

**BRAND**  
**UKRAINE**

# **UKRAINE'S PERCEPTION REPORT IN NORTH AMERICA**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Methodology	3
Ukraine-related search trends analysis	4
Public opinion about Ukraine	7
Ukraine’s coverage in local news media	16
Expert opinions on messages about Ukraine’s image in the region	21
General conclusions	26

## METHODOLOGY

The analysis of Ukraine's perception in North America consists of four pillars:

- **Ukraine-related search trends.** What topics and events are capturing public interest in Ukraine on Google.
- **Public opinion about Ukraine.** The general sentiment and perceptions held by the public towards Ukraine, as reflected in trustworthy social surveys.
- **Ukraine's coverage in local news media.** How Ukraine is represented in news outlets, including the most popular Ukraine-related topics.
- **Interviews with five experts per region.** Analysis of opinions from researchers and experts for a deeper understanding of key trends and the context of Ukraine's perception.

Using the insights from Expert interviews, we have been able to further validate our initial findings. Experts' quotes that either supported or challenged findings from preliminary desk-based research are presented in each section of the report in order to provide a deeper understanding of the results.

## LIMITATIONS

Our media analysis was conducted over a specific, limited time frame (from August to October 2024). A longer period would require more resources for a comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, we believe that the data provided offers a foundational understanding of how Ukraine is covered in local media.

## UKRAINE-RELATED SEARCH TRENDS ANALYSIS

To identify the genuine interest of the regional audience in specific topics, we conducted a study of search queries using Google Trends and Ahrefs. Given the distinct functionalities of these analytical tools, we selected different timeframes for query analysis. For Google Trends, the analysis covered January 2022 to October 2024, while for Ahrefs, it spanned October 2023 to October 2024. Both tools provided data for the United States and Canada. This research enabled us to assess the resonance of various events among audiences in the selected countries.

According to our analysis of data from Ahrefs and Google Trends, the most common reasons for the rising search interest in the “Ukraine” topic in North America during the period from January 2024 to October 2024 were as follows (see Figure 1).

### Dynamics of the search activity for “Ukraine” query on Google



Figure 1. Trend of “Ukraine” search query on Google in North America & worldwide.

Source: Google Trends

**Geopolitical events.** Events involving territorial or military operations often triggered an increase in searches. For instance, specific offensives or military escalations led to heightened interest among local audiences, reflecting regional sensitivities toward geopolitical developments.

**High-Level diplomatic engagement.** Diplomatic interactions, such as official visits by foreign leaders to Ukraine or Ukrainian leaders visiting allies, contributed to spikes in search interest. These events underscored the international dimension of the war and the region’s engagement with it.

**Ukraine’s involvement in football matches.** In line with global trends, major international sporting events involving Ukraine, such as football matches, also influenced search trends. The region displayed an increased interest in Ukraine when their teams participated in notable matches, showcasing cultural and social dimensions in search behaviours.

According to data from Ahrefs and Google Trends, Russian invasion of Ukraine is the most common search topic related to the country in North America (see Figure 2). Football follows as the second most searched subject, reflecting the region’s strong affinity for the sport.

### Trending queries in the context of Ukraine on Google



Figure 2. Trending queries in the context of Ukraine on Google (October 2023 – October 2024).  
Source: Ahrefs (data for the United States and Canada)

Interest in the ongoing war remains prominent, with frequent searches on “*who is winning the war in Ukraine*” and “*how many Russian soldiers have died in Ukraine*”. People in the U.S. and Canada often seek updates on Ukraine’s counteroffensive and the general state of the war.

Additionally, financial aid to Ukraine is a significant area of focus, with numerous searches about “*how much has the U.S. sent to Ukraine*”, “*aid to Ukraine by country*”, and “*will Ukraine pay the U.S. back*”.

In addition to war-related topics, general interest in Ukrainian culture and history is evident. Queries include *“Ukrainian food”, “Orthodox Church”, “Ukrainian Christmas”, “Holodomor”, and “Ukrainian flag”*.

There’s also a notable frequency of searches about volunteering or supporting Ukraine, such as *“volunteer in Ukraine” and “how can the U.S. help Ukraine”*, highlighting an interest in engagement beyond just information gathering.

## CONCLUSIONS

- **Significant rise in attention to Ukraine after the full-scale invasion:** Following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there was a significant surge in interest in Ukraine-related topics among the population of the specified region. This mirrored the global response, where the war generated widespread attention.
- **Long-term decline with periodic spikes:** After the initial surge in interest in the months immediately following February 2022, searches for Ukraine-related topics experienced a gradual decline. However, interest continued to spike periodically in response to major events related to the war, indicating sustained, albeit fluctuating, engagement.
- **Unique regional focus:** Unlike other regions, this specific region demonstrated distinct interests in Ukraine-related searches. While war updates remained prominent, other topics such as high-profile diplomatic visits and geopolitical incidents also played a significant role in driving search interest.

## PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT UKRAINE

Public opinion on U.S. support for Ukraine reveals significant partisan divides, with a notable percentage of Republicans perceiving aid as excessive, while Democrats largely support increased assistance or view current levels as insufficient.

- A bar chart indicates that roughly a quarter of Americans believe the U.S. is offering excessive support to Ukraine, with significant partisan differences (see Figure 3). Currently, 27% of Americans feel that the level of assistance is too high, while 25% consider it “about right”, and 18% think the U.S. should provide more support. These opinions are consistent with those from July, although there has been a slight increase in the number of people expressing uncertainty, rising from 25% to 29%.
- Among Republicans, 42% believe that the U.S. is giving too much support to Ukraine. Additionally, 19% think the current level of assistance is appropriate, while 10% feel it is insufficient.
- In contrast, only 13% of Democrats think the U.S. is providing too much support. Approximately 31% believe the support level is adequate, and 28% assert that the U.S. is not offering enough assistance.

