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Freedom in the World 2025 - Ukraine

Partly Free
51
/ 100
Political Rights 23 / 40
Civil Liberties 28 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status 49 / 100 Partly Free

A country or territory's Freedom in the World status depends on its aggregate Political Rights score, on a scale of 0–40, and its aggregate Civil Liberties score, on a scale of 0–60. See the methodology.

Note

As of 2024, Russian military forces controlled most or all of the Ukrainian regions of Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk, and parts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. The Russian Federation claims to have annexed these regions following illegal invasions in 2014 and 2022. The numerical scores and status listed here reflect conditions in government-controlled areas of Ukraine, and do not reflect conditions in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, which are examined in a separate report. *Freedom in the World* reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Related, disputed, or occupied territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including distinct conditions for political rights and civil liberties and boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report methodology and FAQ.

Overview

The Russian armed forces launched an illegal all-out invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, inflicting massive civilian and military casualties and destroying civilian infrastructure. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared martial law immediately after the invasion. Under this designation, scheduled parliamentary and presidential elections have been postponed and other rights remain restricted. The current administration has enacted a number of positive reforms as part of a drive to strengthen democratic institutions, but the country still struggles with corruption in the government, the judiciary, and other sectors.

Key Developments in 2024

- Presidential elections scheduled to take place in the spring were postponed due to warfare and a constitutional prohibition on holding elections under martial law, with all parties in parliament agreeing that the poll would take place six months after the end of martial law. The government assessed that holding elections would pose significant security risks, and that voting would be difficult, if not impossible, for millions of Ukrainian refugees abroad, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and soldiers on the front line.
- In April, the Zelensky administration introduced several changes to the country's mobilization laws to boost troop numbers amid Russia's intensified offensives. The measures faced criticism from the Ukrainian public and some opposition members for failing to clarify terms of demobilization and service length.
- In August, Zelenskyy signed a law banning the Russian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), which is under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, from operating in Ukraine. The measure drew significant public support, but critics cautioned that the law would curb religious freedom.
- In November, the parliament adopted a law to recognize and provide immediate reparations and access to holistic care to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.
- Large-scale Russian attacks on Ukraine's medical institutions, cultural objects, residential buildings, supermarkets, and energy infrastructure intensified relative to the previous year. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported that July was the deadliest month for civilians in Ukraine since October 2022.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national 3 / authority elected through free and fair elections?

The president is directly elected for up to two five-year terms. In the 2019 election, held in two rounds that March and April, Zelenskyy defeated incumbent president Petro Poroshenko with 73.2 percent of the second-round vote. International observers deemed the election competitive and credible, although polling could not take place in Crimea and eastern Donbas.

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Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 due to the indefinite postponement of presidential elections, which are prohibited under martial law.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected 3 / through free and fair elections?

The 450 members of the unicameral Supreme Council (Verkhovna Rada) are elected to five-year terms through a mixed system in which half are chosen by closed-list proportional representation and the other half in single-member districts.

In early elections held in July 2019, President Zelenskyy's Servant of the People party won 254 seats, giving it an outright majority—the first time any party had crossed that threshold since independence. The Poroshenko bloc, which had rebranded as European Solidarity, took 25 seats. The Opposition Platform–For Life (OPZZh) grouping took 43 seats, Fatherland won 26, and the Voice Party won 20.

The elections were deemed generally competitive and credible, despite some problems. Voting was impossible in Crimea and eastern Donbas, so only 424 of 450 seats were filled. In addition, approximately one million Ukrainian citizens were unable to vote for lack of a registered address. An Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) election-monitoring mission cited irregularities including "widespread vote buying, misuse of incumbency, and the practice of exploiting all possible legislative loopholes," contributing to inequalities among competitors.

Elections scheduled for November 2023 were postponed while the country remained under martial law and in a state of war. The development prompted some criticism but polls reflected support for the move from many Ukrainians. Experts cited the security risks of holding

elections in wartime and the likely disenfranchisement of displaced citizens and front-line soldiers.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management 4 bodies?

The Central Election Commission (TVK) generally administers elections professionally. However, the mixed electoral system for the parliament that governed past polls, including the most recent parliamentary elections in 2019, was criticized as prone to manipulation and vote buying. In December 2019, the parliament adopted an electoral code that partially implemented a proportional-representation voting system, with open party lists for both parliamentary and local elections. Zelenskyy enacted it at the end of that year. Local elections in 2020 were held under the new code, with some modifications allowing IDPs to participate.

