

# Analysis: Civil Society Pre-Elections Policy Advocacy

## **Civil Society and The Revolution at The Ballot Box<sup>1</sup>**

Ukraine's post Euromaidan polity is not unlike a laboratory for the next generation's efforts to achieve democratic consolidation. The country's parallel challenge of democratization and rapid economic restructuring taking place in the headwind of Russia's military and information aggression in the immediate aftermath of Euromaidan or the Revolution of Dignity has concluded its seminal first chapter in 2019, with two consequent elections elevating an entirely new elite to the echelons of national governance. This analysis of civil society was conducted at the end of summer 2019, and it aims to answer the question about what directions Ukrainian civil society may take after this transformative period, and how civil society organizations' relationships with constituents may change.

The first part of the analysis studies the dynamics of citizen awareness and engagement over the course of five years, and how civil society actors took part in the 2019 election marathon. Then, the analysis looks at the current status quo in the USAID/ENGAGE activity's four regional focus areas: Kharkiv, Kherson, Zaporizhia and Sumy Oblasts. The reports conclude with an analysis of CSOs electoral efforts and how the level of influence on decision-making has changed in the process of participation, noting increased citizens' participation and summarizing factors that led to the development of the current circumstances. Finally, we provide an outlook of trends that are likely to develop in the coming year.

Our analysis posits that, due to different approaches to constituent relations and the varying extent of adaptiveness to political realities and resulting actions in the elections period, Ukrainian civil society in the coming year will take two different development courses. First, it will increase the level of political participation and become an influencer in national politics. And second, it will stay clear from political action and concentrate on other activities, often on a subnational level. This suggests a new Ukrainian political-economic landscape and CSOs within it, dividing Ukrainian CSOs into two distinct camps: those with a high level of influence and interest, and those feeling left out and having a diminished interest in participation in policy formulation.

## **End of a Five-Year Era: Citizen Awareness, Engagement, and Civic Activism in 2019**

The eve of Presidential elections in 2019 brought a grim reckoning to Ukraine's civil society activists. On a macro-level, unimagined five years ago during the last years of Petro Poroshenko's presidency, civil society activists were disillusioned with the progress of reforms, particularly in clamping down on corruption, and even more troublingly, they were facing active pushback that some described bluntly as a crackdown.<sup>2</sup> The balance between CSO advocacy efforts and authorities' reaction to them was unequal, therefore internally, due to high pressure on civil society from various angles—including an intensive advocacy agenda, a frequent necessity of urgent action for preventing backlashes, strife for meeting requirements of international partners

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<sup>1</sup> Dickinson, Peter (2019). Rise of the Zelennials: Ukraine's parliamentary elections signal generational shift. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/rise-of-the-zelennials-ukraine-s-parliamentary-election-signals-generational-shift/>

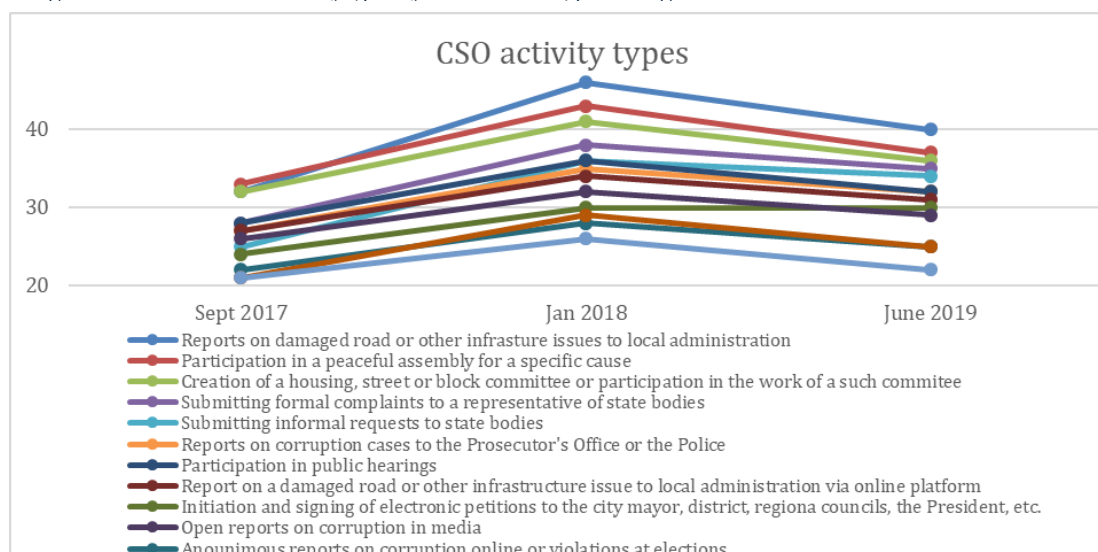
<sup>2</sup> Kaleniuk, Daria (2017). The Coming Crackdown on Ukraine's Anticorruption Crusaders, Atlantic Council. Retrieved from: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-coming-crackdown-on-ukraine-s-anticorruption-crusaders/>

and quite frequently, physical attacks and artificial obstacles to work—tensions within long-standing partnerships and coalitions intensified.<sup>3</sup> The situation right before the presidential elections in spring 2019 threatened the perceived status quo of political responsiveness to civil society advocacy, with a clash of ideologies and possibility of changing developmental courses.

