

G7 Citizens Critical of Putin's Impact on Russian Democracy: BBC Poll

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A majority of G7 citizens regard President Putin as a "negative influence on democracy and human rights in Russia," according to a BBC World Service poll.

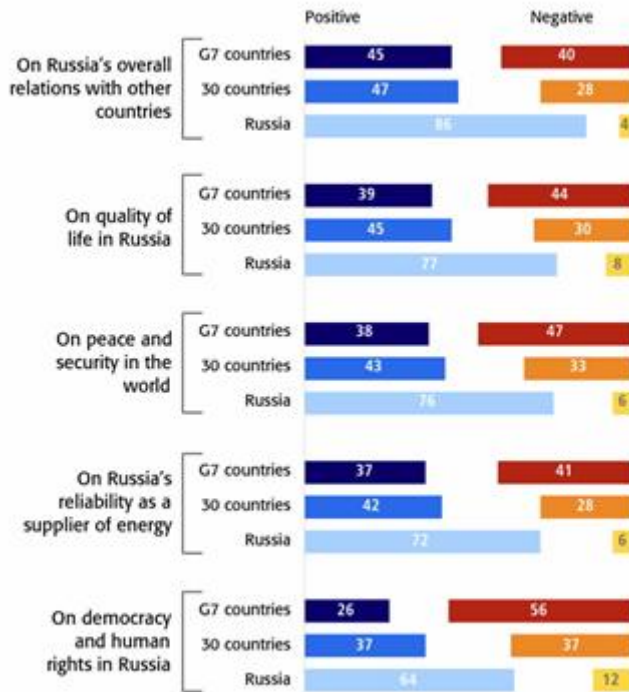
Russian President Vladimir Putin at his annual press conference at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia on February 14, 2008 (Photo: kremlin.ru)

Fifty-six percent of respondents from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, and USA (the G7 nations) believe he has been a negative influence on democracy and human rights in Russia, while 26 percent regard his role as positive in this area.

Forty-seven percent of G7 citizens are also negative about Putin's influence "on peace and security in the world" with 38 percent regarding him positively on the issue.

However the President gets a favourable rating from G7 citizens on Russia's overall relations with other countries. Forty-five percent say his influence has been positive while 40 percent say he has been a negative influence.

Influence of President Putin's Leadership
December 2007



The white space in this chart represents "DK/NA."
Note: Asked to half of sample in each country
Base: Representative sample of 16,000 adults in 31 countries

G7 citizens are divided on Putin's influence "on the quality of life in Russia" (44% negative - 39% positive) and "on Russia's reliability as a supplier of energy" (41% negative - 37% positive).

Asked to rate Russia's overall role in the world, 44 percent of G7 citizens say it is mainly negative while 30 percent say mainly positive.

The G7 results contrast starkly with the views in many other of the 31 countries polled. For instance, urban Chinese citizens give President Putin strongly positive ratings of between 76 percent (on the issue of quality of life in Russia) and 60 percent (on whether Russia is a reliable energy supplier).

As his eight year presidency ends in May 2008, those polled around the world are divided on whether they consider Russia to have a positive role in the world.

Most positive on Russia's role are Egyptians (78% positive) and the Chinese (69%). Most negative are Germans (56% negative), Italians (53%), and Israelis (53%).

In Russia itself, large majorities approve of Putin's performance on most counts. Eighty-six percent see Putin's leadership on Russia's foreign relations as positive; 77 percent are positive on Russia's quality of life; 76 percent on world peace and security; 72 percent on Russia's energy role; and 64 percent on democracy in Russia.

The results are drawn from a survey of almost 16,000 adult citizens across the 31 countries regularly polled for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. GlobeScan coordinated fieldwork between October 31, 2007 and January 25, 2008. Apart from Russia, no countries from the former Soviet Union or Eastern Europe were included.

GlobeScan President Doug Miller says, "President Putin gets poor marks for his impact on democracy and human rights in Russia, but overall many people around the world think he has been good for Russia."

Highlights of the Overall Results

All respondents were asked to give a view on whether they regarded Putin's leadership as positive or negative on the issues of a) the quality of life in Russia; b) democracy and human rights in Russia; c) Russia's overall relations with other countries; d) Russia's reliability as a supplier of energy to other countries; and e) peace and security in the world.

Across the 30 countries polled outside of Russia, an overall average of 47 percent rate the President's leadership positively on "Russia's overall relations with other countries," while 28 percent rate it negatively.

