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Universities and the system: «Groza» presents a study on Russian authorities' pressure on students and academia. Specially for OVD-Info.

[Русская версия](#)

After the beginning of the war against Ukraine, Russian authorities began to interfere more frequently in the work of universities and academic projects. University administrations began to restrict the political activity of students and professors more severely, change regulations on student self-governance, use ethics committees as a tool of pressure, and encourage whistleblowing within educational institutions.

At the same time, the persecution of independent educational initiatives intensified: from 2022 to 2025, 21 educational projects were included in the register of «undesirable organisations». Another 10 educational projects were added to the list of «foreign agents» by the Ministry of Justice. 71 scientists and teachers have also been granted «foreign agent» status since the beginning of the war.

«Groza» and OVD-Info analysed and compiled all known cases of pressure on universities to examine how academia has changed during war time — from structural changes in student governance and administrative persecution to repression targeting independent academic projects and ordinary students.

In order to understand how students themselves view the changes in the academic environment, «Groza» and «OVD-Info» also conducted a survey among 201 students from 79 universities and colleges in 24 cities.

Key findings:

- University administrations deprive student self-governance of autonomy: they change regulations on student councils, dissolve independent councils, and promote loyal candidates.
- Since 2022, there are at least 10 recorded cases of pressure on student councils. .
- Pressure is brought not only on student councils, but also on other student associations: students face threats and punishments for criticising the university.
- The practice of extrajudicial pressure is forming: from 2022 to 2024, 131 cases of pressure on students and faculty were recorded (including 70 student expulsions and 32 faculty dismissals).
- A culture of snitching and denunciation is spreading: in 9 cases, university administrators explicitly called on students to report their peers.
- The persecution of educational projects has intensified: between 2022 and 2025, 21 organisations related to academia are recognised as «undesirable» and 10 as «foreign agents».
- The Ministry of Justice has added at least 71 teachers and scientists to the register of «foreign agents».
- From 2022 to 2024, 113 students and 34 faculty members were charged with «discrediting the Russian armed forces» cases (Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences).
- According to OVD-Info, 325 people — 190 students and 135 teachers — have been involved in politically motivated criminal cases since 2009.
- Students are being used as an administrative resource: at least 559 times between 2022 and 2024, students were herded to rallies, campaigns and patriotic events.

- Students were also pressured to vote, with 13 cases recorded in 2023 and a whole 147 in 2024, including campaigning, being forced to register to vote electronically, and bribery.

RESTRICTIONS OF RIGHT TO ASSEMBLY

University administrations began to change the regulations on student councils and promote loyal students, including representatives of pro-government youth organisations. At the same time, university administrations began to put more pressure on members of informal student associations, initiative groups and other students who openly speak out about everyday, administrative and political problems at universities.

Pressure on student councils

In September 2024, Arsham Bakhmannezhadfad, former head of the student council at Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU), **withdrew** from the university to protect his supporters. According to Bakhmannezhadfad, the FEFU administration compiled a list of «undesirable students» of forty people, ten of whom helped Arsham work in the student council and criticised the university administration. In particular, they opposed amendments to the regulations on expulsion of students. Those on the list were prevented by the university administration from working at the university, from participating in events such as the Far Eastern Economic Forum, and from receiving grants and threatening to withdraw their scholarships.

This is one example of how university administrations deprive student self-governance. University administrations **change** the rules by which students elect student councils, put pressure on activists who talk about problems in the

university, dissolve inconvenient student councils and promote loyal candidates for student government.



cases of pressure on student councils

Since 2022, the regulations on student councils or their elections have changed in at least eight universities, such as **MGIK, Moscow State University, Higher School of Economics, Plekhanov Russian Economic University, Northwestern Federal University of the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration**, and four other universities. One of the changes is the power of the university administration over composition of the student council and the abolish student assembly. This helps university administrations to promote their loyal candidates to student councils — for example, representatives of the state movement of children and youth «Movement of the First» or «patriotic» organisations.

According to Groza's survey, at least 29 universities and three colleges have introduced representatives of the Movement of the First, the Russian Student Detachments, or other pro-government movements to their student councils.

WHAT POWERS DO STUDENT COUNCILS HAVE AND WHY ARE THEY NEEDED?



A student council is an elected body of student **government** that **represents** the interests of students, participates in a dialogue with the administration, organises extracurricular life and helps to solve student issues. According to Article 26 of the Law «On Education», student councils can **influence decisions** within the university — for example, they can participate in decision-making concerning

the educational process and extracurricular life of students, the food options offered in cafeterias, or solving everyday problems in classrooms and dormitories.

There are student councils in almost all major universities. They remain one of the few formal instruments through which students can collectively declare their interests. When active, they can affect rules on student accommodation in dormitories, internal regulations, university transparency, and student involvement in decision-making.

There is at least one university where the student council was dissolved. In April 2024, the rectorate of the Higher School of Economics dissolved the council because the majority of its members opposed the inclusion of a representative of the Movement of the First in the student government. The HSE administration also obliged the student council to cover its work only on media resources agreed with the university administration, and thanks to administrative support, members of the «military-patriotic» organisation "White Raven» and Georgy Kurakin, an employee of the Institute of World Economy and Military Strategy, were **elected** to the student council.

In October 2024, the administration of Plekhanov Russian Economic University also **changed** the regulations for Student Council elections. According to the new rules, only the university administration staff and students chosen by them could decide on the admission of candidates to elections at all levels. A few months later, the student council **included** the REUPATRIOT club and representatives of the Movement of the First.



Events dedicated to Defender of the Fatherland Day at Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, February 21, 2025 / Photo: group «REUPATRIOT | STUDENT PATRIOTIC CLUB»



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In May 2023, MGIK was to hold the next elections of the student council, but the administration postponed them several times and later abandoned them altogether. The university administration **developed** a new regulation on the student council, which significantly reduced its rights. Later, the university held student self-government elections according to a prepared scenario, in which the winners were predetermined.

