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Terrorists or national heroes? Politics and perceptions of the OUN and the UPA in Ukraine[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes controversies and public attitudes concerning the Bandera faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B), the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and Stepan Bandera in Ukraine. The research question is: Which factors affect attitudes toward the OUN-B, the UPA and Bandera in contemporary Ukraine? This article employs comparative and regression analyses of surveys commissioned by the author and conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) in 2009 and 2013 to determine the effects of regional and other factors on attitudes toward these organizations and the OUN-B leader. The study shows that regional factors and perceptions of these organizations' involvement in mass murder were the strongest predictors of the views concerning the OUN-B, the UPA and Bandera. Their public support is strongest in Galicia and weakest in the East and the South, in particular, in Donbas and Crimea, two major conflict areas since the "Euromaidan."

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1. Research question and hypotheses

The policies, attitudes, definitions, and commemorations of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and their leaders and members have exposed significant political divisions in Ukraine since its independence in 1991. They have become the ones among other central issues in Ukrainian politics since the "Orange Revolution" and the "Euromaidan." (Katchanovski, 2014; Marples, 2007, 2010, 2015; Narvselius, 2012; Shevel, 2011). This is one of the first academic studies of the determinants of public attitudes toward the OUN, the UPA, and Stepan Bandera.

After he became the president of Ukraine as a result of the "Orange Revolution" in 2004, Viktor Yushchenko and various nationalist parties in the Orange coalition governments pursued policies of political rehabilitation and heroization of the OUN and the UPA. Yushchenko posthumously awarded the "Hero of Ukraine" title to Bandera, the leader of the main faction of the OUN (OUN-B), and to Roman Shukhevych, the supreme commander of the UPA. In contrast, Viktor Yanukovich, his Party of Regions, the Communist Party, and many other pro-Russian and pro-Communist parties and politicians opposed such policies.

The Yanukovich government after he was elected as the president of Ukraine in 2010 abandoned his predecessor's policies concerning the OUN and the UPA at the national level. The Donetsk Administrative Court in Eastern Ukraine annulled Yushchenko's decrees that awarded the "Hero of Ukraine" title to Bandera and Shukhevych on the grounds that they were not citizens of Ukraine. However, the policies regarding the commemoration of leaders and members of these organizations as

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national heroes continued to be pursued at regional levels in Western Ukraine, especially in Galicia, after the radical nationalist party Svoboda won local elections there, and in Volhynia. Regional and local governments there sponsored monuments to OUN and UPA leaders and renamed streets after them. Many national newspapers, such as *Den*, *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, *Ukrainska Pravda*, and *Ukraina Moloda* along with television (TV) channels, such as TVi and the 5th Channel, as well as regional mass media in Western Ukraine actively promoted historical revisionism and the political rehabilitation and heroization of the OUN and the UPA. Mass media, owned by the government or pro-Yanukovych oligarchs, such as the First National Channel, Inter, and Ukraina TV channels, also frequently disseminated such narratives.

Although the minister of education in the Yanukovych government expressed strong anti-OUN and -UPA views, the history education concerning these organizations and their leaders differed significantly from region to region during the Yanukovych presidency. An interview-based study conducted at that time showed that history teachers in Western Ukraine generally promoted a nationalist perspective concerning the OUN, the UPA, and their leaders, while teachers in Crimea tended to present these organizations and their leaders as Nazi collaborators and mass murders (Korostelina, 2013). There were similar patterns of regional differences in education, mass media coverage, and local government policies on these issues since Ukraine's independence in 1991 during the Kravchuk, Kuchma, and Yushchenko presidencies. In contrast, the "Euromaidan" governments attempted to radically change this pattern and to promote the nationalist narrative in all regions under their control via history education, historical memory, and mass media policies. These policies included specific guidelines disseminated by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory and the Ministry of Education and a 2015 law, which declared the OUN and the UPA as fighters for Ukrainian independence and stipulated that public disrespect toward them and public denial of the legitimacy of their fight for independence of Ukraine would be illegal.

