

ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY AS THE BASIS OF LEGITIMACY AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN WARTIME

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Abstract. One dimension of the Russo–Ukrainian war is the confrontation between authoritarianism and democracy in economic matters. Ukraine is currently engaged in a dynamic process of establishing the democratic legitimacy of public authority. This legitimacy requires public authorities to be economically efficient. This means that public authorities in Ukraine must ensure institutional stability and deliver effective governance. The legitimacy of public authority is a significant factor in achieving victory in wartime. The Russo–Ukrainian war is a convincing example of how resource mobilisation in wartime can only be achieved through societal unity and trust-based relations between the government and its citizens. Institutional trust arises from economic efficiency. War creates a situation that requires the stability of public institutions, as well as the ability to demonstrate economic effectiveness, mobilise resources, maintain public trust and ensure effective strategic management. Theoretical models of legitimacy, both classical and contemporary, need to be reconsidered in light of the specific economic processes that occur during wartime. Political democracy must be complemented by economic democracy. In wartime, the legitimacy of public authority is based on trust in key institutions such as the president, the government and parliament. While the government may resort to restricting certain democratic procedures in wartime (such as media censorship, banning threatening political parties and suspending elections), this should not undermine the fundamental principles of democracy and the rule of law. This article aims to determine the legitimacy of public authority under wartime conditions by examining the relationship between institutional trust and government economic performance. The focus of this paper is to define the economic efficiency of public authorities as the basis for their legitimacy and the trust placed in them during wartime. In the months following the outbreak of the Russo–Ukrainian war, public trust in most government institutions increased. This was driven by a recognition of the need for national unity in the face of an external threat. However, the level of trust in state institutions has declined over time compared to the first year of the war. While trust in many institutions remains higher than before the war, high levels of trust are primarily reserved for those directly responsible for the country's defence, such as the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard, the State Border Guard Service and the Security Service of Ukraine. Trust in the President is higher than before the war, which is linked to his role as Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Trust in volunteer organisations and civil society, as well as in the banking system, has also increased since the war. Sociological studies consistently reveal an imbalance in institutional trust: the highest levels are found in the defence and security sector (the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the State Emergency Service, and volunteer organisations and defence formations), while political institutions of representation and governance (political parties, parliament, the government, the bureaucracy and the judiciary) are subject to chronic distrust. Between 2025 and early 2026, Ukrainian society will prioritise the state's economic effectiveness over electoral legitimacy.

Keywords: economy, politics, legitimacy, public authority, the Russo–Ukrainian war, institutional trust, elections, democracy, economic efficiency, the defence-industrial complex, international financial aid.

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1. Introduction

On February 24, 2026, four years will have passed since Russia began its large-scale aggression against Ukraine. This war can be seen as a confrontation between authoritarianism and democracy, with the Russian Federation's authoritarian regime offering perceived economic and political stability, while Ukrainian society is engaged in a dynamic search for the democratic legitimacy of public authority under wartime conditions. The Russo-Ukrainian war requires the Ukrainian government to ensure institutional stability, achieve effective governance and enhance economic efficiency. Legitimacy of authority becomes a significant factor in achieving victory during wartime. The Russo-Ukrainian war has convincingly demonstrated that mobilising resources under wartime conditions is only possible on the basis of societal unity and trust-based relations between the government and its citizens. Institutional trust arises from economic efficiency.

During wartime, legitimacy becomes a multi-level conceptual framework that encompasses the legal, moral, economic and communicative foundations of trust in public authority. Therefore, classical theoretical models of legitimacy must be integrated with empirical research and theoretical reflection on the specific economic processes taking place in Ukraine during the war. It is also necessary to identify the economic factors that influence trust in public authority.

In the current context, public authorities in Ukraine are facing challenges to their legitimacy against the backdrop of war and a socio-economic crisis, making the issue of legitimacy particularly significant. After all, social expectations, economic opportunities and political institutions are under constant stress, overload and exhaustion. War requires not only stable public institutions, but also the ability to demonstrate effectiveness, mobilise resources, maintain public trust and ensure effective strategic management.

It should be noted that "legitimacy is a multi-layered construct that encompasses the legal, moral, economic and communicative foundations of trust in the government" (Yakovleva, 2020). Theoretical models of legitimacy, both classical and contemporary, require re-evaluation in order to take into account specific economic processes in a wartime context.

If governing institutions fail to demonstrate effective resource management, contribute to the fair distribution of the burden of war and maintain transparent and open communication with society, war and the resulting socio-economic instability will reduce the level of legitimacy of public authority. Conversely, effective administration, efficient social and economic public policy, and a rational military strategy enhance the legitimacy of public authority in wartime.

