
THE AFTERMATH OF CROCUS CITY HALL TERRORIST ATTACK: LABOR MIGRATION POLICY, PUBLIC OPINION AND DYSFUNCTIONAL AUTOCRACY

VSEVOLOD BEDERSON, VLADIMIR ZVONOVSKY,
ALEXANDER KHODYKIN AND OLEG KHOKHLOV
EDITED BY KIRILL ROGOV

CONTENTS

- 4 AUTHORITARIAN DYSFUNCTION: WHY DID THE RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES LAUNCH A CRACKDOWN ON MIGRANTS?
- 9 WAR OF NARRATIVES AND CONSERVATIVE MOBILISATION: THE SOCIOLOGICAL EFFECT OF A TWO-PRONGED PROPAGANDA STRATEGY
- 14 BETWEEN MODERATE XENOPHOBIA AND LOW TOLERANCE: ATTITUDES TOWARDS MIGRANTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE TERRORIST ATTACK / VLADIMIR ZVONOVSKY, ALEXANDER KHODYKIN

The terror attack at Crocus City Hall was a catastrophic failure by the Russian authorities and security services. However, the Kremlin's dual strategy of blaming Ukraine and the West for the attack along with a large-scale anti-migrant campaign, has allowed the authorities to shirk responsibility for this failure. Authoritarian dysfunction results in human and economic losses but is offset by the successful use of conservative mobilisation tools.

The terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall, which killed 145 people, was a catastrophic failure by the Russian authorities and security services. Despite warnings from two sources — the American and Iranian intelligence — Russian authorities did not take preventive security measures, and President Putin publicly dismissed the warnings from American intelligence as provocations the day before the attack.

Nevertheless, the Russian authorities have managed to avoid responsibility for this failure in the eyes of the public. They have been able to achieve this effect through a combination of two propaganda strategies. On the one hand, officials and state media have placed the ultimate responsibility for the attack on Ukraine and the West, where the instigators were allegedly located. This framed the attack within the context of an 'existential' confrontation between Russia and the West and elevated its status to that of an international conspiratorial operation against Russia.

At the same time, law enforcement agencies launched an extensive campaign in Russia against labour migrants from Central Asia. The campaign included raids, mass expulsions, intensified checks at airports, and bans on migrants for certain types of labour activities in the regions. Authorities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan even advised their citizens temporarily to refrain from travelling to Russia. Along with the demonstrably brutal detention of the citizens of Tajikistan suspected of being involved in the attack, this campaign was designed to create an impression of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Russian security apparatus, displacing the impression of its inactivity and dysfunctionality at the time of the terrorist attack.

Surveys conducted by the Levada Centre and the ExtremeScan company two weeks after the attack showed that 65% of respondents supported the Russian authorities' version of events that Ukrainian and Western security services were behind the terror attack at Crocus City Hall. Only 22% of those surveyed by the Levada Centre believed that Russian special services were responsible for this terrorist attack that they failed to prevent. At the same time, about half (48%) think that the attack was made possible because 'the terrorists had the support of foreign intelligence services'. These distributions indicate the success of the Kremlin's 'two-pronged' propaganda strategy.

The public reaction to the terrorist attack reflected the effects of the 'war of narratives' and echo chambers. While 65% of those surveyed supported the official version of events, 15% adhered to an alternative version, according to which Islamist organisations and Russian intelligence services were behind the attack. Supporters of the two versions were clearly divided on the basis

of their attitudes towards the Putin regime and the war in Ukraine, as well as in their assessments of the most significant personal and societal threats. Opposition-minded respondents focused on socio-economic issues, while loyalists focused on geopolitical threats.

The authorities' propaganda campaign had a certain mobilisation effect: the share of those who declared personal support for the 'special military operation' in the April ExtremeScan poll jumped to 61%, compared to an average of 52% in January-March. Meanwhile, the actual interpretation of the attack in mass public opinion depends on how fully opponents of the Russian government and the war are represented in the surveys, as in a repressive climate, those with dissenting opinions with pollsters than loyal respondents.

The anti-migrant campaign organised by the authorities came at a time when the demand for workers in the Russian labour market was at its peak. Over the course of two years of war, the labour market has lost about 1 million people (1.5% of those employed) as a result of several waves of relocation abroad, mobilisation and the widespread recruitment of contract workers. The labour shortage has become one of the factors contributing to increased inflationary pressure. In the medium and long term, this pressure on the labour market will persist or intensify.

Today, labour migrants (both temporary and settled) may constitute about 10% of the workforce in Russia. However, due to unfavourable demographic trends, the deficit of labour will continue to grow, reaching between 2 and 4 million people by 2030, according to expert estimates. Moreover, competition for labour supplied to Russia from Central Asia is gradually increasing, as residents of Central Asian states increasingly consider other countries with more predictable migration climates. In this situation, the anti-migrant campaign significantly damages the economy, while its 'anti-terrorist' effect is practically negligible.

It is important to note that the anti-migrant campaign launched by the Russian authorities is not a response to grassroots demand. A post-attack survey on public attitudes toward migrants did not show a significant surge in xenophobia, which remains at a moderate level typical of Russia in recent years. Approximately 20% of those surveyed expressed antipathy towards and anxiety about migrants, and another 10% express these sentiments in a weak form. However, reducing social distance (such as through acquaintance or proximity) noticeably decreases this level. Trust in close social circles, compensating for low generalised trust and trust in institutions, shifts xenophobia from interpersonal to stereotypical levels.

At the same time, the majority of Russians do not highly value the significance of migrant labour for the economy and do not believe that migrants face discrimination in Russia. However, responses to both these questions are highly politicised: opponents of the current regime are twice as likely as supporters to talk about violations of migrants' rights and 1.5 times more likely to discuss the benefits of migrants for Russia. In other words, the population loyal to the Russian authorities and their narratives does not receive a signal of tolerance towards labour migrants from above; rather receives the opposite signal, which fuels suspicion and distrust.

The anti-migrant campaign by the Russian authorities appears to be a manifestation of the phenomenon of authoritarian dysfunction. The failure to prevent the terrorist attack was compensated by political authorities and security forces through a simulation of effectiveness in ensuring security after the fact. Thus, instead of investing in the efficiency of intelligence services, authoritarian powers prefer to invest in low-efficiency and costly technologies of total control and do not consider the collateral damage they inflict on the economy. At the same time, by fostering suspicion and distrust of migrants and conspiracy theories of 'plots against Russia', the authorities achieve a significant effect of conservative mobilisation, which allows them to mitigate the inefficiency of the current system in the near term.

