

# Impact of social environment on Russian attitude toward the military actions in Ukraine

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The methodological issues of reachability and respondent cooperation were discussed in post-release #6.

After the issues of the respondents' cooperation and its possible impact on the verbal support of Russia's military operation in Ukraine have been analysed, it is necessary to examine the possible influence of the social environment on this support. Here is an analysis of the influence of various factors on the attitude towards the military operation.

The perception of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the mass consciousness is determined by both personal opinion and the influence of the immediate environment. It is obvious that supporters of the military conflict who have the same supporters in their everyday social life have a different point of view and forms of behaviour than those who have both supporters and opponents of the invasion in their environment.

## Key findings

- The younger generation of Russians is not only the least supportive of military action, but also has the most anti-war social environment.
- Support for the military operation is largely determined by trust in the governmental media, which report news about events in Ukraine. On the contrary, interest in finding independent sources of information on the Internet increases criticism of the actions of the Russian Armed Forces there.
- Willingness to support an invasion significantly depends on the assessment of the possible duration of military action and the very prospect of achieving some kind of military success: those who doubt a quick and easy victory oppose military action. It can be assumed that a change in these assessments will also change attitudes toward war.
- The propaganda influence inside military units, other power units, spreads inside the families of servicemen and displaces the obvious fear of losing their lives and health in the course of combat operations. On the contrary, being outside of such influence, relatives of boys of pre-conscription age refuse to support the military operation.
- Personal and social support/non-support for the military operation forms opposite ranges of emotions. Supporters are characterized by pride, hope and respect; opponents by anxiety, resentment and disappointment.

- Support for the invasion since it began has come mainly from groups for whom the political agenda is not the main point. For them the invasion is a moment of national unification and they may stop supporting it if they are convinced that not all of their compatriots support the military action.
- With the dominance of the pro-war point of view on the conflict, there are not so many supporters of a consistent anti-Ukrainian policy, i.e. there are only 6% of those who believe that Ukraine should be occupied and annexed, and that negotiations and peace with it are impossible. The shares of firm 'hawks' and consistent 'doves' are quite comparable - 6% and 7% respectively. Of course, this is not the 'real' number of supporters and opponents of the invasion, but only their most consistent fractions. Thus, the people who belong to the 'hawks' clearly understand the goals that the country's leadership has set for itself and support it in this. There is another, a huge part of the population that may be aware of Russia's true goals in Ukraine, but is not yet ready to share them, supporting only officially declared goals.

## Segmentation of the population of the Russian Federation in relation to military actions

Respondents in our survey answered two questions about their attitudes toward the invasion: about their personal agreement or disagreement with it, and their assessment of how many supporters/opponents are in their everyday social environment. Depending on the ratio of personal attitudes toward the special military operation to the position of the environment, the entire Russian population was divided into six groups. The principle of division is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Attitude towards military action	
Unanimous support	66%
Opponents in social environment	2%
Mixed social environment	18%
Supporters in social environment	0.3%
Unanimous dissent	7%
Other	7%

Table 1. Groups with different personal attitudes toward the special military operation (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences')

According to the data in early mid-March three out of five (59%) Russians strongly supported military action against Ukraine, and 44% of them believed that their everyday surroundings included almost exclusively those who thought exactly the same. Another 9% noted that this

majority was incomplete, and 4% had an approximate balance of supporters and opponents in their surroundings.

Obviously, a person who is confident not only that he or she is right, but also that his or her entire environment thinks the same way, will think and behave very differently than when he or she lives in an everyday environment with an opposing viewpoint. The purpose of this study, however, is to see what factors have influenced the balance of supporters and opponents of the operation.

	Support of the absolute majority	Support of the relative majority	Some support, some do not (50/50)	Most do NOT support a military operation	Almost no one supports a military operation	Undecided	Refusal to respond
Firmly support	44%	9%	4%	0.1%	0.1%	2%	0.1%
Rather support	6%	7%	5%	0.2%	0.1%	1%	0.1%
Undecided	0.4%	1%	2%	0%	0%	2%	0.1%
Rather NOT support	0.1%	1%	3%	1%	1%	1%	0.1%
Firmly NOT support	0.3%	1%	2%	2%	2%	0.3%	
Refusal to respond		0.3%	0.4%	0.1%		0.2%	

Table 2. Principle of formation and filling of groups of attitudes towards Russia's military actions in Ukraine (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences')

## Unanimity of attitudes towards military actions in different social-demographic groups

The major unanimity in support of the military operation was found among the older generation - **79%** of Russians of retirement age support the special operation themselves and are surrounded only by those who support it.

