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Russians Closer to Border Hold More Pro-Ukrainian Views

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Russians living closer to the Ukrainian border are more likely to have favorable views towards the country, a report revealed Friday.

The report, written by Princeton University fellow Nikita Melnikov and economist Sergey Guriev, found that Russians living closer to the Ukrainian conflict felt more empathy with Ukrainian citizens.

Attitudes towards the country were measured using key search words from Russian based search engine Yandex. Data was gathered from 79 Russian regions during the period between Jan. 20, 2014 and July 6, 2015, with key phrases such as "charity," "social security," "adoption," "blood donation" and "help for children" used as evidence of sympathetic feelings towards Ukraine.

Respondents were grouped using a number of factors, including local inflation, vulnerability to changes in the ruble's value and average monthly regional salary, as well as distance from the conflict zone.

The report also showed that in regions closer to the conflict, sympathetic views increased along with the intensity of the fighting — measured by the frequency of the term "war in Ukraine" in the media.

"Our findings are probably down to empathy. The more intense the conflict, the more people in the regions close to the conflict sympathized," said Guriev in a statement to the RBC newspaper.

"The findings were the same even when we excluded searches for blood donation from the data, which suggests that the growth in sympathy towards Ukrainians cannot be purely explained by the direct impact of military activity."

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