



Both Russian and American Publics Sense a Transatlantic Rift

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Building over the last few years, disputes between the United States and Europe over trade, climate change, and nuclear weapons were on full display at the annual Munich Security Conference last month. Russian leaders have tried to exploit these strains between the United States and its allies. In Munich, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov of Russia suggested that the European Union and Russia build a “shared European home.”¹ Sidelining the United States through deepened ties with Europe has long been a strategy of the Kremlin to weaken the West’s united front against Russia’s regional and international aggression.²

Findings from a new US-Russia binational survey, conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Levada Analytical Center, reveal that publics in both countries have noticed cracks in the US-EU relationship.³ While Americans have long expressed support for NATO, a majority say that unity among NATO allies is weakening. At the same time, Russians’ impressions that transatlantic security links are weakening contribute to their sense that the United States is now in a weaker global position.

¹ “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions at the Munich Security Conference, Munich, February 16, 2019,” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, http://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/3520272.

² Dina Smeltz, Lily Wojtowicz, Denis Volkov, and Stepan Goncharov, “US-Russia Experts Paint a Dim Picture of Bilateral Relations Before Summit,” July 2018, https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/report_us-russian-experts-bilateral-relations_180712.pdf.

³ This brief is based on coordinated surveys conducted by Dina Smeltz and Lily Wojtowicz of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and Denis Volkov and Stepan Goncharov of the Levada Analytical Center in Moscow. The joint project on US-Russian public opinion about foreign policy issues was generously funded by the Carnegie Corporation.

Americans View the European Union as a Partner but Sense Discord

In reaction to rising transatlantic disagreements, some European leaders have signaled that Europe should work towards greater self-reliance. After a 2017 G7 summit in Italy—characterized by sharp differences between President Donald Trump and other G7 and European leaders—Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany said that Europe “must fight for our future on our own, for our destiny as Europeans.”⁴ More recently, President Emmanuel Macron of France has advocated for a “true European army” to give Europeans greater independence from the United States, a move also endorsed by Merkel.⁵

Public opinion in both the United States and Russia has registered these strains. A Council poll conducted in February found that nearly one in two Americans think that relations with the European Union are worsening (46%). A similar proportion says that relations with Russia (50%) and China (47%, plurality) are deteriorating. Still, Americans clearly view Europe as more of a partner (78%) than a rival (18%).

Americans are not alone in sensing transatlantic fissures. European publics also express a declining confidence in US international leadership. A Pew survey conducted last spring found scant confidence in President Trump to provide international leadership. Only 28 percent in the United Kingdom, 10 percent in Germany, and 9 percent in France were confident in the US president to do the right thing regarding world affairs. In fact, more in France and Germany expressed confidence in Putin’s leadership than in Trump’s.⁶

More Russians Consider the European Union a Rival than Partner

Russia’s involvement in the crisis in Ukraine, interference in European elections, and poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in the United Kingdom in 2018 have done much to isolate Russia politically from its Western neighbors. Even though Levada polling has found that Russians reject the Western narrative on these events, Russians do not see Lavrov’s dream of a “European home” happening any time soon.

