

Media and Political Information Environment in Ukraine

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The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 triggered major changes across Ukrainian society, reshaping its formal and informal institutions, including the media landscape and the way media is produced and consumed. It affected the media sphere in every aspect - from audience behavior and their consumption habits, to the legal frameworks of media. This paper analyzes the supply of political news - identifying on which platforms audiences rely and how the news are presented. It touches on the subject of news quality, impartiality, credibility, and the role of regulatory oversight. It explores media ownership and concentration, particularly in legacy media and the rise of social platforms. It addresses audience and content fragmentation, investigating political polarization in the media sphere. It examines the spread and perception of misinformation. Lastly, it dives into inequalities in political knowledge and how much the political knowledge an average Ukrainian has.

One of the most prominent and controversial developments was the creation of the “United News” national telethon. In the early days of the invasion, the Ukrainian government initiated an agreement among major broadcasters, including the public service broadcaster “Suspilne,” the parliamentary channel “Rada,” and leading commercial channels such as ICTV, 1+1, Inter, and Ukraine 24. Each participating member was assigned a six-hour block of airtime, with the goal of delivering continuous, centralized coverage of the invasion. Initially, it was praised as a successful tool for combating Russian propaganda efforts and psychological operations against Ukrainian citizens. However, as the war continued, the telethon became an object of critique. Journalists and international organisations, like Reporters Without Borders, have raised serious concerns about the telethon’s impact on freedom of speech and influence on professional journalist standards in Ukrainian media.

Another notable change in the legal dimension of media is the law “On Media” that was passed in 2023. It also created a register of media, registration in which is voluntary for media, with the exception of printed media during wartime, being obliged to get registered. Being part of the register allows media to participate in “co-regulating” bodies, which connect independent media governing bodies and government regulatory bodies like the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council. This co-regulating body must develop rules for the creation and dissemination of information, criteria for determining which resources are considered online media, criteria for defining thematic television and radio channels, and

establish quotas for national content for such media. They must also define criteria for classifying information as harmful to the physical, mental, or moral development of children, approve rules for broadcasting on days of remembrance, define criteria for advertising information that may be considered harmful, approve an action plan for the accessibility of services to persons with disabilities, develop recommendations on the share of European products, etc. Once these codes, criteria, and rules have been created, they will be submitted to the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council for approval and then signed by media entities. The law also expanded the ban on usage of "audiovisual media services" of aggressor states i.e., Russia, broadcasting platforms that use the language of aggressor states by default and whose rules and policies are based on the national legislation of the aggressor state. Despite online media being the most popular form of media, there is no legal definition of what online media actually is.

Supply of political information. The 2024 report by OPIORA, based on a survey of 2011 Ukrainians, revealed that social media remain the most popular source of news in Ukraine, used by 73.4% of respondents. The other Internet media (excluding social media) ranked second with 60%. TV usage has seen a significant drop to 42.7%, down 20% from 2023. Radio (22%) and print media (12%) continued their decline of 11.7% and 6%, respectively. Gender differences in media consumption can also be observed: women are more likely to rely on social media (74.9% vs. 71.7% of men) and television (45.4% vs. 39.5% of men), while men prefer non-social media online sources (65.1% vs. 55.2% of women) and radio (25.4% vs. 19.2% of women). The drop in social media use is more pronounced among men (down by 9.3%), whereas the decline among women is not significant. What was significant was the difference in media consumption by age. Young Ukrainians have traditionally leaned towards social media and other online sources and have remained the predominant users of it. In 2024, 93.3% of people in the age group 18-29 and 85.3% of the 30-39 group used social media for getting news, which is 5% lower than 2023. Throughout that year, the decline continued with older groups too: 81.8% of people aged 40-49 (down from 87%) and 71.5% of those in the 50-59 group (down from 80.1%) relied on social media. Among the age group of 60-69, however, media consumption habits remained stable: 64% of them use social media for news (down 2% since 2023). For online news sources excluding social media platforms, people aged 30-39 are the most active audience (70.4%), followed closely by the 18-29 group (67%) and those aged 40-49 (65.4%). Internet media usage stays relatively strong among those aged 50-59 (60.7%) and 60-69 (51.6%), though it drops significantly to 33.6% for Ukrainians over 70. Television, by contrast, is strongly unappealing to younger audiences and more appealing to older audiences. Only 18.9% of people aged 18-29 and 21.1% of those 30-39 rely on TV for news. But it is the leading news source among those aged 50 and above: 51.2% of the 50-59 group, 65.2% of people aged 60-69, and 77.1% of those over 70 choose TV (OPIORA, 2024). The other 2024 survey from Democratic Initiatives Fund of 2001 people shows that: The main sources of daily information are Youtube (41%), local Telegram channels (39%), national Telegram channels (37%), Facebook (36%), other people (35%), "United

