

The 2002 Parliamentary Elections as an Indicator of the Sociopolitical Development of Ukraine

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The returns of Ukraine's parliamentary elections of 31 March 2002 turned out to be too contradictory to provide grounds for final conclusions as regards the success or failure of the democratic transformation in Ukraine. In fact, the elections became only a stage of the nonuniform political process, in which modernization and democratization coexist with archaic, post-Soviet tendencies. The election campaign revealed serious deviations from standards of transparent democratic process. Yet, in general, the election results were successful because the democratic forces effectively improved their positions in parliament, although they fell short of an absolute majority of seats.

The elections demonstrated a serious expansion of the electoral basis of the reformist forces, as well as decreasing support of past favorites, the Communists. In addition, they delineated a distinct, new pattern among the political forces, a sort of three-party system instead of the former divide between the uncoordinated democrats opposed by the Communists. During the election period, the main contenders in Ukraine's political arena were the "centrist" nomenklatura-oligarchic parties incorporated in the For Integral Ukraine (FIU) bloc, on one hand, and the broad spectrum of reformers united around the person of ex-prime minister Victor Yushchenko in the Our Ukraine bloc, on the other. Allied with the FIU in most cases is the Social-Democratic Party of Ukraine (united) (SDPUu)—the only one of the propresidential parties that, along with the FIU, managed to overcome the 4 percent vote hurdle to get into parliament. The Yulia Tymoshenko bloc and the Socialist Party of Oleksandr Moroz can contribute to Our Ukraine's efforts to establish an opposition to President Leonid Kuchma and the Kinakh government. These two forces unexpectedly overcame the 4 percent hurdle quite successfully. The Communists have become the third independent element. Alone their numbers are not sufficient to be of crucial importance. But

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the total number of opposition MPs, including Communists, is now 219 (48.5 percent of parliament).¹ This is likely to determine the effectiveness of the Supreme Rada's activities, at least during the first year of its work.

Election Returns

Since 1998, Ukraine has had a mixed electoral system. Under the Law of Ukraine on Election of People's Deputies, 225 (half) of 450 deputies are elected according to the results of the vote in the national multimandate constituency, with a 4 percent hurdle applied. The remaining 225 deputies are elected in single-mandate constituencies. The elections demonstrated that the major political forces in the multimandate and single-mandate constituencies could differ significantly.

According to the final returns that were disclosed by the Central Election Committee on 15 April, six parties and blocs had overcome the 4 percent hurdle (see table 1). They thus form the basic configuration of the parliament, which will consist of six major caucuses. In addition, the caucuses will also include MPs elected in single-mandate constituencies who were supported by relevant blocs (parties). It is here that the differences emerge. For instance, in the Communist Party there are seven members of parliament from single-mandate constituencies, so the Communist Party caucus had sixty-six persons (seven plus the initial fifty-nine from the party list).² That is nearly half of what the Communists had in the previous parliament.

The Our Ukraine bloc won in forty-eight districts. It had 118 seats, but in at least one of the constituencies the vote has already been declared invalid.³ The Socialist Party of Ukraine won in three constituencies; in one of them the vote has been declared invalid, so the Socialists will have twenty-two seats.⁴ The Yulia Tymoshenko bloc could add two single-mandate district deputies to twenty-two MPs elected on the party list. SDPUu expected to have eighteen additional mandates. The Integral Ukraine group, established on the basis of the FIU bloc, added the greatest number of MPs to its caucus from those elected in single-mandate constituencies. The arguments of its leaders proved to be convincing not only for the FIU-backed winners (sixty-three persons), but also for a great number of independent deputies. In late May the FIU caucus had 155 to 165 deputies. Later, after the election of Speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn, former chief of the Presidential Administration, that megafaction was divided into eight smaller factions. That divorce has proved that FIU was really an artificial bloc, united only by the fears of MPs and by the personal will of President Kuchma.

