

The Trump effect: anti-American sentiment rises in Ukraine

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Donald Trump's policy towards Ukraine has led to a sharp deterioration in the perception of the United States among the Ukrainian public. Washington's decision to end Russia's isolation, its accusations that Ukraine provoked the war, its claims that President Volodymyr Zelensky is a 'dictator without elections', and its intense pressure on Kyiv to sign an unfavourable raw materials agreement within weeks have severely undermined Ukrainian trust in the United States. This has triggered widespread disillusionment and even fuelled anti-American sentiment in Ukrainian society.

The loss of support from a key partner has forced Ukraine to adapt to the new reality. As a result, it has intensified its cooperation with European countries, particularly France and the United Kingdom, the leaders of the 'coalition of the willing', which aims to safeguard a ceasefire if the warring parties reach an agreement. At the same time, Zelensky's firm response to the pressure and hostile actions of the Trump administration has bolstered domestic support for him; consequently, he has re-emerged as the frontrunner in presidential opinion polls.

Crisis in bilateral relations

The Joe Biden administration's strategy of supporting Ukraine to the extent necessary to enable relatively stable defence but without defeating Russia on the battlefield caused frustration in Kyiv. During the election campaign, Trump repeatedly promised a swift end to the war, raising hopes for a shift in US policy through increased pressure on Moscow. In a December 2024 survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), 45% of respondents said his election would bring the end of the conflict closer, while only 14% held the opposite view (see Chart 1).

Ukrainian hopes placed in Trump were dashed. The attacks by him and Vice President J.D. Vance on Zelensky during a meeting in the Oval Office (see '[Trump–Zelensky: an escalation of rhetoric](#)'), amid a thaw in US–Russia relations and negotiations with the Kremlin excluding Kyiv, led to a profound shift in perceptions of the United States in Ukraine. In a Gradus Research poll conducted on 1 March, 70% of respondents stated that their view of the United States had worsened. More respondents considered the US an unfriendly or hostile state (29%) than a friendly one (13%; see Chart 2). Meanwhile, a March survey by the KIIS showed that the proportion of those who do not believe a just peace can be achieved under Trump's presidency had risen to 55%, compared to 31% in December 2024. Overall attitudes towards the US leader also deteriorated; the number of those who view his return to office as a negative development nearly quadrupled (see Chart 3).

Three months into his current term, Trump has deeply disappointed the Ukrainian people, who criticise him for being naive and accuse him of advancing Russian interests. The role the United States claims to play as a mediator is widely perceived as effectively siding with the Kremlin. In Kyiv, there is a prevailing view that the United States may sacrifice Ukraine's interests if this helps Washington achieve its broader global objectives, including turning Russia against China.

A pragmatic strategy

In response to Trump's pledges to swiftly end the war, the Ukrainian government sought to negotiate an agreement and secure credible security guarantees. To this end, it signalled its readiness to make concessions while also setting out its own 'red lines'; however, this approach failed to gain traction in Washington. Following the suspension of US military aid in the wake of the ill-fated White House meeting, the Ukrainian government had no choice but to enter ceasefire talks in Jeddah on 11 March without a promise of security guarantees, and to accept the US proposal for a full cessation of hostilities. This temporarily improved relations with the United States and enabled the resumption of military assistance (see '[Tactical success for Kyiv: A US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal](#)'). In the face of Russia's continued military operations, it also gave Ukraine grounds to question Vladimir Putin's credibility and commitment to peace as perceived by the US.

Faced with difficulties in its relationship with Washington, Ukraine is urging Europe to take bolder steps in defence of its own security. This was already evident at the Munich Security Conference on 15 February, when Zelensky delivered a speech calling for the creation of a European army, with Ukraine's participation, as an alternative to a potential US disengagement from European security. Ukraine's leadership prioritises cooperation with France and Britain, underpinned by Zelensky's strong personal ties with Emmanuel Macron and Keir Starmer. The central objective is to build a French- and British-led 'coalition of the willing' that, in Ukraine's view, would guarantee the country's post-war security and serve as a channel for engagement with the United States.

