

The Ukrainian party system: how corruption erodes space
for liberal policy making and moves cleavages beyond
traditional categories

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Introduction

This study focuses on the Ukrainian party system in its evolution and operation, and tries to frame it as it appears today in 2013. This is the analysis of a political environment where corruption is widespread and blackmailing is an everyday strategy between politicians of different alignment, used in order to lock each other. Not surprisingly Ukrainian citizens show very low levels of confidence in national politicians and political parties.

Traditional cleavages, such as class affiliation, religion, urban or rural location, have been marginal to Ukrainian political developments, since the creation of an independent civil society during the two decades of independence has been sluggish, and elites dominate both the political and economic life of the country. Since the space for outsiders is little, the holders of vested interests and rent positions try to exploit their economic success by going into politics, where they seek to maximize their profits by pressuring each other.

Quoting Gerald Easter, at the collapse of the Soviet Union "the formal structures of the Soviet state collapsed or were dismantled, **informal personal networks** were left standing", and thus overcame the country, with minimal incentives to achieve a true institutional development.

Leaving the traditional categories aside, peculiar to Ukraine is a division of the country in two between a West with a more marked Central European soul, and a more Russified and industrialized East. Both parts of the country feel a Ukrainian belonging, but in a different way, generating a disagreement on what Ukraine is or should be. This identity issue is central to any study of Ukrainian politics because it is responsible for creating the main cleavage into the Ukrainian society, as electoral outcomes have clearly shown through the years. The fact that this cleavage is only partially exploited by political parties lies in the acknowledging that a win in the whole country is not

possible with the support of just half of it.

Corruption is a widespread phenomenon into Ukrainian society at both high and low level, and has heavily conditioned the political developments in the country. The heavy presence of independents into parliament in the Nineties has been a clear mirror for a political situation dominated by clientelism and patronage. The years that followed and the Orange revolution created the illusion of a possibility for a real alternative to the oligarchic domination, but the new politicians manifested the same attitudes towards power of the ones that came before them.

Another important factor that alimented disillusion in the public has been the call for electoral fraud in 2004 and the consequent repetition of the presidential voting. This election has created an important precedent in which for the first time some scholars could measure statistically the impact of the fraud, which appears as evident using basic correlation analysis among the voter turnout rates and the winners' and losers' shares of votes.

From such a situation, the political system that emerges is fragmented and very leader-oriented. The focus of this study will be showing how corruption has been the cause of this configuration and has brought to what I define as party system capture. This concept is new to political science debate, and is a proposed evolution from the idea of state capture that has been proposed in studies on fragile democracies.

The historical determinants that are behind modern Ukraine

The evolution into the present political situation of Ukraine was slow and due to many factors.

At the root of the divisions into the modern Ukrainian society lies in the lack of political unity of its different territories, that historically were subject some to Habsburg, some to Ottomans and some to the Kiev-Rus rule. This means that the country was

united for the first time under the flag of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Ukraine during seven decades of the XX century (1922 to 1991).

This was possible after the first Soviet leaders had promised that all nationalities on its territory would have been recognized, and this raised enthusiasm in many of the Soviet territories, including Ukraine. Its relevance in historical and demographic terms made possible that Ukraine was the biggest and most important Republic behind the Russian SSR.

It is important to recall that this organization on a national basis of the early Soviet state was conducted through two fundamental instruments. The first were the censuses, that became the means to record which nationalities were present on the territory, in order to decide which were important enough to have the right to be recognized, and which were too insignificant and were thus condemned to oblivion. The second policy was korenizatsiia (indigenization) that promoted the rooting of the different nationalities on their own territory, and the use of the local national language in public acts.

The application of the two policies certified that Ukrainians, one of the largest ethnic groups into the Soviet Union, had a right to have their own socialist republic. At the same time, though, the dimensions and location of the new republic, and its prevalently agricultural large-estate economy made the country and its population an immediate target for Stalin's social reforms. The attempt was to bring a modern industrial economy to the dishomogeneous and underdeveloped territories of the Soviet Union, and in the meanwhile establish a "dictature of the proletariat" over it.

This had the most terrible repercussions in Ukraine, where the transformation of society through heavy reforms brought unexpected catastrophe. A combination of mistakes in the economic programming and unlucky weather conditions resulted in the terrible famine of the 1930s, now known as Holodomor. Together with the repression against the kulaki (rich farmers) it put an enormous toll on the local population, which modern estimates quantify in a loss of 2 to 7 millions Ukrainians between 1931 and 33.

This collective tragedy has been of capital importance for the shaping of identities in the region as it created a sense of brotherhood through suffering among the populations that it was inflicted upon

The Soviet Union firmly negated that the disaster ever happened, and as Hirsch told in a famous article, Stalin himself ignored the scope of the famine, at such point that he was upset when in the 1938 census the population of Ukrainians was severely lower than predicted. In any case, Ukrainian identity shaped itself around this suffering from that moment on and it is no coincidence that Holodomor is now commemorated by monuments and museums by the modern Ukrainian state. At the same time, the relationship between memory and identity worked the other way around, as the political use of the tragedy a clear example of how the selective utilization of memory can shape identity in a population.

The reversal of the pro-nationalistic policies in favour of the so called "Sovietization" turned the tables once for all, and brought the start of the Russification. After the death of Stalin, who had been the promoter of the national organization of the Soviet Union, a shift in policy occurred. The decision behind the pursue of Soviet nationalism was an attempt at imposing a common feeling of citizenship over all the populations of the Union. Practically, it meant that regional nationalisms were outlawed and had to slip into illegality and were never included into the debate inside the party. The increase in the presence of Russians into important public places in all the Republics was also an important phenomenon, and in Ukraine it meant that the share Russians on the total population went from 9.2% of the population in 1926 to 22.1% in 1989.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was extremely quick and came widely unexpected, and as in many other fields, it had deep consequences on the policies of nationalism. Simultaneously with the other republics, Ukraine declared itself a sovereign state and in the wake of independence, nationalism became necessary for uniting the local population and creating a narrative behind the separation from Moscow. Even the

former Ukrainian Communist elites changed their rhetorics overnight and used nationalist discourses to be able to liberate themselves from Russian influence, and legitimate their latitude.

In the Western part of the country a wave of pro-Ukrainian sentiments was able to find historical roots into XIX century nationalism and into the movements of the Twenties and the Thirties. In 1991 it concentrated its efforts around support for the People's Movement of Ukraine, generally known as **Rukh** (literally, movement). Similarly to the movements in other former communist countries it had among his ranks many dissidents incarcerated during the Communist rule for pro-Ukrainian propaganda.

The Eastern regions, where Russian speakers were and are the majority, and that are dominated by the industrial oligarchies of Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk, were treated in Russia as the guarantee that Ukraine would not detach itself from the Soviet Union. In the days of independence this analysis did prove wrong, because the local populations had developed a Ukrainian identity of their own and the local leaders understood that an independent Ukraine would have been a unique occasion to make profits without interference from Russia.

Under the pressure of international observers, the whole of Eastern Europe went on to form multiparty elections, and this included Ukraine. Such development had to happen even in absence of a favorable environment, and usually before the formation of a full market economy was accomplished. Also, the new regimes were expected to evolve into stable party systems in a time span that was much shorter than what Western countries had for their own party development.

The transition out of communism was not the same in the whole area, but had its own regional specifics. As some scholars like Toka and Markovski have described, communist states were not all of the same typology, and the transition depended on which kind of communist regime had been present in the country. Ukraine, as most of the Soviet republics, has always been included in the framework of what is known as **patrimonial**

communism. This was typical of the transformation of societies that before the XX century a class of notaries and landowners had ruled over impoverished peasants. This meant that on those lands the first industrialization and the first experience of politics and party organization came with the Soviet Union. This, and the consequent absence of a culturally-developed and politically-aware middle class meant that the regime could always rule the country fairly easily.

The control was so strong in patrimonial communist countries that in almost all cases, the first multiparty elections were won by the former Communist Parties. The lack of competitors recognized enough by the public was another decisive factor in this sense. This does not mean that the alternatives did not exist at all, as the first years were characterized by a multiplying of political subjects, but their lack of roots into society and their shallow membership base seriously impaired their possibilities for early success.

Moreover, the space for the formation of new parties was clearly defined by the fact that they had to support market economy, a full democratic system, and global trade opening. As Abby Innes stated in one of her essays:

Eastern European parties have had, in effect, to satisfy two constituencies, one internal, the other external, with the very existence of the latter inhibiting the development of the former.

In this environment, the emergence of catch-all parties (parties that aim at the electorate as a whole, and not to a class or sector of it) in Eastern Europe was inevitable due to the lack of time. Elections had to be contested even without a political market and without knowledge of the electoral constituencies' preferences, so that, in order to win, parties had to be flexible, chameleon-like, and ready to follow the change of wind. This said, it is better to make one step back and see how Ukrainian politics changed in its 22 years of independence.

Two decades of troubled politics

In the beginning there was the Party. As in the other post-Soviet countries, Ukraine had a fresh start as an independent country in 1991 (August 24th), but at that moment its political scene included only the Communist Party of Ukraine. In the following months, even before adopting its own Constitution, Ukraine organized and voted for its first presidential elections, where the independent (but Party-supported) candidate Leonid Kravchuk defeated at first round the Rukh candidate Vyacheslav Chornovil (see figure 3).

