MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE

NATIONAL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

“KHARKOV POLYTECHNICAL INSTITUTE”

**THE HISTORY OF UKRAINE**

Created by student of 1.КН.201.8г

Chukwu Irele omike

[**History**](https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Ukraine)

**Prehistory**

From prehistoric times, [migration](https://www.britannica.com/science/migration-animal) and settlement patterns in the territories of present-day Ukraine varied fundamentally along the lines of three geographic zones. The [Black Sea](https://www.britannica.com/place/Black-Sea) coast was for centuries in the sphere of the contemporary [Mediterranean](https://www.britannica.com/place/Mediterranean-Sea) maritime powers. The open [steppe](https://www.britannica.com/place/the-Steppe), funneling from the east across southern Ukraine and toward the mouth of the [Danube River](https://www.britannica.com/place/Danube-River), formed a natural gateway to Europe for successive waves of nomadic horsemen from [Central Asia](https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Central-Asia). And the mixed forest-steppe and forest belt of north-central and western Ukraine supported an agricultural population (most notably the [Trypillya](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Trypillya-culture) [culture](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture) of the mid-5th to 3rd millennia bce), linked by waterways to northern and central [Europe](https://www.britannica.com/place/Europe). The marshlands of these zones were frequent areas of both military conflict and cultural transmission.

Beginning in the 7th–6th centuries bce, numerous [Greek](https://www.britannica.com/place/ancient-Greece) colonies were founded on the northern coast of the Black Sea, on the [Crimean Peninsula](https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimean-Peninsula), and along the [Sea of Azov](https://www.britannica.com/place/Sea-of-Azov); these Hellenic outposts later came under the [hegemony](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hegemony) of the Roman Empire (*see* [ancient Greek civilization](https://www.britannica.com/place/ancient-Greece); [ancient Rome](https://www.britannica.com/place/ancient-Rome)). During the 1st millennium bce the steppe hinterland was occupied successively by the [Cimmerians](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cimmerian), [Scythians](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Scythian), and [Sarmatians](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sarmatian). These peoples, all of Iranian stock, maintained commercial and cultural relations with the Greek colonies.



**Ukraine: historical regions**Historical regions of Ukraine.*Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*

A period of great [migrations](https://www.britannica.com/topic/human-migration) began with the descent of the [Goths](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Goth) from the [Baltic](https://www.britannica.com/place/Baltic-Sea) region into Ukraine about 200 ce. They displaced the Sarmatians, but their own power was broken about 375 by the invading [Huns](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hun-people) from the east, who were followed in the 5th–6th centuries by the [Bulgars](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bulgar) and [Avars](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Avar). Between the 7th and 9th centuries, the Ukrainian steppe formed part of the Turkic [Khazar](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Khazar) mercantile empire, which was centred on the lower [Volga River](https://www.britannica.com/place/Volga-River). Khazar control of the steppe was [breached](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/breached) in the late 9th century by the [Magyars](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hungarian-people) ([Hungarians](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hungarian-people)). The [Pechenegs](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pechenegs), who followed, dominated much of southern Ukraine in the 10th and 11th centuries, and they were in turn succeeded by the Polovtsians ([Cumans](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cuman)). Throughout this period of nomadic invasions, only a few of the Greek settlements on the Crimean Peninsula, notably [Chersonesus](https://www.britannica.com/place/Chersonesus) (*see* [Tauric Chersonese](https://www.britannica.com/place/Tauric-Chersonese)), maintained a precarious existence, relying on the support of the [Byzantine Empire](https://www.britannica.com/place/Byzantine-Empire).

In the meantime, under the impact of Germanic migrations, the movement of [Slavic](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Slav) tribes from their [primordial](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/primordial) homeland north of the [Carpathians](https://www.britannica.com/place/Carpathian-Mountains) began in the 5th and 6th centuries. While some [Slavs](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Slav) migrated westward and others south into the [Balkans](https://www.britannica.com/place/Balkans), the [East Slavs](https://www.britannica.com/topic/East-Slav) occupied the forest and forest-steppe regions of what are now western and north-central Ukraine and southern [Belarus](https://www.britannica.com/place/Belarus); they expanded farther north and to the northeast into territories of the future Russian state centred on [Moscow](https://www.britannica.com/place/Moscow). The East Slavs practiced agriculture and [animal husbandry](https://www.britannica.com/science/animal-husbandry), engaged in such domestic industries as cloth making and ceramics, and built fortified settlements, many of which later developed into important commercial and political centres. Among such early settlements was [Kiev](https://www.britannica.com/place/Kiev) (Kyiv), on the high right (western) bank of the [Dnieper River](https://www.britannica.com/place/Dnieper-River).

[**Kievan Rus**](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kievan-Rus)

The formation of the Kievan state that began in the mid-9th century, the role of the [Varangians](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Viking-people) ([Vikings](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Viking-people)) in this process, and the name [Rus](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rus) by which this state came to be known are all matters of controversy among historians. It is clear, however, that this formation was connected with developments in [international trade](https://www.britannica.com/topic/international-trade) and the new prominence of the [Dnieper](https://www.britannica.com/place/Dnieper-River) route from the Baltic to Byzantium, on which Kiev was strategically sited. Trade along this route was controlled by Varangian merchant-warriors, and from their ranks came the progenitors of the Kievan princes, who were, however, soon Slavicized. In the early chronicles the Varangians were also called [Rus](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rus), and this corporate name became a territorial [designation](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/designation) for the Kievan region—the basic territory of the Rus; later, by extension, it was applied to the entire territory ruled by members of the Kievan [dynasty](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dynasty).

By the end of the 10th century, the Kievan domain covered a vast area from the edge of the open steppe in Ukraine as far north as [Lake Ladoga](https://www.britannica.com/place/Lake-Ladoga) and the upper Volga basin. Like other [medieval](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/medieval) states, it did not develop central political institutions but remained a loose aggregation of principalities ruling what was a dynastic clan enterprise. Kiev reached its [apogee](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apogee) in the reigns of Volodymyr the Great ([Vladimir I](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vladimir-I)) and his son [Yaroslav I](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Yaroslav-the-Wise) (the Wise). In 988 Volodymyr adopted [Christianity](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity) as the religion of his realm and had the inhabitants of Kiev baptized. Rus entered the orbit of [Byzantine](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Byzantine) (later, Orthodox) Christianity and culture. A church [hierarchy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hierarchy) was established, headed (at least since 1037) by the metropolitan of Kiev, who was usually appointed by the patriarch of Constantinople. With the new religion came new forms of architecture, art, and music, a written language ([Old Church Slavonic](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Old-Church-Slavonic-language)), and the beginnings of a literary culture. All these were vigorously promoted by Yaroslav, who also [promulgated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/promulgated) a code of laws, the first in Slavdom. Although Byzantium and the steppe remained his main preoccupations in external policy, Yaroslav maintained friendly relations with European rulers, with whom he established marital alliances for his progeny.

