

Ukraine

Capital: Kiev

Population: 47,110,000

Official Language: Ukrainian

Majority Religion: Ukrainian Orthodox (54%)

President: Viktor Yushchenko

Prime Minister: Yuliya Tymoshenko

Political Standing: Democratic Nationalist

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Ukraine:

How it all began:

Ukraine's geographic location between Europe and Asia was an important factor in its early history. The steppes were the domain of Asiatic nomads, the Black Sea coast was inhabited by Greek colonists, and the forests in the northwest were the homeland of the agrarian East Slavic tribes from whom, eventually, the Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian nations evolved. As the East Slavs expanded, they accepted, in the 9th century, a Varangian (Viking) elite that led them to establish a vast domain, centered in Kyiv (Kiev) and called Kievan Rus. It became one of the largest, richest, and most powerful lands in medieval Europe. In 988 Saint Volodymyr (Vladimir), grand prince of Kyiv, accepted Orthodox Christianity, and in this way brought Kievan Rus under the cultural influence of the Byzantine Empire. Inter-princely feuds, shifting trade routes, and recurrent nomadic attacks weakened Kievan Rus, however, and in 1240 it fell to the invading hordes of the Mongol Empire. The western principality of Galicia-Volhynia managed to retain its autonomy for about a century thereafter.

In the mid-14th century the grand duchy of Lithuania gained control of most Ukrainian lands, while the Polish kingdom ruled the western region of Galicia. In 1569 most of Ukraine was annexed into Poland when the Union of Lublin joined the Lithuanian duchy and the Polish kingdom—already linked dynastically since the late 14th century—in a constitutional union, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The colonization of the vast steppes gave rise to the Cossacks, frontier settlers who, in time, became defenders of Ukrainian interests against Polish overlords. In 1648 Bohdan Khmel'nyt'skyy, the Cossack *hetman*, or leader, led a massive uprising against the Poles. Seeking foreign support, he accepted the overlordship of the Russian tsar in 1654 in the Treaty of Pereyaslav. This initiated steady Russian expansion into Ukraine. Hetman Ivan Mazepa attempted to throw off Russian rule in 1708 and 1709 but failed. By 1793, as a result of the first two partitions of Poland (1772 and 1793), all of the Ukrainian lands east of the Dnieper River had come under Russian rule. In 1774 the Crimean Peninsula was annexed by the Russian Empire. Meanwhile, the western regions of Galicia, Bukovina, and Transcarpathia were incorporated into the Austrian Empire beginning in 1772. As a result of these foreign conquests, about 80 percent of Ukrainians lived under the rule of Russia, while the remaining 20 percent lived under the rule of Austria (known as Austria-Hungary from 1867 to 1918).

Catherine the Great, empress of Russia, introduced serfdom in Russian-ruled Ukraine in 1795 and encouraged the colonization of the south, which soon became the leading agricultural region of the empire. As Russian imperial rule became more encompassing, the Ukrainian elite and the cities became Russified. The villages, however, remained distinctly Ukrainian. In the late 19th century, rapid and large-scale industrialization of the Donets'k and Kryvyi Rih regions began, bringing an influx of Russian workers. Sparked by Western ideas and the poetry of Taras Shevchenko, the Ukrainian national movement developed among the intelligentsia. But imperial repression, including bans on the Ukrainian language, kept it weak. In 1848 a widespread revolution in the lands ruled by the Austrian Empire, including Ukraine's western regions, resulted in the emancipation of the serfs and a new constitution; this allowed for the growth of a strong Ukrainian national movement, which was fiercely opposed by the Poles in Galicia. In social and economic terms, however, change in the village-based society was limited and slow.

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The Twentieth Century:

On January 21, 1990, over 300,000 Ukrainians organized a human chain for Ukrainian independence in memory of the 1919 unification of the Ukrainian People's Republic and the West Ukrainian National Republic. Citizens came out to the streets and highways, forming live chains by holding hands in support of unity.

