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SCIENCE AT RISK Monitoring Report

Academic Freedom in Russia: State Repression and its Influence on Academic Practice

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Academic Freedom in Russia: State Repression and its Influence on Academic Practice

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Foreword

Not only is this study published some 1,000 days after the start of the full-scale and unprovoked Russian war against Ukraine (the dramatic consequences of which for Ukrainian academia we documented in our 2024 study “Academia in Ukraine in Times of War: Current Challenges and Future Perspectives”) but it can also only be understood in the context of the latest and most severe breach of civilisation by the Russian regime. For there is a direct link between Russia’s war of aggression, its war crimes, and its multiple violations of international law, on the one hand, and its extensive inhumane repression in the occupied Ukrainian territories and against parts of its own population, on the other: Both developments demonstrate Russia’s inevitable transition to a totalitarian regime that knows no limits in its repression and use of the most brutal violence against all kinds of dissenters, dissidents and opponents.

Consequently, academic freedom and scientific activity according to European standards no longer exist in today’s Russia. All scientific relations with Europe have been broken off. All formerly liberal universities and educational institutions have been closed or brought back into line. While the militarisation and ideologisation of the university landscape continues unabated and parts of the Russian academia loudly support the regime and the war of aggression, other parts have been persecuted, have retreated into internal exile or have left the country for Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Baltic States, and other European countries.

The following report – conducted by the SCIENCE AT RISK Emergency Office and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office – not only outlines this path to totalitarianism and the final withering away of academic freedom, but also aims to provide a deeper understanding of the Russian education system and the current repression in order to raise awareness of the failure and opportunities of alternative academic models, such as those implemented in the 1990s – albeit under completely different circumstances – by founding fathers such as Theodor Shanin and Nikolay Kaposov.

*Dr. Philipp Christoph Schmäddeke,
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Introduction

The start of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine marked the beginning of the militarisation and weaponisation of Russian higher education and science.¹ In March 2022, 184 rectors of Russia's leading universities signed a declaration of support for the "special military operation."² Many higher education institutions (HEIs) have become centres of active pro-war propaganda and agitation, as well as places for assembling drones and organising 'support for the military.' Ideological courses that legitimise war and territorial annexation have been introduced into the curricula. Whole fields of study, such as human rights, gender or queer studies, as well as some historical research have been restricted, followed by a decline in competence and skill in these areas.

Academic freedom in the country has deteriorated sharply, with scholars facing pressure and repression. The new legislation marks the begin of de facto military censorship, with prison sentences of up to 15 years for criticising Russian aggression in Ukraine — a punishment that goes beyond the standard practices of Soviet-era repression of dissent.

The deterioration in academic freedom has been gradual. From a considerable degree of academic freedom achieved in the 1990s, the situation began to change in the early 2000s with several reforms in higher education. These reforms were implemented through authoritarian practices that, together with generous funding that allowed for the establishment of advanced and (at the time) highly independent higher education institutions, such as the European University in St. Petersburg, the Higher School of Economics, the Moscow School for Social and Economic Sciences, led to the dismantling of university self-government and autonomy.

Against this background, the SCIENCE AT RISK Monitoring Report attempts to trace the creeping autocratisation of the sector, to take stock of the current state of academic freedom and repression in the country following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine, and to explore how exogenous shocks and the increasingly repressive environment are affecting academic practice and scholarly output.

After a brief overview of the science and higher education sector in Russia, **the first part of the report by Ekaterina Trubnikova** traces its development since the 1990s, focusing on how the foundations for the current pressures on academia

1 Chirikov, Igor. "The Weaponization of Russian Universities: A Neo-Nationalism and University Brief. Research & Occasional Paper Series: CSHE. 13.2023." Center for Studies in Higher Education (2023).

2 "Special military operation" is a term used by the Russian state authorities to describe Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Obrashchenie Rossijskogo Sojuza Rektorov [Appeal of the Russian Union of Rectors] is available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20220422090513/https://rsr-online.ru/news/2022-god/obrashchenie-rossijskogo-soyuza-rektorov1/> (accessed 6.11.2024).

were laid. The report uses data from the Academic Freedom Index (AFI).³ The AFI is a collaboration between the V-DEM Institute (University of Gothenburg, Sweden) and the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (Germany) that aims to assess the de facto levels of academic freedom across 179 countries and territories. Its assessment is based on five indicators: (i) freedom of research and teaching; (ii) freedom of academic exchange and dissemination; (iii) institutional autonomy; (iv) campus integrity; and (v) freedom of academic and cultural expression.

