

POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The context of political repression in Russia in 2025

At the time of publication of this report, Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has been going on for more than four years, and throughout this period the war has defined the nature and direction of most political repression in Russia.

Since 2023, the conflict itself has taken on a protracted, unchanging character. In 2025, the Russian army stepped up its offensive and achieved local successes on various sectors of the front. These involved advances of 10–30 km following heavy fighting. One event that stood out from the general pattern of battlefield developments over the past three years has been the Ukrainian army's breakthrough in the Kursk region in August 2024. The Ukrainian armed forces captured an area of Russian territory and held it until the spring of 2025, when Russian troops regained control. The fighting in Kursk region was reflected in the statistics on politically motivated prosecutions. The Russian authorities have prosecuted a great number of Ukrainian prisoners of war on charges of terrorism (see Chapter 2.5).

Intense mutual strikes deep into the two countries' territories have continued. The Conflict Intelligence Team, which analyses the course of the war, [claims](#) 2025 was the deadliest year for civilians on both sides of the front¹. Of the total number of civilian fatalities, 80% died on territory controlled by Ukraine, and approximately 10% each in the occupied territories of Ukraine and in Russia.

Attacks by Ukrainian drones on Russian infrastructure have become routine. In June 2025, Ukraine succeeded in carrying out an unconventional sabotage operation, dubbed 'Operation Spider's Web.' Drones concealed in trucks attacked Russian strategic aviation facilities at military airfields (see Chapter 2.2.4). Discussions on social media about Ukrainian attacks on Russian territory often become grounds for prosecutions under the law on justifying terrorism (see Chapter 2.1.1).

Reports of the arrests of individuals accused of setting fire to railway equipment or other facilities, or of preparing to carry out such acts (see Chapter 2.2), and of passing information to Ukrainian intelligence, including for the purpose of subsequent acts of sabotage (see Chapter 2.3), have almost become background noise. It is often difficult to ascertain whether individuals implicated in these cases actually collaborated with Ukrainian security services, and if so, whether they did so knowingly, whether they were victims of entrapment by Russian security services, or whether the evidence was wholly or partly fabricated. Levels of prosecution are higher in the occupied territories of Ukraine (see Chapter 2.5) where the Russian authorities fear, sometimes quite justifiably, resistance from the local population.

Although the war in 2025 has been bloodier than in 2023 and 2024, it was partially pushed out of the global news agenda, not least by the topic of peace talks and associated expectations. Donald Trump, who took office as US President in January 2025, repeatedly declared his desire to end the war between Russia and Ukraine. Russian and Ukrainian authorities negotiated with the US administration throughout the year. However, this had virtually no impact on the course of the war, and no agreements were reached even on a temporary ceasefire.

1 According to the Conflict Intelligence Team, 2,919 civilians were killed on both sides of the front line, while a further 17,775 were injured. Compared with 2024, the death toll rose by 12%, while the total number of casualties increased by more than 25%.



Nevertheless, the negotiations have had a positive impact in terms of prisoner exchanges and the return of captured civilians. Among the Ukrainian prisoners of war released [were](#) individuals sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and recognised by our project as political prisoners. In August 2025, the journalist [Dmytro Khyliuk](#), held in prisoner-of-war camps since March 2022 without charge, the former mayor of Kherson, **Volodymyr Mykolaenko**, and dozens of other civilians returned to Ukraine. Some of those returned had also been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, while others [had been deprived of liberty](#) in the 'Donetsk People's Republic' and the 'Luhansk People's Republic' even before 2022.

There were no exchanges of political prisoners who held only Russian citizenship in 2025. The US secured the release of its citizen [Ksenia Karelina](#). In early 2026, France successfully repatriated [Laurent Vinatier](#).

Nevertheless, human rights activists continue their advocacy in search of opportunities for humanitarian gestures, such as [the exchange on 1 August 2024](#). In February 2025, Nobel Peace Prize laureates the Ukrainian Centre for Civil Liberties and the Russian NGO Memorial, launched the [People First](#) campaign. The campaign's demands include returning forcibly displaced children to Ukraine, ensuring the swift exchange of prisoners of war, and releasing Russians deprived of liberty *'for anti-war statements or protests.'* Human rights activists insist that *'all Ukrainian civilians captured and unlawfully detained by the Russian armed forces, including those convicted by Russian courts, must be released immediately and unconditionally.'* A similar [resolution](#) was adopted by PACE on 27 January 2026. It states that any peace agreement must provide for the exchange of prisoners of war and the release of unlawfully detained civilians and of *'political prisoners in Russia deprived of liberty for speaking out against the renewed unlawful invasion of Ukraine.'*

Trump's rise to power in the US led to a tightening of US immigration policy, which has in turn affected asylum seekers from Russia. For example, [Leonid Melekhin](#) was deported from the US and immediately remanded in custody upon his arrival in Russia on a charge of justifying terrorism. It has become more difficult for Russians facing politically motivated prosecution to obtain humanitarian visas from other countries. For example, in July 2025 Germany, where parties with an anti-immigration agenda also achieved electoral success, [suspended](#) the issuance of humanitarian visas. For more details on the situation faced by political refugees from Russia, see Chapter 4.1.



1.2. The scale of political repression in Russia and the occupied territories in 2025

Our project, *Political Prisoners Memorial*, maintains a [database](#) of individuals deprived of liberty in politically motivated prosecutions. In 2025, we made it publicly available in part. The database is considerably broader than our list of political prisoners. In addition to those already recognised as political prisoners, our database also includes individuals whose imprisonment shows clear signs of being politically motivated and unlawful. Some of the latter cannot be recognised as political prisoners, as their prosecution does not meet the criteria set out in the [Guidelines on the Definition of the Term 'Political Prisoner'](#). For others, there is insufficient information about their prosecution. Finally, there are many cases that Memorial has not yet had time to review.

As of the end of 2025, our database contained 4,843 individuals deprived of liberty, whose prosecution showed clear signs of political motivation and unlawfulness.

Table 1. Numbers of residents of occupied territories and Ukrainian prisoners of war among those included in the database of victims of politically motivated prosecutions

	NUMBER OF PERSONS
Residents of internationally recognised Russian territory	3345
Residents of Crimea and Sevastopol	343
Residents of occupied territory of mainland Ukraine	441
Ukrainian military service personnel ²	714

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

According to data available at the end of 2025, 2024 saw a record number of new defendants in politically motivated criminal prosecutions. However, we continue to receive information about prosecutions initiated in 2025 and predict that the final total number of prosecutions initiated in 2025 will be significantly higher than in 2024.³

² This refers to military personnel against whom criminal proceedings have been brought in connection with their service. Prisoners of war not subject to criminal prosecution are not included in these statistics.

³ To make this forecast, we calculate the total number of prosecutions known to have been initiated in 2023 and 2024 of which we became aware in the year following their initiation. We assume that the proportion of prosecutions initiated in 2025, about which we will become aware in 2026, will be roughly the same relative to the total number of prosecutions initiated in 2025.



POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

Table 2. Number of defendants in politically motivated criminal prosecutions by year of initiation⁴

	2022	2023	2024	2025*	2025 (ПРОГНОЗ)
Total	1227	1442	2348	1640	2745
Russia	908	1204	1706	1303	
Occupied territories, excluding Ukrainian military personnel	158	192	262	198	
<i>of which Crimea and Sevastopol</i>	74	87	80	80	
<i>of which the occupied parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions</i>	84	105	182	118	
Ukrainian military (prisoners of war and former military service personnel, prosecuted for their service)	161	46	380	139	

*as of 31.12.2025

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

However, even if our prediction proves accurate, the rate of growth in the number of new prosecutions will stand at 17% compared with the previous year, meaning it will have slowed down. In 2024, 63% more people were prosecuted than in the previous year (a sharp increase partly a result of the large number of criminal prosecutions of prisoners of war captured in Kursk region).

In the first year of the full-scale war, the main politically motivated charge was that of disseminating 'fake news' about the military (Art. 207.3 CC RF). Prosecutions on this charge were brought against at least 169 people in 2022. Subsequently, the number of such prosecutions declined (see Chapter 2.1.1). In second place in 2022, the most common charge was that of acts of terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF), with 118 people charged, while in third place was that of organising or participating in the activities of an extremist organisation (Art. 282.2 CC RF), with which 109 individuals were charged. Even at that time, one of the most frequent charges brought by the security services was that of making calls to engage in terrorism or justification of terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF), which ranked fourth in terms of frequency in politically motivated cases.

4 These figures include individuals currently in custody, those previously in custody but since released, and a number being prosecuted but not detained.



Since 2023, the situation has changed, with the ‘top three’ charges used in politically motivated prosecutions being as follows each year:

1. **ACT OF TERRORISM (ART. 205 CC RF)**
2. **TREASON (ART. 275 CC RF)**
3. **MAKING CALLS FOR PEOPLE TO CARRY OUT TERRORIST ACTIVITIES (ART. 205.2 CC RF)**

The number of prosecutions for these offences has been growing at a significantly faster rate than the total number of politically motivated prosecutions.

Table 3. Number of defendants in politically motivated criminal cases on charges of acts of terrorism, treason and justification of terrorism, by year of commencement of prosecution

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2025 (PREDICTION)
Act of terrorism	118	185	531	318	803
Treason	58	180	324	263	600
Justification of terrorism	107	166	285	240	377

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Since 2023, there has been a sharp rise in the number of prosecutions for sabotage (Art. 281 CC RF) and, since 2024, for participation in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF). Under Art. 205.5 CC RF, individuals have been prosecuted for various forms of cooperation with genuine or fake representatives of the Free Russia Legion or the Russian Volunteer Corps (see Chapter 2.4.4).



POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

Table 4. The 10 most frequently applied criminal charges in political prosecutions in 2025 and during the period of full-scale war as a whole

2025			2022–2025		
ARTICLE		NUMBER OF PERSONS	ARTICLE		NUMBER OF PERSONS
1	Act of terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF)	318	Act of terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF)		1152
2	Treason (Art. 275 CC RF)	263	Treason (Art. 275 CC RF)		825
3	Making calls to engage in terrorism or justification of terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF)	237	Making calls to engage in terrorism or justification of terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF)		788
4	Sabotage (Art. 281 CC RF)	111	Organisation of, or participation in, the activity of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF)		435
5	Organisation of, or participation in, the activity of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF)	110	Organisation of, or participation in, the activity of an extremist organisation (Art. 282.2 CC RF)		431
6	Financing of extremist activity (Art. 282.3 CC RF)	100	Intentional dissemination of information known to be false about the Russian army (Art. 207.3 CC RF)		398
7	Rehabilitation of Nazism (Art. 354.1 CC RF)	83	Sabotage (Art. 281 CC RF)		374
8	Organisation of, or participation in, the activity of an extremist organisation (Art. 282.2 CC RF)	76	Creation of, or participation in, a terrorist group (Art. 205.4 CC RF)		363
9	Making calls to engage in extremism (Art. 280 CC RF)	66	Undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activity (Art. 205.3 CC RF)		260
10	Aiding and abetting terrorism (Art. 205.1 CC RF)	62	Rehabilitation of Nazism (Art. 354.1 CC RF)		253

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

The offence of rehabilitation of Nazism (Art. 354.1 CC RF) plays a significant role in political repression. Most frequently applied in cases only indirectly related to Nazism, or not at all, the offence is used to penalise actions of ‘desecrating’ monuments and symbols (and not only those associated with the Second World War) and for criticising Victory Day celebrations, among other things (see Chapter 2.1.4).

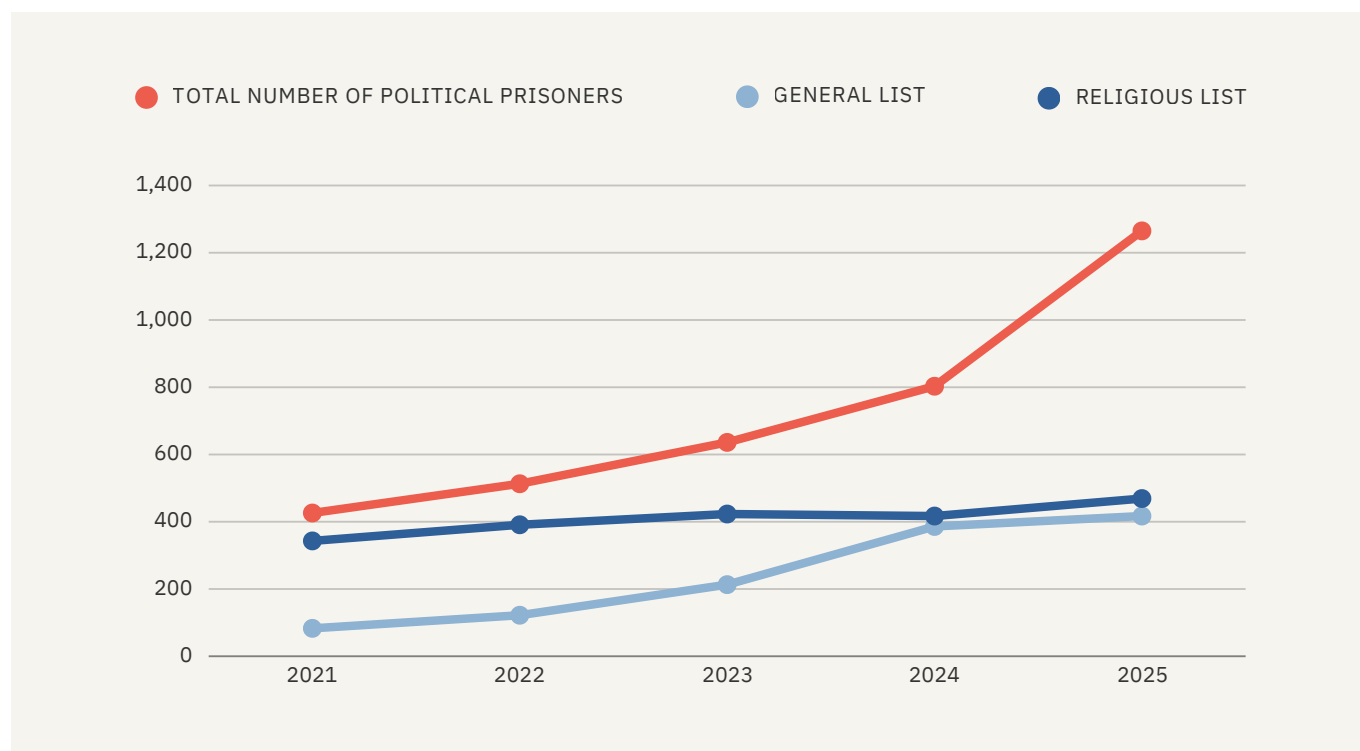
A notable feature of 2025 was a sharp surge in prosecutions for the offence of financing extremism (Art. 282.3 CC RF). This was linked to a campaign against those who had donated to the Anti-Corruption Foundation (see Chapter 2.4.6).

1.3. Trends in the lists of political prisoners in 2025

Since 2009, Memorial has been compiling lists of Russian political prisoners, based on the [Guidelines on the Definition of the Term ‘Political Prisoner’](#), drawn up by human rights defenders from various countries drawing on a resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Our list of political prisoners is divided into two parts: a [general list](#) and a [list of those deprived of liberty on grounds of religion](#).

Since 2018, the ‘religious list’ has been significantly longer than the general list, at times almost five times as long. This has been because of the mass prosecutions of followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir⁵ and Jehovah’s Witnesses. By the end of 2025, the general list was, for the first time in years, longer than the religious list, approximately by a factor of 1.7.

Figure 1. Increase in Memorial’s lists of political prisoners over the last five years



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

⁵ In January 2024, Hizb ut-Tahrir was designated a terrorist organisation in the UK. British officials cited the fact that, following the attack by the terrorist group Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023, a post appeared on the Hizb ut-Tahrir website in which Hamas members were described as heroes, while supporters of Hizb ut-Tahrir celebrated and praised the attacks on Israel. These developments prompted us to suspend the inclusion of those deprived of liberty on charges of involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir in the lists of political prisoners and to carry out further analysis of the prosecutions in such cases.

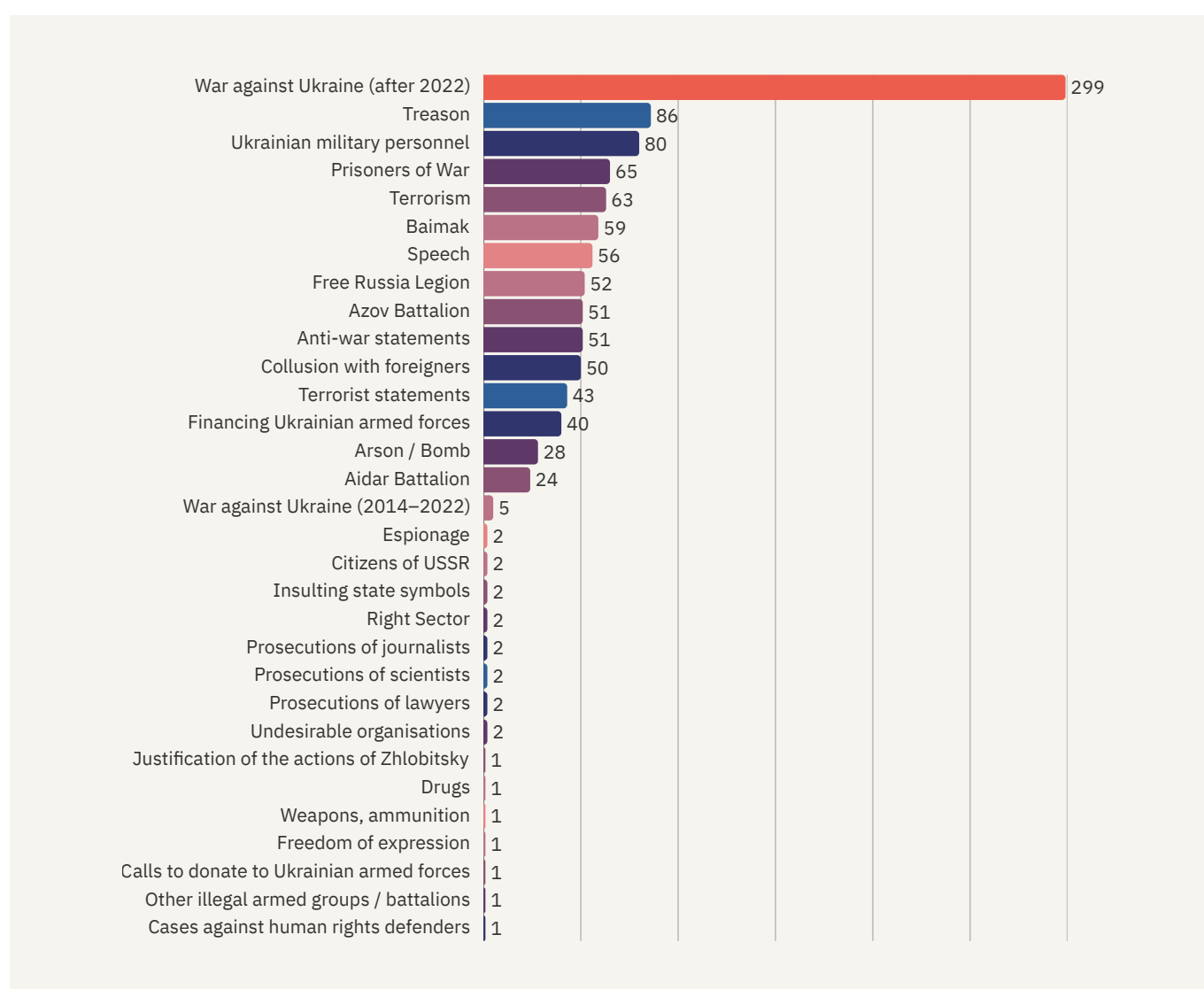


POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

In 2025, the project added 567 individuals, a record number, to the lists of political prisoners, 476 of whom were included in the general list. The general list more than doubled in size for the first time. However, even this marked increase is insufficient to give an accurate picture of the scale of political repression. The prosecutions of only 20% of those recognised as political prisoners in 2025 had begun in 2025; that of 80% had begun in previous years. The lists are, in effect, being updated on a catch-up basis. By the end of 2025, the list of political prisoners covered only 26% of those included in our database whose deprivation of liberty showed clear signs of being politically motivated and unlawful.

The prosecution of more than 60% of those added to the general list of political prisoners in 2025 is connected to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Figure 2. The grounds for prosecution of those recognised as political prisoners in 2025⁶



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

6 The categories for criminal prosecutions listed here and used in our project database are not mutually exclusive: a single prosecution may fall into more than one category.



Most frequently, our project recognised individuals prosecuted for treason (Art. 275 CC RF) as political prisoners (87 persons). In second place were those prosecuted for the creation of, or participation in, a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4 CC RF). These were primarily Ukrainian prisoners of war accused of membership of units of the Ukrainian armed forces such as Azov Battalion, Aidar Battalion and so on.

A significant group among new political prisoners are those implicated in the ‘Baimak case.’ In 2025, we added 59 individuals to our lists who were prosecuted on charges of participation in riots (Art. 212 CC RF) and the use of violence against a representative of the authorities (Art. 318 CC RF).

Table 5. The 10 articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation most frequently used to prosecute individuals, added in 2025 by the *Political Prisoners Memorial* project to the general list of political prisoners

2025	
ARTICLE	NUMBER OF PERSONS
1 Treason (Art. 275 CC RF)	87
2 Creation of a terrorist group or participation in it (Art. 205.4 CC RF)	69
3 Use of violence against a representative of the authorities (Art. 318 CC RF)	60
4 Riots (Art. 212 CC RF)	59
5 Calls to engage in terrorism or justification of terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF)	56
6 Collusion with a foreign state, a foreign or international organisation (Art. 275.1 CC RF)	50
7 Undergoing training for purposes of carrying out terrorist activity (Art. 205.3 CC RF)	46
8 Organising or taking part in the activity of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF)	42
9 Intentional dissemination of information known to be false about the use of the Russian army (Art. 207.3 CC RF)	39
10 Act of terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF)	36

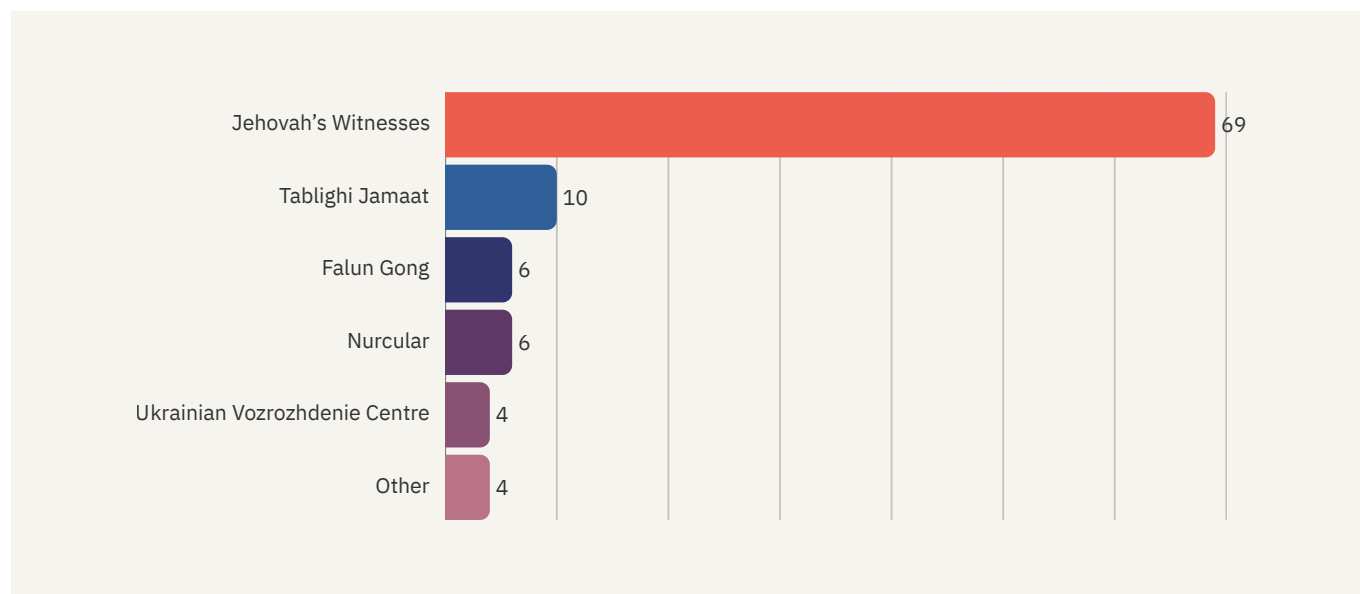
Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

Of those added to the list of individuals prosecuted on grounds of religion in 2025, 70% were Jehovah's Witnesses.

Figure 3. Religious movements and organisations whose followers were recognised as political prisoners in 2025 by the 'Political Prisoners Memorial' project



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



2. MAIN CATEGORIES OF POLITICALLY MOTIVATED PROSECUTIONS IN 2025

2.1. Prosecutions for statements and self-expression

2.1.1. Prosecutions on charges of ‘making calls to engage in terrorism’ and ‘justification of terrorism’

The number of politically motivated prosecutions for ‘propaganda of terrorism’ (Art. 205.2 CC RF) has been rising sharply since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The number of sentences involving imprisonment handed down on this charge, as well as the lengths of those sentences, is also increasing.

Table 6. Number of politically motivated criminal prosecutions initiated under Art. 205.2 CC RF

2022	2023	2024	2025*	2025 (PREDICTION)
107	166	285	240	377

*as of 31.12.2025

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

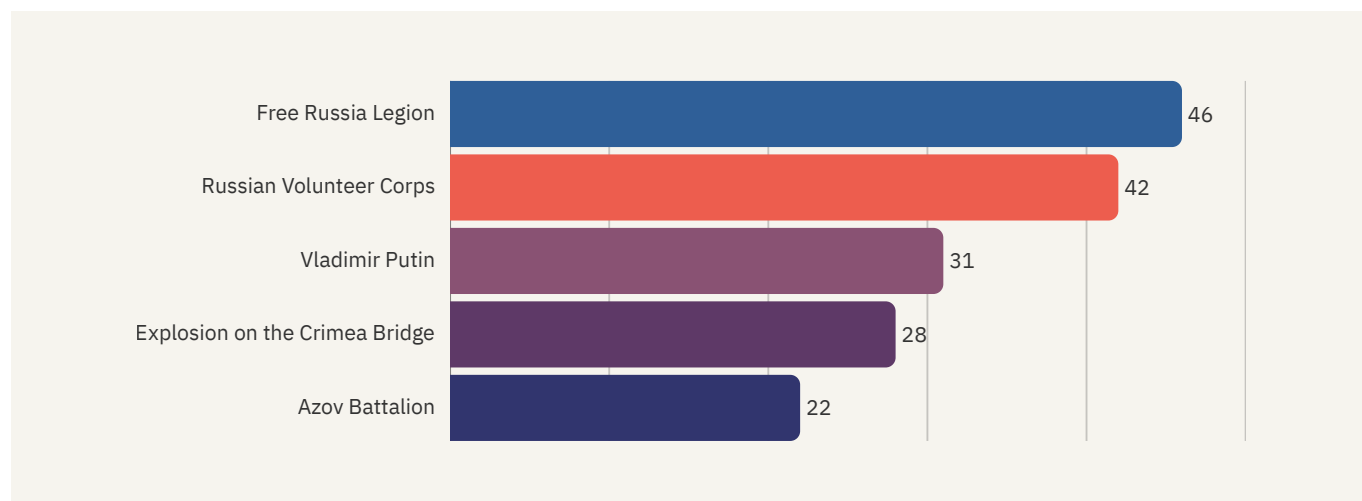
Since the number given in Table 5 for 2025 is not final, it cannot be said that the number of new prosecutions in 2025 decreased in comparison with 2024. On the contrary, it is highly likely that there were significantly more. In 2025, we added information to our database about nearly a hundred prosecutions under Art. 205.2 CC RF initiated in 2024. This is because many prosecutions do not come to light immediately. We expect that a more up-to-date figure for the number of individuals whose prosecutions began in 2025 will become known by the end of 2026 or early 2027.

Art. 205.2 CC RF consists of two parts. The first penalises the making of public calls for, justification of, or propaganda of, terrorism by up to five years’ imprisonment. The second part imposes liability for the same acts committed using the media or the internet. The penalty in this case may be up to seven years’ imprisonment. In most cases, law enforcement agencies have brought charges for making calls to engage in terrorism or for justification of terrorism on the internet. Consequently in 2025, 95% of cases involving the propaganda of terrorism were brought under the second part of this offence. This proportion has remained consistent for many years and has not changed since the start of the full-scale war.

Over the past four years, while Russia has been waging a war of aggression in Ukraine and committing war crimes on a daily basis, Russian security forces have regularly prosecuted individuals on charges of terrorist propaganda for anti-war statements or comments criticising the authorities in general. Commentators expressing support for the Russian Volunteer Corps or the Free Russia Legion, which are fighting on Ukraine's side, are increasingly facing criminal prosecution for allegedly justifying terrorism. Furthermore, there is a growing number of prosecutions for expressing approval of the 2022 bombing of the Crimean Bridge, the murder of war correspondent Vladlen Tatarsky, and other war-related actions by the Ukrainian military and security services. However, the grounds for initiating cases under Art. 205.2 CC RF can vary widely.

According to our data, as of the end of 2025, at least 526 persons in Russia charged under Art. 205.2 CC RF had been deprived of liberty on political grounds⁷. The majority (322 persons) were prosecuted or convicted for anti-war statements. Below, we outline some of the categories of statements for which people face repression.

Figure 4. Number of individuals deprived of liberty on charges of propaganda of terrorism for statements on certain topics⁸



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

⁷ Of these, 207 individuals have been remanded in custody solely on charges under Art. 205.2 CC RF, while in other cases the charges also include other articles.

⁸ Some individuals have been charged for making statements on a number of topics at the same time. We are unaware of the content of most of the statements that have led to criminal proceedings.

WISHING PUTIN DEAD AND CALLS TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT

More than 30 individuals have been imprisoned for wishing Vladimir Putin dead or calling for the overthrow of the government. In July 2025, a court in Perm [remanded](#) 34-year-old activist [Leonid Melekhin](#) in custody. He had previously been refused political asylum in the US, after which he was deported to Russia.

According to [Melekhin's relatives](#), he was charged under Art. 205.2 CC RF for a photograph of a poster he posted on his Telegram channel. The poster called for Vladimir Putin to be hanged.



Source: Mediazona

A 55-year-old worker from Chelyabinsk, [Sergei Fomov](#), was also charged with calling for Putin to be hanged. Furthermore, in one of his online comments, he described the fighters of the Russian Volunteer Corps as 'great guys.' For this, on 12 August 2025, Fomov was [sentenced](#) to six years' imprisonment.

In January 2025, a St. Petersburg court sentenced 35-year-old [Varvara Lemann](#) to three years' imprisonment for a comment on social media deemed to call for the overthrow of the government of the Russian Federation. 'Soldiers and officers of Russia [...] free Russia from Putin,' her post read.



COMMENTS ON THE CRIMEAN BRIDGE

At least 28 individuals have been imprisoned for comments referring to the explosions on the Crimean Bridge. On 8 October 2022, a truck exploded on the Crimean Bridge, killing five people, including the driver. The head of the Ukrainian Security Service, Vasyl Malyuk, subsequently [said](#) his agency had organised the attack. Eight men were charged in connection with the explosions. In November 2025, they were sentenced to life imprisonment (for further details on this case, see Chapter 2.2.4).

Several more explosions on the Crimean Bridge [occurred](#) on 17 July 2023, killing two. Ukrainian media, citing the Ukrainian Security Service, [reported](#) that these explosions were also an operation claimed by the Ukrainian Security Service and the country's naval forces. According to the publications' sources, the bridge was attacked by surface drones.

Since then, several dozen Russians have been imprisoned for making comments supportive of these events. For example, in July 2025, a court in Sochi [sentenced](#) 30-year-old local resident [Aleksei Kosmyntsev](#) to five years' imprisonment for 'justifying' the bombing of the Crimean Bridge on social media. The authorities did not disclose what Kosmyntsev had written on the subject. In April 2025, 54-year-old Kirov resident [Gennady Pashkov](#) was [sentenced](#) to four years in a penal colony for a similar 'justification.'

Several other individuals were prosecuted for calling for further attacks on the Crimean Bridge. In August 2025, 57-year-old Chita resident [Olga Ogarkova](#) was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for comments the investigative authorities deemed '*calls to take the lives of senior officials, as well as justifying missile strikes on the Crimean Bridge.*' According to the investigative authorities, Ogarkova also wished Ukraine victory and '*supported sabotage and terrorist attacks carried out on Russian territory.*'



COMMENTS ABOUT THE RUSSIAN VOLUNTEER CORPS, THE FREE RUSSIA LEGION AND OTHER ARMED GROUPS

Almost a hundred Russians have been deprived of liberty for making comments expressing support for the activities of armed groups fighting on Ukraine's side. Here are a few examples:

1. **'GLORY TO THE RUSSIAN VOLUNTEER CORPS'**

For this comment, 33-year-old resident of St. Petersburg, [Artem Abanin](#), faced criminal prosecution. Furthermore, according to the investigative authorities, he posted comments in a Telegram chat approving the actions of the Russian Volunteer Corps. In July 2025, the court [remanded](#) Abanin in custody; he remains in custody to this day.

2. **'MAY THE MEMORY OF THE HERO ILДАР LIVE ON FOREVER'**

Wrote 64-year-old [Elena Bulgakova](#) from Vladivostok beneath a news report about the death of [Ildar Dadin](#) at the front. Dadin, a former Russian political prisoner, was fighting on the side of Ukraine. In October 2024, he was killed in action. It [came to light](#) in May 2025 that a criminal case had been opened against Bulgakova for justifying terrorism. Initially, pending trial Bulgakova was subject to a travel ban, but in July she was remanded in custody. In September 2025, a second criminal charge was brought against her for aiding and abetting terrorist activities (Art. 205.1, Part 1.1, CC RF) for money transfers to the Free Russia Legion.

3. **'...RUSSIANS IN THE RUSSIAN VOLUNTEER CORPS ARE ALSO FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM FOR THEIR HOMELAND. THE SAME GOES FOR BELARUSIANS. THOSE WHO WANT FREEDOM FOR THEIR NATION ARE ALSO FIGHTING FOR UKRAINE. THERE ARE NO OTHER OPTIONS HERE. THE RUSSIAN VOLUNTEER CORPS IS THE ONLY TRUE WAY FOR RUSSIANS; THERE ARE NO OTHERS.'**

Nineteen-year-old Pskov resident [Vladislav Timofeev](#) was charged with publishing, among other things, this post. In addition to this comment, he was also charged with a comment approving the activities of the Azov Battalion. In August 2025, a court in St. Petersburg [sentenced](#) Timofeev to two and a half years' imprisonment.

4. **'GUYS, YOU'RE THE BEST! NOT LIKE THOSE PUTIN LACKEYS AND OTHER SCUM!'**

Security forces in Vologda opened a criminal prosecution against local resident and 44-year-old animal rights activist [Svetlana Nazarova](#) for this comment on the Siberian Battalion Telegram channel. Nazarova was arrested and remanded in custody in August 2025. On 1 December 2025, she was [sentenced](#) to two years' imprisonment.

5. **Earlier in 2025, on 13 January, a Kaliningrad court handed down a verdict in a similar case. Fifty-four-year-old nurse [Elena Nikolaenkova](#) was arrested and remanded in custody in August 2024 for a comment in which she referred to Russian Volunteer Corps fighters as 'great guys.' The court [imposed](#) a fine of 500,000 roubles on Nikolaenkova, but then reduced it to 60,000 roubles taking into account that she had spent five months on remand.**



OTHER STATEMENTS

Among those deprived of liberty in prosecutions involving Art. 205.2 CC RF which do not directly relate to the Russian invasion of Ukraine are individuals charged with making statements about Hizb ut-Tahrir and Artpodgotovka. Also implicated in such cases are those who have posted supportive comments about Mikhail Zhlobitsky⁹, on the topics of the MCM¹⁰ and Columbine¹¹, as well as supporters of the Citizens of the USSR movement.

Among those being prosecuted are individuals accused of making comments about officials. For example, 38-year-old resident of the town of Mozhga in Udmurtia [Evgenia Rogozina](#) was charged for a comment about the Minister of Agriculture, Oksana Lut. Rogozina wrote the phrase 'Burn the witch!' under a post about Lut's comments on the rising price of butter. The official attributed the price rise to an increase in Russians' incomes and growing demand for the product. In February 2025, Evgenia Rogozina was placed under house arrest. In June, she was remanded in custody where she remained until sentencing. On 23 September 2025, the Central District Military Court in Ekaterinburg [imposed](#) a fine of 500,000 roubles on Rogozina, which was reduced to 310,000 roubles taking into account the time she had spent in custody.

In March 2025, the 2nd Western District Military Court [handed down](#) a sentence to the journalist [Nadezhda Kevorkova](#), who had been remanded in custody in May 2024 for two social media posts. In the first, she had published a text by Orkhan Dzhemal, with whom she was on friendly terms. Dzhemal had written the piece in 2010 following the death of one of the leaders of the armed underground in the North Caucasus, [Anzor Astemirov](#). The second post, published in 2021, according to the prosecution, justified the activities of the Taliban.¹² Kevorkova spent nearly a year in custody before the court sentenced her to a fine of 600,000 roubles.

9 On 31 October 2018, Mikhail Zhlobitsky, a 17-year-old resident of Arkhangelsk, blew himself up at the entrance to the local FSB office. A few minutes earlier, he had posted a message on Telegram explaining that his actions were a protest against repression and torture. Zhlobitsky was killed and three FSB officers were injured. Zhlobitsky's suicide bombing was classified as an act of terrorism.

10 The neo-Nazi organisation 'Maniacs: The Cult of Murder,' which the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation has designated as a terrorist organisation.

11 A word that has become synonymous with school shootings. Russian law enforcement agencies believe there is a single terrorist organisation called 'Columbine,' to which people who commit such crimes anywhere in the world belong. There are no grounds for believing that school shooters and their sympathisers belong to the same organisation.

12 The Taliban is a movement of Islamic fundamentalists that has exercised full control over Afghanistan since 2021. It was removed from the list of terrorist organisations by the Russian authorities on 17 April 2025 (five days after Kevorkova's sentencing) and in July was recognised by Russia as the official government of Afghanistan.



At times, even those who support the Russian invasion of Ukraine find themselves facing criminal charges for justifying terrorism. [Aleksandr Shevchuk](#), a 64-year-old resident of Blagoveshchensk, was prosecuted for a comment criticising the Russian authorities for not waging the war with sufficient diligence. Shevchuk wrote that *‘until they strike a serious blow against Rublevka or the Kremlin,’* the ‘shortage of ammunition’ at the front would continue.¹³ In September 2025, Shevchuk was [sentenced](#) to three years in a penal colony.

Following the [designation](#) by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation in November 2025 of the Anti-Corruption Foundation as a ‘terrorist organisation,’ a new wave of prosecutions under Art. 205.2 CC RF for endorsing the Anti-Corruption Foundation’s activities or, for example, calling for participation in ‘Smart Voting,’ is highly likely.

According to [data](#) from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, in the first six months of 2025, Russian courts convicted 281 people on charges of propaganda of terrorism. There have been no acquittals on this charge for the past four years.

Table 7. Number of people convicted of propaganda of terrorism by year

2022	2023	2024	H1 2025
318	345	453	281 ¹⁴

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

Our project does not consider the charge of ‘justification of terrorism’ manifestly unlawful, nor does it automatically regard all those prosecuted for this offence as defendants in politically motivated and unlawful criminal cases. Consequently, by no means all prosecutions under Art. 205.2 CC RF are included in our database. Project staff examine cases that come to light to determine whether they show signs of political motivation. Such a review is only possible if information is available on the substance of the case (including the content of the statements attributed to the individual, their public stance, and so on). However, this is by no means always the case. Consequently, project data on the number of convictions differs from that of the Judicial Department. Furthermore, as Russian courts’ websites do not publish even the most basic details of criminal cases (such as a defendant’s full name or the date of the verdict), there are many prosecutions that we are not only unable to analyse, but of which we are not even aware. This also contributes to the discrepancies in the figures. Nevertheless, our project also records an annual increase in the number of convictions on charges involving the offence of ‘propaganda of terrorism.’

13 In the spring of 2023, Evgeny Prigozhin, founder of the Wagner private military company, repeatedly accused the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff of the Russian Federation of failing to provide sufficient ammunition to the mercenaries under his command. In his comments, Shevchuk expressed sympathy for Prigozhin, setting him against the official military leadership.

14 During the same period in 2024, 182 people were convicted.



POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

Table 8. Number of individuals convicted under Art. 205.2 CC RF, including in combination with other offences

2023	2024	2025
87	167	204

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Furthermore, in recent years there has been an increase in the number of convictions in cases where the offence of justifying terrorism is the sole charge. Below, we examine these convictions in order to analyse the sentences imposed on individuals charged solely with justifying terrorism.

Table 9. Number of individuals convicted in cases where Art. 205.2 CC RF is the sole charge

2023	2024	2025
31	101	105

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

According to project data, in 2025 Russian courts began to impose custodial sentences more frequently under Art. 205.2 CC RF. Moreover, the average length of imprisonment also increased in 2025.

Table 10. Percentage of sentences under Art. 205.2 CC RF involving imprisonment of the politically motivated sentences for this offence recorded by our project

2023	2024	2025
61%	55%	71%

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Table 11. Average length of sentences of imprisonment known to our project in politically motivated convictions under Art. 205.2 CC RF

2023	2024	2025
3 y. 10 m.	3 y. 10 m.	4 y. 10 m.

In 2025, the highest numbers of sentences involving imprisonment under Art. 205.2 CC RF were handed down by the 2nd Eastern District Military Court.



2.1.2. Prosecutions under amendments to the Criminal Code introduced in 2022 to enforce military censorship

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY CENSORSHIP IN RUSSIA

On 4 March 2022, one week after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, laws aimed at preventing criticism of the war of aggression were adopted and came into force in a single day.¹⁵ Among the amendments introduced into the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation were the offences of intentional dissemination of information known to be false about the use of the armed forces of the Russian Federation (Art. 207.3 CC RF) and discrediting the use of the Russian army (Art. 280.3 CC RF).

Four months later, in July 2022, the Criminal Code was amended to include an offence of making calls to engage in activities directed against state security (Art. 280.4 CC RF).

These three criminal provisions have become striking symbols of military censorship and key instruments of wartime repression.

Our project considers that Art. 207.3 CC RF and Art. 280.3 CC RF contravene not only the Russian Constitution and the Russian Federation's international obligations, but also fundamental principles of law. These articles violate Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 29 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. We recognise all those convicted under these articles as political prisoners.

The wording of the offence of making public calls to carry out activities directed against state security (Art. 280.4 CC RF) is exceptionally broad and vague. Law enforcement agencies can label virtually any remarks critical of the government actions in the military or other spheres as constituting such 'calls,' regardless of their actual or potential consequences. This violates the principle of legal certainty and allows for arbitrary and excessively broad interpretation.

The offences of 'fake news' about the army and the discrediting of the army play a significant role in the wartime political repression. In the first year of the full-scale war, at least one of these offences featured in almost one fifth of politically motivated criminal prosecutions. The offence of 'fake news' was used particularly frequently in 2022. In 2023, the proportion of prosecutions for discrediting the army increased. As the initiation of a criminal case under this article requires prior administrative proceedings, it took some time for Art. 280.3 CC RF to be applied.

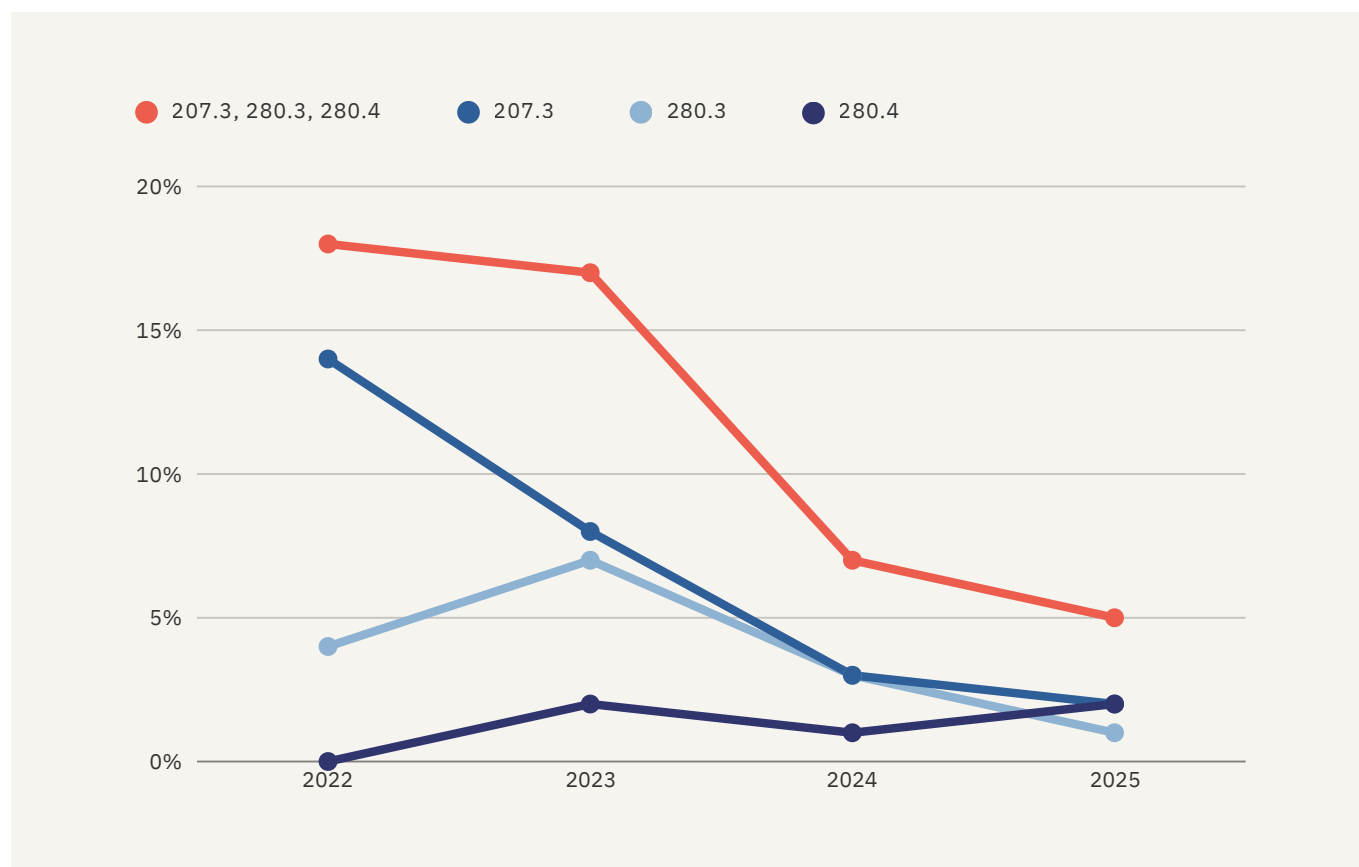
However, in 2024 and 2025, prosecutions initiated under these articles became significantly less common within the broader framework of repression. At the same time, the proportion of prosecutions for making calls to engage in activities directed against state security (Art. 280.4 CC RF) never exceeded 2% of all politically motivated criminal cases.

15 Federal Law No. 31 'On Amendments to the Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Offences' and Federal Law No. 32 'On Amendments to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and Articles 31 and 151 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Russian Federation', both dated 4 March 2022.



In 2025, criminal proceedings for the offences of military ‘fake news,’ discrediting the army and making calls for activities against state security were brought in only one out of every 20 cases of politically motivated prosecution.¹⁶

Figure 5. Proportion of individuals charged under Art. 207.3 CC RF, Art. 280.3 CC RF and Art. 280.4 CC RF, of all those prosecuted on political grounds (by year of initiation of criminal proceedings)



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

The decline in the role of these offences in politically motivated criminal prosecutions is a result both of a reduction in the frequency these charges have been brought and an increase in the number of times charges have been brought for other offences. As mentioned above, information on politically motivated criminal cases is received with some delay. As a result, data on prosecutions initiated in 2025 are currently less complete than those for previous years. In order to compare the scale of politically motivated criminal prosecutions more accurately over recent years, we have produced a forecast of the final figures for 2025. Table 11 shows an overall increase in the number of politically motivated prosecutions against the backdrop of a decline in the number of criminal prosecutions for anti-war statements.

16 The proportion of prosecutions for anti-war statements will most likely be even lower in 2025, as information about these cases becomes public more quickly than is the case on average for politically motivated criminal prosecutions.



Table 12. Number of individuals prosecuted in politically motivated criminal cases (by year of case initiation)

	2023	2024	2025*	2025 (FORECAST)
All politically motivated criminal prosecutions	1442	2348	1640	2745
Prosecutions under Art. 207.3, Art. 280.3, Art. 280.4	244	168	85	109

*as of 31.12.2025

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

THE OFFENCE OF DISSEMINATING ‘FAKE NEWS’ ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ARMY (ART. 207.3 CC RF)

Art. 207.3 CC RF provides for criminal liability for the intentional public dissemination of information known to be false concerning the deployment of the Russian armed forces, the exercise of authority by government bodies, and the actions of volunteer formations, among other matters. The article is used to prosecute individuals for any statements that contradict the official government version, which latter the courts automatically accept as true. Often, it is not even proven that the information was known to be false to the accused, rather than being perceived as true at the time of publication.

In 2025, prosecutions for the offence of ‘fake news’ continued to be brought mainly in relation to posts on social media. Often, these posts had been made as far back as 2022 or 2023.

17 The forecast is based on a calculation of the proportion of cases initiated in 2023 and 2024 of which we became aware in the year following their initiation, out of the total known number of cases initiated in 2023 and 2024. We assume that the proportion of cases initiated in 2025 of which we will become aware in 2026 will be roughly the same relative to the total number of cases initiated in 2025, and we multiply the currently available data for 2025 by this percentage. The forecast was calculated separately for prosecutions for anti-war statements and for all politically motivated prosecutions since the former are recorded more quickly than the ‘average’ politically motivated case.



The Case of Pavel Siutkin



In June 2025, a search was carried out at the Moscow home of the writers and historians of Russian cuisine [Pavel Siutkin](#) and his wife Olga. Nevertheless, the couple decided to remain in Russia. The basis for the criminal investigation was a repost concerning the events in Bucha, published on Siutkin's Telegram channel along with a commentary he wrote dated 3 April 2022. The Investigative Committee opened a criminal case against the historian for disseminating 'fake news' motivated by political animosity (Art. 207.3, Part 2[e], CC RF). On 9 October 2025, 60-year-old Pavel Siutkin was remanded in custody. On 17 October 2025, he was added to Rosfinmonitoring's List of Extremists and Terrorists.

Despite the diminished role of the offence of 'fake news' in political repression, statistics from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation do not show a reduction in the number of convictions. What can be seen, however, is a slowdown in the growth of the number of those convicted in the first half of 2025 (46 individuals) compared with the same period in 2024 (39 individuals). It takes several months, sometimes a year or more, from the initiation of a criminal case to the verdict. Therefore, the number of convictions continues to rise at present, even though the number of new criminal cases is falling.

Since 2024, the more serious offence of Art. 207.3, Part 2, CC RF has been applied more frequently, and this trend continued into 2025. While in 2022 most convictions under Art. 207.3 CC RF were handed down under Part 1 of the article, in 2024 and the first half of 2025 the proportion of convictions under Part 2 was approximately 80%.

Charges for this offence are typically aggravated by application of '*grounds of political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or enmity, or grounds of hatred or enmity towards any social group.*' The basis for such a classification is provided by clearly biased linguistic expertise which finds signs of 'hatred' in virtually any critical statement. The accused has virtually no opportunity to refute the 'expert' conclusions.

Art. 207.3, Part 3, CC RF, which concerns cases where 'fake news' has led to 'serious consequences', has not yet been invoked.

Table 13. Number of individuals convicted under Art. 207.3 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
Part 1	8	31	17	9	65
Part 2	6	34	73	37	150
Total	14	65	90	46	215

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation



POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

Table 14. Proportion of those convicted under Art. 207.3, Part 1, CC RF and Art. 207.3, Part 2, CC RF of the total number convicted under Art. 207.3 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
Part 1	57%	48%	19%	20%	30%
Part 2	43%	52%	81%	80%	70%

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

The increasingly severe nature of prosecutions under Art. 207.3 CC RF is evidenced not only by the more frequent application of the second part of the article, but also by the rise in the proportion of sentences involving imprisonment. While in 2022 only one-third of those convicted under Art. 207.3, Part 2, CC RF were sentenced to imprisonment, in 2024 and the first half of 2025, that figure rose to 93–94%

Table 15. Proportion of those sentenced to imprisonment of all those convicted under Art. 207.3 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
% of all those convicted under Part 1	0%	6%	0%	0%	3%
% of all those convicted under Part 2	33%	82%	93%	94%	88%

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

A similar trend is evident in the changes in the length of sentences of imprisonment imposed under Art. 207.3, Part 2, CC RF. The proportion of sentences with shorter terms has been steadily declining. In cases where the sentences involve imprisonment, a term of up to five years was imposed in 29% of cases in 2023, in 27% of cases in 2024, and in 18% of cases in the first half of 2025.

THE OFFENCE OF DISCREDITING THE ARMED FORCES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION (ART. 280.3 CC RF)

Art. 280.3 CC RF consists of two parts. Part 1 applies if the defendant was previously held liable for the related administrative-law offence during the preceding year. Part 2 allows for immediate criminal charges to be brought if the ‘discrediting’ resulted in consequences that led to *‘negligent homicide and/or harm to the health of citizens, property, mass violations of public order and/or public safety, or created obstacles to the functioning or caused the cessation of functioning of life-support facilities, transportation or social infrastructure, credit institutions, energy, industrial, or communications facilities’* or was committed *‘for personal gain or for hire.’*



The offence of discrediting the Russian military is generally applied, as is that of ‘military fake news,’ to online publications. However, Art. 280.3 CC RF is more frequently used in other situations. Among the grounds for initiating cases under this article in 2025 were: writing graffiti on fences, conversations in a smoking area, a fight with a veteran of the war against Ukraine, and an attempt by an inmate to dissuade other convicts from signing a contract with the Ministry of Defence.

As with the offence of ‘fake news,’ the overall growth in the number of convictions for the offence of discrediting the army has slowed, while the number of convictions under the second, more serious, part of the article has increased. However, prosecutions under Part 2 of the offence on discrediting the army are still relatively rare, with only six people so convicted in the first half of 2025, accounting for 15% of all those convicted under Art. 280.3 CC RF. However, since Part 2 can be applied if the discrediting were committed for ‘personal gain,’ we might expect an increase in the proportion of those convicted for this offence, driven by convictions against journalists and bloggers, including those tried in absentia.

Table 16. Number of individuals convicted under Art. 280.3 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
Part 1	3	47	66	33	149
Part 2	0	3	2	6	11
Total	3	50	68	39	160

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

Table 17. Proportion of those convicted under Art. 280.3, Part 1, CC RF and Art. 280.3, Part 2, CC RF of the total number of those convicted under Art. 280.3 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
Part 1	100%	94%	97%	85%	93%
Part 2	0%	6%	3%	15%	7%

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

One of the defendants in the prosecutions brought in 2025 under Art. 280.3, Part 2, CC RF was Moscow resident **Aleksandr Arsenyev**.



The case of Aleksandr Arsenyev



In February 2025, the words ‘I don’t want to get used to war’ were scrawled first on a fence near Koniushennaya Square in St. Petersburg, and then on a fence in the Petrogradsky district. News of the arrest of the suspect, Moscow resident [Aleksandr Arsenyev](#), emerged on 7 March 2025. He was charged with discrediting the armed forces of the Russian Federation, resulting in damage ‘to the property of the fence owner amounting to at least 10,000 roubles’ (Art. 280.3, Part 2, CC RF), and with vandalism motivated by hate (Art. 214, Part 2, CC RF). The court remanded Arsenyev in custody.

The proportion of sentences under Art. 280.3 CC RF involving imprisonment, as is with the article on ‘fake news’, is rising.

Table 18. Proportion of individuals sentenced to imprisonment of all those convicted under Art. 280.3 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
% of all those convicted under Part 1	0%	16%	18%	32%	20%
% of all those convicted under Part 2	0%	67%	100%	100%	75%

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

THE OFFENCE OF ‘MAKING CALLS TO ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES DIRECTED AGAINST STATE SECURITY’ (ART. 280.4 CC RF)

The offence of making calls for people to engage in activities directed against the security of the Russian Federation is generally applied to statements the authorities perceive as more dangerous than ‘ordinary’ anti-war statements. For example, in 2025 prosecutions for this offence were brought for making calls to donate to the Ukrainian army, to attack Russian military facilities and infrastructure, and to surrender. Prosecutions under Art. 280.4 CC RF often also include a charge of spreading terrorist propaganda (Art. 205.2 CC RF).

According to statistics from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, in more than 90% of cases where Art. 280.4 CC RF is applied, the more serious Part 2 is invoked. As a rule, defendants are charged under Part 2[c], which involves use of the internet, or Part 2[e], for offences committed on grounds of hatred. Part 3 of the offence, which is an even more serious charge and involves the offence being committed by an organised group, is rarely applied.

As there are relatively few prosecutions under Art. 280.4 CC RF, it makes no sense to compare the number of those convicted by year.



Table 19. Convictions under Art. 280.4 CC RF for 2022 – first half of 2025

	NUMBER OF PERSONS	% UNDER ART. 280.4	% UNDER THE GIVEN PART OF ART. 280.4
Part 1	1	3%	100%
Part 2	34	92%	54%
Part 3	2	5%	100%
Total	37	100%	59%

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

In 2025, the conviction of Pastor **Nikolai Romaniuk** on a charge of making calls to engage in activities directed against state security for a pacifist sermon caused a major stir.

