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# Russians and Americans Sense a New Cold War

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The current conflict in Ukraine is described by some as an inflection point in world history, and perhaps [the end of the post-Cold War era](#). Russian President Vladimir Putin increasingly seems to make foreign policy decisions designed to upend the US-European security order and dominate the countries he considers to be in Russia's orbit. At the same time, US President Joe Biden has pitted the NATO struggle with Russia as well as the US competition with China as contests between democracies and autocracies. A recent public opinion survey from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Levada Center in Moscow shows that Russians and Americans view global divisions along Cold War lines. And in what may be the most alarming throwback to those days, large majorities in both countries fear an escalation to nuclear war.

## Key Findings

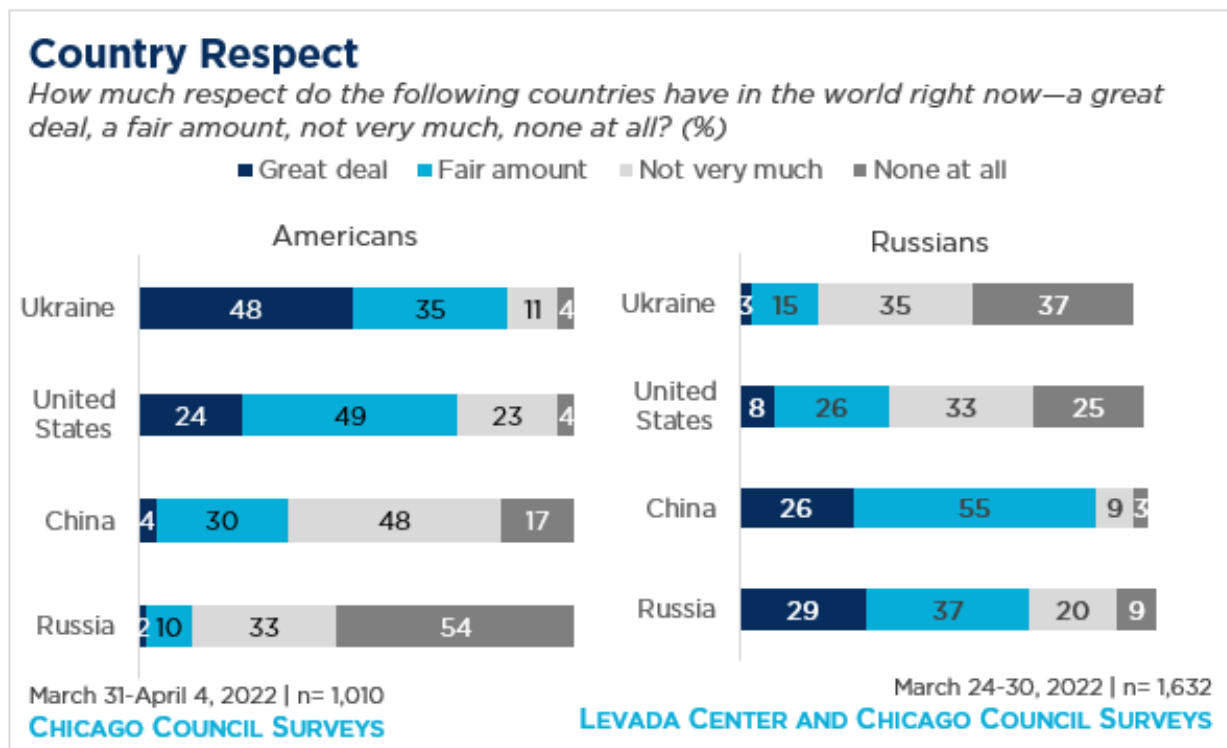
- The most recent survey readings show that Russian and American favorable views of the others' country and leader have plummeted.
- Both publics express strengthened appreciation for those countries considered friendly and growing hostility toward those they see as adversarial.
- Russians are overwhelmingly positive toward Belarus (87%) and China (83%), compared to very few with favorable views of the United States (17%), the European Union (21%), and Ukraine (30%).
- Americans tend to consider the United Kingdom (66%), France (53%), Poland (49%), the EU (48%), Germany (47%), and Ukraine (46%) as allies. By contrast, majorities view Russia as an adversary (57%) and China as either an adversary (22%) or rival (31%).
- Most Russians (62%) and Americans (55% when last asked in 2019) support a containment strategy rather than one of cooperation toward the other country.

