



As Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine entered its third year, authorities in 2024 intensified their crackdown on civil society and dissent. They again expanded Russia’s [repressive legislative arsenal](#) and targeted critics with punitive and stigmatizing “foreign agent,” “undesirable,” and “extremist” labels, hefty fines, and lengthy prison sentences.

In February, opposition leader Alexei Navalny [died in prison](#), where he was serving a draconian sentence imposed over a litany of [spurious and politically motivated charges](#). His supporters and independent journalists [alleged](#) that security services poisoned him, citing discrepancies in official documents about the circumstances of his death.

In March, Vladimir Putin [won](#) the presidential election in the absence of any competition, securing his fifth term in office.

In October, the UN Human Rights Council, noting “the continued significant deterioration” of human rights in Russia, [renewed](#) the mandate of the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation.

## Freedom of Expression

War censorship laws enacted after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and repeatedly expanded and toughened since, remained a major tool to stifle voices denouncing Russia’s war.

convicted under a range of charges, including “fake news” about the Russian military, and increased penalties for public calls that “undermine state security.” The measures appeared aimed at punishing exiled critics and their family members who remain in Russia.

In February, a court in Moscow [sentenced](#) prominent rights defender Oleg Orlov, co-chair of Memorial, to two-and-a-half years in prison for repeatedly [speaking out](#) against Russia’s war on Ukraine and escalating political repression within Russia.

In July, a court in Yekaterinburg sentenced Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich to 16 years in prison on [farfical espionage charges](#). Also in July, another court sentenced theater director Yevgenia Berkovich and playwright Svetlana Petriychuk to six years on false charges of publicly “justifying terrorism” for their [award-winning play](#).

In an opinion [published](#) in February, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) concluded that Alexey Moskalev’s deprivation of liberty was arbitrary, imposed for a legitimate exercise of his expression rights, and called on Russian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release him. Moskalev served out his 22-month prison sentence for repeatedly criticizing the war and was released in October.

In 2024, the authorities had pressed new criminal charges against [at least 78 people](#) at time of writing for “discrediting” Russia’s military or disseminating “fake news,” and 130 people remained imprisoned on these charges.

In August, Russia [freed](#) 15 people as part of a historic prisoner swap. Among them were Gershkovich and a handful of Russian political and civic activists whose imprisonment was politically motivated, including Orlov, Vladimir Kara-Murza, and Ilya Yashin. However, many more remain behind bars: as of December, Memorial’s political prisoners project recorded [783 political prisoners](#) in Russia.

In June, the Supreme Court [outlawed](#) the “Anti-Russian Separatist Movement” as “extremist.” No such organization exists, but authorities [listed](#) dozens of real organizations and movements as its “branches,” including many indigenous rights groups.

In 2024, 33 Jehovah’s Witnesses were sentenced to up to 8.5 years in prison on “extremism” charges. Since the religion was banned as “extremist” in 2017, over [40 members](#) have spent time behind bars, either awaiting trial or serving a prison sentence.

## Undesirables

Russian authorities continued expanding and using legislation on “foreign agents” and “undesirable” organizations to target media, human rights defenders, and other critics.

An August 2024 law [expanded](#) the scope of “undesirable” legislation, allowing the authorities to designate as such any foreign or international organization, not only nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

In 2024, the prosecutor general designated 64 organizations as “undesirable,” including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Belsat, The Moscow Times, and NGOs Freedom House, Article 19, and Feminist Anti-War Resistance. Also designated was Global Giving, a charity platform that many Russian rights groups use for crowdfunding, prompting the platform to [remove](#) all Russian projects.

In 2024, at least three people were [convicted](#) on criminal charges of involvement with “undesirable” organizations, and authorities opened at least 12 new criminal cases.

Grigory Melkonyants [remained](#) in pre-trial detention at time of writing on charges of leading the Russian election monitoring group Golos. Authorities claimed, falsely, that Golos was the same organization as the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations, an NGO designated “undesirable” in 2021. If convicted, he faces up to six years in prison.

Authorities also continued administrative prosecutions against people for participating in “undesirable” organizations’ activities. By April, courts [received](#) at least 19 administrative charge sheets against individuals allegedly “involved” with independent media that Russian authorities designated “undesirable.” Acts of “involvement” included working for the outlets, giving interviews or comments, or sharing their materials online.