Sociopolitical Diversification of Ukraine in Light of Election Returns

The thesis that Ukraine is "a split country" has become a leitmotif of most commentaries regarding its election returns. Numerous articles in the European, American, and Russian media were full of that familiar conclusion about confrontation between the eastern and the western regions of Ukraine, which voted for opposing political forces. "The parliamentary elections made the split of Ukraine closer," said a writer for *Expert.ru*, a Russian Web-based publication.⁵ In my opinion, one should not turn the results into a superficial contradiction between the east and the west

TABLE 1. Election Returns in the National Multi-Mandate Constituency, and Number of Deputies in Caucuses, Including MPs Elected in Single-Mandate Constituencies

Party (Bloc)	Votes cast "For" in Ukraine	%	Seats	Total seats (est.)
Election bloc of political parties, Victor Yushchenko bloc, Our Ukraine	6,108,088	23.57	70	117
Communist Party of Ukraine	5,178,074	19.98	59	66
Election bloc of political parties "For Integral Ukraine!"	3,051,056	11.77	35	160
Election bloc of political parties, "Yulia Tymoshenko election bloc"	1,882,087	7.26	22	24
Socialist Party of Ukraine	1,780,642	6.87	20	22
Social-Democratic Party of Ukraine (united)	1,626,721	6.27	19	30
Election bloc of political parties "Natalia Vitrenko Bloc"	836,198	3.22		
"Women for the Future"				
All-Ukrainian Political Union	547,916	2.11		
Election bloc of political parties "Winter Crop Generation Team"	525,025	2.02		
Communist Party of Ukraine (renewed)	362,712	1.39		
The Greens	338,252	1.30		
Political Party "Yabloko"	299,764	1.15		
Election bloc of political parties "Unity"	282,491	1.09		

Source: Central Election Commission of Ukraine Web site, <<http://195.230.157.53/pls/vd2002/webproc0v>>

without clarifying a rather complicated regional differentiation of electoral preferences in Ukraine. I propose to pay attention to some essential characteristics of regional distribution of voters at the recent elections.

The Our Ukraine bloc won in fourteen western, central, and northern regions of Ukraine and in Kiev; the Communists, in ten eastern and southern regions; the Socialists, in the Poltava region; and the FIU bloc, in the Donetsk region. Such territorial division is somewhat unusual in that western Ukraine has traditionally been in the minority. Now, the electoral sympathies of Halicia have greatly coincided with those of Podillya, Transcarpathia, Bukovyna, and the Kiev, Cherkasy, and Volyn regions, thus indicating a new majority.

The arguments of the Yushchenko bloc turned out to be more convincing than those of the Communists for residents of the northern Ukrainian regions, from Zhytomyr to Sumy, which backed the Communist Party four years ago. The Com-

munist Party also lost in the Ukrainian capital and in the Kiev, Cherkasy, and Vinnytsya regions, where it was a leader in the previous elections. The sweeping shift of quite a few voters from an ultra-leftist to a right-centrist orientation was stimulated partially by disillusionment with the Communist Party, and partially by the personal authority of the right-centrist leader, Viktor Yushchenko. The areas of Communist domination are traditionally located to the south and east of the Cherkasy region, although it was there that the “party of power” (the FIU bloc) and SDPUU achieved maximum results this election. The central Ukrainian region demonstrated quite definite and stable sympathies: it is the electoral basis of the Socialist Party, characterized by moderate leftist orientations and radical opposition to the ruling regime. Most of the Socialist Party electorate is concentrated in the Vinnytsya, Kiev, and Cherkasy regions, and in the Poltava region Socialist voters are even in the majority.

Sociopolitically, the Socialist Party electorate is oriented toward the left-wing, reformist, antiregime paradigm, whereas the Communist Party voters seek exclusively to restore Soviet power. The former is geared toward the future; the latter is oriented to the past. In addition, the Yushchenko coalition and the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc achieved no less significant results in the Socialist Party-controlled central regions, while the FIU bloc and SDPUU contended with the Communist Party in the north and east, supporting the nomenklatura-bureaucratic and oligarchic projects of Ukraine accordingly. Russian experts, in particular G. Markov and G. Pavlovsky, consider these blocs to be “pro-Russian,”⁶ and the Kremlin has openly declared its support for them. However, the “pro-Russian attitude” of FIU is an involuntary position (the Russophilia of A. Derkach’s group is an exception). The bloc’s organic ideologems are stability and openness to many directions of policy, which allow them to justify their lack of strategic vision.

