Interwoven Resilience: Non-State Actors and Formal Institutions in Ukraine's Urban War Effort

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Abstract
This article explores the perceptions of an interplay between formal and informal institutions in sustaining Ukraine's defence and governance during the full-scale Russian invasion. Focusing on three cities—Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy—it examines how civil society organisations, business actors, municipal authorities and national-level decision-makers contribute to security-related functions such as direct city defence, wartime governance, material support to the army, financing of military needs, community leadership, coordination of efforts and communication. Using the repertory grid methodology, the article interviews and records the perceptions of civil society leaders and experts on institutional roles and effectiveness under wartime conditions. Findings reveal the centrality of non-state actors, particularly Territorial Defence Commanders and Local Civic Activists, in frontline cities, often compensating for underachieving formal institutions. Municipal authorities exhibit varied performance, excelling in Vinnytsia but struggling in Mykolayiv and Sumy. The article highlights the adaptability of civil society, the limited governing effectiveness of city formal institutions, the exclusion of national-level decision-makers from local affairs, and the critical need for collaboration between all these actors to enhance resilience and address wartime challenges.

Introduction

This article explores the role and functions of the state (formal) and civic/business (non-state or informal) institutions in the war effort in Ukraine's regions, particularly in the context of the defence of the major cities (oblasni tsentry) from Russia's full-scale invasion. The article investigates public perceptions and interpretations of how these institutions engage in security-related activities at the city level.

When reflecting on Ukrainian society's adaptation to the conditions of war, Mykola Bielieskov highlights that it has assumed functions traditionally reserved for the state:

> The grassroots motivation to defend their land is so impressive among ordinary Ukrainians. . . . In the last 150 years it has been solely the state's task to prepare and support armies on the battlefield. However, since the first day of this war Ukrainians have willingly shifted much of this burden onto their shoulders. (Bielieskov 2022)

Similarly, Yulia Kurnyshova highlights how local authorities and volunteers replaced the national-level institutions in delivering relief. She notes:

> In the first months of Russia's invasion, local governments and volunteers . . . were in the limelight of practical resilience. They provided vital humanitarian aid, especially in remote and frontline areas, and helped communities to remain resilient . . . when access to aid and public services was typically cut off. (Kurnyshova 2023: 95)

These observations challenge conventional state-centric models of governance and security provision, revealing a unique interplay between formal and informal institutions in wartime Ukraine. The article investigates civil society perceptions of this unique interplay in three cities—Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv, and Sumy—to evaluate how formal institutions and non-state actors have adapted to the perils of the Russian invasion.

To conduct the analysis, the article employs the repertory grid methodology, a semi-structured interview tool from personal construct psychology that was

designed to understand how an individual makes sense of reality (Bourne & Jankowicz 2018: 128–129). This qualitative methodology allows to capture the perceptions of civil society activists, experts and journalists from Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy on the performance of their city institutions under crisis conditions. By bridging psychological methodology with political science analysis, the article aims to offer a deeper insight into how civil society leaders comprehend wartime security and how it can be institutionally ensured in their cities.

The article puts forward four hypotheses:

- First, civil society and informal institutions are perceived to bear the primary burden of the war effort and the defence of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy.
- Second, local non-military institutions, both formal and informal, seem to exceed their traditional governance roles to actively support the war effort of their cities.
- Third, central state institutions are perceived to be inadequately engaged in the security provision at the level of cities, with limited visibility and impact.
- Fourth, the poor performance of formal institutions, both national-level and local, encourages the non-state actors to embrace the security-related functions which otherwise they would never have embraced.

This article is part of a broader project with a focus on popular legitimacy for formal and informal institutions in contemporary Ukraine. The project evaluates the adaptation of institutions to post-1991 realities and society's capacity to mobilise in response to external military aggression. By focusing on the major regional cities, the project charts political values and institutional expectations, providing comparative insights into how governance and security are perceived across the country.

This article is structured into three thematic blocks. The first examines the wartime changes in the functioning of formal and informal institutions in Ukraine, introducing the contexts of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy. The second block explains the repertory grid methodology, emphasising its advantages in eliciting the perceptions of civil society leaders. The third block presents the results of the content analysis, summarising key roles and functions that institutions perform in the three cities, as outlined by the interviewees.

The findings of this article have broader implications for understanding governance in crisis contexts. On the example of Ukraine, they reveal the strengths and limitations of formal and informal institutions, highlighting the importance of local actors in sustaining wartime resilience. The article demonstrates that civic and business actors have the capacity to overstep their usual competencies and assume functions typically performed by central or local state institutions—particularly in instances where those formal institutions are underperforming or fail

to respond to urgent needs. In such cases, informal institutions become not just complementary, but substitutive. Conversely, where state institutions remain responsive and functional, informal actors tend to reinforce them, creating synergy in the delivery of security, and thereby strengthening collective resilience. This is a rather illustrative practice for contemporary Ukraine, but may hold true for war-torn environments in other parts of the world.

The article also provides insights into the conditions that enable effective local governance during Russia's ongoing full-scale invasion. Such governance often hinges on the level of social capital and institutional reputation that authorities possess within their communities. These, in turn, are shaped by public perceptions of institutional effectiveness in both governance and security.

Ukraine's war effort

A fair share of the recent literature on the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine argues that the events of February 2022 catalysed the transformation of Ukrainian society. Kurnyshova (2023: 86) has observed that the dichotomic distinction *state-society* lost much of its relevance: 'The functionality of the government, the consolidation of political elites and the professional communication and information management boosted the legitimacy of the state as a security provider and simultaneously inspired resilience within society.' One of the outcomes of the post-2014 decentralisation reform was that the state created a favourable environment for grassroots activism to gain momentum (Kushnir 2024: 123). The operational principle of subsidiarity allowed decisions to be made at the lowest effective level, empowering local governments, volunteers and civil society (Kurnyshova 2023: 96; Sydorchuk & Chabanna 2017: 139).

Apart from the impetus from decentralisation, the new type of *state-society* synergy has been facilitated by the rise of wartime leadership figures. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy became a symbol of national resistance, with nearly 90% of Ukrainians supporting him by the end of 2022 and 59% supporting him in September 2024 (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2024). Valeriy Zaluzhny, the former Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, grew to be another public hero in the first months of the invasion (Kurnyshova 2023: 92; Pankieiev 2024: 16). On the regional level, military commanders responsible for successful defensive and counter-offensive operations garnered the trust of local residents (Pankieiev 2024: 9–10). This allowed selected figures—both state officials and grassroots leaders—to acquire unexpectedly broad legitimacy and to influence the war effort by the mere gravity of their authority.

The business sector, including Ukraine's oligarchs, also played a distinct role in defending the state and its regions. As Andrew Lohsen (2022) notes, Ukraine's wealthiest individuals often aligned with the formal institutions, making substantial donations for the needs of the army and humanitarian support of people in

crisis. This alignment reflects both self-interest—recognising the threat a Russian takeover poses to their properties—and an opportunity to enhance their public standing (see also Fedinec 2024: 343; Burakovsky & Yukhymenko 2023: 181–182; Matuszak 2022). Acknowledging the importance of business actors in wartime planning and governance, this article will also scrutinise their engagement in the defence of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy.

Olga Boichak and Brian McKernan (2024: 49) highlight the limitations of measuring the strength of Ukrainian civil society through formal indicators such as number of registered organisations, their membership and fiscal revenue. Without questioning the importance of the registered NGOs, they suggest adding to the equation the horizontal networks, which have become the driving force behind *state-society* transformations. To properly explore the potential of Ukraine's civil society, Boichak and McKernan deem it necessary to look at 'informal forms of communal assistance and contentious political activities' (Boichak & McKernan 2024: 51; see also Channel Justice 2022: 36; Sereda 2018: 100). Kateryna Zarembo and Eric Martin provide an elegant definition of Ukraine's civil society, which allows to embrace the versatility of its participation in the war effort. For them, civil society is 'a voluntary and civic-minded activity, beyond the household and family, and not including the State or the market. Actions, whether individual or collective, formal or informal, private or non-profit, motivated by civic values, constitute civil society' (Zarembo & Martin 2024: 210; see also Gonçalves dos Reis 2024: 2).

Civil society institutions enjoy an outstanding reputation in Ukraine (Kornievskyi, Tyshchenko, & Yablonskyi 2019: 41). According to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), the public trust in charitable organisations helped them raise nearly UAH 33.96 billion (almost USD 1 billion) in donations during the first year of the full-scale invasion (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2023: 7). The National Democratic Institute survey from January 2023 found that 41% of Ukrainians had experience volunteering (including making donations) not least due to the 'soft power' of the NGOs (Fedinec 2024: 344). On top of that, 37.7% of members of public associations and charitable organisations interviewed by the KIIS believed that civil society strongly influenced the developments in Ukraine after February 2022; 40.3–41.4% of the interviewed members believed that their own influence was strong or moderately strong (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2023: 7).

Before the Russian invasion, 36% of civil society organisations in Ukraine predominantly focused on matters of culture, sport and tourism, while 29.1% dealt with education. In early 2023, the above areas were prioritised by only 8.8% and 5.3% of organisations, respectively. In contrast, assistance to the Armed Forces and support for victims of Russian aggression emerged as primary objectives for 43% of organisations, reflecting a substantial increase of 21.3% and 25.7%, respectively (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2023: 8).

Having interviewed Ukrainian civic activists engaged in the war effort, Boichak & McKernan (2024: 65) conclude that they pursue political goals in three plains. Their short-term goals are 'alleviating some of the immediate needs of soldiers, veterans and civilians to ushering in radical changes at the societal level'. Their long-term goals are 'alleviating immediate needs or helping an existing social institution function better', which signifies their openness to the cooperation, support and reform of the governing structures. Their ultimate goals reside in ushering in 'radical social transformations, such as ending corruption and drastically reforming the state'.

According to Chatham House survey (Lutsevych 2024: 3) – and much in line with what Boichak & McKernan discovered – members of Ukrainian civil society organisations define the following societal challenges as crucial (listed in order of importance): reintegrating veterans by providing prosthetics, creating employment opportunities and offering mental health support; fostering national unity around a strategy for victory; ensuring that children and young people affected by the war have access to quality education; addressing the acute demographic crisis; establishing a functioning war-specific economy; and integrating internally displaced persons into local communities (see also Gonçalves dos Reis 2024: 5). Additionally, civil society activists exert pressure on formal institutions to safeguard press freedom, media independence and journalistic ethics. By doing so, these activists enhance the role of the media as a watchdog and a bulwark against disinformation campaigns (Gonçalves dos Reis 2024: 5). It is, thus, no surprise that nearly 97% of respondents interviewed by the KIIS opined that civic activism contributed to the consolidation of communities, fostered belief in victory and strengthened resistance (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2023: 7).

