Перейти

13.10.2023

Database of detentions at public protests 2011-2021

Russian version

ABOUT US

The OVD-Info project began collecting data on detentions in its very first year of operation. We believe that the data we have collected will help understand the structure of civil rights violations within the system. This, in turn, will empower numerous experts, researchers, graduate students, and students to start their studies in this field as soon as possible.

ABOUT THE DATASET

This dataset represents one of the outcomes of monitoring politically motivated detentions carried out by the OVD-Info team since December 2011.

The political motivation behind detentions is determined by the circumstances of the arrest. It may involve the apprehension of a person participating in a political protest, the arrest of a political activist engaged in campaigning or disseminating campaign materials, or the detention of a person known for their political or social activism without any apparent justification. Here, politics is understood in a broad sense, encompassing the defense 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), but 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.

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.

Download database

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 both objective data describing the protest (such as the event date, the number of detentions, or the information source) and subjective categorization introduced by us for the convenience of data analysis.

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 and the causes for detentions.

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 centered 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 event** — 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).

Demand level (subject_type)

Provisional categorization based on the level of demands presented during the protest. During our dataset work, we've

identified the following demand levels:

- **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.

Topic (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.

- **Foreign policy** — protests focused on international politics, relations with other countries, wars. Example: Peace march, rallies in support of 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.

- **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 solitary protests supporting Sentsov, actions in support of Pussy Riot, the Mothers' March, and so forth.

- **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 defense of the labor rights of workers in any spheres and/or enterprises.

- **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.

Story (subject_story)

The reasons for which participants protested. For instance: protests against pension reform, demonstrations against the 'Platon' system, and rallies against the falsification of the 2011 parliamentary elections.

Organizer type (organizer_type)

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

- **Institutional protest** — events conducted by organizations or movements with a formalized structure.

- **Spontaneous protest** — events lacking explicit organizers, often emerging in response to recent developments.

- **Activist protest** — events organized 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 organized by someone. Consequently, some decisions were made subjectively, drawing from our experience.

Organizer name (organizer_name)

The name of the community or organization acting as the protest organizer.

Number of detentions (detentions)

The number of detentions that took place during the protest.

Detentions place (place)

Rough 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 always a difficult process, but this year we faced an unprecedented number of people detained simultaneously in more than 120 cities, which aggravated the situation. The data that we have already managed to process and publish shows the record scale and cruelty of violations of the right to freedom of assembly throughout Russia. We will continue to clarify them — this is important not for history, but for systemic legal work in all cases of violation of the rights of detainees. During mass protests, it was more important for us to focus on legal assistance to those detained and preparation for the next protests.

Therefore, the 2021 data we published in 2021 and the data we publish now may differ. Moreover, in the spring of 2021, the Russian authorities responded to a request from the

UN Special Procedures, providing the official figure of 17 thousand 600 people detained at the protests on 23 January, 31 January and 2 February, 2021. For the reasons stated above, we cannot confirm or deny this information. This «official» number of detainees was used for general assessment in various materials on our (and not only) website.

Therefore, there are different overall arrest figures for 2021. Now we use an optimized calculation in our work: for numerous rallies we use data published in 2021, which are no longer subject to detailed verification, for other rallies we get updated information from our databases.

More to read

The strangling of Crimea
Denis Shedov and Dan Storyev explain how the repression in occupied Crimea was structured and how it evolved

Detentions at public protests, 2012-2024

Русская версияThe OVD-Info project began collecting data on detentions in its very first year of operation. We believe that the data we have collected will help understand the structure of civil rights violations within the system, and serve as a foundation for future research in this area.The dataset includes information on detentions in Moscow starting from 2012 and in Saint-Petersburg from 2013. Information on other regions and annexed Crimea has been available since 2020. Data of 2021 is still preliminary and is currently undergoing verifications and checks (for more details, see here).It's important to note that the dataset and its visual representations reflect the number of detentions rather than the number of individuals detained. This distinction is used because the same individual can be detained at different protests within a few days.Here, we showcase methods and approaches for utilising the dataset. For this purpose, OVD-Info analysts have created plots with detailed information on detentions at public protests. From these, we have gathered certain insights on the state of assembly freedom in Russia from 2020 to 2024. This serves as an example of the potential applications of this dataset. You are encouraged to analyse this data and create your own visualisations.In the methodology we detail our process for counting detentions and clarify various terms used in the

dataset and accompanying plots.The dataset is available here.If you have an inquiry about the data or would like to explore a joint project with us, contact us via: data@ovdinfo.orgYou can subscribe to updates for researchers and experts. In this newsletter, we inform you about new reports, data and datasets.We also have a Telegram channel where we share newly acquired data.