

# The Ukrainian National Identity Crisis

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## Abstract

*National identity is a person's identity or feeling towards a state or nation. National identity can be linked to a state's political development and civic engagements, as those who have a sense of belonging are more likely to engage in politics. Modernist Ernest Gellner believed national identity is vital for modern industrial societies. Permanent factors such as pride, birth, language, and ancestry are the building blocks for national identity. Ukraine has already lost territory in the southern region due to ethnic division and lack of national identity playing a key role. When citizens don't feel a part of the country socially or economically, they tend to revolt against the government. On the other side when citizens feel like their identity is not being protected by the government they may also revolt against the government in power. If this continues across the regions of Ukraine, this could further weaken the Ukrainian government's influence over its citizens. For a weak state like Ukraine having a cohesive national identity would be important for the preservation of Ukraine's borders while a strong national identity is essential for Ukraine's ability to govern effectively. This study investigates the relationship between Ukrainian national identity and the permanent factors that makes up one's national identity by answering the question how strong Ukrainian's national identity is regionally. I used logistical regression to test my hypotheses derived from these factors. The results have implications to an important underlying issue in Ukraine's national identity.*

## Introduction

When looking at the feelings surrounding national identity in Ukraine, I decided to ask two questions, the first question attempts to identify whether or not Ukraine has a cohesive national identity. The second question looks into whether or not the Ukrainian people have a strong national identity. I wanted to find whether a cohesive national identity, whether weak or strong, can be used as a unifying tool for the government of Ukraine. Looking at and understanding Ukraine's national identity pre-annexation of Crimea could indicate whether Ukraine was on the way to

instability. Recently, there has seen a rise in far-right pro-Ukrainian nationalism clashing against pro-Russian sentiments. I wanted to explore these connections and what possible moves can be made moving forward to find a possible resolution in this identity crisis and find common ground to unite the diasporas of Ukraine.

## Study

To test my hypotheses, I used data from the 2005-2006 World Value Survey (WVS). The WVS is the best possible data for this study for several reasons. First, this WVS was one of the few surveys that included the country of Ukraine in its

survey. This study was conducted paralleling the events of the orange revolution. The Orange Revolution began when opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, lost the election for President. Citing alleged election fraud, Yushchenko called for national protests and a re-election (Karatnycky, 2005). This study was also conducted before the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (THE WORLD FACTBOOK, 2018). That way I can look at all the regions of Ukraine including Crimea to gain a greater understanding of Ukraine's national identity across the regions. Finally, the questions provided are generic in meaning and do not induce biases from the respondents. My dependent variable for this study was national identity which was measured looking at those who only responded to identifying themselves as part of the Ukrainian national on the WVS. I used regional controls to look at the difference in national identity in the four regions of Ukraine, North, South, East, and West. Then I ran it against the relationship between national identity and pride, language, ancestry, and birthright.

#### Findings

Ukraine's is not clearly differentiated among its people and there are contradictory statistically significant findings. None of the variables that were reported supported my hypotheses, except for those who reported pride for their country had a greater sense of national identity by 5.340 times. Surprisingly, language was found to be statistically insignificant to my study. One would think if one spoke Ukrainian at home, they would have a stronger sense of being Ukrainian. In the Western region, Ukrainians were reported to have a greater sense of national identity by 3.226 times and Central Ukrainian were reported to a greater sense of national identity by 2.702 times. Since Kiev is in Central Ukraine and the Orange Revolution was just finishing up, it

would make sense for national identity to be high but not very high due to lack of faith in the government because of the election fraud. It was interesting to find Eastern Ukrainian's were reported to have a greater sense of national identity by 3.989 times. This is surprising because Eastern Ukraine is more associated with Russia geographical, economically and ethnically. Also, during this time, the East was predominately coal and oil jobs and pro-Russian (Karatnycky, 2005) so the links between Eastern Ukraine and Russia were very strong. This could be contributed to the number of participants not reflecting the region to the upmost accuracy, linked to the Orange Revolution, or something deeper that could be investigated in a later study.

#### Implications

These findings implicate that Ukraine does not have a cohesive or strong national identity. There was a divide between the regions of Ukraine in 2005, which could be a result of the political crisis of the Orange Revolution beginning a year earlier. The farther away from the capital of Kiev the more likely one will have a sense of national identity. For the Western region this could be explained due to the larger percentage of ethnic Ukrainians in the West. If this is so, I would like to do more research in why Eastern Ukraine was more likely to have a stronger national identity than the West. It can be implied that Ukraine's national identity is just as divided as its people. Ukraine's national identity has both extreme strong points and weak points, with little middle ground.

This study demonstrates that Ukraine's national identity is not cohesive, thus implying it is not clearly defined. The current far right rhetoric has been drowning out other voices in the country and alienating minorities (Fournier, 2002). Ukrainian's that are proud of their country are more likely to have a stronger national

identity as they identify with the majority population. However, for many minorities, particularly the Ethnic-Russians, they may feel alienated from their country as their ethnicity excludes them from this sense of belong (Fournier, 2002). Causing the ethnic-Russian populations in Ukraine to no longer feel included in the identity and becoming more of a state of 'Us' vs. 'Them'. This weakened national identity causes less trust or civic duty in one's government weakening that government. On the other side, many ethnic-Ukrainians, specifically young males who have seen these changes

in their homeland, feel their identity and personhood is being attacked. Eastern Europe has a history of unifying and dividing countries based on ethnic groups, as seen in other Eastern Europe countries, but this doesn't have to be the solution. This also implies Ukraine's disconnected national identity among its regions means the state's ability to govern is weak. Moving forward, it is time to look further into these factors that are driving Ukraine's nations apart and finding possible pathways towards unification of its regions and people.

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