The second part by Dmitry Dubrovskiy provides a nuanced picture of the current state of the five dimensions of academic freedom in Russia, taking stock of the current repression in academia and presenting strategies that scholars are adopting to respond to the pressure. This section also draws on data from human rights organisations such as OVD-Info, the Memorial Human Rights Center's Political Prisoner Support Program, and the Molniya Project.⁴

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has intensified state interference in academia, affecting the integrity of scientific inquiry in Russia. **The third part of the report by Yegor Albitskii** examines shifts in research topics of Russian social scientists since the start of Russian aggression in Ukraine, using Scopus-indexed journals as a key source of data. By examining both war-related topics and areas subject to broader restrictions, such as gender and LGBTQ+ issues, it provides insights into the impact of external pressures on the research agendas of Russian scholars. The findings show that Scopus-indexed journals appear to maintain a baseline of academic integrity, avoiding overtly propagandistic tendencies. Russian scholars appear to be adapting strategically, either reverting to self-censorship or reorienting their research agendas to minimise the likelihood of state control.

Another consequence of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine is the de-globalisation of Russian higher education, a process that originally began with the outbreak of the war in 2014. Institutional cooperations and academic exchange programmes with international higher education and scientific organisations as well as publishing houses (such as Clarivate, Brill, Elsevier, and Springer) have been terminated. All projects supported by the European Union have been suspended, with one of the most important being CERN, which recently announced the termination of its cooperation with Russia.⁵ The concluding part of the report contains some recommendations on how the international community could deal with the current situation, which is characterised by Russia's military aggression on the one hand and the internal repression of Russian scientists on the other.

3 Academic Freedom Index (AFI) <https://academic-freedom-index.net/> (accessed 6.11.2024).

4 The authors would like to take this opportunity to express his deep gratitude to the above-mentioned organisations for their assistance in collecting materials on students and teachers who have been victims of persecution.

5 Reuters. CERN ends cooperation with Russian scientists. Reuters, September 30, 2024. [CERN ends cooperation with Russian scientists | Reuters](#)

Part 1

Science and Higher Education in Russia since 1991

by Ekaterina Trubnikova



Milestones of post-Soviet development

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited over 500 higher education institutions (HEIs). Soviet universities had no autonomy in determining educational programmes, the number of students admitted, the development of curricula, the hiring of key administrative personnel, salaries, or research directions.⁶ During the Soviet period, HEIs functioned primarily as “personnel factories” for various sectors of the planned economy, with graduates being assigned to jobs in specific industries or in the public sector.

Much of the scientific research was carried out in the Academy of Sciences, as well as in some industry-specific “scientific-research institutes” and “construction bureaus”. Only a small number of universities also performed research functions on a significant scale.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the transformation of the higher education system proceeded in parallel with identical processes in other areas of society. However, despite the numerous reforms, the academic environment of the Russian Federation did not escape the Soviet legacy and even exacerbated some of its elements, which eventually paved the way for the re-autocratization of the entire system.