After the winter term in 2023, St Petersburg State University expelled Pavel Arefichev, head of the history faculty's student council's research committee. The reason given was «poor academic performance». However, according to Studen' — a student-run publication — one lecturer mocked Arefichev's correct answers, while another accused him of «anti-communist views» during a modern history exam.

In 2024, the rules governing the history faculty's student council were revised. References to the council as a self-governing body were **removed**, and its role was reduced to maintaining discipline and upholding «university

traditions». Direct elections held within student groups were replaced with a multi-level system in which students were represented by ‘delegates’ from each grade, while the authority to appoint members of the student council was transferred to student associations approved by the university administration. The system of permanent committees—once a key channel for student representation—was also dismantled.

A post on the council’s VKontakte page (Russia’s equivalent of Facebook) **read:** «The Student Council of the Institute of History at St Petersburg State University was dissolved by the university administration on 15 June 2023. Members of the presidium were expelled on political grounds, and the charter was forcibly rewritten to eliminate all democratic freedoms and student self-governance».

Pressure on Student Organisations

Alongside student councils, university administrators often target both formal student organisations and informal student groups. Their goal is to control student activity and intimidate those who show initiative.

For example, university administrations instructed students not to speak publicly about everyday problems on campus. In December 2024, the administration of Bashkir Medical University — located in Ufa, a major city in the Urals — **threatened** students with expulsion if they spoke out about bedbug infestations in dormitories during an inspection by Rospotrebnadzor — Russia’s consumer rights watchdog. Despite the warning, one student posted about the issue in a VKontakte group. Unknown individuals then attempted to identify them, while the heads of academic clubs encouraged members to file complaints against the group that had published the post.



Cases of Pressure on Student Organisations

In August 2024, Yekaterina Levdina, head of public relations at MGIK — a Moscow-based university of arts and culture — prohibited dormitory residents not to create group chats unless dormitory staff were included in them.

In the official chat, Levdina also announced a shortage of rooms in the dormitory. When several students reacted to the message with a clown emoji, she disabled their ability to post. Three others were banned for criticising the announcement; to regain access, they were told to contact the associate dean.

A more widely-reported case involved students at the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow, who protested against plans to open a new political studies department named after Ivan Ilyin. In April 2024, a group of students created a VKontakte page titled «Russian State University for the Humanities Against the Ilyin School», opposing the decision to name the department after Ilyin — a Russian émigré philosopher known for his ultraconservative views and for publicly endorsing Hitler’s rise to power in 1933.

The students launched a petition that gathered more than 10,000 signatures and organised a street campaign, posting flyers across the city. The university administration urged students not to distribute any materials related to the new department. Three activists involved in the campaign were summoned for a meeting with university officials, who attempted to persuade them that they were «agents of the West».

In late May 2024, students at Kazan Federal University raised concerns over plans to evict them from dormitories in the University Village to make way for the BRICS

Games. The university denied the eviction claims but later announced that the start of the academic year would be postponed until November, citing the BRICS summit, which was scheduled to take place in the Village in late October. The administration described the move as «dormitory clearance».

In response, students launched a petition against the planned evictions and formed an activist group called «Keep Our Dorms». In July, students also **gathered** signatures on-site in the University Village. A week later, Telegram channels linked to regional security forces published videos of students collecting signatures and **threatened** to share their personal details with law enforcement.

The administration of the Institute of Social and Philosophical Sciences and Mass Communications at Kazan Federal University effectively took control of the university's political science club — a local initiative started by political science students. The institute **summoned** students for a meeting at which he declared that «such things cannot be allowed». The club's leadership was forced to suspend activities for a month, which they later resumed by **hosting** a meeting with a local MP from United Russia.

At some universities, administrations have intervened even in relatively harmless, apolitical student initiatives. In October 2024, for example, the Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH) **prohibited** Halloween celebrations. The university's student affairs department issued guidance to lecturers stating that no event held on campus on 31 October «should even remotely resemble Halloween». Not long beforehand, State Duma Deputy Speaker Boris Chernyshov (LDPR) **proposed** renaming Halloween as the «Night of Mysterious Stories» in order to prevent young people from absorbing «foreign influences».

In February 2025, Buryat State University **banned** the celebration of Valentine's Day, citing a fabricated recommendation from the Ministry of Justice. Curators also asked students not to publish posts related to 14 February on social media to avoid complaints. The university later **denied** that any official ban had been introduced.

MECHANISMS OF PRESSURE ON STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF

OVD-Info has documented 131 incidents of extrajudicial pressure on university and college students and lecturers between 2022 and 2024. Of these, 76 cases concerned students and 55 involved academic staff.

131

cases of extrajudicial pressure on students
and lecturers

Denunciations in Higher Education

At least 70 students were expelled and 32 lecturers were dismissed or coerced into resigning. The most common reason for such pressure was opposition to the war. In some cases, repression began with denunciations — filed by students about their peers and lecturers, or by lecturers about students and their colleagues. Since 2022, denunciations have become a systematic tool of coercion, either encouraged or directly supported by university administrations, and sometimes initiated from within the academic community itself.

> 17

reported cases of denunciations

Reporting systems based on internal denunciations across universities have fostered a culture of fear and surveillance, stifling free expression and curtailing students' political engagement. Since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine, university administrations have actively employed denunciations as a tool to suppress independent views. These practices have contributed to a broader erosion of individual freedoms and a climate of distrust across academic institutions.