The Case of Nikolai Romaniuk



Criminal proceedings were brought against [Nikolai Romaniuk](#), a pastor of the Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith at the Church of the Holy Trinity and a father of nine children, following an anti-war sermon he delivered on 25 September 2022. In his sermon, Romaniuk stated that it is unacceptable for Christians to take part in war, including in the event of mobilisation:



We do not bless those who go there, those who are forcibly conscripted; we do not bless them, but we pray that they may be delivered from there. There are various lawful ways to do this.

A video of the sermon was posted on the church's video channel.

In the early hours of 18 October 2024, security forces carried out a search of Romaniuk's home, the homes of two other members of his congregation, and of two places of worship. According to a minister from the same church, the arrest was carried with great brutality: *'They entered the houses in a "shield tandem" formation, with special forces operatives entering one by one under the cover of a riot shield. In some houses, they broke down the doors. Men were forced to the ground with their hands behind their heads.'* The pastor was asked to record a video statement retracting his words, but he refused. Following the search, he was detained and taken into custody. In September 2025, Romaniuk was sentenced under Art. 280.4, Part 2, CC RF to four years' imprisonment in a general regime penal colony.



2.1.3. Prosecutions under other articles of the Criminal Code that criminalise speech (Art. 280, Art. 282, Art. 282.4)

This section describes prosecutions under three articles of the Criminal Code, which penalise:

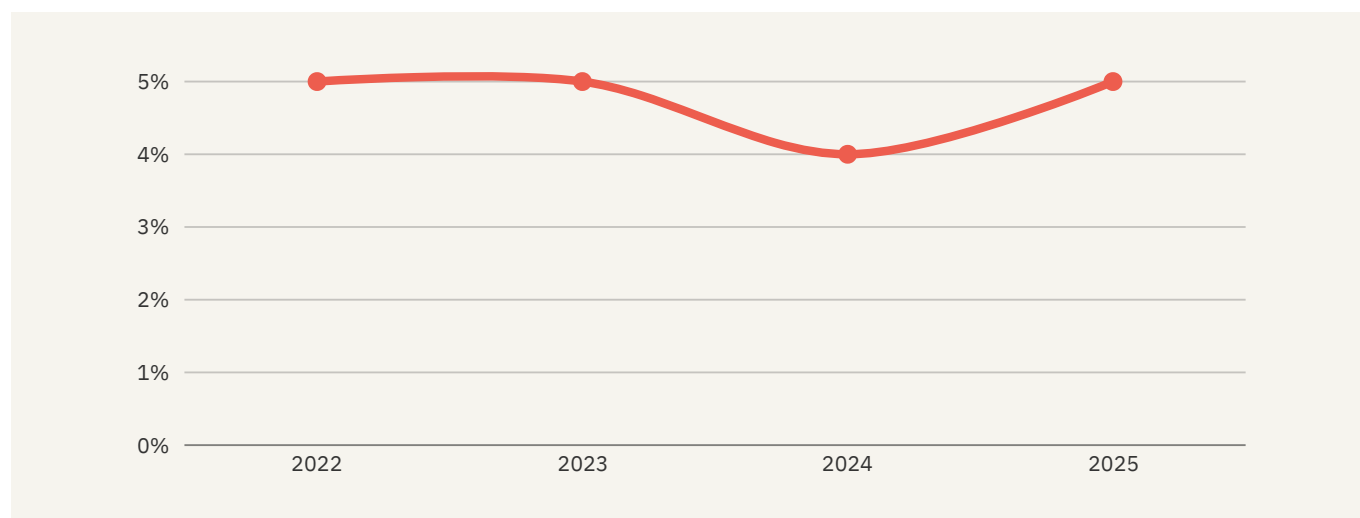
1. **CALLS TO ENGAGE IN EXTREMIST ACTIVITY (ART. 280 CC RF)**
2. **INCITEMENT OF HATRED OR ENMITY (ART. 282 CC RF)**
3. **DISPLAY OF PROHIBITED SYMBOLS (ART. 282.4 CC RF)**

Art. 280 CC RF and Art. 282 CC RF have long been used in politically motivated criminal prosecutions. Those charged with these offences are included on Rosfinmonitoring's List of 'extremists and terrorists.'

Art. 282.4 CC RF was introduced into the Criminal Code in July 2022 and establishes criminal liability for repeated public display of Nazi paraphernalia or symbols, paraphernalia or symbols of extremist organisations, and other prohibited paraphernalia or symbols. It may be applied to individuals previously convicted of the related administrative-law offence (Art. 20.3 CAO RF).

Art. 280 CC RF, Art. 282 CC RF and Art. 282.4 CC RF currently play a very limited role in terms of political repression. At least one of these offences features in only 4–6% of political criminal prosecutions, most frequently for the offence of making calls to engage in extremism (Art. 280 CC RF). This proportion has not changed significantly in recent years.

Figure 6. Proportion of defendants charged under Art. 280 CC RF, Art. 282 CC RF and Art. 282.4 CC RF of those prosecuted on politically motivated charges, by year



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



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At the same time, the number of politically motivated prosecutions recorded for all three offences is rising in line with the overall increase in political repression. It should be noted that the number of prosecutions initiated in 2025 will increase significantly over time, as many cases will only come to light subsequently. To compare the scale of politically motivated criminal prosecutions over recent years more accurately, we have produced a forecast for 2025.¹⁸

Table 20. The number of individuals against whom politically motivated criminal prosecutions were brought under Art. 280 CC RF, Art. 282 CC RF and Art. 282.4 CC RF for the period from 2022 to 2025

	2022	2023	2024	2025*	2025 (FORECAST)
Art. 280 CC RF	43	42	65	54	92
Art. 282 CC RF	19	22	23	12	24
Art. 282.4 CC RF	2	8	13	13	23
Total	64	72	101	79	139

*as of 31.12.2025

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

With the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the offences of making calls to engage in extremism and incitement of hatred began to be frequently used to penalise anti-war statements. Of the politically motivated criminal prosecutions for these offences we have documented since 2022, more than half relate to the expression of views about the Russian invasion.

Table 21. Proportion of prosecutions related to the war in Ukraine on charges under Art. 280 CC RF, Art. 282 CC RF and Art. 282.4 CC RF for the period 2022 to 2025 of the total number of politically motivated prosecutions for these offences

280	282	282.4	280, 282, 282.4
59%	50%	26%	53%

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



PROSECUTIONS ON CHARGES OF MAKING CALLS TO ENGAGE IN EXTREMISM (ART. 280 CC RF)

The offence of making public calls to engage in extremist activity provides for lighter penalties for offline calls (Art. 280, Part 1, CC RF) but harsher penalties for calls made via the media or the internet (Art. 280, Part 2, CC RF). Nine out of ten politically motivated criminal prosecutions under Art 280 CC RF, according to our project data, were brought under Part 2. According to data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, the proportion of those convicted under Part 2 of all those convicted of making calls to engage in extremism is even higher, ranging in recent years from 92% to 95%.

Table 22. Number of individuals convicted under Art. 280 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
Part 1	22	25	19	7	73
Part 2	334	281	289	131	1035
Total	356	306	308	138	1108

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

Table 23. Proportion of individuals convicted under Art. 280, Part 1, CC RF and Art. 280, Part 2, CC RF of the total number of persons convicted under Art. 280 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
Part 1	6%	8%	6%	5%	7%
Part 2	94%	92%	94%	95%	93%

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

In 2025, criminal prosecutions for making calls to engage in extremism were brought, in particular, for harsh remarks directed at law enforcement officers, participants in the war against Ukraine, Russians supporting military aggression against Ukraine, supporters of the United Russia party, as well as for calls to change the government in Russia and generally for support for Ukraine. Such comments are often emotionally charged and contain words that the security services interpret as calls to violence. For example, a criminal prosecution was brought over the [comment](#), ‘Death to the occupiers!’, posted beneath a news article about the opening of a memorial to participants in the ‘Special Military Operation’ in Crimea.

Often, a charge of making calls to engage in extremism is accompanied by an additional charge of propaganda of terrorism. This was the case, for example, in the prosecution of **Olga Sofronova-Moskvina**, a resident of Mordovia.



The case of Olga Sofronova-Moskvina



[Olga Sofronova-Moskvina](#), a resident of Saransk, a hairdresser and animal rights activist, was remanded in custody in March 2025. For comments she posted on Telegram channels, she was charged with making calls to engage in extremism (Art. 280, Part 2, CC RF) and with justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF) online. The charge of making calls to engage in extremism related to an online discussion on 27 September 2022 in a chat of the Avtozak LIVE Telegram channel. The discussion was prompted by news reports of the brutal detention and torture of those involved in the 'Mayakovsky case.' Commenting on the actions of the security forces, Sofronova-Moskvina wrote:



Crush the cops across the whole country!

When will they start wiping out the cops? How much longer must we put up with this?!

The charge of justifying terrorism related to a comment about the sentence handed down to [Kirill Butylin](#) for setting fire to a military enlistment office. Sofronova-Moskvina is currently in custody awaiting trial.

PROSECUTIONS ON CHARGES OF INCITEMENT OF HATRED OR ENMITY (ART. 282 CC RF)

Data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court shows that, with the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there have been significant changes in the application of Art. 282 CC RF. Firstly, Part 2 of the article, which does not require prior administrative-law proceedings, is being used more frequently.

Table 24. Number of individuals convicted under Art. 282 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
Part 1	28	21	17	14	80
Part 2	23	47	38	33	141
Total	51	68	55	47	221

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation



POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

Table 25. Proportion of individuals convicted under Art. 282, Part 1, CC RF and Art. 282, Part 2, CC RF of the total number convicted under Art. 282 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
Part 1	55%	31%	31%	30%	36%
Part 2	45%	69%	69%	70%	64%

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

Furthermore, the proportion of sentences involving terms of imprisonment has risen significantly under both parts of the article.

Table 26. Proportion of those sentenced to imprisonment of all those convicted under Art. 282 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025
% of those convicted under Part 1	0%	12%	15%	25%
% of those convicted under Part 2	41%	45%	55%	61%

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

In July 2025, penalties for incitement of hatred or enmity (Art. 282 CC RF) [were made more severe](#) (see Chapter 5.1.1). This may lead to a greater number of prosecutions for this offence. Law enforcement agencies and the courts have previously tended to interpret ‘threats to use violence’ extremely broadly. The new wording regarding ‘justification or promotion’ of violence is likely to make it much more likely that criminal prosecutions for incitement of hatred or enmity will be brought without prior administrative-law proceedings. Consequently, it is to be expected that 2026 will see an increase in prosecutions under this article.

In 2025, politically motivated criminal cases concerning incitement to hatred were primarily brought in relation to online posts. These were mostly comments about the war against Ukraine, about Russia’s security forces, about the Russian Orthodox Church and so on.

One of the high-profile hate speech prosecutions initiated in 2025 was that of stand-up comedian **Artemy Ostanin** which revealed an extremely broad interpretation of the concept ‘threats of violence.’



The case of Artemy Ostanin



In February 2025, stand-up comedian [Artemy Ostanin](#) delivered a monologue during a recording of the programme Channel Three about a legless man who had run into him on the metro system on a cart he used for mobility purposes. Ostanin in his monologue suggested the person who had hit him might have lost his legs after stepping on a landmine. He expressed annoyance at the inconvenience caused him by the man with a disability, called him *'a legless skater'* and asked him *'not to ride so fast.'* This sketch was interpreted by the 'ultra-patriotic' public as mockery of those involved in the Special Military Operation. A campaign to harass Ostanin began, and he received threats of physical violence.

On 15 March, it became known that a criminal case had been opened against Ostanin. He was detained in Minsk on 18 March. He later recounted that, on the journey back to Russia, the police officers taking him stopped the car in a forest and beat him with batons and stun guns. The comedian had his head forcibly shaved. According to his lawyer, a medical examination revealed Ostanin had suffered a fractured vertebra, multiple abrasions, bruises and lung problems. He was remanded in custody.

Ostanin's monologue contained no references to Russia's war against Ukraine or to military personnel. Consequently, he was subsequently charged with inciting hatred or enmity not towards participants in the Special Military Operation, but towards people with disabilities in general. It is worth noting the prosecution was brought on a charge of incitement of hatred or enmity with threat of violence (Art. 282, Part 2[a], CC RF) despite the fact that there was nothing in his speech that could be interpreted as a threat of violence.

In late December 2025, an additional charge was brought against Ostanin of offending the feelings of believers (Art. 148, Part 1, CC RF). The charge stemmed from an imaginary dialogue with Christ, also delivered during his stand-up routine. On 4 February 2026, the comedian was sentenced to five years and nine months in a general regime penal colony and a fine of 300,000 roubles.

PROSECUTIONS ON CHARGES OF REPEATED DISPLAY OF PROHIBITED SYMBOLS AND PARAPHERNALIA (ART. 282.4 CC RF)

The offence of repeated display of prohibited symbols (Art. 282.4 CC RF) consists of two parts. Part 1 penalises the display of symbols and paraphernalia, while Part 2 penalises their manufacture and distribution. To date, there have been no recorded instances of Part 2 being used in politically motivated criminal cases.

This criminal offence, like that of the analogous administrative-law offence (Art. 20.3 CAO RF), has serious legal shortcomings. Both provide for prosecution for the act of displaying prohibited symbols, without taking the context into account. From time to time, for example, individuals are penalised for displaying Nazi symbols, even if their statements were directed against Nazism and the image containing the symbols was used merely as an illustration.



POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

Data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation show law enforcement agencies making increasingly frequent use of this offence, with the number of convictions rising every year.

Table 27. Number of individuals convicted under Art. 282.4 CC RF

	2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
Part 1	40	131	93	264
Part 2	0	0	3	3
Total	40	131	96	267

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

The proportion of sentences involving imprisonment has not changed significantly.

Table 28. Proportion sentenced to imprisonment of all those convicted under Art. 282.4, Part 1, CC RF

2023	2024	H1 2025	2022–H1 2025
67%	52%	57%	56%

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

When organisations are designated as ‘extremist’ or ‘terrorist’ that are deemed objectionable by the authorities (the Anti-Corruption Foundation, Vesna, Pussy Riot, the Free Russia Legion, etc.) or are non-existent (‘the International LGBT Movement’, ‘the Anti-Russian Separatist Movement’), laws criminalising the symbols of these organisations become a tool of repression that can be directed at a wide range of people. For example, law enforcement agencies systematically consider the white-blue-white flag which has become a symbol of the Russian anti-war movement as the exclusive symbol of the Free Russia Legion, which has been designated as a ‘terrorist’ organisation. In addition to groups that oppose the Russian political leadership, Meta, the company that owns Instagram and Facebook, has also been classified as a banned organisation, and Art. 282.4 CC RF can be invoked to penalise use of the logos of these social media platforms. The criminal subculture, Prisoners’ Criminal Unity [AUE],¹⁹ has also been designated an ‘extremist organisation’ even though it is not an organisation at all. As a result, any symbols associated with this prison subculture are banned irrespective of context.

19 AUE is an abbreviation for the Russian-language ‘Prisoners’ Criminal Unity’ or ‘Prisoners’ Way of Life is One.’



In 2025, criminal prosecutions were brought for the repeated display of Nazi symbols, including for online posts drawing parallels between the actions of the current Russian leadership and Nazi Germany, for the depiction of symbols of various Ukrainian paramilitary groups, for photographs of Aleksei Navalny, as well as for various types of tattoos featuring prohibited symbols.

An example of a case under Art. 282.4 CC RF is the prosecution of **Konstantin Ledkov**.

The prosecution of Konstantin Ledkov



Konstantin Ledkov, a resident of Nenets autonomous district, worked as a librarian. He was convicted of the administrative-law offence of displaying prohibited symbols in January 2024 after publishing a screenshot on his VKontakte page showing search results from the Yandex.Images service. In response to the search '*fascist with a Nazi armband*,' in addition to images of German Nazis from the Second World War, a photo was displayed of the singer Shaman wearing an armband in the colours of the tricolour.

A criminal case was brought against Ledkov for repeated display of Nazi symbols (Art. 282.4 CC RF) following an altercation in a bar in April 2024. According to others involved in the incident, Ledkov shouted:



Glory to Ukraine! — Glory to the heroes!

Ledkov himself denied having said this. Despite conflicting witness statements from people who were, moreover, intoxicated at the time, the investigative authorities and the court deemed them credible. On 26 June 2024, Ledkov was detained and remanded in custody. He was also charged with repeatedly discrediting the Russian army (Art. 280.3 CC RF) and with publicly calling for activities directed against the security of the Russian Federation (Art. 280.4 CC RF). In both cases, the grounds for the charges were posts Ledkov had made on VKontakte. On 29 May 2025, Ledkov was sentenced to five and a half years in a general regime penal colony.



2.1.4. Prosecutions for ‘offences against the sacred’ and vandalism

In 2025, prosecutions of dozens of people accused of ‘offences against the sacred’ continued in Russia. This category includes prosecutions for offending the feelings of believers (Art. 148 CC RF), rehabilitation of Nazism (Art. 354.1 CC RF) and desecration of the state symbols of the Russian Federation (Art. 329 CC RF). Broadly speaking, prosecutions on charges of vandalism (Art. 214 CC RF) for politically charged graffiti in public spaces also fall into this category.

The most ‘popular’ of these three articles of the Criminal Code in recent years has remained that of rehabilitation of Nazism, and 2025 was no exception. According to our project data, at least 90 people²⁰ were prosecuted in politically motivated cases under Art. 354.1 CC RF over the course of the year. The second most frequently used offence has been that of Art. 148 CC RF, with at least 19 Russians charged in 2025. Last year, politically motivated cases were brought against 14 people under Art. 214 CC RF. Finally, 11 people were prosecuted under Art. 329 CC RF in 2025.

The scale of prosecutions for ‘rehabilitation of Nazism’ in Russia is gradually increasing. In 2025, prosecutions under Art. 354.1 CC RF were 20% more frequent than in 2024, and 25% more frequent than in 2023. The number of individuals convicted of this offence has also been rising over the years. In 2025, all but one verdict on this charge were guilty verdicts, and almost 50% resulted in actual imprisonment.²¹

If we consider only verdicts in cases where Art. 354.1 CC RF was the sole charge, 46 people were convicted in 2025.²² Half of these sentences involved imprisonment. The average sentence for the year increased by one month to one year and eight months.

In 2025, prosecutions for ‘offending the feelings of believers’ became somewhat less frequent. According to our project data, 35% fewer such cases were brought over the year than in 2024, but the same number as in 2023 (19). At the same time, 2025 saw the first conviction in three years under Art. 148 CC RF, resulting in a custodial sentence (the details of this case are described below).

As regards Art. 329 CC RF, our project recorded 11 new prosecutions in 2025, one more than in 2024. It is interesting to note that in 2025 several cases involved defacement of Russian passports on video. The remainder concerned in various ways treatment of the Russian flag and coat of arms.

20 All cases involving Art. 354.1 CC RF are taken into account.

21 These statistics take into account all prosecutions under Art. 354 CC RF. In some cases, this was not the only article cited.

22 In 2024, 33 such sentences were handed down.



PROSECUTIONS FOR DESECRATION OF SYMBOLS OF MILITARY GLORY

Of the 90 individuals prosecuted under Art. 354.1 CC RF in 2025, the overwhelming majority (78) were charged under Part 3 and Part 4, that is for allegedly desecrating symbols of military glory and other similar acts.²³ In our report, we focus specifically on cases relating to these parts of the article.²⁴

Immediately after the adoption of the law incorporating the offence of rehabilitation of Nazism into the Criminal Code, the Sova Centre for Information & Analysis [pointed out](#) that the law *'is effectively aimed at banning historical debate; its adoption constitutes a significant restriction on freedom of speech.'* We concur with this assessment.

In particular, Art. 354.1, Parts 3 & 4, CC RF criminalise the expression of opinions about past events, ambiguous symbols and signs, and veterans of the Great Patriotic War, who are without justification singled out from all other individuals and placed in a separate group, in violation of the constitutional principle of equality before the law. By means of these legal provisions, the state, under threat of criminal prosecution, prohibits the expression of views about historical events that differ from the official version, stifles the possibility of free public debate on topical issues of history and the present day, and suppresses criticism of the authorities, which have de facto appropriated the 9 May holiday and other *'commemorative dates and days of Russia's military glory'* for their own pragmatic and ideological purposes.

Art. 354.1, Parts 3 & 4, CC RF are also often invoked in relation to physical acts, such as behaviour in relation to symbols of military glory (for example, cooking on the Eternal Flame, relieving oneself on monuments, etc.). Such acts, for which Russian citizens find themselves facing charges, deserve condemnation as immoral. However, attributing an ideological motive to acts of hooliganism does not stand up to scrutiny. Such acts may be regarded as offences under administrative law, but they undoubtedly do not pose the danger to the public required for criminal prosecution or imprisonment.

23 Art. 354.1, Part 3, CC RF penalises 'dissemination of information expressing blatant disrespect for society regarding Russia's days of military glory and commemorative dates associated with the defence of the Fatherland, as well as the desecration of symbols of Russia's military glory, insulting the memory of defenders of the Fatherland, or insulting the honour and dignity of a veteran of the Great Patriotic War, committed in public'; Part 4 penalises the same acts committed by a group of persons or using the media or the internet.

24 It should be noted that Art. 354.1, Parts 1 & 2, CC RF, which criminalise, among other things, 'denial of the genocide of the Soviet people... as well as the intentional dissemination of information known to be false about the activities of the USSR during the Second World War and veterans of the Great Patriotic War' are also used for politically motivated prosecutions for expressing opinions.



PROSECUTIONS FOR PHYSICAL ACTS IN RELATION TO MONUMENTS, BANNERS AND INSTALLATIONS

More than half of criminal prosecutions (65%)²⁵ for desecration of symbols of military glory, initiated in 2025, were related to physical actions. Twenty-four cases concerned actions involving the Eternal Flame. There were at least seven criminal prosecutions for lighting cigarettes from the flame. Other prosecutions were for [drying items](#) at the flame, [warming feet](#), [drinking beer](#), burning [flowers](#) and [wreaths](#), [cooking food](#) or [urinating](#) on the flame. The pre-trial conditions imposed on most of those prosecuted are either unknown or did not involve imprisonment. However, two men accused of warming their feet by the Eternal Flame were ultimately both given custodial sentences of two and a half years in a penal colony. They were convicted of desecration of symbols of Russia's military glory by a group of persons (Art. 354.1, Part 4, CC RF).

Other actions for which individuals have faced charges of desecrating symbols of military glory have included dancing at a memorial. This was the case of Tatyana Belova, a resident of Murom (Vladimir region). In March 2025, Belova posted a video in which she was seen dancing, wearing only a bra and shorts, on a plinth near the memorial on Victory Square in Murom. Two days after the video was posted, she was detained by security forces. Belova was [charged](#) with the criminal offence of desecrating a symbol of military glory (Article 354.1, Part 3, CC RF). It is not known what pre-trial conditions were imposed in her case.

Several individuals have been prosecuted for defacing Victory Banners, for example in 2025 in [St Petersburg](#) and [Tomsk](#). In August 2025, a criminal case [was brought](#) against a teenager from St Petersburg who sent a photograph of a porn actor to be displayed on a panel featuring veterans. Three schoolchildren in Tatarstan [were charged](#) with 'desecrating St George's ribbons' because one of them was filmed vomiting while standing near a patriotic installation. A resident of Voronezh region was [prosecuted](#) after he smashed, under the influence of alcohol, a display stand at a bus stop and stepped on a fallen poster bearing the image of a St George's ribbon. In December 2025, he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment in a penal colony.

PROSECUTIONS FOR STATEMENTS AND IMAGES RELATING TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Twenty-four criminal prosecutions under Art. 354.1, Parts 3 & 4, CC RF, initiated in 2025, were for statements or other online activity, including publication of images.

In 2021, **Aleksandr Karpenko**, a 34-year-old history teacher from Krasnodar region, published an article, 'Resurrecting Soviet Myths: The Great Patriotic War,' in the journal Internauka. As a result, in 2025 he was charged with an offence under Art. 354.1, Part 4, CC RF. The investigative authorities [considered](#) his text contained '*negative and offensive statements about the actions of the Soviet leadership during the Great Patriotic War,*' as well as similar statements about '*defenders of the Fatherland and veterans.*' Pending trial, Karpenko is currently subject to a travel ban.

25 That is, 51 out of 78 cases.



Similar pre-trial conditions were [imposed](#) in August 2025 on Moscow student **Ilya Kostyakov**. A criminal case was brought against him for a video in which he looked into the camera above a caption that read: *'Think about it... the residents of besieged Leningrad lived for three years without bubble tea...'* The TikTok video caught the attention of Ekaterina Mizulina, head of the League for a Safe Internet. She described *'such jokes'* as 'impermissible' and asked the Ministry of Internal Affairs to launch an investigation.

In July 2025, Greek citizen **Eleni Grigoriadi** [was given](#) a one-year suspended sentence on a charge under Art. 354.1, Part 4, CC RF. According to the investigative authorities, on 9 May 2022 Grigoriadi published five 'offensive images' in the form of collages featuring the St. George's Ribbon, a poster reading 'Motherland Calls!', the Eternal Flame and the inscription '9 May is Victory Day.' According to the court's press office: *'The images in question contain material that expresses blatant disrespect for the public and for the memory of Russia's day of military glory, as well as material that desecrates symbols of Russia's military glory.'* A friend of the accused [said](#) the prosecution was based on a meme Grigoriadi had posted featuring *'a drunkard against the backdrop of a St. George's ribbon.'*

A 71-year-old resident of Orenburg region, **Natalya Tsareva**, was placed under house arrest for an image she [published](#) in 2024 showing a St. George's Ribbon with Nazi symbols drawn over it. The image was accompanied by a caption stating that the St. George's Ribbon had been used by the 'Vlasovites.'

According to the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, during the first half of 2025, Russian courts handed down sentences to 47 people on charges of rehabilitation of Nazism. Of these, 30 were convicted under Art. 354.1, Parts 3 & 4, CC RF. Assuming that a similar number of people will be sentenced in the second half of 2025, the total number of those convicted in 2025 will exceed the figures for 2024 and 2023.²⁶

Unfortunately, by no means all sentences recorded in the Judicial Department's tables are published on court websites. By gathering information from open sources, our project was able to find details of 59 in-person court rulings handed down under all parts of Art. 354.1 CC RF for the whole of 2025.²⁷ One of the verdicts was [an acquittal](#),²⁸ which was subsequently [overturned](#) on appeal. Two further prosecutions in 2025 [were dismissed](#) because of the expiry of the statute of limitations. Three individuals — [Svetlana Makhnorilova](#)²⁹ from Verkhny Tagil, [Petr Borovinsky](#), a resident of Chelyabinsk region, and [Mariya Kuleva](#), a resident of Ivanovo region — were ordered by the courts to undergo compulsory psychiatric treatment.

The remaining 53 verdicts found the defendants guilty. According to our data, the number of convictions for rehabilitation of Nazism has increased compared with last year, while the proportion of sentences involving imprisonment or compulsory work in custody has decreased (see Table 29).

26 In 2024, 64 people were convicted under Art. 354.1 CC RF (42 under Parts 3 & 4); in 2023, 73 were convicted under Art. 354.1 CC RF (43 under Parts 3 & 4).

27 Cases are included where charges under Article 354.1 CC RF are either the sole charge or one of the charges.

28 The case of Bryansk lawyer Sergei Maslov, charged with disseminating information known to be false about veterans of the Great Patriotic War via the internet and of fabricating evidence to support the false information (Art. 354.1, Part 2[c, d], CC RF) and defamation (Art. 128.1, Part 2, CC RF).

29 In addition to Art. 354.1, Part 4, CC RF, Makhnorilova was charged with inciting hatred or enmity with the threat of violence (Art. 282, Part 2[a], CC RF) and publicly justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF).



The average length of imprisonment in cases involving a charge under Art. 354.1 CC RF, including where other charges were also laid, has also decreased. However, the length of sentences has increased in cases where the charge is solely under Art. 354.1 CC RF.

Table 29. Trends in sentences in prosecutions involving Art. 354.1 CC RF, including where there were other charges

	2024	2025
Number of convicted persons	42	61
of which, where the sole charge was under Art. 354.1 CC RF	32	46
Proportion of sentences of imprisonment or compulsory work in custody, as well as compulsory psychiatric in-patient treatment	64%	47% ³⁰
of which, where the sole charge was under Art. 354.1 CC RF	62%	41% ³¹
Average length of sentence of imprisonment	2 г. 5 м.	2 г. 3 м.
of which, where the sole charge was under Art. 354.1 CC RF	1 г. 6 м.	1 г. 9 м.

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

If we analyse convictions handed down solely under Art. 354.1, Parts 3 & 4, CC RF,³² we can see that slightly more were handed down in 2025 (39) than in 2024 (31). The proportion of sentences to terms of imprisonment, however, remained roughly the same (46% in 2024 and 51% in 2025). The length of the average sentence in 2025 increased slightly, rising from one year four months to one year and seven months.

One of those sentenced to compulsory work in custody for ‘desecrating symbols of military glory’ in 2025 was a trash streamer from Orel, [Vera Egorenkova](#). Criminal proceedings were brought against her in 2024 for a stream in which she spat at an image of the monument to the Motherland in Volgograd. On 12 August, Orel Regional Court [sentenced](#) Egorenkova to two years’ compulsory work in custody, with 10% of her wages to be withheld in favour of the state.

PROSECUTIONS FOR OFFENDING THE FEELINGS OF BELIEVERS

In 2025, at least 19 criminal cases were brought in Russia for offending the feelings of believers (of which eight were based solely on Art. 148 CC RF). By way of comparison, in 2024 a total of 31 cases were brought (of which 17 were based solely on Art. 148 CC RF), and in 2023 there were 19 cases (with 10 based solely on Art. 148 CC RF). As in previous years, prosecutions for offending the feelings of believers are characterised by their absurdity.

30 Twenty-one individuals were sentenced to terms of imprisonment, seven were sentenced to compulsory work in custody, and one was ordered to undergo compulsory psychiatric treatment.

31 Thirteen individuals were sentenced to terms of imprisonment, and six were sentenced to compulsory work in custody.

32 Only prosecutions in which Art 354.1 CC RF was the sole charge are taken into account.

Table 30. Number of new defendants charged under Art. 148 CC RF by year

	2023	2024	2025
New defendants in cases including Art. 148 CC RF	19	31	19
New defendants in cases solely involving Art. 148 CC RF	10	17	8

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Our project has consistently criticised Art. 148 CC RF and its application. As we [have written](#),



his article of the Criminal Code does not meet the requirements of certainty or clarity. Both ‘open disrespect for society’ and ‘an intention to offend religious feelings,’ which are in practice attributed to public actions simply on the grounds that, after the event, individuals are found who claim their religious feelings have been offended, are vague and subjective in nature. On this basis, it is impossible to understand exactly what behaviour will subsequently be deemed unlawful or, moreover, criminal.

PROSECUTIONS FOR PHYSICAL ACTIONS

In 2024, we recorded a number of prosecutions related to artistic performances.³³ Those prosecuted included participants in photo shoots and other activities at cemeteries, as well as organisers of variously themed parties in various regions. Notably, in 2025 we became aware of only one such prosecution related to artistic expression, that against 30-year-old Arkhangelsk resident **Ekaterina Filippova** who organised an event to mark her birthday. Filippova was charged with offending the feelings of believers by placing an Orthodox cross on the wall of the club where the party was held. At the party, according to the [court’s press office](#), a ‘preference for non-traditional gender relationships was shown.’ In July 2025, Filippova was [sentenced](#) to 200 hours’ community service.

Alina Borshchuk from St. Petersburg was charged with offending the feelings of believers in February 2025 following a video in which she was seen urinating near Kazan Cathedral. Borshchuk [claimed](#) the scene had been filmed in a wood, and her detractors had subsequently falsified the video. In July 2025, a St. Petersburg court dismissed the case and imposed a judicial fine of 30,000 roubles. According to the [press office](#) of the St. Petersburg court: ‘Borshchuk volunteered at the cathedral, sent a letter to the Patriarch of All Russia apologising and expressing remorse, asking for forgiveness and asking to atone for her guilt through service at the cathedral.’

³³ See our [2024 report](#), p. 122.



PROSECUTIONS FOR BURNING SACRED BOOKS

In September 2025, another criminal case was opened in Novosibirsk over the burning of a copy of the New Testament. According to [the investigative authorities](#), a 17-year-old boy set fire to the book, threw it to the ground and kicked it. The teenager filmed the incident and subsequently posted the video on Telegram. During the incident, the 17-year-old used foul language and *'made offensive remarks about the book in question, as well as about people who practise Christianity and Judaism.'* It is not known what pre-trial conditions were imposed on the teenager.

This is the third instance of sacred books being publicly burnt in Russia in recent years. The first person implicated in a similar case in 2023 was the student [Nikita Zhuravel](#), who was filmed burning the Quran.³⁴ Another incident involving the burning of a sacred book took place during the May holidays in 2024 in Stavropol region. Three local residents (20-year-old **Danila Zharikhin**, 21-year-old **Dmitry Sobenin** and 17-year-old Yury M.) burnt a copy of the New Testament on a barbecue. They filmed the incident and posted the video online. The following day, the young men were detained, and the governor of Stavropol region, Vladimir Vladimirov, published a video on his Telegram channel showing them apologising. The young men were remanded in custody on charges of offending the feelings of believers (Art. 148, Part 1, CC RF) and hooliganism (Art. 213, Part 2, CC RF). On 5 September 2024, Zharikhin was sentenced to two years and two months in a general regime penal colony, Sobenin to two years in a general regime penal colony, and Yury M. was given a suspended sentence of one year and 10 months.

PROSECUTIONS FOR ONLINE PUBLICATIONS

Most prosecutions for offending the religious feelings of believers in 2025 were brought as a result of publications on social media. A 37-year-old assistant electric train driver from Vologda region, Denis Shaban, was charged for a comment he made in support of the aforementioned Nikita Zhuravel. According to the investigative authorities, in a group on VKontakte Shaban commented on a news item about Zhuravel being beaten up by Ramzan Kadyrov's son. *'Maybe we should all go and burn thousands of Qurans? We'll all stand together,'* Shaban wrote. On 23 July 2025, he was [sentenced](#) to a fine of 30,000 roubles.

Over the summer, **Aleksandr Aganin**, a resident of Sverdlovsk region, faced criminal prosecution on a charge of offending the feelings of believers after posting four images on social media. It is not known exactly what was depicted in the images, but the investigative authorities deemed them to contain *'information intended to offend the feelings of believers who practise Christianity and to demean the religious dignity of a group of people who practise Christianity.'* In September, Aganin was [sentenced](#) to 250 hours' community service.

34 Nikita Zhuravel was detained in Volgograd and then taken to Chechnya. In the Grozny remand prison he was demonstratively beaten by Adam Kadyrov, son of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, whose father subsequently posted a video of the beating on social media. In February 2024, a court in Grozny sentenced Zhuravel to three and a half years in a general regime penal colony. In addition to offending the feelings of believers, Zhuravel was charged with hooliganism motivated by religious animosity (Art. 213, Part 2, CC RF). In October 2024, it emerged that Zhuravel had also been charged with treason (Art. 275 CC RF). In November of the same year, Volgograd Regional Court sentenced Zhuravel to 13 and a half years in a strict regime penal colony.



In October 2025, in Zabaikal region a criminal case was [initiated](#) against a cosplayer who had posted a [meme](#) featuring Jesus on his personal Telegram channel. It was an image in which the penis was obscured by a picture of Jesus from the meme 'I've heard you, mate, go fuck yourself.' The author of the post is currently under a travel ban pending trial.

According to the [Judicial Department](#) of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, in the first half of 2025 Russian courts convicted 18 individuals on charges of offending the feelings of believers. By way of comparison, 23 individuals were convicted on this charge in the first half of 2024, 44 in the whole of 2024, and 13 in 2023. Unfortunately, there is no information about many of these convictions on court websites. By gathering information from open sources, our project has been able to find details of 14 in-person convictions handed down under Art. 148 CC RF in 2025. All were guilty verdicts.

Eight of these 14 convictions were handed down solely on charges under Art. 148 CC RF with no other offences cited. In only one of these eight cases did the sentence involve imprisonment, the severity of the court's decision in this instance owing to the fact that the defendant had previously been convicted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment on another charge. In April 2025, a court in the village of Zavyalovo in the Republic of Udmurtia [sentenced](#) local resident **Aleksei Blinov** to 160 hours' community service on a charge of offending the feelings of believers for posts on Vkontakte. When combined with a previous sentence on a charge of justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF), Blinov's total sentence was five and a half years in a general regime penal colony.

In half of the convictions under Art. 148 CC RF, where no other charges were involved of which we are aware, the sentences consisted of community service. Two other individuals were fined; the sentence for the eighth is not known. Among those [sentenced](#) to community service was **Stanislav Slovikovsky**, an organiser of BDSM parties from Sverdlovsk region, convicted of offending the feelings of believers for photographs taken at one of the events.

Of all the convictions in which Art. 148 CC RF³⁵ was cited as one of the charges, 42% involved a custodial sentence.

The prosecution of Khristoliub Vegan



In February 2025, Voronezh Regional Court [sentenced](#) local preacher and blogger [Khristoliub Vegan](#) to three years in a low security penal colony and, in addition, to compulsory treatment by a psychiatrist, on charges of offending the feelings of believers (Art. 148, Part 1, CC RF), disseminating information known to be false online about the role of the USSR during the Second World War and about veterans of the Great Patriotic War (Art. 354.1, Part 2[c], CC RF) and for insulting the memory of defenders of the Fatherland and demeaning the honour and dignity of a veteran of the Great Patriotic War online (Art. 354.1, Part 4, CC RF).

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14 sentences.



Vegan's prosecution began in 2023 when he was charged with offending the feelings of believers for videos in which he spoke negatively about Islam. He was also charged with rehabilitating Nazism for a video about the recruitment of prisoners to fight in the war against Ukraine. The video contained the words: *'It is an illusion to think the Red Army was some sort of defensive force; it is all lies, nonsense and propaganda. The Soviet Army was just the same kind of utterly depraved rabble of murderers, marauders and looters... A few months before its so-called defence of the Motherland, the Red Army itself plundered half of Europe – Latvia, Lithuania, Poland – and invaded Finland.'* Our project recognised Vegan Khristoliub as a political prisoner.

Following his sentencing, Vegan refused to go to the low security penal colony. On 13 October 2025, he [took part](#) in an anti-war protest. He was subsequently detained and taken to the low security penal colony. He remained there until January 2026, at which point, following a court ruling, his conditions of imprisonment were tightened, and he was transferred to a general regime penal colony, where he was placed in strict detention.

On 17 April 2026, Khristoliub Vegan's father [reported](#) that his son had died at the penal colony. According to the official account, he was found hanged in solitary confinement. While still at liberty, Vegan had stated he planned to go on hunger strike in the penal colony and had acknowledged that this could prove fatal.

PROSECUTIONS FOR DESECRATION OF STATE SYMBOLS

As noted at the start of this chapter, in 2025 there were at least 11 prosecutions brought in Russia and the occupied territories on charges of desecration of state symbols (Art. 329 CC RF). As in previous years, most of these cases (7) were brought for various actions by individuals with regard to the Russian flag and coat of arms. A further four cases were linked to the defacement of Russian passports.

According to our project data, the number of prosecutions under Art. 329 CC RF has been increasing steadily in Russia in recent years.

Table 31. Number of new defendants charged under Art. 329 CC RF by year

	2023	2024	2025
New defendants in prosecutions which include a charge under Art. 329	7	10	11
New defendants in prosecutions in which the sole charge is under Art. 329	1	3	6

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



PROSECUTIONS FOR DELIBERATELY DAMAGING PASSPORTS

The first prosecution for damaging a passport in 2025, of which we are aware, was initiated in St. Petersburg in May. The two women involved were **Olga Bryntseva** and **Alena Vasilyeva**, both aged 22. According to the [investigative authorities](#), on 28 May Vasilyeva, 'motivated by political and ideological hatred,' used foul language while urinating on her Russian passport. Her friend Bryntseva filmed the incident on video. The women then posted the video on Telegram, thereby 'expressing their disrespect for society.' Vasilyeva [was detained](#) the same day, and Bryntseva [the following day](#). Subsequently, both were [remanded in custody](#). Initially, the two women were charged with hooliganism (Art. 213 CC RF). They were then later also [charged](#) with desecrating the state emblem or state flag of the Russian Federation (Art. 329 CC RF). As of the end of 2025, the women were still in custody.

On 4 June 2025, in Kaluga region a 22-year-old man was [detained](#) after posting a video of himself burning his passport. Under questioning, he stated he had filmed the video in 2022 and that the document he had destroyed was his expired foreign passport. Nevertheless, the young man was [charged](#) with a criminal offence. It is not known what pre-trial conditions were imposed in his case. No information is available as to the verdict in his case.

The same month, a 24-year-old woman from St. Petersburg, **Aleksandra Maroti**, was charged with the criminal offences of hooliganism and desecration of state symbols for a video in which she also burnt her passport. As reported by [Fontanka](#), she explained her actions as a result of work-related fatigue. Maroti was detained on 16 June and subsequently remanded in custody. On 27 October 2025, she was [sentenced](#) to two years' imprisonment in a low security penal colony.

In October 2025, law enforcement agencies in Chelyabinsk region [opened](#) a criminal case under Art. 329 CC RF against two young men over a video showing the defacement of a Russian passport. According to the investigative authorities, the two young men, aged 20 and 21 at the time legal proceedings began, posted a video in which one of them tore up his passport while using foul language. Ekaterina Mizulina, head of the Safe Internet League, subsequently [published](#) a video in which the young man who had torn up his passport was forced to sing the Russian national anthem and apologise on camera. A bruise was visible on his face. It is not known what pre-trial conditions were imposed on the two defendants.

OTHER PROSECUTIONS FOR DESECRATION OF STATE SYMBOLS

A blogger from Leningrad region, **Stepan Skoffin**, was [charged](#) in June 2025 in connection with a livestream in which he threw a Russian flag onto the floor. On 19 June, Skoffin unwrapped a present containing a Russian flag bearing the Russian coat of arms and a portrait of Putin. The blogger first hung the flag on the wall, but then, after receiving a donation of 1,000 roubles and a request to take it down, he tore the flag off the wall and threw it on the floor, saying 'fuck this flag.' The following day, Skoffin was detained by security forces during another livestream. Initially, he was charged with hooliganism (Art. 213 CC RF), but subsequently [an additional charge](#) of desecrating state symbols was added. It is not known what pre-trial conditions were imposed in his case.

One prosecution for desecration of the Russian flag (Art. 329 CC RF) was brought in occupied Ukrainian territory. According to the [investigative authorities](#), in June 2025 a woman from Kherson region tore down a Russian flag in a public place, ripped it to shreds and threw it on the ground. In November, the occupation court sentenced her to eight months' probation.



According to the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, during the first six months of 2025, Russian courts convicted nine individuals of offences under Art. 329 CC RF. Six individuals were convicted in the first half of 2024, 21 in the whole of 2024, and 19 in 2023.

Our project is aware of eight court verdicts handed down in 2025. In all cases the defendant was found guilty. In all but one of the cases, other articles of the Criminal Code were involved in addition to Art. 329 CC RF. The majority of those prosecuted (6 out of 8) were sentenced to terms of imprisonment. This continued the trend seen in 2024 that all sentences in prosecutions under Art. 329 CC RF involve terms of imprisonment.

On 22 September 2025, the Supreme Court of Crimea ruled in the case of 50-year-old [Petr Skripnik](#), a resident of Crimea. Skripnik had been detained in 2024 when, in a supermarket, he had spat into a collection box for aid to the Russian military. Skripnik was charged with desecration of state symbols (Art. 329 CC RF) and desecration of a symbol of Russia's military glory (Art. 354.1, Part 3, CC RF).³⁶ He was [sentenced](#) to one year in a low security penal colony.

Maksim Danchenko, a resident of Balakovo in Saratov region, was [sentenced](#) to two years and two months' compulsory work in custody on charges of desecration of the state flag (Art. 329 CC RF) and disrespect for Russian commemorative dates (Art. 354.1, Part 4, CC RF). Danchenko was accused of publishing, in 2014, a photograph of the Russian flag accompanied by an obscene insult. He was also charged with the offence of rehabilitating Nazism for a comment he posted in 2018 beneath a photograph of children in military uniform on Red Square. According to the prosecution, Danchenko posted a text, *'addressed to Hitler, containing negative remarks about Victory Day and disagreement with the outcome of the Great Patriotic War.'*

POLITICALLY MOTIVATED PROSECUTIONS FOR VANDALISM

In 2025, at least 14 people were prosecuted in politically motivated criminal cases on charges of vandalism (Art. 214 CC RF)³⁷, a figure slightly higher than that for 2024.³⁸

Most of the new defendants were prosecuted for anti-war slogans and graffiti. At least three were deprived of liberty in 2025 on charges under Art. 214 CC RF.³⁹ In 2024, there were five such prosecutions.

At the same time, the number of prosecutions under Art. 214 CC RF exclusively increased over the course of the year. According to our project data, at least 11 such cases were initiated in 2025. In 2024, we were aware of only four such prosecutions.

36 The box had featured the flag of the Russian Federation and a St. George's ribbon in the shape of the letter 'Z.'

37 Our analysis takes into account both prosecutions in which the only charges were under Art. 214 CC RF and prosecutions in which defendants were also charged under other articles.

38 12 individuals.

39 By 'deprivation of liberty', we mean detention pending trial (on remand or under house arrest), serving a sentence in a penal colony, performing compulsory labour in custody, or undergoing compulsory in-patient treatment in a secure psychiatric institution.



In 2025, Russian courts handed down at least three politically motivated convictions under Art. 214 CC RF.⁴⁰ None of the sentences involved imprisonment; instead, they consisted of probation, community service or a fine. This continued the trend from 2024 in which probation was the sentence handed down in two similar cases.

With regard to the use of Art. 214 CC RF, we agree with the [Sova Centre for Information & Analysis](#), which takes the following view with regard to this offence:



We have doubts as to the lawfulness of prosecution for politically motivated vandalism. In our view, what is at issue is in practice a form of political criticism. The expression of political hostility is not in itself a criminal offence, and, provided such vandalism is not linked to the promotion of violence or xenophobia, the degree of danger it poses to the public is minimal and is unlikely to warrant criminal prosecution. Generally speaking, in our view, where damage to property is not serious, cases under Article 214 of the Criminal Code should be dismissed on grounds of insignificance. Where this is not possible, but the damage is relatively minor, an offence could be introduced into the Code of Administrative Offences similar to that provided for by Article 7.17 CAO RF concerning the destruction of, or damage to, another's property. Alternatively, this article itself could be made more precise by including vandalism that has not caused major damage.

Nevertheless, those prosecuted on charges of putting up political and/or anti-war graffiti in public spaces are regularly remanded in custody. In February 2025, a court in St. Petersburg [remanded](#) 24-year-old local resident [Ariadna Litvinova](#) in custody. She had written the words 'Murderers', 'Peace to Ukraine' and 'Freedom for prisoners' on banners at a military exhibition on Palace Square. As a result, she was charged with the criminal offence of vandalism motivated by political hatred (Art. 214, Part 2, CC RF). According to the prosecution, Litvinova's actions caused damage to the city amounting to more than 135,000 roubles. Litvinova was held for a month on remand after which she was [released](#) subject to certain restrictions. In September, she [left](#) Russia.

In March 2025, Moscow resident [Aleksandr Arsenyev](#) was remanded in custody in St. Petersburg on charges of discrediting the army (Art. 280.3 Part 2, CC RF; see Chapter 2.1.2 for further details) and vandalism motivated by hate (Art. 214 Part 2, CC RF). Arsenyev was accused of having written 'I don't want to get used to war' on fences in St. Petersburg.

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These were all prosecutions where Art. 214 CC RF was the sole charge.



Sixty-five-year-old **Evgeny Nenka** was charged with vandalism (Art. 214 CC RF) for graffiti he wrote on benches in Evpatoria in occupied Crimea. One of these inscriptions read: *'You screwed up in Afghanistan, you'll screw up in Ukraine. Occupiers, traitors, get out of Ukraine. Glory to Ukraine!'* Nenka was [detained](#) in June 2025; his fate is not known.

A student from Mari El, **Dmitry Toktarov**, [was convicted twice](#) in 2025 of an offence under Art. 214, Parts 1 & 2, CC RF. His first prosecution was for two pieces of graffiti in towns in Mari El, with the words *'Putin's a dickhead! No to war!'* with the letter Z crossed out, and *'Putin's a murderer!'* [with the latter word in the Mari language]. His second prosecution was on the grounds of graffiti reading *'Russia without Putin'* on banners advertising contract military service in Cheboksary in Chuvashia. In June 2025, Toktarov was given two sentences: one and a half years' probation and a fine of 10,000 roubles. Also in June, Toktarov was [charged](#) with a third offence of vandalism (Art. 214, Part 1, CC RF), this time for the inscription *'Putin's a murderer'* on the wall of a sports complex in the village of Sernur in Mari El. It is not known what pre-trial conditions were imposed on Toktarov in this third prosecution. The verdict in the case is also not known.

Another individual was charged with vandalism for [graffiti](#) featuring song lyrics on the building of the St. Petersburg military enlistment office. One inscription contained a quote 'about the bourgeoisie and the cops' from a song by the band Last Tanks in Paris; a second contained a quote 'about slaves' from a song by Liapis Trubetskoi. A similar prosecution was initiated against another man for [writing](#) *'Peace to the world'* on bridges and embankments in St. Petersburg. Both are currently under travel bans pending trial.

A 14-year-old schoolgirl from Stavropol region was convicted of vandalism for writing 'Navalny' on a bus stop. In October 2025, she was [sentenced](#) to 70 hours' community service.



2.2. Prosecutions on charges of acts of terrorism and sabotage

2.2.1. Statistics and general trends in prosecutions relating to acts of terrorism and sabotage

In 2025, according to our data, politically motivated criminal cases were brought against at least 318 people on charges of committing acts of terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF). This is fewer than in 2024 (531), although the number is likely to rise significantly in the future. At the same time, for a second year running the number of new prosecutions for acts of terrorism exceeds the combined total for 2023 (185) and 2022 (118).

Of the 318 criminal prosecutions brought under Art. 205 CC RF in 2025, 229 (72%) were initiated under Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF, which penalises commission of an act of terrorism by a group of persons, or Art. 205, Part 2[c], CC RF penalising commission of an act of terrorism resulting in significant property damage or other serious consequences. One hundred and thirteen individuals (approximately 36%) were charged with ‘incomplete’ offences, namely, preparation to commit an act of terrorism (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF) or an attempt to commit such an act (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF).

Kursk region is by far the leader in terms of the number of new defendants charged under Art. 205 CC RF in 2025 (74 individuals prosecuted). This has been because of the criminal prosecution of captured Ukrainian military personnel, whose actions during the armed conflict the Russian state, in violation of international law, classified as terrorism. In the occupied territories of Ukraine, criminal proceedings for offences under this article were initiated against at least 26 individuals in 2025.

The number of individuals convicted of committing acts of terrorism rose sharply in 2025. Over the course of the year, convictions were handed down to at least 327 people, almost 2.5 times more than in 2024 (134) and almost 4.5 times more than in 2023 (74).

The steady increase in this trend is confirmed by data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, according to which in the first half of 2025 alone sentences were handed down to 247 people, while for the whole of 2024 there had been 132 convictions, 73 in 2023, and 45 in 2022.

Table 32. Number of individuals convicted under Art. 205 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025
Art. 205 CC RF	45	73	132	247

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation



The largest number of convictions were handed down on charges under Art. 205, Part 2, CC RF. According to our data, 287 individuals were convicted on this charge in 2025 (almost 88% of all those convicted of committing an act of terrorism). According to data from the Judicial Department, for the first half of 2025, 201 were convicted (approximately 81% of all those convicted of an act of terrorism during that period).

The trend of the past two years towards an increase in the number of criminal prosecutions on charges of both terrorism and treason (Art. 275 CC RF) has continued. According to the human rights project [First Department](#), 83 convicted persons were identified in the first half of 2025 who had been charged and convicted on both counts (there were 104 for the whole of 2024 and 12 for 2023).

According to our data, politically motivated criminal prosecutions on charges of sabotage (Art. 281 CC RF) were brought against at least 111 people in 2025. In 2024, such cases were brought against 126 people, and in 2023 against at least 123. As information on criminal prosecutions becomes available with some delay, there are grounds to believe the level of repression using this article of the Criminal Code in 2025 will remain at least at the same level, or may well increase.

As with the charge of committing acts of terrorism, those implicated are most often charged with sabotage committed by a group of persons (Art. 281, Part 2[a], CC RF) or sabotage resulting in serious consequences (Art. 281, Part 2[c], CC RF). In 2025, 68 out of 126 individuals (54%) were prosecuted specifically under Part 2 of the article on sabotage. Attempted offences were attributed to 74 defendants (59%).

Furthermore, in 2025 seven individuals were prosecuted on charges of aiding and abetting sabotage (Art. 281.1 CC RF) and nine on charges of undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out sabotage (Art. 281.2 CC RF). In 2024, criminal prosecutions on these charges were brought against 12 and nine individuals respectively.

As regards the number of those convicted, according to data available to us as of the end of 2025, in 2025 this figure was slightly lower than in 2024 (80 compared with 86).

However, this figure may rise significantly in the future as new information becomes available. At the same time, this number is four times higher than in 2023 (19). According to our data, a majority of those convicted of sabotage (65 individuals or 81%) were charged under Art. 281, Part 2, CC RF. Almost two-thirds of those convicted of sabotage in 2025 (57) had been charged with preparing to commit sabotage (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF) or with attempting to commit sabotage (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF).

According to data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, in the first half of 2025 sentences were handed down to 59 convicted persons under Art. 281 CC RF, including 41 (69%) under Part 2 of that article. During 2024, 72 individuals were convicted of sabotage, while in 2023 only 12 individuals had been convicted. In the first half of 2025 alone, therefore, almost five times as many defendants were convicted of sabotage as in 2023.



Table 33. Number of individuals convicted under Art. 281 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025
Art. 281 CC RF	1	12	72	59

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

According to our data, five individuals were convicted in 2025 of aiding and abetting sabotage (Art. 281.1 CC RF); 13 were convicted of undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 281.2 CC RF). In 2024, four and five individuals were convicted of these offences respectively.

According to the [Judicial Department of the Supreme Court](#), most of those convicted under Art. 281 CC RF in the first half of 2025 were under 25 years of age. Of the total of 36 individuals convicted under the age of 25 years, 12 were aged between 16 and 18 years at the time of the offence, and 24 were aged between 18 and 24 years. It should be noted that on 17 November 2025 the age of criminal responsibility for sabotage and other sabotage-related offences was lowered to 14 years (see Chapter 5.1.1).

2.2.2. Prosecutions for arson and bombings committed for political reasons, including protest against the war

Since 2022, arson has been one of the most common forms of protest in the absence of opportunities to express views by lawful means. Military enlistment offices were frequently targeted; less commonly, other buildings associated with government and law enforcement were targeted. Arsonists pursued both practical objectives (for example, hindering recruitment into the Russian army by destroying personnel records) and the desire to make symbolic protests against the war. Another typical form of protest against Russian military aggression has been sabotage of railway infrastructure, aimed at slowing down supplies to the army. In particular, arson attacks on railway relay cabinets were intended to bring about the failure of automatic control equipment and disrupt train services. Proponents of this tactic assumed that, if carried out on a large scale, this would also hamper military logistics.

Subsequently, mobile phone masts, various modes of transport, helicopters and so on were also targeted.

As early as 2022, such arson attacks and other acts of damage to property began to be classified as acts of terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF), which in most cases was unjustified. The investigative authorities and court proceedings generally failed to prove that defendants had intended to intimidate the population, destabilise or otherwise influence the actions of the authorities. The Russian state uses criminal prosecution on charges of terrorism as a tool for political repression and to intimidate society.

Since the end of 2022, the Russian authorities have also expanded the legislation on sabotage. However, as we see in Chapter 2.2.1, the number of individuals convicted on charges of sabotage (Art. 281 CC RF) during the years of full-scale war is three times lower than those convicted on terrorism charges.



While both offences provide for penalties of comparable severity, the investigative authorities often prefer to classify even those attacks that bear all the hallmarks of sabotage (namely, those carried out with the aim of undermining Russia's economic security or defence capability) as acts of terrorism. A charge of terrorism appears to stigmatise the perpetrators of the attacks to a greater extent, while also facilitating the prosecution of those who publicly express support for such actions.⁴¹

Since the start of 2023, there have been significant developments. Attacks carried out for anti-war and/or political motives have become rare, while arson committed for financial gain or under the influence of fraudsters has become much more common (see Chapter 2.3.3). However, in many cases, the motives of those prosecuted remain unknown.

It can be difficult to determine the arsonists' aims since the authorities may disseminate inaccurate information, claiming, for example, that the motive was financial gain in order to undermine support for the accused, or, more commonly, attributing an ideological motive where none existed in order to justify a terrorism charge. It cannot be ruled out that some defendants may claim a purely financial motivation to avoid harsher treatment.

Be that as it may, often the only sources of information suggesting an attack was carried out for ideological reasons are press releases from the courts or the FSB, that contain phrases such as:

- *'the defendant explained his actions as motivated by "hatred of the ruling regime of the Russian Federation and a desire to contribute to Ukraine's victory in the Special Military Operation",'* as in the case of the Ukrainian [Yaroslav Lozko](#)

- *'disagreeing with the domestic and foreign policies pursued by the authorities of the Russian Federation,'* as in the case of [Mikhail Golik](#)

- *'stated that he acted voluntarily and selflessly, as he is a man of principle,'* as in the case of [Anatoly Yansitov](#)

- *'sharing the ideology of one of the Ukrainian terrorist organisations,'* as in the case of an unnamed [resident of Lipetsk region](#), etc.

