

## ELITE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UKRAINIAN STATE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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**Abstract.** Solving the problems of state-building and territorial unity of the country, reviving and awakening the spirit of the Ukrainian community, are of great practical importance and demand in the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Responsibility is defined as a constructive form of attitude to a problem that requires a solution. As an internally oriented quality, this phenomenon reflects the tendency or even the desire of a person (or a social group, the state) to adhere to generally accepted socio-cultural norms in their activities, to follow certain rules, and to show readiness to take responsibility for their own actions. Increasing the level of the elite's responsibility is one of the most effective ways to address many social problems in various spheres of public life. It is about the ability to feel social involvement and responsibility to society, the state and future generations, to overcome indifference and alienation from social and political processes. Responsibility is based on social interest. The elite, motivated primarily by social interest, is able to bear responsibility to society, community, and the individual. Its characteristic is not only a certain social status, but also an appropriate intellectual and psychological level of development and the ability to act in accordance with the national interest. Obviously, the active and responsible activity of the elite is its image characteristic and should be aimed at preserving and building the statehood, especially in the context of such a complex social crisis as a war.

**Keywords:** elite; responsibility; war; social crisis; statehood; consolidation

## **Introduction**

In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, humanity is going through a period of severe trials that destroy the established foundations of the world order and demonstrate not only a geopolitical but also a civilisational conflict between different value systems and models of socio-economic and political development. For the Ukrainian society, this is also a problem of preserving territorial integrity and state independence in the context of military confrontation. Hundreds of thousands of killed and wounded, millions of refugees, internally displaced persons – this is an incomplete list of the realities of the war, the largest one since World War II, with the largest concentration of troops on one territory in the entire modern era of wars and thousands of kilometres of the front line. It should be noted that during the war, Ukrainians also faced a decline in the economy and partial destruction of some of its industries, which was ultimately accompanied by impoverishment of the population, the destruction of the energy system, rapid social polarisation of society, etc. A number of social challenges are exacerbated by political instability, which has the potential to escalate into state collapse and is reinforced by the underdevelopment of civil society institutions. Obviously, only a strong-minded nation can respond to the challenges facing Ukrainian society, provided that it consolidates and mobilises its efforts. Each nation is hardened by passing the common test of those who identify themselves with this nation. In general, in the context of military confrontation, Ukraine is overcoming a difficult historical path of “rethinking, redefining and transforming its own cultural and civilisational identity” (Kozlovets 2023, p. 22). This circumstance is especially relevant in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, when historical narratives are used in information warfare as a significant means for manipulating public consciousness (Krasnodemska et al. 2024).

The problems faced by the contemporary Ukrainian society are also the problems of its entire history. Human history is a holistic entity. Obviously, there are several long-term conditions and structures of existence that are timeless and, as a result, retain their relevance in future generations. History is never completely new, since “modernity can mean that point of intersection at which the past becomes the future, that is, the point of intersection of three temporal dimensions, at which the present always disappears... a person is always a past one in time there is future in front of him or her” (Koselleck 2006). Thus, understanding the problems of the present is possible under the condition of understanding them through the prism of the experience of painful reflection on the past. It is worth noting that the history of the formation of Ukrainian statehood is full not only of examples of heroic feats and desperate struggle for independence, but also of a number of defeats, miscalculations and mistakes. As an illustration, the process of nation- and state-building in the 17th century was interrupted by the tragedy of the partition of Ukraine. It was only a century later when Ukrainian intellectuals began to reassert the right of the Ukrainian people to their own statehood (as reflected in Cossack chronicles

and the works of Ukrainian historians in the 18th and 19th centuries). It is obvious that historical research and chronicles not only supported the process of national self-awareness, but also “acted as a kind of political manifestos, shifting the struggle for the Ukrainian state to the realm of history writing” (Rafalskyi 2018, p. 25). The beginning of the 20th century was marked by a new stage in the struggle for Ukrainian statehood. This struggle was accompanied by numerous inter-party disagreements and dogmatism, the desire of the political leadership of the time to pursue individual ambitions which rather resembled political short-sightedness, than responsibility to their own people, and which ultimately led to the loss of statehood. Thus, today’s challenges have deep historical roots, marked by times of statelessness, loss of generational continuity, fostering lack of initiative and slavish idolatry, which leads to the destruction of national self-awareness and a sense of national solidarity.