- Both publics fear a nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States (69% in the United States and 83% in Russia consider this a critical threat)

### The Enemy of My Enemy

Since the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, Russian and American views of each other have tanked. The most recent readings show these negative feelings have only hardened. Moreover, both see the other country’s allies as enemies, and enemies as allies.

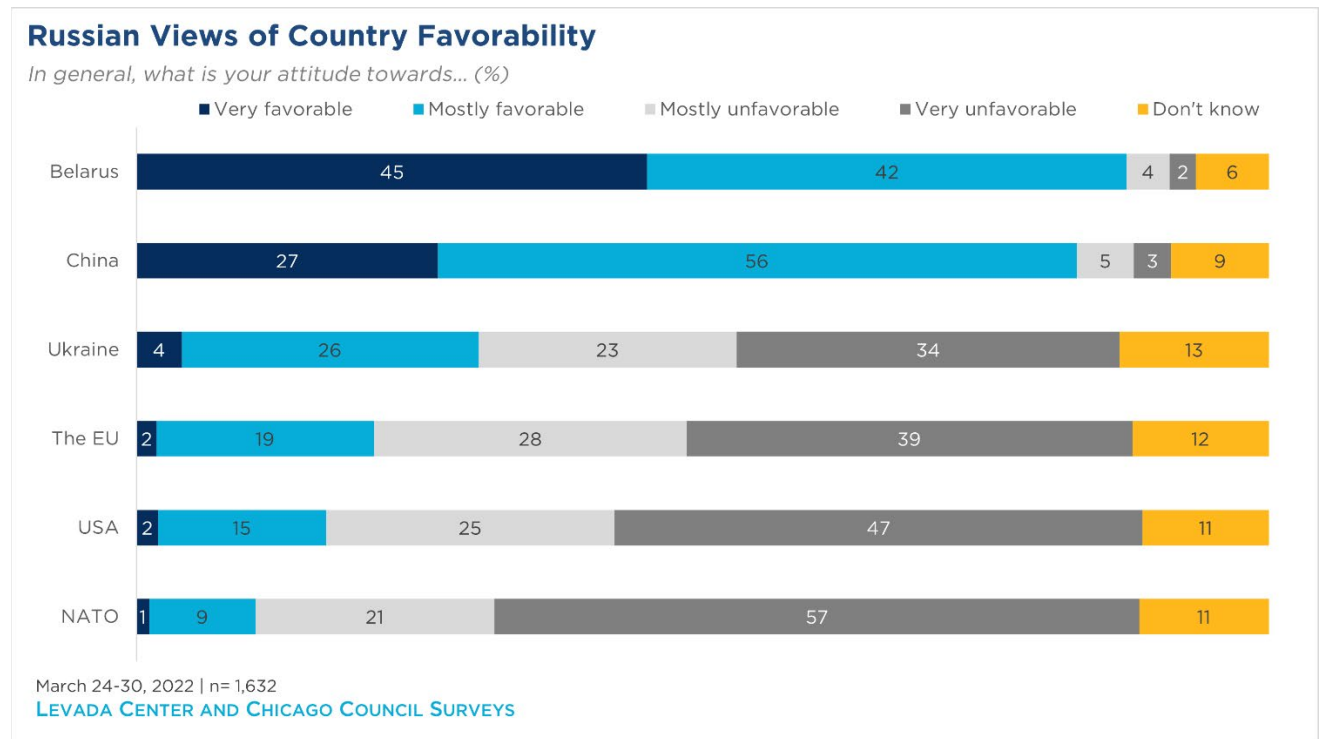
When asked how much respect various countries have in the world today, Russians and Americans have polar opposite views on their own countries, China, and Ukraine. Eight in ten Russians say China is at least somewhat well respected, compared to two-thirds who say the same about Russia. Only a third believe the United States commands at least a fair amount of respect, and just 18 percent think similarly of Ukraine. By contrast, nearly three-quarters of Americans say the United States is at least somewhat well respected, and an even larger majority believe Ukraine garners respect from the world. But only one-third believe China is respected, and just 12 percent say the same about Russia.