According to a «Groza» survey, 127 out of 201 students (63%) said they were afraid to express their opinions within their university. Some respondents noted that their fear was largely shaped by the attitudes of their lecturers and classmates. Thirty-two students (15.9%) reported that they or someone they knew had been subject of a denunciation. Twenty-nine (14.4%) reported receiving threats from classmates or staff due to their political or civic views, and three others said they had faced psychological pressure and moral condemnation.



universities' administrations have encouraged students and staff to report on classmates, colleagues, and local activists

In autumn 2023, students at the Belgorod Institute of Culture and Belgorod Agricultural University were asked to **subscribe to a denunciation chatbot called «Cyber Patrol».** The bot sends users «assignments, » such as submitting complaints against online groups that allegedly „discredit“ the military. That same autumn, a pro-war Telegram channel in the Urals **urged** students and staff at Ural State University to report individuals who did not support the war in Ukraine.

In May 2023, the administration of Penza State University **urged students to report classmates whose**

behaviour «seemed suspicious» — for example, if they had become more reserved or changed their lifestyle. The administration used an FSB announcement as justification, claiming a «sabotage and terrorist attack» was being planned in the region, possibly involving young people aged 15 to 21.

Efforts to institutionalise a culture of surveillance via monitoring of classmates' social media were made at the Northern State Medical University in Arkhangelsk (NSMU) in 2022 and at Tyumen State University (TyumSU) in 2025. NSMU **sought** out a volunteer to monitor fellow students' social media pages; while at Tyumen State, students were **asked** to check their peers' accounts for «extremist content».

In January 2023, students of Omsk State University were **urged** to complain about the Telegram channel of local regional activist Daniil Chebykin because he had previously reported that the university had forced students to participate in 'patriotic' rallies and hand out call-up papers. According to the activist, the students were forced to do so by the university administration.

In March 2024 at Far Eastern Federal University, the administration, which had previously imposed bans on «LGBT propaganda», criticising the state and «discrediting» the army, **required** students to report classmates for misconduct.

The culture of denunciation is developed not only in universities, where staff and students are asked to do so. For example, in June 2023, history teacher Mikhail Belousov was **dismissed** from St. Petersburg State University after a **denunciation** by students who were members of the 'Academic Brotherhood'. The conflict arose over the lecturer's posts in a chat with students, where Belousov criticised the 'Special Military Operation' rhetoric and called the endorsement of 'ruscism' 'disgusting'. Following the teacher's dismissal, seven students were **expelled** from the

university for their anti-war stance and alleged association with Belousov.

MORE ON THE CONFLICT AT THE ST. PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF HISTORY



As the media ‘Bumaga’ wrote, the expulsion of students was **preceded** by a protracted conflict between students with an anti-war stance and students who support the war in Ukraine. The confrontation escalated after the anti-war students won the elections to the student council. Soon after that, a **series of publications** appeared in propaganda media, where anti-war students were accused of ‘russophobia’ and disrespect for volunteer Fyodor Solomonov, who died in the war against Ukraine. The grounds for expelling the members of the student council were statements made by the students in chats, which the university’s ethics committee considered ‘incompatible with the status of a SPbSU student’. Later, the head of the information committee and editor-in-chief of the student media ‘Student’ Alexandra Zaitseva was also **expelled** from the university for her post on VKontakte, where she spoke out against the expulsion of students.

Such cases are not isolated. According to a 2024 OVD-Info **study**, since the beginning of the war against Ukraine, 54 university teachers and 10 employees of colleges and technical schools have fallen under politically motivated extrajudicial pressure.

51 out of all 148

cases of pressure on teachers at all levels of education started with denunciation

University professors account for about 27 per cent of all denunciations in the academic environment, while college professors account for 8 per cent. In nine cases university teachers were denounced by students themselves, in one case by the **mother of a female student**.

Faculty members also file denunciations against students. For example, in December 2023, in Krasnoyarsk, FSB officers **detained** Timofey Chizhov, who had been expelled from the Siberian State University of Science and Technology for anti-war statements. Presumably, the denunciation of the young man was filed by a professor of the university. At the same time, the reason for the search could have been a video in which Chizhov argues about the war against Ukraine with one of the university employees. The young man was released home but charged with an administrative case of ‘discrediting the army’.

Students also denounce their colleagues and classmates. At Far Eastern Federal University, student council member Artem Mandritsa publicly **demand**ed that another student council member be expelled for mentioning the existence of an ‘alternative opinion’ about the war in Ukraine in Russian society. Mandritsa accused him of disrespecting the military and said that ‘such people have no place at the university.’ The university rector thanked Mandritsa for his ‘patriotic stance’, while the student council declared itself ‘apolitical’, calling Mandritsa’s statements ‘personal opinion’.

ETHICS COMMISSIONS

Even before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, university administrations began to regularly use **ethics commissions** to pressure politically active students and professors. Organisations reviewing moral conflicts within the university have the right to recommend students for expulsion and professors for dismissal.

For example, over the past seven years, the ethics commission at SPbSU, **according** to the university's website, has considered cases of at least 35 students and professors related to their political activism. Thus, the first such case occurred in 2018, when three students who participated in the 'He is not our Tsar' rally against Putin's inauguration were **summoned** to the commission. The students, as 'Bumaga' **wrote**, were reprimanded.

In 2021, after rallies in support of Alexei Navalny, the St. Petersburg State University Ethics Commission, at the **request** of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, **reviewed** the cases of 15 detained students, recognising that all of them violated the second paragraph of the University Student Code. The commission also **reviewed** the participation of associate professor Yuri Ivanenko in the protest, without specifying which point was violated, but noting the inadmissibility of «illegal actions» on his part in the future.

In 2022, St. Petersburg State University students were detained at anti-war rallies. Because of this, the university administration planned to **expel** 81 people, but it did **not bring together** an ethics commission. The administration of St. Petersburg State University talked with 20 students at the meeting and condemned them.