The Social Democrats of Medvedchuk fell prey to the erroneous strategy of their image-makers, who evidently deprived them of 3–4 percent of potential votes. The SDPUU’s Moscow-centrism is a myth imposed on the public by Pavlovsky and Gelman, who based the Social Democrats’ campaign on being the antithesis to Yushchenko. As a result, the only powerful party of Kiev oligarchs lost its positions in the western and central Ukrainian regions, where it was quite popular just a year ago. The SDPUU’s losses in Transcarpathia were especially substantial, as the absolute majority of residents of that region had backed SDPUU four years ago. Propagandistic “streaming” of the Yushchenko bloc and SDPUU into the east-west niches undermined both contenders, especially the Social Democrats, as they had to fight for votes in the pro-Russian segments influenced by FIU and the Communist Party in the regions with the most aggressive administrative resources.

Therefore, according to the returns of the 2002 parliamentary elections, the boundaries between the Vinnytsya and Odessa regions, between the Cherkasy and Kirovohrad regions, and between the Poltava and Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv regions can be considered the most substantial differentiating lines. I assess this phenomenon as the shift of the line of the sociopolitical breakup toward the south-east. In an optimistic scenario, with the existing tendencies preserved, the sup-

port of the reformist political forces will expand from the west eastward, and more significantly, from the north southward.

However, circumstances that were demonstrated in past elections may impede the realization of such a scenario. I refer to the significant strengthening of regional authoritarian political regimes that have demonstrated a stronger ability than official Kiev to resist the challenges of modernization and democratization. First of all, I refer to Donetsk.

Perils of the Donetsk Project of Ukraine

Most interesting is that the split occurred not according to attitudes toward Symonenko and Yushchenko, but according to the level of voters' amenability to administrative pressure. Administrative resources failed completely in Lviv, while in Donetsk they were nearly 100 percent effective. Such differences cannot be explained just by voters' attitudes to the Russian language.

We are witnessing a new stage of diversification of Ukraine—stratification according to the level of public resistance to administrative technologies. Some regional political regimes ignore basic democratic principles more openly than happens at the national level. As a result of this evolution, Ukraine now has its own Belarus—the Donetsk region—a superauthoritarian enclave that is a testing ground for the most brutal administrative technologies—the illegal and semilegal activities of the state machinery. Bureaucrats in Donetsk took part in agitation and propaganda (which is prohibited by law), made obstacles for the opposition, applied direct pressure on the media, and so on. Such regimes, in less developed forms, exist also in Poltava, Sumy, Odesa, and Dnipropetrovsk. Observation of such “testing grounds” makes it possible to follow the nature of the political order that has been proposed to the society by the “vanguard” of the authorities: in fact, it is a one-party bureaucratic regime with a number of insignificant satellite parties—a vulgar and deideologized version of the Chinese pattern of governing. The FIU megagroup in parliament, artificially created during the first postelection weeks, is a demonstrative rather than rational project that reflects the value orientations of persons who have assigned themselves to be “winners,” contrary to the will of voters.

The central authorities in Kiev are getting weaker. Will the lame-duck president want to give a trump card to the most powerful regional clan in the hope of protection and immunity? This question is to be answered within a year. The strengthening of regional administrations threatens to disintegrate Ukraine; and potential disintegration, according to political indications, intensified by the new sociopolitical differentiation of the electorate, seems more serious than the language and sociocultural diversity. It can at least be expected that the division of sympathies among participants of the 2004 presidential elections will take place along the boundaries specified by the 2002 elections.

