



Bipartisan Beginnings Yield to Partisan Divides on Ukraine

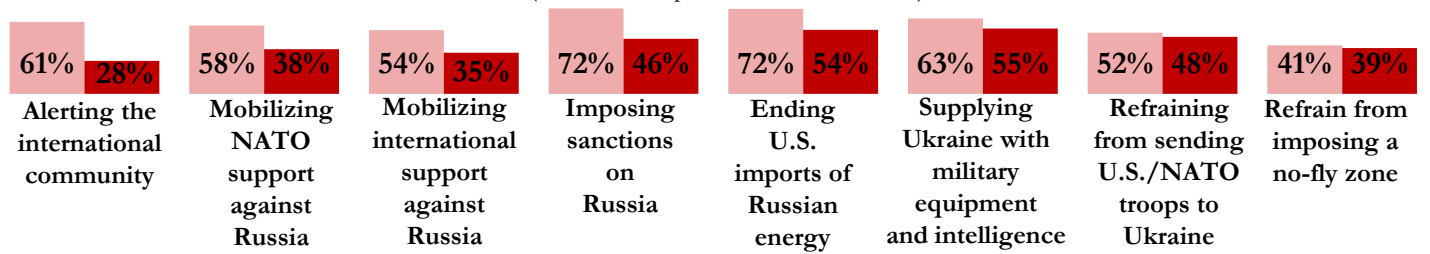
From March to May 2022

Shibley Telhami and Stella Rouse, Principal Investigators

Republicans were less favorable of the same American steps when they were specified as action taken by the ‘Biden Administration’, versus by the ‘United States’

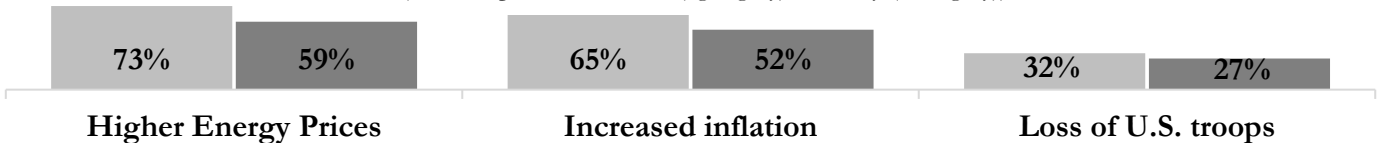
Subsample 1 (Light red): How would you rate the following steps taken by the United States in response to Russia’s war on Ukraine?

Subsample 2 (Dark red): How would you rate the following steps taken by the Biden Administration in response to Russia’s war on Ukraine?
(those who expressed favorable views)



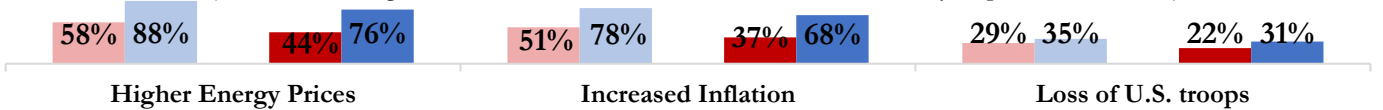
Americans were less willing to incur the costs of war in May than in March

How much of a cost are you prepared to see the U.S. pay in helping Ukraine?
(Total responses in March (light grey) and May (dark grey))



The decrease in willingness was accompanied by increased partisanship

(Red indicates Republican, Blue indicates Democrats; Dark color is May, Light color is March)



Respondents were less supportive of a no-fly zone when they were alerted about risks of war with Russia than respondents who received no such information

Subsample 1 (Dark): NATO and US leaders have opposed a no-fly zone over Ukraine because they say it would risk war with Russia... Do you support imposing a no-fly zone over Ukraine if war persists?

Subsample 2 (Light): Do you support having the US/NATO impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine if war persists?
(those who supported a no-fly zone)





