



Published on openDemocracy (<http://opendemocracy.net>)

Ukraine: democracy vs personality

By [Taras Kuzio](#)

Created 2007-10-09 09:54

Ukraine held parliamentary elections on Sunday 30 September 2007 for a five-year parliament. As with the scheduled elections in 2006, they were described as having been held in a "free and fair" manner by international organisations, such as the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe ([OSCE](#) [1]) and the Council of Europe. Ukraine has now held two free elections in a row and is only one of three countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States ([CIS](#) [2]) that holds them (the others being Moldova and Georgia). That is in of itself an achievement in an increasingly autocratic Eurasian neighbourhood.

Taras Kuzio is a research associate at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University.

For his publications on Ukraine and post-communist politics see www.taraskuzio.net [3]

Also by Taras Kuzio on openDemocracy:

"Ukraine: free elections, kamikaze president [3]" (28 March 2006)

The pre-term [elections](#) [4] were caused by a constitutionally dubious presidential decree on 2 April 2007 that disbanded parliament and called for early elections prior to the summer parliamentary recess, a date subsequently [pushed back](#) [5] to 30 September. Before the decree, the only parliamentary force interested in pre-term elections was the [Yulia Tymoshenko](#) [6] Bloc (BYuT).

[President Yushchenko](#) [7] and Our Ukraine moved towards support for the BYuT position in the second half of March 2007 in response to two factors. First, the repression of Yuriy Lutsenko's People's Self-Defence NGO (which went on to align itself with Our Ukraine in the September elections, in a new formation: the Our Ukraine-People's Self-Defence [the NU-NS]); second, and more important, the allegation that the Anti-Crisis coalition was poaching orange opposition deputies with the strategic plan of boosting their 240 members to 300 to obtain a constitutional majority (if it succeeded in this aim, the coalition could ignore presidential vetoes and render the president in effect irrelevant to Ukraine's political process).

The attempt to extract even greater powers from the president than those already transferred under the 2006 constitutional reforms (when Ukraine moved from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary-presidential democracy) to the government had already begun in January 2007 with the adoption of the law on the cabinet. President Yushchenko had vetoed it - but the veto was overturned by a constitutional majority vote of the Anti-Crisis coalition and the BYuT (one occasion where the opposition BYuT had aligned with the government). President Yushchenko has called upon the new coalition government to annul the law on the cabinet.

Ukraine's pre-term elections therefore came about due to greed on the part of the Party of Regions for additional power. This was despite the increased powers it had obtained under the 2006 reformed [constitution](#) [8] that had transferred power over the government from the president to parliament. [Viktor Yanukovich](#) [9] and the Party of Regions's strategic

miscalculation has lost them the power they could have held until 2011 over a winning orange coalition.

Ukraine's democratic profile

Democratic and orange forces have now won four elections [10] by slim majorities of votes above 50%. In the 2002 elections, the Communist Party (KPU) was removed from its traditional first-place showing to second place by the then newly created Our Ukraine bloc of centre-right and liberal parties. The then four opposition parties and blocs - Our Ukraine, the Tymoshenko bloc, the Socialist Party (SPU) and the KPU - obtained two-thirds of the vote in the proportional half of the elections (Ukraine in 2002 still had a mixed proportional-majoritarian system). Our Ukraine achieved first place with 24%, and the KPU second at 20%. The newly formed Donetsk clan's Party of Regions ran as a member of the For a United Ukraine bloc (which supported Ukraine's pre-orange-revolution president, Leonid Kuchma), and received a paltry 11%.

Two years later, in the 2004 presidential elections, Yushchenko won by 52% (over 44% for Yanukovich). This followed the epic protest popular protest against blatant election fraud following [11] round two of the elections. This, the "orange revolution", in which one in five Ukrainians participated for seventeen days, is Europe's largest peaceful protest [12] since the second world war.

