

What can be measured under military censorship

The Athena Project - Research on the attitudes of Russian residents towards the Russian Federation's special military operation in Ukraine.

It is incorrect to measure support dynamics based on the data obtained under conditions of military censorship. We measured the magnitude of the socially desirable bias in responses to sensitive questions.

Data from two independent surveys were used.

Upon request, we provide access to the materials of these surveys, a detailed description of the methodology, the questionnaire, and the database.

Survey name	Dates	Sample size
Athena	February 28 - March 1, 2022	1642
Chronicles, wave 1	February 28 - March 2, 2022	1807
Chronicles, wave 2	March 11-13, 2022	1811

Methodology

Survey method in both surveys: telephone interview using a random sample of mobile numbers.

Geography of the survey: all regions of Russia.

Target population: Russian citizens aged 18 years and older.

Representativeness of the sample: by sex and age structure and by settlement type (according to Rosstat data from 01.01.2021).

The 95% confidence interval for the total sample estimates (including weighting) does not exceed +/- 2.6 percentage points.

The issue in question

What are the **dynamics of the level** of support for the military operation among the Russian population?

On March 4, 2022, a new article of the Criminal Code concerning fake news about the Russian army appeared in Russia. Said article was given a broad interpretation among the public consciousness, and not unreasonably so.

Citizens have realized the dangers of free self-expression.

Under conditions of military censorship, all research on sensitive topics in Russia, starting on March 5, will yield "technical results".

The questions involving the evaluation of the authorities and the military operation have become sensitive.

Recognizing this fact and having received its full confirmation from the data of almost all other survey companies, we nevertheless kept the question about the level of support for the military operation in the questionnaire. It seemed to us extremely important to see this effect in our own data and to try to measure it.

The poll contained two comparable subsamples. In the questionnaire for the second subsample, we included a respondent's articulated refusal to answer the question about support for the special operation into the question about the attitude toward the military operation.

Weighting not performed	Old wording	New wording
Yes, I support	69%	64%
No, I don't support	14%	7%
Hard to say	17%	16%
I don't want to answer this question	0%	13%

The experiment showed a significant reduction in the percentage of support and non-support in the second subsample. The 13% who refused to answer is a **censorship coefficient**: those who, socially desirable, included themselves in the support group left. It is important to note that the percentage of non-supporting respondents decreased as well, with some similar respondents choosing to retreat into the newly opened position of nonresponse.

Apparently, our sample population resides among those who have googled "criminal penalties for fake news" since March 4.

The "fear of persecution" hypothesis is also indirectly confirmed by the refusal to disclose one's place of residence. For example, there is a significant shift in the question about the place of residence.

Unweighted data	Chronicles 1.0		Chronicles 2.0		Refusal rate increase, %*
	Number of refusals	Respondents' refusal rate	Number of refusals	Respondents' refusal rate	
Region	24	1.3	34	1.9	41
Settlement type	16	0.9	21	1.2	31
City	56	3.8	74	5.1	35
Area	23	7.1	27	7.5	6

Refusal rate increase was calculated using the following formula:

$$([\text{refusal rate } 2.0] - [\text{refusal rate } 1.0]) * 100 / [\text{refusal rate } 1.0]$$

Respondents who found it difficult to answer or refused to answer the question about the support of the military operation, were the ones most likely to avoid answering whether Russia's actions constitute a special military operation.

This same group of "refusers" is much more likely than others to believe that the operation "will never be over".

This same group gives minimal credence to official information and basically avoids news about the war.

These are the people who can be classified as escapists. This group includes the respondents who do not want to know anything about the events in Ukraine, as well as **partially** those respondents who do not support the military operation.

There is an assumption that such a group exists in reality, it may vary in percentage, but in the near future it, as well as other factors, will distort the results of surveys.

It is no longer possible to make a reasonable estimate of the dynamics of support/non-support for the operation on the basis of surveys after 04.03.2022.

The first independent measurements conducted from February 28 to March 02 give a ratio of **57-59% support versus 23-22% non-support.**

We believe there is no reason to assert that these proportions have changed significantly so far.

Changes of a minor nature can be the result of two opposite processes: growth (due to consolidation "around the flag," according to the rhetoric of the state-run media) and decline (due to negative consequences for the lives of people).

As for the reliable changes in the 10 days between the two surveys (Athena and Chronicle), there was a slight increase in negative expectations of a change in wealth from 38% to 44%.

