



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

▶ EUROPE

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Ukraine, located in southeastern Europe, covers 233,090 square miles (603,700 square kilometers) and is slightly smaller than Texas. Forests cover some 18 percent of territory, chiefly in the Carpathian Mountains and in the northern regions. Southern Ukraine is dominated by steppes with fertile soil. Ukraine's black soil gives it great potential as a food producer. The Crimean Peninsula extends into the Black Sea, with its northeastern coast on the Sea of Azov and its southern coast marked by the Crimean Mountains. Europe's largest wetlands (Prip'yat Marshes) are located in a forested northern basin of the Dnipro and Prip'yat rivers. Ukraine has cold winters and warm summers, although a Mediterranean climate prevails in the Crimea.

History. Ukraine has been inhabited since about 1500 BC, but the Slavic ancestors of today's Ukrainians did not begin to settle the region until the seventh century AD. In the eighth and ninth centuries, seven Slavic tribes merged under the leadership of a Norse tribe (Varangians) to form the state of Kievan Rus'. A prominent early leader, Volodymyr I (ruled 980–1015), converted to Christianity and established close ties with the Byzantine (Eastern Orthodox) church. Kievan Rus' weakened in the 12th and 13th centuries to the point that Mongol invasions in 1220 and 1240 destroyed the state.

Despite some independent principalities, the Ukrainians were without unity and autonomy for many centuries. The Mongols held the east even as expansionist Poland and Lithuania controlled the west. The Mongols were eventually forced out, and by the mid-1500s, Poland and Lithuania (which had merged) controlled most Ukrainian lands. The Poles introduced Western Christianity, which clashed with Eastern Christianity and embittered the people against their rulers.

Rebellion soon followed, the most notable being carried out by a self-governing group called *Kozaks* (Zaporozhian Cossacks). The military strength of the Kozaks allowed them autonomy and reduced the influence of Poland and the Roman Catholic Church in the area. The Kozaks waged a national liberation war (1648–54) under the leadership of Kozak *hetman* (military chieftain) Bohdan Khmelnytsky. In 1654, he signed an alliance with Russia against the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom. A Kozak state was carved out of the east (the west remained with Poland), and it prospered for a century. During the reign of Russia's Catherine the Great, Russia defeated the Kozaks (1775) and took control of the east. Later that year, Russia gained dominion over the west by partitioning Poland. Ukraine became a Russian province and so remained until the monarchy fell in 1917.

Ukraine declared independence but was occupied by Germany in World War I and was then forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1922. Western Ukraine, which identified with Europe, greatly resented the imposed Russification of its culture. Communist repression was greatest under Stalin, who collectivized farms and thereby caused the 1933 famine (*holodomor*) that took seven million lives. Dissidents were imprisoned or executed, and use of the Ukrainian language was limited.

Language restrictions and repression eased after Stalin's death. Disaster struck the republic in 1986 with the meltdown of a nuclear reactor at Chornobyl (north of Kyiv). Radioactive contamination caused by the explosion killed many people, ruined the surrounding land, and affected much of eastern Europe. In June 2000, the government announced that the Chornobyl nuclear power plant would be closed down.

Ukraine

Hopes for independence strengthened as the Soviet empire weakened. Local elections in 1990 paved the way for official independence in August 1991. Leonid Kravchuk became the first president. Ukraine's possession of nuclear weapons and its poor relations with Russia hindered progress on some economic and social fronts. In 1993, however, Ukraine ratified the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), agreeing to destroy the bulk of its nuclear warheads. Elections in 1994 brought Leonid Kuchma to office as president. In June 1996, the country adopted a new democratic constitution.

The Kuchma regime suffered from inefficiency and corruption, giving way to the election of Kuchma's prime minister, Viktor Yanukovich, as president in November 2004. However, the election was marred by voting irregularities and scandals, including the near-fatal poisoning of the opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko. Yushchenko and his supporters began a massive campaign of civil protests, dubbed the "Orange Revolution," that led to Yushchenko's victory in a second round of elections called by the Supreme Court.

