

## Research Article

# Rethink. Objects, models, and methods in Humanities and Social Sciences since the invasion of Ukraine

Vadym Osin\*

## From Neopatrimonial Science to Consumption of Academic Degrees: The Case of Political Science in Ukraine

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**Abstract:** This paper is devoted to the transformation of the practices of obtaining academic degrees in Ukraine by applicants from outside the Academy. My hypothesis is that neopatrimonial science, political regime, and credentialism have led to consumption of academic degrees in Ukraine. It is a socially and politically selective process, where the initial pattern is established by the reference groups of top officials. This pattern is subsequently copied and reproduced by lower ranks. It is related to (economically) favorable conditions contributing to the transfer of academic regalia from the category of luxury goods to objects of mass consumption. This process has its own specific features for different groups of applicants from outside the Academy, where the significant factors are the applicant's position and its rank, regional structure of the political regime, and gender. The empirical basis of the work was: (a) career patterns of 642 former and current governors and/or heads of Regional Councils during 1992–2024; (b) 1,735 candidate (PhD) theses in political science defended during 1999–2024.

**Keywords:** neopatrimonial science; consumption; academic degrees; political science; Ukraine; gender

## 1 Introduction

By analogy with *A Book to Burn* by Li Zhi and *Homo Academicus* by Pierre Bourdieu, this paper could be called “a paper to burn”, as it continues the line of silently

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\*Corresponding author: Vadym Osin, Associate Professor, Department of History and Political Theory, Dnipro University of Technology, Dmytro Yavornytskyi Ave. 19, office 63, Dnipro, 49000, Ukraine; and Associated Researcher at French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences (CEFRES, UAR 3138 CNRS–MEAE), Prague, Czech Republic, E-mail: osin.v.v@nmu.one. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2933-3186>

condemned and often self-destructive descriptions of unsightly behavioral norms and patterns of those social groups who are covered by the reputation and power umbrella. It focuses on the practices of mass obtaining of academic degrees by Ukrainian officials, politicians, and businessmen in the 1990s and by the ever-increasing and heterogeneous groups of applicants from outside the Academy (from CEOs of commercial banks to ordinary secretaries from various departments) after 2000.

The paper is written within the framework which can conditionally be called the politics of political science, and the purpose of which was (Easton, Gunnell, and Graziano 1991, Easton, Gunnell, and Stein 1995; Farr, Dryzek, and Leonard 1995) and still is (Boncourt, Engeli, and Garzia 2020) to trace the influence of socio-political factors on the development of political science and the knowledge it produces. The viability of this and similar approaches (e.g., the politics of knowledge) depends largely on comparative analysis, which involves mastering various experiences of interaction between power and knowledge. The post-Soviet Academy provides an opportunity to systematically investigate the specific patterns of power/knowledge, which to some extent has been reflected in several recent collective works on history of political science in Central and Eastern Europe (Eisfeld and Pal 2010; Ilonszki and Roux 2022; Kaase, Sparschuh, and Wenninger 2002; Krauz-Mozer et al. 2015). The main problem of these works is not so much their small number and fragmentation, but rather the gap between the consensus on the determining influence of the political regime on political science and the lack of attempts to identify the specific features of political science under different regimes. The most interesting is the Paulo Ravecca's attempt to highlight "a political, cultural, and academic phenomenon called authoritarian political science" (2019, p. 50) based on "a systematic and in-depth analysis" of the papers published in main political science journals in Chile.

This paper intends to fill the gap in this kind of research, and its starting point is the identification of neopatrimonial science as complementary to the political regime in Ukraine. The empirical basis for its description was the final products of academic certification (academic degrees), so the emphasis in the paper is not so much on knowledge as on politics. I focus rather on the structural conditions for obtaining a huge part of academic degrees in Ukraine, rather than on the content (publications, studies, reports) of scientific work. In turn, several circumstances justify their identification of practice of obtaining academic degrees as a specific pattern requiring primary consideration of its political context.

Firstly, these are not isolated failures in the academic certification system which can be found outside the post-Soviet space (Ezell 2019). According to the conservative estimates, about 30 % of theses in Ukraine are purchased for money. Ultimately, this means obtaining at least 2,000 academic degrees per year with a reduced level of legitimacy. Such a scale speaks to the abnormal openness of the Ukrainian system of higher education to the applicants from outside the Academy.

Secondly, it should be noted that there are specific, even pervasive, relations between authorities and experts in Ukraine. In Western democracies, the prevailing idea is that “professional and autonomous administration entails the presence of well-educated, well-trained, and qualified civil servants able to supply politicians with expert knowledge, arguments and advice” (Blondel et al. 2007, p. 139). Because of this, both parliamentarians and ministers are recruited mainly from educational institutions (Gaxie and Godmer 2007), professional groups (Pinto and de Almeida 2009) which contribute to the implementation of this idea. Sometimes it leads to undesirable conservatism (Bourdieu 1975, p. 44) but, in general, getting a job is preceded by an attempt to acquire certificates and degrees.

In Ukraine, the Academy has been institutionalized to its subaltern status of serving politicians rather than providing them with competent expertise. Article 31 of the Law “On Status of the People’s Deputy of Ukraine” states that “the people’s deputy shall be provided with conditions to improve his/her professional level, namely: professional development, training in educational institutions, including master’s and postgraduate programs ... at the expense of budgetary funds to ensure the activities of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine”. In 1995–2014, an even more odious provision was in force: “The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine shall provide the former deputy for the period of his/her employment with the salary received by the people’s deputy of Ukraine, but not more than one year, and in the case of training or requalification – for up to two years”. The point is that covering the costs of obtaining an academic degree at the expense of the state automatically puts deputies in a privileged position in Ukraine. It is equally important to consolidate the inverted model of relations between the Academy and the authorities, and it has no any relation with the academia lost prestige for public administration officials in many other societies: (1) state structures *a priori* do not seek to recruit experts from the academic community who could contribute to the formation of a “professional and independent administration”; (2) professional expertise represents the “scientific” justification for the (voluntaristic) decisions of political leadership; (3) from officials’ point of view, there is no difference between the “normal” work of legitimate scholars and its final results in the form of competent expertise and the mainly performative obtainment of the academic degrees.

