

# Criminals, Business and State In Post-Soviet Ukraine

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## Abstract

On the thirtieth commemoration of Ukraine's independence, the present condition of the country highlights the necessity of contemplating the historical trajectory that post-Soviet Ukrainian society has traversed. This is not merely a retrospective consideration encompassing the past and present, but also, perhaps more crucially, a forward-looking assessment of Ukraine's future. While Ukraine exhibited a sense of cohesion and significant societal integration shortly after declaring independence, as evidenced by the outcomes of the All-Ukrainian referendum conducted on December 1, 1991, the year 2021 reveals a notable departure from these characteristics (State Archival Service of Ukraine, 2013). Present-day post-Soviet Ukrainian society has become fragmented, marked by discernible social fault lines. As Samuel Huntington (1996) observes, Ukraine is a nation divided along cultural lines, with two distinct civilizations. The fault line between these civilizations, demarcating the West from Orthodoxy, has bisected the nation for centuries (Huntington, 1996). Over the post-Soviet era, Ukraine has experienced a profound transformation in the role of the state, which has rapidly diminished in its capacity to effectively manage the fundamental pillars supporting society. Throughout this period, Ukrainian society has grappled with an enduring systemic crisis. The erstwhile Soviet framework of existence in Ukraine was dismantled, yet efforts to establish a novel system predicated on principles like market economy, human rights, and democracy have encountered significant challenges. While the contemporary Ukrainian society may project an appearance of stability, it conceals vulnerabilities to the deleterious trends stemming from its transformation, which are driven by three primary factors: the state, business entities, and criminal elements. The article aims to delineate the roles played by criminality, business, and the state in the social governance of post-Soviet Ukraine.

## Keywords

business, criminality, state, illusion of stability, economic trends, social transformation.

## Introduction

The research field of Ukraine-related issues is very broad (Chaisty & Whitefield, 2018; Laza-renko, 2020; Kushnir, 2019; Kvartiuk & Curtiss, 2019; Papagiannis et al., 2021). Much attention is paid to EU integration issues (Davydchuk et al., 2018; Garman et al., 2020; Powell et al., 2015; Shevchenko, 2019; Spiliopoulos, 2014). On the thirtieth commemoration of Ukraine's independence, the present condition of the country highlights the necessity of contemplating the historical trajectory that post-Soviet Ukrainian society has traversed.

The post-Soviet transformation of Ukrainian society is a transition from the Soviet model to the models of the post-Soviet social system, in the formation of which several determining factors can be identified. The movement of Ukrainian society from the late Soviet period to the post-Soviet state was characterized by the imbalance between social reproduction and transformation. Eminent English sociologist E. Giddens (1996) defined the study of the relationship between social reproduction and transformation as an important sociological problem. He argued that continuity and variability in social life can be visualized as a 'mixture' of intentional and unintentional consequences of human actions. The task of sociology, as Giddens wrote, is to investigate the resulting balance between social reproduction and transformation. Social reproduction demonstrates how societies 'keep themselves alive' through time, while transformation refers to the changes to which societies are prone. Society is not a mechanical device like a clock or an engine that «keeps itself running» because it has an inbuilt source of energy. Social reproduction is a consequence of the continuous actions performed by people from day to day and from year to year, as well as of the continuity of the diverse social practices to which people are committed (Giddens, 1996).

The dialectics of social reproduction and social transformation of Ukrainian society in the post-Soviet period was determined by the influence of three main factors: the state, business and criminality. Let us make an attempt to determine the role of each of these factors in the post-Soviet transformation of Ukrainian society. It should be noted that the study of the role of each of these factors is presented with a very large degree of difference in the depth and completeness of research results. As in all countries of the world, the least studied factor in this triad remains the criminality, while the largest number of scientific publications reveals the role of the state in social changes in Ukraine.

