

## **Russians Positive on China's Foreign Policy, Economic Model, Negative on U.S. Policies, Bush**

May 30, 2006

### **But Russians Give American Democracy High Marks**

**Americans Like Their System, Not Their President  
Russians Like Their President, But Not Their System**

[Questionnaire](#)  
[Transcript of Panel Discussion](#)



A new study of Russian and American public opinion finds that the Russian public has broadly positive views of China, potentially seeing China as a more promising partner in international affairs than the United States. While Russians admire the U.S. economic system and democracy, most have negative views of U.S. foreign policy and President Bush.

*The Kremlin (Courtesy US Embassy to Russian Federation)*

Americans also give high marks to their own economic system and democracy, but are only moderately positive about their role in the world. They give President Bush negative ratings. A modest majority has a negative view of Russia's influence in the world and a slight plurality has a negative view of China's influence.

These are among the findings of new parallel polls conducted by the Levada Center in Russia and by WorldPublicOpinion.org in the United States. The U.S. poll was executed by Knowledge Networks.

### **Russian Opinion on the US and China**

### Russians on US Foreign Policy

Is the US having a mainly positive or mainly negative influence on the world?



Over the last few years, do you think the effect of US foreign policy on Russia and its interests has been



Please tell me your opinion of...how America uses military power and the threat of force



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The Russian public has a generally negative view of the United States' foreign policy at the present time. Clear majorities feel that the United States has a mainly negative influence in the world (61% and 25% positive), view America's use of military force and the threat of force unfavorably (74% and 13% favorable), and judge the effect of U.S. foreign policy over the past few years as negative for Russian interests (56% and 22% positive). Most Russians also have an unfavorable view of President Bush (59% and 25% favorable). Many other countries share the view that the United States has a mainly negative influence in the world, according to [global polls](#).

Russians have a high regard for the American economic system (73% favorable, 13% unfavorable). And by 2 to 1, they give a good grade to America's system of government (54% favorable, 27% unfavorable). The positive image of the American economic and governing models could be a potential source of political capital for the United States, but the sharply negative opinions of U.S. military policy, U.S. policy towards Russia, U.S. influence in the world, and President Bush appear to undercut these soft power resources.

### Russians on Chinese Foreign Policy

Is China having a mainly positive or mainly negative influence in the world?



Over the last few years, do you think the effect of Chinese foreign policy on Russia and its interests has been



Please tell me your opinion of...how China uses military power and the threat of force



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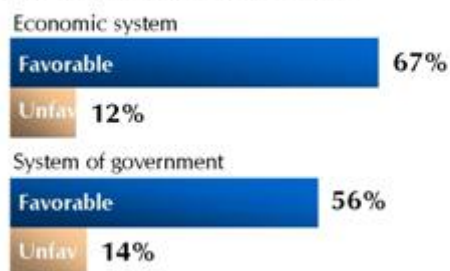
When Russians look at China, they are considerably more positive than when they look at the United States. Most Russians see China as having a mainly positive influence in the world (57%) rather than a negative influence (20%); they have a solidly favorable view of China's system of government (56% , 14% unfavorable) and more Russians see China's use of military power and the threat of military power as favorable (46%) than unfavorable (19%). The effect of Chinese foreign policy over the past few years is also more commonly seen as positive for Russia (42%) than negative (23%).

Russians also have high regard for China's economic system (67% favorable, 12% unfavorable), which is similar to the 73 percent of Russians with favorable opinions about the U.S. economic system.

The Russian people have a less-developed view of Chinese President Hu Jintao than President Bush, with half expressing no opinion of him. But those expressing opinions about President Hu are heavily favorable (42%, 8% unfavorable).

### Russians on Chinese Economy and Government

Please tell me your opinion of China's...



WFO/KN/Levada Center 5/06 It is important to note the discussion below of the

considerably higher scores that Russians give to democracy in America compared to democracy in China, yet they rate the U.S. and Chinese systems of government equally favorably. The United States has a long history of democracy; China does not. Because of these historic differences, Russians may bring different standards to assessments of government systems in the two countries; Russians might also be less troubled by a lack of democracy than Americans appear to be.

The positive Russian assessments given to China—across the issues of foreign policy, military force, influence in the world and leadership—suggest that Russians may see China as a more promising international partner than America.

The Chinese appear ready to return the compliment. In a [BBC/GlobeScan/PIPA poll](#) released in January, 2006, 56 percent of Chinese saw Russia as a positive influence, while 62 percent saw the United States as a negative influence. And as we observe below, the U.S. public leans toward viewing Russia in negative terms. Thus, through the lens of public opinion, there appears to be a greater convergence between Russia and China than between Russia and the US.

### Russian Assessments of their Foreign Policy and Domestic Systems

When Russians look at Russia, they see their country as playing a positive role in the world. They also give good marks to their president. In contrast, they are critical of their political and economic systems.

Large majorities of Russians (80%) feel that Russia has a mainly positive role in the world and have a favorable view of how Russia manages the use of its military force and the threat of military force (65% favorable, 17% unfavorable).

However, only a slim plurality (47% favorable and 43% unfavorable) of Russians give good marks to the Russian system of government.

More starkly, Russians have a negative view of their economic system. A clear majority of Russians (60%) have an unfavorable view of the Russian economic system, compared to 31% holding a favorable view.

## Views of Putin

At the same time, President Putin receives favorable ratings from fully 85 percent of the Russian public: only 9 percent rate him unfavorably. Other [polling by the Levada Center](#) and other [polling groups](#) echo the high public regard for Mr. Putin.

