



Written by [Paul Dragu](#) on July 23, 2025

Anti-Zelensky Protests Erupt Across Ukraine

Thousands took to the streets across Ukraine Tuesday evening to protest a move by President Volodymyr Zelensky that would further consolidate his power.

Zelensky approved amendments that put control of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) and Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) in the hands of the general prosecutor, who happens to be appointed by the president. Ukrainians see this as a path to more power in the hands of a few and less power for the people. Protests broke out in the capital, Kyiv, as well as in Lviv, Dnipro, and Odesa, over the matter, [according](#) to reports.



AP Images
Protesters in Kyiv

BREAKING: Mass protests have erupted in Kyiv, Ukraine against President Volodymyr Zelensky.

This is the first known major protest against the Ukrainian leader.

Thousands of people have turned out in the streets of Kyiv to protest moves by Zelensky's government to block... pic.twitter.com/lmyGobPgu5

— Kyle Becker (@kylenabecker) [July 22, 2025](#)

“Nothing Is Transparent”

One of the protesters, 18-year-old Vladyslava Kirstyuk, [told](#) U.K.-based news outlet *Independent*, “I know what it means for one person to have all the power, when nothing is transparent and everything is working against you. I don't want it to be the same for us here.”

A member of Parliament who voted against the measure, Oleksiy Goncharenko, said this was Zelensky's will. He expressed the belief that it would result in “the end of the independence of anti-corruption bodies inside Ukraine.”

Zelensky said the anti-corruption bodies would still carry out their tasks “but without any Russian influence.” Russian influence is the official reason for this recent development, as it has been for crackdowns on many other institutions and people since 2022. [According](#) to the BBC, before the law was passed, Ukraine Security Service arrested suspected Russian spies within Nabu. After the protests, on Wednesday, Zelensky met with anti-corruption and security officials and vowed to create a “joint plan” to fight corruption within a couple of weeks, reportedly.

EU Leaders Worried

Ukraine created the anti-corruption agencies about 10 years ago at the behest of Western powers as



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part of an effort to fight endemic graft, which is a fact of life in Ukraine. The agencies were a “precondition” for stronger ties with the West. But now European Union leaders are worried that unchecked corruption will once again run rampant. European Commission spokesperson Guillaume Mercier told the BBC:

The European Union is concerned about Ukraine’s recent actions with regard to its anti-corruption institutions. The EU provides significant financial assistance to Ukraine, conditional on progress in transparency, judicial reform, and democratic governance.

Marta Kos, the European commissioner for enlargement, said, “The dismantling of key safeguards protecting Nabu’s independence is a serious step back.”

A major theme among those who are publicly criticizing the Zelensky government over this matter is the concern that Ukraine will revert “back” to its days of wild corruption, which lies on the faulty assumption that the former Soviet Union federation at some point broke with endemic corruption.

History of Corruption

Even after it was no longer part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine had long been considered among the most corrupt countries in Europe. The Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index [from 2019](#) shows that Ukraine and Russia had nearly identical corruption scores, lower than every other country in the region at the time. Ukraine’s score was 30, while Russia’s was 28 (the lower the more corrupt). Bribery in the nation’s economic system was the main feature of graft.

According to the index, Ukrainian corruption supposedly took a hit after 2019. [By 2023](#), Ukraine had worked its way up into the mid-30s, still equal to or slightly lower than every bordering nation but Russia and Turkey. But [last year](#), it dropped by a point to 35. Only Russia and Belarus had lower scores.

Ukraine has never climbed out of the 30s, which, according to the Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, is extremely corrupt. But a quick review of some of the Ukrainian government totalitarian-like policies since 2022 makes a compelling case that bribery is just one of many issues plaguing Ukrainians. The evidence suggests Ukraine is not only systematically corrupt but fundamentally tyrannical.

Marital Law

Since its war with Russia began, the Zelensky government has implemented series of policies that would be deemed autocratic by any reasonably objective measure.

Not long after Russia invaded, Zelensky declared martial law and signed a decree that combined Ukraine’s media outlets into one platform called “United News.” The decree “suspended” private media companies. The justification for this was to have a “unified information policy,” which is dictator-speak for establishing government control over media and turning all major avenues of information into state-controlled propaganda.

The Zelensky government [justified](#) this classic autocratic move as a measure to counter Russian disinformation.

Another victim of Zelensky’s martial-law decree was a dissenting political parties. Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council banned 11 political parties. The largest of these was the Opposition Platform – For Life, the second-largest party after Zelensky’s Servant of the People party. It held 44



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seats in the 450-seat Ukrainian Parliament. Years later, in 2024, Ukraine also banned the Nash Krai party, which had won 1,694 seats in regional administration. [According](#) to reports, “the activities of the political party Nash Krai were banned; the property, funds, and other assets of the party, its regional, city, district organizations, primary cells, and other structural units were transferred to the state.”

The justification? Countering Russian influence.

Not a Democracy

By 2023, it became clear that “Ukraine sure doesn’t look like a democracy anymore,” as former U.S. government officials Michael Gfoeller and David Rundeel said in an [op-ed](#) published in *Newsweek*. Gfoeller and Rundeel made the following points:

Democracies do not ban opposition parties. The fact that so many such parties ever existed says something about the level of opposition faced by the Ukrainian nationalist government that came to power after the 2014 revolution. Then in May of 2022, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law formally banning all these parties.

Gfoeller and Rundeel took issue with another “anti-democratic” move by the Zelensky government: “Democracies do not ban elections.”

Ukraine’s martial law decree conveniently banned elections. Zelensky’s five-year presidential term, which began in May 2019, was set to end in May 2024. The next presidential election was expected in March 2024, but martial law postponed it indefinitely. Ukraine’s parliamentary members don’t have to worry about elections, either. So even if the people wanted new representatives to implement different policies, they can’t have that.

Priests Jailed

Ukraine has also come down on freedom of religion. It has arrested and jailed several Orthodox priests. In August 2023, Anatoliy Yeletskykh was [sent to prison](#) for five years for justifying Russian aggression. Earlier that year, in May, a Ukrainian court [sent Orthodox priest Petro Huben to prison](#) for three years for distributing Russian propaganda. Petro Lebid was [put on house arrest](#) for — you guessed it — “justifying Russian aggression,” a criminal offense. The Ukrainian SBU has raided a number of churches and monasteries in search of Russian spies. It has harassed and jailed far more Christians than mentioned in this article.

In the name of war against its despotic invader, Ukraine has become that which it’s fighting. The Ukrainian government has banned elections, political opposition, freedom of the press, and religious leaders who don’t bow to the state.

European leadership is expressing concerns about Zelensky because he’s taking control over anti-corruption agencies, but why have they said nothing about years of anti-democratic policies? How is systemic corruption more concerning than tyrannical rule? And that goes for the people of Ukraine. They turned out en masse to protest this latest consolidation of power, but where have they been over the last two years as their government essentially outlawed dissent?



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