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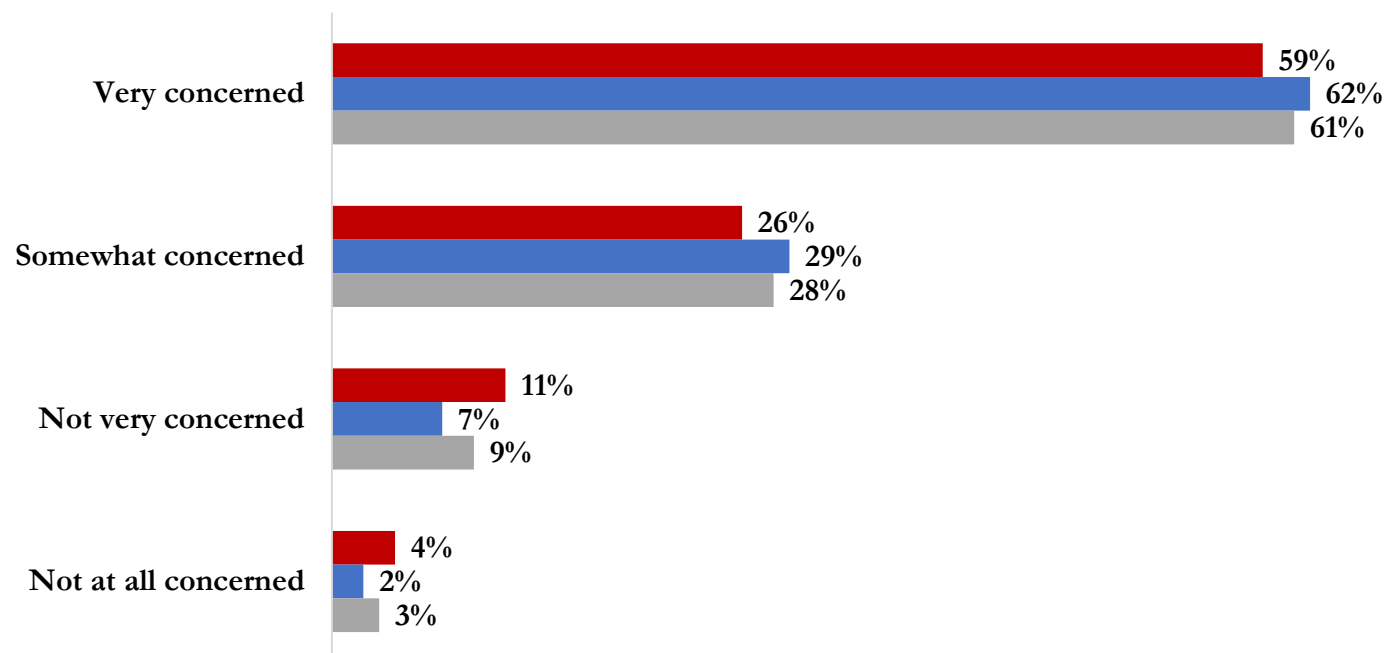
Americans Remain Supportive of Aiding Ukraine but Show Signs of Fatigue in Our May 2022 Poll

In March 2022, one month after Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we reported in an article published by [Brookings](#) that the Ukraine crisis managed to eliminate or narrow the deep American partisan divide, at least surrounding U.S. involvement in the conflict. For example, the poll found that:

- Americans, across the partisan divide, were willing to pay some price in energy costs and inflation for supporting Ukraine.
- Large bipartisan majorities supported supplying Ukraine with military equipment and continuing to impose tough economic sanctions on Russia should the conflict persist.
- Over two-thirds of Americans, including among Republicans and Democrats, were opposed to sending troops to Ukraine, with over two-thirds somewhat or very concerned about a potential U.S. military confrontation with Russia.

Yet, two months later, our May 2022 poll showed signs of growing partisanship and fatigue are starting to appear across public opinions surrounding the Ukraine war. Americans support Ukraine's fight for independence, but some seem fearful of the U.S. becoming militarily involved in another war.

Just one month after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, **Republicans** and **Democrats** were very concerned about a potential U.S. military confrontation with Russia





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Early Bipartisanship Gives Way to Increasing Partisan Gap

At the start of the Ukrainian crisis, Americans showed signs of bipartisan support for actions taken by Biden and how the U.S. should support Ukraine. Most respondents, regardless of political party, overwhelmingly supported actions such as economic sanctions, providing military equipment and increasing diplomatic efforts. There was also bipartisan support for enacting a no-fly zone (NFZ) while few supported sending in troops.

However, since March, there has been an increase in polarization on certain issues related to Ukraine. The change in partisan support of various actions towards Russia is clearly visible when looking at the type of media respondents consume. Since the initial poll in March those who primarily watch MSNBC, CNN or public broadcasting have increased their support for the U.S. sending in troops with NATO allies.

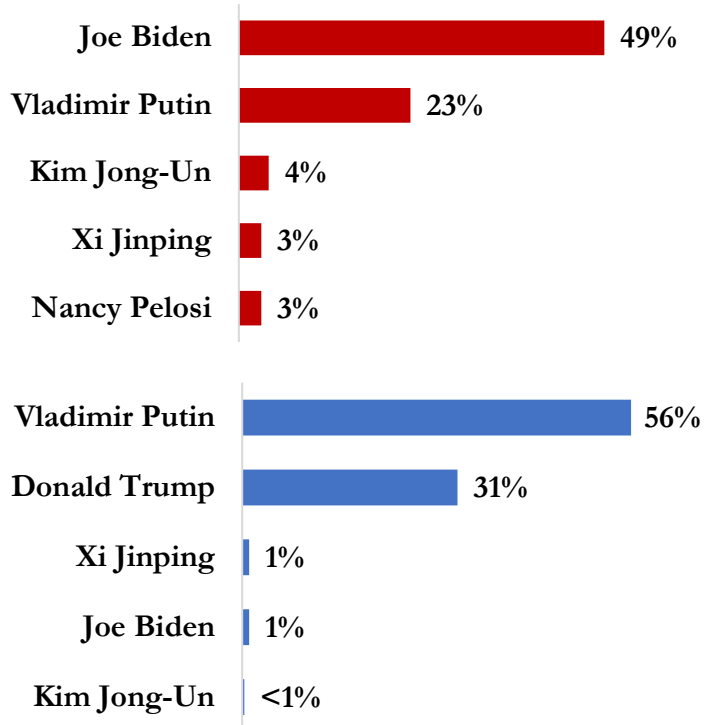
Furthermore, the partisan difference is also visible when we compare the responses from those who primarily watch Fox New versus liberal leaning networks such as CNN or MSNBC. Since March, those who primarily watch Fox News have significantly decreased their support for the U.S. incurring various costs of war due to inflation or energy prices. However, respondents who primarily watch MSNBC reported higher levels of support for incurring financial costs due to the conflict since March.

