

Russians Rather Endure Sanctions than Concede Ukraine War

Most believe Russia should continue to pursue an independent foreign policy despite the sanctions, which are attributed to the West's hostility and misunderstanding of the situation in Ukraine.

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On February 18, [American and Russian diplomats met](#) for the first time since the start of the conflict in Ukraine to discuss an end to the “special military operation” and a revival of US-Russian bilateral relations. The meeting marks a [dramatic shift](#) away from the United States’ transatlantic allies and stunning reversal from US-Russia policy under the administration of former President Joe Biden, which led international efforts to sanction and isolate Moscow. At this point, it seems that Russia’s resolve and refusal to make territorial concessions to Ukraine despite being heavily sanctioned has proven successful.

A Chicago Council on Global Affairs-Levada Analytical Center survey fielded January 23-29, 2025—just before the United States’ remarkable shift in policy—finds that Russians remain defiant, as most believe the Kremlin should not change course in exchange for sanctions relief. Given the recent turn of events, their expectation that relations with Western countries will return to normal in the future—at least with the United States—may come sooner than they predict.

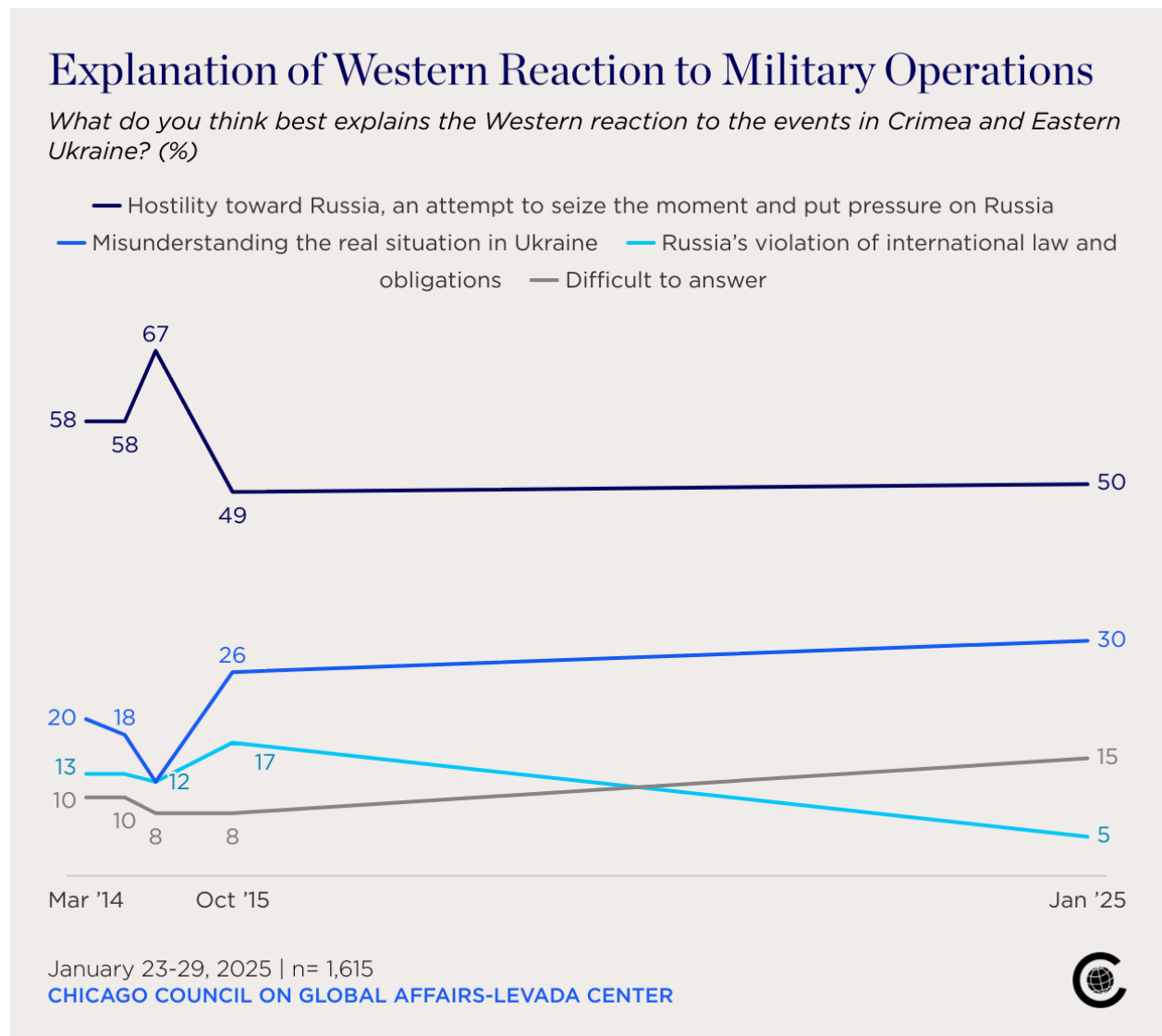
Key Findings

- Few Russians think Western nations imposed sanctions against their country because the Kremlin violated international law (5%). Rather, they believe the sanctions were implemented out of hostility toward Russia (50%) or a misunderstanding of the real situation in Ukraine (30%).
- Despite Western sanctions, nearly eight in 10 Russians (77%) think their country should continue its policies rather than compromise or make concessions to have the sanctions lifted.
- Russians are most inclined to say that cooperation with countries from East Asia and the Pacific (23%) and Central Asia and the Caucasus (20%) is most important for Russia’s economic development.

- For their military security, Russians believe Central Asia and the Caucasus (24%) and Europe and North America (22%) are most important.
- Despite tensions with the West, six in 10 Russians (58%) support expanding ties to Western countries. Once the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has ended, half expect relations with the West will gradually return to what they were before the war (50%).

