

СОЦІАЛЬНІ РЕАЛЬНОСТІ В ЕМПІРИЧНИХ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯХ

UDC 316

Hatsko, V. (2024). What Determines Trust in Local Governance During the War in Ukraine? *Sociological Studios*, 2(25), 19–30. <https://doi.org/10.29038/2306-3971-2024-02-43-43>

What Determines Trust in Local Governance During the War in Ukraine?

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DOI: 10.29038/2306-3971-2024-02-43-43

This study explores the factors shaping trust in local governance during wartime in Ukraine, emphasizing the relevance of this topic amid large-scale decentralization reforms and the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion. The research draws on data from the USAID HOVERLA project, analyzing 33 626 survey responses from 86 hromadas across seven oblasts. Survey-weighted linear regression models are employed to examine trust dynamics in local government institutions and starostas (headmen), incorporating socio-demographic factors, satisfaction with services, budget transparency, civic optimism, and citizen participation. The findings highlight the importance of service performance, transparency, and responsiveness in building public trust. Transparent budget management and responsiveness to citizen feedback emerge as critical drivers, mediating the relationship between participation and trust. While trust in local government reflects systemic performance, trust in starostas is influenced by personal engagement and visibility. Socio-demographic differences, such as higher trust among rural residents, older individuals, and women, further shape these dynamics. The study concludes that trust operates through both “consumer” logic – rooted in service satisfaction – and “citizen” logic, emphasizing accountability and fairness. Recommendations include prioritizing resource transparency, ensuring meaningful responses to citizen engagement, and strengthening the role of starostas in rural communities to foster resilience and trust under crisis conditions.

Received: November 1, 2024

1st Revision: December 9, 2024

Accepted: December 18, 2024

Key words: trust, local governance, Ukraine, decentralisation, citizen engagement, transparency, resilience.

Гацко Валентин. Що визначає довіру до місцевого самоврядування під час війни в Україні? У дослідженні аналізуються чинники, що впливають на довіру до місцевого самоврядування в умовах війни в Україні, зокрема в контексті реформи децентралізації та повномасштабного вторгнення Росії у 2022 році. На основі даних опитування USAID «ГОВЕРЛА» проаналізовано 33 626 відповідей опитаних із 86 громад семи областей України. Для вивчення динаміки довіри до місцевих органів влади та старост застосовано зважені регресійні моделі, які враховують соціально-демографічні змінні, задоволеність послугами, прозорість бюджету, громадський оптимізм та участь громадян. Результати підкреслюють важливість якісного надання послуг та прозорого управління ресурсами для формування довіри громадян. Довіра ґрунтується як на «споживачській» логіці, що пов’язана із задоволеністю послугами, так і на «громадянській» логіці, яка акцентує увагу на підзвітності та відповідальності влади. Хоча бюджетна прозорість і громадський оптимізм є сильними чинниками довіри, участь громадян підвищує довіру лише за умови відчутних результатів. Реагування влади виступає посередником між участю та довірою: нерозв’язані проблеми значно знижують рівень довіри. Дослідження сприяє розумінню динаміки довіри в умовах кризи й пропонує практичні рекомендації для посилення довіри

громадян до місцевих інституцій. Політикам рекомендується акцентувати увагу на прозорості, рівномірному розподілі ресурсів та реальному реагуванні на запити громадян.

Ключові слова: довіра, місцеве самоврядування, Україна, децентралізація, залучення, прозорість, стійкість.

INTRODUCTION

Trust in institutions has been a critical focus of governance research, with global trends showing a marked decline in trust in formal authorities in recent years (Bøggild, 2020; OECD, 2024). Ukraine mirrors this global pattern, particularly in the context of national institutions (Sologoub, 2022; Reznik, & Kozlovskiy, 2021). However, similar to many other countries, trust in local government tends to be relatively higher than in national institutions (Nye, 1997; Hatsko, & Darkovich, 2024a). This trend is often attributed to the proximity of local authorities to citizens and their direct responsibility for service provision, which has been further strengthened in Ukraine through decentralization reforms (Arends et al., 2023).

