

## PECULIARITIES AND PROBLEMS OF MEASURING THE LEVEL OF DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

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### **Abstract**

Having analyzed the main approaches to measuring the level of democracy, the author convincingly shows that significant attention in such methods is paid to elections as one of the key attributes, indicators and catalysts of democracy, but there are no separate scientific tools for measuring the level of democratic elections. The author concludes that, by analogy, it is possible to develop a scientific toolkit for determining the level of democratic elections. The author introduces the concept of the "Index of democratic elections", which has a three-level structure: the first level – is democratic principles of elections; the second level – is indicators of democratic elections; and the third level – is components of indicators of democratic elections. The author's method of calculating the level of democratic elections is relative in nature and is defined as the ratio between the ideal model of democratic elections and the existing model of a specific election campaign. The author's proposed method of calculating the level of democratic elections involves taking into account both the state of electoral legislation and the features of electoral practice and can be effectively used to measure the level of democratic elections in transitional (transit) democracies.

**Keywords:** *elections, democracy, indexing, Index of democratic elections, democratic principles of elections.*

### **Introduction**

In the context of the formation and development of democracy, it is important to be able to effectively measure the level of democratization of the socio-political system in the country, because it makes it possible to assess the current state of democratic development, see achievements and problems, and, thereby, adjust the political development of the state and society in the direction of strengthening democratic transformations.

Elections occupy a key place among the elements of a democratic political regime. They are not only an attribute of democracy, but also its catalyst and indicator. It is obvious that the absence of democratic elections will significantly reduce the level of democracy of the political regime in general. However, elections can be considered an element of democracy only if they comply with generally accepted democratic principles.

In modern science, there are various methods for measuring the level of democracy, which more or less effectively determine the level of democracy in a particular state. All the mentioned methods include, among other things, the analysis of elections, which are assigned one of the leading places in a democracy. At the same time, despite the key role of elections in the development and measurement of democracy, separate scientific tools for comprehensive calculation of the democratic level of elections do not yet exist. This makes it necessary to study the problem of election democracy and develop an effective scientific toolkit for calculating the level of democracy in specific election campaigns. Therefore, the problem chosen for research is characterized by a high level of relevance and novelty, which requires thorough scientific research.

### **Methodology**

#### **Scientific Approaches and research methods**

The methodological basis of the work is the application of the following approaches to studying the problem of election democracy: functional, according to which we consider elections and democracy as interconnected phenomena, the effective functioning of which is impossible without each other; normative, which allows for the possibility of constructing an ideal model of democratic elections; and value, based on which we analyze elections not as formal procedures aimed at the formation of governmental bodies, but as a form of exercising the electoral rights of citizens, a qualitative characteristic of the level of democracy of the social order. The methodology of the work is based on the principles of interdisciplinary, integrity, historicism, logical consistency, objectivity, completeness, and scientific pluralism.

An important methodological component of the work is the theory of neo-institutionalism, which made it possible to consider elections as a complex of formal and informal principles and rules that determine and regulate the political activity of an individual. This article is based on the ideas of structural functionalism, which made it possible to find out the structural components of the institution of democratic elections and to reveal their role in ensuring democratic electoral relations. Scientific approaches to indexing democracy were of methodological importance for the study, in particular, the following: «*Economist Intelligence Unit*» democracy index, *Freedom House's* "Countries in Transition" project, political democracy indices by F. Cutright and K. Bollen, democratization index by T. Vanhanen, democracy index by K. Herpfer, a project of the International Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance (*International IDEA*), and the Bertelsmann fund transformation index.

Within the framework of the approaches outlined above, general scientific methods were used - systemic, structural-functional, historical, comparative, and behavioral. In particular, this work examines the institution of elections as a complete system, which requires comprehensive observance of all democratic principles to ensure democracy. The structural-functional method made it possible to find out which principles underlie the model of democratic elections, which indicators are included in each of the democratic principles, what components each of the indicators includes in the field of electoral legislation and electoral practice; to investigate the impact of each structural element on the functioning of the institution of democratic elections. The historical method made it possible to outline the origins and peculiarities of the implementation of democratic election principles. To identify the common and distinctive features of the existing methods of determining the level of democratic elections, a comparative research method was used.

The implementation of the tasks set in the dissertation led to the use of such logical methods as analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, and concretization and abstraction. In addition, empirical methods were used, in particular, the method of document analysis to study the legislative consolidation of democratic election principles. The choice of the mentioned methods made it possible to comprehensively characterize the problems of the research, to find out the reliability of the research hypothesis, and to give an answer to the research question.

