



## WAR IN UKRAINE

# SOCIOCULTURAL RUNNING ESTIMATE

## Russian and Ukrainian Home Fronts Straining Under War Fatigue

### In This Running Estimate...

- Putin’s popularity dipped slightly to 85 percent, reflecting a decrease in the percentage of Russians who think the country is “moving in the right direction” and in support for the war, which dropped to 74 percent. Interestingly, support for a negotiated end to the conflict also fell to 61 percent from its August high of 66 percent.
- A grassroots movement of Russian soldiers’ wives and mothers called *Put’ Domoy* (“Way Home”) has openly protested, demanding the return from Ukraine of mobilized men—a rare challenge to the Kremlin—reflecting growing war-weariness.<sup>1</sup>
- Ukrainian efforts to lower the draft age and rigorously enforce mobilization have been met with resistance. Reports of inequitable enforcement—from corruption in draft offices to alleged abuse by enlistment officers—have undermined trust in the government. By mid-2024, 46 percent of Ukrainians said there was no shame in dodging the draft, revealing a stark shift from the patriotic fervor of 2022.<sup>2, 3, 4</sup>
- Ukrainian polling indicates war fatigue through a dramatic reversal in attitudes toward the war: in 2022, 73 percent supported fighting until victory, while in 2025 approximately 69 percent support a quick, negotiated end to the war. However, large majorities refuse to accept peace on Russia’s terms or territorial concessions, and 76 percent still believe Ukraine can win with sufficient Western support.<sup>5, 6, 7</sup>



Figure 1: Kyiv Anticorruption Protests (Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyiv\\_anti-corruption\\_protests\\_23-07-2025\\_07.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyiv_anti-corruption_protests_23-07-2025_07.jpg))

# DOMESTIC RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS

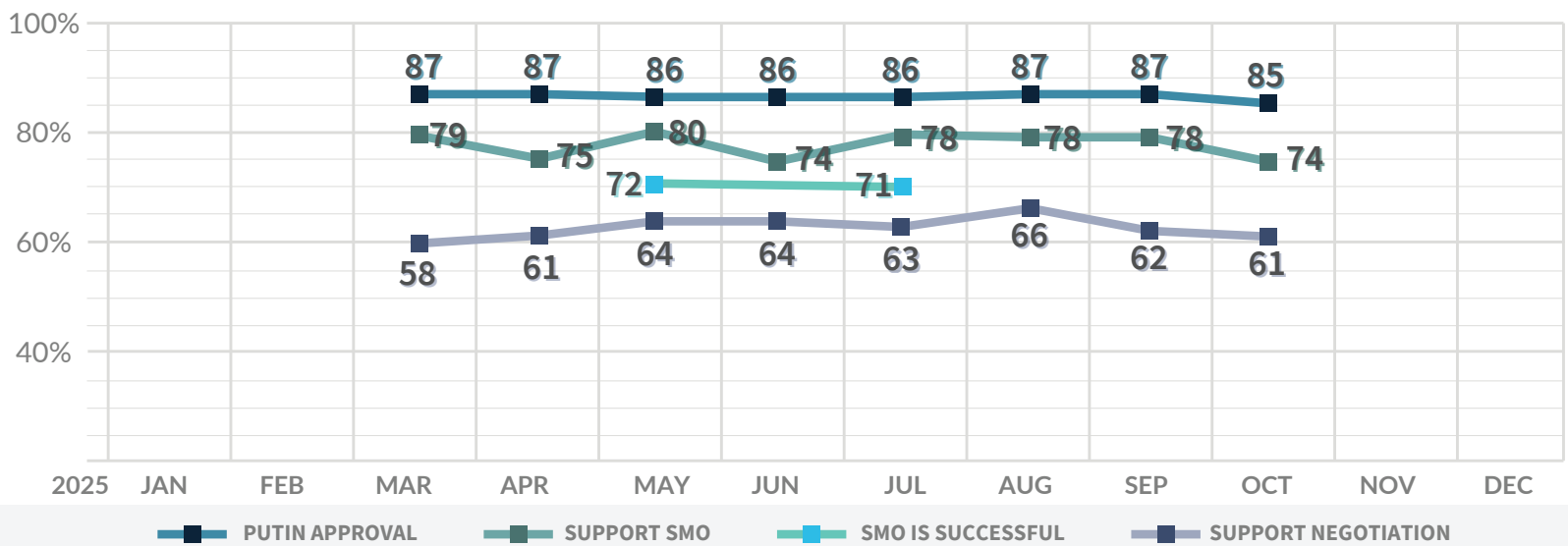


Figure 2: Domestic Russian Perceptions, T2COM G-2.<sup>8</sup>

NOTE: Russian opinion polls are immediately instrumentalized by the Kremlin, repeated by the Russian media, and used to claim that the invasion is supported by the Russian public and conducted in its name.

## PUTIN'S POPULARITY

Russian President Vladimir Putin's approval slipped to 85 percent in October, his lowest rating since late 2024. This parallels a decline in the share of Russians who believe the country is "moving in the right direction."<sup>9</sup> This drop may indicate growing frustration over the absence of a negotiated settlement following Putin's high-profile meeting in Alaska with U.S. President Donald Trump, along with the ongoing physical and emotional toll of the war. While the approval rate remains high, Putin's decline in popularity signals that the conflict stalemate carries political costs even within a tightly controlled information environment. Drivers of Putin's popularity, including patriotism, state control of media, fear of instability, and lack of alternative leadership, remain intact. In contrast, the softer edges of support are sensitive to prolonged conflict and unmet expectations for a quick resolution.

