

Deep Russia: **OUT OF PETROL AGAIN**

What Russians discussed on "VKontakte" and on "Telegram" from 17 to 23 August

Period	17 - 23 August 2026
Platforms	VKontakte, Telegram (regional communities)



Key Findings

At the end of July the Russian authorities managed to temporarily ease the queues and some of the regional restrictions on fuel, but this was achieved mainly by manually redirecting supplies to priority regions, by import shipments and only partly by refineries returning from maintenance. A new series of Ukrainian strikes on oil refining at the end of July and in August destroyed this stabilization.

The government of the Russian Federation responded by extending the temporary ban on the export of petrol, diesel and marine fuel, and also permitted, until 1 July 2027, the production, import and circulation of petrol of lower environmental standards. Beyond that, the authorities were counting on imports to close the imbalance.

The second wave of the fuel crisis retains a noticeable public resonance, but the situation differs substantially between regions. The main irritants for the public remain rising prices, the actual absence of particular grades of petrol, queues, limits and the deteriorating quality of fuel. In a number of regions this is compounded by a mismatch between official information and the experience of motorists: the fuel declared on maps or in announcements is in fact not available at the filling stations.

Reports about the purchase of fuel abroad caused a substantial resonance this week. This became one of the main occasions for criticism and sarcasm about a situation in which Russia, with the status of an oil-producing state, has to buy fuel abroad.

A new theme, compared with the first wave, was complaints about the quality of petrol. The "Euro-2" standard permitted until 2027 was linked in comments to broken injectors and valves, and the decision itself was perceived as a technological rollback.

In most regions the accusations remain generalized and are aimed simply at "the authorities" or the local leadership. The version about panic among drivers is still supported by part of the audience, but in the border regions and the worst-affected regions it is no longer being pushed even by bots. Understanding of the connection with the strikes on oil refineries is growing, but selectively and unevenly.

The main change compared with the first wave is that for a significant part of the audience the shortage and the rise in fuel prices are gradually turning from an emergency event into a long-term problem that has to be adapted to.

The "drone danger" regime and reports of drones being shot down made up the week's broadest topic in terms of coverage. Such reports were published almost daily in more than 40 regions of the Russian Federation.

1. Out of petrol again

Anatomy of the second wave of the fuel crisis: why the July respite proved temporary

At the end of July the Russian authorities managed to temporarily ease the queues and some of the regional restrictions on fuel, but this was achieved mainly by manually redirecting supplies to priority regions, by import shipments and only partly by refineries returning from maintenance. A new series of Ukrainian strikes on oil refining at the end of July and in August destroyed this stabilization. Reuters recorded at least [10 regions where controls on fuel sales were tightened again](#), while [Meduza, citing BenZinMap](#), already wrote of 59 regions with strict limits and another 17 with local disruptions or price rises.

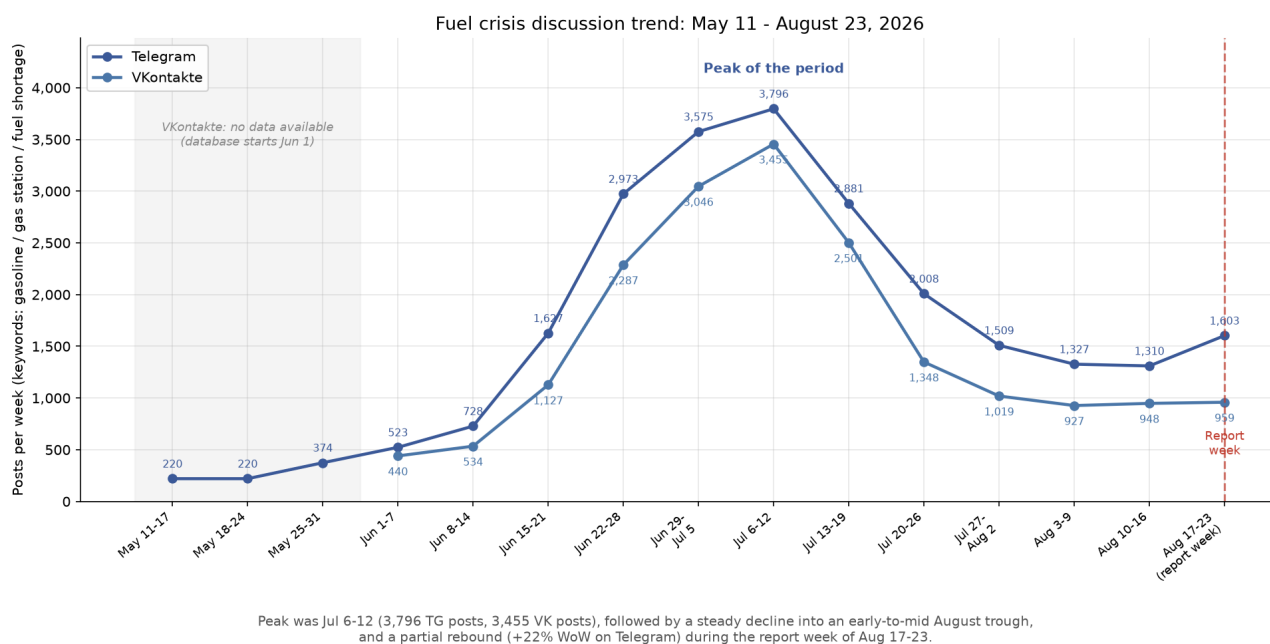
According to GdeBENZ data cited by "Izvestia" and The Insider, [as of 16 August petrol or diesel was available at only 28.1%](#) of Russian filling stations, against 41% a week earlier. [A field check by "Izvestia"](#) in the capital region showed that out of 21 filling stations checked in Moscow and Moscow Oblast, A-95 was available at only 6. So the Ministry of Energy's assurances about "stabilization" collapse when fuel is available at only a minority of points of sale.

