

## **Shift in Electoral Support at the 2019 Presidential and Snap Parliamentary Elections in Ukraine**

The article contemplates universal tendency in regard of a significant increase in electoral volatility peculiar for developed democratic countries. The present study proposes a methodological toolkit for measuring shifts in electoral support, as well as the correctness of its application to the behavior of Ukrainian voters, comparing and correlating electoral volatility indicators for all election cycles. The reasons for a high level of M. Pedersen index in the recent snap parliamentary elections, as well as peculiarities of volatility at the regional level have been analyzed. The present article elucidates the velocity of electoral support shift along with the influence of population paternalism on the change of political agents support as based on the analysis of the results of a sociological survey.

*Keywords: elections, electoral volatility, Pedersen index, regional dimension of electoral support change, paternalism*

## **ZMIANA POPARCIA WYBORCZEGO PODCZAS WYBORÓW PREZYDENCKICH I PRZEDTERMINOWYCH PARLAMENTARNYCH NA UKRAINIE W 2019 ROKU**

Rozpatrzona została powszechna tendencja charakterystyczna dla rozwiniętych krajów demokratycznych odnośnie znacznego zwiększenia chwiejności wyborczej. Przedstawiono zestaw narzędzi dla pomiaru zmian poparcia wyborczego i poprawności jego zastosowania w odniesieniu do zachowania wyborców na Ukrainie. Porównano wskaźniki chwiejności wyborczej w odniesieniu do wszystkich cykli wyborczych. Przeanalizowano przyczyny wysokiego poziomu indeksu M. Pedersen podczas ostatnich przedterminowych wyborów parlamentarnych, cechy chwiejności na szczeblu regionalnym. Na podstawie analizy wyników badań socjologicznych określono szybkość zmiany poparcia wyborczego oraz wpływ paternalizmu części społeczeństwa na zmianę poparcia przedstawicieli politycznych.

*Słowa kluczowe: wybory, chwiejność wyborcza, indeks Pedersen, regionalne pomiary chwiejności wyborczej, paternalizm.*

The 2019 presidential and snap parliamentary elections in Ukraine have become a true electoral quake that not only resulted in the election of a new head of state, V. Zelensky, who

prior to the election had been involved in political life as an ordinary citizen, yet defeating outstanding Ukrainian politicians, having been key political actors for quite a while. Moreover, the elections brought to the parliamentary stage brand new parties, neither previously known to the general public, nor present in the political life of the state, one of which having won a stable majority for the first time in history, with more than two-thirds of the deputy corps suddenly replaced. Thus, various dimensions of this phenomenon require a thorough analysis. Respectively, the objective of the present study is to contemplate the state and tendencies of electoral support shift in Ukraine in the light of world processes, as well as determine the criteria of electoral volatility and its determining factors.

Researchers S. Geers and J. Strömbäk point out that one of the key trends in the changes, typical of advanced industrial democracies is a significant increase in electoral volatility<sup>1</sup>. In their study, the researchers claim that over the span from 1960 to 2014, the proportion of voters who changed the party between elections (intra-election volatility) increased from 11% to 36%. In the article the authors analyzed on the example of the 2014 parliamentary elections in Sweden, how typical of this Scandinavian country the tendency is. Herein, they stated that only 58% of the respondents remained loyal to the same political party throughout the election campaign; 19% of respondents either hesitated or changed party preferences several times, including the issue of voting - not voting; 15% changed their preference / position once and 7% did not intend to vote at the beginning of the election campaign, however made the decision to vote during the campaign. In fact, the proportion of voters who changed electoral preferences between the elections, including the election campaign period, constituted 41%. In the course of the research, the authors employed the methodology, proposed by Mogens Pedersen in 1979. M. Pedersen understood volatility of the electorate as «a pure shift in individual voting preferences», which illustrated «a certain extent to which party power is redistributed between the winning and defeated parties from one election to the other. He proposed a formula for calculating electoral volatility:

