



UNIVERSITY OF  
MARYLAND

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

PROGRAM FOR  
PUBLIC CONSULTATION

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL  
AND SECURITY STUDIES

# Americans on U.S. Role in the Ukraine-Russia War

A NATIONAL SURVEY OF REGISTERED VOTERS

**July 2023**

## PRIMARY INVESTIGATORS

Steven Kull

Nancy Gallagher

## RESEARCH ANALYSTS

Evan Fehsenfeld

Evan Charles Lewitus

## RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Davis Bunn

Bethany Sapp

## INTRODUCTION

In March of 2022, Russia launched a full invasion of Ukraine. The United Nations, including the US, quickly declared this invasion to be an act of aggression that violates Ukraine's national sovereignty as guaranteed by the UN Charter. The invasion triggered a series of debates over the US' role in this conflict:

- the degree of US intervention, if any;
- how to weigh any benefits of intervention against the risk of Russia escalating to nuclear attacks;
- whether to press Ukraine to enter peace negotiations, and if so, under what conditions.

Since the start of the war, the US and NATO have been providing Ukraine with military aid. While the US has committed to supporting Ukraine militarily, it has not always met every request from Ukraine, particularly for the more advanced weaponry. Instead, the US has been gradually giving Ukraine more advanced weapons systems. The US has also been giving humanitarian aid including food and shelter, and funds to repair critical infrastructure.

Despite pressure from various quarters, the US opposed for some time providing Ukraine with fighter jets, one of the most advanced types of weaponry, and one that Ukraine had been requesting since the start of the war. Then, in May 2023, the US struck an agreement with NATO allies, allowing them to send US-made fighter jets, with the US agreeing to train Ukrainian pilots on how to operate them.

There have also been debates about whether the US should encourage Ukraine to enter into peace negotiations with Russia. Early negotiations failed to achieve a peace agreement, and negotiations have yet to resume. Currently, Ukraine's stance is that it will not enter any negotiations until Russia first commits to withdraw all its forces from Ukraine – a precondition rejected wholesale by Russia. The Biden administration has held the position that it will support Ukraine however it decides to move forward.

Some Members of Congress and foreign policy leaders, as well as former President Donald Trump, have called for pressuring Ukraine to start negotiations. In early 2023, two groups of Congresspeople – one Republican and one progressive Democrat – sent a letter to the Biden administration urging them to link future aid packages to a push for starting negotiations. (The progressive group quickly retracted their letter.)

These policy questions are often seen as too complex to be left to eliciting public opinion, through standard polls, town halls, or calls and letters to Congress. The Program for Public Consultation (PPC) has developed an alternative method for revealing public opinion that allows Americans to meaningfully participate in these policy discussions. A representative sample goes through a process called a "policymaking simulation" that provides respondents with the information and perspectives necessary to understand and respond to complex policy questions.

## SURVEY DESIGN

Unlike standard polls that rely on respondents' existing impressions and information, PPC's "policymaking simulations" seek to put respondents in the shoes of a policymaker. Respondents:

- are given a briefing on policy options under consideration;
- evaluate strongly stated arguments both for and against each option; and then
- make their final recommendation.

Respondents were provided a detailed briefing that included information about the history and circumstances leading up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including perspectives on the role played by NATO, and the 2014 political uprising in Ukraine known as the Maidan Revolution and its aftermath.

They then evaluated four policy questions, together with briefings and arguments pro and con:

- Whether the US should continue to provide military aid to Ukraine, including military equipment, ammunition, training and intelligence.
- Whether the US should continue to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine, including providing food and shelter, and funds to repair critical infrastructure.
- Whether the US should have agreed to let other NATO countries provide Ukraine with US-made fighter jets, and for the US to train Ukrainian pilots on how to use them.
- Whether the US should encourage Ukraine to start negotiating a peace deal with Russia, even if Russia has not yet committed to withdraw their forces from Ukraine.

The entire text of the survey was reviewed by experts from each side of the debates to ensure that the briefings were accurate and balanced, and that the arguments presented were the strongest ones being made. Changes were made in response to their feedback.

The survey was written to be fully comprehensible by a person with a high school education. Using the Flesch-Kincaid readability test, the survey text was found to be readable by a person with a 10-11<sup>th</sup> grade reading level.

### Fielding of Survey

The survey was fielded June 15-28, 2023 online with a national sample of 2,445 registered voters provided by Nielsen Scarborough from its larger sample, which is recruited by telephone and mail from a random sample of households. There is a margin of error of +/- 2%.

Responses were weighted by age, income, gender, race and geographic region. Benchmarks for weights were obtained from the US Census' Current Populations Survey of Registered Voters. The sample was also weighted by partisan affiliation, using benchmarks obtained from the US Census' American Community Survey.

