

Deep Russia: **THE ERA OF TOTAL SURVEILLANCE**

What Russians discussed on "VKontakte" and on "Telegram" from 24 to 30 August

Period	24 - 30 August 2026
Platforms	VKontakte, Telegram (regional communities)



Key Findings

News about the **expansion of military enlistment offices' access** to the personal data of those liable for military service and their relatives, **the tightening of control over financial transactions** and **the Kremlin's statements about there being no need for a new mobilization** provoked a predominantly negative reaction. Official denials additionally keep the topic of mobilization alive.

The public does not trust the authorities' statements about mobilization and views the new ways of controlling their data and their money with wariness. It is precisely this contradiction that generates the most distrust. For part of the audience these decisions look connected to one another.

The intensity of the discussions differed significantly from region to region. In most regions the reaction remained predominantly passive. People reacted sarcastically, swore, did not believe it and discussed ways of adapting. In the most active regions the discussion went beyond the specific innovations and turned into criticism of the authorities, Putin and "United Russia", and demands to end the "Special Military Operation".

Statements by Peskov, Medvedev and other officials about there being no need for mobilization were not believed. Commentators referred to the authorities' earlier unfulfilled promises, in particular regarding the 2022 mobilization and the retirement age. A widespread assumption was that no new decisions would be taken before the elections, and that mobilization is possible right after them.

News that military enlistment offices may obtain more data about those liable for military service and their relatives mostly provoked outrage. Commentators do not understand why enlistment offices need information about incomes, accounts, loans, health and relatives. The public is afraid of these data leaking, while others believe they may be used to track people down or to put pressure on them and their families. There were mass demands that such control be applied first of all to officials and deputies, and not to "ordinary citizens".

The expansion of Rosfinmonitoring's access to transactions through the Fast Payments System, the "Mir" system and QR codes was also assessed negatively. In the discussions people assumed that the state wants to see all of citizens' money and spending. Because of this, in various regions people advised switching to cash.

After discussions revived last week, the fuel topic has stopped growing, but it has not declined either. The geography meanwhile remains as broad as possible. The topic is being discussed in more than 80 regions. The most discussed general news item was the import of petrol from Turkey, which has become another fuel supplier alongside India and Morocco. Most commentators consider this situation humiliating for an oil-producing country.

1. THE ERA OF TOTAL SURVEILLANCE

What innovations await Russians?

On 25 August the Ministry of Defense prepared a [draft order](#) that significantly expands the list of data about those liable for military service and their close relatives that is available to military enlistment offices on request. This concerns tax returns, bank accounts, loans and debts, place of work and business, road accidents, marriage, foreign passports, administrative and criminal cases, and also data on the state of health. This information is to be handed over by state bodies and private companies, including medical institutions.

Earlier a [federal law](#) of 26 July 2026 was adopted, which introduces a special procedure for determining fitness for service in certain military positions and, according to open materials, comes into force on 23 January 2027.

