

GCKN RUNNING ESTIMATE

March 2022 — Update 1



Russian Domestic Perceptions: The War in Ukraine

To date, most Russians support Putin’s current operations in Ukraine. This level of support may change as the war continues, but will depend largely on Moscow’s ability to control the narrative and the populace’s access to external sources of information.

- Early polling in Russia indicates strong domestic support for the Kremlin’s decision to conduct military operations in Ukraine. This stems from a traditionally high level of support for Putin alongside the Kremlin’s strong base narrative that has remained relatively unchallenged domestically for years.¹
- This narrative, among other anti-Western portrayals, paints NATO, EU, and the United States as aggressors who aim to reduce Russia’s freedoms and even “Nazify Russia’s neighboring countries.”²
- Perceptions of war support are associated with age, access to open media, as well as other factors such as lived experiences,

educational backgrounds, socio-economic level, and proclivity for independent thinking.³

Perceptions of the war in Ukraine differ by generation. As age increases, so does support for the war. The population of Russia is nearly 145 million, with almost 48 million over the age of 50.

- Older generations support the war the most, with variations: Men are more likely to support war, although this is moderated by age. Specifically, women aged 30-50 are more likely than men to oppose the war. *The gender difference could be attributed to the cost/harm of war on women and children.*⁴
- Urban Russians are less likely to support the war than those in rural communities, but this is also moderated by age. Early protests against the war occurred in urban areas, where the population is statistically younger, more educated, has higher incomes, and typically has more exposure to outside news sources.⁵

Table 1: Russian Domestic Population by Generation

RUSSIAN POPULATION - MARCH 2022				
~145,830,647				
Silent	1925-1945	Age 77-97	~ 7,560,000	5%
Boomers	1946-1964	Age 58-76	~ 32,141,000	22%
Gen X	1965-1980	Age 42-57	~ 31,289,000	21%
Millennials	1981-1996	Age 26-41	~ 34,452,000	24%
Gen Z	1997-2012	Age 10-25	~ 24,992,000	17%
Gen Alpha	2013-pre	Under Age 10	~ 15,330,000	11%

Between 1993 and 2008, Russia saw a considerable decline in its population from 148.37 million to 143.25. During this time, Russia experienced low birth rates and abnormally high death rates. Since then, the population has increased again to 145.9 million; however, the population is projected to start declining again. Russia has one of the lowest fertility rates in the world of 1.58 births per woman, which is also below the replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman. Russia also has one of the oldest populations in the world with an average age of 40.3 years.



- Older Russians are heavy consumers of state-run television, tend to be less educated, and are more likely to support the war than those who use alternative sources for news.

Russian millennials (26-40) are a split group. While they are generally more critical of the Kremlin and its policies – likely because they have access to a wider range of information than their elders – they are divided over support for the war in Ukraine. Millennials under the age of 30 tend to side more with Generation Z views and attitudes (against the war). Russians over the age of 30 tend to side with Generation X views and attitudes (for the war).

- Millennial attitudes about the war in Ukraine differ depending on their age: older Millennials (~33-40) tend to support Russia’s involvement in the war whereas younger Millennials (~26-32) are more likely to oppose it. This may be because older Millennials grew up during a time when Russia was gaining power and influence, while younger Millennials have witnessed Russia’s decline in recent years.⁶
- Many millennials believe that the war is having a negative impact on Russia and that the government is not doing enough to help the victims of the conflict. They also tend to be dissatisfied with the current state of the Russian economy (This contrasts with older generations, who are more content with the status quo). Russian Millennials are more likely to believe the economy is rigged in favor of the wealthy and powerful, and are more likely to support economic reforms that would redistribute wealth more evenly.
- *A comparable lack of support for the war in Ukraine, particularly among Russia's youth, should not be confused*

*with non-support or actual anti-war sentiments. In most cases, the Russian younger generation's lack of support for the Ukraine conflict stems from its broader apathy or even cynicism toward the Kremlin, its policies, and its activities at large.*⁷

Russian public opinion about the war in Ukraine is less likely to shift—and will be increasingly difficult to measure—as the Kremlin tightens control over the domestic narrative. The Russian government has effectively shut down all independent domestic media and has severely restricted social media.⁸

- The majority of Russians above the age of 40 rely on state-run media, which justifies a Russian “special military operation” to liberate Ukraine from NATO/American aggression. This Russian narrative also claims neo-Nazis are persecuting Russians in Ukraine and building nuclear weapons to attack Russia. Furthermore, state-run media espouses the notion that Ukraine is a part of Russia. **A prolonged war could disturb the Kremlin’s control over its narrative, but will likely result in the populace’s most divergent positions anchoring in “more firmly.”**⁹
- Russia’s new “fake news” law essentially threatens anyone who criticizes the Kremlin or its narrative, or who doesn’t adhere to certain monikers related to Ukraine (e.g., operation versus “war”).¹⁰
- Social media companies are now restricted from hosting any communications denouncing the war, and the Russian government has warned parents to check their children’s social media for “unsafe protests.”¹¹

TRAITS OF MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z

Russian millennials are more progressive and open-minded than their parents. They have been raised simultaneously in a Putin and an Internet era (unlike generations of the past). This means that, since their formative years, they have been subjected to high levels of national patriotism and propaganda, while also accessing alternate forms of information on the internet (much more so than older generations).