After being banned for two years by the new constitution, the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) reformed in 1993 and competed in the first free parliamentary elections, of 1994, where **it proved able to remain in power**. The support for Rukh was limited to the regions of the West and Communist party could still count on the support and alignment of the national media. Rukh was also seen by the electorate as giving priority to issues such as democratization and full development of glasnost (openness), plus the promotion of Ukrainian culture and language, themes at the centre of its first electoral campaigns. This proved to be a crucial political mistake, as the main priorities for the population in the aftermath of independence were a quick recovery for a moribund economy, and the ecology, including a solution for the Chernobyl issue (Paniotto, 1991).

In late 1994, a prolonged state of unrest that sparked from union strikes forced the Parliament to call for anticipated presidential elections. This was the first peaceful shift of power in a former USSR territory. Leonid Kravchuk, the KPU candidate, was beaten by another **Leonid, Kuchma**, who had been Prime Minister during his presidency. Kuchma, that had run at the elections as an independent, was thought to gather support from the progressist wing of the KPU and won the election thanks to widespread support of the Western regions, plus in the central and populous capital Kiev (see figure 4). He became a long-lasting leader, confirming its presidency in the 1999 elections, where he

gained a large 57% of votes against the KPU official candidate Petro Symonenko (see figure 5).

The two mandates of president Kuchma were marked by the **creation of interest-led rather than parties-led politics**, with the state exercising strong control over the media and business activities. At the same time Russian expectations of deeper collaboration were betrayed, and replaced by a more neutral stance, also thanks to the bargain power acquired with the renewal of the concession on the Crimean fleet. Crimea has been the historical base of the Soviet Black Sea fleet, is inhabited by Russians and since 1991 belongs to Independent Ukraine, but the fleet in Sevastopol has been allowed to stay under Russian control. Russia fully recognized Ukraine's independence as late as in 1996, certifying that there was no possibility of coming back to a Union between the two states.

In 2000, the Kuchma administration was involved in the "tape scandal", when recordings of conversations about private agreements and bribes at high level involving the president himself became public, generating criticism and international disapproval. Consequently, the 2002 parliamentary elections saw the platform Our Ukraine (which included Rukh) as the most voted political subject in the nation, breaking ten years of electoral victories of the Communists, and imposing the new personality of **Viktor Yushenko**, an economist, as an alternative leader, whose ideas of free market and EU integration called for a change.

In 2004 president Kuchma had decided to retire himself from leader of the country, and designated as successor the current Prime Minister **Viktor Yanukhovich**, who could count on the support of the Eastern regions of the country and the personal approval of the Russian president Vladimir Putin. After a first round with no winners, the second round of the presidential elections was won by Yanukhovich. Huge protests all around the country called for fraud, because all the exit polls indicated a victory of Viktor Yushenko. The Independence Square in Kiev was occupied and pressure rose,

as the risk of a civil war or violent power takeover was seriously present. The solution came through a courageous decision from the side of the judges of the Supreme Court, that decided to deem the election not valid and hence recall it. The ruling elite decided to accept the decision and marked a very important step to the normalization of the country's politics. The recall election was won by Viktor Yuschenko, thus **bringing to power for the first time a coalition affiliated with the former dissidents to communism.**

This whole movement for change was given the name of **Orange Revolution** (from the color adopted by the Yushchenko electoral campaign) and it marked the shift from the authoritarian style of Kuchma during the Nineties and the early '00s, to apparently more open governments. Yet the promises enshrined in this "scene change" were betrayed by constant arguing among the coalition members, and as early as in 2006 the front lost its integrity due to the "betrayal" of the Socialists, who formed an alliance with the Yanukhovic-KPU opposition. Despite attempts at controlling the national politics by Yuschenko, who dissolved the Parliament twice in two years, the long awaited stability was never reached.

The Orange hopes were given a the final blow by the Yanukhovich victory in the 2011 Parliamentary elections. A few months after, the former prime minister Yuliya Tymoschenko, leader of the opposition party Fatherland, was imprisoned on charges of high treason and abuse of power.

Foreign sirens

Facing pressures for reforms in different directions at the same time, from Russia and from the European Union, Ukrainian politicians (on both sides) always disappointed the expectations of foreign powers. Its intrinsic weakness, due to the internal division of the country, kept Ukraine from leaning on one side or the other for good. This is because all politicians are aware that their chances of getting reelection are bound to lower if

their politics become too one-sided, and thus are always struggling to keep a balanced approach. As D'Anieri argues, **the block in foreign policy is due to the fact that the identity issue gets easily involved**, and identity is always very hard to handle in the country.

Getting into detail, the European Union was disappointed by the lack of concrete efforts for reform after the Orange Revolution, but at the same time the EU disappointed the Yushchenko government by never proposing a real membership plan. In general, it is clear that **Ukraine has always been a low priority on the EU agenda**, and this has stopped much of the enthusiasm that could have been generated by a more positive institutional stance.

This failure to meet Ukrainian expectations was due to three factors:

- the need to maintain good relationships with Russia, whose leaders disapprove the entrance of Ukraine into the EU, since they want to keep it under their influence sphere and can control the energy policy in Europe through it,
- the **enlargement fatigue** that the European Union felt after the entrance of twelve new countries of Eastern Europe between 2004 and 2007, and the fact that it would be hard to accommodate a country of 45 million inhabitants like Ukraine
- the complex negotiations to allow **Turkey** as a new member, and the following failure generated a deadlock where the government in Ankara would not tolerate the entrance of other countries before its own admission, especially in the case of a Black Sea rival like Ukraine.

It is very important to describe the relationship that Ukraine has with the neighboring Russian giant, which over the years has been the other important gravitational pole of its foreign, and internal policy. As Kuzio (2012) explains, Russian leaders have always considered Ukraine to be their private property and even President Boris Yeltsin

(a democratic) reluctantly recognized the border with Ukraine only three years after independence.

Even today all kinds of negotiations, be it for the renewal of the concession of the Black Sea fleet to be kept in Sevastopol, or for gas supply, are ruled by the fact that Russia wants to dictate the conditions without offering much in exchange. In case Ukraine does not align, though, the sanctions that are menaced are always sharp. This has been a crucial polarizing factor between the East and West of the country, because in the West such conditions are treated as blackmail coming from what is perceived as a mafia state (Russia) and in the Russian speaking East they are seen as the normal steps towards a reunification with the legitimate "big brother".

So Ukraine finds itself in a position where **it is considered marginal by both sides**, Europe and Russia, and both sides demand loyalty and reforms towards democracy or towards a satellite regime, without promising any short-time benefits to the country. As the crisis blew on the hopes of economic growth and the euphoria for the 2012 European Football Championship (co-hosted with Poland) waned, the country is today trapped between the Russian style of politics à la Putin, and the maintaining of a Western party system.

The theory of cleavages: where does Ukraine lie?

One of the most important theoretical contributions aiming at the understanding of the origins of a political system, is the cleavage theory elaborated in 1968 by Stein Rokkan and Seymour Martin Lipset . Their idea comes from the recognition of the relevance of institutionalized systems into national societies, and their translations into political frameworks. In practice, a cleavage can be thought of as a line of separation that divides the voters along a dichotomy. Lipset and Rokkan claim that four main cleavages were responsible for the formation of the party systems of the XX century and they are

resumable as such

- **centre vs periphery** : the interests of the capital city, or of the dominant regions of a certain country against the ones of the marginal areas, especially when they identify with minority communities and languages.
- **state vs church** : the belief that the spiritual life of the citizen must also influence politics against the belief that the state must remain secular, laical and guided by human rather than confessional principles.
- **owners vs workers** : in industrial societies, the interests of the owners are different from the ones of the workers, bringing to two different visions of societies, one that favours low taxes, free labour markets and the other that is more equalitarian and with a large welfare states to protect the salaried class.
- **land vs industry** : the interests of the countryside and of the agricultural class against the interests of industry and modern means of production.

These cleavages and their combinations were responsible for the formation of party systems and their repeated presence over different countries made possible the creation of party families that were similar across the nations. Many scholars have questioned whether the application of this model is appropriate outside Western Europe, and in fact fitting such categories to the realities of African or Latin American politics has been widely problematic. As for Eastern Europe, some attempts have been made over the last twenty years to capture what the spirit of the new party systems that came after the dictatorship of the national Communist parties would have been.

An interesting model is proposed by Kirschelt (1995) starting from the classical blueprint of the three types of communist regime and elaborating on them separately, in order to reach different conclusions about how cleavages should manifest in post-regime pluralist politics. As previously mentioned Ukraine is traditionally included

in the patrimonial communism model together with the rest of the Soviet Union and Kirschelt comes to a model proposing a juxtaposition of two basic fields.

His prediction says that we should find on one side a mixture of economic populism, authoritarianism, nationalism and lenient decommunization, and on the other the ideas of market liberalism, individualism, cosmopolitanism and harsh decommunization. These should be the two fields for the formation of a bipolar structure with the former communists on one side and the reformers, the pro-European on the other. Its reflection into society would have found on one side the young, the educated, and the ones that could easily go into private business after the fall of communism, and on the other side, the old, the uneducated, the industrial workers and in general all the ones that could not have the flexibility to adjust to the change.

This categorization has proved to be **very useful to explain the first years of the Ukrainian party scene**, with the Communist Party and the Rukh as main competitors, and it has clear merits at describing where the political contestation was fought. Today there are two easy criticisms that this view can be easily confronted with. The first one is that even if the cleavage was present in the party scene, it did not reflect a similar alignment in the voters structure, that was markedly arranged following an identity cleavage (pro-Ukrainian versus pro-Russian) and not a class ideal. It is true that the eastern regions are more industrialized, but in the opinion of who writes this is not the decisive factor like the **language issue** proved to be. The second, and perhaps even more important one is that as the years have passed, a fundamental confusion has mixed the two fields, not making possible a real bipolarism like in the model.