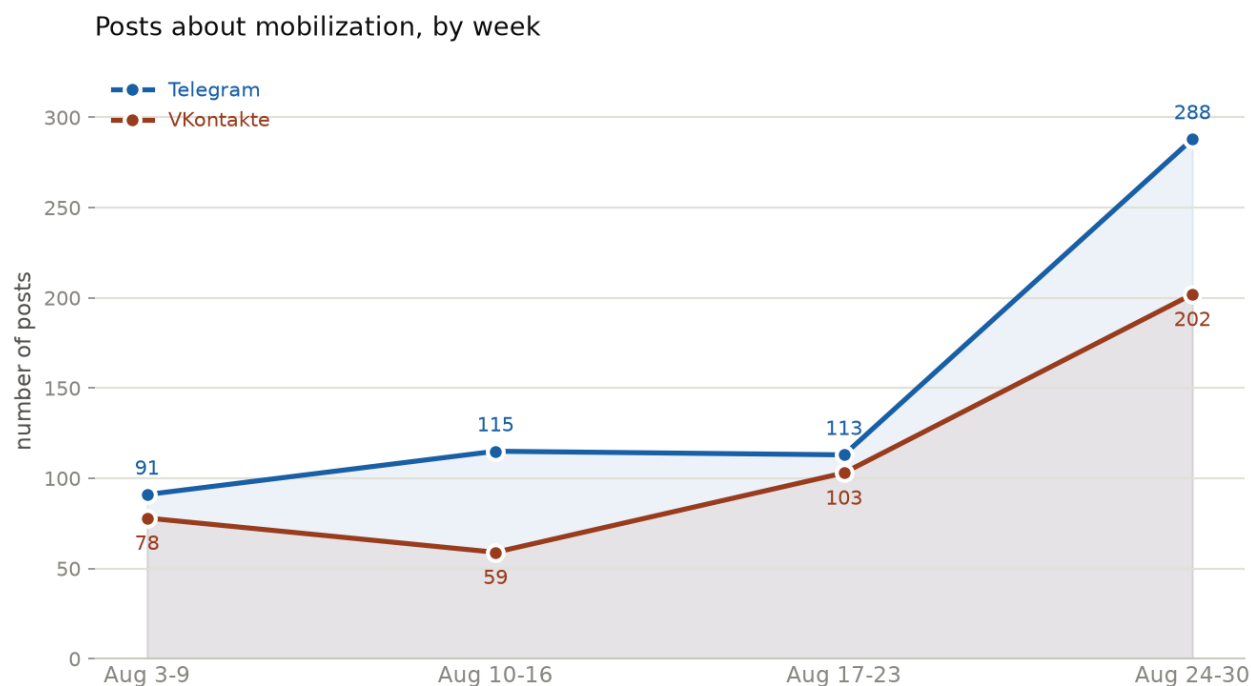
That same week [Dmitry Peskov called the reports about the preparation of a new wave of mobilization "information canards"](#), allegedly spread by Ukraine and Western media. During the week the same thesis was repeated by [Dmitry Medvedev](#), who stated that "there are no plans for mobilization in Russia".

From 1 September 2026 [Rosfinmonitoring gains access](#) to the data of the National Payment Card System on transactions through the Fast Payments System, "Mir" cards and the unified payment QR code. The National Payment Card System is not to disclose the fact that data has been transferred to Rosfinmonitoring, while the deadlines, the method, the volume and the composition of the information are to be determined by a separate agreement between Rosfinmonitoring and the National Payment Card System, in coordination with the Bank of Russia.

[Officially this is explained by](#) the fight against money laundering and the reduction of the burden on banks. The problem is that the law forbids the payment infrastructure operator from disclosing the fact that such data has been transferred, which creates a human rights problem of opacity for the citizen themselves. This change does not mean the automatic blocking of every transfer and does not give the state control over private crypto wallets as such. But it sharply increases the visibility of the fiat entry and exit points on which most everyday peer-to-peer and crypto transactions rest.

Main discussions

News about the expansion of military enlistment offices' access to the personal data of those liable for military service and their relatives, the tightening of control over financial transactions and the Kremlin's statements about there being no need for a new mobilization **provoked a predominantly negative reaction**. Official denials additionally keep the topic of mobilization alive.



The intensity of the discussions differed significantly. The news generated considerable resonance in Buryatia, Perm Krai, Altai Krai and Samara and Chelyabinsk Oblasts, while in Vladimir Oblast, Karelia and a number of other regions there was practically a complete absence of reaction.

In most regions the reaction remained predominantly passive. People reacted sarcastically, swore, did not believe it and discussed ways of adapting.

In the most active regions the discussion went beyond the specific innovations and turned into criticism of the authorities, Putin and "United Russia", and demands to end the "Special Military Operation".

Distrust of the statements about mobilization

In most regions where the topic was discussed, **the statements by Peskov, Medvedev and other officials were not believed**. Commentators referred to the authorities' earlier unfulfilled promises, in particular regarding the 2022 mobilization and the retirement age. A widespread assumption was that no new decisions would be taken before the elections, and that mobilization is possible right after them.

Samara

"There will be no new mobilization in Russia . . . The old one will just carry on" — August 25 at 8:53, ♥101

Perm Krai

"If the authorities say that something is not going to happen, that means this is exactly what you should expect." — August 25 at 10:58, ♥95

Kemerovo Oblast

"And can we get his comment on the authorities' previous statements: There will never be a rise in the retirement age, there will be no war, there will be no mobilization (2022); change the constitution to extend presidential terms - of course not, strengthen the economy and democracy? It turns out it is all the other way round! Thanks, we have learned from bitter experience that you cannot trust those at the top!" — August 25 at 10:39, ♥23

Access of military enlistment offices to personal data

News that military enlistment offices may obtain more data about those liable for military service and their relatives mostly provoked outrage. Commentators do not understand why enlistment offices need information about incomes, accounts, loans, health and relatives. Some commentators are afraid of these data leaking, others believe they may be used to track people down or to put pressure on them and their families. There were mass demands that such control be applied first of all to officials and deputies, and not to "ordinary citizens".

