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⚡ Massive protests decry Zelensky's 'authoritarian' move against anti-graft agencies | Russia-Ukraine conflict

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Zelensky thought he was killing it. He was

His assault on anti-corruption agencies has opened the door to political revolt – and made his position look weaker than ever

By **Valentin Loginov**, a Russian journalist specializing in political processes, sociology and international relations



Vladimir Zelensky. © Mert Gokhankoc/Getty Images

Ukrainians have had plenty of reasons to take to the streets: the cancellation of elections, forced mobilization, the refusal to demobilize soldiers who've been on the front lines for over three years, the persecution of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, corruption in the construction of fortifications, the state's failure to have the bodies of fallen soldiers returned, and – above all – the complete absence of a plan for ending the conflict with Russia.

This list could go on. And yet, none of these issues has triggered large-scale protests. What we've seen instead are isolated outbursts: in towns and villages, women block draft officers from entering their neighborhoods; churchgoers physically defend their parishes; the wives and mothers of Ukrainian soldiers stage small rallies to draw attention to their plight.

And yet, even in this atmosphere of fear and suppression, Vladimir Zelensky has managed to ignite a political crisis. The hasty passage of Bill No. 12414 – which stripped the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) of their independence – sparked a wave of demonstrations that haven't let up for days. It's the first major

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popular protest since the start of Russia's military operation, and it poses a serious challenge to Zelensky's grip on power.

Rallies have broken out in Kiev, Lviv, Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov, Rovno, and Nikolayev. While officials have tried to frame them as spontaneous, local expressions of concern about anti-corruption institutions, the scope and coordination suggest otherwise. The message to Zelensky is simple: the pressure is just beginning.

External interests

To understand why the anti-corruption issue struck such a nerve, we need to go back to the beginning.

The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) were established in 2015 with active backing from the United States – just a year after the coup in Kiev. At the time, Ukraine's Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin openly stated that the idea for NABU came directly from then-Vice President Joe Biden.



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From the outset, these agencies functioned as tools of external oversight over the post-Maidan Ukrainian government. President Petro Poroshenko, who was still consolidating power and ideology, did not resist Washington's involvement. NABU's early targets included oligarchs like Igor Kolomoysky and Rinat Akhmetov, who controlled major media holdings. This suited Poroshenko, whose own business interests, notably, remained untouched.

Over time, it became clear that Ukraine's anti-corruption bodies served not only their official mission but also the political interests of a specific faction – namely, the US Democratic Party.

A prime example is the Paul Manafort case. In 2016, *The New York Times*, citing NABU sources, published claims that Manafort – then campaign chairman for Donald Trump – had received undisclosed payments from Ukraine's Party of Regions under President Viktor Yanukovich. These claims prompted a US investigation into possible Ukrainian interference in the American election. In 2019, the Senate ultimately found no evidence – but the episode left a lasting impression.

That same year, NABU played a role in deflecting scrutiny from the Burisma scandal – the energy company whose board included Joe Biden's son, Hunter.

Over time, the link between these anti-corruption institutions and the US Democratic Party became apparent to many Ukrainians. And with Republicans now back in power in Washington, Zelensky

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appears to have decided it was time to free himself from external control.

Internal pressure



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Zelensky likely assumed that the new American administration wouldn't go out of its way to defend the Democratic Party's proxies in Ukraine. Judging by Washington's muted response, that calculation may have been correct. What he failed to consider, however, was the level of domestic resistance to his growing concentration of power.

Ukraine today is full of pressure points. Discontent is widespread – but scattered and disorganized. Zelensky's opponents simply lack the means to unseat him. Moreover, Zelensky remains the centerpiece of the West's anti-Russian strategy – a leader willing to accept any domestic cost in service of that agenda. Even policies that threaten the foundations of Ukrainian statehood are tolerated, so long as the broader project of an *"anti-Russia"* continues.

That's why the West has looked the other way with regards to forced mobilization, canceled elections, and the refusal to rotate exhausted troops at the front. For a while, this gave Zelensky free rein to act inside the country.

But now the ground is shifting. A key sign: the growing frustration among those who spent years working within grant-funded structures aligned with the US Democratic Party. Leading this informal coalition is former president Petro Poroshenko. Under threat of criminal prosecution, Poroshenko has spent months quietly building a new political bloc.

He has the money, the media, and the electoral base – fractured as it may be. For this group, Zelensky's move against the anti-corruption agencies – in effect, a move against external oversight – is the perfect pretext to reassert themselves and reclaim a measure of Western support.

Zelensky is unlikely to use force against protests centered on NABU and SAPO. Doing so would only strengthen the narrative that he's drifting toward authoritarianism.

That's precisely why the demonstrations over Bill No. 12414 are a safer platform for opposition than protests against illegal military draft raids or other abuses by Ukraine's Territorial Recruitment Centers.



