



Four Russias at War: Regional Impacts and Their Implications on Northern European Security

Researcher *Eemil Mitikka*

Concepts and Doctrine Division

Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, analysts and Russia-watchers have debated the consequences of the war for Russian society. These questions are often addressed by treating Russia as a single, homogeneous entity. Yet, Russia is a vast country with over 80 regions, which differ from each other significantly.

This research bulletin examines the domestic impacts of the war in Russia from a regional perspective. It aims at tracing how negative and positive impacts of the war are distributed across Russia's regions. The research concludes by considering how these impacts may reflect on Northern Europe's security.

Regional perspective to Russia's war

After February 2022, analysts and Russia-watchers have debated the domestic consequences of the Ukraine war for the Russian society. Will the economy collapse? To what extent Russians support the war? Will growing domestic repression stir large-scale protests or even revolution from below?

These questions are often addressed by treating Russia as a single, homogeneous entity. Yet, Russia is a vast country with over 80 regions, which differ from each other notably in terms of economy, culture, and geography. The lifestyles in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Karelia, and Northwestern Russia are in many ways similar to European societies, while areas like the North Caucasus, Siberia, and the Far East are less so.¹

The war in Russia can also affect social cohesion, as some regions have separatist histories. If negatively affected, tensions could lead to conflict and in an extreme scenario even to a civil war. Positive outcomes of the war, in turn, can strengthen support for the Kremlin.

The internal consequences of the war also influence the security of Finland and Northern Europe. Growing discontent with Moscow could lead to social unrest and the rise of separatist movements in some regions, potentially causing border tensions for Russia and increasing migration to neighbouring countries.

¹ Кьнев Александр (2024), *Кто и как управляет регионам России. Система управления и административная устройчивость власти российских регионов*, Рутения.

² Конституция Российской Федерации (2025), Глава 1. Основы конституционного строя, <http://www.constitution.ru/10003000/10003000-3.htm>.

³ Tóth-Czifra András (2025), *The Kremlin's Balancing Act: The War's Impact On Regional Power Dynamics*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2025/02/the-kremlins-balancing-act-the-wars-impact-on-regional-power-dynamics/>.

⁴ Ibid.; Troll Yvonne (2024), *Meet the Author | Irina Busygina - 'The regional governors in Russia are not the victims of the regime'*, Centre

Russia's regions in a nutshell

The Russian Federation consists of 83 federal subjects: 46 oblasts, 21 republics, 9 krais, 4 autonomous okrugs, 2 federal cities, and 1 autonomous oblast. Russia also considers six occupied Ukrainian territories as part of its federation, including the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, and Sevastopol. Republics have their own constitutions and legislation, while other subjects have charters and legislation.²

Oblasts are governed by a governor and a locally elected legislature. They are usually named after their administrative centres. Krai are legally equivalent to oblasts, with the term "krai" (meaning "frontier" or "territory") historically associated with their geographic position during a particular period. Autonomous okrugs home a significant ethnic minority or majority. The only autonomous oblast is the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. Federal cities are those designated as cities of special significance.³

President Putin has significantly reduced the autonomy of Russia's regions during his time in power through a combination of legal, political, and economic centralisation strategies. Key events in this process include the abolition of direct gubernatorial elections in 2004, fiscal centralisation, and legal reforms in 2025 that curtailed local self-government. After February 2022, regional governments are pressured to prioritise militarisation and support for Russia's war, governors are selected based on loyalty to the Kremlin, and regional assets were nationalised or reallocated.⁴

Most of Russia's population is concentrated in central and southern areas, with Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Moscow Oblast being the most densely populated regions. The North Caucasus regions like Ingushetia, Chechnya, and North Ossetia are also population dense. The least populated regions are Chukotka, Magadan, Sakha, Kamchatka, and Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The highest shares of non-Russian ethnic groups are in Ingushetia, Chechnya, Dagestan, and Tuva. The biggest share of ethnic Russians can be found in

for East European and International Studies (ZOiS), <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/meet-the-author/the-regional-governors-in-russia-are-not-the-victims-of-the-regime>; Shtepa Vadim (2025), *Militarization of Regional Policy Leads to Decline of Federalism in Russia*, Eurasia Daily Monitor, 22(59), The Jamestown Foundation, <https://jamestown.org/program/militarization-of-regional-policy-leads-to-decline-of-federalism-in-russia/>; Pertsev Andrey (2024), *Russia's Political Sclerosis Is Creating Regional Fiefdoms*, Carnegie Politika, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/07/regional-clans-russia?lang=en>.



Vologda, Lipetsk, Yaroslavl, Arkhangelsk, Kostroma, and Ivanovo.⁵

Moscow and St. Petersburg are among Russia's wealthiest regions by Gross Regional Product (GRP) per capita, but some less populated areas like Yamalo-Nenets and Sakhalin rank also high thanks to their resource-extracting industries. The poorest regions include parts of the North Caucasus and South Siberia. Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other large cities are central to Russia's post-industrial economy, with educated populations and better-paid jobs. Regions such as Chelyabinsk, Moscow Oblast, Kemerovo, Primorye, Rostov, Sverdlovsk, and Vologda, in turn, are central to Russia's military production.⁶

Southern Russia faces the most severe environmental issues like air pollution and water quality problems, especially in regions such as Astrakhan, Rostov, Chelyabinsk, Transbaikalia, Irkutsk, Krasnoyarsk, Kurgan, Moscow Oblast, Buryatia, and Khakassia.⁷ Siberian and the Russian Far East regions have high violent crime rates, particularly in Tuva and Chukotka, while regions like Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Moscow and St. Petersburg have the lowest crime rates.⁸

As the brief overview above shows, Russia's regions differ significantly from each other on many metrics. The next section introduces briefly prior research on Russia's regions and how the Ukraine war has impacted them.

Prior insights on Russia's regions and impacts of the 2022 invasion

The idea of looking at Russia from a regional perspective is not novel. In her classic article "Four Russias: re-thinking the post-Soviet map", economist-geographer Natalia Zubarevich (2012) divided Russia into four distinct "Russias" based on the socio-economic development and number of populations in regions.⁹

"Russia-1" includes major cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg, characterised by high economic development, educated populations, and lifestyles similar to the West. "Russia-2" consists of industrial towns with less educated populations. "Russia-3" covers small towns and villages facing population decline. "Russia-4" comprises underdeveloped regions with corruption and ethnic conflicts, relying on federal support.

Nikolay Petrov and Aleksey Titkov (2013) investigated the levels of democratisation across Russia's regions in 2001–2011 based on expert evaluations.¹⁰ Most democratic regions in Russia include Perm, Sverdlovsk, and St. Petersburg, aligning with Zubarevich's thesis that they are populous areas with large cities. The least democratic regions, like Chechnya and Ingushetia, have large non-Russian minorities, lack big cities, and fit Zubarevich's "Russia-

4" category of underdeveloped, corrupt regions with ethnic tensions.

