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Most Russians Say State-Run Media 'Objective' in Ukraine Coverage

By Allison Quinn

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Media coverage of the conflict in Ukraine has frequently been described by observers as a propaganda war.

Most Russians believe that the country's state-run news agencies have provided objective coverage of the events unfolding during the Ukraine conflict, a poll by the Levada Center revealed Wednesday.

Fifty-nine percent of respondents to the poll, conducted between Oct. 24 and 27, said they disagreed with the notion often expressed by Western critics that Russian media is distorting the facts on the Ukraine crisis.

Another 13 percent of respondents said they agreed with the statement that Russia is conducting an information war against Ukraine — but that it is justified. Eleven percent said Russian media was guilty of biased media reporting and that it was "harmful and dangerous."

Most respondents also said they noticed an information war being waged against Russia as a result of the conflict, with 54 percent of respondents citing Ukraine as the ringleader of the information war and 55 percent the U.S.

Media coverage of the conflict in Ukraine — which erupted after the ouster of Kremlin-backed President Viktor Yanukovych in February and significantly worsened after Russia's annexation of Crimea in March — has frequently been described by observers as a propaganda war.

The media has played a crucial role throughout the crisis, with Ukrainian and Western media often reporting drastically different facts from those presented by Russian media. Each side has hurled accusations of propaganda at the other, and journalists themselves have repeatedly been targeted.

Russia's state-run media has repeatedly been accused of presenting false reports. Channel One came under fire in July for reporting what many considered a questionable story of Ukrainian troops crucifying a 3-year-old boy in Slovyansk. The report, which relied on a single eyewitness, was never substantiated, and several journalists who traveled to the site of the alleged crucifixion and spoke with residents there were unable to find any evidence to back up the eyewitness's claims.

While Western officials have described such reports as being part of a larger propaganda campaign by Russia, the Kremlin has hit back and accused Western media of biased reporting against Russia.

Maria Zakharova, deputy director of the Foreign Ministry's press service, slammed Western journalists in May for their alleged failure to cover events objectively, urging them not to "follow propaganda" by immediately blaming Russia for everything.

Zakharova has also complained of Western journalists reporting on events in eastern Ukraine without traveling there themselves to see the situation with their own eyes.

The survey, which had a margin of error that did not exceed 3.4 percent, was conducted among 1,600 adults in 134 cities across 46 regions of Russia.

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