

Apology Videos and More

Post-Full-Scale Invasion
Analysis of Extrajudicial
Pressure Tactics



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In Russia, pressure outside the legal framework is the key tool of wartime repression. A public apology recorded on camera is one of the most frequently used practises of such pressure; it originated in Chechnya several years ago and has been gradually propagating across the country. In this article, we'd like to tell you how the means of extrajudicial pressure work, illustrating them with statistics and personal stories.

The ways the government intimidates citizens who share anti-war political views

Extrajudicial pressure as a tool of political persecution has a long history in Russia. By the term 'extrajudicial pressure', we mean pressure exerted on citizens outside the legal framework, unrelated to administrative or criminal persecution.

According to anthropologist Alexandra Arkhipova, "in Russia, there is no mechanism of mass repression; however, authorities still need to intimidate people somehow." That's why traditions of public blaming and shaming are still cultivated. Since the start of the war, these practises have increased in number. Every month, we record about 10 cases of layoffs, academic dismissals, event cancellations, and many other incidents. Apology videos for the disapproval of the government's actions are especially "popular".

In Russia, the practise of recording apologies to the public authorities is primarily related to Chechnya and Ramzan Kadyrov's autocratic regime. The first publicly known apology video dates back to 2015, when a Chechnya resident, Aishat Inaeva, [was forced](#) to renounce her critique of the region's leader.

Chechens had to apologise for complaining about the government's actions, asking it for help, consulting [magicians](#), crying at a wedding, etc. Such cases regularly, multiple times a month, make it into the 'Grozny' TV channel reports. In his interview with the independent digital publication 'MBH media', Tumso Abdurakhmanov, a Chechen political and social activist in emigration, [acknowledged](#) that his relatives were repeatedly threatened and eventually forced to criticise him and praise Kadyrov on camera.

[As put by one of the creators](#) of the pro-Kadyrov VKontakte public page 'Karfagen', the Chechen authorities had consciously chosen this strategy to deal with their opponents; it "has a direct connection to the mentality of our people, specifically to the fear of public shame." Other Russian regions have gradually adopted the same approach. The 'Caucasian Knot' news site used to gather [statistics](#) on the forced public apology videos that took place on the territory of the Caucasus region; only in 2022 there were at least 30 such cases recorded.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, apologies were [extorted](#) from those who shared fake news" about the coronavirus and the government's reaction to the pandemic across the country. In 2021, following the winter protests in support of Alexei Navalny, the Investigative Committee and Ministry of Internal Affairs PR offices en masse [released](#) videos of the detained apologising for participation or encouragement. Among them, Timur Salikhov, Konstantin Lakeev, and Olga Bendas, charged with involvement in 2021 winter protests, as well as a 14-year-old teenager who was forced to apologise on a "Russia-24" broadcast; all of them were asking forgiveness for riling-up people on the Internet to protest.

Apology Videos: A Weapon to Suppress Anti-War Efforts

Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the number of apology videos has been growing; now they target citizens with anti-war political stances. The [case](#) of TikTok creator Nekoglai was one of the most outrageous: he was tortured by the police, who tried to make him apologize for an ostensibly insulting video parody of the Russian soldiers.

It is particularly widespread in Crimea—66 of the 90 cases we have recorded since 24 February 2022 have occurred there.