Among the youngest generation the share of such respondents was only **42%**. Almost a third of their peers do not see unity of opinion around them (**31%**).

This proportion also falls with increasing age to **11%** in the oldest group. Young people remain the main base of opposition to the invasion (**16%** of dissenters, surrounded by like-minded people, against **1%** among the oldest respondents).

As we can see, age has a decisive impact on attitudes toward the operation.

Despite the fact that most of the information about the situation on the fronts comes via TV and family members of different generations received it approximately equally, the views of youth groups differ significantly from views of their older relatives.

	Unanimous support	Opponents among supporters	Mixed social environment	Supporters among opponents	Unanimous dissent
Total population	66%	2%	18%	0%	7%
18-29	42%	4%	31%	1%	16%
30-44	60%	2%	19%	1%	9%
45-59	72%	2%	16%	0%	4%
60+	79%	1%	11%	0%	1%

Table 3. Unanimity of assessments of Russia's military actions in Ukraine in different age groups (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences')

The older generations of Russians are the most enthusiastic about the interview. Their willingness to answer questions is most often noted by the interviewers. On the contrary, students responded with apprehension more often than others.

Russians with higher education are less likely to agree with their environment in support of the invasion of Ukraine (**63%** vs. **69%** among those with a lower level of education). At the same time, the share of those in a mixed environment and in the environment of opponents of military action is also increasing among those with higher education (**19%** and **9%**, respectively). In other words, more educated people are not only less supportive of the military operation, but also more critical of it.

	Unanimous support	Opponents among supporters	Mixed social environment	Supporters among opponents	Unanimous dissent
Total population	66%	2%	18%	0%	7%
Secondary education or lower	69%		15%	1%	5%
Vocational secondary	69%	1%	17%	1%	4%
Higher education, incl.incomplete	63%	3%	19%	0%	9%

Table 4. Unanimity of assessments of Russia's military actions in Ukraine in different education groups (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences')

Continuous, relevant connections with acquaintances and relatives in Ukraine significantly weaken unanimous approval of the aggression (**60%** vs. **66%** among all) and strengthen unanimous opposition to it (**11%** vs. **7%** among all). As can be seen, the more relevant the connections between Russians and residents of Ukraine, the lower the support for the invasion and the higher the disagreement with it.

	Unanimous support	Opponents among supporters	Mixed social environment	Supporters among opponents	Unanimous dissent
Total population	66%	2%	18%	0%	7%
No connection with Ukraine	63%	2%	19%	1%	6%
Not current connections	73%	2%	13%	0%	5%
There are current connections	71%	3%	14%		11%
Permanent connections	60%	1%	22%	1%	11%

Table 5. The unanimity of assessments of Russia's military actions in Ukraine in groups with different intensity of contacts with residents of Ukraine (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences', by row)

Having servicemen in the family, on the contrary, increases support for the military operation (**74%** vs. **62%** among those without servicemen in the family). It is likely that the propaganda influence within military units, other power units, spreads inside families and displaces the obvious fear of losing life and health in this war.

It should be noted that those who have boys and young men under 18 y.o. among their family members show significantly weaker support compared to those who have young men of conscription age in their families. It is probably not only a matter of departmental propaganda among servicemen, but also of the beliefs of large social groups.

	Unanimous support	Opponents among supporters	Mixed social environment	Supporters among opponents	Unanimous dissent
Total population	66%	2%	18%	0%	7%
There are servicemen in the family	74%	1%	13%	1%	5%
No servicemen in the family	62%	2%	19%	0%	7%
There are family members of pre-conscription age (by survey 28.02-1.03)	36%	1%	27%	1%	19%
There are family members of conscription age (by survey 28.02-1.03)	58%	3%	19%	1%	9%

Table 6. Unanimity of assessments of Russia's military actions in Ukraine in groups with different potential involvement in hostilities (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences', by row)

## Unanimity of attitudes toward military actions in groups with different levels of trust in information channels

The unanimity regarding Russian aggression is largely determined by trust in the media reporting news about events in Ukraine. Among those who trust them **85%** support the operation themselves and are surrounded by supporters of the invasion, while among those who do not trust the media only **19%** do so. In contrast, the share of unanimous dissenters in the group of those who do not trust the media is close to a third (**31%**).