The issue of the elite’s responsibility for the state development is a subject of scientific interest for many researchers. Analysis of theoretical aspects regarding the elite nature of society is conducted by R. Michels (2016), who believed that the elite development depends on the features of political and social life of society. D. Bell (1996), V. Pareto (1935), J. Ortega y Gasset (1994) stated that the psychological factor is crucial for the elite creation. They considered the elite to be a stratum of society with special intellectual abilities and character traits. The criterion for assessing the elite is how well it understands the cultural guidelines of the era, the needs of society, and how well it can set goals in accordance with the needs of the era and lead society to achieve them. The implementation of theoretical reflections in the practical plane of the Ukrainian state-building is represented by modern theorists of the Ukrainian statehood development such as D. Dontsov (2019), V. Lypynskyi (2010), M. Mikhnovskyi (2023) and many others. They defined the conceptual ideas of the Ukrainian elite formation. They believe essential features of the national elite are the ability to be motivated in solving social problems and to have a social interest and a sense of unity with the people. The studies on the changing nature of the elite and its merger with the party nomenclature during the Soviet era are also relevant. Thus, O. Pokhylko, I. Ivanova & D. Martynenko (2020) analyse the special features of national identity formation in the context of statelessness as an important factor for the elite development. T. Plakhtii (2023) draws attention to the fact that oligarchy is a natural form of organising a number of elite groups in the context of statelessness. According to O. Liashenko (2022), the key markers of Ukrainian elite creation during the period of independence are the attitude towards the state, one’s identity, and the attitude towards Russia (as a factor of danger and ideological confrontation). According to M. Kozlovets (2023), O. Rafalskyi (2018), M. Sliusarevskyi (2023), Yu. Shaihorodskyi (2023), the qualitative characteristics of the new generation of elite, which can demonstrate its vitality in wartime and during post-war re-

construction, are honesty and adherence to principles, political responsibility and professionalism, openness and transparency, flexibility and ability to adapt to changes effectively, leadership and social empathy, openness to innovation and responsibility for their actions to the state and people.

Another group of studies analyses the phenomenon of responsibility as a result of comprehension and subjective interpretation, which is considered through the prism of human value orientations. E. Fromm (2019) interprets this definition as a person's inner awareness of themselves and others. O. Bezrukova (2015), I. Kresina et al. (2020) analyse the social nature of responsibility and the peculiar features of its implementation in the state-building processes of Ukrainian society.

Solving the problems of state-building and territorial unity of the country, reviving and awakening the spirit of the Ukrainian community is of great practical importance and demand in the realities of the Russian-Ukrainian war. It is about the preservation of the state and what it will look like in the post-war period. Is Ukrainian society ready to consolidate in the face of value disorganisation, powerful information aggression, and the disillusionment of a significant part of it under the influence of a series of political manipulations, apathy and despair in the face of numerous losses? Who is capable of becoming a leader of change in the conditions of war disaster? What role should the national elite play in this situation? Is the elite ready to consider the experience and lessons learned from past state-building processes? Is the elite capable of taking responsibility for preserving and developing Ukrainian statehood? Of course, the outlined issues are complex and multifaceted, requiring several in-depth studies.

In the course of the study, the authors used a comprehensive methodological approach, which involves a range of methods and techniques that meet the research purpose. The core of the strategy is the idea of synthetic theorising, whereby various approaches to explaining the elite nature of society, the phenomenon of responsibility as a level of individuality and freedom of a person or a social community are considered not as oppositional but as complementary.

– The socio-philosophical analysis was used to characterise the nature of elitism and its manifestations in different social contexts.

– Phenomenological analysis allowed us to consider responsibility as a boundary of obligations and a basis for understanding certain relationships between a person and a social group, between a social group and the state, between a citizen and the state, which are formed in the process of fulfilling common requirements.

– The socio-historical analysis of the Ukrainian elite generations made it possible to consider the oligarchic character as a natural form of organisation of a number of elite groups in the Ukrainian society.

– Structural and functional analysis helped to determine the level of ability of the Ukrainian elite to lead the processes of state-building and consolidation during the war.

– The method of generalisation was used to formulate theoretical recommendations.

Historical experience and modern socio-cultural practices show that it is possible to build a powerful, developed democratic state provided that there is an effective leading stratum of society that is interested and ready to support and work for the development of such a state. This stratum of society usually has a high social status, a certain unity of goals and interests, moral qualities and value priorities, the ability to lead, and official powers that allow it to control all key institutions of social life. We are talking about the elite (translated from French as “the best, the selected”) as the most talented and passionate part of society. According to G. Sartori (1976), the assessment and reassessment of the elite qualities should be conducted continuously. Overall, the elite is meant to embody the idea of a ‘hybrid choice’. Therefore, the issue of elite formation should not be viewed through the prism of who holds the most power, but who has the appropriate qualities that can serve as an example for the people. It should be noted that the etymology of this concept has come a long way in its formation and development – from the agro-cultural aspect to the socio-cultural and political science aspects (Bishchuk 2012).