Ukraine's then president, Leonid Kuchma [13] (who held office from July 1994 to January 2005), won the 1994 elections by a similar margin to Yushchenko's in 2004, i.e. 7%-8%. The crucial swing region in presidential elections is central Ukraine which voted for the eastern Ukrainian candidate Kuchma in 1994 and the western Ukrainian candidate Yushchenko in 2004. The margin of victory in both cases of only 7%-8% shows how important a role central Ukraine plays in Ukraine's presidential elections.

By illustration, Yushchenko's victory is far smaller than Mikheil Saakashvili's in Georgia in January 2004 (when he won 96% at the climax of the "rose revolution [13]"); it rather resembles Vojislav Kostunica's in Serbia in November 2000 (following the "bulldozer revolution"). In both Serbia and Ukraine (but not Georgia) the old guard maintained a support-base after the victory of the democratic opposition; the Serbian Radical Party and Ukraine's Party of Regions have both come first in elections held in 2006-07. The defeated presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovich and the Party of Regions he leads have won 44% (2004), 32% (2006) and 34% (2007) of the votes in successive elections, and remain very much part of Ukraine's political landscape.

In the 2006 and 2007 elections the orange camp again won by slim majorities [14] of 55%, in the first instance through the efforts of three political forces (Our Ukraine, BYuT, SPU) and in the second through the BYuT and the NU-NS. In all four victories between 2002-07 the opposition and orange camps have received upwards of 50%-55% of votes and seats in parliament and in the presidency. The anti-orange and pro-Kuchma camps have therefore traditionally had a base of 40%-50% of seats that have drawn on centrist parties, such as the Party of Regions, which supported Kuchma until 2004, and on the KPU.

A maturing system

The elections brought four political forces who entered parliament in 2006. Two orange forces (the BYuT and the NU-NS), the Party of Regions, and the KPU. The SPU won 2.86% and therefore failed to enter parliament. Voters deserted the SPU in protest at its perceived betrayal of the orange coalition when it defected in July 2006 to the Party of Regions, and (along with the KPU) won sufficient votes to create the Anti-Crisis coalition. This led to the unexpected return

[15] of Yanukovych to head [16] the Anti-Crisis coalition government. The fifth force to enter parliament this year is the former parliamentary speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn's bloc, which replaced the SPU as the potential coalition kingmaker.

Although twenty political parties and blocs put forward their slates in the latest elections, this was actually a decline by half on the forty-five parties and blocs which competed [17] in 2006. Of the twenty parties and blocs, only seven obtained votes above 1%.

Ukrainian voters have therefore narrowed their voting preferences [18] to four or five political parties and blocs that have stable ratings in different regions [19] of the country. Orange parties and blocs have stable ratings in Ukrainian-speaking western and central Ukraine, while the Party of Regions and the KPU have bases of support in the Russian-speaking eastern and southern Ukraine.

The creation of virtual parties [19] - created to confuse voters with similar sounding names to take away votes from genuine parties - has been a tactic used by the authorities since the 1998 elections, but with limited effect. The virtual Communist Party of Ukraine-renewed obtained a paltry 0.29% compared to 5.39% for the genuine KPU.

The Tymoshenko factor

Yulia Tymoshenko won 15%-25% of the vote throughout eastern and southern Ukraine outside the Donbas (Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts) and the Crimea, two regions which are heavily dominated [20] by the Party of Regions. Of the three original orange forces (BYuT, Our Ukraine, SPU) the Tymoshenko bloc is the only one capable of taking on the Party of Regions in Russian-speaking [21] eastern and southern Ukraine.

A number of different factors encourage this.