News” national telethon (38%), satellite TV (17%) and radio (13%). Ukrainians receive messages from the authorities about the events of the war and current events in the country in general mostly from the government's Telegram channels (36%), Facebook accounts of the authorities and their representatives (22%), speeches of government representatives on television and radio (19%), YouTube channels of the authorities and their representatives (13%), government channels on WhatsApp (3%) and government accounts on X (2.5%). 16% of respondents in the survey stated that they almost never see messages from the authorities (Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи», 2024).

As we see more Ukrainians abandoning legacy media in favour of online alternatives, the question is raised about the quality of news. Firstly, we examine one of the most commonly criticized sources - the “United News” telethon. Detector Media, which analyzed every day of telethon released a report in 2024 in which they stated that they will be changing the methodology of their analysis, because they believe that harmful tendencies that they observed throughout every past report continued to reappear, thus they won't be reporting on them anymore as they deem it useless. The tendencies observed are the following: first, telethon has shifted from being a media platform to acting as a government propaganda tool, with clear signs of censorship - evident in the removal of opposition voices like European Solidarity party (after the public broadcaster “Suspilne” withdrew to telethon and up to the writing of the report the members of European Solidarity appeared exactly 0 times); second, editorial teams have increasingly focused on promoting government messaging; third, serious violations of professional standards have become common; fourth, the telethon disregards public criticism and viewer expectations, also relying heavily on Telegram and other social media as sources (Куляс and Лигачова, 2024). Regarding Ukrainians own assumptions on quality of the news, i.e. trust in media, again, 2024 ОПОРА report revealed that in 2024, Ukrainians placed the most trust not in legacy media, but in social media (47.3%), followed by the broader online sources excluding social media (43%), and only then television (34.1%). However, this marks a significant reversal from the upward trend in trust observed in 2023. Across all sources, trust is now on the decline. More notably, a growing share of the population reports not trusting any source at all, rising from 5.2% in 2022 to 7.7% in 2023, and reaching a concerning 15.2% in 2024. Television has suffered one of the sharpest drops in public confidence, falling from 61.1% in 2023 to just 34.1% in 2024. Radio experienced a similar fate, with trust levels nearly halved—from 41% to 24.2%. Print media also saw a significant dip, with only 18% of respondents expressing trust in 2024, down from 30.3% the previous year. Social media remains the single most trusted news source, but its credibility is also slipping. In 2023, 60% of Ukrainians trusted news from social platforms; by 2024, that number had fallen to 47.3%. Meanwhile, the Internet outside of social media is trusted by 43% of respondents, just 4.3 percentage points behind social platforms. Although trust in this category has also declined (down 5.8% from 2022), it registered the smallest drop among all sources. Overall, women placed higher trust in the media than men. Among women, social media is the most trusted source, with 52.8% having trust in it. Men,

however, are more inclined to trust online sources that are not social media, with 43.1% marking it as the most reliable source. For women, the trust in non-social media online sources is in second place (43%), while for men, that place is held by social media (40.6%). Despite all that, trust in all media sources has declined for both men and women compared to the year 2023. The most notable drops in trust can be observed in television (down 29% for men and 25.4% for women), radio (a drop of 20.1% among men and 14.1% among women), and social media (falling by 18.4% for men and 8.1% for women).

