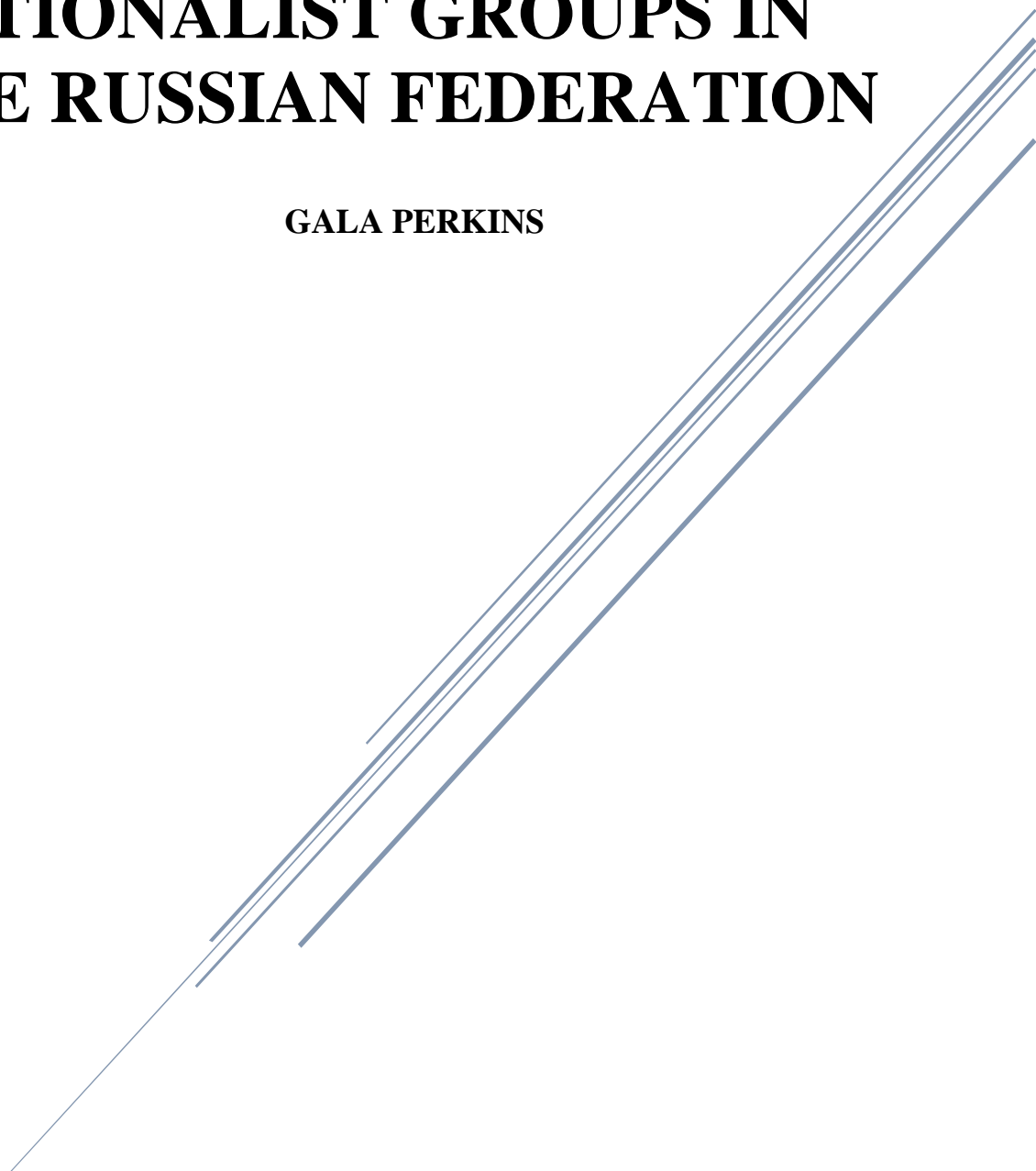


POLICY PAPER

**THE RISE OF RACIST
VIOLENCE BY EXTREME
NATIONALIST GROUPS IN
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

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Nation-building in Contemporary Russia: Policy Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. ABSTRACT	2
2. INTRODUCTION	2
3. THE POLICY PROBLEM	3
3.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	3
3.2. CURRENT BACKGROUND	3
3.3. CURRENT POLICIES	7
4. POLICY OPTIONS	8
5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	10
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY	12

ABSTRACT

This policy paper aims to address the problem of the rise of racist violence in the Russian Federation by extreme Russian nationalist groups. The paper will present the issue of Russian nationalism in its historical context, outline the radicalization of the movement from the mid-2000s onwards, and evaluate the existing policy attempts at dealing with this issue in spite of the growing threat of extremist, racist-motivated violence. While significant efforts have been made to deal with this problem, for example by strengthening the legal framework and deploying more resources towards ensuring an effective prosecution of crimes, figures show that the issue of extremist violence is still salient across the entirety of the Russian Federation. This paper will offer effective policies in order to address this problem: firstly, the further strengthening of the legal framework and correction of some of its ambiguities; secondly, an improvement of the monitoring mechanisms currently in place; and thirdly, the establishment of support centres for the assistance of victims of racist violence. The establishment of support centres will be considered by far the most effective policy. On the one hand, this policy option is able to deal *directly* with the issue by making easier the process of reporting, by helping bring about the judicial process, and by providing legal and emotional support to the victims – an aim that has been completely absent from policy targets up to today. On the other hand, support centres are also able to *indirectly* deal with the issue, for they strengthen and improve the functioning of the other policies commented in this paper. Support centres help the smooth functioning of the legal system by providing legal assistance and ensuring that the legal framework is correctly and fully utilised in the prosecution process, and they also help monitoring organisations by acting as reliant informants.

