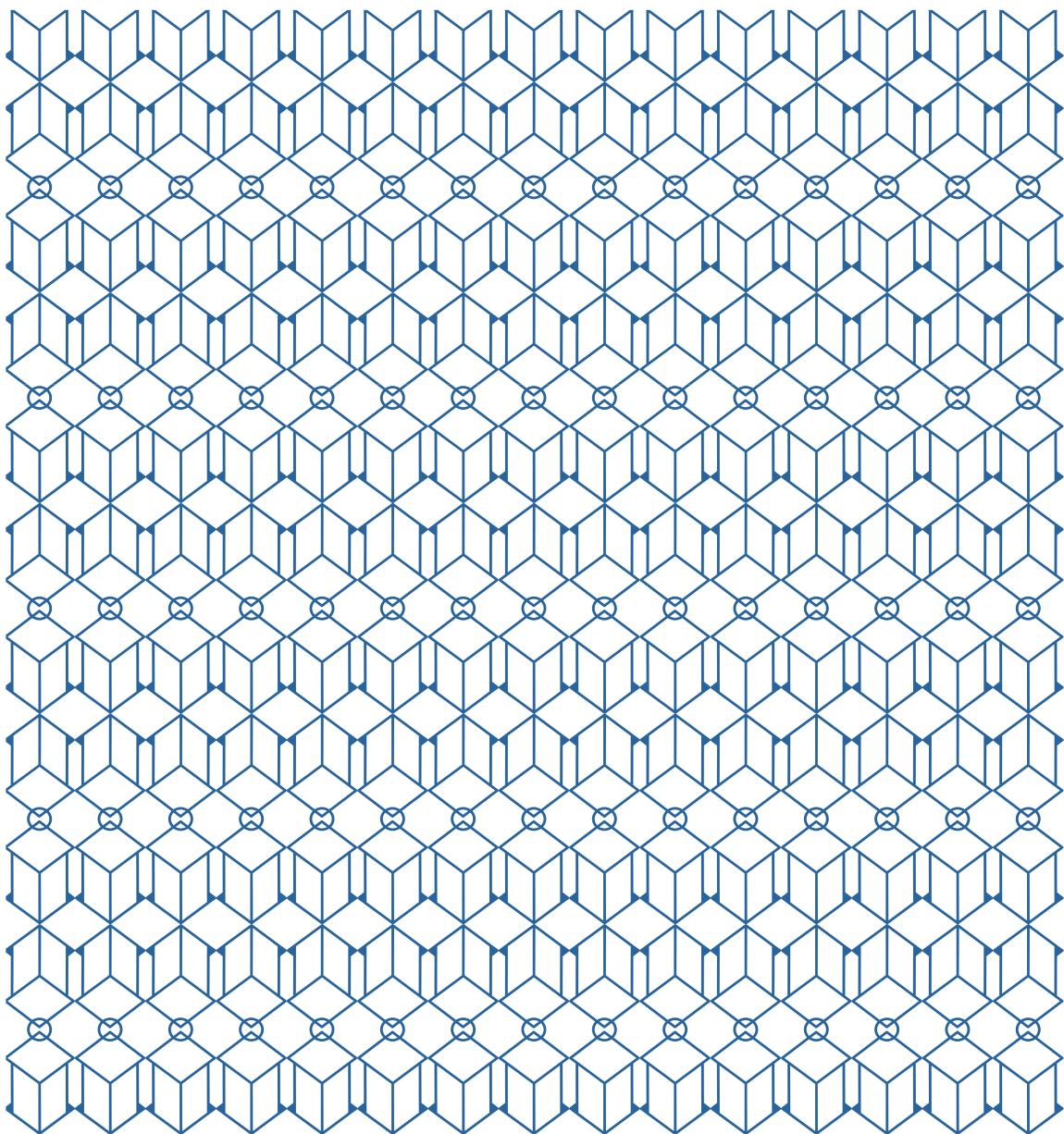


# Xenophobia, Freedom of Conscience and Anti-Extremism in Russia in 2025



SOVA Research  
Center.  
A collection of  
annual reports



Moscow, 2026

# **Xenophobia, Freedom of Conscience and Anti-Extremism in Russia in 2025**

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# Anti-Extremism Lawmaking in 2025

Over the course of 2025, the legislation of interest to us – on countering extremism and terrorism, as well as related provisions affecting freedom of expression and freedom of association – underwent a number of significant changes. Most of them were aimed at tightening regulations, with some exceptions. In this report, we summarize the most important changes, as well as several relevant decisions of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of Russia.

## Countering Extremism

### Incitement of Hatred

A telling development was the amendment of Article 282 of the Criminal Code (incitement of hatred or enmity, as well as humiliation of human dignity). The President of Russia signed the law implementing it on June 24.

Part 1 of this article is now divided into two clauses. Liability under clause “a” applies not only to those who have faced administrative punishment for an analogous act under Article 20.3.1 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (CAO) within the preceding year, as was the case before the amendments, but also to those already having a criminal record under Article 282 or Article 280 (calls for extremist activity), or Article 282<sup>4</sup> (repeated public display of prohibited symbols).

New clause “b” provides for prosecution against actions aimed at inciting hatred or enmity, or humiliating human dignity, when such actions are “combined with the justification or propaganda of the use of violence or the threat of its use.” Thus, the famous “partial decriminalization” of Article 282 CC, which took place in 2018, has been revised to a certain extent.

In addition, in Article 282 Part 2 CC, the wording “by an organized group” was replaced with a broader one: “by a group of persons, a group of persons acting by prior conspiracy, or an organized group.”

The explanatory note to the bill stated that previously, in almost half of cases under Article 20.3.1 CAO, proceedings were initiated for acts that “justify, support, approve, or advocate the use of violence or the threat of such use.” One might have predicted a sharp increase in prosecutions under Article 282 CC and a corresponding drop in cases under Article 20.3.1 CAO, but our monitoring does not corroborate this expectation. The likely reason for this discrepancy is that the CAO imposes administrative liability for old online publications unless they were removed, i.e. the continued availability of online publications is interpreted as a continuous offense. By contrast, under Article 282 CC, “the crime is considered completed from the moment at least one action aimed at inciting hatred is committed,” according to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in prac-

1. This approach to calculating the completion date of a crime, with respect to acts qualified under Articles 280 and 282 CC, was confirmed by the Supreme Court as early as 2011. In addition, in 2016,

tice, people can face charges under the updated version of Article 282 CC only for publications made after the update entered into force in mid-2025. As of the time of writing this report, SOVA is aware of only three criminal cases initiated under clause “b” of Article 282 Part 1 CC.

### Destruction or Damage to Property

Article 167 CC on intentional destruction or damage to property also became more restrictive; the President signed the relevant law in February. Now, for acts “motivated by political, ideological, racial, national, or religious hatred or enmity, or hatred or enmity towards a social group,” charges will follow under Part 2 of this article, with punishment in the form of compulsory labor or imprisonment for up to five years. Previously, this motive did not appear in Article 167 CC as a qualifying element, and such crimes were punished under Part 1, with sanctions ranging from fines to imprisonment for up to two years. On the other hand, it is possible that some ideologically motivated attacks of this kind can now be qualified under the new provision rather than under Article 205 CC (act of terrorism), as has often been done over the past three years.

### Extremist Organizations

In July, three laws were signed that changed the regulations on banning extremist organizations. Under amendments to the Federal Law “On Countering Extremist Activity,” the concept of an “extremist organization” was expanded to include not only associations and organizations banned by a separate court decision, but also extremist communities, once a court verdict under Article 282<sup>1</sup> CC for creating such a community, leading it, or participating in it enters into legal force. It is worth reminding that Article 282<sup>1</sup> CC defines an extremist community as an “organized group of persons,” created “to prepare for or commit extremist crimes,” that is, crimes motivated by hatred.

Accordingly, such communities will now also be included in the official list of extremist organizations, and thus, liability for continuing their activities will fall under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC. A similar mechanism has long been in place with respect to terrorist communities.

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in its ruling on online speech qualified under Articles 205<sup>2</sup> and 280 CC, the Supreme Court expressly stated that in such cases, the crime must be considered completed from the moment the statement was published online. See (in Russian): Resolution of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation No. 11 “On Judicial Practice in Criminal Cases Concerning Crimes of an Extremist Nature.” SOVA Center. 2011. June 20 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/docs/2011/06/d21988/>); SOVA Center commentary on the Resolution of the Plenum of the Supreme Court on Extremist and Terrorist Crimes, SOVA Center. 2016. November 3 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/publications/2016/11/d35761/>).

## Extremist Materials

Another package of laws signed in July contained unexpected new provisions regulating communications services. One of them, which was widely discussed, was the introduction into the CAO of a new Article 13.53 (searching for knowingly extremist materials and accessing them). This offense is punished by a fine of 3,000 to 5,000 rubles. Authority to file offense reports was granted not only to the police but also to the FSB. It should be noted that this provision establishes liability for searching for materials included on the relevant federal list as well as for any other “knowingly extremist” materials, i.e., materials falling under the definition provided in the legislation (in particular, works by leaders of the NSDAP and the Italian Fascist Party, images of leaders of groups recognized as criminal by the Nuremberg Tribunal, or Nazi collaborators).

Imposing sanctions merely for searching for information is an unprecedented legal innovation, even compared to Soviet legislation. As of the end of 2025, we know of only one person who faced charges under this provision.

## Prohibited Symbols

In July, a law was also signed changing the sanctions under Article 20.3 CAO on propaganda or public display of prohibited symbols, the most popular of the “anti-extremism” CAO articles. Now, the maximum sanction for individuals under both parts of this article is community service for up to 100 hours, combined with confiscation of the objects involved in the offense. Previously, punishment under this article included only fines and administrative arrest.

## Countering Terrorism and Sabotage Activity

In November, the President signed a law amending Criminal Code articles that stipulate responsibility for sabotage and terrorist crimes. Some of the changes concern crimes committed by minors and crimes committed against them. The minimum age of criminal responsibility under Article 205<sup>1</sup> (assisting in terrorist activity), Article 205<sup>4</sup> Part 1 (creating a terrorist community), and Article 205<sup>5</sup> Part 1 (organizing the activities of a terrorist organization), as well as Articles 281 (sabotage), 281<sup>1</sup> (assisting in sabotage activity), 281<sup>2</sup> (training for the purposes of sabotage activity), and 281<sup>3</sup> (organizing a sabotage community or participating in such), was lowered to 14.

Minors convicted under Article 281<sup>1</sup> Part 1 and Article 281<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC (participating in a sabotage community) can no longer be released from punishment and placed in a “closed special correctional educational facility”. Article 205<sup>1</sup> Part 2 CC and Article 281<sup>1</sup> Part 2 CC on involving others in terrorism or sabotage now include the aggravating circumstance of committing the crime against a minor.

Other legal innovations pertain to overall liability for such crimes. Under Articles 205<sup>5</sup> and 281<sup>3</sup> CC, organizers of the relevant organizations and communities will now face responsibility both for leading them and for acts committed by these organizations and communities, while participants will face charges for participation and for preparing or committing crimes in which they took part. Courts are no longer allowed to impose suspended

sentences under Article 281<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC. Furthermore, courts cannot impose a sentence below the statutory minimum or a more lenient punishment, or refrain from applying additional punishment under all articles related to sabotage (Articles 281 to 281<sup>3</sup> CC). The rule of not applying a statute of limitations – already in force for most terrorist offenses – has been extended to these articles as well. Finally, parole for offenders convicted under these provisions will be possible only after three quarters of the sentence have been served.

## Related Topics

### Discrediting the Army and Calls for Sanctions

In April, amendments were signed to the CC and the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) introducing a qualifying element of committing a crime for mercenary motives or for hire, as well as expanding the grounds for confiscation of property.

This qualifying element was added to Article 280<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC (discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of Russia or the exercise of powers by state bodies abroad). Thus, any such “discrediting” committed for mercenary motives now entails immediate criminal liability, just like in cases that involve grave consequences (property damage, harming citizens’ health, and so on), rather than administrative sanctions under Article 20.3.3 CAO.

Similar changes were made to Article 284<sup>2</sup> CC (calls for sanctions against the Russian Federation) and Article 284<sup>3</sup> CC (assistance in implementing decisions of international organizations in which the Russian Federation does not participate, or of foreign state bodies). Both now include Part 2, with sanctions ranging from substantial fines to imprisonment.

### Politics of Memory

The law “On Perpetuating the Memory of the Victims of the Genocide of the Soviet People during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945” was signed in April. The law does indeed focus mainly on specific measures to commemorate the victims of Nazi crimes, but it also stipulates sanctions for violating it. The corresponding amendments to the CAO have not yet been submitted to the State Duma, although they have been in development since spring 2025. They are expected to affect Article 354<sup>1</sup> (“Rehabilitation of Nazism”) and Article 243<sup>4</sup> CC.

Another change to Article 243<sup>4</sup> CC was made in July. Previously, it provided sanctions for causing destruction or damage to military graves, as well as monuments, stelae, obelisks, and other memorial structures or objects perpetuating the memory of those who died defending the Fatherland or its interests or dedicated to days of Russia’s military glory. Now, its scope includes not only destruction or damage to graves and monuments, but also their desecration (*oskvernenie*). Until 2020, desecration (*nadrugatelstvo*) of such objects was covered under Article 244 CC. With the introduction of Article 243<sup>4</sup>, a situation emerged in which specific charges were not established for desecration of memo-

rial objects and structures unless they were symbols of Russia’s military glory or burial sites. The newly adopted amendment eliminated this gap. The proportionality of the severe sanctions established by Article 243<sup>4</sup> CC raises concerns, particularly in cases where the actions did not result in significant material damage. On the other hand, enshrining responsibility for such actions under Article 243<sup>4</sup> CC (which applies to specific tangible structures) better satisfies the principle of legal certainty than the practice of qualifying such acts under Parts 3 and 4 of Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC as attacks on *symbols* of military glory and insults to the memory of defenders of the Fatherland, which has gained popularity in recent years. However, we observed no significant change in enforcement practice in cases involving “desecration” of Eternal Flames and similar objects in the second half of 2025.

## Loss of Citizenship

Amendments signed in July expanded the list of grounds for revoking a decision on granting Russian citizenship. They include the crimes committed under a wide range of Criminal Code articles, including Article 205<sup>2</sup> Part 1 (public calls for terrorist activity, propaganda or justification of such), Article 280<sup>4</sup> (public calls for activities directed against state security), and Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC, as well as any crimes motivated by hatred or committed for the purposes of terrorist propaganda, justification or support of terrorism, or sabotage.

At the same time, the mechanism of revoking citizenship due to conviction for certain crimes was limited to those who obtained citizenship by application. Those recognized as citizens on the basis of a federal constitutional law or an international treaty (i.e., residents of the “new territories”) cannot lose their Russian citizenship as a result of a criminal conviction. However, their citizenship could still be terminated extrajudicially on the basis of an FSB decision.

## Criminal Procedure and Penal Enforcement Law

A law signed in February introduced clarifications to the procedure for pretrial detention set out in the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC). Particularly, detention for medium-gravity crimes may now be applied by a court only if the crime involved “the use of violence or the threat of violence,” and in some exceptional cases.<sup>2</sup> The grounds for detention were also further restricted for minor crimes. Detention may now be ordered only when a suspect/defendant either violated another pretrial measure of restraint or absconded.

These procedural “humanization” measures featured a number of exceptions. For example, they do not apply to suspects and defendants under Article 205<sup>2</sup> Part 1, Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 1 (dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Russian army), Article 280, Article 280<sup>1</sup> (calls to violate the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation), Article 280<sup>3</sup> Part 1, Article 280<sup>4</sup> Part 1, Article 284<sup>1</sup> Parts 1 and 2 (participation in the activities of an “undesirable organization”, or financing of such), and Article 284<sup>3</sup> CC. At the

2. When one of the following conditions is met: a suspect/defendant does not have a place of residence; or their identity cannot be established; or they violated another pretrial measure of restraint; or they absconded.

same time, the amendments do apply to medium-gravity offenses such as Article 282 Part 1, Article 282<sup>4</sup>, Article 354<sup>1</sup> Parts 2 and 4, and Article 213 Part 1 CC (hooliganism), as well as to minor offenses such as Article 284<sup>2</sup>, Article 354<sup>1</sup> Parts 1 and 3, Article 214 (vandalism), and Article 330<sup>1</sup> CC (avoidance of responsibilities stipulated by the legislation on “foreign agents”).

In April, amendments were signed to Article 247 Part 5 of the CPC on conducting a trial *in absentia* of the defendant who is abroad and/or evading court appearance and who has not been charged for the same offense abroad. Previously, this provision applied only to cases of grave and especially grave crimes; now its application has been extended to a number of minor and medium-gravity crimes listed in 19 offenses, including several “anti-extremism,” counter-terrorism, and related provisions.<sup>3</sup>

In late December, the President also signed amendments to Articles 73 and 81 of the Penal Enforcement Code (PEC). Under them, prisoners known to “espouse the ideology of extremism,” as well as all convicted foreign citizens and stateless persons, lose their right to request a transfer to a correctional facility located closer to their relatives’ place of residence.

In addition, in December, a bill “On Temporary Restrictive Measures with Respect to Persons Outside the Russian Federation Who Are Failing to Appear to Serve a Sentence” was passed in the first reading. It proposes a whole range of restrictions for those who are abroad and thus evading punishment imposed under any CC articles or under six politicized articles of the CAO.<sup>4</sup>

These offenders will face fourteen restrictive measures, including refusal by the authorities to issue new documents or to perform notarial acts at consulates, refusal to provide e-government services, as well as the freezing of bank accounts, blocking of online banking access, and revocation of electronic signatures.

## Information and Communications Legislation

A law banning the placement of advertising on resources of organizations designated as extremist, terrorist, or “undesirable” was signed in April. It should be reminded that the list of organizations designated as extremist includes the social networks Facebook and Instagram<sup>5</sup>.

3. Article 205<sup>2</sup> Part 1, Articles 207<sup>1</sup> (dissemination of “fakes” about emergency situations), 207<sup>2</sup> (dissemination of publicly significant “fakes” that led to severe consequences”), Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 1, Article 212 Part 3 (calls for mass riots), Articles 243<sup>4</sup>, 280, 280<sup>1</sup>, Article 280<sup>3</sup> Part 1, Article 280<sup>4</sup> Part 1, Article 282 Part 1, Article 282<sup>4</sup>, Article 284<sup>1</sup> Parts 1 and 2, Article 284<sup>2</sup>, Article 284<sup>3</sup> Part 1, Articles 330<sup>3</sup> (activity of foreign NGOs without registration), 354 (public calls for the initiation of a war of aggression), 354<sup>1</sup> CC.

4. Article 19.15 Part 42 (failure to with a warning or an order issued under the “foreign agents” legislation), Articles 19.34 (violation of the order of “foreign agent” activities), 20.3.2 (calls to violate the territorial integrity of Russia), 20.3.3, 20.3.4 (calls for sanctions against Russia), 20.33 (participation in the activities of an undesirable organization).

5. The entry on the List appears as follows: “The American transnational holding company Meta Platforms Inc. for distribution of products – the Facebook and Instagram social networks”.

Also worth noting are legal innovations that were included in the same legislative package as the provision on searching for knowingly extremist materials (see above). Among them are administrative and criminal penalties for transferring SIM cards and providing logins and passwords for various websites to other people. Administrative liability was introduced for advertising VPN services, and the use of a VPN was added to the list of aggravating circumstances of any crime.

In July, amendments were signed to the federal laws “On Information, Information Technologies and Protection of Information” and “On State Support for Cinematography in the Russian Federation.” They prohibit the distribution, through “audiovisual services” (i.e., streaming platforms), of works that contain material discrediting and/or provoking the denouncement of “traditional Russian spiritual and moral values.” The relevant amendments to the CAO were submitted to the State Duma in December. They include plans to supplement the CAO with a new Article 13.35.1 establishing sanctions for failure to remove works that discredit “traditional values” after their distribution certificates have been revoked by the Ministry of Culture, as well as for failure to comply, or to comply in a timely manner, with Roskomnadzor orders to remove not only such works, but also works for which distribution certificates were never issued or were revoked for other reasons. In addition, liability under Article 13.50 CAO for failure to remove such materials is to be extended to social media platforms.

## Regulating the Activities of “Foreign Agents”

A number of legal innovations in 2025 pertained to the legislation on “foreign agents.” In April, amendments were signed banning citizens listed in the register of “foreign agents” from teaching in state and municipal educational institutions and from conducting the rather broadly defined “educational outreach activities”. Organizations designated as “foreign agents” are no longer permitted to engage in educational activities in general. Previously, such restrictions applied only to work with minors. If an educational institution is included on the “foreign agent” register, its license must now be terminated.

Another law expanded the grounds for a “foreign agent” designation. These include “assistance in implementing decisions of international organizations in which the Russian Federation does not participate, or of foreign state bodies, if they are directed against the security of the Russian Federation” (if such actions are not qualified as a criminal offense). In addition, one can now be included in the Ministry of Justice register for “involving citizens, including minors,” in any of the activities of “foreign agents” listed in the law, or for financing such activities.

In June, amendments were signed tightening the sanctions under Article 19.34 Part 5 CAO for failure by “participants” and officials of “foreign agent” organizations (including unregistered associations) to inform others of their status. A new addition to parts 4 and 5 of the same article stipulated that informing about the status “not conforming to the approved format” is also punishable. In addition, a new Part 9 was added to Article 19.4 CAO on failure to comply with the lawful demands of the Ministry of Justice or interfering with an official in the performance of their duties. Article 19.34 CAO was also extended to those who commit an administrative offense while outside Russia.

In October, the President signed a law expanding criminal liability for “foreign agents.” Now, for criminal prosecution under Article 330<sup>1</sup> CC, it is sufficient to have one prior vio-

lation under Article 19.34 CAO within a year (rather than two), or to have a criminal record under Article 330<sup>1</sup> CC.

Amendments to the Tax Code, adopted in November, established a single personal income tax rate of 30% for “foreign agents,” with a ban on tax deductions and loss of certain tax benefits.

# Decisions of the Highest Courts

## Constitutional Court Practice

We would like to point out two decisions adopted in 2025 by the Constitutional Court of Russia that concerned criminal cases involving public statements. The Constitutional Court did not demonstrate any novel approaches here but merely consolidated the existing practice.

In February, the Constitutional Court refused to accept for consideration a complaint by Bashkir activist Ramilya Galim (Saitova) challenging the wording of Article 280 CC and provisions of the Federal Law “On Countering the Legalization (Laundering) of Proceeds from Crime and the Financing of Terrorism” that impose restrictions on defendants in extremism cases. In her complaint, Galim argued that the wording of Article 280 CC enables law enforcement agencies to punish citizens for statements deemed by experts to constitute calls to extremism, regardless of whether these statements were perceived by any audience as incitement to action or resulted in any harm. The Constitutional Court stated that the formula chosen by the legislators for Article 280 CC “does not mean that commission of this act entails no harm or a real threat of causing harm,” and contains no ambiguity “that would result in depriving a person of the opportunity to understand the unlawfulness of their actions and foresee liability for committing them.” The Constitutional Court did not consider the portion of the complaint concerning financial restrictions citing Galim’s failure to provide decisions by lower courts pertaining to her case in which these restrictions had been disputed.

In May, the Constitutional Court issued another refusal to consider a case in response to the complaint submitted by Aleksei Gorinov, former municipal deputy of Moscow’s Krasnoselsky District, convicted in 2022 under clauses “a,” “b,” and “d” of Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC (dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Russian army, with the use of his official position, by a group of persons based on prior agreement, and motivated by hatred). Gorinov complained that his rights had been violated both by Article 207<sup>3</sup> CC itself and by provisions of the Federal Law “On the General Principles of the Organization of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation.” According to his complaint, these provisions fail to protect deputies from prosecution for expressing opinions, since they establish liability for public insults, defamation, or other similar violations, which extends to deputies despite their status. The Constitutional Court held that deputies should not be exempt from liability for defamation or for “war-related fakes.” Moreover, with respect to the latter, the Constitutional Court indicated that the federal legislators “have the right and the duty to carry out legal regulation, including to establish legal liability, in order to prevent and suppress actions that encroach on the legal order,

public order and security, and other values protected by the Constitution of the Russian Federation – even if such actions outwardly appear to involve the exercise of the relevant constitutional rights.”

## Supreme Court Clarifications on Extremist Crimes

On December 23, the Plenum of the Supreme Court of Russia introduced another set of amendments to the resolution “On Judicial Practice in Criminal Cases Concerning Crimes of an Extremist Nature.” Most of the amendments are technical.

Among the substantive changes, we note the complete removal of the indication (based on European case law) that criticism of politicians and officials per se should not be treated as an action aimed at humiliating dignity. Instead, however, the Supreme Court briefly noted that criticism of “political or public figures in connection with their exercise of powers or the performance of other actions allowed for by their status” per se should not be treated as an action aimed at inciting hatred or enmity.

In addition, the Supreme Court provided, for the first time, its recommendations on applying Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC. By analogy with other “speech-related” articles, the resolution states that the crime is considered completed from the moment any of the actions described in the legal provision are committed. One example of such actions is the display of tattoos, which is explicitly noted in the resolution. The Supreme Court also reiterated that the display of symbols is not punishable if “a negative attitude toward the ideology of Nazism and extremism is formed and there are no signs of propaganda or justification of Nazi and extremist ideology.”

# Radicalization of Far-Right Violence: Ideologically Motivated Crimes against Persons and Property and State Responses in Russia in 2025

This report by SOVA Center examines offenses commonly referred to as hate crimes – that is, ordinary criminal offenses committed out of ethnic, religious, or similar hostility or prejudice<sup>1</sup> – and the state’s response to such crimes.

Russian legislation also classifies as hate crimes offenses committed out of political and ideological hostility. The inclusion of these types of hostility in the definition of hate crime is relatively rare in democratic countries and remains debatable.

In this report, we do not examine such crimes unless committed by groups ideologically oriented towards committing xenophobic hate crimes in general. At the same time, we do analyze law enforcement practices regarding certain ideologically constructed provisions of the Criminal Code (CC) related to attacks on material objects.

## Summary

The results of the past year have been alarming. Although the overall level of xenophobic violence did not increase as dramatically as in the preceding year, the situation has deteriorated qualitatively: attacks have become more brutal, the number of killings has increased, and some victims, including murder victims, were children.

The number of acts of vandalism motivated by hatred doubled in 2025. The share of more dangerous acts (including arson and explosions) also increased.

Law enforcement agencies intensified their efforts to counter ideologically motivated violence. In particular, participants in several radical far-right groups were convicted last year, including members of the revived NS/WP organization. We also received reports regarding arrests of new small groups of young neo-Nazis. Overall, excluding the numerous convictions related to the riots at Makhachkala airport, the number of people convicted for

1. Hate Crime Law: A Practical Guide. OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2009. (<https://www.osce.org/odihr/36426>); Verkhovsky Alexander. Criminal Law in OSCE Participating States on Hate Crimes, Incitement to Hatred, and Hate Speech (2nd ed., rev. & expanded). Hague, SOVA Center, 2015 (<http://www.sova-center.ru/files/books/cl15-text.pdf>).

ideologically motivated violence more than doubled in 2025 compared to 2024. Apparently, this intensification of law enforcement activity was instrumental in slowing down the quantitative growth of violence.

Law enforcement has also stepped up its efforts to counter attacks on material objects; 60% more people faced sanctions than the year before. However, for the past four years, this enforcement has targeted primarily not hate crimes, but other actions against material objects. On the one hand, in 2025, more sentences were issued for vandalism motivated by ethnic xenophobia and fewer – for protest actions against the authorities (including in connection with Ukraine). On the other hand, the number of sentences in defense of “traditional values”<sup>2</sup> increased more than twofold and accounted for 65% of the total. The share of verdicts we considered clearly inappropriate also amounted to 65 % – though this is less than last year (74%) or two years ago (69%).

Thus, 2025 was marked by an increase in the social danger posed by hate crimes. Heightened efforts to counter xenophobic violence inspire some cautious optimism, but we cannot say the same of law enforcement practices regarding attacks on material objects. These appear to serve primarily ideological rather than law enforcement purposes.

## Systematic Racist and Neo-Nazi Violence

According to SOVA Center monitoring, 295 individuals were victims of ideologically motivated violence in 2025, seven of whom died. In 2024, we recorded 284 victims, including one fatality.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that last year’s data are not yet final, as information about some attacks reaches us with delays.<sup>4</sup> Thus, we record a slight increase in the number of attacks, although we can assume that the growth was far less dramatic than the year before. At the same time, judging by the number of killings, the brutality of attacks has increased.

Unfortunately, we cannot verify our data against official statistics; the data is not publicly available. We understand that our figures are inevitably incomplete. For instance, we do not include data from the North Caucasus republics, where our methodology simply does not work.<sup>5</sup> We also know very little about the activities of militant groups operating in the name of ethnic minorities. Thus, our data in no way reflects the real level of racist vio-

2. Refers to the desecration (real or alleged) of ideologically significant symbols, primarily those connected to military history: the Eternal Flame, the St. George ribbon, and so on.

3. Database: Acts of violence, SOVA Center (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/database/violence/>). Here and throughout, all the numbers are as of 2026, January 14.

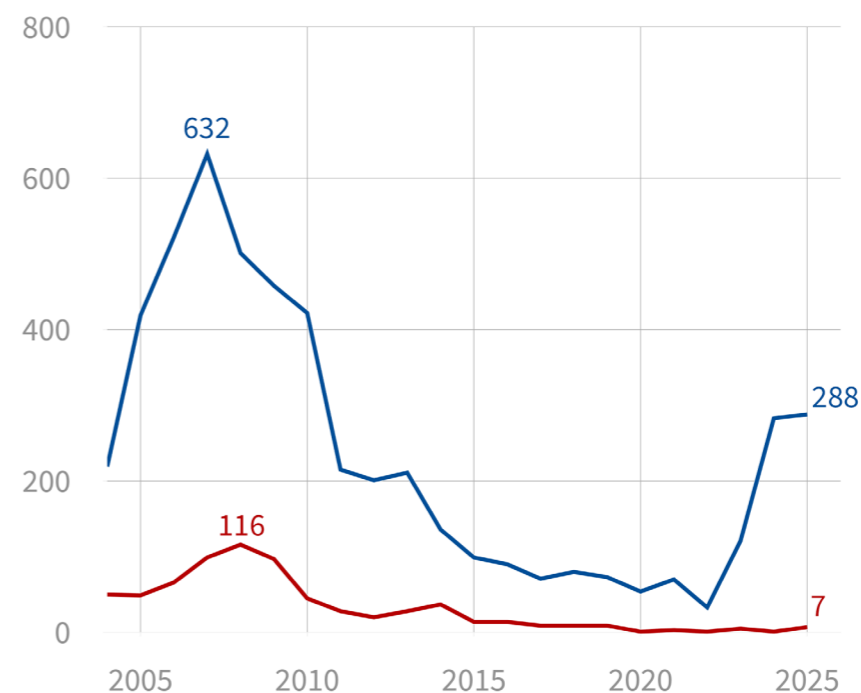
4. Yudina N. Neo-Nazis on the Rise: Hate Crimes and Countering Them in Russia in 2024, SOVA Center. 2025. February 28 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/reports-analyses/2025/02/d47102/>).

5. Moreover, we do not include four Ukrainian regions brought under Russian jurisdiction in the autumn of 2023. Crimea is included, however, because in recent years the regime there has differed little from that in Russia’s southern regions.

lence nationwide. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, we assess dynamics and major trends to some extent, since our methodology has changed little since 2004.<sup>6</sup>

### Hate Crime Victims: Dead and Injured

Data collected by SOVA Center, 2004–2025



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

Each year, we write about the problems we face in gathering information, and nothing changed in this regard over the past year. Extracting data from media reports, which often describe hate crimes in ways that make them hard to identify, remains difficult, and we learn virtually nothing from police reports. Victims themselves are also reluctant to contact law enforcement (due to traditional distrust of the police) or human rights organizations.

For the third year in a row, we have learned about the majority of attacks from far-right Telegram channels, where a new generation of neo-Nazis publishes daily “direct action” reports. Unlike a decade ago, today’s far-right youth are far more committed to secrecy: attackers’ faces are unidentifiable in videos, and the time and place of attacks are often unclear.

We treat such information with caution. For example, we did not include in our statistics episodes where far-right teenagers desecrate corpses (three such cases were known last year), since their authenticity is questionable, and we found no independent confirmation of the alleged killings. Overall, however, we tend to regard video reports from small far-right groups as reliable, since in a number of cases, they have been corroborated by law enforcement, which managed to detain some of the attackers.

Some of these videos were timed to dates significant for the far right: Hitler’s birthday (April 20); the “hatred and revenge day” (May 5, the 40th day after the death of prominent

6. Here and throughout, all chart data is based on the monitoring results of SOVA Center.

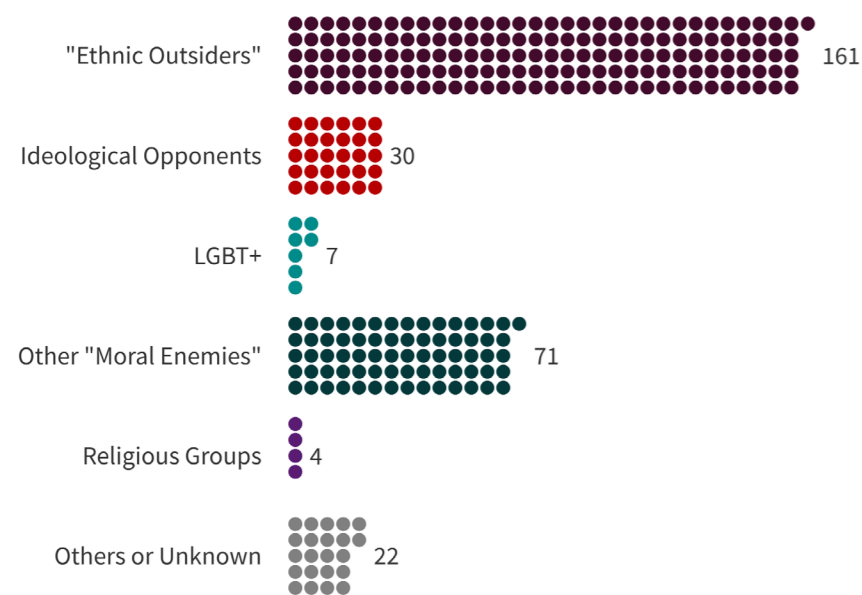
neo-Nazi Maxim “Adolf” Bazylev); the memorial day of another “white hero,” Dmitry Borovikov, leader of the St. Petersburg neo-Nazi group Combat Terrorist Organization (May 19); and the death anniversary of Maxim “Tesak” Martsinkevich (September 16). Alongside these older dates, attacks last year also commemorated new “heroes,”<sup>7</sup> such as the administrator of the popular far-right Telegram channel *Razgrom* or Andrei “Bloodman” Pronsky, a leader of the revived NS/WP.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, the rally that was once the main annual far-right event – the Russian March on November 4 – also received its share of attention. Although the march itself was very modest, several attack videos were deliberately timed to coincide with that date.

From the footage, it is still hard to identify the region where the attacks took place. Based on fragmentary data, we recorded attacks in 22 regions in 2025, though the actual number is likely higher (there were at least 23 in 2024).<sup>9</sup> Unexpectedly, in contrast to previous years, the Moscow Region ranked first in levels of violence, followed by Moscow and St. Petersburg. A notable number of victims were recorded in the Novosibirsk Region, the Chelyabinsk Region, and in Primorsky Krai. Attacks for the second year in a row were also reported in the Vladimir, Sverdlovsk, and Tyumen Regions, as well as in Stavropol Krai.

## Hate Crime Victims by Type in 2025

Data collected by SOVA Center



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

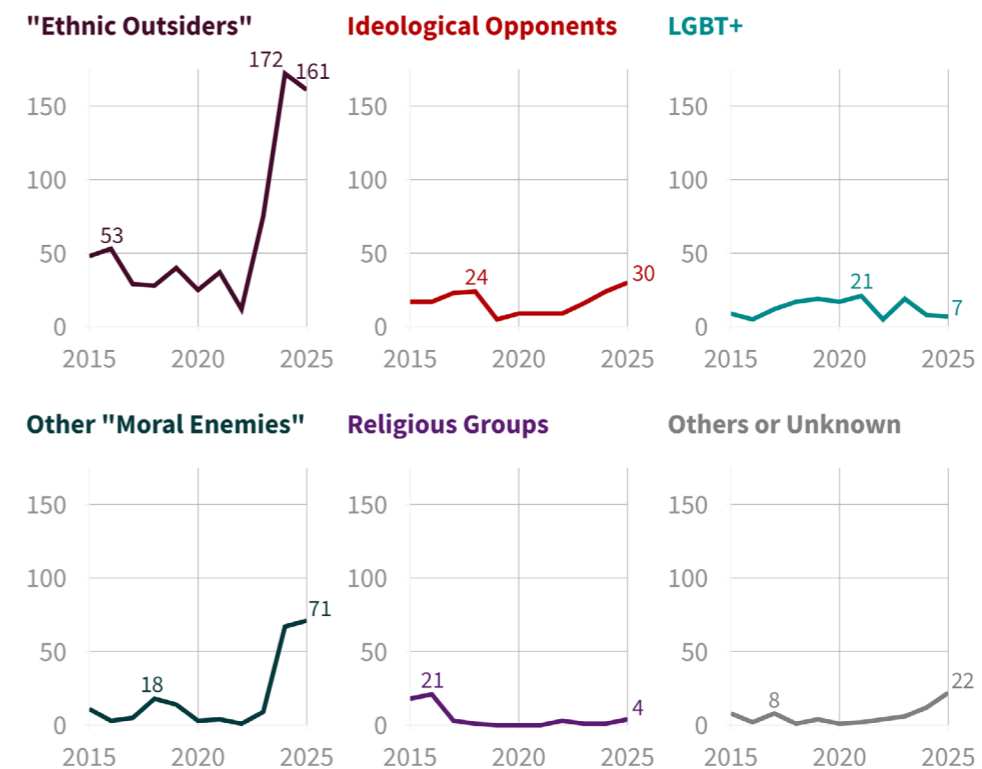
7. At that time, court proceedings against them were underway and ended with verdicts in 2025.

