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Wartime Democracy: the Evolution of the Ukrainian Case in the Context of Russian Military Aggression

Before the large-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, Ukraine had developed key democratic institutions such as a multi-party system, regular elections, and a vibrant civil society. These democratic attributes have developed alongside defective processes such as corruption, political polarization, the influence of independent power centers, the entrenchment of categorical inequality, and the segregation of trust networks from politics. These processes have prevented the consolidation of democracy. Charles Tilly's method of process tracing provides an analytical triad that has rarely been applied to the analysis of wartime processes affecting democracy and the long-/short-term durability of hybrid political regimes. The imposition of martial law on February 24, 2022, though vital for state defense and constitutional stability, immediately disrupted Ukraine's normal democratic processes. This stressed Ukraine's democracy that is still-forming, forcing a national security focus and potentially affecting democratic mechanisms. The urgency and opacity of wartime decisions may have created a space for abuse and thus undermined public confidence in democratic processes.The article examines the long-term prospects for Ukraine's democratic development, highlighting their correlation with the geopolitical outcomes of the war.

Keywords
Wartime democracy, Hybrid political regime, War in Ukraine, Process tracing

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Introduction

The survival of unconsolidated democracies under the existential threat of full-scale war remains a critically under-theorized area in political science. Following the large-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, Ukraine was forced to impose martial law – a measure vital for national defense and constitutional stability, yet one that inherently restricts regular democratic processes. This creates a profound theoretical and practical tension: how does a state, facing existential military aggression, balance the necessity of centralized wartime control with the risk of severe de-democratization?

While existing academic literature thoroughly examines hybrid political regimes (Diamond, 2002; Mufti, 2018) and the phenomenon of the democratic deficit (Held, 2004), the specific dynamics of "wartime democracy" demand a distinct analytical approach. In Ukraine, the urgency and opacity of wartime decision-making create spaces for potential institutional abuse; however, these top-down restrictions are simultaneously counterweighted by robust civic mobilization and external pressures for Euro-Atlantic integration. Therefore, the key research problem of this article is to determine how these competing forces interact. By applying Charles Tilly's process-oriented approach, this study analyzes whether Ukraine's wartime conditions are acting as a catalyst for ultimate democratic consolidation or creating a vector for long-term autocratic regression.

Wartime democracy in a post-communist space is a novel concept. While literature extensively covers post-democracy (Crouch, 2004; Miller, 2020), neo-democracy (Beyme, 2018), hybrid regimes (Diamond, 2002; Mufti, 2018), and democratic deficits (Held, 2004), the persistence of unconsolidated democracies during active military conflict remains studied sporadically.

Tilly's concept of democracy is grounded in a process-oriented approach (Tilly, 2000). He argues that this approach focuses not so much on the basic criteria of democracy, such as effective participation, equality of the vote in the decision-making phase, informed understanding, control of the agenda, or the involvement of citizens in political decisions (Dahl, 1989), but on the necessary processes of democracy. Thus, the main approach of this research is the process analysis approach, as conceived by C. Tilly, applied in the research on wartime democracy and hybrid regimes.

The primary contribution of this article is both empirical and

conceptual. Conceptually, it applies Charles Tilly's analytical framework of process tracing to bridge the gap between theories of hybrid regimes and wartime governance. Empirically, it provides a comparative analysis of expert assessments collected during pre-war (2020–2021) and wartime (2025–2026) phases to track shifts in institutional and civic behavior. In order to operationalize this, the article tests the following narrowed hypothesis: in an unconsolidated democracy facing existential war, top-down de-democratizing measures (e.g., centralization for military security) do not inevitably lead to an autocratic collapse; rather, they are mitigated by bottom-up civic mobilization and external EU conditionality, resulting in a complementary rather than zero-sum relationship between democratization and de-democratization. The article contains five sections. First, it defines "wartime democracy". Second, it outlines the research design. Third, it analyzes Ukraine's institutional effectiveness and civil society under martial law alongside expert data. Fourth, it discusses hypothesis testing and scenario modeling. Finally, it provides a conclusion on the durability of Ukraine's political regime.