Following Yaroslav’s death, Kiev entered a long period of decline, only briefly stemmed in the 12th century under [Volodymyr II Monomakh](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vladimir-II-Monomakh) ([Vladimir II Monomakh](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vladimir-II-Monomakh)). Shifts in trade routes undermined Kiev’s economic importance, while warfare with the [Polovtsians](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kipchak-people) in the steppe sapped its wealth and energies. Succession struggles and princely rivalries eroded Kiev’s political hegemony. The ascendancy of new centres and the clustering of principalities around them reflected regional cleavages—historical, economic, and tribal ethnic—that had persisted even in the period of Kiev’s predominance. These differences were accentuated by the [Mongol](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mongol)-[Tatar](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tatar) invasions that began in the 1220s and culminated in the devastating sack of Kiev in 1240.

The territory that largely coincides with modern [Belarus](https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Belarus), with [Polotsk](https://www.britannica.com/place/Polatsk) as the most important centre, was one such emerging region. The land of [Novgorod](https://www.britannica.com/place/Veliky-Novgorod) to its north was another. In the northeast, Vladimir-[Suzdal](https://www.britannica.com/place/Suzdal) (and later Moscow) formed the core from which developed the future Russian state (*see also* [Grand Principality of Moscow](https://www.britannica.com/place/Grand-Principality-of-Moscow)). On Ukrainian territory, in the southwestern part of Rus, Galicia-Volhynia emerged as the leading principality.

Volodymyr (modern [Volodymyr-Volynskyy](https://www.britannica.com/place/Volodymyr-Volynskyy)) in [Volhynia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Volhynia) had been an important princely seat in Kievan Rus; and [Galicia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Galicia-region-Spain), with its seat at Halych, on the [Dniester River](https://www.britannica.com/place/Dniester-River), became a principality in the 12th century. In 1199 the two principalities were united by Prince [Roman Mstyslavych](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Roman-Mstislavich) to form a powerful and rich state that at times included the domains of Kiev. Galicia-Volhynia reached its highest eminence under Roman’s son [Danylo](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Daniel-Romanovich) ([Daniel Romanovich](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Daniel-Romanovich)). New cities were founded, most importantly [Lviv](https://www.britannica.com/place/Lviv-Ukraine); trade—especially with [Poland](https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland) and [Hungary](https://www.britannica.com/place/Hungary), as well as [Byzantium](https://www.britannica.com/place/Byzantine-Empire)—brought considerable prosperity; and culture flourished, with marked new influences from the West. In 1253 Danylo (in a bid for aid from the West) even accepted the royal crown from Pope [Innocent IV](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Innocent-IV) and recognized him as head of the church, although nothing substantial came from this. Danylo’s reign also witnessed the rise of [boyar](https://www.britannica.com/topic/boyar)-magnate unrest, debilitating dynastic involvements with Poland and Hungary, and the Mongol invasion of 1240–41. These marked the onset of Galicia-Volhynia’s decline, which continued until the extinction of Roman’s dynasty in 1340.

**Lithuanian and Polish rule**

By the middle of the 14th century, Ukrainian territories were under the rule of three external powers—the [Golden Horde](https://www.britannica.com/place/Golden-Horde), the [grand duchy of Lithuania](https://www.britannica.com/place/grand-duchy-of-Lithuania), and the kingdom of Poland.

The steppe and [Crimea](https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimean-Peninsula), whose coastal towns and maritime trade were now in the hands of the Venetians and Genoese, formed part of the direct domains of the Tatar Golden Horde. This was the westernmost successor of [Genghis Khan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Genghis-Khan)’s [Mongol empire](https://www.britannica.com/place/Mongol-empire), whose khan resided at Sarai on the [Volga River](https://www.britannica.com/place/Volga-River). By the mid-15th century the Golden Horde was in a process of disintegration. One of its successor states was the [Crimean khanate](https://www.britannica.com/place/khanate-of-Crimea), which after 1475 accepted the suzerainty of the sultans of the [Ottoman Empire](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire). Both the Crimean Peninsula and large areas of the adjoining steppe continued under the khanate’s rule until its [annexation](https://www.britannica.com/topic/annexation) to the [Russian Empire](https://www.britannica.com/place/Russian-Empire) in 1783.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, Mongol rule was largely indirect, limited to exactions of taxes and tribute whose collection was delegated to the local princes. It was also relatively short-lived; northwestern and central Ukraine became an arena of expansion for a new power that had arisen in the 13th century, the [grand duchy of Lithuania](https://www.britannica.com/place/grand-duchy-of-Lithuania).

Having already over the course of a century incorporated all the lands of [Belarus](https://www.britannica.com/place/Belarus), Lithuania under Grand Duke [Algirdas](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Algirdas) advanced rapidly into Ukraine. In the 1350s [Chernihiv](https://www.britannica.com/place/Chernihiv-Ukraine) and [adjacent](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adjacent) areas—and in the 1360s the regions of Kiev and, to its south, [Pereyaslav](https://www.britannica.com/place/Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyy) and [Podolia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Podolia) (Podillya)—were occupied by Lithuania. Competition with Poland over the former Galician-Volhynian principality ended in the 1380s in partition, by which Lithuania gained Volhynia and [Poland](https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland) was confirmed in its possession of Galicia. Thus, Lithuanian control extended over virtually all the Ukrainian lands as far as the open steppe and even, briefly, to the [Black Sea](https://www.britannica.com/place/Black-Sea).

Within the grand duchy the [Ruthenian](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rusyn-people) (Ukrainian and Belarusian) lands initially retained considerable [autonomy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomy). The pagan Lithuanians themselves were increasingly converting to [Orthodoxy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Orthodoxy-Autocracy-and-Nationality) and [assimilating](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assimilating) into Ruthenian culture. The grand duchy’s administrative practices and legal system drew heavily on Slavic customs, and an official Ruthenian state language (also known as Rusyn) developed over time from the language used in Rus.

