

STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING PUBLIC TRUST IN LAW ENFORCEMENT DURING ARMED CONFLICTS IN LATVIA, LITHUANIA, AND UKRAINE

СТРАТЕГІЇ ЗМІЦНЕННЯ ГРОМАДСЬКОЇ ДОВІРИ ДО ПРАВООХОРОННИХ ОРГАНІВ ПІД ЧАС ЗБРОЙНИХ КОНФЛІКТІВ У ЛАТВІЇ, ЛИТВІ ТА УКРАЇНІ

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Trust in law enforcement agencies is one of the main factors determining the effectiveness of their activities in democratic societies. In crises, particularly martial law, the level of trust in law enforcement agencies can fluctuate significantly, affecting the effectiveness of combating crime, ensuring security and stability in the State. The relevance of this study stems from the need to understand the key factors that shape public trust in law enforcement agencies in times of crisis, as well as to assess the impact of legal reforms on changes in the level of trust in Ukraine and the Baltic States. The article aims to study strategies for increasing public trust in law enforcement agencies during armed conflicts in Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine and to formulate recommendations for improving their performance in crises. The study uses comparative analysis, systematic approach, and content analysis methods to assess legal reforms and their impact on public opinion. The study results showed that in crises, trust in law enforcement agencies largely depends on factors such as the effectiveness of legal reforms, transparency of law enforcement, level of professionalism, and openness to communication. The analysis of legal reforms in Ukraine and the Baltic States has revealed several common and distinctive aspects in building trust in law enforcement agencies. This allows us to identify best practices for adaptation in times of crisis. The study confirmed the importance of continuous improvement of legal reforms to ensure high trust in law enforcement agencies, especially in times of crisis. To strengthen interaction between law enforcement agencies and the public in martial law and other crises, it is necessary to introduce transparency mechanisms, increased accountability of law enforcement officers and active communication with citizens. It is also recommended that training programmes for law enforcement officers be developed aimed at improving their interaction with the public and enhancing mutual understanding in crises.

Key words: security, social stability, human rights, communication mechanisms, models of interaction with the public.

Довіра до правоохоронних органів є одним із основних факторів, що визначає ефективність їх діяльності в демократичних суспільствах. В умовах кризових ситуацій, зокрема воєнного стану, рівень довіри до правоохоронців може значно коливатися, що, в свою чергу, впливає на ефективність боротьби з правопорушеннями, забезпечення безпеки та стабільності в державі. Актуальність цього дослідження обумовлена необхідністю розуміння ключових чинників, що формують довіру громадян до правоохоронних органів у кризових умовах, а також оцінки впливу правових реформ на зміну рівня довіри в Україні та країнах Балтії. Метою статті є вивчення стратегій підвищення громадської довіри до правоохоронних органів під час збройних конфліктів у Латвії, Литві та Україні, а також формулювання рекомендацій для поліпшення ефективності їх роботи в умовах кризових ситуацій. Дослідження базується на використанні таких методів, як порівняльний аналіз, системний підхід, а також методи контент-аналізу для оцінки правових реформ та їх впливу на громадську думку. Результати дослідження показали, що в умовах кризових ситуацій довіра до правоохоронних органів значною мірою залежить від таких факторів, як ефективність проведених правових реформ, прозорість діяльності правоохоронців, рівень їх професіоналізму та комунікаційна відкритість. Аналіз правових реформ в Україні та країнах Балтії виявив ряд спільних та відмінних аспектів у побудові довіри до правоохоронних органів, що дозволяє виявити найкращі практики для адаптації в умовах криз. Проведене дослідження підтвердило важливість постійного вдосконалення правових реформ для забезпечення високого рівня довіри до правоохоронних органів, особливо в кризові моменти. Для зміцнення взаємодії між правоохоронними органами та громадськістю в умовах воєнного стану та інших кризових ситуацій необхідно запровадити механізми прозорості, підвищення відповідальності правоохоронців та активної комунікації з громадянами. Рекомендовано також розвивати програми навчання для правоохоронців, спрямовані на поліпшення їх взаємодії з населенням та покращення взаєморозуміння у кризових умовах.

