



RUSSIA

Strong Partisan Divides Amid General Hostility

By Brian Katulis, Peter Juul, and John Halpin

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Geopolitical competition between America and Russia has reemerged in the past few years.¹ Russia interfered in America's presidential election in 2016 and appears set to do so again in 2020. Moscow remains intent on undermining democratic societies in Europe, and its interventions in Ukraine and Syria continue with no end in sight.² Lacking a constructive international agenda of its own, Russia acts more as a disruptive force in world politics.

Views of American voters

Americans see Russia as an enemy to stand up to

Share of respondents

Q. "Please indicate whether you think this country or group of countries is mostly a friend of the United States, mostly an enemy of the United States, or mostly a competitor of the United States. If more than one of these labels could apply, please pick the one that best describes this country or group of countries."



Source: John Halpin and others, "America Adrift: How the U.S. Foreign Policy Debate Misses What Voters Really Want" (Washington: Center For American Progress, 2019), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2019/05/05083511/ForeignPolicyPoll-reportfinal.pdf>; Center for American Progress and GBAO, "Foreign Policy Research – Phase III" (Washington: 2019), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2019/07/29142002/FP-condensed.pdf>.

American voters widely view Russia as a hostile foreign power, but deep partisan divides exist over Moscow's interference in American politics.

- **Widespread public hostility toward Russia.** A majority—57 percent—of American voters view Russia as mostly an enemy. Two-thirds, or 66 percent, of Democrats see Russia as an enemy, compared with slightly more than half of Republicans and less than half of independents, at 51 percent and 47 percent, respectively. Almost three-quarters—74 percent—of voters view standing up to foreign threats such as Russia and China as a very important issue, including more than 8 in 10, or 85 percent of, Republicans.
- **Support for an assertive Russia policy.** A plurality—47 percent—of voters support either all options short of military confrontation (30 percent) or keeping military force on the table (17 percent) to ensure that Russia does not interfere in Eastern Europe or meddle in American politics. A majority, or 51 percent, of Democrats support either of these two options, as do a plurality of Republicans, at 45 percent.
- **Stark partisan divides on Russian interference in U.S. politics.** More than one-quarter—27 percent—of all American voters say that stopping Russian interference in U.S. politics and government should be a top foreign policy priority. Four in 10, or 41 percent of, Democrats rank stopping Russian interference in American politics as one of their top foreign policy priorities, as do one-quarter of independents, at 26 percent—but this view is shared by just one-tenth (11 percent) of Republicans.³
- **A significant Fox News effect on views about Russia.** Fox News viewers are less likely to see Russian interference as a top foreign policy priority than the public as a whole, at 16 percent and 27 percent, respectively. They are also more likely to support accommodation with Russia than the general public, with almost 8 in 10 (79 percent) supporting establishing spheres of interest with Russia and China compared with slightly more than two-thirds (68 percent) of the public.
- **Preferential economic relationships with allies to counter Russia draws moderate support.** Seven in 10, or 70 percent of, Americans back forming preferential trade blocs with allies in Europe to better compete with Russia and China, including three-quarters (78 percent) of Republicans and two-thirds (67 percent) of Democrats.

The progressive policy alternative

- **Defend America against Russian interference in U.S. politics.** Given its success in 2016 and deep partisan divisions in the United States, Russia will undoubtedly attempt to interfere in U.S. domestic politics again in 2020. There's no excuse for Americans to be unprepared this time.
- **Maintain pressure on Moscow.** The United States and its allies should keep up diplomatic and economic pressure on Russia for its interventions abroad in Ukraine and Syria as well as its interference in the domestic politics of democratic nations. American voters generally support an assertive policy toward Russia.

- **Support allies standing up against Russia.** America's NATO allies stand on the front lines against Russia and remain prime targets for political interference campaigns. The United States should work closely with these allies to develop effective antibodies to Russian interference.

American voters consistently view Russia as a major geopolitical adversary—but stark partisan divides emerge when it comes to defending American democracy against Russian interference. Nonetheless, broad support exists for an assertive U.S. policy toward Russia.

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This information is based on a national poll of 1,200 registered voters conducted July 10 to 14, 2019, by the Center for American Progress and GBAO. It is also informed by a series of focus groups, qualitative interviews, and a national poll of 2,000 registered voters conducted February 25 to March 3, 2019. Polling results are on file with the authors.

Endnotes

1 For further reading on this topic, see James Lamond, "Using Transparency to Deter Russia's Asymmetric Attacks on the West," Center for American Progress, April 10, 2019, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/news/2019/04/10/468522/using-transparency-deter-russias-asymmetric-attacks-west/>; James Lamond, "The Origins of Russia's Broad Political Assault on the United States" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2018/10/03/458841/origins-russias-broad-political-assault-united-states/>; James Lamond and Talia Dessel, "Democratic Resilience: A Comparative Review of Russian Interference in Democratic Elections and Lessons Learned for Securing Future Elections" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2019), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2019/09/03/473770/democratic-resilience/>

2 Ibid.; Carlotta Gall and Patrick Kingsley, "Turkey Halts Syria Incursion, Hours After Deal with Russia," *The New York Times*, October 23, 2019, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/23/world/middleeast/turkey-russia-syria.html>; Will Englund, "Russia looks for leverage as Ukraine slides deeper into impeachment probes," *The Washington Post*, October 7, 2019, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russia-looks-for-leverage-as-ukraine-slides-deeper-into-impeachment-probes/2019/10/05/0fcaef68-e5d9-11e9-b0a6-3d03721b85ef_story.html.

3 Q.31 in Center for American Progress and GBAO, "Foreign Policy Research – Phase II," February 25 to March 3, 2019, on file with the authors.