### Russians Consider China and Belarus to Be in Their Corner

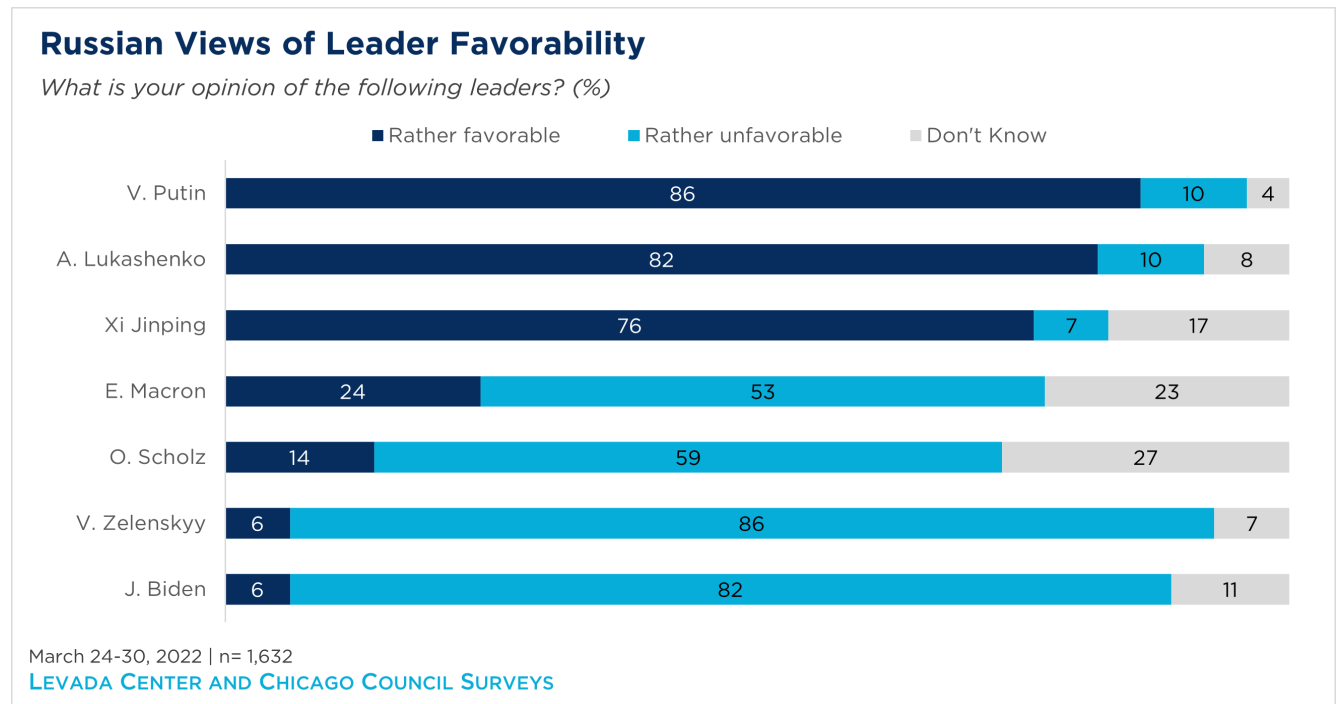
Belarus has been an active participant in Russia’s military operation, [hosting Russian troops, offering Putin support](#), and [possibly even preparing](#) to send its own troops to Ukraine. While China has not actively supported Russia in its mission, [it also has not condemned Russian actions](#). Russians, in turn, have overwhelmingly positive views toward Belarus (87% favorable, up from 84% in 2021) and China (83%, up from 70%

in 2021). Russians are much less favorable toward the United States (17%, down from 33% in February), the European Union (21%, down from 37% in February) and Ukraine (30%, down from 35% in 2021).