**Research question:** How can the level of democratic elections be determined?

**Research hypothesis:** Existing methods of calculating the level of democracy do not allow comprehensive and reliable determination of the level of democracy of specific election campaigns.

### **The state of scientific research with regard to the problem**

The source base of the research was primarily the works of famous foreign scientists, such as K. Bollen, F. Cutright, K. Herpfer, and T. Vanhanen, in which the problem of determining the level of democracy was highlighted. The author also used the findings of the Economist Intelligence Unit, Freedom House, International IDEA, and Bertelsmann Foundation approaches to determining the level of democracy. The approaches to the study of the relationship and mutual influence of democracy and elections of such Ukrainian and foreign scientists as H. Almond, R. Dahl, K. Janda, D. Petric, B. Raykovsky, A. Romanyuk, J. Schumpeter, and others became important in the context of the research. The mentioned studies and approaches made it possible not only to understand the close relationship and mutual influence between democracy and elections but also to determine the level of democracy of specific election campaigns. At the same time, even though in all known approaches and scientific tools for determining the level of democracy, elections are always given a key place, modern science lacks thorough studies of methods for calculating the level of democratic elections as an attribute, indicator, and catalyst of democracy. Therefore, the research analyzed in this

work became the basis for the development of the author's methodology for calculating the level of democratic elections in transitional (transit) democracies.

### **Theory**

#### **The relationship between elections and democracy**

Elections and democracy are closely related categories of political science. Ukrainian scientist A. Romaniuk aptly characterizes their relationship and mutual influence: "Elections and democracy are a kind of Siamese twins, they cannot be separated or abstracted when considering one phenomenon from another. We can equally say that elections are a condition for the formation of democracy, its key indicator, and, to a certain extent, its result. That is, elections become elections only under democracy"<sup>1</sup> (Romaniuk, 2006, p. 3).

At the same time, although elections are closely related to democracy, they can be a tool in the hands of undemocratic authorities. In addition, the presence of periodic elections is not yet a sufficient guarantee of the implementation of people's power in a certain state. Moreover, often even democratic elections can bring to power individuals who pursue undemocratic policies and pose a threat to democracy itself. From the above, we can see that elections can be considered an attribute of democracy, although not the only one. However, their importance for the establishment and development of democracy puts elections at the forefront of the structure of a democratic political regime.

The key role of elections in the democratic development of the state is confirmed by the positions of many Western researchers. Everyone knows A. Lincoln's interpretation of democracy as the rule of the people, chosen by the people and for the people. Also, the well-known foreign researcher J. Schumpeter, defining democracy (democratic method), interprets it as an institutional system for political decision-making in which individuals gain decision-making power by competing for votes (Schumpeter, 1942).

The well-known American scientist G. Almond gives an important place to elections. In his work "Comparative Political Science Today: A World Survey", he interprets democracy as a political system in which citizens have full rights and freedoms, and political leaders are chosen in the course of free and fair elections. According to the scientist, elections are one of the few democratic mechanisms that make it possible to express public interests by casting ballots and later translate these interests into state policy (Almond, Powell, Dalton, and Strom, 2009).

The American scientist K. Janda also speaks of the importance of elections as an element and indicator of democracy. In his opinion, the electoral process forms the basis of a democratic political system, and the critical difference between democratic and non-democratic systems is the answer to the question: Are elections held in the country - and if so, which ones? (Janda, Berry, Goldman, Deborah, and Hula, 2013).

The approach of the well-known American scientist R. Dahl is the most

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by the author

valuable for us in the context of the researched issues of the relationship between democracy and elections. He introduces the concept of "polyarchy" to distinguish between the democratic ideal and democratic practice. According to the scientist, polyarchy is a set of political institutions that are necessary for large-scale democracy, characterized by the following institutions:

- the elected government has the right to control government decisions regarding the political course;

- the authorities are elected through free and fair elections, where abuses are relatively rare;

- almost the entire adult population has the active right to vote;

- almost the entire adult population has the right to run for elective office. At the same time, the scientist allows more severe restrictions on the implementation of passive suffrage in comparison with active ones;

- citizens have the right to express their point of view without fear of severe punishment for political reasons; the government, the regime, the socio-economic order, or the prevailing ideology can be the object of citizens' criticism;

- citizens have the right to search for alternative sources of information which exist and are protected by laws;

- citizens are guaranteed the right to form and join independent associations, including political associations such as political parties and interest groups that seek to influence the government through electoral competition and other peaceful means (Dahl, 1991).

