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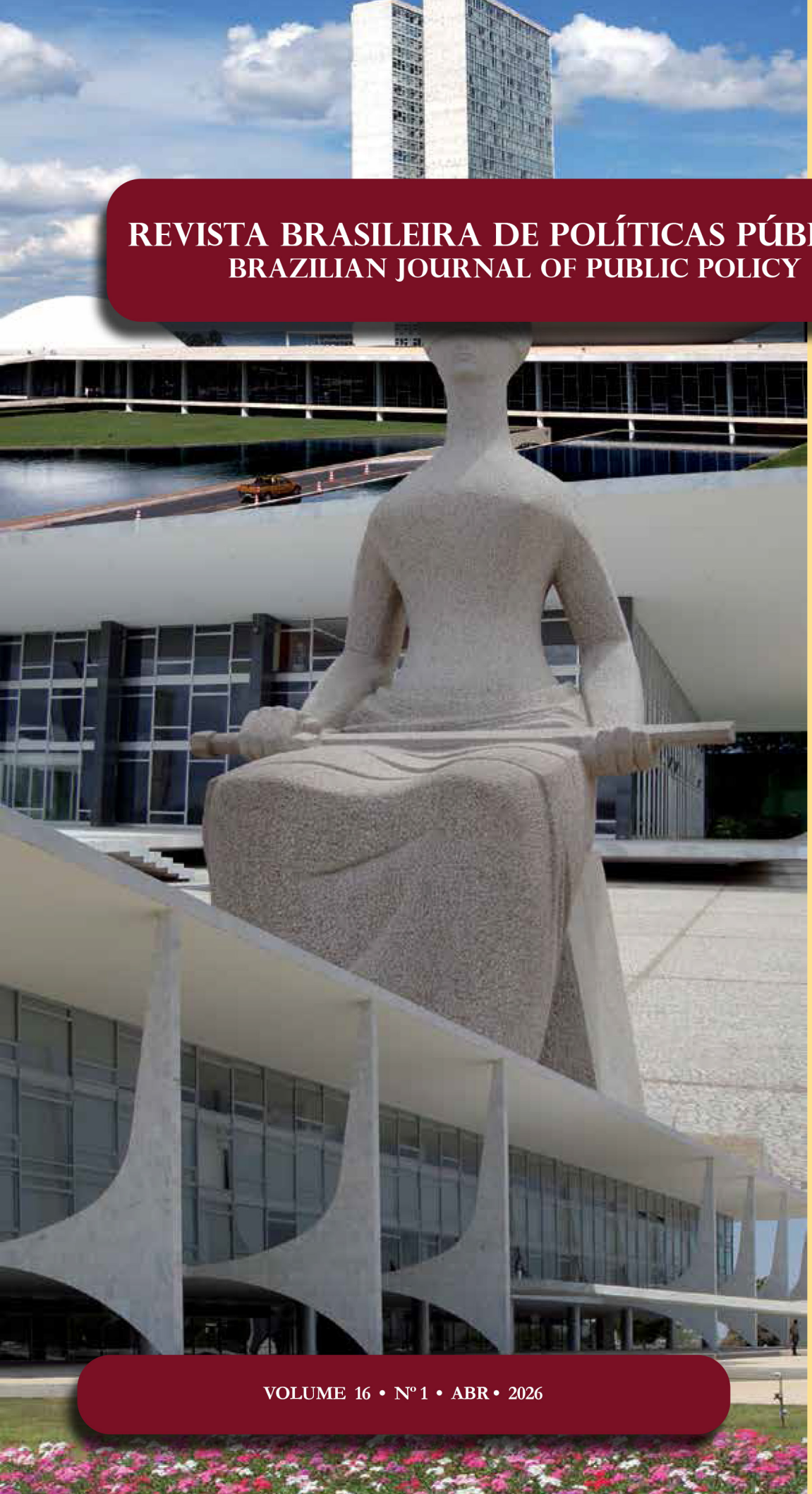

Resilient Democracy in Crisis: Evidence from Participatory Budgeting during Martial Law in Ukraine

Democracia Resiliente em Tempos de Crise: Evidências do Orçamento Participativo sob a Lei Marcial na Ucrânia

Oleh Brovko

Ramon Blanco de Freitas

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Resilient Democracy in Crisis: Evidence from Participatory Budgeting during Martial Law in Ukraine*

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Abstract

This article analyzes the resilience and adaptation of participatory budgeting (PB) in Ukraine under martial law imposed after the Russian invasion in 2022. The purpose of the article is to understand how PB processes were transformed, sustained, and adapted during wartime conditions. The methodology employed is based on a comparative case study of the Ukrainian cities of Khmelnytskyi and Kamianske, using analysis of official documents, PB platform data, and municipal decisions. The main findings indicate that despite the initial suspension in 2022, both municipalities resumed PB activities, increased funding allocations, prioritized projects addressing wartime needs, and expanded the use of digital platforms to ensure citizen participation, including displaced persons and younger populations. Research limitations stem from the focus on two case studies, which enables an in-depth understanding but does not intend to generalize the results to the entire country. In practical terms, the findings provide relevant lessons for sustaining participatory democracy in contexts of armed conflict. The originality of the study lies in demonstrating how direct democracy tools such as PB can be adapted and function as mechanisms of institutional resilience even under extreme wartime conditions.