In September 2023, the St. Petersburg State University Commission **reviewed** the case of philologist Svetlana Drugoveyko-Dolzhanskaya, who **appeared** in court in the case of artist Sasha Skochilenko as an expert for the defence. Then Drugoveyko-Dolzhanskaya **criticised** the linguistic expertise of her colleagues at St. Petersburg State University, Olga Safonova and Anastasia Grishanina. According to the St. Petersburg State University Ethics Commission, during her work, Drugoveyko-Dolzhanskaya «violated the moral and ethical norms of the university.»



Svetlana Drugoveyko-Dolzhanskaya speaks in court in the case of Sasha Skochilenko, May 2, 2023 / Photo: SOTA

According to «Fontanka», a newspaper based in St. Petersburg, in 2024, two students from Drugoveyko-Dolzhanskaya were expelled on a closed thesis defense. Another student, Maria Kiselyova, was expelled from the university for violating the internal code. She was detained for laying flowers in memory of Alexei Navalny.

Here are more examples of how the administration uses Ethics Commissions to pressure universities:

- In September 2022, the Moscow State University Ethics Commission recommended **expelling** two female students for condemning the «patriotic» action of fellow student Stepan Antropov.
- In December 2022, the Higher School of Economics fired associate professor Ilya Inishev for an anti-war post with profanity. The Ethics Commission found his act «immoral».
- In June 2023, Maxim Belomytsev, a student at Kuban State University (one of the biggest universities in the Russian south), was expelled for «gross» violations of the Corporate Culture Code, including non-compliance with the dress code and disrespect for «family values». Belomytsev published posts in support of Ukraine and reviews of cosmetics, for which two administrative cases were brought against him: for «discrediting» the army and «LGBT propaganda».

Beside that, in July 2024, Far Eastern Federal University also **updated** its code of ethics, despite the fact that the student council opposed the changes. The new document prohibited students and staff from «slandering» the university, using «offensive language» and coming to the university in untidy or too revealing clothes. At the same time, the document itself did not specify what exactly is considered «defamatory information». Prior to that, in April 2024, the university administration adopted amendments to the regulations on the expelling procedure, making it possible to expel students if they were brought to administrative or criminal offences in cases related to public order and security. Presumably, the changes were made to expel three students from Boris Nadezhdin's staff, who **were detained** for «LGBT propaganda». However, they were not expelled, and Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science subsequently **recognised** the amendments as violating the rights of students.

The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration Code of ethics was also **changed** in November 2024. Staff and students were required to show «respect to the state and the President,» protect the academy's reputation and refrain from rudeness and swearing. Students can be expelled for violating the code, and teachers face firing.

Точное число использования этических комиссий в качестве инструмента давления, неизвестно.

The exact number of cases in which Ethics Commissions have been used as oppressive tools is unknown.

THE STATE AGAINST ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

The Russian authorities and security officials are also putting pressure on academic projects and institutions in general: for ideological reasons, universities are closing down research areas and faculties, educational institutions are being declared «undesirable» organisations or «foreign agents».

Projects in the education sector, but are not directly related to it, also face repression—for example, media outlets that highlight the problems of higher education, and foundations that finance educational organisations, research by Russian scientists, and provide scholarships for students.

The foundations of the American philanthropist George Soros «Open Society» and «Assistance» **became** one of the first victims of such oppression. In 2015, they were recognised as «undesirable» organisations as a part of the authorities' **actions** against the so-called «soft aggression» of foreign NGOs, which allegedly influenced Russia's domestic policy.

Later, in 2021, Bard College, a private American university that collaborated with St Petersburg State University, was

also **declared** an «undesirable» organisation due to donations from the Open Society Foundations.

WHAT CONNECTS ST PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY WITH BARD COLLEGE?



The Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences (informally known as «Smolny») had been operating at St Petersburg State University in close collaboration with Bard College for more than 20 years. Smolny graduates received dual degrees from both St Petersburg State University and Bard College. Additionally, academic and student exchanges were established between the universities.

Due to the Prosecutor General's Office decision, St Petersburg State University had to completely suspend cooperation with Bard College: the dual degree programme and student exchanges ceased. Initially, Smolny's fate remained in limbo, but by October 2022 it became known that St Petersburg State University would close the «Liberal Arts and Sciences» programme. Subsequently, students began to be enrolled in a bachelor's programme called «Arts and Humanities» with a different, less liberal curriculum. Faculty members who resigned or were dismissed organised an educational project in exile called **«Smolny Without Borders»**, which continues the Russian-American faculty.

After the start of the war against Ukraine, cases of pressure on organisations connected to the academic sphere increased.

In October 2023, the list of «undesirable» organisations was supplemented by Central European University (CEU), also **founded** with George Soros's support. **According to** the

Prosecutor General's Office, «the organisation's efforts are focused on discrediting the special military operation and Russia's political leadership». After being assigned «undesirable» status, CEU **announced** that the university had ceased cooperation with Russian partners and stopped promoting its own educational programmes in Russia. For example, until 2022 the university **collaborated** with the St Petersburg branch of the Higher School of Economics on a faculty exchange programme.

More active persecution of educational initiatives by Russian authorities began in 2023. Six organisations were then declared «undesirable» and four were labelled «foreign agents». Among the undesirable organisations were one university, two educational projects, three research centres and one foundation. Among the foreign agents were two educational projects, one media outlet and one research centre.

- In November, the Prosecutor General's Office **declared** the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) an «undesirable» organisation. The authorities considered that «under the guise of so-called humanitarian and scientific projects, the Centre collects information about the activities of government bodies and internal political processes, based on which it prepares analytical reports that distort the real state of affairs in our country and bear a distinctly anti-Russian character». After being assigned this status, many authors from Russia withdrew ready texts for ZOiS. As noted in a Deutsche Welle article, even scholars who have left are reluctant to cooperate with the organisation.
- A month later, the Ministry of Justice **added** the Academic Network «Eastern Europe», which helps scholars from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine relocate to Germany, to the list of «undesirable» organisations.

