

Policy Brief

Ukrainian Presidential Elections. Results of the First Round and What Could be Expected from the Second Round

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Results of the First Round

The final voting results of the first round of elections resulted Volodymyr Zelenskiy 30.24%, Petro Poroshenko 15.95%, Yulia Tymoshenko 13.40%, Yuri Boiko 11.67%, Anatoliy Hrytsenko 6.91% of votes and the other candidates less than that.¹

Zelenskiy won in 20 regions, including Kyiv; Poroshenko won only in Western Ukraine (Lviv, Ternopil oblasts); Tymoshenko in Ivano-Frankivsk oblast; and Boiko in Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, government-controlled area).²

According to data provided by Central Electoral Commission, the voter turnout at the first round of elections was 63,52%. The highest turnout was recorded in Volyn oblast (68.35%), Lviv oblast (68.88%) and Kyiv (68.01%). The lowest numbers (below 60%) showed Zakarpatia (46,99%), Chernivtsi (56,07%), Luhansk oblasts (56,76%)³.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) says no systemic violations were found. The ambassadors of the G7 countries welcomed the preliminary findings of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on the holding of the first round of presidential elections in Ukraine, which stated that the elections were competitive and were held in a generally peaceful and secure atmosphere.⁴

Ukraine's Interior Ministry registered hundreds of cases of smaller election violations with the greatest number allegedly happening in Kyiv, and in Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Dnipropetrovsk regions.⁵

¹ Ukrainian Central Electoral Commission. Results of Presidential Election 2019 <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2019/wp300pt001f01=719.html>

² Ukrainian Central Electoral Commission. Results of Presidential Election 2019 <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2019/wp301pt001f01=719.html>;

³ Ukraine's Election 2019: LIVE Updates. – Ukraine World, 12 April 2019 <https://ukraineworld.org/articles/ukraine-explained/ukraines-election-2019-live-updates?param1=president¶m2=2019>

⁴ Ukraine's Election 2019: LIVE Updates- – Ukraine World, 12 April 2019 <https://ukraineworld.org/articles/ukraine-explained/ukraines-election-2019-live-updates?param1=president¶m2=2019>

⁵ Preliminary Results Suggest Zelenskiy Wins First Round of Ukraine Presidential Election. – Hromadske International, 1 April 2019 <https://en.hromadske.ua/posts/preliminary-results-suggest-zelenskiy-wins-first-round-of-ukraine-presidential-election>

Yulia Tymoshenko claimed that elections were falsified by Petro Poroshenko campaign, but noted she will not go to court over this, neither did she summon her supporters to organise public protests. According to her, registration of 39 candidates for the elections was a political technology to steal votes in the first round.⁶

Preliminary conclusions⁷ from the first round of Presidential Elections can be summarized as follows.

Ukraine held a generally fair, democratic election. Most top candidates were pro-European; only 1 out of top-5 candidates has pro-Russian rhetoric (Boiko). South and East, previously mostly pro-Russian, now mostly voted for Zelenskiy, whose rhetoric is pro-Western.

Conducting political and economic reforms was the key agenda of vote, with fighting corruption and raising living standards as the key issues. It will be the key agenda also in the Second Round. The issue of war with Russia was on the background, and Poroshenko, who made strengthening sovereignty his central theme, got considerably less votes than Zelenskiy, who focused on anti-corruption issues. Positive sign of those elections is that youth is no longer passive.

However, the elections have seen the rise of a new kind of populism, winner of the First Round Zelenskiy promotes dominantly himself as a person, not so much of a specific set of policies. It could be said, that virtual reality (of TV serial) won over “real” reality. This shows that Ukrainian policy is entering the period of a new political marketing.

What to expect from the Second Round of Presidential Elections

As no candidate received an absolute majority of the vote in the first round, a second round of presidential elections will be held on 21 April 2019 between two candidates who received most of votes, Volodymyr Zelenskiy and Petro Poroshenko.

