

THE WOMEN PUTIN COULD HAVE PARDONED, BUT DID NOT

MARCH 2026





	KEY FIGURES	01
	HOW MANY OF THEM ARE THERE?	04
	WHY ARE MOTHERS OF MINOR CHILDREN BEING IMPRISONED?	05
1	DANGEROUS WORDS LIKE THESE?	07
	Mariya Ponomarenko	07
	Olga Komleva and Svetlana Khustik	08
	Anastasiya Berezhinskaya and Anastasiya Zibrova	09
	Mariya Makhmutova and Yuliya Mirzalieva	10
	Elena Abramova and Kristina Liubashenko	11
	Polina Yevtushenko	12
2	DID THEY SIGN UP TO BE EXTREMISTS AND TERRORISTS?	13
	Kseniya Garina and Elvira Saifullina	13
	Marina Tokareva and Surlana Enchinova	14
3	A WRONG FAITH?	15
	Viktoriya Brazhnik	15
	Olga Petrova	16
4	DID SHE BEAT UP RIOT POLICE OFFICERS?	17
	Saniya Uzyanbaeva	17
5	TREASON AGAINST THE OCCUPIERS?	18
	Oksana Hladkykh	18
	Tetiana Omelchenko and Yuliya Stanika	19
	ARE CHILDREN A MITIGATING FACTOR?	20



KEY FIGURES

Deprived of liberty on politically motivated grounds now

5 257 PEOPLE
503 WOMEN
50 MOTHERS
of minor children

Of these, those recognised as political prisoners

1 406 PEOPLE
126 WOMEN
20 MOTHERS
of minor children

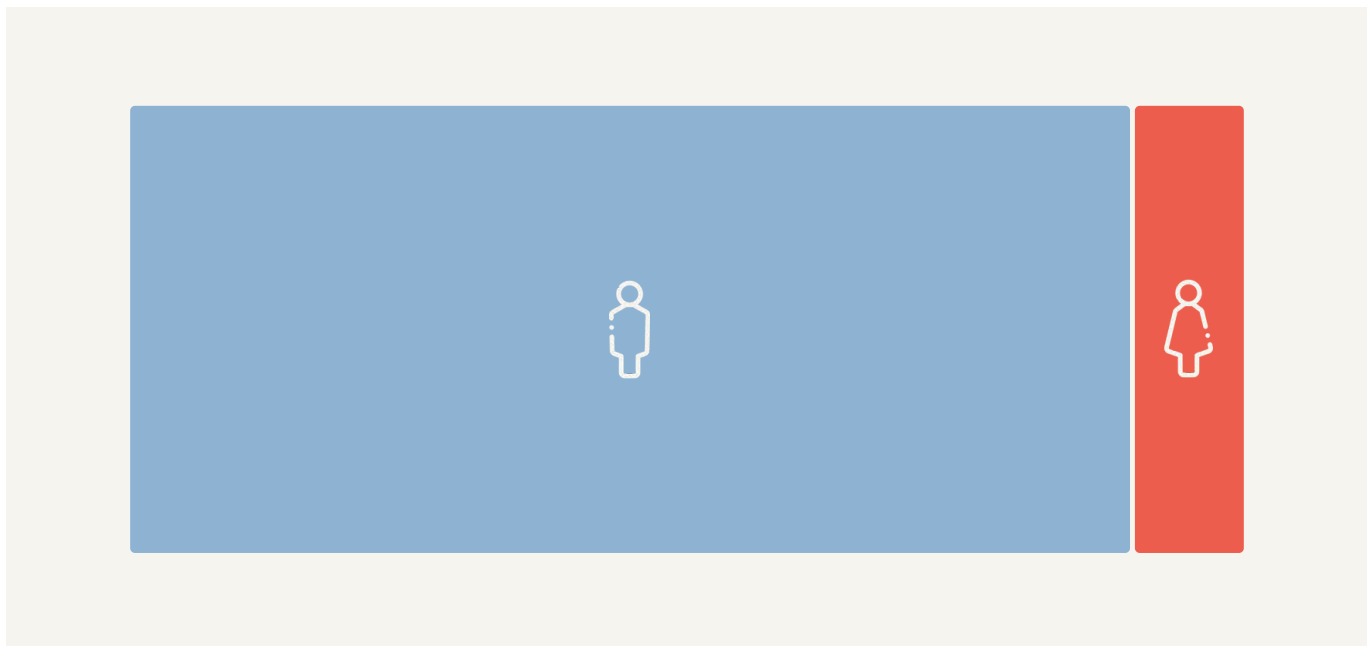


Twenty female political prisoners with minor children remain imprisoned

As of early March 2026, the number of people on our lists with the greatest likelihood of having been prosecuted for political reasons is **9,412**. These lists include citizens of Russia, Ukraine, and other countries whose prosecution or imprisonment in Russia is linked with the war in one way or another or has occurred for other political reasons. Of this number, **1,366 are women**.

At the present time, of those prosecuted, **5,247** have been deprived of their liberty. This number includes people who are held in custody or under house arrest, or have been sent for in-patient psychiatric evaluation; those sentenced to imprisonment or compulsory labour; those subjected to compulsory medical measures in an in-patient facility; as well as those deprived of liberty entirely outside procedural norms, whose names are nevertheless known to us. Of all those imprisoned, **503 are women**. Based on the information available to us, **50 women** held in captivity on politically motivated charges have minor children.

Figure 1. Share of **women** deprived of liberty: Men – 90% | Women – 10%

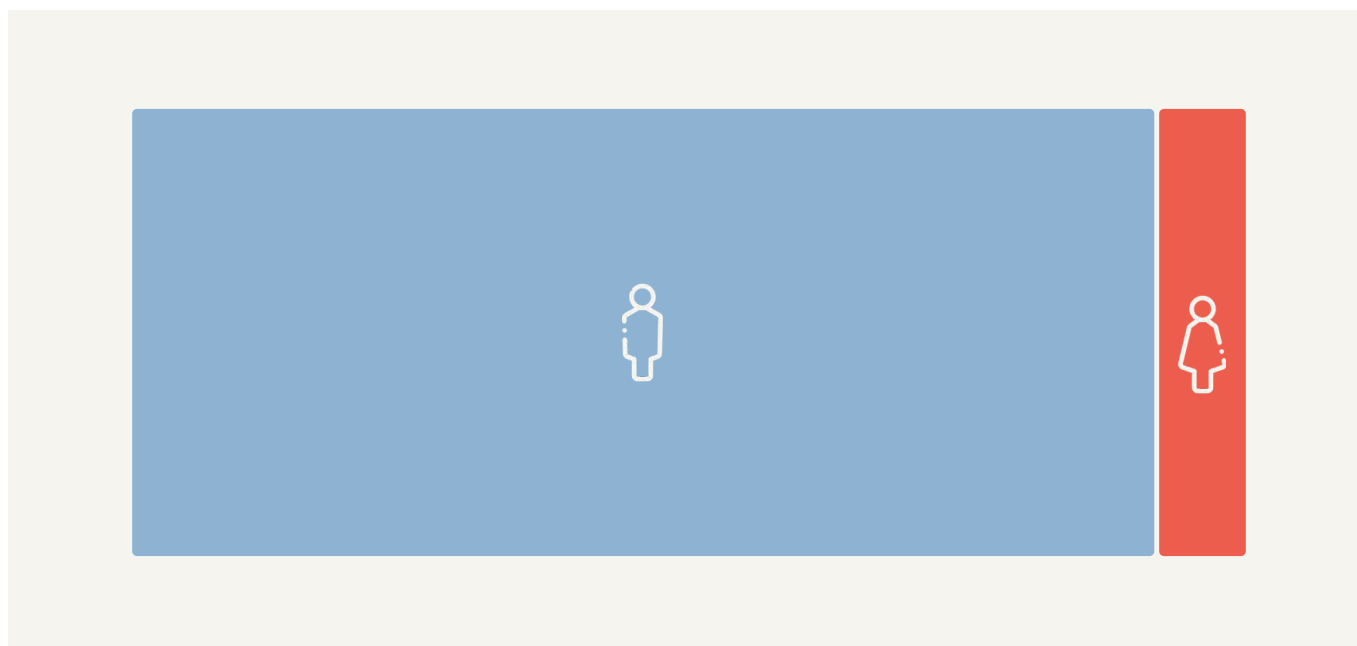


Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



Of the total number prosecuted, our project, Political Prisoners Memorial, has recognized **1,406 as political prisoners**. These are individuals whose imprisonment we have been able to establish is unjustified. The overwhelming majority of these prisoners are men. However, right now there are **126 women** being held on illegal, politically motivated charges in penal colonies, pre-trial detention centres, and psychiatric facilities. Many have minor children on the outside waiting for them.