Plurality Believes Western Reaction to Russia-Ukraine Conflict Based on Hostility

When asked what best explains the West’s reaction to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, just 5 percent say it is because Russia violated international law and obligations. Instead, half (50%) of the Russian public believes that Western countries reacted in hostility against Russia, while three in 10 (30%) believe Western countries misunderstand the real situation in Ukraine. Over time, the public has become a bit more likely to attribute Western reaction to misunderstanding and a bit less likely to say it is based on hostility or a violation of international law and obligations.



Majority Continue to Support Kremlin’s Policy Despite Sanctions

Although the Russian economy has been able to weather the effects of Western sanctions for the first two years of the military operation in Ukraine, reports show that it is finally starting to feel the full impact of the penalties. In recent months, the ruble has weakened, the price of oil exports has dropped, and inflation and interest rates have risen.

Despite this, Russian President Vladimir Putin and other top officials [remain optimistic and often mention the resilience](#) of the Russian economy under Western sanctions. Most Russians trust the reports released by the government about the impact of sanctions on their country's economy (57%, 30% do not trust) (see appendix Table 1).

Survey results indicate that the sanctions levied against Russia have generally spared ordinary Russians. In a [May 2023](#) Council-Levada Center survey, just 15 percent of Russians reported experiencing problems as a result of Western-imposed sanctions and only three in 10 (29%) said they were concerned about the sanctions. These results are broadly consistent with readings from the past two years.

While Russians would prefer that the Kremlin [start peace negotiations](#) to curb the effect of Western sanctions on consumer prices (59%, versus 32% continue military operations), this could be due more to securing Russian battlefield gains than easing the sanctions. Nearly eight in 10 Russians (77%) think their country should continue its own policies despite the imposition of Western sanctions. In fact, support for sticking to its own policies despite sanctions has risen to its highest levels in 2024 and 2025.