While the political environment dramatically changed for the worse before parliamentary elections, several trends in society created favorable conditions for civil society activism. First, the civic literacy of Ukrainians is growing. USAID/ENGAGE’s Civic Engagement Poll (hereafter, “CEP”) demonstrates that the overall civic literacy of Ukrainians has been steadily increasing over the past two years, from 8% passing the civic literacy test in September 2017, to 13% passing in June 2019.

Second, positive dynamics are also observed in the awareness of types of civil society activities, open for potential citizens’ engagement. For instance, awareness of all 12 types of activities listed in CEP has increased since September 2017. January 2018 was a pivotal point for increased awareness, probably in view of the eve of upcoming elections and possibility of a changing developmental course (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Citizens’ awareness of types of CSO activities, percentage*



Third, activities and organizations are distinguishable for important reasons. Social awareness is relatively high in civil society activities, but this does not translate to awareness of civil society organizations. The perceived knowledge of CSOs has, in fact, decreased. In September 2017, only 34% of Ukrainians reported not knowing any type of civil society organization while in June 2019 this number has increased to 37%.<sup>4</sup>

Fourth, it is noteworthy that some of the traditional civil society activities have become less popular, while others have emerged, or their format has changed. For instance, participation in peaceful assemblies is becoming less popular due to previous lack of authorities’ reaction and, in certain cases, change in the nature of cooperation with civil society due to emerging

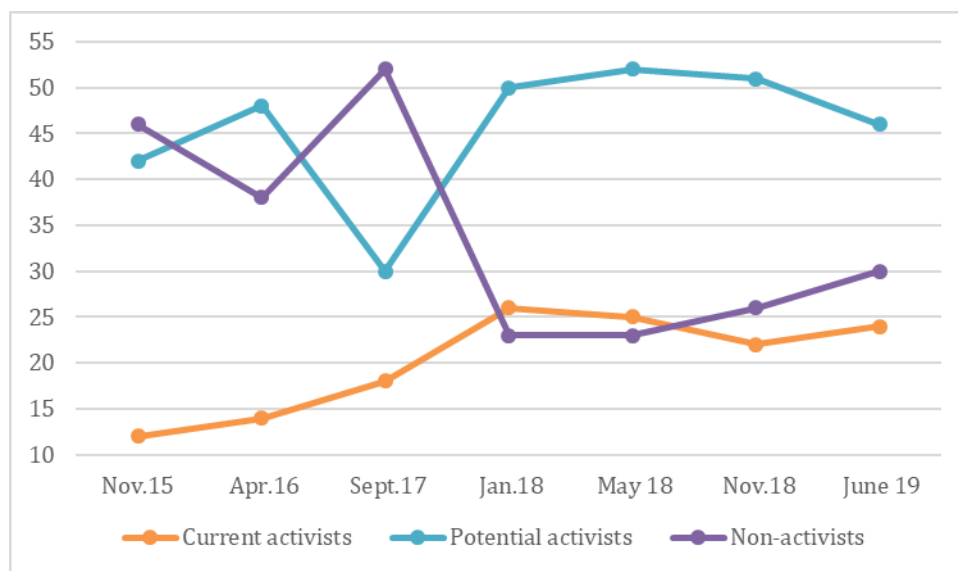
<sup>3</sup> USAID/ENGAGE (2019). ENGAGE Semi-Annual Performance Report. 1 October 2018 – 31 March 2019. Analysis: Civil Society Pre-Elections Policy Advocacy.

<sup>4</sup> USAID/ENGAGE Civic Engagement Poll, September 2017 and July 2019

opportunities for direct parliamentary advocacy. On the other hand, online participatory instruments, such as online draft law commentary, is becoming a more widespread practice.

This increased awareness suggests there are new incentives for participation. An underlining hypothesis of the USAID/ENGAGE activity is that citizens who are aware of civil society activities are more likely to engage with them. The data of the recent CEP proves this. Since September 2017, the number of current activists (eg., those who have engaged with at least one civil society activity in the past 12 months) has increased significantly, from 18% in 2017 to 24% in 2019. The number of potential activists has also increased: from 30% in September 2017 to 46% in June 2019, surpassing post-Euromaidan levels (see Figure 2).<sup>5</sup>

*Figure 2. Dynamics in civil society activism, percentage*



An interesting tendency, however, is that the number of non-activists, despite substantially decreasing since 2017, has been gradually increasing in 2018-2019 (see Figure 2). Other questions of the poll shed light on this phenomenon, as the number of people who do not participate due to lack of interest has been slightly increasing, from 42% in November 2018 to 46% in June 2019.<sup>6</sup> While this may seem like a negative tendency, interest is a conscious phenomenon, meaning that very often Ukrainians are aware of the ways they can participate; however, they decide against it due to various motives.

