6 in 10 Russians Would Support Internet Censorship During a Crisis

By Anna Dolgov

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Nearly six in 10 Russians would support the government if it decided to pull the plug on Internet access inside the country in a crisis situation, a recent poll indicates.

Support for online censorship or cutting off Internet access altogether was the highest among Russians who never or rarely go online, but remained high even among those who surf the web daily, according to a joint survey by Russia's state-run VTsIOM pollster and the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, the RBC news agency reported Monday.

The number of Russians who describe themselves as daily Internet users has reached 42 percent of the country's population, while another 20 percent said they go online several times a week, and 38 percent said had not used the web during the past six months, the poll

indicated.

A majority of Russians, or 58 percent, said that at least in some situations, such as a perceived threat to national security or amid political protests, they would support the government if it decided to cut off Internet access, the report said.

In the absence of those special circumstances, introduction of online censorship is favored by 49 percent of respondents, the report said. The number was only slightly lower, at 43 percent, among those who surf the web regularly, and reached 57 percent among those who rarely or never go online, the report said.

At a time when the government has been telling Russian citizens that the West is supposedly eager to destroy their country and that foreign media defame Moscow's policies, possible "filtering" of foreign media websites won the approval of 45 percent of respondents, while restrictions on "other foreign websites" received the support of 38 percent, the poll indicated, RBC reported.

A total of 42 percent of respondents said they agreed with the statement that although foreign nations use the Internet "against Russia," it is not a threat to their country's "political stability," the report said. But another 24 percent saw the Internet as a threat, according to the report.

After Moscow annexed Crimea from Ukraine last year, Russia's relations with the West have sunk to their lowest since the Cold War. Since then, the Kremlin has moved to ban some foreign nongovernmental organizations and student exchange programs, and some politicians have called for cutting Russia off from the World Wide Web and creating a domestic version of the Internet for Russians' use.

Other types of websites that Russians want blocked or restricted include those featuring gay pornography — with 59 percent of the country's population favoring a ban on such sites — followed by social network pages devoted to staging political protests, with 46 percent, and websites carrying videos of the Pussy Riot punk rock band, with 45 percent.

Contact the author at newsreporter@imedia.ru