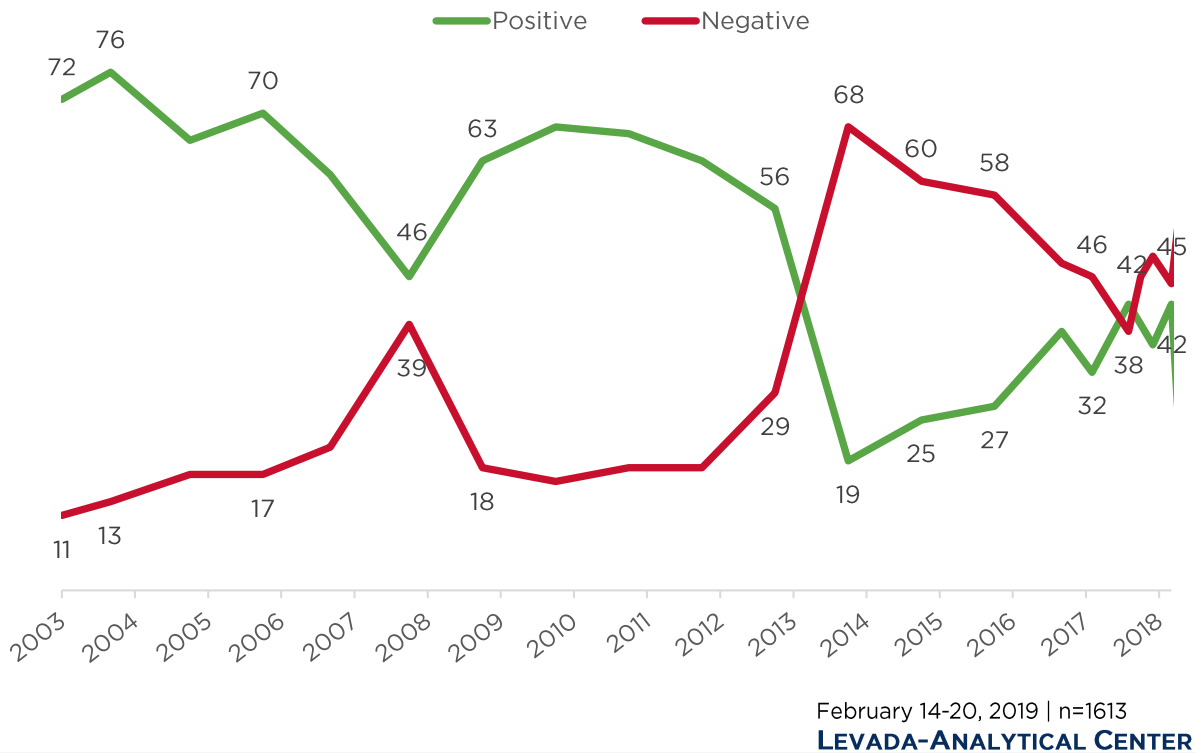
⁴ Jon Henley, “Angela Merkel: EU Cannot Completely Rely on US and Britain Any More,” *The Guardian*, May 28, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/28/merkel-says-eu-cannot-completely-rely-on-us-and-britain-any-more-g7-talks>.

⁵ Stacy Meichtry and Laurence Norman, “France’s Macron Calls for Creating a ‘European Army,’” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/frances-macron-calls-for-creating-a-european-army-1541528803> and Maia de la Baume and David M. Herszenhorn, “Merkel Joins Macron in Calling for EU Army to Complement NATO,” *Politico*, November 11, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-emmanuel-macron-eu-army-to-complement-nato/>

⁶ The Pew surveys also found that overall favorability towards the United States decreased between 15 and 35 percentage points in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom; see: Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes, Jacob Poushter, Laura Silver, Janell Fetterolf and Kat Devlin, “Trump’s International Ratings Remain Low, Especially Among Key Allies,” Pew Research Center, October 1, 2018, <https://www.pewglobal.org/2018/10/01/trumps-international-ratings-remain-low-especially-among-key-allies/#interactive>

Russian View of the European Union

What is your general attitude towards the European Union?