The full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 brought unprecedented challenges to governance structures in Ukraine. While the central government initially experienced a surge in public trust as citizens rallied around national leadership during the crisis, this effect was temporary (Kizilova, & Norris, 2024; Johansson et al., 2021). Local self-government authorities quickly assumed a critical role in Ukraine's wartime resilience, addressing immediate needs such as humanitarian aid distribution, infrastructure repair, and the delivery of essential services (Hatsko, & Bezrukova, 2024; Hatsko, & Darkovich, 2024b). They provided support to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable groups, restored vital infrastructure, repaired water and energy systems, and procured emergency equipment like generators and boilers. Beyond these immediate efforts, they contributed to long-term resilience by establishing community support centers and developing emergency response plans (Brik, & Murtazashvili, 2022; Rabinovych et al., 2023; Romanova, 2022). These efforts underscore the importance of understanding what drives trust in local governance under such extreme conditions.

Research Goal

The central objective of this study is to investigate which factors best predict trust in local governance under conditions of large-scale warfare and evolving decentralization in Ukraine. Specifically, the analysis focuses on three critical dimensions: service performance, perceptions of the policy process, and participation in local decision-making.

Additionally, the study examines whether responsiveness to citizen engagement enhances trust, thereby clarifying the mechanisms through which participation translates into institutional legitimacy.

1. FACTORS OF TRUST IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

What factors predict trust in local government in Ukraine? A recent meta-analysis (Devine, 2024) shows that political trust influences formal political participation (e.g., voter turnout), voting choices, support for progressive policies such as immigration, public spending, and environmental protection, as well as compliance with the law (in the context of COVID-related measures). Local government is particularly important, as it represents the closest point of contact between citizens and the state, with frequent interactions driven by service delivery responsibilities. At the local level, citizens can better identify these public institutions and officials and form judgments of their trustworthiness based on direct and more frequent interactions with them, making it an essential focus for understanding trust dynamics.

A useful classification based on literature is provided by Cheema and Popovsk (2010), who identify five key aspects of government behavior that influence trust in public institutions: (1) the effectiveness of government policies; (2) the presence of committed and inspirational political leaders capable of building broad coalitions for change based on shared core values; (3) economic growth that creates new opportunities for citizens; (4) the efficient delivery of essential public services, such as water, sanitation, healthcare, and education, which have a direct and often immediate impact on citizens' lives, fostering confidence in governance; and (5) administrative integrity, or 'good governance,' characterized by honest, competent bureaucrats working impartially, effectively, and in accordance with the rule of law.

Goldfinch, Yamamoto, and Aoyagi (2023) situate the discussion on antecedents of trust within the broader public administration literature by linking it to key paradigms of administrative reform. They explore whether trust is primarily influenced by adherence to traditional public administration principles,

emphasizing law, procedure, and rights (process); by New Public Management (NPM) doctrines that prioritize performance through results, outcomes, or citizen satisfaction (performance); or by post-NPM governance models that focus on citizen participation, co-production, and networked governance (participation).

The role of service performance in shaping trust in governance is well-documented in the literature. Citizens often base their trust on the ability of authorities to deliver essential services such as public safety, waste management, and infrastructure maintenance (Van Ryzin, 2015; Gustavsen et al., 2017). In times of crisis, this relationship becomes particularly pronounced, as effective crisis management – including equitable distribution of resources and timely responses to emergencies – reinforces perceptions of competence and reliability. Conversely, failures in service delivery can erode trust, especially in high-stakes contexts like war (Aassve et al., 2024; Hatsko, & Darkovich, 2024b).

The relationship between citizen participation and trust in governance is multifaceted, with participation serving as a key mechanism for fostering trust when effectively managed. Active engagement, such as attending public hearings or contributing to local initiatives, can enhance trust by making citizens feel valued and included in decision-making processes (Kim, & Lee, 2012; Lee, & Schachter, 2019). However, the quality of engagement is critical; when citizens perceive their input as ignored or participatory processes as insincere, trust can be undermined (Gaventa, & Barrett, 2012).

