

2.4.2. Use of anti-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation

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a) Use of anti-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation in relation to freedom of speech

Sources noted an increase in the use of anti-extremism and anti-terrorism legislation[259] in the prosecution of religious groups, government critics,[260] political opponents, anti-war activists, and human rights defenders.[261] As reported by the SOVA Research Centre, in 2024, convictions for public speech and participation in extremist and terrorist organisations continued to increase. Around half of the criminal cases related to public speech were linked to the war in Ukraine.[262]

A human rights lawyer noted that terrorism-related offences have become the main focus of criminal repression in Russia. Most of these offences involve statements perceived by authorities as ‘justifying terrorism’, such as expressions of support for the Ukrainian army, comments about its military actions in Russia, and criticism of Russian authorities.[263] Public justification of terrorism as well as public calls for terrorist activity and propaganda of terrorism (Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code), including when committed online, can be punished with up to seven years in prison.[264]

b) Use of anti-extremism and anti-terrorism legislation in relation to freedom of association

According to the SOVA Research Center, in 2024 – similarly to previous years – most convictions for participation in an extremist and terrorist organisation (Articles 205.5 and 282.2 of the Criminal Code respectively[265]) were issued in relation to people associated with various ‘religious and religious-political groups,’ such as Jihadist organisations and Jehovah's Witnesses. While the number of prosecutions against Jehovah’s Witnesses for participation in an extremist organisation in 2024 decreased when compared to 2023, the number of prosecutions for participation in banned pro-Ukrainian organisations increased.[266]

Similar to the rise in criminal charges for participation in extremist organisations, the number of criminal cases related to financing extremist organisations (Article 282.3 of the Criminal Code) has also increased. According to Mediazona, 105 such cases were initiated between January and July 2025, compared with around 70 cases in 2024 and fewer than 50 in 2023. Criminal prosecution for financing extremist organisations is largely used for supporters of the ACF, with

33 criminal cases documented between January and July 2025, whereas previously these types of criminal charges were mainly used against religious groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses.[267] For more information, see chapter 3.1.2. Supporters of Alexei Navalny and Anti-Corruption Foundation and 3.6.1 Jehovah's Witnesses.

Overall, there has been an increase in the number of criminal cases for donations to the ACF in 2024[268] and 2025.[269] As noted by Ivan Pavlov, authorities appear to be acting selectively rather than conducting mass arrests, with a new case emerging roughly every 10 days. While some of those targeted may have links to activism, the overall pattern of selection seems largely random.[270] According to a human rights lawyer, there is 'a potential to prosecute a large number of people, as authorities benefit from departmental statistics, reporting and case quota requirements (Russian: *palochnaya sistema*).[271]

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  Ivan Pavlov, Online interview with EUAA, 10 October 2025

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  Human rights lawyer, Online interview with EUAA, 23 October 2025

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