In this context, in the run-up to the presidential race in the spring, the challenge for Ukrainian civil society was to unite and present a consolidated advocacy front demanding from

<sup>5</sup> USAID/ENGAGE Civic Engagement Poll, September 2017 and July 2019

<sup>6</sup> USAID/ENGAGE Civic Engagement Poll, July 2019

candidates to support the CSOs' agenda. The priorities, developed by the Reanimation Package of Reforms<sup>7</sup>, became a framework document, referred to for official proclamation of all CSO demands. Yet, leading national advocacy organizations felt that to demand everything is akin to demanding nothing. Rather, they revived issue-based coalitions and developed several sectoral agendas, including anti-corruption,<sup>8</sup> justice sector reform,<sup>9</sup> and ecology.<sup>10</sup> The toolkit of these issue-based situational networks was combining online and offline public actions, with well-developed and unambiguous but also focused and limited set of messages, and crucially, coupled with identifying points of entry with candidates, including face-to-face advocacy with the campaign teams of top candidates. As a result, some of the agendas were publicly endorsed by election front-runners.<sup>11</sup>

The results of the presidential elections took Ukrainian civil society by surprise<sup>12</sup>. As Chatham House expert Orysia Lutsevych points out, this is tied to a long-standing "elitist" attitude and insufficient communication with the constituency base<sup>13</sup>. According to a lot of experts, the success of "Servant of the People" Political Party and V. Zelensky lies in effective application of communication channels<sup>14</sup> and constant dialogue with voters. The discussions during both forums "Rethinking the Relations: How the Civil Society Should Act Within the New Frame of Reference"<sup>15</sup> and community of practice conference "Civil Society Self-reliance: Trends and Conclusions of Ukraine Civil Society Capacity Building Platform Marketplace"<sup>16</sup> held in July 2019 made special emphasis on the need for finding better ways of outreach to citizens and, going beyond communication, to engage them into participatory decision-making.

To build upon their achievements or the lack thereof, most issue-based pre-election coalitions have undergone further transformations to consolidate the leading parties' commitments to reforms before the parliamentary elections in July. For better promotion of their advocacy agenda, anti-corruption and judicial reform coalitions merged and drafted a joint agenda for justice.<sup>17</sup> Other coalitions intensified their advocacy efforts, analyzing, which methods worked, and which did not. For instance, ecological coalition has zoomed in on environmental security,

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<sup>7</sup> Reanimation Package of Reforms (2019). RPR Proposals on Reform Priorities for Ukraine, infographics. Retrieved from: <https://rpr.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/RPR-Priorities.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> The Anti-corruption agenda for candidates who run for the President of Ukraine (2019). Retrieved from: <http://anticoragenda2019.org.ua/en>

<sup>9</sup> Justice Reform Agenda for the Presidential Candidates of Ukraine (2019). Retrieved from: <https://pravosuddia2019.org.ua/en>

<sup>10</sup> Ecology Agenda for the Presidential Candidates of Ukraine (2019). Retrieved from: [https://ecology2019.org.ua/?utm\\_referrer=](https://ecology2019.org.ua/?utm_referrer=)

<sup>11</sup> USAID/ENGAGE (2019). ENGAGE Semi-Annual Performance Report. 1 October 2018 – 31 March 2019. Analysis: Civil Society Pre-Elections Policy Advocacy.

<sup>12</sup> E. Solonina (2019). Whose Votes Zelensky and Poroshenko will Inherit? Radio Freedom. Retrieved from: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29858932.html>

<sup>13</sup> N. Humeniuk (2019). Civil society vs Zelensky: Orysia Lutsevych on reforms after elections, Hromadske TV. Retrieved from: <https://hromadske.ua/posts/zelenskij-malo-govoriv-ale-u-lyudej-sklalosya-vrazhennya-nibi-vin-sluhaye-doslidnicya-gromadyanskogo-suspilstva>

<sup>14</sup> S. Dorosh (2019). "Black Ze!" Why and how technologies win elections, BBC News Ukraine. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-47851688>

<sup>15</sup> Europrostir Together (2019) Forum-discussion "Rethinking the relations: how the civil society should act within the new frame of reference". Retrieved from: <https://euprostir.org.ua/stories/143083>

