

GCKN RUNNING ESTIMATE

Effects of Mobilization and Annexation



In the Previous Running Estimate...

- Russian domestic support for the war held at 76% through late August, while those “paying close attention to the war” dropped to 51% and overall “concern about the war” fell to 74%. *Ongoing public responses to Russia’s recent mobilization already foreshadow a substantive decrease in domestic support for the war.*
- Ukrainian patriotism, including the use of the Ukrainian language (even among native Russian speakers), has soared since the Russian invasion, and a whole of society resistance movement has grown in Russian-occupied areas.
- The majority of Ukrainian refugees in Europe plan to return, but most will do so only under the condition that the Russian threat is resolved permanently. Meanwhile, the Kremlin is orchestrating a “Russification” strategy in the occupied regions of Ukraine.
- Russia’s partial mobilization targets the very demographic which has least supported the war—Gen Z and Millennials—portending a downward turn in overall domestic support.

This Running Estimate...

- Russian domestic support for the war decreased from 76% in August to 72% in September, almost certainly reflecting public discontent over Russia’s mobilization and the disorderly way it has been carried out.
- Approximately 300,000 Russians have been mobilized, but at least as many have also fled Russia as a result the mobilization order.
- Ethnic minorities and rural populations across Russia claim that the mobilization is targeting their communities.
- Russian allies have largely failed to support the Kremlin’s annexation of occupied Ukrainian territory.

DOMESTIC RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS

Russia’s decreasing public support for the war stems from those who are against the mobilization, discontent over how it has been conducted, uneasy with the war’s direction following substantive losses, or possibly influenced by unusually strident public criticism by prominent Russians. According to the Levada Center, the Russian populace’s belief that the “special military operation” is successful continued to decline from a high of 73% in May to 53% in September.¹ Similarly, public

support for the war declined from a high of 83% in March to 72% in September.² These drops in support—especially since August—coincide with Russian losses in northeast Ukraine, growing pressure in southeast Ukraine, and President Putin’s subsequent mobilization of approximately 300,000 reservists, which he announced on 21 September.³ According to the Levada Center’s September survey report, 77% of Russians are aware of Ukrainian counteroffensives in the Kharkiv region,⁴ which



dislodged Russian soldiers from their entrenched positions and spurred public skepticism about the war's progress.

- The Levada Center's 8th Russia-Ukraine war survey, conducted 22-28 September and released on 7 October, shows support for Russia's "special military operation" declined from 76% in August to 72% in September. While still high—in large part due to the Kremlin's evolving pro-war narratives projected through state-owned media—declining support for the war suggests growing public apprehension about its progress following recent setbacks for Russian forces in northeast and southeast Ukraine. Support remains strongest among 55 years and older (81%) and weakest among 18-24 years old (48%).⁵
- According to the Levada Center survey, 44% of Russians want the "special military operation" to continue, down from 48% in August. Conversely, 48% of Russians want peace negotiations to be initiated compared to 44% in August. In contrast, according to Gallup, 70% of Ukrainians want the fighting to continue until their country achieves victory, **suggesting Ukrainians sense momentum has shifted in their favor.**⁶
- In August, public attention to the Russo-Ukraine war and concern about the conflict fell from their March peaks of 64% and 82%, respectively, to 51% and 74%.⁷ By 20