INTRODUCTION

The political movement of Russian nationalism has gained significantly in strength and following over the last two decades; and as any nationalist movement, it is not free from more extremist ideological versions and groups. From the mid-2000s onwards, extreme Russian nationalist groups, factions and organizations have proliferated to an unprecedented extent. These groups advocate a version of Russian nationalism that has been labelled by some authors as neo-fascist (Verkhovsky 2016:77). Extreme nationalists are not shy to resort to violent means to pursue their ideological agenda, which is characterised by attitudes ranging from hostile to overtly racist towards other ethnic minorities in Russia. Under this light, it is not surprising that race-motivated crimes have reached their historical peak in the modern era, with more than 3,000 victims over the past 10 years (SOVA, p. 7).

This policy paper focuses on the problem of rising racist violence by extremist nationalist groups in the Russian Federation. This is a highly worrying domestic problem that no modern democracy can afford to ignore. Not only victims are directly affected by the outcomes of these crimes, which leave dozens of deaths every year – the safety and stability of the Russian civil society as a whole is at risk as this trend of overt violence intensifies.

This paper will consider three different policy options that may help improve this situation: (1) strengthening the legal framework; (2) improving monitoring activities; and (3) creating support centres for the victims of racist violence. I will argue that establishing support centres will be, in the current context, the most effective policy. Support centres enable victims to report crimes and push for their prosecution, by providing them with resources and assistance that are out of their reach. While initiatives in the legal realm have been taking place for quite sometime on behalf of the Government, and monitoring activities are ongoing, mainly on behalf of independent or international agencies, there has been no comprehensive attempt at providing a network of direct support for victims of racist violence. This is a major deficiency, for however well organized monitoring agencies may be, or however strong the punitive system is, there is little these policies can achieve if victims are incapable of reporting because they are unable or hesitant to approach the authorities, or because they lack the basic legal knowledge.

The scope of the problem of rising racist violence by extremist groups in the Russian Federation will be analysed by relying on data gathered on the number of violent incidents taking place across the entirety of the Russian Federation over the last decade (2007-2017). These includes any form of physical violence motivated by ethnic considerations, ranging from minor injuries to murder. It must be kept in mind that even the best estimates available are likely to suffer from a downward bias. Gathering data on the real number of racist attacks is problematic due to issues of under-reporting, failures to classify the reported crimes appropriately as hate crimes / racist-motivated crimes, and weak, difficult or non-existent cooperation links between monitoring agencies and particular areas in Russia, where the extent of the problem hence remains unknown.

The remaining part of the paper is divided in three sections. The section below will outline the policy problem of rising racist violence by extreme nationalist groups in Russia in its historical context and sketch the current state of the problem in modern-day Russia. The next section will present three plausible policy options to address this issue: strengthening the legal framework, improving monitoring activities, and establishing support centres. Each of these policies will be evaluated. The last section will sketch policy recommendations to implement what this report argues to be the best policy option, namely the establishment of support centres across the Russian Federation to provide direct assistance to the victims of racist crimes.

THE POLICY PROBLEM

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the beginning of the 21st century, Russia has experienced an increase in the political groups capitalizing on the concepts of imperialism and nationalism for the purpose of political mobilisation, giving rise to an unprecedented wave of far-right movements across the country. Pain (2012) presents an overview of the early, most significant groups in this initial period of the Russian nationalist far-right:

- *The Red Patriots* (early 1990s). Nationalist movement that exploited the nostalgia felt by a significant number of Russians for the USSR years, appealing to concepts like the legitimacy of the USSR borders, the opposition and struggle against the West, the special national character of the Russian people, and the ideals of Communism.
- *The Black Hundreds*. Revival of an ideologically similar movement under the same name emerging after the First Russian Revolution (1905), which was extremely pro-Zarist and defined national membership in terms of Russian ethnicity (Tuminez, 2000). They are politically extreme-right, and ideologically Orthodox-nationalist.
- *The Orthodox Fundamentalists*. Similar movement to the Black Hundreds, but with a conception of the Russian people and nation exclusively articulated in religious terms.
- *Neo-Eurasianism* (mid-1990s). One of the strongest currents –if not the strongest– of Russian nationalism, this movement was characterised by its open anti-Western ethos and an obscure ideological blending of different intellectual traditions and concepts, such as the “Conservative Revolution”, geo-politics and Traditionalism (Shekhovtsov and Umland, 2009).

