

Russians Blame Tbilisi, Not Moscow, for 2008 War, Poll Says

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Georgian soldiers detained by Russian peacekeepers on the Senaki military base in Georgia/ Aleksandr Chizhenok/ TASS

On the 10th anniversary of the Russia-Georgia war, more Russians blame Georgia than leadership in Moscow for the conflict, according to an independent Levada Center poll published Monday.

The war, which began over the breakaway region of South Ossetia on Aug. 8, 2008 and ended five days later, was Russia's [biggest](#) combat operation outside its borders since the U.S.S.R. occupied Afghanistan. Russia recognizes the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both of which Georgia considers part of its territory.

Of Russians who are familiar with the conflict, 34 percent said they hold Georgian leadership liable. Twenty-four percent of the respondents accused the United States and NATO of starting the war, [according](#) to Levada's polling data.

Only 8 percent of respondents named Russia the aggressor in the war, while the majority maintained that Russia “did its utmost to avoid bloodshed.”

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“After the end of the conflict, the media severely restricted any information about Georgia altogether, either negative or positive,” Lev Gudkov, head of Levada, explained [to](#) the Kommersant business daily.

Eighteen percent of Levada’s poll respondents said they were hearing about the war for the first time, while 56 percent said they had “heard something about it.”

Less than a quarter of the respondents said they felt knowledgeable about the war.

Gudkov argued that anti-Georgian propaganda and a lack of post-war news from Georgia shaped public opinion today.

“Since the media actively broadcast [news of the Ukrainian conflict that broke out in 2014], people just began to forget about the 2008 war,” he told Kommersant.

Levada conducted the survey between July 19 and July 25 among 1,600 respondents in 52 Russian regions.

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