

cultural **differences**

*selected cultural differences
between Poland and Ukraine.*
guidebook of the Institute
of Migrant Rights in Wrocław

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cultural **differences**

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similarities & **DIFFERENCES**

The Poles and the Ukrainians are culturally close nations, and in many respects similarities can be seen between them. In everyday relations, however, there are situations when the behaviour of a “culturally different neighbour” seems incomprehensible and can sometimes be misinterpreted perceived as strange.

In order to understand the differences and similarities between representatives of these two nations living side by side and with each other, it is particularly important to point out that the migrants from Eastern Europe residing in Poland consist of a few different groups. The Ukrainians coming to Poland after 2014 were predominantly men (EWL 2022). The most common motive for their migration was the desire to work or study in Poland. That was a planned decision, often preceded by preparations. As a result, representatives of this group often spoke Polish to some degree already at the beginning of their stay or were highly motivated quickly to learn the language. Many of them came from Western Ukraine, which is culturally and historically closer to Poland. After February 2022, however, it was mainly women and children who came to Poland, and they were generally compelled to migrate, unprepared for it and speaking Polish poorly, if at all. There was also a higher proportion of people from Eastern and Central Ukraine than before (EWL 2022).¹

These differences result in a large internal diversity of the Ukrainian community in Poland, which Poles sometimes incorrectly perceive as homogeneous. The differences between the representatives of this group (region, age, class, language etc.) are of great importance for the way they function in their new environment and the shape of the relations they enter with other inhabitants of Poland, whether of Ukrainian, Polish or other origin.

It is therefore important to bear in mind that this study concerns the entire population, without accounting for its internal diversity. Individual attitudes, beliefs and values may differ significantly due to gender, age, education, place of origin or other factors. Ukrainians, like Poles, are a regionally diverse nation. The views of a person from Western Ukraine may differ from those of a person from Eastern Ukraine, just as people from Lower Silesia often differ from the inhabitants of Lesser Poland or Podlasie. The findings on the basis of which we will describe the similarities and differences between Poles and Ukrainians relate to entire communities and present the dominant, but not the only existing, system of values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours prevailing in these two nations. In addition, it is likely that the war will bring (or has already brought) a re-evaluation of some beliefs, both among Ukrainians and among Poles, while the study is primarily based on data from 2020.

¹ Information cited based on „Special Report. Refugees from Ukraine in Poland”. The contemporary division of Ukraine into five regions (Centre, South, North, East and West) used in the report is often used for statistical purposes, also in Ukrainian studies. According to this division, Western Ukraine consists of Chernivtsi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Khmelnytskyi, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Volyn and Zakarpattia oblasts.

I A COMPARISON OF UKRAINIAN AND POLISH CULTURES IN THE FOUR DIMENSIONS PROPOSED BY GEERT HOFSTEDE

One of the most popular typologies of cultural dimensions was proposed by Geert Hofstede (2000). It makes it possible to compare the cultures of different countries in selected aspects using a scale from 0 to 100 points. Therefore, it is possible to determine the position of one culture in relation to another, taking five dimensions into account:

- **power distance,**
- **collectivism and individualism,**
- **femininity and masculinity,**
- **uncertainty avoidance,**
- **long-term and short-term orientation.**

Using selected dimensions², we will point out cultural differences between representatives of Ukrainian and Polish culture, which may affect daily intercultural experiences. Such knowledge allows for better mutual understanding, but also developing mechanisms useful in overcoming possible difficulties.

² The study omits the dimension of uncertainty avoidance in which the two cultures are very similar. Poland and Ukraine have very high levels of uncertainty avoidance (93 and 95 points respectively).

Ukrainians have a higher level of power distance than Poles

Ukrainians are more likely than Poles to:

- **accept a hierarchical social structure,**
- **accept subordinates' dependence on supervisors and expect central management,**
- **recognise the authority of older people,**
- **recognise the authority of teachers, attach importance to education, including higher education,**
- **accept dependence on and submission to state authority.**



Both cultures are characterised by a high distance to authority, which most generally means that their representatives accept the hierarchy of the social structure. Authority is an important element in social life and has the privilege of determining what is right and wrong. Individuals occupying different positions in the hierarchical social structure accept this fact along with the resulting consequences, such as privileges or the lack thereof. However, Ukrainian society is characterised by a very high power distance, close to the end of the scale, much higher than Polish society.

In practice, a higher tolerance of breaking various rules of the workplace can be expected among Ukrainians, as long as the violations are accepted by those in a higher professional or informal position. This effect may be enhanced by a greater motivation, resulting from the migrant's position, to have or to keep a job (which may also result in taking on jobs below one's qualifications, accepting tasks that are not part of one's job responsibilities, etc.). A higher acceptance of social inequality and hierarchical order than in Polish culture may also be relevant in relations with colleagues at work, neighbours or landlords. The high power distance may also result in passivity or reluctance to take the initiative, because reform is expected to begin from above.

The greater power distance in the family is manifested by socialising children into obedience to their parents and assigning the latter the role of superiors. At school, the central figure is the teacher, not the pupil. At work, subordinates expect clear instructions - a good superior is someone who takes responsibility, initiative and control of the whole pro-

cess. In the authority-citizen relationship, the distance manifests itself in the acceptance and preservation of a state of division into the rulers and the ruled. This is related to social order, in which everyone should “know their place”. It generates a sense of security for both the authorities and the citizens, but also legitimate expectations towards the authorities (fulfilment of social needs by state institutions „programmed” to do so). A lower value of power distance is typical for cultures that are more democratic and open to public consultation, while a high value is characteristic of cultures that prefer “hard handed rule”. On the other hand, it is reasonable to hypothesize that when the state does not fulfil its duties and does not meet the expectations of citizens, they may, despite their high power distance, openly express their dissatisfaction. This happened twice in the 21st century Ukraine - during the Orange Revolution of 2003-2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014.

Ukrainians have a lower level of individualism than Poles

Ukrainians are more likely than Poles to:

- seek support and a sense of security among loved ones, in the family (the glory, but also the humiliation of individual concerns to those of the family),
- avoid conflicts and confrontations in interpersonal relationships,
- treat members of one’s own group better than others,
- consider the good or interests of the group as more important than the good of the individual (less commitment to respecting human rights),
- prioritize intergroup relations over achieving goals,
- recognize and expect the dominant role of the state in the economy,
- recognize the superiority of the ideology of equality over the ideology of personal freedom.



The second important difference is the collectivism of Ukrainian society and the individualism of Polish society. This dimension describes the aspect of culture that structures the relationships between people - collectivist cultures locate the individual in a network of people who provide for his or her well-being, whereas in individualist cultures the self-centred individual looks after themselves first and foremost.

In practice, these differences between the generally more collectivist Ukrainians and the more individualist Poles may result in misinterpretations of each other’s actions and intentions. For example, some individualist behaviour may be perceived as unkind and selfish, while collectivist behaviour may as cumbersome and non-transparent. This may manifest itself in difficulties with a meritocratic (competence-based) approach to professional and state relations or in tolerance of nepotism.

In the family, the collectivist approach is about building a community, a sense of “we”. The factors regulating family life are harmony, esteem and shame. In the field of education, there is a strong belief that school is for the young to learn how to behave. At work, standards and values may differ throughout teams. A boundary between familiarity and alienation is created between groups. The state is seen as an institution that provides citizens with adequate living conditions, which may translate into the belief that responsibility for the economic well-being of community members lies more within state institutions (employment policies and a labour market adjusted to the economic conditions, income levels, price stability, etc.) than with individual choices and actions. The state is also expected to ensure economic, social and political equality between people.

Ukrainians have lower levels of masculinity than Poles

Ukrainians are more likely than Poles to:

- attach importance to relationships with others and quality of life, more than to career and earnings,
- equal treatment regardless of gender,
- agree that one works to live, not lives to work,
- criticize those who stand out above the average, dominant behaviour may come from the boss but not from peers,
- recognize the need for state institutions to support those in need,
- expect the implementation of the idea of the welfare state.



Another cultural feature that differentiates the two societies is the division between male and female roles. Feminine cultures emphasise the mutual dependence of the sexes and the flexibility of roles traditionally associated with each of them.

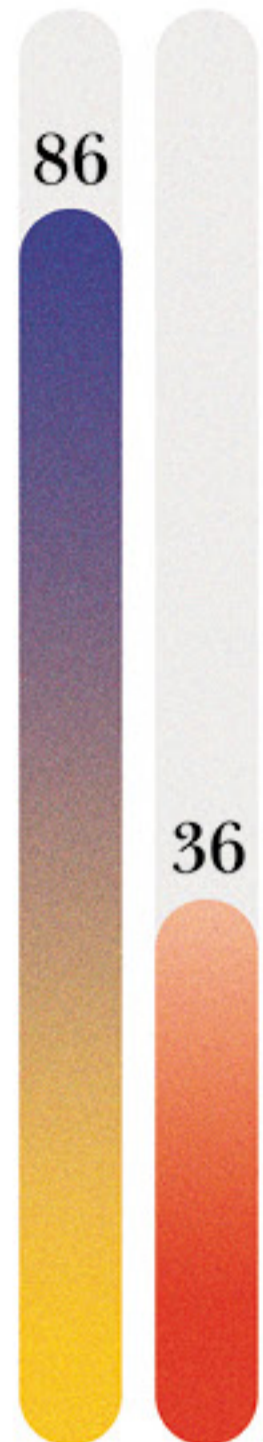
In practice, feminine cultures are characterised, for example, by a greater concern for solidarity and quality of life and the belief that those in higher positions in the hierarchy, in addition to being in charge, are also responsible for ensuring a good social climate.

During the socialisation process families in feminine cultures place more emphasis on building social networks, unity and solving problems by working out compromises in negotiations. At school, it is accepted to be an average student. Evaluation is based more on the efforts, not the outcomes, so failures are not exposed. At work, the emphasis is on quality of life, prideful attitudes are not accepted, unlike for example the use of intuition. In the citizen-state relationship, expectations are formulated to support those in need through institutions, to ensure well-being in a spirit of solidarity with the economically weaker members of society (concern for others and their quality of life). There is a general consensus on the implementation of policies that guarantee economic security for all (satisfying basic needs through social benefits, subsidies, social funds etc.).

Ukrainians have a higher level of long-term orientation than Poles

Ukrainians are more likely than Poles to:

- pursue goals slowly and systematically (achievements that will come in a few years are important),
- believe in the need for mothers to look after their children (and not necessarily kindergartens),
- save and invest (e.g. in real estate),
- treat the past pragmatically rather than normatively - its interpretation depends on the situation, the context and the time.



This dimension of culture describes the valorisation of the past, present and future. Those with a short-term orientation are more focused on the past and present, spending a significant effort on understanding it and finding the truth, while those with a long-term orientation are more future-oriented and believe that the answer to the question “why things are the way that they are” often depends on the context.