<sup>16</sup> ISAR Edniannia (2019). Community of Practice Conference "Civil society self-reliance: trends and conclusions of Ukraine Civil Society Capacity Building Platform Marketplace", stream: <https://www.facebook.com/isar.ednannia/videos/424818211582154/>

<sup>17</sup> The Agenda for Justice (2019). Retrieved from: <http://justiceagenda2019.org.ua/en>

while the human rights groups crafted a more assertive human rights agenda<sup>18</sup> as an advocacy instrument instead of their earlier “10 Hard Questions for Presidential Candidates.”<sup>19</sup>

Further adaptation to new political realities has resulted into *ad hoc* activist mobilization and many CSO leaders running for office in the parliamentary elections.<sup>20</sup> The demand for increased presence of civil society in Verkhovna Rada was both internal and external: while political parties answered to popular demand for new faces in politics and brought trusted opinion leaders on board, civil society was reactive to the narrow window of opportunity opening with the beginning of new Parliaments’ cadence. They deduced that the right for priority setting will be reserved for those who act fast to be able present at the table. Consequently, a number of CSOs and coalitions supported their members running for office, other political leaders decided to run independently.

### **Snap Parliamentary Elections: Dawn of a New “New Ukraine”**

Little breathing remains for civic activists in the immediate aftermath of the presidential elections as the first rumors and then a decision was made about holding early parliamentary elections. For CSOs and activists, this political tsunami created another historic opportunity to take “New Ukraine”—a metaphor used to depict a new generation of Ukrainian policy makers elevated to their post as a result of the Revolution of Dignity—to an even newer stage by permeating the emerging next generation of political elite across the political spectrum.

After presidential elections, political mobilization of civil society activists happened within weeks. The creation of the “Holos” (“Voice”) political party was announced in mid-May and already by early June, during its first congress, the party list was announced,<sup>21</sup> counting the largest number of activists among them. Prominent CSO leaders from different regions of Ukraine made it to the Holos party list, effectively meaning that over 50 CSO leaders were mobilized within just two months.

Civil society leaders represented 14 out of first 30 and 5 out of first 10 candidates on the party list. Civic activists on the list include prominent CSO thought-leaders, working in a variety of policy spheres, overwhelmingly focusing on reforms advocacy and implementation (at least 14 former Reanimation Package of Reforms and its regional coalitions members). Other spheres of party members are contributing to policy-related research and education, support and reintegration of IDPs, healthcare and anti-corruption reforms. The activists represent 18 oblasts of Ukraine as well as temporarily occupied territories of Donbas and Crimea, with one to two members from each, except from Kyiv and Lviv Oblasts which contain more representatives. Compared to other parties, Holos counts more members of Plast National Scout Organization of Ukraine and more Western-educated professionals. Also, some representatives are former participants of “New Leaders” TV show or former staff members of the NGO “Ukrainska Halytska Asambleia”. Civil society activists also became single-mandate district candidates from “Holos” Party, yet, the share

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<sup>18</sup> ZMINA. Human Rights Center (2019). Press conference “13 steps for new Parliament for human rights protection” . Retrieved from:

<https://www.facebook.com/zmina.ua/videos/vb.304089532940956/343932339864937/?type=2&theater>

<sup>19</sup> Civic Space (2019). Ten hard questions to presidential candidates presented. Retrieved from:

<https://www.prostir.ua/?news=prezentuvaly-10-nezruchnyh-zapytan-do-kandydativ-u-prezidenty>

<sup>20</sup> USAID/ENGAGE (2019). Memo “Civil society activists running for 2019 parliamentary elections”

<sup>21</sup> “Holos” Political Party (2019). Holos Zmin. Live, stream of party’s congress. Retrieved from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOUAAAnSxyPs>



of those is significantly smaller, than on party lists. After the parliamentary elections, of the twenty seats the party gained, nine are civil society activists.<sup>22</sup>

“Sluha Narodu” (Servant of the People), the party of the newly elected President was second in terms of the number of activists on its list and ultimately brought 35 current and former activists to Verkhovna Rada, including those representing single-mandate districts. There were three activists among the top 10 and 12 among its top 30 candidates on the list, some of whom have become part of the newly formed government. Despite the fact, that the activists from the “Sluha Narodu” party represent 12 oblasts of Ukraine and some are former residents of temporary occupied territories, the majority of activists are from Kyiv or currently residing in the capital. The overwhelming majority of the activists are working in the spheres of anti-corruption, judicial reforms, other reforms advocacy and implementation, youth policy as well as research on policy-related issues with specific focus on international affairs. A significant number of MPs are former Reanimation Package of Reforms members or its regional coalitions members, Better Regulation Delivery Office (BRDO) staff members, members of professional federations and associations, or members of civic oversight councils of various government bodies. Also, some representatives are former participants of the “New Leaders” TV show, former experts of the Ukrainian Institute for the Future, or former members of ProZorro.

