
The Ukraine Presidential Election: Comparing the 2010 and 2004 exit polls

Contributed by N. Kharchenko (Executive Director) and Vladimir Paniotto (Director General)
Kiev International Institute of Sociology

The presidential elections in Ukraine took place this year on January 17 (first round) and February 7 (a second round among the two candidates who received the most votes in the first round). As in 2004, the 2010 election is seen by many political scientists as a choice between the orientation of Ukraine to the European Union and its orientation to Russia.

The 2004 elections were a very dramatic confrontation between the pro-regime candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, and the opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko. News of the second round election results declaring Yanukovich's victory was accompanied by massive protests known as "orange revolution", which ultimately led to a change of political elites (politicians who came to power were called "orange"). The opposition argued that the elections were rigged and supported these charges pointing out that there were significant differences between the data of the National Exit Poll and the election results. Following a decision by the Supreme Court, the elections were declared invalid and a revote was scheduled. In the revote, Yushchenko won and became president of Ukraine (see Paniotto, 2004).

The 2010 presidential elections represented a revenge of Viktor Yanukovich, who won and became president. There are

some differences between the election campaigns in 2010 and 2004 that can be highlighted. First of all, the "orange" team experienced several splits, lost its unity, and was represented at the 2010 elections by several candidates. Secondly, the actual pace of democratic and economic reforms did not meet the high expectations of society. Thirdly, the "Orange" team changed its leadership, placing the then Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, at the front. Fourthly, support for President Viktor Yushchenko during these six years decreased from 39.9% in the first round of the 2004 elections, to only 5.5% in the first round of the 2010 elections. Finally, confrontation between the frontrunners did not have such a polarizing effect on society: while in 2004 the total support of the two major candidates was 79.2% of vote, it was significantly less in 2010: 60.4%. Over the past five years, new political leaders such as Tigipko and Yatsenyuk rose and managed to get into the top four contestants in the first round of the 2010 election.

Region of residence remained the determining factor of the voters' electoral preferences in 2010, similarly to all previous elections in independent Ukraine. Residents of North-Western regions tend to support pro-Western politicians, and South-Eastern regions prefer pro-Russian politicians. Thus, the North-

Western part voted predominantly for Yulia Tymoshenko (70% of voters), whereas the South-Eastern part supported more heavily the pro-Russian candidate, Viktor Yanukovich (76%).

Pre-Election Polls

In the 2004 presidential elections, the majority of sociological companies had a slight discrepancy in the level of support for the major candidates (Yushchenko and Yanukovich), which was in the range of 2 to 4%. In contrast, the margin for Yanukovich, who was ahead in all the polls, was much higher in 2010, ranging from 7 to 10%. Changes in the political situation in the country led to the fact that respondents informed more freely and honestly about their electoral preferences. This is proven by a smaller difference in the ratings of presidential candidates by applying questionnaire and secret ballot compared to 2004.

Exit Polls

Exit polls in Ukraine have been conducted since 1998. These surveys quickly gained popularity and became an essential part of elections. As with exit polls in other new democracies, a peculiarity of Ukrainian exit polls lies in their excessive politicization and perception as a means for political struggle. "It is often used to 'check the correctness' of the elections, validate or oppose the result of elections and sometimes as an argument in the electoral battle" (Andreenkova, 2005).

Exit poll customers in Ukraine are international NGOs and opposition parties, which are interested in verifying the integrity of elections and the absence of fraud in the vote counting. Ukrainian society expresses a very low confidence in public authori-

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ties and political forces, and the majority of voters question the fairness of elections. Exit poll data attract considerable attention from the public, and are widely discussed in the media and on Internet forums.

Even minor discrepancies between the various sources of exit poll data and election outcomes are interpreted either as a falsification of election results, or as evidence of polling agencies corruption. Thus, researchers are under close public attention and pressure.

Another feature of the exit polls in Ukraine is the lack of infrastructure (transport and telecommunication), as well as the lack of openness of the electoral statistical information. In Ukraine there is no single register of voters, the number and territorial boundaries of the electoral districts change frequently and something similar happens to electoral legislation. In the 2010 elections the information about the size of electoral districts was inaccessible, which greatly complicated sample design.

