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Valentyna Kuryliak

*Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine*

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# ANALYSIS OF THE MULTI-CONFESSIONAL RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN UKRAINE IN THE PERIOD FROM 2000 TO 2021

By Valentyna Kuryliak

**Valentyna Kuryliak**, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of the Department of Philosophy, Theology and Church History of the Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences. Vice-rector for scientific work in the Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences. Scientific interests: History of Protestantism in Ukraine, Seventh-day Adventist Church. Postdoctoral student of the specialty "History and Archeology" of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

E-Mail: [v.kuryliak@ugi.edu.ua](mailto:v.kuryliak@ugi.edu.ua) ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5245-9700>.

## Annotation

This study summarizes information regarding features of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine for the period 2000-2021. Ukraine's Western region is traditionally characterized by a high level of religiosity, while the South and East of Ukraine are the least religious. In recent years, the proportion of citizens who do not identify themselves with any of the religions has increased. There is a significant difference between the level of declared religiosity and identification with a particular religious community. As a result of the military events in the East of Ukraine and the war with Russia, the number of believers and Orthodox churches of the Moscow Patriarchate has significantly decreased, while the number of Orthodox Churches of the Kyiv Patriarchate has increased. After receiving *Tomos* from the Patriarch of Constantinople on December 15, 2018, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine gained more authority in society. However, relations between the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate are characterized by the great tension and conflict, which is expressed at the level of individual communities. Some problems arose during the creation of a unified Orthodox Church in Ukraine, but they did not become critical and did not affect the religious situation as a whole. Only 10% of citizens regularly attend religious services and meetings. The decline in attendance at religious services during the COVID-19 pandemic is accompanied by an increase in parishioner participation via the Internet. Leading churches have a positive attitude towards the use of the latest technologies and instant messengers. The article presents the results of surveys of focus groups. One of these polls testifies to the desire of believers to have changes in terms of religious rituals, in particular, the reduction of time, the understandable language of services and sermons, the introduction of seating in Orthodox churches, or a more modest decoration of churches. However, it has been established that for the growth of temple attendance, it is important not so much to develop a network of places of worship, but to form the interest and motivation of people to visit temples. Unfortunately, the level of recognition of the moral authority of the Church is lower than the level of trust in it. Citizens believe that the largest Ukrainian Churches in their approach to the problems of LGBT communities and other complex issues often take a conservative position that does not meet the requirements of the time, rather than an active position that contributes to solving social problems. Social service and assistance to people, according to the majority of respondents, should occupy a leading place in the activities of the Church. The greatest demand was for psychological assistance and protection of vulnerable groups. The overwhelming majority support the assertion that the Church should be separated from the state and the school from the Church. There is a high level of tolerance among citizens

to the practice of different religions. A negative attitude is present only towards the UOC-MP, but this is a consequence of the military invasion by Russia and the presence of scandals due to provocative statements by the so-called “pro-Russian priests.” The activity of the latter was banned by a number of local councils on the territory of Ukraine due to cooperation with the aggressor country, and after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it was outlawed. A deterrent to inter-religious, inter-confessional and inter-church conflicts in Ukraine remains the fact that religious and ecclesiastical identity is of little importance to citizens. It was found that in Ukraine during the period of independence a special religious situation has formed, characterized by multi-confessional tolerance and the almost complete absence of tension among the various churches that successfully coexist, and often even cooperate with each other.

**Keywords:** analytics, polyconfessionality, religious situation in Ukraine.

### **Formulation of the Problem**

Ukraine is notable for its diversity in the religious sphere, yet serious religious conflicts are not often encountered on its territory. After gaining independence in 1991, the borders of Ukraine were opened to missionaries of various faiths. In the 1990s, there was a tremendous increase in the interest of the population in faith and religion. Has this interest continued? The purpose of this article is to examine the characteristics of the church and religious influence in Ukraine today. Modalities of the church we examine include: the church’s status, trends, problems; the attitude of Ukrainian citizens to the churches, requests and expectations; and prospects for the development of the church –and religious influence in Ukraine in the face of current external and internal challenges.

### **Main Results of the Study**

The Church historically acts as a socio-cultural phenomenon; it influences daily processes in the sphere of spiritual and ideological life, which radically transform the normative regulation of relations between individuals. In the church's most recent activity, the inconsistent application of confessional practices within the general public is noticeable. This shift toward non-confession has a significant impact on the history of countries and peoples. This is especially manifested in those countries where the majority of the population historically professes one faith and, on the basis of it, forms their traditions and cultural memory. Among those countries is Ukraine, in which Orthodoxy has been the official religion since 988 A.D. However, modern society in the context of the globalization process emphasizes the individual’s rights, and freedom of religion is characterized by acceptance toward diversity of its religious composition. The Razumkov Center, together with the Representative Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Ukraine and with the support of the All-Ukrainian Council

of Churches and Religious Organizations, conducted a large-scale study of the features of religious and church-religious self-determination of Ukrainian citizens during 2000-2021, the results of which were published on the Internet and are available to a wide range of readers.