The pro-Western course of the Yushchenko government includes movement toward integration with the European Union. However, Ukraine faces a variety of problems, including corruption, political scandal, crime, and economic difficulty. It continues working to balance relationships with Russia and the West.

THE PEOPLE

Population. Ukraine's population of 46.7 million is decreasing annually by 0.6 percent. Ethnic Ukrainians comprise 78 percent of the population. Ethnic Russians (17 percent) live mainly in the east and in Crimea, where they comprise two-thirds of the population. Despite recent agreements between Russia and Ukraine, ethnic Russians are expected to continue pressing for autonomy in Crimea. Smaller groups include Jews, Tatars, Poles, Germans, Hungarians, Romanians, and Greeks. Tatars live in Crimea but lack citizenship rights. They were expelled by the Soviets in 1944 but have returned in small groups since 1989. Large numbers of ethnic Ukrainians reside in western Europe, North America, and other areas. In Ukraine, more than two-thirds of the people live in urban areas. Kyiv, the capital, is the largest and oldest city.

Language. The official language is Ukrainian, a Slavic language written in the Cyrillic alphabet of 33 letters. During the Soviet period, Russian was also an official language. Russian is no longer as prominent, but it is still widely spoken and is the primary language of ethnic Russians and other ethnic groups. Many Ukrainians in Kyiv and cities east of the Dnipro also speak Russian. More than half of the population is bilingual. Minorities often also speak their respective languages, including Polish, Hungarian, and Romanian. New language laws guarantee ethnic minorities the right to use their native language for public and judicial business.

Religion. Christianity is the dominant religion of Ukraine, represented by Orthodox (Russian and Ukrainian), Greek Catholic (Uniate), and Roman Catholic churches. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church split from its parent Orthodox Church in Russia in 1992; it has no official status. Catholicism is found mostly in the west. Communism encouraged people to abandon their religious beliefs, but many Ukrainians maintained their devout heritage. So once religious freedom began to be allowed in the late 1980s, Christianity began to revive. The trend intensified with independence, and today Christians also include small but growing groups of Protestants and other

denominations. Jews now represent only 1 percent of the population, but their numbers were much higher prior to World War II. Ukraine is home to many sacred Jewish sites.

General Attitudes. Ukrainians consider themselves a merry people, prone to singing and dancing. They appreciate openness and wit, as well as humor. Individualism is also valued, although it was somewhat muted during the Soviet era. Friendships play an important role for most Ukrainians, and neighbors are generally supportive of each other.

The nationalism and euphoria of independence have waned. Many Ukrainians are nostalgic for the poor but stable way of life they had under the Soviet regime. Ukrainian society is experiencing great transition. Those accustomed to Soviet work patterns are learning the meaning and value of private enterprise, individual labor, and personal initiative. At the same time, Ukrainians have been faced with economic hardships and other problems that have led to cynicism toward the ruling elite and disenchantment with reform and democracy.

Personal Appearance. Most Ukrainian fashions are similar to those in other European countries. Professional men wear suits, ties, and hats. Women wear pantsuits, dresses, or skirts. Stylish clothing is important to urban women. Clothing is often imported and is quite expensive. Outside of urban centers many women have sewing machines and make clothes for their families. They may also knit sweaters, hats, and scarves for the winter. Taste and tidiness are important; it is improper to wear wrinkled or soiled clothes.

The older generation dresses more conservatively; elderly women in rural areas usually wear dresses and cover their heads with scarves. On special occasions (e.g., weddings, festivals, and religious holidays), people in western Ukraine often wear the national outfit. The most traditional item, called a *vyshyvanka*, is a shirt or blouse embroidered in one of several regional patterns, which have not changed for centuries.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. When meeting informally, men and women usually wave the hand and give a verbal greeting like *Pryvit* (Hi) or *Dobryj den'* (Good day). *Dobryj den'* is also appropriate in formal situations, in which case people often shake hands. Men wait for women to extend their hand first. In official situations, Ukrainians use titles, including professional titles and *Pan* (Mr.), *Pani* (Mrs.), *Panna* (Miss), or *Panove* ("Sirs" or "Gentlemen"). Relatives and close friends often kiss on the cheek and hug when greeting. They address each other by first name. A respectful form of address includes the first name followed by the patronymic, which is the father's given name and a gender-specific (for son or daughter) suffix. For example, if a man named Ivan had a father named Mykola, Ivan's patronymic name would be Mykolayovich.