The rise of these political actors is threatening to the already fragile stability of Russia’s constellation of ethnic relations, for it fuels attitudes of xenophobia and racism.

CURRENT BACKGROUND

As the 21st century approached the 2010s, it could be observed that the emerging nationalist groups were increasingly radicalized in comparison to their counterparts founded in the 1990s, especially amongst those groups that could be defined as possessing an anti-establishment outlook. In the mid-2000s, a powerful

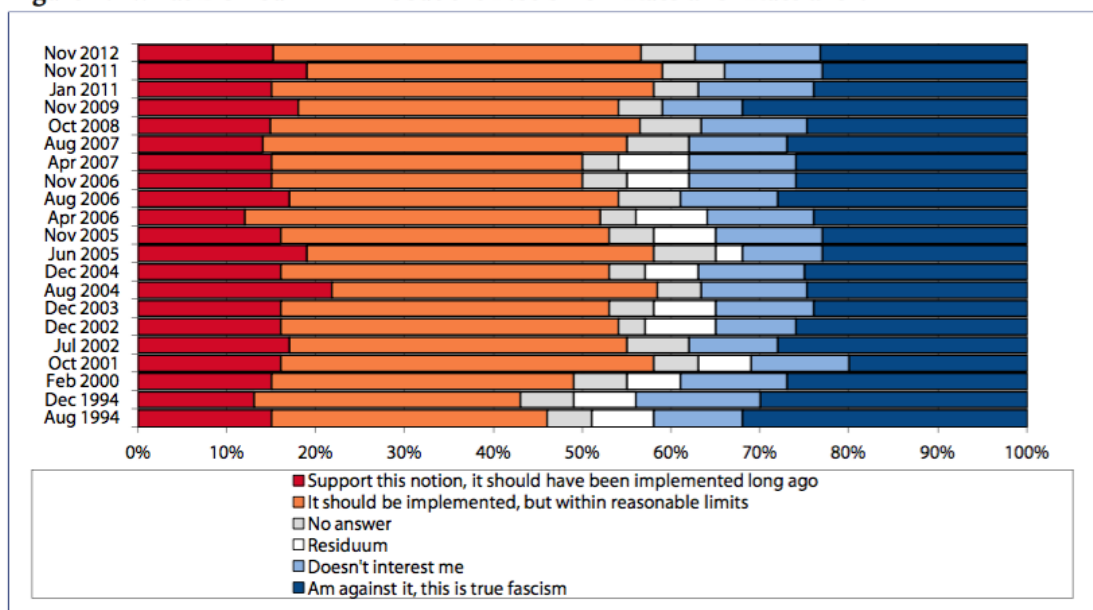
movement emerged that was very different from the nationalisms of the 90s, and it revolved around a “ultra-simplified idea of building a new, ethnically pure (or, at the very least, ethnically hierarchical) Russia in place of the lost empire” (Verkhovsky, 2016:76-77). While exceptions clearly exist, the new mainstream within radical Russian nationalism was characterised by an increasing display of neo-fascist ideas and racist violence (Verkhovsky 2016:76).

While the impetus gained by the nationalist movements in the 1990s was already threatening to the fragile constellation of ethnic relations in Russia, the threat was less salient in the light of two factors. Firstly, even though the 1990s nationalist movements were often characterised by xenophobic and racist attitudes, these were significantly less aggressive than the attitudes displayed by those groups forming in the mid-2000s. These later groups, and their rising display of xenophobic violence, led to unprecedented figures of hate crimes in Russia, with 116 fatal victims being reported in 2008 alone (Verkhovsky 2016:77). Secondly, important nationalist movements of ethnic minorities during the 1990s played a significant counterbalancing role. However, these minority nationalist movements lost their mitigating force as they became increasingly privatized by the local elites at the turn of the century (Shlapentokh, 2009:423). These developments have turned the issue of extreme nationalist groups in Russia into a more pressing issue than ever, which needs to be quickly and skilfully addressed through Government action.

It is notable that an increasing proportion of ethnic Russians in mainstream society i.e. not necessarily affiliated to extremist right-wing ideologies display from negative to overtly xenophobic attitudes towards citizens of other ethnic minorities and immigrants.