1. AUTHORITARIAN DYSFUNCTION: WHY DID THE RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES LAUNCH A CRACKDOWN ON MIGRANTS?

- In response to the terror attack at 'Crocus City Hall', a large-scale campaign was launched, including mass raids, deportations, entry denials for thousands of migrant workers, as well as bans on their employment in certain sectors.
- Meanwhile, the Russian economy is more in need of an influx of labour resources than ever before, with this shortage becoming a factor affecting macroeconomic indicators.
- According to some estimates, migrant workers may account for up to 10% of the country's total workforce, which does not meet its needs. By the end of the 2020s, the labour market deficit could reach 2 to 4 million people.
- The supply of labour to the Russian labour market from Central Asian countries has probably already reached its limit, and competition for labour from this region will intensify in the near future. Citizens of these countries are exploring new areas of labour migration.
- The anti-migrant campaign appears to be economically irrational and, at the same time, futile in the context of counterterrorism objectives. However, it is driven by the authorities' need to compensate for the impression of their own incompetence and inactivity prior to and during the terrorist attack by demonstrating toughness and large-scale control.

RETROSPECTIVE 'ANTI-TERRORIST' CAMPAIGN

The Russian authorities have responded to the terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall, which Tajik citizens have been accused of committing, with an anti-migrant campaign. Vladimir Putin [called](#) illegal migration 'a breeding ground for extremist activity and just outright criminality. And, now, former Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev has identified the prerequisites 'for the disintegration of the country' within the 'man-made crises provoked by migrant flows'.

In the week after the terror attack, raids against illegal migrants took place in 68 regions, according to the publication of the 'Agency' media. As a result, at least 161 criminal cases have been opened, more than 1700 foreigners expelled from the country, and several hundred individuals have received military summonses. A number of regions have restricted the hiring of foreign workers. As it stands, various restrictions are in force in more than 30 regions, [according to RTVi](#). Most often foreigners are banned from working in trade, passenger and freight transport (a ban on working in taxis has been introduced in 29 regions), food production, as well as catering and hotel business. The Ministry of Internal Affairs [has drafted](#) a bill tightening a number of provisions on migration legislation. In particular, it limits the period that foreigners may stay in Russia to 90 days per calendar year. The State Duma has also tightened the regulations for the legalisation of foreigners by marriage.

As a result, the foreign ministries of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have recommended that their citizens refrain from travelling to Russia unless there is an urgent need. Tajik authorities have recorded an outflow of migrants, mass refusals to enter Russia and harassment of migrants at the 'domestic level'. The Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry has stated that it has not observed an increase in the number of refusals of entry, but has suggested waiting for the removal of 'additional security measures and the regime of enhanced control of passage through the state border'.

The behaviour of the Russian authorities and law enforcement seems rather irrational. Russia is experiencing an unprecedented demand for labour, which, among other things, is leading to increased inflationary pressures in the economy. Besides the fact that Russia is experiencing declining birth rates and shrinking number of entrants to the labour market, over the course of two years of war its labour market has apparently lost about 1 million people (1.5% of those employed) as result of war-related wave of relocation, mobilisation and the widespread recruitment of contract workers (→ [Re:Russia: Record Underemployment](#)). At the same time, the growth of production in the defence industry and the 'structural transformation' of the economy has created additional demand for labour. Therefore, the need for labour migration appears to be more acute than ever and will only increase in the coming years.

MIGRANTS AND RUSSIAN LABOUR MARKET: THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

In the first two years of the war, the inflow of labour migrants, contrary to expectations, remained stable. In 2023, 4.5 million foreigners crossed the Russian border to work, according to data from the FSB border service [cited by](#)

[Vedomosti](#) (it is necessary to record ‘work’ as the purpose of the trip in order to then obtain an official work permit). This is even higher than the pre-pandemic level recorded in 2019, when 4.1 million potential workers crossed the border. Uzbekistan (2 million), Tajikistan (1.2 million) and Kyrgyzstan (0.7 million) had the largest number of entrants last year. For all three countries, the inflow exceeded the pre-pandemic level.

The FSB data, however, gives only some idea of the dynamics of entry, but it does not allow us to judge the total size of foreign labour force in Russia. The FSB records every border crossing, while many migrants may leave and return several times a year. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2.3 million new so called «work patents» (permits for those who don’t need a work visa) were issued to foreign citizens in 2023, this was 3.6% more than in 2022. Additionally, for those requiring work visas 99,100 new work permits (+23.6%) were issued. But this data, too, can only serve as a benchmark. First, citizens of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can get a job without any papers or permits as their countries are members of the Eurasian Economic Union. Second, papers are issued for work in a particular region, and if you move, you have to get new ones issued. There are discussions about cancelling this restriction.

Due to the confusion and volatility of accounting rules, we have to rely on expert estimates of the relative total number of labour migrants in Russia. At the beginning of 2024, there may have been just under 8 million temporary and settled labour migrants in Russia, according to experts interviewed by Vedomosti. [A recent report by the Observer Research Foundation \(ORF\)](#) estimates the number of labour migrants at 9-11 million people. Putin recently cited approximately the same estimate of 10 million people. But these estimates do not take into account illegal migrants, and according to the assumption of Kares Schenk, an associate professor at Kazakhstan’s Nazarbayev University, quoted in the ORF report, there may be quite a few of these. Thus, migrant workers (temporary and settled) may account for about 10-12% of Russia’s labour force. Moreover, the need for them is growing. Due to the declining birth rate, the labour shortage will continue to grow and, by 2030, according to expert estimates, will amount to between 2 and 4 million people.

AN EXHAUSTIBLE RESOURCE AND COMPETITION FOR LABOUR

The Russian authorities believe that the labour force from Central Asia and some other former Soviet countries has no alternative but to seek employment in the Russian labour market. This is partly true, but the full picture is much more complex.

First, the potential inflow of labour migrants from these countries has probably already reached its limit, and the need for workers continues to grow. Second, in the long term, the attractiveness of the Russian labour market will decrease due to the gradual weakening of the ruble, ORF expert Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash predicts. As a result of the devaluation that began last year, the ruble has fallen in value by 22% against the Kyrgyz som, by 18% against the Uzbek som, by 25% against the Armenian dram and by the same amount (25%) against the Kazakh tenge. Ruble incomes of migrants did, however, increase, but not by as much.