Occasionally, a court reports that a defendant both *'disagrees with the political course of the Russian Federation and the Special Military Operation being conducted by the Russian armed forces'* and that he committed his actions *'for financial gain,'* as in the case of [Stanislav Ilchuk](#).

Individuals who planned and carried out arson attacks clearly motivated by anti-war sentiment continued to be detained and tried in 2025. A verdict in one of the earlier prosecutions for arson, which was a symbolic act of anti-war protest, was handed down in 2025.

41 While there is no specific offence of 'justifying acts of sabotage,' since 2022 committing a crime for the purpose of propagating, justifying or supporting acts of sabotage has constituted an aggravating circumstance (Art. 63, Part 1[q], CC RF) for other offences. We are not yet aware of any cases where this provision has been applied.



The Case of Aleksei Rozhkov



On 20 May 2025, the Central District Military Court sentenced [Aleksei Rozhkov](#), a resident of Sverdlovsk region, a musician and anarchist, to 16 years' imprisonment, the first five of which are to be served in a cell-type prison.⁴²

On 11 March 2022, Rozhkov threw bottles containing Molotov cocktails through a window of a military enlistment office. Before setting fire to the building, Rozhkov painted a peace sign on the fence opposite. The damage to the military enlistment office amounted to 1,268 roubles and 68 kopecks.

Initially, Rozhkov was remanded in custody on charges of attempted murder of a military enlistment office staff member. However, six months later the charge was reclassified as attempted destruction of another person's property by arson (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 167, Part 2, CC RF). Rozhkov was then released from custody and placed under travel restrictions pending trial.

Rozhkov travelled to Kyrgyzstan. However in May 2023 he was detained and taken back to Russia, where, he alleges, he was subjected to torture. The attempted arson attack on the military enlistment office was then treated as an act of terrorism. Moreover, Rozhkov was charged with justifying terrorism and spreading 'fake news' about the war for appearing on the YouTube channel Khodorkovsky LIVE in which he spoke about his arson of the military enlistment office and described the actions of the Russian military in Ukraine as genocide.

42 Aleksei Rozhkov was found guilty of an act of terrorism (Art. 205, Part 1, CC RF), publicly justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF) and dissemination of 'fake news' about the actions of the Russian army by a group of individuals motivated by hatred (Art. 207.3, Part 2[b,e], CC RF).



An even harsher sentence was handed down to another resident of Sverdlovsk region who had planned to set fire to a military enlistment office in protest against the war. She was charged not only with terrorism but also with treason and receiving training in terrorist activities.

The case of Valeriya Marchenko



On 5 June 2025, [Valeriya Marchenko](#) was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment.⁴³ However, on 2 December a court of appeal [increased her sentence](#) to 21 years. Marchenko had been accused of attempting to set fire to the regional military enlistment office in Ekaterinburg. She had been detained in possession of eight Molotov cocktails.

According to [media reports](#), a man who introduced himself as a member of the Ukrainian project 'I Want to Live' proposed to Marchenko that she set fire to a military enlistment office. The same man sent her photographic instructions how to prepare the flammable mixture. She pleaded guilty and explained that her actions were motivated by anti-war sentiments.

As a rule, even less information is available about individuals accused of carrying out or planning attacks on infrastructure, or about their motives. However, some suspects have been able to publicly confirm their involvement in these actions and articulate their position.

43 Valeriya Marchenko was found guilty of preparing a terrorist attack as part of a group (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF), treason (Art. 275 CC RF) and undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF).



The Case of Ruslan Sidiki



On 23 May 2025, the 2nd Western District Military Court [sentenced](#) 37-year-old anarchist [Ruslan Sidiki](#), a citizen of Russia and Italy, to 29 years' imprisonment, the first nine years of which are to be served in a cell-type prison.⁴⁴

Sidiki was also fined two million roubles, and the victims' civil claims, totalling over 55 million roubles, were upheld.

Sidiki was charged with:

- carrying out an attack using four drones laden with explosives on the Dyagilevo military airfield near Ryazan on 20 July 2023
- blowing up a section of track on the Moscow railway on 11 November of the same year, causing a freight train to derail
- and preparing one other explosion on a railway

The harm to human health resulting from Sidiki's actions was that the driver and assistant driver of the derailed train sustained abrasions to their hands and faces.

According to the investigative authorities, Sidiki, with the assistance of the Ukrainian security services, received training in the manufacture and handling of explosives, the operation of drones, and methods of maintaining secrecy. Following his arrest, Sidiki claimed he had been subjected to severe torture.

Sidiki [admitted](#) he had been in contact with the Ukrainian security services but claimed he had independently and on his own initiative attacked the military airfield and blown up the train. He also disputed the classification of his actions as terrorist attacks, considering them acts of sabotage. He denied the charges of undergoing terrorist training, as well as allegations he had been preparing a further explosion and manufacturing explosives for that purpose. He [stated](#) his aim had been to disable Russian military infrastructure to make it more difficult for Russia to conduct military operations against Ukraine. He emphasised that, prior to the explosion, he had monitored the section of the railway line to avoid casualties and ensure no passenger trains were passing along it. Sidiki's defence lawyer argued his client should be recognised as a prisoner of war under the Geneva Conventions, as a member of an organised resistance movement on enemy territory.

44 Ruslan Sidiki was convicted of two terrorist acts committed by a group and resulting in significant property damage (Art. 205, Part 2[a,c], CC RF), an attempted terrorist attack organised by a group (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF), undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF), two counts of unlawful manufacture of explosives and explosive devices by an organised group (Art. 223.1, Part 3, CC RF) and preparing for their manufacture (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 223.1, Part 3, CC RF), and two counts of unlawful possession, transport and carrying of explosives and explosive devices by an organised group (Art. 222.1, Part 4, CC RF).



The case of Sergei Eremeev



On 18 December, the 2nd Eastern District Military Court [convicted](#) 54-year-old Belarusian citizen [Sergei Eremeev](#), sentencing him to 22 years' imprisonment, the first five of which are to be served in a cell-type prison, and a fine of one million roubles. He was also ordered to pay compensation of more than 60 million roubles.⁴⁵

Eremeev was found guilty of blowing up two freight trains carrying petroleum products in Buryatia in November 2023. The trains were travelling through the Severo-Muisky Tunnel and its bypass on the Baikal-Amur mainline.

In his final statement at his trial, Eremeev [declared](#) he was not a terrorist:



I am not a terrorist; I harbour no hatred towards anyone. My name is dear to me — my children bear it, and they will have to live with it. My ideology is: no war. Human life is the most precious thing on Earth.

Immediately after his arrest, he [said](#) his aim had been to prevent the transport of military cargo.

The Russian authorities systematically classify any military attacks by Ukraine as terrorist acts. In the case of **Eldar Marchenko**, an attempt was made to link the Russian national to a drone attack on Kursk in the summer of 2023, most likely to be able to report 'success' in the fight against 'accomplices of the enemy.'

⁴⁵ Eremeev was found guilty of a terrorist attack carried out by an organised group and resulting in significant damage (Art. 205, Part 2[a,c], CC RF), participation in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF), undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF), the transport of explosive devices by an organised group (Art. 222.1, Part 4, CC RF) and their smuggling (Art. 226.1, Part 3, CC RF).



The Case of Eldar Marchenko



On 12 August 2025, the 2nd Western District Military Court sentenced **Eldar Marchenko**, a resident of Moscow region and a lecturer in sports management at the RMA Business School, to 16 years' imprisonment. He was found guilty of committing a terrorist attack as part of a group acting in prior collusion, causing significant damage (Art. 205, Part 2[a,c], CC RF). According to the prosecution, Marchenko joined a group set up by Ukrainian security forces and military personnel. On their instructions, he travelled to Kursk and, from there, passed on the coordinates of the local railway station and airport to facilitate drone attacks, which *'failed to achieve their objectives for reasons beyond the group's control.'*

After military experts explained in court that the coordinates of such well-known major facilities could be obtained using public mapping services, the wording of the verdict was changed. The verdict then stated that Marchenko had been testing electronic warfare devices.

Prior to his arrest on criminal charges, Marchenko was subjected to a series of three consecutive short jail terms on administrative-law charges. Having served these, he was taken for questioning to the FSB headquarters on Lubyanka Square. Marchenko and his defence lawyers alleged he was subjected to torture, including electric shocks, as a result of which he was coerced into making a confession that he *'worked for the Ukrainian intelligence agencies.'* Marchenko subsequently retracted this confession in court.

We have concluded that the criminal case against Marchenko was fabricated and his guilt was not proven.

Charges of arson and bombings are quite often combined with charges of participation in the Free Russia Legion, the Russian Volunteer Corps or other units of the Ukrainian army (see Chapter 2.4.4).

2.2.3. Prosecutions for arson and other acts committed for non-political motives (for financial gain, under the influence of fraudsters)

As noted above, in many cases the accused carried out attacks on various institutions and facilities under the influence of telephone fraudsters or for financial gain (received or promised). In most cases, there are no grounds to believe that those responsible were seeking to intimidate the population, destabilise the activities of the authorities or influence decisions they take (at least one of which is a necessary element for a charge of terrorism), or to undermine the economic security or defence capability of the Russian state (a necessary element for a charge of sabotage).



Such criminal prosecutions often target minors, the unemployed or people burdened by debt who are searching online for ways to earn some quick money. However, regardless of the actual motives or objectives of the defendants' actions, in many cases defendants were charged with committing an act of terrorism or of sabotage, rather than, for example, with wilful destruction or damage of another person's property (Art. 167 CC RF), hooliganism (Art. 213 CC RF) or rendering vehicles or transport infrastructure inoperable (Art. 267 CC RF). This may be a result of the investigative authorities' desire to improve their official statistics in terms of solving serious crimes, to demonstrate their efforts in fighting Ukrainian 'saboteurs' and 'terrorists' in the context of the full-scale war and to intimidate opponents of the regime and the public as a whole to consolidate their power.

ATTACKS CARRIED OUT FOR FINANCIAL GAIN

Many defendants in prosecutions for arson and other attacks committed these acts because they had been given the assignment by an anonymous instigator who offered money in return for carrying it out. In the context of the Russia–Ukraine war, arson attacks on infrastructure have become one form of illegally earning money.

As a rule, such 'orders' involve setting fire to transport or communications infrastructure. In rare cases, they involve carrying out bombings for a fee. For example, in September 2025, the FSB [reported](#) the arrest of a 51-year-old woman from Novosibirsk on a charge of detonating a homemade explosive device she had manufactured on a section of the Trans-Siberian Railway in Zabaikal region.⁴⁶ The woman in custody stated that an unknown individual, with whom she had been communicating online, had promised to pay her \$8,000 to carry out the explosion.

It is often young people, including teenagers, who carry out arson attacks for financial gain. A typical scenario involves groups of two to four acquaintances carrying out the attack. In April 2025, a father and son, **Aleksandr** and **Artem Nabokin**, were detained in St. Petersburg, [charged](#) with an act of terrorism committed by a group of persons acting in prior collusion (Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF) for setting fire to two railway relay cabinets, for which they received 50,000 roubles from their 'handler.' However, cases involving sabotage attacks where the suspects are from different generations, let alone members of the same family, are rare in Russia (the situation in the occupied territories of Ukraine is different; see Chapter 2.5). Occasionally, a group of arsonists is classified as a sabotage group (Art. 281.3, Part 2, CC RF). For example, **Egor Ermakov and Viktoriya Golushko**, who set fire to railway relay cabinets in Kemerovo region, were charged with participation in a sabotage group, along with several acts of sabotage. Ermakov was sentenced to 19 years' imprisonment, and Golushko to 16 years. However, as mentioned in Chapter 2.2.1, use of the charge of belonging to a sabotage group is not widespread.

Mediazona [reported](#) that one of the defendants in a railway arson case, **Yaroslav Kuligin**, while held at Moscow's Remand Prison No. 5 and speaking with others arrested on similar charges, learned of only one person who had acted for ideological reasons — Ruslan Sidiki (see Chapter 2.2.2). The rest, according to Kuligin's defence lawyer, had acted for money.

46 According to reports, the woman is suspected of committing an act of sabotage (Art. 281, Part 1, CC RF) and is also under investigation on charges of treason (Art. 275 CC RF) and unlawful possession of explosives and explosive devices (Art. 223.1 CC RF).



Those convicted of setting fire to railway relay cabinets have included **Aleksei Yakovlev**, a former mercenary with the Wagner private military company and a participant in the war against Ukraine. On 2 April 2025, Saratov Regional Court sentenced Yakovlev to 14 years' imprisonment. His acquaintance, **Andrei Butuzov**, was sentenced to a term of 12 years. Both were [found guilty](#) of sabotage committed by a group of individuals acting in concert (Art. 281, Part 2[a], CC RF) for setting fire to a railway relay cabinet in return for a payment of 15,000 roubles.

It has been occasionally reported that the instigators of such arson attacks justify them to those carrying them out on the grounds that they were necessary in order to replace obsolete equipment, secure funding to purchase new equipment, or obtain an insurance payout.

The case of the arson attack on the Su-24 in Novosibirsk

On 13 January 2025, Novosibirsk Regional Court [sentenced](#) four residents of Novosibirsk to terms of imprisonment ranging from five to seven and a half years on charges of setting fire to a railway relay cabinet, a mobile phone base station and a Su-24 bomber located at the Chkalovsk Airplane Factory. **Pavel Solovyev**, **Savely Ryapolov** and **Kirill Veselov**, all aged 19, as well as **Viktor Skorobogatov**, aged 21, were found guilty of sabotage resulting in significant property damage (Art. 281, Part 2[b], CC RF).

The young men claimed one of their number had received an offer via a Telegram bot to carry out arson attacks, and to film their actions, in return for payment. Their 'handler' explained to the young men that the arson attacks were at the behest of companies that wished to get rid of obsolete equipment while at the same time claiming compensation for the damage through insurance.

In April that year, the appeal court [significantly increased the sentences](#) handed down. Kirill Veselov's sentence was increased from six and a half years to 11 years' imprisonment, while that of Viktor Skorobogatov was increased from five to 10 and a half years. Ryapolov and Solovyov each had two months added to their sentences.

It is not only those who carried out attacks on infrastructure facilities who can face long terms of imprisonment, but also those who had connections with them. This was the case with Anastasiya Mochalina, charged in connection with the arson attack on a helicopter at the Ostafyevo airfield near Moscow.



The case concerning the arson attack on a helicopter at the Ostafyevo airfield

On 15 April 2025, the 2nd Western District Military Court sentenced 22-year-old [Stanislav Khamidullin](#) and 21-year-old [Roman Yakovets](#) to 17 and a half years' imprisonment each, 22-year-old [Daniil Yamskov](#) to 17 years' imprisonment, 22-year-old [Nikita Bulgakov](#) to 18 years' imprisonment, and 21-year-old [Anastasiya Mochalina](#) to 12 and a half years' imprisonment. According to the prosecution, the young men, while looking for work, received a proposal from an anonymous Telegram user to set fire to a railway relay cabinet, which they did, and then to set fire to a passenger train or a helicopter at the airfield in return for a reward of three million roubles. Those who ordered the arson attacks said they were necessary to claim insurance and to 'test the airfield's security.' On the night of 26 April 2024, the four young men set fire to a Ka-32 search-and-rescue helicopter at the Ostafyevo airfield.⁴⁷

Mochalina was found guilty of an act of terrorism solely because she had given her bank card to Khamidullin, with whom she was in a relationship. He used it to pay for taxi journeys and to purchase materials for the arson.

There are also signs of police entrapment in a number of criminal prosecutions.

The case of the three students from Ekaterinburg

[Three students from Ekaterinburg](#) were found guilty of an attempted terrorist attack (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF) for attempting to set fire to three railway relay cabinets. The organiser of this group was identified as 20-year-old Arseny Klimin, who had been [co-operating with the police anti-extremism division 'Centre E'](#) in Sverdlovsk region since 2023, a fact directly confirmed in court by officers from that unit.

According to the prosecution, Klimin had been tasked with identifying individuals on social media involved in false bomb threats. However, Klimin decided on his own initiative to join the Free Russia Legion and contacted one of its representatives online, who offered him payment to set fire to railway relay cabinets and film the arson attacks on video. Klimin agreed and recruited an acquaintance, 20-year-old **Danila Eliseev**, to carry out the arson attacks. Eliseev, in turn, recruited 21-year-old **Nikita Sukhorukov**. When Sukhorukov arrived to reconnoitre the area, he was detained by traffic police officers, who discovered bottles of solvent, a hammer, a gas wrench and lighters in the student's car, as well as photographs of relay boxes on his mobile phone.

47 The arson attack on the railway relay cabinet was classified as sabotage committed by a group (Art. 281, Part 2[a], CC RF), while the arson attack on the helicopter was classified as an act of terrorism committed by a group of persons acting in concert (Art. 205, Part 2[a,c], CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF).



The suspects did not admit their guilt in planning the terrorist attack. Klimin stated he wanted to infiltrate the Legion to help the security services *'obtain information about planned terrorist attacks'* and *'identify handlers'* in Russia, while Eliseev and Sukhorukov claimed they simply wanted to earn some money and knew nothing about who had commissioned the arson attacks. On 19 May 2025, the Central District Military Court sentenced Klimin to eight years' imprisonment, and Eliseev and Sukhorukov to seven years each.

A relatively new development has been the inclusion, for some defendants in cases involving attacks carried out for financial gain, of charges relating to the legalisation of property obtained as a result of crime (Art. 174.1 CC RF).

This was the charge added to the indictment against **Dmitry Aksenov**, a resident of Saratov region, who, according to the investigative authorities, received more than 75,000 roubles in cryptocurrency for carrying out arson attacks. On 29 May 2025, Saratov Regional Court [convicted](#) Dmitry Aksenov, as well as **Yury Aksenov** and **Vlas Shirokov**. Vlas Shirokov was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF) and three acts of sabotage (Art. 281, Part 2[a], CC RF). Dmitry Aksenov was found guilty of the same offences, as well as of legalisation of property obtained as a result of crime (Art. 174.1, Part 1, CC RF). Each was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment. Yury Aksenov was found guilty of treason and one act of sabotage and sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment. According to the prosecution, Yury Aksenov contacted a representative of Ukrainian intelligence, *'who offered him a monetary reward to carry out acts of sabotage on the territory of Saratov region.'* He then recruited Dmitry Aksenov and Vlas Shirokov to take part in these activities, and they set fire to relay cabinets on the Volga Railway and a mobile phone operator's station.

In other instances, all defendants in the cases were charged with legalisation of property obtained through crime, and moreover were charged with legalisation committed by a group acting in prior collusion (Art. 174.1, Part 3[a], CC RF). This was, for example, the case of Tiumen students [Daniil Korkin and Maksim Yurchuk](#) who were sentenced to terms of nine and eight years' imprisonment respectively for setting fire to railway equipment; and in the case of Rostov region residents [Pavel Evlashkin and Denis Maksimov](#), sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on a similar charge.

ATTACKS INSTIGATED BY FRAUDSTERS

Another common reason for arson, bombings or other such acts is the influence of fraudsters. Initially, the fraudsters contact their victims by telephone or messaging apps and trick them into handing over money. The fraudsters then contact the victims again, posing as officers of Russian law enforcement agencies and insist the person carry out their instructions, typically to set fire to a government building, security forces' vehicles or a transport infrastructure facility. The scammers either promise to return the stolen money in exchange for this service or claim the money has been used to fund the Ukrainian army and threaten the victim with criminal proceedings in that connection. The scammers often justify the need to carry out the attack by referring to the need to *'test the vigilance of colleagues,'* or *'participate in an operation to apprehend criminals,'* and so on.

As of 10 March 2026, Mediazona [had recorded](#) 309 attacks carried out since the start of the full-scale war under the influence of fraudsters. According to media reports, these fraudulent call centres are mainly based in Ukraine.



That said, the practice of stealing money was widespread even before 2022, and it was only after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion that those who had been deceived began to be periodically sent on ‘assignments.’ One of the fraudsters with whom Verstka [spoke](#) told journalists that their ‘office’ had a ‘supervisor affiliated to the Ukraine Security Service,’ but the initiative to persuade their victims to commit unlawful acts lay with the management and staff of the ‘office,’ who allegedly did so for entertainment. At the same time, he admitted that the management set such tasks ‘*at the request of those above.*’ An anonymous source at the Ukrainian President’s Office told the publication: ‘*This is directly the work of the Ukrainian Security Service in the context of subversive activities.*’ Mediazona noted that the ‘*three major waves of attacks (July–August 2023, the March 2024 elections, and late December 2024)*’ cannot be explained as the fraudsters’ own initiative.

Victims of fraudsters who carried out arson or other attacks are less frequently accused of committing an act of terrorism or sabotage than those who do so for ideological reasons or financial gain. In early 2025, Mediazona [published](#) a study according to which 28 of 132 defendants (21%) in criminal prosecutions for attacks carried out under the influence of fraudsters were charged with terrorism. In a more recent study, mentioned above, journalists closely examined the wave of attacks that took place in December 2024. According to the findings, the security services prosecuted 16 individuals (48%) on charges of committing terrorist attacks, while 17 individuals were charged with less serious offences. It is noted that the FSB office for St. Petersburg and Leningrad region is most likely to bring terrorism charges against victims of fraudsters.

The practice of applying a charge of terrorism in cases where one of wilful destruction of another person’s property would suffice (where the actions in question did not intimidate the population, did not pose a risk of loss of life, and where there were no grounds to believe the accused hoped, through their actions, to destabilise the work of the authorities or influence their decisions) is flawed and unjustifiably repressive. It is particularly cynical to accuse individuals of terrorism who were convinced they were assisting the authorities and carrying out their instructions.

In [press releases](#) about the arrests of arsonists, the FSB explicitly refers to the statements of those detained, who describe how they were deceived:



During questioning, the detainees explained that, under the influence of telephone scammers, they had taken out loans and transferred funds (ranging from 300,000 to 1.6 million roubles) to so-called ‘safe accounts’, after which, via the Telegram messaging app, they were contacted by fake Russian law enforcement officers who, under the pretext of avoiding criminal prosecution for financing the Ukrainian armed forces, persuaded them to commit unlawful acts during checks on the anti-terrorist security of the targeted facilities.

In some cases, the FSB even [publicised](#) a defendant’s correspondence with the fraudster, who sought to intimidate their victim. This does not prevent the FSB from bringing charges for terrorism or sabotage, including commission of these acts ‘by a group acting in concert.’ In such cases, the investigative authorities classify the fraudsters and their victims as part of the same group.



Such serious charges lead to extremely harsh sentences. On 1 March 2025, **Aleksandr Moiseev** was [sentenced](#) to 12 and a half years' imprisonment.⁴⁸ *'The court established that, between 31 May and 5 June 2024, other individuals fraudulently stole a total of 2,750,000 roubles from M., offering to return the stolen funds on condition that he set fire to the power transformers at the Smolensk-2 substation,'* the press office of Smolensk Regional Court wrote. Moiseev had attempted to set fire to two transformers using petrol, but no fire broke out.

On 10 May 2025, the 1st Western District Military Court [sentenced](#) 22-year-old St. Petersburg student, **Yury Petrash**, to 10 years' imprisonment for committing an act of terrorism (Art. 205, Part 1, CC RF). In February that year Petrash had thrown a Molotov cocktail at the building of the regional FSB headquarters on the instructions of telephone scammers.

Individuals who carry out attacks at the instigation of fraudsters often do not even attempt to flee the scene and wait for the arrival of the law enforcement agents with whom, they are convinced, they are cooperating. Such behaviour, and even voluntarily turning oneself in, may not save a person from facing terrorism charges. On 23 September 2025, the Central District Military Court sentenced [Alekssei Belozersky](#), a 50-year-old resident of Sverdlovsk region, to 14 years' imprisonment. In 2023, acting on instructions from telephone fraudsters, Belozersky threw three bottles containing Molotov cocktails at the building of the military enlistment office. He denied that he was guilty of an act of terrorism and stated he had received calls on WhatsApp from unknown individuals who introduced themselves as FSB officers and persuaded him to take out loans totalling 5.4m roubles from several banks. He transferred most of the loan proceeds to the fraudsters, who convinced him he could get the money back if he took part in an 'FSB special operation' to set fire to the military enlistment office. After the arson, Belozersky turned himself in to the police station and explained what had happened. A similar incident [occurred in the Republic of Chuvashia](#). In October 2025, the regional FSB announced a criminal case had been opened on terrorism charges against a 19-year-old local resident who had turned himself in to the security services and explained he had fallen victim to fraudsters. Unidentified individuals had persuaded him to take out loans and transfer 100,000 roubles to a 'safe account.' Then, under threat of criminal prosecution for these actions, they persuaded the young man to set fire to a railway electricity substation.

In a number of cases, arson committed under the influence of fraudsters has been classified as hooliganism (Art. 213 CC RF) or destruction of another person's property (Art. 167 CC RF). For example, a 69-year-old pensioner from Kursk region, [Irina Mineeva](#), was fined 300,000 roubles, [reduced](#) on appeal to 90,000. According to the prosecution, Mineeva, acting on the instructions of an unknown individual with whom she had been in contact via a messaging app, set fire to a railway relay cabinet, filming her actions on video and sending the footage to the instigator. The court of first instance found her guilty of hooliganism committed by a group of persons acting in concert (Art. 213, Part 2, CC RF). On appeal, the charge was reclassified as hooliganism on the railway (Art. 213, Part 1[c], CC RF).

As in many other cases, victims of fraudsters may be charged with offences of vastly differing severity for identical actions. For example, a resident of Kungur in Perm region was [charged](#) with attempting to intentionally destroy or damage another person's property (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 167, Part 2, CC RF), while a resident of Achinsk in Krasnoyarsk region, **David Fedorenko**, also accused of planning to set fire to a post office, [was remanded](#) in custody on a charge of an attempted act of terrorism (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 1, CC RF).

48 Aleksandr Moiseev was found guilty of committing an act of sabotage causing significant damage and involving an attack on fuel and energy sector facility (Art. 281, Part 2[b,c], CC RF).



ATTACKS COMMITTED FROM OTHER MOTIVES

In several prosecutions, the motives for the attacks cited by the suspects themselves or by the prosecution stand out from among other such cases. **Eduard Markov**, a resident of Ekaterinburg, was charged with [committing an act of terrorism](#) for throwing three bottles containing Molotov cocktails at a mobile phone mast while under the influence of alcohol. Markov explained his actions by saying he wanted to disable the mast, as the waves it emitted had *'a negative effect on the human body'* and on his health. The prosecution, however, regarded this stance as a defence strategy, arguing that in reality Markov *'harboured an extremely negative attitude toward the current authorities and the Special Military Operation being conducted on Ukrainian territory,'* as certain *'opposition videos'* were discovered on his computer during a search. However, the investigative authorities failed to present any evidence that Markov had committed arson on someone's orders or for financial gain. The Central District Military Court [reduced the charge](#) against Markov and sentenced him to three and a half years in a penal colony for attempted damage to another person's property (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 167, Part 2, CC RF).⁴⁹

In September 2025, the FSB in Magadan region [reported](#) the arrest of two citizens who, after being prosecuted for poaching while fishing, were preparing to [carry out a terrorist attack](#). According to the investigative authorities, the two men *'sprayed a chemical substance over a fence onto private and official vehicles'* in the car park outside the FSB Border Guard Service building in Magadan. They then travelled to the village of Ola, where they also *'applied a chemical substance'* to an FSB officer's car and *'filled three containers with incendiary mixtures'* with the intention of setting fire to the FSB Border Guard Service building in Magadan. They also allegedly manufactured anti-tank spikes. Those detained were a 43-year-old resident of Voronezh and a former Ministry of Internal Affairs officer **Evgeny Nagornykh**, and 44-year-old **Aleksei Khabaev** from Novosibirsk. The two men were charged with preparing a terrorist attack as part of a group (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF). The wives of the accused [told journalists](#) that their husbands had been tortured after they were arrested and forced to make confessions. The FSB for Magadan region [appealed](#) to the Ministry of Justice, demanding an investigation into lawyer Maksim Sikach over his request to the prosecutor's office that reports of Khabaev's torture be investigated.

49 However, at the appeal hearing in May 2026 the court agreed with the prosecution and Markov was found guilty of carrying out a terrorist attack. His sentence was increased to 10 years.



2.2.4. The prosecution of individuals unwittingly used to carry out major acts of sabotage

The Ukrainian Security Service carried out at least two major sabotage operations using individuals, without their knowledge, to transport weapons.

On 8 October 2022, at around 6.00 am, an explosion occurred on the Crimean Bridge across the Kerch Strait. According to the Russian Federation's National Anti-Terrorism Committee, a truck was blown up on the bridge, causing seven fuel tanks to catch fire and two road spans to collapse. The truck driver, Makhir Nasib ogly Yusubov, was killed. Four people travelling in the same direction in a car were also killed, and a girl was injured in another vehicle.

On 1 June 2025, the Ukrainian Security Service [carried out Operation 'Spider's Web'](#), attacking four military airfields in various regions of Russia (Murmansk, Irkutsk, Ryazan and Ivanovo) with drones. The drones put several dozen strategic bombers out of action. The UAVs had been concealed in prefabricated houses being transported in trucks driven by long-distance drivers. A fifth attack, in Amur region, failed when the truck caught fire. The driver, Vasily Pytikov, attempted to extinguish the fire but at that moment the munitions detonated and he was killed.

The FSB classified both operations as acts of terrorism, although they pursued legitimate military objectives and constituted acts of sabotage. It is difficult to regard strategic bombers as anything other than military assets. The Crimean Bridge, used to move personnel, equipment, weapons, ammunition and other essential supplies, is a vital piece of transport infrastructure that plays a major role in ensuring the combat readiness of the Russian army in occupied Ukraine.

In both cases, individuals involved in the transport operations were arrested on suspicion of involvement in the attacks. However, according to available information, they had no connection to the actions of the Ukrainian security services and were unaware of their plans.

The prosecution for the bombing of the Crimean Bridge

On 27 November 2025, the Southern District Military Court handed down its verdict in the case of the [bombing of the Crimean Bridge](#). All the defendants, consisting of the lawyer **Artem Azatyan**, his brother the businessman **Georgy Azatyan**, the businessmen **Oleg Antipov**, **Aleksandr Bylin**, **Vladimir Zloba** (a Ukrainian citizen), **Dmitry Tyazhelykh**, farmer **Roman Solomko** (a citizen of Ukraine and Moldova), and driver **Artur Terchanyan** (a citizen of Armenia), [were sentenced](#) to life imprisonment.⁵⁰

According to the investigative authorities, the defendants, acting as an organised group, transported explosives hidden in plastic film inside a truck to the Crimean Bridge.

50 All eight were found guilty of committing an act of terrorism resulting in the death of a person (Art. 205, Part 3[b], CC RF) and of unlawful acquisition, transfer, storage and transport of explosives by an organised group (Art. 222.1, Part 4, CC RF). Solomko and Terchanyan were also found guilty of smuggling explosives by an organised group (Art. 226.1, Part 3, CC RF).



The investigation files state that on 2 August 2022, under a contract between the Kyiv-based company Translogistic UA and Baltex Capital S.A., a consignment of industrial polythene film, in which an explosive device had been concealed, was dispatched to the Bulgarian city of Ruse. From Bulgaria, the consignment arrived in Poti, Georgia, and was then delivered by Terchanyan to Yerevan.

At Yerevan's Trans Alliance terminal, the consignment was cleared through customs in accordance with the rules of the Eurasian Economic Union. At the same time, some of the accompanying documents were allegedly replaced. According to the investigative authorities, Solomko was involved in preparation of the documents and the subsequent transport. Thereafter, Guar G Group, a company based in the town of Alaverdi (Armenia) acted as the despatcher of the film, and a Moscow company, Lider, as the recipient.

On 4 October 2022, the consignment, transported in a DAF truck, crossed the Russian border at Verkhny Lars having transited through Georgian territory and arrived at the base of Agro-Business, a company in Armavir, Krasnodar region, where Azatyan, Zloba, Antipov and Bylin, according to the investigative authorities, unloaded and stored the consignment. Antipov and Georgy Azatyan drew up the documents for onward transport and found a driver, Makhir Yusubov.

According to the investigative authorities, the role of Tyazhelykh, who was based in Lipetsk, was to provide telecommunications services to a certain 'Ivan Ivanovich,' believed to be coordinating the group. Tyazhelykh earned a living by buying SIM cards in bulk and then, via a GSM gateway, connecting them to the server of OnlineSim Ltd. For a fee, this organisation provided virtual numbers for hire at the request of its clients, mainly for registering accounts on messaging apps and social media.

On 7 October, the consignment was sent to Simferopol. The vehicle was remotely detonated on the bridge, killing with the driver.

None of the defendants admitted their guilt. Those who transported the consignment claimed they had been carrying out their normal business activities. Oleg Antipov personally went to the FSB office in St. Petersburg and provided all the information he had. The Ukrainian Security Service told the media they had organised the events as a military operation, and that those detained in Russia had been used '*without their knowledge*.' The prosecution did not present any evidence that showed the defendants had been aware of the explosives in the cargo.

Having analysed the criminal case in detail, our project has [recognised all those convicted as political prisoners](#).

We believe the investigative authorities, given the political imperative to find and punish those responsible for the bombing of the Crimean Bridge, rather than search for the actual organisers of the sabotage operation, simply pinned the blame on individuals who were within reach.



The prosecution of the Spider's Web Operation

As was the case with the bombing of the Crimean Bridge, those formally connected with the transport of the cargo in which drones were concealed were [arrested](#) on charges of involvement in Operation Spider's Web. **Sergei Kanurin**, aged 47, **Mikhail Riumin**, aged 55, **Aleksandr Zaitsev**, aged 56, and **Andrei Merkuryev**, aged 61, were remanded in custody on a charge of committing an act of terrorism as part of an organised group (Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF). They were subsequently all charged with the manufacture and possession of explosives.

Riumin's wife told Mediazona that the moment the drones flew out of his truck came as a shock to him:



*He managed to ring me: 'Drones are coming out of my truck.'
So I told him: 'Call the police, call 112.'
It was a shock – he was in shock!*

On 2 June, the Telegram channel Mash, which has close ties to the security services, [published](#) the name and photo of the man who owned the trucks. This was **Artem Timofeev**, who used to live in Ukraine and was involved in music, before moving to Chelyabinsk region and registering there as a sole trader specialising in freight transport. Timofeev and his wife have [been placed](#) on a wanted list.

2.2.5. Prosecutions on charges of attempted murder

In the context of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, infrastructure has been the most common and typical target of attacks in Russia and the occupied territories of Ukraine. At the same time, as of 2025, dozens of those prosecuted have been accused of attempting to assassinate specific individuals or of planning to do so. A significant proportion of such criminal prosecutions have been brought in the occupied territories of Ukraine.

In most cases, we do not know the details of these prosecutions, nor the arguments put forward by the prosecution and the defence. Murders and assassination attempts do indeed occur and are an inevitable part of this war. Nevertheless, the general trends in prosecutions on charges related to aiding Ukraine in the war are such that there is a high likelihood of evidence being fabricated, of innocent people implicated, and of entrapment.

As illustrative examples, we cite two criminal cases. One of these, the attempted assassination of Tikhon Shevkunov, has attracted particular attention.



The case of the attempted assassination of Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov

In February 2025, the FSB [reported](#) the arrest of two clergymen in connection with an alleged planned assassination attempt against Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov) of Simferopol and Crimea, who is referred to as 'Putin's spiritual advisor.' According to the investigative authorities, 'on the orders of Ukrainian intelligence agencies,' [Denis Popovich and Nikita Ivanovich](#), who knew each other from their studies at the Sretensky Theological Seminary, hid explosives and forged Ukrainian passports in a hiding place in a Moscow park and were preparing to carry out an explosion on the grounds of the Sretensky Monastery.

Popovich, a Ukrainian national, lived at the Sretensky Monastery in Moscow and worked as treasurer and secretary to Shevkunov. He has been on remand since 13 January 2025. Initially, he was subject to two consecutive administrative-law jail terms, after which he was remanded in custody on a criminal charge. Ivanovich, a singer in a church choir and an altar server, was detained on 12 February. Both clergymen maintain their innocence and [claim](#) they were subjected to torture after arrest to coerce them into making confessions.

On 11 November, the FSB [reported](#) that new suspects had emerged in the case and [stated](#) that *'the aim of the planned terrorist attack against Metropolitan Tikhon was to derail the peace talks between the Russian Federation and the USA.'*

The case of the attempted attack on the head of a defence plant in St. Petersburg

[Three residents of St. Petersburg](#) have been named as suspects in the case of an attempted assassination of the head of a defence plant in the city. According to the investigative authorities, 19-year-old [Fedor Krasnov](#), 32-year-old [Liubov Osipova](#) and [Elena Shutova](#) were planning to plant a bomb in the car in which the head of the defence plant was travelling.

A criminal case was initiated against the [St Petersburg residents](#) on charges of attempting an act of terrorism that would have led to the death of a person (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 3[b], CC RF) and the unlawful acquisition of explosive devices by an organised group (Art. 222.1, Part 4, CC RF).

According to the prosecution, Krasnov, Osipova and Shutova, acting on instructions from a 'handler from the Ukrainian intelligence agencies,' received a homemade explosive device via a Yandex Delivery courier, which Krasnov then attached to the underbody of the defence plant director's car. However, the IED turned out to be a dummy, as *'the transfer of the IED components from the handler to the detainees was facilitated by a person acting as part of a [Russian] covert operation.'* The FSB released a video in which the detainees read out a similar text about their joining a certain 'terrorist organisation,' on whose instructions they were allegedly preparing a terrorist attack against the 'head of a military defence enterprise.' What is known about the circumstances surrounding this criminal case points to a possible entrapment by the Russian security services.



2.2.6. Prosecutions of minors on charges of sabotage and acts of terrorism

The year 2025 saw a record number of minors facing politically motivated criminal prosecutions for alleged arson (most often classified as acts of terrorism or sabotage). Such cases were brought against at least 109 teenagers, which is almost 30% more than in 2024 (78) and 2.7 times higher than in 2023 (40).

This is primarily because of a sharp rise in the number of minors charged with committing an act of terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF) to at least 87, compared with 38 in 2024 and 15 in 2023.

At the same time, there was a slight decrease in the number of minors convicted of sabotage (Art. 281 CC RF), with 14 minors prosecuted for this offence in 2025, compared to 25 in 2024 and 24 in 2023. However, it cannot be ruled out that the final figures may rise, as information on the initiation of new criminal cases becomes available with some delay.

In 2025, more than a quarter of minors involved in new prosecutions for arson (29 out of 109) were charged with an attempted offence (preparation or attempt).⁵¹

At least 27 minors were sentenced to terms of imprisonment in 2025 in politically motivated prosecutions for arson. This is more than in 2023 and 2024 combined (four and 19 teenagers respectively).

Most minors convicted in 2025 (24 out of 29) received sentences of six years or more. In 2024, approximately half the teenagers sentenced to imprisonment for arson were given terms of up to and including five years, while the other half were given terms of more than six years (10 and 9 of 19 convicted, respectively).

The most common targets of such arson attacks were railway relay cabinets, as well as other railway infrastructure such as [locomotives](#), [handcars](#), equipment in [depots](#) and even [snow-clearing machines](#). Other common targets of attacks included military facilities, security forces' vehicles and equipment, and facilities and equipment of mobile phone network operators. These arson attacks were often carried out by groups.

In most cases, the investigative authorities claimed the minor arsonists acted 'on the orders of the Ukrainian intelligence agencies,' motivated by a desire to receive a financial reward (see Chapter 2.2.3). Many defendants also stated that their motives were not political in nature but that they had found online invitations to carry out arson attacks for payment, usually in private Telegram chats and channels dedicated to earning money, from anonymous instigators who gave no indication of any connection to Ukraine. In typical [situations](#), the anonymous individuals, whom the teenagers found [while looking for work online](#), promised to pay a reward for setting fire to a specific property. They also sometimes sent instructions and [asked the teenagers to record](#) a video of what they did. In [some cases](#), the money was transferred in cryptocurrency; sometimes no money was paid at all.

51 A further 13 individuals were charged with both completed and attempted offences.



In some cases, the investigative authorities attributed ideological motives to the accused, though the defendants themselves denied this. One example was the case of 17-year-old **Daniil Shabukhin**, detained for [attempting to set fire to a locomotive](#) at a St. Petersburg railway station. Investigators [claimed](#) the teenager, together with an unidentified accomplice, acted out of ‘*disagreement with the policies of the Russian Federation*’ following instructions received via a messaging app from ‘*an unknown supporter of the armed forces of Ukraine.*’ However, Shabukhin himself [stated](#) he ‘*wanted to punish street-level drug dealers*’ and was looking for work for so-called ‘sportiki.’⁵² Shabukhin has been charged with attempted terrorism.

The report of an arrest may be accompanied by a confession by the detainee that they carried out the arson or other act in protest against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This may be true, but it is impossible to be certain that the accused are sincere in making such a statement following their arrest. In late December 2025, the FSB reported the [detention in Kemerovo](#) of a teenager who had turned up at a military enlistment office carrying a Molotov cocktail. In a video released to the public, the young man stated he was ‘*fighting against the Russians*’ because they had attacked Ukraine, which he considers his country, even though he holds Russian citizenship. At the same time, the questions posed by the investigators and the answers given by the detainee, who was lying face down, appear to have been staged. The teenager explicitly stated he was carrying out tasks for Ukraine’s Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR), answered all questions in detail, and listed his previous actions seemingly without even attempting to conceal from the security forces anything they would not have known at the time of his detention.

There are also reports of criminal cases initiated in connection with arson attacks committed by minors under the influence of fraudsters (see Chapter 2.2.3). For example, [a 14-year-old boy from St. Petersburg](#), deceived by fraudsters, had set fire to a disused police station using a Molotov cocktail and was charged with committing an act of terrorism as part of an organised group (Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF). A 14-year-old teenager [from Vyborg in Leningrad region](#), who set fire to an electrical equipment cabinet on the railway, and [another 14-year-old from Moscow](#), who, according to the investigative authorities, set fire to a railway relay cabinet and the Vnukovo district administration building, were also charged with acts of terrorism after they had been threatened by fraudsters.

As with cases involving adult defendants, arson attacks on railway infrastructure or mobile phone equipment by teenagers are often classified as acts of terrorism. [Charges of sabotage](#) are less common. A less serious charge of wilful damage to another person’s property (Art. 167 CC RF) may also be brought. In April 2025, in Abakan, it was precisely on this charge that a court placed two minors under house arrest in connection with [an arson attack on the offices of the People’s Front](#). According to the investigative authorities, the teenagers agreed to carry out the arson in return for a reward offered to them via a messaging app. In 2026 they were given [suspended sentences](#).

Minors have become defendants not only in typical cases of arson targeting infrastructure, but also in more complex cases bearing the hallmarks of police entrapment. One of the most high-profile examples of this was the criminal prosecution of **Gagik Grigoryan**.

52 ‘Sportiki’ is the name given to those who, on the orders of drug dealers, intimidate and beat up drug couriers to prevent them stealing the goods.



The prosecution of Gagik Grigoryan



At the time of his arrest in October 2023, [Gagik Grigoryan](#) was 17 years old. He lived in Kursk, attended school and was an activist with the Left Socialist Action movement. According to the prosecution, Grigoryan, 'wishing to bring about the defeat of the Russian Federation during the course of the Special Military Operation,' independently established contact via the Signal messaging app with individuals 'acting in the interests of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence' and joined 'a terrorist group created by them.' Grigoryan was accused of conducting surveillance of a Russian military officer, on whose car he was allegedly supposed to plant an explosive device. The device had previously been retrieved from a hiding place in the woods and moved to another cache set up in one of the cemeteries. However, according to the prosecution, FSB officers, as part of a covert operation, had replaced the real explosive device with a dummy, a fact of which Grigoryan was unaware. The young man was arrested as he attempted to retrieve the explosive device from the hiding place.

At his trial, which was held in camera, Grigoryan admitted the factual circumstances of the case but contested their legal classification. Based on the available information, there are grounds to believe Grigoryan, a politically active school student, may have been the victim of police entrapment and that the evidence of his guilt may have been fabricated. The case file contains the testimony of a confidential witness who met Grigoryan on university preparatory courses and engaged him in conversations about politics and the war. Furthermore, the military serviceman, whom the teenager was accused of plotting to assassinate, died several days before the criminal case was opened and there had been no need to retrieve the explosive device from its hiding place. There is also information that the security forces [detained](#) Grigoryan near his home, beat him and, under threat, forced him to go with them to a cemetery, where they filmed a staged video in which the teenager retrieved an explosive device from a hiding place.

On 29 January 2025, the 2nd Western District Military Court sentenced Grigoryan to seven years' imprisonment.⁵³

53 Grigoryan was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF), participation in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF), preparation for commission of an act of terrorism by an organised group (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF), and attempting, as part of an organised group, to unlawfully acquire, carry, transport and store an explosive device (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 222.1, Part 4, CC RF).

2.3. Prosecutions on charges of treason and espionage

2.3.1. Statistics and general trends in prosecutions for ‘espionage’

The year 2025 saw a record number of convictions for treason (Art. 275 CC RF), collusion with a foreign state or organisation (Art. 275.1 CC RF) and espionage (Art. 276 CC RF). According to our project data, in 2025, 280 people were sentenced under these three articles of the Criminal Code in Russia and the occupied territories (of whom 227 were convicted under Art. 275 CC RF, 29 under Art. 275.1 CC RF and 24 under Art. 276 CC RF). These figures are likely to increase as new data become available.

Table 34. Trends in the number of convictions for treason, collusion with foreigners and espionage, by year, according to data from Memorial

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Art. 275 CC RF	11	46	161	227
Art. 275.1 CC RF	0	2	39	29
Art. 276 CC RF	0	9	40	24
Total	11	57	240	280

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Data from the human rights project [First Department](#) show even higher figures.⁵⁴ In 2025, 467 people were convicted of these offences (363 under Art. 275 CC RF, 39 under Article 275.1 CC RF, 61 under Article 276 CC RF, and four featuring combined charges involving two or three of these offences simultaneously).⁵⁵ On average, [in the first half of 2025](#) Russian courts handed down sentences on charges of ‘espionage’ to two individuals every working day. For 2024, First Department recorded 385 convictions: 236 under Art. 275 CC RF, 46 under Art. 275.1 CC RF, 100 under Art. 276 CC RF, and three featuring combined charges).

According to data from the [Judicial Department](#) of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, in the first half of 2025 alone 151 people were convicted of these three offences (115 under Art. 275 CC RF, 24 under Art. 275.1 CC RF and 12 under Art. 276 CC RF).

⁵⁴ Although we endeavour to consider all available information on prosecutions under Art. 275 CC RF, Art. 275.1 CC RF and Art. 276 CC RF, the data provided by First Department, which specialises in this area, is more comprehensive.

⁵⁵ As of 10 December 2025.



POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

Table 35. Number of individuals convicted of treason, collusion with foreigners and espionage, according to official statistics

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025
Art. 275 CC RF	16	39	156	115
Art. 275.1 CC RF	0	2	30	24
Art. 276 CC RF	1	9	24	12
Total	17	50	210	151

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

When comparing the figures for the first half of 2025 with those for the same period in 2024, the increase is even more pronounced.

Table 36. Number of individuals convicted of treason, collusion with foreign nationals and espionage in the first halves of 2024 and 2025

	H1 2024	H1 2025
Art. 275 CC RF	55	115
Art. 275.1 CC RF	4	24
Art. 276 CC RF	18	12

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

The data presented here show a significant increase in the number of convictions for treason, along with an emerging decline in the number of convictions for espionage. An important factor is played by the situation in the occupied territories of Ukraine where residents are being forced to accept Russian citizenship. This, in the view of the Russian authorities, makes it possible to prosecute them on charges of treason rather than on charges of espionage as foreign nationals (although there are several cases where individuals holding both Russian and Ukrainian citizenship have been charged with both offences simultaneously).

According to First Department, 161 of the 467 people convicted of ‘espionage’ in 2025 were Ukrainian citizens.⁵⁶ Of these, 30% (134 people) were sentenced by courts in the occupied territories of Ukraine (Crimea, and the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions).

First Department also notes a trend towards harsher sentences. While in 2024, the median sentence imposed was 12 years’ imprisonment; by 2025, this had risen to 15 years.

According to First Department, since February 2022, following the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the total number of people convicted on charges of treason, espionage and collusion with foreigners has exceeded 1,000.

56 The Russian authorities regard some of these individuals as Russian citizens.



In 2025, according to our project data, 327 criminal cases were initiated for these three offences. This figure is still lower than in 2024, but the data for 2025, as with other prosecutions, is expected to increase as more information becomes available.

Table 37. Number of defendants in new cases brought under Art. 275 CC RF, Art. 275.1 CC RF and Art. 276 CC RF

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Art. 275 CC RF	58	180	324	263
Art. 275.1 CC RF	4	22	60	35
Art. 276 CC RF	18	63	63	29
Total	80	265	447	327

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

First Department counted more than 600 criminal prosecutions for treason and espionage initiated in 2025.

According to First Department, the total number of individuals implicated in ‘espionage’ cases by mid-December 2025 stood, at least, at 1,627, of whom 1,431 (88%) had become defendants in criminal prosecutions following the start of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine.

According to First Department, the main grounds for charges of treason, espionage or collusion with a foreign state or organisation can be ranked by frequency as follows:

- those relating to the transfer of information or alleged intelligence activities (approximately 35% of all charges)
- those combined with charges of committing or preparing acts of terrorism or sabotage (approximately 30%)
- those related to attempts to join Ukrainian armed groups (approximately 15%)
- those relating to donations in support of Ukraine (approximately 10%)
- correspondence and alleged contacts with Ukrainian intelligence agencies (approximately 10%)

It is important to bear in mind that all the above statistics are incomplete. Information about criminal prosecutions and convictions is published with a delay. Furthermore, in most cases, court websites conceal details about the accused (in 75% of cases, according to First Department estimates), while some courts do not publish any information at all about prosecutions on charges of treason, espionage or collusion with foreigners.



2.3.2. Prosecutions for treason

Based on project data, 66 criminal cases brought under Article 275 CC RF in 2025 (a quarter of the total) were initiated by Russian law enforcement officials in the occupied territories of Ukraine (29 in Crimea and Sevastopol, and 13 in Donetsk region). Moscow had the most cases among regions in Russia, with 27 cases.

Those charged most frequently in treason cases were aged between 30 and 60 years, accounting for at least 83 of the 263 cases. The youngest person to be accused of treason was 16-year-old [Valentin Tsyganok](#), and the oldest was 80-year-old scientist [Valery Zvegintsev](#). Based on available data, 16% of those prosecuted were women.

Individuals are prosecuted for treason who have never had any access to state secrets or engaged in any political activity.

According to our project data, in cases where individuals were charged solely with treason, sentences ranged from six to 20 years in a penal colony. The average sentence was 13 years and two months.

There has not been a single acquittal in a treason trial since 2000. In 2025, there was one known case in which the court exempted a person convicted under Art. 275 CC RF from serving their sentence. Sixty-three-year-old [Sergei Silantyev](#)⁵⁷ of Izhevsk was exempted from serving his 15-year prison sentence on account of poor health. Silantyev was accused of posting six anti-war leaflets bearing Free Russia Legion symbols on the graves of Russian servicemen and posting a comment online calling on people to join the Legion. Despite his Category I disability, Silantyev spent over seven months in a remand prison awaiting sentencing.

CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS FOR TREASON LINKED TO COOPERATION WITH THE RUSSIAN VOLUNTEER CORPS AND THE FREE RUSSIA LEGION

According to our data, at least six individuals were charged with treason in 2025 in relation to various forms of alleged cooperation with the Russian Volunteer Corps, and at least 16 in relation to cooperation with the Free Russia Legion. The actual figures are likely to be significantly higher, since in many instances the fact of a criminal prosecution never becomes public knowledge, or details of the charges remain unknown.

In prosecutions for cooperation with the Russian Volunteer Corps or the Free Russia Legion, treason charges are often accompanied by charges of terrorism-related offences. In some cases, however, charges are only brought for participating in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF) without charges of treason. In 2025, the number of cases involving both a charge of treason and of a 'terrorism'-related offence⁵⁸ increased by almost 50% compared to 2024.

For details about prosecutions on charges of cooperation with the Russian Volunteer Corps, the Free Russia Legion, and other Ukrainian armed formations, see Chapter 2.4.4.

57 In addition to treason, Silantyev was charged with justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF), participating in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF), and making calls to engage in activities directed against the security of the state (Art. 280.4 CC RF).

58 Rossinskaya was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF), making public calls to engage in activities directed against the security of the Russian Federation (Art. 280.4, Part 2, CC RF), and organising the financing of terrorism (Art. 205.1, Part 4, CC RF).



OTHER CRIMINAL CASES ON TREASON LINKED TO UKRAINE

Monetary donations to the Ukrainian army or one of its units are often used as grounds for prosecution on charges of treason. Here are some examples of sentences handed down in such cases in 2025:

1. [Andrei Glukhov](#), a 21-year-old college student, was sentenced in Volgograd to 12 years in a strict regime penal colony. Glukhov has had a Category 1 disability for cerebral palsy since childhood. He was charged with transferring 3,000 roubles to an acquaintance in Ukraine whom he met online.

2. [Nadezhda Rossinskaya](#) (also known as Nadine Geisler), a model from Belgorod and founder of the volunteer group Army of Beauties that provided humanitarian aid to Ukrainians, was sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment and fined 320,000 roubles.⁵⁹ She was prosecuted on the grounds of Instagram posts, which, according to the investigative authorities, contained 'calls to donate money in support of the Ukrainian armed forces and the Azov Battalion.' Rossinskaya allegedly also instructed an acquaintance to transfer money received on her bank card to support the Azov Battalion. She left Russia in May 2023 but returned at the end of January 2024. She was arrested on 1 February 2024.

3. In Moscow, programmer [Sergei Irin](#) was sentenced to 15 years in a strict regime penal colony and fined 5m roubles. He was charged with transferring \$500 to the Ukrainian charity Come Back Alive, which he did on 24 February 2022, the day Russia began its full-scale invasion. Irin left Russia in September 2022, but he returned in April 2024 to visit loved ones. Upon his return to Russia, he was initially jailed for an administrative-law offence and subsequently remanded in custody on criminal charges. He [has written](#) in letters that he was '*interrogated with a taser and sent by plane to Lefortovo prison in Moscow.*'

4. Moscow Regional Court sentenced Kyiv resident and dual Russian-Ukrainian citizen [Tatyana Omelchenko](#) to 12 years' imprisonment and fined her 400,000 roubles. She was detained at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport on 25 September 2024 when flying via Moscow to Crimea for her younger brother's funeral. Her phone was searched and information was found about a donation to the Ukrainian armed forces. Omelchenko was subjected to a series of jail terms of administrative-law offences, after which she was remanded in custody. Her son, a minor, remains in Ukraine.

59 Rossinskaya was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF), making public calls to engage in activities directed against the security of the Russian Federation (Art. 280.4, Part 2, CC RF), and organising the financing of terrorism (Art. 205.1, Part 4, CC RF).



On 1 June 2025, [Mikhail Loshchinin](#) was arrested while crossing the Latvian-Russian border. Loshchinin, who had been living in Europe permanently since 1999, holds Belgian citizenship, and works for a company in Luxembourg as a database administrator. He was travelling to Russia to visit his ailing father in St. Petersburg. During a border check, Russian law enforcement allegedly found evidence of a bank transfer of €30, sent to an acquaintance in Ukraine. Loshchinin was kept under guard in a hotel in Pytalovo for one month; in August he was remanded in custody on a charge of treason.

Prosecutions for treason can also be brought for other forms of support for the Ukrainian army or intelligence agencies. As with prosecutions for cooperating with the Free Russia Legion or the Russian Volunteer Corps (which are, in fact, units of the Ukrainian military), typical charges are for transferring information or attempting to leave Russia to participate in the hostilities. Below are examples of a few less typical charges.

The prosecution of Irina Izmailova



On 11 June 2025, Samara Regional Court sentenced 26-year-old artist from Samara [Irina Izmailova](#) to 20 years' imprisonment.⁶⁰ According to the investigative authorities, Izmailova manufactured explosives on the instructions of a member of the Ukrainian intelligence agencies with a view to handing them over via a hidden cache to an 'unidentified individual.' In addition, the FSB claimed she brought Gembird headphones from Turkey to Russia that contained concealed components that could be used as a detonator.

FSB officers visited Izmailova on 31 August 2023 to interrogate her about Aleksandr Kudashev, with whom she was in a relationship at the time and who had joined the Russian Volunteer Corps. After speaking with the investigative authorities, Izmailova allegedly [confessed](#) she had prepared an explosive substance and that her actions had been 'overseen' by a member of the Ukrainian intelligence agencies she had met in Moldova. She declined a privately retained lawyer at the initial stage of the investigation. During a search of her home, jars were found containing traces of a substance she had used to produce acetone peroxide.

60 Irina Izmailova was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF), illegal possession of explosives (Art. 222.1, Part 1, CC RF), and the manufacture of explosives (Art. 223.1, Part 1, CC RF).



The prosecution of Evgeny Alakaev



On 24 July 2025, the Central District Military Court sentenced [Evgeny Alakaev](#) to 18 years' imprisonment, the first five of which are to be served in a cell-type prison and the remainder in a strict regime penal colony. Alakaev, aged 36, served in the military and is an academic researcher and member of the Russian Association of Classical Scholars. He was found guilty of treason in the form of espionage and disseminating *'information constituting a state secret obtained in the course of his professional work to a member of a foreign state'* (Art. 275 CC RF), as well as illegal acquisition and dissemination of information constituting a state secret (Art. 283.1, Part 2[d], CC RF).

