



Illustrations: tdrwgz for OVD-Info

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Repression in Russia in 2025. Overview by OVD-Info

ENGLISH

INTRODUCTION

In 2025, the total number of politically motivated criminal cases decreased and returned to pre-war levels. We also note a threefold decrease in the number of arrests at protests compared to 2024—there were fewer of them than in any year of the war. However, this does not indicate a softening of repression. The average length of a sentence increased from six to eight years compared to 2021. At the same time, the year 2025 saw three times more convictions in politically motivated cases than there were before the war.

The scope for confident statements about repression may be shrinking in the overall context. There is a big shift of the pressure into gray areas, as well as an increase in the amount of information concealed by the government. Entire categories of cases (treason, espionage and terrorism) can now be analysed only at an aggregate level—the area as a whole is becoming

politicised, and obtaining information about each individual case, given their sheer number, is more difficult than ever.

The state actively uses extremist and terrorist articles for politically motivated prosecutions and to construct an ideological framework. The prosecution of “foreign agents,” human rights defenders, activists and anyone who actively criticises the government or whom the government perceives as a threat continues. One example of the use of the criminal code for ideological purposes is the fight against LGBT people. The state not only puts people behind bars, but also prosecutes publishers, bookstores and streaming services for providing information about queer relationships.

Internet restrictions in different regions have become routine, and wartime censorship is gradually becoming normalised, although it remains institutionally vague.

Legislation is changing to accommodate repressive practices. In 2025, Russians were prohibited from searching for “extremist” content and advertising VPN services. As in the 1990s, the FSB will now have its own pre-trial detention centres, and foreign agents will no longer be allowed to engage in educational activities. The key trend in lawmaking is a move towards complete control over society. The war with Ukraine currently serves as a justification for this, but it is clear that there will be no reversal.

The year was marked by confrontation in the Altai Republic, with detentions, administrative protocols and criminal prosecution. Foreign citizens and diasporas, migrant workers, students and conscripts face various kinds of large-scale pressure, which cannot always be considered politically motivated, but is impossible to be ignored.

This report uses data and analysis from OVD-Info. In addition, we spoke with representatives of the human rights project [Department One](#), [the Memorial Human Rights Centre](#), [the Kharkiv Human Rights Group](#), [the Sova Research Centre](#), [the student news](#)

outlet [Groza](#), the projects [Call to Conscience](#) and [Get Lost](#), as well as a lawyer and a cultural historian.

** All data are up-to-date as of 8 December 2025.*

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TREASON, TERRORISM, EXTREMISM

The state is eagerly expanding the practice of bringing especially serious charges—of treason and terrorism. In the occupied territories, Ukrainians who are prosecuted under these articles are systematically subjected to torture and inhuman treatment.

Sentences in terrorism-related cases are becoming increasingly harsh, and minors are appearing in the dock ever more frequently. Prosecutions for donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation are on the rise, and the Anti-Corruption Foundation itself has been designated a terrorist organisation. Prominent opposition members are actively being prosecuted under extremist and terrorism legislation.

Treason and espionage

OVD-Info does not have any noteworthy statistics on cases involving treason (Article 275 of the Criminal Code), confidential cooperation with foreign nationals (Article 275.1 of the Criminal Code) or espionage (Article 276 of the Criminal Code). There is very little information available on such cases. The state prefers that everything be done quietly, without public attention. It is obvious that the surge in the number of cases and convictions, the toughening of penalties, the new wording of the article on treason and the introduction of the article on “confidential cooperation” indicate a significant politicisation of the area. This is also hinted at by the almost daily news reports about the detention of people suspected of collaborating with Ukrainian intelligence services. There are also reports of numerous violations and falsifications in such cases.

According to Yevgeny Smirnov, a lawyer with the human rights organisation Department One, all current criminal cases involving treason and espionage should be considered politically motivated *a priori*. The current wording of the article on treason effectively makes it possible for any Russian citizen to be prosecuted for communicating with a foreigner. Similar provisions appear, for example, in the legislations of Afghanistan and Iran, but not in democratic countries.

In particular, people get charged with treason not only under its standard definition—for disseminating state secrets, attempting to obtain them or defecting to the enemy—but also for certain “other actions” against the security of the country. Federal Security

Service (FSB) officers have leeway to decide themselves which actions can be considered treason. Similar wording appears in the article on espionage. Such wording was practically unheard of in criminal cases until 2023, notes Yevgeny Smirnov. The explosive growth in the number of cases involving “other actions” stems from the fact that virtually any assistance to Ukraine began to be equated with treason, and the article itself began to be applied in criminal cases for actions that the state interpreted as sabotage or terrorism.

According to Department One, many such prosecutions are provoked by Russian intelligence services whose employees gain the trust of citizens and ask them to do something simple—for example, take a photo of the view from a window or the entrance to a building of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This is classified as treason, and the law enforcement officer gains fame as the person who prevented a drone attack, as well as a promotion. The same actions can also be classified as terrorism if the provocateur introduced himself, for example, as a member of the Freedom of Russia Legion.

It has become common practice to initiate cases against residents of the occupied territories for their real or imagined interactions with Ukrainian military personnel. The nature of a charge brought against a person—for treason or espionage—seems to be determined solely by whether they have managed to obtain Russian citizenship.

According to data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, the number of convictions under the article on treason (Article 275 of the Criminal Code) that came into force in the first half of 2025 **almost doubled** compared to the same period of 2024 (115 vs. 55). Under the article on confidential cooperation with foreign nationals (Article 275.1 of the Criminal Code), 24 people were already convicted in the first half of 2025. In the same period of 2024, there were four convictions, and for the whole year of 2024 has seen 30 convictions. There has been no increase in the number prosecutions under the article

on espionage (Article 276 of the Criminal Code): in the first half of 2025, the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court reported 12 convictions, compared to 18 for the same period of the previous year and 24 for the whole of 2024. It should be noted that, **according** to Department One, **the Judicial Department underestimates the statistics on convictions more than threefold.**

Among the prosecutions for treason, the Revolt Centre case stands out. The case gained publicity in July after **a series of searches** at the independent cultural space Revolt Centre in Syktyvkar and at the homes of its employees, as well as in Kaliningrad, Yoshkar-Ola and Petrozavodsk at the homes of journalists and human rights activists. The case was initiated against one of the Revolt Centre's founders, Pavel Andreev (he has left Russia). Later, the Revolt Centre was declared a "foreign agent," which, **according** to Pavel Andreev himself, meant that employees of the centre, even though were not involved in activism or politics, lost the opportunity to work in the business sector because of their new status.

In October, the Telegram channel "Ostrozhno, Novosti" ("Beware, News") **reported** that Andreev was facing prosecution because of the actions of another person bearing the same name, the former Ulyanovsk resident Pavel Andreev, who had cooperated with the city administration on cultural projects. In any case, it is the Andreev from Ulyanovsk, not the one from Syktyvkar, who collaborates with the organisation "Platform for Civil, Anti-War and Humanitarian Initiatives," which is mentioned in the criminal case. Thus, the pressure on the Revolt Centre is probably **explained by an absurd mistake on the part of the investigation**, which it does not want to admit.

Terrorism

OVD-Info cannot consider any case initiated under the articles on terrorist acts (Article 205 of the Criminal Code), financing terrorism (Part 1.1 of Article 205.1 of the Criminal Code),

undergoing training for terrorist activities (Article 205.3 of the Criminal Code) and sabotage to be deliberately politically motivated. We are aware of the fact that in the context of the terrible war, people may, for one reason or another, engage in dangerous activities that threaten others or cause significant harm. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the increase in the number of prosecutions, especially against residents of the occupied territories and Ukrainian military personnel. Just like the new articles of the “sabotage package” (facilitation of sabotage activities—Article 281.1 of the Criminal Code, training for sabotage—Article 281.2 of the Criminal Code, organisation of a sabotage community—Article 281.3 of the Criminal Code), this indicates the politicisation of the sphere.

According to Department One **data**, a significant portion of cases involving terrorism charges are related to the war. The reasons for prosecution include arson, communication with actual or alleged representatives of the Ukrainian side and donations to Ukrainian paramilitary organisations.

Department One **concludes** that courts hand down an average of five convictions under terrorism articles every day. In 2024, there were approximately 1.5 times more convictions than in 2023 (916 vs. 623). The number of convictions in the first half of 2025 is slightly lower than the total number for 2023 (597). **Court decisions are becoming increasingly severe:** in the first half of the year, the number of convictions to terms of more than 20 years was the same as in the preceding five years taken together (even though the outcome of many cases is unknown).

According to the Judicial Department, the first half of 2025 saw a **huge increase in the number of convictions under Part 2 of Article 205 of the Criminal Code** (committing a terrorist act by a group of persons and/or causing various serious consequences). Compared to the first half of 2024, there were **almost seven (!) times more** such convictions—201 vs. 29. The number of convictions under Part 3 of the article (committing a terrorist act involving an attack on dangerous sites or resulting

in death) also increased significantly: 18 in the first half of 2025 compared to two in the first half of 2024. There were also more convictions under Part 1 of the article—28 vs. 23.

Ukrainian soldiers captured in the Kursk region receive sentences under the article on committing terrorist acts: official reports accuse them of violating the rules of war and committing war crimes against civilians, but in reality, for some reason, this all **regularly narrows down** to charges of committing terrorist acts.

The case of bombing the Crimean Bridge on 8 October 2022 stands apart. The defendants were involved in one way or another in the transportation of the cargo containing explosives: one was looking for a driver to transport it, another one was the driver, a third was the director of the company that accepted the order, two owned the warehouse etc. According to them, no one knew about the planned explosion. Upon learning of the explosion on the bridge, the director of the transport company, Oleg Antipov, went to the FSB himself and provided all the information he knew. The other defendants had the status as witnesses for some time and did not try to escape. Having studied the case, the “Support for Political Prisoners. Memorial” project **concluded** that all eight defendants were innocent. Nevertheless, in November 2025, all were found guilty of committing a terrorist act that resulted in the death of people and other serious consequences (Part 3 of Article 205 of the Criminal Code) and of transporting explosives by an organised group (Part 4 of Article 222.1 of the Criminal Code) and were **sentenced** to life imprisonment.

A similar case was opened in June 2025 following an operation codenamed “Web,” in which Ukrainian drones hidden in lorries attacked military airfields in Russia. Mediazona **found out** that four lorry drivers were charged.

The number of convictions for financing terrorism (Part 1.1 of Article 205.1 of the Criminal Code, the most frequently applied part of the article) remained unchanged (50 in the first half of 2025 and 2024). Convictions under the article on undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Article

205.3 of the Criminal Code) doubled, from 20 to 43, as did convictions for participation in the activities of a terrorist community (Part 2 of Article 205.4 of the Criminal Code), from 30 to 64. There were three times as many convictions for organising a terrorist community (Part 1 of Article 205.4 of the Criminal Code)—11 vs. 3, which is already more than in the whole of 2024 (9).

The number of convictions for organising the activities of a terrorist organisation (Part 1 of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code) remained unchanged, with three convictions for the same period in 2024 and 2025. For participation in such activities (Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code), there were 78 convictions in the first half of 2025, compared to 63 in the first half of 2024.

There has been an increase in the number of convictions for sabotage under Part 1 (17 vs. 9) and especially under Part 2 of Article 281 of the Criminal Code (sabotage by a group of persons with serious consequences and/or committed against defence or government facilities—**41 vs. 6**, compared to 28 for the whole of 2024). In the first half of 2025, there was only one conviction under Part 3 of the article—on sabotage involving an attack on dangerous facilities or resulting in death—with no such convictions in 2024.

Terrorism charges are brought against Ukrainians involved in the Azov Brigade as well as Aidar and Donbass (there are two battalions with this name) battalions. The Russian Federation has designated all these units as terrorist organisations. Despite the fact that in recent years these military formations have become part of the Ukrainian army, captured servicemen and state officials from the occupied territories face prosecution in the same type of cases as members of terrorist groups.

The year 2025 saw verdicts handed down in two such collective cases. In March, 12 people associated with Azov were **sentenced** to terms ranging from 13 to 23 years in a strict regime colony (another 11 people received sentences in absentia, as they had previously been transferred to Ukraine as part of a prisoner exchange, and one, Alexander Ishchenko, died in custody).

In October, 15 people associated with Aidar were **sentenced** to terms ranging from 15 to 21 years in a strict regime colony (two female medics involved in the case were transferred to Ukraine, and the fate of another prosecuted individual is unknown).

Yevgeny Zakharov, the head of the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, said that while in 2024 the number of convicted people from the occupied regions of Ukraine, most of whom were military personnel, was counted in the tens, by the end of 2025 the count had reached thousands. Ukrainian human rights activists are only able to establish their location after they are placed in Federal Penitentiary Service facilities—before that, they can be cut off from the outside world and lack procedural status for a long time.

According to the authors of a **report** published by the Memorial Human Rights Centre that is based on conversations with residents of the de-occupied territories of Ukraine, **Russian law enforcement agencies systematically refuse to recognise Ukrainians as prisoners of war**. In fact, the latter are legalised within the Russian judicial system through the initiation of criminal cases. Ukrainians find themselves cut off from their lawyers and families and are held in pre-trial detention centres and penal colonies where they are subjected to torture, sexual violence and deprivation of food and medical care.

Ukrainian prisoners are usually charged with participating in terrorist organisations (Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code) or communities (Article 205.4 of the Criminal Code), as well as undergoing training in terrorist activities (Article 205.3 of the Criminal Code). In addition to terrorism charges, Ukrainian military personnel are also charged with murder, attempted murder and cruel treatment of prisoners (Part 1 of Article 356 of the Criminal Code—use of prohibited means and methods of warfare).

According to Oleg Orlov, a co-chair of the Memorial Human Rights Centre, in wartime it cannot be claimed that all these charges are unfounded. However, the human rights activist notes that in many cases, the law enforcement agencies **use torture to extract confessions**.

According to Orlov, Ukrainian military personnel also face charges of illegally crossing the border, as was **the case** with those who participated in the invasion of the Kursk region. Some receive sentences under the article on violent seizure of power, which is linked to the practice in the unrecognised Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), where Ukrainian military personnel were charged under such articles. After the official annexation, Ukrainians began to be prosecuted under articles mirroring those in the Russian Criminal Code.

It is not only Ukrainian military personnel who face repression, but also **residents** of the occupied territories of Ukraine. Officers of the FSB, the National Guard (Rosgvardia), the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the military police kidnap people who disagree with the invasion, hold them captive in schools and basements, torture them and force them to confess that they participated in anti-Russian protests at the behest of Ukrainian intelligence services. According to Yevgeny Zakharov, the occupation administrations snatch local residents on suspicion of their pro-Ukrainian views or because they spoke Ukrainian. At risk are priests of Ukrainian churches, journalists and former government officials, even if they worked just as ordinary clerks, as well as people who served in the army between 2014 and 2021.

Prosecution of opposition and discriminated groups

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new prosecutions for donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation in 2025

One noticeable trend is **the use of anti-terrorism legislation against the opposition and political associations**. During the year, the list of terrorist organisations was expanded to include the Russian opposition conference Free Russia Forum, the community under the name "Join the All-Union Communist Party

of Bolsheviks” (VKP (b)) and its structural subdivision, the “Omsk Cell of the VKP (b),” the People’s Communist Movement, the anarchist organisation Antisocial Distancing and a **rock band with the same name** (which had been disbanded at the time it was declared terrorist), the Congress of People’s Deputies (an association of politicians who left Russia and spoke out against the war) as well as the American legal entity of the Anti-Corruption Foundation.

The Saint Petersburg activist Alexander Skobov has already been sentenced to 16 years in a strict regime colony (Part 2 of Article 205.4 of the Criminal Code) for his alleged connection with the Free Russia Forum. Another four such cases have been initiated against four participants in the conference who have left Russia. They also include the former world chess champion and politician Garry Kasparov. In 2025, at least six more people associated with the Forum **were added** to Rosfinmonitoring’s list of extremists and terrorists. These people are also located outside Russia, and no details about their cases are available.

There is one known case related to the Forum of Free States of Post-Russia. Rafael Mamedov, a resident of Murmansk, **was taken into custody**. According to his friend, he was arrested for administering the Telegram channel *Free Lapland*, which is the name of one of the 172 “structural divisions” of the Forum banned in 2024. Mamedov was charged with participation in a terrorist organisation (Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code).

In October 2025, the FSB **reported** about a case initiated against prominent Russian opposition figures. All of them are located abroad, are members of the Anti-War Committee, and in April 2023 they signed a declaration in Berlin stating the need to eliminate Putin’s regime. At least 23 people are involved in the case, including the politician Mikhail Khodorkovsky, former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, Garry Kasparov, the political scientist Ekaterina Shulman and the academic Yuri Pivovarov. They are charged with involvement in the activities of a terrorist community (Article 205.4 of the Criminal Code) and violent seizure of power

(Article 278 of the Criminal Code). Khodorkovsky is also charged with incitement to terrorism (Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code).

In 2025, 12 people were charged in cases involving participation in the Artpodgotovka movement, which was declared both an extremist and terrorist organisation (specifically, a certain group “from among the participants” of Artpodgotovka was declared terrorist). Most of them were charged with terrorism, with two people charged only with financing extremist activities (Article 282.3 of the Criminal Code).

According to the police, in April, Artem Pronko, a student at Saint Petersburg State University, hung a mannequin of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, on the monument to Count Uvarov near the Twelve Collegia building with a note reading, “Science is dead.” Pronko stated that he had nothing to do with the protest. Nevertheless, he was fined 20,000 rubles under the administrative article on organising an unauthorised event (Part 2 of Article 20.2 of the Code of Administrative Offences). Following this, the RIA Novosti news outlet reported that law enforcement agencies had identified a group of students with radical left-wing views. According to propagandists, this was a cell of the UK-based International-Communist Organisation “Workers’ Power.” Back in May, the student Harry Azaryan was detained and taken into custody on charges of inciting terrorism. **According to the investigation**, as a member of Workers’ Power, he called for terrorist activities and mass killings. Azaryan’s friends deny information about his radical statements.

The year 2025 was the first year when a collective case was initiated in Crimea against women for their involvement in the Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir. All four defendants were **taken into custody**. The husband of one of them is currently in pre-trial detention on the same charge. At the end of November, reports came out that a woman had been detained in Kazan in a similar case. Her husband was sentenced to a long prison term for involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir in 2019.

In 2025, the list of extremist organisations was expanded with the public association of football fans Kiborgi, the Omsk Slavic Association, the Ukrainian new religious movement AllatRa (which was declared an “undesirable” organisation back in 2023, prompting dozens of criminal cases across Russia), a certain International Satanist Movement and, towards the end of the year, the punk band Pussy Riot.

In 2025, the state continued to designate groups of people as extremist associations, which allows for the confiscation of their property in Russia. Several major Ukrainian businessmen were added to the list, including the oligarch Rinat Akhmetov—he was included in the list for a second time. One of the groups declared extremist was the organisation that owns the Bayadera Holding vodka company.