[According to surveys of migrants conducted by the Institute of Social Analysis and Forecasting of the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration](#), in 2022, the median monthly income in the Moscow region, where about 40% of all foreign migrants work, was 50,000 rubles, in 2023 it was 60,000 rubles. This is an increase of 20%, which almost compensates for the loss occurred as a result of devaluation. However, in other regions, this wage growth was lower.

Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash predicts that citizens of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan will gradually switch to other markets where the economic situation is more stable and people are more tolerant. He notes that the Central Asian authorities are striving to do the same. For example, Uzbekistan, the main supplier of labour to Russia, is negotiating easier employment conditions for its citizens in Germany and a number of other EU countries, as well as in the United Kingdom. These negotiations are based on the [EU's Central Asia strategy](#) adopted in 2019, which includes the attraction of labour migrants from the region. Uzbekistan is also developing cooperation for labour migration with Israel and Saudi Arabia. So far, few labour migrants are travelling to developed countries. With the mediation of the Uzbek Agency for External Labour Migration, some 70,000 people have gone to work in developed countries over the past two years, with a total of 2-3 million Uzbek citizens working abroad. More obvious alternatives to Russia are Turkey and Kazakhstan, to which, like Russia, Uzbek citizens can travel without visas. The former, Jayaprakash notes, is increasingly chosen by women because of the similarity of the two cultures.

Data from a survey conducted by the Institute of Social Analysis and Forecasting of the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration suggests that the majority of labour migrants are still optimistic about their prospects in Russia. In 2022 63% of such migrants felt this way, and in 2023 this rose to 71%. At the same time, the number of those wishing to stay in Russia for good is decreasing, which is an important indicator of absorption. In 2022, 31% of respondents shared such plans, in 2023 this fell to 25%. Accordingly, there are fewer people who want to obtain long-term status in Russia (temporary residence permit, residence permit or citizenship). In the survey conducted in 2023, 46% of those surveyed said they wanted to stay for the long term, compared to 58% a year earlier. The number of those who definitely do not want to do this increased from 28% to 40%. This is apparently due to the fear of going to war as the Russian authorities dream of filling the gaps not only in the labour market, but also the lack of manpower at the front at the expense of migrant workers. However, in the conditions of voluntary labour migration, these goals are incompatible.

AUTOCRATIC DYSFUNCTION: WHY PERSECUTE LABOUR MIGRANTS?

The behaviour of the Russian authorities does indeed appear to be irrational. First, they did not pay any attention to the warnings of the American and Iranian special services about the terrorist attack being planned and were unable to prevent it despite fairly precise instructions. Then they accused Ukrainian and Western intelligence services of being the masterminds behind the attack and simultaneously launched a campaign against labour migrants

from Central Asia. At the same time, mass document checks and staged raids, sometimes with the participation of special forces and film crews, in places where migrants congregate and live, of course, are unlikely to have an effect for the purposes of combating terrorism.

Paradoxically, the cause of such behaviour by the authorities is not only the rise of xenophobia and hostility towards migrants among the population after the terrorist attack. As demonstrated by a survey conducted two weeks after the attack by ExtremeScan, the anxiety and hostility towards migrants after Crocus did not increase, but remained at approximately the same level (→ [Vladimir Zvonovsky, Alexander Khodykin: Between Moderate Xenophobia and Low Tolerance](#)). When asked directly by sociologists whether the attitude of respondents' relatives and close ones towards migrants from Central Asia would change due to the fact that the perpetrators turned out to be from Tajikistan, only 10% stated that it would change significantly for the worse, 21% speculated that it would change but insignificantly, and 62% said that their attitude would not change. This shows that, in reality, citizens do not see the ethnic background of the attackers as the source of the terror threat.

The large-scale and senseless campaign by the authorities and law enforcement agencies against labour migrants in the initial weeks after the terrorist attack can only be explained by the desire to demonstrate to the population signs of 'safety' and reliability of threat control after the fact, thus 'erasing' the impression of their inaction and incompetence during the terrorist attack. Initially, scenes of evident cruelty in the detention of alleged terrorists served this function of confirming the capabilities of the intelligence services. In the next stage, the totality and large scale of control over migrants were intended to finally discredit the notion of the weakness and inefficiency of the state's power potential. Thus, the authorities' reaction to the terrorist attack and their own failure to prevent it consisted of two elements — two related propaganda campaigns. The first — the declaration of Ukrainian and Western special services as the customers — raised the status of the terrorist act to an international conspiracy against Russia; the second — the hunt for migrants — demonstrated the reliability of the Russian law enforcement agencies' control over the situation inside the country in general and among migrants in particular.

The paradoxical dysfunction of autocracy is that it prefers to invest in total control by the security apparatus, which is designed to impress ordinary citizens rather than to effectively counter any terrorist threat. In doing so, it not only inflates the scale and cost of the security apparatus and control measures, but also sacrifices economic interests — in this case the migrants which are so essential to the economy — to create a false impression of its effectiveness.

2. WAR OF NARRATIVES AND CONSERVATIVE MOBILISATION: THE SOCIOLOGICAL EFFECT OF A TWO-PRONGED PROPAGANDA STRATEGY

- About 65% of those surveyed by the Levada Centre and ExtremeScan support the Russian authorities' version of events that Ukrainian and Western security services were behind the terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall. The alternative version is held by about 15%.
- Supporters of the two versions of events are sharply divided based on their attitude toward Putin's political regime and the war in Ukraine, as well as differing assessments of the most significant personal and societal threats. Opposition-minded respondents are focused on socio-economic issues, while loyalists are focused on geopolitical threats.
- By convincing a significant portion of the population that the terrorist attack was ordered by external forces and framing it in the context of an 'existential' confrontation with the West, the authorities have managed to mitigate responsibility for their own failure to prevent the attack, as well as to achieve a certain mobilisation effect: the share of those who declared their support for the 'special military operation' increased by 9 percentage points in the ExtremeScan survey.
- Given that assessments of the terrorist attack and support for one version or another are closely linked to the respondent's overall relationship with the political regime and the war, the real picture of interpreting the attack in public opinion depends on how fully opponents of the Russian government and the war are represented in surveys under conditions of a repressive climate of opinion.

