

Methodology of the dataset of detentions at protests from 2012 to 2023

The OVD-Info team monitors politically motivated detentions daily. This dataset is one of the results of our work.

The political motive of detention is determined by the circumstances: for example, a person was detained at a rally or while handing out leaflets. Here, politics is understood in a broad sense, encompassing the defence of one's rights and interests — activities related to ecology, the rights of LGBTQ, specific urban development issues, or social demands are all regarded as political by OVD-Info.

This dataset used to comprise our news reports on detentions only during protests in Moscow (since December 2011) and in St. Petersburg (since 2013). In 2020-2021* we expanded our database with other regions, including the annexed Crimea. We added it to this dataset and other databases because persecution there is carried out by Russian authorities and we have the ability to verify these data.

Important: *in the dataset and graphs, we count the number of detentions, not the number of people*

detained. The same person could be detained at different rallies within one or several days.

When discussing a protest, we are referring to a public gathering, predominantly protest-related outdoor events, such as demonstrations, marches, and pickets.

We classify events like public lectures, festivals, performances, and concerts as protests, even if they are not held outdoors.

Lastly, political agitation — such as distributing leaflets on the streets or putting up posters in the metro — is also regarded as a protest for the purpose of constructing our dataset.

Arrests or detentions in the context of criminal or administrative proceedings, even if they are linked to the political activities of an activist, are not included in this dataset.

2021 data is preliminary and is being verified, we provide details below.

ОБ ЭТОМ НИКТО НЕ УЗНАЕТ

Если об этом никто не напишет. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы плохие дела не оставались в тишине.

ПОДПИСАТЬСЯ

Description of the source data.

Every row in the source data table provides a description of a public protest where detentions took place. The table contains objective data that are relevant to the event. For example, the date of the event, the number of detainees, the source of information, and others. For the convenience of data research, we also introduced subjective categorisation: for example, the cause: ecology, freedom of speech, education, etc., or the format of the event — a single picket, a meeting, and others.

Below, we provide a detailed description of each attribute and its possible values, with the attribute identifier for the exported data given in parentheses.

Date (date)

Date on which the protest took place.

Event title (event_title)

A descriptive title for the protest. It may include both the actual name of the event and a very brief description.

Region (region)

Region where the protest took place.

Description (description)

Brief overview of the transpired events.

Authorities approval (agreement)

Confirmation of event authorization by regional authorities.

Type (event_type)

Provisional protest format. During our work on the dataset, we have identified the following categories of potential formats:

- Solitary protest — a form of protest carried out by an individual with or without a placard. This category also includes sequences of single pickets, either involving a rotating single picket with identical or diverse placards in the same spot or spreading participants of the event into a chain over a significant distance from each other.
- Gathering — encompasses rallies, pickets, demonstrations, public assemblies, meetings with representatives, and all other types of static (non-mobile) and mass (involving more than one individual) protests taking place simultaneously and at the same location.
- Rally — a direct action event and any other format primarily based on performance or activity.
- In motion — any protest event primarily centred around movement. This can include marches, processions, protest walks, or even runs.
- Occupy — a camp or other instances of sustained protest in the same location.
- Agitation — distribution of leaflets and other forms of campaigning.
- Cultural and educational events — concerts, lectures, film screenings, festivals, and other forms of public cultural and educational activities.
- After the rally and before the rally — detention, which takes place not at the rally itself, but after (they came home, to work, were caught on the street) or before (preventive detention by cameras in the subway, they came home and were taken to the police station under a made-up pretext).

Publications in social networks and public statements — detentions due to online publications that are related to the protests. Such detentions do not take place at the action itself, but after they have been brought to the attention of law enforcers.

Symbols, inscriptions, graffiti — detentions for symbols that the authorities have recognised as banned: badges with the LGBTQ flag, inscriptions in support of Alexei Navalny, pacific symbols, yellow and blue ribbons and others.

Demand level (subject_type)

Provisional categorization based on the level of demands presented during the protest. As stated above, we consider all detentions related to the defence of rights and interests to be politically motivated. Specifically, in this classification of the dataset, we adhere to the accepted terminology and distinguish the following categories:

- **Local protest** — these are events dedicated to very specific issues, such as residents protesting against specific construction projects or the demolition of historic buildings, or demanding the construction of clinics, and so on;
- **Group protest** — these are events where participants aim to address their collective interests. It includes protests by specific groups against the infringement of their rights or in pursuit of their own group interests. Examples include protests by **long-haul truckers** against the 'Platon' system, trade union actions, or healthcare professionals' protests against healthcare reform.
- **Political protest** — these are events where people demand systemic changes, advocating not for their personal interests but for societal, political, or ideological goals. Examples include anti-corruption rallies, protests against pension reforms, against torture, and events aimed for the defense of freedom of speech, among others.