Every state by its social essence is an organization of political power, which is represented by the authorities, establishes the law regulating relations between people on a certain territory, has sovereignty (supremacy) of power on this territory, has the right to gather taxes, as well as the exclusive right to compulsion and violence. The social purpose of the state consists in the duty to ensure the security of citizens and territory, unity and integrity of the country. Among the basic powers of state power in modern societies, the most important is the right to dispose of natural, human, industrial, technological, and other resources on behalf of the people and the resulting duty to act within the national interest (i.e., for the benefit of all citizens who constitute that people).

## Methods

For a more concrete grasp of the methodologies and principles employed in researching criminality, business, and the state in post-Soviet Ukraine, let us delve into potential approaches in greater detail:

- Quantitative methods involves scrutinizing statistical data, utilizing official statistics to discern criminality trends and their correlation with business and the state.
- Conducting interviews with entrepreneurs, law enforcement agencies, and citizens to gather quantitative data and statistics.

- Engaging in conversations with experts from diverse fields (law enforcement, entrepreneurs, activists) to gain a profound understanding of problems and interconnections.
- Conducting interviews with participants and witnesses of specific cases to unveil details and specifics.
- Examining laws and policy documents to comprehend the formal structure and role of the government in regulating business and combating crime.
- Utilizing data from government reports, investigative journalism, and other sources to verify facts and support conclusions.
- Undertaking in-depth analyses of individual events, exploring case studies of business, government, and criminal interactions to identify characteristics and factors in the success or failure of countermeasures.

These approaches can be employed for general research on criminality. The study of criminality, business, and the state in post-Soviet Ukraine specifically adheres to key principles:

1. **Objectivity:** Maintaining neutrality and objectivity in data collection and analysis to avoid bias and subjectivism.
2. **Complexity:** Employing a variety of methods to create a comprehensive picture of the interaction among business, the state, and criminal structures.
3. **Ethics and Confidentiality:** Adhering to ethical standards when interacting with research participants, especially in handling sensitive information.
4. **Systemic Approach:** Examining interrelationships in the business-government-crime system, both domestically and internationally.
5. **Contextualization:** Considering the historical, political, and socio-cultural context to better understand the issues and dynamics.
6. **Practical Relevance:** Focusing on the practical applicability of results to make recommendations and improvements.
7. **Verifiability of Results:** Designing research so that findings can be tested and replicated by other researchers.

By combining these methods and principles, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of criminality, business, and state issues in post-Soviet Ukraine. The concept of criminality in this context has been influenced by various factors, including economic, political, socio-cultural changes, corruption, organized crime, a growing drug problem, and international influences. It is crucial to recognize that opinions on these issues may vary, and the information provided offers a general overview. The processes of criminality formation and development in post-Soviet Ukraine constitute a complex and interrelated problem, necessitating a holistic approach involving law enforcement, societal engagement, economic institutions, and political structures.

## Results

In Ukraine, which represents one of the largest countries in Europe, three decades ago social processes were set in motion that quickly led to the destructive consequences. Among the key destructive processes, the leading place is occupied by the population depopulation. It's important to highlight that the issue of depopulation continues to be a subject of contemporary scientific discourse in other countries as well (De Lucas & Prats, 2020; Larraz & García-Gómez, 2020; Meijer & Syssner, 2017; Onge & Smith, 2020; Vaishar et al., 2020). Throughout the whole history, Ukraine reached the largest population as of 01.01.1993, when it was 52.244 million people. As of 01.01.2018, the total population of Ukraine, according to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, amounted to 42.234 million people (cash population). Thus, within a quarter of a century, the population of modern Ukraine decreased by

10 million people (by 19 %). Since these losses are not inferior in number to the losses from the two great tragedies (from the Holodomor of 1932-1933 the losses were between 4 and 6 million people, and in the Second World War - about 9 million people), some demographers estimate them as a demographic catastrophe in modern Ukraine. These losses are one of the clear signs of social trauma in contemporary Ukrainian society.

