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Most Russians View Assange as Freedom Fighter – State Poll

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Zuma / TASS

Most Russians view WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange as a freedom fighter, according to a state-funded poll published a week after the Australian's arrest in Britain.

WikiLeaks published hundreds of thousands of secret U.S. diplomatic cables that laid bare often critical U.S. appraisals of world leaders, from Russian President Vladimir Putin to members of the Saudi royal family. British police arrested Assange on Thursday at Washington's request after Ecuador terminated his asylum at its London embassy, where he had lived since 2012.

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Forty-five percent of Russian respondents said they believe Assange "promotes the principles of free speech and freedom of the media" with the WikiLeaks disclosures, the state-funded VTsIOM pollster reported Tuesday.

Twenty-seven percent said he acted illegally, an opinion primarily shared by respondents in the younger age groups, while older respondents were more likely to cast Assange as a freedom fighter.

Another 57 percent said the 47-year-old "wanted to open the world community's eyes to cases of corruption, crimes and scandals in different countries."

Only 17 percent said Assange likely sought revenge on his enemies or to attract attention.

VTsIOM conducted the survey among 1,600 Russians on April 13.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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