Figure 2. Proportion of political prisoners who are **women**: Men — 92% | Women — 8%



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Any unjustified, politically motivated prosecution or deprivation of liberty is an injustice and a tragedy. But it can be especially hard for women political prisoners to serve their sentences. Often imprisonment undermines their health. Pre-trial detention centres and prison camps, especially punishment cells, have a ruinous effect on women's bodies, which are often more vulnerable to poor hygiene, uncomfortable sleeping conditions, and gruelling work.

But if a woman has small children outside prison, the scale of the tragedy is compounded. After all, every child left without a mother keenly suffers the pain of separation. The children of female political prisoners bear this cruel punishment though they are not guilty of anything even from the standpoint of the Russian state, and their mothers suffer not only from unjust imprisonment but also from separation from their children.



HOW MANY OF THEM ARE THERE?

On our lists, there are **21 female political prisoners** whose minor children have been deprived of a child's most natural right: to be with their mother. In yet another instance, three small orphans were deprived of their **grandmother**, who was raising them on her own. The reason for this is not a real crime requiring a criminal's isolation but the will of the state and its desire to subjugate society to itself through political repression.

We want to tell the story of those women who are in captivity for political reasons. We want to understand why the state considered these women so dangerous.

First of all, we should note that women who have small children and have been convicted of offences not connected with serious crimes against an individual or with terrorism can have their actual imprisonment deferred until the child reaches the age of 14.

However, according to our information, of the women imprisoned for political reasons, only two have been given this kind of deferral: 34-year-old **Olga Chepeleva** from Belgorod, and 58-year-old **Ilona Nagornova** from Moscow Oblast.

On 23 February 2026, a Belgorod court judged Olga Chepeleva guilty of spreading 'fake news' about the army (Art. 207.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation [hereafter: CC RF]) and sentenced her to five and a half years' imprisonment, sentence deferred. Before this, the mother of minor children had been in a pre-trial detention centre for more than half a year. Judges had extended this strictest form of pre-trial conditions against Olga Chepeleva, who was prosecuted for her words alone and whose guilt had not even been established yet, more than once.

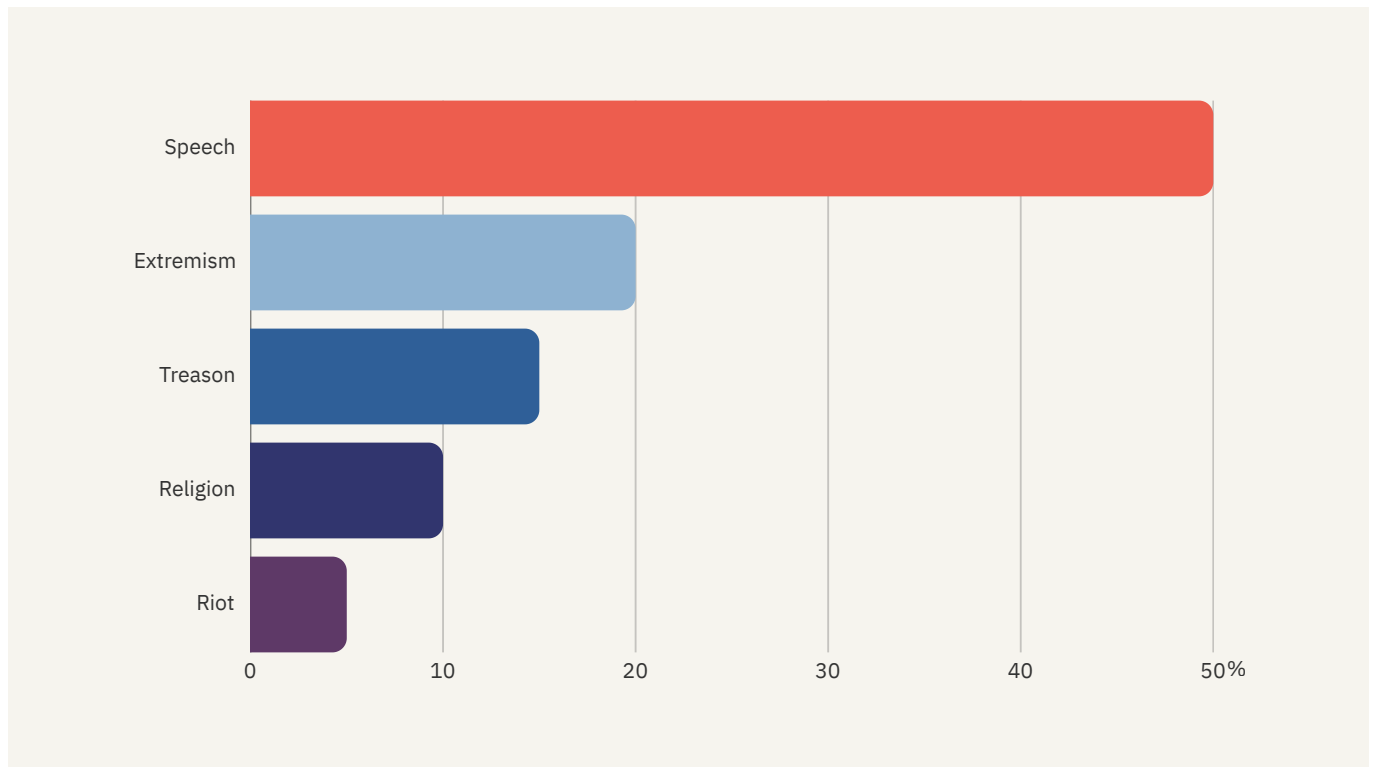
In December 2024, Ilona Nagornova was sentenced for participation in the activities of an 'undesirable organization' (Art. 284.1 CC RF) to three and a half years in a penal colony with her sentence deferred. Ilona is the mother of six children, one of whom is a minor, moreover she is a parishioner in the Vozrozhdenie ['Rebirth' or 'Revival'] Christian church, which has been designated 'undesirable' in Russia.

We are very glad for Olga and Ilona, that they can be home with their children. However there are 20 more female political prisoners who have been deprived of that opportunity, and their children can see their mothers only on visits to prisons and penal colonies.



WHY ARE MOTHERS OF MINOR CHILDREN BEING IMPRISONED?

Figure 3. What are political prisoner mothers prosecuted for (%)



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Ten of the 20 mother-political prisoners have been convicted for posts on social media, statements on the internet, public actions, and incautious conversations — or at least it was their statements that were the point of departure for their prosecution. The investigative authorities and court may consider these kinds of publications and statements to be the above-mentioned ‘fake news’ about the army (Art. 207.3 CC RF), ‘discreditation’ of the army (Art. 280.3 CC RF), and the completely incomprehensible calls for ‘activities aimed against the security of the state’ (Art. 280.4 CC RF).

We have criticized these articles of the Criminal Code many times as unlawful, contradicting the Constitution of the Russian Federation, failing to meet the principles of legal definition, and subject to arbitrary application. In recent years, we have also increasingly seen unlawful and arbitrary prosecution of speech on charges of ‘calls to engage in extremism’ (Art. 280 CC RF) and ‘calls to engage in terrorism’ (Art. 205.2 CC RF).



Sometimes charges of participating in extremist or terrorist groups and organizations are added to prosecutions for speech if the investigative authorities believe the person made the statement not just as an individual but as part of a group.

One of these **10 women**, a blogger from Irkutsk, came into the sights of pro-war activists and law enforcement officers after her sharp criticism of special military operation participants, and then after that was accused of insulting and attacking representatives of the regime. Formally, she was imprisoned for other offences. However, we believe the reason for her prosecution was specifically her expression of her opinion on the internet.

Another **10 female political prisoners** separated from their minor children were deprived of their liberty in connection with other charges.

Six women are imprisoned for allegedly participating in extremist groups and a terrorist organization and, in two instances, religious organizations.

Another **three women** are citizens of Ukraine, convicted for making bank transfers or passing messages to their fellow countrymen. Finding themselves under occupation with small children, they had been forced to accept the Russian citizenship foisted on them if only in order not to lose the roof over their head and so that their children could attend school and receive medical treatment.

