

War and digital democracy. In which cases does Zelensky ignore petitions, and why?



*Iryna Fedoriv, Head of the civic initiative “Holka” (“The Needle”) and
Kateryna Ivanchenko, Head of the Center for Innovation Development*

President **Volodymyr Zelensky** has ignored the demand of Ukrainian citizens to veto a scandalous draft law that nullifies claims against Yanukovich-era forest and coastal plunderers ([12089](#)). On April 7, he signed the law, even though a week earlier, leading NGOs and public figures had demanded that it be vetoed, and **Michel Tereshchenko’s** petition had gained the required 25,000 votes. It took citizens less than two weeks to collect the votes.

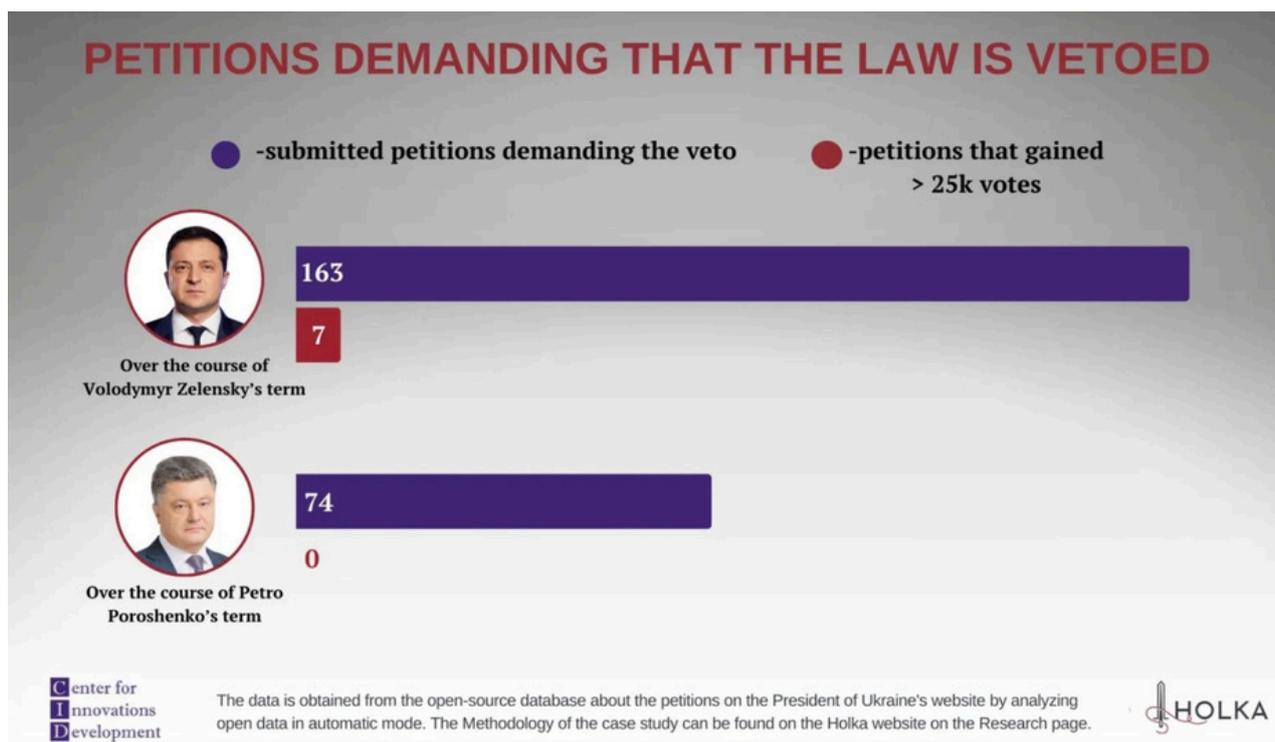
For about five years now, journalists and civil society organizations have not had access to the parliamentary corridors, and lobbyists have been working freely in the session hall, rallying votes for legislative initiatives, including those in the interests of dishonest business. At first, the lack of access to the parliamentary premises was due to the pandemic, and now it is due to the war. The demands of journalists to be given the opportunity to properly cover the work of Parliament are still being ignored.

There are indeed quite justified prohibitions and restrictions. For example, elections cannot be held under martial law, and mass protests are also prohibited. **That's why electronic petitions, which require 25,000 signatures to be considered, remain the only legal instrument of expression for tens of thousands of citizens and encourage the political system to develop democracy.** It is impossible to bring so many people to the street at the same time in one place without putting citizens in danger.

The Holka civic initiative and the Center for Innovation Development, which launched the tool for petitions to the president, analyzed how Ukrainians use it and found out whether the president takes citizens' opinions into account.