Rostov

"It is just like some kind of Stalinist repressions. They would do better to keep that close an eye on the khokhols they have dragged into the country." — August 28 at 3:53, ♥170

Temporarily Occupied Donetsk region

"And why so much personal information, just to serve in the army?.... Something does not add up" — August 29 at 13:25, ♥1

Tyumen Oblast

"They control us like a herd 😊😏" — August 28 at 7:08, ♥10

In a number of regions people discussed whether such measures comply with the Constitution, the right to privacy and the protection of personal data.

Kaluga

"That is where there will be the most scammers selling information to scammers." — August 28 at 7:21, ♥11

Financial control

The expansion of Rosfinmonitoring's access to transactions through the Fast Payments System, the "Mir" system and QR codes was also assessed negatively. In the discussions people assumed that the state wants to see all of citizens' money and spending. Because of this, in various regions people advised switching to cash.

Chelyabinsk Oblast

"Look after yourselves, you devils" — August 26 at 4:48, ♥130

Murmansk Oblast

"after every act of care the people feel they have been screwed.." — August 25 at 10:25, ♥11

Perm Krai

"Let them monitor the incomes of the State Duma deputies instead, and not those of ordinary people who earn their money by honest work" — August 28 at 4:09, ♥104

Lipetsk

"And the whole of Russia will switch to cash 😂😂" — August 28 at 22:57, ♥8

Rostov. A post claiming that the Ministry of Transport allegedly wants to oblige carriers to transmit data on all Russians' trips to a single state database in real time was itself flagged by the VKontakte platform with the label "Information may be unreliable"



General observations

The public does not trust the authorities' statements about mobilization and views the new ways of controlling their data and their money with wariness. It is precisely this contradiction that generates the most distrust. For part of the audience these decisions look connected to one another.

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

Top discussions on Telegram and VKontakte

1. The fuel crisis

After discussions revived last week, the fuel topic has stopped growing, but it has not declined either. The geography meanwhile remains as broad as possible. The topic is being discussed in more than 80 regions.

On the ground people mostly discuss local problems. In Astrakhan Oblast the limit on petrol sales to individuals was lowered to 30 liters. In Kemerovo several drivers complained about "sludge instead of petrol" at a "Gazpromneft" filling station. For the third week in a row, fatigue with the queues is noticeable. Distrust is now expressed not only towards prices and the availability of petrol, but also towards its quality. In the comments people are ironic about the situation being under control. A frequent suspicion is that the shortage is being maintained artificially ahead of the elections on 18 September, in order to show an improvement before the vote. Overall there is less and less surprise in the comments and more and more sarcasm.

Dagestan

"And has the head of the Republic taken any measures on this issue?" — August 26 at 9:47, ♥21

Kaluga

*"Another six months from now: residents of Kaluga ask to be allowed to buy bread to take home,
another year from now: residents of Kaluga beg to be allowed to breathe air...
we have lived to see it, damn it..." — August 26 at 8:19, ♥18*

The most discussed general news item was the import of petrol from Turkey, which has become another fuel supplier alongside India and Morocco. Most commentators consider this situation humiliating for an oil-producing country.

Kaluga

"This is a collapse and a fiasco" — August 29 at 18:09

2. Ozon under attack. Air raid alerts

Attacks on the logistics infrastructure of marketplaces continued this week and covered new facilities. On 27 August drones struck warehouses in Orenburg and Ufa. On the night of 29 August two Ozon facilities in Rostov Oblast came under attack at once.

During the week Ozon announced a change in the payment terms for orders: in some regions goods will now be dispatched only on prepayment. Officially the company explains this as an attempt to reduce the number of uncollected goods.

There is a lot of sarcasm in the comments. Users write that after Wildberries "it was Ozon's turn", and discuss what will be next. Conspiracy theories are appearing about insurance payouts, "empty warehouses" and a possible redivision of the market between marketplaces. There are noticeable accusations that the authorities are incapable of protecting even the logistics infrastructure, without reference to any specific warehouse brand. Sympathy for business also occurs, but it is lost in the flow of irony, anger and distrust.

