



Ukraine  
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# WHY UKRAINIANS AND RUSSIANS ARE NOT 'ONE NATION'?

Six points from  
historical and modern  
perspective




Photo: Pro-Ukrainian protest in Kherson, which is temporarily occupied by Russia. Thousands of people took to the streets on March 13, 2022.

1

## Ukrainians do identify themselves as an independent nation

And that should be enough in the XXI century, but apparently, it's not.

The narrative of one or triune nation that includes Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians was created in the Russian Empire to justify taking over former Kyivan Rus' territories and suppressing national identities.

Later it transformed into the idea of 'brotherly nations', with Russia being the older brother that 'protects' and 'looks after' its 'younger' brothers. In reality, that meant disrespecting the autonomy of these nations and forcing them into compliance.

Both ideas are widely dismissed in Ukraine today. They represent Russian imperialistic ambitions that form their foreign policies to this day, as Putin's speech confirms.

Photo: Farion/Depositphotos. Girl in national Ukrainian clothes.



## 2 Ukrainians have a long history of fighting for their independence

From the Ukrainian Cossack state in the 16th century to The Ukrainian People's Republic in 1917 to finally proclaiming independent Ukraine in 1991.

And the Ukrainians fought not only with weapons but with words as well. For centuries, Ukrainian writers, philosophers, historians, politicians advocated for an independent Ukrainian state and helped shape our national idea. Even when they risked being imprisoned or killed for that.

Photo: 'Cutting down the forest...' book by Larysa Krushelnyska. The Krushelnysky family, early 1930s. In 1934-37, six of these people were repressed and executed. This photo became a symbol of the Stalinist regime's extermination of the Ukrainian intelligentsia.

Photo: UNIAN. Modern Cossacks put on a martial arts performance on the island of Khorlytsia in Zaporizhzhia region. The island is known to be the site where Cossacks built their first settlement and fortress in the 15th century.



## 3 Ukraine has its distinct culture and language

Ukrainian people managed to preserve their identity, even though their territory was torn apart by different empires throughout history.

For many years, Ukrainian culture was oppressed by the Russian Empire and USSR. The Ukrainian language was restricted and even forbidden. It was falsely claimed to be a dialect, a form of Russian. Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian languages do share some similarities, as they all belong to the Slavic language group, along with Czech, Polish, Slovenian, and others. That does not, however, make Russian languages primary to any other.

The main reason people in Ukraine understand Russian so well has not so much to do with languages being alike – but rather with the USSR heritage, as Russian used to be the primary language of politics, culture, media, and education. After Ukraine gained independence, that has slowly begun to change, even more so after the Revolution of Dignity, as modern Ukrainian culture, music, cinematography, and cuisine have flourished.

Painting: 'Our Army, Our Guardians' (1978) by the Ukrainian artist Mariia Prymachenko







4

## Ukraine is a democratic country

Our democracy is still young, but much progress has already been made. Ukrainian people can vote in fair elections – and in the last 30 years, six different politicians took the presidential seat.

Reforms were started in many fields to eradicate corruption, ensure freedom of the press and increase accountability of the officials.

Russia has quite a different political regime. Putin has been in power since 1999, though he formally took a break from the presidency in 2008-2012. And his political party – United Russia – has been in the majority in the Parliament for almost 20 years now.

At that time, state-controlled media and police became more powerful. Primary opponents of his regime were forced to flee the country, sent to prison, or even killed.



5

## Ukrainians are willing to stand for their values

And not just now, in the face of the Russian invasion. During the Orange Revolution in 2004, Ukrainians were not willing to accept election results rigged by the authorities.

In 2014, protests started in response to pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign the association agreement with the EU. Events escalated to be the Revolution of Dignity after demonstrations were violently dispersed and the Parliament passed anti-protest laws. Some marches gathered between 500 thousand and a million Ukrainians in Kyiv. People overthrew Yanukovych's regime. Though it came at a price – more than a hundred people died in this fight.

Russia has also seen some rigged elections, police violence, and authoritarian laws throughout the years. But never such massive protests, even though it has a much bigger population with more than 10 million people living in Moscow.



## Ukrainians want to live peacefully

The same can not be said about the Russian Federation. In 1992, Russian forces occupied part of Moldovan territory, resulting in an unrecognized breakaway state of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic.

Then there were two Russian-Chechen wars: Russia took the region by force and ensured a pro-Russian government there to stop the Chechen people from gaining independence. In 2008, Russia invaded Georgia, and part of the country – South Ossetia – remains under Russian control today. In 2015, Russia intervened in the Syrian War, providing troops and weapons to support Bashar al-Assad's regime.

In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. And in 2022, it started a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Ukrainians want to live peacefully, but we have to fight in response to Russian military aggression. Not to obtain any new land or gain influence in the region, but for our freedom. Once again.

Photo: CNBC. The anti-war demonstration near the Brandenburg Gate in central Berlin. Tens of thousands of people rallied to support Ukraine.

## Read more about Ukraine, its current and historical events on [war.ukraine.ua](https://war.ukraine.ua)

Photo: Dmytro Semenovskiy. Look on St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery from the monuments, protected by sandbags. Kyiv, April 2022