Thirdly, unlike the Western Academy outraged by the fake degrees and trying to fight their “staggering trade” (Clifton, Chapman, and Simon 2018), we see rather an acceptance stage in Ukraine. Oksen Lisoviy, the Minister of Education and Science, noted perplexedly in his recent interview: “Today ... many people ... want to get an academic degree despite the fact that they have nothing to do with science and research” (Кречетова 2024). Being the top official, whose competence also includes control over the process of academic certification, he further admits: “I know that a number of people still turn to dissertation factories where they have their

dissertations written, which they have not even heard of” (Кречетова 2024). It is difficult to disagree with the main conclusion that “the problem lies not in the legal, but in the cultural plane,” with the only clarification that the cultural here is political. Of course, the very fact of plagiarism discovered and recognized in Oksen Lisoviy’s PhD thesis adds to the surrealism of the situation when a top official lacks the ability to oppose the practice of obtaining “illegitimate” academic degrees.

Finally, the process of obtaining an academic degree in Ukraine for applicants from outside the Academy initially presupposed the occupation of a certain administrative position as a necessary condition. They played and continue to play a decisive role in revealing the scientific interests and the transformation of the ordinary officials (according to their diplomas) into encyclopedically educated titans of the Renaissance. Their occupation made it unimportant that the “new wave” of scientists lacked any special training. Only in this case, the former governor of the Odessa region Ihor Palytsia who graduated from Lesya Ukrainka Volyn State University in 1994 majoring in “History and Law” could become a candidate (PhD) of engineering sciences in 2002 without getting any additional degrees or certificates. His thesis titled “Development of an organizational project for the transformation of the oil product supply industry in market conditions” has an obvious connection with the place of his work three years before his defense: the chairman of the board of OJSC “Naftokhimik Prykarpattya”, one of the oldest oil refineries in Ukraine. However, the position often simply affects the acquirement of an academic degree, without any connection to his higher education and functional responsibilities. Thus, Petro Sloboda worked in the State Fiscal Service of Ukraine getting the position of the deputy head at the customs post “Uhryniv” (Lviv Customs), and a year after that he defended his thesis titled “Agrochemical evaluation of Jerusalem artichoke fertilizer systems in the gray forest soil of the Ukrainian Western Forest-Steppe”.

These random cases are not a rhetorical strategy of exemplification, which “almost inevitably results in reducing to the realm of ordinary knowledge those scientific constructs which had been painstakingly wrested from it” (Bourdieu 1988, pp. 1–2). Their aim is to “objectify objectification” by public act of self-knowledge and at the same time demonstrate to an audience unfamiliar with post-Soviet realities that a great number of patterns of obtaining an academic degree in Ukraine contradict existing theories of how the Academy works (or should work). At the same time, they fit well with the characteristics of neopatrimonialism, therefore, my point of departure is the following: it is necessary to distinguish between two interrelated phenomena – neopatrimonial science and consumption of academic certificates. In the following parts of this paper, I will try to substantiate this statement.

## 2 Research Hypotheses

One of the works (Осин 2014) defines “neopatrimonial science” as a system of meaningful and performative interactions of academics with businessmen and officials determined by neopatrimonial political regime. It includes the special selection of [leading] actors who possess a special type of [practical] motivation derived from the patrimonial character of their position. This creates the potential for accumulating academic capital by means of getting control over administering it. Consequently, the stress is placed not on preparation and competence, but on belonging to the most successful political and/or business regional elite. It should be noted that neopatrimonial science is not identical to Ukrainian (social) science, and neopatrimonial political science is not equal to all political science in Ukraine.

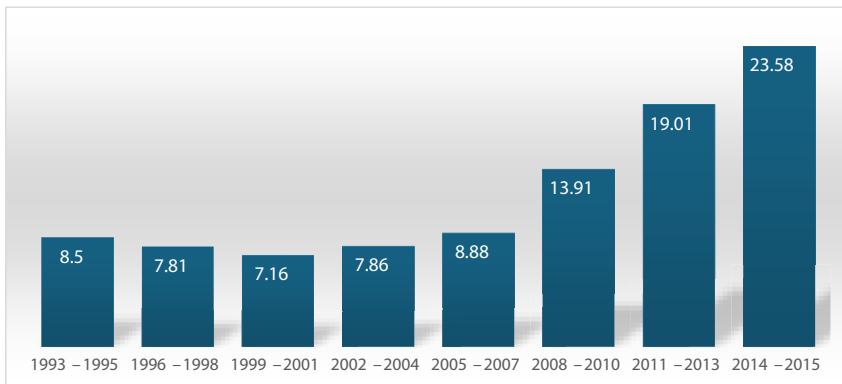
The most obvious feature of neopatrimonialism is “private appropriation of a governmental sphere by those who hold political power, and also the indivisibility of the public and private spheres of society ... the ruling groups regard society as their own private domain, and the fulfillment of public functions as a legitimate means to their own personal enrichment.” (Fisun 2012, p. 90). It assumes an unclear division into the public and private spheres, when “private appropriation by the ruling elite of the public realm” (Fisun 2012, p. 91) presupposes the consideration of almost all social and political institutions as their own fiefdom, the nature of operations with which is not limited by agreements or arrangements. A certain rank in the power hierarchy opens access to several subordinate institutions, including higher education, the control over which is equal to their ownership. To be an official under neopatrimonialism is, in essence, to privatize many “public functions and institutions”, the exact number and completeness of control over which is determined by the rank of the position.

My first **hypothesis** is that the main feature of neopatrimonial science is *the formation of academic capital using the administrative means of managing the latter*. Hence, I suggest that, in neopatrimonial science, success is associated with control over positions that allow one to obtain academic degrees bypassing requirements such as conducting empirical research and developing innovative ideas. Since neopatrimonialism implies a priority for the political sphere, I can predict a lower percentage of theses defended by business representatives and a higher percentage of those defended by politicians. Within the latter I expect to find a bias in favor of representatives of the executive branch, which is consistent with the leading role of the executive branch in general under neopatrimonialism (Eisenstadt 1978) and throughout almost all Ukrainian history (Fisun 2012; Зоткин 2010).

