

Russians Can't Decide Between Economic Development and Military Power

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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GUM department store on Moscow's Red Square

Russians are divided between focusing the nation's efforts on rejuvenating its military power and developing a strong economy, according to a survey published Tuesday by the Levada Center, an independent polling center.

Russia is halfway through a decade-long 20 trillion ruble (\$350 billion) military rearmament and modernization campaign that critics say is diverting resources away from more productive sectors. And with Russia's economy in recession, the government is being forced to cut spending heavily in other areas to allow the defense budget to continue to expand. Russians are divided on how federal funds should be spent, the Levada poll showed.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents said they either fully agreed or mostly agreed with the

statement “It is more important for Russia to be an economic rather than military power,” while 33 percent disagreed.

But 53 percent of respondents said they either fully agreed or mostly agreed that “Russia should spend more on defense even if it creates problems for Russia's economic development,” with 34 percent saying they disagreed.

Prioritizing defense spending over economic development was a hallmark of the Soviet-era economy. Defense spending fell sharply after the collapse of communism, but the Russian government begun to ramp up expenditure in recent years.

Russia spent 4.5 percent of its gross domestic product on defense last year, according to the World Bank. The U.S. spent 3.5 percent in 2014, the bank's data showed.

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