In September, a Moscow court [fined](#) prominent constitutional law scholar Elena Lukyanova on charges of involvement with an undesirable organization. Lukyanova is co-founder of Free University, an academic collective aiming to provide uncensored higher education that was designated as “undesirable” in 2023.

A March law [prohibited](#) placing advertisements in “foreign agent” media or advertising their websites and social media, designed to deprive “foreign agents” of advertisement revenues and thereby purporting to prevent “[covert foreign interference](#)” with Russia’s domestic affairs.

agents from running for any public office and from serving on election commissions. The Justice Ministry [designated](#) independent presidential contender Ekaterina Duntsova a “foreign agent” after authorities prohibited her from running in March elections. Authorities also designated Pavel Ivanov, the Municipal Deputy of Basmanny District in Moscow, a “foreign agent,” ending his bid for a seat in September Moscow local council elections.

At time of writing, the Justice Ministry had [designated](#) 150 people and entities as “foreign agents” in 2024, bringing the total to 901. Those targeted included independent media outlets Holod and Vot Tak, the Memorial Human Rights Defense Center and its co-chair Orlov, and constitutional law experts Lukyanova, Ilya Shablinskiy, and Grigory Vaypan.

In January, Help Needed, a charity, was designated a “foreign agent” and in August the organization announced its [closure](#) due to numerous problems resulting from the designation.

Russian authorities maintained stigmatizing labelling requirements for those even loosely deemed “[affiliated](#)” with “foreign agents.”

In June 2024, Russia’s media and communications oversight agency, Roskomnadzor, [announced](#) it had identified 45 people for criminal prosecution for failing to fulfil the “foreign agent” law’s labelling requirements and that 25 criminal cases had been opened. Among those charged was Golos coordinator Sergei Piskunov, who at time of writing remained in pre-trial detention. In October, a court in Moscow [sentenced](#) French citizen and researcher Laurent Vinatier to 39 months in prison on “foreign agent” charges.

In October, law enforcement officers in Pskov [raided](#) the apartment of Lev Shlosberg, deputy chair of the opposition Yabloko party, who is facing criminal charges for repeatedly failing to mark his social media posts with the “foreign agent” label.

In July, the Justice Ministry issued the first known [warnings](#) under the 2023 [law](#), targeting third parties who “assist” “foreign agents,” to people who had reposted publications by “foreign agents” without the “foreign agent” label.

In October the ECtHR issued a judgement, [finding](#) that the “foreign agent” law violated Russia’s human rights obligations and created “an environment of suspicion and mistrust towards civil society actors and independent voices,” thereby “undermining the very foundations of a democratic society.”

## Reproductive Rights

authorities pressured private clinics to stop performing abortions. In November 2023, a local official said that almost no private clinic was providing abortions in the Kursk region, and at time of writing, at least 12 regions had outlawed “persuading” women to have abortions. November laws banned “propaganda” for “refusing to have children” under threat of steep fines.

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Russian authorities continued their crackdown on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

The Supreme Court’s November 2023 ruling, which outlaws the “international LGBT movement” as an “extremist” organization, allows arbitrary prosecution of LGBT people and of anyone who defends their rights or expresses solidarity with them.

The ruling, which became public only in mid-January 2024, declared the rainbow flag a forbidden symbol of the “LGBT movement.” In 2024, at least 44 people received administrative convictions for “displaying” LGBT movement symbols, mostly for posting the rainbow flag online. At least 7 people were detained for up to 15 days as punishment. Repeated convictions for displays of LGBT symbols entail criminal prosecution, punishable by up to four years in prison.

The ruling also stated that authorities had identified 281 “active participants in the movement.” These unnamed individuals could face up to 10 years in prison for involvement in an extremist organization.

In March, the Justice Ministry and Rosfinmonitoring, the governmental agency mandated to monitor money laundering and financing of terrorism, included the LGBT movement in their extremist and terrorist organization registries.

At least three groups supporting LGBT rights shut down their operations in Russia to avoid prosecution. Other consequences of the ruling have included a series of police raids on gay clubs, incidents of self-censorship, and an uptick in requests for legal advice from remaining LGBT support groups, which increasingly have turned to working clandestinely.

In March, authorities in Orenburg charged three workers at a bar that featured drag performances with “organizing” activities of the LGBT movement, referencing the Supreme Court’s ruling. They face six to ten years in prison on these bogus charges.