Since, by constitution, elections in Ukraine during wartime cannot be held, political campaigning is rather limited (ОПОРА, 2024). Detector Media's overview of its own reports claimed that in 2024, overall political advertising, political pressure, and bribery in media decreased, even in the criticized telethon “United News”. They attribute it to several factors, notably: new legislation - the Law on Media, donors have become more demanding compared to 2022, and that people better understand media threats (Довженко, 2024).

Overall, Ukrainian media is heavily influenced by oligarchic groups.

Regarding the media situation in Ukraine, Ethical Journalism Network report on Ukrainian media reports the following analyst quote: “There are different categories of oligarchs – national calibre, local, regional. The person who defines the policy of the media is the one who pays the bills”. The report also claims that up until the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, 76% of the television audience were watching the channels directly or indirectly controlled by oligarchs (EJN, 2022: 11). Reporters Without Borders report on Ukraine states: “Even though part of the media is controlled by oligarchs, their influence diminished after 24 February 2022, and the state became a central player in the media landscape, independent outlets are able to provide reliable information and combat disinformation”. It should also be noted that in 2021, the parliament passed the “deoligarchisation” law, which restricted oligarchs' ownership of the media. Although we, as some other critics, consider that law to be largely unsuccessful in that regard, as it ultimately resulted in transferring the ownership of the media to the hands of people with direct ties to their oligarchic owners. Regarding the popularity of media groups, according to Marketing Media Review, 1+1 media's own and partner TV channels: 1+1 Ukraine, TET, 2+2, 1+1 Marathon, PLUSPLUS, Bigudi, KVARTAL TV, and Comedy Central - topped the media group popularity ranking with a 26.7% share. The channels of StarLightMedia Group - Novy Channel, STB, ICTV2, ICTV - were in 2nd place and garnered a total share of 26.4% (-4.1% compared to December). Inter Media Group is consistently in third place, but in January it showed an increase of 0.4% and ended the month with a 2.8% share (MMR, 2024). 1+1 media used to be owned by oligarchs Igor Kolomoisky and Igor Surkis, as well as TV presenter Oksana Marchenko, who is the wife of a pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarch, Viktor Medvedchuk. Now the group's ultimate beneficiary is Svitlana Mishchenko, head of the Viasat satellite platform, who owns 57% shares. In addition to her, 24% belong to the head of the media group, Yaroslav Pakholchuk, and another 19% to Viktor Skiba (Данькова, 2024). StarLightMedia Group is owned by an oligarch and a billionaire Viktor Pinchuk, and

his wife Olena Pinchuk. 24 Channel, which has the most subscribers on YouTube out of all TV channels on YouTube, is part of TRK “Lux”, owned by Kateryna Kit-Sadova, wife of Lviv mayor Andrii Sadovyi (Васьковська, 2024). InterMediaGroup shareholders are oligarch Dmitry Firtash, with a 36% stake, former Security Service head Valery Khoroshkovsky, with a 45% stake, and Serhiy Lyovochkin, oligarch and member of the banned Opposition Platform – For Life party, with a 9% stake. TV channels owned by former president Petro Poroshenko - “5 Channel” and “Pryamyi” were sold to the media holding “Vilni Media”. According to Forbes Ukraine, this holding company is located at the same address as the Pryamiy TV channel, and its co-owners include members of parliament from Poroshenko's European Solidarity party: Iryna Gerashchenko, Viktoria Syumar, Volodymyr Arieiev, Iryna Friz, and five media representatives from Channel 5 and Pryamiy. Each of those holds a 9% stake in Vilni Media. The remaining 5% belongs to “Telekanal Pryamy” LLC, and the other 5% to NBM LLC. Basically, the control of those channels remained in Poroshenko’s hands, since the shareholders are members of his party (Крицька and Красніков, 2021). Although “Suspilne” is a state media, its independent supervisory board allowed it to be regarded as one of the most reliable medias in the country, for example by Ethical Journalism Network. EJV reported that during the 2019 election campaign Suspilne was the only media that had no signs of hidden political advertising (EJV, 2022:18)