THE WAR OF NARRATIVES AND THE ECHO CHAMBER EFFECT

Polls conducted in the second half of April by the [Levada Centre](#) and [ExtremeScan](#) demonstrate that official propaganda has largely achieved its goals: Russians, at least those who participate in polling, overwhelmingly support the official narrative that Ukraine and the West were behind the terror attack at Crocus City Hall. The results of the two sociological centres were remarkably similar. The difference lies in the fact that in the Levada Centre poll, respondents could give more than one answer. As a result, 37% of respondents to both questions attributed responsibility for the terrorist attack to the West, 9-11% to Islamist extremism, and another 4% to some 'forces inside Russia' or Russian special

services. The last group is sceptical of the official version of events and assumes that some kind of internal Russian conspiracy is behind the terrorist attack. 21-24% were unable to choose one version of events. In the ExtremeScan poll 27% attributed responsibility to Ukraine, and in the Levada Centre poll this was 50%. However, when calculating the total number, it becomes clear that the possibility to give more than one answer in the Levada Centre poll led those who named the ‘West’ also to indicate ‘Ukraine’ as those behind the attack. The ‘Western’ and ‘Ukrainian’ versions, as in the rhetoric of the Russian authorities, are essentially perceived as one in public opinion.

Responsibility for the terror attack at Crocus City Hall in public opinion, % of the number of those surveyed

ExtremeScan: Who do you think is the mastermind behind this crime?		‘Levada Centre’: Who do you think is behind the terrorist attack in Crocus City Hall in March this year?	
Western European countries or the USA	37	Western intelligence services	37
Ukraine	27	Ukrainian intelligence services	50
Religious extremists, ISIS	9	Radical Islamists	11
Some forces inside Russia	4	Russian intelligence services	4
Other	4	Other	1
Difficult to answer / refusal to answer	20	Difficult to answer	20

Source: ExtremeScan, Левада-центр

Summarising the data, it can be said that about 65% of respondents reproduce the official narrative, attributing the planning of the terrorist attack to the West and/or Ukraine. The 13-15% who chose the answers ‘Islamic extremism’ and ‘forces/special services inside Russia’ supported an alternative narrative, rejecting the official version. And, 20% or slightly more found it difficult to answer.

Although the Kremlin has succeeded in imposing its version of the reasons for the terrorist attack on the majority represented in these surveys in informational and symbolic terms, a more detailed analysis shows that this susceptibility is almost entirely dependent on the respondent’s overall attitudes toward the political regime and the ‘special military operation’.

‘The analysis of ExtremeScan data allows us to conclude that there is a prism of political loyalty in the interpretation of the events of the terrorist attack,’ [writes Elena Koneva, Founder and Chief Researcher of the ExtremeScan agency, in her review of this data](#). ‘Loyalists’ (i.e. those who approve of Putin, are confident in the fairness of past elections, have a more optimistic view of the economy, are hostile to the West, and approve of the death penalty; this makes up 64% of those surveyed) support the propaganda version which assigns the responsibility to Ukraine and the West, while ‘sceptics’ (i.e. those who hold opinions diametrically opposite to those of the ‘loyalists’; this makes up 13% of those surveyed) tend to place the blame on ISIS or ‘some forces inside Russia.’ The same applies to other issues related to the terrorist attack. Thus, for example, political position is the reason for the divergence in the assessments of the Russian security agencies’ reactions to the terrorist attack: 57% of ‘loyalists’ believe that this reaction was successful and effective, while 97% of ‘sceptics’ assess this as a failure.

Support for the official and alternative narratives for the terrorist attack in groups with different political attitudes, % of the number of those surveyed

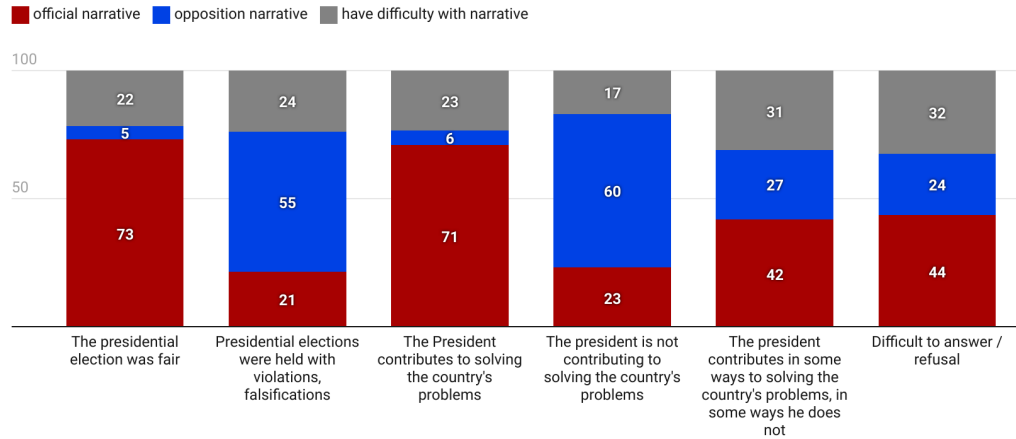
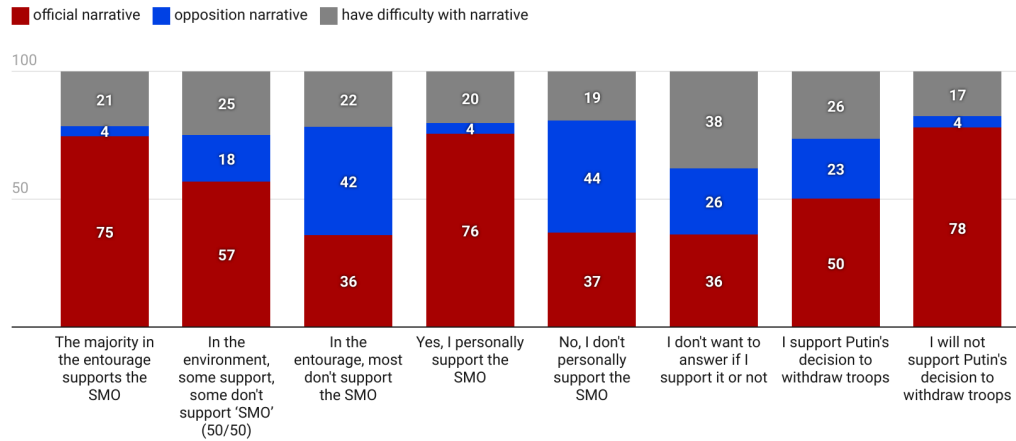


Chart: ExtremeScan



Source: ExtremeScan

As can be seen from the diagrams, the patterns of support for the official and alternative (oppositional) narratives in groups with different political attitudes and with different attitudes to the war are almost mirror images. However, there are some differences. Loyalists are more consolidated; among this group 70-75% support the official narrative and only about 5% do not support it. While among opposition-minded respondents 40-60% support the alternative narrative, and between 20% to 40% are ready to support the official version of events. Meanwhile, among those who do not personally support the 'special military operation' and are among those who do not support the war, the groups are almost equal: 43% support the alternative narrative and 37% support the official narrative.