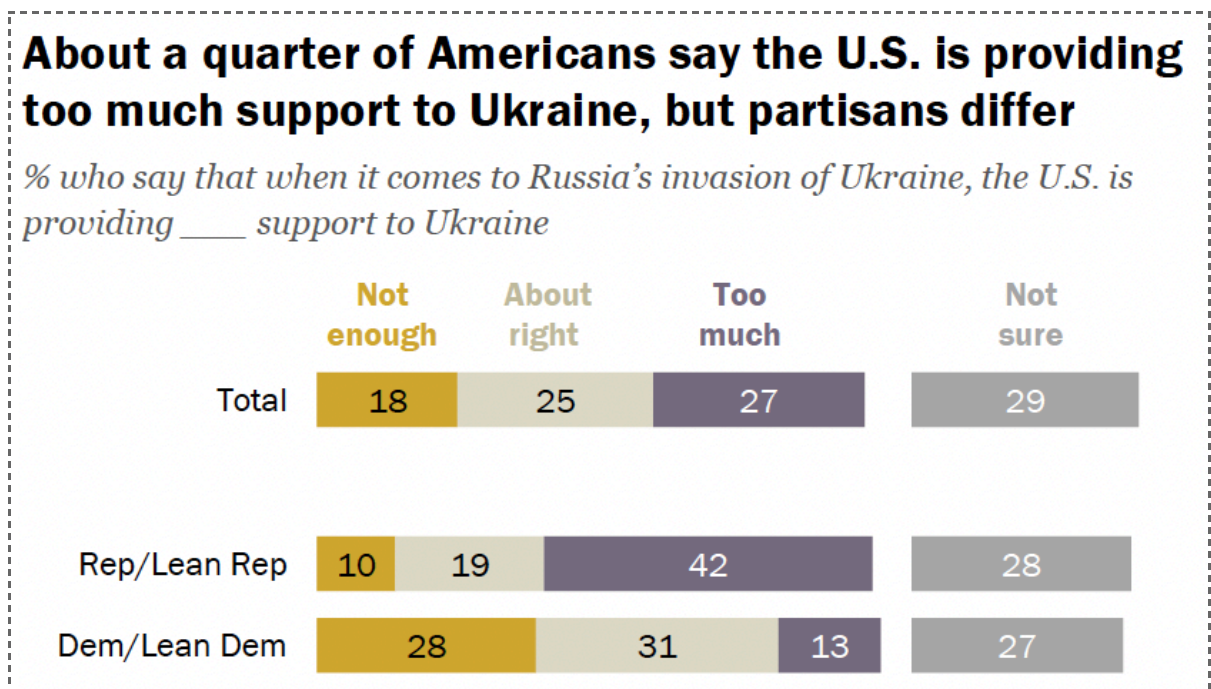


Figure 3. U.S. support for Ukraine: public opinion split (November 2024).

Source: [Pew Research Center survey](#)

“Even though we all understand that what’s happening is so-called ‘war fatigue’, and people are growing tired of the war topic, which has perhaps been overshadowed by other global wars or conflicts, Ukraine still has support. And something interesting is that, as I’ve heard, observed, and had confirmed by many of my American colleagues, there’s actually no difference between Democrats and Republicans when it comes to support for Ukraine — ordinary citizens stand with Ukraine. [...] There’s a strong desire to help Ukrainians, both men and women, including us, the people, children, refugees, internally displaced persons, and individuals with disabilities. People are more interested in very specific stories — who exactly they want to help and how. Military support raises more questions and, perhaps, even debates. And I think there are definitely some concerns among Americans about escalating this conflict further.” (Expert 2)

Analysis reveals a declining perception of the threat posed by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine among Americans, particularly among Republicans, while Democrats continue to express greater concern on the issue.

- A line chart illustrates the decreasing percentage of Republicans who perceive Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a threat to U.S. interests (see Figure 4). Currently, 30% of Americans believe that Russia's actions in Ukraine represent a significant threat to the United States. This perspective has remained relatively consistent over recent years, although there was a notable increase in concern during the initial weeks of the war in 2022.
- Since 2023, Republicans have shown a significantly lower likelihood than Democrats to regard the Russian invasion as a threat. Presently, only 19% of Republicans hold this view, a decrease from 26% in July.
- In contrast, approximately 42% of Democrats consider Russia's invasion a major threat, which is a slight decline from 45% in July but aligns with their sentiments throughout 2023.

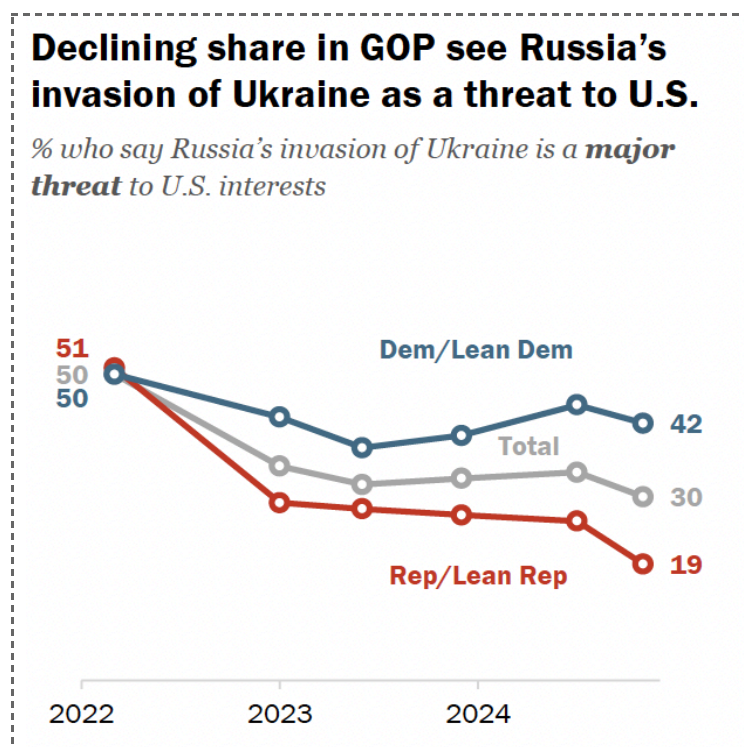




Figure 4. GOP decline in seeing war as major U.S. threat (November 2024).  
Source: [Pew Research Center survey](#)

In The Most Popular Countries (Q3 2024) ranking, Ukraine holds the 25th position in terms of popularity and favourable perception among Americans, with 57% of respondents viewing the country positively (see Figure 5).










	Search	Fame	Popularity
1	 United States of America	98%	80%
2	 Ireland	97%	72%
3	 Canada	96%	72%
-----			
24	 Portugal	95%	58%
25	 Ukraine	95%	57%
26	 Costa Rica	97%	55%
-----			
193	 São Tomé and Príncipe	51%	18%
194	 Kiribati	46%	17%
195	 Burundi	63%	17%

Figure 5. The Most Popular Countries (ranking in the USA, Q3, 2024).  
Source: [YouGov](#)

*"I think Russia has been very successful in putting this issue of nuclear weapons and nuclear war back on the agenda. There's a big article in the New York Times yesterday about war games that were done back in the Cold War. There's actually been a series of articles in the New York Times about the danger of nuclear war in the current era. And I don't think those people are Russian operatives, but every time we start thinking about nuclear war, that works to Russia's advantage [...] The other thing that Russia has been winning on more recently is this idea that Ukraine can't defeat Russia, therefore the best it can do is basically some kind of ceasefire along the current territorial division. That idea is, I think, increasingly widely believed in the United States, including in the elite." (Expert 4)*

## 9 Ukraine's Perception Report In North America

## PERCEPTION OF UKRAINE: SOFT POWER AND ASSOCIATIONS

Nations of North America widely view Ukraine as a politically stable and well-governed country (see Figure 6). Ukraine’s governance, particularly its resilience during the ongoing war, has bolstered its reputation as a politically stable nation capable of managing crises. This perception is supported by strong global leadership demonstrated by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose consistent advocacy for democratic principles resonates with North American audiences. Additionally, Ukraine’s focus on institutional reforms, anti-corruption measures, and transparent governance has further strengthened its credibility in the region.