Direct Polish rule in Ukraine in the 1340s and for two centuries thereafter was limited to Galicia. There, changes in such areas as administration, law, and land [tenure](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tenure) proceeded more rapidly than in Ukrainian territories under [Lithuania](https://www.britannica.com/place/Lithuania). However, Lithuania itself was soon drawn into the orbit of [Poland](https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland) following the [dynastic linkage](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Union-of-Krewo) of the two states in 1385/86 and the baptism of the Lithuanians into the Latin ([Roman Catholic](https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Roman-Catholicism)) church. The spread of Catholicism among the Lithuanians and the attendant [diffusion](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diffusion) of the [Polish language](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Polish-language), culture, and notions of political and social order among the Lithuanian nobility eroded the position of the [Orthodox](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-Orthodoxy) Ruthenians, as had happened earlier in Galicia. In 1569, by the [Union of Lublin](https://www.britannica.com/event/Union-of-Lublin), the dynastic link between Poland and Lithuania was transformed into a [constitutional](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constitutional) union of the two states as the [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](https://www.britannica.com/place/Polish-Lithuanian-Commonwealth). At the same time, the greater part of the Ukrainian territories was detached from Lithuania and annexed directly to Poland. This act hastened the differentiation of Ukrainians and Belarusians (the latter of whom remained within the grand duchy) and, by eliminating the political frontier between them, promoted the closer [integration](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integration) of Galicia and the eastern Ukrainian lands. For the next century, virtually all ethnically Ukrainian lands experienced in common the direct impact of Polish political and cultural predominance.

## Social changes

Over three centuries of Lithuanian and Polish rule, Ukraine by the middle of the 17th century had undergone substantial social evolution. The princely and boyar families tracing their roots to Kievan Rus had largely merged and become part of the privileged [noble](https://www.britannica.com/topic/aristocracy) estate of Lithuania and Poland. Long attached to the Orthodox religion and the [Ruthenian language](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ukrainian-language) and customs, the Ruthenian nobility in the late 16th century became increasingly prone to [Polonization](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Polonization), a process often initiated by education in Jesuit schools and conversion to Roman Catholicism.

With the growth of towns and [urban](https://www.britannica.com/topic/urbanization) trades, especially in western Ukraine, the [burghers](https://www.britannica.com/topic/bourgeoisie) became an important social stratum. They were divided both in terms of an internal social hierarchy associated with the guild system and by religion and [ethnicity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethnicity). Since the 13th century many Poles, Armenians, Germans, and [Jews](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jew-people) had settled in the cities and towns, where the Ukrainians were often reduced to a minority. Although the burghers came to play an influential role within the Ukrainian [community](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community), legal disabilities imposed on non-Catholics progressively limited their participation in the municipal self-government enjoyed by many cities and towns under [Magdeburg Law](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Magdeburg-Law).

In the period of Polish rule the conditions of the [peasantry](https://www.britannica.com/topic/peasantry) steadily deteriorated. The free peasantry that had still existed into the late Lithuanian period underwent rapid [enserfment](https://www.britannica.com/topic/serfdom), while serf obligations themselves became more onerous (see [serfdom](https://www.britannica.com/topic/serfdom)). Peasant unrest increased toward the end of the 16th century, especially in eastern Ukraine. The sparsely settled lands were opened to Polish proprietorship for the first time, and large latifundia (agricultural estates worked by a large number of peasants) were established through royal grants to meet the demands for grain on the European markets. To attract labour to the new estates, peasants were granted temporary exemptions from serf obligations; the expiration of these exemptions and the reintroduction of servitude among a population grown accustomed to freedom led to much discontent and peasant flight into the “wild fields”—the steppe lands to the east and south. Tensions were [exacerbated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exacerbated) by the fact that, while the peasants were Ukrainian and Orthodox, the landlords were largely Polish (or Polonized) and Roman Catholic, and the estate [stewards](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stewards) or leaseholders for absentee proprietors frequently were Jewish. Thus, social discontent tended to coalesce with national and religious grievances.

## Religious developments

As social conditions among the [Ukrainian](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ukrainian-Greek-Catholic-Church) population in Lithuania and Poland progressively deteriorated, so did the situation of the Ruthenian church. The [Roman Catholic Church](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-Catholic-Church-of-Romania), steadily expanding eastward into Ukraine, enjoyed the support of the state and legal superiority over the Orthodox. External pressures and restrictions were accompanied by a serious internal decline in the Ruthenian church. From the mid-16th century, both Catholicism, newly reinvigorated by the [Counter-Reformation](https://www.britannica.com/event/Counter-Reformation) and the arrival of Jesuits in [Poland](https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland), and [Protestantism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Protestantism) (albeit temporarily) made inroads, especially among the Ruthenian nobility.

Attempts to revive the fortunes of the Ruthenian church gathered strength in the last decades of the 16th century. About 1580 Prince Konstantyn Ostrozky founded at Ostroh in Volhynia a cultural centre that included an academy and a [printing press](https://www.britannica.com/technology/printing-press) and attracted leading scholars of the day; among its major achievements was the publication of the first complete text of the [Bible](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bible) in Slavonic. Lay brotherhoods, established by burghers in Lviv and other cities, maintained churches, supported schools and [printing](https://www.britannica.com/topic/printing-publishing) presses, and promoted charitable activities. The brotherhoods were frequently in conflict with the Orthodox hierarchy, however, on questions of authority over their institutions and clerical reforms.

Religious developments took a radical turn in 1596 when, at a synod in [Brest](https://www.britannica.com/place/Brest-Belarus), the Kievan metropolitan and the majority of bishops signed an act of union with [Rome](https://www.britannica.com/place/Rome). By this act the Ruthenian church recognized papal primacy but retained the Eastern rite and the Slavonic liturgical language, as well as its administrative autonomy and traditional [discipline](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discipline), including a married [clergy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/clergy-Christianity).

This so-called [Uniate church](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-rite-church) was unsuccessful in gaining the legal equality with the Latin church foreseen by the agreement. Nor was it able to stem the process of Polonization and Latinization of the nobility. At the same time, the [Union of Brest-Litovsk](https://www.britannica.com/event/Union-of-Brest-Litovsk) caused a deep split in the Ruthenian church and society. This was reflected in a sizable polemical literature, struggles over the control of bishoprics and church properties that intensified after the restoration of an Orthodox hierarchy in 1620, and numerous acts of violence. Efforts to heal the [breach](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/breach) in the 1620s and ’30s were ultimately fruitless. (See also [Eastern Rite church](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-rite-church).)

## The [Cossacks](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cossack)

In the 15th century a new martial society—the [Cossacks](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cossack) (from the Turkic kazak, meaning “adventurer” or “free man”)—was beginning to evolve in Ukraine’s southern steppe frontier. The term was applied initially to venturesome men who entered the steppe seasonally for [hunting](https://www.britannica.com/sports/hunting-sport), [fishing](https://www.britannica.com/topic/fishing-recreation), and the gathering of [honey](https://www.britannica.com/topic/honey). Their numbers were continually augmented by peasants fleeing [serfdom](https://www.britannica.com/topic/serfdom) and adventurers from other social strata, including the nobility. Banding together for mutual protection, the Cossacks by the mid-16th century had developed a military organization of a peculiarly democratic kind, with a general assembly (rada) as the supreme authority and elected officers, including the commander in chief, or [hetman](https://www.britannica.com/topic/hetman). Their centre was the [Sich](https://www.britannica.com/place/Zaporozhian-Sich), an armed camp in the lands of the lower Dnieper “beyond the rapids” (za porohy)—hence, Zaporozhia (in contemporary usage, [Zaporizhzhya](https://www.britannica.com/place/Zaporizhzhya-Ukraine)).