- The decline indicates a shift at the margins, especially among Russians who are economically strained or pessimistic about the country's trajectory.
- Although this shift is not a threat to regime stability, the dip signals vulnerability to future shocks, especially military setbacks, economic deterioration, or high-visibility diplomatic failures.

## OUTLOOK

Putin's approval is likely to remain high but slowly trend downward if the war continues without a decisive breakthrough or credible diplomatic progress. The Kremlin can stabilize numbers through propaganda and repression, but approval elasticity will increase as public patience wanes.

## SUPPORT FOR THE SMO

Support for Russia’s so-called “special military operation” (SMO): Support for the SMO fell from 78 percent in September to 74 percent in October, breaking a months-long upward trend and mirroring the decline in Putin’s approval.<sup>10</sup> Despite this dip, support remains high due to nationalist narratives, entrenched anti-Western framing, and suppression of public dissent. The decline likely reflects frustration over the failed U.S.-led peace initiative, heightened public awareness of casualties, and continued pressure to mobilize. Notably, support was strongest among those who believed the Trump-Putin Alaska meeting was productive, indicating that perceived diplomatic legitimacy boosts support for the war by reinforcing expectations of a favorable outcome.

### Drivers of Support

- Support is anchored in state media consumers and older demographic patriotism as well as a belief in national restoration.
- War support aligns closely with support for Putin, indicating that the SMO has become a proxy for regime loyalty.

### Demographic Breakdown and Insights

- **Strongest Support:** Support for the SMO is strongest among those who believe Russia is on the right track (85 percent), Muscovites (84 percent), consumers of television (84 percent), Putin supporters (81 percent), older Russians (80 percent), men (77 percent), and wealthier individuals (77 percent). These groups, influenced by state media and more insulated from the economic consequences of war, form the Kremlin’s ideological support core. Their backing ensures the war remains politically sustainable and gives the regime confidence that mobilization and continued operations will not produce widespread pushback.
- **Weakest Support:** Support for the SMO is weakest among online media users (72 percent), consumers of social media (71 percent), women (71 percent), less affluent Russians (70 percent), rural residents (68 percent), youth under 24 (67 percent), those pessimistic about Russia’s direction (43 percent), and Putin detractors (27 percent). These groups are most susceptible to war fatigue because of factors such as increased casualties, economic deterioration, and exposure to alternative information to state media (e.g., social media). Notably, declining support among the youth signals long-term legitimacy risk for the regime and, in the short term, may drive migration, draft evasion, or passive noncompliance.
- **Declining Willingness to Support Relatives Joining the SMO:** 55 percent oppose relatives signing a military contract, with support declining by 22 points since May 2023. This trend reflects a shift from abstract patriotic support to tangible risk aversion; rising unwillingness to risk family demonstrates increasing war fatigue. A continued decline in willingness to serve will likely force the Kremlin to rely more on coercion, financial incentives, or foreign fighters to sustain mobilization.

## OUTLOOK

SMO support is likely to remain above 70 percent but could soften further as casualties accumulate and diplomacy stalls. Public backing will remain high enough to avert unrest but too fragile to support major escalations—including full mobilization—without coercive costs. The Kremlin will likely intensify narrative control, emphasizing defensive frames, Western aggression, and promises of negotiated victory.

## PERCEPTION OF SMO'S SUCCESS

July 2025 Levada polling showed confidence in the SMO's success falling to 69 percent, despite stable overall support for the SMO and Putin. This reveals a widening gap: Russians increasingly back the war in principle while doubting its successful prosecution, a divergence fueled by rising casualties, economic strain, and frustration with slow progress. Core regime supporters—older, wealthier, Moscow-based, or television-dependent Russians—remain confident, while groups more exposed to hardship or alternative media grow skeptical. Even with outdated data, the key message is clear: perceptions of success are softening, setting the stage for recent declines in approval.

## SUPPORT FOR NEGOTIATION

Throughout 2023–25, the Levada Center found that more Russians favored ending the SMO than continuing it, with support for a negotiated end to the war generally increasing month-by-month until August 2025.<sup>11</sup> Support for peace talks declined from a high of 66 percent in August to 61 percent in October, reversing gains made after the July truce attempt.<sup>12</sup> The drop reflects disillusionment following the failed March Alaska meeting, not renewed enthusiasm for continued conflict. While the share of the population that favors continuing the SMO rose slightly to 30 percent, it remains a durable minority. War fatigue remains widespread, but so is skepticism that negotiations, especially U.S.-brokered talks, will deliver acceptable terms. This mix of disillusionment and fatigue produces a volatile middle, frustrated by both the continuation of war and stalled diplomacy.

- Support for negotiations remains the majority view, reflecting an ongoing desire for off-ramps, even among those who view the SMO as justified. The decline in support for negotiation stems from failed expectations rather than increased hawkishness, underlining how unmet hopes contribute to public perception dynamics.
- Most Russians want the conflict to end, but only on Russia's terms. An experiment found that if Putin himself decided to end the war with territorial returns, only 30 percent would support him compared with 73 percent who would back him if he ended the war without concessions.<sup>13</sup> Nationalist pride and a sense of “victory” remain potent, so the Kremlin has little incentive to end the war outright; domestically, it can claim that Russians support the war effort and that any dissent is marginal or foreign-inspired.
- Demographically, support for peace negotiations is strongest among those dissatisfied with Russia's direction (79 percent), Putin disapprovers (76 percent), young people under 24 years (75 percent), low-education groups (75 percent), social media users (74 percent), women (69 percent), and rural residents (68 percent). Commonalities between these population segments are shared economic strain, casualty exposure, and/or access to alternative information sources. These demographics collectively represent the main sources of opposition to the SMO, though they are still fragmented and politically inert due to repression.
- Increasing numbers of Russians report being directly affected by casualties or deployments, with 58 percent saying the war has touched their families. Rising personal exposure is a long-term vulnerability for the Kremlin. This exposure increases war fatigue, accelerates pessimism, and erodes trust in official narratives, even if the short-term political impact is muted.