Keywords: Participatory budgeting; Martial law; Democratic resilience; Digital participation; Ukraine.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a resiliência e a adaptação do orçamento participativo (OP) na Ucrânia sob a lei marcial, imposta após a invasão russa em 2022. O objetivo do artigo é compreender como os processos de OP foram transformados, mantidos e adaptados durante o período de guerra. A metodologia empregada baseia-se em um estudo de caso comparativo das cidades ucranianas de Khmelnytskyi e Kamianske, utilizando análise de documentos oficiais, dados de plataformas digitais e decisões municipais. Os principais resultados indicam que, apesar da suspensão inicial em 2022, ambos os mu-

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nicípios retomaram as atividades de OP, com aumento dos orçamentos, priorização de projetos voltados às necessidades da guerra e ampliação do uso de plataformas digitais para garantir a participação cidadã, incluindo deslocados internos e jovens. As limitações da pesquisa decorrem do enfoque em dois estudos de caso, o que permite uma análise aprofundada, mas sem pretensão de generalização para todo o país. Do ponto de vista prático, os achados oferecem lições relevantes para a manutenção da democracia participativa em contextos de conflito armado. A originalidade do estudo reside em demonstrar como ferramentas de democracia direta, como o OP, podem ser adaptadas e funcionar como mecanismos de resiliência institucional mesmo em condições extremas de guerra.

Palavras-chave: Orçamento participativo; Lei marcial; Resiliência democrática; Participação digital; Ucrânia.

1 Introduction

Participatory budgeting (PB) is an innovative form of democratic governance where citizens are directly involved in making decisions about how public funds should be allocated. The concept emerged in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989, under the administration of the Workers' Party. The introduction of PB allowed citizens to engage with local government in the allocation of resources for community projects, significantly improving transparency, citizen engagement, and democratic accountability[1] The process has since spread to cities worldwide, evolving to reflect local needs and political environments.

The implementation and success of PB depend on several factors, including political stability, economic resources, and social inclusion. Political will and support are critical to sustaining PB programs. For instance, changes in political leadership across European cities often resulted in the weakening or discontinuation of PB initiatives.[2] Similarly, economic conditions play a vital role. During periods of fiscal austerity, governments may reduce the budgets allocated for participatory processes, as demonstrated in studies on Latin American countries[3] Social and technological factors also influence PB. As highlighted in the experience of the Lisbon participatory budgeting process, digital platforms have broadened access to PB but have also marginalized communities lacking technological resources[4]

Crises—whether economic, social, or political—pose additional challenges to participatory democracy and PB in particular. Economic downturns often force governments to prioritize urgent needs over participatory initiatives, reducing citizens' opportunities to influence budgetary decisions. Financial constraints during the global economic crisis of the late 2000s led to the suspension of PB programs in various municipalities worldwide, as documented in a global review[5]. Similarly, The COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges to PB, significantly altering its processes and effectiveness. It imposed severe restrictions on in-person deliberations, reduced public funds, and amplified existing barriers, such as digital exclusion, especially among older populations[6]. This dual-layered impact—structural and financial—has reshaped the mechanisms of PB across various contexts. Additionally, PB in Czech municipalities during

[1] BAIOCCHI, Gianpaolo. *Militant Citizenship: Urban Popular Movements in Brazil*. Stanford University Press, 2005.

[2] SINTOMER, Yves; HERZBERG, Carsten; RÖCKE, Anja. Participatory budgeting in Europe: potentials and challenges. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, v. 32, n. 1, p. 164–178, 2008.

[3] CABANNES, Yves. Participatory budgeting: a significant contribution to participatory democracy. *Environment and Urbanization*, v. 16, n. 1, p. 27–46, 2004.

[4] ALLEGRETTI, Giovanni; ANTUNES, Sofia. The Lisbon Participatory Budget: results and perspectives on an experience in slow but continuous transformation. *Field Actions Science Reports*, Special Issue 11, 2014.

[5] DIAS, Nelson (ed.). *Hope for democracy: 30 years of participatory budgeting worldwide*. Faro: Oficina, 2018.

[6] MACIEL, L. R.; COSTA, C. S.; CATAPAN, A. Participatory budgeting in COVID-19 times: a perspective from Paraná and Portuguese municipalities. *International Journal of Professional Business Review*, v. 7, n. 1, p. 1–21, 2022.

the COVID-19 crisis revealed a slight decline in project submissions but an increase in citizen participation during voting, demonstrating the adaptability of PB in maintaining democratic engagement despite crises[7].

Military conflicts represent one of the most severe tests for PB as a tool for direct democracy. In conflict-affected regions the functionality of PB is deeply challenged. War disrupts governance structures, displaces populations, and diverts resources toward defense and humanitarian relief. However, PB can play a pivotal role in post-conflict reconstruction. It offers a platform for rebuilding trust between citizens and governments, fostering social cohesion, and addressing the immediate needs of war-affected communities. In El Salvador, external promotion of PB through U.S.-funded initiatives helped municipalities adopt participatory practices in the post-war period. Although challenges such as centralization and clientelism persisted, PB projects facilitated collaboration between civil society and local governments, creating institutional advances and fostering democratic engagement[8]. Similarly, PB in Medellin, Colombia, emerged as a response to pervasive violence and marginalization, empowering communities through participatory tools. These initiatives particularly benefited women, who experienced empowerment by actively engaging in PB processes, challenging traditional social structures, and influencing urban governance[9]

Democratic instruments such as participatory budgeting have historically been suspended during wartime and were typically reinstated only in post-conflict periods to serve the interests of communities. However, Ukraine presents a unique case where, despite the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022, some democratic processes persisted under martial law.