I consider that the actors of neopatrimonial science, as well as most applicants from outside the Academy discussed in the final part of this paper, purchase their

academic degrees rather than conduct independent research. This is partly verified by journalistic investigations about Ukrainian “dissertation mills”, interviews I conducted (and have not yet published) with members of three special committees for the defense of political science dissertations, and the patterns of obtaining the academic degrees by officials, which exclude writing dissertations by their own. However, it is still necessary to conduct a lot of research on creation and satisfaction of demand for the academic degrees in Ukraine.

The second hypothesis is that *neopatrimonial science, political regime, and credentialism have generated consumption of academic degrees in Ukraine*. The influence of credentialism on mass acquirement of the academic degrees is due to the high level of prestige of science and scholars in Ukraine. For instance, in the mid-2000s, “more than 70 % of Ukrainians were ready to approve the choice of their relatives if they decided to become a scientist” (Мартьнюк and Соболева 2006, p. 140), and this situation was up to 2014 when “the share of those who would support a decision of their relatives to become a scientist dropped from 71 % in 2014 to 55 % in 2017” (Petrushyna 2017, p. 396). At the same time, “citizens rank of this profession is ... high. In a list of 31 different occupations, ‘scientist’ as a profession was ranked fifth (the same went for a lawyer)” (Petrushyna 2017, pp. 384–385). Such attractiveness of science implies interest to academic degrees from many social groups, which leads to the situation when the number of academic degrees no longer correlates with processes within the Academy, primarily with the growth in the number of students and professors (Kohler 1990). Figure 1 presents the ratio of an academic degree (DSc. and PhD degrees) per 1,000 undergraduates, postgraduates and doctoral degree



**Figure 1:** An academic degree per 1,000 undergraduates, postgraduates and doctoral students, 1993–2015.

students (1993–2015). I took the data on the number of students from the website of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, while the number of academic degrees was provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine upon my special request.

Since 2005, the number of academic degrees has grown faster than the number of Academy citizens. Moreover, the Ukrainian dissertation machine does not create jobs outside the Academy: the large number of PhD holders and doctors of sciences carrying out scientific research in the public sector are in scientific organizations of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 3,862 doctors out of 4,159 (92.85 %) and 10,304 PhD candidates out of 11,156 (92.36 %) (Найкова ... 2017, pp. 39, 55). In general, these data fit well into the theory of credential society with its emphasis on educational credential inflation caused by the very fact that “technological change is not the driving force in rising credential requirements” (Collins 2019, p. X).

I think that the regime-mediated interaction of neopatrimonial science and credentialism leads to consumption, that is, the hierarchically organized mass obtaining of academic degrees by applicants from outside the Academy who are not directly involved in satisfying its basic social needs. I adhere to Jean Baudrillard’s interpretation of consumption, which starts with the following principle: “You never consume the object in itself (in its use-value); you are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status” (1998, p. 61). Accordingly, on the one hand, consumption is “*a process of signification and communication, based on a code into which consumption practices fit and from which they derive their meaning,*” and, on the other, it is “*a process of classification and social differentiation in which sign/objects are ordered not now merely as significant differences in a code*” (Baudrillard 1998, pp. 60–61).

One of the advantages of the concept of consumption is that it makes it possible to realize that the sudden desire of the great number of different people to become certified scholars can neither be accidental, nor unrelated to the applicants themselves, or to the intra- and/or intergroup processes. The interpretation of consumption implies a hierarchical way of distinguishing social groups (Baudrillard 1998, pp. 62–63), where there are applicants responsible for establishing the pattern of consumption, and those who reproduce it. Consumption is influenced by the same factors that influenced the obtainment of academic degrees in neopatrimonial science: the (rank of) position and the region. Hence verifying the hypothesis about consumption selectivity means paying attention to three elements: a position (or place of work), its rank, and a region.

### 3 Neopatrimonial Science: Accumulation (of Academic Capital) through (Administrative) Management

The purpose of this part of the paper is to trace further dynamics of the processes of obtaining the academic degrees by Ukrainian officials over the past 10 years. However, instead of distinguishing three groups of positions as in earlier works, I use a more detailed classification allowing to identify new patterns of obtaining academic degrees indicating a transition from neopatrimonial science to consumption.

The empirical basis of neopatrimonial science is the careers of the chairmen of Regional State Administrations (hereinafter – governors) and of Regional Councils (hereinafter – heads of Regional Councils) of Ukraine during 1992–2024. Governors are appointed by the President of Ukraine to exercise the executive power in every of 24 regions as well as one autonomous republic (Crimea) and two cities with special status (Kyiv and Sevastopol). The Regional Council is the local self-government body, the head of which is elected “by the Regional Council by secret voting from among its deputies” (Article 55, the Law of Ukraine “About local self-government in Ukraine”). During the mentioned period, 642 people from different regions and of different age were the governors and heads of Regional Councils, and their careers are a close interweaving of roles that are not always clearly distinguishable in Ukraine – officials, politicians, representatives of law enforcement agencies, and businessmen. Thus, only 8.1% of (former) officials received their academic degrees while getting the position of governor and/or head of the Regional Council, and the rest obtained the degree while occupying the previous or subsequent posts of a Prime Minister, a minister, a CEO of a bank, a director of city electric supply company, a prosecutor or a chief of the regional office of Office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, etc. As a result, focusing on the governors and the heads of Regional Councils allows us to identify representative patterns of interactions of academic scholars with representatives of business and power determined by the Ukrainian neopatrimonial political regime.

For this paper, I have examined the career patterns of 642 former and current governors and/or heads of Regional Councils during 1992–2024, of whom 269 obtained 354 academic degrees (41.9% of the total number of officials). However, I have removed 65 academic degrees from most calculations as they were obtained before 1991 (15.95% of the total number of academic degrees) or because of the lack of reliable data (3.11% of the total number of academic degrees). In addition, 44 degrees were obtained in the educational system, usually before holding any significant job positions, and 2 degrees were obtained by those who did not have a permanent job at

the time of thesis defense. As a result, in most calculations, I have considered 243 cases of academic degrees obtained by 202 individuals.

