

Social issues in the perception of the Russian population (Public Opinion Polls by the Levada Center)

Perception of the most urgent problems of the country, the own material situation and social inequality as well as the inclination to protest against worsening living standards

The Levada Center has been conducting omnibus surveys of the Russian population on a regular basis. This data collection includes five questions (plus standard demographic data) from all surveys conducted from January 1995 to February 2021. The questions concern the perception of the most urgent problems of the country, the own material situation of the respondents and the social inequality in the country as well as the inclination to protest against worsening living standards.

This documentation of data collection documents the questions included in the dataset and provides information about the random-sample questionnaire-based nationally representative polls conducted as omnibus surveys. The original data files are in Russian, but the files “cur_exp-values+labels.xlsx” and “monitoring-values+labels.xlsx” offer translations into English of all questions and answer options.

Included in this data collection are two types of omnibus surveys: “Courier” (file “cur_exp.sav”) and “Monitoring” (file “monitoring.sav”). The SPSS files (.sav) are the original files provided by the Levada Center. They have been exported into the .csv format, using R software. The content of the respective csv-file should be identical with the original sav-file.

The data presented in this dataset have been compiled by the Levada Center. They have been provided to the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen in support of a research project conducted within the Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) 1342 “Global Dynamics of Social Policy”. This dataset has been documented and used for analysis in the context of the CRC by Subproject B06 “External reform models and internal debates on the new conceptualization of social policy in the post-Soviet region”. The Levada Center has agreed to the open access publication (non-commercial use) of the data collection.

Questions included

The design of the surveys is described below.

The dataset contains the following questions:

- Which of the following problems of our society alarm you most and which do you consider to be the most pressing? - multiple answers possible, in the original: КАКИЕ ИЗ СЛЕДУЮЩИХ ПРОБЛЕМ НАШЕГО ОБЩЕСТВА ТРЕВОЖАТ ВАС БОЛЬШЕ ВСЕГО, И ВЫ СЧИТАЕТЕ ИХ САМЫМИ ОСТРЫМИ? (Courier = q1, Monitoring = q31)
- Did the distribution of material wealth become more/less just over the previous year? - free translation, in the original: КАКИМ ОБРАЗОМ, ИЗМЕНИЛАСЬ СПРАВЕДЛИВОСТЬ В РАСПРЕДЕЛЕНИИ МАТЕРИАЛЬНЫХ БЛАГ В ТЕЧЕНИЕ ПРОШЕДШЕГО ГОДА? (Courier = q2)
- How did the material well-being of your family change over the last year (Courier version) / over the last 6 months (Monitoring version) – in the original: КАК ИЗМЕНИЛОСЬ МАТЕРИАЛЬНОЕ ПОЛОЖЕНИЕ ВАШЕЙ СЕМЬИ ЗА ПОСЛЕДНИЙ ГОД? (Courier = q3) / ЗА ПОСЛЕДНИЕ ПОЛГОДА? (Monitoring = L15)

- How likely are mass protests against declining living standards in your city / county district? – in the original: НАСКОЛЬКО ВОЗМОЖНЫ СЕЙЧАС В ВАШЕМ ГОРОДЕ/СЕЛЬСКОМ РАЙОНЕ МАССОВЫЕ ВЫСТУПЛЕНИЯ НАСЕЛЕНИЯ ПРОТИВ ПАДЕНИЯ УРОВНЯ ЖИЗНИ? (Courier = q4, Monitoring = q32)
- If such a protest event takes place, will you personally join or not? – in the original: ЕСЛИ ТАКОГО РОДА МИТИНГИ, ДЕМОНСТРАЦИИ ПРОТЕСТА СОСТОЯТСЯ, ВЫ ЛИЧНО ПРИМЕТЕ В НИХ УЧАСТИЕ, ИЛИ НЕТ? (Monitoring = q33)

In addition, the dataset includes standard demographic data for all respondents: gender (Courier = q5, Monitoring = q1), age (Courier = q6, Monitoring = q2), education (Courier = q7, Monitoring = q3), marital status (Courier = q8, Monitoring = q4), profession (Courier = q9, Monitoring = 01), material situation of the own family (Courier = q10, Monitoring = q14+qL33), place of living - number of inhabitants (Courier = q11, Monitoring = RNP), place of living - mega-region/federalny okrug (Courier = q12, Monitoring = FO).