8. NS/WP (National Socialism / White Power) has been designated a terrorist organization in Russia.

9. In a similar report the year before, we wrote of 19 regions.

## Hate Crime Victims by Type

Data collected by SOVA Center, 2015–2025



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

## Attacks against “Ethnic Outsiders”

In 2025, we recorded 161 attacks on ethnic grounds – that is, attacks against people visually perceived by attackers as ethnic outsiders. This is slightly fewer than the previous year (172 attacks).

Victims in this category included natives of Central Asia and the Caucasus, people of color, and individuals we identified only as having “non-Slavic appearance.” Attacks against the latter group have been particularly brutal. Four people were killed, including two children.

Both children were victims of teenage neo-Nazis. A major media outcry followed an armed attack by a 15-year-old student, Timofei K., against a school in the Gorke-2 village near Odintsovo (the Moscow Region) in December, which resulted in the stabbing death of 10-year-old Kobiljon Aliev<sup>10</sup> from Tajikistan. Another child, a 9-year-old from Kyrgyz-

10. Neo-Nazi teenager attacks school in Odintsovo: 10-year-old boy killed, SOVA Center. 2025, December 16 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/racism-nationalism/2025/12/d52788/>, in Russian).

stan, was killed by a 14-year-old teenager in Trudovaya neighborhood of the Dmitrov Municipal Area in the Moscow Region.<sup>11</sup>

A high-profile incident should be mentioned separately: the death of 37-year-old Armenian-born Gor (Grisha) Ovakimyan during a raid by the “Russian Community” (*Russkaya Obshchina*) on an apartment in Vsevolozhsk of the Leningrad Region. We do not include him in our victim count, since we cannot confirm the attack; the prevailing version states that Ovakimyan died in a fire that erupted during the conflict. A 24-year-old woman was also injured and hospitalized.<sup>12</sup>

Last year, we encountered at least five cases of so-called “white wagons.”<sup>13</sup> For example, a raid dedicated to Hitler’s birthday took place on a commuter train in Sergiev Posad on April 21.

We learned of seven attacks on people of color last year (vs. three in 2024). For instance, a Nigerian citizen was assaulted in St. Petersburg. In Moscow, Francine Villa, a Black resident of Russia, complained of being beaten and insulted by neighbors on ethnic grounds.

Anti-Roma rhetoric and attacks on Roma have continued in Russia. In May, in the village of Gornozavodskoye in Stavropol Krai, a teenager attacked a Roma child. In front of others, he grabbed the child by the hair, demanded an apology for being Roma, and forced the child to kiss his feet.

In 2025, in addition to individual attacks, we recorded a large-scale public anti-Roma incident. In the village of Podlesnoye of the Saratov Region, the death of a teenager in a traffic accident caused by a local Roma resident triggered a spontaneous rally with accusations against the Roma community. These included everyday grievances (violations of living standards and traffic rules) as well as Roma’s alleged criminality and evading mobilization for the “special military operation.” No violence took place, but the situation was apparently so tense that the Roma community hastily left the village immediately afterwards.

There were also attacks motivated by ethnic hatred against ethnic Russians. We learned of two such cases last year (vs. three in 2024). The victims were residents of the Magadan Region who were beaten by three foreigners during a traffic conflict, accompanied by xenophobic slurs.

For the second year in a row, we observed no physical attacks on Jews. However, even in the preceding years, such attacks rarely exceeded one per year.

Traditionally, alongside “ethnic outsiders,” victims also include people beaten “by association.” For example, two people were attacked in the Chelyabinsk Region, namely Ural Federal University lecturer Rustam Ganiev (for being, as the attacker put it, “nerus”, i.e. “not Russian”) and his wife Lyudmila (“for being his wife”). In Sergiev Posad, passengers on a commuter train were assaulted for trying to defend people beaten by far-right activists during the aforementioned “white wagon” raid.

11. Links to nationalist pages found on the phone of a teenager detained for murder, *Moskovsky Komsomolets*. 2025, April 9 (<https://www.mk.ru/incident/2025/04/09/v-telefone-podrostka-zaderzhannogo-za-ubiystvo-nashli-ssylki-na-stranicy-s-nacionalisticheskim-uklonom.html>), in Russian).

12. More on this: Alperovich V. Nationalists on the Path of Success: Public Activity of Far-Right Groups, Winter–Spring 2025, SOVA Center. July 29 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2025/07/d52000/>), in Russian).

13. The idea of the “white wagon” gained popularity among the far right in the early 2000s. Participants in these actions carried out attack raids on commuter trains or subways, searching for people of “non-Slavic appearance,” beating them up, and filming their actions on camera.

## Attacks against LGBTQ+ and “in Defense of Morality”

The number of attacks on LGBTQ+ people remained roughly at the same level as the year before. SOVA Center recorded seven victims (eight in 2024).<sup>14</sup>

LGBTQ+ people fall into a group we categorized as “moral enemies” of the neo-Nazis, and attacks on them are a common form of far-right violence. The category of those said to undermine the nation’s moral fabric – whom far-right activists call “bio-trash” – also includes homeless people,<sup>15</sup> those mistaken for being drunk, drug users, and drug dealers.<sup>16</sup> Far-right activists also place alleged pedophiles in this same category, continuing the traditions of Maxim Martsinkevich’s Occupy Pedophilia project. The latter are not only subjected to physical violence but also often deliberately humiliated for video recordings.

To the attackers, such victims can be ethnically “one of their own.” However, in some cases, the victim is also “non-Russian” (for example, a Central Asian native lured to a fake date with a minor), which raises the intensity of hatred. In such cases, the motive is mixed.

Collecting information about these victims is difficult because they are unwilling to talk about what happened or because of their social marginalization. Nevertheless, we learned of 79 such attacks in 2025<sup>17</sup> (vs. 75 in 2024). For the second year in a row, this is the second-largest victim group in our grim statistics.

## Attacks against Ideological Opponents

The number of attacks by far-right activists against their political, ideological, or “stylistic” opponents also increased compared to 2024. We counted 30 people beaten (vs. 25 in 2024).<sup>18</sup>

The majority of victims in this group were anti-fascists or people mistaken for them (20 individuals). Among political opponents, those harmed included visitors to the Open Space co-working center in Moscow who had gathered for the traditional January 19 event to commemorate victims of neo-Nazis.<sup>19</sup>

14. SOVA Center counts only those incidents known to us in which we see a deliberate attack motivated by hatred.

15. For more on the reasons behind attacks on homeless people, see, for example: Alperovich V., Yudina N. The Ultra-Right on the Streets with a Pro-Democracy Poster in Their Hands or a Knife in Their Pocket: Xenophobia and Radical Nationalism in Russia, and Efforts to Counteract Them in 2012, SOVA Center. 2013. April 26 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/reports-analyses/2013/04/d26972/>).

16. Posts on far-right platforms claiming that the business of transporting, storing, and distributing drugs is mainly carried out by people from Central Asia, Africa, and Roma communities raise the level of hatred even further.

17. Primarily from videos posted by far-right groups.

18. Numbers for this particular group of victims have increased significantly compared to what we reported in a similar report the year before (as of February 8, 2025, we wrote about 14 victims). The peak of such attacks occurred in 2007 (seven killed, 118 injured); since then, there has been a steady decline. Since 2013, the trend has been unstable.

19. On January 19, the anniversary of the murder of lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova, memorial events for victims of neo-Nazis were held in 37 cities in Russia and abroad. In Russia, actions took place in 29 cities. For more details, see: Russian Nationalism and Xenophobia in January 2025, SOVA Center. 2025. February 7 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/news-releases/2025/02/d47101/>).

In Moscow, *RusNews* journalist Konstantin Zharov and a 17-year-old teenager returning from an evening of writing letters to political prisoners were beaten because of their long hair and Yabloko party pins.

In St. Petersburg, an elderly man who resembled Vladimir Lenin was beaten by far-right activists “to avenge the revolution.”

The remaining victims were non-political subculture youth (three punks and other young people of a generally “nonconformist” appearance).

## Religious Xenophobia

In Russia, violence driven by religious xenophobia occurs far less frequently than violence driven by ethnic xenophobia. Nonetheless, four such attacks were recorded last year (vs. one in 2024).

In Klimovsk of the Moscow Region, two employees of a church shop at the Church of St. Sergius of Podolsk were attacked. Two Muslim women also suffered in xenophobic attacks: one was beaten in the town of Rodniki in the Ivanovo Region, and the other was stabbed in the back in Saratov.

In addition to direct attacks, there were also cases of serious online threats. For example, blogger Vladislav Pozdnyakov, founder of the Male State community (designated extremist in Russia), issued threats on his Telegram channel against Mata Tepsaeva, a trichologist in a private clinic in Moscow, who allegedly refused to treat a male patient for religious reasons.<sup>20</sup> The threats and ensuing public outcry prompted the doctor to resign from the clinic.

## Other Attacks

A particularly brutal attack on children in Domodedovo (the Moscow Region) stands out. A teenager armed with a hammer and a knife attacked two girls from behind as they were walking, sprayed them with pepper spray, struck one of them several times with the hammer, and slashed the other with the knife. One victim managed to escape; the other died in hospital from her injuries. The attacker was detained. In one of his notes, he described himself as an “incel” and cited this as the reason for the attack.

In some cases, we cannot precisely determine a target and can only say that the attack was motivated by ethnic hatred or other unspecified hatred. As a rule, we learn about such incidents from official announcements that an investigation has been completed and the case sent to court. In such instances, the hate motive is indicated by the relevant clause in the CC article. Sometimes people are beaten “by association” (see above).

The total number of “other” victims, i.e. those we did not specifically classify, reached 22 in 2025 (vs. 12 the year before).

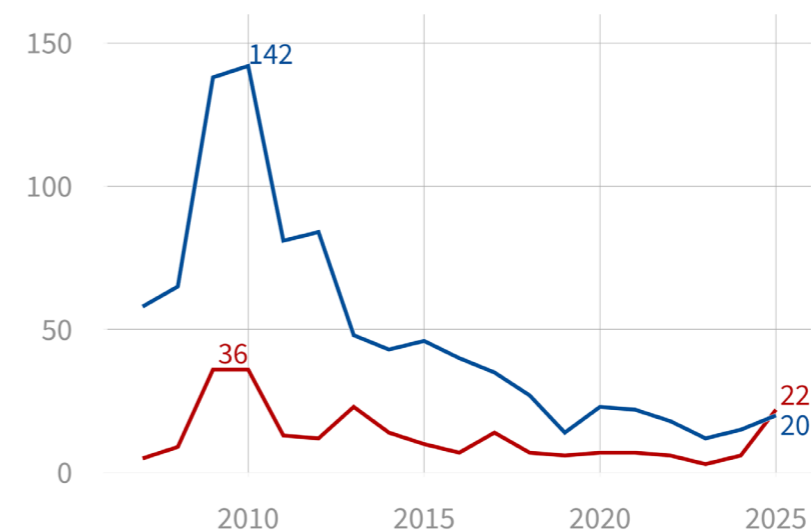
20. For more details: Founder of Male State issues threats against a doctor at a private clinic in Moscow, SOVA Center. 2025, July 11 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/racism-nationalism/2025/07/d51894/>, in Russian).

# Crimes against Property

Crimes against property include damage to cemeteries, monuments, various cultural sites, and other property. The Criminal Code classifies these incidents under different articles, but law enforcement practice has not been consistent. Such actions are usually called vandalism, but for several years, we have preferred to avoid the term, since the term “vandalism,” both in the Criminal Code and in everyday usage, clearly does not capture all possible forms of attacks on material objects.

## Hate Crimes against Property: from Explosions and Arson to Graffiti and Other Damage

Data collected by SOVA Center, 2007–2025



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

The number of property crimes motivated by religious, ethnic, or ideological hatred tracked by SOVA Center rose sharply in 2025. We learned of 42 cases in at least 18 regions of the country. In 2024, we recorded 21 cases in at least 10 regions.<sup>21</sup>

As with violent crimes, our counts do not include attacks on material objects committed for political or ideological reasons (and since 2022, such episodes have become especially numerous), except for the cases where those ideological reasons are connected to xenophobia. Also excluded from this chapter are actions that were classified as attacks on material objects but caused no material damage whatsoever.

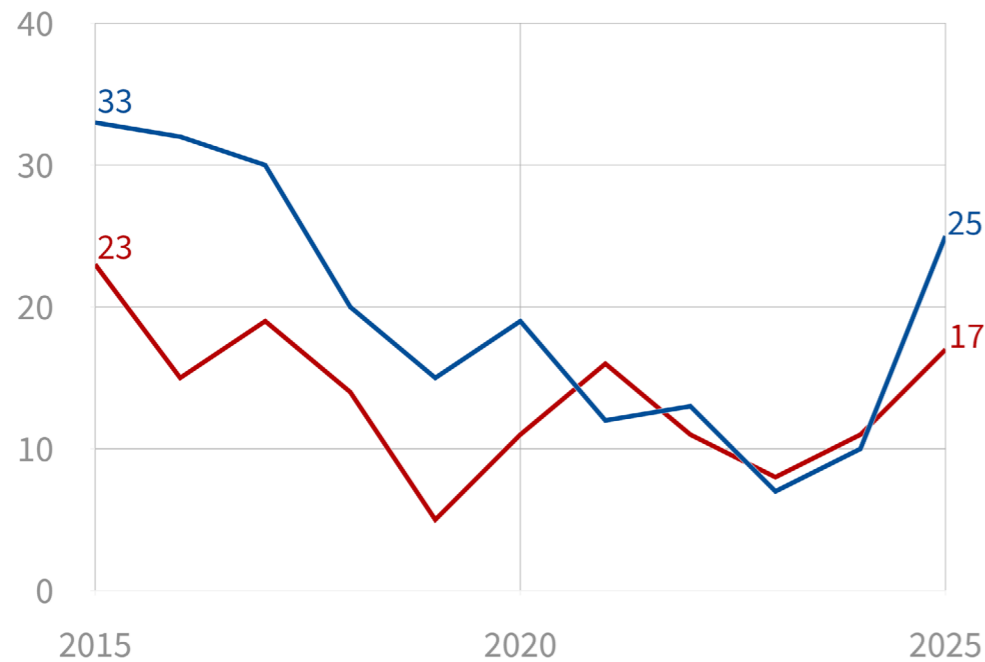
Similarly, our statistics do not include minor incidents, including those committed by far-right activists, such as slashing tires, smashing windows of cars with North Caucasus

21. Database: Vandalism, SOVA Center (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/database/vandalism/>).

license plates, or vehicles with Arabic stickers. We do not include isolated neo-Nazi graffiti or drawings on houses and fences, but we do include serial graffiti.

## Hate Crimes against Property: Motivated by Religion or Ideology\*

Data collected by SOVA Center, 2015–2025



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

\* Excluding ideologically motivated acts unrelated to xenophobia and insignificant acts not resulting in material damage.

According to SOVA's data, more than half of the attacks committed in 2025 (59%) targeted religious sites. There were 25 such incidents in 2025 vs. 10 in 2024. The majority (15 episodes vs. four in 2024) involved desecration of Muslim sites. Next were the Protestant sites with four incidents (vs. zero in 2024), followed by Orthodox (three attacks in 2025; five in 2024) and Jewish (three attacks in 2025; one in 2024).

Seventeen objects were seriously damaged based on ideological criteria (including hostility towards ethnic groups) rather than religion, exceeding the number of such attacks in the previous year (11 incidents). These objects included a World War II memorial, a Lenin monument, Victory Banners, and a police vehicle. This category also included the arson attack against the Tandoor Lavash bakery, attacks against the homes of Roma and people from the Caucasus, attacks on construction barracks housing Central Asian migrant workers, and the arson of a homeless shelter in St. Petersburg.

The number of the most dangerous acts, i.e. arson and explosions, rose sharply to one explosion and 21 cases of arson (vs. one explosion and five cases of arson the year before). The share of such acts was 52% (vs. 28% in 2024).

The regional distribution has also changed. In 2025, we recorded such crimes in 14 new regions (vs. five in the preceding year). At the same time, six regions that appeared in 2024 did not appear in our statistics this year.

## Criminal Prosecution for Violence

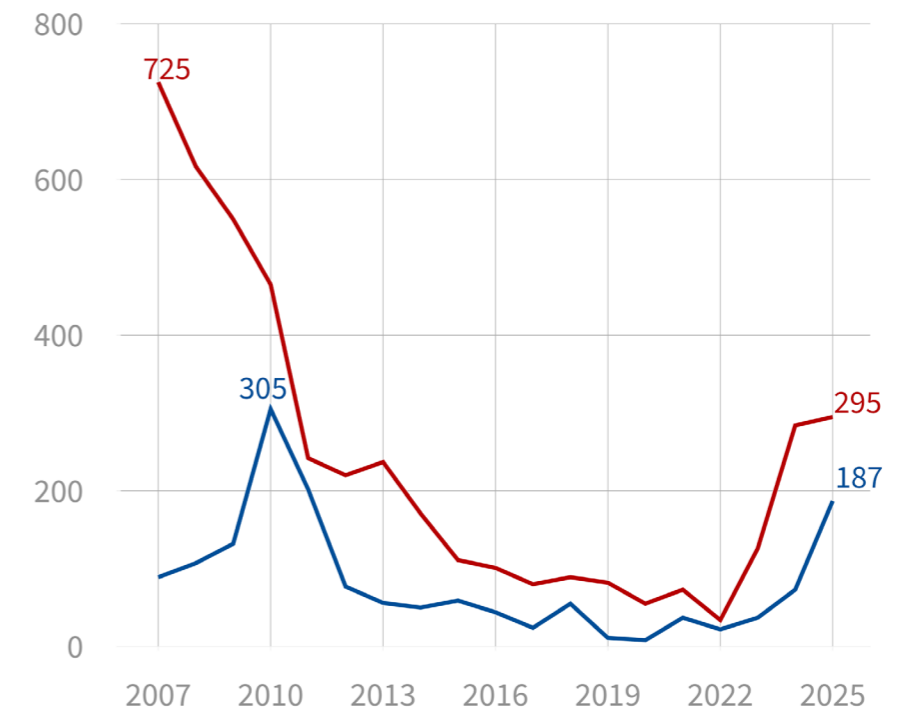
When discussing prosecutions for hate crimes in this and the next chapter, unlike in the previous two chapters, we rely not on our own definition of what falls within the scope of monitoring and research, but on the courts' interpretation. This means, first of all, that our counts include only the verdicts that recognized a hate motive, although hate crimes can definitely result in convictions where the motive of hatred was either not included in prosecutorial charges or not affirmed by the court. Next, while the counts in our previous chapters excluded ideologically motivated acts if their motive was not related to xenophobia, the chapters on law enforcement do include such verdicts. However, they will be noted separately.

In 2025, the number of people we know to have been convicted of violent hate crimes more than doubled compared to the year before (in 2024, the number had exactly doubled). In 16 regions, at least 41 verdicts were issued in which courts recognized a hate motive. In these cases, 187 people were convicted (vs. 73 people in 15 regions in 2024).<sup>22</sup>

Official statistics on verdicts involving a hate motive are unavailable because this qualifying element rarely appears as a separate part of a Criminal Code article, and the Supreme Court's published verdict statistics include article parts but not the specific clauses within those parts.

## Violent Hate Crimes: Victims and Convicts

Data collected by SOVA Center, 2007–2025



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

22. Database: Sentences, SOVA Center (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/database/sentences/>).

In 2025, racist violence was typically qualified under the following Criminal Code provisions, which include a hate motive as an aggravating/qualifying element:

- “Attempted murder” (Article 30 Part 3 and paragraph “k” of Article 105 Part 2): one person;
- “Intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm” (paragraph “f” of Article 111 Part 2): one person;
- “Intentional infliction of minor bodily harm” (paragraph “b” of Article 115 Part 2): one person;
- “Battery” (Article 11 Part 2): one person;
- “Torture” (Clause “h,” Article 117 Part 2): one person;
- “Hooliganism” (Article 213 Part 2): 78 people;
- “Participation in mass riots” (Article 212 Part 2): 99 people;
- “Incitement of national hatred with the use of violence” (Article 282 Part 2): two .

As our data shows, two people were convicted for violent crimes in 2025 under Article 282 (incitement of hatred), while only one such verdict was reported in the preceding year. One convicted offender was the above-mentioned teenager from Stavropol Krai, convicted for attacking a Roma child; the other was serviceman Amyrak Samaan, convicted for xenophobic attacks against his ethnic Russian fellow soldiers.<sup>23</sup> Resolution of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation No. 11 “On Judicial Practice in Criminal Cases Involving Extremist Offenses,” of June 28, 2011<sup>24</sup> states that Article 282 may be applied to violent crimes if they are aimed at inciting hatred among third parties – for example, in the case of a public, demonstrative, ideologically motivated attack. In both cases discussed here, the attacks were public.

53% of those convicted in 2025 (99 individuals) were participants in the anti-Semitic riots at Makhachkala airport in October 2023.<sup>25</sup> Their share was even slightly larger than the year before. Courts in Stavropol Krai spent the entire past year handing down sentences under Article 212 Part 2 (participation in mass riots motivated by hatred).<sup>26</sup> On July 18, 2025, the Investigative Committee reported that a total of 28 verdicts against 135 defendants were issued for participating in the airport riots.<sup>27</sup> We were able to find information on 27 verdicts against 133 people.

23. Military is highly isolated from outside observers, so cases of violence with a xenophobic motive arising from hazing within the armed forces rarely become public.

24. Resolution of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation No. 11 “On Judicial Practice in Criminal Cases Concerning Crimes of an Extremist Nature,” Supreme Court of the Russian Federation (<https://www.vsrfr.ru/documents/own/8255/>, in Russian).

25. For more details, see: Anti-Semitic actions in the North Caucasus, SOVA Center. 2023, October 31 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/racism-nationalism/2023/10/d48837/>, in Russian).

26. Also sentenced under Article 263<sup>1</sup> Part 3 CC (failure to comply with transport security requirements at transport infrastructure facilities and on vehicles, where this act negligently resulted in major damage, committed by a group of persons acting in prior conspiracy).

27. Sentences issued against 135 defendants in the criminal case over the riots at Makhachkala airport, Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, [Telegram post]. 2025, July 18 ([https://t.me/sledcom\\_press/22738](https://t.me/sledcom_press/22738), in Russian).

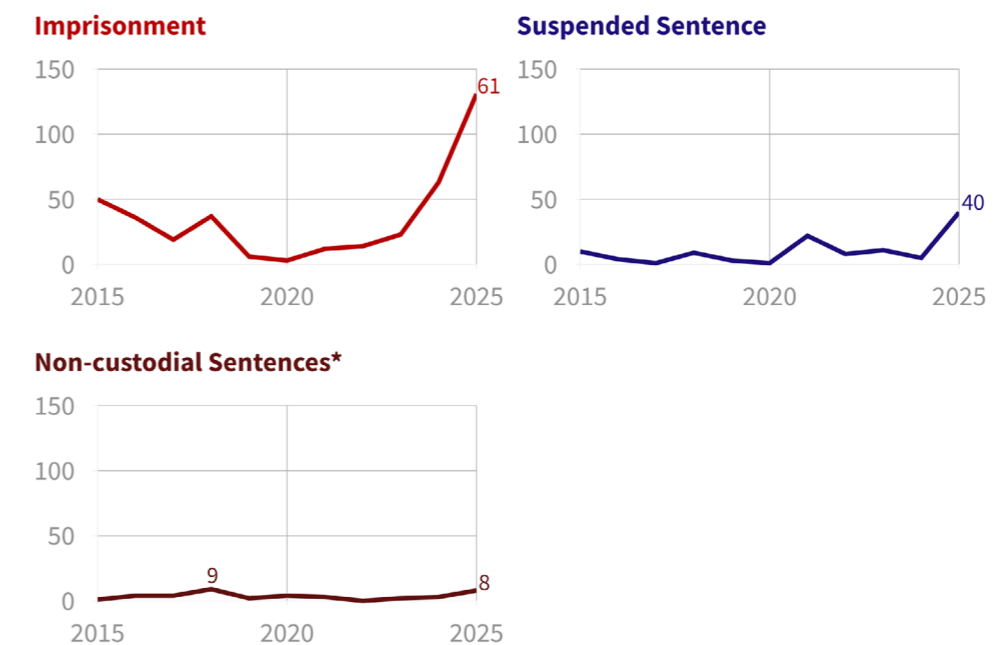
Sentences for violent acts (sometimes combined with other charges) were distributed as follows:

- one person was sentenced to life imprisonment;
- five people – to over 20 years of imprisonment;
- 16 people – to terms of imprisonment ranging from 10 to 15 years; 28
- 85 people – to terms of imprisonment ranging from 5 to 10 years;
- 19 people – to terms of imprisonment ranging from 3 to 5 years;
- five people – to terms of imprisonment up to 3 years;
- 40 people received suspended sentences of varying lengths;
- six people were sentenced to compulsory labor;
- one person – to community service;
- one person – to restriction of liberty.

Sentences imposed on eight defendants are unknown.

## Penalties for Ideologically Motivated Violence

Data collected by SOVA Center, 2015–2025



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

\* This category also includes compulsory psychiatric treatment and the expiration of the statute of limitations.

28. All for participation in the Makhachkala airport riot.

As we can see, the majority of those convicted in 2025 received lengthy incarceration sentences. The highest-profile verdict was issued in Moscow against members of the revived NS/WP group, who faced charges for a string of attacks on various people and objects, as well as the planned assassination of state television presenter Vladimir Solovyov. The group's organizer, Andrei "Bloodman" Pronsky, received a life sentence; the others received terms ranging from 12 to 28 years behind bars.<sup>29</sup>

Members of other far-right groups were also sentenced to incarceration: participants in a teenage gang from St. Petersburg for attacks on passers-by; far-right activists in Krasnoyarsk for attacks on anti-fascists; and a group from Rostov-on-Don for attacks on people of "non-Slavic appearance." Members of a St. Petersburg group (the so-called Tural gang), who called for violence against Russians and Uzbeks, practiced such violence, filmed their attacks, and published the videos on the Telegram channel *Life of a Tramp (Zhizn Brodyagi)*, also received real terms of imprisonment.

21% of those convicted received suspended sentences. The share of suspended sentences for violent hate crimes increased compared to the previous year, when it constituted 6% (vs. 37% in 2023). Suspended sentences were issued primarily for less serious attacks involving pepper spray: against anti-fascists in St. Petersburg (mostly in the San-Galli Garden and mostly based on charges under Article 213) and in Ulyanovsk; against migrants in Kursk and Orenburg; against a Black person in Moscow. Many teenagers also received suspended sentences, including for the attack against a Roma child in Stavropol Krai, as well as a Krasnoyarsk group that attacked another group they mistook for Nazi skinheads.<sup>30</sup>

We have concerns regarding the lenient sentence imposed on far-right activists in Rybinsk of the Yaroslavl Region. For three attacks, including one against Communist Party member Ruslan Radula, "with the use of violence and an object used as a weapon, by a group of persons acting in prior conspiracy," six neo-Nazis were sentenced just to community service.

Unfortunately, we were unable to find information about the penalty imposed on eight members of a far-right community in the Vladimir Region for several attacks on passers-by.

In 2025, according to our incomplete data, new criminal cases for ideologically motivated violence were initiated against 72 people (vs. 67 in 2024).

A notable case involved three teenagers from Yoshkar-Ola charged for attacking foreigners and a local resident in the spring of 2024, as well as for setting a car decorated with pro-government patriotic symbols on fire. One of the defendants, according to investi-

29. For more details, see: Verdict handed down in the NS/WP case, SOVA Center. 2025, December 19 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2025/12/d52810/>, in Russian).

30. The teenagers were found guilty under Article 213 Part 2 CC (hooliganism committed with the use of violence against citizens, motivated by hatred or hostility towards a social group, committed with the use of objects employed as weapons, by a group of persons). We believe that in this case, a motive of political and ideological hatred would be more appropriate than hatred towards the "Nazi skinheads" social group. In our view, this motive can be applied as an aggravating circumstance for serious offenses. Thus, we do not consider the verdicts for an attack motivated by hatred towards the group "Nazi skinheads" to be inappropriate, but we do view this legal qualification as erroneous. See: In St. Petersburg, nationalists are recognized as a social group, SOVA Center. 2011, February 14 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/other-actions/2011/02/d20981/>, in Russian).

gators, joined the terrorist organization banned in Russia known as Maniacs. Murder Cult (*Manyaki. Kult Ubiystv, MKU*).<sup>31</sup>

Last year, law enforcement continued its practice of investigating killings committed more than 10 and even 20 years ago.<sup>32</sup> In April 2025, Maxim Andreev and Vasily Volkov were arrested on charges of committing a xenophobic murder of a taxi driver in 2013. According to law enforcement, one of the defendants approached the authorities more than 10 years later, explaining that "for a long time now he has been tormented by pangs of conscience over what he did."<sup>33</sup>

In December 2025, in St. Petersburg, 42-year-old Sergei Netronin was detained as a suspect in the murder of South Korean citizen Kim Hyon Ik back in December 2003.<sup>34</sup> This killing was part of a series of murders in the case of the notorious Combat Terrorist Organization (*Boevaya terroristicheskaya organizatsiya, BTO*; the Borovikov-Voevodin gang), active in the 2000s.

## Criminal Prosecution for Crimes against Property

As in the case of violent hate crimes, we cannot rely on official data, as the statistics of sentences published by the Supreme Court do not allow us to isolate the data we need. For example, in Article 244 CC (desecration of burial sites / cemetery vandalism), the hate motive is a paragraph, and paragraphs are not shown in the Supreme Court statistics separately. In Article 214 CC (vandalism), by contrast, Part 2 is not divided into paragraphs, but it covers both hate-motivated acts and any other acts committed by a group, so these two qualifying factors are not separated in the statistics.

There is an additional complication for property crimes. In today's Russia, the Criminal Code contains not only offenses formulated specifically as hate crimes (i.e., ordinary crimes motivated by ideology), but also offenses that do not mention motive at all, yet are written in such a way that they can be described as ideological legal constructs. These norms place material objects targeted by the offense into a specially protected category based on their ideological importance, so the perpetrator's motive becomes irrelevant. "Memorial structures or objects perpetuating the memory of those killed defending the Fatherland", protected by Article 243<sup>4</sup> CC, provide an obvious example. Quantitatively, however, the most prominent such category is formed by certain elements of Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC. Although the article is titled "Rehabilitation of Nazism," its provisions cover a wide range of acts. Some of them are related to historical memory and discussion. Others are,

31. Supreme Court designates MKU a terrorist organization, SOVA Center. 2023, January 16 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2023/01/d47493/>, in Russian).

32. We first observed this trend in 2020. See: Yudina N. "Potius sero, quam nunquam": Hate Crimes and Counteraction to Them in Russia in 2020, SOVA Center. 2021, February 5 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/reports-analyses/2021/02/d43611/>).

33. The court selects preventive measures for defendants in a murder case committed in 2013, Moscow Courts of General Jurisdiction [Telegram post]. 2025, April 17 (<https://t.me/moscowcourts/6425>, in Russian).

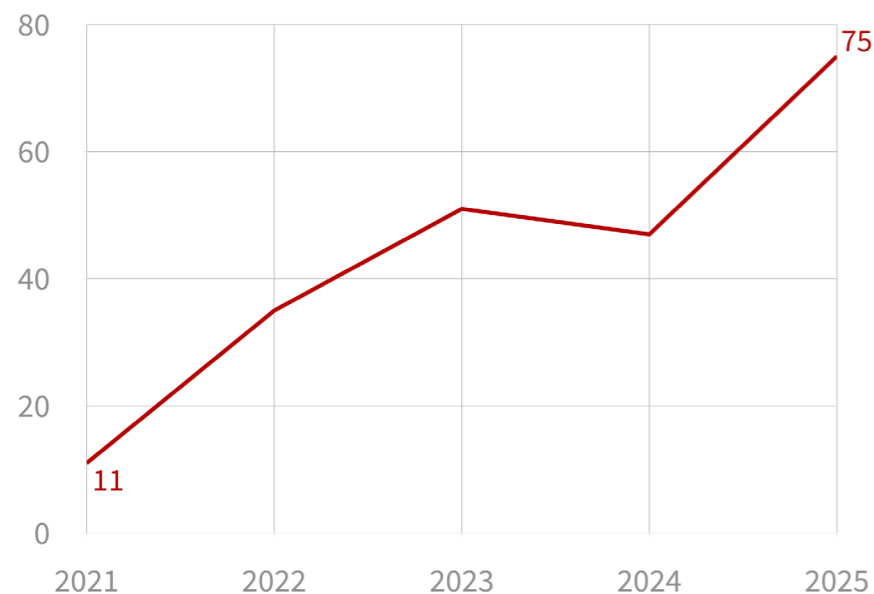
34. Verdict handed down in St. Petersburg in the Borovikov-Voevodin gang case, SOVA Center. 2011, June 14 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2011/06/d21872/>, in Russian).

in fact, ordinary crimes, but the definition of Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC essentially equates them to ideologically motivated crimes. These include attacks on various explicitly protected symbols, which may be present in the form of material objects. In practice, these most often – but not exclusively – involve the Eternal Flame or the St. George ribbon.

In this report, for the first time, we combine criminal law enforcement under both types of provisions aimed at protecting material objects: those that fit the definition of hate crimes, and those we regard as ideologically constructed. We also include verdicts for attacks on property that, for whatever reason, were qualified under articles dealing with public statements or other provisions (hooliganism, for example). At the same time, we do not include verdicts issued under articles on terrorism and sabotage. Although the line between subversive acts and vandalism is not always easy to draw, law enforcement clearly treats these legal qualifications as substantially different, which is evident, among other things, from the differing penalties provided under the respective CC articles.

## Individuals Convicted for Attacks on Physical Objects

Includes verdicts for crimes motivated by hatred and certain “ideological” crimes



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

In total, we know of 53 verdicts against 75 defendants for the above-described crimes against property in 2025 (we reported 38 verdicts and 47 convicted persons in 2024). Three additional individuals were referred for compulsory psychiatric treatment, two were subjected to coercive disciplinary measures, and one received a court fine with no conviction.<sup>35</sup>

35. We do not take into account the verdicts if we have no substantive information about the cases (beyond the fact that certain individuals were convicted under specific CC articles).

In 2025, offenders were convicted for damaging material objects<sup>36</sup> under the following Criminal Code articles:<sup>37</sup>

- Article 148 Part 2 (insulting the religious feelings of believers committed in places specifically intended for worship) was utilized against four people in one verdict, and it was the only article in that verdict;
- Article 167 Part 2 (intentional destruction or damage of property) was used against eight people (vs. four such convictions in 2024). Only in one case did this constitute the sole article used by the prosecution, while in the remaining cases it was far from the principal charge;
- Clause “e” of Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 2 (so-called “war fakes” motivated by hatred) was utilized against one person; the very same act was qualified both under this provision and Article 214 Part 2;
- Clause “b” of Article 213 Part 1 (hooliganism motivated by hatred) was utilized against one person, and it was the only article in the verdict;
- Article 214 Part 2 (vandalism motivated by hatred) was used against 14 defendants (vs. 22 individuals in 2024). It was the only article for four of them;
- Clause “b,” Article 244 Part 2 (desecration of bodies of the deceased and their burial places) was utilized against one person in combination with other articles;
- Article 354<sup>1</sup> Parts 3 and 4 (desecration of a symbol of Russia’s military glory; insulting the memory of defenders of the Fatherland) was used against 47 people (we knew of only 19 in 2024). It was the only charge for 39 of them.

Next, we examine the convictions, grouped into the following categories according to the targets of the actions in question:

- expressing ethnic xenophobia;
- related to religion;
- “attacks on traditional Russian values”;
- related to events in Ukraine;
- other acts directed against the authorities.

A single verdict may combine acts from more than one category, but only a few such cases appear among those examined in this chapter.

49 people were convicted for acts we can describe as **attacks on “traditional values.”** In the overwhelming majority of cases, they faced sanctions for desecrating symbols of military glory – the Eternal Flame and sometimes the St. George ribbon. Accordingly, the overwhelming majority of verdicts (for 44 defendants) were issued under Parts 3 and 4 of

36. Individuals who were released from liability, referred for compulsory treatment, had cases dismissed with the imposition of a court fine, and so on, are not included here.

37. Strictly speaking, the list of articles provided below is not exhaustive. Ideologically motivated attacks on material objects may sometimes be qualified under other CC articles, not generally monitored by SOVA Center. For example, in 2025, we know of verdicts that involved Article 243<sup>4</sup> (destruction, damage, or desecration of military graves or monuments dedicated to the defenders of the Fatherland) and Article 329 (desecration of the state coat of arms or state flag of Russia).

Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC. Four additional defendants faced sanctions under Article 148, and one each – under Articles 214 and 244.

In virtually all of these cases, we consider the verdicts inappropriate.<sup>38</sup> In our opinion, criminal prosecution is justified only where an act poses a substantial public danger. We found no such danger in the acts of at least 47 of the 49 people – their actions either caused no damage whatsoever to monuments or other objects, or the damage was negligible.<sup>39</sup> In some cases, the actions in question involved insults to the religious or patriotic feelings of presumed witnesses, whether online or offline; however, we do not consider offended feelings a sufficient basis for criminal prosecution.