## OUTLOOK

Support for negotiations will likely remain in the 60 percent range though it will fluctuate with battlefield developments and diplomatic symbolism, while war supporters form a stable minority. This underlines the Kremlin's continued balancing act—managing expectations through diplomatic gestures while sustaining military pressure—to navigate divided public sentiment.

## DOMESTIC RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS SUMMARY

Taken together, the latest Levada polling shows four key trends:

- Russian public opinion has grown more brittle and conflicted
- Russia is divided into a negotiation-leaning majority and a war-anchoring minority, making these two camps and their differences the central theme of persistent public and elite division.
- Headline indicators like Putin's approval and support for negotiations remain high but are increasingly fragile

- Support for the war is eroding most among younger Russians, women, economically strained groups, and consumers of non-state media.

Frustration is rising due to the war's duration and failed diplomacy, leading to war fatigue and volatile public support for negotiations. While core regime-aligned groups remain loyal, the erosion of optimism and widening attitudinal fault lines could become more consequential if the conflict continues without gains or credible diplomacy.

## DOMESTIC UKRAINIAN PERCEPTIONS SUMMARY

***Ukrainian public opinion balances on a knife's edge—Ukrainians are exhausted and eager for peace, yet resolute about a just peace that secures their nation's sovereignty.***

As outlined in the War in Ukraine Sociocultural Running Estimate Update 21: Perspectives on Peace,<sup>14</sup> polling confirms a dramatic reversal in Ukrainian attitudes toward the war between 2022 and 2025. During the war's first year, 73 percent of Ukrainians believed the country should continue fighting until victory, while only 22 percent favored negotiations. By July 2025, those numbers flipped—69 percent favored negotiating an end to the war “as soon as possible,” while only 24 percent were committed to fighting until victory.<sup>15</sup> The shift reflects growing war fatigue in the third year of the conflict. However, this war-weariness does not imply willingness to surrender: a strong majority of Ukrainians are “categorically against” any peace deal on Moscow's terms that involves ceding territory.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, more than 75 percent of Ukrainians still express confidence

in ultimate victory if Ukraine continues to receive robust Western support.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 3: (Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyiv\\_anti-corruption\\_protests\\_23-07-2025\\_20.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyiv_anti-corruption_protests_23-07-2025_20.jpg))

## WAR FATIGUE IN RUSSIAN AND UKRAINIAN SOCIETIES

***As the conflict in Ukraine heads into its fourth year, both societies are increasingly weary of the costs. However, public manifestation and government tolerance of war fatigue vary in a reflection of the differing ways each society participates in its government. Regardless, the***

***mere presence of war fatigue and how each society publicly expresses its war fatigue presents challenges to each government and opportunities for their adversaries (and their supporters) to seek advantage.***

## Russian Home-Front War Fatigue: The “Way Home” Wives and Mothers Movement

***Russian society in 2025 shows quiet war fatigue as families of soldiers suffer in silence. A majority would welcome an end to the war, yet overt antiwar activism is suppressed. Regardless, many Russians still believe (or pretend to believe) in eventual victory.*** However, war fatigue over mounting casualties and open-ended deployments has led to a movement of wives and mothers of mobilized soldiers requesting time limits on mobilizations. In autumn 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s partial mobilization decree resulted in sending around 300,000 conscripts and reservists, many without combat experience, to war with no end date. Over a year later, with these men stuck indefinitely on the frontlines, their female relatives began organizing, and by late 2023, a Telegram channel called *Put’ Domoy* (“The Way Home”) had grown to more than 35,000 members. Members of *Put’ Domoy*, mostly women, networked to bring their sons, husbands, and brothers back home from the war.<sup>18</sup> This grassroots movement coalesced into public action in November 2023 when members of *Put’ Domoy* joined an officially sanctioned Communist rally in Moscow. Their message was simple but politically daring: they demanded a timeline for their men’s return and an end to open-ended mobilization.<sup>19</sup>

- *Put’ Domoy* has carefully couched its protests of the indefinite mobilization. They argued that citizens have done their duty and should be relieved by professional soldiers but did not criticize Putin or the war.<sup>20</sup> This approach has been described as consentful contention—dissenting in a way that mimics loyal, dutiful discourse.<sup>21</sup> For example, the movement’s early manifesto explicitly stated “we are not interested in rocking the boat” politically.<sup>22</sup> Many women, often from Putin’s core conservative base, expressed patriotism and even initial support for the war’s goals. Many of the women noted that their families were not financially desperate, so they saw no good reason for their men to risk death for vague patriotic rewards.<sup>23</sup> They framed their plea as helping the army by rotating exhausted men, rather than a betrayal of Russia.<sup>24</sup> Crucially, this approach avoids breaking the laws against criticizing the army or the SMO. It also reflects awareness of the

well-publicized cases of multiple Putin critics whose deaths were declared suicide.