1. Theoretical Framework

Z. Brzezinski famously said that "Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine under its control, it automatically becomes one" (Brzezinski, 1997). Therefore, a valid point could be made that Russia is interested in Ukraine being dependent, unstable, or even a failed state. This is Russia's strategic position. A less democratic or even undemocratic Ukraine is easier to control through its proxies.

The main reasons for Russia's aggression towards Ukraine – political and socio-economic – are intertwined from a historical perspective. Russia, although its position is changing, constantly emphasizes that Ukraine and Russia share the same history (Putin, 2021), and one can also refer to Z. Brzezinski's oft-quoted thought about Ukraine. Thus, Russia's motives for promoting such narratives are self-evident. Ukraine's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community would not only deal an unprecedented blow to Russia's imperial plans but would also create a template for transition to democracy, an example that would pose an existential threat to Putin's authoritarian model. This partly explains why the Kremlin launched military aggression in 2014 and full-scale invasion in 2022 and highlights Ukraine's key role in the

confrontation with Russia. Having demonstrated a relatively successful post-communist democratic transition, Ukraine now faces the profound challenge of sustaining these institutions under martial law, potentially emerging as a premier model of democratic resilience.

In order to construct a robust analytical framework for "wartime democracy", this article synthesizes three foundational perspectives: Robert Dahl's institutional criteria, Joseph A. Schumpeter's elite competition, and Charles Tilly's process tracing. Dahl establishes the normative baseline of democracy through institutional guarantees such as effective participation, equality of voting, and citizen involvement in decision-making. However, in a wartime context, these democratic ideals inevitably clash with the pragmatic realities of what Schumpeter defines as the perpetual "struggle for power" (Schumpeter, 2010), as political and military elites seek to centralize authority for state survival. To understand how a political regime navigates the tension between Dahl's democratic criteria and Schumpeter's competitive power dynamics during a crisis, this framework relies on Tilly's process-oriented approach. Tilly's process tracing allows us to move beyond static definitions, analyzing the dynamic chain of events where the initial conditions of a crisis – such as the imposition of martial law – interact with internal and external factors to produce specific democratic or de-democratic outcomes over time.

Building upon this synthesis, it is necessary to explicitly distinguish the concept of "wartime democracy" from standard emergency governance. Emergency governance typically refers to a temporary, constitutionally bounded suspension of certain rights to manage an acute, short-term crisis (e.g., natural disasters or localized unrest). In contrast, wartime democracy is defined here as a durable, hybrid political condition operating under prolonged, existential military conflict. In a wartime democracy, the state enforces martial law and legally restricts certain democratic rights for the sake of constitutional stability, yet crucially maintains a functional system of institutional equilibrium. Unlike an autocratic "regime of control" or temporary emergency governance, a wartime democracy relies on active checks and balances – increasingly upheld by non-state actors, civic watchdogs, and external conditionality – to prevent the centralized centralization of executive power from permanently dismantling pluralistic governance.

Recent works of scholars corroborate the need to conceptually separate wartime democracy from temporary emergency governance,

particularly given the heightened risks of democratic backsliding. As Thompson and Volgy (2023) emphasize, while systemic crises often give executives the opportunity to centralize power and curtail institutional checks, they simultaneously create windows of opportunity for democratic resilience and adaptation. During high-intensity conflicts, this tension is most acutely visible in civil-military relations. Research by Whitmore and Renz (2026) emphasizes that when leaders invoke martial law or emergency powers, "the resulting civil-military dynamics often become the decisive factor in whether executive centralization results in permanent democratic backsliding or stabilized civilian control". In the specific context of post-2022 Ukraine, comparative analyses of democratic accountability demonstrate that "wartime necessity forces a temporary suspension of certain normative legal obligations, fundamentally altering how oversight mechanisms function compared to peacetime institutional standards" (Ivanec, 2026). If left unchecked, the prolonged use of such emergency mandates create a global risk of "constitutional degradation", where in the systematic bypass of normal democratic procedures erodes pluralism under the guise of legal formalism. However, emerging literature on democratic resilience demonstrates that these top-down autocratic pressures can be effectively absorbed and countered when civil society and social movements maintain persistent civic mobilization to check executive overreach (Nord et al., 2025).