Boris Sokolov et al. (2025) studied cultural value differences in 60 Russian regions.¹¹ They examined attitudes towards abortion, homosexuality, divorce, and gender equality to create an individualism-collectivism index. They found regions like Yaroslavl and Moscow City to be most individualistic, while Chechnya and Dagestan were most collectivistic. Their findings align largely with democratisation levels and centre-periphery dynamics in Russia's regions.

In short, pre-February 2022 research on Russia's regions indicates that more individualistic and richer "European" regions are located in the North, while "non-European" collectivistic and poorer regions are more typically located in the South.

Since Russia's 2022 invasion, the war's domestic impacts have been debated. Zubarevich (2023) notes that regions heavily reliant on sanctioned industries, like those involved in timber processing in the North-West, have suffered due to lost European markets. Production also declined for coal, iron ore, and mineral fertiliser sectors. Conversely, regions with significant military-industrial activities, such as Tula and Sverdlovsk, have benefited as demand for defence production increased.¹²

Laura Solanko (2024) argues that the growth in bank deposits in remote and poor Russian regions during the war indicates that many mobilised soldiers come from areas with high non-Russian populations. These include regions like Tuva, Nenets AO, Chechnya, Buryatia, Altay Republic, Adygea, and Transbaikalia. She suggests that these deposits show where the soldiers are from and which regions have suffered the most casualties.¹³

Sinikka Parviainen and William Pyle (2025) report improved well-being and financial security in Russia post-February 2022, with higher satisfaction due to increased wages from government spending and labour market changes. Ethnic Russians and those in military-industrial regions saw well-being gains, but older Russians and those near war zones faced declines.¹⁴

Andrey Yushkov and Michael Alexeev (2024) found tax collections dropped in frontline regions, while oil- and gas-rich areas benefited economically.¹⁵ Regions producing ferrous metals suffered from strict sanctions imposed in the first half 2022 and lost a significant share of their corporate income tax collections. Thus, they propose that oil- and gas-extracting regions, weapons-producing regions, and the largest city-regions are "winners", and regions that share a border with Ukraine and regions with sanctions-prone industrial specialisations "losers" of the Ukraine war.

⁵ Росстат (2024), *Регионы России. Основные характеристики субъектов Российской Федерации - статистический сборник*, Москва.

⁶ Risinger Lucas, Shkurenko Pavlo, Bilousova Olena et al. (2025), *Disassembling the Russian War Machine: Logistics, Chokepoints, and Dependencies*, KSE Institute, <https://kse.ua/about-the-school/news/disassembling-russia-s-war-machine-new-kse-institute-report-exposes-chokepoints-in-russia-s-military-industrial-logistics/>.

⁷ «Если быть точным» (2025), *Экология в России*, <https://tochno.st/problems/ecology>.

⁸ «Если быть точным» (2025), *Преступность в России*, <https://tochno.st/problems/crime>.

⁹ Zubarevich Natalia (2012), *Four Russias: rethinking the post-Soviet map*, openDemocracy, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/four-russias-rethinking-post-soviet-map/>.

¹⁰ Петров Николай & Титков Алексей (2013), *Рейтинг демократичности регионов Московского Центра Карнеги: 10 лет в строю*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2013/12/rejting-demokratichnosti-regionov-moskovskogo-centra-karnegi-10-let-v-stroyu?lang=ru>.

¹¹ Соколов Борис, Алмакаева Анна, Ломакин Илья, Минков Михаил, Михайлова Наталья, Настина Екатерина & Понарин Эдуард (2025), *Культурные различия между 60 российскими регионами по измерению «индивидуализм — коллективизм», Социологические обозрение*, 24(1).

¹² Zubarevich Natalia (2023), *Special Military Economic Geography: Changes in the Russian Economy by Region*, <https://re-russia.net/en/expertise/080/>.

¹³ Solanko Laura (2024), *Where do Russia's mobilized soldiers come from? Evidence from bank deposits*, BOFIT Policy Brief, Bank of Finland, Helsinki.

¹⁴ Parviainen Sinikka & Pyle William (2025), *Household well-being under sanctions: Insights from the Russian longitudinal monitoring survey*, BOFIT Policy Brief, Bank of Finland, Helsinki, <https://publications.bof.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/53965/bpb2508.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹⁵ Yushkov Andrey & Alexeev Michael (2024), *Russian regions in wartime: fiscal and economic effects of the Russo-Ukrainian war*, Post-Soviet Affairs, 40(4).



Several experts suggest that ethnic minorities and poorer regions are over-represented in war casualties. Christo Grozev (2022) highlighted that many casualties are “non-Slavic” from “far-off regions.”¹⁶ Adam Charles Lenton also found that ethnic minorities from poor areas are disproportionately affected and that ethnicity is a stronger predictor of casualties than economic status in Russia.¹⁷

Prior research also shows that support for the war in Ukraine is higher among Russians in smaller towns and rural areas, while those in big cities are more likely to oppose it.¹⁸

However, there is less research on whether the “positive” and “negative” impacts group together in Russia’s regions. Thus, this research explores how war casualties, economic benefits, war support, and anti-war protests are distributed across Russia’s regions and how these factors group together. It also considers how these domestic impacts of war affect Finland and Northern Europe’s security. The next section introduces the data and methods used in this task.

Data and methods

Regional data from publicly available sources dealing with war casualties, household bank deposits, war support, and anti-war detentions were used to examine the impacts of the war in Russia’s regions. War casualties and anti-war detentions represent negative impacts, and growth in household bank deposits reflects positive impacts of the war. While war support does not fit directly into either of these categories, it was used as a proxy for satisfaction or compliance with the Kremlin policies. Table 1 offers an overview of the data sources.

Variable	Source	Affiliation	Measure
War casualties	Mediazona	Independent media / oppositional	Number of regional war casualties / 100,000 people in Feb 2022–Sep 2025
Growth in bank deposits	Central Bank of Russia	Russian government / state-aligned	On-year growth in bank deposits (%) Feb 2022–Aug 2025
War support	Chronicles-project	Independent research group / oppositional	Share of Russians (%) supporting the war by regions in 2022–2024
Anti-war detentions	OVD-Info	Independent human rights media project	Anti-war detentions by regions / 100,000 people in 2022–2024

Table 1. Dependent variables of the research.

To account for varying regional populations in Russia, war casualties and anti-war detentions were adjusted to reflect figures per 100,000 people. This adjustment ensures that regions with larger populations do not skew results with higher absolute numbers. Population data came from Rosstat’s 2024 statistical yearbook.¹⁹

Dependent variables presented in Table 1 were first examined with map visualisations. After that, bivariate OLS regressions were employed to explore how these variables relate to regional characteristics. Lastly, k-means clustering was applied to identify if casualties, bank deposits, war support, and anti-war detentions form regional groups. This approach is useful in identifying which regions have suffered and gained most from the war.