In the long run, the "two Ukraines" idea of East-West separation has been much more polarizing, especially after the affirmation of the Party of Regions as the strongest competitor on the national scene. The model also fails in its further evolution, where it proposes to go beyond the first polarization, combining it with the national one along the national cleavage. The problem is that the "natural" combination that the scholars

predict is that the ex-communist camp should go along with the national ethnic majority. Ukraine does not follow the scheme because the electoral base of the Party of Regions is in the East, where the Russian minority lives, and the national question is a powder keg for everybody who wants to win the Ukrainian elections using it.

A different evolution is proposed in a 2002 paper by Whitefield focusing on cleavage developments in the whole transition area. The author recognizes the lack of ideological bases for the cleavages in Ukraine, which is the only country in the comparative study for which **only social bases for cleavages** are given. The three main bases recognized by Whitefield were:

- the region, especially in the case of the Western areas, and the language
- age and gender
- ethnicity for Russian and others, the region of Crimea

Whitefield recognizes that the East-West division is the basic cleavage in the country, based on language and ethnic belonging, which is something that always polarized the local electorate. The extent of the consequences of this cleavage has been huge, especially during the presidential elections, where the country changes in shades of votes for the two candidates going from an almost total support for one candidate in the Westernmost regions, and almost total support for the other in the far East, with the crucial battle being fought in the central regions, which also includes 5 million Kievites.

This said, the lack of emergence of traditional cleavages in the aftermath of the fall of communism has been a flattening factor for the new democracy as a real alternative on the left failed to manifest, and one can interpret in political term the liberal affirmation in terms of a stable victory of the "right". Indeed, scholars like Fukuyama described a situation that was more reflective on a new homogeneity, but has not verified on the international scene, but repeated on many national scenes, where the competition has

forcefully been on a "right versus centre-right" basis. All parties we find ourselves with can be described to some extent to be **conservative and liberal**.

Parties in Ukraine today

Today the relevant actors of the Ukrainian party scene are limited in number, as the system stabilized after starting from a great initial dispersion. From the beginning, the evolution was made through top-down mechanics, with parties having a strong leadership, but a small membership base, proposing themselves in electoral confrontations. Following a long-time advice in political theory, I will only consider the parties that are competing at Parliament level, and not every single registered party, which would prove highly confusing and scarcely useful.

The fact that Ukraine is a presidential republic with a two-round direct election for the President, orients the system towards a bipolar, coalition-based equilibrium. Different alliances have produced in Parliament to create majorities, with third parties offering important position to align with one side or the other. As it happens in countries like France as well, it is not uncommon to have a majority in Parliament and a President that belongs to the Parliamentary opposition.

The last elections were held in October 2012, and sent to the Verkhovna Rada the members of five main parties. Here follows a brief description of these main actors of the Ukrainian political scene.

Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU)

The Communist Party of Ukraine is still an important actor today, and it mainly expresses the interests of the old nomenklatura. It is the most important ally of the Party of Regions, and this is natural after the collusion that has been happening between economic and political interests. The KPU leans towards Russia, and has traditionally been

against Ukrainian nationalism and favorable to the re-introduction of Russian language as official. As a natural consequence, it obtains more votes in the Eastern oblasts, and in Crimea, whereas its support in the Western Ukraine is virtually non-existent and limited to nostalgics.

Its formal programme is still based on a deeply Marx-influenced reading of recent history, and advocates for a return to socialism, to collective property and free healthcare, education and full employment, in order to stop the exploitation of Ukraine's people and natural resources by the "international bourgeoisie". Politically speaking, it aims at a return to people's control on institutions, with a direct election of judges, a proportional system at the election, the abolishing of the presidency, and a fight against lobbies and corruption. It also is favorable to the transformation of Ukraine into a federal state with larger regional powers, and to its participation into a customs union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

The fact that the KPU presents itself as a party with a strong ideologic component, is nothing but a strategy to attract the elder electors, while its behavior after losing power in the Nineties, has been a constant bargaining with the oligarchic power platforms that went on to rule the country. The fact that the party had a comeback in popularity in 2012 elections marked the reversion of a trend that saw it slipping into nostalgia and the past, and it is interpretable as an attempt of the electorate to differentiate from the highly unsatisfactory Yanukhovich policies and as a protest vote against the global economic crisis.

Party of Regions (PoR)

The Party of Regions is a party that has its electoral base in the East of the country, as it stems out of the entrepreneurial environment of Donetsk and surrounding areas. It was born in 1997 with the aim of representing the interest of the Russian minorities, thus calling for more federalism on a country-level basis. It is a widely populist conservative

party with clientelistic attitudes, and it is the current ruling party, its center being the president Viktor Yanukhovich. Consequently, it represents the pro-Russia populations and ones who speak Russian as first language. The PoR kept opposing the idea of joining NATO through the years, at least without a national referendum, that so far has never been called. The economic crisis gave Yanukhovich a good occasion to distance himself from prospects of EU accession, claiming that European integration is an auspicious project, but it will remain fully utopian until structural problems are solved.

The party programme is widely populist, indicating only the results that their government wants to obtain for the people, without describing how or when. The promises of steady economic growth, free education and healthcare, energy independence and personal freedoms are highly indicative of the party's attempt to present itself as the good part of society that knows how to solve the problems of the people.

It is a party that does not fit into the natural cleavages, and there is no reference to them in the party charter, not taking a side between workers and owners, church and state, cities and countryside. At the same time, **no mention of corruption appears in their constitutive documents**, a clear sign of how the party does not want to raise attention on the issue, overwhelmingly considered by internal and external observers as a plague to the country.

It is easy to define the party as a clientelistic mechanism and as a political enterprise that aims at gaining and keeping power through any possible means. The fact that Leonid Kuchma was the party's first godfather, and that he personally helped the growth of Viktor Yanukhovich is a clear sign of this. Also one must remember that Kuchma presented himself as independent during the presidential election of the Nineties, as there was no party to represent the interests of the economically progressist and private-interest based part of the country. The Party of Regions came in to fill exactly that void, and after its formation, the heavy presence of independents into parliament came to an end for two mandates.

Batktivshchyna (Fatherland)

The main opposition party is stemming from the movements generated after independence (primarily Rukh) and that gained popularity during the Orange Revolution, is Batktivshchyna, or in English, Fatherland, the party of Yuliya Tymoschenko. It is often classified as a liberal party, due to its pro-market stances, but it is also a widely populist movement, as the rhetorics used by Tymoschenko have always tried to appeal at the people as being the good part of the country. The transformation of her image from the one of successful businesswoman to a more conventional one recalling the traditional Ukrainian housewife in order to appeal to the masses has been an example of a very clear strategy.

In general, the stances in foreign policy that the party shows are openly pro-accession in the EU, and towards a bigger openness of Ukraine. The anti-corruption policy is another important feature of their electoral campaigns, claiming that the ruling elites only mind their own profit and do not think of taking care of the people. The party is affiliated to, and has currently the status of observer in the European People's party, (the European party that used to be the expression of Christian Democracy) but over the years has moved towards conservatism.

Recently Yulia Tymoschenko has been imprisoned on charges of abuse of office during the negotiations of the gas deal with Russia, with a sentence that had a clear political connotation, and was used to put Tymoschenko out of the political race. This has seriously weakened her party, since she was its public face and propaganda leader. The lack of a credible guide, as the fact that the popularity of Yushenko is at an all time low as well, puts the party in trouble for the 2015 presidential elections where in order to be a serious challenge the incumbent Yanukovich, Batktivshchyna will have to reinvent itself.

UDAR

UDAR (punch) is the party of Vitaly Klitschko, a former boxing world champion, that had already run as a mayor of Kiev in the 2006 and 2008 municipal elections, failing to win, but gaining seats in the local council for the then-called Vitaly Klitschko bloc.

In the statute of the party, several goals appear at its focus. Corruption is considered by UDAR to be the main problem of the country, together with the lack of safeguard of property rights. Reforms are proposed, that would transform Ukraine into a place where entrepreneurship of ordinary people is the core of a growing economy. These liberal accents are no new element, but the party seems more proficient than other actors in explaining how it wants to achieve its goals, as the program contains detailed description of the proposed reforms, such as a pay-as-you-go pension system and a deep reform of justice.

In foreign policy UDAR promotes the path for European Union membership and sees Ukraine's integration as indispensable for the non-aligned policy followed in the last twenty years was not considered particularly effective. As for the identity/language issue, the idea is to preserve it through heritage and territory conservation, and to respect the different souls that are present into the Ukrainian society.

As we can see, UDAR's goals tend to overlap with Fatherland, and the party is exploiting the advantage of being a newcomer, and having a popular character for a leader (Klitschko already announced he will run for president in 2015). This fact has brought to the call from many newspaper articles for a merger between the two parties, running with Klitschko as a joint candidate, but this is something that has been constantly denied by both sides.

The party's success can be mainly attributed to two factors. The first is surely the good reputation of its leader, that is not only a popular public figure, but is widely believed to be an honest and capable man. The other is that the Ukrainian electorate has been let down by the members of the 2004 Orange coalition, on which regard the expec-



Figure 1: Results by region for UDAR, 2012 Parliamentary Elections

tations were very high. The fact that such coalition never came to a stable agreement among its members, and the accusations of participating into corruption and abuse of power brought the need for a new opposition to the Party of Regions. UDAR is incarnating the moderate party of this new opposition, whereas Svoboda succeeded in gathering the radicals.