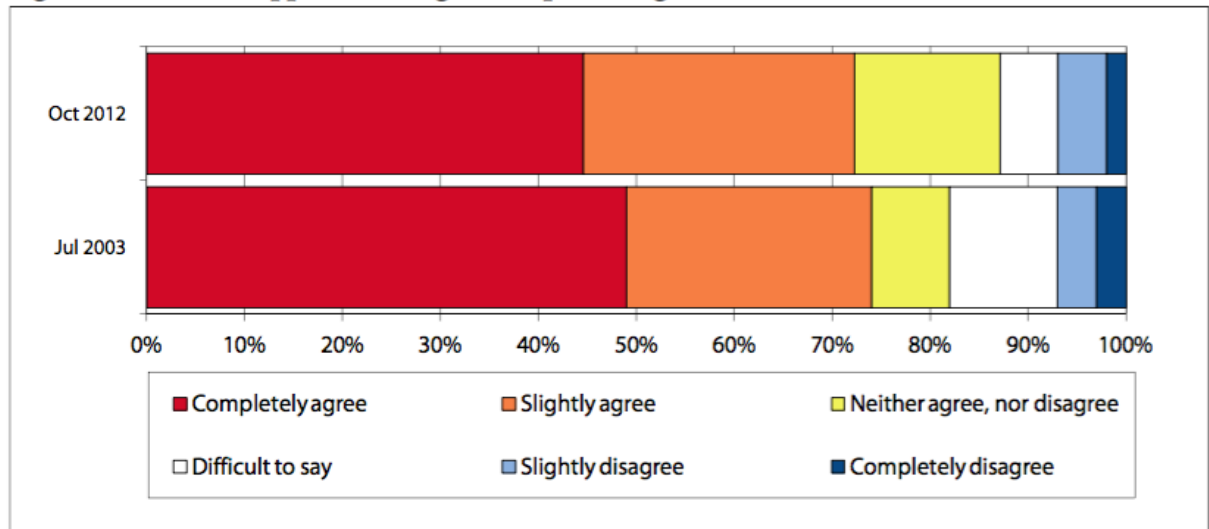
The following opinion polls conducted by the Levada Centre give us an estimate of the magnitude of the problem. Since 2007, more than 50% of respondents consistently identify to a certain degree with the slogan “Russia for Russians”, and more than 70% fully or partly support the slogan “Stop Feeding the Caucasus” (Figures 4 and 9). This shows the relatively high degree of penetration of ethnic Russian nationalist ideas across society.

Figure 4: What Do You Think About the Notion of “Russia for Russians”?



Source: opinion polls by Levada Center conducted August 1994–November 2012, N = 1600. Published on 11 June 2013 on: <http://www.levada.ru/11-06-2013/izvestnost-i-populyarnost-lozungov-oppozitsii> and on 30 August 2012 on: <http://www.levada.ru/print/30-08-2012/rossiyane-o-poli-tike-v-otnoshenii-priezshikh>

Figure 9: Do You Support the Slogan “Stop Feeding the Caucasus”?



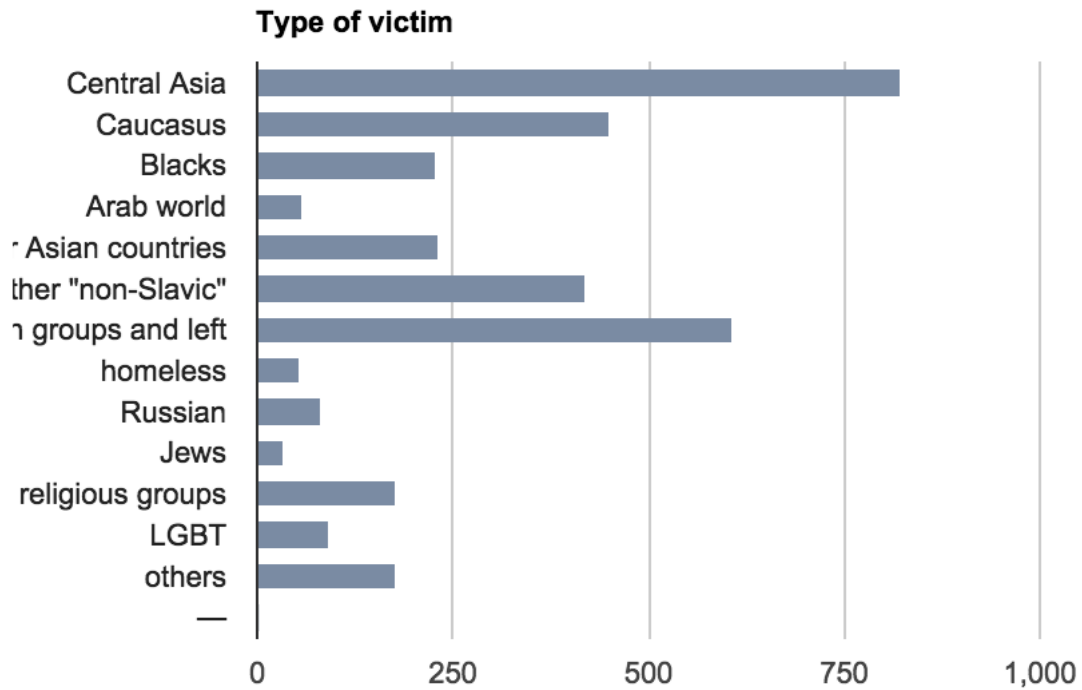
Source: opinion polls by Levada Center conducted from July 2003 to 23–26 November 2012, N = 1596. Published on 14 December 2012 on: <http://www.levada.ru/14-12-2012/rossiyane-o-mezhnatsionalnoi-napryazhennosti-natsionalisticheskikh-lozungakh-obstanovke-n>

While these numbers offer an idea of the current picture in mainstream society, the data looking at the activity of extremist groups is far more alarming. The SOVA centre for information and analysis lists 3,441 victims of extremist far-right violence in the last 10 years (2007-2017) in the Russian Federation.