Campaign Assessment by Ukrainian and Foreign Experts

During the election campaign, Ukrainian and foreign experts saw both indications of Ukraine's progress toward the development of democratic institutions and grave violations of democratic standards.

First, the elections were characterized by widespread manipulation but also showed an improvement in standards, James Sherr noticed.⁷ The improvement was due in part to the ineffectiveness of the authorities, in part to prudence, but in part to restraint. Administrative resources were vigorously employed, but outside three or four regions, they were employed within definite parameters. By comparison with decent standards, not only Western ones, much of this technology was improper; to those who experienced it, most of it was degrading and some of it frightening. But by comparison with Ukraine's previous elections—the presidential elections of October/November 1999 and the parliamentary elections of 1998, not to mention the blatantly rigged referendum of April 2000—the results were positive.⁸

One month prior to the ballot, the Committee of Voters of Ukraine indicated the following major types of violations of the election law:

- Campaigning by state officials or use of state resources to support favored political candidates and groups. The bloc FIU was the overwhelming beneficiary of this support
- Government pressure on certain political parties, candidates, and media outlets
- Criminal interference in election campaigns through violence, threats of violence, or destruction of campaign materials
- Illegal campaign practices by candidates offering free goods and services to voters and distributing unregistered campaign materials
- Executive branch interference in the election process almost exclusively to support the FIU bloc. Much of this interference took place openly; in many cases, government officials involved themselves in the electoral process in an apparent attempt to win favor with their superiors. The Committee of Voters of Ukraine has uncovered no evidence that state support for FIU was ordered or coordinated by the bloc's leadership or senior government authorities⁹

The Center for Peace, Conversion, and Foreign Policy of Ukraine separately polled Ukrainian experts and foreign observers on the quality and international implications of the elections during the postelection week.¹⁰ The Ukrainian group consisted of thirty-six experts representing government and nongovernmental think tanks, NGOs, and the printed media. Most of them took part in analyzing, reporting on, or monitoring the election process. None of them was involved in a campaign of any party, bloc, or individual candidate. The foreign group consisted of thirty-eight observers who represented the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, international organizations in Kiev, and foreign embassies to Ukraine.

Every tenth Ukrainian expert and every fifth foreign observer assessed the campaign as a definite step forward in the development of democracy in Ukraine. The majority, on the other hand, gave a neutral, diplomatic assessment (table 2). Among the comments on the general evaluation of the elections was the following: "The organization of voting and counting of votes was a step forward, while

TABLE 2. Which statement do you agree with?

	Ukrainian experts (%)	Foreign observers (%)
This election was a step forward in development of democracy in Ukraine as compared with previous elections.	11.1	21.1
This election is a step backward in Ukraine's journey to democracy.	2.8	5.3
This election represents neither progress nor regress in the development of Ukrainian democracy.	13.9	5.3
In some aspects the election showed progress; in others it was a regress from previously achieved standards.	72.2	47.3
Difficult to say.	0	21.1

the campaign was not." Every fifth foreign observer could not give a definite answer to this question.

Leaders and activists of NGOs that monitored the election campaign and voting process can be delighted that their activities were the greatest accomplishment of the recent election campaign. Both the Ukrainian and foreign experts shared that opinion (table 2). We cannot say that NGO activities are new for Ukraine, but this time their social repercussions were the greatest they have ever been. Regular reports by the Committee of Voters of Ukraine became the main source referred to by authors of numerous commentaries and articles concerning the election campaign. Although the committee data were never considered doubtful, the Central Election Committee and local election committees were reluctant to take those data into consideration.

Incidentally, ignoring the role of Ukrainian NGOs is one of the major defects of the new Law of Ukraine on Election of People's Deputies of Ukraine. The new law is another argument in favor of Ukraine's progress in the way of democratic reforms. The law providing a new method of establishing election committees (through representation of election subjects) was commended, first of all, by the foreign experts. However, only every twentieth Ukrainian expert and every tenth foreign observer indicated improvement in the activities of election committees. A more positive factor, for 61.1 percent of the Ukrainian experts, was the great attention of the international community to the Ukrainian elections. Ultimately, nearly half of the respondents in both groups found notable the increased public interest in the elections and, as a result, the "increased consciousness of the electorate" (as one expert put it).

