

Is the situation tense in Odessa? Analysis of a strange opinion survey

HRWF (23.08.2016) - According to the majority of Odessa residents, the situation is tense in the city – 54.5%. Some 30.1% of respondents said the situation was more or less stable, 9.9% called the situation explosive and 5.5% of residents were undecided, a recent opinion survey said.

HRWF director is currently in Odessa to take a number of interviews and to investigate some issues. On the eve of the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the independence of Ukraine, the city is full of tourists. The situation is quiet. People enjoy life and are not anxious about a possible threat coming from Eastern Ukraine or from Crimea.

[Odessablog](#) has analyzed the methodology used by SOCIS:

A friend from within the Brussels bubble sent this blog a link regarding a recent SOCIS opinion survey made in Odessa.

What caught the eye in Brussels was “In addition, according to the majority of Odessa residents, the situation is tense in the city – 54.5%. Some 30.1% of respondents said the situation was more or less stable, 9.9% called the situation explosive and 5.5% of residents were undecided.”

Eyebrows therefore raised within the EU institutions regarding the stability – or not – of Odessa based upon this quote. After all, which policymaker these days has time to do anything more than scan a few bullet points, or at most a paragraph or two, of any document pushed under their nose?

Questions of methodology aside, just as important if not more so, is how exactly were the questions worded to solicit the answers given – those questions simply falling outside the time available for those struggling to find time to scan and absorb bullet points.

The exact wording of questions frames outcomes as the below satire makes clear.

Therefore how was the question worded that solicited such a response?

The question was worded thus “*How do you assess the situation in....?*”

Those surveyed then answering *Stable/Tense/Explosive/Don't know*. Looking at the results there are no other options.

Naturally the definition of “*stable*”, “*tense*” and “*explosive*” is open to personal interpretation and thus perception unless specifically defined parameters are within the possible survey answers. In short, this blog’s understanding of “*stable*” may be very different to its readers *etc*.

Indeed there may be a multitude of reasons why somebody surveyed in Odessa may describe the situation as “*tense*”.

Perhaps due to the increasing militarisation of Crimea? Maybe due to the recent “incident” as claimed by the FSB in Crimea? Perhaps due to another significant rise in utility prices from 1st September and social friction that may result? An expectation of a Russian offensive? A [bubbling local war](#) between the criminal elements? Could it be due to open political warfare between Governor, Mayor and major businessmen in

Odessa? A possible provocation on Independence Day or during the City birthday events? Dysfunctional and/or feckless governance – central or local? The real possibility of yet more early elections, be they national or local? A fear of yet more subversive acts?

Any one or more of these issues may determine an answer of “*tense*” rather than “*stable*”.

That “*explosive*” managed less than 10% is surprising, for traditionally the people of Odessa manage to return a solid 15 – 20% survey return that is completely removed and at odds from the answers that the rest of the local constituency gives. Indeed 15% in a survey stating that black was really white, or that the moon is just the sun at night would come as little surprise.

Again however, what are the factors that influence the less than 10% surveyed to arrive at “*explosive*” as an answer? Is there a core reason, or many? Which reason, if any, would result in the “*explosive*” actually exploding – and how would it manifest given the numbers attached to any specific reason?

No policymaker in Brussels has time to get answers to these questions, even if they have a mind to ask them – which is doubtful.

Perhaps worse by way of framing perception, the link sent to the blog from within Brussels only gave the results for the “*How do you assess the situation in....?*” as far as Odessa was concerned.

The survey asked for two perceptions. One for Odessa that got attention within Brussels as the results were displayed in the link, and one for Ukraine as a whole, which didn’t, as those results were absent.

The results for Ukraine as a whole were 6.3% stable, 64.2% tense, 26.1% explosive and 3.4% undecided/don’t know.

Ergo those surveyed in Odessa found the city to be far more “*stable*”, far less “*tense*” and considerably less “*explosive*” than Ukraine overall – yet this did not appear in what was being read by this blog’s friends in Brussels prompting the nudge about the mood and how reflective the poll truly was.

The poll maybe entirely accurate, but of course it is very subjective when considering the question and perhaps wooliness of definitions and perceptions in the answers.

The [survey questions and results can be found here](#) – and perhaps they are far more useful in understanding the local constituency priorities with regard infrastructure and institutions – notwithstanding political positioning – than they are regarding anything approaching a genuine risk assessment.