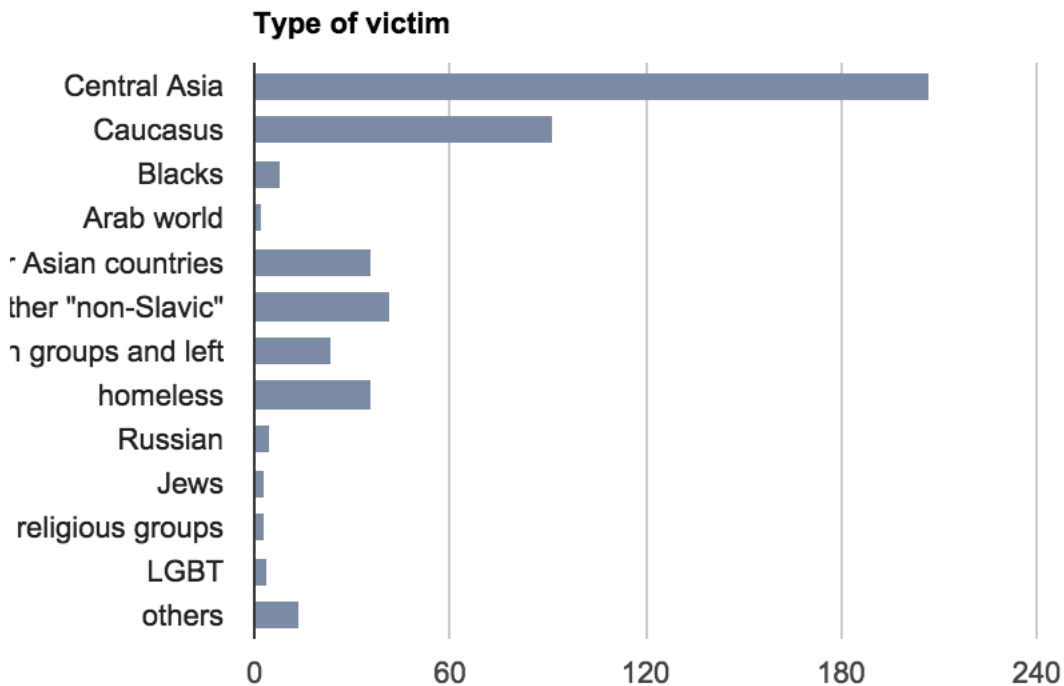
Acts of violence

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	Total
1 Central Asia	9	28	14	45	77	44	51	103	132	190	131	824
2 Caucasus	3	3	8	17	31	19	23	48	96	102	102	452
3 Blacks	1	1	6	15	7	26	20	30	61	29	34	230
4 Arab world			4	6	1	2	5	2	2	15	22	59
5 Other Asian countries	3	5	2	6	7	5	15	21	49	47	72	232
6 Other "non-Slavic"	3	10	9	9	31	16	27	109	59	73	75	421
7 Youth groups and left	20	9	17	16	7	58	41	71	82	106	179	606
8 homeless	3	1	2	12	5	8	6	4	4	5	4	54
9 Russian	2	4	1	5	3	3	9	9	8	15	22	81
10 Jews		3	3	1	2		3	3	4	6	10	35
11 religious groups	2	21	23	15	30	12	31	25	3	7	9	178
12 LGBT	10	4	9	9	27	12	3	3		7	7	91
13 others	6	5	8	13	9	9	11	35	25	28	27	176
14 —					1						1	2
Total	62	94	106	169	238	214	245	463	525	630	695	3441

Of those affected, the highest numbers are to be found in the group of victims coming from Central Asia (824), followed by victims of other groups and with leftist political affiliations (606), and victims from the Caucasus in third place (452).



The statistics for the rate of murders are especially shocking, with Central Asian victims disproportionately taking the lead in the death toll (207), followed by Caucasus victims (92).



Especially when paying attention to the rate of murders, these numbers show an unequivocal direct relationship between ethnic hatred and the rate of incidence of far-right violence.

The most recent statistics, as of the year 2017 (Yudina, 2018), report 71 cases of racist violence, 6 of which were murders. It should be noted that this updates the numbers listed on the SOVA website for 2017 by 7 additional cases already. The attacks took place in 19 regions of the country, versus 18 regions in 2016.

The highest number of victims was to be found in St. Petersburg with one killed and 24 injured. Furthermore, a significant number of attacks occurred in:

- Novosibirsk Region (5 injured)
- Republic of Tatarstan (1 killed, 4 injured)
- Rostov Region (2 killed, 2 injured)
- Oryol Region (3 injured)
- Khabarovsk Region (2 killed, 1 injured)

Monitoring organisations from which the presented statistics were derived acknowledge that these numbers are highly likely to suffer from a downward bias, as hate crimes are very hard to monitor for a different number of reasons. Yudina (2018) points to the fact that victims of these attacks are often reluctant to report them to the authorities, and this constitutes a major issue in monitoring the real number of racist acts of violence. She also points out that, in many cases, information about these incidents is obtained by researchers with a certain delay, so it is expected that the numbers for 2017 will increase as time goes by, just as it has been the case with previous annual reports. Kusche (2013) and Yudina (2018) both highlight the increased tendency to suppress media coverage on these issues, and the rising indifference by society at large towards the issue of right-wing violence, which further complicates the monitoring of the real rate of attacks.