The dataset includes the “Courier” omnibus survey from January 1995 to February 2021. It has been conducted monthly. In the data file the date for each survey is indicated in the form YYYYcurMM (e.g., 1995cur01 for the survey conducted in January 1995). The “Monitoring” survey is included from April 1995 to June 2008. In most years, it has been conducted every second month (usually the months with uneven numbers). In the data file the “Monitoring” surveys are numbered consecutively from 1 to 88. The table below indicates the date for each survey in the form YY-m-M (e.g., 2008-m-3 for the survey conducted in March 2008).

Dates for all “Monitoring” surveys (format: YY-m-M)

1 '94-m-4'	19 '97-m-1'	37 '2000-m-1'	55 '2002-m-11'	73 '2005-m-11'
2 '94-m-5'	20 '97-m-3'	38 '2000-m-3'	56 '2003-m-1'	74 '2006-m-1'
3 '94-m-6'	21 '97-m-5'	39 '2000-m-5'	57 '2003-m-3'	75 '2006-m-3'
4 '94-m-7'	22 '97-m-7'	40 '2000-m-7'	58 '2003-m-5'	76 '2006-m-5'
5 '94-m-9'	23 '97-m-9'	41 '2000-m-9'	59 '2003-m-7'	77 '2006-m-7'
6 '94-m-8' [=11]	24 '97-m-11'	42 '2000-m-11'	60 '2003-m-9'	78 '2006-m-9'
7 '95-m-1'	25 '98-m-1'	43 '2001-m-1'	61 '2003-m-11'	79 '2006-m-11'
8 '95-m-3'	26 '98-m-3'	44 '2001-m-3'	62 '2004-m-1'	80 '2007-m-1'
9 '95-m-5'	27 '98-m-5'	45 '2001-m-5'	63 '2004-m-3'	81 '2007-m-3'
10 '95-m-7'	28 '98-m-7'	46 '2001-m-7'	64 '2004-m-5'	82 '2007-m-5'
11 '95-m-9'	29 '98-m-9'	47 '2001-m-9'	65 '2004-m-7'	83 '2007-m-7'
12 '95-m-11'	30 '98-m-11'	48 '2001-m-10'	66 '2004-m-9'	84 '2007-m-9'
13 '96-m-1'	31 '99-m-1'	49 '2001-m-11'	67 '2004-m-11'	85 '2007-m-11'
14 '96-m-3'	32 '99-m-3'	50 '2002-m-1'	68 '2005-m-1'	86 '2008-m-1'
15 '96-m-5'	33 '99-m-5'	51 '2002-m-3'	69 '2005-m-3'	87 '2008-m-3'
16 '96-m-7'	34 '99-m-7'	52 '2002-m-5'	70 '2005-m-5'	88 '2008-m-6'
17 '96-m-9'	35 '99-m-9'	53 '2002-m-7'	71 '2005-m-7'	
18 '96-m-11'	36 '99-m-11'	54 '2002-m-9'	72 '2005-m-9'	

IMPORTANT NOTE: The data files contain all individual survey rounds which have been conducted. If any of the questions included in this data collection has not been asked in the respective round, the data file shows missing values. That means a missing value always indicates that the respective question has not been asked.

The Levada-Center

The Levada-Center (<https://www.levada.ru/en/about-us/>) began to take shape in 1987 as All-Union Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM) of the Soviet Union. It conducted its first country-wide representative opinion poll in 1988.

