

DECLINE IN XENOPHOBIA TOWARDS ROMA IN UKRAINE: AN ANALYSIS OF RECENT PUBLIC OPINION TRENDS

¹Valentyn ZHARONKIN, ²Janush PANCHENKO, ³Igor DANYLENKO, ⁴Mykola HOMANYUK

¹*Kherson State University, Ukraine*

²*Institute of Ethnology Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czechia*

³*V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine*

⁴*Kherson State University, Ukraine*

¹024053@university.kherson.ua, ²panchenko@eu.cas.cz, ³igor.danylenko@karazin.ua, ⁴mgomanyuk@ksu.ks.ua

Abstract:

This study examines recent trends in attitudes towards the Roma in Ukraine, measured through the social distance score on the Emory Bogardus scale. Historically, the Roma community has faced considerable xenophobia in Ukraine, consistently ranking among the lowest in social acceptance. For decades, the social distance score for Roma has remained around 6.00 on a 7-point scale. However, from 2021 to 2023, data from Ukrainian sociological institutes indicate a gradual decrease in this score to 4.75. Our sociological research corroborated this positive trend, though with an important caveat: The improvement in attitudes towards Roma may not be as substantial as it appears. Some result distortion likely arose due to changes in research methodology. During the war, Ukrainian sociologists shifted from face-to-face interviews to telephone surveys. Additionally, terminology has evolved: Rather than using the previously common ethnonym "Tsyhany", sociologists now refer to "Roma", a term that carries more positive connotations for respondents. Nevertheless, an improvement in attitudes towards Roma has indeed been observed. The study attributes much of this progress to Ukrainian media, which has portrayed Roma contributions to the Russian-Ukrainian war positively.

Key words: Roma, Russian-Ukrainian war, Bogardus scale, xenophobia, socio-cultural studies.

ЗНИЖЕННЯ КСЕНОФОБІЇ ДО РОМІВ В УКРАЇНІ: АНАЛІЗ ОСТАННІХ ТРЕНДІВ ГРОМАДСЬКОЇ ДУМКИ

¹Валентин ЖАРОНКІН, ²Януш ПАНЧЕНКО, ³Ігор ДАНИЛЕНКО, ⁴Микола ГОМАНЮК

¹*Херсонський державний університет, Україна*

²*Інститут етнології Чеської академії наук, Прага, Чехія*

³*Харківський національний університет імені В. Н. Каразіна, Україна*

⁴*Херсонський державний університет, Україна*

¹024053@university.kherson.ua, ²panchenko@eu.cas.cz, ³igor.danylenko@karazin.ua, ⁴mgomanyuk@ksu.ks.ua

Анотація:

Це дослідження аналізує останні тенденції у ставленні до ромів в Україні, виміряні через показник соціальної дистанції за шкалою Еморі Богардуса. Історично ромська спільнота стикалася з суттєвою ксенофобією в Україні, постійно займаючи одне з найнижчих місць у рівні соціальної прийнятності. Протягом десятиліть показник соціальної дистанції для ромів залишався близько 6,00 за 7-бальною шкалою. Однак у період з 2021 до 2023 року дані українських соціологічних інститутів свідчать про поступове зниження цього показника до 4,75. Наші соціологічні дослідження підтвердили цю позитивну тенденцію, хоча й із важливим застереженням: покращення ставлення до ромів може бути не настільки значним, як здається. Ймовірно, певне викривлення результатів виникло через зміни в методології дослідження. Під час війни українські соціологи перейшли від особистих інтерв'ю до телефонних опитувань. Крім того, змінилася термінологія: замість раніше поширеного етноніма «цигани» соціологи зараз використовують «роми», термін, що має більш позитивні конотації для респондентів. Незважаючи на це, покращення ставлення до ромів дійсно спостерігається. Суттєвої кореляції між ставленням до ромів та досвідом проживання поруч з ними як сусідами, а також із соціально-демографічними характеристиками респондентів, не виявлено. Це означає, що головна причина позитивних змін у ставленні до ромів походить не з особистого досвіду респондентів та їх взаємодії з ромами. Дослідження приписує значну частину цього прогресу українським медіа, які позитивно висвітлюють внесок ромів у російсько-українську війну.

Ключові слова: роми, російсько-українська війна, шкала Богардуса, ксенофобія, соціокультурні дослідження.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17721/2413-7154/2024.92.104-113>

UDC: 316.647.82:314.151.3(477)

Introduction

According to monitoring sociological research conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NASU Institute of Sociology) since 1992, Roma have long been the most undesirable ethnic group in the country, with a high level of social distance observed towards them. For 20 years, from 2002 to 2021, the social distance score toward Roma consistently ranged from 5.9 to 6.1 on the 7-point Emory Bogardus scale (Vorona & Shulha, 2021, p. 655).

However, research by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) conducted in November 2021 and September 2022 showed a drastic change. While the data from November 2021 indicated a social distance score towards Roma at 5.34, the survey in September 2022 showed 5.08 (Paniotto, 2022). This means that the score has noticeably decreased. Moreover, in the 2022 survey, Roma dropped to the third place in the xenophobia ranking, behind Russians and Belarusians (citizens of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, respectively).

KIIS did not comment on what could explain the improvement in attitudes towards Roma among the Ukrainian public. However, during our research, we questioned the cause of this improvement and, consequently, the decrease in the social distance score.

