

# From “Memory Wars” to a Common Future: Overcoming Polarisation in Ukraine



# ABOUT



# ARENA

Arena is an innovative programme dedicated to overcoming the challenges of disinformation and polarisation. Based at the Institute of Global Affairs (IGA) within the London School of Economics and Johns Hopkins University SNF Agora Institute, the Arena programme aims to use high-quality research, analysis and evaluation to create effective best practices that can then be disseminated to journalists, public diplomacy teams and civic groups. Arena seeks creative ways to counter the menace of unreality, stop the spread of hatred and division, and foster a fact-based discourse that enhances security, enables democracy and builds trust. Its experimental research projects involve journalists, academics and data scientists who seek to both understand disinformation campaigns and reach audiences impacted by them.

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**PUBLIC INTEREST  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in an era of digitally powered disinformation, social fracture and hyperpolarisation. Ukraine is on the frontline of this global crisis. A vast array of disinformation campaigns financed and promoted by the Kremlin, domestic oligarchs and other groups mean that popular perceptions and preferences in Ukraine are formed in a deeply distorted media environment.

Historical narratives in particular are manipulated in order to polarise audiences, inspire hatred and stir discontent. The Russian state has used historical controversies around World War II as well as lingering nostalgia for the Soviet Union to set social groups in Ukraine against each other, to drive ethnic and geographical divisions and to undermine trust in pro-European reforms. These narratives paved the way for the invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014. Such weaponisation of history does not attempt to explore the past and establish truth, let alone achieve reconciliation or overcome trauma. Its aim is to cynically use historical narratives in an instrumentalised way as part of a military and “information war” that seeks to undermine Ukrainian statehood. Debunking manipulations of history is of course important, but if it is the only strategy, it also risks repeating and reinforcing the agenda and framing set by the Kremlin.<sup>1</sup>

This project has explored the ways in which an independent, public service-spirited media could create content about historical issues that avoids playing into propaganda-driven divides, fosters a more constructive discourse around history and brings Ukrainians into a common national conversation. The results of our project will also be of use to public diplomats, civic actors and educators, as well as to media outlets that share our aim of reducing polarisation in Ukraine and other countries, and building resilient societies with a full, free and evidence-driven public debate.

Arena began the project with polling and segmentation analysis that investigated Ukrainians’ attitudes to history, political beliefs, identity and social values. We then held focus groups designed to identify the common concerns that unite Ukrainians. Using various insights from that analysis and the advice of prominent historians, we worked with Hromadske, an independent Ukrainian online media outlet, to create 16 pieces of video content. Finally, we explored polarised audiences’ reactions to these videos by measuring levels of online engagement and carrying out opinion polls, focusing in particular on the levels of trust. This process produced a number of important findings:

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<sup>1</sup> The use of historical narratives in Russian disinformation campaigns in Ukraine and beyond is covered in greater depth in section 1.2, History as a Weapon.

## Despite Being Polarised by the Politics of Identity and Memory Wars, Ukrainians Share Underlying Values

Our polling identified four “segments” of the population in Ukraine relevant to our study:

- **Segment 1:** an urban<sup>2</sup>, younger, better-educated segment more likely to reside in west Ukraine and Kyiv.
- **Segment 2:** an urban, younger, better-educated segment more likely to reside in south and east Ukraine especially in the cities of Odesa and Kharkiv.
- **Segment 3:** a rural, older segment more likely to reside in west and central Ukraine.
- **Segment 4:** a rural, older segment more likely to reside in south and east Ukraine, especially in Kharkiv and Odesa regions.

The geographical definitions we give here are a useful steer on where segments reside, but they are not absolute. People from different segments reside in all parts of the country to lesser or greater degrees. Moreover there are places that have very mixed segmentation, such as Dnipro, where there are roughly equal numbers of Segments 1 and Segment 2. Geographical terms are deeply politicised in Ukraine, with the idea of “the East” shifting over time and in different discourses. In this report we refer to “east Ukraine” to signify specific locations from our polling.

There was a loose geographical split between these segments in their attitudes to contentious historical topics and issues related to the politics of identity. Ukrainians in west Ukraine and Kyiv were more supportive of Ukrainian nationalist partisans in World War II, more likely to support the Orange Revolution of 2004-05 and the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-14 (also known as the Revolution of Dignity), more likely to have a strong sense of pride in being Ukrainian, and more likely to hold Russia responsible for the current war in east Ukraine. Those in the east and south of Ukraine were more likely to oppose Ukrainian nationalist forces in World War II, to hold ambivalent views towards Russia, to be less proud of their Ukrainian identity (although still with the majority indicating that they feel proud to be Ukrainian), to oppose the Orange Revolution and to be at least ambivalent about the Euromaidan Revolution, if not against it. While older generations are generally more likely to be nostalgic about the USSR, for the younger segments (1 and 2) there is a significant divide: Segment 1, who are

<sup>2</sup> In this study, the term ‘urban’ is used to define segments where the majority live in either a large city (over 1 million inhabitants) or a large town (100,000 - 1 million). The term ‘rural’ is used to define segments where the majority live in a small town (under 100,000 inhabitants) or a village.

more likely to reside in west Ukraine and Kyiv, tend to be much more hostile to the USSR, and Segment 2, who are more likely to reside in south and east Ukraine, usually hold more ambivalent attitudes to the Soviet Union.

Questions in our survey about social values and aspirations for the future, however, revealed a very different pattern. The two urban segments shared more liberal values of openness and creativity, whereas the rural segments tended to prioritise more authoritarian values, such as control and discipline. This difference was measured through preferences in child-rearing, which has historically been considered the most accurate means of assessing latent instincts.<sup>3</sup> Authoritarian instincts do not necessarily infer a desire to live under authoritarian systems of government; they rather reveal something more nuanced around citizens' instinctive preferences towards either "security" or "freedom". The more liberal values of the urban segments were also demonstrated by their relatively high tolerance of minorities when compared with the rural segments. When it came to priorities for the future, the urban segments were much more likely than the rural segments to opt for a Ukraine that is "a protector of human rights", whereas the top choice for both rural segments was "a country that follows its own course". In other words, below the surface of propaganda-driven divisions, Ukraine is a "typical" Western country made up of more "liberal" urbanites and a more "conservative" countryside.

We decided to focus our project on developing ways to engage the two urban segments (Segments 1 and 2), as this is where we find the change agents in Ukraine. They are younger, better-educated, more likely to be employed and more frequently online. These two segments are divided on attitudes to the USSR, the Ukrainian nationalist partisans of World War II and modern party politics. Yet, behind these divides, these two younger, urban segments share similar attitudes to the state, with a strong preference for personal freedom and individualism; they show tolerance towards minorities; and they are supportive of a multicultural and multi-ethnic definition of Ukraine.

Shot from video about Volyn  
massacres | hromadske

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<sup>3</sup> See Stenner, Karen, "The Authoritarian Dynamic", Cambridge University Press (2005)



Our focus groups showed that contentious topics such as Ukrainian nationalist partisans during World War II can drive division, but the discussion of traumatic events in the late Soviet period and the 1990s brought out many shared experiences of common concern. Participants in our focus groups organically brought up the Afghan War, for instance, sharing stories about the negative experiences of family members who had fought there. They also found common ground in the tumultuous economic changes of the 1990s and in their attitudes to the state and corruption. Importantly, these more recent events were much more emotionally resonant for people than World War II.



Shot from video about Afghan War | hromadske

Having identified a set of powerful shared experiences, we then worked with our partners at Hromadske to create video content that would allow us to assess the unifying potential of particular topics and framings.



## 2

### Universal Rights and Civic Values Unite

In measuring reactions to Hromadske films, we looked not only at which themes and topics inspired high levels of trust overall, but also at which provoked an alignment of trust levels amongst both Segment 1 and Segment 2. We found that the films that performed best were those that place an emphasis on universal rights, civic values and shared experiences, without touching on the politics of identity. These included, for example, videos about miners' strikes in the USSR, the rights of soldiers in the Afghan War, the mistreatment of internally displaced people during the Chornobyl nuclear disaster and international protest movements against corruption.

After audiences from each segment had watched several different films, we also asked them about which human rights they found most important. Audiences from both segments consistently agreed that rights to security and access to justice were the most important human rights. On average, Segments 1 and 2 were nearly twice as likely to rank security and access to justice as "extremely important" as they were to rank religious and language rights as having the same level of importance.<sup>4</sup> These results suggest that a focus on personal security has solid potential for uniting different segments of Ukrainian society.

## 3

### Focus on Common Traumas and Resilience

Ukraine endured a great deal of turbulence, terror and slaughter in the 20th century. Much of this experience remains unarticulated in popular culture. In our research, films about common traumas (about the Afghan War, surviving the 1990s and displaced people during the Chornobyl disaster) performed very well in terms of gaining trust from both Segments 1 and 2. Especially popular were films about the 1990s, which explored the everyday challenges of the period and the resilience of ordinary Ukrainians in overcoming them. Ukrainians in both segments were also strongly united in their perceptions of the qualities that had enabled them to survive: they all valued adaptability, determination and ingenuity. Beneath Ukraine's contested histories,

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<sup>4</sup> On average, S1 were 95 per cent more likely and S2 were 80 per cent more likely to rank security and justice as "extremely important" than they were to rank language and religious rights as having the same importance.

there appear to be underlying patterns that bring Ukrainians together: there is common ground in victimhood at the hands of oppressive occupying powers, pride in survival through resilience, and a yearning for security.



Shot from video about Chernobyl disaster | hromadske

## 4

### Bottom-Up Rather Than Top-Down Storytelling

Apart from the 16 films made especially for this project by Hromadske, we also showed our segments two “control” films by other Ukrainian broadcasters. These films both explore topics that are a focus of the Kremlin’s manipulations of history. One of the films attempts to debunk myths about the Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera, and the other film explores the history of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainian nationalist partisans during World War II). These were high-quality videos made by the Ukrainian Public Broadcaster and one of Ukraine’s leading news channels, Channel 24, and both videos use a “top-down” approach to storytelling. These videos received much lower net trust levels and lower trust alignment between segments than films made specially for our project, with net trust dipping well below 50 per cent (which was not the case for any of the Hromadske films).

We found that a more human-centric approach could be helpful when dealing with sensitive topics, in this case the mass killings of Poles in Volhyn during World War II.<sup>5</sup> Instead of trying to affirm the “right” version of history through a top-down narrator, as in the case of the control videos, we attempted a more bottom-up approach to storytelling that instead utilised nuanced personal experiences. We found that audiences previously resistant to recognising the role of their own “side” in these complex, contested events could then open up to a more factual discussion.

## 5

### National Rights and Universal Rights Can be Mutually Reinforcing

Our polling showed that the vast majority of Ukrainians (70 per cent or more of all audience segments) favour a civic model of national identity which is open to anyone regardless of ethnicity, religion, language or place of birth. With this in mind, we created films that intertwined identity issues with a civic concept of being Ukrainian and cross-cutting rights such as access to justice. These films were less unifying than other films we made about more universal themes, but they still gained the trust of the majority of both segments, with much higher trust levels and trust alignment than for the control films.

## 6

### Make History for the Future

The audiences that we engaged with had very different attitudes to the USSR: respondents in Segment 2 were more than twice as likely as Segment 1 to think that “the Soviet Union had values of fairness and equality”. However, when asked about specific policies in the USSR, both segments proved to be closely aligned in their opposition to censorship and human rights violations during the Soviet era. Therefore, focusing public discussions on the specific values that people want to see in a future Ukraine might be an effective way to unite groups currently divided by the politics of identity and nostalgia.

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<sup>5</sup> “Ukrainian and Polish historians still argue over whether the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists sanctioned Ukrainian attacks of Polish villages, and if so, on what level. There is no doubt, however, that most victims of the ethnic cleansing were Poles.” Plochy, Serhii. “The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine”. New York (2015), Basic Books, p.281

# 7

## Overcoming Polarisation is Necessary for Security and Resilience

The exacerbation of social division through digital disinformation is one of the defining problems of our time, both in Ukraine and globally. It is wreaking havoc on mature democracies like the US as well as in “hybrid” or authoritarian regimes. It undermines the optimistic premise of a “marketplace of ideas”, the notion that “the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas – that the best test of truth is the power of thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market.”<sup>6</sup> In an age where the production of “fallacious information” has become so easy, this “market” is all too easy to rig. When audiences can self-select their own media and reinforce their own biases, it is simply not enough to launch facts in their general direction and then complain when they fail to listen.

Economic and social reforms can easily be undermined in societies with low trust in epistemic authority and where evidence-based public discourse has been eroded, making disinformation also a grave economic and political problem. But given the recent intensification of information warfare and subversion, disinformation also represents a serious security risk. Overcoming polarisation needs to become a priority for public service media, donors, civil society and all other bodies that want to promote resilient societies with democratic values. This will require social scientists, media, civil society, educators and policy-makers to constantly test and refine new methodologies, topics, and discourses that have the potential to unite divided groups.

# 8

## Public-Spirited Media Must Learn to Dig Deeper Than the Propagandists.

The aim of hostile state disinformation campaigns is to sow division. Fact-checking and “myth-busting” are important, but they risk entrenching the agenda and framing established by the original disinformation. Public service media and other communicators must learn to understand audiences better than the propagandists, recognising and analysing audiences’ deeper traumas, needs and aspirations.

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<sup>6</sup> As famously formulated by Oliver Wendell Holmes in *Abrams v. United States* 250 US 616 (1919)



# Recommendations for Independent Media in Ukraine

For independent and public-service media aiming to create content on history, we have the following recommendations:

- Explore shared historical experiences through the lens of Ukrainians' resilience in overcoming trauma and their common search for security. Consider, for example, topics like the Afghan War and the economic crises of the 1990s for larger-scale documentaries, TV series or feature films.
- Expand history programming to focus on stories that reflect the struggle for universal, civic values and human rights such as the struggle for justice and security.
- Relate identity discourse to civic rights; the two can be mutually reinforcing.
- Move beyond “memory wars” to draw instead on experiences and lessons from the past that can foster an inclusive national conversation about a common future.
- Explore history through bottom-up storytelling – the personal, nuanced experiences of ordinary people.

Our methodology of polling, audience segmentation, focus groups and testing media content also provides the basis for future projects that move beyond history to consider other important themes in Ukraine, not least economic reform and the war with Russia.

Building resilience to disinformation in Ukraine will require continued sociological analysis and media content testing that can identify unifying values and topics. The Ukrainian Public Broadcaster is the most obvious vehicle to drive forward a media strategy aimed at fostering an inclusive, constructive and fact-based public discourse. However, given the fractured nature of communications and the unpredictable fate of many institutions in the country, it is also crucial that this approach receive the backing of a broad coalition of journalism schools, donors, civil society organisations and international broadcasters active in Ukraine. Experience and best practices also need to be shared with other projects that seek to overcome polarisation around the world, with the ultimate aim of creating an accessible pool of useful and usable common knowledge.

# 1 BACKGROUND

## 1.1

### The Challenge: Democracy in an Age of Disinformation and Division

We live in an era of digitally powered disinformation, social fracture and hyper-polarisation. The internet has opened up the possibility for unprecedented media manipulation and information operations involving a growing number of state and non-state actors both at home and abroad.<sup>7</sup> Often the aim of these operations is to stoke division, sow confusion and diminish trust. Scholars speak of increased “affective” polarisation: the emotional sharpening of social cleavages that can, when pushed to the extreme, make evidence-based debate and democratic deliberation impossible.<sup>8</sup> It is a trend we see both in mature democracies and in so-called “transitional” or “hybrid” states and authoritarian regimes.

Arena’s mission is to help to define how public-service spirited media can ensure a full, free and fair information space in this new environment. How can we overcome polarisation and disinformation to provide a democratic information space in the digital era? Together with social researchers, media companies, historians, policy-makers and data scientists, we aim to pioneer content creation that enhances democratic values, increases trust in accurate media and overcomes divisions to enable evidence-based debate.

**Such questions are particularly vital in Ukraine.** A vast array of disinformation and propaganda campaigns financed and promoted by the Kremlin, domestic oligarchs and other groups mean that citizens’

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<sup>7</sup> House of Commons, Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. “Disinformation and ‘fake news’: Final Report”, Eighth Report of Session 2017–19 (February 2019). Available at: <https://bit.ly/38lp9bp>

<sup>8</sup> For example, see: Duffy, Bobby., Hewlett, Kirstie., McCrae, Julian., Hall, John. “Divided Britain? Polarisation and fragmentation trends in the UK”, Kings College London, The Policy Institute (September 2019) where affective polarisation is given the following definition: “when individuals begin to segregate themselves socially and to distrust and dislike people from the opposing side, irrespective of whether they disagree on matters of policy” (p.6). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2VU6swm>

perceptions and preferences are formed in a deeply distorted media environment. In the 2000s, Ukrainian and Russian spin doctors alike divided the country along a supposedly essential east-west divide: a “pro-Europe”, “pro-Ukrainian”, Ukrainian-speaking voting block in the west was set against a Russian-speaking, Moscow-inclined east that remained nostalgic for the Soviet era.<sup>9</sup> The Kremlin and its proxies played on these narratives during their invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin made particular use of historical controversies around World War II and nostalgia for the Soviet Union to stoke ethnic and geographical divisions. Today, history continues to be used by both foreign and domestic actors to polarise society.

This project has explored ways in which the media can avoid playing into these kinds of propaganda-driven divides. Which historical narratives smooth polarisation while communicating accurate information? What deeper concerns lie behind polarised views of history? And what are the common values that could unify divided groups?

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9 For example, in 2003, a document was leaked to Ukrayinska Pravda that outlined a strategy developed by Russian “political technologists” to facilitate the victory of Russia’s favoured presidential candidate Leonid Kuchma. The document highlighted that as part of this strategy, the media should be tasked to emphasise east-west divides: “Yushchenko should be presented as the enemy of ethnic Russians in Crimea. [...] The pro-Russian political forces [...] begin to declare that if Ukraine cannot protect the interests of the Slavs in Crimea, then there is always Russia ready to support. [...] The task of the media is to interpret this as an ontological conflict between East and West.” “Kuchma’s third term. As it should have been [Tretiy termin Kuchmy. Yak tse povynno bulo buty]”, Ukrainian Truth [Ukrayinska Pravda.] (25 June 2004). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3f6YPdv>

Shot from video about return of Crimean Tatars to Crimea | hromadske





Our methodology of polling, focus groups, media content production and subsequent impact analysis can be implemented on any polarising topic, and it will be of particular utility to public diplomats, civic actors and educators looking to reduce polarisation in Ukraine and other countries.

# 1.2

## History as a Weapon

Russian foreign policy experts make no secret of their intent to use historical narratives as a weapon to stir discontent in neighbouring countries.<sup>10</sup> In September 2019, the European Parliament passed a resolution denouncing Russia's attempts to divide neighbouring countries through information operations that utilised the "dangerous" tactic of glorifying the Soviet totalitarian regime.<sup>11</sup> In May 2020, in the lead-up to the 75th anniversary of VE Day, Russia's weaponisation of history once again hit the headlines, with numerous scholars condemning the Kremlin's manipulation of narratives relating to World War II.<sup>12</sup> This weaponisation of history is quite distinct from genuine, open, and healthy discussion of historical topics.

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10 See the following studies:

- Barbieri, J. Winning hearts, minds... and territory: the use of history in Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine. Unpublished manuscript, University of Birmingham (2019)
- Chatterje-Doody, P. N. "Harnessing History: Narratives, Identity and Perceptions of Russia's Post-Soviet Role", *Politics*, 34:2 (2014), pp. 126–137. Available at: <https://bit.ly/38KWmD9>
- Lucas, Edward. and Pomerantsev, Peter. *Winning the Information War: Techniques and Counter-strategies to Russian Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe*. Center for European Policy Analysis (August 2016). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3iLFOzm> (see pp. 21–29 for sections on Russian disinformation in the Baltics.)
- Polegkyi, Oleksii. "Soviet mythology and memory of World War II as instruments of Russian propaganda", *Warsaw East European Review*, VI (2016), pp. 77–89.
- Prus, Justyna. "Russia's use of history as a political weapon", *Warsaw: The Polish Institute of International Affairs, Policy Paper*, 12:114 (May 2015). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3gFxeAC>

11 European Parliament Resolution. JOINT MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION. Webpage (September 2019). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2ZaBFgR>

12 For example:

- Dickinson, Peter. "US accuses Russia of 'falsifying WWII history'", *Atlantic Council* (May 2020). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2ALRyRy>
- EUvsDisinfo. "In the Shadow of Revised History", *EUvsDisinfo* (May 2020). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2Z9eJOU>
- Goncharenko, Oleksii. "Ukraine cannot stay neutral in Putin's history war", *Atlantic Council* (May 2020). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2ZLwCCy>
- Khromeychuk, Olesya. "Remembering the Wars of the Past, Let's Not Forget the Wars of the Present", *King's College London News Centre* (May 2020). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3e96C9u>
- Yelchenko, Volodymyr. "Putin's Russia has weaponized World War II", *Atlantic Council* (May 2020). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3e6su5e>



Ukraine has endured a particularly bitter experience of Russian disinformation campaigns built around historical themes.<sup>13</sup> Kremlin-backed media branded protestors taking part in Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-14 as "Banderovtsy", the Soviet and Russian generic term for Ukrainian nationalists, painted as Nazi collaborators. The annexation of Crimea was couched in Soviet and Russian Imperial nostalgia, and the war in Ukraine's east has repeatedly been framed as a fight against Ukrainian fascists.

These narratives start right at the top. Vladimir Putin has stated that "Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. [...] In people's hearts and minds, Crimea has always been and still is an inseparable part of Russia."<sup>14</sup> In the same address, Putin also claimed that the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-14 was organised by Ukrainian neo-Nazis: "Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites executed this coup."

These kinds of messages are then vigorously promoted both on television and on social media platforms. Even though Russian television and social media were banned in Ukraine after the Russian invasion, they can still be accessed using satellites and intermediary servers. Russian television programmes are readily accessible via online platforms like YouTube. In some Ukrainian regions bordering Russia (controlled by the Ukrainian government), it is even the case that Ukrainian citizens have access to Russian satellite television rather than Ukrainian television, despite the ban on Russian television. Furthermore, some Ukrainian channels are controlled by pro-Moscow business interests, providing a local conduit for diffusion of Kremlin narratives. Russian proxies also push historical disinformation and polarising narratives on social media. The power of Russian media to win hearts and minds has been clearly highlighted by the influence of Russian media in the non-government-controlled areas (NGCA), where over 60 per cent of the population watch Russian television every day, according to polling carried out as part of the recent SCORE

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13 See the following studies:

- Barbieri, J. Winning hearts, minds... and territory: the use of history in Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine. Unpublished manuscript, University of Birmingham (2019)
- Gajos, Bartłomiej. "History as a weapon", in Irisova, O. et al. (eds.), *A successful failure: Russia after Crime(a)*. Warsaw: The Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding (2017), pp. 61–73.
- Gaufman, Elizaveta. "World War II 2.0: Digital memory of fascism in Russia in the aftermath of Euromaidan in Ukraine", *Journal of Regional Security*, 10:1 (2015), pp. 17–36. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3fcWwFQ>

14 Full text of President Vladimir Putin's Crimea address. "Address by President of the Russian Federation", The Kremlin, Moscow (18 March 2014). Available at: <https://bit.ly/31ZvzBU>

study *Toward a Common Future*. Polling carried out by SCORE also suggests a link between the consumption of Russian television in the GCA (Ukrainian government-controlled areas in Luhansk and Donetsk regions) and increased support for Eurasian Economic Union membership for Ukraine and integration of the NGCA with the Russian federation. This was analysed using SCORE data for two consecutive time-points (2018 and 2019) from the same respondents in the GCA and comparing results for those who watch Russian television channels compared to those who do not.<sup>15</sup>

*The Re-Vision of History* research project led by Internews and Ukraine World analysed 850,000 posts on the Russian social network Vkontakte and 16,000 posts on Facebook by pro-Kremlin groups and pages between January 2016 and April 2019. The key narratives included:

- the portrayal of Ukrainians as neo-Nazis and the framing of the war in the Donbas as a continuation of World War II, with separatists fighting to protect themselves against Ukrainian fascists;
- the depiction of south and east Ukraine as historically Russian as well as the positioning of Crimea as an ancient Russian land and the cradle of Russian orthodoxy (and diminishing or rejecting the heritage of Crimean Tatars and other ethnic and religious groups);
- the narrative of the USSR as a great power, focusing on Soviet nostalgia as a source of pride, accompanied by the claim that the Ukrainian state owed its creation to the Bolsheviks.

The set of posts from pro-Kremlin pages that was analysed for this study encompassed a variety of specific claims: that Ukrainians and Russians were historically one nation that was later artificially divided; that those identifying as Ukrainian nationalists today are in fact “spiritual descendants of military criminals, fascists, and Nazis”; that life was better, easier and safer during the Soviet era.<sup>16</sup> *The Re-Vision of History* authors conclude that the Kremlin’s annexation of Ukrainian territory was preceded by the “annexation of history”.<sup>17</sup>

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15 Gazizullin, Ildar, Guest, Alexander., Lemishka, Oksana., Solodova, Darina. “Toward a Common Future”, SCORE for Eastern Ukraine (July 2020).

16 Yermolenko, Volodymyr (ed.). “Re-Vision of History: Russian Historical Propaganda and Ukraine”, Internews, Ukraine (2019), respectively p. 10; 24; 21. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2ZNpTIs>

17 Ibid.: p. 5.

Recently enacted laws on history and language have also provided another particular focal point for Russian and pro-Russian narratives. In 2014, Russia passed a series of “history laws”, including the “Law Against the Rehabilitation of Nazism” signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in May 2014, which aimed to rally the population around the flag and justify the war in eastern Ukraine (framed in pro-Kremlin media as a fight against Ukrainian “fascists”).<sup>18</sup> In 2015, a year into the war in east Ukraine, and in part in response to Russia’s “history laws”, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a series of so-called “decommunisation laws”. These laws outlawed the denial of “the criminal character of the Communist totalitarian regime of 1917-1991 in Ukraine” and banned both Communist and Nazi symbols.

One of the bills also gave special status to members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), honouring their fight for Ukrainian liberation. Given the complex history of Ukrainian radical nationalism, this decree proved controversial: in their fight for Ukrainian independence, parts of the OUN cooperated with the Nazi Germany during the early years of World War II (before the Nazis later turned against the OUN), and historians still disagree over whether the OUN and UPA sanctioned war crimes against the Polish population of Volhynia and East Galicia.<sup>19</sup> Russian media seized on the controversy around the decommunisation laws in order to promote the idea that the laws defended “Nazism and extreme Ukrainian nationalism”, that ethnic Russians were oppressed in Ukraine and that Soviet history was being disrespected.<sup>20</sup> The epitome of these divisive tensions is the figure of Stepan Bandera, leader of the radical wing of the OUN. While in the eyes of some Ukrainians Bandera is a national hero, who fought for the independence of Ukraine against the Soviet regime, he has also been repeatedly employed as a stock-in-trade collaborationist villain in Soviet and later Russian narratives.

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18 Kopolov, Nikolay. *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2018), p. 217

19 For more background on the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and Stepan Bandera see Plokhy, Serhii. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York (2015), Basic Books, Chapter 20-23.

20 Examples of articles in Russian media presenting the decommunisation laws as “de-russification” and “justification of Nazism and extreme nationalism”

- Lobanov, Maxim., Onishchuk, Elena., Alekseeva, Nadezhda. “There was no break with the Soviet past: five years ago, the process of decommunization officially began in Ukraine”, RT (April 2020). Available at: <https://bit.ly/31XHxvF>
- Regnum.ru: “The politics of Ukraine today - the justification of Nazism”, MOSCOW, Regnum (May 2015). Available at: <https://bit.ly/304M8d5>
- Tass.ru: “In Ukraine, it was proposed to expand the decommunization campaign to derussification”, TASS (April 2019). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2Z9a0N6>



Shot from video about Soviet Ukrainian artist Alla Horska | hromadske

Another set of controversies revolves around the commemoration of World War II, with the 2015 Ukrainian law “On Perpetuation of the Victory Over Nazism in World War II of 1939-1945” making a number of changes to the official representation and memorialisation of the war. The Soviet term “Great Patriotic War” was changed to “World War II” and the recognised start of the war was shifted to the global standard of 1939 from the official Russian date of 1941. A national day of remembrance was also introduced on 8 May (in line with Western Europe) to create a two-day holiday along with the Soviet tradition of Victory Day on 9 May. The Kremlin and local pro-Kremlin media amplified existing tensions around these changes.<sup>21</sup>

Pro-Russian media also seized on the controversy around the 2019 law “On Ensuring the Functioning of Ukrainian as the State Language”. This law strengthened the position of Ukrainian as the only state language in Ukraine and revoked the 2012 “Kivalov-Kolesnichenko Law” passed during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych (who was ousted by the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-14, and currently lives in exile in Russia), which had granted Russian official status as a regional language. The false claim that the Russian language would be banned outright was prevalent in Kremlin-backed media throughout the development of the language law, and this prevalence has only increased since the law was passed in 2019. Language more broadly has become extremely politicised in Ukraine, and one of Putin’s key justifications for annexing Crimea was the need to protect the rights of Russian speakers. The Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-14 was portrayed in Russian media as a “fascist” uprising that sought to outlaw the Russian language in Ukraine.

<sup>21</sup> For example: “Europe instead of Victory. Ukraine’s new attempt to crack down on May 9” , Ukraine.RU News (February 2019). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3gGeYXS>



# 1.3

## Ukrainian Responses

Much Ukrainian media content on history has focused on debunking Russian or Soviet myths. The Channel 5 show *The Time Machine* ran a series called *Ukraine Is Not Russia* in 2017, the 1+1 channel produced a series entitled *Ukraine: Reclaiming Its Own History*, and the programme *Historical Hour* has run programmes such as *Soviet Fakes About World War II*. These programmes, and many others besides, focus on deconstructing Russian or Soviet falsifications of history in favour of the “true” versions of Ukrainian history. Common topics include the crimes of the Soviet regime, Ukraine’s freedom-fighting Cossacks and the role of Ukrainian nationalist partisans during World War II in achieving an independent Ukraine.