Responsiveness is essential in ensuring that participation leads to trust. Local governments that act on citizen feedback and resolve issues demonstrate accountability and transparency, which significantly enhance trust levels. For example, research has shown that citizens' perceptions of local authorities improve when they observe transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, even amidst governance challenges (Beshi, & Kaur, 2020). This dynamic underscores the importance of meaningful follow-through, as participation without responsiveness risks being perceived as performative, ultimately eroding trust rather than building it.

The literature suggests that perceptions of the policy process significantly influence trust in government, as citizens care not only about outcomes but also about how they are achieved (Tyler, 2006). Processes refer to both formal rules, such as regulations requiring public consultations or decision-making guidelines, and non-formalized qualities like respect, courtesy, and adherence to democratic norms (Grimes, 2017; Van de Walle, & Migchelbrink, 2022). These aspects shape perceptions of procedural fairness, due process, and good governance. Citizens value both the consistency and predictability of formal procedures and the fairness and responsiveness of non-formalized interactions, making the quality of governance processes critical to fostering trust.

Transparency and accountability are integral components of the policy process, significantly influencing trust in government. Citizens value decision-making processes that are perceived as fair, open, and responsive, particularly when it comes to resource allocation and public spending (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2010). Accountability mechanisms enhance trust by providing avenues for citizens to voice concerns and hold officials responsible for misconduct or inefficiencies (Wang, & Van Wart, 2007). However, transparency alone is not sufficient to build trust; its impact depends on the clarity and relevance of the information provided. When transparency reveals flaws or inconsistencies, trust may be eroded unless corrective actions are taken to address those issues (Grimmelikhuijsen, & Meijer, 2014).

Awareness is an important factor that connects other factors like participation and responsiveness for citizens. Even if the local authority is effective and responds to citizens' problems - public opinion is partly determined by awareness of these positive practices. Study in Argentina showed that participation increases trust in local authorities - but directly only for the minority of citizens who were participants and indirectly for the majority of citizens who were informed about that (Ardanaz et al., 2023).

Individual characteristics also play a significant role in shaping trust. Age, gender, education, and economic status have all been linked to variations in trust levels. Older citizens often exhibit higher trust in local institutions, possibly due to stronger community ties or a preference for stability (Baldassare, 1985). Gender differences are also evident, with women generally expressing greater trust in local governance than men (Van Ryzin, 2013).

Geographic and economic disparities add another layer of complexity. Rural residents tend to report higher trust in local authorities, likely due to more personal interactions with officials and stronger

community bonds (Siebers et al., 2019). On the other hand, financial hardship is associated with lower trust, as economic struggles can amplify dissatisfaction with perceived government performance and priorities (Uslaner, & Brown, 2005).

The literature identifies several key factors influencing trust in local governance, including service performance, transparency, socio-demographic characteristics, and participation dynamics. While these factors are well-studied in general contexts, the wartime environment in Ukraine offers a unique lens to examine their interplay under extreme conditions. This study builds on these insights to explore how such factors shape trust in local governments during an ongoing crisis.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Sampling

The study was conducted in 86 consolidated territorial communities (CTCs) across seven oblasts of Ukraine: Lviv, Poltava, Volyn, Zhytomyr, Zakarpattia, Odesa, and Rivne. Respondents were residents aged 15 and older who had lived in their communities for at least 12 months, ensuring their familiarity with local governance and service provision.

Sample sizes for each community, ranging from 366 to 430 respondents, were determined based on population data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine as of January 1, 2022. A multi-stage random sampling method was used, with the random route method applied at the final stage to select respondents. In total, 33,626 interviews were conducted.

Data collection occurred between March and mid-June 2023 through computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI), with interviews lasting up to 30 minutes. The data were weighted to account for the population size of each community and its share within the oblast sample, ensuring representativeness.

2.2. Variables

2.2.1. Independent Variables

Policy Process. To measure perception of the policy process, reflecting respondents' evaluations of financial transparency and accountability in their hromada, confidence in local budget management was measured using the question: *"How confident are you that your hromada's budget is managed in the best interests of the entire community?"*. Responses were coded on a four-point scale: 1 = not confident at all, 2 = rather not confident, 3 = rather confident, 4 = fully confident.