We set several goals. First, we sought to determine whether positive changes in public consciousness are actually taking place. Second, we aimed to assess the decline in xenophobia towards Roma in Ukraine over a longer period of time. Third, we hoped to understand the deeper motivations of respondents. Are the observed changes simply related to the emergence of an enemy image (Russians and Belarusians) in the public's perception, resulting in negative attitudes towards other ethnic groups – including Roma – taking a back seat? Are we actually witnessing processes that indicate a growth in positive attitudes towards Roma? To this end, we conducted quantitative and qualitative sociological research from May 3 to July 1, 2023, with the support of the Vidnova Fellowship (MitOst) and Prisma Ukraïna: War, Migration and Memory (Forum Transregionale Studien) programmes.

Methodology and Characteristics of the Research

Initially, the concept of social distance was formulated by the German philosopher Georg Simmel in the early 20th century within his work on the sociology of space (Levine, 1976). According to Simmel, social distance refers to the degree of closeness or alienation between individuals and groups within society.

Simmel's lectures on this topic caught the attention of American sociologists, who were concerned at the time with racial tensions in society (Wark, 2007). This interest led to demand for a quantitative measure of social distance. Soon after, Emory Bogardus developed a straightforward survey, designed to measure the acceptability of various social interactions with members of different ethnic groups using a single

question (Bogardus, 1925). The Bogardus scale asks respondents to indicate their level of willingness to accept members of other groups into their lives – from living in the same country to entering into marriage – thus providing a gauge of societal biases and xenophobia.

Since 1990, Ukraine has used an adapted version of the Bogardus scale, tailored by Natalia Panina, and continues to apply it in the present day (Panina & Golovakha, 2006). The NASU Institute of Sociology and KIIS both use Panina's adapted version of the Bogardus scale in their annual studies of public opinion concerning various ethnic groups.

Social distance towards representatives of different ethnic groups was operationalised as different levels of social interaction and closeness. Thus, for each ethnic group from the provided list, respondents were asked to indicate how close a relationship they were willing to have with members of each group:

- willing to accept as a family member – 1 point;
- close friends – 2 points;
- neighbours – 3 points;
- colleagues – 4 points;
- fellow countrymen – 5 points;
- tourists – 6 points;
- would not allow them into the country at all – 7 points.

The minimum social distance is a score of "1" (willing to accept as a family member), and the maximum is "7" (would not allow into Ukraine).

The scale is cumulative, meaning that except for the last level, choosing a closer social contact implies accepting more distant contacts as well. Cumulativeness in this context means that if a respondent agrees with a statement at one level of the scale, it is assumed that they also agree with all the preceding levels that indicate a lesser degree of social distance. For example, if a respondent agrees to marry a member of a given ethnic group, it is assumed that they are also willing to be friends with them, live in the same neighbourhood, accept them as a colleague at work, and allow them into the country as a tourist.

The numerical value of the scale should be interpreted as follows:

- A score of less than 2.5 indicates national identity;
- Up to 4 points – openness (tolerance);
- From 4 to 5 points – separateness;
- From 5 to 6 points – national isolation;
- Above 6 points – xenophobia (Panina & Golovakha, 2006, p. 109).

In Ukraine, the adapted Bogardus scale has been repeatedly criticised on the grounds that its indicators do "not quite correspond to Ukrainian realities" (Sereda, 2007, p. 94); that it violates the principle of cumulativeness and is "sensitive to the socio-cultural context" (Shestakovskiy, 2009, p. 44). The scale itself and its specific application were subject to criticism. For instance, Nakhmanovych argued that NASU Institute of Sociology and KIIS approached the selection of ethnic groups for measurement unsystematically (2014). Finally, as Shestakovskiy summarised, "it is impossible

to conclude what exactly the indicators based on the Bogardus scale reflect and how dangerous this prevalence is for society” (2009, p. 37).

We largely agree with this criticism. Additionally, it's worth noting that the Ukrainian adaptation of the social distance scale differs from the original in almost every aspect – some minor and some significant. For example, Emory Bogardus's last point on the 7-point scale was “Would exclude from my country” (Bogardus, 1925, p. 302). Of course, this is not the same as “Would not allow into Ukraine” in the Ukrainian adaptation. Nonetheless, even critics eventually agreed that “the Bogardus scale should remain in use in Ukrainian sociology, considering its prevalence, ease of application, reliability, and the already accumulated data” (Shestakovskiy, 2009, p. 46).

Of course, in addition to the Bogardus scale, more modern and effective methods can be used to measure social distance. Mokken Scale Analysis or Guttman Scalogram Analysis may provide greater flexibility and reliability in research (Mokken, 1971; Guttman, 1944). However, the value of the Bogardus scale for us lies in its ability to allow a comparison of the current survey with over 30 years of accumulated data from previous studies. Therefore, we also used the Bogardus social distance scale for our quantitative research.

The target population of the quantitative survey consisted of Ukrainian residents aged 18 and older who use the internet. A nationwide online panel of Ukrainian residents was used as the base for the online survey from which the sample was drawn. The sample (N=902) was proportionally stratified by gender, age, and geography of residence (type of settlement, region of Ukraine). The maximum statistical error (excluding the design effect) in univariate distributions with a probability of 0.95 is 3.3%. The questionnaire for the quantitative research included, in addition to the social distance scale, a series of questions dedicated to the perception of and interaction with Roma, channels of information about Roma, and Roma in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The online survey was conducted using Lemur software¹.

The data from the quantitative survey were supplemented by the results of a qualitative study, which included 16 in-depth interviews with residents of different regions of Ukraine, of various genders and educational backgrounds. To describe the media context, we also used materials from online sources related to the subject of the study.

