

2.4. Anti-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation

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In 2024, the application of anti-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation was expanded.[218] The legal instruments used for prosecuting terrorist and extremist cases in Russia are primarily based on the laws ‘On Combating Extremist Activity’ and ‘On Combating Terrorism.’ As noted by Alexander Verkhovsky, under Russian law, a crime is classified as extremist or terrorist if it is motivated by political or ideological hatred, hostility toward a particular group, or the intent to influence the state or society through violence.[219]

As noted by Human Rights Watch, the authorities have used anti-extremism and anti-terrorism legislation as a means of censorship.[220] According to OVD-Info, although anti-extremism legislation formally addresses violent acts, its broad and vague wording enables courts to treat non-violent actions also as extremist.[221] According to the UN Special Rapporteur, the misuse of criminal provisions concerning the display of ‘extremist symbols’ has led to at least 67 convictions since 2022.[222]

Since 2022, Russia has seen a ‘quite high’ number of ‘violent attacks against the state’, ranging in the official classification from property damage to terrorism. While some of these attacks had ideological motives, such as support for Ukraine, others were reportedly carried out ‘under the influence of scammers, apparently from Ukraine’, who deceived, blackmailed, or offered money to the perpetrators of these attacks.[223] As noted by a human rights lawyer, anti-state actions are prosecuted as terrorist acts’ irrespective of the actual harm caused by them.[224]

Convictions for extremism and terrorism carry severe punishments. Penalties for financing extremist activities range from a fine of 300 000 rubles [3 075 euros] to eight years in prison, while organising such activities may result in a ten-year prison sentence. For financing terrorism, the minimum punishment is eight years in prison, while organisers of terrorist activities face life imprisonment. The maximum penalty for terrorism-related charges is life imprisonment. Persons convicted of terrorism are ‘ineligible for parole or reduced sentences.’[225] As noted by a human rights lawyer, terrorism-related cases are tried in military courts under expedited procedures, leaving minimal room for judicial discretion. In this type of prosecution, proceedings follow strict templates, giving the authorities more control over the outcome.[226]

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