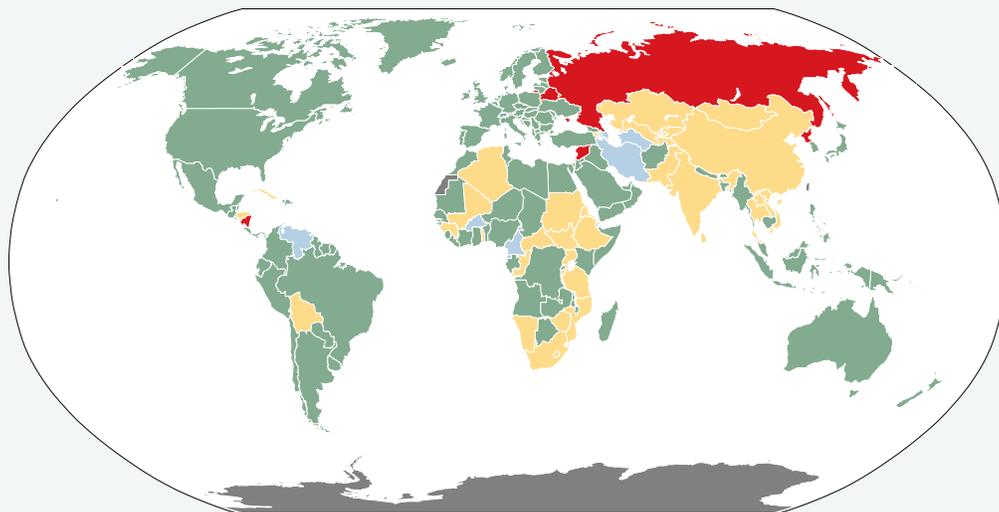
September—one week into partial mobilization—64% of Russians said they were closely monitoring the war and 88% were concerned about the war. These are the highest measures since the war began, coinciding with Ukraine's major advances. Twenty-six percent of Russians closely followed Ukraine's counteroffensive in the Kharkiv region while 51% had "heard something about it". Older Russians (55 and older), more than young people (18-24 years), continue to be most attentive to the war (78% as compared to 48%).

LEVADA SURVEYS	AUG 	Want Peace Negotiations	44%
		Want Special Military Operation to Continue	48%
LEVADA SURVEYS	SEP 	Want Peace Negotiations	48%
		Want Special Military Operation to Continue	44%
GALLUP SURVEY	SEP 	Want Fighting to Continue Until Victory	70%

11th EMERGENCY SPECIAL SESSION - 12 OCTOBER 2022

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION ES-11/4

Defending the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine Against Russian Annexation



■ In favor
 ■ Against
 ■ Abstained
 ■ Did Not Vote
 ■ Non-UN member



VOTING RESULTS

■ 143 IN FAVOR
 ■ 5 AGAINST
 ■ 35 ABSTAINED
 ■ 10 DID NOT VOTE

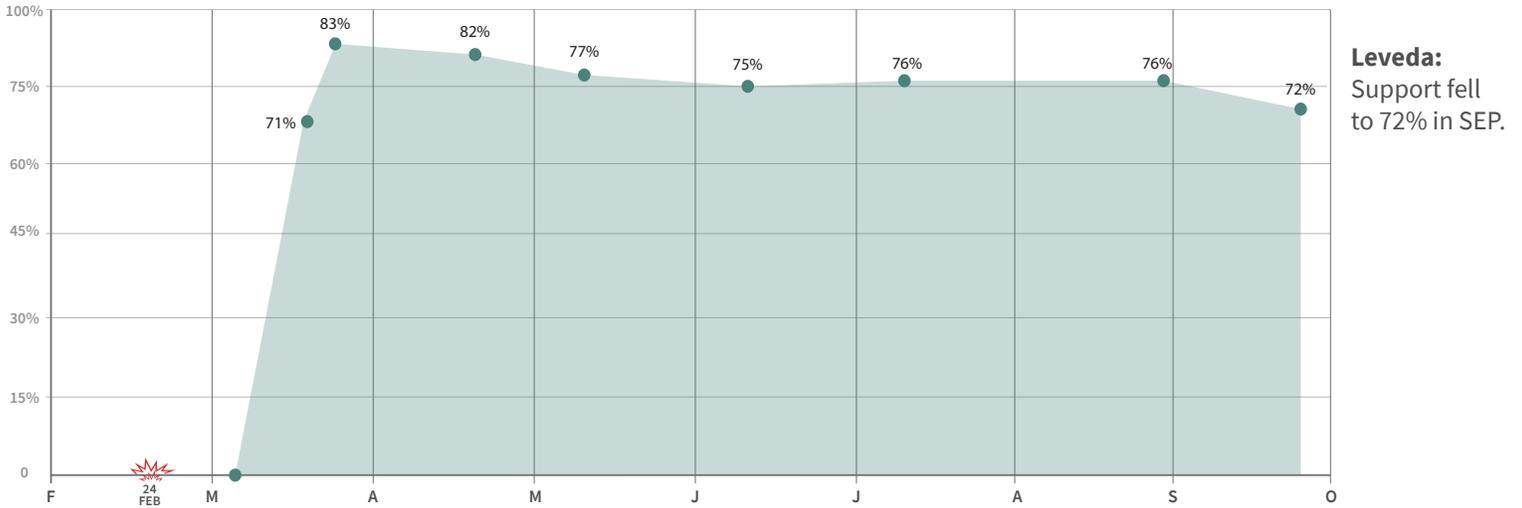
Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations

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RUSSIAN DOMESTIC RESPONSES TO UKRAINIAN ADVANCES IN KHARKIV

According to the Levada Center's September polls, Russian emotional reaction to the Ukrainian military advances in Kharkiv is of anxiety, fear, and horror (35%), anger and indignation (20%), and shock (12%). Only about 9% felt pride in Russia, suggesting that Ukrainian military gains are demoralizing a number of Russians on this topic.⁸ **The rekindling of attention and concern about the war undermines the Kremlin's efforts to normalize the conflict, and suggests that personal connection to the war is becoming more salient to the Russian public than the Kremlin's propaganda.**

Domestic Russian Perceptions of the "Special Military Operation"



*It is important to note that 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.

Figure 1. Domestic Russian Perceptions of the "Special Military Operation" public opinion polls, GCKN.

POLLING SNAPSHOT

(After Mobilization Announcement and Annexation)

Russia:

- After plateauing for two months, support for the "special military operation" began to fall, measuring an early drop of four points to 72% in the latest poll.
- A bare majority (53%) of Russians believe the war is progressing successfully, down from a high of 73% in May.
- Only 44% of Russians want the war to continue, down from 48% in August, while almost half of Russians support negotiations to end the war.

Ukraine:

- 70% of Ukrainians want the war to continue until victory.
- 83% of Ukrainians support joining NATO.
- 67% of Ukrainians believe in the need for a distinct Ukrainian nationalism.
- Popularity of World War II Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera increased from 19% to nearly 50% since the Russian invasion. Another survey shows 74% of Ukrainians have a favorable view of Bandera.

MOBILIZATION MISSTEPS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Segments of the Russian population perceive that Moscow has conducted its partial mobilization incompetently, unequally, and in some cases perilously. This has given rise to a new modicum of public resistance that, if unchecked, could grow and gradually challenge regime cohesion. Implementation of Putin’s mobilization has been beset by challenges, has met resistance across Russian provinces and on state television,¹¹ and has placed the Russian economy and people on a wartime footing.¹² Minority and rural populations, as well as anti-war protesters, have reportedly been targeted for mobilization while white collar workers, politicians, those with political connections, and Muscovites have allegedly been largely overlooked.¹³ Two of Putin’s top propagandists, head of RT Margarita Simonyan and state TV host Vladimir Solovyov, have criticized the shoddy mobilization, warning that commanders were “toying with armed people.”¹⁴