Ukraine declared itself an independent state on August 24, 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and was a founding member of the Commonwealth of Independent States. On December 1, 1991 Ukrainian voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum formalizing independence from the Soviet Union. The Union formally ceased to exist in December 25, 1991, and with this Ukraine's independence was officially recognized by the international community.

The history of Ukraine between 1991 and 2004 was marked by the presidencies of Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma. This was a time of transition for Ukraine. While it had attained nominal independence from Russia, its presidents maintained close ties with their neighbours.

The country adopted its constitution on June 28, 1996.

The Cassette Scandal of 2000 was one of the turning points in post-independence history of the country.

In 2004, Leonid Kuchma announced that he would not run for re-election. Two major candidates emerged in the 2004 presidential election. Viktor Yanukovich, the incumbent Prime Minister, supported by both Kuchma and by the Russian Federation, wanted closer ties with Russia. The main opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, called for Ukraine to turn its attention westward and eventually join the EU. In the runoff election, Yanukovich officially won by a narrow margin, but Yushchenko and his supporters cried foul, alleging that vote rigging and intimidation cost him many votes, especially in eastern Ukraine. A political crisis erupted after the opposition started massive street protests in Kiev and other cities (Orange Revolution), and the Supreme Court of Ukraine ordered the election results null and void. A second runoff found Viktor Yushchenko the winner. 5 days later Viktor Yanukovich resigned from office and his cabinet was dismissed on January 5, 2005.

In March 2006, the Verkhovna Rada elections took place and three months later the official government was formed by the "Anti-Crisis Coalition" among the *Party of Regions*, *Communist*, and *Socialist* parties. The latter party switched from the "Orange Coalition" with *Our Ukraine*, and the *Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc*. The new coalition nominated Viktor Yanukovich for the post of Prime Minister. Yanukovich once again became Prime Minister, while the leader of the Socialist Party, Oleksander Moroz, managed to secure the position of chairman of parliament, which is believed by many to have been the reason for his leaving the Orange Coalition, where he had not been considered for this position.

On April 2, 2007, President Yushchenko dissolved the Verkhovna Rada because members of his party were defecting to the opposition.^[8] His opponents called the move unconstitutional. When they took the matter to the Constitutional Court, Yushchenko dismissed 3 of the court's 18 judges, accusing them of corruption.

Relations between Russia and Ukraine sometimes appear strained. In 2005, a highly-publicized dispute over natural gas prices took place, involving Russian state-owned gas supplier Gazprom, and indirectly involving many European countries which depend on natural gas supplied by Russia through the Ukrainian pipeline. A compromise was reached in January 2006.

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Christianity in Ukraine:

History of Christianity in Ukraine *From Wikipedia*

Dominant role of Byzantine Christianity established

The acceptance of Byzantine (Roman Empire) Christianity as a dominant religion in the area, as well as a state religion, was marked by 988 mass Baptism of Kiev by Vladimir I of Kiev, a ruler of Kievan Rus. After the great East-West Schism that soon followed, the territory of Kievan Rus remained with the Byzantine Patriarch's Eastern Orthodoxy. While most of the Christians in Ukraine were and still are Orthodox, since 1598 an Eastern Rite Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), which claimed varying with time but always a significant membership in western Ukraine, is in full communion with the Catholic see. Still, Eastern Orthodoxy remained a traditional religion in Ukraine and at some points in history was inseparable from most Ukrainians' national self-identity.

The political jurisdiction of Orthodox churches in Ukraine changed several times in its history. Currently, three major Ukrainian Orthodox church bodies coexist, and often compete, in Ukraine: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kiev Patriarchy and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Of them only the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, autonomous under the Patriarch of Moscow, has a canonical standing (legal recognition) within the worldwide Eastern Orthodox Church organization, and operates in communion with the other Eastern Orthodox Churches. However, since the differences within Ukrainian Orthodoxy are purely political rather than doctrinal, this situation may be resolved at some future point with a single Ukrainian Orthodox Church to unite the Orthodox Christians in the nation.

The Protestantism, that had some notable presence in the territory of Ukraine since at least the sixteenth century, was preached for the following centuries mostly by the foreign visitors and settlers. While this situation changed somewhat in the recent decades, the Protestants in today's Ukraine remain a relatively small minority.

