

RUSSIA-POLAND SOCIAL DIAGNOSIS 2020

Russian views on Poland, Poles
and Russia-Poland relations



THE CENTRE
FOR POLISH-RUSSIAN
DIALOGUE AND UNDERSTANDING

Report on public opinion research in Russia

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and Russia-Poland relations

Warsaw 2020

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FOR POLISH-RUSSIAN DIALOGUE
AND UNDERSTANDING

Report on public opinion research in Russia

Survey: Levada Center

Analyses and report: Krzysztof Szczerbacz, Łukasz Mazurkiewicz (ARC Rynek i Opinia)

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The Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding

14/16A Jasna Street, 00-041 Warsaw, Poland

tel. + 48 22 295 00 30

fax + 48 22 295 00 31

e-mail: cprdip@cprdip.pl

www.cprdip.pl

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Introduction – background and research objective

This is the second public opinion survey conducted in Russia in 2020 for the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding.

The previous survey focused on the impact of history on Russian perceptions of Poland and Poles. This study mirrors the *Social Diagnosis* surveys conducted among Poles that focused on how they see relations with Russia.

The survey addresses Russian perceptions of Poland and Poles, including relations between the two countries and peoples as well as current issues affecting those relationships.

One advantage of this research is that it gives an insight into the thinking of the Russian public without 'filtering' by the media or politicians. The answers given by the Russian respondents of course reflect media and official messages in different ways. However, the image of Poland and Poles emerging from these Russian responses is in softer or subtler tones than Russian official statements convey.

Differences between generations deserve special attention and investigation: younger Russians evince a much more open and

trusting attitude towards the world in general and Poland in particular than their parents or grandparents.

The study shows that the average Russian has very limited knowledge about Poland, its culture, personalities and interesting places to visit. Despite the decades since the fall of communism, Russians still have a largely Soviet-era sense of Poland. Presenting the achievements of today's Poland, especially to the younger Russians, has great potential.

The results of the survey also confirm different perceptions of international relations, and of political / cultural 'proximity'. These findings help us understand the reactions of the Russian authorities and public to the foreign policy choices made by Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states. Among Russians pan-Slavic motifs mix with regret and resentment after the breakup of the USSR.

As with the surveys conducted among Poles, this study confirms a significant gap in mutual knowledge and flows of ideas between Poles and Russians: an opportunity for positive changes, regardless of difficult political relations.

Information about the study

Methodology

The study was based on a quantitative survey carried out using the computer-assisted telephone interview technique (CATI).

The survey was conducted on a sample of 1,000 adult Russians, representative of the Russian population by gender, age and size of domicile.

The survey was carried out on 18–19 October 2020 by the Levada Center.

Note that the data on some of the graphs do not add up to 100% for multiple choice questions. With single-code questions there are small deviations from 100% when percentage values are rounded off.

The sample structure for this survey is presented in Figures 1 to 6.

