



Crisis management and adaptation in wartime elections: Ukraine's 2014 snap presidential and parliamentary elections[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Democratic states face logistical challenges managing elections that are magnified when territorial integrity is threatened. This article investigates the effects of conflict and occupation on election administration and outcomes, using data from Ukraine's 2014 snap presidential and parliamentary elections. We analyze the effects of the conflict, reflected in the movement of polling stations, reduced participation, and partisan results. Our findings suggest that the Ukrainian state was successful at containing the conflict, limiting its effects on voters and administrators.

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1. Introduction

Democratic states face a vexing dilemma during periods of natural and anthropogenic crises: how can they perform the essential participatory functions of democracy when unanticipated disruptions intervene in daily life? Natural disasters, such as earthquakes and extreme weather events, can undermine the ability of the state to provide services and the ability of citizens to access services. Some anthropogenic events, like terrorism, civil wars, irredentist activities, and invasion by external forces, quickly impede the capacity of states to deliver democratic services, requiring nimble adaptation.

Concerns about service provision are magnified when national elections are scheduled. If elections are to serve their essential task as accountability tools, candidates must be capable of contesting and citizens must be empowered to participate. While elections can

be delayed by conflict, the failure to hold votes can undermine the legitimacy of democratic systems. Indeed, the United States held elections on the territories it controlled during the Civil War, and other countries have held elections during large-scale domestic and international conflicts. Scholars have investigated the effects of war on elections, but limited research has evaluated administrative adaptation.

We investigate state adaptation to conflict by assessing Ukraine's management of the snap presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014. These elections present a unique opportunity to evaluate how state capacity is maintained when sovereignty is threatened. The elections took place during an escalating conflict involving “insurgent” forces in the eastern part of the country, and we have gathered logistical information about the location of all election commissions to facilitate an analysis of infrastructure adaptations. In addition, our data permit us to evaluate how key election indicators vary over time, especially in embattled territories, and estimate the effects of conflict on election administration and partisan outcomes.

We take advantage of the unique features of the Ukrainian case to assess how states adapt to crises, focusing on election administration. The paper proceeds in four parts. First, we outline the conditions on the ground, discussing the political and social context of the conflict. Second, we describe election administration in Ukraine, noting how it is affected by security challenges. Third, we outline our expectations about the conflict's impact on the state's capacity to

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handle snap elections. Fourth, we assess how Ukraine's administration adapted to crisis using data from the Central Electoral Commission. The paper contributes to our understanding of state capacity and election administration, while also providing a detailed investigation of Ukraine's efforts to conduct elections during conflict.

2. Elections in wartime environments

In a democratic society, one of the primary activities that states must implement are elections; citizen input in decision-making is at the core of democracy, and the regular conduct of public votes is at the center of democratic state activity. Elections require vast technical, personnel, and financial resources and are challenging to implement even under the best circumstances. Increased scholarly interest in the integrity of elections has directed attention to the role that electoral management bodies play in ensuring that the process is fairly and efficiently conducted.

When interventions, such as civil strife or foreign invasion, intrude on normal electoral processes, legitimacy can be undermined. Conflict can impede contestation by candidates or parties, and undermine the ability of citizens to participate and make known their preferences via the ballot. The response of state agencies to these challenges, and efforts to mitigate the negative effects of conflict, are crucial to understanding how democracy operates under threat.

Scholars have investigated the connection between war and elections, emphasizing how election outcomes may be influenced by force commitments abroad (Karol and Miguel, 2007), or the success of fighting forces (Gartner et al., 2004; Arena, 2008). Holding elections is a crucial component of democratic transitions, but elections may generate violence rather than mitigate it (Höglund et al., 2009). Indeed, the implementation of elections in transitional states can ameliorate or spark conflict, especially among losers (e.g., Przeworski, 1991; Anderson and Mendes, 2006; Garfinkel and Skaperdas, 2007; Collier, 2009; Chacon et al., 2011; McBride et al., 2011; Cederman et al., 2012; Flores and Nooruddin, 2012).

The general tendency in the extant literature is to focus on the connection between conflict and election outcomes, although some research has investigated how strife undermines the administrative process and accommodation of displaced voters (Klopp, 2001; Prather and Herron, 2007). This paper is designed to extend knowledge about the effects of conflict by examining *physical/administrative adaptation*. By adaptation, we focus on the ways in which organizations update or modify behaviors to perform essential functions when standard operating procedures are inhibited. The main measure of the conflict's influence is spatial; proximity to conflict should require the most significant adaptations.