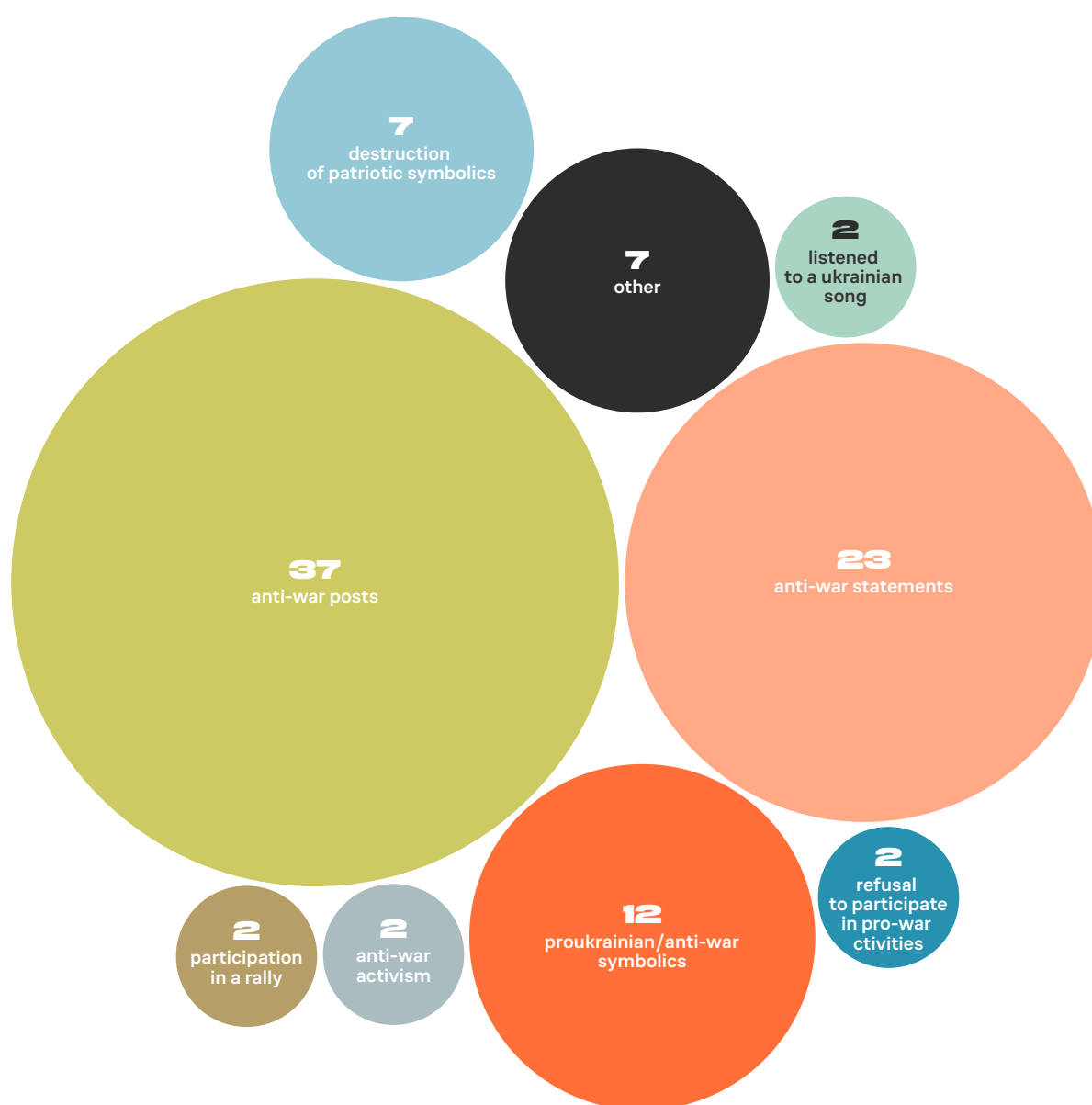
Data: OVD-Info • As of 23 June, 2023

Videos with public apologies appear on the resources of the FSB (Federal Security Service), the [Investigative Committee](#), or the Ministry of Internal Affairs, on social networks of pro-government media, or on Telegram channels, presumably, associated with security forces. The first such apology videos for anti-war activism began to appear from the participants in mass anti-war actions—for example, from [Anastasia Levashova](#) and [Zakhar Tatuyko](#).

Lately, such videos have been particularly common on the network of “SMERSH” channels, which take their name from the Soviet counterintelligence service during the Second World War. The authors of such channels call themselves patriots, claiming that this is “wartime” and that they are looking for ‘traitors’.

