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# TWO YEARS AFTER *MAIDAN*: UKRAINIANS COMMITTED TO DEMOCRACY, DISAPPOINTED IN UNMET ASPIRATIONS



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**Two Years after *Maidan*:  
Ukrainians Committed to Democracy,  
Disappointed in Unmet Aspirations**

Key Findings from a September 2015 IFES Survey in Ukraine





Two Years after *Maidan*: Ukrainians Committed to Democracy, Disappointed in Unmet Aspirations  
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## Methodology

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) fielded a national survey in Ukraine from September 12 to 26, 2015, with a total of 1,558 interviews in areas outside Donbas and Crimea. The margin of error for a sample of this size is plus/minus 2.5 percent. Interviews were conducted in all oblasts outside Donbas and Crimea and the sample is representative of the Ukrainian population outside Donbas and Crimea. Please note that when 'Ukraine' or 'Ukrainians' is used in this document, these terms refer to areas outside Donbas and Crimea or residents of those areas. In addition to this national sample, an additional sample of 204 interviews was fielded in government-controlled areas in Donbas. Due to the lack of official data on population transfers in Donbas over the past two years, as well as concerns about possible intimidation or adverse influences impacting responses of those interviewed, the data from this sample in Donbas is not considered representative of public opinion in these areas. Rather, it may be indicative of opinions that may exist among current residents of government-controlled areas in Donbas. The Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) conducted all fieldwork and data processing for this survey.

## Overview of Findings

This 25<sup>th</sup> IFES annual survey in Ukraine finds that while most Ukrainians are disappointed with current state of affairs in the country and do not have much confidence in their political leadership, there is still a significant block of Ukrainians that is committed to democratic ideals and the rule of law, and prefers that Ukraine look toward Europe and the West for its future geopolitical orientation. The survey further finds that while most Ukrainians do not believe the aspirations of the *Maidan* have been adequately addressed by Ukrainian leaders, these aspirations do reflect a liberal political order that values closer relations with Europe, public affairs conducted with integrity, and democracy and rule of law in the country. The fact that at least a plurality of Ukrainians remain committed to the realization of these ideals is indicative of the significant changes that *Maidan*, at least theoretically, made possible. But the survey data indicates that the lack of realization of these changes combined with the economic situation in the country have contributed to a consistent, slow erosion in the initial positive momentum that was seen in Ukrainian public opinion on heightened hopes for political and social reform after *Maidan*. Given previous trends in public opinion in Ukraine, there is a danger that unless significant, concerted efforts are put in place to address issues of importance to Ukrainians, the momentum for meaningful reform as desired by the Ukrainian public may be lost and followed by the kind of cynicism and political disengagement that characterized public opinion in Ukraine before *Maidan*.

## Economic Difficulties, Corruption, and the Donbas Conflict Color Pessimistic Views on the Current Situation in the Country

According to the survey, a significant majority of the Ukrainian public has serious concerns about the direction in which the country is headed, and sees the country facing many significant challenges. The

trend in public opinion in Ukraine has turned negative over the past year as Ukrainians consider the multiple economic and political challenges facing the country. In a survey IFES conducted in September 2014, 34 percent of Ukrainians felt that the country was headed in the right direction while 42 percent felt that it was headed in the wrong direction. One year later, more than half of all Ukrainians (56%) believe the country is headed in the wrong direction while only 20 percent believe it is headed in the right direction. The view that the country is headed in the wrong direction is widely shared across the country, with a majority in each region voicing this opinion. In no region do more than 28 percent believe the country is headed in the right direction.

The war in Donbas, corruption in the country, and economic challenges are the primary issues identified by Ukrainians as problems the country faces today. Seventy percent mention the war in Donbas, and a significant percentage also mention related issues including relations with Russia (19%) and the issue of energy independence for Ukraine (11%). Corruption is mentioned as a critical issue by 53 percent, while a number of economic issues are also mentioned (inflation 56 percent, poverty 42 percent, unemployment 35 percent, external debt 11 percent, and general economic problems 30 percent).