This is an interesting finding as it reflects how the media may have played a role in impacting the polarization of American's views of the conflict over just a 2-month time period. While some Republicans are becoming less willing to incur the costs of war, some Democrats are becoming more willing to do so.

This could be an indicator of further divisions to come as we get closer to election season later this year.

The increasing divide in support for Ukraine could also be attributed to partisan views on Putin. In March 2022, Republicans were more likely to list Biden first (49%) than Putin (23%) as one of the two "national or world leaders" they disliked the most.. Democrats listed Putin (56%) and then Trump (31%) as their first choice.

Republicans were more likely to select Biden and **Democrats** were more likely to select Putin as their first choice for most disliked world or national leader





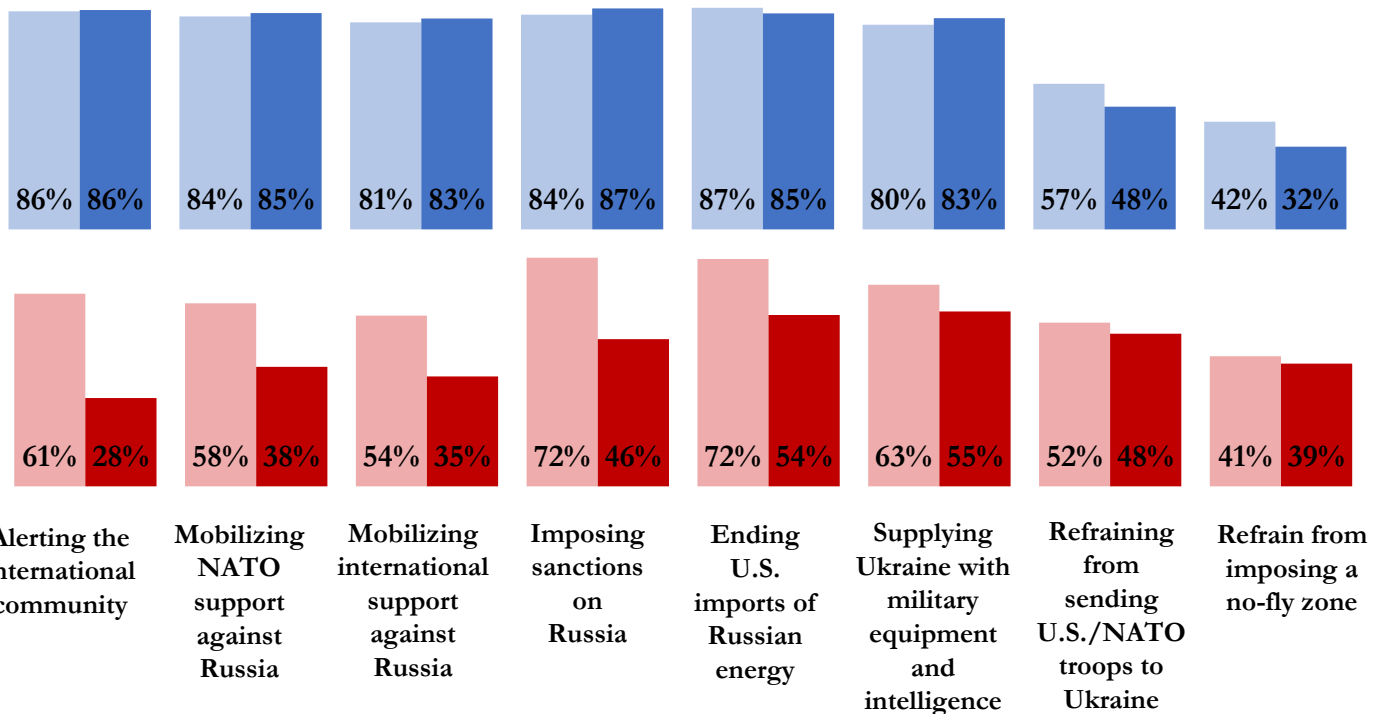
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Early Bipartisanship Gives Way to Increasing Partisan Gap

Additionally, in the poll conducted in May, we included an experiment to measure how people's views of Biden impacted their support for actions taken by the U.S. in the crisis so far. One group was asked to rate their support for steps taken by the 'Biden Administration,' while the other group was asked the same questions, but 'Biden Administration' was replaced by the 'United States.'