Among the main reasons of mass population depopulation in post-Soviet Ukraine we should single out the reasons of socio-economic nature. In the transformation process, the key role was played by neoliberal market reforms aimed at transferring industrial enterprises, trade facilities, consumer services, and the agricultural sector from state to private ownership.

These reforms brought about fundamental changes in the social structure of post-Soviet Ukrainian society. Firstly, new social groups were formed: industrialists, entrepreneurs, merchants, traders, bankers, farmers and others. Secondly, there was a process of erosion of the old structure: the number of the working class was rapidly decreasing; the collective farming peasantry disappeared as a layer with the liquidation of the collective farm system; the intelligentsia underwent a period of certain socio-cultural transformation. Changes in the social structure of the population are characterized by the following indicators: in the period from 1988 to 2001 in Ukraine the number of the highest strata of the population decreased from 19.3% to 2%, the middle strata - from 75% to 9.8%, and the lowest increased from 5.7% to 88% (Dubrovsky & Andrushchenko, 2002).

O. Soskin (2014) proves that Ukraine has a damaged social and property structure of society, which indicates the total hegemony of monopolistic corporate capital. Its social cross-section now looks like this: 1-2 % - the rich (billionaires), 15-18 % - the conditionally middle class, 75-80 % of the poor. The structure of national wealth distribution in Ukraine was as follows: in the hands of 1-2% of the rich are concentrated 65-70% of wealth, and 75-80% of the poor own only 5% of wealth (Soskin, 2014). According to the results of the survey conducted from 13 to 21 March 2021 by the «Rating» Sociological Group on behalf of the Centre of Analysis and Sociological Research of the International Republican Institute, the financial condition of Ukrainian citizens was determined. According to the results, the very poor make up 20%, the poor - 34%, the low-income - 21%, the well-off - 14% (Sociologichna grupa «Rejting,» 2021).

In post-Soviet Ukraine, deindustrialisation has become a source of massive degradation of the labor force and marginalization of the population. In the period from 1990 to 2015, the number of workers in the main sectors of the economy decreased as follows (Skvorets, 2019): in industry from 7.8 million to 2.2 million (3.5 times); in construction - from 2.4 million to 0.2 million (12 times); in agriculture from 4.4 million to 0.5 million (8.8 times); in transport from 1.8 million to 0.7 million (2.5 times); in education, culture, science and art from 3 million to 1.7 million (1.7 times). The total number of people employed in these sectors of the economy decreased from 19.3 million to 5.3 million (3.6 times).

Market reforms led to a multiple reduction of the resource base of post-Soviet Ukraine. «The expenditures of the consolidated budget from 1990 to 1998 decreased from 78.2 billion dollars to USD 12.4 billion. In other words, 6.3 times, including education - 12.4 billion USD to 1.8 billion USD. This includes education - \$12.4 billion to \$1.8 billion (6.7 times); health care - from \$7.9 billion to \$1.5 billion (5.3 times); culture - from \$1.3 billion to \$0.1 billion (13 times)» (Pavlovsky, 2001).

Thus, the transformation of post-Soviet Ukrainian society caused by market reforms was accompanied by a powerful destruction of industrial (deindustrialization), labor (degradation of the workforce), scientific, technical, educational, cultural and demographic (depopulation) potential of Ukraine.

**The study of the business role in the transformation processes of the post-Soviet Ukrainian society indicates the increasing role of this factor in the life of the country**

(Kuzio, 2018). As a result of reforms and privatization of state property, there was a transition from the dominance of state ownership, the share of which was about 95% in 1990, to the domination of private property, the share of which was estimated by analysts at 93% in 2015. This means that the dominant role in the economy has shifted from the state to business. The goal of neoliberal reformers was achieved - to create a liberal state that does not interfere in the economy and plays the role of a «night watchman» for the interests of private owners.

