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THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS OF FORMING POLITICAL CYNICISM

У статті розглядається проблема політичного цинізму. Проаналізовано зміст відповідного конструкту та його складові, а також потенційні чинники поширення політичного цинізму. Здійснено аналіз соціальних та політичних (політичний устрій, ідеологія, політична активність населення та її ставлення до політики та влади) та медійних (поширення скандальної, конфліктогенної інформації про політиків, зсув акцентів на афективну складову, характер поширення та споживання виборцями такої інформації тощо). Окрему увагу приділено аналізу психологічних чинників формування політичного цинізму (наявність певних когнітивних установок та упереджень щодо політики, рівень політичної активності, індивідуально-психологічні характеристики виборців). Представлено результати власного дослідження соціально-психологічних чинників формування політичного цинізму. Проаналізовано загальні показники вибірки за шкалами, які найбільшою мірою репрезентують конструкт «політичний цинізм»: зацікавленість у політиці, рівень довіри до політиків, рівень політичних знань, особистісний цинізм та цинічне ставлення до політичних об'єктів та виявлено, що для вибірки загалом характерним є середній рівень політичного цинізму (схильність до певної міри протиставляти себе політикам, демонструвати недовіру та зневажливе ставлення до них). Представлено резуль-

тати аналізу вибірки за іншими психологічними показниками (міра політичної участі, політична ідентифікація та мотиваційний компонент в політиці, співвідношення екстернального та інтернального локусів контролю, конформізму та домінантності), а також результати аналізу інтенсивності та характеру споживання досліджуваними політичної інформації, що поширюється в медіа. Відповідні показники віднайшли відображення у регресійній моделі, яка демонструє ймовірні чинники формування політичного цинізму, найбільш значущими з яких є: специфіка політико-ідеологічного самовизначення (низький рівень владного самоствердження, переважання нормативної непоступливості та позиційної конкурентності), інтенсивне, нерозбірливе та некритичне споживання політичних новин (переважно телевізійних), особливості політичної активності (розвинений вербально-комунікативний компонент політичної участі та політичний інтерес при невисокому поведінково-вольовому компоненті), конформізм та екстернальний локус контролю.

Ключові слова: політичний цинізм, медіавпливи, політична участь, довіра, зацікавленість політикою.

Introduction

Political cynicism is spreading widely in the modern world, exerting a significant influence on political processes and changing the political landscape. Therefore, S. Rijkhoff, an American researcher, cites at the beginning of her in-depth work on political cynicism the analysts' formulation calling cynics "a third type of voters, apart from liberals and conservatives" (Rijkhoff, 2015). That is why, researchers face many questions regarding the researching methodology for this phenomenon, as well as how to counteract its spread.

Challenge problem

Today, "political cynicism" as a construct does not have an unambiguous interpretation. In numerous works devoted to political cynicism, it is derived from the concepts of "political alienation", "disapproval and dissatisfaction" with some political system or its components, "scepticism", "apathy", "political mistrust", etc. The components of the examined construct also remain debatable.

S. Rijkhoff has performed a systematic review of articles and books devoted to political cynicism published over 50 years, summarizing the list of probable components of this construct, including: belief in immorality, incompetence, dishonesty, unreliability of politicians, their self-interest;

general mistrust to politics and its components; futile attempts to overcome political differences/ideologies; inconsistency of policy (politicians) with people's needs; their insufficient intentions to act in accordance with people's wishes and expectations. This list is also supplemented by certain psychological characteristics: disdain, contempt, hostility, etc. (Rijkhoff, 2015).

Researchers are fairly unanimous in recognizing the destructive consequences of political cynicism for political systems and democracy. The potential risks of the further spread of political cynicism includes: threat to the political power legitimacy (a cynical attitude against the background of constant criticism forms the perception that governments are detached from people's real will), as well as concerns about a decreased participation in politics (cynicism correlates with citizens' apathy and their unwillingness to realize themselves in the socio-political sphere).

Therefore, the question arises about tools to counteract political cynicism, which is closely related to studies on the factors determining the formation of cynical attitudes and the psychological characteristics supporting the development of a cynically oriented personality in relation to politics. Now, the number of psychological studies related to the specified tasks is relatively small; moreover, scientific studies on the nature and national manifestations of political cynicism are practically absent in Ukraine. Taking into account the relevance of the issue, the **article purpose** is to analyse general factors influencing the political cynicism formation, as well as to determine the socio-psychological predictors of this phenomenon.

Theoretical analysis

Review of recent research and publications.