Satisfaction with Local Services. Satisfaction with local services was measured through the question: *"Over the past 12 months, how satisfied are you overall with the services provided to citizens in your hromada?"*. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale: 1 = completely dissatisfied, 2 = rather dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = rather satisfied, 5 = completely satisfied.

Participation in Local Decision-Making. Participation in local decision-making was captured using the question: *"Have you participated in any decision-making processes of local self-government bodies in your hromada in any of the following ways over the past 12 months?"*. Multiple response options included activities such as meetings with local officials, public hearings, and participation in community councils. A binary variable was created, where "1" indicates participation in at least one activity, and "0" indicates no participation.

Active Civic Engagement. Active civic engagement was measured using the question: *"In the past 12 months, have you taken any of the following actions, and if so, how many times?"*. Examples include submitting individual or collective requests to local authorities, attending public meetings, or participating in protests. Responses ranged from "No, did not act" to "More than 10 times". A binary variable was created, where "1" indicates participation in any action at least once, and "0" indicates no participation.

From this variable, a new variable was created to test the responsiveness of local government to participation. It includes three categories: *"no engagement"* (reference category), *"engagement and local government resolved an issue"* and *"engagement and local government didn't resolve an issue"*. Resolution of issues was assessed using the question: *"If you raised any issues, did the local self-government bodies resolve them?"*. Responses of "fully resolved" and "partially resolved" were combined into the "resolved" category, while "not resolved" was categorized as "didn't resolve".

Feedback to Authorities. Feedback to authorities was assessed through a question: *"Over the past 12 months, have you reported the quality of services to local authorities in any of the following ways?"*.

Examples include personal meetings, written submissions, or feedback via online platforms. A binary variable was created, where “1” indicates any feedback provided, and “0” indicates none.

From this variable, an additional variable was created to evaluate responsiveness to feedback. It includes three categories: “no feedback provided” (reference category), “feedback with response from local government,” and “feedback without response from local government.” Responsiveness was assessed using the follow-up question: “*Do you believe the local government responded to your feedback?*”. Responses of “yes” were coded as “feedback with response,” while “no” was coded as “feedback without response.”

Awareness of Local Services. Awareness of local services was measured with the question: “*Do you know how to obtain information about the services for which local self-government bodies are responsible?*”. Responses were coded as 1 = Yes, 0 = No.

Knowledge of Participation Methods. Knowledge of participation methods was assessed using the question: “*What methods of participating in decision-making processes of local self-government bodies in your hromada do you know?*”. Respondents could select multiple options. An additive scale was created, ranging from 0 to 12, with higher scores indicating greater awareness. The scale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = 0.78$).

Knowledge of Decentralization Reform. Knowledge of decentralization reform was measured using the question: “*How well informed are you about the decentralization reform in Ukraine?*”. Responses ranged from 1 = not informed at all to 4 = very well informed.

Awareness of Local Government Activities. Awareness of local government activities was captured through the question: “*How well informed are you about the activities of local self-government bodies in your hromada?*”. Responses ranged from 1 = not informed at all to 4 = very well informed.

Understanding Local Responsibilities. Understanding of local government responsibilities was measured with the question: “*Please evaluate how well you know the responsibilities of the following representatives of local self-government in your hromada*”. Respondents rated their knowledge of various officials, such as the head of the hromada and local council deputies. An average scale was created, ranging from 0 to 4, with higher scores indicating better knowledge ($\alpha = 0.93$).

Awareness of Feedback Mechanisms. Awareness of feedback mechanisms was assessed using the question: “*Do you know the ways in which you can provide feedback to your hromada’s authorities about the quality of the services they provide?*”. Responses were coded as 1 = Yes, 0 = No.

2.2.2. Dependent Variables

Local Government Trust Scale. To assess trust in local government, a unified “Local Government Trust Scale” was developed. This scale is based on responses to the question: “*How much do you trust the bodies/representatives of local self-government and public institutions?*”. The answers are divided into four levels: 1 = do not trust at all, 2 = rather do not trust, 3 = rather trust, 4 = fully trust. It is calculated as the average of these components, ranging from 1 to 4, where higher values indicate greater trust in local government. The scale combines trust levels for the head of the hromada, deputies of the local council, and the secretary of the local council. The scale was assessed for reliability and demonstrated a high level of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.92$), indicating its ability to reliably measure the construct of trust in local government. The average inter-item correlation was 0.74, further confirming a strong relationship among the three components of the scale.