### **1. The Elitist Nature of Society**

The scholars do not provide an unambiguous definition of the concept “elite”. In general, two approaches to understanding this definition can be outlined: socio-structural (emphasis is placed on the role which is played by the elite group in a particular society; the importance of managerial and leadership functions and their connection with its social status and privileges are emphasised); socio-psychological (priority is given to the personal qualities of the representatives of this group, attention is focused on their intellectual abilities, moral qualities, creative and leadership skills, sense of justice and responsibility, etc.). Among the range of theoretical approaches to understanding the nature of the elite, the classical concepts of elites are the most relevant to Ukrainian society. Representatives of these concepts explain the inevitability of the ruling minority existence in society and the process of elite circulation. Thus, G. Mosca identifies the elite with the ruling class, which performs a number of political functions and enjoys the advantages that power brings. A distinctive feature of the elite is its tendency to transform into a dominant closed class, the stability of which is a necessary condition for the stability of society (Martinelli, 2009). His ideas correlate with the views of R. Michels (2016), who links the emergence and development of elites with the peculiarities of the organisation of political and social life in society. Any organisational management scheme requires the separation of the management apparatus and ultimately forms an elite (Michels, 2016).

V. Pareto (1935) expresses somewhat different considerations. He views the elite as the “the upper class of society,” which has high performance in any social

sphere and is endowed with special intellectual abilities (Pareto, 1935). Classical concepts are significant for Ukrainian society because throughout history there has been a reproduction of ruling groups, even when political regimes changed (for example, the replacement of the Soviet nomenclature with the post-Soviet business and political elite).

In the current Ukrainian context, a nationally oriented concept that emphasises the moral authority and patriotism of the elite as the driving force behind state-building is also relevant. In the work “Lysty do Brativ-Khliborobiv” (“Letters to the Brothers-Farmers”), V. Lypynskyi (2010) states that no one will build a state for Ukrainians unless they build it themselves, no one will build a nation, unless they want to be a nation themselves (Lypynskyi 2010). The elite should be responsible for ensuring that the national interest prevails in society, rather than self-centred motives of profit. D. Dontsov (2019) in “The Spirit of Our Past” emphasizes: “the elite remains the elite as long as it is able to work for the common good, to fulfil its calling” (Dontsov 2019). The elite should be responsible for domestic and foreign policy, for fostering national identity, passing on their experience and national spirit, and promoting the economic development of society. According to M. Mikhnovskyi (2023), they must bear personal and material responsibility (in the form of preserving their wealth) for the implementation of their decisions. He draws attention to the fact that states are built not only by the national intelligentsia, but also by a class of entrepreneurs and landowners (Mikhnovskyi 2023). In wartime, Ukrainian society needs not only political and economic power, but also symbolic and moral leadership.

The effectiveness of the elite depends on the extent to which it can understand the challenges facing society and offer adequate and productive responses to them. Its viability is determined by the constant process of changing and updating a certain part of it. This is the process of ‘circulation of elites’. If circulation stops for any reason, the elite becomes closed, loses its ability to govern effectively, and gradually deteriorates.

The ongoing processes of social and political transformation constantly create unique political situations, and as a result, require unbiased decisions and effective political action. It is about the need to inject ‘young blood’ into the elite community, which brings new visions for problem-solving and offers innovative approaches and resources for social development. These are people who are able to generate new ideas, have a different scale of thinking, and are able to take responsibility for innovations. In “The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness” E. Fromm (1997) claims that a living object removed from its natural environment loses its essential characteristics, since its behaviour in a controlled environment is fundamentally different from what is natural for it (Fromm 1997). Obviously, the elite, detached from the problems of life and society, not only loses contact with its social community, but also degrades and degenerates, as it abandons its social mission to be

a generator and a leader of change. This circumstance is especially noticeable in times of social crises and dangers.

Explanatory Dictionary of Foreign Language Words defines the concept of 'crisis' as "a sharp change in the usual state of things; a breakdown, aggravation of the situation, a sharp turn or decline" (1994). The crisis is interpreted as an indicator of the need for change in the area where it occurred. Therefore, this concept is understood not only as a danger but also as an opportunity. The aggravation of many social contradictions and the destruction of the established and habitual order for a person indicate the need to find a different course of events, other options for resolving situations, a different context for understanding problems. Events of crisis existence develop in the light of the entire spectrum of multiple alternative scenarios and obviously have a high level of unpredictability and uncontrollability. This is a kind of boundary situation where chance, coincidence, and subjective reasoning play a significant role.

The determining factor in the process of overcoming a crisis situation is non-linearity and very often spontaneity, which is understood as 'play is the optimal type of social order, when the community is maintained not by social coercion, but by the internal attraction of the game process itself' (Bevzenko 1999, p. 118). It is worth noting that the game is a basic structure of social integration and a natural foundation of human sociality. In times of relative social stability, it loses its primary, mythological foundations and, accordingly, contributes to the activation of rational beliefs, the creation and fixation of arbitrarily formed rules in certain programs, norms, statutes and instructions for actions. The logic of everyday life, which has elsewhere acquired formalized outlines and absurd substantive connotations, ceases to face the modern world challenges. It is becoming crisis-ridden and demonstrates the need for self-organisation of new outlines and forms that are more natural and appropriate to the demands of the time. In fact, this is the relevant period of change or active 'circulation of elites' (Snyder 2022).