Figure 1. Gender

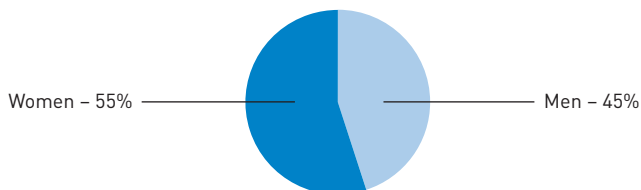


Figure 2. Age

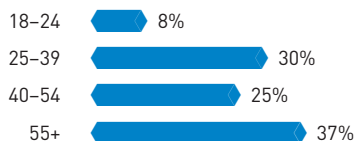
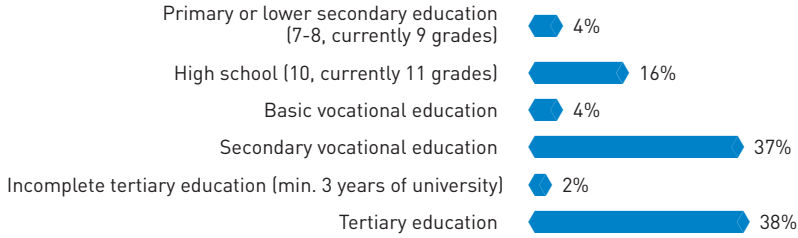
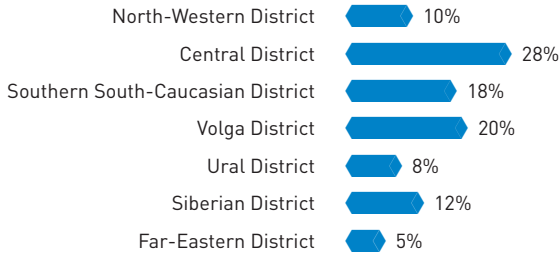
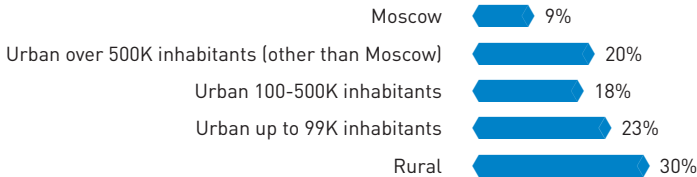
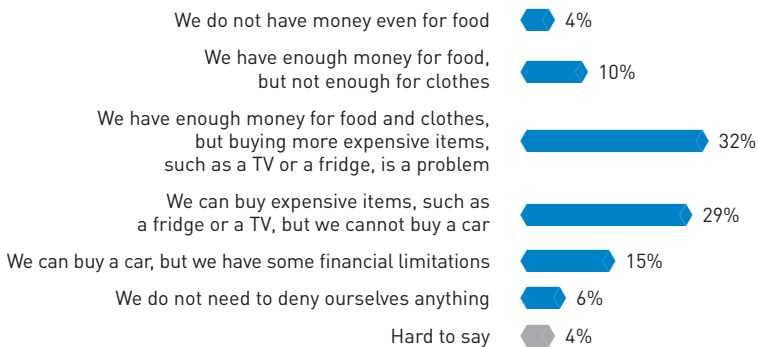


Figure 3. Education**Figure 4. Federal district of residence****Figure 5. Type and size of domicile****Figure 6. Financial status of the family**

Attitudes towards Russia among countries and nations

We first looked at how the Russian public see attitudes towards Russia displayed by other countries and peoples. The results show a traditional but historically evolving map of friendships and suspicions.

70% of respondents think that the leaders of Belarus have the most positive attitude towards Russia. This reflects the close relations between the two countries at the government level.

A good proportion of respondents give positive ratings for the attitude of the French (48%) and German authorities (47%) towards Russia. These countries are important economic partners of Russia, and are seen as more inclined to respect Russian interests in Europe.

A much less favourable attitude towards Russia is attributed to the UK authorities: 55% describe it as negative. This no doubt reflects a long history of difficult political relations and more recent tensions following accusations that Russian special services used chemical weapons in the UK against Alexander Litvinenko and Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia. The United Kingdom is seen as the country most

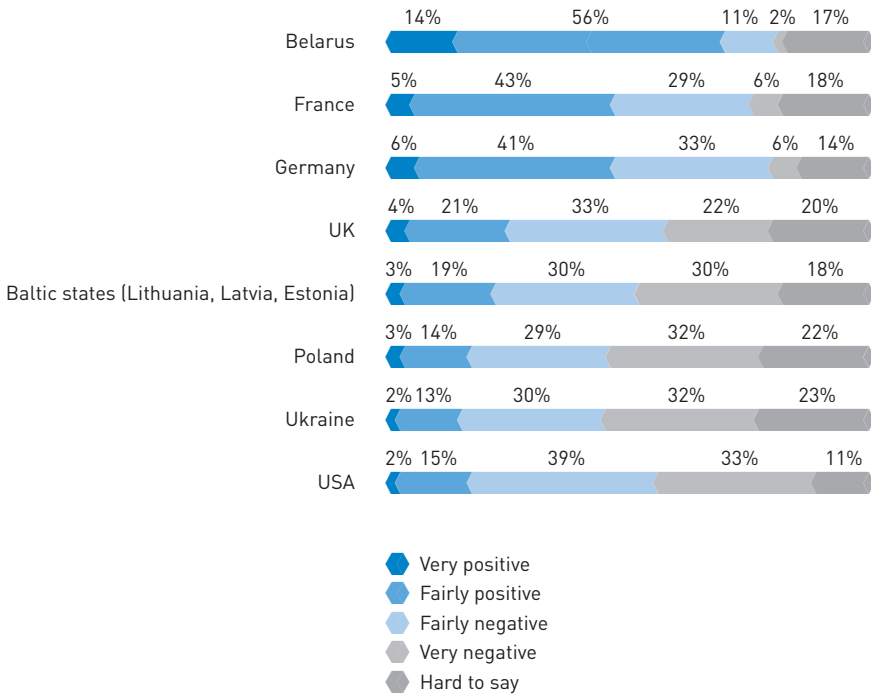
strongly opposing Russia's policy and interests, and more inclined to impose economic sanctions on Russia.