A further analysis was conducted by dividing the sample six ways, depending on the PVI Cook rating of the respondent's Congressional district. This enabled comparison of respondents who live in very red, somewhat red, leaning red, leaning blue, somewhat blue, and very blue districts.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

### Awareness of the Conflict

Eight-in-ten said they are very or somewhat aware of the history of Ukraine-Russia relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as the conflict around NATO expansion. Asked how closely they have followed the events in Ukraine, over eight-in-ten said very or somewhat closely.

### Military Aid

A large bipartisan majority of nearly seven-in-ten favored the US continuing to provide significant military aid to Ukraine, including military equipment, ammunition, training and intelligence. The argument that did best, overall and among Republicans and Democrats, was in favor of military aid, and stated that the US has a duty to help counter Russia's violation of international law by assisting Ukraine. The con arguments, including the one that focused on the potential for escalation to nuclear war, were found convincing by just around half overall. Majorities of Republicans and independents found the con arguments convincing but smaller majorities than for the pro arguments.

### Humanitarian Aid

An overwhelming bipartisan majority of eight-in-ten favored the US continuing to give humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, including providing food and shelter, and helping them repair critical infrastructure. Over nine-in-ten Democrats were in support, as were over seven-in-ten Republicans and independents.

### Fighter Jets

A large bipartisan majority – over seven-in-ten – approved of the NATO agreement reached in May 2023, in which the US allowed its NATO allies to send US-made fighter jets to Ukraine, and the US agreed to train Ukrainian pilots to operate them. Over eight-in-ten Democrats approved of this agreement, as did over six-in-ten Republicans and independents.

### Whether to Encourage Ukraine to Enter Peace Negotiations Now

A clear majority of fifty-six percent said the US should not encourage Ukraine to enter into negotiations with Russia, if Russia does not first agree to withdraw entirely from Ukraine, as per Ukraine's request. Among Democrats, around two-thirds said the US should not do this, as did just over half of independents. However, among Republicans, a small majority supported this idea. All the arguments—both pro and con—were found convincing by large majorities, but the one that did best stated that Ukraine has sacrificed greatly, and the US should not undermine them by pressing for negotiations on terms they do not want.

## FINDINGS

### Awareness of the Conflict

**Eight-in-ten said they are very or somewhat aware of the history of Ukraine-Russia relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as the conflict around NATO expansion. Asked how closely they have followed the events in Ukraine, over eight-in-ten said very or somewhat closely.**

Respondents were first provided a detailed briefing that included information about the history of Ukraine-Russia relations since the Cold War, including the different perspectives on the role that NATO has played. Asked how familiar they are with those events, 80% said very (36%) or somewhat familiar (43%), with no significant partisan differences.

They were then presented a briefing on the differences in public opinion between eastern and western Ukrainians regarding Ukraine's alliances to Russia and Europe; the 2014 political uprising in Ukraine (the Maidan Revolution) and its aftermath; and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, including the response from the US and the United Nations. Asked how closely they had been following those events, 83% said very (46%) or somewhat closely (37%), with no significant partisan differences.

### Military Aid

**A large bipartisan majority of nearly seven-in-ten favored the US continuing to provide significant military aid to Ukraine, including military equipment, ammunition, training and intelligence. The argument that did best, overall and among Republicans and Democrats, was in favor of military aid, and stated that the US has a duty to help counter Russia's violation of international law by assisting Ukraine. The con arguments, including the one that focused on the potential for escalation to nuclear war, were found convincing by just around half overall. Majorities of Republicans and independents found the con arguments convincing but smaller majorities than for the pro arguments.**