$$\sum_{i=1}^n \frac{|V_i(t) - V_i(t+1)|}{2}$$

The index is calculated on the basis of the results of two consecutive elections. All results of the political parties (n) gained at the two elections are taken into account. In case Party A participated in two consecutive elections, the difference in the gained results is measured. That is, if party A gained a result at the previous election  $V_i(t)$ , consequently gaining a result  $V_i(t+1)$  at the next election, then it is the difference between the two results that is measured. If Party B has participated in only one election, regardless of whether it is the previous or the next, then its result is regarded as a change. The index is calculated in the range from 0 (no changes) to

<sup>1</sup> Sabine Geers, Jesper Strömbäk, Patterns of intra-election volatility the impact of political knowledge // Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, T.29, 2019, Vol.3. – P.361-380.

100 (total change). The author presented the European party systems volatility results for the period from 1948 to 1977 (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Volatility of European Party Systems in 1948-1977

	Country	1948-59	1960-69	1970-77	Average	Number of elections
1	Austria	4,1	3,9	3,1	3,7	8
2	Belgium	7,9	10,3	5,5	7,9	9
3	Denmark	5,5	8,9	18,7	11	12
4	Ireland	10,9	6,8	5	7,9	8
5	Italy	10,3	8	6,8	8,4	6
6	Netherlands	6,3	7,9	12,7	9,1	8
7	Germany	15,2	9,5	4,9	9,8	7
8	Norway	3,4	5,2	17,1	8,1	7
9	United Kingdom	4,4	5,2	7,9	5,9	8
10	Finland	4,4	6,9	9,1	6,8	8
11	France	21,8	11,9	10,6	16,9	7
12	Switzerland	1,9	3,7	6,4	4	6
13	Sweedeen	4,8	4,3	6,6	5,2	9
	Average	7,8	7,3	9,2	8,1	

As we can see, the average party volatility for these countries constituted only 8.1%. The period, analysed by M. Pedersen in order to calculate the electoral support shift for political parties, was later defined in Political Science, particularly partology, as «freezing of party systems». Such assessment was largely affected and conditioned by sociopolitical divisions in Western Europe, where there long existed a strong bond between social groups and certain political parties. Respectively, starting with the mid-1970s a new period has begun by analogy described as “thawing,” marking an increase in electoral volatility. The parameters of this growth were proposed in the research by S. Geers and J. Strömbäk. Among the reasons, stipulating the rise in electoral volatility, the authors mentioned the following: a decrease in the value of traditional sociopolitical divisions, attended by simultaneous weakening of the connection between parties and voters; an increase in the level of education that determined the acquisition of the necessary skills of independent political choice without paying heed to traditional party loyalty, and the factor of the very election campaigns, which differently but sensitively influenced various categories of voters.

Ukraine does not belong to developed industrial democracies. However, upon gaining independence, even despite slight differences and transformation of the political process vectors, among the prevailing tendencies one should mention democratization of public life. Accordingly, M. Pedersen’s methodology should be particularly applied with regard to elections with a proportional component within the national voting district. Since party lists in the mixed electoral system were first employed in 1998, those elections can actually serve as a starting point to calculate volatility.

**Table 2.** Changes in the volatility level (Pedersen index) at the parliamentary elections<sup>2</sup>

1998/2002	2002/2006	2006/2007	2007/2012	2012/2014	2014/2019
62,56	63,13	15,81	35,93	82,14	67,76

Except for the two election cycles following the Orange Revolution, in other four cases the volatility index exceeded 50%, presupposing that at the scheduled parliamentary elections more than a half of Ukrainians shifted away from their previous election choice to give preference to a new political agent, i.e. changing their choice. From our perspective, this situation has been caused by the following reasons: firstly, citizens' dissatisfaction with the activities of political actors in power. Since the political parties, holding a majority in the parliament, in accordance with the constitution and in practice, form a government and together with the president exercise dualistic executive power, in particular through senior personnel appointments and determination of the social development directions. Accordingly, the level of satisfaction / dissatisfaction is manifested in indicators of trust in the key government institutions.