The “Batkivshchyna” (Fatherland) party, led by former Prime Minister Yuliia Tymoshenko and European Solidarity, the party of former President Poroshenko, also counted activists amongst their members, although their representation is smaller, bringing nine and seven civil society activists, respectively, to Parliament. “Batkivshchyna” had two activists among the top ten names on the list and nine among its top thirty. The Solidarity Party had two among the top ten and nine among the top 30. Most of the CSO representatives running on the “Batkivshchyna” ticket were former activists, who later became parliamentary members, while most of the activists running for European Solidarity Party are sectoral experts in various spheres of public life from fraud prevention to human rights, with significant percentage working on national memory preservation and assistance to Ukrainian army, overwhelmingly from Kyiv and Lviv.

Even the Opposition Platform – For Life caucus include eleven members who are or were previously participating in civil society activity. However, they represent different types of organizations. The parliamentary members of this caucus were founders or authorities of charity foundations, sports associations and clubs, professional associations, or associations, protecting the rights of ethnic minorities.

There were also a handful of civil society activists among the candidates who ran as independent. Together with representatives of other parties, who have not passed the 5% threshold, but won in single-mandate districts, they number approximately 13 current MPs, representing various regions of Ukraine.

In sum, the parliamentary elections produced a result wherein every sixth member of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine is a former civil society activist. The activists who became members of parliament are representing different organizations with rare exceptions of two or three people from the same organization. The organizations, who have good representation in the newly formed Parliament are usually members of coalitions (for instance, Transparency International Ukraine, who former chairman of its board and two staff of its ProZorro project were elected as deputies, and the organization was also part of the coalition behind the Agenda for Justice.) Moreover, many of the members of parliament are former members of the largest national coalition of civil society

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<sup>22</sup> Siohodni.UA (2019). Composition and factions of new Verkhovna Rada: full list of MPs. Retrieved from: <https://ukr.segodnya.ua/vybory2019/news/frakcii-budushchego-parlamenta-polnyy-spisok-1306204.html>

organizations—the Reanimation Package of Reforms, including its regional coalitions. This is a success for Ukrainian civil society for their voice is now further amplified in the policy-making arena and thus their agenda could find ways to become the foundation for sectoral policies.

### **Civil Society in Kharkiv, Kherson, Sumy, Zaporizhia: Far From Kyiv, Close to the People**

Since the last program year, the USAID/ENGAGE activity has ramped up efforts in four oblasts in Ukraine: ENGAGE built up presence in Kharkiv, Kherson, Sumy and Zaporizhia regions. These regions in the south and east of the country are covering a critical geography for democratic development and territorial integrity of the country. Our analysis of civil society trends and knowledge therefore also extends to take a separate look on these regions, including on civic literacy, citizen awareness of and engagement in civic activities, and on civil society during the electoral process.

The analyses of our coordinators in the four oblasts demonstrate, that civil society in these regions is on a different stage of development than national CSOs.<sup>1</sup> Like in the whole of the country, civic literacy has increased since 2018, but with a broad range compared to the national results. In some of the oblasts the civic literacy rate is significantly lower, whilst in another it is significantly higher. The civic literacy rate increased from 2% to 6% in Sumy, from 6% to 11% in Kharkiv, from 13% to 15% in Zaporizhia, and from 12% to 18% in Kherson Oblast during the observed period. Despite the fact that the awareness of the population in these oblasts is growing, it is still lower than the national average. In particular, it is relevant for all four regions that CSOs are not ready to unite for achievement of a common goal, lack financial sustainability, which results in competition for resources, limited ties with the capital, and focus on ad hoc work rather than achievement of long-term results, translating into lack of interest for innovative and experimental activities.

The rate of participation of activists of these regions in the elections was different and, apart from the Kherson Oblast, most who ran did not manage to garner enough votes to make it to Rada. Overwhelmingly, USAID/ENGAGE coordinators cite citizens' frustration due to political ambitions of local civil society and, consequently, lack of trust to activists supporting certain political forces. Also, polarization of civil society in support of different political camps created obstacles for constructive dialogue and, thus, for coalition-building.

Another flipside of election-related trends, impacting regional CSO operations, is that in many cases CSO leaders did not prepare for transfer of duties upon moving into partisan politics. This led to the above-mentioned human resources gap. Moreover, when activists' attempts at political participation failed, it sometimes led to apprehension, having potential to inhibit cooperation with new authorities.