Nine people faced sanctions for damaging material objects with the motive of **ethnic xenophobia**. The acts range from graffiti on a supermarket wall to arson attacks on market stalls, cars,<sup>40</sup> or migrants' homes.

Two people faced sanctions for damaging objects on the grounds of **religious xenophobia**: one for writing “АҪАҪ 9:5”<sup>41</sup> on an arch near the Church of St. Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg, and the other for setting fire to the Church of St. Dmitry Donskoy in Tyumen.

Thirteen people faced sanctions for acts **connected to the armed conflict with Ukraine**. The articles related to property damage were never the only charges in these verdicts. Acts interpreted as vandalism included arson attacks against the cars or homes of servicemen, as well as cars bearing “Z” stickers; they also included the posting of leaflets of the Freedom of Russia Legion (recognized as a terrorist organization) at a cemetery where participants in the armed conflict with Ukraine are buried. We consider four verdicts in this group inappropriate.

Four people faced sanctions for acts **motivated by hostility towards the authorities** and not directly linked to Ukraine, ranging from damaging police vehicles to arson attacks on government buildings. We consider one such verdict inappropriate.

38. Our method for determining the appropriateness of verdicts is as follows. We classify a verdict as appropriate if we believe that the act was connected to xenophobia and that the punishment was generally justified. A verdict is considered inappropriate if the action did not merit criminal prosecution – for example, if the charges were unfounded, the legal provision itself is unconstitutional, or the danger posed by the imputed act was clearly insignificant. If the charges were generally justified but unrelated to countering xenophobia, we classify the verdict as “other.” If, for any reason, we cannot evaluate a case unambiguously, we categorize it as “not sure.” In some instances, we must simply conclude that we “do not know.”

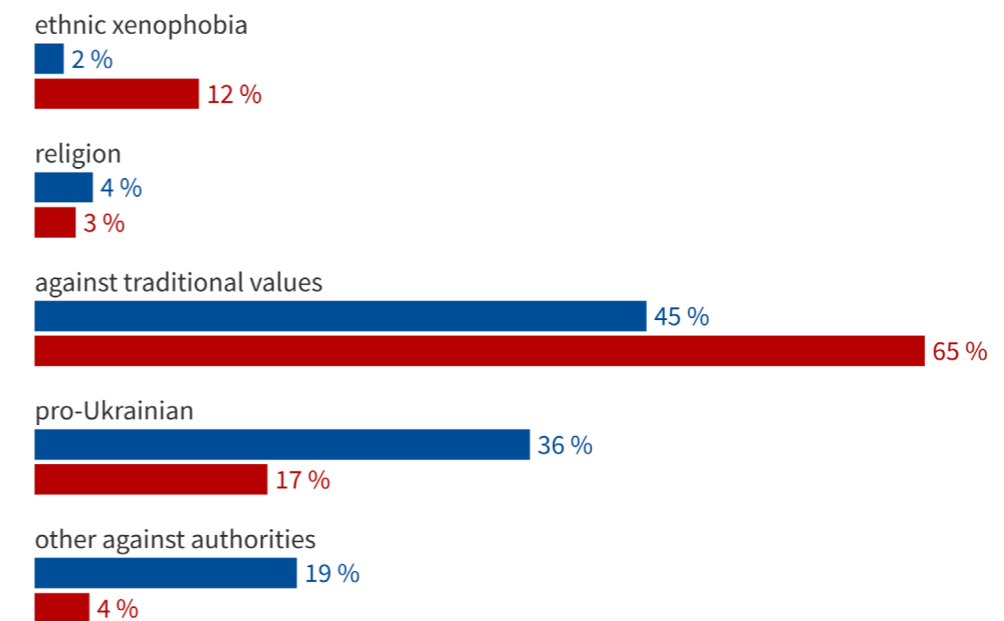
39. Essentially, this often amounts to nothing more than disorderly conduct falling under Article 20.1 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (CAO). In addition, the “desecration” of structures generally falls under Article 214 CC on vandalism, which provides for sanctions less severe than those under Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC. Moreover, if the damage caused by unlawful actions is insignificant, cases under Article 214 can also be dismissed due to the trivial nature of the offense. For borderline cases, it might be helpful to introduce an article similar to Article 7.17 CAO covering the destruction or damage of other people’s property or to clarify the existing article by adding vandalism that did not cause major damage.

40. Including a car decorated with a Buddhist mantra in Tibetan, which the perpetrator mistook for a Quran quotation in Arabic

41. A verse from the Quran that calls for the persecution of polytheists.

## Convictions for Attacks on Physical Objects in 2024 and 2025, by Category

As percentages of the total number of convicted offenders included



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

Includes verdicts for crimes motivated by hatred and certain “ideological” crimes. The same act may belong to more than one category.

Sentences for attacks on material objects (often combined with other charges) were distributed as follows:

- one person was sentenced to life imprisonment;<sup>42</sup>
- 35 people were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment;
- six defendants received suspended sentences;
- five defendants were sentenced to corrective labor;
- eight defendants – to community service;
- three defendants – to compulsory labor;
- five defendants – to restriction of liberty;
- nine defendants – to fines;
- sentences issued against three defendants remained unknown to us.

In all cases, courts ordered convicted offenders to pay monetary compensation for the material damage they caused.

42. The already mentioned leader of NS/WP, whose verdict also included property damage charges.

As shown by the data above, approximately half of the defendants were sentenced to imprisonment for varying terms. However, for roughly half of these convicts, the charges related to attacks on material objects were not the only ones and far from the most serious in the verdicts; they were accompanied by charges such as robbery, terrorism, treason, and so on. For example, in the aforementioned case of the neo-Nazi NS/WP group, the article related to property damage was used to qualify arson attacks on cars and police stations. Two people were sentenced to imprisonment, taking into account their previously imposed sentences.

The presence of additional charges in some verdicts precludes an adequate comparison of sentencing severity across the categories listed above. For instance, in cases related to the conflict in Ukraine, multiple (often grave) charges were present in every verdict involving real imprisonment.

Overall, 18 out of 36 people were sentenced to imprisonment solely for desecration of objects or damage to property with no additional charges.

A resident of Tyumen was sentenced to two years in a settlement colony under a combination of Article 167 (attempted intentional destruction of another’s property by arson) and Article 214 Part 2 for setting fire to the Church of St. Dmitry Donskoy. The harshness of the sentence likely stems from the gravity of the act. All other defendants sentenced to imprisonment for damaging material objects, absent the above circumstances, were convicted under Article 354<sup>1</sup>. In their cases, we consider imprisonment clearly excessive.

For example, an army conscript in the Kaliningrad Region was sentenced under Article 354<sup>1</sup> Part 4 to one and a half years in a settlement colony. Together with a fellow serviceman, he tore down from the wall of a school building in the settlement of Yantarny a St. George ribbon flag dedicated to the Victory Day, damaged the fabric, shouted slogans “justifying Nazism,” and performed a fascist salute.<sup>43</sup>

We consider the remaining incarceration sentences under this article to be not only excessively harsh but also clearly inappropriate. These verdicts involved charges such as damaging a Victory Day display stand or stepping on a poster featuring the St. George ribbon. Seventeen people were sentenced to incarceration solely for desecrating the Eternal Flame: they lit cigarettes from the flame, dried and warmed their shoes or feet nearby, danced, threw small objects into the fire, cooked food over it, and one person urinated into the flame.

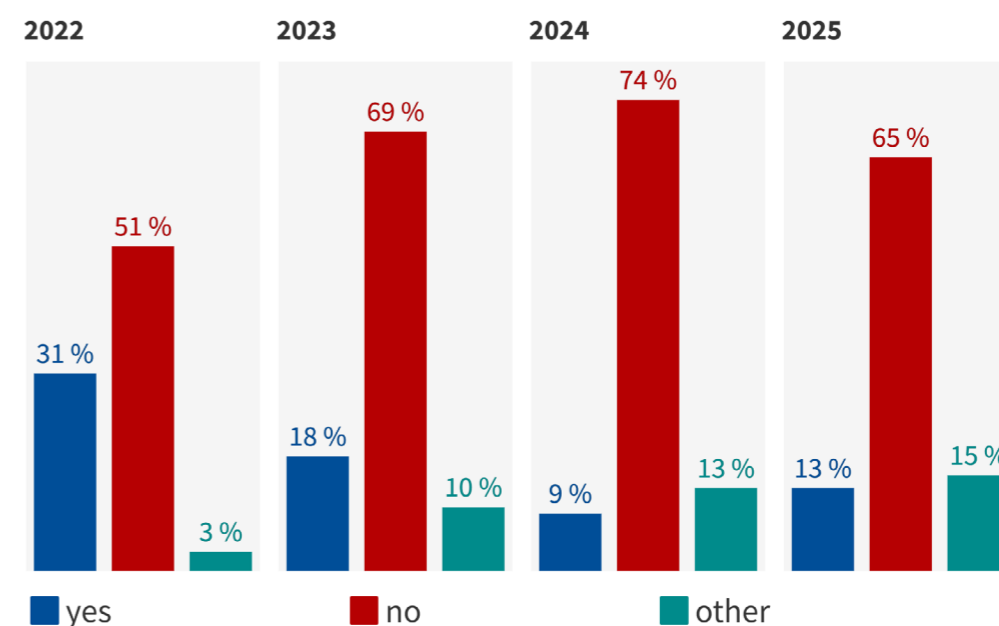
In assessing the appropriateness of verdicts issued for attacks on material objects, we base our conclusions not only on the proportionality of restrictions on freedom of conduct and civil liberties, but also on two additional considerations. First, ideologically motivated offenses incur harsher punishment than ordinary ones. Therefore, if we believe that the convicted offender was not, in fact, guided by ideological motives, we classify the case as inappropriate. Second, political or ideological hostility *per se* is not criminalized. Accordingly, where an attack on a material object is motivated by political or ideological views unconnected to the propaganda of violence or xenophobia, the act is essentially a form of political criticism. As such, it should be treated as ordinary vandalism, without the aggravating “hate motive,” and punished in proportion to the actual damage caused.

43. The second defendant in the case was also sentenced to a settlement colony, but his verdict included other charges as well.

Overall, we consider the convictions of 10 individuals to have been appropriate (vs. four the year before) and those of 49 individuals to have been inappropriate (vs. 35 the year before). In five cases, we are not sure (vs. one the year before), and in one case, we are unable to pronounce a judgment on appropriateness (vs. three the year before). We classified the verdicts against 11 individuals as “other” (compared with six in 2024).

### Convictions for Attacks on Physical Objects: Ratio by Appropriateness

As percentages of the total number of convicted offenders included



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026  
 "Yes" - the act is related to xenophobia, and the charge is appropriate; "no" - the charge is inappropriate; "other" - the charge may be appropriate but unrelated to countering xenophobia. Includes verdicts for crimes motivated by hatred and certain “ideological” crimes. The same act may belong to more than one category.

Of the 49 inappropriately convicted, almost everyone – 44 people – faced sanctions for attacks on “traditional values” (in 2024, there were only 15 such cases; another 11 involved acts related to Ukraine, and nine involved other acts against the regime).

We are aware of 44 new criminal cases against 67 people initiated in 2025 for attacks on material objects similar to those discussed in this chapter (some of which have already resulted in verdicts). This figure is roughly comparable to what we reported for 2024 – 47 cases against 66 people – but we will inevitably receive additional information on cases initiated over the past year.

# Counter-Extremism in 2025: Regulation of Public Speech and Organized Activity

## Summary

Anti-extremism and related legislation in Russia have been aimed primarily at restricting freedom of speech and freedom of association in the name of security. The use of this legislation increased very rapidly in 2025. Contrary to expectations, no “plateauing” occurred. Instead, the growth rates accelerated in many respects, compared to the previous year. This applies to nearly all types of law enforcement examined in this report.

Although the authorities’ understanding of what may threaten state and public security has long been excessively broad, it expanded even further over the past year to include measures such as prohibiting even the search for information and pursuing a systemic campaign against Satanism.

Accordingly, we would like to point out a significant percentage of cases aimed at protecting security in a purely symbolic sense – against encroachments on patriotic symbols, religious feelings, and so on.

As expected, a substantial portion of law enforcement activity is connected in one way or another to the ongoing armed conflict with Ukraine; however, such cases still account for less than half of all cases involving public expression and an even smaller share of those involving organized activity, and this share is gradually decreasing. At the same time, sanctions in this category are noticeably harsher.

A significant percentage of cases that pertained to public speech involved countering ethnic xenophobia. A substantial percentage of cases involving organized activity pertained to individuals associated with various religious and religious-political organizations. To some extent, such cases resulted in clearly excessive or debatably harsh restrictions on civil liberties; however, many of them, undeniably, stemmed from the need to protect society from the spread of ethnic or religious hatred and the preparation of related acts of violence.

Most law enforcement cases under review have been targeting individuals who oppose the authorities – some through peaceful, albeit harsh, criticism, and others through calls for the overthrow of the authorities or actions directly aimed at achieving that goal. The share of the latter has surpassed that of the former and is growing rapidly.

Overall, the law enforcement practice shows an increasing share of the most serious articles of the Criminal Code (CC), such as Article 205<sup>2</sup> and Article 205<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the ratio between the number of criminal convictions issued by courts and the decisions imposing administrative sanctions has, for the first time in many years, begun to shift in favor of the former.

## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to analyze the changes observed in 2025 in state policy concerning politicized law enforcement, focusing only on the segment within SOVA Center’s scope.

Politicized law enforcement should be understood as the application of legal norms that are predominantly or entirely used for political purposes, that is, to achieve the political objectives of the authorities and/or to punish certain actions motivated by political or ideological considerations.<sup>1</sup>

Only some of these norms have been explicitly designed to impose clearly excessive restrictions on civil rights and freedoms and thus contradict the Constitution and recognized norms of international human rights law. Most of them, however, have been designed as legitimate protection against attacks by groups and individuals on the security of the state and society, but often applied improperly or against actions of minor social danger that are too insignificant to warrant prosecution. Thus, politicized law enforcement is not synonymous with political repression; unlike the latter, its appropriateness might vary.

SOVA’s primary focus is anti-extremism legislation and its application, since this body of law was, by its nature, constructed specifically as a universal mechanism of politicized law enforcement. However, it has not become fully universal. SOVA also includes in its analysis certain closely related legal provisions – on “rehabilitating Nazism,” “justifying terrorism,” and so forth. However, we do not analyze other provisions, including those related to treason, “undesirable organizations,” and the like, for various reasons. The specific legal norms examined in this report are listed in the relevant chapters below.

In general, SOVA’s monitoring, presented in this report, adheres to two self-imposed thematic limitations. The first one stems from our limited resources. We have currently chosen either not to study certain forms of politicized law enforcement at all, relying on the work of other organizations (as in the case of provisions on “undesirable organizations” and “foreign agents”), or forego their detailed analysis (this applies to the article of the Code of Administrative Offenses (CAO) on prohibited symbols, the most widely used politicized administrative norm).

The second self-imposed limitation concerns the law enforcement primarily connected with the ongoing armed conflict with Ukraine, which would be difficult to analyze from the perspective of constitutional law enforcement constraints developed for peacetime. For these reasons, we do not analyze law enforcement practices in the territories that came under Russian jurisdiction in 2022–2025.

Taking all of the above into account, this report focuses on two major themes: (1) politicized sanctions (both criminal and administrative) for public speech, and (2) sanctions for the creation of associations that the state regards as extremist or terrorist, or for partici-

1. Of course, provisions concerning ordinary crimes or offenses may at times be applied for political purposes. Moreover, the acts themselves may be motivated by political and ideological considerations not of those who carry them out, but of those who, in one way or another, have incited them.

pation in them. Another major area of SOVA's monitoring – sanctions for hate crimes, whether against individuals or material objects – has been analyzed in a separate report.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this report is to analyze relevant law enforcement in 2025 and identify any significant changes compared to 2024 and previous years. Rather than discussing all observable quantitative correlations, we focus only on those we consider significant.

The monitoring and analytical methodology used by SOVA was described in sufficient detail in two reports published last year,<sup>3</sup> so we will try to avoid repetition here. We collect information on court decisions and new cases under a number of articles of the CC and the CAO (see below for more details), when such information is available, and its availability varies for different legal provisions. We systematize this information using several parameters, two of which are not purely factual but evaluative and thus require clarification.

The first parameter pertains to the act's focus. For this purpose, we introduce the following categories for a statement or an association's activity:

- ethnic xenophobia;
- religion;
- events in Ukraine;
- other criticism of the authorities or their supporters;
- attacking “traditional values.”

Naturally, in some cases, an act does not fit into these categories, or it is described by more than one category, or we do not have sufficient information to assign a category. Therefore, the totals of the category-based data presented in the report do not match the overall figures, such as the total number of individuals sentenced under a given provision.

The second evaluative parameter reflects the extent to which we consider the charges appropriate. For this purpose, we use the following classification:

- “Yes” – if we view the act as related to xenophobia and the sanctions imposed as generally justified;
- “No” – if we believe that the prosecution excessively restricted civil rights, that is, was inappropriate, according to our terminology;
- “Other” – if the prosecution could have been appropriate but was unrelated to countering xenophobia;

2. Radicalization of Far-Right Violence: Ideologically Motivated Crimes against Persons and Property and State Responses in Russia in 2025, SOVA Center. January 21, 2026. (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/reports-analyses/2026/02/d47128/>). Until 2025, we published a similar report, a report on the misuse of anti-extremism legislation, as well as a report on such enforcement overall. Last year, we discontinued the separate report on misuse of anti-extremism legislation, but instead issued two reports – on the application of the Criminal Code (CC) and the Code of Administrative Offenses (CAO). Now, we have further simplified the structure of our reports.

3. Maria Kravchenko and Natalia Yudina. Sanctions for Administrative Offenses Related to Extremism in 2023–2024, SOVA Center. July 25, 2025 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2025/07/d47113/>); M. Kravchenko and N. Yudina. Counter-Extremism in 2024: Regulation of Public Speech and Organized Activity, SOVA Center. August 28, 2025 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2025/08/d47115/>).

- “Not sure” – if we cannot choose between the above values for any reason;
- “Do not know” – if we lack adequate data for making our assessment.

It is often the case that we assess different charges within a single case differently. Therefore, the data on appropriateness likewise do not sum to the total number of convicted individuals.

The data we collect on criminal convictions is available in our public database,<sup>4</sup> although not in full detail. We also use our internal databases on the application of articles of the CAO and new criminal cases, data from the OVD-Info human rights media project, statistical data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of Russia (SC),<sup>5</sup> and other sources.

All data in the report is presented as of April 1, 2026.

Each of the above data sets has its own limitations. The data of the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court does not indicate to what extent and which CC articles are combined within sentences, which can significantly distort the overall picture. The data we have on convictions is substantially incomplete; therefore, qualitative analysis (for example, on the relative percentages of different case categories or varying degrees of appropriateness) can only be approximate. This is even more true for the information on new cases. Meanwhile, the data on decisions under CAO articles is available with a high degree of completeness and accuracy.

At the time of preparing this report, official data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court for 2025 had not yet been released; only the data for the first half of the year was available. Simply doubling the half-year figures to estimate the full year would be too inaccurate. In our experience of comparing first and second half-year data across various articles of the CC, typically, somewhat more convictions are issued in the second half. The degree to which second-half figures exceed those of the first half varies by article and, of course, changes from year to year. Therefore, for a conservative estimate of the annual number of convicted individuals in 2025 for each article of the CC, we used the minimum of the excess observed in 2023, 2024, and the average excess for 2022–2024.<sup>6</sup> As for the number of rulings imposing sanctions under CAO articles for 2025, we relied on data collected by OVD-Info: based on the experience of recent years, for the articles of interest to us, these figures closely match the final official data.

4. Database: Sentences, SOVA Center (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/database/sentences/>).

5. Judicial Statistics for Cases Considered by Federal Arbitration Courts, Federal Courts of General Jurisdiction, and Justices of the Peace, *Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation* (<https://cdep.ru/?id=5>, in Russian)

6. When the Supreme Court publishes the full data for 2025, SOVA Center will release updated charts based on it.

## Regulation of Public Speech

As before, the application of counterterrorism, anti-extremism and related provisions of the Criminal Code to public speech significantly exceeds their use in cases involving organizational activity. At the same time, enforcement of CAO provisions related to more or less ideologized speech is also expanding.

In this section, we will review the use of the following legal norms:

- Article 148 Parts 1 and 2 CC (insulting the religious feelings of believers) and Article 5.26 Part 2 CAO (intentional public desecration of objects of religious veneration);
- Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC (public calls for terrorism, justification of terrorism, or propaganda of terrorism);
- Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 2 paragraph “e” CC (dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the armed forces and the activities of state bodies abroad, motivated by hatred);<sup>7</sup>
- Article 280 CC (public calls for extremist activity);
- Article 280<sup>1</sup> CC (public calls to carry out actions aimed at violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation), as well as the corresponding Article 20.3.2 CAO;
- Article 280<sup>3</sup> CC (discrediting the use of the armed forces of Russia and the exercise by state bodies of their powers abroad), as well as the corresponding Article 20.3.3 CAO;
- Article 280<sup>4</sup> CC (public calls to carry out activities directed against the security of the state);
- Article 282 CC (incitement of hatred or enmity, as well as the humiliation of human dignity), as well as the corresponding Article 20.3.1 CAO;
- Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC (repeated display of prohibited symbols), as well as the corresponding Article 20.3 CAO;<sup>8</sup>
- Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC (“rehabilitation of Nazism”) and Article 13.48 CAO (equating the goals, actions, and decisions of the USSR and Nazi Germany);
- Article 20.29 CAO (mass distribution of extremist materials) and Article 13.53 CAO (searching for knowingly extremist materials and gaining access to them).

We do not include other legal norms related to public speech.<sup>9</sup> You can find more detailed information on the articles that fall within the scope of the SOVA Center’s monitoring and the principles guiding their selection [on our website](#).

7. SOVA Center does not include prosecutions for defamation and the dissemination of false information in its monitoring, as these actions do not directly fall within the scope of anti-extremism regulation. However, if such charges are brought with an aggravating circumstance such as a motive of hatred, they are included.

8. In 2025, we discontinued monitoring and detailed analysis of the application of this legal norm and provide only general assessments.

9. This includes, in particular, cases under Parts 3 to 5 of Article 20.1 CAO (“disrespect for authorities”), which were previously included in our monitoring. On the application of this provision in 2025, see: Insulting Public Morality of the President: How Russians Are Punished for ‘Disrespect’ Toward Putin, *Verstka*. August 19, 2025 (<https://verstka.media/kak-rossiyan-nakazyvayut-za-neuvazhenie-k-putinu>, in Russian). In addition, only one person was punished under Article 20.3.4 CAO (calls to impose sanctions against Russia) in 2025.

## Calls for Terrorism, Justification and Propaganda of Terrorism

We know of 271 court decisions against 285 individuals in cases involving charges of calls for terrorism, its justification, or propaganda (**Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC**). Four individuals were referred for compulsory psychiatric treatment, one was released from punishment due to illness, and the rest were sentenced. In 2024, we recorded 144 decisions against 149 individuals (two of them were referred for treatment, one was released due to illness).

Thus, the number of convictions known to us under this article almost doubled in 2025. This may not be fully accurate. However, even under the most conservative estimate, no fewer than 580 individuals were sentenced under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC in 2025, compared to 453 the previous year. This figure may end up being even higher in the final statistics of the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of Russia. According to data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the number of recorded crimes under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC related to on-line activity also increased by over 50%, and the number of solved crimes in this category increased by 90%.<sup>10</sup>

According to data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court for recent years and for the first half of 2025, in cases where Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC is the primary charge, the majority of defendants still face fines rather than imprisonment. The SOVA Center database includes many cases in which more serious charges were also present; therefore, it shows a significantly higher percentage of custodial sentences than the SC data: 73% of cases in 2025, and 64% of the cases in 2024. However, the SC data for the first half of 2025 also shows a drop in the percentage of fines.<sup>11</sup>

The overwhelming majority – 248 individuals, or 87% – were charged in connection with statements made on the Internet (primarily under Article 205<sup>2</sup> Part 2); the cases of 17 individuals involve statements made both online and offline, and 19 individuals made only offline statements. A year earlier, the percentage of online statements was somewhat lower at 79%.

Examining court decisions under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC by category, we observed a stable percentage of approximately 55% facing charges for statements **related to the armed conflict with Ukraine** (155 defendants in 2025 vs. 82 in 2024). The majority of such verdicts pertained to publications approving actions and disseminating propaganda materials of various Ukrainian organizations recognized as terrorist in Russia – primarily the Freedom of Russia Legion (*Legion “Svoboda Rossii,”* LSR) and the Russian Volunteer Corps (*Russkiy dobrovolcheskiy korpus*, RDK), and, less frequently, Azov. Another group of verdicts in this category is associated with approving the bombing of the Crimean Bridge, drone or missile attacks on Russian territory, attacks on military enlistment offices, assassination attempts

10. Ministry of Internal Affairs Data on Countering Extremism and Terrorism in 2025, *SOVA Center*. February 13, 2026 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2026/02/d53122/>; in Russian).

11. Statistics of the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court in the Sphere of Combating Extremism for the First Half of 2025, *SOVA Center*. October 22, 2025 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2025/10/d52454/>; in Russian).

against high-ranking military officials, and so on. Many of these sentences also involve charges under other articles of the CC.<sup>12</sup>

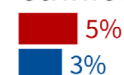
Verdicts to 58 individuals (20%) pertained to other statements directed against the authorities (18 of the defendants were also sentenced under Article 280 Part 2 CC). These were mainly comments that approved using violence against the president, deputies, governors, and other public officials. In 2024, this category accounted for 26% of charges.

In 9% of cases, the charges involved **religious xenophobia** (in most cases, support for the terrorist Islamic State); a year earlier, this category accounted for 12%. In 5% of cases, the charges under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC were related to **ethnic xenophobia** (vs. 3% in the preceding year).

## Prosecution under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC in 2024 and 2025 by Statement Category

As a percentage of the total number of recorded defendants

ethnic xenophobia



religious xenophobia



related to Ukraine



other criticism of the authorities



Source: SOVA Center, 2026

Includes all defendants known to SOVA Research Center whose cases received first-instance court decisions. An individual could be assigned to more than one category.

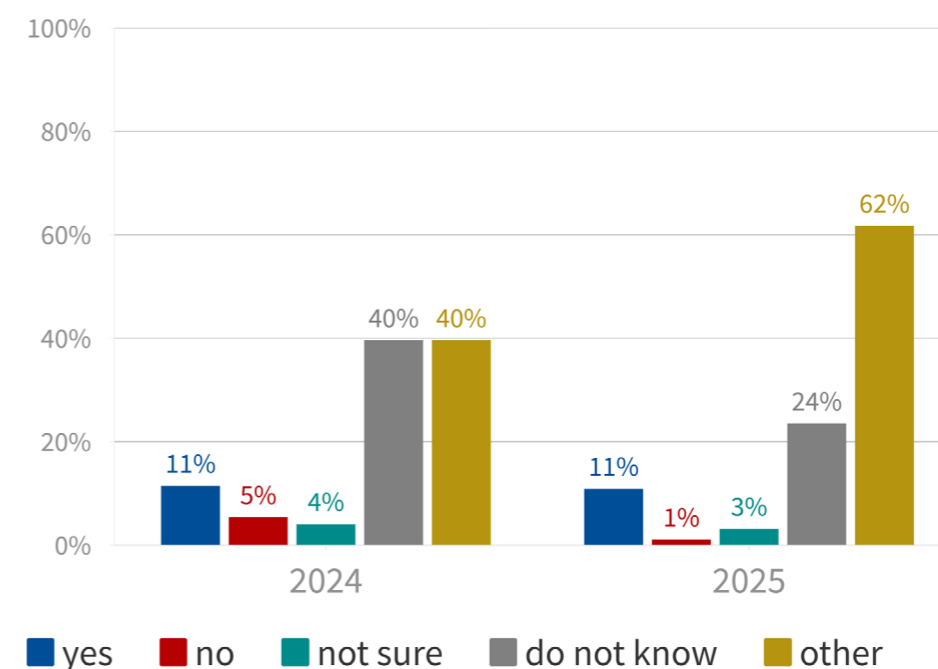
12. A number of these defendants were also charged under other articles related to speech, in particular: 29 individuals with incitement to extremism (Article 280 CC), 13 with other calls to actions against state security (Article 280<sup>4</sup> CC), and six with “fakes about military” motivated by hatred (paragraph “e” of Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC). Sixteen defendants in cases under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC were also convicted of treason (Article 275 CC), three for confidential cooperation with a foreign state (Article 275<sup>1</sup> CC), and 13 individuals for participation in a terrorist organization, namely the LSR or RDK (Article 205<sup>5</sup> Part 2 CC).

Assessing the appropriateness of prosecutions under Article 205<sup>2</sup> of the Criminal Code continues to present difficulties, particularly because in many cases we do not know even the approximate content of the incriminating statements. However, revised data for 2024 shows that 40% of convicted individuals in our database fell into the “do not know” and “other” categories, whereas in 2025, the “other” category became predominant (reaching as much as 62%), while “do not know” accounted for only 24%. This shift is due to the increase in the number of the above-mentioned convictions for approving comments about the Freedom of Russia Legion and the Russian Volunteer Corps, for which we know the approximate – and sometimes exact – content.

We identified fewer clearly inappropriate sentences than in the previous year – only three defendants (1%) vs. eight (5%) in 2024. One of these decisions was a conviction in absentia of human rights defender [Sergei Davidis](#) for sharing an assessment of the sentence imposed on captured fighters of the Azov regiment (recognized as a terrorist organization in Russia) issued by the “Support for Political Prisoners. Memorial” project. Politician [Sergei Udaltsov](#) was convicted for his publications about the criminal prosecution of five Marxists from Ufa on terrorism-related charges, which he considered unfounded. Finally, we classified as definitely inappropriate the verdict against [Yevgeniya Rogozina](#), a resident of Udmurtia, for her comment suggesting to “burn the witch” under a post featuring a statement by the Russian Minister of Agriculture.

## Appropriateness of Prosecution under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC

As a percentage of the total number of recorded defendants



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

Includes all defendants known to SOVA Research Center whose cases received first-instance court decisions. Different actions of the same defendant may fall into different categories.

We know of 233 suspects in cases initiated in 2025 under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC. At least 138 of these cases are related to Ukraine, 37 involve other statements directed against the authorities, 14 – religious xenophobia, and five – ethnic xenophobia.

We believe that charges under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC are inappropriate in at least seven cases. These include the cases of [Aruna Arna](#) and [Vasilya Vershinina](#), supporters of Svetlana Lada-Rus (Peunova), who faced charges for their vague calls to struggle against injustice; publicist [Anatoly Nesmiyan](#), who, in our opinion, did not justify terrorist acts but merely commented on their causes and consequences; and rap enthusiast [Bogdan Portnenko](#), who had posted a provocative music video on his social media page while still a minor.

## Calls for Extremist Activity

According to our records, **Article 280 CC** appeared in 187 verdicts against 191 individuals in 2025; of these, 188 individuals faced charges under Article 280 Part 2 (for statements made online) and only three under Part 1 (offline).

A year earlier, our database showed only 94 convictions against 100 individuals; thus, based solely on our data, the number of convictions under Article 280 CC has increased drastically, almost doubling in 2025. However, calculations based on the Supreme Court data for the first half of the year indicate that the number is not increasing and may even decline by the end of the year (from more than 300 to approximately 280). If this is indeed the case, a possible explanation is the sharp increase in our awareness of convictions under Article 280 of the Criminal Code. At the same time, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the number of recorded crimes under Article 280 CC committed online increased by 58% in 2025, and the number of crimes solved increased by 64%.<sup>13</sup>

Our data shows an increase in the percentage of those sentenced to imprisonment under this article. Of the 188 convicted offenders, 46% received custodial sentences, while only 32% received suspended sentences. A year earlier, based on the cases we recorded, 36% of convicted defendants were sentenced to imprisonment, compared to 45% who received suspended sentences. The increase in the percentage of custodial sentences is explained by the fact that the majority of defendants faced charges not only under Article 280 CC, but also under other articles; notably, as many as 25% of convicted offenders were charged simultaneously under Articles 280 and 205<sup>2</sup> CC.

Approximately 39% of defendants charged under Article 280 CC were prosecuted for expressing ethnic xenophobia, most often directed against Jews, people from Central Asia and the Caucasus, Russians, and Roma (vs. 36% in 2024). 25% of cases involved harsh statements related to the conflict in Ukraine (vs. 22% the previous year); 22% were related to other calls for action directed against the authorities (vs. 28% in 2024); and 5% involved religious hatred (vs. 7% the previous year).

In most cases, we found no grounds to consider convictions under Article 280 CC inappropriate. We classified only one such verdict as inappropriate – to [Anton Zhukov from Saratov Region](#), who, in 2021, posted a comment stating that the State Duma and the Kremlin should be “*burned down*” because the authorities were not lifting coronavirus re-

13. Ministry of Internal Affairs Data on Countering Extremism and Terrorism in 2025.

strictions. We believe that his comment was worded in such a way that it can hardly be interpreted as a genuine call for arson; moreover, since most coronavirus restrictions have been lifted, its potential public danger has further diminished.

We know of at least 147 cases against 153 individuals that were initiated in 2025 and involved charges under Article 280 CC. At least 49 of these are related to expressing ethnic xenophobia, 38 to pro-Ukrainian statements, 34 to other calls directed against the authorities, and six to expressing religious xenophobia. The charges we classified as inappropriate include the case of blogger [Tatyana Montyan](#), who, during one of her YouTube streams, agreed with a viewer that it was necessary to “*wipe out the security thugs [loyalists] without any regrets.*” We view this statement as an endorsement of harsh criticism of her political opponents, rather than a call to violence.

## Calls for Separatism

For several consecutive years, we have had no information about convictions under **Article 280<sup>1</sup> CC** for public calls to carry out actions aimed at violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, if such calls were made within one year after the corresponding administrative liability. It is quite possible that no verdicts were issued under this article in 2025 (according to the Supreme Court, there was one verdict in 2024).

We are aware of 16 rulings under the corresponding **Article 20.3.2 CAO**, which is two fewer than in 2024. Thirteen cases were related to statements made online, and three to offline statements. Fifteen individuals faced sanctions, and one case was dismissed by the cassation court. We consider 11 of the 16 instances of prosecution clearly inappropriate.

The majority of cases were based on statements about the status of Crimea. Several also involved the “liberation of the Caucasus,” the creation of an independent Circassia, armed struggle for a “Smolensk Republic,” the restoration of the USSR, and even the Ural Federal District joining the United States (the latter proposal was, of course, merely a joke). Pavel Andreev, a co-founder of the media outlet *7x7 – Horizontal Russia*, faced sanctions for his post about the designation of the Free Nations of PostRussia Forum (*Forum Svobodnykh Gosudarstv PostRossii*) as a terrorist organization. The post was accompanied by a “Free Nations of PostRussia map.”

## Calls for Actions Threatening State Security

The scale of application of Article 280<sup>4</sup> CC (public calls to carry out activities directed against the security of the state) has been gradually increasing. (This provision was introduced in 2022 and slightly expanded in 2024; in particular, Part 2 was supplemented with the qualifying element of committing the offense motivated by hatred.)

According to the Supreme Court data, 18 individuals were sentenced under this article in 2024 and 15 in the first half of 2025. At this growth rate, the total number of convicted individuals for the year may exceed 50.

Our database includes 29 court decisions against 31 individuals issued in 2025. Thirty defendants were sentenced, and one was released from punishment due to illness. A year earlier, we were aware of 14 cases against 14 defendants.

The cases of 14 individuals convicted in 2025 under this article also involved charges under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC, including four cases with charges under both Articles 205<sup>2</sup> and

280 CC, and six cases under other articles, frequently more serious ones. Thus, in more than half of the cases, Article 280<sup>4</sup> CC was not the primary charge.

Out of the 30 individuals sentenced under this article, 26 received prison sentences (87%); however, only 12 of them were convicted solely under Article 280<sup>4</sup>.

We recorded no convictions under Article 280<sup>4</sup> Part 1. Three individuals were sentenced under Part 3 (committing the offense by an organized group). Twenty-eight known convicted individuals were found guilty under paragraph “c” of Article 280<sup>4</sup> Part 2, that is, for actions carried out on the Internet; in eight cases, these charges were combined with paragraph “e” (hate-motivated), and in one, with paragraph “b” (use of official position).

This latter case also represents the only verdict under Article 280<sup>4</sup> CC that we view as clearly inappropriate – to pastor [Nikolai Romanyuk](#), who was prosecuted for an anti-war sermon.

We are aware of 22 cases initiated in 2025 against 25 individuals, which include Article 280<sup>4</sup> CC. The verdicts in at least two of them were issued in the same year, and three more resulted in verdicts in 2026.

Charges under Article 280<sup>4</sup> CC are associated almost exclusively with the Ukrainian conflict, both for the 2025 verdicts and for the newly opened cases. This article is used to prosecute calls for treason (including the financing of Ukraine’s armed forces), calls to defect to the enemy’s side, to commit acts of sabotage, or for military personnel to stage a mutiny.

## Display of Prohibited Symbols

The application of **Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC** on the repeated display of prohibited symbols grew at an impressive rate in 2025. This growth is entirely logical given that, under the corresponding Article 20.3 CAO, courts sanctioned more than 4,200 individuals for a first such violation in 2023, more than 4,700 in 2024,<sup>14</sup> and no fewer than 4,900 in 2025.<sup>15</sup>

According to data provided by the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court, 96 individuals were sentenced under Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC only in the first half of 2025; at the same growth rate, their number may reach around 230 or even more by the end of the year. In the preceding year, 131 individuals were convicted.

We were able to analyze information on 157 individual court decisions issued in 2025 under Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC. One conviction for disseminating prohibited paraphernalia was issued under Part 2 of this article; the rest were under Part 1.