Martial law prohibits calling and holding elections or referendums at both the national and local levels as long as it remains in effect. Parliamentary elections originally set for October 2023 were postponed, as was the presidential election due in March 2024.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, 3 / and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of 4 these competing parties or groupings?

Prior to the 2022 invasion, with the exception of a ban on the Communist Party, there were no formal barriers to the creation and operation of political parties in Ukraine. However, in May 2022, Zelenskyy signed a law banning political parties that justify, recognize as legitimate, or deny Russian aggression against Ukraine. More than a dozen parties were subsequently identified as "pro-Russian" and banned, including the largest opposition party, the OPZZh. Some members of the banned parties found ways to stay in office, including by forming new parties.

Parliamentary parties are provided with state funding, but the process favors established groups: parties must win at least 5 percent of the vote to receive funds. New-party registration fees are high relative to average income and cost of living. Parties can only register with the Ministry of Justice if they can demonstrate a significant support base (10,000 signatures) in two-thirds of Ukraine's oblasts (regions). Massive war-induced population displacement and human losses since February 2022 present additional challenges to future party formation. Independent

candidates cannot run for local council positions in towns with over 10,000 inhabitants.

Score Change: The score improved from 2 to 3 because Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, where political party activity has been forcibly suppressed, were assessed in a separate report for this edition of Freedom in the World.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its 3 / support or gain power through elections? 4

Ukrainian politics have long featured dynamic competition. Opposition groups are represented in the parliament, and their political activities are generally not impeded by administrative restrictions or legal harassment.

However, under a 2022 presidential decree, Ukraine's main news channels broadcast only government-approved content and give airtime predominantly to ruling-party representatives, limiting opposition parties' avenues for exposure. The postponement of the parliamentary elections in 2023 and presidential elections in 2024 due to martial law also limited the opposition's ability to compete for power. However, political opposition parties enjoy other channels of influence, such as social media platforms, to reach constituents.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

Powerful Ukrainian business magnates, commonly referred to as oligarchs, exert significant influence over politics both directly and indirectly, including through financial support for political parties and lobbying for the appointment of loyalists to key institutional positions. Since 2014, the power of Ukrainian oligarchs has declined somewhat as Ukraine has pursued reforms aimed at curbing their political influence and severed economic ties with Russia. Oligarchs' power has also been weakened by changes in the media landscape, including government controls over media outlets implemented after the 2022 full-scale invasion, and as increasing numbers of Ukrainians turn to social media for news. Oligarchs have also suffered significant business losses due to warfare.

The Russian state continues to pursue disinformation campaigns and other online operations aimed at dividing or demoralizing Ukrainian citizens, though their effect in government-controlled areas has been limited.

B4 0-4 pts

3 /

There are no formal restrictions on the participation of women and members of ethnic, racial, or other minority groups in political life. However, their voting and representation are hindered by factors including discrimination that discourages political participation and, for many Roma, a lack of identity documents. Societal discrimination against LGBT+ people affects their ability to engage in political and electoral processes.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative 2 / representatives determine the policies of the government? 4

Elected officials craft and implement policies and legislation, though many initiatives stall due to opposition from powerful business groups and other special interests. The main obstacle to effective governance in government-controlled parts of Ukraine is corruption.

In 2024, the mandates of both the president and parliament had expired.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1/4

Corruption remains a serious problem, and political will to fight it has been inconsistent. Anticorruption agencies have repeatedly been ensnared in politically fraught conflicts with other state entities and elected officials.

Despite the severe disruption to governance caused by the 2022 full-scale invasion, authorities have been able to push through improvements to country's anticorruption apparatus and investigations. Since 2022, Ukraine's anticorruption agencies, monitored closely by Ukraine's civil society, uncovered multiple cases of embezzlement among high-level government officials, leading to dismissals. Zelenskyy oversaw a corruption crackdown in 2023, in part to reassure allies in the United States and European Union (EU) that the country was making good on a promise to tackle the issue. In 2024, Ukraine expanded reforms that mandate the inclusion of international experts in the vetting of certain government personnel decisions, a strategy viewed by experts as successful in improving the performance of anticorruption agencies. The new rules apply to major economic institutions like the Economic Security Bureau of Ukraine (ESBU) and State Customs Service of Ukraine (SCSU).