The interviews with the representatives of USAID/ENGAGE regional partners and members of the Reanimation Package of Reforms regional coalitions reveal,<sup>11</sup> that while some of the activists had access to representatives of political parties and were able to join them, others had no such opportunity. Despite the desire to run for office, many regional activists lacked “a foot in the door” and, as a result did not take part in political race despite their ambitions to do so. The activists also indicate that they are planning to run in the local elections in 2020 and some of the Reanimation Package of Reforms coalitions are engaged in training a new generation of CSO leaders. The majority state that succession is a problem and regret lacking capacity or resources for planning ahead and preventing human resources crisis. In view of the current situation, with many activists in the Verkhovna Rada and many remaining CSOs having no contacts with

powerholders, some regional organizations and coalitions may run the risk of losing the influence on policy-making process.

Nevertheless, election-oriented civil society activities provided one of the key lessons on effective civic engagement to regional civil society actors. The election process was an effective demonstration through which civil society in those four regions understood the importance of strategic communication. Those with political aspirations or with policy agenda were in regular communications with constituents both online and offline. They also learned that they need to develop better ties with local independent media. To date they had little or no history of media ties. CSOs in the regions are, thus, rediscovering a need to study local media landscapes, and starting to learn new ways of constituency engagement.

In the recent years, the four oblasts are becoming more and more exposed to creative ways of engaging citizens. Many experience benefits from participation, discover opportunities for cooperation or start to organize small scale street campaigns. Based on experience, CSOs having established cooperation with private sector partners achieve better results in citizen engagement, than those, attempting to organize such events themselves.

Oblast administration and CSO relations is an issue meriting special attention. In most cases, some cooperation takes place, for instance, in Zaporizhia on the issue of digitalization. However, overwhelmingly, there is a need for re-establishment of ties, or initiation of dialogue, for ensuing broader engagement of CSOs in regional policy-making process.

Another common problem, faced by CSOs in all four regions is a lack of cooperation, communication and, sometimes, trust among local civil society players. Historically, this has been tied to competition for funding. Insufficient financial sustainability remains a dire problem today, inhibiting advocacy opportunities, in particular. However, recent elections became a factor, exacerbating tensions in cooperation, while some experience of joint work made certain situational coalitions possible. Coalition-building, including in the Reanimation Package of Reforms regional coalitions, is an overall tortuous experience in all four oblasts, and is currently forming at a development stage<sup>1</sup>, as in Zaporizhia and Kherson Oblasts, with CSOs finding and defining common goals and testing boundaries, either accepting those goals or dismantling. Other coalitions—those in Sumy and Kharkiv Oblasts—are in a storming development stage, experiencing conflict and polarization on certain issues.<sup>23</sup>

To understand regional civil society, it crucial that they are by and large primarily focusing on solutions for issues that are deemed relevant to citizens. Aiming to directly impact lives of constituents CSOs on the sub-national level, more importance is placed on building relationships with constituents, rather than be engaged or having an opinion on national reforms. Among the examples cited are community organizing, culture, ecology, youth policy or livelihoods of communities. This trend is likely to become more widespread, a promising future of grass-roots civil society.

An outlier here is the Kharkiv Oblast: stronger civil society there is actively engaged into advocacy, in particular, in the sphere of anti-corruption. The Reanimation Package of Reforms coalition is also stronger there; however, tensions due to activists' political engagement as well as the problem of physical attacks on civil society plays a larger role. In view of this, it is likely, that Kharkiv's civil society will play an active role in the upcoming local elections and, having more ties with national CSOs, will play a bigger role in national policy-making.

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<sup>23</sup> Tuckman, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63(6), p.396. Retrieved from: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/cd78/c763010e6eb856250b939e4eec438e14ef8f.pdf>



In the four oblasts, except for Zaporizhia, the CSOs are stronger in oblast capitals, ranging from very dispersed unsystematic rural CSO activities in the Sumy Oblast to a number of local centers of CSO activities in the Kharkiv Oblast (for instance, in the city of Chuhuiv.) In the Zaporizhia Oblast, a different trend is present. CSOs there were able to unite around solution of local issues and have the potential to establish strong local CSO coalitions. Noting that creation of these coalitions is not tied to extensive outreach of local self-government to citizens, it is likely, that those have grown from successful community-organizing and, thus, have potential for local spill-over effect and broader engagement in community life.

To summarize, civic awareness in the USAID/ENGAGE regions has been growing but has not increased enough to match the national average. Correlating with this, the level of civil society development and citizens' engagement therein, did not allow for successful political participation of the local activists during the 2019 parliamentary elections. The majority of the disillusioned players from civil society, for the most part, are planning to continue with "business as usual", playing a lesser role in national policy formation. Despite this, stronger ties built with constituents thanks to the electoral attempts, allow for formation of other types of coalitions, forming local issue-coalitions, in addition or instead of overall regional policy roadmaps. The level of mobilization of civil society before the local elections will largely determine the extent to which civil society will be effectively engage on locally relevant issues in these regions.