Authorities also continued using “LGBT propaganda” laws to suppress and punish LGBT visibility.

In August, a court in Moscow [fined](#) a local resident 100,000 rubles (US\$1,000) for “LGBT propaganda” over an old social media post featuring same-sex people kissing. A court in Volgograd imposed detention and subsequent deportation on a transgender sex worker, a Tajik citizen, for her online publications. A court in Krasnoyarsk [fined](#) a bar staging drag performances 450,000 rubles (US\$4900) for “propaganda,” noting that they failed to prevent same-sex visitors from hugging and kissing.

Courts [continued](#) fining television channels and streaming services for running content featuring LGBT people or same-sex relations.

Publishers continued [recalling](#) books with LGBT content. A court in Nizhny Novgorod [fined](#) a bookstore 500,000 rubles (US\$5000) for selling a novel including depictions of same-sex relations.

## Ill-Treatment in Custody

Russian authorities [tortured](#), recorded, and shared recordings of the torture of at least two men held as suspects for the March 22, 2024 attack on a concert hall near Moscow, which [claimed](#) the lives of at least 144 people. Four suspects appeared at their closed-door pretrial custody hearings with visible, extensive injuries. Despite strong indications that law enforcement and security services had been committing and publicizing torture, no official investigation had taken place at time of writing.

On February 16, Alexei Navalny [died](#) in a remote prison where he was serving a 19-year sentence. Navalny had been behind bars since his return to Russia in 2021, following medical treatment after surviving a 2020 poisoning attempt that many attributed to the Kremlin. In September, The Insider [published](#) an investigation alleging that his death resulted from another poisoning by government agents. Before his death, prison authorities arbitrarily and repeatedly sent him to various punishment cells and [failed to provide him](#) adequate medical care.

As of June, “at least 80 people prosecuted for political reasons ... are suffering from illnesses in detention and do not receive timely medical care,” [according to OVD-Info](#). In August, the UN Human Rights Committee [requested](#) that the Russian government “take urgent measures to provide comprehensive and appropriate medical care” to Igor Baryshnikov, serving a seven-and-a-half-year prison sentence for opposing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

## North Caucasus

Chechen authorities under governor Ramzan Kadyrov continued to target critics and retaliate against their family members. In June, Chechen authorities

...in Chechnya, an ethnic Chechen blogger. They continued to coercively mobilize local residents to fight in Ukraine. In September, North Caucasus SOS, a leading LGBT rights group, [reported](#) that Chechen police hunted down seven gay men and blackmailed them into “volunteering” to serve in the war.

Earlier in 2024, North Caucasus SOS also alleged that a 23-year-old woman from Chechnya, who had fled her abusive family in 2023 but was later found by Chechen police in St Petersburg and forcibly returned to her family, died in an “[honor killing](#).” There has been no effective investigation into these allegations.

The July 2023 [violent attack](#) in Grozny against journalist Elena Milashina and lawyer Alexander Nemov has not been properly investigated. They were in Chechnya to attend a court hearing in a politically motivated case against Zarema Mussaeva. Mussaeva is serving a five-year prison sentence on false charges [brought in retaliation](#) for her exiled sons’ public opposition to Kadyrov. Authorities repeatedly [refused her parole](#).

In June, armed militants—apparently [supporters of the Islamic State \(ISIS\)](#)—targeted the two largest cities in Dagestan. They torched a church and a synagogue in Derbent and attacked a church and a police checkpoint in Makhachkala. The attacks killed at least 15 law enforcement personnel, four local residents, and wounded dozens. Responding to the attacks, Kadyrov told Chechen law enforcement that relatives of insurgents should be punished in the spirit of collective responsibility. “He who targets [a police officer] should understand that... we will kill them all—father, brother, uncle,” he [said](#).

## Migrants and Xenophobia

After several Tajik nationals were arrested as suspects in the March concert hall [attack](#), migrants from Central Asia and other people with a non-Slavic appearance faced a notable increase in [ethnic-based harassment and attacks](#).

Media reports described an increase in ethnic profiling, arbitrary arrests, and prolonged detention, as well as xenophobic harassment and violent attacks by private individuals and government officials. Authorities [escalated](#) anti-migrant rhetoric.