In wartime, the legitimacy of public authority is based on trust in key institutions such as the president, the government and parliament. While the government may resort to restricting certain democratic procedures in wartime (for example, media censorship, banning threatening political parties, and suspending elections), this should not undermine the fundamental principles of democracy and the rule of law. In the Ukrainian context of 2022–2025, legitimacy does not stem from a single source, but rather from the interplay of various mechanisms. These range from legal legitimacy and rational economic assessments to moral and value-based citizen support.

In times of crisis, the legitimacy of public authority depends not only on political institutions and legislative procedures, but also on economic efficiency and the government's ability to respond quickly to challenges.

This paper aims to define the economic efficiency of public authorities as the basis for their legitimacy and the trust placed in them, in conditions of war.

2. Literature Review

Throughout the history of philosophy, economic theory, and political thought, scholars have focused their studies on various aspects of the legitimacy of power. For example, Thomas Hobbes (2000) argued that power is legitimate if it ensures security and order. John Locke (2001) argued that legitimate authority protects natural rights, such as life, liberty, and property. According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2005), legitimacy derives from the general will of the people. Max Weber (1978) defined the legitimacy of social order and developed a typology of legitimate domination. The system model of support (Easton, 1965) is based on input/output legitimacy. Friedrich August Hayek's work on the role of the rule of law in building trust is discussed in his 2002 paper. Karl Popper's (1994) ideas are based on critical rationalism. Douglass North (1990) defined institutional efficiency as the capacity of institutions to ensure the stability and predictability of the "rules of the game", which leads to legitimacy. David Beetham's (2013) work focuses on normative and social legitimacy. Seymour Martin Lipset (1969) linked economic performance to the legitimacy of democracies, focusing on effectiveness and efficiency. According to Bo Rothstein (2021), institutional trust and justice is based on the integrity and quality of the government. Jürgen Habermas (1984) is one of the thinkers who has written about communicative legitimacy. However, the aforementioned scholarly studies do not adequately address the dependence of public authority legitimacy on economic efficiency in wartime or the role of military and socioeconomic policies in shaping institutional trust. This underscores the need

for a comprehensive study of the legitimacy of public authority in wartime.

The concept of the legitimacy of public authority in academic discourse can be traced back to the work of the German sociologist Max Weber (1978; 1998). He was the first to propose a theory of the legitimacy of the social order, which later formed the basis for the classification of types of legitimate domination. According to Proleev (2013), in his theory of legitimacy, Weber "...transformed the phenomenon denoted by this concept into an absolute value".

According to the classical Weberian model of rational-legal authority, legitimacy is based on citizens' belief in the state's ability to provide predictability, uphold the rule of law and manage resources effectively (Weber, 1978). During wartime, the management of limited resources and economic efficiency become the most visible manifestation of this competence.

During wartime, the combination of rational-legal and charismatic leadership becomes particularly relevant, as society expects public authorities to demonstrate both governance competence and the ability to mobilise moral support.

As political science developed, Max Weber's approach was complemented by D. Easton, who introduced the concept of input and output legitimacy. According to this concept, normative expectations (input) must be balanced with policy effectiveness (output) (Easton, 1965). In wartime, the output component tends to dominate, namely the government's performance in ensuring security, stability and economic adaptation.

Within the neoinstitutionalist framework represented by D. North, legitimacy is defined as a function of the stability and effectiveness of society's "rules of the game". North emphasises that institutions must ensure the effective enforcement of decisions, reduce transaction costs and provide predictability (North, 1990). Under martial law, ensuring the effectiveness of economic decisions poses a challenge to the authorities and undermines legitimacy.

D. North emphasised that "the stability of economic rules – the protection of property rights, the predictability of fiscal policy and the consistency of regulatory standards – forms the institutional foundation of trust in the state" (North, 1990). In crisis conditions, trust in the authorities is maintained if the rules remain clear and stable.

Neo-institutional theories (March & Olsen, 1989) emphasise the importance of formal rules and procedures for maintaining confidence in government economic policies. In contrast, the public choice approach defines efficiency in terms of the ratio of resources expended to economic returns.

F. Fukuyama developed the concept of "performance legitimacy", which is based on actual governance outcomes rather than historical traditions or ideological

orientations (Fukuyama, 2014). When a state demonstrates its ability to maintain macroeconomic stability and provide basic public services, citizens' trust in the state increases.