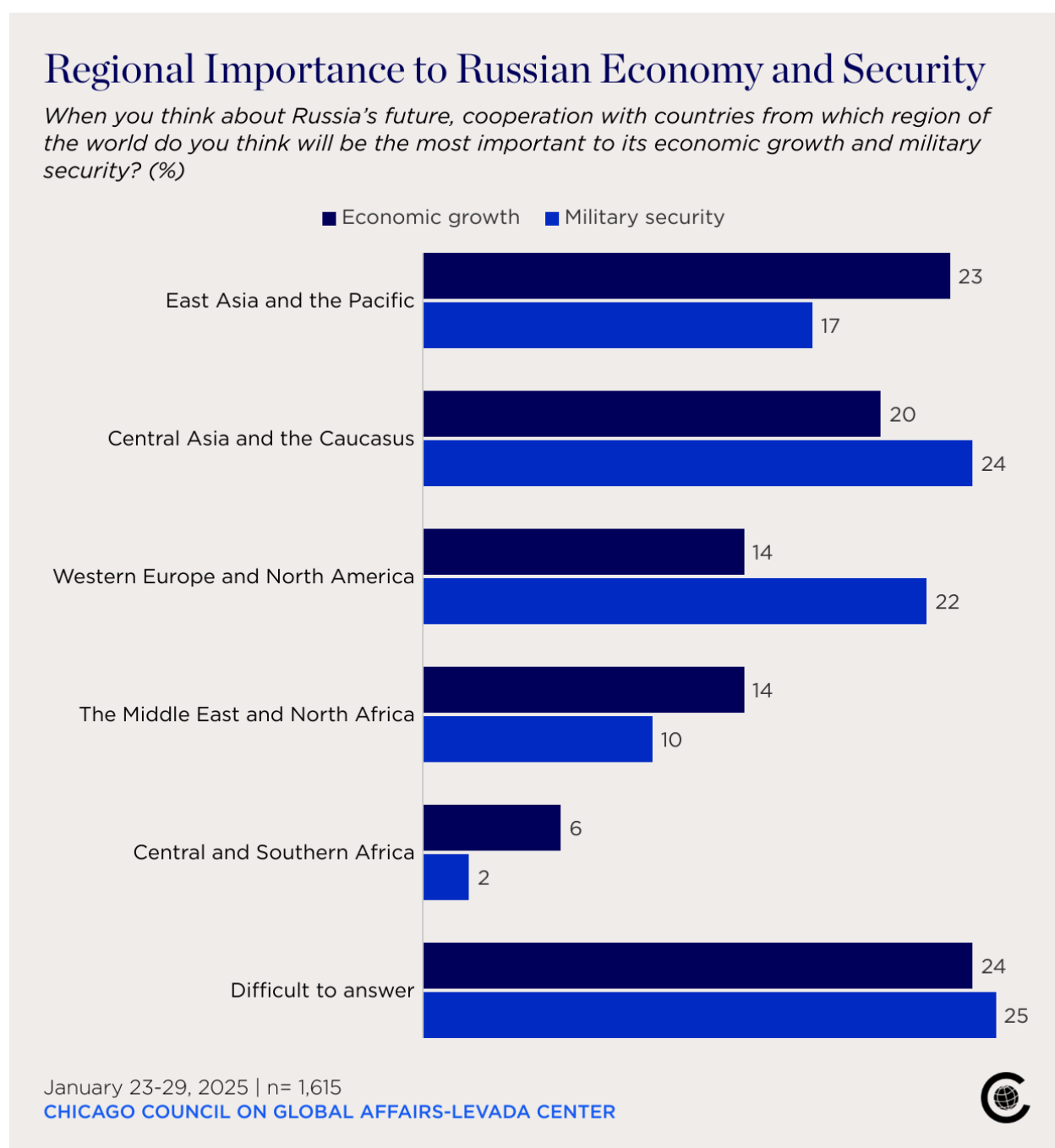


A [September 2024](#) Council-Levada Center poll suggests that everyday Russians would only accept a deal if it froze current battle lines and cemented Russia's battlefield gains in Eastern Ukraine. So while Russians favor peace talks, they do so on their own terms and remain unwilling to make the meaningful concessions, like returning occupied territories to Ukraine, that could lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Asia and the West Deemed Most Important Regions for Russia's Future

To circumvent the effects of Western sanctions, Russia has had to look elsewhere for economic cooperation and trade relations, like East and Central Asia. China, in particular, has become one of Moscow's most important trading partners over the last two years, as it has [dramatically increased its exports to Russia](#) and serves as an [economic lifeline](#) to the Russian government and Russian businesses. Russia also remains the [most important trading partner to and investor in](#) countries across Central Asia and the Caucasus, despite its [waning influence in the region](#) as a result of international isolation.

To most Russians, East Asia and the Pacific (23%) and Central Asia and the Caucasus (20%) are seen as the most important regions to Russia's economic growth. Less than 15 percent of the population believes Western Europe and North America (14%) or the Middle East and North Africa (14%) will play a pivotal role in Russia's economic development, and Central and Southern Africa are considered the least important (6%). However, one in four Russians find the question difficult to answer (24%).

