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UChicago Harris/NORC Poll: About Half the Public Believes Russia is the Sole Perpetrator of War Crimes in the Ukraine-Russian Conflict

Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans have negative views of Russia's actions during the war, but most have positive perceptions of the Russian people.

CHICAGO, May 24, 2023 – About 7 in 10 adults believe Russia's actions in Ukraine are unjustified, 54% believe Russia is the only country committing war crimes in the conflict, and 36% say both sides are guilty, according to a new study from the [University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy](#) and [NORC at the University of Chicago](#).

Majorities continue to support policies such as imposing economic sanctions on Russia (58%) and accepting refugees from Ukraine (56%), but only 26% favor the United States playing a major role in the conflict.

The new poll reveals most adults have negative views of Vladimir Putin (77%), but many have a positive view of the Russian people themselves (50%) and of Russian culture (37%). However, there are significant differences in attitudes based on age and partisanship.

Adults aged 45 and older are more likely than younger adults to agree that Russia's actions are an unjustified attempt to gain territory (79% vs. 59%) and overthrow the Ukrainian government (81% vs. 61%). They are also more likely to believe only Russia has committed war crimes (64% vs. 44%).

Although Democrats are more likely than Republicans to report that only Russia has committed war crimes (65% vs. 52%) and to believe Russia's actions are an unjustified attempt to gain territory (82% vs. 69%), significant majorities of Democrats and Republicans believe Russia's actions in Ukraine are unjustified.

"The survey results highlight a bipartisan consensus toward Russian actions during the war, suggesting that U.S. capacity to stand firm may endure," said [Konstantin Sonin](#), a professor at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and an expert on Russian economics and

politics. “It also provides evidence of what factors are impacting Americans’ attitudes toward Russia, including what they see as America’s appropriate role around the world.”

Public attitudes towards the role of the U.S. in the Russia-Ukraine conflict are strongly associated with views on Russia’s actions and general foreign policy. For example, 44% of those who think the U.S. should play a more active role in world affairs favor the U.S. having a major role in the conflict, compared to 9% of those who think it should play a less active role in the world affairs. And, adults who view Russia’s actions as unjustified are more likely than those who view them as justified to think the U.S. should play a major role in the conflict (32% vs. 10%).

However, support for U.S. involvement in the conflict does not significantly differ between those who view the Russian people positively or negatively. In fact, most adults have positive views of the Russian people and Russian culture despite negative perceptions of the Russian government. For example, 62% consider Russia an enemy of the United States, but 88% say they would feel comfortable being friends or neighbors with someone Russian.

“The findings show that the public’s views the Russia-Ukraine conflict are largely distinct from its opinions of the Russian people,” said David Sterrett, a senior research scientist at NORC. “Instead, people’s attitudes toward the U.S. role in the conflict are closely tied to broader views on foreign policy and perceptions of Russia’s actions during the war.”

About the Study

This study was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and NORC at the University of Chicago. Staff from Harris Public Policy and NORC collaborated on all aspects of the study. Interviews for this survey were conducted between April 13 and April 17, 2023, with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,180 completed the survey. Interviews were conducted in English. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.9 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

A full description of the study methodology for the survey can be found at the end of the report on www.norc.org.

The proper description of the survey’s authorship is as follows: This study was conducted jointly by the [University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy](http://www.harrispublicpolicy.org) and [NORC at the University of Chicago](http://www.norc.org)

Chicago.

About the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy

One of the largest graduate professional schools at the University of Chicago, Harris Public Policy has been driven by the belief that evidence-based research, not ideology or intuition, is the best guide for public policy. For more than three decades, our exceptional community of scholars, students, and alumni have applied this exacting perspective to the world's most pressing problems using the latest tools of social science. Through our undergraduate and graduate programs, we empower a new generation of data-driven leaders to create a positive social impact throughout our global society.

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About NORC at the University of Chicago

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