

Deep Russia: The Desacralized Putin

What Russians discussed on "VKontakte" and "Telegram" from June 29 to July 5

Period June 29 – July 5, 2026

Platforms VKontakte, Telegram (regional communities)



Key takeaways

The information agenda in Russia was once again shaped by the fuel crisis, which has now definitively become the main everyday dimension of the war: queues, limits, the price surge, and the legalization of lower-grade gasoline were discussed in almost every region. The military bloc was defined by strikes deep inside Russia — on Moscow and the Moscow region, St. Petersburg, and Nizhny Novgorod Oblast — as well as the fuel collapse and blackouts in Temporarily Occupied Crimea.

The radicalization of criticism of the authorities — and above all of Vladimir Putin personally — has become especially noticeable recently. This is captured by two independent dimensions at once. Regional analysts of the project: discontent is increasingly addressed not to abstract “officials” but to the president — people recall promises left unfulfilled over 30 years in power, and especially the long-standing criticism over the earlier raising of the retirement age. Sociology: according to the Levada Center, Putin's approval fell over the month from 79% to 74%, and VTsIOM recorded the fastest weekly drop in trust since February 2022.

The radicalization is uneven. In some regions (Samara, Omsk, Volgograd, Kemerovo, and Leningrad Oblasts) Putin is criticized openly and harshly, and moderation cannot keep up with scrubbing it. In others (Murmansk and Orenburg Oblasts, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Perm Krai) his name remains taboo, and the anger is channeled onto the local authorities.

The universal lightning rod became the “United Russia” party ahead of the autumn elections to the State Duma. The statement by deputy Oleg Matveychev that a vote against United Russia means support for Zelensky spread across all regions and backfired — a wave of mockery, accusations of blackmail, and promises to vote “for anyone but United Russia.”

In parallel with radicalization, censorship is growing. Most regional analysts record mass deletions of comments — and the most sensitive topic is not the war but personal criticism of Putin. Bots have noticeably become more active. The exception is Temporarily Occupied Crimea: the worse the everyday situation becomes, the more freely commenters speak out, and censorship can no longer keep up.

Despite the sharpening rhetoric, no readiness to act is visible: the demand for change is so far expressed in the form of caustic sarcasm and the intention to vote against “United Russia” in the autumn.

1. The Desacralized Putin

Sociology and media

Criticism and rejection of Vladimir Putin have grown over the past month. According to [«the Levada Center»](#), approval of Putin's performance dropped from 79% in May to 74% in June — the lowest since the start of the war; the indicator fell that sharply only in September 2022, after the announcement of mobilization. The share of those who believe the country is moving in the wrong direction rose from 25% to 35%. The state-run [VTsIOM](#) for the week of June 22–28 recorded a drop in trust of 3.4 percentage points (to 73.3%) and in approval of its work of 3.5 percentage points (to 66.9%); a comparable decline last occurred in August 2024 amid the Kursk operation. It should be noted that in May VTsIOM changed its polling methodology. As «the most important events of June,» Russians named drone attacks (24% of mentions) and problems with gasoline (22%); the war in Ukraine came only third, at 7%.

Another persistent storyline is the image of an isolated leader losing control: rare trips around the country, an armored escort, yet another expansion of the Federal Protective Service apparatus, discrepancies between statements and the reality at the front. Tellingly, the irony has penetrated even the million-subscriber Z-channels: under Putin's quotes about the “liberation of Donbass and Novorossiia.” In recent months, Putin's statements about the situation at the front are met there with sarcasm and distrust.

The Russian media space is heavily scrubbed of criticism. Therefore, the observed level of criticism of Putin almost certainly underestimates the scale of discontent.

How regional Telegram and VKontakte public groups reacted

- **The radicalization of criticism of the authorities is noticeable in some regions, and the main catalyst has been the fuel crisis.** In Rostov Oblast there were remarks about the “bald old man,” and people more often recall promises left unfulfilled over 30 years in power — especially the raising of the retirement age. In Samara Oblast, where as recently as the autumn criticism of Putin was deleted instantly, negativity toward the president is now often written openly. Putin's press secretary Peskov especially becomes a “red rag.” Statements in Kemerovo and Volgograd Oblasts have become harsher and more aggressive.

Kaluga

Mark Yakushev · Jun 30 at 21:15 · ♥ 9

«The bald guy said everything's going according to plan. So everything's going according to plan — people are dying.»