As the graph shows, UDAR enjoyed wider support in Kiev and in the West of the country, but without being totally neglected in the rest of the country, showing that Klitschko has some good reputation and consideration even in the Eastern regions. Whether UDAR will be a unifying factor for the country it is too early to tell now, but for sure the spotlight is on it.

Svoboda (Freedom)

Svoboda is an extreme right party, a xenophobic, radical and antidemocratic organization, which advocates for the expulsion of the populations of non-Ukrainian heritage,

with emphasis on Jewish and Russian ethnies. It took its current name in 2004, as before the extreme right front in Ukraine was fragmented in several smaller parties with no electoral success. Svoboda claims to be inspired to the Ukrainian nationalism of the interwar period with a direct link to the ideas of Yaroslav Stetsko and Stepan Bandera. Stetsko's book *Two Revolutions* formulated the necessity for a double revolution in Ukraine, a radical change not only in nationalistic sense (Ukraine to Ukrainians), but also as a social movement, in order to bring equality into the country.

Despite opposite predictions of political analysts, the party has come out strongly in the last elections, gaining an extremely high 10% of votes, with resulted into 37 seats in the Verkhovna Rada. The success of Svoboda can be included in a common pattern that has been observed in Europe, where examples of successful populist or right-wing parties can be found in Italy's Five Star Movement (M5S), Fidesz in Hungary, Golden Dawn in Greece, and perhaps even the one of Linke in the Eastern Regions of Germany. It is of particular interest to observe the slow transformation of this party from a fascist right-wing party to a catch-all populist movement, as its main aim is becoming to stay in power after such an unexpected success.

As it happens, Svoboda owes its success to the sluggish pace of economic growth in the country, and the concentrations of resources in the hands of a few oligarchs. This made possible for Svoboda to condemn the most powerful parties labeling them as "false nationalists" and claiming to be the only force able to defend the interests of the ethnic Ukrainians. The fact that Ukrainian demographics are shallow while the numbers of immigrants is rising and the government seems to have no policy to counterbalance this trend, gives the extreme right some fertile ground to argue.

The fact that the other parties are not rooted enough through the citizens it makes for them impossible to mobilize the population against Svoboda. One must also consider that that Svoboda's propaganda weapons (Ukrainian nationalism, economic crisis...) have been widely used in the rhetoric of the other leaders, even if in a less violent way,

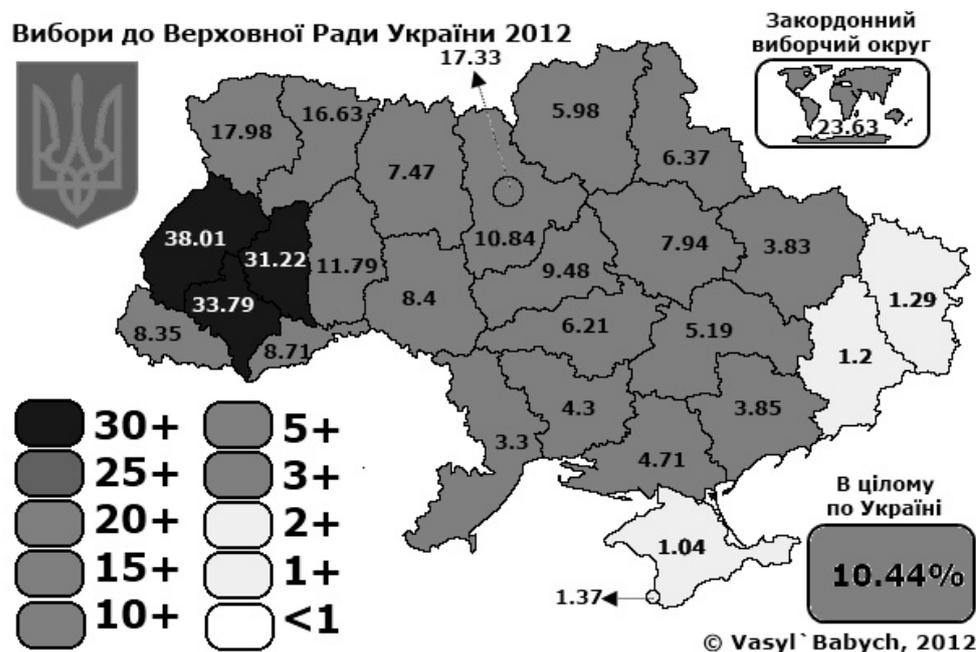


Figure 2: Results by regions for Svoboda, 2012 Parliamentary Elections

and this makes it hard for them to fight it, for lack of ideas.

Moreover, consensus for the nationalistic agenda of Svoboda has been found in the Western regions, gathering over 30% of total votes in L'viv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil' *oblasts* (provinces). This intense polarization had a weakening effect over the support for the historical opposition, that usually got the lion's share of votes in those regions, and helped Yanukhovich win the Parliament support.

Lack of traditional families

Now that we have seen a brief overview of who the main actors are, some general considerations are necessary in order to describe the political framework. It is quite easy to take a political system and to see whether or not its parties can be aligned along (combinations of) cleavages, but what is more challenging is to understand why a certain cleavage has failed to manifest its effects that country's situation. This is why in the

next section I will be looking for the missing parties and fields in the Ukrainian party system, along with the description of the existing parties.

What is particularly striking of the Ukrainian Party system is the fact that the only ideologic parties are at the two sides of the spectrum, as one is characterized as fascist and the other as communist. The rest of the political scene is currently occupied by three parties that represent some kind of political center, but do not belong in a proper way to the three traditional categories, liberal, socialdemocratic, christian-democratic.

Christian Democracy

The lack of christian democracy in Ukraine is not a big surprise. In fact, in the whole of eastern Europe, such kind of parties failed to manifest themselves as credible actors on the national scenes. This is due to several reasons.

First of all, Ukraine is largely Orthodox Christian, and Orthodoxy is organized through Eastern Europe on a national basis with a system of patriarchs, rather than having a centered structure like the Catholic Church whose only Pope has his seat in Rome. This has been a crucial reason of weakness because during the Communist years it has been easy for the local regimes to control orthodoxy, for it was fragmented and close enough to be an easy target. This resulted in many cases of manifest collusion, where even if communism implied a denial of any faith and state atheism, **the leaders and the national patriarchs colluded**, with the Church thus becoming no credible opposition.

In independent Ukraine atheism contributed to narrowing the possibilities for success of Christian political entities, and to further complicate the matter, a marked fragmentation among believers that is peculiar to Ukraine. In the country one can find a national Orthodox church centered around a Kiev Patriarchate, but there is a large portion of believers who follow the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under Moscow Patriarchate. This division among believers is nothing but another reproduction of the East-West cleavage,

and it guaranteed that a united Christian Democratic party would in any case find itself supported only by half of the country.

Also, Christian Democratic Parties are not enjoying a big success in the rest of Europe, because of a general change of costumes, and a growing disaffection towards the Christian faith, which makes its use for public mobilization problematic at best. Eastern Europe, and in our case Ukraine, makes no exception to this.

This does not mean that Christian Democratic parties were never created in the country, as they existed since the first independent years and in some cases they are still present, but they constantly failed to gain voters' support during the electoral contestations. The Christian Democratic Union is the biggest one, and it has been part of the Our Ukraine coalition for the 2002, 2006 and 2007 parliamentary elections. After the change of winds in the country, it moved to the other side in 2010, passing to an open support of the Azarov government.

Social democracy

Social democracy is another important ideology of the twentieth century that does not find a match in the Ukrainian political spectrum. This might sound as a *prima facie* contradiction, as the Ukrainian Socialist Party has been into parliament into all the independent Ukrainian legislatures, with the notable exception of the last one. What is important here is to show that the local Socialist party has failed from being a real social-democratic actor but has held the balance of power during the crucial elections of the first decade of the XXI century.

The Socialist Party of Ukraine was formed in 1991, when the Communist Party was outlawed in the independent Ukraine. Its leader Olexandr Moroz, was able to count on mixed Communist-Socialist support in the early presidential elections, but the party's fortunes were conditioned by the reformation of the Communist Party in 1993. The re-emerging of Communists and the public support they enjoyed as first party in the 1994

and 1998 elections took out space from the development of a moderate left movement. Ultimately neither the Communists nor the Socialists went on to fill the gap, because they had no interest for it and were more concentrated in gaining their share of power in the country politics.

In the following years, the Socialists were among the promoters of the Orange Revolution and the alliance among Moroz and Yushchenko was one of the factors of success in 2004. This alliance proved to be short-termed, since in 2006 the Socialists agreed to participate into the so-called Anti-Crisis Coalition with the Party of Regions and the Communist Party. This move proved to be very successful in bringing back to power the Donetsk faction and Viktor Yanukhovich, but quite ironically, gave a fatal blow to the Socialist Party's functions. In substance, the electorate felt that the party had lost its independence and so its voters deserted it in the following elections, and today it does not have any parliamentary representatives.

The fact that social democracy is normally a promoter of a thorough welfare state system did prove problematic in the aftermath of the fall of Communism. This is because the Soviet system of welfare had widely failed to provide the services it had promised to the people and during the Nineties politics pointed at a downsizing of the public sector. The nominal opposition of the KPU to such measures has been only fictitious as their main worry was to participate in the distribution of resources of the new independent state.

