

WHAT DO UKRAINIANS REALLY THINK OF YANUKOVYCH?

By Taras Kuzio

Members of the pro-Leonid Kuchma camp continue to project an outward appearance of optimism surrounding their candidate, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, and his chances of winning this year's elections. In particular, they believe that two factors will work in their favor. First, Yanukovich draws considerable support in eastern Ukraine, which has more voters than western Ukraine, according to Ihor Shurma, a member of the Social Democratic United Party's politburo (temnik.com.ua, July 19). Second, Serhiy Tyhipko, head of Yanukovich's election campaign, believes his candidate will attract left-wing voters who would vote against challenger Viktor Yushchenko in a runoff (*Ukrayinska pravda*, July 11).

If these two factors work in the manner that the pro-Kuchma camp predicts, this year's elections will resemble the 1994 presidential elections. In that race, Kuchma won in the second round by appealing to eastern Ukrainians, while western and most of central Ukraine voted for the incumbent, Leonid Kravchuk. In the 1994 elections the left voted negatively against the "nationalist" Kravchuk.

Negative voting though, does not always work in favor of the authorities. In the 1999 elections, negative voting against the left aided the incumbent, Kuchma. In 2004 it is not at all clear which candidate will benefit the most from negative voting.

As Parliamentary Speaker and head of the People's Agrarian Party Volodymyr Lytvyn pointed out, it might have been better if Yanukovich was (like Yushchenko) a "self-declared" candidate, rather than the vlada's (authorities) candidate. The authorities have very low levels of popularity and any association with Kuchma will negatively influence a candidate's ratings (*Zerkalo nedeli*, June 26-July 2). This degree of hostility to the authorities will make it impossible for Communist Party leader Petro Symonenko to advise his voters to back Yanukovich. Rather than voting negatively, Communist voters may simply boycott the second round. A Razumkov Center poll found that only 26% of Communists would back Yanukovich in a runoff (*Zerkalo nedeli*, July 3-9).

The left and right opposition candidates will naturally capitalize on this hostility toward the authorities. Although the opposition is weakened from being divided among three candidates -- Symonenko, Socialist Oleksandr Moroz, and reformer Viktor Yushchenko -- this also allows the anti-authorities and anti-oligarch messages to be conveyed to a larger number of voters. In round two, left and right voters who do not like the authorities will have a simple choice to make: vote for the vlada (Yanukovich) or a candidate opposed to the vlada (Yushchenko). This straightforward choice makes the 2004 elections different from those of 1994 and 1999.

The Razumkov Center found that 67% of Ukrainians support moves against the oligarchs (*Ukrayinska pravda*, June 25). Lytvyn warned that tensions are high on

this issue. "Sooner or later Ukraine will arrive at the idea of an anti-oligarch coup. Better it was done as soon as possible without revolution, tension, and in a civilized manner" (Ukrayinska pravda, July 2).

Ukraine's leading political experts are highly negative about Yanukovych. He is the candidate least likely to spread European values, according to Razumkov Center data (Zerkalo nedeli, July 3-9). Experts see Moroz and Yushchenko as being the only candidates who will promote European values if they were elected.

Indeed, Yanukovych's speeches and election program stress economic growth and higher standards of living, but they are conspicuously silent on democratization. Yanukovych's first campaign speech in Zaporizhzhia completely ignored the issue of promoting democratization (Ukrayinska pravda, July 3). Like other centrist oligarchs in the Commonwealth of Independent States, Yanukovych and the pro-Kuchma camp emphasize an economically liberalized but politically authoritarian state. This position is at odds with Ukrainian voters, 75% of whom desire greater democratization (Zerkalo nedeli, July 3-9).

Unfortunately for the pro-Kuchma camp, economic growth alone is not sufficient to attract Ukrainian voters. Although Ukraine's economy has one of Europe's highest growth rates, this has not improved the popularity of the authorities. The majority of Ukrainian voters, according to the Razumkov poll, do not believe that Ukraine is heading along the right path, due to the large gap between declared objectives and reality.

Privatization, for example, has only benefited a small group of former Soviet nomenklatura that is not accountable to anyone. Positive changes, such as economic growth, are credited as having taken place despite the government. Ukraine's public mood is not thankful to the authorities nor does it expect anything in return.

Razumkov Center analysts have ruled out the notion that oligarchs could support the rule of law, civil society, European values, or democratization. "Oligarchs, by their very nature, are incompatible with democratization and are not influenced by societal interests," they argue. Their sole purpose is to enrich themselves with the assistance of the state. It would be naive, the experts polled by the Razumkov Center concluded, to believe that the oligarchs support transition to democratic rule even if they have arrived at the conclusion that the "bandit capitalism" of the 1990s is over.

Razumkov Center experts were asked which candidates were imbued with morals and standards. For example, would any candidate defend society or Ukraine's national interests above those of their own clan? Moroz, followed by Yushchenko, topped the list in terms of placing society and Ukraine's interests ahead of their own. When asked which candidates are "professional" and have "intellect," Yushchenko came first followed by Moroz.

Meanwhile, Yanukovych placed at the bottom of both lists. This unfavorable appraisal is widespread because Yanukovych is the head of the "party of power" of Ukraine's most criminalized and wealthiest clan (Donbas). Yanukovych's election would be "catastrophic" for Ukraine, Mikhail Brodsky, leader of the Yabluko Party, argued, and could lead to "the threat of a criminal-bandit

revolt" (Ukrayinska pravda, July 12). Brodsky proposed, in effect, that Ukrainians should vote negatively: it is as important for Yanukovich to be denied victory as it is for Yushchenko to win.

What would happen in the event of a victory by Yanukovich? Ukraine's experts believe the status quo would be conserved, morality would sink lower, and Yanukovich would favor the Donbas clan. (The same experts believe that the status quo would also be preserved if Lytvyn won, although he is not a declared candidate.)

Only the left or right opposition candidates will provide change, which an astounding 77% of Ukrainians desire, according to Razumkov surveys (Zerkalo nedeli, July 3-9). Ukrainian voters are likely to understand that voting for Yanukovich means voting for the status quo.