### **Democratic Participation Ahead**

The data and stories above show that by the time of 2019 elections, Ukrainian voters were more aware and more ready to participate in civil society activities than before. Higher turnout for presidential elections compared to 2014 (63.53% for the first tour of elections and 62.06% in the second tour<sup>24</sup> of elections in 2019 compared to 59.55% during 2014 elections<sup>25</sup>) demonstrates that, when presented with very different scenarios of the development of the country, Ukrainians have decided to take action and vote for Ukraine's future. Iryna Bekeshnina, Director of Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation calls this a manifestation of a demand for "direct democracy." Having higher level of civic literacy, Ukrainians have higher capacity for independent political decision-making, which translates into their desire to influence the future of their country directly through a democratic mechanism—voting.

Having made their conscious choice, Ukrainian citizens feel that they are more in control of the nation's future. This confidence is reflected in unprecedented levels of hopefulness: for the first time since Ukrainian independence, more than half of citizens believe that the country is in general moving in the right direction.<sup>26</sup> And almost half (48%) of citizens believe that Ukraine is ready to address its key problems and overcome difficulties in the next couple of years, a significant jump up compared to the previous 17-22% of preceding years.<sup>21</sup> But this level of hope also proves the ubiquitous populist trend to engage a next generation of elite. Party lists reflect

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<sup>24</sup> Yashchenko L. (2019). Who has chosen the new President of Ukraine? Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://dif.org.ua/article/khto-brav-novogo-prezidenta-ukraini-ta-yaki-shansi-u-yogo-partii>

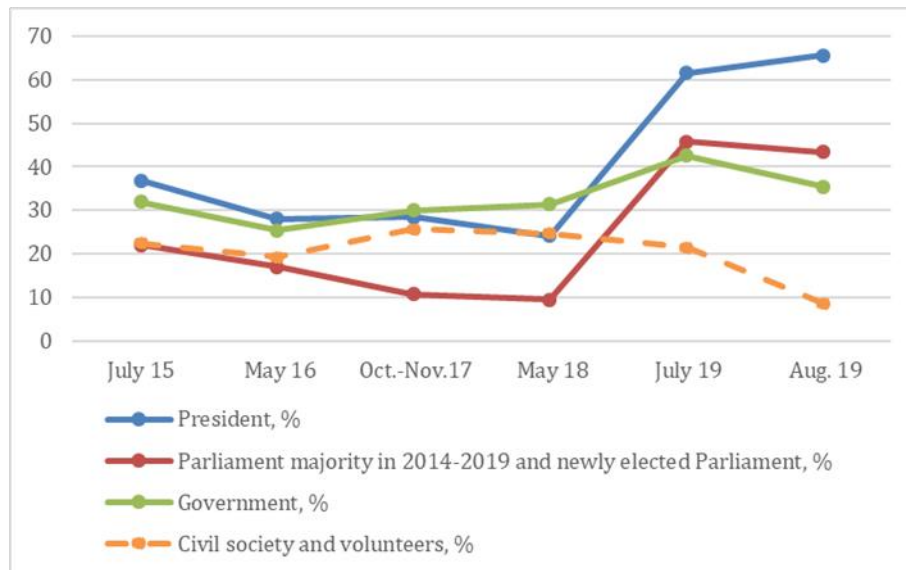
<sup>25</sup> Chesno Civil Movement (2019). Results of Elections of the President of Ukraine 1991 -2019 (winner and second place), infographics. Retrieved from: [https://www.chesno.org/media/uploads/2019/04/23/58444846\\_657883654650606\\_2880529411742892032\\_n.jpg](https://www.chesno.org/media/uploads/2019/04/23/58444846_657883654650606_2880529411742892032_n.jpg)

<sup>26</sup> Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2019). Ukraine Public Opinion Poll on the 28<sup>th</sup> year of independence. Retrieved from: <https://dif.org.ua/article/gromadska-dumka-ukraini-na-28-rotsi-nezalezhnosti-derzhavi>

voters' demand for new faces in politics. The average age of members of parliament of the new convocation of the Rada is 41 years old.<sup>27</sup>

Since the Revolution of Dignity, CSOs have been among the actors whom citizens trusted the most. However, these dynamics are shifting: citizens have been placing trust in reforms implementation less and less on civil society and more on authorities (see Figure 3).<sup>28</sup>

Figure 3. Answers to the question “Whom do you consider to be the main driver of reforms implementation in Ukraine?”, percentage



This said, Parliamentary elections results translate into a significant influence of civil society on national level political decision-making. All parties focus on recruitment of sectoral researchers, in particular, specializing in international relations, policy analysis, political science and sectoral reforms. The potential of high expertise in new members of parliament brings hope that the civil society agenda will become the basis of legislation passed by the new Parliament. Given the Reanimation Package of Reforms regional coalition members are also among the elected deputies, not only national but also strong sub-national CSO coalitions can engage into direct parliamentary advocacy through affiliated members of the Parliament. Still other CSOs can find connections for engagement into direct advocacy through joining coalitions or through contacts obtained by means of cooperation. This is an indication, that civil society representatives may become a technical force behind legislative initiatives and legislative drafting.