When the 'Biden Administration' was not mentioned, Republicans were significantly more likely to state that actions taken were very favorable or somewhat favorable. By simply omitting Biden from the question, respondent's views on the Ukraine crisis dramatically changed, showing how much their views of the president impacted their views on the actions taken towards Ukraine.

Republicans were less favorable of the same American steps when they were specified as action taken by the 'Biden Administration', versus by the 'United States'. **Democrats** views barely changed* (those who expressed favorable views)



* Lighter colors indicate those respondents who received a text that mentioned the Biden Administration's actions in Ukraine, while darker colors indicate those who simply got a text that stated United States response in Ukraine.



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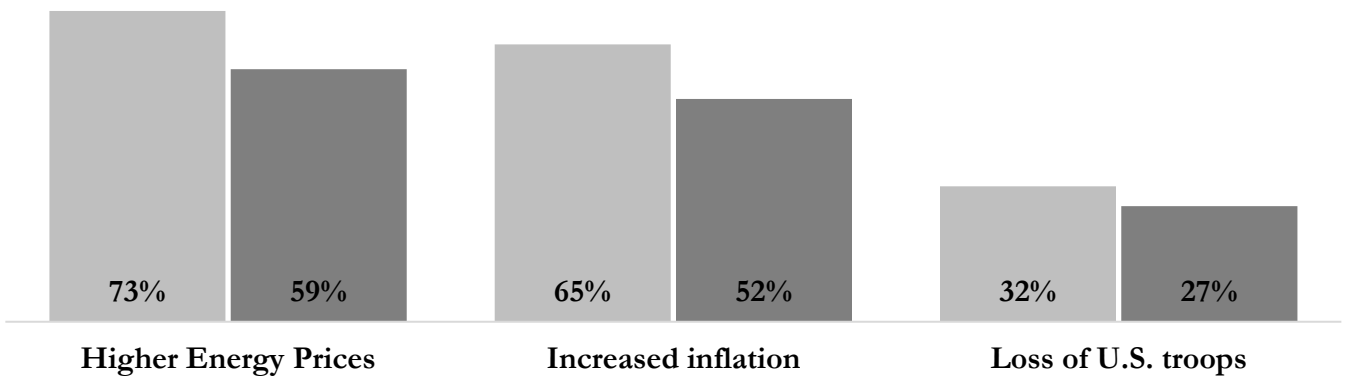
Signs of Fatigue: Where Americans Stand Today

According to our May 2022 poll, while Americans generally showed support for Ukraine, there were signs of fatigue among the public. Since the last poll, conducted in March 2022, acceptance of various costs of war decreased among the public. For instance, there was a sharp drop in willingness to pay higher energy prices between March and May. In March, 73% of Americans were somewhat or very willing to pay higher prices and that same number dropped to 59% in May. There was also a 13% reduction in support for increased inflation over the same time period. The results are likely reflecting the increase in both energy prices and inflation that have impacted Americans since March this year along with general fatigue.

Some of the biggest drops in willingness to pay certain costs of war were among the lowest income brackets. While those making less than 30K were 22% more likely in March to be willing to see loss of U.S. troops to help Ukraine, this group has since dropped their support by 16% making them closer to the average. Furthermore, those in lower income brackets saw the largest drop in willingness to incur the financial costs of supporting Ukraine, compared to higher income brackets, with the lowest income bracket dropping from 74% in March to 52% in May. Since March, both inflation and energy costs have increased, trends that impact the lower income brackets first, making the cost of war more apparent to people with lower incomes.

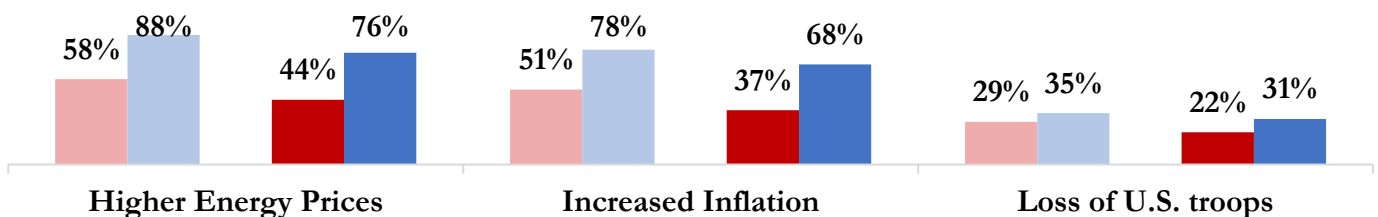
Decline in American Willingness to Incur the costs of War – March to May