**Table 3.** Dynamics of Ukrainian citizens who display trust in state and political institutions (2013–2018) in %<sup>3</sup>

Government Institution	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Militia/police since 2016	8,8 (2012)	6,5	6,5	12,1	22,8	12,5
Prosecutor's Office	7,1	4,8	5,2	5,7	9,2	8,1
Courts	7,0	5,3	6,2	6,4	7,9	7,1
President	10,9	33,9	17,6	10,6	11,2	7,8
Verkhovna Rada	4,6	8,6	8,3	5,7	5,3	4,7
Government	8,1	17,2	8,7	6,5	7,1	7,2
Local authorities	13,8	18,7	16,1	19,8	27,9	18,4
Political parties	6,6	3,8	5,0	4,7	6,0	5,5

As seen in Table 3, the citizens of Ukraine, under the influence of the Revolution of Dignity, significantly increased the level of trust in the Institute of the President of Ukraine, the Government and the Parliament of the country. There is also noticeably growing confidence in the police / police institute after the first year of the police activities (2016), as well as in local authorities upon decentralization programme implementation, especially after local governments received increased budgets and experienced growing financial capacity. Despite these peculiarities / exceptions, as a rule there can be traced a decreasing level of trust following the election / formation of the Institute of the President and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the overall low level of confidence in other political institutions.

<sup>2</sup> The results were obtained on the basis of the Central Election Commission data [Electronic resource] - Access mode: cvk.gov.ua

<sup>3</sup> Таблиця складена на підставі опитувань Інституту соціології НАН України. Див.: Моніторинг 2018: основні тенденції змін громадської думки [Електронний ресурс] – Режим доступу: dif.org.ua/article/monitoring-2018-osnovni-tendentsii-zmin-gromadskoi-dumki

The second reason is a low level of trust in political parties in Ukraine. The evolution of electoral law eventually led to the political parties securing a de facto monopoly on the nomination of candidates at the elections of the president, members of parliament, and local authorities. The provision of the norm on nomination and registration of self-nominees in the law on presidential elections and following the election of deputies within the majority voting districts under the conditions of mixed / parallel electoral system, failed to pose an alternative to the exclusive right of political parties, only concealing their party affiliation / party bias. That is, for the majority of citizens of Ukraine, it is quite obvious that during the elections, the political parties offer promising political platforms, that voters respond to/ “buy”, the parties identify and make all major senior personnel appointments; together with the incumbent state leaders, party leaders define and direct social development. However, despite such omnipotence of parties in Ukraine along with merely formal resemblance to political practices in democratic countries, there emerged a situation that significantly differs from that of developed countries. Firstly, parties may lose power / worsen their results at the next regular election, yet they only exercise suppositional political responsibility. Party leaders remain untenably in power for quite a while. Secondly, severe criticism of the policy of powerful political actors by the opposition, even with the subsequent former opposition’s coming to power, does not lead to overcoming drawbacks / problems in social development (a prime example of corruption). Predominantly, even with the changed names of parties and party representatives in governmental institutions and to a lesser extent at the level of local self-government, the nature of their behaviour and basic parameters of their activities remained unchanged. All this created a closed-loop format of the political process. Respectively, in fact, it created an image of «old politicians» and «old policies.» The underlying meaning of these concepts implies an exclusive struggle for power, which has been a goal in and of itself, and the electoral programmes as well as the activities of political parties served as an instrument of a race for power. Therefore, most citizens were dissatisfied with the results of the country’s course of development, and they placed this responsibility, along with specific authorities, on a wider range of political actors who jointly pursued such a policy with no visible results.