Trust in the Starosta. Trust in the starosta was excluded from the unified scale due to the unique nature of this role. The starosta holds a position with distinct responsibilities at the community level, characterized by closer personal interactions with residents. Therefore, trust in the starosta is largely shaped by different factors compared to those that determine trust in local government as a whole. Relatively weaker correlations between trust in the starosta and other local government representatives support the notion that trust in the starosta is distinct and requires separate analysis. Trust in the starosta is measured on the same four-point scale as the items included in the Local Government Trust Scale: 1 = do not trust at all, 2 = rather do not trust, 3 = rather trust, 4 = fully trust.

2.2.3. Control Variables

Control variables include demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic factors that may influence trust in local governance.

Community Outlook (Civic Optimism). Civic optimism was assessed with the question: “*In your opinion, are things in your hromada moving in the right or wrong direction?*”. Respondents chose from the

following options: 1 = entirely in the wrong direction, 2 = rather in the wrong direction, 3 = rather in the right direction, 4 = entirely in the right direction.

Political Interest. Political interest was measured using the question: “*How interested are you in the activities of local self-government bodies in your hromada?*”. Responses ranged from 1 = not interested at all to 4 = very interested.

Village Residency. This binary variable distinguishes between respondents living in rural areas (villages) and urban areas.

Age. Age groups were categorized into five ranges: 18–25 years (reference group), 26–35 years, 36–45 years, 46–60 years, and older than 60 years.

Gender. Gender was included as a binary variable: Female (reference category = Male).

Education Levels. Education levels were categorized as secondary education (reference group), secondary vocational, primary higher, and higher education.

Wellbeing. Economic wellbeing was categorized into five levels: Not enough for food (reference category); Enough for food, save for clothes; Enough for food, clothes, save for extras; Enough for food, clothes, extras; Enough for food, clothes, and expensive items.

2.3. Data Analysis Strategy

The regression analysis employed survey-weighted linear regression to account for the survey design and applied robust standard errors to ensure reliable inference. Robust standard errors were specifically applied to account for the clustering of respondents at the hromada level, addressing potential intra-cluster correlations. Separate regression models were conducted to analyze overall local government trust and trust in the headman (starosta) to capture differences in influencing factors.

In the model for trust in local government, standard independent variables were included to assess general predictors of trust. Second set of models include variables reflecting the responsiveness of local government to participation and feedback, categorized as “no feedback provided”, “feedback with response from local government”, and “feedback without response from local government”, as well as categories for “engagement and local government resolved an issue” and “engagement and local government didn’t resolve an issue”. This approach aimed to evaluate how local government responsiveness moderates the relationship between participation and trust.

3. RESULTS

The regression analysis demonstrates that each of the target variables contributes to explaining trust in local government, with varying degrees of influence (Table 1, models 1 and 2).

Perception of policy process measured by perceptions of budget management in the interest of citizens emerges as the strongest predictor of trust (Est. = 0,43, $p < 0,001$), significantly larger than the effects of all other factors.

Satisfaction with local services is also a significant predictor of trust (Est. = 0,13, $p < 0,001$), although its effect size is substantially smaller than that of the policy process. This underscores the importance of effective service delivery but suggests that perceptions of fairness and procedural alignment in governance may weigh more heavily in shaping trust.

Participation in community activities, such as engaging with local authorities or attending public meetings, shows a small positive effect on trust compared to other factors (Est. = 0,03, $p < 0,001$). The size of this effect is notably smaller compared to both policy process and satisfaction with services, indicating that participation alone plays a more limited role in building trust unless paired with responsiveness.