These positive attitudes have also been reflected in Russians' voting behavior. Putin won the 2004 election by a 71 percent majority (the second place finisher got 14 percent); up from 53 percent in 2000. This makes him somewhat unique among major world leaders. In the spring of 2006, incumbent national leaders in the United States, Britain, and France have experienced sharply diminished popularity in their second terms while Gerhard Schroeder was defeated in the 2005 Germany elections. But President Putin continues to ride extremely high in public esteem in Russia.

## American Opinions on Russia and China



However their military behavior gets more sharply negative ratings. Asked how Russia and China use their military power and the threat of force, clear majorities of Americans rate both Russia (68%) and China (75%) unfavorably.

When it comes to the impact of their foreign policy on the United States, Americans' views of Russia and China are starkly different: perceptions of Russian influence are much more benign

than those of China. In recent years, both Russia and China have been foreign policy partners with the United States on some initiatives and opponents on others. A slight majority of Americans (51%) see the effect of Russian foreign policy in the past few years to have been positive on the United States and its interests (38% negative). In the case of China, the majority view is reversed: most Americans (54%) see the effects of Chinese foreign policy as negative for the United States and its interests (36% positive).

### Americans on Chinese Foreign Policy

Is China having a mainly positive or mainly negative influence in the world?



Over the last few years, do you think the effect of Chinese foreign policy on the US and its interests has been



Please tell me your opinion of...how China uses military power and the threat of force



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Americans' perceptions of Russian and Chinese domestic systems are quite negative, but the American public sees differences between the two countries. Neither system of government is well-regarded by Americans: 68% of the U.S. public has an unfavorable view of Russia's system of government, but a significantly greater majority (80%) see China's system in unfavorable terms. Russia's economic system receives quite low marks (72% unfavorable), while 56% of Americans have an unfavorable view of China's economic system, and 37% have a favorable view. Nonetheless, the Chinese economic miracle has drawn considerable attention and some admiration in the United States, as well as in the rest of the world. (See for example the [22 nation poll conducted for BBC](#)).

Russian and Chinese leaders get low approval ratings from Americans. President Putin is rated unfavorably by 55% of Americans (36% favorable) and President Hu by 63% (27% favorable).

### American Self-Assessment

#### Americans on World Leaders

Please tell me your opinion of...



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Most nations have favorable opinions of their

country, their political systems, and their foreign policies. America's sense of its own specialness and morality have often been noted. When the American people rate their own country, they give very high marks to the U.S. system of government (83% favorable and 14% unfavorable) and to its economic system (75% favorable and 21% unfavorable).

But their views of the United States' relationships with the world are more muted: 64% of Americans rate its influence as mainly positive (down from 71% in a [fall 2004 poll](#) and unchanged from a fall 2005 poll). The U.S. public by a rather slim majority (54%) sees the country's use of military power and the threat of force in favorable terms, but 42% of Americans have an unfavorable opinion of how the United States uses its military.

In this poll, the American public rates President Bush unfavorably, by a 51% to 45% majority. Many polling organizations in the United States have reported majority negative ratings for the President during this period; [job performance ratings](#) have tended to be even lower.

### **Comparing Russian and American Views**

Russian and American self-evaluations show a contrasting pattern in the spring of 2006. Russians give their country high marks as a positive influence in the world and moderately high marks in its use of military power—higher than Americans rate their own foreign policy in these respects. Russians' evaluations of their President are also far more positive than Americans' ratings of President Bush.

But Russians give much lower evaluations to their economic system and their system of government. Americans give high marks to their system of government (83% favorable) and economic system (75% favorable), but relatively lower grades to their government's use of military force (54% favorable). Only 64 percent believe their country is a mainly positive influence in the world.

### **Grading Democracy**

Democratic practice has a different status and history across the United States, Russia and China. The parallel polls ask respondents to evaluate how democratic each of the three countries are on a 0 – 10 point scale. Russians give the United States a 6.7 average rating, their own country a 4.6 average rating, and China, 4.3.

Americans give their system an average score of 7.4, Russia an average score of 3.7, and China a score of 2.2.

Both countries give the same ordinal ratings to democracy in the three nations, but Americans see the differences in democracy between Russia and China to be greater than the Russians do. Indeed, Russians seem to be rather tough graders when it comes to Russian democracy.

### **Perceived Trends in Democracy**

One of the most important developments of the past quarter century has been the spread of democracy and the decline of totalitarianism. In the eyes of Russians and Americans, have these three countries become more democratic and responsive to their people in recent years? A plurality of Russians (36%) see their country as becoming more democratic and responsive, 24% see it as becoming less democratic, 27 percent say it has stayed about the same, and 13% venture no opinion. While Russians do not give their democracy high scores, they do evaluate their system of government favorably. A modest plurality feel that Russia is on a democratic track, and only a quarter see it as slipping backwards.

Russians in similar numbers (35%) believe China is becoming more democratic and responsive, and fewer see it as becoming less democratic (10%), or staying the same (18%), though 37% gave no opinion. Russians are less likely (26%) to see the United States as becoming more democratic over the last few years; Russians are more likely to say it has stayed the same (31%). Twenty-three percent of Russians say that the United States has become less democratic.

A notable plurality (43%) among the American public says the United States has become less democratic and responsive to its people in the last few years. Only 18 percent say their country is becoming more democratic. Americans are a bit more sanguine about trends in Russia. One-third of the American public believes Russia is becoming more democratic and responsive, 24% less democratic, and 36 percent think it has stayed the same. About half (49%) believe China has not made progress on democracy recently, 24% think it is becoming more democratic, and 18% less democratic.

In Russia, Levada Center polled 1,000 respondents (margin of error +/-3.1%) over April 14-24. In the United States, Knowledge Networks polled 1,023 respondents (margin of error +/- 3.1-3.6% dependent on whether it was a three-quarters or full sample) from April 18-24, using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp>.