During this period, Ukrainian society demonstrated a high level of religiosity. In 2014, it reached the highest figure of 76% compared to 57% in 2000. Believers most often associate religion or faith with spirituality, moral guidelines, and also a source of knowledge valuable for the understanding of history and the development of civilization. Faith is also considered a mystery, a sacrament, and an alternative approach to everyday life, routine, and daily problems. Religion is also perceived as a force that unites people around certain values, certain principles that they uphold, for which they are ready to fight even at the cost of their lives. Religious values affect how societies build social relations and found state unions. Unbelievers and atheists, alternatively, have defined religion as a way to influence people and manipulate their minds. The superficial, demonstrative nature of religiosity, which often has nothing to do with spirituality, is also emphasized by respondents who, during the survey, identified themselves as non-believers or atheists.<sup>1</sup>

Polls have shown that the following patterns persist: dependence of the level of religiosity on gender, age, place of residence (urban/rural), and level of education. Generally everywhere, the level of religiosity is higher in older age groups than in younger ones. There are more believers among women than men (75% and 59%, respectively), and among rural residents, more believers than urban residents (75% and 64%, respectively). Also, there is a regional character of the level of religiosity of citizens. The South and East are traditionally characterized by the lowest level of religiosity, the West - the highest. However, compared to the level of the year 2000, the proportion of those who consider themselves believers in the South and East grew, approaching the figures observed in the Central region of the country. Participants in open responses explained regional specifics. In their opinion, this is a direct consequence of historical events, because churches were destroyed more prevalently in the South and East during the Soviet Union. At that time, atheism was preached in schools, Christians were despised, and religiosity was not permitted to be instilled in children.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> А. В. Арістова, "Релігія в Україні," *Велика українська енциклопедія*, accessed October 4, 2022, [https://vue.gov.ua/%D0%A0%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%96%D0%B3%D1%96%D1%8F\\_%D0%B2\\_%D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%97%D0%BD%D1%96](https://vue.gov.ua/%D0%A0%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%96%D0%B3%D1%96%D1%8F_%D0%B2_%D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%97%D0%BD%D1%96). [A. V. Aristova, "Religion in Ukraine," Great Ukrainian Encyclopedia]

<sup>2</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021pp.* (Київ, 2021), 5, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021. (Kyiv, 2021), 5,]

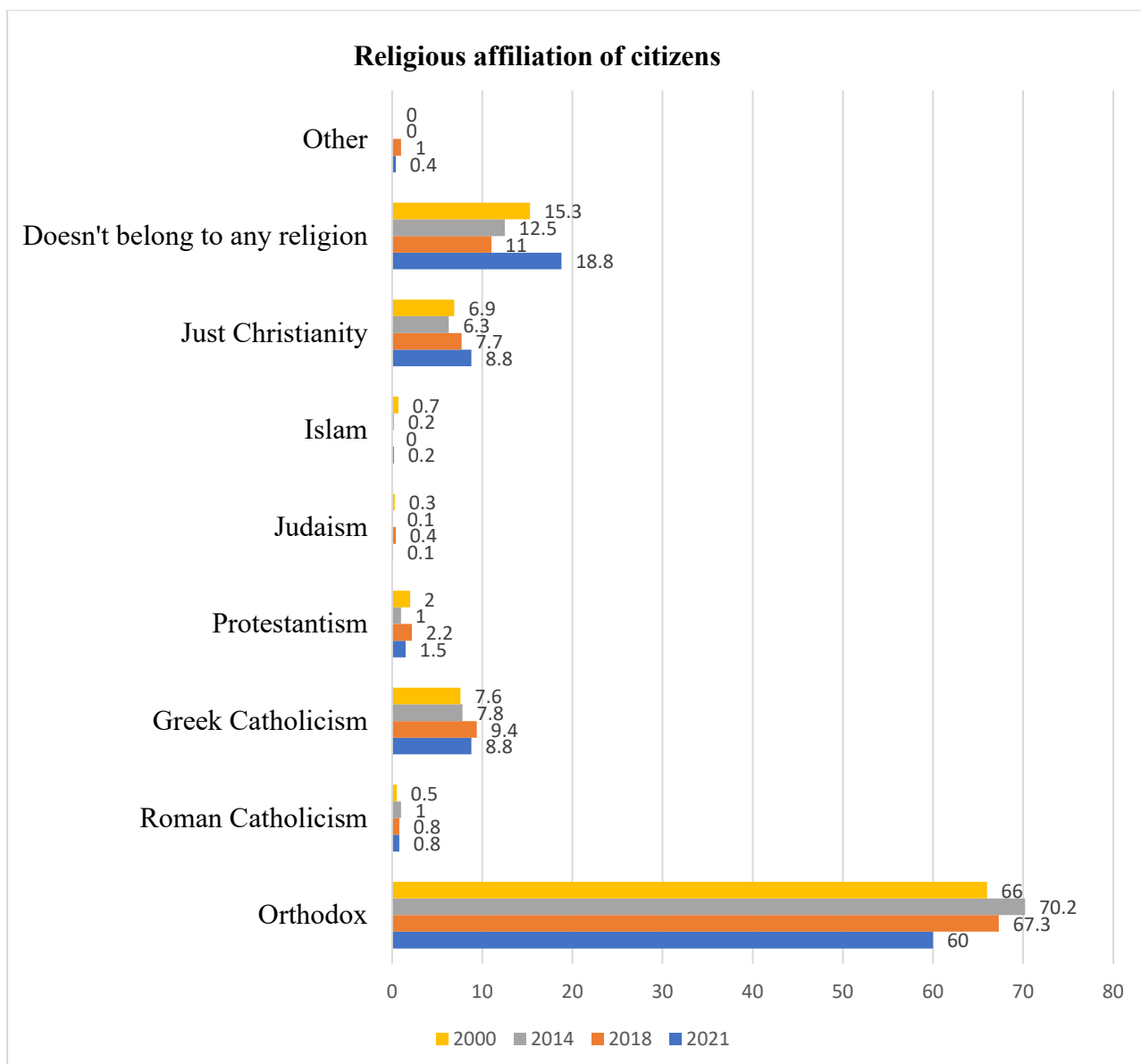
Respondents' declaration of belonging to a certain religious organization of the church is not always associated with religious belief but may be attributed to socio-cultural or ethnic identity. This principle is most typical for the group of "just Christians" among whom only 54% called themselves believers, while 25% vacillating between faith and unbelief, 7% non-believers or atheists, and 10% who are indifferent to religious issues. The self-identity of a part of citizens with Orthodoxy can be directly related to socio-cultural identity. Evidence of this phenomenon is confirmed by respondents' accumulative strong sense of patriotism to Ukraine in relationship with Orthodox affiliation. Citizens of Ukraine were asked whether they needed to belong to a particular religion in order to affiliate themselves as authentic Ukrainians. Respondents who answered positively to the question consider the OCU to be such a religion (church).<sup>3</sup>

