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Data Review

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Abstract

This dataset originates from an international project launched by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative initiative coordinated by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland. The Russian component of the study, designed to gauge public opinion toward the United States across 20 countries, was fielded by the Levada Center in May 2009. The questionnaire focuses on Russian perceptions of the United States' global role, its respect for international law and human rights, and confidence in key political leaders.

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Review of Russian component of the WorldPublicOpinion.org study on perceptions of Barack Obama and the USA

by Stas Gorelik

This dataset originates from an international project launched by *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, a collaborative initiative coordinated by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland. The Russian component of the study, designed to gauge public opinion toward the United States across 20 countries, was fielded by the Levada Center in May 2009 using face-to-face interviews with a nationally representative sample of approximately 800 adult respondents. The survey was conducted shortly after Barack Obama assumed the U.S. presidency, at a time when expectations of a ‘reset’ in U.S.-Russia relations were particularly salient.

The questionnaire focuses on Russian perceptions of the United States’ global role, its respect for international law and human rights, and confidence in key political leaders. Among other things, respondents were asked to evaluate whether the United States plays a mainly positive or negative role in world affairs, whether it is cooperative with other countries, and whether it respects human rights.

Additional items assess approval of U.S. handling of specific issues, such as climate change. As for confidence in key political leaders, the survey also includes such measure for U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (ordinal scales).

A key limitation of the survey is that a substantial share of respondents selected ‘don’t know’ to several questions, particularly those concerning some abstract principles of foreign policy. These responses likely reflect ambivalence or limited information rather than neutral attitudes, which complicates substantive interpretation of the results. In addition, the dataset represents a single cross-sectional snapshot. That said, the Levada Center has regularly (typically every few months) fielded questions on Russians’ attitudes toward foreign countries, including the United States (see the Levada Center’s website)¹.

Data access: <https://drum.lib.umd.edu/items/4190f973-a93f-44f4-9268-8ebb2f261010>.

¹ See also on Discuss Data: Levada Center (2022). Foreign countries in the perception of the Russian population 1997-2022, <https://doi.org/10.48320/CF09B496-A4E9-41C4-ABCE-4DE51C185FC7>.