In and of itself, forcing citizenship on the inhabitants of occupied territories is a violation of the provisions of international humanitarian law and a **state crime**

In this light, the conviction of Ukrainian citizens for ‘betraying the homeland’ — the Russian Federation, which has occupied their land — is particularly absurd and cynical.

One woman, an inhabitant of Baymak, was condemned without justification for participating in a riot.



DANGEROUS WORDS LIKE THESE?



*'m certain a time will come in my country
when this reality now in which people
are tried for their words will be only a memory*

Elena Abramova — political prisoner

And so, half the convicted mothers of minor children ended up in prison for exercising their right to freedom of opinion.

It is noteworthy that three of those convicted and arrested are **journalists**.

Charges against them are connected with their professional activity

Mariya Ponomarenko



Journalist **Mariya Ponomarenko**, a mother of two minor daughters, was one of the first charged under the new Art. 207.3 CC RF on military 'fake news.' The justification for her prosecution was an article she wrote about the strike on the Drama Theatre in Mariupol in March 2022. In February 2023, Mariya Ponomarenko was sentenced to **six years** in a penal colony. Later, a second criminal case was opened against her for attacking Federal Penitentiary Service employees. According to the investigative authorities, Mariya refused to attend a disciplinary commission voluntarily, and when penal colony staff took her there by force, she began to resist and allegedly assaulted them.

In March 2025, a court sentenced her to a further one year and 10 months of penal colony. However, given her time served and considering that after this charge was brought Mariya was in a pre-trial detention centre, the total term of her imprisonment increased by only one month.

During the trial, Mariya Ponomarenko declared a hunger strike several times, protesting her conditions of detention in the penal colony.



Olga Komleva



Olga Komleva was a volunteer at Navalny's Ufa headquarters before it was declared an extremist organization.

As a journalist, she collaborated with RusNews and wrote about the mass protests in Baymak in Bashkortostan. Olga was detained in Ufa on 27 March 2024. Along with several other journalists, she was accused of participating in an extremist group — the Navalny Headquarters — (Art. 282.1, Part 2, CC RF) and later yet another charge was added of spreading 'fake news' about the army (Art. 207.3, Part 2, CC RF).

On 29 June 2025, a court in Ufa sentenced her in camera to **12 years** in a general regime penal colony.

Olga left a 15-year-old son at home.

Svetlana Khustik



Svetlana Khustik is a journalist from Krasnoyarsk and mother of two children; her younger daughter is a minor.

The grounds for her prosecution for 'fake news' (Art. 207.3 CC RF) was an article for Sibir.Realii, an on-line publication. In May 2023, Svetlana wrote about an exhibition devoted to the captivity of tens of thousands of Soviet soldiers in Uman in 1941. The article discussed the fact that this story resonates with current events — the missile strike on an apartment building in Ukrainian Uman in 2023.

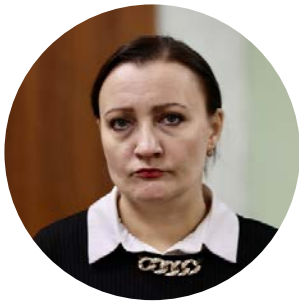
It is in this part of the text that the sentence incriminating Khustik appears: *'...here, on the night of 27-28 April, a Russian missile fell, and 23 people perished, including five children.'* It is set off in italics, put in quotation marks, and signed 'SR', which indicates an editorial insertion by Sibir.Realii. However, the court did not take the fact that the journalist had nothing to do with this sentence into account, and she was remanded in custody.

Svetlana Khustik faces up to **10 years'** imprisonment is convicted.



Another three women who wrote blogs on different social media are being prosecuted for publication of videos and text files on VKontakte and Instagram.

Anastasiya Berezhinskaya



Anastasiya Berezhinskaya is a Moscow theatre director and the mother of two small children.

In May 2024, a criminal case was opened against her for posts on VKontakte about the war against Ukraine under three articles:

- 'fake news' about the use of the army (Art. 207.3, Part 2, CC RF)
- repeated 'discreditation' of the use of the army (Art. 280.3, Part 1, CC RF)
- calls for terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF)

On 14 November 2024, a court in Moscow sentenced Anastasiya Berezhinskaya to **eight years** in a general regime penal colony, after which she was taken into custody.

Anastasiya Zibrova



In August 2023, a search was conducted at the home of 30-year-old **Anastasiya Zibrova**, a dog handler from Moscow Oblast. She was accused of spreading 'fake news' about the Russian army (Art. 207.3, Part 2, CC RF) for a post on VKontakte about a missile strike on Kramatorsk train station. In May 2024, Anastasiya, who up until then had been released on her own recognizance, was placed under house arrest. In August 2024, a court in Odintsovo sent Zibrova to a penal colony for five years. This sentence was reversed on appeal, but in September 2025 she was sentenced again to **five years** in a penal colony.

Anastasiya asked to have her sentence deferred, since she is raising her small daughter alone and caring for her elderly grandmother. The court did not grant her request.



Mariya Makhmutova



Mariya Makhmutova is a 35-year-old blogger from Irkutsk Krai and the mother of a minor child.

She had 5,000 subscribers to her Instagram blog. Mariya recorded her videos in a highly eccentric manner, using obscene language. On 12 June 2025, Russia Day, she criticized both the holiday and the ongoing war against Ukraine. Pro-war bloggers launched a campaign of harassment against Mariya on social media and wrote a denunciation against her.

The next day, law enforcement officers broke down the door to her apartment. She was taken away for a medical examination and then was twice jailed for an administrative-law offence. Mariya refused to apologize for what she had said. On 18 June 2025, a criminal case was opened against her for insulting a police officer (Art. 319 CC RF), and then also on a charge of using violence against police officers during one of her arrests (Art. 318 CC RF). On 6 November 2025, the court sentenced Mariya Makhmutova to two **years and seven months** in a low-security penal colony.

Formally, Mariya Makhmutova's prosecution was not connected with her statements. However, in our opinion, it was these statements that were the point of departure first for the harassment campaign and then for depriving her of her liberty.

Yuliya Mirzalieva



Yuliya Mirzalieva is a resident of Moscow with Ukrainian roots and a lawyer by education. According to the investigative authorities, on 2 April 2023, under a report in Fontanka on the bombing of Vladlen Tatarsky, perpetrated by Darya Trepova at an event in his honour, Yuliya wrote, *'Retribution has reached the cur. Zhenka will be getting his soon, too, he can't hide, the spineless dog. The audience at Kobzon's concert. On my feet applauding'*. Two and a half years later, in August 2025, she was arrested, held for a month and a half on a series of short jail terms, and then charged with publicly justifying terrorism on the internet (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF).

On the day of Yuliya's arrest, her 15-year-old son was handed over to a social worker from the child welfare authorities *'in connection with her failure to fulfil her duties to support and raise her minor son.'*



Two women from our list attempted to speak out against the war, joining peaceful street protests.

Elena Abramova



After the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a 43-year-old translator from St. Petersburg, **Elena Abramova**, staged single-person pickets with placards saying *'No war!'* and *'A world without war. Russia without Putin'*. For this she was first fined, but then criminal charges were brought for discrediting the army (Art. 280.3, Part 1, CC RF).

As of August 2023, Elena Abramova has been released under travel restrictions. On 25 March 2025, a court sent her to a penal colony for **two years**; she was taken into custody in the courtroom.

Elena left a minor daughter at home.

Kristina Liubashenko



Kristina Liubashenko is a citizen of Ukraine from Kyiv who fled to Switzerland in 2022 with her mother, grandfather, and two daughters. There she met a man, also a refugee from Ukraine, who convinced her to go to Moscow to hold a peaceful protest there against the war. On 8 May 2023, the police arrested Kristina Liubashenko. According to the investigative authorities, that day on Swallow Hills she released balloons with the white-blue-white flag. Kristina was arrested and charged with hooliganism. Later, however, the investigative authorities claimed the flag was a symbol of the Free Russia Legion, which has been designated a terrorist organization, and accused Kristina Liubashenko of being a participant in that organization (Art. 205.5 CC RF).

Before the verdict was handed down, another charge was added of spreading military 'fake news' (Art. 207.3, Part 2, CC RF). On 17 June 2024, Kristina Liubashenko was sentenced to **12 years** in a general regime penal colony. She was probably the victim of an FSB sting operation.