Krasnodar

Nikita Komissarov · Jul 4 at 7:57 · ♥ 48

«What success is he congratulating anyone on? What is he blabbering about? You could hardly call the current situation a success. And he even dressed up, all military-like, as if he'd just come from the battlefield, and not hiding somewhere in offices and bunkers...»

- **At the same time, in many regions personal criticism of Putin remains taboo.** In Murmansk Oblast the “main enemy” is the governor and local deputies, and users themselves accuse the authors of attacks on Putin of “shilling for the khokhols.” In Krasnoyarsk Krai maximum anger is expressed in safely vague phrasings: “where is the country heading?”, “everything's been stolen.” In Orenburg Oblast, criticism of the president was deleted immediately. And in Dagestan the main public groups stopped publishing military topics altogether back in the spring.
- **The safest and most popular target is “United Russia” and the State Duma.** Matveychev's statement backfired everywhere: in Samara Oblast it became the main topic of the week (“why even have elections then”), in Kuzbass people called for not going to the polls at all, in Irkutsk Oblast they responded with a wave of anger over the “brazen manipulation,” and in Murmansk they expressed readiness to vote “for anyone but United Russia.”

Rostov

Marka Dimitrovykh · Jul 2 at 0:32 · ♥ 815

«He's completely lost his mind. A person in their right mind won't vote for United Russia. United Russia spent more than 25 years building a bright, happy future, they finished building it — and now we're in that bright, happy future. A hell of a future.»

Kuzbass

Vyacheslav Ragozin · Jul 2 at 12:04 · ♥ 29

*«Now this is a provocation.
Who came up with the idea that a vote against United Russia means support for that scumbag Zelensky.
You morons, for an ultimatum like that we're definitely against»*

Murmansk

Viktor N · Jul 2 at 18:55 · ♥ 51

«For anyone but United Russia,! 🤔🤔🤔»

- **Censorship is intensifying in sync with the radicalization.** Analysts in most regions record a growing number of deleted comments and blocked accounts, and specifically so: in Belgorod Oblast people are banned not for criticizing the “Special Military Operation” but for any critical mention of the president even in civilian topics; in Kursk Oblast pro-Kremlin bot networks intimidated commenters with criminal-code terms; in Kaluga Oblast posts criticizing the governor were deleted most harshly; in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug they “scrubbed” comments under “socially significant” topics — primarily about fuel. Against this backdrop, users increasingly resort to self-censorship and figurative language.

Rostov

Kostya Svetlakov · Jul 4 at 0:24 · ♥ 65

«There's a lot you could write, too bad they lock you up for it...»

Omsk

Aleksandr Karabanov · Jul 1 at 19:39 · ♥ 210

«Give us a catalog of what we're allowed to do, watch, and read.»

↳ Olga Zagurskaya · Jul 1 at 19:42 · ♥ 145

«Aleksandr,» [image-meme: «NOTHING IS ALLOWED»]

↳ Aleksandr Karabanov · Jul 1 at 19:45 · ♥ 19

«Olga, and there's nothing to nitpick 😎»

↳ Xxgs Zjhu · Jul 1 at 21:02 · ♥ 7

«Aleksandr, you're allowed to watch and read Solovyov»

- **The situation in Temporarily Occupied Crimea is different:** the worse the situation, the more freely the public speaks out, despite intensifying censorship, which is shifting from scrubbing comment threads to deleting entire root posts. In Samara and Leningrad Oblasts, analysts also note that bold commenters are becoming more numerous.
- **Pro-Kremlin bot networks have noticeably become more active.** In Belgorod Oblast they “report that the president wants peace, but Ukraine and Europe are demonstrating escalation”; in Irkutsk they steered discussion of the fuel shortage toward “the advantages of public transport,” until the threads turned into nonstop cursing. There are many such stories across different regions.