Social crises produce a shift in social relations (sometimes it can acquire a sudden and avalanche character) and can trigger the mechanism of formation of new social structures and orders, which a different level of social relations will mark and, as a result, require a 'young' viable elite to come to the forefront of creating the realities of a new social existence. We will illustrate these considerations based on the research of the historian of religion and ethnographer M. Eliade (2016). Analysing the life features of various ancient peoples, he noticed that in times of stability and prosperity, people tend to forget about the primary gods and gravitate more towards those who help them ensure survival and meet their daily needs, particularly the patrons of cattle breeding, agriculture, and trade. However, in times of great crisis and disaster, they turn to the primary gods again in the hope of receiving help in overcoming chaos and danger. "In an emergency, in the extreme case, when the very existence of the collective is in danger, a person leaves the deities

who supported and reinforced his/her life in normal times to return to the Supreme Being” (Eliade, 2016, p. 48).

Obviously, responses to the social life challenges begin with certain processes in the deep layers of human consciousness, provided that rational adaptive models are destroyed. ‘A person has to make sure, or rather feel, that attempts to establish relations with society through some logical, rational schemes and models are ineffective’ (Bishchuk, 2012 p. 15). Therefore, the problem of the creation and circulation of the elite should be considered from the perspective of self-organisational transformations that society undergoes as a complex and integral system. Its effectiveness and viability depend on the extent to which it is able to provide productive responses to the social life challenges and ensure its progress. According to J. Ortega y Gasset (1994), the effectiveness of the elite is determined by its responsibility. The selectivity of the elite lies in the fact that it “measures itself in a special way, is ready to assume historical responsibility for the fate of society in general”.

## **2. Responsibility as a Limit of Obligations**

Extensive Explanatory Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language explains the term ‘responsibility’ as “a duty assigned to someone or taken upon oneself to be responsible for a certain area of work, business, for someone’s actions, deeds, words; as seriousness, importance of a matter, moment, etc.” (2005). This concept is interdisciplinary, and therefore, it has a large semantic field for analysis and is considered from different perspectives and aspects. Within the philosophical aspect, responsibility is interpreted as the basis for understanding certain relationships between a person and a social group, a social group and the state, a citizen and the state, which are formed in the process of fulfilling common requirements. In the praxeological plane, the state, controlling the responsibility of the citizen, realizes one of its most important functions – ensuring social justice. Instead, a person’s ability to fulfil an obligation and the conditions of his or her rightness or guilt constitute his or her responsibility (Bezrukova 2015). This interdependence of the ‘state-person’ connection makes it possible to consider the category of responsibility, according to the principles of categorical imperative by I. Kant, as a norm of treating other people and oneself as a goal and never as a means (Kant, 2004, p. 130). It is about the formed ability and willingness of the subject of social relations to realise the consequences of his/her actions, to recognise them as the result of his/her own conscious and free choice, the ability to make independent decisions and to adhere to them during implementation.

The phenomenon of responsibility is conditioned by the development level of the emotional and ethical sphere of human life, which indicates his/her complex and contradictory nature. As a result of comprehension and subjective interpretation, which is refracted through the prism of value orientations, it ultimately proves to be the outcome of a complex mental, emotional, and volitional process. The

point is that the phenomenon of responsibility “unfolds in time as the subject’s understanding of how to act to achieve a positive result within socially acceptable ways and means of activity, to make appropriate decisions that should be unfolded in actions and behaviour that, as the subject hopes, will lead to benefits in a way that is legitimate from the point of view of moral norms and values functioning in society” (Bezrukova 2015, p. 124). This process involves the development of a certain level of a person’s self-awareness, self-regulation, self-control and self-esteem. The basic components of responsibility are a number of personal qualities and competencies, in particular: justice, honesty, and adherence to principles. Obviously, these personal qualities cannot be realized successfully if a person is not able to sympathize and empathize, to be tolerant of other people’s positions and opinions, and therefore not only the sensory-emotional sphere is relevant, but also the rational one, which is based on the processes of understanding, analysis, awareness etc. Performing responsibility and being responsible for a certain type of activity, fulfilling one’s duties, observing social norms and regulations requires a number of volitional qualities: stability, perseverance, diligence, endurance. According to E. Fromm, a sense of responsibility is a fragile human quality – it is a duty that is “imposed not from the outside, but internally realized before the judgment of one’s conscience” (Fromm, 2019, p. 124).

Therefore, the basic characteristics of the phenomenon of responsibility are the level of individuality and freedom of a person or a social community, a social institution, which is manifested in the degree of free choice by the subject of his/her duty and the right to choose the best option for the attitude to reality in specific conditions, based on public interests. Responsibility is a constructive attitude towards a problem that requires a solution. As an internally oriented quality, this phenomenon reflects the tendency or even the desire of a person (or a social group, the state) to adhere to generally accepted socio-cultural norms in their activities, to follow specific rules, and to be ready to take responsibility for their own actions. Responsibility through the prism of activity contributes to social consolidation. The unification of people occurs on the basis of everyone’s awareness of their own responsibility towards society and future generations.

