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60% of Russians Think Their Country Is World Leader in Space Exploration

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As Russia marks Cosmonautics Day on Tuesday, six out of 10 Russians believe their country is the world's leader in space exploration — a sharp increase over the past three years, polls by the independent Levada Center indicated.

Another 17 percent of Russians named the United States as space exploration leader, compared to 21 percent who said so in 2014, and to 31 percent in 2013 — the year before Moscow became involved in the Ukraine conflict and unleashed vehemently anti-American rhetoric.

Meanwhile, 61 percent of Russians this year named their country as global leader in space exploration, compared to 46 percent in 2014 and 35 percent in 2013, Levada Center polls indicate.

China came in a distant third in the latest space leadership poll. About 6 percent of Russians named it as leader, compared to 11 percent in 2014 and 9 percent in 2013, the Levada Center

said in a report.

Amid their increasing assertion of their country's leadership, Russians were somewhat less enthusiastic about expanding the country's space programs.

About 42 percent of respondents supported such an expansion, while another 45 percent thought the programs should be kept at their current levels, and 6 percent said the programs should be cut, according to the Levada Center poll.

Support for expanding Russia's space programs marked a slight decline from March 2013, when 50 percent of respondents were in favor, Levada Center said in a report.

About 55 percent of Russians look favorably upon “space tourism” — flights by private individuals into space for a substantial fee — while 34 percent frown at the enterprise, the poll indicated. The numbers were similar to those recorded in 2013, according to the Levada Center report.

The latest poll was conducted on March 11-14 among 800 adults in 137 cities and towns across Russia. It gave a margin of error of no more than 4.1 percentage points.

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