In 79 convictions, or 50%, the charges pertained *only* to the display of symbols of the **AUE criminal subculture**, recognized as an extremist organization.<sup>16</sup> At least seven more individuals were convicted for demonstrating such symbols alongside Nazi symbols; thus, the share of convictions related to the display of AUE symbols reaches 55%.

The overwhelming majority of these charges were based on public displays of tattoos bearing such symbols. Such displays most often occurred in places of detention. In some

14 . M. Kravchenko and N. Yudina. Sanctions for Administrative Offenses Related to Extremism in 2023–2024.

15 . According to data obtained through the OVD-Info human rights media project.

16 . We decided not to include such verdicts in our database and not to conduct a detailed analysis of them.

cases, people were convicted for displaying photographs of such tattoos or simply images featuring AUE symbols on social media.

Fifty-nine individuals, that is, 38%, were convicted for displaying **Nazi or neo-Nazi symbols**. Notably, only 12 of them were punished for online activities, one for displaying symbols both online and offline, and 46 individuals for offline display only. According to our data from previous years, liability under Article 20.3 of the CAO is imposed more frequently for online publications, with only a quarter to a third of all rulings involving offline statements.

A number of cases were based on tattoos of swastikas made while in custody. Some verdicts cite the defendants’ testimonies indicating that they got such tattoos as part of “negation” (*otritsalovo*), i.e., their consistent defiance of the prison administration. Several inmates demonstrated these tattoos in penal colonies or pre-trial detention centers, while several former inmates did so on the street, in shops, communal apartments, or dormitories.

However, around two dozen convictions are associated with the deliberate propaganda of far-right ideologies. Individuals punished under Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC for neo-Nazi tattoos included, among others, [Konstantin Tyrin](#), who had previously served a sentence for two murders motivated by ethnic hatred; [Arseniy Lysenko](#), convicted for a hate-motivated attack; and bodybuilder [Konstantin Bryukhanov](#). Alexander Smetanin, a resident of Krasnoyarsk Krai, received two convictions under Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC in 2025: one for painting swastikas on a boat and a car, and the other for wearing a ring decorated with swastikas.

In addition to the swastika, such cases can include other symbols such as the “Black Sun,” popular among neo-Nazis as a tattoo on the elbow, the Totenkopf (“death’s head”), the SS runic logo, and brass knuckles with spikes and a laurel wreath (considered a symbol of the neo-Nazi network NS/WP, recognized as a terrorist organization).

Separately, we note the conviction of Ukrainian national [Alexander Korol](#), who had served in Azov (recognized as a terrorist organization) and was convicted on charges of shooting up of a car with civilians in Mariupol. His sentence was extended for a tattoo featuring a swastika and an SS symbol.

Nine convictions were related to **Ukraine**. Three cases involved symbols of the prohibited Azov, the LSR, and/or the RDK. In one case, the defendant faced sanctions for a tattoo combining the swastika and the trident, which is considered a symbol of several modern Ukrainian organizations banned in Russia, as well as of some of the World War II collaborationist groups.

Two verdicts – against Konstantin Ledkov (also charged under other articles) and [Stepan Tronin](#) – were related to the slogan “Glory to Ukraine!” interpreted as the official greeting of the same organizations.

Two cases were based on the display of Nazi symbols intended as criticism of the policies of the Russian authorities. Vladimir Efimov, leader of the Kamchatka branch of the Yabloko party, was convicted for using a scene from the anti-fascist film *Cabaret* as commentary on the work of the singer Shaman. [Irina Kostrova](#), a follower of the “Citizens of the USSR” movement, faced sanctions for publishing a historical photograph of a German soldier standing on a tank bearing a visible “V” symbol on its turret (one of the symbols associated with the actions of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine).

We identified five convictions as primarily related to **criticism of the authorities** in other contexts. Four of them targeted “Citizens of the USSR” for using their own symbols<sup>17</sup> and for comparing Russian symbols to Nazi ones. In one case – that of Alina Khodzhiyeva – the prohibited symbols included not only Nazi imagery in a photograph featuring Hitler, but also a photograph of Alexei Navalny, interpreted as the symbol of the banned Anti-Corruption Foundation (*Fond borby s korruptsiyey*, FBK) or Navalny Headquarters.

One individual was, in fact, punished for using the swastika solely within the framework of a **historical discussion**. Vasily Chebykin faced sanctions for publishing a video with a swastika on its cover image. However, the video itself addressed the scale of crimes committed by Soviet soldiers in Germany, which, in the author’s view, has been exaggerated in Western historiography – that is, it was not aimed in any way at the propaganda or justification of Nazism.

Finally, one case was entirely **non-political**. A practice of prosecutions under Article 20.3 CAO for black-and-white images of pit bulls popular among car enthusiasts, which has become widespread in Dagestan, led to at least one conviction under Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC. Nazir Aldanov was convicted for his failure to delete such an image from his social media profile.<sup>18</sup>

As for the sanctions imposed, if we exclude cases involving exclusively AUE symbols, imprisonment under Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC was imposed in at least 40% of cases in 2025. Nine individuals (29%) were sentenced to imprisonment without special circumstances justifying such a sentence.<sup>19</sup> In the remaining cases, the individuals were either inmates of penal institutions or had prior convictions.

Courts imposed suspended prison sentences in 18% of cases, and community service equally often. Corrective labor was imposed in 10% of convictions, compulsory labor in 8%, and a fine in one case. The distribution of types of punishment was broadly similar in the convictions known to us for 2024.

Reviewing the appropriateness of all charges brought under Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC in 2025,<sup>20</sup> we classified 57% as “other” (primarily cases involving AUE symbols). We view 37% as, at least to some extent, appropriate. We consider nearly 8% (12 convictions) inappropriate, and we are not sure about 2% (three convictions). This differs from the situation in 2024,

17. There were no sanctions for using the USSR state emblem, although, in previous years, we have noted several administrative cases under Article 20.3 CAO for its use.

18. Black-and-white images, and in particular car stickers featuring a pit bull, became popular after the release of racing video games created by the British company Pitbull Syndicate Ltd. However, since 2023, Russian courts – primarily in Dagestan – have begun to classify such images as symbols of the neo-Nazi group Pit Bull, which operated in Krasnodar and was designated an extremist organization in 2010. Most people who use and distribute these images are clearly unaware of the Krasnodar group and, accordingly, do not promote its activities. Moreover, the court decision banning the Pit Bull group made no mention of its symbols.

19. We refer to the imposition of imprisonment for speech-related offenses in combination with other articles CC, as well as to those who were already in custody, on probation, or released on parole.

20. Including all cases known to us involving AUE symbols.

when more than half of convictions were classified as appropriate, one third as “other,” and only two convictions fell into the “inappropriate” or “not sure” categories.<sup>21</sup>

We are aware of at least 57 cases initiated under Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC in 2025 (excluding cases involving AUE symbols). At least 32 of these have already resulted in convictions.

We did not track the application of **Article 20.3 CAO** in detail in 2025.<sup>22</sup> We know that, in addition to the contexts mentioned above, cases under Article 20.3 of the CAO involved symbols associated with the FBK (not limited to portraits of Navalny), the banned movements “Vesna” and “I/We Furgal,” the National Bolshevik Party (NBP), various Islamist organizations, the logos of Facebook and Instagram, neo-pagan symbols, LGBTQ symbols, and others. After the “\_” was recognized as an extremist organization in July 2025, courts considered around two dozen cases involving the display of satanism symbols and the circulation of related paraphernalia.<sup>23</sup>

## Dissemination of Knowingly False Information about the Use of the Armed Forces and the Activities of State Bodies Abroad

SOVA Center monitors and enters into its database only the application of **paragraph “e” of Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC** (dissemination of false information about the activities of the armed forces and state bodies motivated by hatred).<sup>24</sup>

In 2025, we became aware of 71 court decisions concerning 77 individuals; two of them were referred for compulsory treatment, and the rest faced punishment. For 2024, we recorded 84 defendants, two of whom were also referred for treatment.

Our information is incomplete, so it would be premature to speak of a reduction in the scale of application for this article. Nevertheless, based on our monitoring data, we observe no increase. Data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court, however, may show an increase to as many as 130 convictions in 2025. At the same time, for the entire 2024, the Supreme Court recorded only 70 convicted individuals – significantly fewer than we did. The discrepancy may be due to the uneven distribution of convictions under this article across the two halves of the year, as well as to the fact that the Judicial De-

21. However, this comparison is only preliminary in nature, since the collection of data on 2025 verdicts was conducted more thoroughly.

22. We discontinued monitoring such cases as of April 2025.

23. Ivan Smurov and Iva Tsoi. Pentagram, Tarot, and a Cow Skull: How the State, Under the Guise of Fighting Satanists, Persecutes Cosplayers and Musicians, *Verstka*. December 4, 2025 (<https://verstka.media/kak-gosudarstvo-pod-vidom-borby-s-satanistami-presleduet-kospleerov-i-muzykantov>, in Russian).

24. We believe that in the application of Article 207<sup>3</sup> CC, the motive of ideological and political hatred is clearly used without sufficient justification: people who publish information about the military actions in Ukraine that differs from the official version are, in most cases, ideologically and politically opposed to the authorities’ course, so such publications usually constitute a form of political criticism. Therefore, we consider cases under paragraph “e” of Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC inappropriate in all cases where the charge is unrelated to violence or direct calls for it.

partment records decisions under the date they enter into force, whereas we record them under the date the verdict was issued.

At least 85% of known sentences involved imprisonment (vs. 93% the previous year); in one case, compulsory labor was imposed, and in one case, a suspended prison sentence.

Judgments in absentia were issued in at least 42% of cases. A year earlier, the share of in absentia convictions was even higher and approached 50%. Most often, such defendants are politicians, journalists, and activists who have left the country, as well as Ukrainian political figures and journalists.

In at least 58 cases, the charges were based on statements made on the Internet. Seven individuals were prosecuted for statements made offline, and five for statements made both online and offline.

In some cases, convictions were issued not only under paragraph “e,” but also under other paragraphs of Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC. Some defendants were charged simultaneously under several different articles of the CC.<sup>25</sup>

In 2025, according to the information available to us, at least 69 individuals became suspects in new cases under paragraph “e” of Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC; in 16 of these cases, convictions were issued in the same year.

## “Discrediting the Army”

We are aware of 61 court decisions issued in 2025 under **Article 280<sup>3</sup> CC** on discrediting the use of the armed forces of Russia or the activities of state bodies abroad.<sup>26</sup> 54 defendants were sentenced, six were released from punishment due to the expiration of the statute of limitations, and one was referred for compulsory treatment. These figures are lower than in 2024, when we were able to analyze 79 decisions against 82 individuals, 75 of whom faced sanctions.

The data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court, however, indicates that 39 individuals were sentenced under this norm in the first half of the year alone. For the full year, according to our estimates, the number may reach around 90. In 2024, the Supreme Court statistics recorded only 68 convicted individuals. Similarly to Article 207<sup>3</sup> CC, the discrepancy between our monitoring data and that of the Judicial Department may be related to the above-mentioned difference in methodology – using the date of entry into force vs. the date of the verdict. It is also possible, however, that the Supreme Court’s final data for the year will be lower than our estimate.

The likely trend toward a reduction in the scale of application of Article 280<sup>3</sup> CC is also consistent with the dynamics for **Article 20.3.3 CAO**, which provides for sanctions against

25. Most frequently, these were charges under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC (public justification of terrorism) in nine cases; Article 330<sup>1</sup> CC (violation of the obligations of a “foreign agent”) in five cases; and Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC (“rehabilitation of Nazism”) in five cases.

26. We consider punishment for discrediting the actions of the Russian army and state bodies abroad to be an unjustified restriction of freedom of speech, aimed at suppressing criticism of the actions of the government and the armed forces of Russia. Therefore, we regard prosecution under Article 280<sup>3</sup> CC as inappropriate in all cases where the charge is unrelated to violence or direct calls for it, that is, in the overwhelming majority of cases.

individuals before they become criminally liable under Article 280<sup>3</sup> Part 1 CC. Each year, the number of people punished under this CAO article has decreased. In its first year, it was applied to more than 4,400 individuals, but in 2025, sanctions under it were imposed approximately 1,300 times.<sup>27</sup>

The recent expansion of the aggravated provision of Article 280<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC, which stipulates liability after the first violation rather than after prior administrative charges,<sup>28</sup> is unlikely to significantly alter the situation. Notably, we are not aware of any convictions issued in 2025 under Part 2 of this article, whereas at least eight individuals were sentenced under it in the previous year.

The structure of sanctions imposed under Article 280<sup>3</sup> CC has changed. Whereas in 2024, the most common punishment in the cases known to us was a fine (41%), it was imposed in only 9% of the cases known to us in 2025.

Thus, imprisonment ranked first among punishments, although its percentage did not change: 39% of those convicted were sentenced to imprisonment in both 2024 and 2025. In more than half of these 2025 cases, Article 280<sup>3</sup> CC was the only charge.

30% of defendants received a suspended sentence (vs. only 13% in 2024). Another 5% were sentenced to compulsory labor (6% the previous year).

In 50 cases, the charges were based on statements made online; four involved both online and offline speech; and four more cases were based on offline statements only.

According to our data, cases under Article 280<sup>3</sup> CC in connection with public speech were opened against at least 37 individuals in 2025.

## Incitement of Hatred

The most well-known, though not the most frequently applied, “anti-extremism” provision is **Article 282 CC**, which criminalizes incitement of hatred or enmity, as well as the humiliation of human dignity. It is worth reminding that this provision underwent a “partial decriminalization” in 2018. The offense became punishable under **Article 20.3.1 CAO**, and only repeated violations within one year fell under Article 282 Part 1 CC. The change did not pertain to acts specified in Article 282 Part 2 CC – those involving calls for violence and committed by an organized group or with the use of an official position. In the summer of 2025, however, Article 282 CC was amended in the opposite direction. A prior conviction under Article 282 or under Articles 280 or 282<sup>4</sup> CC now provides sufficient grounds for criminal liability. More importantly, criminal liability now also arises immediately for acts “involving the justification or propaganda of the use of violence or the threat of its use.” In addition, acts committed by any group of persons without prior conspiracy are now punishable under Part 2.<sup>29</sup>

27. According to the data obtained through OVD-Info as well as the adjusted forecast based on data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court for the first half of 2025.

28. For more on this change, see: Anti-Extremism Lawmaking in 2025, SOVA Center. January 28, 2026 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2026/01/d47127/#c1>).

29. For more on these changes, see: Anti-Extremism Lawmaking in 2025, SOVA Center. January 28, 2026. (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2026/01/d47127/#b1>).

In 2025, our monitoring identified 44 court decisions against 54 individuals under Article 282 CC; the charges were based on speech in 40 cases against 50 individuals.<sup>30</sup> Our data for 2024 is very similar: 40 decisions against 54 individuals, including 38 speech-related charges against 50 individuals. However, according to data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court, 55 individuals were found guilty under this article in 2024, while 47 were convicted only in the first half of 2025. We estimate that the total number of convictions for the year may exceed 90.

We know of 12 individuals sentenced under Article 282 Part 1 in its version that was in force before mid-year. We have not recorded any convictions under the updated version, which is divided into two paragraphs. 31 individuals were sentenced under Article 282 Part 2 paragraph “a” (acts involving the threat of violence) and 12 under paragraph “c” (acts committed by an organized group). Once again, this is very close to the 2024 data (13 individuals under Part 1, 29 under paragraph “a” of Part 2, 1 under paragraph “b”, and 12 under paragraph “c”).

No significant changes are evident in sentencing practices under this article. Of the 51 individuals sentenced by courts (three others were referred for compulsory treatment), 67% were sentenced to imprisonment. However, for half of these individuals, the judgment also included other charges, often more serious. Nearly 20% received suspended prison sentences. A similar pattern was observed in 2024: 71% were sentenced to imprisonment, 18% to suspended sentences.

Among those convicted specifically for speech, the overwhelming majority – 43 individuals – were sentenced under Article 282 CC for online publications.

For the majority (56%), the charges under Article 282 CC were related to the propaganda of **ethnic xenophobia**; a year earlier, only 20% of charges fell into this category. According to our data, most defendants faced charges for statements directed against migrants from Central Asia and the North Caucasus, as well as migrants in general. The statements pertained to ethnic Russians in at least seven cases (vs. the overwhelming majority of cases in 2024) and to Jews in six cases (only one case a year earlier).

24% (the same as the previous year) were convicted for speech related to the **conflict in Ukraine**. Their statements were primarily directed against citizens of Russia in general, supporters of the “special military operation,” or Russian military personnel. This number includes convictions in absentia of Ukrainian and Russian politicians and public figures. Three decisions in this category may be considered clearly inappropriate: the verdicts against streamer [Alexander Sokolovsky](#) and activist [Andrei Slotin](#) for statements about Russian military personnel that contained no calls for violence, as well as the conviction in absentia of actress [Yana Troyanova](#) for her harsh criticism of the state of Russian society, which the court interpreted (incorrectly, in our opinion) as incitement of hatred toward Russians.

14% of defendants were sentenced under Article 282 CC for other harsh statements directed **against the authorities**; a year earlier, such convictions accounted for as much as 40%. In 8% of cases (four cases), the charges were primarily based on **religious hatred** – both against Christians and Muslims (we know of only one such conviction in 2024).

30. That is, this figure does not include verdicts in which charges under Article 282 CC were connected to attacks motivated by hatred.

As for cases initiated in 2025 under Article 282 CC, we are aware of 42 such cases against 50 individuals, including 41 cases based exclusively on speech. Only three individuals became suspects under the completely new paragraph “b” of Part 1, which pertains to acts “involving the justification or propaganda of the use of violence.”

The application of **Article 20.3.1 CAO** reveals a different pattern. In total, more than 1,100 rulings were issued under it in 2024<sup>31</sup>, and nearly 1,200 in 2025.<sup>32</sup> We analyzed 655 rulings for 2024 and 784 for 2025.

Excluding six cases dismissed by courts on various grounds, approximately 90% of rulings resulted in administrative fines, 7% in arrest, 2% in community service, and several cases in warnings. There are no significant differences here compared to 2023–2024.<sup>33</sup>

As before, individuals most often face liability under Article 20.3.1 CAO for statements directed against<sup>34</sup> migrants from Central Asia (22% of rulings) and/or the Caucasus (16%); a year earlier, these “most popular” groups appeared in 20% and 18% of rulings, respectively. Ethnic Russians took the third place among clearly identified ethnic groups (9% in 2025 vs. 13% in 2024). In addition, more than 11% of rulings in 2025 were related to statements about migrants and “non-Slavs” in general (9% in 2024), also directed primarily against individuals from the Central Asian states.

We observed a slight increase in the share of court decisions related to statements against law enforcement officers (almost 15% vs. 12% in 2024), officials, politicians, unspecified representatives of authority (almost 8% vs. 6% in 2024), as well as against military personnel and the president personally.

Partially due to this group of cases, the share of court decisions that we consider inappropriate has also changed. While such cases accounted for slightly more than 15% of the total in 2023,<sup>35</sup> and just under 18% in 2024, we classified nearly 23% of rulings imposing sanctions under Article 20.3.1 CAO as inappropriate in 2025 (that is, 176 rulings vs. 116 in 2024).

31. M. Kravchenko and N. Yudina. Sanctions for Administrative Offenses Related to Extremism in 2023–2024.

32. According to data obtained through the OVD-Info human rights media project.

33. See: M. Kravchenko and N. Yudina. Sanctions for Administrative Offenses Related to Extremism in 2023–2024.

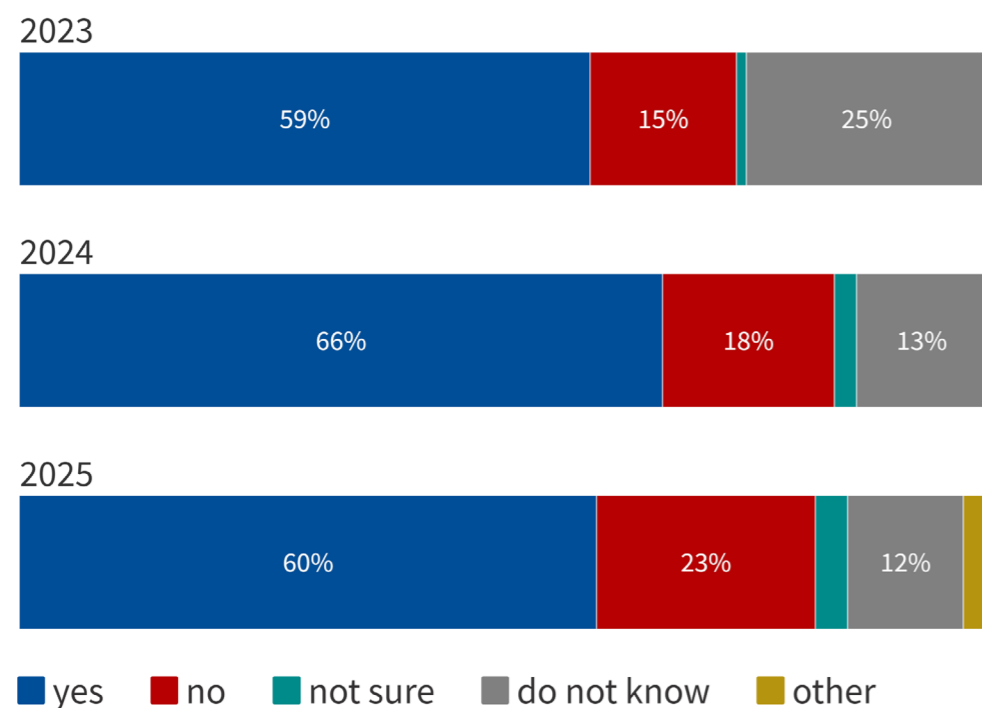
In our 2023-2024 report, we adjusted the data we collected on sanctions imposed under Article 20.3.1 CAO based on the aggregate annual data for Articles 20.3 and 20.3.1 provided by the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. The correction turned out to be very minor; we noted only that community service was imposed slightly more often than SOVA’s data indicated. Overall, this experience has demonstrated that the data we collect on types of punishment is sufficiently accurate.

34. For cases, in which the target of hostility is known from the court ruling or could be determined from other sources.

35. Taking into account the smaller share of rulings processed by us.

## Appropriateness of Prosecution under Article 20.3.1 CAO

As a percentage of recorded rulings imposing sanctions



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

## “Rehabilitation of Nazism”

Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC covers a broad range of acts. We addressed the subset of these acts that can be characterized as attacks on material objects in [another report](#); here, we only review speech. At the same time, the range of statements for which individuals are held liable under this article is also quite diverse. These include the glorification or denial of Nazi crimes; the dissemination (usually not accompanied by propaganda of violence) of “knowingly false” information about the activities of the USSR during the Second World War (Article 354<sup>1</sup> Parts 1 and 2); disrespectful opinions about days of military glory, desecrating symbols of military glory, insulting the memory of defenders of the Fatherland, and humiliating the honor and dignity of veterans of the Great Patriotic War (Parts 3 and 4).

We have information on 68 court decisions applying this article in individual cases related to public statements. Fifty-nine individuals were convicted; in one case, proceedings were terminated due to the defendant’s death, and in another case, due to the expiration of the statute of limitations. As many as seven defendants were referred for compulsory treatment. In 2024, our database recorded 44 cases against 46 individuals, 43 of whom faced sanctions, one was acquitted, and two were referred for compulsory treatment.

Thus, the upward trend in the use of Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC continued in 2025. The number of individuals sanctioned for their speech under this provision increased by approximately

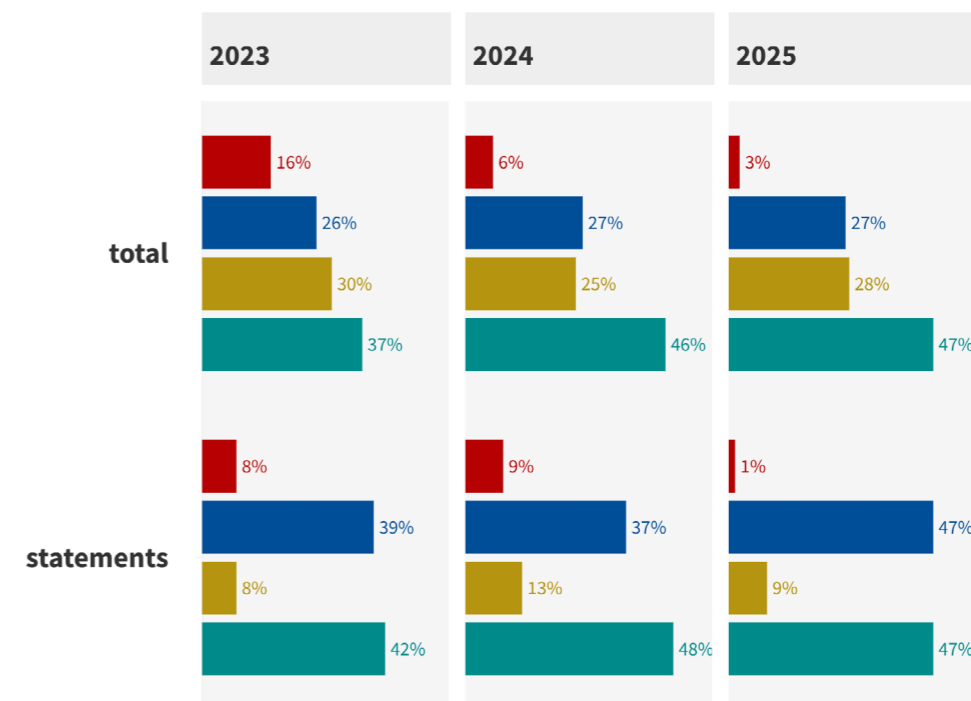
50%. Considering the full scope of the article, including attacks on material objects, the growth is even more pronounced: we recorded 119 decisions in 2025 compared to 63 in 2024 – that is, nearly twice as many. This number significantly exceeds our conservative estimate of the number of convicted individuals (97) calculated on the basis of the Supreme Court data for previous years and the first half of 2025.

Both in 2024 and in 2025, almost half of the defendants under this article faced charges under Part 4 (insulting acts committed online or by a group of persons with respect to dates and symbols of military glory, or war veterans), while 26–28% were prosecuted under Part 3 (the same acts, but committed offline and individually) and under paragraph “c” of Part 2 (for the aforementioned statements about history committed online). If we focus only on speech, Part 2 paragraph “c” and Part 4 are equally prevalent (48% each), while a year earlier, Part 4 was more common.

## Application of Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC, by Parts

As a percentage of the total number of recorded defendants.

Only **Part 1**, **Part 2 Paragraph “c”**, **Part 3**, and **Part 4** are shown.



Источник: SOVA Research Center, 2026

Includes all defendants known to SOVA Research Center whose cases received first-instance court decisions. An individual could face charges under several parts of the article.

36% defendants convicted for statements under Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC were sentenced to imprisonment (vs. 42% in 2024); 31% received suspended sentences (vs. 23% in 2024); 12% faced fines (vs. 16% in 2024), 8% were sentenced to compulsory labor (14% the previous year), and one individual was sentenced to community service.

In 15% of cases, the statements were made offline, in 84% – online, and in one case – both offline and online. A year earlier, offline statements accounted for about 28%, and

statements made only online comprised 67%. Thus, law enforcement practice is increasingly shifting its focus to the Internet.

In 2025, half of the speech-related cases (against 34 defendants) were based on insults to **values and symbols** that the Russian authorities classify as traditional. In 2024, this category accounted for 46%.

A significant number of such convictions involved the publication of images featuring the St. George ribbon and comments critical of the Russian authorities, including in the context of the armed conflict with Ukraine. Notably, these posts were published by defendants holding a wide range of political views, from far-right figures such as [Eleni Grigoriadi](#) or [Alexander Panasenko](#) to the orthodox Stalinist [Dmitry Denisov](#). At least four individuals were convicted for publishing images (particularly popular among “Citizens of the USSR”) claiming that Nazi collaborators used the St. George ribbon during the Great Patriotic War. Other objects, such as the monument “The Motherland Calls!” in the cases of trash streamer [Golubka](#) and St. Petersburg resident [Yanina Lenskaya](#), could also be treated as symbols of military glory subject to desecration.

Another common law enforcement pattern is related to alleged disrespect toward days of military glory – most often, though not exclusively, criticism of the Victory Day celebrations.

In several cases, charges were based merely on deviations from state-promoted interpretations of events of the Second World War. Thus, [Marina Zheleznyakova](#), the deputy head of the Primorye branch of Yabloko, was convicted for a post asserting that the “*communist, totalitarian regime*” bears part of the responsibility for the outbreak of the war and its numerous victims. In St. Petersburg, local historian Dmitry Vitushkin was convicted for a comment approving the actions of a Finnish sniper during the Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland (1939–1940).

The case of St. Petersburg resident [Andrei Tishchenko](#), who criticized referendums on the accession of new regions to Russia using a collage of historical photographs with his own caption, combines several of the above themes. In this case, the court interpreted a sarcastic caption – stating that Leningrad residents “*with great enthusiasm and excitement*” held a “*referendum on joining Greater Germany*” – as knowingly false information about the USSR during the World War II. The court also declared the Day of the Lifting of the Siege of Leningrad a desecrated day of military glory, and even recognized the Narva Triumphal Gate – erected in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and featured in one of the photographs – as a desecrated symbol of military glory.

34% of convictions (against 23 individuals) we classified as propaganda of **ethnic xenophobia** (43% in 2024). The overwhelming majority of such cases involved statements approving of or denying the Holocaust.

In at least six cases (9%), the statements were directly related to support for **Ukraine**; there were at least five such convictions (10%) in 2024.

We consider 43% of convictions for statements under Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC inappropriate, and 38% as more or less appropriate. A year earlier, 48% were inappropriate, and 37% were appropriate.

We have information on 72 cases initiated under Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC in 2025 against 76 individuals, specifically for their public statements. In total, we are aware of 110 new cases under this article against 135 individuals.

**Article 13.48 CAO** (publicly equating the goals, decisions, and actions of the USSR and Nazi Germany during the Second World War) continues to be used rarely. We are aware of only one instance of its application in 2025: Crimean Tatar activist [Enver Seitmemetov](#) was fined for asserting that, following the Second World War, tribunals should have been convened not only at Nuremberg but also to prosecute those responsible for the deportations of peoples in the USSR, including the Crimean Tatars.

## Offending the Feelings of Believers and Desecration of Religious Paraphernalia

We are aware of 21 court decisions under **Parts 1 and 2 of Article 148 CC** (offending the feelings of believers) that were related to public speech. The total number of defendants in these cases was also 21 (although one of them was convicted twice in two different cases). A year earlier, we recorded more decisions – 33 verdicts against 36 individuals.

Data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court also indicate a slight decline in application of this norm: 18 individuals were convicted in the first half of 2025, and the year-end total is expected to exceed 30. In 2024, the Judicial Department recorded 43 convicted offenders.

The decisions known to us for 2025 found 18 individuals guilty and imposed punishment. In one case against a minor, the court terminated the proceedings and imposed compulsory disciplinary measures on the defendant. Two cases were terminated due to the expiration of the statute of limitations, and another due to reconciliation with the victim.<sup>36</sup>

Among those convicted, at least 10 (55%) were sentenced to community service, four (22%) to imprisonment, two (11%) received suspended prison sentences, and a fine was imposed in one case. In all cases where imprisonment was imposed, the charges also included other, more serious articles.

As in previous years, the majority of cases (involving at least 16 defendants) were related to statements made online.

Prosecutors brought cases under Article 148 CC in 2025 for a wide range of conduct. The incriminating acts included [atheistic comments](#), statements [against Islam](#), publications about Christianity by a “[black magician](#)”, [advertisements for BDSM parties](#), [a quarrel with a priest](#) during an personal conflict, and recording [a video with lowered trousers next to a church](#).

In most cases, we consider the convictions clearly inappropriate or doubt their appropriateness. Only the cases under Article 148 CC against blogger [Areg Shchepikhin](#) and radio prankster [Valentin Bushuev](#) can be viewed as appropriate, since their statements clearly incited hatred (both were also sentenced under Article 282 CC).

In 2025, we learned of 21 new cases under Article 148 Parts 1 and 2 CC against 27 individuals in connection with their statements. At least eight of these cases were adjudicated in the same year.

36. Cases under Article 148 CC fall under public prosecution and, according to the Criminal Procedure Code, cannot be terminated on the grounds of reconciliation between the parties. Nevertheless, since 2021, at least four cases have been terminated on this basis.

It appears that **Article 5.26 Part 2 CAO** (intentional public desecration of religious or liturgical literature, objects of religious veneration, signs or emblems of ideological symbolism and paraphernalia, or their damage or destruction) is being applied with increasing frequency.

We believe that this provision should primarily protect religious paraphernalia from physical damage. However, in practice, individuals are punished under it for the “desecration” of religious symbols that do not necessarily have a material form, and the concept of a “symbol” is interpreted quite arbitrarily. We consider such law enforcement practice to be entirely inappropriate.

Moreover, forensic experts often identify the elements of offending the feelings of believers and of desecrating symbols in the same statements. Thus, in practice, the elements of Article 5.26 Part 2 CAO and Article 148 Part 1 CC partially duplicate each other. Evidently, law enforcement agencies (primarily the Centers for Combating Extremism of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) often prefer filing an administrative report – or multiple reports – under Article 5.26 CAO to forwarding materials to the Investigative Committee for the initiation of a case under Article 148 CC. This is especially true in cases where claims are filed based on multiple publications by the same author simultaneously under several CAO articles – such as Article 20.3 CAO on the display of prohibited symbols and Article 6.21 CAO on the propaganda of “non-traditional sexual relations.”

Although we had no opportunity to systematically track the application of Article 5.26 Part 2 CAO across the entire country, we recorded 36 court rulings concerning 20 individuals; 34 of them were issued in Moscow.

Courts imposed sanctions in 34 cases: administrative fines in 19 of them, and community service in the remaining 15. One Moscow resident was released from liability on grounds of insignificance, and one case was terminated due to the expiration of the statute of limitations – the case of designer Artemy Lebedev, who faced charges for a photograph of a carpet depicting the Virgin Mary with a hand-rolled cigarette.

31 court rulings against 15 individuals related specifically to online publications. The overwhelming majority of these cases involved saved collages with Russian Orthodox icons on VKontakte or memes depicting Jesus, whose image experts and courts also treat as an object of veneration protected under Article 5.26 Part 2 CAO. In one case, the charges were based on an excerpt from the satirical cartoon Wonder Showzen; three claims were based on TikTok videos mentioning God and Jesus. Yet another case was based on an image depicting crescents instead of crosses on Saint Basil’s Cathedral in Moscow.

At least five cases concerned offline actions: a walk inside a monastery dressed as a woman and appearing in a bar dressed as a nun, the use of religious symbols in restaurant design and in khinkali ads, and selling paraphernalia in an esoteric goods store.

## Recognizing Materials as Extremist and Sanctions for Their Dissemination

In recent years, we have noted that law enforcement agencies have been making increasingly less use of such an instrument as the banning of “extremist materials”<sup>37</sup> in court, fol-

37. Quotation marks here indicate a reference to the definition in Article 1 of the law “On Countering Extremist Activity.”

lowed by charges for their mass dissemination under Article 20.29 CAO. The growth of the Federal List of Extremist Materials (FLEM) has slowed annually, and prosecutions under Article 20.29 CAO have declined in frequency. In 2025, this trend stalled, with little change compared to the previous year in either respect.

At the same time, the FLEM has acquired a new function: since autumn last year, **Article 13.53** has been added to the CAO, under which individuals may be punished not for disseminating, or even possessing, extremist materials, but merely for searching for them and becoming acquainted with their content. In our view, this provision is fundamentally unconstitutional: the right to seek information, as recognized by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, is not subject to restriction under that Covenant or under the Constitution of the Russian Federation, and until now it had not been restricted in practice. Under Article 13.53 CAO, individuals can be held liable not only for searching materials included in the FLEM, but also for any materials whose content corresponds to the definition of “extremist materials” in the law. Given the breadth of this definition, the size of the FLEM, and the vagueness of many of its entries, one might theoretically expect a large number of cases under this new article; however, at the time of writing this report, we know of only three.

One of these cases reached the court in November 2025. A magistrate of Judicial District No. 2 of the Krasnogorsky judicial area of Kamensk-Uralsky in the Sverdlovsk Region initially required clarification of the police report, but once this was done, a local resident faced a fine of three thousand rubles. In late December, this decision was upheld on appeal. The substance of the charge was that student Sergei Glukhikh searched for information about the Azov regiment and the Russian Volunteer Corps, both recognized as terrorist organizations. However, information about terrorist organizations in itself does not constitute “extremist material,” and the revised version of the report stated that Glukhikh had searched for Azov symbols. This, in itself, would also be insufficient for prosecution: public display of symbols of terrorist organizations falls under Article 20.3 CAO, but this does not automatically make such symbols “extremist materials.” In this case, however, one of the symbols – the Azov chevron – does indeed appear in the FLEM under number 3269.

Regardless of the motives behind the student’s search for information, his prosecution should be considered inappropriate. This example clearly shows how easy it is to violate the new article of the Code of Administrative Offences inadvertently.

### Additions to the Federal List of Extremist Materials

In 2025, the FLEM was expanded by 35 entries (vs. 38 in 2024). By the end of the year, the list contained 5,489 entries.