II PERSONAL SPHERE

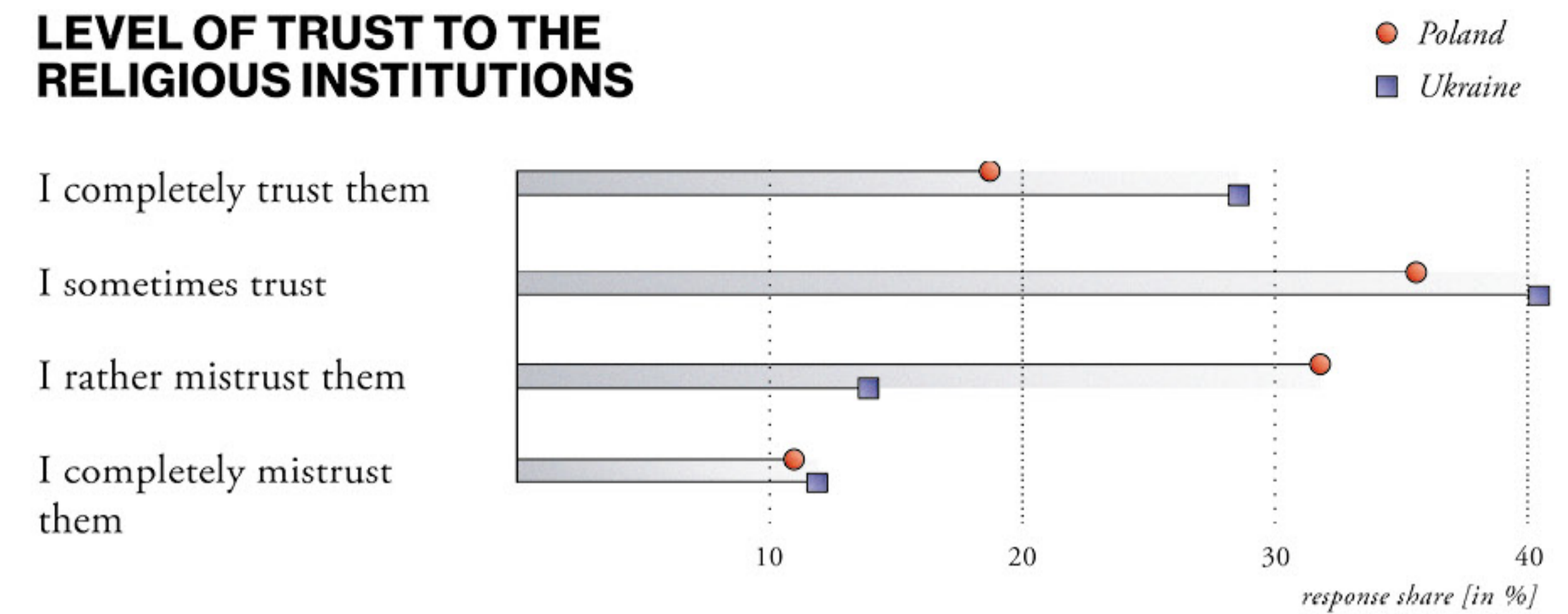
RELIGIOUS VALUES

towards permissivism

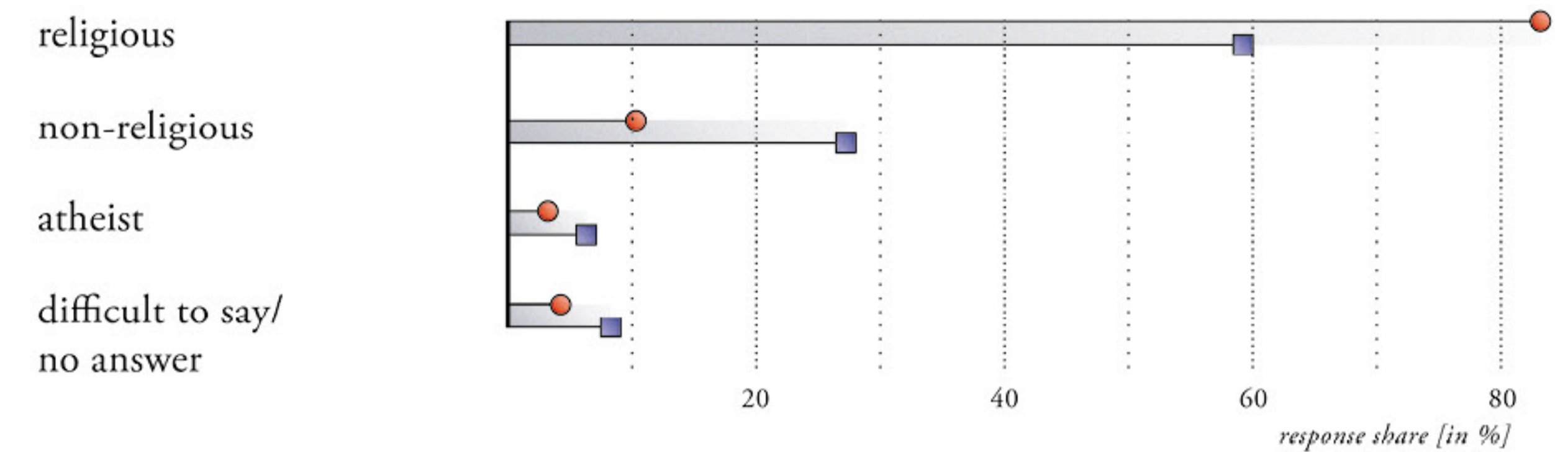
- God is less important in the lives of Ukrainians than in the lives of Poles,
- Participation in masses is ritualistic for Ukrainians, they usually do it on major religious holidays, while Poles do so on a weekly basis,
- Ukrainians declare themselves religious less often than Poles, although both nations are predominantly religious.

One area where we can observe a difference between Poles and Ukrainians is in their religiosity. God is important in the lives of both Poles and Ukrainians, although far less so for the latter. Poles are more likely than Ukrainians to declare themselves as believers. A consequence of the different religious commitment is that Ukrainians are more permissive. This means that Poland's eastern neighbours are less rigorous in judgments concerning religiously defined precepts and prohibitions, as well as the resulting behaviour. They more often and more willingly justify deviations from norms and have a more ritualistic approach to their faith (e.g. Poles go to church more often than Ukrainians, the former weekly, the latter rather on major holidays). The religious sphere is less important in their everyday life than in the lives of Poles. Therefore, norms stemming directly from the teachings of the church or indirectly from the influence of the church on everyday life in Poland may be misunderstood or not accepted by them, even though Poles are the ones who declare greater criticism of the church.

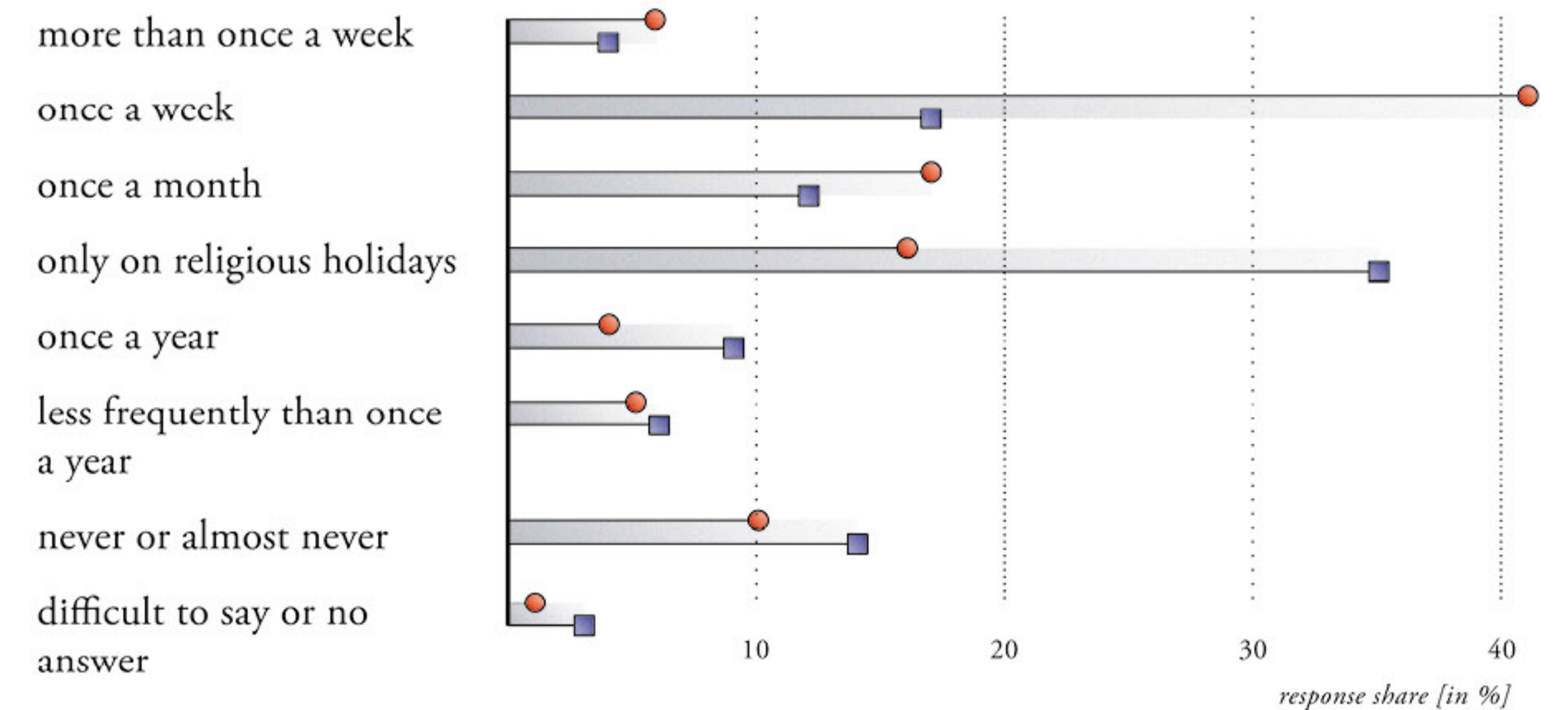
LEVEL OF TRUST TO THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS



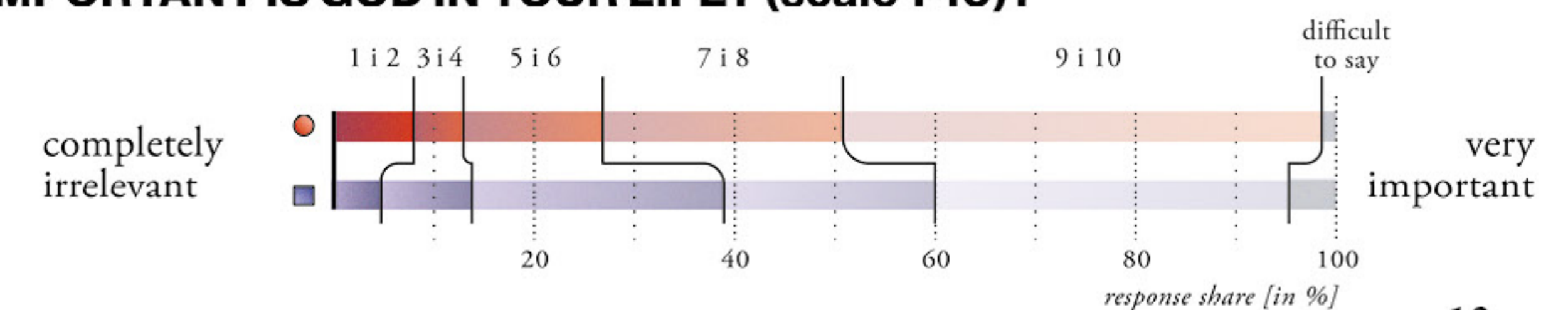
IN TERMS OF RELIGION YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF:



NOT INCLUDING WEDDINGS, BAPTISMS AND FUNERALS, HOW OFTEN DO YOU ATTEND A MASS?