As it turned out, the actual religious identity is much less important for citizens than the civilian one, because 68% of respondents identify themselves precisely as "citizens of Ukraine." Christians of the UOC-MP most often identify themselves with people of their faith. During the monitoring period, the majority of citizens were convinced that religious faith does not imply mandatory religious certainty. 58% of those surveyed in 2021 believe that "a person can just be a believer and not practice any particular religion." This point of view clearly prevails in all regions, with the exception of the Western region. The younger the respondents, the more often they tend to believe that a person can be "just a believer."<sup>4</sup>

The distribution of confessional preferences of citizens of Ukraine since 2000 has not changed much so far. By the beginning of 2021, 60% of those surveyed identify themselves as Orthodox, 9% are followers of Greek Catholicism, and 8.5% of those who identified themselves simply as Christians. Other denominations and religious trends are represented by a much smaller number of followers. The proportion of those who do not identify themselves with any of the religions, according to the study, is the highest for the entire period. Thus, over the past few years, there has been a growing trend in the number of citizens who do not identify themselves with any of the religions (Fig. 1).

<sup>3</sup> "Історія релігії в Україні," *Тиждень*, accessed October 4, 2022, <http://week.dp.gov.ua/osvitnia-prohrama/do91/istoriia-relihii-v-ukraini>. ["The history of religion in Ukraine," Tzhden]

<sup>4</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021pp.* (Київ, 2021), 8, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021. (Kyiv, 2021), 8,]



**Fig. 1 Distribution of citizens of Ukraine by religious affiliation from 2000 to 2021<sup>5</sup>**

It should be noted that confessional self-determination retains an expressive regional specificity. The largest number of Orthodox Christians is typical for the Center of Ukraine, they are somewhat smaller in the South and East, while in the West their share is even smaller. In turn, a significant part of the Westerners polled identify themselves as Greek Catholics. Among older people (60+) the proportion of Orthodox is growing, while among young people

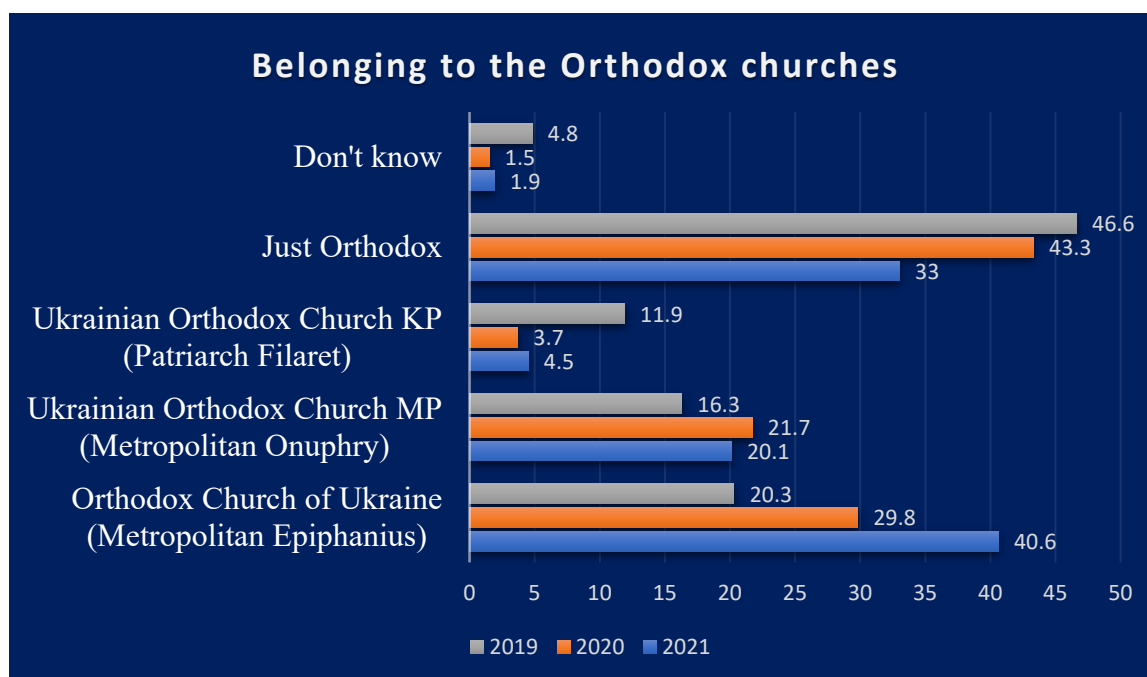
<sup>5</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021рр.* (Київ, 2021), 39, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, *Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021.* (Kyiv, 2021), 39]