Apart from social democracy, one might question whether any emergence of a **new left** has shown any vitality in Ukraine, proposing themes based on post-modernism as the care for the environment. The only example in this sense has been the electoral performance of the Green Party in 1998, when they captured 19 seats in the Parliament. This, other than being an isolated occurrence, was not a positive case, as the lists of the party were just found to be the vehicle that some oligarchs had chosen to enter the political arena.

As an expert of Ukrainian politics pointed out to me a few months ago, the main problem is that Ukrainian parties have never been organized to be "schools of democracy" right from the start. This was the role of the socialist mass parties in the beginning of the XX century, and it is a party function that is losing all its importance in the West, and in a country like Ukraine was never present. Party members and elites are aggregations of people sharing the same interests, with strong hierarchical structures and a quasi-total lack of rooting on the territory. The fact that an electoral campaign can be conducted on television (and in the future will probably move on the internet makes the costs lower in terms of organization and high in terms of access to powerful instruments.

Corruption and politics: an iron axis

In Ukraine political corruption is not just the object of mere suspicions. Corruption is not alleged, nor claimed. Corruption is by no means a fairytale used to destabilize a system, to create a lack of credibility. It is so widespread and proved in and out of courts that it would be even ridiculous to talk about the local society without mentioning it.

Of course corruption was not generated today, and neither it had started in the wake of independence in 1991, but comes from far. Soviet times were marked, in Ukraine like elsewhere by an inefficient system of resource allocation, and corruption was a way to re-balance a flawed system for the ones that were in power positions. The reliance on informal power structures is not something new to post-communist countries, as the high inefficiencies of Communist bureaucracy had brought in all countries to the formation of alternative ways to obtain what would not have been possible to have otherwise. Naturally, the Party and its high officials were at the center of everything, being the locus of power and of the privileges that went with it, but factory managers, customs functionaries, and police officers are other good examples of privileged places that some degree of freedom that could allow them to move inside the loopholes of the Communist

monolith.

This does not mean that those informal structures remained the same during and after the transition years. As brilliantly described by Federico Varese in the late Nineties, the creation overnight of free markets, in absence of experience and of a legal framework, created a host of opportunities for the ones that could seize them, to make money and power in legal or illegal forms. Very often, **the ones who had trafficked before had the skills and the intuition to exploit new opportunities** too. The fact that the state itself lacked resources as it was used to depend on Moscow's support for both decisions and financing, contributed to a lax stance towards corruption.

Some economists even argued that corruption is a positive force into society, as it is a natural way to exploit opportunities that the rigidities of the market prevent, or to increase the time efficiency of slow bureaucracies. Examples in this sense come from the studies of Huntington (1968) or Lui (1985). Since the aim of this paper is to describe the political impact of corruption, not its influence over the economy, I must say that for the latter the outcomes have been uncontroversially highly damaging.

But now let's step back for a moment, and go at the roots of the matter. Corruption is, indeed a wide expression with a number of linked meanings. The dictionary definition (from the Merriam-Webster dictionary, online edition 2013) gives us a few possibilities for interpretation, defining corruption as:

- impairment of integrity, virtue, or moral principle;
- decay, decomposition;
- inducement to wrong by improper or unlawful means;
- a departure from what is pure or correct.

What these different meanings have in common is the idea of a mispractice, is the concept that corruption is a deviation from an ideal behavior, or from an ideal state

(when dealing with a phenomenon), that thus becomes corrupt. There are many fields of application for the concept, but in recent years politics is becoming the sector that is more often associated to corruption. Following our definition, political corruption is a degeneration of what politics should be like, of the ideal of it.

Since elected politicians are subject to the mandate of the citizens that voted them, they should follow a behavior that favors the public good and respects such mandate. Citizens transfer the use of power to the state, and in representative democracy, the state acts through elected and appointed functionaries. On the contrary, political corruption is defined by illegitimate power use to obtain private gains.

In the past, scholars' analyses described corruption as something that belongs only to developing countries, where strong democratic structures have yet to develop. In a following wave, developed but decaying societies, were included into the spectrum of possibilities, but as the years went by and political scandals stained the public spheres of the most developed nations like the United Kingdom and the United States of America, scholars agree about the fact that

it inheres in all social systems - feudalism, capitalism, communism and socialism. It affects all classes of society; all state organizations, monarchies and republics; all situations, in war and peace; all age groups; both sexes; and all times, ancient, medieval and modern. (Heywood, 1997, quoting Atalas)

It is important to mention that corruption belongs to both democratic and non-democratic regimes, but is far more dangerous for the former since it undermines the trust link that constitutes the bridge between the representatives and the citizens. Corruption has been often pointed as one of the main reasons for the fall in voter turnout rates of the last decades. The fact that in some nations corruption charges brings to heavy electoral sanctions in terms of vote loss, and in others they do not, is still a matter of discussion between the scholars. In Italy and in France for example, the scandals that involved

prominent politicians such as Jacques Chirac and Silvio Berlusconi, had no tangible consequences on their success, but conversely, what happened to Helmut Kohl and his CDU fifteen years ago.

A necessary differentiation between forms of political corruption is the one between clientelism and patronage. They both are ways to give something in order to obtain political consensus. The difference is the one between the use of a collective or an individual *modus operandi*. Thus clientelism becomes the preferential path for obtaining a job, overcoming merit and competence using money and personal links, whereas patronage is used by groups in order to obtain collective benefits for collective support.

Corruption in Ukraine

Going back to our country case, in Ukraine corruption is widespread in the police, in the local and national administration, in the judiciary, and through political parties, bribes and pressures rule the game. It is a surprisingly transparent phenomenon, as favors are passed back and forth and networks are created through different sectors, and the more the scale of corruption rises the more they know about everyone else's vices, and has the elements to accuse them of being corrupt. This blackmail system is what makes everybody tied to it, and it was efficiently described in a brief but illuminating article by Keith A. Darden in 2001, and as of today nothing seems to have changed.

Darden described the situation that under Kuchma was quite paradoxical. Corruption and illegal appropriation were not only tolerated but also encouraged at high levels, while at the same time subject to a strict monitoring. This was necessary in order to create an environment in which compliance was assured by the file of each individual's wrongdoings, as everyone is liable to be blackmailed. If the member does not bend to the pressure, the file is made public exposed to shame. Another peculiarity of the Ukrainian environment is that laws exist and are in some cases very harsh, but as a rule of law is weak, they are only used as an instrument for blackmailing.

At the same time the judiciary system, a fundamental guarantee of transparency and accountability, is completely incapable to front the pressures from politicians (Trochev, 2010). Some ill-born practices like MPs calling judges on the phone to wish them to take the good decision on a sentence, or lack of concrete procedures following an accusation are habitual. Sometimes when sentences are pronounced, they are never enforced, producing a double standard in judiciary, where the citizens are all but equal in front of the law.

The whole system of lawyers and judges is disrespected by common people due to to this disparity in treatment and to the presence of ties with the vested interests. This is also detrimental to the few honest ones, that can be easily be accused on false charges, since the public opinion will tend to believe that the accusations are true, since they are for the vast majority of judges.

The fight against corruption has been conducted in the last decade by all governments, so that the word received wide diffusion in the local media, and with everybody recognizing that corruption is a huge problem into the country. The result of these policies though, is that measures have been taken, but only at the low level, so that petty corruption has diminished, but not grand corruption, which has never been as solid. The press is also indirectly censored, and the control over the national television channels has been so pervasive that in the Kuchma years the use of *temnyky*, briefs telling the contents and ways to present daily events became a common practice (Kudelia, 2012).

There also have been several political murders in recent years, the most famous of which has been the one of the independent journalist Georgiy Gongadze. Gongadze was the founder and promoter of the famous website *Ukrayinska Pravda* and during his brief career tried to denounce the crimes of the Kuchma administration and the networks of associations between oligarchs and politicians in the countries. He was kidnapped and died in September 2000, six months after opening the website, and the investigations over his death have been blurred and inconsistent ever since. This case has notoriously been at the root of the public indignation that would have been one of the causes behind

the Orange Revolution.

The other famous case has been the one of Vyacheslav Chornovil, who died in 1999 in a mysterious car accident. Chornovil had been the first leader of Rukh when Ukraine became independent, and was still a very prominent figure of the anti-Kuchma opposition at the time of his death. Speculation has been widespread that, due to the fact that the other participants in the accident were silenced or died, this has likely been a political assassination.

In my opinion, the fact that everybody knows how big the problem is and how corrupt the leaders are, implies that some idea of complicity "unites" the society, so that cleavages fail to manifest and dialectics other than the East-West divide are scarcely present. The widespread sensation that everybody is involved and the belief that there is no alternative are a very efficient deterrent from the creation of real politics.

Political dynamics of a complex system

What has been more and more clear through the years is that Ukrainian political parties are in their nature more similar to elite clubs and are mainly used to promote the interest of their leaders. I propose that a better expression for defining the relationship that such parties have with their leaders is the one between company **owners and clients**. The leader of the political party is the owner, who, like in a big company tries to sell his product (himself and his political platform) to the clients, i.e. the voters. A natural consequence of such model is that the social orientation of the parties is flexible and changeable, going even beyond the catch-all party.

Party brands are used primitively, and labels are refused by the leaders themselves. This is because falling under a label is like putting a lid over the activities of the party, and in a competitive environment like the Ukrainian one this would be a crucial mistake. Even the presence of electoral programmes, no matter if simple or articulated, is little

more than a *pro forma*, as the majority of the electorate is not aware of them and a large portion of citizens does not really expect the party to implement them if elected. The party machine thus becomes just a way to deceive people into voting for one or the other candidate.