According to B. Rothstein's theory of good governance, citizens' trust in the authorities is influenced by the institutional dimension. Legitimacy increases when state institutions act competently, impartially, transparently and effectively, with the economic sphere serving as an indicator of this quality (Rothstein, 2021).

In wartime conditions, institutions are subject to extreme pressure:

- The state budget operates under a deficit regime;
- the tax system adapts to a shrinking economic base;
- social policy shifts its priorities; defence expenditures become dominant.

Economic performance during wartime is not just an economic indicator; it is also a fundamental political resource that lends legitimacy to the government. Tangible policy results, such as contained inflation, a stable exchange rate, a controlled budget deficit and regular social payments, serve as signals that the state is in control.

Noting the danger of the artificial construction of public opinion by "traditional actors of purposeful opinion-making from the industrial era, such as capitalist classes, party leaders, the bureaucracy, and the elite of the 'information wave' – mediocracy, billionaire visionaries, and the creative class", it should be emphasised that the artificial construction of legitimacy is likewise doomed to fail (Yakovleva, 2025).

The concept of "legitimation crises" suggests that modern states risk losing public support if they are unable to fulfil their material reproduction functions effectively (Edgar, 2005). Society expects the state to provide stability, predictability, and security, and these expectations are heightened in wartime. The economic sphere becomes a political arena in which the government's legitimacy is measured.

The works of D. Buchanan (2003) and P. Rosanvallon (2009) emphasise the pluralistic and dynamic nature of legitimacy. Authorities must constantly reaffirm their legitimacy by being effective, accountable, transparent and responsive to social demands. Legitimacy is not viewed as a fixed state, but rather as an ongoing process of interaction between the authorities and society.

Adherents of the communicative-discursive model of legitimacy, particularly Jürgen Habermas (1984), argue that political authority is only considered legitimate when political decisions are made through public communication procedures. Government decisions generate "communicative consensus" (Yakovleva, 2020). In a crisis, this process changes: society expects promptness, but the time available for public deliberation is reduced. In such situations, there is a dichotomy between "automated action" and "response

to an extreme situation", and public opinion determines the value orientations of governance, the boundaries of acceptable policy decisions and compliance with criteria of rational choice (Yakovlev & Yakovleva, 2025).

In wartime, communicative legitimacy does not disappear, but rather transforms. In the Ukrainian context, this takes the form of disclosing public information, being transparent about decision-making processes, being accountable for the use of international aid, and providing regular updates on the state of the economy and defence.

3. Methodology

The legitimacy of public authority in wartime is defined based on a study of the relationship between institutional trust and government economic efficiency. This study relies on secondary sociological research methods.

The empirical methodology is based on sociological surveys conducted via face-to-face interviews. Analysis of the dynamics of trust and distrust towards public authorities under wartime conditions, as well as citizens' socio-economic assessments and political orientations, relies on nationwide surveys conducted by the Razumkov Centre, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) and the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine between December 2021 and early 2026. The advantages of the face-to-face survey method, used by Ukraine's leading sociological centres, include long-term comparability, i.e., the ability to analyse data, indicators or subjects over an extended period while ensuring their comparability. One disadvantage is the influence of social desirability on responses. The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) also conducts telephone surveys. Among its advantages, its operational speed should be highlighted. Using a scale from 0 to 10 enables sociologists to analyse the intensity of responses rather than relying on binary answers. Methodological differences account for variations in the indicators, so it is important to analyse trends rather than quantitative values.

The interpretation of the sociological research data was based on the distinction between "formal legitimacy" and "performance legitimacy". The latter reflects citizens' sense of fairness and trust in the government, taking on particular significance in wartime. The idea of performance legitimacy (Beetham, 2013; Rothstein, 2008; Fukuyama, 2014) suggests that citizens will trust public authorities if they ensure the following: 1) macroeconomic stability; 2) policy predictability; 3) effective resource management; 4) social protection; 5) prospects for development.

During wartime, economic factors can either strengthen or undermine legitimacy. Therefore, the government's effectiveness in funding defence,

stabilising the hryvnia, securing aid and supporting businesses is crucial not only for economic reasons, but also for the political survival of the state.

4. Institutional Legitimacy and Government Economic Efficiency During Wartime

As the theory of institutional legitimacy demonstrates, political trust is based not only on the normative acceptance of authority, but also on its ability to promote the public good, particularly in terms of economic security and stability (Weber, 1978; Beetham, 2013; North, 1990). The economic effectiveness of state policy during wartime is a determining factor for both macro-stability and the legitimacy of public authority. War creates the conditions necessary for testing the effectiveness of government: it must use limited resources as efficiently as possible while maintaining the functioning of the state, social cohesion and public trust. As Ukrainian researchers N. Hladynets and V. Kuzmenko noted: "During a period of martial law and devastating war, state authorities must take measures to create an effective organisational and economic mechanism of state influence in order to optimise economic processes and protect national interests" (Hladynets & Kuzmenko, 2024).

