International IDEA

Q&A



ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE DURING AND AFTER THE WAR

Why has Ukraine not held elections during the war?

Martial law prohibits elections, and the minimum conditions for a genuine democratic contest cannot presently be guaranteed. These include security, equal participation, meaningful competition, media freedom, independent observation and effective remedies.

Recurrent missile and drone attacks, occupation, and damaged electoral infrastructure would put lives at risk. Military service and mass emigration would exclude substantial groups of voters and potential candidates.

See:
Article 19 of the Law on Martial Law; Conducting elections during war;
International IDEA statement on elections, security and lasting peace in Ukraine.



What are the biggest obstacles to organizing an election while the war continues?

Security is the overriding obstacle. Polling stations, campaign events, election commissions and counting centres could be attacked or interrupted by air-raid alerts.

Voters must feel safe to participate freely. Candidates, journalists and observers would also face unequal access across frontline, recently liberated and safer regions. Other obstacles include occupied and mined territories, destroyed premises, outdated voter records, displacement, military participation, cyberattacks, foreign information manipulation and exceptional staffing and funding needs.

Solving one problem would not suffice: the electoral system as a whole must meet minimum standards of security, inclusion and trust.

See:
Conducting elections during war; Supporting Ukraine's Democracy After the War; Parliamentary subgroups' key findings.

What does Ukrainian law say about elections under martial law?

Martial Law prohibits presidential, parliamentary and local elections, and national and local referendums, while martial law remains in force. The Electoral Code terminates electoral processes when martial law or a state of emergency is introduced.

The Constitution safeguards institutional continuity: Article 83 extends Parliament's powers until the first sitting of the Parliament elected after the emergency ends; Article 108 provides that the President exercises powers until a newly elected President takes office.

These are continuity mechanisms, not discretionary, indefinite mandate extensions. Elections therefore cannot lawfully be called or conducted under the current regime. The challenge is to restore credible competition promptly once legal and security conditions permit.

See:
Article 19 of the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law";
International IDEA statement to the UN General Assembly, 24 February 2026.

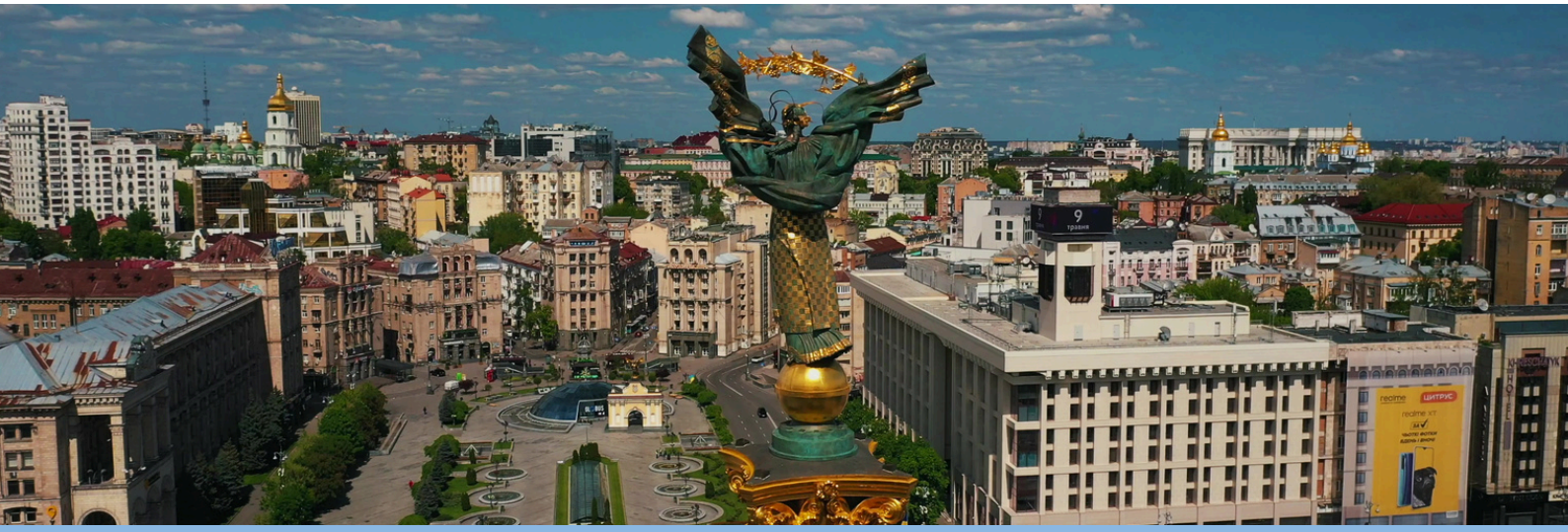
Does postponing elections undermine Ukraine's democratic credentials?