Polina Yevtushenko



Yet another suspected victim of a sting operation by law enforcement officers was **Polina Yevtushenko** from Tolyatti.

Six criminal charges were brought against her, four connected with statements on the internet and another two the result of incautious conversations with a provocateur.

In July 2023, 24-year-old Polina was arrested as she was leaving the kindergarten where she had dropped off her five-year-old daughter.

At first, she was charged with preparing to commit treason (Art. 30, Part 1, Art. 275 CC RF) and remanded in custody. The grounds for this charge were Polina's conversations with someone she knew whom she allegedly tried to convince to join the Free Russia Legion. In connection with these conversations, which her new acquaintance had been recording from the very beginning, she was also charged with aiding terrorism (Art. 205.1, Part 1.1, CC RF).

Later, for posts on VKontakte and Instagram, she was charged with

- making calls to engage in terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF)
- calls to engage in extremism (Art. 280, Part 2, CC RF)
- spreading 'fake news' about the Russian army (Art. 207.3, Part 2, CC RF)
- rehabilitating Nazism (Art. 354.1, Part 4, CC RF)

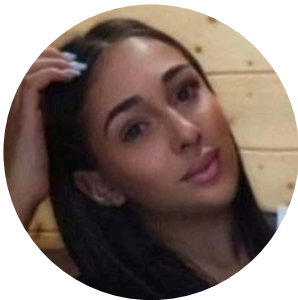
In January 2026, the prosecutor asked for 18 years for Polina, and on 6 March the judge announced the verdict: **14 years**' deprivation of liberty.



DID THEY SIGN UP TO BE EXTREMISTS AND TERRORISTS?

The cunning of the charge of participating in an extremist group (Art. 282.1 CC RF) is that frequently, up until the moment of their arrest, the accused have no idea they are part of one. This charge allows for even more arbitrary application than the similar charge of participation in the activities of an extremist organization (Art. 282.2 CC RF). The latter at least formally allows for the possibility of ending one's participation in an organization the courts have deemed terrorist. At the same time, any association of citizens can be declared an extremist group retrospectively.

Kseniya Garina and Elvira Saifullina



Kseniya Garina from Irkutsk Krai and **Elvira Saifullina** from Norilsk were arrested on the same day, 30 October 2024. At the time, mass searches and arrests were being conducted in different cities against people involved in the activities of the ANTI PYTKI project, which collects and disseminates information on violence and torture in places of imprisonment.

Elvira Saifullina was accused only of recruiting for an extremist group (Art. 282.1, Part 1.1, CC RF), while Kseniya Garina, in addition to that, was also accused of financing an extremist organization, and later of inciting disruption and disorganization in the work of the penal colony.



At the same time, the director of the ANTI PYTKI project said the women were only subscribers to the channel, while Kseniya Garina was also a volunteer. She helped prisoners correct mistakes and write up their complaints of torture and violence and had no idea that this activity might be declared extremist.

Kseniya, who is raising a four-year-old son, has been imprisoned for nearly a year and a half.

Elvira, the mother of two minor children, is now under house arrest.

Both face multi-year prison terms if convicted.



Marina Tokareva



Fifty-seven-year-old **Marina Tokareva** from Komsomolsk-on-Amur, is a grandmother and sole guardian of three small grandsons aged two, four, and six. She was charged with involvement in an extremist organisation for her interest in the work of the politician Svetlana Lada-Rus. Marina Tokareva and her friend Nataliya Ignatyeva were convicted of distributing, at a meeting of supporters, a book with information on the VOLYA [Freedom] party, which had been deemed extremist and dissolved.

On 10 March 2025, Nataliya Ignatyeva was sentenced to **five and a half years** in a penal colony, and Marina Tokareva to **two and a half years**.

On the day of her sentencing, Marina Tokareva's grandsons were taken away by child welfare authorities.

The VOLYA party, in which the women were accused of participating, was indeed deemed an extremist organization and dissolved back in 2016. At the same time, both Nataliya Ignatyeva and Marina Tokareva have stated that at the meeting of activists, who spoke with a local agenda, they had merely passed on a book where this party was mentioned at the request of two young men who turned out to be infiltrated agents. The women are not accused of any kind of 'extremist' actions. The extent of their 'participation' was dissemination of information about a long-since dissolved organization.

Surlana Enchinova



Surlana Enchinova is a paediatrician from the Altai Republic and the mother of a small son. Prosecuted on a charge of participating in a terrorist organization (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF), she faces up to 20 years' imprisonment if convicted. According to the investigative authorities, Surlana Enchinova connected over the internet with a representative of the Free Russia Legion, sent a 'candidate application,' and shared the personal data of law enforcement officers and military personnel. Surlana was detained in October 2024 on the way to Novosibirsk, when she was supposedly going to join the Legion.

As in the case of Polina Evtushenko, the prosecution's materials give every reason to assume Surlana Enchinova was the victim of a sting operation.



A WRONG FAITH?

We mentioned above the prosecution of a member of the Vozrozhdenie church. The sentence handed down against Ilona Nagornova was deferred until her youngest child reaches the age of majority. Another believer was less fortunate.

Viktoriya Brazhnik



Forty-five-year-old **Viktoriya Brazhnik** is also a member of the Vozrozhdenie Christian church, a charismatic religious organization that emerged in Ukraine in the late 1990s.

For many years, until 2022, the church operated legally in Russia until the Prosecutor General's Office declared it 'undesirable.'

Viktoriya Brazhnik moved to Moscow from Ukraine and was raising two children and a niece on her own.

Charged with financing an undesirable organization (Art. 284.1, Part 2, CC RF), Viktoriya said she was unaware of the ban on Vozrozhdenie and believed the funds were to help the poor and the sick.

In August 2025, a court ordered Viktoriya Brazhnik to undergo **compulsory psychiatric treatment**.



Olga Petrova



Another believer was placed under ‘preventive surveillance’ by security forces on account of what they deemed to be a strange and dangerous combination: a Russian Muslim woman.

Olga Petrova, born and raised in Krasnodar Krai, married, converted to Islam, and moved to Dagestan where she began selling Islamic goods. Olga was accused of financing terrorism (Art. 205.1, Part 1, CC RF) because between 2013 and 2015 she made nine bank transfers totalling about 20,000 roubles.

Law enforcement officials claimed the transfers were intended for ISIS.

However, Olga Petrova herself stated she had transferred the money to a woman from whom she purchased goods. This version was confirmed by their correspondence.

While the prosecution **failed to prove** otherwise, testimony against Olga was provided by other convicts who were under the control of law enforcement agencies

In December 2021, Olga Petrova was sentenced to **seven years** in a penal colony.

At the time of her arrest, she had two minor children.

On 19 July 2025, Olga **gave birth to a son in the penal colony**.



DID SHE BEAT UP RIOT POLICE OFFICERS?

Saniya Uzyanbaeva



Saniya Uzyanbaeva, 40, worked as a salesclerk at a Pyaterochka supermarket in the town of Sibai in Bashkortostan. In December 2023, her 20-year-old son Danis returned from the army after completing mandatory military service. A month later, Saniya and Danis were detained following protests in the neighbouring town of Baymak. In January 2024, thousands of local people had gathered outside a courthouse in Baymak where the trial of Fail Alsynov, leader of the Bashkir national movement, was taking place. He was sentenced to four years in a penal colony on charges of inciting hatred for a speech at an environmental rally. Fail Alsynov's supporters were outraged by the verdict.

Riot police attempted to disperse the protesters. Snowballs were thrown at the police, who responded with tear gas, baton charges, and flashbang grenades.

The next day, arrests of rally participants began. The trials of dozens of people charged with riot and violence against police officers (Art. 212 CC RF and Art. 318 CC RF) were then held in various cities across Russia.

In February 2025, Danis was sentenced to **four and a half years** in a penal colony. In April 2025 Saniya was sentenced to **five and a half years**.

Saniya's minor daughter, Liliya, was left without her mother and brother.

The prosecutions of Saniya and Danis and other rally participants were **unfounded**

The protest outside the courthouse was largely peaceful and was not accompanied by riots or armed violence. The charges were based solely on isolated incidents, such as the throwing of snowballs, or simply being present in the crowd, which in and of themselves could not be considered participation in rioting or violence.



TREASON AGAINST THE OCCUPIERS?

The Russian authorities are currently handing down demonstratively harsh sentences against Ukrainian citizens. There is a particular cynicism on the part of the Russian authorities in the fact that Ukrainian residents of the occupied territories are being put on trial for so-called ‘treason against the homeland.’