Nonetheless, many exit-polls are generally conducted in Ukraine. This is also a manifestation of political groups' distrust towards each other. During the 2004 elections (round 1, round 2 and revote of the second round) there were 15 exit-polls, while in 2010 there were a total of 12 exit polls conducted. Taking into account all the financial burdens it creates a ground for improvement of research methodology by the polling agencies. Unfortunately, the release of the exit poll data is accompanied by a very little methodological information and the actual data are not available for analysts, with the exception of the National Exit Poll.

The Exit Polls Results in 2010 and 2004 and their Public Resonance

Round 1 exit poll results are presented in Table 1 (see page 14). All exit-polls correctly "predicted" Viktor Yanukovich and Yulia Tymoshenko getting into the second round. The average error for each of the candidates is less than one percent, the maximum error for the leaders comprises 3.5% for Yanukovich and 2.2% for Tymoshenko. This mistake was made by the National Exit Poll mainly due to the lack of funding. In contrast to other exit polls, which do not disclose their sources of funding or are supported by the media, the 2010 National Exit Poll is a public initiative financed by a forum of international donors, Ukrainian NGOs, physical persons and controlled by the Oversight Council of domestic and foreign experts: (http://www.exitpoll.org.ua/en/about_project.htm).

In the conditions of a cold winter (the temperature in some regions of Ukraine was below 15 degrees Celsius or below 5 degrees Fahrenheit) it was necessary to have three interviewers at each polling station (one counts every k-th voter, the other is conducting an interview, and the third one is getting warm, every half-hour interviewers replace each other). The National Exit Poll budget (in contrast to other exit polls) allowed having two interviewers only. Thus, it was decided that interviewers would rest during 30 minutes every hour and to reduce the selection step twofold to keep the sufficient number of respondents. For the big cities this step was not sufficient, thus the interviewers missed part of the respondents, therefore the big cities were under-represented. These cities are located mostly in south-eastern part of Ukraine, where high levels of Yanukovich support prevail, as a result Yanukovich was underestimated, and Yulia Tymoshenko overestimated. Without taking into account this error, the maximum error in all other exit polls did not exceed 2%.

In the second round (see Table 2, page 14) exit polls were more accurate. *National Exit Poll* received more funding and its results were among the most accurate estimates. In the second round the average error of all the exit polls turned out to be 0.3%, and the maximum error no more than 1%.

10 727	15 000	17 512	10 000
350	420	402	500

Analyzing the methodology of the exit-polls that are applied in Ukraine, we can say that their common feature is the very large sample size (number of precincts and voters). The number of precincts vary from 300 to 1500, the number of respondents vary from 6000 to 50000. All of the exit polls use short questionnaires (1-2 pages) and collect very little information for further analysis. With regard to the differences, they are related to 1) the method of precinct selection, 2) the method of selection of respondents at the

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precincts, and 3) data collection methods - interviews or self-administered questionnaires.

Method of participant's selection. The most widely used sampling procedure for exit polls in Ukraine is a stratified probability sample. Stratification of PSU (primary sample units) is based on the regional structure and urbanization type. In general, the selection of PSU is carried out in two ways. First, precincts are allocated by the strata in proportion to the number of precincts at each stratum. Then, within each stratum precincts are selected randomly.

The following are considered PSUs: electoral districts, administrative units or individual settlements, which are selected with probability proportional to the number of registered voters or vote total in recent elections. On a second stage precincts are selected randomly or based on other considerations.

Method of respondent selection. There are two competing approaches: quotas, i.e. assigning a number of respondents per precinct and distribute them on a time interval of interviewing, and a "single step method", when the interviewers do not receive a task for the fixed number of interviews, but must carry out interviews during the entire election day of every k-th voter, while k is the same for all precincts.