The studies examining political cynicism provide sufficiently broad ideas on the factors of its formation. Conventionally, these factors can be divided into several groups: socio-political, media, psychological.

Among socio-political factors, political culture and historically formed attitudes to the authorities have the key role. The political cynicism characteristic for the post-Soviet countries has a common root: the syndrome of a "little Soviet person" dependent on the state and, at the same time, disenfranchised, unable to defend their rights, antagonistic and apathetic-inactive. Political cynicism of this kind is characteristic for people in authoritarian states. And if it was gradually supplanted during the years of independence in Ukraine, it is flourishing to this day in Russia. The results of P. Shields' research testify that the authoritarian rule and unconvincing state propaganda in the Russian Federation strengthen

the existing cynical attitude to politics, due to which “collective actions necessary for reforms from below are difficult to even imagine” (Shields, 2021).

We should note that political cynicism is developed not only because of authoritarianism, but also along with other political processes. Thus, high political cynicism is also characteristic for countries with developed democracy. We have distinguished the following relevant factors supporting political cynicism: a significant distance between the political elite and ordinary people, dissatisfaction with the state course, populist sentiments. At the same time, the last factor is the most significant, as it accumulates people’s dissatisfaction with all the previously mentioned ones.

Populist ideology directly opposes two antagonistic groups: ordinary people and the ruling elite. As a result, people lose hope, begin to despise the political elite, and they vote for those parties or politicians who express populist ideas and promote unrealistic programs under the guise of people’s interests (Rooduijn and others, 2017).

Cynicism, according to N. Amelchenko, is an evidence of the crisis of classical ideologies, while populism fills this lacuna. At the same time, politics floods mass-media and turns into a show, where politicians’ personalities are more interesting to voters than their ability to solve social and political problems (Amelchenko, 2019).

It is interesting that both populism and political cynicism, according to the research results, are associated with belief in conspiracy theories. Basing on a survey of respondents in Greece, Great Britain and the United States, a group of researchers (Papaioannou, and others, 2022) found that political cynicism mediated the relationship between populist views and conspiracy beliefs. In turn, O. Bondarchuk demonstrated that an external locus of control - a tendency to see the source that manages one’s life in the external environment and to remove from oneself the responsibility for solving one’s own or socio-political problems – was a predictor of a worldview combining populism and belief in conspiracy theories (Bondarchuk, 2022).

Mass media, including the latest network media, are greatly important for political cynicism spreading. Competing for audience attention, they actively reproduce populist ideas, criticize the government, pay close attention to politicians’ personal traits in a “yellow”, often scandalous trend. Such information deepens mistrust, contempt and disgust at politicians and becomes an ideal background for political cynicism formation, both in the Western countries and in Ukraine. At the same time, H. Song advocates the position that the level of political cynicism is

related to the nature of consumed media information: the more passively and uncritically it is used, the greater the likelihood of political cynicism is (Song H., 2020).

The most deeply studied psychological factors associated with political cynicism are cognitive attitudes towards politics and specific political activities: political alienation, mistrust, prejudiced attitude towards politics, a sense of one's own effectiveness/inefficiency in socio-political life, intolerance, etc. As it was mentioned earlier, a close relationship was found between political cynicism and external locus of control. Scientific studies identified also such important psychological factors forming political cynicism as scepticism and general cynicism. In addition, correlations were found between political cynicism and scales of the five-factor personality model, in particular neuroticism and benevolence (in the examined case, distrust) (Pattyn and others, 2012).

Determination of such aspects of the general problem that were not highlighted before.

Since the psychological aspect of political cynicism has not sufficiently studied yet, scientists make only assumptions on what personal traits can lead to the formation of political cynicism. There are only few studies in the scientific literature that contain relevant prognostic models. The study of Dutch scientists is indicative; it was based on a survey of 543 teenagers and proposed a model according to which the greatest influence on political cynicism formation was an individual's general cynicism, followed by a negative perception of the current country authorities and a feeling of disgust for politics, lack of political knowledge, politically negative socialization of parents and friends, negative self-esteem and political frustration and anger (Dekker, Meijerink, 2013). This study, however, proposed forecasts only for the teenage audience. Therefore, the task is interesting to build a prognostic model for other age groups, on the basis of a national sample.