The importance of economic issues and the conflict in Donbas to people in Ukraine is further highlighted by the fact that those two sets of issues are cited as primary reasons why Ukrainians may support a particular political party in the local elections to be held on October 25. When asked to name issues that a political party must address in order to win their votes, 36 percent mention initiatives to raise the standard of living of Ukrainians, 8 percent mention combating unemployment, and 8 percent mention social protection of Ukrainians. Seventeen percent mention ending the war in Donbas through a peace agreement or other means. Corruption, governmental reforms, and reducing the influence of so-called “oligarchs” are also mentioned frequently (17%). The focus on economic issues is highest in all regions, while initiatives to end the conflict in Donbas receives the highest mentions in the West (29%) and South (18%).

On the issue of corruption, 40 percent of Ukrainians report having made some form of payment or bribe for a public service or to avoid a fine over the past twelve months. This percentage is slightly higher than the 37 percent who reported taking part in these types of activities in the April 2014 IFES survey in Ukraine. The most common type of payment was in hospitals or clinics (32%), to process a document (9%), at school or at work (8% each), or to avoid a traffic citation (6%). A majority of Ukrainians also see corruption as a fact of life, with 58 percent agreeing that Ukrainians consider corruption a fact of life with far fewer (29%) disagreeing. These attitudes are also similar to those found in the April 2014 survey (55 percent agree, 32 percent disagree) but significantly different from what was found in the July 2011 survey (71 percent agree, 26 percent disagree). Survey data on *Maidan* (see section on *Maidan*) indicates that corruption was a galvanizing issue for the movement, and this may explain the significantly lower percentage of Ukrainians willing to accept corruption since the 2011 survey. The same dynamic is likely at play in the increase in support for democracy in Ukraine.

## **Democracy Enjoys Strong Support, but Support is Tested by Current Environment**

IFES surveys in recent years have shown that as the Ukrainian public sours on the current situation in the country, it also tends to lose faith in democracy in Ukraine, primarily because many Ukrainians chiefly associate democracy with socio-economic benefits rather than the rights intrinsic to a democracy. However, this survey finds that even in the face of the worsening situation in the country support for democracy and a democratic system remains strong. The survey data reveals that a plurality of Ukrainians can be characterized as Strong Democrats who are strongly supportive of democracy and the maintenance of democratic rights in Ukraine. Close to half of all Ukrainians (49%) believe that democracy is preferable to any other form of government while 21 percent believe that in certain situations, a non-democratic form of government can be preferable. Sixteen percent are apathetic and do not think that the form of government matters to people like them. It should be noted, though, that support for democracy as the preferred system of government has slowly eroded since the September 2014 IFES survey in which 65 percent said that democracy was preferable to any other form of government. Responses on other questions in the survey indicate that the economic situation in the country as well as continued pervasiveness of corruption have led many Ukrainians to question whether Ukraine is a democracy, and have likely also contributed to the erosion of support for democracy.

Still, a plurality of Ukrainians expresses support for democracy and does so even when given alternatives that would theoretically address the current situation in the country. Respondents to the survey were given two choices and asked to pick one: prioritizing economic development even though it would mean foregoing some democratic rights, or prioritizing maintenance of democratic rights even though this would mean that the economy would grow slowly. Forty-two percent prioritize democratic rights while 37 percent prioritize economic development, and 21 percent do not give a definitive response. It should be noted that when this question was asked in the November 2013 IFES survey, 36 percent prioritized economic development and 30 percent prioritized democratic rights, emphasizing the increased focus on democratic rights in Ukrainian political culture since the Orange Revolution. On another question, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the notion that it is more important for political leaders to maintain order than protect the democratic rights of citizens. Thirty-nine percent disagree with this statement while 38 percent agree. There has been a slight increase in the percentage favoring democratic rights compared to the November 2013 IFES survey, when 37 percent agreed that it was more important that political leaders maintain order and 36 percent disagreed.