Another factor that reduces the level of responsibility is the restriction or levelling of the freedom and individuality of a person (a social group). Actually, freedom and responsibility are social criteria that help a person realise their uniqueness and, as a result, encourage them to be responsible for their actions from the standpoint of independent sovereignty. Bureaucratic governance also has a negative impact on the level of responsibility. The point is that bureaucrats usually tend to act and make decisions based on established rules and regulations, with little use of personal responsibility for the effectiveness of their choices. Their safety and professional self-respect are based on their adherence to regulations, not the ‘laws of the human heart’ (Fromm 2019). At the same time, E. Fromm (2019) points to the ambivalent

nature of the level of responsibility and bureaucratic management. On the one hand, bureaucracy cultivates a spirit of alienation, as it is guided by established rules in its decisions and takes little account of 'the living people with whom it deals'. On the other hand, bureaucracy cultivates normative responsibility, which provides the institutional basis for the existence of society or its specific group and ultimately prevents disorder and anarchy, thereby having a positive impact on the viability of the social organism (Fromm 2019).

Therefore, increasing the level of responsibility is one effective way to address a number of social problems in various spheres of public life. Responsible actions of a person, a social group, a community or the state are a necessary condition for state-building and consolidation of the Ukrainian nation. The ability of a person or a social group to feel a sense of social involvement and take responsibility for society, the state, and future generations helps overcome indifference and alienation from socio-political processes.

There are many obstacles (the main one is the abuse of political power) to carry out these tasks. These obstacles are of low moral qualities and are used to manipulate history and specific facts for propaganda purposes. Historical memory affects the national self-identity of Ukrainians in different ways. The author found that the war became a crucial catalyst for Ukrainians to reassess their national identity and reinforce national unity. (Drohomyretska et al. 2024).

The relevance of the elite's responsibility lies in its ability and readiness to realise the consequences of its actions, to recognise them as the result of its own conscious and free choice, and to make independent decisions to achieve a common goal – the establishment of social justice and solidarity, civil rights and freedoms, state-building and national development in society. Responsibility is based on social interest. The elite, motivated primarily by social interest, can have a responsibility to society, community, and the person. Its characteristic is not only a certain social status, but also an appropriate intellectual and psychological level of development, as well as the ability to act in accordance with national interests. Obviously, the responsible activity of the elite is its image characteristic and should be aimed at preserving and developing statehood, especially in the context of such a complex social crisis as war.

### **3. Circulation of Elites and the Ukrainian State-Building Process**

The state of war is a multifaceted phenomenon due to the interweaving of various processes it represents. On the one hand, war divides society, often 'regressing' it to the simplest and even archaic forms of existence, reducing a range of human relationships to the project framework of 'friend-enemy' (Bilyi & Hardashuk, 2015, p. 11). At the same time, wartime can become a powerful means for the consolidation of society and the formation of civil society. Obviously, the problems of nation revival and state-building depend on the level of the national elite formation. The

ruling elite should be regarded as a group of people who concentrate key resources of influence on society in their hands, namely the highest circles of politicians, the leadership of big business, and the top of military structures. According to C. Wright Mills (2000), it is the union of these three sectors that forms the ‘core’ of the ruling elite, given that their representatives make strategic decisions that determine the development of society (Mills 2000). It should be noted that the current ruling elite in Ukraine was formed as a result of the consistent evolution of several political generations, each of which had its own system of values, management style, and mental guidelines.

M.M. Sliusarevskyi (2023) distinguishes four generations of the political elite: the Communist Party generation (representatives are brought up by the administrative-command system, people with an apparatus mentality and discourse); the post-Communist generation (representatives have a quasi-party mentality, support for the administrative-command discourse); oligarchic (representatives are characterized by the mentality of big business with elements of a quasi-party mentality and specific indicators of a proprietary approach to the state); post-oligarchic (the generation is not devoid of ties with oligarchs, but demonstrates the mentality of a middle-class, non-oligarchic business and its variety – show business, which is based on the denial of respectability and systemic nature of previous political generations) (Sliusarevskyi 2023). The evolutionary continuity of political generations, the combination of different mentalities – party, oligarchic, business – the partial renewal of elites without radical changes in values, and the dominance of personalities over institutions, the growing role of the media, public image, and social networks as instruments of political influence are the characteristics of the modern Ukrainian ruling elite formation. Ukraine’s current ruling elite is undergoing transformation: it preserves the legacy of previous political generations but is gradually shifting toward new values of openness, transparency, and independence. Its formation is influenced by both old management traditions and society’s demand for renewal and democratization of power. At the same time, the process of renewing the elite remains incomplete, as old connections and behaviour patterns still determine a significant part of political life. The prospect for development is the formation of a new type of elite – the one that is responsible, competent, and focused on the public good.