Early history

St. Andrew is thought to have preached on the southern borders of Ukraine, along the Black Sea. Legend has it that he travelled up the Dnieper river and reached the future location of Kiev, where he erected a cross on the site where the Church of St. Andrew currently stands, and prophesied the foundation of a great Christian city. A representative from Crimea was present at the First Council of Nicaea (325). Around this time, these churches and the inland farther north came under the control of the Goths, some of whom were Christians.

Christianity became dominant in the territory with the mass Baptism of Kiev in the Dnieper river in 988 by St. Vladimir. Following the Great Schism in 1054, the Kievan Rus' that incorporated most of modern Ukraine ended up on the Eastern Orthodox side of the divided Christian world.

Early on, the Orthodox Christian metropolitans had their seat in Pereyaslav, and later in Kiev. The people of Kiev lost their Metropolitan to Vladimir-Suzdal in 1299, but regained a Ukrainian Metropolitan in Halych in 1303. The religious affairs were also ruled in part by a Metropolitan in Navahradak, (present-day Belarus).

After the Break-up of the Kievan Rus:

In the 1400s, the primacy over the Ukrainian church was restored to Kiev, under the title "Metropolitan of Kiev and Halicia".

Following the Union of Lublin, the polonization of the Ukrainian church was accelerated. Unlike the Roman Catholic church, the Orthodox church in Ukraine was liable to various taxes and legal obligations. The building of new Orthodox churches was strongly discouraged. The Roman Catholics were strictly forbidden to convert to Orthodoxy, and the marriages between Catholics and Orthodox were frowned upon. Orthodox subjects had been increasingly barred from high offices of state.

In the Union of Brest of 1596, a part of the Ukrainian Church was accepted under the jurisdiction of the Roman Pope, becoming a Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). While the new church gained many faithful among the Ukrainians in Galicia and Volhynia, the majority of Ukrainians in the rest of the land remained within Eastern Orthodoxy with the church affairs ruled by then from Kiev under the metropolitan Petro Mohyla. The eastward spread of the Union of Brest led to violent clashes, e.g., assassination of the Uniate archbishop Kuncewicz by the Orthodox mob in Polotsk in 1623.

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Twentieth Century:

Soviet and Post-Soviet period

After the Russian Revolution and the Russian Civil War the Bolsheviks seized power in the Russian Empire and transformed it into the Soviet Union. To them religion had no place in the socialist state. A ruthless campaign was unleashed that in Ukrainian SSR alone as early as December 1918 the first execution of the head of the Ukrainian Exarchate Metropolitan of Kiev and Halych took place. This was only the start which culminated in mass closing and destruction of churches that stood since the days of the Kievan Rus and executions of clergy and followers.

In 1988 with the millennium anniversary of the baptism of Rus, there was yet another shift in the Soviet attitude towards religion the USSR apologized for all repressions towards religion and promised to return all property to the rightful owners. Although what began as a peaceful return of many closed church buildings in the central, eastern and southern Ukraine, in the former-uniatic areas of western Ukraine it was a different story. As UGCC survived in diaspora and in the underground they took their chance and were immediately revived in Ukraine, where in the wake of general liberalization of the Soviet policies in the late-1980s which also prompted the activation of Ukrainian national political movement. The Russian church became viewed by some as an attribute of Soviet occupation, and bitter, often violent clashes over church buildings followed with the ROC slowly losing its parishes to the UGCC. The UAOC also did not wait long and quickly followed suit. Sometimes possessors of Church buildings changes several times within days. All Soviet attempts to pacify the almost-warring church parties were unsuccessful, especially after the UGCC's demand that all property that was held prior to 1939 would be returned.