Social Distance Towards Roma

The cultural and social differences between the Roma and the surrounding populations contribute to a high level of hostility and prejudice against them in many countries worldwide, not only in Ukraine. This bias is rooted so deeply in history that even the exonyms used by other peoples to refer to the Roma carry discriminatory connotations. For example, the term “Tsyhany”, common in all Slavic languages as well as some others, originates from the Greek word ἀτίγγατος, meaning “untouchables”. This term was used to refer to a heretical sect in Byzantium, describing its members as “ventriloquists

and wizards [...] who are inspired satanically and pretend to predict the unknown” (Crowe, 2007, p. 1). However, it is worth noting that the etymology (and its derogatory connotation) of the word “Tsyhany” is largely unknown to the general public.

The issue of prejudice against the Roma remains highly pressing today. The title of one of the monographs on this topic speaks for itself: *Romaphobia: The Last Acceptable Form of Racism* (McGarry, 2017). Among the prevailing stereotypes, perhaps that which has the most influence on social distance towards Roma is the myth of their total criminalisation. Exploiting such sentiments, for example, the Federal Republic of Germany did not officially acknowledge the genocide of Roma during World War II until 1982. It was claimed that Roma, unlike Jews, ended up in concentration camps not for racial reasons, but “criminal” ones (Barany, 2002, pp. 265–66).

Attitudes towards Roma differ significantly across European countries. A 2019 Pew Research poll revealed that negative views of Roma were expressed by 83% of Italians, 76% of Slovaks, 72% of Greeks, 68% of Bulgarians, 66% of Czechs, 61% of Lithuanians, 61% of Hungarians, 54% of Ukrainians, 51% of Poles, 44% of French, 40% of Spaniards, 37% of Germans, 30% of Dutch, 29% of Swedes, and 23% of Britons (Wike, 2019).

As shown, Ukrainians fall roughly in the middle of this list. When supplementing these results with data on positive views towards Roma, Ukraine notably stands out among Eastern, Southern, and Central European countries, where attitudes towards this ethnic group tend to be predominantly negative. Positive views towards Roma were shared by 14% of Italians, 21% of Slovaks, 25% of Greeks, 25% of Hungarians, 27% of Czechs, 28% of Bulgarians, 30% of Lithuanians, 39% of Ukrainians, 41% of Poles, 50% of French, 52% of Germans, 57% of Spaniards, 60% of Britons, 66% of Dutch, and 67% of Swedes (Wike, 2019).

Thus, while Ukraine undeniably has a high level of social distance towards Roma, in the balance of positive and negative evaluations, it aligns more closely with Western European countries.

The Pew Research poll did not include Ukraine's neighbor, Romania, where relations between the population and Roma are among the country's most challenging interethnic issues. According to *National Research Report 2022: Antigypsyism in Romania: Lessons (not) learned*, “seven of the eight characteristics used by respondents to describe Roma were negative, with only one being neutral” (Rostas & Nodis, 2022, p. 10).

This is not merely a research issue. Established xenophobic myths, along with the poverty and limited legal literacy of many Roma, restrict their access to various spheres of life. In these circumstances, Roma communities often rely on mutual support and self-sufficiency. To maintain their integrity, they tend to uphold traditional occupations, lifestyles, and ethnic customs, which can only be sustained in closed communities. This creates a cycle of isolation.

¹ Lemur is a nationwide online survey panel: <https://newimage.org.ua/lemur-2/>

Romas' detachment from mainstream society limits their participation in modern economy, business, education, and skilled employment. These conditions result in a declining standard of living and amplify existing challenges in accessing education and social integration. Simultaneously, the isolation and poverty of Roma communities fuel anti-Roma sentiment and the persistence of anti-Roma myths, further obstructing their employment and social inclusion.

Overcoming stigmatisation and discrimination, as well as reducing social distance with the national majority, presents a challenge for educational programs, laws, and social integration initiatives for Roma in any country where they reside. To achieve this effectively, regular measurements of social distance are needed, along with tracking and analysing its dynamics.

Quantitative and qualitative research findings

Our research confirmed the KIIS data indicating that Roma have moved up two positions from the lowest rank on the social distance scale, now ranking above Russians and Belarusians (Fig. 1, Table 1). However, the social distance score we recorded for Roma as of May–June 2023 is 5.37 on the Bogardus scale, which is slightly higher than the KIIS survey result of 5.08 in September 2022.

An even greater difference is observed when compared to the subsequent KIIS survey, which was conducted well after our own. According to the data provided by KIIS in October 2023, the score of social distance towards Roma was 4.75 (Paniotto, 2024). We tried to determine the reasons for such differences.

It can be assumed that the differences in the obtained results are due to different research methodologies. First, starting in 2021, KIIS moved away from the previous face-to-face questionnaire method due to the COVID-19 pandemic, replacing it with Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). CATI was also used in 2022 and 2023. According to Volodymyr Paniotto, Director of KIIS, this change in methodology may have influenced the results obtained: "In the telephone survey, there is a slightly higher level of education of respondents and therefore a lower level of xenophobia" (Paniotto, 2024).

In contrast, we conducted the survey via an online panel and respondents completed the questionnaires themselves. The question of how the presence of an interviewer influences the respondent remains a relatively understudied area of sociology and psychology. It is believed that in the presence of others, a person may be inclined towards socially approved responses and actions (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Moreover, socially approved responses can include both tolerant statements or actions as well as xenophobic ones. In any case, the experiments of Gretchen B. Sechrist and Charles Stangor showed that participants with prejudices against African Americans tend to demonstrate their negative attitudes more explicitly if they believe that others share their views (Sechrist & Stangor, 2001). Concerned about the potential impact of an interviewer's presence on the sensitive topic of xenophobic attitudes, we took Krumpal's advice into

account: "Survey designers could generate more valid data by selecting appropriate data collection strategies that reduce respondents' discomfort when answering to a sensitive question" (Krumpal, 2013, p. 2025). Therefore, we conducted the survey using a method that allows respondents to complete the questionnaires themselves.