In September, in a development that damaged the credibility of the National Anticorruption Bureau (NABU), the agency's long-standing deputy director was dismissed following an investigation into claims he had leaked criminal investigation information to high-profile suspects.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1/4

Poor government transparency has long helped to facilitate corruption, and transparency has declined as a result of the ongoing war and martial law. Journalists have found state registers holding public information to be incomplete, poorly updated, and subject to war-related cyberattacks. Parliamentary committee meetings are no longer open to the public as ordinarily required by law; meeting locations, times, and agendas are no longer disclosed in advance, ostensibly for security reasons. President Zelenskyy's "United 24" initiative, launched in 2022, coordinates charitable donations in support of Ukraine, but critics say it further centralizes authority, as the distribution of funds is believed to be the responsibility of the cabinet.

In October 2023, Zelenskyy signed a law to resume asset declarations for officials and make them publicly accessible. The National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP) reported in 2024 that at least half of selected declarations evaluated contained inaccurate information or evidence of illegal enrichment or unjustified assets.

Add Q

Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a 0 culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?

Score Change: The score improved from -2 to 0 because the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, where Russian forces have sought to eliminate Ukrainian ethnicity and national identity, were assessed in a separate report for this edition of Freedom in the World.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 2/4

The constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and expression, and libel is not a criminal offense. At the start of the Russian invasion in February 2022, the Ukrainian government consolidated all television channels under a single government-controlled information platform, United News, that is broadcast around the clock on all channels in Ukraine. In late December 2022, Zelenskyy signed into law a controversial bill that expanded the government's control over print and online media,

ostensibly to prevent the spread of Russian propaganda. Among other provisions, the law allows authorities to close news sites that are not officially registered as media without a court order. In October 2024, the editorial board of *Ukrayinska Pravda*, a respected media outlet, claimed that Zelenskyy's office was engaging in an "ongoing and systematic pressure" campaign against it that threatened its independence.

A number of Russian outlets have long been banned, and in 2023, lawmakers expanded the ban on Russian news channels, websites, and social media platforms and their journalists.

Journalists in Ukraine have been targeted by invading Russian forces and continue to face life-threatening risks while carrying out their basic duties.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or 3 / nonbelief in public and private? 4

The constitution and a 1991 law define religious rights in Ukraine, and these are generally respected. However, smaller religious groups continue to report some discrimination.

In August 2024, President Zelensky signed a law banning religious organizations with links to Russia, which in effect banned the Moscow Patriarchate of the UOC (the UOC-MP) from operating in Ukraine. The ban is expected to affect significant numbers of Ukrainians, as UOC-MP has more parishes in Ukraine than the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). The move drew public support, but critics cautioned that the law could curb religious freedom.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free 2 / from extensive political indoctrination?

Academic freedom was generally respected in government-controlled areas before the full-scale 2022 invasion.

In areas that were successfully liberated by Ukrainian forces, Ukrainian teachers who had worked under Russian control have faced criminal collaboration investigations. A December 2024 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report documented several cases of Ukrainian teachers prosecuted for "acts of collaboration" for continuing their professional duties during Russian occupation. The penalties included bans on working in certain professions or in public service, and prison terms.

Two laws passed since 2017 have faced criticism for mandating the use of Ukrainian as the primary language of instruction in publicly funded secondary schools. The government in December 2023 introduced amendments that would lift some restrictions on the use of minority languages in schools and public spaces once martial law ends in Ukraine.

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or 2 / other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4

The polarizing effects of years of war, as well as a high number of prosecutions for collaborationism, have weighed on political expression. Heated exchanges in the media and instances of violence against those expressing views considered controversial are not uncommon, likely contributing to self-censorship among ordinary people.

