



Despite Last Year's Expectations, Publics Sense Strains in US-Russia Relations

Dina Smeltz, Senior Fellow, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

Lily Wojtowicz, Research Associate, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

Stepan Goncharov, Sociologist, Levada Analytical Center

February 2018

This is the third of three reports based on coordinated surveys conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Levada Center in Moscow on US-Russian public opinion about foreign policy issues, generously funded by the Carnegie Corporation.

Many observers expected a reset in US-Russia relations with the election of Donald Trump. However, a year into the Trump administration, the United States has placed additional sanctions on Russia and identified Russia as a key threat in the 2018 National Security Strategy. A Kremlin spokesperson described current US-Russian relations as [one of the biggest disappointments of 2017](#). Opinion surveys conducted year-end in both the United States and Russia reflect similar disappointment and continued mistrust among the general publics.

What a Difference a Year Makes

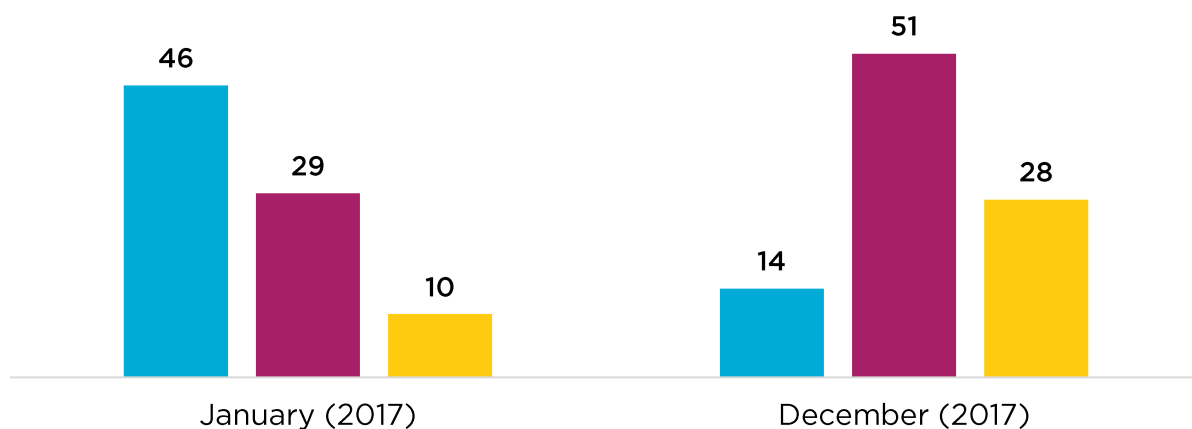
A year ago, the publics in both Russia and the United States expected US-Russia relations to turn a corner. A Levada survey conducted in January 2017 found a plurality of Russians expecting bilateral relations would improve (46%) with the election of Donald Trump (see figure). A [November 2016 FOM survey](#) even found that Russians expected Trump would recognize Crimea as part of Russia and lift the sanctions on Russia (70% each). In the United States, a December 2016 [Bloomberg public opinion survey](#) reported that six in ten Americans (62%) thought relations would improve within the next four years.

Hope vs. Reality: Russian Views of US-Russia Relationship Under Trump

Do you think that US-Russian relations will change after the election of President Donald Trump, and if so, in what way? (January 2017)

Do you think that US-Russian relations have changed after the election of President Donald Trump, and if so, in what way? (December 2017)

■ Improved significantly/somewhat ■ Haven't changed ■ Worsen somewhat/significantly



CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

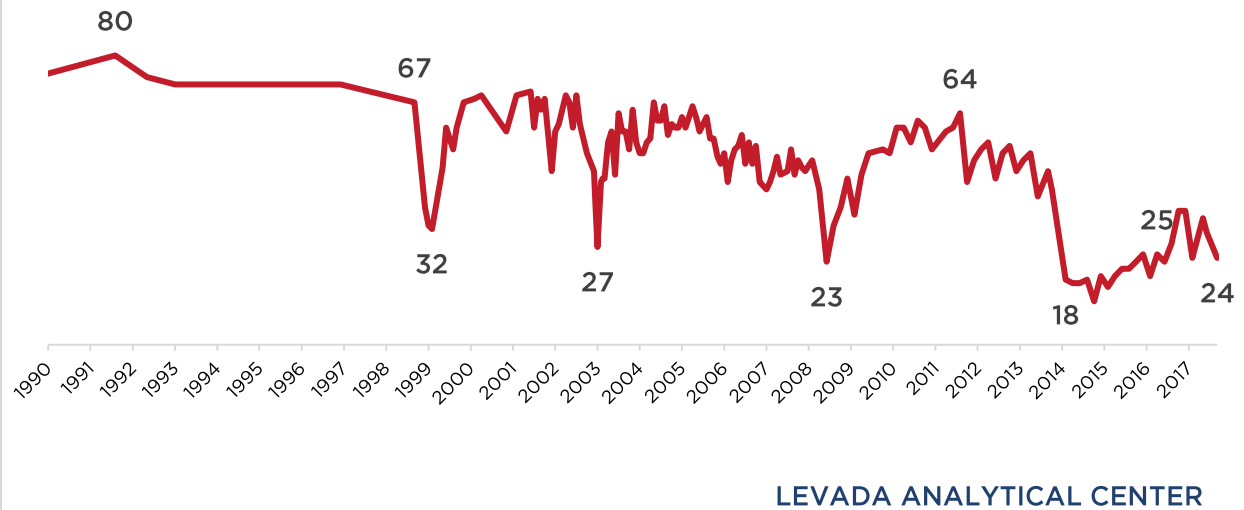
LEVADA ANALYTICAL CENTER

But today, Chicago Council and Levada surveys find that public expectations have been dashed. Half of Russians (51%) say that US-Russia relations have not changed after the election of Donald Trump and 28 percent say they have worsened. Only fourteen percent say relations have improved (see figure). Moreover, only a quarter of Russians express a favorable opinion of the United States (24% favorable, 60% unfavorable), similar to opinion in 2016 (when 25 percent expressed a favorable view).¹ And among those who believe that Russia has enemies (66% overall), half name the United States as an enemy (53% of all those giving a first mention; 35% of the overall Russian public).

¹ Russians are similarly unfavorable about Ukraine (28% favorable, 56% unfavorable) and the European Union (28% favorable, 54% unfavorable). They are much more positive about Japan (48% favorable, 30% unfavorable).

Russian Views of the United States

In general, how do you feel about the United States? (% favorable)

