

RUSSIAN IMAGE IN AFRICA AND NATIONAL REPUTATION CAPITAL

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Bianki
and Partners

About us



- Bianki and Partners is an **independent political consulting company**.
- We specialize in politics and elections: consulting, research, development, and implementation of operations, projects, and campaigns.
- Since 1999 we have worked in **15 countries** (Asia, Africa, Western and Eastern Europe) and we are based in Saint Petersburg (Russia).
- We have conducted over **450 in-depth studies and over 30 campaigns** and projects.

1. Study initiators

The study *Russian Image of and National Reputation Capital* was conducted on the initiative and in cooperation with the **Expertise Integration (Intexpertise)** company (Intex LLC, <http://intexpertise.ru>).

This study is part of the preparation of the report **Russia — Africa Shared Vision 2030** (project site, <http://ravision2030.com>). The report will be the most complete audit of all aspects of the interaction between Russia and African countries over the past 30 years, and also describe the possibilities for promoting cooperation.

The report was timed to coincide with the first ever **Russia-Africa summit and forum** which will be held in Sochi on 23-24 October 2019 (<http://summitafrica.ru/>).



2. Conceptual framework

	Psychological definition	'How it works'
Image	Perception Representation of the image of an object in the mind of one who perceives	Determines the basic attitude
Reputation	Set (mindset) Overall evaluation(+ / -) and opinion on the special characteristics of the object of the person who interacts	Determines behavior <u>in the context of a situation</u> , primarily at the yes/no level (to interact / to avoid)

3. Dates, method, sampling

Dates: from 15 July to 11 September 2019.

Study method: structured expert interview.

Duration of one interview : from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours (on average - 1 hour 35 minutes).

Sampling: 48 people.

Geography of the interviewed:

23 Russians with some experience in Africa (from one to seven countries)

25 Africans from 11 countries (Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, Morocco, Mali, Mozambique, Egypt) who professionally cooperated with Russia.

Field of activity of the interviewed:

business representatives (31 out of 48 people; 11 of them are the co-owners of medium-sized businesses, 20 managers of large companies),

representatives of states (9 people),

representatives of the social research (8 people).

4. Interview' Topic Guide

Topic Guide consisted of 5 parts :

1. a description of the respondent's interaction (work in Africa in the case of Russians, interaction with Russians in the case of Africans);
2. a description of the ideas (opinions, attitudes) of Africans about Russians (we asked both Russian and African experts about the image of Russians in the minds of Africans);
3. a description of the ideas (opinions, attitudes) of Africans about the Russian business;
4. a description of the ideas (opinions, attitudes) of Africans about Russia as a state;
5. opinion on the possibilities of Russia and Russian companies in various fields in terms of the needs of African countries in imports as well as cooperation in those areas.

Further, in order to verify expert positions, we asked the interviewed to respond to the generalized point of view of the interviewed before.

5. View of Russians by Africans

Consensus characteristics (more than half of the experts spoke proactively, a significant part of the others agreed)

No 1: Tough. Russians are aggressive, firmly maintain their position, are straightforward and outspoken.

- It partially stems from the image of a paramilitary and 'coercive' country (the source of such an image is the military activity in the XX-XXI centuries; American films about the KGB and nuclear threat).
- Often the hardline approach, especially along with openness, is interpreted as *rudeness*. *Assertiveness* (including the insistence on high standards) is a part of those characteristics.
- The second, no less significant reason for that perception, is *language* (do not have the skills of politeness).
- This is more often perceived by Africans as positive. Negative things can be smoothed over by openness.
- The stiffness of Russians is perceived negatively by those young Africans (aged below 30 years - those who do not remember the USSR) who are deeply integrated into European culture.

No 2: Openness, sincerity, straightforwardness, informal approach.

- It is uniquely positive for most Africans. To a lesser extent, the positive nature is for the inhabitants of the Arab countries of Africa - they tend to perceive it as *naivety*.
- It is often described in comparison with other nations. The positivity of the Western culture along with the tight boundaries, that they set in communication, is often perceived by Africans as hypocrisy. Against that background, the sincerity of the Russians is a big advantage. Even more positively, the openness of Russians is perceived against the background of the Chinese, to whom the attitude is fundamentally worse at the personal level.
- At various levels (in the case of the establishment - with a slight irony, in the case of taxi drivers - hoping for a tip); but Russians in Africa are more often called 'white brothers' for not keeping at arm's length, warm-heartedness and a taste for personal relationships.

Frequent characteristics

(named by more than a quarter and confirmed by a significant part of the others)

No 3. Racism. Noticeably, the most sensitive topic in a discussion. Those, who studied in Russia or the USSR, highlight the problem especially clearly. The negative approach is rather simplified.

No 4. Reliability ('you can rely on').

No 5. Proficiency. First of all, it concerns engineering specialties (in the broad sense, it includes IT), secondly, military, and thirdly, doctors. Quite often, it is about *personal expertise*.

No 6. Generosity (no greedness). It is a dual characteristic.

No 7. Vigour, courage. Quickly make decisions and immediately implement. Positive.

No 8. Easygoingness. The reverse side of straightforwardness and openness. It is rather negative in business communication (perceived as **naivety**) but positive in the personal context.

No 9. Lack of consistency.

6. Results. Insight into the Russian business

- The idea of the Russian business among the older generation of Africans and those, who deal with large Russian companies, is almost completely aligned with the idea of the state.
- The image of the Russian business in Africa was significantly spoiled in the 1990s (until the mid-2000s).

