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Timely analysis and commentary on geopolitical developments in Eurasia

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[Ukrainian Political Technologists and Seven Election Myths](#)



By Taras Kuzio

Ukraine's "political technologists" have little in common with European and US political scientists and political consultants. The catastrophic state of political science in the Ukrainian education system has, for a decade now, made it nearly impossible to buy books on Ukrainian politics, and more books and scholarly articles on Ukrainian politics are published in the United States and Europe than in Ukraine. Many of a small group of Ukrainian political scientists have left underpaid academia for the far more lucrative world of political technology.

One can observe seven myths about the political and electoral situation in Ukraine that are currently being widely propagated by Ukrainian political technologists.

Myth 1: The Communist Party (KPU) increased its support in 2012.

Reality 1: The Party of Regions and KPU are symbiotic twins, and the KPU received higher support because ex-Communist voters returned to them from the Party of Regions. Ukrainians vote for the Party of Regions and KPU because a third of Ukrainian voters hold undemocratic views and prioritize economics and stability over democracy (<http://dif.org.ua/ua/polls/2012-year/madjani-ivi.htm>). These voters are based in Russian-speaking Ukraine and vote for the Party of Regions and KPU. A higher proportion of Party of Regions and KPU voters than Svoboda voters hold authoritarian and undemocratic views (see EDM, October 17).

Myth 2: Former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko will be released from prison before the 2015 elections.

Reality 2: Tymoshenko's sentence of seven years imprisonment and three years ban from public office aimed to remove her from Ukrainian politics until after 2020. In addition, personal revenge and fear play roles in her continued detention. In February 2010, Viktor Yanukovich told the US Ambassador to Ukraine he expected to win the 2010 presidential elections by over ten percent, but he won them by only three percent (<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10KYIV199.html#>).

Myth 3: In 2015 Yanukovich's political technologists will engineer his re-election.

Reality 3: In 2015, Yanukovich will not have the high support he possessed in 2004 when he was popular in eastern Ukraine and while the economy was growing by 12 percent per year. In the re-run second round of the 2004 elections, he was defeated by Viktor Yushchenko by only eight percent of the vote.

Election fraud in Ukraine may reach up to five percent of the vote, unlike in most Eurasian countries where it is greater. In the fraudulent second round of the 2004 elections, the Central Election Commission claimed Yanukovich defeated Yushchenko by three percent. Increasing Yanukovich's support from 20–25 percent to 48 percent (which he won in 2010) will be practically impossible without resorting to mass fraud.

Myth 4: Political technologists will manipulate the 2015 elections so that Communist Party leader Petro Symonenko or Svoboda nationalist leader Oleh Tyahnybok will enter the second round. Political technologists believe Yanukovich can only win a second term if he repeats the 1996 Russian and 1999 Ukrainian presidential elections where Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kuchma encouraged Ukrainians to vote against them and support the incumbent. In 2015 Tyahnybok could play the role of Symonenko in 1999.

Reality 4: Opposing Viktor Yanukovich in the second round will be opposition leaders Arseniy Yatseniuk or Vitaliy Klychko who would defeat Yanukovich if Ukraine holds a free election in 2015—but which is unlikely because Yanukovich has presided over five fraudulent elections since 1999. Former US Ambassador to Ukraine Steven Pifer said nobody in the West any longer believes Ukraine is democratic (<http://tyzhden.ua/Politics/65125>).

Myth 5: Voting “proty vsikh” (against all) only works against “orange” leaders. In the second round of the 2010 elections, Yushchenko called on voters to vote against both candidates reducing support for Yulia Tymoshenko more than Yanukovich.

Reality 5: Proty vsikh works against any incumbent. In 2010, many “orange” voters stayed at home rather than vote for Tymoshenko who received three million fewer votes than Yushchenko in December 2004. Two million fewer eastern Ukrainian voters supported the Party of Regions in 2012 compared to 2007. In 2015, Yanukovich will face the same incumbent problem as Tymoshenko, but this time it will be eastern Ukrainian voters who will vote proty vsikh by staying at home.

Myth 6: Yanukovich will engineer his re-election by changing the constitution to a parliamentary system to avoid an election. The newly adopted law on referendums could be used to circumvent the need for an election in 2015 (<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/new-wording-of-constitution-could-be->

approved-at-nationwide-referendum-according-to-law-315646.html).

Reality 6: The Party of Regions will be unable to command the loyalty of a constitutional majority to change the constitution to a full parliamentary system. In addition, Yanukovich would never agree to be a symbolic head of state under parliamentary control and with few powers.

Myth 7: Oligarchs will be forced to support Yanukovich in 2015.

Reality 7: Fearing Tymoshenko's anti-elite rhetoric, Ukraine's oligarchs supported Yanukovich in 2010. Former President Leonid Kuchma told the US Ambassador to Ukraine that the second round of the 2010 elections was a choice between "bad" and "very bad" (Yanukovich and Tymoshenko). (<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10KYIV190.html>).

The 2015 election will be unlike 2010 and instead will resemble 2004 where oligarchs will put their eggs in the authorities and opposition baskets. Oligarchs will not fear Yatseniuk or Klychko because they are not viewed as threats to their business interests (<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/politics/media-monitoring-shows-possible-rift-between-oligarchs-administration-315438.html>).

Rather, Ukrainian oligarchs will be more afraid of Yanukovich. They will fear that "The Family" (the emerging clan from the president's home town in Donetsk oblast, see EDM, December 2, 2011) will raid their assets by the end of his second term in 2020 (<http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/will-yanukovich-win-the-ukrainian-elections-by-anders--slund>).

As Ukraine will face serious economic and financial crises in 2013-2014 (see EDM, November 29), the run up to the 2015 elections along with politics in the parliament will be raucous and unstable. However, the widely disseminated predictions from Ukrainian political technologists for how the country's next political developments will be shaped are based on fundamental misdiagnoses and misunderstandings of past and future trends.