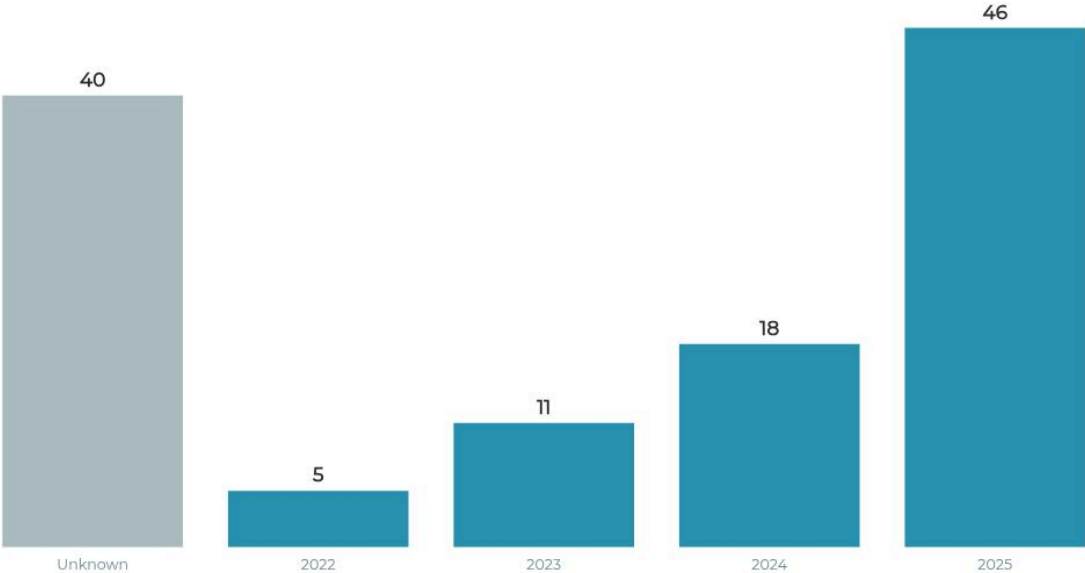
In May 2025, a case was initiated against the journalist Alexander Nevzorov and his wife Lydia for financing extremist activities (Article 282.3 of the Criminal Code). The reason for this was their announcement that they were raising donations. A year earlier, they became the first family to be designated as an extremist organisation.

Cases have apparently been initiated against three opposition politicians—Yulia Navalnaya, Vladimir Kara-Murza and Ilya Yashin—in connection with the Russian opposition march that took place in Berlin on 1 March 2025. The State Duma deputy Vasily Piskarev was the first to comment on the case, without naming names. He mentioned the articles on participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code), participation in the activities of an extremist organisation (Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code), creation of an extremist community (Article 282.1 of the Criminal Code) and calls for extremism (Article 280 of the Criminal Code). A Moscow court later arrested Kara-Murza and Yashin in absentia, with both facing charges related to extremist organisations and Kara-Murza also facing charges related to “fakes” (Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code). Since then, no details of the case have been

made public. Kara-Murza is among the 23 defendants in the Anti-War Committee case.

The campaign of repression against people who transferred money to the Anti-Corruption Foundation after the organisation was declared extremist gained serious momentum. In 2022, there were five defendants charged under the article on financing extremist activities (Article 282.3 of the Criminal Code); in 2023 there were 11, in 2024 there were 18, and in 2025 there were 46. In total, OVD-Info has information about 120 people facing prosecution. Mediazona **reported** about 114 cases in October.

New prosecutions for donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation by year



Data: [OVD-Info](#) as of 8 December 2025.

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In 2025, 74 verdicts were handed down in cases involving donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation (compared to 16 in 2024). In the vast majority of cases, the punishment was in the form of a fine. Nine people were given suspended sentences, three were sentenced to forced labour, four were sentenced in absentia, and eight were given **real** prison terms.

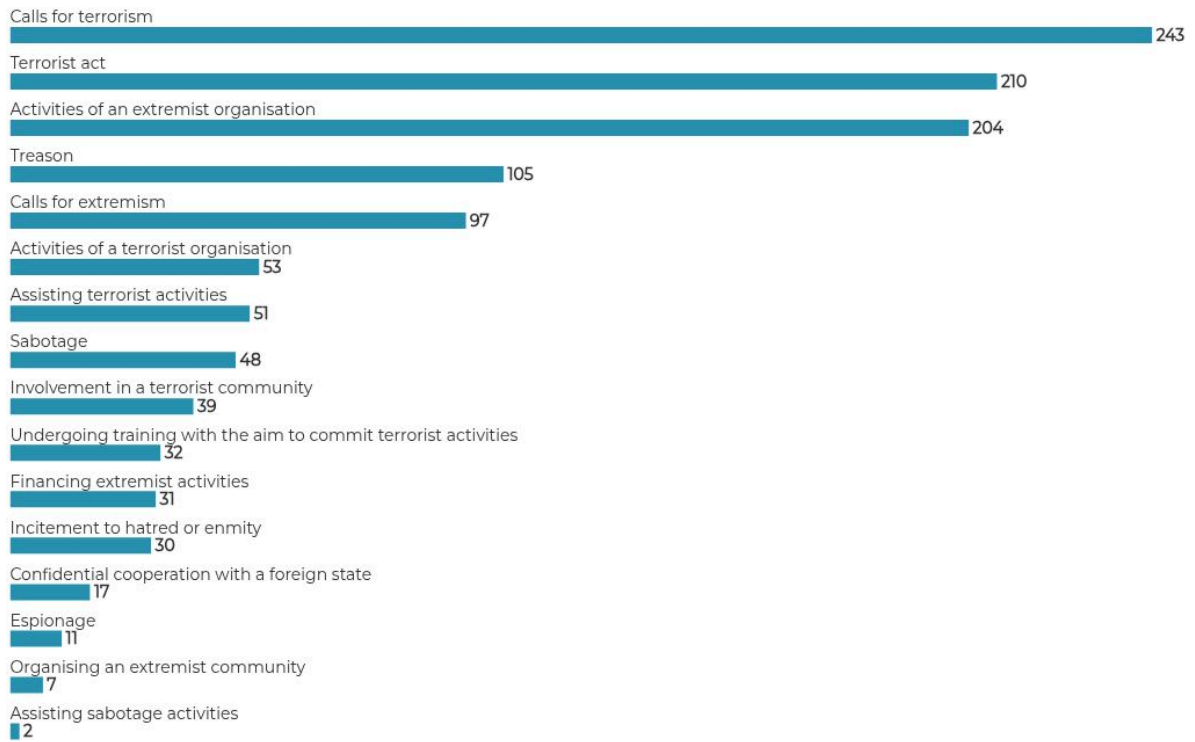
Pressure on Jehovah's Witnesses communities continues unabated (54 prosecuted individuals in 2025 vs. 49 in 2024).

It is also worth noting the prosecution of female activists involved in national movements. In 2025, a case was initiated under the article on participation in the activities of an extremist organisation (Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code) against a representative of the Bashkir national movement, the journalist Aigul Gimranova-Lion, and a representative of the Circassian national movement, the journalist Larisa Tuptsokova of Circassian Media. Details are unknown. Both activists left Russia a long time ago.

According to the Judicial Department data, the first half of 2025 saw 76 convictions under Part 1 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organising the activities of an extremist organisation) and 142 convictions under Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organisation). In 2024, there were 41 and 92 convictions, respectively. The number of convictions under the article on financing extremist activities (Article 282.3 of the Criminal Code) also increased—to 63 vs. 33 (58 convictions were handed down under this article throughout 2024).

We describe the pressure on the LGBTQ community in detail in a separate chapter.

Cases involving crimes against state authorities in the first half of 2025



Data: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court

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FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ASSEMBLY

Overall, there were fewer new prosecutions for statements than in the previous year (among those where the topic can be identified). As before, the article on justifying terrorism is applied most often. Censorship has gradually become the norm, but it is institutionally vague, and vigilantes are very active in this area. The regime suppresses criticism of the cult of the state, the established socio-cultural order and state myths. The internet is increasingly being blocked or restricted. There has been a significant increase in the number of decisions on cases involving the display of prohibited symbols and convictions under the article on the rehabilitation of Nazism—a record high. There were fewer detentions at protest rallies than in the previous year, but the year 2025 was marked by confrontation in the Altai Republic and “carousel arrests” of musicians.

Criminal prosecution for statements

New prosecutions

We recorded significantly fewer instances of prosecution for statements in 2025 than in 2024 (264 vs. 340). Only repression for incitement to violence or approving of violence against the authorities remained at the same level (28 instances in 2025 vs. 26 in 2024).

264

instances of prosecution for statements in 2025. Last year, there were 340 such cases

Prosecutions for incitement to violence against the authorities, which ranked fourth in terms of new cases initiated in 2024, lead the statistics in 2025. Second came prosecutions for statements about the Freedom of Russia Legion or the Russian Volunteer Corps (28 in 2025 vs. 41 in 2024). Cases involving statements against the authorities that do not include calls for violence rank

third (16 in 2025 vs. 34 in 2024), and in the fourth place are prosecutions for information about crimes committed by the army, which were the most common topic of prosecution in 2024 (51 in 2024 vs. 25 in 2025—a drop of more than half in both instances).

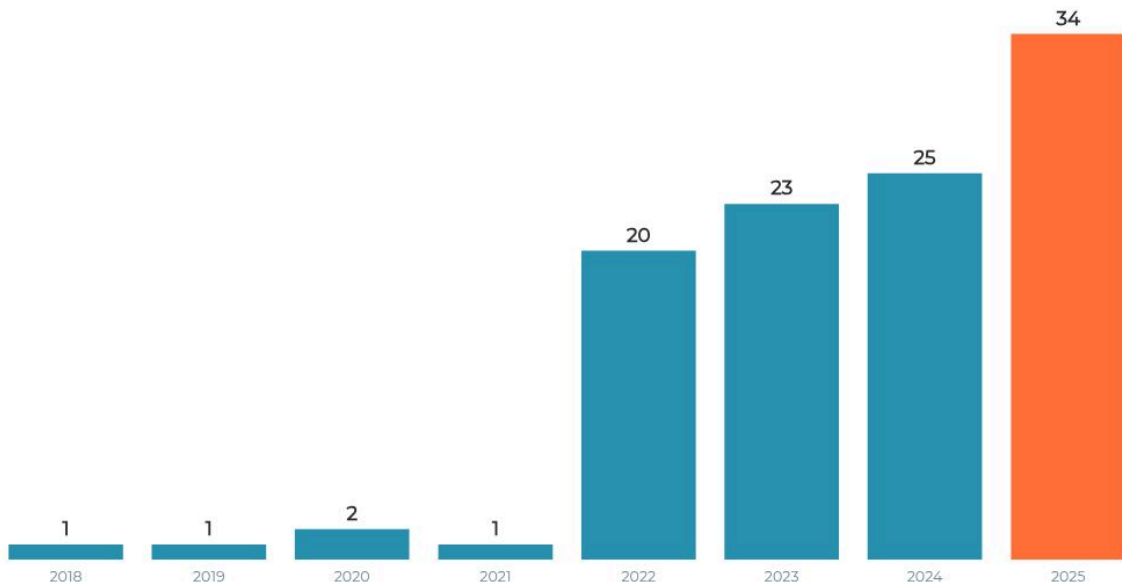
Among the statements that were relatively frequently used as a basis for prosecution in 2024, there was a significant decline in those concerning the Russian military (from 15 to 6), attacks on the Crimean Bridge (from 14 to 6) as well as Navalny and the Anti-Corruption Foundation (from 10 to 2). There was also a decrease in the number of prosecutions related to calls for violence against Russian military personnel (from 12 to 8).

Topics of statements that became a basis for prosecution



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In 2025, most instances of prosecution for online posts were initiated for posts made in previous years



Data: [OVD-Info](#) · as of 8 December 2025

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It is important to make two caveats. First, we can form an opinion about the subject matter of the statement in only half of the instances. Second, a significant portion of the cases in 2025 were initiated for statements made in 2024 and earlier.

The vast majority of cases involve statements made on the internet. In addition, the statistics include statements made on public transport, in court, in places of detention, in rehabilitation centres, graffiti on buildings and urban facilities, as well as the publication of books and the **display of works of art in museums**.

The article on propaganda of terrorism (Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code) remains **the most common**, although the absolute number of new cases initiated under it is significantly lower than in 2024—102 vs. 147. There were fewer prosecutions under Article 205.2 for anti-war statements (35). There were 45 cases under the article on “fakes” about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code) in 2025 (compared to 79 in 2024). The number of prosecutions under the article on discrediting the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation

(Article 280.3 of the Criminal Code) decreased almost fourfold compared to 2024 (from 57 to 17).

Aruna Arna, an activist from the Altai Republic and a prominent participant in protests against municipal reform, was charged with inciting terrorism. The activist was banned from certain activities as a measure of restraint, but was then placed in a pre-trial detention centre. It is possible that the authorities are attempting to quell regional protest with the help of such charges.

Convictions in 2025 for statements

The year 2025 saw at least 285 sentences handed down in politically motivated cases for statements in total. This is 20% lower than in 2024 (362 sentences). In 139 instances in 2025, the defendants received real prison terms (160 in 2024), and in 20 cases, people were charged not only for statements. Eight people were ordered to undergo compulsory medical treatment (vs. 13 such instances in 2024).

We recorded 125 convictions under the article on propaganda of terrorism (Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code), of which **73 convictions resulted in a real prison sentence** (in 15 cases, not only for statements). The Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation lists more than 20 decisions on compulsory hospitalisation. According to the Judicial Department, the total number of convictions under Part 2 of Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code (for statements made on the internet) in the first half of 2025 increased significantly compared to the same period in 2024: 262 vs. 164. Department One **notes** that usage of this article among other terrorism-related articles is decreasing.

Criminal prosecutions for statements related to the war

New prosecutions

We recorded 142 new prosecutions for anti-war expressions in 2025. This is less than in any of the war years and 1.5 times less compared to 2024. In 2024, we noted a decrease of 1.6 times compared to 2023, and this trend still holds. All these instances of prosecution are related to statements. We recorded 59 prosecutions for statements not related to the war (including statements whose content is unknown to us).

The number of other war-related prosecutions decreased more than twice in 2025 compared to 2024 (from 148 to 73). There were only 64 new prosecutions initiated on the basis of war-related (but not pure anti-war) statements.

As in the previous year, the article on propaganda of terrorism (Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code) was used most frequently in cases involving statements related to the war (no fewer than 81 prosecutions, of which 46 were anti-war). As Yevgeny Smirnov, a lawyer with the human rights group Department One, notes, a large part of such cases is triggered by people's reactions to high-profile military events classified as terrorist attacks. People discussed drone strikes, the assassination of Vladlen Tatarsky or the attack on the Crimean Bridge.

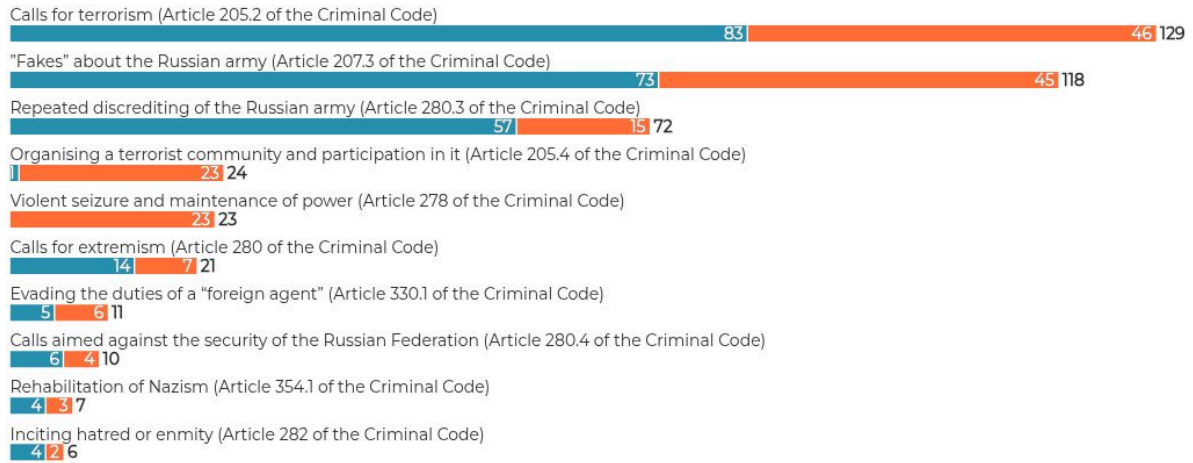
The second most frequently applied article is the article on public dissemination of knowingly false information ("fakes") about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code—no fewer than 46 cases, all of them presumably anti-war). Third (with a large gap) comes the article on discrediting the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Article 280.3 of the Criminal Code—no fewer than 15 cases, all of them anti-war). In particular, the cases against **four TV Rain journalists who left Russia** were initiated under the article on "fakes."

142

new prosecutions for anti-war expressions
in 2025

Cases involving offences against the authorities in 1H 2025

● 2024 ● 2025

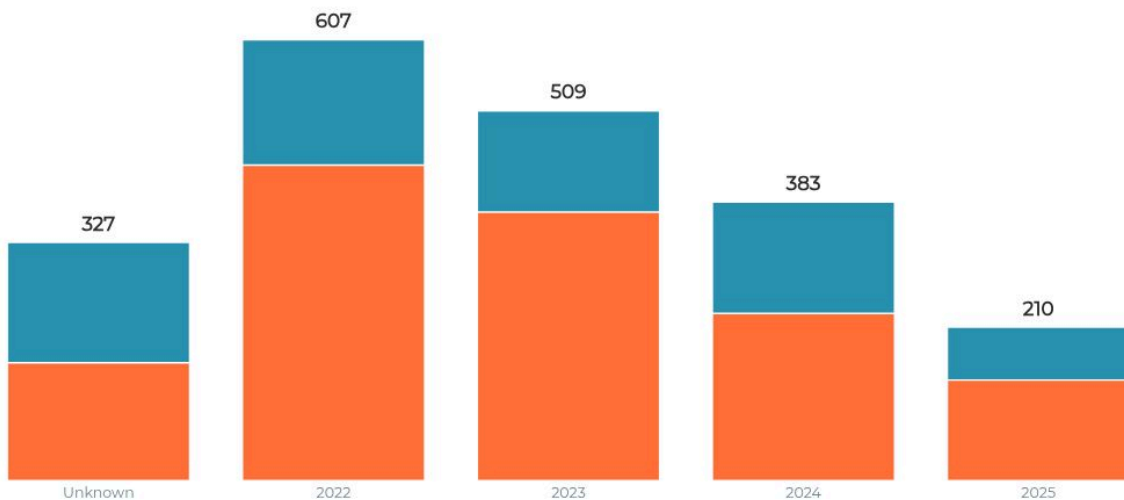


Data: [OVD-Info](#) - as of 8 December 2025
 * The same individual may be prosecuted under several articles

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Politically motivated prosecutions related to the war in Ukraine

● Anti-war prosecutions ● Other prosecutions related to the war



Data: [OVD-Info](#) - as of 8 December 2025

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A flagrant instance is the case of the stand-up comedian Artemy Ostanin. On 17 March he was **detained** in Belarus and subjected to beatings and cruel forms of humiliation: the man was shaved, handcuffed and got a meat grinder hung around his neck—likely because he had ironised in his stand-up performance about

an incident in the Murmansk region where mothers of soldiers killed in the war were gifted meat grinders. In a day, when already in Moscow, Ostanin was taken into custody as part of a case of inciting hatred. The basis for the case was his joke about a man having lost his legs in a mine explosion with whom he had a conflict in the subway. The case was initiated following a crime report filed by the patriotic movement Zov Naroda (“Call of the People”). According to the investigation, Ostanin “made negative and offensive comments in relation to a participant in the special military operation.” The comedian himself claims that neither the subject of the joke nor the joke itself had anything to do with the war, as it was about “a beggar in the subway who has been rolling around without legs on a skateboard for about 20 years.”

