

Do politicians do what they say they will do? Democracy demands that parties and parliamentarians have recognizable positions on the major issues of the day. It also demands that they will, on average, vote for laws that align with the positions they stated in their party platforms, otherwise known as “party ideology.” When this connection between ideology and legislative action is broken, the consequences for democracy can be tragic. Ukraine’s democracy is in trouble: it is a weak party system beset by military conflict, endemic corruption, and long-standing social inequality. For this scientific project, Ukraine presents an important test of the “ideology-action” link. The major research questions of this project are: (1) Do Ukrainian politicians do what they say they will do? and (2) How do the political biographies of parliamentarians (such as their gender, age, political experience, and electoral district) influence the connection between ideology and action?

Scholars have recognized the importance of “ideology – action” link. Yet, for a few reasons, the link as it exists in post-Soviet states is not well understood. First, most theoretical models are built for Western Europe, and thus miss the specific configuration of factors relevant for post-Soviet countries. Second, we lack comprehensive, over-time data on party ideology and legislative action for Ukraine.

This project addresses these problems by developing a model that works for post-Soviet Ukraine. It will greatly enhance existing measures of party ideology for all major Ukrainian parties and across time. It will, for the first time, build a database of roll call voting on major pieces of legislation and prepare these data for statistical analyses. I perform these analyses to test theories of the ideology-action link. I examine legislation on three major priority areas of Ukraine since 2002: military conflict in the east and the subsequent refugee crisis; corruption in government and economic life; and social inequality.

The main hypothesis is the ideology-action gap: that, by and large, parties and politicians make only a weak connection between what they write in their party platforms during the election campaign, and what they actually do once in office. Ukrainian parties are closely connected to big business and frequently represent the interests of big business; these “representatives of the people” are thus not loyal to the ideological positions expressed in their party platforms. Populism is generally regarded as an attempt by political parties to speak ‘for the people’, to vocalize ‘people’s interests,’ and to claim to wrest power from big business and the elite political class; as such it has been a major ideological position in modern Ukraine. The extent to which populism has been the salvation of Ukraine is not empirically established. Thus, I examine five major political ideologies – populism, tolerance, traditionalism, statism, and economic liberalism. Finally, I also examine the distinctive influence of parliamentarian biography.

I perform statistical analyses on the main data sources of this project, which are: (a) political platforms of 27 major political parties and blocs that entered parliament in Ukraine 2002-2014; (b) The East European Parliamentarian and Candidate data (EAST PaC) 1990 – 2014 for Ukraine that contains all of the candidates matched over time and in which demographic and electoral characteristics are available for each candidate; and (c) Roll-call voting data on war/refugees, corruption, and social inequality legislation, 2002-2016. I will combine all these sources of data to produce a new data-base for scholars of democratization and electoral politics in Ukraine. These data will be archived for public use in Poland’s Archiwum Danych Społecznych.

This project is interdisciplinary by joining sociology and political science to produce new, original, and emergent knowledge. This project contributes to the social sciences on the topics of democracy, electoral politics, and studies of post-Soviet countries. I will produce high profile publications and engage with the public via websites, popularized publications, and a one day workshop on the topic of the project. Democracies such as Ukraine, and other post-Soviet states, face serious problems. To overcome them, we need useful theory and accurate data. The data and its research products of this project will enhance our knowledge on the functioning of democracy, politics, and society in Ukraine, Poland and all across Europe.