In the early months of full-scale war, the government's effectiveness was primarily measured by its ability to prevent a macroeconomic collapse (Yurchyshyn, 2022; Centre for Economic Strategy, 2022).

Russia's invasion in February 2022 was the most significant economic shock in Ukraine's history as an independent state. In the first three months leading up to summer 2022, Ukraine's GDP fell by 36%, ending the year down 29.1%. Inflation rose to 26.6%, with more than 30% of businesses suspending operations. The budget deficit also rose to record levels. According to the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine and the State Treasury Service, Ukraine's actual state budget deficit in 2022 amounted to 911.1 billion UAH (general fund deficit: 909.5 billion UAH). This figure was significantly lower than the planned ceiling of 1,399.5 billion UAH, but still exceeded the initial plan (Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, 2023).

A gradual recovery began in 2023–2025. During this period, the focus shifted towards fiscal sustainability, debt management, flexible budget structures, and balancing defence and social spending. According to data from the NBU and the Ministry of Economy: in 2023, GDP grew by +5.3%, and inflation fell to 5% (National Bank of Ukraine, 2024); 2024: GDP grew by 3.4%, inflation accelerated to 12% (National Bank of Ukraine, 2025); 2025: GDP growth slowed to 1.8% and will remain at this level in 2026; inflation slowed to 8% by the end of 2025 (National Bank of Ukraine, 2026).

In 2022, the government's measures aimed at stabilising Ukraine's economy focused on:

1) Taxation and regulatory policy. This includes the possibility of transitioning to a Simplified Taxation System (STS) for medium and large enterprises, abolishing customs duties on all goods except those imported from Russia, Belarus and temporarily occupied territories, and introducing VAT-free imports for STS enterprises. Local governments were also granted the right to introduce and increase or decrease local taxes.

2) State support for businesses (a programme to relocate businesses from occupied and frontline areas, financial support for businesses through bank loans ("Affordable loans at 5–7–9%" have been created or launched by several platforms: to help food retailers find regional suppliers (<https://pererobka.org.ua>), to coordinate manufacturers and retailers with military-civilian administrations and international organisations (such as the <https://dpss.creatio.com>), urgent financial assistance for sowing and other purposes).

3) Financial system. The NBU revoked the licences of Russian banks and froze all transactions involving imports and dividends, except for those involving state-owned entities or those that had been granted special permission. Currency restrictions were introduced and the hryvnia was revalued. Measures were also taken to ensure the availability of bank loans and refinancing. Particular attention was paid to fiscal policy and securing international support to address the budget deficit. Exports were reoriented towards the EU (Center for Economic Strategy, 2022).

Following the views of the experts, one might agree that: "...without a reliable economic backbone, achieving military victories is difficult and ensuring sustainable post-war growth is virtually impossible" (Center for Economic Strategy, 2022).

Thus, the country's economy has become a priority domain that shapes the course of military operations in wartime conditions. Economic performance in these circumstances has a mixed institutional and communicative nature: effectiveness is evaluated not only through quantitative indicators, but also through the level of trust in the procedures used to produce these indicators.

The key sectors driving GDP growth include:

1. The defence-industrial complex (DIC) is the main driver of industrial production. State procurement of weapons, ammunition and drones not only stimulates state-owned factories, but also hundreds of private technology companies. This fosters the development of high technologies (military tech) and creates jobs.

2. The construction sector is experiencing strong growth thanks to the "eOselya" programme, which stimulates demand for housing through subsidised mortgages; infrastructure projects, such as the restoration of roads, bridges, and protective structures for the energy sector; and the "eRecovery" programme,

which funds the repair of property damaged as a result of the war.

3. The energy sector has been the focus of significant investment. It has undergone decentralisation, with the development of small-scale generation such as solar panels and gas piston units, as well as a repair campaign. Huge funds are being directed towards the purchase of transformers and the restoration of grids, generating demand in related industries.

4. Logistics and exports. First and foremost, the establishment of a "maritime corridor" is noteworthy. By 2024, Ukraine had almost reached pre-war levels of sea exports. This is crucial for the agricultural sector, particularly grain and oil sales, as well as for the metallurgical industry, which has increased its exports of iron ore and metal products through ports in southern Ukraine.