This article examines the role of formal and informal institutions in the war effort in three Ukrainian cities—Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy. While much of the up-to-date research has been focused on Kyiv-based institutions, exploring the resilience of territorial communities in other parts of the country is important for understanding the impact of the decentralisation reform, especially in the context of Ukraine's limited experience with self-governance. Apart from that, such an exploration will help unveil the uniqueness of the regional self-organisation and institutional interplay in the context of the Russian invasion.

The selection of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy as case studies allowed to devise a compelling analytical framework. Vinnytsia is located in west-central Ukraine, in a comparatively safe rear, with a population of 369,739 as of January 2022 (Ministry of Finance of Ukraine 2024). It has hosted 2,508 registered non-governmental organisations at the time of writing this article (YC Market 2024a). Since 2014, the dominant focus of these organisations has been on promoting democratic values and community development, enhancing local governance and civic participation, fostering leadership and volunteerism among young peo-

ple, preserving local heritage and cherishing urban art. Mykolayiv is a southern frontline city with a pre-invasion population of 470,011 (Ministry of Finance of Ukraine 2024). It has faced significant destruction yet maintains an active civil society network of 2,699 organisations (YC Market 2024b), which have a history of engagement in humanitarian aid and support to vulnerable populations, promoting transparency and combating corruption, and advocating for the protection of the Southern Bug River and local ecosystems. Sumy is a northern frontline city located near the Russian border. It counted 256,474 residents before the invasion (Ministry of Finance of Ukraine 2024). With 2,032 non-governmental organisations in late 2024 (YC Market 2024c), Sumy can compete in civic activism—at least in officially registered activism—with more populous Vinnytsia and Mykolayiv. The civil society organisations in Sumy have a record of providing support to internally displaced persons and facilitating community integration, enhancing media literacy and critical thinking skills among residents, and promoting urban art.

Repertory grid methodology

This article employs the repertory grid interview technique to gather primary empirical data. Originating in the 1960s within the field of personal construct psychology, the repertory grid technique offers a structured framework for exploring nuanced meanings of discussed concepts and topics. Whilst being in essence a qualitative methodology, it allows for the quantitative operationalisation of individual responses, which can then be subjected to statistical analysis. As noted by Devi Jankowicz (2004: 14–15), a leading expert in the field, the repertory grid technique represents a combination of structured interviewing and a multidimensional rating scale approach (see also Osterberg-Kaufmann 2022: 3).

The repertory grid—literally a grid containing information collected during an interview (see example below)—comprises four sections (Jankowicz 2004). First is the *topic*, a straightforward section that identifies the research field, guiding further elaboration and exploration of how interviewees perceive the discussed concepts. In this article, the topic is the security-related functions and performance of institutions in three cities. The second is a *set of elements*, a section that presents a list of objects or items whose characteristics are analysed during the interview. In this article, the elements include ten institutions involved in the security provision in Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy (details provided below). The third section is *constructs,* which includes interviewee-elucidated statements (perceptions) relating to the elements. Constructs in this article represent the security-related functions and performance of the ten institutions in three cities. Each construct is bipolar, requiring an interviewee to provide an opposing statement alongside the original one. Finally, the fourth section is *quantitative ratings*, which includes numerical values assigned by an interviewee to each element based on the individual understanding of its relationship with the construct. In

this article, ratings are assigned on a 1–5 scale, reflecting the degree to which each institution demonstrates a specific security-related function or activity.

The repertory grid interview technique allows for a systematic exploration of how civil society leaders and experts perceive institutional functions and performance. In the process of interviewing and filling out the grids, to elucidate every new construct (function/performance of an institution) and add it to section three, the interviewees were presented with three elements (institutions) and asked to identify two that shared a similarity and one that stood out. The guiding question was: 'In the context of your observations, what makes two of these institutions more similar and/or effective than the third at the city level?' The response (perception) of the interviewees was noted down as a statement and used as the basis for the 'positive' construct pole with the opposing pole phrased as an antonym. For instance, if the original 'positive' statement sounded like 'The institution(s) are(is) affiliated with the city and know(s) the local context well' and was placed in the right construct pole of the section three, the antonym would be 'The institution is detached from the city and not directly affiliated with it, does not know the local context' and placed in the left pole (see example table below). Once the construct poles were established, the interviewees had to look into the fourth section and rate the relationship between the elements (institutions) and the construct (functions/performance) on a 1–5 scale. Throughout the interview, the interviewer recorded responses, continuously expanding the repertory grid with new constructs and ratings.

It is important to mention that, for this article, the interviewer prepared the elements (institutions) in advance and aggregated them in triadic combinations, which remained consistent across all interviews (e.g. 'President of Ukraine—City Mayor—Local big business owners' to elucidate the first construct, 'Parliament of Ukraine—City Council—Local volunteers/civic activists' to elucidate the second construct, and others). As for constructs, ten of them were elucidated during the interview and one was supplied at the very beginning: 'In general, the institution does not manifest itself in any way at the city level' against 'In general, the institution functions very efficiently at the city level'. The supplied construct was necessary to assess the quality of performance of the same institution in three different cities.

The elements (institutions) discussed during the interview included the President of Ukraine (**PU**), the Parliament of Ukraine or *Supreme Council* (**SC**), the City Mayor (**CM**), the City Council (**CC**), the Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces (**AC**), Commanders of territorial defence units (**TDC**), Local volunteers/civic activists (**LCA**), Local big business owners (**LBB**), Local media influencers (**LMI**) and Leaders of local religious organisations (**LRL**).

This set of elements was created based on four considerations. First is *public trust*—institutions were chosen based on their perceived trustworthiness in

public opinion surveys (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation 2023). Second is *representativity and accountability*—almost all institutions in the set are either elected or directly accountable to the public. Third is *contribution to the war effort*—all institutions are actively engaged in the defence of the country and, specifically, the cities of Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy. Fourth is *attention in the literature*—all institutions have been defined as the ones making an impact in recent academic publications.

For clarity, an example of an empty repertory grid is provided below (Table 1):

Table 1: Example of repertory grid

Section one (topic)												
RepGrid #N												
Topic: Institutional Functions and Performance												
Section three (opposing construct pole)	**Section two (set of elements)**											**Section three (original construct pole)**
	President of Ukraine	Supreme Council	City Mayor	City Council	UAF Commander-in-Chief	TDU commanders	Local activists/volunteers	Local big business owners	Local media influencers	Local religious leaders	Ideal institution	
The institution is detached from the city and not directly affiliated with it, does not know the local context	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	The institution is affiliated with the city and knows the local context well
Elucidated construct -2	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Elucidated construct 2
Elucidated construct -3	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Elucidated construct 3
...	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	...
Elucidated construct -10	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Elucidated construct 10
In general, the institution does not manifest itself at all at the city level	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	In general, the institution functions very effectively at the city level
	Section four (quantitative ratings), N=1-5,											

Source: Author

The repertory grid technique offers several advantages over other interviewing techniques. First, it allows for the quantitative insights into the qualitative data. Second, it establishes a transparent and consistent connection between constructs (functions/performance) and elements (institutions). Third, it gives interviewees the freedom to independently define institutional functions and performance, ensuring that they perceive the constructs as personally relevant rather than imposed by the interviewer. Finally, the grid format allows for equal attention to each element, enabling reliable comparisons within and between grids (Bourne & Jankowicz 2018: 135–136).

The article draws from answers from 35 interviewees, distributed as follows: 15 in the Vinnytsia sample, 10 in the Mykolayiv sample and 10 in the Sumy sample. The sample sizes were intentionally designed to favour Vinnytsia, the only city in the rear, compared to Mykolayiv and Sumy, which are both frontline cities. The interviewees included civil society leaders (independent volunteers, *ad hoc* activists and/or registered NGO members—29 in total), experts in municipal governance (one per city) and local media analysts (one per city). Some of the interviewees had a history of involvement in national and regional war efforts, such as supplying equipment or crowdfunding for the army and territorial defence units.

Interviewees were recruited through discriminative snowball sampling, with eligibility criteria requiring them to be established civil society leaders, experts or media analysts who had been permanently residing in Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv or Sumy. They needed to have specific knowledge of the functioning of formal and informal institutions at the city level and relevant governance experience (formal, informal or both). All interviews were conducted individually and via online video conferencing software. All interviews were recorded between March and August 2024.

The article acknowledges a potential bias inherent in interviewing civil society leaders who are, in part, expected to assess the performance of non-state informal institutions—including their own. This bias may manifest in a tendency to overestimate their own significance in providing security and compensating for gaps in governance. However, given the interview-based methodology, such subjectivity is considered acceptable within the qualitative research framework. Moreover, civil society leaders represent only one of ten institutions discussed in the article, and the inclusion of their perspectives offers valuable insight into broader dynamics of governance and security provision. That being said, the author recognises the importance of mitigating this bias in future and plans new research that will incorporate data from representatives of local formal institutions and ordinary city residents.

It is important to emphasise that repertory grids belong to the qualitative research toolkit. At their core, they are semi-structured interviews designed to yield in-depth insights into how individuals perceive and make sense of the

world around them. Two out of the four sections of each grid are shaped entirely by the subjective perceptions of the interviewee, ensuring that the data reflects individual experiences. At the same time, the responses can be systematically structured, categorised and compared across grids. This unique combination allows us to bridge qualitative and quantitative approaches, enabling a degree of basic statistical analysis.

While the article acknowledges the limitations of repertory grids from a strictly quantitative perspective—such as the relatively small sample size—it emphasises the method's qualitative strength: depth of interpretation rather than breadth of coverage. The study is based on 35 interviews, which generated a total of 350 constructs (perceptions of functions/performance of institutions) across three cities. Even when approached quantitatively, this volume of data offers the potential to identify statistically meaningful patterns and regularities.

Content analysis

The content analysis looks into the perceptions expressed through the elucidated constructs to pool and aggregate the latter into categories according to the meanings they convey ('bootstrapping' technique). With respect to repertory grids, constructs serve as both *content units* (i.e. units revealing the meaning of the basic idea) and *context units* (i.e. units demonstrating how the basic idea was phrased). 'In other words, each and every construct is regarded as expressing a single unit of meaning' (Jankowicz 2004: 149).