One can be considered a traitor for posting on social media, playing Ukrainian songs in public, [expressing](#) an anti-war position out loud in public places, for a sticker on a car, and even yellow and blue [paint on buildings](#) or clothing. Even a refugee from Mariupol, Valentina Prikhodchenko, who left for Sevastopol, was forced to apologise on the video: she had a small Ukrainian flag in her apartment, it was [noticed](#) by a passerby from the street.

«Reasons» for apologies



Data: OVD-Info • As of 30 June, 2023

Apologies in Crimea

Disclaimer: OVD-Info collects data on repressions by the Russian authorities in the annexed Crimea because we have the opportunity to verify these data.

Alexander Talipov, who calls himself a social activist because of his long-standing [fight](#) against corruption of local officials, is actively involved in drawing attention to such cases in Crimea. The Crimean editorial office of 'RIA Novosti' published an [article](#) about him, glorifying him for his 'detective' investigations, which make it possible to identify 'waiters' in the smallest details—this is how Crimeans who are loyal to the Russian authorities, call people who are waiting for the arrival of the armed forces of Ukraine.

Telegram channel 'Crimean SMERSH' was created shortly before the start of mobilization in September 2022 as a "Register of Russophobes, Ukronazis and Traitors" (as Talipov himself [described](#) the project), and in November it started working at its full capacity. Similar telegram channels exist in other regions as well—in at least 25 Russian and three occupied territories of Ukraine (Zaporozhye and the self-proclaimed LNR and DNR). However, mostly those are the channels with not more than 500–1000 subscribers, while 'Crimean SMERSH' has more than 60 thousand subscribers, and the Sevastopol one has almost 10 thousand.

Firstly, Talipov posted screenshots of posts with an anti-war or pro-Ukrainian position, as well as similar graffiti on SMERSH, calling on "Comrade Major" to find and punish those who were responsible. Similar content also appeared on Talipov's [personal channel](#). Videos of apologies were later added to such posts. At least three people were also dismissed from their jobs after the apology was published—[teacher](#) Ekaterina Pavlenko, [nurse](#) Anisia Yankova and Simferopol [airport worker](#) Natalia.

But only the Crimean channels publish apologies at such scale. Most likely, this is because Talipov is connected to the local security forces—many people are detained by the police after his messages, and the videos are probably recorded right at the police stations.

The 'Crimean SMERSH' publishes photos of the [detentions](#) of 'waiters', their personal data, videos from searches and detentions—content that cannot be obtained without connections with the security forces. The author of the channel often thanks 'law enforcement agencies and the Center for Combating Extremism and the FSB officers who promptly respond to all our publications.' On top of that, a Novaya Gazeta source in the Crimean Interior Ministry confirmed ties to Talipov.

[According to Talipov](#), support of Ukraine and "expectation" of Ukrainian forces entering Crimea are insulting, considering the sacrifices that "our fighters bear" during the Special Military Operation. Talipov thinks that calling for accountability and apologies are necessary for stopping anti-russian activity and ensuring [security](#) of the state. This "social activist" actively promotes the idea of withdrawing russian citizenship from those discrediting the Russian army.

Talipov notes that he himself and the entire network of “SMERSH” channels is only indicating the composition of offense, and everything else (including apparently, using force to apologize) is done by law enforcement entities.

The publications warn those who are critical to the government, that in case of “wrong” or not patriotic enough position—they are next. This also works in connection with judicial persecution: many of those who apologized have been fined under an article about army discreditation (Article 20.3.3 Code of Administrative Offenses).

What Do Apology Videos Look Like?

Usually, this is a video taken with a phone, with gray walls in the background, which most probably are in police stations. First, the person has to introduce him/herself, they state their name and date of birth, and after they pronounce the text of remorse which sounds like a quote from an administrative report. For example, Vladimir Gordeev, charged with arson of military recruitment office, [has used](#) an official expression “doused with combustible liquid”; and [Alina Khimina](#) from Crimea has used “forbidden social network” in her speech.