(Total responses in March (light grey) and May (dark grey))



The decrease in willingness was accompanied by increased partisanship

(Red indicates Republican, Blue indicates Democrats; Dark color is May, Light color is March)





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Signs of Fatigue: Where Americans Stand Today

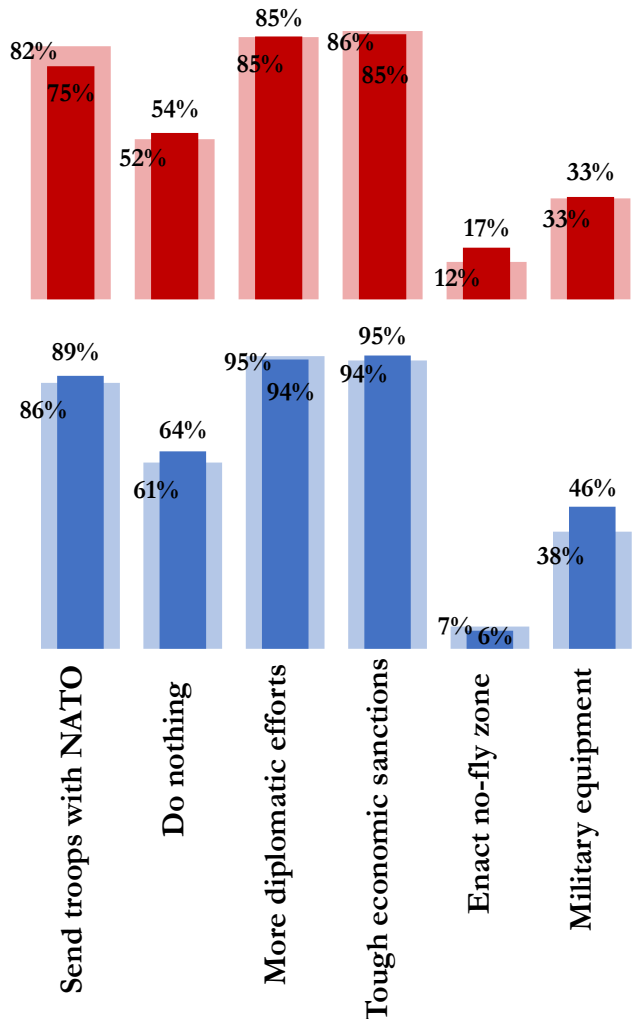
Besides fatigue among lower income brackets, there was also a reduction in the willingness to pay the costs of war among certain racial groups. When looking at how different racial groups responded between March and May, there is a clear change especially among Black respondents. In March, Black respondents were more willing than the average to pay the costs associated with helping Ukraine. In May, support among Black respondents decreased across all three categories (increased energy prices, inflation, and loss of U.S. troops).

Overall, most respondents wanted the U.S. to take action in the Ukrainian crisis, with very few respondents saying the U.S. should do nothing. However, there was a slight increase in the difference between Democrats and Republicans. The number of Republicans who wanted the U.S. to do nothing increased from March to May 2022. Those who mainly consume news online also stated that the U.S. should do nothing in higher numbers (16% in March, 22% May).

Additionally, while few Republicans reported that their views of Biden improved since the start of the war (7% in March, 6% in May), Democrats largely view Biden favorably as a result of his handling of the conflict. However, even among Democrats, there are some signs of fatigue. In March, 67% of Democrats had a more favorable view of the president as a result

of the conflict, while in May that number dropped to 62%. This seems to indicate that even among his supporters, the war is having a negative impact on their view of Biden.

Republicans and **Democrats** barely changed their views on what the U.S. should do from March to May*
Which of the following should the U.S. do if the Russian Invasion of Ukraine Persists?



*Lighter colors and percentages on the left indicate data from March 2022



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Americans Support Helping Ukraine, But Show Emerging Reluctance to Pay the Cost

Another experiment, conducted in the May 2022 poll, split the sample into two subsamples and asked respondents if they supported imposing a no-fly zone (NFZ). However, the first group was given the following context to a potential NFZ: “NATO and U.S. leaders have opposed a no-fly zone over Ukraine because they say it would risk war with Russia. Imposing a no-fly zone means being prepared to attack Russian defenses, including on Russian territory, shoot down Russian airplanes, and having

NATO/U.S. planes shot down.” The second group was given no such context.

Americans, including both Republicans and Democrats, who were provided the context were less likely to support a NFZ. This suggests that the Biden administration has failed to create a clear link for the American public between imposing a NFZ and the risk of a direct war with Russia.