A similar picture emerges with the three Baltic states: 60% of respondents describe their attitude towards Russia as negative. These countries have become a certain symbol of liberation from Russian influences and do not get a good press in Russia.

Negative attitudes towards Russia are attributed to the Polish (61%) and Ukrainian (62%) authorities. Russians older than 55 were most critical of the attitudes displayed by the authorities of these countries: some 80% of them attribute a negative attitude to the authorities of Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic states. The youngest Russians are more positive: only some 30% of those aged 18–24 see those countries' authorities as negatively disposed towards Russia.

A clear majority of younger and older Russians (72%) ascribe to the government of the United States a negative attitude towards their country. This reflects strategic rivalries dating back to the Cold War.

Figure 7. Attitudes towards Russia displayed by authorities of various countries

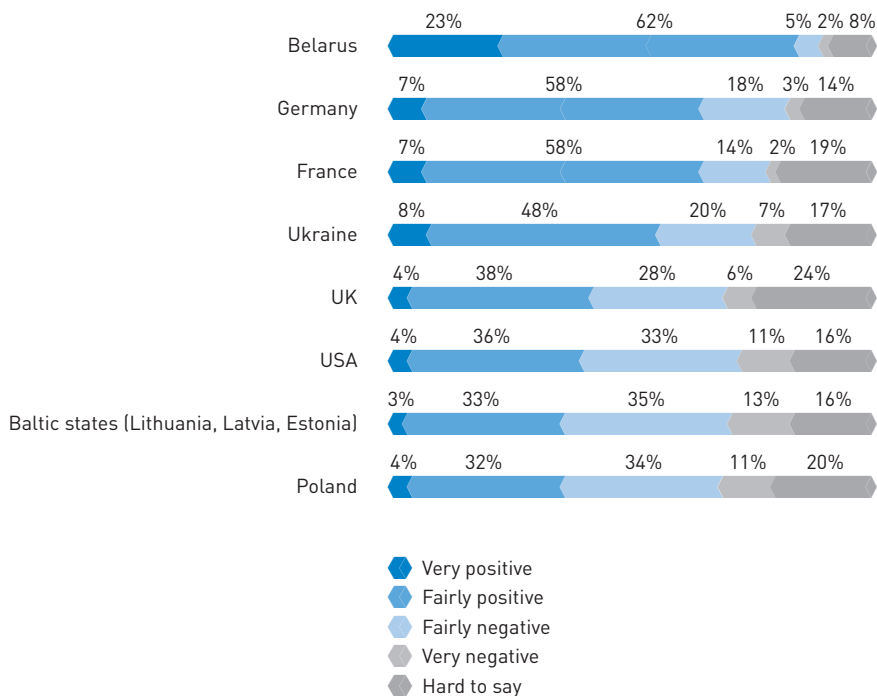


How do you see the attitude of the authorities of Ukraine / Belarus / Poland / the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) / UK / Germany / France / USA towards Russia?

Russians see the attitudes of different peoples towards Russia in a largely similar way. 85% of respondents describe Belarusians' attitude towards Russians as positive (85%). This reflects significant cultural similarities, the sizeable Russian-speaking population in Belarus, and close political and economic cooperation between the two countries. A majority of respondents (65%) also believe that citizens of Germany and France have a positive attitude towards Russia.

The most distinctive difference in how Russians see the views of authorities and citizens is with Ukraine. 56% of Russians believe that Ukrainians have a positive attitude towards Russia. This may reflect a belief in Russia that across Ukraine as a whole Ukrainians are culturally close to Russians, and don't share the hostile attitudes towards Russia and Russians displayed by people in Western areas of Ukraine.

Figure 8. Attitudes towards Russia displayed by inhabitants of various countries

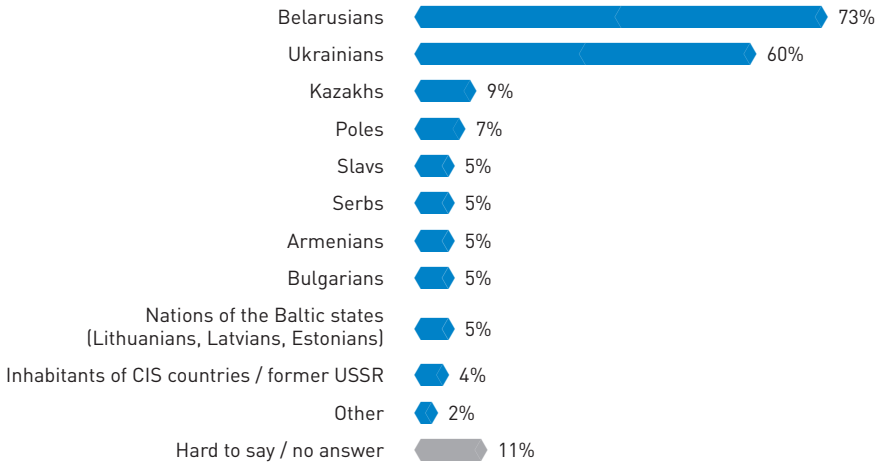


How do you see the attitude of the inhabitants of Ukraine / Belarus / Poland / the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) / UK / Germany / France / USA towards Russia?