Often it feels that those who apologize, [read](#) their statements on paper: they [lower](#) their eyes and [stammer](#). In some videos it is clear that the person is [scared](#). Bogdan Ziza, who was charged with 15 years of detention for pouring blue and yellow paint on stairs of Eupatorian administration, mentioned that siloviki [forced](#) him to record the video several times, because “his repention was not truthful enough”.

In other videos the person is positioned with a russian flag in the background, and forced to [wear](#) a military uniform. Sometimes those videos are recorded by the people themselves using their phones but published in pro-government channels.

All of them say almost the same things: that they [support](#) the special military operation, the Russian Federation and the president. The man who was arrested for a “UA” sticker on his car in Sevastopol, and was forced to put on a huge letter Z instead, [thanks](#) “comrade major for a patriotic sticker”. In another example, a tattoo specialist who was fined earlier and was forced to apologize for tattoos in Ukrainian, says that “in case of any emergency, I am ready to come forward together with our military”, and for the [next](#) 40 seconds she listens to the russian hymn.

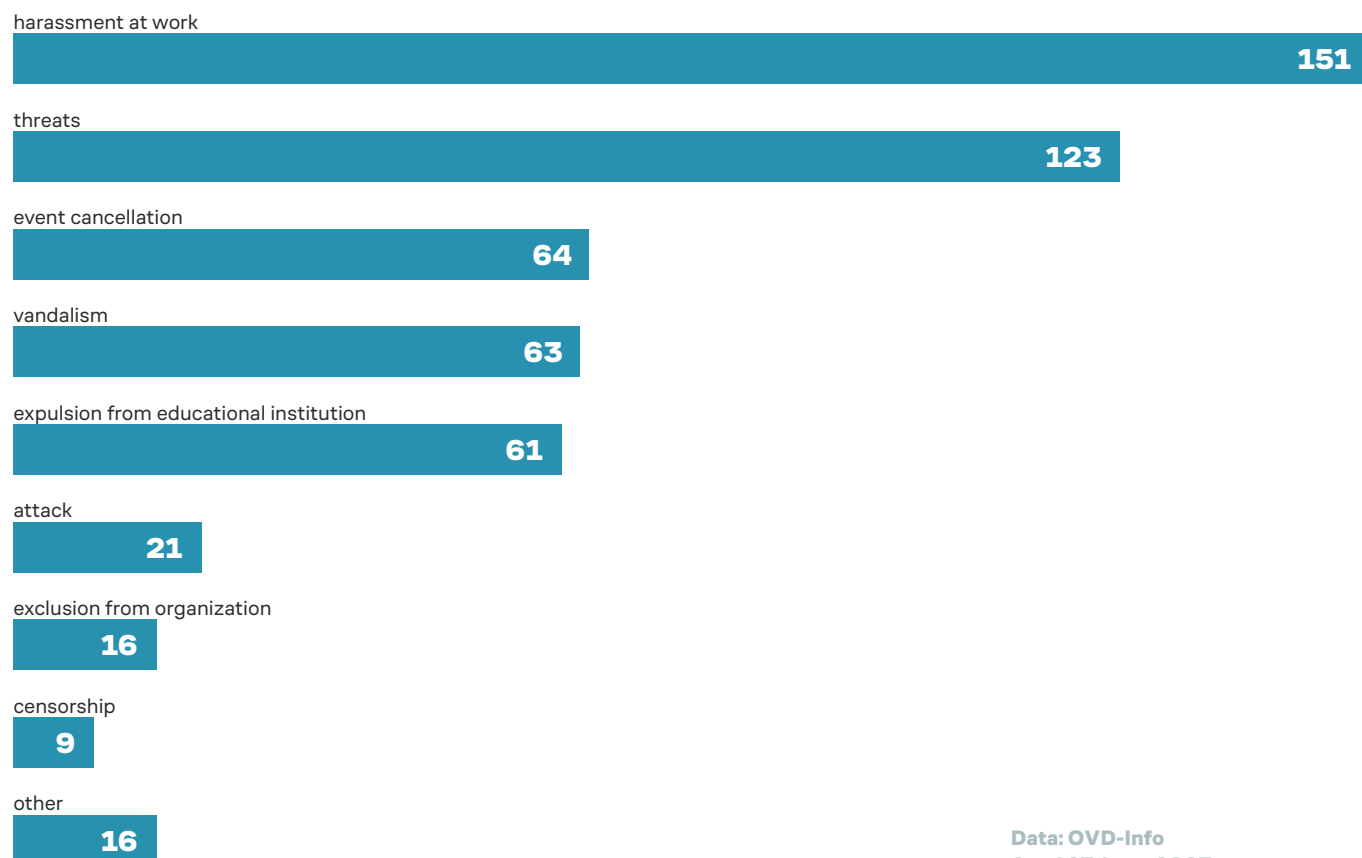
The visitors of Moscow bars Underdog and La Virgen were forced not only to listen but also sing patriotic songs; the same was attempted to be done with visitors of book presentation of an artist Sasha Skolichenko in “Open Space” (“Otkrytoe Prostranstvo”).