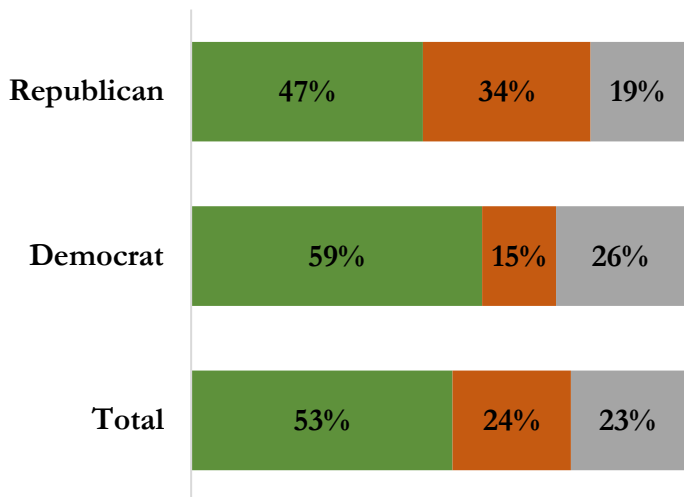
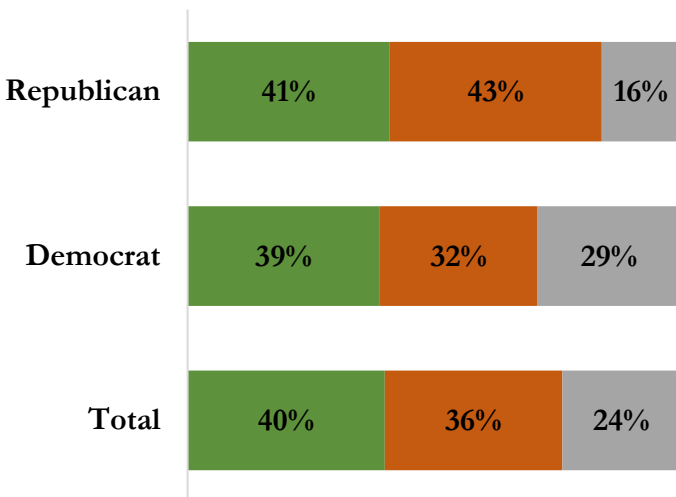
Respondents were less supportive of a no-fly zone when they were alerted about risks of war with Russia than respondents who received no such information

Group 1:
With Context

Group 2:
No Context

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know





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Americans Support Helping Ukraine, But Show Emerging Reluctance to Pay the Cost

Further examining the support among those who were provided the link between NFZ and the risk of a direct war with Russia, the results found that providing that context did not prevent support for a future NFZ should the invasion persist. Later in the poll, we asked respondents to select which options they would like to see the U.S. take if the war persists. Of those who were provided the context in the earlier experiment, 56% supported imposing a no-fly zone should the invasion persist. Holding true with our conclusion about the experiment, respondents who were not provided the context were more likely to support a NFZ if the invasion persists (63%). This also held true for Democrats, with 55% supporting a future NFZ when provided context compared to 72% when no such context was provided. However, 56% of Republicans who were given the context of the possible implications to a NFZ supported one if the invasion persists, compared to 51% who were not provided the context. In general, when asked about if the war persists, more Americans supported enforcing a NFZ if the invasion of Ukraine persists (59% in May compared to 56% in March), this also held true across party lines with 54% of Republicans and 64% of Democrats supporting a NFZ in May compared to 52% and 61% in March, respectively. In addition, of those who were provided the link, 16% of those who did not support imposing a NFZ later stated they would support this option if the war persists. Comparatively, only 5% of those who did not support an NFZ when previously asked without any link, later said they supported this option. Since this 5% was not provided any context to the question, it is possible the reason there was less variation is people who selected no without any context are influenced by their personal opposition to imposing a NFZ, regardless of if it was a hypothetical future situation, rather than those influenced by linking a NFZ with direct war with Russia.

However, the overall increased support for NFZ from March to May and the willingness to support a NFZ when respondents were asked it a second time is likely a function of the second question providing a scale of potential responses; from sending troops to increasing diplomatic measures to doing nothing. The public, having already supported less confrontational options such as sanctions and diplomatic talks, without success, were more willing to accept a hypothetical future action that takes greater potential risks than what they agree is currently allowable as long as it is less confrontational than sending troops.

As discussed previously in this report, Americans were slightly more willing to send troops, military equipment, and enforce a NFZ in May than they were in March. However, despite the increased support for U.S. action in Ukraine by Americans, they were less prepared for the consequences of war. Fewer Americans were prepared to see higher energy prices, increased inflation, or the loss of U.S. troops. Despite the increased fatigue and disengagement from Ukraine by the public, Americans were still seemingly wanted to support Ukraine. To further explore this gap in support of action versus consequences, we asked respondents about their views on Russia, Ukraine, and the war.