As we can see, the Russian media today to a large extent determines the perceptions of the mass consciousness regarding the military operation in Ukraine. Their influence makes a decisive contribution to the Russians' agreement with the actions of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine.

However, it is incorrect to consider this as a pure victory for the governmental media. In many ways the success was achieved because of the closure of a number of non-governmental media. And those Russians who are discontented with the current policy satisfy their hunger for information by circumventing the state-imposed restrictions on the Internet with a VPN.

Supporters of war, surrounded by like-minded people, are most numerous among those who do not use the Internet. There are fewer supporters of military actions among users of VPNs, these people are the most unanimous in their opposition to military action.

	Unanimous support	Opponents among supporters	Mixed social environment	Supporters among opponents	Unanimous dissent
Total population	66%	2%	18%	0%	7%
Trust mass media	85%	1%	8%	0%	1%
Trust in some things, don't trust in others	58%	3%	24%	1%	6%
Don't trust mass media	19%	4%	35%	2%	31%
Don't use Internet	77%	0%	9%	1%	1%
Don't know about VPN	70%	1%	16%	1%	4%
Use VPN	48%	4%	23%		18%
Don't use VPN	63%	2%	20%	0%	8%

Table 7. Unanimity of assessments of Russia's military actions in Ukraine in groups with different attitudes to governmental and other sources of information (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences', by row)

Attitudes towards the war are influenced by the assessment of its prospects. Almost half (**48%**) of those who believe that Russia will not achieve military success oppose the operation and are supported by their entourage. The attitude towards the war is differentiated no less significantly by expectations of its duration. Among those who expect the end of war action in the coming weeks or months **71-73%** support it and have the surrounding that share their position.

Level of support drops to **45%** among those who fear that it will drag on for a long time. And unanimous disapproval of the military operation is increasing in this group.

As we can see, the readiness to support the invasion significantly depends on the assessed prospects for the end of military operations and the very prospect of military success. It can be assumed that a change in these assessments will also change attitudes toward the operation.

	Unanimous support	Opponents among supporters	Mixed social environment	Supporters among opponents	Unanimous dissent
Total population	66%	2%	18%	0%	7%
Few weeks	71%	1%	15%	0%	6%
Few months	73%	1%	17%	1%	6%
Long-lasting war	45%	4%	26%	0%	14%
Russia will win	72%	1%	16%	0%	3%
Undecided	32%	5%	27%	1%	11%
Russia will NOT win	6%	11%	32%	1%	48%

Table 8. Unanimity of assessments of Russia's military actions in Ukraine in groups with different assessments of the prospects of the military operation (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences', by row)

Depending on whether Russians support the invasion, they have opposite feelings about the events in Ukraine. Among supporters of war who are in an environment of supporters the top three feelings were pride (**55%**), hope (**43%**), and respect (**42%**).

Those who unanimously disagree with the war express the other pole of emotions - anxiety (**58%**), indignation (**50%**), and disappointment (**41%**). The same negative feelings are experienced by opponents of the invasion who have an environment with opposite views. When people have a social environment with different points of views the prevalence of different feelings is more even. They more often experience both negative and positive feelings: anxiety (**49%**) and hope (**32%**).



	Unanimous support	Opponents among supporters	Mixed social environment	Supporters among opponents	Unanimous dissent
Total population	66%	2%	18%	0%	7%
Proud	55%	11%	18%	25%	2%
Hope	43%	18%	32%	13%	7%
Respect	42%	4%	13%	25%	2%
Trust	29%	4%	14%		2%
Anxiety, fear	25%	54%	49%	13%	58%
Joy	14%		5%		1%
Outrage, discontent	5%	36%	17%	13%	50%
Disappointment	4%	32%	18%	13%	41%
Irritation	3%	21%	13%		34%
Shame	1%	25%	12%		29%
Indifference	1%	4%	5%	38%	7%

Table 9. Correlation between the unanimity of assessment of Russia's military actions in Ukraine and personal emotions (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences', by row)

## Dynamics of unanimity in assessments of military actions

At the beginning of the invasion **47%** of Russians supported it personally and at the same time were confident that within their inner circle most people held the same view. **14%** of Russians themselves were against the invasion and believed that their inner circle shared the same opinion.