A prolonged absence of elections is a serious democratic challenge: it weakens electoral accountability, delays renewed mandates and creates vulnerabilities to hostile information operations. These costs should not be minimized.

But voting without adequate security, inclusion, genuine competition, media pluralism and independent oversight could further undermine legitimacy. International IDEA emphasizes security, legal certainty, inclusion and trust as prerequisites.

Ukraine's democracy must also be assessed through functioning constitutional institutions, parliamentary decision-making, critical media, civil society, courts and oversight mechanisms. These have shown substantial wartime resilience, while full democratic competition must be restored as soon as conditions permit.

See:
International IDEA, Ukraine's Parliament: From wartime resilience to democratic renewal;
International IDEA, How a democracy survives 1,561 days and counting of war.





How have other democracies balanced elections and national security during wartime?

There is no directly comparable case that offers Ukraine a ready-made model. International IDEA notes that wartime elections have historically been rare and that most states facing emergencies that threaten life and basic democratic freedoms have postponed voting until credible conditions could be restored.

The United Kingdom postponed general elections during both World Wars and extended the life of Parliament through legislation. Elections resumed in 1945 after the principal threat to the United Kingdom from the European war had ended. This precedent shows that a consolidated democracy may lawfully postpone elections during an existential emergency while preserving institutional continuity and planning a return to electoral competition.

Post-conflict cases are more relevant to the timing and sequencing of Ukraine's first post-war elections than to voting during active hostilities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, elections followed the Dayton Peace Agreement and were organized with extensive international involvement; International IDEA's comparative analysis records a six-month timeline, extendable to nine months, but also notes serious technical and political problems. The lesson is not that Ukraine should copy a fixed deadline. It is that elections must be integrated into a wider transition from war to sustainable peace and supported by realistic security, legal and administrative arrangements.

See: International IDEA, Timing and Sequencing of Transitional Elections.

How could internally displaced persons and Ukrainians abroad be included?

Including voters abroad will require early preparation, close cooperation with host countries, substantial funding and a voting network far larger than the traditional system based primarily on embassies and consulates. Options under consideration include using additional non-diplomatic premises, increasing the number and geographic distribution of polling locations, improving advance registration, and coordinating security, logistics and data protection with host-country authorities.

International IDEA-supported consultations conducted by the Central Election Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have examined practical models in European countries, including the legal conditions for using non-diplomatic premises. Any model will need host-state consent and must preserve the secrecy of the vote, reliable voter identification, secure transfer and storage of electoral materials, transparent counting, observation and effective complaint procedures.

For internally displaced persons, the key tasks include updating electoral addresses and State Voter Register data, opening or enlarging polling stations where population patterns have changed, ensuring accessible voter information, and avoiding procedures that indirectly disadvantage citizens who cannot return to their former residence.

Parliamentary elections create an additional representation challenge because mass displacement has changed the relationship between voters and territory. Any temporary adaptation of the electoral system should be narrowly tailored, publicly debated and adopted well before the election; a rushed redesign of the system would introduce further uncertainty into an already demanding process.

See:
International IDEA Preparing for post-war elections: out-of-country voting.

See:
International IDEA, Parliamentary Electoral Dialogue on out-of-country voting.

See:
International IDEA, Strengthening Ukraine's preparedness for post-war elections.

See:
International IDEA, Supporting Ukraine's Democracy After the War.

See
International IDEA, Ukraine's post-war elections: Parliamentary subgroups present key findings.



Could an election held during the current conflict be regarded as legitimate?

