

Ukraine's revolution lives on

The orange glow may have faded, but the country has shown that democracy at the ballot box is working

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From outside, Ukraine must look like a country of paradoxes. In 2004, the presidential elections became a milestone in Ukraine's post-Soviet development, leading to democratic change through the Orange Revolution; five years later, the antihero of the revolution, Viktor Yanukovich, will [soon be inaugurated as the fourth president of Ukraine](#). His rival, the princess of the Orange Revolution, [Yulia Tymoshenko](#), the current prime minister, has little choice but to admit the election defeat.

What has happened to Ukraine? Does it mean the Orange Revolution has failed? Not at all. In reality, it has won, as the country enjoys free and fair elections resulting in huge electoral turnarounds, such as the one we have seen this week. The popular European and US perception is misleading: the current race is not a repeat of the Orange Revolution battle: a liberal, pro-EU candidate against an authoritarian pro-Russian. The protagonists may be the same as in 2004, but the 2010 elections have a very different plot.

It is not the ideas of democracy and integration with Europe that have lost in Ukraine, but those who have failed to bring these ideas into life. Yanukovich's victory, first of all, is a popular protest against the Orange Revolution leaders: the current president, [Viktor Yushchenko](#) and prime minister, Tymoshenko, whose bitter internal conflict put the country at risk of collapse. Yanukovich does not enjoy the support of the majority of Ukrainians; he did not even gain the votes of the majority of those who came out to vote, let alone the 30% who preferred to stay at home on Sunday. In fact, he has lost a million of his supporters since the last election.

But his opponents have suffered an even greater collapse of support. The fate of the outgoing president and superstar of 2004, Yushchenko, is all the evidence needed – in the first round of this presidential election, he got a mere 5% of the vote in his bid for a second term: a spectacular demise of a man once idolised in Ukraine and feted as a progressive and powerful post-Soviet leader by the west.

In truth, the majority of the population do not expect any positive change in the country with any of the two main candidates who competed in Sunday presidential runoff. In this sense, the 2010 presidential elections are seen by many Ukrainians as irrelevant.

Since 2005, Tymoshenko has headed the government as prime minister twice, in 2005 and in 2007, both times in coalition with the current president Yushchenko. She was his ally in the Orange Revolution, but she turned into the president's fiercest critic, and the conflict between them paralysed the government. In a spectacular volte-face in June 2010, she allied with Yanukovich in an attempt to change the constitution and to cancel both the direct presidential and the next parliamentary election. She also mounted a populist campaign against Ukraine's business elite known as the "the war on oligarchs", while still fostering business interests in her own party.

Yanukovich has benefited greatly from Ukraine's new open-democracy, something he fought and tried to defraud. The failure of the Yushchenko government and voter dissatisfaction brought him and his party back to government in 2006, and makes him president in 2010. When Yanukovich served as prime minister, his coalition tried to change the constitution to weaken the powers of the president. Their method was deemed unconstitutional and Yushchenko dissolved the parliament. Bizarrely, in opposition, Yanukovich has turned into a democracy defender and now promises to lead Ukraine in to the EU.

This election does little to move Ukraine towards having a stable government, something Ukrainians need most in the time of the deepest economic crisis. Yanukovich will assume the presidency, but not yet the government. He will have share power with Tymoshenko, who still holds the office of prime minister, and she has a formal majority in the parliament. Until Yanukovich's party is able to get the control in parliament, the new president will be weak, just like Yushchenko who had veto powers, but had his hands tied in converting his electoral promises into policy.

[The Party of Regions](#) led by Yanukovich may find enough votes in the parliament to dismiss Tymoshenko's government, but not to form its own. Thus Yanukovich will have to choose between a deal with his political opponent or a snap parliamentary election. It is difficult to predict what could happen in the case of the new parliamentary elections, as the first round of the presidential race this January has shown that Ukrainians are hungry for a genuine change of the political elite.

With the democratically elected new president of Ukraine, the EU should not repeat its mistake of 2005. It must engage more strongly through opening its doors to Ukraine. The success of Ukraine's democracy will have a strong impact on the long-term stability of post-Soviet eastern Europe. The current political elite in Ukraine is unlikely to end corruption, and bring Ukraine closer to the EU. But while Ukrainian citizens hold the elite accountable, Ukraine has a chance to change for the better.

Once Ukraine matures its democracy and strengthens its economy, it will also make the EU stronger. Whether Yanukovich can be any more successful in this endeavour than his predecessor remains to be seen, especially while the spectre of Tymoshenko looms large.