Ключові слова: безпека, соціальна стабільність, дотримання прав людини, механізми комунікації, моделі взаємодії з населенням.

Statement of the problem. In the current context of armed conflicts and hybrid threats, law enforcement agencies are crucial in ensuring security, law and order and social stability. However, the effectiveness of their activities largely depends on the level of public trust. In times of war or military tension, this trust can be severely challenged by the spread of disinformation, abuse of power, changes in legal regimes and restrictions on civil liberties. In the Baltic States, particularly in Latvia and Lithuania, as well as in Ukraine, which is facing full-scale military aggression, the issue of public trust in law enforcement agencies is becoming critical.

Despite the general aspiration to European standards of law and order and human rights, law enforcement agencies in these countries face numerous challenges related to crises of trust, low transparency in decision-making, the influence of political factors and the need to counter information and cyber threats. In Latvia and Lithuania, the problem is exacerbated by the risks of external interference and the polarisation of society. At the same time, in Ukraine, it is complicated by martial law, challenges to law enforcement in the de-occupied territories and the fight against collaborationism.

Given these factors, there is a need to develop effective strategies to strengthen public trust in law enforcement agencies in the context of armed conflicts and crises. It is neces-

sary to determine which communication mechanisms, models of interaction with the population and approaches to reforming law enforcement agencies can help increase public trust in state institutions. An analysis of the experience of Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine will help identify common and unique challenges and develop recommendations for improving the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in crisis situations.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Current research pays considerable attention to strengthening public trust in law enforcement agencies in the context of armed conflicts, especially in the Baltic States and Eastern Europe. An analysis of scientific publications of the last five years allows us to identify key areas and gaps in this area.

The study by O. Lytvyn [1] and I. Reinholde [2] examines public security management in post-conflict societies. The authors emphasise the need for democratic control and a systematic approach to build trust between the public and law enforcement agencies. They emphasise that integrating cultural and institutional elements is critical for effective security governance in post-conflict settings.

P. Suve et al. [3] analyse police education and training systems in the OSCE region. The authors emphasise the importance of sustainable police training and curriculum reform to build public trust. They note that the introduction of modern

training standards contributes to the professionalism of law enforcement officers and improves their interaction with the public.

In the context of human rights during armed conflicts, the study by A. Zavackis and J. Nicmanis [4] examines the issues of ensuring and protecting human rights in conflict situations. The authors emphasise that respect for human rights is fundamental to building trust in state institutions, including law enforcement agencies. They also draw attention to the need to adapt national human rights mechanisms to the conditions of conflict.

In a study on enforced disappearances, human rights activists M. Beilmann and L. Lilleoja [5] analyse national practice and international standards in this area. The authors note that effective investigation of cases of enforced disappearances and bringing perpetrators to justice is key to restoring public trust in law enforcement agencies, especially in the context of armed conflict.

The study by A. Kubayenko [6] examines the problems of exercising and protecting political and civil rights under martial law. The authors emphasise that ensuring the rights and freedoms of citizens, even under restrictions, is critical to maintaining trust in state institutions, including law enforcement agencies.

Identification of previously unresolved parts of the overall problem. Despite the availability of these studies, several unresolved issues remain. First, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis of strategies to build trust in law enforcement agencies during active armed conflicts. Secondly, comparative aspects of implementing such strategies in different countries, such as Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine, which share common historical and geopolitical features but have different experiences in security and law enforcement, have not been sufficiently studied.

Given these gaps, this study aims to fill the existing niches by providing a detailed analysis and comparison of strategies for building public trust in law enforcement agencies in Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine during armed conflicts. Particular attention will be paid to studying effective practices that can be adapted and implemented in other countries to increase public trust in law enforcement agencies in crises.