In August 2003, the Ministry of Property Relations of the Russian Federation adopted a decision to change the status of the Center, resulting in a change of the Center's management. The research team rejected the changes and left the organisation to create a new independent pollster called "Analytical Service Polls" VTsIOM-A". However, usage of the new name was forbidden by court order, so the organization continued to operate under the name "Yuri Levada Analytical Center" (Levada-Center).

Opinion polls conducted by the Levada Center follow the principles of WAPOR (World Association for Public Opinion) and ESOMAR (European Society for Opinion and Market Research). Senior staff of the Center have been trained in the USA and Western Europe.

The omnibus surveys of the Levada-Center

The Levada Center holds monthly omnibus surveys. The omnibus survey is based on the nationwide, multi-stage, stratified and probability sample that represents the adult population of Russia over 18 years of age. For the "Courier" Survey the number of respondents amounts to 1,600; for the "Monitoring" Surveys the respective number was 2,500. The statistical error of both surveys does not exceed 3.4%.

The omnibus survey covers the entire adult population of Russia excluding the following categories:

- a) persons doing their military service by conscription (around 0.8% of the total adult population)
- b) persons under imprisonment before trial or already convicted (around 0.6% of the total adult population);
- c) persons living in remote or difficult to access regions of Far North (around 1.8% of the total adult population);
- d) persons residing in rural settlements with not more than 50 inhabitants (around 0.8% of the total adult population);
- e) persons with mental illnesses constantly living in psycho-neurological hospitals (about 1.2% of the total adult population).

Additionally, homeless people are also not included in the sample (about 1.5% of the total adult population). Consequently, around 6.7% of Russia's total adult population are excluded from this survey.

The omnibus survey is conducted in the form of face-to-face interviews at the home of respondents. Usually, the questionnaire comprises 80-100 questions, including the demographic section.

Sample Design

At the first stage, urban settlements and rural administrative districts are selected as primary sampling units (PSUs). The nationwide sample (N = 1,600) is divided among:

- 8 large geographical macro regions (Federal Okrugs) – North-West, Central, Volga, South, North Caucasus, Ural, Siberia, Far East — proportionate to the size of the local population aged 18+ of each macro region, in addition to Moscow as a macro region and self-representative stratum.
- 5 types of settlements in each of the macro regions in proportion to the size of the local population aged 18+ of each type:
 - cities > 1,000,000 inhabitants;
 - cities 500,000 – 1,000,000 inhabitants;

cities 100,000 – 500,000 inhabitants;
urban settlements < 100,000 inhabitants;
rural administrative districts.

In the North-West region there are no cities with 500,000 – 1,000,000 inhabitants, in the Far East region and in the North Caucasus there are no cities with more than 1,000,000 inhabitants, and Moscow is considered as a separate stratum. As a result, the total number of strata is 38 (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of adult (18+) population and sample among macro regions and settlement types

Geographical macro region (Federal Okrug)		rural administrative districts		urban settlements < 100K inhabitants		cities 100K-500K inhabitants		cities 500K-1'000K inhabitants		cities > 1'000K inhabitants		Totals	
		%	interviews	%	interviews	%	interviews	%	interviews	%	interviews	%	interviews
1	North-West	1,52	24	2,41	39	1,99	32			3,77	60	9,69	155
2	Central	4,93	79	5,71	91	6,29	101	1,17	19	0,75	12	18,85	302
3	Volga	5,66	91	4,46	71	2,59	41	3,44	55	4,04	65	20,19	323
4	South	4,16	67	2,08	33	2,53	40	0,97	16	1,52	24	11,26	180
9	North Caucasus	2,99	48	1,16	19	1,56	25	0,38	6			6,09	98
5	Ural	1,51	24	2,47	40	1,90	30	0,50	8	1,84	29	8,22	131
6	Siberia	2,91	47	2,74	44	1,21	20	2,02	32	2,70	43	11,58	186
7	Far East	1,40	22	1,54	25	1,58	26	0,87	14			5,39	87
8	Moscow									8,73	140	8,73	140
TOTAL		25,08	402	22,57	362	19,65	315	9,35	150	23,35	373	100,00	1 602

Selection of primary sampling units (PSUs):

All cities with over 1,000,000 inhabitants are included in the sample as self-representative units. The number of interviews in each of these cities is determined in proportion to its size in the adult population of the Russian Federation.