Likewise with other countries, Russian distinguish national official attitudes and the attitudes of citizens: the latter are more likely to be described as positive. The score for the United Kingdom is 42%, with 40% for the USA.

Poles and citizens of the three Baltic states received the lowest (36%) positive mentions: Russians aged 55+ were the most critical.

Russian respondents see as broadly similar the attitudes of the Polish authorities and Polish people. This is an important finding of this study. In a similar survey conducted among Poles (*Poland-Russia. Social Diagnosis 2020*) and in other surveys in previous years, there was a clear difference between Poles' attitudes towards the Russian state (more critical) and the Russian people (more positive).

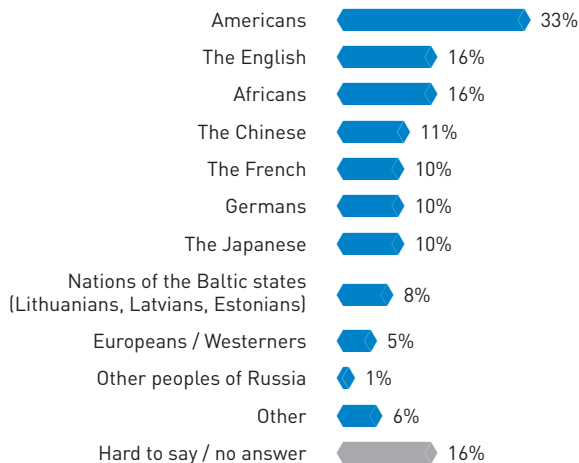
Figure 9. Nations closest to Russians in cultural terms

Which nations are closest to Russians in terms of culture and customs? (Open-ended question)

The Russian respondents see Belarusians (73%) and Ukrainians (60%) as the peoples by far the closest culturally to themselves. These Eastern Slav peoples mostly profess the Christian Orthodox religion, and were viewed as a “branch” of the Russian people by Russian elites in the 19th century. They also lived with Russians in the same country in the 19th and 20th centuries. Kazakhs are the next people seen as closest to Russians (albeit at only 9% of mentions); this reflects Russian awareness of a shared past in the Russian Empire and USSR,

and close political cooperation today between Russia and Kazakhstan. Lower ratings are given to Poles (7%), Serbs, Armenians, Bulgarians, inhabitants of the Baltic states (all 5%) and CIS countries in general (4%).

The “Slav factor” is interesting. This is more important for Russians than for Poles, who (as shown by the other surveys mentioned) feel that different nations as well as other Slavs are culturally close to themselves.

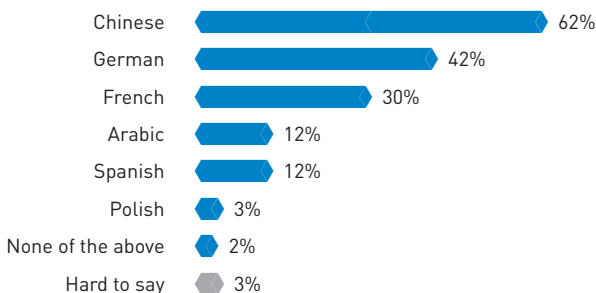
Figure 10. Nations most distant from Russians in cultural terms

Which nations are most distant from Russians in terms of culture and customs? (open-ended question)

When asked about nations furthest from Russians in cultural terms, respondents tended to mention Americans (33%) and then the English and Africans (16%), the Chinese (11%), the French, the Germans, the Japanese (10% each) and the Baltic peoples (8%).

Most Russians believe it's a good idea to learn Chinese (62%), no doubt reflecting the rapidly

growing global importance of China, and wider Russian / Chinese relations. Similar reasons are in play with German and French (42% and 30% respectively), the next two languages seen as worth learning. Arabic (12%) and Spanish (12%) are more valued than Polish (3%).

Figure 11. Languages worth learning (except for English)

Apart from English, which of the following languages are worth learning?

Knowledge and image of Poland

Many respondents (31%) had no spontaneous connotations / associations related to Poles.

