

# DEFENCE AND DIPLOMACY: EVOLVING OPINION ON UKRAINE'S WAR

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC  
February 2025

Lord Ashcroft Polls  
X @LordAshcroft



## CONTENTS

Methodological note	3
The conflict	4
The view from Ukraine	7
Russian opinion	11
The western perspective	17
Hopes for a settlement	20
About Lord Ashcroft	25

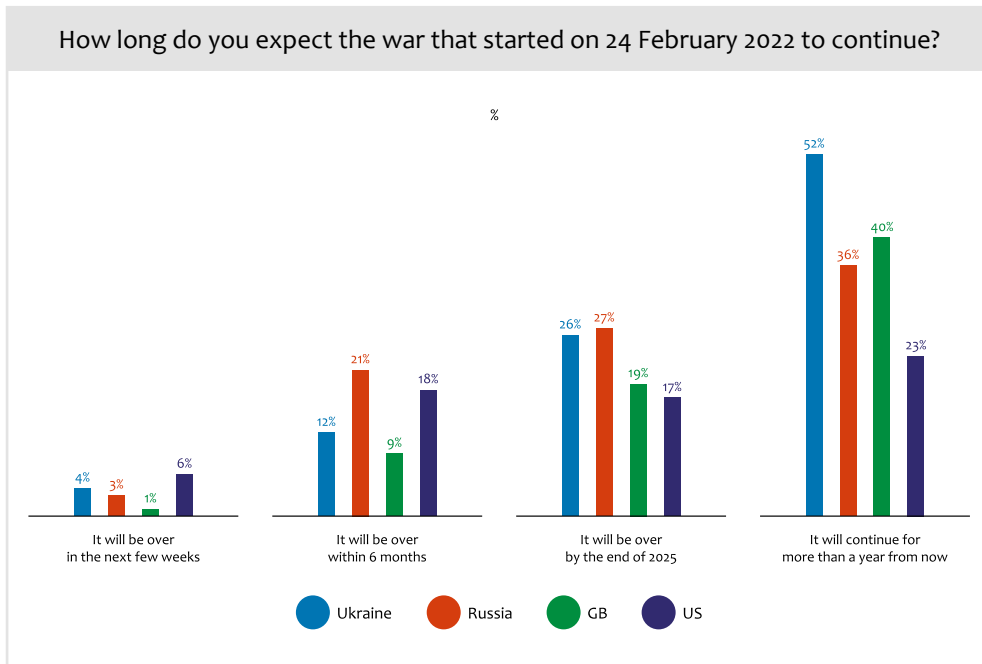
## METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

- 2,049 adults in Ukraine were interviewed by telephone between 21 and 31 January 2025.
- 1,021 adults in Russia were interviewed by telephone between 23 and 31 January 2025.
- 2,067 adults in Great Britain were interviewed online between 2 and 4 February 2025.
- 2,208 adults in the US were interviewed online between 31 January and 4 February 2025.

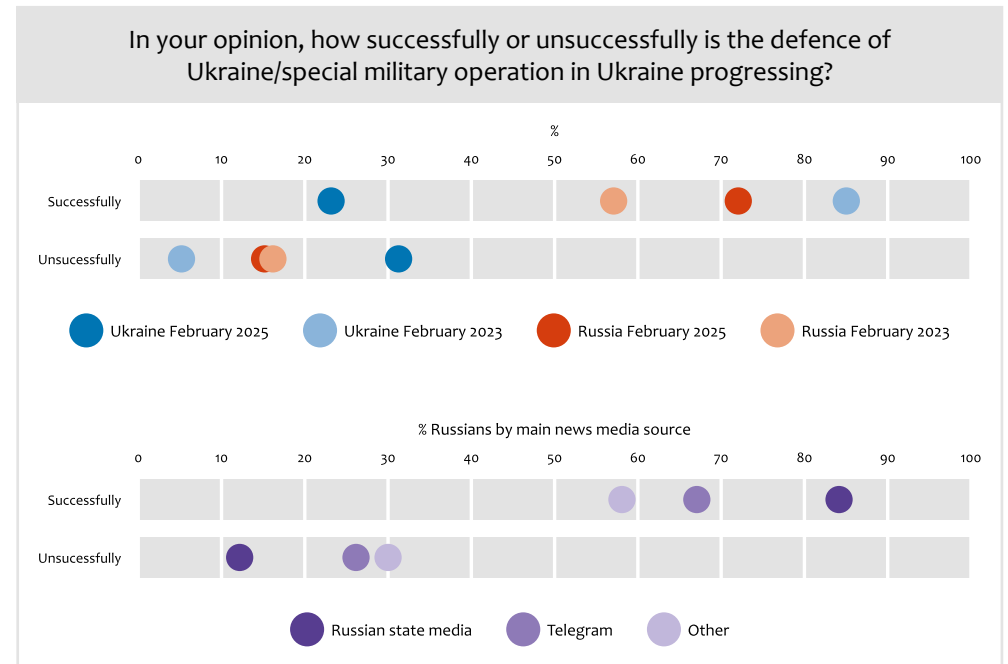
Results have been weighted to be representative of all adults in each country. Full data tables are available at [LordAshcroftPolls.com](https://LordAshcroftPolls.com).



# THE CONFLICT

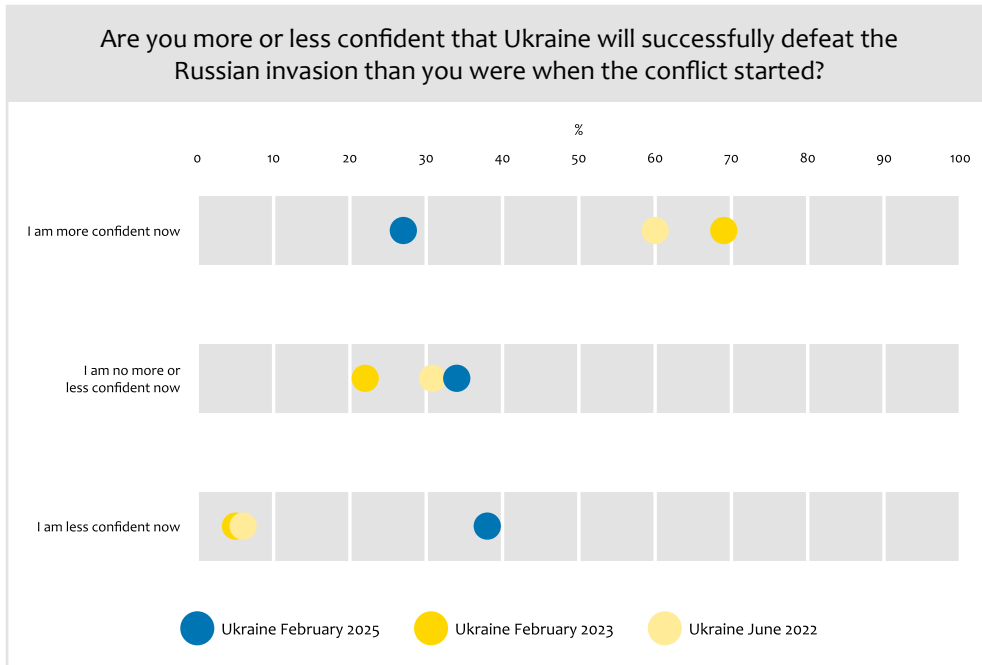


Few in any of the four countries we surveyed expect an imminent end to the war. Despite the election of President Trump and widespread discussion of a peace settlement, a majority of Ukrainians (52%) believe the conflict will still be going on a year from now – though Russians are more likely than not to think it will be over by the end of 2025. Americans are more optimistic about an early conclusion than people in Britain: a quarter, including 41% of those who voted for President Trump, say they believe the conflict will end within the next 6 months.

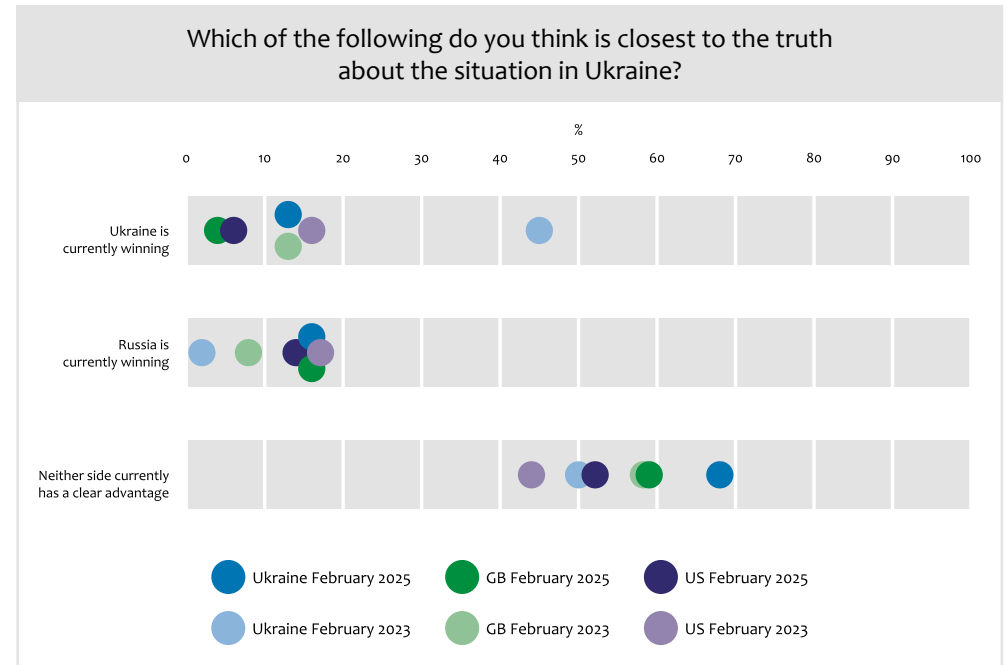


Fewer than a quarter of Ukrainians said they believed the defence of their country was progressing successfully, compared to 85% in our survey 2 years ago. The proportion saying things were going very successfully was down from 32% to 7%. While the proportion saying “unsuccessfully” was up from 5% to 31%, a plurality (44%) saw a degree of stalemate, saying the defence of Ukraine was proceeding neither successfully nor unsuccessfully.

More than 7 in 10 Russians believed the “Special Military Operation” (SMO) in Ukraine was proving successful, up from 57% in 2023. This belief was more widespread among those for whom Russian state media was their main source of news (84%) than Russians who got most of their information from Telegram (67%) or other sources (58%).