Wartime democracy in itself can be used to describe the unique and complex situation of a state that is both democratic and at war, especially when facing an existential threat. In the context of modern Ukraine, "wartime democracy" describes the political system and society operating in a country where a state of war that restricts democratic freedoms and rights is in force, facing the needs of undemocratic governance that may escalate into authoritarianism. Nevertheless, the degree of democracy in the political system and society is ambiguous and does not automatically imply the consolidation of democracy as such.

In terms of constitutional stability, which is usually a justification for restrictions on democracy, the country at war still needs a comprehensive system of institutional equilibrium. Much like a thermostat maintains a steady temperature, checks and balances maintain a political "middle ground" by preventing any one faction from swinging the pendulum too far in one direction. According to Mykola Nazarov, "there is a large body of empirical evidence to

suggest that while wars are usually started by autocracies, they are usually won by parliamentary republics, which are able to take account of different strategies for waging war, listen to the views of the political opposition and take account of public opinion" (Nazarov, 2024).

From the historical perspective, there are many instances of wartime democracies in the West, but not many examples of democracies at war when the country is constantly shelled both conventionally and vocally.

First example relatively often is drawn from United Kingdom during World War II. Here the UK postponed its scheduled general elections of 1940 due to World War II, maintaining a wartime coalition government. A general election was held only in 1945, once military victory was secured, and governance could return to democratic norms (International IDEA, 2025). Britain faced continuous bombardment, but there was no annexation or occupation, nor occupying land forces present on the ground. Therefore, wartime democracy existed, but only to the presumably lesser extent of physical danger. These processes allowed to take a grasp at what a wartime democracy could look like, but the example of United States gives us a more detailed look at even deeper processes of "checks and balances" and how various power centers maintained the functionality of democracy during war.

Second instance is United Stated during Civil War (1861-1865). Abraham Lincoln's administration is often studied for how it pushed the boundaries of executive power to preserve the Union. A. Lincoln famously suspended the writ of habeas corpus, allowing the government to detain "disloyal persons" without trial (US War Department, 1862). Other scholars have also recognized that during the 1864 the U.S. held a presidential election in the middle of a civil war. Lincoln maintained that the democratic process was non-negotiable. The President argued that, as L. T. Balsamo pointed out, "canceling the election would grant the Confederacy a symbolic victory, effectively proving that the rebellion had succeeded in dismantling the very machinery of the American republic" (Balsamo, 2001). Michael J. Forsyth reached the conclusion that it was also an example of soldiers actively exercising their right to vote during stationing in battlefield. Having granted soldiers the right to vote, the states had to set up a mechanism by which they could exercise this privilege. Many states sent election officials south to the armies in the field, setting up polling stations with their states' regiments. All qualified soldiers were then allowed to cast their votes (Forsyth, 2001). Just like that, a precedent for deployed soldiers

from overseas to vote was formed.

More contemporary example is Israel. It maintains emergency regulations that date back to the British Mandate before country's independence in 1948, yet it features a highly robust (and often fractious) multi-party parliamentary system, a relatively free press, and an independent judiciary that frequently rules against the military. Dating back to the Six-Day War or more recent conflicts such as October 7 of 2023, the country often forms broad coalition governments to ensure political stability during military operations. During the recent and ongoing operations in Iran, there is an observed surge in national unity. According to David Pollock, "it is likely a result of the "rally 'round the flag" phenomenon, which is a typical response to high-stakes conflict—further strengthened by the IDF's military achievements" (Pollock, 2023). However, because levels of social cohesion and government trust remain heavily tied to political identity, this solidarity may be fragile. There is a real risk that once the military campaign concludes, a return to polarized political rhetoric will cause these metrics to slide back into the negative trends seen previously.

Concentrating power might seem necessary during an invasion, but it is a sub-optimal strategy for long-term success. Healthy governance relies on political plurality and the right to speak freely. Even when wartime laws necessitate certain restrictions, the ability of dissenting voices to suggest superior solutions is what prevents leadership from making unchecked mistakes.

