

# Religious Freedom Trends in the Post-Soviet World: Ukraine

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Reflecting on developmental trends in the post-Soviet/post-Communist world, the religious situation in this region can be described as impressively diverse, as it is home to all types of religious expression, and in some nations controversial, due to the relationships between religious organizations and governments. Within this context, Ukraine is experiencing many different cultural and political influences, but because of its historical openness to religious freedom, the state hasn't implemented any totalitarian principles in its religion laws. Ukraine objectively and consciously maintains and supports religious tolerance and diversity, not just as a contemporary feature, but also as an essential and irremovable part of its heritage and identity.

By comparing Ukraine with other countries in the post-Soviet world, we can identify several of the most important features of the nation's religious situation, taking into account the relationships between its different religious organizations, along with the relationship between these religious organizations and the government:

1. Ukraine is a poly-confessional and poly-religious state, not only because of its aforementioned historical religious traditions, but also its contemporary efforts to fully respect every individual's right to free and unlimited religious self-realization.
2. During the Soviet era, Ukraine had the highest possible level of religious freedom, and that trend continues in today's society.
3. We have to keep in mind that statistics reflecting the institutional structure of the Ukrainian religious landscape (the number of active registered religious organizations) don't necessarily coincide with statistics related to society's overall approach to religion.
4. The official institution that is responsible for carrying out political activity within the sphere of religious freedom has existed in Ukraine since its founding 100 years ago in 1918.
5. Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine's leaders have prioritized several issues related to religious freedom:
  - a. Maintaining equality for all types of religious organizations;
  - b. Implementing international religious freedom standards into national legislation;
  - c. Cooperating with religious organizations and assisting them in achieving objective goals in which state involvement is justified. For example, in 2017, the government partnered with Protestant churches to organize a variety of events related to the 500th anniversary of the

Reformation. Also, the state actively works with Ukraine's large Orthodox community to help them obtain recognition from other Orthodox Churches, primarily through the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

6. Since the war broke out in eastern Ukraine, the above-mentioned trends are even more visible, despite Russia's attempts to accuse Ukraine of violating religious freedom rights. These accusations have become even harsher during the last two years, and Russia uses them as one of its many tactics in its hybrid war against Ukraine.
7. The Russian-Ukrainian war in the Donbas region and Russia's annexation of Crimea have influenced many aspects of public life in Ukraine, including religious freedom. As a result, after two decades of searching for the best way to develop Ukraine's government, the nation's leaders are now implementing strategies that are in line with democratic principles. Within this democratic context, religious freedom in Ukraine is also becoming more democratic and liberal.