Oksana Hladkykh



Oksana Hladkykh, a mother of three minor children, lived in the village of Pryazovske in Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia Oblast.

After the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the occupation of her village, she was forced to obtain Russian citizenship so that her children could attend school. However, Oksana did not hide her hostility toward the Russian military and spoke out openly on social media. As a result, she was reported to the authorities.

In November 2023 she was detained and then held for a prolonged period without being formally charged, moved ‘from one basement to another,’ and poorly fed. Oksana Hladkykh lost 13 kg. She was later charged with treason (Art. 275 CC RF) for allegedly passing information about Russian troops to the Ukrainian side.

In June 2024, an occupation court sentenced Oksana Hladkykh to 14 years in a penal colony.

On appeal, the sentence was reduced to **13 years**.

The charges against Oksana Hladkykh were **unfounded**

She was accused of passing on non-classified information about Russian facilities in the occupied territories. These facilities are not located in Russia and cannot be related to Russia’s security. She was tried under Russian law in a court established by the occupying authorities, and the prosecution itself raised serious doubts: there are grounds to believe Oksana Hladkykh was subjected to unlawful pressure and was the object of a possible sting operation by security forces.



Tetiana Omelchenko



Tetiana Omelchenko, a resident of Crimea, moved to Kyiv in 2012 but continued to visit relatives on the peninsula. In 2021, she obtained a Russian passport. After her husband's death, Tetiana was bringing up her son alone and was engaged in charitable work, helping sick children and homeless animals.

In September 2024, she travelled to Crimea to attend her brother's funeral. Tetiana Omelchenko was detained at the airport during a security check and subjected to three consecutive jail terms under administrative law for alleged petty hooliganism.

She was then charged with treason (Art. 275 CC RF) for bank transfers found on her mobile phone.

On 1 October 2025, Tetiana Omelchenko was sentenced to **12 years** in a general regime penal colony and a fine of 400,000 roubles.

In court, Tetiana asked that her sentence be deferred until her child reached the age of majority. Her request was denied.

Yuliya Stanika



Thirty-year-old **Yuliya Stanika**, a resident of the town of Hola Prystan in Kherson Oblast where she was bringing up her young daughter, was detained on a charge of treason in March or April 2025.

She was accused of having made bank transfers 'to foreign banks' between September 2023 and January 2024 which, according to FSB investigators, were intended for activities directed against the security of the Russian Federation.

In October 2025, an occupation court in Kherson Oblast sentenced Yuliya Stanika to **12.5 years'** imprisonment.



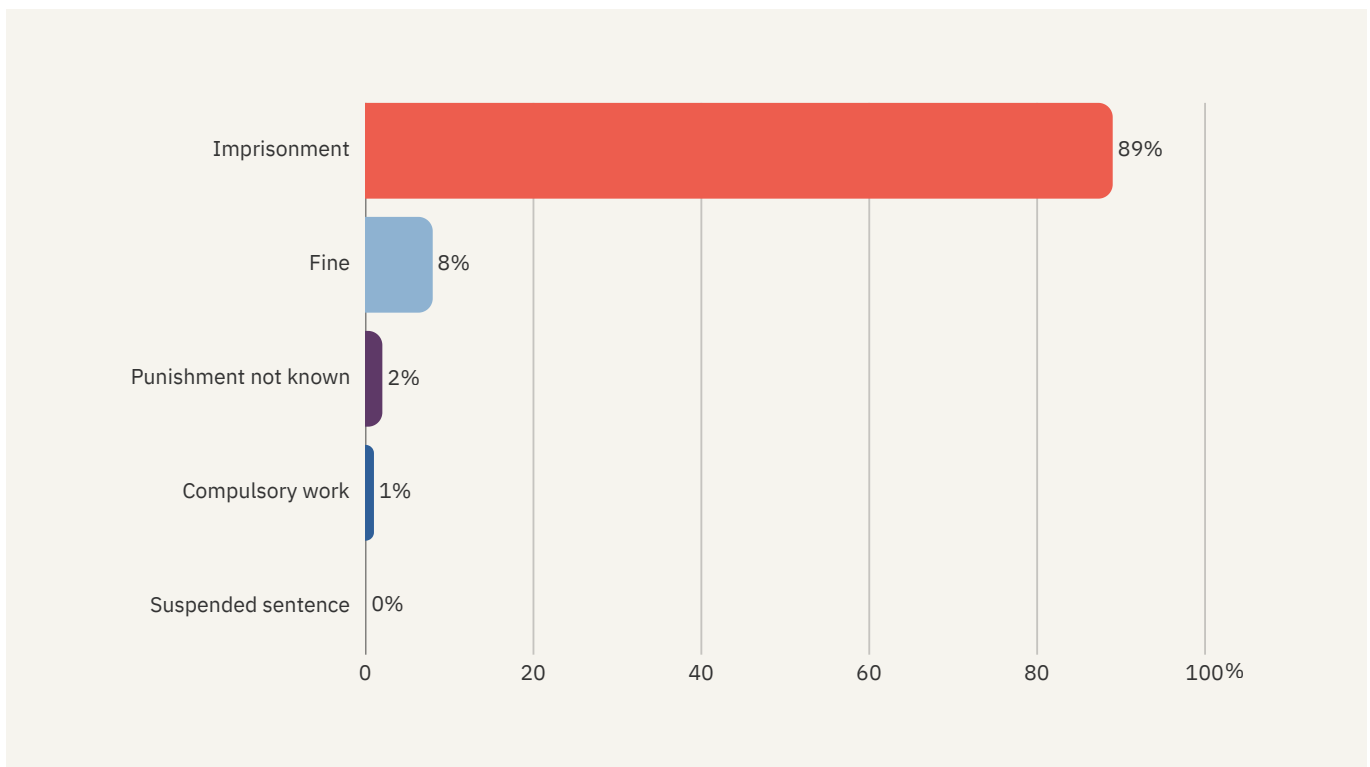
ARE CHILDREN A MITIGATING FACTOR?

We have sought to determine whether the fact that a woman has minor children affects the severity of a sentence handed down on politically motivated charges. Are judges inclined, when handing down sentences, to be more lenient towards women with children or simply towards women in general?

Often, convictions for speech are handed down, not on the basis of a single charge, but several charges at once. For example, this occurred in the case of Anastasiya Berezhinskaya who was prosecuted for speech on charges of ‘fake news’ (Art. 207.3, Part 2, CC RF), ‘discreditation’ (Art. 280.3, Part 1, CC RF) and incitement to terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF). We therefore first consider all prosecutions brought for exercising the right to freedom of expression.

In total, more than **1,800 prosecutions** for speech have been initiated on the charges listed above, as well as on charges of ‘incitement of terrorism’ or ‘incitement of activities directed against state security.’ In some cases, these charges have been combined with charges for other criminal offences. In some cases, individuals have been tried in absentia after they left Russia; in others, convicted persons were not deprived of liberty.

Figure 4. Sentences for convictions of speech (%)



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



Our project has recognized **269 people** as political prisoners, in pre-trial detention or convicted on one or more charges, in connection with their exercise of the right to freedom of expression. We include in our lists only those deprived of liberty at one or more stages of the prosecution. Of the 237 sentences handed down against them, 212 involved imprisonment; in 18 cases defendants were fined; in two cases defendants were sentenced to compulsory work (not in custody); one convicted person was given a suspended sentence. The punishments handed down to four others are not known.