The [Cossacks](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cossack) defended Ukraine’s frontier [population](https://www.britannica.com/science/population-biology-and-anthropology) from [Tatar](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tatar) incursions, conducted their own campaigns into Crimean territory, and, in their flotillas of light craft, even raided Turkish coastal cities in [Anatolia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Anatolia). The Polish [government](https://www.britannica.com/topic/government) found the Cossacks a useful fighting force in wars with the Tatars, Turks, and [Muscovites](https://www.britannica.com/science/muscovite-mineral) but in peacetime viewed them as a dangerously volatile element. Attempts to control them institutionally and to limit their numbers through an official register created serious discontent among the Cossacks, who increasingly perceived themselves as forming a distinct estate with [inherent](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inherent) rights and liberties. Sporadically over a half century starting in 1591, the Cossacks rose up in revolts that were put down only with great difficulty.

In the first half of the 17th century, the Cossacks also became involved in the raging religious conflict. In 1620 the entire Zaporozhian host joined the Kievan Orthodox brotherhood; in the same year, a new Orthodox [hierarchy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hierarchy) was [consecrated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consecrated) in Kiev under their military protection. Thus, in the great religious divide, the Cossacks became identified with staunch support of Orthodoxy and uncompromising opposition to the [Uniate church](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-rite-church). Under the protection afforded by the Cossacks and the [dynamic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dynamic) leadership of a new metropolitan of Kiev, [Peter Mogila](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Petro-Mohyla) (Ukrainian: Petro Mohyla), Orthodoxy flourished in Ukraine; it became the driving force behind a cultural revival that included the establishment of the Kievan Mohyla Academy, the first Ukrainian institution of higher learning.

## The Khmelnytsky insurrection

Tensions stemming from social discontent, religious strife, and Cossack resentment of Polish authority finally coalesced and came to a head in 1648. Beginning with a seemingly typical Cossack revolt, under the leadership of [Bohdan Khmelnytsky](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bohdan-Khmelnytsky), Ukraine was quickly engulfed in an unprecedented war and revolution.

Khmelnytsky was a petty nobleman and Cossack officer who, unable to obtain [justice](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/justice) for wrongs suffered at Polish hands, fled to the Sich in late 1647 and was soon elected hetman. In early 1648 he began preparations for an insurrection, securing for this purpose Tatar military support. A Polish army sent into Ukraine to forestall the rebellion was shattered in two battles in May. This victory gave signal to a massive popular uprising. Violence spread throughout Ukraine as Cossacks and peasants vented their fury on those they associated with Polish [tyranny](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tyranny) and social oppression—landlords, officials, Latin and Uniate clergy, and Jews. The Poles in turn took bloody reprisals against the rebellious population. In September Khmelnytsky inflicted another crushing defeat on a newly raised Polish army, marched westward through [Galicia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Galicia-region-Spain), and finally besieged [Zamość](https://www.britannica.com/place/Zamosc) in Poland proper. He did not press his advantage, however, and, with the election of a new Polish king in November, he returned to central Ukraine. In January 1649 Khmelnytsky entered Kiev to triumphal acclaim as liberator.

Although initially seeking only a redress of grievances from the Polish crown, Khmelnytsky, following his arrival in Kiev, began to conceive of Ukraine as an independent Cossack state. He set about establishing a system of government and state finances, created a local administration under a new governing elite drawn from the Cossack officers, and initiated relations with foreign states. Still prepared to recognize royal [sovereignty](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereignty), however, he entered into negotiations with the Poles. But neither the [Treaty of Zboriv](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Compact-of-Zborow) (August 1649) nor a less favourable agreement two years later proved acceptable—either to the Polish nobility or to the Cossack rank and file and the radicalized masses on the Ukrainian side.

While military operations continued inconclusively, and because Tatar support proved undependable at crucial moments, Khmelnytsky began to search for other allies. In 1654 at [Pereyaslav](https://www.britannica.com/event/Pereyaslav-Agreement) he concluded with [Moscow](https://www.britannica.com/place/Moscow) an agreement whose precise nature has generated enormous controversy: [Russian](https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Russia) historians have emphasized Ukraine’s acceptance of the tsar’s suzerainty, which subsequently legitimized Russian rule, but Ukrainian [historiography](https://www.britannica.com/topic/historiography) has stressed Moscow’s recognition of Ukraine’s [autonomy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomy) (including an elective hetmancy, self-government, and the right to conduct foreign relations) that was virtually tantamount to independence (see [Pereyaslav Agreement](https://www.britannica.com/event/Pereyaslav-Agreement)). Moscow now entered the [war](https://www.britannica.com/topic/war) against Poland. No decisive breakthrough occurred, however, despite occasional joint victories, and Khmelnytsky became increasingly disillusioned with the Muscovite alliance. There were disputes over control of conquered territory in [Belarus](https://www.britannica.com/place/Belarus) and conflicts over Russian interference in internal Ukrainian affairs. Especially galling to the hetman was the Russo-Polish rapprochement that followed the [invasion](https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Northern-War) in 1655 of Poland by [Sweden](https://www.britannica.com/place/Sweden), Moscow’s adversary but Ukraine’s potential ally (see [First Northern War](https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Northern-War)). Khmelnytsky again cast about for new alliances and coalitions involving Sweden, [Transylvania](https://www.britannica.com/place/Transylvania), [Brandenburg](https://www.britannica.com/place/Brandenburg-historical-margravate-Germany), [Moldavia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Moldavia), and [Walachia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Walachia), and there were indications that the hetman planned to sever the Muscovite connection but died before he could do so.

## The Ruin

Khmelnytsky’s successor, Hetman Ivan Vyhovsky, broke with Moscow and in 1658 concluded the new Treaty of Hadyach with [Poland](https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland). By its terms, central Ukraine (attempts to include Volhynia and Galicia were unsuccessful) was to constitute—under the hetman and a ruling elite of nobles and officers—the self-governing grand duchy of [Rus](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rus), joined with Poland and [Lithuania](https://www.britannica.com/place/Lithuania) as an equal member of a tripartite commonwealth. Distasteful to the Polish magnates for its [concessions](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concessions) to the hated [Cossacks](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cossack), repugnant to the Cossacks and the peasant masses for its [conservative](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conservative) social cast and Polish connection, and a provocation to Moscow, the Treaty of Hadyach was never [implemented](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/implemented). Faced with mounting opposition, Vyhovsky resigned the hetmancy and fled to Poland.