Formulation of the article's objectives (statement of the task). The article aims to analyse the strategies for strengthening public trust in law enforcement agencies during armed conflicts in Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine and to develop recommendations for improving the efficiency of their activities in crises.

In order to achieve this goal, the following tasks need to be addressed:

- to analyse the impact of major legal reforms on the level of trust in law enforcement agencies in the Baltic States and Ukraine;
- to investigate the key factors that influence the level of public trust in law enforcement agencies in crises;
- to propose practical measures to strengthen cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the public in martial law and other crises.

Summary of the main research material. After gaining independence in the 1990s, the Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – faced the need to radically transform their law enforcement agencies. The Soviet model of the police, which operated based on repressive methods of control, was incompatible with the democratic system that the newly independent states sought to build. Reforms were based on the principles of the rule of law, accountability of law enforcement agencies to society and human rights [7, p. 15].

One of the first steps was the adoption of new laws on the police, which established democratic law enforcement principles. In Lithuania 1990, the Law on Police was adopted, which liquidated the Soviet militia and created a modern police force with clearly defined functions of protecting civil

rights. Similar laws were adopted in Latvia and Estonia, which helped to set new standards for police work and establish mechanisms for public accountability.

The reforms also included eliminating repressive units and creating new specialised departments to fight organised crime, corruption and economic crimes. For example, in Lithuania and Latvia, the KGB political units responsible for surveilling citizens were disbanded, and departments for economic security and financial crime were created [8, p. 157].

Since the 2000s, the Baltic States have been actively adapting their law enforcement systems to the standards of the European Union [9, p. 192]. The prospect of joining the EU has become a powerful incentive for further democratisation of the police and increasing its legitimacy in the eyes of citizens.

One of the key aspects of the reforms is the fight against corruption and the assurance of transparency in law enforcement. Anti-corruption bureaus, such as the Special Investigation Service in Lithuania and the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau in Latvia, have been established. These structures have been granted independent status and expanded powers to investigate corruption schemes in state bodies, including the police.

In addition, considerable attention was paid to the professional training of police officers. European educational programmes were introduced, and police officers were allowed to undergo internships in EU countries [10, p. 194]. In Lithuania and Estonia, the reforms affected the evaluation system of law enforcement officers: regular testing and certification were introduced, which helped reduce corruption and increase public trust.

An important step was strengthening relations between the police and the public. Police communication programmes were introduced, and public councils were established at law enforcement agencies to allow citizens to participate in shaping security policy.

Ukraine, like the Baltic states, faced the problem of reforming law enforcement agencies after the collapse of the USSR. However, the transformation of the law enforcement system in Ukraine was delayed, and the active phase of reforms began only after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014.

One of the key reforms was the liquidation of the militia and the creation of the National Police of Ukraine. This process was based on the experience of Lithuania and Latvia, where a similar transition took place in the 1990s. In 2015, the Law on the National Police was adopted, which established new principles of police work: transparency, accountability, and focus on protecting the rights of citizens.

The reform included a significant reduction in the number of law enforcement officers, renewal of personnel and introduction of new training standards. Re-certification of employees was introduced, and some new officers were recruited through open competitions. International partners such as the EU and the US played a significant role in the reform, helping to train new staff and develop law enforcement standards.

In addition to structural changes, Ukraine has actively introduced mechanisms to control the activities of law enforcement agencies. The establishment of the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) and the High Anti-Corruption Court was an important step in the fight against corruption in law enforcement. The role of civil society organisations in overseeing police activities was also expanded.

During the war, starting in 2022, trust in Ukraine's law enforcement agencies increased as the police and the National Guard became important elements in maintaining public security. In cooperation with international partners, digital technologies are being introduced to monitor crime, which also contributes to building public trust.

Digitalisation has become one of the key areas of law enforcement reform in the Baltic States and Ukraine. The introduction of modern technologies has not only increased

the efficiency of the police, but also strengthened public trust by making law enforcement activities more transparent and accountable to society [11, p. 484].