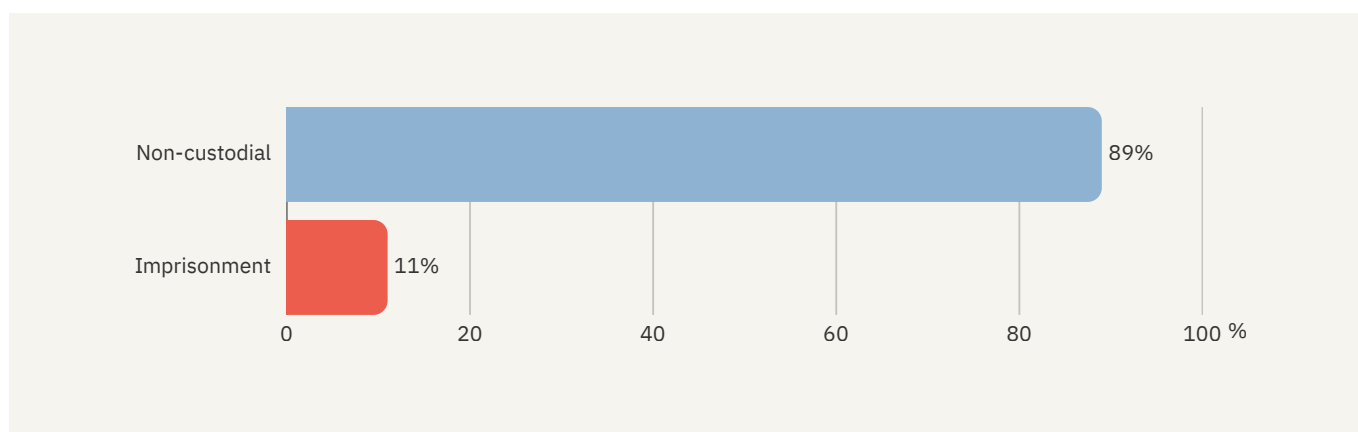
The average term for those imprisoned for speech is four and a half years. Of all those imprisoned solely for speech, **32 are women**. Their average sentence was longer at just **over five years**.

Anastasiya Berezhinskaya, a mother of two young children, was convicted on three charges for speech and sentenced to eight years in a penal colony. This sentence was handed down by Judge Andrei Pluzhnikov of the Second Western District Military Court.

Below we review the situation regarding charges for specific offences related to speech.

Elena Abramova, for holding single-person pickets, was charged with ‘discrediting the army’ and sentenced to two years in a penal colony (Art. 280.3, Part 1, CC RF). Since the adoption into law of this criminal offence, 149 individuals have been prosecuted people under it, and 110 sentences handed down. The great majority of those convicted of this offence received non-custodial sentences (either fines or suspended sentences); only 12 people were imprisoned (sentenced to a penal colony or to compulsory work in custody), two of whom were women. Two years’ imprisonment is the maximum sentence that has been imposed for this offence; the average term is just over a year and a half. It is not known why Judge Anton Savlenkov deemed two single-person pickets with placards reading ‘No war!’ and ‘A world without war. Russia without Putin’ so dangerous that he sent the mother of a minor daughter to prison for two years. Perhaps family connections played a role: Elena Abramova is the daughter of Soviet dissident Arnold Eremenko.

Figure 5. Sentences handed down under Art. 280.3, Part 1, CC RF (%)



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

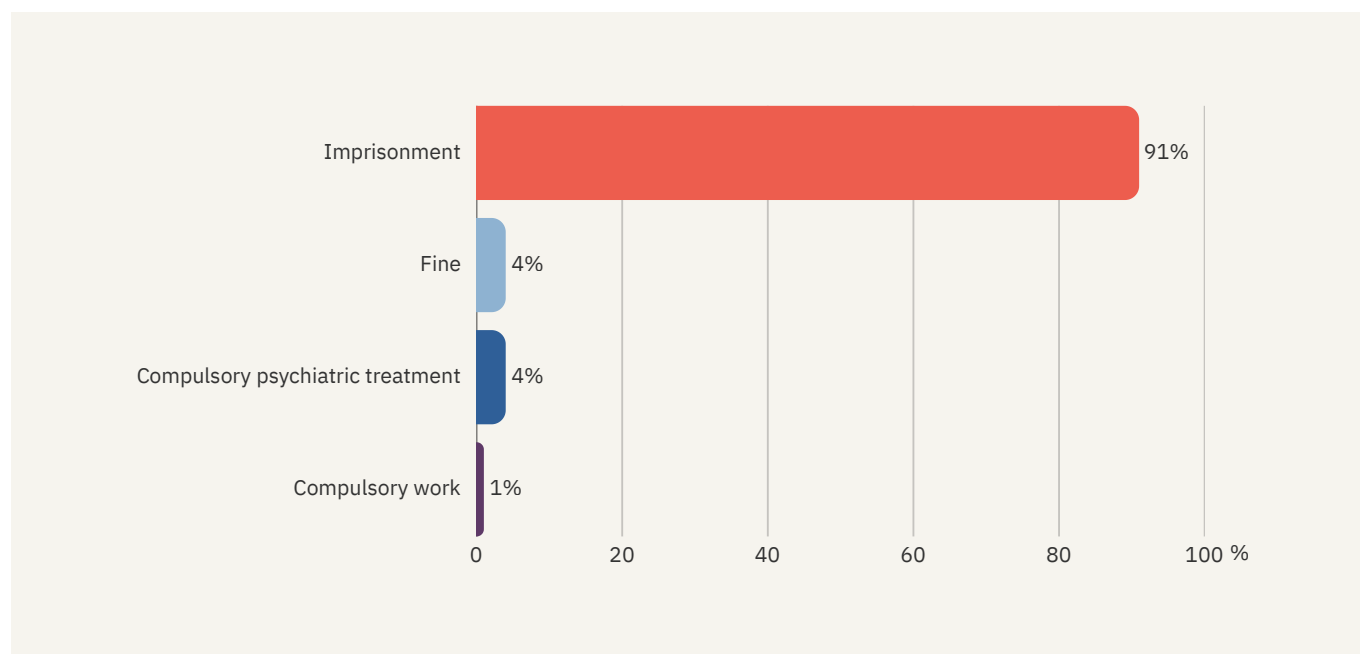


FREE POLITICAL PRISONER MOTHERS

The charge of ‘intentional dissemination of information known to be false regarding the use of the armed forces of the Russian Federation and the exercise of authority by state bodies of the Russian Federation’ (Art. 207.3 CC RF), in other words ‘fake news’ about the military, provides for harsher penalties. We know of a total of **273 prosecutions** brought exclusively under this article of the Criminal Code, though we often do not know the circumstances of the case or the names of those charged.

Of all those prosecuted solely under this article of the Criminal Code, we have recognized **88 individuals**, currently or previously in custody, as political prisoners. Of the 73 verdicts handed down in these cases, 66 involved sentences to terms of imprisonment, three to fines, three to compulsory psychiatric treatment, and one to compulsory work (not in custody).

Figure 6. Sentences under Art. 207.3 CC RF (%)

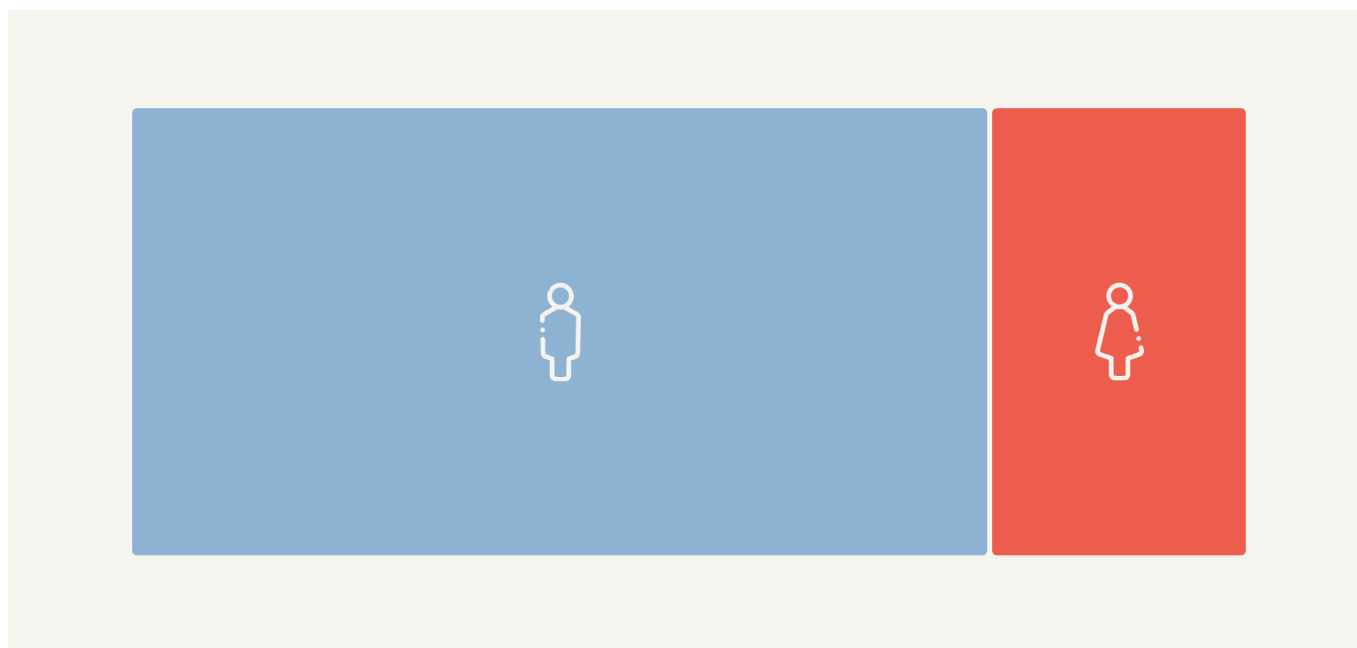


Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



Of the 73 individuals convicted, **17 were women**. Only one of the women convicted was sentenced to a fine. All three ordered to undergo compulsory psychiatric treatment were women. The average sentence for those charged exclusively under Art. 207.3 is **five years and eight months**. The average sentence for women is above the average at **five years and eleven months**.