Debunking Russian and Soviet myths has also been a focus of Ukraine’s National Institute of Remembrance, and this became especially prominent during the presidency of Petro Poroshenko (2014-19). The Institute’s initiatives to deconstruct Russian narratives about the Ukrainian Insurgent Army include the *10 Myths About UPA* project carried out in partnership with the news weekly and online platform *Novoye Vremia*.<sup>22</sup> Another, entitled *The War and Myth: Unknown WWII*, focused exclusively on debunking Soviet myths about WWII.<sup>23</sup>

Many debunking projects are high-quality and a necessary corrective to decades of disinformation. However, there is a risk that an overfocus in Ukrainian media on debunking Russian falsifications of history, especially on divisive issues and through polarising framing, means that the overall historical agenda is still being set by the Kremlin. Our own Twitter and online media analysis confirmed that the internet-based conversation on historical issues revolves around the polarising topics of World War II, Bandera, and decommunisation. We carried out social listening on Twitter in order to search for Russian and Ukrainian language keywords related to a selected list of eight historical topics and figures. The location filter of Ukraine was applied in order to pick up tweets on these topics that were posted in Ukraine. Over the period of April/May 2018 to April/May 2019,<sup>24</sup> the highest number of

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22 Vyatrovych, Volodymyr. “10 myths about the UPA: The UPA fought for a monoethnic state”, Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (August 2017). Available at: <https://bit.ly/31YV2es>

23 Zinchenko, Oleksandr, Viatrovych, Volodymyr., Maiorov, Maksym. “The War and Myth: Unknown WWII”, Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (2017). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3fcHeAY>

24 Media analysis was carried out using an open source media intelligence tool over the same period April/May 2018 to April/May 2019, with Ukraine filter applied.

tweets were about World War II, closely followed by Bandera and the decommunisation laws.<sup>25</sup> An analysis of top media stories highlighted the same pattern, with stories about Bandera, World War II and decommunisation laws dominating.

Recent studies from cognitive psychology suggest that debunking may backfire as it runs up against the limitations of entrenched aspects of human cognition. One key example is Cook and Lewandowsky's "familiarity backfire effect"<sup>26</sup>. This describes how the repetition inherent to debunking makes information more familiar and inadvertently bolsters the retention of the inaccurate content targeted by the debunking. For this reason, debunking efforts should emphasise affirmation of the facts they wish to communicate rather than negating myths and falsifications.<sup>27</sup> The limits of fact-checking and debunking have also been associated with the difficulty people have in processing negations ("X is not Y").<sup>28</sup> The most effective strategy for countering the Kremlin's distortions of history may therefore be to change the agenda of historical discourse rather than focusing on debunking Russian myths and manipulations.

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25 The eight topics selected for keyword analysis for social listening and media analysis were: WW2/ Great Patriotic war, Stepan Bandera, Decommunisation laws, Vasyl Stus, Semyon Petliura, Catherine II, Volyn and Yuri Shevelov.

26 Lewandowsky, Stephan., Ecker, Ullrich K. H., Seifert, Colleen M., Schwarz, Norbert., Cook, John. "Misinformation and Its Correction Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing", *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 13:3 (2012), p. 115. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3fcsVw1>

27 Cook, John., Lewandowsky, Stephan. "The Debunking Handbook", St. Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland (2011), p. 2. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2CjINPU>

28 Nyhan, Brendan., Reifler, Jason. "Misinformation and fact-checking: research findings from social science", New America Foundation, Media Policy Initiative Research Paper (2012), p. 15. Available at: <https://bit.ly/321Rpo7>

Shot from video  
about Afghan War  
| hromadske



# 1.4

## Elite-Driven Polarisation and Public Opinion

**The Kremlin and other forces use controversial historical topics to divide Ukrainian society, but to what extent does this reflect dynamics in Ukrainian public opinion?**

On the one hand, a 2017 study from the sociology NGO Rating Group revealed a geographic difference in attitudes to Bandera and Ukrainian nationalist partisans during World War II, with positive attitudes prevailing in western and central Ukraine while negative attitudes dominated in southern and eastern Ukraine.<sup>29</sup> There is, however, far more unity on most other historical figures, suggesting that beneath the propaganda-driven narratives lies significant common ground.

Likewise, the latest sociology in Ukraine points out that the simplistic east-west dichotomy is less clear-cut than we are led to believe by Russian propaganda and the divisive campaigns of some Ukrainian political actors.<sup>30</sup> The MAPA program at Harvard University's Ukrainian Research Institute compiled social research data from all over Ukraine in order to create visual maps of social attitudes across the country, including those related to history and identity. This project has shown that although the east-west divide does exist to a certain extent, the regional variability of social attitudes forms a far more complex picture.<sup>31</sup>

The language issue, too, is far more nuanced than is commonly thought. The Kremlin used the need to "protect" the rights of Russian speakers in Crimea and Donbas as a way to justify Russian aggression against Ukraine. Yet sociological polling by several studies has shown that whether Ukrainians speak Ukrainian or Russian does not define their sense of Ukrainian identity. Studies such as *Capturing ethnicity: the case of Ukraine* by Olga Onuch and Henry Hale have demonstrated

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29 Rating Group. "Ukraine in the focus: sociological dimensions", Summary and full report (26 June 2017), p. 45. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2Ob06Ek>

30 Studies on this topic include:

- Sasse, Gwendolyn. "Ukraine: the role of regionalism", *Journal of Democracy*, 21:3 (2010), pp. 99–106.
- Schmied, Ulrich., Myshlovska, Oksana. *Regionalism Without Regions: Reconceptualizing Ukraine's Heterogeneity*. Budapest, Central European University Press (2019).
- University of St. Gallen. *Region, Nation, and Beyond: An Interdisciplinary and Transcultural Reconsideration of Ukraine* (2012–15). Webpage (2017). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2ZNzY84>

31 Harvard MAPA. *Digital Atlas of Ukraine*, Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University. Webpage (2018). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2Z9itjm>

the strength of civic identity<sup>32</sup> in Ukraine, particularly following the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-14. Ukrainian soldiers fighting on the frontlines speak both Ukrainian and Russian; the Euromaidan Revolution featured people speaking both languages; and most Ukrainians are more or less bilingual. More recently, the 2019 presidential election had voters from all across the country opting for the primarily Russian-speaking television star and comedian Volodymyr Zelensky. Any divisions in Ukrainian society are clearly far more complex than “east versus west” or “pro-Ukrainian versus pro-Russian”, which is how they have frequently been presented in elite-driven narratives.

Through polling, audience segmentation and the testing of media content, the Arena team set out to gain a deeper understanding of societal attitudes and to investigate how independent Ukrainian media could foster a constructive, values-based conversation around history. Given that Ukrainians themselves appear to have a more nuanced understanding of history and identity politics, how could this deeper understanding be elicited and employed in the forging of a media approach capable of reducing polarisation around historical narratives in Ukraine?

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32 See:

- Onuch, Olga., Hale, Henry E. “Capturing ethnicity: the case of Ukraine”, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 34:2-3 (2018), p.84-106. Available at: <https://bit.ly/31YcNe7>
- Kulyk, Volodymyr. “Language and identity in Ukraine after Euromaidan”, *Thesis Eleven*, 136:1 (2016), p. 90-106. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3iMj1n5>
- Pop-Eleches, Grigore., Robertson, Graeme B. “Identity and political preferences in Ukraine – before and after the Euromaidan”, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 34:2-3 (2018), p.107-118. Available at: <https://bit.ly/304V2av>
- Skok, Iuliia. “Building a Common Identity of Ukrainian Citizens in the New Environment: Special Aspects, Prospects and Challenges”, Razumkov Center, Kyiv (2017). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2ZblxKY>

Euromaidan. Photo by Alexandra Gnatoush on flickr





# 2 SOCIAL RESEARCH

The first step towards overcoming polarisation is to understand the common values shared by different societal groups. We approached this through surveys, segmentation and focus groups. Our methodology will be useful for anyone who is interested in overcoming polarisation in any country. Our results, however, will be of particular use to anyone looking to address polarisation in Ukraine be it related to history, public policy reforms, the war with Russia, or any other contentious topic of this kind.

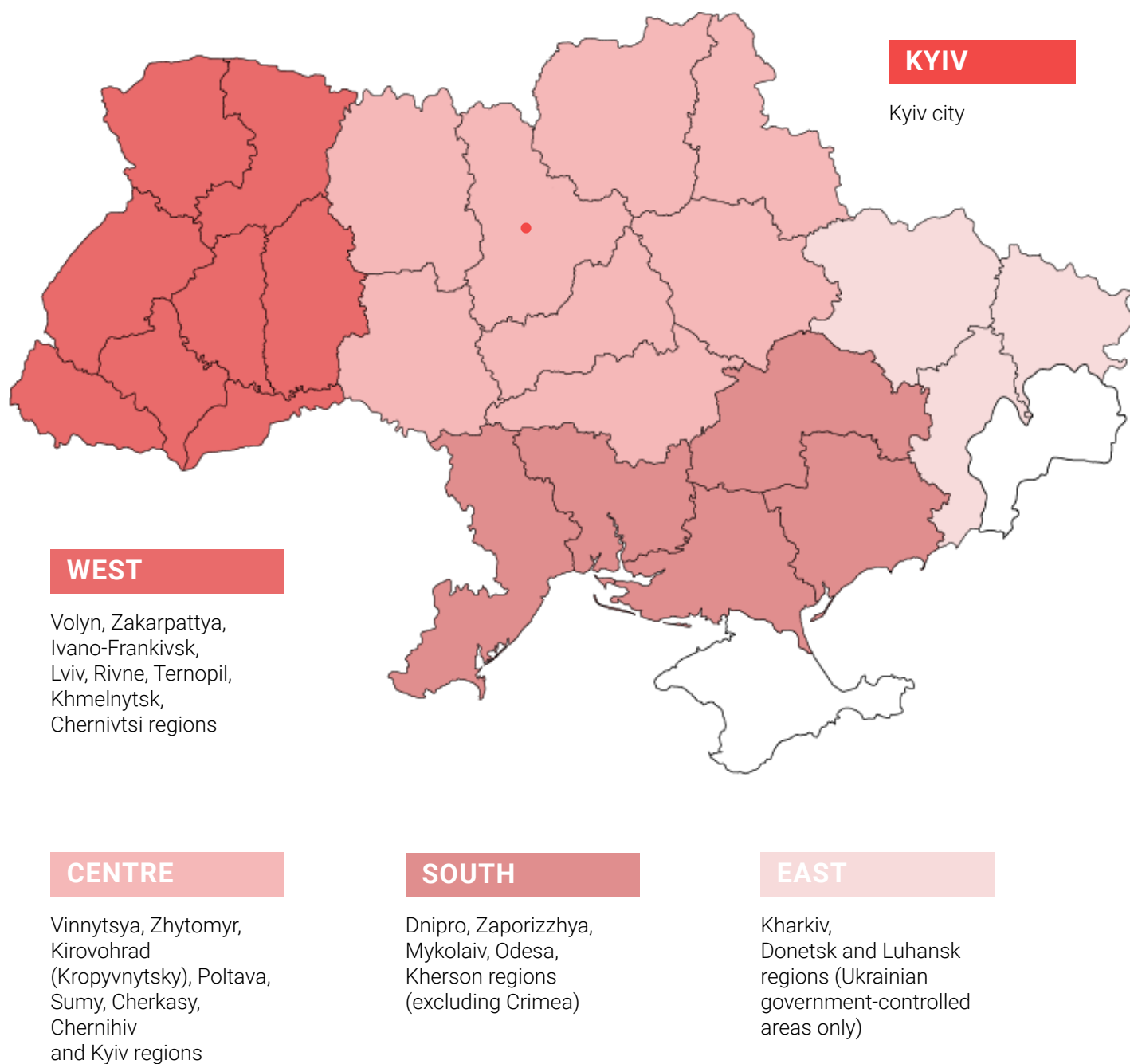
## 2.1

### Survey and Segmentation

Alongside a team of experts based both in Ukraine and the UK, we developed a cross-cutting social survey with sections on identity, values, nostalgia, aspirations for the future of Ukraine, perceptions of history and media consumption. The survey was designed with the aim of digging into the relationship between socio-political values, attitudes on history and demographics. Understanding all of these different aspects of social attitudes makes it possible to look for areas of consensus. What unites those groups that have opposing views on, for example, Stepan Bandera? And how do their views on history correlate to their sense of optimism for the future? Or to their views on the role of the state?

One subject that our survey focused on was nostalgia. Expert Sophia Gaston (Head of Research at Arena) has done extensive analysis of nostalgia all across Europe, finding that nostalgic perceptions of the past are often rooted both in anxieties about the present and in fears about the future. Gaston shaped the survey's section on nostalgia so that we would be able to understand whether or not participants feel that their lives have improved in recent years, how they perceive the Soviet past, and how optimistic they are about the future. Historian Yaroslav Hrytsak helped to design the sections that delved more deeply into attitudes on various historical themes, and sociologists Oksana Lemishka and Ilke Dagli contributed insights from the latest sociological studies by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development and the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index.

The survey was completed by a nationally representative sample of 1000 people aged 18-75 in Ukraine, and it was carried out by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in May 2019. The survey covered the following regions:



Drawing on the expertise of segmentation experts at analytics company Bonamy Finch, we used factor analysis on our survey results to define different audience clusters. The key drivers or “golden questions” that defined the audience clusters were the following:

## Liberal vs Authoritarian Values

- **Tendency towards authoritarian values** (derived from asking participants about their favoured parenting approaches). Previous studies have indicated that authoritarian instincts can align meaningfully with a variety of other social, economic and political preferences.<sup>33</sup> Our survey used an established battery of questions to measure the composition of authoritarian instincts amongst the Ukrainian population, enabling us to segment the respondents along an authoritarian spectrum. This battery measures authoritarian instincts via a series of fixed questions around child-rearing preferences, which has historically been considered the most accurate means of assessing latent instincts. Authoritarian instincts do not necessarily imply a desire to live under an authoritarian system of government; rather, they suggest something more nuanced about citizens’ instinctive preferences towards issues like “security” or “freedom”.
- **Tolerance of minorities** (derived from asking participants how closely they would be prepared to associate with ethnic and religious minorities, people with learning disabilities and the LGBT community).



## Nostalgia

- Participants were asked about whether they felt things had improved, stayed the same or got worse over the course of their lifetime.

Shot from video about experience of 1990s | hromadske

<sup>33</sup> See Stenner, Karen, “The Authoritarian Dynamic”, Cambridge University Press (2005).

## Aspirations for Ukraine's Future

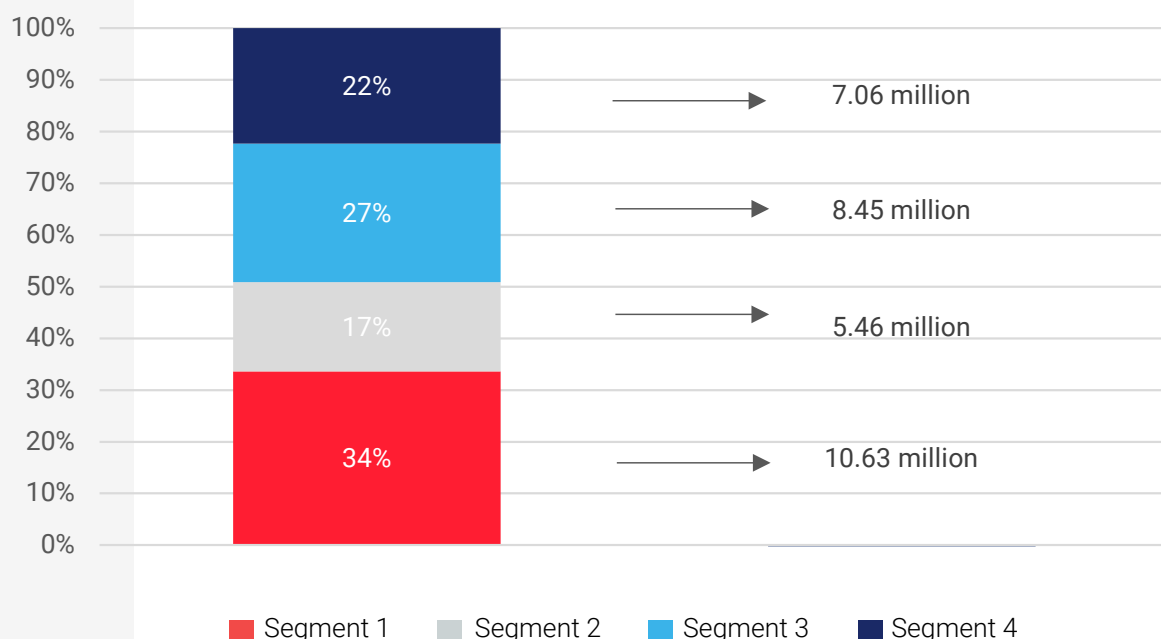
- Participants were asked what kind of Ukraine they would like to see in the future. The options presented were: “a cultural melting pot like Canada”, “a cohesive single-ethnic state like Poland”, “a protector of human rights”, “a country that follows its own economic and political path”, “a strong military power”, “a country that is integrated into the global economy” and a Ukraine that “puts Ukraine first”.

Each segment is broad and could be broken down further, but for our purposes four clear segments stood out:

- **Segment 1:** an urban<sup>34</sup>, younger, better-educated segment more likely to reside in west Ukraine and Kyiv.
- **Segment 2:** an urban, younger, better-educated segment more likely to reside in south and east Ukraine, especially in the cities of Odesa and Kharkiv.
- **Segment 3:** a rural, older segment more likely to reside in west and central Ukraine.
- **Segment 4:** a rural, older segment more likely to reside in south and east Ukraine, especially in Kharkiv and Odesa regions.

<sup>34</sup> In this study, the term ‘urban’ is used to define segments where the majority live in either a large city (over 1 million inhabitants) or a large town (100,000 - 1 million). The term ‘rural’ is used to define segments where the majority live in a small town (under 100,000 inhabitants) or a village.

### Distribution of segments in the Ukrainian population (18-75 years)







## **Loose Geographic Split on Politics of Identity and Contentious Historical Topics**

There was a loose geographical split between these segments in their attitudes to contentious historical topics and issues related to the politics of identity. Ukrainians in west Ukraine and Kyiv were more supportive of Ukrainian nationalist partisans in World War II, more likely to support the Orange Revolution of 2004-05 and the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-14 (also known as the Revolution of Dignity), more likely to have a strong sense of pride in being Ukrainian, and more likely to hold Russia responsible for the current war in east Ukraine. Those in the east and south of Ukraine were more likely to oppose Ukrainian nationalist forces in World War II, to hold ambivalent views towards Russia, to be less proud of their Ukrainian identity (although still with the majority indicating that they feel proud to be Ukrainian), to oppose the Orange Revolution and to be at least ambivalent about the Euromaidan Revolution, if not against it. While older generations were generally more likely to be nostalgic about the USSR, for the younger segments (1 and 2) there is a significant divide: Segment 1, who are more likely to reside in west Ukraine and Kyiv, tend to be much more hostile to the USSR, and Segment 2, who are more likely to reside in south and east Ukraine, usually hold more ambivalent attitudes to the Soviet Union.



## **Urban-Rural Divide on Social Values and Aspirations for the Future**

Social values and aspirations for the future, however, were divided along urban-rural rather than geographic lines. The two urban segments shared more liberal values of openness and creativity, whereas the rural segments tended to prioritise more authoritarian values, such as control and discipline. The more liberal values of the urban segments were also demonstrated by their relatively high tolerance of minorities when compared to the rural segments. In terms of priorities for the future, the urban segments were much more likely than the rural segments to opt for a Ukraine that is “a protector of human rights”, whereas the top choice for both rural segments was “a country that follows its own course”. In other words, below the surface of propaganda-driven divisions, Ukraine is a “typical” Western country made up of more “liberal” urbanites and a more “conservative” countryside.

Our segmentation also showed that Zelensky voters in particular were united by a sense that life had got worse during their lifetimes. Segment 1 was the only segment where the majority felt that life had improved during their lifetime, and this was also the only segment that voted mostly for Poroshenko.

Detailed graphs showing the segmentation and survey results for key questions are provided in the annex to this report.

The principal characteristics of the segments are outlined in the table below.

## SEGMENT 1

S1 are highly educated urbanites, mostly under the age of 50. They are more likely to reside in west Ukraine and Kyiv. The majority of S1 are employed, and of all the segments they are the best-off financially. 50 per cent speak Ukrainian at home, with the remaining 50 per cent either speaking Russian or using both languages equally.

S1 are the only audience segment where the majority feel that life has improved over the course of their lifetime. People in S1 are also by far the most likely to believe that the next generation will be better off.

S1 have the highest levels of patriotism out of all of the segments. They are the most likely to regard Stepan Bandera positively, the most hostile towards the USSR and the most likely to believe that Russia is to blame for the current war.

This segment is characterised by liberal social values, with a preference for private ownership and individual responsibility rather than reliance on the state.

S1 was the only segment where the majority voted for Poroshenko in the 2019 presidential election (second round).

## SEGMENT 2

S2 are highly educated urbanites, mostly under the age of 50, and more likely than average to reside in the south and east of Ukraine. The majority are in full-time or part-time employment. S2 are slightly less well-off than S1 but still much better-off than the national average. S2 are the segment most likely to speak Russian at home (although a significant 40 per cent speak Ukrainian at home).

S2 share many similarities with S1: they also have liberal values, favour the private sector and oppose over-reliance on the state.

However, whereas people in S1 are optimistic about the future and show higher levels of trust in institutions than the other segments, S2 are characterised by cynicism and distrust.

S2 have an ambivalent attitude to the USSR, feeling nostalgic about some elements of the Soviet past but negative about the suppression of certain freedoms in the USSR. The majority hold negative attitudes towards Stepan Bandera.

People in S2 are the least likely of all segments to feel proud to be Ukrainian. They are also the most likely to believe that Ukraine bears the greatest responsibility for the current war (although the majority still believe that Russia bears the greatest responsibility).

The majority of S2 voted for Zelensky in the 2019 presidential election (second round).

## SEGMENT 3

The vast majority of S3 are rural dwellers, mostly over the age of 50. They are less well-off than the national average and the most likely of all the segments to be retired. The majority of S3 did not receive a university education.

S3 are more likely to reside in west Ukraine than the national average. However, there is also a high percentage of S3 in central Ukraine (36 per cent) and south Ukraine (22 per cent). S3 are the most likely segment to speak Ukrainian at home, and they are by far the most likely segment to live in a village.

S3 are the most inclined towards authoritarian values and the least tolerant towards minorities. The majority believe that life has got worse during their lifetime.

S3 have a strong sense of Ukrainian national identity and pride. They are more likely than S2 and S4 to view Stepan Bandera positively.

The majority of S3 voted for Zelensky in the 2019 presidential election (second round).



## SEGMENT 4

The majority of S4 are rural dwellers, mostly over the age of 50. They are the most likely segment to reside in south or east Ukraine. The majority speak Russian at home. They are the least well-off of all the segments. The majority do not have a university degree.

S4 are the most likely segment to believe that life has got worse during their lifetime, with a staggering 91 per cent taking this view. They are also most likely to think that the next generation will be worse-off.

S4 are the segment most likely to be nostalgic for the Soviet Union and to have a negative attitude towards Stepan Bandera. They are also the most likely to believe that the heritage of Ukraine and Russia cannot be separated.

S4 are the segment least likely to hold Russia responsible for the war (although they still hold Russia more responsible than they do Ukraine). They are also the least likely to have supported the 2004-05 and 2013-14 revolutions.

The majority of S4 voted for Zelensky in the 2019 presidential election (second round).



Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, Kyiv, Ukraine.  
Photo by Maksym Diachenko

## Our Focus on the Two Urban Segments

Our polling and segmentation revealed that groups divided by the politics of identity and manipulated historical narratives actually have much in common in terms of their political and social values.

For this project we decided to focus on finding ways to engage the two more urban, younger and better-educated segments. They constitute the agents of change in Ukraine and they are the most digitally active. If these two groups can be engaged in equal measure, they have the potential to form a strong pro-democracy community.

**Areas of convergence and divergence for these two audience clusters:**

### SEGMENT 1

average age 39; urban dwellers more likely to reside in west Ukraine and Kyiv; majority have higher education; majority employed

### SEGMENT 2

average age 40; urban dwellers more likely to reside in south and east Ukraine; majority have higher education; majority employed

## a) Diverge on the following:

Photos by Administration of the President of Ukraine

S1



**Voted Poroshenko**

Support the 2019 language law “On Ensuring the Functioning of Ukrainian as the State Language”

Highly patriotic

Blame Russia for the war

Mostly look favourably on Ukrainian nationalist forces in World War II (Bandera, Ukrainian Insurgent Army)

Hostile to USSR

Support decommunisation law to remove communist themes from names of streets and towns

Least nostalgic, believing life has got better during their lifetime

Trust Ukrainian and Western media more than average (though it should be noted that there is low trust in media across all segments)

S2



**Voted Zelensky**

Oppose the 2019 language law “On Ensuring the Functioning of Ukrainian as the State Language”

Less proud to be Ukrainian

Higher than average tendency to blame Ukraine for the war (though they still hold Russia more responsible than Ukraine)

Hold strongly negative attitudes towards Ukrainian nationalist forces in World War II

Hold ambivalent and sometimes nostalgic attitudes to USSR, believing that the Soviet Union had values of fairness and equality, though also aware of its human rights abuses and economic shortfalls

Oppose decommunisation law to remove communist themes from names of streets and towns

Overall more nostalgic, believing life has got worse during their lifetime

Less trust in all media than Segment 1, with especially low trust in Ukrainian local and national media



## b) Converge on the following:

S1 and S2 are both **anti-authoritarian** and display a greater than average propensity to value **individualism, competition and private ownership**

Both segments are significantly more accepting of ethnic minorities and LGBT people than other segments

Out of seven possible priorities for the future Ukraine, “a protector of **human rights**” and “a country that is **integrated into the global economy**” were in the top three choices for both Segments 1 and 2

**Pro-civic identity:** both segments strongly agree with the statement that “All people living in Ukraine can be Ukrainians no matter their ethnic/racial/religious

## 2.2

### Focus Groups

Beyond polling and segmentation, we also conducted focus groups. These focus groups, designed by Arena’s Head of Research Sophia Gaston, allowed us to delve more deeply into people’s perceptions of history and their broader social values and political views.

To get a sense of overall national sentiment, we carried out a range of focus groups not only with Segments 1 and 2, but also with nationally representative groups. These were divided according to demographics, with specific groups for women, older people, younger people, and people from east Ukraine (with participants from Donetsk and Luhansk regions). In total, we carried out seven focus groups: four in Kyiv and three in Odesa.

Whilst there were opposing views regarding the politics of identity and contested areas of history, **there were some historical themes that emerged as unifying across all focus groups**. This was especially the case when it came to shared experiences of the recent past, particularly participants’ common traumas **of the late Soviet period and the 1990s**.

The summary below includes key findings from the focus groups on perceptions of national identity, on attitudes towards history, and on broader social and political values.





Shot from video about solidarity between Crimean Tatars and Jews in Ukraine | hromadske

### **Strong Sense of Civic Identity Across the Board, but Divides Over the Politics of Identity**

- When asked about the construction of identity, participants across all groups favoured a civic form of identity, which is earned through place of residence, patriotism and a sense of “commitment” to Ukrainian society rather than through ethnicity or language.
- There were some points of contention, with Stepan Bandera being the clearest example. While some participants viewed him negatively, others perceived him as a positive symbol of Ukrainian identity.
- In a group combining Segment 1 and Segment 2, the two segments clashed over perceptions of identity: Segment 2 was more inclined towards pluralism, whereas Segment 1 was more eager to construct a robust framework of identity around language, culture and history.
- Although there were some points of contention in the groups, participants were highly socialised and quick to diffuse tension by finding common ground.

“

*We live here together, all different nationalities and we have one destiny.*

S2

“

*National identity is really important for me. Ukrainian songs and stories taught me to love my country.*

S1

“

*Bandera fought for Ukrainian values, he was a patriot.*

Younger group

“

*Ukrainian identity is about how you feel inside, how you show your patriotism.*

Female group

“

*People talk too much about Bandera – I think he's a negative character.*

East Ukraine group

## Some Divides in Attitudes Towards Russia

- In the focus group combining Segment 1 and Segment 2, there were some divides in attitudes towards Russia. While a number of Segment 2 participants acknowledged Russia's aggression, they fundamentally saw the two nations' trajectories as inextricably linked. It was only when pressed to identify differences in character that Segment 2 participants disparaged their Russian neighbours as "chauvinistic", intolerant and of poor social character when compared to Ukrainians.
- Segment 1 participants, however, were actively hostile towards Russia and condemned Russian aggression against Ukraine. They challenged the Russians' view of Ukraine as part of the Russian "empire" and emphasised distinctions in terms not only of character, but also of history, culture and identity.

### S2 participants:

- *"I would like our [Ukraine and Russia's] relationship to be a peaceful friendship."*
- *"We should be good neighbours ... at the very least, no conflicts."*
- *"I hope that in the future there will be a common understanding, and everything will be fine."*

### S1 participants:

- *"They [Russia] think that we are their brothers, but we see how they treat us."*
- *"Russians think we are the same country, that we are not independent – that we are part of them."*
- *"They think we are part of their empire."*

## Passion for Freedom as a Distinct Ukrainian Characteristic

- A common theme in our nationally representative groups, where we spoke in depth about how people perceive Ukrainian identity, was the idea of the Ukrainian "free spirit". This was seen as a defining feature of Ukrainians, whereas Russians were perceived as wishing to be ruled by a "tsar".
- Several participants also spoke with pride about Ukraine's bravery in fighting for freedom over the course of its history.