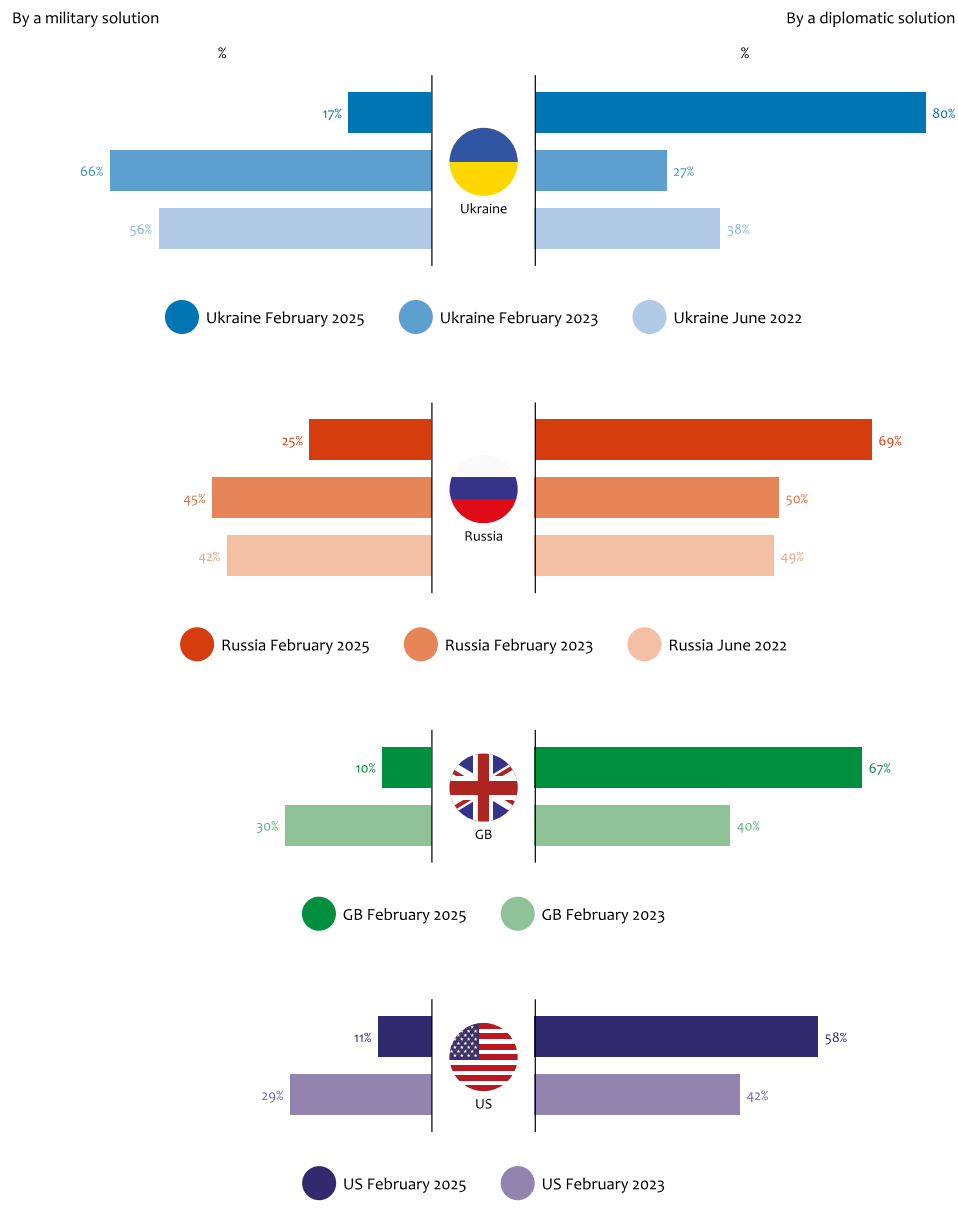


Correspondingly, more Ukrainians are now more likely to say they are less confident of defeating the Russian invasion than they were when the conflict started than that they are more confident – a sharp reversal from our previous surveys.



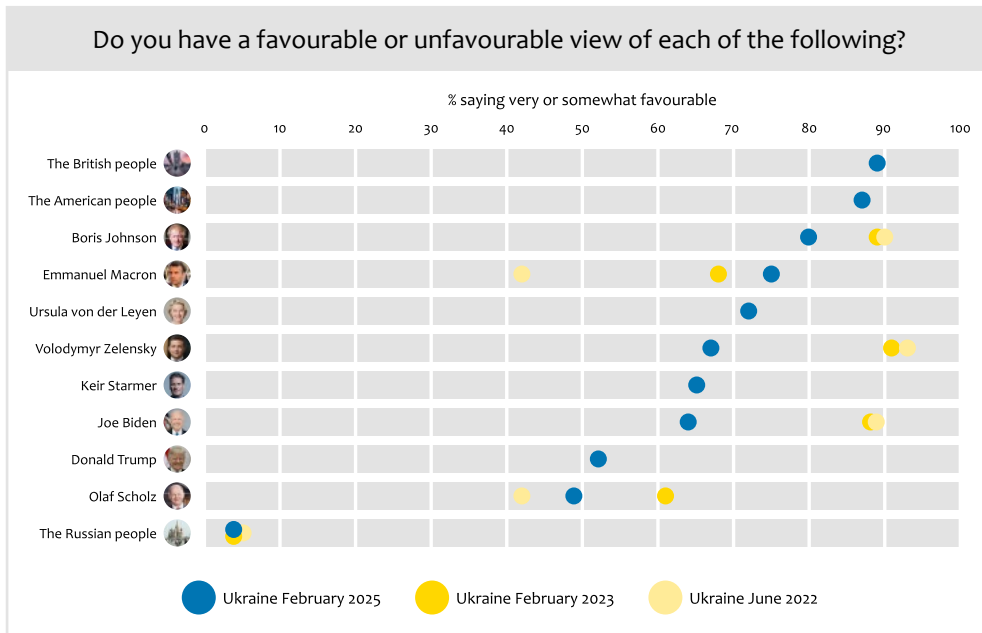
Putting the question more directly, we find a large majority in Ukraine, and smaller majorities in Britain and the US, believing that no side in the conflict currently has a clear advantage. The proportion of Ukrainians saying they are currently winning is down sharply over the last 2 years. While only 14% of Americans say Russia is currently winning, Trump voters are more than twice as likely to say this (19%) as Harris voters (9%).

Do you think the war is more likely to be ended by a military solution (the defeat of one side's military) or a diplomatic solution (an agreement to end the war between diplomatic representatives from Russia and Ukraine)?

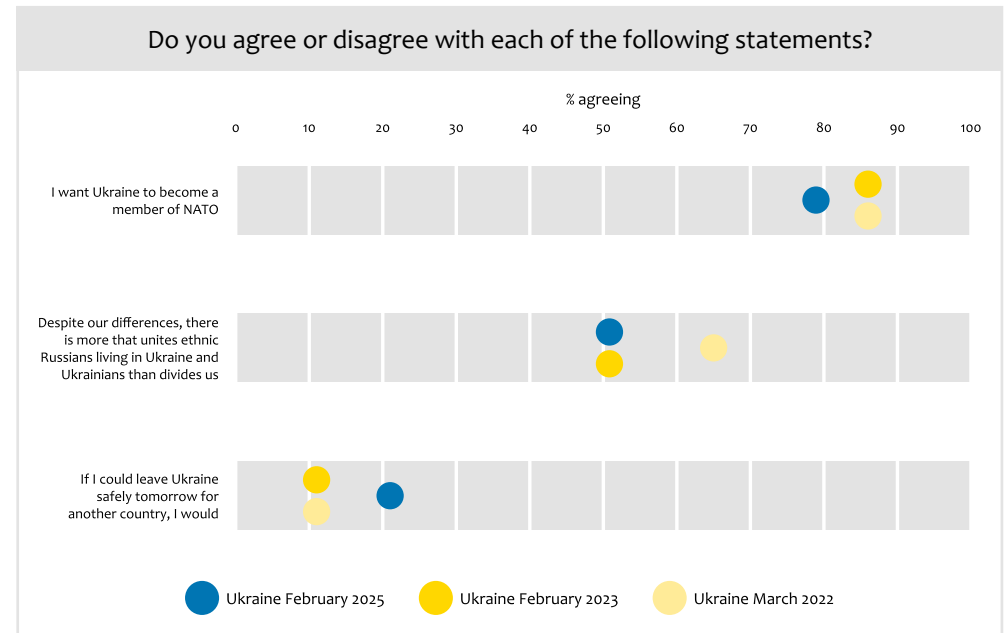


Across the board, there is a dramatic shift towards believing that the conflict will end in a diplomatic solution rather than a military victory for one side or the other. While those in Russia, Britain and the US were always more likely to think there would be a diplomatic conclusion, clear majorities in all 4 countries now believe this. The shift is most marked in Ukraine itself: 2 years ago, 66% believed there would be a military solution; 80% now say the conflict will end with a diplomatic settlement. In the US, 72% of Trump voters foresee a diplomatic end to the war.

# THE VIEW FROM UKRAINE

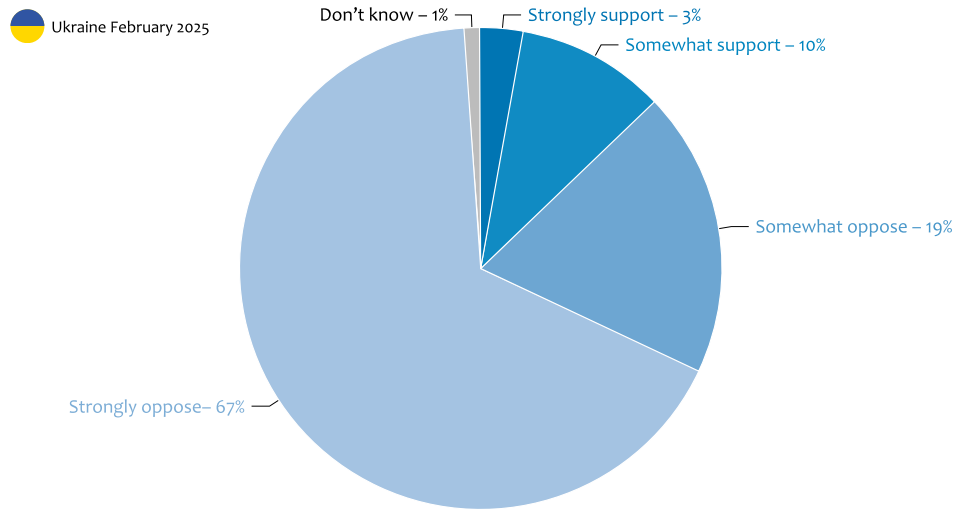


Two thirds of Ukrainians say they have a positive view of President Zelensky, though this is down from his favourability ratings of over 90% in the year after the Russian invasion. In terms of individuals, former UK prime minister Boris Johnson tops the table, followed by Zelensky, current UK PM Keir Starmer and former US President Joe Biden – who with a 64% favourability rating is more popular in Ukraine than his successor (52%). French president Emmanuel Macron is alone in having risen in popularity since our 2023 survey. The British people (89%) and the American people (87%) outstrip the politicians.