What historians now see as the reason for the following events was the decision of the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Metropolitan of Kiev and all Ukraine Filaret to achieve total independence of his metropolitan see with or without the approval of the mother church required by the canon law. In November 1991 at a working he headed Metropolitan Filaret requested the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church to grant the Ukrainian Orthodox Church autocephalous status. Patriarch Filaret also gained support of Leonid Kravchuk the then President of Ukraine, who believed that a new independent government should have its own independent church. Knowing of the unpopularity of the UAOC outside Galicia and with their strong friendship ties. Nevertheless Filaret managed to organise a covert communion with the UAOC in case Moscow refused. The sceptical hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church called for a full Synodical council in March-April of 1992 where this issue would have been discussed, upon arrival most of the clergy of the UOC who initially supported Filaret, openly criticised this move and immediately the votes turned against him. In the end the council voted for Filaret to retire from his position which was confirmed by a sworn.

With only three bishops remaining at his support Filaret initiated the unification with the UAOC, and in June 1992 a new Church was created the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kiev Patriarchy (UOC-KP) with 94-year-old Patriarch Mstyslav as a leader. While chosen as his assistant, Filaret was de-facto ruling the Church. A few of the Autocephalous bishops and clergy who opposed such situation refused to join the new Church and following the death of Mstyslav a year later the church was once again ripped through a schism and most of the UAOC parishes were regained when the churches re-separated in July 1993. Most of the fate of control of church buildings was decided by the church parishes, but when most refused to follow Filaret, paramilitaries carried out raids bringing property under their control.

Various Religions include; Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kiev Patriarchy (UOC-KP), Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), and the Roman Catholic church and various Protestant churches currently hold a very small but growing membership in Ukraine.

Protestantism in Ukraine:

Protestantism arrived to Ukraine together with German immigrants in the 18th century, who were initially granted religious freedom by the Russian Imperial authorities, unlike the native population. One of earliest Protestant groups in Ukraine were Studists German Evangelical sect that spread from German villages in Bessarabia and Ekaterinoslav province to the neighbouring Ukrainian population. Protestantism in Ukraine rapidly grew during the liberal reforms of Alexander II in the 1860s. However, towards the end of the century authorities started to restrict Protestant proselytism of the Orthodox Christians, especially by the Studists, routinely preventing prayer meetings and other activities. At the same time Baptists, another major Protestant group that was growing in Ukraine, were treated less harshly due to their powerful international connections. In the early 20th century, Volyn became the main centre of the spread of Protestantism in Ukraine. During the Soviet period Protestantism, together with Orthodox Christianity, was persecuted in Ukraine, but the 1980s marked the start of another major expansion of Protestant proselytism in Ukraine.

Today largest Protestant groups in Ukraine include Baptists, Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists. Of note is Hillsong church in Kiev. Despite the rapid growth and aggressive missionary activities, even today Protestants in Ukraine remain a small minority in a largely Orthodox Christian country.

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Politics:

There are some 120 political parties active in Ukraine. They fall roughly into four different categories: radical nationalist, democratic nationalist, liberal-centrist, and Communist-socialist.

The **radical nationalist** parties are fearful of Russia and advocate a strong presidency. Their commitment to democracy— particularly if regions of Ukraine seek to secede—is not firm. The **democratic nationalist** parties are also fearful of Russia, but also appear strongly committed to democracy, individual rights, and the protection of private property. The influential Rukh Party (Ukrainian Popular Movement), which won 43 seats in the 1998 elections, belongs to this group. The **liberal-centrist** parties are particularly concerned with promoting free market economic reform. They are also committed to democracy and individual rights. The **communist-socialist** parties oppose privatization and seek continued state control of the economy. They generally favor close relations with Russia. The most important party in this group, the Communist Party of Ukraine, won 116 seats in 1998.

About Viktor Yushchenko:

President Viktor Andriyovych Yushchenko was born on February 23, 1954 in Khoruzhivka, Sumy Oblast, Ukrainian SSR, into a family of teachers. His father, Andriy Andriyovych Yushchenko (1919-1992), fought in the Second World War, where German forces captured and placed him in numerous concentration camps throughout Poland and Germany, including the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp as a POW. He survived the ordeal. After returning home, Andriy Yushchenko taught English at a local school. Viktor's mother, Varvara Tymofiyovna Yushchenko (1918-2005), taught physics and mathematics at the same school.