War and the imposition of martial law often bring a devastating halt to democratic governance, including crucial mechanisms of citizen participation. In Ukraine, the immediate response to the invasion prioritized national security over democratic engagement, leading to significant restrictions on civic freedoms and public access to information. These measures, though imperative for national survival, underscore the inherent tension between safeguarding democracy and protecting a nation under siege.

The enforcement of martial law under Presidential Decree No. 64/2022, effective from 5:30 a.m. on February 24, 2022, marked a critical shift in governance[10] Constitutional rights were significantly curtailed, and local self-government faced procedural constraints under the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law." Notably, local authorities were granted discretionary power to restrict public access to draft decisions, and council and committee deliberations could be conducted in closed sessions without prior public notice[11] These modifications effectively sidelined citizens from participating in decision-making processes that directly impacted their lives[12]

Such wartime measures are not merely administrative adjustments but strategic necessities in the context of an existential threat. The adversary's exploitation of publicly available information as a tool of warfare necessitated these restrictions. However, these constraints also illuminate the vulnerability of democratic

[7] KUKUČKOVÁ, Silvia; BAKOŠ, Eduard; SAMSONOVÁ, Gabriela. Intensity and fragility of Czech participatory budgeting during the COVID-19 crisis. *Public Money & Management*, p. 1–9, 2024.

[8] BLAND, Gary. Supporting post-conflict democratic development? External promotion of participatory budgeting in El Salvador. *World Development*, v. 39, n. 5, p. 863–873, 2011. Disponível em: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2010.09.010. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[9] HAJDAROWICZ, Iwona. Does participation empower? The example of women involved in participatory budgeting in Medellin. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, v. 44, n. 1, p. 22–37, 2018. Disponível em: https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2018.1431048. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[10] UKRAINE. President. Decree No. 64/2022, On the introduction of martial law in Ukraine, 24 Feb. 2022. Available at: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/64/2022. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[11] . UKRAINE. Parliament. Law on the legal regime of martial law, No. 389-VIII, 12 May 2015. Available at: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/389-19. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[12] MYKHAILOV, Mykola. Direct democracy under martial law: ways to realize the people's right to power. *Aktualni Problemy Pravoznavstva*, n. 2, p. 13–18, 2022. Available at: https://appj.wunu.edu.ua/index.php/appj/article/download/1373/1420. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

institutions in times of conflict. The abrupt disruption of transparency and civic engagement demonstrates the profound costs of war—not only in terms of human suffering but also in the erosion of democratic principles. Ukraine's experience during this period presents a crucial case study in the resilience and adaptability of democratic institutions under extreme duress. Understanding these challenges contributes to the broader discourse on governance in conflict-affected societies, highlighting the delicate balance between national security imperatives and democratic integrity.

This study examines how participatory budgeting (PB) in Ukraine has endured and adapted under martial law. Through a comparative analysis of two cities—Khmelnytskyi and Kamianske—it explores how local administrations resumed PB processes during the ongoing war after initial suspension in 2022. Both cities introduced substantial procedural adjustments, making them illustrative examples of democratic resilience in crisis conditions.

Methodologically, the analysis is based on municipal reports, participatory budgeting platform data (such as e-DEM and Hromadskyi Project), and city council regulations. It combines systematic content analysis with statistical data on citizen participation and qualitative assessment of changes introduced during wartime. Khmelnytskyi and Kamianske offer contrasting security environments: the former is located in the relatively safe western part of Ukraine, while the latter, in Dnipropetrovsk region, is closer to the frontlines. This contrast enables a context-sensitive exploration of institutional adaptability and participatory continuity under extreme stress.

The article advances the following analytical arguments:

(1) PB mechanisms in Ukraine have shown notable resilience by adjusting processes and timelines rather than abandoning them;

(2) wartime disruption has triggered shifts in funding priorities and affected modes of civic engagement;

(3) the use of digital platforms has become instrumental in sustaining participatory practices when traditional outreach mechanisms were no longer viable;

(4) differences in local institutional flexibility and governance culture shaped the degree and success of PB adaptation; and

(5) these variations reveal both the vulnerabilities and the innovative potential of decentralized governance during national emergencies.

2 Adaptive Democracy: Theoretical Tools for Understanding PB in Wartime

To understand how participatory budgeting (PB) persisted and evolved under martial law, this section introduces two key theoretical frameworks—Resilience Theory and the Theory of Blended Democracy. These perspectives help to explain institutional adaptability and digital innovation in conditions of extreme political and social stress.

This study employs Resilience Theory and Theory of Blended Democracy to analyze the dynamics of participatory budgeting (PB) under wartime conditions. Resilience Theory, initially developed in ecological sciences[13] , has been extensively adapted within social sciences to examine the capacity of institutions and societies to absorb shocks, adapt to crises, and transform governance structures . In the context of democratic governance, resilience is understood as the ability of participatory institutions to withstand external shocks—such as political instability, conflict, or economic crises—while maintaining their core democratic

[13] HOLLING, C. S. Resilience and stability of ecological systems. *International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis*, Research Report RP-73-003, 1973.

functions . Resilience in governance is not merely about returning to a previous state but involves adaptation and transformation to meet new societal needs under evolving constraints.[14]

In conflict-affected societies, democratic resilience manifests through the ability of governance institutions to sustain public participation mechanisms despite existential threats. Participatory budgeting, as a democratic instrument, is particularly vulnerable in wartime, where governance priorities shift towards national security, emergency response, and crisis management.[15] However, the continuation of PB in some Ukrainian municipalities despite martial law illustrates the adaptive capacity of local institutions to recalibrate participatory frameworks to the realities of war. For example, cities like Khmelnytskyi and Kamianske maintained or even increased PB funding, adjusted project categories to address wartime needs, and sustained public participation despite security threats and displacement. For example, cities like Khmelnytskyi and Kamianske maintained or even increased PB funding, adjusted project categories to address wartime needs, and sustained public participation despite security threats and displacement.