A week after Moscow launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Ukrainian lawmakers, in the absence of meaningful public comment, amended the criminal code to expand grounds for collaborationism charges to include public denial of Russian aggression, glorification of Russia, and insulting the honor and dignity of Ukrainian soldiers. Violations are punishable by fines, imprisonment, and restrictions on the ability to "hold certain positions or engage in certain activities" for a period of up to three years. From March 2022 to June 2024, more than 9,000 collaborationism cases had been registered by Ukraine's prosecutor general. Human rights defenders caution that the laws are too broad and may result in legal issues for nearly anyone who had contact with Russian occupation authorities, including people who accepted social services, medical and other workers providing basic services in previously occupied areas, and those who may have interacted with them only for survival under occupation.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 3/4

The constitution guarantees the right to peaceful assembly but requires organizers to give the authorities advance notice of demonstrations. Ukraine lacks a law governing the conduct of demonstrations and specifically providing for freedom of assembly.

Martial law enacted after the full-scale invasion placed restrictions on the constitutional guarantee of freedom of assembly, though gatherings have continued to take place. In 2024, a series of demonstrations called for the demobilization of military personnel who had been exhausted by prolonged combat deployments, while another demanded answers from the government about soldiers missing in action.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

Numerous civic groups influence decision-making at various levels of government. Ukraine's civil society has mobilized significant resources to

support Ukraine's defense and humanitarian needs since 2022, watchdog groups also contribute to anticorruption efforts.

Civil society organizations are required to disclose their ultimate beneficiaries and ownership structure under money-laundering legislation; leaders of many groups have characterized this as interference in their work. Since the full-scale invasion, government control over financial transactions between nongovernmental organizations and foreign banks have been strengthened on grounds that in wartime, the risk of using charity organizations for possible money laundering is higher.

Some civil society activists have faced intimidation and threats, and law enforcement agencies have sometimes failed to bring perpetrators to justice.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or 2 / labor organizations?

Trade unions function in the country, but strikes and worker protests are infrequent, as the largest trade union, stemming from the Soviet-era labor federation, lacks independence from the government and employers. Factory owners still pressure their workers to vote according to the owners' preferences.

In 2022, a new labor code applicable under martial law took effect. The code effectively stripped employees of companies with fewer than 250 employees of any legal protection—making pay structure, working hours, and the conditions or terms of contract termination subject to the employer's discretion. It was estimated that more than 70 percent of the Ukrainian workforce was affected by this change.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 1/4

Ukraine has long suffered from corrupt and politicized courts, and reform initiatives meant to address the issue have often stalled or fallen short of expectations. However, despite the ongoing war, authorities have implemented some improvements. The reestablishment of the High Council of Justice and the High Qualification Commission of Judges in 2023 paved the way to start the process of filling more than 2,000 judicial vacancies and vetting some 1,900 sitting judges, all of which had been on hold due to political gridlock since 2019. The 2023 adoption of a merit-based procedure for the appointment of Constitutional Court judges was another long-awaited achievement. Also in 2023, Ukraine enacted laws improving disciplinary proceedings against judges as well as the selection processes for officials overseeing those procedures.

Nevertheless, the judiciary remains severely understaffed, with roughly the same number of judicial vacancies still unfilled (2,000) in October 2024. The backlog of cases, combined with lack of human and financial resources, have made it more difficult for the remaining justices to deliberate properly on the cases being heard, further diminishing Ukrainian citizens' access to justice. Additionally, numerous judges and court staff were killed in Russian attacks during the year.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1/4

Although due process guarantees exist, in practice individuals with financial resources and political influence can often escape prosecution for wrongdoing. Judges have stymied corruption investigations into high-profile officials, including within the judiciary.

Wartime collaboration was added to Ukraine's criminal code a few days after the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022. The law did not introduce a clear definition of what constituted collaboration, and charges and penalties have varied considerably from region to region. Critics also say the law is too harsh in its punishment of people in occupied territories, who may have engaged in banned activities due to Russian military coercion. Domestic and international observers have also expressed concern about whether the more than 2,000 accused individuals will receive proper due process in the midst of a war.

Despite these and other significant challenges, the Ukrainian courts have showed resilience during the conflict, with most maintaining high clearance rates, according to a recent report from the European Commission.