All the analyses were done using programming language R, and RStudio integrated development environment.²⁰ Tidyverse, tidymodels, tmap, and rnaturalearth were the main R packages used in the analyses.²¹

Variable maps

Maps on how war casualties, bank deposits, war support, and anti-war detentions are distributed across Russia’s regions are shown in Figure 1. In these maps, each dependent variable was divided into quintiles. Dark red regions represent the highest and dark blue regions the lowest quintile on each metric.

Visual examination of Figure 1 suggests that dependent variables are not strongly correlated with each other. For example, while both war casualties and bank deposits are high in many South Siberian regions, many northern regions have experienced heavy casualties but still showed little growth in bank deposits during the war years.

Regarding war casualties per 100,000 people, the leading regions with this metric are Tuva (415,1 per 100,000 people), Buryatia (346,2 per 100,000 people), Chukotka (331,2 per 100,000 people), Gorno-Altai (282,2 per 100,000 people), and Transbaikalia (228,3 per 100,000 people). Regions with lowest number of population-adjusted casualties are federal cities Moscow (11,4 per 100,000 people) and St. Petersburg (22,2 per 100,000 people), North Caucasian Chechnya (22,3 per 100,000 people), Ingushetia (31,1 per 100,000 people), Kabardino-Balkaria (34,2 per 100,000 people) and Karachay-Cherkessia (48,2 per 100,000 people), and Moscow Oblast (42,7 per 100,000 people).

The South Siberian Tuva Republic stands out for having both high war casualties and significant growth in bank deposits. Between February 2022 and August 2025, bank deposits increased by 41,8%. The number of war casualties per 100,000 people is about 17% higher than in Buryatia, which ranks second in terms of casualties.

Other top regions with growth in bank deposits include Kursk (26,6%), Adygea (26,4%), Mari El (25,6%), Kostroma (25,3%), Transbaikalia (25,3%), and Chechnya (25,1%). Regions with slow growth in bank deposits include Magadan (11,4%), Yamalia

¹⁶ Популярная политика (27.2.2022), Христо Грозев: “На войне погибло уже 4000 русских”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBFceXJgs-I>.

¹⁷ Lenton Adam C. (2022), *Who is dying for the «Russian World»?* | Riddle, <https://ridl.io/who-is-dying-for-the-russian-world/>.

¹⁸ Mitikka Eemil (2023), *Hyökkäyssodan kannatus Venäjällä [War surveys as data source after the February 2022]*, *Idäntutkimus* 29 (4):4-25, <https://doi.org/10.33345/idantutkimus.121491>; Mitikka Eemil (2023), *Support for War of Aggression in Russia – Dive Into Public Opinion Surveys, Russia’s war on Ukraine : strategic and operational designs and implementation*, Forsström Pentti (ed.), National Defence University, Department of Warfare, Helsinki.

¹⁹ Росстат (2024), *Регионы России. Основные характеристики субъектов Российской Федерации - статистический сборник*, Москва.

²⁰ R Core Team (2021), *R: A language and environment for statistical computing*. R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria, <https://www.R-project.org/>; Posit team (2025), *RStudio: Integrated Development Environment for R*. Posit Software, PBC, Boston, MA, <http://www.posit.co/>.

²¹ Wickham Hadley, Averick Mara, Bryan Jennifer et al. (2019), *Welcome to the tidyverse*, *Journal of Open Source Software*, 4(43); Kuhn Max & Wickham Hadley (2020), *Tidymodels: a collection of packages for modeling and machine learning using tidyverse principles*, <https://www.tidymodels.org/>; Tennekkes Martijn (2018), *tmap: Thematic Maps in R*, *Journal of Statistical Software*, 84(6), doi:10.18637/jss.v084.i06; Massicotte Philippe & South Andy (2025), *rnaturalearth: World Map Data from Natural Earth*, <https://docs.ropensci.org/rnaturalearth/>, R package version 1.1.0.9000.

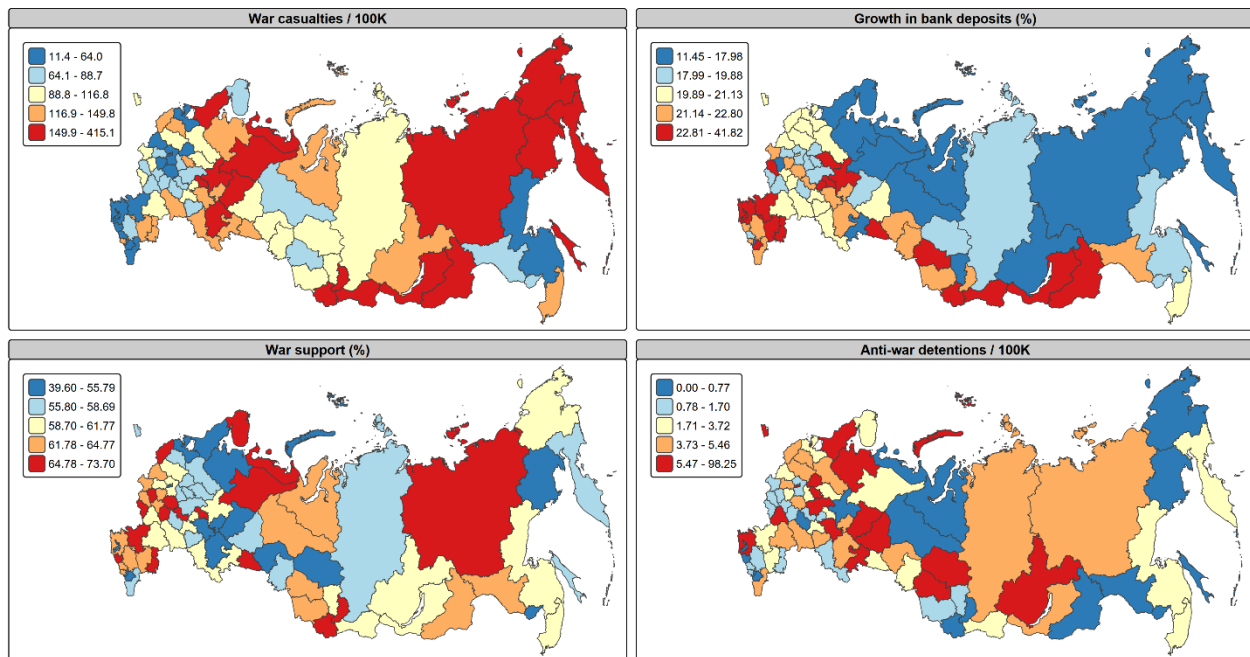


Figure 1. War casualties, growth in bank deposits, war support, and anti-war detentions in Russia's regions.

(13,1%), Chukotka (13,2%), Komi (16,1%), and Kemerovo (16,5%).

War support is the least systematically distributed dependent variable, as there are high and low support areas in all parts of Russia. On average, the highest support for war in Ukraine is in Karachay-Cherkessia (73,7%), followed by Gorno-Altai (71,3%), Pskov (70,5%), Komi (69,5%), Mordovia (69,5%), and Astrakhan (69,0%). Regions with lowest levels of war support are Jewish Autonomous Oblast (39,6%), Chechnya (42,7%), Ingushetia (43,2%), Udmurtia (48,5%), Tatarstan (49,2%), St. Petersburg (51,5%), and Karelia (52,0%).