Ukraine’s assessment by various attributes of soft power

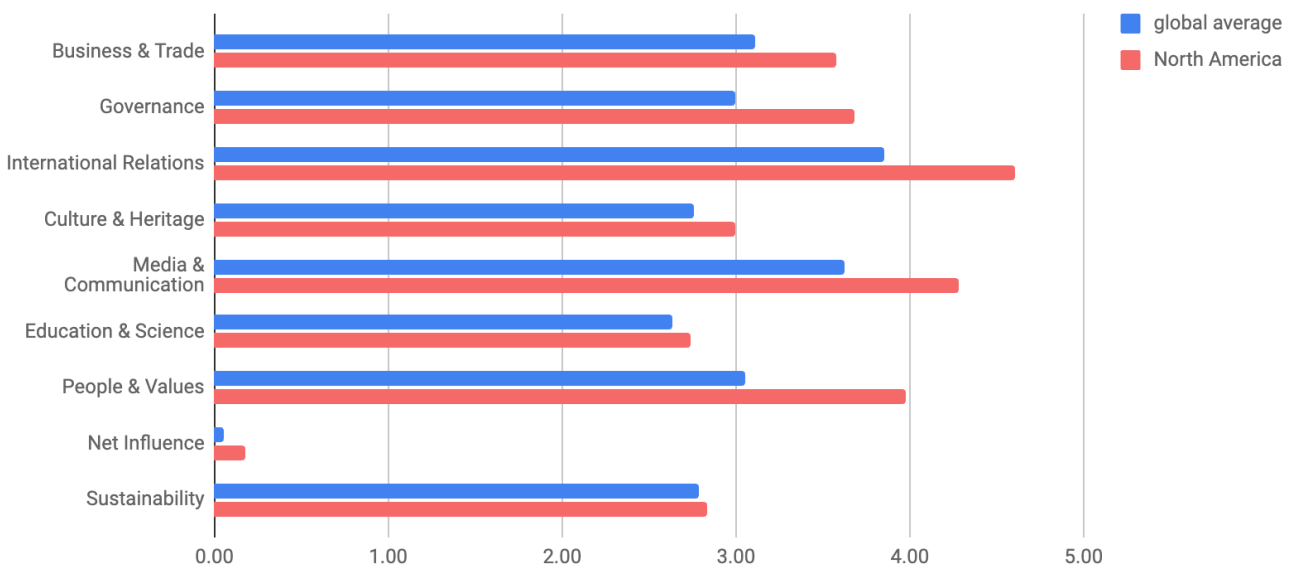


Figure 6. Ukraine’s assessment by various attributes of soft power (maximum possible score 10).

Source: Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index 2024

*“The other and much more difficult is of course and I leave it to people who know better about economics and outreach is to show the potential of Ukraine economically once the war is over. And I think that has to be shown as well. I mean, Canada has a free trade agreement with Ukraine, relatively small trade compared to what it could be. But that certainly is an area where much more work has to be done. So I would say that Ukraine understands, I think more than ever, the need for soft power. And we now have. All of those displace scholars, displace the media people, people with tremendous talent. We have to find ways in which they can communicate very effectively.” (Expert 3)*

*How these small groups of Ukrainians are designing mostly drones but are designing, you know weapons and weapon systems and Again, that's kind of a startup culture resonates well among of Certainly a lot of the young men in the United States But I would also want to do something about, this is what Ukrainians do. Ukrainians at this very basic level, something happens, and we don't wait for the government to solve the problem, right? That kind of thing. We just do it without waiting for the government. That appeals to Americans, right? Because we don't like our government.” (Expert 4)*

According to the Ukraine Message Testing Research Social Survey in 12 countries conducted by Zink Network for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in 2023, the perception of Ukraine's soft power in North America exceeds the global average across all areas, especially in governance, international relations, people, and media (see Figure 7).

### Perception of Ukraine's "Governance" as a soft power component, across various countries

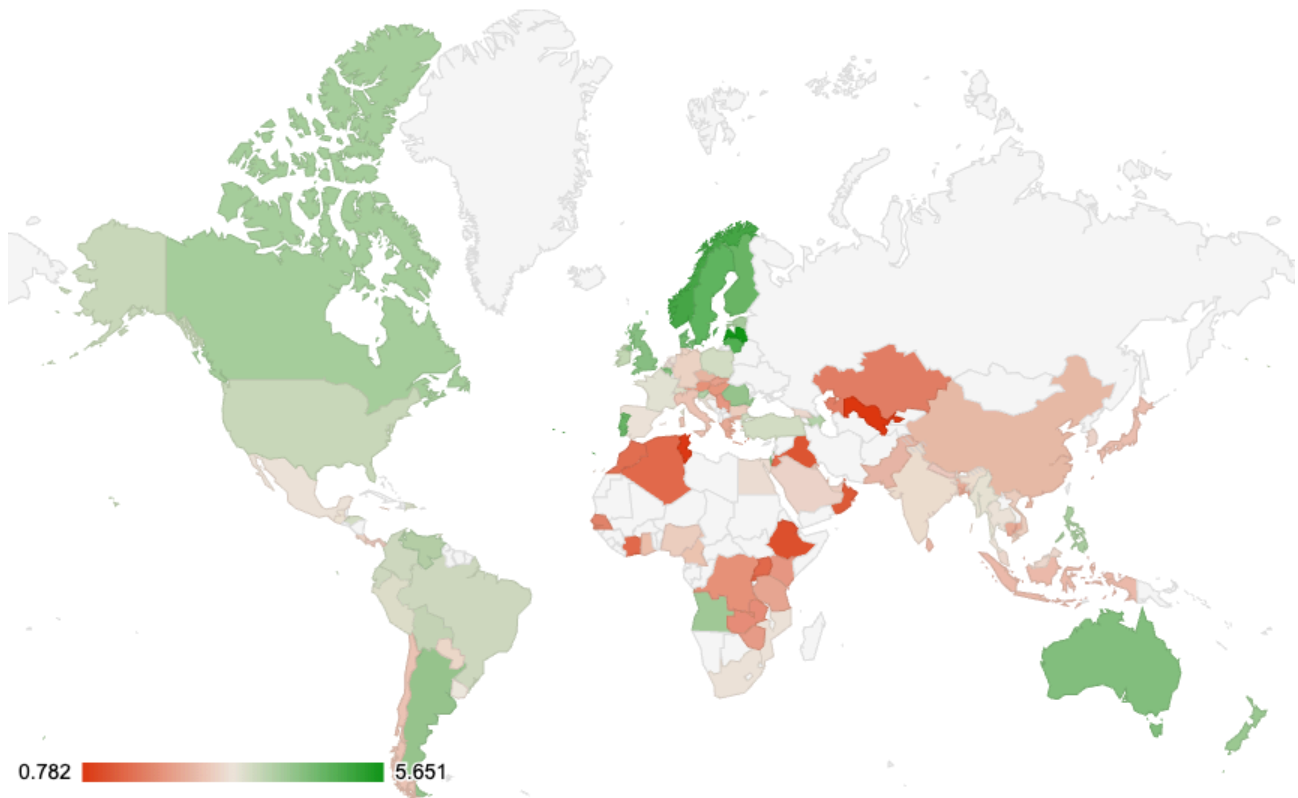


Figure 7. Perception of Ukraine's "Governance" as a soft power component, across various countries<sup>1</sup>  
Source: Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index 2024

Canada and the U.S. consider Ukraine influential in diplomatic circles. Ukraine's active participation in international organizations and its ability to garner widespread support against Russian aggression underline its growing diplomatic influence. Both Canada and the U.S. perceive Ukraine as a key player in European security and as an advocate for the international rules-based order. Its efforts to engage with NATO, the UN, and other global entities have also amplified its diplomatic visibility, furthering its image as a nation of significant international standing. The successful alignment of Ukraine with Western allies in countering authoritarianism has solidified its position as an influential partner in North American political discourse.

Despite these positive perceptions, Ukraine's overall familiarity remains limited among the broader North American population (see Figure 8). While political elites and

<sup>1</sup> The "Governance" soft power pillar includes such criteria as "Internationally admired leaders", "Politically stable & well-governed", "High ethical standards and low corruption", "Safe & secure", "Respects law and human rights"

informed audiences recognize Ukraine’s significance, general awareness is hindered by a lack of cultural exposure and limited representation in media narratives outside the context of the war.