Laws adopted in August [introduced](#) a special “deportation regime” for foreigners who do not have valid identity documents or authorization to stay in Russia. They allow authorities to automatically place these individuals on a public registry of “controlled persons,” banning them from driving, marrying, leaving a municipality, changing residence without state permission, and opening bank accounts or making financial transactions (including withdrawing funds) exceeding a stipulated amount. The law authorizes police to enter

Records of detainees. It also authorizes the use of digital surveillance of those persons or individuals “assisting” them, including access to bank operations, cell data, and facial recognition technology.

Another August [law](#) empowered the police to extrajudicially sanction foreigners on a range of administrative charges, including for “LGBT propaganda.” It also allows police officers to impose deportation as an administrative penalty, significantly undermining fair trial guarantees.

## Online Censorship, Surveillance, and Privacy

Authorities continued their campaign to censor and control independent voices online.

In March, a 2023 [law entered into force](#) that prohibits the promotion of censorship circumvention tools, including virtual private networks (VPNs). Between July and September, Apple [blocked at least](#) 25 VPN apps in its App Store [in response to a request](#) by Roskomnadzor.

In August, Roskomnadzor ordered the [blocking of](#) the secure instant messenger app Signal.

In August, a new [law](#) established a state registry of social media pages with an audience of more than 10,000 people. The law requires the owners of such pages to submit their personal information to the authorities and prohibits sharing the posts of unregistered owners of such pages. It also stipulates that only social media pages on the registry should be allowed to monetize their content.

Also in August, Russian authorities apparently introduced measures to drastically [slow down](#) YouTube. In September, Russian internet service providers [said](#) authorities were throttling YouTube using state-managed deep packet inspection technology installed in providers’ networks.

The Russia-proposed UN Cybercrime Convention was agreed to by member states in November. The treaty establishes broad surveillance powers and has the potential to transform cross-border access to data and facilitate transnational repression.

## Freedom of Assembly

Freedom of assembly remained virtually non-existent. Russian authorities continued using Covid-19 restrictions in place since 2020 as a [pretext](#) to ban opposition protests while allowing [events](#) aligned with official policies. In 2024,

Rights Group OVD-IHR.

In January, police [violently](#) dispersed spontaneous assemblies in support of Bashkir activist Fail Alsynov, sentenced to four years in prison on bogus incitement of hatred charges for his speech at an environmental rally in Bashkortostan. Police [detained dozens](#) of protesters and brought at least 80 [criminal cases](#) alleging participation in mass rioting and use of force against police officers.

In February, authorities [detained](#) more than 500 people at events commemorating the memory of Alexei Navalny.

In March, during Russia's presidential vote, police detained at least [136 people](#) over peaceful protests or election monitoring.

In February, a court in Khabarovsk [outlawed](#) an opposition movement as "extremist" after it organized a series of mass peaceful protests in support of former Khabarovsk governor Sergei Furgal, arrested in 2020.

## International Accountability

In 2024, key steps were taken to advance justice for serious international crimes Russian forces committed in Ukraine. The ICC investigation [yielded four arrest warrants](#) against senior Russian military commanders, addressing Russian forces' attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

However, enforcing the ICC's arrest warrants, including the 2023 warrant against Vladimir Putin, remains a challenge. Despite their arrest obligations, several ICC member countries have extended [protocol](#) invitations to him. In September, Putin notably participated in an official ceremony in Mongolia, an ICC member country that [failed](#) to arrest and surrender him to the ICC. His visit rightfully generated condemnation from several state parties and the [European Union](#).

Russia has repeatedly used its UN Security Council veto to prevent accountability for war crimes in Syria, Ukraine, and elsewhere. In March 2024, Russia used its veto to block renewal of the North Korea Panel of Experts, which had reported to the Security Council on North Korean arms transfers supporting Russia's military campaign in Ukraine, in violation of UN sanctions on Pyongyang. That effectively shut down the panel.

Browse Countries

Choose



## Keynote



**Tirana Hassan**

Former Executive Director

# Protecting Rights, Saving Lives

Human Rights Watch defends the rights of people in close to 100 countries worldwide, spotlighting abuses and bringing perpetrators to justice

**DONATE NOW**

## Get Updates On Rights Issues Worldwide

Enter an email address

Sign Up

Connect With Us



© 2026 Human Rights Watch

---

Human Rights Watch | 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor | New York, NY 10118-3299 USA | t 1.212.290.4700

Human Rights Watch is a 501(C)(3) nonprofit registered in the US under EIN: 13-2875808