The BYuT traditionally conducts the most efficient election campaign and attracts a large number of young enthusiasts. Yulia Tymoshenko [22] herself is the most charismatic of Ukraine's politicians, especially compared to the rather droll Yushchenko and Yanukovych. The BYuT also has less stigma attached to it as a force that supports Nato membership or is anti-Russian. Both of these issues - language and Nato - are sensitive issues in eastern Ukraine and were used by Yanukovych in the 2004, 2006 and 2007 elections to mobilise the Russian-speaking electorate against what Yanukovych called "the orange horde". The BYuT's position is also well established, unlike Our Ukraine's and Yushchenko's; it has been consistent in its opposition to the Yanukovych government, the Anti-Crisis coalition and the Party of Regions.

In the 2007 elections, the BYuT was the only political force to obtain a major increase [23] of voters; in this case 1.5 million. The BYuT is also the only political force to be on a continuous upwards trajectory in increasing its support from 8% in 2002, when it first fought an election, to 23% in 2006 and 32% in the 30 September 2007 election. In the 2006 and 2007 elections, the BYuT secured second place.

The Tymoshenko bloc and the Party of Regions are Ukraine's only two political "machines" (using the term in the American sense). The gap between the BYuT and the Party of Regions narrowed from ten in 2006 to only two in the 2007 elections, primarily by the BYuT's active campaign [24] in eastern and southern Ukraine. Disillusioned eastern Ukrainian voters are no longer just defecting to leftwing parties, as they have traditionally, but to the BYuT as well.

A crisis in Our Ukraine

Also in openDemocracy on [post-orange politics](#): [24]

* Alexander Motyl, "in Ukraine: [Ukraine and Russia: divergent political paths](#) [24]" (17 August 2006)

* Ivan Krastev, "[Ukraine and Europe: a fatal attraction](#) [24]" (1 December 2004)

* Patrice de Beer, "[Ukraine's inspiring boredom](#) [24]" (4 April 2006)

* Alexander Motyl, "[How Ukrainians became citizens](#) [24]" (25 November 2004)

* Andrew Wilson, "[Ukraine's crisis of governance](#) [24]" (1 May 2007)

[Our Ukraine](#) [25], the president's nascent party, continues to have problems in establishing itself as a serious player. The Our Ukraine bloc obtained its highest vote in 2002, during the era of Leonid Kuchma, when it obtained 24% of the vote; but it has stagnated during Yushchenko's presidency. In the 2006 and 2007 elections, Our Ukraine and the NU-NS respectively obtained 14% on both occasions.

This 14% represents a stable 10% that has always in the 1990s voted for *Rukh* (the Ukrainian popular movement that led Ukraine to independence) and an additional vote by those who back Lutsenko's People's Self-Defence NGO. The NGO has drawn much of its enthusiasm and activists from youth groups, such as *Pora* [26] (It's Time), which was active during the orange revolution.

The NU-NS attempted to forge a new profile for the 2007 elections by removing senior businessmen who had corrupt reputations. [Petro Poroshenko](#) [27], a founding member of Our Ukraine, was such a figure; he was removed because he was tainted by corruption charges from the September 2005 crisis. Another strategic overhaul included aligning Lutsenko's People's Self-Defence NGO to Our Ukraine to give it a "radical" edge.

These changes proved to be ephemeral and Our Ukraine continued to suffer from four major problems.

First, the low popularity of the president whose ratings have been hovering below 15%. The president's campaigning on the NU-NS's behalf harmed its popularity.

Second, the continued influence of oligarchs in the NU-NS (such as the Pryvat group, one of two Dnipropetrovsk clans), and the president's courting of oligarch favour after he removed the anti-oligarch Tymoshenko government in September 2005.

Third, the mismatch between the anti-oligarch and anti-corruption rhetoric of the NU-NS and its [lack of action](#) [28] in dealing with these issues in power. The NU-NS failed to convince [voters](#) [29] of its genuineness.