However, generally speaking, the two groups holding diametrically opposed views are quite consistent, and the real picture of attitudes towards the terrorist attack depends on how fully opposition-minded groups are represented in the sample (in conditions of repression and the widespread psychological pressure of propaganda, opposition-minded people may more frequently refrain from participating in polls).

ATTITUDES TOWARDS WAR, FEARS AND THREATS IN THE SHADOW OF THE TERRORIST ATTACK

The terrorist attack in a concert hall near Moscow has predictably had an impact on Russian citizens' sense of personal security. According to the Levada Centre, the share of those who fear that someone close to them or the respondent himself could become a victim of a terrorist attack has increased by 18 percentage points compared to 2023 and amounts to 73% of those surveyed. The last time this figure reached such a level was after the St Petersburg metro tragedy in 2017 (78%). According to ExtremeScan, in 2024, the threat of terror attacks (64%) is tied in first place with price increases (65%) in the ranking of personal threats (to self and family).

However, political polarisation can also be noted in the perception of threats. Among those who believe that President Putin's activities contribute to solving problems in the country (78% in the ExtremeScan sample), the greatest number of those surveyed (65%) fear the threat of terrorist attacks, and almost as many (62%) fear rising prices. Among those who believe that Putin's activities do not contribute to solving the problems in the country, the overwhelming majority, 83%, fear price increases, while almost the same number, 82%, fear a worsening of their financial situation. 69% fear abuse by law enforcers, and in this group only 61% fear possible terrorist attacks. In other words, 'sceptics' are more focused on internal socio-economic problems.

'Diseases, man-made disasters, the threat of nuclear weapons and shelling from Ukraine are also areas where the camps overlap,' comments Elena Koneva. However, the risks of price rises, worsening financial situation, redundancy, mobilisation and abuse by the security forces differ so radically that it is as if the groups live in different countries. Putin's supporters are 1.5-2.5 times more optimistic about the personal threat caused by these issues.

When it comes to threats to Russia's security as a whole, the area of consensus is much smaller, apparently because the threats here are at the level of the state and thus speak more clearly about the capacity of the authorities, and so this is the zone of disagreement between the political groups.

Against this backdrop, it is striking that in all political groups 'corruption in power' occupies first place in the list of personal and public threats. This is a subject of absolute consensus. As Elena Koneva rightly notes, corruption is 'an umbrella euphemism for criticism of the authorities', but for loyal groups such criticism appears to be confined in a narrow sphere and is adjacent to support for official 'geopolitical' narratives and economic optimism.

This is also emphasised by the most significant effect of the terrorist attack evident in the survey. According to ExtremeScan, while in January-March the proportion of those who said that they support the 'special military operation' fluctuated between 46-56% (with an average of 52%), in the April measurement it was 61%. At the same time, the share of those who openly do not support the war has not decreased (15%), but the share of those who refuse to answer the question or are undecided has sharply decreased. The number of those surveyed who are not ready to withdraw troops from Ukraine and transition to peace talks

has also increased. While in February 2024, 48% were in favour of withdrawing troops from Ukraine ‘if Vladimir Putin were to make such a decision’, and 32% of those surveyed would not support the withdrawal of troops, both positions converged in April at 44%.

Personal and public threats in the perception of different political groups,
% of the number of those surveyed

	Total	The President is not helping to solve the problems	The president contributes in some ways to solving problems, in some ways he doesn't	The President is helping to solve problems	Customers of the terrorist attack: religious extremists, ISIS	Customers of the attack: Ukraine	Customers of the attack: the West or the U.S.	Customers of the attack: some forces inside Russia
Threats to national security								
Corruption in government	77	93	94	73	90	75	80	94
Confrontation with NATO and the US	62	37	67	66	43	72	73	38
Economy collapse / ruble weakening	57	83	72	52	81	55	53	73
Threat of nuclear weapons use	56	54	55	57	47	64	57	48
Personal threats								
Price increase	65	83	83	62	80	66	65	68
Possible terrorist attacks	64	61	70	65	67	70	68	67
Material deterioration	55	82	80	49	82	52	49	69
Diseases, epidemics	52	50	52	52	54	60	55	54

Source: ExtremeScan

Questions about support for the war in the survey were asked at the end, after the questions about the ‘perpetrators’ of the terrorist attack. For those who accepted the official narrative, as Elena Koneva notes, ‘the terror attack appeared to be a material confirmation of Putin’s myth about the civilisational nature of the war’. Control over the interpretation of events has allowed the Kremlin to relegate domestic socio-economic and political problems to the background and, at the same time, to bring existential fears and threats to the forefront. As a result, it has been able to mitigate its own catastrophic failure, that is the fact it ignored detailed warnings of the terrorist attack from the US and Iranian intelligence services. As a result, the Levada Centre poll shows that only 22% believe that Russian special services are responsible for the unpreventable terrorist attack. While about half (48%) believe that it was made possible thanks to the support of foreign intelligence services.

3. BETWEEN MODERATE XENOPHOBIA AND LOW TOLERANCE: ATTITUDES TOWARDS MIGRANTS BEFORE AND AFTER THE TERRORIST ATTACK



Vladimir Zvonovsky
Sociologist



Alexander Khodykin
Sociologist

- Surveys conducted after the terrorist attack do not show a significant surge in xenophobia, which remains at a moderate level typical of Russia in recent years. Antipathy towards and anxiety about migrants are expressed by around 20% of those surveyed, with just over 10% more expressing these sentiments in a weaker form.
- The moderate nature of xenophobia is also underlined by the fact that a reduction of social distance (such as through acquaintance or proximity) noticeably reduces the level of distrust. Trust in one's surroundings, compensating for low generalised trust and trust in institutions, displaces xenophobic sentiments from the interpersonal level to the generalised, stereotypical level.
- Meanwhile, on average, the majority of those surveyed do not highly value the importance of migrant labour and do not believe that migrants are subject to discrimination. However, responses to both of these questions are heavily politicised: opponents of the current government are twice as likely as its supporters to speak about migrant rights violations and one and a half times more likely to talk about the benefits of migrants for Russia.
- These ratios suggest that, against the background of moderate and superficial xenophobia, the majority loyal to the authorities do not receive a signal of tolerance 'from above'; rather, on the contrary, these signals fuel 'suspicion' towards migrants.

