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# Historical Borders and Contemporary Administrative Divisions Influences on Political Views in Ukraine

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## Abstract

Political divisions in Central and Eastern Europe were dramatically changing during the historical course of the region. Ukraine is one of the striking examples. If we take the current territory of the country and draw all the historical border lines between empires, it would be cut into many pieces. Even more striking phenomenon is that these old borders sometimes reappear on the maps of electoral returns in Ukraine. The same patterns are revealed in other countries, for example, in Poland (Zarycki, 2015; Grosfeld & Zhuravskaya, 2015), Romania (Haydukiewicz, 2011), Czech and Slovak Republics (Voda & Pink, 2015; Simon, 2015). The research question emerges, why and how these borders are framing current political views in Ukraine.

One hypothesis is that it is due to the persistence of cultural heritage of empires as a result of the specific role of such social institutions as family, church, and school. This is supported by works on Polish electoral geography and also by Leonid Pesakhin (2013) research on legacies of Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires in their borderlands in contemporary Ukraine. The second hypothesis is going further and suggests that issues important for specific regions in previous historical times are also part of the discourse and political rhetoric in contemporary times. For instance, peripheral location of Ukraine frames political views not only on foreign policy but also on domestic social, economic, and political issues. Moreover, historical heritage and myths accompanied by regional identity provide opportunities for political mobilization on the basis of different narratives about past, current, and future of the country. These narratives are competing with each other during the course of the history and are produced not only by regional actors but also by external powers. The purpose of this paper is to show through the electoral geography of Ukraine after the independence in 1991 where and how historical borders appear on electoral maps and what kind of political narratives they are demarcating. Historical persistence and change of these narratives are also under our attention.

For these purposes, the first task was to determine case studies and map all the cases where historical borders or current administrative boundaries appeared on electoral maps of Ukraine after 1991. Administrative divisions were taken into consideration because they persisted from the Soviet times and also produce new identities and create visible limits for political mobilization and imagined narratives. It makes the situation more complicated because very often historical borders do not correspond with current administrative and consequently several political narratives and identities could compete between each other or be politically mobilized at the same time. To analyze this issue in more details the case study of Kremenets district of Ternopil oblast of Ukraine was chosen. This case is interesting because this district is part of historical Volhynia, but now it is a part of Ternopil region, which, despite this

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Kremenets area, is historical Galicia. Moreover, it is a line between Austria-Hungarian and Russian empires and between the Soviet Union and interwar Poland. The research is based on a survey and in-depth interviews with the inhabitants of Kremenets district. The composition of the sample is of different age groups to track changes in the narratives building: the older generation with a memory of Polish times, the middle generation with a strong memory of Soviet times, and a young generation with memory-building in independent Ukraine. The results will be presented at the conference. In addition, we are going to investigate how young generation use social networking sites and how groups and public pages created where are geographically bounded. Moreover, it opens a question how the use of social networking sites is eliminating or help to persist influence of historical borders and administrative boundaries.

The final point of the paper is to put analyzed case study into a wider framework of Ukraine. Multiscale nature of the geographical place and multiple identities are crucial here. However, it is worth to admit that after the independence multiple regional discourses about the future of the country started to compete with each other. The history of electoral returns shows us how influential some of these discourses were. Such events as the conflict in the East of the country also dramatically changed the electoral landscape. However, such events just create new agenda to attach political mobilization campaign, while the same spatial frameworks are used. The paper accentuates the importance of long-lasting spatial arrangements of Ukrainian politics.

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