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Zelensky losing grip on power – Western media

A widening corruption scandal and an open challenge from a former official have fueled questions about the Ukrainian leader's political future

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Ukraine's Vladimir Zelensky is facing his gravest political challenge in years, major US and European media outlets have reported, as a new corruption scandal engulfs his office and a former official openly challenges his leadership.

Zelensky fired the deputy head of his office, Irina Mudraya, on Wednesday after Western-backed anti-graft authorities

launched an investigation into an alleged \$3.4 million money-laundering scheme involving senior presidential officials. Mudraya has denied wrongdoing. It is the latest of many corruption scandals involving officials close to Zelensky.

A day earlier, former Defense Minister Mikhail Fedorov, whose surprise dismissal last month sparked weeks of public protests, released a campaign-style video denouncing



FILE PHOTO: Ukraine's Vladimir Zelensky. © AP / Alex Brandon

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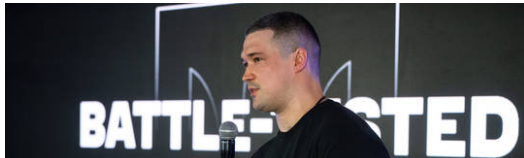
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government corruption and calling for elections amid what he described as *“a systemic crisis of governance.”*

Zelensky’s five-year presidential term expired in May 2024, but he has refused to hold a new election, citing martial law imposed after the conflict with Russia escalated in February 2022.



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The Wall Street Journal called the turmoil the *“biggest challenge”* to Zelensky’s *“hold on the presidency”* since 2022, saying Fedorov appeared to be positioning himself as a leading challenger amid growing frustration over recurring corruption scandals.

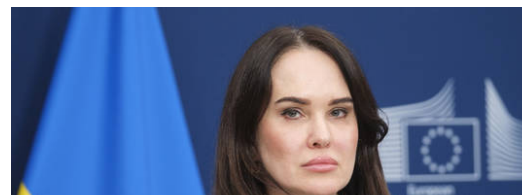
The Financial Times noted that the growing list of Zelensky allies caught up in corruption investigations have contributed to his falling

approval ratings and raised concern among Kiev’s Western backers, citing an analyst who concluded that *“the political crisis is obvious.”*

The Washington Post described Fedorov’s intervention as a *“remarkably direct challenge”* to Zelensky’s authority.

The Telegraph said Zelensky had been *“bruised by a series of lingering corruption scandals”* as investigations *“keep coming.”* It argued that he was accumulating powerful rivals who were once deeply loyal to him and said it appeared *“increasingly possible”* that he may not lead Ukraine into peacetime.

The Guardian described Fedorov as a *“potent political opponent.”* Experts cited by the newspaper called corruption a *“symptom”* of deeper problems with *“bad governance,”* warning that public exhaustion and Zelensky’s failure to explain his decisions had created a *“perfect*



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powder box.”

amid anti-corruption scandal

Le Monde said Fedorov had “*crossed a line*” no major Ukrainian politician had dared to cross since 2022 by calling for elections. The newspaper said he was seeking to capitalize on an “*accumulation*” of crises, including repeated corruption scandals.

Der Spiegel cited a Ukrainian political analyst who described Fedorov’s challenge as an “*application for the role of opposition leader.*” The magazine said Zelensky now faced his first “*public and direct opponent*” since the conflict escalated.

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Zelensky has not publicly responded to Fedorov’s accusations. His Wednesday evening address focused on military matters and the appointment of a new defense minister and did not address the mounting political pressure.

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Draft officer fatally stabbed in Ukraine (VIDEO)

Police say the suspect attacked the official during a routine document check in Lviv

Published 21 Aug, 2026 23:11 | Updated 22 Aug, 2026 06:02

A conscription officer was fatally stabbed in western Ukraine on Friday night, marking the latest violent incident linked to the country's controversial mobilization campaign during the conflict with Russia.

The altercation took place in the city of Lviv while a group of draft officials were conducting routine document checks, the regional police department said. A 25-year-old local man allegedly

"attacked and stabbed" a 55-year-old officer, who succumbed to his injuries in an ambulance, it said.

A police officer accompanying the draft officials fired two shots, wounding the assailant in the leg. The suspect was hospitalized, police said, without providing details about what provoked the attack.