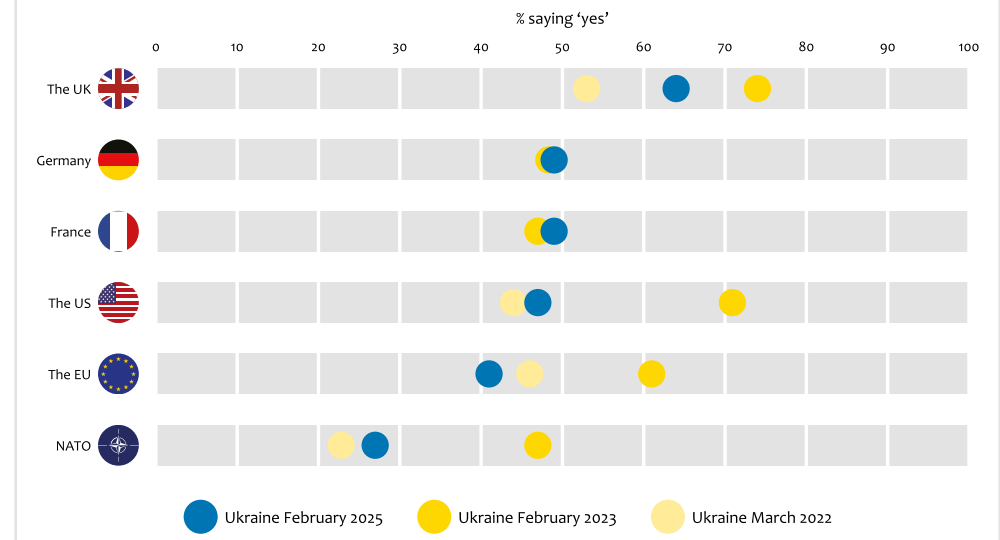
Only just over 1 in 5 Ukrainians say they would leave the country if they could safely do so – though this is double the proportion during the first year of the war. One third of 18 to 34 year-olds say they would leave if they could, compared to 1 in 10 of those aged 65 or over. While 79% say they want their country to join NATO, this is down 7 points from the proportion who said the same in 2023. As in our previous survey, half of Ukrainians say there is more that unites them with ethnic Russians living in the country than divides them – though agreement highest among the over-65s (63%) and lowest among those aged 25-34 (40%).

As you know, men in Ukraine are eligible to be drafted into the military at the age of 25. Would you support oppose extending the draft to men from the age of 18?



Ukrainians were overwhelmingly opposed to reducing the age at which men were eligible to be drafted into the military from 25 to 18. Only 13% supported the idea with 86% opposed, including 67% strongly opposed.

Do you think each of the following are doing enough to help Ukraine?

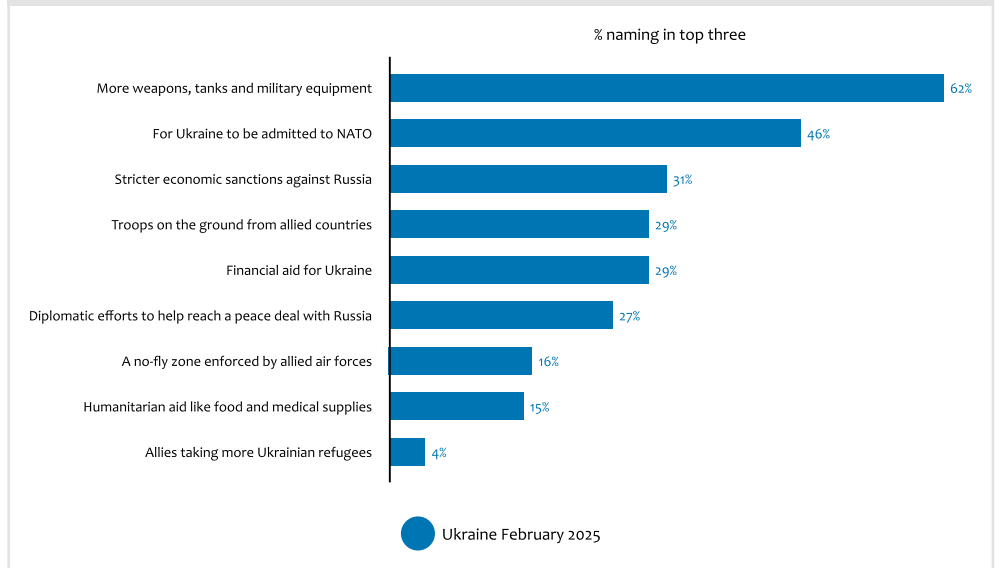


Asked whether they think various countries and organisations are doing enough to help their cause, Ukrainians put the United Kingdom at the top of the table. However, the proportion giving a positive answer for the UK is down by 10 points since 2023 – though this fall is less than for the US (down 24 points), the EU and NATO (both down 20 points). The US and EU are now seen on a par with Germany and France – whose ratings are unchanged since the last survey but which were previously at the bottom of this table. Only just over a quarter say NATO is doing enough.

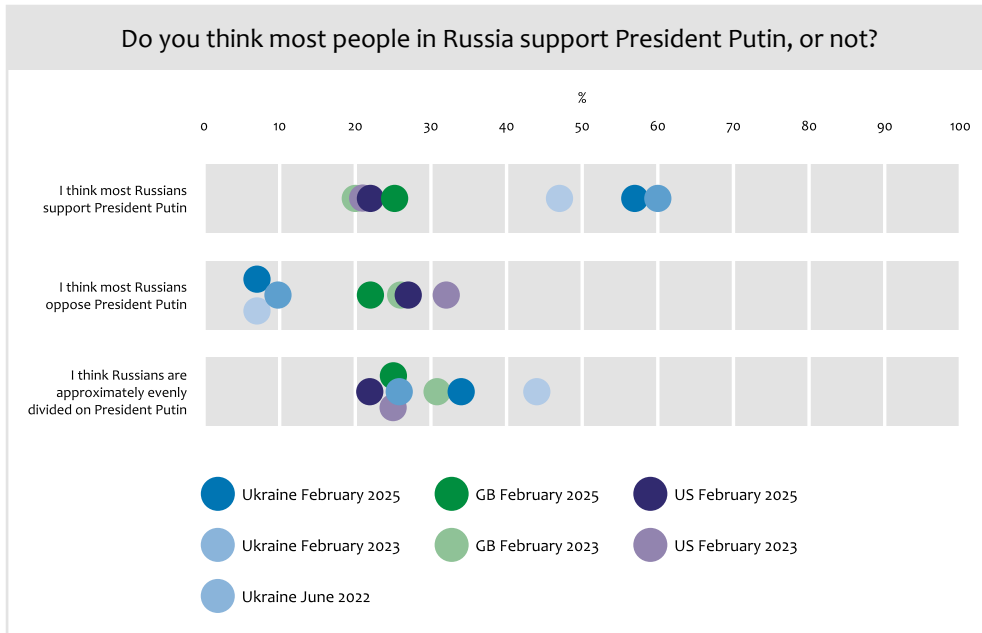




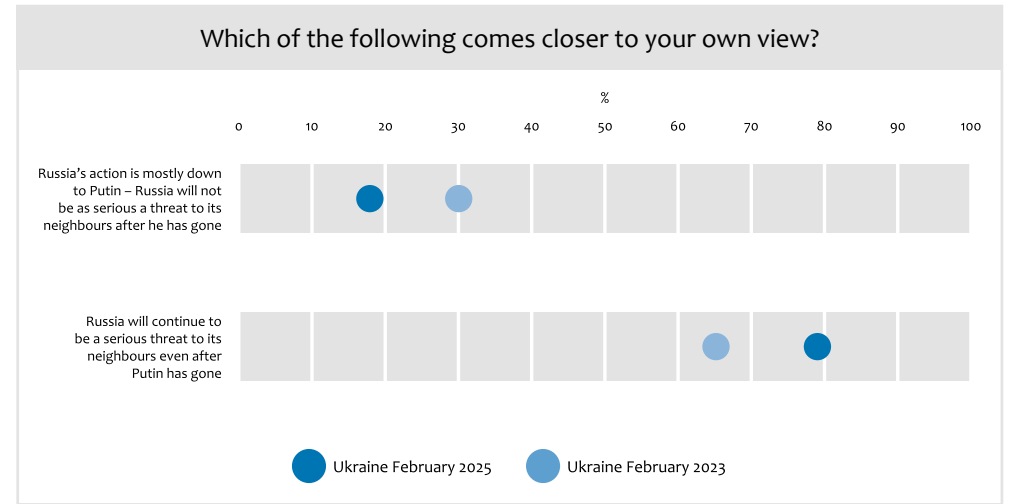
Which **three** of the following would you most like from Ukraine's allies?



Asked what they would most like to see from their allies, more than 6 in 10 Ukrainians chose “more weapons, tanks and military equipment” in their top three answers. NATO admission and stricter economic sanctions against Russia were next, ahead of troops on the ground and financial aid. Diplomatic efforts to reach a peace deal with Russia came sixth on the list.

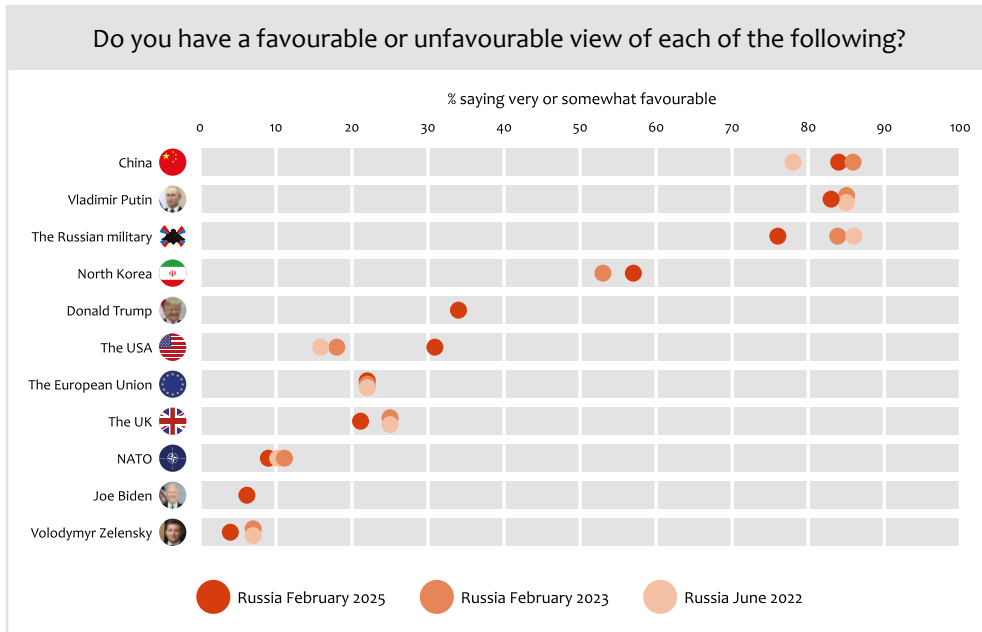


As in our previous survey, some 6 in 10 Ukrainians believe that most Russians support President Putin, with a further 1 in 3 believing the population is divided. Only 7% think most Russians oppose Putin. In Britain and the US, people were evenly split as to whether most Russians support, oppose or are divided on Putin.