Research highlight that resilience in governance is contingent upon institutional flexibility, redundancy, and adaptive learning—key elements that allow public administration to integrate participatory mechanisms even under conditions of extreme duress. The adaptation of PB in Ukraine, where funding has been reallocated to defense and humanitarian needs while preserving civic engagement, exemplifies how democratic institutions can reconfigure participatory processes without dismantling them entirely. This aligns with the argument that resilient institutions possess mechanisms for both crisis response and long-term democratic continuity.[16]

Theory of Blended Democracy is particularly relevant to understanding PB's digital transition under martial law.[17] Blended democracy integrates both online and offline participatory mechanisms to enhance accessibility and security in governance[18]. The digitalization of PB in Ukraine aligns with this model, as municipalities have increasingly relied on online platforms to facilitate public participation while mitigating risks associated with in-person deliberations. Kersting and Regalia highlight that digital democracy must balance technological innovations with inclusivity, ensuring that vulnerable populations are not excluded from participatory processes.[19] This is particularly crucial in wartime Ukraine, where digital authentication methods like BankID have been implemented to maintain democratic engagement while addressing security concerns. Khmelnytskyi, for example, allowed both online and offline voting to ensure access for older citizens, while Kamianske employed digital-only voting with authentication through BankID and Google Forms to include displaced persons and out-of-town workers. Studies on digital democracy in crisis situations[20] further illustrate that participatory tools can remain functional when integrated with adaptive digital governance.

Applying these theoretical perspectives to Ukraine's participatory budgeting experience reveals a dual process of resilience and transformation. While wartime conditions have imposed significant constraints,

[14] MEEROW, Sara; NEWELL, Joshua P.; STULTS, Melissa. Defining urban resilience: A review. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, v. 147, p. 38–49, 2016. Disponível em: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2015.11.001. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[15] FUNG, Archon. Putting the public back into governance: the challenges of citizen participation and its future. *Public Administration Review*, v. 75, n. 4, p. 513–522, 2015. Disponível em: https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12361. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[16] BOIN, Arjen; McCONNELL, Allan; HART, Paul 't. *Governing after crisis: the politics of investigation, accountability, and learning*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

[17] KERSTING, Norbert. Online participation: from "invited" to "invented" spaces. *International Journal of Electronic Governance*, v.6, n.4, p.270–280, 2013.

[18] KERSTING, Norbert. Participatory turn? Comparing citizens' and politicians' perspectives on online and offline political participation. *Lex Localis*, v. 14, n. 2, p. 251–263, 2016. Disponível em: https://doi.org/10.4335/14.2.249-263. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[19] KERSTING, Norbert; REGALIA, Marta. Direct democracy and its integrity: the Italian 2020 and the Turkey 2017 constitutional referendums. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, v.16, p.527–544, 2023.

[20] MACIEL, L. R.; COSTA, C. S.; CATAPAN, A. Participatory budgeting in COVID-19 times: a perspective from Paraná and Portuguese municipalities. International Journal of Professional Business Review, v. 7, n. 1, p. 1–21, 2022. Disponível em: https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2022.v7i1.123. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

they have also driven innovations in civic engagement. In Khmelnytskyi, for instance, PB resumed with a focus on veterans' support and civil defense, while in Kamianske, digital-only platforms were utilized to engage displaced citizens and ensure secure participation. These adaptations demonstrate the ability of PB to evolve in response to external pressures. These frameworks offer valuable insights into the broader implications of crisis governance and the future of participatory democracy in conflict-affected regions.

3 Results

3.1 Pre-War Participatory Budgeting in Ukraine

Participatory budgeting was introduced in Ukraine in 2015 as part of decentralization reforms, empowering citizens to influence local budget allocations. Although not regulated by national law, local governments decide on its implementation. The process involves several key stages:

1. Proposal Submission: Residents submit project ideas, usually within predefined categories such as health, education, or transportation. These restrictions streamline focus but may exclude other pressing issues.
2. Evaluation: Proposals are reviewed for compliance with guidelines and alignment with objectives. Eligible projects proceed to voting.
3. Voting: Citizens vote online (via tools like BankID) or offline. Digital barriers, such as limited tech access, may restrict participation, making offline options vital.
4. Implementation: Winning projects are executed, but challenges like cost inflation or potential fund misuse by local authorities can hinder outcomes.

This system gives communities a voice in decision-making but requires transparency and adaptability to be truly effective.