In 2025, Russian law enforcement officers again initiated cases against journalists reporting on the invasion of the Ukrainian army into the Kursk region. In 2024, 12 reporters became defendants in criminal cases of illegal border crossing, and three reporters became defendants in such cases this year (the British journalists Jerome Starkey and Kaylan Robertson, and also the Spanish journalist Alberto Rojas).

The blogger Tatiana Montian’s case stands apart. She has been an active supporter of the war and has been fundraising money for assistance to the front line. Details of the case are unknown; among other things, we do not know the specific charges that have been brought against her. For this reason, we do not include her prosecution in our statistics. She herself **claims** that the basis for her prosecution has become her 2022 post containing the phrase “to rub out the guards without any mercy.” We have so far recorded several individual instances of prosecuting people who supported both the regime and the war at different stages (some, such as Igor Strelkov, even participated in the war), but allegedly changed their opinion or criticised some actions of the authorities too much. Montian’s case should apparently be considered a manifestation of the pressure on volunteers fundraising money for military needs, which remains outside the scope of our observation. This topic is studied by the journalist **Ivan Fillipov**.

Sentences handed down in 2025 for war-related statements

229

sentences in politically motivated cases for statements related to the war

According to OVD-Info data, the year 2025 saw 229 sentences handed down in politically motivated cases (of which, 45 sentences as part of new prosecutions). The number of sentences in such cases was 289 in 2024.

In 2025, 118 of delivered verdicts pertained to imprisonment (121 in 2024). At least 15 convicts are prosecuted not only for statements they have made. 2 people were ordered to undergo involuntary treatment (7 in 2024). 99 judgements are under the charges for propaganda of terrorism (Part 1, Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code). 62 sentences involve imprisonment ranging from 2 to 18 years. At least 11 convicts are charged with other crimes in addition to making criminalised statements.

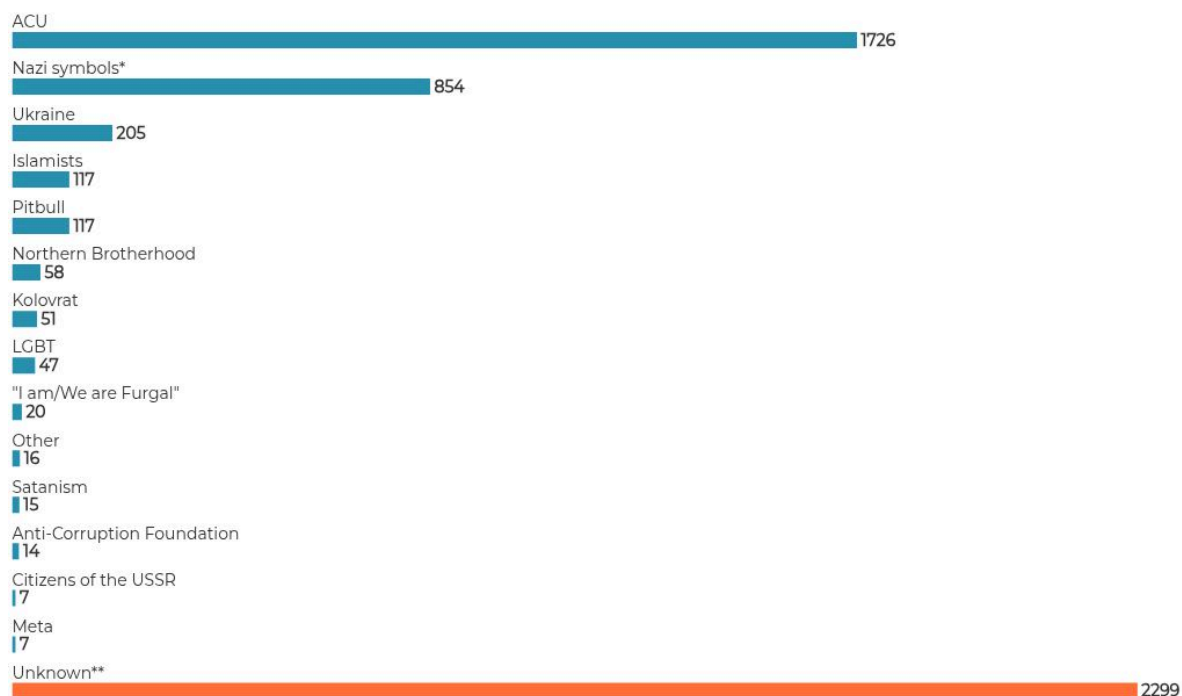
The Judicial Department provides data on 46 sentences under the article on “fakes” about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation that entered into force in the first half of 2025. We apparently know about 42 of them. In total, we know about 106 decisions under this article throughout the year, of which 38 sentences included imprisonment ranging from two to 18 years. The difference is explained by the fact that some convicted persons were charged under several articles. For instance, [Olga Komleva](#), an activist from Ufa, was sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment. Apart from “fakes,” she was charged with collaboration with the Anti-Corruption Foundation (participation in an extremist community). In captivity, Komleva’s ability to speak temporarily disappeared at times. Five people were ordered to undergo compulsory medical treatment.

Forbidden symbols

In 2025, more than **5.5 thousand** (5,551) **cases** were referred to the courts of first instance under the article on public display of forbidden symbols (Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences). This is somewhat more than in 2024 (5,329 cases). In some instances, the basis for the prosecution was attributes of political organisations banned in Russia, such as the Anti-Corruption Foundation and Vesna (“Spring”). Apart from that, residents of Russia were charged with displaying symbols of the “LGBT movement,” islamist communities, the Meta corporation, the Arrestant Criminal Unity (ACU) criminal subculture, Satanism, the phrases “ACAB” (“All Cops Are Bastards”) and “I Am/We Are Furgal,” pictures of celtic crosses, Svarog’s squares and attributes related to football. **205 cases are related to displaying Ukrainian symbols**, in particular, the Ukrainian Tryzub, symbols of the Azov Brigade and the phrase “Glory to Ukraine.”

One can get prosecuted under this article also for pro-Ukrainian and anti-war statements, because the comparison of Russian servicemen with the army of the Third Reich or Vladimir Putin to Adolf Hitler also falls under the forbidden symbols in the current practice. It is difficult to differentiate such cases from public display of the true Nazi symbols: texts of the court decisions are censored. In 2,299 instances it is not possible to determine what exactly was the basis for initiating the case, because the texts of the decisions are hidden or simply absent from the court registry. In 2024, that occurred only in 30% of cases.

Administrative cases involving the display of forbidden symbols by the basis for prosecution



Data: [QVD-Info](#) - as of 8 December 2025
 * Including anti-war and pro-Ukrainian statements
 ** Not possible to identify due to court censorship
 ** Невозможно определить из-за цензуры судов

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The SOVA (“Owl”) Centre, which monitors the application of anti-extremist legislation, stopped detailed recording of cases initiated under Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences in April 2025. The data from January to March did not show significant differences compared to previous periods: **slightly more than 40% of cases involved “Nazi” symbols, 30% involved ACU symbols, and another 10% involved Ukrainian ones.** SOVA’s experts believe that the scale of applying Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences has not changed.

A new phenomenon is the prosecution for displaying symbols of the “International Satanist Movement,” which was **banned** by the Supreme Court in July (Satanists were added to the registry of extremist organisations in September). There are already people facing charges for pictures of pentagrams, for tattoos, clothes, the “Leviathan’s cross,” a cup with an image of a pentagram and Baphomet, the book *Satanic Rituals* and the sale of satanic attributes in an esoteric shop.

The Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation combines Articles 20.3 and 20.3.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences (incitement of hatred or enmity) in its statistics. According to official data, 3,322 people were punished under these two articles during the first half of 2025, compared to 3,001 during the same period of the previous year (a 10% increase).

96

people were sentenced under the criminal article on repeated display of prohibited symbols (Article 282.4 of the Criminal Code) in the first half of 2025, which is 80% more than during the same period of 2024

According to the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court, **96 people were sentenced** under the criminal article on repeated display of prohibited symbols (Article 282.4 of the Criminal Code) in the first half of 2025, **which is 80% more than during the same period of 2024** (53).

SOVA is aware of 47 people sentenced throughout the year. These included, for example, the use of Nazi symbols **to criticise** the political system, a **portrait** of Navalny and a picture of Hitler, pro-Ukrainian **statements** (4 cases) and a **fragment** of the film Cabaret in a post about the singer Shaman. Xenophobic propaganda was involved in 28 cases and ACU symbols in 17. Prisoners' tattoos were often the basis for their prosecution.

Prosecution for encroachment upon the sacred

Over the recent years, the Russian government has been closely monitoring actions and statements that deviate from its ideas about values and ethics. In particular, censorship can largely be explained by non-compliance with traditional values listed in the **presidential decree** of November 2022. These values are deliberately formulated in abstract terms so as to allow for different

interpretations. The same decree also refers to “destructive ideology” that contradicts traditional values but is at the same time being actively “imposed” on the Russian people.

The state has been purposefully battling inappropriate behaviour and statements for a long time. For the most part, this concerns what the authorities consider to be disrespectful attitudes towards religious and historical sanctities (mainly relating to the memory of the Great Patriotic War and, occasionally, other events in military history that are equated to them).

The article on insulting the religious feelings of believers (Article 148 of the Criminal Code) is not applied very often. According to our data, 25 politically motivated prosecutions were initiated under this article in 2024 and almost half as many (13) in 2025. The courts handed down at least ten convictions, with real prison terms imposed only on those who had already been convicted or who were also charged under other articles.

To the contrary, the article on the rehabilitation of Nazism ([Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code](#)) ranks third in terms of the number of prosecutions in 2025 (however, the number of new cases decreased compared to 2024—57 vs. 64). You can read more about this article and its role in a [report](#) and relevant [material](#) by OVD-Info.

The fourth part of the article is applied most often (30 prosecutions initiated in 2025), which penalises disrespectful actions towards the memory of the war committed on the internet or by a group. Among the actions that led to the initiation of cases were [outrageous pranks](#) near monuments, including those posted online, as well as posts that contained disapproving or ironic statements about monuments, holidays or acts of heroism. A telling example is the case against the Ufa resident Natalya Lazaricheva, who expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that Russia began to celebrate June 22, the day the Great Patriotic War began. Despite the fact that her post said, “We are the country that defeated fascism. We must strengthen our awareness of our people’s victory on 9 May,” the investigation [concluded](#) that her

post formed a negative attitude among citizens towards commemorative events and encouraged them not to participate in those events.

Part 3 (25 prosecutions) of the article is generally applied only in relation to outrageous actions that involve monuments or symbols and are carried out alone. Among politically motivated cases, Part 2 of Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code is much less common: in such instances, it may be triggered by a statement challenging the Russian authorities' interpretation of events related to World War II (for example, a more or less reasoned opinion that the USSR bears the same responsibility for the outbreak of the war as Germany).

Under the administrative article on equating the actions of the USSR and Germany during World War II (Article 13.48 of the Code of Administrative Offences), only three cases were referred to the courts in 2025, **two** of which have been **heard**. Their outcomes are unknown. In 2024, the courts also considered only two cases under this article.

The number of verdicts under the article on rehabilitating Nazism reached a record in 2025. According to data from the Judicial Department and OVD-Info's own calculations, at least 86 people were sentenced to various types of punishment (**64** in 2024 vs. 73 in 2023), and eight were ordered to undergo compulsory medical treatment. **Of the 94 decisions, OVD-Info considers 64 to be politically motivated (which is another record high).**

Internet restrictions

Government agencies block access to resources, as well as disable mobile internet service during major official events and drone attacks.

In May, the authorities warned of restrictions on mobile internet service due to Victory Day celebrations, but already in June interruptions **became** almost a daily occurrence. In July, network

outages were reported in 79 regions. In some areas of the Nizhny Novgorod region, people complained that mobile network access **had not been working** for about two months. In the Ulyanovsk region, the authorities **announced** that mobile internet service would not resume working until the end of the war. According to a survey conducted by the **Khroniki (“Chronicles”) project**, **up to 72% of respondents reported problems with internet access** in October.

While Russian citizens were becoming used to living without mobile internet, the authorities **tested “white lists”**—approved lists of websites and resources that continue to function even when the network is disabled. The lists include government and banking services, domestic entertainment channels and mobile apps of state-owned corporations such as Russian Railways. The practice of “white lists,” as **noted** by the Re: Russia project, demonstrates a new strategy on the part of the authorities—the creation of a “sovereign internet.” Previously, the state sought to specifically ban undesirable content, but now everything that is not specifically permitted will be banned. It is not yet clear how successful this strategy will be.

Another step towards a “sovereign internet” has been the crackdown on messaging apps. The state is promoting Max, a domestic messaging app, while restricting the functions of its supposed competitors.

In August, Roskomnadzor began blocking calls on Telegram and WhatsApp inside Russia. The agency **stated** that these measures were necessary in order to fight fraudsters. The Ministry of Digital Development **assured** that the block would be lifted if the messaging services “complied with Russian legislation.” Two months later, Telegram and WhatsApp **began** to experience intermittent service disruptions, and later some operators **stopped** delivering SMS messages to register new users in these applications.

Moreover, the authorities restricted the operation of the **Google Meet** and **FaceTime** services. By the end of November,

Roskomnadzor openly admitted that it was attempting to completely block WhatsApp in Russia. The State Duma **cited** the “leakage of diplomatic negotiations” on the conclusion of a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine with the participation of the United States as one of the reasons for restricting access to WhatsApp.

Censorship

According **to data** from the Roskomsvoboda project, by August 2025 the number of blocked internet resources had exceeded 25,000; thus, at least 5,000 websites were blocked over the course of a year. The project notes that the pace of blocking has slowed down. In 2025, 35 items were added to the federal list of extremist materials (compared to 38 items added in 2024). The policy of banning publications by undesirable authors continued in 2025, as did the removal of prohibited topics from other literary works.

TV series have become a prime target for censorship: official streaming services cut out any details, scenes and episodes from foreign series that could be seen as touching on forbidden topics. As Mediazona points out in its “Cut Out in Russia” **project**, “everything (and even more than required by law) is being cut out: LGBT, abortion, drugs, criticism of Putin, various sexual practices and all kinds of extremist organisations.”

According to the sociologist and cultural historian Ilya Kukulin, modern censorship in Russia is institutionally blurred and carried out by different actors at different levels. Kukulin highlights a new actor—vigilantes, Z-bloggers who organise public campaigns on social media. A recent example is the **scandal** surrounding the book festival at the GES-2 cultural centre, when, after a post in a Z-channel, the stand of the Individuum publishing house was closed and the speeches of a number of participants were cancelled.

The scientist believes that **censorship became normalised** by the autumn of 2025: most participants in the process (authors, publishers, exhibition organisers, directors, bloggers etc.) perceive it as an unpleasant but inevitable part of the game.

“There are people who are skilled in finding loopholes in the existing fence as well as ways to speak publicly about social problems and war, at least by means of hints—but over time, the control becomes stricter, and it is never clear whether a particular method of circumventing censorship taboos will work the next time,” explains the sociologist. “Censorship is becoming increasingly effective, and not only through direct prohibition. It is in line with the social terror of the era of social media, when it is enough to arrest one person or ban one thing to intimidate the rest.”

The recent censorship of books is linked to changes in sales regulations that came into effect on 1 September 2025: bookstores selling publications by “foreign agents” can no longer count on municipal support, which is why they started withdrawing books from sale, Kukulin notes. The recent instance of **Stephen King’s book “It” that was withdrawn from sale** is, in his opinion, indicative of the fact that publishers are increasingly willing to sacrifice not only subcultural authors, but also well-known, mass-market ones.

According to Ilya Kukulin, in today’s Russia, “it is not allowed to attack the state, the cult of the state created by the current authorities, the socio-cultural order that the leadership considers necessary and requiring reproduction as well as the historical myths created by the state.”

In addition, a very important feature of modern censorship is the complete rejection of attempts to distinguish between parody, sometimes even fantasy, and political statements. The expert identifies a serious problem—the intensification of the conflict “between the generation of those aged 15 to 20 and those who are significantly older.” Due to the fact that the aging representatives of government authorities are trying to place young people under unconditional control, “any topics that in their view provoke what they call destructive behaviour in young people become stigmatised, when in reality it is simply a way of escaping control.”

Due to fears that young people will become estranged from their parents under the influence of the internet and social media, any

uncontrolled and strange information aimed at young people on the internet is perceived as potentially dangerous, believes the expert interviewed by OVD-Info.

Freedom of assembly

362

detentions at public rallies—3.5 times fewer than in 2024

According to OVD-Info data, the year 2025 saw 362 detentions at public rallies—**3.5 times fewer** than in 2024 (1,244) and 2.7 times fewer than in 2023 (953).

16 February—the first anniversary of Alexei Navalny’s death—was a day of mass arrests. In Yekaterinburg, 24 people were **detained** during two evenings of letter-writing. A total of 39 people were **detained** in various cities during rallies commemorating the politician.

We recorded 38 detentions at anti-war protest rallies over the course of the year.

Meanwhile, in 2025, people in different regions took to the streets at least twice a month (to protest against construction, municipal reform, to demand hot water supply etc.). For the most part, the rallies were not met with pressure from the authorities. However, in November, **arrests took place** at a public gathering in the Moscow region, with two participants **detained**. In the Krasnodar region, the police **intimidated** activists who were planning to hold a gathering against the storage of sand contaminated with fuel oil—a consequence of an accident in the Black Sea. In Bashkortostan, the police **visited** people who had participated in protests in defence of the Shikhan Kryktytau.

There is a feeling that the authorities allow citizens to “let off steam” concerning social issues, but continue to crack down hard on protests against the war and in memory of Navalny.

On average, once a month there were reports that the authorities refused to approve various protest rallies—against increases in utility rates, for decent compensation for travel to dialysis, against new construction, against an abortion ban and a “dry law” (a law on alcohol prohibition), in memory of the 1993 events in Moscow, against increases in scrap metal collection fees and VAT, as well as for a free internet and, finally, against the ban on rallies.

The Republic of Altai reacted particularly harshly to mass protests, where residents expressed their disagreement with municipal reforms that abolished village councils. This story deserves a detailed account, as it reminds us of a seemingly forgotten reality—of coordinated and uncoordinated rallies of regional significance, followed by mass arrests and other repressive measures against their participants over several months.