Almost every eighth (**12%**) either did not have a definite point of view themselves, or was surrounded by holders of different points of view about the situation in Ukraine. **3%** of opponents and **1%** of supporters of the invasion were among their opponents. Finally, almost every fourth remained on the periphery of the discussion of this topic - they either did not have a personal opinion or refused to assess support for the invasion within their circle.

After three weeks of battles, both military and informational, the balance of power has changed. The proportion of supporters of the operation living in a supportive environment rose from **47%** to **66%**, while the proportion of opponents of military action living in a supportive environment halved, from **14%** to **7%**. On the other hand, the share of those on the information front line decreased from **36%** to **18%**.

Two directions of change can be distinguished. First, there was a significant increase in support for the invasion. This growth occurred due to a reduction of the share of dissent, and due to a reduction of 'other' group (those for whom events in the political sphere are not very relevant). In the first days of the invasion they could not articulate their attitude to the



operation, and then they assimilated the dominating point of view from the mass media and their immediate environment.

Secondly, the group of Russians who are close by and communicate with bearers of opposing viewpoints is increasing. They retain an awareness of the existence of different points of view; for them it is an everyday medium of communication.

	28.02-1.03	18-20.03
Unanimous support	47	66
Opponents in social environment	3	2
Mixed social environment	12	18
Supporters in social environment	1	0
Unanimous dissent	14	7
Other	24	8

Table 10. Dynamics of the unanimity of assessments of Russia's military actions in Ukraine in the groups (February-March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences', by column)

## The 'hawks' and 'doves' fractions

In the third wave apart from the direct question about support of a military operation in Ukraine six questions about possible scenarios for the development of the situation in Ukraine were included.

These were either assumptions about military developments up to the occupation of Ukraine and its accession to Russia, as well as various options for the cessation of hostilities, negotiations, and the withdrawal of troops from Ukraine. For each suggestion the respondent could agree or disagree or evade a certain answer.

The most consistent supporters of a military solution of conflict were those who also consistently supported the opinion about the liquidation of the independent Ukrainian state. Their position is most fully expressed in the article '[What Russia should do with Ukraine](#)' ('In this respect, a denazified country cannot be sovereign', 'The duration of denazification can in no way be less than one generation, which must be born, grow up and reach maturity under the conditions of denazification').

In order to get an estimate of maximum support for the 'victory' understood in this way, we aggregated the values of all 6 attributes corresponding to the establishment of full, long-term

and exclusive sovereignty of Russia over Ukraine. These are the values of 'agreement' with judgments #1 and #6, and disagreement with judgments #2, #3, #4, and #5. Let us conditionally call them **'hawks'**.

Those who, on the contrary, turned out to be consistent supporters of peaceful negotiations, the cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of Russian troops (agreement with the judgments #2, 3, 4 and 5 and disagreement with #1 and #6) we call **'doves'**, because they consistently stand up for peaceful good-neighborliness between the two countries.

Both groups have more or less clear ideas about the future of Russia and Ukraine. The others have a less consistent position, and, accordingly, they can change it under the pressure of circumstances.

	Agree	Disagree
Continuation of hostilities until the complete surrender of Ukraine	71	19
Withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine	23	66
Cessation of hostilities and initiation of negotiations	57	35
Direct negotiations between Russia and the West (Putin and Biden)	54	34
Conclusion of a peace treaty between Russia and Ukraine	70	22
The consolidation of the occupied territory of Ukraine and its annexation to Russia	43	43

Table 11. Shares of those who agreed and disagreed with the evaluative statements about the future of Ukraine (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences', by row)

The share of hawks among Russians is not high - **6%**. This is rather unexpected because in response to the direct question about support for a 'special military operation', the share of those who agree was about **80% (78%)**. But expressing this opinion respondents most often reproduce a formula assimilated from the media, while the aggregate indicator reflects the attitude of Russians toward the circumstances of hostilities that are less formalized in the media.