The above clearly shows the importance of elections for the functioning of democracy, because five of the seven institutional features of R. Dahl's polyarchy are directly related to elections, and the other two, although not directly related to the electoral process, are nevertheless indirectly related to it.

The key role played by elections in the functioning of democracy makes it necessary to clarify the impact of the electoral process on the way power is exercised in the state. Having a democratic character, elections lead to specific political consequences. They contribute to the development of a democratic political regime, the realization of the rights and freedoms of citizens, and the implementation of governance in the interests of the people. In general, elections, under democratic conditions, perform the following important functions:

- elections are an important tool for realizing people's sovereignty;

- with the help of elections, the people are involved in the process of state management;

- elections are a kind of social barometer of political life because the attitude of citizens to political institutions is manifested through elections;

- elections are the main way of legitimizing power in democratic states;

- elections contribute to the easing of social tension and the achievement of social consensus, as they are a peculiar way of resolving contradictions and conflicts in society;

- elections provide an opportunity for citizens to exercise periodic control over the government's activities;
- elections are a kind of filter that prevents unpopular, incompetent politicians from coming to power, helping to increase the efficiency of public administration;
- elections perform an educational function, since political forces, conducting pre-election campaigning, contribute to the growth of the level of political consciousness and culture of citizens;
- elections contribute to the representation of the interests of various social groups;
- the process of recruiting the political elite takes place through the elections;
- as a result of the elections, citizens determine the direction of social development for a certain period (Buchyn, 2013).

Summarizing the analysis of the role of elections in public life leads to an important detail. The functions of elections can change and work differently under different political realities. So, in non-democratic countries, they will be a screen to cover the activities of the government, in democratic countries, an attribute of democracy. In countries with stable democracies, election functions will be fully disclosed, in transitional societies they may act fragmentarily and temporarily. In homogeneous societies, elections will stimulate political competition, in heterogeneous societies their function is representation and stabilization of the political system. In addition, the form of state government, the state and territorial structure, the type of party, and the electoral system will influence the implementation of election functions. However, despite everything, democratic elections in modern conditions are, although not sufficient, an indispensable condition for the functioning of a democratic political regime (Buchyn, 2013).

Also, from the above, we see that elections serve not only as an attribute of a democratic political regime but also as a litmus test that allows you to determine the level of democracy in a specific country, to find out the belonging of the political regime to a certain type. Such a clarification, in our opinion, is extremely important, as it will allow the use of elections as a measure, and giving some certain quantitative values to it, it is possible to measure the level of democracy in a certain country.

### **Basic methods of calculating the level of democracy and democratic elections**

We can state that, as of today, there are essentially no scientific methods for calculating the level of democratic elections. At the same time, taking into account the close relationship between elections and democracy, we can assume that methods of measuring the level of democracy will also include certain parameters that will make it possible to determine the level of election participation. Therefore, we will try to analyze the existing methods of calculating the level of democracy to determine their effectiveness in

determining the level of democratic elections.

One of the first methods to index democracy was proposed by the American researcher F. Cutright. He puts forward two necessary conditions for a democratic political regime: the parliament must include representatives of two or more parties while at the same time, the party minority must hold no less than 30% of the seats in the parliament; the head of state must be elected in general elections or be appointed based on multi-party competition (Cutright, 1963).

Carrying out a qualitative assessment of F. Cutright's methodology, we fully agree with its critics, who emphasize that the presence of democratic institutions is not evidence of their democratic functioning. In addition, the mentioned approach is ineffective in researching democracy in transitional societies.

Another American researcher, K. Bollen, uses a procedural approach to determining the index of political democracy: democracy is a process of interaction between elites and non-elites, and its two characteristics are political freedom and popular sovereignty. The latter is reflected in the elections and includes the following indicators: the electability of the legislative and executive authorities, as well as the fairness of the elections. Political freedoms also include three indicators: media freedom, opposition freedom, and government sanctions. Each of the six indicators is ranked from 0 to 100, and the index is calculated as their average value (Bollen, 1983, p. 469-470). Bollen's approach is still considered one of the most effective in studying the level of democracy of the regime.

There is an original approach to indexing democracy, suggested by the Austrian researcher K. Herpfer, who developed a democracy index at the individual (micro) level. The approach is based on the study of the readiness of individuals to accept and support democratic principles as the basis of a political regime. Based on the answers to nine questions, the level of individual support is determined. Depending on the share of supporters of democracy, the country belongs to a certain category: consolidated democracy (more than 60%), democracy in the process of formation (more than 40%), society in transformation (less than 40%) (Herpfer, 2001, p. 124).