Other urban settlements and rural districts are considered as primary sample units (PSUs). In each stratum (except a stratum of cities over 1,000,000 inhabitants) the number of PSUs is calculated with an average of at least 10 interviews per PSU (but not more than 12), and the PSUs are selected with the probability proportional to the size (PPS) method as well. The total numbers of interviews calculated for a stratum are distributed approximately equally among selected PSUs.

In total, 137 PSUs are selected including 97 urban and 40 rural PSUs (Table 2).

Table2. Distribution of adult (18+) population and number of PSUs among macro regions and settlement types

Geographical macro region (Federal Okrug)		rural administrative districts		urban settlements < 100K inhabitants		cities 100K-500K inhabitants		cities 500K-1'000K inhabitants		cities > 1'000K inhabitants		Totals	
		%	PSUs	%	PSUs	%	PSUs	%	PSUs	%	PSUs	%	PSUs
1	North-West	1,52	2	2,41	4	1,99	3			3,77	1	9,69	10
2	Central	4,93	8	5,71	9	6,29	10	1,17	2	0,75	1	18,85	30
3	Volga	5,66	9	4,46	7	2,59	4	3,44	5	4,04	5	20,19	30
4	South	4,16	7	2,08	3	2,53	4	0,97	1	1,52	2	11,26	17
9	North Caucasus	2,99	4	1,16	2	1,56	2	0,38	1			6,09	9
5	Ural	1,51	2	2,47	4	1,90	3	0,50	1	1,84	2	8,22	12
6	Siberia	2,91	5	2,74	4	1,21	2	2,02	3	2,70	3	11,58	17
7	Far East	1,40	3	1,54	3	1,58	3	0,87	2			5,39	11
8	Moscow									8,73	1	8,73	1
TOTAL		25,08	40	22,57	36	19,65	31	9,35	15	23,35	15	100,00	137

The sample includes:

- 15 cities over 1,000,000 inhabitants;
- 15 cities with 500,000 – 1,000,000;
- 31 cities with 100,000 – 500,000;
- 36 urban settlements less than 100,000;
- 40 rural administrative districts.

At the second stage, the secondary sampling units (SSUs) are selected from the lists of electoral districts (blocks, streets) in urban settlements and villages in rural districts. The number of surveyed SSUs is defined by 5-12 interviews per SSU; 14 SSUs are selected in Moscow, 6 SSUs in St. Petersburg. Overall, about 163 SSUs are selected.

At the third stage, the households are selected by a random route method. From this route lists interviewers approach each 7th household in blocks with multi-storey apartment buildings and each 3th household in blocks with individual houses.

At the fourth stage, one household member is selected based on the question whose birthdays is closest to the interview date. Once a person has been selected as respondent in a particular household, this person may not be substituted with another person of the same household.

Soft quotas (sex and age) are used only at this last stage (i.e., the selection of a respondent in a household). They are applied after 75% of the sample is collected and when the deviations resulting from the “next birthday method” are +/- 15%. Quotas for the selection of respondents are used to increase accessibility of some problem groups (e.g., younger persons, males) and to decrease some groups that often are oversampled, for example, women over 55 years of age.

If nobody is at home or the selected member of a household is absent, an interviewer is required to visit this household again. In order to reach those who work late hours and those who leave for the weekends, interviewers are required to visit households at different times of the day and at different days of the week.

The stages of the selection process are based on the following data:

- Russian Federal State Statistics Service: Population Census 2010 (gender/age/education distribution);
- Federal State Statistic Service: Resident population of the Russian Federation by municipalities on January 1, 2018 (rural/urban population, gender/age distribution);
- Lists of electoral districts (blocks/streets in urban settlements or villages in rural districts) with located buildings in each of sampled settlements.