

Most Russians Don't Want Gays as Neighbors, Poll Finds

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Besides drunks, who do Russians not want most as neighbors or colleagues?

The answer: homosexuals, according to new research examining national identity released by a state-run pollster, the Russia Public Opinion Research Center, or VTsIOM.

According to the survey, 51 percent of Russians would not like "under any circumstances" to see a homosexual as a neighbor or co-worker.

Such an apparent loathing of homosexuality was one of the divisions highlighted by the survey, which examined what ideas and values united Russians and what kept them apart. Representing 45 regions across the country, 1,600 Russians took part in the poll.

The search for a defining national idea has provoked much discussion within Russia's political elite since the Soviet collapse, but the topic has recently become more acute as President

Vladimir Putin faces domestic opposition to his rule and as Russia's profile on the world stage grows.

Next week, Putin, senior officials, international experts on Russia and Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, will meet to discuss Russia's national identity at the annual Valdai Club.

"The experience of failure [of the Soviet Union] itself has left a mighty legacy over Russia today: the fear of really articulating a positive vision because of the way that positive visions in the past have been exclusive and imposed by violence," Richard Sakwa, a professor of Russian and European politics at Britain's Kent University and a member of the Valdai Club, said in written comments.

Homosexuality in Russia became a controversial issue for many Russians — and foreigners — after Russia passed a law earlier this year banning the promotion of nontraditional sexual relationships among minors.

While the Kremlin maintains that the law does not prevent adults from making their own sexual choices, critics describe it as nothing more than a state-supported crackdown on gay people that has led to a spike in homophobia, including homophobic attacks, across the country.

It is not just cultural and social decisions, however, that inform the divisions defining Russian identity, but also ethnic and national ones — divisions that experts say could be potentially devastating if mismanaged.

One of the largest schisms within Russian society, according to the survey, appears to be rooted in a perception of Russian identity as defined against migrants living in Central Russia, and the ethnic groups of the country's North Caucasus.

According to the VTsIOM survey, 44 percent of Russians said that while a Ukrainian could be called an ethnic Russian if he or she had lived in Russia for many years, only 7 percent thought the same could be said of a Chechen or Dagestani from the North Caucasus. Russia and Ukraine are different countries, but Chechnya and Dagestan are republics within the Russian Federation, and all Chechens and Dagestanis have Russian passports.

"The main dividing line [in Russian society] is between residents of large cities and central Russia as a whole, and the residents of Russia's Northern Caucasus," Valery Fedorov, head of the Russia Public Opinion Research Center pollster, told reporters Tuesday.

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