Despite their popularity, Telegram channels aren’t usually legally considered as media (even though they can be registered as such), and thus, they do not need to disclose their ownership. For those reasons, a number of popular Telegram channels' authors remain anonymous. Report from ЧЕХО analyzed Ukrainian-oriented Telegram channels with over 100.000 subscribers, and their ties to the current MPs, which usually manifest in reposts of particular MPs and alleged political advertisement. They also identified “Ukrainian cluster” channels as well as “bridge” propaganda channels between Ukrainian and Russian segments of Telegram, which, by the claim of the Security Service of Ukraine, were coordinated by Russian special services. Although, allegedly, some of those like “Легитимний”, “Резидент”, have close ties to current or former MPs of the ruling party “Servant of the People”. It should also be noted that despite their recognizability, the actual number of subscribers of those particular channels might be much less than the official numbers show, due to the artificial boost of the subscriber count by fake accounts. Members of the ruling party also have ties not only to this one but to different clusters of channels, for example, “Труха Україна”, which was created by Kharkiv businessman Maxym Lavrinenko. “Труха Україна” (2,7 million subscribers) is the most popular news Telegram channel in Ukraine, which also has almost all major cities represented by regional Telegram channels in its network. The report also identified a cluster of channels of deputies of the “European Solidarity” party led by former president Petro Poroshenko, which are the Telegram channels of actual TV channels that were previously owned by Poroshenko (Максимова, 2023).

According to the Razumkov Centre, in May 2023, the share of supporters of the democratic regime increased to 73%, while the share of supporters of

authoritarianism decreased to 9.5%. The share of Ukrainian citizens who consider the democratic political system to be “rather good” or “very good” to 93% in 2023. The share of those who consider the democratic political system to be “very good” has increased more (from 36% to 57%). When asked to choose between freedom and equality, 75% of respondents choose freedom. However, when given the choice between freedom and security, Ukrainians are more likely to choose security (54.5%, while 44% choose freedom). When assessing their political views in the left-right coordinate system on a scale from 1 to 10 (“left-right”), Ukrainians give an average score of 5.8. The political position of the majority of Ukrainians can be characterized as “centrist” (68% of respondents rated it between 4 and 7). The share of respondents who believe that “Ukraine will be a highly developed, democratic, influential European country in the future” rose to 64%. The share of those who believe that Ukraine will be a country on a special path of development (like the Chinese way) has also increased slightly to 16%. Residents of the Western (75%) and Central (67%) regions most often believe that “Ukraine will be a highly developed, democratic, influential European country in the future” (59% in the Southern region, 47% in the Eastern region). In the Eastern region, the share of respondents who believe that “Ukraine will be a country that follows a special path of development (like China)” is higher than in other regions (22.5%, while in other regions it is 14-15%). When asked whether they would like to see the return of the Soviet era, 83.5% responded negatively, while 5% responded positively, while before the invasion in 2017 whole 21% of participants answered positively. Only 12% of residents of the Eastern region, 5% of the Central region, 4% of the Southern region, and 0.7% of residents of the Western region expressed a desire to restore the order of the Soviet era. It should also be noted that those results should not be seen as an evidence of Ukrainians starting to adhere more to a unified democratic liberal or other ideology, but rather as that more Ukrainians base their views on the same vague values compared to the past, since the study does not go into detail of the actual policy preferences (Разумков Центр, 2023). Since politics in Ukraine is more personalized, it’s important to look into the approval and disapproval ratings of concrete political figures. In May 2025, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology conducted a survey measuring the level of trust in individual Ukrainian politicians among 1010 respondents. 7% of respondents approved of Oleksii Arestovych (formerly a member of the Office of the President) and 79% disapprove, Yuri Boiko (leader of now banned pro-russian party Opposition Platform – For Life) got 7% approval rating and 72% disapproval, president Volodymyr Zelenskyy got 74% approval rating and 22% disapproval, Kyiv mayor Vitalii Klychko got 43% of approval and 47% of disapproval, former president Petro Poroshenko got 25% approval rating and 70% disapproval, volunteer and member of “Holos” party Serhii Prytula got 50% approval 38% disapproval, Dmytro Razumkov (former member of “Servant of the People) got 27% approval 37% disapproval rating and 34% of respondents didn’t know him, head of “Batkivshchyna” Yulia Tymoshenko got 14% approval and 80% disapproval rating, Oleksii Honcharenko (member of European Solidarity) got 27% approval rate 32% disapproval and 25% didn’t know him. It concludes that on average, respondents trust three out of ten listed

