

1.2. State control over information and media

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Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian authorities have increased restrictions imposed on media.[42] In February 2022, *Roskomnadzor* – the Russian federal executive agency in charge of media supervision[43]– instructed media outlets to avoid using the terms 'attack', 'invasion', and 'war'[44] and to use solely information from the Russian Ministry of Defence (MoD).[45] Officially, the Russian government refers to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a 'special military operation' (Russian: *SVO*),[46] even after the authorities have acknowledged that 'it became a war' in February[47] and March 2024.[48]

Independent reporting from Russia has become increasingly restricted due to laws criminalising criticism of the military[49] and the government.[50] Many independent media outlets and human rights groups have been closed or designated as 'foreign agents' or 'undesirable organisations'.[51] The authorities have continued to tighten online censorship,[52] blocking 'thousands of websites' – including those of independent media, human rights organisations, and opposition politicians – for allegedly violating the legislation on online activity.[53] In July 2025, as reported by Reuters, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov defended the censorship, acknowledging it as 'unprecedented' for Russia but justified due to the war in Ukraine. According to Reuters, Peskov 'noted the closure of many media outlets and the emigration of some reporters, stating that 'the war is going on in the information space too.'[54]

As of early August 2025, the Russian NGO that monitors internet freedom, *Roskomsvoboda*,[55] reported that over 25 000 websites and links have been blocked due to 'war censorship', according to the national blacklist registry, with about 5 000 sources added since August 2024. This list includes both Russian and international media sources.[56] In September 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur noted that *Roskomnadzor* monitors 'online content to identify shifting political opinions, track dissent and suppress political activity,' reporting that in 2025 the authorities blocked 410 online resources linked to 'undesirable organisations' and 87 linked to 'foreign agents'.[57] For information about 'undesirable organisations' and 'foreign agents', see chapter Legislation on undesirable organisations and foreign agents.

In line with the political agenda, books, films, theatre, and television productions were censored or withdrawn for addressing same-sex relationships and other prohibited topics, or due to

authors’ designations as ‘foreign agents’.58 Furthermore, media outlets frequently use self-censorship, avoiding topics like homosexuality and religion to align with the state’s conservative stance.59

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