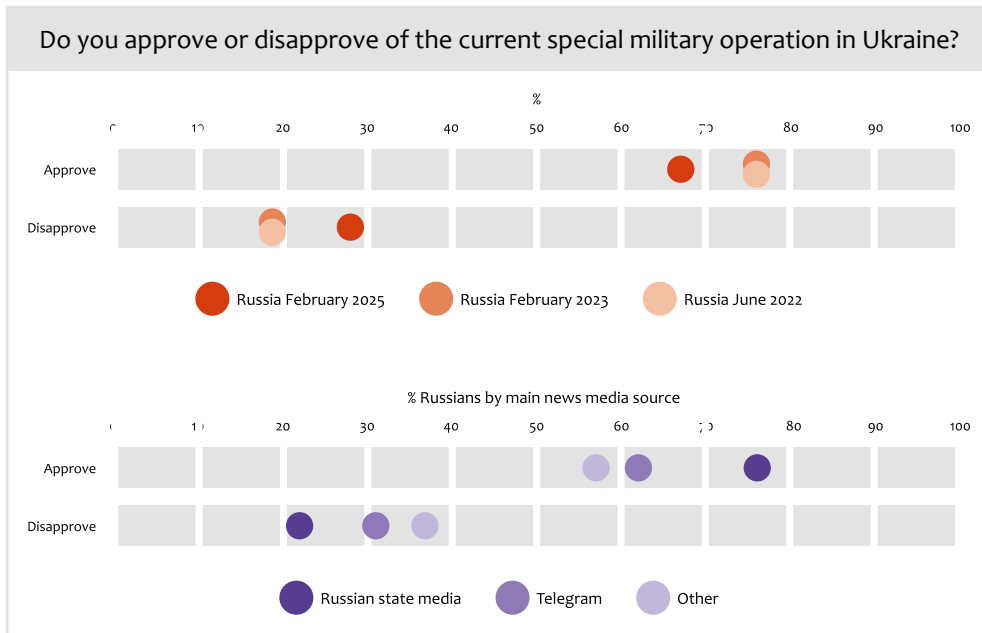
Accordingly, Ukrainians overwhelmingly believe that the threat from Russia is not simply down to Putin but will continue after he has gone. Nearly 8 in 10 believe this to be the case, up from 65% in our 2023 survey.

# RUSSIAN OPINION

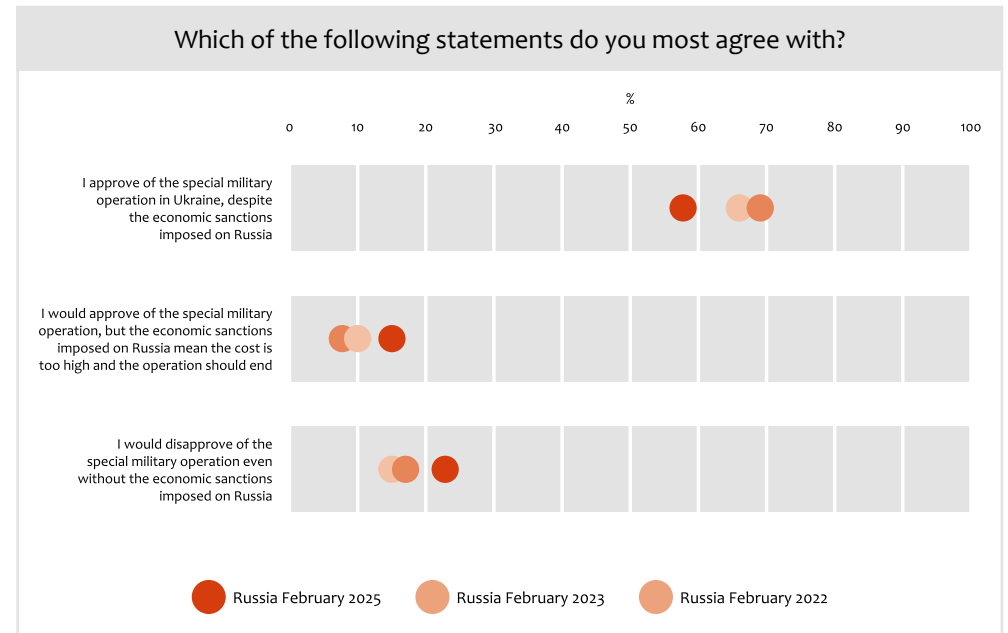


Favourability towards the US has increased notably since our previous survey in 2023, and 34% of Russians say they have a positive view of President Trump – nearly 6 times as many as say the same for his predecessor. The other significant change over the last 2 years is the drop in favourability towards the Russian military, down to 76% from 84% in 2023.



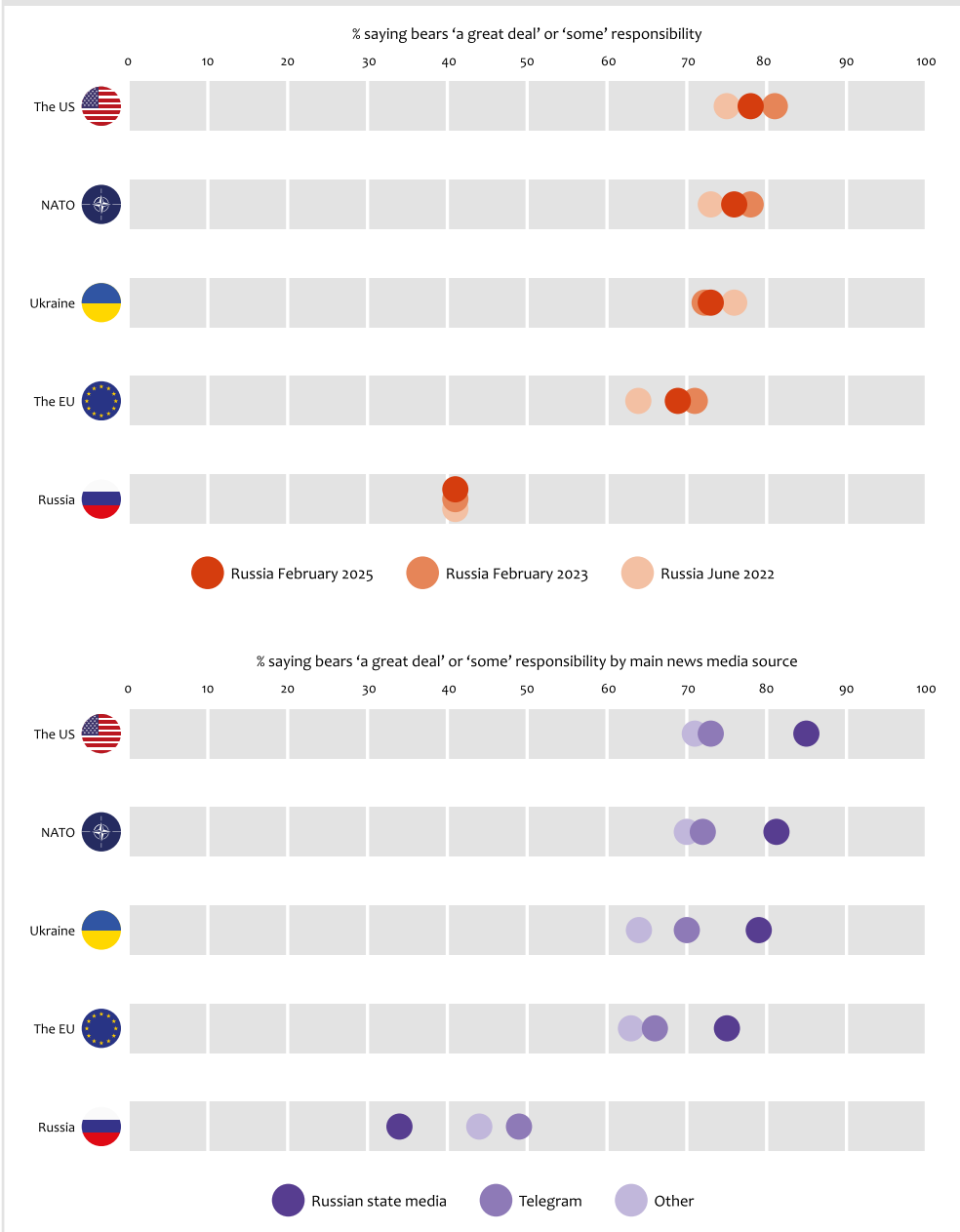


Overall approval of the SMO among Russians has fallen from 76% in 2023 to 67% now. The proportion saying they strongly approve is down to 39%, compared to a majority two years ago. A total of 28% were prepared to say they disapproved, including 34% of women, and 35% of 18 to 24-year-olds.

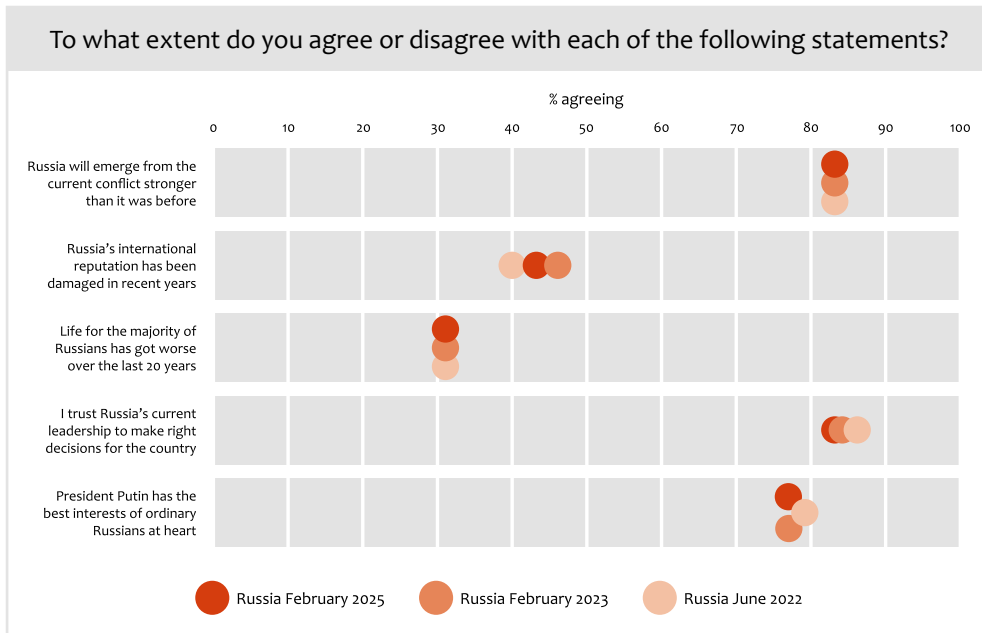


Support for the SMO weakens when we put the question in the context of economic sanctions. Just over half (58%) say they approve of the action despite the sanctions, down from 69% in 2023. Nearly a quarter say they would disapprove of the SMO even if there were no sanctions. Notably, the proportion saying they would approve of the SMO but sanctions mean the cost is too high and the operation must end has nearly doubled, albeit only to 15%, in the last 2 years. This rises to nearly 1 in 5 (19%) among those aged 34 or under, and is also higher among the lowest-income groups.