In March 2023, the Ministry of Justice added «Free University» to the list of «undesirable» organisations. The Prosecutor General's Office decided that «the educational institution's teaching staff popularises the activities of extremist organisations», and the literature used by the university bears an «anti-Russian character».

WHAT IS «FREE UNIVERSITY»?



«Free University» is an educational project founded in 2020 by former Higher School of Economics lecturers Kirill Martynov, Yulia and Viktor Gorbatov, and Elena Lukyanova. Shortly before the «Free University» appeared, the university administration did not renew contracts with the project's founders. As Doxa **reported**, the administration then added the lecturers to a list of «unreliable» individuals. The university's press service noted that the Higher School of Economics leadership terminated contracts with the lecturers due to university «reorganisation».

After ending cooperation with the Higher School of Economics, Martynov, the Gorbatovs and Lukyanova decided to **create** an independent educational project, «free from administrative pressure and censorship». The project's task was to «rebuild the university from scratch, freeing teachers from all administrative dictates». After the organisation was declared «undesirable», the university continued to operate anyway, but outside Russia.

- **In July 2023, the Ministry of Justice declared Sergey Chernyshov**, the founder of the Novosibirsk private college Novocollege, a «foreign agent». He was given the corresponding status due to foreign students paying for their tuition and refunding money for an Airbnb booking in 2021. Due to the new status, Chernyshov was forced to leave Novocollege in June 2023, but in the same month the college **was fined** 50 thousand rubles due to the fact that the college management refused to hold «important conversations». A year later, Novocollege **closed**. About 1.5 thousand people studied in the organisation.
- **Since the end of 2023, the Ministry of Justice has declared several projects related to education to be foreign agents:** in November 2023, the student magazine **Groza**, in March 2024, the media for the academic community **T-Invariant**, and in December 2024, the educational project **University Transparency Laboratory (Loupe)**. Roskomnadzor **blocked** the websites of Groza and T-Invariant in Russia, and Lupa, after assigning the status, **announced** that it was closing its online course.

Russian universities are also closing individual programmes on their own. For example, in June 2024, the private European University at St. Petersburg (EUSP) **closed** its political science department, and students who had not completed their studies were transferred to the history department. The dean of the department, Grigory Golosov, went on an «extended leave». Before that, in 2023, the St. Petersburg city prosecutor's office **conducted an inspection** of the university «for extremism, » during which security forces **confiscated** eight books from the university library and fined 70,000 rubles for participating in an „undesirable“ organisation. The university had previously **received** grants from Soros foundations.

WHAT IS EUSP?



The European University at St. Petersburg is a private humanities university founded in 1994. In 2008, the Dzerzhinsky District Court of St. Petersburg **revoked** EUSP's educational license due to «fire safety violations». Presumably, the university's problems arose because of a programme to train election observers. After denunciations and complaints to the Prosecutor General's Office, the university closed this programme. However, a month after a public campaign in support of the university, the university itself continued its work. In 2016, after 8 years, the Russian authorities **again tried** to revoke EUSP's educational license. However, in 2018, the university's license was finally **returned**. Currently, EUSP has not been declared either a «foreign agent» or an «undesirable» organisation.

PROFESSORS-"FOREIGN AGENTS»

The persecution of educational organisations is just one of the instruments of pressure on academia, which is directed not only against academic institutions, but also against individual teachers and scientists. The authorities include in the register of foreign agents those who openly criticise state policy, participate in anti-war initiatives, work in independent educational projects, the media and foreign research centers.

We analysed the list of individuals-"foreign agents» — **from 2021 to 2025, at least 74 university professors and scientists were included in the register — every tenth of the total number of individuals-"foreign agents» (there are 575 people in total)**. Before the war, in 2021, only three of them were included in the register — the founder and director of the «Center for the Defence of Media Rights»

Galina Arapova, the coordinator of the Perm branch of the «Golos» movement **Vitaly Kovin**, and political scientist and coordinator of the «Golos-Siberia» foundation **Alexey Petrov**. After Arapova and Kovin were declared «foreign agents», they were fired from the universities where they taught — **Voronezh State University** and **Perm Humanitarian Pedagogical University**, respectively. Petrov **was fired** from Irkutsk State University in 2016, before he was included on the list of «foreign agents». Then activists from the pro-government movement «National Liberation Movement» wrote a denunciation against him, according to whom the professor allegedly went to foreign conferences and «skipped» his classes.

After the beginning of war, teachers and scientists began to be included in the list of «foreign agents» much more often. The record year was 2023 — then 27 people were declared «foreign agents». In 2022 and 2024 — 18 people each.

In most cases, the university dismissed employees before they were added to the registry—with at least 45 such instances recorded. Following the Ministry of Justice’s ruling, at least eight individuals either resigned or were dismissed between 2021 and 2025.