Gestures. Hand and body gestures are used only moderately in daily conversation. It is important to establish eye contact a few times (but not constantly) during a conversation. Facial expressions are reserved. Smiling at strangers is rare and viewed as flirtatious. Approval is expressed by nodding the head. Pointing with the index finger is considered uncultured, but some people do it anyway. To speak to a superior (teacher, boss, official, or senior) with one's hands in the pockets or arms folded across the chest is viewed as disrespectful and cause for reprimand. Chewing gum while talking is also improper. Women expect some chivalry from men. It is rude for a man to not open a door for a woman. Men commonly help women carry heavy items or at least offer to do so. When on

public transportation, men may offer their seats to women, though more often youth do so for elders.

Visiting. Because of the Ukrainian tradition of hospitality, people welcome both expected and unexpected guests. Still, visits arranged in advance are preferred whenever possible. Friends, neighbors, and relatives often visit just to socialize. In these cases, guests are always offered tea or coffee and some refreshments. Guests invited for dinner are offered a more abundant meal and are expected to stay for a while afterward. They commonly present their hosts with flowers (only in odd numbers), cake, a bottle of liquor, or candy or toys for the children. Guests do not sit on the floor or put their feet on furniture. It is polite to stand when a woman enters the room.

Eating. Ukrainians eat a light *snidanok* (breakfast) in the morning before leaving for school or work. The main meal, eaten in midafternoon, is called *obid*. It consists of two main courses, the first being some kind of soup, the second containing meat or fish. Working people usually bring food from home or go to *canteens* (cafés) for *obid*. The third meal, *vecheria*, is eaten at 6 or 7 p.m., and family members usually eat it together. When eating, Ukrainians keep hands (not elbows) on the table. It is improper to leave the hands in the lap. People eat with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. Leaving food on one's plate is considered wasteful. Guests honor the hosts when they ask for second helpings; refusing additional servings is seen as a gesture of modesty. Because of economic difficulties and the unavailability of restaurants during the communist era, most people dine out only for special occasions.

LIFESTYLE

Family. The family unit is important in Ukraine, and extended family ties are valued. The average family has one or two children and is led by the father. Both parents usually work outside the home. Many elderly parents live with their adult children, and grandparents often assume responsibility for daily child care. Women perform most household chores.

The elderly are treated with love and respect. It is a common practice for parents to support children until they reach adulthood and even after they are married. In turn, children care for aging parents when it becomes necessary. When grandparents live in the country and adult children live in the city, the grandchildren may be sent to live with the grandparents for several weeks during the summer.

Housing. Most urban Ukrainians live in multi-storey apartment buildings erected when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union. Only in Kiev, Odessa, and one or two of the other larger cities are there many houses that predate the Soviet era. The Soviet apartments, which tend to be quite small, used to be allocated by the government. During the economic reforms of the early 1990s, inhabitants were allowed to buy them for a nominal fee, virtually nothing.

People buying homes since then have generally had to pay cash, as mortgages remain rare. Some affordable apartments are still leased from the government, as renting from a private owner is expensive. In rural areas, the size of homes can vary significantly. It is not uncommon, even in small houses, for several generations of the same family to live together. For the most part, Ukrainians decorate their homes very colorfully. A lot of homes boast flowery wallpaper, cabinets displaying crystal, and bright carpets both covering the floor and hanging from the walls. Suburban families have most modern conveniences (electricity, gas, and water), while rural people don't always have these conveniences.