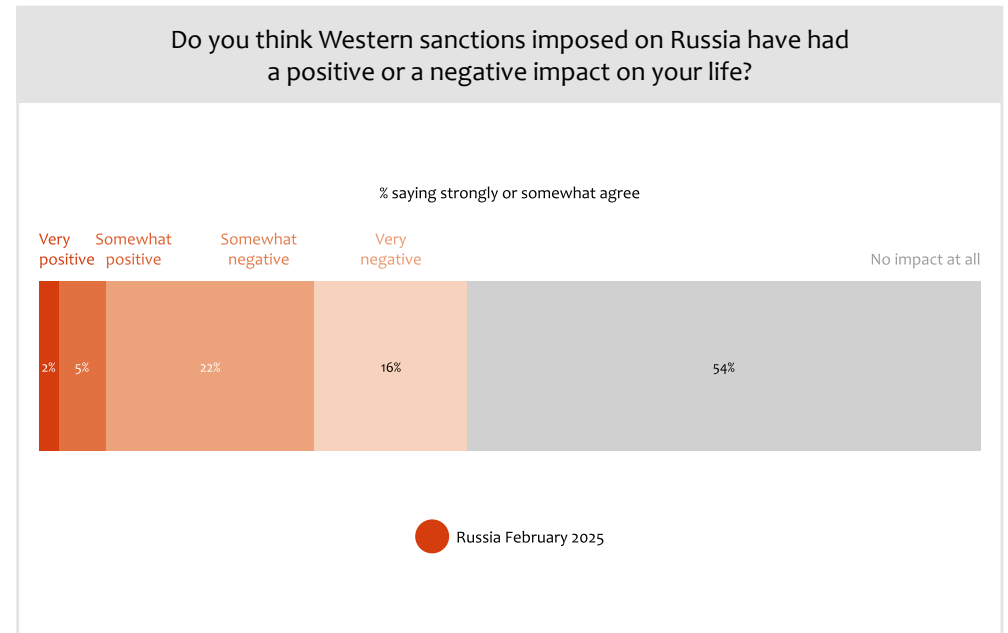
To what extent do you think each of the following is responsible for the current conflict in Ukraine?



As in our previous surveys, Russians are most likely to say the US and NATO are responsible for the conflict, followed by Ukraine and the EU. The proportion saying Russia itself is responsible has been consistent since the early months of the war, at 41%. The youngest Russians were less likely to blame the US, NATO, Ukraine and the EU – and more likely to say Russia bore some responsibility – than the oldest.

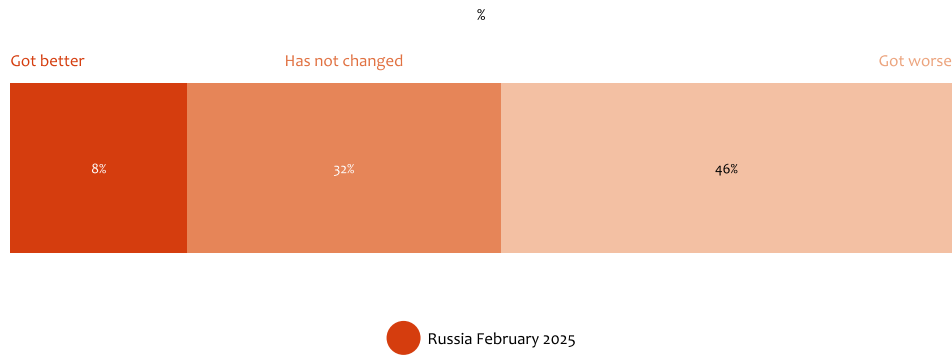


There has been no significant shift in opinion over the last 3 years when we ask about a number of other related issues. More than 4 in 5 continue to say they trust Russia's current leadership to make the right decisions for the country and that Russia will emerge from the conflict stronger than it was before, and more than three quarters say they believe Putin has the best interests of ordinary Russians at heart. At the same time, more than 3 in 10 say life for most Russians has got worse over the last 20 years, and more than 4 in 10 say the country's international reputation has been damaged.



A majority of Russians said that western sanctions had had no impact on their lives, while nearly 4 in 10 said they had had a somewhat (22%) or very negative impact (16%). Half of those aged 25-34 said sanctions had affected them negatively, making them the most likely group to do so.

In your opinion, over the last 3 years, would you say life for most Russians has:



Despite this, nearly half of Russians (46%), including a majority of 25 to 34-year-olds and those for whom Russian state media is not the main source of news, said they thought life for most Russians had got worse over the last 3 years.

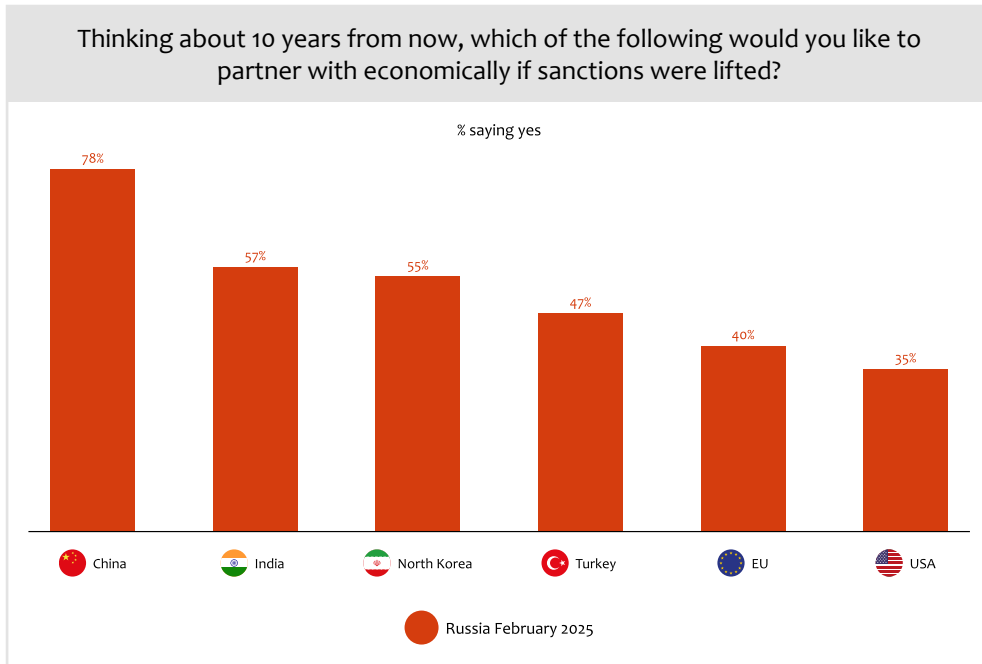
We asked those who said life had got worse to say – unprompted – who or what they thought was responsible for this. The most frequent answer was the federal government, named by more than 1 in 3 Russians, followed by the president (22%) and the conflict with Ukraine (18%). Local government officials and corruption were blamed more than hostility from the west.

In your opinion, who or what is most responsible for making life worse for most Russians over the last 3 years?

[NB Those saying life for most Russians has got worse over the last 3 years]

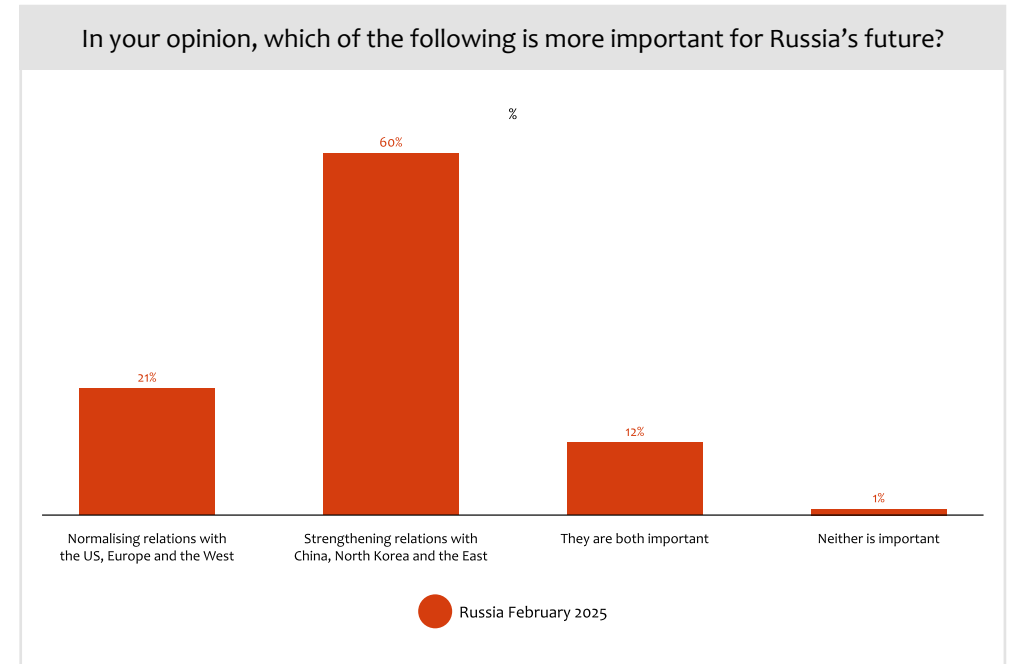
	The federal government	35%
	The president	22%
	The conflict with Ukraine	18%
	Local government officials	14%
	Hostility from the US and NATO	10%
	Western sanctions	7%
	Corruption	6%
	Hostility from Ukraine, EU, UK	6%
	Russians themselves and Russia as a whole	5%
	The world economic situation in general	4%
	Central Bank (inflation, refinancing rate)	3%
	Oligarchs and elite	2%
	State Duma	2%

Russia February 2025



More than two thirds of Russians said that if sanctions were lifted they would definitely want to develop partnerships with western European countries, or would be interested in doing so. There were clear majorities for closer partnerships across all demographic groups.

However, when we asked more specifically about which countries Russians would most like to partner with if sanctions were lifted, only minorities mentioned the EU (40%) or the US (35%). More popular prospects were China (78%), India (57%), Turkey (47%) and even North Korea (55%).