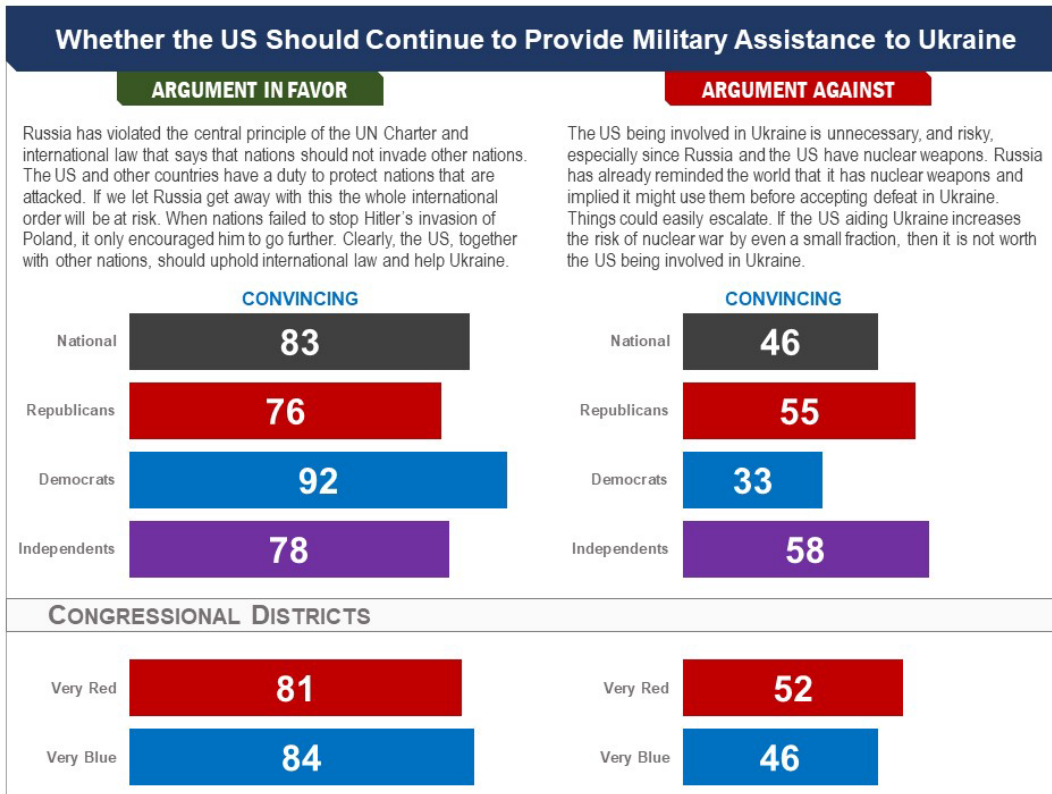
Respondents were presented a briefing on US military assistance to Ukraine, as follows:

*We will now turn to a key question: whether the US should continue to provide military and other assistance to Ukraine.*

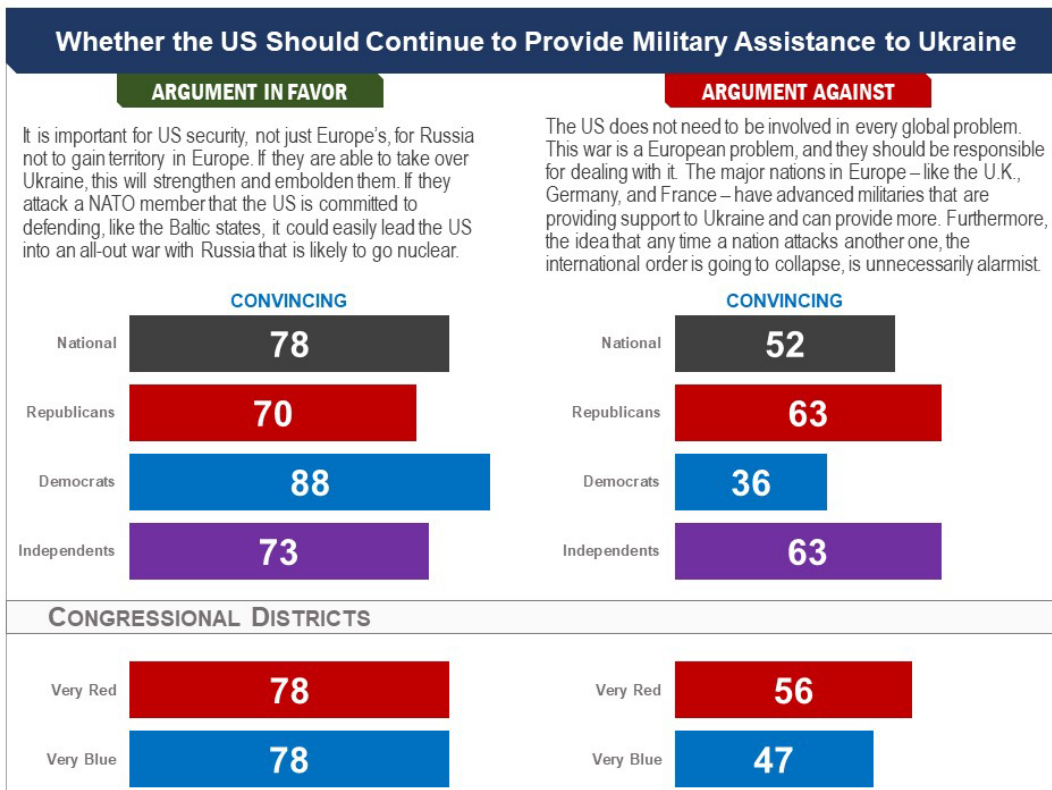
*As you may know, the US has been providing the Ukrainian military: military equipment, ammunition, training and intelligence. It is difficult to put a dollar value on this assistance, as much of the military equipment provided is fairly old and used, but it is roughly some tens of billions of dollars.*

*European countries have been providing an equivalent amount of military assistance.*

The first argument in favor, that Russia has violated international law which the US has a duty to uphold, did the best of any argument. It was found convincing by an overwhelming bipartisan majority of 83% (Republicans 76%, Democrats 92%). The first con argument, that US involvement risks escalating the conflict to a nuclear war, was found convincing by less than half (46%), including just 33% of Democrats but a majority of Republicans (55%) and independents (58%).