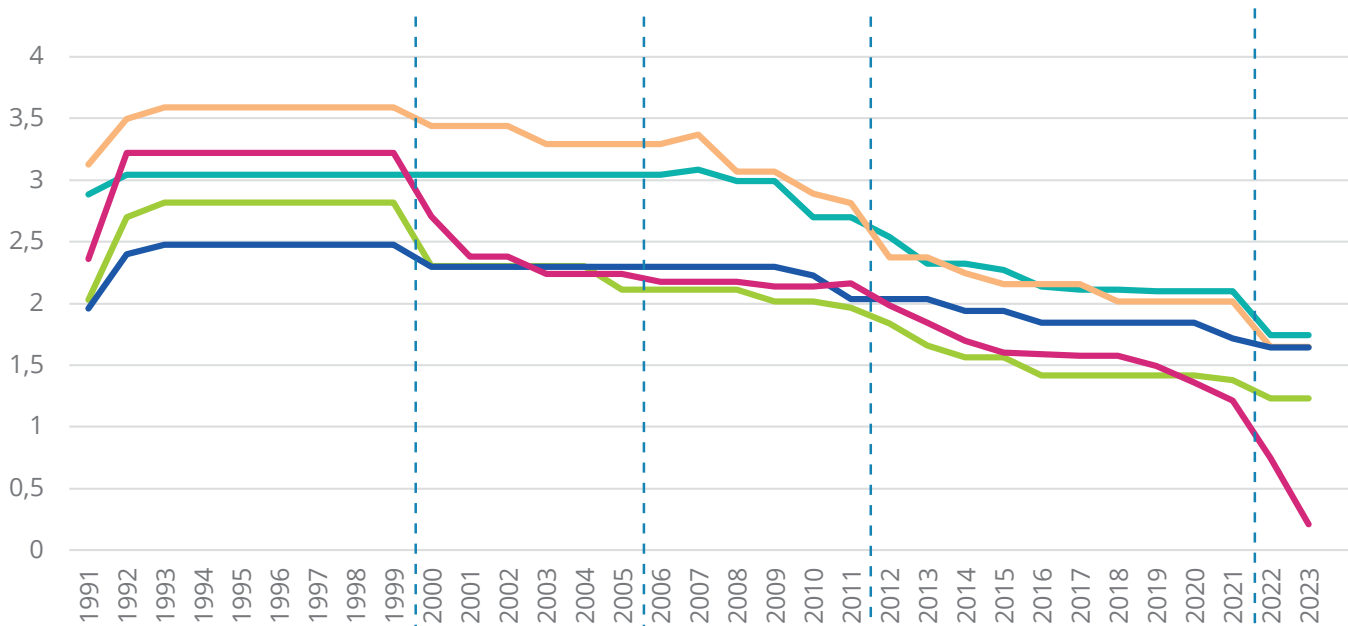
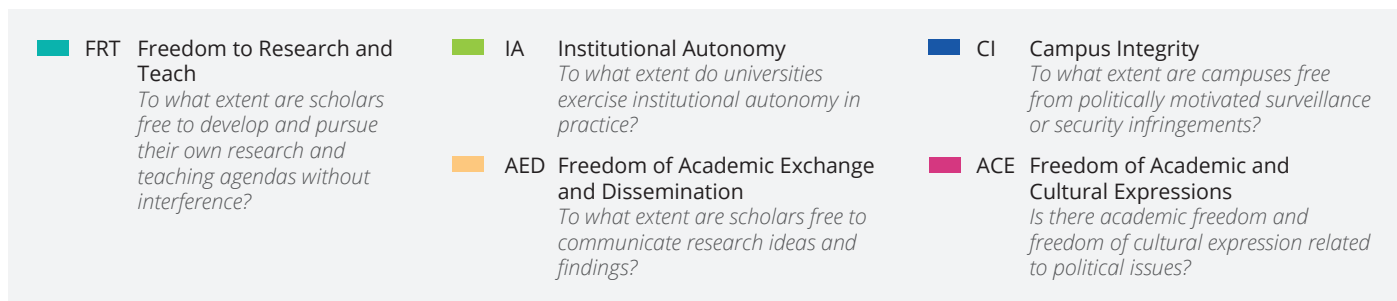
Violation of academic and individual freedoms have become a worrying feature of Russian academia over the past two years. At the same time, the pressure on Russian academia has increased gradually. By distinguishing several periods from the early 1990s to the present, the analysis shows how the basis for this pressure was formed. The analysis uses data from the Academic Freedom Index (AFI), which assesses five indicators of academic freedom: freedom of research and teaching, freedom of academic exchange and dissemination, institutional autonomy, campus integrity, and freedom of academic and cultural expression. Figure 1 shows Russia's development in each of these dimensions of academic freedom at each stage of development.

6 Maia Chankseliani, *What Happened to the Soviet University?*, First edition, History of Universities (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

Figure 1. Russia's Academic Freedom Index scores (1990-2023) and development periods of Russia's science and higher education

AFI system of measurement:

0-4 on each dimension, where 0 – completely restricted and 4 – fully free.



