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Elections In Ukraine Are Not Scheduled, But Everyone Is Preparing For Them



The elections in Ukraine are just around the corner—sooner or later, they are inevitable. The more discussions there are about a potential ceasefire, the more political figures launch their preliminary election campaigns. The war may have caused considerable damage to the country, but it has not dampened the thirst for power.

The last elections in Ukraine took place during the active phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and focused on regional mayors and deputies. The national parliamentary elections were **held** in the summer of 2019, just a few months after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy **won** an overwhelming 73% of the vote.

Before the full-scale invasion, the political landscape was primarily divided into pro-European and pro-Russian factions. However, the pro-Moscow orientation seems to have been decisively abandoned.

The current struggle is framed between nationalist and globalist ideologies, often with a troubling mix of both. Politicians actively advocate for Ukraine's integration into the Western world while simultaneously embracing narrow-minded nationalist sentiments.

Currently, only one person in Ukraine boasts solid approval ratings across polls—and it is not President Zelenskyy. Political calculations indicate that, besides the backing of Ukrainians, support from Donald Trump and an agreement from Vladimir Putin to negotiate would be crucial for any candidate aiming for the presidency.

The war has worn down many Ukrainians, and this fatigue is likely to increase over time. Thus, some old-school politicians with ties in the Kremlin are already sending warm greetings through their established connections.

The Polls

Political polls have been conducted for some time, albeit somewhat more discreetly

following the unsuccessful counteroffensive in the summer of 2023. **According** to a friendly to the Office of the President poll from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 45% of Ukrainians express trust in the president, while 31% do not.

Another poll shows Zelenskyy's approval ratings ranging from 10% to 16% under different election scenarios. This polling agency has been labelled as pro-Russian due to its previous engagements with past power structures viewed as sympathetic to Kremlin interests.

Nevertheless, the findings have been circulated by politicians who favour these results, such as Yulia Tymoshenko, whose support ranges from 7% to 12.6%. This poll is unique in that it includes the diaspora, which could play a decisive role in the elections, much like in the recent presidential elections in Moldova.

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The frontrunner in all the ratings is Valeriy Zaluzhny, the former Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, who orchestrated a response to Russian aggression in 2022.

His electoral potential metrics range from 16% to 24% in case of elections, reflecting the enduring high trust in the military, which remains at 90% or higher.

Although Zaluzhny has not openly entered the political arena, he was **dismissed** in early 2024 to later become Ukraine's ambassador to the United Kingdom.

Recently, Ukrainian political journalists revealed that the head of the presidential office invited Zaluzhny to join the incumbent president's team during the potential race. While it remains uncertain if Zaluzhny will run as a frontrunner, he undeniably possesses considerable appeal.

The war has disrupted traditional media formulas

Zaluzhny has maintained a low profile on social media, transferring his highly popular X account as commander-in-chief to his successor, Oleksandr Syrskyi, and not establishing a new one until December 23, 2024.

Most ambassadors have their own accounts for international communication, highlighting a discrepancy. Zaluzhny's verified account swiftly gained followers but subsequently disappeared within a month.

On the other hand, Zaluzhny's team allegedly runs a private channel on Telegram, the most popular social media platform in Ukraine during the war. Joining this channel requires administrator approval. The content of the channel is focused on fostering discussions suggesting military governance in Ukraine could be successful.

High-cost and often unreliable regional Telegram channels fall short of reaching significant national scales

I go into these technical details because one of the most significant concerns for candidates today is determining which sources to utilize for public relations. The war has disrupted traditional media formulas, rendering the national telethon—unified by major channels since the war's onset—ineffective, with dwindling ratings.

One of the largest media holdings, linked to oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, has **shut down**, while online media cater to increasingly niche audiences. High-cost and often unreliable regional Telegram channels fall short of reaching significant national scales.

Yulia Tymoshenko frequently pays for ads on accessible Telegram channels, focusing on populist social messages regarding high taxes and utility costs. Meanwhile, Yuriy Boyko, a

former member of the pro-Russian Party of Regions, has resorted to TikTok, a platform recently linked to election interference in Romania, to share nostalgic messages in Russian, targeting the south-eastern regions with discussions on monument demolitions and rampant radicalism in the country.

After posting the video, he was summoned for questioning by the Security Service of Ukraine. He then issued an apology and refrained from making more video appeals.

Who is preparing for the elections?

In Ukrainian social media, there is only one political star who roams freely: Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Although he publicly **denies** the possibility of elections, citing constitutional restrictions, his team is already actively preparing for them.

The pre-political image of the young and charismatic actor takes center stage on social media. Various accounts filled with hundreds or thousands of videos showcase Zelenskyy, who may not say much but captivates audiences with his charming smile set to enchanting music.

Zelenskyy's team is among the few already receiving a stable salary for preparing for the electoral process.



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Former President Petro Poroshenko, who continues to hold out hope for a second term, is actively promoting his assistance to the people. However, Zelenskyy has already claimed all of Poroshenko's electoral ground—defending the Ukrainian language, strengthening the army, and supporting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as well as advocating for NATO and EU membership.

Poroshenko is left to promote a retrospective view of these initiatives that he once launched.

Another potential competitor is Andriy Biletsky, the radical head of the military bloc "Azov," which has already fractured into several factions. Biletsky is actively giving interviews, promoting military authority, and recently stated that "a ceasefire in the war would not be catastrophic."

Few politicians willing to move beyond populist frameworks

Despite the rampant nationalism on social media, Ukraine is not traditionally a nationalist nation, and such forces barely garner 2% of the vote in each election. The last time Ukrainian nationalists held a seat in the parliament was in 2012-2014, only for one term.

These unscheduled elections, for which everyone is preparing, raise more questions than answers due to an uneven playing field caused by the wartime vertical power structure, a significantly weakened media infrastructure, and Ukrainian voters settling in various countries.

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Furthermore, there are concerns about how elections can be conducted under martial law and how soon they can be organised after reaching certain ceasefire agreements.

Incumbent Ukrainian politicians think that the electoral process will be short—about three to four months—and there is considerable demand for change among Ukrainians.

Therefore, in order to be fully prepared when the time comes, all potential candidates want to be ready. They do this by seeking funding, developing cautious messaging for their PR campaigns, hiring teams, and trying to solidify their positions.

Meanwhile, few politicians are willing to move beyond populist frameworks, and this week, martial law and general mobilisation in Ukraine will be extended again—until May 9th.