Data collection methods. In the professional milieu of Ukrainian polling agencies there is an ongoing debate about which method of data collection provides more accurate data on the voter's choice: personal interviews or self-administered questionnaires (with a secret-ballot procedure). Supporters of the secret-ballot procedure argue that self-administered ballots minimize socially desirable responses (Bishop and Fisher, 1995) and supporters of the face-to-face interview believe that the use of self-administered questionnaire reduces participation in the exit poll of the senior people with lower educational levels and poor eyesight. The secret-ballot procedure provides a higher response rate and is usually closer to election results, which we consider to be a more reliable method.

Conclusions

Despite the different methodologies the results of exit polls in 2010 were very close to the election outcomes. We attribute this to the fact that while the election results mainly depend on the place of residence of voters, strict maintenance of the regional proportions in the sample is sufficient to obtain good results, and other factors (nonresponse, interviewers' influence, the respondents' sincerity, etc.) are insignificant.

The concurrence of data from all exit polls clearly promoted the legitimacy of the elections in the eyes of the public, journalists, political elites and the international community.

At present, after assumption of power by the new president, a new majority in parliament and a new cabinet are established. The society actively discusses the issues of Ukraine's refusal from the integration in Europe, degree of closeness of relations with Russia, possibility of independence loss by Ukraine, preserving the democratic gains of 2004, in particular, freedom of the press, etc., with the rise to power of the pro-Russian president, which Viktor Yanukovich is considered to be. Currently these issues are not clear.

References

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Bishop, G.F. and B.S. Fisher (1995). "Secret Ballots and Self-Reports in an Exit Poll. Experiment," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 59: 568-588.

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Tables: Estimates of exit-poll accuracy: comparative data of exit-polls and elections.

Table 1. First Round of Ukraine Presidential Elections 2010

	Initiators and Polling Agencies							Mean diff. with result	Max diff. with result
	Election Result	Consortium 'National Exit Poll'	ICTV, GFK	Shuster live studio	Inter, FOM-Ukraine, USS, Socis	A&F, UISR	R&B Group		
RESULTS									
Yanukovich	35,32	31,8	34,5	34,7	36,6	34,5	37,66	0,4	-3,5
Tymoshenko	25,05	27,2	25,63	25	25,8	24,8	26,13	-0,7	2,2
Tigipko	13,06	13,6	13,79	13,2	13,5	12,6	11,64	0,0	-1,4
Yatsenyuk	6,96	7,8	7,01	7,1	6,6	8,9	7,09	-0,5	1,9
Yushchenko	5,45	5,9	5,65	5,8	5,2	5,4	5,12	-0,1	0,5
Others 13 candidates together	10,24	10,7	10,45	11,5	9,4	10,3	9,8	-0,1	1,3
SURVEY DESIGN									
Number of voters	36576763	12520	25 105	10 727	15 000	17 512	10 000		
Number of precinct	33667	240	300	350	420	402	500		
Type of voters selection on last sampling stage		systematic	n/a	systematic	quota	n/a	quota		
Data collection method		secret-ballot	secret-ballot	secret-ballot	face-to-face interview	face-to-face interview	secret-ballot		
Nonresponse		27%	15%	n/a	26,4%	24%	27,5%		

Table 2. Second Round of Ukraine Presidential Elections 2010

	Election Result	Polling Agencies						Mean diff. with result	Max diff. with result
		Consortium 'National Exit Poll'	ICTV, GFK	Shuster live studio	Inter, FOM-Ukraine, USS	Inter, Socis	R&B Group		
RESULTS									
Yanukovich	48.95	48,4	49,3	48,7	49,52	49,6	49,7	0,3	0,8
Tymoshenko	45.47	45,7	45,3	45,6	44,90	44,5	44,8	-0,3	-1,0
SURVEY DESIGN									
Number of voters	36576763	16123	21 635	20 000	15 000	20 000	10 000		
Number of precinct	33667	300	n/a	350	300	602	500		
Type of voters selection on last sampling stage		systematic	n/a	systematic	quota	quota	quota		
Data collection method		secret-ballot	n/a	secret-ballot	face-to-face interview	face-to-face interview	secret-ballot		
Nonresponse		23%	13.1%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a		