Shot from video about Pavlohrad Miners Strikes | hromadske

**Older group:** *“[We have a] free spirit – we don’t need a king or a tsar. We value freedom a lot more than Russians.”*

**East Ukraine group:** *“We always fight for something. Always throughout history we have been at war – we stand our ground”.*

**East Ukraine group:** *“[A free spirit] is a Ukrainian national characteristic. But in Russia, they have tsars, and they always want a tsar to lead them.”*

### **Mixed Attitudes on the USSR as a Whole, but With Unifying Common Traumas**

- Our focus groups demonstrated mixed attitudes with regard to the Soviet Union. On the one hand, some participants spoke about the USSR as a more stable time, when people had better morals and there was a stronger sense of community. This was particularly true of the older nationally representative group, as well as our groups with Segment 2. On the other hand, participants across all groups also spoke negatively about queues and the scarcity of products in the USSR, as well as the lack of freedom of speech.
- Opposing views of the USSR were particularly apparent in a focus group combining Segment 1 and Segment 2 participants with those from Segment 1 exhibiting far more hostile attitudes towards the Soviet Union. Yet, despite clear divisions in overarching views of the Soviet Union, **participants across all focus groups bonded in their discussion of common traumas during the late Soviet period, not least the Chornobyl disaster.**

- In the focus groups with Segment 1 and Segment 2, participants brought up the Afghan War unprompted, and participants from both segments shared stories about the negative experiences of family members who had fought in it. They agreed on their opposition to Soviet censorship of the Afghan War and on the USSR's lack of consideration for the lives of individual soldiers. Some also referred to the Afghan War as a turning point where people lost faith in Soviet ideals.
- Some participants also touched on the unarticulated trauma of the Soviet period:

**S2:** *“My uncle was killed in Afghanistan. I have heard stories from him that were completely different to the ‘real history’ that you hear on television.”*

**S2:** *“Before Stalin’s death, everyone believed in communism. My mum stopped believing in communism after the Afghan War. Everyone stopped believing when the elites stopped believing.”*

Shot from video about Afghan War | hromadske





- Some participants also touched on the unarticulated trauma of the Soviet period:

**S2:** *“My family hasn’t talked about it [the Soviet period] at all.”*

**East Ukraine group:** *“In my family, neither my mum nor my dad told me about Holodomor [the man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933].”*

**S2:** *“We never discussed the problems of the Soviet Union with my grandmother.”*

## Shared Experience of the Turbulent 1990s

- We discussed the 1990s in depth during our focus groups with Segment 1 and Segment 2 participants. Participants across the board recalled the immense economic, political and social shock that they and their families endured in the decade after the collapse of the USSR.
- Participants remembered the hardships of this time and a loss of sense of agency. They also spoke with great sensitivity of the widespread “shame” experienced during the 1990s, with many professionals having to take on second jobs like selling handicrafts out of hours simply to maintain a decent quality of life:

**S2:** *“There were a lot of people who couldn’t understand what had happened – people were shocked.”*

**S2:** *“We had coupons – suddenly [with inflation] everyone was a millionaire.”*

**S1:** *“Sometimes people would end up in hospital and not be able to afford to have an operation.”*

**S2:** *“In the 1990s, my parents were small traders. People considered us as speculators and it was shameful”.*

**S1:** *“I remember the inflation, and that the electricity supply was interrupted.”*



Shot from video about Soviet Ukrainian artist Alla Horska  
| hromadske

**Older group:** *“It was scary then. People lost their jobs and savings. There was a general lack of confidence in the future. It was about survival.”*

**Female group:** *“We had to fend for ourselves.”*

**Female group:** *“There was a fear of the unknown. We didn’t know what tomorrow might bring.”*

- However, both segments also spoke of the **resilience** that Ukrainians showed in adapting to this new environment and helping each other to survive:

**S2:** *“The main positive thing of that time was that people helped one another, for free, in a sincere way.”*

**S1:** *“The most important skill in the 1990s was to learn how to sell something.”*

**S2:** *“My neighbours would look after me when my mother was out selling handicrafts to sailors, so there was always a helping hand to survive.”*

**S2:** *“A lot of people had to change their careers at that time, change their skills.”*

## **Shared Belief That an East-West Divide is Elite-Driven**

- Participants across all of our focus groups were aware of the role played by the media and political forces in fuelling division in the country:

**Younger group:** *“Mass media talk about an east-west division so it’s psychologically hard.”*

**Older group:** *“There is no separation, we are united – we are just separated by an information war.”*

**East Ukraine group:** *“There’s a lot of propaganda. When the war started, I was afraid to say that I was from east Ukraine because people treated us badly.”*

**S1:** *“Our politicians turn people against each other as an instrument of political control: east against north, south against west.”*

## Deep, Widespread Concern About Corruption

- There was consensus across all of the focus groups about the need to fight corruption. There was deep frustration about the impunity of corrupt politicians and a strong desire to hold corrupt officials to account through a more robust legal framework, including independent bodies to monitor the activities of public officials and a much wider platform of laws and regulations.

**S2:** *“We should have a serious system in place that can watch over politicians’ activities and observe if they are taking bribes and whether they are upholding good or bad behaviour.”*

**S1:** *“The source of corruption in Ukraine is the oligarchy.”*

**Older group:** *“Corruption is the number one problem in Ukraine”*

**Younger group:** *“We need to put in place an efficient system that would hold government officials accountable.”*

**Female group:** *“Corruption is interlinked with crime. If high-up officials are involved in a crime, they can sweep it under the rug.”*

**East Ukraine group:** *“Officers standing at the checkpoints make a lot of money from bribes.”*

## Widespread Belief in the Possibility of Change

- Apart from among Segment 1, the election of Zelensky was broadly seen as a positive development and a reflection of “people power” challenging the system of corruption.
- Despite their disappointments, Ukrainians remain convinced that both the public and politicians are capable of bringing about change. **This belief in the possibility for change is considerably more palpable than in the cynical advanced democracies.**

**Younger group:** *“[With the election of Zelensky]we have shown there is true democracy in Ukraine, unlike in Belarus and Russia.”*

**East Ukraine group:** *“People from below can influence the people at the top. If you don’t like something, you can protest and change it.”*

**Older group:** *“Now we have a person of another system in charge. We need to give him some time, to see if he is capable of making some changes.”*

**Younger group:** *“We have options today. Every citizen can join numerous initiatives and vote for certain projects at the district level. If the project gets enough votes, the government has to carry it out. Local authorities continue to build cultural spaces and improve schools.”*

## Views on War with Russia

- There was consensus across all focus groups that Russia is responsible for the war. However, there was also a significant degree of antipathy towards the Ukrainian government for allowing the conflict to persist and a feeling that the war has been engineered by business interests, including on the Ukrainian side. Participants expressed a lack of agency with regard to the war, particularly in focus groups involving Segment 2; they did not connect with the conflict as “their” war.
- Many participants related to the war in terms of its impact on the country’s economy.

**S2:** *“The reason for the length of the war is just business interests.”*

**S2:** *“There are always people who profit from the war.”*

**Younger group:** *“And things that are done illegally by the government, people are just told that these are war expenses.”*

**Female group:** *“All our money is going there – it’s hampering the economy.”*

## Negative Attitudes Towards the Euromaidan Revolution from Segment 2

- The Euromaidan revolution was only substantively discussed during focus groups with Segment 2, with participants expressing largely negative attitudes towards the protests. While most Segment 2 participants agreed that early-stage activists were genuine and had good intentions, there was a widespread belief that the involvement of many later-stage activists was financially incentivised.

**S2 participants:**





Photo by Evgeny Feldman on wikipedia

- *“I saw Maidan as the beginning of the end of Ukraine.”*
- *“They say that everyone was paid – people were paid to come.”*
- *“It was real at the start, they sincerely went out to Maidan to protest, but then later more people who were paid came along.”*
- *“Russia and America fight between themselves, that’s why we have such big problems here in Ukraine.”*
- *“At first it was genuine and then later it was not genuine, it was paid.”*

Overall, the focus groups showed that polarised groups share common experiences and traumas around historical topics such as the Afghan War, Chornobyl and the economic instability of the 1990s. They also demonstrated that Ukrainians are prepared to hear each other out; even contentious topics did not lead to any particularly aggressive conversations (as they often do in focus groups between, for example, Remainers and Brexiteers in the UK). The focus groups also revealed a number of other points of commonality that are not directly linked to this project, namely the environment and emigration. We explore these points in more detail in the recommendations for further research at the end of this paper.

## Content Strategy



# CONTENT CREATION AND IMPACT

## 3.1

Through social research and audience analysis, we were able to identify segments that are divided by the politics of identity and various historical narratives, but this process also cast light on common values cutting across these divided segments. Our focus groups then took us a step further in understanding some of the shared historical experiences that have the potential to unite different audiences. Based on the findings from our social research, and taking Segments 1 and 2 as our key audiences, we worked with prominent historians and cultural experts Serhii Plokyh, Yaroslav Hrytsak, Volodymyr Yermolenko, Rory Finnin, and Serhy Yekelchyk to develop new ways of engaging with historical themes that might help to overcome polarisation in Ukraine and foster common values for the future. We then developed these ideas together with the Hromadske TV team led by Nataliya Gumenyuk in order to build our strategy for content creation. Hromadske is one of Ukraine's independent media, positioning itself as a "civic" broadcaster. Hromadske has long focused on online media, but more recently the broadcaster has also launched a more traditional TV station.

Our discussions produced the following aims for our content strategy:

- Explore shared experiences and traumas in recent history;
- Foreground common values for the future;
- Break down binary thinking about history: could Segment 1 recognise the legitimacy of some Soviet achievements? Could Segment 2 accept criticism of the Soviet Union?
- Explore national identity through the prism of multiculturalism and human rights: our original survey showed that both segments share a civic understanding of Ukrainian identity, are tolerant of ethnic minorities and believe that protecting human rights is a key priority for Ukraine.

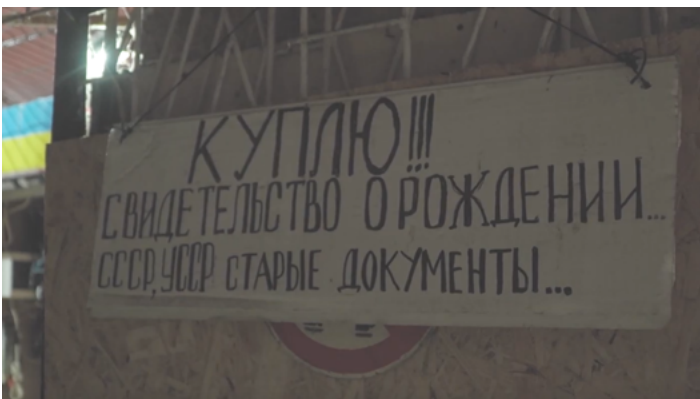
Building on these aims, we worked with Hromadske to create sixteen videos, all designed for Facebook audiences, featuring interviews mixed

with archive footage, and lasting between three and four minutes. As often as possible they involved interviews with ordinary people who had directly experienced the events in question. All of the videos were made in both Ukrainian- and Russian-language versions. There was no statistically significant difference in the level of engagement from our segments based on the language used to boost a particular video.

### **We split the videos into 6 topics**

(see annex for descriptions and links for all films):

A key factor in deciding on video topics was whether potential stories would have something new to say, going beyond commonly discussed historical topics, feeling relevant to the current moment, and therefore



#### **The 1990s (2 films):**

two videos about how ordinary people managed to deal with the turbulent changes of the 1990s. These videos aimed to explore the common trauma of economic hardship in the 90s, with a focus on the resilience of Ukrainians in getting through this period.



#### **Late Soviet trauma (3 films)**

a group of films about people's experiences of Chernobyl and the Afghan War. These films aimed to explore common traumas in the late Soviet period, looking at specific shared experiences in recent history without making broad-brush statements about the USSR as a whole.



#### **Soviet Ukrainian legacy (2 films):**

films about achievements in Soviet Ukrainian art and computer science that are relatable for both Segment 1, who are predominantly hostile to the USSR, and Segment 2, who are more inclined towards Soviet nostalgia.



### **National identity (4 films):**

a group of films that explored national identity through the lens of civic identity, multiculturalism, and the fight for Ukrainian national and human rights in the Soviet Union.



### **Protest movements (4 films):**

films about different Ukrainian protest movements: the peasant rebellion against Stalinist collectivisation, the miners' strikes of 1989, and protests against the police in the USSR. We also made one video that went beyond the Ukrainian context by exploring the history of the fight against corruption in Peru.



### **Contested history (1 film):**

the final film deliberately tackled the more contested topic of the Volyn mass killings of Polish civilians in 1943-45 by Ukrainian nationalists. This film was used to test whether presentation via bottom-up storytelling would affect our segments' openness to divisive historical topics.

having the best possible chance of achieving engagement via mass media. For example, the video on Soviet Ukrainian computer science not only foregrounded the achievements of female scientists, it also featured the head of Women Who Code speaking on the role of women working in computer science today. The film about Pavlohrad Miners featured both men directly involved in the 1989 strikes and also their sons, raising the question of whether the younger generation of today would be prepared to take the same bold action as their fathers did 30 years ago. The films about the 1990s aimed to explore untold stories from this painful decade, a period that has received scant attention in public discourse in Ukraine.

In addition to the films we made with Hromadske, we tested two films from mainstream Ukrainian television. One film, produced by

the Ukrainian Public Broadcaster, focused on debunking myths about the Ukrainian nationalist icon Stepan Bandera. The second, produced by the news channel 24, was about Ukrainian nationalist partisans in World War II. These two films attempted to provide balance about these historical topics, both of which are often targeted by Russian state propaganda.

In order to test responses to the videos, we carried out two types of evaluation:

- **Online polling:** Segment 1 and Segment 2 participants took part in online sociological surveys, watching the videos and then answering questions. Some questions were specific to the film, or to groups of films. In every session, we measured the audience's level of trust towards each film. Our measure of trust, developed with the LSE Department of Media and Communications, was made up of five questions that sought to tease out "perceived trustworthiness": these questions focused on whether participants thought the film was accurate, credible, believable, informative and an honest reflection of the topic, with the overall trustworthiness score being an average of all five responses.
- **Digital targeting:** the films were targeted at the two segments separately in order to measure engagement levels. This was achieved by creating targeted Facebook advertisements, with the platform allowing us to distribute content to specific audiences; using a variety of filters based on demographics and interests, we were able to construct audiences representative of Segments 1 and 2. We then targeted content separately to the two segments in order to measure their engagement levels with the Hromadske films. The key metric we used to measure this was **the retention rate**: the number of views lasting at least 15 seconds divided by the number of times the Facebook ad featuring the video appeared in people's newsfeeds ("impressions"). In other words, the retention rate tells us the percentage of people who watched the video for a meaningful amount of time after being given the opportunity to view it.

In addition to online polling and digital targeting, we carried out some **topline qualitative analysis of Facebook comments** in response to the videos on Hromadske's public Facebook page.

## Results





Photo by Denys Rodionenko on Unsplash

## 3.2

### • The Trust is Out There

Our priority metric for this project was trust, and we sought to create films that generated not only high levels of trust itself, but also a close alignment in trust levels between the two segments, whereby both sides trusted the content equally. A problem in Ukraine and the world over is that trust has become politicised, with people tending only to trust the media preferred by their in-group. In Ukraine, a generalised lack of trust in local and national media opens up fertile ground for hostile state narratives. As Kremlin narratives frequently seek to provoke cynicism,<sup>35</sup> the trust factor is particularly relevant in Ukraine.

Our polling at the beginning of this project showed that while Segment 1 have higher than average trust in Ukrainian and Western media (and extremely low trust in Russian media), Segment 2 have low trust in all media. We aimed to create accurate, nuanced content on history that fosters trust among both segments, but since Segment 2 was more cynical about the media overall, eliciting trust from this audience was a particular priority.

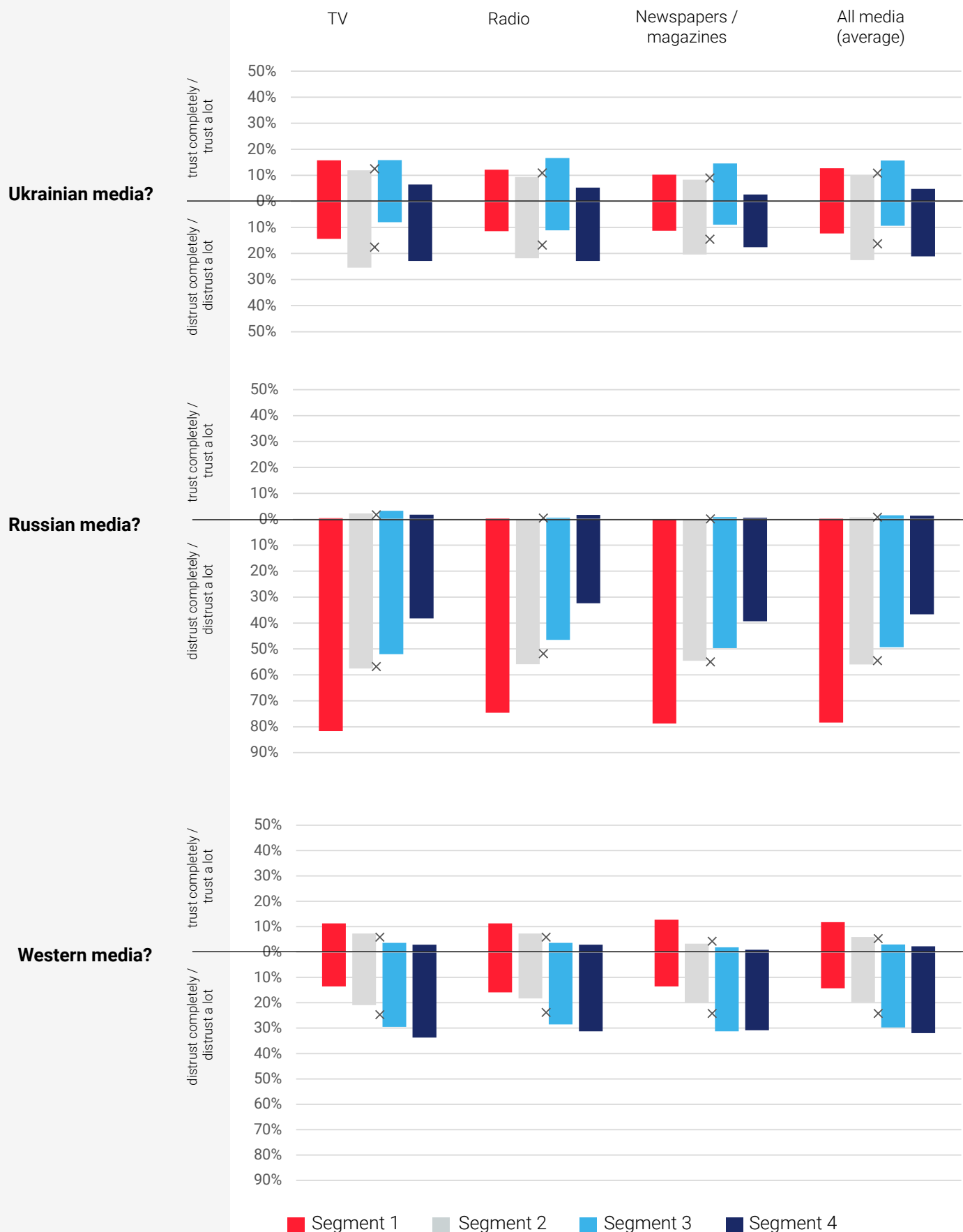
The films that we made with Hromadske succeeded in gaining the overall trust of both segments. They generated higher trust levels than

35 See:

- Jankowicz Nina., "How to Lose the Information War: Russia, Fake News, and the Future of Conflict." I.B. Tauris (2020)
- Paul, Christopher., Matthews, Miriam. "The Russian 'Firehose of Falsehood' Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It", RAND Corporation (2016). Available at: <https://bit.ly/2DxdqRv>



## To what extent do you trust/distrust\*

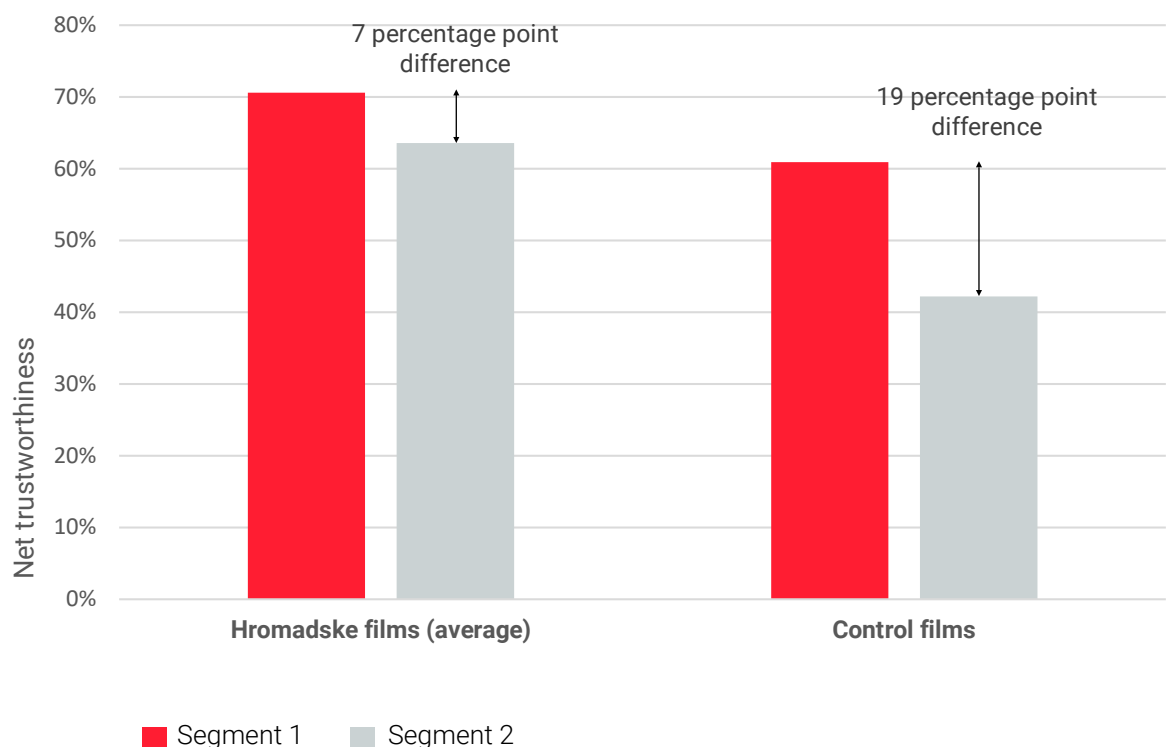


\*Respondents were asked to rate each on a seven-point scale from "trust completely" to "distrust completely". The graph shows the top two and bottom two responses combined. The black crosses show the national average.

we saw in our original survey, and garnered more trust than the control films made by mainstream Ukrainian media. Among Segment 2, there was only 42 per cent net agreement that the control films produced by mainstream Ukrainian media were trustworthy. However, for the films made by Hromadske, the level of trust among the same segment was much higher, with 64 per cent net agreement. There was also much more alignment between the segments in their levels of trust towards the Hromadske films: while there was a 19 percentage point difference between the segments' trust levels for the control films, this fell to just 7 percentage points for the Hromadske films. Three of our films (Afghan War, Fight Against Corruption in Peru and Pavlohrad Miners) gained over 70 per cent net trust even from Segment 2.

- **Universal Rights and Civic Values Unite Best**

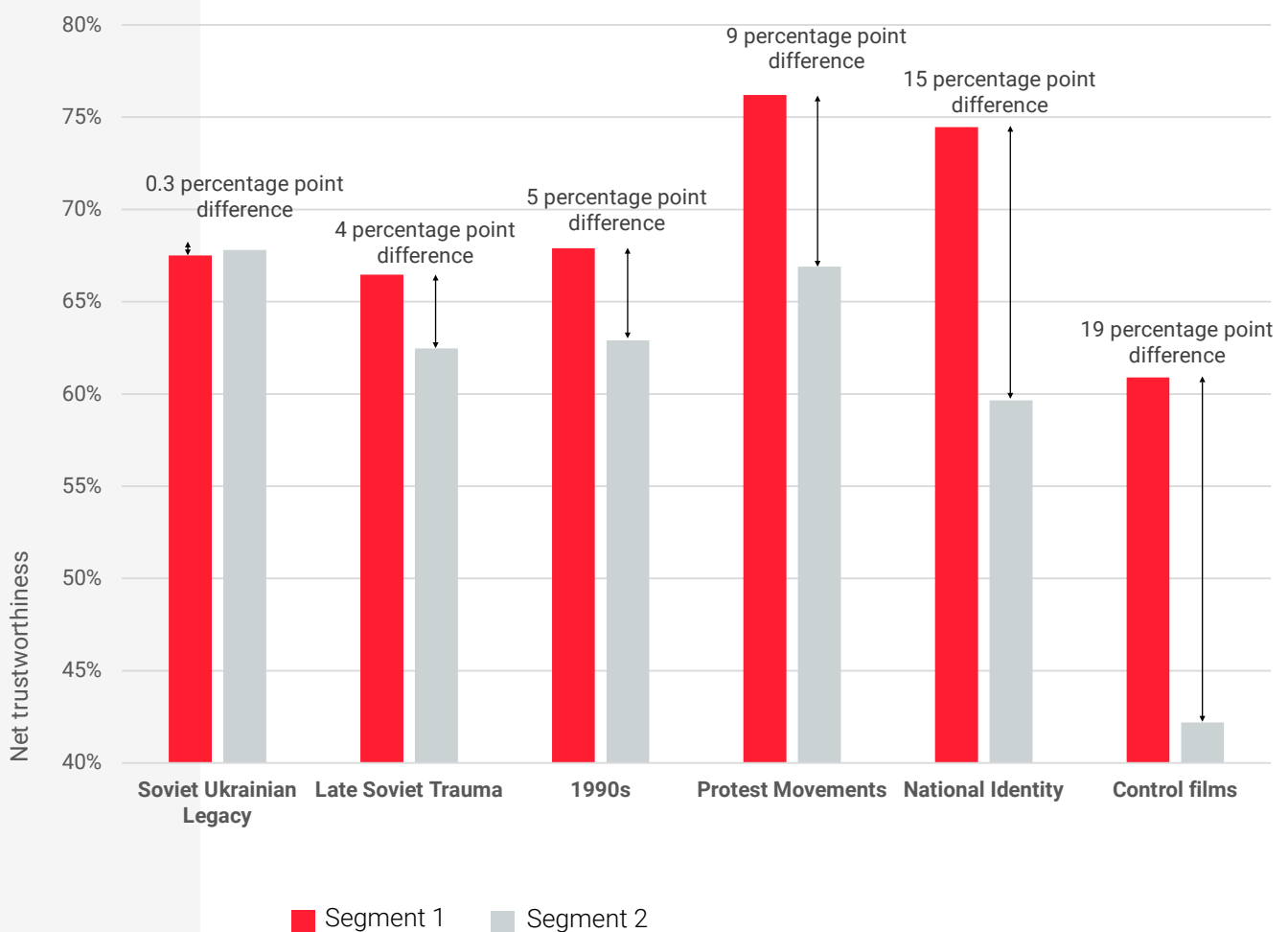
### Hromadske films vs. control films: trustworthiness



We observed that the Hromadske films that had the highest levels of trust and trust alignment were those that foregrounded universal, civic values and shared experiences without touching on the politics of identity.

Of all the categories of films made by Hromadske, those that explored national identity were the least unifying, with a 15 percentage point difference between trust levels for Segment 1 and Segment 2. It should be noted that although these films were the least unifying of all the films made by Hromadske,<sup>36</sup> they were nonetheless trusted by the majority of both segments, receiving far higher levels of trust and alignment than the control videos.

### Trustworthiness (by category)



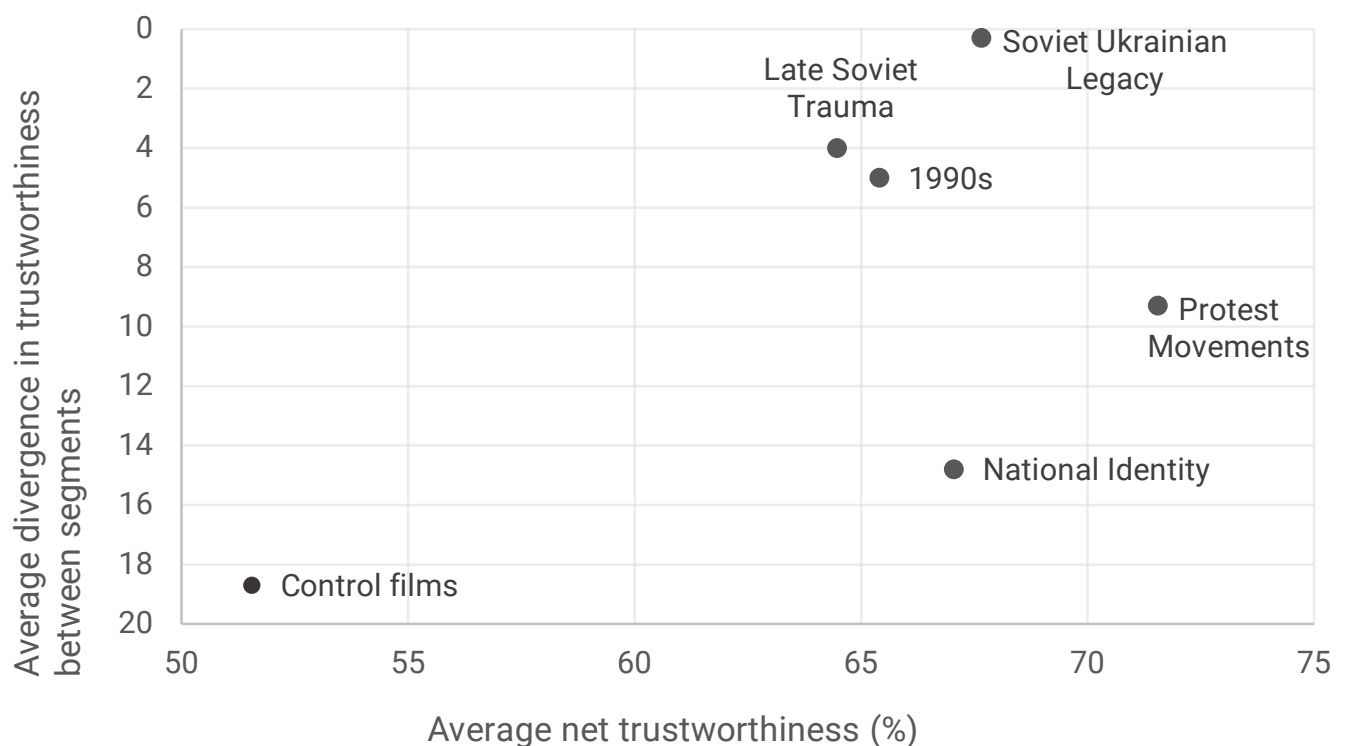
### In terms of retention rate (percentage of people who watched the films

36 The graph with net trust levels does not include the "Contested History" category, as this contained only one film. Here we deliberately chose the contested topic of the Volyn massacres in order to test the segments' openness to a more divisive issue. Results relating to the Volyn video are explored in the "bottom-up storytelling" section below.