CRIMINAL OR ADMINISTRATIVE PROSECUTION OF STUDENTS

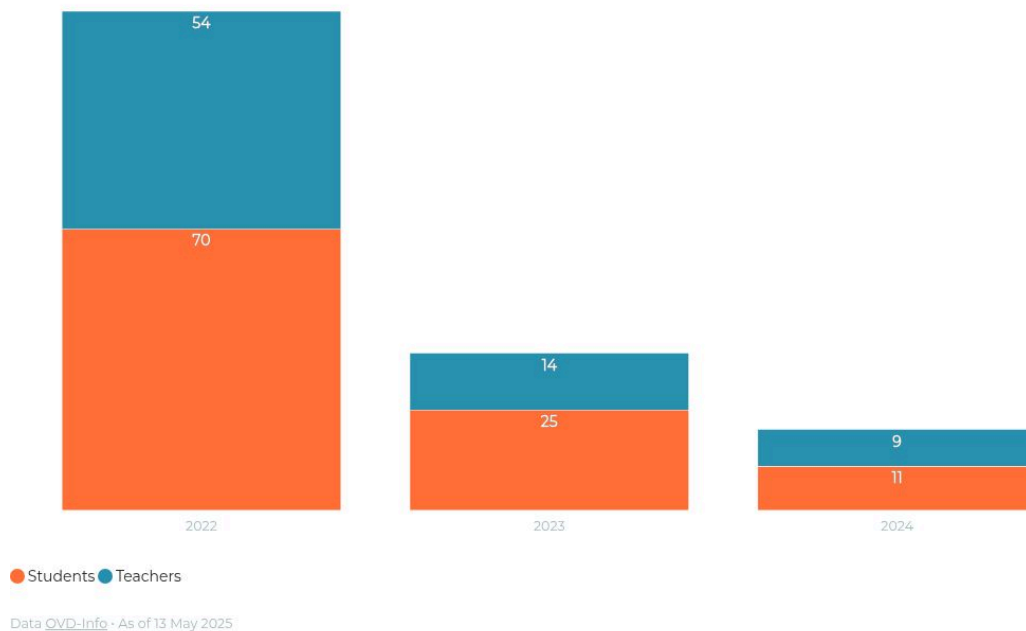
Administrative cases

The total number of administrative cases initiated under the charge of «discrediting the armed forces» (Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences) has been declining in recent years. While 5,600 cases were opened in 2022, this figure dropped to 2,900 in 2023 and fell further to just over 2,000 in 2024. A corresponding decrease has been observed

in cases involving students and academic staff, with numbers falling from 124 in 2022 to just 20 in 2024.

The highest number of «discreditation» cases against students and faculty were recorded in Moscow (21), followed by Sverdlovsk Oblast and St. Petersburg (10 each), as well as nine in occupied Crimea.

Most «army discreditation» cases against students and academics were initiated in 2022



* A Flourish data visualization

Administrative cases against students and university staff often stem from distribution of anti-war leaflets, social media posts, participation in anti-war protests, or simply voicing opposition to the war in Ukraine.

For example, in St. Petersburg, student Polina Mityanina was fined 30,000 roubles for putting up anti-war leaflets in March 2022. The young woman had entered the lift in her apartment building with a stack of leaflets when she was spotted by a property manager. Under the pretext of checking her documents, he lured her into a service room, locked the

door, and called the police. Mityanina was held at the police station for 30 hours, the leaflets were confiscated, and she was later fined under the «discreditation of the armed forces» charge.

Other notable cases:

- In Moscow, two students were **fined** 55,000 roubles for placing candy at the monument to Lesya Ukrainka in January 2023. Despite their claims of merely studying nearby, the police confiscated their phones, detained them, and brought charges citing both «army discreditation» and involvement in an unauthorised demonstration. Case materials included protest signs that the students denied owning.
- In Nizhny Novgorod, music college student Dmitry was **fined** 30,000 roubles for a «No to war» status on his VKontakte social media profile in March 2023. He alleged that the college's acting director, Andrei Pankratov, had made the complaint and reported him. The charge was based on the «army discreditation» article.
- In occupied Crimea, Dmitry Tolstenko, an associate professor at Crimea Federal University, was **fined** 32,000 roubles for a video featuring the slogans «*Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!*» in November 2023. He was charged with «discrediting the army» and «displaying extremist symbols».

113 students and 34 academics
have faced «army discreditation» charges

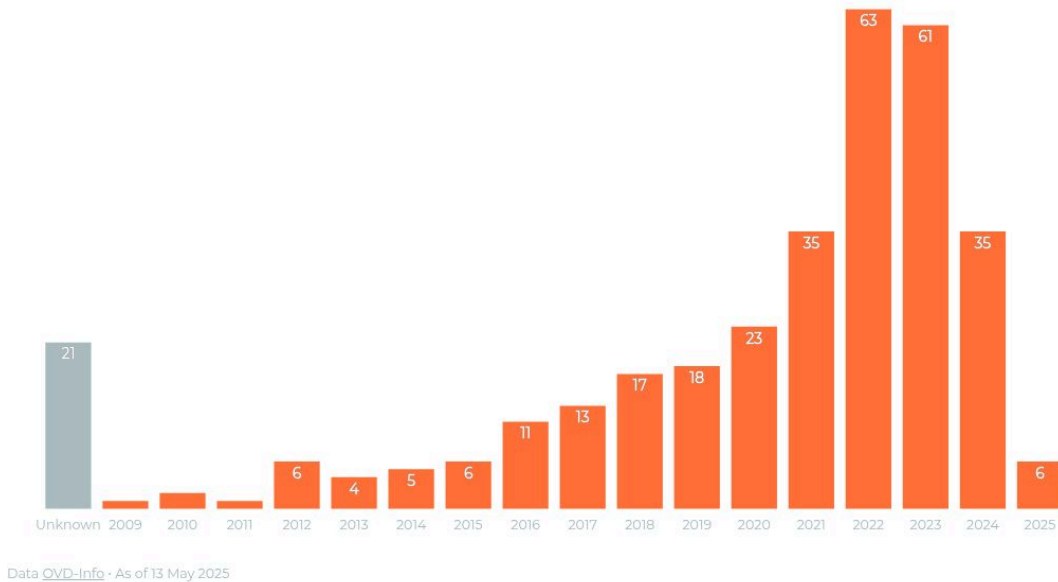
CRIMINAL CASES

According to OVD-Info, politically motivated prosecution of students and university staff in Russia began long before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Since 2009, at least 325 individuals have faced politically motivated criminal charges — comprising 190 students and 135 faculty members. Geographically, these cases were concentrated in Moscow (54 cases), with Bashkortostan and St. Petersburg recording 20 cases each.