Ukraine is seeking the involvement of the largest possible number of European forces spanning land, naval, and air components. In its view, the post-ceasefire stabilisation mission of the 'coalition of the willing' should be granted a broad mandate, enabling a robust response to any Russian provocations. Its troops should be deployed across multiple regions of Ukraine, including areas near the combat zone. At the same time, Ukraine has avoided framing this issue as a binary choice between Europe and the United States, emphasising that the most effective outcome would be achieved through a European-led initiative actively supported by Washington (see '[Deployment of a European reassurance force in Ukraine: a political or military measure?](#)').

Internal consolidation

Despite its negative consequences for Ukraine on the international stage, the Trump-Zelensky spat has boosted public trust in the president: in the second half of March, his approval rating reached 69%. This development has also strengthened his prospects for a second term: according to an Ipsos poll, in a hypothetical presidential election, Zelensky would likely defeat his potential challenger, General Valerii Zaluzhnyi (see Chart 4 for details). On the one hand, rising support for the president suggests that an early election would work to his advantage. On the other, it weakens both US and Russian calls for such a

vote, as it would be unlikely to produce a change in leadership.

The Ukrainian people perceive US pressure aimed at forcing an agreement in negotiations with Russia as an attack on their sovereignty and view Zelensky's resolve as an assertion of Ukraine's sovereign rights. High public support for the president stems from his unwavering and effective stance in the face of pressure to sign a disadvantageous raw materials agreement and to organise elections amid ongoing hostilities. In fact, it is likely that rising public trust in Zelensky prompted the Trump administration to drop the latter demand. As a result of popular approval for the president's performance, Ukraine will further harden its stance on any future US demands to revise its 'red lines' during peace negotiations. These demands may include recognising territorial concessions *de jure*, abandoning Ukraine's bid for NATO membership without obtaining alternative, credible security guarantees, and limiting the capabilities of its armed forces. The Ukrainian people are also signalling they are prepared to continue fighting even without US support: according to a March survey by the KIIS, 82% of respondents support this approach.

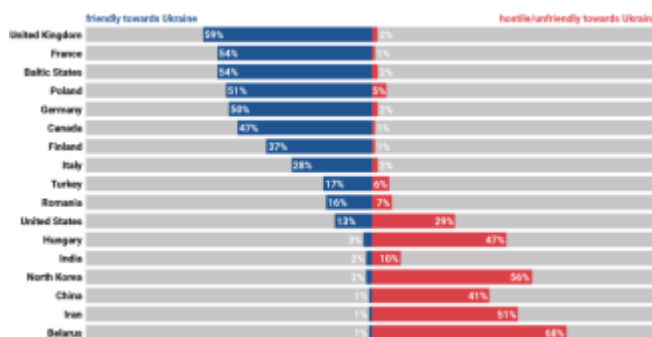
Despite efforts to adapt to the policies of the new US administration, Ukraine has failed to gain its favour, leading to a significant deterioration in relations with Washington. Ukrainian mistakes, such as questioning US-led peace efforts and holding a meeting between the presidents in the Oval Office without an interpreter, are not the main reason for Ukraine's failure to persuade the Trump administration to adopt its vision for ending the war. From the outset, the Republican leader has favoured engagement with Putin; despite signs of growing impatience, his administration continues to hope for a negotiated breakthrough and an agreement with Moscow.

Chart 1. Responses to the question: "What kind of peace can Ukraine expect under the Trump presidency?"



Source: The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology.

Chart 2. Countries perceived by Ukrainians as friendly or unfriendly/hostile towards Ukraine



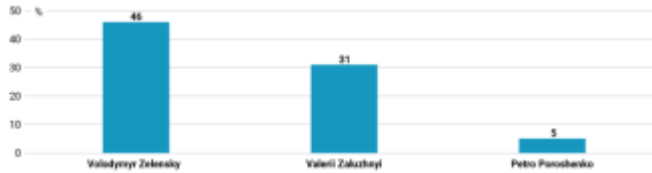
Source: Gradus Research.

Chart 3. Responses to the question: 'Do you think it is good or bad for Ukraine that Donald Trump has become President of the United States?'



Source: The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology.

Chart 4. Support for the most popular candidates in a hypothetical presidential election



Source: Ipsos.