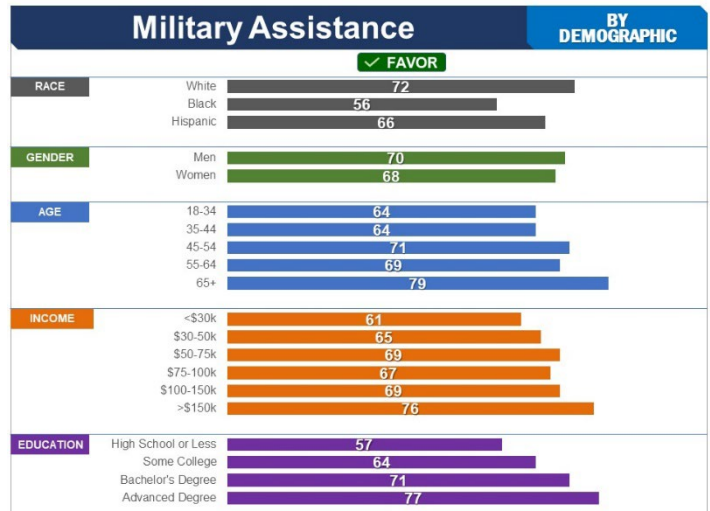
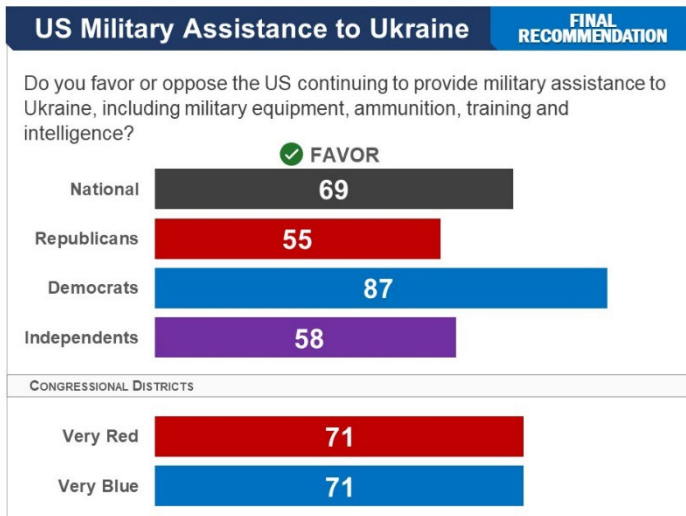


The second argument in favor, that it is important for US security that Russia does not gain a foothold in Europe, was found convincing by a very large bipartisan majority of nearly eight-in-ten (78%, Republicans 70%, Democrats 88%). The second con argument countered that Europe is fully capable of handling the problem itself and challenged the idea that failing to respond to the conflict threatens world order, was found convincing by just over half (52%), including 63% of Republicans and independents, but only 36% of Democrats.



Asked whether they favor, “the US continuing to provide military assistance to Ukraine, including military equipment, ammunition, training and intelligence,” 69% were in favor, including 55% of Republicans, 87% of Democrats and 58% of independents.

Majorities in all types of congressional districts were in favor of continued military aid, from very red to very blue districts, with no significant variation.



## Humanitarian Aid

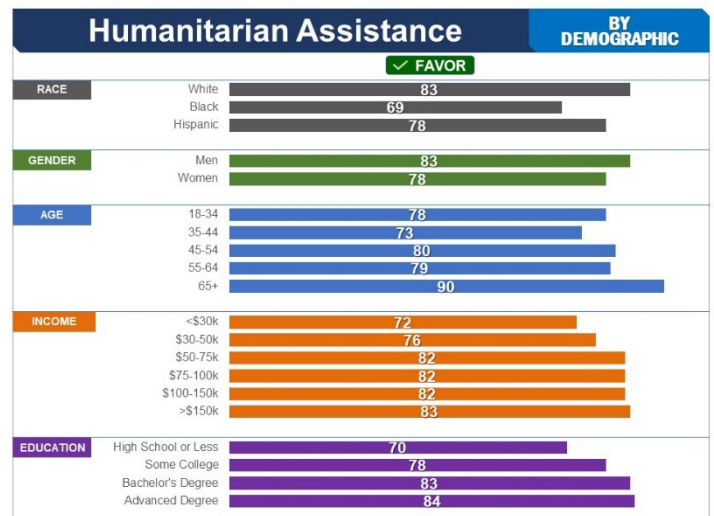
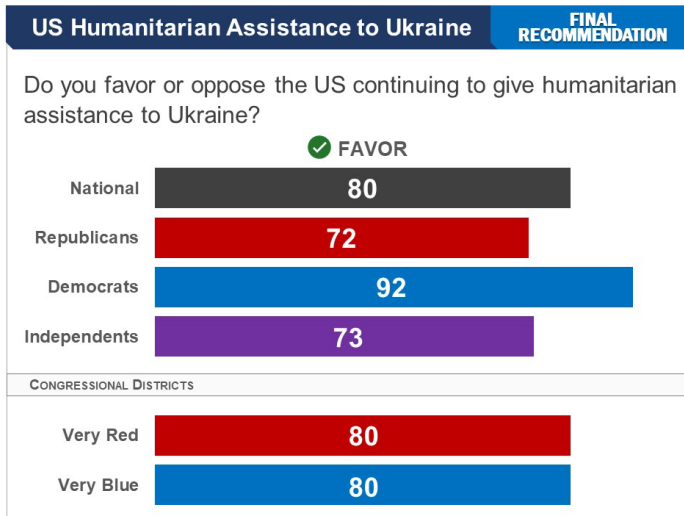
**An overwhelming bipartisan majority of eight-in-ten favored the US continuing to give humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, including providing food and shelter, and helping them repair critical infrastructure. Over nine-in-ten Democrats were in support, as were over seven-in-ten Republicans and independents.**