(18-23) the number of those who do not belong to any religion is growing. Tangible changes are taking place in terms of the confessional-church self-determination of Orthodox believers which is due to a change in the institutionalization of Orthodoxy in Ukraine. After all, until 2018, three largest Orthodox denominations legally and actually operated in Ukraine: Ukrainian Autocephalous Church (UAOC), Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UPC under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP); Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP). The majority of citizens identified themselves as “just Orthodox” without belonging to any of the Orthodox churches.

By 2018, the proportion of “just Orthodox” has significantly decreased, but the number of those who identify themselves as members of the UOC-KP has increased. The number of UAOC believers constantly fluctuated around the one percent. The UOC-KP and the UAOC united into the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), which in January 2019 received *Tomos* of autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but already in May 2019, Honorary Patriarch Filaret of the OCU withdrew his signature under the decision to establish the OCU and proclaimed the restoration UOC-KP; however, it was deregistered and removed from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities. These events disorientated many believers in their church identification. Therefore, after 2018, the proportion of Orthodox who did not identify themselves with any church organization increased again. Some citizens simply did not know to which Orthodox Church they belonged. The current situation has strengthened the manifestation of the so-called “dual identity,” when people recognize commitment and trust in both church structures and their leaders, and the need to make a clear choice in favor of one of them becomes a difficult task. The actions of Patriarch Filaret were negatively perceived by the public. The majority of believers believed that he was simply fighting for power, thereby harming the Church, and they condemned his actions. This situation made it possible to foresee that in the future the “conflict of identities” might lead to a decrease in the number of those who identify themselves with the UOC-KP., An increase in the number of those who identify themselves with the OCU resulted, as confirmed by the findings of subsequent studies. However, due to confusion, citizens still often misidentify themselves with one or the other Orthodox Church, because they do not distinguish between their names.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021рр.* (Київ, 2021), 10, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021. (Kyiv, 2021), 10,]



**Fig. 2 Dynamics of affiliation of citizens to different Orthodox Churches of Ukraine for the period 2019-2021<sup>7</sup>**

According to the results of the 2021 survey, the UOC-KP lost the majority of its parishioners. To date, only 4.5% of citizens recognize themselves as its supporters. Due to this, the number of OCU supporters increased from 20.3% in 2019 to 40.6% in 2021. The share of “Just Orthodox” believers who have not decided or do not know which Orthodox church they attend has decreased by almost 15% over three years, which indicates that these people were able to identify themselves with a particular community. Most likely, the formation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the granting of autocephaly to it had a significant impact.

Most supporters of the UOC-MP are in Central and Eastern Ukraine, while 94% of UGCC believers are citizens living in Western regions. As for the age-related representation within believers, 39% of the believers of the UOC-MP are people over 60 years old, and only 7% are young people. However, most of all young people refer themselves to the group of “just Christians” without identifying with any denomination. Another feature of the UOC-MP is that 68% of believers are women. Among the “just Orthodox” the number of women and men are

<sup>7</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021рр.* (Київ, 2021), 45, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, *Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021.* (Kyiv, 2021), 45,]



approximately equal, and among the “just Christians” and those who did not identify themselves with any religion, the majority are men.<sup>8</sup>

Describing church-confessional self-determination, researchers most often pay attention to the nominal self-attribution of citizens to one or another church, although membership in a particular religious community should be a sign of churching. Membership in the community was recognized only by 21% of the respondents. Thus, there is a significant difference between the level of declared religiosity and the level of identifying oneself with a particular religious community. Older people and rural residents are more likely than younger and urban residents to identify themselves as belonging to a particular community. However, according to survey results, the proportion of members of religious communities increased compared to the previous year among the believers of all three largest churches in Ukraine, which confirms the conclusion about the multi-confessional nature of religiosity in Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

Rural residents attend church services more often than urban ones, and women more often than men. Only 20% of respondents attend services once a week on a regular basis, 44% attend church only on major holidays. In recent years, there has been a noticeable decrease in the attendance of religious services by citizens of the Western regions, but this is largely due to the strengthening of the COVID-19 pandemic and, accordingly, citizen quarantine. Within Western regions, the incidence rates of COVID-19 were the highest. During the pandemic, many churches began to broadcast services on the Internet. In the Western region, they are distinguished by the largest number of believers who participate in services online. The believers of the UGCC are also most favorable to the use of the latest technologies, which explains their high activity in the Western regions. Most of the respondents attend church services for one or more of the following reasons: communication with God, participation in prayers, religious rites, to get away from everyday worries, because of the desire to listen to a sermon, to solve moral problems, and to be among like-minded people. Also, a significant part of the believers noted that they attend church services all their lives and this is their habit, while the other part receives material or spiritual support from the community. In terms of motivation,