While it may appear that millennials may be more willing to challenge the status quo and push for change, they do not have the resources of older generations or the understanding of how to effect change. Moreover, the Kremlin’s narrative and warning regarding dissent is quite strong, mitigating the wherewithal of millennials to counter their government’s actions and policies. Finally, most decisions are local, and if people are provided basic needs from local resources, they tend to be less willing to challenge authorities.

Russians under the age of 30 are the least paternalistic and the most entrepreneurial, the most tolerant, most culturally aware and the most open to pro-Western ideas compared to older generations in the country. Some components of this group view the West as a good model for Russia.

Russians under 25 prioritize human rights almost twice as much as state interests. The opposite is true among older Russians. Successful Russians under the age of 30 will become the future elite of Russia (~2040-2050).

**Information gathered from a variety of sources.¹²*

Domestic Russian Perceptions of the War — Average Across All Ages¹



1 These percentages are an average extraction taken from the four surveys reviewed.

Domestic Russian Perceptions of the War — Average Across Generations²



2 These averages are extracted from one survey and combined with qualitative information from other open source reports.

POLLING SUMMARY

In the early stage of the conflict, more than half of the Russians surveyed expressed support for the war. Four surveys to date suggest more than half of Russians surveyed (58 percent to 71 percent across all ages) support the war in Ukraine (“military operation”).¹³

- **Questions may matter.** Notably, each survey asked the question slightly differently. For example, one survey asked “do you support the Russian military operations on Ukraine territory”; another asked “do you support the decision to conduct military operations in Ukraine;” while a third survey asked if responders support the invasion into Ukraine.¹⁴

» The Kremlin and state media refer euphemistically to the attack on Ukraine as a “special military action

meant to “liberate” Ukrainians and “denazify” the country. World War II is an effective foundation for this narrative. The Kremlin has branded Ukraine as an exponent controlled by Neo-Nazis.¹⁵

- » A “fake news” law that Putin signed on 4 March criminalizes contradiction of the official Kremlin line. Merely describing the war as such could lead to a 15-year jail sentence, posing obvious challenges for those seeking to conduct accurate polls there.¹⁶
- **Sample size matters.** Three of the four surveys (two telephone and one in-person survey) provide sample sizes: 1,640, 1,600, and 1,556 respondents. The fourth was conducted by a blogger who gathered ethnographic interviews.

Table 1: Public Opinion Surveys* about “Military Operations” in Ukraine

	Support (Firm to Some)	Oppose (Some to Completely)	Do Not Know or No Response
February 24 – March 18			
RUS Org³	67%	23%	10%
FOM⁴	58%	23%	13%
VCiOM⁵	64%	17%	18%
Varlamov⁶	As much 71%	22%	7%

*Surveys conducted vary slightly with what they are calling the war—most calling it a “military operation”

3 Russian Research Organization with close ties to the Russian government - Telephone Survey – February 25 and 27

4 Independent Polling Company with ties to the Russian government. Telephone Survey – February 28-March 3

5 Russian Research Organization with close ties to the Russian government – In-person Home Survey – February 25-27

6 Ilya Varlamov – Home visits – in the early weeks. Varlamov is a popular, independent Russian blogger who, over the past decade, has gained quite a following in Russia and abroad. His reporting is objective and honest; according to Ray Finch, from the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), his analysis can be trusted.

