

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs has closely followed the Ukrainian presidential election and its implications for the country's future. NDI's pre-election report on Ukraine described the country's political landscape on the eve of the October 31 election. Since 1992, NDI's programs in Ukraine have sought to strengthen democratic political parties and their factions in parliament and support the growth of civil society institutions that promote citizen participation in political life.

SUMMARY

On October 31, 1999, Ukraine held its third presidential election in the eight years of its independence. The accompanying table shows the results of the first round of voting, as reported by the Central Election Commission. In the runoff ballot scheduled for November 14, President Kuchma will face Communist Party candidate Petro Symonenko. Kuchma was the favorite in the initial round of voting and remains favored to win in the runoff.

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| Voter turnout | 69.96% |
| Invalid ballots | 3.93% |
| Leonid Kuchma | 36.49% |
| Petro Symonenko | 22.24% |
| Oleksandr Moroz | 11.29% |
| Natalia Vitrenko | 10.97% |
| Yevhen Marchuk | 8.13% |
| Yuri Kostenko | 2.17% |
| Hennadyi Udovenko | 1.22% |
| Others | 1.74% |

The two candidates represent sharply contrasting political forces. President Kuchma, whose promises of reform have not curtailed Ukraine's economic decline or its pervasive corruption, represents the centrist forces that dominate government administration. Symonenko, not a charismatic leader in his own right, has the support of a broad range of left-leaning parties that want to revert to Soviet-era policies to address the

country's economic woes.

ELECTION RESULTS AND SECOND-ROUND STRATEGIES

In the October 31 balloting, President Kuchma carried 17 of Ukraine's 27 regions. Symonenko led in seven regions, with three others going to other left-wing candidates. Kuchma's support was highest in the heavily Ukrainian-speaking western and central regions, where voter turnout was generally the highest (up to 88%). Symonenko carried predominantly Russian-speaking regions that largely supported Kuchma in his 1995 defeat of Leonid Kravchuk.

Since the completion of first-round balloting, both President Kuchma and Petro Symonenko have courted the support of the 13 losing candidates and their supporters. President Kuchma has attracted support from Yevhen Marchuk, who got nearly 10 percent of the vote, and Hennadyi Udovenko, the official Rukh party candidate.

The parliament's speaker and Peasants' Party head, Oleksandr Tkachenko, as well as Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz, have endorsed Symonenko, who is expected to consolidate the support of all leftist forces.

Voter turnout is expected to be a key factor in determining the outcome of this weekend's runoff. More than half of the first-round vote went to candidates other than the incumbent, suggesting that the president must turn at least some of the "protest voters" in order to win the second round. In 1995, President Kuchma drew substantial support from voters that last month voted for leftist candidates. Symonenko's Communist base is well-organized, disciplined, and expected to turn out this Sunday. This could spell trouble for President Kuchma, who is counting on the support of a loyal local administration and all centrist and right-of-center voters.

ELECTION CONDUCT

The Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) sent a joint mission to observe the October 31 elections. The delegation noted an improvement in Ukraine's election laws, but also observed that in practice, the implementation and enforcement of these laws was "often selective and did not provide a level playing field for all candidates."

The OSCE/PACE mission criticized both state and private media's electoral coverage, noting that pervasive bias made it "almost impossible for a voter to rely on any one source of information to gain an objective view of the campaign." Observers also expressed concern that public officials, including heads of eight regional administrations, had campaigned on behalf of President Kuchma, and that state security forces had been "actively involved in politically motivated interventions." Despite numerous complaints regarding the conduct of the election campaign, the OSCE reported that very few resulted in satisfactory remedies.

A major monitoring operation was also mounted by the organization Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU), with which NDI has worked since 1994. Because the Ukrainian government refused accreditation to domestic monitors, CVU's 15,000 volunteers gained access to polling places as accredited journalists. The organization also conducted a parallel vote tabulation on election day based on a representative sample of polling places. CVU reported a large number of violations that fell into three main categories: campaign activity on the day of voting, misconduct during the voting and counting process, and interference by government officials in the voting process. In CVU's judgment, the cumulative impact of these irregularities could not have significantly influenced the outcome of the election.

WHAT COMES NEXT

A victory for President Kuchma in the November 14 runoff is unlikely to provide momentum to this year's campaign promises, which include a more efficient, smaller national government and greater independence for local government. On the economic front he has vowed to balance the federal budget, improve the country's rate of development, and protect national savings from inflation. His strongest achievements have been in the area of foreign affairs, where he has managed to resolve territorial conflicts with Russia, bring Ukraine into the Council of Europe, and initiate working relations with NATO. The current parliament, heavily dominated by leftist opponents, will remain a major obstacle to real reform.

If the forces of reaction bring Symonenko to power, he will have a strong mandate to reverse many of Kuchma's policies, and will seek to do so. The Communists, along with many of their political allies, advocate a return to central economic planning, an end to privatization, and closer ties to Russia and Belarus. More extreme leftist politicians, who might have strong influence on the policies of a Symonenko administration, have advocated a complete break with western economic and political institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Council of Europe.

Whoever wins, the constitution may prove to be the next battleground. President Kuchma has raised the possibility of amending the constitution to create a bicameral legislature, which could diminish the power of his opponents in parliament and punish his challengers. Parliamentary leaders have proposed extending the legislature's authority to approve presidential appointments, including members of the president's cabinet.

The choice before Ukrainian voters is a difficult one. While Kuchma's presidency has been witness to notable political accomplishments, his policies have been largely ineffective in bringing economic prosperity to the country. Symonenko gives a voice to those disenchanting voters calling for at least a partial return to the Soviet system, but offers little in the way of a positive vision of Ukraine's future. The victor on November 14 will inherit a powerful office with broad powers to determine Ukraine's political and economic course for the next five years.

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