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<sup>8</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021рр.* (Київ, 2021), 12, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021. (Kyiv, 2021), 12]

<sup>9</sup> Тетяна Фойт, “Не просто йти до церкви!,” *ДивенСвіт*, last modified January 23, 2017, accessed October 4, 2022, <https://dyvensvit.org/blogs/1006187/>. [Tatyana Foyt, "Don't just go to church!" DivenSvit]

residents of the Southern region stand out, because for them the leading motive is that attending a religious service calms and allows you to forget everyday worries.<sup>10</sup>

Most of the citizens who attend churches believe that nothing needs to be changed, everything suits them. With regard to the modernization in the structural arrangement of churches, some believers attest that more attention should be paid, alternatively, to: various types of assistance to community members, to simplification of rituals, to reduction in the duration of services, and that more attention be given to the psychological support of community members. Basic religious teaching for members of the community and performance of services in native languages were much less frequently requested.

It is proposed that more church funds be invested in educational and humanitarian programs instead of maintaining lush temples and expensive cars. Those who belong to the UOC-MP are distinguished by the greatest conservatism and restraint. From 9% to 13% of believing citizens of Ukraine provide material support to the church on a regular basis. A significant portion of the people, several times a year, pays the requirements or donates funds to their church. Among the faithful of various churches, members of the UGCC most often provide regular assistance to the Church.<sup>11</sup>

Along with the Armed Forces of Ukraine and various volunteer organizations, the church enjoys a fairly high level of public trust. This indicator reached its highest level in 2010 and amounted to 72.5%. The Church is perceived in Ukraine primarily as a non-state spiritual institution, independent of politics, which is called upon to promote moral and spiritual values; this is very significant. Epiphanius, Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Ukraine, enjoys the greatest authority. A negative trend towards a decrease in trust is noted only in relation to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. As for the general attitude of citizens towards different religions, 74% have a positive attitude towards Orthodoxy. 37% of respondents have a positive attitude towards Greek Catholicism, 31% towards Roman Catholicism, from 11% to 14% of respondents have a positive attitude towards Protestantism, Islam, and Judaism. Representatives of Greek Catholicism in the Western regions of Ukraine have the most negative attitude towards Protestants. Negative attitudes towards Islam and Judaism are somewhat more pronounced among representatives of the older age group. The thesis that only

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<sup>10</sup> “Як змінювалась релігійність українців з 2000 року. Короткий переказ великого дослідження Центру Разумкова,” *LB.ua*, last modified February 2, 2022, accessed October 4, 2022, [https://lb.ua/society/2022/02/02/504398\\_yak\\_zmynuyalas\\_religiynist.html](https://lb.ua/society/2022/02/02/504398_yak_zmynuyalas_religiynist.html). [“How has the religiosity of Ukrainians changed since 2000. A brief retelling of the major research of the Razumkov Center,” *LB.ua*]

<sup>11</sup> “Про УГКЦ,” *Українська Греко-Католицька Церква*, accessed October 4, 2022, <https://ugcc.ua/church/about/>. [“About the UGCC,” Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church]

religions traditional for Ukraine have the right to exist is most supported in the West. As of 2021, believers surveyed think that religious conflicts between the faithful of different churches occur mainly around property and buildings, due to political contradictions, division of power and spheres of influence.<sup>12</sup>

Patriarch Kiril is critically perceived by Ukrainian Orthodoxy because of his support for Russian aggression in the East and the war that began on February 24, 2022. This war raised the question in general about the existence of Orthodox churches of the Moscow Patriarchate on the territory of Ukraine, because in the conditions of war, this organization acts in support of the aggressor country. In the spring of 2022 alone, the number of Orthodox in the Moscow Patriarchate has halved. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine has banned the involvement of priests of the UOC-MP in the chaplain service. This is consistent with the order, which notes that “priests whose spiritual centers are located on the territory of the aggressor country are not allowed.” After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a number of local councils, for security reasons, decided to suspend or ban the activities of the UOC-MP.<sup>13</sup>

In 2022, about 600 Orthodox communities withdrew from the UOC-MP. Most of them moved to the OCU, and some are still hesitating. In total, after the creation of the OCU, more than 1,100 MP communities joined it, more than half after the start of a new phase of Russian aggression against Ukraine. A significant part of the parishes moved with their superiors, but in most cases the communities changed jurisdiction without the consent of the leadership. This has often led to local conflicts.<sup>14</sup>

There were cases of anti-Ukrainian statements by the so-called pro-Russian priests, or their cooperation with the aggressor country. For example, Metropolitan Yelisey, a bishop of the UOC-MP, who supported the Russian authorities during the occupation of Izyum, Kharkiv region, was removed from his post. He was seen at events held by Russia during the occupation, and spoke out in the media in support of the position of the Moscow Orthodox Church. He