Anti-war protests are largely concentrated in big cities based on population-adjusted anti-war detentions. Leading regions with these are federal cities St. Petersburg (98,2 detentions per 100,000 people) and Moscow (70,3 detentions per 100,000 people). These

figures are unsurprising, as protests have typically concentrated in Moscow and St. Petersburg in post-Soviet Russia.²²

Other top regions in anti-war detentions include Novosibirsk (19,8 detentions per 100,000 people), Sverdlovsk (13,1 detentions per 100,000 people), Kaliningrad (9,7 detentions per 100,000 people), Nizhny Novgorod (9,6 detentions per 100,000 people), Perm (8,9 detentions per 100,000 people), and Karelia (8,0 detentions per 100,000 people). Regions with no reported anti-war detentions include under-developed regions such as Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Nenetsia, Gorno-Altai, and Chukotka.

Federation-level scope

Figure 2 shows how dependent variables relate to regional factors using bivariate OLS regressions. Red triangles show negative relationships, blue triangles positive, and grey circles non-significant

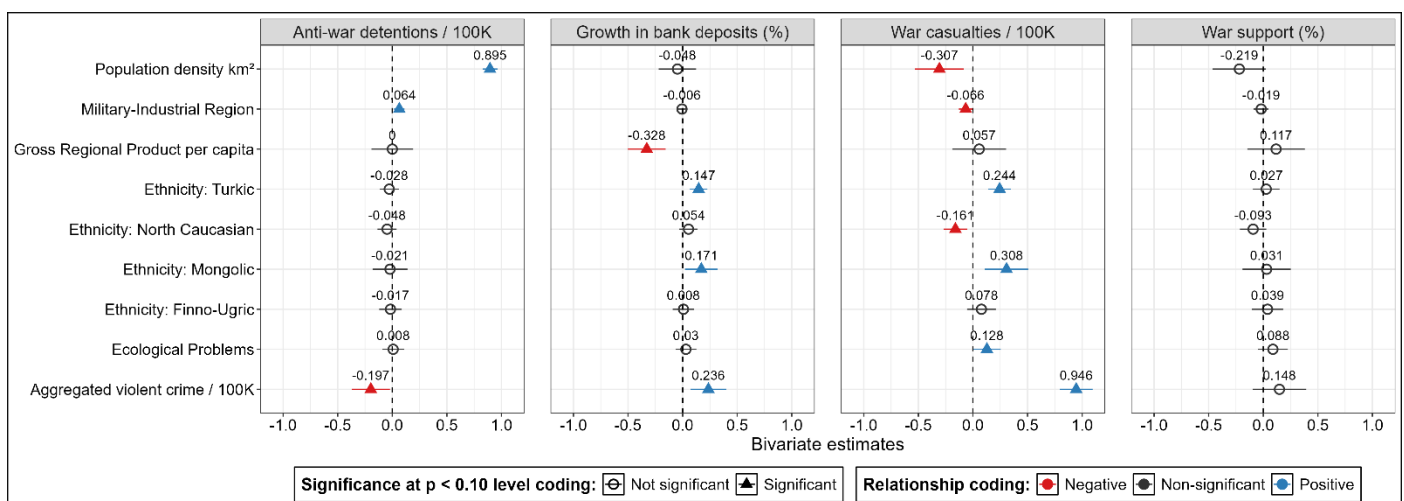


Figure 2. OLS regressions on linkage between dependent variables and regional level factors.

²² Рогов Кирилл (2021), *Год Навального. Политика протеста в России 2020–2021: стратегии, механизмы и последствия*, Фонд "Либеральная миссия", Москва.



results, with lines indicating 90% confidence intervals. As the figure shows, war casualties (third panel from the left) are most strongly linked to regional factors.

The main predictor of war casualties is the number of violent crimes per 100,000 in a region. Regions with more Mongolic and Turkic minorities also show higher casualties, while North Caucasian minority regions have fewer. Lower population density and lesser military-industrial production are linked to more casualties, suggesting remote areas suffer more. Ecological issues relate to higher casualties, while economic gains, like increased bank deposits, are more evident in regions with lower GRP per capita and higher violent crime rates.

Big cities drive anti-war detentions due to their high population density. Regions with military industries protest more against the war, although weakly, while violent crime reduces protest participation. War support is not strongly linked to regional factors. Only the negative relationship between war support and regional population density is close to reaching statistical significance at the $p < 0.10$ level, suggesting that war support tends to be lower in densely populated regions compared to sparsely populated ones. The higher p-values indicate greater statistical uncertainty for war support than for the other dependent variables.

Regional clusters

K-means clustering was employed on casualties, bank deposits, war support, and anti-war detentions to see if they form regional groups. Exploratory data analysis suggested four clusters, so clustering with four centres was applied. Figure 3 shows regional clusters in Russia based on these factors.

The first cluster, labelled as “High casualties, but economic gains,” includes Tuva, Buryatia, Chukotka, Gorno-Altai, and Transbaikalia. These regions have high war casualties and significant bank deposit growth, except Chukotka. They show strong war support and minimal anti-war detentions.

These areas are poor, sparsely populated, and strained by ecological problems and violent crime. Tuva leads in violent crime, and Chita in Transbaikalia has been called Russia’s “garbage capital.” War offers opportunities for social mobility in these regions. The cluster average for ethnic Russians is lowest here.

The “Low casualties, but high discontent” cluster consists mainly of population dense regions, where support for war (cluster

average: 46,5%) and number of population-adjusted casualties (cluster average: 33,4 per 100,000 people) are low. This cluster includes federal cities Moscow and St. Petersburg, North Caucasian republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia, and Far Eastern Jewish Autonomous Oblast.

Regions of the second cluster have the highest number of anti-war detentions (cluster average: 33,7 per 100,000 people), although this is largely explained by the high detention rates in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as other regions report no anti-war detentions. These regions have also relatively low growth in bank deposits (cluster average: 20,0%), although Chechnya (25,1%) is among the top regions on a federation-level comparison.

The “Mostly adverse impacts” cluster consists of wide range regions, where impacts of the war have been mostly negative. This cluster has the second highest number of war casualties and anti-war detentions.

Regions with high levels of casualties in this cluster include Sakhalin, Kamchatka, Magadan, Karelia, and Perm. Anti-war detentions per 100,000 people, in turn, are most numerous in Sverdlovsk, Kaliningrad, Nizhny Novgorod, Perm, and Karelia.

Growth in bank deposits has been on average lowest in these regions. War support is lowest after the “Low casualties, but high discontent” cluster, and regions with lowest levels of war support include Udmurtia (48,5%), Tatarstan (49,2%), Karelia (52,0%), Tomsk (52,1%), and Arkhangelsk (53,3%).