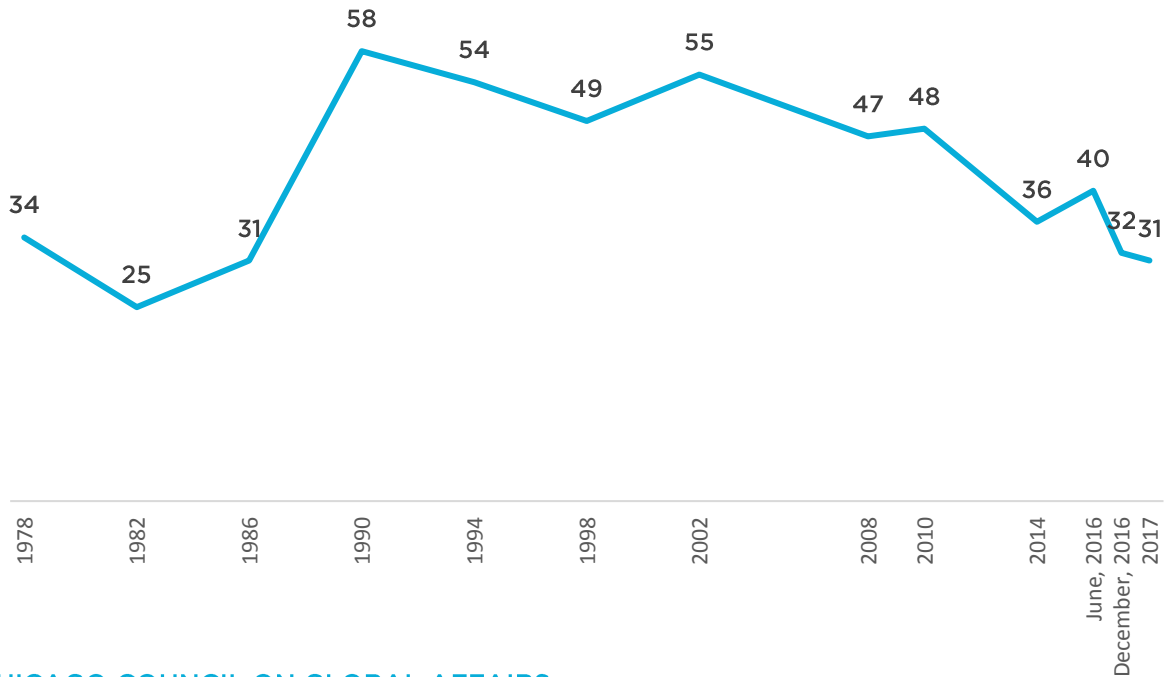


In the United States, American views of Russia continue to be negative at levels not seen since the Cold War. On a temperature scale—where 0 degrees represents a very cold, unfavorable feeling and 100 degrees represents a very warm, favorable feeling—Americans rate Russia an average of 31 degrees.² Opinion of Russia is even cooler among Democrats (28°, Republicans 34°, Independents 35°). Perceptions of Russia as an adversary to the United States have also increased slightly. [A Gallup poll](#) from last June found that 52 percent of Americans described Russia as an adversary (6% ally), up from 46 percent in January 2017 (9% ally). And [the 2017 Chicago Council Survey](#) conducted in June-July 2017 found that confidence in Russia to deal responsibly with world problems remains low (28%, 27% in 2015).

² Americans rate Russia the lowest among China (40°), Mexico (51°), and the European Union (57°).

American Views of Russia

Please rate your feelings toward some countries and peoples, with one hundred meaning a very warm, favorable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from zero to one hundred, the higher the number the more favorable your feelings are toward that country or those people. Russia (mean degrees)



CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Mutual Distrust

The Trump administration's [National Security Strategy](#) states that Russia is trying to “weaken the credibility of America’s commitment to Europe, undermine transatlantic unity, and weaken European institutions and governments.” At the same time, the Russian government has accused the United States—[particularly when Hillary Clinton](#) was Secretary of State—of rabble rousing in Russia.

American and Russian publics echo these accusations of interference. Eight in ten Russians believe that the United States tries to influence Russia’s domestic affairs (78%) and that the United States is trying to undermine Russia’s international influence and power (81%). Perhaps because of these suspicions, a narrow majority says that Moscow should try to limit US power (52%) rather than undertake friendly cooperation with the United States (47%), though fewer Russians feel this way now than a year ago (when 68 percent thought their country should attempt to limit US influence). Moreover, Russians widely believe that Russia needs to improve relations with the US and other Western countries (75% at least a fair amount).

Only 31 percent of Russians believe their own country tries to influence the domestic affairs in the United States, but Americans think otherwise. In total, at least seven in ten Americans think that Russia tries to influence the domestic affairs of the United States (69%) and that Russia is actively working to undermine US international influence and power (74%).³ In a stark reversal from opinion in 2016, the 2017 Chicago Council Survey conducted in June-July 2017 found that more Americans said the United States should actively work to limit Russia’s power (53%, 43% undertake friendly cooperation).

At the same time, Americans are not naïve about American influence, with a majority believing that the United States tries to influence domestic affairs in Russia (55%).

Interference in Domestic Affairs*		
	A Great Deal	A Fair Amount
<i>And to what extent do you think Russia tries to influence the domestic affairs of the United States - a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, not at all?</i>		
American View	30%	40%
Russian View	8	23
<i>To what extent do you think the United States tries to influence domestic affairs in Russia - a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, not at all?</i>		
American View	13	42
Russian View	36	43

*Due to rounding, percentages in text may not match total percentages in figures.

Both Publics See Growing Importance for Russia, Less Influence from United States

The Russian and American survey results seem to reflect public acknowledgement of Moscow’s growing presence on the world stage. Since 2014 Russia has had an increasing impact on international affairs particularly due to its forays into the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. A majority of Russians (56%) and a plurality of Americans (41%) agree that Russia plays a more important role in the world today than it did ten years ago.⁴ In addition, while still a minority position, more Americans

³ [As reported previously](#), 61 percent of Americans think Russia tried to influence the outcome of the 2016 US presidential elections.