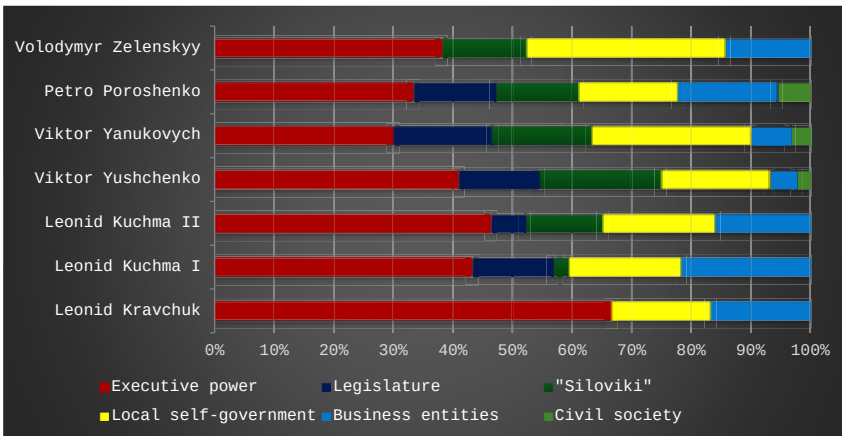
Academic degrees in Ukraine differ from those awarded in most European countries. Before the latest reforms dealing with the introduction of bachelor, master, and PhD degrees, there were two degrees in Ukraine: (1) candidate of sciences, usually obtained after 3 years of postgraduate study (*aspirantura*) with the defense of a candidate (PhD) thesis, and (2) Doctor of Science (DSc), which took much longer to obtain. In practice, the majority of those who got a candidate degree did not proceed with writing a doctoral dissertation for several reasons, but obtaining a candidate degree after finishing postgraduate studies was considered something mandatory, so most of the social scientists in Ukraine in state universities have candidate (PhD) degrees. The prestige of academic degrees depends on the time and effort required to obtain them, the opportunities to achieve higher positions in the academic hierarchy, and the history behind them. The DSc degree is often perceived as the (only) full-fledged academic degree, dating back to times of close integration with Western educational systems, and the candidate degree is a relic of the USSR (Юркова 2010). It was introduced in 1934 to overcome the shortage of teaching staff, when, for example, none of the graduates of the then elite Institute of Red Professors of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) “wrote any scientific work, and, therefore, there was no way to get even an associate professorship, let alone a professorship” (Стрижак 2007, p. 316). Thus, it was decided to introduce a simplified thesis and the candidate degree. Subsequently, the candidate degree became traditional in the Soviet system of higher education and a few post-Soviet countries. In this paper, I do not differentiate between candidate and DSc degrees, but majority of the statistics relate to “candidate” science as the main interactive platform for interaction between power/ regime and science.

I have taken the information about academic degrees and their acquirement from open sources, such as the websites of regional state administrations and regional councils, the websites of departments where officials worked. I also used various personal websites, news agencies, websites of different universities (for example, the Center for Slavic Studies of Hokkaido University and their project “Political Elite of Ukrainian Regions”), such Internet portals as “Politrada” (<http://politrada.com/regions>), “Official Ukraine today” (<http://dovidka.com.ua>) and others. The data was cross-checked with the database of thesis abstracts provided by The Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine.

Further, I have identified 7 groups of positions reflecting different degrees of involvement in political, economic, and other significant spheres. These are the “executive” (Prime Minister, ministers, governors, etc.), “legislative” (people’s deputies, heads of the Verkhovna Rada, of its committees and commissions), and “judicial” (judges of various courts) branches of power, “local self-government”

(heads and/or deputies of District, City and Regional Councils ... ), “siloviki” or “law enforcement” (Security Service of Ukraine, Main Directorate of Intelligence, Armed Forces of Ukraine, State Emergency Service of Ukraine, Ministry of Internal Affairs, etc.), “civil society” (non-governmental organizations, community organizations, labor unions, mass media), and “business entities” (representatives of small, medium and large businesses).

Figure 2 represents the results of the distribution of 243 cases of academic degrees obtained by former or current officials in six groups of positions (none of “judiciary representatives” were governors and/or heads of the Regional Council during the mentioned period). Reference to the Presidents of Ukraine (“Leonid Kravchuk”, “Leonid Kuchma I”, “Leonid Kuchma II”, etc.) means the relevant period when these academic degrees were obtained. Periodization is based on the (not always equal) terms of office of presidents, rather than on the allocation of equal periods or their linking to Ministers of Education responsible for establishing the “rules of the game” for acquiring academic degrees, determined by the neo-patrimonialism. The latter is a hierarchy of various patronages regulated by the President, due to which the renewal of the neo-patrimonial bureaucracy, including governors and/or heads of Regional Councils and, as a consequence, the acquirement of academic degrees by its (new) members depends primarily on the change of Presidents (or the relevant patron-client networks) rather than on the figure of the Minister of Education or some natural course of time. Figure 2 shows that the academic degrees were most often received by representatives of executive power (40.74 %) and half as often by representatives of local self-government (20.58 %). The



**Figure 2:** Academic degrees and workplaces of the governors and the heads of Regional Councils, 1992–2024.

number of representatives of business entities (13.58 %) and “siloviki” (13.17 %) is almost equal, while that of the legislative branch (10.29 %) and, especially, civil society (1.65 %) is very small.

In general, these data correspond to the hypothesis of different importance of the political and economic spheres while obtaining the academic degree and the internal differentiation of the former according to the logic of neopatrimonialism. Thus, success in neopatrimonial science is associated, mainly, with control over executive and elected positions as they will allow someone to obtain an academic degree without conducting the original research systematically, which is the basis for the formation of intellectual identity. At the same time, executive positions have greater potential than elected or business ones, or even those in law enforcement agencies. In other words, representatives of the executive branch have more favorable opportunities to establish control over the administrative means of accumulating academic capital in Ukrainian science. The existing disproportion between the number of academic degrees by governors and the heads of Regional Councils reflects their relative importance in Ukrainian politics.