This is the outcome of corruption in the sense that **corruption undermines the function of the formal structures** in the country. Corruption determines a shift in where power lies, that is not only at the top of the formal institutions, but also in the nexus where they overlap with informal ones. This is valid both at local and national level, from the parliament to the police, to the public administration. Likewise, a political party does not obtain success because it is rooted in civil society and in formal political institutions, but also, and often mainly, because it is rooted inside the informal structures of society, such as lobbies and oligarch circles. Thus, a party cannot exist without its own "godfathers", who help it grow and so experiences success thanks to their obscure work. No party has been able to fall out of this scheme in the last two decades.

Neo-patrimonialism and the "blackmail system"

Widespread corruption put Ukraine on the way to what Carothers (2002) defines as **feckless pluralism**. This is the name for a system where regular elections are held and alternations of power are possible but politicians are corrupt, self-interested and cut off from the people. In general political participation tends to be little beyond voting and the conflicts among elites often end up with a collusive solution.

The definition of **neo-patrimonialism** given by Katerina Malgyna is a way to express a similar idea. Stemming from the Weberian idea of patrimonialism, that already inspired the idea of patrimonial communism, one can define a neo-patrimonialist state one where bureaucratic (formal) structures and patrimonial (informal) structures coexist in an iron claw pact. Public and private are not differentiated, but they are one thing in

order to benefit the people holding positions of power. One might at this point ask: what is the factor that creates this miracle union? The answer cannot be but **corruption**, which as a one-time game is only an illegal transaction, but when repeated becomes apt to create networks.

The problem about the current analysis is that the impact that corruption has on the party system has been widely neglected, and the same goes for political institutions. A good example of how corruption is underestimated as an overarching phenomenon can be found in some of the past reforms of Ukrainian political institutions. One of the most famous changes in the national governative framework has been the shift towards a more parliamentary system brought by the Orange Revolution. International analysts greeted the reform as a healthy change and guarantee against harsh rule from the Presidents and their corrupt lobbies, as it had been during the two Kuchma mandates.

Seen in retrospective, one can note how little effective this change has been to prevent informal structures from seizing the power once again. This happened in a very simple way. While the opposition parties were unable to agree over a common political logic and thus could not make any decisions, the Party of Regions formed an alliance with the Socialist and Communist Parties and cemented it by slowly stealing members of Parliament from the opposite side. This, coupled with the attempts by president Yuschenko at dissolving the Rada, practically paralyzed it, thus making it an empty locus of power. The most important observation that comes from this line of reasoning, is that the problem with the functioning of the Ukrainian democracy did not lie in its presidential nature (since presidentialism is not a wrong system *per se*) but in its being rooted in neo-patrimonialist structures.

Sadly, many analysts were eager to treat the new democracies of Eastern Europe like their Western counterparts, in order to interpret them following the same categories. History, in the short space of two decades has proved them wrong and has shown the necessity of adopting more flexible approaches to different realities. In this specific case

this means that when informal networks count more than formal ones, interpretation must be done according to the former.

In order to work, this system needs the support and involvement of the organs that are supposed to perform the checks on improper links and influences between the two spheres. This is represented by the judiciary and possibly by specific governmental agencies, with the anti-corruption being an obvious case when it exists. In Ukraine in particular, the Constitutional Court, charged with the power to decide on illegitimate practices of the government and the parliament, has been highly politicized and thus became the main battlefield and the mirror of temporary power advantages.

The role of the independents

An element that must be added to the picture is the high relevance of non-party members in the Ukrainian parliament, especially during the Nineties. The first election was still dominated by the Communist Party, which took 331 of the 450 seats. A big difference was marked by the 1994 vote, where the share of valid polls cast for candidates running with a party was just 39.5%, with the rest (or 60,5%) being taken by independent candidates. In 1998 the number of independents went down but still covered around one fifth of the assembly (111 of 445 members). During the next elections the independent candidates disappeared, since the strong coming out of the Orange opposition made many politicians choose a field and run for one of the two broad factions. Independents resurfaced in the 2012 contestation, capturing 43 seats (10% of the total).

These independent members have been of crucial importance in all the elections that saw them competing. They represent of a factor that is not easy to control as they easily shift sides, not being vinculated by a party programme but only to the mandate of their electoral constituency. They are another living example of how informal pours into formal in Ukraine, and while their presence might have been predictable in the first election, their re-emerging in 2012 is the clear symptom of how they are a convenient

tool for a inefficient democracy.

For the electors, an independent candidate can be seen as somebody who is out of the dirt of politics. For the independent candidate himself, often an entrepreneur, the chance of entering politics without a party is a convenient way to exploit his power network and create some new ones. Last, for the parties, independent candidates are an external help that is much needed through the complex evolutions of an all-but-stable parliament.

This also suggests that the Ukrainian political system uses parties but can also live without them when needed. This tendency is dangerous because it makes it harder to use an efficient system of checks for individual candidates and it is another tool that informal structures use to make party democracy nothing but an empty shell (what has been previously mentioned as feckless pluralism).

Informal pacts and the "mud machine"

Going back to Ukrainian political parties, the problem of why they do not fit into traditional categories becomes something that we can explain. In a country where society and formal institutions are not working the way that they are supposed to work, having parties aiming at them in a traditional way would be risky at best. Supposing that a party tries to compete along formal lines of conduct, it will be easy for its competitors to accuse it of being like everybody else. There is a term that Italian journalists use for defining this mechanism that is used by corrupt people in power in order to discredit a newcomer when he or she comes out to challenge them. This is called "macchina del fango" (e.g. in D'Avanzo, 2010) which can be easily translated with "mud machine" meaning that whenever an apparently immaculate actor tries to appear on the scene, the other ones, will drag him into the mud with them by accusing him of (true or false) participation in corruption schemes.

Another important signal of how parties are used as shells is the abundance of for-

mal and informal pacts among them. Pacts are commonplace in Ukraine, and have been widely used extensively in the last decade. The Orange Revolution itself is interpretable as such according to Malgina, that describes it as the outcome of a three-way agreement signed by Viktor Yushchenko with Kuchma (for allowing the re-run of the fraud elections), with Tymoschenko (for presenting a united opposition and her appointment as Prime Minister) and with Moroz (for obtaining the support of the Socialists in the re-run). When talking about such a case one might question himself whether any boundary between formal structures (the parties), and informal negotiations (the leaders), even exists.

This also sheds light on another important effect of the Orange Revolution, constituted by the oligarchization of Parliament. The participation of businessmen and their irresponsible use of politics for personal gain, perfectly fits into the idea of feckless pluralism that I mentioned above. This happened because the 2004 elections showed once for all that Kuchma could lose, and that political alternation was possible in Ukraine. The local oligarchs thus lost the certainty that by supporting the ruling party they were sure to be in power too, and intervened personally. Some of them remained faithful to the Party of Regions, some others switched sides and aligned to the Orange front, thus expanding their web over the whole party system.

The concept of *state capture* is something well known in political literature, meaning the complete control of the state institutions from the dominant group, possibly happening under the appearance of democracy. What I want to argue here is that Ukraine went one step beyond, reaching something that can be called **party system capture**. The local elites that it would have been impossible to establish a post-communist sultanate on the model of Turkmenistan or Belarus, where the ruling elites take no prisoners, the Ukrainian oligarchy decided that taking everybody as prisoners was a much safer option. The huge problem that this kind of capture generates is that even alternation of power becomes useless to defeat corruption, and that civil society becomes completely cut off

from any possibility of influence on the politics of the country.

Electoral fraud: the 2004 case and more

Another factor that has contributed to make the political environment suspicious and unstable have been the accusations of electoral fraud. In all Ukrainian elections, the candidate that lost generally accused the winner of cheating, especially in the regions that make its voting stronghold. This is not uncommon in many different states, but in Ukraine an election has actually been annulled and recalled due to electoral fraud.

What is specially interesting about the 2004 election, is that the fraud has been actually measured statistically by some scholars, which gave important hints at how the swindle was organized. Mikhail Myagkov and Peter C. Ordeshook were able to produce studies of a clarity deemed impossible just a few years ago. This was possible through a new approach distancing itself from the traditional methods of observation, limited in scope like the use of international observers. Other statistical methods have proved to be of limited efficiency because they soon became obvious to the vote riggers, and they were usually based on checks on the repetition or absence of certain digits from electoral results (supposing that the fraud creators pay attention to the fact that if the percentages end with a 0 or a 5 they are easier to detect).

The new method was based on a completely different assumption. It started from the observation of the correlation coefficients between the voter turnout rates and the share of votes for a certain party, on a series of cross-section data where the observations are the electoral constituencies. What the scholars observed is that even if there was an overallrise in the number of people that went to vote at the 2004, it coincided with a suspect appearance of turnout rates higher than 95% and even 100% in a few constituency. Since this never happens in any regular election (high percentages of turnout are not observed in any country nowadays), the scholars hypothesized that these figures are a hint at a manipulation. What the data are showing is that probably in those very

highly attended constituencies some of the ballots that were not cast, were crossed and made valid by somebody before or during the counting.

The hypothesis that was elaborated on this basis was that if the increased turnout was a natural phenomenon, its correlation with the different parties' electoral outcomes should have been more or less neutral, corresponding to every party's percentage of votes. What was found instead for the 2004 Ukrainian elections was that in the Eastern regions, Yanukhovich's gains over an increase in turnout were more than proportional to its votes' share. On the contrary, the correlation of Yushchenko's votes with the turnout rates was slightly negative, a sign of how he lost support in the constituencies showing high turnout rates. Naturally, this might be because Yanukhovich's strong districts are places where there is a higher civic conscience but the fact that those elections were, in fact, recalled due to widespread fraud, reinforces the belief that the hypothesis was going in the right direction.