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Russia's Violation of Sovereignty and International Law Most Upsets Both Republicans and Democrats

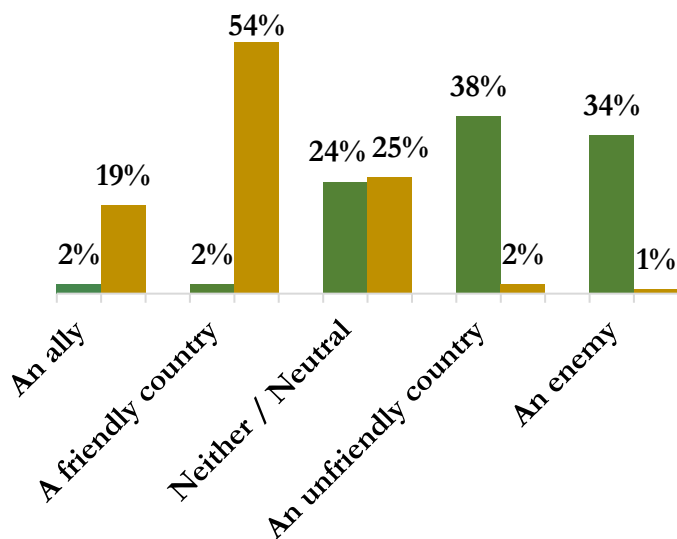
In March 2022, one month into the Ukraine war, we asked respondents their views on Russia and Ukraine. Most Americans did not consider Ukraine an ally or Russia an enemy. A majority, including Republicans and Democrats, described Ukraine as 'a friendly country,' while pluralities of both Republicans and Democrats described Russia as 'an unfriendly country.' When asked how much blame for the Ukraine war fell on each actor: Russia, Ukraine, the U.S., and NATO. Across the partisan divide, the majority of Americans blamed Russia. However, one-third of Americans partially blamed the U.S. for the conflict, including almost half of Republicans.

Further exploring the role of the U.S. on the international stage, we asked respondents of the March 2022 poll about American exceptionalism. Most Americans, across the partisan divide, did not believe

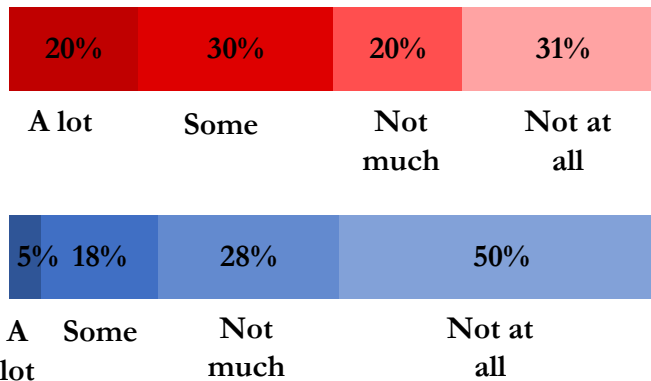
the U.S. was still a good model for democracy. Only 27% said that democracy in the U.S. was a good example for other countries to follow, including 28% of Democrats and 29% of Republicans. A large majority (61%), including Republicans and Democrats, said the U.S. "used to be a good example but has not been in recent years."

When asked what makes the U.S. exceptional, while a majority of Americans (52%) said it is exceptional because of what it represents, including 61% of Republicans, only 24% of Americans said it was exceptional because of what it has done for the world, including 26% of Republicans and 23% of Democrats. Looking further at Democrats, less than half (47%) said it was exceptional because of what it represents, with 30% reporting it is not exceptional at all.

Americans said **Ukraine** is 'a friendly country' to the U.S., but **Russia** is 'an unfriendly country'



Republicans were more likely to partially blame the U.S. for the crisis in Ukraine than **Democrats** were





CRITICAL ISSUES POLL

Russia’s Violation of Sovereignty and International Law Most Upsets Both Republicans and Democrats

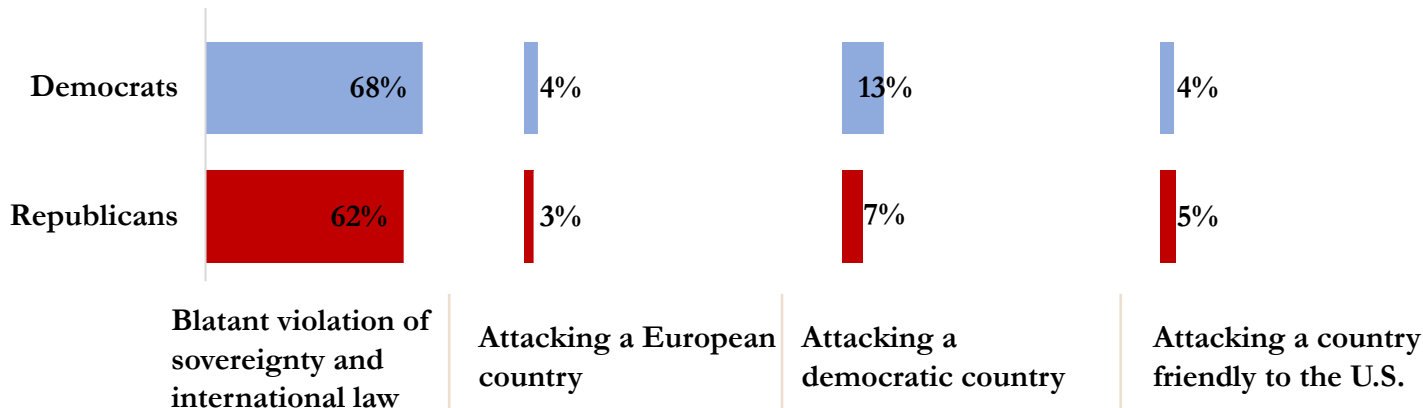
Looking at attitudes toward the Russian invasion, most Americans were upset by the invasion being a “blatant violation of sovereignty and international law,” over it being an attack against a democratic country, a country friendly to the U.S. or a European country. When asked in March 2022 how important it was that Ukraine remained a sovereign nation, having gained its independence after the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, 80% of respondents stated it was very important for Ukraine to remain sovereign following the Russian invasion in February 2022, including 74% of Republicans and 87% of Democrats. Respondents whose primary source of political information was from the internet or social media were the least likely to say it was very important (64%) compared to those who read newspapers (85%), watched public broadcasting (91%), network TV news (84%), or shows like CNN (84%), Fox News (78%), or MSNBC