Dagestan

"They flew in from Ukrainian territory? Oh sure! Oh sure! We believe it!" — August 24 at 10:50, ♥28

Posts about missile danger and the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle threat have already become an integral part of the regional information space. In the comments on the daily alerts, fatigue and habituation are noticeable. People discuss how the alerts and all-clears sound so often that the threat is barely discussed on its merits any more. When attacks do lead to casualties, the tone changes sharply. Official statements about "the absence of critical consequences" collect the most criticism, since they contradict the stories of specific individuals who speak of the death of loved ones, of destruction and of the absence of any reaction from the authorities.

Perm Krai

"It is a shit show, comrades, a shit show. Thanks to the authorities for our future, which there will not be." — August 30 at 23:24, ♥30

Nizhny Novgorod

"Lukoil" is on fire again... But otherwise everything is going according to plan 👍 — August 26 at 10:59, ♥18

↳ *"Now all that is left is to work out how you can 'repel an attack' and still have a fire at an oil refinery." — August 26 at 11:33, ♥12*

3. The unannounced visit of the CIA director to Moscow

CIA Director John Ratcliffe arrived in Moscow unannounced on a US Air Force military transport aircraft. In the comments, the most noticeable reaction was to the Kremlin's initial statement that it supposedly did not know who exactly had flown in. Users were ironic about the fact that an American military aircraft lands at Vnukovo unhindered, while official representatives declare that they are "not aware".

Temporarily Occupied certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions

"If the Kremlin knows nothing, it turns out they flew in as if coming to their own home. A US military aircraft.

*Peskov needs to think about what he is saying.
Or they simply take us for i.dio.ts." — August 25 at 17:19, ♥21*

Part of the audience perceived the visit as yet another excuse for memes and mockery. That same week the fate of Kanye West's concert in St. Petersburg was being decided, and some commentators joked that the CIA director had supposedly flown in "to ask them not to cancel Kanye West's concert".

Others, on the contrary, attached serious significance to it, recalling previous visits by CIA chiefs to Moscow and linking them with subsequent changes in the war. Calls for peace were isolated.

Separately, a conspiracy line arose around the repair works near the Kremlin. The dismantling of the flagpole, which was officially explained as scheduled repairs, was linked by some commentators to Ratcliffe's visit and perceived as a possible sign of preparations for important events.

4. The court campaign against "Yabloko" moves from the federal to the regional level

After "Yabloko" was removed from the federal elections to the State Duma, the fight moved to the regions. On 28 August the Sverdlovsk Oblast Court granted a claim by the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and removed the party from the elections to the oblast Legislative Assembly. The formal grounds for this decision were the use of banned social networks and violation of the law on foreign funding. In Kaliningrad Oblast a similar claim was filed by the "Communists of Russia" party. The public criticizes the very method of eliminating a competitor through the courts. Even those who do not support "Yabloko" condemn it. They do not believe in the legitimacy of such elections at all.

5. The "Special Military Operation" may last until 2030

Viktor Sobolev, a member of the State Duma defense committee, stated that Russia must end the "Special Military Operation" with an "absolute victory" by 2030, in order to then prepare for a possible clash with NATO countries. The reaction turned out to be one of the sharpest of the week. Fatigue, irritation and rejection of the very prospect of several more years of fighting predominated in the discussions, especially given that the statement came three weeks before the elections. Demands that deputies send their own children to the front appear under almost every post on this topic, regardless of the region. Besides this, people were ironic that by 2030 there will be no one left to fight, and recalled that deadlines for ending the "Special Military Operation" had already been named before, but they did not come true.

Samara

"So they will finish it by '30, because in '30 it might start with Europe? Nice prospects for the future..., especially for the young..

I was just wondering whether to do the renovation or not, I think it is 100% not even worth bothering..." — August 24 at 17:36, ♥125

Perm Krai

"The whole State Duma to the front, f.ck them" — August 24 at 18:01, ♥155

Tatarstan

"By 2030 there will be no one left to fight" — August 25 at 2:29, ♥38

Novosibirsk Oblast

*"It is somehow dangerous to comment. I will just close the news item with a poker face..."
— August 25 at 5:32, ♥18*

Novosibirsk Oblast

*"We were living relatively calmly and normally, but no, everything had to be destroyed"
— August 25 at 5:42, ♥87*

Volgograd Oblast

*"Well let them go and let the whole State Duma do the fighting, even until '35!" — August
25 at 8:08, ♥22*

Pskov Oblast

"In that time there will be no men left in the country..." — August 25 at 0:26, ♥49

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.