As of January 2022, before the full-scale war, participatory budgets were actively operational in more than 45 cities. Some cities set the voting age at 16, with registration in the city being mandatory for project authors and voters. In seven regional centers, the voting age is set at 18: Odesa, Dnipro, Zhytomyr, Ivano--Frankivsk, Lutsk, Kharkiv, and Cherkasy. The lowest voting age among regional centers is in Mykolaiv, where residents aged 14 and above can participate in the participatory budget[21]

These pre-war PB practices reveal both strengths and vulnerabilities. On one hand, the system allowed considerable local autonomy and flexibility, encouraging bottom-up initiatives. On the other, the absence of a national legal framework, reliance on mayoral discretion, and uneven voting eligibility policies across cities point to a fragmented institutional environment. This fragmented foundation may have shaped how different municipalities responded to wartime conditions—some with greater agility and adaptation, others with hesitation or suspension of participatory mechanisms

3.2 Participatory Budgeting in Wartime Ukraine: Institutional Adjustments and New Priorities

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has had a profound and transformative effect on various aspects of daily life, including the mechanisms and processes of participatory budgeting. By November 2024, only 8

[21] HNIDASH, V. S. Participatory budgeting as a tool for democratizing the budgetary process. In: Local democracy: the role of communities and local self-government bodies. Proceedings of the scientific-practical round table, Sumy, p.14–16, 2024. Disponível em: https://fcp.law.sumdu.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/1Dzimyk_10.05.2024-3.pdf. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

cities had conducted participatory budgeting initiatives during the 2023–2024 period. These cities—Khmelnytskyi, Uman, Lutsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ternopil, Kamianske, Volodymyr, and Vinnytsia—represent the exception rather than the rule, as most municipalities suspended such initiatives under martial law[22]

The cities that sustained participatory budgeting initiatives during wartime were predominantly located in the central and western regions of Ukraine. These efforts were generally driven by regional centers and larger municipalities with relatively greater economic resources. However, economic capacity alone did not dictate participation; smaller cities like Volodymyr and Kamianske managed to continue participatory budgeting despite financial constraints.

In addition to its geographic shifts, the thematic focus of participatory budgeting underwent significant changes during martial law. While pre-war projects frequently emphasized urban beautification, cultural activities, and sports, wartime priorities now dominate. A considerable portion of proposed projects in 2023–2024 addressed critical needs such as equipping civil defense shelters, providing self-defense training for civilians, and supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs). Other initiatives included the rehabilitation of veterans, aid for families of fallen servicemen, and the procurement of essential equipment for defense forces, such as drones, evacuation vehicles, and electronic warfare systems.

In Khmelnytskyi, participatory budgeting was also suspended after the onset of the war. Projects that won the 2021 vote remained unimplemented. However, in November 2022, the city council decided to make changes to implement these projects in 2023[23] On December 22, 2023, the city council approved a new budgeting program for 2024-2026, which allowed for the organization of participatory budgeting considering wartime conditions[24]

Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the participatory budgeting process in Kamianske was suspended. The 2022 contest, initially planned for February 28, was postponed indefinitely due to national security concerns and the redirection of municipal funds toward defense and humanitarian aid. This disruption reflected a broader trend in Ukrainian municipalities, where participatory mechanisms faced unprecedented challenges under martial law. In Kamianske, decisions were made at the beginning of 2023 regarding the implementation of projects from 2020 and 2021 that were not completed due to the war[25] On February 24, 2023, the city council decided to hold a participatory budgeting contest for 2023- 2024 and amended the contest rules[26]

Thus, each of these cities developed its own approach to restoring participatory budgeting, taking into account the specifics and needs of the local community under martial law conditions.

These local adaptations reflect a broader pattern of democratic resilience under extreme pressure. While many municipalities suspended PB during wartime, Khmelnytskyi and Kamianske demonstrated that institutional will and administrative flexibility can enable the continuation of participatory mechanisms, even when governance resources are stretched. Their actions highlight a shift in the function of PB—from being

[22] TRANSPARENT CITIES. Participatory budgeting under wartime conditions: How cities implement it. Transparent Cities, (n.d.). Disponível em: https://transparentcities.in.ua/news/byudzhet-uchasti-v-umovakh-viiny-yak-yogo-provodiat-mista. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[23] KHMELNYTSKYI CITY COUNCIL. Decision No. 4, *On Extending the Term of the Public Budgeting Program for the Khmelnytskyi City Territorial Community for 2020–2022*, (Extraordinary 21st Session), 2022. Disponível em: https://www.khm.gov.ua/uk/content/pro-prodovzhennya-terminu-diyi-programy-byudzhetuvannya-za-uchasti-gromadskosti-byudzhet-0. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[24] KHMELNYTSKYI CITY COUNCIL. Decision No. 4, *On Amendments to the City Council Resolution No. 10 of 21 Dec. 2023*, (39th Session), 2024. Disponível em: https://www.khm.gov.ua/uk/content/pro-vnesennya-zmin-do-rishennya-miskoyi-rady-vid-21122023-roku-no10-0. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[25] KAMIANSKE CITY COUNCIL. Decision No. 797-29/VIII, On Amendments to the Decision of 22 Dec. 2021 No. 392-14/VIII, (29th Session VIII Convocation), 2023. Disponível em: https://kam.gov.ua/byudzhet_uchasti/normatyvna_baza. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[26] KAMIANSKE CITY COUNCIL. Decision No. 807-30/VIII, On Amendments to the Decision of 22 Dec. 2021 No. 392-14/VIII (with amendments), (30th Session VIII Convocation), 2023. Disponível em: https://kam.gov.ua/byudzhet_uchasti/normatyvna_baza. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

a tool for civic development to one for collective survival—anchoring democratic legitimacy in times of existential threat

3.3 Structures of Decision-Making: Civic Inclusion vs Administrative Control

In the context of participatory budgeting, the composition, functions, and names of the jury vary across the cities of Khmelnytskyi, and Kamianske, reflecting their unique approaches to citizen engagement and local governance.