We assess the state's physical/administrative adaptation to the conflict by analyzing infrastructure updates and estimating the effects of the conflict on participation and outcomes. We anticipate that the conflict will produce significant impediments to suffrage, with voters hindered from participating due to lack of access to polling places. In addition, we anticipate that participation in areas proximate to the conflict will be reduced, due in part to security concerns. Partisan effects may also be evident, with the conflict disproportionately affecting citizens with particular partisan profiles. We assess these effects using election data, comparing records from the 2010–2012 election cycle to the 2014 cycle.

3. The political context of Ukraine's 2010–2014 election cycles

Ukraine's 2014 snap presidential and parliamentary elections took place in May and October, after then-president Viktor Yanukovich fled the country. While the catalyst for snap elections was

the collapse of the Yanukovich regime, their origins stretch back to the previous 2010–2012 presidential-parliamentary election cycle.

Viktor Yanukovich was elected president of Ukraine in 2010, and this election was considered to be generally free and fair (Herron, 2011). While Yanukovich was chosen through a credible electoral process, his policy choices raised concerns about deterioration in the quality of Ukraine's nascent democracy. Further, the president's behavior was interpreted by many Ukrainians as an attempt to restore authoritarian practices.¹ These concerns were amplified by perceptions of fraud in the late 2010 local elections and 2012 parliamentary elections (Herron and Boyko, 2012; Herron, 2014).

The regime's decision to renege on a promise to pursue closer relations with the European Union through an Association Agreement in late 2013 mobilized Ukrainian citizens to occupy the main square of the capital city, Kyiv, and protest against the regime. Protests intensified, with government actors increasingly using force in an attempt to disperse protesters, and protesters responding in kind. Following a brutal February, 2014 attack in which security forces killed dozens of protesters, Yanukovich abandoned his post and left the country.

The *de facto* abdication by Yanukovich prompted the interim government to call an early presidential election. Conditions for early elections substantially changed over the course of 2014. After Yanukovich's flight, Russian forces intervened covertly and overtly in Ukraine, first by occupying and annexing Crimea, and later by instigating violence in Donetsk and Luhansk (Donbas).² At the time of the snap presidential elections, one of Ukraine's regions (Crimea) was occupied and outside of state control, combat operations were being conducted in Donetsk and Luhansk undermining state control, and heightened fears of expanded conflict threatened many other regions.

In addition to affecting the capacity of the state to hold elections, strife in Ukraine influenced partisan competition. Yanukovich's party-of-power, the Party of Regions, fractured in the wake of his ouster. Four candidates who had been affiliated with the Party of Regions contested the snap presidential election, although three of them were formally dismissed from the party. The strongest candidate in this group was Serhiy Tihipko who only managed to garner 5.2% of the vote. Tihipko defeated the official Party of Regions candidate, Mikhail Dobkin, who received 3%. Petro Poroshenko, a businessman and politician who had been allied both with Yanukovich and the opposition at different points in his career, garnered more votes than any other candidate in every district except for one. The election was decisive; it was the only presidential election in Ukraine's independent history to be finalized without a runoff.

Soon after his election to the presidency, Poroshenko advocated for early parliamentary elections. After the governing coalition disbanded, the president announced the dissolution of parliament in late August with early elections to be conducted in late October.³

¹ Public opinion surveys conducted annually by IFES document the changing perceptions of democratic quality in Ukraine. While the immediate aftermath of Yanukovich's election produced more confident responses in Ukraine's social and political conditions, satisfaction with Yanukovich's management of the economy, international relations, and other matters declined over time. Ukrainians were divided on many issues, but perceptions of corruption can be detected in responses. For example, a plurality of respondents in the 2011 survey indicated that prosecutions of Yuliya Tymoshenko and Yuriy Lutsenko were politically motivated; a majority indicated this perspective if the response of "politically motivated and legitimate" is added to the total. Moreover, the proportion of Ukrainians "concerned" or "alarmed" at Yanukovich's respect for rights and freedoms increased, and the proportion who were "alarmed" also increased. See the reports at ifes.org.

² We also use the traditional term "Donbas" to describe these two regional units.

³ The dissolution of the majority was not due to unresolvable conflict, but rather as a pretense to hold early elections. Ukraine's constitution permits the president to call snap elections if the coalition collapses. Pro-European forces, eager to oust anti-European forces from parliament, pursued early elections as a tool to accomplish this goal.

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