After Vyhovsky, Ukraine began a rapid descent into a prolonged state of [chaos](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chaos) that contemporaries called “the Ruin.” Tensions increased between the Cossack officers, who were undergoing a transformation into a hereditary landowning class, and rank-and-file Cossacks and the peasantry, who were the expected supply of labour. From 1663, rival hetmans rose and fell in the competing Polish and Russian spheres of influence. In 1667, by the [Truce of Andrusovo](https://www.britannica.com/event/Truce-of-Andrusovo), Ukraine was partitioned along the [Dnieper River:](https://www.britannica.com/place/Dnieper-River) the west, known as the [Right Bank](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Right-Bank-historical-region-Ukraine), reverted to Poland, while Russia was confirmed in its possession of the east, known as the [Left Bank](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Left-Bank-historical-region-Ukraine), together with [Kiev](https://www.britannica.com/place/Kiev) (which actually was located west of the river); the arrangement was confirmed in 1686 by the Treaty of Eternal Peace between Poland and [Russia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia).

The partition of Ukraine caused a patriotic reaction. The hetman of the Right Bank, [Petro Doroshenko](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Peter-Doroshenko), briefly occupied the Left Bank and sought to re-create a unified Ukrainian state under the vassalage of the [Ottoman Empire](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire). A massive Ottoman military intervention in 1672 had as its primary effect the outright annexation of [Podolia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Podolia) as an Ottoman province for a quarter century. Doroshenko’s hopes—and popularity—evaporated as further Ottoman operations failed to establish his rule and led to devastation, especially after Russia was drawn into the war. Mass flight of the populace to the Left Bank, and even beyond, depopulated large tracts of Right Bank Ukraine. Two large-scale Ottoman campaigns followed Doroshenko’s abdication, but a truce in 1681 put an end to further direct Turkish military involvement. Ottoman power was soon on the wane in [Europe](https://www.britannica.com/place/Europe), and in 1699 the province of Podolia reverted to Polish rule.

## The autonomous hetman state and Sloboda Ukraine

After the partition of 1667, the [autonomous](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomous) [hetman](https://www.britannica.com/topic/hetman) state, or Hetmanate, was limited territorially to the east, in Left Bank Ukraine. (The hetman state in Right Bank Ukraine, under at least [nominal](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nominal) Polish control, was abolished by the Poles at the turn of the 18th century.) At the head of the state stood the hetman, elected theoretically by a general Cossack assembly but in effect by senior officers, who in turn were largely swayed by the tsar’s preference. The terms of autonomy were renegotiated at each election of a new hetman, and this led over time to a steady erosion of his [prerogatives](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prerogatives). Nevertheless, for a century the Hetmanate enjoyed a large measure of self-government, as well as considerable economic and cultural development.

The ruling elite in the Hetmanate was composed of the senior Cossack officers, [*starshyna*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/starshyna), who had evolved into a hereditary class approximating the Polish nobility in its privileges. The common Cossacks too were undergoing stratification, the more impoverished hardly distinguished, except in legal status, from the peasantry. The conditions of the free peasantry worsened over time, their growing obligations tending increasingly toward [serfdom](https://www.britannica.com/topic/serfdom). Urban life flourished, however, and the larger cities and some towns continued to enjoy municipal self-government; the burghers largely maintained the rights of their social estate.

In the [ecclesiastical](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ecclesiastical) realm, the Uniate church disappeared from the Cossack-controlled territory, and the [Orthodox](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-Orthodoxy) Kievan metropolitanate itself was transferred in 1686 from the patriarchal authority of [Constantinople](https://www.britannica.com/place/Istanbul) to that of Moscow. Although [Ukrainian](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ukrainian-Orthodox-church) churchmen eventually gained enormous influence in [Russia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia), within the Hetmanate itself in the course of the 18th century the church progressively lost its traditional autonomy and distinctive Ukrainian character.

The hetman state reached its zenith in the hetmancy of [Ivan Mazepa](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ivan-Mazepa). Relying at first on the support of [Tsar](https://www.britannica.com/topic/tsar) [Peter I](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Peter-the-Great) (the Great), Mazepa exercised near monarchical powers in the Hetmanate. Literature, art, and architecture in the distinctive Cossack Baroque style flourished under his patronage, and the Kievan Mohyla Academy experienced its golden age. Mazepa aspired to annex the Right Bank and re-create a united Ukrainian state, initially still under the tsar’s [sovereignty](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sovereignty). But Peter’s centralizing reforms and the exactions imposed on the Hetmanate in connection with the [Second Northern War](https://www.britannica.com/event/Second-Northern-War) appeared to threaten Ukrainian autonomy. In 1708, in furtherance of his plans for independence, Mazepa made a secret alliance with [Charles XII](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-XII) of Sweden, but in the decisive [Battle of Poltava](https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Poltava) (1709) their allied forces were defeated. Mazepa fled to Moldavia, where he died shortly thereafter.

Although Peter allowed the election of a successor to Mazepa, the Hetmanate’s autonomous prerogatives were severely curtailed and underwent further weakening over the remaining decades of the 18th century. From 1722 to 1727 and again from 1734 to 1750, the office of hetman was in [abeyance](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abeyance), as the Russian imperial regime introduced new institutions to oversee the country’s governance. In 1750 Empress [Elizabeth](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elizabeth-empress-of-Russia) revived the hetmancy for Kyrylo Rozumovsky, the brother of her favourite. On the accession of [Catherine II](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Catherine-the-Great) (the Great) in 1762, the hetman and the starshyna petitioned for the restoration of the Hetmanate’s previous status; instead, in 1764 Catherine forced Rozumovsky’s resignation. Over the next 20 years all vestiges of Ukrainian autonomy were eliminated, and in 1775 the [Zaporozhian Sich](https://www.britannica.com/place/Zaporozhian-Sich), the [bastion](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bastion) of the Cossacks, was destroyed by Russian troops.

To the east of the Hetmanate lay lands that until the 17th century had remained largely unpopulated—part of the “wild fields” since the Mongol invasion. Into this area, starting in the late 16th century, the Muscovite government gradually extended its line of fortifications against the Tatars. In the 17th century this territory became an area of colonization by Ukrainian peasants and Cossacks fleeing Polish rule and, later, the ravages of the Ruin period. The newcomers established free, nonserf settlements called slobodas that gave the area the name of [Sloboda Ukraine](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sloboda-Ukraine). [Kharkiv](https://www.britannica.com/place/Kharkiv-Ukraine) developed into the region’s main centre. Like the Hetmanate, Sloboda Ukraine enjoyed extensive internal autonomy, though under officials appointed by the Russian imperial government. The autonomy of Sloboda Ukraine was abolished under Catherine in 1765.