⚡ Pluralism by default

- De-ideologisation and pluralism
- Election of university rectors
- Formation of a private sector in higher education

⚡ Restoration of control and “westernisation”

- Government’s financial leverage: centralisation of decision-making in the hands of the Ministry of Education
- Bologna Declaration

⚡ Reorganisation under the guise of development

- Attempts to strengthen the research capacity of universities
- Shift from the election of rectors to their appointment by state authorities

⚡ Tightening of state control and struggling for “efficiency”

- Reaction to mass political protests: increased control over students and staff; university structure becomes strictly unitary; Laws on “foreign agents” (2012) and “undesirable organisations” (2015)
- Further attempts to increase the efficiency of the sector: monitoring of university performance; excellence initiatives.
- Concentration of resources among a small group of universities

⚡ Militarization of universities and academic emigration

- Structure of political control and repression in universities
- Law on “fakes” about the Russian Armed Forces
- Discontinuation of international collaborations
- Scholars fleeing Russia

Pluralism by default. 1991 – 2000

This period is generally characterised by de-ideologisation and de-politicisation of education and “pluralism by default.”⁷ In the early 1990s, Russia was experiencing enormous economic problems. The state pursued a policy of non-intervention in science and education.⁸ The market economy opened up a range of business opportunities, including in the academic sphere. Despite the enormous challenges of transformation in the country, the 1990s became a period of the greatest academic freedom in Russia (Fig. 1).⁹

The 1992 Education Act abolished the rule that rectors were appointed by the relevant ministries and introduced electoral procedures for the selection of university leaders. The Act also allowed the establishment of private universities and granted state universities the right to secure extra-budgetary funding, including educational services provided for a fee. This led to the emergence of a private higher education sector that was largely independent of state authorities. In addition, various state and private foundations were set up to provide financial support for science and education.

Restoration of control and “westernisation”. 2000 – 2005

The economic growth of the early 2000s enhanced the government’s ability to begin “liquidating the numerous alternative centers of power”,¹⁰ including those in the academic sphere. An important element in this process was the centralisation of decision-making on the distribution of state-funded university places in the hands of the Ministry of Education. This allowed the regime to make the financial stability of universities dependent on their political loyalty,¹¹ thereby reducing their institutional autonomy, as illustrated by the corresponding aspect of the AFI (Fig. 1).

Ironically, the first steps towards restoring state control over HEIs coincided with a large-scale programme of “westernisation” of higher education in Russia.¹² In 2003,

7 Lucan Way, *Pluralism by Default: Weak Autocrats and the Rise of Competitive Politics* (JHU Press, 2015).

8 D. Platonova et al., *Universitety Na Pereput'ye: Vyssheye Obrazovaniye v Rossii*. [Universities at the Crossroads: Higher Education in Russia], HSE (HSE, 2019).

9 I. G. Dezhina, “Evolution of University Autonomy and Academic Freedom in the Evaluation of University Faculty Members,” *Vysshee Obrazovanie v Rossii = Higher Education in Russia* 33, no. 5 (June 19, 2024): 48–66, <https://doi.org/10.31992/0869-3617-2024-33-5-48-66>; Lyubov Ezhova, Dmitry Dubrovskiy, and Irina Olimpieva, “Russian Understanding of Academic Freedom” (St. Petersburg: Center for Independent Social Research, 2020); Mikhail Sokolov, “Faculty Self-Governance, Professorial Power, and Academic Freedom in Russia,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 30, no. 1 (2022): 59–83.

10 Maria Snegovaya, “Smena Rezhima v Rossii? Demokraticheskiĭ Tranzit, Kotorogo Ne Bylo. [Regime Change in Russia? Democratic Transit That Never Happened],” *Forum Noveisheĭ Vostochnoevropeĭskoiĭ Istorii i Kul'tury - Russkoe Izdanie* [Forum of the Newest Eastern European History and Culture - Russian Edition], *Politologija* [Political science], no. 1–2 (2023): 119–35.

11 Natalia Forrat, “The Political Economy of Russian Higher Education: Why Does Putin Support Research Universities?,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 4 (July 3, 2016): 299–337, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1051749>.

12 Igor Chirikov and Igor Fedyukin, “The Role of Universities in Putin’s Russia. Reinforcing the State,” in *Neo-Nationalism and Universities*, ed. John Aubrey Douglass (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.85165>.