Fourth, Our Ukraine - unlike the BYuT - has never been sure of its position in opposition or in government. In October 2006, Our Ukraine went officially into opposition and yet its members remained in government. Foreign minister Borys Tarasiuk was in the Yanukovich government but the *Rukh* party that he heads was in opposition. Such an unclear position has turned voters away from Our Ukraine to the Tymoshenko bloc, which has always had a clear position on not cooperating with the Party of Regions. After the 2007 elections only the BYuT came out immediately and forcefully [against](#) [30] joining any coalition that included the Party of Regions.

The NU-NS is composed of nine parties that have declared their intention to merge after the elections. Most of the parties are small and weak national democratic forces. The merger will be a test of the willingness of the nine party leaders to forego their personal ambitions in the interests of forging a united pro-presidential party for the 2009 elections.

National democratic parties have been notoriously poor at merging, in contrast to the big two political machines - the Party of Regions and the BYuT - who have absorbed smaller parties and

incorporated representatives of smaller parties. The Party of Regions includes representatives from parties that supported Leonid Kuchma (such as Labour Ukraine, the Social Democratic United Party and the *Morske* party). The BYuT has incorporated the Conservative Republican and Yabloko parties as well as a wing of the Ukrainian National Assembly. More importantly, Our Ukraine failed in 2005-06 to become a presidential political machine.

The left's demise

The 2007 elections witnessed the continued decline of the left in Ukrainian politics. In the 1990s the combined left included 40% of parliamentary seats, and it controlled the speaker's position in 1994-98 and 1998-99. In the 1998-2002 parliament the KPU, with 120 seats, was the largest faction.

Since the 2002 elections the left have been in decline from a combined onslaught by the pro-reform parties and by the Party of Regions in the Communist traditional support base of Donbas and the Crimea. The KPU dropped to second place in the 2002 elections and to fifth and fourth places in the 2006 and 2007 elections respectively. In the 2004 elections the KPU leader Piotr Symonenko came in last of the four big political forces that put forward candidates, below SPU leader Oleksandr Moroz [31].

There are three reasons why support for the left has declined.

First, defections to the Party of Regions in the Donbas and the Crimea - a process similar to the movement of Russian Communist Party members to Vladimir Putin's [31] United Russia party (indeed, the Party of Regions and United Russia signed a cooperation agreement in 2005). The Party of Regions includes a radical anti-orange wing of former KPU and Pan-Slavic party members.

Second, biological [32] reasons - many KPU members, whose average age is in the 60s in a country where the average life span is 65, have died off.

Third, the improved socio-economic situation in Ukraine since 2000 when the economy returned to growth.

The SPU was traditionally the "younger brother" of the KPU during the 1990s. Since 2002 the SPU had come to match the KPU's support, and in the 2004 elections the SPU leader Moroz won a greater number of votes than KPU leader Piotr Symonenko.

Alone among Ukraine's left parties, the SPU was invited to join the Socialist International, giving it respect throughout Europe as a post-Soviet social democratic party. The accolades arrived too early; the SPU's betrayal of the orange camp in July 2006, when it gave the Party of Regions and the KPU sufficient numbers in parliament to create the Anti-Crisis coalition, was never forgiven by voters who deserted [33] it in the 2007 elections. Similar external condemnation of the SPU's 2006 defection came from the Socialist International and socialists in the European Parliament.

The coalition's numbers

An orange coalition would have a small majority of 228 seats in a parliament that has 450 deputies. With absent deputies, or a repeat of the defections that plagued the 2006-07 parliament, the orange coalition could run into problems. If the Lytvyn bloc were to join the coalition the numbers would rise to 248, giving it a more comfortable majority.

The Party of Regions is in a quandary, as it could only hope to re-enter government in a grand coalition with Our Ukraine. Its claim to have the right to create the coalition and government because it came first is not in line with European practice as in proportional systems who comes first has less weight than who creates [34] the coalition. In Serbia the Radical Party came first in the January 2007 elections [34] but did not form the government.