When it comes to political leaders, the pattern is much the same. Russians approve of the job President Putin is doing (83%), up 12 percentage points since just one

month prior (71% in February). Putin’s overall favorability is even higher (86%). A majority also give glowing ratings to Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko (82% favorable) and Chinese leader Xi Jinping (76%). Ratings for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (6% favorable) and President Biden (6%, down from 19% in January 2021) are nearly rock bottom, while those for French President Emmanuel Macron (24%) and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (14%) are slightly more favorable but still low overall.



## Americans Consider Europeans and Ukraine to be Part of “Team USA”

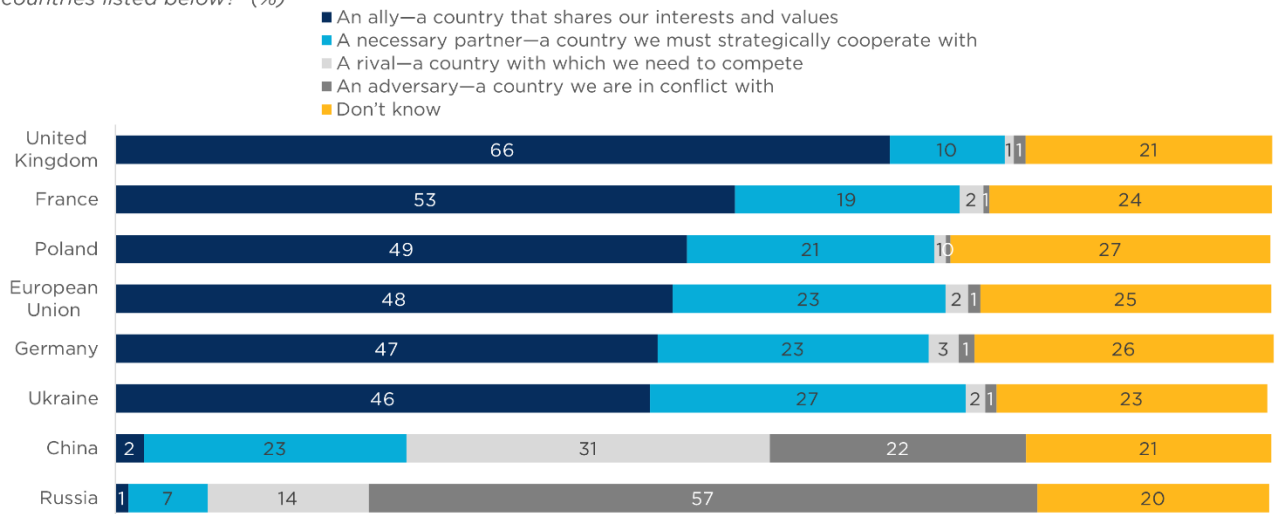
When asked whether they consider several countries to be allies, necessary partners, rivals, or adversaries, Americans are most likely to classify the United Kingdom (66%) and France (53%) as allies, defined as “a country that shares our interests and values.” Nearly half also consider Poland (49%), the European Union (48%), Germany (47%) and Ukraine (46%) to be allies, and solid majorities of at least seven in ten describe these countries as either allies or partners.

By contrast, a majority of Americans consider Russia an adversary (57%, up from 39% in 2021), described as “a country we are in conflict with,” and 14 percent say it is a rival, or “a country with which we need to compete.”<sup>1</sup> Relative to ratings that Russia receives, Americans consider China more of a frenemy: 22 percent consider it an adversary, while 31 percent say it is a rival, and 23 percent say it is a necessary partner (in 2021, 32% saw China as a rival, 29% as an enemy, 21% as a partner).

<sup>1</sup> Last asked [in 2021](#) to rate their feelings of Russia on a thermometer scale with 100 meaning a very warm, favorable feeling and zero meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, Americans give Russia an average rating of 29—the lowest reading recorded in Chicago Council Surveys since the final years of the Cold War.