The fourth cluster is called “Mixed impacts.” This cluster has highest levels of war support, second highest growth in bank deposits, and second lowest levels of war casualties and anti-war detentions.

Since war support and growth in bank deposits are high in this cluster, these regions are most likely to comply with the Kremlin politics. Average GRP per capita of these regions is also notably higher (486,338 roubles) than in other clusters.

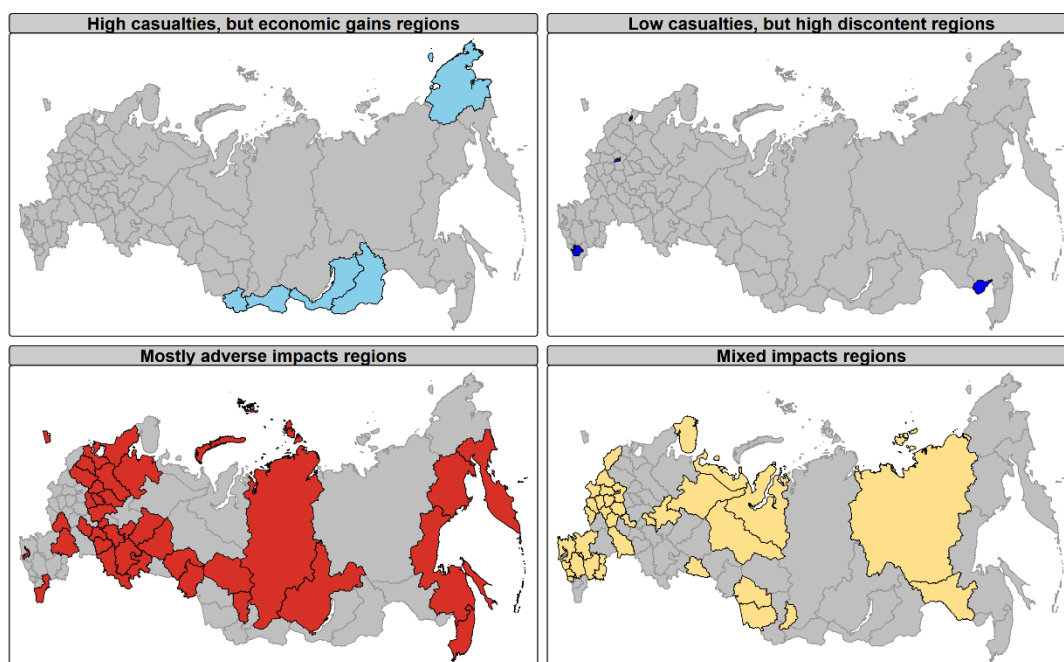


Figure 3. Regional clusters on impacts of the war.



Regional cluster	War casualties / 100K	Bank deposits	War support (%)	Anti-war detentions / 100K	Population density	GRP / capita	Share of Russians (%)	Ecological problems	Crime victims / 100K
High casualties, economic gains	320,6	26,4	63,4	1,6	1,9	123,208	54,2	4,0	100,2
Low casualties, high discontent	33,4	20,0	46,5	33,7	1881,2	237,116	55,7	2,6	24,0
Mixed impacts	102,5	20,9	65,2	2,4	31,3	486,338	77,3	3,1	38,8
Mostly adverse impacts	111,8	19,7	56,6	4,5	25,1	233,491	83,2	3,1	39,7

Table 2. Relationships between regional clusters, dependent variables, regional factors.

Table 2 offers an overview on how regional clusters relate to dependent variables and regional factors.

Regional disparities vs. war-time protests

Urban protests

The beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion sparked nationwide anti-war protests. More than 14,000 people were detained during the 17 days following 24th of February 2022.²³ While regions with big cities, such as Moscow City, St. Petersburg, Chelyabinsk, Krasnoyarsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Perm, Samara and Sverdlovsk were the main locations of protests, they reportedly took place in at least 50 Russian cities.²⁴

Interestingly, all the regions with biggest initial anti-war protests have either faced mostly negative consequences of the war, or report the highest discontent with the war according to cluster analysis presented in the previous chapter. Moscow City and St. Petersburg are the leaders in population adjusted anti-war detentions, and they report also relatively low levels of war support.

St. Petersburg is known for anti-war protests in Russia. In October 2025, young residents of St. Petersburg gathered there to sing Russian rapper Noize MC’s anti-Kremlin song, “Cooperative Swan Lake.”²⁵ Other regions like Nizhny Novgorod, Arkhangelsk, and Sverdlovsk also saw protests, notably by ambulance workers demanding higher salaries in January 2024, who addressed their concerns to President Putin and local officials.²⁶

North Caucasian anti-mobilisation protests

War-time protest in Russia has not been limited only to big post-industrial cities. Putin’s “partial mobilisation” decree in Fall 2022

stirred large protests in ethnic republics of Dagestan and Chechnya, and other regions of North Caucasus.

On 21st of September 2022, several dozen women in Grozny, Chechnya, attempted to protest against mobilisation but were detained.²⁷ The next day, a federal highway near Babayurt, Dagestan, was blocked by villagers protesting at a military registration and enlistment office (военкомат). One of the protesters shouted to the employee of the enlistment office that “[when] in 1941–1945 [second World War] we fought, it was a war, but this is not a war. This is just politics!”²⁸

A few days later, protesters gathered in the center of Dagestan’s capital Makhachkala to rally against mobilisation. They chanted “no to war”, “no to mobilisation”, and “our children are not fertilizer.” Protesters clashed with the police, and police dissolved the protests violently. At least 101 people were arrested.²⁹

The North Caucasian protests are significant because they took place in poor, under-developed, and culturally conservative regions where public dissent is rare. Chechnya’s leader Ramzan Kadyrov is notably repressive among Russia’s regional leaders, making the September 2022 protest in Grozny notable as a rare act of defiance.³⁰

It is also noteworthy that Chechnya and other North Caucasus regions have separatist histories, exemplified by the Chechen wars in 1994–1996 and 1999–2000. In 2023, the “Ingushetian Independence Committee” (Комитет Ингушской Независимости) also informed about the creation of “Ingushetian Liberation Army” (Ингушская Освободительная Армия) which will “restore the territorial integrity of Ingushetia and protect its borders from possible aggression by Russian satellites.”³¹ Ingushetian Liberation Army was labeled as an extremist organization in December 2024

²³ OVD-Info (2022), *No to war*, <https://ovd.info/en/no-to-war-en#1>.

²⁴ Al Jazeera (2022), *Russia-Ukraine: Mapping anti-war protests around the world*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/25/russia-ukraine-mapping-anti-war-protests-around-the-world>.

²⁵ Cole Brendan (2025), *Videos show Russian youths chant anti-war song in St. Petersburg* | Newsweek, <https://www.newsweek.com/videos-russian-youths-chant-anti-war-song-st-petersburg-10883035>.