Respondents were presented the following:

*Both the US and European countries have also been giving Ukraine humanitarian aid, including providing food and shelter, and helping them repair access to water and electricity. So far, the US has given about \$39 billion in such assistance. The Europeans have contributed an equivalent amount and have also accepted more than a million Ukrainian refugees into their countries. Another proposal is for the US to continue giving humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.*

Asked whether they favored, “the US continuing to give humanitarian assistance to Ukraine,” 80% were in favor, including 92% of Democrats, 72% of Republicans and 73% of independents.

Majorities in all types of congressional districts were in favor of continued humanitarian aid, from very red to very blue districts, with no significant variation.



### Fighter Jets

**A large bipartisan majority – over seven-in-ten – approved of the NATO agreement reached in May 2023, in which the US allowed its NATO allies to send US-made fighter jets to Ukraine, and the US agreed to train Ukrainian pilots to operate them. Over eight-in-ten Democrats approved of this agreement, as did over six-in-ten Republicans and independents.**

Respondents were briefed on this topic, as follows:

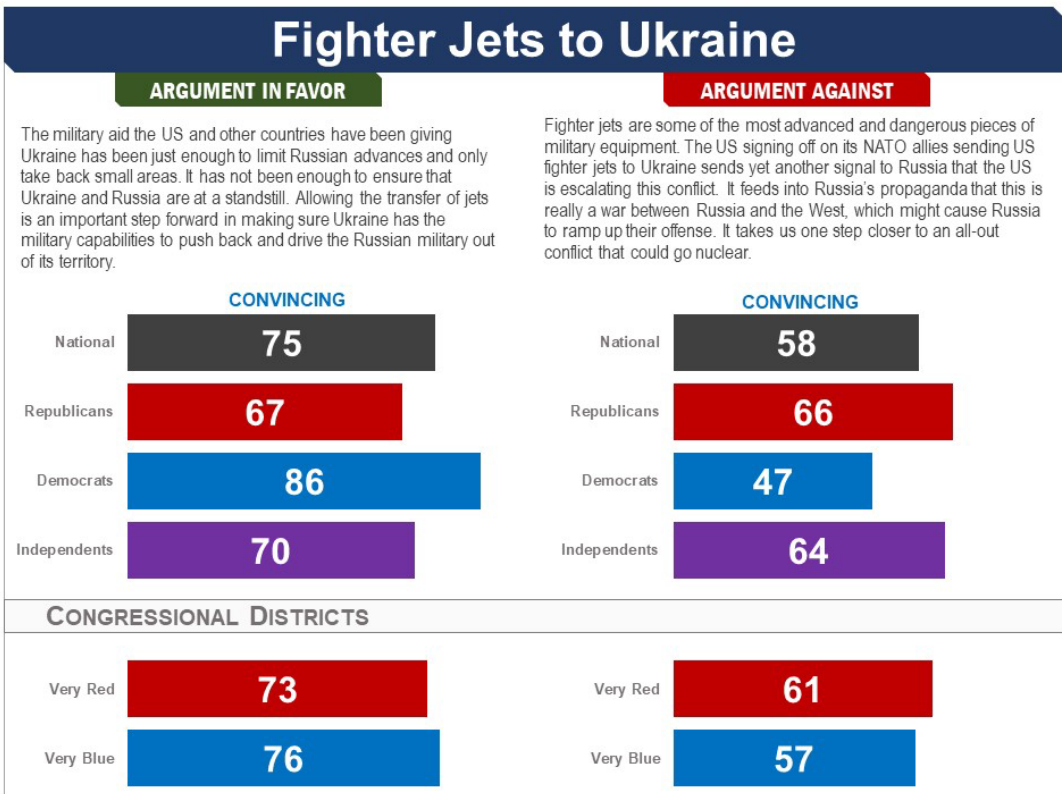
*Now let's turn to a specific type of military equipment that Ukraine has been asking the US and other NATO members for – fighter jets.*

