Here's What Trump Gets Wrong About Ukrainian Democracy

By Katja Freitas

March 04, 2025

Ukranian President Zelensky visits Trump at the White House. **Julie Rogers / Zuma / TASS**

Last week, U.S. President Donald Trump threw the diplomatic world into chaos when he posted on Truth Social that Zelensky was "a dictator without elections" and falsely claimed that his approval rating had dropped to four percent.

Although he later claimed to be surprised he had ever said it, Trump's headline-grabbing statement was seized upon by Russian politicians to amplify the narrative of Zelensky's illegitimacy.

Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council, eagerly echoed Trump's remarks, underscoring how Trump's comments directly played into the Kremlin's propaganda efforts and agreeing with him "200 percent" on X. "If you'd told me just three months ago that these were the words of the U.S. president, I would have laughed out loud," he added.

By aligning with the Kremlin's narrative, Trump furthers its primary objective of inciting unrest among Ukrainians by pushing for elections in Ukraine, which would throw the country into chaos and play into Russia's hands. EU High Representative Kaja Kallas asserted during her visit to Ukraine on the third anniversary of the war that Russia's narrative is "strongly represented" in the messages coming from the U.S.

Related article: [Trump Is Rolling Out the Red Carpet for Russian Oligarchs](#)

Following Trump's allegations, Western leaders like British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz reacted quickly to reaffirm their support for President Zelensky, underscoring recognition of his legitimacy.

Despite the fact that the war has forced Ukraine into difficult democratic compromises, the unity displayed by its institutions and people shows that the country's political system has remained resilient in the face of existential threats.

A survey released on Feb. 19 by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology — one of Ukraine's leading polling organizations — showed that 57% of Ukrainians trust Zelensky, a five-point increase on December's results. This result directly contradicts the narrative of Zelenskyy's illegitimacy.

Further demonstrating solidarity, on Feb. 24, the Ukrainian Parliament overwhelmingly reaffirmed Zelensky's mandate. Out of 268 members present, the vote was unanimous, with only 12 deputies absent. The resolution declared that Zelensky's presidency remains legitimate, reaffirming the Ukrainian people's trust and the Verkhovna Rada's support for the leader elected in free, transparent, and democratic elections.

Although the postponement of elections is not ideal, the extraordinary circumstances of the ongoing war provide robust justification. Beyond legal considerations, logistical and legitimacy challenges make holding elections under current conditions highly impractical. Millions of Ukrainians are displaced abroad or internally, while others remain under Russian occupation. Many soldiers are serving on the front lines — factors that would severely undermine the credibility of any election.

During a recent press conference, Zelensky addressed these concerns: "This is just not right. How can we call an election in which half of the population of the country won't be able to vote? How will they be able to vote? How will military personnel be able to vote? There's no way. How can we vote normally when today we were attacked with 267 drones?"

Related article: [Welcome to Trump and Putin's Brave New World](#)

Meanwhile, according to legislation and Ukraine's Constitution, holding elections during martial law is not permitted. However, it is not entirely accurate to claim that the Constitution explicitly prohibits presidential elections during this period. Instead, the Constitution extended the mandate of the Verkhovna Rada (the unicameral Ukrainian parliament), meaning that elections have been postponed and must be held within one month of the end of martial law.

There is a broad consensus among Ukrainians that elections should only take place after this period. The decision on when and whom to elect remains solely with the Ukrainian nation, reflecting its sovereign right to shape its democratic future.

Holding elections during wartime would compromise the constitutional right of every citizen to participate in free and fair elections by secret ballot without threats or intimidation. Russia's ongoing aggression renders any election impractical and would prevent every member of society.

To uphold the integrity of the electoral process there needs to be a sustainable ceasefire, followed by the lifting of martial law and thorough logistical preparations, including setting up voting infrastructure.

The Kremlin is bound to amplify the narrative of Ukraine's alleged illegitimacy throughout its talks with the U.S. However, it is extremely ironic that an authoritarian regime — whose leader manipulated the Constitution to cling to power until 2036, robbing its own people of free and fair elections — is lecturing sovereign nations on democracy. Russia's attempt to weaponize democratic discourse only exposes its hypocrisy and blatant disrespect for its own citizens' fundamental rights.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/03/04/heres-what-trump-gets-wrong-about-ukrainian-democracy-a88232