The authors of the fundamental work, devoted to the problem of researching the socio-economic situation of Ukraine, identified the second actor after the ruling class of Ukraine, which was interested in the implementation of this model of transformation of Ukrainian society (Heyets et al., 2009). This actor is international capital. Ukrainian scientists state that Ukraine at the time of independence is undergoing the process of transformation into the periphery of the world capitalist system, which means its inclusion in the world value chains as a source of raw materials, cheap labor and a place of concentration of low-tech environmentally harmful industries that produce products with low added value. Scholars prove that Ukraine's peripheralization is a consequence of its inclusion in the global capitalist system based on the principles of the Washington Consensus. Neoliberal reforms, which included privatization, liberalization of finance, trade, and deregulation of the economy, were aimed at opening up new, previously closed to transnational capital, and at integrating countries with economies in transition into the global capitalist system as exploited periphery. Therefore, «the neoliberal strategy of socio-economic transformation of Ukrainian society was not an independent work of the Ukrainian power community, it was an action ordered by pro-capitalist forces, but it agreed to this way of «entering the world community of civilized countries because it opened up opportunities for extremely rapid enrichment even at the cost of a well-predicted and managed social catastrophe» (Heyets et al., 2009).

The main actors behind the primary accumulation of capital in post-Soviet Ukraine were representatives of the bureaucracy, business and criminals. The links between them were so strong that one and the same person simultaneously belonged to two or even three of these elements. The common interests of these three elements in the fastest possible accumulation of capital became the basis for the formation of Ukraine's shadow economy.

According to experts, legislative deficiencies and socio-cultural peculiarities of society created the necessary conditions for the existence of the shadow economy. It was rooted in all types of business - large, medium and small. Its scale reached 50 per cent of production. Profits of enterprises were concealed, criminal schemes for tax evasion were created, wages existed in two forms - official and «in envelopes». As a result of excessively liberal foreign trade, the country was overrun with cheap imported goods with which domestic goods could not compete, leading to the decline and complete collapse of our industry, especially light industry. Corruption of customs officials contributed to this process, which gave a green light to contraband (Shulga, 2011). Considering this issue, it's worth noting that despite efforts to reduce the shadow economy, its share in the total national product continues to increase. This phenomenon is the subject of interdisciplinary research (Alvarado et al., 2021; Bashlakova & Bashlakov, 2021; Chen et al., 2021; Hajilee et al., 2021; Mazhar & Méon, 2017).

According to the assessment of one of the leaders of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine G. Osovyi (2002), in the 90s of the 20th century there was a total increase in the exploitation of labor force on the part of employers, the state abandoned strict regulation of the market, liberalized it in every possible way, letting prices go. All the forces of the ruling class were thrown into the initial piling up of capital and then its «laundering». The main sources of such enrichment were state property and depreciation of labour force. The researcher claims that during 10 years of privatization, state property worth 120 billion hryvnias was denationalized, but only about 6 billion hryvnias went into the state treasury. At the same time, «lucky businessmen» annually exported billions of dollars worth of capital through

offshore zones. It came to the point that in order to supplement working capital, which was in short supply, employers began to massively delay wages since 1995. Through such forced illegal confiscations from their employees, they received in 1999 an «interest-free loan» of more than 7 billion hryvnias. Paradoxically, the state, following the private owners, resorted to such «savings» and stopped paying wages to public sector employees in a timely manner (Osovyi, 2002).

Many scientists recognise that corruption has become the cause and consequence of the shadow economy, which has led to a significant property differentiation of society, a decline in morality and degradation of social and political life. The problem of corruption in Ukraine to a certain extent reflects the general discourse of current socio-behavioral research (Akbari et al., 2019; Litina & Palivos, 2016; Modesto et al., 2020; Orosz et al., 2018; Ryvkin & Serra, 2020; Salmon & Serra, 2017; Van Deurzen, 2017). *In Ukraine, as in other post-Soviet countries, business and power have no distinction.* The tendency to merge business and politics through formal and informal influence of oligarchic groups on decision-making by the highest government institutions, which was established in the mid-1990s, has now reached its peak. Corruption can be seen as a creation of capital, which turns everything into a commodity, and in particular seeks to commercialize the services of state power and administration. Power, by its intermediary nature, is like money, and the political system is like a market. All public goods that are monopolistically produced by the state are non-market in nature, but the recipients of corruption rent turn them into goods (Piassetska-Ustych, 2016).