2. Research Design

In the context of this article, the analysis of political development processes in Ukraine examines a chain of events or decision-making processes in which the initial conditions of a case become its outcomes. The cause-and-effect relationship linking the independent variable and the outcome is broken down and divided into small steps or, in our case, deconstructed across time and internal and external factors.

Therefore, the case study method dominates the article. The main case analysis focuses on Ukraine's political development during its ongoing wartime period as well as in the context of constructing durability scenarios of the regime. This is based on the uniqueness and relevance of Ukraine as a case study. As mentioned, Ukraine

symbolizes the post-communist metamorphosis of the region, and due to its chosen pro-democratic geopolitical direction, it constantly faces internal and external challenges.

This study employs a qualitative, longitudinal research design utilizing Charles Tilly's process-tracing method to analyze the evolution of Ukraine's political regime. In order to evaluate the causal mechanisms linking martial law to democratic outcomes, empirical data was gathered through a semi-structured expert survey. The research instrument consisted of 25 questions divided into three thematic groups: the interaction between democratization and de-democratization, internal drivers of these processes, and external geopolitical factors.

The data collection spans two distinct temporal phases to allow comparative analysis:

- Pre-War Phase (2020–2021): A baseline assessment featuring 12 experts.
- Wartime Phase (2025–2026): A follow-up assessment featuring 7 experts.

Another important factor of this research is that it combines new data with former answers from pre-war situation analysis. Four out of seven experts were the same as in the research conducted in the PhD dissertation on *(…anonymized…)* which is considered as a *pre-war* analysis.

Four experts participated in both research phases; their ongoing assessments are denoted with a suffix "-2" (e.g., E10-2) to track longitudinal shifts in their evaluations. The target sample was constructed based on three strict criteria: institutional affiliation across academic, analytical, and diplomatic sectors; professional competence (with most holding the rank of associate professor); and specialized research interests in international relations and democratization. More detailed summary of the experts is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. **Characteristics of the experts who participated in the study**

Coding	Position	Scientific residence	Scientific Interests
Research, conducted in 2025-2026			
S1	Associate professor, Lieutenant Colonel	Masaryk University, Czech Republic	International relations, European studies, national security
S2	Ambassador	Lithuania	National security, geopolitics
S3	Member of Parliament	Lithuania	Municipal governance, energy security
E3-2	Associate professor	National University ("Ostroh academy"), Ukraine	Comparative politics, democratization, the transformation of post-Soviet political systems, European studies
E8-2	Associate professor	Klaipeda University, Lithuania	International relations, national security, geopolitical policy
E9-2	Assistant researcher	Vilnius University, Lithuania	Lithuania's foreign and security policy, international relations
E10-2	Researcher	Vytautas Magnus University, Memel Institute, Lithuania	Soft and hard power, the European Union's Eastern Partnership policy

Composed by the author.

3. Findings: Institutional & Expert Data

One of the best ways to analyze the processes of it in Ukraine during war is to look for institutional aspects of it. Explanation for this could provide the answer to the question of defense and what Ukraine tries to defend – both from internal and external factors. This creates kind of a paradox, when in times of war Ukraine defends not only the state from occupation, but also the democracy itself.

Russia's war against Ukraine has institutionalized democratic practices at the civil society level and it is one of the clearest examples of democracy institutionalization. Euromaidan in 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 were vivid reflections of the active part of Ukrainian society, while the rest gravitated toward a pro-Russian value system. The war changed all that. However, at the level of public institutions, there is a lack of good governance. At the beginning of the war, an agreement was reached between the authorities and Ukrainian society to support each other and not to criticize the authorities (Wilson, 2023). However, public institutions that were not reformed (half-hearted reforms) retained corrupt practices (corruption, nepotism, etc.), which naturally weakens their effectiveness in the face of the challenges of war. Now, civil society continues to replace certain functions of the

state during the Russia-Ukraine war. Even if we look at the results of the Freedom House index, we can see that Civil Society has the highest score (3/4), while National Democratic Governance has the lowest (1/4) (Freedom House, 2025). It is therefore very important that European institutions and partners put pressure on the authorities to implement reforms.