According to the poll conducted by the Rating sociological group on 5-10 April 2019 51% of Ukrainians say they would vote for presidential candidate Zelenskiy in the 21 April runoff, while incumbent President Petro Poroshenko would gain 21%. 18% have not decided, 10% do not intend to vote. Among those who intend to vote in the second round: 61% vote for Zelenskiy and 24% for Poroshenko, 15% have not decided. Among

⁶ Ukraine's Election 2019: LIVE Updates. – Ukraine World, 12 April 2019 <https://ukraineworld.org/articles/ukraine-explained/ukraines-election-2019-live-updates?param1=president¶m2=2019>

⁷ Ukraine's Election 2019: LIVE Updates. – Ukraine World, 12 April 2019 <https://ukraineworld.org/articles/ukraine-explained/ukraines-election-2019-live-updates?param1=president¶m2=2019>

those who intend to vote in the second round and have decided on the choice: 71% - for Zelenskiy, 29% - for Poroshenko.⁸

According to poll, Zelenskiy overcomes his competitor within all age categories. He is also the leader among the residents of the East, South, and Center. At the same time, in the West, the positions of both candidates are almost equal.⁹

This makes it probable that in the second Round it could be expected that approximately two thirds of votes will be cast for the Zelenskiy and a quarter of votes for Poroshenko.

One view among analysts is that anger over Mr Poroshenko's failure in raising living standards and combating corruption is so deep that he will struggle to win over supporters of candidates eliminated from the race, including Ms Tymoshenko, the pro-Russian candidate Boiko and the reformist Hrytsenko. However, Poroshenko has fought back, suggesting that his opponent in second round, Zelenskiy, is supported by Moscow while also being a "puppet" of Igor Kolomoisky, one of Ukraine's oligarchs whose TV channel has given vast airtime to the comedian before elections.¹⁰

To those who supported Poroshenko in the first round, the reasons are familiar to those in the West: military success in defending the country from further incursions by Kremlin-backed forces in the east; the clinching of visa-free travel to the European Union; the significant achievement of overseeing the establishment of an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church; and some level of economic stability, particularly more recently. Yet, in the absence of any credible candidate who espoused the legacy of the Maidan protests and with disappointment about how he has appeared to obfuscate over anti-corruption measures, many look to him as the least worst option.¹¹ Main problem for Poroshenko is the slow improvement of Ukrainians living standards, which is more important for voters than the Maidan legacy and generally successful conduct of war in Eastern Ukraine. Therefore, it is unlikely, as polls show, that it will be possible for Poroshenko to win in the second round of presidential elections.

Zelenskiy's popularity is based on the role of President of Ukraine in the hugely popular 2015 television series "Servant of the People". To support Zelenskiy, the political party

⁸ Monitoring of the electoral moods of Ukrainians (5-10 April, 2019). – Rating Group, 11.04.2019 http://ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/monitoring_elektoralnyh_nastroeniy_ukraincev_5-10_aprelya_2019.html

⁹ Monitoring of the electoral moods of Ukrainians (5-10 April, 2019). – Rating Group, 11.04.2019 http://ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/monitoring_elektoralnyh_nastroeniy_ukraincev_5-10_aprelya_2019.html

¹⁰ Financial Times article cited in Ukraine's Election 2019: LIVE Updates. – Ukraine World, 12 April 2019 <https://ukraineworld.org/articles/ukraine-explained/ukraines-election-2019-live-updates?param1=president¶m2=2019>

¹¹ Jonathan Hibberd, Ukraine presidential elections narrowed down from 39 to 2 contenders. – New Eastern Europe, 1 April 2019 <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/04/01/ukraine-presidential-elections-narrowed-down-from-39-to-2-contenders/>

Servant of the People was created in March 2018 by people from the same TV production company Kvartal 95. The TV station belongs to businessman Igor Kolomoisky, who is probably the main financial supporter and influencer of the Zelenskiy, although Zelenskiy himself denies this connection. It is expected that Zelenskiy, whose political experience is limited, will struggle to formulate more coherent policy if elected.

Unlike Poroshenko, who has been crystal-clear about his desire to see Ukraine join the European Union and NATO, Zelenskiy has taken a more cautious approach to the issue. While seeming to support EU and NATO membership and saying he does not plan to change Ukraine's westward course, he says he would like to give Ukrainians the opportunity to decide for themselves whether to stay on the course with referendums on the matters.¹²

Zelenskiy has pointed out that "Ukraine chose a course toward European integration, a course toward Europe long, long ago, and nobody is going to change this course. But in order to join NATO, after all, we should explain to people...that this is not some alligator that wants to swallow us, Ukraine, and that this is really about the country's security... We need to reach out to every person living in the east of Ukraine...to every Ukrainian ... and NATO [membership] must be acquired through a referendum."¹³ It could be said that this position of Zelenskiy reflects general mood in Ukraine.