²⁶ Аносова Елена (2024), *На Урале врачи скорой помощи устроили протест из-за униженно низких зарплат. Они обратились к Путину* | E1.RU, <https://www.e1.ru/text/health/2024/01/15/73123121/>; Shablinsky Ilya (2024), *Social protests in the Russian regions: Scale and Role of Political Parties*, <https://ridl.io/social-protests-in-the-russian-regions-scale-and-role-of-political-parties/>.

²⁷ Радио Свобода (2022), *В Грозном женщины попытались провести акцию против мобилизации*, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-groznom->

[zhenschiny-popytalisj-provesti-aktsiyu-protiv-mobilizatsii/32046472.html](https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-groznom-zhenschiny-popytalisj-provesti-aktsiyu-protiv-mobilizatsii/32046472.html).

²⁸ Черновик (2022), *Жители Бабаюрта мобилизовались и перекрыли федеральную трассу*, <https://chernovik.net/news/zhiteli-babayurta-mobilizovali-i-perekryli-federalnuyu-trassu>.

²⁹ ОВД-Инфо (2022), *Списки задержанных в связи с акциями против мобилизации 25 сентября*, <https://ovd.info/news/2022/09/25/spiski-zaderzhannyh-v-svyazi-s-akciyami-protiv-mobilizacii-25-sentyabrya>.

³⁰ Кавказ.Реалии (2022), *Чеченские матери против мобилизации. Итоги недели*, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/chechenskie-materi-protiv-mobilizatsii-itogi-nedeli/32047463.html>.

³¹ Kavkazcenter.com (2023), *Ингушские активисты объявили о формировании Ингушской Освободительной Армии*, <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2023/04/20/121523/ingushsk-ie-aktivisty-obyavili-o-formirovanii-ingushskoj-osvoboditelnoj-armii.shtml>.



according to the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB).³²

Support for separatist movements in areas like Chechnya may increase due to the war in Ukraine. Only 42,7% of Chechnya residents support the war. On the other hand, casualties in Chechnya (22,3 per 100,000 people) and Dagestan (52,1 per 100,000 people) are low due to larger populations. Moreover, Dagestan's anti-war detention rate (3,4 per 100,000 people) is below the Russian average. Chechnya also saw a 25,1% increase in household bank deposits during the war, ranking 8th out of 83 regions, indicating economic benefits that may curb separatist sentiments.

Russian Far East anti-mobilisation protests

Putin's mobilization decree sparked protests also in the Russian Far East. In line with the North Caucasian protests, these were mostly performed by women.³³ On 25th of September 2022, around 400 people participated in protest rally against mobilisation in Sakha's (Yakutia) capital Yakutsk. They protested against mobilisation and chanted slogans such as "no to war" and "no to genocide."³⁴

Small groups of protesters gathered in Buryatia's capital Ulan-Ude to protest against mobilisation.³⁵ In March 2022, Buryat opponents of the war established the "Free Buryatia Foundation," which was labelled an extremist organisation by Russian authorities in 2024.³⁶ The organisation organises legal aid for soldiers and national guard members who object the war in Ukraine.³⁷ Members of the foundation argue that Ukrainians and Buryats are both victims of Russian colonialism, and that Buryats are over-represented among war casualties.³⁸

The analyses presented earlier support the argument of heavy casualties among Buryats. The number of population-adjusted casualties (346,2 per 100,000 people) in Buryatia is the second highest in all Russia after Tuva (415,1 per 100,000 people). Yet, these regions have also gained economically the most from the war in the light of household bank deposits.

While the Southern Siberian regions Tuva, Buryatia, Transbaikalia, and Gorno-Altai have borne thus far the highest number of casualties in the war, these regions are also possessed by social problems, such as violent crime and poor state of ecology. The

general quality of life is low and poverty is widespread in these regions.³⁹

Despite the risk of being killed at the front, the war in Ukraine offers opportunities for social mobility in the Southern Siberian and Far Eastern regions of the "High casualties, but economic gains" cluster. These enhanced opportunities are likely to lift the threshold to rebel against the war and hinder separatist sentiments. These regions are also sparsely populated, which further complicates the coordination of oppositional movements.

Bashkortostan 2024 uprising

Bashkortostan 2024 protests are among the largest regional protest in Russia after February 2022. On 12th of January 2024, over 1,500 people turned out in small town of Baymak to protest against sentencing Bashkir activist Fayil Alsynov to four years in a penal colony.⁴⁰ He was accused of "inciting ethnic hatred" and calling for the separation of Bashkortostan from Russia.⁴¹

Alsynov is an environmental activist focused on Bashkortostan's sovereignty. He opposes mining projects that harm the environment and local communities. In 2020, he successfully campaigned against limestone mining on Kushtau, leading to its protection as a natural site after public protests.⁴²

The protests in Bashkortostan highlight tensions between the central power and regions, driven by issues like resource extraction, ecological damage, and the high enlistment of local young men in the Ukraine conflict.⁴³ As of November 2025, Bashkortostan reportedly has the highest number of war casualties.⁴⁴

Bashkortostan's 2024 protests align with this research's findings. Its casualty rate (159,7 per 100,000 people) and anti-war detentions are high (4,6 per 100,000 people), while war support (54,1%) is low compared to other regions. Bashkortostan groups with regions experiencing mostly negative impacts (Figure 3).

Moreover, a military unit from Bashkir volunteers called the "Bashkort Company" (Пота «Башкорт») was formed in 2022 to fight on the side of Ukraine in its war against Russia. It was labelled as an extremist organisation in 2024.⁴⁵ On their official website, the Bashkort Company states that it aims to "get rid of the oppression of the Russian dictator forever" and that "the mission

³² Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации (2025), *Единый федеральный список организаций, в том числе иностранных и международных организаций, признанных в соответствии с законодательством Российской Федерации террористическими (на 25 августа 2025 г.)*, <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>.

³³ SakhaDay.ru (2022), *В Якутске состоялась женский осухай*, <https://sakhaday.ru/news/v-yakutske-sostoyalsya-zhenskiiy-osuohay-v-obshchestvennoy-palate-nazvali-ee-obedinyayushchey-akciey>.

³⁴ Fedorov Yurii (2022), *Якутия, акция протеста, против мобилизации, хоровод вокруг космонавтов 25 сентября 2022 г.*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DgfrUS46JY>.

³⁵ The Moscow Times (2022), *Over 1,300 Detained as Russians Protest Mobilization | The Moscow Times*, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/09/21/over-1300-detained-as-russians-protest-mobilization-a78859>.

³⁶ Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации (2025), *Единый федеральный список организаций, в том числе иностранных и международных организаций, признанных в соответствии с законодательством Российской Федерации террористическими (на 25 августа 2025 г.)*, <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>.

³⁷ Global Voices Central & Eastern Europe (2022), *The Republic of Buryatia: invasion of Ukraine is an extension of Russia's domestic dominance over the country's ethnic minorities - Ukrainians and Buryats share a history of Russian abuse*, <https://globalvoices.org/2022/06/30/the-republic-of-buryatia-the-invasion-of-ukraine-is-an-extension-of-russias-domestic-dominance-over-its-ethnic-minorities/>.

