



## RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH VOTERS

### *About research*

Research is implemented using "qualitative methodology of sociological research". The main advantage of this approach is to identify the full range of topics' perceptions by the voters, as well as to identify new, not pre-defined aspects of perception of discussion topics that are important to voters meanings that affect the ultimate behavior at the polling station. At the same time, the chosen methodology does not allow accurately to estimate the number of voters who share certain features of perception of discussed topics.

The study was conducted by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) through the request of OPORA within the period from the 31st of August to the 9th of September. During the study 7 focus group discussions with voters were conducted in the following locations: Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Pavlograd, Dnipropetrovsk region; Kherson and Darivka village, Kherson region; Rivne and Dubno, Rivne region. In focus groups in regional centers participated men and women aged from 20 to 70 years old, in district centers and villages - men and women aged from 50 to 70 years old.

This report was created with the support of the European Union and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU or USAID.

### *Research summary*

- The majority of research participants are not aware of changes to the election system, or of what are the fundamental differences between the new and the old election system.
- Many of the participants did not know that the election system, with the use of which the voting is held from the party lists, called "proportional". Some respondents "heard" that the majority of candidates will not be elected during these elections, but did not fully understand how exactly the system has changed.
- By default, the majority of participants of the research suggest that they will be able to choose both a party and a candidate. Not everyone understands that the party will formalize a candidate in each district. Some participants expect a system of "open lists where they can elect parties and candidates separately."
- Expectations of the respondents concerning voting papers are that they will be analogous to the familiar ones: with the possibility to elect a party and a candidate separately. A new voting paper that has been tested on focus groups causes difficulties in understanding. For many participants it is difficult to explain what names in parentheses mean. The participants of the research believe that it is necessary to sign columns: the first column is the party that is elected, the second - the leader of a party in multi-mandate constituency, and in the third column they should indicate a party representative on the territorial district.
- The vast majority of the research participants consider that actively information sharing of the voters about changes in the election system is of great importance. It is necessary to explain everything in details using examples and visual material: how the system has changed and which principles will be used while electing deputies of municipal authorities.

- It is important to note that the explanation of the changes to the election system using extracts from the text of the new law on elections, works very poorly. For most participants it is difficult to understand what is said in the text. It is much better to use presentation in connection with infographics and reviewing of real-world examples of specific municipal authorities.
- It was the most difficult to understand for the focus groups participants points related to the new system voters. These points are:
  - Formalization of a leader of the local branch of the party in the electoral list and the fact that he will be elected in case when the party gains 5 percent and more in the multi-mandate territorial constituency. It is also not very clear that all candidates except the leader compete with each other within the party.
  - The fact that the party as a whole, but not a single candidate has to overcome 5% vote threshold in territorial election district.
  - The fact that no candidate can be elected in some constituency and that some candidates can be elected in one constituency. Many participants are confused because of such a opportunity because they perceive it as a lack of "personal representative" in municipal authorities: "To whom shall I then apply, when not to my representative." Some voters do not understand how this could happen, that's why they expect that any deputy from the district will be presented in the constituency.

### **Main results**

Most participants of research know that next elections will take place in October in Ukraine. Almost everyone can also name the exact date of this event - 25 October. More difficult questions was about what kind of elections are expected. Some of the respondents were undecided between the options: mayoral elections, parliamentary elections and elections of deputies to municipal authorities (or all options together).

Despite the fact that all participants of discussions are about to go to the polls and vote, many of them expressed a rather low level of trust in politicians in general, frustration in existing political forces. These respondents expect no changes for the better. Thus, the main reason to vote for them is willingness to avoid the situation when their voice could be used to "fraud" results of the elections. Therefore some part of the respondents do not exclude that they will just damage a voting paper on election day, not giving his voice to anyone.

*«Every year, the belief goes away, why? As well as our hope. Every year it goes away. We hope for the best, but it results, as always. This is our life, we see what happens. Essentially, I want to say that from year to year we do not want it any more. Even to come to these elections, to vote for someone. Why is that? Because you know everything in advance "(Dariivka village, Herson region).*

*"In order no one steals my voice, no one votes instead of me." ( Dnipropetrovsk)*

For the rest of respondents the motivating factor is the desire to change, conviction that, despite the preliminary results of the elections, this time "new faces", more decent and honest politicians can come to power.

*«We want that someone new will come to power. But not like our mayor who were in all parties that have already been once elected. He's already in the party, which is in power. He always apply. I think he has to be ashamed of it. We need new, young forces ". (Pavlograd)*

The vast majority of respondents are not aware of the changes in the election system, or what are the fundamental differences between the new and the old election system. The most knowledgeable respondents are those who live in the city of Kyiv (they are aware of the vote threshold, the ability to recall a deputy). In other villages, especially in rural areas, respondents were confident that no change in the electoral system is expected. Many of them said that only due to the focus group, they have learned something about the changes; otherwise they would be aware of changes to the election system only at the polling station.