It is not always known under which pressure the person agreed to apologize, however it is clear that the people were threatened and possibly physically offended. One of the people who apologized [mentioned](#) that he was threatened with a criminal offense.

Such practices clearly humiliate people and assault their dignity. We categorize them as extra-judicial pressure in response to one's anti-war position and as such it is a priori illegitimate prosecution.

Apologizing on camera is only one of the many ways of pressuring people. Opponents of war may face forced employment termination and different problems at the workplace, expulsion from an organization, revoke one's attorney or deputy status, damaging one's own property or belongings, canceling concerts and other events, street assaults by 'unknown' people, etc.

Extra-judicial pressure for anti-war position



Data: OVD-Info
As of 23 June, 2023

Both the government and the people who support the war use these instruments in order to install the atmosphere of fear as thus it is easier to pretend that the whole country supports the 'special military operation'. Moreover, they help to socially isolate anti-war activists and prevents attempts at uniting horizontally as people are afraid to make their real opinion known to those around them. One know that they can easily be fired, the door of their home can be vandalized with Z symbols, they can be beaten and after that made to apologize on camera. People get used to keeping silent under such conditions.

An activist from Crimea, Andrey Belozеров, who has first-hand experience of [suffering from a report to the authorities](#), made a comment in his interview to 'Crimea. Realii' that the 'SMERSH' initiative bloomed in Crimea in contradiction to the universally shared pro-Ukrainian sentiment among the inhabitants of the peninsula. A writer with 'SMERSH', a Talipov, believes, on the contrary, that Crimea has the

same amount of such people as any other region in Russia, however, ‘law enforcement works better on the peninsula’.

The Crimean statistics for prosecution for discrediting Russian army — there are 365 administrative cases that went through courts in Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, there were more cases only in Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

What to do

If you have encountered or have been subjected to extra-judicial pressure, contact us via our OVD-Info Telegram bot. We keep track of all such cases and provide legal aid free of charge.

We also advise to contact the following human rights organizations:

Human rights organization in the Republic of Chechnya — VAYFOND

Contacts: 15 012 326 969 (WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal)

t.me/vayfond

t.me/vayfondsupport

e-mail: info@vayfond.com

www.vayfond.com

Independent ‘Anti-fund’ project provides legal aid in the employment field to people who subscribe to anti-war position and support to industrial action. They can be contacted on Telegram: t.me/strikefund

For LGBTQ people

Crisis help group CK SOS (Republic of Chechnya):

sksos.org

Children’s crisis counseling hot line and psychological support for children:

88 002 000 122

telefon-doveria.ru

‘Tvoya territoriya’ — psychological help for children and adolescents

твоятерритория.онлайн (from 15.00 to 22.00)

Psychological help for people who have faced violence from their partner, sexual abuse or any other violence

Autonomous non-commercial organization ‘NeTerpi: psychologists for relationships without violence’

neterpi.com/inst_nasilie

Help center for survivors of sexual violence “Syostry” (Sisters).

Phone number: 8 499 901-02-01

new.sisters-help.ru