

What Do Russians Think of the October Revolution?

A hundred years later, Russians are split over whether the revolution should be commemorated at all

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Alexander Ryumin / TASS

In the months leading up to the 100-year anniversary of the October Revolution in 1917, the Kremlin has been subdued — and ambiguous — about its stance on the event that changed the course of world history.

President Vladimir Putin has called the collapse of the Soviet Union the “geopolitical catastrophe of the century.” But speaking about the revolution he has said, “We know well the consequences that these great upheavals can bring.”

Celebrations on the centenary, Nov. 7, are expected to be muted. Instead, the country officially

celebrated Unity Day on Nov. 4 — which Putin instituted in 2005 to replace the Soviet holiday.

Interviews with Russians at Pushkinskaya Square in central Moscow on Monday painted a similarly confused picture. Some of those questioned wished the nation would officially observe the centennial. Some are happy that the event will go largely unnoticed. And some simply don't care.

— *Margarita Khachatryan, 52, a pension fund inspector and her daughter, Angela Khachatryan, 27, a makeup artist, who said: "I have no opinion on the matter."*

"I think we should celebrate the anniversary, undoubtedly. There were pluses and minuses, of course, but we must celebrate it. The fact that there won't be any large public events is fine because likely there would have been violence."

— *Lena Koluntayeva, 52, school administrator with her son, Yevgeny Koluntayev, 17, a high-school student.*

Lena: "For us who were pioneers, who were communists, it was a really important day. We always went to the rallies. But the new holiday [Unity Day] is a good one too. We went to a rally that day. There were a lot of young people there and it was all very interesting. I think that this is fine. There was one holiday, now there's another. I'm happy with all holidays."

Yevgeny: "I'm against communists. So it's good there's no celebration, because why should we remember what happened? We should march toward the future. I'm a patriot, so Nov. 4 for me is a good holiday, because it's really about Russia."

Lena: "Well, my son has his own opinion. He of course didn't live during the Soviet Union, so the younger generation chooses their own holidays."

— *Olga Yeromina, 58, lawyer:*

"I would have preferred for there to be no Lenin, because then there wouldn't have been a revolution. But, anyway, the experiment happened, and so it seems to me that it's important for the whole world to remember it.

I'm not in favor of a revolutionary path through which millions die and many people are put in prisons and executed. I think the evolutionary path is better — steady development without such massive losses."

— *Yelena Avdeyeva, 20, university student:*

"For me, the 100-year anniversary is positive. It's an important event. I think it should be celebrated."

— *Igor Konstantinovich, 80, retired:*

"There is this polemic going on about Lenin. But have you read Sergei Yesenin's [poem](#) [the fabled Soviet poet's ode to the revolution's leader, which Konstantinovich then proceeded to recite from memory]?"

For me it's an important date. The people were so down that they had to stand up through a revolution. So for me it should be a big celebration. I carry the holiday with me in my soul.

I'm 80. I was born in 1937. I lived through the war, I lived through hard times, so this holiday for me will always be a holiday. Just like May 1 [Labor Day]. People used to go out into the streets for demonstrations each year.

I don't know what there will be going on tomorrow. I have bad legs. But if there was a celebration tomorrow, I would go with joy.

It's not right that the holiday isn't being celebrated this year. This new holiday on the fourth should be moved to the seventh. Then the people would feel and understand what it's about. Not all of us have died yet who believed — *believed* then, not now — in what the Soviet Union could bring about. It's the story of Russia."

— *Maria Yermakova, 30, ecologist:*

"I was born in a different time. I wasn't a pioneer. The anniversary doesn't have a big meaning for me like for the people of the older generations. I know the date as a part of history.

My friends and I treat it with respect.

I don't think we need any public events. It's cold, people would go outside and get sick and spread diseases. So I'm not for demonstrations. Of course people can go out and speak freely about their desires, their politics, their ideas. But I don't really like official demonstrations. Because then people follow the crowd, take the ideas of their neighbors and don't think critically."

— *Marina Rishina, 76, retired engineer and her grandson Prokhor Rishin, 11:*

Prokhor: "I would love to see big rallies again. They were fun."

Marina: "No, we don't need that. We don't need a revolution."

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