The process of obtaining the academic degree in Ukraine largely depends on the Presidents, and the starting point in all senses is Leonid Kravchuk (serving from December 5, 1991, until July 19, 1994), under whom 2.47 % officials of the total number of cases obtained the academic degrees. There was a significant growth during the first (July 19, 1994–November 30, 1999) and especially the second term (November 30, 1999–January 23, 2005) of Leonid Kuchma – 15.23 % and 28.4 % respectively. Under Viktor Yushchenko (January 23, 2005–February 25, 2010) there was a slight decline (13.99 %), which continued during the presidency of the odious and corrupt Viktor Yanukovich (February 25, 2010–February 22, 2014) – 12.36 %. The presidency of Petro Poroshenko (June 07, 2014–May 20, 2019) is notable for the small increase in the number of top officials with academic degrees (14.82 %), while under the incumbent President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, there is a serious decrease of those (8.63 %) who obtained them due to their official positions.

The correlation between the President and the obtainment of the academic degrees can be explained by using the idea of Henry E. Hale (2014, p. 87): “[P]atrimonial presidential systems, so long as they include contested national elections, tend to produce regime cycles”. It means back-and-forth changes at the level of institutions (“strong authoritarian features ... emerges, then appear to be democratizing ... , then revert to more authoritarian features ... and so on and so on”) (Hale 2014, p. 88), which do not affect the structures of personal networks and therefore do not change the regime itself fundamentally. I consider that the relative stability of the political elite, which was formed under Kuchma and largely satisfied its academic claims during his presidency, turns into a relative decline in the rate of obtaining the academic degrees under Yushchenko, Yanukovich, and even Poroshenko (it should

be kept in mind that his presidency was marked by the loss of Crimea and Donbas – the latter regularly provided a huge number of defenses of top officials), while maintaining the neopatrimonial nature of the regime.

At the same time, the obvious decline in “power” thesis defenses during Zelenskyy’s presidency requires a separate study that is beyond the scope of this paper. As a preliminary hypothesis, I will assume that it is not about a fundamental change in the Ukrainian political regime, but about the cumulative influence of the internal and external factors (Covid-19 and the war among them). These challenges largely contributed to both the slowdown in the process of obtaining the academic degrees in the Ukrainian higher education system (not only for officials) and the more frequent turnover of the power team members in comparison with the previous Presidents. Thus, Table 1 shows that there is the largest number of governors and heads of Regional Councils under Zelenskyy since the independence of Ukraine. And it is even though starting from Russian invasion, there is almost no elections to Regional Councils and, accordingly, there is no new heads. The combination of these factors in practice meant that potential “scientists” from outside the Academy did not have the opportunity or time to organize their own certification processes. At the same time, the duration of term is an important predictor of academic degree acquirement: the longer an official is in office, the more successful he/she is in extracting prebendal income (i.e., income derived from a certain position) from it, including the academic degrees (Осін 2014).

I do not present new data about the regional dimension of neopatrimonial science since they confirm earlier conclusions: the least “strong” (primarily in terms of intertwining business and politics) regions of Ukraine are characterized by the greatest number of thesis defenses. Thus, neopatrimonial science is largely structured by the forces determining the political development of the country: general dominance of the center (as a resource manager) and the ranking of regions depending on their political and economic power.

## **4 From Neopatrimonial Science and Credential Society to Consumption in Political Science**

The empirical basis of neopatrimonial science (governors and heads of Regional Councils, ministers and prime ministers, bankers, and top managers) made it possible to trace the influence of the political regime on academic certification. It is also the reason for doubts about the real scale of obtaining academic degrees by male and female applicants from outside the Academy: is this a “narrow niche” practice, the actors of which are relatively few top officials, or are we talking about larger-



scale processes of obtaining academic degrees, where the heterogeneous groups of actors cover almost all academic fields?

Indirect data allow us to make a choice in favor of the second hypothesis. Based on the possible productivity of the 46 firms offering to write a dissertation for money in 2016, Ararat Osipyan (2017) determines the approximate number of “illegitimate” theses to be between one fourth and one third of all defended ones. Even such conservative estimates give shocking figures: according to State Statistics Committee of Ukraine during 2013–2015 there were more than 22,000 candidate (PhD) theses defended, which turn out to be at least 5,500 candidate degrees obtained *mostly* by applicants from outside the Academy and bypassing the existing rules. It is easy to understand that there is just not so many top officials in Ukraine, and therefore obtaining the academic degrees in that way has already covered other social groups.

In this part of the paper, I will try to identify patterns of obtaining academic degrees by applicants from outside the Academy using the examples of theses in political science defended during 1999–2022. The choice of political science in this case is mostly determined by belonging to this sphere and personal responsibility for the situation in the discipline. The lower temporal limit is based on 1999 being the first year when the announcements about the forthcoming defenses started including the applicant’s place of work. The upper temporal limit is because after Russian invasion of Ukraine, the theses defenses in political science practically stopped. As a result, 1,735 candidate (PhD) theses were considered, among which 428 degrees (24.66 %) were received by the applicants from outside the Academy.

The first step is to find out whether the process of obtaining the academic degrees is equal for applicants from the Academy and from outside of it, or whether its intensity varies from group to group. In the first case, we will talk about obtaining the academic degrees being determined by a common factor, while in the second case we can talk about special logics of the process, which are different in the Academy and outside of it. Therefore, I have calculated the growth rates for two selected groups of applicants. The chain method was applied, where one period is compared with the previous one. Table 2 shows the data on candidate (PhD) theses in political science defended in Ukraine during 1999–2022 by male and female (it should be noted that even if gender identity can be non-binary, official data allows only this simplified version).