This gap suggests a need for more strategic cultural diplomacy and public engagement to enhance Ukraine’s soft power and to deepen its connections with ordinary citizens in North America. Leveraging cultural exports, tourism promotion, and collaborative initiatives in areas like technology and education could address this deficit.

### Perception of Ukraine’s “Familiarity” as a soft power component, across various countries

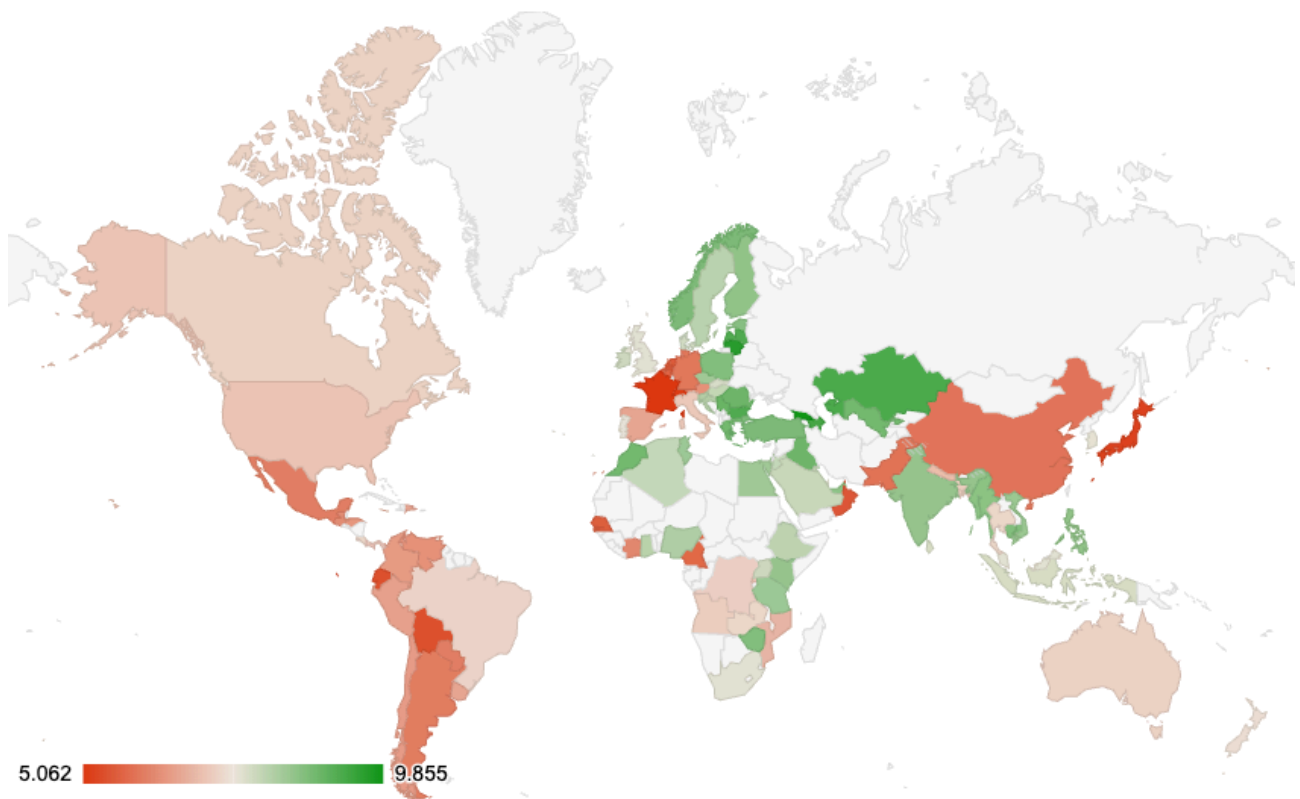


Figure 8. Perception of Ukraine’s “Familiarity” as a soft power component, across various countries.

Source: Brand Finance, Global Soft Power Index 2024

*“At some point, Ukraine became personified by President Zelenskyy. This is likely because Americans don’t yet have other strong and recognizable faces of Ukraine that they can immediately associate with the country besides him. I hope this is changing, but unfortunately, it seems not as quickly as we might expect. As a result, everything connected to him — whether good or not so good — can reflect the image of the entire country, shaping its entire brand. For now, he carries the image of a hero who stood up to defend the nation, famously saying, ‘I don’t need a ride; I need ammunition.’ Those powerful messages, crafted by strong copywriters, left a striking impression and were often the first things people thought of when Ukraine came to mind.” (Expert 2)*

According to the results of the Ukraine Message Testing Research Social Survey conducted by Zink Network, Americans perceive Ukraine as a country that symbolizes the fight for freedom and justice. Positive associations mostly emphasize Ukraine's spirited response to the war. The main positive associations include resilience, independence, democratic values, heroism, and struggle (see Figure 9).

Negative associations are mostly explained by the sorrowful impact of the war, but also include financial implications (corrupt and expensive).

### Associations with Ukraine in USA



Figure 9. Associations with Ukraine in the USA (September 2023).  
Source: social survey in 12 countries conducted by Zink Network for MFA of Ukraine

*"The thing that originally resonated with Americans when Russia first attacked was the heroism of these Ukrainians standing up against this giant attacker. I think that's probably the version of the story that is still easiest. It's every movie we watch. It's the easiest for us to relate to, and it's the one we love the most. [...] We love an underdog. Ukraine is fighting for its land and so on. These are themes that really resonate with Americans. And again, I think about all these American Western movies. It's always somebody defending their land. We're fighting for our land."* (Expert 4)

## Impact of statements on public favorability towards Ukraine in USA

The American audience responds most favourably to statements emphasizing Ukraine’s fight for independence, democratic rights, and territorial integrity, resonating with values of freedom and dignity (see Figure 10).

While messages on humanitarian aid and defence against Russian imperialism strengthen support, economic or geopolitical arguments, such as fuel prices and tech partnerships, have less impact, indicating that moral and value-driven narratives are key to American support.

### To what extent do these statements make you feel more or less favourable towards Ukraine? - USA

■ Less favourable ■ More favourable



Figure 10. Impact of statements on public favorability towards Ukraine in the USA (September 2023). Source: social survey in 12 countries conducted by Zink Network for MFA of Ukraine

In the U.S., public opinion strongly supports Ukraine, with widespread condemnation of Russia’s invasion, recognition of Ukraine’s independence in decision-making, and belief in the effectiveness of Ukraine’s military. Many Americans also endorse humanitarian aid to Ukraine, even if funded by taxpayers. Pro-Ukrainian views significantly outweigh neutral or pro-Russian stances, reflecting strong solidarity with Ukraine (see Figure 11).