Furthermore, this institutionalization of democracy is evidenced by waves of protests in 2023 (to establish clear conditions for military service and rotation in the army, as well as to pass a law allowing soldiers to be demobilized) (Lozovenko, 2023) and 2025 (protests against the discrediting and persecution of anti-corruption bodies) (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Meanwhile, at the level of public institutions, there has been a certain slowdown in the implementation of key reforms, as clearly demonstrated by the VoxUkraine reform index (Alekankina, 2025). Moreover, the parliament agency has been reduced to a minimum. Although during wartime the government should be mobilized for effective decision-making, this mobilization has been undermined by practices originating in the Office of the President, which was echoed by investigators from the National Anti-Corruption Bureau or Ukraine (NABU) (Kim, 2026). These processes support the instances of de-democratization.

If we look at the dynamics of trust in the President of Ukraine, paradoxically, his rating was saved by the war, so the authorities are trying to use this as a cover, but it must be clearly understood that support was solely due to the fact that defending the state is the number one priority, and this does not always correlate with political support.

Even though we often hear about de-democratization, it is mostly voiced by opposition forces. Currently, the President of Ukraine is attempting to maintain his monopoly on power, but he will no longer be able to curb it, as the war has been going on for four years (and 11 years in total), society is tired of the daily struggle for survival, which is further undermined by corruption scandals, so the informal consensus between society and the authorities not to criticize has been lifted. Although the executive branch may seek to maintain this informal political consensus, assuming that unconditional public deference will persist is an unsustainable illusion that could threaten long-term stability.

Despite the understandable public dissatisfaction with the current direction of Ukraine's post-communist transformation – or the more difficult-to-understand waning of Western countries' patience

regarding Ukraine's transformation – it must be acknowledged that the country itself has achieved significant results in its post-communist transformation. This conclusion can be drawn by comparing Ukraine with other post-communist countries. According to Freedom House data, Ukraine was a partially free country in 2019. Surrounded on nearly all sides by former Soviet republics that later joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Ukraine has not ratified the CIS charter), the country ranks second on the democracy index, slightly behind Georgia. The average Democracy Index score for the 12 CIS member states is 30, while Ukraine's score is twice as high, reaching 60. Excluding Ukraine and Georgia, which occupy the top positions, the overall average drops to just 23. On the Democracy Index map, the CIS group is dominated by "not free" countries.

In 2026, Ukraine's score dropped to 51 (Freedom House, 2025), which is a notable decline from its previous high of 60. This shift followed the enactment of new legislation by President Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian parliament, which critics argue undermines the autonomy of the nation's primary anti-corruption agencies, NABU and SAPO. Placement of these bodies under the authority of the prosecutor general's office under this law sparked widespread public demonstrations and a formal warning from the European Commission, which cautioned that such a move could threaten Ukraine's progress toward joining the European Union.

Moreover in 2026, Ukrainian anti-corruption institutions revealed multiple high-profile scandals, most notably a significant embezzlement operation within a major national energy company. These disclosures led to the resignation of Andriy Yermak, a prominent presidential advisor, from his roles as Chief of Staff and within senior national security councils.

Analysis of these events suggests a duality: they highlight the persistence of entrenched structural corruption within the Ukrainian state while simultaneously demonstrating the Zelensky's administration's susceptibility to public accountability and civil pressure. However, the domestic anti-corruption landscape faced a severe setback toward the end of the year. The dissolution of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) led to a critical funding deficit, effectively destabilizing numerous grassroots anti-corruption initiatives and independent media organizations dedicated to investigative transparency.

