Is Ukraine a Multiethnic Country?

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One entrenched perception of Ukraine among foreign scholars and pundits is that it is a multiethnic country with deep divisions between ethnic groups, particularly Ukrainians and Russians.[1] Rooted in Soviet official discourse on nationalities, this perception contributed to a widespread belief in the early post-Soviet years that the relations between the titular majority and the large Russian minority are likely to be conflictual.[2] Even when a full-blown inter-ethnic conflict failed to materialize, and other cleavages such as language and region turned out to be more prominent in national politics, the underlying assumption that there is a Russian minority clearly distinct from the Ukrainian majority was not thoroughly problematized in scholarly analyses.[3] The more visible presence of several other ethnic minorities such as Crimean Tatars, Hungarians, and Roma reinforces the perception of Ukraine's multiethnicity, which most scholars continue to measure by the Soviet category of "nationality."[4] Although survey data clearly demonstrate that at least for "the Russians," the size of the thus-defined minority has drastically declined, particularly in the wake of Russia's military intervention of 2014, most

1. See Stephen Shulman, "National Integration and Foreign Policy in Multiethnic States," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 4, no. 4 (December 1998): 110–32; Sherrill Stroschein, "Measuring Ethnic Party Success in Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine," *Problems of Post-Communism* 48, no. 4 (July 2001): 59–69; Richard Connolly, "A Divided Ukraine Could See Two Radically Different States Emerge," *The Conversation*, March 4, 2014, at theconversation.com/a-divided-ukraine-could-see-two-radically-different-states-emerge-23946 (accessed May 12, 2021).

2. Ian Bremmer, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Russians in the New Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 2 (1994): 261–83; Pål Kolstø and Andrei Edemsky, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* (Bloomington, 1995), 170–99; Susan Stewart, *Explaining the Low Intensity of Ethnopolitical Conflict in Ukraine* (Münster, 2005), 26–32.

3. Dominique Arel and Valeri Khmelko, "The Russian Factor and Territorial Polarization in Ukraine," *The Harriman Review* 9, no. 1 (1996): 81–91; Stewart, *Explaining the Low Intensity of Ethnopolitical Conflict in Ukraine*; Kataryna Wolczuk, "'Whose Ukraine?': Language and Regional Factors in the 2004 and 2006 Elections in Ukraine," *European Yearbook of Minority Issues* 5, no. 1 (2006): 521–47.

4. Paul Kubicek, "Regional Polarisation in Ukraine: Public Opinion, Voting and Legislative Behaviour," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 2 (March 2000): 273–94; Neil Munro, "Which Way Does Ukraine Face?: Popular Orientations Toward Russia and Western Europe," *Problems of Post-Communism* 54, no. 6 (November 2007): 43–58; Aaron Erlich and Calvin Garner, "Subgroup Differences in Implicit Associations and Explicit Attitudes during Wartime," *International Studies Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (June 2021): 528–41.

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analysts seem to assume that the meaning of people's perceived belonging to this group (and other ethnic minorities) remains largely unchanged.[5]

It is this assumption that the present paper challenges. Building on recent theories of ethnicity, it argues that individuals differ greatly in the salience and meaning of their identification with the supposedly ethnic groups, and such groups differ in the strength and ways of enforcement of their boundaries.[6] Moreover, states differ in the degree to which ethnic identifications and boundaries are institutionally entrenched, discursively highlighted, and taken into account in policymaking. In Ukraine, despite the Soviet legacy of rather strong institutionalization and discursive presentation of nationality, the post-Soviet state discontinued or downplayed most of the institutional mechanisms of the reproduction of ethnic distinctiveness and virtually abandoned the use of ethnic categories in official discourse. While several smaller minorities retained some discursive presence, the once very large group of ethnic Russians ceased to be publicly presented and popularly perceived as clearly distinct from the bulk of Ukrainians, a change best manifested in the predominant reassignment of the group's ethnic label to the population of Russia. Although Ukraine's multiethnic "composition" was never explicitly questioned, the significance of this multiethnicity for Ukrainian citizens has greatly decreased, and its meaning has clearly changed, which scholars should register, explore, and explain.

The paper is intended as a step toward the implementation of this ambitious program. It begins with a discussion of different meanings of multiethnicity in scholarly literature and supports the shift of perspective from clear-cut groups to diverse identifications and practices. I then examine the Soviet legacy of the institutionalization of ethnicity before proceeding to an analysis of its unraveling in post-Soviet Ukraine. My analysis relies on three straightforward criteria for the importance of ethnic distinctions: their entrenchment by state institutions, their prominence in political and other discourses, and their salience for the population. I focus on the disappearing differentiation between the two largest groups of Soviet times, Ukrainians and Russians, while also briefly discussing the persistent distinction of several other ethnic minorities.

Meanings of Multiethnicity

Scholars have understood societal multiethnicity in two main ways: as the coexistence of different ethnic groups and as the diversity of ethnic

5. Volodymyr Kulyk, "Shedding Russianness, Recasting Ukrainianness: The Post-Euromaidan Dynamics of Ethnonational Identifications in Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no. 2–3 (2018): 119–38.

6. Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (August 2002): 163–89; Andreas Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 4 (January 2008): 970–1022; Evan S. Lieberman, *Boundaries of Contagion: How Ethnic Politics Have Shaped Government Responses to AIDS* (Princeton, 2009).

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identifications and manifestations.[7] The first understanding is somewhat similar to the predominant lay perception of ethnicity as individuals' stable belonging to clear-cut descent-based groups. Although scholars are aware that such belonging is at least partly subjective and changeable, many of them tend to essentialize ethnic groups as "objectively existing" entities clearly distinct from one another. This perception is vividly manifested in descriptions of "ethnic composition" or "ethnic structure" of a certain society, using official data on people's self-declared identification by the supposedly ethnic categories to present that society as consisting of a certain number of ethnic groups with certain size, geographical distribution, and other characteristics that can change with time.[8] The coexistence of many sizable ethnic groups is then conceptualized as ethnic heterogeneity (also called diversity and fragmentation) of society, which has been of great interest to social scientists due to its detected correlation with low economic development and high likelihood of ethnic conflict.[9] While scholars debate the proper ways to measure ethnic heterogeneity and its impact on society, their primary preoccupation with differences in the number and size of groups reveals an assumption about roughly equal strengths of such groups' internal cohesion and external boundaries.

In contrast, a growing body of theoretical and empirical work explores identifications and boundaries without taking it for granted that people associated with a certain ethnic category constitute a bounded group. In the most radical rejection of traditional "groupism," Rogers Brubaker proposes to completely discard ethnic groups as a category of analysis and instead analyze social situations with different degrees of "groupness" associated with certain ethnic categories. He argues that unlike nationalist actors claiming to represent homogenous national groups, their would-be members do not in most situations rely on ethnic categories or attach primary importance to ethnic identification. Beyond the *situational* variation in the individual relevance of certain ethnic categories, the unequal degrees of groupness result from variously successful *long-term* efforts of group-making by influential social actors.[10] Andreas Wimmer conceptualizes such efforts as particular

7. Multiethnicity can be examined at both individual and collective levels; I am primarily interested in the latter. Individuals with multiple ethnic backgrounds and/or identifications can, of course, be part of the multiethnic landscape of their society or community.

8. Leszek A. Kosinski, "Changes in the Ethnic Structure in East-Central Europe, 1930–1960," *Geographical Review* 59, no. 3 (July 1969): 388; Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, "Demographic Sources of the Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union," *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 4 (December 1989): 609; Dennis Dingemans and Robin Datel, "Urban Multiethnicity," *Geographical Review* 85, no. 4 (October 1995): 458.

9. Tanja Ellingsen, "Colorful Community or Ethnic Witches' Brew?: Multiethnicity and Domestic Conflict during and after the Cold War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44, no. 2 (April 2000): 228–49; Jacob L. Vigdor, "Interpreting Ethnic Fragmentation Effects," *Economics Letters* 75, no. 2 (April 2002): 271–76; Alberto Alesina and Eliana La Ferrara, "Ethnic Diversity and Economic Performance," *Journal of Economic Literature* 43, no. 3 (September 2005): 762–800.

10. Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups."