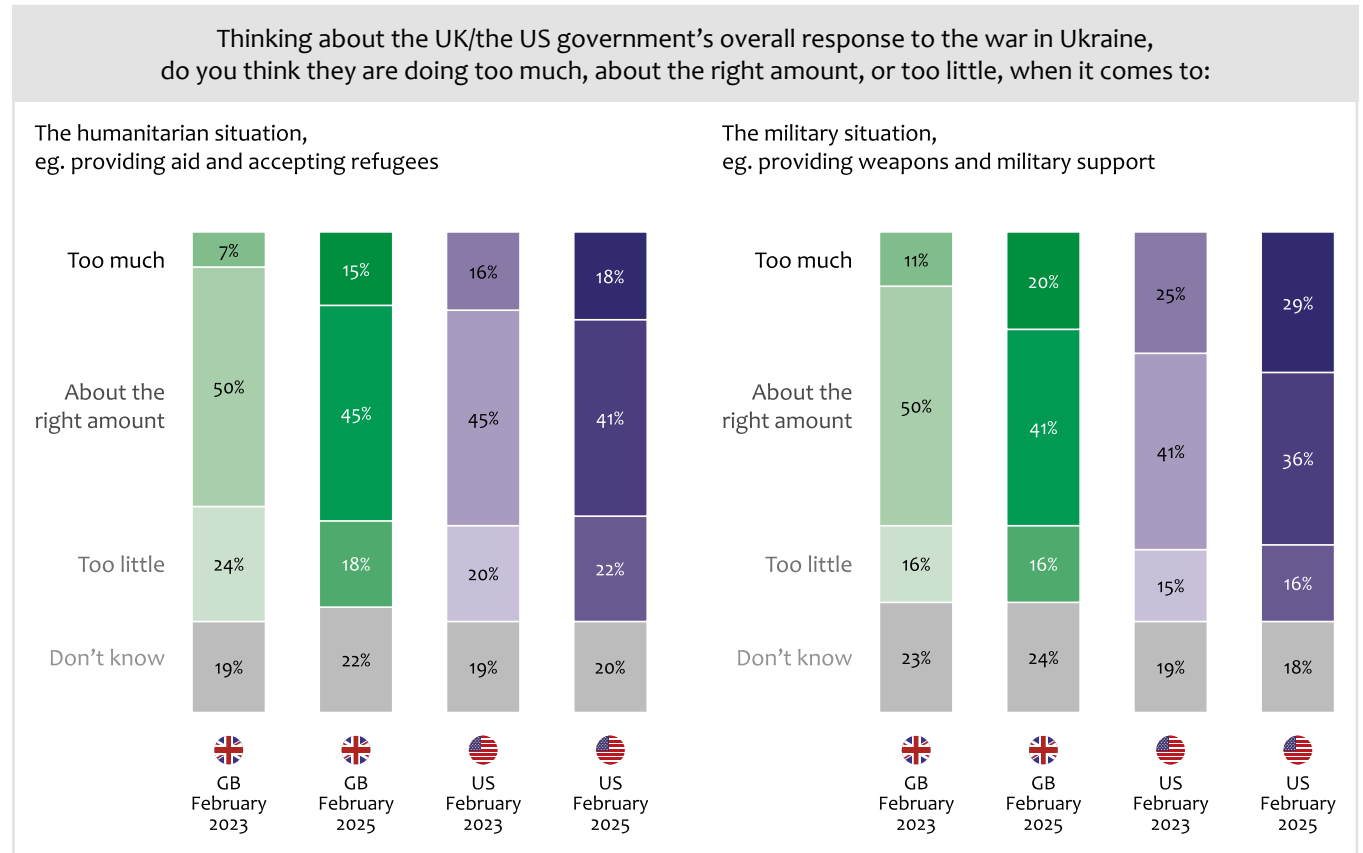


This view was confirmed by a further question on priorities for Russia's future. Only just over 1 in 5 said it was more important to normalise relations with the US, Europe and the west; 6 in 10 said it was more important to strengthen ties with China, North Korea and the east. Russians aged 18 to 24 were the most likely to prioritise relations with the west.

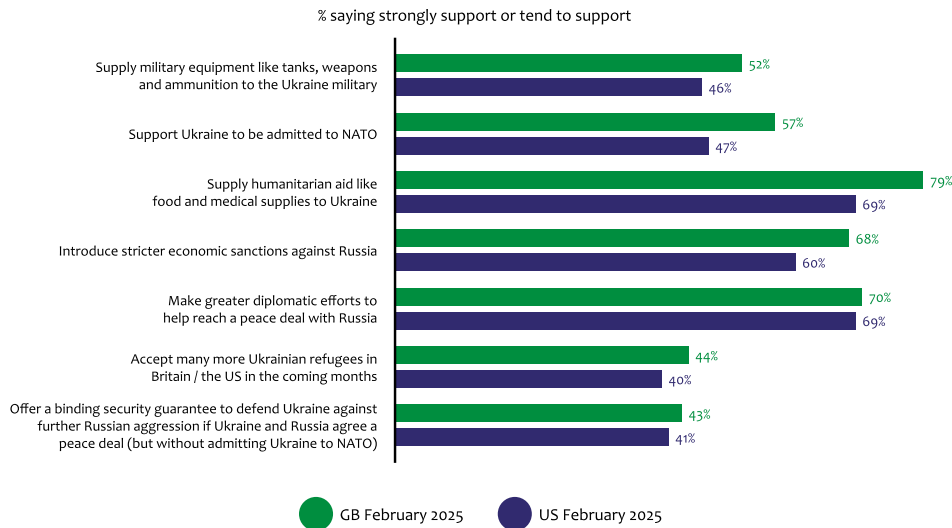


# THE WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

As in 2023, pluralities in both Britain and the US said they thought their government's response to the Ukraine conflict had been about right in terms of both humanitarian and military support. However, the proportions saying they are doing too much have doubled on both fronts in the UK, and have also edged up in the US – where 31% of Trump voters say America is doing too much on the humanitarian level and nearly half of Trump voters (47%) say they are providing too much military support.



Would you be willing for the UK/the US to do each of the following, or not?

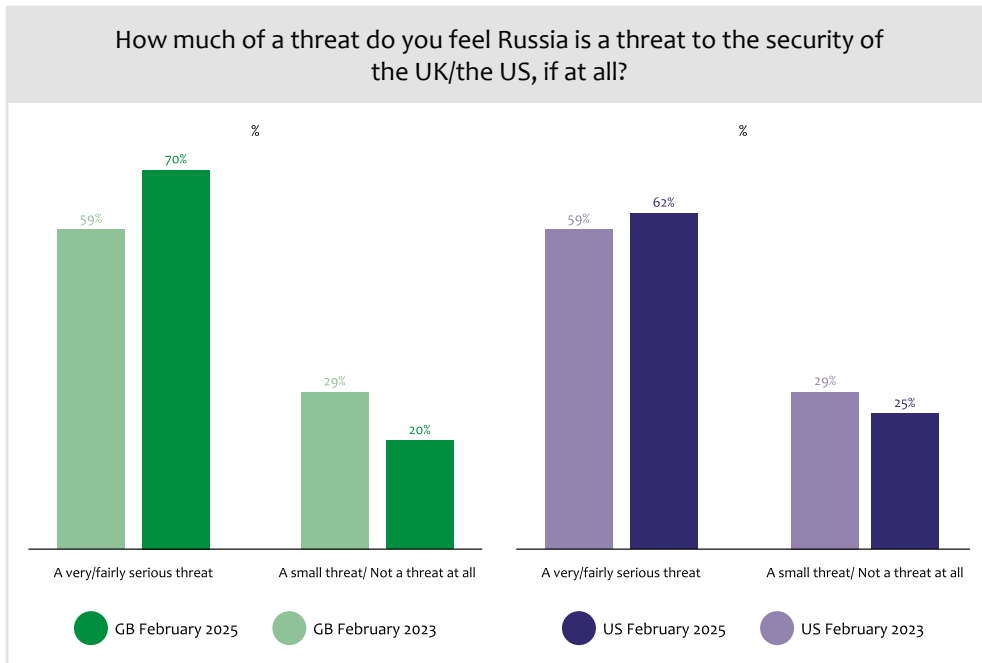


Around half of respondents in Britain and the US said they would be willing to supply military equipment and ammunition to the Ukraine military and to admit Ukraine to NATO, but there were notable differences by political group. Fewer than 4 in 10 Trump voters supported both ideas, compared to around two thirds of those who backed Kamala Harris. Only one idea – making greater diplomatic efforts to reach a peace deal – was more likely to be backed by Trump voters (78%) than Harris voters (69%). In Britain, Conservative voters were slightly more supportive of each idea than Labour voters, except in the case of accepting more refugees. Reform UK voters were less supportive in all cases, except that of making greater diplomatic efforts to reach a settlement. Only a minority in either country supported offering Ukraine a binding security guarantee in the event of a peace deal.

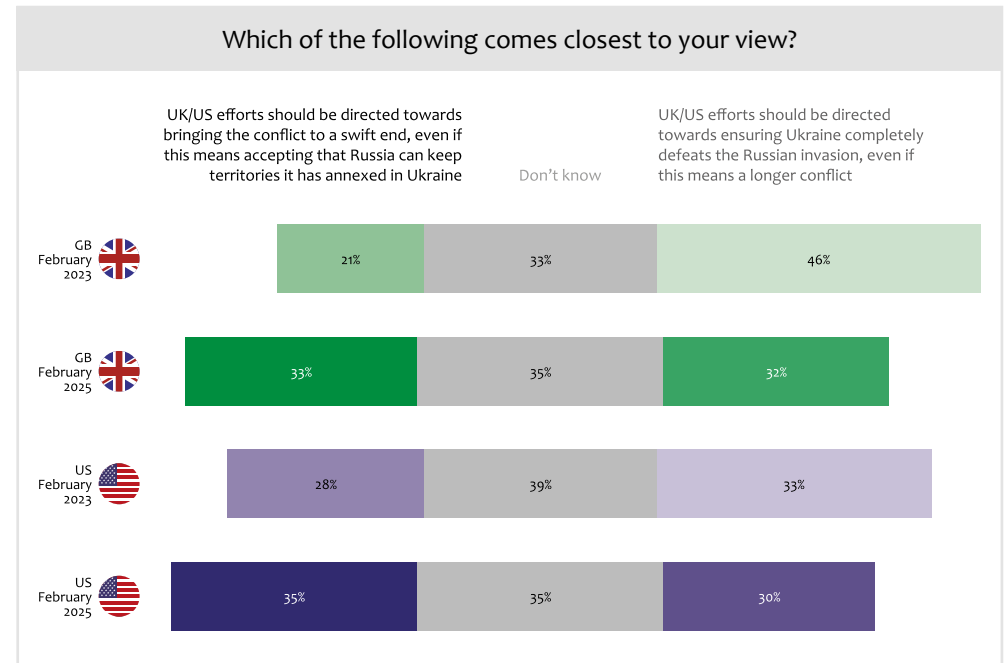
It has been proposed that in the event of a settlement between Ukraine and Russia, an international peacekeeping force could be deployed to Ukraine to help guarantee its security. How would you feel about UK/US troops being deployed to Ukraine as part of an international peacekeeping force?



In the UK, just over half (52%) said they would support British troops taking part in an international peacekeeping force to help guarantee Ukraine’s security in the event of a settlement. More than 6 in 10 Conservative and Labour voters were in favour, compared to just 36% of those who voted for Reform UK. In the US, only a minority (45%) said they would favour American troops’ participation in such a force. This included 60% of those who voted for Harris but only 39% of those who voted for Trump.