Dating and Marriage. Young Ukrainians meet at discos and concerts, in school and at work, and through friends. From April to October they spend a lot of time in parks, engaging in a variety of outdoor activities. When dating, they usually visit friends, go to bars or movies, or dance at discos. Couples usually marry in their early twenties. A marriage is legal only if performed in a city hall or in a "wedding palace." Most couples today also have a religious ceremony.

Urban wedding parties are fancy but do not involve much tradition. On the other hand, rural weddings are big events that usually last for three days. Such weddings resemble a combination of a grand party and a performance since many people are responsible for completing traditional acts. For example, at some point the bride must be "stolen." The successful thieves "demand" a ransom for her return.

Life Cycle. During the first month of a baby's life, few people come to the house. On the day a baby is christened into the Orthodox Church, a big party is held. Close family members, particularly grandparents, are always welcome. Before starting school, Ukrainian children often end up spending considerable time with their grandmothers.

When someone dies, the family covers the mirrors in the home with linen. Relatives and friends follow the coffin, along with a brass band that typically plays Chopin, to the cemetery. After the funeral procession and ceremony, mourners return to the family home for a wake, where refreshments are served. A small glass of vodka with a piece of bread on top is traditionally put out for the deceased. The glass remains in place until the liquid has evaporated. Small wakes are also held nine days and forty days after a death.

Diet. Vegetables, breads, dairy products, and starchy foods are basic staples of the Ukrainian diet. Pork and beef are popular meats. Poultry, sausages, and preserved meats are also widely available. The most popular Ukrainian dishes are made of cereal grains and flour pastes. Common grains include buckwheat, oats, and millet. Rice is imported. Popular dishes include *varenyky* (stuffed dumplings), *holubtsi* (cabbage leaves stuffed with ground meat and rice), and *kasha* (cooked or baked cereal). *Kasha* is served with either meat or poultry. Chicken Kyiv (Kiev) is known worldwide. Ukraine is one of the few areas in Europe where corn-on-the-cob is eaten. Soup is essential; *borsch* is the most popular. *Borsch* usually contains cabbage, beets, potatoes, carrots, and meat, which is optional. It can be served hot or cold, with or without sour cream, and there are several varieties according to locality and season. Crepes and pancakes are also popular.

Ukrainians enjoy seasonal fruits such as apples, pears, plums, berries, and melons. Fresh produce is available but very expensive in the winter, so in summer and autumn people make numerous preserves for the winter months.

Recreation. On weekends, young people enjoy leaving the city and camping on a riverbank or in the woods. Hiking and skiing are also popular activities. In the summer, people enjoy swimming, volleyball, soccer, and table tennis. Fishing and soccer are especially popular with men. Watching television or visiting friends is a typical leisure activity.

Urban Ukrainians with *dachas* (country houses) spend much time there tending a garden, making preserves, and relaxing. People without *dachas* often have a small garden plot near the city. Theaters and musical concerts are available in cities. Rural people get together on weekends to play music, sing, and dance. Literature is important to Ukrainians, and most are avid readers.

Ukraine

The Arts. During the Soviet era, the government often used the fine arts as propaganda, but Ukrainian culture was preserved through folk songs and legends. Folk songs are sung a cappella or are accompanied by instruments such as the *sopilka* (flute), *volynka* (hornpipe), and stringed *bandura* (similar to a many-stringed guitar or lute), which is Ukraine's national instrument. The *hopak* is a showy Ukrainian folk dance in which men jump, twirl, and kick, and women perform simpler movements. Ukrainian folk dance groups are very popular and perform all over the world. Ukraine is known worldwide for the delicate art of Easter-egg painting (*pysanka*), which is still practiced with great skill today. Embroidered clothing and tapestries are also well appreciated.

Ukraine's independence has meant greater artistic freedom. Government funding for the arts has been drastically reduced, though most entrance fees and tickets are still affordable for the majority of the population, and many Ukrainians frequent museums and theaters.