A 30-country average of 45 percent believe his leadership has been mainly positive on "the quality of life in Russia," while 30 percent think he has been a negative influence on this.

Opinion across the countries polled is equally divided on his contribution to "democracy and human rights in Russia" with 37 percent regarding his leadership as positive and 37 percent regarding his role as negative.

When asked about his influence on Russia's reliability as a supplier of energy to other countries, Putin is regarded positively by 42 percent of global respondents while 28 percent see him negatively on this issue.

On the issue of world peace and security, 43 percent regard his leadership as positive, however a third of those polled (33%) view his contribution negatively.

The poll also asked whether respondents were positive or negative on Russia's influence in the world.

Views of Russia are more divided than for Mr. Putin. An overall average of 35 percent across the 30 countries polled outside of Russia rate the country as "having a mainly positive role in the world" while another 35 percent say it is having a mainly negative role.

Over the past year, views of Russia have improved in 14 of 23 countries for which tracking is available, and have remained stable in eight of the other tracking countries (India is the exception, where views have declined).

Regional Views of Putin

In Asia and the Pacific (Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines and South Korea), on average across the five areas, 48 percent gave Putin an overall positive. The largest positive majorities were in China and South Korea; 60-76 percent of Chinese gave Putin positive ratings across all five areas, as did 55-75 percent of South Koreans.

A majority of respondents in Japan (51%) said Putin's leadership had been negative for world peace and security and significant numbers rated most other areas negatively. On the question of democracy and human rights, Japan and Australia both had many giving negative ratings (48% and 47% respectively), and the Philippines was divided.

In the three African countries polled--Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria--on average a modest majority, 53 percent, gave Putin an overall positive rating across all five areas. Majorities expressing approval were limited to Kenya, where 62-68 percent were positive on all five areas, and Nigeria, where majorities of 52-60 percent were positive. Ghana leaned positive (33-39% across all questions), but almost half of Ghanaians did not provide answers.

In the Middle East, the three countries polled (Egypt, Israel, and Turkey) all had quite distinct reactions. Egypt was the most supportive in the entire poll, with 80-84 percent rating Putin's leadership positively in all five areas. Turks did not coalesce around any majority view: while most (49%) felt Putin has been positive for Russia's quality of life, a much narrower number (41% to 36%) thought he has been positive for democracy. Turks were divided about Putin's leadership on foreign relations, security, and Russia as an energy supplier. In Israel, many were negative on Putin's performance in all areas except Russia's quality of life, where a modest number (43%) was supportive.

In Western Europe, the six countries polled (France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the UK) were more negative than positive, with an average 45 percent giving Putin an overall negative rating across the five areas, and a 57 percent majority rejecting his performance on democracy and human rights. Spain was the most negative, with majorities rating Putin negatively on democracy (64%), quality of life (60%), and peace and security (53%). Italy was most inclined to be somewhat positive, with 54 percent approving Putin's leadership on Russia's foreign relations, and was positive overall about security and Russia's energy role. Interestingly--given current tensions between Britain and Russia--Britons' views were very nuanced, with 45 percent being negative about democracy and human rights, narrow margins approving Putin on foreign relations and Russia's energy supplier role, and a divided response on Russia's quality of life.

In North America, Canadians were positive on quality of life (45%) and Russia's foreign relations (46%), negative on democracy (50%) and security (44%) and divided on

Russia's energy role. While the United States was more negative than Canada overall, there were negative majorities on only three out of five questions: democracy (62%), quality of life (59%), and security (57%). On Russia's energy role, 44 percent rated it negatively, and on foreign relations Americans were nearly divided (47% negative, 43% positive).

Latin Americans (Argentines, Chileans, Mexicans, and Central Americans, who were sampled as a six-country group) leaned very mildly positive toward Putin--but with just an average score of 33 percent positive across all five areas. In most Latin American countries large numbers of respondents declined to reply. Mexico was a clear exception to this, however. A majority there (56%) rejected Putin's performance on democracy, and Mexicans were divided on Russia's quality of life. However, Mexican majorities were positive on Putin's performance on Russia's foreign relations (57%), its energy role (52%), and world security (63%).

In total 15,957 citizens in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Ghana, Germany, Great Britain, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines, Portugal, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, and the United States were interviewed face-to-face or by telephone between October 31, 2007 and January 25, 2008. Polling was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan and its research partners in each country. In 13 of the 31 countries, the sample was limited to major urban areas. Given that country ratings were given by half-samples of about 500 per country, the margin of error per country ranges from +/-3.4 to 4.6 percent.