Volgograd

Denis Durmanov · Jun 29 at 13:22 · ♥ 69

«that's right — Donbass and Novorossiia are our land with our people. if the Armed Forces of Ukraine won't leave the nice way, then we'll help them leave feet first — simple as that»

↳ Garik Malchan · Jun 29 at 13:38 · ♥ 1

«Denis, +15 rubles (Kremlin) 🤖» [image: «bot detector» card]

Andrey Nogal · Jun 29 at 16:08 · ♥ 2

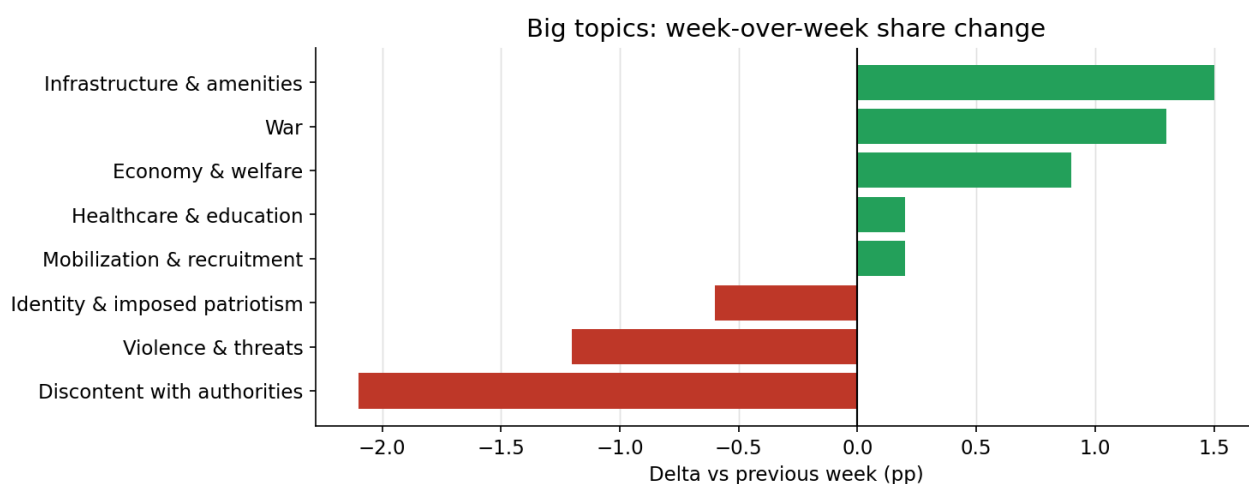
«Denis Durdumov, you bots are like maggots in a village outhouse 🤡»

General observation

The radicalization of rhetoric is not yet converting into a readiness to act: the boundary of the permissible is expanding in words, not in deeds, and the main safeguard remains the fear of punishment. The main legal form of protest for the autumn is becoming the intention to vote against “United Russia” — which is probably why the authorities are trying to toxify such a vote in advance.

2. The Week in Russia's Regional "VKontakte" and "Telegram"

Activity on Telegram



The week's main critical discussions on Telegram and VKontakte

The fuel crisis, act two: queues, Euro-3, and gasoline imports

Queues at gas stations were discussed almost everywhere — from Krasnodar Krai, where people “lost count” trying to tally the cars, to Tomsk Oblast, where drivers fill up 7–12 liters a day “just in case.” In Novorossiysk gasoline ran out completely; in the Kuzbass town of Kiselyovsk a single gas station served the whole city with a kilometer-long queue. In Oryol Oblast, from July 4 they began fueling on a schedule — depending on the first digit of the license plate. Users mused about “how else they’ll keep the people in check,” and suggested that “the khokhols will burst out laughing.”

Rostov

Aleksandr Shcherbina · Jun 30 at 7:52 · ♥ 755

«Just sell it through the MAX messenger already 🤔 No MAX? Then walk on foot 🚶»

↳ Sergey Koshelev · Jun 30 at 8:04 · ♥ 701

«Aleksandr, you're a pain, don't give them ideas 😏😏 or else they'll bring in sign-ups through Gosuslugi too»

Officials' explanations and advice only raised the temperature: “just endure it,” switch to trams, “look for the positive instead of panicking.” The audience's response is the same

across the country: “we've been enduring for 30 years already,” “we can get by without deputies too — for about 100 years.”

The government has allowed the circulation of “Euro-3” gasoline until the end of the year (a return of “Euro-2” is also being discussed). This was read as an official lowering of living standards: people expect mass engine repairs, in Rostov Oblast they complain about an “incomprehensible liquid” that swells the canisters, in Tatarstan they joke that “AvtoVAZ will make it out.” Another storyline is imports: Dmitry Peskov confirmed talks about purchasing petroleum products abroad; deliveries from Belarus, India, China, and Kazakhstan were reported. For the audience, this is a moment of national humiliation.