Considering the findings from these three questions together, a plurality of Ukrainians (41%) can be characterized as Strong Democrats who emphasize democracy and democratic rights and want to maintain these rights despite the significant challenges facing the country, while 35 percent have weak attachments to democracy and are willing to forego democratic rights for economic development or order. Compared to the November 2013 survey, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of Strong Democrats. In that survey, 38 percent had weak attachments to democracy while 33 percent could be characterized as Strong Democrats.

While the commitment to democracy has increased since the November 2013 survey, the large majority of Ukrainians remains dissatisfied with the way democracy is working in practice in Ukraine. Only 15 percent say that they are very or somewhat satisfied with how democracy works in Ukraine while 58 percent are very or somewhat dissatisfied. In the 2013 survey, 13 percent were satisfied and 64 percent were dissatisfied. In this survey, respondents were also asked whether Ukraine is democracy in two different ways. When asked whether Ukraine is a democracy or not, 28 percent say that Ukraine is a democracy, 33 percent say it is not, and 18 percent say Ukraine has elements of both a democracy and non-democracy. The percentage saying Ukraine is a democracy has declined from 39 percent in the September 2014 survey, reflecting dissatisfaction with democracy in Ukraine.

A more nuanced understanding of Ukrainian attitudes toward democracy can be gained through a second question. On this question, respondents were asked to gauge how much of a democracy exists in Ukraine: 2 percent say Ukraine is a full democracy, 19 percent a democracy but with minor problems, 43 percent a democracy but with major problems, and 23 percent say Ukraine is not a democracy at all. This data indicates that while the majority thinks Ukraine is a democracy, most of these Ukrainians believe that it has significant problems. Among the reasons given for Ukraine not being a democracy, the most prominent include a lack of respect of rights and non-democratic governance by the government, laws not being equally applied, lack of reforms and continued corruption, and the lack of economic development in the country. As indicated earlier, Ukrainian attitudes toward democracy have been strongly influenced by current conditions in the country and while there has been some erosion in support for democracy since the immediate period following *Maidan*, there remains a significant part of the Ukrainian population that is continuing to profess faith in democracy despite the challenging conditions. Whether that faith continues to persist will depend in large part on the performance of Ukrainian authorities in introducing reforms on the issues most resonant with strong democrats in Ukraine.

One interesting aspect of greater support for democracy is manifested in responses to a question on the survey which asked respondents to agree or disagree with several statements about civic activism. In general, this survey shows a significant increase in Ukrainians' views on the effectiveness of civic activism compared to the 2013 survey in which this question was last asked. In this survey, 63 percent strongly or somewhat agree that people working together can bring about needed change (increase of 8 percent since 2013) and 41 percent agree that they have a role to play in solving problems in their community (increase of 9 percent). While 51 percent agree that 'it does not matter how I vote, nothing will change,' this percentage has decreased 15 percent since the 2013 survey, indicating that belief in power of voting has increased significantly since that survey.

## **Views on Elections**

When asked if they will vote in local elections on October 25, 2015, 41 percent say they are very likely to vote, 30 percent say they are somewhat likely to vote, and 23 percent say they are either unlikely to vote or will not vote. Analysis of IFES survey data from previous surveys indicates that the percentage who turn out to vote in elections in Ukraine generally tend to be just slightly higher than the percentage who say that they are very likely to vote. With this in mind, it is reasonable to expect a turnout below 50 percent



for the local elections. There is significant variation between different regions in the percentage who say they are very likely to vote. The highest percentage saying they are very likely to vote are in the Center (52%) and the West (48%), while the percentage is very low in the South (27%). In the East, 38 percent are very likely to vote and this percentage is 37 percent in the North and Kyiv.