Reuters reported that [the Orsk oil refinery halted processing after the strike on 11 August](#). Meduza counted strikes on facilities in [Bashkortostan, Krasnodar Krai, Volgograd, Saratov, Yaroslavl, Nizhnekamsk and Samara Oblast](#). According to expert estimates, Russian refining in August was expected to be at [3.8-4.1 million barrels per day against the usual 5.3-5.5 million barrels per day](#), that is, roughly 25-31% below the normal level.

The government of the Russian Federation responded with a ban on the export of petrol, diesel, marine fuel and gas oils [from 1 August 2026 to 31 January 2027](#), and also permitted, [until 1 July 2027](#), the production, import and circulation of petrol of lower environmental standards. Beyond that, the authorities were counting on imports to close the imbalance. Reuters reported on [a plan to import petrol from India](#) of up to 400 thousand tonnes per month, but [Russia's summer demand](#) was estimated at a minimum of 110 thousand tonnes of petrol per day. [The Belarusian resource is also limited](#). In July Belarus sharply increased fuel deliveries to the Russian Federation, but already at the beginning of August [petrol exports collapsed](#) almost eightfold.

There were reports of [limits at the filling stations of the large chains](#), while the diesel shortage creates risks for the harvest and the autumn sowing. The Kremlin also understands this, and has created a separate mechanism for supplying farmers with fuel [until 1 November](#).

Main discussions



The second wave of the fuel crisis retains a noticeable public resonance, but the situation differs substantially between regions and does not have the same intensity of discussion as the previous one. In Buryatia the topic of queues at filling stations became one of the central ones, in Novosibirsk Oblast the discussions are characterized as extremely intense, and in Kaluga, Rostov and Kursk Oblasts the problem also remains current. At the same time, in Kaliningrad Oblast the situation has stabilized, in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug fuel is mostly available, and in Altai Krai news and discussions of the second wave are not noticeable at all.

The main irritants for the public remain rising prices, the actual absence of particular grades of petrol, queues, limits and the deteriorating quality of fuel. In a number of regions this is compounded by a mismatch between official information and the experience of motorists. The fuel declared on maps or in announcements is in fact not available at the filling stations. Such complaints were observed, in particular, in Krasnodar Krai and in Belgorod, Kaluga, Rostov and Volgograd Oblasts, as well as in other regions.

Buryatia

"Rosneft deliberately closed half the filling stations so that there would be bigger queues at the others... Prospekt Avtomobilistov, Batareyka, Burvod — all supposedly under repair, though it was not bloody needed at all. As a result everyone is squeezing into the small NNK and BRK stations and the remaining Rosneft ones, which are badly located and have narrow entrances, hence the queues..." — August 21 at 3:38, ♥8

The greatest resonance this week was caused by reports about the purchase of fuel abroad. This became one of the main occasions for criticism and sarcasm about a situation in which Russia, with the status of an oil-producing state, has to buy fuel abroad.