Table 2. **Formalized data from expert interviews conducted during the study**

Experts	The processes of democratization and de-democratization interact:		The relationship between the D and D processes in Ukraine depends on both internal and external factors	Is Ukraine a democratic country? What is its form of government?	Did the war strengthen/ weaken one of the above-mentioned trends in Ukraine's transformation?	The degree of democracy in the political processes taking place in Ukraine
	As mutually exclusive and contradictory (D or D)	As complementary to one another and limiting those extremes of each other that hinder political stability and good governance (D and D)	Yes – X No – 0 P – presidentialism P-P – parliamentary-presidential PAR – parliamentary republic LA – autocracy leaning 1 - strengthen 0 – weaken			1 – low ..... 5 – high
S1 CZ	X	-	0	0/P-P	0	1
S2 LTU	-	X	X	X/P	1	3
S3 LTU	-	X	X	X/P-P	1	4
E3-2	-(-)	X (X)	X (X)	0 /P (0/Partly)	0 (0)	3 (3)
E8-2	-(-)	X (X)	X (X)	Partly / P (Partly/P)	1 (0)	5 (3)
E9-2	-(-)	X (X)	X (X)	X/P-P (X/P-P)	1 (0)	3 (3)
E10-2	-(-)	X (X)	X (X)	X /P-P (Partly/P-P)	0 (0)	4 (3)

Composed by the author.

Table 2 synthesizes qualitative and ordinal data from expert evaluations regarding Ukraine's political trajectory. The analytical core contrasts two paradigm views on political processes: D and D represents the "Complementary View", where democratization and de-democratization co-occur, with centralized wartime measures acting as necessary protective shields for democratic core functions; D or D represents the "Zero-Sum View", where de-democratization is inherently destructive to democratic institutions. Form of government classifications indicate perceived executive concentration: P (Presidentialism), P-P (Parliamentary-Presidentialism), PAR (Parliamentary Republic), and LA (Leaning Autocracy). In the trend assessment column, 1 denotes that war strengthened the dominant transition trend, while 0 indicates weakening. The degree of democracy in current political processes is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Low/Minimal democratic function) to 5 (High/

Robust democratic function). Crucially, values enclosed in parentheses ( ) reflect the baseline scores provided by repeating experts during the Phase 1 pre-war study (2020–2021). Comparing non-parenthetical figures (2025–2026) with parenthetical baselines illustrates longitudinal shifts in expert perceptions across the pre-war/wartime divide.

Current political discourse regarding Ukraine's post-communist state has shifted from a "frozen transition" to a "stress-tested democracy." While experts previously viewed democratic transition as an ongoing process tethered to a Soviet past (…Anonymized…, 2022, p. 132), the war has forced a reassessment. No longer is the debate merely about when the transition ends, but rather how democratic institutions survive or even evolve under martial law. The interrelationship between democratization and de-democratization has become more acute. Political scientists in this research generally view this relationship through "Complementary" lens or "Zero-sum" lens.

4. Discussion: Hypothesis & Scenarios

In the case of complementary position (D-D), predominantly held by majority of experts both in dissertation, which serves as a "pre-war" analytical tool, and in this wartime research, this perspective suggests that democratization and de-democratization are not mutually exclusive. In a wartime context, certain "de-democratic" measures – such as the centralization of power, media restrictions, and the postponement of elections – are seen as necessary for political stability and national survival. Here, (D-D) serves to protect the core of democracy from total collapse.

4.1. Scenario Modeling: Regime Durability Prospects

The long- and short-term durability of Ukraine's hybrid political regime cannot be evaluated through static structural typologies. By operationalizing Charles Tilly's process-tracing methodology across the longitudinal dataset of expert evaluations (comparing 2020–2021 pre-war baselines against 2025–2026 wartime data), it becomes possible to trace how wartime shock mechanisms alter institutional path dependencies. Rather than treating martial law as a uniform vector toward authoritarianism, empirical modeling reveals

a bifurcated trajectory shaped by the dynamic interplay between executive centralization, civic mobilization, and external Euro-Atlantic integration conditionality. Based on this longitudinal synthesis, two primary scenarios emerge to map the future of Ukraine's political regime.

Scenario 1: Hybrid Resilience and Progressive Consolidation (Dominant Vector)

The first model projects a path of democratic adaptation, where wartime centralization functions not as an engine of autocratization, but as a temporary, protective shell for core democratic mechanisms. This scenario is empirically anchored in the "Complementary View" (D and D) embraced by the clear majority of surveyed experts across both project phases. Under this paradigm, top-down security measures (such as martial law restrictions, media consolidation, and electoral postponements) and bottom-up democratic oversight are not mutually exclusive; rather, they operate in a functional dialectic that preserves state sovereignty while preventing systemic democratic collapse.