A plurality of Ukrainians expect the local elections to be reasonably free and fair. When asked about the integrity of the upcoming elections, 44 percent say that they will be either completely or reasonable free and fair while 21 percent say they will be flawed enough to doubt the accuracy of results and 12 percent say they will not be free and fair at all. Positive expectations for the integrity of election process are highest in the Center (54%) and West (50%). A positive note for elections in Ukraine is that there has been an increase in the percentage who believe that elections in Ukraine are competently administered. In the June 2015 IFES survey, 66 percent agree that elections are competently administered, compared to 56 percent in the 2013 survey. While there might be greater confidence in the competence of election administration, this confidence does not necessarily transfer to the Central Election Commission (CEC) as only 32 percent express confidence in the CEC while 48 percent profess a lack of confidence.

Respondents to the survey were also asked for the party for which they would vote in the elections. Among those very likely to vote, 12.8 percent say they will vote for the Poroshenko-UDAR bloc, 10.5 percent would vote for Batkivschnyna, 8 percent for Samopomich, 6.4 percent for the Radical Party, 4.1 percent for the Opposition Bloc, 3.1 percent for Right Sector, and 11 percent for other parties. However, 36 percent have not made up their minds yet. While support for the Poroshenko-UDAR bloc is fairly well spread out across the country, other parties and blocs have regional niches. Batkivschnyna derives most of its support in the West, Center, and North of the country, while the Opposition Bloc derives almost of its support in the South and Center, and the same is true for Samopomich in the West.

## **Continued Preference for Stronger Ties with Europe and the West**

In addition to the continued support for democracy, the IFES survey also finds that roughly half of Ukrainians believe that the country would better off with closer political and economic relations with Europe than with Russia. Overall, 49 percent believe that Ukraine would be better off with closer relations with Europe, while 8 percent prefer closer relations with Russia. Nineteen percent think Ukraine should have close relations with both, while 14 percent think Ukraine should not have close relations with either Europe or Russia. Support for closer relations with Europe is highest in the West (71%), North and Kyiv (51%), and Center (48%). In the South, 30 percent prefer closer relations with Europe while 24 percent prefer close relations with both and 14 percent prefer closer relations with Russia. In the East, 29 percent prefer closer relations with Europe and 34 percent with both.

In addition to preferring closer relations with Europe, Ukrainians are also likely to have much more positive views of Western governments and institutions than of Russia. Sixty-four percent of Ukrainians have very positive or somewhat positive views of the leadership of the European Union and 59 percent have the same opinions of the leadership of Germany. Positive views of Germany have increased since September 2014 when 49 percent had positive views. Fifty percent have positive views of United States

leadership, and 45 percent of NATO. As far as views on Russian leadership is concerned, only 12 percent have positive views while 68 percent have negative views. Positive views on Russian leadership are at their lowest level in the last two years.

## **Aspirations for *Maidan* Perceived to Embody Liberal Values and Integrity in Governance**

The *Maidan* movement started as a movement demanding greater integration with Europe, but as the movement grew in size and intensity it became associated with a great number of causes and issues. Two years after *Maidan*, this survey asked Ukrainians to specify what they think were and are the key aspirations of the movement. The responses suggest that Ukrainians primarily view *Maidan* as a movement seeking more liberal socio-political values for Ukraine as well as more integrity in governance, as opposed to a movement focused on nationalistic or purely political aims.

Respondents to the survey were given eight commonly-cited aspirations usually associated with *Maidan* and asked them to specify the 3 most important reasons for *Maidan* taking place. Combining the number of mentions of a particular aspiration as either first, second, or third most-important results in the following:

- Reduction of corruption (60 percent total; 20 percent most important reason)
- Greater integration with Europe (54 percent total; 34 percent most important)
- Limit influence of oligarchs (44 percent total; 9 percent most important)
- A country with liberal values where all people are equally protected (39 percent total; 12 percent most important)
- Reforms of the judiciary and law enforcement agencies (32 percent total; 8 percent most important)
- More democracy in Ukraine (21 percent total; 4 percent most important)
- Protecting Ukraine's national heritage and institutions (15 percent total; 3 percent most important)
- Proper balance in powers of the president and parliament (9 percent total; 3 percent most important)