Of those who did, the connotations of the words "Pole, Polish man / woman" are largely neutral. These words are associated with inhabitants of Poland (20%) or "normal people" (6%). Some references to dance and music appear (8%). The number of both positive and negative associations with "Pole, Polish man / woman" is low (5%). 3% of respondents associate Poles with culture.

After hearing the words "Pole, Polish man / woman", only 3% of respondents immediately think of their kinship / similarity with the Russian nation.

A small minority (3%) associate "Pole, Polish man / woman" with betrayal, venality or cowardice. This echoes 19th century stereotypes of 'disloyal' Poles, subsequently reinforced by a negative perception of Poland actively turning away from Russia after the Cold War ended.

The largest number of positive and negative connotations were reported by the oldest age group aged 55+. Younger people under 24 display the narrowest range of connotations and the most neutral associations (48% of mentions for "Poland, inhabitants of Poland").

Figure 12. Spontaneous connotations around the words "Pole, Polish man / woman"



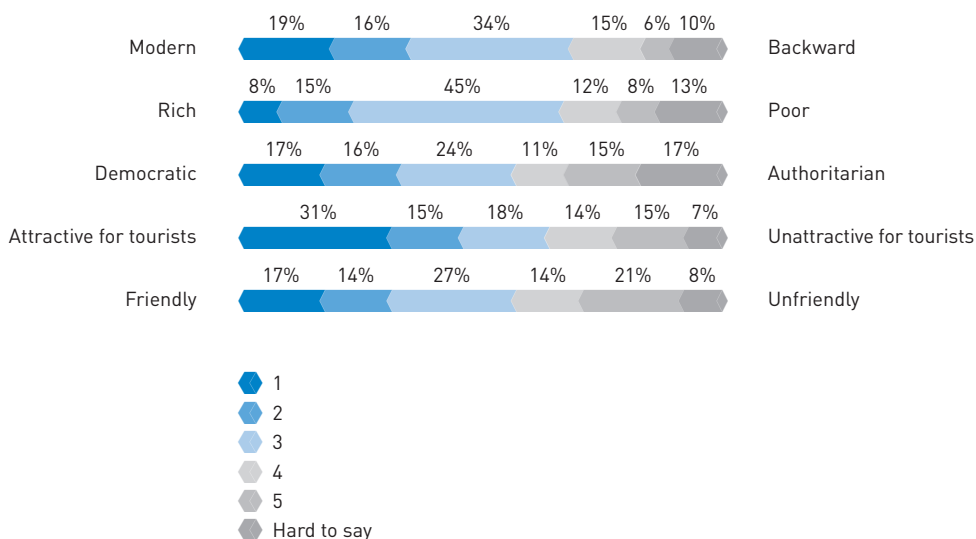
What connotations first come to your mind when you hear the words "Pole, Polish man / woman" (open-ended question)

The image of Poland among Russians was explored by offering the following contrasts:

- Modern / Backward
- Rich / Poor
- Democratic / Authoritarian
- Attractive for tourists / Unattractive for tourists
- Friendly / Unfriendly

More respondents described Poland as modern (35%) than backward (21%). 34% gave a non-committal answer.

Figure 13. Perception of Poland



Please rate Poland on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means modern and 5 means backward.

Please rate Poland on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means rich and 5 means poor.

Please rate Poland on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means democratic and 5 means authoritarian.

Please rate Poland on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means attractive for tourists and 5 means unattractive for tourists.

Please rate Poland on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means friendly and 5 means unfriendly.

23% of respondents think that Poland is a rich country; 20% describe it as poor. The largest group of respondents (45%) express no clear opinion.

Poland is seen as attractive for tourists by 46% of Russians. Notably fewer respondents (29%) think it is an unattractive destination. 18% give a neutral answer.

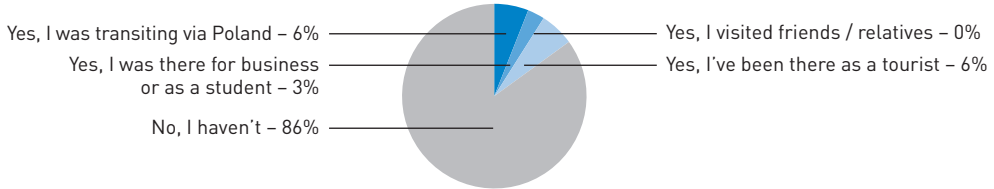
Russians have mixed views on the Polish political system. The largest share of respondents (33%) believe that Poland is a democratic country; 26% express the opposite opinion, seeing Poland as an authoritarian state. 24% of respondents have no clear opinion.