*Until recently only a few NATO countries provided a limited number of fighter jets to Ukraine, and Ukraine has asked for more. NATO countries did have more fighter jets they had bought from the US, but the US did not permit them to transfer them to Ukraine (A condition of the sale was that the US can say who they may transfer the jets to.)*

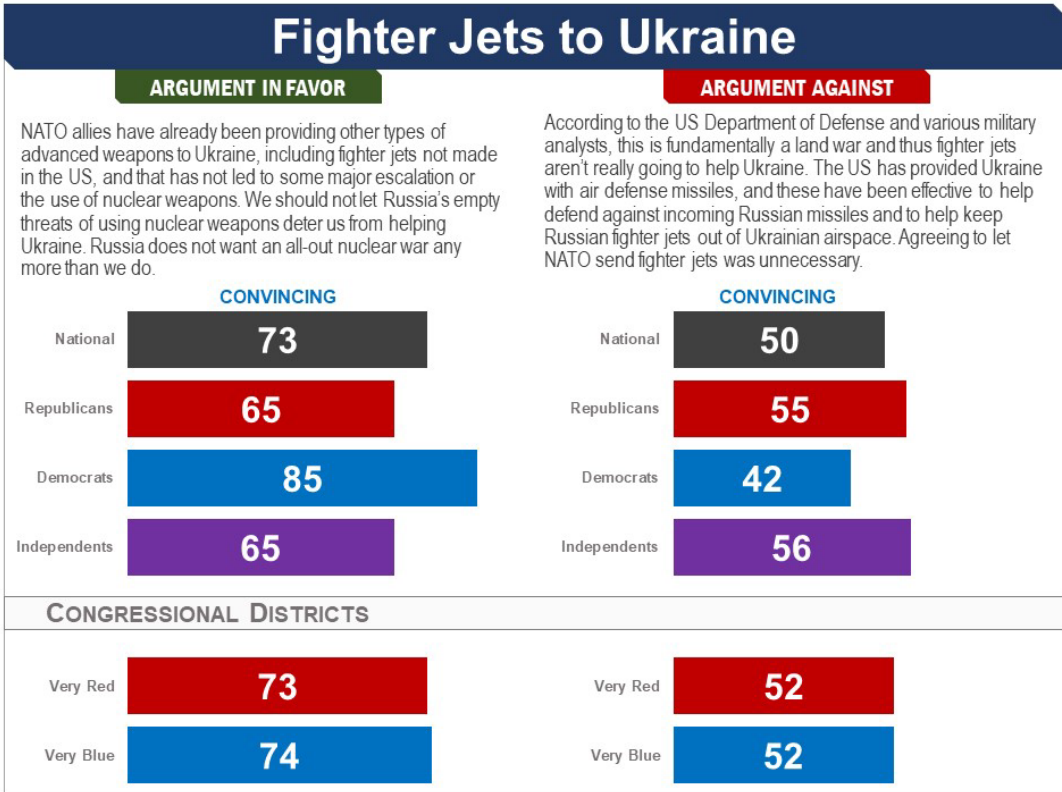
*Recently, at the urging of other NATO members, the US shifted its positions and agreed to allow them to provide those fighter jets to Ukraine. The US also agreed to provide training to Ukrainian pilots on how to operate these fighter jets. Whether the US should have agreed to this has been debated.*

The first argument in support stated that this type of advanced military equipment is essential for Ukraine to push back Russian forces, and was found convincing by 75% (Republicans 67%, Democrats 86%). The argument against, that this sends an escalatory signal to Russia who could respond with a nuclear attack, was found convincing by 58%, including 66% of Republicans, but just 47% of Democrats.





The second argument in support, that the US and NATO have been sending more advanced weaponry to Ukraine without any escalation by Russia, was found convincing by 73% (Republicans 65%, Democrats 85%). The argument against asserted that, according to the Department of Defense, fighter jets aren't useful or necessary for Ukraine's military success, and was found convincing by just 50%, including a small majority of Republicans (55%), but just 42% of Democrats.