In Latvia, the technological transformation of the law enforcement system began in the 2000s as part of the European integration process. An important step was adopting the Law on Ensuring Police Transparency, which defined new approaches to police interaction with citizens. This law introduced mandatory public information on the activities of law enforcement agencies, provided public access to official police reports, and allowed citizens to independently monitor the work of police units. This approach reduced corruption and built trust in the law enforcement system. To ensure openness, special online platforms were created that allowed citizens to receive information about investigations, file reports of offences and track their consideration in real-time.

The further development of digital technologies in law enforcement in Latvia was made possible after adopting the Law on E-Governance, which facilitated the automation of many police processes. As a result, electronic document management systems were introduced, which reduced the processing time of cases, reduced the bureaucratic burden on law enforcement officers and eliminated opportunities for corruption schemes. In addition, developing digital services has made the police more accessible to citizens. An important stage of the reforms was automating the process of registering offences, which allowed citizens to report crimes through an official web portal without visiting a police station.

One of the most effective anti-corruption measures was the creation of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB), which was empowered to monitor law enforcement officers' financial transactions and independently investigate cases of abuse of power. This system has significantly reduced corruption in the police and improved its reputation among citizens.

Estonia has become a leader in the digitalisation of law enforcement among the Baltic states. The introduction of technological solutions in police work began in 2000 with adopting the Information Systems Act, which defined the basic principles of integrating state databases and automating law enforcement. One of the most important achievements was the creation of the Electronic Police system, which allowed citizens to submit applications in real-time, receive information on the progress of cases, pay fines and receive consultations without having to physically visit a police station.

Particular attention was paid to creating an integrated law enforcement database, which allowed all police stations to be linked into a single information system. This has significantly improved coordination between law enforcement agencies, speeding up responses to crimes and reducing the risk of duplication of information during investigations. In addition, the automatic recognition system of car licence plates has made it possible to track stolen vehicles and record traffic violations more effectively.

The fight against cybercrime has become another important area of law enforcement's digitalisation in Estonia. In 2008, the Cybersecurity Act was adopted, which created a special unit to investigate crimes in cyberspace. Since then, Estonia has become one of the leading centres for cybersecurity in Europe. A special online threat monitoring system was launched to analyse large amounts of digital information and quickly identify potential threats.

In Lithuania, the digitalisation of the law enforcement system was developed in several directions. First of all, the electronic identification system of citizens was introduced, which made most police services available online. Thanks to digital identifiers, citizens can submit appeals, receive inquiries, and view information about their offences through their accounts on the official police web portal.

Special emphasis was placed on using intelligent technologies in the fight against crime. CCTV cameras in public places

were integrated with the centralised police database, allowing for automatic recognition of wanted persons and prompt response to potential threats. Police patrols were equipped with modern mobile devices to instantly check documents and access the database without returning to the station.

Ukraine also began introducing modern technology into the law enforcement following the 2014–2015 reforms. The Unified Register of Pre-trial Investigations was created, which allowed for automating the criminal case process and simplified control over its progress. A system of video recording of police officers' actions was also introduced, which helped to reduce the level of abuse and increase the transparency of law enforcement.

One of the key areas of digitalisation was using artificial intelligence in monitoring public security [12, p. 112]. A system of face recognition and video stream analysis was introduced, which made it possible to identify offenders in real-time and significantly increased the effectiveness of the operational response.

The fight against cybercrime has also become one of the reform priorities. In cooperation with Europol, a special cyber police department was created to access international databases and use the latest technologies to investigate online fraud and financial crimes.

In general, using modern technologies in police reform has significantly improved the efficiency of law enforcement agencies in the Baltic States and Ukraine [13, p. 112]. Digitalisation has reduced the time required to respond to crimes, increased the transparency of police activities and made them more accessible to citizens. The introduction of intelligent systems for analysing and automating law enforcement processes has helped strengthen public trust in the police and create a safer society.