**Table 4.** What, in your opinion, is the general direction of matters in Ukraine, right or wrong? in %<sup>4</sup>

Date of survey	Right	Hard to say	Wrong
09.2014	29,0	20,0	51,0
09.2015	17,0	13,0	68,0
09.2016	11,0	17,0	72,0
09.2017	19,0	13,0	69,0
09.2018	15,0	12,0	73,0
01.2019	15,0	12,0	73,0

<sup>4</sup> Electoral mood monitoring of Ukrainians, February 2019 [Electronic resource] - Access mode: [ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg\\_files/rg\\_ua\\_electoral\\_02.2019\\_press.pdf](http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_ua_electoral_02.2019_press.pdf)

In their overwhelming majority existing parties do not meet the democratic countries standards. They were established not as structures, intended to reflect interests of large groups of people. On the contrary, for the most part, the parties are leader-focused, i.e. aim at protecting / representing the interests of a particular politician, or a small group of party leaders \ financial and industrial structures. A number of studies illustrate that in the present-day Ukraine socio-political demarcation with stable ties between certain parties and electoral groups never occurred. In a leader-type party, winning seats in the parliament involved mobilizing citizens' support, which is mainly achieved not through articulation of group / public interests, but through large-scale populist projects, including electoral programme, designated as a set of promises to give voters what they wanted / they expected at the time of the elections. As a result, all such projects proved to be of one-off nature (exemplified by the history of the «Batkivshchyna» electoral programs at the 2006 and 2007 parliamentary elections). Obviously, such projects did not presuppose their implementation. During the regular elections, the parties presented another promising projects, while avoiding to report on the previous ones. Expendability of such programmes, a lack of follow-up reporting, as well as accountability for their implementation do not contribute to securing the electorate, discouraging voters from re-supporting the same party.

In addition, political parties, as the main political actors in Ukraine for the most part never became democratic structures, remaining highly centralized with a limited / controlled level of internal democracy. Party leaders and party rules declared a commitment to democratic foundations, yet the practical dimension of most parties met the standards of democratic centralism, guaranteeing permanent control of party leadership both over the party and its members. Accordingly, the vast majority of Ukrainian parties has been closed to the emergence of new, authoritative leaders within their party environment. The emergence of new leaders has always been controlled by party authorities. Thus, party leaders transferred the abovementioned state of affairs to Ukrainian politics, undertaking everything possible to keep the political class a closed environment. All mentioned above formed the essence of the “old politicians” and “old politics” phenomena, designated to block democracy within the party and prevent new authoritative leaders from entering the political class. Active populism and irresponsibility of the political class became a striking feature of this policy. As a result, a series of successive elections, with changed party names and officials' names without a significant improvement of the situation in the country, conditioned a strong demand for «new parties» and «new politicians.» The main indicator of novelty was not being in power / in the main political institutions prior to the elections.

In fact, it is the factor of the confrontation between the «old» and «new» politics, as well as «fresh faces» of politicians, that posed the main paradigm of the 2019 presidential and snap parliamentary elections. Refusal to support / weak support for «old» political parties and politicians from that environment, as well as prevailing active support for «new» parties

and their representatives, can be considered a form of shifting the blame and responsibility for either low or insufficient results the country's previous course of development on «old» political parties and, respectively, politicians. These parties lost voters' support. Instead, new parties actively relying on populism, yet not obliged to report for the time being, were acceptable to a large number of citizens. Their main advantage was not previously being in power, attended by harsh criticism of the «old» parties and politicians, that appeared to be enough for the the «fresh faces» to gain such support.

Technically, a wide coverage / use of the Internet (more than 70% of the population as of the beginning of 2019<sup>5</sup>) by avast majority of the population has become another significant factor. Indeed, Internet resources and channels have created strong competition for party information. The parties lost their monopoly on spread of information about themselves prior to the election. With the involvement of the traditional media, the wide spread of paid journalism, infomercials as well as and customized, promotional information, access to information from the network has created a powerful resource / channel for campaigning and voter mobilization. Diminishing trust in the traditional media, having long been the mouthpiece of the «old» parties, was an additional benefit, simultaneously attended by a growing loyalty to the Internet sources, both alternative and more democratic yet less biased. The combination of these and other factors led to a high level of electoral volatility at the national level in Ukraine in 2019.