⁴ A majority of Americans also view China as more important today than ten years ago (58% more important), while a plurality say the European Union is about as important (43%, with 30% less important; see appendix for full trend results). This suggests that Americans think the US and European positions in the world are shifting relative to other powers. Russians were not asked about China and the European Union.

see Russian military power as a critical threat to the United States now (42% in June-July 2017) than when last asked in 2002 (23%).⁵



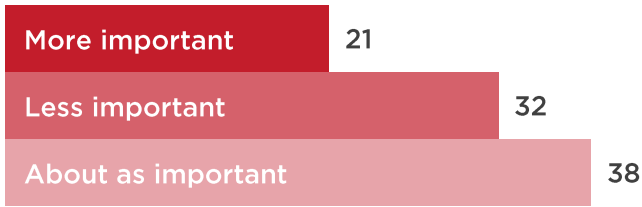
Conversely, neither Americans nor Russians say that the United States is more important today than it was ten years ago. Nearly half of Americans think the United States is less important today (47%) and another third think it is as important (31%; see figure).⁶ A slight plurality of Russians says the United States is about as important today as ten years ago (38%), though a third also say that the United States is less important (32%). In addition, only a third of Russians describe US power and influence as a critical threat (35%) to their country. Even fewer view the NATO security alliance (24%) and the US sanctions (15%) as critical threats to Russia.

⁵ And for the first time in Chicago Council surveys, a majority of Americans said they would support using US troops to defend a Baltic NATO member if Russia attacked (52%).

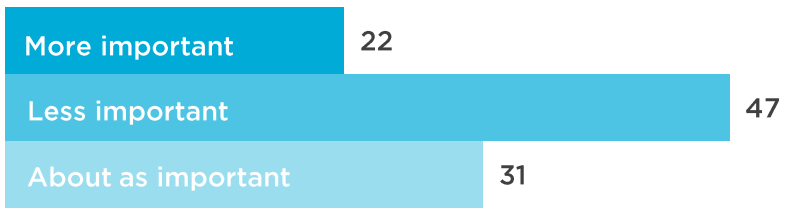
⁶ The last time a majority Americans saw the United States as playing a more important role than 10 years ago was in 2002 (55%). See appendix tables for full results.

The US Role in the World

Russian Survey: And what about the United States, does it play a more important role in the world today compared to ten years ago, a less important role or about as important a role as it did ten years ago?



US Survey: Do you think the United States plays a more important and powerful role as a world leader today compared to 10 years ago, a less important role, or about as important a role as a world leader as it did 10 years ago?



CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

LEVADA ANALYTICAL CENTER

Improved Relations Less Likely Now

Since fielding this survey, the Kremlin has criticized the newly released US National Security Strategy (NSS) calling US policy “imperialistic,” with the goal of [“maintaining a unipolar world order.”](#) This is likely because the NSS named Russia a top threat to the United States and charged Moscow with interfering “in the domestic political affairs of countries around the world.” While neither side has said as much, official hopes for rehabilitating the US-Russian relationship may go the way of public opinion.

Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from the joint 2017 Chicago Council-Levada Analytical Center survey on Russian and American Attitudes conducted in December 2017. The 2017 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, conducted in the summer of 2017, is also cited.

The Chicago Council Survey on issues related to Russia was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their national online omnibus service, KnowledgePanel™, between December 1-3, 2017 among a weighted national sample of approximately 1,000 American adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error is ±3 percentage points.

The Levada Center survey was conducted between December 1-5, 2017 by the Levada-Center (Levada Analytical Center) with face-to-face interviews conducted among a representative sample of 1,605 Russians aged 18 years and older, living in eight federal districts of the Russian Federation (including Crimea). Inside each district the sample is distributed among five strata of settlements proportionally to the number of population living in them in age of 18+ years. The margin of error is ± 3.4 percentage points.

The 2017 Chicago Council-Levada Analytical Center Joint Survey on Russian and American Attitudes is made possible by the generous support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Results are also cited from the 2017 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel between June 27 and July 19, 2017 among a weighted national sample of 2,020 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error is ± 2.4 percentage points.

The 2017 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Korea Foundation, and the personal support of Lester Crown and the Crown family.

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan organization that provides insight – and influences the public discourse – on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices and conduct independent research to bring clarity and offer solutions to challenges and opportunities across the globe. Ranked [No. 1 Think Tank to Watch](#) worldwide, the Council on Global Affairs is committed to engaging the public and raising global awareness of issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business and governments engage the world. Learn more at thechicagocouncil.org and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](#).

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 survey methods. 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 and follow [@levada_ru](#) or on [Facebook](#).