Many of the participants did not know that the election system, with the use of which the voting is held from the party lists, called "proportional". Some respondents "heard" that the majority of candidates will not be elected during these elections, but did not fully understand how exactly the system has changed.

By default, the majority of participants of the research suggest that they will be able to choose both a party and a candidate. Not everyone understands that the party can nominate one candidate in the district or do not nominate anyone at all. Some participants expect a system of "open lists" where they can elect parties and candidates separately."

The first acquaintance with the new voting paper showed that it is intuitively incomprehensible for the majority of research participants. Previous respondents' expectation regarding voting papers is that they will be analogous to the familiar ones: with the possibility to elect a party and a candidate separately.

For many participants it was difficult to explain what names in parentheses mean. A variety of versions was expressed during the discussions:

*«We have a large choice here. As if one could be written, now two are written.»  
(Pavlograd)*

*«I have understood that he is a deputy» (Dariivka village, Kherson region)*

*«Larger is probably cooler, dude "(Dnipropetrovsk)*

*"Maybe the first wants to be elected in the municipal authorities, and the second - as the mayor. I understand it like this". ( Dnipropetrovsk)*

The unusual appearance and the presence of several names instead of one caused slightly negative emotions from the respondents' side. If one part of the respondents said that if they would see such a voting paper on the election day, they would come to the members of the election commission for explanation, the other part of participants in a similar situation would just scratch the voting paper out in order not to vote within the system that is not comprehensible for them.

*(in chorus): «I would not vote at all» (Kherson)*

After the corresponding slide was shown a voting paper became clearer, the respondents said that it is actually quite simple, but only with the prior explanation. Therefore, participants believe that it's necessary to provide people with such an explanation (preferably in the voting paper itself). Whether the columns must be marked: the first column is the party that is elected, the second one - is the first candidate of the party (leader) in multi-mandate constituency and the third - is the representative of the party in the territorial district; or the explanation must be written on the marginal of a voting paper.

The vast majority of the research participants consider that active information sharing of the voters about changes in the election system is of great importance. It is necessary to explain everything in details using examples and visual material: how the system has changed and which principles will be used while electing deputies of municipal authorities.

Participants of the research consider that conducting of a broad information campaign before the election makes more sense because informing of a voter directly at the polling station will be less effective and will help to create queues and misunderstanding.

*«Usually people come [to polling station] - all the walls are posted, you do not know where to look. To look through everything, Sunday will end. »(Dnipropetrovsk)*

*"We need social advertising, which would explain. For example, like it was with the subsidy. " (Kyiv)*

Using of the media as a possible way of informing people with the new electoral system was discussed more often (published mass media and television), sometimes people talked also about the use of outdoor advertising. In the case of television the participants of the discussion would like to see short videos with a simple comprehensive infographic. Some participants also noted that informing should not be limited only by advertising, because not all of viewers watch it, but to share this information through the news and other programs. According to the respondents, candidates and political parties which plan to participate in elections, should play an active role in revealing a true and complete information about the changes to the public through the channels available to them.

At the same time, respondents think that posters explaining the changes are availability on the polling stations, as they are confident that much of the population as they are will not get to know about these changes before they get to the polling station.

Some participants suggested to indicate changes in the invitation which is sent to voters, or to add a booklet to the invitation describing the changes.

It was the most difficult to understand for the focus groups participants the points related to the new system voters. These points are:

- Formalization of a leader of the local branch of the party in the electoral list and the fact that he will be elected in case when the party gains 5 percent and more in the multi-mandate territorial constituency. It is also not very clear that all candidates except the leader compete with each other within the party.
- The fact that the party as a whole, but not a single candidate has to overcome 5% vote threshold in territorial election district.
- The fact that no candidate can be elected in some constituency, and that some candidates can be elected in one constituency. Many participants are confused because of such a opportunity because they perceive it as a lack of "personal representative" in municipal authorities: "To whom shall I then apply, when not to my representative." Some voters do not understand how this could happen, that's why they expect that any deputy from the district will be presented in the constituency.

Evaluating some changes in the electoral system, which they especially like or dislike, the participants of discussion mainly expressed the following thoughts: the ability to recall the mandate by means of the submission of the initiative group is perceived the most positively in general. Most of the respondents regard this innovation as a potential ability to control over the quality of the deputy's performance from the voters' side.

*«He will take care of his city» (Dnipropetrovsk)*

In these conditions, the respondents expressed the opinion that in order to evaluate this innovation, they wanted to know more about the specific mechanism how to recall the mandate - to understand how transparent and accessible it will be to the ordinary people. Some participants also expressed concerns that the possibility to recall can be used by the party for "punishment" or intimidation of some deputies, who go against the "party line." Such concerns again lead respondents to the need to ensure transparency of procedures and control by the community.