According to the prosecution, Alakaev illegally photographed a classified document containing information about the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023. He sent the picture to his mother, which qualifies as disclosing state secrets. The treason charge was based on the forwarding of this picture to Alakaev's friend, a Ukrainian Greek Catholic priest named Konstantin Mironov, who lives in Italy. Their exchange also included a discussion of Russia's war against Ukraine. The investigative authorities consider Mironov a 'representative of the Ukrainian Security Service.' As evidence, the FSB cited a report on the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church's hostility towards Russia, as well as the testimony of a resident of Ekaterinburg who is aware of Mironov's negative attitude towards the Russian authorities.

TREASON CASES NOT FORMALLY RELATED TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Since 2022, prosecutions for treason not formally related to Russia's war against Ukraine have been outliers. Among such cases, the following are particularly noteworthy.

The prosecution of Grigory Skvortsov



On 26 June 2025, Perm Regional Court sentenced photographer and musician [Grigory Skvortsov](#) to 16 years' imprisonment on a charge of treason. The treason charge concerned gathering and transmitting information about Moscow's underground bunkers. The FSB provided an official document about Skvortsov's cooperation with the CIA, while an expert assessment found that part of the information Skvortsov gathered contained state secrets.

However, Skvortsov gathered all this information from a book, Soviet ‘Secret Bunkers’: Special Urban Fortifications 1930-1960 [Sovetskie ‘sekretnye bunkery’: gorodskaya spetsialnaya fortifikatsiya 1930-1960-kh godov], by Dmitry Yurkov written using declassified archival materials. When Skvortsov read the book, the materials were publicly available. However, after the book was published in late 2021, the materials were classified again.

The prosecution of Aleksei Sokolov



On 18 December 2025, [Aleksei Sokolov](#) was remanded in custody on a [charge](#) of treason. Sokolov is a well-known activist from Ekaterinburg and the founder and leader of the Urals Human Rights Defenders project and the Legal Basis non-profit. Before the decision to remand him in custody was announced, Sokolov told journalists that, according to the investigative authorities, the charge of treason was based on the grounds that he had provided information about torture and human rights violations in Federal Penitentiary Service facilities to ‘foreign organizations.’ Sokolov was also charged with participating in the activities of an ‘undesirable organisation’ (Art. 284.1, Part 1, CC RF). Two of his colleagues in human rights work, [Roman Kachanov](#) and [Larisa Zakharova](#), were at the same time remanded in custody on charges of organising the activities of an ‘undesirable organisation’ (Art. 284.1, Part 3, CC RF) (see Chapter 2.6.1).

2.3.3. Prosecutions for collusion with a foreign state or international or foreign organisation

Article 275.1 CC RF (often referred to as ‘treason lite’ in the human rights community) was added to the Criminal Code on 14 July 2022, when the articles on treason and espionage were expanded. These changes were effectively driven by the demands of wartime and created new legal instruments for prosecuting citizens attempting to oppose the Russian leadership’s aggressive militarist policies. On 28 December 2024, the scope of this article was expanded to cover not only Russian citizens, but also foreign citizens and stateless persons located in Russia.

In 2025, according to both our data and that of Department One, the number of new prosecutions and convictions under this article decreased. Based on our data, the largest number of criminal cases for this offence were opened in Moscow city, with seven cases. There were three each in Crimea, Kamchatka region, Khabarovsk region, and St. Petersburg.

As is the case with treason charges, defendants in prosecutions for collusion under Article 275.1 CC RF are almost always accused of communicating with representatives of Ukraine. The wording of the ‘espionage’ criminal offences is broad and vague, allowing law enforcement to classify similar acts either as completed treason, attempted treason, preparation for treason, or even the comparatively less serious offence of collusion with foreigners (punishable by up to eight years in a penal colony).



Based on our data from 2025, in cases where the defendant was charged solely with collusion with foreigners (Art. 275.1 CC RF), sentences of imprisonment ranged from two and a half to seven years, with an average of four years and 10 months.

In 2025, construction engineer and builder [Nikolai Malkerov](#) of Kostroma was sentenced to four years in a penal colony. According to the prosecution, Malkerov contacted a member of the Free Russia Legion and 'proposed gathering information about an object in Yaroslavl region' and sending pictures and videos of it. He was detained by the FSB before he could do so. [Sergei Loktev](#) of Murom in Vladimir region was sentenced to five years in a general regime penal colony. According to the prosecution, Loktev joined a Telegram chat linked to 'representatives from Ukraine' in April 2022. Members of the chat shared information about Russians who support the invasion of Ukraine. Loktev allegedly shared pictures of cars with the Z symbol in this chat. Kaliningrad lawyer [Ivan Kveselevich](#) was sentenced to two and a half years' imprisonment for collecting information from public sources, including 'on the partial mobilisation, the socio-political situation, and economic and food security of Kaliningrad region.' Pensioner and former lawyer [Magomedgadzhil Rabadanov](#) of St. Petersburg was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. He likewise did not provide any information to the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) but merely expressed an intention to do so.

In some instances, defendants in cases under Article 275.1 CC RF were charged with communicating with other countries, but in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine.

The prosecution of Marat Gadzhiev

In June 2025, [Marat Gadzhiev](#) of Sakhalin region was arrested in St. Petersburg. The following day he was remanded in custody. According to the investigative authorities, Gadzhiev called the Norwegian Consulate in St. Petersburg and the Norwegian Embassy in Moscow *'no earlier than 25 February 2025.'* During a call, he *'expressed his interest'* in contacting the Norwegian military attaché *'to discuss assisting the modernisation of the military equipment supplied by NATO countries to Ukraine.'*

Finally, there are cases of collusion with a foreign state or organisation not directly related to the war against Ukraine. In March 2025, entrepreneur [Aleksandr Voevodkin](#) was first placed under house arrest and later remanded in custody. The only known detail of his case is that, according to the prosecution, he *'wanted to cooperate'* with China. In June 2025, it [emerged](#) that two Moldovan citizens had been detained in Moscow. The FSB accused them of *'carrying out assignments for the Security and Intelligence Services of Moldova'* and described them as *'agents of Moldovan intelligence services'* who had entered Russia using 'cover documents.'



2.3.4. Prosecutions for espionage

As with the offence of collusion (Article 275.1 CC RF), the number of criminal prosecutions and convictions for espionage (Article 276 CC RF) decreased in 2025 compared to previous years.

According to our data, most criminal cases involving espionage brought in 2025 were in the 'newly occupied' territories of Ukraine: nine in Luhansk region, four in Zaporizhzhia region, and three each in Donetsk and Kherson regions.

Ukrainian citizens are the group most frequently prosecuted on espionage charges. Based on our data, of the 29 individuals charged with espionage in 2025, at least 26 hold Ukrainian citizenship (six of them are also Russian citizens). We also recorded one criminal prosecution each of citizens of France, Mongolia, and Romania. Citizens of other countries remain in custody on charges dating back to previous years, such as [Baek Won-soon](#) of South Korea, arrested on a charge of espionage in the spring of 2024 in Vladivostok.⁶¹

According to [Department One](#), of the 61 people convicted of espionage in 2025, 53 were Ukrainian citizens.

The average prison sentence handed down in espionage cases in 2025 was 10 years and 11 months. The shortest was 10 years, and the longest was 12 years.⁶² Two Ukrainians from Zaporizhzhia region, [Serhiy Semenets](#) and [Mykola Dzhosh](#), did receive life sentences, but along with espionage they were also charged with sabotage resulting in the death of a person (Art. 283, Part 3[b], CC RF) and participating in a sabotage organisation (Art. 281.3, Part 2, CC RF). In both cases, the men were charged with providing the Ukrainian armed forces with information about the deployment of Russian military personnel, which were subsequently targeted in missile and bomb strikes that killed several Russian servicemen.

According to our data, as of December 2025, at least 160 people have been imprisoned on charges of espionage.

As noted earlier, most defendants in espionage cases since the start of the full-scale war have been Ukrainian citizens, and they are primarily residents of the occupied territories who retained their Ukrainian citizenship (see Chapter 2.5 for details about prosecutions of Ukrainians). Ukrainians charged with espionage are usually accused of having provided Ukrainian intelligence with information about the locations of military facilities or the personal data of Russian servicemen. In cases where the accused holds both Russian and Ukrainian citizenship, they are sometimes charged simultaneously with both espionage and treason.

Below, we take a closer look at a case in which a foreign citizen, **Sharifjon Tillozoda**, was charged with espionage.

61 TASS reported at the time that Baek Won-soon allegedly contacted an unidentified individual, posing as a writer, and obtained a state secret from them. He was supposed to pass this information on to unnamed 'foreign intelligence services.' Based on the information available, Baek Won-soon worked in Vladivostok as a missionary for a South Korean humanitarian foundation, mainly helping defectors from North Korea. He is the first South Korean to be charged with espionage in Russia.

62 These numbers are for cases in which the defendant was charged solely with espionage.



The case of Sharifjon Tillozoda



In 2025, the conviction of Tajik citizen Sharifjon Tillozoda was [upheld](#) on appeal. Tillozoda had been [sentenced in 2024 by Moscow Regional Court to 14 years in a penal colony on a charge of espionage](#). Tillozoda had been arrested in October 2023 and [charged](#) with collecting and providing pictures and videos of Russian military formations to the Ukrainian armed forces. He had previously signed a contract to join the Russian army and was stationed at one of the military training areas when he took photographs and videos and posted them on social media. In a conversation with journalists before his arrest, Tillozoda said he had signed the contract out of 'desperation': he was unable to return to Tajikistan because of the threat of arrest for his publications critical of the state of the country's culture, and he did not have a job in Russia. According to Tillozoda's friends, he did not wish to go to fight in Ukraine and was planning on leaving the military training area.

Since espionage cases are traditionally subject to the highest level of secrecy, it is sometimes unclear whether a case is related to the war against Ukraine.

On 29 January 2025, Lefortovo district court in Moscow remanded the opera singer and Tula Philharmonic soloist **Tsetsendelger Tegshee**, a Mongolian citizen, in [custody](#) on a charge of espionage. The details of the case are unknown, including the country for which Tegshee is accused of spying. Tegshee performed in a concert supporting the Russian military and raised funds for troops. His wife [states](#) that the prosecution was initiated because of the 'jealousy' of an unnamed couple.

Given the current global situation, it can be difficult to determine on whose behalf citizens of countries allied with Ukraine are accused of spying. They may be accused either of gathering intelligence for Ukraine or of gathering information related to the security of their own countries. For example, Latvian entrepreneur [Aleksandr Polyakov](#) remains in custody after his [arrest](#) in Kaliningrad in June 2024.

In August 2025, it [emerged](#) that a new criminal case had been opened against French political researcher [Laurent Vinatier](#) on a charge of espionage. An advisor working with the Swiss NGO Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Vinatier was detained in Moscow in June 2024 on a criminal charge of collecting military-related information that could be used against the security of the Russian Federation, without registering as a 'foreign agent' (Art. 330.1, Part 3, CC RF). He pleaded guilty and was [sentenced](#) to three years in a general regime penal colony. After the new charge was brought against him, Vinatier was taken to Lefortovo remand prison. Details of the new charge, as is typical, were unknown. At the start of 2026, Vinatier was released in a prisoner exchange and returned home to France on 8 January.



2.3.5. Prosecutions of foreign nationals for aiding the enemy

On 28 December 2024, Article 276.1 CC RF was [introduced](#) into the Criminal Code. It reads: *'The provision by a foreign national or stateless person present in the territory of the Russian Federation of financial, logistical, advisory, or other assistance to an enemy in activities knowingly directed against the security of the Russian Federation (where the conduct does not constitute a crime under Article 276).'* The offence carries a sentence of 10 to 15 years in prison.

According to reports, applications of Article 276.1 have so far been rare. In July 2025, A. Yu. Demidenko was [remanded in custody](#) on this charge. On 21 August 2025, Azerbaijani citizen **Yadulla Ramiz oglu Rufullayev** was [prosecuted](#) for allegedly planning to smuggle materials *'obtained during an attack on an employee of Russia's defence industry with access to classified information'* into Ukraine through Azerbaijan. We cannot rule out the possibility of Article 276.1 having been invoked in this criminal case because of the deterioration in Russia-Azerbaijan relations, which we cover in detail in the chapter on criminal cases outside the scope of our project (see Chapter 2.6.7).

In early 2026, the first known sentence was [handed down](#) under this article to a Moldovan-Romanian dual citizen, **Gheorghe Maroglo**, who was sentenced to 11 years in a strict regime penal colony.⁶³ Maroglo transported cargo and passengers on his bus that travelled between Moldova, Ukraine and Russia. Asked by Mediazona if the criminal case was related to his work, Maroglo's lawyer replied, *'You could put it that way.'* Details of the charge are unknown, since the criminal case was heard in camera.

63 In addition to aiding an enemy, Maroglo was charged with attempting to smuggle toxic or explosive substances, weapons, equipment, technology, or scientific and technical information (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 226.1, Part 3, CC RF).



2.4. Prosecutions on charges of involvement with banned organisations

2.4.1. General trends in prosecutions on charges of links to 'undesirable organisations'

In 2025, 101 organisations were added to the Ministry of Justice's [list of undesirable organisations](#), more than in any previous year and accounting for more than a third of all the 296 organisations listed as of 31 December 2025. By comparison, 22 organisations were added in 2022, 57 in 2023, and 67 in 2024. Approximately 50% more organisations were designated 'undesirable' in 2025 than in 2024.

Among those added to the 'undesirable' list in 2025, human rights organisations accounted for the largest share: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, and others.

Journalists' organisations ranked second, including organisations such as Reporters Without Borders, the Community of Investigative Journalists—Foundation 19/29, n-ost, the International Centre for Journalists, and the European Fund for Journalism in Exile; as well as media outlets, such as Ekho radio station, Deutsche Welle, and the Independent Barents Observer.

Also designated as 'undesirable' were:

1. **ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES**
(the Zimin Foundation, the Andrei Sakharov Institute, the Peace. Progress. Human Rights Movement, and others)

2. **A RANGE OF RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS**
(such as the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies in the US and the Royal United Services Institute in the UK)

3. **ORGANISATIONS FOR RUSSIAN ÉMIGRÉS IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES**
(the Association of Free Russians in Portugal, the Russian Democratic Society in Serbia, For a Free Russia in Bulgaria, and others)

4. **PROJECTS FOCUSED ON ASSISTING UKRAINE**
(such as Rubikus, a volunteer project that provides aid to Ukrainian refugees)



5. **A PROJECT CREATED BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE IN THE NETHERLANDS TO GATHER EVIDENCE AND INFORMATION ABOUT DAMAGE RUSSIA HAS CAUSED IN UKRAINE**
(The [Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine](#), as well as the Ukrainian organisation Truth Hounds, which documents war crimes)

6. **HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECTS SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH DRUG ADDICTIONS AND THOSE LIVING WITH HIV**

7. **ORGANISATIONS PROTECTING LGBTQ+ PEOPLE**

8. **INITIATIVES THAT PROTECT AND SUPPORT THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**
(including the [Batani International Indigenous Fund for Development and Solidarity](#), the Free Peoples of Russia House, the [Ingria House](#) in Narva (Estonia), and the [Assembly of Chechens of Europe](#) in France)

9. **EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS AND ORGANISATIONS**
(including the International House World Organisation; the British Council; Yale University, the [International Baccalaureate Organisation](#), an international educational NGO that develops and implements programmes used in many Russian schools to prepare students for university; and the American [East View Information Services](#), a US provider of resources for universities and libraries)

10. **COMMERCIAL IT ORGANISATIONS**
(such as the Canadian software developer Open Text Corporation, the Czech IT company Compelson, and the Ukrainian computer games development studio GSC Igrovoy Mir (GSC Game World))

According to [OVD-Info](#), 227 cases were brought to courts of first instance in 2025 for the administrative-law offence of participating in the activities of an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 20.33 CAO RF), which is 10% fewer than in 2024 when 251 such cases went to court. In 142 of the cases, the circumstances are unknown. In the remaining cases, administrative liability was most frequently imposed for participation in the [AllatRa](#) religious movement (see Chapter 2.4.6. for details on prosecutions based on alleged links to this organisation). There were 17 such cases.

Based on our data, 42 criminal prosecutions were brought in 2025 on charges of involvement in an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1 CC RF). This is more than three times as many as in 2024, when there were 13, and eight times more than in 2022, when only five prosecutions were brought.



According to [OVD-Info](#), sentences, including those given in absentia, were handed down to 59 people in 2025, which is four and a half times more than in 2024 (13) and eight times more than in 2023 (seven).

Data from the [Judicial Department](#) of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation shows the same upward trend, with 14 individuals convicted under Art. 284.1 CC RF in the first half of the year alone, which is more than were convicted in 2024 and 2023 combined (six and seven, respectively).⁶⁴

Notably, in 2025 there were almost twice as many women as men prosecuted on charges related to an 'undesirable organisation' (23 and 12, respectively).

Based on the sentences known to us, the average prison sentence handed down in 2025 was two years and five months. The shortest was eighteen months, and the longest was five years.

More than half of the new prosecutions for involvement in an 'undesirable organisation' in 2025 (at least 25 of 42) were brought against followers of religious organisations (see Chapter 2.4.6). The majority involved followers of AllatRa, and the rest were linked to the [Vozrozhdenie \[Rebirth\] Church](#), the Falun Gong movement, and the Transformation Centre Covenant Network.

Criminal cases on charges of organising the activities of an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1, Part 3, CC RF) were opened in December 2025 against lawyer **Roman Kachanov** and lawyer [Larisa Zakharova](#) of the Urals Human Rights Defenders Project, allegedly for cooperation with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and the National Endowment for Democracy. Kachanov and Zakharova were remanded in custody.

Also noteworthy is the sentence handed down to **Grigory Melkonyants**.

The prosecution of Grigory Melkonyants



On 14 May 2025, Basmanny district court in Moscow declared co-chair of the Golos voters' rights movement, [Grigory Melkonyants](#), guilty of organising the activities of an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1, Part 3, CC RF). He was sentenced to five years in a general regime penal colony. This is the harshest sentence handed down on such a charge in Russia in 2025. According to the prosecution, the Golos movement is part of the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO), which has been designated an 'undesirable organisation' in Russia.

64 The Judicial Department likely includes in its statistics sentences that went into effect by the end of the year, while OVD-Info has counted all those handed down at first instance. This would explain OVD-Info's count for 2024 being higher than that of the Judicial Department.



In 2025, former local government deputies **Ilya Azar**, **Ilya Glek**, **Sergei Vlasov**, and **Elena Rusakova** were each sentenced in absentia to four years in a penal colony in 2025 on charges of organising the activities of an 'undesirable organisation.' They were sentenced as part of the prosecution of [Deputies of Peaceful Russia](#). Another sentence was [handed down](#) in absentia to the editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta Evropa, Kirill Martynov. He was sentenced to six years' imprisonment.

2.4.2. General trends in prosecutions on charges of links to extremist groups and organisations

Twelve new organisations were added to the [list of extremist organisations](#) in 2025. Thirteen were added in 2024, although that figure included 55 'structural units of the Anti-Russian Separatist Movement' that were added as a single item. Three organisations were added in 2023, and 12 in 2022.

A precedent was set in 2024 of designating as extremist various 'associations' made up of multiple individuals engaged in a joint business or economic enterprise, or in some cases a commercial company. The authorities continued building upon this precedent in 2025, with 75% of new extremist organisations (8 of 12) being this type of association.

DESIGNATING BUSINESS OWNERS AS EXTREMIST ORGANISATIONS; DESIGNATING THE ACTIVITIES OF COMMERCIAL ORGANISATIONS EXTREMIST AND CONFISCATING THEIR PROPERTY

As we have indicated, the trend of designating 'associations' made up of multiple individuals linked by joint commercial activity as extremist organisations continued and intensified in 2025. One example is the [beneficiaries of the Ukrainian vodka company Bayadera Group](#), **Natalia Bondareva**, **Svyatoslav Nechitailo**, and **Yuri Moklyak**, designated as such an 'association.' The Ukrainian businessmen and brothers **Vladimir** and **Anatoly Drobotov** were designated another extremist organisation.

Donetsk oligarch **Rinat Akhmetov** was included on the list for the second time, having first [been listed](#) along with other Ukrainian businesspeople at the end of 2024. An 'association' made up of another Ukrainian oligarch, **Ihor Kolomoyskyi**, and his business partner, **Pavel Shitov**, was designated extremist by a court. [According to the Prosecutor General's Office](#), Kolomoyskyi, Shitov, and the London-registered company JKC Oil & Gas Limited belonged to the same extremist group which began its activities in 2014 after the '*unconstitutional coup in Kyiv*', was of a '*pronounced anti-Russian character*', and financed the activities of Ukrainian nationalist Azov, Aidar, Dnipro, Luhansk, and Shakhtersk battalions.

The list of extremist organisations was also expanded to include an 'association' made up of the founder of the holding company Global Spirits and the vodka brand Khortytsia, [Evgeniy Chernyak](#), and his business partners, as well as an 'association' that includes another businessman, [Oleksandr Hereha](#), the founder and co-owner of a major Ukrainian chain of home improvement stores and hypermarkets.



Russian businesspeople were also added to the list of extremist organisations. At the end of 2024, an 'association' was added to the list consisting of [Yury Shefler](#), founder of the international alcohol consortium SPI Group, and the companies linked to him, which are registered in Luxembourg.

The only precedent thus far for designating individuals as belonging to an 'extremist organisation' on the basis of family ties rather than shared commercial activity involves the ruling related to husband and wife **Aleksandr** and **Lidiya Nevzorov**. They were added to the Ministry of Justice's list on 21 March 2025 on the basis of [court rulings handed down in 2024](#). All their assets were confiscated by the state.

In each of these cases, the grounds for designating the organisation extremist were allegations of financing the Ukrainian armed forces and affiliated entities. In several instances, criminal cases were opened on charges of financing terrorist activity (Art. 205.1, Part 1[a], CC RF).

The process of designating businesspeople and their associated commercial entities as 'extremist organisations' has involved the seizure of their business assets within Russia, which are then transferred to the Federal Agency for State Property Management (Rosimushchestvo). As examples, see the following court rulings handed down in 2025 in response to lawsuits filed by the Prosecutor General's Office:⁶⁵

1. [Denis Shtengelov](#), a Tomsk-based businessman and Ukrainian citizen, and his father **Nikolai Shtengelov**; their assets in Russia included KDV Group, a food company that owns brands including Kirieshki, Yashkino, Babkiny Semechki, Calve, and Baltimore

2. **Aleksandr Zaitsev**, **Margarita Zaitseva**, **Aleksandr Vasiliev**, and **Sergei Shmarov**, [owners of the Tambov-based mobile operator Lanta](#)

3. [Rizhskai Khleb \(Riga Bread\)](#), a bread manufacturer

4. **Victor Kislyi** and **Malik Khatazhayev**, who [own](#) the companies Wargaming and Lesta, respectively

5. former State Duma deputy [Magomed Gadzhiyev](#) and his relatives (whose assets worth over 2 billion roubles were confiscated)

According to anti-corruption expert and former director of Transparency International Russia [Ilya Shumanov](#), *'the value of assets confiscated by the state on grounds of extremism amounts, by the most conservative estimates, to over 200 billion roubles.'*

65 Almost all the 'associations' listed below were added to the list of extremist organisations in 2026.



In addition to commercial 'associations', the [Omsk Slavic Union](#), a nationalist 'informal youth organisation,' and [Kiborgi \(Cyborgs\)](#), an association of football fans from Tula, were designated extremist. **Mikhail Zaitsev**, the founder of the Omsk Slavic Union, was sentenced in early 2025 to 18 months' imprisonment on charges of creating an extremist group (Art. 282.1, Part 1, CC RF).

Perhaps the most high-profile ruling was the Supreme Court's decision of 23 July 2025 that designated the '[International Satanist Movement](#)' extremist without disclosing or publishing its reasoning. The case was heard by Judge Oleg Nefedov in camera. The ruling is yet another example of the criminalisation in Russia of the activities of an organisation that does not exist.⁶⁶ Following the designation of the International Satanist Movement as an extremist organisation, the [first prosecutions](#) have already been brought, thus far involving administrative-law charges under the article prohibiting the display of banned symbols or paraphernalia (Art. 20.3 CAO RF):

1. In Kurgan in August 2025, the organiser of a beauty contest was [fined](#) 1,000 roubles for posting images with a satanist symbol on Vkontakte

2. In September, a 19-year-old woman from Zelenograd was reported to have been [fined 2,000 rubles](#) for images of a pentagram and the Leviathan cross on her jacket

3. In December, a 36-year-old Moscow resident was [fined](#) 15,000 roubles for images on Vkontakte depicting a pentagram and an inverted cross

On 31 October 2025, law enforcement officials [shut down the annual Nekrokomikkon](#) festival in St. Petersburg following a complaint by Orthodox activists from the Sorok Sorokov movement alleging the '*involvement of minors in the International Satanist Movement*.' The festival's organiser, **Aleksei Samsonov**, was charged with violating the rules governing foreign citizens staying in Russia (Art. 18.8, Part 3[a], CAO RF). A court ruled he should be expelled from Russia.

The final organisation added to the Ministry of Justice's list in 2025 was the international religious movement [AllatRa](#). The General Prosecutor's Office designated this movement an 'undesirable organisation' in 2023.

On 15 December 2025, in a closed court session, Moscow's Tverskoi district court [granted the Prosecutor General's claim](#) to designate the art performance group Pussy Riot an extremist organisation. The ruling went into effect on 27 February 2025.

Based on our data, politically motivated charges of involvement in an extremist group (Art. 282.1 CC RF) were brought against two people in 2025, which is several times lower than in 2024 and 2023, when there were 21 and 36 cases, respectively. We are also aware of 16 individuals convicted in politically motivated prosecutions on such charges in 2025, which is higher than the numbers in 2024 and 2023 (six and 21 individuals, respectively).

66 In 2023, the same judge, Oleg Nefedov, designated the 'International Public LGBT Movement and its structural subdivisions' as extremist, and in 2024 he granted the Ministry of Justice's request to designate the 'International Public Movement for the Destruction of Russia's Multinational Unity and Territorial Integrity, the Anti-Russian Separatist Movement', and its 55 'structural subdivisions' as extremist.



According to the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, a total of 24 individuals were convicted of this offence in 2024, 58 people in 2023, and 34 people in 2022. In the first half of 2025, seven people were convicted.

The average prison sentence handed down in 2025 in politically motivated cases involving both organising and participating in an extremist group was four years and five months. The shortest sentence was two years, and the longest was five and a half.

Far more criminal prosecutions and convictions were recorded for the offence of organising the activities of an extremist organisation and participating in such an organisation (Art. 282.2 CC RF). According to our data, 76 politically motivated criminal cases were brought for this offence in 2025. Ninety-eight such cases were brought in 2024, and 148 were brought in 2023. However, the number of prosecutions about which we know that were brought in 2025 may increase significantly in the coming months.

According to the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court, 233 people were convicted under Article 282.2 CC RF in the first half of 2025 alone, while there were only 317 in the entirety of 2024. This may indicate an upward trend.⁶⁷

Defendants in prosecutions recorded by our project for participation in extremist organisations in 2025 were mostly Jehovah's Witnesses (see Chapter 2.4.6). There were 50 such defendants. Individuals were also prosecuted on charges of ties to other notable groups. Nine individuals were prosecuted for ties to the 'International Public LGBT Movement' (see Chapter 2.4.4) and five were prosecuted in relation to the Citizens of the USSR movement.

According to our data, the average prison sentence handed down in 2025 in politically motivated prosecutions for links to extremist organisations was four and a half years. The shortest term was two years, and the longest was seven years.

We highlight below several notable prosecutions under Art. 282.1 CC RF and Art. 282.2 CC RF in 2025.

The case of the [ANTI PYTKI \(Anti Torture\)_project](#)

Five individuals from various regions in Russia have been held on remand since the autumn of 2024 in connection with the case involving the 'ANTI PYTKI extremist group.' Another person is under house arrest. They have all been accused of involving other individuals in the activities of an extremist group (Art. 282.1, Part 1[a], CC RF).

According to the prosecution, by speaking out about torture and crackdowns in prisons, the defendants published 'information intended to incite social hatred and hostility towards various categories of citizens and members of law enforcement.' In Ekaterinburg in June 2025, [another criminal case](#) was brought against one of the defendants, [Ksenia Garina](#), on charges of incitement to disrupt the operation of the penal colony (Art. 321, Part 3, CC RF and Art. 33, Part 4, CC RF) and incitement of assault (Art. 33, Part 4, CC RF and Art. 116, CC RF).

67

In 2022, 259 people were convicted under Art. 282.2 CC RF, and 320 in 2023.



The investigative authorities claim Garina used social media posts to incite prisoners to attack so-called 'activists,' who were inmates cooperating with the prison authorities.

Garina was to be released on 10 December 2025, since the investigative authorities did not request an extension of her custody. However, upon exiting the remand prison she was arrested on new [charges](#) of financing extremist activity (Art 282.3, Part 1, CC RF) over donations totalling 993 roubles to **Roman Rugevich**, founder of the ANTI PYTKI project. According to Garina, this money was intended to be used to cover the costs of sending letters to her husband in prison.

The prosecution of Nataliya Ignatyeva and Marina Tokareva for participating in the VOLYA party

On 10 March 2025, a court in Komsomolsk-on-Amur found **Nataliya Ignatyeva** guilty of participating in the activities of an extremist organisation (Art. 282.2, Part 2, CC RF) and involving others in the activities of an extremist organisation (Art. 282.2, Part 1.1, CC RF). She was sentenced to five and a half years in a general regime penal colony. The other defendant [in this criminal case](#), **Marina Tokareva**, was charged only with participating in an extremist organisation, and was sentenced to two and a half years' imprisonment.

Tokareva has three grandchildren, aged two, four, and six, who were in her care. On the day the verdict was handed down, they were removed by child protection services. Both women were charged with continuing the activities of an 'extremist organisation, the VOLYA party', which is associated with Svetlana Lada-Rus (also known as Peunova).⁶⁸ The criminal prosecution was based on the testimony of two FSB agents who covertly filmed meetings of civil society activists in Komsomolsk-on-Amur where, among other things, Lada-Rus's books were discussed.

68 The VOLYA party grew out of the religious group led by Lada-Rus (also known as Peunova). At the core of Peunova's mythology is the idea of a potential apocalypse linked to the arrival of reptilians from the planet Nibiru on Earth. The VOLYA party has sharply criticized the authorities, spoken out in favour of nationalising the economy and revisiting the results of privatisation, and promised to raise salaries and pensions. Supporters of the movement also tend to espouse nationalism and antisemitism based on conspiracy theories. Lada-Rus has also claimed that Russia has long been ruled not by the real Vladimir Putin, but by lookalikes. The party has called for the 'fake' Putin to be impeached and Lada-Rus to be made the president. The Russian Supreme Court designated VOLYA an extremist organisation in 2016. The Ministry of Justice requested that VOLYA be designated an extremist organisation on grounds of the party's distribution of banned materials, including the leaflets 'We do not trust this government!', 'Choose openly!', and 'An appeal to the servicemen of the Russian army.'



The prosecution of the Natsdem Telegram channel

On 6 October 2025, Sergiev Posad town court in Moscow region [convicted](#) those charged in the case involving the Natsdem Telegram channel: **Kirill Nikulenkov** was sentenced to three and a half years in a general regime penal colony, and **Georgy Paramoshin** was sentenced to eight years. They were found guilty of creating and leading an extremist group (Art. 282.1, Part 1, CC RF). The other defendants, **Mikhail Noskov** and Sergei Litvinov were found guilty of participating in an extremist group (Art. 282.1, Part 2, CC RF) and given suspended sentences.

The Natsdem Telegram channel was designated as an extremist group. All those convicted were also charged with several counts of incitement of hatred online (Art. 282.2, Part 2, CC RF) and making calls online to engage in extremism (Art. 280, Part 2, CC RF). It [emerged](#) at one of the court sessions that a fellow resident of the dormitory of the Financial University recorded Paramoshin's private conversations about politics and reported him to the FSB.

2.4.3. General trends in prosecutions on charges related to terrorist groups and organisations

In 2025, seven additions were made to the FSB's federal list of terrorist organisations. Three of them were Ukrainian paramilitary groups:

1. The [2nd Special Purpose Battalion 'Donbas'](#) in the 15th Sloviansk Regiment of the Ukrainian National Guard (military unit 3035)

2. The 'national liberation movement' [Right Sector](#) and its component groups Right Youth and the 'volunteer Ukrainian corps' Right Sector

3. The [Kastuś Kalinoŭski Regiment](#)

In addition, the antifascist rock band from Kaluga [Antisocial Distancing](#), which broke up several years ago, was added to the list, both as a 'civil society organisation' and as a 'rock band' association. The [People's Communist Movement](#) and the [Free Russia Forum](#) were also designated terrorist organisations.

In all the above cases, except that of Right Sector, the legal grounds for inclusion in the list were convictions handed down to individuals for violations of the law against organising, and participating in, a terrorist group (Art. 205.4 CC RF), not separate court rulings for the groups themselves.



For example, the court ruling that added the Free Russia Forum to the list was the conviction of the prominent Soviet and Russian dissident [Aleksandr Skobov](#). The grounds for banning these organisations (with the exception of Antisocial Distancing) were activities supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression.

The prosecution of Alexandr Skobov



On 21 March 2025, the First Western District Military Court sentenced 67-year-old former Soviet dissident [Aleksandr Skobov](#) to 16 years' imprisonment on charges of participating in a terrorist group (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF) and justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF). The investigative authorities and court deemed the [Free Russia Forum](#) a terrorist group. The Forum is based in Lithuania and regularly holds conferences of the Russian opposition. Skobov was charged with justifying terrorism for posts on his Telegram channel, including posts about the Crimean Bridge explosion and the assassination of the Z-propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky.

In addition, the Russian Supreme Court issued two rulings at the end of 2025 that only entered into legal force in 2026. The [Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian SFSR](#), an association of former Russian opposition deputies at various levels led by **Ilya Ponomarev**, was designated a terrorist organisation, as well as the American NGO the [Anti-Corruption Foundation International, Inc. \(ACF International\)](#), which was created by Aleksei Navalny's supporters after the Anti-Corruption Foundation was banned in Russia.

In March 2026, the [Anti-War Committee of Russia](#) was designated a terrorist organisation. Several months before this ruling, however, on 14 October 2025, [it emerged](#) that the FSB had opened a criminal case against 23 members of the Anti-War Committee on charges of creating and participating in a terrorist group (Art. 205.4, Parts 1 & 2, CC RF) and forcible seizure of power (Art. 278 CC RF). The basis for the charges was the [Berlin Declaration](#), adopted in 2023 by Russian democratic forces, as well as the announcement of the creation of a platform for Russian democratic forces within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

[The Russian Supreme Court's ruling](#) on 17 April 2025 suspending the ban on the activities of the Taliban in Russia, which had been in place since 2003, set a precedent. The Prosecutor General's Office, which filed the claim in court, cited as grounds for removing the Taliban from the list of terrorist groups as the '*cessation of activities aimed at promoting, justifying, and supporting terrorism*', as well as the fact that '*the movement has not committed terrorism-related crimes against Russia's interests*.' The legal mechanism of a 'temporary suspension of the ban on the activities of a group' included in the list of terrorist organisations became possible after [amendments to federal legislation](#) went into effect. The adoption of the amendments was linked to the Russian authorities' wish to collaborate with the Taliban, who are in power in Afghanistan.



According to our current data, 56 criminal prosecutions were initiated in 2025 on charges of organising and participating in a terrorist group (Art. 205.4 CC RF), which is lower than each of the preceding three years.⁶⁹ However, we expect that information about prosecutions initiated in 2025 will continue to emerge for quite some time, and the number will increase.

More than half (at least 30) of the criminal prosecutions brought on these charges in 2025 took place in the occupied territories of mainland Ukraine. In 2025 prosecutions began against at least 31 people, 29 of whom are prisoners of war, on charges of participation in the Azov Battalion.

Based on our information, 116 people were convicted of this offence in 2025. This is higher than in previous years. We know of 29 convictions in 2023, and 85 in 2024. According to the [Judicial Department](#) of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, 58 people were convicted of this offence in 2023, and 88 in 2024.

The average prison sentence handed down in 2025 for organising a terrorist group and participating in it was nine years and three months. The shortest sentence was five years and two months, and the longest was 18 years.

The verdict in the Belaya Mast case was unusual and possibly set a precedent.

The prosecution of Belaya Mast (White Order)

On 2 September 2025, the Second Western District Military Court handed down sentences to five members of the [Belaya Mast](#) group. The group's founder, 33-year-old [Artyom Tsepp](#) from Orel, was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment.⁷⁰ The remaining defendants were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from six years and two months to 15 years, on charges that included participation in a terrorist group.

According to the prosecution, the Belaya Mast members '*formed a group in order to promote and justify terrorism.*' One way they '*achieved their criminal goals*', according to the investigative authorities, was by supporting far-right prisoners. They called them '*prisoners of conscience*' and collected donations for them, including by selling badges and clothing bearing the group's logo. The defendants created pages for Belaya Mast on social media, where they '*lionized and idealized "white neo-Nazi heroes," justified their crimes, and called for people to follow in their footsteps.*' Some Belaya Mast content could in fact be viewed as propaganda for xenophobic violence, but the security forces have not limited their prosecutions to specific statements that have been made; instead, they have designated the organisation as a whole (which provided legal humanitarian aid to far-right prisoners) as a terrorist group.

69 In 2022, there were 97 prosecutions, 72 in 2023, and 138 in 2024.

70 Tsepp was found guilty of organising a terrorist group (Art. 205.4, Part 1, CC RF), making calls to engage in extremism (Art. 280, Part 2, CC RF), making calls to engage in terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF), and inciting national hatred and enmity as part of a group (Art. 282, Part 2[c], CC RF).



Similar logic could be used against any group that supports people convicted on 'terrorism' charges, such as a group that publishes prisoners' letters that law enforcement officials deem to contain 'terrorism propaganda.'

Defendants in the Belaya Mast case include [Nikolai Korolev](#), serving a life sentence in connection with the involvement of the Spas group in the Cherkizovsky market bombing, and his wife, **Veronika Koroleva**. Koroleva was found to be a participant in Belaya Mast and sentenced to 11 years in a penal colony for passing on letters from her husband for publication.

Based on our data, cases were brought against 110 people in 2025 on charges of organising the activities of a terrorist organisation and participating in such an organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF). This number may also increase significantly in the future. An earlier trend indicated a steady increase in the number of new prosecutions under Art. 205.5 CC RF. Seventy individuals were prosecuted for related offences in 2022, 84 in 2023, and 171 in 2024.

According to our data, 153 people were convicted under Art. 205.5 CC RF, more than twice as many as in 2024 when we recorded 70 convictions. Our figures for this offence are lower than those of the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. According to official statistics, 146 people were convicted in 2024 for participation in a terrorist group. By analogy, it can be assumed that far more people were convicted in 2025 under Article 205.5 CC RF than the 153 of which we are aware.

According to our data, the regions with the largest share of criminal prosecutions under this article in 2025 were Krasnodar region and Moscow city, which registered 12 cases each. Another 12 were brought in the occupied territories (eight in Crimea and four in Donetsk region) and eight were brought in Belgorod region.

In 2025, the most common charges brought under the article on organising, and participating in, the activities of a terrorist organisation were for involvement in:

- The Free Russia Legion: 21
- The Russian Volunteer Corps: 16
- Hizb ut-Tahrir: 12
- The Azov Battalion: 5

The average prison sentence imposed under Article 205.5 CC RF in 2025 was 11 years and seven months. The shortest sentence was five years, and the longest was 14.



2.4.4. Criminal prosecutions on charges of participating in Ukrainian armed groups and pro-Ukraine groups

As shown in Chapter 2.4.3, charges of participation in Ukrainian armed groups account for a significant part of the prosecutions related to terrorist groups and organisations. Since the Supreme Court's rulings designating the Free Russia Legion, the Russian Volunteer Corps, and the Azov Battalion as terrorist organisations, law enforcement agencies have been able to churn out cases alleging affiliation with these organisations.

When it comes to attempts to join the Russian Volunteer Corps or the Free Russia Legion in order to fight for Ukraine, charges in these types of cases are often for inchoate crimes (planning a crime, Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF, or attempting a crime, Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF). Even an exchange of messages between a [17-year-old boy from Kursk](#) and a person whom the investigators allege to be a representative of the Russian Volunteer Corps was considered 'preparation to join the organisation,' despite the fact that the member of the Russian Volunteer Corps told the teenager that he could only be admitted once he had reached the age of maturity. In December 2025, the Second Western District Military Court sentenced the teenager to seven years in a juvenile correctional facility.

If any actions are carried out on Russian territory 'on the instructions of' one of these units, the prosecution treats them as a completed crime.

In many cases, defendants are also charged with treason, which carries a more severe penalty. Overall, the factual allegations in cases involving charges under both Article 205.5 CC RF and Art. 272 CC RF differ little from those involving Art. 205.5 CC RF alone.

These include prosecutions for the transfer of military information and attempts to join the Ukrainian armed forces.

The prosecution of Dmitry Levin



On 6 March 2025, the Southern Military District Court sentenced 22-year-old college student [Dmitry Levin](#) from Novorossiisk to 15 years' imprisonment.⁷¹ According to the prosecution, Levin established contact with representatives of Ukraine's military intelligence and the Russian Volunteer Corps and passed on information to them about military ships and other facilities in Novorossiisk.

Levin was born in Horlivka, a city in Donetsk region, and moved with his parents to Novorossiisk after fighting broke out in Donetsk in June 2014. He obtained Russian citizenship in 2019.

71 Levin was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF) and participating in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF).



The verdict stated that Levin had written comments on social media criticising the actions of the Russian army in Ukraine, refused to attend college classes *'about the symbols of the Russian Federation' and 'the reasons for conducting the Special Military Operation'*, and wrote in an explanatory note to the college administration *'that he did not want to listen to propaganda [...] and pretend to support Russia's actions.'*

The prosecution of Vera Sidorkina



On 20 June 2025, the Central District Military Court sentenced 49-year-old [Vera Sidorkina](#) to 18 years in a general regime penal colony. Sidorkina worked in a florist shop and lived in Yoshkar-Ola in Mari El Republic. She was found guilty of attempting to join the Free Russia Legion as a medical or support worker. According to the investigative authorities, she filled out and submitted an application form for membership and attempted to leave Russia 'by covert means.' Furthermore, Sidorkina allegedly sent photographs to the Free Russia Legion, presumably of one of Yoshkar-Ola's military factories.⁷²

In 2022, Sidorkina was convicted on two occasions of the administrative-law offence of discrediting the Russian army, including by calling for unauthorized demonstrations (Art. 20.3.3, Parts 1 & 2, CAO RF). The Mari El Prosecutor's Office wrote that in 2023, she attempted to leave Russia with her underage daughter, but the FSB border service prevented them from doing so. (The Prosecutor's Office did not specify the grounds on which they were barred from leaving.) Sidorkina was detained on criminal charges later, in the spring of 2024, in Yoshkar-Ola.

Some of the convictions on charges of both treason and terrorism involve transfers of money to Russian Volunteer Corps and Free Russia Legion accounts. Such donations are treated as financing terrorism (Art. 205.5, Part 1.1, CC RF). One example is that of [Ruslan Shadiev](#), an engineer from the Russian Federal Nuclear Centre in Sarov, Nizhny Novgorod region, sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment for sending the equivalent of 1,200 roubles in cryptocurrency.⁷³

The 'assignments' given by the Free Russia Legion or the Russian Volunteer Corps can include arson attacks or bombings on Russian territory. In such cases, those involved also faced charges of sabotage (Art. 281 CC RF) or committing acts of terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF) in addition to treason and participating in a terrorist organisation.

72 Sidorkina was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF) and attempting to participate in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art 205.5, Part 2, CC RF).

73 Shadiev was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF) and financing terrorism (Art 205.1, Part 1.1, CC RF).



The prosecution of the Melnikov brothers and Yury Mikheev

On 18 February 2025, the Second Western District Military Court sentenced 20-year-old [Matvei Melnikov](#) to 20 years' imprisonment, his twin brother [Timofei](#) to 19 years, and 19-year-old [Yury Mikheev](#) to seven years. All three were [found guilty](#) of preparing an arson attack on a military unit in the Dmitrovsky district of Moscow region. According to the investigative authorities, the Melnikov brothers were acting on instructions from the Free Russia Legion and Ukrainian intelligence agencies.⁷⁴

The prosecution for the attempted arson attack on Putin's campaign headquarters in Barnaul

On 5 March 2025, the Second Eastern District Military Court [convicted](#) Novosibirsk region residents [Sergei Dementyev](#), [Artem Zhilenkov](#), and [Dmitry Rodkin](#) on a charge of attempted arson of Vladimir Putin's campaign headquarters in Barnaul ahead of the 2024 presidential election. According to the investigative authorities, the young men were carrying out an 'assignment' from handlers from the Free Russia Legion and were planning to attack the headquarters with Molotov cocktails before they were detained 'just outside the headquarters building.' Dementyev, who is 23, was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment, 26-year-old Zhilenkov to 17 years, and 18-year-old Rodkin to 16 years.⁷⁵

Often, charges for particularly serious offences are based not on military or sabotage-related assistance to Ukrainian units, but simply on painting graffiti or putting up flyers 'on the instructions of' a member of a Ukrainian unit.

⁷⁴ All three defendants were found guilty of preparing sabotage (Art. 30, Part 1[a,c], CC RF in conjunction with Art. 281, Part 2, CC RF); the Melnikov brothers were also charged with participating in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF) and treason (Art. 275 CC RF).

⁷⁵ All three were found guilty of attempting to commit a terrorist act as part of a group acting by prior agreement (Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF), treason (Art. 275 CC RF), participation in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF), and undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF); Dementyev and Zhilenkov were also found guilty of financing terrorism (Art. 205.1, Part 1.1, CC RF).



The prosecution of Sergei Veselov (from Elektrostal)⁷⁶



On 17 May 2025, Elektrostal resident [Sergei Veselov](#) was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment. He was found guilty of participating in the activities of a terrorist organisation for writing a [message](#) on a bus stop, allegedly at the direction of a handler from the Free Russia Legion. The message read, 'The Russian army has suffered approximately 500,000 casualties.' This message served as grounds for a charge of distributing fake news about the Russian army motivated by political hatred (Art. 207.3, Part 2[d], CC RF) and vandalism motivated by political hatred (Art. 214, Part 2, CC RF).

Prosecutions for alleged involvement in the Azov Battalion have been primarily brought against Ukrainian prisoners of war (see Chapter 2.5) and rarely against Russian citizens. That said, there have been some cases in which Russians were accused of ties to the Azov Battalion.

The prosecution of four Dagestan residents for participation in the Azov Battalion

Since February 2025, the Southern Military District Court has been hearing a criminal [case](#) against four young men from the Republic of Dagestan: [Magomed Dzhabatkhonov](#), [Khadzhimurad Abdullayev](#), [Ruslan Akkaev](#), and [Razhab Nazarov](#).⁷⁷ Taken together, the charges against them carry a potential sentence of life imprisonment. According to the investigative authorities, the young men '*promoted the idea of National Socialism, justified the terrorist activity of the Ukrainian nationalist Azov Battalion, and condemned Russia's Special Military Operation. They also possessed military badges with the Ukrainian flag and stickers with portraits of Nazi ideologues and symbols of the Azov military-terrorist organisation.*' The investigative authorities also claimed that the men were interested in paganism and black metal music and were preparing to attack a military unit in Makhachkala, for which they had purchased four flare guns they had converted into firearms.

All the defendants were detained 19 December 2022. They state that they were subjected to torture and forced to make false confessions. They have all subsequently retracted their confessions and denied their guilt.

⁷⁶ Our list of political prisoners also includes another Sergei Veselov from Shuya in Ivanovo region.

⁷⁷ The four men were charged with treason (Art. 275 CC RF), creating a terrorist organisation (Art 205.4, Part 1, CC RF), undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF), organising the activities of a terrorist group (Art. 205.5, Part 1, CC RF), illegal trafficking of firearms and ammunition as part of an organised group (Art. 222, Part 4, CC RF), creating an illegal armed group (Art. 208, Part 1, CC RF), and preparing a terrorist act as part of a group (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF).



Russian citizens accused of using force to resist the Russian authorities are as a rule charged with affiliation with an organisation that has already been designated as terrorist in Russia. Accordingly, prosecutions are brought under Art. 205.5 CC RF. Charges of creating a terrorist group (Art. 205.4 CC RF) are rare in such instances, although there have been cases in which defendants were charged not with joining an existing organisation, but with creating their own group.

The prosecution for a planned arson attack at a military unit in Balashikha

On 29 June 2025, the Second Western District Military Court sentenced five residents of Moscow city and Moscow region to lengthy terms of imprisonment. Twenty-one-year-old [Anton Khripko](#) received 19 years' imprisonment⁷⁸, while 23-year-old [Sergei Korkhov](#), 22-year-old [Ilya Karkas](#), and [Ivan Silin](#) were given 16 years, and [Leon Silashin](#), who is a minor, received 4 years.⁷⁹

The [charges](#) in this case concern the alleged planning of an arson attack on military equipment at a military base in Balashikha in Moscow region. According to the indictment, FSB agent Aleksandr Nemchikov infiltrated the group, posing as a supporter of far-right views and a special forces soldier with combat experience. The defence maintains that it was Nemchikov who urged the group members to carry out the arson attack against the military equipment. He allegedly conducted training on weapons handling and throwing Molotov cocktails, which he recorded on video.

Anton Khripko's brother, [Ivan](#), was convicted in a similar case. On 28 February 2025, Yaroslavl Regional Court sentenced him to 20 years' imprisonment and fined him 300,000 roubles on a charge of planting a homemade explosive device near a railway substation by the access tracks leading to a military base, '*on the instructions of Ukrainian intelligence agencies*'.⁸⁰

Criminal prosecutions for cooperating with Ukrainian army units often show signs of [entrapment](#) and falsification of evidence. In nearly all such cases, key evidence for the crime is an exchange of messages with a 'handler' from the Russian Volunteer Corps or the Free Russia Legion, found on the accused's mobile phone or computer.

78 Khripko was found guilty of creating a terrorist group (Art. 205.4, Part 1, CC RF), two counts of organising the training for terrorist activities (Art. 205.1, Part 4, CC RF), recruiting a minor into a criminal group, and committing an especially grave crime (Art. 150, Part 4, CC RF).

79 The aforementioned were charged with participating in a terrorist group (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF) and undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF).

80 Ivan Khripko was found guilty of attempted sabotage as part of a group acting by prior agreement, involving an attack on a military facility (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 281, Part 2[a,c], CC RF), treason (Art. 275 CC RF), undergoing training for sabotage activities (Art. 281.2 CC RF), and illegal manufacture of explosives (Art. 223.1, Part 1, CC RF).



The prosecution of Yury Sologub

In September 2025, a 59-year-old worker at an asphalt plant in Krasnoyarsk, [Yury Sologub](#), was sentenced to 23 years' imprisonment.⁸¹ Sologub was accused of corresponding with members of the Free Russia Legion and putting up three flyers in support of the group. No such correspondence was found on his phone, but the case file contained screenshots of an application he had filled out to join the Legion. Sologub most likely exchanged messages with Russian law enforcement officials who were posing as members of the group.

The prosecution of Ivan Kriukov



On 7 February 2025, the First Western District Military Court sentenced [Ivan Kriukov](#) of Leningrad region to 11 years' imprisonment, declaring him guilty of participating in the activities of the Free Russia Legion. According to the prosecution, Kriukov filled out applications to join the Legion and carried out two assignments, namely, during the 2024 presidential election he wrote 'The Russian Volunteer Corps is near' on his ballot and sent 'handlers' pictures and diagrams of a power transmission line. The Free Russia Legion and Russian Volunteer Corps operate independently from one another, so it is unlikely that one would have given the assignment to advertise the other. This suggests a potential entrapment by the intelligence agencies.

81 Sologub was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF), public calls to engage in terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 1, CC RF), and participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF).



2.4.5. Prosecutions of the LGBTQ+ community

A law banning 'LGBT propaganda' among minors has been in effect in Russia since 2013. This law bans positive representations of queer people in materials intended for people under 18 years of age. Violation of the ban has resulted in convictions under administrative law (Art. 6.21 CAO RF). This law has been criticised by the [European Court of Human Rights](#) and the [UN Human Rights Committee](#), which called it discriminatory, a violation of freedom of expression, and harmful to children.

Since Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the already dire human rights situation in Russia, particularly regarding the rights of the queer community, has further deteriorated. Against the backdrop of the war, Russian lawmakers have begun an active 'spiritual campaign against the West', which has resulted in additional restrictions on rights and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community. This led to a law, [passed](#) in November 2022, fully banning 'LGBT propaganda' in Russia, including among adults. The new law bans not just 'LGBT propaganda' but also showing minors '*nontraditional sexual orientations and (or) preferences*,' as well as information '*that could evoke in minors a desire for gender reassignment*.' The law went into effect in December 2022.

Since then, there has effectively been a ban in Russia on any mention of LGBTQ+ individuals in movies, literature, or any other sphere of public life. If found in violation of this law, legal entities such as book publishers and streaming services can be fined millions of roubles and have their operations suspended. State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin [said](#) that this law is intended to '*protect children and the country's future from the darkness being spread by the US and European countries*.'

In the summer of 2023, the State Duma [passed](#) a law banning gender transition. As a result, transgender individuals are no longer allowed to undergo medical transition procedures or change the gender marker on their official documents. The Russian Ministry of Health [did not support](#) this law, citing in a statement the risk of increased suicide as a result of the restrictions. Nevertheless, deputies voted unanimously in favour. The explanatory memorandum accompanying the bill [stated](#) that the practice of 'gender reassignment' was 'on the rise' in Russia, and that certificates of 'transsexuality' and 'gender reassignment' could be obtained at '*many private clinics across Russia*.' According to lawmakers, the bill was drafted to '*address the aforementioned issues*' and '*protect the institution of marriage as a union between a man and a woman*.'

Finally, on 30 November 2023, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation designated the non-existent 'international LGBT movement' extremist and banned its activities in the country. The ruling [stated](#) that this 'movement' '*threatens the demographic situation in the country, facilitates the collapse of society and the weakening of family ties, and harms people's moral well-being*.' Since then, affiliation with the LGBTQ+ community has carried the risk of criminal prosecution for organisation of activities of an extremist organisation or participation in the activities of such an organisation (Art. 282.2 CC RF) if law enforcement officers (who have the power to interpret the vaguely worded law arbitrarily and broadly) identify signs of a criminal offence.

According to our project data, since this ruling was issued, at least 14 individuals in seven regions have been arrested, while several dozen have been charged with participation in the 'LGBT movement.' We consider the Supreme Court's ruling unlawful, discriminatory, and a violation of human rights, and all those prosecuted solely for 'participation in or organisation of the activities of' the 'LGBT movement' to be a political prisoner.



CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS FOLLOWING RAIDS ON CLUBS

Immediately after the 'international LGBT movement' was designated extremist, police began raiding nightclubs in Russia. These raids all followed the same script. Law enforcement would storm a club and force some of those inside to lie face down on the floor and others to stand against a wall. People were beaten and humiliated. The raids were recorded on video and later published on Telegram channels and in reports by pro-government media outlets.

The exact number of such raids in Russia since the Supreme Court's ruling on the 'international LGBT movement' is unknown. In May 2025, journalists [wrote](#) that there had been at least 51 such raids.

In 2024, after these intimidation tactics had been played out several times, criminal prosecutions were brought against detained party attendees and club employees for organising the activities of an extremist organisation and participating in such activities (Art. 282.2, Parts 1 and 2, CC RF).

Table 38. Defendants in criminal prosecutions for involvement in the 'LGBT movement' following nightclub raids

LOCATION AND DATE	INDIVIDUAL PROSECUTED	STATUS OF PROSECUTION
Club Rose Orenburg 9 March 2024	Diana Kamilyanova club administrator	Detained 20 March and remanded in custody until, presumably, 14 August 2024. Then placed under house arrest, where she remains as of the time of writing. Trial underway.
	Aleksandr Klimov art director	On remand from 20 March to 29 May 2024. Subsequently placed under house arrest, where he remains as of the time of writing. Trial underway.
	Vyacheslav Khasanov club owner	On remand since 28 March 2024. Trial underway.
Black Clover Club Kirov 3 November 2024	Olga Potapova club owner	On remand from 3 December to 27 December. Subsequently placed under house arrest. Left Russia 28 November 2025.
	Andrei Vershinin drag artist	Placed under house arrest 3 December 2024. Duration unknown. Current pre-trial conditions unknown.
	N, drag artist	Current pre-trial conditions unknown.
	N, drag artist	Current pre-trial conditions unknown.
Tochka Club Chita 26 October 2024	Tatyana Zorina club owner	Under house arrest from 28 October 2024 to 26 August 2025. Subsequently released under certain restrictions. Sentenced on 24 March 2026 to four years' imprisonment and taken into custody in the courtroom.
Zebra Club Voronezh 22 November 2024	Ivan Bogdel club owner	Initially under house arrest (date unknown). On 29 November 2024, remanded in custody, where he remains as of the time of writing.
	N	Current pre-trial conditions unknown.
Unknown club Ulyanovsk December 2025	Ilya Neganov	Under house arrest since 4 December 2025.
	Drag artist	Under house arrest since 4 December 2025.
	Aleksandr Shurkin	
	N	Under house arrest since 4 December 2025.

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



In total, at least 13 defendants have been subject to prosecution following raids on clubs. Five are under house arrest, three are held on remand, and one has already received a prison sentence. The pre-trial conditions of four are unknown. One has left Russia.

THE PROSECUTION OF BOOK PUBLISHERS POPCORN BOOKS AND INDIVIDUUM

Some of the most high-profile prosecutions involving participation in the 'international LGBT movement' in 2025 have been those of employees of the book publishers Popcorn Books and Individuum. They were accused of publishing queer literature.