The phenomenon of corruption is considered as a phenomenon that is determined by social conditions and processes. Identification of the essence of corruption requires a systemic approach, which makes it possible to analyze it in terms of social, political-legal, legal and economic approaches. Corruption as a socio-economic phenomenon in a broad sense is revealed in the «corrosion» of power, when state officials and other public persons authorized to perform managerial functions use their official position, status and authority of their position for personal enrichment or in group interests. Corruption as a political and legal phenomenon is a way of criminalisation of political power and public administration system, its transformation from an institution expressing national interest into an apologist and secret defender of the corporate interest of power elites. Corruption as an economic phenomenon is a latent, illegal, implemented through rent-oriented behavior of officials, form of non-sanctioned relations of exchange, distribution and appropriation of economic goods, money, securities and assets, which limit economic freedom, equality of competition and access of citizens and businesses to national resources. Under these conditions, officials convert power into property and capital, provide non-economic advantages in competition (primarily in the resource markets) to business representatives who pay corruption rent (Piassetska-Ustych, 2016).

Analyzing the contradictions in the transformation of Ukrainian society, V. Heyets (2009) defined the socio-cultural content of these social changes. He wrote that although it was declared that the country had set the task of becoming a nation with a civilized market economy and achieving results that would serve as a fundamental model of life, in reality, the previous model of state absolutism in Ukraine, as in other countries, was evolving towards market absolutism. A social atmosphere was formed in which the «new ideology» was synonymous with «total freedom,» allowing individuals to pursue enrichment without any restrictions. Pseudo-market relations dominated in many areas, especially in the interaction between the state and business (Heyets, 2009).

Market absolutism means turning everything that is possible into a commodity. This means that in the public consciousness there have been such changes that allow to turn into a commodity not only manufacturing products, services, natural resources, labour power, land, but also a human being, human life, power, public office, and if possible, not only the body, but also the soul of a person.

In my memory I recall a case of communication with one of my good acquaintances, who was a successful farmer, leased about 1.5 thousand hectares of land (shares) and within 10 years bought several jeeps. In a word, he was not a poor man and could earn a lot of money. Once during one of his meetings he shared with his friends his impressions of his meeting with the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) general in his house near Kiev. The farmer was amazed by the general's three-storey mansion and the luxury it contained - collections of weapons, paintings and other valuables. The farmer was dumbfounded: where could the general get the money for all this luxury? I asked the farmer: «Is the power that the general has, his ability to influence the fate of people and the conduct of business, access to information containing state, military, scientific, or other secrets, worth nothing?» If there is an opportunity to «trade ranks or positions», it is already a source of considerable income. And society is aware of the widespread practice of dishonest operation of positions in government and local self-government bodies, in court, in law enforcement agencies, prosecutors' offices, and even in the army. In 2015, there was a video on the Internet about the certification of the chief prosecutor of Dnipropetrovsk, which showed that this «prosecutor», when asked by a member of the commission about the principles of legal proceedings in Ukraine, could not name any of these principles. A person who has no elementary knowledge of jurisprudence acted as a verdictor of the fates of many people. It is hard to imagine how many human destinies were mutilated as a result of such «prosecutor's practice» and how many real criminals were able to escape justice. This is how the «absolutism of the market» influences people's outlook and behaviour, and ultimately leads to the degradation of social systems.