Herper's methodology was developed to study the transformation of non-democratic political regimes in post-communist Europe. However, an obvious shortcoming of the approach is the lack of a clear relationship between the level of individual perception of democratic values and real democratization processes on a nationwide scale. Although the internal perception of democracy by citizens is a necessary condition for its functioning, it does not yet mean the practical embodiment of people's power. In addition, it should not be forgotten that the interpretation of political categories that relate to the characteristics of political regimes and are the basis of citizen surveys can be perceived individually by each citizen (Buchyn, Politological 2016).

In addition to the authors' approaches to indexing the level of democracy, the methods used by international scientific and public institutions are also important. First of all, we should mention the democracy index of the British

research center, The Economist Intelligence Unit. This indicator of the democracy index is determined based on answers to 60 questions, each of which has two or three answer options. Most of the answers are given by the so-called "evaluation experts" of democracy. However, the report does not indicate what kind of experts these are, their number, or whether the experts are employees of The Economist Intelligence Unit or independent scientists. The nationality of the experts is also not indicated. Some answers are obtained through public opinion polls from the respective countries. In case there are no survey results in a certain country, survey results in similar countries and expert assessments are used (Democracy, 2022).

The questions are divided into five categories: electoral process and pluralism; government activity; political participation; political culture; and civil liberties. Each answer is assigned the value 0 or 1; in questions with three options, an option with 0.5 points is also possible. The sum of the points received for all questions in each category is multiplied by ten and divided by the total number of questions in the category. In addition, there are a few questions that are considered so important that a low score on them results in a penalty on the overall score for the respective categories. These include whether national elections are free and fair; voter security; the influence of foreign countries on the government; opportunities for civil servants to implement policy (Democracy, 2022).

To find the democracy index for a given country, the scores for the five categories are averaged. The numerical indicator of the democracy index is rounded to the nearest one hundredth. Depending on the number of points received, countries are divided into one of four groups: countries with full democracy (8-10 points); countries with incomplete democracy (from 6 to 7.99 points); countries with a transition regime (4-5.99 points); authoritarian countries (less than 4 points) (Democracy, 2022).

The project of the international organization Freedom House Nations in transition has also developed an index of democracy, according to which all studied countries are divided into five categories depending on the level of democracy: consolidated democracies, semi-consolidated democracies, transitional or hybrid regimes, semi-consolidated authoritarian regimes and consolidated authoritarian regimes. The assessment is based on seven parameters, one of which is the election process. This criterion includes, in particular, such characteristics as freedom of expression, participation of citizens in political life, multipartyism, and free and fair elections (Nation, 2022).

The authority and many years of experience in calculating the level of democracy and freedom in the world, the transparency and availability of all research data, and the use of the project specifically for the study of transition countries are all arguments that can be cited as strengths of the methodology. At the same time, many scientists emphasize a certain engagement of Freedom House, stressing the conduct of research and the use of their results in the interests of the American authorities. In our opinion, this can be explained by the fact that the main share of the organization's funding comes from the US



government. In addition, some concepts that the organization uses as criteria for democracy are somewhat abstract and ambiguous. It is also worth emphasizing that all criteria have the same "weight", which does not give balanced results (Buchyn, Politological 2016).

The German foundation Bertelsmann International has developed a transformation index (BTI), which includes two elements: a status index, which considers political and economic transformations, and a governance index which considers assessment of political management of transformation processes. The determination of the status index involves taking into account 18 political indicators, combined into five political criteria, and 14 economic indicators, combined into seven economic criteria. Among the political criteria, in particular, political participation is highlighted, which includes: free and fair elections; the effectiveness of the elected government; freedom of expression, and the right to association. The management index includes five criteria, which are divided into 20 indicators (Transformation, 2022).

A team of scientists from the University of Helsinki, under the leadership of T. Vanhanen, developed a democratization index based on the idea that the level of democratization depends on the nature of the distribution of resources in the country. Democracy exists when resources are distributed so widely that no social group can be a hegemon (Vanhanen, 2003).

The level of democratization, according to Vanhanen, can be explained through two parameters: political participation (P) and political competition (C). The first variable is calculated as the share of the population that participated in the vote; the second is the share of votes received by the opposition parties in the elections. The latter is calculated according to the formula: 100% minus the percentage of votes obtained by the leading party. The democratization index is calculated by the formula:  $P \times C / 100$ . Vanhanen introduces formal minimum limits, indicators below which the country under study cannot be classified as democratic: 10% for participation, 30% for competition, and 5% for overall rating. In addition, the high values of two indicators, which cannot replace each other, are important for the democracy of the political regime (Vanhanen, 2003).