Consensus characteristics (more than half of the experts spoke proactively while a significant part of the others agreed)

No 1. Dominated importance of a personal contact with decision makers. The strive for personal relationships is liked by Africans while ignoring the rules is perceived negatively. Moreover, in Africa, decisions taken by decision makers does not necessarily mean they will be fulfilled at lower levels.

No 2. Faithfulness. It is often a compliment. It is related to straightforwardness.

No 3. Rule negation (desire to do things differently, not as is common). It is about ignoring existing rules - both legislative and well-established informal practices.

Frequent characteristics

(named by more than a quarter and confirmed by a significant part of the others)

No 4. The Russians tend to force decisions on the African side.

No 5. Good competence level, also beyond a narrow area of responsibility.

No 6. 'Cheaper but it works', 'good engineers'.

No 7. Poor marketing, lack of promotion.

No 8. Penchant for fast return on investment.

No 9. Lack of flexibility for their part.

No 10. Closedness.

No 11. Lack of commitment, lack of determination to have things done.

7. Results. Africans' ideas about Russia

- Besides experts, in general, the population's views are scarce; most often, there are ten facts that an individual can mention about Russia ('whites', 'big', 'far', 'Putin', '2018 FIFA World Cup'; of the second order – 'war', 'against the USA', 'communism', 'cold', 'Khabib Nurmagomedov').
- The ideas about what is happening inside Russia are extremely limited - in general, this is of no interest. Few people are considering the possibility of doing business in Russia or travelling as a tourist.
- The image of Russia is quite holistic - there are three characteristics that more than 90% of experts agree with, the others are rare.

No 1. Russia is big and strong. As part of this characteristic, the statement '*power nation*' (not just militarized but specifically focused on the use of force). These characteristics are respected. The most important factor determining this view is the image of the President of Russia V.V. Putin, in the view of the Africans – a 'tough guy', a 'strong man'.

No 2. Russia is a counterweight to both the West and China. Russia's activity in the international arena is essentially perceived positively in Africa. The policy of the Western powers on the continent leads to a very skeptical attitude towards them; China's economic expansion is perceived as a threat to independence. 'Russia is the only white non-colonial power'.

No 3. It helps, and is generous. The image of a generous country is a positive characteristic from the point of view of Africans. It was generated as a result of the USSR policy, the cancellation of debts by contemporary Russia, and, importantly, the absence on its part of any fundamental political demands. For Russia, this characteristic also has a negative aspect, at least because *sponsorship* expectations are high without obvious benefits for the state itself.

8. The dynamics of ideas about Russia

Stages of the image of Russia (there are still all the three components now,):

1. Nostalgic positive trace from the USSR (they helped fight for independence; credited/sponsored a lot without demanding anything in return; built; trained).

2. Disappointment, annoyance at being abandoned (almost no one has a clear version of what exactly happened with the USSR; moreover, most often there is not even general information).

3. Russia is regaining its position Most clearly, from the point of view of the Africans, this is shown by specific events - the 2018 World Cup and actions in Syria. However, Russia's high profile in the Western media also convinces many that Russia is regaining its position (see B9).

*The **risk** of falling into the trap of high expectations: the opinion that Russia has regained influence is updating the demand for the same interaction patterns that were used by the USSR.*

9. Shaping ideas about Russia

No 1. The key source of information about Russia, that determines its image, is **Western media** (CNN, BBC, Deutsche Welle, etc). Most of the Africans shape their opinion by contradiction – ‘since Russia is criticized, it means that it is competing; it’s good that there is someone to object’.

No 2. The image in a particular country is determined by **what relationships a country had with the USSR**. In places where the presence of the USSR was significant, there is a dual attitude to Russia: the more noticeable was the role of the Union in the country, the greater the disappointment of its representatives about the USSR’s leaving in the 1990s.

No 3. The level of negativity in a country in relation to the former metropolitan country. The higher the level of negativity (it is often associated with the depth of the country’s economic problems, but not only this), the more demand is for ‘anti-Western’ Russia.

No 4. Current economic relations of a country with Russia. If they are present in significant volumes, the perception of Russia is better.

No 5. Personal experience – studying in Russia or personal interaction with Russians.

10. Findings

The Russian can be characterized, firstly, by rigidity, and secondly, a combination of such qualities as openness, sincerity, straightforwardness and informal approach. The attitude is largely clearly positive.

The Russian business. Firstly, the dominated importance of personal relationships with decision-makers, secondly, the negation of rules, and thirdly, faithfulness. The attitude (with the exception of some damage caused by a number of immigrants from the former USSR in the 1990s) is rather positive. The positive approach is no longer related to the present in the sense of 'how the Russians do business in Africa' but in view of expectations, 'it is important that the Russians also do business in Africa'.

Russia is most often characterized as large and strong; as a counterweight to both the West and China; as helping and generous.

11. Conclusion

- The image of the Russian business as perceived by Africans is linked to the image of the state. Russian companies are not partners of the first choice. But Africa is still looking forward to Russian business to maintain a balance between the 'old oppressors' and 'new invaders'.
- The key problem from the point of view of image and reputation can be called a fundamental lack of promotion, namely as stable regular communication with an explanation of positions at both the level of specific business negotiations and the level of inter-state cooperation.
- **Russia is in demand, it is welcomed. But it is not understood – communication is required.**