The content analysis in this article embraced all 35 repertory grids and 350 constructs (150 from the Vinnytsia sample group, 100 from Mykolayiv and 100 from Sumy), aiming to identify security-related constructs. This meant that only the constructs containing keywords such as 'defence', 'security', 'protection', 'war', 'army', 'military' and 'martial' were flagged for analysis. Once these constructs were identified, their thematic categories were developed for each of the three sample groups. Most of the elucidated categories appeared to be the same for Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy. On the last stage of content analysis, the percentage of flagged security-related constructs in relation to the total number of constructs within each sample group was calculated and presented in graphs (see below).

The majority of constructs were easily allocated to categories. However, there were two clusters of constructs that appeared to be tricky. The first cluster is the constructs that encompass multiple and/or overlapping security-related activities. To allocate these constructs to a category, the initial association provided by the interviewee was used as a point of reference. For instance, if a construct began with 'cooperation' or 'interaction' and was later elaborated with specific details (e.g. 'Interaction with other institutions to ensure the financial and economic needs of the city'), it was categorised under 'Wartime inter-institutional cooperation' (not 'Financial support to the city war effort'). Constructs discussing

any kind of 'humanitarian and technical' support to the army were categorised under 'Humanitarian and spiritual support to the city defence structures', while constructs focusing on 'technical and humanitarian' support to the army were allocated to the 'Material and technical support to the city defence structures' category. The second cluster is the constructs that did not explicitly include the security-related keywords but clearly reflected wartime challenges (e.g. support for internally displaced persons or assistance for people in crises). These were also included in relevant categories. That being said, constructs from both clusters were comparatively few.

After categorising all security-related constructs, the article examined which elements (institutions) received high ratings in which constructs (functions/performance). The percentage of constructs associated with each high-scoring element within a category was then calculated.

To determine an element's relevance to a construct, only institutions with a rating of 4 or higher were considered. For bipolar constructs, only the 'positive' pole—indicating strong performance of a function—was included in the analysis and added to tables (see below). The opposing pole was excluded, as high ratings in it indicated poor institutional performance in security-related activities.

The relationship between an element and the supplied construct enabled the assessment of the institution's overall wartime effectiveness within a specific city. To calculate this, the ratings from all supplied constructs, across all repertory grids within a given city sample, were summed for each institution and then divided by the number of interviewees in that sample. Based on the resulting average, institutional effectiveness was classified as follows: scores between 2 and 3 indicated 'low' effectiveness, scores between 3 and 4 indicated 'moderate' effectiveness, and scores between 4 and 5 indicated 'high' effectiveness.

The results of the content analysis are presented in a series of tables (see below). These tables include *categories of security-related constructs*—thematic groupings of constructs identified during the analysis; *list of security-related constructs*—specific constructs within each category as elucidated by the interviewees; *construct codes and numbers*—unique identifiers for constructs to ensure clarity and traceability to original repertory grids; *weight of a category*—the proportion of all constructs in one category relative to the total number of security-related constructs; *institutional performance within a category*—the weight of each institution in performing functions within a given category.

Vinnytsia

Fifteen (15) interviewees from Vinnytsia elucidated 150 constructs in total, among which 44 were security-related (29.33%). See Table 1.1 and Graph 1.1.

Table 1.1: Security-related functions and performance of institutions in Vinnitsa

Category	Construct definition	Construct №	Constructs quantity (weight among 44 defence constructs, %)	Institution times mentioned in the category (weight among others in the category, %)
Direct participation in the city defence (**DPCD**)	Regional assistance to the Armed Forces (purchase of drones and cars, fundraising and collection of donations); Involvement with the security structures of the city; Reform and support of the city defence structures; Participation in the city's defence structures, support of Vinnytsia's fighting spirit; Affiliation to territorial defence structures; Participation in the city and state defence structures; Participation in the structures of defence and protection of the city; Participation in the security and defence of the city, assistance to relevant structures; Involvement in the activities of defence and security structures of the city; Participation in volunteer (informal) support of city defence structures; Defence activities at the city level, assistance to Vinnytsia units at the front.	VA1.2 VA1.3 VA3.3 VA3.6 VA4.3 VA8.3 VA9.5 VA10.8 VA12.3 VA12.8 VA13.3	11 (25%)	LCA: 10 (16.94%) AC: 8 (13.55%) TDC: 8 (13.55%) LBB 7: (11.86%) PU: 6 (10.16%) CC: 6 (10.16%) CM: 4 (6.77%) LMI: 4 (6.77%) SC: 3 (5.08%) LRL: 3 (5.08%)
Material and technical support to the city defence structures (**MTSA**)	Provision of technical support and humanitarian aid to city security structures; Assistance in technical and humanitarian equipment of city security structures;Participation in the logistical support of defence structures in Vinnytsia; Participation in the support, equipment and management	VP1.8 VA1.8 VA4.8 VA5.8 VA6.5	8 (18.18%)	TDC: 7 (20.58%) LCA: 7 (20.58%) CM: 5 (14.70%) CC: 4 (11.76%) PU: 3 (8.82%)

| Category	Description	Count	Codes	Frequencies
	of defence structures at the city level; Participation in material and technical provision of city defence structures; Involvement in material, technical and humanitarian assistance to the city's defence structures; Involvement in the material and technical support of the city's defence structures; Participation in the material and technical support of the city's defence structures.		VA9.8, VA11.8, VA13.8	AC: 3 (8.82%), LBB 2 (5.88%), LMI: 2 (5.88%), SC: 1 (2.94%)
Wartime planning and governing in the city (**WPGC**)	Influence on the city's security structures; Influence on the security of the city through the formal army institutions (recruitment of soldiers, defence planning); Involvement in the planning and implementation of the city's defence; Influence on the enhancement of the city security and defence; Influence on the formation of the city governance model (legislation and defence); Formal subordination to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and execution of orders and combat tasks; Strong subordination to the General Staff of the Armed Forces; Use of institutional authority and competencies to strengthen the city's defences.	8 (18.18%)	VJ1.3, VA1.6, VA2.3, VA5.3, VA7.6, VA9.3, VA11.3, VA11.5	AC: 6 (18.75%), TDC: 6 (18.75%), CC: 5 (15.62%), PU: 4 (12.5%), CM: 3 (9.37%), LCA: 3 (9.37%), SC: 2 (6.25%), LBB: 2 (6.25%), LRL: 1 (3.12%)
Wartime community leadership and support (**WCLS**)	Active solving humanitarian problems and helping members of society in crisis situations; Active patriotic position, focus on satisfying the wartime interests of the city community and front-line fighters; High compassion and sensitive response to humanitarian and spiritual needs of citizens (emotional support); Uniting society around the problems of city	7 (15.9%)	VJ1.8, VA3.4, VA3.7, VA5.5, VA7.5, VA10.3	LCA: 7 (17.94%), LBB: 7 (17.94%), PU: 5 (12.82%), CC: 5 (12.82%), AC: 4 (10.25%), LRL: 4 (10.25%)

	Description	Codes	Count	Frequencies
	defence; Active solving of humanitarian issues of the city (assistance to displaced people); High trust of residents in the institution that guarantees their security and protection; Active institutional engagement in satisfying the basic material needs of society, including security.	VA10.5		CM: 3 (7.69%) TDC: 3 (7.69%) LMI: 1 (2.56%)
Wartime inter-institutional cooperation (**WIIC**)	Openness to dialogue with other institutions to provide security during the full-scale invasion; Active cooperation and subordination in the context of fulfilling defence obligations (mobilisation, demobilisation); Direct cooperation with other institutions to enhance the defence of the city; High inter-institutional synergy in providing humanitarian and material aid to city defence structures; Direct cooperation with other institutions to enhance defence and solve humanitarian issues.	VP1.7 VA4.6 VA6.3 VA6.8 VA8.8	5 (11.36%)	PU: 5 (15.15%) LBB: 5 (15.15%) LMI: 4 (12.12%) CC: 4 (12.12%) LCA: 4 (12.12%) SC: 3 (9.09%) TDC: 3 (9.09%) CM: 2 (6.06%) AC: 2 (6.06%) LRL: 1 (3.03%)
Financial support to the city war effort (**FSCW**)	Payment of taxes to the regional budget for the safety and well-being of the city; Financing of needs reported by city security structures, financing of innovative solutions; Participation in financing and logistical support of city defence structures.	VA1.5 VA1.9 VA3.9	3 (6.81%)	LCA: 3 (17.64%) LBB: 3 (17.64%) CM: 2 (11.76%) CC: 2 (11.76%) TDC: 2 (11.76%) PU: 1 (5.88%) SC: 1 (5.88%) AC: 1 (5.88%) LMI: 1 (5.88%) LRL: 1 (5.88%)

| Humanitarian and spiritual support to the city defence structures (**HSSA**) | Active resolution of the humanitarian issues in the city and humanitarian support of local defence structures. | VA3,5 | 1 (2.27%) | PU: 1 (20%) LCA: 1 (20%) LBB: 1 (20%) LMI: 1 (20%) LRL: 1 (20%) |
| Wartime communication (**WCom**) | Active participation in communication activities and formation of public opinion in Vinnytsia during the war. | VA3,10 | 1 (2.27%) | PU: 1 (50%) LMI: 1 (50%) |

Source: Author

Graph 1.1: Percentage of security-related constructs among all constructs elucidated in Vinnytsia

Security (44)
29.3%

Total (150)
70.7%
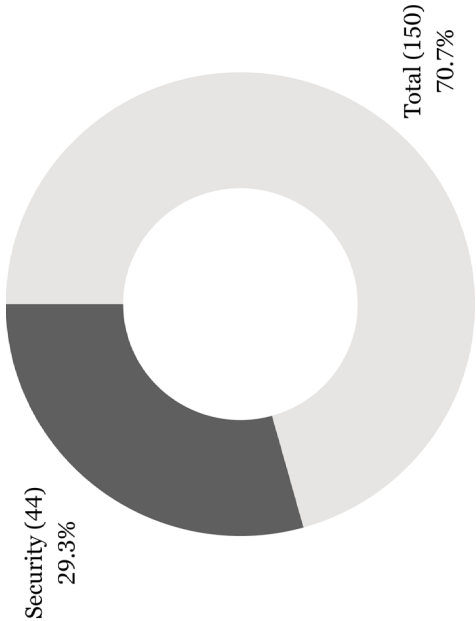
Source: Author

It is also worth highlighting some additional data extracted from the Vinnytsia repertory grids, particularly from the supplied construct ratings. Table 1.2, as well as Graphs 1.2 and 1.3 provide details on the quantity and quality of functions performed by an institution.