The question about Poland's friendliness provoked divided responses. 31% of respondents see Poland as a friendly country, but 35% think the opposite. 27% of responses are neutral.

Overall Poland is rated highest by the youngest group of Russian respondents (18–24 years) and most negatively by the oldest group (55+).

Majority of Russians have never visited Poland. 86% have not come to Poland in the past 30 years. Only 6% of respondents say they've visited Poland for tourism. 6% transited Poland during another trip.

Figure 14. Visiting Poland in the past 30 years

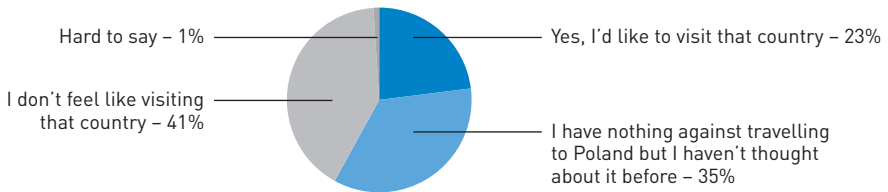


Have you been to Poland in the last 30 years?

23% of respondents say they'd like to visit Poland for tourism. 35% admit that they've not thought about it but wouldn't mind making such a trip. 41% of Russians surveyed aren't interested in

coming to Poland. This view is particularly prevalent among Russians aged 55+ (64% don't want to visit Poland).

Figure 15. Willingness to visit Poland for tourism

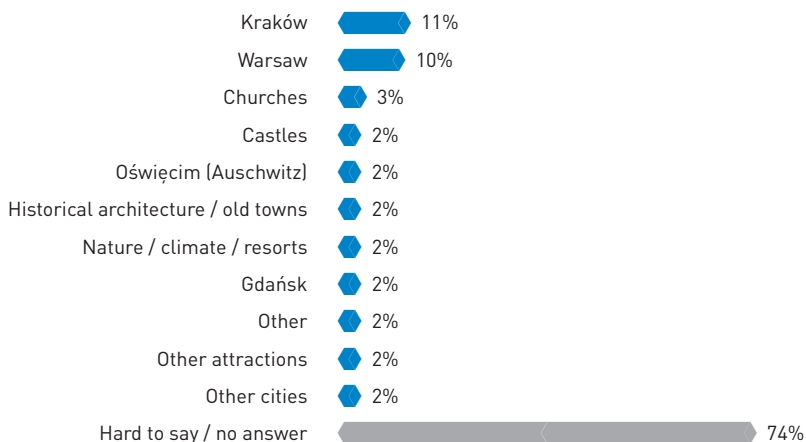


Would you like to go to Poland on a tourist trip?

For most Russians Poland is not a familiar tourist destination. 74% of the respondents can't name any Polish tourist attractions. Those who could do so mentioned Kraków (11%) and

Warsaw (10%). Some respondents mentioned churches, Oświęcim (Auschwitz), historic architecture or nature, or Gdańsk.

Figure 16. Awareness of tourist attractions in Poland

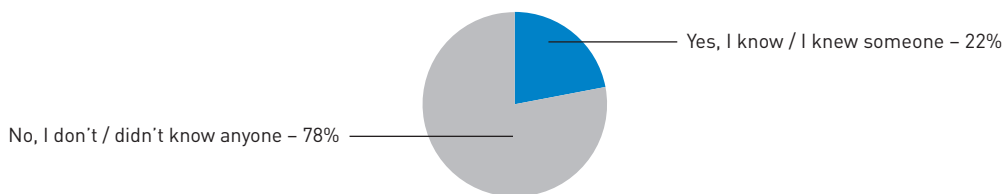


Could you please name any tourist attractions in Poland? (open-end question)

22% of respondents know or knew a Polish person personally. It was not made clear whether

these contacts took place in Soviet times or more recently.

Figure 17. Do you personally know a Polish person, or did you know one in the past?