HOW IMPORTANT IS GOD IN YOUR LIFE? (scale 1-10)?



PERSONAL MORALITY

towards permissivism

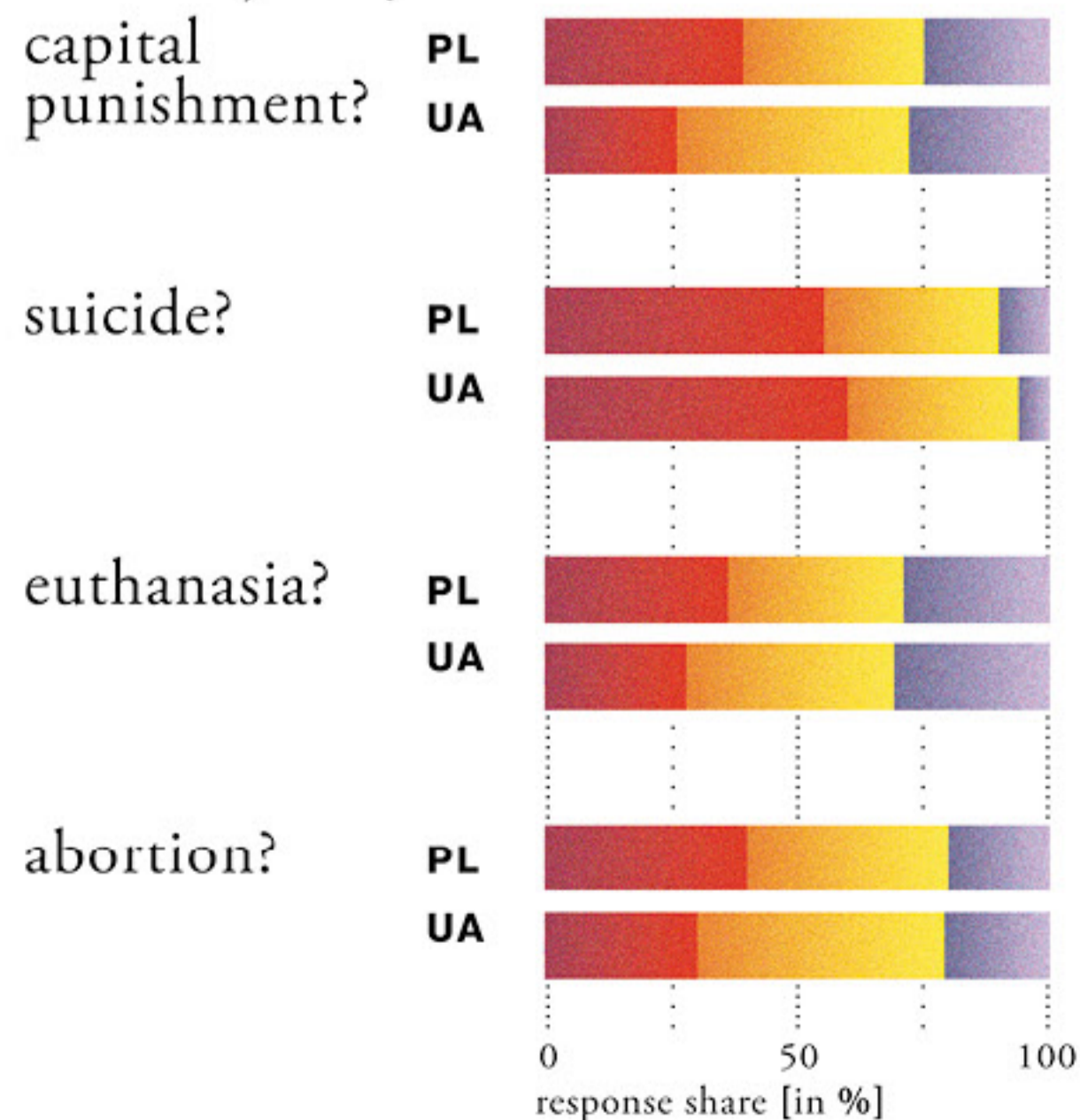
- **Ukrainians perceive the protection of life less strictly than Poles (they are more likely to justify capital punishment, euthanasia and abortion),**
- **Ukrainians perceive divorce and sexuality less strictly than Poles (they are more likely to justify sex work and occasional sexual intercourse).**

A system of moral norms and values can be linked to the religious sphere. Phenomena, which in Polish public discourse are generally associated to the protection of life, are accepted somewhat differently in Ukrainian society. Ukrainians are more likely than Poles to express acceptance of the death penalty, abortion and euthanasia. Of the phenomena compared, only suicide is slightly more accepted by Poles, although it is relatively least accepted for both nationalities. Restrictions on the availability of abortion in Poland often come as a surprise to Ukrainian women. Differences in value systems also result in slightly different customs, which may surprise or cause disappointment on both sides.

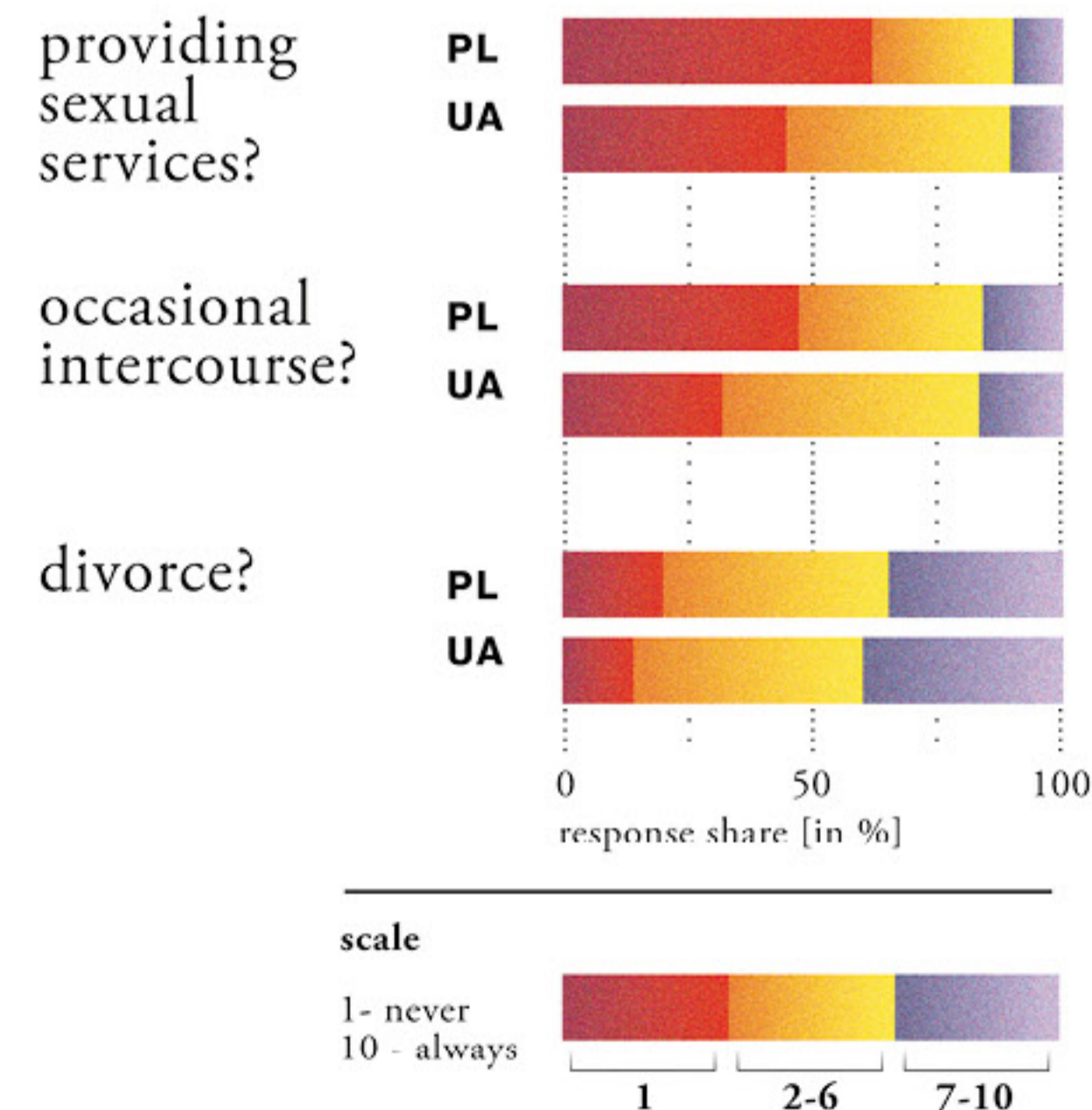
moral values

LIFE PROTECTION

Can we justify:

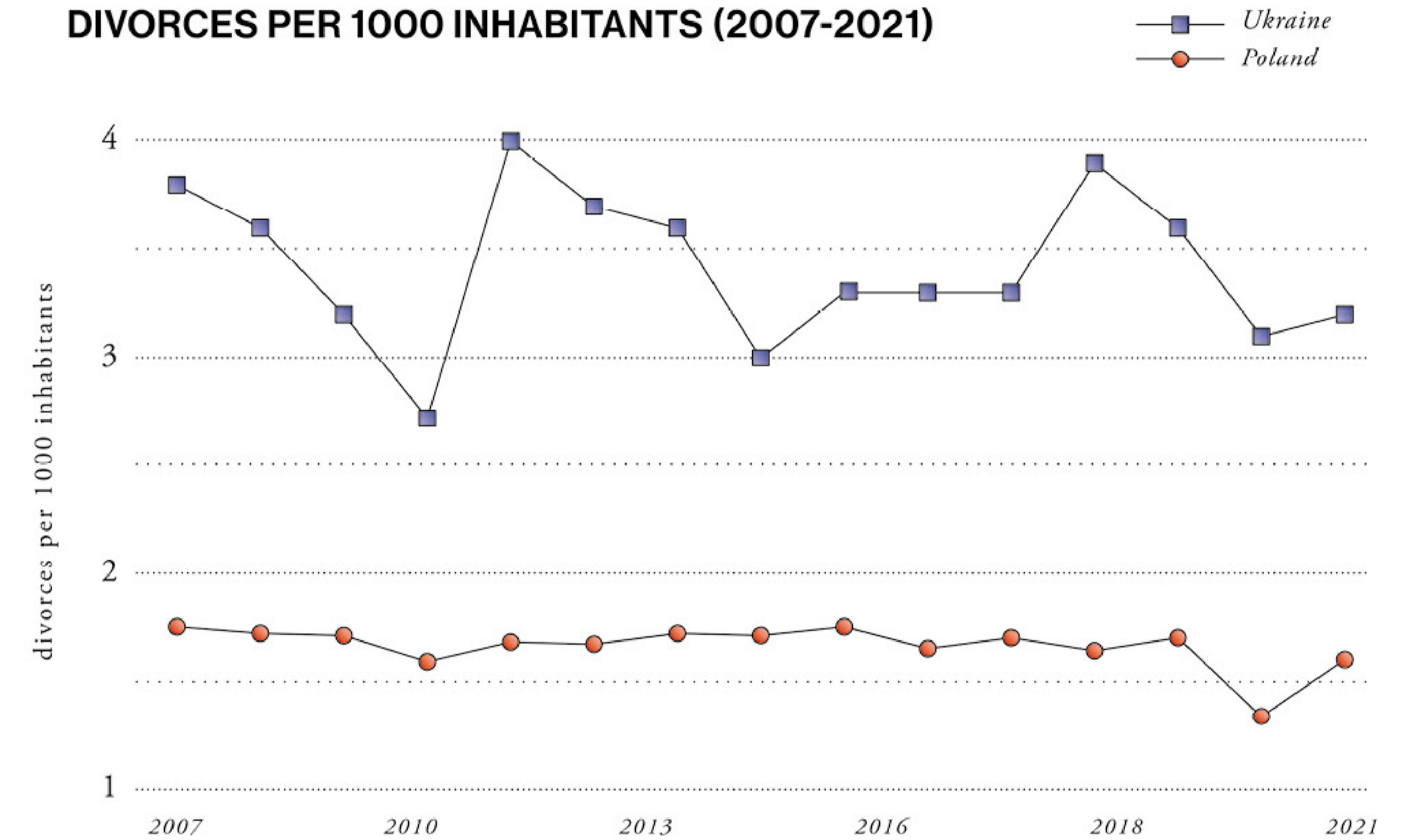


FAMILY AND SEXUALITY



Differences are also evident in the sphere of morals related to human sexuality in the broadest sense. Poles are less likely to accept sex work, occasional sexual intercourse and divorce. The beliefs identified in the research are reflected in higher divorce rates in Ukraine.

DIVORCES PER 1000 INHABITANTS (2007-2021)



source: our own analysis of data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine and Statistics Poland

The lesser moral rigour of Ukrainians may make them feel more comfortable in the less conservative communities of large Polish cities than in other parts of the country. However, in the perspective of the country as a whole, it can be said that Poles still subscribe to the „Catholic morality trend”, while Ukrainians subscribe to the „liberal morality trend” (Kiciński 2005). The permissiveness of Ukrainians in the private sphere, encompassing religion, family and sexuality, which in the Polish context resonate strongly with each other, shows that there can be misunderstandings in this field. A phenomenon of surrogacy, present in the legal and cultural system of Ukraine, may arouse surprise or even opposition among more culturally conservative Poles.

III PUBLIC SPHERE

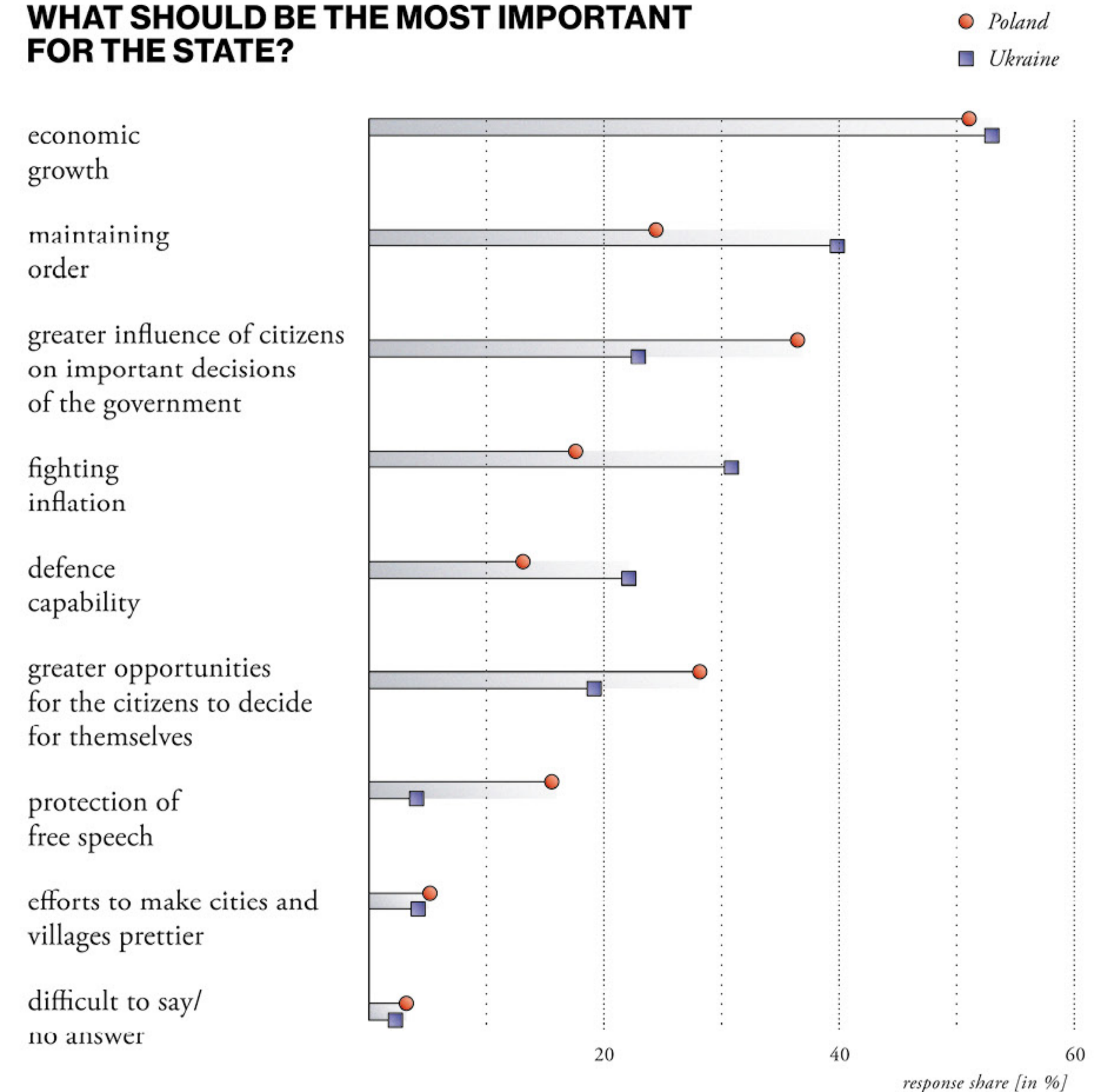
Cultural differences are also noticed in the public sphere, related to the opinions and experiences regarding the functioning of the state, the role it should play in relation to its citizens, but also the attitude of citizens to the laws regulating the functioning of the state and the politically constituted community.

VALUES RELATED TO THE FEELING OF ECONOMICAL AND PHYSICAL SAFETY *MATERIALISTIC ORIENTATION*

- national defence capability, maintaining order and fighting inflation are more important for Ukrainians than for Poles,
- Ukrainians more often than Poles formulate economic expectations in relation to democracy (equal income protection by the state, taxing the rich to support the poor, public help for the unemployed),
- Ukrainians more often than Poles think that the state should protect economic needs of its citizens (income equality, higher state-level responsibility for the public welfare, greater share of public property).

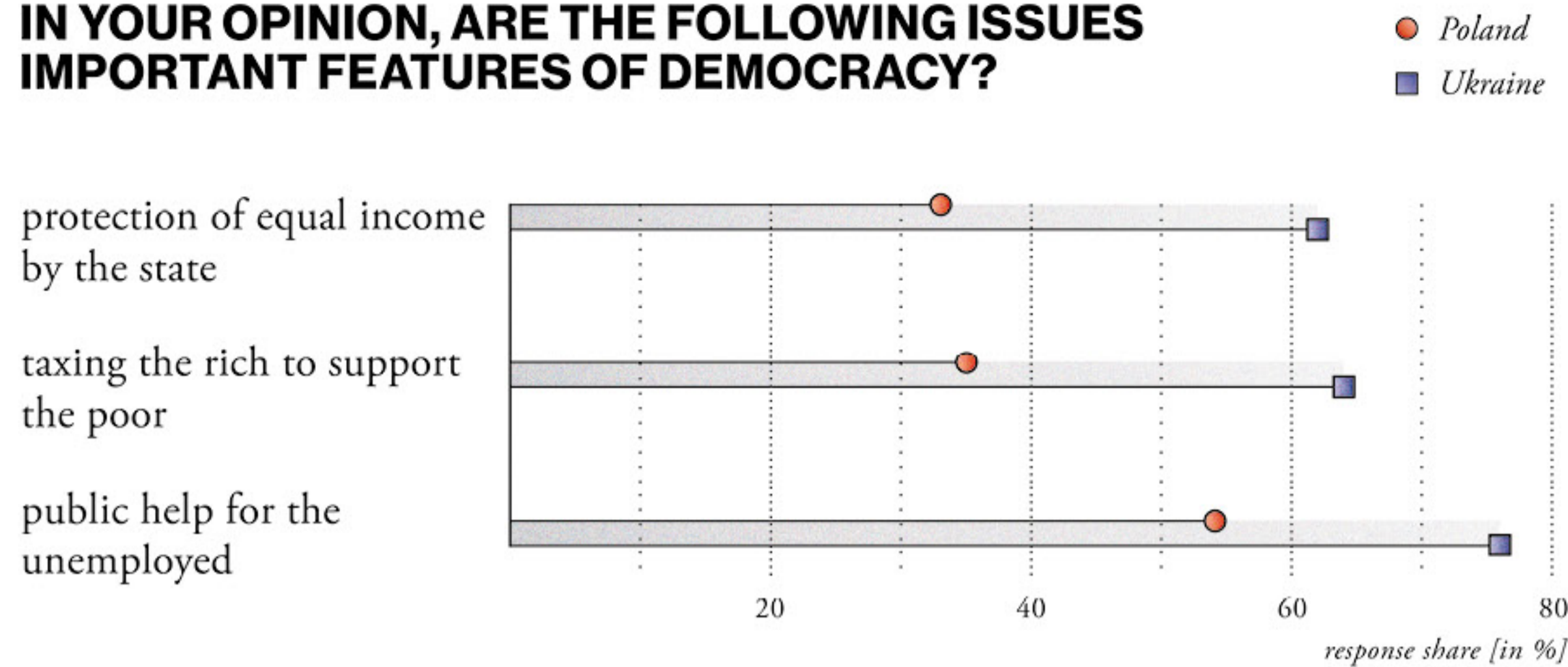
Ukrainians more often than Poles expect the state to ensure physical and material safety. What matters most for them is maintaining order, fighting inflation and increasing defence capability. Ukrainians formulate these expectations twice as often as Poles. On the other hand, Ukrainians much less frequently than Poles pay attention to matters related to civil rights and social participation in decision making. In particular, it refers to the citizens' influence on important government decisions, their ability to decide for themselves and protection of the freedom of speech.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE MOST IMPORTANT FOR THE STATE?