Table 1.2: The number and effectiveness of defence functions performed by an institution in Vinnitsa.

| Institution	Number of constructs (mentions across 30 constructs, %)	Performance on a 1-5 scale (effectiveness)
President of Ukraine	26 (59.09%)	2.73 (low)
Parliament of Ukraine	10 (22.72%)	2.4 (low)
City Mayor	19 (43.18%)	4.2 (high)
City Council	25 (56.81%)	4.2 (high)
Commander-in-Chief of UAF	24 (54.54%)	2.8 (low)
Commanders of territorial defence units	23 (52.27%)	2.8 (low)
Local volunteers/civic activists	27 (61.36%)	4.13 (high)
Local big business owners	15 (34.09%)	4.06 (high)
Local media influencers	7 (15.9%)	3.13 (moderate)
Leaders of local religious organisations	12 (27.27%)	2.8 (low)

Source: Author

Graph 1.2: Quantity of security-related functions performed by institutions in Vinnytsia (max 44)
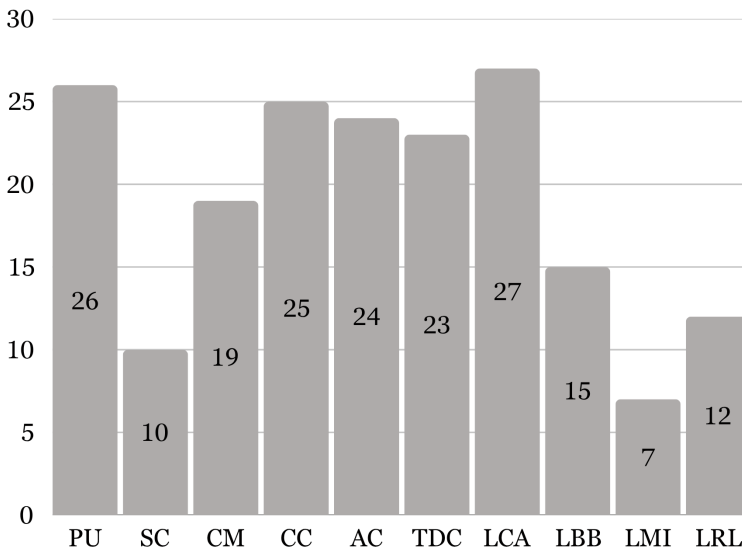
Source: Author

Graph 1.3: Quality of institutional performance in Vinnytsia (max 5)
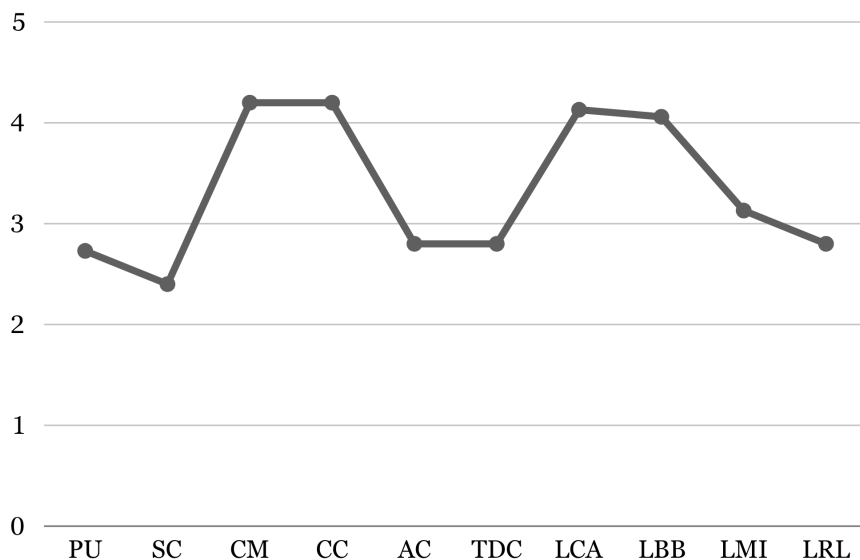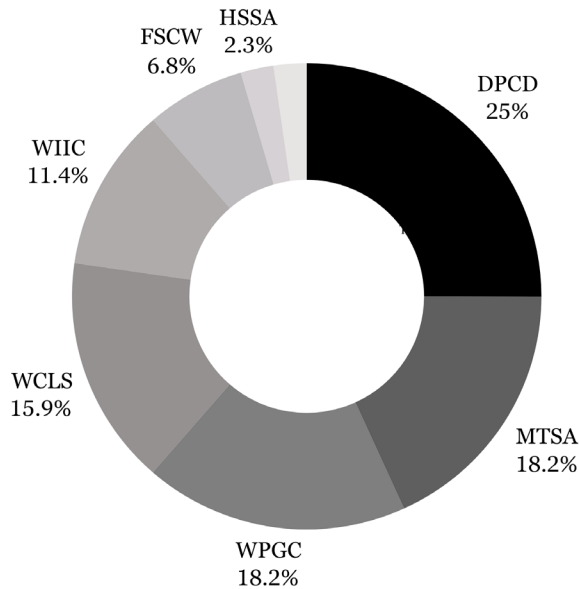

Source: Author

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 demonstrate that—in the perceptions of interviewees—local civic activists, City Mayor and City Council emerge as pivotal actors in Vinnytsia, each playing a critical role in the defence and support functions. Their effectiveness exceeds 4 points and is the highest among all institutions. In contrast, while formal state institutions such as the President, Army Commander-in-Chief and territorial defence commanders exhibit substantial involvement in defence-related constructs, their effectiveness score under 3 suggests a perception of limited efficiency compared to the abovementioned local actors. The Parliament is notably underperforming with respect to both quantity and quality of functions in Vinnytsia. Local big business owners seem to be effective and easy to access, but not as versatile and responsive as civic activists and municipal authorities. Local media influencers and religious leaders are neither effective nor particularly visible in the city's war effort.

An interesting observation is that the President is perceived to be more actively engaged in local communication and community leadership than the media influencers (not least due to the regular online video addresses of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the public). City Mayor and City Council have exceeded their traditional roles as purely municipal institutions; beyond their responsibilities in administering the city, they have strived to provide material, technical and financial support to the army. Local civil activists excel in direct contributions

to city defence and the execution of *ad hoc* tasks for the army and community. Surprisingly, local big business owners have emerged as leaders in community support and inter-institutional cooperation, highlighting their responsiveness and role in fostering resilience.

For more details on which institutions are the most active in which categories of functions in Vinnytsia see Graphs 1.4 and 1.5.

Graph 1.4: Categories of security-related functions in Vinnytsia, as elucidated from 44 constructs
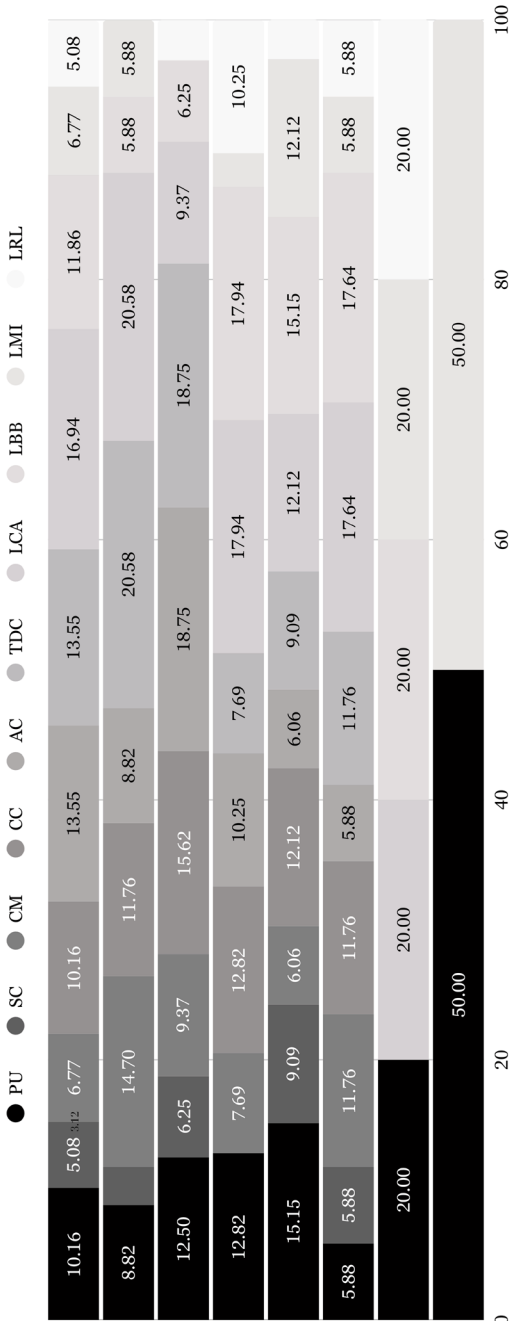

Source: Author

Mykolayiv

Ten (10) interviewees from Mykolayiv elucidated 100 constructs in total, among which 42 were security-related (42%). See Table 2.1 and Graph 2.1.

As with the case of Vinnytsia, it is worth extracting additional data from the supplied construct ratings and creating a separate Table 2.2, as well as Graphs 2.2 and 2.3, to illustrate quality and quantity of institutional functions.