In Khmelnytskyi, the participatory budgeting process is managed by the Participatory Budgeting Commission, appointed by the mayor. The composition of the Commission, approved by the mayor's decree, includes six representatives from the city's executive bodies and at least six representatives from public organizations and the city council, pending their consent.

The primary tasks of the Commission are:

- Organizing and supporting the participatory budgeting process at all stages, including providing information, organizational, and methodological support to project authors;

- Evaluating projects for voting;

- Performing additional tasks related to the Commission's objectives[27]

In Kamianske, the participatory budgeting projects are evaluated by the Coordination Council for the Implementation of Participatory Budgeting, a consultative body. The Council consists of local government officials, city council deputies, members of public organizations, and neighborhood self-organization bodies. The composition and size of the Council are approved by the mayor's decree.[28] As of the mayor's decree No. 483-r from December 14, 2023, the Coordination Council includes 15 members, only three of whom represent public organizations, while the remaining members are city council deputies and officials from the city's executive bodies.[29]

These two cities thus employ distinct institutional models for PB oversight, reflecting different balances between governmental and public influence. Khmelnytskyi's Commission features a roughly equal representation of officials and community members, fostering broader civic engagement in PB management. Kamianske's Coordination Council, while including some community representatives, remains dominated by government officials and councillors, offering limited direct public input. Each model demonstrates a different strategy for governing PB under the pressures of conflict, with Khmelnytskyi favoring a more inclusive approach and Kamianske a more centralized one.

3.4 From Urban Development to Civil Defense: Wartime Shifts in PB Agendas

After the introduction of martial law on February 24, 2022, the participatory budget projects in the cities Khmelnytskyi, and Kamianske underwent significant changes. Although the number of submitted projects decreased, the budgets allocated for project funding not only did not decrease but even increased. This highlights the importance of supporting community initiatives during a crisis.

[27] KHMELNYTSKYI CITY COUNCIL. Decision No. 4, *On Extending the Term of the Public Budgeting Program for the Khmelnytskyi City Territorial Community for 2020–2022*, (Extraordinary 21st Session), 2022. Disponível em: https://www.khm.gov.ua/uk/content/pro-prodovzhennya-terminu-diyi-programy-byudzhetuvannya-za-uchasti-gromadskosti-byudzhet-0. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[28] KAMIANSKE CITY COUNCIL. Decision No. 392-14/VIII, On Participatory Budgeting of Kamianske City Territorial Community for 2022–2026, 22 Dec. 2021. Disponível em: https://kam.gov.ua/byudzhet_uchasti/normatyvna_baza. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[29] MAYOR OF KAMIANSKE. Order No. 483-r, *On Amendments to Order No. 12-r of 17 Jan. 2022 (with changes)*, 14 Dec. 2023. Disponível em: https://kam.gov.ua/ua/news/pg/310122435495446_p18/. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

In 2021, 88 projects were submitted in Khmelnytskyi, with 23 receiving funding totaling 93,000 euros[30]. After the resumption of the participatory budget competition in 2024, 39 projects were admitted to voting, with 16 funded for a total of 110,619.47 euros[31]. New project priorities which defined by Khmelnytskyi Local Council include the rehabilitation of defenders, social support, inclusion, adaptation and integration of internally displaced persons, shelters, and national-patriotic education of children and youth. This shows a significant shift towards safety and support for those affected by the war compared to pre-war projects that focused on housing and communal services, education, healthcare, culture and tourism, social protection, sports, and youth policy[32]

Before the war, in 2021, 79 projects were admitted to voting in Kamianske, with 11 funded for a total of 82,972 euros. Under martial law conditions, the participatory budgeting process in Kamianske was temporarily suspended in 2022. In 2023, the city resumed participatory budgeting with adjustments reflecting wartime priorities. The first stage of the 2023 cycle, project submission, took place in October and lasted six weeks, concluding on November 26, 2023. A total of 62 projects were submitted across four categories: "Ecology, IT, and Culture" (17 projects), "Infrastructure" (16 projects), "Education and Healthcare" (15 projects), and "Physical Culture and Sports" (14 projects). Compared to 2022, there was a shift in project focus, with increased attention to supporting the Ukrainian Armed Forces and defense initiatives[33]

In 2023, 62 projects were admitted to the participatory budget competition, with 13 funded for a total of 99,502 euros[33]New categories consider the circumstances of martial law, including the procurement of medical equipment, bandaging materials, the arrangement of civil protection structures, temporary heating points, and mobile resilience points. Projects also provide for the provision of technical rehabilitation means for individuals with disabilities[34]

The evaluation process in Kamianske also saw modifications. In 2023, preliminary checks resulted in the rejection of seven projects due to non-compliance with key participatory budgeting principles. The main reasons for rejection included projects being inaccessible to the general public, excessive focus on capital repairs, and proposals lacking a clear and self-sustaining end product. Following this, the expert assessment phase led to the rejection of three additional projects due to non-compliance with urban planning regulations, land use conflicts, and duplication of services already covered by municipal funding.