In this case Russians' opinions become less dependent on internalized stereotypes, and their position is far from being so belligerent. Consistent support for the war is expressed by less than **10%** of those who share the official viewpoint (**6%** vs. **78%**). On the other hand, the

decline in the number of supporters of peace is not so great - from **16%** to **7%**, i.e. among opponents of invasion just under half are consistent opponents of military action.

Here it is important to understand that the share of 'hawks' does not include the 'real' number of supporters of the invasion, but only its most consistent faction, ready to go all the way. Its members clearly understand and support the goals of the country's leadership. There is another, huge part of the population that may be aware of Russia's true goals in Ukraine, but is not yet ready to share them, supporting only officially declared goals.

Naturally, the proportion of doubts and vague answers in consistent assessments is greater than in direct questions. Nevertheless, there is one consistent supporter of peace in Russia for every consistent supporter of invasion. As we can see, this is radically different from the ratio of support in the direct question, which takes into account only the assessment of the decision of the country's leadership, not its possible consequences.

Consistent supporters of negotiations are concentrated in St. Petersburg and the North Western Federal District in general (**20%** and **14%** respectively), while the 'hawks', on the contrary, are located in the southern provinces - in the Southern and North Caucasian districts (**11%** and **10%** respectively). Probably the reason for these differences lies in the traditional authoritarian way of life in most southern regions, the suppression of opposition, and the low standard of living there.

On the contrary, the NWFD has more freedoms, including political ones: the St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly has a fraction of the 'Yabloko' party, there are relatively independent media and bloggers, in relatively small Novgorod and Pskov the protest activity in previous years was higher than in cities of similar size.

In addition, the standard of living in the North Western Federal District is higher than the national average. It should also be taken into account that practically all the large cities of the Northwest are the most important hubs of communication between Russians and residents of other countries (St. Petersburg, Kaliningrad, Arkhangelsk, Murmansk). In other words, the more intensive the communications with people from other countries, the lower the share of 'hawks'.

The share of 'hawks' among men is twice as high as among women (**8%** and **4%**, respectively), which can be explained by the traditionally higher militancy of men. On the other hand, the shares of 'doves' in both groups are practically the same (**7%** and **6%**, respectively).

		Hawks	Doubters	Doves
	TOTAL	6%	87%	7%
	Men	8%	86%	6%
	Women	4%	88%	7%
	St.Petersburg	2%	78%	20%
	Moscow	7%	83%	10%
Federal districts	Central	6%	88%	7%
	North Western	2%	85%	14%
	Southern	11%	86%	3%
	North Caucasian	10%	89%	1%
	Volga	7%	86%	7%
	Ural	4%	93%	4%
	Siberian	4%	86%	10%
	Far Eastern	3%	92%	5%

Table 12. Shares of 'hawks' and 'doves' in different social groups (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences', by row)

It was shown above that governmental TV creates a more belligerent point of view. Reaching a wider range of communication channels, especially those banned in the Russian Federation, makes people more peaceful. The more channels of communication plus wider the choice plus more opportunities to go beyond the limits outlined by the new Russian legislation, the higher the proportion of Russian citizens who oppose the continuation of hostilities in Ukraine.

Among those who trust Russian government TV channels, **8%** are consistent supporters of the military operation, while among those who do not trust them there are only **2%**. Among those who do not trust TV, the share of consistent supporters of the cease-fire is 9%, while the number of 'hawks' is **5%**. As we can see, governmental TV generates more consistent supporters of the war 'until total victory'.

Among those who do not use the Internet, no firm supporters of peace were found at all. Among those who do not know what a VPN is, it is only **3%**. Among those who are informed about VPN, but do not use it, the share of hard supporters of peace is 8%. Every fourth user of this tool of circumventing censorship on the Internet (**25%**) is a firm supporter of peace. The wider and more diverse the range of communications, the more consistently people stand up for peace and deny war.

	Hawks	Doubters	Doves
Total population	6%	87%	7%
Trust governmental mass media	8%	91%	2%
Trust in some things, don't trust in others	2%	89%	9%
Don't trust governmental mass media	5%	86%	9%
Don't use Internet	7%	93%	
Don't know about VPN	7%	91%	3%
Use VPN	7%	68%	25%
Don't use VPN	5%	88%	8%

Table 13. Shares of 'hawks' and 'doves' among adherents of various news content (March 2022, RF, N=1600, 'Experiences', by row)