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*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

## Opinion DeSantis voters support aid for Ukraine. So should he.



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As a congressman in 2015, Ron DeSantis (R-Fla.) [criticized](#) the Obama-Biden administration for not providing lethal aid to Ukraine after Russia invaded and annexed Crimea. But today, as governor of Florida and a potential 2024 presidential candidate, DeSantis has [walked back his Reaganite clarity and hawkish stance](#), apparently concerned that Donald Trump plans to use Ukraine as a cudgel against him with MAGA voters.

That is a mistake — both substantively and politically.

A [Harvard CAPS-Harris poll](#) shows that while some MAGA Republicans agree with Trump's soft stance on Ukraine, many more Republicans still [support Ukraine](#). And the primary voters who back DeSantis — or say they are open to backing him in a two-way race — prefer his old, pro-Ukraine position.

Asked whether they had a favorable view of Ukraine, just 42 percent of Trump supporters said yes. But 51 percent of Republicans overall — and 55 percent of DeSantis supporters — have a favorable view, the poll found. That is a 13-point difference in pro-Ukraine sentiment among DeSantis supporters over Trump supporters.

Respondents were then asked whether they agreed that the United States should support Ukraine “until Russia pulls all invading forces from its territory or is defeated on the battlefield” — the most hawkish position possible. Sixty percent of all Republicans agreed that we should support Ukraine until Russia is defeated or driven out, a clear and strong majority. Meanwhile, 53 percent of Trump voters were in favor of supporting Ukraine — slightly below the GOP average but still a majority. DeSantis supporters? A decisive 63 percent said we should back Ukraine until it achieves complete victory.

When the field was narrowed to just Trump and DeSantis, the responses were even more stark: A whopping 69 percent of those who support DeSantis said we should back Ukraine until victory.

What does this tell us? First, many Republicans still support helping Ukraine. Second, DeSantis supporters are more hawkish than Trump supporters. Third, the voters DeSantis attracts away from other candidates if the field is narrowed are likely to be even more hawkish on Ukraine. Seven in 10 want to help drive Russia out of every inch of Ukrainian territory it has unlawfully seized.

Respondents were also asked whether the more than \$27.4 billion in security assistance the United States has provided Ukraine since Vladimir Putin invaded “is a justified investment in the protection of an ally and its people or an unjustified expenditure in a foreign war?” On this, Republicans were almost evenly split, 49 percent in favor to 51 percent opposed. When faced with a crowded field, 44 percent of Trump supporters and 48 percent of DeSantis supporters said our investment in Ukraine was justified. But in a hypothetical two-man race between Trump and DeSantis, 59 percent of those who back DeSantis said our security assistance to Ukraine is money well spent.

When asked if they would support giving Ukraine an additional \$10 billion, 48 percent of Republicans said yes. In a crowded field, 42 percent of Trump supporters and 48 percent of DeSantis supporters favored giving Ukraine the additional help. But in a two-man race, the share of DeSantis supporters who said they would give more to Ukraine rose to 58 percent. In other words, while the GOP is split on whether our aid to Ukraine is justified (and Trump supporters are slightly more likely to say we are giving Ukraine too much), Republican primary voters inclined toward DeSantis disproportionately favor more security assistance for Ukraine.

All of this suggests that DeSantis is taking the wrong approach when he tries to appeal to MAGA voters by dismissing the war in Ukraine as a “territorial dispute” and declaring that he cares “more about securing our own border in the United States than I do about the Russia-Ukraine border.” While Trump’s MAGA base is slightly more likely than most Republicans to oppose helping Ukraine, these voters are a minority of GOP primary voters — and they will never abandon the former president. DeSantis gains nothing by trying to appeal to them. He only looks weak, and he alienates pro-Ukraine voters who are open to supporting his candidacy.

Instead of trying to win over “hard” MAGA voters, DeSantis needs to consolidate the support of Republicans who want someone other than Trump to be the GOP nominee, while picking off “soft” MAGA voters who can be convinced it is time to move on from Trump. Those voters disproportionately support Ukraine.

Given these numbers, DeSantis should not be waffling on Ukraine. Doing so gains him little support from hard MAGA anti-Ukraine Republicans while alienating those MAGA and other GOP voters who share a Reaganite worldview. Rather, DeSantis should take a bold stance in support of the Ukrainian freedom fighters and back them until they defeat Russia and drive out Vladimir Putin’s army.

That’s the smart move politically. It’s also the right thing to do.