Russia signed the Bologna Declaration. This was arguably “mainly at the behest of a political elite that sought to take advantage of Bologna and European integration for its own purposes”.¹³ The initial, and arguably real, aim of the authorities was not to facilitate academic mobility between Russia and Europe, but to reduce costs.¹⁴ The transition from five-year to four-year study programmes was expected to reduce the cost per student and the need for teaching staff. However, joining the Bologna process ultimately made a positive contribution to the Russian education sector by introducing mobility programmes and integrating the domestic academic system into the global network. At the same time, the AFI does not reflect any significant change in academic exchange and dissemination since 2003 (Fig. 1).

Compared to 1999, freedom of academic and cultural expression shows a significant decline, falling by almost a third by the end of the period. Along with institutional autonomy, campus integrity and academic exchange and dissemination have also declined. Only freedom of research and teaching remains at the same level, showing that the state has not yet reached the academic agenda.

Restructuring under the guise of development. 2006 – 2011

During this period, the process of autocratisation of universities advanced even further. With the creation of new types of universities – “Federal universities” (2006) and “Research universities” (2008)¹⁵ – aimed at increasing the research capacity of universities across the country, the state introduced a number of structural changes in the academic sphere.¹⁶ These initiatives, which offered attractive funding to increase research opportunities, required mergers with other institutions and revisions of university statutes in order to participate. In addition, the introduction of new types of universities was accompanied by a shift from the election of rectors in state universities by university staff to their appointment by state authorities.¹⁷ The selection of universities to participate in these projects was sometimes influenced by the lobbying efforts of regional administrations.¹⁸ As a result, the supported universities did not “need to compete in the market of educational services”¹⁹

13 Dmitry Dubrovskiy, “Academic Rights in Russia and the Internationalization of Higher Education,” *Academe* 105, no. 4 (2019): 45–49.

14 Natalia Forrat, “The Political Economy of Russian Higher Education.”

15 The Federal Universities Project began in 2006 with two participants, later expanding to ten. The National Research Universities Project initiated in 2008 with two universities, grew by twelve more in 2009, and added another 15 in 2010.

16 Mikhail Sokolov, “Faculty Self-Governance, Professorial Power, and Academic Freedom in Russia.”

17 Forrat, “The Political Economy of Russian Higher Education”; Mikhail Sokolov, Sofia Lopatina, and Gennady Yakovlev, “Ot tovarishhestva k uchrezhdenijam: konstitucionnaja istorija rossijskih vuzov [From Partnerships to Bureaucracies: The Constitutional Evolution of Russian Universities]” *Voprosy Obrazovaniya* 3 (2018): 120–45.

18 Igor Fedyukin and Isak Frumin, “Rossiyskiye Vuzy-Flagmany [Russian Universities-Flagmen],” *Pro et Contra*, no. 5–6 (2010): 19–31.

19 Irina Abankina et al., “The Effects of Reform on the Performance of Higher Education Institutions,” *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* 4, no. 1 (April 20, 2012): 23–41, <https://doi.org/10.1108/17581181211230612>.

and the goal of achieving excellence was missed. At the same time, unequal access to state funding led to increasing stratification among higher education institutions.

The 2006-2007 regulatory changes also affected the requirements for doctoral qualifications, adding new criteria for candidates and dissertation councils.²⁰ As a result, several hundred dissertation councils were closed in 2006-2008. The changes further undermined the autonomy of universities by significantly affecting the performance of their PhD programmes and the career prospects of their staff. During this period, indicators of academic freedom in Russia declined, with the exception of freedom of academic and cultural expression, which remained largely stable (Fig. 1). The decline in freedom of research and teaching and freedom of academic exchange and dissemination was more pronounced, as these areas were more affected by the aforementioned structural changes and new regulations on academic degrees.

Tightening state control and the struggle for “efficiency”. 2011 – 2022

The new phase of tightening control over universities began after the mass political protests (also called “youth protests”) in 2011-2012.²¹ University administrations reacted by increasing their control and surveillance over students and academic staff.²² The state responded with amendments to the Federal Law “On Education”, which further reduced institutional autonomy of HEIs (Fig. 1). Overall university structures became strictly unitary, with faculties and departments losing many opportunities for autonomous decision-making.²³ The new regulations made student councils more dependent on university administrations, effectively turning them into mere ornaments to legitimise all administrative decisions.

