

**VIKTOR YANUKOVYCH LOSES CONTROL IN KYIV, RETREATS TO DONETSK**

By [Taras Kuzio](#)

As the political standoff continues in Ukraine, the only conclusion that can now possibly be made is that the pro-presidential camp never sought to hold free and fair elections in the first place. Both rounds one (October 31) and two (November 21) of the presidential elections were condemned by international organizations, Western governments, and Ukrainian domestic observers.

Plans for organized mass election fraud have been confirmed on tapes made by the Security Service (SBU) in Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich's campaign headquarters and subsequently leaked to challenger Viktor Yushchenko. (The Russian-language tapes can be heard at [maidan.uar.net/audio](http://maidan.uar.net/audio) and [pravda.com.ua](http://pravda.com.ua) has published three excerpts.) Just as President Leonid Kuchma was implicated in Kuchmagate, now a "Yanukovychgate" is taking shape.

While round one witnessed moderate "massaging" of the vote, in round two the authorities deployed extensive and blatant fraud. The political crisis following round two has paralyzed the authorities, which grossly under-estimated the domestic and international reaction and vastly over-estimated their own strength. Yanukovich has admitted, "If I am to be really honest, I never expected such statements [from the West]" (Ukrayinska pravda, November 25). Institutions of state power (local councils, educational institutions, television, the Interior Ministry, the military, and SBU) have increasingly recognized Yushchenko as Ukraine's next elected president while refusing to recognize Yanukovich's alleged "victory."

The authorities's paralysis pushed them into pressuring the Central Election Commission (CEC), which itself was involved in election fraud, to declare on November 24 that Yanukovich had won. Their plans to rush through Yanukovich's inauguration two days later and publish the official election results in parliament's Holos Ukrainy and the Cabinet of Ministers' Uriadovyi Kurier was thwarted by both Yushchenko's "orange revolution" on the streets of Kyiv and by the Supreme Court ruling that no official announcement could be made until it had investigated the numerous charges of fraud.

This left the Yanukovich camp in further paralysis and panic. One day after the CEC announced the official results, the situation in Kyiv and Ukraine began to "tip" in Yushchenko's favor. While Leonid Kuchma is still president technically, real power is increasingly moving into Yushchenko's hands.

In August 1991 leading Ukrainian officials, including then-parliamentary speaker Leonid Kravchuk, waited until the anti-Gorbachev putsch in Moscow failed before jumping ship. The same delay was happening in the "orange revolution," as many individuals and state institutions waited until Thursday or Friday (November 25-26) before defecting to Yushchenko. Interior Ministry cadets and officers openly sided with Yushchenko, while the SBU and former Defense Minister Yevhen Marchuk issued statements condemning election fraud (see Marchuk on [5tv.com.ua/video](http://5tv.com.ua/video)). The Ministry of Defense's orchestra even serenaded the sea of the orange-clad protestors.

Yanukovich's gut instincts were always to resort to force or provoke conflicts with Yushchenko's orange crowd by transporting his own supporters to Kyiv. They began to arrive on November 24-25 and never totaled more than 15,000-20,000 (compared to Yushchenko's estimated 200,000-one million). Yanukovich's supporters tended to be coal miners or other workers from his home base of Donetsk, who were given \$100 for expenses, free alcohol, and

transportation (The Times, November 27).

Dispatching Yanukovich supporters to Kyiv grossly backfired. Instead of clashing with Yushchenko's supporters, some of them defected to Yushchenko's side after political discussions and being given warm clothing, food, and shelter. Other Yanukovich supporters were simply awed by the size of Yushchenko's support, as local Donetsk television stations had misled them about the scale of the protests. At the November 26 round-table negotiations brokered by Poland and the EU, Yanukovich announced that he would send home his supporters. Yushchenko wryly pleaded for him to continue sending them, as many had defected to his ranks.

The governmental paralysis deepened during Saturday's parliamentary hearings, when the pro-presidential camp split. The stormy session voted by an unusually high constitutional majority of 307 votes (out of 450) for a resolution that did not recognize the second-round vote. The resolution was supported by key opposition groups: the dissident Center faction (which had supported Yushchenko in round two), speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn's Agrarians, and the People's Democratic-Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs [NDP-PPPU] (PPPU head Anatoly Kinakh also backed Yushchenko in round two), and unaffiliated deputies.

Opposition to the resolution came from Yanukovich's Regions of Ukraine, Labor Ukraine (led by Serhiy Tyhipko, who formally headed the Yanukovich campaign), and the Social Democratic United Party. Even within these three factions, 19 out of 131 deputies backed the resolution.

The 48-hour ultimatum issued by Yushchenko at the November 26 roundtable meeting, followed one day later by the parliamentary resolution, were too much for Yanukovich. Feeling betrayed by Kuchma and other Kyiv allies, and unable for an entire week to enter his own government building due to a blockade by the orange crowds, forced Yanukovich to abandon Kyiv and retreat to Donetsk.

Seven days after the runoff, an extraordinary session of the National Security and Defense Council (NRBO) convened without the Prime Minister. The NRBO criticized Yushchenko's supporters for barricading state and government buildings in Kyiv. Meanwhile, Yanukovich and his eastern Ukrainian allies were criticized for separatist and autonomist agitation. Kuchma even praised parliament's resolution as "correct," which Yanukovich interpreted as further evidence of betrayal (Ukrayinska pravda, November 28). Even before round two Yanukovich had threatened Kuchma that he would become his "personal enemy" if he approved changes to the law on presidential elections adopted by parliament on November 18 that aimed to remove potential channels for election abuse.

Yanukovich ignored the NRBO session, instead preferring an "All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies" held in Severodonetsk, Donetsk oblast. Besides local council deputies from Russophone regions of eastern and southern Ukraine, the congress invited Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov to speak, in what can only be understood as gross interference in Ukraine's internal affairs. The congress was broadcast using Russian television transmitters.

The congress heard calls for a "federal southeastern republic based in Kharkiv" (Ukrayinska pravda, November 28). Yanukovich threatened to call for a referendum on this issue if Yushchenko becomes president. The 1994 elections in Donetsk included a referendum on a similar question and, like then, any such referendum today would have no legal force. Not surprisingly, as Yushchenko pointed out, the officials organizing these separatist steps are the same individuals who were most involved in election fraud.

Yanukovych's retreat to Donetsk also reflects his skepticism about the Supreme Court ruling scheduled for today (November 29). The Supreme Court is likely either to annul the results in the regions with rampant fraud (i.e. Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv) and then hold fresh elections, or to call for a repeat of round two on December 12 or 19, a step preferred by Yushchenko. In either case, Yanukovych is likely to lose to Yushchenko by a substantial margin, as he has been discredited by the charges of election fraud.

Yanukovych is in a dilemma of his own choosing. Claims that he did not know of plans to falsify the elections on his behalf are not believable. The majority of Ukrainians, who have watched unbiased television coverage since November 25, (see related article in this issue of EDM), now believe Yushchenko's charge that round two was plagued by election fraud.

Kuchma is squeezed between the "Orange Revolution" and Yanukovych's wrath at being betrayed. By permitting Viktor Medvedchuk, head of the presidential administration, to undertake the dirtiest and most divisive elections in Ukraine's history, Kuchma is now facing both a popular revolution and autonomist-separatist sentiment as he leaves office.