The second factor influencing research results is the differing perception of the ethnonyms "Roma" and "Tsyhany". For a long time the ethnonym "Roma" was used in sociological surveys in Ukraine. For example, the "Monitoring of Social Change", which includes surveys of various companies on the Bogardus scale from 1992 to 2021, records the dynamics of the score of national distance specifically regarding the ethnonym "Tsyhany" (Vrona & Shulha, 2021, p. 655). On the contrary, the aforementioned KIIS surveys conducted from 2021 to 2023 use the wording "Roma (Tsyhany)" (Paniotto, 2022; 2024). In our survey, respondents were offered the wording "Tsyhany (Roma)". This wording was chosen after conducting in-depth interviews, during which we discovered that if we completely abandoned the ethnonym "Tsyhany", some respondents would not understand which group we were referring to. However, it should be taken into account that "relatively more negative associations are recorded for the word 'Tsyhany' than for 'Roma'" (Homanyuk et al., forthcoming). This likely influences the survey results in that the use of the word "Tsyhany" increases the score of social distancing compared to use of the word "Roma."

In-depth interviews also revealed a qualitative difference in the perception of the ethnonyms "Roma" and "Tsyhany." Although their meanings partially overlap, the word "Tsyhany" is more associated with an antisocial lifestyle, while "Roma" is perceived as the name of an ethnic group. Here are two statements from our in-depth interviews that clearly illustrate the difference in the perception of the ethnonyms "Roma" and "Tsyhany":

"Being a Tsyhan is a way of life, while being Roma is a nationality." (Man from Kyiv, 20 years old)

"For me, Tsyhany are those who steal mobile phones at the train station. Roma are those who have managed to assimilate and live in society." (Woman from Kyiv, 28 years old)

For some respondents, "Roma" and "Tsygany" are actually considered different ethnic groups altogether. One study participant, a 20-year-old student from Kyiv, said, "I've never encountered Tsygany in my life, only occasionally seen them at the train station", while he "was in the same school class as a Roma girl". He was afraid of Tsygany and would avoid interacting with them, having "only heard negative things about them since childhood". In contrast, he hypothetically saw the possibility of reducing social distance to a minimal level with his Roma acquaintance: "Could I marry her? She's a good person. I don't know; I might not even mind if we had some kind of relationship." Undoubtedly, surveying this respondent about "Roma" and "Tsygany" on the Bogardus scale would yield opposite results.

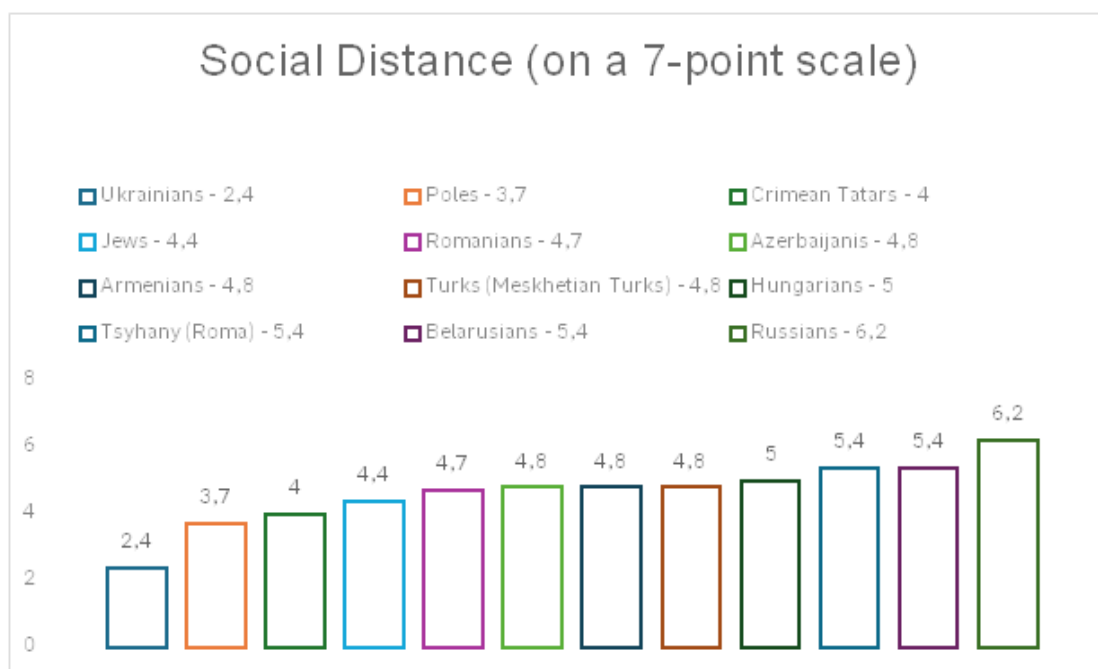


Fig. 1. Social distance towards various ethnic groups in Ukraine

Table 1

Distribution of respondents' answers on the Bogardus scale regarding different ethnic groups in Ukraine

I agree to allow representatives of the national (ethnic) group indicated in the line as ...