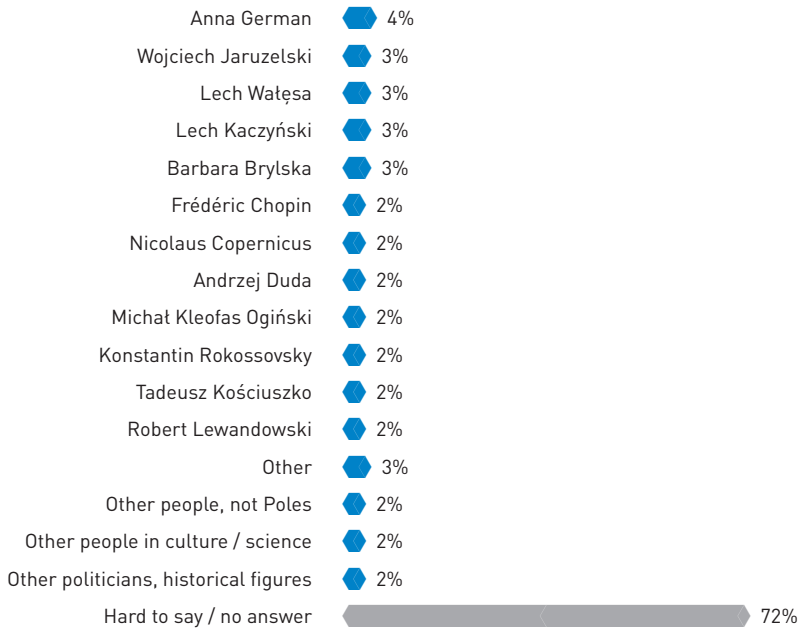
Do you personally know a Polish person or did you know one in the past?

Most respondents (72%) and particularly younger Russians up to 39 (85%) could not name any famous Poles.

Of the specific names mentioned, Anna German (a singer, composer and actress with close links to Russia) was highest with just 4%. Political leaders Wojciech Jaruzelski, Lech Wałęsa and

Lech Kaczyński each got 3%, as did Barbara Brylska, an actress popular in the former Eastern Bloc. Other Poles mentioned included Frédéric Chopin, Nicolaus Copernicus, Poland's current President Andrzej Duda, Michał Kleofas Ogiński, Konstantin Rokossovsky, Tadeusz Kościuszko and Robert Lewandowski (all with 2%).

Figure 18. Famous Poles



Please name famous Polish people that you know.

The Russian respondents drew their knowledge of Poland from television (62%) or the Internet (45%). Books and films about Poland are read / watched by 13% of respondents; 12% get information from other media. Friends in Poland are a source of knowledge for 6%.

The same holds true for schools, textbooks and books by Polish writers. Information from family and relatives were noted by 3% of respondents. Visits to Poland were mentioned by 2%. 1% got their information from family members living in Poland.

Figure 19. Sources of information about Poland



Where do you get information about Poland from?

Political and cultural relations

The survey asked Russians why they think Poland supports Ukraine in its conflict with Russia.

The most commonly mentioned reasons include bad relations between Poland and Russia (22%) and the idea that Poland uses its relations

with Ukraine to build its power (22%). 16% of respondents believe Poland supports Ukraine in building democracy. Some answers mentioned the influence of the United States and European Union (7%). 30% of the respondents did not have a firm opinion.

Figure 20. Reasons for Poland supporting Ukraine in the conflict with Russia

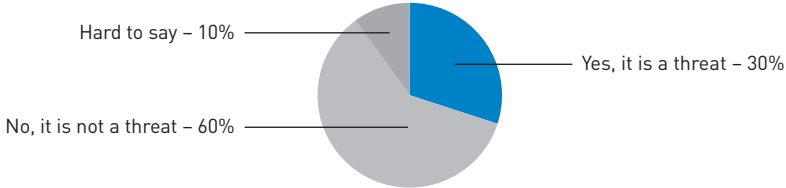


The Polish public supports Ukraine both in its conflict with Russia and in Ukraine's integration with the European Union. Why do you think Poland supports Ukraine in this way? (open-end question)

Most Russians have opinions on whether Poland's support for Ukraine is a threat. A clear majority of Russians (60%) don't see Poland's

support for Ukraine as a threat to Russia. 30% think it is a threat. 10% of respondents can't say one way or the other.

Figure 21. Does Poland's support for Ukraine pose a threat to Russia?



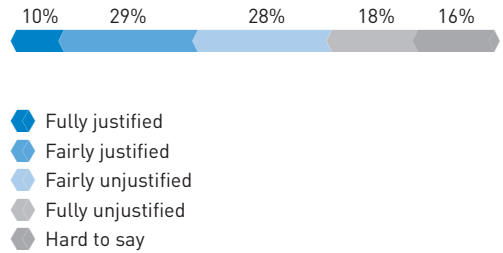
Does Poland's support for Ukraine in its conflict with Russia pose a threat to Russia?

The survey examined how Russians see allegations made by Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko that Poland intends to capture western Belarus by force.

39% of respondents see such accusations as justified (mainly those aged 55+: every second person in this age group agrees). However, more respondents believe the opposite: 46% think that it's unjustified to accuse Poland in this way. This is particularly the case for the youngest respondents: 76% of those aged 18-24 share this view. 16% of respondents have no firm opinion.