The fact that statistical methods were able to catch anomalies that, even if they do not contain filmed proof of the fraud, they are a clear indication of what happened on large scale, means that the ones that perpetrated them were sure to be covered enough so that they would have not been spotted. Studies produced after that election, found out that since 2007 elections in Ukraine were probably regular as in any other country. This does not necessarily mean that political parties have been looking for consensus in legal ways, but only that they abandoned the more explicit means they had used in 2004.

Just as interesting are the findings by Myagkov, that in the rerun of the 2004 elections, frauds of the same kind, but on a smaller scale, were found favoring Yushchenko, a sign of the fact that no party is really clean on the national scene. The fact that this finding went generally ignored is the reflection of two factors. The first is that the international public opinion (with the exclusion of Russia) wanted a change of government in Ukraine and had no interest in undermining the credibility of Viktor Yushchenko in

the moment of his appointment. The second is that in the following years the Orange Bloc would have shown to be entwined with lobbies and corruption as well, and so, a manipulation at its advantage is not a big surprise anymore.

The gender issue

A cleavage that is mentioned by Whitefield in 2002 and has been neglected in most of the traditional literature, is constituted by gender differences. The Ukrainian society is widely male-dominated, a place where Viktor Yanukhovich, could allow himself to say in the 2010 electoral campaign that "a woman's place is in the kitchen", in order to persuade the voters not to choose his opponent Yulia Tymoshenko. In fact, the national parliament had at the time the lowest percentage of women among the whole of the post-Communist countries (excluding Georgia), with a mere 8% female MPs elected in 2007. If one confronts this with the high representation that (due to quotas) women had in Soviet times, notably 33% in the Ukrainian Soviet parliament, it is easy to see that women were among the losers in the aftermath of independence

Indeed, the presence of a female leader of the opposition has been a strong polarizing factor into Ukrainian politics, as it was the first time that a woman was allowed to rise to political notoriety. The situation was charged with judgements to the point that the national media dedicated daily space to the comment of Tymoshenko's outfits and hairstyle.

But it might be the last time that a woman is an exception, as something has surely been surely moving in this field. In the last years, female rights groups from Ukraine, have risen into international notoriety, the most famous of them being FEMEN. This is a sign of how Ukrainian women want more representation into society and their reaction to the diffusion of sex tourism in the country, where prostitution and night clubs are a major business, both for locals and foreigners.

Although the gender cleavage failed so far in creating pressure for new political

parties, it certainly had its weight on the outcomes of 2010 presidential elections, as pointed out by a clever study by Alexandra Hrycak in 2011. The fact that the electoral campaign was polarized over a gender difference was a huge change that affected the rhetorics of the propaganda, putting forward slogans like "they squabble, she works, she is Ukraine". Such slogans tended to indicate Tymoshenko as the good part of the country, in an attribution of roles that implies that men are corrupt and women are not. Although the career of the first female Prime Minister of Ukraine is all but immaculate, affirming that corruption is an affair for men is not a shallow truth. The fact that men control the economy and politics in the country implies that they must control the trafficking and the informal structures as well.

The 2010 election was won by Yanukhovich by a short margin (49 against 46%) and Tymoshenko apparently enjoyed a large success in the Western regions, so that the traditional support of those regions for the opposition did not leave her. The figures, though, show that even if she dominated in those regions, the 80% that she gathered was not enough, and in particular, it did not match the level of consensus that her predecessor Yushchenko could reach in 2004. The problem is, that according to the exit polls, most of the vote that she was lacking should have come from men. In fact, gender loyalty proved to be an important factor as the level of consensus that Tymoschenko had among women was the same that Yushchenko enjoyed, whereas many men preferred to vote for Yanukhovich and thus elect a man, rather than keep their opposition orientation and choose the "Ukrainian princess".

Conclusions

What we can say at the end of this study is that there are some consolidated truths and realities about the Ukrainian political scene.

First of all, the country is divided in two apparently inconcialiable souls, one more

European in the West and one more Russian in the East. These two souls are the main divide into Ukrainian society and the only political cleavage that has proved to create polarization on electoral days. Outside Ukraine these two fields recall the two poles of influence, the European Union on one side, and the Russian Federation on the other. Neither of these giants seems interested in collaborating with Ukraine per se, but only into making the country fit into a certain vision of the world.

When trying to fit these parties into categories, the scholar's work is not easy, since they are more similar than they are different in their internal de facto policies. All the actors in the system are vaguely liberal in economic ideas, widely populist, and joined by the lack of membership base and penetration into civil society. The fact that in Ukraine the two moderate ideologies of social-democracy and christian-democracy have failed to emerge in the party system depends on the fact that the relative cleavages between state and church and owners and workers are of marginal importance into Ukrainian society.

Into this scenery, the actual political party scene has five main actors, two that form the current government, and three that represent the opposition. The Party of Regions, based in the Eastern regions and the related oligarchs, has as its partner the old Communist Party. On the other side, the opposition that is still linked to the Orange Revolution is gathered under the flag of Batkivshchina, but two other parties have emerged in recent years, the extreme-right xenophobes of Svoboda, and the UDAR party of the former boxing champion Vitaly Klitschko.

The main reason why this political system does not evolve today into a more traditional one with a right and a left, but mainly stations around an Eastern-centered majority and a West-centered minority is that corruption is pervasive at all levels in the country. Corruption is maintained in high level politics thanks to a blackmail system, where all the actors know each other's bad deeds and can use them for accusation. In this way the traditional state capture mechanism that is shown in patrimonialist states has evolved into what I define as *party system capture* where all the actors are tied

together and they control not only the state but the politics of the country as a whole.

Formal and informal layers of society are fused into a unitary web where oligarchs on one side and bureaucrats and politicians on the other control the main nexuses. In such environment political parties are hardly more than tokens and they are strongly identical to (and identified with) their leaders. In addition to this, the role of independent candidates to a Parliament position has been important in the first elections and has emerged again in the 2012 contest, proving that the system uses political parties but can also do without them in some cases.

Ultimately, this paper proposes an analysis of Ukrainian politics that starts from the traditional instruments of the cleavage theory and uses the more modern focus on corruption and neo-patrimonialism to show how they are no more useful to interpretation of the modern system.