5. Domestic trade and the service sector. Household consumption is recovering faster than expected. Rising household incomes (partly due to high payments to military personnel) and businesses adapting to power cuts by using generators and Starlink have become factors contributing to economic stability.

Particular emphasis should be placed on international financial assistance. From the beginning of the full-scale invasion in February 2022 until autumn 2025, Ukraine received over 145 billion USD in international financial aid (Minister of Finance discussed Ukraine, 2025). This sum comprised budget support, loans and grants from partners such as the IMF, the EU and the G7. According to various analytical sources (Bomprezzi, Cherepinskiy, Irto, Kharitonov, Nishikawa & Trebesch, 2025), the total volume of international support (financial, military, humanitarian, etc.) provided between the start of the full-scale war in February 2022 and the end of 2025 is estimated to be between 267 billion EUR and 399 billion EUR.

According to data from the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Ukraine had received over 309 billion EUR in the form of military, humanitarian or financial aid from 41 countries by early 2026. A significant proportion of this aid (more than a third of the total for the first three years) was provided in 2022 (Trebesch & Nishikawa, February 2026).

In such circumstances, the state would be unable to finance defence, social spending and infrastructure independently. Therefore, the effective management of international aid has become a factor in establishing legitimacy (Fukuyama, 2014), and the ability to perform economically during a crisis is becoming one of the main sources of legitimacy for public authorities.

According to forecasts by the IMF, the NBU and the World Bank, the following macroeconomic trends are expected in 2026: moderate inflation of 7.5%, modest economic recovery with GDP growth of 1.8%, a budget deficit of 17–19% of GDP depending on the pace of recovery and public debt of 88–94%

of GDP (moderately high but manageable). Therefore, the volume of international financing is a key factor in achieving stability (International Monetary Fund, 2026).

The economy remains resilient in wartime due to institutional coherence of policy and international support. This has a direct impact on the legitimacy of government authority.

5. Economic Efficiency as a Factor of Political Trust During Wartime: Institutional Legitimacy vs. Procedural Democracy

An important aspect of institutional legitimacy is public opinion on holding nationwide elections during wartime. According to a survey by the Razumkov Centre conducted in February–March 2025, only 22% of respondents supported holding presidential or parliamentary elections before the end of the war, while 66% opposed the idea (Razumkov Centre, 2025a). Thus, a societal consensus has emerged regarding the need to postpone the electoral cycle until the end of martial law.

The ratio of 66% to 22% indicates that a logic of security necessity and institutional legitimacy predominates over procedural democracy. In wartime, citizens prioritise preserving political stability, avoiding internal political confrontation and concentrating resources on security and defence. Under wartime conditions, the legitimacy of the government is determined by economic effectiveness rather than the regular renewal of electoral power.

Support for holding elections varies significantly depending on the level of trust in the President of Ukraine. Among those who trust the president, only 11% would support holding elections, while 79% would oppose them. Among those who do not trust the president, support is higher at 40.5%, but even here, a relative majority of 47% still oppose the elections (Razumkov Centre, 2025a).

Data from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) for 2025–early 2026 confirm a similar structure of public attitudes. The majority of the population believes that elections should be held once the active phase of the war has ended. Between 2025 and 2026, the emergence of a model of "consolidation around the postponement of elections" reflects the prioritisation of security over the procedural regularity of the democratic cycle.

These data demonstrate several important patterns:

1) Supporters of the current government hold a consolidated position against holding elections under wartime conditions;

2) even among citizens who are critical of the government, there is no clearly articulated demand for immediate renewal of power through elections;

3) oppositional attitudes do not automatically translate into a demand for electoral competition in wartime conditions.

Attitudes towards elections are determined not only by the level of trust or distrust in the leader, but also by awareness of security risks. Under martial law, citizens primarily associate the centre of strategic decision-making with presidential authority.

A correlation between trust and support for elections is also evident in the case of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Among those who trust parliament, 11% support elections, while 76% are against. Among those who do not trust parliament, 25% support elections, while 64% are against (Razumkov Centre, 2025a).

Ukrainian society is willing to suspend the regular electoral process temporarily, on the condition that the government guarantees defence capabilities, macroeconomic stability and international support. Economic performance has become the cornerstone of the government's legitimacy, with international support serving as a means of securing it.

Sociological surveys conducted between 2022 and 2026 enable one to trace the evolution of public opinion on trust in the government in wartime. Key indicators of public trust in the government, such as assessments of the economic situation, belief in victory and attitudes towards democratic procedures, serve as important measures of the legitimacy of public authority and the resilience of the political system.