Zelenskiy has said he supports the Minsk peace accords – two agreements between Moscow and Kyiv signed in September 2014 and February 2015 that provide a road map to peace, albeit one that has allowed each side to interpret the direction of that road differently. He has said he would like the United States and the United Kingdom to join peace negotiations. Currently, those talks are held in the Normandy format – a four-way dialogue between Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and France. He has also shown interest in allowing an international peacekeeping force to secure the war-torn east.¹⁴

Zelenskiy has said that he's ready to negotiate with Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the war in eastern Ukraine, but he has offered few specifics on how he would accomplish that without ceding any territory to Russia.¹⁵

¹² So Far, Zelenskiy Is High On Charisma And Light On Policy. Do Ukrainians Care? – RFE/RL, 08.04.2019 <https://www.rferl.org/a/so-far-zelenskiy-is-high-on-charisma-and-light-on-policy-do-ukrainians-care-/29868871.html>

¹³ So Far, Zelenskiy Is High On Charisma And Light On Policy. Do Ukrainians Care? – RFE/RL, 08.04.2019 <https://www.rferl.org/a/so-far-zelenskiy-is-high-on-charisma-and-light-on-policy-do-ukrainians-care-/29868871.html>

¹⁴ Poroshenko says ready for debates due on April 14, April 19, By Interfax-Ukraine. – Kyiv Post, 9 April 2019 <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/poroshenko-says-ready-for-debates-due-on-april-14-april-19.html>

¹⁵ Anton Troianovski, Parallel universe: The front-runner seeking to be Ukraine's president plays one on TV. – Washington Post, 9 March 2019 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/parallel-universe-the-front-runner-seeking-to-be-ukraines-president-plays-one-on-tv/2019/03/09/2a4cc22e-3a8c-11e9-b10b-f05a22e75865_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.dc87bd17530f

However, Dmitriy Peskov, press secretary of Russia's president Vladimir Putin, has said as reply to Zelenskiy's statements that: "Russia does not occupy any Ukrainian territory... Words "occupation" or "annexation" cannot be applied to Crimea de jure or de facto" as "everything that happened in Crimea was held in strict observance of Ukrainian law and based upon the international law"¹⁶

A native Russian speaker from south-central Kryviy Rih, Zelenskiy has also spoken out against the Poroshenko government's restriction on Russian language in government, media, and art, although he supports the status of Ukrainian language, as the federal language and thinks everybody should learn it.¹⁷

Poroshenko expressed a desire to participate in a debate with his opponent before the second round. Zelenskiy accepted the offer, but on the condition that it should take place on Olympic Stadion and all Ukrainian TV networks have the equal rights to translate the event – condition that Poroshenko accepted.¹⁸ The candidates however have differing views, when the debate should take place, either on 14 April as Poroshenko wanted (Zelenskiy did not show up although Poroshenko did) or on 19 April as Zelenskiy fixed it.¹⁹

Programme positions of candidates in the second round of Ukrainian Presidential Elections

Main electoral program points of Petro Poroshenko^{20 21}

- Apply for EU membership in 2023 and begin implementing the NATO Membership Plan.
- Restore the standard of living and begin the fight against poverty.
- Make Ukraine the regional leader of industrial development; one of the leaders of the agrarian and IT sectors; the transport hub of Eastern Europe and one of the most visited European countries.

¹⁶ Ukraine's Election 2019: LIVE Updates. – Ukraine World, 1 April 2019 <https://ukraineworld.org/articles/ukraineexplained/ukraines-election-2019-live-updates?param1=president¶m2=2019>

¹⁷ So Far, Zelenskiy Is High On Charisma And Light On Policy. Do Ukrainians Care? – RFE/RL, 08.04.2019 <https://www.rferl.org/a/so-far-zelenskiy-is-high-on-charisma-and-light-on-policy-do-ukrainians-care-/29868871.html>

¹⁸ "Стадион, так стадион": Порошенко принял вызов Зеленского на дебаты на "Олимпийском". – UNIAN, 4 April 2019 <https://www.unian.net/elections/10504287-stadion-tak-stadion-poroshenko-prinyal-vyzov-zelenskogo-na-debaty-na-olimpiyskom-video.html>

¹⁹ Ukrainian Presidential Rivals Propose Different Dates For Public Debate. – RFE/RL, 08.04. 2019 <https://www.rferl.org/a/poroshenko-calls-for-april-14-debate-with-presidential-rival-zelenskiy/29867537.html>

²⁰ Предвыборная программа Порошенко. – Obozrevatel, 14.02.2019 <https://www.obozrevatel.com/president-2019/program/predvybornaya-programma-poroshenko.htm>