The table below describes the key areas of policy reforms and their impact on trust in the police in each country.

Socio-economic status is an important factor that affects the level of public trust in law enforcement agencies, including the police, especially in times of crisis [14]. In times of socio-economic instability, when people are experiencing difficulties, the perception of law enforcement agencies may be negative, as citizens may view the police as part of structures that are not only unhelpful but may also be corrupt or unfair. In turn, stable economic conditions and a high level of social security increase trust in the police, as people feel that their interests will be protected equitably and fairly. The socio-economic context, including economic stability, access to resources and social mobility, influences perceptions of the police, which in turn determines the level of trust in the police.

Various sociological and political theories explain this relationship. Social justice theory, for example, argues that citizens are more likely to trust the police if they perceive them as fair and impartial. Important aspects include fairness in applying the law, equality before the law and respect for human rights. Social capital theories also emphasise the role of public trust and interaction between police and citizens based on cooperation and participation in public life. At the same time, according to economic approaches, trust in the police depends on economic development, access to social benefits and corruption.

Social factors also significantly impact the level of trust in law enforcement agencies [15, p. 375]. The crime rate in a region directly impacts the perception of the police. High crime rates can lead to insecurity among citizens, which reduces trust in the police. At the same time, an effective police response to crime and its ability to maintain order can increase trust, even in the face of high crime. Another important social factor is the social status of the citizen, as trust in the police often varies among social groups. The poor tend to have less trust in the police because they feel that their interests and rights are not taken into account.

Table 1

Characteristics of the main legal reforms that affected trust in the police in the Baltic States and Ukraine

Key areas of reform	Key events	Impact on trust in the police
Latvia		
Transparency and accountability of the police	Adoption of legislation to ensure public monitoring of police activities, open access to police reports, creation of electronic platforms for communication with citizens	Improved public control over police work, increased transparency and reduced distrust in law enforcement agencies
Fighting corruption	Establishment of an independent anti-corruption bureau (KNAB), introduction of financial control over law enforcement agencies, introduction of mechanisms for checking the integrity of police officers	Reduced corruption in the police and increased the legitimacy of law enforcement agencies
Estonia		
Digitalisation of law enforcement	Creation of e-police, introduction of a unified database, development of online services for citizens, introduction of mobile technologies for patrols	Optimised police work, made it more accessible to citizens, and facilitated prompt response
Cybersecurity and international cooperation	Introduction of cybersecurity legislation, creation of specialised units to combat cybercrime, integration with Europol and Interpol	Strengthened the ability of the police to respond to modern threats, increased trust in the competence of law enforcement agencies
Lithuania		
E-governance and digitalisation of the police	Introduction of digital identifiers for access to police services, use of CCTV cameras and artificial intelligence in law enforcement	Improved communication between citizens and police, made the work of law enforcement more transparent
Cooperation with international organisations	Integration into global databases, cooperation with international law enforcement agencies in the fight against organised crime	Increased the effectiveness of investigations, ensured compliance of the police with European standards
Ukraine		
Police reform and its reboot	Liquidation of militia and creation of the National Police, introduction of competitive selection of personnel, re-certification of employees	Radically changed the image of the police and increased public trust in the new law enforcement agencies
Anti-corruption and accountability	Introduction of electronic declaration of police officers' income, creation of anti-corruption bodies to control law enforcement activities	Improved public control over police activities, reduced corruption risks

Source: author's own development.

The level of education is also a key factor in building trust in the police. People with higher education have more knowledge of their rights, which allows them to be more critical of the police and demand more transparency from them. Higher education also promotes greater participation in civic life, which can increase trust in law enforcement.

Cultural and historical factors play an important role in shaping trust in the police. In countries with long-standing political instability, such as authoritarian states or countries with corrupt law enforcement agencies, citizens often distrust the police because they are associated with repression and control. This is particularly true in post-Soviet countries, where the police have traditionally been seen as an instrument of state control rather than a protector of citizens' rights.