The period from December 2021 to early 2026 can be divided into three distinct stages: a period of institutional scepticism before the war; a phase of mobilisation and consolidation; and a transition to institutional differentiation and the rationalisation of citizens' expectations.

In the context of a war economy, the dynamics of the balance between trust and mistrust, socio-economic assessments, and citizens' political orientations must be analysed.

Whereas in December 2021 "only 20% of citizens believed that events in Ukraine were moving in the right direction, whilst 65.5% held the opposite view" (Razumkov Centre, 2021), by "September–October 2022 the proportion of positive assessments had risen to 51%, and in February–March 2023 it reached a peak of 61%" (Razumkov Centre, 2024b).

Between 2022 and early 2023, there was a clear mobilisation effect, with society uniting behind the state in response to an external threat.

However, between mid-2023 and mid-2024, the proportion of citizens who viewed the course of events as appropriate gradually declined. The protracted nature of the war, economic difficulties, and accumulated socio-psychological fatigue are key reasons for this trend.

According to the results of a survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre (2025b) in November 2025,

32.5% of respondents believed that 'events in Ukraine are moving in the right direction', whilst 48% assessed them as moving in the wrong direction. At the same time, these figures are not statistically different to those for September 2024 and are still better than those for December 2021 (Razumkov Centre, 2024b).

The proportion of respondents who consider the current situation to be positive rises significantly with increasing trust in the government – from 19% among those who do not trust the authorities at all, to 51.5% among those who trust them completely (Razumkov Centre, 2025b). This suggests a strong correlation between institutional trust and the overall evaluation of the political direction.

Respondents' material well-being influences their level of trust in the authorities. An analysis of household financial situations in Ukraine, based on sociological survey data collected by the Razumkov Centre, reveals significant changes between 2021 and 2024, which are linked to economic difficulties and the aftermath of a large-scale war. Before the start of large-scale hostilities in May 2021, only 36% of respondents rated their family's financial situation as "very" or "quite" poor, 48% as "neither poor nor good", and 14% as "good" or "very good" (Razumkov Centre, 2024b). According to the results of a survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre (2024b) in September–October 2022, the proportion of negative assessments rose to 39%, whilst the proportion of positive assessments fell to 10%. This reflects the initial phase of the economic shock following the outbreak of full-scale war.

A certain improvement in respondents' material conditions was observed in February and March 2023. The Razumkov Centre (2024b) reported that 35% of respondents assessed their well-being as poor, 50% as average, and 12% as good, approaching the pre-war structure of assessments. In December 2023, the indicators remained stable, with no statistically significant differences from previous waves (37% poor, 51% average and 10.5% good). This suggests that the population has adapted to the new economic conditions over a prolonged period (Razumkov Centre, 2024b).

In September 2024, a further enhancement in subjective evaluations of well-being was evident. The proportion of respondents who evaluated their material well-being as poor declined to 31%, while the proportion of positive assessments increased to 16% (Razumkov Centre, 2024b).

The data presented herein demonstrate a U-shaped trend, whereby following an initial decline in response to the shock conditions of 2022, there has been a gradual adjustment and a partial recovery in subjective well-being to a level close to, or even higher than, that of the pre-war period. The findings suggest a positive correlation between subjective economic well-being and political support.

6. Public Trust and Belief in Victory: From Idealism to Pragmatism

In May 2021, nine months before the start of the full-scale invasion, 60% of respondents rated the economic situation in the country as "very bad" or "quite bad", while only 5% described it as "good" or "very good". 32% held a neutral view ("neither bad nor good") (Razumkov Centre, 2024b). These figures indicated a fairly high level of economic pessimism among citizens in the pre-war period.

In September–October 2022, seven months after the start of the full-scale war, the proportion of negative assessments increased to 64.5% (Razumkov Centre, 2024b). Thus, the first year of the war was characterised by the expected intensification of economic pessimism, linked to widespread destruction, loss of production capacity, migration, and fiscal policy restructuring.

However, by February–March 2023, the proportion of negative assessments had fallen to 55%. This was lower than the pre-war level recorded in May 2021. Meanwhile, the proportion of positive assessments stood at 4%, while neutral assessments accounted for 37% (Razumkov Centre, 2024b).

An adaptive mechanism was gradually formed in the society.

However, the figures deteriorated again in December 2023: 66.5% of respondents rated the economic situation as "very bad" or "quite bad", 3% as positive and 27% as neutral (Razumkov Centre, 2024b). This trend is linked to war fatigue, energy security issues and mounting inflationary pressures.