- According to Levada polling, the mobilization evokes popular feelings of anxiety, fear, and horror (47%), shock (23%), pride (23%), anger/indignation (13%), and indifference (9%). Two-thirds of Russians (66%) fear that continuous fighting in Ukraine will result in general mobilization compared to the 28% who held the same view in February.¹⁵ The visceral reaction to the mobilization ranges from men fleeing the country, to Russian companies complaining that it decapitated the white-collar workforce, to elements of popular dissent and violence that destroyed at least 20 Russian military recruitment offices as of 26 September, according to the Moscow Times. Similar examples of public outrage include the shooting of a Siberian enlistment officer during the mobilization and a man in the western city of Ryazan who set himself on fire at a bus station in protest of fighting in Ukraine.¹⁶
- Minorities, namely Crimean Tartars, Kalmyks, Tuvans, Buryats, Yakuts, and Muslims, claim they are being targeted for mobilization over ethnic Russians, especially Muscovites (e.g., the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan has the highest known number of troops killed in Ukraine). Amid suggestions that the Putin regime is conducting ethnic cleansing via unequal mobilization, anti-war groups have emerged within Russia’s minority populations and raised the potential for more social instability. The first mobiki confirmed by the Kremlin as killed in action were all from the border area with Kazakhstan, further reinforcing perceptions that the Kremlin is targeting rural and minority populations for mobilization.¹⁷ In response, Russian Special Services are undertaking a disinformation campaign to discredit indigenous leaders and deter international support for their grievances.¹⁸
- The Kremlin has acknowledged “errors” in its mobilization efforts, according to press reporting.¹⁹ Errors included mobilization notices delivered to the disabled, men without military training, pensioners, students, those with serious illnesses, teachers, and low-density tech workers.²⁰ In response, the Kremlin reprimanded and fired military officials; changed the mobilization criteria to exempt a category of white-collar workers, state media staff, and students;²¹ and claimed governors are working to rectify the situation.²²

PARTIAL MOBILIZATION ANNOUNCED TO RUSSIAN PUBLIC

On 21 September Putin announced a partial mobilization—Russia’s first since WWII—signaling a significant escalation of the war and placing the entire country on a wartime footing.⁹ Since then, the Kremlin annexed four occupied Ukrainian regions, implemented martial law in them and announced the economic mobilization of eight Russian regions along the Ukraine border. . . further raising the impact of the war on both sides.¹⁰

RUSSIANS FLEE INTO EUROPE AS PUTIN TIGHTENS LAW

Russians have been fleeing the country in droves to avoid fighting in Putin's war against Ukraine, creating an urgency for the Kremlin to implement extraordinary measures that risk further alienation of increasingly skeptical elements within the population. Hundreds of thousands of Russians have fled Russia to neighboring countries since Putin's 21 September mobilization announcement. One report, citing a Kremlin source, indicates the number of fleeing Russians may have already reached 700,000 by late September.²³

- Putin's partial mobilization announcement immediately prompted long queues at Russian border checkpoints, with many people standing in line for 4-5 days, according to press. The European Union Border Agency, Frontex, estimates that in the week following Putin's announcement, 66,000 Russians entered the EU, a 30% increase from the previous week. Frontex claimed most Russians entered the EU through the Finnish and Estonian checkpoints.²⁴

- The mass departure of Russians stems in part from the public's perception that the "partial mobilization" is a pretense for a general mobilization, according to press.²⁵ Levada September polling indicates that 66% of Russians are afraid that continuous fighting in Ukraine will eventually result in general mobilization.²⁶ Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu claimed 300,000 reservists would be drafted, but official documents authorizing the mobilization give much broader terms, sowing fears among Russians of a wider draft, according to press.²⁷
- Kremlin concern that the widespread backlash against the mobilization would prolong local protests²⁸ prompted the government to enact several new amendments to the criminal code, tightening punishments related to military service during mobilization, martial law, or war. The new rules will punish Russians who abandon or fail to report for military duty with up to 10 years in prison.²⁹

PUTIN REGIME SOLIDARITY SLIPPING?