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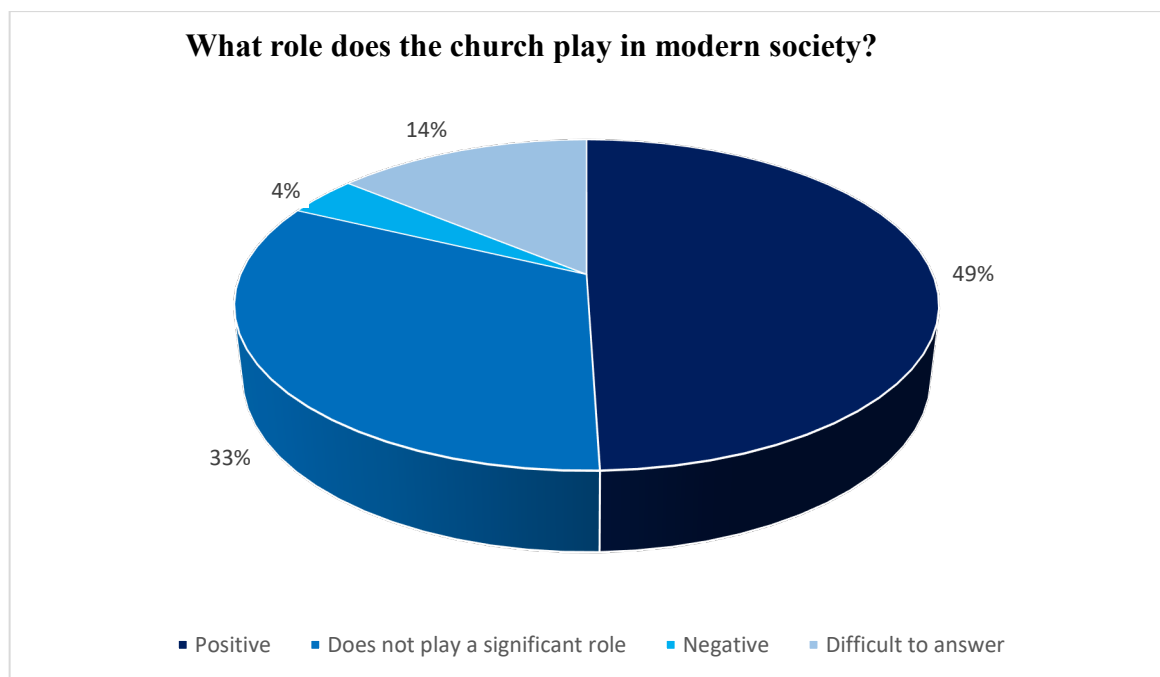
<sup>12</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021pp.* (Київ, 2021), 123, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021. (Kyiv, 2021), 123]

<sup>13</sup> Лариса Волошка, “Аваков заборонив брати капеланами священників УПЦ МП, центр якої – на території агресора,” *Новинарня*, last modified August 17, 2017, accessed October 4, 2022, <https://novynarnia.com/2017/08/17/avakov-zaboroniv-brati-kapelanami-svyashhenikov-upts-mp-tsentr-yakoyi-na-teritoriyi-agresora/>. [Larisa Voloshka, "Avakov forbade the hiring of priests of the UOC MP, whose center is on the territory of the aggressor, as chaplains," Novynarnia]

<sup>14</sup> Тарас Антошевський, “Пів року без МП: декілька сотень парафій УПЦ сказали прощай патріархату-окупанту,” *RISU*, last modified September 6, 2022, accessed October 4, 2022, [https://risu.ua/piv-roku-bez-mp-dekilka-soten-parafij-upc-skazali-proshchaj-patriarhatu-okupantu\\_n131715](https://risu.ua/piv-roku-bez-mp-dekilka-soten-parafij-upc-skazali-proshchaj-patriarhatu-okupantu_n131715). [Taras Antoshevskiy, "Half a year without MP: several hundred parishes of the UOC said goodbye to the occupying patriarchate," RISU]

condemned the decision to form the UOC and receive Tomos. After the de-occupation of most of the territory of the Kharkiv region in September, Yelisey was seen on the territory of the aggressor state.<sup>15</sup>

During 2000-2021, the level of moral authority of the church in Ukraine decreased from 56.3% to 47.9%. The authority of the church is falling because believers regard that: the hierarchs of churches are not models of morality, the church does not respond to the demands and problems of modern life, and it demands benefits for itself in paying for energy suppliers. Some of these benefits are manipulated through unfair taxation, selfish usage of land, and gaining properties from insolvent citizens. The church does not change the order and duration of services and sermons, apart from considering that this does not always correspond to the modern pace and way of life. Older people go to church most often, and young people have nothing to do there. The younger the respondents, the less often they tend to note the high moral and spiritual qualities of the clergy.



<sup>15</sup> Альона Рязанцева and Софія Цветкова, “УПЦ усунула Ізюмського митрополита Єлисея, який приймав окупантів і втік до РФ,” *Суспільне. Новини*, last modified September 29, 2022, accessed October 4, 2022, <https://suspilne.media/286994-upc-usunula-izumskogo-mitropolita-elisea-akij-prijmav-okupantiv-i-vtik-do-rf/>. [Alyona Ryazantseva and Sofiya Tsvetkova, "UPC deposed Metropolitan Elisey of Izyum, who hosted the occupiers and fled to the Russian Federation," *Suspilne. News*]

**Fig. 3 The role of the church in modern Ukrainian society as of 2021<sup>16</sup>**

During the study period, the positive social role of the church deserved a high appreciation from citizens; however, with the outbreak of hostilities in the East of Ukraine in 2014, the proportion of people who noted the role of the church as positive significantly decreased. However, by 2021, almost 50% of respondents positively assessed the role of the church in society. Results suggested that 33% believe that religious organizations do not play a significant role, and 4% assessed their roles as negative (Fig. 3).