## US Relationships with Other Countries

Generally speaking, which of following descriptions do you feel best reflects the relationship between the United States and the countries listed below? (%)

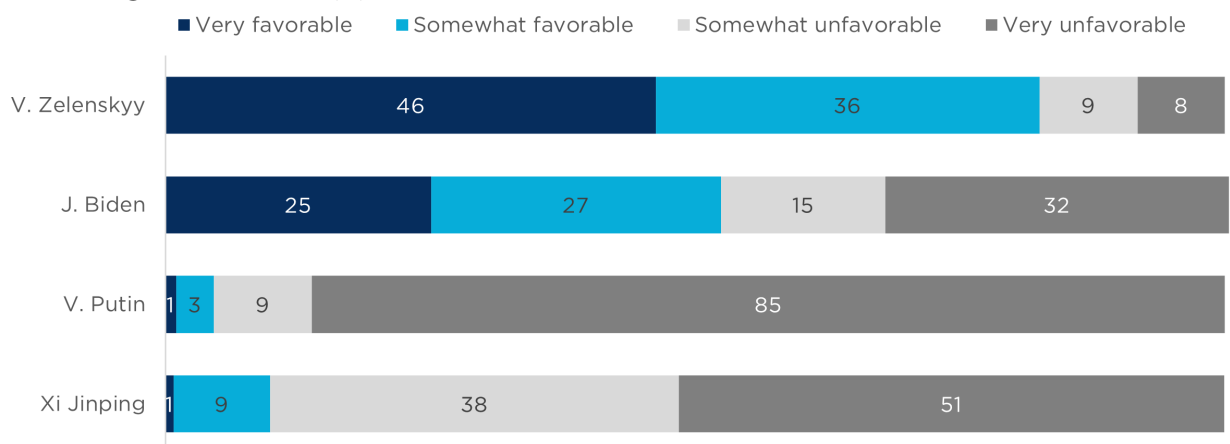


March 25-28, 2022 | n= 1,016  
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The pattern for political leaders is similar. Ukrainian President Zelenskyy has apparently inspired a wide majority of Americans (81% favorable), while 52 percent of Americans express a favorable view of US President Biden—with large partisan differences for the latter (87% Democrats, 14% Republicans and 48% Independents). One in ten or fewer are favorable toward Xi (10%, 13% in 2021) and Putin (4%, down from 12% in 2021).

## US Views of Leader Favorability

Do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable view of the following world leaders? (%)



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## Majorities on Both Sides Fear Nuclear Threat

In addition to expressing a sense of geopolitical division between Russia on the one side and the United States and Europe on the other, Russians and Americans each communicate an increased sense of threat from the other country.

When Putin announced [Russia's "special military operation"](#) in Ukraine,<sup>2</sup> he warned that "no matter who tries to stand in our way" they will meet consequences that "you have never seen in your entire history." This comment was broadly interpreted as a threat to use nuclear weapons against any Western country trying to interfere with Russia's goals. Russian media have circulated propaganda about a Ukrainian nuclear weapons program and US aid in bioweapons facilities—both of which the US intelligence agencies have [firmly denied](#).

Publics in both countries are alarmed by these messages. Majorities in both countries fear the risk of a nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States (69% in the United States and 83% in Russia consider this a critical threat). In addition, a majority of Russians view US military growth as a critical threat (58%), while a majority of Americans describe Russia's military power similarly (54%, up from 41% in 2020).

In light of Russia's military action in Ukraine, two-thirds of Americans (67%) say Russia's territorial ambitions are also a critical threat, up from 30% when last asked, in 2016. Six in ten Americans (60%) view Russia's power and influence in the world as a critical threat, up from 45% in 2020. The military conflict in Ukraine is perceived as slightly less of a threat to the United States (55% critical).

Russian concern about threats from the West also extends beyond a potential nuclear exchange. Russians also fear a Western-initiated cyberattack on their country (56%) and an information war between Russia and Western countries (54%).<sup>3</sup>

## Back to A Containment Strategy?

[Many](#) foreign policy experts are advocating a renewed policy of [containment in light of the situation between Russia and Ukraine](#). Americans tend to agree with this line of thought and action. In this survey, only 7 percent agreed that Russia is a necessary partner with whom we must cooperate. And when [last asked in 2019](#), a majority of Americans (55%) preferred that the United States actively work to limit Russia's power (compared to 44% who thought the United States should undertake friendly cooperation and engagement).