Research methodology

The performed theoretical analysis has allowed us to specify the methodological scheme of the empirical study and to formulate working hypotheses: about the existing relations between political cynicism and certain personal traits, as well as the amount and nature of consumed political information from mass-media. The following *methodological tools* were used to test the hypotheses: the Questionnaire on Participation in Politics (Kiyashko, 2013), the Questionnaire on Political and Ideological Self-Determination (Tsyganenko, 2003), Conformity scale from Cattell's 16 Personality Factors in O.M. Kapustina's adaptation (Kapustina,

2001), Rotter's Locus of Control Scale adapted by S. Pantileev, V. Stolin (Pantileev, Stolin, 1983), S. Rijkhoff's Scale for Political Cynicism (Rijkhoff, 2015) and a questionnaire that allowed us to determine how the respondents consumed political information presented in mass-media.

Statistical data processing was carried out using the SPSS statistic program using descriptive statistics, frequency analysis, correlation analysis with Pearson correlation coefficients, multiple linear regression analysis.

Taking into account the specifics of the researched theme, the sample was made up of electoral age people (over 18 years old). The total sample included 138 people, men and women. To identify how political cynicism correlates with age, the sample was proportionally divided into four groups: 18-24 years old, 25-34 years, 35-42 years, and older than 43 years.

The results

At initial stage of result processing, measures of central tendencies were analysed for indicators from the used methods; the most interesting were the results of S. Rijkhoff's Scale for Political Cynicism, which, in addition to trust, included indicators of political interest, political awareness and cynicism itself as an individual's psychological quality and as a system of beliefs about immorality, dishonesty, incompetence and selfishness in politics (Rijkhoff, 2015).

The representatives of our sample were generally characterized by the following: a fairly high level of interest in politics (interest in political events in their region, discussing politics with close people and minimal manifestations of political participation, such as voting in elections); a low level of trust (prejudiced attitude and distrust toward politicians, perceptions of them as insincere, dishonest); low indicators of political knowledge regarding the country political system and political situation, as well as poor awareness of their opportunities to influence political processes.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for the political cynicism scales

	Interest in politics	Political cynicism	Trust	Political knowledge
Average	11,80	6,41	4,78	12,54
Median	12,00	7,00	5,00	11,00
Standard deviation	3,280	3,996	2,545	8,357

The respondents had an average level of political cynicism, they might feel inequality, injustice from political elite and, therefore, considered politicians as their debtors and opponents. As a result, they perceived politics as a dirty and dishonest phenomenon.

The results obtained with Kiyashko's Questionnaire on Participation in Politics supplemented the previous conclusions. The respondent's participation in politics was characterized by a greater interest in political news and events, their discussion (the verbal-communicative component of political participation), rather than direct implementation of certain actions (the behavioural-volitional component): the average value of the first component was 3.65, and the second was only 1.74. The behavioural component of political activity was low in all age groups. Young people and people of the older age group showed strong interest in discussing political events, the representatives of these groups also tried to understand political processes (the cognitive component). Lower general participation in politics was characteristic for people aged 25-34 and 35-42 years, and the highest participation in politics was shown by people aged 18-24.

The results obtained with Tsyganenko's Questionnaire on Political and Ideological Self-Determination showed that the lowest values for total sample were recorded for "powerful self-assertion" (average value was 10.07): the respondents mostly did not feel their own need for power, nor did they admit that they showed it in interaction with others. "Pragmatic rationalization" was also low (average value was 12.19): the respondents had little faith in their own abilities, experienced difficulties in explaining what was happening to them in their individual and social life.

Other indicators: "dominant autonomization", "positional competition", "normative intransigence" and "political identification" were at an average level (their average values were within 15.54-16.17). The respondents felt equally as objects and subjects of activities, they mostly complied with social norms and oriented to the process, not to the result of an activity, they did not have a strong desire to compete with other people and a desire for social self-assertion, their political identification and the motivational component in politics were mediocre.

The sample representatives were not inclined to show unhealthy features of the external locus of control (blame other people and, to a greater extent, the government and politicians in respondents' personal or social problems); many respondents had an adequate ratio of external and internal locus of control (average indicators were 11.57 and 11.43 with a median of 11 and 12, respectively). The value distribution for Conformity scale from Cattell's 16 Personality Factors was also close to normal (average 12.761 with a median of 13). Only few non-conformists

and outright conformists (unsure of their own positions, not independent in their political behaviour) were among the respondents.

At the next study stage, the results obtained with the questionnaire determining the sources of political information and the features of its consumption were analysed. We found that 54% of the respondents used the Internet (news portals, social networks and search engines) to receive political information, 37% used television, only 2% used radio and 7% received political information from their friends during discussions. The information obtained during discussing on politics with friends was the most important for the 35-42-year-old respondents. The role of this information source decreased with age. Discussing politics with friends and relatives was not a source of information at all for people of the older age group, they preferred television and this was the only group who admired radio. On the other hand, the Internet was more popular among younger respondents.