The importance of material safety among Ukrainians is also visible in terms of economical expectations to the democracy as a system and to the government. Ukrainians more often than Poles think that the most important state goals should be the protection of income equality, taxing the rich to support the poor and public support for the unemployed. They therefore opt for egalitarianism and for the “democracy of equal life conditions” (Ziółkowski 2006).

IN YOUR OPINION, ARE THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IMPORTANT FEATURES OF DEMOCRACY?

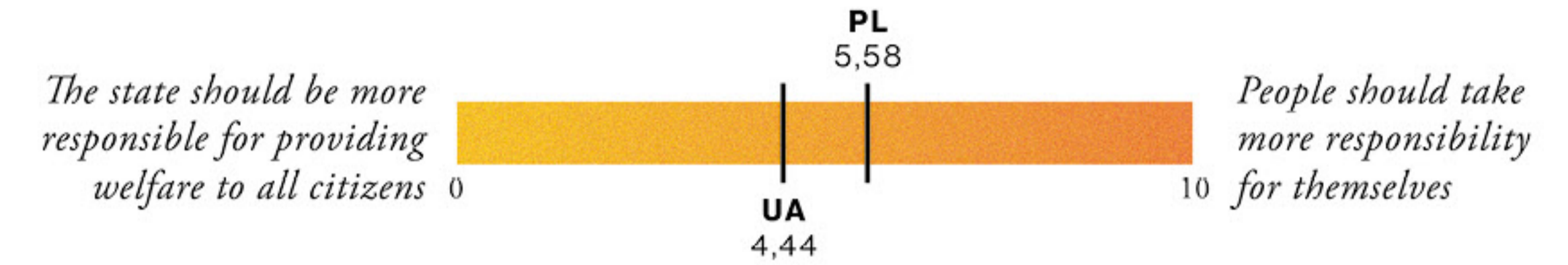


One of the aspects of the expectations towards the state to protect the citizens are declarations of economic needs, which should be satisfied by the state. Ukrainians are more likely to believe that the state should increase its responsibility for ensuring the well-being of all citizens and that the share of public property should be increased. Ukrainians less frequently support free market regulations. They are more likely to believe that competition is bad, which can be related to their greater affiliation to collectivism. They more often think that the incomes should be equal rather than stem from “individual merit”. It can therefore be said that neoliberalism has not become as widely established in Ukraine as it has in Poland. It is worth pointing out though, that people’s declared views on particular values do not always go hand in hand with electoral behaviour or policy-preferences. This is no different in the case of Poland and Ukraine. Election results and political decisions are the product of many factors, and the personal values of individual voters is only one of them.

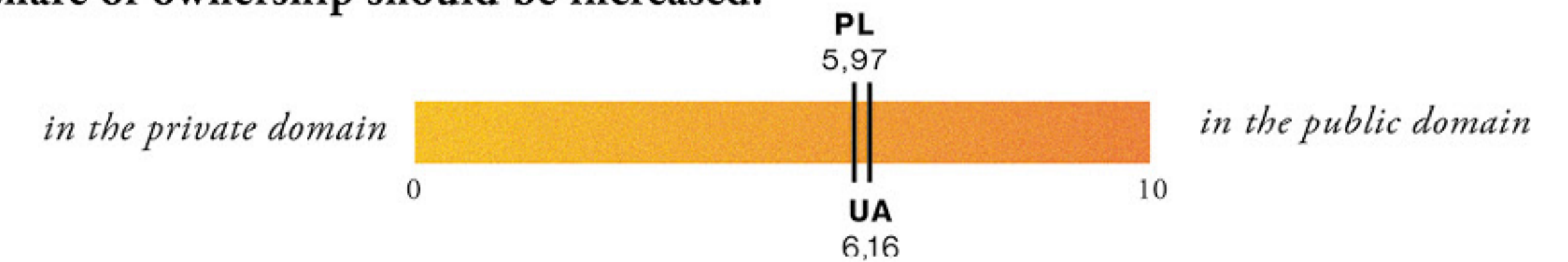
The above findings demonstrate that Ukrainians attach great importance to a sense of security, primarily in an economic sense, and are consequently oriented towards respective values. Economic security is linked to the assessment of one’s standard of living and economic conditions, as well as the need to protect it (and the social position associated with it). This is supported by the declarations of Ukrainians in terms of assessing their own income, because they described their income as high half as frequently as Poles. Of course, we should bear in mind the objective and significant difference between income and purchasing power in Poland and Ukraine.

ECONOMIC VIEWS

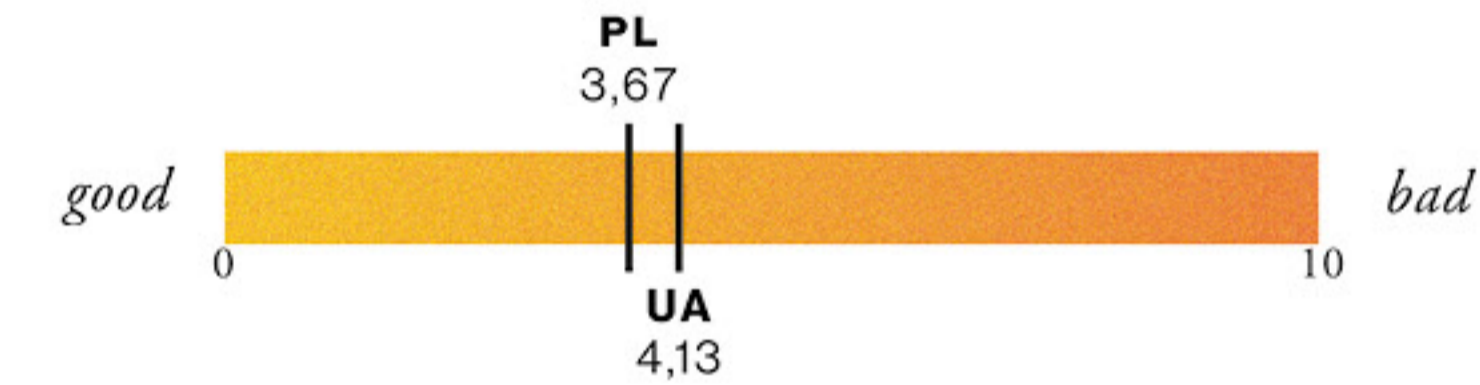
Opinions on the welfare-related role of the state:



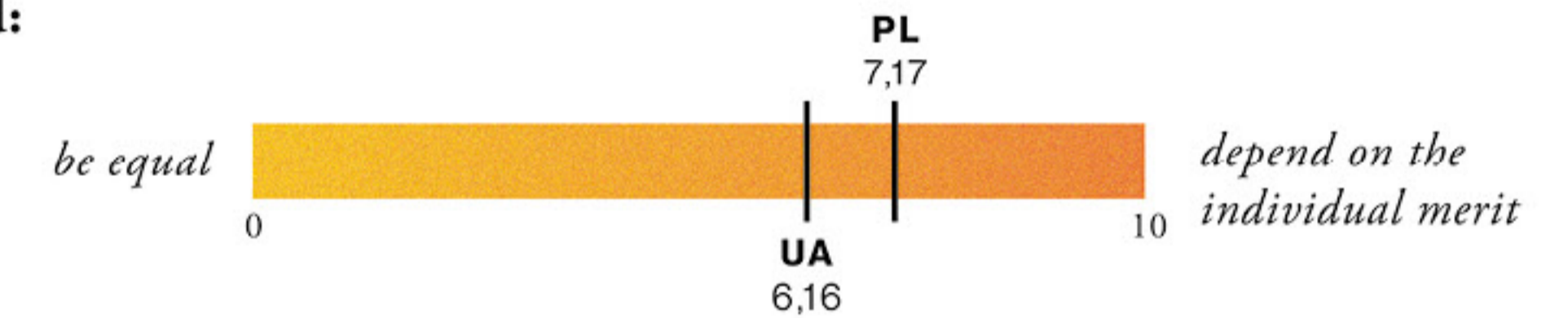
The share of ownership should be increased:



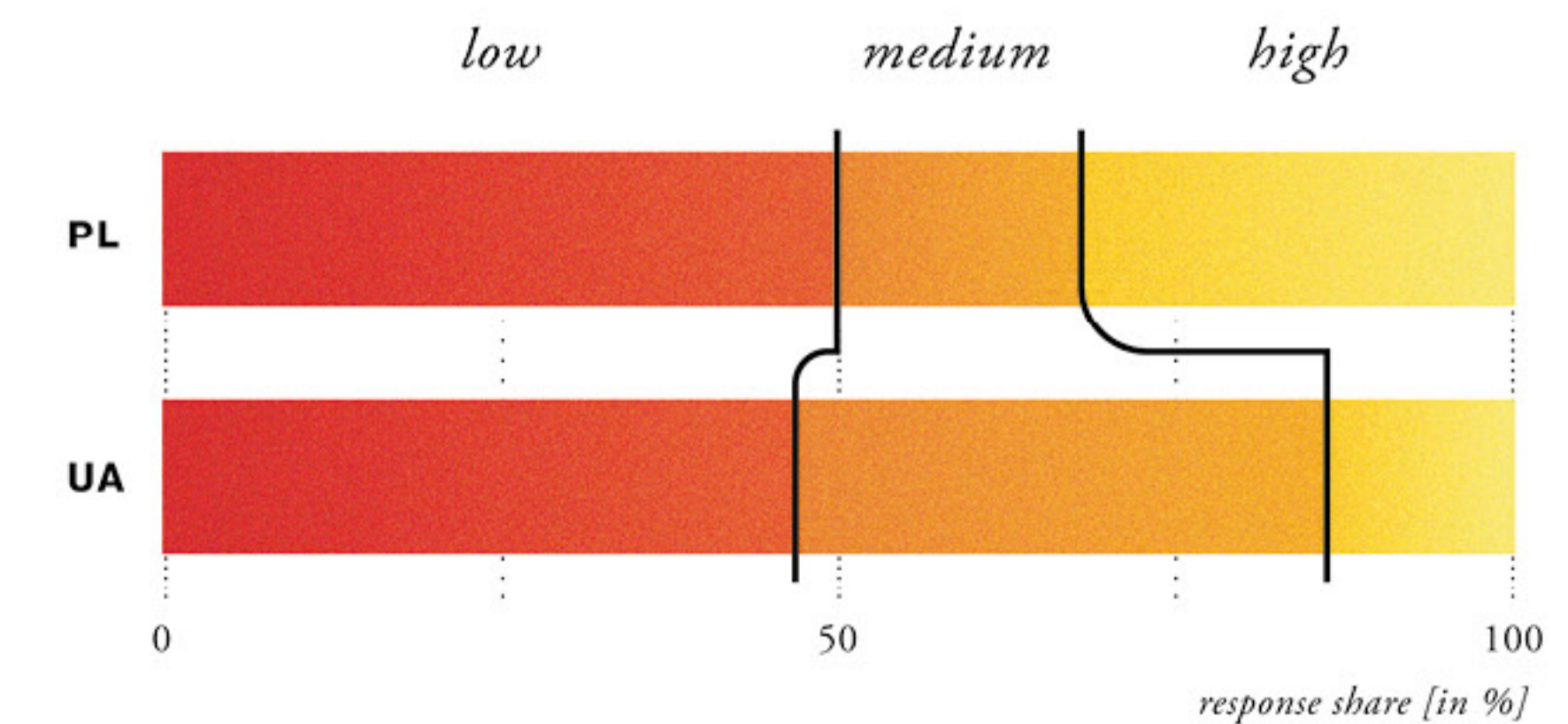
Competition is:



Incomes should:



EVALUATION OF THE PERSONAL INCOME LEVEL



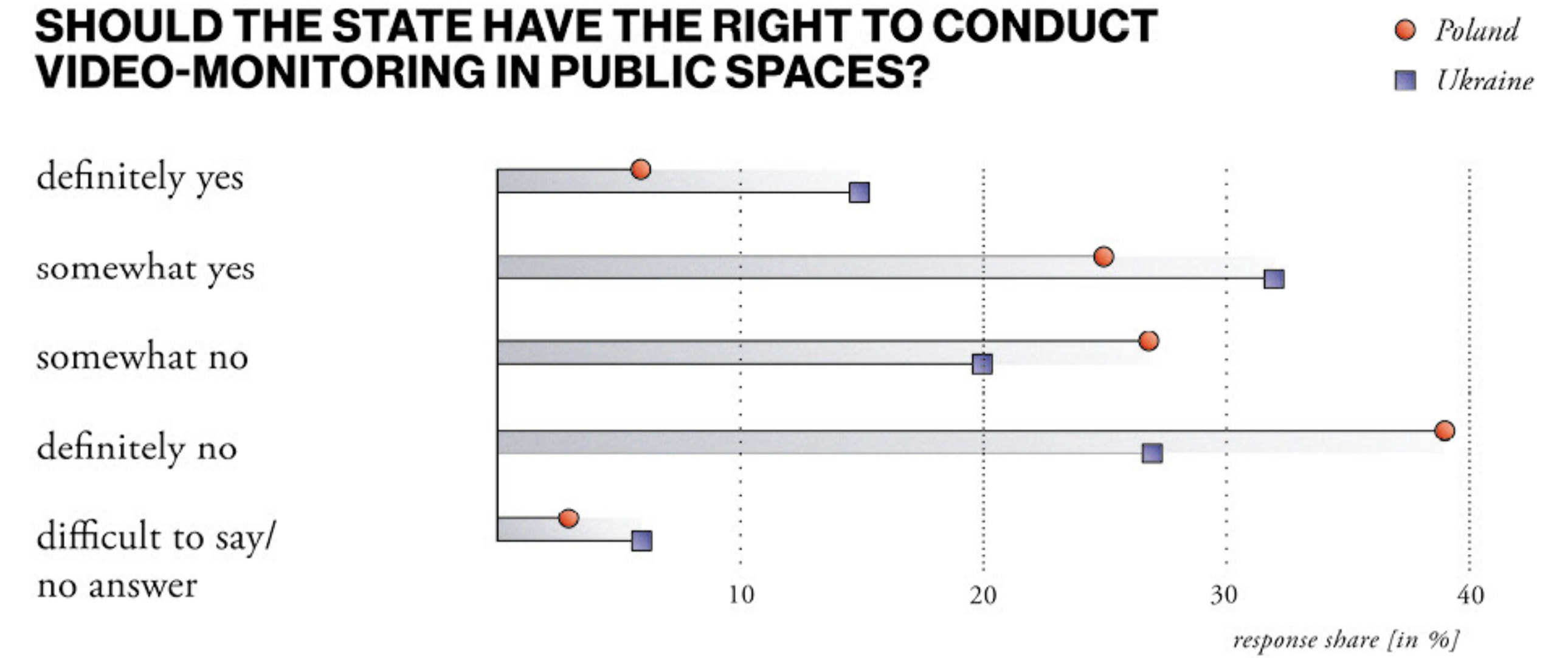
It can be assumed that in relation to socio-economic values, Ukrainians are more likely to follow compensatory and welfare logic, not free market logic (Ziółkowski 2006). The latter approach is more visible among Poles. Ukrainians also value the economic order linked to a concept of a solidarity state rather than a liberal state. In particular, they demand economic protection from the state and are reluctant to take individual responsibility for their own fate (Ziółkowski 2006). Government is therefore understood as a guarantor of safety and basic needs. To some extent, the government should also take responsibility for the fate of the citizens. Therefore, they are less inclined to show initiative or to participate in free market competition, where individual and not collective achievements matter.

Ukrainians more often than Poles tend to agree, that the state should have right to take actions described as fostering increased public security, such as:

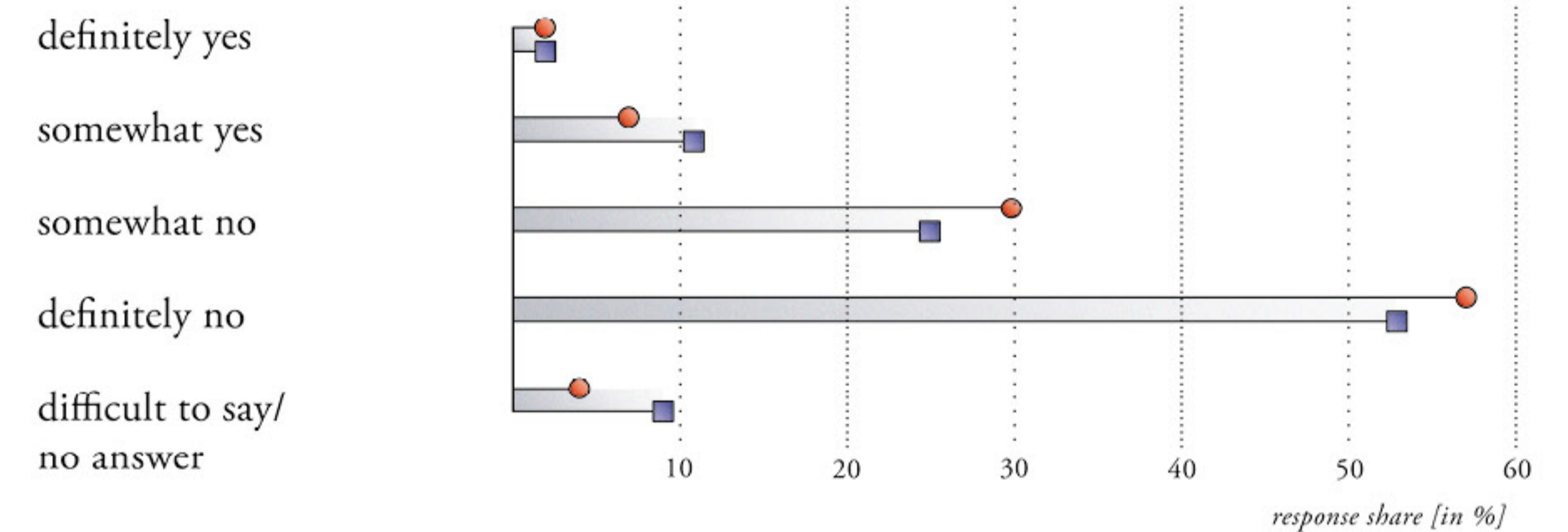
- **video-monitoring in public places,**
- **access to emails and other information available online,**
- **collecting information on citizens without their knowledge.**

Ensuring economic safety is not the only task which Ukrainians expect from the state. A feeling of physical safety in public spaces is equally important for them, even at the cost of interfering with privacy. Ukrainians agree more frequently than Poles that the state should be able to conduct video-monitoring in the public places, collect information about citizens without their knowledge and have access to emails and other information available online.

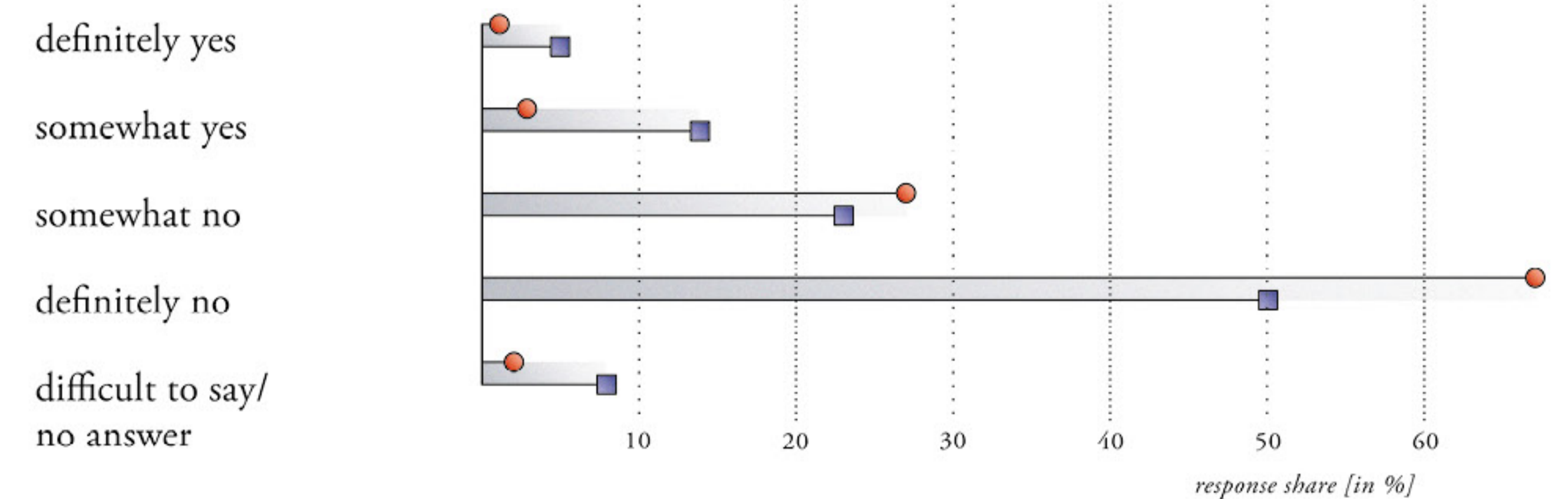
SHOULD THE STATE HAVE THE RIGHT TO CONDUCT VIDEO-MONITORING IN PUBLIC SPACES?



