Ukrainian politics and society is dominated by Nazi ideology

The Myth

Nazism is rampant in Ukrainian politics and society, supported by the authorities in Kiev. The Ukrainian government is a purveyor of xenophobia, racism, and, particularly, anti-Semitism. Nazi groups have taken control of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The Facts

Following Russia’s annexation of Ukrainian peninsula Crimea in February 2014 and citizen protests, the Russia-state media began claiming that Nazism was rampant in Ukrainian politics and society, including in the inner circle of former president Petro Poroshenko and current president Volodymyr Zelensky. According to Logically, a U.K.-based technology firm that helps governments and businesses counter disinformation, articles and social media posts making such claims have sharply increased since early November 2021, as tensions between Russia and Ukraine intensified following Russia’s build-up of more than 100,000 troops on its border with Ukraine. The alleged rise of anti-Semitism is among Russia’s justifications for a possible invasion of Ukraine.

The claim got a high-profile boost in late December 2021, when Russian President Vladimir Putin said at his annual year-end news conference that President Zelensky, “like his predecessors, fell under the influence of radical elements – as they say in Ukraine, Nazis.”

Radical far-right groups do exist in Ukraine and, according to a 2018 Freedom House report, they represent a “threat to the democratic development of Ukraine.” The report stated that “street activities,” which mostly involve the disruption of protests and anti-Semitic and homophobic vandalism by far-right groups, including C-14, are having a “serious impact on everyday life and societal development in Ukraine.” Freedom House also said that during confrontations between right-wing groups and law enforcement, Ukrainian police have shown “unacceptable passivity when it comes to preventing or suppressing unlawful activities, investigating incidents, and bringing perpetrators to justice.”

However, the report also stated that far-right extremists have poor political representation in Ukraine and no plausible path to power. Indeed, in the 2014 parliamentary elections, the far-right nationalist party Svoboda received 4.7 percent of the vote. In the 2019 presidential election, the Svoboda candidate, Ruslan
Koshulyansky, won just 1.6 percent of the vote, and in the parliamentary elections, Svoboda won 2.2 percent of the vote. Svoboda currently holds one parliamentary seat.

The Russian state-owned media also has made false claims about the prevalence of anti-Semitic attacks in Ukraine. For example, Russian state-run news sites Izvestia and RIA-Fan claimed that the Ukrainian far-right nationalist group Right Sector had beaten at least 20 Jewish people and robbed and attacked many others in Odessa, a city in southern Ukraine. The media outlets attributed the claims about the beatings to Mikhail Malman, whom they described as "one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Odessa."

However, Sam Sokol, a journalist and author of "Putin's Hybrid War and the Jews: Antisemitism, Propaganda, and the Displacement of Ukrainian Jewry," reported in Foreign Policy magazine in 2019 that the story about Right Sector in Odessa was a "complete fabrication." According to Sokol's article, the claim "was vociferously challenged by local Jewish leaders, all of whom denied any knowledge of the fictional Malman." Moreover, Berl KapULKine, a spokesman for the Jewish community of Odessa, said in an October 2014 statement that "Mikhail Malman" was neither the leader of the community nor even a member of it. "None of what was said in these statements happened in the community - no meetings were held, there were no attacks," Kapulkine said.

The Russian state-owned media has also made false claims about the reason many Jews left Ukraine following the Russian annexation of Crimea. A 2014 article and video segment in Russia Today, titled "Pushed to leave: Packing moods among Ukraine's Jewish minority amidst far-right rise," claimed that many members of the Jewish minority said they felt that "they will be forced to leave the country, where the far-right is capitalizing on the turmoil." The video and article featured an interview with Mikhail Kapustin, a Ukrainian rabbi, who said he is being "pushed" to leave Simferopol, Crimea's regional capital.

However, Russia Today misquoted Kapustin. Kapustin told Sokol in the Foreign Policy article that he decided to leave Crimea not out of fear of Ukrainian anti-Semitism, but because he did not want to live under Russian occupation. In that article, Sokol reported that according to Israeli officials, more than 32,000 people left Ukraine for Israel since the conflict began in 2014. This exodus "was overwhelmingly motivated by the instability and danger caused by Russian aggression rather than anti-Semitic attacks," Sokol wrote.

Statements made by members of Ukraine's Jewish community and reports by the Ukrainian National Minority Rights Monitoring Group also contradict claims of widespread anti-Semitism in Ukraine. In response to a statement made by Putin in 2014 that there was a "rampage" of "anti-Semitic forces" in certain parts of Ukraine, the leaders of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies and the Jewish Council of Ukraine, among others, released a letter to Putin stating that his assertions about the rise of anti-Semitism did not match "the actual facts."

Indeed, a 2018 report by the National Minority Rights Monitoring Group, which monitors anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Ukraine, said that the number of anti-Semitic incidents has been declining in Ukraine in recent years. Additionally, the PEW
Research Center, a Washington D.C.-based think-tank, found in 2018 that Ukraine was the most accepting of Jews among 18 surveyed countries in Central and Eastern Europe. In Ukraine, five percent of respondents said they would not accept Jews as fellow citizens, compared to 18 percent in Poland and 12 percent in Russia, according to the report.

A January 2022 report published by the U.S. Department of State's Global Engagement Center flatly rejected the claims about rampant or systemic anti-Semitism in Ukraine. "This grossly exaggerated neo-Nazi narrative, which the Kremlin continues to peddle today, is designed to build public support at home and abroad that Russia's military intervention in Ukraine is justified," the report said.

Variations of this Myth

Right Sector has declared war on Jews in Odessa.

Jews are forced to leave Ukraine because of anti-Semitic attack by Ukrainian Nazi groups.

Examples of this Myth

https://www.rt.com/russia/544248-zelensky-nazi-influence-putin/

"As tensions run high in the war-torn Donbass region, Putin remarked that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had been sucked into the orbit of the "Nazis" who had been pulling officials off the path of seeking a diplomatic resolution to the conflict."

https://tass.com/politics/1036396

"Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov castigated the current Ukrainian regime likening them to their pro-Nazi predecessors of WWII."

https://tass.com/world/1323399

"LPR Foreign Minister Vladislav Deinego believes that remarks made by Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky, who urged Donbass residents who consider themselves ethnic Russians to relocate to Russia, are a display of the neo-Nazi nature of Kiev's policy."


"many from the Jewish minority tell RT they feel they will be forced to leave the country, where the far-right is capitalizing on the turmoil."

http://izvestia.ru/news/577676

"Один из лидеров еврейской общины Одессы Михаил Майлюк 7 октября заявил о том, что за месяц боения «Правого сектора» жертвы погибли более 20 евреев. Майлюк ссылается на данные РОВД Суворовского района города Одессы, которые еврейская община получила недавно."
Reliable Sources


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https://maidantranslations.com/2014/03/05/open-letter-of-ukrainian-jews-to-russian-federation-president-vladimir-putin/


https://www.chabad.odessa.ua/templates/blog/post_cdo/aid/658934/postid/49169

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https://uatv.ua/en/who-are-you-give-an-answer-for-yourself-president-volodymyr-z


