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<td>Russia/U.S. - Opinion Polls</td>
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Russians Oppose Chechen War
Also against foreign involvement

As fighting in Chechnya dragged on into February, the Russian populace became more disenchanted with the leadership's policies. The war has undermined support for the government; it could lead to an early change at the top or a reversion to more authoritarian patterns of rule.

KEY FINDINGS

• A majority of the public say that Russia's actions in Chechnya have been "unacceptable," whatever the government's objectives.

• Most want to see the fighting stop now, to permit negotiations, but only about a third favor an immediate withdrawal of Russian forces. One-fifth would have their troops push on to final military victory.

• Three-fourths say that other nations should not get involved in trying to end the conflict.

• Nearly two-thirds think it at least somewhat likely that the crisis might undermine democracy in Russia.

• Half say their confidence in Yeltsin has diminished as a result of the Chechen events; a small majority say they favor his resigning.

• Still, Yeltsin would get as many votes as anyone--but only 6 percent of the total--if a presidential election were held today.

War in Chechnya "Unacceptable"
A small majority (57%) of Russians believe that Russia's actions since December in Chechnya have been "unacceptable," no matter what the objective. A third (31%) feel that the actions have been necessary to protect Russian sovereignty (i.e., to hold on to independence-seeking Chechnya).

Women more often than men (63% to 50%) say that Russian actions have been unacceptable; and men are more likely than women to find them "necessary" (39% to 24%).
Although three-fourths (73%) want an end to the fighting, views are mixed on the way to achieve this aim. More favor Russian forces' remaining in place during a ceasefire—to allow for further negotiations—than support an immediate withdrawal of Russian forces to facilitate negotiations (42% to 32%). Another fifth (19%) say their troops should press ahead until Zhokhar Dudaev is defeated militarily. Gender differences are apparent here as well: men more frequently than women say they would push for military victory (26% to 14%), women more than men favor the immediate withdrawal of troops (38% to 24%).

A USIA-commissioned Moscow telephone poll in early January showed very similar results.\(^1\) In the past, however, one might have expected a divide between "liberal" Moscow and the rest of the country, especially rural Russia, on such policy issues as the war. Today there is almost no difference. On the issue of the troops' withdrawing or remaining in place, for example, in this nationwide poll Moscow is no more "pacifist" than the whole of Russia. Muscovites today favor the troops remaining (49%) rather than withdrawing immediately (23%).

**Most Also Against Foreign Involvement**

Three-quarters (73%) feel that other nations should not get directly involved in trying to find a solution to the conflict in Chechnya. A fifth believe otherwise, having a preference for multilateral (UN, OSCE) or other CIS nations' involvement over intercession by NATO or individual Western countries.

**Political Consequences of the Conflict**

Two-thirds (67%) feel that the current crisis could undermine the democratic system of government in Russia. As many (63%) say that this is at least somewhat likely.

Asked about some parliamentarians' calls for President Boris Yeltsin to resign, a majority (56%) favor his resigning. Three in ten oppose it. The rest of the country is less supportive of Yeltsin than Moscow, where opinion divided evenly on his resignation earlier in January and where slightly more oppose than favor his resignation today (45% against it, 38% for it).

Half of the public (52%) say their confidence in Yeltsin decreased as a result of what is going on in Chechnya. A handful—2 percent—say it increased; for the rest, it remained unchanged. Yet opinion seems inconsistent: Although the great majority of Russians (79%) voice little or no confidence in Yeltsin (18% have at least a "fair amount"), these results are nearly identical with those of a November 1994 nationwide poll (76% lacked confidence in Yeltsin, 18% had confidence in him). By these numbers his confidence level has not dropped. Moreover, Yeltsin enjoys wider confidence among Muscovites in the latest poll (27%) than in the earlier phone poll and most other recent opinion surveys.