²¹ НАТО, ЕС и региональное лидерство. Что пообещал Порошенко в предвыборной программе. – NV, 08.02.2019 <https://nv.ua/ukraine/politics/nato-es-i-regionalnoe-liderstvo-cto-poobeshchal-poroshenko-v-predvybornoy-programme-50005279.html>

- Continue work on the restoration of territorial integrity and the return of the occupied territories by political and diplomatic means.
- Strengthening of Army and Navy and rearmament with modern equipment, rising social guarantees for military personnel.
- Continue the policy of decentralization, this will ensure the qualitative progress of the entire national economy.
- Continue the policy of reducing the tax burden. To replace the taxation of corporate profits with the taxation of capital withdrawals from the country.
- Direct investment in education to increase wages and qualifications of teachers.
- Improve levels of medicine.
- Strengthen attraction for investments for export of products with high added value.
- Support the increasing use of Ukrainian language and culture.

Main electoral program points of Volodymyr Zelenskiy^{22 23}

- Adopt the draft law “On democracy”. Ukrainians will form tasks for power through referendums.
- Adopt laws “On the withdrawal of immunity from the President of Ukraine, people’s deputies and judges”; “On the impeachment of the President of Ukraine”; “On the recall of the people’s deputy of Ukraine”.
- Elections to the Parliament and local councils should be held in open lists.
- Replace the income tax with a tax on the withdrawn capital.
- Formation of a transparent land market.
- Introduce a one-time “zero declaration” for business.
- Law enforcement agencies should cease to exert economic pressure on business and return to fulfil their direct responsibilities to ensure the safety of citizens.
- Introduce the economic passport of Ukrainians: every child from birth will accumulate up to adulthood part of the realization of the state’s natural benefits.
- Display all information about the use of budgets, tenders, procurement publicly.
- Zero tolerance to corruption at all levels: ban those convicted of corruption offenses from holding government posts.
- Ensure real independence of the entire chain of anti-corruption agencies: in particular, anti-corruption agencies have to be established via an independent international commission.
- Remove immunity from prosecution for politicians.
- Establish the High Economic Court.

²² Програма Зеленского на выборах-2019. – Obozrevatel, 14.02.2019 <https://www.obozrevatel.com/president-2019/program/programma-zelenskogo-na-vyiborah-2019.htm>; <https://program.ze2019.com/>

²³ Ten first steps Zelenskiy would take if he became president, Ukraine’s Election 2019: LIVE Updates. – Ukraine World, 12 April 2019 <https://ukraineworld.org/articles/ukraineexplained/ukraines-election-2019-live-updates?param1=president¶m2=2019>

- Strip law enforcement agencies, such as the Security Service of Ukraine, Prosecutor General's Office, and Ministry of Interior Affairs, of powers to investigate economic crimes. Transfer these powers to a new agency for economic investigations.
- Decriminalize economic activity as much as possible and introduce monetary and administrative penalties for economic crimes, and hold to account public officials who harass businesses.
- Toughen the punishment for public officials involved in corruption by way of voluntary resignation, confiscation of property, and a lifelong ban on taking any public office. Ban the courts from releasing corrupt officials on bail.
- E-government: as many government services to business as possible should be moved online.
- Transition of Ukraine to its own energy resources.
- A professional army should become a school of leadership and freedom.
- In front of the guarantors of the Budapest Memorandum and the EU partners, the issue of supporting Ukraine in the quest for a war should be raised, returning the temporarily occupied territories and forcing the aggressor to reimburse the damage. The defending of national interests and territories cannot be the subject of any negotiations.
- The movement of Ukraine to NATO and other similar associations is a guarantee of security which should receive confirmation through an all-Ukrainian referendum.

Conclusions

Preliminary public polls indicate considerably higher support for presidential candidate Zelenskiy than incumbent Poroshenko. In the case of victory of Poroshenko, Ukraine can be expected to continue on the course that is similar to the present one. Poroshenko's electoral program includes promise of strong pro EU and NATO foreign policy course, that includes somewhat unrealistic expectations (EU membership application by 2023), while there are not too many promises of internal reforms. Zelenskiy's electoral program concentrates on fighting corruption and supporting economic development, notable is his support for strengthening e-government solutions. On foreign policy Zelenskiy also supports EU and NATO integration, but those goals should be approved according to him in referendum. Zelenskiy is probably also more willing (having less preconditions) to negotiate with Russia to end the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.