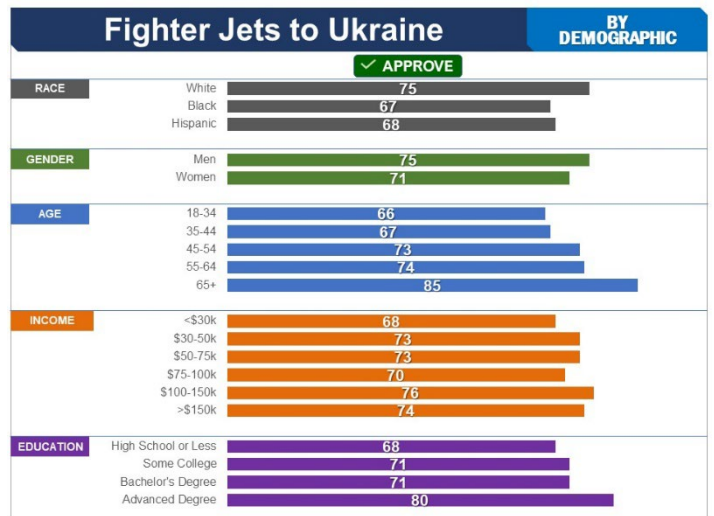
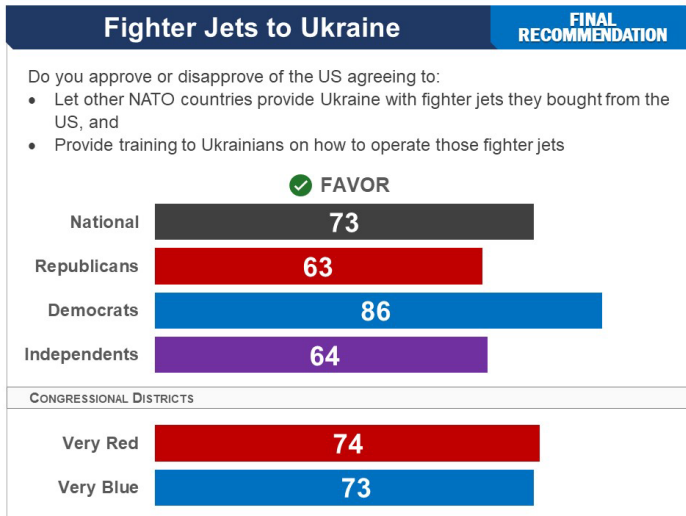


They were again presented the US-NATO agreement by which the US would:

- *let other NATO countries provide Ukraine with fighter jets they bought from the US and to*
- *provide training to Ukrainians on how to operate those fighter jets*

Asked for their final recommendation, 73% approved, including 63% of Republicans, 86% of Democrats and 64% of independents.

Majorities in all types of congressional districts were in favor of the fighter jet agreement, from very red to very blue districts, with no significant variation.



### Whether to Encourage Ukraine to Enter Peace Negotiations Now

A clear majority of fifty-six percent said the US should not encourage Ukraine to enter into negotiations with Russia, if Russia does not first agree to withdraw entirely from Ukraine, as per Ukraine’s request. Among Democrats, around two-thirds said the US should not do this, as did just over half of independents. However, among Republicans, a small majority supported this idea. All the arguments—both pro and con—were found convincing by large majorities, but the one that did best stated that Ukraine has sacrificed greatly, and the US should not undermine them by pressing for negotiations on terms they do not want.

Some Members of Congress and foreign policy leaders, as well as former President Donald Trump, have called for pressuring Ukraine to start negotiations.

Respondents were introduced to the topic of negotiations, as follows:

*Currently, there is a debate about whether the US should encourage Ukraine to enter into negotiations with Russia.*

*Right now, the US takes the position that it is entirely up to Ukraine to decide whether to start negotiating a peace deal with Russia, and under what conditions. Ukraine has expressed interest in such negotiations, but on the condition that Russia first commits to withdraw its troops from all of Ukraine, which Russia has refused to do.*

They were then presented the following proposal:

*Some people have proposed that the US should encourage Ukraine to enter into negotiations, **whether or not** Russia first commits to withdraw from all of Ukraine.*

The first argument in favor, which asserted that there is no way Ukraine can actually win because Russia will likely resort to nuclear attacks if it feels like it's going to lose, was found convincing by 57%, including 63% of Republicans and 64% of independents, but just under half of Democrats. The first con argument proclaimed that the implication of this proposal is Ukraine ceding territory to Russia and thus letting Russia get away with international crimes, and was found convincing by a bipartisan majority of two-thirds, including 60% of Republicans, 77% of Democrats and 64% of independents.

