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Russian State Poll Shows Empathy for Hebdo Killers

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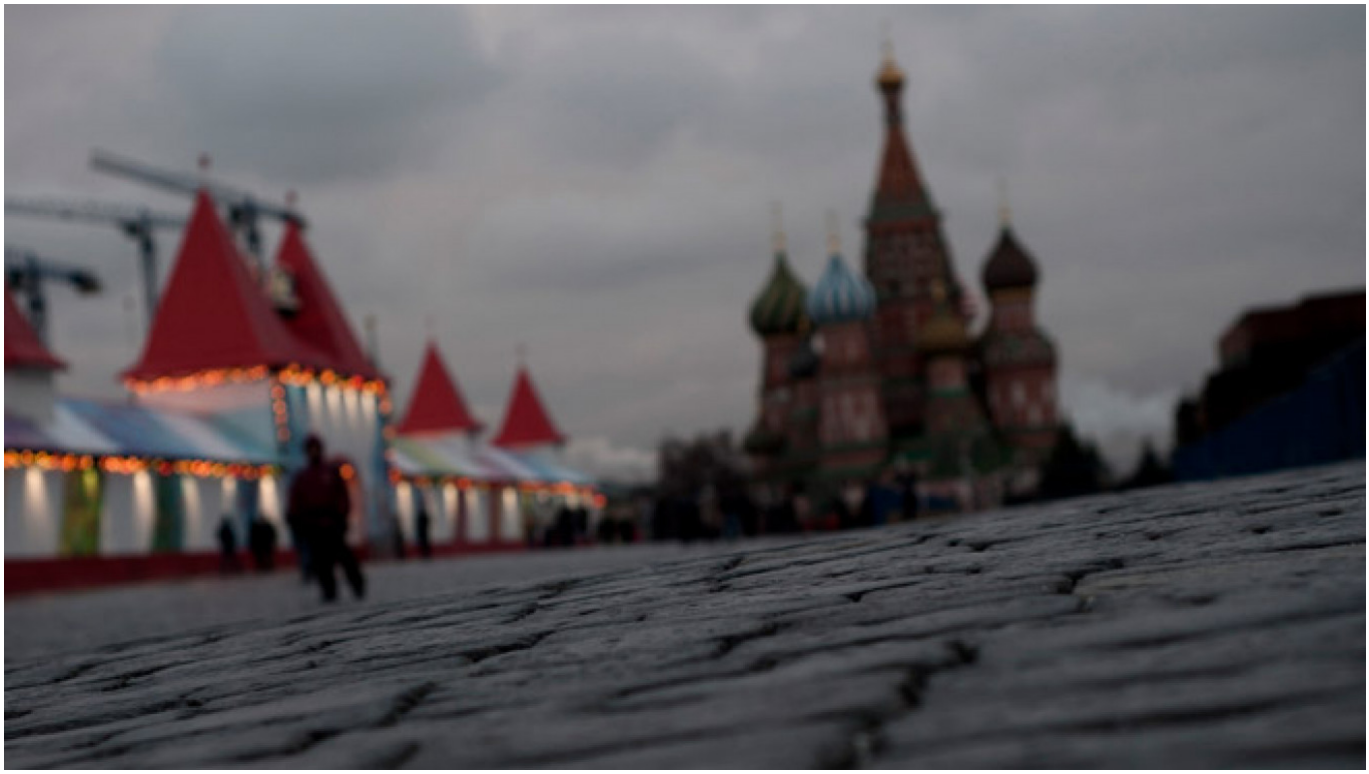

Only 13 percent of these respondents said "Muslim extremists" were the key reason for the incident.

Thirty-nine percent of Russians familiar with the recent shootings at French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo said they "understood" how the gunmen could have perpetrated the act, while another 5 percent said they "approved" of the massacre, a state pollster revealed Monday.

Early this month, gunmen who said they were avenging the prophet Muhammad killed 12 people at the Charlie Hebdo satirical newspaper in Paris. The newspaper has regularly featured profane caricatures of the Muslim prophet as well as other religious figures.

Three-fourths of the respondents the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) contacted for the poll were familiar with the attack.

Of those, the vast majority said the French government or the journalists themselves were to blame for the tragedy. Nearly a third (30 percent) said the "behavior of the French journalists who insulted the religious values of Muslims" was the primary reason, while another 25 percent said "the policy of the French government allowing journalists to insult

religious values" was the main culprit.

Only 13 percent of these respondents said "Muslim extremists" were the key reason for the incident.

Eleven percent of respondents familiar with the attack said the main reason was the French government's policy of allowing "a large number of Muslims" to enter the country, and 6 percent said it was the fault of France's "weak" police and national security forces. Only one answer was permitted for the question.

In Russia it is a crime to insult the beliefs of religious devotees, in accordance with a 2013 law passed in the wake of the Pussy Riot scandal. Violators face up to three years in prison.

On Monday, popular Russian daily newspaper RBC, known for its business-focused reporting, said that the Russian media watchdog Roskomnadzor had issued it a warning for publishing a picture of “stacks” of a Charlie Hebdo publication that featured a religious caricature on the cover.

A day earlier, the head of Russia's influential Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, said in a sermon broadcast on state television channel Rossiya 24 that Charlie Hebdo's caricatures of the prophet Muhammad were "childish" compared with its mockeries of Christianity.

"Today, in saying 'no' to terrorism, killings and violence, we also say 'no' to the inexplicable drive by a certain group of people to deride religious feelings," the patriarch said, Reuters reported.

The VTsIOM poll was conducted on Jan. 17-18 among 1,600 people across 46 of Russia's regions. It had a statistical margin of error of 3.5 percent, the pollster said.

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