According to the Kremlin, in early 2024 at least 240,000 of the troops in Ukraine were mobilized citizens, and nearly every Russian community had some men at the front.<sup>25, 26</sup> As one mobilized man’s wife recounted, her husband initially went along with the draft partly out of peer pressure and a fatalistic fear of being arrested if he refused, saying “running was pointless... they’d find everyone anyway.”<sup>27</sup> Casualty numbers have been state secrets, but anecdotal evidence of losses seeping into social media and independent Western reports indicates there were over 300,000 killed or wounded Russians as of June 2025.<sup>28</sup> Levada polls show the share of Russians who think the war has brought “more harm than good” to Russia rose from 41 percent in May 2023 to 47 percent by September 2024, and only 28 percent of Russians believed the war’s benefits outweighed its damages.<sup>29</sup> Emotionally, about one-third of Russians admit to feelings of “anxiety, fear, or horror” regarding the war, according to polling in mid-2024.<sup>30</sup> These are significant undercurrents for a society that typically projects stoic approval.

- The Kremlin is historically wary of mothers’ movements, which famously helped end the Chechen War in the 1990s. Authorities seemed unsure how to respond to *Put’ Domoy*. Throughout early 2024, authorities denied *Put’ Domoy* permits for large rallies and instructed state media to ignore them. Police often merely observed *Put’ Domoy* protests or detained only journalists and male supporters, apparently reluctant to jail the women themselves.<sup>31</sup> This measured response suggests the Kremlin recognizes the social sensitivity of the situation. Analyst Andrei Kolesnikov noted, “these wives and mothers are not part of the traditional liberal opposition...many come from Putin’s core base,” so a harsh crackdown could backfire.<sup>32</sup>

- While not taking physical action against the women protesters, the Kremlin has responded through legal means and propaganda. In late 2023, a Kremlin-influenced campaign labeled the group’s Telegram channel as fake news.<sup>33</sup> On May 31, 2024, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation officially declared *Put’ Domoy* a foreign agent.<sup>34</sup> This designation, routinely used to vilify NGOs and activists, signaled that authorities view the wives’ movement as a threat. Independent media outlets reported that some of the movement’s more vocal organizers were forced out of their jobs or faced harassment after being tagged with the foreign agent label. By 2025, most movement leaders had been pressured into silence. In one instance, a prominent army wife-turned-activist was added to an extremist registry and publicly shamed, leading her to stop organizing.<sup>35</sup>

## Ukrainian Home-Front War Fatigue: Conscription, Fairness, and Civic Trust

***Ukraine’s continued military personnel deficit to Russia and the protracted nature of the war contribute to societal fissures that are vulnerable to Russia’s manipulation.***

From the outset of the invasion in 2022, Ukraine implemented nationwide mobilization, relying on volunteers and conscription to expand its armed forces. By 2023, however, the initial rush of patriotism-driven volunteers had waned, and Ukraine faced the difficult challenge of sustaining troop levels during the protracted war. This has led to a series of policy changes and crackdowns that, while militarily necessary, have sparked domestic debate over fairness and civic rights. Major societal tensions in Ukraine revolve around the minimum age for conscription, the enforcement methods of mobilization, and issues of corruption, resulting in a renewed exodus of military-age men from the country.

### UKRAINE’S DIMINISHING DEMOGRAPHIC

In April 2024, amid intensifying Russian offensives, Ukraine’s parliament lowered the upper conscription age to 25. Previously, Ukrainian men ages 18-26 were eligible for military service only if they volunteered or had prior service; otherwise, compulsory mobilization started at age 27. Kyiv’s Western backers, including the United States, pressured Ukraine to consider dropping the draft age to 18 to enlarge the pool of recruits. This idea proved deeply unpopular. In street interviews in Kyiv, mothers and grandmothers expressed horror at the thought of sending “18-year-old children to the slaughter.” Many Ukrainians pointed out that the 18–25 male age group is already the smallest in the population (due to low birth rates in the 1990s and early 2000s). As one woman lamented, “there will be nobody left to have babies” if the youth are all mobilized. This demographic reality feeds public anxiety that an all-out draft of teenagers would mortally wound the nation’s future, potentially resulting in a repeat of Europe’s “Lost Generation” from World War I. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pushed back on the U.S. recommendation, arguing in December 2024 that lack of arms and equipment, not personnel, was the bigger constraint on Ukraine’s war effort. He quipped, “if a person is unarmed, what’s the difference if he is 20 or 30?” Thus, the formal minimum age for volunteers remains at 18 and 25 for conscription (lowered from 27).<sup>36</sup>



Figure 4: (Source: <https://tinyurl.com/47cpwbsc>)