St. Petersburg

Anschela Dawydowa · Jun 30 at 12:27 · ♥ 168

«The internet barely works, drones fly over your head, nowhere to fuel up the car... Everything's going according to plan... One breakthrough after another, dear fellow citizens!»

The third act has already been announced — prices: carriers raised fares by at least 10% from July 1, taxi drivers in Pskov and Kaluga go out on the line less often, and everywhere the same expectation repeats — that “everything will get more expensive, except salaries.”

Orenburg

Olesya Kuzina · Jul 1 at 12:50 · ♥ 40

«As always, instead of admitting the problems and solving them, the authorities simply blame the people and create yet another useless "working group" for surveillance. To avoid "artificial" hype, they need to end the Special Military Operation.»

Temporarily Occupied Crimea: gasoline at 200 and cities without power or water

In Temporarily Occupied Crimea, the crisis is at its most acute phase. Prices for 95-octane reached 155–210 rubles/liter, fuel is dispensed by quota, in Sevastopol five bus routes were halted to save on the limits, and at Anapa's gas stations officials, police, and Cossacks “optimize the work of the stations.” Vladimir Putin's statements that “there are sufficient reserves in Crimea” and the State Duma's promises to solve the problem “in two weeks” are met by commenters with distrust.

In parallel, the peninsula lives under rolling blackouts: Armyansk and Krasnoperekopsk sat for several days without water or power, enterprise workers are sent into idle time with their wages cut by a third, and the queue before the Crimean Bridge reached 1,500 vehicles.

Temporarily Occupied Crimea

Yaroslav Yaroslav · Jul 2 at 6:52 · ♥ 7

«There are two Russias. One is the Kremlin's, where everything goes according to plan. And the Russia of ordinary citizens, where it's a total shitshow.»

Jul 1 at 14:50 · ♥ 22

«...🔗the report's done.»

Svetlana Cherkashina · Jul 1 at 14:11 · ♥ 15

«If it really was like that, then our top brass is preparing a bogus report on the work done during the emergency in the city for the head of Crimea. And, as always, a selfie (in the center, in the first and second micro-districts no water trucks were spotted, apart from the crowd of people under the scorching sun waiting for drinking water to be handed out in the second micro-district. And video and comments from residents about the work done and the results — did you try to take those, or just prettier and more convenient little photos?»

Viktor Golyuk · Jul 1 at 13:22 · ♥ 11

«If there's a photo, or better yet a video of this mess, send it over. Very curious.»

Andrey Andreev · Jul 1 at 14:32 · ♥ 8

«Here's Aksyonov's hotline +7978-909-15-10»

Svetlana Cherkashina · Jul 1 at 14:17 · ♥ 6

«Take a photo of yourselves in the crowd of people standing in line for drinking water like it's a parade!!!! Otherwise it's the usual pretty photos and smoke in our eyes, oh so caring, you are,,!!»

Scott Fellon · Jul 1 at 15:30 · ♥ 3

«If this is true, then the administration clearly has problems with its young staff. They could've quietly rendered it in AI, posted it, and the local pushovers would've spewed fewer complaints here»

On the mainland, the evacuation of children became a separate topic: Rostov schoolchildren were taken out of “Artek” ahead of schedule. Commenters did not sympathize but were astonished at the parents.

Rostov

Elena Bauer · Jun 29 at 16:47 · ♥ 114

«I wonder — parents see that the war's been going on for 5 years, everything's being smashed everywhere, and yet they send their kids off to camps. L-logic»

Strikes deep inside: Moscow, St. Petersburg, and the shifting rear

Nightly reports of 200–400 downed drones are mostly perceived not as a success of air defense but as a realization of the scale of the problem. In the case of civilian casualties, sympathy in the comments was mixed with a single question: when will the war end.

St. Petersburg

Olga Krasnowa · Jun 30 at 10:51 · ♥ 155

«This is just awful. How long will all this keep flying at us? Turns out no one is protected, and on top of that our boys are dying in the war and now civilians are dying too,»

↳ Leksa Tref · Jun 30 at 10:53 · ♥ 84

«Olga, the supreme leader says it was boring without some action, and anyway it's not such a nightmare-nightmare-nightmare 🙄»

The alarms reach farther: “drone-danger” regimes were declared in Tyumen, Sverdlovsk, and Omsk Oblasts; missiles were filmed on phones over Udmurtia and Chuvashia.