An indicator of the elite’s responsibility to society is adherence to transparency and accountability in their activities. Analysis of information media sources has revealed ambivalence in the Ukrainian elite’s ability to act transparently, strategically, and in the public interest. Positive aspects include the official informing of the public by the pro-government elite about the course of hostilities, logistics, humanitarian measures, etc. It should be noted that monitoring organizations and the public are watching how the media use official sources and analysing whether the news provides reliable information. For example, the website of the “Institute

of Mass Information” presents not only the main events of the day, but also general and regional analytics, a map of recommended media, and various positions on social phenomena in the “Freedom of Speech Barometer” section (Anonymous 2025). Various journalistic projects, including “War Speeches” by OPORA (Anonymous, 2024), record and provide analytical reviews of politicians’ public speeches and statements. Some military administrations and local government bodies publish reports on budgets, plans for regulatory acts, anti-corruption measures, etc. It should be noted that reporting is mainly declarative in nature. Politicians may inform about what they are “doing,” but the assessment of the results of this activity is not always clear and qualitative, such as what has been achieved, what has not been implemented, the amount and nature of resources, etc. The detailing of reports by the ruling elite to society is reduced due to the complications of the situation caused by hostilities, censorship, or restrictions related to military secrecy or security. Despite the fact that most of the news about the actions of the ruling elite is posted on official websites, there is still a significant proportion of reports in the media space without any indication of the source or from dubious sources. Monitoring by the “Institute of Mass Information” has shown that some news has many formal features (“a meeting was held,” “the issue was discussed,” etc.), but lacks specifics (Anonymous 2025). The incompleteness, insufficient transparency, and lack of detail in the information resource do not allow citizens to objectively assess the appropriateness of decisions made by the ruling elite.

Another indicator of accountability is the ability of the elite to respond to public criticism and demands. This refers to the resignation of officials and politicians under pressure from the public, journalistic investigations, or protests. Public pressure, street protests, and public campaigns can lead to the revision of draft laws. An example of this is the protests against law No. 124414, which significantly restricted the independence of anti-corruption bodies – the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office (SAPO). Immediately after the law was passed, mass protests took place in Kyiv, Lviv, Dnipro, Odesa, and other cities. Under public pressure, the authorities registered a new bill No. 13533, which restored the independence of NABU and SAPO (Svyrydiuk & Havryliuk, 2025). The influence and active initiatives of public movements force the ruling elite to adjust their policies, review educational reforms, and make changes to electoral legislation under pressure from protests. If protests become widespread, it becomes dangerous to ignore them because they affect electoral prospects. It should be noted that in democratic practice, it is important for the elite not only to respond to public demands, but also to publicly acknowledge mistakes. In Ukrainian society, this mechanism works selectively. Examples include the public acknowledgment of responsibility by the mayor of Lviv, A. Sadovyi, during massive garbage collection problems in the city: “I admit my fault that I could not find a solution for the

city in time” (Anonymous 2017). During delays in the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, the Minister of Healthcare, M. Stepanov, publicly acknowledged that the campaign was progressing much slower than expected: “We did not start as quickly as we planned, and that is my responsibility” (Anonymous 2021). Following mass protests against restrictions on the powers of the NABU and SAPO, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, admitted that the government had made a mistake: “We should have consulted with society before adopting Law No. 12414” (Anonymous 2025). This is essentially an acknowledgement of incorrect actions and a signal of readiness to correct policies. These are rare examples of direct acknowledgement of personal policy by the Ukrainian political elite, but they often tend to avoid direct acknowledgement of mistakes, explaining the causes of problems by “external circumstances” (war, state of the economy, “predecessors”). Even when the course is changed (for example, decisions are reversed under public pressure), it is often presented not as a “mistake” but as “flexibility of the authorities” or “search for compromise.”

A key indicator is the willingness to act in the interests of society, rather than just narrow groups. This refers to adopting decisions that are unpopular but necessary (for example, mobilization reforms, energy security, economic support, etc.). In wartime, the elite demonstrates responsibility by prioritizing the survival and security of the state, even at the cost of falling ratings. In the post-war period: responsibility equals the ability to prevent “revenge,” preserve democratic institutions, and continue European integration. Another indicator of the elite’s responsibility is their ability to formulate long-term strategies. The elite is responsible if it not only responds to the crisis but also plans for reconstruction (recovery plans, attracting investment, reforming the security sector). A sign of responsibility is participation in the development and public presentation of long-term strategies, especially after 2022: the Ukraine Recovery Plan, which presents over 850 projects in various economic sectors; the National Revenue Strategy (2023 – 2030) – a plan for reforms in the tax and customs system, including the fight against the shadow economy and the digitization of tax procedures; Ukraine’s energy strategy until 2050 – focused on “green” energy, the development of renewable energy sources, etc. However, in practice, there are often problems: plans are adopted as “strategies,” but implementation stalls in the early stages due to political changes, lack of funding or war. Some programs focus on the future, such as: developing a “green” economy, reconstruction of cities based on the “Build Back Better” principle (energy efficiency, climate change resilience); the school education reform “New Ukrainian School” (aimed at children who will enter the labour market in the 2030s) and others. So, the Ukrainian elite has strategies with clear stages (reconstruction, energy, education), but their implementation often depends on the political cycle and external funding; consideration of the interests of future generations in programs, but in practice often gives way to short-term political benefits. However, there is a tendency among

the Ukrainian ruling elite to focus on quick results for ratings: “spot” road repairs instead of a systematic infrastructure policy; constant changes in tax legislation without stability for business. Strategies have stages, but often lack control points and responsibility, monitoring, and reporting systems for implementation.