Appendix 1- US Survey Questions

Q. Please rate your feelings toward some countries and peoples, with one hundred meaning a very warm, favorable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from zero to one hundred, the higher the number the more favorable your feelings are toward that country or those people. Russia, China, European Union, Mexico

Thermometer

	Russia ⁷ Mean	China Mean	EU Mean	Mexico Mean
<u>Country</u>				
United States (2017)	31	40	57	51
2016 (December)	32	-	-	
2016 (internet)	40	44	-	51
2014 (internet)	36	44	-	54
2010 (internet)	48	45	-	46
2008 (internet)	47	41	-	50
2006 (internet)	-	40	-	47
2004 (internet)	-	44	-	54
2002 (internet)	53	40	-	53
2002 (telephone)	55	48	-	60
1998	49	47	-	57
1994	54	46	-	57
1990	58	45	-	56
1986	31	53	-	59
1982	25	48	-	61
1978	34	44	-	58

Q. And to what extent do you think Russia tries to influence the domestic affairs of the United States - a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, not at all?

Russian influence on US domestic affairs⁸

	A great deal (%)	A fair amount (%)	Not very much (%)	Not at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>						
United States (2017)	30	40	20	7	3	100

⁷ In surveys prior to 1990, this was asked as "Soviet Union"

⁸ Due to rounding, percentages in text may not always match total percentages in appendix tables.

Q. To what extent do you think the Russian government tried to influence the outcome of last fall's US presidential election?

Russian influence on US presidential election

	A great deal (%)	A fair amount (%)	Not very much (%)	Not at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>						
United States (2017)	35	26	22	13	4	100

Q. And do you think generally that Russia is:

Cooperate or Undermine

	Trying to undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with the United States (%)	Working to undermine US international power and influence (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
United States (2017)	22	74	5	100
2016	24	71	5	100

Q. To what extent do you think the United States tries to influence domestic affairs in Russia - a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, not at all?

US influence on Russian domestic affairs

	A great deal (%)	A fair amount (%)	Not very much (%)	Not at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>						
US (2017)	13	42	32	8	4	100

Q. In dealing with Russia, do you think the US should:

Cooperate or Limit

	Undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with Russia	Actively work to limit Russia's power	DK/NR	Total

	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<u>Country</u>				
US (2017)	43	53	4	100
2016	56	39	6	100

Q. Do the following countries play a more important role in the world today compared to ten years ago, a less important role or about as important a role as it did ten years ago?

Role as World Leader- Russia

	More important (%)	Less important (%)	About as important (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
US (2017)	41	20	35	5	100

Role as World Leader- China

	More important (%)	Less important (%)	About as important (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
US (2017)	58	9	29	5	100

Role as World Leader- The European Union

	More important (%)	Less important (%)	About as important (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
U.S. (2017)	23	30	43	5	100

Q. Do you think the United States plays a more important and powerful role as a world leader today compared to 10 years ago, a less important role, or about as important a role as a world leader as it did 10 years ago?

US Role as World Leader

More important	Less important	About as important	DK/NR	Total
----------------	----------------	--------------------	-------	-------

	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<u>Country</u>					
US (2017)	22	47	31	1	100
	21	48	30	1	100
2012	24	43	32	1	100
2010	24	38	37	1	100
2002	55	17	25	3	100
1998	50	19	27	4	100
1994	47	26	29	3	100
1990	37	35	24	4	100
1986	41	26	29	4	100
1982	27	44	24	5	100
1978	29	41	24	6	100
1974	28	38	27	7	100

Q. Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all:

Threats- The military power of Russia

	Critical threat	Important but not critical threat	Not an important threat at all	DK/NR	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	42	51	7	0	100
2002	23	57	20	-	100
1998	34	48	15	3	100
1994	32	49	15	4	100
1990	33	52	12	3	100

Appendix 2- Russian Survey Questions

Q. Do you think that US-Russian relations will change after the election of President [Donald Trump/Barack Obama], and if so, in what way?

US-Russian Relationship

	Improve significantly (%)	Improve somewhat (%)	Remain the same (%)	Worsen somewhat (%)	Worsen significantly (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>							
Jan. 2017	7	39	29	8	2	15	100
Nov. 2016	10	44	27	2	0	17	100
Mar. 2009	4	35	35	6	1	20	100
Jan. 2009	4	30	38	6	1	22	100

Q. Do you think that US-Russian relations have changed after the election of President Donald Trump, and if so, in what way?