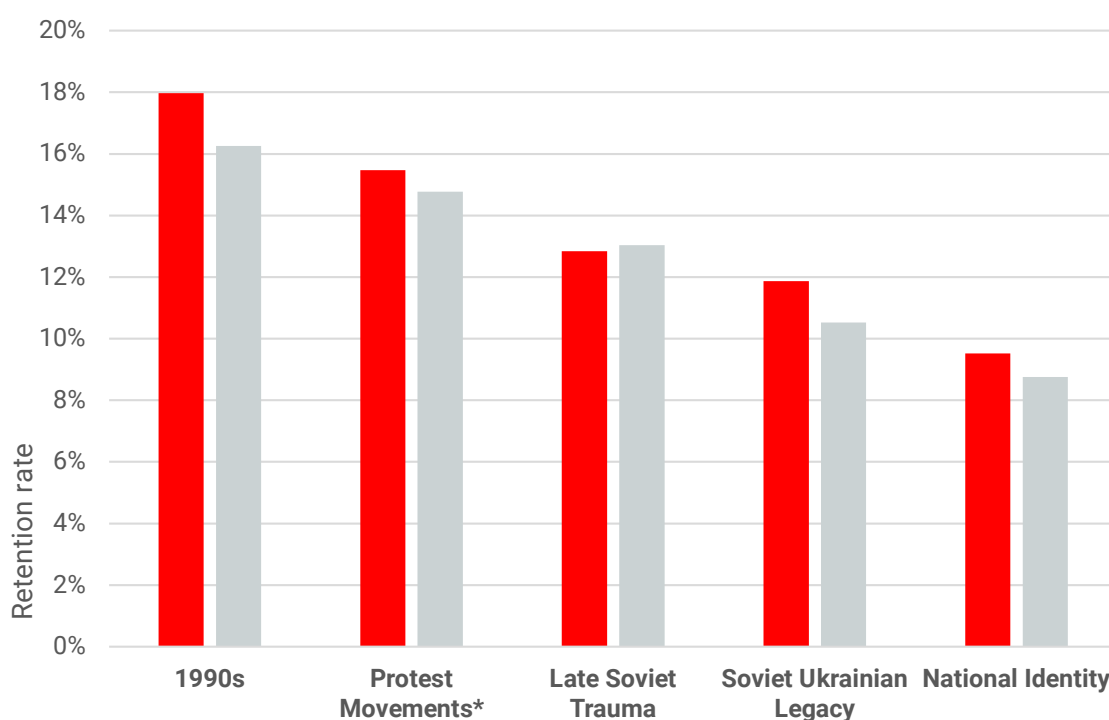
Shot from video about Afghan War | hromadske

### Alignment in trustworthiness between segments against overall trustworthiness (by category)



for 15 seconds or more after the video ad appeared in their Facebook news feed), there was strong alignment between the segments across all categories.

## Audience retention rate (by category)



\*We were unable to carry out digital targeting for the Peru film so the retention rate for this film is not included in the category "Protest Movements". We were also unable to carry out digital targeting for the control films so they are not included here.

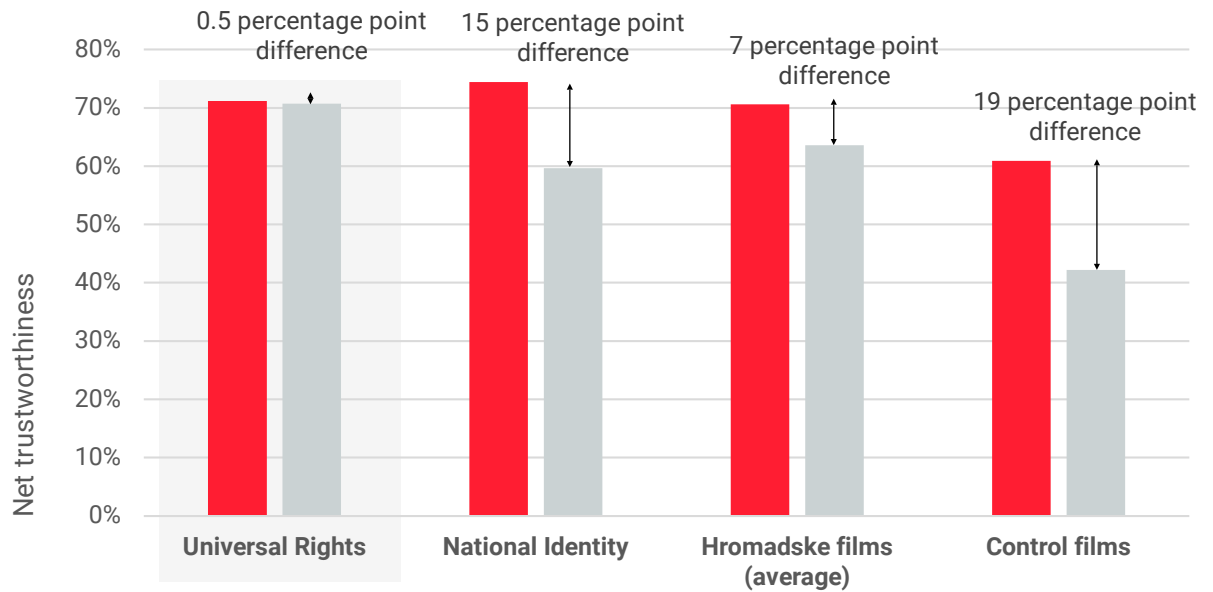
■ Segment 1    ■ Segment 2

We also observed that **the films that performed the best in terms of both overall trust levels and trust alignment were those that foregrounded universal rights and civic values.** Four films that had a particular focus on universal, civic rights and values were:

- **Afghan War:** foregrounded the issues of censorship and soldiers' rights during the Afghan War.
- **Peru's fight against corruption:** explored how Peru's history of fighting corruption may be relevant for Ukraine, thereby focusing on the question of anti-corruption without entering into identity discourse in any way.
- **Pavlohrad Miners:** depicted miners' strikes and the fight for labour rights in the late Soviet period.
- **Displaced from Chernobyl:** explored the experience of those displaced following the Chernobyl disaster, particularly how they were accepted into new communities.



## Universal Rights comparison: trustworthiness



## Universal Rights comparison: audience retention rate



■ Segment 1 ■ Segment 2

\* We were unable to carry out digital targeting for the Peru film, so the average retention rate applies to 15 rather than 16 Hromadske films. We were also unable to carry out digital targeting for the control films so they are not included here.

**Universal Rights (4 films)**  
 Pavlohrad Miners  
 Peru Fight Against Corruption  
 Displaced From Chernobyl  
 Afghan War

**National Identity (4 films)**  
 Becoming Ukrainian  
 Crimean Tatars Return  
 Crimean Tatars and Jews  
 Stus



Shots from videos about Pavlohrad Miner Strikes and Pavlohrad Peasant Uprising | hromadske

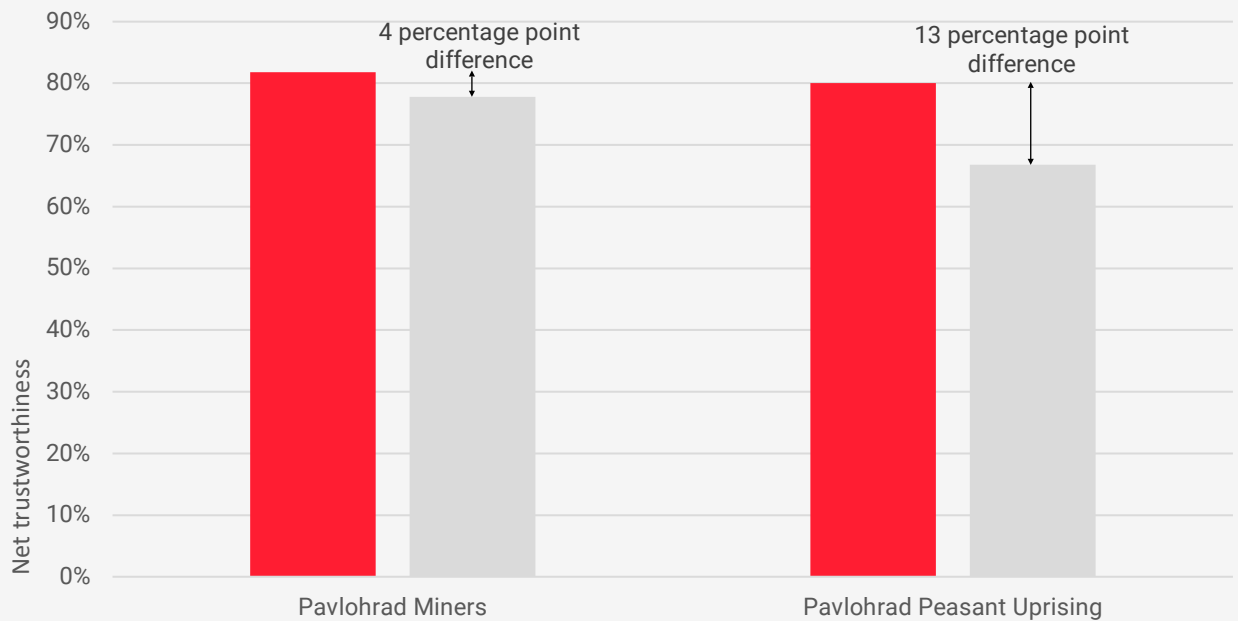
## Pavlohrad protest movements: a comparison

We made two videos on historic protest movements in Pavlohrad:

- **Pavlohrad Miners** explored the 1989 strikes by miners fighting for better labour rights
- **Pavlohrad Peasant Uprising** dealt with the peasant uprising against Soviet collectivisation in Pavlohrad in 1930

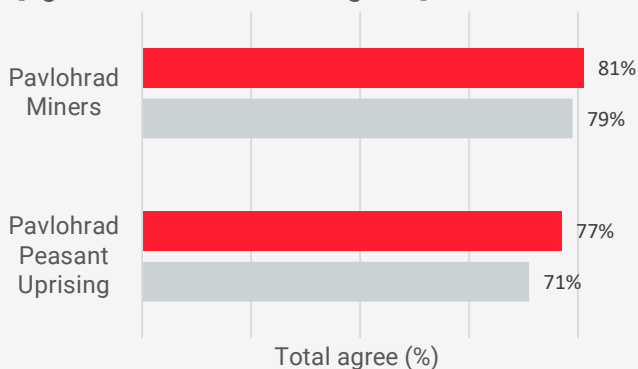
Both films performed very well in terms of overall trust levels and retention rates, but levels of **trust alignment for Pavlohrad Miners were significantly higher**. This may be because Pavlohrad Miners focused more squarely on universal, civic rights, whereas Pavlohrad Peasant Uprising also touched on the man-made famine against Ukrainians during Stalin's rule (Holodomor), which is strongly associated with Ukraine's struggle for national rights.

## Pavlohrad Miners vs Pavlohrad Peasant Uprising trust

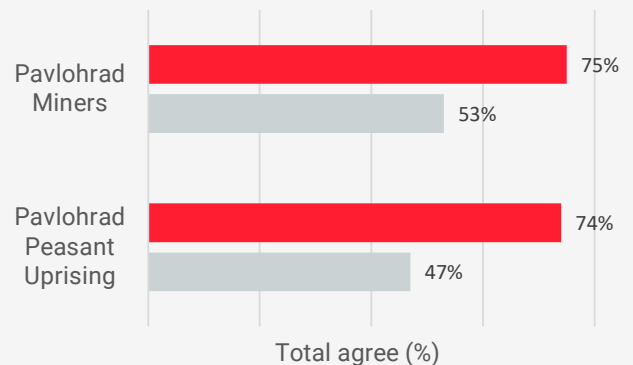


The more detailed questions that we asked in our online surveys for the Pavlohrad videos also provided illuminating results. For both videos we repeated the same three questions about the importance of fighting for rights. When asked the more universal question of whether “it is worth fighting for your rights, even if you are defeated”, the segments were highly aligned in their agreement that it is indeed worth it. However, when asked whether they agreed that “a history of fighting for freedom unites all Ukrainians”, there was much less alignment. Although the universal value ascribed to fighting for rights is extremely unifying, linking the same value to the politics of identity leaves segments much less aligned.

"It is worth fighting for what you believe in, even if you are defeated"  
[agreement after watching film]



"A history of fighting for freedom unites all Ukrainians"  
[agreement after watching film]



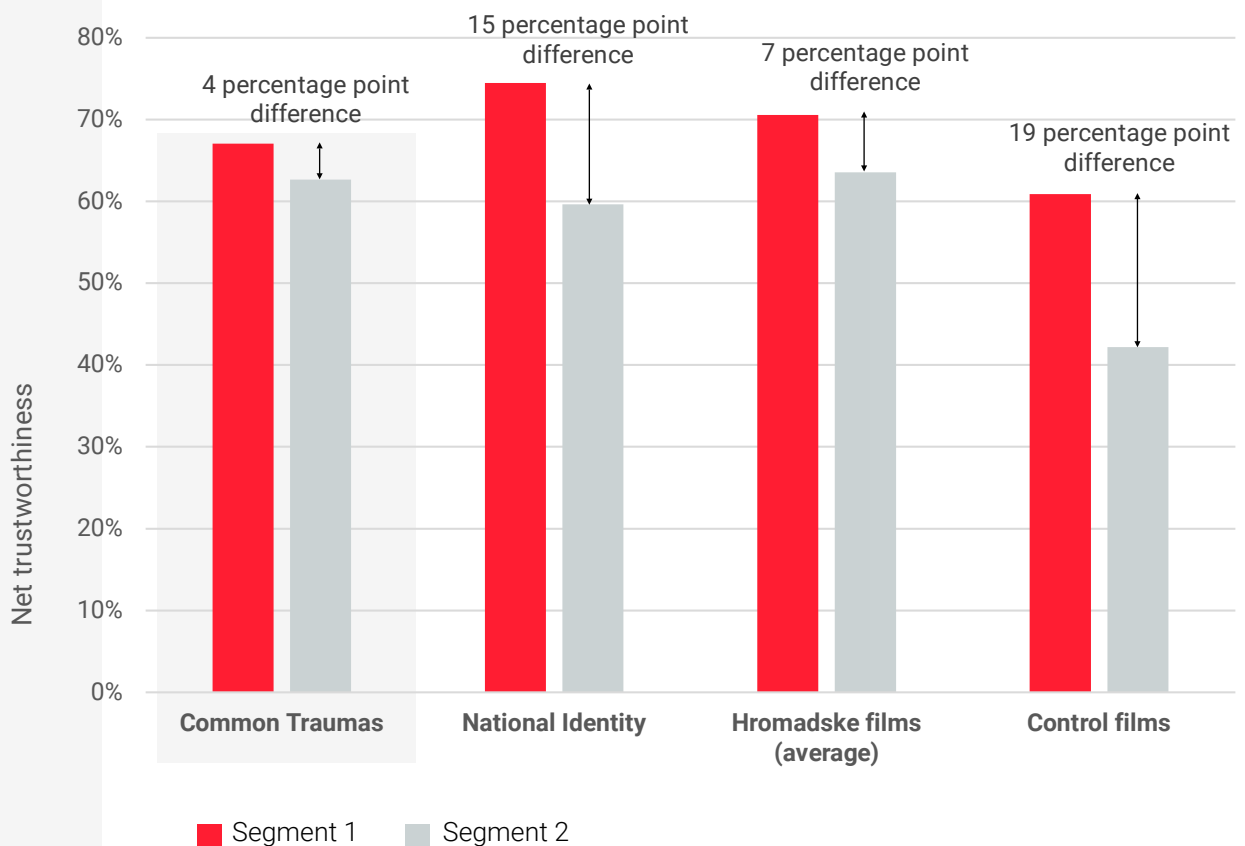
■ Segment 1    ■ Segment 2

- **“We’re All United by Our Traumas”**

In a recent essay, the human rights lawyer Larysa Denysenko wrote of how Ukrainians all across the country are united by their traumas. Having likewise observed the unifying potential of common traumas<sup>37</sup> in our focus groups, particularly with regard to Afghanistan, Chornobyl and the 1990s, we worked with Hromadske to make videos that explored these themes.

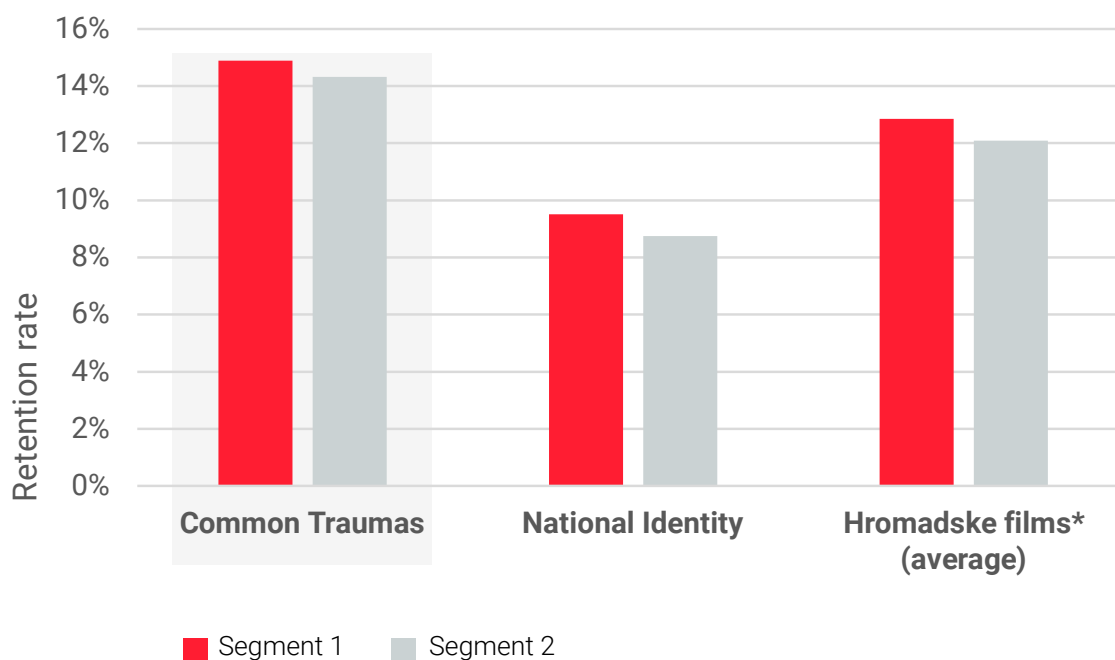
If we group together the films on late Soviet traumas and the 1990s, we can see that the Hromadske films exploring common traumas achieved higher than average trust alignment and retention rates.

### Common Traumas comparison: trustworthiness



<sup>37</sup> Denysenko, Larysa. “Majority as a Minority” in collection of essays “Ukraine in Histories and Stories”, Internews and Ukraine World (January, 2019). Available here: <https://bit.ly/2AQS9RO>

## Common Traumas comparison: audience retention rate



\*We were unable to carry out digital targeting for the Peru film, so the average retention rate applies to 15 rather than 16 Hromadske films. We were also unable to carry out digital targeting for the control films so they are not included here.



Shot from video about Afghan War | hromadske

Our qualitative analysis of Facebook comments also showed that users responded with more unified responses to our videos on common traumas than to other videos. This was particularly clear for the video on the Afghan War, where there were no divisive comments at all. Moreover, many Facebook users responded to the video on the Afghan War with comments sympathising with the families in the video and sharing their own memories of relatives fighting in the war.

### Common Traumas (5 films)

1990s Radiorynok  
1990s Kokush  
Chornobyl Censorship  
Displaced From Chornobyl  
Afghan War

### National Identity (4 films)

Becoming Ukrainian  
Crimean Tatars Return  
Crimean Tatars and Jews  
Stus





Shot from video about the Radiorynok in the 1990s | hromadske

## Resilience in the 1990s

Our films on the 1990s aimed both to explore the trauma of this period and to foreground Ukrainians' resilience in overcoming it.



Shot from video about the work of film engineer Anatoliy Kokush in 1990s | hromadske

**The first film** told the story of Anatoliy Kokush, a film engineer who founded the company Filmotechnic in the 1990s to develop camera technologies for special effects. Kokush was awarded two Oscars for innovations in motion-picture technology. This video aimed to tell a positive story of success and resilience in the 1990s despite the difficulties of this period.

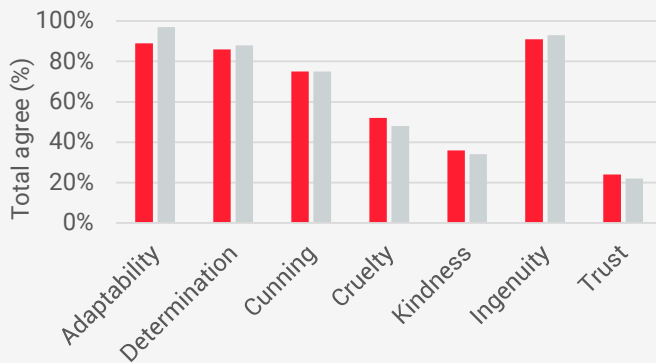


Shot from video about the Radiorynok in the 1990s | hromadske

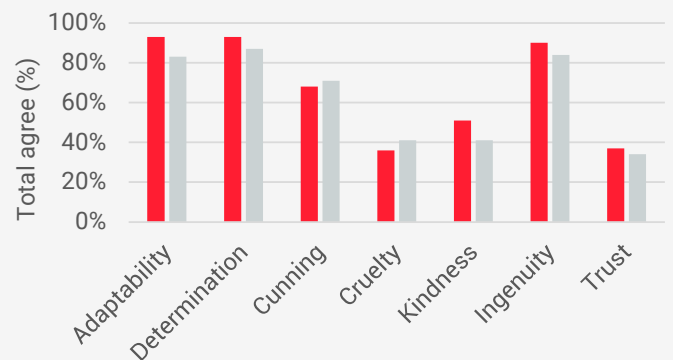
**The second film** on the 1990s focused on the "Radiorynok" in Kyiv, a market for gadgets where many people came to sell goods in the 90s. As one of our focus group participants remarked, "the most important skill in the 90s was to learn how to sell something". This video explored the challenges that people faced at the time, but it also gave this experience a positive spin by focusing on Ukrainians' resilience in getting through this difficult time.

After participants watched the 1990s videos as part of our online surveys, we asked them which qualities they believed were the most important for getting through this period. For both films, the two segments were closely aligned, both identifying adaptability, ingenuity and determination as the most important qualities. This suggests the consensus-building potential of exploring the difficult years of the 1990s through a more positive lens of Ukrainians' resilience.

"Which of the following qualities do you believe were needed for survival in the 1990s?" [after watching the Radiorynok film]

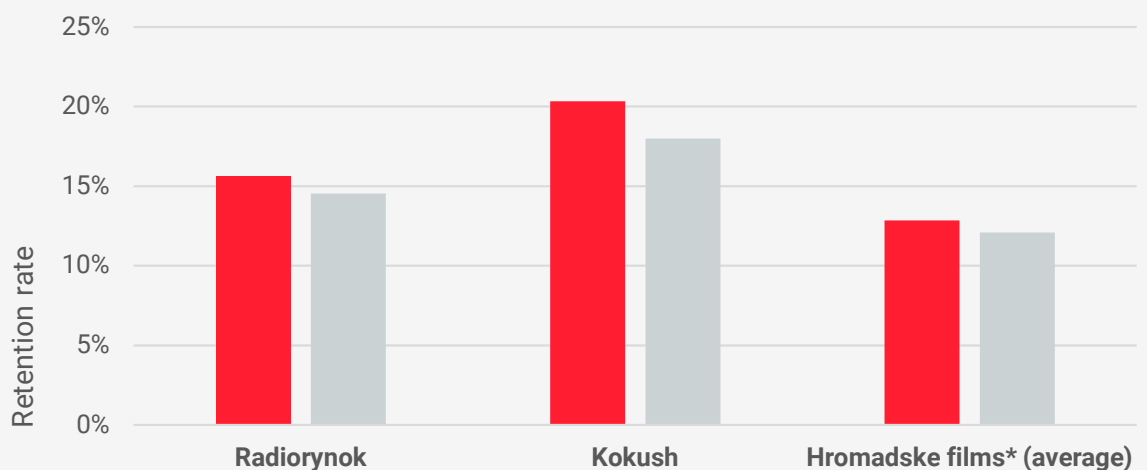


"Which of the following qualities do you believe were needed for survival in the 1990s?" [after watching the Kokush film]



**The 1990s films both performed especially well with regard to engagement levels on Facebook.** The Kokush film received the highest retention rate out of all of the films made by Hromadske for this project. Another takeaway from the 1990s films was the high number of positive comments on Facebook about the Kokush video, with users praising Kokush as a self-made man. This suggests that Kokush's story chimed with the inclination of both Segment 1 and Segment 2 towards private ownership and individualism.

## Radiorynok vs. Kokush: audience retention rate



■ Segment 1  
■ Segment 2

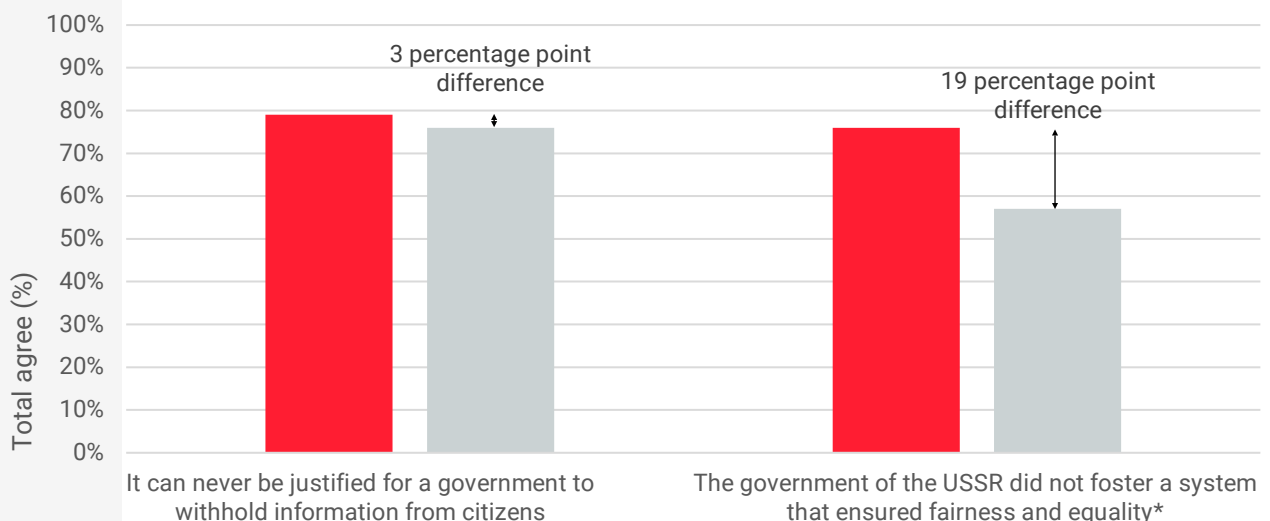
\*We were unable to carry out digital targeting for the Peru film, so the average retention rate applies to 15 rather than 16 Hromadske films.

- **Explore History to Define the Future**

Our online surveys showed that even though people tend to defend group identities when they are challenged, they are open to fact-based criticism on specific issues that underpin those identities. For example, groups that are nostalgic for the USSR as a whole remain open to specific criticisms of Soviet policies.

A clear example of this trend is our video on the Afghan War, which was one of our most unifying videos. Importantly, this video focused on personal stories and experiences. Whilst the people in the video were critical of the Soviet authorities, this was specifically with regard to censorship of the war and the treatment of soldiers, whereas wholesale judgements on the Soviet Union were avoided. After watching this video, the segments were highly aligned in agreeing that “it can never be justified for a government to withhold information from citizens” (76 per cent of Segment 1 and 79 per cent of Segment 2). The segments were also aligned in their support for the notion that “in the Afghan War, the Soviet Union didn’t value the lives of soldiers enough” (86 per cent of Segment 1 and 73 per cent of Segment 2). But when we asked about the values of the USSR as a whole, there was greater divergence: only 57 per cent of Segment 2 agreed that the USSR didn’t have positive social values, as opposed to 76 per cent of Segment 1.

### **“To what extent do you agree with the following statements?” [after watching the Afghan War film]**



\*The second statement has been reversed to be “negative” rather than “positive”

■ Segment 1    ■ Segment 2

This again shows that the segments are open to nuanced stories about specific historical topics, but when the discussion turns to the “Soviet values” or “Ukrainian identity” more broadly, that alignment is lost. We found a similar effect in our films about Soviet achievements. Both segments were open to celebrating the art of Soviet Ukrainian artist Alla Horska and the success of female Soviet computer scientists, but extrapolating their successes as part of an abstract “Ukrainian culture” generated more pushback.

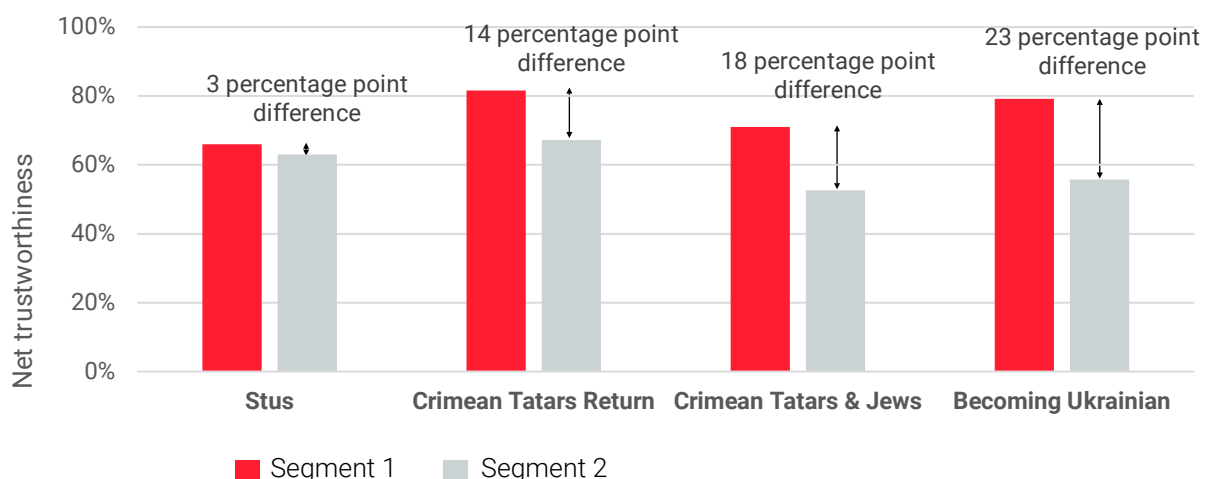
A way out of this paradox is to reframe the past in terms of questions about the future. Do those who are nostalgic for the USSR want its human rights abuses in the Ukraine of the future? Do we agree that female scientists should play an important part in Ukraine going forward?