Murmansk

"Are you serious? Petrol from India, strawberries from Greece, imported potatoes — and where is ours? Or is only our sh...t our own. Why is the government of Murmansk Oblast not commenting on the situation?" — August 17 at 12:11, ♥101

Rostov

"Actually that plant in India was built by Vova's friend Sechin, where Sechin buys our oil cheap at a preferential price and brings petrol from there into our country at the European price. Not bad, Vova and his friends milking the people of our country while telling us stable fairy tales on television." — August 24 at 22:54, ♥121

The target of the grievances

One of the recurring lines of discussion remains the conflict between the official version about a controlled situation and "artificial hype" and the reports of residents themselves. In Buryatia the media explain the queues by panic and by the problems of one particular private chain, in Karelia the authorities speak of a full supply of fuel, and in Volgograd Oblast part of the discussion also comes down to accusations against panic-mongers and resellers. But comments regularly appear reporting a real absence of petrol and long queues.

Dagestan

"Now the Minister of Internal Affairs will again pretend he does not notice anything. And in about three months, when it starts getting cheaper, he will put on his show again" — August 19 at 13:16, ♥46

At the same time, the narrative that the crisis is created by motorists themselves continues to work unevenly. It remains noticeable in Kemerovo, Lipetsk and Volgograd Oblasts. In Krasnodar Krai such explanations are already getting less support, and in Kursk Oblast, according to observations, the version about "artificial hype" has effectively disappeared from the discussion.

Perm

"Any second now the Kremlin bots will come running and will argue, frothing at the mouth, that it is the drivers themselves who are to blame — that they are creating the hype and buying up the petrol." — August 22 at 17:02, ♥46

Krasnodar

*"Really? And never mind that the tourists were here and still are, and the petrol used to be here and now it is not
So there is no need to blame the tourists" — August 17 at 14:38, ♥40*

In most regions the accusations remain generalized and are aimed simply at "the authorities" or the local leadership. However, in Novosibirsk and Krasnoyarsk both the regional and the central authorities are criticized. In Samara Oblast the discontent is directed at Putin and "United Russia"; in Yaroslavl Oblast "Putin's policy" is mentioned

negatively; in Leningrad Oblast Putin, Peskov and United Russia's policy are mocked; and in Perm Krai the fuel topic turns into discussions about who should not be voted for.

Perm Krai

"Putin clumsily read out from a piece of paper that Ukraine's strikes do not cause any damage to the economy.

Goyda, comrades.

We believe, we endure, we vote." — August 20 at 10:49, ♥47

↳ *"Nikolay, he can read out from a piece of paper in his bunker until he turns blue that 'there is no damage'! Take a look at the actual filling stations across the regions: across the whole country petrol is left at exactly 28% of filling stations!*

Private operators across the regions are shutting down en masse and hang..." — August 20 at 11:51, ♥19

Kaluga Oblast

"Say thank you to the president for everything. Soon there will be no petrol, no gas, no forest.

A great power.

It was, before him 😂😂😂" — August 19 at 8:44, ♥4

The connection with the strikes on oil refineries

Understanding of the cause is advancing, but slowly and selectively. In Perm Krai it has "finally" sunk in that the shortage is a consequence of the war; in Sverdlovsk Oblast, where in the first wave the connection was not seen, people are now beginning to see it. In Krasnoyarsk Krai damaged plants are mentioned ("unlike Ukraine, we have none that are completely destroyed, they will be repaired soon"), while in Lipetsk Oblast some commentators reproach the authorities for not being able to protect the oil refineries.

Meanwhile, in Pskov Oblast nobody links the crisis to the war, and in Volgograd and Omsk Oblasts the quality and the price are discussed without any cause-and-effect connection. In Dagestan half the population does not know about the wrecked oil refineries. In Saratov Oblast the logic is inverted: there people write that the rumors about plants destroyed by drones are being spread by the authorities deliberately for the sake of profit. Orenburg Oblast is just about the only region where Unmanned Aerial Vehicle attacks are named as the cause directly, and precisely because the strikes took place nearby.

Novosibirsk Oblast

"Gazprom has really pulled off a scheme, and there are still plenty of idiots who believe in Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and oil refineries." — August 23 at 12:15, ♥27

↳ *"Aleks, right, right... Well, there were drones... But these 'scheduled' repairs are exactly about rocking the boat further... They are scheduled, after all, not emergency ones.. In principle they could have been put off until better times... But the big chains, it seems, still want to squeeze out the whole market.. They do not care about people, the main thing is to stuff the cash away into some offshore somewhere.." — August 23 at 12:35, ♥14*

Changes in perception compared with the first wave of the fuel crisis

A new theme, compared with the first wave, was complaints about the quality of petrol. The "Euro-2" standard permitted until 2027 was linked in comments to broken injectors and valves, and the decision itself was perceived as a technological rollback.