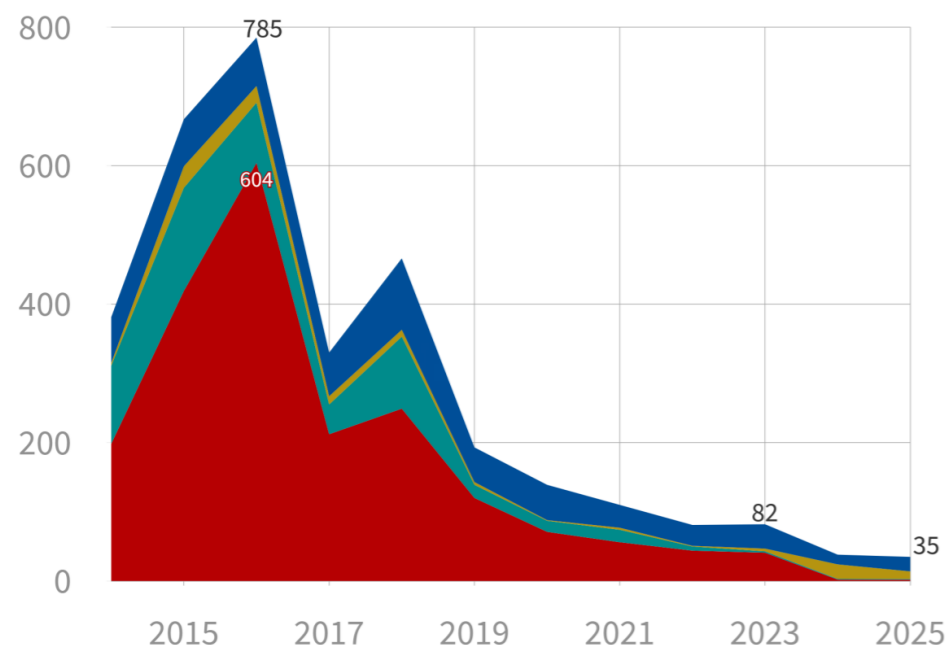
Among the 2025 additions, the most notable are materials originating from Ukraine that express anti-Russian sentiment, either in ethnic or national terms. (11 entries). The list also added six materials linked to the “Citizens of the USSR” movement, five associated with non-violent religious groups (primarily Falun Dafa and Jehovah’s Witnesses), and four entries consisting of AUE-style songs. Materials of other types appeared much less frequently. Only two materials by radical Russian nationalists were added – unchanged from the previous year, despite their earlier dominance among FLEM additions. There are also just two items from non-Russian nationalist groups, and only one Islamic entry, a book glorifying military jihad.

According to our estimates, nine out of the 35 materials were banned inappropriately in 2025 (vs. five out of 38 in 2024). Five of these were the religious texts mentioned above. We found no calls for violent actions in the *Notes of a Bashkir Nationalist. Kuk Bure* by Ruslan Gabbasov or *Patriot* by Alexei Navalny. The Ukrainian propaganda song “Listen, Mom, This

Is Ukraine,” which is harshly critical of Russian soldiers, also contained no such calls. Finally, the little-known song “Pray” appears to have been misinterpreted by the court as a call to unlawful actions due to its refrain “Pray, steal, and kill,” reflecting a fairly common problem of interpreting polysemantic texts. Thus, materials were banned inappropriately in slightly over 25% of cases – a noticeably higher percentage than we observed earlier in this decade. Starting in 2020, this figure fluctuated between 10 and 18%.

## Additions to the Federal List of Extremist Materials

Materials by **Russian nationalists**, **Muslim materials**, **Ukrainian materials**, and **others**



Sources: Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation; SOVA Research Center, 2026

### Dissemination of Extremist Materials

The exact number of rulings imposing sanctions issued in 2025 under **Article 20.29 CAO** is not yet known. There were certainly at least 301 such decisions.<sup>38</sup> According to data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court, 178 rulings entered into force in the first half of the year. Taking into account the usual decline in the number of decisions in the second half of the year, this number suggests at least 320 decisions for the entire year. According to the official data, there were 314 such rulings in 2024.

Data for the first half of the year indicates that fines remained the primary penalty under Article 20.29: only two individuals (1% of cases) were subjected to administrative arrest, four times fewer than in the previous year.

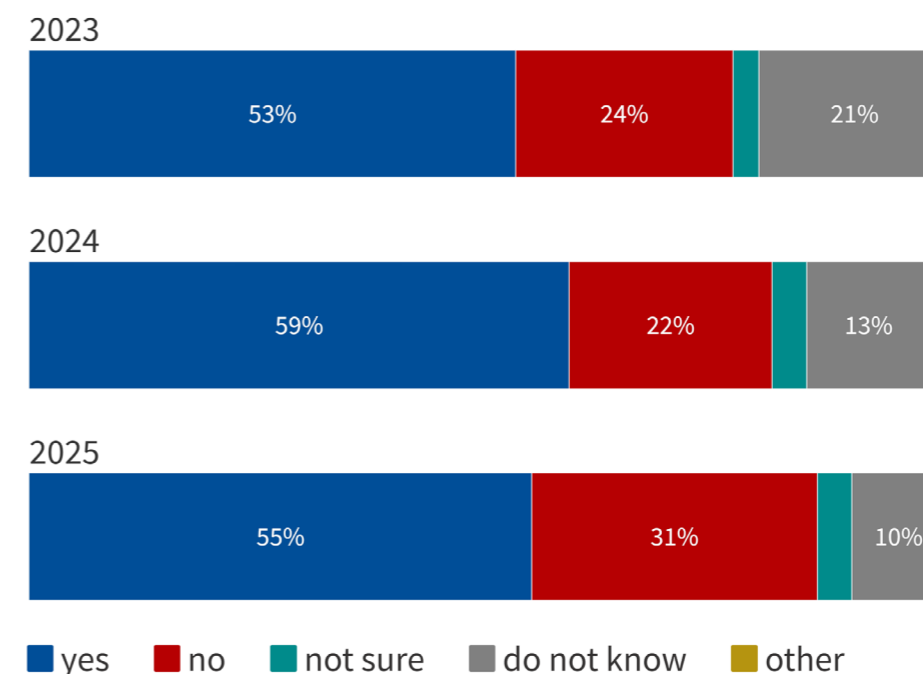
38. According to data obtained through the OVD-Info human rights media project.

We can analyze the content of court decisions using our database, which contains 187 rulings imposing sanctions in 2025, as well as one ruling terminating the proceedings due to the expiration of the statute of limitations (vs. 186 rulings imposing sanctions in 2024). This represents more than half of the total number of decisions made under this article, allowing us to draw certain conclusions about law enforcement practice as a whole.

Unexpectedly, the share of sanctions for offline dissemination rose from 6% in 2023 to 15% in 2024 and to 22% in 2025. This sharp increase in 2025 coincides with a 50% rise in clearly inappropriate charges under this article.

## Appropriateness of Prosecution under Article 20.29 CAO

As a percentage of recorded rulings imposing sanctions



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

Traditionally, many inappropriate cases under Article 20.29 CAO are related to Islamic materials – 33 out of 64; 12 of them involve the popular book *Fortress of the Muslim*.

As before, the use of materials related to Nazism – not for Nazi propaganda, but for statements of a clearly different intent – may result in a fine under Article 20.29 CAO. For example, one Moscow resident accused supporters of Ukraine of brainwashing Russians. He used a portrait of the chief Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels seven times for this purpose and was punished seven times. This episode also illustrates that portraits of Nazi and fascist figures are treated as prohibited materials. We know of at least five cases in which individuals faced charges for certain pagan symbols that were interpreted as Nazi or neo-Nazi symbols, clearly with no regard to the context in which they were displayed (usually alongside other pagan symbols). Moreover, Article 20.29 CAO was applied rather than Article 20.3, even though these symbols are not included on the Federal List of Extremist Materials (FLEM).

Several cases involving charges under Article 20.29 CAO were somewhat unusual. Two individuals were fined for publishing the “Dulles Plan,” a well-known forgery popular among Russian nationalists, but banned inappropriately, since the text itself contains no unlawful incitement. Two scholars in Crimea were fined for a book that had not been banned, in which respondents, interviewed by sociologists, mentioned prohibited organizations. Here, Article 20.29 CAO was applied in a manner inconsistent with its scope.

It is somewhat more difficult to assess the focus of this law enforcement practice, since the content of some prohibited materials is unknown, and in other cases, law enforcement authorities interpret it differently from what might be expected.

Summarizing the available data, we can continue the comparison started in our 2024 report across different types of materials that triggered sanctions under Article 20.29 CAO.<sup>39</sup>

Types of materials	Materials, percent		
	2023	2024	2025
Expressing ethnic xenophobia <sup>40</sup>	44	47	41
Religious <sup>41</sup>	13	24	41
Related to Ukraine	4	2	1
Other politically oppositional	17	6	3

The trends are very clear. In the application of Article 20.29 CAO, the share of cases related to countering xenophobia remained more or less stable in 2023–2025; videos depicting scenes of violence, music videos, and audio recordings of far-right groups and similar materials continued to dominate with 52 court decisions last year. The share of law enforcement related to religion grew almost exponentially and, as noted, largely due to Islamic materials. Conversely, the percentage of charges for oppositional political statements, including the issue of the armed conflict with Ukraine, declined just as rapidly and has now become barely noticeable. Evidently, other legal provisions are used to punish such statements.

## Aggregate Data on Sanctions under Criminal Code Articles for Public Speech

In 2025, we recorded a total of 699 court decisions against 731 individuals whose statements were classified under various criminal articles (703 faced court-imposed sanctions). In 2024, we only knew of 500 decisions against 531 defendants, and in 2023, of 388 decisions against 426 individuals. Please note that our calculations in this section exclude

39. M. Kravchenko and N. Yudina. Sanctions for Administrative Offenses Related to Extremism in 2023–2024.

40. This category includes any works by authors of a nationalist or (neo-)Nazi orientation, except for Ukrainian ones, which are placed in a separate category.

41. This category also formally includes materials whose creators or distributors may not have regarded them as religious: songs by the 1990s Chechen singer-songwriter Timur Mutsuraev, the slogan “Orthodoxy or Death,” neo-pagan symbols, and so on.

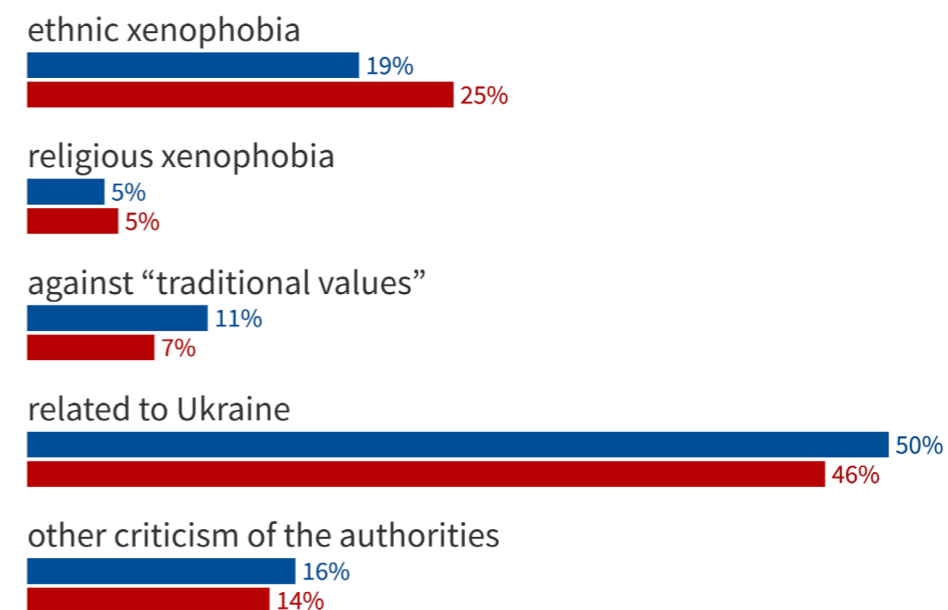
individuals sentenced under Article 282<sup>4</sup> CC for demonstrating AUE symbols and under Article 205<sup>2</sup> for “Columbine” propaganda.

In other words, in 2024, we recorded 25% more individuals facing trial for their statements than the year before, and in 2025, we observed a further 38% increase. According to official data, however (counting only the defendants sentenced under these articles as their primary charge), the increase was 44% in 2024 and, according to our conservative estimate, 26% in 2025. We conclude that our awareness of such cases increased in 2025.

Let us consider the distribution of the court decisions known to us for 2024 and 2025 by category.<sup>42</sup> As in the previous year, Ukraine remained the most common theme of statements leading to criminal charges in 2025. However, according to our data, the share of defendants brought to trial for such statements declined slightly. At the same time, the proportion of convictions for propaganda of ethnic xenophobia increased noticeably.

## Criminal Prosecution for Public Speech in 2024 and 2025, by Category

As a percentage of the total number of recorded defendants



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026  
Includes all defendants known to SOVA Research Center whose cases received first-instance court decisions. An individual could be assigned to more than one category.

The table below shows what types of sanctions were imposed in 2025 on those convicted, depending on the categories of their statements (it should be recalled that in some cases we assigned a single conviction to more than one category).

42. Again, we excluded the cases involving the display of AUE symbols.

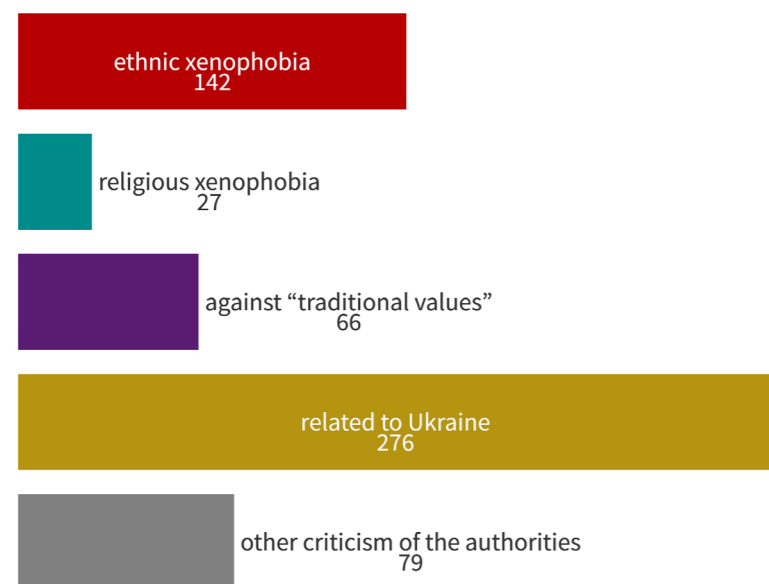
Statement categories	Imprisonment	Suspended sentences	Compulsory labor	Corrective labor	Community service	Fine
Ethnic xenophobia	74	53	18	9	9	9
Anti-government	56	18	8	2	3	11
Pro-Ukrainian	225	29	10	0	1	44
Against "traditional values"	16	13	2	1	11	4
Religion	28	4	0	0	1	5

This data indicates that approximately 41% of known defendants convicted for ethnic xenophobia were sentenced to imprisonment. Authors of pro-Ukrainian statements faced imprisonment in 69% of the verdicts. Imprisonment was imposed on 55% of defendants convicted for other statements directed against the authorities and 32% of defendants whose speech was deemed to attack "traditional values." The highest percentage of prison sentences, nearly 74%, was observed among the relatively small number of defendants convicted for statements related to religion. This differs very slightly (only by 2–4%) from the pattern observed in 2024.

The 644 suspects in newly initiated cases concerning public statements are distributed across categories approximately as follows.

### Criminal Prosecution for Public Speech in 2025

Suspects in newly initiated cases



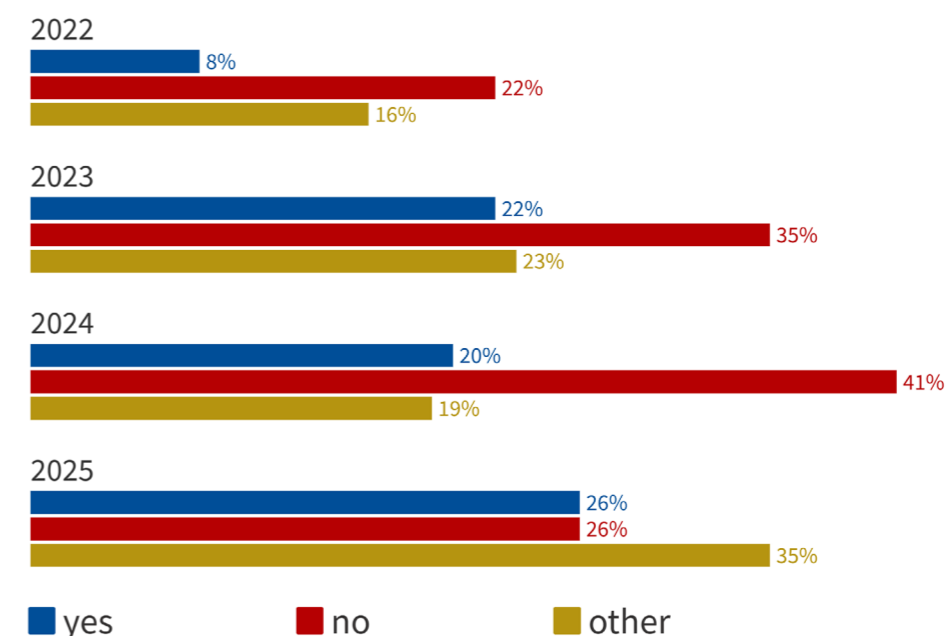
Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026  
Includes all suspects and accused in criminal cases known to SOVA Research Center. An individual could be assigned to more than one category.

Comparing the relative percentages across the categories in newly initiated cases with those in already issued convictions, we see a gradual decline in cases involving speech related to Ukraine and critical of the authorities. Other categories do not exhibit a clear trend. It should be reiterated, however, that these calculations do not include cases involving the display of AUE symbols.

As reflected in the chart below, the appropriateness of the verdicts varies widely. It is worth noting that comparisons with 2022 data should be treated with caution. First, for several reasons, we classified appropriateness as "do not know" more frequently in 2022. Second, the "special military operation effect" had already influenced the initiation of new cases but had not yet significantly affected verdicts back then. However, we then observe that the share of clearly inappropriate decisions increased in 2024 at the expense of the "other" category, which includes convictions based on statements unrelated to xenophobia but for which state prosecution could be justified. In 2025, by contrast, the percentage of inappropriate convictions declined significantly because a greater percentage of cases were classified as "other" or as directly related to xenophobia. However, given the overall increase in the number of speech-related verdicts, the absolute number of inappropriate convictions known to us decreased only slightly, by 11%. Between 2024 and 2025, the number of cases in the 'appropriate' and 'other' categories increased by 154% and 83%, respectively.

### Appropriateness of Criminal Prosecution for Public Speech

As a percentage of the total number of recorded defendants

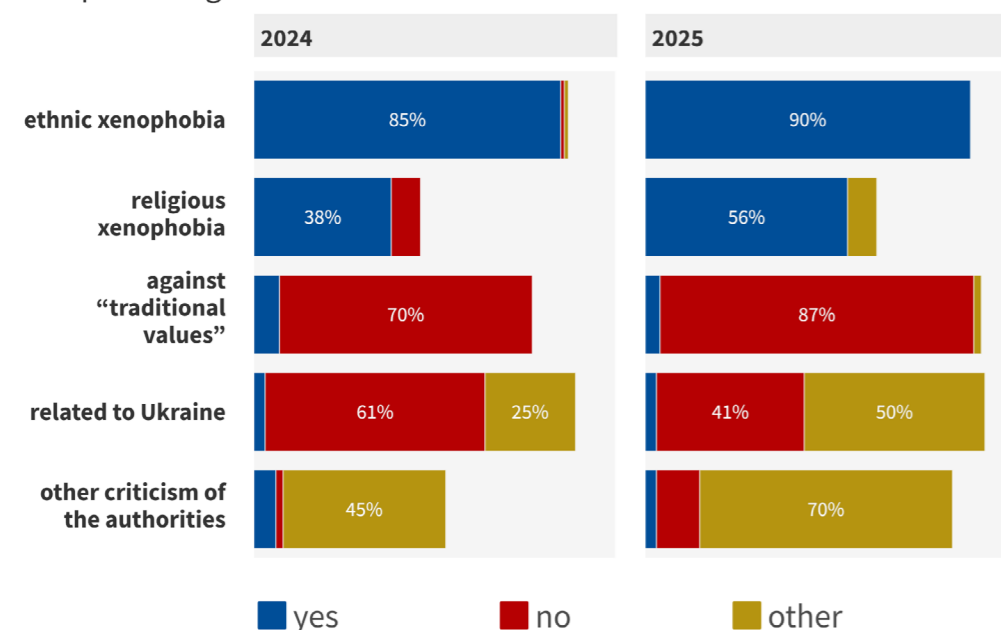


Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026  
All defendants known to SOVA Center, whose cases received first-instance court decisions, were included. Different actions by the same defendant could be assessed differently.

Let us examine how the appropriateness of sanctions changed across statement categories.

## Criminal Prosecution for Public Speech in 2024 and 2025, by Categories and Appropriateness

As a percentage of the total number of recorded defendants



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026  
All defendants known to SOVA Center, whose cases received first-instance court decisions, were included. Each individual could be assigned to multiple categories simultaneously.

The most significant change is the doubling of the percentage of "other" convictions for statements related to Ukraine, driven by a decline in the percentage of inappropriate convictions. The share of "other" decisions issued for criticism of the authorities has also increased; however, in this case, inappropriate convictions rose dramatically as well.

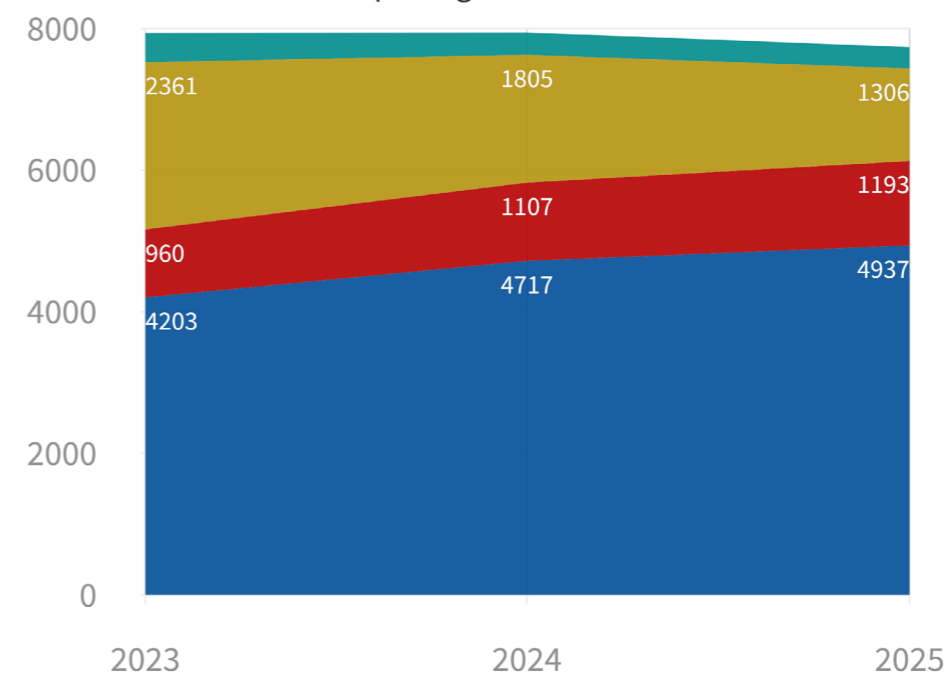
## Aggregate Data on Prosecution under CAO Articles Related to Public Speech

Although we did not monitor all politicized provisions of the CAO, we are able to present aggregate data on them. The chart below shows the number of decisions imposing administrative sanctions under the four most frequently applied provisions.<sup>43</sup>

43. That is, it does not include rulings under Article 5.26 Part 2, Articles 13.48, 20.3.2, 20.3.4, as well as Parts 3 to 5 of Article 20.1 CAO. The number of rulings for 2025 is approximate – based on data obtained through the OVD-Info human rights media project.

## Application of Articles 20.3, 20.3.1, 20.3.3, and 20.29 CAO

Number of decisions imposing sanctions



Sources: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation; OVD-Info, 2026  
Data for 2025 is projected.

It appears that the long-term growth in the number of individuals punished under politicized articles of the CAO not only slowed in 2024 but declined somewhat in 2025. Amid a rapid increase in criminal prosecutions, the previously large gap between these two forms of law enforcement has narrowed slightly.

## Restrictions on Organized Activity

From its emergence in 2002, anti-extremism legislation has been largely focused on prosecuting organized activity. Since then, the provisions regulating such prosecution have multiplied and become significantly more stringent. Three types of associations have emerged, participation in which is itself criminalized: terrorist, extremist, and undesirable organizations (listed in descending order of perceived threat).<sup>44</sup> Each designation is ap-

44. By definition, "undesirable organizations" exist outside Russia. They receive this designation without a judicial procedure, unlike the two other categories. However, cooperation with these organizations within Russia is punishable as well. Organizations can also be designated as "foreign agents," but then participation is not punishable in and of itself, although it entails a number of restrictions and obligations, as well as sanctions for non-compliance.

plied to associations for certain forms of activity deemed anti-constitutional and threatening to security.

In this section, we discuss criminal sanctions for participation in associations already designated as terrorist or extremist (we provide only general figures for “undesirable organizations”), and then the associations newly designated as terrorist or extremist.

We analyze the following Criminal Code articles:

- Article 282<sup>1</sup> (involvement in the activities of an extremist community);
- Article 282<sup>2</sup> (involvement in the activities of an extremist organization);
- Article 282<sup>3</sup> (financing of extremist activities);<sup>45</sup>
- Article 205<sup>4</sup> (involvement in the activities of a terrorist community, only for far-right groups);
- Article 205<sup>5</sup> (involvement in the activities of a terrorist organization).<sup>46</sup>

It should also be noted that SOVA Center does not include in its monitoring the cases related to involvement in Islamist jihadist organizations,<sup>47</sup> as well as Muslim and other religious organizations and groups, if we do not have sufficient information about their activities.<sup>48</sup> As a result, we are unable to analyze many parameters of criminal sanctions for participation in associations based on our data, as we did for sanctions for public speech.

We do not aim to describe or even mention all cases. Instead, the analysis organizes the data by the categories outlined in the introduction and by the political types of organizations. However, for a number of defendants, even their alleged organizational affiliation is unknown.

45. We do not systematically track facilitating terrorist activity, including its financing. Still, such charges (usually under Article 205<sup>1</sup> Part 1.1 CC) may appear in cases that were included in our monitoring for other reasons.

46. For Articles 205<sup>4</sup> and 205<sup>5</sup> CC, imprisonment is the only sanction provided, so they will not be specified further.

47. This limitation in the scope of monitoring is attributable primarily to insufficient information on both the cases and the activities of these groups.

48. This includes, among others, scattered groups of adherents of ‘pure Islam,’ whom the authorities prosecute as members of the extremist organization At-Takfir wal-Hijra, although, to our knowledge, no such organization currently exists in Russia (and its past existence is debatable). In 2025, we recorded 17 individuals convicted of participation in it; at least four others were arrested on the same charges and remain under investigation.

## Associations of Russian Nationalists and Neo-Nazis

In 2025, 42 individuals were convicted for participation in the activities of groups of Russian ethnic nationalists, some of which could be described as neo-Nazi. Additionally, one female student was referred for compulsory psychiatric treatment. We consider all of these court decisions appropriate. Some of the groups were prosecuted as extremist, others as terrorist. Our database includes 25 such convicted individuals for 2024.

We know of two individuals sentenced to imprisonment under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC for participation in banned **extremist** organizations that can, to varying degrees, be considered nationalist (no such convictions were reported in 2024). These are two members of the All-People’s Union for the Revival of Russia (*Obshchenarodny Soyuz Vozrozhdeniya Rossii*, OSVR) led by Svetlana Peunova (Lada-Rus). They were convicted for continuing the activities of the banned *Volya* party, since the authorities reasonably view the OSVR as its continuation. The OSVR is also known for its anti-war stance.

In 2025, another 10 Russian nationalists became suspects under the same article, including four supporters of Lada-Rus and five members of *T.O.Y.S.*, a Samara-based football ultras group, which was banned in 2017.

Nationalist groups face charges under Article 282<sup>1</sup> CC much more frequently. In 2025, we recorded 23 convicted individuals (22 the previous year). These are usually members of small local groups, and sometimes, even the names of those groups remain unknown. An example of such a group is the Omsk Slavic Association, which was designated an extremist organization in May, while its members faced criminal charges. The degree of involvement in actual violence varied among the groups, but almost all of them were involved in violence to some extent. One group, for example, was preparing an explosion in the building of the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia (RUDN) in Moscow. The most notable case was likely the conviction of the administrators of the Telegram channel Natsdem, which in 2022–2024 combined anti-war and anti-migrant propaganda: the two principal administrators, known as Keshu and Pomorsky, received custodial sentences, while two others received suspended sentences. In total, at least 12 individuals were sentenced to incarceration under this article.

We know of two cases against eight individuals initiated in 2025, which are not at all similar: the Novosibirsk group has been charged with serious violent crimes, while the Volgograd group has been charged mainly with advocating such acts. There is also a case with an unknown number of suspects initiated in connection with the participation of the RDK column in an opposition rally in Berlin (the case involves Ilya Yashin and Vladimir Kara-Murza, among others).

We are aware of seven court decisions against 12 individuals under Article 205<sup>5</sup> CC for participation in **terrorist** organizations (three individuals were sentenced under this article in 2024). These cases involve participants in the neo-Nazi networks NS/WP and Maniacs. Murder Cult (*Manyaki. Kult Ubiystv*, MKU). Both groups have faced sanctions for a long time, but their activity has not ceased. In all cases, the charges concerned public calls for violence or preparation for violent acts, and in some cases, also actual violent crimes. Article 205<sup>5</sup> CC provides for a mandatory sentence of imprisonment with no alternative, but one female member of NS/WP was referred for compulsory treatment.

We also know of cases against another 11 individuals initiated in 2024; six of them face charges of participating in the same two networks. This Criminal Code article also appears in the case of the RDK at the Berlin rally, mentioned above.

In contrast to the previous year, we also know of two group convictions under Article 205<sup>4</sup> CC. The first involved participants in the group that was preparing an explosion at RUDN. We do not know the details of the case or why four individuals were sentenced under Article 205<sup>4</sup> and three also under Article 282<sup>1</sup> CC. The second verdict concerns participants in *Belaya Mast* (White Color, or White Suit), a neo-Nazi group that supported imprisoned far-right offenders while glorifying their ‘feats’ and calling for further acts. Convicted individuals include Nikolai Korolev, serving a life sentence for organizing a bombing at the Cherkizovsky market in Moscow, and his wife. There had been a number of convictions in the *Belaya Mast* case already, and new cases continue to be investigated. To a large extent, this major court case is directed against neo-Nazis of the 2000s and 2010s who have continued their activities.<sup>49</sup>

We are aware of only one new case under Article 205<sup>4</sup> CC, against two far-right individuals in Vladimir who were planning arson attacks on food establishments during periods when migrants are present in large numbers.

## “Citizens of the USSR”

The activities of nine organizations of “citizens of the USSR”<sup>50</sup> have already been banned, and their participants have long been facing sanctions. “Citizens of the USSR” continue to disseminate various conspiracy theories, including xenophobic ones, and, most importantly, call on citizens, officials, and even law enforcement personnel not to obey the authorities of the Russian Federation, which they do not recognize as a state.

We know of nine verdicts against 12 activists issued under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC; one additional individual was referred for compulsory psychiatric treatment. This is significantly fewer than the previous year (36 convicted individuals), but similar to 2023 (13). Some of those convicted in 2025 were found by courts to be affiliated with the large community of “citizens of the USSR” led by Sergei Taraskin and banned back in 2019. Others were followers of an association banned in 2022 with its center in Novokuibyshevsk of the Samara Region. The sentence for one defendant also included Article 282<sup>3</sup> CC for financing an extremist organization.

In Karachay-Cherkessia, a group of nine “citizens of the USSR” was convicted as an independent extremist community under Article 282<sup>1</sup> CC.

49. The alleged founder of *Belaya Mast*, Artyom Tsepp, was first sentenced in 2014. The alleged administrator of the group’s Telegram channel, Mark Filippov, is ‘famous’ after the incident, when, during a 2010 search, the head and hands of an associate he had killed were found in his refrigerator. Another figure associated with this group, David Bashelutskov, who was convicted in 2010 for a series of murders and bombings and released after serving his sentence, drowned in a pond shortly before arrests in this case began.

50. For more on “citizens of the USSR,” see: Mikhail Akhmetiev. *Grazhdane bez SSSR. Soobshchestva «sovetskikh grazhdan» v sovremennoy Rossii* [Citizens without the USSR. Communities of “Soviet citizens” in modern Russia], Moscow: SOVA Center, 2022 (in Russian).

Nine of those convicted were sentenced to actual imprisonment, 10 to suspended sentences, and two to other forms of punishment. One additional individual was referred for compulsory treatment.

It is worth noting that “citizens of the USSR” also faced charges under other articles, primarily those on public statements (Articles 280, 280<sup>3</sup>, 282, 282<sup>4</sup>, 354<sup>1</sup> CC); in such cases, we can identify seven individuals who were inappropriately convicted. We identified no inappropriate convictions under Articles 282<sup>1</sup>, 282<sup>2</sup>, and 282<sup>3</sup> CC.

We know of cases against 19 “citizens of the USSR” initiated in 2025 for participation in banned organizations.<sup>51</sup> So far, we have not been able to identify clearly inappropriate charges among them.

## Banned Ukrainian Organizations

As in the previous year, we recorded many sentences and new cases for cooperation with organizations operating in Ukraine that are banned in Russia.<sup>52</sup> The charges were based on attempts to travel to Ukraine and join such organizations or to cooperate with them by carrying out acts of sabotage or propaganda activities on Russian territory. We do not consider such charges inappropriate, although in some cases, we may have doubts about their factual basis.

The overwhelming majority of convictions, as well as of new cases initiated last year, concern cooperation with the Russian Volunteer Corps (*Russkiy dobrovolcheskiy korpus*, RDK), recognized as a terrorist organization, or, somewhat more frequently, with the Freedom of Russia Legion (*Legion “Svoboda Rossii,”* LSR). We cannot determine with certainty to what extent these cases involved genuine interaction with a ‘handler’ from Ukraine and to what extent they were FSB operations aimed at identifying individuals willing to engage in such interaction. Nor can we say with certainty to what extent the defendants in known cases were motivated by ideological considerations, as opposed to financial or other motives. Most likely, as in the previous year, the latter significantly outnumbered the former. In some cases, however, it is known that defendants held far-right views, which may have contributed to their interaction with the RDK or with the also banned Azov or the Right Sector.

We are aware of 55 individuals convicted for their ties to these organizations (vs. 30 in 2024). They faced charges under Article 205<sup>5</sup> Part 2 CC (and in two cases, for some reason, also under Article 205<sup>4</sup>; in one case, Article 208 on illegal armed formations was added, and, in another case, Article 275<sup>1</sup> on confidential cooperation with a foreign organization). In 30 cases, the judgments also included Article 275 CC (high treason), as well as other articles, depending on the circumstances.

One individual was sentenced under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC for cooperation with the Right Sector back when it was still listed only as an extremist, not a terrorist, organization.

51. The cases initiated last year, mentioned here and below, include several for which the verdicts were also issued in 2025; however, they are not included in our calculations.

52. Many known cases involved charges of treason and confidential cooperation with Ukrainian state bodies, but we do not monitor such cases.

Two sentences were issued for actions in favor of Ukraine that were essentially similar to the above cases but unrelated to cooperation with Ukrainian organizations. These are the convictions against five members of a far-right group in the Moscow Region, sentenced under several articles, including Article 205<sup>4</sup> CC, and against one member of the Artpodgotovka movement (see below), also sentenced under several articles, including Article 205<sup>5</sup> Part 2 CC. All six discussed preparations for acts of sabotage. The terrorist group members from the Moscow Region had this conversation with an agent who had infiltrated the group, and one member even managed to carry out one such act.

Similar cases under Criminal Code articles on participation in organized activity in connection with Ukraine were initiated in 2025 against at least 39 individuals. Article 205<sup>5</sup> appears in 36 of these cases, Article 282<sup>2</sup> in four, Article 205<sup>1</sup> in five, and Articles 282<sup>1</sup> and 282<sup>3</sup> each appear once.

Among those charged in 2025, the majority – at least 39 individuals – are allegedly connected with the RDK, LSR, or, in some cases, Azov.

Groups of activists speaking on behalf of various ethnic minorities and linked – or alleged by investigators to be linked – to the Free Nations of PostRussia Forum (recognized as a terrorist organization) form a separate category. This separatist Forum is indeed connected to Ukraine and includes combat units fighting on its side, so it can be described as a pro-Ukrainian organization. However, those prosecuted in connection with it are not necessarily genuinely affiliated with the Forum, since the officially published list of its “structural subdivisions” does not accurately reflect the coalition’s actual structure and composition.<sup>53</sup>

In April, two elderly activists of the Erzya national movement received suspended sentences under Article 282<sup>1</sup> Part 2 CC in Mordovia. Although they were not charged under Article 205<sup>5</sup>, the case narrative was linked to other activists who were part of the Forum.

We know of five new individuals charged in 2025 under Article 205<sup>5</sup> of the Criminal Code in connection with the Forum or organizations that are indeed part of it, though the actual number is likely higher. Among them are a young man who administered the Telegram channel *Free Lapland*, émigré activist Aigul Gimranova-Lyon of the Committee of the Bashkir National Movement Abroad, and Kalmyk wrestler and businessman Eduard Baltykov. The charges against activists from the Aborigin Forum – a long-standing coalition of ethnic minority activists that has not advocated separatism – are particularly concerning.

## Banned Opposition Organizations

Sanctions against supporters of Alexei Navalny are increasingly taking the form of prosecution for financing his banned structures, primarily the Anti-Corruption Foundation

53. Free Nations of PostRussia Forum and Its Subdivisions Added to the List of Terrorist Organizations, SOVA Center. January 13, 2025 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2025/01/d50882/>, in Russian).