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strategies of making and unmaking of group *boundaries*. One of these strategies is the creation of "a more encompassing boundary by grouping existing categories into a new, expanded category" in order to mold a group with greater demographic and political power. Wimmer suggests that "perhaps the most consequential form of boundary expansion in the modern world is nation building," which is pursued by ethnic majority actors together with, and by means of, "their" state.[11]

The state is, of course, a particularly important actor: not only can it facilitate the making of some groups while hampering that of others, but it can also emphasize or downplay ethnic boundaries in general. Evan Lieberman argues that the *strength of institutionalization* of ethnic boundaries heavily affects the predominant perception of social problems as common to all society or particular to certain groups that, in turn, facilitates or complicates effective policies to solve them. Among the state institutions strengthening ethnic boundaries, he highlights the inclusion of the ethnicity question in regular censuses and official statistics, the adoption of negatively or positively discriminatory policies regarding members of certain ethnic categories, and the prohibition or discouragement of marital and sexual relations between members of different categories.[12] Şener Aktürk examines a larger number of institutions and policies where the state's (non)recognition of ethnic groups is enacted. He distinguishes between those policies determining *membership* in the national community such as citizenship, immigration, and ethnic minority status, and those encouraging (or not) the *expression* of ethnic diversity, including the recognition of multiple ethnic categories in official documents and censuses, multiple official languages, ethnic territorial autonomy, and ethnically based affirmative action. Accordingly, he identifies three "regimes of ethnicity," namely monoethnic (allowing membership for only one ethic group), antiethnic (not restricting the membership for other groups but prohibiting the expression of their difference), and multiethnic (both admitting multiple groups and allowing them to express their distinct ethnicity).[13] Although Aktürk's analysis assumes bounded descent-based groups, we can rely on it to examine the impact of the above-mentioned institutions and policies on the salience of ethnic identities and boundaries.

A number of empirical studies have explored ethnic identifications and practices in countries with different strengths of ethnic boundaries and thus, in a sense, different meanings of societal multiethnicity. Where the state prescribes and employs ethnic categories as a key element of social organization, as in Singapore, people tend to perceive their ethnic identities as relevant to

11. Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries," 987.

12. Lieberman, *Boundaries of Contagion*.

13. Şener Aktürk, "Regimes of Ethnicity: Comparative Analysis of Germany, the Soviet Union/Post-Soviet Russia, and Turkey," *World Politics* 63, no. 1 (January 2011): 115–64. In a later paper, he modifies his theory and applies it a large number of European countries: Şener Aktürk, "European State Formation, Three Models of Nation-Building, and the Variation and Change in State Policies toward Ethnic Diversity" (unpublished paper, Association for the Study of Nationalities, May 6, 2021).

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most practices they participate in.[14] In western countries, even as obviously multiethnic and multicultural as the US, the relevance of ethnic identities to most people's social practice is much lower, particularly among the politically and culturally dominant majority. Thus for American whites, the identification with a particular descent-based census category has generally become what Herbert Gans characterized as "symbolic ethnicity," meaning a badge of ethnic distinction rather than an essential characteristic affecting one's everyday experience.[15] At the same time, for minorities in the US ethnic identity is more consequential and more directly related to their distinct background.[16]

Even in east central Europe, "historically characterized by much higher degrees of ethnic and national groupness" than the west due to group-making efforts by nationalist elites and a rather strong institutionalization of ethnicity by successive states, Brubaker's observations of the post-communist developments in the Transylvanian city of Cluj led him to conclude that "'groupness' has generally remained low. At no time did Hungarians and Romanians crystallize as distinct, solidary, bounded groups."[17] At the same time, his and his coauthors' analyses of everyday ethnicity in that city shows that ethnic identity matters more to perceived members of the Hungarian minority than to the Romanian majority. The unequal relevance of ethnic categories for would-be members of the two groups can be viewed as reflecting these categories' unequal usefulness for boundary-making purposes. While the category "Hungarian" can, in that setting, only mean ethnocultural nationality and thus ethnic distinction from the majority, the identification as a Romanian pertains to "some (often inextricable) mixture of ethnocultural nationality, citizenship, and 'country.'"[18] Such an asymmetry can be found in many European countries where the nation-state bears the name of the majority ethnic group and is widely seen as primarily serving its interests.

Ukraine is similar to other east central European countries in the traditionally high salience of ethnic categories resulting from nationalist projects and conflicts of different periods. However, the most important historical factor shaping Ukraine's multiethnicity is the particularly strong institutionalization

14. Ah Eng Lai, *Meanings of Multiethnicity: A Case-Study of Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur, 1995). Although the Singaporean state emphasizes the equality of all (recognized) ethnic groups and promotes an inclusive national belonging based on civic values and common supra-ethnic language, the intensification of interethnic contact at a time of rapid social change has led to increased ethnic awareness and even assertiveness.

15. Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1979): 1–20.

16. Paul R. Spickard and Rowena Fong, "Pacific Islander Americans and Multiethnicity: A Vision of America's Future?," *Social Forces* 73, no. 4 (June 1995): 1365; Tomás R. Jiménez, "Negotiating Ethnic Boundaries: Multiethnic Mexican Americans and Ethnic Identity in the United States," *Ethnicities* 4, no. 1 (March 2004): 75–97. Therefore, persons of mixed origin, while situationally stressing different parts of their ethnic identity, tend to perceive the minority part(s) as more meaningful.

17. Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," 178, 181.

18. Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton, 2006), 213.

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of ethnic boundaries by the Soviet regime. It is the Soviet practices and their legacy that I will discuss in the next section.

Multiethnicity in the USSR and Soviet Ukraine

The Soviet regime made ethnicity a fundamental social category and presented multiethnicity—or rather multi-nationality, since major ethnic groups were recognized as separate nations—as one of the defining features of Soviet society.[19] Actually, it was not only society that was multiethnic but also the state: formally a federation of the supposedly national republics established as a form of statehood for the largest fifteen nations, with some of these republics having lower-level autonomous units for smaller groups. In addition to such *territorial* institutionalization, ethnicity was institutionalized on a *personal* level as every citizen was assigned a supposedly descent-based ethnic designation: nationality, which the regime made virtually unchangeable, registered in personal documents, and used in many practices of positive or negative discrimination.[20] The USSR can thus be considered a paradigmatic example of a multiethnic regime of ethnicity in Aktürk's typology. Not only did the Soviet state grant multiple ethnic groups membership in the polity but also allowed, indeed encouraged them to express their distinction in various institutionalized practices.

To be sure, state policies—and their consequences for ethnic categories' degrees of groupness—changed with time and vary across would-be groups. In the 1920s and the early 1930s, the Soviet leadership actively promoted the institutionalization of countless ethnic categories and the transformation of their putative members into distinct groups with their own political bodies and/or cultural facilities.[21] In contrast, in the mid-1930s the regime considerably reduced the number of recognized ethnic groups, disbanded territorial units and/or cultural establishments for many of those still recognized, started discriminating against putative members of certain non-Russian groups (a practice most notoriously exemplified by ethnic deportations during World War II), and came to glorify the Russian nation as "the first among equals" to which other groups needed to maintain proximity. Moreover, it gave the highest priority to the meeting of linguistic needs of Russians (and, by extension, Russified members of other ethnic categories), establishing for them Russian-language educational and cultural facilities all over the USSR and virtually exempting them of the necessity to learn the languages of the

19. Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 414–52.

20. Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 1996); Yuri Luryi and Victor Zaslavsky, "The Passport System in the USSR and Changes in Soviet Society," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 6, no. 1 (January 1979): 137–53; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, 2001).

21. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, chapters 1–5; Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment," 419–40; Francine Hirsch, "The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and the Category Nationality in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 Censuses," *Slavic Review* 56, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 251–78.

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people among whom they lived.[22] However, it can be argued that "the nationality policy had abandoned the pursuit of countless rootless nationalities in order to concentrate on a few full-fledged, fully equipped 'nations,'" first and foremost the titular nations of the union republics.[23] Until the final years of the Soviet empire, Moscow encouraged the republican elites to continue developing distinctly national cultures, albeit severely censoring their work for putative manifestations of nationalism.[24] Most fundamentally, "[t]he continued existence of nationally defined communities and the legitimacy of their claims to particular cultural, territorial and political identities. . . was never in doubt.[25]" Over the decades, it became part of common sense thinking among Soviet people, leading most of them to internalize the division of society into ethnic categories and identify with one of them.[26]

At the same time, some long-term policies of the Soviet regime weakened ethnic boundaries by undermining many people's identifications with the assigned categories of nationality. To begin with, as a result of large-scale regime-promoted migrations millions of Soviet citizens found themselves in republics or autonomies other than "their own," which created a discrepancy between the territorial and personal dimensions of their ethnic identity, thus making it less meaningful and stable. Moreover, after the discontinuation of the educational and cultural facilities in languages other than the respective titular language and Russian, members of non-Russian migrant and indigenous minorities could not support their ethnic identity by practicing their "national" language and culture, at least not in the public domain. While some of these minorities might feel pressure to assimilate into the titular groups of the respective republics, more often their members were encouraged to embrace the Russian language, for which facilities were more widely available and which promised better prospects for social mobility. Many of them thus came to identify with the Russian or the entire Soviet people no less strongly than with their putative ethnic group, but this shift was usually not reflected in their census-declared nationality, which tended to replicate one registered in personal documents.[27]

In the post-World War II decades, linguistic Russification became increasingly widespread even among titulars in the non-Russian republics who also

22. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, chapters 7–11; Bohdan Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1987), chapter 3;Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), chapter 3.

23. Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment," 445.

24. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, chapter 11; Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (Toronto, 2004). Moreover, it allowed those elites to take more or less resolute affirmative action in favor of the respective titular groups, to the detriment of Russians and, especially, ethnic minorities in those republics. Krista A. Goff, *Nested Nationalism: Making and Unmaking Nations in the Soviet Caucasus* (Ithaca, 2021).

25. Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment," 441.

26. Volodymyr Kulyk, "Constructing Common Sense: Language and Ethnicity in Ukrainian Public Discourse," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 2 (March 2006): 281–314.

27. Robert J. Kaiser, *Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton, 1994), chapter 4; Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

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felt pressure to rely on the prestigious and "progressive" language. This was particularly the case in the big cities where migrants from other republics constituted a considerable part of the population and Russian was the predominant language of prestigious jobs and popular culture. While the continuous influx of villagers increased the share of titulars in most cities' populations, many of these migrants sooner or later switched to Russian as the main language of everyday life. The change of language practice did not usually lead to a change of nationality, however, which was considered strictly determined by that of one's parents, and only children of ethnically mixed couples were allowed to choose. Most of the linguistically Russified titulars did not even change the native language they declared in censuses: although this category was not registered in personal documents, the official discourse led Soviet people to believe that native language was an attribute of the eponymous ethnic group and, therefore, should correspond to nationality. As a result, the share of people identifying with the titular language in most republics remained much higher than that of people primarily using that language in everyday life, although not as high as that of people claiming the titular nationality. The widespread discrepancy between one's ethnic and linguistic identifications and/or between both of them and one's language practice undermined many people's identification with the assigned ethnic categories. In addition, the increasing prevalence of ethnically mixed marriages necessitated mixed offspring to choose one nationality that often did not reflect their self-identification with both, or neither categories, thus further blurring the boundaries between the respective "groups."[28]

Ukraine was one of the union republics where these boundary-blurring tendencies were most pronounced. Although a large number of people of Russian descent had lived for centuries in what became the Ukrainian SSR, this number greatly increased in the Soviet decades due to mass in-migration from Russia. Most of the newcomers settled in the cities where the share of ethnic Russians reached 30 percent, while in some cities of the east and south it surpassed 50 percent. Accordingly, most factories, offices, educational establishments, and cultural facilities in those cities relied on Russian, which in turn urged ever more native speakers of Ukrainian and other languages to use it as their main language. While the great majority of ethnic Ukrainians retained their self-designation by nationality, the gap between ethnic and linguistic identifications grew ever wider, so that in the last Soviet census of 1989 fully 12 percent of people claiming Ukrainian nationality declared Russian as their native language. When in the early 1990s mass surveys started inquiring about the language(s) people use in everyday life, they confirmed that the reliance on Russian was much more widespread than the identification with it. Moreover, the surveys revealed that many people

28. Kaiser, *Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*, chapters 5–6; Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine*, chapter 5; Paul S. Pirie, "National Identity and Politics in Southern and Eastern Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 7 (November 1996): 1079–1104; Volodymyr Kulyk, "Soviet Nationalities Policies and the Discrepancy between Ethnocultural Identification and Language Practice in Ukraine," in Mark R. Beissinger and Stephen Kotkin, eds., *The Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe* (New York, 2014), 202–21.

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use *both* languages in various practices, including family communication.[29] Not only did the discrepancy between ethnolinguistic identification and language practice weaken many people's attachment to their alleged groups, but also the predominant reliance on the same language for most members of the two largest nationalities in the cities where they were in everyday contact further blurred the inter-group boundary. Finally, the boundary was additionally undermined by the prevalence of ethnically "mixed" marriages that increased tremendously during Soviet decades (up to 30 percent of marriages by 1979) and was particularly impressive in the eastern and southern regions with the largest number of ethnic Russians. No wonder people categorized as Russian were more likely to identify themselves with the encompassing category of the Soviet people: in a 1991 survey, 47 percent of respondents of Russian nationality chose this pan-ethnic identity while 26 percent chose the ethnic Russian category.[30]

Although the large majority of Ukrainian society (95 percent in the 1989 census) consisted of people assigned to Ukrainian or Russian nationality, the republic was home to supposed members of many other ethnic groups, including several that were regionally concentrated and thus had better chances of reproducing their groupness. In particular, the annexation by the USSR of several adjacent territories with a largely Ukrainian population during World War II added to the republic's ethnic landscape hundreds of thousands people of Romanian/Moldovan, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Gagauz descent.[31] Moreover, the first two of these "groups" (or three, if Romanians and Moldovans are counted separately) were allowed to receive education in their eponymous languages in the places of their predominant concentration, which greatly contributed to active use of and identification with them by their would-be members. In contrast, members of other putative groups gradually assimilated into the Russian language in which they had to study and work, while mostly retaining their self-designation by nationality, which, of course, did not always mean a clear ethnic identity.[32] In addition, the 1954 transfer of Crimea from the Russian to Ukrainian republic paved the way for the later appearance in Ukraine of the Crimean Tatars, who had been deported to Central Asia in 1944 and were only allowed to return to the peninsula in the last years of the USSR. While most of them lost their ancestral language during the deportation, the experience of ethnically based discrimination contributed to their strong ethnic identity, as reflected in their predominant

29. Kaiser, *Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*, chapters 4–6; Kulyk, "Soviet Nationalities Policies," 203–12.

30. Pirie, "National Identity and Politics in Southern and Eastern Ukraine," 1085–90. Actually, at that uncertain time Soviet identity was almost equally appealing to alleged Ukrainians, with 43 percent preferring that option.

31. Volodymyr B. Yevtukh, *Etnopolityka v Ukraïni: Pravnychyĭ ta Kul′turolohichnyĭ Aspekty* (Kyiv, 1997), 19–21; Viktor Stepanenko, "A State to Build, a Nation to Form: Ethno-Policy in Ukraine," in Anna-Maria Biro and Petra Kovacs, eds., *Diversity in Action: Local Public Management of Multi-Ethnic Communities in Central and Eastern Europe* (Budapest, 2001), 310–13.

32. *Natsional′nyi sostav naseleniia SSSR: Po dannym Vsesoiuznoi perepisi 1989 g.* (Moscow, 1989), 78–79.

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identification with the Crimean Tatar nationality and native language.[33] No less significantly, the transfer of Crimea meant the addition of a large number of people who had a much clearer sense of Russian origin and distinct identity than most of their fellow "group members" in other parts of Ukraine.

Boundary-making in Post-Soviet Ukrainian Politics

The demotion of ethnicity in post-Soviet Ukraine resulted from the boundary-making efforts of influential political actors and the state whose institutions they controlled. Some of these actors had clear preferences for the drawing of internal boundaries, while others sought to deemphasize ethnic divisions and promote an inclusive nation-building.

The goal of establishing an independent Ukrainian state was advanced in the late 1980s by Ukrainian nationalists (most of whom called themselves national democrats) as part of a program of "national revival" that was intended to enhance the social relevance of ethnic identities and practices, and thus of boundaries between ethnic groups. Nationalists wanted to bring Russified Ukrainians "back" to their ethnic "roots" and thus create a powerful ethnonation that would be able to achieve an independent nation-state. However, the goal of independence only became attainable once nationalists were joined by a reformist part of the communist nomenklatura, which emphasized socioeconomic rather than ethnocultural goals and sought to win over the inclusive "people of Ukraine" against the Moscow center. But after this inclusive strategy helped secure overwhelming popular support and the international recognition of Ukrainian independence, the nomenklatura leadership of the new state headed by President Leonid Kravchuk adopted many political and discursive elements of their former nationalist rivals in search of the historical and cultural legitimacy of independence. Supporters of the preservation of strong ties with Russia, driven by leftist and/or Russian nationalist ideas, vehemently opposed this new emphasis on Ukrainian ethnocultural identity. It is only in Crimea with its Russian majority, however, that these actors appealed primarily to ethnic Russians, while in other southern and eastern regions they sought to mobilize the much more sizeable constituency of Russian-speakers and thus emphasize the language over the ethnic boundary.[34] Their "anti-nationalist" mobilization helped to defeat Kravchuk in the 1994 presidential election, which revealed that regionalism was as an important factor of political preferences affected by ethnocultural identities. In the run-off, residents of the west and center predominantly supported Kravchuk's call for asserting independence, while eastern and southern voters preferred his rival Leonid Kuchma's promise to strengthen cooperation

33. Edward Allworth, ed., *The Tatars of the Crimea: Return to the Homeland*, 2nd ed. (Durham, 1998); Maksym Sviezhentsev and Martin-Oleksandr Kisly, "Race in Time and Space: Racial Politics towards Crimean Tatars in Exile, Through and After Return," *Krytyka*, June 2021, at krytyka.com/en/articles/racial-politics-towards-crimean-tatars (accessed July 8, 2022).