Graphs

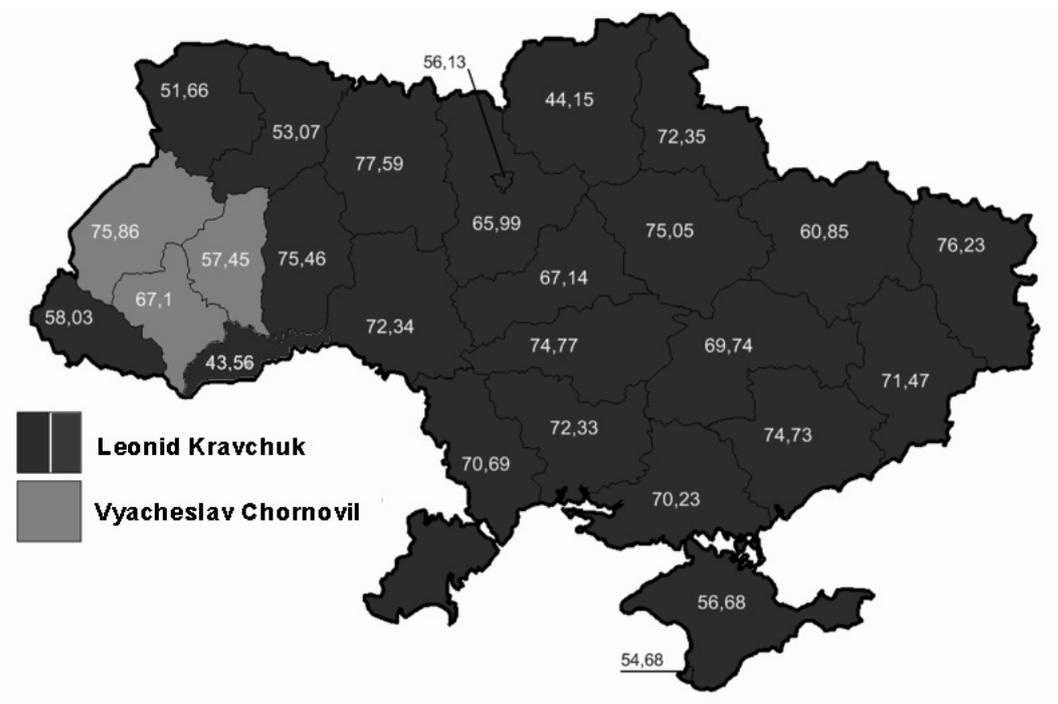


Figure 3: 1991 Presidential Election

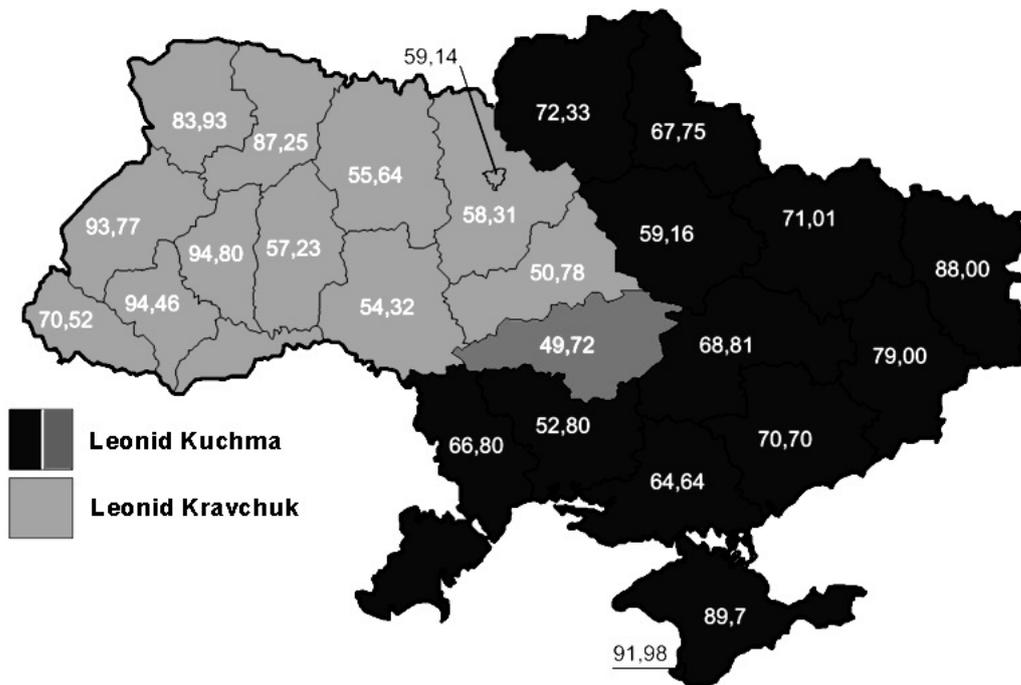


Figure 4: 1994 Presidential Election

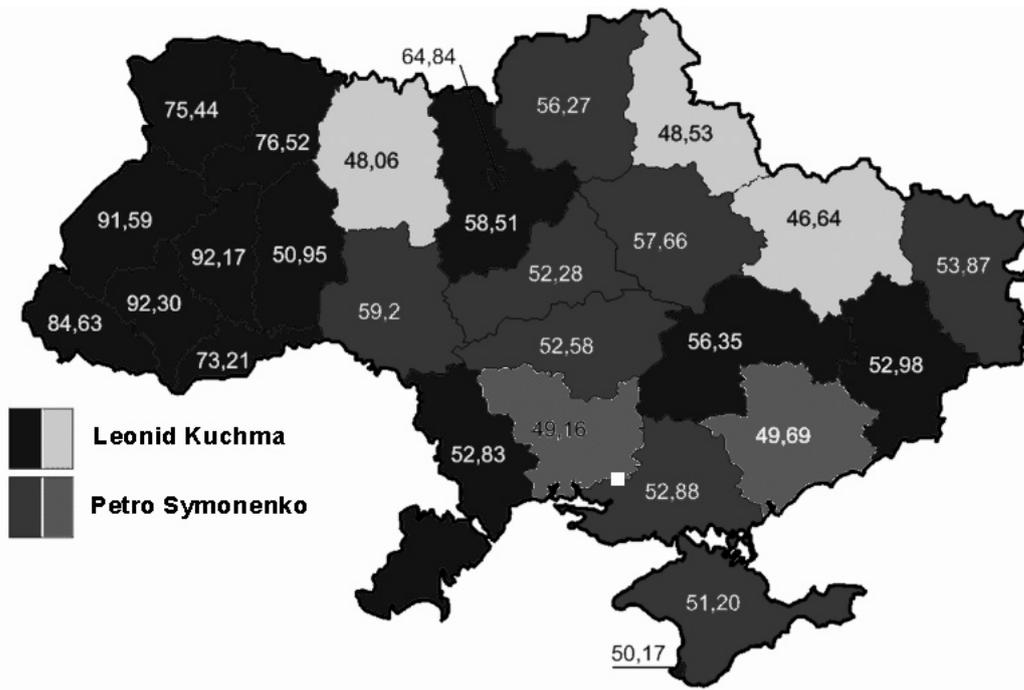


Figure 5: 1999 Presidential Election

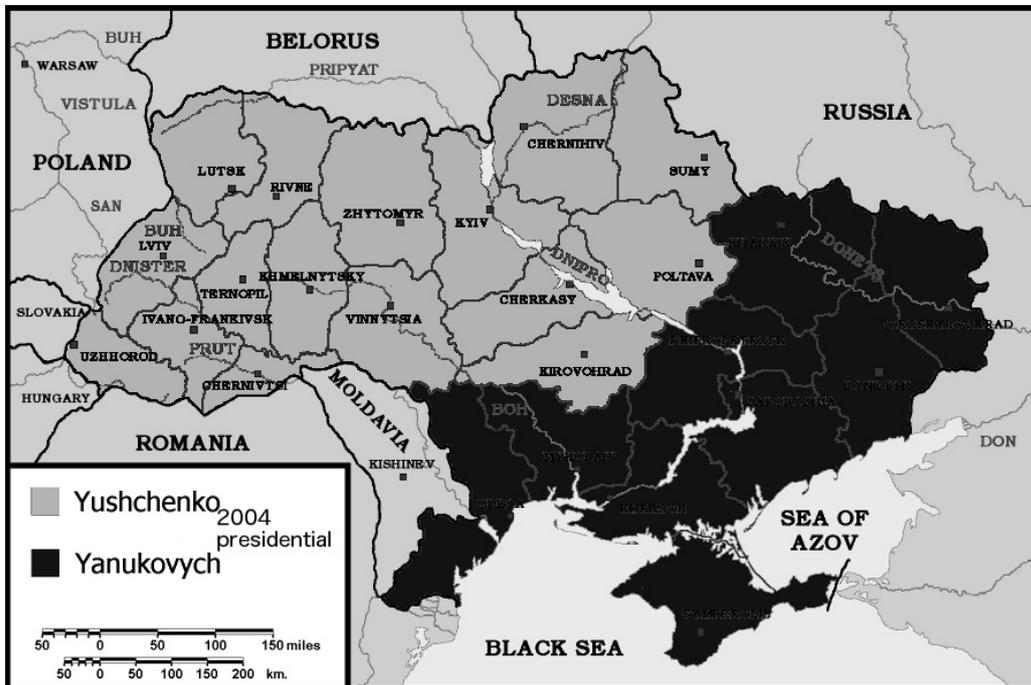


Figure 6: 2004 Presidential Election (Rerun)

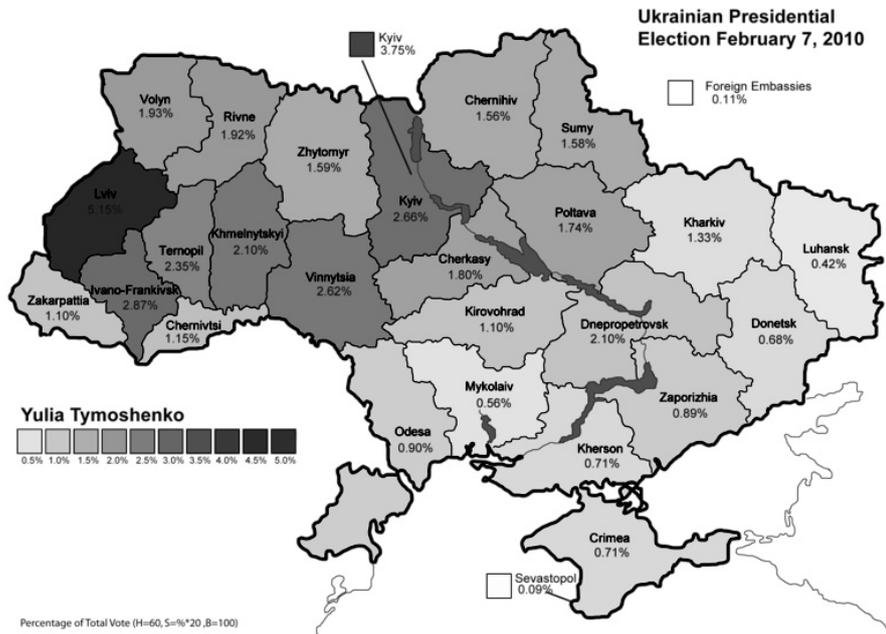


Figure 7: 2010 Presidential Election, Yulia Tymoshenko



Figure 8: 2010 Presidential Election, Viktor Yanukovich

Results of Parliamentary Elections 1994-2012 for the three biggest parties
 (where Opposition is Rukh, then Bloc Yulia Tymoschenko, then Batkhivschina)

| year | KPU votes | % | seats | P.Regions votes | % | seats | Opposition votes | % | seats |
|------|--------------|------|-------|--------------------|------|-------|---------------------|------|-------|
| 1994 | 3,683,332 | 19.1 | 86 | - | - | - | 1,491,164 | 5.5 | 20 |
| 1998 | 6,550,353 | 24.7 | 121 | 241,262 | 0.9 | 2 | 2,498,262 | 9.4 | 46 |
| 2002 | 5,178,074 | 20.0 | 66 | 3,051,056 | 12.2 | 101 | 6,108,088 | 23.6 | 111 |
| 2006 | 929,591 | 3.7 | 21 | 8,148,745 | 32.1 | 186 | 3,539,140 | 13.9 | 81 |
| 2007 | 1,257,397 | 5.4 | 27 | 8,013,895 | 34.4 | 175 | 3,301,282 | 14.1 | 72 |
| 2012 | 2,609,345 | 13.4 | 32 | 6,116,815 | 30.0 | 187 | 5,209,090 | 25.6 | 101 |

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