- As casualties mounted and frontline brigades needed replenishment, reports emerged of aggressive local recruiting tactics. By mid-2023, social media was rife with anecdotes and videos depicting conscription patrols—uniformed teams that roamed cities and villages to serve draft summonses, sometimes in intimidating ways. An internal investigation found numerous cases of draft officers taking bribes to declare men unfit for service or to facilitate their travel abroad.<sup>37</sup> One regional recruitment chief owned luxury real estate in Spain, seemingly financed through illicit payoffs from draft evaders, which caused public outrage.<sup>38</sup>
- In August 2023, amid scandal, Zelenskyy dismissed the top military commissar (recruitment officer) in each region of Ukraine due to widespread corruption and abuse in the enlistment system. This purge was a dramatic acknowledgment by the government that public trust in the fairness of the draft was eroding. Despite the personnel shake-up, problems persisted in 2025. Ukraine introduced new digital tools to streamline mobilization; for example, it established mandatory electronic registration called *Reserve+* for all men of fighting age. However, these were accompanied by strict deadlines and the threat of penalties, leading to long lines and confusion as men scrambled to comply. In July 2024, when a 60-day grace period for updating personal data expired, men were seen camping overnight by recruitment centers in Kyiv to avoid being marked as draft dodgers.<sup>39</sup> Such scenes underscored a climate of anxiety even among law-abiding citizens.
- Allegations of unlawful force by some conscription officers have surfaced. During the first half of 2025, Ukraine’s Human Rights Ombudsman received over 2,000 complaints about rough treatment by enlistment patrols. Investigations revealed incidents such as a bicyclist in Rivne being run off the road and tear-gassed by officers trying to serve him papers. In another extreme case in western Ukraine, a man with a valid exemption (as sole caretaker for his disabled mother) was detained, beaten, and allegedly driven to a forest by officers who attempted to extort him—essentially simulating an illegal border crossing to scare him. He eventually paid a bribe and fled the country, one of many young Ukrainian men now opting for preemptive emigration rather than risk

a brutal forced draft. *Al Jazeera* reported that in August 2025 hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian men are believed to be in hiding domestically, and an exodus of teenage boys abroad (often sent by their parents to avoid future call-up) is underway.<sup>40</sup> Such accounts, while not representative of the average draftee’s experience, have spread fear and resentment that ordinary Ukrainians are being roughed up and dragged to war, while the well-connected ones find ways out.

- Corruption and avoidance of service by elites remains a sore point. High-profile prosecutions have been initiated to show that no one is above the law:
  - » In October 2024 Zelenskyy fired the country’s prosecutor general after revelations that several prosecutors purchased fake disability certificates to dodge the draft.
  - » In early 2025, the chief military psychiatrist was arrested on charges of accepting bribes to falsely conscripts as mentally unfit and having amassed luxury properties and cash during the war.<sup>41</sup>

These measures aim to reassure the public that wartime sacrifices are being evenly shared. However, it may be too little, too late, as many Ukrainians believe that those with money or influence can escape frontline duty. In 2022, Ukrainians who fled the country or otherwise avoided service were popularly scorned. In a June 2024 Razumkov Center poll, 46 percent of Ukrainians said there is no shame in avoiding conscription, 25 percent were unsure, and only 29 percent still felt that draft-dodging is shameful.<sup>42</sup> Sociologists link this changed attitude to the reports of corruption: people see unfairness in elites skipping service, making them less inclined to judge ordinary Ukrainians who also try to avoid serving.<sup>43</sup>

- The issue of fairness in military service has led to social rifts, extending beyond differences between ordinary Ukrainians and elites. Some friend groups have splintered over the issue of service. One army wife said she “broke up with many female friends who defend their husbands’ right not to fight,” calling that mindset “disgusting—let someone else die while I’m hiding behind my wife’s skirt.”<sup>44</sup> Online, commentary is divided. Some shame men of fighting age for relaxing in Lviv or abroad, and others argue it

is a rational decision for men to avoid being cannon fodder in ill-planned assaults.

## Ukrainian War Fatigue: Morale, Trust, and the Willingness to Fight

**Despite war weariness and Russia's overmatch in available personnel, Ukraine continues to hold its own because of Western support and the belief that it is fighting a war of national survival.** As detailed in the *War in Ukraine Sociocultural Running Estimate Update 21: Perspectives on Peace*, while most Ukrainians desire an end to the war, they insist it must conclude on their terms. Many believe Ukraine should fight until that is achieved.<sup>45</sup> When it comes to willingness to serve personally, Ukraine faces a complicated reality. On one hand, patriotic fervor is still evident, as men continue to volunteer in response to recruiting campaigns. However, the pool of eager volunteers is not unlimited.

- Many units have no trouble finding volunteers. Elite brigades like the 3rd Separate Assault or the 1st Da Vinci Wolves Battalion run billboard and social media campaigns that successfully attract motivated recruits. Kyiv regularly highlights stories of professionals and even former criminals volunteering for the front. Ukraine has allowed certain prisoners to enlist

for redemption, like Russia, though on a smaller and more regulated scale.<sup>46</sup> These narratives aim to inspire voluntary enlistment and take pressure off conscription.

- Conversely, following several waves of mobilization, most willing recruits are already serving, leaving behind those who are reluctant or have valid reasons to stay home (e.g., family, health, essential jobs). The presence of hundreds of thousands of men in hiding or who have fled the country highlights a significant minority actively seeking to avoid service.<sup>47</sup>
- Ukraine's leaders have acknowledged this strain. Officials have discussed the need for a future demobilization/rotation plan, suggesting that once the situation stabilizes, those who have served long tours must be relieved or the army's morale will crack.<sup>48</sup> However, such rotation has been very limited because the intensity of combat hasn't allowed it yet.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WAR FATIGUE: TWO SOCIETIES, TWO NARRATIVES

**Both Russia and Ukraine are societies engaged in a protracted and costly war, where the initial, fervent unity has given way to more complex, ambivalent attitudes. However, the sociocultural dynamics differ profoundly: Russia faces a passive discontent and Ukraine an active debate.**

- **Nature of Dissent:** The two cases examined here highlight sharp differences in the forms, limits, and consequences of dissent between Russian and Ukrainian societies.
  - » The mothers and wives of *Put' Domoy* in Russia protest the open-ended mobilization of reservists and conscripts, largely without crossing the line into prohibited criticism of Putin or the SMO. Nonetheless, the Kremlin has engaged

in legal and propaganda campaigns against organizers, resulting in the gradual silencing of outspoken opposition.<sup>49</sup>

- » In Ukraine, dissent takes the form of debate and criticism within a democratic context, where the media, opposition figures, and civil society openly challenge the government on issues like draft policy or corruption while still supporting war aims. The freedom to complain arguably acts as a safety valve in Ukraine, whereas in Russia the suppression of open dissent forces grievances into more symbolic acts or private grievance.