As for the reaction of religious associations in Ukraine to the acute problems of our time, it should be noted primarily that the citizens of Ukraine are little informed about the position of the largest Ukrainian churches regarding a number of problems. Some of these issues include environmental decline, global warming, mass migrations of the population, attitude towards LGBTQ communities, international terrorism, and global warming. More than half of the respondents did not know anything about the reaction or position of the churches regarding these problems. This issue may indicate their lack of interest or the absence of a clear position among the religious organizations themselves. Assessing which side the Church is on in terms of “poor and disadvantaged” or “strong and rich,” citizens tend to believe that the Church is more on the side of the “strong and rich.” The results of the latest poll, however, no longer confirm this trend. According to the participants of the study, the OCU most adequately responds to the challenges and problems of our time, although such results are dictated by the greater prevalence of this organization and its popularity among citizens.<sup>17</sup>

Over the past 20 years, there have been discussions amid Ukrainian citizens about separation of church from state and school from church. The proportion of Ukrainian citizens in agreement that this situation is a necessary condition for democracy and ensures the human right to freedom of choice has increased significantly. 58% of citizens are convinced that the Church should not interfere in relations between a person and the state, because Ukraine is historically a multi-confessional country and the priority of any church will only cause additional tension. This tension is anticipated within inter-church and church-state relations.

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<sup>16</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021рр.* (Київ, 2021), 69, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021. (Kyiv, 2021), 69,]

<sup>17</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021рр.* (Київ, 2021), [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021. (Kyiv, 2021),]

Discrimination of believers of other churches is also expected. Only 18% of respondents as of 2021 consider it expedient to introduce a state church, 52% of them think it should be a church like OCU. It is interesting that, despite the rejection of the idea of a state church by the majority of citizens, they support the increasing involvement of the Church in participation in state or public affairs.<sup>18</sup>

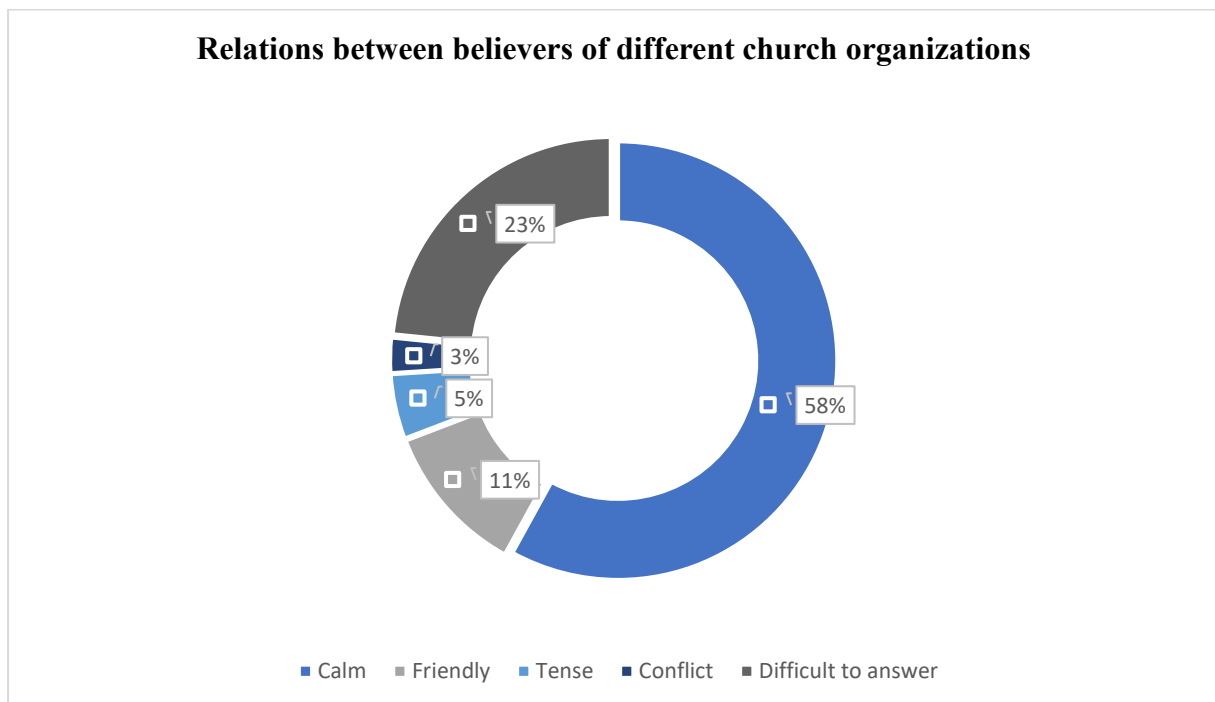
Citizens have a negative or indifferent attitude to the public demonstration of their religious behavior by some state figures of Ukraine. Also, compared with 2010, the proportion of citizens who believe that religion should not be taught in general education schools has increased. The number of those who support the idea of compulsory study of religion at school, as well as those who believe that the basics of religious teachings can be taught as optional, has decreased. The teaching of religion in schools is categorically opposed by most residents of the East, South and Center, while the relative majority of Westerners are in favor of its optional teaching. Representatives of many faiths are now present in the classes, and therefore it is not necessary to teach Christianity so that there are no conflicts on this basis. Citizens are wary of the introduction of a compulsory study of a religious subject in schools, because too much can be abused. By abuse they mean the imposition of their understanding of “true Christianity” by various religious organizations. Some respondents prefer that each denomination establish Sunday schools, which can be attended by everyone, because this has always been the case according to the Orthodox tradition.