Holidays. On New Year's, Ukrain's most popular holiday, people decorate fir trees and have parties that often last through the night. Religious holidays are regaining prominence. Christmas, celebrated on 25 December by Catholics and on 7 January by Orthodox Christians, is particularly popular in western Ukraine and rural areas. During the Christmas season, children go door-to-door to receive candies and cookies in exchange for *koliadki* (Christmas carols) and jokes.

Easter is observed throughout the country. Family and friends gather to visit and prepare painted eggs and *paskha* (special cakes).

National holidays include International Women's Day (8 Mar.), Solidarity Day (1 May), Victory Day (9 May), and Independence Day (24 Aug.). An old holiday, Soviet Army Day (23 Feb.) is unofficially celebrated as a sort of Men's Day. On Women's Day, women receive flowers and gifts, household help from husbands, and a day off from work. Special attention is paid to mothers, and girls are congratulated as future women. Victory Day marks the end of World War II and is extremely important to most families.

SOCIETY

Government. Ukraine is a parliamentary democracy led by a strong executive president (currently Viktor Yushchenko), who is directly elected for a five-year term. Parliament (*Verkhovna Rada*) has 450 members, who are also directly elected. A large number of political parties are represented. The prime minister (currently Viktor Yanukovich) is the head of government. All citizens may vote at age 18.

Economy. Ukraine was the Soviet Union's "breadbasket" because it produced more than one-fourth of the USSR's agriculture. The potential for an agriculturally based economy exists, but it cannot be tapped without significant reform. Farms must be modernized and laborers must adjust to wage work; however, government privatization has been slow.

During the Soviet era, large coal and iron deposits contributed to the development of a sizable industrial base that produced goods for many other republics. In fact, Ukraine was the second most productive Soviet republic (behind Russia). But industry also requires materials from outside Ukraine, and these can now be purchased only with hard (convertible) currencies, which are in short supply. The country also has a large

POPULATION & AREA

Population	46,710,816 (rank=27)
Area, sq. mi.	233,090 (rank=43)
Area, sq. km.	603,700

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	77 of 177 countries
Adjusted for women	62 of 140 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$6,394
Adult literacy rate	99% (male); 99% (female)
Infant mortality rate	14 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	60 (male); 72 (female)

defense industry that must begin creating consumer-oriented products before it can become profitable.

Corruption, political opposition, and continued state subsidies to unprofitable industries and collective farms have hindered growth and foreign investment in recent years. Reforms and improvements in infrastructure are needed to stabilize the cash-strapped economy and overcome large public debts. Many goods and services are bartered or traded informally; in fact, the size of Ukraine's unofficial economy rivals the official economy. High inflation and underemployment are ongoing problems. Ukraine's currency is the *hryvnia* (UAH).

Transportation and Communications. Urban public transportation is efficient. Streetcars, buses, and trolleys are the main means of transport, but major cities also have subways. Most families do not own cars. Roads are extensive but are often in poor repair. Fuel is expensive, which also makes taxis expensive and sometimes hard to find. Unofficial "taxis" often pick up people who ask for a ride.

Rural people get around on bicycles; buses or trains take them to nearby towns. The railroad network is developed, although trains are in need of modernization. Air Ukraine is the domestic airline. Telephone and postal services have improved but are still inadequate. The press is active, but newspapers and television are tightly controlled by different political groups, both by the government and the opposition. Many local radio and television stations are private.

Education. Education is highly valued in Ukraine. Children are required to attend school from age six to fifteen, when they finish middle school. Most teenagers prefer to go to high school for two more years and prepare to enter a university. Others choose to work during the day and attend school in the evening, train at schools specializing in certain careers, or enter job-training programs. Universities are located in major cities. Entrance exams are required by all institutions of higher education.

Health. Medical care is free, but service is poor. Although medical advice is available, treatment is often inadequate because facilities frequently lack basic supplies and modern equipment. Pollution levels are high and tap water is not safe to drink. Cancer and other problems stemming from the Chernobyl nuclear accident continue to afflict a large portion of the population.

AT A GLANCE

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