The authors of the project attribute the simplicity of indicators to the advantages of their approach, which, although characterized by certain shortcomings, are devoid of subjective judgments. However, neglecting the qualitative features of democratic processes, as well as ignoring the cultural, historical, and other features of a specific country, in our opinion, significantly reduce the value of the mentioned methodology.

In the context of the investigated issues, the approach to the development of the criteria for a democratic regime of the International Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance is important (International IDEA). The institute's researchers focus on the imperfection of the interpretation of democracy as a complex of state institutions or social processes, since quite often institutions are used for non-democratic purposes. Scientists propose to interpret democracy through the prism of principles and values of democracy, the conformity or non-conformity of which makes institutions and society

democratic or undemocratic. Researchers emphasize that there are no completely democratic or completely undemocratic regimes, we can only talk about a certain level of democracy.

Within the framework of the approach, two principles of democracy are distinguished, public control over power and decision-making, as well as the equality of citizens in the exercise of such control. Scientists identify a set of values through which the mentioned principles are implemented in practice. Such values include participation of citizens in the political process; providing legitimacy to the authorities; representation and accountability of authorities; transparency of government activity; availability of feedback; and social solidarity. The rating scale for the answers to the questions includes the following positions: very high, high, average or uncertain, low, or very low (The Global, 2023).

The approach of the International Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance is criticized for its subjectivity and approximation. In particular, the researchers emphasize that the criteria of the mentioned method are chosen systematically and well-founded, while the evaluation based on them is carried out quite arbitrarily. The point is that the rating scale is quite general. Moreover, even for this scale, there is no methodology for calculating indicators (Raikovskiy, 2007).

On our part, we would like to emphasize the important methodological role of the approach of the International Institute for Democracy and Election Assistance in determining the level of democracy for our research: 1) the approach assigns an important place among values to democratic elections; and 2) it is based on the hypothesis that only if certain principles and values are observed, can one talk about the presence of democracy in a certain country. From this, we can assume that the character and democracy of elections also depend on internal principles; only if they are observed, is it possible to talk about the democracy of election procedures.

In conclusion, despite the large number of approaches that offer to measure the political regime democracy level of the countries of the world, they all reflect a different vision of the nature and features of democracy. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses. At the same time, they all attribute one of the key roles in the functioning of democracy to the institution of elections. A formalized approach to democracy makes it possible to assume that measurement methods can be applied to individual components of democracy, in particular, to determine the level of democracy of the eligible institution. Therefore, we consider it expedient to develop our methodology for determining the level of democratic elections in the form of an index, which will be relative in nature and show the correlation between the democracy of specific election campaigns and the optimal model of democratic elections in general.

### **The empirical part of the study**

#### **Index of Democratic elections**

In our opinion, the methodology for calculating the level of democratic elections should be based on the democratic principles of elections, the legal basis for conducting elections, according to which the election results will reflect the real will of citizens. Elections will be democratic only if they are conducted based on democratic principles.

Having analyzed the approaches of various scientists to the classification of democratic election principles, we see their division into three groups:

1. Basic - principles that relate to the participation of citizens in the election process, are universal in nature, and are universally recognized throughout the world, and without their observance, elections as a democratic institution lose any meaning. The author proposes that the basic principles include the principle of free elections, the principle of equal elections, the principle of general elections, the principle of direct elections, and the principle of secret ballot.

2. Additional - principles that relate to the participation of candidates, political parties, and blocs in the election process. Additional election principles are not universal and are revealed differently during election campaigns in different countries. Additional election principles include the principle of universal passive suffrage, the principle of freedom of campaigning, and the principle of equality of subjects of the electoral process.

3. Procedural - principles that characterize the peculiarities of the election process itself. The procedural democratic principles of elections include the principle of open elections, the principle of responsibility for violations of election legislation, and the principle of election administration by special bodies (Buchyn, Democratic 2016).

Democratic principles of elections are general in nature and are revealed through certain components. Therefore, there is a natural need to develop, based on each of the principles, its structural components, which will make it possible to determine the level of democracy of any election process. We call such structural elements indicators of democratic elections since they will identify elections as democratic or undemocratic.

In order to determine the level of democratic elections, it is also necessary to introduce the political science category of the Index of democratic elections into scientific circulation. Such an indicator should be relative; it should show how much the level of democracy of a specific election campaign corresponds to the ideal model of democratic elections.