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\(^1\)See "Muscovites, By Slim Margin, Against Chechen War" (B-2-95), January 12, 1995.
Were an extraordinary presidential election held today, Yeltsin would poll as well as any of his rivals, but this is damning with faint praise: he would receive a mere 6 percent of the vote. No other candidate would receive more; leading reformers (such as Grigorii Yavlinskii and Yegor Gaidar) and reactionaries (Vladimir Zhirinovskii) would each attract about equal numbers of ballots. Two-thirds do not know for whom they would vote in such an election (37%), volunteer that they would not vote at all (12%), or would vote against all candidates (18%)--a situation not unlike that as the public approached the elections of December 1993.

Media Coverage of Events
Since December, the war in Chechnya has dominated news coverage in Russia. Most Russians (86%) say that they have heard or read at least a fair amount about what is going on there. The overwhelming majority (89%) report using domestic TV to obtain "reliable information" about the conflict. With multiple responses possible, 59 percent also say they listen to domestic radio for such information; in addition, a third (36%) cite local newspapers as a source. Some, but not many, turn to foreign TV or foreign radio (each 5%) for information on the conflict in Chechnya.

Views are mixed about the performance of domestic media in the crisis. Half (53%) say Russian media are doing a fair or poor job of keeping them informed about events in Chechnya. Four in ten (41%) believe that these media are doing a good or very good job. The main news programs on government-run television channels (Ostankino and Russian TV) have carried sometimes graphic pictures but mild commentary on the war; independent NTV has been more critical and nuanced in its coverage.

Prepared by Steven A. Grant, R/RUC
Issued by the Office of Research and Media Reaction

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2To indicate how little they care for any potential Russian candidates, some blithe spirits in this poll say they would vote for Margaret Thatcher.
MEMORANDUM

TO: Ann Pincus, Director
Office of Research

FROM: R. Alvin Richman

SUBJECT: U.S. PUBLIC'S ATTITUDES TOWARD RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA AND NATO EXPANSION

SUMMARY -- A review of recent polls on American attitudes toward Russia and European security issues reveals:

(1) U.S.-Russian relations -- In contrast to the 1980's, Americans now view Russia more as a "partner" than as a "competitor" of the U.S. in world affairs.

(2) Yeltsin -- Positive views of President Yeltsin have declined appreciably during the past year. For the first time, negative views of Yeltsin outweigh positive ones.

(3) Economic aid to Russia -- Support for aiding Russia depends more on Russia's policies than on Yeltsin's popularity. A clear majority of Americans (about 55%) continue to approve substantial economic aid to Russia to encourage its cooperation abroad and internal reforms.

(4) NATO and NATO expansion -- About three-fifths of the public continue to support maintaining the present U.S. commitment to NATO. Support for extending NATO to Eastern Europe is considerably less than this (42% in favor vs. 32% opposed) when it is specified that it would entail "committing the U.S. to defend East European countries against attack in the same way as we are committed to defending Western Europe."

U.S.-Russian Relations Viewed as Mainly Positive

Recent polls show Americans are inclined to view Russia more as a partner and friend of the U.S. than as a rival or military threat. A Wall Street Journal poll last month asked whether Russia generally is "more of an ally or more of an adversary" of the U.S. A clear majority said Russia was more like an ally of the U.S. (56%) than an adversary (35%). A CBS/NY Times poll last December regarding future relations
with Russia presented two less polarized options, but obtained similar results: Fifty-seven percent said they expect, overall, that Russia will be "more of a partner" of the U.S. in the future, compared to 34 percent who expect Russia will be "more of a competitor."

CBS/NY Times also asked which country in the world would be the "most important diplomatic partner" of the U.S. in the coming century -- "the country the U.S. depends on most in international diplomatic relations." Among the three-fifths of the respondents expressing an opinion, Russia was mentioned most frequently (34%), followed by Great Britain (29%), Japan (12%), China (7%) and Germany (7%).