At the time of the study (before the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine and the introduction of the Unified News telethon), the most popular news resources for the respondents were the TV channel "1+1" and the website (tsn.ua) of the TSN TV-channel, which covered more than 30% of all sources, portals 24tv.ua and korespondent.net (20% and 15% of all Internet sources), TV channel "Ukraine" (its share was 13% of all TV channels).

The majority of respondents (26%) searched the latest news several times a day, 22% did several times a week, 17% did several times a month, 15% did once a day, 9% did once a week. At the same time, 11% of the respondents did not watch political news nearly at all. The data how the respondents acquainted with political news (their attention) were indicative: almost half of the respondents (48%) did it casually (simply flick through the news tape without taking the time to read the details); only 11% did it quite consciously (allocated several hours to familiarize with the news, read (listen to) experts, examine carefully some stories); the rest took an intermediate position or were not interested in such news at all (contact only with information such as "news find me" - reposts, political information integrated with entertainment content, etc.).

At the next stage, we performed a linear multiple regression analysis to identify socio-psychological factors forming political cynicism. Basing on the coefficient of determination R , we found that the strongest linear relations between regression model variables was for one of the 20 selected models (R -squared 0.850) that explained 83% of the results. Autocorrelations were examined for this model (the Durbin-Watson coefficient was 1.427) and residuals were analysed (normally distributed),

so the regression model was statistically significant and could be used for further analysis.

Dominant self-assertion was the most important variable in the prognostic model. Since the value is negative, the lower was a person's desire to assert himself in the power system, the higher his/her political cynicism was. Political cynics are bystanders who do not aspire to take the helm and carry out political transformations themselves, but they tend to transfer problems to the government, blaming it for their own or public troubles.

The frequency of news consumption was the second most important component of the prognostic model, and attentiveness (passivity) of their consumption was also significant. This result confirms the thesis that if a person consumes political news more often and less critically, he/she becomes more cynical in a political context. At the same time, the influence of television news (the TV channels "1+1" and "Ukraine for our sample) directly determined the increase of political cynicism, and the dominant interest in online news showed the opposite tendency, which might indicate a greater criticality of the audience using the Internet to search for political information.

Table 2

Beta coefficients for the prognostic model of factors forming political cynicism

	Non-standardized		Standardized	t	Significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	8,630	2,588		3,335	,001
Domestic policy interest	2,466	,257	,461	9,612	,000
Trust	,766	,076	,488	10,064	,000
Dominance-conformism	-1,263	,117	-,522	-10,064	,000
Locus of control	,476	,072	,332	6,606	,000
Attention to news	,790	,147	,318	5,365	,000
Verbal-communicative component	,281	,149	,127	1,888	,062
Powerful self-assertion	-,581	,059	-,657	-9,758	,000
Online media	-1,726	,255	-,316	-6,762	,000
Internet sites	,404	,064	,283	6,311	,000
Positional competition	,316	,063	,247	5,008	,000
Normative intransigence	-,477	,087	-,259	-5,464	,000
Watching TV	-1,272	,299	-,196	-4,251	,000
Frequency of news searching	1,221	,163	,527	7,484	,000
Interest in politics	,408	,072	,335	5,679	,000
Participation in politics	,268	,086	,250	3,128	,002
Pragmatic rationalization	-,177	,060	-,126	-2,976	,004
Source of information	-,934	,212	-,229	-4,406	,000
Knowledge	,074	,022	,154	3,325	,001

If we add significant indicators such as interest in domestic politics and general interest in politics and formal indicators of political participation, manifested primarily via the verbal-communicative component (discussing politics with others), we can obtain a fairly clear picture: a politically cynical person is not passive, he/she talks a lot about politics, searches for political news, votes in elections, but his/her position appears to be antagonistic towards the authorities, and the news content he/she craves only reinforces his/her cynical position.

The next indicator was trust (beta coefficient 0.488); unexpectedly, it has positive value: the more people tend to trust others, including politicians, the more likely they are disappointed in them and become more cynical.

As it was expected, conformity and external locus of control influenced significantly on political cynicism formation. Normative intransigence, pragmatic rationalization and positional competition were also included into the regression model, which proved the following: political cynics were more likely to adhere to externally prescribed norms, did not believe in their own abilities, oriented poorly in the real processes that regulated their own and political life; on the other hand, they were prone to competition and rivalry in business and interpersonal relationships.

