, Ukraine's economy is based on the creative class, especially during the war, as the main taxpayers are entrepreneurs and business owners. "During the war caused by the Russian aggression in 2014 and the large-scale armed invasion on February 24, 2022, it was the middle class that came to the defense of Ukraine as volunteers and activists" [11].

Richard Florida, an American sociologist, described the phenomenon of the creative class back in 2002 in his book *The Creative Class: People Who Change the Future*. "Homo creativus is a global bestseller, an expanded and updated edition in which the author shows how the world has changed with the emergence of a new economic class and what its decisive role is in the further development of social life [4].

Creativity is associated with the comprehension of the need to create what society needs at this very moment and in the method that is most acceptable to humanity. L. Shymchenko points out that creative thinking in combination with different levels of motivation provides the effect of achieving the goal, forms the

belief in the presence of a working intellect, acts as a stimulant for self-realization, and generates a desire for effective innovation. This is how the creative class is gradually formed [7]

Richard Florida refers to the core of the creative class as people engaged in science and technology, architecture, design, education, art, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technologies and new creative content. In addition to the core, the creative class includes a large group of creative professionals working in business, finance, law, healthcare and related fields. According to Florida, the main goal of local authorities today should be to create favorable conditions for the creative class [1].

On the occasion of the publication of Richard Florida's book *Homo creativus* in Ukrainian, the Book Arsenal business platform hosted a panel discussion between entrepreneurs on the topic: "People who will change the future: when will the creative class revolution in Ukraine take place?" Volodymyr Vorobey, CEO of PPV Knowledge Networks, said: "Creativity, like any other approach, can be both positive and negative. Two things are important here. First, the extent to which the creative class understands its responsibility. Since the creative class in Ukraine is not fully formed, it does not understand its responsibility to society. It doesn't understand that its representatives are becoming the global elite and have the ability to influence system change." Volodymyr Vorobey believes that the highest level of self-awareness as a representative of this class is not only to be creative, but also to have civic skills and responsibility, to be involved in creating or changing social systems. Without this, the creative class will not grow, but will be only islands isolated from the rest of the environment. The creative class is not about technology, but about values, which are then transformed into ideas and innovative projects [3].

Changes in the class model of society have led to a transformation of the system of social values, Sakalo points out. The main values of the creative class include individuality, comprehensive freedom, meritocracy, diversity, openness, and tolerance. They are gradually replacing, replacing or supplementing the old values inherent in the organizational era [6].

Ukrainian politician O. Prodan assures that the creative class in modern Ukraine has not yet been formed into a more or less coherent group. Opportunities for creative activity are quite limited or non-existent, and this type of work rarely brings decent financial rewards [5].

Creative people value individuality. L. Shymchenko argues that the process of forming creativity, as a comprehension of the need to ensure changes in the future, requires careful changes in the social process itself and in the system of public policy (mainly educational, social, informational, security, and economic) [7].

The creative class is, first and foremost, individuals who have the appropriate values. They are ready to defend them with weapons. They strive for change, create new initiatives and implement them. Does the current government in Ukraine understand the problems of the creative class? Does the creative class trust the president? How does it perceive its leader and what areas of the government's work does it think need to be improved? We were looking for answers to these and other questions by conducting a survey among Odesa's creative class representatives.

It should be noted that this kind of research is lacking in Ukraine. We have conducted one of the first expert studies in Ukraine of representatives of the creative class in Odesa. In general, the South of Ukraine, and especially Odesa, is known for a large number of well-known citizens who are representatives of the creative class. These are entrepreneurs, singers, actors, artists, architects, comedians, media market specialists, directors, scientists, and IT professionals. We interviewed 32 representatives of the creative class in June-July 2024. The study involved 56.2% of women and 43.8% of men. Also, 93.8% of respondents have a complete higher education. 6.2% have incomplete higher education. Of these, 50% of creative class representatives are aged 18 to 35, 37.5% are aged 36 to 50, 6.3% are aged 51 to 65, and 6.2% are over 66.

During the survey, the creative class of Odesa was asked the question: "What areas would they advise V. Zelensky to improve?" (several answers could be selected). The results were as expected: 81.3% - to work on personnel policy, 75% - to fight corruption, 62.5% - to control the situation at the front, 50% - to pay attention to domestic policy and help the military/veterans, 43.8% believe that the president should focus mainly on foreign policy and the return of prisoners of war. After all, the results of sociological surveys show distrust of the ruling team: The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the Office of the President of Ukraine, and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. One of the main internal problems Ukrainians see is corruption [2].

In May 2024, Ukrainian society continued to debate the legitimacy of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's tenure as President of Ukraine. In May 2024, he completed his five-year term in office. We asked representatives of the creative class: "Do they consider V. Zelenskyy a legitimate president?" During the martial law in Ukraine, 75% of creative class representatives consider V. Zelenskyy to be a legitimate president, 6.3% believe that it is necessary to overcome the legitimacy crisis (possibly by holding elections), and another 18.7% chose the answer "difficult to answer".

The level of trust Ukrainians have in the president is constantly fluctuating. During the presidential election, it was 73%; in early February 2022, Zelenskyy's rating dropped to around 34%. In the first week of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the level of trust rose sharply to 90%, and as of May 2024, it is around 59% [12]. The president's rating depends on political reality and actions, reactions to problematic issues that arise in the country. 43.8% of creative class representatives said they "trust" or "rather trust" the president, 18.8% said they "rather distrust" him, 18.7% said they "do not trust" him, and 18.7% of respondents said they found it difficult to answer this question.