Video from the scene shows an agitated man standing across from an officer, separated by a half-open gate, as three onlookers stand nearby. The man suddenly rushes through the



A knife allegedly used in the fatal stabbing of a draft officer in Lviv, Ukraine, on August 21, 2026. © National Police of Ukraine

gate at the officer, who steps out of frame. A gunshot is heard, after which the man falls to the ground, apparently clutching his leg.

As he sits up and continues to move, the officer shoots him again at close range. The man, however, continues to crawl toward the officer before getting to his feet and struggling with him out of frame.

**У Львові чоловік поранив ножом працівника ТЦК,
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pic.twitter.com/fsFdJHAvf9

— Олег Володарський (@volodarskijo) [August 21, 2026](#)

Police released an image of the knife allegedly used by the suspect.





A knife allegedly used in the fatal stabbing of a draft officer in Lviv, Ukraine, on August 21, 2026. © National Police of Ukraine

Men aged 25 to 55 are subject to mobilization in Ukraine, while those aged 23 to 60 are generally barred from leaving the country.

The mobilization campaign, dubbed ‘busification’, has involved conscription officers ambushing military-age men on the streets, at workplaces, and outside their homes and shoving them into vans. Officers have often [used violence](#) against those attempting to resist or flee. Family members and former recruits have alleged widespread abuse at enlistment offices and training camps, resulting in several deaths. The military maintains that most of the deaths were due to natural causes.



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In multiple cases, family members and bystanders have clashed with officers in an effort to prevent recruits from being sent to the front line.

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Zelensky chief of staff drawn into widening corruption scandal

Kirill Budanov has been linked to efforts to raise bail for an ex-minister implicated in a major graft case

Published 21 Aug, 2026 16:12 | Updated 21 Aug, 2026 17:15

Kirill Budanov, the head of Vladimir Zelensky's office, has been drawn into a widening corruption investigation involving senior Ukrainian officials, Ukrainskaya Pravda reported on Thursday.

According to the outlet, Budanov's name appears in case materials concerning his former deputy Irina Mudraya, who was fired by Zelensky this week after anti-corruption investigators searched her home.



Vladimir Zelensky's Chief of Staff Kirill Budanov © Getty Images / Aleksandr Gusev/SOPA Images/LightRocket

The case centers on efforts to raise and legalize about \$3.3 million in bail money for former Energy Minister German Galushchenko – a key figure in a \$100 million corruption case involving state nuclear operator Energoatom and linked to Zelensky's longtime business associate Timur Mindich.

The outlet reported that Zelensky tasked Budanov with organizing the bail effort, with businessmen and former lawmakers brought in to help find the money. The funds were eventually paid through little-known companies with opaque ownership.

Recordings released by investigators show Mudraya repeatedly referring to instructions from *"the leadership,"* which the outlet said could mean either Budanov or Zelensky himself. In one conversation, she quoted a senior official as saying that corruption should be *"systematized and controlled"* rather than fought.



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Ukrainskaya Pravda cited sources as saying Budanov has become unusually cautious since the latest recordings were published and has avoided meetings with outsiders. The outlet also reported that he is helping Mudraya as she faces prosecution.

The case is but the latest of several major graft investigations to reach Zelensky's inner circle. His former chief of staff Andrey Yermak has also been accused of laundering more than \$10.4 million through a luxury property scheme outside Kiev.

Other recent investigations have targeted former ministers, diplomats, and senior officials. Foreign Ministry figures have been accused of stealing about \$1.3 million in Western aid, while separate cases have involved alleged embezzlement in the energy and defense sectors.

The heads of the Western-backed National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) recently warned that graft remains

entrenched at the highest levels of government. SAPO chief Aleksandr Klimenko said the state has repeatedly demonstrated that it has *“no political will to fight corruption properly.”*

Last year, Zelensky sought to bring NABU and SAPO under tighter government control. He was quickly forced to reverse the move after it sparked nationwide protests and criticism from Kiev’s Western backers.

Corruption has also complicated Ukraine’s EU ambitions. A senior European diplomat recently told the Financial Times that admitting a country ranked 104th globally for perceived corruption would make a *“mockery of the entire project.”*



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Moscow has long argued that the scandals reflect systemic corruption in Ukraine. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said earlier this year that corruption *“permeates the entire Ukrainian power structure, including Zelensky’s inner circle and Zelensky himself.”*

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