- **Civic Values and the Politics of Identity Can Be Mutually Reinforcing**

Even though our films exploring national identity were less successful than those dealing with more universal themes and common traumas, they still performed significantly better than the control films. Our films sought to intertwine the politics of identity with broader civic values: the rights of Crimean Tatars were framed through property rights; the story of the Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus recounted his brutal and unjust imprisonment by the Soviet regime. Another film, *Becoming Ukrainian*, stressed Ukrainian identity as it relates to freedom of choice. Though the least successful of our films, it was also one of the riskiest: its story begins with the Euromaidan Revolution, which our initial polling had already revealed to be a divisive topic for Segments 1 and 2.

The video on Vasyl Stus garnered a particularly high degree of trust alignment. Stus is an important example of how national identity and universal rights are in no way mutually exclusive: he was a patriotic Ukrainian poet who fought for Ukrainian national rights as part of the struggle for universal human rights in the Soviet Union.

### National Identity films: trustworthiness







Shot from video about prominent Ukrainians from different backgrounds | hromadske

- **Personal Security is Consistently Ranked as the Most Important of All Human Rights**

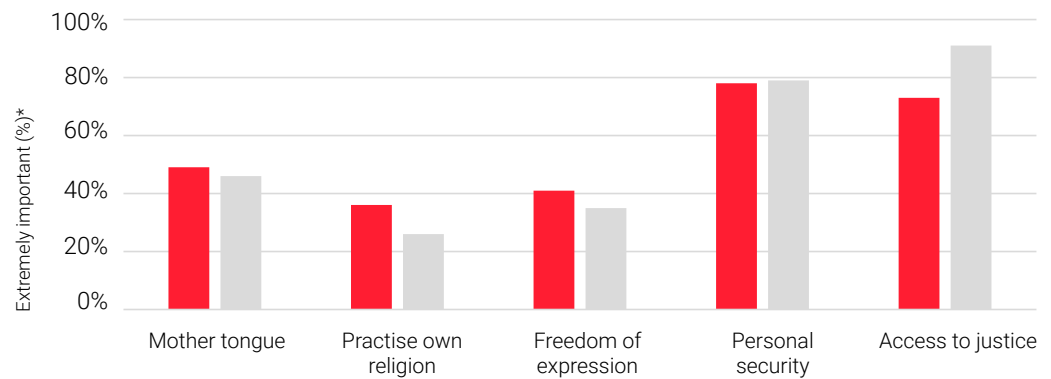
One of the “golden questions” that defined our audience segmentation was about what kind of Ukraine people wanted to see in the future. Both Segment 1 and Segment 2 selected “protector of human rights” in their top three responses. But which human rights do they hold dear? And are they the same ones? Do some place more emphasis on national rights?

In order to dig deeper into what the segments understand by “human rights”, our online surveys asked the segments which rights they found important after watching four different films: a film about police brutality in the USSR emphasising the right to personal security, a film about the Soviet Ukrainian dissident Vasyl Stus, and two control films about Stepan Bandera and the Ukrainian nationalist partisans during World War II. Essentially, all four films mixed issues of human and national rights.

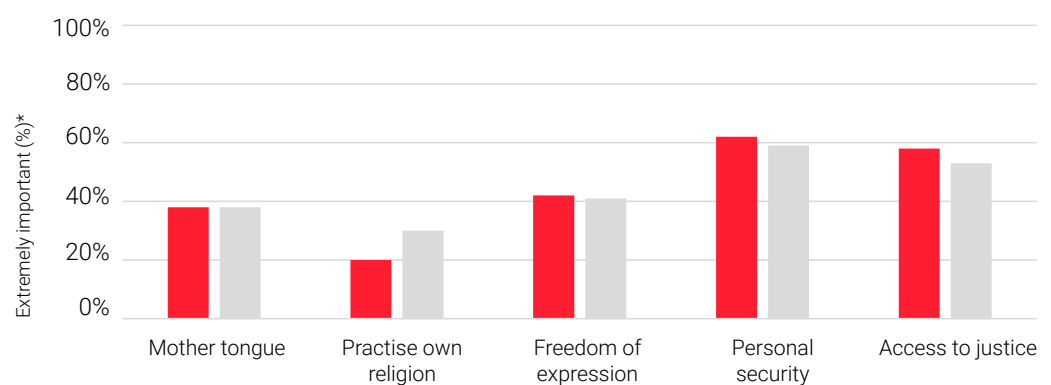
We found that regardless of whether the segments watched the film on police brutality or one of the films about national rights, they consistently ranked personal security and access to justice as the most important human rights. Even after watching films about national rights, audiences in both segments agreed that the rights to justice and security were the most important. These results suggest that a focus on personal security has solid potential as a means of uniting different segments of Ukrainian society.

## How important to you are the following rights and freedoms?

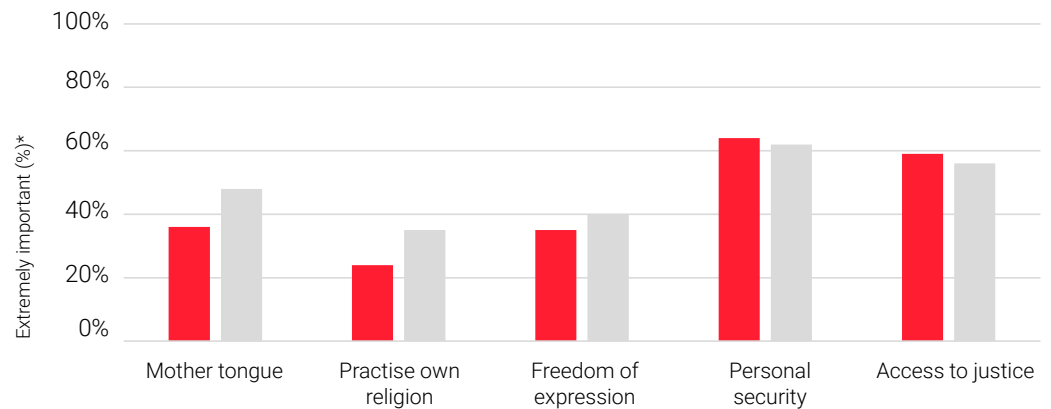
[after watching the Police Brutality film]



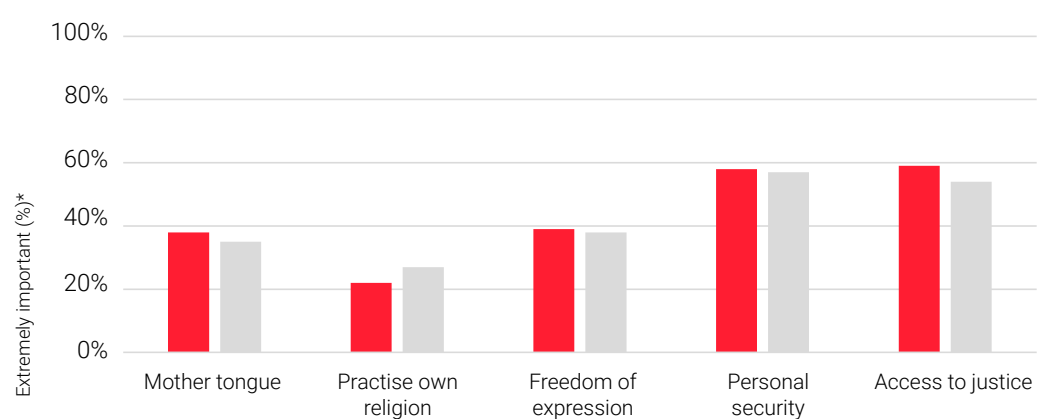
[after watching the Stus film]



[after watching the UPA film]



[after watching the Bandera film]



■ Segment 1  
■ Segment 2

\*Respondents were asked to rate each on a seven-point scale from "extremely important" to "completely unimportant". The graph shows the responses for "extremely important" only.



Shot from video about solidarity between Crimean Tatars and Jews in Ukraine | hromadske

- **Multiculturalism and Solidarity with Minorities**

Our original survey showed Segments 1 and 2 to be significantly more tolerant towards ethnic minorities compared to Segments 3 and 4.

Segments 1 and 2 were also closely aligned in their civic understanding of Ukrainian identity, with 72 per cent of Segment 1 and 68 per cent of Segment 2 agreeing that “All people living in Ukraine can be Ukrainians no matter their ethnic/racial/religious backgrounds, geography of origin and/or language they speak”.

However, it is noteworthy that Segment 1 were much less likely than Segment 2 to favour multiculturalism for a future Ukraine: in answer to the question of how they would like Ukraine to be viewed from the outside in future, 59 per cent of Segment 2 selected the option “a multicultural country like Canada” versus only 22 per cent of Segment 1.

Since Segment 2 are more likely to be Russian speakers, they may consider themselves to be a minority that should be accepted into a multicultural society. The recent language law strengthening the position of Ukrainian as the only official language of Ukraine was one of the most divisive topics for Segment 1 and Segment 2 in our online survey: 63 per cent of Segment 1 believed that the law would help strengthen Ukraine, whereas only 25 per cent of Segment 2 thought so.

As part of this project we made two videos that aimed to explore the

segments' views on multiculturalism in more depth, and we focused specifically on the segments' attitudes towards ethnic minorities. The first film dealt with the return of Crimean Tatars to Crimea in the 1990s and the acceptance of Crimean Tatars as Ukrainians, and the second looked at solidarity between Crimean Tatars and Jews in Ukraine.

For the film on Crimean Tatars returning to Crimea in the 1990s, the two segments were extremely aligned in their strong support for multiculturalism and in their view that Crimean Tatars should have the same rights as all other Ukrainians (with 90 per cent agreement from Segment 1 and 92 per cent from Segment 2).

In the online survey for the film on Crimean Tatars and Jews in Ukraine, we asked more detailed questions about the segments' attitudes towards multiculturalism. There was strong agreement between the segments that "mutual help and respect between different peoples of Ukraine should be part of what it means to be Ukrainian" and that "the different peoples of Ukraine share a history of being oppressed by ruling powers". This apparent support for multiculturalism in Ukraine may be rooted in a shared sense of victimhood and solidarity with minorities resulting from a shared history of oppression by imperial powers during the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Further research would be required, however, to explore this hypothesis in greater depth.

- **Bottom-Up Storytelling**

Almost all of our videos included witness accounts and personal stories rather than "top-down" reports on history, and although further research would be necessary to confirm this, our results suggest that this approach was very successful. Rather than making judgements on history, the videos made as part of this project mostly explored relatable, shared historical experiences through the stories of individuals. By comparison, the control videos that we tested featured narration from a presenter (in the Bandera video) or a voiceover (in the video on Ukrainian nationalist partisans during World War II). The level of trust for the control videos was significantly lower than for the videos made by Hromadske. Whilst this is likely to be due in large part to the topics themselves – our online survey having shown the Ukrainian liberation movement to be a polarising topic – the Hromadske videos' bottom-up storytelling approach may still have contributed to the increased levels of trust.

Our highest performing films (Afghan War, Pavlohrad Miners and Peru's Fight Against Corruption) were particularly strong in terms of bottom-up storytelling. We also observed that the films where bottom-up storytelling was least central were also the least trusted. For example, the video on Police Brutality in the USSR had more captions and less





Shot from video about police brutality in USSR | hromadske

storytelling from interviewees than other videos made by Hromadske, which may have contributed to its below-average trust scores. We also observed a significant difference in trust levels for our two videos on Chernobyl. The first video featured just one interview with the former deputy chief of the nuclear power plant, who spoke generally about Soviet censorship of the disaster, without exploring his own personal experience. The second video centred on two characters who spoke about their experiences of being displaced from Chernobyl following the disaster, and their stories were much more relatable. The video about displaced people also had fewer captions than the film about censorship. Segment 2 in particular had significantly lower trust in the film about censorship (54 per cent net trust for the censorship film compared to 63 per cent for the film people displaced from Chernobyl). The fact that the video on displaced people had more of an emphasis on bottom-up storytelling may have contributed to Segment 2's higher levels of trust in this video.

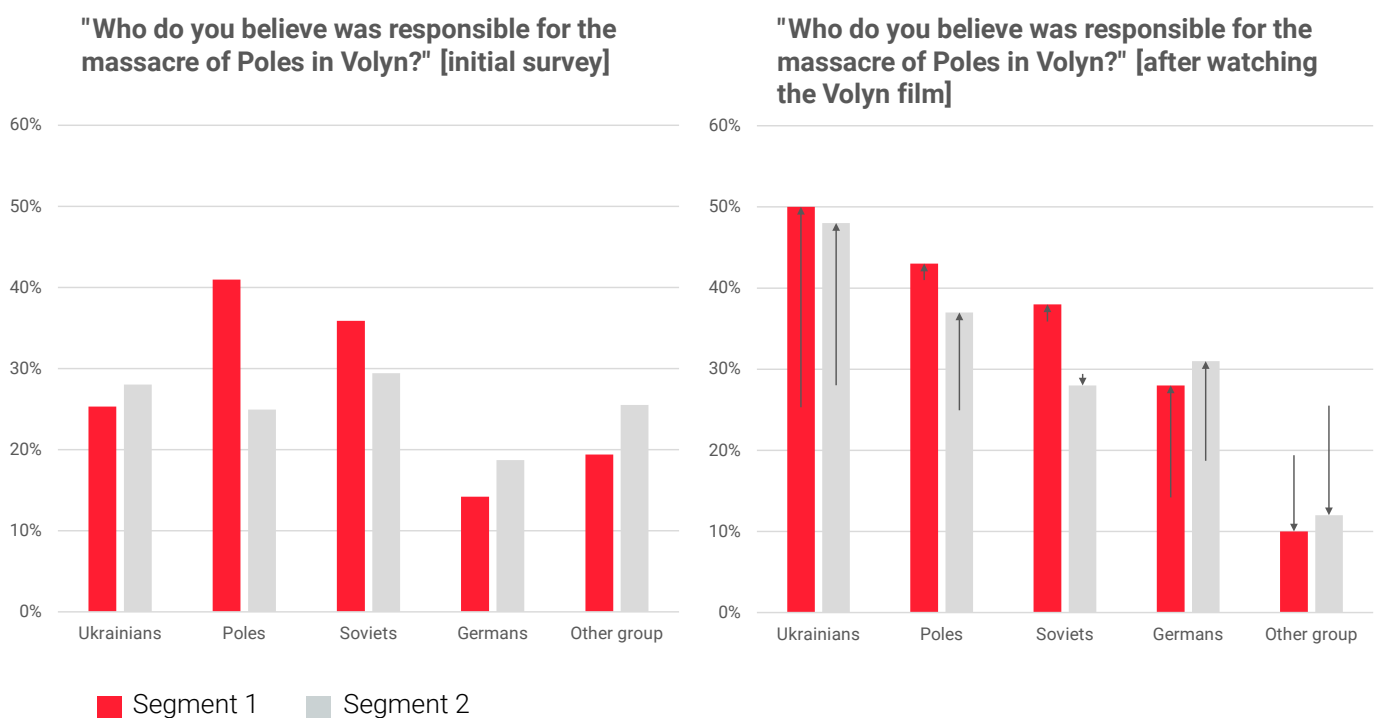
One of our videos deliberately took the divisive topic of the Volyn mass killings of Poles in 1943-45 as a means of testing the segments' openness to a nuanced, human story exploring a particularly controversial page in Ukrainian history<sup>38</sup>. Our original survey found that the majority of both Segment 1 and Segment 2 did not acknowledge Ukrainians' responsibility for the Volyn massacres. The more patriotic grouping, Segment 1, were especially likely to blame the Poles for the massacres.

In our film about Volyn, we tried to explore the moral complexity of the

38 "Ukrainian and Polish historians still argue over whether the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists sanctioned Ukrainian attacks of Polish villages, and if so, on what level. There is no doubt, however, that most victims of the ethnic cleansing were Poles." Plochy, Serhii. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York (2015), Basic Books, p. 281.

situation through the story of an elderly Ukrainian villager whose father tried to save their Polish neighbours. When her father's efforts failed and their neighbours were killed, she and her father buried them, and she has tended their graves ever since. After viewing this video, both segments agreed that the villagers had done the right thing, and the segments were also willing to accept that Ukrainians had been to blame for the massacre (see the graph below that compares the segments' responses in the original survey and after watching the film).

The response to this video on Facebook was also encouraging. There



was, as we expected, disagreement among commenters on attitudes to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and the degree of Polish or Ukrainian responsibility for the massacres. But there were also a significant number of constructive comments expressing the view that every story has two sides and commending the video for exploring such a difficult topic through personal stories.

In other words, even the most difficult parts of history can be explored if they are approached through nuanced personal experiences.

## General Recommendations

# 4

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### 4.1

Overcoming polarisation has to become a key strategy and indicator of success for public-service spirited media and those who support it, from Ukraine to the USA. Polarisation, social fracture and identity-driven division are salient issues not only in Ukraine. They have become some of the defining crises of our time, as prevalent in mature democracies like the US as in “hybrid” or authoritarian regimes. This project, alongside Arena’s other research, lays out a practical, successful methodology that can allow public service-spirited media to identify and test techniques with the potential to break down divides. The same concern should also be shared by individuals and institutions focusing on security issues and socio-economic development. A resilient society is essential in resisting hybrid or information warfare. Likewise, reforms are more likely to be successful if they can be discussed and debated in a respectful, evidence-based public space.

Public-spirited media, politicians and communicators must learn to dig deeper than the propagandists. The aim of malign influence operations, media manipulation and hostile state disinformation campaigns is to sow division and entrench polarised identities. Fact-checking and “myth-busting” are important, but they risk entrenching the agenda and framing established by the other side. Simply pumping out “correct” information in the hope that it will win out in a “marketplace of ideas” no longer works in a fractured media landscape where audiences can self-select their material. Public service media and other communicators must learn to understand audiences better than the propagandists, recognising and analysing their deeper traumas, needs and aspirations. They will have to offer a conversation that is more compelling and vital. This can sometimes mean merely being more useful than the other side, or – as in the case of a sensitive area like history – it can entail the exploration of emotionally fraught but frequently neglected subjects.

It is important to understand that polarisation is driven by elites; the public are more nuanced. Throughout the world we see political and





Soviet mosaic at the Institute for Nuclear Research, Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo by Yevhen Nikiforov

media elites defining publics along crass binary lines: “globalists” versus “patriots”; “liberals” versus “Christian conservatives”; “Brexit” versus “Remain”; “pro-Russian” versus “pro-Western”. Our polling and segmentation for this and other Arena projects shows that real audiences are far more nuanced, reflecting the complex social dynamics in wider society. Public diplomats, media and other communicators need to avoid reinforcing propaganda-driven binaries and engage with this more variegated spread of opinions.

To ensure that democratic values flourish in the 21st century, we need to understand why and when audiences value them. Which human rights really matter to people in different groups? When they say they oppose “corruption”, what is it specifically that they oppose? Our Ukraine research showed that people in different social groups found the right to safety and justice more important than language or religious rights, that what they really dislike about corruption is the impunity of rich and powerful elites. We need to be constantly interrogating what democratic values mean and why they are relevant.

To keep audiences engaged, focus on the future. Our research in Ukraine focused on some topics that were unique to Eastern Europe, such as experiences of the Afghan War and the fall of the USSR. However, other issues emerged that are universally relevant. We saw how audiences push back against broad-brush criticism of their identity groups yet remain open to specific, evidence-based criticism on particular issues. Even those nostalgic for the USSR agree that on censorship and soldiers’ rights its record was bad. Our recommendation is to shift the framing of such issues away from identity and nostalgia and towards aspirations for the future, where a fact-driven, evidence-based discourse once again becomes possible.

**Outline and links for the 16 films made by Hromadske as part of this**





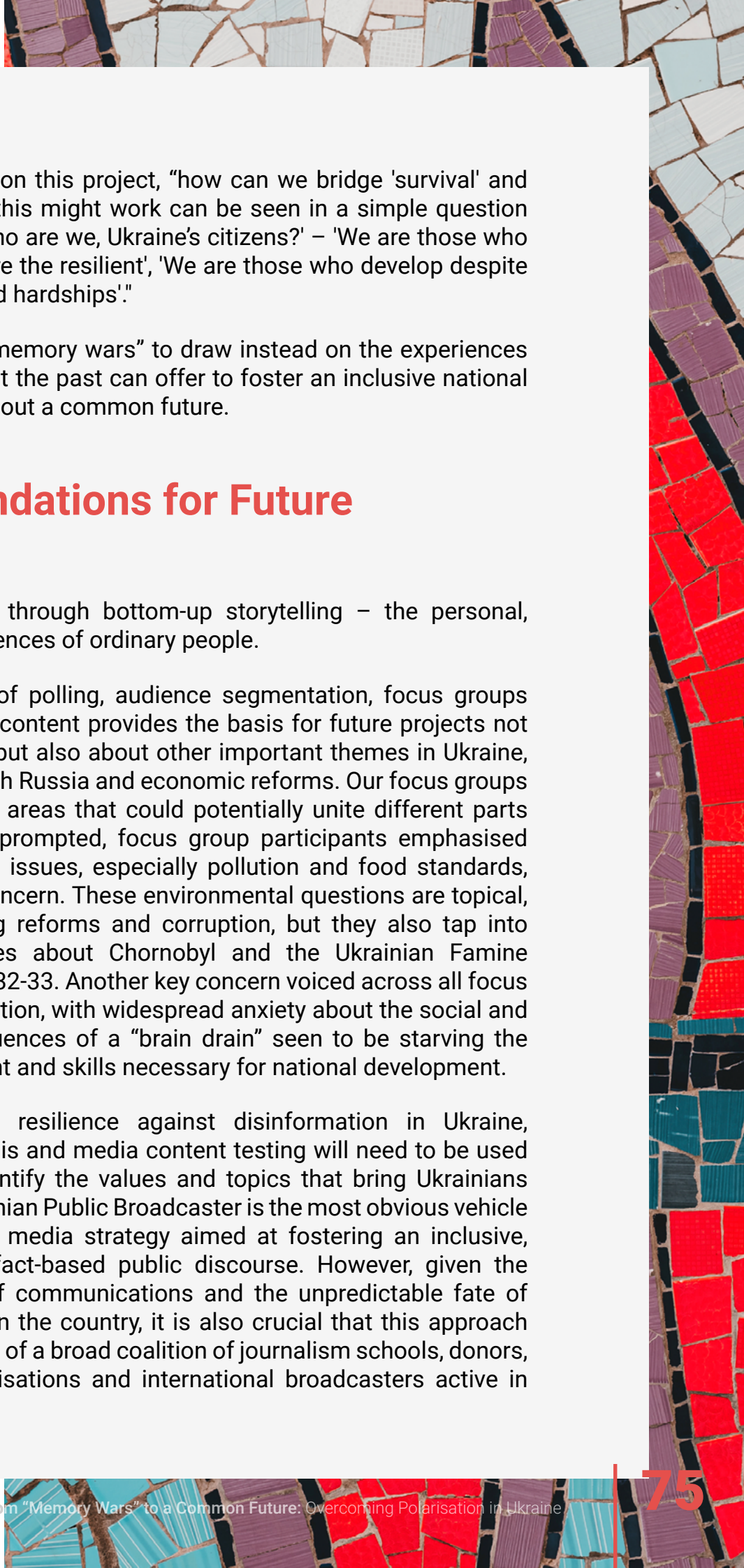
## Recommendations for Independent Media in Ukraine

This research has shown that different audiences are resistant to top-down narratives which try to impose a “correct” version of Ukraine’s multi-layered history. The project has pointed towards an important trend: Ukrainians across the country, irrespective of their political affiliation, are united by their shared experiences, traumas, and search for security. Exploring these traumas through the lens of Ukrainians’ resilience, as we demonstrated with our videos about the 1990s, could be a powerful way to unite people across the country, especially where media content foregrounds specific experiences and universal rights.

Whilst videos on national identity were the least unifying, we naturally do not suggest that Ukrainian media should avoid identity discourse altogether. Similarly, although the Ukrainian liberation movement during World War II is one of the most divisive topics for Ukrainians, this does not mean that it should be avoided either. As our video on the Volyn massacres highlighted, even the most contentious topics can be explored without polarising audiences, as long as they are treated with sufficient nuance. Other areas of history, meanwhile, have been shown to have the potential to unify and to expand public discourse around history in a way that foregrounds common values and favours constructive conversation about the future. These issues, from the Afghan War to the economic turmoil of the 1990s, are the ones Ukrainians in our focus groups were most emotional about, rather than those stemming back to the now distant World War II.

For public service media aiming to create content on history that smooths polarisation, we have the following recommendations:

- Explore experiences of shared trauma in history through the lens of Ukrainians’ resilience in overcoming these traumas and the common search for security. For example, consider the topics of the Afghan War and the 1990s for larger scale documentaries, TV series or cinema.
- Expand history programming to focus on stories that reflect the struggle for universal, civic values and human rights such as the struggle for justice and security.
- Relate identity discourse to resilience and civic rights: the two can be mutually reinforcing. In the words of Volodymyr Yermolenko, Ukrainian philosopher and analytics director at Internews Ukraine,



and an advisor on this project, “how can we bridge 'survival' and 'identity'? How this might work can be seen in a simple question and answer: 'Who are we, Ukraine's citizens?' – 'We are those who survived', 'We are the resilient', 'We are those who develop despite oppressions and hardships'."

- Move beyond “memory wars” to draw instead on the experiences and lessons that the past can offer to foster an inclusive national conversation about a common future.

## Recommendations for Future Research

- Explore history through bottom-up storytelling – the personal, nuanced experiences of ordinary people.

Our methodology of polling, audience segmentation, focus groups and testing media content provides the basis for future projects not just about history, but also about other important themes in Ukraine, such as the war with Russia and economic reforms. Our focus groups also surfaced new areas that could potentially unite different parts of the country. Unprompted, focus group participants emphasised that environmental issues, especially pollution and food standards, are of particular concern. These environmental questions are topical, relating to ongoing reforms and corruption, but they also tap into historical memories about Chernobyl and the Ukrainian Famine (Holodomor) of 1932-33. Another key concern voiced across all focus groups was emigration, with widespread anxiety about the social and economic consequences of a “brain drain” seen to be starving the country of the talent and skills necessary for national development.

In order to build resilience against disinformation in Ukraine, sociological analysis and media content testing will need to be used to consistently identify the values and topics that bring Ukrainians together. The Ukrainian Public Broadcaster is the most obvious vehicle to drive forward a media strategy aimed at fostering an inclusive, constructive and fact-based public discourse. However, given the fractured nature of communications and the unpredictable fate of many institutions in the country, it is also crucial that this approach receive the backing of a broad coalition of journalism schools, donors, civil society organisations and international broadcasters active in Ukraine.

# ANNEX

## 5.1

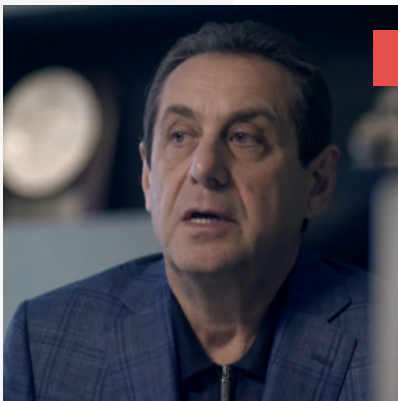
### Hromadske Films

project:



#### Artifacts of the 1990s: how the “techies” of the “Radiorynok” survived

This video explores the hardships many people had to face in the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It includes three personal experiences from an electronics repair technician, a trader, and a vendor and collector of retro equipment. The three are based in various Kyiv markets, including the “Radiorynok”. They talk about how people started trading tech novelties such as game consoles, CDs and VCRs to survive the 1990s and lament how radically times have changed, with these items now available cheaply in electronics markets and flea markets.



#### Rise in the 1990s (“Kokush”)

This video explores the incredible success of Ukrainian film engineer Anatoliy Kokush, who founded the Filmotechnic company in Kyiv at the start of the crisis in the 1990s. His unique technical inventions earned Kokush two “technology Oscars” in 2006. Many Hollywood blockbusters with action scenes (including Titanic, Avatar, Transformers, and Mission Impossible) were shot using Filmotechnic camera cranes.



#### Afghanistan: The Uncomfortable War

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to support the Afghan government against anti-communist Islamist guerrillas. The USSR withdrew its troops a decade later when it became clear that its empire was crumbling. 160,000 Ukrainians participated in the war and about 3,000 died. This video addresses the many untold truths about the war through personal stories. One focuses on a war veteran, and another deals with the family tragedy of a woman whose husband perished in the conflict and who later became the head of the Committee of Relatives of Soldiers that died in the Afghan War.





### **Women Code Too**

This video explores the role of women in the development of the significant but little-known tradition of technical sciences in Soviet Ukraine. It includes interviews with the daughters of Kateryna Yushchenko and Viktor Hlushkov. Yushchenko was one of the first cybernetics scientists in the world, creating one of the world's first high-level programming languages, outpacing the Americans and pursuing her scientific research despite Soviet obstructions. Hlushkov founded the Institute of Cybernetics in Kyiv and contributed to the development of artificial intelligence and military systems.



### **A Soviet Ukrainian Alla Horska**

This video includes an interview with the granddaughter of the Ukrainian dissident artist of the Soviet period Alla Horska. A prominent member of the Sixtiers Movement, Horska frequently spoke out against political repressions. She created countless Soviet murals, with one of her most famous works being "The Victory Flag" in Krasnodon, Luhansk region (currently occupied by Russia-backed separatists). Horska's granddaughter speaks about how her grandmother was both a Soviet artist and a Ukrainian patriot.



### **Displaced From Chornobyl**

This video includes an interview with two former Pripyat residents, who married on the day of the Chornobyl accident on April 26th, 1986. Almost 50,000 inhabitants lived in Pripyat prior to the disaster. Now it is a ghost town and a common destination for dark tourism enthusiasts. The couple recalls how internally displaced people from Chornobyl were received and treated at the hospitals in Kyiv.