As for the general attitude of citizens towards different religions, 74% have a positive attitude towards Orthodoxy. 37% of respondents have a positive attitude towards Greek Catholicism, 31% towards Roman Catholicism, from 11% to 14% of respondents have a positive attitude towards Protestantism, Islam and Judaism. Representatives of Greek Catholicism in the Western regions of Ukraine have the most negative attitude towards Protestants. Negative attitudes towards Islam and Judaism are somewhat more pronounced among representatives of the older age group. The thesis that only religions traditional for Ukraine have the right to exist is most supported in the West. As of 2021, believers surveyed believe that religious conflicts between the faithful of different churches occur mainly around

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<sup>18</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021рр.* (Київ, 2021), 106–107, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, *Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021.* (Kyiv, 2021), 106–107]

property and buildings, due to political contradictions, division of power, and spheres of influence.<sup>19</sup>



**Fig. 4 Relations between believers of different churches and religions in Ukraine as of 2021<sup>20</sup>**

The majority of respondents note that relations between believers in the area where they live are calm, another 11% noted that they are friendly, 3% that they are conflicted, and only 5% that they are tense. The greatest tension is observed in the Central regions. 39% believe that high tension exists between the UOC and the UOC-MP, as well as between the latter and the UOC-KP. People believe that the roots of the conflict are exclusively political and do not see a religious component in it. The survey participants in the Western region consider the relationship between the OCU and the UGCC to be friendly. Tensions between other religious organizations are noted by only a few percent of the respondents, so we can conclude that there

<sup>19</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021*рр. (Київ, 2021), 123, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021. (Kyiv, 2021), 123]

<sup>20</sup> Центр Разумкова, *Особливості релігійного і церковно-релігійного самовизначення громадян України: тенденції 2000-2021*рр. (Київ, 2021), 124, [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021\\_Religiya.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_Religiya.pdf). [Razumkov Center, Peculiarities of religious and church-religious self-determination of citizens of Ukraine: trends 2000-2021. (Kyiv, 2021), 124]

are almost no conflicts between other churches. In general, during the monitoring, Ukrainian society demonstrated a fairly high level of tolerance towards the practice of different religions. However, 47% consider it acceptable to ban certain religious organizations that are dangerous for the state or have a dangerous psychological impact on people.

## **Conclusions**

The period after Ukraine gained independence can be called a transitional stage, when the structuring of society took place, the search for each citizen of his/her place in the economic, social, cultural, and spiritual spheres transpired, because everything that existed before then disappeared along with the Soviet Union. In a democratic society, every person has received a real right to choose between being a believer, an unbeliever or an atheist. There was a crystallization of worldview positions, which was followed with a series of annual surveys. This choice is still happening, but it has been significantly deformed by a litany of crises. These include the severe crisis of all public spheres, social insecurity, the oppression of basic necessities of life, the shock of the war in the East since 2014, environmental disasters, and pointedly, the unexpected Russian attack on February 24, 2022 that killed many people. Families were separated or homeless, and the war dragged on for months. In such conditions, many people turned their eyes to religion, in the age-old foundations of which they seek to find support for their precarious position.

In Ukraine, the expressive regional character of all aspects of religious and confessional-church self-determination of Ukrainian citizens is preserved: the Western region is traditionally characterized by a high level of religiosity, while the South and East are the lowest. The attribution of some citizens to one or another religion or confession is associated mainly with socio-cultural or ethnic identity, rather than with religious spheres. The Church in Ukraine is an essential factor in the democratization of the life of society on the basis of Christian values. It forms a socially active position of believers in defending their civil rights, which serves the interests of the formation and development of civil society. A fifth of citizens have an unstable religious or confessional-church identity due to disputes between Orthodox churches, and over the past few years, there has been a growing trend in the number of those who do not identify themselves with any of the faiths. The proportion of citizens in agreement about the separations of church from state, and school from church, are necessary conditions for a democratic state. The belief that these separations ensure the human right to freedom of conscience has increased. In the Western region, more often than in others, believers believe that only religions traditional for Ukraine have the right to exist.



The most conflictogenic relations are between the two Orthodox churches, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP). The latter was banned due to cooperation with the aggressor country, and many of its communities came under the jurisdiction of the UOC. The level of actualized conflict in relations between representatives of different religious organizations in Ukraine is low, and since religious identity is much less important for citizens than civil identity, the emergence of religious conflicts in Ukraine in the near future seems unlikely.

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