Looking at the ethnicity of the identified victims, as well as at the regions with the highest rates of racist violence, it is fairly clear that the main victims in the problem under scrutiny are ethnic minorities. The most affected are, in the first place, Central Asian minorities, which includes ethnic groups like the Uzbeks and the Kazakhs. In the second place follow minorities from the Caucasus, which includes the Chechens, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Ossetians and Georgians. Racist-motivated acts of violence do not only affect the specific victims, but also have deep repercussions for their families and the broader ethnic community to which they belong.

Furthermore, the high rate of violence does not only affect individuals of an ethnic minority and their communities, but they contribute to an environment of unsafeness, social agitation, and inflamed inter-ethnic tensions that threaten the stability and security of the Russian society as a whole.

CURRENT POLICIES

The surge in racist violence in the mid-2000s motivated a policy of promoting a more effective prosecution of crime perpetrators and stronger punitive measures, leading to fairly large-scale arrests of individuals involved in racist violence and a significant increase in the number of prison sentences (Verkhovsky, 2016:80). This partly achieved a reduction in violent activity, due to the dissuasive character of higher penalties and a more effective prosecution than before. However, it also incentivised the separation of extremist, pro-violence groups from the political movements they were originally associated with, in an attempt to go underground (Verkhovsky, 2016:80). Extra-officially, however, ideological as well as relational links may still exist between right-wing, violent, independent groups and the political organizations they split from. Today, these links are obscured and more untraceable than ever before due to the strategic move of publicly de-associating one another. While the new emphasis on prosecution and condemnation of hate crimes was largely effective and much needed, there is still room for improvement. As of the time of writing, the SOVA centre reports the following court sentences emitted with regard to the activities of far-right groups in Russia:

Sentences

		2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	Total
1	vandalism	8	7	17	7	16	8	23	23	24	19	10	162
2	violence	35	60	64	59	72	118	269	343	197	175	114	1506
3	organization	57	50	74	59	35	35	57	58	37	24	31	517
4	propaganda	222	249	245	172	159	121	96	103	81	102	47	1597
Total		322	366	400	297	282	282	445	527	339	320	202	3498

From the statistics on reported acts of violence and emitted sentences, we see that the following percentage of acts of violence by far-right groups were punished by the legal system:

- 2013: 30.25%
- 2014: 34.91%
- 2015: 60.38%
- 2016: 63.83%
- 2017: 56.45%

There has been a significant increase in the rate of acts of far-right violence which are effectively punished by the legal system since 2013. However, it is evident that the number of sentences that are successfully prosecuted still falls very short from the total number of violent acts registered by the statistics. In 2017, only roughly over half of the acts of violence committed by the nationalist extremists were punished by the legal system. A failure to prosecute perpetrators of this kinds of violence fuels a sentiment of legitimation, downplays notions of ‘guilt’, and generally fosters the proliferation of violence as attackers perceive a low risk associated to their actions. Golova et al. (2010:38-40) draw attention to the fact that racist discrimination, and even cases of racist violence, are observed on behalf of police officials themselves. A study by the independent Russian organisation of the Committee Against Torture (Komitet protiv pytok, 2007) established that 20% of interviewees claimed to have experienced unlawful violence on behalf of police officials. This is a crucial issue that partly explains the under-reporting of racist attacks by the victims of racist violence. It provides one plausible explanation of why victims may be reluctant to report, and why the statistics we possess are likely to be heavily downward biased.

Furthermore, Makarkin (2009) argues that there is a very divided perception within the authorities themselves –including the police corps—regarding the threat which extremist right-wing groups pose to society. While some consider it a serious issue, others do not attach much weight to it at all. When the prosecutor does not perceive xenophobic violence as a serious threat or real issue in the Russian Federation at all, it often occurs that crimes by the far-right extremists are incorrectly prosecuted as disorderly conduct, instead of as hate crimes. This significantly reduces the gravity of the sentence when dealt with in court, and thus diminishes the effectiveness of punitive measures. Other measures must be taken.

POLICY OPTIONS

The first policy option that will be presented deals with the issue at hand by hardening or modifying the existing legal framework concerned with extremist groups and their activities, and with instantiations of racist violence and hate crimes.

The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation lists as an aggravating circumstance the motive for a particular crime being “political, ideological, racial, national, religious hate or animosity, or hate or animosity against any social group” (Art. 63 Par. 1 e). Many articles within the Criminal Code dealing with this type of issues were amended post-2007 to include the wording “any social group”, while previously they exclusively targeted crimes motivated by racist, ethnic or religious considerations. Furthermore, the

Russian Federation introduced a framework of anti-extremism legislation in July 2002, which was expressly designed to deal with the specific problem of extremist violence. Amongst others, this framework has made the founding of an extremist organization (Art. 282 note 1 CC RF), as well as activity or membership in an extremist association (Art. 282 note 2 CC RF), punishable by law.