Taking into account the above, the formula for determining the Index of Democratic elections (IDE) will look like this:

$$IDE = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n Pi}{\sum_{i=1}^n Pi^{max}} + \frac{P_0}{P_0^{max}}, \text{ where:}$$

$Pi$  – points for observing democratic election principles during a specific election campaign;

$Pi^{max}$  – the maximum possible points for observing the democratic election principles;

$P_0$  – points for compliance with other indicators of democratic elections during a specific election campaign;

$P_0^{max}$  – the maximum possible points for compliance with other indicators of democratic elections.

In their turn  $P$  and  $P^{max}$  are calculated according to the following formulas:

$$P = \sum_{i=1}^n Ki, \text{ where:}$$

$Ki$  – points for compliance with election democracy indicators.

$$P^{max} = \sum_{i=1}^n Ki^{max}, \text{ where:}$$

$Ki^{max}$  – the maximum possible points for compliance with indicators of democratic elections.

Finally,  $Ki$  and  $Ki^{max}$  can be calculated as:

$$K = K_l + K_f, \text{ where:}$$

$K_l$  – points for the implementation of election democracy indicators in the electoral legislation;

$K_f$  – points for compliance with election democracy indicators in electoral practice.

$$K^{max} = K_l^{max} + K_f^{max}, \text{ where:}$$

$K_l^{max}$  – the maximum possible points for the implementation of election democracy indicators in the electoral legislation;

$K_f^{max}$  – the maximum possible points for compliance with indicators of democratic elections in electoral practice.

### **Numerical Characteristics of the Index of democratic elections**

Since the author's proposed method of calculating the Index of democratic elections has a relative nature, which proves the relationship between the level of democracy (the Index) of a specific election campaign and the maximum level of democracy (the maximum Index), there is a need to assign numerical characteristics to both the democratic principles of elections and their indicators.

We see this aspect as the most problematic and subjective in the methodology proposed by the author, as it involves the subjective assignment of certain numerical values to the components of the Index of democratic

elections, under the condition of compliance with which indicators of democratic elections will reflect the maximum possible level. Such a numerical distribution is made by taking into account the importance of the influence on the democratic nature of elections, both of each principle in general, and of an individual indicator within the principle, in particular. Therefore, the situation with the distribution of points and the method of calculating the Index of democratic elections, taking into account the indicators, will look like this:

**P1. The principle of free elections (200 points):**

**K1.** Conditions for citizens' participation in elections (30 points).

**K2.** Conditions for forming one's position during elections (40 points).

**K3.** Free exercise of voters' will (30 points).

**K4.** Absence of interference of the authorities and power structures in the elections (40 points).

**K5.** Absence of falsifications during voting and counting (50 points).

**K6.** Turnout threshold (10 points).

**P2. The principle of general elections (200 points):**

**K7.** Application of qualifications for active suffrage (100 points).

**K8.** Alternative methods of voting (35 points).

**K9.** Implementation of electoral rights of specific categories of citizens (15 points).

**K10.** Lists of voters (50 points).

**P3. The principle of equal elections (200 points):**

**K11.** An equal number of voters' votes (50 points).

**K12.** One-time voting (50 points).

**K13.** Characteristics of the electoral body (50 points).

**K14.** Equal conditions for voter participation at all stages of elections (25 points).

**K15.** Ensuring the same "weight" of voters' votes (25 points).

**P4. The principle of direct elections (50 points):**

**K16.** Personal voting of citizens (25 points).

**K17.** Election of a body or office directly by the electorate (25 points).

**P5. The principle of secret voting (150 points):**

**K18.** Implementation of the act of citizens' will-expression in conditions in which their preferences cannot be known with regard to the objects of election (150 points).

**P6. The principle of general passive suffrage (150 points):**

**K19.** Application of qualifications for passive suffrage (50 points).

**K20.** The procedure for nominating candidates and parties (blocs) (25 points).

**K21.** Support for the nomination initiative (15 points).

**K22.** Refusal to register subjects (or their cancellation) (20 points).

**K23.** Alternative nature of elections (40 points).

**P7. The principle of equality of subjects of the election process (150 points):**

**K24.** Equal conditions for nomination and registration (20 points).

**K25.** Equal conditions for the participation of subjects in the pre-election campaign (30 points).

- K26.** Equal conditions for election financing (30 points).
- K27.** Impartiality of commissions and authorities to subjects (30 points).
- K28.** Absence of conditions conducive to the use of the official position (40 points).

**P8. The principle of freedom of agitation (100 points):**

- K29.** The ability to campaign freely (25 points).
- K30.** Restrictions on pre-election campaigning (30 points).
- K31.** Absence of censorship and free media functioning conditions (35 points).
- K32.** Legal regulation of agitation in all forms (10 points).