BETWEEN THE PERSONAL AND THE STEREOTYPICAL: MODERATE ANXIETY, XENOPHOBIA AND SOCIAL DISTANCE

After the terror attack at Crocus City Hall, the question of Russians' attitudes towards labour migrants from Central Asia has once again been brought into focus. [Human Rights Watch](#) has recorded an increase in the number of cases of xenophobic harassment of labour migrants by private individuals and officials.

[The Sova research centre has also noted](#) a spike in attacks on migrants following the terrorist attack.

[An ExtremeScan survey](#), conducted 8-15 April, two weeks after the terrorist attack, was designed to measure several aspects of Russians' attitudes toward Central Asian migrants. First, the researchers asked respondents whether they would personally feel a sense of anxiety or antipathy if they encountered a migrant in various social roles: 1) a utility worker or taxi driver, 2) a doctor or nurse, 3) a neighbour, or 4) a family member of an acquaintance or relative. These questions were formulated in accordance with the Bogardus social distance scale and the hypothesis of a direct link between social distance and willingness to accept the 'other': the smaller the social distance, the less willingness to admit people of a different nationality into their circle. Thus, the hypothesis suggests that those who are willing to see people from Central Asia as utility workers or taxi drivers are more numerous than those willing to see them as family members of close acquaintances. In addition, these questions allow us to assess the level of prejudice when it comes to the professional qualities of migrants: as most of them are forced to engage in unskilled labour, society forms a stereotype about their inability to engage in activities that require high levels of qualification and responsibility (doctors, nurses).

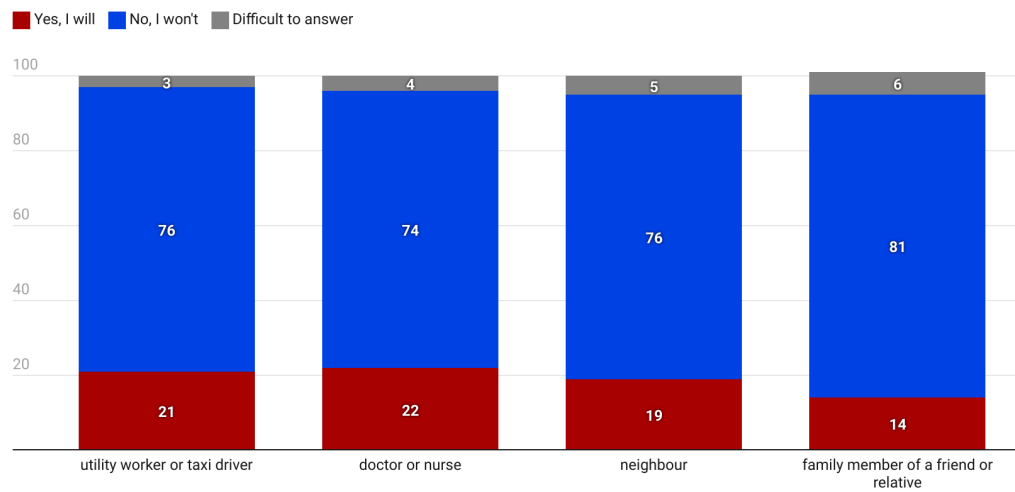
According to the survey results, it can be said that anxiety and antipathy towards migrants in Russia — even after the terrorist attack — are at a moderate level. The majority of those surveyed (60%) believe that they would not experience these emotions towards migrants in any of the proposed situations. Only 8% of respondents foresee negative emotions in all four situations, and one in three respondents (34%) thinks they will experience these emotions in at least one of the proposed situations. The average negativity score across the sample is 19%. At the same time, labour qualifications do not matter: whether it is utility workers, drivers, or doctors, just over 20% of respondents harbour negative emotions towards individuals from Central Asia. Increased prejudice against labour migrants in professions requiring high qualifications is not identified from the data, i.e. the second hypothesis was not confirmed.

However, the first hypothesis is also not confirmed; on the contrary, the data demonstrate reverse causality — the smaller the social distance, the less negativity or concern towards migrants from Central Asia. If 21% of respondents would experience these emotions towards a janitor, only 14% would towards a close family member of the respondent.

So, if a person enters the inner circle, they already, by virtue of this circumstance, evoke trust. For example, if someone has established a good rapport with a doctor at their local clinic, the doctor's ethnic background does not matter much. If a hypothetical Tajik or Kyrgyz individual moves into the same stairwell and is a 'good person', they invoke trust regardless of their origin. And, if they became a member of the family, it means, probably, that they have passed a certain 'filter', thus reducing the anxiety associated with their presence. This trust in informal relationships established in the here and now is provided primarily by the length of time the 'stranger' has been in the inner circle. For example, a stranger who waits for a bus with you late in the evening, after 20 minutes of such waiting, evokes far more trust than they did when they first arrived at the

bus stop. Informal contact holds more significance than formal institutions and markers of social status.

‘Would you experience anxiety or antipathy if you encountered a migrant from Central Asia in the following social roles?’, % of those surveyed



Source: ExtremeScan

Thus, Russians’ trust in their environment, which compensates for generalised distrust and low trust in institutions, proves to be stronger than xenophobia, which is displaced from the interpersonal to the generalised level. The attitude towards a janitor from Central Asia is significantly worse than to a person inside the inner circle: the former is perceived as an abstract stereotypical character, while the latter is perceived as a concrete person with whom the respondent maintains communication.