While 75% of creative class residents of Odesa consider V. Zelenskyy to be a legitimate president and 43.8% "trust" or "rather trust" him, when asked "Do you think it is necessary/possible to hold elections during martial law?" (several answers were possible), 50% of respondents said that it was not advisable to hold any elections during martial law, 43.8% chose to hold local elections, and 31.3% of creative class representatives supported holding presidential and parliamentary elections during the war.

In the 2019 presidential election, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy defeated an experienced politician, a then incumbent President Petro Poroshenko. Ukrainian society had a demand to overcome corruption and wanted to see someone from the people who had not yet been in politics and was not tainted by scandals to solve all the problematic issues. It is worth noting that before Zelenskyy announced his intention to run for president on New Year's Eve, January 1, 2019, the TV series *Servant of the People* was broadcast on television in 2015-2018, where he played the main role of a history teacher who managed to become president, which served as a political technology and many Ukrainians expected Zelenskyy to do the same things as the main character in the series. That's why we asked Odesa's creative class: "Have the expectations of V. Zelenskyy's image, which he had during the 2019 election campaign, been met as of 2024?" 37.5% of respondents answered: "yes, mostly", 37.5% - 'no, mostly' and 25% - 'no, absolutely'.

Answering the question "Has Volodymyr Zelenskyi changed as a leader since the beginning of the war?" 43.8% of respondents from the creative class in Odesa believe that the president remains a democratic leader, but shows signs of authoritarianism. In turn, 81.3% of creative class Odessans believe that V. Zelenskyy was a populist and remains so, 12.5% believe that he was not a populist and is not now, and 6.2% believe that he was a populist before, but not now.

Representatives of the creative class in Odesa perceive the image of the President as a "charismatic leader" (37.5%), 31.3% define his image as "not a politician," 25% - "the people's elected representative" and 6.2% - "the people's servant." Interestingly, respondents were offered other images as well: "Military," 'Father of the Nation,' 'Hero,' or, for example, 'Strong Hand,' but after two years of war, none of the respondents see V. Zelenskyy in these images. Respondents representing the creative class of Odesa see the image of the President that he built in 2019 and maintained until 2021 as relevant.

Also, to the question: "What image do you personally associate V. Zelenskyy with" 62.5% answered 'President of war', 31.3% - 'President of victory' and 6.2% - 'President of peace'. The answers to this question are more than expected, as V. Zelenskyy has been a wartime president for more than half of his term, and his presidency was marked by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Creative class Odessans noted changes in the current image of Volodymyr Zelenskyi. The majority of respondents noted noticeable changes in the president's image after the start of the full-scale invasion. The president is trying to be a strong, strong-willed, fearless leader of a country at war, as well as responsible and serious. Respondents note the president's fatigue, emotionality and harshness in communication, rigidity in decision-making, and, last but not least, his communication skills in establishing relations with partners, diplomacy and demanding assistance for Ukraine. "In order to create a complete, functioning political image, a politician must not only have a strong visual appearance and be able to communicate non-verbally, but also transmit and translate this image through language, which is the main tool for various speeches, addresses, meetings, etc." [8]. "All elements of the president's image help not only to unite Ukrainians in the middle of the country, but also increase the support of Ukraine by the world community. After Volodymyr Zelenskyi's speeches before the governments and parliaments of different countries of the world, we observe clear actions of support for these countries: not only verbal, but also financial and armed" [9].

It should be added that representatives of the creative class in Odesa all noted that the president looked tired. V. Zelenskyi began to smile less, look serious, and experience stress and the constant pressure of war. The respondents also noted changes in Volodymyr Zelenskyy's appearance: a change from the classic style of clothing to "military", a beard and an older man's appearance, which adds severity, and the president can often be seen wearing accessories (badges or ribbons) in support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Experts representing the creative class also noticed changes in the president's facial expressions and gestures: emotionality, simultaneous sharpness and restraint, confident gait, fewer hand gestures when explaining something.

The opinions of Odesa's creative class were divided in answering the question: "Would you vote for Volodymyr Zelenskyi in the next presidential election?". 25% would vote for V. Zelenskyi, 37.5% of respondents plan to vote for another candidate (no alternative candidates were offered), and 37.5% are undecided.

To summarize, representatives of the creative class in Ukraine are a driving force, have broad opportunities, are ready for change and can implement it, but do not fully understand their power and the level of ability to use it for the development of the country. Representatives of the creative class should unite in public organizations and parties, create associations to achieve a long-term goal: the development of Ukraine, the region, the city, using their own resources, ideas and opportunities, relying on their own creativity and intelligence. This will be especially important after Ukraine's victory in the Russian-Ukrainian war, as the country needs to be rebuilt, the economy needs to be strong, and the political system is expected to change and reboot in connection with the launch of the election process: presidential, parliamentary, and local elections.

The results of a study/survey of representatives of the creative class in Odesa show that Volodymyr Zelenskyi is considered a legitimate president with a fairly high level of trust, with the majority of respondents trusting or rather trusting the president. Respondents would like to draw the president's attention to work on personnel policy, controlling the situation at the front, fighting corruption, and working with the military/veterans. The majority of respondents consider it inappropriate to hold elections in June-July 2024.

Also, creative class residents of Odesa perceive V. Zelenskyy as a "president of war" who has the images of a "charismatic leader," "not a politician," "the people's chosen one," and "a servant of the people." Respondents emphasize significant changes in the president's appearance, rhetoric, facial expressions, and gestures: tired and serious look, demanding, sharp emotionality, determination, ability to convey information to foreign audiences, "military" style, confidence in actions and gait.

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