### **The Chernobyl Accident. Secret**

This video explores how and why Soviet authorities tried to silence the truth about the Chornobyl disaster. It includes an interview with Sergey Parashyn, a party secretary and deputy director at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant. He explains that despite the threat of radiation, the disaster was no exception to Soviet censorship practices. Parashyn interprets the liberalisation of information as a result of Gorbachev's glasnost policy (which revealed previously unknown facts about the nuclear disaster) as a catalyst for the collapse of the USSR.





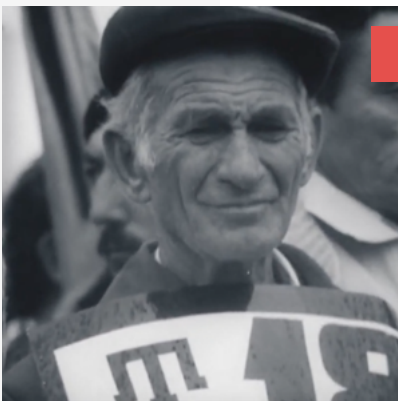
## **Becoming Ukrainian**

This video explores inclusive expressions of Ukrainian civic identity in the lives of prominent individuals from different ethnic backgrounds who consciously chose to become Ukrainians. These include ethnic Russian Maria Vilinskaya, who became a staple of Ukrainian literature under the pseudonym Marko Vovchok; Bolshevik supporter and pioneering journalist Maik Yohansen, a Kharkiv resident of Latvian-Swedish-Norwegian descent who was executed by the NKVD for “anti-Soviet, nationalist and terrorist activities”; and Sevastopol-born cinematographer Yaroslav Pilunsky, for whom the Euromaidan protests represented a tipping point in the consolidation of Ukrainian national identity.



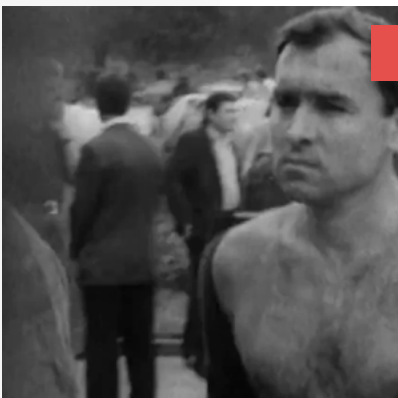
## **Friends in Need: Muslims and Jews in Crimea**

This video explores the tragic and fascinating interweaving of Crimean Tatar and Jewish cultures in Ukraine. This dialogue is exemplified by the Jewslim Orchestra band, which appeared after Russia’s annexation of Crimea and chose to combine Crimean Tatar and Jewish musical traditions as a form of cultural protest. Their art commemorates the peaceful co-existence of Muslims and Jews over the years. For example, during World War II the Crimean Tatars pretended Jewish children were their own to save them from concentration camps.



## **Home After Deportation**

Through the personal story of Dilshad Rahimov’s family, this video explores the tragedy of the Crimean Tatars, who were deported en masse in 1944 to Central Asia. It also delves into the problems they faced once they were allowed to return to their native Crimea from 1989 onwards. Over the following four years, 250,000 people returned to their homeland and nearby territories.



## **Why Did Ukrainian Miners Strike in 1989?**

This video includes interviews with participants in the Donbas miners’ strikes of 1989, a protest against holdback pay and late payment of salaries. Pavlohrad, located in Dnipropetrovsk region in east Ukraine, became one of the main centres. As a result of the protests, miners received increased holidays and the list of work-related diseases was expanded. The video’s interviews with the children of former strikers suggest that such large-scale protests would be unthinkable in contemporary Donbas.



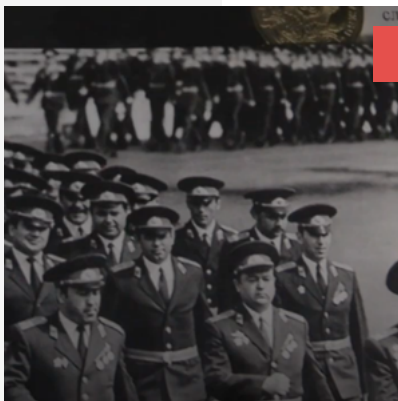
### **Forgotten Pavlohrad Rebellion: Peasants vs Soviet Authorities**

This video deals with the large-scale uprisings against Soviet collectivisation and dekulakisation (dispossession) in villages near Pavlohrad, east Ukraine, in the early 1930s. As a result of the revolt, 13 peasants were killed, 200 were arrested, and 27 were sentenced to death. The Dnipropetrovsk region suffered perhaps more than any other during the Holodomor in 1932–33. This video also illustrates how little local residents know about these events. At the cemetery in Ternivka, there is a monument to the representatives of the Soviet authorities who suppressed the uprising, but no monument exists to commemorate those who died of starvation, only a mass grave.



### **It's Possible To Defeat Corruption: the Case of Peru**

What can Ukraine learn from other countries' experiences in the fight against corruption? This video attempts to provide some answers by looking at the case of Peru. In the 1990s, following mass protests, now ex-president Alberto Fujimori became the first head of state in the country's history to be convicted of abuse of power and bribery. His case was followed by several other criminal proceedings against Peruvian officials and became a precedent that would inspire the successful anti-corruption reforms in the following decades.



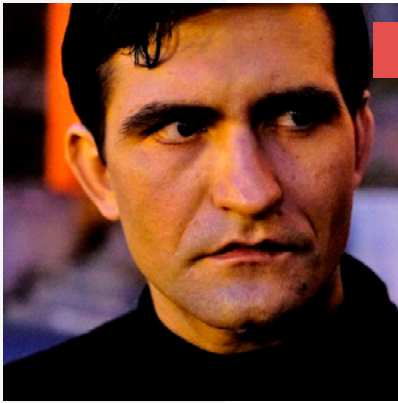
### **Riots Against Soviet Police in Ukraine**

This video includes interviews with former law enforcers and human rights activists who discuss the forgotten issue of anti-police riots in the USSR. In the 1960s, the Soviet cities of Odesa and Kryvyi Rih saw large-scale riots against police brutality. Illegal detentions were not perceived as such until the appearance of human rights defenders in the 1990s. Sadly, few citizens in today's independent Ukraine are aware of these events.



### **Three Crosses in Volyn**

This video addresses the topic of the Volyn massacres, where tens of thousands of Polish civilians were killed at the hands of Ukrainian nationalists in 1943. The Ukrainian counter-narrative emphasises that Ukrainians and Poles were both victims and both perpetrators. The video looks at the difficult truths of these dramatic years through the story of the daughter of an elderly Ukrainian villager who saved his Polish neighbours during the massacres. To keep her promise to her father, the now elderly woman has been tending the grave of her father's Polish friends for decades.



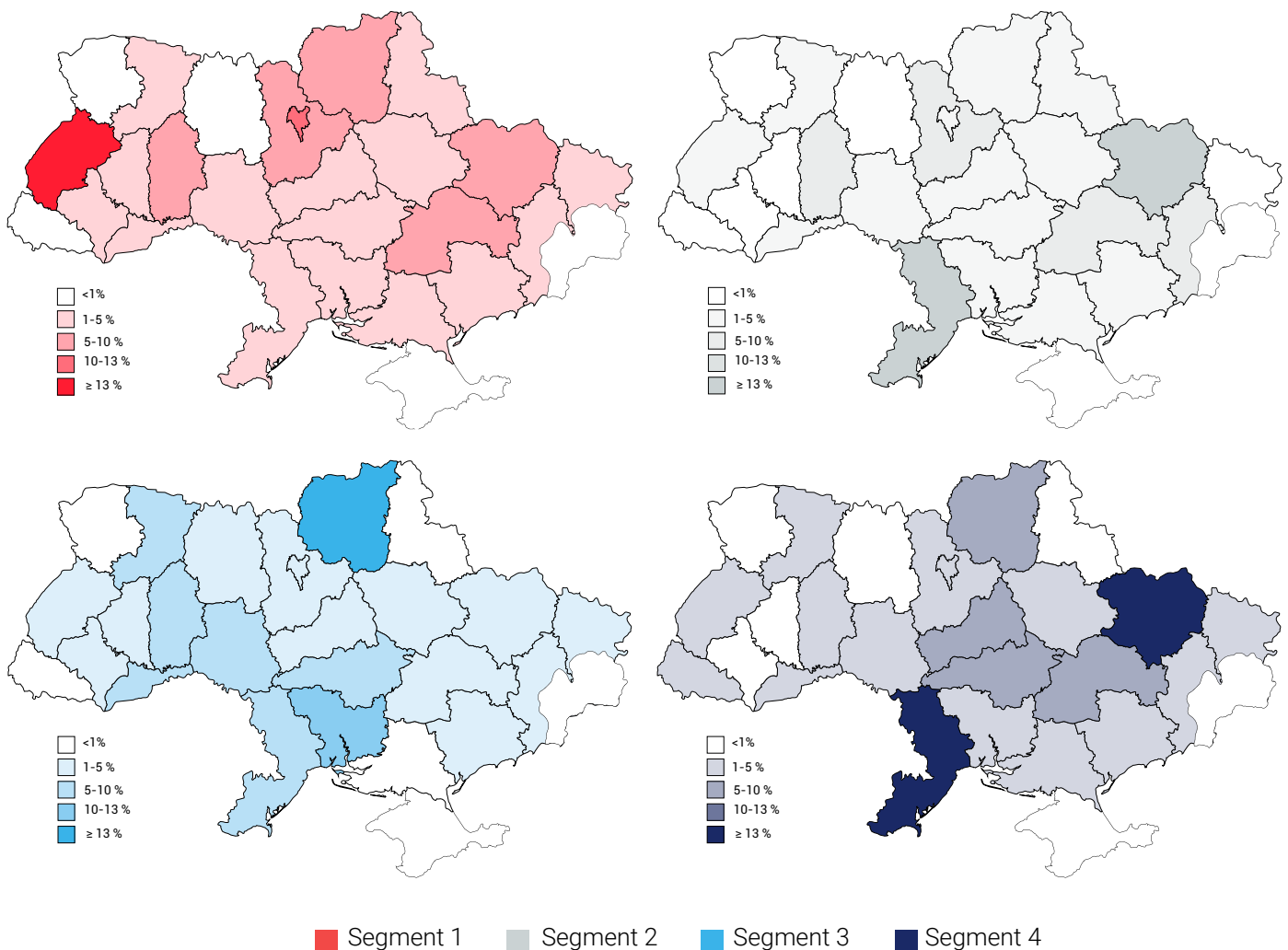
## **"Banned": the Story of the Dissident Poet Vasyl Stus<sup>39</sup>**

This video discusses the recent film "Banned" (Zaboronenyi), which narrates the tragic story of Ukrainian poet and dissident Vasyl Stus. Charged twice with "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda", Stus was sent to Soviet forced labour camps, where he died. The video also includes an interview with the lead actor and the film's screenwriter, as well as feedback on the film from Stus's fellow dissident and friend Vasyl Ovsienko.

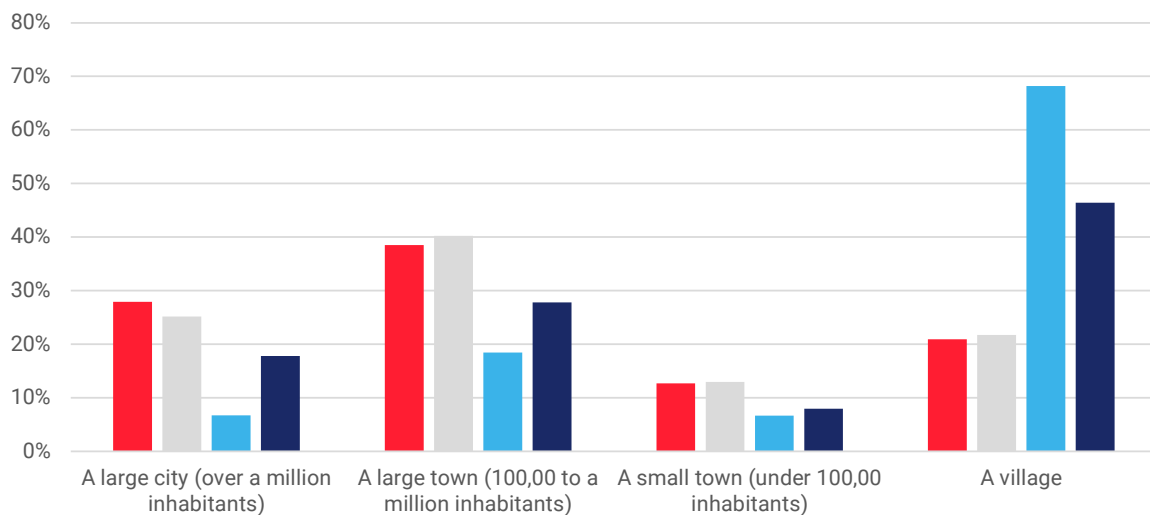
39 This film was made later than the other Hromadske films as an additional test of content exploring national identity. It was not promoted as part of the same series as the rest of the films, and there is no English language version.

# 5.2 Audience Segmentation Graphs

## Geographic distribution of segments :



## "Do you live in an urban or rural area?"

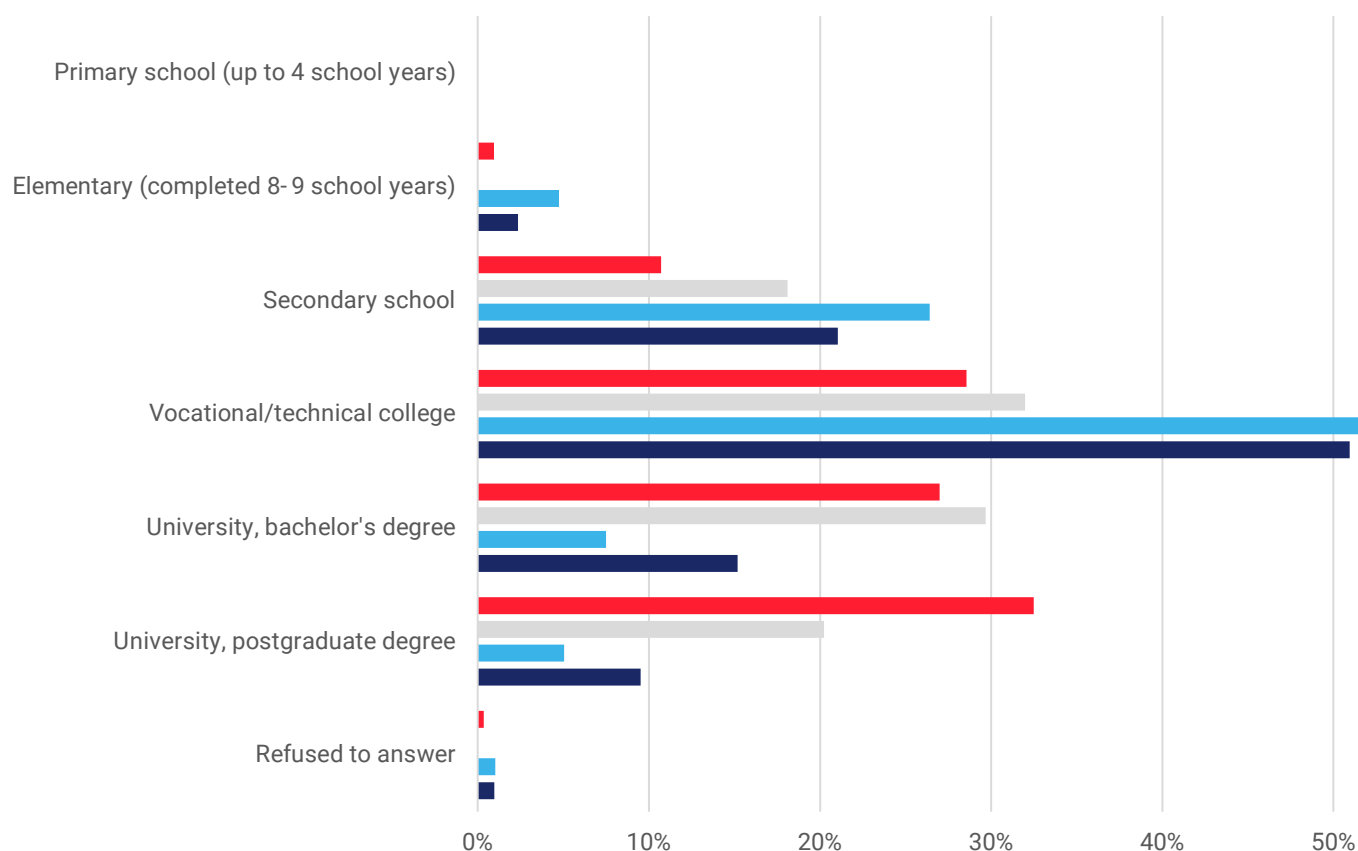


## Age distribution of segments

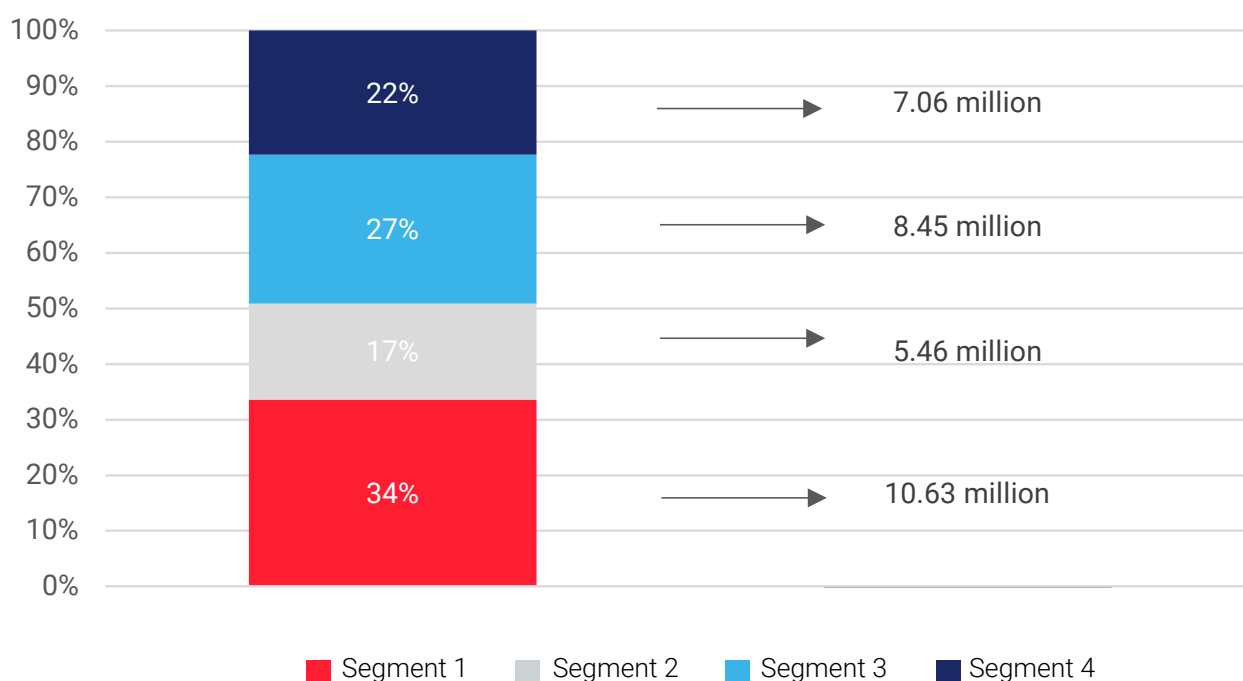




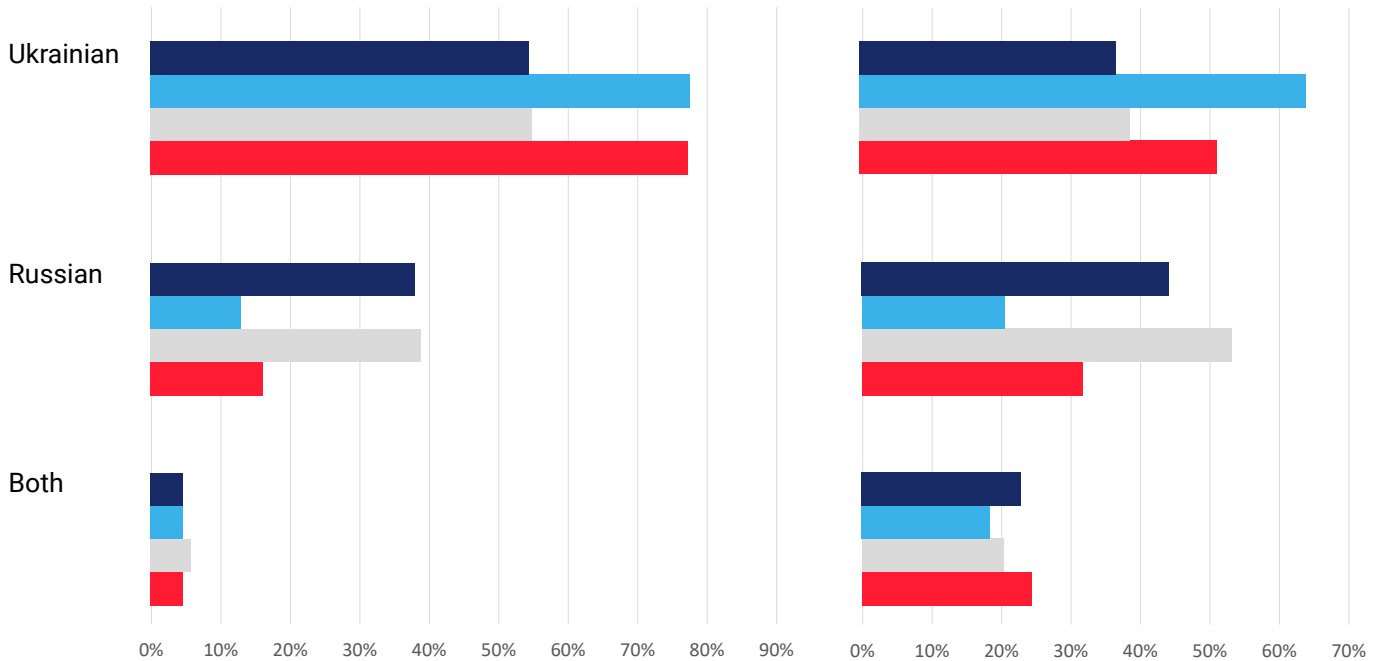
## "What is the highest level of education you have completed"



## Distribution of segments in the Ukrainian population (18-75 years)

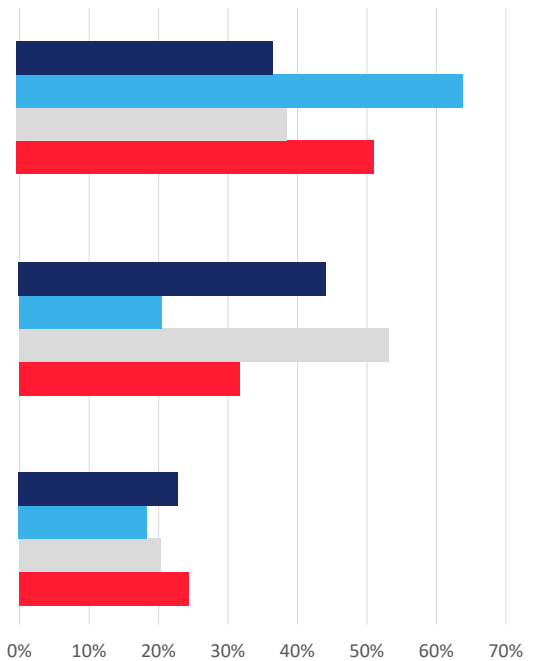


## "What language(s) do you speak at home?"

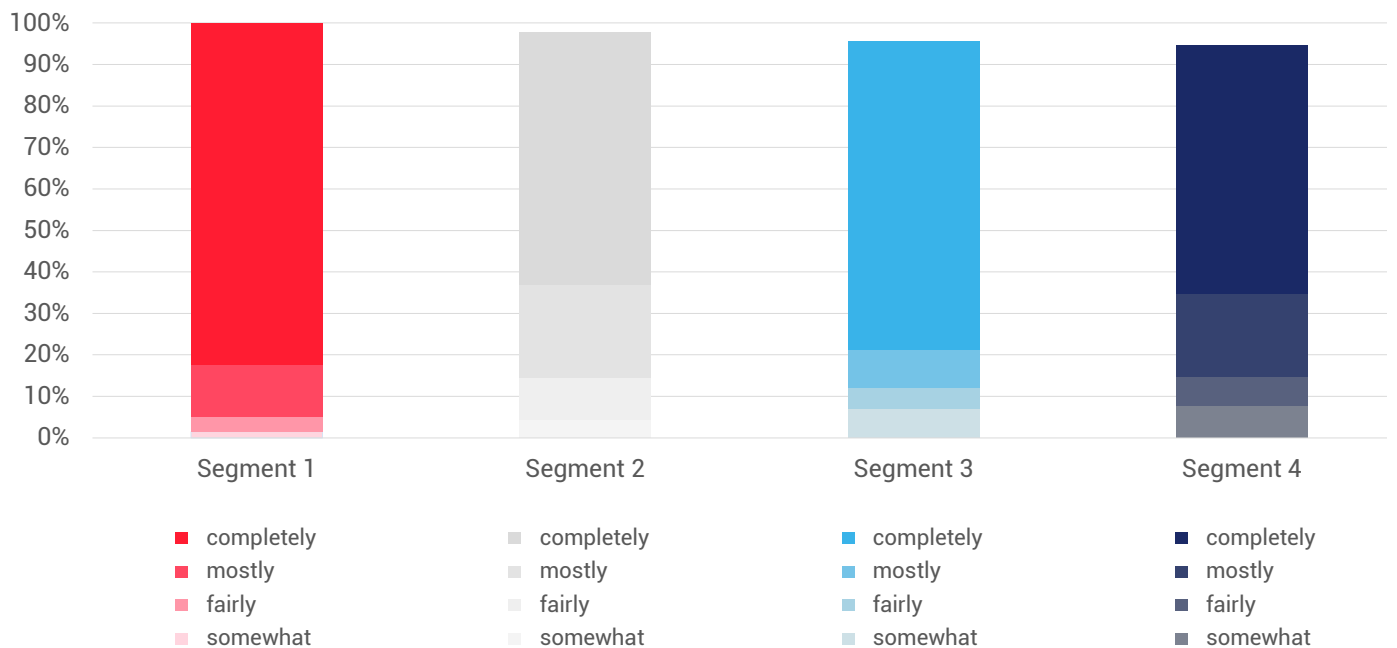


Segment 1 Segment 2 Segment 3 Segment 4

## "What is your mother tongue?"

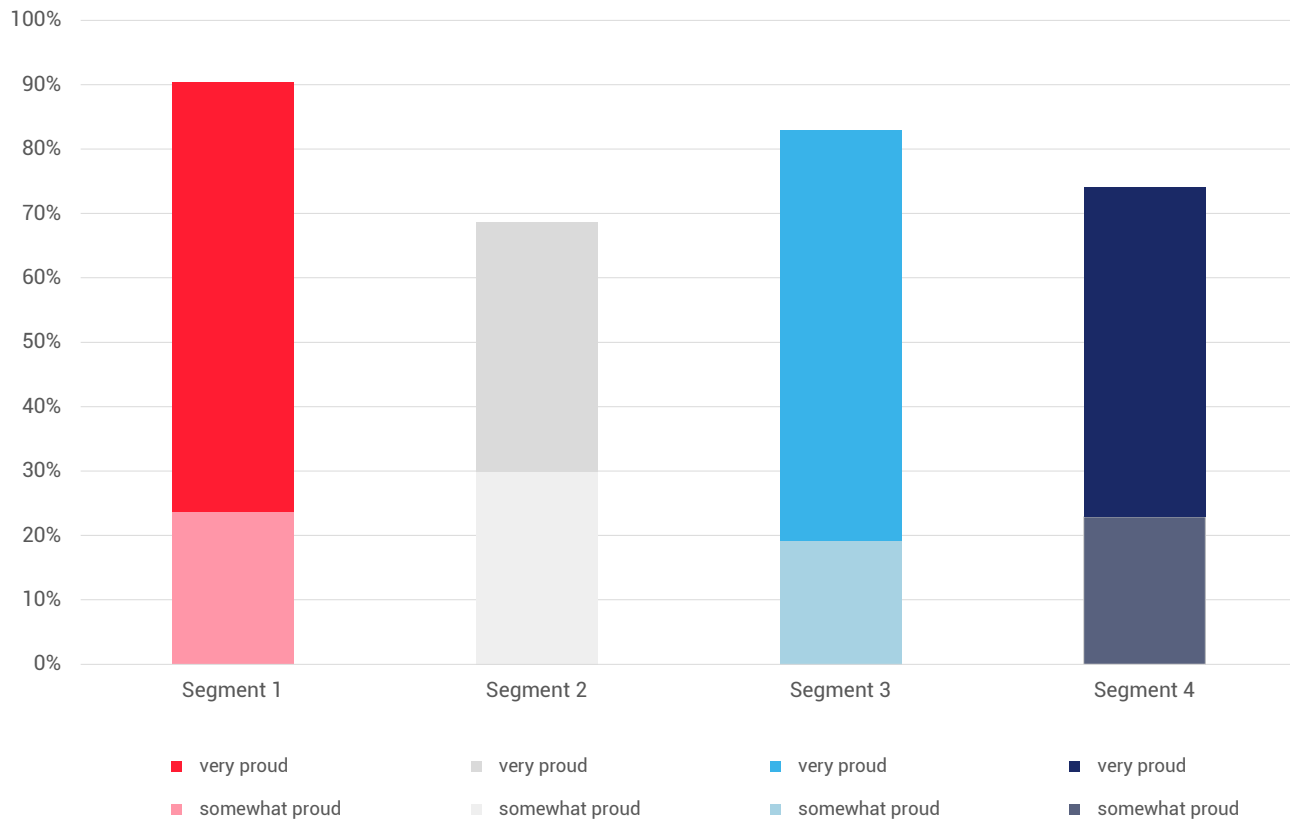


## "To what extent do you feel Ukrainian?"\*



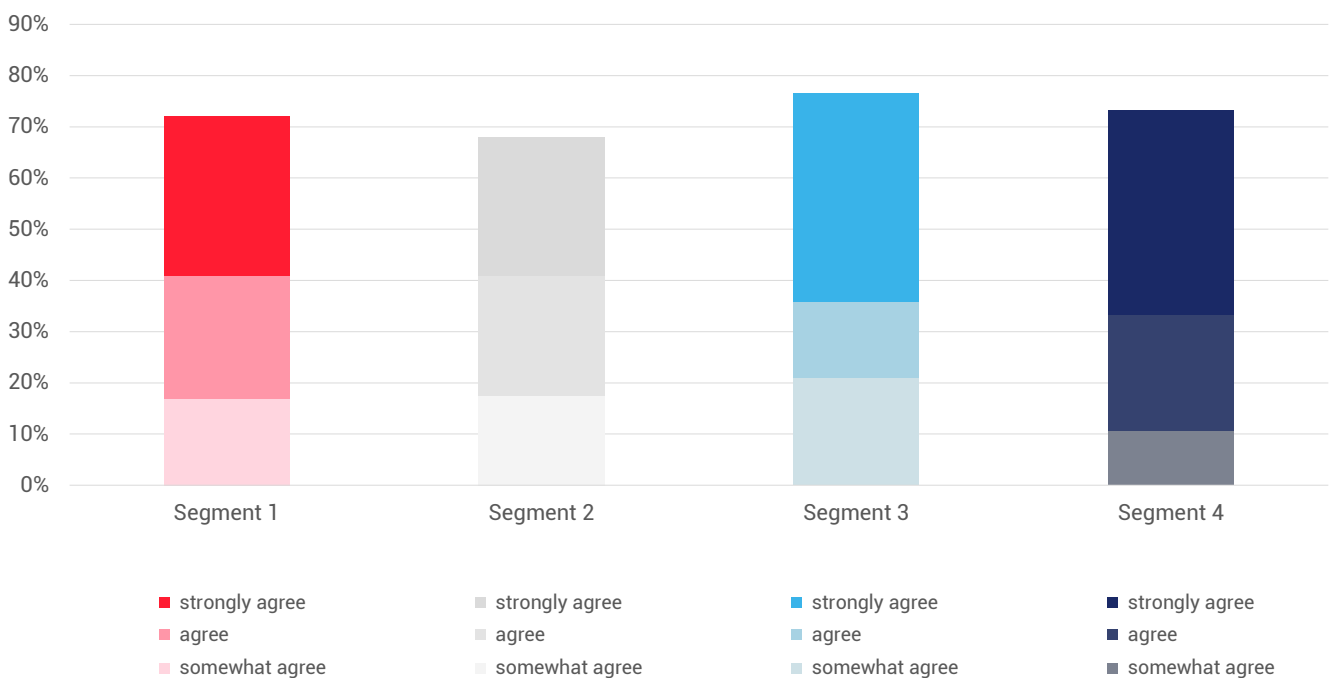
\*Respondents answered according to a five-point scale from "completely" to "not at all". The graph shows the top four responses.