For their part, Russians largely accept the official narrative that the United States and NATO [are the main sources of tension](#) between Russia and Ukraine. In 2016, Russians told interviewers that the goal of the economic sanctions placed on their country in response to the [annexation of Crimea was to weaken Russia](#) (74%) rather than to stop the fighting in the Donbas (6%) or to return Crimea to Ukraine (17%). And even

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<sup>2</sup> Because of the Russian government restrictions on the use of [certain terms](#) to describe the Russian military action in Ukraine, the joint survey used either "military operation" or "military action" in these questions. To be true to the results, we use that language throughout this report.

<sup>3</sup> A majority of Americans also consider cyberattacks against US computer networks a critical threat (73%), but the question wording didn't specify where those attacks might originate.

before the recent escalation between Russia and Ukraine, [a February 2022 Levada survey](#) found a majority of Russians (60%) blamed the United States and NATO for the tensions in eastern Ukraine. Fourteen percent blamed Ukraine, and just 4 percent blamed Russia. These opinions help to explain the current survey results showing twice as many Russians believe that Russia should try to limit US power and influence in the world (62%) as say their country should be open for cooperation with the United States (30%).

## Conclusion

Regardless of the foreign policy merits of the United States adopting a strategy of containment toward Russia, it seems unlikely that the American public would support anything else. With opinions of Russia and Putin so low, and the strong sense that Russia presents a critical threat to US interests, it is difficult to envision enthusiasm among Americans for another reset of bilateral relations. While Russian opinions of the United States had appeared to be moving in a less negative direction in Council-Levada surveys from 2021, it seems very unlikely the Russian public will push for improved relations now, given their currently dim view of the United States. In this moment, the animosity between the two countries appears mutual.

## Methodology

The US data in this report are based on results of a survey conducted March 25–28, 2022, by Ipsos using its large-scale nationwide online research panel, KnowledgePanel, among a weighted national sample of 1,016 adults, 18 or older, living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/- 3.0 percentage points and is higher for subgroups or partial-sample items.

Partisan identification is based on respondents' answer to a standard partisan self-identification question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?"

Additional US data come from an AmeriSpeak® survey conducted March 31–April 4 with a sample size of 1,010. Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. Randomly selected US households are sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame.

The Russian data in this report come from a survey conducted March 24–30, 2022, by the Levada Center. The survey was conducted among a representative sample of 1,632 Russians 18 or older, including urban and rural residents. The sample included people from 137 municipalities within 50 regions of the Russian Federation. The survey was conducted as a personal interview in respondents' homes. Quotas for gender and age are used in the final stage of respondent selection to increase accessibility of some problem groups (younger people, males) and to decrease some groups that often are oversampled (for example, women 55 and older). These quotas