(FBK).<sup>54</sup> Since we consider the designation of these organizations as extremist to be inappropriate, we also regard sanctions for participating in or financing them as unjustified.

Due to a partial leak of donor data, many individuals have become potential defendants, and the number of cases under Article 282<sup>3</sup> of the Criminal Code for donations to the FBK has already surpassed all other cases against FBK activists. In 2025 alone, we have confirmed 86 convictions for donations to Navalny’s organizations, with a further eight almost certainly involving the same charges (compared with 20 in 2024 and four in 2023).

Of these 94 individuals, 12 were sentenced to imprisonment without additional charges in the judgment. Most of the others received substantial fines, while 14 were given suspended prison sentences.

In 2025, we are aware of 119 cases evidently initiated for financing the FBK (vs. 33 in 2024), although some of these have already resulted in convictions.

Meanwhile, prosecution of activists for actual participation in Navalny’s structures has also continued. In 2025, we knew of nine individuals sentenced under Article 282<sup>1</sup> CC (five in 2024) for participation in an alleged extremist community, which, according to the law enforcement, Navalny created no later than 2014. This group includes three of Navalny’s lawyers and the current head of the FBK, Leonid Volkov.<sup>55</sup>

Four individuals were convicted for involvement in Navalny’s structures under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC.

We know of fewer such new cases in 2025: none under Article 282<sup>1</sup> and, apparently, three under Article 282<sup>2</sup>.

Prosecution of Vyacheslav Maltsev’s *Artpodgotovka* movement<sup>56</sup> has continued. The movement itself was designated as extremist, but a small group of its participants, led by Maltsev in exile, was convicted as a terrorist community and thus added to the list of terrorist organizations. Therefore, Artpodgotovka participants and donors could, in principle, be prosecuted under both extremist (Articles 282<sup>2</sup> and 282<sup>3</sup>, respectively) and terrorist (Articles 205<sup>5</sup> and 205<sup>1</sup>) provisions of the CC; evidently, depending on whether the alleged actions took place before or after the group was designated as terrorist, so that some cases include charges of both types.

In 2025, eight individuals were convicted: five were charged under Article 205<sup>5</sup>, four under Article 205.1 Part 1.1, two under Article 282<sup>2</sup>, and one under Article 282<sup>3</sup> CC. All eight were sentenced to imprisonment.

We know of 11 individuals who were newly charged in connection with Artpodgotovka movement; these cases were brought under various combinations of the same four articles of the CC.<sup>57</sup>

In October, a case was initiated against 23 members of the émigré Anti-War Committee of Russia (*Antivoyenny Komitet Rossii*, AKR), which includes many well-known public and

54. The American legal entity of the FBK was designated as a terrorist organization in late 2025 (see below), but this change has not yet been reflected in law enforcement practice.

55. He was sentenced under multiple articles CC at once.

56. We do not currently consider Artpodgotovka a nationalist organization, although initially the movement could have been classified as such.

57. Another activist was instead charged with propaganda of violence under Article 280 CC.

political figures of the Russian diaspora, on charges of creating a terrorist community and attempting to overthrow the government. The details of the charges are not entirely clear, but it evidently includes support for Ukraine in the armed conflict. For almost all of the defendants, this is not their first case. For example, Garry Kasparov had previously been charged under Article 205<sup>4</sup> CC as a leader of the Free Russia Forum, which was added to the list of terrorist organizations in March 2025. Within Russia, no individuals have yet been formally charged or named as suspects in the AKR case.

Other opposition organizations and groups encountered this type of anti-extremism enforcement less frequently in the past year. We are aware of one conviction almost certainly related to the inappropriately banned *Vesna* (Spring) movement, and one new case under Article 282<sup>2</sup> against a coordinator of this movement, who had left the country. Another known case initiated in 2025 was opened against a coordinator of the Omsk Civic Association (OGO, also inappropriately banned), who had also left the country. In November, the former head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ingushetia, a leader of the Ingush opposition (with seven other leaders already convicted in 2021), was sentenced to nine years of imprisonment.<sup>58</sup> In May, an anarcho-communist in Ufa was sentenced under Article 282<sup>1</sup> CC and several other articles, including for arson attacks on administrative buildings committed in 2011.

In December, after a two-year trial, the court issued sentences to Marxist circle participants in Ufa. Unlike all the organizations mentioned above, this group was not critical of the armed conflict with Ukraine – on the contrary, it included veterans of the military campaign in Donbas. The investigation classified discussions of plans for a socialist revolution under Article 278 CC as preparation for the overthrow of the constitutional order. In addition, the participants were charged with involvement in a terrorist community, propaganda of terrorism, and offenses related to the illegal circulation of weapons. As a result, five members of the circle were sentenced to imprisonment for terms ranging from 16 to 22 years.

## Banned Religious Organizations

### Jehovah's Witnesses

In 2025, we know of 66 convictions against 124 Jehovah's Witnesses, prosecuted for continuing the activities of their organizations, which we consider inappropriately banned, and, in some cases, also for financing them. That is, the situation has remained virtually unchanged from the previous year, when 126 individuals were convicted, and one was acquitted. However, the charge of financing banned organizations appeared only in four cases this time (vs. 25 in 2024). One additional case was terminated due to the defendant's death.

58. Former Head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ingushetia Pogorov Sentenced to Nine Years of Imprisonment, *SOVA Center*. November 20, 2025 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2025/11/d52632/>, in Russian)

38 individuals received custodial sentences (29 of them with terms of five years or more), 49 received suspended sentences, and another 36 were fined.

We are aware of 70 individuals against whom cases were initiated in 2025 – more than in the previous year (49), but still significantly fewer than in 2023 (107).

### Muslim Organizations That Face Inappropriate Sanctions

This section discusses three organizations: Nurcular (this designation is used to ban communities of followers of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi),<sup>59</sup> Tablighi Jamaat,<sup>60</sup> and the radical Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami. The first two are banned as extremist organizations, and the last one as a terrorist organization.<sup>61</sup>

No one was convicted for participation in Nurcular in 2025 (two individuals were convicted in 2024), and we are not aware of any new cases.

As for Tablighi Jamaat, the sentence of Penza preacher Fawzi Bikmayev, originally convicted in 2021, was once again reviewed, with his suspended sentence replaced by a custodial one. The case against a five-person group, initiated in December 2024 in Rostov Region,<sup>62</sup> had not reached a verdict by the end of 2025.

On the other hand, 12 individuals were convicted for membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir (vs. seven in 2024). One was a Central Asian national already serving a sentence since 2014 on a similar charge and sentenced again, while in custody. The remaining individuals belonged to two interconnected Crimean Tatar groups from Dzhankoi. Members of both groups were also charged with preparing to overthrow the constitutional order. This charge is often brought in Hizb ut-Tahrir cases solely on the grounds that the party's doctrine envi-

59. In 2008, the Supreme Court recognized the followers of the moderate Turkish theologian Said Nursi, collectively referred to as Nurcular, as an extremist organization. We view the ban on Nursi's books and on the association of his followers as inappropriate, and the European Court of Human Rights agreed with this position in 2018.

60. The pietist Muslim movement Tablighi Jamaat was banned in 2009, and we consider this ban inappropriate as well. For more on the persecution of Tablighi Jamaat followers, see: Ilyas Kurmanbek. Criminal Trials Concerning Tablighi Jamaat in Russia (2010-2025), *Memorial, Support for Political Prisoners*. February 6, 2026 (in Russian).

61. The European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly ruled that neither the doctrine nor the practice of Hizb ut-Tahrir indicate that the party is terrorist in the strict sense of the term. However, the ban against it could be justified, since it advocates the overthrow of a number of existing political systems in order to establish a dictatorship based on Sharia. Furthermore, Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology includes antisemitism and the demand for the elimination of the State of Israel, as well as a categorical rejection of democracy and human rights. The use of violence against countries that the party considers aggressors against the "lands of Islam" is viewed as legitimate.

Under Russian legislation (among others), calls for the violent overthrow of a government (not necessarily Russian) can be classified as terrorist, providing formal grounds to designate Hizb ut-Tahrir as terrorist. However, it is important to note that Hizb ut-Tahrir does not call for the overthrow of governments outside of the "lands of Islam," including in Russia. On this basis, and taking into account the severity of sanctions under Article 205<sup>5</sup> CC, we consider the prosecution of organization's followers under this article solely for the fact of their membership clearly excessive. However, this does not apply to prosecution for other unlawful acts.

62. Our previous report mistakenly stated that there were four defendants.

sions, in the long term, replacing constitutional systems with Sharia rule. The Crimean defendants were sentenced to terms ranging from 13 to 17 years.

At least 11 individuals were arrested in 2025 in connection with newly opened cases. These include two groups in Crimea (five men and four women) and two foreign nationals in Moscow. In addition, a group of eight individuals was arrested in Bashkortostan; law enforcement authorities may also have considered them a cell of this party. The wife of one already convicted Hizb ut-Tahrir member in Kazan was also arrested on unreported grounds.

### Other Religious Organizations

At least 11 adherents of the *Allya-Ayat*<sup>63</sup> were sentenced in 2025 (vs. none in 2024). Five women in the Novosibirsk and Kemerovo Regions received suspended sentences under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC. A group of four individuals was convicted in Rostov-on-Don: the group's leader was sentenced under Article 282<sup>1</sup> CC, and the participants under Article 282<sup>2</sup>; all of them received suspended sentences. One additional participant died in pre-trial detention during the investigation. The sixth participant in the same group had been convicted separately earlier and also received a suspended sentence.

Additionally, one *Allya-Ayat* follower was convicted not under an extremism-related article, but under Article 239 Part 1 CC (establishing a religious or public association whose activities involve violence against citizens or otherwise harm their health, as well as leadership of such an association). We are not aware of any newly initiated cases.

The leader and one participant of the Altai neo-pagan movement *Ak Tyan*<sup>64</sup> also faced sanctions in 2025. Both were sentenced under Articles 282<sup>2</sup> and 282<sup>3</sup> CC and received suspended sentences with bans on engaging in religious activities for several years.

## Associations Encroaching on “Traditional Values”

In 2025, criminal sanctions continued for alleged participation in the non-existent but banned-as-extremist “international LGBT movement.” We are aware of six individuals sentenced under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC: a queer activist (convicted in absentia), one business owner whose activities were oriented toward gay clientele (who died under investigation), two individuals simultaneously charged with the dissemination of pornography and sexual coercion related to homosexuality, one individual convicted of sexual violence against a minor (for certain actions in a penal colony interpreted as creating a “cell” of the “LGBT movement”) and, finally, one individual who had simply publicly expressed his homosexual preferences.

63. This para-religious teaching is focused on highly unconventional methods of healing, but it does not incite hatred and does not practice violence. Therefore, we consider the designation of its followers as extremist inappropriate.

64. The ban against *Ak Tyan* (also known as the *Karokol Initiative Group*) was justified on the grounds that the movement's participants not only advocated for the restoration of Altai paganism, but also conducted aggressive propaganda against representatives of other religions, such as Buddhists, and asserted the ethnic superiority of Altaians over other peoples.

We are aware of 19 individuals who faced new charges in 2025 under this article. The range of interpretations of participation in the “LGBT movement” is no less broad here. Among those charged are three employees of the *Popcorn Books and Individuum* publishing houses in the case that involved the confiscation of thousands of books; five employees of a massage parlor chain (this case, with 17 charged in total, also includes allegations of organizing prostitution); and three organizers of parties. At least three of those charged may be described specifically as LGBT activists. Cases initiated in 2024, primarily against owners and employees of gay clubs, are also continuing.

After the equally nonexistent “International Satanism movement” was added to the list of extremist organizations in September, we can expect similar criminal cases for participation in it. However, such cases had not yet appeared in 2025.

## Other Banned Associations: AUE and Columbine

The state continues to actively use anti-extremism legislation against ordinary criminal activity, relying on the designation of the AUE phenomenon as an extremist organization.<sup>65</sup> In 2025, we learned of 78 individuals sentenced under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC and 18 under Article 282<sup>3</sup> CC, for a total of 80 (100 the previous year). In only one case was the defendant sentenced to compulsory labor; in all other cases, courts imposed custodial sentences ranging from two and a half to 22 years. It is worth noting, however, that many of those convicted were already in a penal colony or pre-trial detention, and a significant number also faced other charges, such as occupying a leading position in the criminal hierarchy (Article 210<sup>1</sup> CC), disrupting the operation of detention facilities (Article 321 CC), and so on.

Sanctions against another non-existent organization, banned as terrorist – the *Columbine movement*<sup>66</sup> – must also be noted. In fact, this designation refers to the school shooting subculture – adolescents (and, occasionally, somewhat older young people) associated with it romanticize and glorify school shooters. This subculture appears to overlap with broader misanthropic ideas that originated in neo-Nazi circles and are now most visibly represented in the *MKU* network (see above). The school-shooting fan community supports and, apparently, encourages the small number of individuals who actually intend to carry out armed attacks against schools, colleges, and similar institutions. Such incidents,

65. The romanticization of the criminal underworld and its exploitation, including for commercial purposes – associated with the notion of a so-called AUE movement (*Arestantskoe Ugolovnoe Yedinstvo* or *Prisoners Criminal Unity*) may and should be counteracted by law enforcement. However, it clearly does not exist as an organization. The specific “laws” of the criminal underworld, along with associated symbols and attributes, promotion of criminal activity and normalization of these “laws,” pose a social danger. Yet this set of ideas is not political in nature and does not, in and of itself, threaten the constitutional order. Therefore, in our view, anti-extremism legislation is not an appropriate instrument for countering AUE.

66. Despite the obvious public danger of school shootings, recognizing the entirety of their supporters as a terrorist organization is hard to justify. According to the definition provided by the law “On Countering Terrorism,” terrorism must be aimed at influencing the actions of authorities and intimidating society, whereas school shooters pursue entirely different goals.

unfortunately, occur with some regularity. As a result, this environment quite understandably attracts the attention of law enforcement.

The state prosecutes not only individuals who have actually carried out or planned such attacks, but also those who were merely active participants in the subculture. These adolescents exchange various materials, including genuinely dangerous ones – for example, instructions on making explosives. At the same time, however, they are prosecuted as participants in a terrorist organization, which carries extremely severe prison sentences.

In 2025, we know of three individuals sentenced under Article 205<sup>5</sup> Part 2 CC, aged between 16 and 19. One young woman received a suspended sentence, while two young men received custodial sentences, although one of them was also charged with preparing a terrorist act. Another 16-year-old girl was referred for compulsory treatment.

## Aggregate Data on Articles Concerning Involvement in Banned Associations

Using the conservative method, we have chosen for estimating the total number of individuals convicted in 2025, we see a very substantial increase in their number.<sup>67</sup>

We expect more than a twofold increase in sentences under Article 205<sup>4</sup> CC, which we track only minimally and therefore cannot analyze in detail. Under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC, the number of convictions could rise by 50%; however, the data presented above across different areas of law enforcement offers no clear explanation for this significant growth.

Conversely, the twofold increase in sentences under Article 282<sup>3</sup> CC continues the rapid growth that began a year earlier. Charges of financing extremist activity are being applied ever more broadly to a wide range of activities, primarily in connection with the FBK.

The number of verdicts under Article 205<sup>5</sup> CC is increasing, but this development merely represents a return to 2023 levels. The growing number of sentences for cooperation with Ukrainian organizations is offset by a decline in sentences for participation in other organizations – presumably the radical Islamist groups not included in our monitoring.

It is not possible to determine the exact total number of individuals sentenced under the articles discussed in this section, since a single verdict may combine these charges or include other, more or less serious offenses. A very rough estimate of the trend can be obtained by summing the number of individuals sentenced under these articles as the primary charge and, separately, those sentenced under them as both primary and additional charges and then averaging these totals. Applying our conservative methodology to estimate the full year 2025 yields more than 850 convicted individuals. For comparison, the figures were approximately 550 in 2024 and 2023, and around 400 in 2022. We reiterate that this is a rough estimate; nevertheless, it clearly indicates that overall prosecution for participation in banned associations increased sharply in 2025.

Monitoring data of SOVA Center provides information on court decisions against 419 individuals, excluding those convicted for participation in AUE and Columbine.

67. This will become clearer after the publication of the official data for 2025.

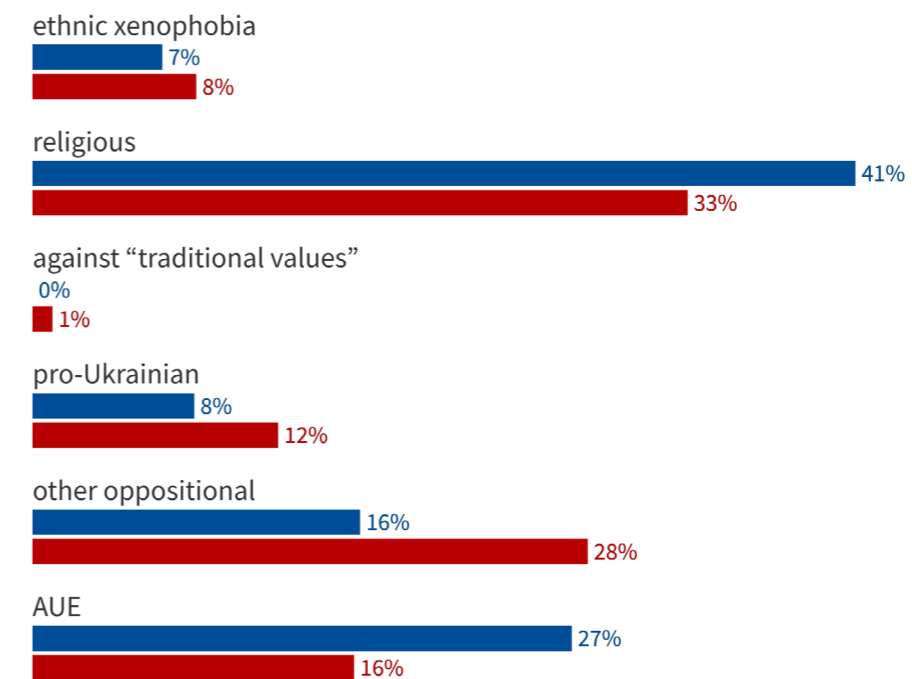
Let us first present the data we have on the defendants sentenced under the increasingly widely applied Article 282<sup>3</sup> CC on the financing of extremist activity.<sup>68</sup>

	2022	2023	2024	2025
FBK	1	4	14	94
Jehovah's Witnesses	19	21	25	4
AUE		7	23	18
"Citizens of the USSR"	1	4	0	1
Minor religious groups				5

Let us examine how the distribution of individual sentences for participation in organized activity has changed across categories (the categories in sentences may overlap).

## Criminal Prosecution for Organized Activity in 2024 and 2025, by Category

As a percentage of the total number of recorded defendants



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026  
Includes all defendants known to SOVA Research Center whose cases received first-instance court decisions. An individual could be assigned to more than one category.

68. Isolated verdicts for donations to certain organizations are not included in the table.

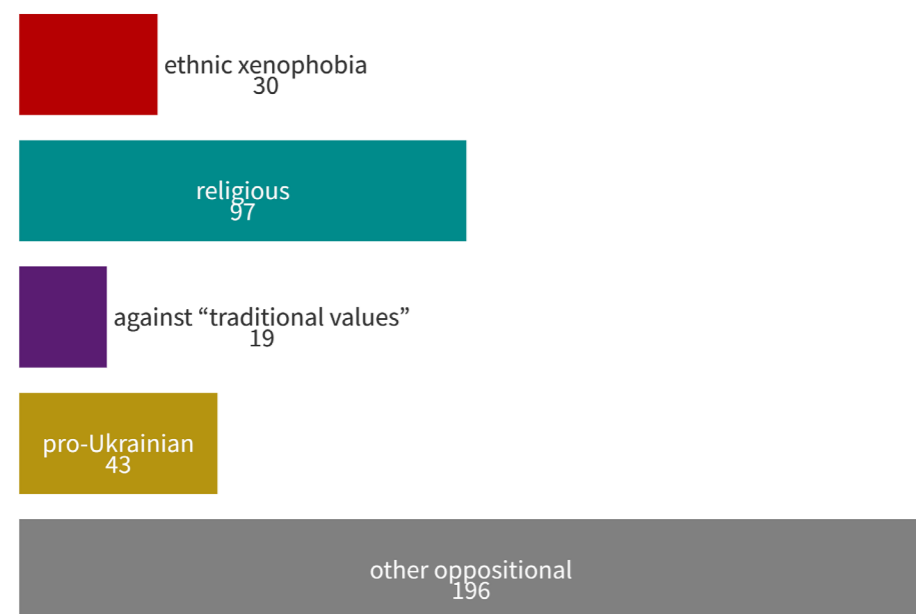
While the number of individuals convicted in connection with the religious associations we monitor has remained almost unchanged, their share has decreased noticeably. For AUE, both the number of known convicted individuals and their share have declined. However, we observe growth in other categories, and the number of cases within them has roughly doubled.

The increase is particularly pronounced in the “criticism of the authorities” category, driven by the large number of sentences for financing the FBK. The still relatively small number of sentences aimed at protecting “traditional values” consists of sanctions related to the “LGBT movement.”

We are now going to examine, by category, the 261 cases against 393 individuals that we currently know were initiated in 2025 for participation in organized activities. This does not include cases involving participation in AUE or Columbine.

### Criminal Prosecution for Organized Activity in 2025, by Category

Suspects in newly initiated cases



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026  
Includes all suspects and accused in criminal cases known to SOVA Center, excluding those charged with involvement in AUE or Columbine.

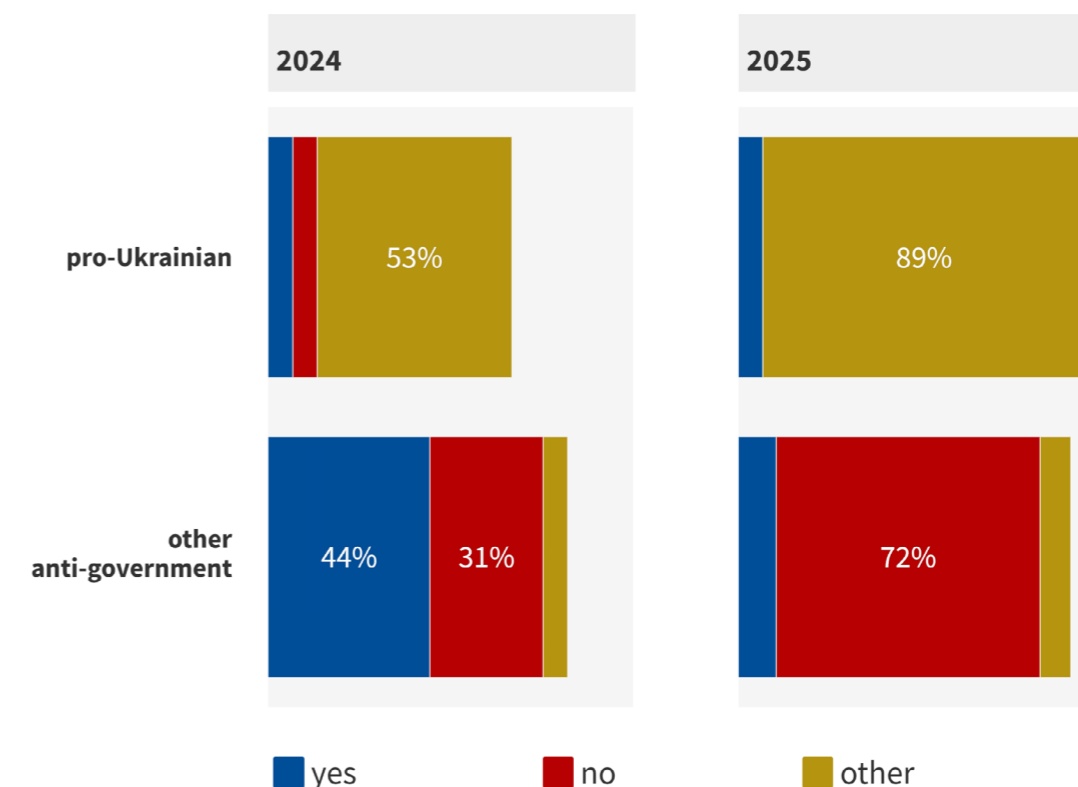
It is easy to see the continuation of the trends noted above.

Now, we shall review the distribution of the appropriateness of convictions by category. It is worth reminding that, with regard to religious organizations, we monitor almost exclusively inappropriate applications of the law; therefore, this category is omitted in the chart below. In addition, all sentences for organized activity in support of ethnic xenophobia were classified as “yes” (i.e., appropriate), and all convictions for involvement in AUE were

classified as “other.” Accordingly, we examine the shift in the appropriateness of convictions in two categories: cases related to Ukraine and cases involving other oppositional activity.

### Criminal Prosecution for Organized Activity, by Appropriateness

As a percentage of the total number of recorded defendants



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026  
All defendants known to SOVA Center, whose cases received first-instance court decisions, were included. A defendant could be charged under several parts of the article.

As we can see, in 2025, there were no verdicts for participation in pro-Ukrainian organizations that we consider entirely inappropriate. That said, there were only two such cases the year before, both involving clearly incorrect legal qualification of the defendants’ actions. The number of cases we consider questionable has also decreased significantly. As a result, nearly 90% of convictions in this category are classified as “other,” meaning that in these instances the state apparently had grounds for criminal prosecution. Here we observe the same trend as in the area of public speech related to the armed conflict – there has been a drastic increase not merely in anti-war expression, but in direct support for the opposing side in the conflict, often in the form of sabotage and similar actions. The state is predictably prosecuting such activity.

The distribution of appropriateness in cases involving participation in other opposition-related associations has been markedly affected by the wave of cases concerning the financing of the FBK, which we consider inappropriate. As a result, the share of cases related to countering xenophobia has declined sharply, although the absolute number of such convictions

has increased. Meanwhile, the share of cases we classify as “other” has also grown, with their number tripling (12 compared to 4), largely due to defendants associated with Artpodgotovka.

SOVA Center does not monitor prosecutions for cooperation with “undesirable organizations,” but such prosecutions also continued. Initial instances of such cooperation are punishable under Article 20.33 CAO, while repeated cooperation (within one year), leadership roles, or financing are prosecuted under Article 284<sup>1</sup> CC.

The Judicial Department does not publish statistics under Article 20.33, so we can rely only on data from the OVD-Info human rights media project, which tends to be nearly complete: first-instance courts imposed sanctions on 158 individuals in 2025 (vs. 201 the previous year). According to Supreme Court data, sentences against 14 individuals entered into force in the first half of the year under Article 284<sup>1</sup> CC (vs. six for the entire 2024); however, according to OVD-Info, courts of first instance issued sentences to a total of 41 individuals in 2025. Thus, this area of criminal law enforcement, unlike administrative enforcement, is accelerating sharply.

## Recognizing Organizations as Extremist and Terrorist

It should be recalled that Russian legislation provides for two statuses for associations designated as terrorist or extremist. The first – “community” – refers to those whose participation has been recognized by criminal process as a crime under Articles 205<sup>4</sup> or 282<sup>1</sup> CC. The second – “organization” – refers to associations banned by a separate court decision for activities deemed terrorist or extremist. Participation in such organizations, after their inclusion in the relevant lists, is punishable under Articles 205<sup>5</sup> or 282<sup>2</sup> CC, respectively. However, for some time now, recognizing an association as a terrorist community has entailed its inclusion on the list of terrorist organizations without additional judicial review. Since 2025, the same mechanism has been introduced for extremist communities.

Moreover, organizations already present on one list may sometimes be deemed more dangerous than previously thought and added to another list. They are not removed from the original list, but in practice, liability for participation in their activities is thereafter assessed under the more severe designation. For example, in 2025, the Ukrainian Right Sector was designated not only as extremist but also as terrorist, but there are currently few cases involving participation in the Right Sector. The new religious movement AllatRa (also of Ukrainian origin) was designated not only as undesirable but also as extremist. A number of criminal cases were opened against its participants, although for now, they are being prosecuted for participation in an undesirable organization and its financing. The émigré Free Russia Forum was “reclassified” from undesirable directly to terrorist; criminal prosecution against some of its participants is already underway. A similar transition was expected over time for the Anti-War Committee of Russia, as a result of a group criminal case against it as a terrorist community. However, the Prosecutor General’s Office did not wait for a verdict and, on February 13, 2026, applied to the Supreme Court to designate it a terrorist organization; the court granted this request on March 2.

On the other hand, in April, the status of a terrorist organization was suspended for the first time – for the Taliban, whose government in Afghanistan has been de facto recognized by Russia. At the same time, there is still no mechanism for complete removal from the lists of extremist and terrorist organizations.

We already wrote in last year’s report about the largest addition to the list of **terrorist organizations**: the émigré of Free Nations of PostRussia Forum was recognized as a terrorist organization in 2024, but added to the list only in 2025. In our opinion, this decision may become the source of many controversial criminal cases, since the published list of 172 “structural subdivisions” of the Forum includes both real combat units fighting on the side of Ukraine, separatist groups not engaged in violent activity, organizations of ethnic minorities that are not separatist, and various associations that either never belonged to the Forum (and immediately distanced themselves from it) or do not exist at all.<sup>69</sup> To date, there are few criminal cases related to the Forum, but more can be expected.

Direct support for Ukraine in the armed conflict became the basis for adding to the list the above-mentioned Free Russia Forum and, certainly, the Belarusian Kastus Kalinoŭski Regiment, which is fighting on Ukraine’s side, as well as the Right Sector. A certain sabotage group from Perm, recognized as a terrorist organization in 2023, was also added to the list.

Islamist terrorism is represented in the 2025 additions to the list only by a group referred to as the Megion Jamaat, also recognized as terrorist in 2023.

Apparently, the radical left is viewed as a greater threat. The list was expanded to include the VKP(b) or “Join VKP(b)” (the name of its VKontakte group) from Omsk, designated as a terrorist community in 2024. In January 2025, the Kaluga anarchist rock band Antisocial Distancing and an “association” of the same name were recognized as terrorists; the People’s Communist Movement (*Narodnoe kommunisticheskoe dvizhenie*, NKD) received the same designation in April. In all cases, the charges involved preparing terrorist acts. However, this activity was not necessarily related to support for Ukraine – a connection to Ukraine apparently existed for the NKD,<sup>70</sup> but apparently not for “Join VKP(b).”<sup>71</sup> Antisocial Distancing expressed anti-war sentiment, but the court decision appears to be based instead on the justification of violence against far-right actors and anti-regime violence, including the well-known attack by Mikhail Zhlobitsky<sup>72</sup>, who blew himself up in an FSB building in Arkhangelsk back in 2018. A group of radical communists in Ufa, convicted on December 16, including on charges of creating a terrorist community, was also not pro-Ukrainian but will be added to the list of terrorist organizations once the verdict enters into force.

There were also other convictions issued under Article 205<sup>4</sup> CC in 2025, so the list may yet be expanded to include additional groups, including far-right ones.

In total, the list grew by 11 entries over the year (counting the Free Nations of PostRussia Forum, together with all its structural subdivisions as a single entry) and reached 70 entries.

69. Free Nations of PostRussia Forum and Its Subdivisions Added to the List of Terrorist Organizations, SOVA Center. January 13, 2025 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/counteraction/2025/01/d50882/>, in Russian).

70. “People’s Communist Movement” Organized Terrorist Attacks on Instructions from Ukraine, *Izvestia*. June 6, 2025 (<https://iz.ru/1899768/2025-06-06/narodnoe-kommunisticheskoe-dvizhenie-organizovyvalo-terakty-po-zadaniyu-ukrainy>, in Russian).

71. This refers to the case of Maksim Prikhodko. See: Konstantin Voronov. The Court Assessed the Organizational Abilities of a Security Guard, *Kommersant*. August 8, 2024 (<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6879677>, in Russian).

72. The Kaluga Prosecutor’s Office Demanded That a Disbanded Anarchist Rock Group Be Recognized as “Terrorist,” *OVD-Info*. November 17, 2024 (<https://ovd.info/express-news/2024/11/17/kaluzhskaya-prokuratura-potrebovala-priznat-terroristicheskoy>, in Russian).

In November 2025, the Supreme Court recognized Anti-Corruption Foundation, Inc. (ACF) – the U.S.-registered legal entity of the FBK – as a terrorist organization. Although Navalny’s organizations, previously designated as extremist, did not automatically acquire terrorist status, we can assume that cooperation with them after the entry of the ACF decision<sup>73</sup> into force will be classified under terrorist articles.

In December, the Congress of People’s Deputies, created in exile by Ilya Ponomarev, was deemed a terrorist organization. The Supreme Court’s press release noted that the organization was led by Ponomarev and Andrei Sidelnikov, both of whom had previously been sentenced under Article 205<sup>2</sup> CC. However, the Congress had already split in 2024, with the two politicians ending up on opposing sides, and a new organization was subsequently formed on the basis of the faction that included Sidelnikov. It remains unclear to whom, and in what manner, the ban (which entered into force in January 2026) will be applied.

Far-right groups have traditionally been among those added to the list of **extremist organizations**. In 2025, these included the Tula-based soccer fan group Cyborgs and the Omsk Slavic Association.

AllatRa, the new religious movement mentioned above, in addition to its anti-war stance, attracted the attention of law enforcement with its conspiracy theories and criticism of the authorities.

In September, the list grew further to include the “International Satanist movement” banned in July by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. This is yet another ban of a non-existent organization to create a broad framework for restrictions and sanctions targeting a wide range of individuals and groups. The court decision has still not been published. Only a press release from the Prosecutor General’s Office and an interview with Roman Silantsev (a proponent of “destructology” whose expert analysis was used by the court) are available. These materials present Satanism as linked to neo-Nazism, anti-Orthodox vandalism, occult rituals, and ordinary criminal activity. However, why the authorities have chosen to address these diverse issues in this particular way can only be a matter of conjecture; it appears consistent with the broader trend of promoting “traditional values.”

The inclusion on the list of an “association” consisting of publicist Alexander Nevzorov and his wife reflects a court decision issued in 2024, undoubtedly related to Nevzorov’s criminal case for statements in support of Ukraine.

Finally, in 2025, the practice of designating groups of Ukrainian businessmen as extremist associations expanded, with their property in Russia subsequently confiscated.<sup>74</sup> Seven such groups were added to the list on the Ministry of Justice website (vs. three in 2024), and the process of banning such groups is ongoing.<sup>75</sup> In total, the list grew by 12 entries over the year and reached 129 entries.

73. The decision entered into force in February 2026, and ACF was added to the list on March 3, 2026.

74. We wrote about this in: Family Values. The Anniversary of an Innovation in Russian Anti-Extremist Policy, SOVA Center. January 10, 2025 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/reports-analyses/2025/01/d47100/>).

75. In addition, in late 2025, a decision was made to recognize an organized criminal group in Chelyabinsk as an extremist association on the grounds of its alleged connection to the banned AUE movement among other charges. See: Chelyabinsk “Makhoninskie” Group Recognized as Extremist, SOVA Center. November 17, 2025 (<https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2025/10/d52492/>, in Russian).

The list will continue to expand. In October, the Niyso Popular Movement, which describes itself as a “de-occupation movement,” was banned in Chechnya.<sup>76</sup>

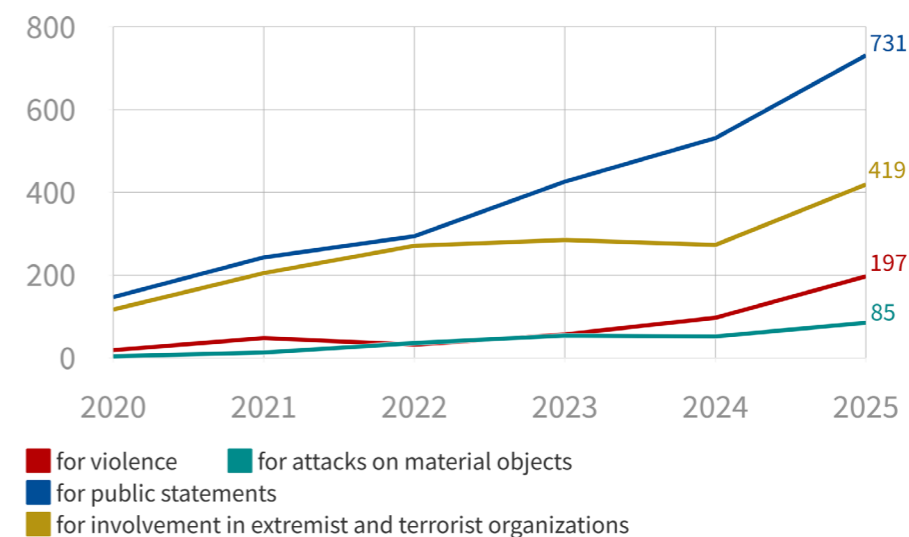
In 2025, 101 foreign or international organizations were added to the list of “**undesirable organizations**” on the Ministry of Justice website; by the end of the year, it contained 296 organizations. The entities added last year include numerous journalistic and human rights organizations, as well as structures created by Russian political émigrés. Particularly notable are organizations apparently associated with LGBT-related issues. Thus, the list came to include a number of organizations that the authorities could, in one way or another, associate with associations, real or imagined, that have already been banned in Russia.

## In Place of a Conclusion

In 2025, we recorded 699 total court decisions against 731 individuals issued under Criminal Code articles for criminalized speech, and 289 decisions against 419 individuals related to participation in organizations and their support. The figures do not include sanctions for involvement in AUE and Columbine, or for displaying their symbols (this area of law enforcement cannot be classified as politicized).