In August 2024, President Zelenskyy signed a law to ratify the Rome Statute, the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s founding treaty. However, the Ukrainian government also invoked the treaty's special provision allowing governments to limit the court's jurisdiction over war crimes committed by the country's nationals for seven years following ratification. Human rights groups have urged Ukraine's officials to drop the limitation, which risks guarding war criminals from accountability.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and 0 / freedom from war and insurgencies? 4

All regions of Ukraine have been subjected to indiscriminate Russian missile or artillery strikes against both civilian and military targets. Invading Russian troops have engaged in a range of human rights violations affecting both civilians and combatants, including arbitrary detention and forced disappearance, torture, conflict-related sexual violence, and other apparent war crimes.

Long-distance strikes on civilian infrastructure across the country by Russian forces have at times left millions of Ukrainians without power, heating, water, and adequate housing. Civilians who have remained in areas near the front lines face daily attacks using explosive weapons with wide-area effects. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as of September 2024, almost 12,000 civilians have been killed and 25,000 injured since February 2022 as a result of the Russian state's aggression.

In 2024, large-scale Russian attacks on Ukraine's medical institutions, cultural objects, residential buildings, supermarkets, and energy infrastructure across multiple regions intensified relative to the previous year. The OHCHR reported that July 2024 was the deadliest month for civilians in Ukraine since October 2022.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of 2 / various segments of the population?

A 2012 law introduced a nonexclusive list of grounds on which discrimination is prohibited, and gender discrimination is explicitly banned under the constitution. However, these protections are inconsistently enforced. Members of the Romany minority and LGBT+ people experience significant discrimination in practice. Rights groups have reported that employers openly discriminate on the basis of gender and age.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability 1 / to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 4

The full-scale invasion has caused significant displacement. In addition to the disruption to employment and education caused by the Russian invasion, the danger of land mines and unexploded ordnance prevents refugees and IDPs from returning home and impairs agricultural activity.

Russian and Russian-affiliated authorities have forcibly transferred Ukrainian civilians, including children, to either Russia or Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, in violation of international law.

Ukrainian mobilization laws enacted in March 2022 prohibit most men aged 18 to 60 from leaving the country. Mobilization reforms of 2024 obligated all men of military age to self-report their updated location, biographic data, and contact information in a new government-run mobile application. Facing a reduced number of military-aged men, the Ukrainian government has also launched efforts to repatriate more than 850,000 Ukrainian men estimated to have fled abroad. The efforts include a new

rule where men aged 18 through 60 may only renew their passports in Ukraine.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from 4 state or nonstate actors?

The government has taken steps to scale back regulation of private businesses in recent years, though the business environment is affected by widespread corruption. A reform law allowing the sale of agricultural land went into effect in 2021, ending a moratorium. For the first three years of the law's existence, only individual Ukrainian citizens could buy and sell farmland. Since 2024, organizations are also allowed to acquire land, so long as participating members are all Ukrainian citizens.

In 2024, the Ukrainian government launched the largest privatization campaign in its recent history by auctioning off some two dozen state-owned companies, including the four-star Hotel Ukraine in Kyiv; UMCC, Ukraine's largest mining and titanium ore processor; Aeroc, a manufacturer of aerated concrete products; Demurinsky GZK, a mining company and processor of titanium and zirconium; and Kyiv's largest shopping center, Ocean Plaza. The main goal of the privatizations was to prop up Ukraine's cash-strapped economy by bringing in more private investment.

Military mobilization has been a persistent challenge for the private sector since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion. Changes introduced to mobilization laws in May 2024 that made it more difficult to defer service have impacted companies' ability to hire and retain staff.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

The government generally does not restrict personal social freedoms, though same-sex marriage remains unrecognized in Ukraine. Ongoing Russian military aggression has added urgency to calls for the legalization of same-sex marriage, which would afford same-sex partners of wounded and deceased soldiers the same rights and benefits as those granted to heterosexual spouses.

Domestic violence is widespread, and police responses to the few victims who report such abuse are inadequate.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from 2 / economic exploitation?

The trafficking of women domestically and abroad for the purpose of prostitution continues. IDPs are especially vulnerable to exploitation for sex trafficking and forced labor.

The new labor code adopted in 2022 threatened to increase exploitative conditions for Ukrainians working at companies with fewer than 250 employees, as it withdrew legal protections and made their pay structure, working hours, and conditions or terms of contract termination subject to the employer's discretion.

Associated documents

Document ID 2125456 Related / Associated

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Russian Federation, Ukraine

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Freedom in the World 2025 - Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine* (Periodical Report, English)

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