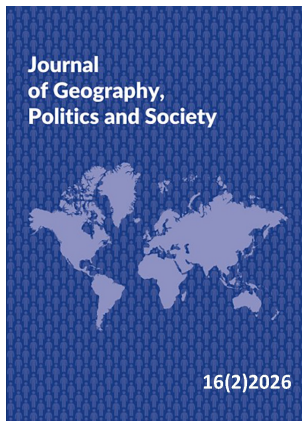




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IDENTITY POLICY AS A COMPONENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF UKRAINIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The article examines the development of Ukrainian civic identity under wartime conditions and analyses identity policy as a component of national security. It argues that the Russian-Ukrainian war has acted as a catalyst for the reassessment of linguistic practices, cultural orientations, political values, and patterns of civic self-identification. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between identity policy, social cohesion, national resilience, and resistance to external information and psychological influence. The study also considers the growing importance of the European dimension of Ukrainian identity in the context of European integration. It is shown that support for Ukraine's European course coexists with an incomplete understanding of the values and institutional principles on which the European Union is founded. The article concludes that a coherent identity policy should combine the consolidation of Ukrainian national and civic identity with systematic civic education, the strengthening of democratic values, and the development of institutional mechanisms capable of supporting social cohesion during and after the war.

Key words

identity policy, Ukrainian identity, Russian-Ukrainian war, consolidation of Ukrainian society, national security, European integration.

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1. Introduction

Ukraine's current stage of development is characterised by profound transformations driven by the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war and the country's strategic commitment to European integration. The war has substantially reshaped Ukraine's socio-political landscape, increasing the need for internal consolidation and strengthening the resilience of the state and society. Under these conditions, identity policy acquires particular significance as an instrument for supporting social

cohesion and internal stability. The war has not only intensified security challenges but has also accelerated the reassessment of the value foundations of Ukrainian society, including its cultural, linguistic, civic, and political orientations. Wartime conditions change the mechanisms through which identity is formed: processes of consolidation accelerate, while tensions associated with traumatic experience, migration, forced displacement, and transformations of collective memory become more visible.

In this context, identity policy is directly linked to the state's capacity to maintain internal stability and

counter external threats. Value and symbolic markers that define citizens' sense of belonging can no longer be regarded exclusively as cultural or social categories. Identity becomes a strategic resource that influences trust in public institutions, citizens' willingness to engage in collective action, and society's capacity for self-organisation. For this reason, identity policy should be considered an integral component of national security policy.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the development of identity policy in contemporary Ukraine as a component of national security policy and to identify its principal areas of implementation. Particular attention is paid to the tasks of Ukrainian identity formation that arise in the context of European integration.

To achieve this purpose, the study addresses the following objectives: to examine theoretical approaches to identity policy in Ukraine; to determine its role in the security sphere; to analyse the impact of the war on the transformation of Ukrainian identity; to identify contradictions in contemporary identity-formation processes; and to define principles for the development of identity policy in the context of Ukraine's European integration.

2. Literature Review and Methodology

Identity is traditionally examined within social psychology, political science, sociology, and cultural studies. In recent years, Ukrainian scholarly discourse has increasingly focused on the role of identity in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. A substantial body of research indicates that the war has acted as a catalyst for social consolidation, while also generating destructive pressures on identity formation through traumatic experience, forced displacement, loss, and prolonged insecurity.

Recent research on Ukrainian identity has focused primarily on its historical, cultural, civic, and political dimensions. Relevant contributions include the works of Kozlovets (2011), Vonsovykh (2020), Stepyko (2011), Reznik (2022), Holovakha (2021), and Zelenko and Kononenko (2022). These studies address such issues as belonging to a national community, the role of cultural symbols and values, shared historical memory, political identification, and collective visions of the future.