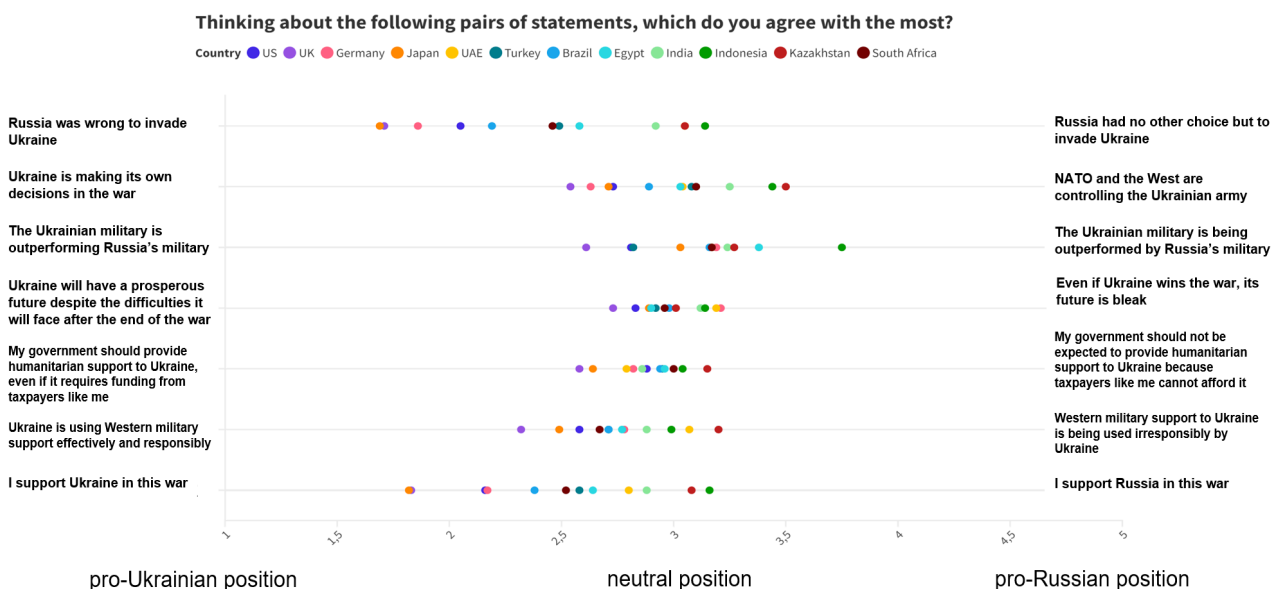


Figure 11. Global perspectives on Ukraine: pro-Ukrainian vs. pro-Russian views (September 2023). Source: social survey in 12 countries conducted by Zink Network for MFA of Ukraine

## CONCLUSIONS

- **Strong moral support rooted in democratic values:** Public opinion in the U.S. and Canada leans heavily toward supporting Ukraine, driven primarily by alignment with democratic principles and Ukraine’s fight for sovereignty. Statements focusing on Ukraine’s independence, human rights, and resistance against Russian imperialism resonate strongly with North American audiences, emphasizing the value-driven basis of support.
- **Enduring support for aid with growing economic concerns:** Humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine remains broadly supported by North Americans, even with taxpayer costs. However, there is increasing interest in the economic impact of this support, with frequent public queries about the financial cost and future repayment prospects. This indicates a slight shift in focus towards the practical implications of prolonged support.
- **Perceptions mixed with financial concerns and some scepticism:** While most associations with Ukraine in North America are positive, emphasizing resilience and bravery, there is also concern about the economic burden, with criticisms centred on the financial costs and occasional doubts over corruption. Despite these concerns, pro-Ukrainian sentiment strongly outweighs neutral or pro-Russian stances in the region.

## UKRAINE'S COVERAGE IN LOCAL NEWS MEDIA

To assess Ukraine's perception through the lens of the media, we analysed coverage of Ukraine in the largest news outlets across the region.

According to SimilarWeb data, the leading media platforms in the studied countries include *The New York Times*, *Fox News*, *The Washington Post*, *New York Post*, *USA Today*, *Business Insider*, *NPR*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *NBC News*, *CNN*, *CBC*, *Associated Press*, *CTV News*, *Global News*, *BuzzFeed News*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *National Post*. The analysis focused on the period from August to October 2024, examining 6 220 articles published in English.

In the analysed period, local media published the highest number of articles on September 17, covering the discussions about Ukraine's possible involvement in the assassination attempt on Trump (see Figure 12).

Other peaks of search interest included such topics:

- Military operation by the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Russia's Kursk region,
- Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visit to the U.S.,
- Anthony Blinken's visit to Ukraine,
- Lloyd Austin's visit to Ukraine,
- North Korea's intercontinental ballistic missile test.

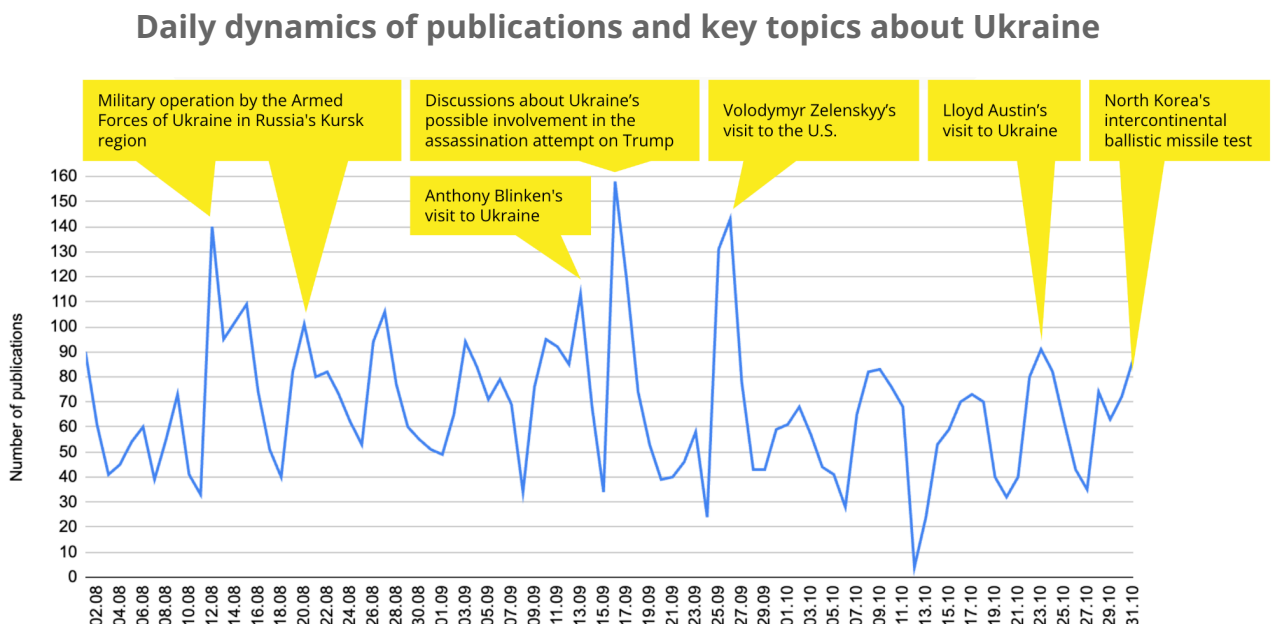


Figure 12. Daily dynamics of publications and key topics about Ukraine (August-October 2024).

Source: Looqme media monitoring database



From August to October, Western media continued to focus on the Ukrainian military operation in the Kursk region, which began on August 6 (see Figure 13). Share of voice is calculated as the % of articles dedicated to a particular topic among all the publications about Ukraine in the biggest news media. We believe the analysed sample of sources represents the general trends in major media of North America.

*“The first year of the full-scale invasion, when Ukraine was constantly on CNN for the entire North America, brought Ukrainian images and support of Ukraine.” (Expert 3)*

*“What Americans focus on is the war itself. Stories about ATACMS missiles or Putin’s nuclear threats are what catch the public’s attention.” (Expert 4)*

### Key topics about Ukraine in terms of the % of published articles

Topic	Share of Voice
<b>Military operation by the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Russia's Kursk region</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>International support and Western weapons for Ukraine</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>North Korea’s troop deployment in the Russia’s war against Ukraine</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Russian shelling of Ukrainian cities</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Russian offensive</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Discussions on allowing Ukraine to use Western weapons to strike targets on Russian territory</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Reality of life in Ukraine</b>	<b>3%</b>

Figure 13. Key topics about Ukraine in terms of the % of published articles (August-October 2024).