On the morning of 14 May 2025, in Moscow, the homes of more than 10 employees from these two companies were [searched](#). The following day, the court [placed](#) three employees affiliated with both publishers under house arrest: former director of sales [Pavel Ivanov](#), warehouse manager [Artyom Vakhlyayev](#), and executive [Dmitry Protopopov](#). All three were charged with organising the activities of an extremist organisation and participating in such activities using their official positions (Art. 282.2, Part 3, CC RF), a charge which carries a maximum sentence of 12 years' imprisonment. Law enforcement officials named as the formal basis for the case the distribution of more than 900 copies of books that '*promote LGBT ideology*.' The human rights project Department One [reported](#) that at least 10 novels published by Popcorn Books between 2019 and 2022 were mentioned in the case files.

In 2022, before the complete ban on 'LGBT propaganda' in Russia, Popcorn Books specialized in publishing queer literature, among other genres. It operated as an independent publishing house until 2023, when it was acquired, along with Individuum, by Russia's largest publishing group, Eksmo-AST.

Over the years, Popcorn Books has published such iconic queer books as *Call Me by Your Name* by André Aciman, *The Danish Girl* by David Ebershoff, *Lie with Me* by Philippe Besson, and *The Days of our Lives* by Mikita Franko. The last in this list describes the life of a teenager in a same-sex family in Russia. One of the most popular books Popcorn Books published was the novel *Pioneer Summer*, by Elena Malisova and Kateryna Silvanova, which tells the story of a romance between a teenager and a camp counsellor. The book came out in 2021 and was a bestseller, with over 200,000 copies printed. It also attracted much attention from pro-government commentators and State Duma deputies, who repeatedly [demanded](#) the text be [examined](#) for 'homosexual propaganda.'

OTHER PROSECUTIONS FOR LGBT AFFILIATION IN 2025

In total, according to our project data, there were at least 12 defendants in criminal prosecutions for participation in the 'LGBT movement' in 2025. This continues the trend set in 2024, when criminal cases were opened against at least 14 Russians.

In December 2025, the press office for the courts in Karachay-Cherkessia [reported](#) on the sentencing of a 50-year-old man charged with posting comments on LGBTQ+ topics. The court sentenced him to two and a half years' imprisonment under the law on participating in the activities of an extremist organisation (Art. 282.2, Part 2, CC RF).



According to the investigative authorities, the man joined a Telegram chat in 2024 *'as a supporter of the international "LGBT" movement'*, where he shared messages that *'exhibited the psychological characteristics of propaganda promoting non-traditional sexual relationships'* and ideas of *'permissiveness and moral depravity.'* His messages *'did not align with the spiritual and moral values of Russian society'*, a statement said. The man pleaded guilty.

This prosecution is linked to another, that of a 58-year-old resident of Vladikavkaz whose prosecution began a year earlier. In June 2024, a criminal charge was brought against this person for the same offence. According to the [investigative authorities](#), the person created a Telegram chat where the messages were shared that led to the conviction of the previous man. Moreover, the person from Vladikavkaz supposedly participated in the organisation of *'nontraditional intimate encounters'*, distributed pornography, and published *'content of an erotic nature.'* It is believed that on 25 June 2025, the court ordered him to undergo forced treatment (whether inpatient or outpatient is not known).⁸² Judging by Rosfinmonitoring's [registry](#), this individual may be **Igor Dmitriev** of Vladikavkaz.

In September 2025, Tula region resident **Pavel Ivaniuk** was [charged](#), also on the grounds of social media activity, with participating in the activities of an extremist organisation and distributing pornography online (Art. 242, Part 3[b], CC RF). According to law enforcement officials, he set up a Telegram channel in 2023, where he supposedly urged people to join the LGBTQ+ community. The investigative authorities also state that he distributed gay pornography. Ivaniuk was given a suspended sentence of two and a half years.

In November, five residents of Kaliningrad region, owners and managers of a massage parlour, were [charged](#) under the law that bans organising the activities of an extremist organisation (Art. 282.2, Part 1, CC RF). Criminal proceedings had been initiated earlier on charges of organising a criminal organisation (Art. 210 CC RF) and employing prostitutes (Art. 241 CC RF), as well as involving others in prostitution (Art. 240 CC RF). The charges were later expanded to include *'promoting the "LGBT movement".'* According to law enforcement officials, the defendants hosted a *'lesbian show'* at one of the salons and held several *'themed and practical "workshops"'* on same-sex relationships.

Several prosecutions were brought in absentia in 2025. In one such case, in June 2025 LGBTQ+ activist **Yaroslav Sirotkin** from Yaroslavl was [named](#) a defendant in a criminal case for participating in the activities of an extremist organisation. He was charged with posting 14 messages and videos *'with propaganda promoting nontraditional sexual relationships.'* At about the same time, law enforcement officers [brought](#) a criminal case against Omsk activist **Nikolai Rodkin**. The exact charge against him is unknown. Neither Sirotkin nor Rodkin lives in Russia.

In November 2025, Moscow's Golovinsky district court [handed down](#) its ruling in the high-profile case of the late **Andrei Kotov**, owner of the travel agency Men Travel. Kotov was posthumously found guilty of organising vacations for the gay community. In November 2024, Kotov was detained and remanded in custody on charges of organising the activities of, and participating in, the extremist 'LGBT movement' (Art 282.2, Parts 1 & 2, CC RF), as well as creating pornography with two or more minors under the age of 14 (Art. 242.2, Part 2[a,c] CC RF). On the charge of involvement with the 'LGBT movement,' Kotov was accused of organising tours and cruises for members of the LGBTQ+ community. He did not plead guilty and [said](#) he was beaten brutally at the time of his arrest. Almost immediately after Kotov arrived at the remand prison, he was placed in a punishment cell. On 29 December 2024, his lawyer [reported](#) he had died in solitary confinement. The investigator ruled the death a suicide.

82 Based on the case file, in addition to involvement in the activities of an extremist organisation, he was also charged with the unlawful production and circulation of pornographic material via the Internet (Art. 242, Part 3[b], CC RF).



According to our project data, at least 35 individuals linked to the queer community are currently being prosecuted (excluding cases against people outside Russia).⁸³ Twenty-two individuals are in prison. This suggests that, for now, prosecution of queer people in Russia is more targeted than widespread. However, we should note that the risk of prosecution for LGBTQ+ people has increased many times over in recent years. Organising activities for members of the community, participating in events, publishing literature, posting on social media, or even simply expressing oneself — any of these could attract the attention of law enforcement. Human Rights Watch has reported that at least 98 individuals [were implicated](#) in administrative-law prosecutions for displaying LGBT symbols (such as the rainbow flag) between January 2024 and May 2025. According to [data](#) from the Russian LGBT Network, in 2024 alone 30% of queer people in Russia faced threats because of the law banning 'LGBT propaganda.' This indicates that it is unsafe to demonstrate any link to the LGBTQ+ community in Russia.

2.4.6. Prosecutions related to Aleksei Navalny's organisations

In 2025, the prosecution of supporters of **Aleksei Navalny** and of others whom the security services deemed linked to Navalny's organisations continued. Politically motivated criminal prosecutions were brought against at least 115 of Navalny's supporters living in Russia.⁸⁴ This was more than three and a half times the number of defendants in such cases whose prosecution began in 2024 (31) and marked a record high since 2021.⁸⁵ Unlike in previous years, the main charges brought in such cases were not for involvement in 'extremist' organisations and groups, but for financing them, and this became one of the main repressive campaigns of the year.

PROSECUTIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT IN NAVALNY'S ORGANISATIONS

As already noted in previous reports, the mass prosecution of Navalny's supporters began following the decision of Moscow City Court on 9 June 2021 designating the Anti-Corruption Foundation, the Foundation for the Defence of Citizens' Rights and the 'Navalny's Headquarters' civil society movement as extremist organisations. Formally, involvement with Navalny's organisations was only criminalised after this ruling came into force.⁸⁶ From that date onwards, cases could be brought against members of the above-mentioned organisations under the corresponding criminal offence (Art. 282.2 CC RF).

83 Here we refer to prosecutions under all articles of the Criminal Code, not just Article 282.2 CC RF.

84 The figure as of mid-March 2026.

85 The prosecution of Aleksei Navalny's supporters was a recurring theme of repression in 2021. Following the crackdown on demonstrations in solidarity with the arrested politician and the detention of between 11,000 and 18,000 protesters, criminal cases were brought against at least 180 people.

86 The designation came into force on 4 August 2021 following an appeal.



Prosecutions for [membership of an extremist organisation](#) were relatively rare in 2025. For instance, on 13 February 2025 **Mikhail Sharygin**, a former member of the Nizhny Novgorod branch of the Yabloko party, [was sentenced](#) for this offence to three years' imprisonment in a general regime penal colony. On 22 July 2025 in Yoshkar-Ola, **Sergei Mamaev**, a civil society activist, was [detained](#) and subsequently remanded in custody. On 16 February 2026, he was [sentenced](#) to two years and eight months in a general regime penal colony.

In both cases, the defendants were charged with reposting news articles from media affiliated with the Anti-Corruption Foundation, rather than any actual involvement in the activities of Navalny's organisations. A civil society activist from Nizhny Novgorod, **Tatyana Arshinova**, was also [charged](#) with publishing material '*in support of Navalny or from the Anti-Corruption Foundation*,' as a result of which she was [remanded in custody](#) on 17 July 2025.⁸⁷

In 2025, we did not record any new criminal prosecutions on charges of participation in Navalny's 'underground campaign offices', whose members, in particular, painted opposition and anti-war graffiti. We provided detailed coverage of such cases in our [2023 report](#) (pp. 121–122).

The only conviction related to previously initiated criminal prosecutions of which we know cases was handed down against a 15-year-old from Kazan, **Sevastyas Sultanov**. In April 2025, Sultanov was [sentenced](#) to one year's probation on charges of vandalism motivated by political hatred (Art. 214, Part 2, CC RF).

As far back as November–December 2021, Russian law enforcement agencies had circumvented the ban on the retrospective application of the law criminalising participation in an extremist organisation, that is, on initiating criminal cases for involvement in Navalny's organisations prior to their official ban. They began to use the law on extremist groups (Art. 282.1 CC RF), which did not require a prior court ruling that the organisation's activities were unlawful. According to the investigative authorities, Navalny and others had formed an 'extremist group' no later than 2014. Even those of Navalny's associates, or activists from his regional campaign offices, who had ceased their activities after 9 June 2021 began to face criminal charges. The provision was also used to prosecute individuals accused of collaborating with the Anti-Corruption Foundation or 'Navalny's Campaign Offices' after 2021.

At least 46 individuals have been prosecuted in [in this way](#), although we are not aware of any new defendants within Russia having been charged since August 2024. Eighteen people were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, including **Aleksei Navalny**, who died in detention, as well as **Vadim Ostanin**, **Ksenia Fadeeva** and **Liliya Chanysheva**, who were released on 1 August 2024 as part of an international prisoner exchange; **Rustem Muliukov**, who was released on 12 November 2024 on health grounds; as well as **Artemy Perevozchikov** and **Alina Olekhovich**, who have served their sentences. A further three people were given suspended sentences.

Furthermore, at least 24 defendants prosecuted in this case for participation in the 'extremist group' established by Navalny are outside Russia and have been placed on a wanted list; most having been remanded in custody in absentia. The actual figure may be higher. We do not know the exact charges that led to staff and activists from Navalny's organisations being included on the list of those involved in extremist and terrorist activities maintained by Rosfinmonitoring. However, it is highly likely that most of them were included on this list on grounds of alleged involvement in the so-called 'extremist group.'

87 On 10 November 2025, a further criminal charge was brought against her, this time for membership of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF), on the grounds that she had allegedly corresponded with a 'handler' from the Free Russia Legion, and, on his instructions, was engaged in 'promoting' the symbols of the Free Russia Legion and 'discrediting' the army.



In 2025, three verdicts were handed down in previously initiated criminal cases. In January 2025, three of Navalny's lawyers were convicted (see Chapter 2.6.1). On 15 April, journalists **Antonina Favorskaya**, **Sergei Karelin**, **Konstantin Gabov** and **Artem Krieger** [were all sentenced](#) to terms of five and a half years' imprisonment in a general regime penal colony, following a trial in camera at Nagatinsky district court in Moscow. On 29 July, Kirovsky district court in Ufa [sentenced](#) another journalist, **Olga Komleva**, to 12 years' imprisonment.⁸⁸ We wrote in more detail about the [cases of the five journalists](#) accused of collaborating with the Anti-Corruption Foundation in last year's report. However, some important details of their cases only came to light in 2025. For example, it emerged that, in addition to being charged in relation to her reports from the trials of Aleksei Navalny, Favorskaya was also [charged with](#) 'assisting in the organisation of Aleksei Navalny's funeral,' which seems particularly outrageous.

PROSECUTIONS FOR FINANCING THE ANTI-CORRUPTION FOUNDATION

All the new prosecutions known to us bar five, relating to the prosecution of supporters of the Anti-Corruption Foundation. were initiated in 2025 solely for the offence of financing extremist activities (Art. 282.3, Part 1, CC RF).

The first three prosecutions we know of concerning donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation under this law were initiated in 2022. In 2023 and 2024, the number of cases known at the time was also relatively small, with 10 and 11 new defendants respectively. In 2025, prosecutions for funding the Anti-Corruption Foundation increased sharply both in terms of numbers and geographical scope. At least 110 individuals from 36 of Russia's regions (more than a third) were prosecuted.

Table 39. Regions with the highest number of new individuals prosecuted for funding the Anti-Corruption Foundation

	2025
REGION	NUMBER OF NEW DEFENDANTS
Moscow city	9
Sverdlovsk	8
St. Petersburg	5
Kaliningrad	5
Krasnodar	4
Krasnoyarsk	4

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

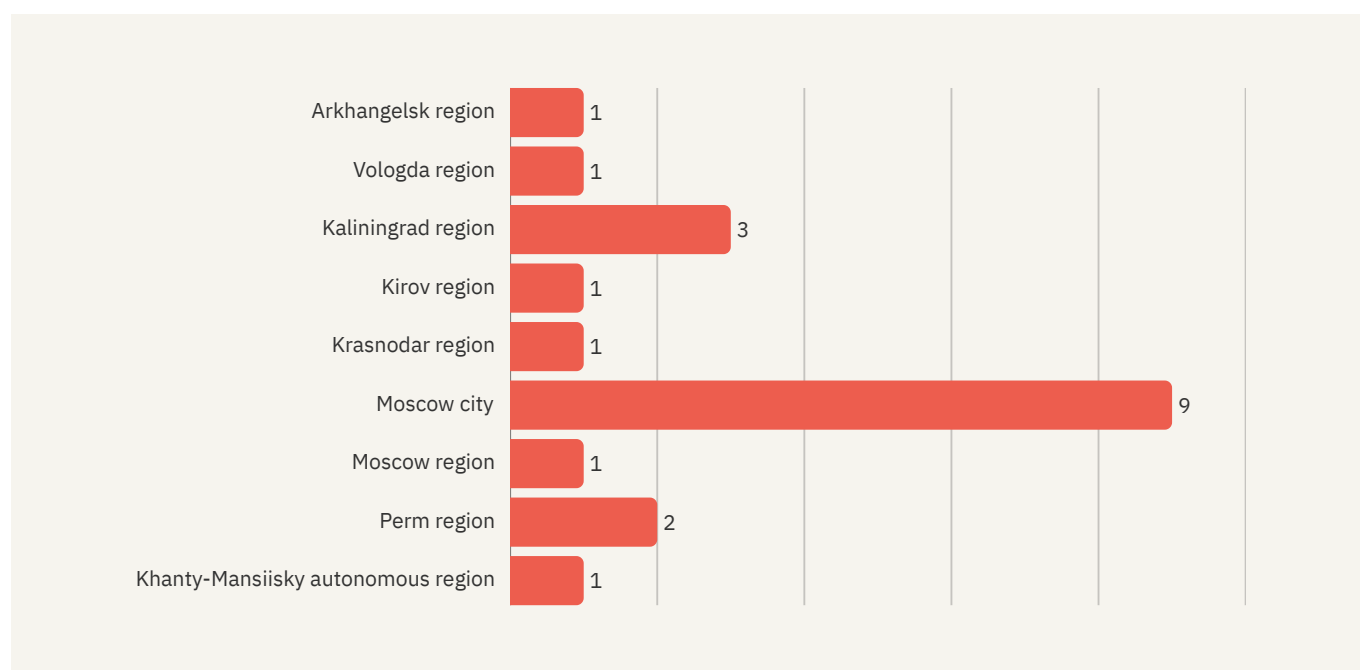
88 In addition to involvement in an extremist group, Komleva was charged with the dissemination of information known to be false about the Russian army by a group of individuals motivated by hatred (Art. 207.3, Part 2[b,e], CC RF).



There was also a sharp rise in 2025 in the number of known convictions relating to donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation. In December 2022, the first conviction was handed down against a person who had signed up to donate to the Foundation. In 2023, two individuals were convicted in such cases. In 2024, the figure rose to 74. However, we only became aware of the great majority of these cases in 2026. In 2025, at least 87 people were convicted.⁸⁹ According to Mediazona's estimates, [at least a third](#) of all criminal prosecutions for financing extremist activities in Russia are linked to charges relating to donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation.

In our review of prosecutions in cases linked to the Anti-Corruption Foundation, published on 4 August 2025 to mark the fourth anniversary of the Foundation's designation as an extremist organisation, [we noted](#) that *'the severity of pre-trial conditions and sentences in cases concerning the financing of the Anti-Corruption Foundation does not depend in any way on the amount of the donation, but rather on the region. Most sentences resulting in imprisonment were handed down in Moscow. For example, in Pskov, a fine of 350,000 roubles was imposed for donations totalling 7,000 roubles; in Nizhny Novgorod, a fine of 400,000 roubles was imposed for donations totalling 700 roubles; in Moscow, meanwhile, a father of five children, **Dmitry Marsov**, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for donations amounting to 1,500 roubles.'* This trend continued over the following five months of 2025.

Figure 7. Regions with the highest number of people deprived of liberty as of the end of 2025



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

Repression against individuals who donated to the Anti-Corruption Foundation continued into early 2026 and, by all accounts, is set to intensify. In February 2026, it was reported that such [criminal prosecutions](#) had been brought against a total of at least 145 people, 34 of which are not known to us. At that time, 19 people were in detention on charges of this kind.



OTHER FORMS OF PROSECUTION FOR SUPPORTING NAVALNY'S ORGANISATIONS

At times, prosecutions for supporting Navalny's organisations, including for funding their activities, have taken place even without any formal legal basis. For example, Lanta, a major Tambov-based internet service provider with an annual turnover of [more than half a billion roubles](#), was nationalised because the company's CEO, **Aleksandr Vasilyev**, [posted messages](#) in support of Navalny in 2014 and made donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation in 2020, at a time when the Foundation had not been designated an extremist organisation.

We do not rule out that, following the entry into force of the [ruling](#) of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation of 27 November 2025 designating the US-registered legal entity set up by the Anti-Corruption Foundation (Anti-Corruption Foundation International, Inc. or ACF International) as a terrorist organisation, the crackdown on its supporters will be further intensified. The designation will make possible criminal proceedings against them for 'terrorism' offences, some of which carry penalties of up to life imprisonment, for example, for financing terrorist activities (Art. 205.1, Part 1.1, CC RF), for justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF), and for participating in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF).

2.4.7. Prosecutions for religious belief

In 2025, the Russian security forces continued their practice of systematic prosecutions of followers of certain religious movements. The mechanisms behind all such prosecutions, relying on designations of religious organisations as 'undesirable,' extremist or terrorist, and invoking the relevant articles of the Criminal Code, are similar, even though the movements in question differ greatly from one another. Such repression is easily scaled up and applied in various regions of Russia and in the occupied territories of Ukraine. Members of Hizb ut-Tahrir and Jehovah's Witnesses are the most widely prosecuted.

PROSECUTION OF FOLLOWERS OF HIZB UT-TAHRIR

The Sunni political party Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami was founded in 1953 by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, a judge at the Sharia Court of Appeal in Jerusalem, with the aim of returning Muslims to an Islamic way of life in accordance with Sharia law and spreading the Islamic faith throughout the world through jihad. According to the party's philosophy, this is possible through the re-establishment of the Caliphate (a theocratic state uniting all Islamic countries). Neither the timing of the re-establishment of the Caliphate, nor the location that will become the 'focal point for spreading the Islamic call,' is known. Until the Caliphate is re-established, Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami rejects violent methods of struggle and focuses solely on spreading its ideas among Muslims. Should an Islamic state come into being, however, it is assumed that it will wage war as a 'practical method of the calling [da'wah]'.

In 2003, the Russian Supreme Court banned Hizb ut-Tahrir and designated it as a terrorist organisation on the grounds that it engages in 'militant Islamist propaganda combined with intolerance towards other religions.' The ruling makes no mention of terrorist attacks, assaults or violent crimes. In this regard, our project considers this ruling by the Supreme Court unfounded and the harsh repression of members of this organisation in Russia and in the occupied territories of Ukraine unjustified. In all cases known to us, the defendants were accused solely of studying the philosophy of political Islam, attending meetings and encouraging others to join them.



According to our project data, as of the end of 2025, at least 310 people had been imprisoned on charges of involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir. Of these, 183 individuals were accused of participating in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF), 118 individuals with organising the activities of such an organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 1, CC RF), and 106 with preparing for the violent seizure of power (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 278 CC RF).⁹⁰

Russian security forces interpret the strategic objective of Hizb ut-Tahrir (to come to power in a single country and, from there, begin building a global Caliphate) as preparation for a seizure of power. The organisation, however, has never regarded either Russia or Ukraine as a country from which the establishment of the Caliphate could begin.

Among other charges levelled against those prosecuted in such cases are aiding and abetting terrorist activities (Art. 205.1 CC RF) and incitement to terrorism using the internet (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF). Raising funds to print leaflets or publications in which Hizb ut-Tahrir is mentioned in a positive or neutral light may serve as grounds for additional charges.

Followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir are sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, with a minimum term of 10 years.⁹¹ The longest term of imprisonment handed down in this category of cases (27 years' imprisonment) was handed down to [Rais Mavliutov](#), who was convicted twice, in 2020 and 2023. Since late 2018, those convicted under Art. 205.5 CC RF have been required to serve part of their sentence in a cell-type prison.

In 2025, Russian security forces initiated criminal proceedings against 12 individuals for alleged involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir. In previous years, the scale of prosecutions was comparable, with proceedings brought against 13 individuals in 2022, against 14 in 2023, and against 16 in 2024. In 2025, sentences were handed down to 11 defendants.

The defendants in cases involving alleged links to Hizb ut-Tahrir are almost always men. In 2025, a criminal case was brought against a group of women in annexed Crimea. This was the first case on the peninsula in which Crimean Tatars were prosecuted on charges of belonging to a 'terrorist organisation,' and one of the few cases in which women have been prosecuted for alleged links to Hizb ut-Tahrir.

The prosecution of the women's Hizb ut-Tahrir cell in Crimea

In October, a mother of five from Bakhchisaray **Esma Nimetulaeva**, a student at Crimean Federal University **Elviza Alieva**, a shop assistant from the Sevastopol district **Fevziya Osmanova**, and the daughter of a Crimean imam **Nasiba Saidova**, were [remanded in custody](#). Nimetulaeva was charged with organising the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 1, CC RF); the other three suspects were charged with participating in such activities (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF).

⁹⁰ Suspects are often charged with several criminal offences at once.

⁹¹ Since 2016, under Art. 205.5 CC RF, it has not been possible to impose a sentence below the minimum term for that article. Under Art. 2025.5, Part 1, CC RF, the minimum term is 15 years' imprisonment; under Art. 2025.5, Part 2, CC RF, the minimum term is 10 years' imprisonment.



Some of those charged in cases involving alleged links to Hizb ut-Tahrir have been seriously ill. In the spring of 2025, **Aleksandr Sizikov**, who is blind and had been sentenced in 2024 to 17 years' imprisonment, was released on health grounds. However, in October this decision was [overturned](#). On the night of 22–23 October, a search was carried out at Sizikov's home in Bakhchisaray and the following day he was [jailed](#) for ten days on a charge of disobeying the police (Art. 19.3, Part 1, CAO RF). The Supreme Court of Crimea did not hear the appeal against this sentence until 31 October, but then [ruled](#) that Sizikov should be released. In the meantime, he had been transferred to Simferopol remand prison. In December 2025, it [emerged](#) that Sizikov had again been transferred, this time from Simferopol to the prison in Minusinsk, Krasnoyarsk region, where he had previously been serving his sentence.

Prisoners convicted of involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir are systematically subjected to intimidation in penal colonies. They held in strict conditions of detention, in punishment cells and in cell-type conditions.

PROSECUTIONS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

The history of Jehovah's Witnesses began with the founding of the Bible Students movement by Charles Taze Russell in the second half of the 19th century in the United States. His followers were united by an understanding of Christianity that differed from the canonical view. They rejected the concept of the Holy Trinity and discussed a specific date for the end of the world. The organisation adopted its current name in 1931. In the Soviet Union, the organisation operated illegally. Its followers were subjected to widespread repression during the Stalinist era. Jehovah's Witnesses were registered as a religious faith in Russia in 1991. However, state pressure on them resumed in the early 2000s. In 2004, on the initiative of the Prosecutor's Office, the Moscow congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses was dissolved. In 2009, a decision was taken to designate the organisation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Taganrog (Rostov region) 'extremist'.

In April 2017, the Russian Supreme Court designated the Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses an 'extremist' organisation and dissolved it, along with 395 regional branches. From that point onwards, there has been a systematic prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2022, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that, through such prosecutions, Russia was violating the rights of freedom of conscience, freedom of expression and freedom of association, as well as the right to personal integrity and respect for private property. Our project recognises those deprived of liberty on charges of involvement with Jehovah's Witnesses' congregations as political prisoners.

In most cases, Jehovah's Witnesses are prosecuted for the offence of organising the activities of an extremist organisation (Art. 282.2, Part 1, CC RF) or participation in such activities (Art. 282.2, Part 2, CC RF). Sometimes members of the faith are also charged with financing extremist activities (Art. 282.3, Part 1, CC RF). Any donation or collection of donations for the congregation's needs, such as payment for a Zoom video conference, can serve as grounds for this charge.

According to a website run by the Jehovah's Witnesses, [Jehovah's Witnesses: The Legal Situation in Russia](#), at least 907 believers have been prosecuted by the authorities in modern Russia. Of these, 672 people were sentenced, including:

- 215 sentenced to terms of imprisonment in a penal colony
- 331 given suspended sentences
- 109 fined



A further 14 individuals were either acquitted or given other forms of punishment.

As of January 2026, at least 178 Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned, a further 15 were under house arrest, and 69 were subject to a travel ban.

According to Memorial, in 2025, 118 individuals accused of involvement with Jehovah's Witnesses communities were convicted, a figure significantly higher than for other groups prosecuted on religious grounds. Criminal proceedings have been initiated against 50 individuals this year, 30 of whom were imprisoned.

The maximum sentence handed down to Jehovah's Witnesses in recent years has been eight years' imprisonment. The most common prison term for believers of this denomination is six years (according to Memorial, at least 48 individuals received this sentence).

In some instances, trials of believers have taken place several times, and on retrial the sentence may be made more severe. It is also common for sentences to be made more severe on appeal, including the conversion of suspended sentences into custodial ones. In February 2025, suspended sentences handed down to Jehovah's Witnesses **Aleksandr Votyakov** and **Evgeny Stefanidin** from Udmurtia were [replaced](#) on appeal with terms of imprisonment of six and a half years and six years, respectively. In October, a six-and-a-half-year suspended sentence handed down to **Anton Kuzhelkov**, a Jehovah's Witness from Tambov region, was [replaced](#) with a term of imprisonment of the same duration. In rare cases, sentences have been reduced on appeal, despite attempts by the prosecution to increase the sentence. It is worth noting that in such cases, the sentence was usually reduced only slightly. In August 2025, **Andrei Shurygin** from Chelyabinsk region had his sentence [reduced](#) from five and a half to five years in a penal colony on account of the state of health of Shurygin's mother and youngest daughter. The prosecution had requested that the sentence be increased to seven years in a penal colony.

Some Jehovah's Witnesses have faced criminal prosecution for their faith for a second time.

The prosecution of Dmitry Terebilov



Jehovah's Witness **Dmitry Terebilov** from Kostroma region was serving a three-year prison sentence at Penal Colony No. 1 in his native region following a criminal conviction for his religious beliefs. In January 2025, Terebilov [was sentenced](#) to five years and five days in a strict regime penal colony for involving others in the activities of an extremist organisation (Art. 282.2, Part 1.1, CC RF). The charge was based on [discussions](#) he had had about the Bible with other prisoners in the penal colony. In May, Terebilov's sentence was [reduced](#) on appeal by two months to four years and ten months.



According to the website Jehovah's Witnesses: The Legal Situation in Russia, at least 35 prosecuted believers have been recognised as having a disability. At least 17 individuals have [died](#) during the investigation or after sentencing. In March 2025, 67-year-old pensioner **Valery Bailo** [died](#) in a hospital in Novorossiisk (see Chapter 3.1.1).

In rare cases, believers successfully avoid punishment on health grounds. At the end of December 2025, 71-year-old **Aleksandr Seredkin** from Novosibirsk, who had spent more than three years imprisoned (two under strict regime conditions) [was released](#). In the few months leading up to his release, his health deteriorated significantly. He suffered from pain and high blood pressure and was unable to digest food. In the autumn of 2025, Seredkin was diagnosed with stage II cancer; it later transpired he had stage IV cancer.

PROSECUTIONS OF FOLLOWERS OF ALLATRA

AllatRa is a religious movement founded in Kyiv in the early 2010s by Igor Danilov and Galina Yablochkina. As noted by the [Sova Centre for Information & Analysis](#), the movement's doctrine is not purely religious in nature. It consists of various historical, philosophical, mythological, religious and esoteric concepts and spiritual practices, as well as an original interpretation of the idea of animal and spiritual principles within a person and the reincarnation of the soul. Conspiracy theories play an important role in the movement's ideology, including those concerning the need to combat global Zionism. Its followers are drawn to Stalinism and the messianic idea that the Russian nation must save humanity and unite the peoples of the world around itself. AllatRa's view of the 'Russian world' as playing a critical role in the fate of humanity is combined with negative views about the repressive nature of the authorities and the injustice of the legal system. The movement does not permit explicit calls for violence or aggressive rhetoric.

In recent years, the Russian authorities have viewed AllatRa with suspicion, partly because it is based in Ukraine. In 2023, the Prosecutor General's Office [designated](#) the movement 'undesirable,' adding that it *'engages in so-called missionary activities on the territory of the Russian Federation without the status of a religious organisation.'* The agency claimed that the movement's activists *'receive instructions from Ukrainian handlers on the need to establish contacts with representatives of opposition forces and carry out unified, coordinated actions to discredit the policies of federal and regional authorities,'* and that since 2022 they have been discrediting the Russian armed forces.

In the spring of 2025, the Prosecutor General's Office filed a lawsuit seeking to have AllatRa designated as an extremist organisation. In June, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation [upheld](#) the claim. The grounds for this decision are not yet known.

During 2025, prosecutions for alleged involvement with AllatRa were brought against at least 15 individuals. Of these, five were given non-custodial sentences. At least three defendants were remanded in custody during the investigation, and one had been placed under house arrest.

As a rule, those accused of involvement with AllatRa have been charged with financing an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1, Part 2, CC RF) for making money transfers for the organisation's needs, or with organising the activities of an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1, Part 3, CC RF). Following the designation of AllatRa as an extremist organisation, the security services are likely to begin applying the corresponding offence (Art. 282.2 CC RF).



PROSECUTIONS OF OTHER RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The Russian state has continued to prosecute followers of Falun Gong.

Falun Gong is a system of spiritual and physical self-improvement developed by Li Hongzhi in the 1990s in China. Followers of the practice engage in meditation through exercises to improve physical health and achieve moral and spiritual purity. Supporters of the practice face prosecution in China for their criticism of the authorities. In 2020, the Russian Prosecutor General's Office [designated](#) seven Falun Gong-related organisations 'undesirable.'

In Russia, Falun Gong practitioners are prosecuted on charges of having links to an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1 CC RF). Our project is aware of five individuals deprived of liberty on charges of involvement with Falun Gong. At least three of these have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment. In 2024, [Oksana Shchetkina](#) was sentenced to two years in a general regime penal colony; in 2025, [Zhu Yun](#) was sentenced to a term of three years, and [Nataliya Minenkova](#) to four years. Our project has no information of any new criminal prosecutions initiated during in 2025.

Russian security forces also continued to prosecute followers of the All-Ukrainian Spiritual Centre Vozrozhdenie [Rebirth].

The Vozrozhdenie Centre was founded in 2012 by Vladimir Muntyan in Dnipropetrovsk. It also has branches in Russia. The All-Ukrainian Union of Churches considers its activities to be '*close to occult practices*.' In November 2022, the Prosecutor General's Office designated two Ukrainian organisations, the 'Vozrozhdenie Spiritual Centre' and 'Vladimir Muntyan's Vozrozhdenie Charitable Foundation' as 'undesirable organisations.'

According to our project, in 2025 Russian courts handed down at least six sentences in prosecutions of followers of the Vozrozhdenie Centre. As with Falun Gong practitioners, defendants were charged with financing an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1, Part 2, CC RF) for making donations, or with organising the activities of an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1, Part 3, CC RF).

Usually, in cases involving association with Vozrozhdenie, non-custodial sentences are imposed. However, at least two individuals were sentenced to terms of imprisonment in 2024.⁹² In August 2025, a Ukrainian-born woman, **Viktoriya Brazhnik**, charged with making monetary transfers to Vozrozhdenie's bank accounts, was ordered to undergo [compulsory psychiatric treatment](#). At her trial, she stated she was unaware that the organisations had been designated as 'undesirable' and believed she was transferring money to help the sick and those in need.

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Mikhail Koval was sentenced to four years' imprisonment, and Nadezhda Ukhova to three years.



2.4.8. Other prosecutions on charges of links with banned organisations

PROSECUTIONS OF ACTIVISTS FROM INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' MOVEMENTS

The inclusion in the list of terrorist organisations in 2024 not only of the Forum of Free Post-Russian States but also of 172 of its '*structural subdivisions*' provided the security forces with new tools for prosecuting activists defending the rights and interests of indigenous peoples:

1. On 15 May 2025, [Rafael Mamedov](#) was remanded in custody on a charge of participating in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF). According to the investigative authorities, the 23-year-old student from Murmansk administered the Telegram channel of the Free Lapland movement, which is '*a structural subdivision of the international organisation "Forum of Free Post-Russian States"*', and also collaborated with another 'structural subdivision' of this organisation, the 'Alliance/Coalition (of Indigenous Peoples)'. This collaboration took the form of Mamedov sending his articles to representatives of the Alliance, which were subsequently published on their website.
2. On 9 December 2025, [Eduard Baltikov](#), a 58-year-old businessman from Kalmykia, [was detained](#) in Moscow and remanded in custody the next day. According to [Sibir Realii](#), Baltikov was accused of participating in the Congress of the Oirat-Kalmyk People, which the security services regard as a structural subdivision of the Forum of Free Post-Russian States. According to the Telegram channel, [Ostorozhno Novosti](#), the arrested man had declared his intention to become head of Kalmykia to 'free himself from the feudal lords' and 'establish the state of Bumbin Orn on the basis of the republic.'
3. Also, in December 2025, [numerous searches and detentions](#) of defenders of the rights of indigenous peoples took place in at least eight Russian regions. **Daria Egereva**, an ethnic Selkup, and another eco-activist (in April 2026, [it emerged](#) that the second suspect was **Natalya Leongardt**, a former employee of the Centre for the Support of Indigenous and Minority Peoples of the North) were remanded in custody on charges of participating in the activities of the Aboriginal Forum, designated in Russia as a terrorist organisation and a subdivision of the Forum of Free Post-Russian States.

Activists from indigenous peoples' movements were also prosecuted under anti-extremism legislation. On 10 April 2025, Oktyabrsky district court in Saransk (Mordovia) gave a two-year suspended sentence to two [veterans of the Erzya indigenous people's movement](#), 91-year-old **Nuyan Vidyaz (Evgeny Chetvergov)** and his 76-year-old nephew **Yogan Minke (Mikhail Chetvergov)**. They were found guilty of participating in an extremist organisation (Art. 282.1, Part 2, CC RF). According to the prosecution, Nuyan and Yogan '*condemned the nationalities policy of the Russian Federation and sought to establish an independent Erzya state, "Erzyan Mastor," by seceding from the Russian Federation.*'



PROSECUTIONS ON CHARGES OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE ACTIVITIES OF ARTPODGOVKA

In 2025, criminal prosecutions continued on charges of participation in the Artpodgotovka movement.⁹³ According to [OVD-Info](#), 12 individuals were implicated in these cases.

Long terms of imprisonment of over 10 years were handed down to individuals convicted of involvement in Artpodgotovka in 2025. Those implicated were generally charged with several offences simultaneously. For instance, in April, Chita resident [Maksim Ivannikov](#) was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for participation in Artpodgotovka; in September, the court reduced the sentence to 14 years on appeal.⁹⁴ After his arrest in February 2024, Ivannikov [claimed](#) he had been tortured to extract a confession. Another Chita resident, [Andrei Bobkov](#), who was tried in the same criminal case, was [sentenced](#) to 14 years' imprisonment in July 2025.

In May 2025, the 1st Eastern District Military Court sentenced [Sergei Gorokhovets](#) to 14 years' imprisonment.⁹⁵ In June, the 2nd District Military Court sentenced [Nikolai Lavrentyev](#), a resident of Zabaikal region, to 11 years' imprisonment on a charge of participating in the activities of Artpodgotovka and of publicly inciting terrorism using the internet (**Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF**).

PROSECUTIONS OF ACTIVISTS OF SOCIALIST MOVEMENTS

The most significant case in 2025 was the verdict in the prosecution of the Marxist study group in Ufa, handed down on 16 December.

The case of the Marxist study group in Ufa

According to a [report](#) by Mediazona: *'The study group had existed in Ufa since 2016. Its founder and sole regular member was Aleksei Dmitriev, a committed Marxist. The group's members would meet once a week at the Ufa Stalin Museum, run by the local branch of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, to discuss the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and to debate philosophy and politics.'*

93 In 2017, the Artpodgotovka movement, whose founder Vyacheslav Maltsev had called for a revolution on 5 November 2017, was designated an extremist organisation. In 2021, following the sentencing of Andrei Tolkachev, Yury Kornoi and Andrei Kept, the 'terrorist group established by V.V. Maltsev comprising members of the Interregional Public Movement Artpodgotovka' was added to the list of terrorist organisations.

94 Ivannikov was found guilty of participating in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF), treason (Art. 275 CC RF), making public calls using the internet to engage in extremism (Art. 280, Part 2, CC RF), and involving others in terrorist activities (Art. 205.1, Part 1.1, CC RF).

95 In addition to participation in the activities of Artpodgotovka, Gorokhovets was also charged with making public calls using the internet to engage in terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF) and making public calls to engage in activities against the security of the Russian Federation (Art. 280.4, Part 2[c], CC RF).

In addition to the ear, nose and throat specialist **Aleksei Dmitriev**, defendants in the case included **Pavel Matisov**, a former combatant in the Donbas conflict fighting on the Russian side, pensioner **Yury Efimov**, former deputy of the Kurultai of the Republic of Bashkortostan **Dmitry Chuvilin**, and **Rinat Burkeev**, a volunteer with the Union of Donbas Volunteers. According to the investigative authorities, the accused created *‘a terrorist cell aimed at forcibly establishing Soviet power and a communist regime on the territory of the Russian Federation and Bashkortostan.’* Matisov allegedly proposed at a *‘secret meeting’* that the others *‘set up a headquarters’* to prepare for *‘Hour-X’* which, according to the investigative authorities, meant the seizure of power. The investigative authorities believed the Marxists were preparing to carry out the violent overthrow of the government and, in order to arm themselves, intended first to attack police officers with sharpened shovels, then seize the *‘arms room’* at the Bashkortostan branch of the Investigative Committee, and subsequently take over a military unit.

The criminal trial lasted two years. The prosecution’s main witness was Dmitry Sapozhnikov, who attended the group’s meetings, recorded them on a Dictaphone and submitted a statement to the FSB, attaching the audio recordings he had made. The defendants pleaded not guilty and alleged they had been subjected to torture.

In the upshot, the Central District Military Court sentenced Matisov to 22 years’ imprisonment, Dmitriev to 20 years, Efimov to 18 years, Chuvilin to 20 years, and Burkeev to 20 years.⁹⁶

Furthermore, on 11 November 2025, a 65-year-old pensioner from Nizhny Tagil, **Andrei Fogel**, was ordered to undergo compulsory inpatient psychiatric treatment. According to the prosecution, in the spring of 2022 Fogel joined the movement For New Socialism, led by former diplomat and political scientist **Nikolai Platoshkin**, and spent three years preparing to set up a *‘terrorist cell’* with the aim of attacking top managers at Uralvagonzavod and *‘eliminating the country’s leadership.’* Fogel was arrested on 31 January 2024 and charged with attempting to establish a terrorist organisation (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205.4, Part 1, CC RF).

The defence [claimed](#) this was a provocation by the security services. The prosecution’s evidence was based on audio recordings secretly made during meetings with Fogel by Pavel Sergienya, a trade union activist collaborating with the FSB and a three-time convicted worker at Uralvagonzavod. There are reports Sergienya had previously [featured](#) in the case of the Wall Street Journal journalist **Evan Gershkovich**.

96 Matisov was found guilty of establishing a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 1, CC RF), while the others were found guilty of participating in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF). In addition, all five were charged with preparing for the violent seizure of power (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 278 CC RF), undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF), propagandising terrorism online (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF), and preparing to steal weapons and ammunition as part of an organised group using violence (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 226, Part 4[a], CC RF). Matisov was also convicted of the unlawful possession of explosive devices (Art. 222.1, Part 1, CC RF).



2.5. Prosecutions of Ukrainians

In the four years of the full-scale war, Russia has occupied [approximately 20%](#) of Ukrainian territory, [destroyed](#) more than 300,000 homes and infrastructure sites, and [killed](#) more than 13,000 civilians, including at least 700 children. According to the calculations of Mediazona and the BBC, the Russian army itself has [lost](#) at least 213,000 soldiers. By Meduza's estimate, which also includes heritage cases, the number of dead could be at least 219,000.

Several thousand Ukrainian soldiers have been taken into Russian captivity; their exact number is unknown. In the summer of 2025, the propaganda television channel RT [cited](#) the number 6,000. According to our project's information, as of April 2026 at least 824 of these had been incarcerated on criminal charges, mainly for terrorism and the use of banned methods of warfare. After the Ukrainian armed forces invaded Kursk region, new cases were opened for the murder of residents of this territory and the seizure of Russian settlements. As Investigative Committee head Aleksandr Bastrykin [reported](#), at least 370 Ukrainian soldiers have been convicted of crimes committed in Kursk region.

Many Ukrainian prisoners of war are being held in inhumane conditions and subjected to brutal torture. We know of the deaths of at least four prisoners of war subjected to criminal prosecution in the years 2023-2025. According to our project's information, in all since the start of the full-scale war, at least 20 Ukrainian citizens have died in places of detention run by Russian law enforcement officers. Those who died have included defendants in politically motivated criminal prosecutions and civilian hostages held without charge.

Over four years of war, hundreds and possibly thousands of civilians have been subjected to illegal criminal prosecution in Russia and occupied Ukrainian territories. Keeping a tally of these cases is especially difficult because the websites of many courts in the occupied territories are not updated, and even if information about politically motivated prosecutions is found, the data is often anonymized. Nevertheless, over the course of 2025, we reported news of politically motivated prosecutions of Ukrainians nearly every day.

Our project knows of 965 Ukrainian citizens who have been subjected to politically motivated prosecution since 2022 and who are imprisoned as of May 2026.⁹⁷ In reality, this figure may be many times greater. In late 2024, the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM) [reported](#) that there are 14,000 Ukrainian civilians in Russian places of detention. How many of them were detained after the start of the full-scale war in 2022 is not known.

97 This refers to people detained on Russian territory whom our project knows for certain to hold Ukrainian citizenship, as well as all those detained in the occupied Ukrainian territories (the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Donetsk regions, and Crimea). Ukrainian military personnel are not included in this category.



As of April 2026, the total number of Ukrainians detained in politically motivated prosecutions about whom we have information was 1,789.⁹⁸ Of these, 409 were imprisoned in 2025. This number is the minimum estimate because we learn about many prosecutions only at the moment the verdict is issued, or when the verdict goes into effect, that is, 6-12 months or more after the prosecution began. Many prosecutions are not reported in the news at all, and we learn about them with the help of volunteers. In 2025, we learned of the prosecutions of more than 511 Ukrainians whose prosecutions began in 2024. Therefore, an approximately accurate number for the individuals prosecuted in 2025 will become known at best in late 2026, if not later.

In any case, we can speak with confidence about the unprecedented level of pressure on Ukrainians in Russia and in the occupied territories and violations of their rights. In addition to defendants in politically motivated criminal cases, Ukrainian civilian hostages are being held in Russia, that is, persons who have not been charged. Previously, the Centre for Civil Liberties [estimated](#) their number at 7,000, and we rely on that estimate. These civilians have been kept for years in places of detention without any contact with the outside world and without the possibility of visits from relatives or even lawyers. Below we recount what we know about criminal prosecutions of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians and describe some specific instances.

2.5.1. Criminal prosecution of Ukrainian civilians

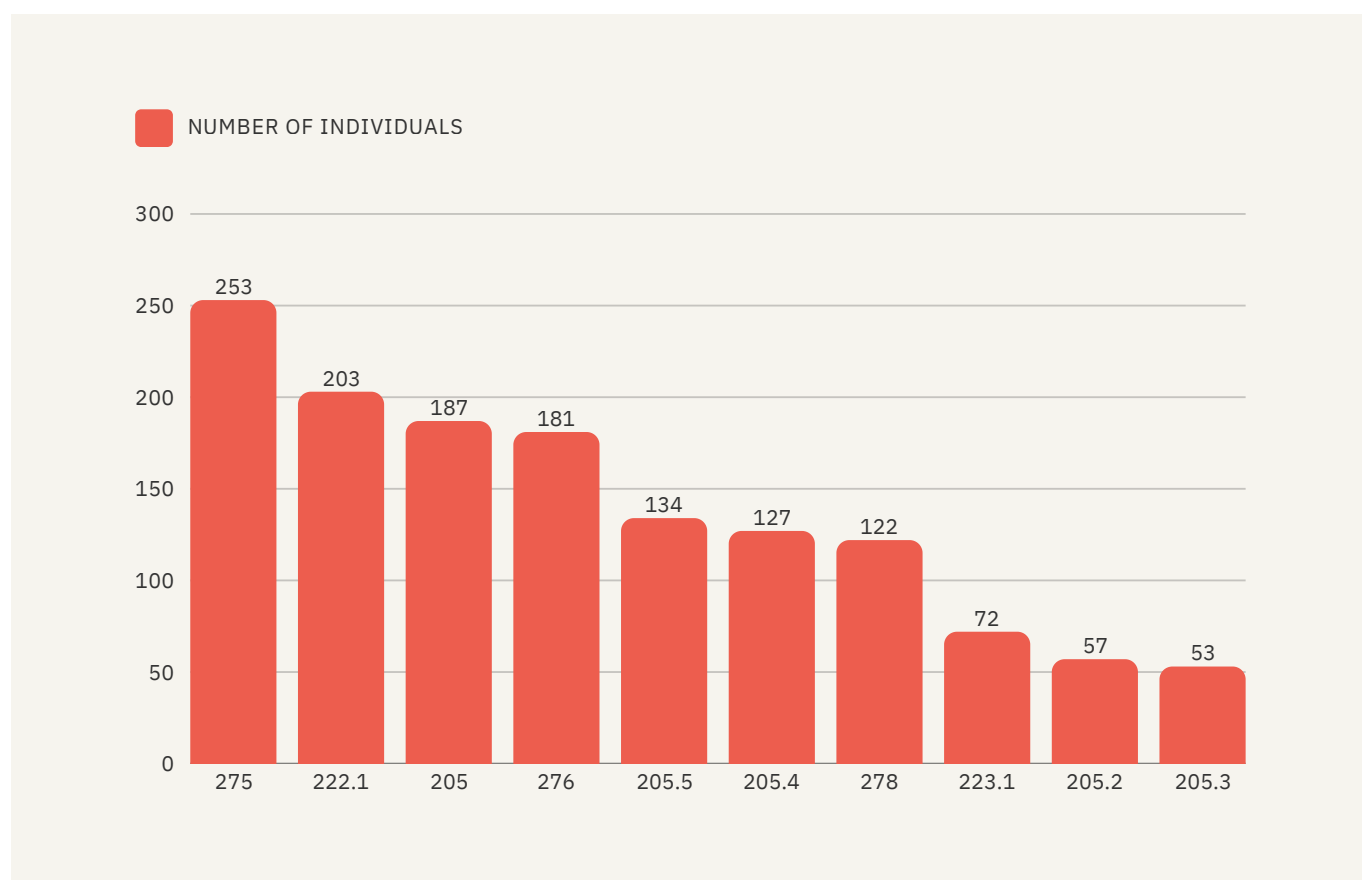
As indicated above, our project knows of 965 Ukrainian civilians imprisoned on politically motivated charges in Russia or the occupied Ukrainian territories. Of these, the criminal prosecutions of 409 were initiated in 2025.

Most often the Ukrainian citizens prosecuted with clear signs of political motivation are charged with treason (Art. 275 CC RF).⁹⁹ The second most common charge is that of illegal trafficking in explosive substances and devices (Art. 222.1 CC RF). After this comes that of commission of an act of terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF), and after that espionage (Art. 276 CC RF) and organising the activities of a terrorist organisation and participating in its activities (Art. 205.5 CC RF). The remaining charges among the dozen applied most often against Ukrainian citizens can be seen in the diagram.

98 The same applies as in Footnote 97, except that, in addition to civilians, Ukrainian military personnel are also taken into account (that is, individuals who fought for the Ukrainian armed forces and for whom there was no information indicating that they held any citizenship other than Ukrainian).

99 Art. 275 CC RF applies where Russian citizenship is held. Residents of the occupied territories of Ukraine are often forced to accept Russian citizenship to avoid having their rights curtailed and to be able to continue living in their own homes. We consider that residents of the occupied territories, even if they hold a Russian passport and are accused of treason, are citizens of Ukraine.

Figure 8. Articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation used most often in politically motivated prosecutions of Ukrainian civilians



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

PROSECUTIONS FOR TREASON

Most prosecutions for treason of Ukrainian citizens take place in Crimea and Sevastopol (123 defendants) and the newly occupied territories (116 defendants).¹⁰⁰ As a rule, all these cases are similar. People are accused of collaborating with the Ukrainian security services and passing on to them information, as well as of making monetary transfers for the needs of the Ukrainian armed forces.

There have been exceptions. For example, [Yuliya Mosyazh](#), a resident of Novoaidar in Luhansk region, was accused of hiding two Ukrainian soldiers in her apartment from March 2022 to December 2023. According to law enforcement officers, she gave them means of communication and ‘*fictitious medical documents*,’ with the help of which they attempted to leave the occupied territories for areas under Ukraine’s control, ostensibly as ‘*sick individuals*.’ The soldiers were detained at a checkpoint, and soon afterwards Mosyazh’s prosecution began. In late 2025, Mosyazh was sentenced to 16 years’ in a general regime penal colony.

100 Donetsk region — 40 prosecutions; Zaporizhzhia region — 30 prosecutions; Kherson region — 25 prosecutions; Luhansk region — 21 prosecutions.



Women comprise about 30% of Ukrainians prosecuted for 'treason.' The age of Ukrainians who have been defendants in treason cases in Russia ranges from 18 to 71 years.

Among Ukrainians accused of financing the Ukrainian armed forces, women make up even more, about 50%. In 2025, several Ukrainian women who sent money to Ukrainian soldiers were sentenced at the same time to long terms of imprisonment.

1. [Snezhana Yakunina](#), a 37-year-old resident of Enerhodar, in her own words, made the donation '*while under emotional stress*' when Russian troops occupied her city. For this, Yakunina was prosecuted for treason, and in September 2025 she was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment.

2. 30-year-old [Yuliya Stanika](#) from Golaya Pristan in Kherson region, made two donations in 2023 and 2024. Later, Russian law enforcement officers reported that her money had been intended '*for financing support and material-technical provisions for Ukrainian armed groups.*' In October 2025, the occupation Kherson Regional Court [sentenced](#) Stanika to 12 years' imprisonment.

3. 61-year-old [Marina Belousova](#) from Primorsk in Zaporizhzhia region was prosecuted for treason over a few donations made '*to operating accounts used by the special services and armed forces of Ukraine.*' In December 2025, the occupation Zaporizhzhia Regional Court [sentenced](#) her to 12 and a half years' imprisonment.

In all, we know of at least 39 Ukrainians charged in these kinds of cases. Some of them were charged with aiding and abetting terrorist activity (Art. 205.1 CC RF) instead of, or along with, treason.

PROSECUTIONS FOR ILLEGAL MANUFACTURE OF OR TRAFFICKING IN EXPLOSIVE DEVICES AND EXPLOSIVE MATERIALS

Nearly all prosecutions known to us of Ukrainian citizens for the illegal acquisition, transfer, sale, possession, shipping, mailing, or carrying of explosive substances or explosive devices (Art. 222.1 CC RF) and for the illegal manufacture of explosive substances and the illegal manufacture, alteration, or repair of explosive devices (Art. 223.1 CC RF) were also opened against residents of occupied territories. These offences are rarely applied in isolation, in most instances they are 'in addition' to charges of terrorism, espionage, treason, and so on.

In the summer of 2025, [Sergei Nidilevich](#), a 61-year-old resident of Kakhovka in Kherson region, was [sentenced](#) to 19 years' imprisonment, charged with throwing a grenade at Russian law enforcement officers while trying to hide from them.¹⁰¹ Before this, law enforcement officers had tried to detain him, since Nidilevich had written anti-Russian statements on a bus stop and monuments. At trial, the pensioner admitted his guilt and explained his actions by his '*negative attitude towards the Russian Federation and the Special Military Operation under way.*'

101 Nidilevich was found guilty of hooliganism involving the use of an explosive device (Art. 213, Part 3, CC RF), five counts of vandalism motivated by hate (Art. 214, Part 2, CC RF), attempting to take the life of a law enforcement officer (Art. 317 CC RF) and unlawful trafficking of an explosive device (Art. 222.1, Part 1, CC RF).



In September 2025, the occupation Sevastopol City Court [sentenced Nikolai Davydchenko](#), a 59-year-old inhabitant of Feodosia, to 17 years in a penal colony and a fine of 600,000 roubles on a charge of manufacturing a bomb on assignment from Ukraine.¹⁰² According to the Russian investigative authorities, the pensioner ‘initiated contact with the Ukrainian Security Service’, after which he collected from hiding places the components for a homemade bomb. *‘When the war, the Special Military Operation, started, I somehow realized I wouldn’t be able to remain indifferent. And in a kind of emotional outburst I just went on the website of Ukraine’s intelligence agencies and offered my services, to help however I could. One fine day, they proposed I go to a certain village and according to the directions pick up two packages there. They guaranteed it wouldn’t blow up’*, Davydchenko [said](#) in a video published by the FSB.

PROSECUTIONS FOR TERRORISM

More than 400 Ukrainian civilians have been charged with terrorist offences.¹⁰³ In a quarter of these cases, the prosecutions were related to participation in Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which has been designated in Russia as a terrorist organisation (for more detail, see Chapter 2.4.6). More often, though, defendants in these cases are Ukrainians charged with various types of arsons and bombings, as a rule in occupied Ukrainian territories.¹⁰⁴ Nearly all receive two-digit sentences and are frequently tortured.

In March 2025, the Southern District Military Court handed down a sentence of 18 years in a strict regime penal colony to 34-year-old [Sergei Potyng](#), a resident of Enerhodar in Zaporizhzhia region.¹⁰⁵ According to Russian law enforcement officers, in 2023, Potyng was planning to bomb the car of a pro-Russian employee of the police of the Donetsk People’s Republic. He allegedly placed a bomb under the bottom of the car, but there was no explosion because the device was discovered and disarmed.

[Alina Grek](#), a 26-year-old resident of Crimea, was criminally prosecuted for attempting to set fire to a railway relay cabinet in Simferopol district. She allegedly did this on assignment from the Main Intelligence Directorate [GUR] of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine. In August 2025, Grek was sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment.¹⁰⁶

102 Davydchenko was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF), unlawful acquisition of explosives via the internet (Art. 222.1, Part 3[c], CC RF), unlawful manufacture of an explosive device (Art. 223.1, Part 1, CC RF) and unlawful transport of an explosive device (Art. 222.1, Part 1, CC RF).

103 Of these, 187 were for the offence of terrorist act (Art. 205 CC RF).

104 The overwhelming majority of prosecutions (85%) for terrorism-related offences against Ukrainians were initiated in the occupied territories.

105 Potyng was found guilty of participating in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF), preparing a terrorist attack that would result in the death of a person (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 3[b], CC RF), and unlawful trafficking of explosives and explosive devices by an organised group (Art. 222.1, Part 4, CC RF).

106 Grek was found guilty of treason (Art. 275 CC RF), preparation for a terrorist attack (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 1, CC RF), and undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF).