In 2012, the status of “foreign agent” was introduced to identify Russian non-commercial organisations receiving foreign money. Later, in 2015, the measures were supplemented by the concept of “undesirable organisation”, whose activities are prohibited on the territory of the Russian Federation. This restricted many educational and research projects that received funding from foreign sources. In 2017, the concept of “foreign agent” was further extended to include media outlets and, later, to individuals. Since 2021, “foreign agents” are not allowed to offer any informal educational activities.

20 Dmitrii Trubnikov and Ekaterina Trubnikova, “From Bogus Journals to Predatory Universities: The Evolution of the Russian Academic Sphere Within the Predatory Settings of the State,” *Minerva* 62, no. 1 (March 2024): 49–68, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-023-09502-2>.

21 Radio Svoboda, Feb. 17, 2012, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/24486841.html> (accessed 6.11.2024)

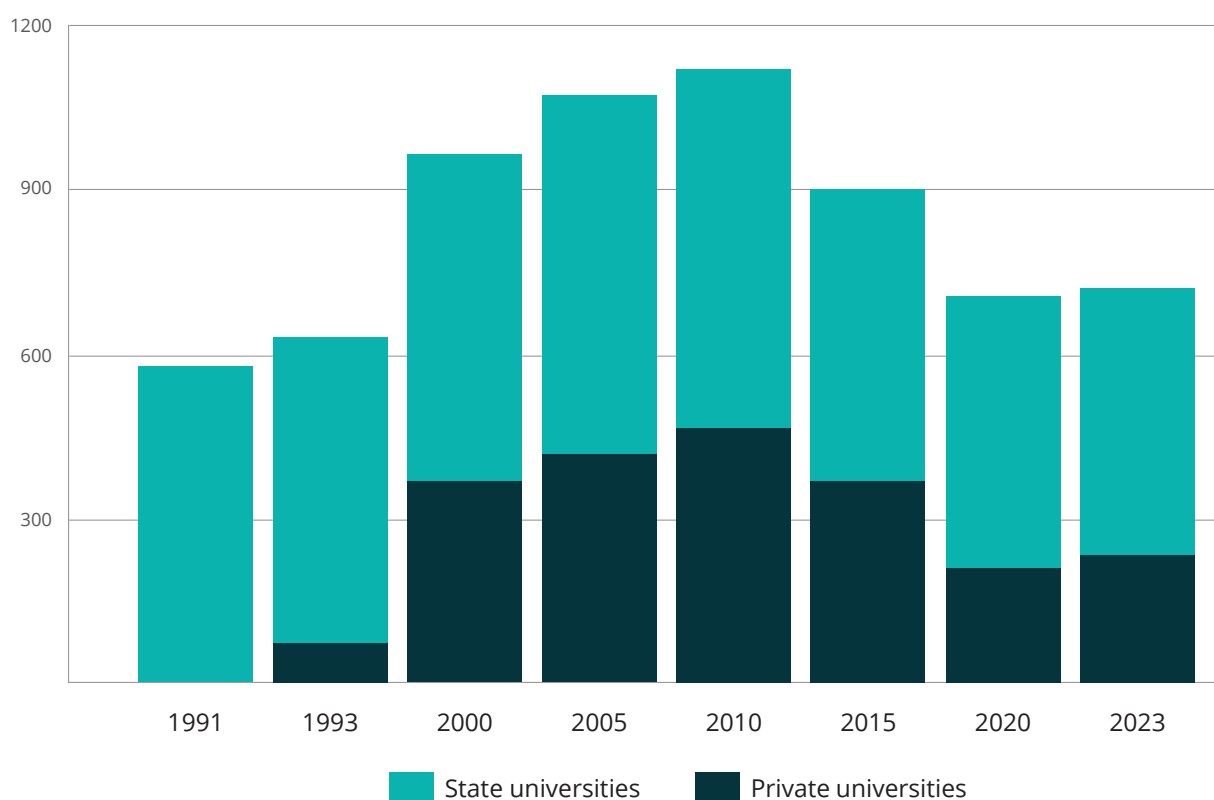
22 Nikolai Petrov, “SCIENCE AT RISK Monitoring Report. Russia 2022/2023: Persecutions in the Academic Sphere and Forced Emigration. 2024,” 2024, https://science-at-risk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/SAR-Monitoring-Report_Russia-Dec-2023-1.pdf (accessed 6.11.2024).