Svoboda, the Right Sector, and several less influential far-right organizations presented themselves as ideological successors of the OUN and the UPA. While these far-right organizations were in a minority among the "Euromaidan" leadership and participants, they played a key role in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government in February 2014 (Katchanovski, 2015). The Right Sector, the Social National Assembly, Svoboda, and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists formed battalions and other paramilitary formations under their own command or under the formal command of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and these units played a significant role in the civil war in Donbas in Eastern Ukraine.

Leaders of the "Euromaidan" and the subsequent Maidan governments brought the "Glory to Ukraine. Glory to Heroes" slogan of the OUN-B and UPA into mainstream use. President Petro Poroshenko declared October 14 as day to honor the defenders of Ukraine; this day has been marked by the OUN-B, UPA, and contemporary far right organizations as the date of the UPA's founding. A law, which declared the OUN and UPA to be fighters for Ukrainian independence and made it illegal for Ukrainian citizens or foreigners to express public disrespect to members of these organizations was proposed by Yuri Shukhevych, son of a UPA supreme commander, and it was adopted by the Ukrainian parliament in April 2015 (Marples, 2015).

The issue of the politics of the OUN and the UPA is relevant not only to Ukraine but also to other countries. The Simon Wiesenthal Center, a leading United States (US)-based Jewish organization, expressed its "deepest revulsion at the recent honor awarded to Stepan Bandera, who collaborated with the Nazis in the early stages of World War II, and whose followers were linked to the murders of thousands of Jews and others" (Wiesenthal, 2010). The European Parliament in its resolution of February 25, 2010, concerning the situation in Ukraine stated that it "deeply deplores the decision by the outgoing President of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, posthumously to award Stepan Bandera, a leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) which collaborated with Nazi Germany, the title of 'National Hero of Ukraine'; hopes, in this regard, that the new Ukrainian leadership will reconsider such decisions and will maintain its commitment to European values" (European, 2010).

In spite of their differences on many other issues, the leaders of Poland and Russia and many other politicians, especially before the "Euromaidan," expressed similar stance concerning the OUN and the UPA and opposed the political and historical revisionism concerning these organizations and Yushchenko's awarding of the title of "Hero of Ukraine" to Bandera. They pointed out the OUN's collaboration with Nazi Germany and the OUN's involvement in mass murder. For example, the Polish Senate declared the anti-Polish actions of the UPA and the OUN during World War II to be ethnic cleansing with "elements of genocide" (Sejm, 2010).

Leading Russian politicians and the Russian media exaggerated the involvement of the OUN and UPA's ideological successors among the far right organizations during the "Euromaidan" and the conflict in Donbas, claiming that a "fascist coup" took place in Ukraine. The Russian government and separatist leaders used such claims to justify the secession and the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014 with the help of Russian military intervention there. Leaders of Russian-supported separatists in Donbas made similar claims and adopted the Saint George's Ribbon, a Russian World War II symbol, to argue that they fought the "fascist" regime. In contrast, the Western governments and the media generally minimized or ignored OUN- and UPA-related issues during the "Euromaidan" and the conflict in Donbas.

This study analyzes attitudes concerning the OUN-B, the UPA, and Stepan Bandera in Ukraine. The research question is: Which factors determine attitudes concerning the OUN, the UPA, and Bandera in Ukraine? This first section of the article reviews previous studies and examines contemporary controversies regarding these organizations. It provides a framework for the analysis of public attitudes toward the OUN-B and the UPA. The study focuses on the OUN-B because it was historically more influential than was the Andrii Melnyk faction (OUN-M), in particular, by organizing the UPA, and because the policies of the heroization of the OUN in Ukraine primarily concerned the Bandera faction.

The main research hypothesis is that regional factors are major determinants of views concerning these organizations. Because the OUN and the UPA were regional organizations that were based primarily in Galicia in the 1930s and the 1940s, public support for these organizations is likely to be strongest in this region. Support for the OUN and the UPA is also likely to

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