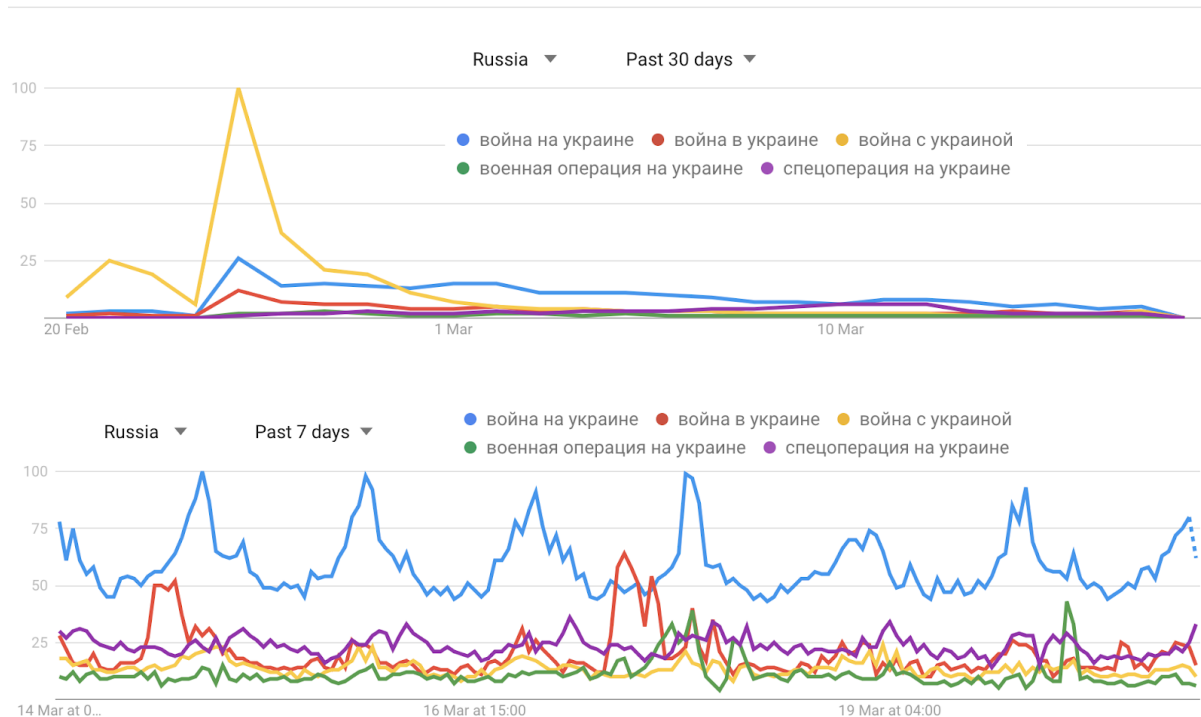
Was the special operation to introduce the term "military special operation" a success?

According to the new rules for the use of terms in the questionnaire, the concept of "military operation" is applied. From time to time the question arises as to whether the respondents have the same understanding of what we mean.

Due to the fact that we cannot directly compare the reaction depending on the use of the term "Military Operation" or "w*r", we used the analysis of search query frequency in Google trends and obtained incomparable results, which means that "w*r" dominates in the minds of Russian people.

We set a search for the term in different versions. At the time of the announcement of the military operation, the version "war WITH Ukraine" went by a wide margin. People perceived it that way, in its most acute form.

Then happened a transformation to "war IN Ukraine," which is leading until today. If you take a look at the weekly dynamics, this becomes obvious.



Legend: red: War in Ukraine; blue: War on Ukraine (different prefix, often deemed to be grammatically wrong by the Ukrainians); yellow: War with Ukraine; green: Military operation in Ukraine; purple: special operation in Ukraine

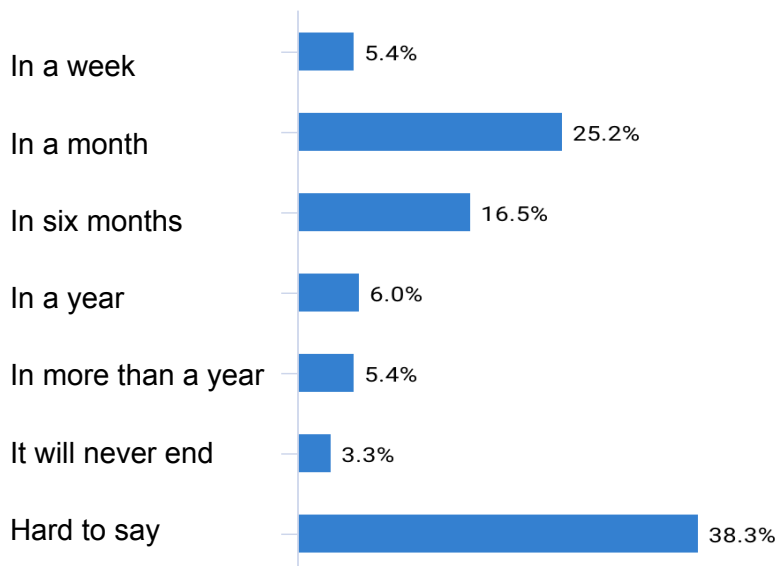
In the survey we asked whether Russia's actions were a special military operation, yes or no. The question seemed somewhat unbalanced, but we did obtain some information.

There was a high correlation between approval of the event and categorizing it as a "military operation" and vice versa, disapproval correlated with disagreement with the term.