Compared with the first wave, in many regions there is a noticeable decrease in emotional intensity and a gradual adaptation to the shortage. In Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Karelia and in Nizhny Novgorod, Chelyabinsk and Pskov Oblasts the discussions have become calmer or less active. Such a reduction in tension is not necessarily connected with an improvement in the situation. In Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, for example, while the shortage persists, an attitude of "we cannot change anything" is emerging, and in Chelyabinsk Oblast people are trying harder to adapt to the situation.

At the same time there are regions where the repetition of the crisis has, on the contrary, increased irritation. In Kaluga Oblast the population reacts more sharply because the promised temporary nature of the problems was not borne out; in Moscow Oblast a growth of irritation is recorded; in Rostov Oblast there are fewer positive expectations and less confidence that the authorities can settle the situation, and people also attack those who call for enduring it until the end of the "Special Military Operation". In Samara Oblast the initial shock has given way to getting used to the shortage itself, but at the same time criticism of Putin has intensified. In Belgorod Oblast the bots have stopped writing that the situation is improving, and in Yaroslavl Oblast the illusion of stability is no longer being created.

Moscow

"An oil-producing country? Who are we producing it for..." — August 18 at 20:44, ♥15

A separate factor that has to be taken into account when assessing sentiment is the moderation of critical comments and the activity of bots. The deletion of criticism is noticeable in Bashkortostan, Buryatia and in Orenburg, Nizhny Novgorod and Pskov Oblasts. In Samara, Lipetsk, Volgograd and other regions Kremlin bots are working actively, promoting the version about panic, temporary difficulties or the responsibility of the motorists themselves. Leningrad Oblast is an example, where the low volume of news is created artificially, since they try to write as little as possible about fuel, limiting themselves to quotes about "certain difficulties". A low share of direct criticism in individual regions therefore does not in itself allow any conclusion about a positive attitude of the audience to the situation.

General observations

The main change compared with the first wave is that for a significant part of the audience the shortage and the rise in fuel prices are gradually turning from an emergency event into a long-term problem that has to be adapted to.

The version about panic among drivers is still supported by part of the audience, but in the border regions and the worst-affected regions it is no longer being pushed even by bots.

Understanding of the connection with the strikes on oil refineries is growing, but selectively and unevenly.

2. The week in Russian regional "VKontakte" and "Telegram"

Top discussions on Telegram and VKontakte

1. Putin's statements

On 19-22 August Putin made a series of statements about preparations for the return of servicemen from the "Special Military Operation", about the absence of "critical consequences" from Ukrainian strikes, about the effectiveness of the strikes by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on Ukraine, and about the coming elections.

Of all the statements, the one about the absence of "critical consequences" from Ukrainian strikes caused the greatest resonance. The audience perceived such a formulation as devaluing the deaths of civilians, children in particular. Commentators stressed that the loss of individual lives is in itself a critical consequence.

Volgograd

"The deaths of civilians in Volgograd, Voronezh, Saratov and elsewhere — are those not critical consequences for him?!" — August 20 at 6:55, ♥16

The call to prepare for the return of participants in the "Special Military Operation" brought to the surface anxiety about the future adaptation and employment of traumatized veterans, and also generated parallels with the experience of the veterans of Afghanistan and Vietnam. Part of the audience treated the statement with distrust, suggesting that what should be prepared for is not the return of servicemen but new deployments to the front.

Orenburg

"Looks like we live in different Russias)" — August 20 at 14:01, ♥26

A separate persistent motif was personal criticism of Putin. In various regions and under various publications he was called a "windbag".

Omsk

"I will go and take the noodles off my ears, at least I can cook them." — August 19 at 19:18, ♥36

The audience also received skeptically the statement that the elections should confirm Russia's resilience. The discussion mostly came down to sarcasm about the predictability of the results and about the very point of holding elections in conditions where their outcome, in the commentators' opinion, is known in advance.

Pro-government reactions were also present, in particular thanks to the "Defenders of the Fatherland" foundation and statements about a coming victory. But they were less prominent than the critical, skeptical and anxious reactions.