The Russian military's battlefield setbacks and a chaotic mobilization have led to rare criticism from within the regime, prompting efforts by Putin to reassert control, regain battlefield momentum, and solidify support. With large swaths of land and equipment recaptured by Ukrainian forces in their counteroffensives, the pressure on Putin to respond has intensified.³⁰ A rash of criticism against the direction and conduct of the "special military operation" by Putin regime officials, state media, oligarchs, and local officials appear to have unsettled the regime and pushed the Kremlin to appoint a new War Commander, escalate hostilities with Ukraine, and punish some of the critics with criminal charges depending on their political strength.³¹

- The success of Ukrainian counteroffensives in the northeast and southeast and a muddled mobilization are challenging Putin's need to balance three key Russian nationalist factions: milbloggers and journalists (necessary for his influence campaign), retired military officers and veterans (needed for recruiting), and siloviki^a (who supply additional combat forces), according to the Institute for the Study of War.³² Pro-war groups, including two powerful supporters of Putin—Ramzan Kadyrov (leader of the Chechen Republic) and Yevgeny Prigozhin (owner of the Wagner Group) have

criticized Russia's military leadership.³³

- In September, Putin's domestic popularity, which had hovered consistently between 82-83% since the start of the war, declined for the first time to a (still high) 77%, according to the Levada Center. This decline mirrors the regression in Russians' belief that the war was proceeding in the right direction, as it fell from 69% in March to 60% in September.
- Though Putin's popularity appears to be slipping among both regime supporters and the public, desire to participate in protests remains limited. Before the invasion, the propensity for protests in Russia was well below 30% and the desire to participate in protests was less than 20%. In August these rates dropped to 17% and 11%, respectively, likely due to aggressive Kremlin suppression efforts.³⁴

^a *Siloviki* are Russians with their own power base and forces. Examples are Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov (recently promoted to Colonel-General by Putin) and Wagner Group head Yevgeny Prigozhin.

RUSSIAN STRATEGIES IN OCCUPIED, ANNEXED TERRITORIES

In Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories, the Kremlin's strategy to defeat Ukrainian resistance, win hearts and minds, and undermine Ukrainian sovereignty have almost certainly achieved an opposite, broader effect: Ukrainian cohesion and galvanization of resistance. Moscow differentially appoints new officials among Ukrainian loyalists with instructions to treat certain locals with respect, deport others to Russia, and subject some communities to humiliation, torture, and summary executions.³⁵ ***The variety of actions by Russian troops and appointed officials reflect the Kremlin's military priorities, strategy, and resource allocation following recent defeats that undermined earlier ambitious post-war planning efforts.***

- Moscow held artificial referendums in areas it plans to administer directly—the southern oblasts of Kherson and Zaporizhia, and northeastern oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk—to indicate residents' preference for Russia. In

Melitopol and similar locations under Russian control, Moscow is carrying out Russification by flying the Russian flag in schools, forcing them to teach history from the “other side”, and using the Russian language, to erase Ukrainian history.³⁶

- In Kremlinna and Mariupol in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts (the Donbas), which Russia has partially controlled through proxy separatists since 2014, Moscow has applied a scorched-earth strategy of merciless, incessant pummeling that reduced million-plus populations to thousands. Moscow has deported over a million Ukrainians from the region to Russia, leaving mostly the elderly behind, according to press. ***Moscow has indiscriminately targeted civilian infrastructure in the Donbas as not just a military measure, but as part of a strategy to shape the environment for its administrative control.***³⁷

RESPONSES TO ANNEXATION OF OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia and Kherson oblasts drew swift rejection internationally and little support from some of Putin's allies, demonstrating a growing level of Russian isolation. Multiple Russian allies—including Kazakhstan, Serbia, Cuba, Iran and China—failed to support Russia's annexation of eastern Ukraine in a UN General Assembly resolution condemning it. Turkey, which maintains a relatively good relationship with Russia despite its NATO membership, was a co-sponsor of the resolution, and Hungary, whose President Orban often defends Putin and Russia, voted in favor of it. Only Belarus, North Korea, Syria, and Nicaragua joined Russia in voting against the resolution.