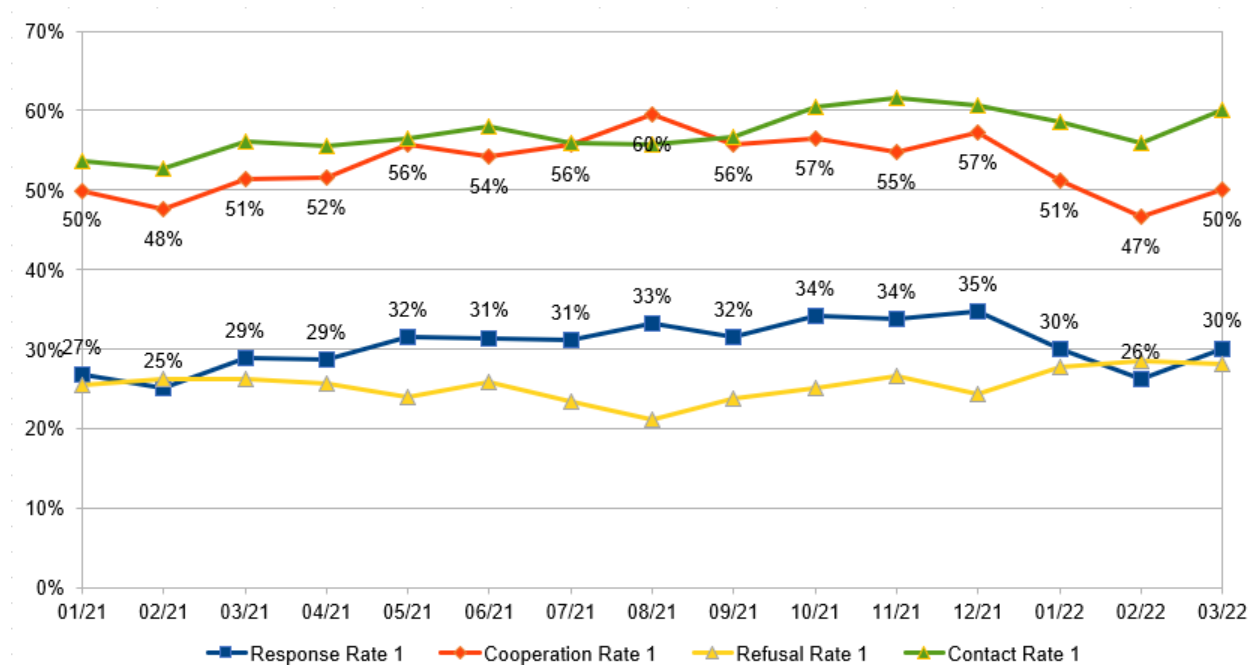


are applied after 75 percent of the sample is collected and when the deviations after the next birthday method are +/- 15%. For more information about Levada sampling, please see <https://www.levada.ru/en/methods/omnibus/>

The statistical error of these studies for a sample of 1,600 people (with a probability of 0.95) does not exceed:

- 3.4 percent for indicators around 50 percent
- 2.9 percent for indicators around 25/75 percent
- 2.0 percent for indicators around 10/90 percent
- 1.5 percent for indicators around 5/95 percent

While surveys conducted in nondemocratic contexts can be [criticized](#), the survey's response rate, contact rate, and refusal rate are generally consistent with past readings since January 2021 (see below). In other words, there is no clear evidence that Russians have become less willing to cooperate with pollsters since the conflict in Ukraine started.



The following indicators are calculated using American Association for Public Opinion Research formulas.

Response rates—The number of complete interviews with reporting units divided by the number of eligible reporting units in the sample.

Response Rate 1, or the minimum response rate, is the number of complete interviews divided by the number of interviews (complete plus partial) plus the number of noninterviews (refusal and break-off plus noncontacts plus others) plus all cases of unknown eligibility (unknown if housing unit, plus unknown, other).



Cooperation rates—The proportion of all units interviewed of all eligible units ever contacted.

Cooperation Rate 1, or the minimum cooperation rate, is the number of complete interviews divided by the number of interviews (complete plus partial) plus the number of noninterviews that involve the identification of and contact with an eligible respondent (refusal and break-off plus other).

Refusal rates—The proportion of all cases in which a housing unit or the respondent refuses to be interviewed, or breaks off an interview, of all potentially eligible cases.

Refusal Rate 1 is the number of refusals divided by the interviews (complete and partial) plus the nonrespondents (refusals, noncontacts, and others) plus the cases of unknown eligibility.

Contact rates—The proportion of all cases in which some responsible housing unit member was reached.

Contact Rate 1 assumes that all cases of indeterminate eligibility are actually eligible.

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Established in 2018 with a transformative \$10 million gift from the Crown Family, the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy is driven by the belief that the public plays a critical role in determining the direction of US foreign policy and that an informed and engaged public is critical for effective policymaking. The centerpiece of the Lester Crown Center is its annual survey of American public opinion and US foreign policy, the Chicago Council Survey, which has been conducted since 1974. For the latest research from the Crown Center, follow [@ChiCouncilFP](https://twitter.com/ChiCouncilFP).

### **About the Levada Center**

The Levada Center is one of the leading research organizations in Russia that conducts public opinion surveys, expert and elite surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and other types of surveys. The center brings together experts in the fields of sociology, political science, economics, psychology, market research, and public opinion polls. The center's research and experts have been cited in national and international media such as *Kommersant*, *Vedomosti*, *RBC*, *the Economist*, *the Wall Street Journal*, *the New York Times*, *Reuters*, *BBC Radio*, *Radio Liberty*, and others. Learn more at [levada.ru](http://levada.ru) and follow [@levada\\_ru](https://www.facebook.com/levada.ru) or on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/levada.ru).