Researchers have also analysed changes in citizens' attitudes towards the symbolic values associated with Ukrainian statehood and the emergence of new markers of national and civic

identity under conditions of military threat (Polishchuk, 2024). The importance of a stable sociocultural identity for the development of state institutions and resistance to Russian aggression has likewise been emphasised (Stepyko & Chernenko, 2017).

More recent work shows that the war has intensified challenges to young people's value orientations while simultaneously strengthening the role of the Ukrainian language and historical memory as markers of national identity and mechanisms of psychological adaptation (Stepyko, 2026). Research has also examined regional patterns of youth identification and the role of education policy in strengthening civic identity during wartime and the post-war period (Ostapenko et al., 2024).

Among the most recent studies of national and civic identity, particular attention should be paid to the analytical report of the National Institute for Strategic Studies, *Analysis of the Main Trends in the Sphere of Collective Identities of Ukrainian Society: Challenges to National Security*, which examines collective identities as a factor of national security and argues for the development of a comprehensive state identity policy (Potapenko et al., 2024).

At the same time, comparatively little research examines identity policy explicitly as an element of state security policy. There is also a growing need within Ukraine's political and legal discourse for research on identity policy in the context of European integration, including the adoption of European democratic values, institutions, and social practices.

The study is based on a systems approach, which makes it possible to examine identity policy as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing political, social, cultural, educational, and institutional components. This approach enables an assessment of the interconnections among different areas of public policy and their influence on identity formation. An institutional approach is used to analyse the role of public authorities, educational institutions, and civil society organisations. The empirical basis also includes data from sociological surveys that illustrate changes in key identity markers among Ukrainian citizens.

In this article, identity policy is understood as the activity of state institutions and civil society aimed at shaping and supporting shared values, norms, symbols, and behavioural patterns that strengthen citizens' sense of belonging to a common political community. The analysis focuses on three interrelated dimensions of identity: civic, cultural, and political. The civic dimension concerns a sense of

belonging to the state and readiness to perform civic responsibilities; the cultural dimension encompasses historical memory, language, traditions, and symbolic resources; and the political dimension concerns attitudes towards participation in public affairs, institutions, and the principles of political order. Their interaction significantly influences the level of social cohesion and resilience.

3. Results

3.1. Identity Policy as a Component of Security Policy

Under the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, identity policy has become a substantive component of national security. It contributes to the internal cohesion of society, which is particularly important when information and psychological influence constitute major instruments of external aggression. A consolidated civic identity also supports information resilience by reducing vulnerability to disinformation and manipulative narratives and by strengthening trust in public institutions.

The erosion of Ukrainian identity is one of the objectives of Russia's policy in the temporarily occupied territories, where cultural institutions, educational practices, historical narratives, and linguistic environments associated with Ukraine have been systematically targeted. In Resolution 2558 (2024), Countering the Erasure of Cultural Identity in War and Peace, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe characterised the Russian Federation's policy as the use of "cultural cleansing" as a weapon of war and stated that the deliberate and systematic destruction or looting of cultural property may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity and may reveal genocidal intent directed against Ukrainian identity and culture (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2024). The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe similarly stated that attacks on and looting of cultural sites appear to form part of a systematic policy aimed at erasing Ukraine's historical and cultural identity and called for reparations for damage to historical, cultural, and religious heritage (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 2024).

The security function of identity has also been reflected in Ukrainian legislation and strategic planning. The current framework of the Law of Ukraine On National Security of Ukraine links national security policy with the protection of national interests and the consolidation of society,

while the National Security Strategy emphasises resistance to humanitarian aggression, the consolidation of the Ukrainian nation, and the strengthening of Ukrainian identity (Law of Ukraine, 2018; President of Ukraine, 2020).

A similar logic is present in the Information Security Strategy, which identifies information operations conducted by the Russian Federation as a threat to Ukrainian identity and social cohesion. Under conditions of large-scale disinformation campaigns, the communicative dimension of identity therefore becomes an important mechanism for maintaining resilience to destructive information influence (President of Ukraine, 2021).