In general, the growth rate of applicants from outside the Academy is 6–7 times higher than the growth rate of applicants from the Academy, even though for the latter it is negative during the specified period. In other words, the growth rate of higher education system representatives shows negative dynamics, which allows us to speak about the “normal” and predictable dependence of the faculty reproduction processes in Ukrainian universities on external factors, starting from demographic factors (in particular, the constantly decreasing number of school graduates) or

**Table 2:** Growth rates of candidate (PhD) theses in political science defended in Ukraine (1999–2022), %.

Years	Gender	Candidate (PhD) degree		
		From the Academy	Outside the Academy	Total
1999–2001	M			
	F			
2002–2004	M	17.50	64.29	29.63
	F	77.14	800.00	97.22
2005–2007	M	110.64	86.96	102.86
	F	50.00	88.89	54.93
2008–2010	M	–7.07	34.88	5.63
	F	63.44	158.82	78.18
2011–2013	M	–9.78	24.14	3.33
	F	–3.95	20.45	1.53
2014–2016	M	–19.28	–9.72	–14.84
	F	–15.07	–15.09	–15.08
2017–2019	M	–29.85	–47.69	–38.64
	F	–51.61	11.11	–34.91
2020–2022	M	–76.60	–67.65	–72.84
	F	–76.67	–58.00	–68.18
1999–2022	M	–2.06	12.17	2.16
	F	6.18	143.74	16.24

political situation in the country (e.g., different demand for the political scientists depending on regime cycles) and ending with the level of prestige and payment. Applicants from outside the Academy show independence from all relevant factors governing the scale of the dissertation machine, which raises several questions regarding the basis and/or rationality of obtaining the academic degree. In addition, the female growth rate from outside the Academy is almost 12 times higher than the male growth rate in this group, which can be seen as a contradiction to neopatrimonialism with its emphasis on masculinity, power, and wealth. These findings generally call for a new theoretical framework, that is, consumption. Based on Jean Baudrillard's ideas, I distinguish, analytically rather than empirically, three stages through which the process of academic degree consumption takes place.

1. *The pattern establishment* is based on the crossing of (symbolic) boundaries being previously relatively closed to power and commodity-money relations. This stage is directly related to the activities of the neopatrimonial science actors (prime ministers, ministers, deputies, etc.) up to early 2000s. The significance of the actors of neopatrimonial science is that their status allows to (finally) break down the boundaries between power and science, and, as a result, they lay the

foundation for the consumption pattern showing *the very possibility* of consuming an academic degree and turning it into one of the symbols of their status.

2. *Commodification* is the transformation of an academic degree into goods, so that all stages of its obtaining get the monetary value. Its significance goes beyond the mere fact of paying for an academic degree; it is rather a matter of making the applicants' money visible at every stage, thus keeping the dissertation machine running at an acceptable (for reproduction) level. The money of hundreds of neopatrimonial science actors was not enough, while the arrival of (tens of) thousands of new applicants finally transformed the academic degree from a symbolic award in a very narrow field into goods available to all members/consumers of society.
3. *The pattern reproduction* is the involvement of new social group members as well as less ranked members who have already begun to obtain degrees into the process of consumption.

Thus, relatively few actors of neopatrimonial science, closely associated with the political sphere ("core" of consumption), are apparently responsible for establishing the pattern, while reproduction is ensured by a wider range of social groups. As such, the pattern reproduction should reflect both the above-mentioned specific features of the political regime and less specific social impulses. Among the latter, I would include the gendered nature of the pattern reproduction due to the obvious patriarchy of Ukrainian society. Therefore, the growth in consumption should be accompanied by an intensive increase in the number of female applicants, especially in the lower ranks, as well as by a greater concentration of applicants in higher and middle ranks. As for the influence of the political regime, it is shown in the structuring of consumption. Thus, the "core" sends a signal about the ongoing privatization of the institution of higher education and the possibility of obtaining an academic degree without full involvement into the "normal" life of the Academy. I consider that the least ranked members of the primary group that carries out the obtaining of academic degrees ("core") are the most susceptible. Members of other groups assimilate this signal with a certain delay and largely since the primary group acts as a reference group for other social groups. Accordingly, it can be assumed, firstly, that the farther a particular group is distant from the power, the later the consumption will be observed within its framework. Secondly, the signal assimilation and, as a consequence, commodification with pattern reproduction proceeds from top to bottom, so the lower ranks will consume academic degrees later than higher (and/or middle) ones.

Verifying the hypothesis about consumption means to measure a position (or place of work) of applicant, its rank, and a region. To identify the first element I have

used the above classification of positions into seven groups. Two other significant elements are the rank in the (power) hierarchy and the division of “applicants” by regions. I have identified three ranks (high, middle and low), which is easier to do for power structures with their established system of ranks and more difficult to implement for other groups, where the following principle was adopted: the head of any institution or company and his/her deputies are considered as the high rank, the heads of various departments and their deputies belong the middle rank, and ordinary employees are the low rank. As for the regional dimension, I limited myself to contrasting the center (Kyiv) with the periphery (all other regions). The establishment of the pattern and its reproduction can be traced through imbalance in obtaining academic degrees by male and female applicants of different positions, ranks and regions.

Table 3 is based on 428 candidate (PhD) theses in political science, and it shows the dependence of consumption on region, rank, gender, and position of the applicants. I am aware that political science is likely to be more popular among the representatives of executive power and civil society, while the others may be more inclined towards academic degrees in economics or law. I suggest that in this case identifying expected patterns of consumption can be considered a strong argument for ubiquitous nature of degree consumption.

According to the hypothesis about the selective nature of the academic degree consumption, the first two stages imply a great number of the applicants from the “political” sphere, especially of the high rank (in the center and/or periphery). At the same time, the third stage is revealed when the dominant trends are: (a) large-scale defenses of the applicants outside the “political sphere”; (b) gender-marked obtaining the academic degrees by middle and especially low ranked applicants; (c) the predominance of thesis defenses rather in the periphery than in the center. Table 3 shows the validity of these expectations.

In 1999–2022, low-ranked representatives dominated (32.08 % from the center and 21.79 % from the periphery), followed by middle-ranked applicants (19.92 % from the center and 13.82 % from the periphery), and then high-ranked ones (7.28 % from the center and 5.62 % from the periphery). These figures are consistent with the hypothesis of hierarchical consumption, according to which the pattern reproduction implies involvement of the low-ranked applicants into this process. The same can be argued about gender: it was assumed that as more and more people become involved in consumption, the proportion of low-ranked women will increase. During 1999–2022, women make up slightly less than one third of the total number of applicants in political science from outside the Academy (32.77 %), but their number gradually increases from the high ranked to the middle- and then low-ranked ones, both in the center (0.94 %, 6.8 % and 12.39 %, respectively) and in the periphery (0.7 %, 2.34 % and 9.6 %, respectively).