Source: Looqme media monitoring database

*“In that way, one can see a certain decline. There has been relatively good reporting that came from Canada. Mark McKinnon, who writes for The Globe and Mail, a major Canadian national newspaper, writes frequently on it. The National Post, which largely represents conservative opinion, has columns from Adam Givo.” (Expert 3)*

*“Yeah, I think that since the beginning of the war, a lot of people have stopped paying attention. That’s pretty typical with how news stories go. Something big happens. A lot of people get interested and follow it while it’s on the front pages of the newspapers or obviously people don’t read newspapers any more, but it’s at the top of their social media feeds or on their news that they watch, and then it fades, and so they pay less attention. There’s a smaller subset of people like me who have remained very deeply interested. But in the early days of the war, everybody I knew was asking me about Ukraine. And that’s not so much the case now.” (Expert 4)*

To gain a deeper understanding of the nuances in local media coverage, we conducted a narrative analysis of the largest topic. North American media prioritized assessments of the operation's strategic and military aspects, emphasizing its risk and unpredictable consequences for the geopolitical balance. Attention is often given to military support and NATO coordination, reflecting the region's close security relationship with Ukraine. American outlets demonstrate support for Ukraine but urge caution, considering potential responses from Russia. Most publications recognize that the operation has significant resonance and could influence the long-term political and military decisions of the United States and its allies.

*"These media outlets broadcast messages or statements from the Russian government or the Kremlin without verifying them. For example, claims that NATO is to blame for starting the war or narratives about Nazis in Ukraine. This impacts how Ukraine is perceived, even in academic circles. What's particularly significant is that this also applies to pro-liberal media, which one might expect to be more supportive of Ukraine. I can't even imagine what outlets like Fox News or far-right publications write about Ukraine. The media have an enormous influence." (Expert 1)*

The analysis identified several key narratives in North American media coverage of Ukraine's military operation in the Kursk region:

- **International support and the U.S. position on the operation.** Some publications view the operation within the context of U.S. and allied responses, emphasizing that Washington supports Ukraine's right to defence, though with caution regarding actions on Russian territory.
- **The sudden nature of the operation and its strategic impact.** North American media underscore that the Ukrainian operation on Russian territory came as a surprise to the Kremlin. This narrative connects to analyses of the effectiveness of Ukrainian tactics and evaluations of the operation's impact on the overall war strategy.
- **Ukraine as an active participant, choosing a risky strategy.** American media note that Ukraine, despite Western support, increasingly acts independently, expanding its goals and methods to maximally weaken Russia. Media highlight the operation as an example of a bold strategy while acknowledging its high risks.
- **Evaluation of Western military support and NATO's role.** Publications draw attention to how the Kursk operation is perceived in the context of Western support for Ukraine. Discussions include whether the operation had NATO or allied approval and what implications this may have for future arms supplies.
- **Domestic Russian resonance and reaction to civilian evacuations.** North American media often focus on humanitarian aspects and the public reaction within Russia. Reports describe the evacuation of civilians and the social consequences of the operation for the Russian population.

This part presents an analysis of the key figures most frequently quoted in North American media when covering Ukraine-related topics. The analysis highlights how these figures are portrayed and the context in which their statements are used, shedding light on the narratives being constructed around Ukraine's military operations, international relations, and the broader geopolitical landscape.

### **Key figures quoted in media articles on Ukraine in North America between August and October 2024:**

- **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** — quotes emphasize Ukraine's fight for sovereignty and calls for international support, positioning Ukraine as a defender of democracy in Europe.
- **Vladimir Putin** — quotes reflect the Kremlin's aggressive rhetoric, often illustrating Russia's threatening stance.
- **Mykhailo Podolyak** — comments on Ukraine's policies, providing updates on military actions and bolstering morale, strengthening ties with the international community.
- **Maria Zakharova** — represents Russia's diplomatic stance, frequently with rhetoric aimed at discrediting Ukraine and justifying Kremlin actions.
- **Joe Biden** — quotes highlight the U.S.'s firm support for Ukraine, sending a strong signal to allies and deterring adversaries.
- **Kamala Harris** — emphasizes the democratic and moral dimensions of the war, underscoring the global importance of supporting Ukraine.
- **Donald Trump** — offers a more critical perspective on the level of U.S. support for Ukraine, reflecting internal political debates in the U.S.

## CONCLUSIONS

- **Political support and military aid:** Key North American media consistently cover support for Ukraine, focusing on official statements about arms supplies and military assistance. The articles emphasize the strategic interest of the United States in countering Russian aggression and the importance of the war for global security.
- **Geopolitical consequences:** Articles analyse the international repercussions of Russia's war against Ukraine, including the strengthening of NATO's role and the increase in U.S. defence spending. Publications often view the war as part of a broader global struggle between democratic nations and authoritarian regimes.
- **Human dimension in media coverage:** Media narratives in North America focus primarily on high-level geopolitical decisions and strategic considerations regarding the war in Ukraine and international support. While this emphasizes military aid and global security, it typically neglects the human stories that show how these decisions impact millions of Ukrainians. Integrating personal narratives into communication strategies is essential to bridge this gap, enrich media discourse, and foster a stronger emotional connection with global audiences.
- **Analysis of Russian actions:** Although most materials hold a pro-Ukrainian stance, Russian officials are also mentioned, mainly in connection with sanctions and accountability for war crimes. However, critical assessments are balanced to maintain a neutral tone.
- **Domestic impact:** The costs of supporting Ukraine and their effect on the U.S. economy are discussed, as the American audience is interested in how aid affects domestic national interests.

## EXPERT OPINIONS ON MESSAGES ABOUT UKRAINE'S IMAGE IN THE REGION

To gain a deeper understanding of Ukraine's perception in different regions, we conducted interviews with five experts per region. Contacts were identified using a snowball sampling method, asking ENGAGE program partners for recommendations on knowledgeable experts. This ensured a diverse pool of participants.

The interviews followed a semi-structured, in-depth approach, combining the flexibility to explore emerging themes with a framework based on prior desktop research. This method allowed us to gain detailed qualitative insights while ensuring comparability across interviews.

### EXPERT DESCRIPTION:

- **Western Researchers:** Scholars from Western institutions with an interest in Ukraine, capable of reflecting on how news and events related to Ukraine are perceived in the region.
- **Ukrainian Experts and Communicators:** Practitioners engaged in Ukraine's external communications in the U.S. or Europe, offering insights into the effectiveness and specifics of such efforts.
- **Soft Power Contributors:** Individuals involved in cultural, economic, and experiential exchanges, relevant for discussions on Ukraine's soft power.

Using qualitative methods, we have focused on developing communication messages. Extracting expert recommendations for refining communication strategies tailored to specific regional contexts.

Based on the analysis of these interviews, we can outline the following communication messages:

### Highlight personal stories

- Showcase the courage and humanity of Ukrainians through personal experiences, such as families rebuilding lives or individuals contributing to the fight.
- Use stories to counteract stereotypes and add depth to Ukraine's image.

