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Most Russians Believe New Law Will Curb 'Fake News' – Poll

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Andrei Lyubimov / Moskva News Agency

A majority of Russians think a controversial new set of laws will effectively reduce the spread of false information online, according to a state-run survey published on Wednesday.

This week, President Vladimir Putin signed into law legislation that will fine online media for spreading "fake news" and punish those who exhibit "blatant disrespect" to the state with fines or jail sentences. Observers and lawmakers have warned that the laws' vague language could be abused to stifle free speech.

Fifty-seven percent of Russian respondents said the amount of fake news will decline with the new law, the state-funded VTsIOM pollster reported. Almost 30 percent foresaw no change, while 4 percent said the law will lead to more fake news.

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More than 80 percent approved of the new law, while 13 percent said it was unnecessary.

Meanwhile, more than 20 percent of VTsIOM's respondents said they were hearing about the fake news law for the first time. More than 60 percent said they had "heard something about it," while 17 percent said they were well-informed about the law's passage.

VTsIOM conducted the survey among 1,600 Russians on March 19.

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