Public ranks various threats to U.S. as more serious than Russia’s military power — The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations survey, conducted by Gallup last October, asked respondents to rate the importance of eight different threats to U.S. interests in the next 10 years. "The Military power of Russia" ranks next to last in importance as an expected threat -- 32 percent rated it as a "critical threat" during the next 10 years. Nearly twice as many cited "economic competition from Japan" (62%) and "the development of China as a world power" (57%) as critical threats. Heading the list are nuclear weapons proliferation (72% "critical threat"), large-scale immigration into the U.S. (72%) and international terrorism (69% -- see Table 1).

Yeltsin’s Positive Image Has Eroded

Gallup and NBC polls taken in January show positive views of President Yeltsin have declined about 25 percentage points since early 1994, with much of this decline occurring since the fighting began in Chechnya in December. Now, for the first time, negative views of Yeltsin exceed positive views. Gallup/USA Today found 31 percent have a "favorable opinion" of President Yeltsin (vs. 45% "unfavorable opinion") -- down from 61 percent favorable in February 1994. The NBC/Wall Street Journal question contained five response options, including "neutral" opinion of Yeltsin, and obtained these results ("Don't Know" responses omitted):

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1 CBS asked the same question about future U.S. relations with China and Japan. In contrast to their views on Russia, about three-fifths of the American public expect China (62%) and Japan (63%) to be mainly competitors rather than partners of the U.S. in the future.

2 The Chicago Council posed this question last Fall also to a sample of "American leaders" in various government and private organizations. U.S. leaders, like the public, ranked Russian military power next to last as a possible threat to U.S. interests in the coming decade (16% "critical threat") and ranked nuclear arms proliferation at the top of the list (61%). However, U.S. leaders expressed much less concern than the public about the threats of international terrorism (33% "critical threat"), large-scale immigration into the U.S. (31%) and economic competition from Japan (21%).
Positive Opinion of Yeltsin | Neutral | Negative Opinion of Yeltsin
---|---|---
Jan. 1995 | 20% (3% "very positive") | 30% | 31% (11% "very negative")
Jan. 1994 | 43% (8% "very positive") | 30% | 12% (5% "very negative")

Many Americans distinguish between continued positive assessments of U.S. relations with Russia and diminished approval of President Yeltsin. NBC's poll found the public believes -- by a 5-to-3 margin -- that support for Yeltsin should not be a "top priority of U.S. policy toward Russia" (53% vs. 32% who think it should be a top priority).

**Most Americans Continue to Support Aiding Russia, In Principle**

Previous surveys have shown that the public is more supportive of aiding Russia for the purpose of dismantling nuclear weapons and achieving other U.S. security objectives than for the purpose of assisting Russian political and economic reforms or trying to bolster President Yeltsin. Two recent polls show a majority of Americans continue to support economic aid to Russia. The Chicago Council survey (10/94) asked whether U.S. "economic aid" to Russia should be "increased, decreased, kept about the same, or stopped altogether." Fifty-four percent said U.S. aid to Russia should either be maintained at the current level (34%) or increased (20%). Two-fifths of the public want either to reduce U.S. economic aid to Russia (19%) or halt it entirely (20%). Support for aiding Russia is nearly on a par with support for aiding the "newly independent countries in Eastern Europe" (54% increase or maintain aid vs. 32% reduce or halt it).³

In January, the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes asked respondents which of these two statements came closest to their own views about aiding Russia:

**Keep aiding Russia:** "After spending trillions of dollars defending against the Soviet threat, it would be foolish to not help the Russians make the transition to democracy and capitalism. If they go back to totalitarianism, we will be really sorry we did not try harder to help."

**Stop aiding Russia:** "After having threatened the rest of the world for several decades, the Russians do not deserve our help. Besides, if we help them get back on their feet, they might turn around and threaten us again."