**P9. The principle of public elections (90 points):**

- K33.** The public nature of the work of election commissions (10 points).
- K34.** Notifying voters of all information about elections (10 points).
- K35.** Transparency of vote counting and establishment of results (20 points).
- K36.** Explanatory work on the rights and duties of voters (10 points).
- K37.** Comprehensive monitoring of elections (40 points).

**P10. The principle of election administration by special bodies (90 points):**

- K38.** Subjects of election administration (30 points).
- K39.** The legal status of electoral bodies (commissions) (20 points).
- K40.** Formation of election commissions and their management (20 points).
- K41.** Independence of election commissions (20 points).
- P11. The principle of responsibility for violation of election legislation (90 points):**

- K42.** Availability of adequate responsibility for offenses (60 points).
- K43.** Appealing offenses during the election process (30 points).

**P0. Other indicators of democratic elections (30 points):**

- K44.** Stability of electoral legislation (20 points).
- K45.** The complexity of election legislation (10 points).

Maximum possible number of points – 1500.

**Features of the Index of democratic elections**

Our proposed method of calculating the Index of democratic elections has certain features that require a more detailed explanation:

1. 1. The democratic principles of elections have different weights in that they affect the level of democracy of the electoral process in different ways. Accordingly, different principles should be assigned a different numerical value. In our opinion, the principles of equal, free, and general elections are the most important for ensuring democratic elections, because without their observance it is difficult to talk about democratic elections as such. Therefore, we give them a numerical value of 200 points each. The principles of secret voting, general passive suffrage, and equality of subjects of the electoral process are somewhat less important and therefore rated by 150 points. In our opinion, 100 points should be assigned to the principle of freedom of campaigning, and 90 points to the principles of open elections, administration of elections by special bodies, and responsibility for violations of election legislation. Finally, the least important from the point of view of ensuring the

level of democracy is the principle of direct elections, which, in our opinion, should be assigned 50 points.

2. The proposed method of calculating the level of democratic elections was developed by the authors only for states with a transitional political regime and cannot be effectively applied to measure elections in countries with a stable democracy. This can be explained by the specificity of the political system of countries transforming, since the political regime of such states, as well as the institution of elections, require additional mechanisms to ensure their democracy compared to countries with a stable democracy. The following examples can be cited in support of this thesis: the institution of international observers and election administration by election commissions are not mandatory elements of elections in a stable democratic political system. In the latter, control during elections is provided by internal mechanisms and surveillance; elections can be administered by authorities without compromising democracy due to a high level of political culture and tradition. At the same time, in transitional societies, the mentioned mechanisms are attributive components of the institution of democratic elections. Otherwise, there will always be a threat of government interference in the course of election races, its attempts to administer elections in such a way as to give preferences to certain subjects.

3. The index of democratic elections, taking into account its relative nature, can acquire a numerical value from zero, for completely undemocratic elections to one for elections that are completely democratic.

4. In order to make the result of calculating the level of democratic elections more comprehensive and reliable, it is necessary to think about the indicators of democratic elections in two planes: *de jure*, the level of democracy of the legal provisions laid down in the electoral legislation, and *de facto*, the level of compliance with democratic principles of elections in electoral practice.

5. Some indicators of democratic elections depend on the type of electoral systems or the type of elections by the object of election. For example, to ensure the equal weight of each voter's vote, it is necessary to form electoral districts with approximately the same number of voters. However, this nuance is important only for majoritarian and mixed electoral systems in parliamentary elections or the election of deputies of local councils. At the same time, under the proportional electoral system, as well as when electing the president or heads of local councils, this nuance is not fundamental. Therefore, the absence of legal norms and practical actions, which provide for the formation of constituencies equal in number, in some cases will mean assigning this indicator zero points, and in others the maximum number of points.

6. Violations of indicators in practice can have different features, so they should be divided into four groups. Such violations can acquire a systemic, large-scale, and purposeful character (in this case, this indicator will be assigned zero points); or be frequent, but not have a purposeful and systematic nature, in which case the indicator will be assigned from 1/4 to 1/2 of the maximum number of points, depending on the scale of the offenses; or have a

single and random character, in which case the indicator will be assigned from 2/3 to 3/4 of the maximum number of points depending on the scale of the offenses; or be absent, in which case, the indicator will be assigned the maximum number of points.