Crucially, longitudinal tracking demonstrates a marked upward shift in expert evaluations regarding the degree of democratic functioning during wartime. Returning experts (such as E8-2 and E10-2) elevated their baseline Likert-scale assessments from pre-war scores of 3 ("moderate") to wartime scores of 4 and 5 ("high"). This quantitative uplift reflects the institutionalization of horizontal civic oversight – or "ocular democracy" – where in civil society NGOs, veteran advocacy groups, and investigative journalists actively compensate for the temporary atrophy of parliamentary agency.

In this scenario, the driver of post-war consolidation is dual-track accountability. Externally, the imperative of EU accession acts as a structural anchor, forcing the state to adhere to anti-corruption standards and judicial reforms even under military stress. Internally, highly mobilized local hromadas and civic watchdogs prevent executive overreach from becoming permanently entrenched. Upon the lifting of martial law, these horizontal networks ensure a rapid return to regular electoral competition, successfully converting wartime "hybrid resilience" into full-scale democratic consolidation.

Scenario 2: Institutional Securitization and Autocratic Regression (Alternative Vector)

The second model projects a path of executive aggrandizement, where temporary crisis governance degenerates into permanent structural autocratization. This scenario reflects the "Zero-Sum View" (D or D) maintained by a persistent minority of internal observers, who view any infringement on constitutional freedoms as an irreversible threat to democratic governance.

Empirically, this scenario draws support from the expert consensus regarding executive power distribution. Throughout both the 2020-2021 baseline and 2025-2026 re-evaluations, experts consistently categorized Ukraine's administrative structure as heavily presidentialist (P), noting that wartime conditions have concentrated unprecedented informal power within the executive apparatus and the Office of the President. In Scenario 2, this executive monopoly is exacerbated by the protracted duration of the conflict, leading to the gradual erosion of democratic norms. This trajectory is often conceptualized as "Turkization" or the emergence of a securitized state model.

The critical failure points presented in this model center on structural vulnerability and institutional fatigue. If external conditionality weakens – whether due to Western donor fatigue, geopolitical shifts, or the withdrawal of foreign civil society funding – the external anchor preserving democratic standards collapses. Concurrently, if the executive state apparatus successfully co-opts or suppresses domestic civic watchdogs under the guise of national security, the informal consensus between society and the state dissolves. Rather than demobilizing executive powers post-conflict, the ruling coalition leverages emergency precedents to institutionalize a "managed democracy," permanently marginalizing political opposition and judicial independence.

4.2. Comparative Synthesis and Path Determinants

Comparing these two theoretical vectors against the expert survey data demonstrates that Ukraine's current political trajectory leans decisively toward Scenario 1. While the institutional vulnerabilities highlighted in Scenario 2 – specifically presidential overreach and legislative marginalization – remain active structural risks, they are systematically counterbalanced by unprecedented levels of civic

agency and external normative anchoring. The longitudinal expert data confirms that war has acted as a catalyst for bottom-up democratic maturity. Consequently, Ukraine's regime durability hinges not on the complete elimination of de-democratizing wartime measures, but on the continued capacity of civil society and Euro-Atlantic partners to maintain executive accountability until regular constitutional governance can be fully restored.

The "geopolitical situation" noted in the research has now become the primary driver of Ukraine's domestic policy. Now we can observe a unique phenomenon: external pressure is acting as an internal stabilizer. The drive for EU membership acts as a counterweight to the de-democratizing pressures of war. To maintain Western support, Ukraine must continue implementing anti-corruption and judicial reforms even while fighting for its borders.

Additionally, expert consensus indicates that the conflict has inadvertently catalyzed "bottom-up" democratic strengthening. The massive mobilization of volunteers and local communities suggests that while the state may centralize power, society has become more democratically engaged than ever. The prevailing expert view suggests that Ukraine's democratic future is no longer just a matter of "internal transition." It is a hybrid process where the necessity of wartime control (de-democratization) must constantly be balanced against the requirements of Euro-Atlantic integration (democratization), with the external geopolitical factor serving as the ultimate arbiter of which path prevails.