## Right Bank and western Ukraine until the Partitions of Poland

The western Ukrainian lands of [Galicia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Galicia-historical-region-Eastern-Europe) and [Volhynia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Volhynia), though part of the theatre of war during the Khmelnytsky insurrection, remained in its aftermath still firmly under Polish control. The Right Bank, after the abatement of the Ruin and the retrocession of [Podolia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Podolia) by the Turks, also reverted to Polish sovereignty. However, only in 1714, after further dislocations connected with the Second Northern War, was control reestablished over the area by a greatly weakened Poland.

The society that reemerged in Ukrainian territories under Polish rule in the 18th century differed markedly from that in the Hetmanate. The Cossacks virtually disappeared as a significant organized force. Cities and towns experienced a serious decline, and their populations became more heavily Polish and, especially in the Right Bank, Jewish. [Roman Catholicism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-Catholicism) maintained and even [enhanced](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enhanced) its earlier privileged status; the Uniate church, however, became predominant among Ukrainians, with Orthodoxy claiming a smaller number of adherents.

In the absence of strong central authority and with the elimination of the [Cossacks](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cossack) as a countervailing force, the Right Bank was dominated by the Polish nobility. Especially influential were a few magnate families whose huge estates formed virtually independent fiefdoms, with their own privately armed militias. The desolated lands were slowly repopulated through [peasant](https://www.britannica.com/topic/peasantry) migrations (frequently organized by the nobility) from Galicia and, especially, Volhynia. The extreme exploitation of the [enserfed](https://www.britannica.com/topic/serfdom) peasantry bred discontent that led sporadically to uprisings by bands of rebels called haydamaks (Turkish: “freebooters” or “marauders”). The most violent, known as the Koliivshchyna, occurred in 1768 and was put down only with the help of Russian troops.

Polish rule in Ukrainian territories came to an end with the extinction of the [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](https://www.britannica.com/place/Polish-Lithuanian-Commonwealth) in three [partitions](https://www.britannica.com/event/Partitions-of-Poland)—in 1772, 1793, and 1795 (see [Partitions of Poland](https://www.britannica.com/event/Partitions-of-Poland)). In the first partition, Galicia was annexed by Habsburg [Austria](https://www.britannica.com/place/Austria). In the second, Russia took the Right Bank and eastern Volhynia; it absorbed the rest of Volhynia in the third.

In the absence of strong central authority and with the elimination of the [Cossacks](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cossack) as a countervailing force, the Right Bank was dominated by the Polish nobility. Especially influential were a few magnate families whose huge estates formed virtually independent fiefdoms, with their own privately armed militias. The desolated lands were slowly repopulated through [peasant](https://www.britannica.com/topic/peasantry) migrations (frequently organized by the nobility) from Galicia and, especially, Volhynia. The extreme exploitation of the [enserfed](https://www.britannica.com/topic/serfdom) peasantry bred discontent that led sporadically to uprisings by bands of rebels called haydamaks (Turkish: “freebooters” or “marauders”). The most violent, known as the Koliivshchyna, occurred in 1768 and was put down only with the help of Russian troops.

Polish rule in Ukrainian territories came to an end with the extinction of the [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](https://www.britannica.com/place/Polish-Lithuanian-Commonwealth) in three [partitions](https://www.britannica.com/event/Partitions-of-Poland)—in 1772, 1793, and 1795 (see [Partitions of Poland](https://www.britannica.com/event/Partitions-of-Poland)). In the first partition, Galicia was annexed by Habsburg [Austria](https://www.britannica.com/place/Austria). In the second, Russia took the Right Bank and eastern Volhynia; it absorbed the rest of Volhynia in the third.

## Independent Ukraine

The population of Ukraine voted overwhelmingly for independence in the referendum of December 1, 1991. (About 84 percent of eligible voters turned out for the [referendum](https://www.britannica.com/topic/referendum), and about 90 percent of them [endorsed](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/endorsed) independence.) In an election coinciding with the referendum, Kravchuk was chosen as president. By this time, several important developments had taken place in Ukraine, including the dissolution of the Communist Party and the development (under the newly appointed Minister of Defense Kostiantyn Morozov) of the [infrastructure](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/infrastructure) for separate Ukrainian armed forces. Ukraine also had withstood political pressure from Moscow to reconsider its course toward independence and enter into a restructured Soviet Union. A week after the independence referendum, the leaders of Ukraine, [Russia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia), and Belarus agreed to establish the [Commonwealth of Independent States](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Commonwealth-of-Independent-States) (CIS). Shortly thereafter the U.S.S.R. was formally disbanded.

## Postindependence issues

Following the [dissolution of the Soviet Union](https://www.britannica.com/event/the-collapse-of-the-Soviet-Union), Ukraine was commonly regarded as the former Soviet republic (outside of those in the Baltic region) with the best chance of achieving economic prosperity and [integration](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integration) with Europe as a whole. But by the end of the 20th century, the Ukrainian economy had faltered badly, and social and political change fell short of transforming Ukraine into a wholly European state. Nevertheless, Ukraine registered some important gains in this period. It consolidated its independence and developed its state structure, regularized relations with neighbouring countries (in spite of some [contentious](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/contentious) issues), made some important steps in the process of democratization, and established itself as a member in good standing of the international [community](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community).

## State building and diplomacy

President Kravchuk’s immediate priority was [state building](https://www.britannica.com/topic/state-building). Under his [stewardship](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stewardship), Ukraine quickly established its armed forces and the infrastructure of an independent state. [Citizenship](https://www.britannica.com/topic/citizenship) was extended to the people of Ukraine on an [inclusive](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inclusive) (rather than ethnic or linguistic) basis. Ukraine received widespread international recognition and developed its [diplomatic service](https://www.britannica.com/topic/foreign-service). A pro-Western [foreign policy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/foreign-policy) was instituted, and official pronouncements stressed that Ukraine was a “European” rather than a “Eurasian” country. The state symbols and [national anthem](https://www.britannica.com/topic/national-anthem) of the post-[World War I](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I) Ukrainian National Republic were reinstituted. Yet at the same time that independent Ukraine was acquiring the attributes of statehood, it faced a number of contentious issues that severely strained the fledgling country: the nature of its participation in the CIS, nuclear disarmament, the status of [Crimea](https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimea), and control of the [Black Sea](https://www.britannica.com/place/Black-Sea) Fleet and its port city of [Sevastopol](https://www.britannica.com/place/Sevastopol). While inflaming passions on both sides of the border, these issues also helped to define Ukraine’s new relationship with Russia.