The number of politically motivated criminal cases in Russia surged dramatically in 2021 during protests supporting Alexei Navalny (521 cases, compared to an annual average of 250 in previous years). **Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, repression intensified further (861 cases).** This trend similarly affected students and lecturers who had **actively participated** in 2021–2022 protests or **publicly** condemned the Russian state policies.

Subsequently, the number of politically motivated criminal prosecutions against Russians in general and people associated with universities in particular also declined: the number of politically motivated prosecutions of students and teachers in 2024 reached 35 cases, while in 2022-2023 it was 63 cases in each year. This can probably be attributed to stricter legislation and the resulting fear of public speeches amidst harsh sentences in «anti-war» cases. In addition, the decrease in the number of political persecutions at universities may have been influenced by mass emigration among teachers and academics.

The number of criminal cases against students and teachers rose by almost two times during the first years of war



* A Flourish data visualization

STUDENTS AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCE

Universities and civil servants on a regular basis use students as props in order to create an illusion of wide support for the government. For example, students are forced to vote in elections, attend patriotic events and write letters to soldiers. Sometimes this happens under the cover of «recommendations» and silent pressure from teachers, and sometimes under the threats of dismissal or blackmailing.

As a rule, students are rounded up to rallies and concerts on memorable dates, such as Victory Day, Defender of the Fatherland Day, the day of the «annexation» of Crimea, and Putin’s birthday. In 2022, there are new events that require a crowd: the day of the «annexation» of the LDPR, meetings with the military, Z-rallies, and other events related to the war against Ukraine.

Military and political events

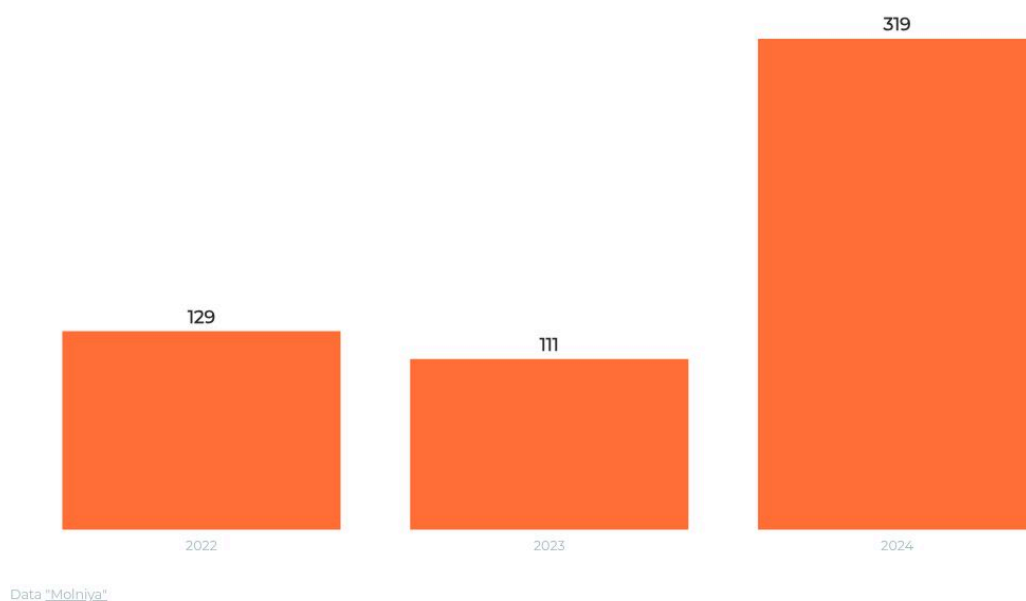
Overall, according to the calculations of the human rights project for students, «Molnia» («Lightning»), from 2022 up till 2024, students were forced to attend or participate in political and military events 559 times. In 2022 — 129 cases, in 2023 — 111, and in 2024 — 319. .

- In September, 2022, students of Omsk State University (OmSU) were **forced** to participate in Z-rally — students were promised exemption from classes.
- At Perm State National Research University, KVN participants were **forced** to attend a rally dedicated to the support for «annexation» of LDPR. They were threatened that if they did not attend the rally, they would not be able to perform at the district committee of the House of Culture.
- In October of the same year, students of St. Petersburg colleges were **rounded up** onto Palace Square in order to congratulate Putin on his birthday.
- **In September, 2022, at RANEPA Ekaterinburg branch students were rounded up for a meeting with deputies in order to discuss the war against Ukraine.** It was impossible to refuse to attend the event — classes were replaced by this discussion. At the event students were forced to write letters to soldiers which were sent to the front line with chocolate.
- **At the end of October, 2022, students of RANEPA Lipetsk branch were forced to attend the show «Polite people», where it was promised to provide «the maximum effect of presence» at war.**
- **Students at South Ural State Institute of Arts were forced to write letters to the front line** — they were **forced** to participate in the all-Russian movement «Letter to the Soldier». One of the heads of the university departments told her students that «this is not supposed to be done from the heart — it's your academic duty».
- In November, students of Syktyvkar Polytechnic College were **forced** to sew hoodies and stretchers for recruits.

- In December, students of Tomsk Music College were **forced** to perform for the recruits — students were not warned in front of whom they were to perform.
- In 2022, **OmSU**, **SibMed** and **TSU** students were forced to hand out call-up papers after the announcement of mobilization. They were promised «financial support», exemption from classes and were threatened to be dismissed.

In spring, 2023, Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation **initiated a mass movement «Universities for the front!». According to this initiative universities collect and send humanitarian aid to the front: clothes, medicine, devices and letters for soldiers. More than 500 universities now take part in the movement.**

Students were forced to attend politicised events at least 559 times



* A Flourish data visualization

Ekaterina Mizulina's tours of universities

Among other notable events at universities that took place in 2023-2025 is the tour of Russian universities made by the head of the Safe Internet League, Ekaterina Mizulina. Despite Mizulina's popularity and huge lines to meet her, universities still round up students to her speeches.