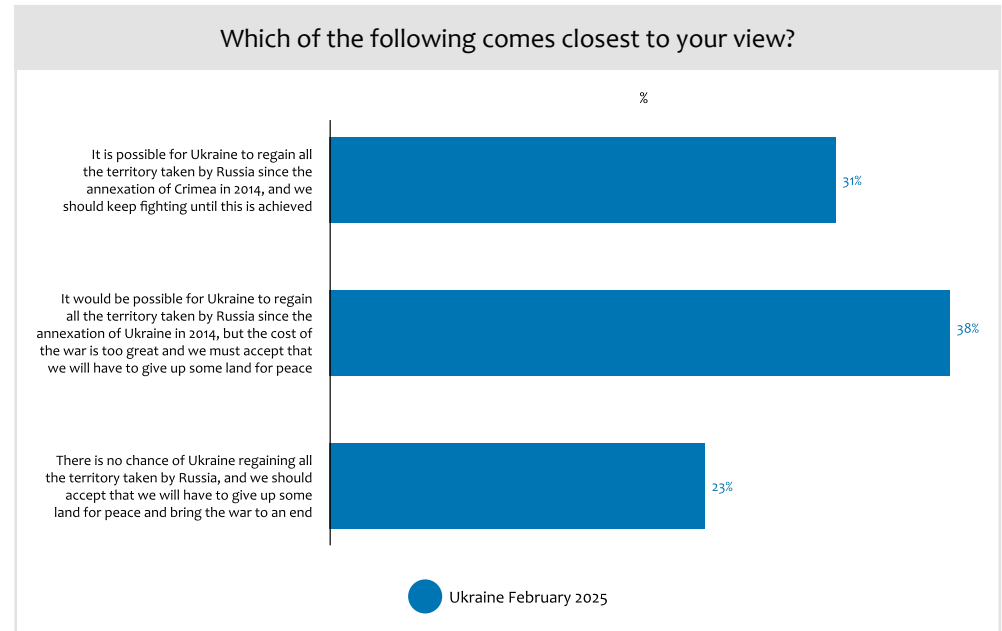
Majorities in both Britain and the US see Russia as a threat to the security of their country, but fewer than 3 in 10 in either country see the threat as very serious. Trump voters are less likely to see Russia as a threat (60%) than those who backed Harris (73%), while in Britain those who voted Reform UK are less likely to think so (62%) than those who voted Conservative (83%) or Labour (79%).



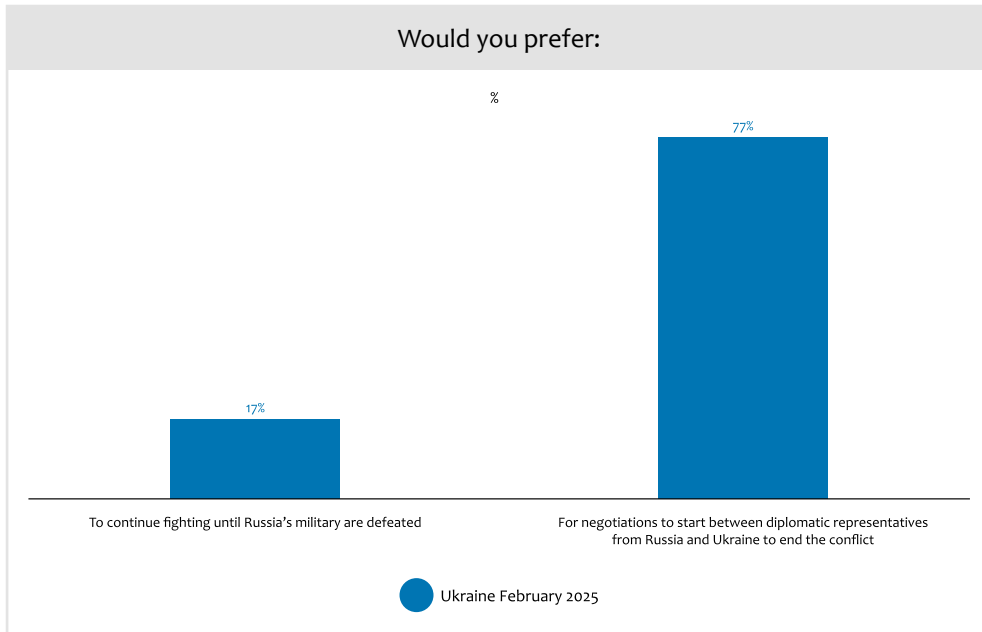
In both Britain and the US, people were evenly divided between thinking their country's efforts should be directed towards helping defeat the Russian invasion even if that means a longer conflict, or bringing the conflict to a swift end even if that means Russia keeping annexed Ukrainian territory. However, compared to our 2023 survey there was a clear movement in both countries towards ending the conflict and away from pursuing complete victory for Ukraine. In the US, Trump voters were more than twice as likely to want to direct efforts to ending the conflict swiftly even at the cost of territory (52%) than Harris voters (23%).



## HOPES FOR A SETTLEMENT

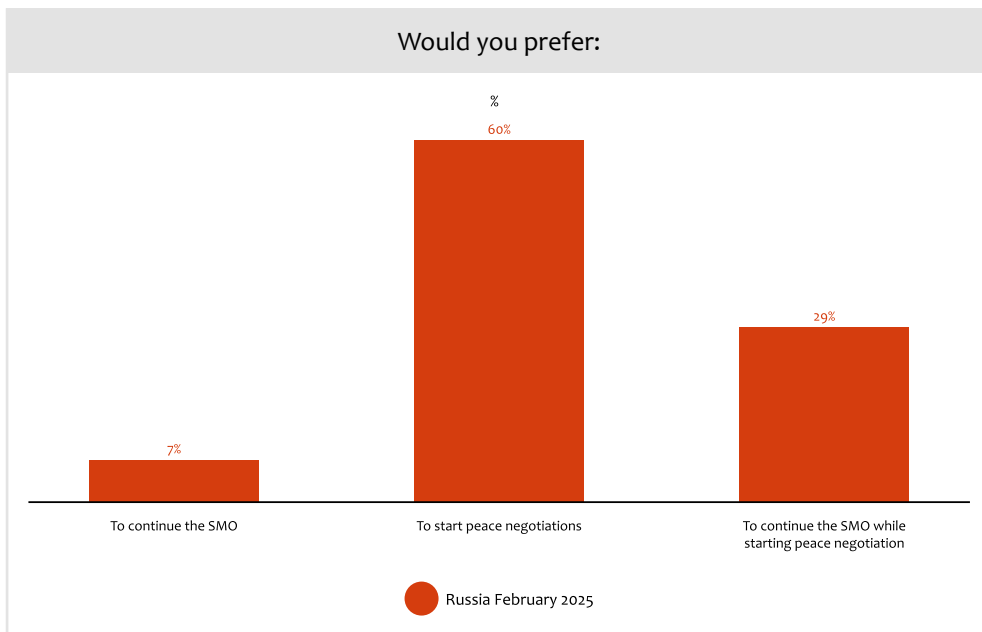


Only just over 3 in 10 Ukrainians agreed it was possible to regain all the territory taken by Russia since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and that they should keep fighting until that was achieved. More than 6 in 10 said Ukraine would have to accept giving up some land for peace – either because there is no chance of regaining all the territory taken by Russia (23%), or – more often – that while this would be possible, the cost of the war is too great (38%). Those aged 18 to 24 were the most likely to say the country must accept trading land for peace (72%), with more than half (52%) believing it was possible to regain all lost territory but the cost was too high.

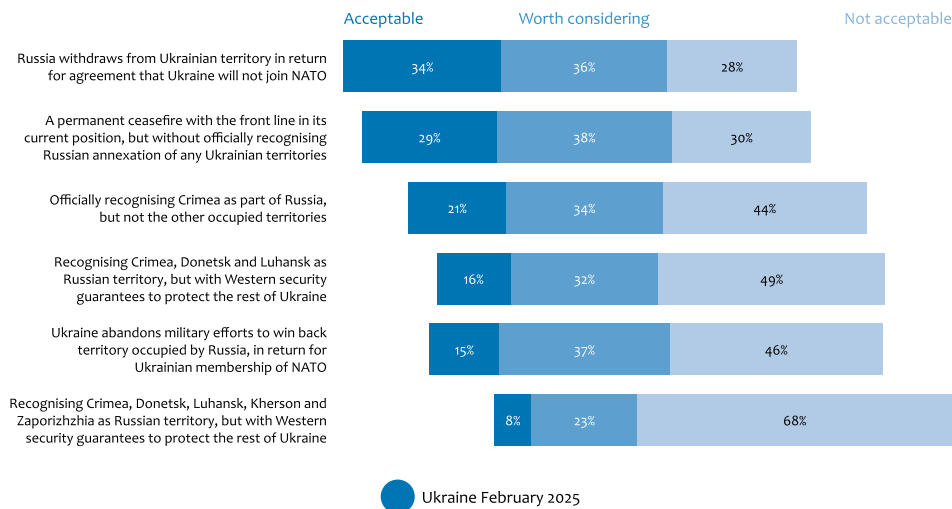


Large majorities in both Ukraine and Russia said they would like to see peace negotiations beginning. In Ukraine, more than three quarters (77%) said they would start negotiations with Russia than continue fighting until the Russian military are defeated (the preference of just 17%).

In Russia, 6 in 10 said they would rather start negotiations, with a further 29% saying they would like to do so while continuing the SMO. Only 7% said they wanted to continue the military operation with no peace negotiations.

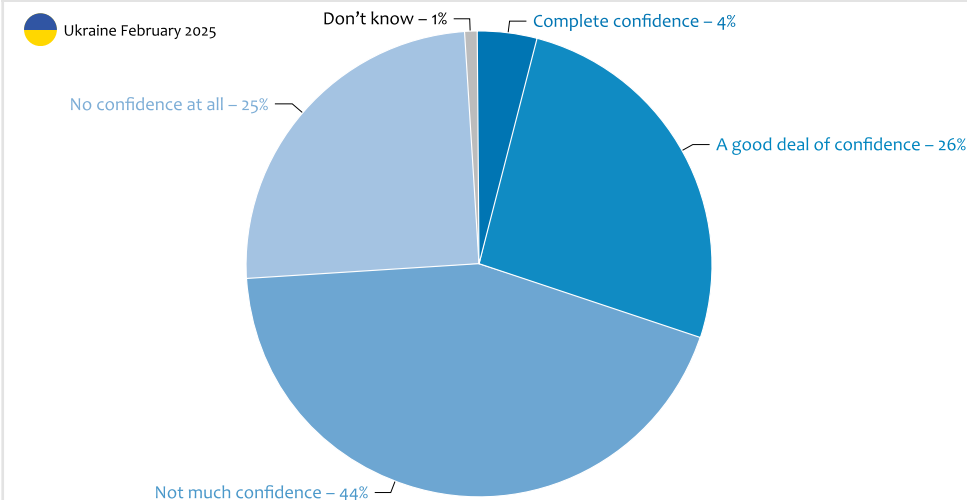


If it guaranteed an immediate end to the war, which of the following scenarios, if any, would you be willing to accept, even if reluctantly?