34. Taras Kuzio and Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine: Perestroika to Independence* (Edmonton, 1994); Volodymyr Kulyk, *Ukraïns'kyi natsionalizm u nezalezhnii Ukraïni* (Kyiv, 1999).

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with Russia.[35] Upon assuming office, however, Kuchma came to emphasize reformist priorities and continued the implementation of certain nationalist policies. At the same time, he sought to marginalize his opponents on both "flanks" by incorporating parts of their programs in the so-called "centrist" agenda that was thought acceptable to virtually all Ukrainian citizens.[36]

Most elements of this inclusive nation-building strategy that de-emphasized internal ethnic boundaries were adopted by subsequent presidents and the parties they controlled or allied with, albeit with considerable variation of political configurations and ideological messages.[37] In the early 2000s, Viktor Yushchenko successfully challenged Kuchma's "centrist" discourse by emphasizing the division between the "authorities" and the "people."[38] This ethnically inclusive strategy won him the majority of votes in the 2004 election, although its results turned out to be as regionally polarized as in 1994. Kuchma tried to prevent Yushchenko's victory by resorting to electoral fraud but had to back down under the pressure of the Orange Revolution. When Yushchenko became president, however, his discourse was marked by rather strong Ukrainian nationalist overtones that alienated many people with some attachment to Russia and/or the Russian language.[39] In contrast, his 2004 rival, Viktor Yanukovych, sought revenge by mobilizing his predominantly eastern and southern constituencies, whom he presented as possessing a distinct regional identity with the Russian language as its core element.[40] In the presidential election of 2010, his voters turned out to be slightly more numerous than the mostly western and central supporters of Yulia Tymoshenko, who presented an apparently more inclusive but unmistakably "Orange" discourse.[41]

Yanukovych's presidency, however, was interrupted by the 2013–14 Euromaidan protests against his authoritarian and pro-Russian policies. These protests united people of different ethnic backgrounds and linguistic preferences but set them apart from people with opposing views, a divide that strongly correlated with the long-term delimitation between the western and central versus the eastern and southern regions.[42] After the new revolution

35. Arel and Khmelko, "The Russian Factor and Territorial Polarization in Ukraine."

36. Volodymyr Kulyk, "Constructing Common Sense," 292–304.

37. Of course, presidents were not the only influential actors in these respective periods, but a discussion of all major political forces would make this part of the analysis too long and complex, to the detriment of other parts that are more central to my argument.

38. Volodymyr Kulyk, *Dyskurs Ukraïns'kykh Mediï: Identychnosti, Ideolohiï, Vladni Stosunky* (Kyïv, 2010), chapter 5.

39. Volodymyr Kulyk, "Language Policies and Language Attitudes in Post-Orange Ukraine," in Juliane Besters-Dilger, ed., *Language Policy and Language Situation in Ukraine: Analysis and Recommendations* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 15–55; Anton Shekhovtsov, "The 'Orange Revolution' and the 'Sacred' Birth of a Civic-Republican Ukrainian Nation," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 5 (September 2013): 730–43.

40. Wolczuk, "Whose Ukraine?"; Kulyk, "Language Policies and Language Attitudes in Post-Orange Ukraine."

41. Nathaniel Copsey and Natalia Shapovalova, "The Ukrainian Presidential Election of 2010," *Representation* 46, no. 2 (2010): 211–25.

42. Olga Onuch, "The Maidan and Beyond: Who Were the Protesters?," *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 3 (2014): 44–51; Iryna Bekeshkina, "Decisive 2014: Did It Divide or Unite Ukraine?," in Olexiy Haran and Maksym Yakovlyev, eds., *Constructing a Political Nation:*

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forced Yanukovych out of the country and brought to power a more pro-western and nationally minded government, Russia responded by military intervention in Crimea and the Donbas, thus inadvertently contributing to the growth of a more assertive Ukrainian nationalism and a more anti-Russian Ukrainian identity.[43] The new president, Petro Poroshenko, both reflected and reinforced this change by discourse and policymaking that, while not explicitly excluding members of any ethic, linguistic, or regional groups, nevertheless offered them a national identity with a predominantly Ukrainian ethnocultural content that many people found exclusive and divisive.[44] Their alienation, together with the frustration of many people with his supposedly corrupt and ineffective governance, led to Poroshenko's crushing defeat in the 2019 election, when voters in all parts of Ukraine clearly preferred the apparently inclusive message of his rival Volodymyr Zelensky.[45] Although he has not abandoned this inclusive discourse, the logic of the office urges Zelensky to continue many of his predecessor's policies that embody an ethnoculturally Ukrainian and geopolitically anti-Russian identity.

For all the differences between the six presidents (and the parties they relied on), none of them emphasized boundaries between ethnic groups. Actually, not only the presidents but all influential political actors either preferred to divide Ukrainian society along linguistic or regional lines or, more often, did not want to divide it at all, hoping to get support from people of various backgrounds. In the next two sections, I will analyze how this inclusive orientation was reflected in state institutions and political discourse.

Institutions Affecting Ethnic Boundaries

My analysis of the institutionalization of ethnicity in post-Soviet Ukraine will focus on those institutions featured in the theoretical works by Aktürk and Lieberman. I will begin with institutions determining membership in the political community and then proceed to those regulating the expression of ethnic distinctions. In both cases, I will not only examine the design of the

Changes in the Attitudes of Ukrainians during the War in the Donbas, 2nd. ed. (Kyiv, 2017), 1–33.

43. Volodymyr Kulyk, "Ukrainian Nationalism Since the Outbreak of Euromaidan," *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2014): 94–122; Volodymyr Kulyk, "National Identity in Ukraine: Impact of Euromaidan and the War," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 4 (April 2016): 588–608; Bekeshkina, "Decisive 2014"; Oleg Zhuravlev and Volodymyr Ishchenko, "Exclusiveness of Civic Nationalism: Euromaidan Eventful Nationalism in Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 36, no. 3 (May, 2020): 226–45.

44. Volodymyr Kulyk, "Memory and Language: Different Dynamics in the Two Aspects of Identity Politics in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers* 47, no. 6 (November 2019): 1030–47; Olga Onuch, "'We Want to Simplify Ukraine': Olga Onuch on Language and Political Preferences in Ukraine," *Hromandske International*, July 25, 2019, at en.hromadske.ua/posts/we-want-to-simplify-ukraine-olga-onuch-on-language-and-political-preferences-in-ukraine (accessed July 12, 2022).

45. Joanna Rohozinska and Vitaliy Shpak, "Ukraine's Post-Maidan Struggles: The Rise of an 'Outsider' President," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 3 (2019): 33–47; Gwendolyn Sasse, "The Uneven First Year of Zelenskiy's Presidency," *Judy Dempsey's Strategic Europe* (blog), May 19, 2020, at carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/81829 (accessed July 12, 2022).

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relevant institutions but also discuss how their actual functioning affected ethnic practices and identities.[46]

The original design of the institutions determining membership in the newly independent political community was intended to ensure the population's support via referendum to legitimize the proclaimed independence. Similarly to most other former Soviet republics, Ukraine granted automatic citizenship to all people permanently residing then on its territory (plus those who had been born in Ukraine but later moved elsewhere and now wanted to return, as well as their children and grandchildren). More remarkably, Ukraine was among those post-Soviet states that did not give members of the titular ethnic category any preferences in acquiring citizenship through immigration and naturalization.[47] In any event, the scope of immigration to Ukraine after the initial post-Soviet reshuffling turned out to be much smaller than that of emigration to more prosperous countries. At the same time, the government did not want to allow dual citizenship for people of Ukrainian origin who preferred to stay in the respective host states but wanted their "ethnic homeland" to recognize their roots and attachment. Key political actors feared that primarily ethnic Ukrainians in Russia and ethnic Russians in Ukraine would seek dual citizenship, which would blur the boundary between the Ukrainian and Russian *civic* nations and thus undermine Ukraine's independence from Russia.[48]

As far as the expression of ethnic distinctions is concerned, the most important institutional means are the legal recognition of ethnic minorities and their members' special rights.[49] In this respect, the new Ukrainian state sought to combine the legacy of the Ukrainian Soviet republic and the normative approaches of the European organizations to which it wished to belong. Soon after the proclamation of independence, the parliament adopted a special law on national minorities that recognized distinct "groups of Ukrainian citizens who are not Ukrainian by nationality and manifest the feeling of national self-awareness and commonality." Such groups were given so-called national-cultural autonomy, including the right to study, or be instructed in,

46. Based on the design of boundary-making institutions, Aktürk classifies Ukraine as one of those states that "combine antiethnic citizenship and immigration policies with some of the multiethnic expression policies" (Aktürk, "European State Formation," unpublished paper). However, as my analysis of the functioning of these institutions will demonstrate, the multiethnic component has been very weak, except for the first years of independence.

