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Ahead of parliamentary elections in Ukraine

Tadeusz A. Olszański

The parliamentary elections to be held in Ukraine on 28 October will most likely be won by the ruling Party of Regions (PR); they will receive the most support in the proportional voting, and win the largest number of seats in the single-mandate constituencies. The two main opposition forces, the United Opposition 'Fatherland' and the 'UDAR' party, which are currently receiving similar levels of support, will also exceed the five-percent electoral threshold; the Communist Party, quite probably the 'Freedom' party and perhaps 'Forward, Ukraine!' may do so as well. (see Appendix).It can be assumed that in the majority-voting districts, the Party of Regions' candidates (or those it supports) will win most of the seats. So, the PR will have a majority in the new parliament, but will not have enough seats to change the constitution.

According to the electoral law, half the deputies are elected from party lists in the proportional elections, and the other half will have won a relative majority in the single-mandate constituencies. The election results will affect the form of the expected amendments to the constitution and other important reforms, and will also define a 'starting position' before the presidential campaign of 2015. However, the majority elections do offer an opportunity for people from outside the party systems to enter into 'big politics'.

The campaign has seen fewer violations than before (although the opposition parties maintain otherwise). Most of the violations are related to the majority elections, where the possibility of electoral fraud must also be considered. However, any possible violations of the proportional elections are unlikely to have a significant effect on the outcome.

The election campaign

None of the parties have been running very active election campaigns (except the Communists); nor have their party manifestos displayed any clear political programmes (apart from 'Freedom'). Likewise, there is little public interest in the elections, and the poll numbers on voter turnout are significantly lower than they have been in previous elections.

The ruling **Party of Regions** has clearly decided not to try winning over United Opposition and 'UDAR' voters, and has instead focused on combating the Communists' rising popularity, as they directly undermine the PR's support.

The United Opposition (an alliance of Yulia Tymoshenko's 'Fatherland', Arseni Yatsenyuk's 'Front for Change' and several minor parties) is running a defensive campaign: it seems that they are resigned to defeat, and have already announced that the elections will be rigged, calling on the EU not to recognise the results.

'UDAR', a new party founded by the famous boxer Vitali Klichko, has long campaigned mainly in the west and centre of the country, thus objectively weakening the United Opposition. It has only intensified its work in the east and south in recent weeks, where the party can now count on substantial support from voters disenchanted with the PR, but who are reluctant to support the Communists. Support for 'UDAR' has risen in the last few weeks, mainly at the expense of the United Opposition.

The Communists have been running a well-planned, active campaign, emphasising the PR's failure to keep their campaign promises. They have emphasised that their party lists have a large number of younger and middle-aged people; the Communists have succeeded in breaking the trend of their electorate 'aging' over the past few years.

The 'Forward, Ukraine!' party aims to weaken the United Opposition; it is probably being financed by the leading Ukrainian oligarch, Rinat Akhmetov. It has not proved to be very effective, even though the party still has some hope of entering parliament.

'Freedom', the main force of Ukrainian nationalism at the moment, is campaigning throughout the country, but it aims more at promoting nationalist ideas and the image of the party rather than winning many votes outside of western Ukrainian districts.

In the single-member districts, a large number of the candidates are representatives of local political parties and business structures, some supported by the government, some by its competitors. The Party of Regions attaches great importance to these elections, and is running strong candidates in most districts. The opposition parties were long unable to agree on assigning these districts so that only one opposition candidate would stand in each one; in the end, such an agreement was only concluded in a few districts. Nevertheless, they have put up some strong candidates, but their major politicians have preferred the 'safer' option of starting from the party lists. In several districts of eastern Galicia, 'Freedom' are almost certain of victory; meanwhile the Communists are clearly not hoping to win many of the majority-voting seats.