When participation is paired with responsiveness, its impact on trust becomes more pronounced. Engagement linked to issue resolution by the local government shows a strong positive effect on trust (Est. = 0,115, $p < 0,001$), comparable in size to the effect of satisfaction with services. Conversely, engagement without issue resolution does not significantly differ from not participating, highlighting the importance of follow-through in civic engagement.

Feedback to authorities shows similar patterns. Feedback without a response from the local government significantly reduces trust (Est. = -0,109, $p < 0,001$), while feedback met with a response has only a negligible effect compared to not providing feedback. These findings demonstrate that responsiveness not

only amplifies the positive effects of participation on trust but also mitigates the risk of participation leading to disillusionment when citizens feel ignored.

Knowledge of local government responsibilities has a considerable positive effect on trust (Est. = 0,17, $p < 0,001$), making it the second-largest contributor after the policy process. This suggests that citizens' understanding of government roles significantly enhances their trust. In contrast, deeper awareness of decentralization processes has a slight negative effect on trust (Est. = -0,02, $p < 0,05$), potentially reflecting unmet expectations. Awareness of local services, participation methods, and local government activities exhibit even smaller, non-significant effects on trust.

The analysis reveals that several control variables significantly influence trust in local government and the headman. Civic optimism consistently emerges as a strong positive predictor of trust, demonstrating that positive attitudes about the community's future significantly contribute to trust levels. Among demographic factors, rural residents and older individuals exhibit higher trust in local authorities, while women show slightly greater trust than men. However, the effect of gender is smaller when it comes to trust in the headman. Higher levels of education are associated with lower trust, likely reflecting heightened expectations or more critical perspectives. Financial stability positively influences trust in local government, but it does not significantly affect trust in the headman.

For trust in the headman (starosta), the analysis reveals distinct patterns compared to trust in local government (table 1, models 3 and 4). The effect of perception of the policy process is smaller for trust in the headman than for local government (Est. = 0,30 compared to Est. = 0,43).

Participation measures, however, have a stronger effect on trust in the headman. Civic engagement shows a significant positive association with trust (Est. = 0,09, $p < 0,001$), reflecting the personal and visible nature of the headman's role in the community. Feedback to authorities regarding government services negatively affects trust in the headman (Est. = -0,03, $p < 0,001$) but has no significant effect on trust in broader local government. This suggests that unmet expectations impact perceptions of individual leaders more acutely than perceptions of institutions.

The effect of participation, particularly when considering responsiveness, is more pronounced for the headman. Civic engagement linked to issue resolution by the local government shows a strong positive effect on trust (Est. = 0,25, $p < 0,001$), while a lack of responsiveness to service feedback results in a strong negative effect (Est. = -0,25, $p < 0,001$).

Knowledge of local government activities (Est. = 0,05, $p < 0,001$) and participation methods (Est. = 0,03, $p < 0,01$) are also significant predictors of trust in the headman, likely due to their approachable and community-focused role, which fosters direct interactions with citizens.

Table 1

Regression results

Variable	Local Government Trust Scale		Trust in Headman	
	Model 1 (with Participation)	Model 2 (with Participation & Responsiveness)	Model 3 (with Participation)	Model 4 (with Participation & Responsiveness)
1	2	3	4	5
Policy Process	0,435*** (0,011)	0,427*** (0,011)	0,307*** (0,020)	0,297*** (0,020)
Satisfaction with Local Services	0,128*** (0,010)	0,121*** (0,010)	0,157*** (0,014)	0,147*** (0,014)
Participation in Local Decision-Making	-0,003 (0,007)	-0,008 (0,007)	0,003 (0,012)	-0,004 (0,012)
Active Civic Engagement	0,031*** (0,009)		0,089*** (0,012)	