In January 2024, 57% of assessments were negative (5% were positive and 34% were neutral), while in September 2024, these figures were 60%, 6% and 29.5% respectively (Razumkov Centre, 2024b). These figures are similar to those observed in May 2021, before the war.

The dynamics of economic assessments from 2021 to 2024 can be characterised by three phases: (1) pre-war structural pessimism; (2) a deepening of negative evaluations in the first year of the war; and (3) stabilisation and subsequent fluctuations within the pre-war range.

This suggests that the population has adapted relatively well to the conditions of a wartime economy, forming rationalised expectations about how it functions.

A survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre from February 28 to March 6, 2025, revealed a clearly structured hierarchy of institutional trust (Razumkov Centre, 2025a).

The highest levels of trust are held by institutions within the security sector. The Armed Forces of Ukraine (93.5%), the State Emergency Service (85.5%), volunteer units (85.5%), volunteer organisations

(80%), the National Guard (79%), the State Border Guard Service (74%), the Security Service of Ukraine (64%), and the Ministry of Defence (63%) (Razumkov Centre, 2025a).

Institutions demonstrating a positive balance of trust (where trust exceeds distrust) include: "the Church (65%); civil society organisations (60.5%); the President of Ukraine (57.5%); heads of local communities (cities, towns, villages where respondents live) (51%); the National Bank of Ukraine (51%); local government bodies (heads of cities, towns, villages where respondents live) (51%); and local councils (48% trust vs 43.5% distrust)" (Razumkov Centre, 2025a). It is particularly noteworthy that the National Bank of Ukraine has a positive balance of trust, especially in the context of a wartime economy, as macro-financial stability becomes a key factor in sustaining public policy support.

Furthermore, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) documented fluctuations in public confidence in the President of Ukraine in 2025, correlating with prominent socio-political occurrences. This observation lends further credence to the concept of "event sensitivity" in relation to this particular indicator (KIIS, 2025a). Within an institutional economic framework, this can be interpreted as evidence that trust in presidential authority is more responsive to signals of governance quality. By contrast, trust in defence institutions exhibits a more "structural" and fundamental character in wartime conditions. The majority of respondents expressed a sense of distrust. The Razumkov Centre (2025a) found that 79% of respondents expressed a lack of trust in the state apparatus (civil servants), 77% in political parties, 77% in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 73% in the judiciary (the judicial system as a whole), 71% in the Government of Ukraine, 63.5% in the Prosecutor's Office, 62% in the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, 62% in the National Agency on Corruption Prevention, 62% in the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, and 54% in commercial banks.

Distrust also exceeds trust in the case of "Ukrainian media (50% do not trust them, 41% trust them) and trade unions (46% and 22.5%, respectively)" (Razumkov Centre, 2025a).

In contrast, trust exceeds distrust in relation to local governance and certain oversight institutions, including the heads of local communities (cities, towns, villages where respondents live) (50% vs. 42%), local councils (49.5% vs. 41%), and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights (48% vs. 34%) (Razumkov Centre, 2025b). Consequently, a defence-centred model of public legitimacy has emerged, in which societal trust is concentrated around institutions responsible for the security and defence sector.

In November 2025, the Razumkov Centre reported that the proportion of respondents expressing trust in the President of Ukraine was comparable to the proportion of respondents expressing distrust (48% vs. 45%) (Razumkov Centre, 2025b). In contrast, KIIS data from early 2026 demonstrate a more favourable balance: 62% trust and 34% distrust (net balance +28) (KIIS, 2026).

The majority of respondents expressed distrust in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (76% of respondents did not have confidence in it), the state apparatus (civil servants) (75%), the Government of Ukraine (73%), political parties (71.5%), the judiciary (the court system as a whole) (66%), the Prosecutor's Office (60%), the political opposition (59%), and the Ukrainian authorities as a whole (57%) (Razumkov Centre, 2025b).

To maintain a high level of mobilisation, it is important to analyse the level of belief in victory. Belief in victory acts as a socio-psychological stabiliser, sustaining society's willingness to endure the long-term costs of a wartime economy.

The dynamics of the expected timeframe for victory have undergone a significant transformation. In 2023, 50% of respondents expected to achieve victory by the end of the year. By 2024, this figure had fallen to 20%, with 40% now projecting a timeframe of 1–2 years and 17% anticipating 3 or more years. Meanwhile, the proportion of respondents who were uncertain increased to 22% (Razumkov Centre, 2024a).