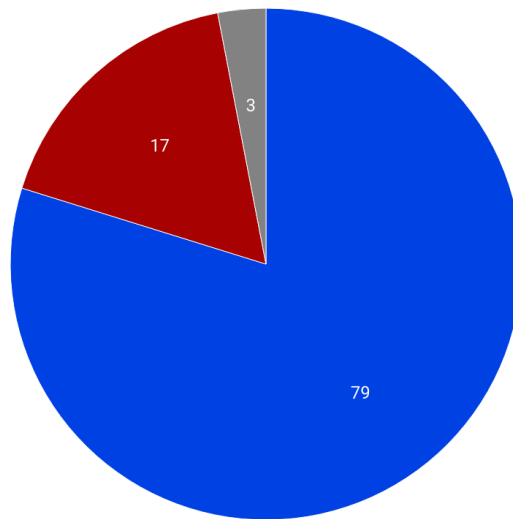
INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL: PERCEPTION OF MIGRANTS AND ONE’S WORLDVIEW

Transitioning from the interpersonal level of communication to the institutional level of perception of labour migration issues reveals a more complex picture.

On the other hand, the level of support for discrimination based on nationality was relatively low. Direct discrimination (‘Should Russians in Russia have more rights than people of other nationalities, or should all citizens of the country have equal rights?’) is supported by 17% of those surveyed, at least on a declarative level, while four out of five respondents (79%) support equal rights. Anxiety and antipathy towards migrants from Central Asia in all four social roles are directly linked to a willingness to infringe on the rights of representatives of non-Russian ethnic groups. About 40% of those who feel anxiety or dislike migrants would support discrimination against non-Russian ethnic groups if they were utility workers or taxi drivers (39%), doctors or nurses (38%), neighbours (36%), or spouses of a relative or a friend of the respondent (39%). However, it is important to note that the group of those experiencing such feelings is not particularly large (20-30%).

‘Should Russians in Russia have more rights than people of other nationalities, or should all citizens of the country have equal rights?’, % of those surveyed

■ All citizens should have equal rights ■ Russians should have more rights ■ Difficult to answer / refusal to answer



On the other hand, the results of the survey showed that migrant labour is valued quite low by Russians. Only one in three respondents (35%) stated that the benefits of having Central Asian migrants outweigh the problems, and only a quarter (26%) acknowledge instances of their rights being violated. 40% of those surveyed believe that there are more problems than benefits from migrant labour, and an equal proportion says that there is no discrimination against migrants in Russia. Overall, this suggests that Russians are not fully aware of the importance of migrant labour for the Russian economy and, accordingly, are not inclined to think about the problems migrants face.

‘In your opinion, are migrants’ labour and civil rights violated in Russia or not, are they discriminated against or not?’, % of those surveyed

■ No, migrants' rights are not violated ■ Difficult to answer / refusal to answer ■ I think migrants' rights are being violated

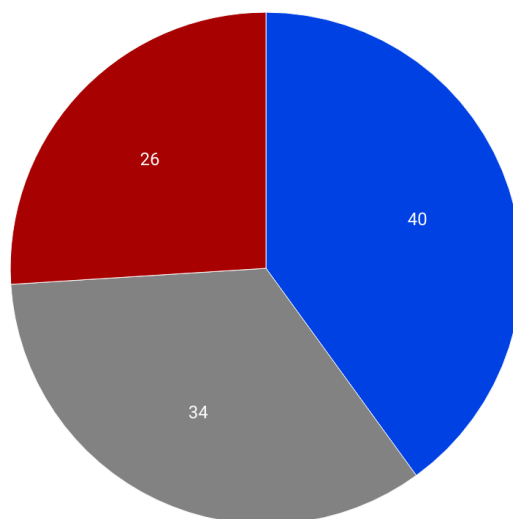
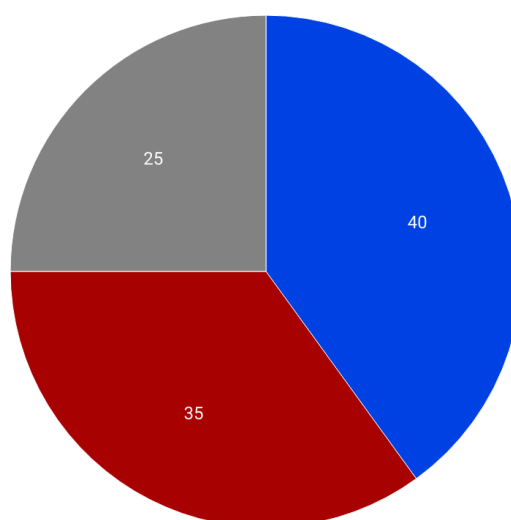


Chart: Re: Russia Source: Левада-центр

'Do you think that migrants from Central Asia are more beneficial or more harmful for Russia?',
% of those surveyed

■ More problems ■ More benefits ■ Difficult to answer



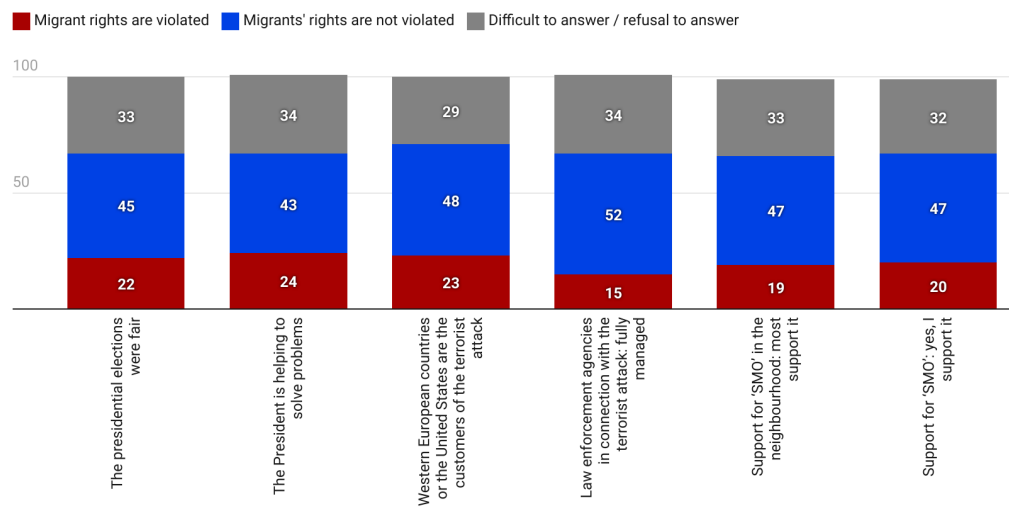
Among those who believe that the problems caused by migrants outweigh the benefits, the average level of negative emotions towards them stands at 34% (compared to 9% among those who believe that they bring more benefits). Thus, negative emotions and the 'underestimation' of migrants are directly related. On the other hand, the average rate of negativity towards Central Asian migrants does not differ between the groups who recognise and do not recognise the existence of discrimination against migrants. Apparently, denying the discrimination of migrants is not a sign of xenophobia but rather a way to maintain a comfortable perception of social reality.