One more indicator is adherence to the principle of the rule of law. This refers to the responsibility of the elite, which means not allowing themselves to make “exceptions” to the rules even in wartime (corruption, abuse of power). A societal test shows if the elite punishes its “own people” in the same way as “others,” then this increases trust. An indicator of responsibility is the answer to the question: does the government respond to criticism and change policy after public pressure (e.g., the resignation of officials after journalistic investigations)? Formally, Ukrainian legislation enshrines the equality of all citizens before the law, but in practice there are significant problems with the immunity of the political elite: criminal cases against high-ranking officials are often “stalled” in the courts. A culture of impunity persists in society, along with the expectation that the “big” elite will remain unpunished.

An indicator of responsibility is moral leadership. Society expects leaders to set an example – serving in the army, volunteering, and rejecting ostentatious luxury. The phrase of Volodymyr Zelensky “I need ammunition, not evacuation,” became a marker of the elite’s readiness to share the dangers of war with their citizens (Teise 2022). Many politicians have actively engaged in volunteer work, including organizing humanitarian corridors, purchasing equipment, and assisting internally displaced persons. Some members of parliament, city mayors, and officials joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine and territorial defence formations. However, many officials and pro-government politicians were involved in scandals with “business trips” when they used foreign trips at the state’s expense for personal interests (shopping, business, tourism). An example is the President’s call for representatives of the ruling elite to take responsibility and not use the war as an excuse to live more comfortably, avoiding their duties: “Every intention of any official, of any member of parliament to go abroad should be checked down to the second. If someone really wants to take a break from working for the state, then the state will also take a break from such people” (Anonymous 2023). This is a manifestation of moral pressure and the standard that society expects. The scandals in 2023 involving the purchase of food for the army at inflated prices showed that even during wartime, there are those who take advantage of the crisis for personal gain. This damaged not only the reputation of individual officials, but also the trust in the elite and the state as a whole (Sobenko 2023).

Some members of the Ukrainian elite left the country (sometimes using fake documents), which caused a wave of public outrage. An example of public criticism is a message from a soldier with the call sign ‘Stalker’: “Poroshenko’s deputies have left massively for Europe, while Ukrainians are dying under heavy shelling” (Boiko 2024). The public believes that the elite should remain in the country,

especially when there is danger, and that leaving or staying abroad is perceived as treasonous or a neglect of duty.

In times of war, the issue of moral leadership becomes crucial. Citizens evaluate the elite not only by their decisions, but also by how willing they are to share the burden of war themselves. The “new wave” of politicians and social elite tries to be closer to society. They reduce their own expenses and direct their material resources to support the army, demonstratively refuse ostentatious luxury, wear military uniforms or simple clothing, which creates the image of “one of us.” It should be noted that moral leadership is often symbolic in nature, as the elite’s readiness to stand with citizens under fire means a lot to people. At the same time, the elite itself does not always anticipate such expectations, so when they are caught engaging in “inappropriate behaviour,” public discrediting occurs. Ukrainian society is reactive. It responds quickly to signs that the elite is “not sharing the burden of war.” Scandals quickly become nationwide thanks to social media, which increases pressure on the ruling elite and makes it more accountable to society.

The majority of the Ukrainian elite does not yet meet the standards of a true national leader – it lacks moral authority, intellectual depth, and long-term responsibility. Many researchers believe that modern Ukrainian society is experiencing an acute shortage of high-quality elites. In particular, in academic studies, researchers characterise it as people who do not have moral authority: “the elite that indulges the moods of the crowd cannot be the leader of the nation” (Datsiuk 2017), “everyone is in charge, and no one is responsible” (Prokhasko, 2006), “the soon-to-be-rich, that do not have moral authority, and therefore the right to be called the elite” (Valevska 2017), “over the years, people have come to power who are politically and economically harmful, who disarm not only with words”; insufficient development of intellectual abilities: “from time to time we hear the voice of one of our semi-literate politicians” (Pakhlovskaya 2015).

In general, the ruling elite started expressing the interests of oligarchic groups and reflected complete subordination to them in its organizational structure (Rafalskyi 2018). The elite is hindered from generating ideas for the statehood development (a high level of distaste for power, political nihilism) by socio-psychological features of the development of Ukrainian society in general, its mentality, the level of political culture and political consciousness, and national and civic identity. It should be noted that the national identity formation as a factor in the elite development took place in the context of Ukrainian statelessness. O. Pokhylko, I. Ivanova, and D. Martynenko, using the example of the personal development of the Ukrainian teacher and scholar Yu. Stupak, stated that the Ukrainian intelligentsia ensured the continuity of the Ukrainian elite in times of statelessness and the Soviet totalitarian regime (Pokhilko, Ivanova & Martynenko 2020).