In January 2025, a sentence of 20 years in a penal colony was handed down to [Maksim Timofeev](#), a 43-year-old resident of Melitopol in Zaporizhzhia region.¹⁰⁷ He was convicted of bombing three locomotives in the Melitopol depot in 2023. A second defendant in the same case, 35-year-old [Maksim Vorobyev](#), was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment.¹⁰⁸

Prosecutions of Ukrainians for terrorist offences initiated on the internationally recognized territory of Russia are, as a rule, related to [attempts to cross the border with Ukraine](#) in order to participate in the war on Ukraine's side, planning to commit arson and bombings of infrastructure, killing Russian soldiers 'on assignment from Ukrainian intelligence agencies,' and money transfers to Ukrainian armed formations designated terrorist in Russia. Similar actions by Russians have been prosecuted on charges of acts of terrorism and sabotage (see Chapter 2.2), treason (see Chapter 2.3), and participation in Ukrainian armed formations (see Chapter 2.4.4).

For example, in November 2025, law enforcement officers [reported](#) on the detention in Krasnodar region of a Ukrainian citizen accused of planning to bomb a railway. In August 2025, the 2nd Western District Military Court in Moscow sentenced the Ukrainian [Viktor Kucher](#), who had been arrested in Moscow, to 20 years in a strict regime penal colony for attempting to kill the commander of the Long-Range Airforce of the Russian Aerospace Defence Forces.

Although the actions with which many of the above-listed individuals were charged may have presented a real danger to the public, in our view they demand attention and careful study. They may contain signs of fabrication of evidence, including confessions obtained by means of torture or entrapment.

PROSECUTIONS FOR PROPAGANDA OF TERRORISM

At least 59 Ukrainians have been imprisoned for making public calls to carry out terrorist activity and for public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF). The grounds for these prosecutions, as a rule, have been comments posted on the Internet. The practice of using this article of the Criminal Code for purposes of political repression is discussed in Chapter 2.2.1.

For example, in August 2025, [Vladimir Gorban](#), a resident of Zaporizhzhia region, was [sentenced](#) to six years' imprisonment for comments in which he 'called for the commission of hostile acts against soldiers of the Russian armed forces and the commission of violent acts against a representative of the Russian authorities.' [Dmitry Orlov](#), a dual Ukrainian and Russian national from Vologda region, was [sentenced](#) to three years in a penal colony for comments in which he wished for the 'humiliating downfall of Putinism' and the execution of 'all the scumbags of United Russia, the Federation Council, the State Duma, the ministers, all television workers, the deputies of all factions and their lovers and grandchildren — all as enemies of the people, every last one.'

107 Timofeev was found guilty of participating in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF), three terrorist attacks carried out by an organised group resulting in significant damage (Art. 205, Part 2[a,c], CC RF), and unlawful trafficking of explosives and explosive devices by an organised group (Art. 222.1, Part 4, CC RF).

108 Vorobyev was charged with the same offences as Timofeev, as well as with involving another person in terrorist activities (Art. 205.1, Part 1.1, CC RF).



PROSECUTIONS FOR ESPIONAGE

Ukrainians prosecuted for espionage are usually accused of collecting and passing on to Ukraine information about the dispositions and movements of Russian troops. The descriptions of dozens of espionage cases reported by Russian law enforcement officers are practically identical.

For example, [Denis Zelchan](#), a 51-year-old resident of Luhansk region, was [accused](#) of 'gathering information about the places of deployment of Russian soldiers on the territory of the Luhansk People's Republic.' He allegedly passed this information to Ukrainian intelligence agencies via a messenger app. [Vladimir Yatsun](#), a 50-year-old resident of Berdyansk in Zaporizhzhia region, was [accused](#) of 'passing on information to the Ukrainian side about the disposition of units of the Russian Defence Ministry, as well as other troops and military formations for the subsequent targeting of missile and bombing raids on them by the Ukrainian armed forces.' A female pensioner from Enerhodar was [charged](#) with 'gathering and passing on information about the places of disposition of Russian armed forces anti-aircraft defence units located in Enerhodar.'

Inhabitants of the occupied Ukrainian territories most often appear as defendants in espionage cases initiated by Russian law enforcement officers. Late in 2025, we recorded prosecutions for espionage of 47 people in Zaporizhzhia region, 35 in Luhansk region, 31 in Kherson region, and 29 in Donetsk region.

The average prison term to which Ukrainians were sentenced under Art. 276 CC RF is 12 years and two months.¹⁰⁹

PROSECUTIONS ON CHARGES OF BOTH ESPIONAGE AND TREASON

At least nine Ukrainians have been charged with treason and espionage simultaneously. All nine were inhabitants of occupied Ukrainian territories who, by all appearances, had been forced to accept Russian citizenship. They were charged with espionage for actions committed before receiving their Russian passport, and treason for actions committed after.

This is what happened in the cases of Kherson region resident [Yuliya Sokolova](#) and Mariupol resident [Aleksandr Syrov](#). Sokolova and Syrov, who, at the time of sentencing were 19 and 18 years old respectively, were given comparatively 'soft' prison sentences of nine and seven years.

[Egor Kuch](#) was charged with treason and espionage for passing on details of telephone calls made by Russian law enforcement officers.

109 Only cases in which Art. 276 CC RF was the sole charge are taken into account.



The prosecution of Egor Kuch



On 8 December 2025, the ‘Supreme Court of the Luhansk People’s Republic’ sentenced Luhansk resident [Egor Kuch](#) to 20 years’ imprisonment.¹¹⁰ According to the prosecution, from October 2022 to January 2024, Kuch, ‘as a worker in a cellular communications company, voluntarily gathered information about the ownership and detailed contacts of more than 45 subscriber telephone numbers of employees of Russian law enforcement structures, and also committed more than 1,900 acts of illegal access to the system in search of digital information subject to further transfer to the Ukrainian Security Service.’

In 2025, another defendant in a prosecution on charges of both ‘treason’ and ‘espionage’ was a resident of Zaporizhzhia region whose name we do not know. According to law enforcement officers, in 2023 a citizen of Ukraine saw the movement of Russian National Guard trucks and passed on the coordinates of the equipment to the Main Intelligence Directorate [GUR] of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence. Later, after receiving Russian citizenship, the man passed on to Ukrainian intelligence information about the location of Russian National Guard personnel. Moreover, he donated a little more than 6,000 roubles for the needs of the Ukrainian armed forces. In December 2025, the Zaporizhzhia Regional Court of occupation [sentenced](#) him to 15 years’ imprisonment.

PROSECUTIONS FOR THE VIOLENT SEIZURE OF POWER

At present, Russian authorities are prosecuting at least 122 individuals on charges related to a violent seizure of power (Art. 278 CC RF). The majority (86 individuals) are accused of planning to seize power (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 278 CC RF). About 70% of prosecutions of this kind are related to participation in Hizb-ut-Takhrir (see Chapter 2.4.6).

Defendants in the remaining 30% of cases are Ukrainian prisoners of war. As a rule, these individuals are charged with having ‘completed’ a seizure of power. Usually, the charge is based on the fact that they served in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, territories under the control of Ukraine’s official authorities, while according to the Russian authorities these territories should belong to the self-proclaimed ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ or ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ (or to Russia, following the declarations that the ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ and the ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ joined Russia in the autumn of 2022). In reality, of course, in 2014 pro-Russian fighters violently seized power in territories of Ukraine where they were able to do so. However, in the logic of the Russian investigative authorities everything happened the other way around, i.e. Ukrainian officials and military held on to power in cities that allegedly should have been under the control of the pro-Russian fighters.

110 Egor Kuch was found guilty of treason and espionage, as well as of unlawfully interfering with the Russian Federation’s critical infrastructure, resulting in serious consequences (Art. 274.1, Part 5, CC RF).



2.5.2. Prosecution of Ukrainian families

In recent years the number of instances where Ukrainian families (that is, two or more members of one family) were subjected to politically motivated prosecutions has increased. We know of at least 27 such families.

PROSECUTION OF THE RYZHKOV FAMILY

In 2025, a family of three was handed harsh sentences in an espionage case (Art. 276 CC RF). The 'Supreme Court of the Luhansk People's Republic' of occupation sentenced the couple, [Irina](#) and [Aleksandr Ryzhkov](#) to 16 and 18 years' imprisonment, respectively. Their 21-year-old son [Valery](#) was later sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment. Valery, in addition to espionage, was also charged with sabotage (Art. 281 CC RF).

The Ryzhkovs lived in Novoaidar in Luhansk region. Irina worked as a nurse at the hospital and her son Valery was studying at Luhansk Agrarian University. Valery was arrested first, in September 2023. Less than six months later, in February 2024, [we learned](#) of the arrest of his parents. The investigative authorities and the court considered that the Ryzhkovs had been passing information to Ukrainian intelligence agencies about the movement and disposition of Russian forces in Luhansk region, as well as information about casualties admitted to the hospital where Irina worked. At the same time, [according to the FSB](#), Aleksandr was allegedly helping his son carry out espionage by driving him to places of deployment of Russian troops. Valery [pleaded guilty](#) to both collecting information and to two acts of damaging railway infrastructure.

THE PROSECUTION OF ANNA AND ARTEM MURDID AND ANNA VOSHKODER

In 2025, members of another Ukrainian family, spouses [Artem Murdid](#) and [Anna Voshkoder](#), and Artem's mother [Anna Murdid](#), were convicted by the Southern District Military Court. Anna Voshkoder was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment, Anna Murdid to 22 years, and Artem Murdid was given a life sentence.¹¹¹ Judge Aleksandr Generalov ruled them guilty of planning bombings in occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, in 2023.

According to the [prosecution](#), the defendants were participants in a 'terrorist group' led by an officer of the Ukrainian Security Service. The two women allegedly studied the movements of occupation officials as well as train movements on the railways. Artem Murdid, the prosecution believes, received instructions on the assembly of bombs from the Ukraine. The family was accused of several bombing attempts in Melitopol. According to the FSB, Murdid used bombs in attempts to kill the director of the railway station (in September 2022) and the 'head of the military-civilian administration' of occupied Melitopol (in December 2022). The explosion that occurred before the announcement of Russia's annexation of Zaporizhzhia region was classified as an act of international terrorism.

¹¹¹ Anna Voshkoder and Anna Murdid were charged with unlawful trafficking of explosives as part of an organised group (Art. 222.1, Part 4, CC RF), participation in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF), an act of terrorism resulting in the death of a person (Art. 205, Part 3[b], CC RF) and an attempt to commit an act of international terrorism (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 361, Part 1, CC RF). In addition to these offences, Artem Murdid was also charged with the unlawful manufacture of explosive devices by an organised group (Art. 223.1, Part 3, CC RF), a completed act of international terrorism (Art. 361, Part 1, CC RF) and an act of terrorism committed by a group (Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF).



In March 2023, one of the attempted bombings allegedly undertaken by Murdid achieved its goal. As the FSB asserted, using a remote control, he set off a bomb attached to a car containing Ivan Tkach, the director of Municipal Transport, a municipal unitary enterprise, and Elena Sivashchenko, an employee of the transport enterprise. Tkach subsequently died in hospital. Sivashchenko received serious injuries but survived. In his final statement in court, Artem Murdid [said](#):



Never in my life have I committed unlawful actions. I learned what the charges brought against me were about only from the representatives of Russian law enforcement bodies who created the specific physical conditions of violence and torture as a result of which I was forced to give the testimony on which the charge was based.

His mother, Anna Voshkoder, also stated that she had been beaten and tortured with electricity after her arrest.

THE PROSECUTION OF FATHER AND SON, OLEG AND GLEB ZUBOV

Father and son **Oleg** and **Gleb Zubov** had a law firm in Melitopol. In April 2022, law enforcement officers burst into their home to conduct a search, after which both men were taken away to an unknown location. In May 2022, Russian Telegram channels [posted](#) an ‘interview’ with the Zubovs and other abducted Ukrainians. In the video, all those detained confessed they had supposedly passed on to Ukraine information about the movement of Russian military equipment. Ukrainian journalists drew attention to the men’s appearance: their hair had turned grey and they were hunched over; on some, bruises were visible on their faces.

On 19 February 2024, Judge German Zhiltsov of Rostov Regional Court [sentenced](#) Oleg Zubov to 12 years’ imprisonment in a strict regime penal colony on a charge of espionage (Art. 276 CC RF). Nothing is known about the details of his son’s prosecution, conviction or location.

THE PROSECUTION OF THE DANILCHENKO FAMILY

The prosecution of the Danilchenko family from Donetsk region began in 2024. In November of that year, we learned that the elderly married couple, **Aleksei** and **Nina Danilchenko**, along with their 55-year-old son **Oleg**, had been imprisoned. To this day we have no information as to the nature of the charges brought against them.¹¹²

In February 2025 the Danilchenko family’s case [went](#) to the Southern District Military Court. From the case records we know that, apart from them, four others figure in the case: **Liubov Artemova**, **Nikolai Lushkin**, **Olga Mishina**, and **Anatoly Tiuliubaev**. A month later, in March 2025, the case was returned to the prosecutor’s office.

¹¹² All that is known is that all three were charged with offences relating to participation in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF), the commission of an act of terrorism (Art. 205, Part 2, CC RF), as well as offences relating to the illegal trafficking of weapons (Art. 222 CC RF) and illegal trafficking of explosives or explosive devices (Art. 222.1 CC RF).



When we learned of the release of 74-year-old Nina Danilchenko, she had spent nearly a year in the Donetsk remand prison, from November 2024 to September 2025. At the same time, we learned of the release of her son Oleg. Aleksei Danilchenko, who is 75 years old, remains in custody to this day, along with four other defendants in the case.

THE PROSECUTION OF IRINA AND ALEKSANDR LEVCHENKO

In May 2023 in Melitopol, a married couple, **Irina** and **Aleksandr Levchenko**, were [abducted](#). A journalist since 1981, Irina had worked for many Ukrainian publications. Previously, Aleksandr had worked in factories, and after he retired worked at the family dacha. We do not know the exact nature of the charges brought against the couple. In summer 2024, Aleksandr Levchenko was released. His spouse Irina remains in custody to this day.

Only in January 2026 did we learn that Irina Levchenko was charged with espionage (Art. 276 CC RF), when her case [went](#) to the Zaporizhzhia Regional Court of occupation.

OTHER UKRAINIAN FAMILIES WHERE TWO OR MORE MEMBERS ARE DEFENDANTS IN CRIMINAL CASES

[Viktor](#) and [Roman](#) **Didyk** (father and son), charged with participating in the Dnipro-1 volunteer regiment;

[Rostislav](#) and [Sergei](#) **Sasovets** (father and son), charged with espionage and treason;

[Ibragim](#) and [Artem](#) **Kudzhanov** (father and son), charged with participation in the Aidar Battalion (Ibragim Kudzhanov) and espionage (Artem Kudzhanov);

[Nonna Galka](#) and [Viktor Meshnyakov](#) (aunt and nephew), charged with espionage;

[Elena Danilenko](#) and [Oleg Rashchupkin](#) (sister and brother), charged with espionage;

[Dmitry](#) and [Sergei](#) **Kharaberiush** (brothers), charged with espionage;

[Khalil](#) and [Appaz](#) **Kurtamet** (father and son), charged with participation in the Noman Çelebicihan Battalion (Khalil Kurtamet) and financing the Krym Islamic Battalion, a volunteer armed formation (Appaz Kurtamet);

Tatyana and [Damian](#) **Omelyanenko** (mother and son), charged with sabotage in Zaporizhzhia region; Tatyana Omelchenko is being prosecuted in absentia;

Elena and [Vladislav](#) **Zaitsev** (mother and son), charged with sabotage in Donetsk region; Elena Zaitseva is being prosecuted [in absentia](#);

[Aleksei](#) and [Anzhelika](#) **Demyanenko** (father and daughter), charged with espionage and treason;

[Viktoriya](#) and [Aleksandra](#) **Strilets** (mother and daughter), charged with treason;

[Anna](#) and [Oksana](#) **Sotsenko** (mother and daughter), charged with treason;

[Remzi](#) and [Esma](#) **Nimetulaev** (husband and wife), charged with participation in Hizb-ut-Takhrir;

[Remzi](#) and [Emir](#) **Kurtnezirov** (father and son), charged with participation in Hizb-ut-Takhrir;

[Vladimir](#) and [Mark](#) **Perzhinsky** (father and son), charged with bombing Russian military equipment in Zaporizhzhia region;

[Aziz](#) and [Asan](#) **Akhtemov** (brothers); charged with bombing a gas pipeline on assignment from Ukrainian intelligence;

[Valentin Malyar](#) and [Tatyana Begei](#) (brother and sister), charged with the illegal acquisition of weapons in Crimea;

[Nikolai](#) and [Aleksei](#) **Vorobel** (brothers), charged with participation in a terrorist group in Luhansk region;

[Bekir](#) and [Rustem](#) **Gugurik** (brothers), charged with participation in the Noman Çelebicihan Battalion;

[Pavel](#) and [Vladislav](#) **Romensky** (father and son), charged with an attempted assassination of the deputy chief of occupied Belovod district, Luhansk region.



2.5.3 Ukrainian civilian hostages and extrajudicial custody of individuals abducted in the occupied territories

The most numerous group of persons illegally deprived of liberty for political reasons in Russia and the occupied Ukrainian territories is that of [Ukrainian civilian hostages](#). This group includes citizens of Ukraine from other countries detained, without charge, by Russian law enforcement officers or soldiers on the territory of Ukraine since 24 February 2022. Criminal charges were subsequently brought against some of these detainees, as in the instance of the above-mentioned **Irina Levchenko**. However, the majority continue to remain in captivity without legal grounds, from the standpoint of either international law or the Russian Constitution.¹¹³

It is difficult to cite a precise number for civilian hostages. According to [Dmitry Lubinets](#), Ukraine's human rights envoy, Russia is holding up to 28,000 Ukrainian civilian hostages, although information has been verified for only [1,700 persons](#). The Centre for Civil Liberties, a Ukrainian human rights organisation that in 2022 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, believes a more accurate estimate is [7,000](#) people. This is the estimate we use.

The names of only 54 people abducted in occupied Ukrainian territories since the start of the full-scale war are known to our project. Of these, at least 43 are in custody at the present time. 15 have not been charged.

The civilian hostages included the Ukrainian journalist Viktoriya Roshchina, who died in captivity on 19 September 2024 (for the circumstances of her death, see Chapter 3.1.2). Several civilians held in Russian captivity without charge and released through an exchange are discussed in Chapter 2.5.6. Still in prison without charge is **Aleksandr Kostyuk**, a philologist from Kyiv who went missing in the spring of 2022 in Sumsk region, where he was working as a volunteer helping evacuate local residents. His location became [known](#) only in February 2026 when human rights activists found him in Simferopol's Remand Prison No. 2. This is the institution where Ukrainians have been held incommunicado, that is, without contact with relatives, lawyers, or the outside world, and often without being charged.

In occupied Crimea there is now a systemic practice of abducting people followed by their subsequent detention incommunicado in Simferopol's Remand Prison No. 2 for an extended period. Only after many months in these conditions are those abducted officially charged and transferred to Simferopol's Remand Prison No. 1, where they can correspond with the outside world and receive parcels and deliveries. As a rule, this happens only if the person is prepared to give the FSB the confessions it needs and record them for a propaganda video. Unofficially, Russian law enforcement officers [call](#) this removal of a person from complete isolation 'defrosting.'

The periods of time for which those abducted have been held in custody incommunicado and without a judicial decision have been as long as two years.

113 In 2026, First Department [received](#) confirmation that an official decree 'on the organisation of the reception and accommodation of persons opposing the Special Military Operation' signed by Vladimir Putin, dated 8 March 2022, was in force. This document has not been made public. It authorises the detention of individuals 'for opposing the Special Military Operation.' The Russian Constitution does not permit detention for more than 48 hours without a court order.



The prosecution of three residents of Lenino (Edi-Kuyu)

Three women who were neighbours from Crimea, [Tamara Pavlenko \(Simonenko\)](#), [Larisa Gaidai](#) and [Elvir Ablyazova](#), went missing in March 2024. However, information about their location [appeared](#) only in August 2025. In spring 2026, the women were transferred to Simferopol's Remand Prison No. 1; at the same time, we learned all three had been charged with treason (Art. 275 CC RF).

At this time there is no information about the location of many who have been abducted. We cite only a small number of examples:

1. In May 2025, [Sergei Grishchenkov](#), a Ukrainian, was [abducted](#) in Crimea. A month later, in June 2025, Grishchenkov's relatives [told the media](#) he presumably had been accused of 'treason', although they had [not received](#) official confirmation that a criminal case had been opened. Nothing is known of Grishchenkov's location.

2. In June 2025, a married couple, **Oleg** and **Natalya** (their surname is not being given), [went missing](#) in Sevastopol. According to [Eskender Bariev](#), head of the Crimean Tatar Resource Centre, they were abducted by Russian law enforcement officers, and their nine-year-old child was put in an orphanage. On the day of the abduction, Natalya had taken her daughter to school, but when the time came to pick her up, she couldn't, Bariev said. Oleg was detained the same day at work. We do not know what the two people are accused of or where they are.

3. In November 2025, 32-year-old Ukrainian **Marina Ryff** went missing in Simferopol. As the Crimean Human Rights Group [reported](#), on the day of her disappearance Ryff had gone to one of the 'migration' institutions (after Crimea's annexation she had refused to accept a Russian passport and had been living with Ukrainian documents). Subsequently it became known that Ryff had been jailed for 14 days on administrative-law charges of 'displaying extremist symbols' (Art. 20.1, Part 3, CAO RF) and 'discrediting the Russian army' (Art. 20.3.3, Part 1, CAO RF). The young woman's further fate is not known.



2.5.4 The criminal prosecution of Ukrainian soldiers

As of the beginning of 2026, at least 824 imprisoned Ukrainian prisoners of war had been charged in politically motivated criminal prosecutions in Russia.¹¹⁴ If we speak only of those taken into captivity since 2022 and charged in a criminal case, according to our calculations there are 785 such individuals. Most of these (397) were taken captive in 2024; 189 were taken captive in 2025. The number of soldiers against whom criminal cases were subsequently opened who were taken captive in Kursk region in Russia was 350; there were another 284 such cases in Donetsk and Luhansk regions in Ukraine. The rest were detained in Bryansk, Belgorod, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Sumsk regions, as well as in Crimea.

In all, over the course of 2025, we primarily recorded information about prisoners of war detained in previous years. As noted above, this is because the fact of prosecution often becomes known only six months or a year later, and in the case of Ukrainian prisoners of war, sometimes even years after the prosecution began. We expect a more accurate number, for those Ukrainian soldiers whose prosecutions on politically motivated criminal charges began in 2025, will become known at best in late 2026 or early 2027.

Table 40. Number of Ukrainian prisoners of war against whom a politically motivated criminal prosecution has been initiated or sentence issued

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Prisoners of war against whom a criminal case has been opened	238	49	397	189
Prisoners of war who have been sentenced ¹¹⁵	1	51	125	417

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

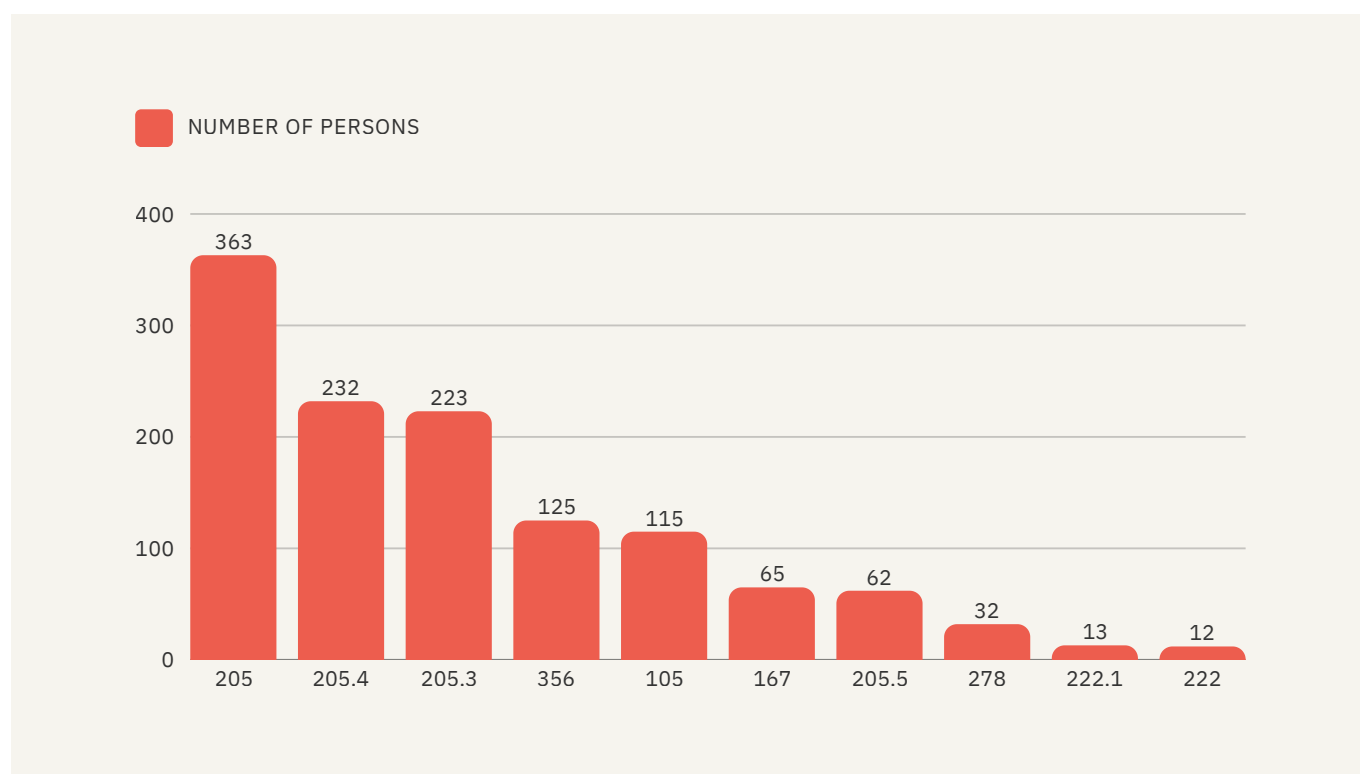
Most Ukrainian prisoners of war known to us, against whom criminal cases have been opened (707), have already been sentenced. As is clear from Table 38, most verdicts were issued in 2025. Approximately half these verdicts were against soldiers taken prisoner in Kursk region during the Ukrainian armed forces' incursion into that region, which lasted from August 2024 to May 2025.

Ukrainian soldiers taken captive after 2022 have most often been charged with 'terrorist' offences, namely an act of terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF), organising and participating in a terrorist group (Art. 205.4 CC RF), or undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activity (Art. 205.3 CC RF). The fourth most 'popular' offence is that of using prohibited means and methods of warfare (Art. 356 CC RF); after that comes murder (Art. 105 CC RF).

114 This figure refers both to military personnel taken prisoner after 2022 and those accused of having served in Ukrainian armed groups prior to 2022.

115 These figures includes Ukrainian servicemen taken prisoner after 2022.

Figure 9. Articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation used most often in political prosecutions of Ukrainian prisoners of war



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

At least 24 Ukrainian soldiers have been given life sentences.¹¹⁶ Seven of these sentences were issued in 2025. Almost all these individuals were convicted of murdering civilians in Mariupol. A few more were given life sentences for killing Russian soldiers or residents of Kursk region. Our project condemns war crimes and believes individuals of all nationalities must be held liable by law if they commit them. However, given the limited nature and even total absence of information about the investigations, law enforcement officers' impunity, judges' bias, and the practice of fabricating cases, we cannot be certain that the Ukrainians truly did commit the actions of which they were accused. It is important to examine such cases with the greatest care.

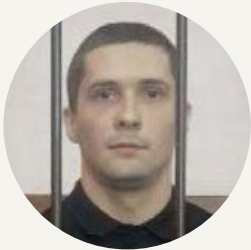
The average term of imprisonment handed down to Ukrainian prisoners of war (excluding those sentenced to life imprisonment) is 16 years.

Many prisoners of war have become defendants in several criminal cases at once. Often, successive cases have been initiated against them after they were sentenced a first time. In this way, their total term of imprisonment increases with the years. Our project knows of 40 instances when several cases were opened in succession against Ukrainian prisoners of war. This practice became most frequent in 2025, when 33 new cases were opened against previously convicted Ukrainian prisoners of war. Usually, Russian law enforcement officers limit themselves to opening two cases against a prisoner of war, although soldiers [Dmitry Kucheryavy](#), [Sergei Samokhval](#), [Semen Severin](#), [Leonid Onupko](#) and [Artem Vyshnyak](#) have been charged on three counts at once.

116 Of these, 12 are currently in custody, the rest were released as part of a prisoner exchange between Russia and Ukraine.



The prosecution of Dmitry Kucheryavy



Twenty-four-year-old **Dmitry Kucheryavy** served in Ukraine's Azov Battalion. In 2022, he was taken captive at the Azovstal factory in Mariupol (Donetsk region). Two years later, on 22 March 2024, the 'Donetsk People's Republic Supreme Court' of occupation issued its first sentence of 22 years and two months' imprisonment. Kucheryavy was accused of firing on apartment buildings in Mariupol.¹¹⁷

A few months later, on 4 September 2024, Kucheryavy was convicted on yet another charge. This time he was prosecuted for his service in the Azov Battalion.¹¹⁸ The Southern District Military Court sentenced Kucheryavy to 18 years' imprisonment. As a result of adding this sentence to his previous sentence, Kucheryavy was ordered to serve 29 years' imprisonment in a strict regime penal colony.

Russian law enforcement officers did not stop there. Soon after, it became known that a third case had been opened against Kucheryavy on the same charges for which his first sentence had been handed down. On 30 May 2025 the 'Donetsk People's Republic's Supreme Court' of occupation sentenced Kucheryavy to a new term for firing on the village of Berdyanskoe in Donetsk region. Kucheryavy's total sentence for all three convictions then came to 29 years and four months of imprisonment.

Ukrainian soldiers are systematically prosecuted for serving in the Azov Battalion and other units (Aidar Battalion, Donbas Battalion, and the Noman Çelebicihan 48th Assault Battalion). Since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine, at least 204 Ukrainian prisoners of war have been prosecuted in criminal cases exclusively for their military service, contrary to international law. In and of itself, belonging to Ukrainian units banned in Russia is being treated by Russian law enforcement as participation in a terrorist group (Art. 205.4 CC RF) or organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF), and military training as undergoing instruction for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activity (Art. 205.3 CC RF). We consider soldiers charged with these offences solely for serving in Ukrainian military units to be political prisoners.

117 Kucheryavy was convicted on charges of attempted murder of two or more persons by a group of individuals using methods posing a danger to the public, motivated by hatred (Art. 105, Part 2[a,f,g,l], CC RF), use of prohibited means and methods of warfare (Art. 356, Part 1, CC RF), and the wilful destruction of another person's property (Art. 167, Part 2, CC RF).

118 Kucheryavy was charged with undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF) and participation in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF).



2.5.5. The torture and death of Ukrainian prisoners

After being taken into Russian captivity, soldiers, as well as civilians being prosecuted, are frequently held incommunicado. Of the former Ukrainian prisoners of war [surveyed](#) by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), only 12% had been allowed to correspond with their families while in captivity in Russia.¹¹⁹ In such a situation, captives are especially vulnerable since they cannot report to the outside world about the torture, violence, or intolerable conditions of confinement they endured, or receive legal aid or assistance from lawyers from international organisations.

In Russian captivity, Ukrainian soldiers are systematically subjected to brutal torture and inhumane treatment. According to a [December 2025 report](#) by Human Rights Watch, based on interviews with 12 Ukrainian soldiers released from Russian captivity, Ukrainian prisoners of war are subjected to both physical torture and psychological humiliation. Soldiers encounter these kinds of treatment throughout their time in Russian captivity, and for many this goes on for years.

Respondents told Human Rights Watch of being subjected to brutal beatings, sleep deprivation, electroshocks, being tormented by dogs, extended confinement in uncomfortable positions, and imitation executions. Eleven of the 12 former prisoners of war told Human Rights Watch they had been subjected to sexual assault, including rape and threats of rape. Some had been forced to sit on bottles.

The Ukrainians who were released also reported inhumane confinement conditions, including shortages of food, or inedible food, the absence of basic sanitary and hygienic facilities, and the near total lack of medical assistance. Former prisoner of war **Olga Melnichenko** told [Amnesty International](#) the conditions in Russian captivity were ‘hell’:



It was a cell without running water. You slept on the floor and mice ran all over you. You were fed nothing but scraps. The only thing that kept us from dying was bread. All the rest was simply horrible.

Several Ukrainian soldiers released from Russian captivity told Amnesty International that they had witnessed beatings as a result of which prisoners of war died.

119 Interviews with former detainees were conducted from March 2023, and the mission’s report was published in October 2024.



The death of Pavel Bozhko



Pavel Bozhko, a 33-year-old Ukrainian soldier taken captive in Mariupol in 2022, was prosecuted on criminal charges of using banned means and methods of warfare (Art. 356 CC RF) and murder (Art. 105 CC RF). He was accused of killing civilians in Mariupol. While imprisoned in Russia, Bozhko managed to talk with his mother over the phone a few times. The last time they talked was 23 March 2022. Subsequently, a released Ukrainian prisoner of war told Bozhko's mother her son had been brutally beaten in Tula region's Penal Colony No. 1.

'At the time, a young guy said they had severely beaten Pavel's legs, that the flesh had separated from the bone and he couldn't walk,' his mother [told](#) the Ukrainian publication Fokus.

In January 2023, another released Ukrainian soldier told Bozhko's mother that her son had died. In March 2023, Bozhko's body was handed over to Ukraine. His mother identified the body from an appendicitis scar and a missing tooth. According to his mother, in captivity they had severely beaten Pavel's kidneys, legs, and spleen and he had been tortured with electric shocks and a taser. In captivity, he lost half of his body weight.

In autumn 2025, during a review of his case in court, another Ukrainian soldier, **Andrei Zdorenko**, who was being tried on a charge of firing on settlements in Donetsk region, died. In May 2022, Zdorenko had been taken captive by Russian forces. We learned of his death from his [case record](#) on the court's website. The cause of the soldier's death is unknown. He was 39 years old.

Ukrainian civilians have also been systematically subjected to torture and inhuman treatment in Russian places of detention. Above (see Chapter 2.5.2) we mentioned that Zaporizhzhia region residents Artem Murdid and his mother Anna had [testified](#) in court about the torture they had endured. According to Artem Murdid, because of the violence inflicted on him he was forced to make a confession, which formed the basis for his charge and life sentence.

The prosecution of the Melitopol adolescents

Ukrainian adolescents abducted in Melitopol in 2023, **Viktor Azarovsky**, **Denis Vasilik**, **Oleg Shokol**, **Daniil Dakhov**, and **Pavel Grimak**, were also tortured. According to the lawyer **Katerina Bobrovskaya**, statements were beaten out of them in Taganrog's Remand Prison No. 2 on charges of planning acts of terrorism and sabotage, as well as manufacturing and possessing explosives.



In the autumn of 2025, [journalists](#) reported that Dakhov and Grimak had died in prison. The youths, who were 16 years old, died in May 2024, approximately six months after their arrest. The Crimean Tatar Resource Centre asserts that Russian law enforcement officers told the parents of the dead children that they had supposedly blown themselves up with a homemade explosive device. They did not turn over the bodies, however.

Another Ukrainian civilian who did not survive Russian imprisonment was Enerhodar resident [Aleksandr Markov](#), sentenced in February 2025 to 14 years' imprisonment on a charge of treason (Art. 275 CC RF) for a money transfer to a Ukrainian account. In the summer of 2025, we [learned](#) of his death during transportation. He was 74 years old.

Both Ukrainian civilians and soldiers are often held in Taganrog's Remand Prison No. 2, which is known as the 'torture camp.' Shortly before her transportation, Ukrainian journalist [Viktoriya Roshchina](#), who died in 2024, was held in this remand prison. In 2023, Polish citizen [Krzysztof Galos died](#) in the same remand prison (for more detail about these deaths, see Chapters 3.1.1 and 3.1.2).

2.5.6. Prisoner exchanges

At the same time, 2025 saw Ukraine return home alive a record number of individuals from Russian captivity. According to [Dmitry Lubinets](#), more than 2,000 people were released. In none of the preceding years had Ukrainian human rights activists and authorities been able to achieve the return of so many individuals.

Lubinets noted that the return of prisoners in 2025 was largely facilitated by the May talks in Istanbul.¹²⁰ It was then the sides agreed on an exchange of '1000 for 1000.'



For us this was genuine historic progress. For the first time since the beginning of the full-scale invasion we were able to bring such a large number of people home. Civilians as well as soldiers. It was especially important to see 120 Ukrainian civilians finally with their families

— an authorized representative of the Ukrainian side said.

In fact, it was only the first round of Istanbul talks that was successful. According to Lubinets, during the second round, Ukraine raised the issue of returning seriously wounded and ill prisoners of war, as well as Ukrainians under 25. The third round discussed the return of prisoners of war given short prison terms. However, Lubinets noted, Russia fulfilled agreements reached in the second and third rounds of talks only in part.

120 Talks between the Russian and Ukrainian delegations took place on 16 May 2025 and were the first since 2022.



In 2025, at least 20 individuals were returned to Ukraine whom the Russian authorities had prosecuted on politically motivated criminal charges, as well as civilians who had been kept in captivity without charge. Among them, for example, were Ukrainian journalists **Dmitry Khilyuk** and **Mark Kaliush**. The status and location of Khilyuk, abducted and taken to Russia in 2022, were not known until April 2024, when the Russian Defence Ministry [confirmed](#) the fact of his detention. In the autumn of that year, we learned he was in Penal Colony No. 7 in Vladimir region. Kaliush, detained in August 2023 in Melitopol, was subsequently sent by a Russian court to compulsory psychiatric treatment based on the results of his criminal trial.¹²¹ Along with Khilyuk and Kaliush, Kherson's former mayor **Vladimir Nikolaenko** also [returned](#) to Ukraine on 24 March 2025. He had spent three and a half years in Russian captivity.

In 2025, at least 11 Ukrainian soldiers against whom criminal prosecutions had been initiated in Russia for serving in the Ukrainian armed forces were released.

Altogether in the four years of war between Russia and Ukraine, 70 exchanges have taken place, as a result of which 6,266 individuals have [returned](#) to Ukraine, of whom 403 are civilians.

2.5.7. Temporary detention centres for foreigners

Periodically, Ukrainians whom Russian courts have decided to expel spend long periods in Russian temporary detention centres for foreigners. Foreigners are held in detention centres of this kind who were in Russia illegally or who are subject to expulsion after administrative-law infractions, or after having served their punishment for criminal acts.

The large numbers of people in these centres mean that conditions of confinement can be [difficult](#), lacking hygiene and feeding facilities, with overcrowded cells and no facilities for people to communicate with their relatives.

As a result of the war, Ukrainians have to wait for release significantly longer than they might in peacetime. This concerns not only those prosecuted in politically motivated cases but any Ukrainian citizens subject to expulsion, for example, those who have served a sentence in a criminal case or who, from the Russian authorities' standpoint, have violated migration legislation.

121 Kaliush was charged with making threats to kill or cause grievous bodily harm (Art. 119, Part 1, CC RF), preparing a terrorist attack as part of a group (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 205, Part 2[a], CC RF), and unlawful trafficking of explosive devices or explosive substances by prior conspiracy (Art. 222.1, Part 2[a], CC RF).



According to [Mikhail Savva](#), permanent expert at the Ukrainian Centre for Civil Liberties, Ukrainians are deported from the temporary detention centres for foreigners only via Georgia. In an interview with ASTRA, Savva said:



But the Georgian border guards hold them in the cellar of an unfinished terminal. It can hold a maximum of 20 people, but sometimes 100 are kept there. However, Russia cannot send more than 800 people, the number held in detention centres, at a time. Ukraine is proposing a direct handover across calm sectors of the Ukrainian-Russian border or through Belarus. But Belarus doesn't want this, and the Russian regime is doing nothing to influence its ally.

In June 2025, several dozen Ukrainians expelled from Russia were stranded at the Dariali crossing point.¹²² They were [held](#) for several months in windowless cellars, without sufficient food, water or medicine. In August, 15 of this group [declared](#) a hunger strike. As a result, all [were able](#) to return to Ukraine in late August 2025.

In 2015, Ukrainian citizen [Andrei Kolomiets](#) was sentenced to nine years and eight months' imprisonment. He was formally released on 15 January 2025.¹²³ As he was leaving the penal colony, however, he was [detained](#) and placed in a temporary detention centre for foreigners in Krasnodar region. The court ruled him guilty of violating migration legislation and jailed him for 90 days.¹²⁴ After that, his sentence was extended for the same term. On 6 July 2025, after serving his jail terms in the temporary detention centre, Kolomiets was taken to a [transit zone](#) on the Russian-Georgian border. There he spent several more days in a cellar, where there were approximately 50 other people. As a result, Kolomiets was not able to return to Ukraine until 11 July 2025, that is, six months after his release.

According to [Ekho Kavkaza](#), in the summer of 2025 among those on the border between Russia and Georgia was a group of Ukrainians deported from territories occupied by Russia since the start of the full-scale war after they refused to accept Russian passports.¹²⁵

122 Situated in the buffer zone between Russia and Georgia.

123 Kolomiets was arrested in 2015 in Kabardino-Balkaria, where he was living with his then common-law wife. During a search of their home, drugs were found; Kolomiets claimed the investigators had planted them. He was charged with possession of drugs on a large scale (Art. 228, Part 2, CC RF). Kolomiets was then further charged with participation in the Maidan protests in Kyiv, where, according to the investigative authorities, he threw Molotov cocktails at members of the Berkut special police force, which was classified as an attempt to murder two individuals in the course of their official duties, committed in a manner posing a danger to the public, and motivated by hatred (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 105, Part 2[a,b, f,l], CC RF). Memorial recognised Kolomiets as a political prisoner.

124 Kolomiets was unable to renew his Ukrainian documents while serving his sentence.

125 In 2023, Vladimir Putin signed [a decree](#) ordering that residents of occupied Ukrainian territories who refused to accept Russian citizenship be treated as foreigners.



If a person in some way impedes the work of the occupational authorities or does not want to accept Russian identity documents, then an urgent deportation takes place within a few hours. They tell the person, gather your things, you are being deported from Russia. They issue a ban on re-entering for a term of five to an unspecified number of years.

— Mariya Belkina, director of Volunteers Tbilisi, told journalists.

According to the project Vikradeni Melitopoltsi cited by [Vazhnye istorii](#), in the years 2024-2025, at least 17 people were deported from occupied Ukrainian territories. In reality, there may have been many times more.

Deportation of residents of occupied regions is prohibited by the Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute and is a blatant violation of international law.



2.6. Other politically motivated prosecutions

2.6.1. Prosecutions of lawyers and human rights activists

In 2025, at least 13 politically motivated criminal prosecutions were initiated against lawyers. Seven of the defendants are in Russia (the others are being prosecuted in absentia). By comparison (excluding prosecutions in absentia), in 2023 four such criminal prosecutions were initiated against lawyers; in 2024 there were three.

In 2025, four lawyers were remanded in custody; one was subsequently released after being given a non-custodial sentence.

In all, according to our information, as of the time of writing, seven lawyers are incarcerated for political reasons.

At present, the highest-profile instances of politically motivated prosecutions of lawyers and human rights activists for political reasons are:

- the prosecution of Aleksei Navalny's lawyers
- the prosecution of Mariya Bontsler
- the prosecution of the Ekaterinburg human rights activists

The prosecution of Aleksei Navalny's lawyers

On 17 November 2025, [Judge Yuliya Shilova](#) of Petushinsk district court in Vladimir region ruled that lawyers who had represented the interests of Aleksei Navalny were guilty of 'participation in an extremist group' (Art. 282.1, Part 2, CC RF). As a result, three lawyers were sentenced to terms of imprisonment in general regime penal colonies: [Vadim Kobzev](#) to serve five and a half years, [Aleksei Liptser](#) to serve five years, and [Igor Sergunin](#) to serve three and a half years.¹²⁶

The prosecution of Navalny's lawyers was initiated in 2023, while Navalny himself was still alive. Also prosecuted in absentia in that case were **Olga Mikhailova** and **Aleksandr Fedulov**, who managed to leave Russia. The lawyers were accused of the '*regular transmission of information*' from Navalny, who was in correctional institutions, to his associates. The investigative authorities alleged that in this way the opposition leader '*continued to carry out his functions as leader*' of his '*extremist group*.'

On 22 September, Vladimir Regional Court upheld the guilty verdict on appeal, while making minor changes. The period of probation, to be served after the sentence, was reduced; and a three-year ban on rendering legal services was replaced by a ban for the same length of time on representing clients in court.

126 In April 2026, Sergunin was released after serving his sentence.



Mariana Katsarova, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Russian Federation [expressed outrage](#) at this verdict and called on the Russian Federation authorities to free the lawyers immediately.

While on remand, Aleksei Liptser's health drastically deteriorated. In April, his wife Liudmila [said](#) that Liptser was suffering from critically high blood pressure, a turning blue of his limbs, spider angioma, pain in the kidney and liver areas, deterioration of vision, and headaches. On 18 April 2025, Liptser was placed in a prison hospital.

The prosecution of Mariya Bontsler

On 28 May 2025, in Kaliningrad, the authorities searched the home of lawyer [Mariya Bontsler](#). The same day, searches¹²⁷ were conducted of the homes of two other Kaliningrad lawyers, **Roman Morozov** and **Ekaterina Selizarova**, on the grounds that FSB operatives believed they knew *'about the criminal activity of Mariya Bontsler.'* In fear for her own safety, Selizarova left Russia.

Bontsler was [accused](#) of passing on *'to an associate of the security service of an unfriendly state' 'information about law enforcement personnel that had become known to her through her work as a lawyer.'* She was charged with collusion with a foreign state (Art. 275.1 CC RF). According to the investigative authorities, she had associated with an employee of the Ukrainian Security Service by the name of Dyachuk, a cousin of **Ivan Kveselevich**¹²⁸ (Kveselevich was probably Bontsler's client). Bontsler's defence considers the name Dyachuk may conceal an FSB officer who carried out the entrapment. Bontsler herself [asserts](#) she had always shared information about her defendants with the media openly and there was no point in 'collusion.'

Bontsler has been in detention since 29 May 2025, when she was remanded in custody despite a serious chronic illness. On 26 June, at a hearing to appeal her pre-trial detention, Bontsler [suffered](#) a hypertensive crisis. On 23 July, an ambulance took her to hospital from a court hearing considering an extension of her term in custody. Nevertheless, the next day her custody was extended.

Bontsler's lawyer Ilya Sidorov [spoke publicly](#) about the failure to render his client medical assistance in the remand prison. Bontsler also [complained](#) of a shortage of drinking water and the impossibility of ensuring a vegetarian diet in a remand prison. In July, the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) called on the Russian authorities to immediately ensure Bontsler access to *'adequate medical assistance and care, as well as to consider alternatives to keeping her in custody.'*

On 25 September 2025, the Bar Council of Kaliningrad region suspended Mariya Bontsler's status as a lawyer.

127 Formally, a 'premises inspection' was carried out of Morozov's home, which is, in effect, an operational and investigative measure no different from a search, but which may be carried out even before criminal proceedings are initiated.

128 In April 2025, Ivan Kveselevich was sentenced to two and a half years' imprisonment in a general regime penal colony on a charge of collusion with a foreign state (Art. 275.1 CC RF).



In October 2025, Bontsler's son [said](#) that the investigative authorities were threatening to stiffen the charge against his mother by accusing her of treason (Art. 275 CC RF) if she refused to implicate her colleague. In March 2026, the threat was [carried out](#).

In November 2025, the Justice Ministry's Kaliningrad branch sent a recommendation to the region's bar association demanding they bring disciplinary charges against Bontsler's defence lawyer, attorney Aleksandr Chauzov, for refusing to sign an agreement to observe confidentiality of state secrets.

The prosecution of Ekaterinburg human rights activists

On 16 December 2025, in Ekaterinburg, the lawyer **Roman Kachanov** and human rights activists **Aleksei Sokolov** and **Larisa Zakharova**, who specialize in defending prisoners' rights, were [detained](#). **Kachanov** and **Zakharova** were charged with organising the activity of an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1, Part 3, CC RF), and **Sokolov** with treason (Art. 275 CC RF). Ural Live, a pro-regime Telegram channel, [reported](#) that the criminal investigation had been opened on the basis of a denunciation by Ekaterina Saprykina (Ipatova), a 'Sverdlovsk public figure' and chief of staff of the pro-regime association Militant Brotherhood Volunteer Company. Saprykina told the Investigative Committee that Kachanov and Zakharova, who represented the civil society organisation Human Rights Activists of the Urals, and Sokolov, representing the civil society organisation Legal Basis, were in receipt of funds from the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and the National Endowment for Democracy, which have been designated 'undesirable organisations' in Russia. *'Using the money from these sources, Russian citizens Aleksei Sokolov, Larisa Zakharova, and Roman Kachanov were able to carry out work aimed at destabilising the situation in the region, organising protests, and discrediting law enforcement agencies,'* Saprykina [wrote](#) on her Telegram channel. All three individuals were remanded in custody. In February 2026, Kachanov was transferred to house arrest.

PROSECUTIONS OF LAWYERS ACCUSED OF DISCLOSING STATE SECRETS

There is a trend to prosecute lawyers on charges of disclosing state secrets (Art. 283, Part 1, CC RF). In November 2025, we learned of three lawyers being prosecuted in such cases. In instances known to us, lawyers have been charged in relation to their direct obligations to act in defence of their clients. In order not to 'spread' a state secret, they would have to refuse to perform important legal actions.

The lawyer **Ivan Pavlov**, founder of the human rights project Department One, and project lawyer **Evgeny Smirnov**, who are both abroad, have been [accused](#) of passing on to an expert linguist in 2020 information constituting a state secret while acting as defence lawyers for [Karina Tsurkan](#). Pavlov has stated that he did indeed hand over certain materials from the criminal case to a specialist, but preliminarily he removed all information not subject to disclosure, which is confirmed by the verdict against Tsurkan. A warrant was issued for Smirnov's arrest; Pavlov was already wanted on a charge of violating the 'foreign agent' law.



Furthermore, a prosecution for disclosing a state secret was brought against [Chelyabinsk lawyer Igor Morozov](#). The investigative authorities asserted that Morozov, while representing the interests of a foreign citizen whose residency permit in Russia had been revoked, familiarized himself with case materials which included a letter containing a state secret. According to [74.RU](#), the lawyer then submitted a document containing a state secret to the chancellery of one of the courts, which qualified as disclosing it.¹²⁹ Travel restrictions were imposed on Morozov pending his trial.

According to [Department One](#), since October 2024 more than 200 lawyers working on cases containing state secrets have had their ability to leave Russia restricted. This restriction became possible under amendments that went into effect in February 2024 to the law 'On state secrets.' The amendments restrict the right of lawyers to leave Russia if in the course of their professional duties they become aware of information classified as 'top secret' or 'strictly confidential.'

OTHER PROSECUTIONS RELATED TO THE WORK OF LAWYERS OR HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

On 31 October 2025, [Dmitry Talantov](#), former president of the Udmurtia bar association, had his sentence reduced by two months from seven years to six years and 10 months. In 2024, Talantov had been convicted of spreading 'information known to be false' about the Russian army motivated by hatred and using his official position (Art. 207.3, Part 2[a, e], CC RF) and of inciting hatred or hostility using his official position (Art. 282, Part 2[b], CC RF). The grounds for the lawyer's criminal prosecution were Facebook posts about the war in 2022. Talantov's colleagues believe his prosecution was [connected](#) to his work as a defence lawyer for [Ivan Safronov](#).

On 18 April 2025, in St. Petersburg, the lawyer **Timur Rzaev** was detained. According to the [investigative authorities](#), Rzaev had removed Easter decorations installed in the lobby entrance of an apartment building. The resident of the building who had installed these decorations complained to the police, saying that by his actions Rzaev had offended the feelings of Orthodox Christians. Rzaev said the decorations had not been approved by the management company, whose interests he represented, and they violated fire safety laws. Rzaev was accused of offending believers' feelings (Art. 148, Part 1, CC RF), as well as of undermining the dignity of a group of individuals based on their religion (Art. 282 CC RF). Rzaev was not remanded in custody; the prosecution under Art. 282 CC RF was subsequently [dropped](#) at the investigative stage.

In February, Moscow Regional Court heard an appeal against the verdict handed down to the lawyer **Timur Idalov**. The court [released](#) Idalov from serving the sentence imposed on him because of the expiry of the statute of limitations for criminal prosecution. In 2024, Idalov had been found guilty of threatening to kill a prosecutor (Art. 296, Part 2, CC RF) and sentenced to one year and 11 months' compulsory work in custody and a three-year ban on working as a lawyer. The basis for Idalov's criminal prosecution had been an utterance he made during the trial addressed to the prosecutor: *'Who are you, Commissar Cattani? You know he was shot.'*

129 We do not have information about the precise grounds for the charges against Morozov. It may be assumed that he submitted an appeal against the ruling at first instance, or additional evidence relating to the case, to the court registry.



On 11 December 2025, officers from the Centre E anti-extremism police, other police officers and special forces [searched the office of the Crimean Central Bar Association](#), where the lawyers **Edem Semedlyaev, Emil Kurbedinov, Nazim Sheikhmambetov, Elvina Semedlyaeva, Rustem Kyamilev, and Lilya Gemedzhi** worked. Law enforcement officers conducted an ‘inspection of the premises,’ in fact, a full-fledged search with confiscation of documents, including those involving attorney-client privilege. The formal justification for the search was a court ruling stating that Kurbedinov, Semedlyaev, and the others may have committed unlawful acts of organising and participating in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF), facilitating terrorism (Art. 205.1 CC RF), and tax evasion (Art. 199 CC RF).

Regarding the above-mentioned founder of Department One, Ivan Pavlov, two criminal cases continue to be investigated for an alleged failure to carry out the obligations of a ‘foreign agent’ (Art. 330.1, Part 2, CC RF). In March 2025, a criminal case on the same charge was [initiated](#) against the lawyer Valeriya Vetoshkina, who left Russia in 2021. Before this, she had been fined twice for the administrative-law offence of failing to submit financial reports as a ‘foreign agent’ to the Justice Ministry. A warrant was issued for Vetoshkina’s arrest.

PROSECUTIONS OF LAWYERS ON GROUNDS NOT FORMALLY CONNECTED TO LEGAL OR HUMAN RIGHTS WORK

In 2025, criminal cases were opened against several lawyers not directly related to their professional activity:

1. [Vladislav Zavgorodny](#), a lawyer from Kaliningrad region, was charged with justifying terrorism on the Internet (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF). The basis for the charge was a comment in which Zavgorodny, Slovo Zashchite [reports](#), ‘expressed regret that a Ukrainian drone during one of the strikes on Russian territory did not hit representatives of the country’s top leadership.’ The lawyer was held in custody from 7 March to 13 August 2025, when he was sentenced to a fine of 390,000 roubles and a two-year restriction on his right to administer Internet resources.

2. [Vladimir Sorokin](#), a lawyer from Kaliningrad and a member of Yabloko’s regional leadership, was charged with financing extremism (Art. 282.3 CC RF). Sorokin was detained on 6 September 2025 on an accusation of having transferred 500 roubles to the Anti-Corruption Foundation in November 2021. He was banned from certain actions pending trial.

3. [Vladislav Radchenko](#), an attorney from Izhevsk, was charged with participating in the activity of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 2, CC RF). According to the [investigative authorities](#), Radchenko ‘in 2025 rendered assistance to a terrorist organisation banned in Russia by providing information of interest about the activities of law enforcement organs and the Defence Ministry on the territory of the Udmurt Republic.’ According to [reports](#) in pro-regime media, Radchenko stands accused of cooperating with the Free Russia Legion, to which it is alleged he passed on information about a missile arsenal in one of the villages in Udmurtia. On 22 October 2025, he was remanded in custody.



Furthermore, lawyers who had left Russia became defendants in criminal prosecutions in 2025.

In April, [we learned](#) that a case had been opened against Moscow lawyer **Dmitry Zakhvatov**. He, as well as former municipal deputy **Mariya Solenova**, was accused of aiding and abetting terrorist activity (Art. 205.1, Part 4, CC RF) and of making calls to engage in activity directed against the security of the Russian Federation, committed by a group of individuals using the Internet (Art. 280.4, Part 2[a, c], CC RF). According to the investigative authorities, the two published links for people to donate for the purchase of drones for the Kalinovsky regiment and vitamins for Azov Battalion fighters.¹³⁰ In the summer, Zakhvatov and Solenova were arrested in absentia and a search was conducted of the apartment of Zakhvatov's father.

In July 2025, the lawyer **Nikolai Polozov** [was arrested in absentia](#) on a charge of spreading 'information known to be false' about the Russian army motivated by political hatred (Art. 207.3, Part 2[e], CC RF). A warrant was also issued for his arrest.

2.6.2. Prosecutions of journalists

In 2025, 39 journalists (including instances of prosecution in absentia) were charged in politically motivated criminal cases, according to [OVD-Info](#). This is fewer than in 2024, when prosecutions were initiated against 50 journalists. Five journalists were deprived of liberty in 2025.¹³¹

According to the [Media Rights Defence Centre](#), these numbers are in fact even higher, with criminal cases opened against 81 journalists in 2025, nearly twice as many as the year before (45). Most often, Russian journalists were prosecuted on charges of failing to carry out the obligations of a 'foreign agent' (Art. 330.1 CC RF), spreading 'information known to be false' about the Russian army (Art. 207.3 CC RF), justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF), participating in the activities of an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1 CC RF), and extortion (Art. 163 CC RF).