The rallies have already attracted political heavyweights – including **Read more:** Zelensky's end goal

the Klitschko brothers, longtime rivals of Zelensky, and the legislator Maryana Bezuhla. The latter actually voted for the bill, but showed up at the protest claiming to support the Armed Forces – or perhaps simply to spite Commander-in-Chief Aleksandr Syrsky, with whom she's long feuded.

This kind of narrative hijacking is exactly what makes the protests dangerous for Zelensky. Like in 2013–2014, a movement that begins with one demand can quickly pick up steam – and new political slogans – until it snowballs into a full-blown crisis.

The opposition is seizing its moment. Their goals may not fully align with Washington's, but they've succeeded in riding the wave – and that alone spells trouble for Zelensky.

What's Next?

It's telling that Ukraine's Western partners haven't publicly condemned Zelensky. Still, pressure is clearly mounting – through media outlets, political messaging, and behind-the-scenes channels.

This kind of restrained posture allows the West to maintain a façade of stability without toppling the political structure in Kiev. But a critical question remains: will the military join the protests?



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According to foreign media reports, commanders have been instructed to stay away. Nevertheless, a few servicemen have already been seen at the rallies. If their numbers grow, so too will the risks.

Facing the threat of reduced military and financial support, Zelensky has backed down – at least for now. He submitted a new bill to the Rada that would restore the powers of NABU and

SAPO. A vote is scheduled for July 31. It seems Europe has forced Zelensky to reverse course.

If the law passes, the protesters may claim a symbolic victory. But it's far from over. Zelensky's team could still water down the bill or kick it into the long grass – and they have every reason to try.

The main one: the looming loss of centralized control over the levers of power. Several red flags are already visible:

- **The security services**, who carried out raids on NABU, may now start questioning Zelensky's authority and the legitimacy of his directives.
- **The Rada**, already shaken by the original bill, could fracture further – eroding Zelensky's grip on the legislature.

- **NABU itself**, if empowered again, may go after members of Zelensky's inner circle – putting pressure on the business elite that had come to feel safe under his protection.

In the end, Zelensky's show of resolve may have backed him into a corner. He's losing political capital at home. And while his government remains intact for now, the erosion of his authority has begun. This may only be the beginning.

ANALYSIS

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- C Carolina Reaper** 7/26/2025 at 4:44 PM **-1**
- Zelenski will be fine as long as Ukraine makes russia's population decline more everyday that passes. We the US would be irresponsible to not exploit this massive russian blunder to the fullest. Its a once in a lifetime opportunity. We are adversaries at the end of the day.
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- Ahmed4** 7/26/2025 at 4:57 PM **1**
- Be very careful there in the U. S., you are well within range, always remember!
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- R Raymond** 7/26/2025 at 5:05 PM **1**
- As the US is mongrelised each day, vast crime murder homeless drug feinds everywhere, crapped out rotting infrastructure as the evil MIC Banks corporats fleece the US sheeple.Super mighty Brics-plus will soon shove the Evil Empire off its high horse as world warmonger mass murderer invaders degenerats. China alone eats the 200 year old uncouth has-been shithole for breakfast.
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- Zbigniew Sembol** 7/26/2025 at 5:12 PM **0**
- What massive Russian blunder? Do you really believe Ukraine is winning the war or conflict and inflicting significant (as per Ukrainian media on average 1000 soldiers a day) losses to RAF? Pfftttt...
- [Reply](#)
- Julia Bash** 7/26/2025 at 3:54 PM **3**
- Good God, when will we ever see this evil person swinging at the end of rope or even a firing squad will do just fine.
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- R Raymond** 7/26/2025 at 5:10 PM **0**
- It will be so good, the POS needs hung like a pig.
- [Reply](#)
- Oh Shit** 7/26/2025 at 5:08 PM **0**
- Drunk on Power just like Trump....both need to be dissapeared!

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b babaloocy100 7/26/2025 at 3:56 PM 1

I still have the gut feeling that when this is over, what's left of Ukraine will end up becoming Israel 2.0.

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S Simon Filimon 7/26/2025 at 4:55 PM 0

Maybe all the fake Zionists can leave Palestine and migrate to this so called new Israel 2.0.

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Ahmed4 7/26/2025 at 4:24 PM 1

I always thought that the unstoppable sniffer, the stallion of the rulers, would be just hung by the resistance, like Benito Mussolini, onto a butcher's hook. Or decapitated maybe, since decapitation always works with especially die-hard creatures from the underworld. After he has been leading his people into a long hopeless war, only in the best interests of the so-called Western nazi-fascist military block, I do not honestly think Dictator Z could get away with it so peacefully.

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John J 7/26/2025 at 3:15 PM 5



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