*"People who have some personal connection to Ukraine — it doesn't necessarily have to be through relatives or past generations — it could also be those who have travelled to Ukraine, participated in programs like the Peace Corps or Fulbright. I think this has a very strong impact." (Expert 1)*

*"For example, I see a lot of videos and things of destroyed buildings. I'm not sure pictures of destroyed buildings really affect people very much. I think what affects people is, you know, stories of husbands who disappear, mothers who've been raped. I mean, that's a terrible thing and we shouldn't exploit it. But I think that is more likely to move people. Stories about individual people, not buildings." (Expert 4)*

*"I would want for us as Americans to see average Ukrainians out there saying, yeah, I've been here for two and a half years and this is why I fight. This is why I fight. Because of Bucha, because of the Holodomor, because of freedom, because they watched Tom Hanks in Saving Private Ryan and are inspired, right? I guess, you know, my big picture is I think once negative stories start, it's very difficult to address them. And so I would want to make the Russians address negative stories, and I would push out as much personal information. Personal heroic stories about Ukrainians. Americans, we don't think in abstract terms, we don't think in structural institutional terms, we think in emotional terms. Freedom, heroism, sacrifice, all that stuff." (Expert 4)*

*"The idea that Ukrainian democracy needs to be supported — well, again, that's just my personal opinion, right? I personally believe in supporting those values because I truly believe in them. But it seems to me that to motivate someone to go to their senator or sign something in support of Ukraine, they need to have personal experience with Ukraine — maybe as a Peace Corps volunteer, a tourist, or someone who's been here at least once — or to hear stories that really move them, you know, storytelling that compels them to act. General phrases about democracy are beautiful and impactful, but I don't think they're enough to drive action." (Expert 2)*

### **Focus on shared values**

- Emphasize the universal desire for freedom and self-determination, which connects with American ideals of independence and justice.
- Frame the narrative as a defence of not only Ukraine but also global norms and sovereignty.

*"But you use the word freedom and I think that's still something that Americans relate to, and you know freedom and democracy may sound like the same thing, but they have slightly, at least in English, slightly different valences. And that's, you know, that's what I would want is Ukrainians, regular Ukrainians saying we just want to be free. We just want to be free. I think that still resonates with Americans. One of the problems is there's a lot of admiration for authoritarianism right now in this country. People love Donald Trump, you can see that from the election, and a lot of those people, I wouldn't say they love Vladimir Putin, but they have a certain admiration for what he's been able to accomplish. And so I think you combat that not with talking about democracy, but talking about freedom." (Expert 4)*

*"Well, I think it's about injustice as such. It's a universal human factor — the idea that there is an independent country. Even if some perceive it as a part of Russia, everyone knows that it is, in fact, an independent country. And suddenly, this completely independent country is being invaded. That's the initial reaction — that something like this shouldn't be happening in the modern world. Anyone from Arkansas or Texas, any person, understands that this is wrong, that this shouldn't be happening." (Expert 2)*

### **Ensure aid reaches its intended recipients effectively**

- Promote stories of accountability and reforms in Ukraine to counteract negative perceptions.
- Ensure clear communication about how foreign aid is monitored and used effectively. Emphasize transparent and impactful use of aid, showcasing how support directly benefits those in need and strengthens Ukraine's resilience in its fight for sovereignty.

*“However, Ukraine has to live with its past and the way that corruption did work and quite honestly, with its mistakes in its politics of having elected Kuchma or Yanukovich in these elections, these are facts, just as this goes on. So it is extremely important that everything be done transparently, and it is a narrative of importance. I don't think it is a dominant narrative at the moment. I think much more difficult is the feeling that the cause is almost hopeless now. That is that there is no way you have to just come to accommodation.” (Expert 3)*

*“Our fight against corruption in Ukraine is visible. I believe this influences the perception of the overall level of corruption in the country, but I think it's necessary. It's also significant to point out that investigations and exposés are happening in Ukraine. It's not just a case of corruption existing and nothing being done about it. I think it's crucial to talk about anti-corruption reforms.” (Expert 1)*

*“Yeah, I think this is, I think this is another tough one just because we're at this isolationist moment in our time. But I would think about, again, leaving aside the money itself, some things we already talked about. But I want stories about how effectively Ukraine is using this weapon, and I would want pictures and stories of Ukrainian soldiers. Using American weapons to defend their homes.” (Expert 4)*

*“Ukraine has a pretty good track record for corruption. And so, but I think the thing that maybe it's harder to see from where you are is people in the United States who for whatever reason might not support aid to Ukraine, one of the most powerful arguments they could use is that Ukraine is corrupt and the money's being wasted. And so there are Americans who are repeating that theme. And I think this is a tricky one, because one of the things you might want to do is to have more stories out there about corruption being punished. I think that's a bit risky, right? What I would want is, and again, I think it's hard to battle these narratives. I want to be clear about that. But, so I might not even try to battle them. I might just focus on the more positive stuff elsewhere, not to fight the battle on losing, on a difficult ground for you about, that's actually what I would do. I would not even talk about it.” (Expert 4)*

## **Showcase cultural richness**

- Leverage Ukrainian cultural symbols (e.g., music, art, food) to engage audiences emotionally and create positive associations.
- Highlighting successful Ukrainians within regional contexts — such as startups like Grammarly, achievements in sports like the MBA Cup, and contributions to global culture — showcases Ukraine's innovation and talent, fostering pride and positive recognition.

*“Music works very well, and it's beautiful because, even if languages can be a barrier, music transcends that. It's wonderful. I think there should be more collaborations between their musicians and Ukrainians, whether in English or in Ukrainian — it's essential to include Ukrainian as well. They love those folkloric motifs, even if they don't understand the language, because it's beautiful and captivating. Recently, I attended a meeting where one of our American partners mentioned that Ukraine excels the most in this marathon we're currently in — this war — when it's authentic and true to itself. [...] The beauty industry is another incredible and strong aspect of Ukraine that we somehow overlook, but it's something we should leverage. Our photographers are also phenomenal. And everyone agrees — wherever they've been, even after visiting Michelin-starred restaurants, they still find Kyiv's cuisine tastier and ten times cheaper. It's always a pleasant surprise to them.” (Expert 2)*

*"We put out from our Institute a translation of the 12 volumes of Hrushevsky's history of Ukraine rules This has been adopted by Olena Zelenska's bookshelf policy We now can present so much of the work that we did earlier and production of English language materials now can go out The stories on contemporary Ukraine and Ukrainian literature now being translated into English Is I think having a great impact on it so that Ukraine must continue to present itself." (Expert 3)*

*"Share positive stories about Ukraine, moving away from the military context and focusing more on civilian, societal, and personal storytelling. Highlight what's happening in Ukraine — our innovations, startups like Grammarly or Ship It Cube, which people might not realize are Ukrainian, or creations by individuals with Ukrainian roots. Talk about fashion design that captivates the world, even though we ourselves sometimes don't know that these designers are Ukrainian. The goal is to build narratives that strengthen Ukraine's image as an independent and innovative country." (Expert 2)*

*"Ukrainian folk dancers and musicians can engage broader audiences emotionally. These cultural symbols create lasting impressions." (Expert 4)*

## **Enhancing the Influence of Ukrainians in the region**

- By supporting and amplifying the voices and actions of Ukrainians abroad, Ukraine can solidify its image as a valuable and proactive global player, while also countering misinformation and building stronger international alliances.
- Highlighting the active contributions of Ukrainians to North American societies fosters a positive association with Ukraine. This integration showcases Ukraine's global relevance and the shared values between its people and North American communities.
- Empowering Natural Advocates: Individuals with personal ties to Ukraine can amplify Ukraine's image by sharing their experiences. Their authentic narratives carry credibility and create a ripple effect in shaping public opinion. Engage diaspora communities to act as ambassadors for Ukraine.