	...members of my family	...close friends	...neighbours	...work colleagues	... residents of Ukraine	...guests of Ukraine	Would not allow them into Ukraine
Ukrainians	60%	5%	1%	1%	30%	3%	0%
Poles	17%	22%	12%	3%	20%	24%	2%
Crimean Tatars	12%	15%	10%	3%	45%	12%	3%
Jews	12%	10%	9%	5%	30%	29%	5%
Romanians	6%	7%	16%	3%	22%	42%	4%
Azerbaijanis	6%	8%	11%	5%	22%	42%	6%
Armenians	6%	8%	11%	4%	23%	42%	6%
Hungarians	6%	5%	13%	3%	21%	39%	13%
Tsyhany² (Roma)	3%	3%	7%	2%	32%	30%	23%
Belarusians	8%	4%	9%	2%	11%	25%	41%
Russians	6%	2%	2%	1%	6%	7%	76%

² A note on translating the terminology: although the Ukrainian terms 'Tsyhan'/'Tsyhany' (Циган/Цигани) can be translated as 'Gypsy'/'Gypsies' when the words come up in interviews or media sources, we decided to transliterate the words to avoid the connotations that the English terms may carry. The majority of the Roma in Eastern and Southern Ukraine do not consider the ethnonym 'Tsyhany' incorrect or offensive, and often use it as an endoethnonym along with the self-designation 'Roma'. For more, see Nataliia Zinevych (Zinevych 2017)

Due to its higher neutrality and international use, the term “Roma” has largely replaced “Tsyhany” in official documents, normative acts, public discourse, and academic language in recent years. Its widespread use is a step towards the recognition of minority demands; however, it is also important for us to strive for methodological precision in the sociological survey so that we do not deceive ourselves by substituting words. As Natalia Zinevych accurately noted, “[W]ith the politically correct transformation of the ethnonym from Tsyhany to Roma, we can hardly assert an automatic change in the attitude of Ukrainian society toward the Roma ethnic group” (Zinevych, 2017, p. 498).

It is important to note that even if the term “Roma” has more positive or neutral associations compared to the term “Tsyhany”, it does not automatically guarantee a low score of social distance. Similarly, the willingness to recognise this ethnic group as part of the Ukrainian nation does not necessarily indicate reduced social distance (Fig. 2). Thus, even the respondents who answered “rather yes” to the question of whether Roma could be considered part of the Ukrainian nation demonstrated a 5-point score of social distance (characterised on the Bogardus scale as “Isolation”) (Fig. 3).

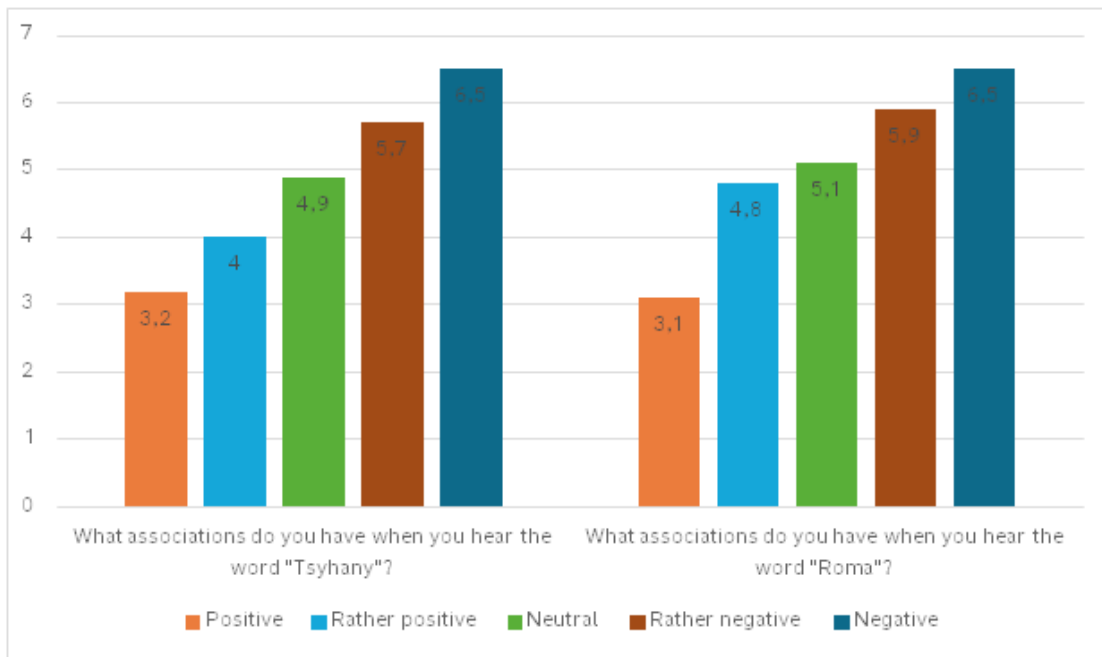


Fig. 2. Correspondence between the average values on the Bogardus scale and the emotional connotations of the words “Roma” and “Tsyhany” among respondents