39% of respondents see such accusations as justified (mainly those aged 55+: every second

Figure 22. Accusing Poland of intending to capture part of Belarus



Alexander Lukashenko has accused Poland of intending to capture western Belarus by force. Do you think this accusation is justified?

A strong majority of Russians believe that their country should develop cultural and social cooperation with Poland.

36% believe that such cooperation should occur without restrictions, as the best way for neighbours to learn each other's views (this opinion emphasised by people with tertiary education: 50%).

However, almost the same number of respondents (35%) believe that both countries should cooperate but only in limited ways (mostly young

people: this opinion was expressed by every second person aged 18–24). This reflects concern that the Polish authorities will use this situation "to the detriment of Russian interests."

18% of respondents believe that the two countries should not cooperate, because "breaking contacts is the best way to ensure Russia's security in a situation of political and informational confrontation." This view is mainly shared by people with primary or secondary education. 11% of respondents have no clear opinion here.

Figure 23. Should Russia develop cultural and social cooperation with Poland?



Should Russia develop cultural and social cooperation with Poland, regardless of existing political differences? If so, to what extent?

Summary

The Russian respondents of this survey believe that the authorities of the Baltic countries (60%), Poland (61%) and Ukraine (62%) display a negative attitude towards Russia.

In the case of Poland, many Russians see negative attitudes of the Polish authorities towards Russia aligned with negative attitudes of ordinary Poles (45% of Russians think ordinary Poles are negatively predisposed towards them).

Younger Russians show fewer fixed preconceptions towards the authorities and citizens of Ukraine, Poland or the Baltic countries. They're open to other cultures and nations (including Russia's strategic rival the United States).

By contrast Russians aged 55+ usually hold a negative opinion of both authorities and citizens of Poland and the Baltic countries. They do have a positive attitude towards citizens of Ukraine but with a negative attitude towards the Ukrainian authorities.

Despite the geographical and historical proximity of Russia and Poland, Russian respondents are largely uninformed about Poland: for one in three Russians the words "Pole, Polish man / woman" have no connotations. Up to 75% of Russians can't identify any tourist attractions in Poland or famous Poles. 86% of Russians have not visited Poland in the past 30 years, and 76% don't know any Polish person.

Most Russians are open to visiting Poland for tourism (23% of respondents would like to visit Poland, and 35% have not thought about it but have nothing against it).

The (relatively few) respondents who do know tourist attractions in Poland mentioned Kraków

(11%) and Warsaw (10%). Over 70% of Russians can't name any famous Pole, which shows that Polish culture and history are little known in contemporary Russia. Those famous Poles mentioned by respondents included political figures (Wojciech Jaruzelski, Lech Wałęsa and Lech Kaczyński (but with only 3% each), or cultural personalities whose careers peaked during the Soviet period: Anna German (4%) and Barbara Brylska (3%). Names of contemporary figures are missing.

The Russians who do report some connotations / associations linked to Poles describe them in a neutral way. Only 5% of respondents have specific negative or positive associations. The image of Poland is ambiguous: Poland is viewed as attractive for tourists and as modern, democratic and friendly, but clear negative views are also evident. Younger Russians tend to have positive opinions about Poland, with older Russians more inclined to the negative.

Despite Russians' limited knowledge and polarised opinions about Poland, most Russians (71%) believe that the two countries should build cultural and social cooperation. A half of the respondents with a view on this think believe that such cooperation should not be restricted since it's the best way to a neighbour's perspective. A similar number are more cautious, favouring only limited cooperation lest Poland exploit the situation to the detriment of Russian interests.

This emerging picture of popular Russian attitudes towards Poland shows that there is great potential for improving Russians' modest and outdated knowledge of Poland, especially through culture, social life and tourism.

Notes

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This research gives an insight into the thinking of the Russian public without 'filtering' by the media or politicians. The answers given by the Russian respondents of course reflect media and official messages in different ways. However, the image of Poland and Poles emerging from these Russian responses is in softer or subtler tones than Russian official statements convey. Differences between generations deserve special attention and investigation: younger Russians evince

a much more open and trusting attitude towards the world in general and Poland in particular than their parents or grandparents. The study shows that the average Russian has very limited knowledge about Poland, its culture, personalities and interesting places to visit. Despite the decades since the fall of communism, Russians still have a largely Soviet-era sense of Poland. Presenting the achievements of today's Poland, especially to the younger Russians, has great potential.



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Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding

14/16A Jasna Street, 00-041 Warsaw

tel.: + 48 22 295 00 30, fax + 48 22 295 00 31

e-mail: cprdip@cprdip.pl, www.cprdip.pl