

### Surveys in Ukraine in the Context of the Russian Full-Scale Invasion: Organizational Problems and Methodological Challenges

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Firstly, for the most sensitive questions, methodological experiments should be conducted to assess systematic measurement errors.

Secondly, for these questions, it makes sense to use one of the described methods to increase the sincerity of responses, for example the “imagined acquaintance method.”

#### *About the Author*

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Thirdly, when interpreting survey results, it should be kept in mind that we cannot consider only the statistical significance of differences. We must also take into account the systematic error and only describe those differences that exceed the combined sum of the statistical and systematic errors.

#### COMMENT

## Surveys in Ukraine in the Context of the Russian Full-Scale Invasion: Organizational Problems and Methodological Challenges

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It is evident that in conditions of large-scale military confrontation, both certain democratic rights within a country and the possibilities of sociological research of its society are limited. Below are a few thoughts on the impact of the Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 on the research capabilities of Ukrainian sociology.

When it comes to the study of public opinion in times of war, Ukrainian sociology has faced a number of ontological problems, of which three are discussed below: 1) knowledge about the general population as a historical artefact; 2) deterioration of the ability to reach respondents; 3) no alternative socio-cultural dominant and its derivatives. Let us consider each in more detail.

### The General Population as a “Historical Artefact”

Our information about the general Ukrainian population is rather a convention of the sociological community based on the available data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (‘Ukrstat’) than actual reliable knowledge. This was mostly the case before the war. That is why sociologists were looking forward to the next census. The last census—and the first in independent Ukraine—was in 2001, and a census planned for 2023 was not carried out because of the war; no census is allowed during martial law and in the first six months after its end.

Now this convention on the general population has turned into a historical artefact, leaving no other alternatives for the sociological community to rely on when it comes to representative surveys. Basically, the “embalming” of the demographic structure from the past works satisfactorily due to a number of pragmatic reasons: 1) the changes in public opinion compared to the period before the large-scale invasion are too strong and comprehensive for systematic errors to distort them significantly; 2) we compare samples that follow the same demographic determinants, i.e., we use an analytical approach to longitudinal analysis—we use, in a sense, “pseudo-panels”; 3) when using certain research designs and methodological approaches, it is quite justified to ignore the demographic structure of the general population that existed before the full-scale invasion.

In general, this unusual situation for stable societies (i.e., those not at war) indicates that the general population can be not only a statistical population, but also an analytical one. The statistical population, in this case, is the current population that we are able to cover with our research. With “analytical population” we mean a typologized population constructed on the basis of available data for a specific research purpose (for example, to track changes in society). This analytical approach opens up additional opportunities for us to understand the dynamics of social phenomena and processes in Ukrainian society.

### Respondent Coverage Capabilities

In my personal opinion, under current conditions, the ability to reach respondents—if we are considering surveys that claim to have a sufficient degree of sample data reliability—is determined by the functionalities of CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) surveys with random generation of mobile numbers. Obviously, this approach leads to under-coverage of certain categories of respondents (for example, residents of rural areas with poor mobile connectivity or people that still use only landline phones), and, as a result, creates objective limitations in studying their opinions on socially important issues. However, such categories constitute only a small minority of the general population, and the inability to reach them in the study should not fundamentally distort the results of nationwide surveys.

### Socio-Cultural Dominance

The socio-cultural dominant reflects the prevailing moods in society and functions as a filter through which public opinion is represented. The consequences of a socio-cultural dominant are self-censorship of respondents, narrowing of socially permissible research topics, and superficial discursive uniformity. Due to this socio-cultural dominant, completely neutral research, in the academic sense, can potentially become a cause of social disturbance or conflict.

In addition, methodological challenges arise from the fact that in the current situation, with the security risk posed by the hostilities, it is too difficult to carry out face-to-face studies or surveys based on questionnaires for self-completion (again, if interviewers are involved). And although CATI largely compensates for these shortcomings, it significantly limits the scope of

the sociological toolkit and the characteristics of the questions due to direct contact (and its non-alternativeness) between the interviewer and the respondent, which may cause excessive caution of the respondent. Accordingly, an urgent methodological challenge is to create new survey designs that would combine wide coverage of the population with the possibility of using sociological questionnaires that include a sufficient number of coding items and have no restrictions on the specifics of the questions due to their sensitivity.

The experience of the all-Ukrainian survey of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 2023 indicates that one of the forms of implementation of such surveys could be a mixed mode design consisting of two consecutive stages: CATI -> CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview). The first (very short) stage involves recruiting a respondent for the survey and recording their basic demographic information. At the second stage, the respondent receives a link to an online questionnaire with basic questions. This design allows for both increasing the scope of the toolkit and weakening the effect of social desirability of answers. The problematic part of this design is the insufficient involvement of the oldest age group of respondents (70 years and older) in the study.

### Implications

Thus, in the near future, conducting reliable all-Ukrainian surveys will depend on the following conditions: 1) accurate data on the demographic structure of the Ukrainian population; 2) controlled narrowing of the general population of the study; and 3) overcoming the obstacles of socio-cultural dominance in obtaining responses.

#### *About the Author*

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