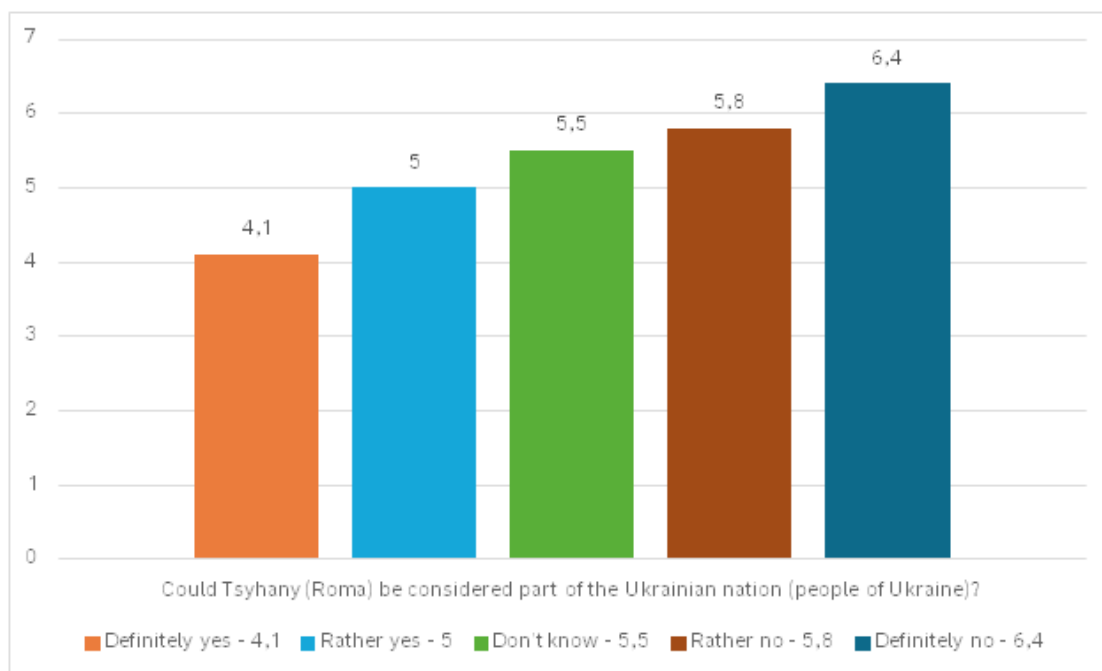


Fig. 3. Correspondence between the average values on the Bogardus scale and respondents’ willingness to consider Roma as part of the Ukrainian nation

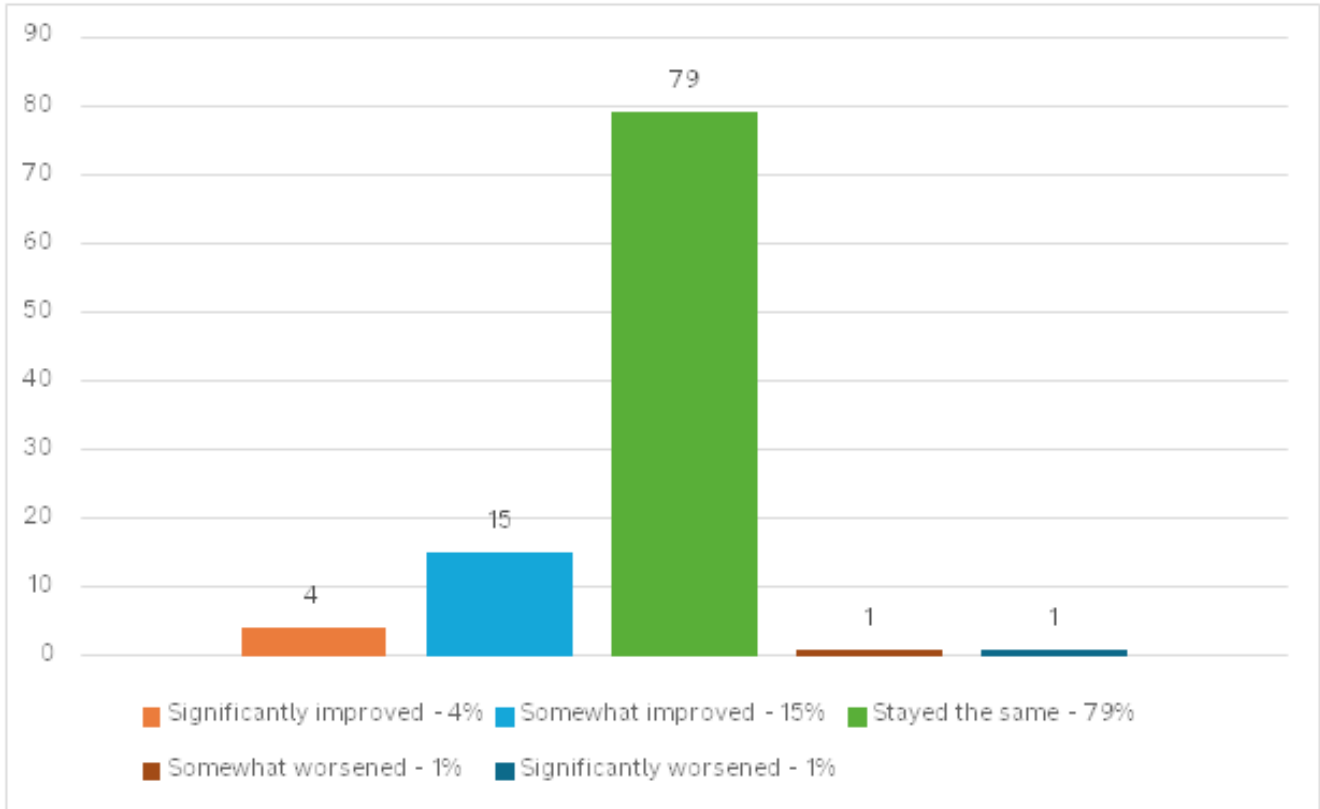
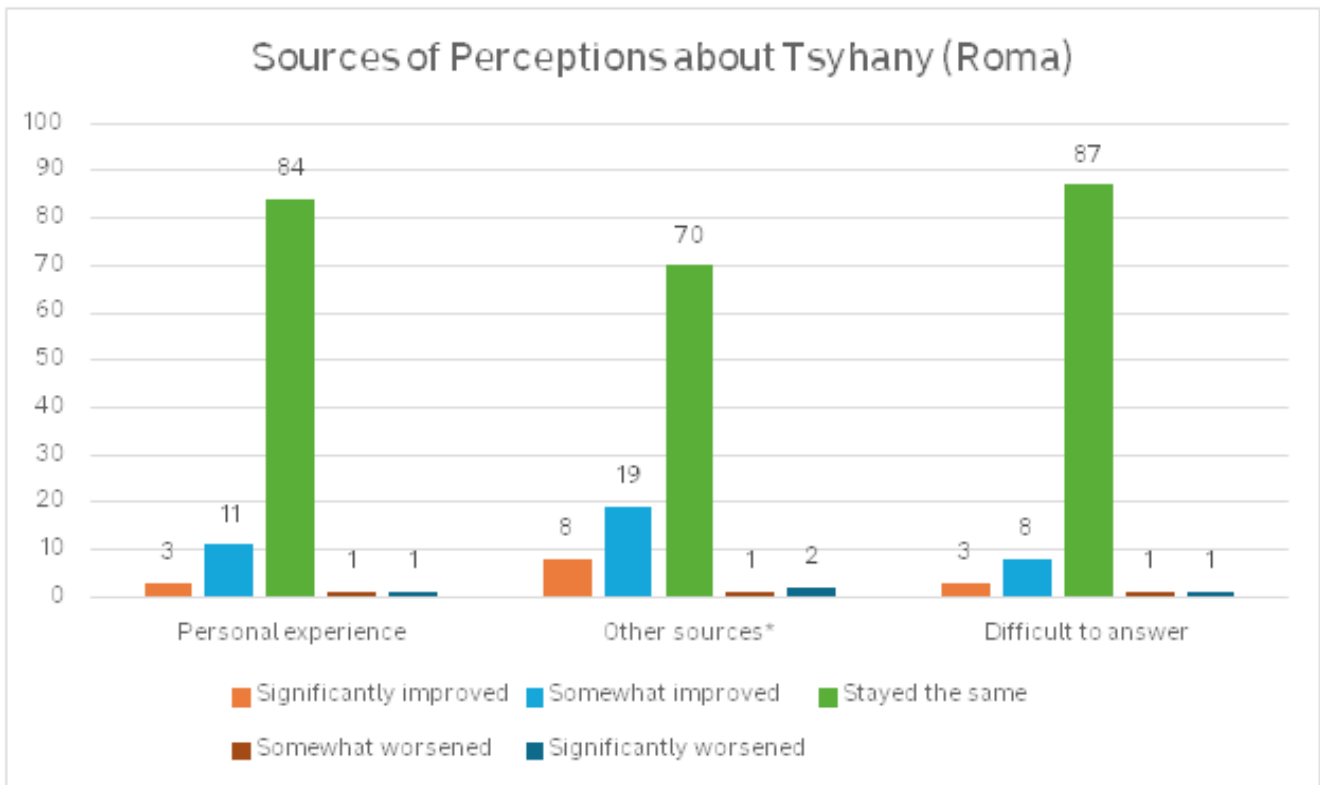


