

**MONKEY CAGE**

# Why are Germans losing enthusiasm for helping Ukraine?

It's not just about energy costs, our research finds. Germans have a deep cultural aversion toward military intervention.

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Will the spiking costs of energy, which are particularly high in Germany, [erode European support](#) for assisting Ukraine's war effort against Russia? Russia – in its attempt to use energy as a weapon – has reduced gas supplies to Europe. As a result, prices have soared to ten times their previous levels and supplies are simply running out. Not surprisingly, many look to Germany – the EU's largest economy – as the test case for [continued European commitment](#) to Ukraine. Will the [astronomical gas bills](#) and the cold winter lead Germans to press their government to reduce or withdraw its assistance to Ukraine?

To investigate, we ran a public opinion survey -- and found that energy prices are not the key issue. We learned, much as [other surveys](#) are finding, that while Germans support Ukraine's battle against the Russian invasion, they believe that Germany has already done enough. Two factors -- their historical memory of German aggression in World War II and concern about the costs of hosting refugees -- matter more than energy prices in German public opinion about helping Ukraine.

## **We're sympathetic but we've done enough**

[We surveyed](#) an opt-in sample of 1,000 Germans online between September 14 and October 6, 2022. We used statistical tools to obtain results that reflect the German population along age, gender, and state. We asked a series of questions about the war in Ukraine and what respondents thought of Germany's efforts to assist.

Then we asked how much they supported (none, a little, some, very, or extremely) four specific policies:

- Increasing sanctions on Russia and Putin, even if these sanctions might lead to a further increase in food and gas prices;
- Sending more missiles and other military equipment to Ukraine, even if this increased Germany's military budget;
- Admitting more refugees from Ukraine, even if it placed additional burdens on the economy;
- Admitting Ukraine into NATO even if this means committing to defending Ukraine militarily in the future.

Most Germans (91 percent) expressed at least some sympathy for the Ukrainians. However, a majority (54 percent) think that their country is doing enough (37 percent) or too much (17 percent) to help Ukraine's military efforts and its refugees.

### **Lukewarm support for further military intervention and admitting more refugees**

In general, roughly 30 percent of Germans oppose each of the four policies, while roughly 70 percent expressed some degree of support. But if we break down support by intensity (strong or weak), where strong is measured as "very" or "extremely" and weak is measured as "some" or "a little," we find some telling variation.

While less than half (40 percent) strongly support more sanctions, even fewer support either delivering more weapons to Ukraine or admitting more refugees (just 31 percent strongly support each policy). Strong support for admitting Ukraine to NATO is lower still at only 26 percent.

In other words, German support for increasing either military assistance or humanitarian aid is lukewarm.

### **Former East Germans are even less willing to support Ukraine than those in the West**

This national snapshot, however, hides important differences between erstwhile East and West Germany. East Germans are more opposed to all four policies than West Germans by a wide margin. For example, while only 27 percent of West German respondents are opposed to increasing military assistance to Ukraine, 52 percent of East Germans express this view. This is consistent with a more benign attitude toward Russia and greater skepticism toward NATO among that group.

### **If it's not energy costs, what shapes German attitudes toward Ukraine?**

But if Germans are more willing to sacrifice their family budgets than to send weapons or take in refugees, energy costs clearly aren't as crucial as observers have suggested. We believe two other factors are key.

The first is the commitment to military non-intervention that the nation has cultivated since the end of World War II. That war's legacy leads many Germans to adopt an attitude of military restraint and aversion to military engagement. By now, Germany's self-understanding as a "civilian power" has become a core part of its identity, which is hard to change. That same history – including the memory of German cities being bombed – might also influence Germans' reluctance to be directly involved in the conflict.

In this respect, the German government's decision to send weapons to Ukraine to fight Russian aggression has been a revolutionary change in its foreign policy, which has had a fundamental commitment not to intervene militarily outside its borders. German jets and troops participated in the NATO-led operation in Kosovo in 1999, helping to end Serbian forces' genocide against the Albanians. And after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Germany sent troops to the U.S.-led military operation in Afghanistan. But these deployments were unpopular from the outset and the government faced mass protests as a result.

When German Chancellor Olaf Schulz announced that Germany would supply Ukraine with weapons, the public supported him overwhelmingly. But as the war has dragged on, Germans have become more hesitant about being involved militarily. That's also what happened during the Afghanistan war: German support for direct involvement declined sharply over time, leaving even less appetite for military intervention anywhere.

The second key factor is refugee fatigue. As the social and fiscal reality of hosting refugees has become clearer, Germans are losing enthusiasm for admitting more Ukrainians. This could have serious consequences in the coming months, as Russia's ongoing bombing campaign will likely send more Ukrainians fleeing to European countries – which might serve to further weaken support for Ukraine.

While declining gas prices since October, due in part to warmer temperatures, have given Europe a reprieve, this may not be sufficient to sustain current levels of support for Ukraine. In Germany, the government has announced a plan to pay the December gas bills for households and small- to medium-sized businesses. But even that might not be enough to boost German public support for delivering weapons and admitting more Ukrainian refugees.

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