Traditionally, the regional parliamentary elections results somewhat differ from those at the national level. The most benchmark case occurred at the 2019 presidential and snap parliamentary elections, when the results in the Lviv region fell into the individual case category compared to the national ones. On the whole, traditional support of parties and candidates of national-democratic orientation is characteristic of the voters of this region. Accordingly, parties that focus on supporting / expanding ties with the Russian Federation, regardless of the level of support for these parties nationwide, gain minimum voting support. Therefore, we could assume that electoral volatility in the region should have been substantially lower than national ones. We calculated the volatility level for the two recent parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2019 in the Lviv region and the result obtained constituted 59,72<sup>6</sup>. As you can see, the difference between the national and regional indicators is neither dramatic, nor appreciable. In our opinion, this can be accounted for by the versatility of the factors, having led to the shift in electoral preferences, both for the Lviv region and the rest of Ukrainian citizens.

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<sup>5</sup> The number of Internet users in Ukraine has increased [Electronic resource] - Access mode: [www.443742/kilkist-internet-korystuvachiv-v-ukrayini-zbilshylas-infografika](http://www.443742/kilkist-internet-korystuvachiv-v-ukrayini-zbilshylas-infografika)

<sup>6</sup> The results were calculated by the author based on the data, provided by the Central Election Commission [Electronic resource] - Access mode: [cvk.gov.ua](http://cvk.gov.ua)

**Table 5.** The level of trust in the key political institutions in Lviv region<sup>7</sup>

	Trust	Hard to say	Mistrust
President	16,2	26,7	57,1
Verkhovna Rada	8,0	25,2	66,9
Government	9,0	28,3	62,8
Prosecutor's Office	8,0	20,8	71,2
Court	8,7	23,3	68,1

The analysis of electoral volatility implies a step value of duration of the break / cleavage between the two parliamentary elections. Accordingly, the absolute factor in changing electoral support is the time period over which an average voter can compare his expectations with the outcomes of his chosen political agent. The result will never presuppose 100% satisfaction / approval. In addition, over this period, there is a natural movement / change of voters, when young citizens become entitled to vote whereas senior representatives leave. As a span of 4-5 years is appreciable enough for a number of events to occur so as to provoke various reactions / assesment, the issue of the citizens' political choice stability remains urgent.

In 2019, Ukraine held two rounds of regular presidential elections (on March, 31 and April 21), as well as snap parliamentary elections on July, 21. We intend to contemplate fluctuations in electoral preferences at the presidential election and over the period between the two elections with the help of a poll, carried out in Lviv region. Respondents were asked to indicate who they voted for in the first and second rounds of presidential elections and at the snap parliamentary elections. Two-dimensional tables enabled us to determine the major overlaps. We selected supporters of P. Poroshenko at the first presidential election as a reference group. Such a choice is due to the fact that Poroshenko participated in the two rounds of the presidential elections and his party had a certain history of existence, a relatively formed party structure, but the party structure of V. Zelensky was a novelty. Hypothetically we assume that voters who supported Poroshenko in the first round should have confirmed their choice in the second round. However, among the voters of Poroshenko in the second round, only 83.6% confirmed their choice, whereas 10% voted for V. Zelensky, with 5.8% not voting at all. Presumably this shift happened due to the course of the election campaign, when the arguments or position / behaviour of the candidates affected the choice of the voter. We can also assume that the change of an agent was typical of voters who doubted the correctness of their previous choice.