Financial factors are also crucial for the level of trust in the police. In countries with high economic development and stability, the police usually have the necessary funding, equipment and training. In countries with weak economies, where the police face funding problems, lack of resources and corruption, trust in law enforcement can be much lower. Low police salaries and limited opportunities for effective work also hurt public perceptions of police performance.

Thus, the level of trust in the police is closely linked to various socio-economic factors. A stable economic environment, low levels of corruption, fairness in applying the law and access to social benefits can significantly increase trust in the police. At the same time, a lack of economic stability, high levels of corruption and social inequality can reduce trust in law enforcement agencies, jeopardising their effectiveness and ability to maintain law and order in society.

In the context of strengthening interaction between law enforcement agencies and the public in martial law and other crises, it is important to introduce several practical measures to improve communication, reduce tensions

between different social groups and increase trust in law enforcement agencies.

The first step should be to develop and implement a transparency system in law enforcement. The public needs to have access to information about the work of law enforcement agencies, their actions in emergencies, the progress of investigations, and the execution of tasks. This can be ensured through the active use of social media and specialised online platforms where law enforcement agencies can inform citizens and receive public feedback.

The second important area is the organisation of regular meetings between law enforcement officials and the public. Such meetings can occur both at the local level and online, allowing us to involve as many citizens as possible in discussing security issues and the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies. This will also help to develop effective strategies for interaction, considering the population's specific needs during crisis situations.

To increase the effectiveness of cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the public, it is advisable to organise training and awareness-raising events. For example, these could include training for citizens on security issues, the legal basis for their actions in crises, and promoting civic engagement and local initiatives. This also includes preparing citizens to respond appropriately during emergencies, such as shelling, evacuation or other threats.

In addition, an important step is to create effective mechanisms for engaging citizens in law enforcement under martial law. This can be done by supporting civic initiatives and volunteer organisations that work with law enforcement agencies to provide information, assist in investigations or even organise patrols.

An integral part of these measures should be developing a human rights policy and providing adequate training for law

enforcement officials to ensure that the rights of citizens are protected, especially in emergencies. Training in ethics, conflict recognition and prevention, and communication with different population groups will help reduce social tensions and improve interaction between law enforcement and citizens.

In general, strengthening interaction between law enforcement agencies and the public in martial law and other crises requires a comprehensive approach, including transparency, public education initiatives, and effective engagement of citizens in addressing security and human rights issues.

Conclusions. The legal reforms implemented in the Baltic States have significantly improved public trust in law enforcement agencies. They were based on transparency, increased control over the activities of law enforcement agencies and public involvement in decision-making. In Ukraine, however, reforms aimed at achieving similar results face several challenges, including insufficient institutional stability and high levels of corruption, which negatively affect public trust.

Key factors affecting the level of public trust in law enforcement agencies in times of crisis. The study showed that in crises, such as martial law or other emergencies, the level of trust in law enforcement agencies is significantly influenced by such factors as transparency of law enforcement actions, effectiveness of com-

munication with the public, human rights and protection of civil rights in the performance of official duties. Low levels of trust are often correlated with a lack of professionalism in law enforcement and a lack of openness and adequate response to crises.

Practical measures to strengthen interaction between law enforcement agencies and the public in martial law and other crises. In order to strengthen interaction between law enforcement agencies and the public under martial law, practical measures should be implemented, including increased transparency of law enforcement activities through regular public reports and open communication channels. It is important to create effective feedback mechanisms between citizens and law enforcement officers and to engage citizens in law enforcement by supporting civic initiatives and volunteer organisations. Implementing educational programmes to teach citizens the basics of security and the legal aspects of actions during crises is also necessary. In addition, ensuring human rights and high professionalism among law enforcement officers are key to building trust in times of crisis.

Prospects for further research include an expanded analysis of the effectiveness of legal reforms in Ukraine and the Baltic States in the context of their impact on building trust in law enforcement agencies and the specifics of implementing these reforms in the post-crisis period.

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