### Trends in Anti-Extremism Criminal Law Enforcement

By types of offenses



Source: SOVA Research Center, 2026

All defendants known to SOVA Center, whose cases received first-instance court decisions, were included. Each individual could be assigned to multiple categories simultaneously. Cases related to involvement in AUE and Columbine, as well as the display of related symbols, are excluded.

76. It was added to the list in January 2026.

# Challenges to Freedom of Conscience in Russia in 2025

We present a report based on information gathered through monitoring carried out by SOVA Center. The information is published on the Center's website in the section "Religion in a Secular Society" ([www.sova-center.ru/religion](http://www.sova-center.ru/religion)), including links to sources in the media and on the internet; the report provides references only to sources not indicated on the website. For events of the preceding year,<sup>1</sup> only necessary updates are provided. Our task is not to provide a comprehensive description of all events in the religious and public sphere; as a rule, the events mentioned in the report serve as illustrations of the trends observed.

Problems and issues related to the abuse of anti-extremism legislation are, for the most part, presented in other reports.<sup>2</sup>

## Summary

In 2025, the state policy of discrimination against religious minorities largely followed the approaches established in previous years, as noted in our prior reports. Below, we indicate only the main trends of the past year.

The ongoing anti-migrant campaign, as in the previous year, significantly complicated the situation of Muslim organizations. Protests against the construction of mosques were often held under anti-migration slogans, and representatives of far-right movements played a significant role in organizing them.

Under the pretext of combating illegal migration and extremism, the authorities continued to shut down already operating Muslim prayer houses and rooms. Far-right actors also frequently took part in raids aimed at identifying such premises. However, it should be noted that in many cases, prayer houses and rooms were indeed opened with violations and without the necessary approvals.

The list of undesirable organizations continued to grow through adding religious associations, although not very actively. The intensity of prosecution, including criminal cases, for cooperation with undesirable religious organizations and for financing them has at least not decreased. Believers received new sentences, including real terms of imprisonment, and new cases were initiated.

1. O. Sibireva, "Challenges to Freedom of Conscience in Russia in 2024," SOVA Center, May 6, 2025

(<https://www.sova-center.ru/en/religion/publications/2025/05/d47105/>).

2. Episodes related to hate crimes against persons or property and law enforcement practices in this area are described in the report "Radicalization of Far-Right Violence: Ideologically Motivated Crimes against Persons and Property and State Responses in Russia in 2025" in this volume. Law enforcement related to public statements and participation in certain associations are discussed in the relevant report in this volume.

Criminal prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses continued. They faced sanctions, including lengthy terms of actual imprisonment, as punishment for continuing the activities of an extremist organization.

The number of administrative cases for "unlawful missionary activity" continued to grow. As before, Protestant believers and Muslims faced such administrative prosecution most frequently.

Administrative pressure on unregistered religious associations increased in 2025. Communities of the International Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptist Churches, which refuses state registration, were subjected to numerous inspections, some of which were accompanied by disruptions of worship services. As a result of this pressure, several communities suspended their activities. The leaders of one community, after being prohibited from using their house of prayer for several months, agreed to submit a notification of the commencement of a religious group's activities.

The scope of criminal prosecution for offending religious feelings decreased compared to 2024 but remained high. As before, charges under this article were mostly based on on-line publications.

Public defenders of believers' feelings most often continued to act in defense of Russian Orthodox believers and chose forms tested in previous years, such as organizing public campaigns and submitting complaints to law enforcement agencies. The campaign against the "fall of crosses" – schematic depictions of churches without crosses, which Orthodox activists had been finding objectionable for several years – received legislative support. The State Duma adopted a law protecting religious symbols that banned such images in the media and advertising.

The level of vandalism motivated by religious hatred increased sharply, primarily due to incidents targeting Muslim sites. Many of these incidents, a significant portion of which can be classified as dangerous, involved representatives of far-right movements.

Defamation of religious minorities in mass media continued, both at the federal and regional levels. One such media defamation campaign triggered two acts of vandalism against Protestant churches.

## Legal Regulation

Several legislative acts affecting the activities of religious organizations were adopted in 2025. The norms related to anti-extremism legislation are described in another report.<sup>3</sup>

Here, we will mention two laws aimed at protection against the "fall of crosses." On July 15, the State Duma adopted a law on the protection of religious symbols; the Federation Council approved it on July 25, and Vladimir Putin signed it on July 31. The law prohibited the depiction of religious buildings and objects without religious symbols in mass media, on the internet, in advertising, on goods, signage, and in state and municipal symbols. The Russian Orthodox Church had advocated for the adoption of such a law.

On December 18, the State Duma adopted a law mandating the presence of crosses on any reproductions of the coat of arms of the Russian Federation. The Federation Council

3. See "Anti-Extremism Lawmaking in 2025" in this volume.

approved it on December 19, and Vladimir Putin signed it on December 29. At the initiative of a group of deputies led by Vyacheslav Volodin, Article 1 of the law “On the State Coat of Arms of the Russian Federation” was supplemented with the following clarification: “The small crowns, the large crown, and the orb are topped with straight, equidistant, four-pointed crosses with expanding ends.”

## Bills Not (Yet) Developed

In November, a group of deputies led by Leonid Slutsky submitted to the State Duma a draft amendment to the Code of Administrative Offenses (CAO) introducing fines for the “distortion of the image” of religious buildings when selling goods, providing services, or advertising. It suggested fines of up to 30,000 rubles for individuals, up to 50,000 rubles for officials, and up to 300,000 rubles for legal entities. The authors of the initiative explain the need for these amendments by a “legal vacuum” that arose after the adoption of the law on the protection of religious symbols in July 2025. At the time of writing this report, the draft law had not yet passed the first reading.

Amendments to the law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations,” intended to restrict worship services in residential buildings, were introduced in the State Duma three times in 2025, but none of these initiatives succeeded.

Thus, in January, deputies from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation submitted a draft law to the State Duma prohibiting organized religious worship and the placement of religious organizations in residential apartment buildings, as well as refusing registration to religious organizations whose locations do not comply with legal requirements. The document received negative reviews for failure to comply with the “*legal criteria of necessity and proportionality of permissible restrictions on rights and freedoms deriving from the legal provisions of Article 55 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation.*”<sup>4</sup> As early as July, the Communist Party submitted a new version of this draft law. This time, the authors proposed amendments to the law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations” and to the Housing Code to prohibit the placement of religious associations in residential and non-residential areas of residential apartment buildings. However, the revised version also received a negative evaluation from the Legal Department and the State Duma Commission on Ensuring Housing Rights of Citizens.

Deputies from the New People (*Novyye lyudi*) party proposed a bill in October to ban religious services in non-residential areas of apartment buildings, as well as regular worship services on residential premises, but withdrew their draft a month later. The amendments drew criticism from representatives of various religious organizations.

Another similar draft law was submitted to the State Duma in June. Deputies proposed a ban on religious worship services in apartment buildings when attended by visiting groups, while not prohibiting residents from performing religious rites. In addition, the document provides for a ban on the registration of religious organizations that are lo-

4. “Klishas: Federation Council Committee Will Not Support a Ban on Religious Organizations in Residential Buildings,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, March 20, 2025 (<https://rg.ru/2025/03/20/klisshas-komitet-sf-ne-podderzhit-zapret-na-religioznye-organizacii-v-zhilyh-domah.html>), in Russian).

cated or conduct religious services in residential and non-residential areas of residential buildings. At the time of writing, the draft law has not yet reached its first reading.

In April, a group of deputies led by Pavel Krashenninikov, the chairman of the State Duma Committee on State Building and Legislation, submitted to the State Duma a bill “On Amendments to Articles 3 and 4 of the Federal Law “On Veterans.””

The draft law grants the status of combat veterans to clergy who have visited military units participating in combat operations in Ukraine. It also proposes granting the status of disabled combat veterans to clergy who became disabled due to wounds or concussions received when visiting military units. The Russian Orthodox Church had long advocated this idea to the authorities. However, the bill never reached its first reading; the government determined that it required substantial revision.

The authors of yet another initiative to ban advertising of esoteric services, including astrology, magic, fortune-telling, and others, also failed in their efforts. In March 2025, Nina Ostanina, Andrei Svintsov, and Alexei Kornienko proposed the relevant amendments to the laws “On Advertising” and “On Information, Information Technologies, and Information Protection.” However, the government recommended rejecting this bill, since its wording “does not comply with the principle of legal certainty,” and equating “all forms of alternative practices” carries the risk of a “legal imbalance.”

One of the initiative’s authors, Deputy Svintsov, had come up with a similar initiative two months earlier, but limited only to tarot practitioners. However, he withdrew his draft bill after the first reading.

# Problems Concerning Places of Worship

## Conflicts Surrounding Temple Construction

As before, religious organizations occasionally encountered difficulties with the construction of religious buildings.

As in 2024, there were only a few conflicts related to the construction of Orthodox churches, most of which had begun in previous years. The conflict over the construction of a church on the embankment in Yubileyny Microdistrict of Krasnodar was the most significant. Throughout the year, residents continued to stage protests and hold pickets. Public hearings on the construction were held in October, and the majority of participants – more than 1,400 out of 1,928 – spoke against building the church at this location. However, the Commission on Land Use and Development, disregarding the opinion of the majority of the microdistrict’s residents, recommended that the city administration approve the construction of the church.

Opponents of the construction continued their appeals to the authorities, including recording a video address to Putin, and, having received no desired response, began collecting signatures for the resignation of the city mayor, Evgeny Naumov. The local Communist Party branch organized a similar petition campaign.

In January 2026, Mayor Naumov signed a resolution outlining the plans for the embankment, which implied that the church would be built at the location opposed by residents. However, the allocated area was reduced from 26,015 to 7,200 square meters.

The St. Petersburg Committee for State Control, Use, and Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments also approved the construction of the Church of St. George the Victorious in Pushkin commemorating the “special military operation” soldiers, despite opposition from the majority of public hearing participants. The residents appealed to the Metropolitan Varsonofy (Sudakov) of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, asking for his assistance in finding a “better and more appropriate location” for the church. Ignored by secular and church authorities, the construction’s opponents placed a banner with the words “No Place for a Church Here” on a building near the construction site in June.

In Makhachkala, protests continued against the construction of the Church of St. Alexander Nevsky on the shore of Lake Ak-Gyol. The opponents went to court attempting to challenge the city’s master plan, land use, and development rules, which, in 2016, designated this site as a zone permitting the construction of religious buildings. According to the plaintiffs, both documents violate residents’ right to unobstructed access to the lake and were adopted with procedural violations.

Chelyabinsk residents protested against the construction of a church in Traktorozavodsky District next to a lyceum. Residents of nearby buildings fear “round-the-clock bell ringing” and inconveniences associated with construction. In September, the city authorities reported that the church project had not been approved and no construction permit had been issued; they promised to organize public hearings.

As before, the construction of mosques in various regions was accompanied by numerous conflicts, some of which have persisted for years. As in the previous year, these protests often had an anti-migrant character, and their active participants—and in some cases organizers—were representatives of far-right organizations.

For example, the Russian Community (*Russkaya Obschina*) expressed dissatisfaction with the possible purchase by a Muslim community of a building for a prayer house in Balashikha, located near a kindergarten and a defense industry enterprise. The city administration was forced to provide justifications and explained that it had no plans to open a prayer house and never approved the purchase of the premises by a religious organization.

Residents of New Moscow continued to protest against the possible construction of an interreligious center with a mosque in Kommunarika. This time, opponents of the construction recorded a video address to Vyacheslav Volodin, Dmitry Medvedev, and Mikhail Mishustin. The appeal contained numerous anti-migrant clichés.

Protests continued against the construction of a mosque in Verkhnyaya Kurya Micro-district of Perm. The construction’s opponents placed niqab-clad snow figures accompanied by offensive slogans on the construction site. A criminal case against Anna Pyanzina, the action’s organizer, was initiated under Article 282 (incitement of hatred) of the Criminal Code (CC). However, it was soon closed, after a linguistic examination failed to find incitement to hostility in the texts of the posters (“Niqabs for snow women,” “White women for black guests,” “Give me a hot Muslim.”)

Of course, conflicts surrounding mosque construction also involved motives other than xenophobia. Opponents raised concerns about possible everyday inconveniences, similar to objections against Orthodox church construction. Thus, residents of the Solnechny Gardening Partnership near Krasnoyarsk, where a Muslim prayer house has already been

operating, expressed their dissatisfaction with the prospect of a mosque on the same plot. Neighbors assumed that the building would produce late-night noise and worsen the transport situation. However, according to the owner, there are no plans to build a mosque. A Husayniyya (a venue for Shia mourning rituals) has been operating on the site and observing all applicable regulations for prayer houses. Most neighbors have no objections to gatherings of believers.

We are not aware of conflicts related to the construction of religious buildings of other religious organizations.

## Problems with the Use of Existing Buildings

As in previous years, Muslims most frequently encountered difficulties in using their existing buildings. Typically, residents of nearby buildings complained about various inconveniences associated with the proximity of worship services. Official bodies responded to these complaints with sanctions against religious organizations. As with the mosque construction conflicts, representatives of far-right organizations often played an active role in campaigns against already operational Muslim facilities.

The closures of Muslim prayer houses and prayer rooms in various regions continued in 2025. For example, a prayer house organized by the Muslim community in a building it had purchased without the appropriate authorization was closed in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. The building had been registered in 2012 as a catering facility. A building inspection, following a complaint from local residents, revealed violations of sanitary and fire safety regulations. The building owner received a warning about the inadmissibility of violating the law.

Prayer houses were closed in Mytishchi and Balashikha in the Moscow Region.

The Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation for Krasnodar Krai reported the discovery of five illegal Muslim prayer rooms in the region: in Krasnodar, the Varenikovskaya stanitsa in Krymsky District, the Khorin Khutor, and in the settlements of Mayak and Podgornaya Sinyukha in Otradnensky District. In two cases – Krasnodar and Varenikovskaya – reports were filed against the organizers under Article 5.26 Part 4 CAO (missionary activity violating the requirements of legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and religious associations). In the remaining three cases, inspections were based on the alleged religious group activities without notifying the relevant authorities. The results of these inspections are unknown.

Illegal prayer rooms were shut down in Karagay District of Perm Krai and in Sosnovsky District of the Chelyabinsk Region. In both cases, the organizers faced charges under Article 5.26 CAO.

The Investigative Directorate of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for the Samara Region initiated an inspection following complaints from residents of the Mekhzavod settlement about disturbances caused by the inability of parishioners to fit inside their prayer house during services, leading them to gather outside. As a result of the inspection, the chairman of the Muslim religious society of the Krasnoglinsky District, Ildar Minkhametov, was fined 50,000 rubles for organizing an unauthorized gathering.

In Sary Oskol, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, together with the prosecutor’s office, conducted an inspection following complaints from local residents that cars of believers, who arrived at a prayer house to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, were blocking an exit road. The inspection failed to confirm the facts stated in the complaint but established that no re-

religious organization was registered at that address. An administrative case was initiated against the building owner under Article 8.8 Part 1 CAO (use of a land plot in a manner inconsistent with its designated purpose and/or permitted use), and the organizer of the prayer gathering received a warning about the inadmissibility of violating counter-extremism legislation.

Alisher Ch., the owner of a prayer house, recognized as an unauthorized construction back in 2023, was fined 30,000 rubles in Vyazma under Article 20.35 Part 2 CAO (violating requirements for anti-terrorist protection of facilities (territories) of religious organizations). In 2023, the court ordered the demolition of the building, but the owner dismantled only part of the structure and registered it as his residence, thus making the demolition legally impossible.

As in the previous year, we observed only a small number of problems experienced by other religious organizations when using existing property. Based on an anonymous complaint about the emergency condition of the building of the Evangelical Christian (Pentecostal) church “Word of Life,” the administration of Severodvinsk in the Arkhangelsk Region prohibited the community from conducting worship services in the building. No relevant inspections or expert assessments ever took place. This decision was preceded by a social media defamation campaign against the church and its pastor. Believers moved their services to rented premises and filed a complaint with the prosecutor’s office over the authorities’ actions.

In addition, we know of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ property seized in two regions. As in previous years, courts declared building donation agreements invalid following the blanket ban on Jehovah’s Witness organizations. A court declared invalid a 2017 agreement under which a local Jehovah’s Witness organization had transferred ownership of a land plot and a building to the organization “Jehovah’s Witnesses in Austria.” In the Tula Region, the Main Interregional Directorate of the Federal Bailiff Service filed another claim with the arbitration court against the “Religious Confession of Christian Jehovah’s Witnesses in Spain,” seeking the confiscation of a land plot in Tula from the community. A similar claim made in 2024 was left without consideration because the plaintiff failed to provide certain required documentation. We do not know the outcome of the 2025 case. In addition, a building previously seized from Jehovah’s Witnesses was put up for sale in Chita.

## Conflicts Related to the Transfer of State and Municipal Property to Religious Organizations

As before, state and municipal property was occasionally transferred to religious organizations, but we are not aware of any cases where such transfers caused conflicts.

As in prior years, property was most often transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church. For example, the government of St. Petersburg issued a decree on transferring to the St. Petersburg Theological Academy one of the buildings of Psychiatric Hospital No. 6 on the embankment of the Obvodny Canal. The religious organization asserted its rights to the building in 2023. The building is a cultural heritage site of regional significance and housed the Alexander Nevsky Antoniev Theological School before 1917.

The Ministry of Property of the Moscow Region transferred ownership of the following three sites to the Exaltation of the Cross parish in Orekhovo-Zuyevo: a church, a Sunday

school, and a spiritual and educational center on Fabzavucha Street. The religious organization, which for 15 years had been engaged in restoring the church, had been using these buildings. The church is a cultural heritage site of regional significance.

The transfer of property to other religious organizations, as a rule, also proceeded without incident. Thus, the Orenburg authorities transferred to the Orenburg Regional Spiritual Administration of Muslims the former building of the “Husainiya” madrasa, recognized as being in emergency condition. In Troitsk of the Chelyabinsk Region, the Regional Spiritual Administration of Muslims has become the owner of a mosque building with a land plot. The building, constructed in 1878, is a cultural heritage site of municipal significance.

In addition, in Nizhny Novgorod, the building of a historic Catholic church on Studenaya Street was transferred to the parish of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The building successively housed a Catholic church, a printing house, and a regional branch of the Russian Energy Agency.

In Rostov-on-Don, the building of the Nakhichevan Theological Seminary was transferred to the ownership of the Russian and New Nakhichevan Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The building is a cultural heritage site of regional significance.

Museum property was occasionally transferred to religious organizations; however, as in the previous year, these cases did not give rise to conflicts. For example, the Savvino-Storozhevsky Monastery near Moscow received the Guardhouse building (Karaulnaya Palatka), previously maintained by the Zvenigorod Museum-Reserve, to be used free of charge for 49 years. In Ryazan, the Palace of Prince Oleg – the earliest civil building of the Ryazan Kremlin – was transferred to the diocese. The museum exhibition previously housed there was relocated to the Museum Center, as had been done with exhibitions from Kremlin churches transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church earlier.

In some cases, religious organizations had to go to court to defend their property rights. Thus, in February, the Oktyabrsky District Court of Ufa recognized the ownership rights of the local Muslim religious organization “Mahalla No. 2025” to a madrasa building in the village of Nagaevo, constructed in 2007 but never legalized or operational.

The local Muslim religious organization of the village of Staromochalei in Pilninsky District of the Nizhny Novgorod Region filed a claim with the regional arbitration court against the district administration seeking to legalize a mosque building that had been considered an unauthorized construction. We do not know the outcome of the proceedings but assume that the court sided with the religious organization, since the district administration reportedly did not object to the plaintiff’s claims.

An Orthodox parish in Samara successfully defended its right to a land plot for building a church. The Samara Regional Court rejected the claim of the Samara Department of Urban Planning, which had challenged the decision that recognized the refusal to grant the parish a land plot for a church complex as unlawful. The Samara mayor’s office attempted to challenge the decision of the court of first instance, which the parish had also won.

The Arbitration Court of the Belgorod Region rejected the claim of the Krasnensky District administration, which asserted the municipality’s ownership of three real estate assets – a residential building, a garage, and a boiler house – previously acquired by the parish of the Church of the Nativity of Christ in the village of Gorki.

# Discrimination Based on Religion

## Liquidation of Religious Organizations

We know of several cases of the liquidation of religious organizations in 2025. In January, the Kaluga Regional Court satisfied a claim by the regional office of the Ministry of Justice to liquidate the Kaluga Evangelical Lutheran Church, a local religious organization that had operated for 16 years. The liquidation decision was based on a certificate from the FSB stating that the religious organization did not conduct regular worship services. However, both parishioners and Archbishop Alexander Franz confirmed that services were held and that the community remained active. According to Pastor Dmitry Martysenko, the authorities repeatedly pressured the church.

Also in January, the Orenburg Regional Court, following a claim by the regional office of the Ministry of Justice, liquidated the local Christian Church of Evangelical Christians (Church of the Living God) in Mednogorsk for its charter's lack of compliance with legal requirements and for failure to provide documents confirming its activities.

Several Muslim organizations in different regions were closed for various violations. In January, the Moscow Regional Court granted a claim by the Ministry of Justice and liquidated a local Muslim religious organization in the town of Kotelniki near Moscow. For several years, local residents and *Russkaya Obschina* had demanded that the prayer house be closed. In 2025, the premises were sealed, and a criminal case under Article 173<sup>1</sup> CC (illegal creation or reorganization of a legal entity) was initiated against the organization's leader, Salavat Ibatullin.

In November, a court satisfied the claim filed by the Ministry of Justice and liquidated Mahalla No. 2708, a Muslim religious organization in Sergiev Posad. The grounds for liquidation were described as "formal indications." The organization's prayer house, which had been operating for more than 20 years, has been closed. According to Arslan Sadriev, the organization's head, problems began after a change in the city administration in 2020. A criminal case under Article 173<sup>1</sup> CC was also initiated against Sadriev.

Based on a claim by the Ministry of Justice, a court in Mozhaysk liquidated the Vatanim Muslim community for mentioning in the minutes of its founding meeting a person who had died three days before the meeting. The religious organization also lost its appeal.

In October, the Orenburg Regional Court liquidated the Light of the World local religious organization in Kuvandyk for non-compliance of its charter with legal requirements and for lack of documentation confirming its religious activity based on a claim filed by the Ministry of Justice.

In addition, the activities of religious associations that had previously refused state registration were suspended in 2025 upon request from the prosecutor's office. In July, the Yoshkar-Ola City Court, acting on a prosecutorial claim, prohibited the activities of a group of Evangelical Christian Baptists until a notification of the commencement of their religious group's activities was submitted to the Ministry of Justice. The religious group belongs to the unregistered International Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches (IU ECB), and it was gathering for joint prayer in a private residence for several decades. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Mari El upheld the decision of the court of first instance.

In October, the Armavir City Court suspended the activity of a local religious group, also belonging to the IU ECB, which refuses state registration, until a notification of the commencement of their religious group's activities was submitted to the Ministry of Justice. Also in October, the Timashevsk District Court of Krasnodar Krai suspended the activity of a similar community in Timashevsk, citing the same requirements.

## Recognition of the Activities of Religious Organizations as Undesirable, and Religious Figures as "Foreign Agents"

The Prosecutor General's Office continued to add religious organizations to the list of organizations whose activities are recognized as undesirable in Russia. Three such organizations were added to the list in 2025: the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA); Brigham Young University in Utah founded by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); and Friede Allen e.V. ("Peace to All"), a Germany-based charitable foundation that assists clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church persecuted for criticizing military actions in Ukraine. The initiative to recognize the latter organization as undesirable was submitted to the prosecutor's office by Yana Lantratova, head of the State Duma Committee on the Development of Civil Society, Public and Religious Organizations.

As in the case of religious organizations previously included in this list, the Prosecutor General's Office justified its decision by referring to their support for the Ukrainian authorities and the threat they allegedly pose to Russia's constitutional order.

Followers of religious organizations already recognized as undesirable, as in the preceding year, were subjected to administrative and criminal prosecution. Thus, Irina Smirnova, a resident of Bryansk, was found guilty under Article 284<sup>1</sup> Part 2 CC (provision of funds and rendering of financial services to an undesirable organization) for transferring funds to representatives of the AllatRa international movement. She received a two-year suspended sentence and a two-year ban on website administration or engaging in online activities related to the collection and analysis of information about undesirable organizations. A resident of Serpukhov received a one-and-a-half-year suspended sentence with a one-year probation on a similar charge.

AllatRa followers were sentenced to compulsory labor at least twice: two years for Omsk businessman Roman Miroshnikov, under Parts 1 and 2 of Article 284<sup>1</sup> CC (participation in the activities of an undesirable organization and financing and organizing its activities), and one and a half years for Denis Sadigov from Murmansk under Part 2 of the same article.

Yelena Moiseenko from the Saratov Region, and Irina Uchparyan from Samara, were each sentenced to 240 hours of community service under the same part of the same article. Meanwhile, Stanislav and Yelena Boyko, a married couple from Perm, were each fined 5,000 rubles under Article 20.33 CAO (participation in the activities of an undesirable organization) for cooperation with AllatRa and keeping *Sokrovennik*, the AllatRa newspaper, at their home.

We should also note that AllatRa was recognized as extremist in June, and we already recorded one case of sanctions for involvement in AllatRa as an extremist organization; a 49-year-old woman from Sibay received an official warning.

New criminal cases were initiated in 2025 for financing AllatRa. We recorded such cases opened against a resident of Kaliningrad and two residents of Krasnodar Krai, as well as several cases in Samara.

Followers of Vladimir Muntyan’s “Revival” organizations (the All-Ukrainian Spiritual Center and the Charitable Foundation) were also prosecuted under Article 284<sup>1</sup> Part 2 CC. For example, Olga Leontyeva, a 63-year-old resident of Izhevsk, was sentenced to imprisonment for a year and a half. However, the court took into account her remorse, her health condition, and her obligation to care for her elderly mother and disabled daughter and replaced her real prison term with a suspended sentence followed by one year of probation. Olesya Kosenkova from the Priyutovo settlement in Bashkortostan and a resident of Zarinsk in Altai Krai also received suspended sentences under the same article: two years followed by a two-year probation period and one and a half years, respectively.

Several followers of Muntyan were sentenced to community service under the same part of the same article: Rezida Sadeeva from Neftekamsk – to 360 hours; Lyubov Karimova from Udmurtia, Sergei Ogloblin from Novouralsk, and an unnamed resident of Asbest – to 300 hours each; a resident of Perm Krai – to 250 hours; and Dinara Akhmetova from Izhevsk – to 240 hours. Meanwhile, a Moscow court referred Viktoria Brazhnik, a Ukrainian-born defendant charged under the same provision, for compulsory psychiatric treatment.

At least four additional criminal cases for financing Muntyan’s organizations were initiated during the year: in Severodvinsk of the Arkhangelsk Region, Yekaterinburg, the Nizhny Novgorod Region, and Udmurtia.

Unlike followers of AllatRa or Muntyan’s organizations, adherents of Falun Gong faced real imprisonment. In Moscow, 46-year-old Natalia Minenkova was sentenced to four years of imprisonment, with a seven-year ban on engaging in public and political activities, including via the Internet, under Article 284<sup>1</sup> Part 3 CC (carrying out the activities of an undesirable organization). Zhu Yun, a Russian citizen residing in Tomsk, received three years in a minimum-security penal colony under the same criminal charge, with a three-year ban on engaging in public and political activities.

Seven employees of the Aptrend training center in Moscow were fined under Article 20.33 CAO for distributing books by L. Ron Hubbard with the copyright of the Church of Spiritual Technology. A complaint against Aptrend was filed by its student. As a result, the center decided to cease its activities. In Kaliningrad, a case under Article 284<sup>1</sup> Part 3 CC was initiated against a coach who used materials of undesirable Scientology organizations.

The list of “foreign agents” was expanded in 2025 to include defrocked Russian Orthodox priest Ioann Kurmoyarov, supernumerary cleric Andrei Kordochkin of the Madrid diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the Islam-focused Alif TV Project.

## Criminal Prosecution

Criminal prosecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses continued. New charges of the activities of an extremist organization were filed in 2025. Jehovah’s Witnesses reported 27 new cases opened against 52 believers. According to our data, at least 171 people were being held in penal colonies and pre-trial detention as of late February 2026.

Jehovah’s Witnesses faced sanctions under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC (organizing the activities of an extremist organization) and Article 282<sup>3</sup> CC (financing the activities of an extremist organization). According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, 29 believers were sentenced to imprison-

ment. The longest sentences – seven years in a minimum-security penal colony – were imposed on Aleksandr Neverov from Saransk, Samvel Babayan from Samara, and Evgeny Sokolov from Voronezh. The oldest individuals sentenced to actual prison terms, Valery Knyazev and Indus Talipov from Izhevsk, both aged 74, received three-year sentences. All of them were found guilty under Article 282<sup>2</sup> CC.

In addition, Jehovah’s Witnesses estimated that 111 searches were conducted in believers’ homes during the year and often involved various violations, including the use of violence.

Believers of other religious organizations also faced criminal sanctions. The Zheleznodorozhny District Court of Novosibirsk delivered a guilty verdict against the leaders of the Church of the Last Testament. Sergei Torop (Vissarion), Vadim Redkin, and Vladimir Vedernikov were found guilty under Article 239 Part 1 CC (creating a non-profit organization infringing on the personality and rights of citizens), paragraphs “a” and “b” of Article 111 Part 3 CC (intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm), and paragraph “d” of Article 112 Part 2 CC (intentional infliction of moderate bodily harm). Vedernikov was additionally convicted under Article 159 Part 4 CC (fraud). Torop and Vedernikov were sentenced to 12 years, and Redkin to 11 years of imprisonment in a maximum-security penal colony. It is worth noting that the bodily harm in their case refers to mental health damage allegedly caused by participation in their community – a highly questionable charge.

In the Belgorod Region, Aleksandr Ovsyannikov was sentenced to two and a half years in a minimum-security penal colony for publishing materials of the “Russian Orthodox Church – Tsarist Empire” under Parts 2 and 3 of Article 239 CC (creating a non-profit organization whose activities involve inducing citizens to refuse to fulfill their civic duties or to commit other unlawful acts, and participation in such an organization).

Another verdict under Part 1 of the same article was issued against F. Abdullaeva, a resident of Smolensk, for creating the Alla-Ayat religious group and distributing materials of this organization. The court sentenced her to two years of imprisonment, followed by a two-year probation, but released her from punishment due to the expiration of the statute of limitations. In December 2021, the same court found Abdullaeva guilty under the same provision, but the appellate court overturned the verdict in 2022 and sent the case for retrial.

## Restriction of Missionary Activity

The prosecution of religious organizations and believers for “unlawful missionary activity” continued in 2025. At the time of writing, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation had published statistical data on the application of Article 5.26 CAO (violation of legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and religious associations) only for the first half of 2025. During this period, courts considered 292 cases under this article – significantly more than in the comparable period of 2024 (187 cases). The number of people subjected to punishment under this article also increased to 176, including 134 individuals, 32 legal entities, 9 officials, and 1 individual entrepreneur (in the first half of 2024, the numbers were 133, 84, 40, 8, and 1, respectively).

Fines remained the primary form of punishment under this article. In the first half of 2025, they were imposed in 153 cases, warnings were issued in 16 cases, and community service was imposed seven times (in the first half of 2024, the numbers were 118, 14, and 1,

respectively). In seven cases, punishment also involved administrative deportation, and in six cases, confiscation of the instrument of the administrative offense.<sup>5</sup>

Based on the data, it can be assumed that the total number of “anti-missionary” cases increased significantly in 2025 compared to the previous year.

Most known cases of liability under this article, once again, concerned Muslims and Protestants.

Organizing prayer rooms was often interpreted as “unlawful missionary activity.” For example, in Yakutsk, hotel owner I. Abdilkhashimov was fined 10,000 rubles under Article 5.26 Part 4 CAO (conducting missionary activity in violation of legal requirements) for organizing a prayer room. Z., a director of a fruit and vegetable company, also from Yakutsk, was fined 5,000 rubles for a similar offense under the same provision. The fruit and vegetable company was fined 100,000 rubles, since the prayer room had been organized on its premises. Under the same provision, organizers of prayer rooms in Syktyvkar and Kostroma were each fined 5,000 rubles.

A resident of Kursk, originally from Dagestan, was fined 5,000 rubles under the same provision for distributing the *As-Salam* newspaper near a residential building without documents confirming his authority to conduct missionary activity.

In Temryuk of the Krasnodar Krai, the organizer of a musical titled “Interchurch Evening of Praise” and two performing musicians were each fined 10,000 rubles under Article 5.26 Part 4 CAO. The 49-year-old believer organized the event and invited a Protestant religious group from Magnitogorsk. Law enforcement authorities treated his actions as unlawful missionary activity. The event was disrupted by police and Federal Security Service officers.

In the stanitsa of Bryukhovetskaya in Krasnodar Krai, church minister Sergei Timoshchuk (IU ECB) was fined 5,000 rubles under the same provision. The charges were based on a religious worship service he had conducted in a private home at the invitation of friends. Baptist Viktor Seregin was fined in Bryansk for holding a worship service in his home without authorization documents for missionary activity.

We should also note two noteworthy cases under Part 4 of this article. In Kostroma, Dmitry Kuzmin, a deputy of the Kostroma Regional Duma and the Kostroma City Duma from the Communist Party, was fined 5,000 rubles for “unlawful missionary activity.” As an Evangelical Christian running for election, he conducted missionary activity on premises not designated for that purpose without authorization from a religious organization. In Novorossiysk, Sergei Yenichev was fined 10,000 rubles despite having authorization documents for missionary activity. According to the local police officer who visited Yenichev at his home, Yenichev, being an Evangelical Christian, was disseminating the foundations of the Orthodox (!) doctrine.

Foreign nationals also regularly faced sanctions for “unlawful missionary activity.” For example, in Ukhta, entrepreneur R. was fined 35,000 rubles under Article 5.26 Part 5 CAO (missionary activity by a foreign citizen in violation of legal requirements) for organizing a prayer room in a café. Guvanch Saparov and Didar Muradov were each fined 30,000 rubles under the same provision for performing namaz in the Moscow metro without documents confirming their authority to conduct a religious rite in a public place.

5. “Judicial Statistics Data,” Judicial Department at the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, October 20, 2025 (<https://cdep.ru/?id=79>, in Russian; available via Archive.org).

In many cases, fines for “unlawful missionary activity” imposed on foreign citizens were accompanied by deportation from the country. Thus, in Kemerovo, two citizens of Uzbekistan were each fined 30,000 rubles for performing namaz in a local supermarket under the same charge and then deported.

## Other Forms of Discrimination

Muslim organizations in various regions were still regularly subjected to police pressure. As a rule, such interventions were connected with raids aimed at identifying illegal migrants and often accompanied by disruptions of worship services and other violations. In addition to law enforcement agencies and various state bodies, representatives of the *Russkaya Obschina* and other far-right organizations occasionally took part in these raids.

For example, in November, officers of the Center for Combating Extremism of the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia for the Moscow Region, the Main Military Investigative Directorate of the Investigative Committee of Russia, the prosecutor’s office, the criminal investigation department, and the State Traffic Inspectorate, as well as officers of the Riot Police and the National Guard of Russia (*Rosgvardiya*), with the participation of unnamed volunteer patrol members, conducted a comprehensive inspection of a local Muslim religious organization in Elektrostal. As a result of the inspection, reports were compiled under Article 8.8 Part 1 CAO (use of a land plot not in accordance with its designated purpose) and Article 5.26 Part 4. 37 individuals were taken to the military recruitment office.

We are aware of similar raids in Moscow against the following organizations: Risalyat on Ogorodny Proezd and Istina on Basovskaya Street. Raids also took place in Balashikha, Naro-Fominsk, Staraya Kupavna, and Troitsk in the Moscow Region, as well as in Tver and Surgut.

In addition to Muslims, Baptists – specifically, the communities belonging to the International Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches (IU ECB) – experienced systematic pressure from law enforcement agencies in 2025. Security forces in various regions attended worship services, sometimes disrupting them, and conducted inspections, citing the alleged “reports” on gatherings of “suspicious persons.”

Such visits took place in several communities in Krasnodar Krai. Specifically, in the settlement of Lazarevskoye, police officers, an assistant prosecutor, a local police officer, and a plainclothes individual arrived at a community’s house of prayer and disrupted an evening service. They refused to show their identification. One of the parishioners was detained, taken to a police station, and fingerprinted, but no charges were filed. Four volumes of religious literature were seized from the premises.

In Tula, an IU ECB church was visited by a local police officer and two FSB officers during an evening service. Criminal investigation officers appeared at the service before this visit, recorded video footage, and then informed their colleagues about a gathering of “dubious individuals.”

In Murino of the Leningrad Region, a deputy prosecutor, a local police officer, police officers, and several plainclothes individuals came to inspect a Baptist service held on the Trinity Day and, despite the presbyter’s warning that he was ready to speak after the worship service, attempted to question the believers during the holiday service.

In Novocherkassk of the Rostov Region, following a similar visit by representatives of six agencies, including the prosecutor's office and Rosgvardiya, six administrative cases were initiated against a Baptist community. We have no information about the outcome of these cases.

As in the previous year, we recorded cases of discrimination against Muslim women for wearing headscarves in educational institutions. However, whereas previously we tended to classify such cases as non-state discrimination, state bodies were almost always involved in the incidents related to "hijabs" in 2025. For example, a lyceum director in Khabarovsk demanded that a student who came to the September 1 assembly wearing a headscarf remove it, while acknowledging that the existing regulations contained no direct prohibition on wearing headscarves. The student's parents were forced to file complaints with the prosecutor's office and the regional commissioner for children's rights. The Investigative Committee did initiate an inspection based on the incident, but not due to the parents' complaint. Rather, the inspection followed accusations against the girl's father that appeared in far-right Telegram channels. The authors of those messages accused him of being affiliated with "Wahhabism," belonging to an ethnic criminal group, and threatening the director.