political figures. It also reveals the intricacy of the rivalry between Zelenskyy and Poroshenko supporters. Despite the polarization, 73% of those who trust Poroshenko also trust Zelenskyy. Conversely, 25% of Zelenskyy's supporters also express trust in Poroshenko. Altogether, 19% of Ukrainians living in government-controlled territories trust both leaders simultaneously. Many citizens hold more complex views than the party officials tend to present and are often placing confidence in leaders from different political groups (KIIS, 2025).

A December 2025 analysis of the 23 most popular online Ukrainian media by the Mass Information Institute revealed that the balance of opinions and points of view was 96% among the monitored media, which is the most stable indicator out of all the researched indicators; its fluctuations remained within one percent throughout the recent years. The level of reliability standard was 95% on average among all the monitored media, which increased from 2024, 92.6%, which was attributed to a number of media using AI-generated images to illustrate news in 2024. Most of the unreliable news, however, is non-political articles with the purpose of entertainment. The standard of separating facts from opinions increased to 89.3% from 83.4% in 2023. The report claims that the media became less prone to fearmongering and manipulation on war topics, but they continue to “make unattributed assumptions and value judgments, as well as sexist statements, in particular in the headlines” (Баркап, 2025). Their July 2024 analysis of the 5 most popular Telegram channels in Ukraine concluded that most of the content on Telegram channels that is high-quality comes from Ukrainian and Western online media sources, but most original posts on Telegram channels avoid clear references to sources. However, original publications are the rarest type of content on the Telegram channels studied. For example, the report says that the most popular one, “TPYXA” has approximately 15% commissioned posts. At the same time, only half of them are marked as such. Half of the channel's posts, with the exception of commissioned ones, are messages with links to popular Ukrainian and foreign media outlets, although the channel also uses dubious sources of information, as well as unnamed sources (Баркап, 2024). In academia, the study of misinformation and fake news in media predominantly focuses on Russian propaganda and its influence in particular countries.

The degree of inequality in political knowledge is a rather unexplored topic in Ukraine, especially in the media aspect of it. However, there is a United Nations Development Programme and Kyiv International Sociology Institute report on “Civic awareness in Ukraine”, which was based on a public opinion poll of 2000 respondents, 3 focus groups, and 2 expert focus groups. It concluded that civic knowledge of Ukrainians is “not up to par”. It argued that the reason for the low awareness of the population about the personalities and work of representatives was a lack of a system of feedback between MPs and voters, neglect by MPs of their responsibilities to inform the public about their activities, and insufficient media coverage of MPs' work. 39% of Ukrainians could not answer the question about citizens' responsibilities to the state, 40% of Ukrainians think that the source of power in Ukraine is the President of Ukraine, although, according to Article 5 of the Constitution of Ukraine, the source of power is the people (41% of Ukrainians named

that correctly). Regarding the ability to name the deputy who was elected to the Verkhovna Rada and the city council in their constituency, only 14% and 11% of Ukrainians, respectively, could do that. The report claims that Ukrainians tend to have rather low consistency in their views: more than half of those surveyed who chose tolerance as one of their values considered it unacceptable to live next door to with members of the LGBT community (UNDP, 2016).

In conclusion, the ongoing war has made significant changes in political information supply, with digital platforms overtaking the legacy media, yet it also raised concerns about the disinformation and fake news. While regulatory reforms and institutional efforts aimed to uphold news quality and state resilience, declining public trust and growing reliance on new unregulated sources created new challenges for Ukrainian media sphere. Despite efforts to limit oligarchic control, it seems media ownership remains concentrated. At the same time Ukraine's media system is maintaining relative unity in crisis and remains somewhat free and effective, especially considering Ukraine remains a country of active warfare.

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