47. Oxana Shevel, "The Politics of Citizenship Policy in New States," *Comparative Politics* 41, no. 3 (April 2009): 273–91. Although "Ukrainians from abroad" did receive special treatment in being allowed to immigrate beyond established quotas, that status was defined in an inclusive way to encompass "person[s] of Ukrainian ethnic descent or with origin in Ukraine." See Zakon Ukraïny "Pro immihratsiiu," adopted June 7, 2001, at zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2491-14#Text, art. 4; Zakon Ukraïny "Pro zakordonnykh ukraïntsiv," adopted March 4, 2004, at zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1582-15#Text, art. 1 (both accessed May 20, 2021).

48. Shevel, "The Politics of Citizenship Policy in New States"; Maryna Yaroshevych, "Zakordonni ukraïntsi ta pytannia podviinoho hromadianstva," Portal zovnishnioï polityky, [2019], at fpp.com.ua/topic/zakordonni-ukrayintsi-ta-pytannya-podvijnogo-gromadyanstva/ (accessed May 20, 2021).

49. Here I diverge from Aktürk, who considers the official recognition of ethnic minority status as one of the policies defining membership in the national community.

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their respective languages and to meet their cultural and religious needs, but the ambiguous wording of the respective provision virtually exempted the state from a clear obligation to ensure adequate means to implement the declared right.[50]

At the same time, the Ukrainian leadership refrained from recognizing the minorities' right to *territorial* autonomy, considered dangerous for the new state's territorial integrity.[51] The only territorial autonomy within Ukraine, Crimea, was established in the last year of the USSR in the context of the alleged restoration of autonomies abolished during the Stalin years. Although its ethnic character was not explicitly recognized, both the Russian majority and the Crimean Tatar minority were given the right to use their languages in various domains, which for the minority remained mostly symbolic. While the Crimean Tatars received some preferential treatment as one of the formerly deported ethnic groups, their claim to the status of an indigenous people was not recognized; nor were their representative bodies. The Ukrainian leadership understood the exceptional role of these bodies but did not want to set a precedent for legalizing ethnically based political organizations.[52] Its negative attitude to such organizations was clearly manifested in the law on political parties, which required that citizens from at least two thirds of Ukraine's oblasts establish a party, thus precluding the formation of parties by ethnic minorities that were predominantly concentrated in certain regions.[53] Russians were the only minority that had significant, albeit very uneven, presence in all oblasts, but influential politicians of Russian descent were more interested in joining (or establishing) parties that would seek support from all (major) ethnic groups, even if their appeals tended to particularly resonate with Russian-speakers and residents of the east and south.[54]

Finally, the post-Soviet Constitution of 1996 defined "the people of Ukraine"—the political community on whose behalf the act was adopted—as "Ukraine's citizens of all nationalities" and recognized certain rights for national minorities and indigenous peoples.[55] However, such wording of the

50. Zakon Ukraïny "Pro natsional′ni menshyny v Ukraïni," adopted 25 June 1992, at zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2494-12#Text, art. 3, 6 (accessed May 21, 2021).

51. This was demonstrated in the first year of independence when the central government ignored the results of a referendum in a Hungarian-majority district in Transcarpathia, where a large majority supported the idea of a Hungarian autonomous unit; Stepanenko, "A State to Build, a Nation to Form," 315.

52. Volodymyr Kulyk, *Revisiting a Success Story: Implementation of the Recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to Ukraine, 1994–2001* (Hamburg, 2002); Stewart, *Explaining the Low Intensity of Ethnopolitical Conflict in Ukraine*.

53. Zakon Ukraïny "Pro politychni partiï v Ukraïni," adopted April 5, 2001, zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2365-14#Text, art. 10, 11 (accessed July 12, 2021).

54. Graham Smith and Andrew Wilson, "Rethinking Russia's Post-soviet Diaspora: The Potential for Political Mobilisation in Eastern Ukraine and North-east Estonia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 49, no. 5 (July 1997): 845–64; Volodymyr Kulyk, "Identity in Transformation: Russian-Speakers in Post-Soviet Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 1 (January 2019): 156–78.

55. Constitution of Ukraine, adopted June 28, 1996, https://rm.coe.int/constitution-of-ukraine/168071f58b, preamble and art. 10, 11, 53, 119 (accessed May 21, 2021). The notion of indigenous peoples was thus first introduced in Ukrainian legislation.

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Constitution reflected the logic of establishing an independent state out of the Soviet republic rather than signaled the dominant approach to governing that state. In the following years, ethnic references in legislative and administrative acts became increasingly rare. While the authorities declared the inadmissibility of ethnically based discrimination and did not usually prevent minority members from assuming representative or executive positions at various levels, they did not want them to act primarily as representatives of ethnic groups but of their respective territorial constituencies. Accordingly, the politics of ethnicity was increasingly limited to the activities of ethnocultural associations whose influence on the bulk of putative members of the respective groups varied greatly, from the Crimean Tatar Mejlis' ability to mobilize thousands of people to the largely false claims to representing the group by associations "of" Russians and many other minorities. While occasionally engaging leaders of such associations in some symbolic or consultative activities, the authorities did not see the need to interact with them in actual policymaking, since self-appointed "representatives of the minorities" could hardly deliver the support of "ordinary members." Such an approach contributed to the low salience of the previously assigned ethnic identities for would-be members of most ethnic categories, except for those whose identities were sustained by everyday experiences such as collective action and special (positive or negative) treatment on the basis of ethnicity, particularly Crimean Tatars, Hungarians, and Roma.[56]

Also contributing to the low salience of ethnic identity was the fact that the new state discontinued the Soviet practice of the official registration of personal nationality. In the first year of independence, the parliament approved the format of new Ukrainian passports that did not include information on nationality.[57] Accordingly, nationality also disappeared from other personal documents and official forms. Hence the authorities did not know the nationality of citizens they were dealing with and could not use this for preferential or discriminating treatment, except when it could be inferred from appearance or speech, which was not the case for difference between "Ukrainians" and "Russians" in most parts of the country. At the same time, the absence of information on individuals' nationality did not challenge the accustomed belief in the relevance of this characteristic, which was clearly demonstrated by the first post-Soviet census of 2001. In Dominique Arel's observation, "no one seems to have questioned the very presence of a question on ethnic nationality in the Ukrainian census," as the Soviet practices "have made nationality

56. Yevtukh, *Etnopolityka v Ukraïni*; Stewart, *Explaining the Low Intensity of Ethnopolitical Conflict in Ukraine*; Volodymyr Yevtukh, *Roma in Ukraine: Ethnodemographical and Sociocultural Contexts*, at http://enpuir.npu.edu.ua/bitstream/handle/123456789/15465/Yevtukh.pdf (accessed May 21, 2021).

57. Although nationalist deputies objected to such a "denationalizing" move, most other MPs believed that it was important to avoid ethnic divides and mold a united identity of Ukrainian citizens. Stenohrama plenarnoho zasidannia (Verkhovnoï Rady Ukraïny), June 26, 1992, at www.rada.gov.ua/meeting/stenogr/show/4749.html (accessed July 12, 2021).

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so 'natural,' so hegemonic in public discourse, that no one is capable of thinking outside the box."[58]

The persistence of this Soviet-implanted idea was, however, heavily undermined by the authorities' refusal—for reasons most likely unrelated to ethnic matters—to conduct the next census after the traditional period of ten years or thereafter. The prolonged absence of up-to-date information on the numerical strength of "nationalities" contributed to the virtual disappearance of ethnic categories from public discourse that, in turn, further downplayed their perceived social relevance.[59] Certain minorities such as Hungarians or Crimean Tatars remained visible due to their activities or their special treatment by the Ukrainian authorities or those of their kin-states.[60] Neither its putative members or Ukrainian or Russian political actors, however, could activate the largest non-titular category, the Russians. As argued above, most such actors clearly preferred the more sizeable category of Russian-speakers.[61]

Linguistic differences between members of the Ukrainian and Russian categories were much more visible and entrenched than ethnic ones. Not only is language preference more clearly manifested in various formal and informal practices than is ethnic origin, but also many influential political forces put forward policies based on the former characteristic and encouraged their respective constituencies to assert their preferences. From the early years of

58. Dominique Arel, "Interpreting 'Nationality' and 'Language' in the 2001 Ukrainian Census," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2002): 223–24. The impact of Soviet practices was also manifested in media reports on census results, which uncritically reproduced the official report referring to the alleged presence in Ukraine of certain numbers of people belonging to certain nationalities. Although the census demonstrated a significant increase in the number of people identifying as Ukrainians and, by the same token, a sharp decrease in the number of self-declared Russians, the media did not interpret this drastic change as evidence of the subjective nature of nationality designations and clung instead to the idea of objectively existing, albeit numerically changing, groups; Kulyk, *Dyskurs Ukraïns'kykh Mediĭ*, chapter 6.