Veto petitions as a digital mass protest

When Parliament passes a law that outrages a significant number of citizens, Ukrainians demand that it be vetoed. This was the case both during **Petro Poroshenko's** and **Volodymyr Zelensky's** presidencies. Notably, in recent years, citizens have become more united, and petitions demanding vetoing laws have gained more than 25,000 votes.



Ukrainians became so united during the war that they could summon 25,000 votes not in 90 days but sometimes in a day. **Keep in mind that all these petitions demanding to veto the draft law received the required number of votes after February 24, 2022.**

PUBLIC RIOT
HOW THE PRESIDENT REACTS ON THE PETITIONS DEMANDING A VETO

HOLKA

Key author of the bill	Number of votes by the petition	Number of days during which 25k votes were collected	Response	Veto	The bill is signed and adopted?
 Partial restoration of declaration (№9534) David Arakhamia	>84 тис.	1	✓	✓	
 Urban development reform (№5655) Olena Shuliak	<42 тис.	1	✗	✗	✗
 Stricter punishment for military personnel (№8271) Maksym Pavlyuk	>35 тис.	1	✓	✗	✓
 To nullify the claims against the plunderers (№12089) Ihor Fris	<26 тис.	11	✗	✗	✓
 New time calculation (№4201) Ruslan Stefanchuk	>25 тис.	84	✗	✗	✗
 Taxation in times of war (№8401) Denys Shmyhal	>25 тис.	40	✓	✗	✓
 "Animal cruelty bill" (№8150) Oleksandr Haidu	>25 тис.	40	✓	* the bill withdrawn	

The data is obtained from the open-source database about the petitions on the President of Ukraine's website by analyzing open data in automatic mode. The Methodology of the case study can be found on the Holka website on the Research page.

Center for Innovations Development

In this way, the necessary votes were collected in a day for a petition demanding to veto the law that would have returned the declarations of politicians and officials only partially. The petition gathered more than 80,000 signatures and set a new record after collecting votes for the petition to veto the urban planning “reform.” Zelensky responded to the petition on declaration and vetoed the law. Parliament was forced to take into account the president’s warnings. However, both the president and the Parliament took into account not only the public outcry but also the fact that Western partners who provide assistance want to see transparency.

In total, during Zelenskyy’s term, 7 petitions demanding to veto the project received more than 25,000 votes. Here are the 7 citizens who submitted these petitions. One of them is an MP.

Yet, Zelensky used the veto procedure only once at the request of citizens.

In two cases, laws that had been heavily criticized by society were “buried.” Here, the president did not veto the laws, but he did not sign them either. We are talking about the draft law “On Time Calculation” by Speaker **Ruslan Stefanchuk** and the scandalous urban planning “reform” 5655, which was carried out by the head of the Servant of the People party, **Olena Shulyak**. Citizens received no response to these two petitions.

AUTHORS OF THE PETITIONS DEMANDING THE VETO WHO GATHERED 25 THOUSAND VOTES



Oleksandr Yabchanka
(bill No.9534)



Michele Tereshchenko
(bill No.12089)



Serhiy Dorotych
(bill No.8401)



Oleksiy Honcharenko
(bill No.4201)



Vladyslav Protsenko
(bill No.5655)



Yana Nazarenko
(bill No.8150)



Tetiana Kostohryzenko
(bill No.8271)

As for the latter initiative by Shulyak, the collection of signatures ended on the same day that Parliament supported the bill. In total, more than 42,000 citizens managed to vote under the demand to veto the draft law.

Both the European Parliament and the European Commission saw corruption risks in Shuliak's "reform," while the Royal Chatham House Institute (UK) emphasized that there would be risks of construction cartels.

The time limit for the veto turned out to be limited, and the president only later emphasized during a press conference that it was his personal choice not to sign the Shulyak urban planning "reform." According to him, his partners did not approach him on this issue.

It should be added here that MPs themselves sometimes submit petitions to Zelensky. For example, MP **Oleksiy Honcharenko** (EU) has authored several petitions, one of which, in particular, concerned the veto of Stefanchuk's draft law "On Time Calculation" and received more than 25,000 votes. However, the votes were not collected within the required 15 calendar days, and the collection lasted 84 days. But this relieves the president of responsibility for not responding to the petition.



What's wrong with the veto petition procedure?

A descendant of the Tereshchenko family, **Michel Tereshchenko**, has filed a petition with the president to veto draft law [12089](#), which aims to nullify claims against those who seized the forests and coasts of the state and communities during the Yanukovich era and before.

Why do the procedures for reviewing petitions demanding a veto raise serious concerns?



Michel Tereshchenko
former Hlukhiv mayor
and Tereshchenko
descendant.