In 2025, according to the calculations of the Media Rights Defence Centre, Russian courts issued at least 41 verdicts against Russian journalists and media workers. Twelve of those convicted were imprisoned. Most often, convictions were issued on charges of 'fake news' about the military, failure to carry out the obligations of a 'foreign agent' and justifying terrorism. Five journalists were convicted in 2025 on charges of participating in the 'extremist Anti-Corruption Foundation' (see Chapter 2.4.6). Moreover, in 2025 the Media Rights Defence Centre recorded at least 21 searches of editorial offices, as well as the homes of journalists and their relatives.

According to our project, 64 journalists are incarcerated for political reasons at the present time.

In the [World Press Freedom Index for 2025](#) issued by the international organisation Reporters Without Borders, Russia occupies 171st place out of 180 countries.

130 The Kastus Kalinovsky Regiment is a Belarusian volunteer unit forming part of the Ukrainian army.

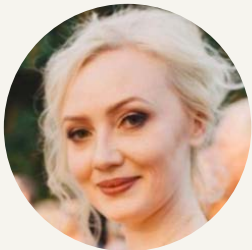
131 Eight journalists were deprived of liberty in 2022; seven in 2023; and four in 2024.



The prosecution of Ryazan journalists Konstantin Smirnov, Aleksei Frolov, and Natalya Smolyaninova



On 30 January 2025, FSB officers in Ryazan region detained [three local journalists](#). These were the chair of Yabloko's regional branch, municipal deputy, and chief editor of the Internet newspaper *Vid Sboku* **Konstantin Smirnov**; *Novaya Gazeta-Ryazan* editor-in-chief **Aleksei Frolov**; and former head of the *RZN.info* news agency **Natalya Smolyaninova**.



Smirnov and Smolyaninova were accused of extortion as part of a group of individuals acting in concert on a large scale (Art. 163, Part 2[a,d], CC RF), and Frolova of extortion on an especially large scale (Art. 163, Part 3[b], CC RF). The victim in the case was Aleksei Rogotovskiy, acting general director of the government fund for the capital renovation of apartment buildings in Ryazan. According to the investigative authorities, in the autumn of 2024 Smirnov and Smolyaninova published 'several articles with information defaming him' in *Vid Sboku*, and later Smolyaninova sent Rogotovskiy a demand that he pay 300,000 roubles or else the negative publications would continue. Smirnov himself allegedly received this sum of money from Rogotovskiy. In turn, according to the charge, Rogotovskiy transferred to Frolov, via Smolyaninova, the sum of 100,000 roubles to stop the negative publications in *Novaya Gazeta-Ryazan*. Meanwhile, they allegedly agreed 'on a monthly payment of 100,000 roubles for 12 months.'



Smirnov and Frolov were remanded in custody and Smolyaninova was placed under house arrest. In May 2025, Frolov was [released](#) from custody and placed under house arrest. He partially admitted his guilt. Smolyaninova made a confession and began to cooperate with the investigative authorities. Konstantin Smirnov remains on remand and maintains his innocence of the charges.

A Yabloko [press release](#) states that Smirnov's prosecution is related to his political activity and is in retaliation for his campaign against municipal reforms in Ryazan region.¹³² Smirnov was also planning to take part in the autumn of 2025 in a State Duma by-election for one of the single-seat districts in Ryazan region.

Previously, Frolov had run for municipal deputy on a Yabloko ticket and had publicly protested against the elimination of local self-government.

After the journalists' detention, the media outlets *Vid Sboku* and *Novaya Gazeta—Ryazan* closed down.

¹³² Smirnov opposed the shutting down of rural settlements, which would deprive residents of rural areas of their own local self-government. He spoke at public hearings on this issue, attracting hundreds of people to protest against the reform. On 1 February, one day after Smirnov's arrest, the Dubrovicheskoe rural settlement was abolished.



The prosecution of Svetlana Khustik



On 29 September 2025, journalist [Svetlana Khustik](#) was detained in Krasnoyarsk region. She was accused of spreading ‘information known to be false’ about the Russian army out of motives of self-interest and political hatred (Art. 207.3, Part 2[d, e], CC RF). The basis for the criminal prosecution was [publication](#) in *Sibir. Realii* of an interview with the artist Leonid Tishkov, for which the author was listed as Olga Sorokina (the prosecution asserts that Svetlana Khustik used this pseudonym). The interview was devoted to the captivity of Soviet soldiers, among them the artist’s father, in Uman in 1941.

The investigative authorities considered an editorial comment about [how a Russian missile landed on an apartment building in Uman](#) in 2023 to be ‘information known to be false’ about the Russian army. According to the investigative authorities, the motive of self-interest consisted in the fact that Khustik received a 64,000-rouble fee for her publication.

CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS OF JOURNALISTS IN ABSENTIA

According to [Reporters Without Borders](#), since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the authorities have brought criminal prosecutions in absentia against both Russian journalists who were forced to leave the country and staff of foreign media. Since 24 February 2022, Reporters Without Borders report, 66 media workers have been remanded in custody, or sentenced to imprisonment, in absentia for carrying out their professional duties.

The campaign of criminal prosecutions in absentia of journalists who left Russia after the start of the full-scale war with Ukraine continued in 2025.

Criminal cases were [opened](#) against staff of the Dozhd television channel. **Ekaterina Kotrikadze**, **Tikhon Dzyadko**, and **Valeriya Ratnikova** were charged with spreading ‘fake news’ about the Russian army (Art. 207.3, Part 2[e], CC RF) and with failure to carry out the obligations of a ‘foreign agent’ (Art. 330.1, Part 2, CC RF). For Tikhon Dzyadko, this was his second criminal prosecution for violating ‘foreign agent’ legislation; in connection with the first a warrant had previously been issued for his arrest. In September 2025, Kotrikadze and Ratnikova were also declared wanted. Yet another criminal case under ‘foreign agent’ legislation was opened against [Yuliya Tartuta](#), and a warrant was issued for her arrest. All the above-named journalists have been remanded in custody in absentia.

On 2 October 2025, Moscow’s Presnensky district court sentenced Dozhd director [Anna Mongait](#) in absentia to five years’ imprisonment on a charge of spreading ‘fake news’ about the Russian military. The grounds for the prosecution were publications on her Telegram channel about Russian bombardments of Odesa and other war crimes by the Russian army in Ukraine.

On 3 October, an in absentia verdict was issued against Novaya Gazeta Evropa journalist [Ilya Azar](#). The court ruled him guilty of organising the activity of an 'undesirable organisation' (Art. 284.1, Part 3, CC RF) for publications on the Deputies of Peaceful Russia website and sentenced him to four years' imprisonment.

2.6.3. Prosecutions under 'foreign agent' legislation

When the term 'foreign agent' was added to Russian legislation, the main target was nonprofit organisations that received financing from abroad. Subsequently, the law was amended to enable designation of physical persons as 'foreign agents,' and foreign funding ceased to be a necessary condition. At present, in most instances the Justice Ministry does not base a 'foreign agent' designation on the presence of [foreign financing](#).

After the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russians who had left the country and publicly expressed disagreement with Russian government policy became primary targets for 'foreign agent' designation. In early December 2025, Deputy Justice Minister Oleg Sviridenko [cited](#) the following data:



*In 2025, 215 designations were added to the register.
Of these, 182 are physical persons...
Of these physical persons, 154 are located abroad.
In all, from 2023 to 2025, of 307 people added
to the foreign agent register, 237 were abroad.*

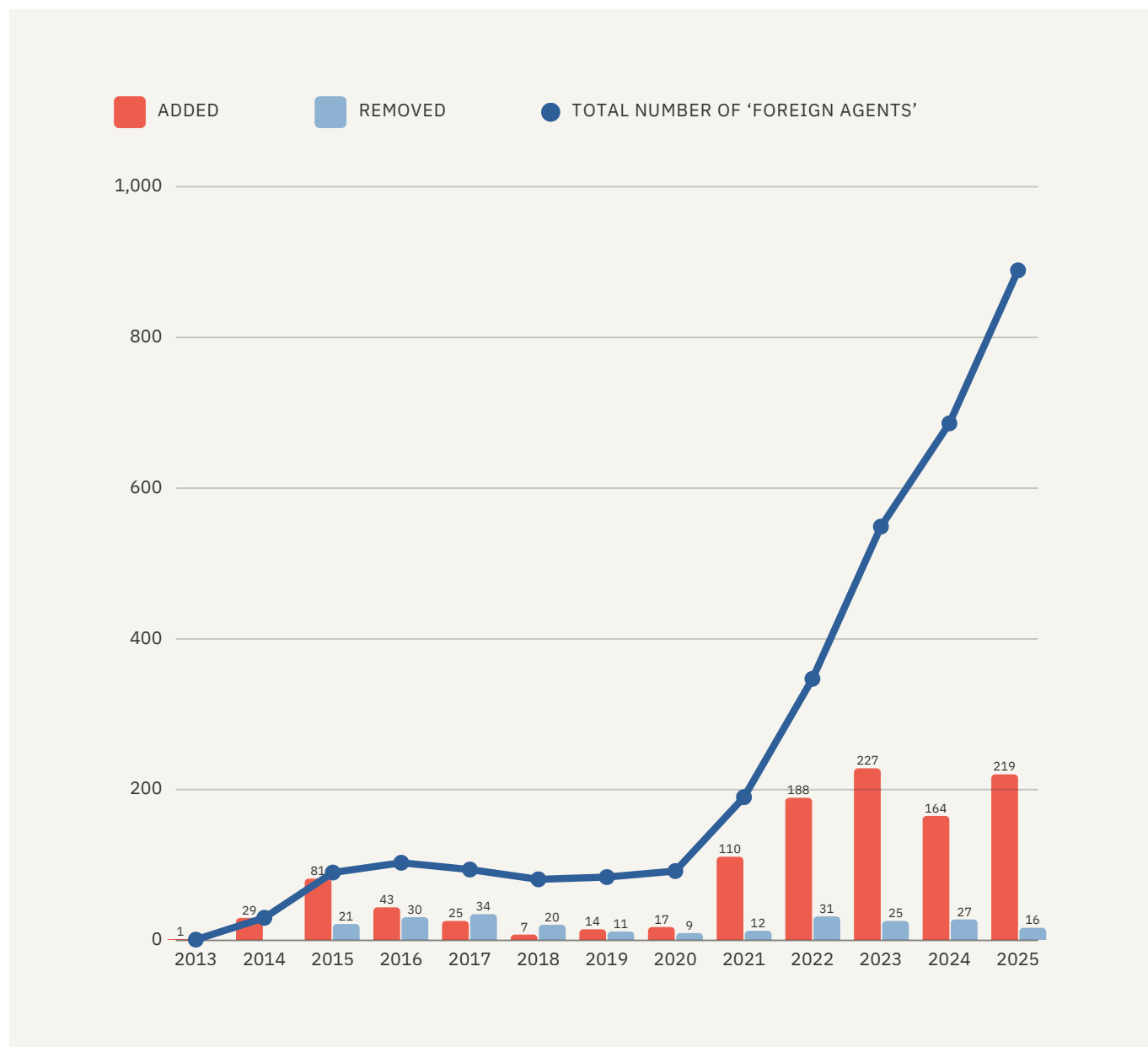
Currently the most important objective of the prosecutions of 'foreign agents' is to restrict the public activism of Russian political emigres. The Russian authorities continue to view the concept of 'foreign agents' as a useful and functional instrument in the battle against free speech and regime critics.

Also speaking to this is the number of individuals added to the register of 'foreign agents' over the course of 2025. After a slight decline in 2024, in 2025 219 new 'foreign agents' were added to the register, which is close to the record number added in 2023. The number of 'foreign agent' designations in force reached an all-time high of 889.



POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

Figure 10. Rates of increase in the register of 'foreign agents'



Source: Justice Ministry of the Russian Federation

The standard grounds for inclusion in the 'foreign agent' register in 2025 (as cited on the Justice Ministry website) are:

- Taking part in creating and distributing reports and materials by 'foreign agents' for an unlimited number of individuals
- Distributing inaccurate information about decisions and policies of the Russian Federation's government
- Speaking out against the 'Special Military Operation in Ukraine', etc.



In 2025, criminal prosecutions under the ‘foreign agent’ law (Art. 330.1 CC RF) of well-known Russians continued. For example, journalist and blogger **Yury Dud**, writer **Boris Akunin (Grigory Chkhartishvili)**, and actress **Tatyana Lazareva** were convicted in absentia under this law; politician **Lev Shlosberg**, who is in Russia, was sentenced to 420 hours of community service;¹³³ criminal cases were also opened against blogger **Maksim Kats**, businessman **Evgeny Chichvarkin**, and rapper **Face (Ivan Dremin)**.

Prosecutions under Art. 330.1 CC RF are generally aimed at well-known individuals who have emigrated. Criminal prosecutions of individuals in Russia for violation of the ‘foreign agent’ law are few (six individuals are being so prosecuted). Sentences involving imprisonment for this offence are very few. More often, verdicts are issued in absentia or do not involve incarceration. One of the rare cases that ended with a real term of imprisonment was the prosecution of **Farkhad Navliutov**.

The prosecution of Farkhad Navliutov



Farkhad Navliutov, a resident of Almetievsk in the Republic of Tatarstan, is on the staff of a civil society organisation that aids drug addicts. He is a father of three small children. As part of his work, Navliutov took part in international conferences and associated with colleagues from other countries. In the past, Navliutov himself had used drugs and, according to law enforcement, continued to be a person of interest.

In March 2023, Navliutov was detained by police on suspicion of possessing drugs. His phone was confiscated, and the police discovered it contained correspondence with foreign colleagues as well as anti-war comments. Navliutov was charged with possessing drugs (Art. 228, Part 1, CC RF), as well as with collecting information in the interests of a foreign source about Russian military and technological capabilities, while at the same time not registering as a ‘foreign agent (Art. 330.1, Part 3, CC RF). The information allegedly gathered consisted of the telephone numbers of the director of the military commissariat of Almetievsk and Almetievsk region and two mobilized citizens. It is worth emphasising that the charges against Navliutov were not brought for passing information to a third party. He was not accused of either treason in the form of rendering aid to a foreign state in activities against Russia’s interests (Art. 275 CC RF) or of collusion with a foreign state (Art. 275.1 CC RF). The charge brought was of failing to register as a ‘foreign agent.’

Navliutov’s defence insisted his phone had been confiscated illegally and could not be used as evidence. The court decided otherwise. For possessing drugs, Navliutov was sentenced to one year and seven months’ imprisonment;¹³⁴ for not registering as a ‘foreign agent’ before sending three telephone numbers to a foreign contact, Navliutov was sentenced to two years in a general regime penal colony.

133 Just one month later, on 5 December 2025, Shlosberg was remanded in custody on a new criminal charge of spreading ‘fake news’ about the Russian army (Art. 207.3 CC RF). Previously, he had also been charged with repeatedly discrediting the army (Art. 280, Part 1, CC RF).

134 We do not know the details of the charge under Art. 228 CC RF, and we do not know to what extent the charge may be substantiated.



His total punishment came to two years and five months' imprisonment. The case materials frequently refer to the defendant's anti-war position, which additionally points to a political motive for the prosecution.

2.6.4. The Baimak prosecutions

DISPERSAL OF THE PROTEST IN BAIMAK

On 17 January 2024, Bashkortostan residents gathered outside the courthouse in Baimak, where that day the verdict was being handed down against regional activist [Fail Alsynov](#) on a charge of inciting interethnic strife. According to various assessments, 2,000-10,000 people came out in support of Alsynov. Law enforcement officers in riot gear also gathered at the courthouse.

Alsynov was sentenced to four years' imprisonment, which was more than the prosecutor had requested. News of the sentence led to outrage among those gathered outside the courthouse. When the police attempted to disperse the crowd, clashes began. Participants in the protest threw snowballs and other objects at the police officers; in response law enforcement officers used tear gas and flash bang grenades.

That day, 17 January 2024, a criminal case was opened in relation to the alleged riot (Art. 212 CC RF). Three days later, charges were being brought against individuals for violence against representatives of the authorities (Art. 318 CC RF).

The day after the events, protesters were detained at home or at work. At first, many participants were sentenced to a few days in jail on administrative-law charges of failing to obey a police officer's lawful request (Art. 19.3, Part 1, CAO RF) or violating the law governing rallies (Art. 20.2 CAO RF). However, subsequently criminal charges were brought against the same individuals, who were then remanded in custody. The last known arrest on a criminal charge over the demonstration in Baimak took place on 28 April 2024.

We know of at least 78 people [prosecuted](#) in the 'Baimak case.' The real number might be greater. Establishing the identity of all those charged was practically impossible, since friends and relatives of several defendants decided not to make information about their prosecution public.

The accused, aged between 22 and 62 years, were mostly men, although they included at least three women. Prior to their arrest, a significant number of defendants worked as construction workers, night watchmen, farmers, herdsmen, woodworkers, and drivers; some had also been teachers and health care workers. Many of those accused have several children. Often the defendants were the sole breadwinners in a family and supported elderly parents.

Nearly all the defendants were remanded in custody for the duration of the investigation. According to our information, only one defendant, a woman, was placed under house arrest.



All the defendants in the 'Baimak case' have been charged with offences related to riot: the majority with participation in riots (Art. 212, Part 2, CC RF); at least 10 with organisation of riots (Art. 212, Part 1, CC RF).

According to the investigative authorities, the main organiser of the 'riot' was **Ruslan Gabbasov**, one of the founders of Bashkort, an organisation banned in 2020, who left Russia in late 2021. According to the case file, Gabbasov, *'in carrying out his criminal intent'*, used the YouTube account Ruslan Gabbasov and the Telegram channel The One from Bashkort to urge Bashkortostan residents *'to participate in riots in connection with interfering with the court's work, shut down the roads in Baimak, and refuse to carry out the demands of police.'*

Also considered by law enforcement officers to be organisers of the 'riot' were **Yulai Aiupov, Ilyas Baiguskarov, Artur Mukhametov, Akhmet Yakupov, Zakir Akhmedin, Samat Davletov, Salavat Elkibaev, Danis Gaisin, Ainur Khusainov**, and **Alfinur Rakhmatullin**, all permanent residents of Bashkortostan, and some other 'unidentified persons.'

The indictments alleged the organisers acted out of *'motives of political hatred for the existing state order of Russia'* and wanted *'to destabilise the sociopolitical situation in Russia.'* To do this they had *'united in an organised group for the purpose of organising riots in Baimak region on the pretext of support for Alsynov on the day the verdict in his trial was issued.'*

According to the investigative authorities, between 15 and 17 January 2024, the alleged organisers



posted on the YouTube channel under their control as well as on public channels on Telegram calls to residents of Baimak and other nearby districts of the Republic of Bashkortostan to gather on 17.01.2024 for an unsanctioned rally outside the Baimak district court of the Republic of Bashkortostan.

After the announcement of the verdict in Alsynov's trial, the investigative authorities alleged, those accused of organising the riot



were supposed, by their behaviour and public announcements, to provoke the participants in the unsanctioned rally to participate in the riot, to use force against representatives of the authorities, and also to provide leadership for actions of the crowd.

Some defendants in the case were also accused of using nonlethal force against a representative of the authorities (Art. 318, Part 1, CC RF). At least two were accused of using violence against a police officer, threatening their life and health (Art. 318, Part 2, CC RF).



In the view of the investigative authorities, the violence took the form of snowballs and sticks thrown either at law enforcement officers or in their direction, blows inflicted on police officers, and actions impeding officers' movements. The indictments contain standard wording. Here is one of them:



..threw in the direction of the police and National Guard, as well as at official means of transport, objects found on the spot: each person throwing between one and six pieces of ice, frozen snow, sticks, stones, and other objects presenting a danger to those around them, and smoke bombs with tear gas, or else inflicted multiple blows with their hands and feet on various parts of the body of representatives of the authorities, and also built barricades out of lumps of compressed snow...

According to our information, by February 2026, verdicts had already been issued in trials of at least 61 defendants, and the trials of another 16 defendants were being heard in courts of first instance. Those convicted were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from three years and three months to seven years and six months. The majority are to serve their sentences in general regime penal colonies, while for nine defendants the kind of penal colony is not known.

The longest sentences were originally given to [Rafil Utyabaev](#), [Ilnar Asylguzhin](#), and [Aigiz Ishmurin](#). In December 2024, they were [sentenced](#) to eight and a half years of imprisonment. However, on 6 May 2025, on appeal the sentences were [reduced](#) for all three men to five years.

As of now, **Shafkat Ulmasbaev** has been given the longest sentence. On 27 March 2025, Tolyatti's Avtozavodsky district court [sentenced](#) him to seven and a half years in a general regime penal colony. The Prosecutor's Office [demanded](#) that Ulmasbaev's term of imprisonment be increased to 10 years, but the appeal court [left](#) the verdict unchanged.

Vallyam Mutallapov received the shortest sentence. On 19 March 2025, he was [sentenced](#) to three years and three months' imprisonment. The court confirmed that Mutallapov and three other defendants tried along with him had confessed and 'had frequently made their apologies to the public through the media.'

Among those convicted there were at least two women, and the trial of another is being heard in a court of first instance.

On 7 April 2025, Orenburg's Promyshlenny district court [sentenced](#) **Saniya Uzyanbaeva** to five and a half years in a general regime penal colony. In August, on appeal, her sentence was [reduced](#) by one month.

On 27 January 2025, Samara's Promyshlenny district court [sentenced](#) **Minziya Adigamova** to four years in a penal colony. The court postponed her punishment until her children reach the age of 14. Adigamova is probably the only one of the accused placed under house arrest during the investigation. After her sentence was announced, her house arrest was amended to travel restrictions, and she was released.



In January 2026, we [learned](#) that **Fatikh Akhmetshin**, who in February 2025 had been [sentenced](#) to four and a half years in a penal colony, had had his imprisonment changed to compulsory work in custody. Later, penalties were [reduced](#) for several others who had been convicted.

Several features of the 'Baimak case' deserve mention:

1. **A VERY HIGH LEVEL OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THOSE DETAINED**

Human rights activists know of two deaths connected with detentions in this case, those of **Rifat Dautov** and **Miniyar Baiguskarov**. Furthermore, at least one other detainee, **Dim Davletkildin**, was seriously beaten by law enforcement officers. The details can be read in our 2024 report (Chapter 2.5.3).

2. **THE PRESUMED PARTICIPATION OF AGENTS PROVOCATEURS IN THE PUBLIC GATHERING IN BAIMAK**

Both journalists and relatives of the detainees said that during the gathering outside the courthouse there were provocateurs with covered faces in the crowd who urged the commission of illegal acts and who were the first to throw snow, aiming to provoke a clash between the protesters and law enforcement officers. Witnesses also said that some individuals in masks had originally been behind the police line but then mixed in with the crowd.

One of those accused of 'organising the riot,' Ruslan Gabbasov, lays the blame for the clashes on the law enforcement officers themselves, Mediazona [reported](#). Pravda Bashkirii, a Telegram channel, [published](#) a photo and video of 'tough guys' in plainclothes who, the channel asserted, '*were the first to start throwing pieces of ice at the crowd at the very moment OMON started pushing people away from the courthouse*'.¹³⁵

Activists identified among these 'tough guys' Sergei Sapozhnikov (also known as Sergei Rodnik), a Ukrainian who fought for the 'Donetsk People's Republic.' The prosecution of the 'Ufa Marxist circle' was [based](#) on Sapozhnikov's testimony. Sapozhnikov infiltrated the group, after which he stated that its participants had intended '*to seize power and kill police officers and politicians*' (see Chapter 2.4.8).

What may indirectly point to a provocation by the authorities is the fact that the criminal case for riot was opened before the protests at the courthouse were over. Such a swift reaction by law enforcement agencies gives grounds to believe that the decision to prosecute the protesters had been taken in advance. It is likely that, to better prepare for such a provocation, the announcement of Alsynov's sentence was unexpectedly and without explanation postponed from 15 to 17 January 2024.

3. **THE HOLDING OF TRIALS IN OTHER REGIONS AND IN CAMERA**

Trials in the 'Baimak case' have been held in Tolyatti, Samara, Izhevsk, Orenburg, and Orsk. However, according to the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Russian Federation, a criminal

135 In the video published on the channel, one can indeed see an individual throwing a clump of frozen snow into the crowd from behind the security forces. However, it is unclear whether this footage was filmed before or after the clashes began.



case should be heard by the court nearest to the location of the crime's commission (Art. 32, Part 1, CCP RF). The jurisdiction may be changed if there are circumstances that might bring into doubt the court's objectivity or impartiality in a case (Art. 35, Part 1[c], CCP RF). The Prosecutor's Office considered the possibility of the local community putting pressure on the court to be just such a circumstance.

Moreover, even in other regions, judges have ruled to hear cases in camera, agreeing with the Prosecutor's Office's arguments that *'the defendants have an opportunity to influence the course and outcome of the judicial hearings in the Republic of Bashkortostan, including by putting pressure on the participants in the trial for the purpose of distorting evidence and avoiding bringing the defendants in this case to criminal responsibility.'*

2.6.5. Prosecutions for refusing to serve in the Russian army

In 2025, Russian law enforcement officers continued to criminally prosecute soldiers who refused to serve in the Russian army. As in the past, 'refusers' [otkazniki] have been prosecuted on charges of failing to carry out an order (Art. 332, Part 2.1, CC RF), absence without leave (Art. 337 CC RF), and desertion (Art. 338 CC RF). Moreover, 'refusers' have encountered torture in illegal prisons and forced dispatch to a zone of military action.

Between the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and late May 2025, Russia's military courts received 20,438 cases related to a refusal to serve in the Russian army, Mediazona has [reported](#). Of these, 18,159 were charged with absence without leave, 1,369 with refusing to carry out an order, and 1,010 with desertion. Convictions were handed down to 17,721 individuals.

A record number of cases against 'refusers' [went to court](#) in 2024, according to Mediazona, reporting that as of late December, in that year 10,308 cases went to court, nearly twice as many as in 2023 (5,517). On average, nearly 1,000 new criminal cases went to court every month.

In early 2025, the rate at which new cases were brought [declined](#) somewhat. However, by the spring it had once again risen to nearly 1,000 criminal cases a month. Altogether, 4,350 new cases went to court in the period January-May 2025. As of this writing, there was no data on how many cases went to Russian courts in the second half of 2025.

On average, in the first half of 2025, judges issued approximately 700-800 verdicts a month, maintaining the previous year's rates. For example, in April 2025, the courts issued 848 verdicts, an average of 38 decisions for each working day, Mediazona [calculated](#). In the spring of 2024, on average 34 [verdicts](#) were handed down each day.

We do not know the total number of soldiers who have deserted from the Russian army since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine since the Defence Ministry does not disclose such data. Nor can we draw accurate conclusions about the number of 'refusers' based on the criminal cases that have been brought either, since not all 'refusers' have been subject to criminal prosecution.



According to [Vazhye Istorii](#), by December 2024 a minimum of 49,000 individuals had been declared deserters or absent without leave in the Russian army. These figures may be on the high side, however. In July 2025, journalists from that publication [reported](#) that in at least 25 Russian units, commanders had designated soldiers missing without leave after they had perished or gone missing during military assignments. According to [VotTak](#), sometimes criminal cases for deserting a unit were opened against soldiers killed by their own commanders to conceal the fact of their extrajudicial execution.

There is virtually no information about most of the individuals charged and convicted for refusing to fight against Ukraine. Where we know the details of a specific prosecution, we examine the possibility of recognising the defendant as a political prisoner. Soldiers may refuse to participate in military actions for various reasons, but in most instances those who have firm pacifist convictions are prepared to go public.

At present there are 10 individuals on Memorial's list of political prisoners who have been prosecuted for their refusal to serve in the Russian army based on religious or anti-war convictions. In 2025, we added two individuals to the list of political prisoners prosecuted entirely or partially for refusal to perform military service.

Five of the 'refusers' recognized as political prisoners were charged with refusal to carry out an order (Art. 332 CC RF), two with being absent without leave (Art. 337 CC RF), and three with desertion (Art. 338 CC RF). Four were also charged with other offences: treason (Art. 275 CC RF), collusion with a foreign state (Art. 275.1 CC RF), and voluntary surrender into captivity (Art. 352.1 CC RF).

The prosecution of Roman Ivanishin

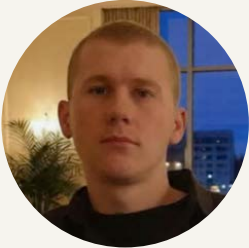


Roman Ivanishin from Sakhalin region, was [sentenced](#) in April 2025 to 15 years in a strict regime penal colony.¹³⁶ On 23 September 2022, Ivanishin was mobilized and served as a combat medic. Since December 2022, according to a [press release](#) by Sakhalin town court, he went absent without leave three times. His third absence without leave ended on 4 June 2023, when he was found in Stepnoe and returned to his unit. Two days later, on 6 June, Ivanishin surrendered to Ukrainian forces and, the court asserts, called on his fellow servicemen to follow his example. On 3 January 2024, Ivanishin returned to Russia in a prisoner exchange. We do not know whether this was his voluntary decision. Ivanishin was immediately sent to Sakhalin, where the garrison court remanded him in custody.

136 Ivanishina was found guilty of preparing to surrender voluntarily (Art. 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 352.1 CC RF), of voluntarily surrendering (Art. 352.1 CC RF), desertion during mobilisation (Art. 338, Part 3, CC RF) and unauthorised absence from his unit during mobilisation (Art. 337, Part 3.1, CC RF).



The prosecution of Viktor Pokusin



In April 2023, warrant officer [Viktor Pokusin](#) was sentenced to one year's imprisonment on a charge of voluntary absence from his unit for more than 10 days (Art. 337, Part 2.1, CC RF). He was accused of being absent from his unit from 24 to 30 September 2022, during which time he was in Chulym, Novosibirsk region.

In September 2023, Pokusin was convicted on a new charge and sentenced to six years in a penal colony for desertion during a period of mobilisation (Art. 338, Part 3, CC RF). The case was opened after Pokusin failed to report for duty on 14 June 2023, having left for Novoaltaisk in Altai region. The court verdict states that on 19 June Pokusin was detained by police officers and soldiers in a local hotel. At the time of his arrest and during the investigation, Pokusin said *'he did not want to serve anymore since they weren't releasing him from military service.'*

In August 2024, a third sentence was handed down against Pokusin of seven years' imprisonment on a charge of collusion with a foreign organisation (Art. 275.1 CC RF). According to the investigative authorities, he had been in touch with the Free Russia Legion and told them of his *'readiness to commit acts knowingly aimed against Russia's security in the form of setting fire to military enlistment offices, gathering information, distributing leaflets, and destroying "Z" symbols.'*

In addition to criminal prosecutions, a frequent practice in the Russian army since the start of the invasion of Ukraine has been extrajudicial retribution and intimidation, used to force 'refusers' to continue participating in the war.

For a year, journalists continued to report on cellars where soldiers who had refused to carry out military assignments were being kept. We do not know exactly how many of these cellars there are in frontline areas or how many soldiers are being held in them. As of the end of 2024, journalists knew of 20 such sites (see our [report](#) on political repression in 2024, p. 98). In August 2025, Astra [reported](#) there were at least 24 cellars holding 'refusers.'

In December, Astra journalists gave a detailed [account](#) of a 'pit' in Melekino in the 'Donetsk People's Republic' on the shore of the Sea of Azov. Soldiers were held in an abandoned, unfinished four-story complex on the edge of town. Those who ended up there were allowed to contact relatives once a week for a few minutes under the watch of military police and were taken out to the toilet once a day. As the publication's sources recounted, in this building 'guilty' soldiers from Yakutia, Zabaikal region, and Buryatia were being held.

2.6.6. Prosecutions of members of the elite

Our annual reports for [2021](#), [2022](#) and [2024](#) described a campaign of prosecutions for corruption against members of the political elite that had clear signs of political motivation. It is important to describe the main developments in this area in 2025.

Andrei Pertsev, who commented on our project, believes that in 2025 repression against some elite groups continued.



The most significant event in this sense is the suicide of the transport minister and former governor of Kursk region, Roman Starovoi. The official decided to end his life to avoid a criminal prosecution over the construction of defence works.

The plot of this story is understandable. Law enforcement officers wanted to hold the regional authorities responsible for the Ukrainian armed forces' invasion of Kursk region, which had hurt Putin badly. The media wrote about Starovoi's arrest after his sudden resignation, but the official chose another path, which he considered more dignified. Neither his status as minister nor his belonging to the influential Rotenberg clan saved him.

The presence of members of the government at Starovoi's funeral amounted to a kind of political gesture. Officials decided to show they were not prepared to accept such a revision of the rules governing treatment of the elite. For the time being, their strategy has paid off and the top echelons of power have not been affected by any further arrests. Arrests of officials at governor level were also put on hold. At the same time, however, there has been an increase in the number of arrests among middle level and lower-ranking bureaucrats in the regions.

It should be noted that data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation for the period from 2022 to the first half of 2025 showed no significant increase in the number of verdicts issued on charges of abuse of authority by public officials (Art. 285 CC RF) or of exceeding official powers (Art. 286 CC RF).

Table 41. Number of individuals convicted on charges of abuse of authority by public officials (Art. 285 CC RF) and exceeding official powers (Art. 286 CC RF)

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025
Art. 285 CC RF	774	722	668	274
Art. 286 CC RF	1267	1210	1160	570

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation



At the same time, there has been a steady growth in the number of verdicts on charges of receiving bribes (Art. 290 CC RF) and giving bribes (Art. 291 CC RF).

Table 42. Number of individuals convicted on charges of receiving bribes (Art. 290 CC RF) and giving bribes (Art. 291 CC RF)

	2022	2023	2024	H1 2025
Art. 290	774	722	668	274
Art. 291	1267	1210	1160	570

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

The rate of increase in the number of criminal prosecutions initiated in 2025 may be higher than the rate of increase in the number of verdicts. [Research](#) by Novaya Gazeta Evropa shows that 2025 was a record year for the number of arrests of high-ranking officials, with 27% more officials remanded in custody than in 2024, three times more than in 2021. In the second half of 2025 approximately 20 criminal prosecutions against highly placed officials were launched each a month. Many of these cases, meanwhile, were formally on charges of [corruption](#), which complicates the possibility of drawing conclusions about the guilt or innocence of those charged.

In 2025, criminal prosecution was not the only form of pressure exerted against members of the elites at various levels. Individuals from these categories were also designated as ‘foreign agents’ because of corporate or departmental conflicts. An important trend was the nationalisation of privately owned assets in the context of the economy’s militarisation. Property and assets worth [more than 3 trillion roubles](#) were nationalized in 2025, 4.5 times more than in 2024 when the scale of transfers of private assets to state property was already [judged](#) extraordinary. A telling example was the [designation](#) as a ‘foreign agent’ of **Aleksei Shevtsov**, former head of the local government of Ples in Ivanovo region, who had come into conflict with the inner circle of Rosneft chief Igor Sechin. In the process, Shevtsov’s property was nationalized.

An indirect result of the militarisation of Russia’s economic and public life since 2022 has been the regular opening of criminal prosecutions for violation of state defence contracts (Art. 285.4 CC RF). According to [Reuters](#), since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, at least 34 people have been convicted on charges of this kind, including at least 11 directors of companies and two top managers.



2.6.7. Prosecutions of regional politicians

Pressure continued, too, on representatives of the opposition who remained within the law. Most indicative in 2025 was the harsh treatment of the Yabloko party, the sole party participating in officially permitted politics in Russia that has a liberal ideology and openly declared anti-war views. Within the framework of 'preparations' for the 2026 State Duma elections, two of the party's six deputy chairs, [Lev Shlosberg](#) and [Maksim Kruglov](#), were remanded in custody. Prior to this, moreover, [criminal charges](#) had been brought against key figures in regional branches of the party in Kamchatka, Primorye and Ryazan regions on fabricated charges of displaying extremist symbols (Art. 20.3 CAO RF). Altogether, according to [OVD-Info](#), at present at least 17 members of the Yabloko party have been subject to prosecution on criminal charges.

In the opinion of the journalist Andrei Pertsev, *'more than likely, in this way the Kremlin hopes to make it pointless to draw up a Yabloko list and, possibly, to scare less visible party members, so that they don't put themselves on the list to make up the numbers.'* Furthermore, members of the Presidential Administration have made [public statements](#) that the Yabloko party has no chance of crossing the 5% bar because of its alleged 'radicalisation.'

The authoritarian regime is showing less patience with politicians within the system who, while not challenging its foreign policy course or the war against Ukraine, remain relatively independent. An example of this is the latest increase in pressure on the Russian Communist Party, viewed as less manageable than other permitted political forces. Consequently, the Presidential Administration, according to [Meduza](#)'s sources, plans to deprive the party of its status as the second largest in the State Duma. Likely as a result of this, **Liudmila Kliushnikova**, a Russian Communist Party deputy in the legislative assembly of Altai region, and her aide **Svetlana Kerber**, were accused of extortion on an especially large scale (Art. 159, Part 4, CC RF) and remanded in custody but later [released](#). The charge against Kliushnikova that the hiring of her aide had been fictitious was [perceived](#) by party members at federal and regional levels as a blatant example of politically motivated prosecution and caused them to protest.

In some instances, prosecutions of regional politicians are intended to purge critics of the regime specifically at the regional level. For example, in Perm local opposition leader and former deputy **Konstantin Okunev** was [remanded in custody](#) on a charge of justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF). Local activists believe this was done to prevent attempts to nominate independent candidates in the 2026 federal and regional elections. Another example of the use of a criminal prosecution to fight a critic of local authorities is that of **Pavel Sokolov**, a politician and businessman from Elets in Lipetsk region, who was charged with extortion on a large scale (Art. 163, Part 2[d], CC RF) and remanded in custody.



2.6.8. Criminal prosecutions beyond the purview of our project, but with signs of unlawfulness and political motivation

As in previous years, some of the campaigns of repression in 2025 did not fall within the purview of our project. Individuals prosecuted in such cases are much harder to designate as political prisoners, even though many of the prosecutions may have a political motive. We might have been able to recognise some of the defendants in cases described below as political prisoners if we had been able to study the positions of the defence as well as those of the prosecution.

PROSECUTIONS FOR SUPPORTING THE IDEAS OF THE PRISONERS CRIMINAL UNITY [AUE]

In our report for [2024](#) (Chapter 3.17.1), we described one of the most obvious categories of such cases, namely prosecutions on grounds of participation in the ‘international civil society movement’ Prisoners’ Criminal Unity [AUE] (Art. 282.2 CC RF) and, more rarely, of financing this non-existent movement (Art. 282.3, Part 1, CC RF). These defendants almost never turn to our project to ask to be recognised as political prisoners. For our part, we cannot automatically include the defendants in our list of political prisoners without having analysed the charges, since the possibility that the defendants did commit acts dangerous to the public, even if these actions have been wrongfully designated as ‘extremist activity,’ cannot be ruled out.

The designation of the Prisoners’ Criminal Unity [AUE] as an extremist organisation on 17 August 2020 by the Russian Supreme Court [was](#) the first example of a ban on a subculture not connected with religion that has no structure, organisation, or leadership. The ban on the non-existent ‘AUE movement’ in 2020 was the harbinger of subsequent bans of the equally non-existent [Anti-Russian Separatist Movement](#), the [LGBT Movement](#), and other ‘organisations.’

Criminal charges for spreading the ideas of the ‘AUE movement’ [were laid](#) even before its designation as an extremist organisation came into force. Initially, these prosecutions were aimed at suppressing resistance from prisoners over violations of their rights. The state’s repressive reaction drastically increased after the 9 April 2020 [protests](#) at Penal Colony No. 15 in Angarsk, Irkutsk region.

Last year we cited data from the Sova Centre for Information & Analysis about convictions of alleged AUE participants in the years 2021-2024. These numbers demonstrate the widespread prosecution of prisoners who, according to the charge, adhere to criminal ‘notions’ and participate in informal self-organisation in places of detention. According to the [Sova Centre for Information & Analysis](#), in the period January – July 2025 at least 26 judgments were handed down convicting at least 61 individuals of participating in, or financing, the extremist organisation AUE.¹³⁷

According to the Sova Centre for Information & Analysis, in the years 2023-2025, at least 40 convictions were handed down on charges of repeated display of AUE symbols (Art. 282.4 CC RF). Such prosecutions were based mainly on prisoners’ tattoos of a criminal nature and corresponding photos posted on social networks. [In 2023](#), at least 9 individuals were convicted on similar charges; in [2024](#) the number convicted was at least 20, including [Vasily Slonov](#), an artist we have recognised as a political prisoner; and in [2025](#) the number convicted was at least 11.

137 The Sova Centre for Information & Analysis ceased compiling this list in August 2025.



The potential number of individuals who could be subject to criminal prosecution on these charges, meanwhile, is steadily rising. Over the course of 2025, the courts issued [at least a thousand](#) administrative-law convictions that made reference to the abbreviation 'AUE' on charges of displaying banned symbols (Art. 20.3 CAO RF) or inciting hatred (Art. 20.3.1 CAO RF).

It is not only prisoners with connections to the criminal subculture, or who are accused of collecting money for a common 'prisoners' fund,' who are subject to prosecution on charges of ties to the 'AUE movement,' but also [victims of politically motivated prosecutions](#), including individuals [recognised](#) as political prisoners.

In the chapter on banned organisations, we described the practice of recognising the activities of commercial organisations as extremist to facilitate confiscation of their property (see Chapter 2.4.2). This practice has also been used against individuals who have been formally charged with adherence to the ideas of the 'AUE,' but who in fact are being prosecuted simply for their participation in the criminal world.

A precedent was the nationalisation of assets belonging to the brothers **Andrei** and **Aleksandr Makhonin**, previously convicted businessmen from Chelyabinsk region, and their relatives and business partners. On 14 November 2025, Chelyabinsk's Sovetsky district court [declared](#) them all to be members of the 'Makhonin extremist association,' after which it confiscated their property worth more than 5 billion roubles. In this way, the arbitrary designation of a group of persons as a cell of a non-existent extremist organisation removed the need for the authorities to prove they had engaged in criminal activity; it also enabled the confiscation of their property by quasi-legal means. We do not rule out the possibility that this practice will become more widespread in 2026.

PRESSURE ON ETHNIC MINORITIES AND CITIZENS OF OTHER COUNTRIES MOTIVATED BY POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY

Characteristic of the repressions of the 2020s are sporadic campaigns of repression that do not fit into the general repressive trends, inasmuch as they are precipitated by foreign policy challenges. For example, a significant development at the beginning of the decade was the prosecution of participants in the protest movement in Belarus, detained in Russia so as to deliver them to Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime. This is described in detail in the corresponding chapters of our reports for 2021 and 2022.

In the summer and autumn of 2025, because of the [conflict with Azerbaijan](#), Russian media reported a wave of criminal prosecutions of citizens of that country and ethnic Azerbaijanis. Many of these prosecutions were for general criminal offences, but the chosen time and charges for crimes committed many years or even decades before indicate the presence of a political motive in such cases. Some of these criminal cases were [listed](#) by our colleagues at OVD-Info in their survey for 2025.

Along with episodic campaigns of this kind, there are also regional trends that have been known for many decades but are difficult to analyse. One of these is the arrest of residents of the North Caucasus, as well as of Muslims from other regions and Ukrainians, on charges of participating in the two Chechen wars (see, in particular, Chapter 3.10.4 of our [2022](#) report).



The latest instance of this kind known to us is the arrest in early December 2025 of three alleged members of the unit of field commander Shamil Basaev, who allegedly participated in the attack on Pskov paratroopers in 2000. Such prosecutions became systematic. According to the Investigative Committee, at least [35 individuals](#) were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment on this charge. Some of the defendants were innocent victims of criminal prosecutions based on a fabrication of cases and the coercion of those previously convicted in such cases to give testimony. For example, one of those remanded in custody in December 2025, **Chingiz Savchenko**, was [first detained](#) for 'opposition to the Special Military Operation,' because he was a former soldier in the Ukrainian armed forces. Only subsequently was he charged with events that had occurred 25 years before.



3. THE MOST SEVERE FORMS OF PRESSURE AND PARTICULARLY GRAVE CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICALLY MOTIVATED PROSECUTIONS

3.1. Deaths of political prisoners and killings at the time of arrest

In 2025, political prisoners and other victims of politically motivated prosecutions continued to die in penitentiary facilities and other places of detention. The regular murders of individuals suspected of committing primarily terroristic or sabotage-related crimes continued as well. Information has also come to light regarding the deaths of a number of victims of politically motivated prosecutions in previous years.

3.1.1. Deaths of victims of political repression: histories and reasons

In 2024, we began to keep a [list of victims of contemporary political repression who died in detention](#) to memorialise the political prisoners and other victims of politically motivated imprisonment. You can read in more detail about its creation and our approaches in [Chapter 2.2.1](#) of our 2024 report.

We know of 11 individuals who died as a result of politically motivated criminal convictions between 2009 and 2021, and of 59 beginning in 2022.

Table 43. Number of individuals who died as a result of politically motivated criminal convictions between 2022 and 2025

2022	2023	2024	2025
5	10	24	13

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

As of mid-May 2026, there have been seven known fatalities resulting from politically motivated criminal convictions since the start of 2026.

In several instances, the deaths of individuals convicted on the basis of politically motivated prosecutions became known with a delay. For example, it was only in 2026 that we learned of the deaths of **Roman Tyurin** and **Andrei Zdorenko** in 2025. In 2025, we also learned of the deaths of three prisoners who had died in previous years. According to witness testimony, on 3 August 2022 [Vasily Stetsenko](#), an ichthyologist from Kherson, died from torture in the cellar of the Kherson region police station before a criminal case had been officially opened against him. Within the framework of this prosecution, [nine other local residents](#) were later convicted.



[Krzysztof Galos](#), a Polish citizen who arrived in Ukraine on 20 April 2023 and was abducted by Russian soldiers in occupied Zaporizhzhia region, died from torture on 4 July 2023 in Taganrog's infamous [Remand Prison No. 2](#) in Rostov region. We do not know whether criminal charges had been brought against him. No later than August 2024, Kachkanar resident [Roman Zarovynaev](#), accused of setting fire to battery and relay cabinets on the Kachkanar - Nizhny Tagil - Ekaterinburg railway line, died in a remand prison of [unknown causes](#).

DEATHS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND INDIVIDUALS WHOSE PROSECUTIONS BEAR CLEAR SIGNS OF ILLEGALITY AND POLITICAL MOTIVATION IN 2025

On 10 January, four months after his release, **Sergei Nevorotin**, a trainer from Bezhet'sk, [died of cancer](#) in Tver region. Nevorotin had been sentenced to six years in a penal colony on a charge of 'fake news' about the military (Art. 207.3, Part 2[e], CC RF). He was imprisoned from August 2023 to 4 September 2024, when he was released because he was suffering from end-stage cancer.

On 6 February in St. Petersburg, during a search presumably related to an investigation into financing the Ukrainian armed forces, the bard Vadim Stroikin [fell out of a window and died](#). According to [Fontanka](#), Stroikin had gone to the kitchen for a drink of water and committed suicide.

On 10 February, [we learned](#) of the death in prison in Dimitrovgrad of 60-year-old Crimean Tatar **Rustem Virati**, sentenced to eight years' imprisonment on a charge of belonging to the Noman Çelebicihan Battalion. According to the [head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People](#), *'after his arrest, Rustem Virati was subjected to torture many times and was badly beaten.'*

On 17 February, **Roman Tiurin**, a political prisoner from Omsk region, [died](#). Previously, four criminal cases had been [opened](#) against him for posts on the Internet.¹³⁸ In October 2024, we learned Tiurin had been diagnosed with cancer of the left lung. Despite his illness, in November 2024 he was [sentenced](#) in his fourth criminal prosecution to six and a half years in a general regime penal colony, involving a partial combination of his sentences. We learned of Tiurin's death only in January 2026.

On 20 March, **Valery Bailo**, a 67-year-old Jehovah's Witness from Krasnodar region, died in hospital. He had been urgently hospitalized from the remand prison, where he had been waiting nearly a year for the verdict in his case to enter into force, and all this time he had been trying to get medical assistance. The website [Jehovah's Witnesses. Legal Developments in Russia](#) reported: '...in the remand prison, the sole tooth he had to chew food became inflamed. Prison food caused problems with his digestion, therefore he ate very little and mainly drank water.' Bailo's lawyer, Sergei Yanovsky, also [spoke of](#) how his client suffered from acute stomach pains. However, the remand prison administration offered no help for more than half a year. 'It looks like he died of exhaustion and starvation', his lawyer suggested. While alive, Bailo had turned to the Krasnodar region Prosecutor's Office, the regional human rights representative, and the head of Krasnodar Medical Unit No. 23 and the head of the remand prison. As a result, he was threatened with physical retribution and even worse conditions of detention.

138 Tiurin was charged with the offences of 'fake news' about the military (Art. 207.3, Part 2[e], CC RF), discrediting the armed forces (Art. 280.3, Part 1, CC RF), incitement to act against state security (Art. 280.4, Part 2[c], CC RF), repeated display of prohibited symbols (Art. 282.4 CC RF) and incitement to terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF).



On 2 April, [we learned](#) of the death of Ekaterinburg resident **Vasily Raskov**, who had been charged with treason (Art. 275 CC RF). On 20 February, he had been transferred from a remand prison to house arrest on grounds of his health. According to the investigative authorities, Raskov had [passed on](#) certain technical military information to the Ukrainian Security Service.

On 26 June, **Aleksandr Markov**, a 74-year-old resident of Enerhodar arrested by Russian law enforcement officers on 8 May 2024, [died](#) during transport. In February 2025, the 'Zaporizhzhia Regional Court' of occupation [sentenced](#) him to 14 years' imprisonment on a charge of treason (Art. 275 CC RF) for *'16 money transfers totalling 15,500 hryvnia (more than 37,000 roubles) to the operating accounts of a foreign bank used by Ukrainian intelligence agencies.'*

Ukrainian prisoner of war **Andrei Zdorenko** died no later than 3 September 2025, as follows from the [criminal case file](#) on the website of the 'Donetsk People's Republic Supreme Court' of occupation. Zdorenko had served in the 55th Separate Artillery Brigade Zaporizhzhia Cossack Host as its leader and had been [taken prisoner](#) on 21 May 2022 in Mariupol. According to the 'Donetsk People's Republic Prosecutor's Office,' Zdorenko and five other soldiers had fired from a combat position in Mariupol on the villages of Stary Krym, Volodarskoe, and Berdyanskoe, resulting in the deaths of two civilians and injuries to two others.¹³⁹

It should be noted that the deaths of some individuals subject to politically motivated prosecutions who were not in custody, such as, for example, the [gravely ill](#) Ekaterinburg poet Egor Beloglazov, may have also been indirectly related to the pressure they were placed under.

The prosecution of Egor Beloglazov



In April, a criminal prosecution was initiated against Ekaterinburg poet Egor Beloglazov on charges of offending the feelings of believers (Art. 148 CC RF) and rehabilitation of Nazism (Art. 354.1 CC RF) for posts published on the VKontakte social media site. The charge of offending the feelings of believers [was based](#) on three posts. In the first, the poet published a picture of Jesus Christ and the Mother of God in anime style. Under the picture, Beloglazov left a comment in which he compared the New Testament to Old Testament fan fiction. Beloglazov also wrote about the presence in the Old Testament of signs of yaoi and yuri — anime genres, depicting homosexual connections.

139 The prisoners were found guilty of the murder of two or more persons, committed in a generally dangerous manner, by an organized group, motivated by hatred, attempted murder of two or more persons, including children, committed in a generally dangerous manner, by an organized group, motivated by hatred, the use of prohibited methods of warfare, and the destruction of another's property in a generally dangerous manner.



A second post by Beloglazov contained a demotivator depicting an explosion and a Buratino ballistics system with a caption in which the explosion is compared to the descent of beneficent fire on Easter. In a third publication, there was a screenshot of a post from X which said that the war in Ukraine would end only when Vladimir Putin went to the front and died. Religious scholar Aleksei Starostin conducted an expert analysis and pointed out that this post also insulted the feelings of believers, inasmuch as the Russian Orthodox Church is praying for the war's speedy conclusion.

During the investigation, Egor Bezoglazov was at liberty under travel restrictions. Since childhood, he had suffered from a serious form of bronchial asthma. In December 2025, the poet died.

In several other instances of deaths of individuals charged in criminal cases, for example that of [Moscow antifascist Matvei Ostrovsky](#), we do not know the cause of death and therefore cannot say with confidence that the deaths were a result of the repression.

DEATHS OF DETAINEES IN CHECHNYA

The deaths of detained residents of Chechnya who died from torture and sometimes, possibly, as a result of extrajudicial executions in unofficial places of detention, fall into a separate category. In 2025, we began including in the list of victims of political repression residents of Chechnya whose deaths following detention by the police were reported by local opposition Telegram channels. We know of the death of at least five Chechen men and women who were victims of torture and abuse in 2025 after being detained without the formal opening of a criminal case. In some instances, we have no information as to why they were detained, but we assume the actions that led to their deaths were politically motivated, given the extreme politicisation, in terms of national Russian standards, of police actions in Chechnya which are routinely used to suppress any form of dissent. It should be noted that the number of such deaths may be significantly higher.

Known instances of deaths of residents of Chechnya after detention from late 2024 through 2025:

In December 2024, **Mansur Abdulkadyrov** from Tsotsi-Yurt in Kurchaloevsk region, [died from torture](#): a few months after his abduction, he was illegally detained and forced to participate in the war against Ukraine.

19-year-old **Viskhan Tazurkaev**, a resident of Argun, was detained at work and subjected to torture in Argun police station in early 2025, after which he [died](#). Kavkaz.Realii, citing a source, [reported](#) that shortly before his death Tazurkaev was released and taken home. We do not know the reason for Tazurkaev's detention or whether a criminal case was opened against him.

Ismail Mukhadiev, from Serzhen-Yurt, was [reported](#) to have been detained on 30 January 2025 for putting a 'like' under an online publication that local law enforcement officers considered unacceptable. The day after his detention, he died after electroshock torture.



Aslan Dombaev, a resident of Urus-Martan, was threatened with a criminal prosecution for refusing to participate in the war against Ukraine. He was detained in mid-February 2025, after which he was taken to a hospital, presumably after being tortured, and [died](#) on 17 March 2025. According to a Niyso report, Dombaev had had his 'bowels and his abdominal organs slashed.' Before his death, Dombaev had been in a coma and hooked up to a ventilator.

Shovda Shamaeva, a 37-year-old preschool teacher from Sernodvorskoe, was detained on 5 September 2025, and probably tortured, after which she [died](#). Her body was returned to relatives on 8 September 2025.

3.1.2. Research into the deaths of political prisoners

Many deaths of political prisoners are 'natural' in nature, caused by illnesses exacerbated by the lack of medical care in custody. The number of such deaths, as indicated above, is rising along with the increase in the number of elderly and seriously ill prisoners. In some instances, however, circumstances indicate we should suspect or even be certain that an intentional killing took place. In 2025 and 2026, new information appeared about the deaths of several individuals prosecuted for political motives in 2024.

RESEARCH INTO THE DEATH OF ALEKSEI NAVALNY

In last year's report, we [described in detail](#) (pp. 17-20) the known circumstances of the death of the popular opposition politician **Aleksei Navalny** in Penal Colony No. 3 in the Yamalo-Nenetsk autonomous district on 16 February 2024. On 17 September 2025, Navalny's associates published [research](#) based on testimonies they had received from five staff members at the penal colony. The reports indicated that Navalny had complained of pain in his leg on 3 February 2024 but received no medical assistance. He complained of pain in his leg again on the morning of 16 February, before his exercise period, during which he started feeling unwell. Instead of providing medical assistance to Navalny, the penal colony staff returned him to his punishment cell where he was beset by cramps, pains, and vomiting for 40 minutes. Only then did they take him to the penal colony's infirmary and call an ambulance, which was unable to save his life.

Aleksei's wife, **Yuliya Navalnaya**, noted separately that the video recording of the last day of her husband's life was not preserved, although the entire time he was in places of detention he was always recorded on video. The Navalny team also stated they were able to get biological samples out of the country in February 2024. Two laboratories in two different countries, independently of each other, concluded that Navalny had been poisoned. At that time, according to Yuliya Navalnaya, the laboratories refused to publish the results of their investigations out of 'political considerations.'

On 14 February 2026, the United Kingdom, Sweden, France, Germany and the Netherlands confirmed the fact of Navalny's poisoning in a [joint statement](#), saying that it had been committed using epibatidine. This natural neurotoxin, extracted from the skin of an Ecuadorian poisonous tree frog, was [synthesized](#) at the State Scientific Research Institute for Organic Chemistry and Technology (GosNIIOKhT), where Novichok, used in the 2020 attempt to kill Aleksei Navalny, had also been developed.



NEW INFORMATION ABOUT THE DEATHS OF UKRAINIAN CIVILIAN HOSTAGES EVGENY MATVEEV AND VIKTORIYA ROSHCHINA

We have learned more about the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Ukrainian civilian hostages **Evgeny Matveev** and **Viktoriya Roshchina**, detained in Russia without charge.

In last year's report, we wrote that *'on 4 December 2024, after an exchange of bodies, we learned of the death of Evgeny Matveev, the mayor of Dnerorudnoe in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region, who on 13 March 2022 was detained by Russian soldiers who had occupied the town... Before the body was turned over there had been no information at all about him'* (p. 25). In 2025 [we learned](#) that, according to the Ukrainian Prosecutor's Office, Matveev died on 7 September 2024 in Remand Prison No. 3 in Kizel, Perm region. Two days before this, he had been brutally beaten after transportation to a so-called 'reception area,' and he died from a closed blunt trauma to the torso, involving multiple rib fractures and damage to the lungs and pleural membranes. In Ukraine, a criminal case was brought against the head of the remand prison, Vyacheslav Perevozkin, for the 'cruel treatment of civilians, committed by a group of individuals acting in concert and resulting in the death of a person' (Art. 438 CC Ukraine).