The Continuation of the Table 1

1	2	3	4	5
Engagement and local government didn't resolve an issue		-0,041 (0,035)		0,075 (0,043)
Engagement and local government resolved an issue		0,115^{***} (0,020)		0,246^{***} (0,033)
Feedback to Authorities	-0,009 (0,008)		-0,034^{***} (0,009)	
Feedback without response from local government		-0,109^{***} (0,030)		-0,245^{***} (0,040)
Feedback with response from local government		0,024 (0,023)		-0,013 (0,026)
Awareness of Local Services	0,009 (0,008)	0,009 (0,008)	0,017 (0,019)	0,017 (0,019)
Knowledge of Participation Methods	0,011 (0,007)	0,011 (0,007)	0,033[*] (0,013)	0,033[*] (0,013)
Knowledge of Decentralization Reform	-0,021[*] (0,008)	-0,023^{**} (0,008)	-0,051^{***} (0,013)	-0,053^{***} (0,012)
Awareness of Local Government Activities	0,013 (0,009)	0,014 (0,009)	0,045^{***} (0,012)	0,045^{***} (0,012)
Understanding of Local Responsibilities	0,171^{***} (0,011)	0,172^{***} (0,011)	0,156^{***} (0,014)	0,157^{***} (0,014)
Awareness of Feedback Mechanisms	0,004 (0,009)	0,005 (0,009)	0,013 (0,015)	0,014 (0,015)
Controls				
Civic Optimism	0,188^{***} (0,008)	0,183^{***} (0,009)	0,170^{***} (0,018)	0,164^{***} (0,017)
Political Interest	0,007 (0,008)	0,009 (0,007)	-0,015 (0,013)	-0,012 (0,012)
Village	0,140^{***} (0,026)	0,134^{***} (0,026)	0,045 (0,060)	0,002 (0,063)
Age: 26–35 years old	-0,020 (0,024)	-0,022 (0,024)	0,025 (0,031)	0,024 (0,031)
Age: 36–45 years old	0,003 (0,024)	-0,001 (0,024)	0,036 (0,035)	0,029 (0,036)
Age: 46–60 years old	0,031 (0,022)	0,028 (0,022)	0,062 (0,032)	0,058 (0,033)

The End of the Table1

1	2	3	4	5
Age: Older than 60 years old	0,084*** (0,024)	0,082** (0,024)	0,106** (0,033)	0,104** (0,034)
Gender: Female	0,047*** (0,010)	0,047*** (0,010)	0,029* (0,015)	0,028* (0,015)
Education: Secondary Vocational	-0,027 (0,022)	-0,026 (0,022)	-0,066 (0,036)	-0,07 (0,036)
Education: Primary Higher	-0,077** (0,023)	-0,081*** (0,023)	-0,071* (0,031)	-0,076* (0,031)
Education: Higher	-0,055* (0,023)	-0,057* (0,023)	-0,066* (0,036)	-0,07* (0,036)
Wellbeing: Enough for Food, Save for Clothes	0,039 (0,025)	0,037 (0,025)	0,049 (0,042)	0,046 (0,042)
Wellbeing: Enough for Food, Clothes, Save for Extras	0,063* (0,027)	0,060* (0,027)	-0,009 (0,049)	-0,014 (0,048)
Wellbeing: Enough for Food, Clothes, Extras	0,075* (0,029)	0,075* (0,029)	-0,039 (0,052)	-0,040 (0,051)
Wellbeing: Enough for Food, Clothes, Expensive Items	0,074 (0,044)	0,070 (0,043)	-0,012 (0,083)	-0,011 (0,080)
Constant	-0,170*** (0,040)	-0,177*** (0,040)	-0,080 (0,087)	-0,070 (0,093)
Observations	22,699	22,699	13,273	13,273
R ²	0,55	0,55	0,40	0,40
Adjusted R ²	0,33	0,31	0,10	0,07

*Note: The entries in the table are standardized β coefficients (beta) with standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance of the coefficients: * $p \leq 0,05$, ** $p \leq 0,01$, *** $p \leq 0,001$. Source: author's calculations.*

4. DISCUSSION

Our findings reveal that perceptions of the policy process, specifically the alignment of local government decisions with citizens' interests, have a larger effect on trust than other variables. This aligns with literature suggesting that processes often have a greater impact than outcomes (Van Ryzin, 2013). However, perceptions of alignment with citizens' interests may be shaped by local authorities' performance, suggesting a potential mediation effect. Future research using panel data should explore this relationship further.