## "To what extent do you feel proud to be Ukrainian?"\*



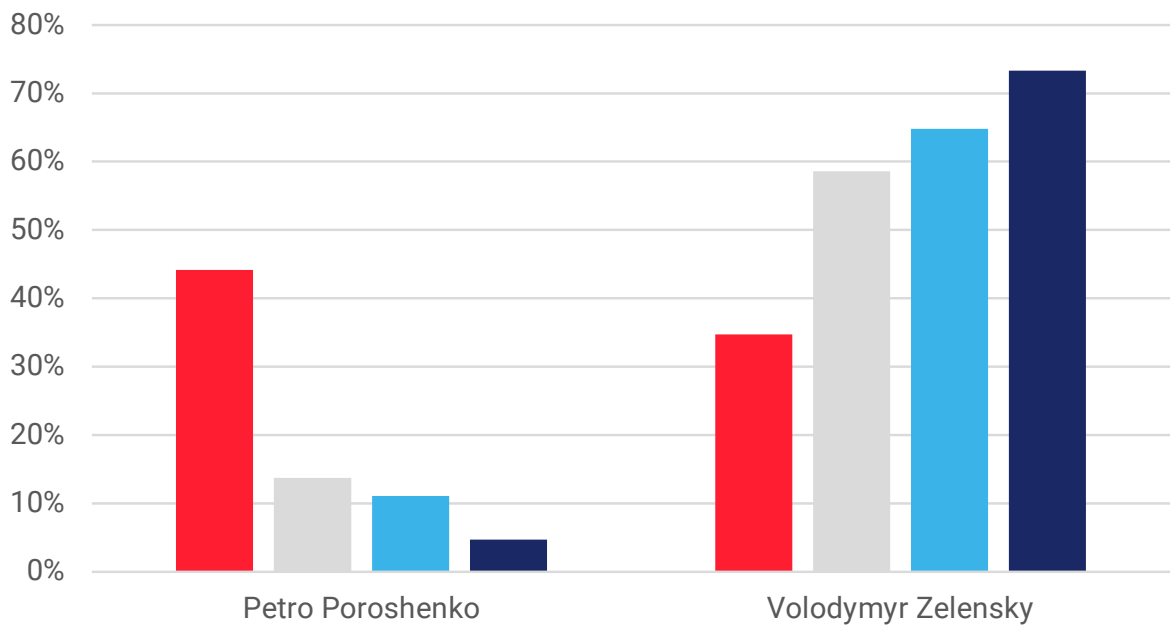
\*Respondents were asked to choose one of four options: "very proud", "somewhat proud", "not very proud" and "not at all proud". The graph shows the top two responses.

## "To what extent do you agree/disagree that all people living in Ukraine can be Ukrainians, regardless of their ethnic/racial/religious background, place of birth and/or the language they speak?"\*

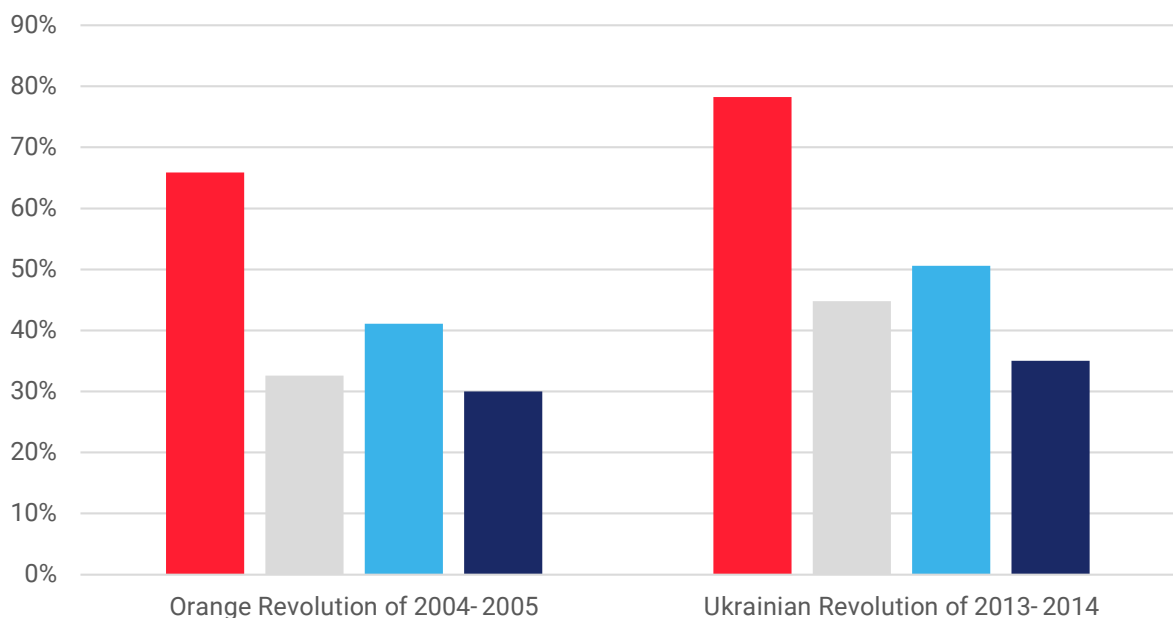


\*Respondents answered according to a seven-point scale from "completely agree" to "completely disagree". The graph shows the top three responses.

## "Which candidate did you vote for in the second round of the 2019 presidential elections?"



## Support for recent revolutions\*

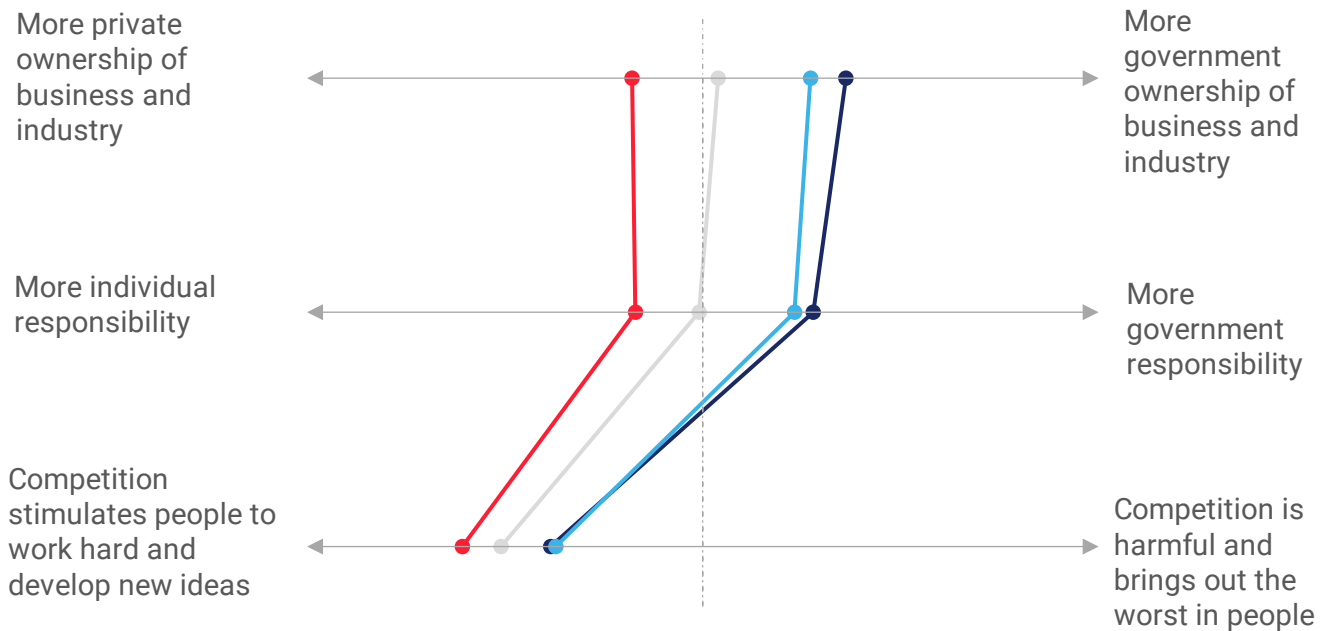


\*Respondents answered according to a ten-point scale where ten represented the strongest support. The graph shows the top four responses combined.

■ Segment 1   ■ Segment 2   ■ Segment 3   ■ Segment 4

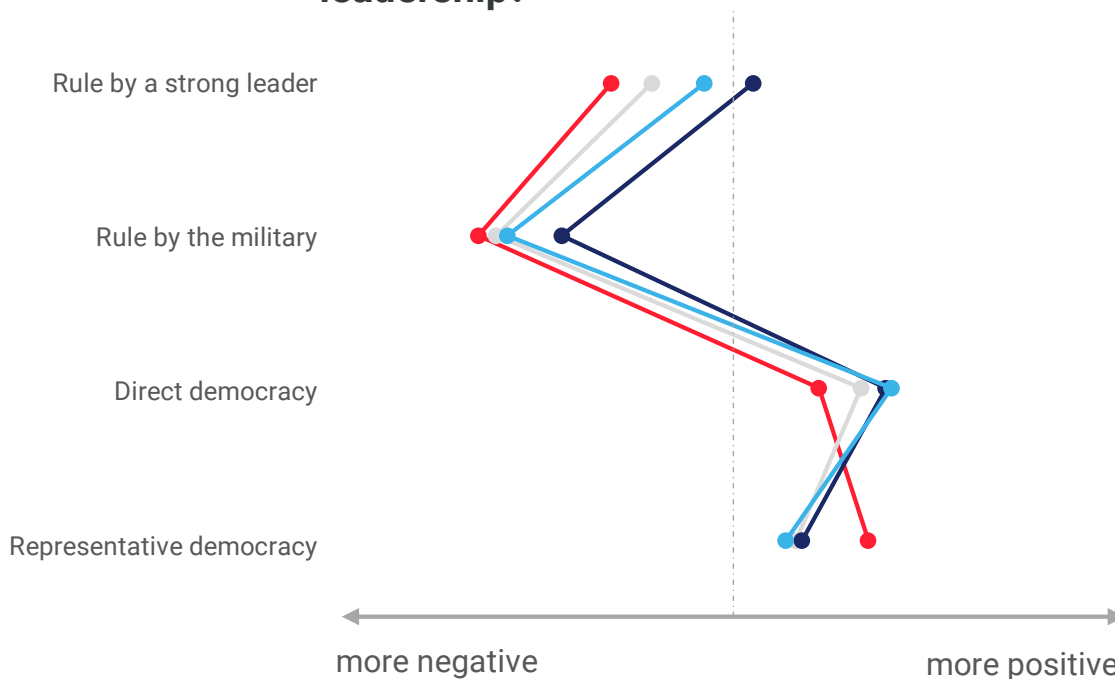


## Role of the state\*



\*Respondents answered according to a ten-point scale. The graph shows the weighted mean, excluding "don't know" responses

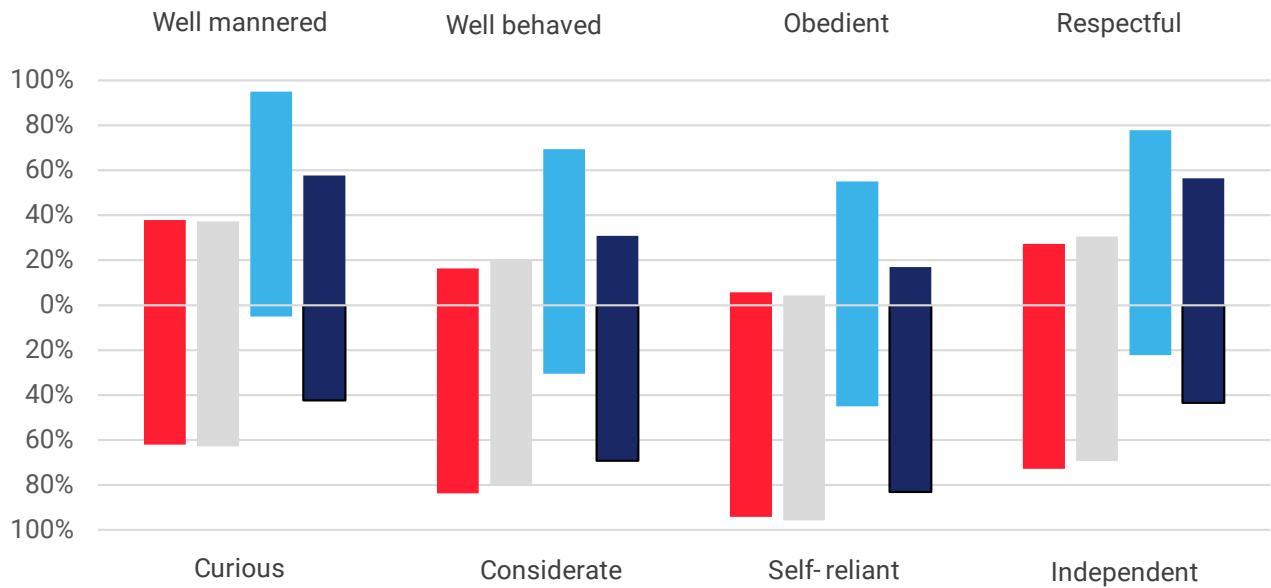
## "How do you view the following systems of leadership?"\*



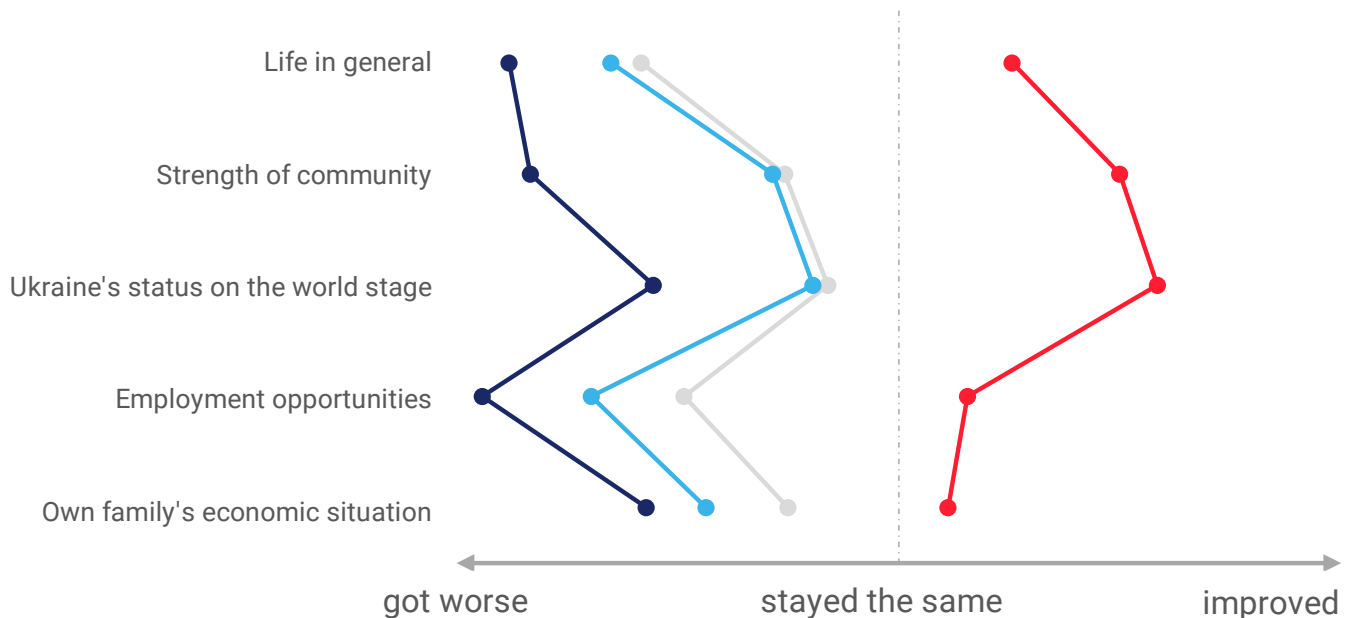
\*Respondents were asked to rate each on a seven-point scale from "extremely bad" to "extremely good". The graph shows the weighted mean, excluding "don't know" responses

Segment 1 Segment 2 Segment 3 Segment 4

## "It is important to raise a child to be..."



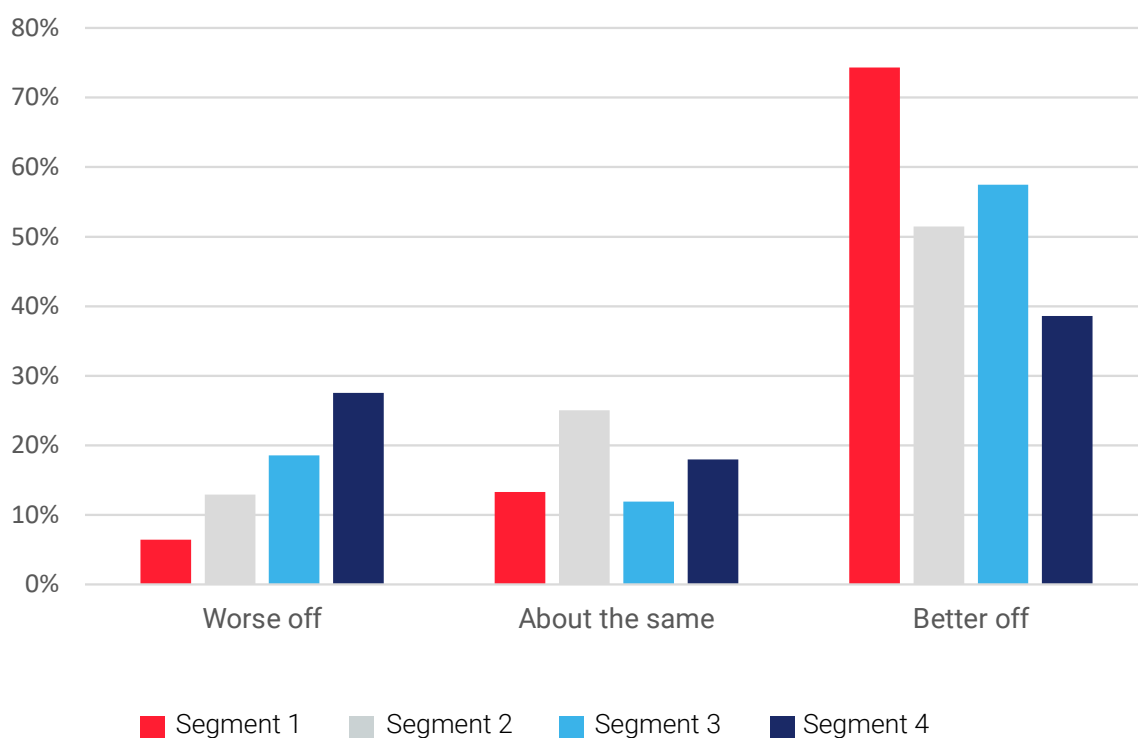
## "How has life in Ukraine changed over the course of your lifetime?"\*



\*Respondents were asked whether each aspect had improved, stayed the same, or got worse. The graph shows the weighted mean, excluding "don't know" responses.

Segment 1 Segment 2 Segment 3 Segment 4

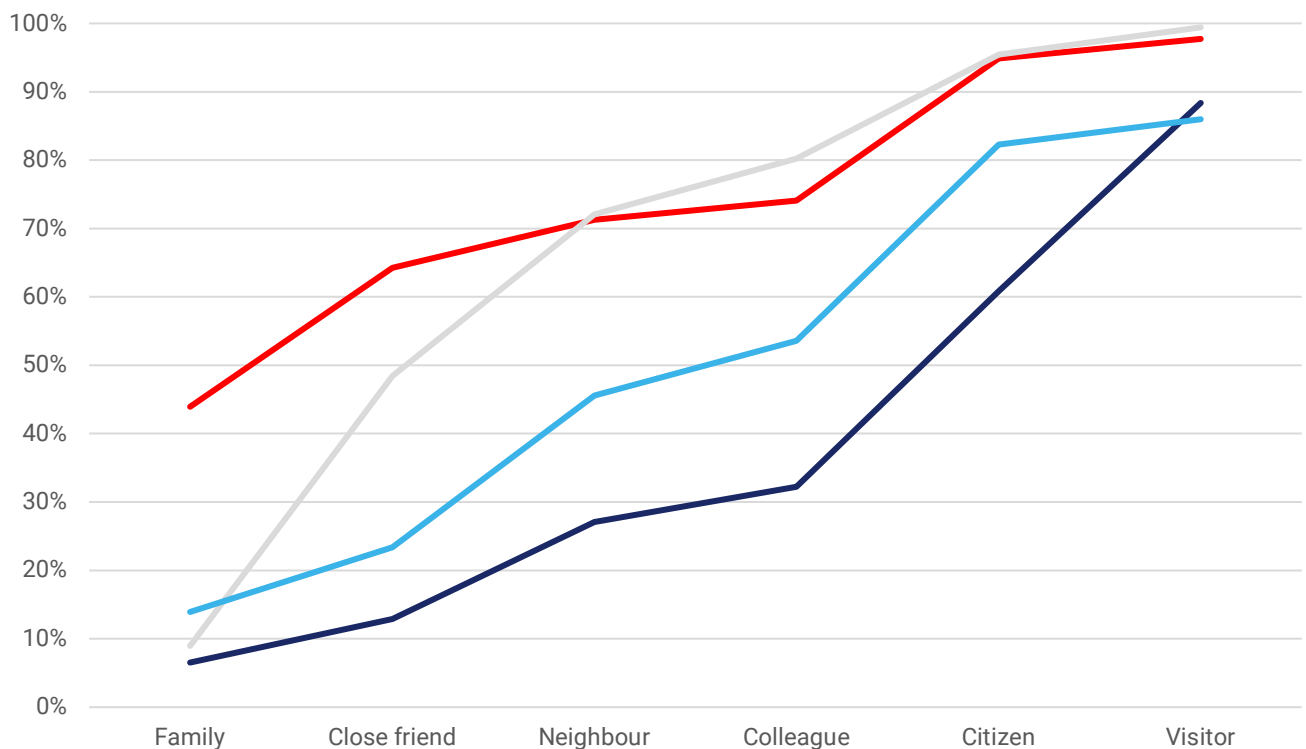
## "Do you believe that the next generation in Ukraine will be better off, worse off or the same as your generation?"



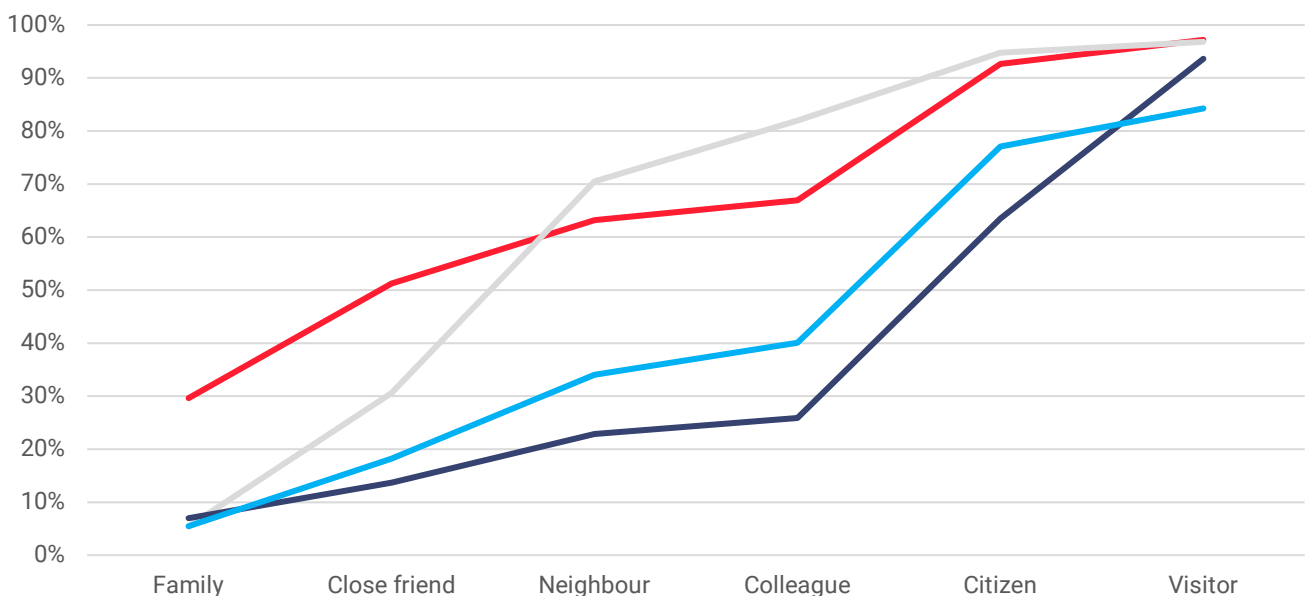
Soviet mosaic at Comprehensive school №95, Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo by Yevhen Nikiforov



## "Would you be willing to have someone of an ethnic minority as..." (cumulative analysis)



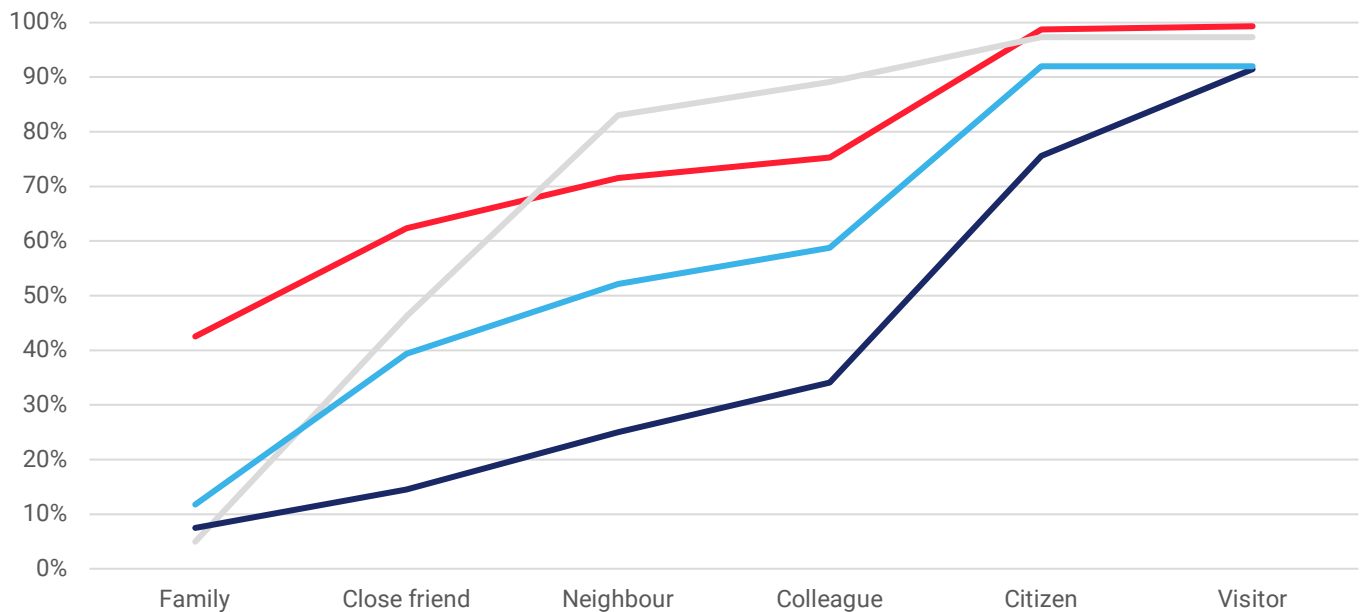
## "Would you be willing to have someone of a religious minority as..." (cumulative analysis)