(93%). This could be, in part, because of the volume of [false information](#) and [propaganda](#) being spread about the war in Ukraine on the internet.

However, overwhelmingly, Americans seem to be focused on the international impact and consequences following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. When asked in March 2022, over half of Americans, including 59% of Republicans and 56% Democrats, stated the Russian invasion of Ukraine ended the post-Cold War era. These results suggest that Americans may be more concerned about the stability of the rules-based international order, contradicting the Biden administration’s [emphasis](#) on the Ukraine war being “a battle between democracy and autocracy.”

Republicans and **Democrats** were most upset by Russia’s violation of sovereignty and international law when invading Ukraine, over Russia attacking a European country, democratic country, or a country friendly to the U.S.

What upsets you the most about Russia’s war on Ukraine, if any?





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Survey Methodology (March 2022)

The first survey was carried out March 16-28, 2022 online from a nationally representative sample of Nielsen Scarborough's probability-based panel, originally recruited by mail and telephone using a random sample of adults. The poll was conducted among a national poll of 1,320 respondents, with a margin of error of +/- 2.7%. Overall, the sample was adjusted to reflect population estimates (Scarborough USA+/Gallup) for Americans. The survey variables balanced through weighting were: age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, level of education, census regional division, and political party affiliation.

Survey Methodology (May 2022)

The second survey was carried out May 6-16, 2022 online from a nationally representative sample of Nielsen Scarborough's probability-based panel, originally recruited by mail and telephone using a random sample of adults. The poll was conducted among a national poll of 2,091 respondents, with a margin of error of +/- 2.14%. Overall, the sample was adjusted to reflect population estimates (Scarborough USA+/Gallup) for Americans. The survey variables balanced through weighting were: age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, level of education, census regional division, and political party affiliation.

Note: These questions were fielded as part of a larger poll on foreign and domestic issues. Participants in this study were provided by Nielsen from Nielsen's sample of respondents.

To view the full questionnaire for this poll, please click [here](https://criticalissues.umd.edu/). For more information please visit: <https://criticalissues.umd.edu/>



CRITICAL ISSUES POLL



Leadership for the Critical Issues Poll



Shibley Telhami is the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, College Park, and Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. Professor Telhami has also been active in the foreign policy arena. He has served as advisor to the US Mission to the UN (1990-91), as advisor to former Congressman Lee Hamilton, more recently as senior advisor to George Mitchell, President Obama's United States Special Envoy for Middle East Peace (2009-2011) and as a member of the U.S. delegation to the Trilateral US-Israeli-Palestinian Anti-Incitement Committee. Professor Telhami has contributed to *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times* and regularly appears on national and international radio and television. His bestselling book, *The Stakes: America and the Middle East* was selected by *Foreign Affairs* as one of the top five books on the Middle East in 2003. He has been a principal investigator in the annual Arab Public Opinion Survey, conducted since 2002 in six Arab countries.

Stella Rouse is a professor in the Department of Government and Politics and director of the Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement. Professor Rouse earned her Ph.D. from Louisiana State University in 2008. In 2010, she was a visiting scholar at the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity and Gender in the Social Sciences (REGSS) at Duke University as a Ford Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellow. Rouse's book, *Latinos in the Legislative Process: Interests and Influence*, published by Cambridge University Press, was named by *Huffington Post* as one of the "Best Political Science Books of 2013." Her second book, *The Politics of Millennials: Political Beliefs and Policy Preferences of America's Most Diverse Generation*, with Ashley D. Ross, was published in August 2018. She has a forthcoming book, titled "Citizens of the World: Political Engagement and Policy Attitudes of Millennials across the Globe," which will be published by Oxford University Press in 2022.

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