- **Role of Leadership and Propaganda:** Putin’s regime has tightly controlled the narrative. It insulates most Russians from the war’s harsh reality—no images of coffins on TV and the use of euphemisms like “SMO”—and highlights any signs that suggest eventual triumph. For many Russians, this makes the war seem unreal. They can cheer for it without suffering much, unless they have a relative in the army. That explains in part why protests have remained small: most Russians do not feel directly affected enough to risk opposing Putin.<sup>50</sup>

Like Putin’s regime, Zelenskyy’s government uses propaganda to keep hope alive. However, it recognizes

and acknowledges that Ukraine is fighting for national survival. Every community has buried soldiers, and every resident experiences air raid alerts. Although Kyiv has banned pro-Russian media and politicians, Ukrainian leaders have been relatively open about the war’s difficulties (within OPSEC limits). This makes the public’s support more informed but also more fragile. If people sense incompetence or injustice on the part of officials, support may weaken. Firing corrupt officers, though painful, may have strengthened public resolve and trust. It showed the system can correct itself.

## IMPLICATIONS

***The conflict in Ukraine illustrates that long-term military outcomes are shaped not only by battlefield performance but also by the durability of sociocultural will and cohesion within both state and society.*** These dynamics carry implications for how military power is sustained over time, particularly in conflicts characterized by protracted mobilization, rising casualties, external support, and persistent information competition. For the U.S. Army, this underscores the relevance of sociocultural conditions as a factor that can influence operational environments, partner capacity, and conflict trajectories.

- In Russia, narratives such as *Bring Our Men Home* function as a counterweight to the Kremlin’s portrayal of the war as limited in cost and broadly supported. The visibility of casualties, mobilization burdens, and the experiences of soldiers’ families have the potential to erode public confidence, especially among demographics with lived or inherited memories of earlier conflicts. These dynamics demonstrate how internal sociocultural pressures can affect regime legitimacy and strategic flexibility, creating conditions that may shape both adversarial behavior and the broader information environment in which military operations occur. Awareness of such pressures can inform assessments of stability, escalation risk, and public tolerance for continued conflict.
- The grievances that *Put’ Domoy* publicizes are likely shared by a broader swath of Russian society, even if rarely voiced. The *Put’ Domoy* wives and mothers

served as a litmus test about how far ordinary people can push the boundaries of dissent when their loved ones are at risk. That the Kremlin hasn’t arrested these women, as it has done with other opposition figures, indicates an awareness of latent public fatigue and societal sensitivities to mothers. Their rallying cry, “*Give us back our men!*” doesn’t explicitly say *stop the war*, but the implication is clear. To solve their problem, authorities must either end the war or mobilize a whole new wave of troops.<sup>51</sup> This situation shows the Kremlin’s duplicity by claiming the SMO is going well yet refusing to rotate or demobilize the men it called up. How the Kremlin navigates this discontent—through repression, concession, or distraction—will be a key indicator of its home-front stability going forward.

- That said, Russian society’s current apathy or quiet fatigue is a strategic asset for Putin—it means he can carry on the war without drastic opposition, so long as he avoids a second mass mobilization that would shock the public into action.
- In Ukraine, Russian information efforts that frame conscription and mobilization policies as coercive, coupled with anecdotal evidence shared in the public sphere, illustrate how draft-related issues can become focal points for undermining trust in government leadership. Fluctuations in public support, protest activity, recruitment, and desertion rates serve as observable indicators of societal strain and resilience. In any

conflict, these indicators can signal shifts in public sentiment that may influence operational tempo, force generation, and political decisionmaking. For the U.S. Army, such patterns highlight the importance of accounting for sociocultural variables when evaluating partner endurance and the evolving character of the operational environment.

- Ukrainian society's argumentative, noisy fatigue is, conversely, a strength of its democracy—issues are brought to light and at least nominally addressed (such as replacing corrupt recruiters), which may help sustain long-term resilience. However, it also represents a vulnerability if war-weariness grows too deep, possibly limiting Ukraine's manpower or pressuring its leaders into a compromised peace not fully on its terms.

- Moscow cannot count on breaking Kyiv's will to fight through attrition alone—Ukrainians are tired but not willing to surrender or splinter. Likewise, Kyiv and its allies cannot bank on a Russian "people's revolt" to stop Putin—Russians are unhappy but mostly depoliticized and acquiescent, and any significant antiwar movement would likely be crushed early. The war's outcome will thus hinge on other factors such as battlefield dynamics, elite decisions, and external support; these sociocultural undercurrents will shape each government's ability to escalate or resolve the conflict.

