

The Orange Revolution

Why the U.S. and Russia care so much about Ukraine's disputed election

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IT WAS BOTH A SYMBOL AND A SYMPTOM OF the revolution that rippled across Ukraine. As the presenter of state-controlled UT-1's main morning news program was updating viewers on the Central Electoral Commission's decision to declare Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych the winner of the country's November 21 presidential vote, Natalya Dmitruk, the woman who translates broadcasts into sign language, decided to send a very different message. "When the presenter started to read the news," Dmitruk tells TIME, "I said, 'I address all deaf viewers. Yushchenko is our President. Do not believe the Electoral Commission. They are lying.'"

Independent Ukraine's fourth presidential election since the collapse of the Soviet Union was supposed to reach a conclusion in the November 21 runoff. The Electoral Commission said preliminary tallies showed Moscow's favored candidate, Yanukovych, ahead by 3 percentage points. But immediately there were widespread accusations by Ukrainian and foreign monitors of massive fraud—including voter intimidation, physical assaults and the torching of ballot boxes. Yet the state-controlled media, which had backed Yanukovych through the five-month campaign, were reporting no major violations. Convinced that the election was being stolen from the rightful victor, supporters of Western-leaning opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko poured into Kiev's Independence Square to demand that their man be recognized as the winner. City residents mixed with swarms of protesters from across the country, all wearing some-

thing orange, the color of Yushchenko's Our Ukraine party. Despite heavy snow and freezing temperatures, the crowd was in a festive mood, eager to embrace Yushchenko's orange revolution against the country's Moscow-backed old guard. When a mob of students took over part of the nearby Ministry of Education building, staff members served them tea and cookies.

Yushchenko, his face disfigured by what he claims was an attempt by government authorities to poison him with dioxin, urged people not to leave the square until the commission's ruling was overturned. "We appeal to citizens of Ukraine to support the national resistance movement," he told the cheering throng. "We should not leave this square until we secure victory." And his supporters did just that. After six days of nonstop peaceful protests, the state and its candidate were forced to back down. In a nonbinding vote, Parliament declared the results invalid. Days later, Ukraine's Supreme Court voided the election and ordered a repeat of the runoff on December 26.

In a race that was fought largely over whether Ukraine would pursue Western-style reforms and closer ties to Europe or stick with state control and a tight relationship with Russia, coming that far was a remarkable achievement for Yushchenko. But even if he does ultimately prevail at the ballot box, that doesn't mean that the crisis is over. Rather like red-state-blue-state America, Ukraine remains a divided and distrustful nation, with the Russian-

speaking, industrialized eastern part of the country backing Yanukovych and the more nationalistic, agricultural west wanting Yushchenko. The two camps are as polarized as the reporting on UT-1's morning news broadcast.

While Yushchenko's



voters celebrated in Kiev and the West, a wave of rallies rolled through Yanukovych strongholds in the east to protest what people there saw as a stolen election. Political leaders, defiant of Kiev's authority, angrily rejected the decision to hold another poll and called for the creation of a new autonomous region. Some even threatened to join eastern Ukraine with Russia. The electoral impasse could crack the country along the acute cultural and political rifts that divide it. "We are dealing with a deep split in the country," says Andrzej Zalucki, Deputy Minister of Foreign

Affairs for Poland, which shares with Ukraine a border that stretches more than 250 miles. "It's worse than just a political partition. It's ethnic and nationalistic."

There's also the risk that a wayward Ukraine could damage relations between Moscow and the West. During the campaign, Russian President Vladimir Putin made no secret of which side he was on: he visited Ukraine twice to broadcast his support for Yanukovych. Political consultants and media specialists close to the Kremlin played a major role in shaping the strategy of the Yanukovych campaign, and, according to specialists, Russia pumped millions of dollars into his election bid. Putin was the first world leader to congratulate the Prime Minister on his victory, a full two days before the Electoral Commission declared him President-elect.

Sources well briefed on Kremlin affairs tell TIME that as protests in Kiev gathered momentum, Putin urged discredited outgoing President Leonid Kuchma—eager to secure a safe retirement amid charges of corruption and political violence—to declare Yanukovych the winner. The sources say Putin made it clear that a Yushchenko victory would not be acceptable.

Yanukovych, 54, has made no secret of his pro-Moscow leanings. Just as important, Ukraine's business and political elites have flourished in one of the world's most corrupt economies, and they trust that he won't rock the boat. If Yanukovych seems a throwback to the Soviet era, Yushchenko,

50, wants to bring Ukraine into the free-market age. In opposition, he turned Our Ukraine into a powerful bloc that's threatening to undo the current ruling clan's lock on power.

Almost before the final votes were tallied, international election monitors raised allegations of widespread fraud. According to the Organization for

Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which sent in observers to watch the balloting, there were "highly suspicious and unrealistic" turnouts in key Yanukovych areas. Monitors recorded reports of harassment, intimidation and

multiple voting and noted that the list of eligible voters mysteriously grew 5% on Election Day. Senator Richard Lugar, who represented the U.S. at the vote, was scathing in his assessment: "A concerted and forceful program of Election Day fraud and abuse was enacted with either the leadership or cooperation of governmental authorities."

However the disputed election finally plays out, it has undermined the Bush Administration's cozy relations with Putin, at least behind the scenes. In his first term, George W. Bush was willing to give Putin a free hand in what Russia calls the near abroad, the states that spun off from the broken Soviet Union. At the same time, Bush has made encouraging democracy around the world a central pillar of his presidency. In Ukraine those two policies clash mightily.

Secretary of State Colin Powell made clear Washington's support for Yushchenko, saying the U.S. was "deeply disturbed by the extensive and credible reports of fraud." The next day, at a European Union–Russia summit, Putin emphasized that the dispute should be settled without outside interference. No other country, he warned, has a "moral right to push a major European state to mass disorder." ■

Questions

1. Why and how did Yushchenko supporters challenge the election results?
2. How has the election dispute affected relations between the U.S. and Russia?



Democracy In Ukraine

A GALLERY OF VIEWS



On November 21, 2004, voters in Ukraine went to the polls and cast their ballots for President. Soon after the results were announced, observers and citizens charged that there had been widespread election fraud. In response to this dispute, which is described in **The Orange Revolution** on page 19, commentators offered a variety of perspectives. Study the three cartoons at left. Then answer the questions below.

1. Describe the action taking place in each image. What figures are shown? What symbols do you see?
2. How does the creator of the top cartoon depict democracy? What is the significance of making the democracy figure blue?
3. Study the middle cartoon. What comment is the cartoonist making on the relationship between Russia and Ukraine? What details convey this message?
4. To what aspect of the disputed election does the bottom cartoon refer? How does this cartoon symbolize democracy?
5. Of the three images, which do you consider the most optimistic about the future of Ukraine? Why?
6. **Following Up.** Using library resources or the Internet, conduct research to learn more about the repeat election and other recent developments in Ukraine. Write up your findings in two or three paragraphs that could be added to the TIME article.