*"Ukrainians who have moved abroad are a great resource. There are many of us here, and we have contacts with different communities in America. Personal connections are critical. For example, I try to talk about Ukraine in my lectures and share positive stories so that students associate Ukraine not only with war but with something good too." (Expert 1)*

*"People who have personal experiences in Ukraine, like Peace Corps volunteers or tourists, become natural advocates for Ukraine by sharing what they saw and learned." (Expert 2)*

*"Canada has a large Ukrainian diaspora, which has historically played a critical role in shaping public opinion and lobbying for Ukraine. Their efforts are a major asset in influencing Canadian politics." (Expert 3)*

*"For decision-makers, it's essential to frame Ukraine's fight as critical to global security and stability. This resonates more with policymakers than humanitarian arguments." (Expert 4)*

*"Indeed, as you mentioned, sharing positive stories about Ukraine — moving away from the military context and focusing more on civilian, societal, and personal storytelling — is very important. Highlighting what's happening here, like our innovations and startups, for instance. Many people might not know that Grammarly or Ship It Cube are Ukrainian startups, or that they were created by people with roots in Ukraine. Or talking about fashion design, which the whole world admires, while we ourselves sometimes don't even realize that those designers are Ukrainians. Shifting to such narratives helps build a stronger image of Ukraine as an independent country." (Expert 2)*



## CONCLUSIONS

- **Awareness and initial sympathy:** Awareness of Ukraine increased significantly post-2014 and after the full-scale invasion in 2022. Sympathy for Ukraine is generally high, but there is evidence of “war fatigue” in North America.
- **Importance of personal stories:** Personal narratives about Ukrainian resilience and suffering resonate strongly, especially those involving individuals and families.
- **Challenges with corruption narrative:** Concerns about corruption in Ukraine persist and are often amplified by Russian propaganda. Transparency in aid usage is critical to counter this.
- **Cultural diplomacy and soft power:** Leveraging Ukrainian culture — music, art, and historical narratives — can create positive associations and engagement.
- **Freedom and democracy as anchors:** Framing Ukraine’s struggle as a fight for freedom resonates more with audiences than broader notions of democracy.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Ukraine's perception in North America is shaped by a mix of moral alignment, geopolitical significance, and public familiarity. While North Americans largely support Ukraine, this support varies in intensity and focus depending on partisan, economic, and media-driven influences. To maintain and deepen this support, Ukraine must employ nuanced, and proactive communication strategies tailored to the region's distinct cultural and political dynamics.

- **Framing Ukraine as a pillar of democracy and freedom.** The shared values of democracy, sovereignty, and freedom are deeply ingrained in North American identity, making them key points for communication. Framing Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression as a defence of global democratic values positions the country as not only a victim but a proactive defender of international norms. Narratives must consistently reinforce the idea that Ukraine's success is a success for democracy worldwide, aligning its struggle with the broader ideological and moral framework cherished in the United States and Canada. This approach solidifies Ukraine as a partner in defending freedom, ensuring continued moral and political support.
- **Emphasizing human stories to engage emotions.** The power of storytelling lies in its ability to create emotional resonance, and this is especially effective in North America, where individualistic and human-centric narratives prevail. Stories of Ukrainians' resilience — whether it be families rebuilding their lives, women serving on the frontlines, or innovators crafting unique solutions under extraordinary circumstances — must be at the heart of communication campaigns. Such narratives humanize the war, making it relatable to North American audiences and fostering deeper emotional connections. Highlighting personal heroism and the human cost of the war can sustain empathy and engagement even as general interest in the war wanes.
- **Leveraging media for strategic visibility.** The decline in media coverage of Ukraine, attributed to "war fatigue" and competition from other global crises, underscores the need for proactive media engagement. Ukraine must ensure a steady stream of compelling narratives through partnerships with influential media outlets. Providing journalists with exclusive stories, access to key figures, and visually engaging content can help sustain media interest. High-profile events, such as official visits or cultural initiatives, should be strategically timed and publicized to capture public attention. The goal is to maintain Ukraine's relevance on the media agenda while shaping the narrative in its favour.

- **Addressing economic scepticism through transparency.** As public discourse in North America increasingly reflects concerns about the financial cost of supporting Ukraine, communication efforts must tackle these doubts head-on. Highlighting the tangible benefits of aid — such as Ukraine’s contributions to global security, future economic potential, and its role in countering authoritarian regimes — can shift the narrative from burden to investment. Additionally, showcasing successful governance reforms and mechanisms for ensuring aid accountability can address perceptions of corruption, building trust among sceptical audiences.
- **Tailoring messages to partisan audiences.** The partisan divide in North America necessitates segmented communication strategies. While Democratic audiences are more receptive to narratives centred on human rights, democracy, and moral responsibility, Republican audiences respond better to practical arguments, such as strengthening national security or countering Russian aggression. Messaging for Republicans should emphasize the strategic importance of Ukraine as a bulwark against authoritarian threats, positioning support for Ukraine as aligned with American interests rather than solely moral obligations. Crafting messages that resonate across these divides ensures broader bipartisan backing.
- **Expanding Ukraine’s cultural presence.** Despite strong political and moral support, cultural familiarity with Ukraine remains limited in North America. Expanding Ukraine’s presence through cultural diplomacy — such as promoting Ukrainian art, cuisine, literature, and music — can foster a deeper, more personal connection with the broader public. Initiatives like showcasing Ukrainian films, partnering with cultural institutions, and engaging with diaspora communities can bridge this familiarity gap. Such efforts not only enhance Ukraine’s image but also provide a narrative beyond the war, showcasing the country’s rich heritage and contemporary relevance.
- **Strengthening soft power through leadership and innovation.** Ukraine’s resilience and governance during the war have significantly enhanced its soft power. Communication should focus on portraying Ukraine as a country of innovation and leadership, capable of overcoming adversity and contributing to global progress. Highlighting post-war reconstruction plans, technological advancements, and Ukraine’s active role in international forums can reinforce its image as a forward-thinking nation. Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s leadership remains a powerful symbol, but diversifying the portrayal of Ukrainian figures and institutions will create a more nuanced and relatable national brand.

- **Proactively countering negative perceptions.** Concerns about corruption and the financial burden of aid are common criticisms, particularly among Republican and fiscally conservative audiences. Instead of defensively addressing these critiques, Ukraine should focus on showcasing positive stories of reform and tangible outcomes. Highlighting how international aid supports education, healthcare, or infrastructure projects can create a narrative of progress and accountability. This approach not only counters scepticism but also builds confidence in Ukraine's governance and commitment to transparency.
- **Maintaining relevance amid competing global crises.** As global attention shifts to other crises, Ukraine must innovate its communication strategies to sustain interest. Beyond the immediate war narrative, themes of recovery, resilience, and international collaboration can keep Ukraine in the spotlight. Stories of how Ukrainians are rebuilding their lives or contributing to global challenges, such as climate change or technological innovation, offer fresh angles that resonate with diverse audiences. Framing Ukraine as a proactive global partner rather than solely a nation in crisis ensures continued engagement and support.

By focusing on these strategic communication approaches, Ukraine can not only sustain North American support but also deepen its influence and build a lasting, multifaceted relationship with the region's audiences. These efforts will be instrumental in securing long-term political, economic, and cultural partnerships.