US-Russian Relationship

	Improved significantly (%)	Improved somewhat (%)	Haven't changed (%)	Worsen somewhat (%)	Worsen significantly (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>							
Russia (Dec. 2017)	2	12	51	20	8	7	100

Q. In general, what is your attitude towards the United States?

United States

	Very favorable (%)	Mostly favorable (%)	Mostly unfavorable (%)	Very unfavorable (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>						
Russia (2017)	2	22	44	16	16	100

Q. In general, what is your attitude towards the European Union?

European Union

	Very favorable (%)	Mostly favorable (%)	Mostly unfavorable (%)	Very unfavorable (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>						
Russia (2017)	2	26	39	15	18	100

Q. In general, what is your attitude towards Japan?

Japan

	Very favorable (%)	Mostly favorable (%)	Mostly unfavorable (%)	Very unfavorable (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>						
Russia (2017)	6	42	22	8	22	100

Q. In general, what is your attitude towards Ukraine?

Ukraine

	Very favorable (%)	Mostly favorable (%)	Mostly unfavorable (%)	Very unfavorable (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>						
Russia (2017)	2	26	39	17	17	100

Q. What do you think, does Russia have enemies today?

Enemies

	Yes (%)	No (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
Russia (2017)	66	21	13	100

Q. Whom can you call an enemy of Russia?⁹

Enemies Specific - First Response

	Russia 2017 First mention (%)	Russia 2017 Second mention (%)
The United States	35	8
Former USSR Republics	7	12
European countries/the European Union	5	9
Putin/current government	3	1
Terrorists	3	2
NATO/Western political elites	2	2
Other domestic political factions	2	1

⁹ Open response question, only asked of those who responded “yes” to previous question, “What do you think, does Russia have enemies today?”

All around	2	-
China/East Asian countries	1	1
Corruption	1	1
Other	2	1
Don't know	4	-
No response	-	29
Not asked	34	34

Q. To what extent do you think the United States tries to influence domestic affairs in Russia - a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, not at all?

US Influence on Russian Domestic Affairs

	A great deal (%)	A fair amount (%)	Not very much (%)	Not at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>						
Russia (2017)	36	43	9	3	10	100

Q. And do you think generally that the United States is:

Cooperate or Undermine

	Trying to undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with Russia (%)	Working to undermine Russian international power and influence (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
Russia (2017)	19	81	0	100
United States (2017)	22	74	5	100
2016	24	71	5	100

Q. And to what extent do you think Russia tries to influence the domestic affairs of the United States - a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, not at all?

Russian Influence on US Domestic Affairs

	A great deal (%)	A fair amount (%)	Not very much (%)	Not at all (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>						
Russia (2017)	8	23	35	22	13	100

Q. In dealing with the US, do you think Russia should:

Cooperate or Limit

	Russia should be open for cooperation with the US (%)	Russia should aspire to limit US international influence and power (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>				
Russia (2017)	47	52	1	100
2016	32	68	6	100

Q. Does Russia need to improve relations with the US and other Western countries?

Improving Relations

	Definitely yes (%)	Rather yes (%)	Rather no (%)	Definitely no (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>						
Russia (Dec. 2017)	24	51	13	3	9	100
Sept. 2016	15	47	18	6	14	100
Nov. 2015	23	52	14	2	10	100
Sept. 2015	17	49	16	4	13	100
Feb. 2015	13	53	16	2	16	100
Sept. 2014	13	53	18	6	10	100

Q. Do you think Russia plays a more important role in the world today compared to ten years ago, a less important role or about as important a role as it did ten years ago?

Role as World Leader - Russia

	More important (%)	Less important (%)	About as important (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	56	18	21	5	100

Q. And what about the United States, does it play a more important role in the world today compared to ten years ago, a less important role or about as important a role as it did ten years ago?

US Role as World Leader

	More important (%)	Less important (%)	About as important (%)	DK/NR (%)	Total (%)
<u>Country</u>					

<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	21	32	38	9	100

Q. Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of Russia in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all:

Threats - US Power and Influence

	Critical threat	Important but not critical threat	Not an important threat at all	DK/NR	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	35	47	18	0	100

Threats - The NATO Security Alliance

	Critical threat	Important but not critical threat	Not an important threat at all	DK/NR	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	24	50	25	1	100

Threats - US Economic Sanctions against Russia

	Critical threat	Important but not critical threat	Not an important threat at all	DK/NR	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<u>Country</u>					
Russia (2017)	15	47	38	0	100