Viktor Yushchenko graduated from the Ternopil Finance and Economics Institute, and began his profession as an accountant. After completing his studies (1975), he worked as a deputy to the chief accountant in a kolkhoz, then served as a conscript in the Border Guard unit of KGB on the Soviet–Turkish border (1975-1976).

In 2002, Yushchenko became the leader of the Our Ukraine (*Nasha Ukrayina*) political coalition, which received a plurality of seats in the year's election to Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament) . However, the number of seats won wasn't enough for a majority, and the efforts to form it together with other opposition parties failed. Since then, Yushchenko has remained the leader and public face of the "Our Ukraine" ("Nasha Ukrayina") parliament faction.

Yushchenko was widely regarded as the moderate political leader of the anti-Kuchma opposition, since other opposition parties were less influential and had fewer seats in parliament.

Since the end of his term as prime minister, Yushchenko has become a charismatic political figure popular among Ukrainians in the western and central regions of the country. As of 2001–2004, his rankings in popularity polls were higher than those of the president at the time, Leonid Kuchma.

As a politician, Viktor Yushchenko is widely perceived as a mixture of Western-oriented and moderate Ukrainian nationalist. He also advocates moving Ukraine in the direction of Europe and NATO, promoting free market reforms, reforming medicine, education and the social system, preserving Ukraine's culture, rebuilding important historical monuments, and remembering Ukraine's history, including the Holodomor famine-genocide of 1932-33. His opponents (and allies) sometimes criticize him for indecision and secrecy, while advocates call the same attributes signs of Yushchenko's commitment to teamwork, consensus, and negotiation. He is also often accused of being unable to form a unified team free of inner quarrels.

Since becoming the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko has been an honorary leader of "Our Ukraine" party. In the latest parliament election in March 2006, the party, led by Prime Minister Yekhanurov received less than 14% of the national vote and took third place behind the Party of Regions, and the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc. In 2008 Viktor Yushchenko popularity has plunged even lower to less of 10 % .

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Other Tid Bits:

- ⇒ According to Ethnologue, there are 31 million speakers of Ukrainian in Ukraine with another 8 or more million in Russia and in the former republics of the Soviet Union, as well as in Eastern Europe, U.S., Canada, and Latin America.
- ⇒ Today, Ukrainian is the official language of the Republic of Ukraine. Approximately 83% of its 47.5 million inhabitants speak Ukrainian as their first language.
- ⇒ In northern and central Ukraine, Russian is the language of the urban population, while in rural areas, Ukrainian is much more common. In the south and the east of Ukraine, Russian is prevalent even in rural areas, and in Crimea, Ukrainian is almost absent. In Kiev, both Russian and Ukrainian are spoken today, a shift from the recent past when the city was primarily Russian-speaking. Other languages include Romanian, Polish and Hungarian
- ⇒ As of 2007 the population was approximately 46,299,862 people. However, as the estimated population growth is -0.68%, the estimated population for 2050 is only 33,573,842. A decrease of almost 13 million people!
- ⇒ The Capital City of Ukraine is Kiev.
- ⇒ Kiev's population is approximately 1,470,000 people.
- ⇒ 73 percent of the people in Ukraine are Ukrainian. 23 percent are Russian and a variety of ethnic groups make up the final 5 percent.
- ⇒ Female life expectancy in Ukraine is 74 years while a male's life expectancy is 62.2 years. The average being 68 years
- ⇒ Ukraine has a very high literacy rate at 100 percent. The required schooling is 9 years.
- ⇒ They are a republican nation with a president and a prime Minister.
- ⇒ Currency is hryvnia
- ⇒ Ukraine gained its independence in 1991, with the break-up of the former Soviet Union
- ⇒ Rich in natural resources, Ukraine was once called the 'Breadbasket of Europe' because of its fertile soil and beneficial climate conditions. Sadly, the tragic 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident (just north of Kiev) still lingers, and dangerous land contamination and radioactivity concerns are still viable problems. To read more about this incident go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chernobyl_accident

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Kharkiv the semi-mythical founder



The gold-crusted domes of the 11th century Monastery of Caves shine in the sunset in Kiev, Ukraine



Monastery Bell in Kiev