The data above indicates that reduction of corruption and greater integration with Europe are perceived to have been the two most important aspiration of the movement, with more than a third citing integration with Europe as the most important aspiration. Related issues are also stressed frequently, including limiting the influence of oligarchs, liberal values for the country, and reforms of the legal personnel and institutions. Similar sentiments were also expressed in the IFES June 2015 survey when respondents were asked to consider the importance of several reform agendas in Ukraine. In terms of first choice for reform efforts, 47 percent of Ukrainians in the June survey mentioned anti-corruption reforms, 26 percent reforms of the judiciary, and 5 percent reform of law enforcement bodies.

When it comes to progress on these aspirations, Ukrainians are largely pessimistic. For each of these issues, a large majority sees little to no improvement having been made. Protection of Ukraine's national culture receives the highest rating, with 25 percent seeing at least some improvement and 65 percent seeing little to no improvement. Fifteen percent see improvement in Ukraine's political and economic integration with Europe with 75 percent see little to none. Fourteen percent see improvements in democracy in Ukraine while 76 percent see little to none. For all other issues, less than ten percent see improvement while more than four in five see little or no improvement. It is thus not surprising that only 5 percent of Ukrainians think that the current authorities have addressed the aspirations of the *Maidan* either very or somewhat well, compared to 73 percent who say they have done so poorly or not at all. This is a significant decline from the September 2014 survey when 21 percent had positive views and 66 percent negative views.

## **General Decline in Confidence in Political Leaders**

Given the socio-economic conditions in the country as well as majority's perceptions that the issues central to the *Maidan* movement have not been addressed, it is not surprising that there has been a general decline in confidence in political leaders among Ukrainians. In this survey, the highest level of confidence in political leaders is expressed in President Poroshenko. Thirty-two percent express confidence in Poroshenko, while 62 percent lack confidence in him. This compares to 69 percent who expressed confidence in him in the September 2014 IFES survey. Prime Minister Yatsenyuk has suffered from a similar decline in confidence, from 60 percent in September 2014 to 20 percent in this survey. The head of UDAR, Klitschko, has fallen from 43 percent in September 2014 to 25 percent in this survey. Interestingly, the one politician who has rebounded in the public's perception in the past few months is former Prime Minister Tymoshenko. In a December 2014 survey, her confidence rating was at 17 percent, it was 16 percent in the June 2015 IFES survey but is now at 25 percent, similar to Klitschko. Confidence in the Vice Speaker of the *Rada*, Andriy Parubiy, has stayed relatively similar to that found in the June 2015 survey (22 percent September, 25 percent June).

The Ukrainian military continues to enjoy high levels of confidence with 74 percent expressing confidence and very few (19%) expressing a lack of confidence. There is also a high degree of confidence in pro-Ukrainian volunteer battalions (52%) that have been active in the conflict in Donbas, although confidence in the battalions is significantly lower in the South and East than in other regions. Sixty-three percent have confidence in the media based in Ukraine. In general, and as observed in other IFES surveys in Ukraine, there is significantly higher confidence expressed in local officials such as the mayor of the respondent's city (47%) or their city/village council (47%) than in regional officials such as the Raion administrator (30%) or the Oblast Governor (27%). It is also interesting to note that while the traditional Ukrainian militia (police) receives low confidence ratings (22%), the newly formed Ukrainian police receives much higher confidence ratings (52%).

In the context of the *Maidan* movement, there is skepticism on the part of many Ukrainians that current leaders can address the aspirations of the movement. Forty-seven percent disagree that 'current leadership in the country understand the reforms that are needed to address' the aspirations, while 38

percent agree. There is even greater skepticism about the reforms actually taking place, with 51 percent disagreeing that the current political leaders will ensure that needed reforms are introduced. Twenty-eight percent agree with this statement. Finally, a significant majority (72%) agrees that 'the only way the objectives of the *Maidan* can be achieved is through a new generation of leaders not tied to the status quo.'



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