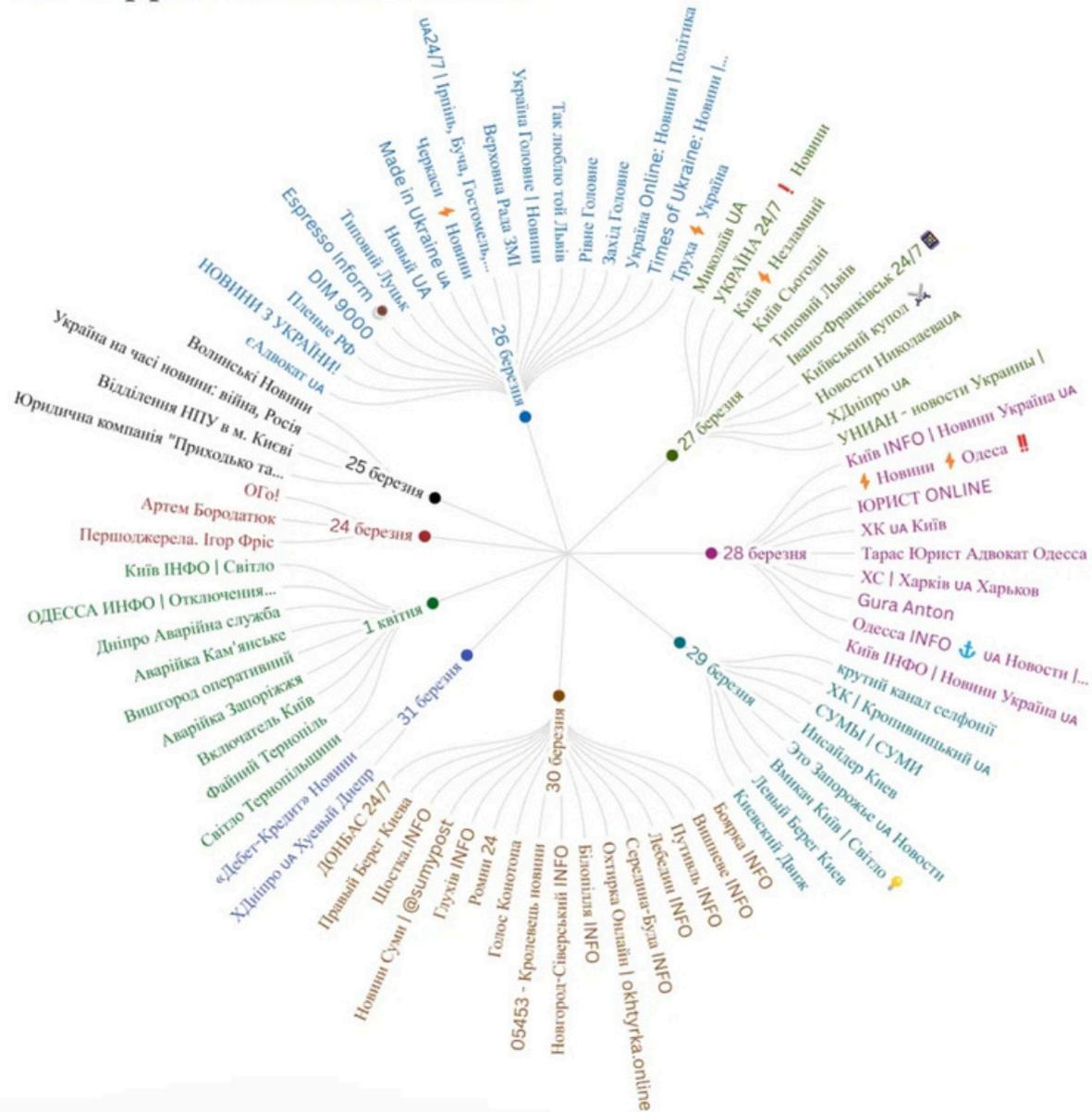
There are 90 days to collect votes. But the Constitution gives the president only 15 calendar days to veto a law. The timing is critical. We filed the petition on Thursday, and it was made public only on Monday. I think our civil society did a brilliant job: we collected the required number of votes in about 10 days, and this is not surprising: draft law 12089 caused a significant public outcry. The draft law was opposed by frontline soldiers and public figures: actress and Hero of Ukraine Ada Rogovtseva, Nobel Prize winner Oleksandra Matviychuk, show business representatives Taras Topolya and Ihor Kondratyuk, and many other citizens. Thus, the President had 5 more days to veto the law at the request of citizens in accordance with the procedure provided for by the current legislation. The petition has been in the “pending” status for three business days. With weekends, that’s 5 calendar days. The deadline was being delayed. The guarantor of the Constitution has not yet provided any response to the petition and signed the shameful bill 12089, which violates 13 (!) articles of the Basic Law.