However, the post-2007 amendment to the Criminal Code has had ambiguous effects. While on the one hand, it has served to protect victims of extremist crimes which have been targeted e.g. due to their sexuality (homophobia), it has also turned the law much vaguer with respect to the way in which it specifically caters for and protects the special vulnerability of minorities. In practice, Articles such as Art. 63 can be invoked as an aggravating circumstance also for crimes committed against members of a majority or against those who are not defenseless, by appealing to 'hate' as an underlying motive (Golova et al., 2010:23). It is thus difficult to determine in what way the Criminal Code specifically caters for the needs and vulnerability of ethnic minorities. As the aggravating factor of hate crimes is no longer strictly defined in terms of protecting ethnic minorities, the special punitive character of the law and its initial appeal as fostering deterrence of racist hate crimes is eliminated, or at least diminished.

The current legal framework could be improved firstly by erasing the ambiguities in the legislation; and secondly, by including a greater specific protection of minorities and hardening the sentences for hate crimes, particularly of those motivated by xenophobia. Strong and solid legal foundations are essential for the effective prosecution of hate crimes, and they also prove efficient in decreasing the number of attacks. Improving the classification system of crime motives would improve the avenues for the specific prosecution of racist crimes, thus enhancing the current legal framework's capacity to target the problem most effectively. Some authors stress that the legal framework dealing with the victims of ethnic hatred must be improved as a whole, and that "many problems in the criminal prosecution of crimes motivated by racism and other biases can be traced back to the general problems of the Russian legal system" (Golova et al., 2010:27).

However, problems in the prosecution process go far deeper than where amendments to legislation can reach. A very pressing problem is that, regardless of how well articulated the legal framework may be, prosecutorial authorities may negate, disregard or downplay the (racist) motive in sentencing (Golova et al., 2010:26). Furthermore, in order for crimes to be effectively prosecuted, victims must be able to represent and advance their own interests, as well as to bring about the judicial process, which largely depends on the financial, legal and social resources that the victim possesses (Golova et al., 2010:40). Without appropriate legal assistance and awareness of the options available to victims of crimes of this kind, the incidents might go unreported or deficiently prosecuted, for example by failing to legally frame the motives in an adequate manner. Thus, even if the legal framework was optimally amended to cater for the vulnerability of these minorities, significant practical obstacles would still impair legal amendments from performing as they should.

The second policy option that will be considered deals with improving the monitoring activities that register hate crimes taking place across the entirety of the Russian Federation, and gather relevant data concerning the type of crime, characteristics of the victim, geographical location, extent or success of the legal prosecution, amongst others. While official statistics on reported racist violence exist, these are regarded to be largely biased. Official statistics classify criminal acts solely based on the terms on which they are prosecuted; therefore, if a crime fails to be prosecuted as a racist crime, it will not count towards the statistics even if it was clearly motivated by ethnic considerations (Golova et al., 2010:28). Furthermore, due to reasons that remain unclear, official statistics seem to be further unreliable, for prosecutorial authorities have repeatedly and publicly contradicted each other, and/or their own published statistics (Golova et al., 2010:28).

There also exist both international and national independent organisations which are committed to monitoring hate crimes across the Russian Federation. These independent organisations work with police departments and state authorities, but also with other informants such as the press and the media, and trusted private sources. While the work of independent organisations has significantly improved monitoring methodologies and the accuracy of existing statistics, further factors continue to seriously impair the data

gathering process. The SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis, one of the leading organisations in this field, lists some of the following factors: a growing indifference by media outlets regarding the coverage of incidents of racist violence; hesitant attitudes in civil society in some regions of the Russian Federation regarding cooperation with SOVA and similar agencies; a lack of informant networks and cooperative links in some regions of the Russian Federation; and a lack of cooperative interest by the authorities to clearly classify racist motivated violence as such and to provide public and transparent statistics on the matter.

A pressing issue regarding the rise of racist violence in Russia is the unknown extent of the problem. The issues that emerge in monitoring not only obscure the real extent of the problem, but also prevent the effective implementation of targeted policies, as it is unclear where these policies are most needed (geographically), or existing data may be biased with respect to which groups are most affected. In order to address this problem effectively, monitoring efforts will have to be improved in the future. Official statistics especially could use much improvement. However, policies that target a better functioning of the monitoring system will not directly prevent the commitment of hate crimes. At most, these will have an indirect preventive effect, as the establishment of better monitoring methods threatens perpetrators with being caught more easily, and thus with a higher chance of facing tough sentences.

So far, the policies presented were aimed at persecuting hate crimes through a hardening of the legal framework, and through more consistent efforts in monitoring attacks by organisations like SOVA and the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights. While these are worthwhile initiatives, the fact that attacks may go unnoticed due to a lack of reporting, or the fact that they may not be properly classified as stemming from racist motivations with perpetrators obtaining attenuated sentences, has remained an untackled issue ever since the Russian Federation started to witness the rise of far-right extremism.