Analyzing the participation of the most active social groups of Ukraine in the socio-political life of the country in the period of transition to independence, N. Shulga (2011) identified a certain role of such groups as the nomenclature, intellectuals, miners and criminals. The researcher believes that the role of criminal elements in these processes consisted in the fact that they were also interested in the collapse of the socialist type of economic management, because it did not give the opportunity to legalize large-scale embezzlement, funds obtained as a result of various frauds, to transfer them by inheritance. These social elements cannot be called a group in its exact sociological meaning, firstly, because everyone who engaged in illegal activities, hid, concealed it, secondly, because there were no stable ties between them at the level of the whole society. This does not exclude the existence of any local organized criminal groups (Shulga, 2011). As noted above, the model of neoliberal reforms implemented in Ukraine has opened fabulous opportunities for the criminal world to strengthen its influence not only by using racketeering, raiding, bribing officials, but also by penetrating into the power structures.

**In the conditions of merging of power and business, spread of corruption and shadow economy in the post-Soviet society, the most favourable ground for the flourishing of criminality has been created.** Unfortunately, there are very few studies of criminality in post-Soviet Ukrainian society at the level of scientific research. It should be noted that economists, sociologists, political scientists, specialists in public administration have conducted a lot of research on the study of post-Soviet Ukrainian society, while historians avoid these problems. And not by chance. The reason lies in the fact that it is impossible for historians to avoid a comprehensive consideration of destructive processes in society, and thus the assessment of the activities of social actors who, in pursuit of wealth, power or glory, destroyed the national heritage of Ukraine. There is an understanding that an objective study of the real processes of social transformation in Ukraine, especially containing information about the role of specific individuals in them, creates dangers for the researcher, which no one can protect him from: neither law enforcement agencies, nor the prosecutor's office, nor the court, nor the state authorities.

The book «Donetsk Mafia», authored by S. Kuzin, is dedicated to the criminal world of Ukraine (Kuzin, 2006). In the Introductory speech B. Penchuk notes that the very first laws

of the state aimed at transition to the market, especially in the development of small business, were used by criminal groups to launder funds of the «shadow» economy, accumulate strategically important initial capital, and further - to introduce their representatives into the economic and power structures. A mafia similar to American-Sicilian groups has formed in the region, which has achieved full power not only in Donetsk (the most densely populated and industrially developed) region of the country, but is also gaining strength, becoming on its feet in the whole Ukraine. This domestic mafia - not just organised crime, but acting for many years in full contact with representatives of power structures, aspiring and able to become a state. The book contains biographies of many leaders and businessmen of Donetsk region, who are accused of criminal acts and, in particular, of illegal actions that hindered the investigation of 55 high-profile murders related to the redistribution of property and business (Kuzin, 2006).



Figure 1. The cover of the book «Donetsk Mafia» by S. Kuzin (left)  
Figure 2. The cover of the book «Crimean Gambit» by A. Kochkina (right)

The second book in the series «Mafia in Ukraine» was written by A. Kochkina and it is called «Crimean Gambit». This book describes the activities of criminal groups for a decade and a half in Crimea, shows the connection of representatives of the criminal world with specific leaders, and provides documents and photographs of the crime victims (Kochkina, 2006).

There is no doubt that there is enough evidence to write books about criminal groups in all other regions of Ukraine, but the problem is not that, but what to do with all this legacy. One can find information in the sources about the actions of Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, Vinnytsia, Lviv, Zakarpattia and other influential clans that developed during the post-Soviet transformation of Ukrainian society. Criminalisation and then oligarchization of society became the main factors in the formation of the ruling class of Ukraine, and all this means that its representatives are ready to commit any new crimes for self-preservation. The post-Soviet period saw the deaths of many prominent politicians, businessmen, and state officials who became victims of fierce struggles for power, property, or influence in the country. In November 1996, Ukrainian politician and businessman Yevhen Shcherban was killed on the airport airfield in Donetsk. On 23 April 1998, the former head of the National Bank



of Ukraine, financier and politician Vadym Hetman was shot dead in the lift of his home in Kiev. In March 1999, Vyacheslav Chernovol, one of Ukraine's political leaders, was killed in a car accident. The investigation into the tragedy was to answer the question of whether the accident was staged. On 4 March 2005, former Ukrainian Interior Minister Yuriy Kravchenko was found dead at his dacha in Koncha-Zaspa, near Kiev, with two gunshot wounds to the head. Whether it was murder or suicide remains an open question. In January 2007, influential politician Yevhen Kushnaryov suffered a gunshot wound during a hunting trip, from which he died shortly afterwards, but it remains a mystery whether it was an accidental death or a premeditated murder.