Fig. 4. Change in respondents' attitudes towards Tsyhany (Roma) in Ukraine after the start of the war (%)



*Combined categories: “based on information from the internet”, “based on stories from other people”, “based on movies and literary works”

Fig. 5. Correlation between the change in attitude towards Roma in Ukraine after the start of the war depending on the source of perceptions about Tsyhany (Roma) (%)

Assessment of Changes

As we can see, the positive changes in Ukrainian society towards the Roma are not as significant as might be expected when comparing KIIS survey results for 2021, 2022, and 2023 with earlier surveys by the NASU Institute of Sociology. Notably, in 2021, the NASU Institute of Sociology and KIIS both conducted surveys on the social distance scale at approximately the same time, but received different results. The score of social distance towards Roma in the NASU Institute of Sociology survey was 5.9 (Vorona & Shulha, 2021, p. 655), while in the KIIS study, it was 5.34 (Paniotto, 2022).

We have equal confidence in the professionalism of both the NASU Institute of Sociology and KIIS. As noted above, the differences can be attributed to variations in methodology. After all, unlike KIIS, the NASU used the ethnonym “Tsyhany” and paper questionnaires, which respondents filled out themselves.

Nevertheless, the mere fact that three consecutive surveys, conducted by KIIS at one-year intervals and using the same CATI methodology, showed a decrease in the xenophobia rating is reliable evidence of the existing dynamics. The social distance score towards Roma according to KIIS data changed as follows: 2021 – 5.34; 2022 – 5.08; 2023 – 4.75 (Paniotto, 2022; 2024).

Although during the full-scale Russian invasion, most respondents did not change their (predominantly negative) attitude towards Roma, one in five (19%) stated that their attitude towards Roma had either significantly or somewhat improved since the beginning of the war (Fig. 4).

Our research did not find a significant correlation between the positive or negative evaluation of Tsyhany (Roma) and the experience of living alongside them as neighbours. It also showed that distancing towards the Roma ethnic group is almost independent of socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, education, or region of residence. In all these groups, the average distancing score is categorised as “Isolation” (ranging from 5 to 6 on the 7-point Bogardus scale). In other words, the primary reason for positive changes in attitudes towards Roma does not originate in the personal experiences of respondents and their interactions with Roma, but more likely with what the respondents referred to as “other sources” in their responses (Fig. 5).

The role of the media is of special importance in this context. Ukrainian media, which positively highlighted the role of Roma during the war, turned out to be the “other sources” significantly influencing the decreased social distance score. A substantial portion of this positive effect can be attributed to one particular news story that went “viral” at the very beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in late February 2022. The story in question concerned the Roma in Lyubymivka (in the Kherson region) who stole a Russian tank. The story quickly gained traction on social media platforms, with many users sharing it as a symbol of Ukrainian resistance. It became part of a larger collection of stories highlighting the unity, resilience, and ingenuity of the Ukrainian people in the face of invasion (Homanyuk & Panchenko, 2023). This incident was familiar to 55% of respondents, and the majority of them believed it to be true (Fig. 6).