The last policy that will be presented addresses these unresolved issues. Up to the time of writing, there has been no attempt in the Russian Federation to establish a support system that specifically caters for the needs of ethnic and racial minorities suffering racist violence; neither as an independent, targeted program, nor as part of a bigger initiative. Victims, in many cases, chose not to report crimes, being put aback by the procedure required to do so. As it has already been mentioned, victims of ethnic backgrounds may fear the authorities due to perceived or suspected racist attitudes in official bodies themselves, including the police corps. Victims might also be reluctant to report due to the perception that their case will be treated unfairly, or not taken seriously enough. Whenever victims do report, they may lack the legal knowledge or legal assistance necessary to make adequate use of the legal framework at their disposal, for example by ignoring the ways in which the legal framework specifically caters for the type of violence they have been subjected to. This can lead, for instance, to a legal misclassification of the crime – failing to adequately prosecute it as a hate crime with racist motivations. There is a crucial, absolute lack of targeted policies addressing these deficiencies in the system. In this context, the best policy that can be implemented is one that starts to bridge the mentioned gap in the current institutional setting, by providing support services to the victims of racist-motivated crimes. This policy complements the efforts in the legislative and monitoring spheres; thus, it is not only effective on its own, but it also increases the effectiveness of legal and monitoring policies, whether prospective or already in place.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The best policy that can be currently implemented to deal with the rise of extreme-right, racist-motivated violence is the instauration of support centres for the victims of racist violence. These support centres should offer a variety of services for victims and the families of victims of racist violence, and should be situated strategically, i.e. especially in areas where most cases of racist violence are identified or are suspected to be taking place. While policies that target the legal framework and monitoring activities are important, their optimal functioning is currently seriously compromised by the issues of under-reporting and incorrect prosecution of crimes. Support centres are a targeted, easily implementable initiative that bridge this gap in the current institutional setting.

All services provided by support centres ought to:

- Be fully confidential
- Be free of charge
- Ensure full anonymity of users of the services
- Ensure security, as well as a *feeling* of security, for all users of the services
- Be run by members of different ethnic minorities, and ensure that at least one individual of each ethnic minority is available in the Centre at all times, providing the choice for victims to speak to a worker of their own ethnic background, if they so wish
- Ensure that the proportion of Centre workers with different ethnic backgrounds is reflective of the ethnic make-up of the community where the Centre is situated

Support centres ought to provide assistance at any stage from the moment the hate crime occurs to the finalisation of the legal prosecution process. This includes:

- Support centres as a place to go to at any time to report a case of racist-motivated violence, without the need for a previous appointment
- Assistance with respect to reporting the case to the official prosecuting authorities, including assistance on how to raise the case, formulate the motives, narrate the incidents, etc.
- General legal assistance with respect to the rights awarded to minorities, their protection within the existing legal framework, the legal options available to them for the prosecution of hate crimes, etc.
- Specific legal assistance with respect to the hate crime suffered, and the ways in which the legal framework in place is relevant to the particular victim and his or her particular case
- Legal assistance throughout the judicial process: preparation for court appearances, etc.
- Emotional support for victims and families at the time of the crime, as well as throughout and after the legal prosecution process

Beyond specifically assisting victims of crimes, support centres should also:

- Act as an informational hub for minorities with regard to their rights
- Raise the visibility and awareness of the issue of racist violence across the wider population
- Establish working links with monitoring agencies, like SOVA, in order to increase the effectiveness of nation-wide monitoring of racist crimes

The implementation of this policy thereby would achieve the following:

- Help the more effective prosecution and condemnation of hate crimes, ensuring a correct application of the legal framework
- Curb the number of crimes that go unreported, and thus unprosecuted
- Help with a more rigorous monitoring of hate crimes, supporting the work of already existing monitoring agencies
- Increase visibility of racist motivated crimes
- Increase visibility of options available for the prosecution of said crimes
- Provision of a 'safe space', where victims can go without fear of being mistreated, discriminated against, downplayed, or judged

- Provision of a ‘safe space’, where victims of different ethnic backgrounds can feel comfortable by opening up to and receiving assistance from people of their same ethnic background, and who share and/or are familiar with their culture, language, concerns, situation, and the discrimination suffered.

Establishing a visible and effective network of support for victims will not only help the specific victims of hate crimes who access these services, but it will also generally address the broader issue of xenophobia in Russia. By creating a network of centres which provide direct aid to the ethnic communities suffering discrimination, the problem of xenophobia is addressed through penetration in civil society. Traditional methods to deal with this issue, such as the legislative system and official governmental bodies like the police corps, can often fail to reach out to victims due to their perceived impersonality, as well as their perceived alienation from the everyday reality of discrimination which ethnic communities face. Support centres which penetrate civil society and are regionally oriented tackle the issue of racist violence not only by focusing on the prosecution of perpetrators, but by empowering victims and ethnic communities against the threat of ultra-nationalist groups: a necessary condition if the battle against violence and extremism is ever to be won.

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