Mysterious was the death of two heads of the State Property Fund of Ukraine V. Semenyuk-Samsonenko (in August 2014 «suicide» with a double-barrelled shotgun) and M. Chechetov (in February 2015 he threw himself from his flat on the 17th floor). They knew too much about privatization and the fierce struggle between claimants for state property (Zanuda, 2015). The inability of the state authorities to solve all these high-profile crimes and punish the perpetrators is evidence of their weakness in countering the influence of the criminal world.

The degree to which citizens protect their property rights can be judged by statistics reflecting the percentage of court judgements enforced, but this percentage is not high, and it must also be taken into account that it takes months, and often years, to get to a court judgment and to spend a lot of money on lawyers. Therefore, judicial defense for the majority of citizens becomes simply inaccessible. An ordinary citizen remains defenseless before arbitrary behavior of officials, before employers, before the criminal world. True, if a person has the opportunity to enlist the support of criminal authorities, watchmen, then he gets a real chance to restore the violated justice. In this case, the problems are solved by the methods of Don Corleone from the film «The Godfather» (Coppola, 1972). And it must be said, it is solved quickly and effectively. The spread of social practices of solving by criminals those issues that should be solved by law enforcement agencies or other state bodies testifies to very serious and understudied changes in the culture of post-Soviet society.

Ukraine's social governance, as it was mentioned above, has established a one-factor model of economy, which focuses exclusively on maximizing profit, and therefore the country is doomed to degradation. In the modern world, those social systems that are based on a multifactor management model have been successful. In such a model, in addition to economic efficiency (maximum profit), social efficiency (the ability to solve social problems, overcome social contradictions and conflicts, invest resources in human and social capital) and public safety (which is determined by the ability to ensure the stability and integrity of society, the positive nature of social change) are also ensured.

The change in the ratio of the state, business and criminal influence on social governance has led to such processes as deprofessionalisation in all spheres, but especially in public administration, and a decrease in the scientific justification of decisions. An example is the decision to liquidate the sanitary-epidemiological service in Ukraine. It turned out that this service is an important tool for combating epidemics and in those countries where it functions, the response to the coronavirus pandemic was more successful than in those countries where it is absent. At the parliamentary level, a decision was made to restore the sanitary-epidemiological service in Ukraine, but it turned out that it would require significant resources and two years time. Over the last 7-8 years in Ukraine, the practice of appointing non-professionals as heads of institutions, enterprises, state campaigns and even ministries has become widespread, and this has always led to destructive consequences.

Investigating the problem of the split between oligarchs as a threat to the integration of Ukrainian society, sociologist N. Shulga (2018) denies the existence of oligarchic consensus in post-Soviet Ukraine. He proves that since the early 90s there has been a fierce competitive struggle between groups of businessmen, who quickly enriched themselves and gradually

formed as oligarchs, which resulted in showdowns with violence, torture, shootings in lifts, car and stadium explosions, and great loss of life. It is impossible to speak of any consensus of the oligarchs in the following decade.