Ukrainian leaders perceived the CIS to be no more than a loose association of former Soviet republics and a means of assisting in a “civilized divorce” from the union. In contrast, [Russia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia) regarded it as a means of retaining some degree of regional integration (under [Moscow](https://www.britannica.com/place/Moscow)’s political domination) and sought to establish it as a supranational body that would succeed the U.S.S.R. These differing views were not clear at the meeting that created the CIS, but within several weeks they had become very evident. Disagreements between Russia and Ukraine ensued as the latter [repudiated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/repudiated) proposals for a CIS army under unified command, a common CIS citizenship, and the guarding of “external” rather than national borders. Remaining vigilant that involvement with the CIS not compromise its [sovereignty](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sovereignty), Ukraine participated only as an associate member. However, after more than seven years of independence, with the CIS no longer a real threat to the country’s [sovereignty](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereignty), [Ukraine](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine) finally agreed to join the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly in March 1999.

The issue of nuclear disarmament proved a vexing one. In the wake of the [Chernobyl disaster](https://www.britannica.com/event/Chernobyl-disaster), antinuclear popular [sentiment](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sentiment) ran high in Ukraine; even prior to independence, Ukrainian leaders had committed themselves to [divesting](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/divesting) the country of [nuclear weapons](https://www.britannica.com/technology/nuclear-weapon). But throughout this period, Ukrainians had not been aware of the size of the nuclear arsenal on their soil—Ukraine was effectively the third largest [nuclear power](https://www.britannica.com/technology/nuclear-power) in the world at the time—nor had they considered the high costs and logistical problems of nuclear divestment. After approximately half of the arsenal had been transferred to [Russia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia) early in 1992, the leaders of independent Ukraine began to question the wisdom of blindly handing over the weapons to a potential adversary that was now claiming portions of Ukraine’s territory (i.e., [Crimea](https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimea)). Ukraine then expressed reservations about the complete removal of the weapons from the country before it could obtain some guarantees for its security as well as financial compensation for the dismantling and transportation of the warheads. This apparent backtracking caused major concern in the West (particularly in the [United States](https://www.britannica.com/place/United-States)) and Russia. Intense diplomatic pressure followed, and Ukraine began to be portrayed as something of a rogue state in the Western [media](https://www.britannica.com/place/Media-ancient-region-Iran). Finally, in May 1992 Ukraine signed the Lisbon [Protocol](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Protocol), which marked Ukraine’s accession to the START I treaty (see [Strategic Arms Reduction Talks](https://www.britannica.com/event/Strategic-Arms-Reduction-Talks)). Subsequent negotiations, brokered by the United States, resulted in a trilateral statement (between the [United States](https://www.britannica.com/place/United-States), Russia, and Ukraine) in January 1994, which outlined a timetable for [disarmament](https://www.britannica.com/topic/disarmament) and dealt with the financial and security issues that Ukraine had raised.

The interconnected issues of [Crimea](https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimea), Sevastopol, and the Black Sea Fleet not only [constituted](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constituted) Ukraine’s thorniest postindependence problem but also posed a significant threat to peace in the region. In 1954 the Russian S.F.S.R. had transferred the administration of Crimea to the Ukrainian S.S.R. However, it was the one region of Ukraine where ethnic Russians constituted a majority of the population. In 1991 Crimea was granted the status of an [autonomous](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomous) republic, and Crimeans supported the vote for Ukrainian independence (albeit by a small majority). But disenchantment with an independent Ukraine soon followed, and a movement for greater [autonomy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/autonomy) or even secession developed in the peninsula. The separatists were encouraged in their efforts by routine pronouncements by prominent Russian politicians and the Russian [Duma](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Duma-Russian-assembly) that Crimea was Russian territory that never should have been part of Ukraine. The situation was complicated by the arrival of about 250,000 Crimean Tatars in the peninsula—returning to the historic homeland from which they had been deported at the end of [World War II](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II)—starting in the late 1980s.

Tensions in the region increased in 1994: separatist leader Yury Meshkov was elected Crimean president in January, and a [referendum](https://www.britannica.com/topic/referendum) calling for [sovereignty](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sovereignty) was passed two months later. Meshkov proved to be an inept leader, however, and he quickly alienated his own supporters. By September he and the Crimean parliament were locked in a [constitutional](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constitutional) struggle. The parliament finally stripped Meshkov of his powers and elected a pro-Kiev [prime minister](https://www.britannica.com/topic/prime-minister). In March 1995 Ukraine abolished the post of Crimean [president](https://www.britannica.com/topic/president-card-game) and instituted direct political rule, though it granted Crimea significant economic [concessions](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concessions). The Crimean separatist movement collapsed.

The dispute between Russia and Ukraine over control of the [Black Sea Fleet](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Sea-Fleet) and Sevastopol, the Crimean port city where the fleet was based, was particularly [acrimonious](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/acrimonious). Early in 1992 Ukraine laid claim to the entire fleet, which had been an important naval asset of the [Soviet Union](https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union). Russia responded unequivocally that the fleet always had been and would remain Russia’s. A “war of decrees” over the issue continued until June 1992, when Kravchuk and Russian Pres. [Boris Yeltsin](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Boris-Yeltsin) agreed that the fleet would be administered jointly for a three-year period. Subsequently an agreement was reached to divide the fleet’s assets evenly, but after further negotiation Ukraine consented to allow Russia to acquire a majority share of the fleet in exchange for debt forgiveness. The question of basing rights was not resolved until a final agreement on the Black Sea Fleet was reached in 1997. It allowed Russia to lease the main port facilities of Sevastopol for 20 years. Shortly afterward, Ukraine and Russia signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership (1997), which recognized Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty and existing borders (including Crimea) and regularized relations to some degree.

The turbulent relations between Ukraine and Russia in the post-Soviet period were likely inevitable, given that the independence of Ukraine was such a sudden, fundamental change. Russia had tremendous difficulty in perceiving—let alone accepting—Ukraine as an independent country: it viewed Ukraine as an [integral](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integral) part of the Russian realm and even considered Ukrainians to be virtually the same people as Russians. Consequently, [Russia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia) reacted to Ukraine’s departure more strongly than it did to the separation of the other Soviet republics. On the other hand, Ukraine was intensely aware of the fragility of its recent independence and extremely sensitive to any perceived encroachment on its [sovereignty](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sovereignty) by Russia. Relations between the two countries continued to be volatile into the early 21st century. Ukraine’s dependence on Russia for [fossil fuels](https://www.britannica.com/science/fossil-fuel) was an issue of particular concern. For example, in 2006 Russia temporarily cut off its supply of [natural gas](https://www.britannica.com/science/natural-gas) to Ukraine after claiming that Ukraine had not paid its bills. Ukraine, however, maintained that the move was a reprisal for its pro-Western policies.