The stronger effect of the policy process also supports Gustavsen's (Gustavsen et al., 2017) argument that the citizen and consumer logics are complementary. The citizen logic emphasizes trust based on active participation and the belief that individuals can influence governance, while the consumer logic focuses on

the system's ability to deliver expected outcomes. Our findings suggest that trust in local government is shaped not only by service delivery but also by perceptions of fairness and responsiveness, integrating both citizen and consumer perspectives.

We observed a significant effect of understanding local responsibilities, which is comparable in magnitude to the effects of participation and satisfaction with services on trust in local government, as well as to the effect of satisfaction with services on trust in the headman. This finding suggests that this variable may reflect not only citizens' awareness but also the transparency of governance and the effectiveness of local government communication efforts. If this interpretation holds, it provides additional evidence of the critical role democratic processes play in fostering trust in government.

Although satisfaction with services shows a smaller effect on trust compared to perceptions of the policy process, this does not diminish the value of service performance. First, the literature on citizen satisfaction highlights that the performance of public services does not directly or mechanistically translate into citizens' satisfaction levels (Stipak, 1979; Mok et al., 2017). A dominant framework in this field, the "expectancy-disconfirmation model" (EDM), underscores the critical role of citizens' perceptions and prior expectations in shaping their judgments of satisfaction with services (Zhang et al., 2022). Future research could incorporate the dimension of expectations to examine how these, in conjunction with satisfaction, influence trust in local government. Second, government performance is a multidimensional concept, and satisfaction with services is only one way it can be measured. The literature suggests that objective and subjective performance indicators, as well as different types of performance content, such as outputs, outcomes, and democratic processes, may have varying effects on trust (Zhang et al., 2022).

General participation in decision-making does not automatically translate into greater trust. The regression findings indicate that citizens are more likely to build trust when their participation is met with tangible and responsive actions. This underscores a critical challenge for local leaders and international development programs promoting citizen engagement: participation efforts must be accompanied by meaningful follow-up to demonstrate impact. When citizens perceive their input as ignored or ineffective, trust can erode, potentially discouraging future engagement. Conversely, municipalities that visibly address citizen concerns – such as resolving infrastructure issues or improving access to essential services – can foster trust even in the absence of widespread formal participation. Notably, the effect of participation paired with responsiveness is comparable in size to the effect of satisfaction with services, emphasizing that citizens value not only the outcomes delivered by local governments but also the process through which their voices are acknowledged and acted upon.

Our analysis shows that the model explains less variation in trust in the headman than in trust in local government, suggesting the need for additional variables in future research. Factors such as the frequency of interactions and the headman's proximity to citizens could be crucial, consistent with Frederickson's (Frederickson, & Frederickson, 1995) "paradox of distance," which posits that people trust nearby officials more while perceiving distant ones as less competent and trustworthy. Trust in the headman is notably shaped by direct, personal engagement and responsiveness, with civic engagement and issue resolution showing strong positive effects. However, unmet expectations related to service feedback severely diminish trust, highlighting the heightened sensitivity of citizens to both successes and failures in responsiveness from visible and accessible leaders like the headman.

CONCLUSION

Our findings show that trust in local governance depends on several key factors, including how decisions are made, the quality of services provided, and how well local authorities respond to citizen input. Trust in local government grows when decisions align with what citizens care about, highlighting the need for fairness, transparency, and inclusivity.

These insights show the importance of both good governance processes and strong results in building trust. However, they also warn that failing to meet citizens' expectations can damage trust. As decentralization gives local governments more responsibilities, earning public trust will require delivering quality services, actively engaging with communities, and being responsive to their concerns. Future research could look deeper into how factors like expectations, personal interactions, and closeness to officials influence trust in local governance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND FUNDING

This research was conducted as part of the “Enhancing Community Resilience” project implemented by the Kyiv School of Economics Institute (KSE Institute) and supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the USAID HOVERLA Project. The study was made possible thanks to the generous support of the American people. The content of this research does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Additional institutional support was provided by the Kyiv School of Economics Institute, which facilitated the data analysis and preparation of this publication.

Special thanks are extended to Daniil Karakai and Ruslana Moskotina for their valuable comments and insightful review, which greatly contributed to the refinement of this research.

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