## Discussion

The exploration of criminality, business, and the state in post-Soviet Ukraine is intricate and multifaceted. Since 1991, when Ukraine gained independence, notable changes in the political, economic, and social spheres have significantly influenced the dynamics among criminal structures, business, and the state. Several key aspects of this complex topic include:

- **Oligarchy:** Ukraine has witnessed the emergence of an oligarchic system, where a small group of affluent and influential businessmen, known as oligarchs, wield control over large enterprises and sectors of the economy. These oligarchs often maintain close connections with political elites, leveraging their influence to safeguard their interests.
- **Corruption:** A pervasive issue in Ukraine, corruption extends across various sectors, including business and government. Elevated levels of corruption can facilitate illicit transactions and shield the interests of criminal organizations.
- **Organized Crime:** Ukraine is home to diverse organized criminal groups engaged in activities such as smuggling, drug trafficking, and arms trafficking. These groups may have affiliations with both business and political entities.
- **Anti-Corruption Reforms and Efforts:** Since 2014, Ukraine has embarked on numerous initiatives to combat corruption and enhance transparency within state institutions. These endeavors encompass the establishment of anti-corruption bodies like the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (NAPC) and the creation of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Court.
- **Geopolitical Factors:** Developments in geopolitics, such as the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the country's relations with Russia, exert a profound impact on the political and economic landscape. These factors contribute to the intricate interplay between criminality, business, and the state in the region.
- **Economic Crisis and Instability:** Ukraine has faced economic crises since gaining independence, contributing to potential growth in the shadow economy and increased criminal activity.
- **Energy Sector:** The strategic importance of Ukraine's energy sector attracts attention from both oligarchs and foreign interests, potentially leading to unfair deals, including energy smuggling.
- **Media and Information Warfare:** Media and information resources are often manipulated to advance political and corporate interests, influencing public opinion and shaping consciousness.
- **Competition for Resources and Influence:** Intense competition for access to natural resources, infrastructure, and influence over government decisions may lead to illegal competition methods and power struggles.
- **International Intervention:** Various international actors are drawn to Ukraine, and their interests and influence play a significant role in the dynamics between criminal structures, business, and the state.

Fighting crime and corruption, along with reinforcing the rule of law, remains a top priority for the Ukrainian government and society. These efforts are crucial for ensuring stability, economic development, and building trust in state institutions. Investigating and understanding the intricate interconnections between criminal structures, business, and political elites poses an ongoing challenge for Ukrainian authorities.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the impact exerted by the state, business, and criminal elements on social dynamics within post-Soviet Ukrainian society yields several noteworthy conclusions:

Throughout the course of social transformation in Ukrainian society, a notable reconfiguration of influence occurred among the state, business, and criminal elements.

During the twilight years of the Soviet era, specifically during the period of perestroika, state authority still occupied a predominant position in the realm of social governance. In contrast, the realm of legal business was in its nascent stage, and the criminal underworld was just beginning to emerge from the shadows. However, the 1990s marked a pivotal turning point in this landscape.

Neoliberal reforms precipitated a substantial shift wherein the state relinquished its commanding role in the economy, ceding this position to the burgeoning business sector. In this transition, criminal elements played a decisive role. Through methods such as extortion, hostile takeovers, corruption, and engagement in the shadow economy, they established control over the country's primary resources.

The critical facet of social reproduction, as elucidated by E. Giddens (1996), which serves as the lifeline of any society, experienced significant erosion in post-Soviet Ukraine. This erosion manifested itself in the depletion of demographic, production, industrial, scientific, technological, labor, social, educational, cultural, and human capital.

The process of social transformation in post-Soviet Ukraine, driven by the evolving roles and influences of the state, business, and criminal elements in societal governance, has assumed a destructive character.

With the diminished capacity of state authorities, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary to effectively discharge their functions, the influence of criminality in maintaining control over society and preserving the existing social order has been on the ascent.

The challenges stemming from the transformation of post-Soviet Ukrainian society underscore the necessity of fortifying the state's role, reasserting its agency as a proactive actor in fostering positive trends within the realms of social reproduction.

The future exploration of these issues should center on substantiating strategies, means, and methodologies to optimize the impact of the state, business, and criminal elements on social reproduction and social transformation within Ukrainian society.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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