The questions about the benefits of migrant labour and whether they are discriminated against in Russia were generally highly politicised, that is respondents appealed to a certain normative worldview when answering them. The camps of supporters and opponents of the incumbent authorities represented in the survey results were fairly consistent in their answers to questions about support for Putin, the fairness of elections and attitudes towards intervention in Ukraine. Opponents of the current government are twice as likely as its supporters to talk about violations of migrants' rights in Russia (48% of Putin's supporters vs. 24% of his opponents) and one and a half times as likely to talk about the benefits of migrants for Russia (43% of non-supporters vs. 32% of supporters). Meanwhile, loyalists are twice as likely to assert that migrants' rights are not violated and are less inclined to attach importance to their role in the labour market.

Yet, somewhat surprisingly, among opposition-minded Russians, there are slightly more supporters of special rights for Russians, i.e. discrimination against migrants (23% among opponents of the 'special military operation' and 15% among its supporters) and the average level of negativity towards Central Asian migrants is slightly higher (22% among those who are sure that the presidential election was rigged versus 19% among those who believe that the election was fair). In other words, supporters of the establishment of special

rights for Russians are not consistent in their political views. Within the camp of opposition-minded Russians, two groups can be discerned: one includes supporters of liberal-humanistic values advocating for interethnic tolerance and against discrimination, while the other comprises those who do not support the president and military actions, not due to ideological disagreements with the Russian leadership, but apparently because they blame the president and his policies for the deterioration of their financial situation. Among those who have experienced such deterioration, there are more who oppose the incumbent government (29% do not support the president, compared to the sample average of 10%) as well as those harbouring negative feelings towards migrants from Central Asia.

‘Are migrants’ rights violated in Russia?’, % of those surveyed who support the following opinions and statements



Source: ExtremeScan

SOME CONCLUSIONS: MODERATE XENOPHOBIA AND LOW TOLERANCE

Thus, the level of xenophobia — dislike of migrants from Central Asia — even after the terrorist attack in Crocus City Hall, from a sociological point of view, can be defined as moderate. The average indicator of negativity across the sample as a whole is 19%. This attitude towards migrants has remained relatively stable in recent years. If we add to this group those who experience a more moderate or situational negativity (in one of several proposed situations), we can conclude that cautious and/or negative attitudes are characteristic of approximately one-third of Russians.

The results obtained are consistent with the data from similar studies conducted by other sociological centres using other survey methods. Thus, according to a [FOM poll](#) conducted in February 2022 at people’s place of residence, a quarter of Russians (25%) feel dissatisfied and worried about migrants from Central Asia. Approximately the same percentage (24%) would have a negative attitude to living in proximity to them, and 50% believe that their entry into Russia

should be restricted, i.e. regulated. Moreover, in the FOM survey, almost equal groups considered migrants to bring more benefit (29%) or more harm (30%), with a large proportion undecided. [A 2021 Levada Centre local opinion poll](#) found a negative attitude towards migrants from Central Asia among a quarter of Russians. This includes 26% of respondents who believe they should not be allowed into Russia at all, and an additional 25% who think they should only be allowed for a limited period.

An ExtremeScan survey indicates that men are generally more tolerant of migrants than women: compared to women, men have a lower average negative attitude towards migrants (16% vs. 22%), are more likely to recognise the benefits of migrants (38% vs. 32%) and have a lower support for infringing on the rights of non-Russians (13% vs. 20%). Among all age groups, young people are the most tolerant of migrants. Russians aged 18-29 are, on average, less likely to feel anxiety or antipathy for Central Asians (13%), less likely to agree to infringe on the rights of non-Russians (12%) and are more likely to recognise the existence of discrimination against migrants (39%). People with higher levels of education are also more tolerant of migrants: they believe that Central Asian migrants bring more benefits (38% vs. 32% among those without higher education), and they are significantly less likely to believe that Russians in Russia should have more rights than people of other nationalities (13% vs. 21%).

Residents of Moscow and St Petersburg express greater concern about Central Asian migrants: the average negative attitude towards them in the capitals is 24%, compared to the sample average of 19%. At the same time, residents of the capitals are more likely to talk about violations of migrants' rights (30%) as well as the benefits of migrant labour (40%), and do not stand out in terms of support for ethnic equality.

Russians who have experienced a decline in their financial situation, as already mentioned, are less tolerant towards migrants. They are more likely to harbour antipathy or anxiety towards such arrivals (23%) compared to those whose financial situation has improved (15%). Russians facing worsened financial conditions are twice as likely as those with improved conditions to advocate for greater rights for Russians compared to other ethnicities: 22% versus 11%.

Another important factor influencing Russians' level of anxiety about Asian ethnic groups is anxiety about the future in general. In groups where there are fears of new terrorist attacks, mobilisation, technological disasters, abuses by law enforcement personnel, diseases, epidemics, and so forth, the level of anxiety and antipathy towards migrants (21-24%) is twice as high as those who rule out the possibility of such events in the near future (11%). As we can see, anxiety about 'migrants' is integrated into the general background of anxieties.

However, all these fluctuations fall within a relatively insignificant range of deviations from the average figures mentioned above. Additionally, the reduction of social distance reduces the level of distrust — interpersonal communication helps alleviate 'stereotypical' negativity. Russians' trust in their environment, which compensates for generalised distrust and low trust in institutions, is stronger than xenophobia, which is displaced from the interpersonal to the generalised level. At the same time, support for direct discrimination against

non-Russians, expressed in the restriction of their rights compared to the rights of Russians (17% of those surveyed are in favour of this), is close to the average level of distrust/anxiety towards migrants.

With a relatively low level of hostility and wariness, Russian society does not have a definite stance on the extent to which migrants are necessary for the Russian labour market and, consequently, on whether there is a need to protect their rights. Opposition-minded Russians hold positive opinions on these issues almost twice as often as Russians who are loyal to the government and more receptive to the 'official' point of view. Moreover, the latter group constitutes the majority of respondents. This circumstance suggests that 'suspicion' towards migrants is to some extent fuelled from above.