The security dimension of identity is also reflected in the Law of Ukraine On the Fundamentals of National Resistance, whose current framework includes the formation of civic responsibility, defence awareness, and value orientations relevant to national resistance. In this context, strengthening Ukrainian national and civic identity forms part of the broader preparation of citizens for national resilience and resistance (Law of Ukraine, 2021).

Thus, Ukrainian legislation and strategic documents increasingly treat identity policy as an important element of national resilience and security under wartime conditions.

3.2. Transformation of Ukrainian Identity under Wartime Conditions

The Russian-Ukrainian war has contributed to the strengthening of civic identity, increased national solidarity, and the emergence of new value orientations. At the same time, wartime experience has generated profound social and psychological consequences. This combination requires the state and expert community to develop a comprehensive identity policy that supports social cohesion while addressing trauma, displacement, and the long-term effects of war. Reconsideration of historical narratives and political values has become an important element in the formation of a more resilient national community based on freedom, dignity, and democratic principles.

Military aggression has also prompted a reassessment of the role of language as a marker of statehood and national identity. During the war, the linguistic situation in Ukraine has acquired a significance that extends well beyond the humanitarian sphere and is increasingly connected with questions of social consolidation and civic identification. For many years, the formal predominance of Ukrainian as the state language

coexisted with widespread bilingualism and substantial exposure to the Russian-language information space. Since the beginning of Russian aggression, the language question has acquired new political and security dimensions, particularly because Russia has repeatedly instrumentalised the issue of the “protection of Russian-speaking populations” in attempts to delegitimise Ukrainian statehood and justify military intervention.

For many citizens, a shift towards greater use of the Ukrainian language has therefore become not only a cultural choice but also an expression of civic commitment and resistance to aggression. According to a nationwide survey on changes in Ukrainian society during the full-scale war, respondents most frequently pointed to the increased use of the Ukrainian language and greater popularity of Ukrainian-language cultural products (71%), support for de-Russification processes (57%), and the growth of national consciousness (57%) (Razumkov Centre, 2026).

The strengthening of civic identity is also visible in long-term sociological monitoring. According to data summarised in *Ukrainian Society in Wartime: 2023*, 46% of respondents in 1992 identified citizenship of Ukraine as their primary identity, whereas by 2023 the share had reached 80% (Holovakha & Makeiev, 2023).

Wartime conditions have also intensified the process of national consolidation. According to a 2025 survey, 63% of respondents believed that Ukrainians were overcoming contradictions and moving towards a united nation, while 30% believed that internal contradictions were deepening. By comparison, in 2020 only 35% believed that the country was moving towards greater unity, whereas 58% considered internal contradictions to be increasing (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2025).

The European dimension of Ukrainian identity has strengthened at the same time. As of July 2025, 75% of respondents supported Ukraine’s accession to the European Union and 70% supported accession to NATO (International Republican Institute, 2025). Support for the European course is broadly distributed across major social categories. The strengthening of European self-identification is also reflected in survey data: whereas 36% of respondents reported feeling European in 2005, the corresponding figure reached 51% in 2025 (Razumkov Centre, 2025a).

According to another Razumkov Centre survey, the share of respondents who identified themselves with the pan-European cultural tradition increased

from 7% in 2006 to 10% in 2023 (Razumkov Centre, 2023).

At the same time, support for European integration coexists with a relatively high level of authoritarian political attitudes. In the 2021 monitoring study of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 57% of respondents agreed that “a few strong leaders can do more for the country than all the laws and discussions” (Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2021, p. 636). This tendency has not disappeared: in a 2025 survey, 69% of respondents considered a political system with “a strong leader independent of parliament and elections” suitable for Ukraine (Razumkov Centre, 2025b).

These survey results indicate that a stable majority in Ukrainian society supports European integration and that European identity markers are gradually becoming more prominent. At the same time, there are no grounds for assuming that European identity has been adopted uniformly or without contradiction. Authoritarian attitudes remain present in public consciousness, which means that the consolidation of a European component of Ukrainian identity requires long-term civic, educational, and cultural work rather than reliance on geopolitical orientation alone.