Figure 7. Individuals convicted of disseminating 'fake news': Men — 77% | Women — 23%



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Having minor children does not lead to a more lenient sentence. Mariya Ponomarenko, one of the first to be convicted of this offence, was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Anastasiya Zibrova was sentenced to a term of five years, although she had been charged for just one publication. Previously, Anastasiya Zibrova had worked as a police dog handler. She was raising a young daughter on her own and also had an elderly grandmother in her care. Judge Dmitry Venev of Odintsovo city court sentenced Anastasiya Zibrova to a term of imprisonment and also denied her a deferral of her sentence until her child should reach majority age. On appeal, this verdict was overturned. However, Judge Sergei Dolya of the same court subsequently sentenced her to the same penalty.

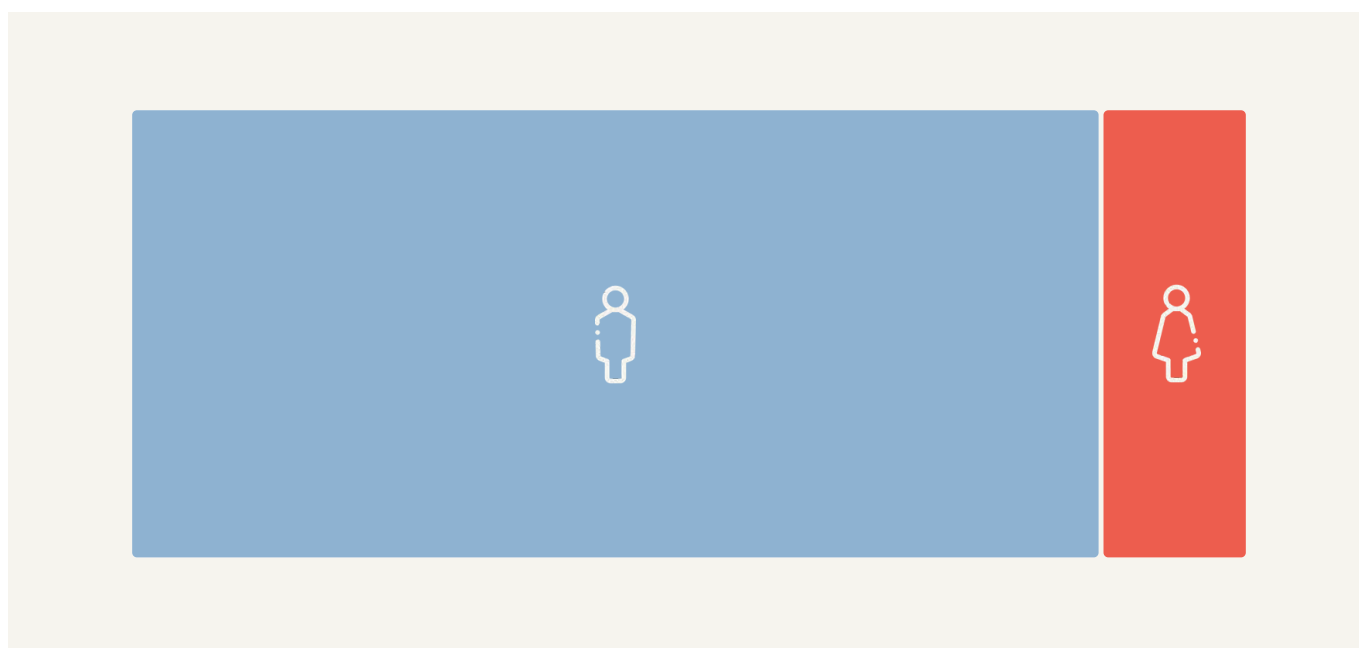
Charges of involvement in extremist organizations or groups are often used by the Russian authorities to suppress opposition or any form of civic activism that appears even slightly threatening to the current government's hold on power. More than a hundred political, religious, and civic associations have already been designated as extremist organizations. This list includes, for example, the 'International LGBT Movement,' the 'I/WE Sergei Furgal' movement, numerous ethnic associations collectively referred to as the 'Anti-Russian Separatist Movement – an International Civil Society Movement to Destroy the Multinational Unity and Territorial Integrity of Russia,' the Anti-Corruption Foundation and Navalny's Headquarters, as well as various non-traditional religious associations.



Truly dangerous groups have ended up on the same list as organizations whose designation as extremist is clearly contrived and serves only to advance unlawful political purposes. We have repeatedly spoken out against the designation of peaceful associations as extremist and the criminal prosecution of their members as both unlawful and unjustified.

Of those prosecuted for involvement in an extremist organization (Art. 282.2 CC RF) or an extremist group (Art. 282.1 CC RF), and not facing any other charges, we have recognized **438 individuals** as political prisoners. Of these, **57 are women**.

Figure 8. Individuals convicted of 'extremism': Men — 87% | Women — 13%



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Two hundred and forty-two individuals have been sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. The average prison term of all those convicted is **four years and nine months**. **Seventeen** of those sentenced to terms of imprisonment **are women**, and their average sentence is **three years and one month**. It should be noted that ten of the women sentenced to terms of imprisonment are Jehovah's Witnesses. We have repeatedly stated that the prosecution of adherents of a religious faith solely for performing rites or distributing publications is discriminatory and violates international legal norms.

Against this backdrop, the prosecution and conviction of Marina Tokareva, a grandmother and sole guardian of three young grandchildren, does not stand out as particularly cruel. Yet the two-and-a-half-year prison sentence imposed on her was unlawful and unjustified. This is even more so because the sentence falls not only on Marina Tokareva herself, but also on the three young grandchildren taken away by child welfare authorities and deprived of their only close relative.