It should be noted here that representatives of non-fractional businesses have submitted their own counter-petition demanding that the President sign this law. But it still hasn’t gained any votes despite the fact that Telegram and Facebook ads were running in favor of this petition. Research [results](#) confirm this. Moreover, the ads were bought on Telegram, which was founded by a Russian and is not regulated by the state and does not pay taxes to the country’s budget.

Even this massive campaign did not help lobbyists buy votes because, when you play by democratic rules, both a millionaire who has taken possession of a plot of land on the coast or in the forest stolen from a community or the state and a citizen who wants to go to the riverbank with his children have one vote.

It should be added here that even MPs sign petitions to the president. For example, when analyzing the signatures on the veto of draft law 12089, the signatures of full namesakes of nine MPs were found, including **Anna Bondar** and **Yulia Ovchynnikova (Servants of the People)**.

The list of Telegram channels that called for the support of Bill No.12089



Open data source: Telegram. Period of time: from 20 March to 1 April 2025.
The list comprises channels with more than 1 thousand subscribers.

A petition demanding that the president sign the law in the interests of dishonest business was supported by MP and key author of the project **Ihor Fris** (Servant of the People) and the full namesakes of his four faction colleagues, **Halyna Yanchenko**, **Ruslan Horbenko**, **Dmytro Chorny**, and **Maksym Dyrdin**. All of them voted for 12089.

ABSOLUTE NAMESAKES OF THESE MPS VOTED ON THE PETITION OF SEMYDIDKO SUPPORTING BILL

№12089.



Ruslan Horbenko



Ihor Fris



Dmytro Chornyi



Maksym Dyrdin



Halyna Yanchenko



It is worth noting that during the preparation of the law for the second reading, during a meeting of the relevant committee, MP **Fris** [thanked](#) Supreme Court Judge **Vasyl Krat** and noted that he “spent a huge amount of his time and was directly involved not only in the doctrine of the bill, but also in the writing of the material provisions.”

Despite the fact that Ukrainians managed to collect 25,000 votes, the president considered the business lobby, which failed to collect votes for its counter-petition, and ignored the demand of citizens, who turned out to be quite united.

And Zelensky signed this law 12089 in fact a few weeks after its adoption, although there are laws that have been waiting for his signature for months. For example, the legislative initiative of the head of the Committee on Freedom of Speech, Yaroslav Yurchyshyn ([11321](#)), which gives the media more rights and the opportunity to cover and control the work of the committees, has not been signed since the beginning of the year. The choice of the president here certainly did not contribute to the strengthening of democratic instruments aimed at controlling the actions of the authorities.

In general, the collection of signatures for the veto petition 12089 revealed quite serious problems in the work of the instrument that is an outpost of democracy in wartime.

Was the petition tool intended for citizens to demand a veto?



Mykhailo Leichenko

Deputy Head of the CID, who was responsible for launching electronic petitions and the participatory budget in Kyiv

Now we see that there are demands to veto some laws. This means that the website of the President's Office should have a thematic section with the requirement to "veto the law." And it is quite obvious that if the timeframe for vetoing is limited by the Constitution, then the Regulations should be amended accordingly. 15 calendar days is too short a timeframe to give two business days to publish a petition and three business days to wait for it to be submitted for consideration, and then another 10 days to wait for the president's response. This period also includes weekends, meaning that the procedure itself can be longer than the time limit allotted by the Constitution for a veto. Yet, even in such circumstances, Ukrainians have proven that they can unite and close the petition campaign in a day. A striking example is the petition demanding the veto of the law on only partial restoration of asset declarations. In times of war, there is a particularly urgent need to strengthen the tools of digital democracy.

The Holka civic initiative has already appealed to the Presidential Office to amend the Regulations on the publication and consideration of petitions in terms of deadlines. However, even the adjustment of procedural issues will not solve the main problem in the government, which has a representative function from the people, not from "virtuous" business, which may be expected to support them in the elections.

When some Western partners, under the influence of the aggressor state, say that Ukraine needs elections, the President of Ukraine ignoring the will of the citizens does not just play into the hands of lobbyists here in Ukraine. It strengthens the information field with real facts that can be used by enemy propaganda.

Therefore, both "virtuous" business and the president must constantly remember whose interest prevails: the people of Ukraine or big business. And whether it was in the state's interest to create a confrontation between big business and the public right now.

The research methodology can be found [on the website](#) of the Holka civic initiative.



A team that unites representatives of various sectors and participates in the formation of a vision for the development of the state and communities. Anyone can join us. No one will create quality policies for us without us.

+38 098 666 05 63

ngo.holka@gmail.com