With regard to the results of the snap parliamentary elections, our reference group was also represented by P. Poroshenko's electorate, as well as and those, having supported the political party «European Solidarity», led by P. Poroshenko. Respectively, we hypothesize that the overwhelming majority of respondents were to have supported the then-president's

<sup>7</sup> The «Socioinform» Agency poll in December 2018



party, for whose leader they voted at the presidential election<sup>8</sup>. Such an assumption is based on the hypothesis on the consistency of one's choice protection, especially under the conditions of another candidate's victory and the threat to the course, declared by P. Poroshenko. Only 48.6% of the respondents, having given their vote for Poroshenko in the first round<sup>9</sup> of the presidential election, supported the «European Solidarity» at the snap parliamentary elections. Of the options / positions indicated, 2.6% did not remember who they voted for, while 8.4% responded they had not voted. Since the turnout in the Lviv region was 68.91% in the first round and 67.34% in the second round, according to the CEC, we can assume that 11% of the above mentioned citizens found / offered a soft form of refusal to directly state their political stance even in an anonymous Questionnaire. Alternatively, 40.6% of respondents voted for another political agent. In this case, the period over which the shift occurred was only four months long. The reasons for such a rapid and large-scale change could be the following: firstly, disappointment in P. Poroshenko's political stance / activity upon the presidential election, or holding him responsible for the voters' poor state of affairs, or low standard of living of a citizen; secondly, a high level of support of V. Zelensky by most Ukrainian citizens, accompanied by the belief in the possibility of his team changing the present situation in the country, positioning himself as belonging with the majority as an option of solidarity with the majority; thirdly, the impact of arguments and events during the election campaign.

As a separate factor, simultaneously closely related to the abovementioned ones, we would like to emphasise the setting for an agent, capable of realizing paternalistic attitudes, i.e., finding a new and successful political agent who would solve the socio-economic problems of citizens, dissatisfied with their current state of affairs. Since, following the presidency of P. Poroshenko and his party being in power, some of the citizens remain dissatisfied with their conditions, among this category a significant number is not ready to look into the causes of such a situation, beginning to look for a new agent to solve their problems, instead<sup>10</sup>. The paternalistic sentiments of this part of the population underlie / determine the search for a permanently new political agent, capable of dramatically improving the lives of this category of voters.

Thus, from our perspective, a high level of electoral volatility at the parliamentary elections in Ukraine has been predetermined by the following factors: firstly, by dissatisfaction with the outcomes of activities of certain politicians and political parties in power; secondly, the

<sup>8</sup> Voting at the first presidential election was selected as the bottom-up position. We agree with the common view that, in the first round, voters overwhelmingly vote according to their preferences, and in the second round, a large proportion of voters vote tactically, focusing on preferences or «lesser evil» that did not matter for them in the first round.

<sup>9</sup> We deliberately took the results of the first round, when voters voted for different candidates, representing distinct political parties / projects, since voting in the second round of the presidential election is already dichotomous and the voter must discard his political sympathies / preferences. Instead, at the parliamentary elections, the voter again faces up to the need to choose between a number of parties according to their advantages.

<sup>10</sup> During the survey, respondents, dissatisfied with their / their family's economic situation, were asked the following questions: If you are not satisfied with your family's financial situation, which of the following is your intention? The following responses were obtained: 29.0% - I am looking for extra earnings or other job in Ukraine; 23.8% - I plan to require additional social allowances from the state (subsidies, benefits, etc.); 18.6% - I am not going to change anything; 13.8% - I intend to look for a job abroad; 14.8 - Difficult to answer.

weakness / condition of the existing political parties in Ukraine, which are leader-driven by nature and governed by the principles of democratic centralism, restricting the possibility of new, authoritative political leaders emerging in the parties, thus changing the ruling and opposition parties and politicians within the majority and those in power did not lead either to overcoming the shortfalls, inherent in Ukrainian society or to a visible improvement of the standard of living of the majority of citizens; thirdly, a high level of paternalism of the bulk of voters, expecting political agents to provide desired benefits without being personally eager to achieve them.

### **References**

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