2. Drones at Ozon

After several weeks of strikes on Wildberries warehouses, this week drones attacked four Ozon logistics centers, in Samara and Orenburg Oblasts, Adygea and Makhachkala. On the night of 24 August drone debris fell on a private round-the-clock children's center in Krasnodar, killing three teenagers and injuring 12 people.

The most likes and comments were gathered precisely by the posts about the deaths of the children, and the reaction there is the most emotional. What outraged commentators most was that the strikes in which the children died were called "non-critical". This was perceived as indifference on the part of the authorities to the loss of individual lives.

Under other posts, which were not about the deaths of children, the reaction was considerably calmer. There people discussed both the normalization of the recurrence of strikes in their lives and complained about where they were now supposed to order goods. Some commentators suggested that goods for the front were being stored in the warehouses, so the attacks are logical and are against a "legitimate target".

Tolyatti

"The Special Military Operation has to be stopped. We need people who can do that. By supporting the current ones, it will only get worse. People of Tolyatti, if this is not stopped, tomorrow it will hit our own home, our workplace, or God forbid the place where our children are. There is an opinion, and it seems to be borne out, that the current leaders do not understand that every life matters, they are not competent at defending the country or at ending the Special Military Operation." — August 24 at 6:25, ♥52

A less widespread but persistent line was the conspiracy theory. Some commentators linked the strikes to a possible redistribution of the market between marketplaces.

Perm

"This is not the Armed Forces of Ukraine, most likely China is clearing the trading platforms for itself 😡😡😡" — August 22 at 10:28, ♥3

3. Night alerts and other massed Unmanned Aerial Vehicle attacks

The "drone danger" regime and reports of drones being shot down made up the week's broadest topic in terms of coverage. Such reports were published almost daily in more than 40 regions of the Russian Federation. It is worth noting that a noticeable share of such posts are short informational "alert / all-clear" messages with few comments or none at all.

Under posts with substantive discussions, the most noticeable and best-supported reaction was fatigue from the constant danger and getting used to the alerts and strikes. The second most widespread was gratitude to the air defense troops, and commentators often separated their assessment of the military from that of the regional authorities. The air

defense forces were thanked for their work, while governors were criticized because, in the audience's opinion, they "take credit for their achievements".

Nizhny Novgorod

"Publish a map of shelters in the city and the oblast! Last night there was another massed attack on the region, and so far the scale of the raids is only growing. Is the population supposed to take cover at the stadium?"

Where is the data on civil defense for the population, rather than concerts and matches?!"
— August 19 at 9:48, ♥17

Further, a noticeable line of discussion consists of sarcasm and black humor. The war itself and the constant attacks were ironically called "a bit of action". People also spoke about irritation at internet shutdowns during alerts and complained about the absence of suitable shelters.

Open support for the war, to the effect that "the enemy will be crushed", is also present, as is skepticism about how drones can cover long distances unnoticed. At the same time both of these lines are noticeably less frequent than fatigue, gratitude to the air defense, sarcasm and general dissatisfaction with the warning and protection system.

Perm

"Say what you like but our air defense guys are doing great they let one through only once and otherwise they shoot everything down" — August 21 at 7:38, ♥38

"How I wish this would all be over already..... if it were not for the European countries that keep supporting Ukraine with weapons and money, we would have been living in peace long ago" — August 21 at 7:40, ♥18

3. The Runet went down because of a power outage at a single data center

On the evening of 18 August the power went out in several districts of Moscow (the "Oktyabrskaya" metro station, Zamoskvorechye, and the Danilovsky and Gagarinsky districts). Among the de-energized facilities was the MMTS-9 data center, which caused a mass network failure, as a result of which individual banks, messengers, social networks and cable networks stopped working. The most complaints came from Moscow, Moscow Oblast and St. Petersburg, and the outage lasted approximately 1-1.5 hours. In scale the failure was large, but not total; the cause of the initial power failure has not been officially disclosed in full.

Distrust of the official explanations prevails in the discussions. A significant part of the commentators assumes that the "interruptions at the data center" are a cover for actions by Roskomnadzor, and sarcastically call this the "sovereign internet" or the "Cheburnet". Commentators also tied the event to the elections on 18 September, arguing that this is in fact a rehearsal for a complete shutdown ahead of the vote. Practical complaints about specific consequences (banking apps, taxis and intercoms not working) occurred often, but usually as an addition to the discussions above rather than on their own. Technically informed explanations that the problem lay precisely with the domain name registrar, a

local failure at a single node, were also present, but clearly gave way to a politicized perception of the event.