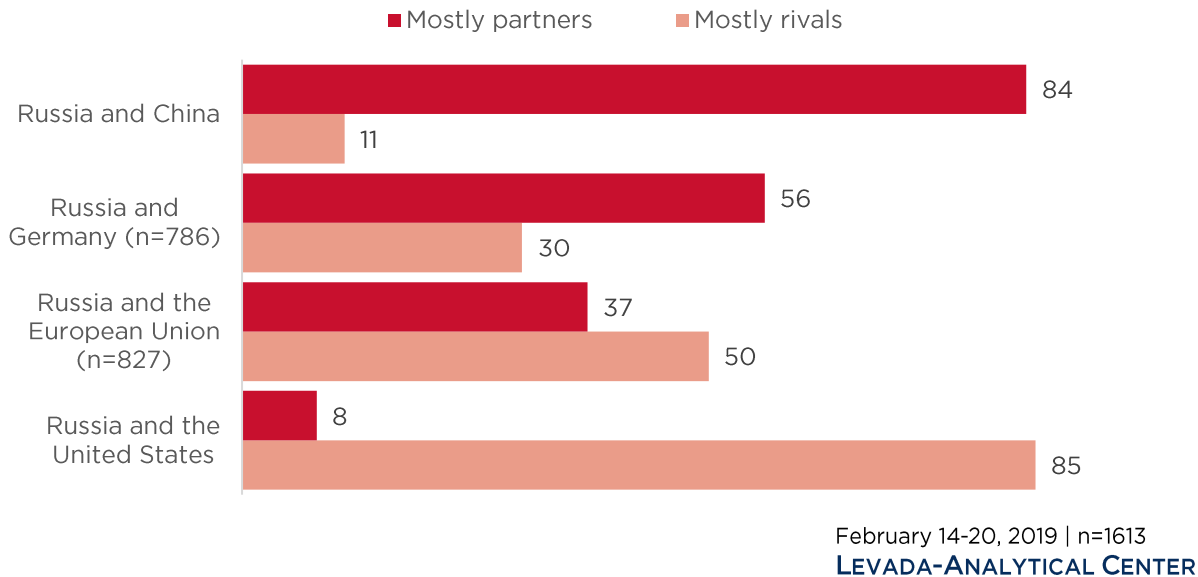


As many Russians view the European Union negatively (45%) as positively (42%).⁷ While more positive than the low point of 19 percent in 2014—a reaction to European sanctions against Russia for annexing Crimea—these readings are still a far cry from the positive majorities for most of the period before 2012. The last major dip in positive sentiment towards the European Union was a reaction to European reactions to the Russia-Georgia conflict in 2008.

⁷ “Otnoshenie k Stranam,” Levada Analytical Center, March 20, 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/2019/03/20/otnoshenie-k-stranam-3/>.

The View from Russia: Rivals or Partners?

At present, are the following countries mostly rivals or mostly partners? (%)



Today, Russians more decisively consider the European Union to be Russia’s rival (50%) than a partner (37%). Perhaps reflecting Germany’s efforts to ensure that Russia’s Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline—which would channel Russian gas into Europe—is completed, the majority of Russians think that Germany is more a partner (56%) than a rival (30%).⁸ Younger Russians—between the age of 18 and 29—are more likely to view the European Union as a partner (46% vs. 43% rival) than those age 30 and over.

At present, are the following countries mostly rivals or mostly partners? The European Union				
	Age 18-29 (%)	Age 30-44 (%)	Age 45-59 (%)	Age 60+ (%)
Mostly rivals	43	51	55	49
Mostly partners	46	35	34	38