At the same time, the war has created unprecedented conditions for the formation of a new elite, emerging from civil society, the army, and the volunteer

movement. The future of statehood depends on whether this new wave of elites can gradually replace the old oligarchic model and become the true leaders of the nation. For example, real politics will require the involvement of combatants and volunteers in political participation and implementation of the tasks of Ukraine's post-war revival. They can play an important role in shaping public opinion, restoring trust in authorities, and implementing political tasks. It is evident that their experience, ability to make effective decisions in difficult situations, as well as understanding of the needs and problems of the military, can be implemented through their representation in the authorities. In modern public policy, elite representatives are looking for ways to develop forms of public participation in decision-making processes. The tools of e-democracy are not a reincarnation of the old means of political communication. The active use of information technologies in everyday social life to form e-democracy can contribute to both positive social trends and negative social consequences (Arbeláez-Campillo et al. 2020). Democracy is a natural environment for critical thinking. Whereas totalitarian systems suppress critical thinking, in democratic systems critical thinking is fostered and it promotes freedom and expression of views, which determine the right of citizens to think differently from what is generally accepted in society. Thus, critical thinking is a part of democracy and a condition for the national elite development (Storozhenko et al. 2023).

Interaction may be relevant when potential representatives of the new elite learn these organizational practices and try to transfer them to the hierarchically structured political organizations they create, thereby destroying these hierarchies at their core (Plakhtii 2023). It is obvious that the process of functioning of discursive-communicative practices and the presence of social capital in society contribute to the education of social responsibility among citizens. Thus, communicative foundations are laid in the relations of responsibility, which deepen the social understanding of responsibility, and the problems of equality related to it. According to E. Levinas equality is acceptance of responsibility for another person, "acceptance of what is already my responsibility in relation to him" (Levinas 1999, p.21). The peculiarities of the communicative type of responsibility of the elite and society are considered by A. Yermolenko (2014). Communicative responsibility, in his opinion, is based on shared responsibility through dialogue-based coordination of interests and the will to reach a reasonable consensus (Yermolenko 2014). Consolidation of society and processes of state-building take place on the basis of everyone's awareness of their own responsibility to society and future generations. In this context, the social responsibility of the state becomes of particular importance as a necessary condition for ensuring sustainable development, which is based on the coordination of the interests of the state, an individual, society, and business (Kresina et al. 2020).

Yu. Zh. Shaihorodskyi (2023) defines the effectiveness signs of the new generation of the elite, formed in the conditions of military confrontation and capable of

consolidating Ukrainian society: readiness for changes and awareness of their necessity; education; civic activism; focus on European integration; positive attitude and practical application of modern, in particular, digital technologies and information tools to ensure management efficiency; dominance of democratic values in the structure of value orientations (Shaihorodskyi 2023).

Therefore, the change of the elite begins with the political activation of society. The war gave a considerable impetus to the intensification of social life and the “circulation of the elite”. What used to take decades to change now it takes months or even weeks. The social responsibility of the elite contributes to the society consolidation. Social interest should become the basis of responsible activity of the national elite. The issue of building civil society, the involvement of the state, organizations, social groups, and people in solving social problems existing in society and their implementation of socially responsible activities in various spheres of public life is becoming more relevant.

### **Conclusions and summary**

Society cannot exist without the elite, which is the engine of its progress and changes. The problem of the elite creation and circulation should be considered from the perspective of self-organizational transformations that society undergoes as a complex and integral system. Its effectiveness and viability depend on the extent to which it can provide productive responses to the challenges of social life and ensure its progress, as well as the extent to which it adheres to the principles of individual and collective responsibility.

Increasing the level of responsibility of the elite is one of the effective ways to solve a number of social problems in various spheres of public life. It is about her ability to feel socially involved and responsible to society, the state and future generations, to overcome indifference and alienation from social and political processes. Responsibility is based on social interest. Actually, the elite, motivated primarily by social interest, is able to bear responsibility to society, the community, and the person. Its characteristic is not only a certain social status, but also an appropriate intellectual and psychological level of development and the ability to act in accordance with the national interest. The war in Ukraine is creating conditions for the replacement of the previous oligarchic elite with a new generation of more responsible elites focused on national interests. Positive signs in this process are the growing influence of civil society, which is capable of influencing policy through public protests, journalistic investigations, and media control; and the formation of a new wave of moral leadership during the war (volunteering, service in the Armed Forces). A “new wave” of young politicians, military personnel, and volunteers has emerged, claiming the status of a new elite. Obviously, the responsible activity of the elite is its image characteristic and should be aimed at preserving and building statehood, especially in the context of such a complex social crisis as a war.

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