3.3. Legal and Institutional Foundations of Identity Policy

Ukraine’s political institutions and expert community have faced the task of developing an identity policy capable of supporting social cohesion under wartime conditions. In response, a legal and institutional framework has gradually been established at the national and local levels.

In December 2022, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the Law of Ukraine On the Basic Principles of State Policy in the Sphere of Affirming Ukrainian National and Civic Identity. Among other provisions, the law defines the consolidation of Ukrainian society, the strengthening of national and civic identity, and the development of value orientations connected with Ukraine’s European and Euro-Atlantic course as important objectives of state policy (Law of Ukraine, 2022).

In implementation of this law, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Strategy for the Affirmation of Ukrainian National and Civic Identity for the Period up to 2030 together with an operational action plan. These policy documents place particular emphasis on education, civic participation, cultural resources,

historical memory, and the creation and dissemination of Ukrainian cultural and information products (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2023c).

The institutional framework was further developed in April 2023, when the Cabinet of Ministers established the Coordination Council on the Affirmation of Ukrainian National and Civic Identity and approved a Model Regulation for corresponding coordination councils at regional and local levels (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2023a, 2023b). As a result, a multi-level institutional structure began to emerge, bringing together central and local authorities, civil society organisations, and experts involved in identity policy.

Under the adopted policy framework, public authorities and civil society organisations have implemented numerous projects aimed at strengthening civic identity, developing Ukrainian narratives, promoting Ukrainian-language cultural and information products, supporting historical memory, and encouraging young people's participation in local governance. According to the monitoring report on the implementation of the operational plan, by the end of 2025 approximately 229,400 activities and projects had been implemented, involving about 3.9 million people, including approximately 0.5 million Ukrainians living abroad (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine, 2025).

In 2026, following a competitive selection process, public funding was allocated to 37 projects implemented by 24 civil society organisations in the sphere of national and civic identity, with a total budget of UAH 18 million (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine, 2026).

Thus, Ukraine has developed a multi-level institutional framework for identity policy that connects the state and municipal levels with civil society and expert networks. Through education, media, cultural projects, publishing, and digital content, this framework contributes to the development of a Ukrainian identity grounded in historical memory, civic responsibility, and a European political orientation.

3.4. Problems and Risks in Implementing Identity Policy

Monitoring of identity-policy implementation indicates a number of persistent problems and risks (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine, 2025, pp. 150–152). One of the most important is the insufficient institutional capacity of public authorities, particularly at the municipal level.

Measures aimed at strengthening civic identity often face limited financial resources, shortages of qualified personnel, and insufficient educational and research support. As a result, some initiatives remain fragmented and fail to develop into sustainable policy instruments.

Another significant problem is the insufficient level of cross-sectoral cooperation. Monitoring data indicate continuing weaknesses in coordination among central and local authorities, civil society organisations, and educational institutions, which reduces the coherence and cumulative effect of individual initiatives.

The limited involvement of civil society in the development and implementation of identity policy also remains problematic. Public organisations, consultative bodies, and expert communities do not always have a meaningful influence on decision-making, even though they can act as important intermediaries between the state and citizens and help adapt identity policy to the needs of particular social groups and territorial communities.

Regional differences constitute an additional challenge. Ukraine is characterised by considerable historical and cultural diversity, which influences how elements of national identity are perceived across regions. Effective identity policy should therefore avoid excessive uniformity and combine common national and civic values with respect for regional specificities and cultural diversity.