The first rally, during which the protesters blocked a highway, took place in June 2025 and led to administrative **finances and arrests**. At the same time, Governor Andrei Turchak promised to preserve some elements of local self-government. Then, at an approved rally, several thousand people demanded Turchak’s resignation. Three days later, the Altai Legislative Assembly passed a law abolishing village councils. The authorities turned out to have concealed information about how the vote had gone.

Pressure on protesters began in July. The police drew up police reports against residents who recorded video messages (in one instance, this ended up only with a warning), and police officers approached participants in the protests to intimidate them. A deputy who refused to support the reform was **fired** from his job, and a resident of one of the districts was **expelled** from a village council meeting. Police reports were also drawn up against people for gathering outside court buildings and filming during trial. Vasily

Kudirmekov, an opponent of the reform, was **removed** from his position as head of the “Altai People’s Kurultai.”

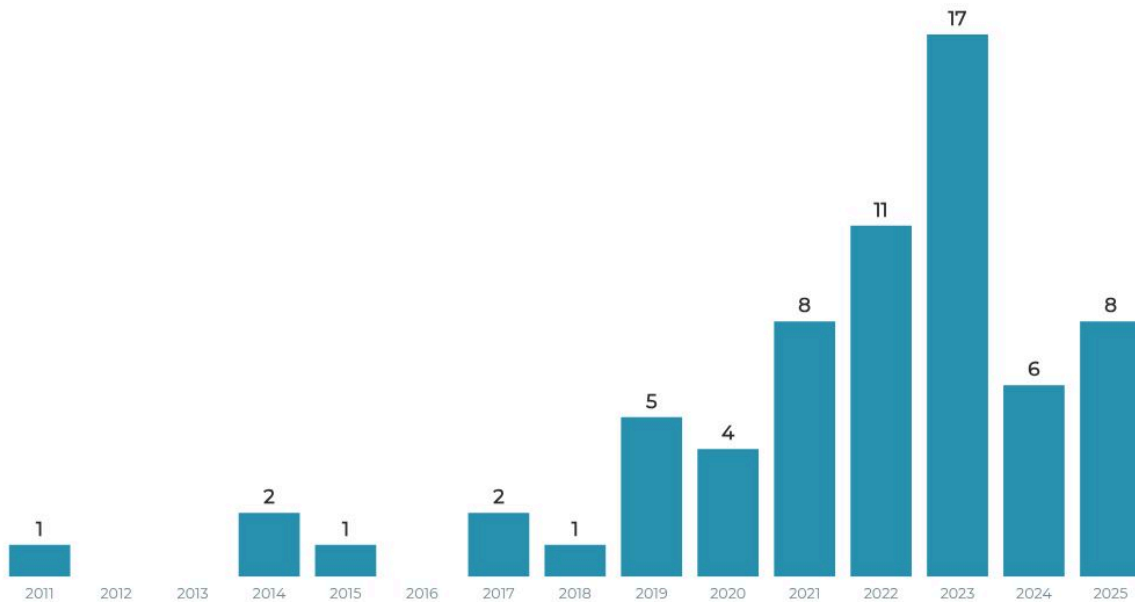
The lawyer Dmitry Todoshev who opposed the reform was arrested **for 12 days** on charges of disobeying police officers. Law enforcement officers stopped Todoshev’s car and demanded that he undergo a medical examination—he refused to get into the traffic police car, so they dragged him out by his neck and legs. He was later **arrested** for another eight days because residents came to support him at a court hearing on a complaint against the reform.

The activist Aruna Arna, effectively one of the leaders of the protest, was charged in a case involving calls for terrorism (Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code). Her home was searched on the day when she was planning to fly to Moscow to deliver thousands of signatures calling for Turchak’s resignation. She is currently **in custody**.

An amendment was made to the regional law on meetings of deputies with residents: Turchak proposed cancelling them altogether, but in the end, it was decided that the executive branch would now determine the locations for these meetings.

In October, law enforcement officers drew their attention to the music band **Stoptime**, led by the singer Diana Loginova (Naoko). On the streets of Saint Petersburg, the band performed songs by musicians designated as “foreign agents.” Members of Stoptime were detained under the administrative article on the organisation of “simultaneous mass gatherings” (Article 20.2.2 of the Code of Administrative Offences) and arrested for 12 and 13 days. Upon completion of these terms they were subjected to “carousel arrests”: they were arrested **twice** immediately after their release and detained again under the same article for other performances. Recently, law enforcement agencies have increasingly resorted to “carousel arrests” prior to initiating proceedings under especially serious charges (such as treason).

Over the past 14 years, 58 politically motivated criminal prosecutions started with “carousel arrests”



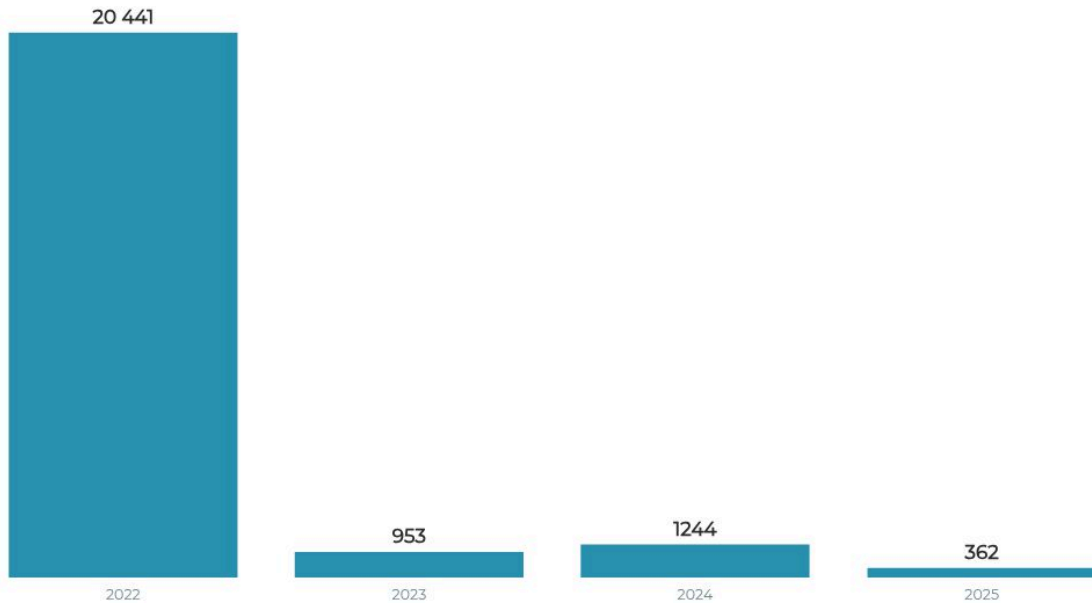
Data: [OVD-Info](#) · as of 8 December 2025

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Two police reports were also drawn up against Naoko under the article on discrediting the use of the armed forces (Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences), and she was fined under one of them. She served one of her administrative arrests formally for two offences—in addition to organising a mass gathering, she was also charged with petty hooliganism for performing a song by Noize MC that contained profanity.

Musicians and activists in various cities took to the streets to support the participants of Stoptime with songs and banners. Ekaterina Ostashева from Perm who organised a concert in support of the Saint Petersburg musicians was arrested and detained for seven days under the article on refusal to undergo a medical examination for drug intoxication (Article 6.9.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences). After the initial period of detention expired, she **was arrested** again and detained for another 15 days under the article on disobeying lawful orders of police officers (Article 19.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences).

In 2025, law enforcement officers detained Russian citizens the least number of times compared to previous years since the beginning of the war



Data: OVD-Info · as of 8 December 2025

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The year 2025 was marked by mass sentences in the Baymak case, the largest protest-related case in recent years.

Participants in the January 2024 gathering in support of the Bashkir activist **Fail Alsynov** were sentenced to terms ranging from three years and three months to seven and a half years under the articles on mass rioting (Article 212 of the Criminal Code) and using violence against representatives of the authorities (Article 318 of the Criminal Code). In one case, the serving of the sentence was postponed until the convicted woman’s children turn 14 years old. **In total, sentences were imposed against 53 people over the year.** A further nine individuals were convicted in 2024. At the time this report was prepared, fifteen people were awaiting the conclusion of their trials, two were on the wanted list, and one died after being detained.

76 defendants in the Baymak case were transferred from Bashkortostan to other regions for the duration of the court

proceedings:

- **331 individuals**—to the Orenburg region;
- **28 individuals**—to Udmurtia;
- 17 individuals—to the Samara region.

The transfer of the case files related to mass rallies to other regions is a common practice that obviously complicates life for people facing prosecution, their relatives, who face greater difficulties with visiting the prisoners, and lawyers, who have to spend more resources and time on travel. The court ordered a resident of Bashkortostan to undergo compulsory medical treatment on charges of inciting mass riots because two days before the gathering, she urged people to gather outside the court in Baymak, where Alsynov’s verdict was being delivered.



“FOREIGN AGENTS” AND “UNDESIRABLE” ORGANISATIONS

The state continues to make active use of discriminatory legal statuses against its opponents, in particular, against people who have left the country. The number of newly designated “foreign agents” and “undesirable” organisations, as well as the number of cases initiated against them, is growing rapidly. The register of “foreign agents” is increasingly including journalists and cultural figures, while politicians are added to it less frequently. Pro-war loyalists have also begun to appear in the register. 80% of new “foreign agent” designations are linked to support for Ukraine. Changes to the foreign agent legislation have placed 180 people at risk of criminal prosecution. The state now declares “undesirable” various projects that focus on HIV prevention and support for LGBTQ+ people, as well as IT companies, game developers and consulting agencies.

“Foreign agents”

In 2025, the Ministry of Justice added 178 individuals and 37 organisations to the register of “foreign agents,” bringing the total to 215, compared to 164 in 2024, a one-third increase.

Journalists were added to the register particularly frequently: compared to 2024, their number increased by more than 2.5 times (from 35 to 90). Media outlets and online media still remain the largest category: 17 in 2025 and 19 in 2024. There was also an increase in the number of cultural figures added to the register: 24 in 2025 and 17 in 2024.

In addition, a new trend has also emerged: since the autumn, the register has begun to include creative initiatives: the DAR literary prize and the SlovoNovo festival of contemporary Russian culture. The number of researchers designated as foreign agents has doubled, from 11 to 23. By contrast, the rate of increase in the number of politicians in the register has fallen by more than a half (from 30 to 13), and the number of people engaged in educational activities has also declined (from seven to two).

On at least two occasions in 2025, individuals who were not only loyal to the authorities but also supported the war against Ukraine were added to the register. In August, the propagandist Sergey Markov was declared a “foreign agent,” and in September, the war correspondent Roman Alekhin was added to the register. Experts explained the inclusion of Markov in the register by his support for the Azerbaijani authorities during their conflict with Russia. Alekhin was added shortly after being **charged** with laundering money allocated to help the front line.

A total of **173 individuals and organisations (80%)** were declared “foreign agents” for speaking out against the “special military operation” or supporting Ukraine. This is more than the total number of new foreign agents designated in 2024.

In 2025, 16 organisations were removed from the register, almost exclusively due to the cessation of their activities. Seven of them were limited liability companies created, as required by law, by individuals and associations that had previously been designated as foreign agents. In one case, according to official data, the inspection “did not reveal any evidence of activity as a foreign agent.” In 2024, 27 organisations, of which all or almost all had previously ceased operations, and five individuals were removed from the register.

The article on evading the duties of a foreign agent was the second most frequently applied article in politically motivated administrative prosecutions in 2025

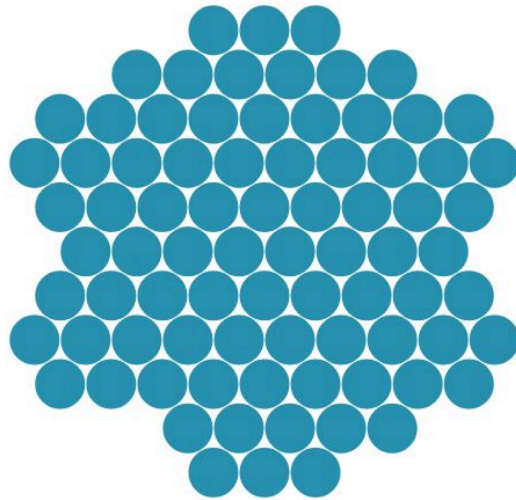


Data: court records, calculations by OVD-Info · as of 8 December 2025

The number of cases referred to the courts of first instance under Article 19.34 of the Code of Administrative Offences (violation of the procedure for the activities of a foreign agent) amounted to 1,058, which is approximately 30% higher than in 2024, when 750 such cases were referred to the courts of first instance.



Criminal cases of evading the duties of a "foreign agent" were initiated against 80 people



Data: [OVD-Info](#) • As of December 8, 2025
* Hover the mouse over each circle to see the name of the "foreign agent"

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Criminal prosecutions under the article on evading the duties of a foreign agent (Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code) were initiated against 37 people in 2025, compared to 34 in 2024. Two of the individuals have not been declared "foreign agents." These are Alexander Voronov, facing prosecution as one of the participants of the LGBT initiative group Coming Out (listed in the register), and Darya Chernysheva, who is listed in the register as a participant in two organisations designated as foreign agents: the "7×7" media outlet and the Revolt-Centre. Unlike all the other

defendants in such criminal cases, Chernysheva is facing charges under Part 1 of Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code (evasion from the provision of documents for one's inclusion in the register). According to the information at our disposal, this is the first case of this kind.

Of the 37 individuals against whom cases were initiated in 2025, only two women remain in Russia: Darya Chernysheva and Olga Tsukanova, the founder of the Council of Mothers and Wives, which advocated for improving the conditions of service for mobilised soldiers. Chernysheva was subjected to prohibition of certain actions as a measure of restraint. Tsukanova spent six months in pre-trial detention and was then **sentenced** to one year and seven months of corrective labour. Taking into account her time spent in pre-trial detention, the sentence amounted to one month.

Another innovation of the year is that for the first time, a person **has been charged** with violating the procedures for the activities of a foreign agent for a second time. This person is Grigory Chkhartishvili, also known as Boris Akunin: in the first case, which was combined with cases of public justification of terrorism (Part 2 of Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code) and involvement in a violent alteration of the constitutional order (Part 1 of Article 205.1 of the Criminal Code), he **was sentenced** in absentia to 14 years of imprisonment in July 2025.

A total of 25 sentences were handed down under **Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code** in 2025, compared to one in 2024 (26 sentences in the entire history of its application). At least eight of these sentences were handed down in cases initiated in 2025.

The punishments vary widely, as people facing prosecution were often charged with other offences as well. Two people residing in Russia **were sentenced** to imprisonment. Sergei Piskunov, an activist from the Kemerovo region, also charged with seducing a minor, **was sentenced** to four years and one month. Farhad Navlyutov, a resident of Tatarstan and a member of an organisation that helps drug addicts and their families, was charged under the third and most serious part of Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code

and sentenced to two years in a colony, which he already served. Lev Shlosberg, the deputy chairman of the Pskov branch of the Yabloko party, was sentenced to 420 hours of **compulsory labour** (he is also under investigation in two other cases—for discrediting the Russian Armed Forces and spreading “fakes” about the Russian Armed Forces).

All the other defendants were sentenced in absentia to varying terms, ranging from one year and one month (the journalist Yuri Dud, this being his first prison sentence under the second part of the “foreign agent” article) to 14 years (Akunin) of imprisonment. Only three of the sentences handed down in absentia did not involve imprisonment: the actress Tatyana Lazareva was sentenced to one year and nine months of corrective labour, the editor-in-chief of the Important Stories news outlet Alesya Marokhovskaya to ten months of corrective labour and the former coordinator of Navalny’s headquarters in Tambov Diana Rudakova to a fine of 80,000 rubles.

In October 2025, amendments were introduced to Parts 1 and 2 of Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code. Previously, a criminal case could be initiated against a person who had two court rulings issued under the corresponding administrative article (Article 19.34 of the Code of Administrative Offences) within a year; now, a single ruling is sufficient. According to our calculations, the number of people at risk has increased by 180:

- 144 people designated as “foreign agents”;
- 34 people listed as “participants” in unregistered associations in the “foreign agents” register;
- Two heads of organisations designated as foreign agents.

In reality, the risk group is significantly wider, because even before the October amendments were adopted, it included people with more than one administrative conviction, as well as those who already have a criminal record.

We are aware of 15 people who were declared “foreign agents” and against whom criminal proceedings were initiated in 2025, but have no information about which articles they were charged under or about the nature of the charges. Ten of them belong to the aforementioned risk group. The likelihood that Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code is applied in these cases is high, but it is also known that at least two of these people have been included in the list of extremists and terrorists with a note that is placed at the names of people prosecuted under terrorism-related articles.

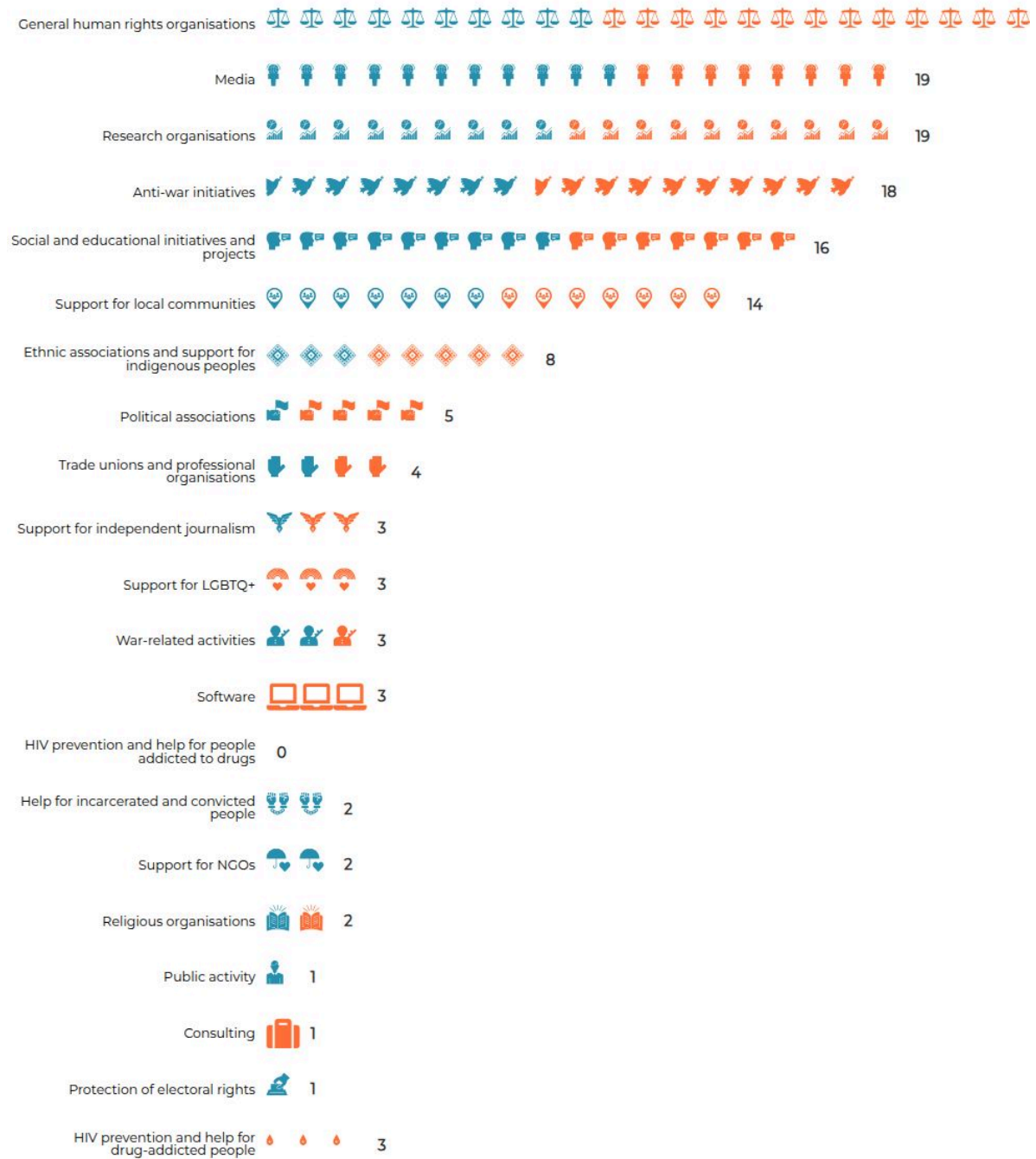
In 2025, a law came into force that completely prohibited “foreign agents” from engaging in educational activities. From that year on, they were also prohibited from receiving municipal financial support and participating in the management bodies of state corporations. In addition, they were required to transfer their income from intellectual property, sales and rentals of real estate as well as other activities to special ruble accounts, access to which is only possible from within Russia. At the end of the year, a law was passed that deprived foreign agents of tax benefits.