On the reverse side, through affiliation with political forces, CSOs' partisan dependence is also increasing, which potentially transpires into ideological influences on CSO activity. The cooperation of new powerholders with civil society was widely promoted in social media and, given the absolute majority in the Parliament, with “Sluha Narodu's” drop in ratings, the rating of politically active civil society might drop as well.

<sup>27</sup> Trebor I. (2019). He is 41 and his name is Sasha and he lives in Kyiv – portrait of a typical MP on the new convocation of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, *Sehodnia.UA*. Retrieved from: <https://www.segodnya.ua/politics/emu-41-god-on-kiyvianin-sasha-portret-tipichnogo-deputata-novogo-sozyva-verhovnoy-rady-1309204.html>

<sup>28</sup> Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2019). One hundred days after presidential elections; citizens' assessment and expectations. Retrieved from: <https://dif.org.ua/article/100-dniv-pislya-prezidentskikh-viboriv-otsinki-ta-ochikuvannya-gromadyan>

Although present-day optimism may not be long-lasting, it gives a new government a free hand in policy-making and indicates both a success and risk for Ukrainian civil society. Success lies in establishment of better communication channels between government and citizens, and the fact that 90% of Ukrainians do not regret their political choice in presidential elections proves that.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, this is an indication that Ukrainians may not feel the need as an intermediary for communication with power-holders anymore. The so-called “country in a smartphone” mechanism<sup>30</sup> may open more new horizons for direct citizen-government communication, and it is a challenge for civil society to demonstrate its value and find a role better serving their constituents in new context.

Taking the above into account, after the parliamentary elections, civil society in Ukraine is likely to run different developmental courses. While part of it will have a significant influence on national policy-making and is likely to become more dependent on affiliated political forces, the other part may have less influence on policy-making, and given the high trust of citizens in the new authorities, is likely to have less support from constituents, which may lead to refocusing on services-provision and refraining from advocacy-related activities.

### **Future Challenges and Outlook**

The vast majority of activists have been working in the sphere of reforms promotion; many have significant advocacy or communication experience. But because many national CSOs now have representation in the Verkhovna Rada, they are currently facing the problem of lack of human resources in advocacy and communications capacity. For regional CSOs this problem is quite dire, as most active CSO leaders are now engaged in politics while a transfer of skills and functions did not occur.

Both the results of the presidential and parliamentary elections, and the changing nature of CSO-citizens interaction indicate the need for reconsidering the role of civil society in Ukraine. Part of this role, however, is already predetermined by the new status quo: many civil society activists demonstrated high contextual adaptiveness by taking part in July parliamentary elections, and many others are eyeing to be picked up for running in the local elections of 2020. Consequently, it is feasible now to speak of two forms of existence of civil society in Ukraine: those organizations and activists, who have a seat and voice at the table, and those who do not.

As a result of these civil society transformations, by the end of summer 2019, Ukrainian civil society is roughly divided into two groups. The first is CSOs, having stable cooperation with new authorities, usually both through former members and active dialogue or contacts with former CSO representatives in the Parliament or Government of Ukraine. And the second is those who did not actively participate in the elections and continue to do “business as usual.” In this context, it is instrumental to study the new composition of the sector and perspectives for its future activity.

Our analysis suggests that in the fall of 2019, Ukrainian civil society actors, on the national level, will need to:

- Rethink their mode of interaction with citizens, determining their role in constituents’ lives and searching for effective ways of outreach to citizens;

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<sup>29</sup> Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2019). One hundred days after presidential elections; citizens’ assessment and expectations. Retrieved from: <https://dif.org.ua/article/100-dniv-pislya-prezidentskikh-viboriv-otsinki-ta-ochikuvannya-gromadyan>

<sup>30</sup> Ukrainska Pravda (2019). “Country in a smartphone”: Zelensky asked Ukrainians to take part in a survey: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/07/19/7221317/>

- Be actively engaged in political life; taking part in CSO coalitions consulting policy-makers; otherwise they will find themselves excluded from participation in policy-formation, and;
- Fill the gap left after colleagues joined government; they will need to recruit new colleagues in particular for effective communication and advocacy.

Civic actors on the regional CSOs will need to:

- Decide their role to play during the upcoming local elections; whether as candidate or an agenda-setter, or to opt out from the most important sub-national chance for political participation;
- Prepare to face a need to reboot relationships with local and regional authorities to remain engaged in local and regional policy-making upon the results of local elections;
- Start by thinking on training of a new generation of CSO leaders in their communities and oblast;
- Garner capacity assistance, in particular, with respect to building on effective partnerships with citizens, and;
- Continue to be intentional about focusing activities around issues most pressing to the communities.