The executive branch became an election subject de facto when it supported the For Integral Ukraine bloc, in contravention of the law. Its activities received

the greatest number of criticisms. In the opinion of the foreign observers, the use of “administrative resources” was the most negative characteristic of the 2002 Ukrainian elections (table 3). Most of the Ukrainian experts agree, although they think that the most negative element of the campaign was the activities of the leading Ukrainian media and their inability to be impartial and provide equal access to all candidates. Despite the well-known lack of independent media in Ukraine and the established practice of manipulating voters, certain media went beyond the limits of decency during these elections. The election campaign demonstrated the superiority, in numbers and in resources, of the “means of mass agitation and propaganda” over the “the means of public communication and information.” Numerous “black PR” projects would have been impossible to realize without the participation of the mass media. Half of the Ukrainian experts and one-third of the foreign respondents indicated this as a serious negative characteristic of the campaign.

TABLE 3. Which elements of the 2002 election campaign could be positively evaluated from the viewpoint of the development of democratic institutions in Ukraine (up to three options)?

	Ukrainian experts (%)	Foreign observers (%)
The new law on election of people's deputies of Ukraine and the guarantees of honest elections that it contains	38.8	52.6
More honest conduct of the executive branch as compared with previous elections	0	0
Activities of Ukrainian NGOs that monitored compliance with the election law	72.2	57.9
Increased political standards of participants in the election process and their readiness consciously to follow democratic principles	13.9	10.5
Increased public interest in elections	47.2	52.6
Great attention of the international community to the Ukrainian elections	61.1	36.8
Covering of election campaign, programs, and positions of election participants by the Ukrainian media	5.5	0
Activities of the judiciary during the election campaign	2.8	0
More effective activities of Central Election Committee and local election committees	5.5	10.5
Other (e.g., “Increased consciousness of the electorate”)	2.8	0
None	0	0

Nearly half (44.4 percent) of the Ukrainian experts believed that there were undisguised attempts at election fraud, but only 23.7 percent of the foreign observers agreed. In my opinion, it was the presence of foreigners that was the main deterrent to election rigging, which is why most of the foreign observers did not encounter blatant fraud. Every fifth foreign observer, however, was taken aback by the low political standards of election participants, which they apparently encountered among representatives of various political forces.

Election fever in Ukraine is over now. However, unlike what happened in 1999, no one expects the political struggle to become less strenuous or the negative tendencies of the election period to be counterbalanced by the achievements of renewed power. The mobilization of the whole state machinery for the existing government's self-preservation is an alarming tendency that lowers Ukraine's status in the international arena. The nature of the activities of the state machinery, failure to ensure the rule of law, and lack of independent media are the main factors that now determine the distance between Ukraine and Europe.

Notes

1. There were 229 (50.5 percent of parliament) until the end of May. Some MPs left the opposition because of administrative pressure.
2. That was before two MPs left the Communist faction. Now there are sixty-four.
3. In May seven MPs who supported Volodymyr Lytvyn for the speakership were excluded. Now there are 111.
4. One of them left the faction under pressure from outside.
5. See <<http://www.expert.ru/expert/current/data/ukr.shtml>>.
6. Interview of G. Pavlovski, <<http://www.ukraine.ru/interview/125593.html>>.
7. James Sherr, "Ukraine's Parliamentary Elections: The Limits of Manipulation," Occasional Brief, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Sandhurst, UK, 21 April 2002.
8. Ibid.
9. Committee of Voters of Ukraine, <<http://www.cvu.kiev.ua/eng/>>.
10. "The 2002 Parliamentary Elections and Their International Implications Assessed by Ukrainian Experts and Foreign Observers," Center for Peace, Conversion, and Foreign Policy of Ukraine, *Ukrainian Monitor*, Policy Paper 6, April 2002.