One of the key indicators of social consolidation in the context of a prolonged war is a high level of belief in victory, which was measured at 85% in January 2024 (Razumkov Centre, 2024a) and 74% in February–March 2025 (Razumkov Centre, 2025a). Despite a 11% decline over the year, belief in victory remains dominant. This allows it to be interpreted as a fundamental source of legitimacy.

This implies the following: (1) a decline in short-term optimism, (2) the development of long-term expectations, and (3) society adapting to a prolonged period of conflict.

From an economic perspective, extending the expectation horizon implies a willingness to sustain long-term reallocation of resources in favour of defence, increased taxation and a slower recovery process.

The Razumkov Centre (2024a) conducted a study which revealed that 38% of respondents expressed a preference for a complete restoration of the 2014 borders, 27% advocated for a military defeat of Russia leading to its internal collapse, and a mere 4% deemed an end to the war without a comprehensive restoration of territorial integrity as acceptable.

However, in 2025, the outlook appears more realistic, with public expectations adopting a more pragmatic stance. Survey findings indicate that 30% of respondents support the restoration of the

2014 borders, 22% advocate a return to the line of 23 February 2022, 11% seek a liberation without Crimea, and 10% call for an end to the war without the full liberation of all territories (Razumkov Centre, 2025a).

A decline in maximalist scenarios is observed, alongside growing support for compromise-based options and a diversification of strategic expectations.

In 2024, a high level of belief in victory was found to be correlated with high trust in defence institutions (Razumkov Centre, 2024a; 2024b). Despite a decline in the level of belief, trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine remains above 90% (Razumkov Centre, 2025a; 2025b), which confirms the structural nature of this relationship.

Thus, belief in victory acts as an intangible form of institutional capital, supporting the state's fiscal capacity through tax compliance and the willingness of citizens to accept mobilisation-related policy decisions. Although belief in victory remains high, it is becoming less emotionally impulsive and more rationalised. The extension of time horizons reflects a shift towards a prolonged wartime economic model. In 2024–2025, institutional trust in the authorities is increasingly based not on short-term expectations of a swift victory, but on acceptance of a long-term resilience strategy.

7. Conclusions

Thus, the dynamics of citizens' trust in public institutions in Ukraine emphasise the importance of economic factors. Institutional trust is a fundamental resource for political stability and the state's economic efficiency. In wartime, this becomes critically important as it enables the state to mobilise resources, maintain social cohesion and implement complex governance decisions.

In the months following the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war, public trust in most state institutions increased. This was driven by the perceived need for national unity in response to the threat posed by Russia.

However, the level of trust in state institutions has declined over time compared to the first year of the war. Nevertheless, trust in many institutions remains higher than before the war. It is particularly important for institutions directly responsible for the country's defence, such as the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard, the State Border Guard Service and the

Security Service of Ukraine, to maintain a high level of trust. Trust in the president has increased since the war, partly due to his role as Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Similarly, trust in volunteer and civil organisations, as well as in the banking system, has increased since the war began.

However, the level of trust in the government, the Verkhovna Rada, the state apparatus and political parties is currently just as low as before the outbreak of war. Over the past year, the most noticeable increase has been in the proportion of people who trust anti-corruption institutions. This is because they have exposed a number of corruption cases in the highest echelons of power. However, the proportion of people who trust anti-corruption institutions is still lower than the proportion of people who do not trust them (Razumkov Centre, 2025a; 2025b).

Sociological studies reveal a consistent pattern of asymmetry in institutional trust. The highest levels of trust are found in the defence and security sector, particularly the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the State Emergency Service and volunteer organisations. In contrast, political institutions of representation and governance, such as political parties, parliament, the government and the bureaucracy, as well as the courts, continue to be subject to chronic distrust.

Thus, even when society shows a high degree of unity on defence issues, trust in party politics and representative democracy is not restored. As for elections, the majority of those who do not trust Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy do not support holding them.

In the context of a war economy, this acts as a stabilising factor by reducing the risk of political unrest, maintaining the concentration of administrative resources and supporting the predictability of international governance.

Public opposition to holding nationwide elections during wartime demonstrates the following: the dominance of security-oriented rationality over procedural democracy; a strong dependence of attitudes on trust in the President of Ukraine; the absence of a critical mass of public demand for a change of government through elections during the war; a shift in legitimacy from the regularity of the electoral cycle towards economic efficiency.

From 2025 to the beginning of 2026, Ukrainian society prioritised the state's economic efficiency over electoral legitimacy.

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