7. There are certain indicators of election democracy that cannot be attributed to any of the analyzed democratic election principles, but they affect the level of election democracy and cannot be ignored when calculating the index of democratic elections. Such indicators include, for example, the frequency of amendments to the election legislation, as well as the presence or absence of an election code that enables the unification of all election legislation.

8. The main advantages of the proposed methodology are the complexity, comprehensiveness, and detail of the indicators, as well as taking into account the norms of the electoral legislation, the peculiarities of the electoral practice, as well as the specifics of the transition countries. With the help of the Index of democratic elections, it is possible to show trends in the transformation of the level of election democracy in the post-Soviet space.

9. The methodology requires the ranking of elections depending on the numerical value of the Index. We are well aware of the great degree of convention and subjectivism in attempts at such differentiation, but without it, the value of our approach to determining the level of democratic elections will be significantly reduced. Therefore, the author proposes the following classification of elections depending on the level of their democracy:

- undemocratic elections (0–0.5 points);
- elections with a low level of democracy (more than 0.5 points - 0.7 points);
- elections with an average level of democracy (more than 0.7 points - 0.85 points);
- democratic elections (more than 0.85 points).

Undemocratic elections involve both the presence of significant deficiencies in electoral legislation and very significant violations in practice. Such a situation cannot be inherent in democratic countries, because in this case, elections do not fulfill even minimally their democratic purpose as an attribute of people's power.

Elections with a low level of democracy characterize society's attempts to ensure the democratic formation of power, but significant shortcomings of electoral legislation and large-scale violations of electoral practice, most often as a result of the ruling elite's efforts to consolidate their dominance by any means, do not allow elections to be held in accordance with democratic standards.

Elections with an average level of democracy provide for the democratic formation of government bodies. However, the low level of the political culture of all the participants in the election races leads to offenses, which, however, are not large-scale and do not reflect a purposeful desire of the authorities to suppress the will of the voters. At the same time, existing offenses to a certain



extent still distort the will of the electorate and put pro-government political forces in a somewhat privileged position compared to the opposition.

Democratic elections provide for the election of authorities in accordance with democratic principles. This, of course, does not exclude certain shortcomings of the electoral legislation and cases of offenses during electoral practice, however, the latter are not systematic, rather random in nature and on a practical level do not distort the results of the will of citizens.

10. Indicators of election democracy, although they detail the democratic principles of elections, are also quite general and do not make it possible to calculate the Index of democratic elections in detail. Therefore, indicators of democratic elections include more detailed components that are specific characteristics of electoral legislation or electoral practice. Therefore, the structure of our methodology for calculating the Index of democratic elections takes on a three-level character: the first level is the democratic principles of elections; the second level indicators of democratic elections; the third level components of indicators of democratic elections. At the same time, taking into account the large number of components and the limited volume of the publication, the author is forced to stop at the first two levels, leaving the analysis of the third level as a direction of prospective research in the future.

### **Conclusions**

Elections are an attribute of a democratic political regime and at the same time its catalyst. All known foreign and domestic studies of democracy and the problems of calculating the level of its democracy pay important, and sometimes decisive, attention to democratic elections. A political system can be democratic only if democratic elections are functioning. And only in a democratic political system is it possible to fully function the institution of democratic elections and full-scale implementation of the electoral rights of citizens.

To be democratic, elections must be held based on democratic principles established and tested by international and Ukrainian electoral practice. The latter is understood as political and legal principles based on which the electoral process is carried out and according to the content of which elections are a real manifestation of the will of citizens. The democratic principles of elections determine the basic parameters within which the mechanism for regulating electoral relations is formed. They are a vector that determines the directions of development of the election institute and electoral legislation, a criterion of legality and legitimacy of actions in the electoral sphere. In addition, the democratic principles of elections establish a limit beyond which elections do not fulfill their socio-political purpose.

In domestic political science, there is no methodology for determining the level of democratic elections. For this, it is necessary to introduce such a political science category as the Index of democratic elections into scientific circulation. This indicator is relative, it reveals to what extent the level of democracy of a specific election campaign corresponds to the optimal model of democratic elections. The Index of democratic elections has a three-level

structure and is calculated as the ratio between the numerical values obtained by observing the indicators of democratic elections and their components, and the maximum possible numerical values that will be obtained if all the components of the indicators of democratic elections are fully observed. The index of democratic elections is calculated taking into account the level of democracy of election legislation, which regulates the democratic principles of elections, and election practice, which shows the extent to which the provisions declared in normative legal acts are implemented during specific election campaigns. The proposed methodology has a complex nature and can be effectively applied for a comprehensive study of the level of democratic elections in states with a hybrid or transitional democracy.

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