Cause (subject_topic)

Provisional categorization of events by subject matter. Frequently, protests lack distinct demands, specific topics, or are challenging to pinpoint to a single one. In these instances, we tried to identify

the prevailing subject of the protest. During our work on the dataset, we have identified the following primary topics:

- **Antifa** — certain protests conducted by anarchists and antifa may lack a distinct topic but carry a clear ideological (anti-fascist or anti-nationalist) element. For instance, the [annual](#) January 19th march in memory of Stanislav Markelov and Anastasia Baburova. We introduced this value for these scenarios.
- **Anti-war — protests** (and other ways of expressing dissent — publications, statements, symbols) aimed at expressing an anti-war position.
- **Foreign policy** — protests focused on international politics and relations with other countries. For example, [the events in support](#) of protesters in Belarus.
- **Elections** — protests opposing election manipulation, rallies advocating for candidates' access to elections, and similar activities.
- **Gender rights** — events promoting gender equality, feminist initiatives, and LGBTQ rights protests.
- **Urban planning** — protests concerning urban construction policies. Examples include rallies against the demolition of historic buildings or infill development projects.
- **Housing** — protests connected to housing problems. For instance, protests by residents of dormitories or buildings slated for demolition. An example is rallies against the renovation program in Moscow. Protests by 'defrauded co-investors' also fall under this category.
- **Healthcare** — protests opposing healthcare reform, the closure of hospitals and clinics, and trade union actions by medical professionals, among other things.
- **Pro-war** — protests in favour of military actions or demanding their escalation.
- **Corruption** — anti-corruption protests.

- **Migration legislation** — protests supporting or opposing migration, and advocating for or against the introduction of visas for residents of other countries.
- **Nationalist agenda** — some protests with a nationalist orientation may lack a distinct topic but carry an evident ideological (nationalist) element. For example, the annual 'Russian March.' We have introduced this category for such instances.
- **Education** — protests opposing education reform, the closure of schools and universities, teacher union actions, and more.
- **Political prisoners** — events in solidarity with political detainees and protests against repression. Examples include rallies in support of Alexei Navalny, defendants of the «[New Greatness](#)» case and others.
- **Against the government** — numerous protest actions may lack a distinct topic but carry a clear political (anti-Putin, anti-governor, anti-Medvedev) element. We have introduced this category for such instances.
- **Against torture** — protests opposing torture.
- **Freedom of speech** — events opposing censorship, advocating for journalists and the media, and protesting against Internet site blocking, among other issues.
- **Freedom of assembly** — events advocating for the right to freedom of assembly, and protests against detentions and arrests at rallies. A classic example is '[Strategy 31](#).'

- **Specific economic requirements** — events opposing financial or economic decisions made by the authorities that impact specific individuals or groups. For instance, rallies by **foreign currency mortgage holders** or protests by **long-haul truckers against the 'Platon' system**. Protests against the increase in the retirement age are not included in this category because, in the majority of cases, the demands during these rallies were directed towards the government as a whole, rather than solely related to the reform.
- **Labor rights** — protests in defence of the labour rights of workers in any spheres and/or enterprises. For example, **delivery servicemen protest**.
- **Ecology** — protests advocating for the preservation of nature and the environment, including actions for animal protection. Examples include **rallies** against landfills in Volokolamsk, Greenpeace initiatives, and protests against park development.
- **Other** — different topics not covered by the categories listed above. For example, a solitary protest with a blank canvas, protests against conscription into the army and protests on the day of the October revolution on November 7.

Story (subject_story)

The reasons for which participants protested. For example, a rally **against pension reform**, **against non-admission** of independent candidates to elections to Moscow City Duma in 2019, etc.

Organiser type (organizer_type)

Provisional categorization by the type of event organisers. During our work on the dataset, we have identified the following types:

- **Institutional protest** — events conducted by organisations or movements with a formalised structure.
- **Spontaneous protest** — events lacking explicit organisers, often emerging in response to recent developments.
- **Activist protest** — events organised by informal activist groups or communities. This category also includes activists who, independently and without ties to specific groups, consistently engage in solitary protests.

It's worth noting that in certain cases, it may not always be evident whether a protest was intentionally organised by someone. Consequently, some decisions were made subjectively, drawing from our experience.

Organiser name (organizer_name)

The name of the community or organisation acting as the protest organiser.

Number of detentions (detentions)

The number of detentions that took place during the protest.

Detentions place (place)

Approximate address of the place where the apprehensions took place.

Police department (ovd)

The names of the police departments to which the detained were transported.

Source of information (links)

List of links to sources providing information on the detentions.

***Data for 2021 are preliminary and are subject to verification.**

Verifying information is invariably a challenging task. However, in 2021, we encountered an unprecedented situation with

a massive number of individuals detained simultaneously across more than 120 cities, complicating the verification process further. Additionally, in the spring of 2021, the Russian authorities **responded** to a request from UN Special Procedures. Among other details, they disclosed the official count of individuals detained at rallies in support of Alexei Navalny on January 23, January 31, and February 2, 2021, totaling 17,600 people.

At the current moment, we are unable to either confirm or refute this figure. We have utilised the official number of detainees for a preliminary evaluation of the situation in the content published on the OVD-Info website and in other media outlets.

We couldn't process and verify the data at that exact time because we focused on legal assistance to detainees and prepared for the next rallies.

Nevertheless, the information we have managed to process and disclose indicates an unprecedented scale of violations against the right to freedom of assembly across Russia. We are committed to continuing our efforts to refine this information, as it holds importance not only for historical records but also for the systemic legal work concerning all instances of detainee rights violations.

Consequently, the figures we reported in 2021 and those published for the same period in 2024 may vary due to differing overall arrest statistics for 2021. Our current work incorporates optimised calculations: for some events, we use data published in 2021 that is no longer undergoing detailed verification; for others, we rely on updated information from our databases.



ЧТО Я МОГУ С ЭТИМ СДЕЛАТЬ?

Прочитать, рассказать, поддержать. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы как можно больше людей узнали о политических репрессиях в России сегодня.

ПОДДЕРЖАТЬ