

One in 3 Russians Afraid to Show Criticism in Opinion Polls

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If public opinion polls show massive support for the Kremlin's policies, this might be partially because about a third of all Russians think they can be punished for disclosing critical views, a respected independent pollster says.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents to a recent survey said anyone who speaks critically about the government to a polling organization would "probably" or "certainly" face state persecution, the Levada Center said in a statement Monday.

But conversely, another 61 percent said that such persecution would be "unlikely" or "impossible," the report said. Eleven percent of respondents declined to answer.

Also, about a third respondents appeared to be generally hesitant or reluctant to exercise their freedom of speech where views about government policies are concerned.

A total of 6 percent said they were unable to speak freely about government policies, and another 28 percent said they could speak "with some restrictions" and "not everywhere," the poll showed.

The poll, conducted on Aug. 1-4 among 1,600 residents of 46 regions across Russia, had a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

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