- **Source matters.** Each of the four surveys to date was administered by different sources: a Russian polling company, a Russian government agency, an independent polling company, and a Russian blogger.
- **Results may be temporal or may be stable.** The most current reports for this paper are from surveys conducted from 25 February to 11 March. A prolonged war may produce different results. However, the absence of information that presents Russia as an aggressor (i.e., attacks on civilians) or opposes the Kremlin’s central position (i.e., this is not a military operation, but a war or siege of Ukraine by the Russian government), may prevent differing results in subsequent polls.
 - » One survey measures support for the war as high as 71%, while most of the surveys in the early weeks (across all ages) show support at only 58% or higher.¹⁷
 - » According to a Russian-English independent news website, “The TV is winning.” Despite the information leaking in from family members outside of Russia, relatives inside the country refuse to change their propagandized accounts of the war.¹⁸
- **Prior polling is useful.** How the Russian public views Putin, the Kremlin, and associated actions with an invasion into Ukraine may be more accurately understood by examining public opinion prior to 24 February 2022.¹⁹
 - » Putin is intensely sensitive to public opinion polling and very likely to maintain a strong control of the narrative produced by this information. Background and attitudes prior to the war are likely to produce more stable views of public sentiment on current issues.²⁰
- **Fear matters.** Most Russians, despite their demographics, are fearful of retribution for speaking or acting out against the government - explaining the limited number of protests.²¹
 - » On 04 March 2022, Putin signed the legal order to punish by imprisonment those speaking against the government. This is supported by Western reporting of over 14,000 protesters arrested as of 12 MAR 2022, and widespread reporting of protesters being beaten, harassed, and otherwise abused by police.²²
 - » No non-government rallies are authorized in Russia under laws enacted under the premise of the COVID-19 pandemic.²³
 - » Most polling numbers should be met with heavy scrutiny. Surveys conducted on domestic Russians are subject to extreme repression, incomplete or the absence of data, as well as (temporal) rallying of patriotism under current circumstances.²⁴

GAPS

- Factors explaining why Russians are fleeing from Russia since the onset of the war; e.g., is migration connected to their opinions of the war?
- Perspectives (on the Ukrainian conflict) of ethnic Russians living in Russia’s “near abroad” and beyond, especially where there may be a mix of Russian and Western media.
- Projections of how Russia’s younger generation (aged 20-40) will perceive Putin and/or the regime and its actions (including this Ukrainian conflict) over next 20-25 years. This generation appears more open to economic resiliency and some aspects of Western ideology, but these notions may evolve with eventual changes in Russian leadership and in the Operational Environment.

METHODOLOGY

Data is collected from a variety of open-source outlets—public opinion polling as much as possible—as well as scholarly literature and information obtained from vetted regional subject matter experts. GCKN analyzes the data using the GCKN Analytic methodology which is a fusion of social science and intelligence analysis processes where relevant content from large amounts of qualitative data is filtered through a research

question, coded, categorized and judgements developed with supported data from the sources. This involves a process of co-creation with multiple GCKN analysts collecting and analyzing the data and collaborating on emerging judgments with GCKN subject matter experts (SMEs). GCKN subsequently vets these judgements against classified reporting on this topic to discover and adjudicate discrepancies.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Russian public opinion: Poll shows 58 percent of Russians support Ukraine invasion, 23 percent oppose it - The Washington Post; What Do Russians Think About Putin's War? | CEPA.
- 2 What do Russians think of Putin's invasion of Ukraine? | Euronews; How Do Russians Feel About a War With Ukraine? - Carnegie Moscow Center - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Dr. Thomas Sherlock, EUCOM Invited SME, SMA Presentation, 23 March 2022.
- 3 Five charts that help explain how to read the Kremlin's survey data on support for the war in Ukraine - iMEDD; Russian public opinion: Poll shows 58 percent of Russians support Ukraine invasion, 23 percent oppose it - The Washington Post' Dr. Thomas Sherlock, EUCOM SME, SMA Presentation, 23 March 2022.
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- 8 Dr. Thomas Sherlock, EUCOM Invited SME, SMA Presentation, 23 March 2022; Interview with TRADOC G2, FMSO SME, Ray Finch, 21 March 2022.
- 9 What Do Russians Think About Putin's War? | CEPA.
- 10 Putin Signs Law Introducing Jail Terms for 'Fake News' on Army - The Moscow Times; Putin signs law against 'fake' news in Russia, as independent media struggles for survival - The Washington Post; Global news media on defensive after Putin signs 'fake news' law | Reuters; Russia Takes Censorship to New Extremes, Stifling War Coverage - The New York Times (nytimes.com); Russian Anti-War Activist Get
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- 12 Five charts that help explain how to read the Kremlin's survey data on support for the war in Ukraine - iMEDD; Generation Putin: young Russians on the only leader they've ever known | Financial Times; Russian public opinion: Poll shows 58 percent of Russians support Ukraine invasion, 23 percent oppose it - The Washington Post; Radaev, V. V. (2018). Millennials compared to previous generations: an empirical analysis. *Sociological Studies*, 3(3), 15-33; Zaburdaeva, E. V. (2020). *Sociocultural Analysis of Millennials in Russia. Концепт*
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- 17 Russian public opinion: Poll shows 58 percent of Russians support Ukraine invasion, 23 percent oppose it - The Washington Post; Interview with TRADOC G2, FMSO SME, Ray Finch, 21 March 2022.
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Image Content

Table 1: Susan Littleton, Russian Domestic Population by Generation, infographic, GCKN, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Table 2: Susan Littleton, Public Opinion Surveys* about "Military Operations" in Ukraine, infographic, GCKN, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.