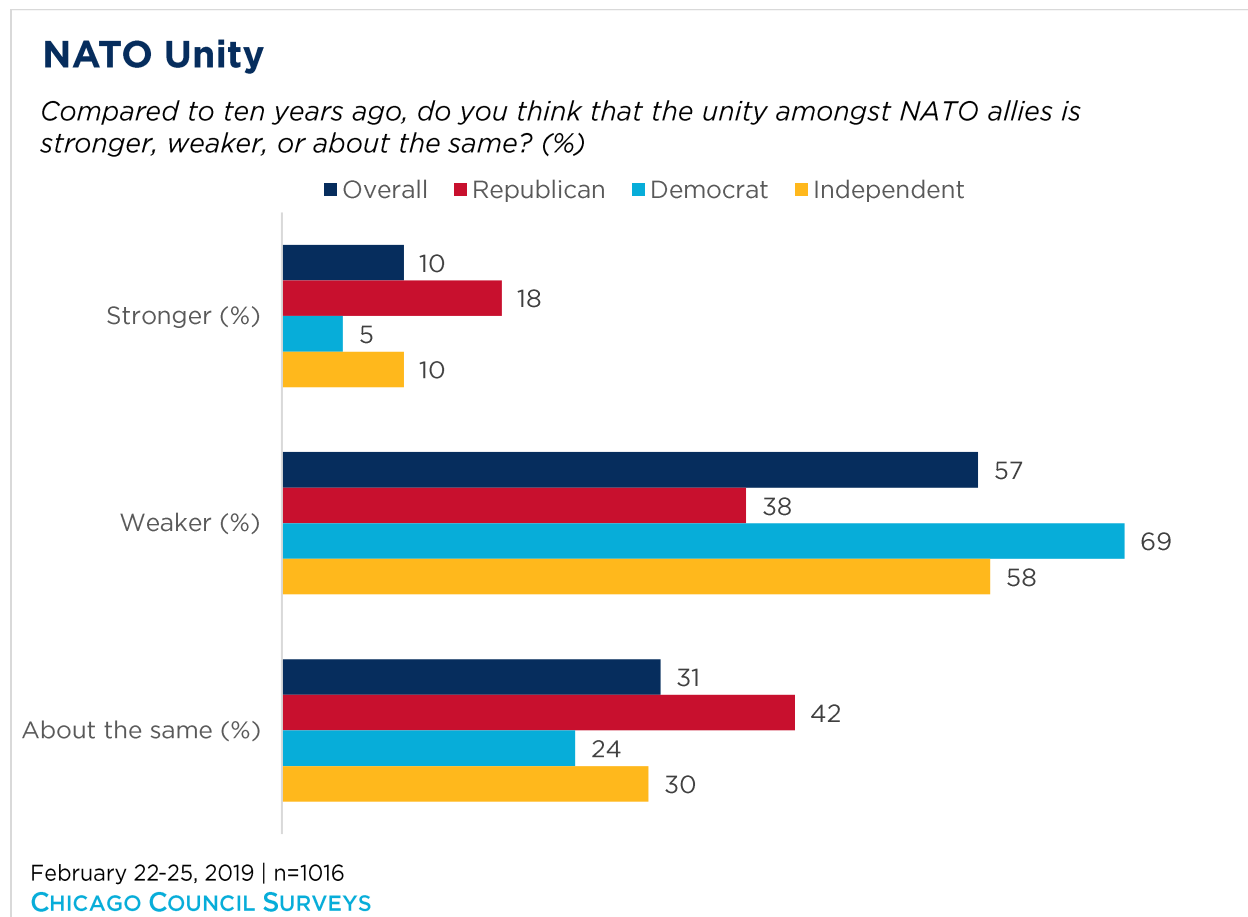
February 14-20, 2019 | n=1613
LEVADA-ANALYTICAL CENTER

Cracks in NATO Unity

The Council-Levada survey results show that a majority of Americans (57%) and a plurality of Russians (40%) believe that unity among NATO allies is weaker today

⁸ Anca Gurzu, “France and Germany split over Nord Stream 2 pipeline,” *Politico*, February 7, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-and-germany-split-over-nord-stream-2-pipeline-russian-gas-regulation/>.

than it was ten years ago. About three in ten among both publics say unity is about the same (31% Americans, 33% Russians); one in ten say it is stronger (10% Americans, 11% Russians). In the United States, these views have a partisan tinge. Democrats and independents are more likely to describe NATO unity as weaker today (69% Democrats, 58% independents). Republicans are divided between those who think NATO unity has remained the same (42%) and those who think it is weaker (38%).



Still, past Chicago Council Surveys show that the American public has consistently supported the NATO alliance. In 2018, three in four Americans favored maintaining or increasing the US commitment to NATO; in fact, a higher percentage of Americans favored increasing the US commitment to NATO than in any previous Council poll since 1974.

Among Russians, the overt tensions between the Trump administration and European leaders contribute to a sense that the United States is in a weaker global position. The plurality of Russians who say that unity among NATO members is weaker now are more likely than others to say that the United States is respected less in the world (61% vs. 44% who believe NATO unity is stronger). They are also less likely to consider the United States a rising military power (63% vs. 76% among those who believe NATO unity is stronger).

Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from a joint Chicago Council-Levada Analytical Center survey on Russian and American Attitudes conducted in February 2019.

The US survey was conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs using their national online omnibus service, KnowledgePanel™, between February 22-25, 2019 among a weighted national sample of 1,016 American adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error is ±3 percentage points.

The Russia survey was conducted between February 14-20, 2019 by the Levada-Center (Levada Analytical Center) with face-to-face interviews conducted among a representative sample of 1,613 persons aged 18 years and older, living in eight federal districts of the Russian Federation. Inside each district, the sample is distributed among five strata of settlements proportionally to the number of population living in them, 18 years of age or older. The margin of error is ±3.4 percentage points.