# ENDNOTES

- 1 “We Don’t Need Your Money, Give Us Back Our Men!” Russia Post, [https://russiapost.info/society/back\\_our\\_men](https://russiapost.info/society/back_our_men); Reporters Detained at Moscow Protest by Soldiers’ Wives – AFP - The Moscow Times, February 3, 2024, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/02/03/reporters-detained-at-moscow-protest-by-soldiers-wives-afp-a83966>
- 2 “Ukraine’s conscription crisis: Alleged abuse leads to protests, emigration,” Al Jazeera, August 8, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/8/ukraines-conscription-crisis-alleged-abuse-leads-to-protests-emigration>
- 3 “Why Do Ukrainians Oppose Lowering The Conscription Age?” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, January 15, 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-war-conscription/33275293.html>
- 4 “Long Lines, Worries As Ukraine Pushes To Bolster The Ranks For The Fight Against Russia,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, July 20, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-war-draft-mobilization-russia/33043064.html>
- 5 “Ukrainian Support for War Effort Collapses,” Gallup, August 7, 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/693203/ukrainian-support-war-effort-collapses.aspx>
- 6 “Polls Show Ukrainians Increasingly Want End to War, But Not Under Russia’s Terms,” Russia Matters, August 8, 2025, <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/polls-show-ukrainians-increasingly-want-end-war-not-under-russias-terms>
- 7 “76% of Ukrainians believe Russia could be defeated with sanctions and proper support,” Ukrainska Pravda, September 16, 2025, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/09/16/7531094/>
- 8 Figure 2: Susan Littleton, Domestic Russian Perceptions, infographic, GCKN, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.
- 9 “Putin’s Approval Rating,” Levada Center, 2025, <https://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/approval-of-the-authorities/>.
- 10 “Conflict with Ukraine in October 2025: Attention, Support for the Actions of the Russian Armed Forces and the Start of Negotiations, Attitude to the Hypothetical Decision of a Loved One to Sign a Contract to Participate in a Special Operation,” Levada Center, November 11, 2025 <https://www.levada.ru/2025/11/11/konflikt-s-ukrainoj-v-oktyabre-2025-goda-vnimanie-podderzhka-dejstvii-rossijskih-vooruzhennyh-sil-i-nachala-peregovorov-otnoshenie-k-gipoteticheskomu-resheniyu-blizkogo-cheloveka-podpisat-kontrakt-dly/>.
- 11 “Poll: Majority of Russians Would Oppose Returning Land Even if Putin Decides To Return it as Part of Peace Deal,” Russia Matters, October 17, 2024, <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/poll-majority-russians-would-oppose-returning-land-even-if-putin-decides-return-it-part-peace>
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 See GCKN, War in Ukraine Sociocultural Running Estimate 21: Perspectives on Peace, August 11, 2025
- 15 “Ukrainian Support for War Effort Collapses,” Gallup, August 7, 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/693203/ukrainian-support-war-effort-collapses.aspx>
- 16 “Polls Show Ukrainians Increasingly Want End to War, But Not Under Russia’s Terms,” Russia Matters, , August 8, 2025, <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/polls-show-ukrainians-increasingly-want-end-war-not-under-russias-terms>
- 17 “76% of Ukrainians believe Russia could be defeated with sanctions and proper support,” Ukrainska Pravda, September 16, 2025, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/09/16/7531094/>
- 18 “We’re tired of being good girls’: Russia’s military wives and mothers protest against Putin,” The Guardian, December 25, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/25/russia-military-wives-mothers-protest-against-putin-war-ukraine-troops-female>
- 19 “We Don’t Need Your Money, Give Us Back Our Men!” Russia Post [https://russiapost.info/society/back\\_our\\_men](https://russiapost.info/society/back_our_men)
- 20 “Wives of mobilized Russian soldiers hold rare protest at defense ministry demanding their return,” AP News, June 3, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-soldiers-wives-defense-ministry-2f3fb8b8722392d032580657fba6f6cc>
- 21 “We Don’t Need Your Money, Give Us Back Our Men!” Russia Post, [https://russiapost.info/society/back\\_our\\_men](https://russiapost.info/society/back_our_men)
- 22 “We’re tired of being good girls’: Russia’s military wives and mothers protest against Putin,” The Guardian, December 25, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/25/russia-military-wives-mothers-protest-against-putin-war-ukraine-troops-female>
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Reporters Detained at Moscow Protest by Soldiers’ Wives – AFP - The Moscow Times, February 3, 2024, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/02/03/reporters-detained-at-moscow-protest-by-soldiers-wives-afp-a83966>
- 26 “Russian losses in the war with Ukraine. Mediazona count, updated 20 NOV,” Mediazona, November 25, 2025, [https://en.zona.media/article/2025/11/21/casualties\\_eng-trl; Pjotr Saur, One million and counting: Russian casualties hit milestone in Ukraine War, The Guardian, June 22, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2025/jun/22/one-million-and-counting-russian-casualties-hit-milestone-in-ukraine-war>; Seth G. Jones and Riley McCabe, “Russia’s battlefield woes in Ukraine,” CSIS, June 3, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-battlefield-woes-ukraine>](https://en.zona.media/article/2025/11/21/casualties_eng-trl; Pjotr Saur, One million and counting: Russian casualties hit milestone in Ukraine War, The Guardian, June 22, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2025/jun/22/one-million-and-counting-russian-casualties-hit-milestone-in-ukraine-war; Seth G. Jones and Riley McCabe, “Russia’s battlefield woes in Ukraine,” CSIS, June 3, 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-battlefield-woes-ukraine)
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 “Russian losses in the war with Ukraine. Mediazona count, updated 20 NOV,” Mediazona, November 25, 2025, [https://en.zona.media/article/2025/11/21/casualties\\_eng-trl; Pjotr Saur, One million and counting: Russian casualties hit milestone in Ukraine War, The Guardian, June 22, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2025/jun/22/one-million-and-counting-russian-casualties-hit-milestone-in-ukraine-war>; Seth G. Jones and Riley McCabe, “Russia’s battlefield woes in Ukraine,” CSIS, June 3, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-battlefield-woes-ukraine>](https://en.zona.media/article/2025/11/21/casualties_eng-trl; Pjotr Saur, One million and counting: Russian casualties hit milestone in Ukraine War, The Guardian, June 22, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2025/jun/22/one-million-and-counting-russian-casualties-hit-milestone-in-ukraine-war; Seth G. Jones and Riley McCabe, “Russia’s battlefield woes in Ukraine,” CSIS, June 3, 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-battlefield-woes-ukraine)
- 29 “Poll: Majority of Russians Would Oppose Returning Land Even if Putin Decides To Return it as Part of Peace Deal,” Russia Matters, October 17, 2024, <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/poll-majority-russians-would-oppose-returning-land-even-if-putin-decides-return-it-part-peace>