59. In contrast to the first post-Soviet years, even the results of mass surveys were usually published without the breakup by nationality, as sociologists did not want to stir ethnic tensions by implying that it was ethnic identity that accounted for differences between ethnically defined "groups" of respondents. The author's exchange on Facebook with sociologists Volodymyr Paniotto and Mykhailo Mishchenko representing two of Ukraine's most active survey companies, May 14, 2021, at www.facebook.com/volodymyr.kulyk/posts/4200080000023895 (password required; accessed November 28, 2021).

60. Ismail Aydingün and Ayşegül Aydingün, "Crimean Tatars Return Home: Identity and Cultural Revival," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 1 (January 2007): 113–28; Vil S. Bakirov, Alexandr I. Kizilov, and Kseniya Kizilova, "Hungarians in Contemporary Ukraine: Identities and Representations," *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences* 11, no. 3 (2011): 229–48.

61. Even the Russian "kin state" was not much interested in emphasizing a distinct identity of its ethnic "compatriots," seeking instead to make all those Ukrainian citizens whom it considered linguistic and cultural kindred politically loyal. While Moscow pressured Kyiv to ensure the rights of their Russians/Russian-speakers for decades, it recently started granting willing Ukrainian residents Russian citizenship (with or even without relocation to Russia) in pursuit of demographic and geopolitical goals. Igor Zevelev, "New Russian Policy Toward Ukraine: Citizenship Beyond Borders," *Kennan Cable* no. 54 (July 2020), at https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-54-new-russian-policy-toward-ukraine-citizenship-beyond-borders (accessed July 12, 2021).

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independence, the language issue remained salient in Ukrainian politics as supporters of Ukrainian sought to overcome the legacy of Soviet Russification, and parties claiming to represent speakers of Russian fought for that language's unrestricted use in all domains.[62] At the same time, linguistic boundaries were not strongly institutionalized either. Although the Constitution proclaimed, alongside the status of Ukrainian as the only state language, a guarantee of the "free development, use and protection of Russian, and other languages of national minorities of Ukraine," it did not indicate any specific means for its enactment.[63] An individual's language preference was not recognized as a basis for claiming certain linguistic rights. Nor were language policies on certain territories related to the linguistic "structure" of their population, except for several years after 2012 when Russian and several other languages enjoyed special status as so-called regional languages on territories of their prevalence. In 2018, however, the law establishing this status was declared unconstitutional, and then a new law was adopted that required the pervasive use of Ukrainian, with no mention of the right to use Russian or any other language.[64] Further undermining linguistic boundaries has been the above-mentioned discrepancy between language identity and language practice, which makes it impossible to unequivocally distinguish between speakers of the two main languages, all the more so because many people identify with and/or rely on both Ukrainian and Russian. Nevertheless, language preference remains a more salient social marker and a more divisive political issue than ethnic identity, which public discourse clearly demonstrates.

Ethnic References in Public Discourse

In view of the great variety of public discourses, I will focus on the discourse of politicians exemplified by two practices both intended for the public but reaching very different people. While the Presidents' New Year's Eve addresses are arguably watched by a large majority of the population, a tradition going back to the Soviet times, electoral platforms of political parties are likely to be examined only by a small minority of politically engaged citizens. At the same time, the latter practice reveals positions and strategies of various political actors rather than only those currently in power.

The New Year's Eve addresses by Ukraine's six presidents over thirty years of independence demonstrate the perceived unimportance of ethnic divisions and, by extension, the identities they are based on. It is only in the first such address by Leonid Kravchuk on the eve of 1992 that "people of Ukraine," an inclusive formula preferred at the time by most politicians to the potentially exclusive "Ukrainian people," was presented as consisting of "people of all generations, all nationalities" and explicitly called "the multinational people of Ukraine." Furthermore, Kravchuk argued later in his address that

62. Dominique Arel, "Language Politics in Independent Ukraine: Towards One or Two State Languages?," *Nationalities Papers* 23, no. 3 (September 1995): 597–622; Juliane Besters-Dilger, ed., *Language Policy and Language Situation in Ukraine: Analysis and Recommendations* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009).

63. Constitution of Ukraine, art. 10.

64. Kulyk, "Memory and Language."

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"the self-awareness of all nationalities in our republic is on the rise; the process of the revival of their culture, language, and traditions is unfolding." In addition to the civic "people," the president evoked the ethnic designation of the Ukrainian community by mentioning "all those who feel themselves Ukrainian, although they live outside of Ukraine."[65]

In their subsequent addresses, however, both Kravchuk and his successor, Leonid Kuchma, did not feature Ukraine's multiethnicity and addressed their audience simply as "compatriots." To be sure, Kuchma sometimes relied on Soviet clichés to argue that although in Ukraine "there live members of tens of nations and nationalities, religious denominations, [and] there are significant differences between different territories, there have not been, and will not be, confrontation or conflicts on this basis."[66] At the same time, he started referring to the ethnically inclusive body of compatriots as "the Ukrainian people," "Ukrainian nation," and even "Ukrainians," in a clear deviation from the Soviet discourse where these notions, especially the last one, had a clearly ethnic connotation. His successor Viktor Yushchenko made "the Ukrainian people" his main term of addressing the audience, while also using the term "Ukrainian" in the civic sense: "We have begun the creation of a new country where every citizen can say, 'Yes! I am Ukrainian! And I am proud of it.'"[67] Seeking to unmake some of Yushchenko's supposedly nationalist tendencies, Viktor Yanukovych reverted to addressing his viewers as "compatriots." Soon, however, he also started referring to Ukrainian citizens as "the Ukrainian people" and "Ukrainians." Amid the Euromaidan protests, for example, he tried to reassure his audience that "regardless of political views, Ukrainians have demonstrated to one another and the whole world their common responsibility for the fate of their country."[68]

Euromaidan's victory and Russian aggression against Ukraine brought about a stronger attachment of Ukrainian citizens to their state, country, and the inclusively defined nation. At the same time, it caused a noticeable shift to the designation of this nation as "Ukrainians," which virtually stripped the word of its previous ethnic meaning.[69] The New Year's Eve addresses by President Poroshenko reflected this shift: while in the first year he still addressed his audience as "compatriots," he later switched to "Ukrainians" and talked, for instance, about "tens of thousands of Ukrainians who have already taken advantage of the visa-free regime" with the European Union.[70] Contributing to the predominance of the civic meaning of "Ukrainians" in

65. "Novorichne pryvitannia ukraïns′komu narodovi Prezydenta Ukraïny L. Kravchuka," *Holos Ukraïny*, January 3, 1992, 1–2.

66. "Novorichne zvernennia Prezydenta Ukraïny Leonida Kuchmy do ukraïns′koho narodu," *Holos Ukraïny*, January 3, 2001, 1–2.

67. "Novorichne vitannia Yushchenka," *Ukraïns′ka Pravda*, January 1, 2006, at www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2006/01/1/3044851/ (accessed March 28, 2021).

68. "Prezydent pryvitav Ukraïnu z Novym rokom," *Dzerkalo tyzhnia. Ukraïna*, January 1, 2014, https://zn.ua/ukr/POLITICS/prezident-privitav-ukrayinu-z-novim-rokom-134933_.html (accessed July 13, 2021).

69. Kulyk, "National Identity in Ukraine."

70. "Novorichne pryvitannia Poroshenka (povnyi tekst)," *UNIAN*, January 1, 2018, at www.unian.ua/politics/2327181-novorichne-privitannya-poroshenka-povniy-tekst.html (accessed July 13, 2021).

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political and other discourses was the civic meaning of the term's main counterpart, "Russians," which since the beginning of the war came to primarily designate citizens of Russia rather than an ethnic group in Ukraine. This shift started much earlier but was greatly accelerated by the war, which accentuated the need to delimit Ukrainian citizens from those whom many came to perceive as enemies.[71] Actually, the New Year's Eve addresses did not mention Russians or any other ethnic group. They just spoke of "Ukrainians" as though there were no other people in the audience or the country. When Poroshenko's successor, Volodymyr Zelensky, tried to present a clearly inclusive image of the Ukrainian people, he not only retained its already accustomed designation as "Ukrainians," but also presented its diversity as exemplified by speakers of certain languages (Ukrainian, Crimean Tatar, Hungarian, and Russian) rather than by members of certain ethnic groups.[72] He thus expressed the established belief that linguistic distinctions matter more than ethnic ones.