Ukraine’s relations with its other neighbours tended to be much more cordial. Relations with [Hungary](https://www.britannica.com/place/Hungary) were from the outset friendly. [Poland](https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland) was supportive of Ukrainian independence as well, notwithstanding earlier centuries of acrimony. Ukraine also fostered a working relationship with several countries of the former Soviet Union by cofounding a loose subregional organization called GUAM ([Georgia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia), Ukraine, [Azerbaijan](https://www.britannica.com/place/Azerbaijan), [Moldova](https://www.britannica.com/place/Moldova); known as GUUAM from 1999 to 2005, when [Uzbekistan](https://www.britannica.com/place/Uzbekistan) was a member). Relations with [Romania](https://www.britannica.com/place/Romania) were complicated by that country’s claims to certain Ukrainian territories, including northern [Bukovina](https://www.britannica.com/place/Bukovina) and southern [Bessarabia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Bessarabia), as well as Zmiyinyy (Serpent) Island and its surrounding waters in the Black Sea. [Belarus](https://www.britannica.com/place/Belarus)’s [authoritarian](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authoritarian) [political system](https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-system) and its proposed two-state union with Russia rendered close ties with Ukraine unlikely.

Ukraine’s relations with the United States started out very poorly. During a visit to Ukraine in the summer of 1991, U.S. Pres. [George Bush](https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-H-W-Bush) affronted many Ukrainians when he warned them against “suicidal” [nationalism](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nationalism) and urged them to remain within the U.S.S.R. When Ukraine gained independence later that year, Washington was extremely concerned about the new country’s large nuclear arsenal. Only after the resolution of the [disarmament](https://www.britannica.com/topic/disarmament) issue did significant ties begin to develop. Ukraine soon ranked as a major recipient of U.S. [foreign assistance](https://www.britannica.com/topic/foreign-aid), and the two countries developed a strong political relationship.

## Economic difficulties

Ukraine’s postindependence economic performance—in sharp contrast to its relatively successful efforts at state building and diplomacy—was markedly poor. The social dislocation brought about by economic “shock therapy” in Russia dampened the Ukrainian [government](https://www.britannica.com/topic/government)’s desire for rapid change; it opted instead for a gradualist approach toward achieving a [mixed economy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/mixed-economy). Economic decline followed, since Ukrainian [industry](https://www.britannica.com/technology/industry) was already suffering from the disruption of trade with former Soviet republics in the wake of the U.S.S.R.’s [demise](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/demise). [Ukraine](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine)’s heavy dependence on foreign energy sources also strained the economy, particularly because Russia, Ukraine’s main supplier, moved to raise the previously subsidized price of [fossil fuels](https://www.britannica.com/science/fossil-fuel) to world levels. As a solid [monetary policy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/monetary-policy) had not been established, Ukraine experienced hyperinflation, which reached a rate of at least 4,735 percent in 1993. Meanwhile, [corruption](https://www.britannica.com/topic/corruption-law) increased as political insiders grabbed state assets for themselves or took unfair advantage of low-interest loans available to industry and [agriculture](https://www.britannica.com/topic/agriculture). A sustained attempt at economic reform came with the appointment of [Leonid Kuchma](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leonid-Kuchma) as [prime minister](https://www.britannica.com/topic/prime-minister) in October 1992. His efforts, however, were strongly opposed by a majority of parliamentarians and, to a degree, undermined by President Kravchuk himself. An [exasperated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exasperated) Kuchma resigned in 1993.

## Social developments

Postindependence society in Ukraine saw some positive developments. The media became much more open and vibrant, although those who were too openly critical of the administration were subject to harassment, notably during Kuchma’s presidency (1994–2005). Previous constraints on academic and [intellectual](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectual) life were lifted, resulting in a growing and [diverse](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diverse) body of publications, and [liberal arts](https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberal-arts) and business schools began to emerge. There was substantial development in religious life, as the Ukrainian Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholic [churches](https://www.britannica.com/topic/church-architecture)—as well as other denominations—were able to operate freely. In addition, a new generation of youth began to grow up without the ideological and intellectual constraints of Soviet society.

Relations with minority groups in the postindependence period were generally peaceful. The Jewish community experienced something of a renaissance, with the American-born [chief rabbi](https://www.britannica.com/topic/chief-rabbinate) of [Kiev](https://www.britannica.com/place/Kiev), Yaakov Dov Bleich, playing an instrumental role in organizing synagogues, schools, and charitable activities. Moreover, the Ukrainian government openly pursued a positive relationship with the Jewish community. The Hungarians and Romanians in western Ukraine were afforded nationality rights, and the government made some efforts to assist the [Tatars](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tatar), tens of thousands of whom still resided abroad as a result of mass deportations in the 1940s. Unrest among the Tatars was limited in the postindependence period, in large measure because of the effective leadership of former dissident Mustafa Jemilev.

Ukraine’s large Russian minority found itself in an [ambiguous](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambiguous) situation in the postindependence years. As part of the dominant nationality within the U.S.S.R., it had maintained the preferred status of what some observers termed a “psychological majority” in Soviet Ukraine. In independent Ukraine, however, the status of Russians was less assured. Although granting Ukrainian Russians the full rights of citizenship was never an issue, many of them were frustrated that Russian was not recognized as the second official language of the country. This highly contentious matter was resolved to some degree in 2012, when a new law was passed that allowed regional authorities to confer official status upon minority languages. Moreover, the gradual Ukrainization of the school system has not been popular in regions of Ukraine with large Russian populations. The matter was further complicated by Russia’s vow to defend the rights of ethnic Russians in the so-called “near-abroad,” which includes Ukraine.

Postindependence Ukraine witnessed the growth of numerous social ills. Both street crime and [organized crime](https://www.britannica.com/topic/organized-crime) increased, and Ukraine became a [conduit](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conduit) for the international illegal drug trade. A rise in the number of drug addicts accompanied a worrisome growth in the number of people infected with [HIV](https://www.britannica.com/science/HIV). The trafficking of Ukrainian women for the international sex trade also emerged as a serious concern—evidenced by the fact that Ukraine was the first former Soviet republic to host an office of La Strada International (a network of organizations that work to prevent [human trafficking](https://www.britannica.com/topic/human-trafficking)). Life expectancy fell, particularly for males, and occurrences of diseases considered long [eradicated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eradicated), such as cholera, were recorded. Many people—especially the elderly—were reduced to living in dire poverty, and many others sought work outside Ukraine, both legally and illegally, as migrant labourers.