In Mykolayiv, as in Vinnytsia, local civic activists stand out with the highest engagement in defence-related functions. Their role is pivotal in mobilising resources and addressing immediate wartime needs. City Mayor and territorial defence commanders are equally prominent, each performing half of the defence functions. That being said, the perceived effectiveness of City Mayor indicates fairly strong leadership while the territorial defence commanders demonstrate limitations in execution. The President and Army's Commander-in-Chief, two

Graph 1.5: Institutional engagement in performing security-related functions within each of the categories in Vinnytsia

● PU ● SC ● CM ● CC ● AC ● TDC ● LCA ● LBB ● LMI ● LRL

	PU	SC	CM	CC	AC	TDC	LCA	LBB	LMI	LRL
DPCD	10.16	5.08 3.12 6.77	10.16	13.55	13.55	13.55	16.94	11.86	6.77	5.08
MTSA	8.82	14.70	11.76	11.76	8.82	20.58	20.58	20.58	5.88	5.88
WPGC	12.50	6.25	9.37	15.62	18.75	18.75	18.75	9.37	6.25	
WCLS	12.82	7.69	12.82	10.25	7.69	17.94	17.94	17.94	10.25	
WIIC	15.15	9.09	6.06	12.12	6.06	9.09	12.12	15.15	12.12	
FSCW	5.88	5.88 11.76	11.76	5.88	11.76	17.64	17.64	17.64	5.88	5.88
HSSA	20.00	20.00	20.00	20.00	20.00	20.00				
WCom	50.00	50.00	50.00							

0   20   40   60   80   100

Source: Author

Table 2.1: Security-related functions and performance of institutions in Mykolayiv

Category	Construct definition	Construct №	Constructs quantity (weight among 42 defence constructs, %)	Institution times mentioned in the category (weight among others in the category, %)
Wartime planning and governing in the city (**WPGC**)	Ability to make key decisions to protect the city, the institution has broad powers and does not liaise with others; Implementation and support of decisions made to protect the city, high effectiveness of decision implementation; High awareness of the front-line situation and dynamics, access to military secrets and resources; High desire to end the war, even through negotiations with the enemy; Active involvement in coordinating army conscription processes in the city; Pivotal role in making decisions about the city's defence; Active care of the city welfare and management in wartime; Resolving issues related to protection and defence of the front-line city, active interaction and communication to boost defence; High efficiency of the institution in adopting important decisions for the security and development of the city; Ability to make decisions under martial law, the increased influence during martial law; The institution is important and influential only in wartime.	MP1.6 MP1.9 MA2.3 MA3.1 MA3.6 MA4.6 MA4.9 MA8.3 MA8.6 MA6.1 MA6.6	11 (26.19%)	AC: 9 (18%) PU: 7 (14%) CM: 6 (12%) LCA: 6 (12%) LMI: 6 (12%) TDC: 5 (10%) LBB: 5 (10%) LRL: 3 (6%) CC: 2 (4%) SC: 1 (2%)
Wartime inter-institutional cooperation (**WIIC**)	High symbiotivity and interaction of the institution with others in the context of protecting the city; Inter-institutional activity in ensuring the material and technical	MP1.3 MA1.8 MA2.2	7 (16.66%)	LCA: 7 (21.87%) LMI: 5 (15.62%) CM: 4 (12.5%)

	needs of the city's defence structures; Inter-institutional cooperation in the context of the state of war to ensure the defence of the city; Interaction with other institutions to ensure the financial and economic needs of the city and the army; Cooperation in the context of assistance and support for the city's defence structures; Inter-institutional work on defence, participation in joint projects on material/technical support for the army; High inter-institutional synergy that allows rapid response to urgent war needs.	MA2.9 MA3.8 MA4.8 MA8.2		AC: 4 (12.5%) TDC: 4 (12.5%) LBB: 4 (12.5%) CC: 2 (6.25%) LRL: 2 (6.25%)
Financial support to the city war effort (FSCW)	High activity in financing and logistical support for the city's defence; Management of funds to support the city's defence capability (impact on defence budgets); Participation in fundraising activities for the needs of the city's defence; Participation in the formation and filling of the budgets of the city's defence structures; Active participation and high efficiency in raising money for the needs of the army and the city community.	MP1.4 MA1.2 MA1.4 MA1.9 MA2.4	5 (11.90%)	CM: 3 (15.78%) LBB: 3 (15.78%) PU: 2 (10.52%) CC: 2 (10.52%) TDC: 2 (10.52%) LCA: 2 (10.52%) LMI: 2 (10.52%) SC: 1 (5.26%) AC: 1 (5.26%) LRL: 1 (5.26%)
Material and technical support to the city defence structures (MTSA)	Material and technical support to local defence structures; Active and sincere participation in assistance to the army (material and technical, informational, or PR); Involvement in assisting and supporting the city's defence forces, high responsiveness to army requests; Quick and effective response to requests from the city's defence structures, active material and technical support of the army.	MA2.5 MA3.4 MA7.5 MA8.8	4 (9.52%)	LCA: 4 (23.52%) TDC: 3 (17.64%) LBB: 2 (11.76%) LMI: 2 (11.76%) LRL: 2 (11.76%) PU: 1 (5.88%) SC: 1 (5.88%)

				CM: 1 (5,88%)
				AC: 1 (5,88%)
Humanitarian and spiritual support to the city defence structures (**HSSA**)	Providing humanitarian assistance to defence structures, spiritual and mental support for soldiers; Support and assistance in the reintegration of army veterans at the city level; Involvement in supporting the army and providing humanitarian assistance to people in difficult situations; Provision of spiritual and psychological support to soldiers and refugees.	MPr.5 MAr.1 MA5,8 MAr.5	4 (9,52%)	LCA: 3 (25%) LRL: 3 (25%) AC: 2 (16.66%) LBB: 2 (16.66%) CM: 1 (8,33%) LMI: 1 (8,33%)
Direct participation in the city defence (**DPCD**)	Direct involvement in defence activities, legal obligation to do so; Active cooperation with the military bloc, direct involvement in the defence of the city; Direct participation in the army vertical, contribution to the army reform; Participation of the institution in strengthening the city's defence, support for the army.	MA6.8 MJI.3 MAr.3 MA4.5	4 (9,52%)	AC: 3 (18.75%) TDC: 3 (18.75%) PU: 2 (12.5%) CM: 2 (12.5%) CC: 2 (12.5%) LCA: 2 (12.5%) SC:1 (6.25%) LBB: 1 (6.25%)
Wartime communication (**WCom**)	Active dissemination of critically important information in the community, counteraction to hybrid warfare; Participation in, as well as communication about measures to support the community and the military of Mykolaiv; Formation of trends and norms of social ideology in wartime (Muscovites are inhumane, the Ukrainian language is supreme); High media presence, active communication of critical information, media coverage of wartime events and decisions.	MPr.10 MAr.7 MA3.10 MA8.10	4 (9,52%)	PU: 3 (20%) LCA: 3 (20%) CM: 2 (13,33%) AC: 2 (13,33%) LMI: 2 (13,33%) SC: 1 (6,66%) TDC: 1 (6,66%) LBB: 1 (6,66%)

| Wartime community leadership and support (**WCLS**) | Active assistance to the city community in war conditions, the institution is the first to respond to the challenges of war; The institution follows the vocation to protect the community, goes beyond its direct powers in the context of 'military democracy'; Eagerness to help people in difficult life situations, treatment and rehabilitation, targeted action. | MP1.2
MA6.3
MA7,8 | 3 (7.14%) | TDC: 3 (18.75%)
LCA: 3 (18.75%)
CM: 2 (12.5%)
AC: 2 (12.5%)
LBB: 2 (12.5%)
LMl: 2 (12.5%)
CC:1 (6.25%)
LRL: 1 (6.25%) |

Source: Author

Graph 2.1: Percentage of security-related constructs among all constructs elucidated in Mykolayiv

Total (100)
58%

Security (42)
42%

Source: Author

Table 2.2: The number and effectiveness of defence functions performed by an institution in Mykolayiv

Institution	Number of constructs (mentions across 30 constructs, %)	Performance on a 1–5 scale (effectiveness)
President of Ukraine	15 (35.71%)	2.7 (low)
Parliament of Ukraine	5 (11.9%)	2.2 (low)
City Mayor	21 (50%)	3.6 (moderate)
City Council	9 (21.42%)	2.8 (low)
Commander-in-Chief of UAF	21 (50%)	2.7 (low)
Commanders of territorial defence units	21 (50%)	2.6 (low)
Local volunteers/civic activists	30 (71.42%)	3.7 (moderate)
Local big business owners	20 (47.61%)	3.4 (moderate)
Local media influencers	20 (47.61%)	3.2 (moderate)
Leaders of local religious organisations	12 (28.57%)	2.1 (low)

Source: Author

Graph 2.2: Quantity of security-related functions performed by institutions in Mykolayiv (max 42)
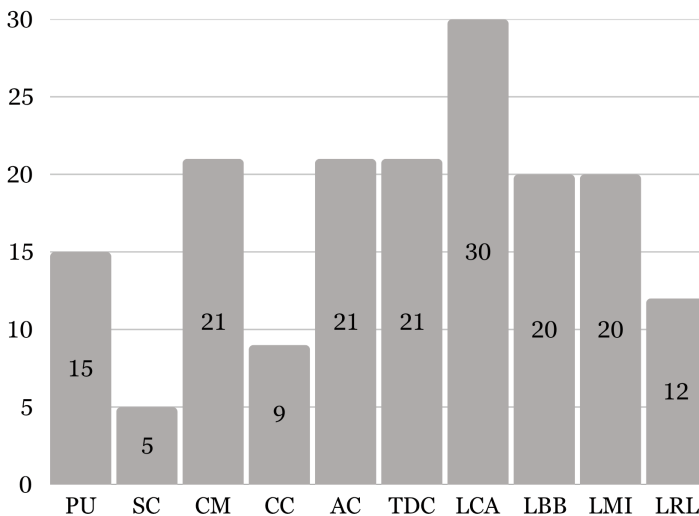
Source: Author

national-level institutions, are involved in strategic decision-making, yet their effectiveness at the local level remains modest compared to grassroots actors. Local big business owners and media influencers both perform many functions and are fairly effective. City Council, National Parliament and local religious leaders are neither operationally impactful nor engaged in many activities in wartime Mykolayiv.

Graph 2.3: Quality of institutional performance in Mykolayiv (max 5)
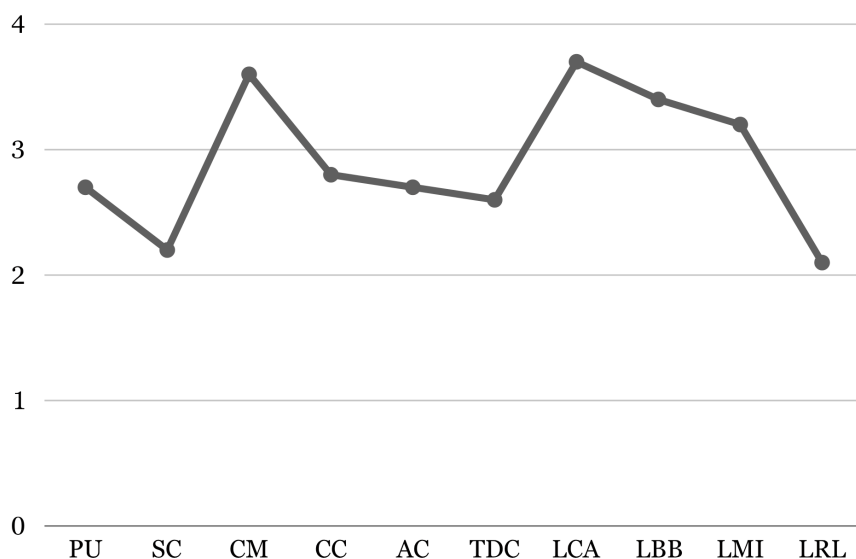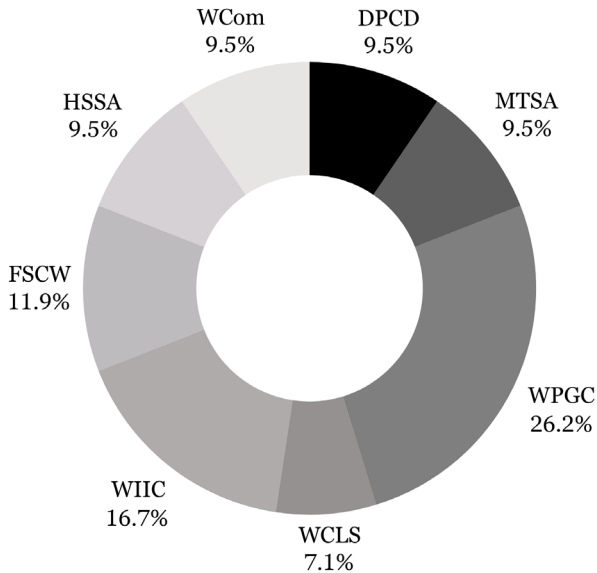