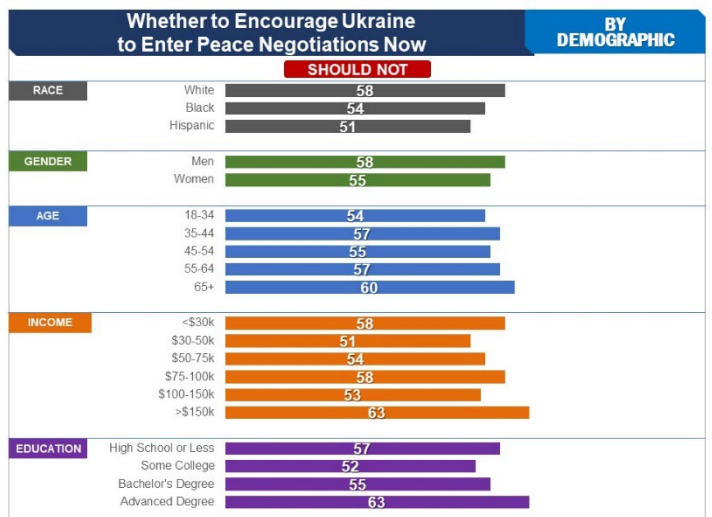
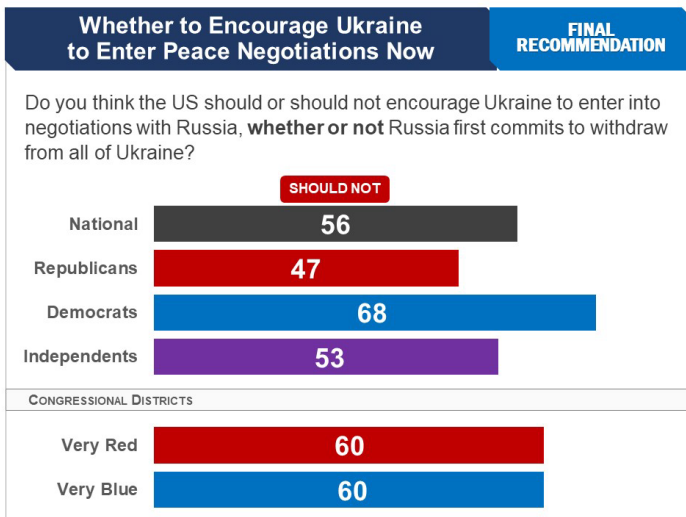


The second argument in favor emphasized that this war is costing lives and anything that can be done to end it as soon as possible should be done. This was found convincing by a bipartisan six-in-ten, including 65% of Republicans, 53% of Democrats and 67% of independents. The counter argument proclaimed that Ukraine has sacrificed greatly and exceeded everyone's expectations, and to press for negotiations now would undermine them, and was found convincing by a large bipartisan majority of three-quarters, including 68% of Republicans, 85% of Democrats and 68% of independents.



Asked for their final recommendation, a majority (56%) were opposed to the US encouraging Ukraine to enter into negotiations with Russia, whether or not Russia has committed to withdraw from all of Ukraine, including 68% of Democrats and 53% of independents, but less than half of Republicans (47%, with 53% in favor).

Majorities in all six types of congressional districts were against this proposal, from very red to very blue districts, with no significant variations.



## Demographics

When it comes to foreign policy regarding Russia, there is always the question as to whether older generations, who lived through the Cold War, will be more likely than younger generations to support policies opposed to Russian expansion. An analysis of the primary demographic factors shows that, while there is majority support among all age groups for continued military aid and fighter jets, there are substantially more people aged 65 and above who are in support. (See pgs. 7 and 10)

People who have higher education are also more supportive of continued military aid and fighter jets, although there is still majority support among each educational group. (See pgs. 7 and 10)

Because Republican support for military aid and encouraging negotiations was relatively close to being divided, a separate analysis was done to determine if there are any substantial differences between demographic groups of Republicans. The only significant variations were by age. Continuing to provide military aid was supported by a majority of Republicans aged 45 and older (62%), but it was supported by less than half of Republicans between 18-44 years old (45%). Encouraging Ukraine to enter negotiations, even if Russia has not agreed to withdraw their troops, was favored by half of Republicans aged 45 and older (49%), but among those 18-44 years old a majority of 57% favored encouraging it.

# AMERICANS ON US ROLE IN THE UKRAINE-RUSSIA WAR

## A National Survey of Registered Voters

JULY 2023

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**STEVEN KULL | NANCY GALLAGHER**  
Primary Investigators

**EVAN SCOT FEHSENFELD | EVAN CHARLES LEWITUS**  
Research Analysis

**DAVIS BUNN | BETHANY SAPP**  
Research Assistance

**JP THOMAS**  
Communications & Media Outreach

**ALLISON STETTLER**  
Design & Production



**PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION**  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

The Program for Public Consultation seeks to improve democratic governance by consulting the citizenry on key public policy issues governments face. It has developed innovative

survey methods that simulate the process that policymakers go through — getting a briefing, hearing arguments, dealing with tradeoffs — before coming to their conclusion. It also uses surveys to help find common ground between conflicting parties. The Program for Public Consultation is part of the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland. [www.publicconsultation.org](http://www.publicconsultation.org)



**SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY**  
**CENTER FOR**  
**INTERNATIONAL &**  
**SECURITY STUDIES**  
**AT MARYLAND**

The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) conducts research, informs policy debates, and helps current and future leaders find creative solutions to complex global challenges. Three cross-cutting themes connect faculty, researchers, and students working on CISSM's research agenda:

- Reducing risks from dual-use technologies
- Enhancing human security
- Improving multi-stakeholder governance

CISSM is well connected to policy debates and practitioners and offers its researchers and students opportunities to develop broad perspectives on security, economic, and international development issues.