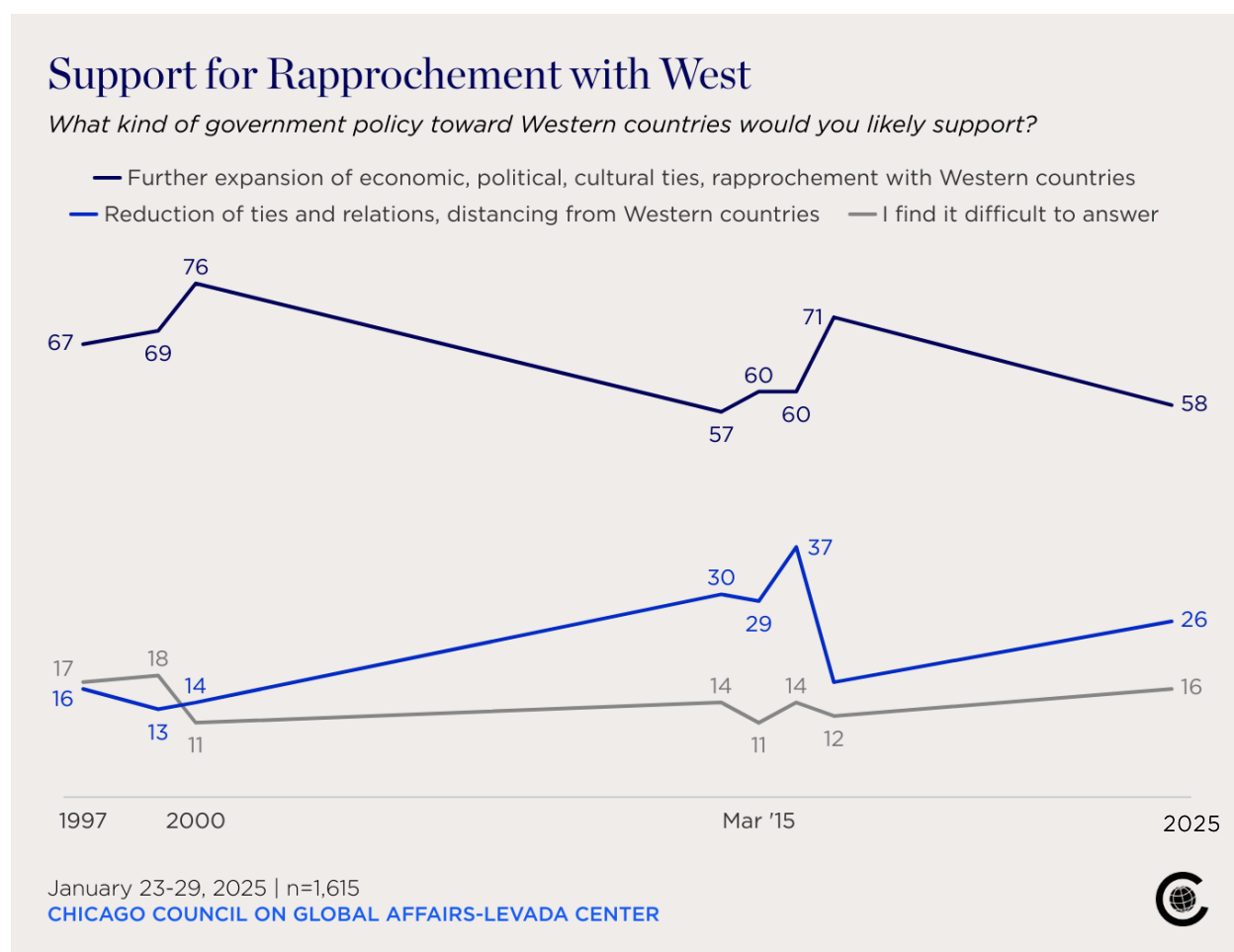


When it comes to their country's military security, Russians view Central Asia and the Caucasus as the most important region (24%) but nearly as many

name Western Europe and North America (22%). In doing so, Russians are likely referencing military threats from NATO as determinants of their military security rather than expectations of military cooperation with Western nations. East Asia and the Pacific (17%), as well as the Middle East and North Africa (10%), are seen as less important to Russia's military security, but not as insignificant as Central and Southern Africa (2%). Again, one in four Russians finds the question difficult to answer (25%).

Despite Anger at West, Majority Expect a Relationship Reset after War

Despite expressing [negative views](#) of the United States, the European Union, and France, six in 10 Russians (58%) support the expansion of economic, political, and cultural ties with Western countries. A quarter support reducing ties and distancing Russian relations with Western countries (26%). This marks a sharp decline in support for rapprochement with Western nations since 2016 but is consistent with levels recorded around previous military operations in Ukraine, specifically the “reunification” of Crimea from 2014 and 2015 (57-60%).