SHOULD THE STATE HAVE ACCESS TO EMAILS AND OTHER INFORMATION SHARED ONLINE?

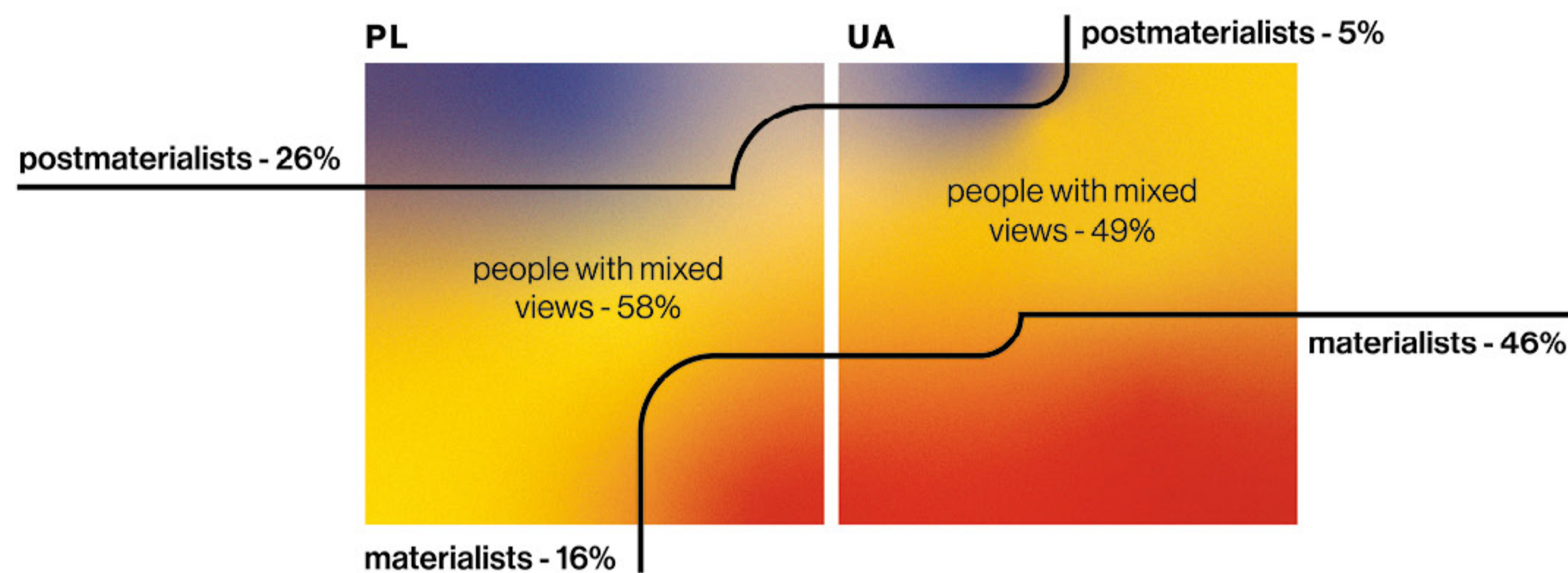


SHOULD THE STATE HAVE THE RIGHT TO COLLECT INFORMATION ON ITS RESIDENTS WITHOUT THEIR KNOWLEDGE?



The indications of the role of the state are supported by certain values and related goals. One of the most popular measures of this aspect of culture is the so-called postmaterialism index. Expectations of the state providing citizens with a sense of economic and physical security are described as materialistic (oriented towards satisfying the basic needs). Demands to create opportunities for citizens' self-expression, success, individual development, or care for the environment, on the other hand, are values collectively described as post-materialist (oriented towards the fulfilment of higher-order needs). Among Ukrainians, the share of people oriented towards materialistic values is more than twice as high as among Poles, while the share of people for whom postmaterialistic values are important is five times lower.³

POSTMATERIALISM INDEX (2020)



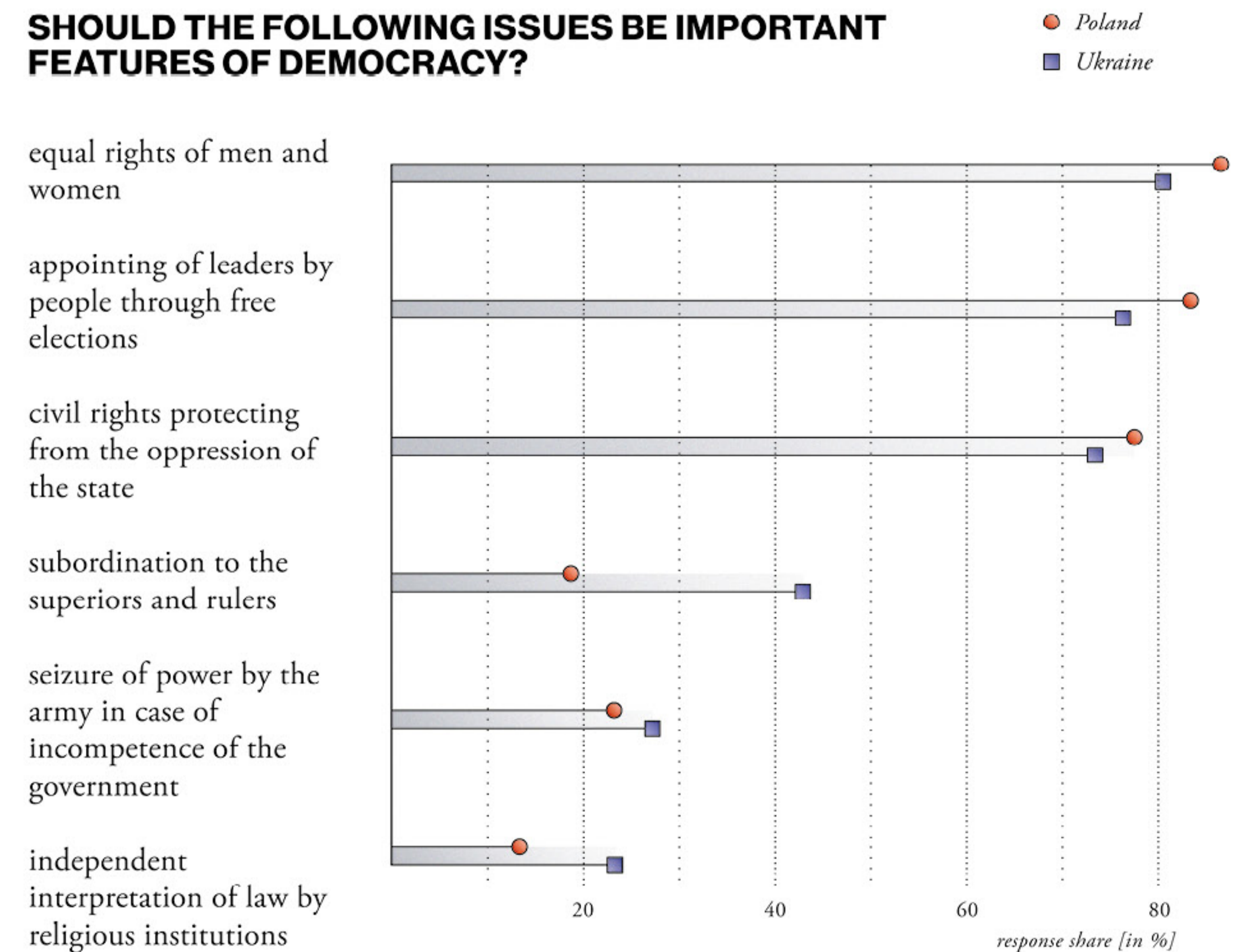
Ukrainians more often than Poles think that the important features of democracy are:

- subordination to the rulers and superiors,
- independent interpretation of law by religious institutions,
- seizure of power by the army in case of government incompetence

³ This definition of materialism differs significantly from the meaning of the word in everyday language. When using the term, it is therefore necessary to pay particular attention to which meaning should apply in a given case.

Materialistic and postmaterialistic values can be translated into attitudes towards politics. The higher the level of satisfaction of basic needs, the higher the acceptance of democratic solutions (Siemińska 2004). The need to ensure the feeling of safety among citizens declared by many Ukrainians impacts their vision of democracy - the principles of the political system and civil rights. Ukrainians much more often than Poles think that an important part of democracy is subordination to the rulers and superiors. They are also more inclined to accept military government, if the civic government turns out to be incompetent. The already-identified levels of power distance explain the more frequent acceptance for independent interpretation of law by religious institutions. At the same time, it should be noted that, with the exception of the first of the above issues (submission to superiors and rulers), which is related to the power distance discussed in the first chapter, the differences in the perception of democracy between Poles and Ukrainians are small and in this respect the two cultures are relatively similar.

SHOULD THE FOLLOWING ISSUES BE IMPORTANT FEATURES OF DEMOCRACY?