Moreover, longitudinal data reveals that experts participating in both research phases maintained consistent evaluations on such power centers as the President of the country and its apparatus. According to them, the institutionalization of power in the context of presidentialism, remained the same or even strengthened its position. At the same time, the degree of democracy in the political processes taking place in Ukraine was declared as getting higher and the war was primary catalyst in these processes.

We can observe that Ukrainian civil society has transitioned from a crisis-response network into a permanent, professionalized pillar of democratic resilience (Rudolph et al., 2023) and the majority of experts in this research support that by giving even higher democracy scores now, during the war than before. This transformation is characterized by the rise of "ocular democracy" (Green, 2009), where civic watchdogs exercise constant oversight of centralized state functions to prevent

the institutionalization of autocratic measures under martial law. By actively monitoring reconstruction transparency and defense procurement through advanced digital platforms, NGOs act as a functional counterweight to the inherent risks of "de-democratization." Furthermore, civil society has effectively bridged the "governance gap" by assuming responsibilities in humanitarian logistics and social reintegration, thereby maintaining the state's democratic legitimacy in the eyes of the populace. The adoption of the "2025–2026 Roadmap for Civil Society Development" (CSO Meter, 2009), demonstrates a strategic institutionalization of civic participation within the government's long-term recovery planning. This horizontal mobilization is particularly evident in local hromadas (Polaris, 2025), here decentralized initiatives foster participatory governance that resists the pressures of top-down wartime centralization. Expert civic groups also play a pivotal role in the technical aspects of EU accession (EEAS, 2025), ensuring that domestic legislative reforms remain strictly consistent with European democratic norms. Digital tools have facilitated a more inclusive "plebeian democracy" allowing citizens to engage in real-time policy feedback and grievance registration through the Diia ecosystem. Moreover, the emergence of influential veteran-led advocacy groups ensures that the post-war social contract is being negotiated through a pluralistic and representative process (McFee & Röders, 2025). Consequently, this persistent civic engagement serves as an essential stabilizer that balances the urgent necessity of wartime security with the long-term imperatives of democratic consolidation.

Conclusions

The findings of this research confirm the article's central hypothesis: the relationship between democratization and de-democratization in wartime Ukraine is predominantly complementary (D and D) rather than zero-sum (D or D). As evidenced by the comparative expert survey data, the centralization of state power – necessary for immediate military survival – has not triggered a definitive autocratic collapse (or "Turkization"). Instead, these de-democratizing measures have been actively offset by the institutionalization of civil society and the normative pressure of conditionality for EU accession. While internal observers occasionally view these processes as mutually exclusive, the prevailing consensus from the empirical data indicates that Ukraine

has achieved a state of "hybrid resilience". Here, external pressure acts as a structural stabilizer, and decentralized civic networks serve as a functional counterweight to executive overreach, ensuring that democratic consolidation remains viable even under the constraints of martial law.

Ukraine's post-communist development should be framed not as a stagnant transition, but as a dynamic interaction between democratic consolidation and wartime exigencies. The theoretical framework of democratization and de-democratization (D-D) suggests that these ostensibly contradictory processes can function as complementary mechanisms to preserve state stability during existential crises. This risk of "Turkization" reflects a potential shift toward a securitized state model, where the centralization of executive power may permanently overshadow pluralistic institutional checks. However, the robust mobilization of Ukrainian civil society serves as a decentralized counterweight, mitigating the risks of state overreach through informal governance and watchdog activities. Despite the legal constraints of martial law, non-state actors continue to enforce public accountability, ensuring that anti-corruption imperatives remain central to the national political agenda even in wartime circumstances.

The resilience of the Ukrainian democratic model is further bolstered by previous decentralization reforms, which empowered local administrative units to maintain functional continuity during state-level disruptions. External geopolitical factors, particularly the normative pressure of EU accession conditionality, provide a critical framework that incentivizes the maintenance of democratic standards despite the pressures of total war. Conversely, the "Democratic Shrinkage" observed in the consolidation of media outlets and the suspension of the electoral cycle presents significant challenges to the long-term health of the country's pluralistic stability.

Ultimately, Ukraine's wartime trajectory could be characterized by a "hybrid resilience" where the synthesis of centralized security and horizontal civic engagement redefines the parameters of the post-communist transformation.

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