Source: Author

It can be observed in Table 2.1 that the institutions most open to inter-institutional cooperation are local civic activists and media influencers. In terms of financing the city's war effort, City Mayor and local big business owners take the lead. While the involvement of business actors is expected, the Mayor's prominent role is less conventional, as it is typically the City Council that has primary influence over the distribution of the municipal budget. Actually, the Mayor seems to be an authoritative institution in the city as it is engaged in performing functions across all categories. Material, technical and humanitarian support to the army is predominantly driven by grassroots actors. Direct participation in defence and wartime governance, however, is led by the Army's Commander-in-Chief (moderately effective). Similar to the observations from Vinnytsia's Table 1.1, the President demonstrates a notable strength in wartime communication.

For more details on which institutions are the most active in which categories of functions in Mykolayiv see Graphs 2.4 and 2.5.

Sumy

In Sumy, the categories of institutional performance exhibit a few differences compared to Vinnytsia and Mykolayiv. For instance, the phrasing of constructs in Sumy sample made it hard to combine them into a distinct category for humanitarian support to the army. Second, when mentioned, the inter-institutional synergy was not explicitly tied to the post-invasion context. Third, the category

Graph 2.4: Categories of security-related functions in Mykolayiv, as elucidated from 42 constructs
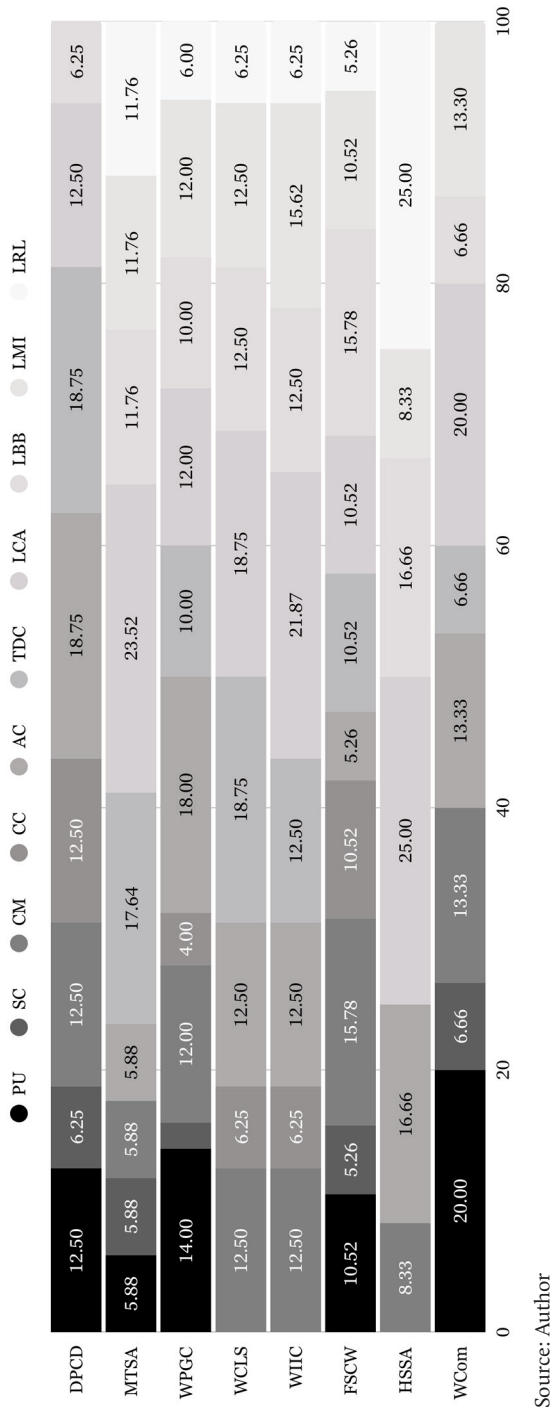

Source: Author

of community leadership had to integrate humanitarian contributions to the war effort. Fourth, the communicational prowess of institutions was frequently noted by the interviewees but rarely in the wartime context, contrasting with how constructs were phrased in Mykolayiv, another frontline city. Finally, a particularly unique category in Sumy is 'Cooperation with the enemy' reflecting the geopolitical impacts of city's proximity to Russia and its unique patterns of pre-invasion coexistence.

Ten (10) interviewees from Sumy elucidated 100 constructs in total, among which 30 were security-related (30%). See Table 3.1 and Graph 3.1 for more detail.

After the processing of supplied construct ratings in Sumy repertory grids, the quantity and quality of defence functions performed by institutions have been presented in Table 3.2, as well as Graphs 3.2 and 3.3.

Sumy's institutional performance showcases a heavy reliance on grassroots and local actors, with territorial defence commanders and civic activists playing leading roles. Their high scores in a supplied construct highlight the strength of localised and adaptive response in this northern frontline city. Conversely, the lower scores for national-level institutions like the President and the National Parliament highlight gaps in centralised governance or poor awareness of local contexts. The elucidated contributions of local media influencers and big business owners emphasise their importance in indirect support of the war effort through equipping the army

Graph 2.5: Institutional engagement in performing security-related functions within each of the categories in Mykolayiv

Legend: ● PU ● SC ● CM ● CC ● AC ● TDC ● LCA ● LBB ● LMI ● LRL

Stacked bar values (left to right for each institution):

Institution	Values (left → right, %)
DPCD	12.50, 6.25, 12.50, 12.50, 18.75, 18.75, 12.50, 6.25
MTSA	5.88, 5.88, 5.88, 17.64, 23.52, 11.76, 11.76, 11.76
WPGC	14.00, 12.00, 4.00, 18.00, 10.00, 10.00, 12.00, 12.00, 6.00
WCLS	12.50, 6.25, 12.50, 18.75, 18.75, 12.50, 12.50, 6.25
WIIC	12.50, 6.25, 12.50, 12.50, 21.87, 15.62, 6.25
FSCW	10.52, 5.26, 15.78, 10.52, 5.26, 10.52, 10.52, 15.78, 10.52, 5.26
HSSA	8.33, 16.66, 25.00, 16.66, 8.33, 25.00
WCom	20.00, 6.66, 13.33, 13.33, 13.33, 6.66, 6.66, 20.00, 6.66, 13.30

x-axis: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100

Source: Author

Table 3.1: Security-related functions and performance of institutions in Sumy

Category	Construct definition	Construct №	Constructs quantity (weight among 30 defence constructs, %)	Institution times mentioned in the category (weight among others in the category, %)
Direct participation in the city defence (**DPCD**)	Active performance of the city's defence functions; Construction of fortifications around the city, implementation of a new centralised defence model; Involvement in supporting and staffing the city's defence forces; High initiative and creativity in matters of city defence; Active performance of the city's defence function; Direct involvement in the defence of the city and building the resilience of the frontline community; Designing local defence, managing the defence budget; Involvement in the defence and protection of the city, participation in defence structures; Involvement in the defence of the city and the formation of city military policy; Performing the function of direct protection of the regional capital; Involvement in the defence of the city of Sumy, providing support to defence structures; Active position in confronting the enemy and responding to community requests.	SA7.3 SA6.6 SA5.3 SA5.8 SA4.3 SA3.6 SA2.3 SA1.3 SA8.3 SP1.3 SJ1.3 SP1.5	12 (40%)	TDC: 12 (21.81%) LCA: 10 (18.18%) AC: 8 (14.54%) PU: 6 (10.9%) LBB: 5 (9.09%) LMI: 5 (9.09%) CM: 3 (5.45%) SC: 2 (3.63%) CC: 2 (3.63%) LRL: 2 (3.63%)
Wartime planning and governing in the city (**WPGC**)	Active formal management of the city under martial law; Understanding the city's defence needs, understanding threats and methods of counteraction, active communication with the army and military; High flexibility, ability for selective activity in the context of the defence of frontline cities; Work to strengthening the city's defence structures; Performance of key functions in the defence of the city and the state, formation of defence strategies; Availability of formal and informal mechanisms for solving problems of the community of a front-line city.	SA7.6 SA4.8 SA1.6 SP1.8 SJ1.6 SJ1.5	6 (20%)	TDC: 6 (22.22%) AC: 5 (18.51%) LCA: 5 (18.51%) PU: 4 (14.81%) CC: 3 (11.11%) LBB: 3 (11.11%) CM: 1 (3.70%)

Material and technical support to the city defence structures (**MTSA**)	Active cooperation and individual activity in material and financial support for the city's defence forces; Assistance in the logistical support of defence structures at the expense of city budget funds; Support to local defence structures, provision of logistical assistance to the army; Provision of logistical support to city defence structures.	SA8.8 SA7.5 SA6.8 SJ1.8	4 (13.33%)	TDC: 4 (19.04%) CC: 3 (14.28%) AC: 3 (14.28%) LCA: 3 (14.28%) CM: 2 (9.52%) LBB: 2 (9.52%) PU: 1 (4.76%) SC: 1 (4.76%) LMI: 1 (4.76%) LRL: 1 (4.76%)
Financial support to the city war effort (**FSCW**)	Allocation of funds and financing of city defence projects (including protecting the sky over Sumy); Provision of additional financing for the city's defence structures, crowdfunding; Ability to manage the city budget for the needs of the city's defence, access to city resources.	SA8.5 SA7.4 SA6.3	3 (10%)	CC: 2 (22.22%) TDC: 2 (22.22%) LBB: 2 (22.22%) CM: 1 (11.11%) LCA: 1 (11.11%) LRL: 1 (11.11%)
Wartime community leadership and support (**WCLS**)	Active involvement in campaigns aimed at encouraging the community to protect the city; Active involvement in meeting the humanitarian needs of the city's community.	SA3.3 SA1.8	2 (6.66%)	LMI: 2 (33.33%) PU: 1 (16.66%) LCA: 1 (16.66%) LBB: 1 (16.66%) LRL: 1 (16.66%)
Wartime communication (**WCom**)	Attempts to improve communication processes and accelerate information exchange to enhance city defence; Objective informing the population in the conditions of war, interest to influence public opinion.	SP1.10 SP1.4	2 (6.66%)	LMI: 2 (100%)
Cooperation with the enemy (**CoEn**)	History of cooperation with the enemy after the invasion, seeking opportunities for private communication in the conditions of the war.	SP1.1	1 (3.33%)	LBB: 1 (100%)