We describe the repressive aspects of the legislation in more detail in a separate chapter.

“Undesirable” organisations

The status of an “undesired” organisation was most often assigned to human rights projects

● 2024 ● 2025



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The number of organisations declared “undesirable” as of 8 December 2025 is already slightly higher than the total number in 2024 (80 vs. 70). While in the previous year most of the organisations added to the register of “undesirable” ones were related to the media (11), human rights organisations lead the list in 2025 (13 vs. 10 in 2024), and only eight new media-related organisations were added to it.

The number of anti-war initiatives increased slightly (from eight to 10), as did the number of research organisations (from nine to 10), while the number of educational projects decreased (seven in 2025 vs. nine in 2024). There were at least 36 organisations actively opposing the war or assisting Ukraine added to the register over the year in total.

In addition, for the first time, the list of “undesirable” organisations was expanded with:

- Projects involved in HIV prevention and assistance to drug addicts (three in one year);
- Projects supporting LGBTQ+ people (three as well, but two of them are subdivisions of the same organisation);
- Software companies (three, including the developer of the S.T.A.L.K.E.R. computer game);
- A consulting company.

Most of the organisations added to the register in 2025 (as in 2024) are associated with the United States (13 in 2025, 17 in 2024) and Germany (11 and 16 respectively), with the United Kingdom coming third with nine organisations.

The number of cases referred to the courts of first instance under the administrative article concerning involvement in the activities of an “undesirable” organisation (Article 20.33 of the Code of Administrative Offences) amounted to 227 in 2025 (10% less than in 2024—251). The circumstances of 142 cases are unknown (the texts of the decisions have not been published or contain redactions).

Most of the cases involving the aforementioned charges (17) are related to the religious movement AllatRa, which was founded in Ukraine. There were five such cases in 2024.

Organisations that led by the number of mentions in cases under Article 20.33 of the Code of Administrative Offences last year (Meduza, the Ukrainian religious organisation Revival, The Insider,

Radio Liberty) were mentioned in only a few rulings in 2025. In addition, the year 2025 saw first cases related to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, declared “undesirable” in 2024 (6 cases), the British Council, which was added to the register in 2025, and the Deputies of Peaceful Russia association, established in Berlin in 2023 and added to the register in 2024 (one case each).

At the end of 2025, an administrative case under the article on participation in the activities of an “undesirable” organisation was apparently initiated for the first time for retelling a news article, without links or reposts. A police report **was drawn up** against the journalist Alexei Seregin from Yoshkar-Ola for a post in his Telegram channel, where he wrote about a piece by the “undesirable” news outlet Project titled “**Fathers and Grandfathers**,” which dealt with the system of cronyism and nepotism in power.

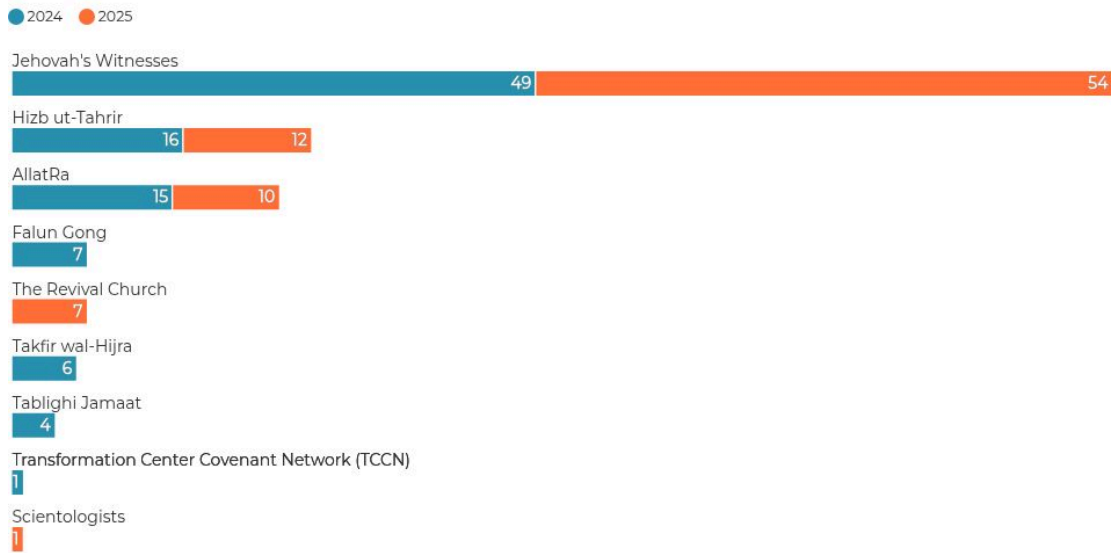
Interestingly, another police report **was drawn up** against Seregin under the same article for posting a link to a publication of an outlet not included in the register: the reason was a link to the Agency news outlet—the case materials indicate that it was established by journalists from the same Project news outlet.

In most instances, it is unknown involvement with which organisation led to bringing administrative charges against people in 2025



Data: OVD-Info · as of 8 December 2025
* Restoring the name of the organisation is not possible due to censorship in court decisions

Criminal prosecutions for involvement with religious groups (all articles)



Data: [QVD-Info](#) - as of 8 December 2025

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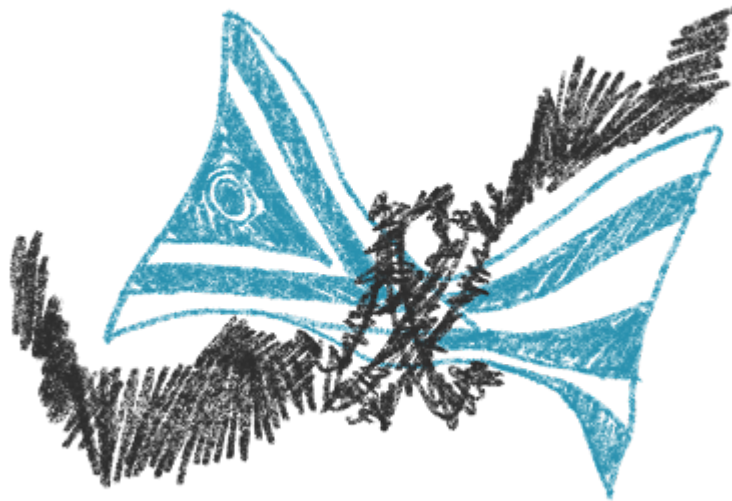
At least 32 criminal cases were initiated under Article 284.1 of the Criminal Code (activities of an “undesirable” organisation) in 2025. Three were under Part 1 (participation in the activities), 13 under Part 3 (organisation of the activities) and 15 under Part 2 (financing of the activities).

It should be noted that we know almost nothing about many cases. We often learn about them when they appear on court websites, but in most instances the names of the defendants are not published. Official reports on sentences usually only mention the punishment, the field and place of residence of the convicted persons, less often the sum of money transferred (in the case of financing) and even less often the name of the organisation. The true number of new prosecutions is likely to be significantly higher than 30 (but our statistics only include those cases where we can establish the year in which the prosecution began).

In 2025, criminal cases were initiated for the first time on charges related to Deputies of Peaceful Russia (4 instances), Meduza (2) and The Insider (1) news outlets, for involvement with which, as we showed above, no administrative cases were initiated in 2025. **The Ukrainian religious movement AllatRa leads**

in terms of mentions in criminal cases (10). Seven prosecutions are related to the Ukrainian religious organisation Vozrozhdenie (“Revival”).

At least 56 sentences were handed down in cases of involvement in “undesirable” organisations in 2025. Details of 16 of these sentences are unknown (one of them was overturned). In five instances, people facing prosecution were deprived of their liberty in absentia—these were the cases of Ilya Azar, Sergei Vlasov, Igor Glek and Elena Rusakova (they **are being prosecuted** because of the Deputies of Peaceful Russia) and the case of Kirill Martynov, the editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta Europe (in addition to running the news outlet, he was charged with “performing the functions of the head” of the Free University). Ten people were given suspended sentences, 16 were sentenced to compulsory labour and four to forced labour. Three people received real prison terms. **Grigory Melkonyants**, a co-chair of the Golos movement, charged with organising the activities of the European Network for Election Monitoring (ENEMO), was sentenced to five years. **Yun Zhu**, a resident of Tomsk, and **Natalya Minenkova**, a resident of Moscow, who, according to the investigation, established cells of the Falun Gong movement, which is banned in China, were sentenced to three and four years, respectively. One person was ordered to undergo compulsory medical treatment.



PRESSURE ON THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Sexual and gender identity continue to serve as a basis for prosecution. Book publishers and shops, streaming services and even establishments with certain designs are becoming victims of the fight against the “LGBTQ+ movement.” Criminal cases against the LGBTQ+ community can be based on intimate messages in private correspondence and messages in public chat rooms, sex education and even criticism of Supreme Court decisions.

Criminal and administrative cases

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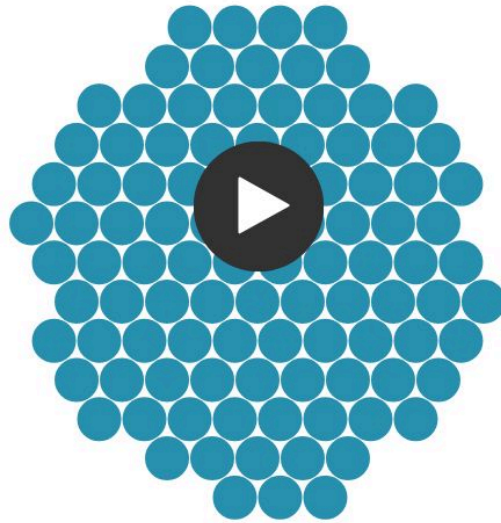
instances of pressure on the LGBTQ community in 2025, according to data from the Coming Out group

The “Publishers’ case” became a high-profile politically motivated prosecution. In May, the homes of several current and former employees of the Eksmo publishing company (about 10 people) **were searched** in Moscow in connection with a case involving an extremist organisation due to “LGBTQ+ propaganda,” and three were placed under house arrest. The reason was the sale of queer literature published by Individuum and Popcorn Books, which are part of Eksmo. The case against Popcorn Books and Individuum has been **the most severe prosecution** in the publishing business since 2022.

Another **12 people** became defendants in cases of involvement in the “LGBT movement.” People were prosecuted, for example, for **public posts with “LGBT themes”, sex education, LGBTQ+ activism** and **criticism of a Supreme Court decision**. The broadest instance of prosecution was the **case** against the directors and administrators of massage parlours in the Kaliningrad region. Along with the article on organising brothels, they are also charged under the article on extremist organisations, presumably because the parlours offered “lesbian shows.”

In 2025, **six representatives of the book industry**, including the Falanster and Podpisnye Izdaniya bookshops, were brought to administrative responsibility for “LGBT propaganda,” according to court records. The streaming service Kinopoisk, Apple and **at least 84 individuals** were charged with “propaganda” and “displaying symbols” of LGBTQ+ people. Most of them were fined, with the total amount of known fines amounting to at least **6.36 million rubles** for 2025. **Nine people** were arrested **for up to 15 days**.

In 2025, administrative cases involving 'LGBT propaganda' were referred to the courts at least 201 times



Data: [court database, OVD-Info calculations](#)
* Some defendants are charged in multiple cases

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Previously, representatives of businesses friendly to the LGBTQ+ community were prosecuted under the law on extremist organisations, but in 2025, the target of the crackdown shifted to members of the community and organisations that support them, according to the Coming Out group. In addition to extremism, people facing prosecution are charged with distributing pornographic material for sending intimate images of themselves in private messages. LGBTQ+ activists are also tried for failing to fulfil their duties as “foreign agents.”

Police reports under administrative articles on propaganda of “non-traditional sexual relations” (Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences) became standard practice in 2025. They were drawn up against people who had been charged with displaying “extremist symbols” (Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences) for images of rainbows and rainbow flags. First criminal cases have been initiated for repeated display of such symbols (Article 282.4 of the Criminal Code).

A resident of Karachay-Cherkessia **was sentenced** to 2.5 years in a colony on charges of participating in the activities of an extremist organisation because, according to the court, he made **comments “bearing psychological signs of propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations” as well as of ideas of “permissiveness and immorality”**. According to the court’s press release, these comments and ideas did not correspond to “the spiritual and moral values of Russian society.”

Raids

Over the year, law enforcement officers conducted **at least six raids** on nightclubs under the guise of combating the LGBTQ+ community, disrupting parties in **four regions**. **There were four times fewer raids than in 2024**, but law enforcement officers behaved more brutally. According to the Coming Out group, while law enforcement officers previously tried not to leave traces of beatings and violence on LGBTQ+ individuals, in 2025 they stopped caring.

The reason for the police report drawn up under the administrative article on “LGBT propaganda” against the owner of the Ulyanovsk bar “Podye! Bar” Vadim Kudyushev **was** the design of the establishment. The pink lighting allegedly referred to the pink triangle, a symbol of the LGBTQ+ community, and the glowing circle turned into a circle filled with white (a symbol of agenderism) when placed against the skin of a white person in sufficient lighting. **According to law enforcement officers, these are all “commonly accepted and recognisable hidden symbols of the LGBT community.”**

In addition, the practice of staged dates, where law enforcement officers deliberately arrange meetings with queer people and then ambush them, is becoming more widespread.

The Coming Out group notes that **even ordinary Russians have become more cruel towards LGBTQ+ people** (based on its experience dealing with instances of violence, attempted murder and murder).

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instances of pressure against organizations targeting the “LGBT movement” in 2025, according to data from the Coming Out group

Content censorship

In order to avoid prosecution for the so-called “LGBT propaganda,” Russian streaming platforms censor foreign content. Mediazona noted that the service Amediateka cut out scenes involving queer couples or any references to LGBTQ relationships in the series *The Walking Dead*, *The Young Pope*, and *The New Pope*.

Foreign streaming platforms also restrict Russian viewers’ access to such content. For example, Russian users of Apple TV are unable to watch the series *Pluribus*, whose main female character is in a relationship with another woman.

In addition, Russian authorities block access to information related to the LGBTQ community. In particular, Roskomnadzor **restricted** access to the YouTube channel of the project Parni+ (“Guys+”).



PRESSURE IN DETENTION

Repression does not end with sentencing. People in captivity face harsh conditions, torture and inhuman treatment. They are denied medical care and are subjected to new criminal charges. Over the course of the year, two individuals facing prosecution died in custody, and one died immediately after release. Two seriously ill detainees were released but later taken back to pre-trial detention. Instances of torture using electric shocks and threats of rape have been documented.

Deaths and severe health conditions in detention

In 2025, at least two persecuted individuals died in custody.

Valery Bailo was 67 years old at the time of his death. Before his arrest, he lived in Russia's Krasnodar region. In April 2024, he was taken to pre-trial detention on charges of involvement with the Jehovah's Witnesses community (Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code—participation in the activities of an extremist organisation), and in July he was sentenced to 2.5 years in a penal

colony. **Valery was denied medical care while in pre-trial detention**, and his health deteriorated. He needed surgery on his knee joint: the ligaments were completely torn, and the knee was supported only by muscles. He complained of severe tooth pain, which for several months forced him to consume only liquid food. His chronic gastrointestinal illness also worsened.

According to his lawyer, during their last meeting with Bailo in February 2025, he was severely emaciated and unable to eat “because of intense, acute pain, yet he was denied medical assistance.” On 22 March 2025, Valery was reported to have died in the pre-trial detention centre.

Rustem Virati died in custody at the age of 60. Prior to his arrest, he **lived** in Ukraine’s Kherson region. On 16 March 2023, he was detained in connection with alleged participation in the Crimean Tatar volunteer battalion named after Noman Çelebicihan, but was released the following day. He was later detained again and taken into custody on charges of participation in an illegal armed formation (Part 2 of Article 208 of the Criminal Code).

For the first four months, Rustem’s relatives did not know where he was being held. On 10 February 2025, he was reported to have died. **According to** the Crimean Tatar Resource Centre, Virati’s health deteriorated significantly in detention: “his blood sugar levels increased, severe swelling of the legs developed, and fluid accumulated in his lungs.”

Sergei Nevorotin, a resident of Russia’s Tver region, **was released** from punishment due to stage four cancer in September 2024. In December 2023, Sergei, a powerlifting coach, was sentenced to six years in a penal colony under the article on “fakes” about the army (Part 2 of Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code) for anti-war statements. The prosecutor’s office sought to overturn the decision on his release, citing Nevorotin’s alleged social danger. In January 2025, Sergei **died** in a hospital at the age of 59.

In at least two instances known to us, the prosecutor’s office successfully appealed to overturn the release of seriously ill

Muslims from occupied Crimea who were prosecuted on political grounds. In May, the court **released** 40-year-old Alexander Sizikov due to complete blindness and hypertension. **However, in October, the appellate court overturned the decision following a complaint by the prosecutor's office, and Sizikov was returned to detention.** Fifty-seven-year-old Lenur Khalilov was **released** due to cancer in August, but was taken back into custody in October. Previously, Sizikov and Khalilov were sentenced to 17 and 18 years in strict regime penal colonies, respectively, on charges of involvement in the Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Torture and inhuman treatment

As **reported** by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Russia Mariana Katzarova, during the second half of 2024 and the first half of 2025 “at least **258 cases of torture** committed by law enforcement officers, prison staff and inmates acting on orders from prison administrations” were documented. These figures reflect the scale of torture affecting not only people prosecuted on politically motivated charges, but also other prisoners.