**Table 3:** Region, rank, and position of the applicants of candidate (PhD) degree in political science from outside the Academy (1999–2022), %.

	Presidency												Total			
	Leonid Kuchma-II		Viktor Yushchenko		Viktor Yanukovich		Petro Poroshenko		Volodymyr Zelensky							
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F						
Judiciary																
	Center – high rank															0.7
	Center – middle rank			0.47	0.23											
	Center – low rank															
	Periphery – high rank															
	Periphery – middle rank			0.23												0.47
	Periphery – low rank			0.7	0.23											1.17
Total																0.23
Legislature																
	Center – high rank															
	Center – middle rank	0.23	0.23	0.23				0.23								0.23
	Center – low rank															
	Periphery – high rank	0.7		0.47	0.47	0.23		0.23								0.94
	Periphery – middle rank															
	Periphery – low rank															0.47
Total																0.23
Executive power																
	Center – high rank	0.94	0.23	0.7	0.47	1.4	0.23	1.17								5.62
	Center – middle rank	0.23		0.23				0.23								0.7
	Center – low rank	0.47		1.17	0.23	0.7	0.7	0.47								4.68
	Periphery – high rank	2.34	0.94	1.64	2.1	2.34	1.4	0.7								13.33
	Periphery – middle rank	0.47	0.23	0.94		0.7	0.47	0.7								3.75
	Periphery – low rank			0.23		0.23	0.23	0.23								1.17
Total																0.23
“Sloviki”																
	Center – high rank															
	Center – middle rank	0.47		0.23		0.47	0.47	1.17	0.47	0.23						3.04
	Center – low rank	0.47		1.17	1.17	3.97	2.8	1.87	0.47	2.34	1.4					3.75

Table 3: (continued)

Presidency	Leonid Kuchma-II		Viktor Yushchenko		Viktor Yanukovych		Petro Poroshenko		Volodymyr Zelenskyy		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Periphery – high rank					0.7		0.23		0.23		1.17
Periphery – middle rank			0.94		1.17	0.23	1.64	0.7	0.7	0.47	5.85
Periphery – low rank			2.34		3.74	0.23	3.51	1.4	1.17	0.7	14.04
Center – high rank	0.47		0.94		0.7		0.7				2.82
Center – middle rank	0.47		0.7	0.47	0.47	0.23	0.47	0.7			3.51
Center – low rank	0.7		0.47	0.7	0.47	0.94	0.94	1.17	0.23	0.47	6.1
Periphery – high rank				0.23	0.47		0.23			0.23	1.17
Periphery – middle rank				0.23	0.94		0.47	0.23			1.88
Periphery – low rank			0.23	0.7	0.23	0.7	0.47	1.17	0.47		3.98
Total	1.64		2.34	2.34	3.28	1.87	3.28	3.28	0.7	0.7	19.43
Local self-government			0.23				0.23				0.47
Center – high rank					0.23						0.23
Center – middle rank											0.23
Center – low rank			0.23								0.47
Periphery – high rank											
Periphery – middle rank			1.17		0.7	0.23	0.23		0.23	0.23	2.82
Periphery – low rank			1.64	0.47	0.23	0.94	0.47			0.23	1.88
Total			1.64	0.47	1.4	1.17	0.47		0.23	0.47	5.85
Business entities	0.47		0.47	0.47	0.47	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23		2.82
Center – high rank	0.23		0.94	0.94	1.4	0.94	0.47	0.94		0.23	6.1
Center – middle rank			0.47	0.7	0.7	1.4	0.47	0.47		0.47	4.68
Center – low rank			1.17		1.64	0.23	0.7	0.23		0.23	4.45
Periphery – high rank			0.47		1.17	0.23	0.94	0.7	0.23	0.23	4.2
Periphery – middle rank		0.23		0.7	1.17	1.17	1.64	2.1	0.47	0.94	8.43
Periphery – low rank		0.23	3.52	2.82	6.55	4.2	4.45	4.67	0.93	2.1	30.64

Looking at intragroup patterns of obtaining the academic degrees, we can find evidence in favor of the hypothesis of hierarchical consumption. Thus, during the second term of Kuchma and the presidency of Yushchenko, most applicants from outside the Academy were the representatives of the executive power (4.68 % and 6.54 %, respectively). The dominant position of Kyiv as well as predominance of the low ranks remained not only during the mentioned periods but also during 1999–2022. It meets the expectations, as the consumption pattern was established during the 1990s by actors of neopatrimonial science, and firstly, by the representatives of the executive power. The constant increase in the number of female applicants (in absolute and relative indicators) up to their absolute dominance during Zelensky's presidency also confirms the hypothesis predicting a greater concentration of low-ranked women.

Similar consumption patterns are demonstrated by the “siloviki”: primarily, we are talking about the predominance of low ranks during 1999–2022. At the same time, the center dominates during the second term of Kuchma and the presidency of Yushchenko, but after that, the periphery got ahead. Similar dynamics can be observed regarding the gender dimension, except that the feminization in this group began later – during the presidency of Yanukovych – which did not prevent dominance (as in the case of the executive power) of female applicants during the Zelensky's term.

It was also expected that academic degree consumption initiated by the actors of neopatrimonial science should ultimately lead to pattern reproduction not only within government institutions, but also outside the latter, drawing other social groups into this process. Indeed, during Yushchenko's presidency, there was a rise in the number of applicants from business entities and civil society, and since Yanukovych's term, they have been pushing the power structures further and further away from them. Business entities and civil society demonstrate the patterns of obtaining the academic degrees which are quite different from the similar patterns of the executive power and “siloviki”. Specifically, in business, the center dominated during Yushchenko's presidency, but the periphery went to the top during the other periods (excluding the second term of Kuchma, when there was complete parity between the center and the periphery). Regarding the hierarchy, the high-ranked representatives of business entities reached their best position during the second term of Kuchma; although, under Yushchenko, middle-ranked applicants began to predominate, and starting from Yanukovych's presidency, the low-ranked ones went ahead. Finally, in civil society group applicants from the center prevailed during the whole time up to Zelensky's term, when parity with the periphery was established. A clear difference is initial dominance of the low ranks in parallel to weakening of the high ranks and strengthening of the middle ones.