Thus, we identified the main socio-psychological factors forming political cynicism, among which certain personal traits, the specificity of political activity and the intensity/character of perception of political media information acquired the greatest importance.

Discussion

The results obtained by us are generally in line with numerous studies on the factors forming political cynicism. Our predictive model included predictors of political cynicism described by other researchers (Dekker, Meijerink, 2013; Pattyn, Van Hiel, Onraet, 2012; Rijkhoff, 2015; Rooduijn, Van der Brug, De Lange, Parlevliet, 2017; Song, 2020): conformism and external locus of control, susceptibility to media influences because of uncritical interpretation of media information, general negative attitudes towards politics, low levels of political knowledge, political identity and motivation, etc. Absent aspirations for powerful self-assertion, strongly expressed in our model indicator, is an interesting addition to the generally recognized list of factors forming political cynicism. A completely unexpected result in our research was a direct correlation between political trust and political cynicism, while many studies presented these phenomena as opposites (political cynicism was often equated with distrust toward politicians). Our result is consistent with the claim (in particular,

Rijkhoff, 2015) that political cynicism is indeed not a simple reflection of political mistrust, but is a more complex entity. In addition, we can suggest that individual trust (credulity) may be associated with a certain indiscernibility and uncritical perception of politicians, and may also form a heightened sense of disgust towards those who destroy such trust.

Conclusions

The performed theoretical analysis allowed us to outline the content and structure of the “political cynicism” construct, which is a more complex and ambiguous concept compared to political mistrust, and also includes a whole range of cognitive attitudes and prejudices about politics and politicians, as well as affective components (disrespect, contempt, alienation, etc.).

The results of our research demonstrated that a significant part of the sample had traits of political cynicism, formed, however, against the background of significant political interest and political activity (primarily, its verbal-communicative component). The socio-psychological factors forming political cynicism were identified according to performed multiple regression analysis, the most important among which were certain personal traits (an absent desire for authoritative self-assertion, conformism, external locus of control and credulity), specifics of political activity (high interest in politics, tendency to actively discuss it with others with low indicators of real participation in politics), as well as the influence of mass media (high interest in political news with an uncritical perception of them, tendency to trust television).

The political landscape changed significantly after the full-scale invasion of Russia into our country: we are talking about the ruling elite’s monopoly on the formation of a political agenda (in particular, due to introduced Unified News telethon), about strengthened positions of the authorities and about the increased trust in the President, local authorities and other state bodies recorded in many studies. Therefore, **prospects for further research** can include studies on changes in the level of political cynicism and psychological factors determining this dynamic in the country at war.

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Abstract

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THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS OF FORMING POLITICAL CYNICISM

The article considers the problem of political cynicism. The content of the relevant construct and its components, as well as potential factors of the spread of political cynicism, were analyzed. An analysis of social, political (political system, ideology, political activity of the population and its attitude to politics and power) and media (distribution of scandalous, conflict-causing information about politicians, moving the focus to the affective component, nature of dissemination and consumption of such information by voters, etc.) was carried out. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of psychological factors in the formation of political cynicism (the presence of certain cognitive attitudes and prejudices regarding politics, the level of political activity, individual psychological characteristics of voters).

The results of the own research of socio-psychological factors in the formation of political cynicism are presented. The general indicators of the sample were analyzed according to the scales that most represent the construct “political cynicism”: interest in politics, level of trust in politicians, level of political knowledge, personal cynicism and cynical attitude towards political objects, and it was found that the sample is generally characterized by average level of political cynicism (tendency to oppose politicians to a certain extent, show distrust and disdain for them). The results of the analysis of the sample according to other psychological

indicators (a measure of political participation, political identification and motivational component in politics, the ratio of external and internal locus of control, conformity and dominance) are presented, as well as the results of the analysis of the intensity and manner of the respondents' consumption of political information disseminated in the media. The relevant indicators were reflected in the regression model, which demonstrates the most likely factors in the formation of political cynicism, the most significant of which are: specifics of political and ideological self-determination (low level of authoritative self-affirmation, predominance of normative intransigence and positional competitiveness), intense, indiscriminate and uncritical consumption of political news (mainly televised), features of political activity (developed verbal-communicative component of political participation and political interest with a low behavioral-volitional component), conformism and external locus of control.

Key words: *political cynicism, media influence, political participation, trust, interest in politics.*

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