Oleg Kuryaev, a 56-year-old delivery driver from the Moscow region, was supposed to be released from the Sakharovo detention centre on the evening of 28 August 2025, after nearly two months of so-called “**carousel arrests.**” Instead, he was taken to the FSB building on Lubyanka Square. **According to** Kuryaev, he was beaten and tortured with an electric shock device at night. He was later charged with treason (Article 275 of the Criminal Code).

Mikhail Proshenkov, a 58-year-old Jehovah's Witness from the Saratov region, **was tortured during a search** in September 2025. **According to** his relatives, law enforcement officers pinned him face-down on the floor, breaking his glasses, and demanded the password for his computer. After he refused, they threatened to use violence against him and his son. After he refused again, the law enforcement officers struck **six electric shocks to Mikhail's thighs, shins and abdomen.**

Alexei Dmitriev, a 43-year-old doctor from Ufa, has been **in custody** since 2022 on charges of preparing to overthrow the government and creating a terrorist organisation due to his participation in a Marxist study group (Article 278, Part 4 of Article 226 in conjunction with Article 30, Part 2 of Article 205.2, Article 205.3 and Part 2 of Article 205.4 of the Criminal Code). **According to** Dmitriev, on 1 October, an unnamed operative officer at Pre-Trial Detention Centre No. 5 in Yekaterinburg demanded that he give “the necessary testimony.” After Dmitriev refused to incriminate himself, the officer **beat him and threatened him with rape.**

Significant and numerous groups of detainees who are also subjected to inhuman treatment include arbitrarily detained Ukrainian civilians and Ukrainian prisoners of war. They are held not only in the occupied territories, but are also distributed across numerous pre-trial detention centres and other places of detention throughout Russia. They face extremely harsh conditions, are tortured and subjected to extrajudicial executions. The accounts that become public **provoke** horror. We discussed this in more detail above, in the section on prosecutions under terrorism-related articles.

Denial of access to medical care

OVD-Info documented 11 instances of denying medical care in captivity in 2025. In some cases, prosecuted individuals entered detention already in need of medical assistance. In others, illnesses developed after their incarceration. We also recorded instances in which assistance was denied during acute medical emergencies.

In early December, the Crimean Tatar Tofig Abdulghaziev, who **had been sentenced** to 12 years in the Hizb ut-Tahrir case, was **diagnosed** with a brain tumor. He was previously diagnosed with tuberculosis of the lymph nodes. Over several years, **Abdulghaziev’s health rapidly deteriorated, yet he was repeatedly denied release on medical grounds.** In 2023, Tofig said that due to hypothermia in his cell, he suffered from joint pain,

could barely move and had lost 15 kilograms. In March 2024, he was **admitted** to intensive care in critical condition.

Irina Danilovich, a nurse and journalist from Crimea, **said** that at Penal Colony No. 7 in the Stavropol region, where she is being held following a conviction for possessing explosives, **a regulation was introduced allowing the administration to unreasonably deny or indefinitely delay medications.** Meanwhile, the medical unit lacked essential medications, and some were diluted with water. Previously, while Danilovich was in pre-trial detention, she **lost hearing** in her left ear. Doctors **would not share** test results with her, and prison management refused to provide Irina with the medications prescribed to her. Independent doctors **believe** Danilovich suffered from acute otitis. She also has neurological disorders and brain damage—she may have suffered a stroke in pre-trial detention.

“Egor isn’t getting any better. He now vomits nothing but bile,” **reported** his support group in February for the high school student Egor Balazeikin, who was **convicted** of setting two military recruitment offices on fire (Part 1 of Article 205 of the Criminal Code in conjunction with Part 3 of Article 30 of the Criminal Code). Egor suffers from autoimmune hepatitis. Initially, the medical commission refused to recognise him as disabled, even though **his liver fibrosis was progressing.** In December 2024, Balazeikin **was assigned** a third-degree disability for one year. In October 2025, the court **denied** the young man release on health grounds.

During one of the court hearings, **the former head** of the Serpukhov district of the Moscow region Alexander Shestun, convicted on three counts, **complained** of severe pain and a lack of medical care in the punishment cell.

Strict conditions of detention

Over the past year, prisoners prosecuted for political reasons were placed in punishment cells, cell-type premises, single cell-type premises or under strict conditions of detention at least 114 times. These penalties are usually imposed due to minor nitpicking by the

guards, and the penalties themselves can be applied an unlimited number of times in a row. All of these **penalties amount to a stricter regime of detention, in some cases even total isolation.**

The former Moscow municipal deputy Alexei Gorinov, **convicted** in a case involving “fakes” about the Russian army (Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code), **was held** in a punishment cell for two months. **Gorinov was disciplined for “not keeping his hands behind his back” while receiving bed linens and for having letters left on his nightstand.** Afterward, Alexei **was placed** in a cell-type premise and then **back** in a punishment cell.

In September, the activist **Mikhail Kriger** went on a hunger strike demanding to be returned to his unit, as well as end his solitary confinement and other punitive measures. The political prisoner **ended** the hunger strike significantly weakened, but that did not prevent the prison administration from **placing** him in a single cell-type premise for six months.

In 2025, prosecuted individuals in captivity went on a hunger strike at least 17 times. The prisoners protested against **finances**, refusal to provide **medical care** and harsh **prison conditions**.

Repeated prosecutions and other forms of pressure

In February, a new criminal case was **reported** to have been initiated against 21-year-old Artem Begoyan, a resident of Mordovia **sentenced** to 20 years in a colony for arson on the railway, for allegedly justifying terrorism based on his conversations with cellmates (Part 2 of Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code).

In November, Alexander Neustroev, a resident of Yekaterinburg who was already serving a sentence, was **sentenced** to an additional term on a similar charge.

In August, a court **sentenced** Zarema Musayeva, the mother of Chechen opposition figures, to an additional three years and 11

months in a penal colony for assaulting a Federal Penitentiary Service officer (Part 2 of Article 321 of the Criminal Code). Musayeva has been **imprisoned** since January 2022, suffers from diabetes and is insulin-dependent.

In August, a new criminal case was reported to have been **initiated** against the journalist Maria Ponomarenko, who was **sentenced** in 2023 to six years for reporting on the events in Mariupol (Part 2 of Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code), for causing minor bodily harm to an Federal Penitentiary Service officer. Previously she was additionally **sentenced** to one year and ten months in a colony for assaulting prison staff (Part 2 of Article 321 of the Criminal Code). **According** to her lawyer, **Ponomarenko attempted suicide three times** between 30 July and 9 August 2025.

Another common form of pressure on politically prosecuted prisoners is to **restrict** their correspondence with and visits of their loved ones.

In some instances, psychiatric methods of pressure are used. The Kaliningrad activist Oleg Savvin was ordered to undergo compulsory medical treatment while the investigation into his actions was ongoing. Savvin is facing prosecution for an anti-war comment he made on social media in 2022 and for disseminating “fakes” about the Russian army (Part 2 of Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code).

A review by the Global Initiative on Psychiatry **reports** 112 instances and 109 victims (three of whom were subjected to the abuse twice) of using psychiatry for political purposes in Russia over a 10-year period, from 2015 to 2025.



PROCEDURAL STATISTICS AND SOCIAL GROUPS

A decline in the overall number of politically motivated criminal cases does not mean a softening of repression. Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Crimea continue to lead in terms of the number of cases. In the two capitals, half of the administrative political cases are against foreign agents. Journalists are the most often prosecuted group in criminal cases. Young Russians are prosecuted slightly less often, while middle-aged Russians are slightly more frequently. Foreign citizens and diaspora communities, migrant workers and Ukrainians, students and conscripts face various types of widespread pressure that are difficult to classify as political, but impossible to ignore.

General information

The year 2025 was marked by a significant drop in the number of new politically motivated prosecutions, as we **classify** them.

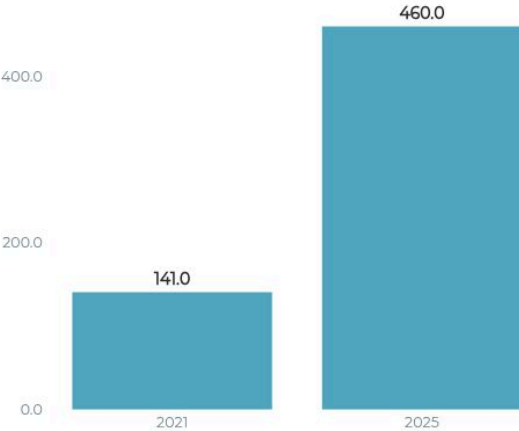
In 2024, there were 798 of them, and in 2025, 522. This is the same number that we documented in the pre-war year of 2021.

The actual number of cases is almost certainly higher. There are prosecutions for which we cannot identify the exact year of their initiation, but we suspect that they began in 2025. However, they are not included in the statistics. Furthermore, there are cases that we assess as potentially politically motivated, that is, as “possible.” A political motive is likely, but we lack the expertise or information to draw a definitive conclusion. Such cases are also not included in the statistics.

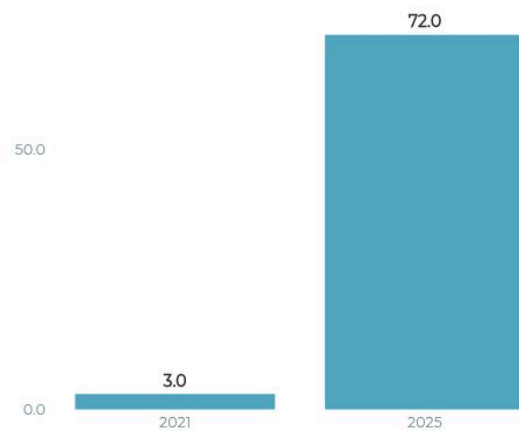
Finally, as explained above, we do not consider cases of treason, terrorism or sabotage to be inherently political. However, the extraordinary increase in the number of such prosecutions hints at the politicisation of this area.

Repression in Russia is intensifying

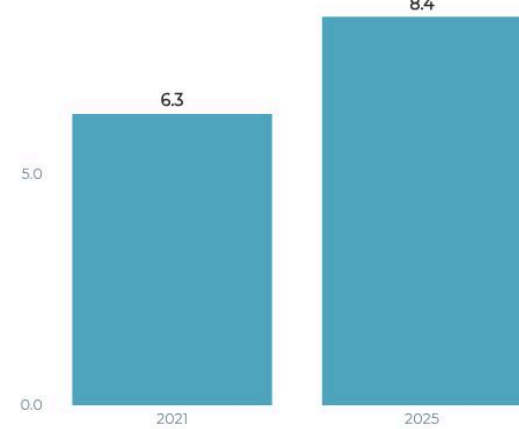
Number of convictions with the defendant(s) present



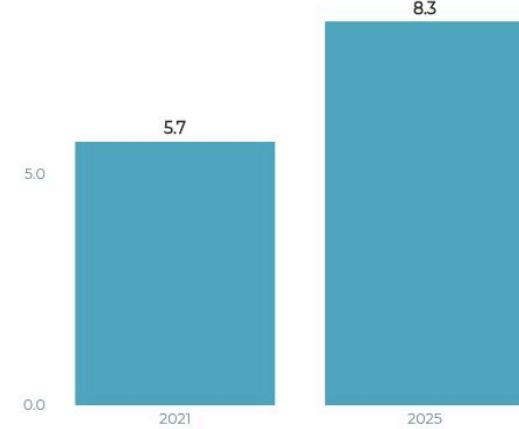
Number of convictions in absentia



Average duration of convictions with the defendant(s) present (in years)

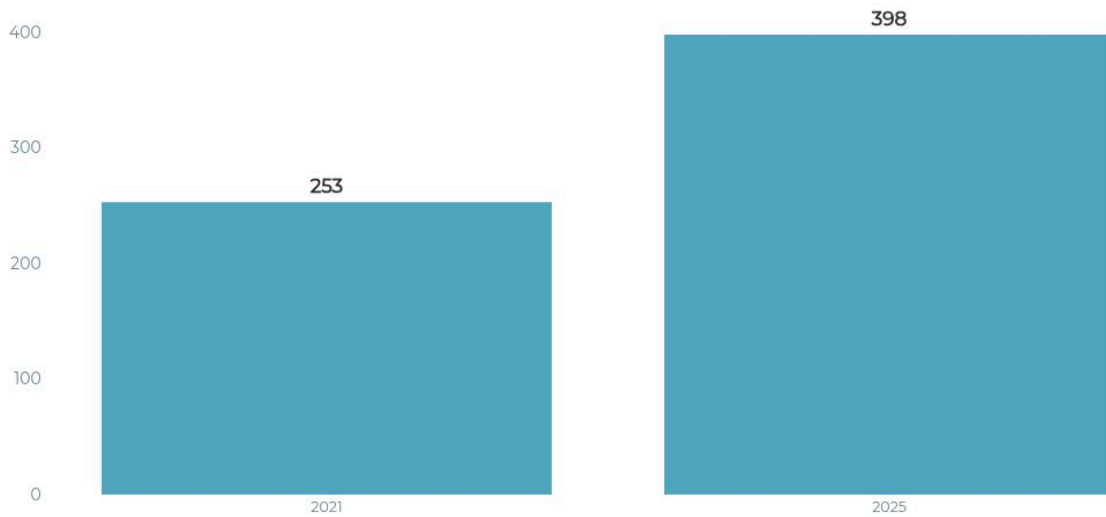


Average duration of convictions in absentia (in years)



Data: Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation · as of October 2025
Data include three quarters of each year

Number of individuals prosecuted for political motives and imprisoned in 2021 and 2025



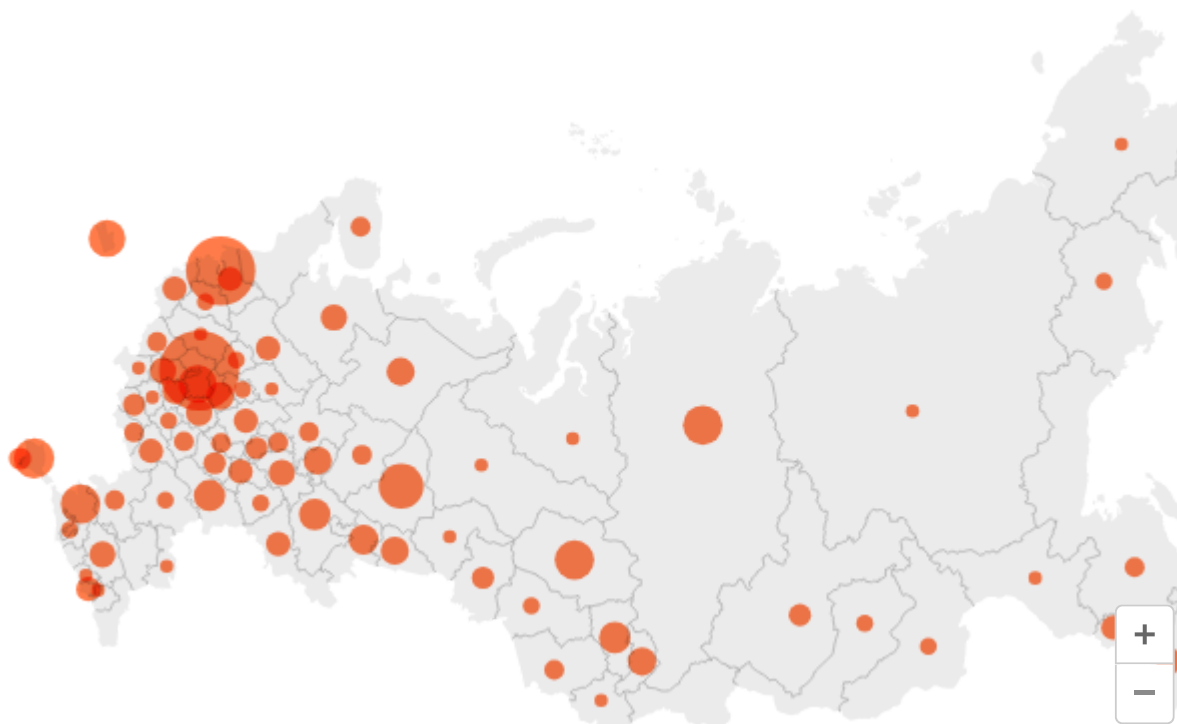
Data: OVD-Info • as of 8 December 2025

Regions

In most of the 85 regions, the number of politically motivated prosecutions continues to decline: only 21 regions had more criminal cases in 2025 than in 2024.

Moscow led in the absolute number of politically motivated prosecutions in 2025, with **69 people** facing criminal charges. In Saint Petersburg, we identified at least **51 people facing politically motivated prosecution. The Sverdlovsk region came third with 20 people.** Crimea had 16 defendants (fourth place), mostly charged in cases of involvement in the banned Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir. Among the regions with the fewest criminal cases is the Altai Republic (3), whose residents actively **protested** against the policies of the new acting head of the region Andrei Turchak.

The leaders in the number of defendants in politically motivated criminal cases in 2025 are Moscow, Saint Petersburg and the Sverdlovsk region



* OVD-Info collects data on repression by the Russian authorities in occupied Crimea because we are able to verify these data

Источник: OVD-Info • [Скачать данные](#) • Создано с помощью [Datawrapper](#)

In 2025, the capital also saw the highest number of politically motivated administrative cases—**896 instances**. Crimea ranked second after Moscow in politically motivated administrative cases, with **504 instances**, 95% of which involved discrediting the Russian army.

More than half of administrative cases in Moscow and Saint Petersburg were initiated under the article on violations of the obligations imposed on “foreign agents” (Article 19.34 of the Code of Administrative Offences). This may be explained by the fact that many politicians, activists and journalists who ignored the foreign agent legislation lived and worked in these cities.

The number of administrative cases outside Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Crimea is significantly lower. Only isolated cases

were recorded in regions with low levels of protest activity, such as the Oryol region (4 cases), or in places where extrajudicial persecution of government critics is widespread, for example Chechnya (2 cases) and Ingushetia (5 cases).