The semantics of the word "operation" worked, but for internal usage people turn to the heavier word.

The term OPERATION conveys the swiftness of the event, and this is the extent to which it is reflected in the answers to the question:

WHEN WILL RUSSIA'S MILITARY OPERATION IN UKRAINE END?



The respondents who gave meaningful answers mostly gave a period of one month to six months.

Unfortunately, there is no measurement conducted at the end of February. It would be interesting to see how the citizens of Russia estimated the duration of the operation at the beginning.

WHERE DOES THE OPERATION TAKE PLACE

65% believe that the military operation covers all of Ukraine. There are **12%** of respondents with tunnel vision who believe that the operation is concentrated on the territory of the LPR/DPR. These people only hear what they want to hear: the long-standing propaganda of "protecting the interests of Russians in the Donbas".

	Military operation territory	
	LPR/DPR territories only	Other regions of Ukraine as well
Watch TV	86%	73%
Don't watch TV	15%	27%

THE PEOPLE KNEW

In Project Athena, we were asking the following question

HOW WILL THE MAJORITY OF UKRAINE'S POPULATION REACT TO THE RUSSIAN TROOPS DEPLOYED THERE?	
	Total
In a friendly manner	16%
Neutrally	11%
In a hostile manner, but will not offer resistance	10%
In a hostile manner, and will offer resistance	31%
Hard to say	32%

The results are staggering: from 27.02. to 01.03.22 only **16%** were expecting the Ukrainians to meet the Russian troops in a friendly manner, and **73%** either thought (28.02. - 01.03.22) they would meet the Russian troops in a hostile way or found it difficult to answer, including 32% of respondents who understood that the Ukrainians would offer resistance.

MILITARISTS. THOSE WHO SUPPORTS THE WAR

The group of people who assumed that the Ukrainians would meet the troops with hostility and offer resistance, but approved of the military operation, is particularly interesting.

This group includes **20%** of the population, isomorphic by basic demographic metrics to the entire population. The goalstructure of these people is more radical than that of the population as a whole.

		Total	Approval in spite of hostility
Goals and reasons of the military operation	Protection of / help to the LPR and DPR	32%	43%
	Don't know, hard to say	27%	16%
	Security of Russia	17%	24%
	Denazification of Ukraine	9%	8%
	Wrong politics and power in Ukraine	8%	9%
	Demilitarization of Ukraine	2%	2%

The table shows the positions that scored significant percentages. The demilitarization of Ukraine was also added to the table. Again, the most obvious goals for this group are the protection of the LPR/DPR and the "security of Russia," with significantly higher numbers than in the rest of the sample.

Denazification has more or less settled down in the minds of the people, while demilitarization found no resonance either in this group or in the sample as a whole. Among the people in this group there are fewer of those who found it difficult to identify the purpose of the operation.

87% of militarists are confident that Russia will succeed in this operation, compared to **73%** against the aggregate.

82% of this group would like to see Putin remain in office as long as possible (as opposed to **60%** in the rest of the sample).

This group is interesting because it has absorbed the spirit of the campaign in Ukraine as much as possible and represents the desired standard of mass consciousness. They constitute the core of support.

WHAT IS IT FOR

The goals of the operation correlate highly with the expectations of victory.

Among those who predict victory, twice as many respondents consider the defense of the LPR/DPR and the security of Russia to be the goal.

Respondents who do not believe in victory find it much more difficult to name goals, and if they do, they mention the conquest of Ukraine and Putin's personal ambitions much more often than the rest of the sample.

	Total	Confidence in the victory of the Russian Federation over Ukraine	
		Russia will win	Russia will not win
Protection of / help to the LPR and DPR	32%	↑ 37%	↓ 15%
Don't know, hard to say	27%	↓ 22%	↑ 36%
Security of Russia	17%	↑ 19%	↓ 8%
Denazification of Ukraine	9%	10%	↓ 2%
Wrong politics, power in Ukraine	8%	10%	5%
Capture, annexation of the territories of Ukraine	2%	↓ 2%	↑ 17%
Putin's personal goals/ambitions	2%	↓ 1%	16%
Demilitarization of Ukraine	2%	2%	0%
Negative, unjustified goals, against the war	2%	1%	↑ 7%

This question too has "DON'T KNOW, HARD TO SAY" in its runner-up position.

In general, a specific characteristic of these surveys has been the unusually high level of refusals to answer and of using the "hard to say" option for substantive questions.

This drastically reduces the possibility of extrapolating data onto the general population. But it remains possible to analyze different groups of opinions, to look at the dynamics in terms of trends rather than percentages, to look for correlations between parameters.

In order to continue to provide important information under such extreme conditions, we sociologists must learn how to work with this fragmentary knowledge.

Journalists and commentators should take some of the responsibility and broadcast only what they are confident they have understood.

Otherwise the surveys or their publication will have to be interrupted for a period of time.

SURVEY MATERIALS

Survey materials are available upon request.

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