Electoral violations

The number of violations of the electoral law and the rules of democratic campaigning is lower than in the previous elections. This is mainly because the Party of Regions seems certain of victory. The majority of infringements are related to contests in the single-mandate constituencies. The main type of irregularity is public support by the government of specific candidates, as well as vote-buying, which is a direct violation of the law. However under the current electoral law, this cannot form the basis for the CEC to remove a candidate from the election. Available data indicates that there have also been a significant number of cases of pressure on the media, especially on local media. The most serious incident of this kind was the removal of the opposition station TVi from the major cable networks, and its harassment on dubious charges. Under the influence of internal and international criticism, a project to strengthen the law on defamation, which was primarily aimed at journalists, has been abandoned.

Webcams have been installed in all polling stations to monitor the course of voting. However there is concern that, especially in smaller centres, this will intimidate voters, inclining them to vote for the ruling party (in Ukraine there is a general lack of faith in the

confidentiality of voting). It is difficult to say whether this was in fact the intended effect.

The biggest threat to the honesty of the elections is linked to the process of counting the votes and determining their validity. The election commissions include many representatives of parties who have registered only a few candidates, or even just one. The committee members representing these parties have usually been 'delegated' by the Party of Regions; so, this party has much greater representation on the commissions than that required by the electoral law. They could use it to manipulate the results (for instance, by annulling ballots), and to push through their viewpoints on issues requiring the committee members to vote to resolve disputes.

The risk of election results being manipulated is focused on single-member districts. In the proportional elections, fraud is possible mainly in the east of the country (in order to weaken the Communists), and also against the 'Freedom' party is involved.

Predictions of the election results

In the light of the surveys available for the proportional elections, we can expect that on a turnout of about 60-65%, the Party of Regions can count on 30-35% of the vote, the United Opposition and 'UDAR' will get about 18-20% each; 10-12% for the communists, 'Freedom' 4 to 6%, and 'Forward, Ukraine!' about 4% (these figures are higher than those given in the polls, because the undecided category disappears). It is quite likely, however, that support for 'Freedom' and the Communists has been underestimated in these polls.

There is no data about the preferences of voters in single-mandate constituencies. We must not assume, however, that in each case the PR's or 'UDAR's voters will automatically support the candidates their parties support. There is a widespread expectation that the majority of these seats will go to the PR, or to the candidates it supports.

The turnout will be important. The ordinance limiting voting outside one's place of residence to one's home electoral district is intended to prevent 'electoral tourism', which has been one of the main types of electoral fraud in Ukraine in the past; but it has deprived numerous voters of the practical possibility of voting. If the election commissions prove even more determined to enforce the personal vote (previously, voting for absent family members had been tolerated if their identity documents were shown at the polling station), voter turnout may fall significantly.

A low turnout will be unfavourable for both the United Opposition & 'UDAR' and the Party of Regions, while it will favour the Communists and 'Freedom', whose electorates are well-disciplined. On the other hand, if the oldest generation turn out in force, and the youth vote is weak, these factors will benefit the PR and the Communists.

Appendix

Polls: support for the major parties

Polls conducted in late September and October by the Democratic Initiatives centre and the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, as well as the TNS Ukraine centre in the first half of

October. Only respondents who have declared they will participate in the elections had their party preferences recorded.

Ready to participate in the elections (rounded up to full percentage points). Poll by Democratic Initiatives

Definitely yes	57
Probably yes	21
Don't know	4
Probably not	4
Definitely not	14

Support for parties

	Democratic Initiatives	TNS Ukraine
Party of Regions	23,3	33
United Opposition 'Fatherland'	15,1	24
UDAR	16	16
Communist Party of Ukraine	10,1	12
'Freedom'	5,1	bd (<5%)
'Forward, Ukraine!'	2,1	bd
Others	2,7	bd
Undecided	24	bd

We have also given information about answers to questions about the elections in single-mandate constituencies, which were collected as part of the Democratic Initiatives survey

quoted above. Only 54% of respondents knew that these elections (in addition to the proportional ones) were being held; 36% did not know any of the candidates in their district (6% knew all of them), and 36% did not know which party is supported by the candidate they intended to vote for.