- A 12 October UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territory passed with five votes in favor, 35 abstentions, and 10 countries not voting.³⁸ ***Russia maintains some support internationally, but that support was somewhat weakened by its escalation of the conflict with Ukraine, annexation of territory belonging to a sovereign state, and repeated threats to use nuclear weapons.***
- On a related topic, Moscow's annexation reinforced the Ukrainian perception of Russia as an existential threat, motivating Kyiv to strongly pursue NATO membership. In turn, the Kremlin claimed Ukraine's (re-)stated desire to join NATO proved that Russia's “special military operation” was necessary to remove the country as a threat. According to a September 2022 poll by the Ukrainian sociological

group “Ratings,” 83% of Ukrainians would support joining NATO if a referendum were held, with only 4% against it. This is a record high, up from 76% in June 2022.³⁹



WAR INCREASES POPULARITY OF CONTROVERSIAL UKRAINIAN NATIONALIST LEADER

Survey data from the Democratic Initiatives Foundation and the Razumkov Center shows that Ukrainian popular support for **World War II Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera** increased by 19% to nearly half the population since the Russian invasion. Only 11% viewed Bandera negatively, with 19% seeing Bandera both ways and 20% unsure. In the same survey, 67% believe in the need for distinct Ukrainian nationalism. A “Ratings” group poll in April 2022 found that 74% of Ukrainians had a positive view of Bandera. ***The increase in popularity for Bandera plays into the Kremlin’s narrative of the need to “de-Nazify” Ukraine. Putin has stated on several occasions his intent to root out Ukrainian neo-Nazis or “Banderites.”***

A Ukrainian “ultranationalist,” Bandera is alleged to have collaborated with the Nazis, through coercion or ideological unity (or both), in an attempt to gain an independent Ukraine—only to be imprisoned in a concentration camp. He survived the war but

was killed by the Soviets in 1957. Bandera supporters are sought out by Russians among Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilians alike.⁴⁰

Image above: Stepan Bandera before 1934

Attribution: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0d/SBandra.jpg>

RUSSIAN EXPLOITATION OF UKRAINIAN VOLUNTEERS

Following Ukraine’s successful counter-offensives against Russia in the east, its volunteer battalions now risk increased Russian infiltration. Since the start of the war, criminal groups linked to the Kremlin have attempted to infiltrate Ukrainian volunteer battalions. Anxiety over Russian aggression spurred a wave of volunteering absent meticulous vetting and screening, likely enabling pro-Russian groups to mix in with Ukrainian volunteers, with the intent to sabotage. As a result, in March, Ukrainian military and civilian volunteers switched from their distinct yellow armbands to blue, after saboteur elements of the Russian military began wearing the yellow armbands^b in disguise. The Ukrainians initially switched the armbands from right to left, but later changed colors to frustrate Russian machinations.⁴¹

- The mid-March Russian attack on the Yavoriv training base, located 11 miles from the Polish border and housing dozens of international volunteers, may have been facilitated by Russian spies who infiltrated the base pretending to be volunteer fighters, according to press. Three former British paratroopers were among the 35 people killed during the attack.⁴²
- In June, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) claimed it neutralized an organized criminal group operating in

disguise as a volunteer battalion, according to press. The group, which was directed by a Dagestan native controlled by the Kremlin, forged documents to join a volunteer battalion to steal weapons and undermine Ukrainian efforts. The SBU also claimed it thwarted efforts by Russian criminals who were planning to infiltrate Kyiv-based volunteer units.⁴³

- In mid-August, anonymous SBU personnel claimed Russian spies had infiltrated the general staff, according to press. When Ukrainian volunteer forces received orders to follow specific routes, they came under artillery fire from Russian forces, suggesting enemy foreknowledge of their plans.⁴⁴

^b Ukrainians wore armbands for identification and to avoid friendly fire.

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Page 3. Figure 1: Susan Littleton, *Domestic Russian Perceptions of the "Special Military Operation" public opinion polls*, infographic, GCKN, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Page 7. Unknown, *Stephan Bandera before 1934*, <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0d/SBbandera.jpg>.