- 30 See GCKN, War in Ukraine Sociocultural Running Estimate Update 18: Peripheral Impacts – Immigration as a Weapon of Instability, September 23, 2024
- 31 “We’re tired of being good girls’: Russia’s military wives and mothers protest against Putin,” The Guardian, December 25, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/25/russia-military-wives-mothers-protest-against-putin-war-ukraine-troops-female>; “Reporters Detained at Moscow Protest by Soldiers’ Wives,” The Moscow Times, February 3, 2024, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/02/03/reporters-detained-at-moscow-protest-by-soldiers-wives-afp-a83966>
- 32 “We’re tired of being good girls’: Russia’s military wives and mothers protest against Putin,” The Guardian, December 25, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/25/russia-military-wives-mothers-protest-against-putin-war-ukraine-troops-female>
- 33 “We Don’t Need Your Money, Give Us Back Our Men!” Russia Post, [https://russiapost.info/society/back\\_our\\_men](https://russiapost.info/society/back_our_men)
- 34 “Wives, Mothers Of Mobilized Russian Troops In Rare Protest At Defense Ministry In Moscow,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, June 3, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-moscow-wives-mothers-mobilized-soldiers-ukraine/32977644.html>; “Wives of mobilized Russian soldiers hold rare protest at defense ministry demanding their return,” AP News, June 3, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-soldiers-wives-defense-ministry-2f3fb8b8722392d032580657f7bea6fcc>
- 35 “We Don’t Need Your Money, Give Us Back Our Men!” Russia Post, [https://russiapost.info/society/back\\_our\\_men](https://russiapost.info/society/back_our_men)
- 36 “Why Do Ukrainians Oppose Lowering The Conscription Age?” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, January 14, 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-war-conscription/33275293.html>; “‘Children to the slaughter’: Ukrainians oppose lowering conscription age,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, January 15, 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-war-conscription/33275293.html>
- 37 “Why Do Ukrainians Oppose Lowering The Conscription Age?” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, January 14, 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-war-conscription/33275293.html>
- 38 “Long Lines, Worries As Ukraine Pushes To Bolster The Ranks For The Fight Against Russia,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, July 20, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-war-draft-mobilization-russia/33043064.html>
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 “Ukraine’s conscription crisis: Alleged abuse leads to protests, emigration,” Al Jazeera, August 8, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/8/ukraines-conscription-crisis-alleged-abuse-leads-to-protests-emigration>
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 “Long Lines, Worries As Ukraine Pushes To Bolster The Ranks For The Fight Against Russia,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, July 20, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-war-draft-mobilization-russia/33043064.html>
- 43 “Why Do Ukrainians Oppose Lowering The Conscription Age?” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, January 14, 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-war-conscription/33275293.html>
- 44 “Ukraine’s conscription crisis: Alleged abuse leads to protests, emigration,” Al Jazeera, August 8, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/8/ukraines-conscription-crisis-alleged-abuse-leads-to-protests-emigration>
- 45 See GCKN, War in Ukraine Sociocultural Running Estimate Update 21: Perspectives on Peace, August 11, 2025.
- 46 “Long Lines, Worries As Ukraine Pushes To Bolster The Ranks For The Fight Against Russia,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, July 20, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-war-draft-mobilization-russia/33043064.html>
- 47 “Ukraine’s conscription crisis: Alleged abuse leads to protests, emigration,” Al Jazeera, August 8, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/8/ukraines-conscription-crisis-alleged-abuse-leads-to-protests-emigration>
- 48 “Long Lines, Worries As Ukraine Pushes To Bolster The Ranks For The Fight Against Russia,” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, July 20, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-war-draft-mobilization-russia/33043064.html>
- 49 “We Don’t Need Your Money, Give Us Back Our Men!” Russia Post, [https://russiapost.info/society/back\\_our\\_men](https://russiapost.info/society/back_our_men); “We’re tired of being good girls’: Russia’s military wives and mothers protest against Putin,” The Guardian, December 25, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/25/russia-military-wives-mothers-protest-against-putin-war-ukraine-troops-female>
- 50 See GCKN, War in Ukraine Sociocultural Running Estimate Updates, 2022-present.
- 51 “Wives of mobilized Russian soldiers hold rare protest at defense ministry demanding their return,” AP News, June 3, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-soldiers-wives-defense-ministry-2f3fb8b8722392d032580657f7bea6fcc>