CIVIC MORALITY

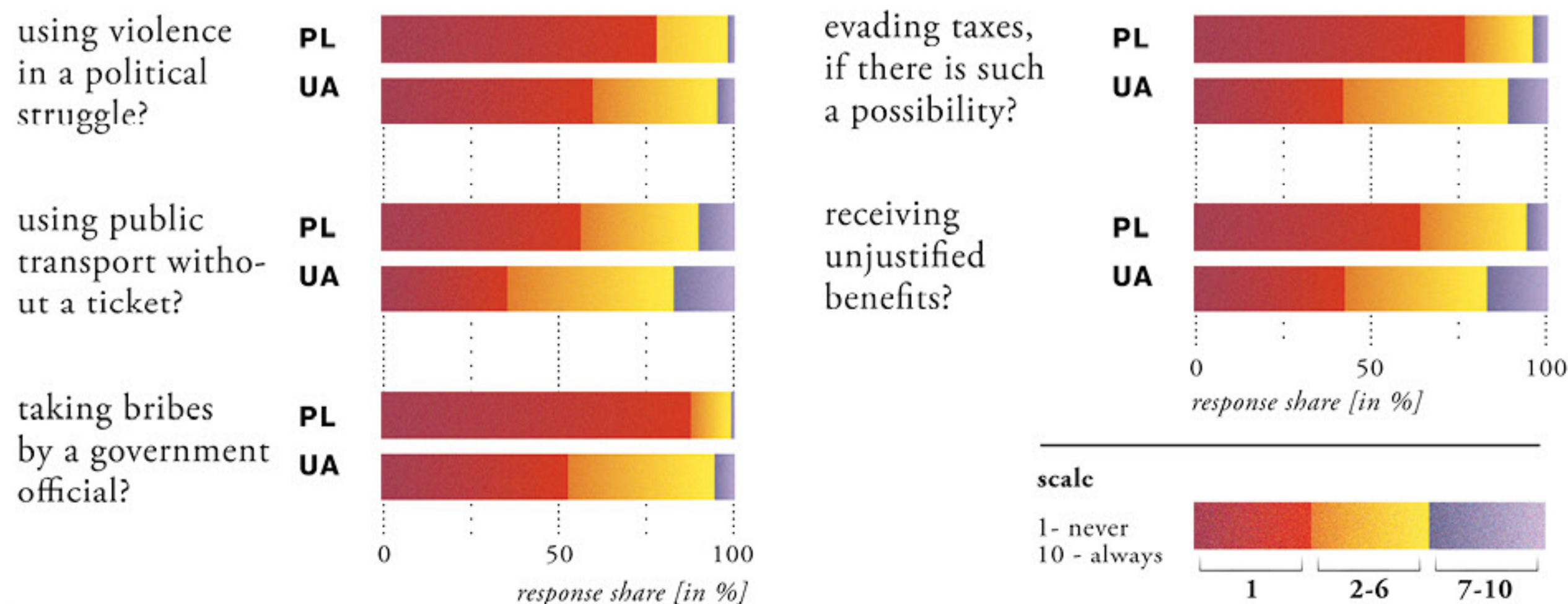
TOWARDS PERMISSIVISM

- **Ukrainians more often than Poles declare the possibility of justifying violations against rules related to the civic sphere, the state and the law (using public transport without a ticket, accepting a bribe, evading taxes, unjustified collection of benefits),**
- **Ukrainians more often than Poles indicate that corruption is a big problem in their country.**

Ukrainian personal efficacy, acknowledgement of the necessity or legitimacy of complying with it, does not result in particular strictness in respecting the norms regulating the citizen-state relationship. Ukrainians more than Poles are inclined to justify violations against the norms related to the civic sphere - against the state and the law. They declare less frequently, that it is not acceptable for government officials to take bribes, to evade taxes, to use violence in political struggle, to receive unjustified social benefits, and to use public transport without a ticket. The greater rigor in Poland in terms of civic morality is a consequence of political socialization, the recognition of norms that protect the common good and interests of the collective. It is the result, as Jasinska-Kania (2007) wrote, of the socialization of moral consciousness.

moral values STATE AND LAW

Can you justify:



The matter of civic morality is connected to the problem of corruption. Ukrainians more often than Poles indicate that corruption is a big problem in their country. The informal transfer of goods and money in different spheres of public life (politics, administration of justice, healthcare, uniformed services), results in a lack of trust to the public institutions - disregard of legality of their functioning, and the perceived inefficiency of actions in terms of satisfying social needs. Corruption, as a “burdensome norm” (Szczepański 2006), is attached to a belief that a moral obligation to integrity is limited only to one’s closest contacts. This so called “amoral familism” means: “maximize the temporary benefits for your family, assuming that everyone acts the same way” (Banfield, after: Nowakowski 1996).

THE MAJORITY OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS CONSIDER THAT CORRUPTION IS A MAJOR PROBLEM (2017)

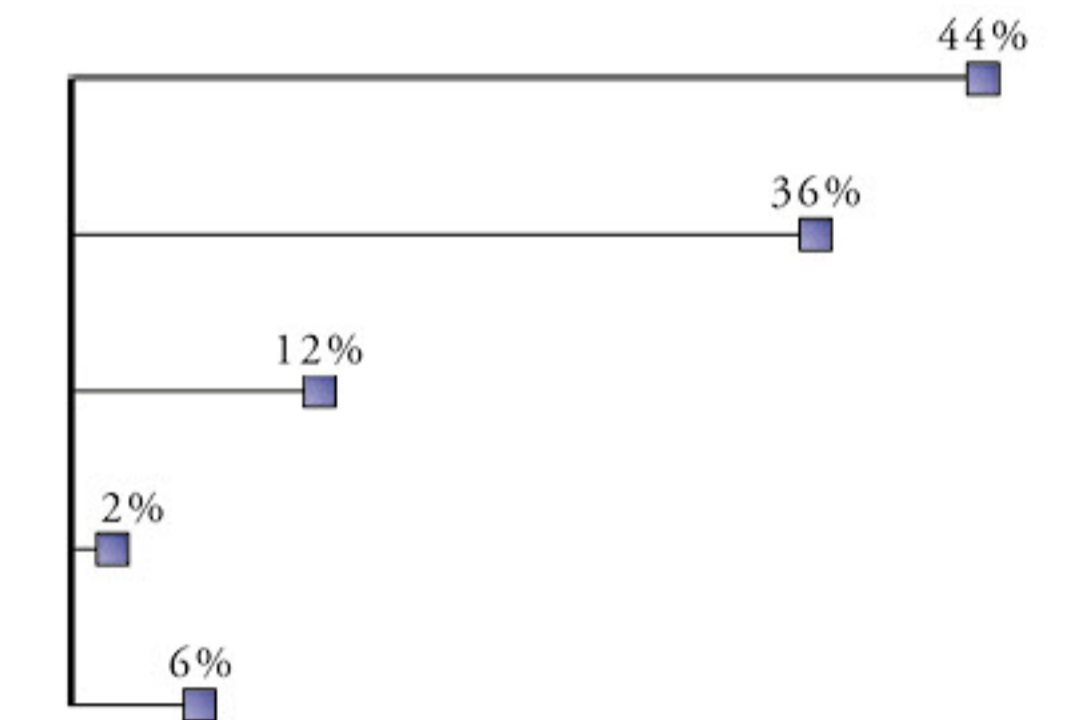
corruption is the most serious problem in Ukraine

corruption is quite a serious problem, but there are more relevant problems

the problem of corruption exists, but it is not that serious

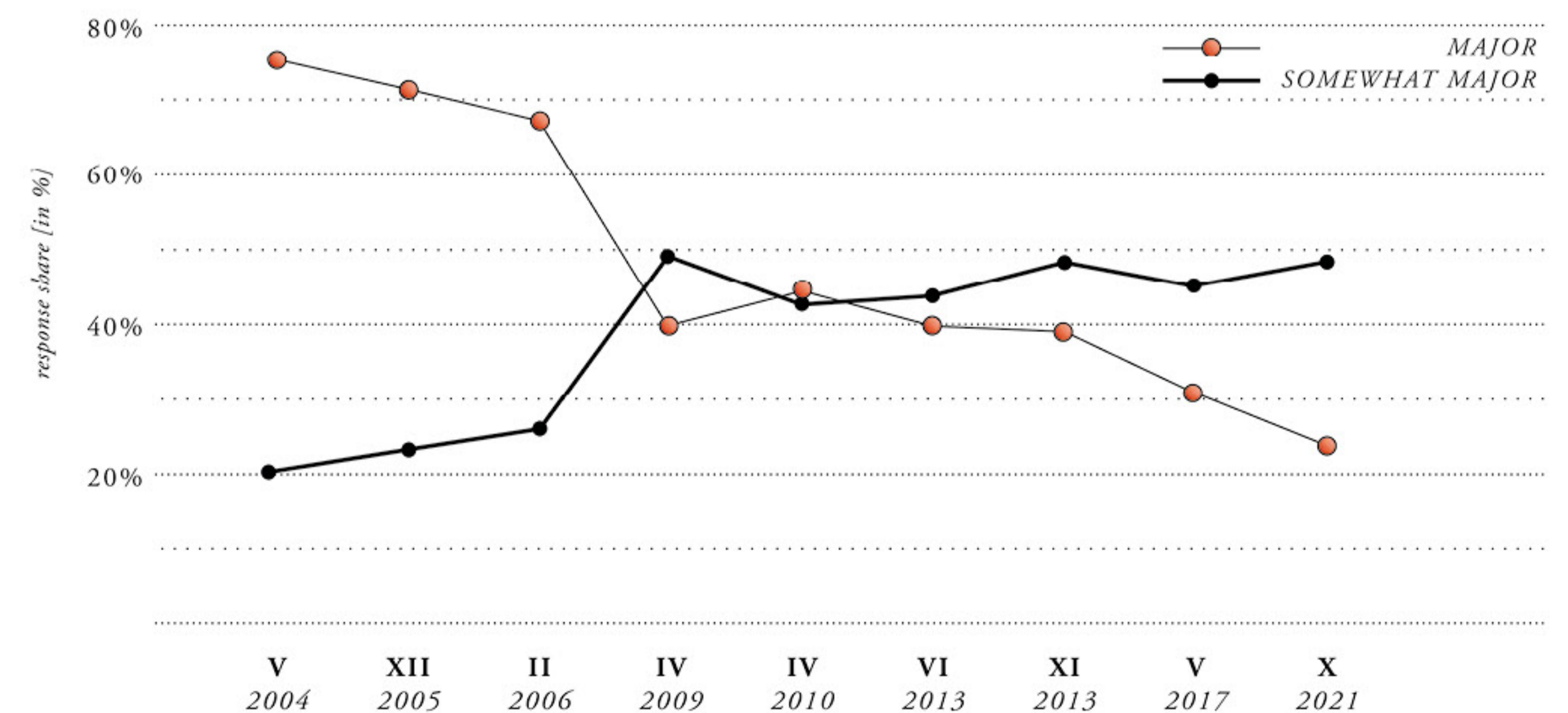
the problem of corruption is quite far-fetched

difficult to say



source: our own analysis of the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation

IS CORRUPTION IN POLAND A MAJOR OR A MINOR PROBLEM?



source: our own analysis of the CBOS za Markowski 2021

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Source for the figures in Chapter I: our own analysis of Hofstede Insights

Sources for the figures in Chapters II and III (unless otherwise indicated): our own analysis of data of the World Values Survey 2020 and the Ukrainian Centre for European Policy (ukr. Український Центр Європейської Політики, Ukrainiyskyi Tsentri Yevropeyskoi Polityky)

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Institute of Migrant Rights

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The Institute of Migrant Rights provides free assistance to migrants in the form of:

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 - legal (with a solicitor, legal adviser and an inspector of the State Labour Inspectorate),
 - with a career counsellor,
 - with an entrepreneurship specialist,
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