³⁸ Ibid.; Shcherbakova Irina (2022), *'This War Is a Vampire': Buryat Activists Protest Ukraine Invasion | The Moscow Times*,

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/04/27/this-war-is-a-vampire-buryat-activists-protest-ukraine-invasion-a77469>.

³⁹ РИА Новости (2025), *Рейтинг российских регионов по качеству жизни — 2024*, <https://ria.ru/20250217/rejting-1999152726.html>.

⁴⁰ Myles-Primakoff Dylan & Posner Lillian (2024), *Russia's Bashkortostan protests: Separatism isn't the real threat facing Putin*, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/russias-bashkortostan-protests-separatism-isnt-the-real-threat-facing-putin/>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Shkel Stanislav, Dekalchuk Anna D., Grigoriev Ivan S. et al. (2024), *The Roots of Spontaneous Protest in Bashkortostan | Ponars Eurasia*, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/the-roots-of-spontaneous-protest-in-bashkortostan/>.

⁴⁴ Важные истории (2025), *Потери России в войне с Украиной — проект «Харон»*,

<https://storage.googleapis.com/istories/charon/index.html>; Медиазона (2025), *Потери России в войне с Украиной. Сводка «Медиазоны»*, <https://zona.media/casualties>; Kluge Janis (2025), *How many Russian soldiers died - according to regional budgets? | Russianomics*, <https://janiskluge.substack.com/p/how-many-russian-soldiers-died-according>.

⁴⁵ Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации (2025), *Единый федеральный список организаций, в том числе иностранных и международных организаций, признанных в соответствии с законодательством Российской Федерации террористическими (на 25 августа 2025 г.)*, <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>.



of the Bashkort Company is the liberation of Bashkortostan through the liberation of Ukraine.”⁴⁶

Karelian separatism

The Republic of Karelia is a region in close proximity to Finland and Northern Europe, making it relevant to Northern Europe’s security. It has experienced negative impacts of war, with high casualties and anti-war detentions. Karelia has low growth in household bank deposits and war support compared to other regions (see Figure 1).

There are signs of dissatisfaction with the war even at an official level in Karelia. Emilia Slabunova, a member of Karelia’s Legislative Assembly, wrote to President Putin on 22th of November 2022 and asked him to stop mobilisation.⁴⁷ Slabunova mentioned receiving appeals from Karelian residents who are concerned that the mobilisation will continue despite the government’s assurances.⁴⁸ These worries indicate that many Karelians are unwilling to fight for Russia in Ukraine.

Karelia has been one of the hardest-hit regions economically since February 2022. The forest industry is crucial to region’s economy, but exports to Finland and Europe have stopped completely due to EU sanctions.⁴⁹ At the same time, Karelia’s industrial production has not benefited from Russia’s economic shift to the East due to being geographically distant from markets of East Asia and Africa.⁵⁰

Forecasts have long predicted that Russia may dissolve due to internal struggles.⁵¹ It has been suggested that Karelia would seek to rejoin Finland in this process.⁵² More recent foresights propose that Putin’s policies and the conflict in Ukraine could fasten Russia’s internal disintegration.

Finnish media has reported Karelian national movements seeking independence from Russia after February 2022. In 2023, Yle reported on activist Dmitry Kuznetsov, leader of “Stop the Occupation of Karelia,” aiming to establish an independent Karelian state.⁵³ In 2025, Yle covered Vladislav Oleinik, representing Suur-Suomen Sotilaat (“Soldiers of Greater Finland”), seeking to form a Finno-Ugric world separate from the Moscow’s rule.⁵⁴ Their proposed nation includes Finland, Estonia, and Russian regions with significant Finno-Ugric populations.⁵⁵

“Stop the Occupation of Karelia” and “Suur-Suomen Sotilaat” were declared extremist groups by Russia in 2024.⁵⁶ They are linked to Finnish far-right organisations, raising concerns about

possible involvement in Russia’s information warfare.⁵⁷ Yet, experts do not believe Karelian independence activities are part of the Kremlin’s strategy.⁵⁸ Oleinik was labeled a “foreign agent” by Russian authorities in 2024, and there is no evidence connecting these movements to the Kremlin’s covert operations.

Still, Karelian independence advocates aiming to separate Karelia from Russia may unintentionally be exploited by the Kremlin in its information warfare to create an enemy image of Finland. In 2023, Nikolay Patrushev, who was serving as the Secretary of Security Council of Russia at the time, said that there are extremist calls and plans circulating on social media to form a Karelian separatist battalion that would include Finnish citizens.⁵⁹ Thus, Karelian separatist movements may serve as an instrument for the Kremlin in its information campaigns against Finland.

Despite the growing negative effects of the war and the recent rise of separatist groups, Karelian separatism is unlikely to pose a significant threat to the Kremlin. Karelia is a sparsely populated region with a small number of ethnic Karelians or Karelian speakers.⁶⁰ As a result, calls for separatism do not necessarily receive a positive response from the population of the region.

Moreover, a land corridor runs through Eastern Karelia, connecting Moscow to Russia’s Northern fleet in the Murmansk region. This fleet has strategic nuclear weapons on submarines and is vital to Russia’s military power. Therefore, Eastern Karelia is unlikely to be the first place where the Kremlin’s grip would loosen.⁶¹

Despite this, Karelia is significantly affected by the negative impacts of the war in Ukraine. This could result in increasing dissent and nationalism, prompting more Karelians to question their loyalty to the Kremlin. In an extreme situation, this might lead to the emergence of separatist military movements and possibly even to an internal conflict with the central power.

Conclusions

The economic and human impact of Russia’s war varies across the country’s regions. Remote areas with ethnic minorities face higher casualties, while urban regions like St. Petersburg and Moscow see more anti-war sentiment and protests. Poor and underdeveloped parts of Southern Siberia have high casualties but also benefit economically from the conflict. In contrast, major cities like St. Petersburg and Moscow serve as hubs for anti-war protests, but the human cost of the conflict is a lot less apparent there compared to the poorer and remote regions.

⁴⁶ Рота Башкорт (2025), *Официальная страница роты, сформированной из добровольцев Республики Башкортостан, которые с 2022 года воюют в составе ВСУ*, <https://www.rota-bashkort.com/>.

⁴⁷ Loh Matthew (2022), *Russian regional leaders wrote to Putin demanding he stop mobilizing reservists to fight in Ukraine, as chatter about a second draft intensifies* | Business Insider, <https://www.businessinsider.com/russian-lawmakers-write-putin-asking-stop-war-mobilization-2022-11>.

⁴⁸ Слабунова Эмилия (2022), *Эмилия Слабунова*, <https://t.me/Slabunova/1103>.