This belief was also revealed in electoral programs of major political parties in subsequent parliamentary elections.[73] Among the many issues voters were promised would be addressed, most parties mentioned something like "the steadfast observance of the rights of all national minorities."[74] This issue, however, seemed to have insufficient priority for any major party to tackle it. Remarkably, those parties raising the issue of the Russian language's status did not relate it to the rights of the eponymous ethnic group, thereby presenting that language as a value for all Ukrainian citizens, similar to how their opponents presented Ukrainian. Some programs clearly portrayed both languages as equally legitimate and valuable; for example, Yanukovych's Party of Regions declared in the 2006 election: "We are in favor of granting the Russian language the status of a second state language in Ukraine. Our slogan is, 'Two languages—one people!'"[75]

It is only after the adoption of the 2012 language law relating the "regional" status of certain languages to their prevalence among the local population that the Party of Region's successor, the Opposition Block, promised in 2014 to "make it possible for communities to determine the status of Russian and other languages as regional languages in places of compact settlement of national minorities."[76] It was a response to the post-Euromaidan

71. Kulyk, "Ukrainian Nationalism since the Outbreak of Euromaidan."

72. "'Davaite kozhen chesno vidpovist′ na vazhlyve pytannia: Khto ia?' Novorichne pryvitannia prezydenta Zelens′koho," *TSN*, December 31, 2019, at https://tsn.ua/politika/davayte-kozhen-chesno-vidpovist-na-vazhlive-pitannya-hto-ya-novorichne-privitannya-prezidenta-zelenskogo-1468050.html (accessed July 13, 2021).

73. For each election, I analyze the programs of those parties that cleared the threshold and, therefore, had their own factions in parliament the following years. I examine all elections since 2002.

74. Peredvyborna prohrama partiï "Blok Petra Poroshenka" (2014 election), at www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2014/wp502pt001f01=910pf7171=202.html (accessed April 16, 2021; access temporarily closed).

75. Peredvyborna prohrama Partiï rehioniv (2006 election), at www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2006/w6p001.html (accessed April 16, 2021; access temporarily closed).

76. Peredvyborna prohrama Politychnoï partiï "Opozytsiinyi blok" (2014 election), at www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2014/wp502pt001f01=910pf7171=199.html (accessed April 16, 2021; access temporarily closed).

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government's perceived intention to abolish the 2012 law that would leave Ukrainian as the only official language in all parts of the country. When the law was indeed abolished in 2018, the next embodiment of Yanukovych's party, the Opposition Platform for Life, announced in the following election that it would "give Ukrainian citizens back the right to speak, communicate, and study in Russian and the languages of national minorities."[77] This subtle change in wording reverted to a special treatment of Russian as more than a minority language, which should be protected for the sake of all citizens. In contrast, the Russian ethnic minority was not explicitly mentioned in any electoral program of these or any other parties that earned the reputation of being "pro-Russian."

Accordingly, the programs shifted over the years from the ethnic to the civic meaning of the word "Ukrainians," or rather, from not using it because of its exclusive connotation to using it in the inclusive sense. Ironically, the first such usage was to be found in the Party of Regions' program in 2012 when the party was in power and thus was inclined to promote an inclusive nation building. While the ruling party bragged about "doing everything for the great goal, the wellbeing of all Ukrainians,"[78] its apparent nationalist opponents from the Svoboda (Freedom) party called for "the use of the Ukrainian language in the media in accordance with the number of Ukrainians," that is, the percentage of the titular nationality as established by the 2001 census.[79] Since 2014, however, the nationally minded parties have embraced the inclusive meaning most enthusiastically, thus contributing to its predominance and making it almost imperative even for other, more ideologically ambivalent or programmatically "anti-nationalist" parties. In the 2019 election, even the Opposition Platform for Life did not see the need to refrain from this word as it announced a "policy of reconciliation and accord that would make it possible to unite Ukrainians from West to East and from North to South, 'sowing' the country together."[80]

A similar shift from the ethnic to civic meaning of the word "Ukrainians," together with the virtual disappearance of references to any other ethnic groups could be observed in other public discourses, particularly that of mass media, which arguably exerts the greatest influence on popular perceptions and usage. While a systematic analysis of any media practice is beyond the scope of this paper, earlier research found the civic meaning of "Ukrainians" already in the early 2000s, starting with reports on sports events in which

77. Peredvyborna prohrama Politychnoï partiï "Opozytsiina platforma—Za zhyttia" (2019 election), at www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2019/wp502pt001f01=919pf7171=393.html (accessed April 16, 2021; access temporarily closed).

78. Peredvyborna prohrama Partiï rehioniv (2012 election), at www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2012/wp502pt001f01=900pf7171=50.html (accessed April 16, 2021; access temporarily closed).

79. Peredvyborna prohrama Vseukraïns′hoho ob′iednannia "Svoboda" (2012 election), at www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2012/wp502pt001f01=900pf7171=71.html (accessed April 16, 2021; access temporarily closed).

80. Peredvyborna prohrama Politychnoï partiï "Opozytsiina platforma—Za zhyttia" (2019 election). www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2019/wp502pt001f01=919pf7171=393.html (accessed April 16, 2021; access temporarily closed).

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Ukrainian athletes competed with representatives of other civic nations.[81] As my observations demonstrate, this meaning has over the years become predominant in both institutional media outlets and ordinary citizens' communication on social media, a shift obviously accelerated by the patriotic upsurge in response to Russian aggression.

Citizens' Identifications by Ethnic Categories

Survey data confirms the low salience of ethnic identity compared to the encompassing national attachment and shift in the meaning of Ukrainian identity from ethnic to ethnonational. This is reflected not only in responses to straightforward questions on the salience and meaning of people's belonging to certain categories but also in the widespread re-identification from Russian to Ukrainian nationality and the embrace of Ukrainian identity by many people also identifying as Russians.

Major poll companies keep asking respondents what their nationality "is," or who they "consider [themselves] to be" by nationality, although they do not usually include responses to this question in their press releases, which are the main source of public knowledge about attitudes and preferences of the population. Those few results that are published demonstrate a steady increase, over the years, of the percentage of respondents who declare their nationality to be Ukrainian and a corresponding decrease in the share of those identifying as Russians.[82] In those surveys where the respondents are allowed to report not only "clear-cut" identities but also the hybrid Ukrainian-Russian one, many respondents declare the latter, even if they are not given any list including this option. A comparison of pre- and post-2014 surveys shows that many people who previously identified as Russians responded to Euromaidan and the war by embracing Ukrainian identity first in addition to, and then instead of, the Russian one. Yet while a sizeable minority of respondents admit to determining their nationality by "the country I live in," and a small portion explain their choice as based on "the language I speak," a large majority still argues that they have merely adopted the nationality of their parents, a clear demonstration of the durable power of Soviet discourse presenting nationality as a hereditary category. Thus, in a 2017 survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), 68 percent of Ukrainians by nationality and 78 percent of Russians by nationality declared their self-designation to be inherited rather than chosen. In the former subsample,

81. Kulyk, *Dyskurs Ukraïns′kykh Mediĭ*, chapter 7.

82. For example, annual monitoring surveys by the Institute of Sociology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine show that while the share of Ukrainians rose from 69 percent in 1992 to 91 percent in 2018, the share of Russians shrank from 24 to only 8 percent. "Rezul′taty natsional′nykh shchorichnykh monitorynhovykh opytuvan′ 1994–2018 rokiv (tablytsi, pidhotovleni doktorom sotsiolohichnykh nauk M.A. Parashchevinym)," in *Ukraïns′ke suspil′stvo: Monitorynh sotsial′nykh zmin* 6 (2018), 521, at i-soc.com.ua/assets/files/monitoring/dodatki2018.pdf (accessed May 12, 2021). It should be noted that the usual sample size of most nationwide surveys does not allow an adequate assessment of the number of people identifying with any nationality other than Ukrainian, Russian, or both Ukrainian and Russian. In most publications of results, people of all other nationalities are subsumed under the category of "other."

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27 percent admitted to making the civic choice, and in the latter, 9 percent said they applied the linguistic criterion.[83]

Further blurring the boundary between the two nationality "groups" is the fact that many of those people who, when they believe it is expected of them, make a clear choice of one nationality category, otherwise also more or less strongly identify with the other. This is clearly demonstrated by responses to various inquiries about the degree of respondents' identification with Ukrainians and Russians. For example, in KIIS' regular omnibus surveys, a question on who the respondents consider themselves by nationality is followed by another question asking those who identified as Ukrainians, Russians, or both to locate their identity on a five-point scale between the two "pure" categories. In the above-mentioned 2017 survey, 10 percent of those respondents who initially chose Ukrainian nationality later reported some degree of Russianness, and an impressive 55 percent of those opting for Russian nationality admitted an additional identification as Ukrainians.[84]

The unequal prevalence of hybrid identifications among people primarily identifying with the two main nationalities is also evident in the results of a 2017 survey by the Razumkov Center. In response to a question on whether they "feel belonging to a certain nationality," 12 percent of respondents declared their belonging to two or more nationalities, and a further six percent said they did not feel any such belonging, thus demonstrating two different responses to the perceived inadequacy of nationality categorization in today's Ukraine. Among people opting for Ukrainian nationality, 10 percent admitted to having a hybrid identification and five percent to feeling detached from all nationalities. But among those respondents who first said they were Russians, fully 30 percent then declared having an additional identification (most likely, Ukrainian) and 20 percent rejected this categorization altogether.[85] It can be assumed that for those people of Russian origin who come to (also) feel Ukrainian, the latter identity has primarily a civic meaning, an assumption confirmed by ethnographic research in various parts of the country.[86] Actually, when surveys inquire about the meaning of Ukrainianness without relating it to the category of nationality, respondents clearly prioritize civic or attitudinal criteria over ethnocultural ones. Already in 1998, in response to the question, "What makes someone a Ukrainian?" 40 percent of respondents opted for the "consciousness of oneself as a Ukrainian," 17 percent indicated the criterion of citizenship, 23 percent highlighted Ukrainian ancestors, and

83. Kulyk, "Shedding Russianness, Recasting Ukrainianness."

84. Calculations based on raw data of a survey conducted in May 2017 for a research project by the Research Initiative on Democratic Reform in Ukraine (ridru.artsrn.ualberta.ca/) with the author's participation. The project was funded by the Kule Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Alberta.