In Zhukovsky District of the Kaluga Region, parents of students at one of the schools expressed outrage over two seventh- and ninth-grade students wearing headscarves to classes. The complainants received support not only from the school administration but also from the regional Ministry of Education. The girls were forced to stop attending classes, and their parents sought legal assistance. The regional Minister of Internal Policy, Oleg Kalugin, commented on the case after it gained publicity, approving the actions of the school administration and stating that "school is a civic institution; it is a secular institution, therefore there is no need to emphasize one's religious particularities here."<sup>6</sup>

In some cities of Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, prosecutors took control over students' appearance. For example, parents in Nizhnevartovsk were warned of potential school inspections related to students wearing religious attire. If students were found wearing religious clothing, including hijabs and niqabs, heads of institutions would face responsibility. Educational institutions in Nefteyugansk received similar directives.

It is worth adding that we know of several conflicts related to performing namaz in public places that we cannot classify as discrimination. For example, a Yandex Taxi driver in Tyumen did not begin a trip until he finished performing namaz; meanwhile, the car remained in waiting mode. In response to the passenger's complaint, Yandex Taxi support offered her compensation and promised to impose sanctions on the driver. Another driver, of a scheduled bus in Vladivostok, began praying directly in front of the bus, obstructing the passage of other vehicles. An administrative offense report was filed against the driver. In addition, a radiologist at the Gatchina Interdistrict Hospital left his workplace to perform namaz and asked his patients to wait, including a patient with an open wound and venous bleeding. The hospital administration conducted a conversation with the doctor and also revised the work schedules, "taking into account the staff's religious needs."

6. "Kaluga Minister Spoke Out Against Wearing Hijabs in Schools," RIA Novosti, September 18, 2025 (<https://ria.ru/20250918/hidzhaby-2042735282.html>, in Russian).

It should also be noted that the performance of namaz in public places regularly became a topic of public discussion. In some cases, officials attempted to address this issue through administrative sanctions. For example, in April, the administration of Andropovsky Municipal District of Stavropol Krai sent a letter to various institutions threatening them with fines for performing namaz in public places and angering many Muslims. After a comment by Ramzan Kadyrov, the leader of Chechnya, who called this initiative "open discrimination and legal arbitrariness," the letter was withdrawn.

It is worth noting that official Muslim structures did not share the outrage in this case. Muhammad Rakhimov, the mufti of Stavropol Krai, supported the administration's initiative, stating that "all religious rites are performed on premises or with the permission of local authorities. There is no point in unauthorized campaigns. And if they occur without permission, naturally, this should be punishable."<sup>7</sup>

## Positive Verdicts

In some cases, believers and religious organizations successfully defended their rights, including through the courts.

On several occasions, believers and religious organizations were able to challenge fines for "unlawful missionary activity." For example, the Krasnodar Regional Court overturned two rulings of the Oktyabrsky District Court of Krasnodar and terminated the cases against two Brazilian Pentecostal pastors, each of whom had been fined 30,000 rubles and sentenced to deportation under Article 5.26 Part 5 CAO. Vicente Julio Cesar Kravchenko and Eder Da Silva Figueiredo were detained in August when security forces arrived at the church, disrupted the holiday service in honor of the Dormition of the Mother of God, and removed both pastors from the hall without explaining the reasons to the congregation. The court of first instance failed to take into account that both clerics were lawfully present in Russia, held residence permits, were employed, and possessed documents confirming their authority from the religious organization "Kingdom of God" and the Russian United Union of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals).

The regional court annulled the fines and deportation orders. However, the church members filed a complaint with the Investigative Committee to open a criminal case regarding the disruption of the service under paragraph "a" of Article 148 Part 4 CC (unlawful obstruction of the activities of religious organizations or the conduct of worship services and other religious rites using official position) and paragraph "d" of Article 286 Part 3 CC (abuse of official powers resulting in a substantial violation of the rights and lawful interests of citizens or organizations by a group of persons by prior agreement or an organized group). We do not know whether this complaint resulted in any legal action.

In Tyumen, the court terminated an administrative case against the Light of the World Evangelical Christian church under Article 5.26 Part 3 CAO (activities by a religious organization without indicating its official full name, including the issuance or distribution of literature, printed, audio, and video materials without proper labeling). The prosecutor's office

7. N. Aksenov, "Mufti of Stavropol Supports Ban on Public Prayers Outside," Kommersant – Caucasus, April 21, 2025 (<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7674515>, in Russian).

sought to hold the organization liable for the absence of labeling on several books and video files. However, these materials had not been published by the religious organization itself and were not distributed during missionary activity, so the court closed the case.

In Noyabrsk of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, proceedings were terminated against Catholic priest Marek Jashkowski, a citizen of Poland, who had faced charges under Article 5.26 Part 5 for failure to notify authorities of the commencement of the activities of a religious group. The priest explained that he was the rector of the parish of St. Joseph the Worker and traveled twice a month at the invitation of parishioners to conduct services, without attempting to attract outsiders. The parish had also repeatedly attempted to register as a religious organization. The court found no elements of an offense in Fr. Marek's actions and closed the case.

We are also aware of several cases in which believers successfully defended in courts their right to perform alternative civilian service on religious grounds – in particular, a 25-year-old volunteer from St. Petersburg, a member of an Orthodox youth volunteer organization assisting the homeless. An Orthodox priest confirmed the young man's pacifist views.

A Christian named Mikhail from the Moscow Region succeeded in obtaining the right to alternative civilian service only on his third attempt. His first application, submitted in 2023, was considered only in 2024 and rejected on the grounds of "insufficient evidence that military service contradicts his beliefs or religion." Mikhail challenged the decision in court but lost at all three levels. The same outcome occurred with his second application. In March 2025, he submitted a third application, and the military prosecutor's office confirmed that the military commissariat had committed violations. In April, the draft commission approved his request.

Yegor, a 21-year-old believer from a Protestant church in Krasnodar, obtained permission to perform alternative civilian service, even though the medical commission declared him fit for military service and ignored his educational deferment. He cited religious beliefs that do not allow him to take up arms as grounds for refusing military service. His pastor accompanied him to the commission hearing and confirmed that Yegor had attended church since childhood.

Despite Russia's refusal to recognize the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights, the Court continued to consider previously submitted complaints. In March, it issued a judgment in the case "Kolyasnikov and Others v. Russia." The applicants included pastor Alexei Kolyasnikov from Krasnodar, fined in 2014 for reading the Bible in a café, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses, representatives of Aum Shinrikyo, the Embassy of Jesus Evangelical Christian (Pentecostal) Church of Nizhny Novgorod, the Methodist Christian Church of Vladivostok, and other organizations. The Court established a violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion) and ordered the respondent state to pay the applicants between 2,500 and 7,500 euros within three months.

In October, the ECHR delivered a judgment in the case "Markin and Others v. Russia," combining the complaints filed between 2018 and 2022 by 28 Jehovah's Witnesses from several regions who faced prosecution for continuing the activities of an extremist organization. The Court found a violation of the same Article 9 and ordered the state to pay each applicant 15,000 euros within three months, with an additional 3,000 to 3,500 euros awarded to three of the defendants.

We also note that the community of the Kurganinsk house of prayer in Krasnodar Krai, whose activities were suspended in 2024 due to failure to notify authorities of the commencement of its activities, submitted the required notification and resumed its activities in December 2025, regaining access to the house of prayer that had remained sealed for six months. The community belongs to the previously mentioned International Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches (IU ECB), which unites churches that refuse state registration as a matter of principle.

## Protecting the Feelings of Believers

### Protection from Above

Law enforcement under Article 148 Part 1 CC ("offending the religious feelings of believers" without aggravating circumstances) remained active, although the number of sentences reported under this provision was lower than in the previous year: 19 sentences (vs. 26 in 2024). 17 sentences to 18 individuals involved punishment (in 2024, it was true for 22 sentences to 24 individuals, and two others were referred for compulsory treatment). As before, we do not necessarily have information about the specific grounds for convictions under this article. We also consider a significant portion of the sentences under this provision, for which we know the details, to have been imposed inappropriately.

Defendants convicted under Part 1 of this article were sentenced to actual imprisonment in three cases, but all three involved additional, more serious charges. The most severe sentence – seven years in a minimum-security penal colony with a three-year ban on administering internet resources – was imposed on blogger Vadim Kharchenko from Gelendzhik. In addition to offending religious feelings, he was charged under three other criminal articles. We do not know which of his publications formed the basis for prosecution under this provision.

Two individuals received lengthy suspended sentences under this article. Nikolay Pozharuk, a resident of the Sverdlovsk Region, received a suspended sentence of six years and 10 days with a probation period of two and a half years for posting a comment offensive to Christians. Ilya Stebenev, a student at the Penza Railway Transport College, received a four-year suspended sentence with a two-year probation and a fine of 5,000 rubles. The court found that he had offended religious feelings in three comments under a Telegram post titled "Moscow Welcomes the Growth of the Muslim Population, Putin Said." Both individuals were also charged with unlawful handling of explosive substances.

In nine cases, offenders convicted under Article 148 Part 1 were sentenced to community service. The most severe such punishment – 250 hours each – was imposed on Mansur Zhabrailov, a rural schoolteacher from Chechnya (with a two-year ban on teaching), and Aleksandr Aganin, a resident of Serov in the Sverdlovsk Region (with confiscation of his mobile phone as the instrument of the offense). Internet publications served as the grounds for criminal prosecution in both cases. Zhabrailov was also charged under Article 282 CC. Oleg Merzlyakov, a resident of Yakshur village in Zavyalovsky District of Udmurtia, re-

ceived 100 hours of community service under Article 148 Part 1 for publicly swearing at a priest and the Orthodox faith on the grounds of a local church, while intoxicated.

Dmitry Vetrov, a resident of Ivanovo, faced a fine of 140,000 rubles for comments on VKontakte that were offensive to Christians of various denominations.

In addition, we are aware of four court decisions under Article 148 Part 2 (the same acts committed in places specifically designated for worship and other religious rites). Punishment was imposed on four individuals in one case only (in 2024, there were nine such decisions, including six convictions against seven individuals, and three decisions on compulsory psychiatric treatment). Residents of the Novgorod Region – Igor Yakovlev, Timur Dekanov, Vsevolod Talavyra, and Georgy Pavlov – were each sentenced to 240 hours of community service for desecrating burial crosses while intoxicated “by demonstrating various gestures,” photographing the process, and publishing the images. A vandal charged under the same provision, along with three other articles for his actions in the Assumption Church in Ivanovo, was referred for compulsory treatment. Blogger Anna Borshchuk, who published a video of herself urinating near Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg, was released from criminal liability after apologizing and voluntarily working at the church as an act of atonement. The case against Igor Maksimov, a parishioner of a Greek Catholic church who had placed stylized icon-like images of Stepan Bandera, Roman Shukhevych, and Josyf Slipyj in the church refectory, was terminated due to the expiration of the statute of limitations. Maksimov was also charged under Part 1 of Article 354<sup>1</sup> CC (rehabilitation of Nazism).

Those deemed by the authorities to have offended religious feelings also faced administrative sanctions under Article 5.26 Part 2 CAO (intentional public desecration of religious or liturgical literature, objects of religious veneration, worldview symbols or emblems, or their damage or destruction). According to the data provided by OVD-Info, there were at least 43 such cases. In most cases, the substance of the claims is unknown due to the absence of court decisions. Seven of the ten cases known to us resulted in fines, and three – in community service.

Many cases pertained to online publications. For example, Moscow resident Ilya Kostyakov was sentenced to 80 hours of community service for a TikTok video.

Restaurant managers faced administrative sanctions for offending religious feelings on two occasions. In Simferopol, a court fined Vladimir Sizykh, founder of the El Pastor restaurant chain, 100,000 rubles. Décor in one of his restaurants included “a modified image of the Mother of God (with a skull instead of her face) and a caricature depicting the Lord Jesus Christ as a shepherd with a boombox on his shoulder,” which law enforcement authorities and the court considered offensive to Orthodox believers.

In Orenburg, a court fined Dmitry Ivanov, manager of the Georgian cuisine restaurant “Nino-Vano,” 150,000 rubles for promotional flyers depicting St. Basil’s Cathedral with domes shaped like khinkali dumplings. Notably, a lawyer of the Orenburg diocese participated in the proceedings and argued that although St. Basil’s Cathedral was a museum, it also remained an active church, and therefore the depiction of its domes as khinkali offended a sacred site.

In addition, police detained a 15-year-old resident of Saratov who shouted “Allahu Akbar” in an Orthodox church and recorded it on video. A preventive conversation was held with the girl, and a report was filed against her parents under Article 5.35 CAO (failure by parents to properly fulfill their duties of care and upbringing of a minor).

Members of the State Duma repeatedly acted as defenders of religious feelings. In particular, their attention was often focused on the so-called “fall of crosses” – schematic depictions of churches without crosses. For example, Communist Party deputy Mikhail Matveev appealed to the Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor General’s Office, demanding criminal proceedings under Articles 148 and 282 CC against AST Publishers, which had released an educational game “Russia’s Landmarks.” The game’s cover depicted Orthodox churches without crosses, while mosques featured crescents, and a Kremlin tower displayed a star. The publisher explained that the crosses were not visible due to the orientation of the image and stated that the game would not be reissued.

Anna Kuznetsova and Pyotr Tolstoy, Deputy Speakers of the State Duma, complained about what they considered an offensive social studies textbook by Phoenix Publishing House with the cover depicting St. Basil’s Cathedral without crosses. The deputies requested an inspection: Tolstoy addressed the Prosecutor General, while Kuznetsova appealed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The results of the inspection are unknown, but in July, the State Duma adopted the aforementioned law protecting religious symbols and prohibiting such images.

The same deputy, Mikhail Matveev, also filed a complaint with the Prosecutor General’s Office against Tver Tissue, a toilet paper manufacturer whose packaging depicted St. Basil’s Cathedral and the Spasskaya Tower of the Moscow Kremlin. The deputy regarded this as both an offense to believers’ feelings and an attempt to discredit state authorities. Following the complaint, the company changed the packaging, removing the image of the church, but the company director, nevertheless, received a prosecutorial order to remedy the violations of legislation on freedom of conscience and religious associations. Twelve thousand rolls of the “offensive” toilet paper were destroyed.

In another case involving “offensive” toilet paper, the matter went to court. A court in Moscow prohibited the sale of souvenir toilet paper depicting a 1,000-ruble banknote. The court considered the depiction of Prince Yaroslav the Wise – canonized as a saint – on the fake banknote to be offensive to believers’ feelings and contrary to spiritual and moral values.

The Federal Antimonopoly Service for Khabarovsk Krai halted advertising by the car audio workshop “BASS HOUSE 4212” after it was deemed offensive to believers’ feelings, as it used an image of Christ. The client, who was the shop’s sole proprietor, was found to have violated advertising law.

## Protection from Below

As before, various public activists regularly spoke out in defense of believers’ feelings. Most often, their efforts were aimed at protecting the feelings of Russian Orthodox believers. As in previous years, organized activist groups, primarily the Sorok Sorokov organization, were the key defenders of Orthodox believers’ feelings.

Orthodox activists continued to target cultural events. For example, in the fall of 2025, Sorok Sorokov demanded the removal of the painting “In the Utility Room” from the solo exhibition of Aleksandr Rukavishnikov, held at the Fineart gallery at Winzavod. According to the defenders of Orthodox believers’ feelings, the painting “*depicts the Lord Jesus Christ consuming vodka in the company of four intoxicated men*,” and its display should be prosecuted under Article 148 CC. According to the curator of the exhibition project, Maria Moskvicheva, “*three sturdy Orthodox fellows arrived with a prepared complaint to the Winza-*

*vod administration, immediately called the police, and then the Investigative Committee.*<sup>8</sup> Rukavishnikov refused to remove the painting.

In November, representatives of Sorok Sorokov demanded that comedians Nurlan Saburov, Sergei Detkov, and Alexei Shcherbakov publicly apologize for profanity-laden jokes about Christ featured in a 2023 episode of the show “What Happened Next?” Having received no apology, Orthodox activists filed a claim with the Investigative Committee requesting that the statements of the show’s participants be examined for offending believers’ feelings. Already in January 2026, Saburov was banned from entering Russia for 50 years. The decision was motivated by the need to protect national security and spiritual and moral values.

In addition, Sorok Sorokov complained about “blasphemous” goods in the Witch’s Path, a store located near the Pokrovsky Monastery in Moscow. Orthodox activists were outraged by items found among the merchandise, including books on occultism and magic from Ukrainian publishers; candles shaped like sexual organs with pentagrams; icons with horns; figurines of demons; and other similar objects. These goods were subsequently removed from sale. The store owner, Anna Avdeeva, was fined 100,000 rubles under Article 5.26 Part 2 CAO.

Other Orthodox activists, from a Cossack organization affiliated with the Danilov Monastery, successfully petitioned for the suspension of the Enchantress fair, where they had identified “esoteric” goods and related workshops. First, the Cossacks visited the fair, and then, after they complained about a “*satanic event taking place across the street from the monastery,*” police officers, FSB inspectors, and district administration representatives arrived. Following these inspections, the premises’ owners cut the electricity and announced the involuntary suspension of the fair.

Orthodox activists also complained about “blasphemous” publications, as in the case of a video in which three girls twerked in front of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. Sorok Sorokov activists complained to the Investigative Committee, requesting that the dancers be held criminally liable for offending believers’ feelings. Soon after the complaint, the girls were charged under Article 20.1 CAO (disorderly conduct), and the administration of the Stroganov Russian State University of Art and Industry, where they studied, expelled them “for violating public order and offending the religious feelings of citizens.”

Perhaps the most high-profile episode in the fight to protect Orthodox believers’ feelings was the conflict between Sorok Sorokov and Apti Alaudinov, Deputy Head of the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Orthodox activists demanded prosecution against him under Articles 148 and 282 CC and his removal from his army post after he made offensive remarks about Schema-Hegumen Gavriil (Vinogradov), who had accused Muslims of being ready to “slaughter Muscovites.” The defenders of religious feelings did not withdraw their claim even after Alaudinov apologized to the clergyman on his Telegram channel. By that time, Gavriil had already been removed from his position for xenophobic statements. However, after a face-to-face meeting between Orthodox activists and Alaudinov, Sorok Sorokov concluded that “*Apti Alaudinov is not an enemy of Russians and Orthodox believers, but a friend,*” and decided not to insist on sanctions and to “continue the dialogue.”

8. “Sorok Sorokov Demanded the Removal of Alexander Rukavishnikov’s Painting from the Fineart Exhibition,” *MoskvichMAG*, October 1, 2025 (<https://moskvichmag.ru/gorod/sorok-sorokov-potrebovalo-snyat-kartinu-aleksandra-rukavishnikova-s-vystavki-v-fineart/>), in Russian).

At times, church structures raised concerns about threats to believers’ feelings, without the public activists’ mediation. For example, the authorities of Achinsk in Krasnoyarsk Krai canceled the burning of an effigy during Maslenitsa celebrations, citing a request from representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In May, Metropolitan Longin (Korchagin) of Simbirsk and Novospassk called on Alexei Russkikh, the governor of the Ulyanovsk Region, to ban Protoka, a festival of self-development and healthy lifestyle, which moved to the region in 2024 after being held for ten years in the Samara Region. According to the metropolitan, the festival “*teaches young people various occult and neo-pagan ‘spiritual’ practices*” and promotes ideas of occultism. Despite his efforts, the festival took place, albeit under a different name – “the Place of Power.”

Metropolitan Dimitry (Eliseev) of Chita and Petrovsk-Zabaykalsky publicly criticized Halloween decorations on the Centaur Cinema building. In his view, distorted crosses with red streaks placed at the entrance symbolized Satanism and offended the feelings of believers. At the same time, he noted that “*there are elements of the holiday that are not prohibited – pumpkins, candles, and so on. But the cross is a Christian symbol,*” and promised to file a law enforcement claim. Although no formal complaint was filed, the regional Ministry of Internal Affairs initiated an inspection. We have no information on its results.

Defense of the offended religious feelings came not only from Orthodox activists and representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church but also from other public figures. For example, Yekaterina Mizulina, head of the Safe Internet League, identified “*a clear offense to believers’ feelings, which is a punishable offense*” and “*a continuation of systematic efforts to discredit the Russian Orthodox Church that attempts to get children involved*” in TikTok videos featuring fifth- and sixth-grade students using a toilet brush as a holy water brush. Based on her reaction, the administration of a Moscow school conducted an internal review and required the students involved to apologize. A St. Petersburg school, whose students had filmed a similar video, limited its response to holding discussions with children and parents about the “inappropriate behavior.”

Television host Boris Korchevnikov drew public attention to the “Forest Gates,” an art object constructed in Kirov. According to him, the ornamentation of the gates, installed at the entrance to the Poroshino sports and tourism park, featured pagan motifs, and the object represented a “Vedic” “window to hell.” The park administration tried to explain that the gates depicted a forest and a family of bears whose noses visitors would rub “for good luck,” and that the installation was located away from the “health trail” and did not obstruct access. However, under pressure from city authorities, the park administration was forced to dismantle the gates.

It should also be noted that, in some cases, organizers of cultural events took preventive measures and imposed restrictions without waiting for complaints, if an event seemed potentially offensive. Thus, in Kazan, the exhibition “The Finiteness of Infinity,” featuring works by artist Ivan Stan from Mari EL, was closed on its opening day “for technical reasons.” The head of the Supermodern Gallery, where the exhibition was held, demanded the removal of two of Stan’s works because they were “imbued with paganism and Satanism.”

We are aware of only one case in which non-Orthodox believers asserted that their feelings had been offended, and their claim had consequences. The installation of airport trash bins bearing the silhouette of Lake Baikal, sacred to the Buryat people, as well as the placement of a prayer drum next to a smoking area, provoked outraged responses. The airport administration promised to replace the bins and relocate the prayer drum.

# Insufficient Protection from Defamation and Attacks

## Violence and Vandalism

The level of violence motivated by religion remained low, but such incidents still occurred from time to time. Muslim women were victims of such violence on at least two occasions. In August, a woman from Rodniki in the Ivanovo Region, while intoxicated, struck a Muslim woman on the back of her head, “*expressing hatred toward the victim ... in connection with her belonging to the Muslim religion.*” The attacker was sentenced to eight months of restriction of freedom under Article 116 CC (battery).

In October, a teenager attacked a Muslim woman wearing a head covering on the street in Saratov and stabbed her in the back. He filmed the incident and subsequently published the video on social media. The victim managed to resist but was hospitalized. The attacker was detained, and a case was initiated against him under Article 30 Part 3 and Article 105 Part 2 CC (attempted murder).

Oleg T., a resident of the Sverdlovsk Region, carried out a rampage in the Church of the Holy Martyr Sergius of Podolsk in Klimovsk (the Moscow Region) in February. He threatened the church store employees, tore off an employee’s headscarf, beat them with a stick, smashed the glass on an icon, and stole approximately three thousand rubles. A criminal case was initiated against him under Article 148 Part 4 CC (violation of the right to freedom of conscience and religion, with the use of violence).

In April, Natalia Medvedeva, a former photojournalist for *Ogonyok* and author of conspiracy books, attempted to tear off the niqab of a female passenger in the Moscow metro but was beaten by the woman’s companion, who also broke the attacker’s tablet. Administrative reports under Article 20.1 CAO (disorderly conduct) were filed against both Medvedeva and Ibodullozoda Muzaffardzhon Fazliddin (the companion of the niqab-wearing passenger). Medvedeva was sentenced to seven days of administrative arrest, Fazliddin to 13 days. Later, he was sentenced to two and a half years in a penal colony for the same actions under paragraphs “a” and “c” of Article 213 Part 1 (hooliganism involving violence, committed on public transport) and Article 167 Part 2 CC (intentional destruction or damage of another person’s property).

Compared to 2024, the number of acts of vandalism motivated by religion increased sharply – we are aware of 23 such cases in 2025 (vs. 10 in 2024). These included one shooting and 11 incidents of arson (vs. one explosion and three incidents of arson in 2024).

Muslim sites were targeted most frequently – 15 cases (vs. 4 in 2024). Prayer houses and mosques were set on fire in Ramenskoye and Yegoryevsk (the Moscow Region), as well as in Blagoveshchensk, Usinsk, and Tolyatti. In Tambov, an attacker fired a pneumatic pistol at a prayer house, damaging a windowpane. In Khabarovsk, vandals destroyed the entrance to a Muslim cemetery and smashed a stand displaying verses from the Qur’an. In St. Petersburg, Adygea, Khabarovsk, and the Chelyabinsk Region, perpetrators threw parts of pig carcasses at Muslim sites. Representatives of far-right organizations were involved in many of these incidents.

Orthodox sites were targeted by vandals three times (vs. 5 in 2024). In addition to the aforementioned rampage in the Klimovsk church, the Ilyinsky Church at the Banykinskoye Cemetery in Tolyatti was vandalized. The perpetrators left the inscription “There is no God but Allah!” A wooden cross near the Church of St. George the Victorious in Sol-Iletsks also suffered damage. In the latter case, a local resident detained on suspicion of arson explained that her actions had been motivated by disagreement with the location of the cross.

Jewish sites were also targeted three times (once in 2024). Perpetrators threw Molotov cocktails at the synagogue building in Obninsk, which had already been attacked in 2024. A cell of the neo-Nazi network NS/WP, banned in the Russian Federation, took responsibility for the arson. An armed resident of Yessentuki attempted to enter a synagogue in Sochi, where a children’s class was taking place, but failed and instead broke the gate with a hammer and threw stones at the building. The attacker was registered with a psychiatric clinic. In Moscow, a teenager drew offensive words and Nazi symbols on a Jewish community tent during the Sukkot holiday.

Protestant sites were targeted by vandals at least twice (no such cases were recorded in 2024). In the settlement of Ulakhan-An in Khangalassky District of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), unknown individuals set fire to a building belonging to a local Evangelical Christian-Baptist church. In Abakan, vandals defaced an Evangelical Christian prayer house with offensive graffiti.

## Defamation of Religious Minorities

As in previous years, mass media regularly published defamatory materials about religious minorities. Such materials continued to target Protestant churches and new religious movements.

In April, a number of federal and regional media outlets – including REN TV, *Izvestia*, the Perm edition of *Arguments and Facts*, and ProPerm – published “exposé” reports about the Russian United Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals), its presiding bishop Eduard Grabovenko, and the alleged involvement of church leadership in driving former pastor Nikolai Shavrin to suicide. The authors of the reports accused Grabovenko and other pastors of extorting money and property from parishioners, maintaining ties with foreign religious organizations, supporting Ukraine, and so on.

For example, REN TV claimed that “evangelical Christianity has always been considered a ‘soft power’ of the U.S. State Department, which generously funded grants ‘to promote religious freedom.’”<sup>9</sup> *Izvestia*, in support of its “anti-sectarian” accusations, cited as expert opinion statements by Aleksandr Dvorkin, a leading anti-sectarian Orthodox campaigner,

In connection with the defamatory campaign, the church had to issue a press release describing the situation as “mass harassment,” which affected “thousands of churches in the country and hundreds of thousands of citizens of the Russian Federation.” A similar statement was issued by the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, which

9. “How Pastors of the ‘New Testament’ Built a Business Empire at the Expense of Parishioners,” REN TV, April 7, 2025 “<https://ren.tv/longread/1322936-kto-i-kak-prevrashchaet-veru-v-istochnik-lichnogo-dokhoda>, in Russian).

linked the series of defamatory publications to the acts of vandalism against Protestant churches described above.

Publications by *Tulskie Novosti* about Adventists forced the Seventh-day Adventist Church to bring the matter to court. In May, *Tulskie Novosti* published a video report emphasizing the foreign origin of Adventists, claiming that in the 1990s, the organization gained popularity thanks to foreign funding and the “*spiritual hunger, illiteracy, and permissiveness of that time,*” and now, “*the influx of people into the sect appears to have decreased, thanks to greater religious literacy among the population.*”<sup>10</sup> The journalists engaged Aleksey Yarasov (deputy head of the missionary department of the Tula Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church) and a former member of the Adventist church who had converted to Orthodoxy, as experts.

Adventist church leaders contacted the editorial office, demanded the removal of the offensive report, and filed a lawsuit when their demand was refused. Several believers and Zaoksky Adventist University also filed separate defamation claims. The court consolidated these claims into a single case, which concluded in February 2026 with a settlement agreement.

In September, several media outlets circulated a report by Baza claiming that Adventists were assisting a Moscow retiree in a court case to seize her daughter’s legally owned apartment, allegedly using threats and forged documents. The Information Department of the Euro-Asian Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church issued a statement calling these publications “*a gross violation of journalistic ethics*” and “*deliberate slander.*”

In November, NTV aired an exposé report with the telling title “Sectarians, Magicians, and Witches: How ‘Religious NATO’ Is Waging War Against Russia,” covering several religious organizations. In particular, according to the authors, followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) “*softly but persistently recruit new members*”: “*Perhaps no religious organization in the world has so many people with ties to American security services.*”

NTV journalists also traditionally accused the Church of Scientology of profit-seeking: “*For Hubbard’s followers, the main thing is profit. A reward for each new adherent. The operation is a financial pyramid that benefits those at the top.*”

The report’s authors also mentioned representatives of other organizations in a negative context, as well as all “*sorcerers, witches, magicians, and esoteric practitioners of all kinds,*” who allegedly “*cast curses on Russians as instructed by the Security Service of Ukraine, holding sabbats on the air of central Ukrainian channels. Satan Worship has already become a cult in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.*”<sup>11</sup>

A journalist from the outlet *Prufy.ru* classified “Mormonism” among “prohibited movements” without hesitation and accused believers of espionage: “*Mormonism, along with many other prohibited movements, appeared in Russia in the 1990s. Young Mormons who come to Russia to preach and teach English are regularly accused of espionage.*”<sup>12</sup>

10. “Life According to the Word of God: What Is the Adventist Movement Based On?” *Tulskie Novosti*, May 6, 2025 ([https://newstula.ru/fn\\_1659438.html](https://newstula.ru/fn_1659438.html), in Russian).

11. “Sectarians, Magicians, and Witches: How the ‘Religious NATO’ Is Waging War against Russia,” NTV, November 22, 2025 (<https://www.ntv.ru/novosti/2950570/>, in Russian).

12. Ye. Gunenkova, “An American Church Caught Fire in Moscow. One Exists in Ufa as Well,” *Prufy*, January 9, 2025 ([https://prufy.ru/news/chp/162611-v\\_moskve\\_gorela\\_amerikanskaya\\_tserkov\\_takaya\\_est\\_i\\_v\\_ufe/](https://prufy.ru/news/chp/162611-v_moskve_gorela_amerikanskaya_tserkov_takaya_est_i_v_ufe/), in Russian).

It should be added that the majority of reports on criminal cases and sentences against Jehovah’s Witnesses also contain “anti-sectarian” rhetoric. For example, a REN TV report in February on such a criminal case was titled “Sectarians in Hiding Recruit Adherents near Nizhny Novgorod.”<sup>13</sup>

## Insufficient Protection of Religious Minorities

Public activity of fighters against “sectarians” and other minorities remained low but was still occasionally present. For example, in July, Vladislav Pozdnyakov, founder of the Male State community, threatened Mata Tepsaeva, a doctor at a Moscow clinic. According to Pozdnyakov, she had refused to treat a male patient for religious reasons. The Male State leader published a recording of a conversation with a clinic administrator and a photograph of Tepsaeva in a hijab and called on his followers to file complaints and seek the doctor’s dismissal. The clinic’s chief physician accused Pozdnyakov of falsifying the audio recording and explained that the refusal to treat the patient was based not on religious considerations, but on Tepsaeva’s lack of the necessary licenses and professional qualifications to treat male patients.

The incident provoked wide public resonance. The doctor’s critics included Marina Akhmedova, a member of the Presidential Council for Human Rights, as well as deputies Vladislav Davankov of the State Duma and his colleague from the “New People” party – Krasnodar City Duma deputy Sergei Klimov. Under such pressure, Tepsaeva chose to resign from the clinic.

## Persecution of Clergy for Criticism in Connection with the Armed Conflict with Ukraine

Clergy of various religious organizations sometimes publicly criticized the military conflict with Ukraine and then faced sanctions from the state, and sometimes from religious organizations.

Some of these clerics faced criminal prosecution. Thus, Nikolai Romanyuk, a 63-year-old pastor of the Evangelical Christian Holy Trinity Church, was found guilty under paragraphs “b” and “c” of Article 280<sup>4</sup> Part 2 CC (public calls to carry out activities directed against state security, committed using an official position and on the internet) and sentenced to four years in a minimum-security penal colony followed by a three-year ban on pastoral activity. The case was based on his 2022 sermon, in which the pastor criticized the idea of Pentecostals participating in combat operations.

Ilya Vasiliev, head of the Moscow Zen Centre and founder of the Civic School of Hackers, was sentenced in June under paragraph “e” of Article 207<sup>3</sup> Part 2 CC (public dissemi-

13. “Sectarians in Hiding Recruit Adherents near Nizhny Novgorod,” *REN TV*, February 13, 2025.

nation of deliberately false information containing data on the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation under the guise of reliable reports, motivated by political, ideological, racial, national, or religious hatred or enmity) to eight years of imprisonment in a minimum-security penal colony with a four-year ban on activities related to administering internet websites. The case was based on Vasiliev's post from December 2022 about the shelling of Kherson during a Christmas ceasefire, later deleted. In October, this sentence was overturned, and the case was sent for retrial, while Vasiliev remained in custody.

A case under Article 205<sup>2</sup> Part 2 CC (public justification of terrorism committed using the internet) was opened against hieromonk Nikandr (Evgeny Pinchuk) of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia under the omophorion of Metropolitan Agafangel. Nikandr had previously faced administrative and criminal charges for discrediting the army. The charge was related to the justification of the activities of the Russian Volunteer Corps (*Russkiy dobrovolcheskiy korpus*, RDK), recognized as a terrorist organization. The court ordered his detention as a preventive measure.

A case under Article 280<sup>3</sup> Part 1 CC (repeat discrediting of the army) was also initiated against preacher Eduard Charov, who does not associate himself with any particular denomination and had previously faced administrative sanctions for discrediting the army. The case was based on a video address by Yevgeny Prigozhin recorded shortly before his June 2023 mutiny and shared by Charov on Vkontakte. Prigozhin's address stated that the military actions in Ukraine were not connected with aggression on its part. The case is already in court. In 2024, another case against Charov was opened under Article 205<sup>2</sup> Part 2 CC; its consideration began in March 2025 and has not been concluded.

Clergy also faced administrative charges for criticizing Russia's actions in the conflict with Ukraine. For example, priest Nikolai Savchenko, a cleric of the Church of St. Peter, Metropolitan of Moscow, was arrested for 14 days in St. Petersburg under Article 20.3 Part 1 CAO (public display of prohibited symbols or attributes) for a 2014 photograph showing him on Nevsky Prospekt holding a Ukrainian flag. The court interpreted the photograph as a display of symbols of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, recognized as extremist in Russia.

Archbishop Grigory Mikhnov-Vaytenko of the Apostolic Orthodox Church was fined 30,000 rubles under Part 1 of Article 20.3.3 CAO (discrediting the army) for publishing a video in 2022.

Grigory Okhanov, former chairman of Kerigma, the St. Petersburg Association of Orthodox Youth Communities, was fined 30,000 rubles under the same Article 20.3.3 for his interviews of 2022 and 2024, which condemned military actions in Ukraine. At the time of the earlier interviews, Okhanov was a cleric of the Russian Orthodox Church. He later moved to Turkey and became a priest of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

In St. Petersburg, two university instructors – Olga Dautova, professor at the Ushinsky Academy of Postgraduate Pedagogical Education, and her husband Sergei Khristoforov, associate professor at Herzen State Pedagogical University – were dismissed for their association with the School of the Unified Principle, which holds a pro - Ukrainian position and is based on the teachings of the "Orthodox spiritual visionary" Olga Asaulyak. According to media reports, followers of the School prayed for Volodymyr Zelensky.

As in the previous two years, the only known cases of clergy punished for their anti-war stance by their own religious organization pertain to the Russian Orthodox Church. The number of such cases has noticeably decreased. Nevertheless, they did occur, and in all instances known to us, the most severe sanction – defrocking - was imposed:

Priest Vadim Kuzmitsky, former rector of the Church of the "Vsetsaritsa" Icon of the Mother of God in Srednyaya Akhtuba (Volgograd Region), was defrocked in July. In 2022, he had been suspended from ministry and left Russia. The disciplinary measures were based on an address in which he anathematized those who initiated the military actions.

In December, the ecclesiastical court of the Moscow diocese ruled to defrock Archpriest Andrei Lorgus – a priest, publicist, rector of the Institute of Christian Psychology, and author of books on Christian psychology. The court found that he had violated a number of Apostolic rules and rules of the Ecumenical Councils but did not specify the nature of these violations. It is known that in 2022, while already a supernumerary cleric and residing outside Russia, the Archpriest signed a letter by clergy condemning Russia's actions in the armed conflict with Ukraine. The patriarch signed the defrocking decree in 2026.

In January, Metropolitan Savva (Mikheev) of Vologda and Kirillov approved a decision of the ecclesiastical court and signed a decree defrocking hieromonk Tikhon (Sokolovsky) of the Spaso-Prilutsky Dimitriev Monastery in Vologda for "unauthorized departure from the monastery and diocese and deviation into schism." In the autumn of 2024, due to his anti-war position, the priest joined the clergy of the Orthodox Community of Apostolic Tradition in the name of the Holy Trinity in St. Petersburg, which is part of the Apostolic Orthodox Church. Prior to this, Tikhon had been prohibited from using social media and preaching.

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