Occupied Crimea surpassed Saint Petersburg and became second only to Moscow in the number of politically motivated administrative cases



* OVD-Info collects data on repression by the Russian authorities in occupied Crimea because we are able to verify these data

Источник: OVD-Info • [Скачать данные](#) • Создано с помощью [Datawrapper](#)

Social groups

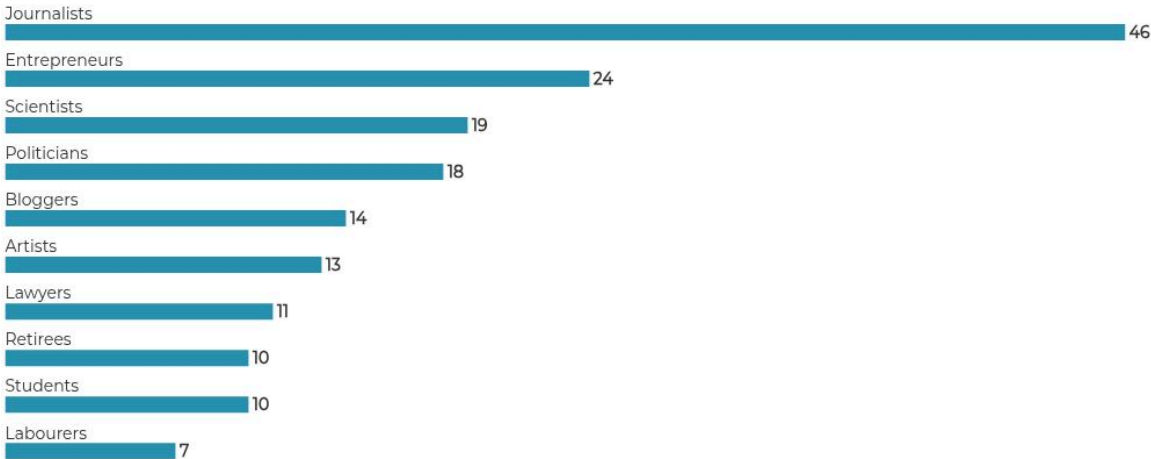
The group most often targeted in politically motivated criminal cases in 2025, as in 2024, was independent journalists, particularly those covering the war, repression and corruption. 39 journalists were prosecuted, five of whom were anchors of the TV Rain television channel. Criminal cases were also initiated against members of the Meduza team and individuals who had collaborated with the outlet, as well as journalists from Novaya

Gazeta Europe, The Insider, Groza and journalists running their own media projects.

Entrepreneurs were also frequently prosecuted, with **20** instances recorded in 2025. Among them were Boris Zimin and Yevgeny Chichvarkin, both of whom supported political movements and publicly criticised the invasion of Ukraine, the politician and well-known opponent of Vladimir Putin Mikhail Khodorkovsky as well as Nikita Yefremov, who was detained after returning to Russia because of donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation. Musheg Alkamyán, the owner of a small transport business, was charged with hooliganism (Article 213 of the Criminal Code) and incitement to hatred (Article 282 of the Criminal Code) following a drunken argument in a share taxi, during which he insulted the head of the Investigative Committee Alexander Bastrykin.

People prosecuted in politically motivated cases also included politicians, scientists, bloggers, artists, students and lawyers.

Most politically motivated criminal cases were initiated against journalists in 2025



Data: OVD-Info · as of 8 December 2025

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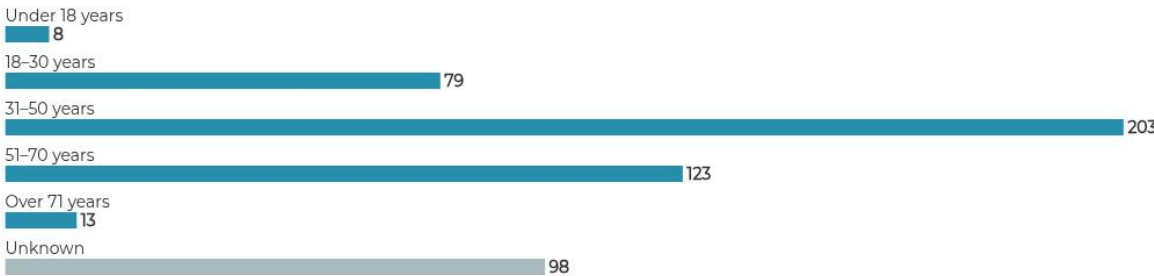
Age groups

The number of minors subjected to criminal prosecution remained the same as in 2024—**eight individuals**. The identities of almost

all of them remain unknown. Five were charged with rehabilitation of Nazism (Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code), one with involvement with a certain extremist organisation, and one teenager from Moscow was charged with failure to report a crime (Article 205.6 of the Criminal Code).

Thirteen people aged over 71 became defendants in criminal cases for **statements critical of the Russian authorities** or **alleged links to Jehovah’s Witnesses**. **Three individuals** in this age group were charged with forcible seizure of power on the basis of their membership in the Anti-War Committee. The proportion of prosecuted middle-aged individuals (aged 31–50) increased from **19.9%** to **24%** compared to 2024. As a rule, they were targeted under anti-war or terrorism-related articles. By contrast, the share of young Russians (aged 18–30) fell from **24.4%** to **13.6%**.

People prosecuted in 2025 by age group



Data: [QVD-Info](#) · as of 8 December 2025

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Lawyers and human rights defenders

Lawyers defending civil and human rights in Russia clearly remain a high-risk group.

In May, the Kaliningrad-based lawyer **Maria Bontsler** was taken into custody on charges of confidential cooperation with foreign nationals (Article 275.1 of the Criminal Code) despite suffering from severe hypertension. According to the investigation, she allegedly collected information about officers of the FSB and

passed it to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). Bontsler had represented **Igor Baryshnikov** in an “anti-war” case and cooperated with OVD-Info. The case against her has been **marked by** procedural violations and sustained **pressure**. Representatives of the human rights organisation Prizyv k Sovesti (Call to Conscience) state that law enforcement agencies deliberately sought to “remove” Bontsler as an effective lawyer defending individuals prosecuted for anti-war statements and people liable for military service.

Bontsler became one **of 15 human rights defenders and lawyers targeted in criminal cases**. In **five instances**, the basis for the prosecution was the publication of material about the war in Ukraine. For example, Nikolai Polozov, who defended members of Pussy Riot in the case concerning A Punk Prayer, **was charged** with spreading “fakes.” A similar charge **was brought** against the human rights defender Yelena Popova for posting a link to a livestream in support of the Movement of Conscientious Objectors. Experts from Prizyv k Sovesti (Call to Conscience) note that one month before the search, she had announced her departure from the human rights movement after 15 years of work.

The Constitutional law expert Yelena Lukyanova **was charged** with forcible seizure of power (Article 278 of the Criminal Code) and participation in a terrorist organisation (Article 205.4 of the Criminal Code) for her membership in the Anti-War Committee of Russia, which has adopted the so-called Berlin Declaration calling for a change of government in the country.

15

human rights defenders and lawyers targeted
in criminal cases in 2025

Other grounds for criminal cases included alleged **violations of foreign agent obligations, criticism of pressure on LGBTQ communities, links to organisations banned in Russia**, and even **disruption of the functioning of a penal colony**.

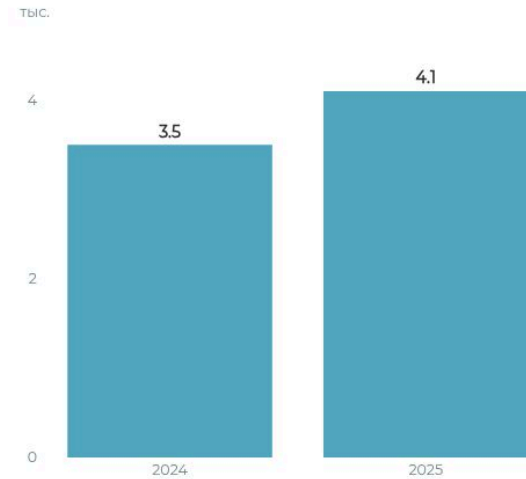
Experts from Department One **say** that the full number of prosecuted human rights defenders remains unknown. According to their assessment, law enforcement agencies have increasingly initiated cases against those who defend people prosecuted for political reasons and those who criticise the authorities. The state appears to use prosecutions of lawyers as a demonstrative measure aimed at intimidation and cleansing of the professional environment.

Foreign nationals and members of diaspora communities

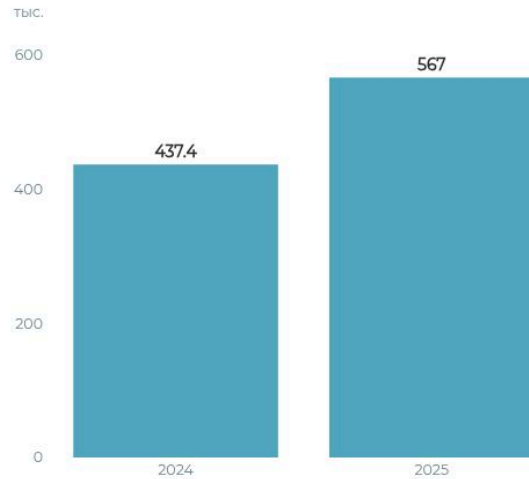
The terrorist attack at the Crocus City Hall concert venue in 2024 **triggered an anti-migrant hysteria** that was actively encouraged by the authorities. Thousands of citizens of former Soviet states living in Russia were deported, often **in violation** of their rights. **In 2025, systematic pressure on migrants continued.** According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the number of deportations over the first three quarters of the year increased by **16%** compared to the same period of the previous year, reaching **4,100 people**. The total number of administrative police reports for migration violations exceeded **697,000 instances—123,000 more** than the year before.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has increasingly targeted foreign nationals for all categories of migration-related offences

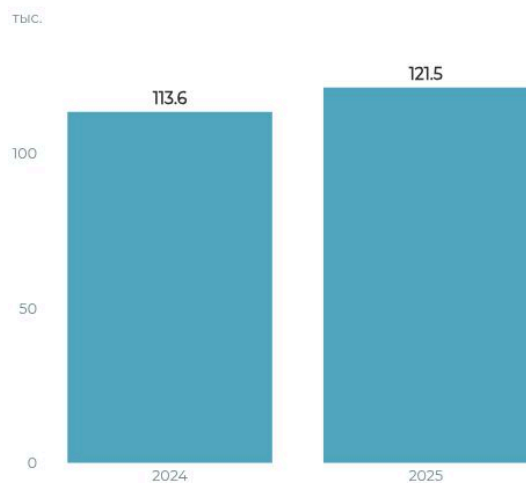
Number of people deported



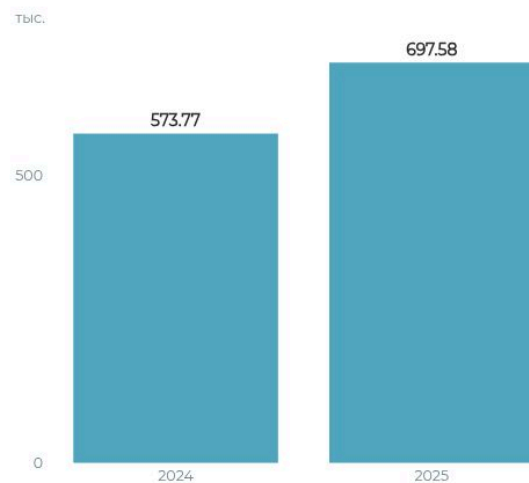
Violation of the rules of entry to the Russian Federation



Violation of the rules of stay in the Russian Federation



Number of administrative police reports related to migration



Data: Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation · as of 8 October 2025
Data include three quarters of each year

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According to Yevgeny Smirnov, a lawyer with Department One, the increased scrutiny of foreign nationals is linked to the war. The state treats everyone crossing the border as a potential saboteur or traitor. This also explains **the meticulous screening** of Ukrainian citizens, whose phones are searched by FSB officers for “suspicious” information. **Other Ukrainians may be held for weeks in temporary detention centres on vague “suspicions”** of planning terrorist acts, using a practice similar to so-called **“carousel arrests,”** while law enforcement officers prepare criminal cases. These same centres also hold Ukrainians released from

Russian prisons, whom the state is formally obliged to deport but is unable to do so because of the war.

In 2025, Azerbaijanis in Russia and Russians in Azerbaijan became hostages to a sudden crisis in relations between the two countries. After the crash of an Azerbaijan Airlines flight from Baku to Grozny in December 2024, Azerbaijani authorities blamed Russian air-defence systems. In summer, two people of Azerbaijani origin died during detention in Yekaterinburg in connection with investigations into murders committed in 2001, 2010 and 2011. Azerbaijan stated that the detainees had been tortured. The following day in Baku, eight Russian citizens—**tourists and IT specialists**—were violently detained and placed in custody. They were reportedly suspected of drug smuggling from Iran and cybercrime. Senior employees of the Russian state media outlet Sputnik Azerbaijan were also **taken into custody** on charges of fraud, illegal business activity and money laundering.

Following this, during the summer in Russia:

- Elshan Ibragimov, head of the Azerbaijani national-cultural autonomy in Moscow, **was stripped of citizenship** and then **deported**;
- Zaur Shipilov, described by journalists as an influential Azerbaijani figure, **was taken into custody** in Orenburg;
- Vagif Suleymanov, allegedly linked to the prominent businessman God Nisanov, **was detained** in Moscow;
- Mamedali Agayev, a former director of the Moscow Satire Theatre, **was placed in pre-trial detention** on charges of large-scale fraud.

In October, Vladimir Putin met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in Dushanbe. Putin offered an apology and acknowledged the Russian Federation's responsibility for downing the aircraft. Following this diplomatic exchange, employees of Sputnik Azerbaijan **were placed under house arrest** and subsequently released, whilst in Moscow, Mamedali Agayev was released from

custody. However, shortly thereafter in Ulyanovsk, Islam Guseinov, the head of the local Azerbaijani diaspora, was stripped of his Russian citizenship.

Additionally, OVD-Info is aware of 19 foreign nationals currently facing politically motivated criminal prosecution in Russia.

Student crackdown

We recorded **11 instances of criminal prosecution** against students in 2025. According to Leonid Spirin, the editor-in-chief of the student media outlet Groza, whilst 2024 saw the authorities **attempting** to encourage higher birth rates amongst youth through benefits and reproductive health surveys, **the dominant theme of 2025 was the compulsory introduction of the state-backed messenger app Max** .

Faculty supervisors forced students to install Max and migrate all communications to the platform under threat of expulsion. Speaking to OVD-Info, Spirin noted: “We cannot yet say this is a directive from the very top. It appears to be local zealotry, stemming from the ban on foreign messengers for state employees. Our source at one university provided documents indicating that [supervisors] face fines deducted from their salaries for non-compliance.”

Another trend is the centralisation of social polling. According to Groza, the authorities are keen to gauge student sentiment, their attitudes towards politicians, and their level of political engagement.

Conscription and military service

The project Idite Lesom (freely translated as “Get Lost”), which assists Russian conscripts and deserters, notes that military recruitment offices continue to intimidate conscripts with threats of issuing arrest warrants, blocking their payment cards and 15-day

administrative arrests. **Furthermore, full-scale raids take place in Moscow.**

Idite Lesom is also aware of an instance where a resident of Krasnoyarsk, who was attempting to secure Alternative Civilian Service (ACS), was criminally charged with draft evasion (Article 328 of the Criminal Code) after the military recruitment office ignored all his appeals.

Requests for ACS **are being** rejected with increasing frequency despite a rising number of applications (over 2,700 known applicants), according to experts from Prizyv k Sovesti (Call to Conscience). Their data indicates that only one application **was approved** during the entire spring draft in Moscow. Military draft boards reject applicants based on their own subjective beliefs rather than the established rules, making it impossible for conscripts to predict which of their arguments will be deemed relevant.

Conscripts who re-apply for ACS also face rejections, attempts to draft them into the army and occasionally criminal prosecution. Many men who do end up in conscript service are coerced or deceived into signing contracts to be then sent to the front line. A conscript from Chuvashia, whose family spoke to Idite Lesom, said he was promised to serve in a “guard company at the base,” only to discover later that he was being deployed to Mariupol. Prisoners also continue to be pressured into signing contracts.

Prizyv k Sovesti has recorded a rise in arbitrary treatment of conscientious objectors by serving personnel. Men drafted during mobilisation or under contract are attempting to leave the service by any means possible—through imprisonment, desertion or refusing orders. They face violence and forced deployment to deadly assault operations. Deserters are not only pursued legally. There is a practice of creating special “capture squads” where representatives of military units **resort to** threats, blackmail, violence and murder, bypassing the Military Investigative Department and the Commandant’s Office.

LEGISLATIVE REPRESSIONS

Throughout the year, the State Duma has passed laws simplifying repressive measures. The key trend is a movement towards total control over society. It has become easier to designate organisations as “extremist.” The FSB will now have its own remand centres, making independent oversight of conditions significantly more difficult. It is now forbidden even to search for “extremist” content or advertise VPN services. Foreign agents have been banned from educational activities, and shops are effectively prohibited from selling books by foreign agents.

Suppressing dissent under the guise of anti-extremism

“In 2025, a key trend was cemented in Russian law-making: a shift towards total societal control and the expansion of repressive tools. Restrictions on foreign agents have tightened, anti-extremist norms now cover the mere act of searching for information, and the procedure for designating organisations as extremist has been simplified. The state has extended prison terms and expanded the grounds for bringing charges under the articles on discrediting the army, calls for sanctions and sabotage, with liability extended even to adolescents [under 16],” explains the lawyer Valeria Vetoshkina, who collaborates with OVD-Info.

The State Duma **has simplified** the process for designating organisations as extremist. Under the new norms, a community can be added to the Ministry of Justice’s list of extremist organisations if just one of its members is convicted under the article on **“extremist communities”** (Article 282.1 of the Criminal Code). Previously, a court decision on a ban or liquidation was required.

It has also become easier to add individuals to the Rosfinmonitoring list of terrorists and extremists. The grounds now include charges

of spreading “fakes” about the army or discrediting it, as well as displaying Nazi or any other prohibited symbols (Article 282.4 of the Criminal Code).

The FSB has been authorised to operate its own pre-trial detention centre. One of the bill’s co-authors, the State Duma deputy Vasily Piskarev, clarified that these centres are intended to hold suspects in cases of treason, espionage, confidential cooperation with foreign nationals and extremist or terrorist crimes (though the law itself does not specify this).

As Valeria Vetoshkina explains, in the 1990s, Russia removed pre-trial detention centres from the control of the security service in order to join the Council of Europe. In FSB-controlled detention centres, access to a lawyer will become a concession granted by the administration rather than a right, whilst defence lawyers themselves will be unable to monitor violations of their clients’ rights promptly. “Returning to such a model is a return to the origins that Russia formally renounced for the sake of integration into the European system of protecting human rights,” Vetoshkina believes.

Furthermore, the State Duma **has banned the consumption of certain content, introducing** administrative fines for **searching for “extremist” materials**. In December, a resident of the Sverdlovsk region **was fined** 3,000 rubles because FSB officers found traces of a search for information about the Azov Brigade on his phone. Due to the police report, the man was forced to resign from his job. The law provoked a strong reaction in society, even from some supporters of the authorities, including Yekaterina Mizulina, the head of the Safe Internet League, a state-sponsored Russian non-profit internet censorship organisation.

Other prohibitions introduced by this law include:

- Advertising VPN services;
- Transferring SIM cards or internet accounts to another person;
- Refusal by VPN owners to comply with Roskomnadzor requirements to restrict access to pages from the registry of banned sites;
- Violation of rules regulating the interaction with state bodies and law enforcement agencies, as well as the disclosure of information about such connections by telecommunication operators or internet service administrators.

Advertising on the resources of “undesirable” and “extremist” organisations **has also been banned**.

This year, **liability for committing acts of sabotage began to apply to adolescents from the age of 14**. At the same time, the law separately stipulated that involving children in sabotage is now punishable by life imprisonment.