The participatory budgeting contest in Kamianske was officially restarted on February 24, 2023, following amendments to the contest rules by the city council. The process involved a complete transition to electronic submission and voting, which was well-received by project authors and the community. Despite the challenging environment, citizens actively engaged in the participatory budgeting process, demonstrating resilience and commitment to local development.

[30] HROMADSKYI PROJECT. Public Project Online Platform (Ukraine). Disponível em: https://pb.org.ua/en. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[31] E-DEM. Unified Local e-Democracy Platform of Ukraine. Disponível em: https://e-dem.ua/. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[32] KHMELNYTSKYI CITY COUNCIL. Decision No. 4, *On Amendments to the City Council Resolution No. 10 of 21 Dec. 2023*, (39th Session), 2024. Disponível em: https://www.khm.gov.ua/uk/content/pro-vnesennya-zmin-do-rishennya-miskoyi-rady-vid-21122023-roku-no10-0. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[33] E-DEM. Unified Local e-Democracy Platform of Ukraine. Disponível em: https://e-dem.ua/. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

[34] KAMIANSKE CITY COUNCIL. Decision No. 807-30/VIII, On Amendments to the Decision of 22 Dec. 2021 No. 392-14/VIII (with amendments), (30th Session VIII Convocation), 2023. Disponível em: https://kam.gov.ua/byudzhet_uchasti/normatyvna_baza. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

Table 1 – Participatory Budgeting Dynamics in Khmelnytskyi and Kamianske (2021–2024)

City	Year	Projects Submitted	Projects Funded	Total Budget (EUR)	Focus Areas Before Martial Law	Focus Areas After Martial Law
Khmelnytskyi	2021	88	23	93,000	Housing and communal services, education, healthcare, culture and tourism, social protection, sports, and youth policy	Rehabilitation of defenders, social support and inclusion, adaptation and integration of internally displaced persons, shelters, national-patriotic education of children and youth
	2024	39	16	110,619.47		
Kamianske	2021	79	11	82,972	Infrastructure, physical culture and sports, ecology, IT and culture, education, healthcare	Procurement of medical equipment, bandaging materials, civil protection structures, temporary heating points, mobile resilience points, technical rehabilitation means for individuals with disabilities
	2023	62	13	99,502		

This comparative table reveals a shift in both quantity and thematic direction of PB projects under martial law. While the number of submissions decreased, financial support per project increased, indicating a strategic concentration on essential wartime needs. Project priorities shifted from general civic improvement toward direct contributions to defense, safety, and social resilience. These trends demonstrate not only adaptation to crisis but also a deliberate reorientation of participatory democracy to support collective survival and cohesion

Overall, both cities show a trend towards a decrease in the number of submitted projects but an increase in the budgets for funding. The project categories in Khmelnytskyi and Kamianske have significantly shifted towards safety and support for war-affected individuals. These trends are clearly summarized in Table 1, which highlights changes in project numbers, financial allocations, and thematic priorities before and after the imposition of martial law. These changes reflect the adaptation of community initiatives to the new challenges posed by martial law and underscore the importance of a participatory approach in city management during a crisis.

3.5 **Engaging the Public under Martial Law:** Patterns of Inclusion and Exclusion

This sections examines the participation trends in two Ukrainian cities: Khmelnytskyi, and Kamianske. By evaluating who submits projects and who votes, as well as the inclusivity and accessibility of the process, we gain insights into how different demographics engage in civic activities. This comparison highlights variations in age and gender participation, as well as the impact of inclusive policies on community involvement.

In Khmelnytskyi, project submission and voting eligibility extend to physical persons aged 16 and older registered in the city's territorial community, including IDPs. In 2021, participation comprised 53 female authors (71%) and 22 male authors (29%). In 2024, this trend persisted with 20 female authors (71%) and 8 male authors (29%)[35][35]

[35] HROMADSKYI PROJECT. Public Project Online Platform (Ukraine). Disponível em: https://pb.org.ua/en. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

In terms of age groups, in 2021, the 46-65 age group was the most active (35 projects, 47%), followed by the 36-45 group (24 projects, 32%). The 26-35 age group submitted 13 projects (17%), while the 65+ and under-25 groups were minimally represented with 2 (3%) and 1 (1%) projects, respectively. For the 2024 PB cycle in Khmelnytskyi, preliminary data suggest a similar gender pattern – e.g. 20 female authors (71%) and 8 male authors (29%) submitted projects – though detailed age group data for 2024 were not available in the same detail.

Kamianske's participatory budgeting system allows for project submissions and voting by Ukrainian citizens aged 14 and older who are registered or residing in the city or own property there, including private entrepreneurs and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Voting is conducted exclusively online with mandatory authentication via BankID, MobileID, or a qualified electronic signature (QES). This strict electronic voting system ensures secure and verified participation, safeguarding personal data and maintaining the integrity of the process. Participants can vote by authenticating on the platform budget.e-dem.ua or through PrivatBank terminals. For those not registered in the Kamianske municipal territorial community, such as IDPs with registration certificates, individuals working or studying in Kamianske, or those conducting business there but registered in another community, voting can be done via a Google form[36]

Based on statistical data from Kamianske's participatory budgeting process between 2018 and 2024, a significant fluctuation in voting participation can be observed. While only 3,861 citizens voted in 2018, participation surged dramatically to 20,800 in 2019 and peaked at 21,032 in 2020. However, this peak coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have influenced voting patterns. Increased online accessibility and heightened public interest in municipal support initiatives during the crisis likely contributed to this spike in participation. Nevertheless, by 2021, participation dropped to 17,329, indicating a possible decline in enthusiasm or accessibility challenges as pandemic-related restrictions eased and attention shifted elsewhere. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 profoundly impacted participatory budgeting in Kamianske. With martial law imposed, the 2022 PB process was suspended entirely. When it resumed in 2023-2024, the number of participants reached 17,461, slightly lower than pre-war levels but demonstrating resilience despite wartime hardships. This suggests that while some citizens remained engaged in local decision-making, broader insecurity and migration patterns may have affected participation rates.