Source: Author

Graph 3.1: Percentage of security-related constructs among all constructs elucidated in Sumy
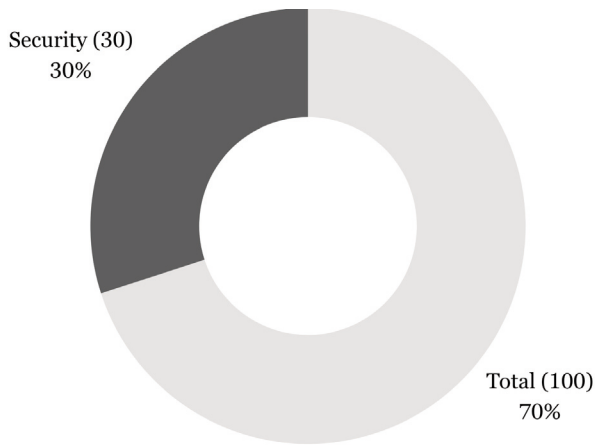
Source: Author

and framing public opinion. Both the City Mayor and City Council demonstrate moderate performance with a narrow focus on city governance, which makes informal local institutions shine with respect to security provision.

Table 3.2. The number and effectiveness of defence functions performed by an institution in Sumy

Institution	Number of constructs (mentions across 30 constructs, %)	Performance on a 1–5 scale (effectiveness)
President of Ukraine	12 (40%)	2.3 (low)
Parliament of Ukraine	3 (10%)	2.3 (low)
City Mayor	7 (23.33%)	3 (moderate)
City Council	10 (33.33%)	2.9 (low)
Commander-in-Chief of UAF	16 (53.33%)	2.9 (low)
Commanders of territorial defence units	24 (80%)	3.9 (moderate)
Local volunteers/civic activists	20 (66.66%)	4.2 (high)
Local big business owners	14 (46.66%)	3.4 (moderate)
Local media influencers	10 (33.33%)	4.1 (high)
Leaders of local religious organisations	5 (16.66%)	2.5 (low)

Source: Author

Regarding the critical observations from Tables 3.1 and 3.2, territorial defence commanders stand out as particularly active and effective in Sumy, surpassing their performance in other cities. While it may take on fewer functions overall, it executes them better. Unusually, defence commanders play an influential role

Ostap Kushnir

Graph 3.2: Quantity of security-related functions performed by institutions in Sumy (max 30)
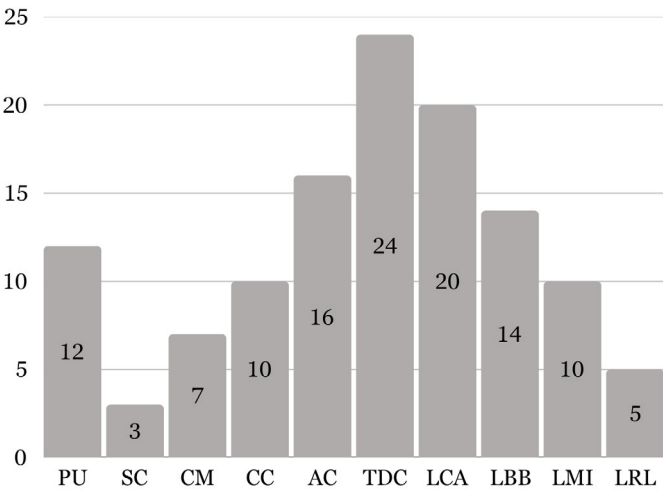
Source: Author

Graph 3.3: Quality of institutional performance in Sumy (max 5)
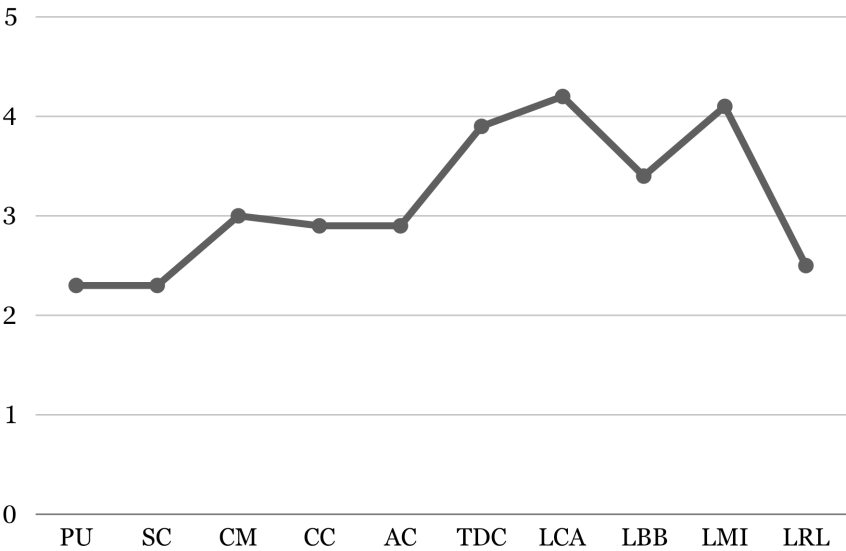
Source: Author

in Sumy governance, a function not typically associated with their mandate. Ukraine's Army Commander-in-Chief, on the other hand, appears to be the least versatile in performing security-related functions compared to other cities. Together, territorial defence commanders, the Army's Commander-in-Chief,

and local civic activists form the backbone of Sumy's 'hard power' defence. Local big business owners and media influencers effectively fulfil their traditional niche functions, though these were not identified as critically important by the interviewees. The President of Ukraine is no longer defined as a good wartime communicator and community-builder.

For more details on which institutions are the most active in which categories of functions in Sumy see Graphs 3.4 and 3.5.

Graph 3.4: Categories of security-related functions in Sumy, as elucidated from 30 constructs
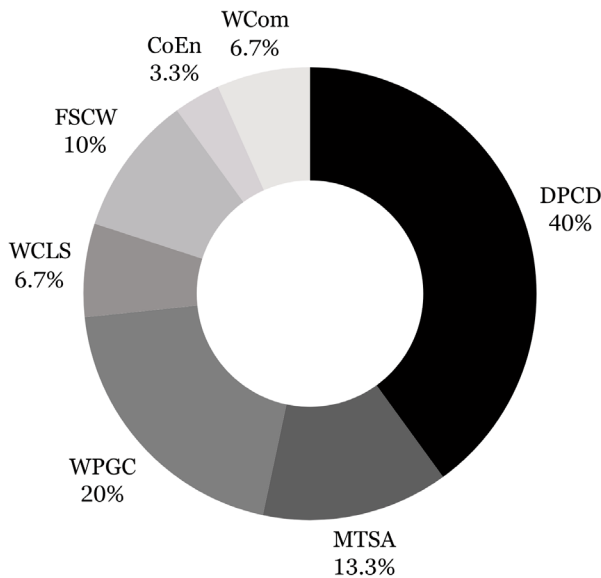
Source: Author

Major findings

Having analysed all security-related constructs elucidated by 35 interviewees from Vinnytsia, Mykolayiv and Sumy, the article identified nine key categories of functions that institutions are expected to perform to address wartime challenges in the third year of the Russian invasion. These functions are: *Direct participation in city defence* or **DPCD** (emerged as a core function in all cities, encompassing tasks such as fortifying the terrain, establishing coordination between units, and staffing defence structures); *Wartime planning and governance* or **WPGC** (reallocating municipal resources to support defence projects/infrastructure, designing response mechanisms to mitigate evolving threats, and devising plans for community protection and resilience-building); *Material and technical support to defence structures* or **MTSA** (supplying the army with vehicles, drones, tools, protective

Ostap Kushnir

Graph 3.5: Institutional engagement in performing security-related functions within each of the categories in Sumy
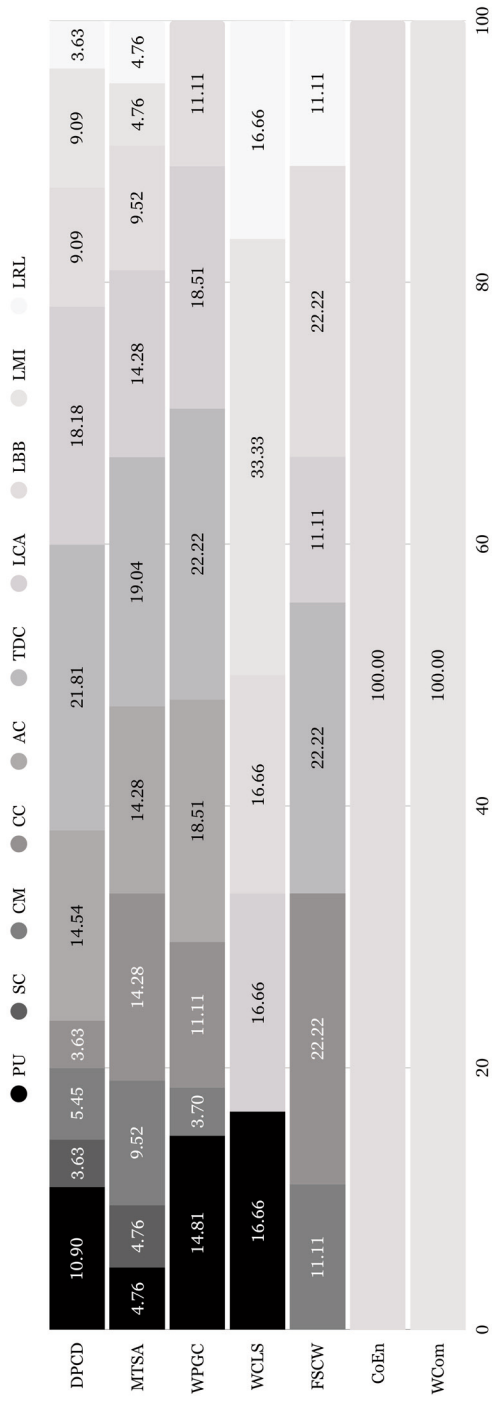
Source: Author

gear, communication devices and other similar goods); *Financial support for city war efforts* or **FSCW** (redirecting municipal funds to support defence needs, crowdfunding, public fundraising, procurement of military equipment, investing in innovative technologies and/or infrastructure); *Wartime communication* or **WCom** (updating the community timely and accurately about wartime developments, counteracting Russian misinformation and propaganda, campaigning to foster public resilience and support for defence efforts); *Wartime community leadership and support* or **WCLS** (encouraging civic participation in defence-related activities, leading initiatives to unite the community); *Wartime inter-institutional cooperation* or **WIIC** (building horizontal networks to better address material, technical, humanitarian, financial and other needs of the territorial communities and military units); *Humanitarian and spiritual support to defence structures* or **HSSA** (offering spiritual guidance and emotional counselling to soldiers, reintegration of veterans into society, helping people in crisis situations—including internally displaced people); *Cooperation with the enemy* or **CoEn** (trying to restore pre-war practices of doing business with Russia—category that concerns big business owners in Sumy only). These nine categories identified by the article to a significant degree are in line with the typical activities of Ukraine's civil society as they were described by other scholars (see the section 'Ukraine's war effort' above).