Another law **has restricted** the rights of those charged under articles on terrorism, extremism and sabotage. Individuals included in the Rosfinmonitoring register of terrorists and extremists will be unable to conduct financial transactions and must request written permission from the agency to receive funds credited to them. As **noted** by the human rights project Department One, bank accounts of people in the registry are already frozen. This affects social benefits, scholarships, pensions and other payments.

Pressure against foreign agents and critics of the government

State Duma deputies regularly label people included in the “foreign agent” register as **enemies of Russia** and publicly promise **to deprive them of old age pensions** and use **other severe measures** against them.

The State Duma passed three laws against foreign agents. **One of these banned them from working in the school system and**

education. Bookshops are *de facto* **prohibited from selling books by foreign agents**—those are already being **removed** from the shelves. This has already affected well-known writers with large print runs: Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Boris Akunin, Dmitry Bykov, Asya Kazantseva and Dmitry Glukhovsky. Another law **expedited** the process of bringing criminal charges for evading the duties of a “foreign agent.” Previously, in order to be criminally charged one needed to have two previous fines under the corresponding administrative article (Article 19.34 of the Code of Administrative Offences), but now a single fine is enough. The State Duma also **increased** the tax rate for “foreign agents” to 30%, effectively depriving them of tax benefits and deductions. Because of this, organisations included into this register of the Ministry of Justice will no longer be able to use reduced income tax rates.

New wording **was added** to the articles on discrediting the army (Article 280.3 of the Criminal Code), calls for sanctions (Article 284.2 of the Criminal Code) and assisting international organisations in which Russia does not participate (Article 284.3 of the Criminal Code). The penalties for such crimes will be **harsher** in case of “mercenary motives.” **The court will have a right to confiscate property** of the defendant if it deems the defendant has obtained it “as a result of crimes” or if it is intended to be used for “financing activities against Russia’s security.”

Revocation of citizenship and insults against historical memory

The repressive legislation that the State Duma managed to adopt in 2025 **includes** amendments to the citizenship law. The list of crimes for which naturalised Russians can lose their passports has expanded and now includes confidential cooperation with a foreign state or international organisation (Article 275.1 of the Criminal Code).

As **noted** by the Vazhnye Istarii (“Important Stories”) media, the government makes considerable effort to deprive politically unreliable people of their passports. By the summer of 2025, 214

people have already been **deprived** of their received citizenship for failing to register with a military recruitment office; most of these people lost their passports in 2024. Dmitry Kisiev, who was born in occupied Crimea and was the chief of staff for Boris Nadezhdin (a presidential candidate in the last election), was also **stripped** of his citizenship. The politician Ilya Yashin, who left the country as part of a prisoner exchange, was even **declared** stateless. However, **as far as we know**, he was never stripped of citizenship.

Besides everything else, the authorities **introduced** a law criminalising the desecration of monuments to the Great Patriotic War. The SOVA centre **believes** that this means that unintentional desecration of monuments could simultaneously be classified as rehabilitation of Nazism (Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code) and destruction, damage or desecration of military graves (Article 243.4 of the Criminal Code).

RESISTANCE AND VICTORIES

In 2025, we saw not just repression getting more intense, but also inspiring examples of solidarity in the society. Sixteen-year-old Anya Zhuravleva, abused by her cellmates, was released from imprisonment. The Stoptime musicians escaped the “carousel arrests” system. Several hundred Ukrainian civilians from the occupied territories were released. More than 200 prosecuted people were freed. More than 3,000 people wrote almost 6,900 letters to political prisoners. More than 54 thousand appeals related to violations of human rights were sent to various authorities by means of the Dyatel (“Woodpecker”) service.

Why note the good things

In June, 16-year-old Anya Zhuravleva was released on recognisance not to leave. The teenager was **charged with** preparing a mass murder in school (Part 2, point “a” of Article 105

of the Criminal Code in conjunction with Article 30 of the Criminal Code) and participating in the Columbine terrorist organisation (Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code). In November 2023, at the age of 14, Anya detonated a firecracker in a deserted area and published a video of it in a Telegram channel. After that, she was taken to pre-trial detention, where she spent a year and a half and was **subjected to abuse from her fellow inmates** with the connivance of the guards. The situation changed after media **attention** to the case and public outcry. At the very least, Anya is now at home with her loved ones.

Many people also sympathised with the musicians from the Saint Petersburg band Stoptime—the singer Diana Loginova (Naoko), guitarist Aleksandr Orlov and drummer Vladislav Leontyev. In October they were detained and held in captivity by means of “carousel arrests,” arresting them again right after each release. Law enforcement often **uses** this tactic before initiating criminal proceedings. In November, the musicians were finally **released**, and some of them left Russia. Solidarity with Stoptime was expressed through solo pickets in Russia’s regions as well as by musicians within the country and beyond.

Also in 2025, more Ukrainian civilians detained on the occupied territories **were released** than over the three previous years of the full-scale war taken together. These are just several hundreds out of **many thousands**, but for those who were freed this was often a release from the conditions of torture or death.

Why do we have to notice and analyse not just negative events in our work but also positive ones? First, like all people involved with the topic of repression, we have a hard time coping with the years-long feeling of hopelessness. Good news gives us strength. Second, to analyse political persecution in its entirety, we cannot ignore local victories. Yes, **the goal of our project** is a complete end to repression in Russia. But it is also important to document small steps in this direction.

Unfortunately, there is always a chance that even if the situation improves slightly today, it will worsen tomorrow. For example, the

blind Crimean resident Aleksander Sizikov was initially released—it was a great joy and a legal victory, but later this decision was overturned, and Aleksander was **taken back** to pre-trial detention. In September, Alexei Gorinov, a former municipal deputy and the first person convicted of “fakes” about the Russian Armed Forces, was **transferred** to a cell-type premise amid widespread public support for his situation. The conditions there are worse than in the colony but still better than in the punishment cell where Gorinov had previously spent two months. However, in November Alexei **was placed** in a punishment cell again.

Many “good” events are seen as such only within the general context of political repression. Like many people all over Russia and beyond, we breathed a sigh of relief learning about the Stoptime musicians **leaving** Russia. It is hard to ignore that forced emigration of young people is in itself a difficult ordeal and a form of political pressure. However, against the backdrop of hard choices that the Russian state forces upon people, their departure feels like an improvement.

At the same time, when using subjective concepts such as “good” and “improvement,” it is important to consider the opinions of people within. For example, the mother of one of the prosecuted prisoners noted in an interview with OVD-Info the importance of receiving financial and moral support, the importance of defence lawyers’ work and the ability to influence events in a penal colony to change the situation. The lawyers involved in the work with politically prosecuted people explain that **improvements can occur even after their legal complaints are rejected**. Conversely, formally upholding complaints may not result in any changes. The reality of repression, especially within penitentiary facilities, is complex and does not always fit neatly within a legal framework.

One of the important legacies of the English psychologist Viktor Frankl, who survived a Nazi concentration camp, is that **living through repression and preserving oneself in extreme conditions** is the most important form of resistance. Frankl and, in particular, his book *Yes to Life* are **mentioned** by contemporary

Russian political prisoners. The Soviet writer, dissident and political prisoner Anatoly Marchenko, who died behind bars in December 1986, **noted** in his book *My Testimony* that “prisoners must demonstrate big endurance, big moral power in order to preserve themselves, their human dignity and human relationships with one another in such inhuman conditions.” The very fact that people prosecuted for political motives were able to survive the hardship of repression and then walk free, and that their relatives and ordinary caring people could find strength in themselves to demonstrate solidarity, attention and support, is in itself an important form of resistance.

Released prisoners

The year 2025 saw at least 211 people **released** from penitentiary facilities. Some of them had spent long years in captivity. Among the released people were defendants in high-profile politically motivated cases, such as the **case of the Ingush opposition**, as well as victims of repression that the authorities turned into a conveyor, such as **Jehovah’s Witnesses**.

The citizen of Ukraine and participant in the Kyiv Euromaidan Andrei Kolomiets was released after having served almost 10 years in a strict regime colony. He had been sentenced in occupied Crimea on **charges** of attempted murder of Berkut fighters during Euromaidan and smuggling marijuana. After being formally released, Andrei spent several months in a temporary detention centre for foreign nationals and then got stranded in the buffer zone at the Russia-Georgia border. After all, in July he managed to come back to Ukraine and see his parents after a long separation. A defendant in the “**Network case**” Viktor Filinkov, who had spent seven years in captivity, was released in **January**. He was immediately deported to his native Kazakhstan.

The human rights defender and one of the first people sentenced for discrediting the army Vladislav Nikitenko was **released** in May. The Kirov-based activist Svetlana Marina was **set free** in November. Svetlana had been sentenced for criticising the killed “war

correspondent” Vladlen Tatarsky. After being released, Svetlana **noted** the large public support that she received while in captivity: “There was a colossal support from the side of civil society. I received countless letters. People were concerned, they worried about me.”

Amid the tendency towards repeated prosecutions—as was demonstrated in the cases of **Zarema Mustafaeva**, **Alexei Gorinov**, **Maria Ponomarenko** and **Azat Miftakhov**—an unobstructed release of prisoners is already valuable. **Political prisoners themselves note their fear of new charges.** The musician Igor Levchenko, who **spent** almost three years in captivity for a video where he criticised the invasion of Ukraine, **admitted** after being released that he had been afraid of a repeated criminal prosecution: “I couldn’t believe until the very end [that I would walk free]. I thought that a new case might emerge.”

Acquittals and reductions of punishment

We are aware of 61 instances over the past year where people facing prosecution were acquitted, their cases were terminated, or their punishment reduced and measure of restraint mitigated.

Most of the time, prosecutions were terminated due to the expiration of the statute of limitations. That is how the court **terminated** a criminal case of desecrating the symbols of military glory (Part 3 of Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code) initiated against the resident of the Bryansk region Alexander Koshechko in March. According to the prosecution, the man tore down a St. George’s ribbon from a soldier’s coat, stomped it into the mud and made insulting statements. Koshechko was found not guilty in 2024, but the court decision was later overturned and the case was sent for reconsideration.

In some instances, the punishment was reduced at the stage of an appeal—unfortunately, most often only by several months. The Saint Petersburg city court **reduced** the sentence of the PhD student Vladimir Mironov in his case of broken windows and anti-

war inscriptions on the facade of a district military recruitment office, reducing his sentence from four years to three years and six months. The court **reclassified** the charge of hooliganism from Part 2 to Part 1 of the corresponding article, excluding the charge of using a weapon (Article 213 of the Criminal Code). In the summer, the Orenburg regional court reduced the sentences of the defendants of the “**Baymak case**” by **several** months.

We recorded at least **78 terminated administrative cases with a political background** (2.2% of the total number) in 2025.

In August, a case of the local activist and candidate of historical sciences Vladimir Vozilov, who faced charges of discrediting the army, was **terminated** in the Ivanovo region due to the expiration of the statute of limitations. The police report was drawn up against him for his posts on VKontakte. In April, the Chelyabinsk regional court **overturned** the arrest of the photographer Sergei Likhvatskikh for his post containing the letter “N” (the first letter of Navalny’s last name) that he made on VKontakte back in 2018.

It is important to keep in mind that even minor improvements would have been impossible without appealing the court sentence as well as without public attention and solidarity. Besides, repression in modern Russia is not monolithic, and the society continues to have leeway for defending human rights and providing assistance to people facing prosecution. We discussed it in our **overview of repression** published at the occasion of three years since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Medical help

At least 225 imprisoned people are having health issues. Many suffer from chronic diseases. Meanwhile, the quality of the penitentiary medical services is very low, and the conditions of detention only make the problems worse. In some instances, denied access to medical care may be an instrument of pressure.

Nevertheless, people facing prosecution, their relatives, lawyers and the society were able to achieve local improvements and even

systemic changes.

The artist Lyudmila Razumova, sentenced in a case of anti-war graffiti, was **transported** from a colony in the Tver region to a penitentiary hospital in Torzhok in March. Earlier she went on hunger strike demanding, among other things, medical help. In June, a defendant in the “**Mayakovsky Readings case**” Egor Shtovba, sentenced under the articles on inciting hatred and calls for actions against the security of the state due to reading poems, **said** that he had been provided medical treatment and his workload in the colony had been lowered. As a result of difficult 18-hour day shifts, Egor’s leg had **swollen and developed a blue discoloration**, which may have been a sign of vein issues.

Maria Nemova, a lawyer specialising in cases of access to medical help for prisoners, noted in an interview with OVD-Info that prisoners often do not want to talk about their health publicly because it is very personal information. “When it comes to medical help and some humanitarian issues, complaints, requests and appeals are rather effective. Sometimes one has to file them repeatedly, complain to more than one agency, to more than one person. But water sharpens the stone,” Nemova believes.

According to the mother of an individual who has been sentenced in a politically motivated criminal case and has experienced a deterioration of his health in captivity, the involvement of other people is very helpful to her. **“People who have all this time been with us and who have not abandoned us are a very big help,”** says the woman.

“Today we didn’t make it, but tomorrow we will, the day after tomorrow we will. We must talk about it. We must help each other. That’s most important. If we don’t do this, then yes, right now we are in a hole, and the hole is getting bigger. Now it seems that it is already totally impossible, that we will never crawl out of here. But we must crawl out regardless. Good must prevail,” she believes (excerpt from an anonymous interview to OVD-Info from September 2025).

In the summer, the government **expanded** the list of severe diseases that can prevent taking a person into custody. **According to** the member of the Human Rights Council Eva Merkacheva, it is only relevant to illnesses that make it impossible for the person to eat or take care of oneself. The list of such diseases is not a perfect, magical solution and does not lead to an automatic release of even those prisoners who are indeed suffering from them. There are still a lot of opportunities to interpret the law in favour of discrimination. However, this is certainly a step towards the humanisation of the penitentiary system.

The lawyer Maria Nemova agrees that **working on particular cases as well as prompting small changes on the local level and progress on the systemic level truly makes a difference**: “... But it’s a very long, meticulous process. In general, this system requires global reform. But at least we can make things better little by little. It’s very satisfying to see certain results of our work. And we can see those results.”

The power of solidarity

In 2025, Russian citizens were also successful in seeking compensation for the violation of their rights.

At the beginning of the year, a court in Perm partially **satisfied** the claim of Dmitry Vdovin and Bobomurod Paishanov, awarding them 230,000 rubles for the torture they suffered in Solikamsk’s Corrective Colony No. 1. Earlier, the former head of the colony’s security department Artur Khromtsov received a suspended sentence for abuse of authority following the release of a recording of the prisoners’ beating. In January, a court in Yakutsk **ordered** the Ministry of Internal Affairs to pay 93,000 rubles to the journalist Victoria Tarabukina to compensate for court costs and moral damage in the case of a police report drawn up against her—she was fined under the article on violation of the procedure for holding rallies (Part 6.1 of Article 20.2 of the Administrative Code) for covering an anti-migrant rally.

As early as February, the compensation amount awarded to OVD-Info's defendants for violation of their rights related to peaceful protests **surpassed a billion rubles**. Unfortunately, in March 2022, Russia stopped fulfilling its obligations to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), so by far not everyone has been able to receive the awarded amounts.

Besides that, all facts of violations documented by the international court will remain available for the future. ECHR's decisions can end up being executed in case the political situation changes.

In October, the UN Human Rights Council **extended** the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Russian Federation Mariana Katsarova for another year. The mandate was established in 2022, amid the intensification of repression in Russia and following Russia's expulsion from the Council of Europe and the ECHR. The special rapporteur **publishes** annual reports on human rights, highlighting instances of gross violations, current trends, and also offering specific solutions to Russia and the international community. While the Russian authorities have demonstratively ignored her statements, her reports remain an authoritative source of information at the international level.

We strongly believe that one's rights and freedoms touch upon not only the government but also the society. When public and government institutions do not work, people who have faced political repression emphasise the importance of care and support they received from others. In the context of political repression, a lot happens in the dark, quietly. That is why it is so difficult to accurately evaluate the magnitude of solidarity with the victims of politically motivated prosecutions in Russia. Nevertheless, we know that in 2025, for example, 54 thousand appeals were filed with different government agencies, including the Federal Penitentiary Service, the Investigative Committee, the Prosecutor's Office and the Commissioner for Human Rights in different regions with the help of the **Dyatel** service. 3,052 people sent 6,879 letters to prisoners through **Vestochka**. Hundreds of lawyers continue

to defend the rights of those prosecuted for political reasons, despite the ever-increasing **risks**, and thousands of people continue to support their work through **donations** or **volunteer** assistance.

All of this serves as inspiration and encouragement despite the odds.

CONCLUSIONS

We have documented a decrease in the number of criminal prosecutions under a number of articles.

The year 2025 saw far fewer prosecutions for statements than 2024 (264 vs. 340).

There were 142 prosecutions for anti-war statements in 2025. It is less than in any year since the start of the war and also 1.5 times less compared to 2024 data. In 2024, we documented a decline in relation to 2023—1.6 times. This dynamic continues.

To the contrary, there is an increase in the number of prosecutions in other areas, with records being set.

In 2025, the Ministry of Justice added 215 individuals and associations to the register of “foreign agents” (a one-third increase compared to 2024). 173 individuals and associations (80%) were declared “foreign agents” for speaking out against the “special military operation” or supporting Ukraine, which is more than the total number of new foreign agents in 2024. There were 23 convictions under the criminal article on evading the duties of a foreign agent (in 2024, there was only one conviction, compared to 20 convictions under that article altogether).

The number of court decisions under the article on the rehabilitation of Nazism reached a record high in 2025. According to the Judicial Department and OVD-Info’s own calculations, at least 86 people were sentenced to various types of punishment

(64 in 2024 vs. 73 in 2023), and eight were ordered to undergo compulsory medical treatment.

New legal initiatives expand the basis for prosecutions. The government has made a bet on the institutional fight against those who it deems an opponent. With each passing year, the set of tools that the authorities use to put pressure on “foreign agents,” journalists, human rights advocates, activists and critics of the regime becomes bigger and more diverse.

Censorship and self-censorship have become the new norm. Most of the participants in the process (authors, publishers, exhibition organisers, directors, bloggers, etc.) perceive this as an unpleasant but inevitable rule of the game. An important feature of state policy is the complete rejection of attempts to distinguish between parody, sometimes even fantasy, and political statements. Due to the fear that young people will become disconnected from their parents under the influence of the internet and social media, any uncontrolled or strange information that is directed towards young people on the internet is perceived as potentially dangerous.

The body of extremist and terrorist articles is actively used for politically motivated prosecution and building of the ideological framework. The usage of the Criminal Code for ideological purposes can be exemplified by the prosecutions of the LGBT community. The government not only imprisons people but also prosecutes publishing agencies, book stores and streaming services for sharing information about queer relationships. The pressure is shifting more and more into gray areas, and the government hides more and more information.

The total number of criminal cases that we can call politically motivated with certainty has declined and reached its pre-war point. Nevertheless, we cannot declare this a mitigation of the repression. It is quite the opposite—political repression has become more severe. This can be witnessed in the increase in the number of prosecutions under extremist and terrorist legislation, the average sentence in comparison to pre-war years as well as the number of convictions and people prosecuted in captivity. The

regime tries to make people believe that war and emergency measures are here to stay, maybe even forever.

** All data are up-to-date as of 8 December 2025.*