The 2019 and 2017 Chicago Council-Levada Analytical Center Joint Surveys on Russian and American Attitudes are made possible by the generous support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan organization that provides insight – and influences the public discourse – on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices and conduct independent research to bring clarity and offer solutions to challenges and opportunities across the globe. Ranked [No. 1 Think Tank to Watch](#) worldwide, the Council on Global Affairs is committed to engaging the public and raising global awareness of issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business and governments engage the world. Learn more at thechicagocouncil.org and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](#).

About the Levada-Center

The Levada-Center is one of the leading research organizations in Russia that conducts public opinion surveys, expert and elite surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and other survey methods. The Center brings together experts in the fields of sociology, political science, economics, psychology, market research, and public opinion polls. The Center's research and experts have been cited in national and international media such as *Kommersant*, *Vedomosti*, *RBC*, *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Reuters*, *BBC Radio*, *Radio Liberty*, and others. Learn more at levada.ru and follow [@levada_ru](#) or on [Facebook](#).

Appendix 1: US Topline*

Q. In your opinion, are relations of the U.S. with the following countries improving, worsening or staying about the same?

Russia

	Improving (%)	Worsening (%)	Staying about the same (%)	NR (%)
Overall	10	50	38	2
Republican	20	31	49	<0
Democrat	5	62	31	1
Independent	9	50	38	3

China

	Improving (%)	Worsening (%)	Staying about the same (%)	NR (%)
Overall	18	47	33	2
Republican	39	26	35	-
Democrat	6	64	28	1
Independent	15	44	38	3

The European Union as a whole

	Improving (%)	Worsening (%)	Staying about the same (%)	NR (%)
Overall	12	46	40	2
Republican	26	20	54	-
Democrat	4	64	31	1
Independent	10	47	40	3

Q. At present, are the following countries mostly rivals or mostly partners?

The United States and Russia

	Mostly rivals (%)	Mostly partners (%)	NR (%)
Overall	78	18	4
Republican	73	24	3
Democrat	83	14	3

* Due to rounding, totals may not add up to 100%; for Republicans n=237, Democrats n=338, and independents n=372.

Independent	77	18	5
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The United States and China

	Mostly rivals (%)	Mostly partners (%)	NR (%)
Overall	63	32	4
Republican	65	32	3
Democrat	64	33	3
Independent	61	34	5

The United States and the European Union

	Mostly rivals (%)	Mostly partners (%)	NR (%)
Overall	19	77	4
Republican	14	83	3
Democrat	22	74	4
Independent	20	76	4

Q. Compared to ten years ago, do you think that the unity amongst NATO allies is stronger, weaker, or about the same?

	Stronger (%)	Weaker (%)	About the same (%)	NR (%)
Overall	10	57	31	3
Republican	18	38	42	2
Democrat	5	69	24	2
Independent	10	58	30	2

Appendix 2: Russian Topline*

Q. At present, are the following countries mostly rivals or mostly partners?

Russia and the United States

	Mostly rivals (%)	Mostly partners (%)	NR (%)
Overall	85	8	7
Approve of Putin	85	8	7
Do not approve of Putin	86	8	7

Russia and China

	Mostly rivals (%)	Mostly partners (%)	NR (%)
Overall	11	84	5
Approve of Putin	10	86	4
Do not approve of Putin	14	79	7

Russia and the European Union (split with question below, n=827)

	Mostly rivals (%)	Mostly partners (%)	NR (%)
Overall	50	37	13
Approve of Putin	48	40	12
Do not approve of Putin	55	32	13

Russia and Germany (split with question above, n=786)

	Mostly rivals (%)	Mostly partners (%)	NR (%)
Overall	30	56	14
Approve of Putin	28	61	11
Do not approve of Putin	33	48	19

Q. Compared to ten years ago, do you think that the unity amongst NATO allies is stronger, weaker, or about the same?

	Stronger (%)	Weaker (%)	About the same (%)	NR (%)
Overall	11	40	33	16
Approve of Putin	10	42	32	17
Do not approve of Putin	13	38	34	15

* Due to rounding, totals may not add up to 100%; Russians were asked “All-in-all, do you approve of the job Vladimir Putin is doing as President of Russia?” for those who approve of Putin n=1037, for those who do not approve n=564.