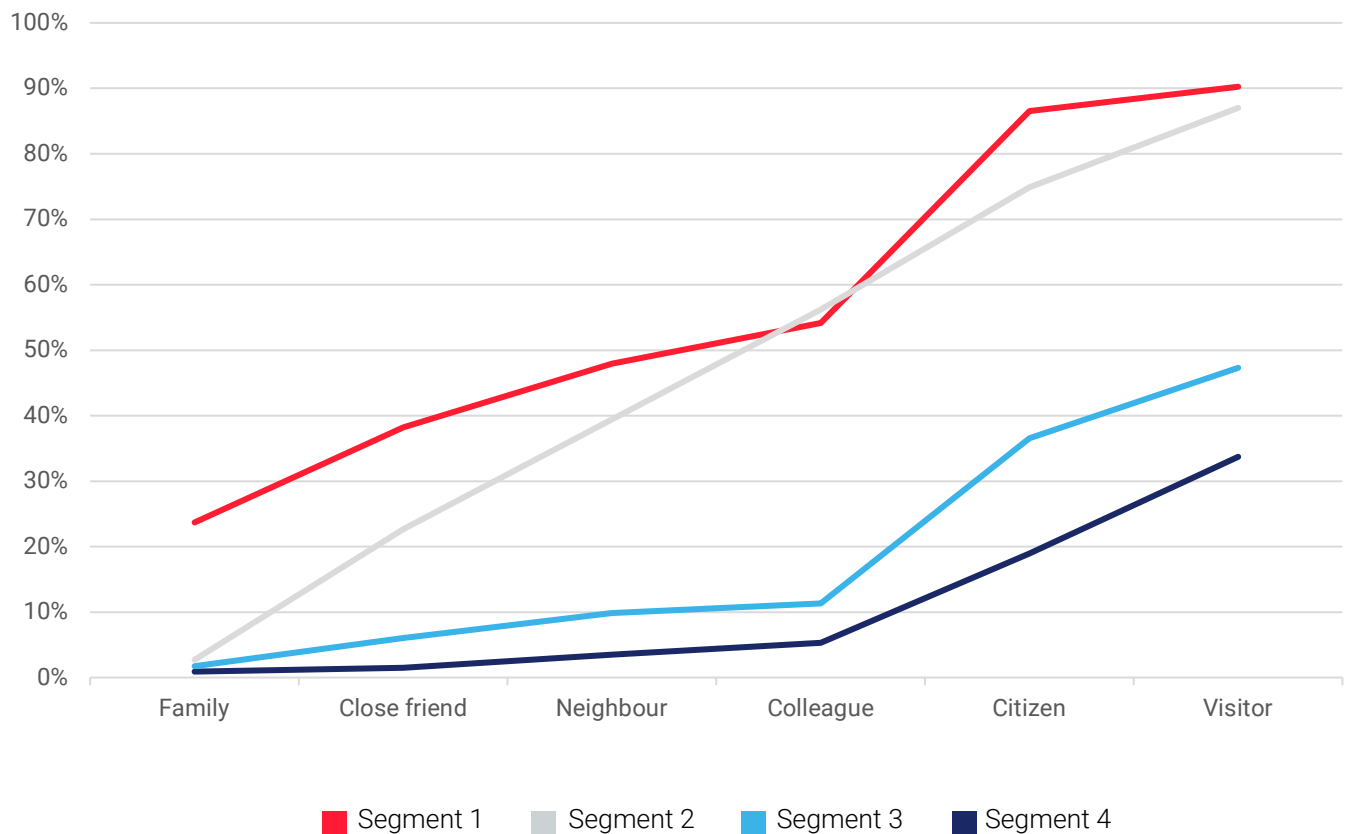
■ Segment 1
 ■ Segment 2
 ■ Segment 3
 ■ Segment 4



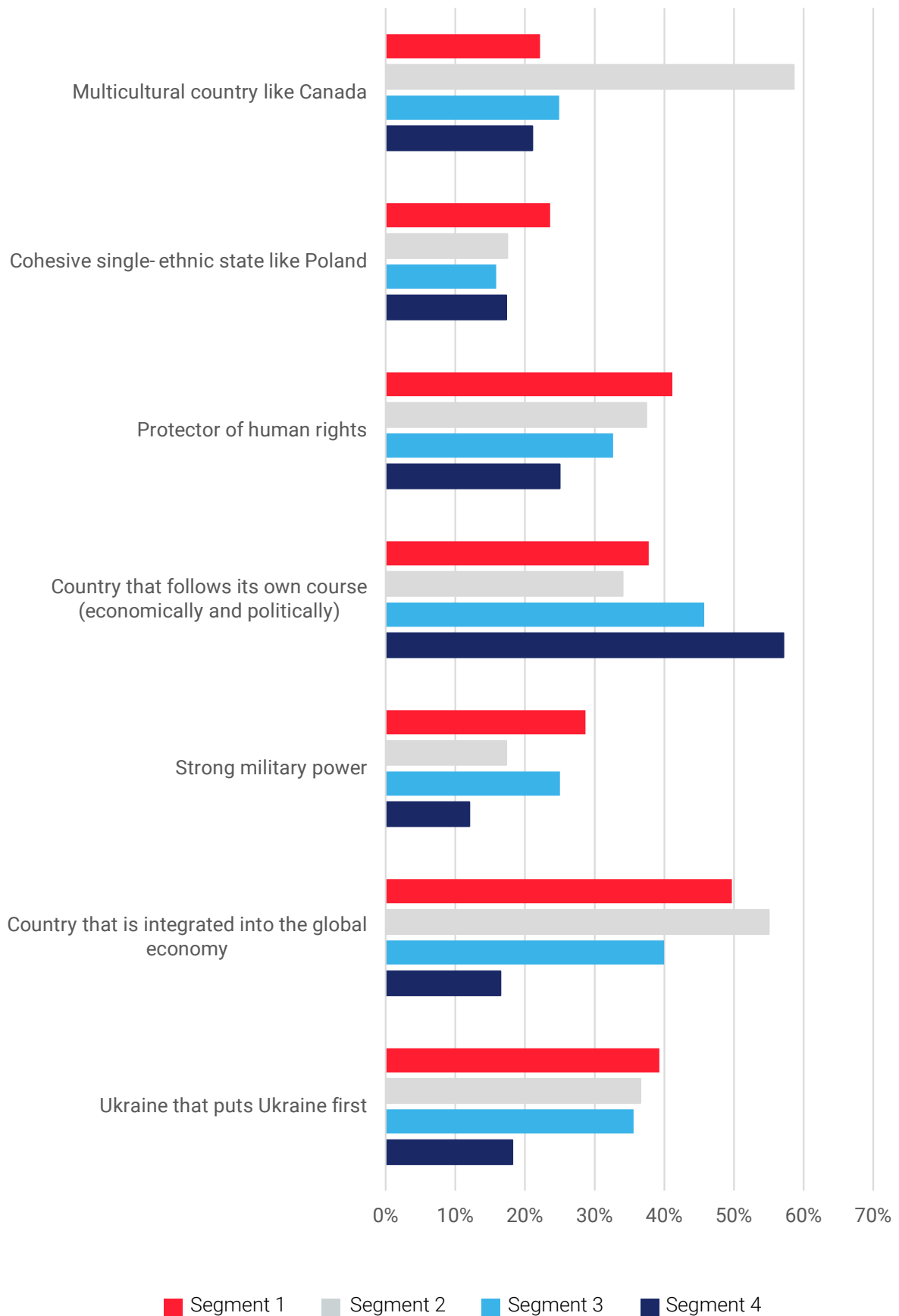
## "Would you be willing to have someone with learning disabilities as..." (cumulative analysis)



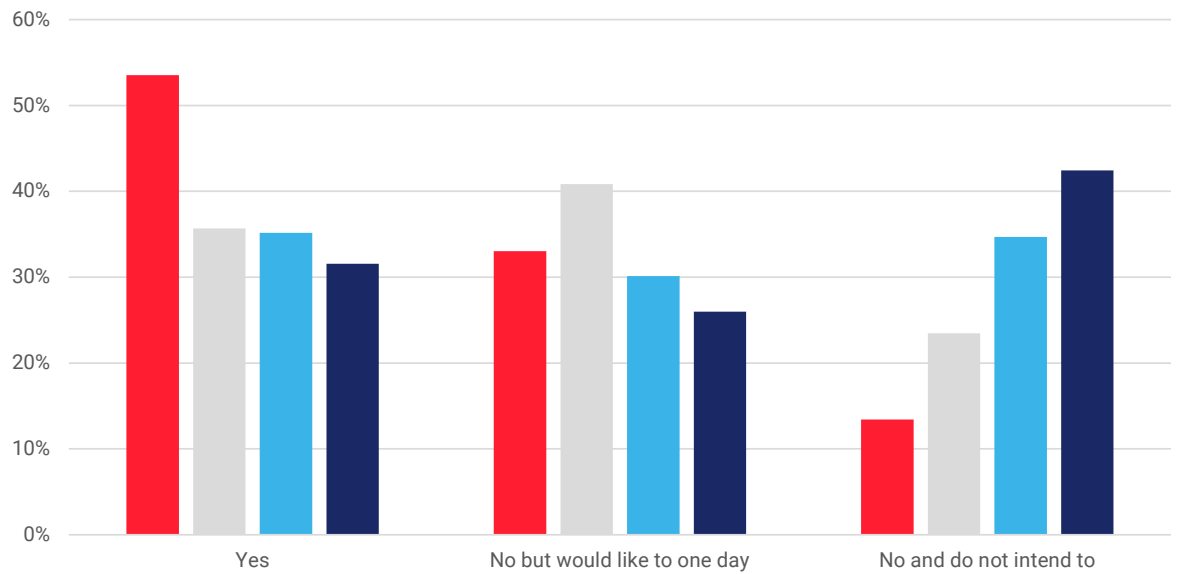
## "Would you be willing to have someone LGBT as..." (cumulative analysis)



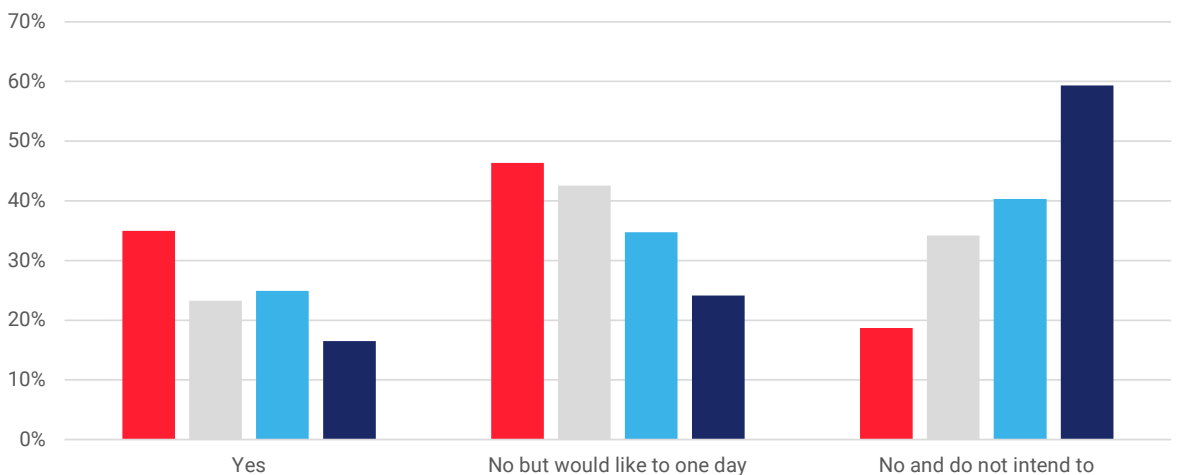
## "How would you like people from outside to view Ukraine in the future? (select all that apply)"



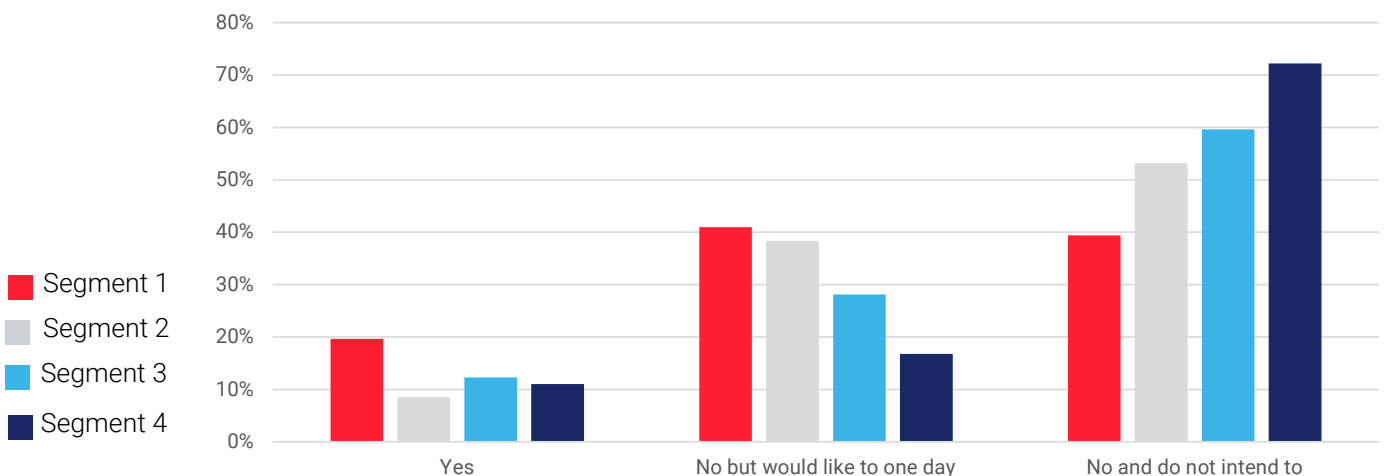
## "Have you ever participated in a charitable activity or event?"



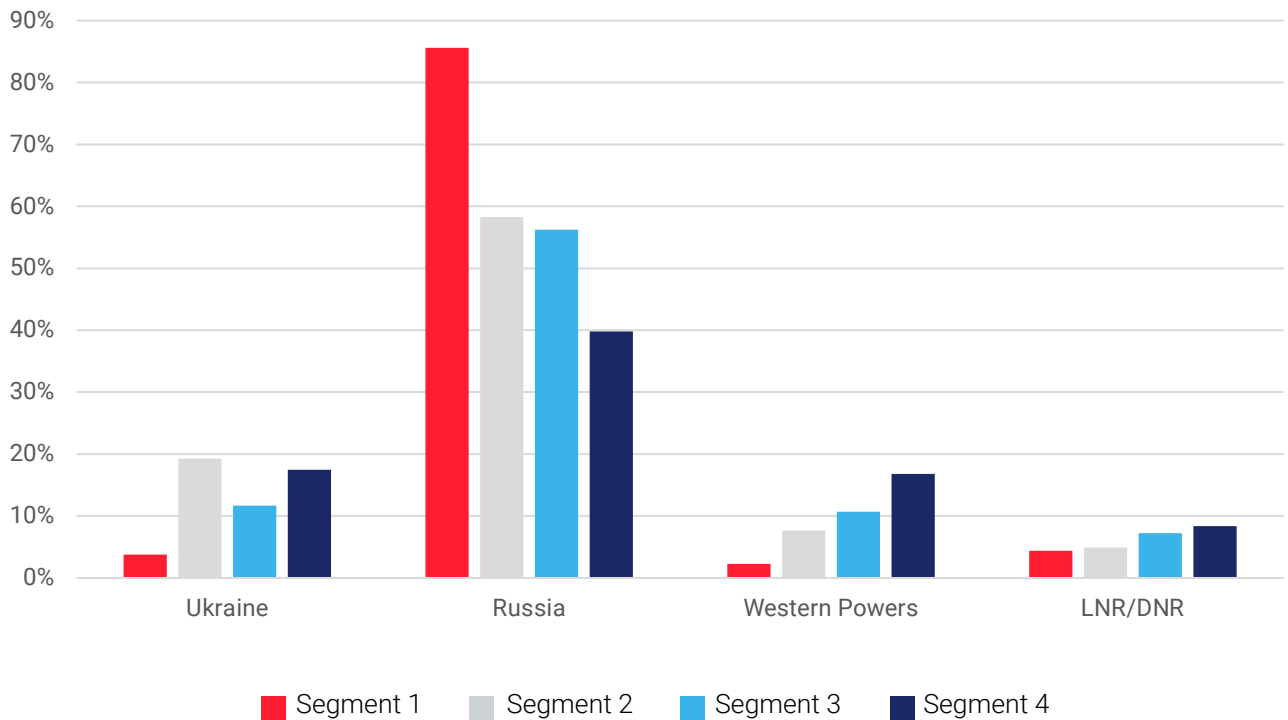
## "Have you ever participated in a volunteer activity or event in the national interest?"



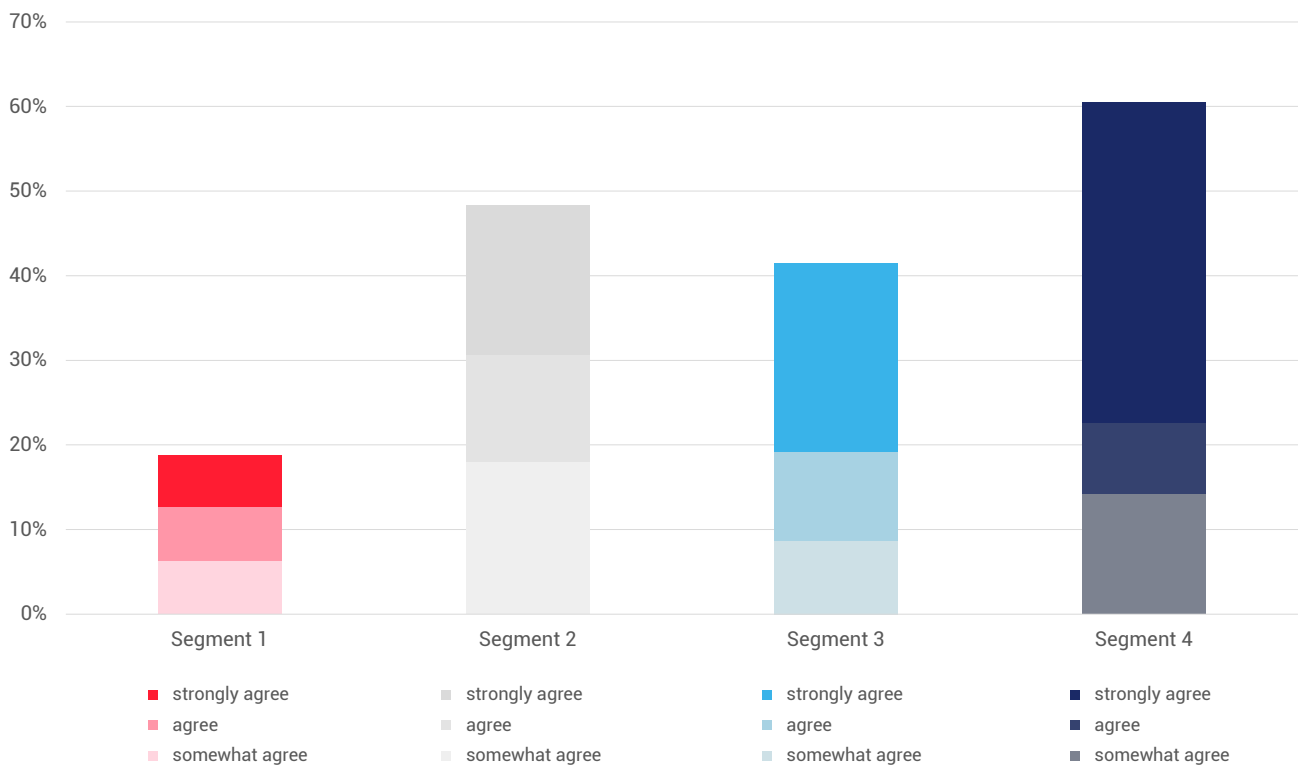
## "Have you ever taken part in a protest, march or demonstration on a national or local issue?"



## "In your opinion, who bears the greatest responsibility for inciting armed conflict in the east of Ukraine?"



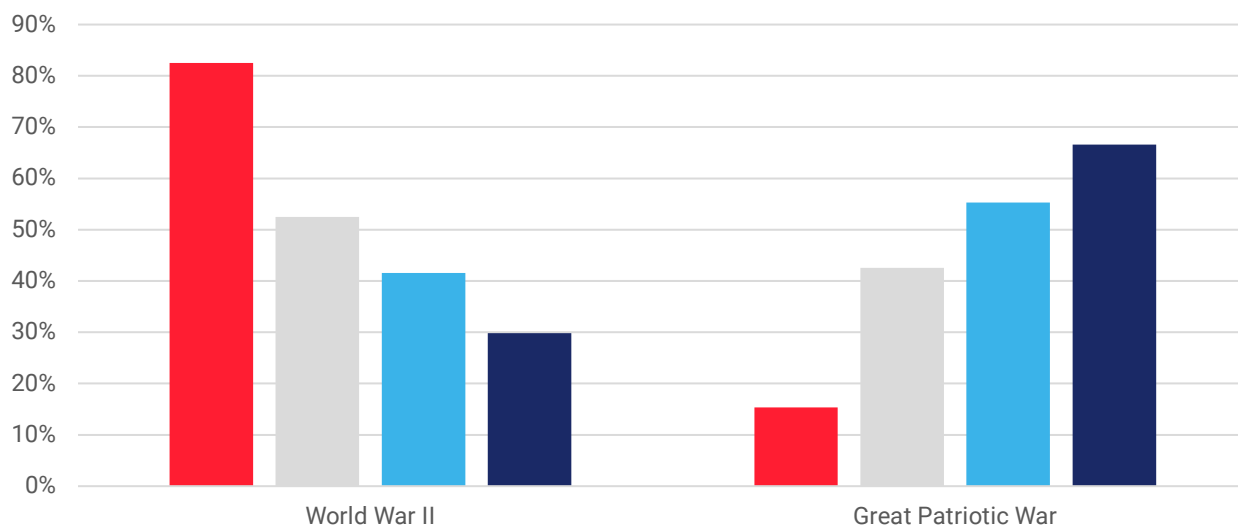
## "To what extent do you agree/disagree that it is impossible to separate the common heritage of the Russian and Ukrainian people?"\*



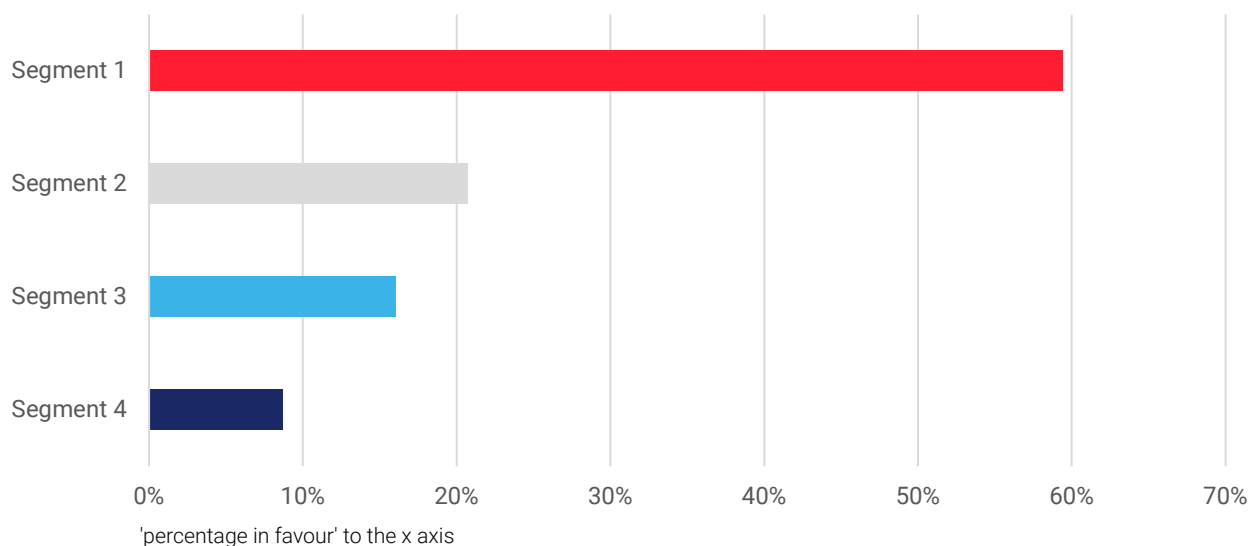
\*Respondents were asked to rate each on a seven-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The graph shows the top three responses.



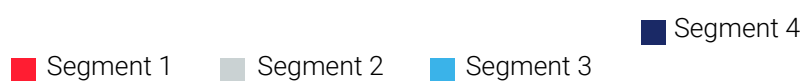
## "Which term do you use for the last great war?"



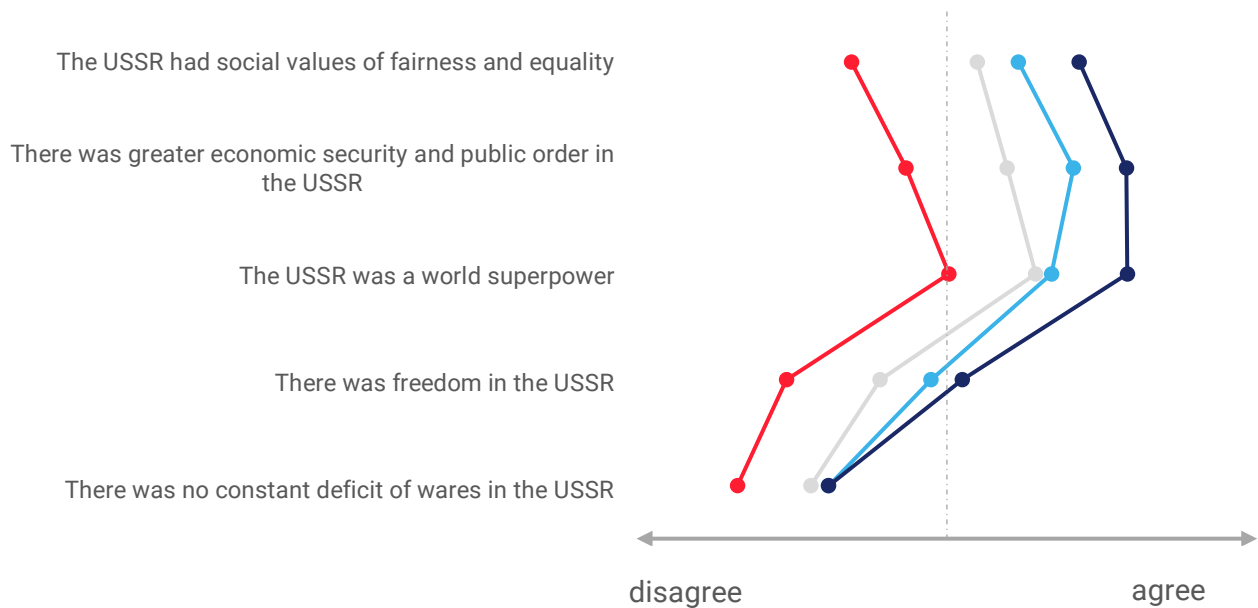
## "Are you in favour of the renaming of cities, villages and streets away from communist-related themes?"\*



\*Respondents answered according to a ten-point scale from "completely unfavourable" to "completely favourable". The graph shows the top four responses combined.

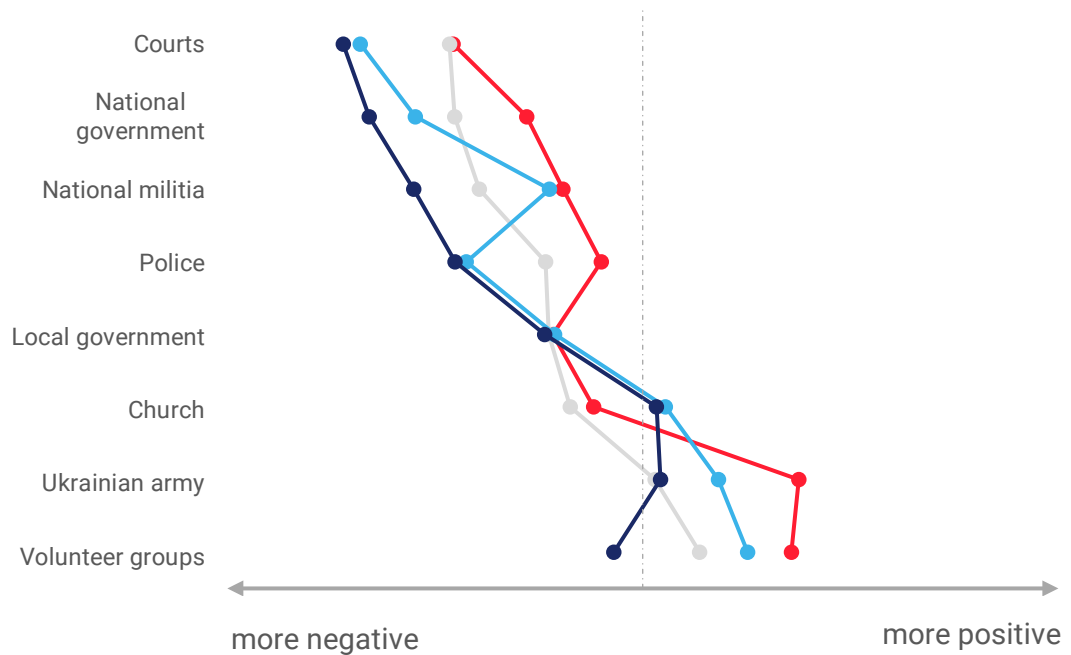


## Attitudes towards the USSR\*



\*Respondents answered according to a ten-point scale from "completely disagree" to "completely agree". The graph shows the weighted mean, excluding "don't know" responses. The last two statements have been reversed to be "positive".

## Trust in institutions\*



\*Respondents answered according to a ten-point scale from "completely trust" to "completely distrust". The graph shows the weighted mean, excluding "don't know" responses.

■ Segment 1   ■ Segment 2   ■ Segment 3   ■ Segment 4



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

# From “Memory Wars” to a Common Future: Overcoming Polarisation in Ukraine

July 2020