*«Specifically, who should be the initiative group? What is the number of signatures to be collected? » Kyiv*

*"In general, such a rule in the law is a bad rule. Because if, for example, this rule makes a deputy not independent in fact. In case he goes against the will of the party. For example, the party said that we need to vote for that bill. If this project in general is bad and the deputy do not want to vote for it, he says "no" (Rivne)*

The research participants perceive raise of the threshold to 5% and change to the election system of mayors of large cities rather neutral.

If we are talking about the threshold the majority of respondents note that it is beneficial to big parties and that such a system has its disadvantages and advantages. The main disadvantage is that it will be difficult "to enter politics" for the small and new parties, and the number of parties will be reduced.

*«I think our choice will be reduced in this way». (Rivne)*

According to opinion of a large part of the respondents, this is advantage at the same time, as it will be more difficult for the dishonest politicians who are going to come to power, to create a party and to take office by means of bribing of voters.

*«5% is much more buckwheat!» (Kyiv)*

In the case of the election of the mayor the arguments are similar. The respondents believe that the advantage of the new system is the office can not be accidentally taken by someone who get trust from few residents.

*«Our mayor won previous elections with very little support. And it turns out that he had then only 20% who supported him, and he became the mayor of the whole city. The other words he is two-bit politician" (Rivne)*

Disadvantages are - the fact that extra budgetary funds will be spent for the second round of election, and that for the second round the candidates will try to convince voters more aggressively and can use "dirty" technology to reach it.

*«At the first time a person chooses based on his emotions. At the second time he chooses based on the fact how he was warmed" (Dnipropetrovsk)*

An additional negative attribute may be the fact that those residents of the city who do not like both of the candidates of the second round may decide not to go to the polling stations at all.

Thoughts of the residents of small towns are divided approximately equally to those, who believe that the electoral system in small cities should remain the same as now, and to those, who believe that it should be similar to the system of elections in large cities. Arguments of respondents are identical to the arguments for / against the new system in the big city.

*«I think he should not become. He has 50%. I mean that he has to get 50% and one-tenth. And if he does not get 50, then there must be a second round" (Dubno)*

Some respondents additionally noted that under the decentralization the election of mayor will become less important because this post would lose some of the powers compared to the municipal authorities.

Most respondents make concerns about the absence of non-party candidates in the new system. They find it's unfair to have no possibility to vote for a candidate who does not belong to any party but "does a lot for your hometown". The need for such candidates to join this or that party, according to these respondents, will lead to loss of independence of actions and their own convictions.

*«And if an opinion of «a majority candidate» does not align with the program of any party? He goes separately because he is doing something for the people, develops his area and works. But suppose he does not want to join any particular party and to*

*bear some liability. That is why? He had no way out. He needs somebody to join in order to stand in elections" (Kyiv)*

*«Why am I deprived of a right? Our Constitution states that I have the right, as an individual, to nominate myself as a candidate. And now I am forced to join the party, but I do not want to join the party" (Rivne)*

The respondents are not sure whether the party can nominate real candidates "on the field" at all, especially when talking about rural areas or less popular districts. The specificity of rural areas to the respondents' mind is the fact of less confidence in the political parties in general, people wish to nominate "locals", villagers, with whom they are familiar.

*«What kind of parties are there in the villages? There are no parties in the villages, there are no parties in districts. The people there nominate those who they know" (Rivne)*

The smaller part of the respondents on the contrary think that this change is positive, because deputies-majority could buy a place in this or that party in the past immediately after they were elected.

Most participants are concerned about the possibility that no candidate from their district will win the elections, therefore they perceive it as the absence of "own representative" in municipal authorities: "To whom shall I then apply, when not to my representative." Some voters do not expect and do not understand how this could happen, that's why they expect that any deputy from their district will be presented in the constituency. The majority thinks that in such a situation they will not have the possibility to defend their interests, because the deputies from another constituencies will not have any time to and wish to solve their problems.

*«And he will say me: «Get out of here, you are not from my constituency» (Dnipropetrovsk)*

Some fear of the above mentioned is strengthened due to the fact that referring to the words of the respondents while choosing a candidate on local elections they pay more attention to a person, not to a political party to which the person belongs. At the same time new election system is more preferable to political parties, but not to particular candidates.

*«I came to conclusion that within this system the parties win more, because if I put my hand like this and imagine that I do not look at the surnames, but think of the political party which I want to elect for, the voting paper is quite normal from this point of view.» (Dubno)*

While electing the majority of respondents try to be focused on the track of candidate's real actions, on his biography. It is very important for many respondents to know a candidate during a long period of time, to follow his deals.

*«If he did something, does something for the city, for the enterprise, where he was in the past» (Dubno)*

Mass media is also a popular source, but the respondents consider that it does not worth to trust media too much due to a large number of "customized" material.

In these conditions some part of respondents noted that if a candidate who they like would enter a political party which they consider to be "dishonest", they would not give their votes for such a candidate.