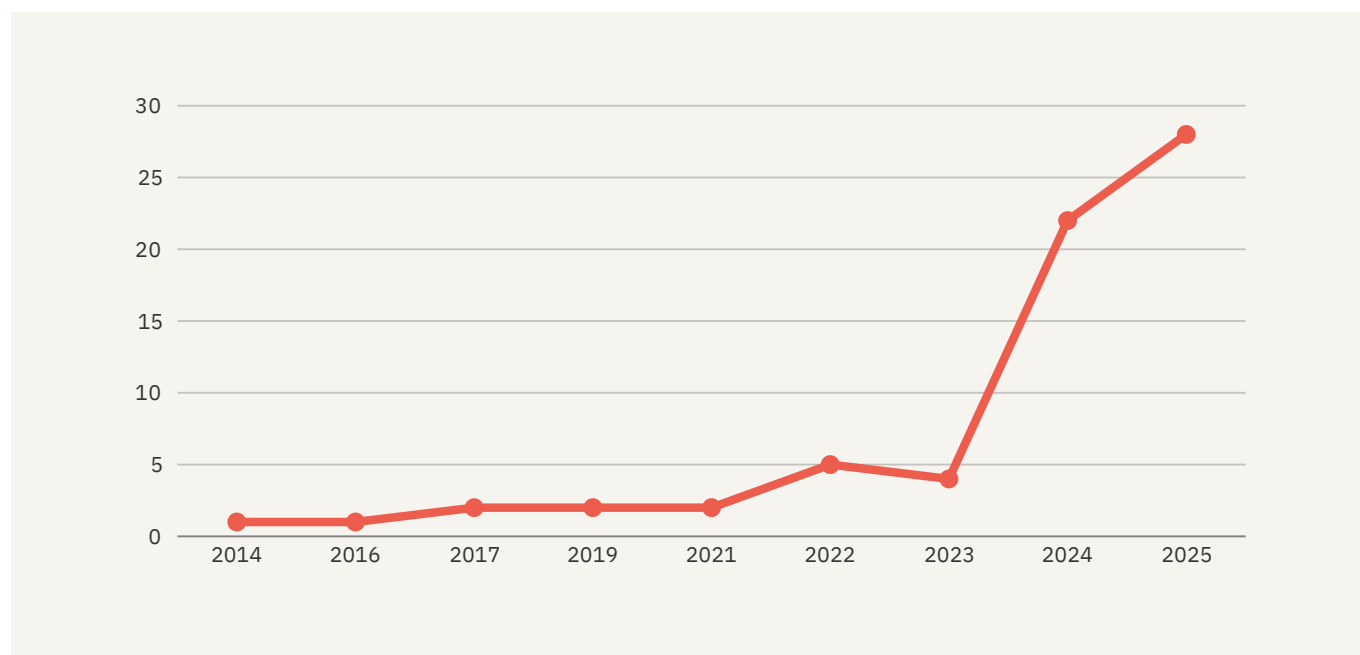


The harshest penalties are reserved for those charged with treason (Art. 275 CC RF). This article of the Criminal Code covers the offences of espionage, disclosure of state secrets, or the provision of financial or other assistance to a foreign state or international organization in their activities, where such activities are deemed ‘directed against the security of the Russian Federation.’ In recent years, a charge of treason has become the most radical tool for cracking down on dissidents. Its use has steadily increased since 2022, with treason charges being brought, not only against Russians living in Russia itself, but also against Ukrainian citizens who find themselves under occupation and have been forced to accept Russian citizenship.

According to our project, **952 people** have faced politically motivated charges of treason. Such charges are often combined with charges for other offences, such as participation in a terrorist organization (a designation applied by the Russian Federation to many units of the Ukrainian armed forces), attempted sabotage, preparing to cross the state border, and others.

Of those charged exclusively with treason (Art. 275 CC RF), we have recognized **77 individuals** as political prisoners. This low proportion is explained primarily by the fact that in many cases we are unable to assess the lawfulness of the prosecution. Often, the case files and even the names of the accused are not made public; their trials are held in camera and are effectively beyond public scrutiny. This situation corresponds neither to the spirit nor the letter of the law; it violates the principle of openness and transparency of judicial proceedings guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation. At the same time, we recognize individuals as political prisoners, even where we do not know the details of the case, if the charge of treason is linked to providing funding for Ukraine directed ‘against the security of Russia.’

Figure 9. Ukrainians prosecuted under Art. 275 CC RF



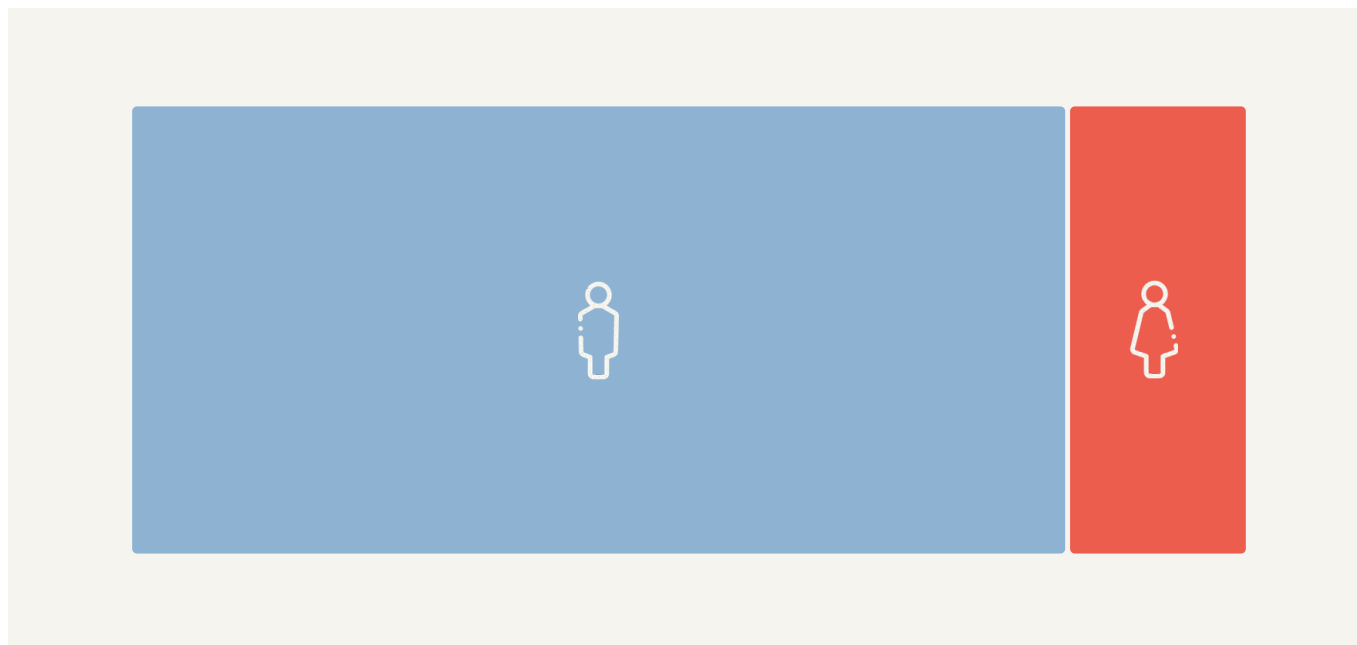
Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



Of the **470 individuals** charged with treason, **70 are citizens of Ukraine**. The great majority of these Ukrainians obtained Russian citizenship during the forced passportization in Crimea and the occupied parts of the Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts. The imposition of Russian citizenship on the population of the occupied territories has been in violation of international law, in particular the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. We consider all charges of treason brought against Ukrainian citizens forced to obtain Russian citizenship under conditions of the occupation to be unlawful. **Twenty-nine** of the accused Ukrainian citizens **are women**; most often these Ukrainian women were charged with transferring money or passing information to their compatriots.

Of the 77 political prisoners charged exclusively with treason (Art. 275 CC RF), **65 were men** and **12 were women**.

Figure 10. Convicted of Treason: Men — 84% | Women — 16%



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Of these, 65 have already been sentenced. All those convicted of treason were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The shortest sentence handed down (four years in a penal colony) was given to a Russian citizen for ‘preparing to commit treason.’ The average term of imprisonment has been **11 years and eight months**. The average prison term for women has been longer at **12 years and eight months**.

At the same time, for Ukrainian men and women convicted of treason the average sentence has been **13 years and three months**. The terms of imprisonment imposed on Ukrainian women with young children for so-called ‘treason’ fit squarely within this general trend. The presence of minor children has had no significant influence on the severity of punishment.



Our analysis shows that, while women make up a minority of political prisoners, judges often hand down harsher sentences against them; the presence of minor children has little impact on the decision to impose imprisonment.

We calculate that, in addition to the **20 women** unlawfully convicted on politically motivated charges, at least **28 minor children** are suffering because of the state's actions. Families and childhoods have been destroyed by the state to serve the political interest of those in power.

We do not always know the exact ages of children who were minors at the time of their mothers' convictions. We also understand that, in many cases, the term 'minority' is a purely formal designation. It is impossible to measure the suffering caused to a child, teenager, or young adult by the unjust imprisonment of their closest loved one.

In conclusion, we recall the divided family of perhaps the most famous political prisoner who is a mother, that of theatre director **Zhenya Berkovich**

Zhenya Berkovich adopted two teenage girls when they were 13 and 15 years old. Unfortunately, they were able to spend only a few years together, years that were both difficult and fruitful.

When Kira and Anna were 17 and 18, their mother was arrested.

Our project has recognized **Yevgeniya Berkovich** and **Svetlana Petriyчук** as political prisoners. Today Zhenya Berkovich's daughters are of legal age; we are certain they still need their mother. The imprisonment of Zhenya Berkovich is as unjust as ever.



We recognise that the information we possess about politically motivated prosecutions of women with children may be far from complete. If you are aware of any such cases, please send the information to our project.

POLITICAL PRISONERS MEMORIAL

MEMOPZK.ORG/EN

If you know of any cases of illegal politically motivated prosecution, please contact us through our [CHATBOT](#) or at HELP.POLITICAL.PRISONERS@MEMOHRC.ORG