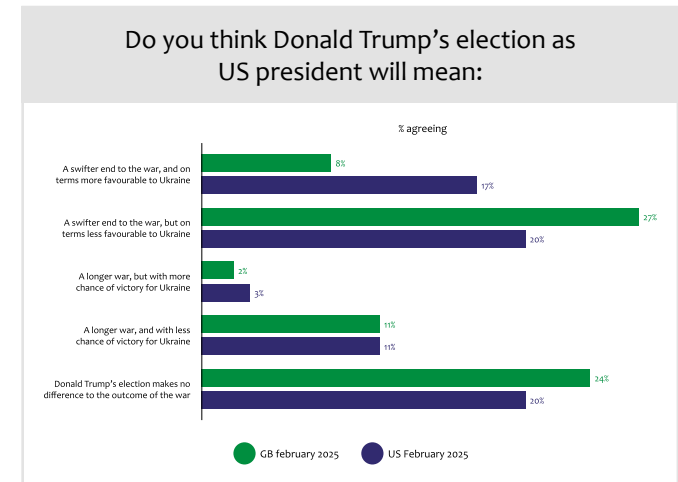
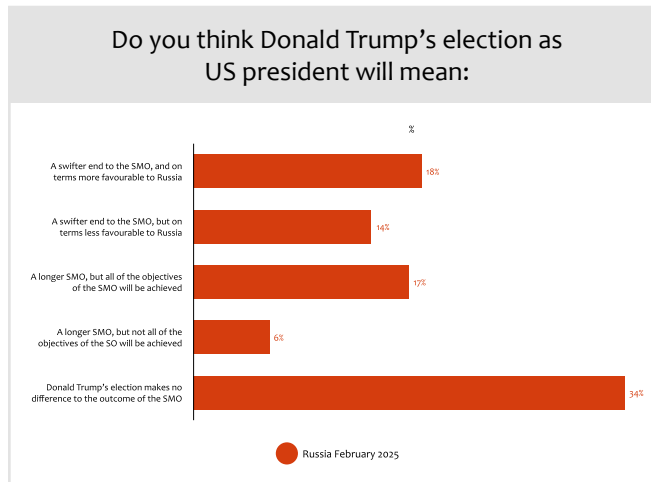
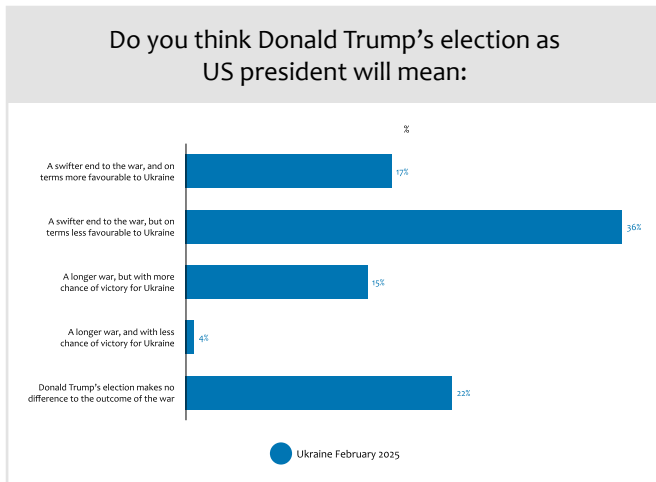


We asked Ukrainians whether or not they would find various hypothetical scenarios acceptable as conditions for ending the war. Of these, the most acceptable were the idea of Russia withdrawing from Ukrainian territory in return for agreement that Ukraine will not join NATO, with 70% thinking this was either acceptable or worth considering. Slightly fewer (67%) were prepared to countenance a permanent ceasefire on the current front line, but with no official recognition of annexed Ukrainian territory as Russian. Officially recognising Crimea as part of Russia was less acceptable (55% prepared to consider), as were abandoning military efforts to win back occupied territory in return for NATO membership (52%) and recognising Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk as Russian, but with western security guarantees for the rest of Ukraine (48%). Recognising these territories plus Kherson and Zaporizhzhia as Russian territory with western security guarantees for the rest of Ukraine was the least acceptable option, with only 8% saying this would be acceptable and only another 23% prepared to consider it.

If western allies including the US and the UK were to guarantee Ukraine's security as part of a peace agreement with Russia, but without Ukraine joining NATO, how much confidence would you have in these western security guarantees?



Only 1 in 25 Ukrainians said they would have complete confidence in security guarantees offered by western allies as part of a peace agreement with Russia, and just over a quarter (26%) said they would have a good deal of confidence. Nearly 7 in 10 said they would have not much confidence (44%) or no confidence at all (25%).



In all four countries surveyed we asked whether people thought the election of President Trump would mean a longer or shorter war, and a better outcome for one side or the other. A majority of Ukrainians (53%) thought it would mean a swifter end to the war, but most of these thought this would be on terms less favourable to Ukraine. Overall, only just under 1 in 3 Ukrainians (32%) thought Trump's election would prove to be to Ukraine's advantage.

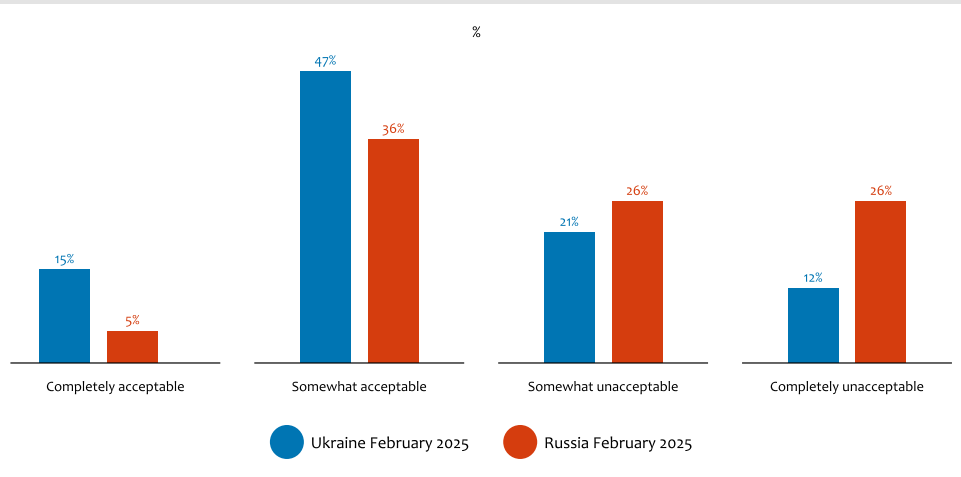
Russians were the most likely to believe that Trump's election would make no difference to the outcome of the war (34%). The remainder were more likely to think it would mean a swifter end to the SMO than a longer one, and a more rather than less favourable outcome for Russia.

In Britain, just over 1 in 3 (35%) thought Trump would help bring about a swifter end to the war, but only 1 in 10 thought it would lead to a more favourable outcome for Ukraine. Americans were the most likely to think Trump's election would have some impact on the outcome (only 20% said it would make no difference), but there were considerable variations by voter group. Six in 10 Trump voters thought the new president would mean a swifter end to the war. They were also the only group to think his election would mean a better outcome for Ukraine than for Russia; Harris voters were four times as likely to think Trump would bring about a more favourable outcome for Russia (40%) than for Ukraine (10%).

Here is a proposal for a peace agreement which could be offered to end the conflict in Ukraine:

**The international community would not recognise the newly annexed territories as part of Russia. The West would support Ukraine and provide security guarantees for its territory, and Ukraine's accession to NATO would be postponed. Economic sanctions against Russia would be eased and Russia would take part in financing Ukraine's reconstruction.**

If these conditions were offered to Russia, please tell me whether you think these terms would be acceptable to our country or not?

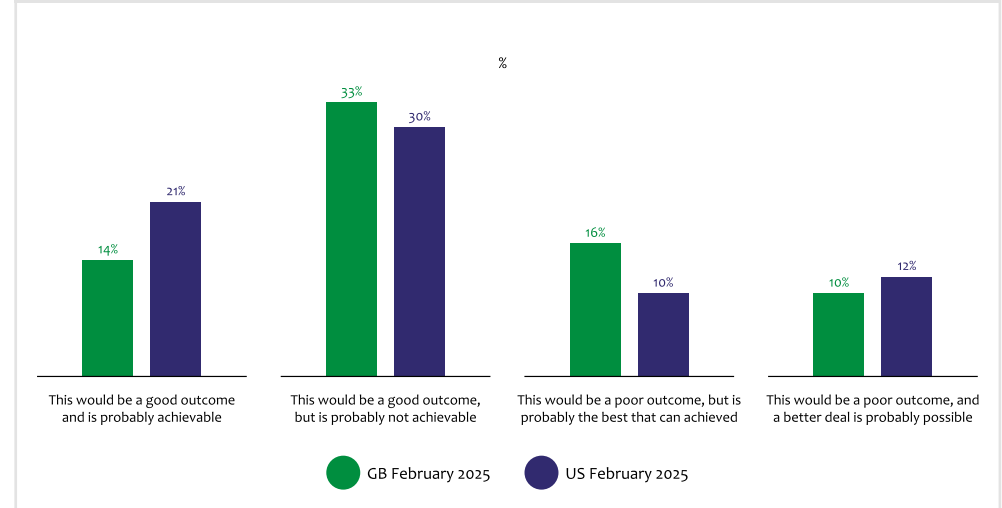


We presented respondents in Ukraine and Russia with the outline of a hypothetical peace settlement based on the main points put forward by Keith Kellogg, President Trump's special envoy, before the US election last year. A majority of Ukrainians said the proposal sounded either completely or (more often) somewhat acceptable, with only 12% saying it sounded completely unacceptable. Russians were more sceptical, with a majority (52%) saying the plan sounded somewhat or completely unacceptable, but with 41% saying the opposite.

A peace agreement along the following lines has been proposed to end the conflict:

**The international community would not recognise the newly annexed territories as part of Russia. The West would support Ukraine and provide security guarantees for its territory, and Ukraine's accession to NATO would be postponed. Economic sanctions against Russia would be eased and Russia would take part in financing Ukraine's reconstruction.**

Do you think:



In both Britain and the US, around half of respondents said the plan would represent a good outcome – but within this, most thought it was probably not achievable. Only around 3 in 10 in both countries said they thought the deal sounded feasible.



## ABOUT LORD ASHCROFT

LORD ASHCROFT KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. He is a former treasurer and deputy chairman of the UK Conservative Party. He is also honorary chairman and a former treasurer of the International Democrat Union. He is founder and chairman of the board of trustees of Crimestoppers, vice-patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, chairman of the trustees of Ashcroft Technology Academy, a senior fellow of the International Strategic Studies Association, former chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University and a former trustee of Imperial War Museums.

### HIS POLITICAL BOOKS INCLUDE:

- Smell the Coffee: A Wake-Up Call for the Conservative Party
- Call Me Dave: The Unauthorised Biography of David Cameron
- Hopes and Fears: Trump, Clinton, the Voters and the Future
- Well, You Did Ask: Why the UK Voted to Leave the EU
- The Lost Majority: The 2017 Election, the Conservative Party, the Voters and the Future
- Jacob's Ladder: The Unauthorised Biography of Jacob Rees-Mogg
- Diagnosis of Defeat: Labour's Turn to Smell the Coffee
- Going for Broke: The Rise of Rishi Sunak
- Reunited Nation? American Politics Beyond the 2020 Election
- Red Knight: The Unauthorised Biography of Sir Keir Starmer
- First Lady: Intrigue at the Court of Carrie and Boris Johnson
- All To Play For: The Advance Of Rishi Sunak
- Red Queen? The Unauthorised Biography of Angela Rayner

### HIS OTHER BOOKS INCLUDE:

- Victoria Cross Heroes, Volumes I and II
- Special Forces Heroes
- George Cross Heroes
- Special Ops Heroes
- Heroes of the Skies
- White Flag? An Examination of the UK's Defence Capability
- Unfair Game: An Exposé of South Africa's Captive-Bred Lion Industry
- Life Support: The State of the NHS in an Age of Pandemics
- In the Shadows: The Extraordinary Men and Women of the Intelligence Corps