In the final part, it is worth focusing on the economic basis of consumption. Obviously, the (genuine) actors of neopatrimonial science operate under different structural constraints than other groups involved in the consumption process. One of the most important constraints is purchasing power, which can be determined by using a few indirect indicators of the economic situation in the country. You can endlessly show an example of consumption of any product, but if a significant number of people do not have the money to buy it, then this product will remain a luxury item and a sign of a certain lifestyle, but in no way a consumer item.

Accordingly, I assume that consumption of academic degrees by the high-ranked applicants (both in the center and in the periphery) is less related to economically favorable conditions, but it is more related to them where the middle and low-ranked applicants are concerned. To verify this hypothesis, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated, demonstrating a proportional relationship between the two variables: the number of defenses by certain ranks in Kyiv and the regions and the number of economic indicators, such as nominal average wages, inflation, and nominal GDP (Table 4). The statistical package IBM SPSS Statistics (version 28.01.1.1.1) was used.

In general, the hypothesis about the relationship between consumption, the economic situation in the country, and the ranks of applicants was confirmed. The three variables have the least influence on the number of high-ranked applicants' defenses and the greatest influence on the number of middle and the low-ranked ones. Inflation is not as strongly related to the processes of obtaining the academic degree as the nominal average wage or GDP. In addition, the differences between the

**Table 4:** The Pearson correlation coefficient (number of defenses, rank, regions, gender, and economic indicators).

Region – rank	Gender	Inflation	Nominal average wages	Nominal GDP
Center – high rank	M	–0.03	0.72	0.72
	F	0.31	0.94	0.94
Center – middle rank	M	0.44	0.97	0.97
	F	0.50	0.99	0.99
Center – low rank	M	0.48	0.99	0.99
	F	0.46	0.99	0.99
Periphery – high rank	M	0.00	0.77	0.77
	F	0.03	0.77	0.77
Periphery – middle rank	M	0.39	0.98	0.98
	F	0.38	0.98	0.98
Periphery – low rank	M	0.06	0.82	0.81
	F	0.42	0.98	0.98

ranks in the center and periphery within the variables are minimal. Finally, the defenses of female applicants, as a rule, are more determined by economic factors than of male applicants, especially in the case of the high ranks in the center.

## 5 Conclusions

This paper explored the transformation of the practices of obtaining academic degrees in Ukraine by applicants from outside the Academy. My hypothesis was that neopatrimonial science, political regime, and credentialism have generated consumption of academic degrees in Ukraine. Neopatrimonial science and consumption both have common features due to influence of the political regime and the actors' behavior in the space of the symbolic economy. Firstly, they are hierarchical and involve the introduction of a pattern by higher social groups; secondly, they are not egalitarian, since the obtainment of academic degrees is evidence of power, status, or authority. The differences between them lie primarily in the number and nature of the social groups involved. Consumption is oriented towards the mass reproduction of a pattern by the maximum possible number of professional groups making the whole society an arena of exchange, communication, and differentiation.

Consumption of academic degrees is a socially and politically selective process, where the initial pattern is established by the reference groups of top officials. Within the neopatrimonial science, the obtainment of academic degree is considered a manifestation of inter- and intra-elite competition at the regional and/or central levels. Accordingly, the processes of status differentiation are limited to the groups close to power, which are distinguished by their ability to control the administrative means of accumulating academic capital and thereby extracting prebendal income. This pattern is subsequently copied and reproduced by lower ranks. Despite the significant symbolic component of obtaining the academic degree, pattern reproduction is related to (economically) favorable conditions contributing to the transfer of academic regalia from the category of luxury goods to objects of consumption. This process itself has its own specific features for different groups of applicants from outside the Academy, where the significant factors are the applicant's position and its rank, the regional structure of the political regime, and gender.

I will also note two issues that are important for further understanding of the problems studied in the paper. Firstly, contrary to the opinion of many scholars, I am not inclined to view relationship between applicants outside and inside Academy on a dichotomous normative scale, where some are assigned an exclusively positive role as the providers of genuine scientific knowledge, while the other serves as the embodiment of everything deviant in science. In fact, the boundaries between these two phenomena are permeable and fluid, and the true nature of their sophisticated

relationship requires special study. An obvious direction for future research is to develop the idea that selfishness and self-interest usually lead to the formation of a socially useful system. In other words, it is necessary to trace the influence of neopatrimonial science and the academic degrees consumption on the financial stability of the (social) sciences in Ukraine, their prestige and legitimacy.

The second problem – the motivation of applicants from outside the Academy to acquire academic degrees as they are not taken seriously in the (political) science community. I believe that the actors of neopatrimonial science are motivated by drives which cannot be reduced to the traditional ones, such as the desire to earn money or a backup job. Academic degrees are a type of prestigious thing indicating not wealth, but “power” in clan struggle. Their distribution among Ukrainian officials is an indicator of the power of a certain patron-client networks and at the same times a reward from the group, because the most successful patron is the one who can reward the maximum number of followers. The dependence of an official’s career on the patron’s benevolence contributes to recruitment of risk-seekers who can achieve the smallest advantages in the status struggle, greedy for prestigious things and aggressively pursuing them, because neopatrimonial politics can cut off access to these opportunities at any moment. Thus, the regime sets a frame in which not taking advantage of one’s chances is the grounds for negative stigmatization and exclusion from the group. Actions to immediately capitalize on official powers are an unconditional reflex, even if they are irrational as in the case of obtaining academic degrees. They are irrational from the point of view of the scholars and the rest of society but more than understandable and justified in the eyes of the true target audience of neopatrimonial science actors – a group of their own kind. However, if for adherents of neopatrimonial science obtaining academic degree is a struggle for status, the drives pushing representatives of other social groups to consume degrees are not quite clear. It is possible that for some of them (for example, representatives of “civil society”) obtaining an academic degree is a more rational act, whimsically but still associated with some hypothetical benefit in their work. Revealing the relevant drives and their detailed differentiation should be the subject of the future research that can contribute to theoretical discussions about the links between the political regime, scholars, and society.

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