The Party of Regions obtained a 2% increase in its vote share (from 32% to 34% over 2006), but the actual number of votes cast for it declined. The Party of Regions has 175 seats, and combined with the KPU commands only 202, a shortfall of twenty-four seats for a coalition majority. Even if the Lytvyn bloc were to be added (giving such a coalition 222) this would still be three seats short.

Yushchenko called for a grand coalition [35] after the elections to include [36] the Party of Regions, the BYuT and the NU-NS. The BYuT immediately rejected such a coalition and threatened to go into opposition. The NU-NS, as after the 2006 elections, is divided over joining [37] an orange or a grand coalition.

Towards 2009

The 2007 elections [38] were a harder-fought election than those in 2006 because their outcome would also decide Yushchenko's fate. In the sense that an orange coalition will be formed and Tymoshenko is likely to return as prime minister, the election result is indeed favourable to Yushchenko's re-election as president in 2009 for a second term.

At the same time, Yushchenko has never had an easy working relationship with Tymoshenko, as seen by his removal of her in September 2005 after only eight months in government. It cannot be pleasant news to the presidential secretariat that Yushchenko's re-election is now so dependent on the Tymoshenko bloc as the only "original" orange force that won a striking victory in 2007. (Our Ukraine received the same number of votes as in 2006, while the SPU vote collapsed and it failed to enter parliament).

Yushchenko's dilemma is twofold [39]. With only Our Ukraine's support the president could not hope to be re-elected for a second term, as both Our Ukraine and the president have only 15% support. Disillusionment is too great. He therefore has to rely on either of the two big political forces - the BYuT or the Party of Regions. It is difficult to imagine the Party of Regions successfully ordering its voters in eastern Ukraine to vote for Yushchenko. Nevertheless, the Party of Regions was shocked by the BYuT's success in the 2007 elections and must be calculating that they would be better off with a stagnant, second-term Yushchenko than an energised, first-term Tymoshenko.

Tymoshenko would be prepared to support Yushchenko again, as she did in 2004 when she alone of the leaders of Ukraine's four opposition forces did not stand, but only if she was still in a prime-ministerial role. If Tymoshenko is either not offered the prime ministership, or loses the position ahead of 2009, she will inevitably stand as a second orange candidate in the next presidential elections - where she would most likely defeat Yushchenko in the second qualifying round (orange voters know that in a second-round contest for the presidency Tymoshenko would defeat Yanukovich, whereas Yushchenko would undoubtedly lose).

In 2005 the president had the right to remove the prime minister under the 1996 constitution, but under the reformed 2006 constitution the prime minister is beholden to the parliamentary coalition. The only manner in which Yushchenko could again undermine a Tymoshenko government would be by ordering NU-NS deputies to withdraw from the orange coalition. Such

a demand might run the risk of splitting the NU-NS into pro- and anti-Tymoshenko camps ahead of the 2009 elections, thereby reducing Yushchenko's power-base even more.

The barrier to reform

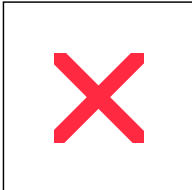
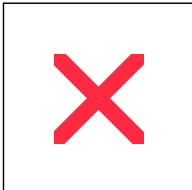
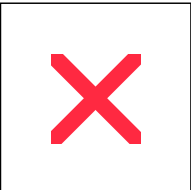
Ukraine's fourth democratic and orange victory in five years is again slim. Alone among the three orange political forces, the orange victory represents a breakthrough only for the BYuT and for Yulia Tymoshenko personally. The 2007 elections have given the orange revolution a second chance after the strategic presidential mistakes of 2005-06, the failure to establish an orange coalition after the 2006 elections and the eighteen-month split in the BYuT-Our Ukraine alliance following the ousting of the Tymoshenko government that worked in favour of increasing support for the Party of Regions.

A renewed orange alliance composed of prime-minister-in-waiting Yulia Tymoshenko and President Viktor Yushchenko is the only way to kick-start democratic reform [40] in Ukraine, but this would ultimately depend on them overcoming their personal ambitions. Ukraine's long political drama [41] is yet unfinished.