Tatarstan

"On the 18th, 19th and 20th we will be sitting with no internet at all" — August 23 at 11:44, ♥4

"In fact, the population of Russia is under two types of sanctions. Some sanctions are imposed by the world community, the second lot are imposed by the Russian authorities. The question is, how long will the population hold out before it starts scattering from the sinking ship? You cannot live like this forever." — August 23 at 12:30, ♥3

4. The removal of "Yabloko" from the elections and the sentence for Lev Shlosberg

On 17 August the Supreme Court rejected "Yabloko's" appeal against its removal from the State Duma elections, and on 18 August the Central Election Commission officially excluded the party from the federal ballot. It was the only party running under the slogan "For Peace and Freedom". That same week the Pskov city court sentenced the party's deputy chairman Lev Shlosberg to 11 years and 1 month of imprisonment for "discrediting" the army. The news covered about 50 regions of the Russian Federation.

Most often commentators accused the authorities of being afraid of real competition in the elections. In such comments parallels with the year 1937 and complaints about "elections without a choice" regularly appeared. The 11-year sentence for Shlosberg for "discrediting" is itself considered too harsh a punishment, especially when compared with punishments for violent crimes.

The pro-government position was also noticeable. Some users wrote about the party's "marginality" and "foreign funding". A separate, less widespread line of discussion was calls to take part in the vote all the same: to vote "against all" or to deliberately spoil the ballot as a form of protest.

5. How much it costs to get a child ready for school

The estimate of the costs of getting a child ready for school provoked mass discussion. According to the report, getting a boy ready for school costs about 17 thousand rubles, and a girl 19 thousand. Most commentators considered these sums unrealistically low. Commentators cited their own calculations, mostly 25–45 thousand rubles for one child and 60–80 thousand for two. Most often they mentioned the costs of several pairs of shoes, the school uniform and clothing for older pupils.

People actively gave advice on how to save. They advised buying things in advance at the winter sales, looking for cheaper options on Avito and Wildberries, or using clothes and shoes from last year. Comments in which the official estimates were called realistic were considerably fewer. They usually concerned families who had bought some of the items in advance or already had the necessary clothing, that is, were not getting a child ready for school completely "from scratch".

Nizhny Novgorod

"Parents pay for their children to have their brains washed at school and to be turned into vatniks, who will then run across the fields away from drones for as long as their legs hold out." — August 19 at 11:26, ♥2

6. Another increase in housing and communal services tariffs

Regional public groups this week wrote actively about the increase in gas, water and heating tariffs from 1 October. Depending on the region, the rise will be from 8% to 22%.

The discussions concerned not so much the increase itself as its date. The tariffs are due to rise immediately after the State Duma elections on 18 September, and many commentators perceived this as a deliberate postponement of an unpopular decision to the post-election period rather than a coincidence.

Dagestan

"And all of this after the elections, that is why we vote against United Russia" — August 20 at 10:05, ♥21

There were also doubts about the justification of the tariffs themselves, which were further reinforced by the news from the Federal Antimonopoly Service about 103 billion rubles of unjustified overpayments for 2023–2025. Because of this, users asked why the payments keep growing and where exactly this money goes. Less widespread were specific complaints about the quality of communal services. People wrote about leaking roofs, interruptions in hot water and other problems, stressing that the quality of service is not improving along with the growth of the tariffs. Some proposed returning housing and communal services to state control in order to solve the problem systemically.

General observation

The approach of the elections affects how the audience explains other events. Even ordinary socio-economic news is perceived as part of a pre-election logic, with the suspicion that unpopular decisions are being postponed while positive steps, on the contrary, are being showcased before the elections.

Methodology

What this project is. Systematic monitoring of sentiment in Russian regions — with a focus on critical and negative posts as an indicator of what irritates, frightens or outrages people. The conclusions rest on two parallel sources from monitoring regional VKontakte groups and Telegram.

VKontakte and Telegram. Automated data collection in regional Russian communities on VKontakte (536 groups) and Telegram (428 channels) — regional news channels, local public groups, oblast media, local "chat bots" with audiences ranging from several thousand to hundreds of thousands of subscribers. Coverage — all Russian regions and the occupied territories of Ukraine. Observations by regional analysts were additionally used.

Quotes in the report text are given verbatim.