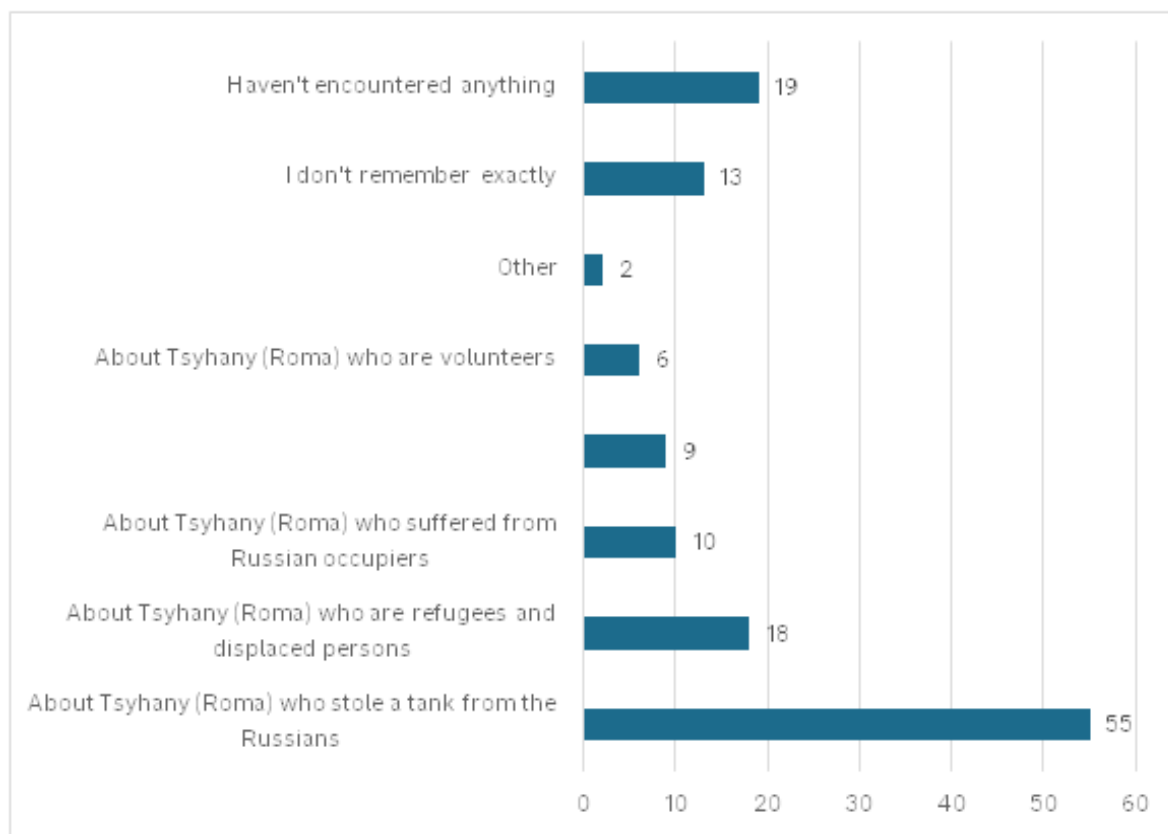


Fig. 6. Information encountered by respondents in the past year on social media or in the media about Tsyhany (Roma) in Ukraine (multiple responses allowed)

Those who encountered information in the media about Roma serving in the Ukrainian armed forces or participating in volunteer activities are significantly fewer, but still notable, at 9% and 6%, respectively. This presence is also credited to the Ukrainian media, which deliberately emphasised that, despite Roma national traditions of pacifism and having large families (which legally allows them to avoid mobilisation), many Roma voluntarily chose to serve in the Ukrainian military (Halas, 2022).

Conclusions

Our research confirms a certain decrease in social alienation towards Roma in Ukraine. This has been captured by sociological surveys from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology for several consecutive years. However, based on our review of the survey results, we assess the scale of these positive changes to be more modest than might first appear.

At least partially, the shift in the social distance score on the Bogardus scale in 2022 and 2023 occurred due to changes in research methodology. In earlier surveys, Ukrainian sociologists used the ethnonym “Tsyhany”, which carries a more negative connotation than the currently used ethnonym “Roma”. Additionally, due to the COVID pandemic, face-to-face surveys were replaced with telephone surveys, which have continued to be utilised following the onset of the full-scale Russian invasion. Telephone surveys are also known to show lower levels of xenophobia.

Nevertheless, Roma have indeed moved up two positions in the social distance ranking, overtaking

Russians and Belarusians to escape the bottom spot. According to our research, nearly one in five respondents has improved their attitude towards Ukrainian Roma since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion. This positive change is likely due primarily to Ukrainian media, which highlighted the role of Roma during the war in a favourable light, for instance as soldiers and volunteers. However, the single most important positive role can be attributed to one “viral” story: the tale of Roma in Lyubymivka stealing a Russian tank. It turned out that more than one-half of respondents were aware of this story.

As we can see, the war has contributed to the consolidation of Ukrainian society in the fight against a common enemy. This may have also played a significant role in the decline of xenophobia towards Roma. Interestingly, even those respondents who hold negative prejudices against Roma (at the “Isolation” level on the Bogardus scale) are largely willing to consider them part of the Ukrainian nation. Overall, we are observing a consistent decrease in social distance towards Ukrainian Roma, which has been further supported by several surveys.

Acknowledgements

This article has been published with the support of the Czech Science Foundation (GA 24-14388L) as a part of the bilateral project “Unequal Citizenship and Transnational Mobilisation of Polish, Czech and Ukrainian Roma in the Face of the War in Ukraine - ROCIT” (rocit.pl).

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