Overall, the two cities exhibit different participation dynamics shaped by their policies. Kamianske's lower voting age and digital-only voting have broadened participation among tech-savvy groups, especially youth, whereas Khmelnytskyi's inclusion of traditional voting methods ensures older and less tech-oriented citizens remain involved. Both cities' PB processes demonstrate strong female representation among project initiators, suggesting that women in these communities play a leading role in social activism and local problem-solving. We also observe a shift in age-group engagement during the war, potentially influenced by the conflict's societal impacts – for example, working-age adults and younger citizens may feel a greater urgency to engage in community projects that address wartime challenges, while older citizens might participate less due to safety concerns or displacement. The inclusive policies toward IDPs and the use of digital tools for voting in both cities reflect a commitment to keeping PB accessible and democratic under trying circumstances. These trends indicate a robust civic infrastructure that adapts to changing demographics and conditions, ensuring broad community involvement in local governance even during a war.

Ultimately, the comparative evidence suggests that inclusivity in wartime PB is shaped by both technological design and institutional flexibility. Cities that combined digital tools with adaptive outreach strategies—such as IDP verification mechanisms or offline options—fostered broader engagement across age, gender, and displacement status. The contrast between Khmelnytskyi and Kamianske highlights that different con-

[36] POGLYAD.INFO. *V Kam'jans'komu zalyshyvsia ostannii tyzhden dlya golosuvannya za hromads'ki proekty* (In Kamianske, the last week remains for voting on public projects), 15 Jan. 2024. Disponível em: https://www.poglyad.info/2024/01/15/v-kamyanskomu-zalyshyvsya-ostannij-tyzhden-dlya-golosuvannya-za-gromadski-proyekty-byudzhet-uchasti-misto/. Acesso em: 28 maio 2025.

figurations of access and support yield distinct participation dynamics. Wartime PB, therefore, functions not only as a budgeting tool, but as a litmus test of democratic inclusivity under pressure.

4 Conclusions

This article has examined how participatory budgeting (PB) can persist and adapt under conditions of martial law, using the cases of Khmelnytskyi and Kamianske to analyze the resilience of democratic institutions in Ukraine during wartime. Contrary to the dominant assumption that armed conflict suspends participatory mechanisms, our findings show that PB can not only endure, but evolve — provided that institutional flexibility, political will, and digital infrastructure are present.

Empirically, both cities demonstrated notable continuity and transformation: while the number of project submissions declined, the allocated budgets increased (from €93,000 to €110,619 in Khmelnytskyi; from €82,972 to €99,502 in Kamianske), and citizen turnout remained significant (over 17,000 voters in Kamianske post-invasion). Project priorities shifted decisively from conventional urban development to initiatives targeting defense preparedness, IDP support, and social resilience. These quantitative patterns underscore that participatory democracy can retain legitimacy and relevance in times of existential crisis.

Theoretically, the study contributes to scholarship on resilience theory and blended democracy. We show that PB serves as an institutional testbed for both concepts: it demonstrates the capacity of governance systems to reconfigure participatory processes under duress, and it highlights the dual role of digital platforms in both expanding access and posing challenges to inclusion. Our findings reinforce that resilience in democratic governance is not merely about survival but about strategic adaptation — modifying procedures, priorities, and platforms to maintain core democratic values in disrupted contexts.

Importantly, the Ukrainian experience complicates binary narratives of democracy versus security. Local governments' decision to preserve and recalibrate PB, even with reduced staff, limited resources, and ongoing threats, reflects a deeper strategic understanding of participatory instruments: they are not symbolic add-ons, but tools for community stabilization, legitimacy, and civic agency. In wartime, engaging citizens in localized problem-solving through PB becomes a form of democratic resistance and institutional continuity.

That said, this study has limitations. Its focus on two cities, though analytically rich, constrains the generalizability of findings. The research relies on documentary and platform-based data, and does not incorporate qualitative insights into citizen perceptions, trust, or informal dynamics shaping PB. Moreover, it isolates PB as a singular mechanism, without examining complementary or rival forms of direct democracy — such as digital petitions, assemblies, or informal consultations.

Future research should expand across three axes: geographically (including frontline and smaller municipalities), methodologically (through surveys, interviews, ethnography), and conceptually (linking PB to broader democratic innovation in conflict zones). Comparative studies between Ukraine and other post-conflict or authoritarian-resilient societies could illuminate common strategies for institutional survival and public engagement under extreme stress.

In conclusion, Ukraine's wartime experience with PB reveals not a breakdown, but a transformation of participatory governance. Even amid war, digital tools, flexible design, and civic commitment enabled democratic institutions to remain operative. These findings challenge the presumption that democracy must retreat during crisis. Instead, they suggest that when participatory systems are embedded in local governance and capable of adaptation, they can become instruments of resilience — anchoring public legitimacy in the most turbulent of times.

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