

 **THE FORMER SOVIET UNION:  
THEN AND NOW**

# Ukraine: Then and Now

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# IMPORTANT EVENTS IN UKRAINE: THEN AND NOW

**1924**

Lenin dies; Stalin becomes leader of the Soviet Union.

**1922**

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is created; Soviet troops march into Kiev, claiming Ukraine as one of the first four Soviet Republics.



**1928**

Stalin announces plan to collectivize farms in Ukraine.

1920

1925

1930

1935

1940

**1923**

Lenin begins *korenizatsiya*, a program to promote Ukrainian culture.

**1932**

Stalin begins punishing farmers by orchestrating a famine, killing between 6 and 8 million people.



**1926**

Stalin bans all religious worship in Ukraine and other Soviet republics.

**1941**

In June Hitler's army invades Ukraine; September 29–30, Nazi troops exterminate more than thirty-three thousand Jews at Babi Yar.





## A Nation on the Brink

Ukraine is a nation on the brink of momentous change. After several tense weeks of protests and violence in Ukraine's capital of Kiev (sometimes spelled Kyiv), Russia, Ukraine's giant neighbor to the east, inserted itself into the controversy in 2014. Defying international warnings and condemnation, Russia annexed Crimea, the autonomous Black Sea republic of southern Ukraine. For weeks afterward countries around the world sought ways to punish Russia and support Ukraine. More than anything else, however, this event illustrates the deep divisions and extreme challenges faced by modern Ukraine. Signs of trouble have been building for a while. In November 2013 the *Maidan*, the large public square in Kiev, was the site of a protest movement. Many Ukrainians were furious about the economic and political actions of their government. At times the crowds in the *Maidan* numbered in the hundreds of thousands as some protesters lobbed rocks at police and set stacks of tires ablaze. Television viewers around the world watched as the violence increased between police and demonstrators.

The following month, on December 26, hundreds of journalists and activists stood outside the Ministry of the Interior's government offices. Many held candles, while others clutched grisly photographs of thirty-four-year-old Tetyana Chornovil, a respected Ukrainian journalist. As they stood in the cold, the protesters demonstrated their outrage at the violent act of the day before—a vicious physical attack on Chornovil. "Shame! Shame!"<sup>1</sup> they yelled, aiming their angry words at the people inside the building.

## A Silent Attack

Anyone who knew Chornovil would have had trouble recognizing her from those photographs. Her face was bloodied and battered, one eye blackened, her nose broken, and her lips split and swollen. After beating her, Chornovil's assailants threw her into a ditch and left her there at the side of the road with a concussion and multiple fractures to her nose and face.

According to police, Chornovil had been driving home early in the morning of December 25 when suddenly a car veered in front of her. It blocked her path and then forced her car to the side of the road. As soon as she stopped, several men got out of their car and broke the back window of her car. Her assailants pulled her out of the car and began to beat her.

Chornovil told police she was attacked by at least two men, neither of whom uttered a single word during the beating. "I started running, they began pursuing me," she said in video comments posted on Ukraine's *Pravda* news website. "They were hitting me on the head, they were not saying anything, they were just hitting."<sup>2</sup>

"They were hitting me on the head, they were not saying anything, they were just hitting."<sup>2</sup>

—Journalist and activist Tetyana Chornovil after being beaten.

## A Worrisome Trend

Many Ukrainians are certain that the assault on Chornovil was not a random act of violence but rather the latest in a series of attacks against Ukraine's activists and journalists. In 2013 there were reports of more than one hundred acts of violence in Ukraine against journalists who had written blogs or articles finding fault with the government.

Journalists point out that Chornovil had recently written several articles critical of Victor Yanukovych, Ukraine's president at the time. She had also questioned the sudden and unexplained wealth and lavish lifestyles of some of Yanukovych's government ministers. In fact, the day she was attacked she had been working on a story revealing an expensive country manor being built for Ukraine's interior minister, Vitaliy Zakharchenko.





*Kiev's Independence Square (or Maidan) was the site of mass antigovernment protests in February 2014 (pictured). Government forces fired on demonstrators, escalating the crisis in Ukraine—a crisis that gave Russia an opening to annex Crimea.*

Chornovil had sneaked onto the new property and taken photographs that she intended to publish on her website. She and other journalists believe the beating was an effort to prevent her from publishing the story and photographs.

Russia's takeover of Crimea and the physical violence against the media are examples of the tensions—both internal and external—that are threatening to tear Ukraine apart. For decades this nation of 46 million people has been dealing with massive corruption by its political leaders. The country is also deeply divided about its future direction. About two-thirds of the population are ethnic Ukrainians; nearly one-third are ethnic Russians; the remainder includes other groups such as Poles, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Jews. All of these populations have different ideas about how Ukraine should be governed and by whom. The future of Ukraine, which had once seemed very bright, is now cloaked in uncertainty.



## Geography

- Location: Eastern Europe.
- Area: 233,032 sq. miles (603,550 sq. km), slightly smaller than Texas.
- Coastline: 1,728.65 miles (2,782 km).

## People and Society

- Population: 44,573,205 (as of July 2013).
- Median age: 40.3 years.
- Population living in cities: 69.9 percent.
- Ethnicity: 77.8 percent Ukrainian; 17.3 percent Russian; 4.9% other ethnicities.
- People living with HIV/AIDS: 230,500 (as of 2012).

## Government

- Type of government: republic.
- Capital: Kyiv (sometimes spelled Kiev).
- Provinces (similar to states): twenty-four.
- Voting age: eighteen years and older.
- Frequency of presidential elections: every five years.

## Economy

- National GDP (purchasing power): \$331.6 billion (2012).
- Average per capita GDP: \$7,300.
- Top agricultural products: grain, sugar beets, sunflower seeds, vegetables, beef, milk.
- Top industrial products: coal, electric power, metals, machinery.
- Unemployment rate: 7.5 percent.
- Population living below the poverty line: 24.1 percent.



### Books

Daniel Barter, *Chernobyl's Atomic Legacy: 25 Years After Disaster*. Tours, France: Jonglez, 2012.

Volodymyr Bassis and Sakina Dhillawala, *Ukraine*. New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2009.

Marc Di Duca, Leonid Ragozin, and Sarah Johnstone, *Ukraine*. London: Lonely Planet, 2011.

Adriana Helbig, Oksana Buranbaeva, and Vanja Mladineo, *Culture and Customs of Ukraine*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2012.

Will Mara, *The Chernobyl Disaster*. New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2011.

Anna K. Shevchenko, *Culture Smart! Ukraine*. London: Kuperard, 2012.

### Websites

**Guide to Ukraine** (<http://ukraine.uazone.net>). This English-language site has maps, articles on Ukraine's history and culture, as well as news articles about events occurring throughout the country.

**InfoUkes** ([www.infoukes.com/religion](http://www.infoukes.com/religion)). This site provides information about religion, politics, and travel in Ukraine, as well as political satire.

**KyivPost** ([www.kyivpost.com](http://www.kyivpost.com)). *KyivPost* is the online weekly edition of Ukraine's largest English-language newspaper. It features in-depth articles about politics and economic and social issues.

**The World Factbook** (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>). The World Factbook is a website of the US Central Intelligence Agency. It contains detailed statistics on the geography, economy, transportation, government, history, and people of Ukraine.





*Note: Boldface page numbers indicate illustrations.*

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