Legitimacy depends on more than formal compliance with a voting calendar. It requires public confidence that eligible citizens can participate on reasonably equal terms, that election administrators can act independently and professionally, that campaigning and media access are genuinely.

Under current conditions, each of these elements would be vulnerable. Large groups—including military personnel, displaced citizens, residents of occupied or frontline territories and Ukrainians abroad—would face unequal opportunities to vote or stand for election. Persistent Russian information operations, cyberattacks and efforts to discredit Ukrainian institutions would further complicate the creation of a common factual environment in which voters could make informed choices.

International recognition cannot substitute for domestic legitimacy. International observation and assistance will be important, but the decisive test will be whether Ukrainian voters, candidates, institutions and civil society broadly regard the rules and conditions as fair. A rushed election could deepen divisions and provide further opportunities for hostile interference; a carefully prepared election could instead renew democratic mandates and strengthen post-war recovery.

See:

International IDEA statement to the UN General Assembly, 24 February 2026.

International IDEA, Explainer: Conducting elections during war.

International IDEA, Ukraine's post-war elections: Parliamentary subgroups present key findings.

International IDEA statement on elections, security and lasting peace in Ukraine.

Strengthening Ukraine's preparedness for post-war elections.

How is Ukraine preparing now for elections when conditions permit?

Preparation is already under way even though elections cannot currently be held. A parliamentary working group, established in December 2025 and involving all parliamentary factions and groups, state institutions, the Central Election Commission, civil society and experts, is developing comprehensive legislative proposals for elections in a special or post-war period.

See:
Verkhovna Rada:
Working Group on post-war elections.

The work is organized through thematic subgroups addressing election administration and infrastructure, voting abroad, participation of military personnel, internally displaced persons, temporarily occupied and frontline territories, security criteria, information support, foreign interference and Ukraine's international obligations. This makes the process broader than the drafting of a single election-day law: it is an attempt to define the legal and operational architecture for the first post-war electoral cycle.

See:
International IDEA, Ukraine's post-war elections: Parliamentary subgroups present key findings.

The Central Election Commission is simultaneously developing implementing proposals, assessing the condition of electoral infrastructure, preparing to update the State Voter Register and strengthening institutional capacity in risk management, strategic communication, information technology and cybersecurity. International IDEA supports this work through related programmes, comparative research, training, country visits and dialogue with European authorities responsible for out-of-country voting.

See:
Central Election Commission of Ukraine;
International IDEA, Charting a path to recovery;
International IDEA,
Strengthening Ukraine's preparedness for post-war elections.

Early preparation does not predetermine the date of elections. Its purpose is to ensure that, once the sovereign legal and security decision can be made, Ukraine does not have to choose between an unjustified delay and an improvised electoral process.

See:
International IDEA, Preparing for post-war elections: out-of-country voting.

How much time would Ukraine need after a ceasefire or peace agreement?

There is no final legally agreed timetable, and the starting point should not be a ceasefire in name only. A credible process requires a sustainable security environment and the lifting of martial law, followed by an evidence-based assessment of whether voting can be organized safely and inclusively throughout the relevant territories.

See:
International IDEA statement on elections, security and lasting peace in Ukraine;
International IDEA statement to the UN General Assembly

The clearest Ukrainian expert benchmark has been a minimum preparatory period of six months before the first post-war electoral process begins. The period would be needed to adopt the special legal framework, assess security by territory, restore commissions and premises, update the State Voter Register, arrange voting for citizens abroad and military personnel, procure materials, train staff, enable observation and conduct public information and voter education.

See:
White Paper on preparations for post-war elections in Ukraine;
Central Election Commission proposals on the legislative framework for elections after the termination or lifting of martial law.

The governing principle should be “as soon as credibly possible”, not “as soon as technically imaginable”. Too long a delay would increase pressure on democratic legitimacy; too short a timetable could jeopardize security, inclusion, competition and trust—the very values the election is intended to restore.

See:
International IDEA statement on elections, security and lasting peace in Ukraine;
International IDEA statement to the UN General Assembly.

For further information or interview requests, consult International IDEA’s Media Resources.