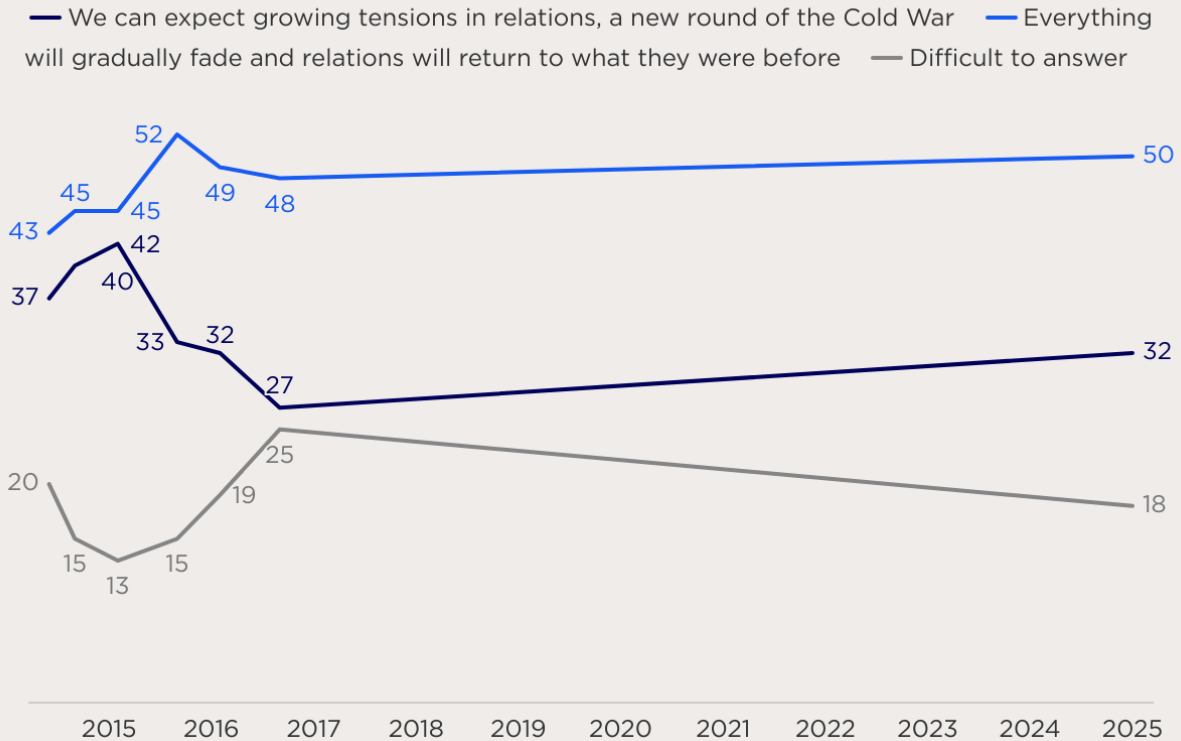


In addition, half of Russians (50%) believe relations with Western countries will return to the way they were before the current conflict in Ukraine, while a third (32%) expects tension to grow; nearly two in 10 (18%) find the question difficult to answer.

Looking at these results longitudinally, Russians were more narrowly divided between these two options during the Crimean “reunification” with Russia. But starting in September 2015, a declining share of Russians have expected tensions to grow into a new round of the Cold War.

Expectations for Future Relations with West

How do you think relations between Russia and Western countries will develop after the current conflict in Ukraine and Crimea? (%)



January 23-29, 2025 | n= 1,615

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Conclusion

Despite their country being heavily sanctioned and ostracized by the international community, Russians believe the Kremlin should continue to pursue its foreign policies. At the same time, many think it would benefit Russia to increase ties to the Western nations. Given the recent warming between US President Donald Trump and Putin, perhaps Russians would be more amenable now to a US-negotiated agreement to end the conflict—though based on previous surveys, they likely would not support giving up any territory in concession.

Appendix

Appendix Table 1: Trust in Government Reports

To what extent do you trust reports from the Russian government about the following? (%)

	Definitely trust	Somewhat trust	Somewhat don't trust	Definitely don't trust	Difficult to answer
Successes of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine	24	45	16	9	5
Amount of resources spent on the special operation in Ukraine	17	34	24	12	13
Toll of Russian civilians and military personnel killed as a result of the special operation	12	23	30	20	16
Impact of Western sanctions on the Russian economy	18	39	21	9	13

January 23-29, 2025 | n=1,615

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Methodology

This Council-Levada Center survey was conducted January 23-29, 2025, among a representative sample of all Russian urban and rural residents. The sample consisted of 1,615 Russians aged 18 or older from the 137 municipalities within the 50 regions of the Russian Federation. Researchers from the Levada Center conducted personal interviews in respondents' homes.

The distribution of responses is given as a percentage of the total number. The data set is weighed by gender, age, level of education for each type of settlement (large cities, medium cities, small towns, villages) within each Federal district independently, in accordance with Rosstat data. The statistical error of these studies for a sample of 1600 people (with a probability of 0.95) does not exceed: 3.4 percent for indicators around 50 percent, 2.9 percent for indicators around 25 percent/75 percent, 2.0 percent for indicators around 10 percent/90 percent, and 1.5 percent for indicators around 5 percent/95 percent.

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