



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on January 19, 2024

Western Leaders Reportedly Push “Unhinged” Zelensky to Hold Elections

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s efforts to cling to power amid the drawn-out conflict Russia are now prompting criticism even from his allies in the West, a development which could imperil the western financial and arms support crucial to Kiev’s sustaining of the war effort.

As reported by the outlet [Global Village Space](#), Western leaders are becoming concerned that Zelensky is getting “out of control,” a concern exacerbated by the Ukrainian president’s repeated refusal to hold elections during the course of the war.

Thus far, regular electoral proceedings have been suspended due to martial law, although lawmakers could amend the nation’s laws to allow for elections to go forward.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told the outlet that Zelensky’s shifting rhetoric on the matter — saying one moment that the Ukrainian people do not want elections under current conditions and then saying that he is willing to run for reelection under certain circumstances — is a reflection of “the wish of that individual and his associates ... to keep power as much as they can.”

Lavrov added that the West “would have liked to have more flexibility,” and that holding elections would put Zelensky “more in line with Western interests, because he has been increasingly getting out of control.”

The current suspension of elections not only keeps Zelensky in place as president, it preserves a parliamentary ruling majority for Zelensky’s Servant of the People party.

It is unclear how the president and his party would fare in the event of elections; a survey last month by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KMIS) suggested a drop in public faith in the Ukrainian government, with distrust of parliament rising from 34 percent to 61 percent and trust in Zelensky dropping from 84 percent to 62 percent since December 2022.

In Ukraine, the president is elected by a popular vote every five years. A candidate must receive more than 50 percent of the votes to win in the first round. If no candidate achieves this, a second round is held between the top two candidates. The Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine’s parliament, is a unicameral legislative body.

Members of the Verkhovna Rada are elected through a mixed electoral system, combining a proportional representation system and a single-member district system. Half of the seats are allocated based on party lists through a proportional representation system, where voters vote for a political party.



AP Images
Volodymyr Zelensky



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The suspension of elections has been a tactic employed by various dictators throughout history as a means to consolidate power and maintain control. Under Fidel Castro, elections were suspended and Cuba became a one-party state under the control of the Communist Party.

In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez came to power through elections, but he later implemented constitutional changes that extended presidential term limits and consolidated power in the executive branch.

Notably, authoritarians throughout history have often made use of war or threats (whether real or feigned) to national security as justification for suspending electoral processes. After becoming Chancellor of Germany in 1933, Hitler and the Nazis used the Reichstag Fire as a pretext to pass the Reichstag Fire Decree, which suspended civil liberties, including freedom of the press and the right to assemble. Subsequent measures, such as the Enabling Act of 1933, effectively eliminated political opposition and paved the way for Hitler's unchallenged rule.

But the question of free and fair elections in Ukraine has become another point of critique among right-wing lawmakers in the United States. Many argue that Ukraine claims to be fighting for democracy yet is being undemocratic by refusing to hold elections.

The political Right in America has been more critical of Zelensky, with some hard-right voices wanting a total end to all support for Ukraine while moderate conservatives want aid to be more conditional and restricted — this in opposition to the prevailing stance of Democrats, who have advocated for a virtual slush fund for Ukraine.

Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), for example, has supported Ukraine but emphasized that Kiev must hold elections in 2024.

A piece by [BBC](#) noted the challenges Ukraine would face with elections during wartime:

Security is the main one. A displaced population is another.

"It's impossible to hold elections during the war when millions of our citizens are abroad or internally displaced," says Olena Shulyak, MP and the head of the ruling Servant of the People party.

"[It's impossible to hold elections] when we can't guarantee security to our citizens, when our soldiers ... cannot vote or be nominated as candidates."

Other challenges include schools — which are normally used as polling stations — being damaged, an outdated voter registry, restricted rights under martial law and a lack of funding.

The peril faced by the Zelensky government is that the criticism could evolve into a complete halt of war aid should Republicans take Congress and the presidency in the November 2024 American elections. A U.S. government led by Republicans — especially helmed by Donald Trump in the White House — is less likely than a Democrat one to sign off on blank checks to Kiev.



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