Keep aiding Russia - 59% Stop aiding Russia - 36% Don't know - 5%

³ U.S. leaders are much more supportive than the general public of economic aid to Russia. Eighty-five percent believe this aid should either be increased (40%) or kept at the current level (45%). Less than one-fifth want it reduced (12%) or stopped (2%).
Many Americans Distinguish Between Support for NATO/West Europe and NATO/East Europe

NATO -- Two recent polls show about a two-to-one majority support the present U.S. commitment to NATO. A Times Mirror poll (12/94) found 60 percent believe the "NATO alliance" should be "maintained," compared to 27 percent who think it is "not necessary anymore." The Chicago Council survey (10/94) presented arguments on both sides of this issue and found 61 percent believe the "U.S. commitment to NATO" should either be kept at its present level (56%) or increased (5%), compared to 26 percent who think the U.S. should either reduce its commitment to NATO (20%) or withdraw entirely (6%). Support for the U.S. commitment to NATO is almost identical to what it was in late 1990, but is down about 10 percentage points from its high-point in 1986 (70% maintain or increase U.S. commitment vs. 16% reduce or end it).

NATO expansion -- Two polls last year on this issue were worded quite differently and obtained very different results. ABC/Washington Post (1/94) asked, "Now that the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact alliance have broken up, do you think Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic should be allowed to join NATO, or not?" Sixty-four percent responded "yes", compared to 21 percent "no" -- similar to results usually obtained for the "NATO alliance" itself. In contrast, the Chicago Council's question on expanding NATO "to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic" stressed that this would commit the U.S. to defending them against attack "in the same way as we are committed to defending Western Europe." Forty-two percent expressed support for NATO expansion on this question (22 points less than the ABC/WPost poll), compared to 32 percent who were opposed.

Use of U.S. troops in Europe -- The Chicago Council survey (10/94) asked specifically about using U.S. troops to help defend Western Europe, Poland or Ukraine in case any of them were attacked by Russia. The results show that the public's willingness to defend countries in eastern Europe and the former USSR is

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4 The complete question was: "Some people feel that NATO, the military organization of Western Europe and the United States, has outlived its usefulness, and that the United States should withdraw militarily from NATO. Others say that NATO still has a function in preserving peace in Europe. Do you feel we should increase our commitment to NATO, keep our commitment what it is now, decrease our commitment but still remain in NATO, or withdraw from NATO entirely?"

5 The complete question was: "Some people believe that NATO should be expanded to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, thereby committing the United States to defend them against attack in the same way as we are committed to defending Western Europe. Do you think NATO should or should not be expanded to include those three countries?" A majority of U.S. leaders (58%) and college graduates among the general public (56%) expressed support for NATO expansion on the Chicago Council poll.
considerably less (by 20 points or more) than its willingness to defend Western Europe. Respondents were asked this question:

"There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using U.S. troops in other parts of the world. I'd like to ask your opinion about some situations. ... Would you favor or oppose the use of U.S. troops if ..."

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<th></th>
<th>Favor</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
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<tr>
<td>Russia invaded Western Europe</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia invaded Poland</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia invaded Ukraine</td>
<td>20</td>
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For further information regarding this report contact: Al Richman (202) 619-5140

"U.S. leaders make much sharper distinctions than the public regarding the situations where the U.S. should commit its troops: Ninety-one percent of the leaders favor using U.S. troops to defend Western Europe against a Russian invasion and 60 percent of the leaders favor defending Poland. However, 21 percent are willing to use U.S. troops to defend Ukraine -- nearly identical to the proportion among the general public."
Table 1. Americans Rate Threats to the U.S.  
(Chicago Council on Foreign Relations/Gallup, 10/94)

**Question:** "I am going to read you a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please tell me if you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all."  
("No opinion" responses omitted from Table)

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<th>Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
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<td>Large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the U.S.</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>The possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>International terrorism</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic competition from Japan</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td>The development of China as a world power</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td>Possible expansion of Islamic fundamentalism</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>THE MILITARY POWER OF RUSSIA</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>27%</td>
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