⁴⁹ Galaktionov Oleg, Vasiliev Aleksey, Sukhanov Yuriy et al. (2023), *Analysis of the forestry sector in the Republic of Karelia under current economic conditions*, E3S Web of Conf. International Scientific Siberian Transport Forum - TransSiberia 2023, 402; Зубаревич Наталья В. (2025), *Влияние санкций на развитие регионов России в 2022–2024 годах*, Журнал Новой экономической ассоциации, 1(66).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Statfor (2015), *Decade Forecast: 2015-2025* | Statfor, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/decade-forecast-2015-2025>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Stasevskij Justas (2023), *Venäjän nakertajat - Venäjältä maanpakoon lähteneet aktivistit uskovat, että Venäjä hajoaa Ukrainan sodan seurauksena*, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20036537>.

⁵⁴ Suur-Suomen Sotilaat (2025), *Projektista Suur-Suomen Sotilaat*, <https://suur-suomensotilaat.com/o-proekte-suur-suomen-sotilaat>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации (2025), *Единый федеральный список организаций, в том числе иностранных и международных организаций, признанных в соответствии с законодательством Российской Федерации террористическими (на 25 августа 2025 г.)*, <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>.

⁵⁷ Karjalan liitto (2022), *Karjalaiset mahdollisen informaatiovaikuttamisen kohteena*, <https://www.karjalanliitto.fi/uutiset/2022/12/karjalaiset-mahdollisen-informaatiovaikuttamisen-kohteena.html>.

⁵⁸ Jääskeläinen Petri (2023), *Toimivaatko Active Club -kamppailukerhot porttina äärioikeistojärjestöihin? – Osa jäsenistä saattaa valmistautua itsenäisyyspäivänä väkivaltaisuksiin* | Seura, <https://seura.fi/asiat/tutkivat/active-club-kamppailukerhot-saattavat-toimia-porttina-aarioikeistojarjestoihin-osa-jasenista-valmistautuu-itsenaisyyspaivana-vakivaltaisuksiin/>.

⁵⁹ TACC (2023), *Патрушев: зарубежные спецслужбы усилили работу по стимулированию сепаратизма в Карелии*, <https://tass.ru/politika/18413339>.

⁶⁰ Stasevskij Justas (2023), *Venäjän nakertajat - Venäjältä maanpakoon lähteneet aktivistit uskovat, että Venäjä hajoaa Ukrainan sodan seurauksena*, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20036537>.

⁶¹ Ibid.



Some of the most notable wartime protests have taken place in regions with significant ethnic minority populations. In 2022, North Caucasians and Siberians protested against Putin's mobilisation decree, and Bashkortostan witnessed one of the largest wartime protests in Russia in 2024 following the detention of a local environmental activist. Noteworthy, regional separatist and independence movements have emerged in various regions that have experienced significant protests or the negative impacts of the war.

Stating that this development poses a major threat to central power or would lead to civil war in Russia may be exaggerated. The Kremlin has stripped regional governments of power, and many regional leaders of ethnic republics are staunch supporters of the war and Putin.⁶²

To date, the Kremlin has maintained control over Russia's regions. The separatist groups have remained on the fringes, and authorities have been able to suppress the protests. However, the Kremlin cannot completely ignore the increasing presence of separatist groups. Regions such as those in the North Caucasus have strong national identities, big populations, and a recent history of separatism.

The Kremlin increasingly uses strategies such as mass detentions, criminal proceedings, facial recognition-based arrests, and new extremism classifications to control protests and marginalise ethnic or regional movements.⁶³ While this approach can keep protesters off the streets, it also diminishes opportunities for feedback and increases the potential for policy mistakes.

Regional disparities among soldiers fighting in Ukraine create more war veterans in some regions. Signs of rising violent crime among Ukraine war veterans are already emerging.⁶⁴ The current conflict in Ukraine involving 650,000 Russian soldiers surpasses the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan, with over a million veterans likely.⁶⁵ If promised benefits for war veterans do not align with reality, the Kremlin may face challenges demobilising veterans. This could lead to heightened tensions in regions with large veteran populations.

The impacts of the war on the Karelian region could have far-reaching implications for the security of Finland and Northern Europe as a whole. Karelian region has sent many soldiers to the front lines, suffered economic consequences from sanctions, and seen the emergence of separatist groups. Proximity to Finland, shared history, and cultural ties could lead to local unrest or support for resistance movements due to casualties, lack of local war support, and economic stagnation.

In an extreme case scenario, Russian civil war would impact Finland's security due to its border with Russia. This could lead to increased migration along the Finnish border, putting strain on border security and refugee management in case of significant displacement.

Uneven impacts of war in Russia can also have broader implications for Northern Europe's security. With internal divisions growing, there is a risk of aggressive foreign policy to deflect from domestic issues. Putin's popularity tends to rise during times of Russia's military conflicts, potentially leading the Kremlin to start another conflict to draw away attention from domestic challenges.⁶⁶

To prepare for and alleviate the security risks related to Russia's internal development, Finland should enhance border monitoring and defence capabilities in the Karelian region. Moreover, Finland should intensify cooperation with its allies to monitor developments in Russia's ethnic minority regions. It is also essential for Finland to develop contingency plans for managing increased migration from Russia. Lastly, to improve security situation in the Northern Europe, Finland and its allies should continue diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions between Russia and the West.

To conclude, Finland must continue to bolster its defense preparedness, engage in cooperative defence arrangements with its allies, and monitor potential Russian military escalations in its proximity. The internal fragility of Russia, marked by stark regional disparities, could have long-lasting geopolitical consequences that must be closely analysed for future security planning.

Additional Information

PhD Researcher, MSocSc Eemil Mitikka (eemil.mitikka@mil.fi) worked as a Researcher at the Finnish Defence Research Agency in 2025. He is currently a Researcher in the Russia Group at the Finnish National Defence University's Department of Warfare.

⁶² Shtepa Vadim (2025), *Militarization of Regional Policy Leads to Decline of Federalism in Russia*, Eurasia Daily Monitor, 22(59), The Jamestown Foundation, <https://jamestown.org/program/militarization-of-regional-policy-leads-to-decline-of-federalism-in-russia/>.

⁶³ OVD-Info (2023), *Russian wartime repression report. One year since the full-scale invasion*, <https://ovdinfo.legal/instruction/russian-wartime-repression-report-one-year-full-scale-invasion#1>; The Insider (2024), *Russia labels Free Russia Foundation as "extremist" for alleged ties to non-existent "separatist movement"*, <https://theins.ru/en/news/273382>.

⁶⁴ Goble Paul (2025), *Russia Faces Upsurge in Crime as Veterans Return from Ukraine* | Eurasia Daily Monitor, <https://jamestown.org/russia-faces-upsurge-in-crime-as-veterans-return-from-ukraine/>.

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⁶⁶ Svenonius Ola & Mitikka Eemil (2022), *Propaganda and Actual support – How to Make Sense of Russian Polls After February 24th?*, FOI Memo 7935, <https://www.foi.se/en/foi/reports/report-summary.html?reportNo=FOI%20Memo%207935>.