85. Tsentr Razumkova, "Identychnist' hromadian Ukraïny: tsinnisno-orientatsiinyi aspect," in *Osnovni zasady ta shliakhy formuvannia spilnoï identychnosti hromadian Ukraïny* (Kyiv, 2017), 6.

86. Abel Polese and Anna Wylegala, "Odessa and Lvov or Odesa and Lviv: How Important Is a Letter? Reflections on the 'Other' in Two Ukrainian Cities," *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 5 (November 2008): 787–814.

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only four percent the Ukrainian language.[87] Twenty-two years later, another KIIS survey asked the respondents what characteristic "is the most important for telling who is really a Ukrainian and who is not," giving them the choice between two ethnic and two civic criteria. The responses confirmed a clear preference for the civic understanding of Ukrainianness: while 45 percent of respondents prioritized Ukrainian citizenship and 25 percent highlighted permanent residency in Ukraine, only 9 percent defined Ukrainianness primarily by descent and 6 percent by the use of the eponymous language.[88]

Finally, surveys show that Russian ethnic identity is much less salient for respondents than Ukrainian identity, which is both ethnic and national, although the relationship between the two varies by the region. Yaroslav Hrytsak reports the results of a longitudinal study of the hierarchy of identities in predominantly Ukrainian and Ukrainian-speaking L′viv and the ethnically mixed but heavily Russian-speaking Donets′k between 1994 and 2004. The respondents were given a list of twenty-eight different characteristics and asked to indicate all that described them. While in L′viv Ukrainian identity was matched by the local one (both indicated by just above 70 percent of respondents), in Donets′k the local identity was clearly, and increasingly, ahead of the national one (the 2004 figures being 70 and 43 percent, respectively). At the same time, the salience of Ukrainian identity in both cities remained stable, while the Russian one gradually decreased (from 14 to 5 percent in L′viv and from 36 to 21 percent in Donets′k).[89] In 2014, a few months after the outbreak of the war with Russia, a similar question was included in a nationwide survey by KIIS, except that respondents could choose up to three characteristics from a list of twenty. The responses confirmed that Ukrainian identity was the most salient of all in Ukraine as a whole and the western regions in particular, but in the Donbas it lagged behind identifications with one's locality, region and, especially, gender. Moreover, "Ukrainian" turned out to be a much more salient characteristic than "Russian" or, for that matter, "Russian-speaker," with the three characteristics being highlighted, respectively, by 47, 3, and 4 percent of respondents in the entire sample. Remarkably, while 56 percent of those respondents who reported an eponymous nationality chose Ukrainian, only 28 percent of self-declared Russians indicated the respective ethnonym as one of the words that best describes them.[90] This does not necessarily mean that Ukrainian *ethnicity* matters more than the Russian

87. Andrew Wilson, "Elements of a Theory of Ukrainian Ethno-national Identities," *Nations and Nationalism* 8, no. 1 (January 2002): 44.

88. Calculations based on raw data of a survey conducted in October 2020 for the British Academy-funded research project "Identity and Borders in Flux: The Case of Ukraine" (ibifukraine.com) with the author's participation.

89. Yaroslav Hrytsak, "Istoriia dvokh mist: L′viv i Donets′k u porivnial′nii perspektyvi," *L′viv-Donets′k: Sotsiial′ni identychnosti v suchasnii Ukraïni*, special issue of *Ukraïna Moderna* (2007): 49–51. In Donets′k, Soviet identity was initially more salient the than Russian one, but its relevance decreased more drastically, from 40 to 10 percent.

90. Kulyk, "National Identity in Ukraine," 596. In the Donbas, Ukrainian identity became much less salient than it was in Donets′k in 2004, but so did Russian and Russian-speaking identities, hence the three labels were chosen by a roughly equal share of respondents, 11–13 percent. There, too, ethnolinguistic identifications mattered less than civic/territorial ones, except that the latter were local or regional rather than national.

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one, although it may by the case because of the much greater discursive prominence of the former. Rather, Ukrainian *identity* matters more than Russian one because the former is no less national than ethnic.[91] Confirming this interpretation is the fact that 9 percent of Russians by nationality considered "Ukrainian" as one of their best fitting characteristics, which means that they perceived the latter identity as primarily civic and thus compatible with their ethnic identification as Russians.

This paper has demonstrated the inadequacy of the widespread perception of Ukraine as a multiethnic country with clear boundaries between ethnic groups. While several ethnic minorities admittedly retain a rather high degree of group cohesion, the boundary between people formerly categorized as Ukrainians and Russians has almost disappeared. Its dilution began in the Soviet decades with its ethnic mixing and pervasive linguistic Russification in cities, but it is the post-Soviet abandonment of institutional and discursive mechanisms of the reproduction of ethnic distinctions that made a crucial contribution to the low salience of ethnic identities in general and the differences between people of Ukrainian and Russian descent in particular. All major political forces in Ukraine pursued expansive boundary-making strategies aiming at the entire population or at least a certain regional (and, by the same token, linguistic) part. Accordingly, most institutions that used to maintain the boundary between the two main ethnic categories became inoperative, ethnic Russians were virtually erased from public discourse and, over the years, most people of Russian descent either ceased to identify as Russians or ceased to attach high importance to that lingering identity. And while Ukrainian identity has become preeminent, it is nowadays primarily perceived not as pertaining to a particular ethnic group but rather as an encompassing national identity of the entire population, even though it is heavily imbued with the Ukrainian ethnocultural content. This became obvious after the Russian aggression of 2014 (and was vividly confirmed in response to Russia's full-blown invasion in February 2022), but my analysis demonstrates that the gradual change in the patterns of identification by the would-be ethnic categories and in the meanings people attached to them actually began much earlier. To be sure, disagreements about the *content* of Ukrainian identity persist as not all citizens accept the state-promoted predominance of the titular language, the nationalist narrative of the past, or the anti-Russian foreign policy orientation.[92] However, these disagreements are

91. The greater boundary-making utility of Ukrainian nationality and native language compared to their Russian counterparts is also demonstrated by the fact that the identification with the Ukrainian categories has a stronger impact on various identity-related political attitudes than identification with the respective Russian categories. Volodymyr Kulyk and Henry E. Hale, "Imperfect Measures of Dynamic Identities: The Changing Impact of Ethnolinguistic Characteristics on Political Attitudes in Ukraine," *Nations and Nationalism* 28, no. 3 (2022): 841–60.

92. Olexiy Haran and Maksym Yakovlyev, eds. *Constructing a Political Nation: Changes in the Attitudes of Ukrainians during the War in the Donbas*, 2nd ed. (Kyiv, 2017); Kulyk, "Memory and Language"; Henry E. Hale and Volodymyr Kulyk, "Aspirational Identity Politics and Support for Radical Reform: The Case of Post-Maidan Ukraine," *Comparative Politics* 53, no. 4 (July 2021): 713–51.

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by no means perceived as a confrontation or competition between different ethnic groups.

Although the title of this paper provocatively asks *whether* Ukraine is a multiethnic country, analyses of ethnocultural processes should rather aim at clarifying *how* or *in what sense* it is multiethnic. Ukraine's population does not "consist" of clear-cut Ukrainian, Russian, and other ethnic groups, but Ukrainian citizens do differ greatly in their ethnocultural practices and ethnolinguistic identifications. While few people in today's Ukraine view themselves as only Russian and not at all Ukrainian, many more consider Russian their native language, and still many more speak primarily Russian in their everyday life and/or interact with the (however defined) Russian culture more than the Ukrainian one. Moreover, many others variously combine Ukrainian and Russian elements in their linguistic and cultural repertoires. Finally, there are people who identify with other categories and/or practice other languages and cultures than Ukrainian and Russian. Certainly, Ukraine is ethnoculturally diverse, albeit to a lesser extent than many other countries in the world today, and this seems to be a more appropriate designation than "multiethnic."

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