Particular attention should be paid to the European component of Ukrainian identity. Available research suggests that young people's knowledge of European values remains uneven. University students do not always have sufficient opportunities to study the principles and institutional meaning of European values within formal curricula (Maslova & Goncharova, 2023, pp. 112–113). A survey conducted by the Ukrainian Association of Teachers and Researchers of European Integration found that only 19.5% of student respondents reported a deep understanding of European values, while 48% described their familiarity with them as general (Tupakhina et al., 2024). The authors concluded that knowledge of European values is often fragmentary and abstract, especially outside the social sciences and humanities. This limits students' understanding of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, civic responsibility, and the institutional principles that underpin contemporary European political identity.

Addressing these problems requires a long-term state strategy, active participation by civil society, and systematic involvement of educational institutions.

The European component should therefore be strengthened within civic and humanities education in secondary and higher education, with particular attention to the values on which the European Union is founded and to their practical institutional meaning. Knowledge of European values should be disseminated through formal education, public discussions, conferences, seminars, civic-education initiatives, and the media. Such work can help broader audiences understand the substance and objectives of Ukraine's European integration and can make identity policy a more effective instrument for Ukraine's integration into the European political and cultural space.

4. Conclusions

The findings confirm that identity policy has moved to the centre of Ukraine's security and consolidation agenda. Its significance lies not only in supporting a shared sense of national and civic belonging, but also in strengthening resilience, social cohesion, and the value foundations of democratic statehood. The main conclusions of the study can therefore be summarised as follows.

1. Under the conditions of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, identity policy has evolved from a predominantly humanitarian area of public policy into an important component of national security. Resistance to Russian aggression has demonstrated that a strong civic identity is not only a factor of cultural development but also a resource for national resilience, citizens' readiness for collective action, and social solidarity.

2. The Russian-Ukrainian war has become a powerful catalyst for the transformation of Ukrainian identity. Processes of civic and national self-identification, reassessment of the Soviet legacy, and reconsideration of cultural and political values have intensified. The consolidation of the Ukrainian political nation is reflected in the growing importance of civic identity as a principal form of self-identification.

3. Identity-formation processes are neither linear nor free from contradiction. Wartime experience generates social and psychological challenges associated with trauma, forced displacement, loss, and the transformation of local communities. Identity policy must therefore combine the objective of national consolidation with measures aimed at addressing the long-term consequences of collective wartime trauma.

4. The security function of identity policy is particularly important because Ukrainian identity is itself a target of Russian aggression. The destruction

and appropriation of cultural heritage, manipulation of historical memory, and promotion of the ideology of the "Russian World" form part of a broader strategy aimed at weakening Ukrainian statehood. The consolidation of Ukrainian national and civic identity should therefore be treated as a substantive direction of national security policy alongside military, economic, and information security.

5. In recent years, Ukraine has created the basic legal and institutional mechanisms required to implement identity policy, including legislation, strategic documents, coordination bodies, and networks linking public institutions with civil society. Their effectiveness, however, continues to be constrained by limited institutional capacity, insufficient resources, weak cross-sectoral coordination, and uneven involvement of civil society.

6. Support for European integration has become one of the central markers of Ukraine's civilisational and political orientation. In the context of the strategic course towards EU membership, the European component of Ukrainian identity should be based not only on geopolitical preference but also on the internalisation of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, political pluralism, human dignity, and social solidarity. Survey data nevertheless indicate that strong support for EU accession is not always accompanied by a deep understanding of European values and practices, while certain authoritarian attitudes remain present in public consciousness.

7. The formation of the European component of Ukrainian identity through education, science, culture, and civic education is therefore of particular importance. Educational institutions should provide not only professional knowledge and competencies but also opportunities to understand the principles of democratic governance and the functioning of European institutions. The current shortage of systematic educational programmes on European values indicates that this should become a priority area of state humanitarian and educational policy.

8. In the context of Ukraine's status as a candidate country for accession to the European Union, identity policy should simultaneously strengthen national cohesion and deepen citizens' understanding of democratic values, the rule of law, and civic responsibility. The purposeful development of a European component of Ukrainian identity should therefore be regarded as a strategic task for the coming years and as an important factor in the modernisation of the Ukrainian state and its integration into the European political and legal space.

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