Average rating

(1 vote)

Rate this:


 <input data-bbox="424 1397 513 1447" type="button" value="Submit"/> 

Trackback URL for this post:

<http://opendemocracy.net/trackback/34739>

Source URL:

http://opendemocracy.net/article/democracy_power/ukraine/democracy_vs_personality

Links:

- [1] <http://www.osce.org/item/26824.html>
- [2] http://cde.mtuci.ru/distance/cis_countries_map.htm
- [3] <http://www.taraskuzio.net/>
- [4] http://www.angus-reid.com/tracker/view/15287/ukraine_2007
- [5] http://ukraine.suite101.com/article.cfm/ukraine_parliamentary_election
- [6] http://ukraine.suite101.com/article.cfm/yulia_tymoshenko_politician
- [7] <http://www.yuschenko.com.ua/eng/>

- [8] http://www.servat.unibe.ch/law/icl/up__indx.html
[9] http://ukraine.suite101.com/article.cfm/viktor_yanukovych_early_life
[10] <http://www.electionguide.org/country.php?ID=223>
[11] <http://taraskuzio.net/journals/special.shtml>
[12] <http://dif.org.ua/ua/publ/287/pp33.vis>
[13] <http://www.artukraine.com/buildukraine/kuchma.htm>
[14] <http://www.polskieradio.pl/zagranica/gb/dokument.aspx?iid=59800>
[15] <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/08/3cfe86f8-d7b7-4beb-8fb9-d69aab1ee249.html>
[16] http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/en/publish/article?&art_id=21698388&cat_id=32579
[17]
http://www.cfr.org/publication/10223/ukrainians_vote_for_parliament.html?breadcrumb=default
[18] <http://www.kyivpost.com/nation/27485/>
[19] http://go.hrw.com/atlas/norm_htm/ukraine.htm
[20] <http://www.focus.in.ua/article/politics/21704.html>
[21] http://ukraine.suite101.com/article.cfm/ukraines_language_conflict
[22] <http://www.tymoshenko.com.ua/eng/index/>
[23] <http://www.kyivpost.com/nation/27487/>
[24]
http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=420&issue_id=4230&article_id=2372426
[25] http://www.yuschenko.com.ua/eng/present/the_Our_Ukraine_bloc/
[26] <http://pora.org.ua/eng/content/view/2970/310/>
[27] <http://www.poroshenko.com.ua/?view=57>
[28] <http://www.cfr.org/publication/11181/>
[29] <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/09/6a3be284-2a6e-41bc-adab-82b502474590.html>
[30] <http://www.byut.com.ua/ukr/news-4978>
[31] <http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/2007/10/02/ukraine-so-long-oleksandr-moroz/>
[32]
http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=407&issue_id=3225&article_id=2369228
[33] <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/10/A7B58797-56BD-49E6-BE43-4CCDB93D8888.html>
[34] <http://www.partyofregions.org.ua/pr-east-west/4559abe3c46ab/>
[35] <http://www.voanews.com/english/2007-10-08-voa50.cfm>
[36] http://www.president.gov.ua/news/data/1_19652.html
[37] <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/10/08/europe/EU-POL-Ukraine-Politics.php>
[38] <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/vnd2007/w6p001e.html>
[39] <http://pravda.com.ua/news/2007/10/5/65026.htm>
[40] http://www.angus-reid.com/analysis/view/28418/ukraine_needs_a_new_electoral_reform
[41] <http://www.mw.ua/1000/1550/60263/>



Copyright © [Taras Kuzio](#) . Published by openDemocracy Ltd. You may download and print extracts from this article for your own personal and non-commercial use only. If you teach at a university we ask that your department [make a donation](#). [Contact us](#) if you wish to discuss republication. Some articles on this site are published under different terms.