In February 2024, Mizulina visited Yekaterinburg, a major city in the Ural Mountains, to give a talk at Ural Federal University. According to the local Telegram channel «Svet. Yekaterinburg» (meaning «Light. Yekaterinburg»), the event **needed** to meet a student attendance «quota». However, the university administration asked to invite only loyal students and preferably not from the journalism faculty. Next, Mizulina traveled to Kazan, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan. There, the administration of the Institute of International Relations at Kazan Federal University **instructed** students to attend the event by order of the director.

In May 2024, she arrived in Voronezh, a large city in southwestern Russia, where students were **forced** to attend the meeting under threat of expulsion. Just fifteen minutes into her speech, many in the audience began leaving the hall.

Mizulina reached Irkutsk, a major city in Siberia, where she spoke at IrNITU. Students were **required** to attend and even made to sing Shaman's song «*Ya russkiy*» («I'm Russian») — all for the sake of «polished video footage».

Participation in Elections

In 2023, in addition to rallies, concerts, and lectures, students were coerced and pressured to take part in elections. According to the Federal Law «On Education,» institutions of higher and secondary education **are required to maintain** political neutrality, while the Federal Law «On Elections» **prohibits** any form of political campaigning within these institutions. Forcing students to participate in elections or imposing political views on them violates the

law and may result in disciplinary, administrative, or criminal liability.

Despite the official ban, in March 2023, **the rector of Mordovia State University compelled students to vote for him in the United Russia** (*Edinaya Rossiya*, President Vladimir Putin's ruling political party) primaries while he was running for a seat in the regional parliament. In Krasnoyarsk Krai, employees of the Krasnoyarsk Construction College and the Siberian Federal University were similarly **pressured** to engage in the United Russia primaries.

In September, during regional elections, a group advisor **at the Novosibirsk College of Food Industry and Processing encouraged students to vote for Governor Andrey Travnikov** and asked them to report back on whether they had cast their ballots. At Novosibirsk State University, the administration **sent** emails to students and staff members urging them to take part in the elections, while in Voronezh, students **were transported** to polling stations by bus. In November 2023, students at the Crimean Federal University were made to **register** in the electronic voting system as part of a regional training exercise for the «Vybory» («Elections») e-voting system and the «Vybory 2.0» digital platform.

Overall, in 2023 the student human rights project «Molnia» recorded 13 violations in universities and colleges in connection with elections and pre-election campaigning.

In 2024 students and staff of institutions of higher and secondary education were more frequently exploited in the context of voting. Over the course of the year, «Molnia» recorded 147 violations related to elections in universities and colleges. That year, Russia **held** presidential elections, additional State Duma by-elections, gubernatorial elections in 25 regions, legislative elections in 13 regions, and municipal elections.

Students and faculty members at at least 27 educational institutions were forced to vote.

In 2024, against the backdrop of the presidential and Moscow City Duma elections, students and faculty at at least seven universities and colleges were asked to register for electronic voting, or their registration was being monitored. This occurred at [Voronezh State University](#), [Tomsk College of Culture and Arts](#), [Nizhny Novgorod State University](#), and [the Russian State University for the Humanities](#)

At universities and colleges, students and faculty were asked to vote either on a specific day or at a designated polling station. For example, at the Siberian State University of Geosystems and Technologies, students [were encouraged](#) to vote on March 15 directly at the university. In exchange, they were promised a voucher for a free meal in the cafeteria. Non-local students were asked to unregister from their home polling stations and register at the one located on the university's premises.

In September 2024, student voters at the Russian University of Cooperation in Kazan (KKI RUK) were also offered bribes. Student representatives from one of the faculties [were asked](#) to report the number of students who had voted, and the group with the highest turnout was promised a «sweet prize». According to Groza's readers, students at the university are frequently compelled to attend «patriotic» lectures in exchange for extra credit and exemptions from classes.

At Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University, students [were forced](#) to register for a quiz dedicated to the presidential election. Teachers were threatened with fines if the number of compelled registrations did not increase. Students were told that those who hadn't registered would be identified by their questionnaire numbers and contacted to explain why they hadn't signed up.

YOUTH POLICY UNTIL 2030: THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES, COLLEGES, AND IDEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Universities and colleges are increasingly functioning not as autonomous educational institutions, but as controlled structures tasked with carrying out ideological objectives. This is explicitly **stated** in the Strategy for the Implementation of Youth Policy until 2030. Among the stated goals are the development of «skills for socially useful work through service», the involvement of participants in the war against Ukraine in educational activities, including within universities and colleges, and «the development of forms of cooperation in the sphere of student upbringing between institutions of higher education and socially oriented non-profit organisations engaged in the patriotic education of youth».

Through updated codes of ethics, reorganisation of student councils, criminal and administrative cases, ethics commissions and public encouragement of whistleblowing, the authorities build loyalty in universities and deprive students and professors of authority.

These developments are unfolding against the backdrop of increased spending on state youth policy, the **launch** of propaganda courses, and the creation of Kremlin-controlled youth organizations such as the Movement of First. Compared to 2022, spending on youth policy **rose** by 40% in 2023, reaching 69 billion rubles. In 2025, the government **plans** to allocate 66 billion rubles for youth policy. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, authorities **have spent** over 91 billion rubles on so-called «patriotic» education. In 2023 and 2024 alone, more than 85 billion rubles were allocated to the corresponding federal programme. Most of the funds are funneled through the Rospatriotcenter and go toward forums, souvenirs, security, and facility repairs.

The academic environment has become a particular focus of state attention, viewed as a space not only for teaching, but also for shaping «correct» attitudes, loyalty, and political passivity. As a result, universities are increasingly being transformed into instruments of ideological control.