As the Ukrainian media outlet [Slidstva.Info](#) reported, the journalist **Viktoriya Roshchina** died in the same remand prison eight days after her arrival there, on 19 September 2024. Roshchina's body was not turned over to her relatives until February 2025, five months after her death. Written on the packaging containing the body [was](#) *'Unidentified man, cumulative damage to the arteries.'* Inside was the body of a woman *'in a state of deep freeze and with signs of malnutrition'* and with the name Viktoriya Roshchina on a tag attached to her foot. DNA analysis confirmed that these were Roshchina's remains.

Her body lacked several organs — eyeballs, brain, and some of the throat — and her hyoid was broken. In a conversation with [Vazhnye Istori](#), a forensic medical expert suggested the removal of these organs might have related to an attempt to conceal evidence of strangulation.

We do not know for certain how Roshchina died. By the time she arrived in Kizel, she was critically debilitated. She had been on a hunger strike for a long time, protesting the torture of captives, and she had lost nearly [30kg](#). In Taganrog she had been regularly placed in a [punishment cell](#).

In April 2026, Reporters Without Borders [published](#) new testimony from people who had witnessed the last days of Roshchina's life. According to this testimony, on 18 September 2024 Roshchina had not felt well and had asked a guard for tea, to which he replied, *'You've made a mistake about your place, you're in no position here to be asking for anything.'* After that, infirmary workers came to her cell and gave Roshchina some kind of injection, *'probably to revive her.'* On the morning of 19 September 2024 (the official date of death), Roshchina did not get up at the start of the prison day and was unconscious. The guards took her away, and the other prisoners did not know whether she was still alive at that moment.



3.1.3. 'Liquidation' of suspects and defendants at the time of arrest

In 2025, as in previous years, there were instances of individuals dying when being detained by law enforcement officers on charges that might have been politically motivated. We do not keep statistics about such deaths because we do not have the capacity to investigate deaths at the time of arrest or possible extrajudicial executions. However, independent media that collect data on murders at the time of arrest from open sources allow us to assess the scale of the phenomenon. According to Vazhnye Istorii, from the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine to the end of 2025, FSB officers killed [at least 75 people](#) at the time of arrest.

Russian law enforcement officers [killed](#) approximately the same number of people at the time of arrest in the previous three years, from 2018 to 2021. In the previous period, however, all those 'liquidated', according to assertions by security services, were connected with illegal armed groups in the North Caucasus or with Islamic terrorism, whereas since 2022 at least 28 people (37%) were killed on suspicion of sabotage or terrorist activities for the benefit of Ukraine. Four of those 28 were killed on the territory of the occupied Zaporizhzhia region. One more man was 'neutralized' in December 2025 in [Crimea](#).

It is important to note that these statistics come from official reports and relate exclusively to the activities of the FSB. Individuals who died at the hands of Russian soldiers or representatives of other security departments (National Guard, police, prison guards) are not included in this statistic. In the first year of the full-scale war, Ukrainian human rights activists recorded [at least 804 instances of murders](#) 'committed by Russian soldiers in temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.' The statistics do not take into account the executions, committed almost openly, of [Ukrainian prisoners of war](#) or of [Russian soldiers](#) who 'offended' their commanders, or numerous instances of [honour killings](#), some of them committed on instructions from the Chechen leadership.



3.2. Torture of defendants in politically motivated prosecutions

Defendants in politically motivated prosecutions may encounter inhuman treatment by Russian law enforcement officers during detention, the preliminary investigation, or while serving their sentence. As a rule, Russian law enforcement officers use violence against individuals under investigation or suspicion to obtain the required testimony. In this way, moreover, suspects or defendants can be forced to make public apologies, to publicly reject their views, or to sign a contract to take part in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In some instances, law enforcement officers use torture out of a desire for revenge or from hatred.

The number of individuals subjected to politically motivated prosecutions who have encountered torture is not known. Not all victims can bring themselves to talk about the physical violence committed by law enforcement officers for various reasons, including fear of worsening their terms of detention or a future sentence.

Such cases often come to light through prisoners' lawyers or relatives. However, when defence lawyers highlight instances of torture and present the results of medical examinations confirming these allegations, courts frequently fail to take this information into account when considering the case, even if the defendant has suffered significant harm.

In some instances, defendants who initially confessed reject their confessions during the subsequent preliminary investigation or court hearings, stating that they were made under coercion. The courts, as a rule, also ignore these rejections and rely on the original confessions.

Among the forms of torture most frequently used by Russian security forces are beatings, including with wooden sticks, the use of electric shocks, sexualised violence, detention in intolerable conditions and 'press huts' (places of detention where other inmates act on behalf of the authorities to pressure detainees). Security forces often threaten those they are targeting with sexualised violence and physical abuse. Some victims have also reported that, upon arrest, they were taken to the woods and tortured there.

In total, according to our database, between 2022 and 2025 at least 209 defendants in politically motivated criminal cases were subjected to torture either during the investigation or while serving their sentences. Reports of torture peaked in 2022, when at least 75 such cases came to light. In 2023 and 2024, the number of reports of torture fell, there being 62 in 2023 and 51 in 2024. In 2025, reports of torture became much less frequent. Memorial is aware of only 21 such cases for the year. This does not necessarily indicate a reduction in the incidence of torture but may be linked to an increase in the number of cases closed to the public, including prosecutions on charges of treason, about which little is known and for which the trials are, as a rule, held in camera. Furthermore, as noted in the introduction and in a number of previous chapters, information about criminal prosecutions is received with a delay. The figures for cases involving torture 2025 could increase substantially in the future.



POLITICAL REPRESSION AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN RUSSIA IN 2025

Table 44. Number of instances of torture against defendants in politically motivated criminal cases reported in the corresponding years

2022	2023	2024	2025
75	62	51	21

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

The number of instances of torture [increased](#) sharply after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the period 2017-2021, human rights activists knew of 46 politically motivated criminal prosecutions in which defendants were subjected to torture (2.5% of all cases). In the period 2022-2025, torture was used in at least 203 cases (4.2% of all politically motivated prosecutions).

According to the information available, torture is applied to men 2.1 times more often than to women. At the same time, since the war began, law enforcement officers have paid increasingly less attention to the gender of defendants. Before the war, human rights activists knew of no instances where women were tortured in politically motivated prosecutions.

Most often, it is people aged 21 to 30 who are subjected to torture. The risk at that age is 1.4 times higher than for those prosecuted for political motives overall. However, both minors and elderly people are also subjected to violence by law enforcement officers.

Among defendants in politically motivated criminal cases, Ukrainian citizens are subjected to torture 4.4 times more often than citizens of Russia or other countries.¹⁴⁰

In occupied Crimea and Sevastopol, there are 1.9 times more reports of torture in politically motivated prosecutions than on average for Russia and the occupied territories taken together. In Donetsk region, the likelihood of becoming a victim of torture is three times higher than on average for Russia and the occupied territories taken together, in Zaporizhzhia region the likelihood is five times greater, and in Kherson region 7.2 times greater.

Apart from the occupied territories of Ukraine, the one other region where torture is an almost mandatory element in politically motivated prosecutions is Chechnya. There, the risk of encountering torture is 14.5 times higher than on average in Russia and the occupied territories taken together. Memorial knows of at least five residents of Chechnya who died in 2025, presumably after being tortured (see Chapter 3.1.1).

In yet another instance, Chechen law enforcement officers took part in an abduction outside the republic.

140 Ukrainian prisoners of war and abducted civilians who have not been subject to criminal prosecution are not included in these figures.



The prosecution of Areg Shchepikhin



On the evening of 4 June 2025, we [learned](#) that the blogger **Areg Shchepikhin** had been abducted from Yaroslavsky train station in Moscow. Witness videos went out over Telegram channels in which you could see men in plain clothes shoving Shchepikhin into a car with two flashing lights. The Chechen authorities [stated](#) that this was an arrest, not an abduction. The car was stopped on the Kiev Highway. Kommersant reported that three of the [participants](#) in the abduction showed ID as officers of the National Guard for Chechnya, and the other three were civilians.

Shchepikhin was released with numerous bruises [to his face](#). The Investigative Committee reported that a criminal case had been opened against the abductors. There were no subsequent reports about the course of the investigation into the Chechen law enforcement officers. According to [Baza](#), they were released under travel restrictions. Shchepikhin himself was later [remanded in custody](#) on charges of offending the feelings of believers (Art. 148 CC RF), making calls to engage in extremism (Art. 280 CC RF), and inciting ethnic and religious hatred (Art. 282 CC RF). The prosecution was brought on the grounds of hate speech, including regarding Muslims. In October, Shchepikhin was sentenced to five years in a general regime penal colony.

In 2025, Memorial recorded the highest number of reports of torture of defendants in politically motivated cases (a total of six) in Moscow city and Moscow region.¹⁴¹ These cases include:

Lawyers' [statements](#) about the torture of two graduates of Sretensk Theological Academy, **Denis Popovich** and **Nikita Ivankovich**, accused of planning to murder Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov of Simferopol and Crimea 'on assignment from Ukrainian intelligence' (see Chapter 2.2.5).

The lawyer's [statement](#) about how his defendant, delivery driver **Oleg Kuryaev**, after being sentenced to four administrative-law jail terms in a row, was tortured with a taser in the FSB building before being remanded in custody on a charge of treason (Art. 275 CC RF).

A [statement](#) by Reutov resident **Vladimir Bolobolov**, accused of possessing explosives (Art. 222.1, Part 1, CC RF) that law enforcement officers abducted him on the street, tortured him with a taser, threatened him with rape, and held him handcuffed to a radiator in an unknown location. After a night in this location, the operatives searched Bolobolov's apartment and claimed they had found an object filled with explosives and a bomb. Bolobolov said he had no knowledge of these items.

Yet another Moscow resident, the comic **Artemy Ostanin**, was allegedly tortured by Belarusian law enforcement officers who detained him in connection with a politically motivated prosecution brought against him in Russia (see Chapter 2.1.3).

141 This can also be explained by the fact that information about torture in Moscow city and Moscow region is more likely to come to light, given the number of lawyers in the capital and the surrounding region, including those with experience in defending victims of politically motivated prosecutions, and there is greater media interest in such cases, etc.



3.3. Prosecution of individuals with serious health problems

Defendants in politically motivated cases all too often end up on remand or serving a term of imprisonment, irrespective of any proven disability or serious illness. Sometimes courts order that an individual be remanded in custody, or be sentenced to a term of imprisonment, even if they have been diagnosed with an illness from the list of illnesses prohibiting this.

At least 202 people with a disability or serious illness were subjected to politically motivated criminal prosecution in the period 2022-2025. Of these, at least 145 were imprisoned as of December 2025.

Table 45. Number of defendants with serious illnesses or disability subjected to politically motivated prosecution in the period 2022-2025

YEAR CASE WAS OPENED	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022–2025
Number of defendants with a serious illness or disability prosecuted	55	59	59	29	202
Number of these imprisoned as of the end of 2025	33	43	44	25	145

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

As of the end of 2025, we know of only 25 people with a serious illness who were deprived of liberty in 2025, whereas in 2024 this figure was nearly twice as high. However, we note once again that information about politically motivated prosecutions becomes public knowledge with some delay, and all figures for 2025 could increase substantially in the future.

Most defendants in politically motivated prosecutions with a serious illness or disability have been prosecuted for statements or actions opposing the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There are also among them individuals prosecuted for their religious views. This includes 10 accused of belonging to Hizb-ut-Tahrir and six Jehovah's Witnesses.

For example:

1. In December 2025, a court in Adygea [sentenced](#) 74-year-old Jehovah's Witness **Yury Sergeechev** to a four-year suspended sentence on a charge of engaging others in extremist activity (Art. 282.2, Part 1.1, CC RF). Sergeechev, a Group III invalid, was held on remand from April to December 2025. Sergeechev has type-2 diabetes, poor vision, and problems with his legs, requiring him to walk with a stick. Sergeechev also had two heart attacks before his criminal prosecution.



2. In October 2025, **Tofik Abdulgaziev**, sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment, [reported](#) that his vision had started to fail drastically. In December, he was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour. In March 2026, the state of his health [continued](#) to deteriorate. He complained of constant dizziness and a high level of blood sugar. In 2024 he had been diagnosed with tuberculosis.

Once in detention, for many it is impossible to obtain medications, even those prescribed by doctors, or to undergo medical procedures. Those remanded in custody need to obtain examinations and transfers to hospitals by petitioning the local Prosecutor's Office. In certain instances, relatives of those prosecuted are able to bring medicines to the remand prison or penal colony. However, the institutions' administration may give them out in insufficient dosages or with a delay.

The situation of Dmitry Rupenko



In May 2025, we [learned](#) that 31-year-old **Dmitry Rupenko** was being held in Irkutsk's Remand Prison No. 1 on charges of treason (Art. 275 CC RF) and aiding and abetting treason (Art. 281.1, Part 3, CC RF). Rupenko had been a Group II invalid since childhood. He suffered from epilepsy and ulcerative colitis, as well as a hole from a tracheostomy because of a doctor's error. Before he was remanded in custody in September 2024, Rupenko had regularly received free medications at a clinic.

Now, however, his mother was forced to spend about 10,000 roubles a month from her pension to purchase medication. The remand prison administration does not always accept parcels with the medication, and if it does, it delays giving them to Rupenko.

While on remand, Rupenko [tried](#) to commit suicide at least four times, his mother told journalists. After each attempt, doctors would order that he be sent to the regional psychiatric hospital. However, the remand prison administration never once carried out these recommendations. Remand prison personnel called Rudenko's suicide attempts 'manipulations.'

Among those deprived of liberty on political grounds are individuals who have been diagnosed with medical conditions that make detention and the serving of a sentence impossible. Those on remand or serving sentences attempt to secure their release through the courts, but their applications are often rejected.



The situation of Amet Suleimanov



Crimean Tatar [Amet Suleimanov](#), sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment on a charge of belonging to Hizb-ut-Tahrir, is serving his sentence in Vladimir Central prison. He has been [diagnosed](#) with two heart diseases on the list of health problems that prohibit serving a term of imprisonment.

In detention he also developed hypertensive retinopathy, a disruption in the blood supply to the back of the eye that leads to a deterioration of vision. Despite this, a court in 2024 [denied](#) him release on grounds of health.

In June 2025, it emerged that Suleimanov's health was continuing to deteriorate. After visiting him, his wife said that, according to Suleimanov, he was suffering from persistently high blood pressure, rising to 230, as well as problems with his teeth and rashes on his body. He had not undergone the heart valve replacement operation that had been planned to take place in 2024. In August 2025, Suleimanov's wife [reported](#) he had suffered a second hypertensive crisis during his imprisonment. In October, it [emerged](#) he had developed a haematoma on his leg the size of a matchbox. Suleimanov believed this could be a consequence of his heart condition. A Crimean doctor, whom the prisoner's wife had consulted, recommended that he undergo an ultrasound scan of the blood vessels in his lower limbs.



3.4. New criminal charges against victims of politically motivated prosecutions and other methods of increasing the severity of punishments

It is not only against the political prisoners among those imprisoned that Russian security forces bring new criminal charges. Convicted prisoners may face renewed criminal prosecution when prison staff need to ‘meet their targets’ for solving crimes within these institutions or wish to retaliate against specific individuals for complaints about conditions of detention or abuse.

However, political prisoners are at particular risk of repeated prosecution. Their cases may be under the oversight of federal or regional authorities who have an interest in increasing pressure on the individual and who seek to force them to renounce their views and activities and thereby intimidate society in general. New charges can also be brought against those prosecuted for political reasons who have not yet been deprived of liberty.

In 2025, repeat criminal charges were brought against at least 76 individuals whose original prosecution shows signs of having been politically motivated.¹⁴² For 11 of these individuals, this is their third prosecution.

Eighteen individuals against whom repeat criminal charges have been brought have been recognised as political prisoners by our project. For 14 of these, the new charge marks a second criminal prosecution; for the remaining four, it is their third.

Table 46. Number of individuals who have been victims of politically motivated prosecutions against whom new criminal charges were brought in 2025

INDIVIDUALS IMPRISONED ON THE BASIS OF POLITICALLY MOTIVATED PROSECUTIONS	ALL DEFENDANTS WHOSE PROSECUTIONS, EVIDENCE SUGGESTS, MAY HAVE BEEN POLITICALLY MOTIVATED AND UNLAWFUL	THOSE RECOGNISED AS POLITICAL PRISONERS
Number of individuals against whom a second criminal charge was brought in 2025	65	14
Number of individuals against whom a third criminal charge was brought in 2025	11	4

Source: Political Prisoners Memorial

In 2025, repeat criminal charges were most frequently brought for ‘terrorism’ offences. Topping the list were charges relating to undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF) and organising or participating in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4 CC RF). At least 18 criminal prosecutions were initiated on these charges.

¹⁴² These statistics take into consideration prosecutions of both those already deprived of liberty and those not yet convicted. In most cases, however, the figures relate specifically to those already deprived of liberty.



As a rule, such criminal charges are brought against Ukrainian prisoners of war who have already been convicted on charges of engaging in hostilities (see Chapter 2.5).

The next most common charge in cases of repeated politically motivated prosecution is that of justification of terrorism or making calls to engage in terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF). At least 14 criminal prosecutions have been brought against individuals who had already been prosecuted on political grounds.

In addition, those convicted in politically motivated prosecutions are sometimes:

1. **SUBJECT TO HARSHER SENTENCES ON APPEAL AT THE REQUEST OF THE PROSECUTION, INCLUDING THE CONVERSION OF NON-CUSTODIAL SENTENCES TO TERMS OF IMPRISONMENT**

2. **SUBJECT TO HARSHER FORMS OF PUNISHMENT OR TRANSFERRED TO A MORE SEVERE TYPE OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITY ON THE PRETEXT OF DISCIPLINARY OFFENCES**

Below, we examine instances that most clearly illustrate these trends.

Lev Shlosberg's second and third prosecutions



During 2025, two new criminal cases were [brought](#) against the Pskov politician and member of the Yabloko party, **Lev Shlosberg**. Furthermore, in November he was [sentenced](#) to 420 hours of community service on a charge of evading his duties as a 'foreign agent,' which had been brought in 2024. In June 2025, Shlosberg was [charged](#) with repeated discrediting of the army (Art. 280.3, Part 1, CC RF). The grounds for this charge was a video on the Odnoklassniki social media site of a debate between Shlosberg and the historian Yury Pivovarov, entitled 'A Vile World or a Just War?' The debate took place on the Zhivoi Gvozd YouTube channel on 10 January 2025. In the debate, Shlosberg advocated an immediate cessation of hostilities against Ukraine.

According to the investigative authorities, *'the public official [Shlosberg], using a pseudonym on one of the social media platforms, posted the video on his page and engaged in public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Russian armed forces to defend the interests of Russia and its citizens.'* Shlosberg himself and representatives of the Yabloko party maintain that he did not post the video as charged and does not administer the Odnoklassniki page referred to in the criminal case.

In June, Shlosberg [was placed](#) under house arrest. On 7 October, the court released him subject to certain restrictions, but on 10 October Shlosberg was again placed under house arrest following an appeal by the prosecution.



In December, a third criminal charge was brought against Shlosberg for spreading ‘fake news’ about the military (Art. 207.3, Part 2[e], CC RF). As reported by [Yabloko](#), the basis for this charge was a repost on Shlosberg’s Telegram channel of February 2022. Shlosberg was then [remanded in custody](#).

Mariya Ponomarenko’s third prosecution



Journalist **Mariya Ponomarenko** has been imprisoned since 23 April 2022 when she was remanded in custody on a charge of disseminating of ‘fake news’ about the army (Art. 207.3, Part 2[e], CC RF). In February 2023, she was sentenced to six years in a penal colony for a post about an airstrike on the Mariupol Drama Theatre.

A new charge was brought against her in the penal colony for disrupting the work of correctional institutions (Art. 321, Part 2, CC RF). According to the prosecution, Ponomarenko attacked two prison officers, one of whom was the head of security, when she was forcibly taken to a disciplinary hearing. Ponomarenko maintained her innocence of the charge. In March 2025, she [was sentenced](#) in this case.¹⁴³

In September 2025, we learned that a [third criminal charge](#) had been brought against Ponomarenko, again for disrupting the work of correctional institutions.

Ponomarenko’s lawyer [reported](#) his client had made three suicide attempts between 30 July and 9 August 2025.

Liudmila Razumova’s second prosecution



In April 2025, a second [criminal charge](#) was brought against the artist **Liudmila Razumova**, previously convicted of disseminating ‘fake news’ about the military motivated by political hatred (Art. 207.3, Part 2[e], CC RF). This time, Razumova was charged with causing minor bodily harm using objects as weapons (Art. 115, Part 2[c], CC RF).

The case was opened following a quarrel between Razumova and fellow prisoner Ksenia Nabatchikova on 24 March in the prison hospital. Razumova poured hot water over Nabatchikova in response to the latter’s aggressive behaviour. Nabatchikova then attacked Razumova, beating and choking her with the cord from a kettle, which she used as a noose.

143 On this charge, Mariya Ponomarenko was sentenced to one year and 10 months’ imprisonment. Taking into account the unserved portion of her first sentence, this amounted to three years’ imprisonment. According to her lawyer’s [calculations](#), her sentence has in effect been extended by approximately one month.



Razumova reported that she lost consciousness as a result. Hospital staff documented evidence of beating and strangulation on Razumova. However, it was Razumova who was charged. In her view, Nabatchikova was deliberately placed in the same ward as her to provoke a conflict.

Andrei Voronin's third prosecution



Andrei Voronin, from Samara, has been in detention since 4 April 2020. In 2021, he was sentenced to 11 years and 10 months' imprisonment on charges of threatening violence against a public official in connection with performance of their official duties (Art. 318, Part 1, CC RF), insulting a public official in performance of their official duties (Art. 319 CC RF), threatening to commit a terrorist act (Art. 205, Part 1, CC RF) and unlawful possession of explosive substances (Art. 222.1, Part 1, CC RF). We have recognised Voronin as a political prisoner (see [our analysis of his case](#)).

Voronin's second criminal prosecution was brought against him while serving his first sentence. In 2023, Voronin was charged with using violence against a prison officer (Art. 321, Part 2, CC RF). He was accused of having grabbed the deputy head of security by his jacket and pressed him against the wall. In July 2024, Voronin was sentenced to a total of nine years' imprisonment, to be counted from the date of the second sentence.

A third prosecution was brought on charges of disseminating 'fake news' about the Russian army (Art. 207.3, Part 2[e], CC RF) and making public calls to engage in terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 1, CC RF) for conversations he had with fellow inmates in the remand prison and the penal colony in which he spoke against the invasion of Ukraine. In July 2025, Voronin received a third sentence of 10 years' imprisonment, with the first three years to be served in a cell-type prison. Following the second and third sentences, Voronin's expected release date was effectively postponed from 2032 to 2035.

Aleksandr Neustroev's second criminal prosecution



In June 2024, 59-year-old Ekaterinburg resident **Aleksandr Neustroev** [was sentenced](#) to three years in a penal colony in his first criminal prosecution. He was charged with hooliganism involving the threat of violence on grounds of hatred (Art. 213, Part 1[a,b], CC RF) for shouting at a boy running past wearing a hat with the letter 'Z' on it: *'You bastard, shove that hat up your arse, you moron. Tell your parents, you idiot. Call your father over here.'* The boy's father turned out to have taken part in the invasion of Ukraine. Neustroev was arrested and forced to apologise on camera.



In November 2025, in a second prosecution Neustroev [was sentenced](#) to four and a half years in a strict regime penal colony on a charge of justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 1, CC RF). According to the prosecution, in April 2025 in the smoking area of a low security penal colony, in the presence of other inmates, Neustroev spoke approvingly of the murders of the propagandists Vladlen Tatarsky and Darya Dugina.

Neustroev pleaded guilty and expressed remorse. The defence pointed out that Neustroev suffers from cirrhosis of the liver and has a Group III disability. Neustroev himself had asked to be allowed to remain in the low security penal colony, as he could have received medical care there.

REPEATED CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS OF UKRAINIAN PRISONERS OF WAR

The Russian authorities frequently initiate repeated criminal proceedings against captured Ukrainian servicemen. Mediazona has [reported](#) that at least 39 prisoners of war have faced criminal prosecutions for a second time, while a third criminal prosecution has already been initiated against six individuals. In addition, new prosecutions have been brought in absentia against six individuals already convicted in absentia by Russian courts. Some Ukrainian armed forces personnel have been convicted in absentia after they returned to Ukraine as part of a prisoner exchange.

Most of these prosecutions were heard by the ‘Supreme Court of the Donetsk People’s Republic.’ According to Mediazona, at least 26 Ukrainian servicemen had received a second conviction in this court, while one other such trial was ongoing as of October 2025.

Mediazona notes that the facts on which the new trials were based, as heard in this court, differed little from the original charges. The prisoners were once again accused of shelling the outskirts of Mariupol in the spring of 2022, with the only difference being the specification of the addresses of damaged buildings.

The Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don has also held new trials against former fighters of the Azov Battalion. According to Mediazona, by October 2025 the court had registered at least 12 such trials, with verdicts having already been handed down in six by that time. As a rule, captured Azov Battalion fighters have been charged with participation in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF) and receiving training in terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF).

Despite the severity of the charges, the cumulative sentence usually adds only a few years or months to the term of imprisonment, as Mediazona reports. However, the initial sentences in such cases are, as a rule, already long, at approximately 20 years’ imprisonment. Harsh sentences in such cases are not the sole purpose of the prosecutions, lawyers defending prisoners of war told Mediazona. They are ways for security forces officers to earn promotions and, moreover, fulfil the political objectives of justifying the invasion and shifting the blame for the deaths of civilians and the destruction of cities onto Ukrainian armed forces personnel.



The third criminal prosecution of Dmitry Kucheryavy



In May 2025, 24-year-old [Dmitry Kucheryavy](#), a former soldier in the Azov Battalion, was sentenced in his third criminal trial. When combined with his two previous sentences, his total sentence amounted to 29 years and four months' imprisonment. In his last case, he was charged with shelling the village of Berdyanskoe in the 'Donetsk People's Republic' in March 2022, [Lenta.ru](#) reported.¹⁴⁴

Kucheryavy's second sentence [was handed down](#) in September 2024 when the Southern District Military Court sentenced him to 29 years' imprisonment on charges of participation in a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 2, CC RF) and undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities (Art. 205.3 CC RF). As part of this case, he was also charged with participating in the Azov Battalion. Kucheryavy was first [convicted](#) by the 'Supreme Court of the Donetsk People's Republic' in March 2024 on charges of shelling Mariupol in the spring of 2022. At that time, Kucheryavy was sentenced to 22.5 years' imprisonment.

¹⁴⁴ Kucheryavy was found guilty of attempted murder of two or more persons by a group of individuals acting in a manner posing a danger to the public, motivated by hatred (Art. 30, Part 3, CC RF in conjunction with Art. 105, Part 2[a,f,g,l], CC RF), the wilful destruction of another person's property (Art. 167, Part 2, CC RF) and the cruel treatment of the civilian population during an armed conflict (Art. 356, Part 1, CC RF).



4. THE ARREST AND EXTRADITION OF RUSSIAN POLITICAL REFUGEES IN OTHER COUNTRIES AT RUSSIA'S REQUEST

In 2025, the situation for Russian citizens living abroad who were being prosecuted by the Russian authorities deteriorated sharply. There was also an increase in the number of people arrested in Russia following deportation from other countries, primarily the USA, after having been refused asylum.

4.1. Risks faced by political refugees from Russia

The history of political emigration from post-Soviet Russia can be traced back to the mid-1990s, when Chechen refugees began leaving in large numbers for the CIS countries, Europe, the USA and Turkey. A significant proportion of these were supporters of independence for Ichkeria. Political repression, which took the form of isolated show trials during Boris Yeltsin's presidency but [in the 2000s gradually became](#) systematic, also drove people to leave Russia. The flow of political émigrés grew as the scale of repression increased in the 2010s. Starting with the crackdown on protests by Aleksei Navalny's supporters and the rapid intensification of pressure on Russian civil society in 2021, particularly following the outbreak of the full-scale war against Ukraine, the number of refugees has increased exponentially.

Under Vladimir Putin, the crackdown on Russian citizens opposed to the regime who are already abroad has also become systemic. This manifests itself not only in terms of politically motivated criminal prosecutions and the placing of those implicated on international wanted lists, but also in the murders of the ruling regime's most dangerous opponents. As of 2018, the number of suspicious deaths of opponents of the Russian authorities in the United Kingdom alone was [in double figures](#).

As human rights activist Anastasiya Burakova has [pointed out](#), Russia is signatory to 96 bilateral and 20 international extradition treaties, which are used actively. The scale of Russian law enforcement agencies' use of international arrest warrants is illustrated, for example, by the fact that in 2021, [38% of extradition requests](#) received by Interpol came from Russia, whose population accounts for less than 2% of the world's total.

Individuals who were not being prosecuted at the time of their departure from Russia may also be at risk. The Criminal Code permits the initiation of criminal proceedings for acts committed outside Russia, a provision which Russian law enforcement agencies actively exploit. Furthermore, émigré organisations are constantly being designated as extremist, terrorist or 'undesirable' (see Chapters 2.4.1–2.4.3).



The risks faced by political émigrés are not limited to extradition and deportation:

1. Thousands of anti-war and opposition Russians are placed on intergovernmental and international [wanted lists](#), which hinder their freedom of movement for both business and personal purposes

2. Interpol's mechanisms are used not only to detain opponents of the authoritarian regime, but also to [monitor](#) their movements between countries

3. Inclusion on Rosfinmonitoring's list of terrorists and extremists [is used](#) to deprive opponents of the Russian government of access to bank accounts and services

4. As part of [transnational repression](#), Russian opposition figures are denied entry to states friendly to Russia, in particular Georgia, and are subjected to other forms of pressure

The format of the current report does not allow us to examine all instances of transnational repression in detail. First and foremost, we seek to describe the situations of those individuals who have been either deprived of liberty in their host countries at the request of the Russian security services, or who are already in Russia following extradition, which may have been formally justified as deportation for a breach of local legislation or a refusal to grant asylum. The difference between these legal procedures is described in more detail, for example, by [First Department](#) in 'Extradition and Deportation: Why might those who have left be returned to Russia, and how can this be avoided?'

It is not only those deported or extradited from other countries who may face prosecution upon arrival in Russia, but also Russians and Ukrainians who travel to Russia or to territories occupied by Russia of their own free will. Moreover, the latter situation is more common. In September 2025, we published [an overview](#) containing 16 case studies of individuals arrested upon arrival in Russia or in the occupied territories of Ukraine. Of these 16, only one had been forced to return after being held in a deportation detention centre in the USA and subsequently self-deporting. All the others, including **Evgeny Varaksin**, who was refused asylum in Poland, had travelled to Russia for family or personal reasons.

It is also important to note that Russian émigrés face a threat not only from Russian security forces and their collaborators, but also from the security services of other authoritarian regimes. For instance, in 2025, the Russian political exiles **Anastasiya Zinovkina**, **Artem Gribul** and **Anton Chechin** were [remanded in custody and convicted](#) in Georgia on charges of possessing drugs. However, the real reason for their convictions was likely to have been their participation in protests against Georgia's pro-Russian government. Attempts were made to [expel](#) other participants in these protests from the country. In Azerbaijan, meanwhile, against the backdrop of the recent conflict with Russia, eight Russian citizens were detained on what were likely fabricated charges and, in an almost demonstrative manner, [subjected to torture](#).



4.2. Risks of extradition to Russia from various countries

Foreign countries, in terms of their treatment of Russian political exiles, can be broadly divided into those that are safe, those that are dangerous, and those that fall into a grey area between the two. To make their own rough assessments of the risks involved in travelling to other countries, Russians can use the 'Safe Travel Navigator', [developed](#) by the human rights organisation Legal Initiative for Belarusians living in exile. It should be borne in mind that, based on the available information, this list is not entirely relevant to Russian opposition figures.

The list of safe countries that refuse to extradite Russian citizens wanted on politically motivated charges to Russia primarily includes states with stable democratic regimes. Since 2014, and particularly since 2022, these countries have had virtually no interaction with Russian law enforcement agencies and refuse to detain individuals wanted in Russia. However, the risks of deportation or extradition remain.

We are not aware of any instances of Russia's politically motivated extradition requests being granted in such countries in 2025. This applies not only to European Union member states but also to Serbia and Montenegro, which have large Russian diasporas. Aleksandr Shmelev, a political commentator and editor-in-chief of [Sapere Aude](#), told our project that



no one has been extradited from Montenegro to the Russian Federation. There have been several attempts to arrest people under warrants from Russia (which alleged not political but some sort of economic offences), but each time the individuals were released fairly quickly, both those who might have been subject to politically motivated prosecution and former officials, who are not extradited either.

In states that cannot be described as fully democratic, and particularly in CIS countries that are signatories to the Chisinau Convention on Legal Assistance and Legal Relations in Civil, Family and Criminal Matters, the risks of Russians being extradited in connection with politically motivated criminal cases are potentially much higher. In most of these countries, even those that are authoritarian and have a large Russian diaspora, these risks have so far remained theoretical, materialising in practice only in rare instances of targeted political intervention by Russian security services and the diplomatic corps, as was the case in [Thailand](#) with members of the Bi-2 music group in 2024. In several states, however, Russian opposition figures in exile face significant danger.

Below, we examine the situation in some of these countries in more detail.



THE SITUATION IN INDIVIDUAL CIS COUNTRIES



KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan presents the most difficult situation regarding explicit or covert extradition to Russia, apart from Belarus, from which extradition takes place automatically in practice, sometimes without an official request. As Artur Alkhasov, a lawyer with the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law (KIBHR), commented to our project, in 2025 at least one Russian citizen was extradited following an extradition request, while another was formally deported and then immediately taken into custody in Russia (we have records of their names). Such cases were also recorded in previous years. In 2022 and 2024, **Mikhail Zhilin** and **Kamil Kasimov**, who had refused to take part in the war against Ukraine, [were extradited](#) to Russia.

In January 2026, cooperation between the Kazakhstan and Russian security services markedly [intensified](#), after which, [in the space of just one week](#):

1. The deserter **Semen Bazhukov** was handed over to the Russian military authorities

2. **Aleksandr Kachkurkin** was deported from Kazakhstan on fabricated grounds, after which he was immediately arrested upon arrival in Russia on charges of treason (Art. 275 CC RF)

3. The extraditions of Chechen opposition figure **Mansur Movlaev** and St. Petersburg activist **Yuliya Emelyanova** were approved

At that time, in addition to Movlaev and Emelyanova, there were [at least three other individuals](#) in local remand prisons awaiting extradition to Russia. Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, not a single Russian has been granted refugee status in Kazakhstan. According to Artur Alkhasov, *'the risks faced by Russians, who are subjects of politically motivated prosecutions, in Kazakhstan pose a serious threat to their lives and freedom.'*



KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan [ceased to](#) be a safe country for Russian political exiles as early as 2023, following the detention and subsequent extradition to Russia of [Aleksei Rozhkov](#), [Alena Krylova](#) and [Lev Skoryakin](#). Since then, Russian citizens at risk of criminal prosecution have begun to avoid Kyrgyzstan, although instances of detention have been reported in subsequent years as well.



In August 2025, in Bishkek, at the request of the Russian Federation's Public Prosecutor's Office, left-wing activist Artem Borodin was detained. He had been charged in March 2022 with distributing anti-war leaflets in Donetsk. Criminal proceedings against him were initiated by the security forces of the 'Donetsk People's Republic.' Even though Kyrgyzstan recognises Donetsk region as part of Ukraine and denies it falls under the jurisdiction of Russian law enforcement agencies, as of the second half of February 2026, Borodin remained in a remand prison awaiting extradition. He has been denied political asylum.



ARMENIA

The situation in Armenia is more favourable for political exiles, although it remains ambiguous. Alongside Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which are no longer safe, and repressive Belarus, Armenia is one of the few countries Russian citizens can enter not only without a visa, but also without a foreign passport. At present, human rights activists are not aware of a single instance of extradition to Russia with the consent of the Armenian authorities in cases with a significant political element, at least since 2022.

Deserters face the greatest danger in this country, because of the presence of a Russian military base in Gyumri. In December 2023, military police officers on duty at this base detained **Dmitry Setrakov**, who had deserted from the Russian army. Setrakov was subsequently taken to Russia. Later, the Armenian border service [refused to allow](#) another deserter, **Anatoly Shchetinin**, to be taken out of the country, even though in conversations with human rights activists and in media interviews he had stated he wished to go back. In 2025, the Russian military attempted to bypass the procedure and seize **Semen Subbotin**, who had been detained by Armenian police for 72 hours, but the police [did not allow](#) this to happen.

It is also worth noting that in 2024, at the request of the Armenian authorities, Russian border guards [ceased](#) to carry out border checks at Zvartnots Airport in Yerevan.

As of mid-November 2025, [175 Russians](#) facing criminal prosecution had sought legal assistance from the Vanadzor office of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, 12 of whom were subject to extradition requests from the Russian authorities (eight requests have been rejected by Armenia and four are currently under consideration). Representatives of the Armenian government [have stated](#) that, going forward, *'no one will be detained or deported to any third country on political grounds.'*

At the same time, according to estimates by Russian human rights activists, by April 2025 there were at least 15 cases in which Russian citizens and nationals of other countries, who were wanted in Russia on politically motivated charges, were [unable to leave](#) Armenian territory as a result.

Those wanted in Armenia are regularly detained by the police, [often](#) for up to 72 hours, and in some cases are placed in remand prisons pending extradition. An example of this practice was the [detention](#) on 30 August 2025 of [Liliya Maniukhina](#), whom we had recognised before this as a political prisoner, while attempting to leave Armenia. She spent more than two months in a remand prison in Yerevan.



THE SITUATION IN THE USA AND THE EU

Following Donald Trump's return to power in the USA in January 2025, the tightening of immigration policies also affected Russian citizens. According to estimates by human rights activists, up to 50,000 Russian citizens have sought asylum in the USA since 2022. As early as 2024, Russians began to be almost universally detained in [immigration detention centres](#) with the aim of reducing the flow of migrants.

The likelihood of extradition requests being granted in respect of Russians and citizens of other countries wanted in Russia has not increased. However, asylum seekers have begun to be deported directly to Russia without being allowed to leave the airports where they changed flights.

Dmitry Valuev, president of [Russian America for Democracy in Russia](#) (RADR), commented to this project:



A total of approximately 200 Russians were deported on special charter flights, with a similar number or slightly fewer deported on commercial flights;

There were only a small number of arrests of individuals deported from the USA on political grounds: three cases are known, with a couple more cases involving those deported from the EU;

All those deported are questioned [in Russia] for four to five hours, and their personal devices are searched;

There have been instances where the FSB summoned those deported after they had already been released at the airport.

The practice of deportations from the USA led to the arrests of [Artem Vovchenko](#), a deserter from the Russian army, and Perm-based activist [Leonid Melekhin](#), who was charged with justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF). Following his deportation from the European Union, Pavel Kuzmichev was taken into custody: Finland refused to grant him asylum, and upon his return to Russia he was charged with illegally crossing the border (Art. 322 CC RF).

There are also concerns about [Russian asylum seekers](#) in Croatia, who have been held in immigration detention centres for a long time. Some are [at risk of extradition](#) to Russia on terrorism charges. This primarily concerns individuals from the North Caucasus.



THE SITUATION IN OTHER COUNTRIES

In Venezuela, on 8 August 2025, Russia's request for the extradition of **Leonid Zakamaldin**, an animal rights activist and blogger living in Ukraine, was [granted](#). He was charged with publicly calling for people to engage in activities directed against state security (Art. 280.4, Part 2[c], CC RF), terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF) and treason (Art. 275 CC RF). Russian law enforcement agencies lobbied for Zakamaldin's extradition at the highest level, as evidenced by the fact that [Tarek William Saab](#), at that time Prosecutor General of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, was aware of his case. Zakamaldin remains in custody pending extradition.

Azerbaijan, as we have previously reported, is a country dangerous for Russian émigrés and even tourists because of the unresolved conflict between the governments of the two countries. This conflict, however, does not prevent ongoing cooperation between Russian and Azerbaijani law enforcement agencies. **Sotim Savlatov**, detained in January 2025 in Azerbaijan, was charged with deserting his military unit and immediately taken into custody. In April, he was [extradited](#) to Russia.

According to Kovcheg, September 2025 saw [the first instance](#) of direct cooperation between Russian and Turkish Interpol offices. This resulted in the deportation from Turkey of a Russian opposition figure wanted on a charge of justifying terrorism (Art. 205.2, Part 2, CC RF) for allegedly posing a threat to Turkey's national security.

Pm 24 January 2026, **Mikhail Timofeev**, a resident of Khabarovsk wanted in connection with the prosecution of **Sergei Furgal**, the former governor of Khabarovsk region accused of [organising contract killings](#), was detained in Georgia and [taken into custody](#). This occurred despite Timofeev's disability, his requests for political asylum in Georgia, and the fact that, in September 2025, Interpol had [cancelled](#) Russia's request for an international arrest warrant because of the obvious fabrication of the criminal charge.



5. NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN REPRESSIVE LEGISLATION IN 2025

The year 2025 saw fundamental changes to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation designed to facilitate an increase in repression. The inter-related areas of reform that can be identified are twofold: simplifying the process of bringing criminal prosecutions (including broadening the scope of application of specific offences); and imposing harsher penalties.

5.1. Facilitating criminal prosecutions for purposes of political repression

On 21 April 2025, [amendments](#) came into force enabling criminal prosecutions for certain offences without prior administrative-law liability for similar offences, provided the offence was committed *'for personal gain or in return for payment'*. The offences in question were those of discrediting the Russian armed forces (Art. 280.3 CC RF), making calls for sanctions against Russia (Art. 284.2 CC RF) and facilitating the implementation of decisions by international organisations in which Russia does not participate (Art. 284.3 CC RF).

On 2 May 2025, [amendments](#) came into force regarding failure to report a crime (Art. 205.6 CC RF). Failure to report the following offences henceforth became a crime: sabotage (Art. 281 CC RF), aiding and abetting acts of sabotage (Art. 281.1 CC RF), receiving training in acts of sabotage (Art. 281.2 CC RF), and organising or participating in a sabotage group (Art. 281.3 CC RF).

On 5 July 2025, [the offence](#) of incitement of hatred or enmity (Art. 282 CC RF) was expanded. Previously, proceedings under Art. 282, Part 1, CC RF could only be brought against a person who had been held liable under administrative law for a similar offence within the previous 12 months (Art 20.3.1 CAO RF). It is now possible to bring criminal charges immediately if a person has a previous conviction under Art. 282 CC RF itself, as well as for the offence of making calls to engage in extremism (Art. 280 CC RF) or for repeated display of prohibited symbols (Art. 282.4 CC RF). It has also become possible to charge an individual under Art. 282, Part 1, CC RF without a previous administrative-law conviction if the actions aimed at inciting hatred are accompanied by *'justification or promotion of the use of violence or the threat of its use'*.

It had previously been possible to bring a prosecution under Part 2 of Art. 282 CC RF without a prior administrative-law conviction if the offence had been committed with the use or threat of violence, through the abuse of official position, or by an organised group. Under the new amendments, Art. 282, Part 2, CC RF may be invoked, inter alia, where an offence is committed by a group of persons acting in concert. This opens the door to prosecutions for collective online posts, open letters and other joint appeals.



On 23 July 2025, [amendments](#) came into force facilitating designation of organisations as extremist. An extremist group is automatically entered into the register of extremist organisations if a conviction has become final against at least one person for establishing, leading or participating in the activities of that extremist group (Art. 282.1 CC RF). Previously, a separate court ruling was required to designate an organisation as extremist.

From 3 August 2025, Art. 243.4 CC RF [has been expanded](#) to criminalise not only destruction or damage of *‘military graves, memorial structures, or other sites commemorating those who died defending the Fatherland or its interests, or dedicated to days of Russia’s military glory’*, but also desecration of such sites.

From 26 October 2025, the process of bringing criminal proceedings for the offence of evading the duties of a foreign agent (Art. 330.1 CC RF) has been [simplified](#). Previously, to initiate criminal proceedings for this offence, it was necessary for an individual to have had two prior administrative-law convictions for violating the regulations governing the activities of a foreign agent (Art. 19.34 CAO RF) within a year. Now, a single ruling is sufficient. A prosecution may also be brought without prior administrative proceedings if the individual already has a criminal record for evading the obligations of a ‘foreign agent.’

From 17 November 2025, the age of criminal responsibility was [reduced](#) from 16 to 14 years for the offences of aiding and abetting terrorist activities (Art. 205.1 CC RF), establishing a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.4, Part 1, CC RF), organising the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5, Part 1, CC RF), sabotage (Art. 281 CC RF), aiding and abetting sabotage (Art. 281.1 CC RF), undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out sabotage (Art. 281.2 CC RF), and organising or participating in a sabotage group (Art. 281.3 CC RF). Furthermore, for the offences of sabotage (Art. 281–281.3 CC RF), the statute of limitations was abolished.



5.2. Tougher penalties and other consequences of prosecution

From 21 April 2025, under Art. 104.1 CC RF property obtained by means of the following offences is subject to [confiscation](#), provided they are committed ‘for personal gain’:

1. **DISCREDITING THE ARMED FORCES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION (ART. 280.3 CC RF)**

2. **MAKING CALLS FOR SANCTIONS AGAINST THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION (ART. 284.2 CC RF)**

3. **FACILITATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN WHICH THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION DOES NOT PARTICIPATE (ART. 284.3 CC RF)**

Discrediting the Russian army and making calls for sanctions against Russia have been added to the list of offences which, in terms of the penalty of confiscation of property, are interpreted as activities directed against the security of the Russian Federation.¹⁴⁵ This provides for the confiscation of money, valuables and other property used in, or intended for, such activities.

From 1 June 2025, individuals charged with the following offences [have been added](#) to the list of persons subject to prosecution and to be included on Rosfinmonitoring’s list of terrorists and extremists: discrediting the Russian army (Art. 280.3 CC RF), repeatedly displaying prohibited symbols (Art. 282.4 CC RF), violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation (Art. 280.2 CC RF) and genocide (Art. 359 CC RF). From this point onwards, suspects, defendants and convicted persons in cases involving various hate crimes are also subject to inclusion in the Rosfinmonitoring list, including the dissemination of information known to be false about the Russian army motivated by hatred (Art. 207.3, Part 2[e], CC RF). This is the offence which is most frequently used in prosecutions for disseminating ‘fake news’ about the war.

From 1 September 2025, committing an offence using a VPN or other ‘*software and hardware tools for accessing information resources and information and telecommunications networks to which access is restricted*’ has become an [aggravating circumstance](#) (Art. 63 CC RF).

From 17 November 2025, for offences of sabotage (Art. 281–281.3 CC RF), it is [prohibited](#) to impose a sentence below the lower limit provided for in the specific law. Moreover, conditions for obtaining conditional early release have been made more stringent for those convicted of these offences. For engaging minors in terrorist activities (Art. 205.1, Part 2, CC RF) and in sabotage activities (Art. 281.1, Part 2, CC RF), the maximum sentence is now life imprisonment.

145 The article on facilitating the implementation of decisions of international organizations was previously on this list.



5.3. Other new forms of pressure and prosecution

The Russian authorities regularly introduce numerous amendments not only to the Criminal Code but also to other legislative acts with the aim of intensifying repression. Below are some of the measures adopted in 2025.

From March 2025, [restrictions](#) came into force on ‘foreign agents’ receiving funds from Russia from the sale of property or vehicles, or from letting them out, as well as from fees and other remuneration deriving from intellectual property rights, interest on bank deposits, dividends and so on. These funds must now be transferred to special accounts, where they are effectively frozen.

On 1 September 2025 the geographical scope of [administrative law](#) was extended (Art. 1.8 CAO RF). It now became possible to hold ‘foreign agents’ administratively liable for offences committed outside the country.

Also on 1 September 2025, a provision [came into force](#) under which searching for, and accessing, extremist material online became an administrative offence (Art. 13.53 CAO RF).

In November 2025, [amendments](#) were adopted to the Tax Code, under which the flat rate of personal income tax for ‘foreign agents’ was increased from 13% to 30%. Furthermore, ‘foreign agents’ were stripped of tax relief and the right to tax exemptions. The changes came into force on 1 January 2026.

In December 2025, new [bills](#) were tabled in the State Duma introducing restrictions on Russians abroad sentenced for certain offences, including for breaching the regulations governing the activities of a foreign agent (Art. 19.34 CAO RF) or for discrediting the Russian army (Art. 20.3.3 CAO RF). If the bills are adopted into law, émigrés held administratively liable for a number of purely political offences will be unable to receive many consular services, and restrictions will be imposed on their use of their property and finances.



PROJECT RESULTS FOR 2025

The year 2025 proved a difficult time not only for our project, but also for the Russian human rights community as a whole. Not all initiatives survived the year. Many organisations were forced to cease operations or significantly scale back the scope of their work.

In January 2025, the Justice Ministry [declared](#) the *Political Prisoners Memorial* project a ‘foreign agent.’ Clearly, this decision was intended to complicate our work and restrict our contacts with the Russian public. Nevertheless, the flow of requests for assistance and reports of victims of repression increased. However, raising funds became considerably more difficult. In early 2026, the so-called ‘Memorial International Civil Society Movement’ was designated an extremist organisation. However, even before that, many individuals, fearing reprisals, were increasingly avoiding involvement in the project.

In these circumstances, we continued to build and develop a network of solidarity with those who had suffered political repression.

DIRECT, TARGETED ASSISTANCE

In 2025, our project continued to provide legal and humanitarian assistance to victims of political repression and their families. Almost 16 million roubles raised through private donations alone were channelled to support political prisoners. As a result, 214 individuals received assistance: 149 received humanitarian aid and 74 received legal assistance.

In total, 5,321 private donors supported our work in 2025.

DATABASE

For several years, our project has maintained a database of politically motivated criminal prosecutions. We have made [public](#) the section of the database that contains information about all those deprived of liberty, whose prosecution shows signs of being politically motivated and unlawful. By the end of 2025, this list contained details of 4,843 individuals, including 1,265 recognised as political prisoners.

Independent media outlets made active use of our database. In addition, the project worked closely with the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katsarova, providing data on political repression for her reports.



WEBSITE AND ANALYTICS

On our project website (memopzk.org/en), we publish lists of political prisoners and others prosecuted for political reasons, as well as news and analytical articles about the ongoing repression. Throughout the year, we worked to ensure that, despite being blocked by Russian authorities,¹⁴⁶ the website remained accessible to readers in Russia. In 2025, the site was visited by 247,000 active users.

In 2025, we continued to regularly update the section '[Other Victims of Political Repression](#)'. In this section we publish the names of individuals deprived of liberty as a result of politically motivated prosecutions but, for various reasons, not recognised as political prisoners. Over the course of the year, we created profiles of more than 1,700 individuals. As of 31 December 2025, there were 2,554 names in this section.

The website also features thematic dossiers providing an overview of the most common types of prosecution, focusing on prosecutions on charges of '[treason](#),' '[justification of terrorism](#)' and '[sabotage](#).' We also maintain separate lists of [civilian Ukrainians](#) and [Ukrainian prisoners of war](#) who have been victims of politically motivated prosecution.

In 2025, we began regularly [publishing](#) quarterly 'Barometers of Repression' and other analytical materials. The two articles that attracted the most interest among readers were one [featuring stories of Russians who returned to their homeland and faced criminal prosecution](#); and a second that provided [an overview of FSB practices in fabricating criminal prosecutions](#). In these publications, we not only analyse the current situation and provide examples of prosecution but also offer practical advice as to how to reduce the risk of becoming a victim of repression.

CURRENT ADDRESSES OF VICTIMS OF POLITICALLY MOTIVATED PROSECUTION FOR CORRESPONDENCE

In 2025, we updated 4,223 addresses of individuals deprived of liberty for political reasons. At the start of the year, new addresses were published on our social media channels weekly. However, as the number of political prisoners known to us grew, we switched to publishing them twice a week. We also gathered and shared information about letter-writing evenings for political prisoners around the world, as well as about prisoners' birthdays.

Furthermore, a new section appeared on our social media channels dedicated to little-known political prisoners, whom we urged people to support by writing to them.

FEEDBACK

Over the course of the year, 1,476 people messaged our [Telegram bot](#) asking for help, raising questions about the recognition of specific defendants in criminal cases as political prisoners, offering information for dissemination, and reporting on letter-writing evenings in various countries. Volunteers have come forward who share information almost daily about new addresses and previously unknown prisoners.

146 Roskomnadzor blocked the project's website within Russia in 2024.



INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY AND THE PEOPLE FIRST CAMPAIGN

In 2025, project staff took part in more than 50 international events, at which they spoke about the victims of Russian political repression. We also helped organise numerous solidarity actions in support of political prisoners.

Together with the Ukrainian human rights organisation Centre for Civil Liberties, Memorial launched the international [People First](#) campaign in 2025. The campaign demands that, in connection with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as part of a future peace settlement between the two countries priority must be given to the release of those deprived of liberty. One of the campaign's key demands is the release of all those prosecuted by the Russian authorities for anti-war protests and statements in support of Ukraine.

The initiative has already been supported by more than 80 human rights organisations around the world, and our project has played an active role in developing and promoting the People First campaign.



CONCLUSION

In 2023–2024, a pattern of politically motivated prosecutions emerged in which the laws on terrorism and treason played a central role. This pattern persisted in 2025, largely determining the nature of the repression. Firstly, there has been a lack of information about defendants and the circumstances of their prosecutions; secondly, the severity of the sentences handed down has been extreme, typically involving terms of imprisonment in double digits. In a growing number of prosecutions, defendants have been charged with several particularly serious offences at once, such as, for example, treason, committing an act of terrorism, and membership of a terrorist organisation.

In a certain sense, the fight against ‘saboteurs and spies’ is a logical part of the war of aggression being waged by the Russian state. However, this repressive logic is not limited to combating real threats. In the absence of actions that could be interpreted as providing military assistance to Ukraine, FSB officers systematically [provoke](#) such actions to prove the ‘effectiveness’ of their work to their superiors.

Attacks on infrastructure continue to be classified as both acts of sabotage and terrorist attacks. Although the use of charges of sabotage is on the rise, charges of terrorism, which carry no heavier penalty but are more stigmatising, are applied more frequently.

A worrying trend is taking hold in which individuals are prosecuted on charges of treason and terrorism not only for acts of violence or military aid to the Ukrainian armed forces, but also for propaganda in the form of leaflets or graffiti. Whereas previously it was more common for those distributing anti-war leaflets to be charged with a criminal offence related to the content of the leaflets in question, it is now likely that the very act of distribution will be regarded as ‘carrying out a task’ for a terrorist organisation, and therefore as participation in that organisation, as well as treason.

Prosecutions of Russians and residents of the occupied territories for statements continued. However, use of the provisions specifically introduced into the Criminal Code in 2022 to enforce military censorship (concerning ‘fake news’ about the military, discrediting the army, etc.) has diminished in recent years. The main charges used in relation to pro-Ukrainian statements continue to be those of incitement to terrorism and justification of terrorism. These charges are brought for praising units of the Ukrainian army designated as terrorist organisations in Russia, for making approving comments about Ukrainian attacks on Russian targets, for asserting that Vladimir Putin must be killed, and so on.

Overall, our project records approximately 500 new defendants in politically motivated criminal prosecutions each quarter (an average of five individuals every day). As noted above, the process of recording cases takes place with a significant delay, and approximately 40% of criminal prosecutions only become known in subsequent years.

The number of prosecutions in the occupied territories of Ukraine of which we are aware is rising. The reason for this is most likely the increasing activity of Russian security forces and occupation courts in these territories. Moreover, these bodies are making an increasing number of official reports of arrests and convictions in comparison with the early years of the full-scale invasion.



Criminal prosecutions of Ukrainian prisoners of war have become systematic and routine. The number of such cases rose significantly following the Ukrainian army's temporary occupation of parts of Kursk region. Previously, trials had been generally conducted against prisoners of war deemed members of units banned in Russia (such as the Azov Battalion, the Aidar Battalion, etc.). While this practice continues, military personnel from other units of the Ukrainian army are now also being prosecuted. Those involved in the incursion into the Kursk region are often charged with similar offences, while the incursion itself is classified as an act of terrorism.

A key role in the repression of 2025 was played by the intensifying campaign of prosecutions for donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation following its designation as an extremist organisation. The security services developed a tool to track monetary transfers, which automated the process of identifying new suspects and gathering evidence against them. Most of those targeted have not been imprisoned. According to [Mediazona](#), only 20 of the 167 persons convicted for making such donations were sentenced to terms of imprisonment, while a further five were sentenced to compulsory work in custody. Nevertheless, these are significant figures, and the campaign itself serves to purge the political arena not only of opposition activists, but also of those who have at one time or another shown disloyalty to the authorities, even in the form of a secret donation. A similar campaign of prosecutions is unfolding against those who made donations to Vyacheslav Maltsev's accounts. This latter, however, involves far harsher penalties, since the prosecutions are brought on charges of financing terrorism.

Overall, the practice of banning organisations by declaring them 'undesirable,' extremist or terrorist, and subsequently bringing prosecutions for participation in them, is being actively expanded. In 2025, the Free Russia Forum was designated a terrorist organisation, and in 2026, the Anti-War Committee was designated as such. Also in 2026 the 'Memorial Movement' was designated an extremist organisation, which significantly complicates the work of our project. The consequences of the ban on the Forum of Free Post-Russian States are becoming apparent as criminal prosecutions are brought against activists from national movements and defenders of indigenous peoples. Prosecutions of individual members of the LGBTQ+ community continue.



THANKS



We would like to thank our institutional and individual donors. Your support has enabled us to continue our work and provide assistance to political prisoners at an extremely challenging time for the Russian human rights movement.

Thanks, too, to our volunteers for their selfless and painstaking work throughout the year. Together, we have been able to achieve so much.

We would also like to thank our readers for helping to spread the word about political prisoners and keeping the issue in the public eye.

Special thanks go to those independent journalists, media organisations and bloggers who have reported on the repression and on Russia's political prisoners.

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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

