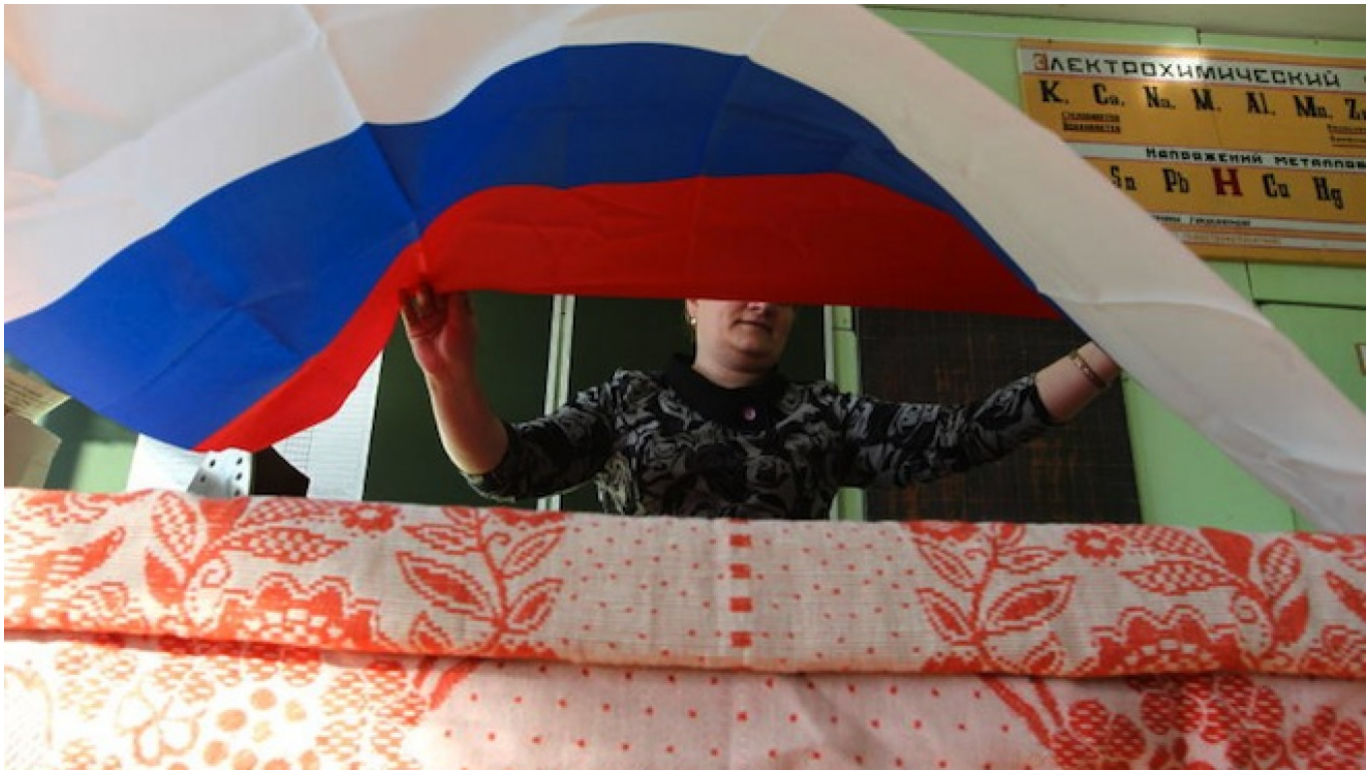
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russians Keep Lips Locked in Opinion Polls, Fearing Backlash

January 22, 2016



A new survey by the independent Levada Center pollster has found that their work might be of limited use — more than a quarter of the Russians questioned said they were reluctant to express their views in opinion polls.

Twenty-six percent of those questioned in the poll said they were averse to expressing their view on current affairs when surveyed, a poll published Friday on the Levada Center's website showed. Slightly fewer people, 23 percent, said they also felt uncomfortable about discussing such matters with their colleagues and 17 percent felt apprehensive even in a family context.

Almost half of those questioned, 49 percent, said they thought most Russians would be reticent to discuss current affairs when approached by pollsters.

The most popular explanation given for the aversion of speaking openly was fear of possible backlash on people's own lives — 56 percent of respondents thought fear of retribution was the main reason. One fifth of those questioned, 20 percent, said they thought people did not want to face the truth themselves.

The Levada study comes after a New Year's poll conducted in Crimea by the state-run VTsIOM pollster led to widespread criticism and the questioning of surveying practices in Russia.

The VTsIOM poll concluded that 94 percent of Crimeans would happily sacrifice their comfort in Moscow's standoff with Kiev, while the peninsula continues to suffer from blackouts after saboteurs blew up power lines in southern Ukraine.

Ninety-three percent of respondents also said they would oppose any energy deal with Kiev if it referred to the peninsula as belonging to Ukraine.

Crimea was annexed by Russia in March 2014 following a referendum in which a large majority of Crimeans voted in favor of Moscow. Critics have denounced the referendum as illegitimate.

The Levada poll was conducted Nov. 20 to 23 and questioned 1,603 people in 48 Russian regions. The margin of error did not exceed 3.4 percent.

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