Elections to the State Duma: the campaign begins with scare stories

Besides Matveychev's statement, the week also brought actual electoral news: at the “United Russia” congress, the regional lists were headed by sitting governors (Khabirov in Bashkortostan, Khotsenko in Omsk Oblast, Aksyonov and Razvozhaev in Temporarily Occupied Crimea and Temporarily Occupied Sevastopol), and the lists include many participants of the “Special Military Operation.” In the Altai Republic, a man previously fined for “discrediting” the army was nominated as the communists' candidate — and he himself replied to commenters in the thread. The general backdrop is deep distrust: “they'll draw up a United Russia victory anyway,” and the fuel crisis is called “the best election campaign” against the party of power.

Krasnodar

Elena Fomina · Jul 5 at 17:28 · ♥ 33

«Right before the elections 🙄»

↳ Hungry Rabbit · Jul 5 at 18:47 · ♥ 5

«Elena, they already said that whoever won't vote for United Russia will be voting for Zelya. This is agony, soon the lid on the bottom will slam shut. Better buy flour, pasta, and other cheap calories»

Matvienko: “three children by 35” and saving “every kopeck”

Valentina Matvienko became a lightning rod twice in one week. First — with the statement that by the age of 35 Russians should give birth to at least three children, start a family, and succeed in a profession. The responses were almost without exception not about an unwillingness to have children but about the conditions: mortgages, kindergartens, healthcare, danger. People immediately recalled that the speaker herself has one child.

Omsk

Oleg Konovalov · Jul 2 at 4:08 · ♥ 112

«People aren't dogs, you can't order them to breed, no matter how hard the old farts try. Even animals stop reproducing in bad conditions. They ran the country into the ground and now they're bug-eyed, surprised that something's wrong with the demographics.»

The second sortie — the call to “save every kopeck” and cut back state forums. The audience responded by tallying up the fortunes of oligarchs and officials: “ordinary people already live modestly.”

Rostov

Mikhail Tokin · Jun 30 at 10:14 · ♥ 243

«So let the oligarchs help — they drove the country into poverty while the number of dollar billionaires grew»

Abolishing medical examinations for the army

The Ministry of Defense's proposal to abolish mandatory medical examinations for the mobilized and contract soldiers was perceived critically: the state is running out of people, a new wave of mobilization is being prepared. In the comments, many people discovered for the first time that people with HIV, hepatitis, and tuberculosis are taken to the war.

Krasnodar

Aleksey Kabanovsky · Jul 5 at 0:48 · ♥ 10

«remember how you laughed at the khokhols? Remember? And now what, is it funny?»

Rostov

Ivan Yangulov · Jul 4 at 21:36 · ♥ 91

«And their own kids will just keep enjoying life abroad, bravo»

Closed borders: checkpoints and talk of a visa ban

The Russian government closed a number of border crossing points on the borders with Latvia, Finland, and Estonia; in parallel, the most-reposted post of the week in Moscow feeds was a possible complete ban on EU tourist visas. In Pskov, the closure of the checkpoints was rather supported (“why didn't they close them right away?”), while in Kaliningrad Oblast, squeezed between closed borders, a feeling of blockade and “outcast status” dominates — tellingly, administrators deleted the most candid post about it.

Kaliningrad

Larisa Korzhunova · Jun 30 at 16:46 · ♥ 7

«How can you say such a thing? Everything here is growing and expanding, both the "well-being" of the people and of business. Everything's fine, beautiful marquise, everything's fine, everything's fine. Never mind that the "stables" are burning, everything's fine. What do our rulers care about the people, about business, about the ports. The main thing is that you pay your taxes on time, and as for the rest....?»

Methodology

What this project is. Systematic monitoring of sentiment in Russia's regions — with a focus on critical and negative posts as an indicator of what irritates, frightens, or outrages people. The conclusions rely on two parallel sources.

VKontakte. Observations by analysts working in regional Russian VK communities — in selected regions of all eight federal districts of the Russian Federation, as well as in Temporarily Occupied Crimea and the Temporarily Occupied certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Telegram. About 410 regional Russian channels — regional news channels, city public groups, oblast media, and local “chat-bots” with audiences ranging from a few thousand to tens of thousands of subscribers. Coverage spans all Russian regions and the occupied territories of Crimea and the certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Quotes in the report text are presented verbatim.