According to the perceptions of the interviewees, in all three cities, local civic activists and volunteers emerge as a pivotal actor, demonstrating significant adaptability and commitment to security-related functions. In Vinnytsia, the institution leads in direct city defence, as well as in community and army support activities (material, financial, humanitarian). In Mykolayiv, it dominates in inter-institutional cooperation, community leadership, and material and humanitarian support to the army. Sumy further highlights civic activists' importance, where they perform 66.66% of security-related functions with an effectiveness score of 4.2/5, excelling in direct defence, grassroots governance and community leadership. While one should not question the pivotal role of the institution, it is worth keeping in mind that the majority of interviewees are civic activists themselves, which may lead to a latent bias in their (self-)assessment.

Similarly, territorial defence commanders are believed to be momentous in direct defence and operational tasks across all three cities, with their prominence increasing in frontline contexts. In Vinnytsia, commanders contribute to 52.27% of functions, focusing on wartime governance and army logistics with moderate effectiveness. Mykolayiv sees comparable engagement at 50% with similarly moderate performance in inter-institutional cooperation and material and financial support to the army. In Sumy, however, territorial defence commanders' performance reaches its peak, handling 80% of defence functions—direct defence, wartime governance, army logistics and financial support—with a relatively high effectiveness score of 3.9/5. The outstanding performance of the institution in

Sumy may be related to the fact that the local self-government bodies lack effectiveness. At the time of the recording of the sample interviews, the mayor of Sumy was under investigation by the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office and could not perform its functions. Therefore, territorial defence commanders (backed by local civic activists, big businesses and media influencers) might have had to step in and cover the emerging institutional gap.

Municipal self-government bodies, such as City Mayor and City Council, demonstrate varying levels of performance depending on the city. In Vinnytsia, the interviewees believe that both institutions seem to work as a team and go beyond their formal responsibilities, making substantial contributions to the material and financial support of the army. In Mykolayiv, City Mayor handles 50% of functions with an effectiveness score of 3.6/5, manifesting a fairly strong leadership, while City Council remains in the Mayor's shadow with 21.42% engagement. The picture in Sumy is the opposite of Mykolayiv because City Council performs 33.33% of functions while City Mayor handles 23.33%. Both institutions scored ≤3 in effectiveness in Sumy and are predominantly focused on governance and resource allocation. In frontline cities, unlike in Vinnytsia, low indicators of municipal self-government bodies may be partially explained by the strong authority of the military administrations that are tasked with the organisation of defence and logistics for the military under martial law. On top of that, the Mayor of Sumy could not perform its duties fully.

National-level institutions, including the President of Ukraine and the Army's Commander-in-Chief, seem to contribute significantly to defence efforts but often face challenges in effectiveness on a local level. In Vinnytsia, the President excels in wartime communication, bolstering morale and unity. Mykolayiv sees the President's performing 35.71% of functions with moderate effectiveness (2.7/5), emphasising strategic governance. In Sumy, the President's involvement increases to 40%, but its effectiveness declines to 2.3/5. Army Commander's performance is consistent across all three cities, handling over 50% of functions, yet its effectiveness remains moderate, with scores ranging from 2.7 to 2.9/5. Speaking of the Parliament of Ukraine, it is one of the least effective and engaged institutions, with scores of effectiveness approaching 2/5 in all three cities.

Economic and logistical support roles are prominently held by big business owners, which—according to interviewees—demonstrate versatility across contexts. In Vinnytsia, they play a noticeable role in community support and inter-institutional cooperation. In Mykolayiv, they handle 47.61% of functions, focusing on financing and material support to the war effort. Sumy further underscores the importance of local big business owners, where they perform 46.66% of functions with a moderate score of effectiveness (3.4/5).

Local media influencers have often been recorded to play a niche role, particularly in informing about wartime realities and boosting public unity. In Vinnytsia,

they are the most visible in communication and inter-institutional cooperation, though performing poorly overall. Mykolayiv highlights their critical contribution to shaping public opinion and providing essential information, performing 47.61% of functions with moderate effectiveness. In Sumy, media influencers achieve an effectiveness score of 4.1/5, reflecting their unique ability to engage and support a frontline population. The discrepancy in performance of the institution may hint that in Vinnytsia it is being used as a tool for political struggle while in Mylolayiv, and especially in Sumy, it became a tool of survival for the community.

Contributions of local religious leaders are consistent in their focus on spiritual and moral support across all three cities, though their overall involvement and effectiveness are perceived as incomparably lower than those of other institutions. In Vinnytsia, the interviewees believe that the religious leaders complement the humanitarian activities of other city actors, while in Mykolayiv and Sumy they add a layer of resilience for communities under immediate threat. Across all cities, the role of religious leaders highlights the importance of addressing the psychological and emotional dimensions of resilience, offering an important, albeit secondary, layer of support in Ukraine's wartime governance. Some of the interviewees argue that the religious leaders' role in the war effort does more harm than good because—instead of uniting all people against the common enemy—the unceasing hostilities between denominations deepen rifts within and between territorial communities.

Conclusion

Revisiting the hypotheses presented at the beginning of the article, the research confirms that all of them are either true or partially true. First, the hypothesis that civil society and informal institutions—particularly local civic activists and territorial defence commanders—bear the primary burden of the war effort in their cities is true. The interviewees believe that the defence commanders undertake a significant share of functions in direct defence and wartime governance, with their role being particularly pronounced in Sumy. Local civic activists complement these efforts by leading community mobilisation, providing material and technical support and facilitating inter-institutional cooperation. Local big business owners are perceived to play a critical role in financing urban security and supporting the community, while other informal actors, such as media influencers and religious leaders, contribute within more niche and less visible capacities.

Second, the hypothesis that non-military institutions exceed their traditional governance roles to actively support the war effort is partially true. In Vinnytsia, according to the interviewees, municipal institutions like City Mayor and City Council assume responsibilities for material and financial support of the army, roles traditionally outside their legal mandates. However, in Mykolayiv and Sumy,

the performance of non-military formal institutions is believed to be more limited. This limitation is partly due to the strong presence of military administrations and, in Sumy, the paralysis of the mayor's activities resulting from an investigation.

Third, the hypothesis that central state institutions are inadequately engaged in security provision at the city level is partially true. The President of Ukraine and the Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces are believed to contribute to strategic oversight and wartime communication, with the President excelling in morale-building in Vinnytsia. However, their direct effectiveness in addressing local needs, particularly in frontline cities like Sumy and Mykolayiv, is perceived as moderate to low. The Parliament of Ukraine consistently ranks as one of the least engaged and effective institutions, underscoring gaps in central-local coordination. One may refer to Kurnyshova's observation here (2023: 93) that, instead of framing nationwide wartime resilience, the Parliament lost trust and agency in the eyes of Ukrainians and became the 'legislative department of the President'.

Fourth, the hypothesis that the poor performance of formal institutions encourages non-state actors to embrace security-related functions is true. In contexts where formal institutions fall short—most notably in Sumy—local informal entities such as territorial defence commanders, civic activists and big business owners are believed by the interviewees to step in to fill critical governance and security roles. This phenomenon is the most articulate in frontline cities, where non-state actors not only adapt to but excel in functions traditionally managed by formal institutions. While such interplay highlights the adaptability and resilience of civil society, it also underscores systemic weaknesses in formal governance structures during wartime.

It would be unreasonable to claim that Ukraine's wartime civil activism is an absolutely unique phenomenon; it shares similarities with the experiences of other regions in turbulence across the world. In Afghanistan, for example, local NGOs and informal networks have been engaged for decades in delivering humanitarian aid, supporting displaced populations and promoting local development (Lakha 2024; Porter Peschka 2011: 7, 15). In West Africa, civil society organisations have also been noticed in assisting combatants, post-conflict peacebuilding, and reconciliation efforts (Boadu 2025; Acemoglu & Robinson 2023: 407–408; De Waal 2009: 101–102). Across these cases, a common thread is the ability of grassroots actors to operate where formal state institutions are either weak, absent or distrusted.

While these similarities are significant, Ukraine's civil activism is still distinct. Unlike many other regions in the world, Ukraine experienced several waves of peaceful and organised mass mobilisation—most notably the Orange 2004 and the Euromaidan 2013–14 Revolutions—which contributed to a strong tradition of civic engagement and public accountability (Diuk 2014: 84). These revolutions not only energised Ukrainians, but institutionalised mechanisms of political guardianship, giving citizens a more assertive role in governance (Zarembo & Martin 2024: 210).

On top of that, Ukrainians' aspiration for EU integration further distinguishes their bottom-up proactivity—the access to broader European networks and awareness of norms have enhanced grassroots organisational capacity and legitimacy. In contrast, civil society in Afghanistan has often been fragmented, politically constrained, and heavily dependent on international aid (Nemat & Werner 2016: 8–9). Finally, Ukraine has faced an invasion of a well-equipped, well-trained and sizeable professional army of an enemy state in an immediate geographic proximity, which has not always been the case in other parts of the world.

In a word, while grassroots resilience is a shared feature with other regions, Ukraine's civic activism stands out for its continuity, domestic legitimacy and integration with international civil society frameworks. That being said, the role and place of Ukraine's civil society in global context, as well as the degree of applicability of Ukraine's grassroots experiences to other war-torn environments, requires a separate and more tailored research.

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