23 Mikhail Sokolov, Sofia Lopatina, and Gennady Yakovlev, “Ot tovarishhestva k uchrezhdenijam: konstitucionnaja istorija rossijskih vuzov [From Partnerships to Bureaucracies: The Constitutional Evolution of Russian Universities].”

In parallel with increasing control over higher education, the state has exploited the need to increase its efficiency. In 2012, mandatory bibliometric indicators were introduced to assess the performance of Russian universities, and since 2013, a large-scale monitoring of university performance has been enacted, resulting in numerous closures of less effective institutions or their mergers with better performing ones in the following years (Fig. 2).

Several excellence initiatives have been launched: Project 5-100 (2013)²⁴, the Flagship Universities Project (2016),²⁵ and the Priority 2030 programme (2021),²⁶ which provided generous state funding to participating universities. These initiatives resulted in a concentration of resources in a small group of universities, which received the majority of state funding. State-funded study places were increasingly redistributed to “excellence” universities. Additionally, there was a shift of fee-paying students towards the participating institutions. This significantly reduced the financial opportunities of non-participating institutions.

Figure 2. Number of higher education institutions in Russia



24 The goal of the Project 5-100 was to include at least 5 Russian universities in the top 100 universities globally by 2020 (according to one of the 3 major rankings (THE, ARWU, QS)). The project started with 15 participating universities in 2013. In 2015-2020, it included 21 universities.

25 The “flagship universities” project was intended to support regional universities focused on solving the problems of the regional economy of a specific federal subject. Currently, the project includes 34 HEIs.

26 The goal of the Priority 2030 programme is to create more than 100 “centres” for scientific, technological, and socio-economic development in the Russian Federation by 2030. Universities should be at the core of these “centers.” In 2024, the number of the participants exceeded 140 HEIs.

The excellence initiatives reduced the autonomy of universities, with leading university administrations siding with the regime in its struggle for financial resources and taking steps to curtail the political and academic freedoms of faculty and students.

Militarisation of universities and academic emigration.

2022 – present

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, academic freedom in Russia has been severely curtailed (Fig. 1). Currently, Russia is among the 20% of countries with the lowest level of academic freedom in the world.²⁷

In March 2022, the Russian Union of Rectors signed a statement in support of the "special military operation" (184 signatures).²⁸ Russian universities began to take an active part in developing relations with universities in the "new territories". Universities have become involved in direct cooperation with military structures.²⁹ By the end of 2023, a clear structure of political control and repression had been established at universities, including vice-rectors for security, youth policy, coordination centres, and so-called "E centers".³⁰

The freedom of academic and cultural expression experienced the sharpest decline. This is due to the amendments to the Russian Criminal Code that criminalized criticism of the war and any information about the Russian Armed Forces that contradicts the official narrative. Many scientists have been persecuted for their political position and even former cooperation with foreign colleagues.³¹ According to some estimates, from March 2022 to December 2023, the number of court cases related to the "fakes" about the Russian Armed Forces exceeded 8,000.³² To comply with the new clauses, universities have increased their monitoring of social media to identify inappropriate statements by students and staff.³³

27 Katrin Kinzelbach et al., "Academic Freedom Index – 2023 Update," (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), 2023), <https://doi.org/10.25593/OPUS4-FAU-21630>; Katrin Kinzelbach, Staffan I. Lindberg, and Lars Lott, "Academic Freedom Index – 2024 Update" (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg [FAU], March 7, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.25593/OPEN-FAU-405>.

28 Obrashhenie Rossijskogo Sojuza Rektorov [Appeal of the Russian Union of Rectors] is available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20220422090513/https://rsr-online.ru/news/2022-god/obrashchenie-rossijskogo-soyuza-rektorov1/> (accessed 6.11.2024).

29 For example, already in November 2022, Nikita Anisimov, the rector of HSE University, was awarded the Medal 'For Strengthening Military Cooperation' from the Ministry of Defense (the information is available at <https://www.hse.ru/staff/anisimov>).

30 Coordination centers and "E centers" are university divisions that monitor social networks in order to identify activities of students or university employees that are undesirable from the point of view of the Russian state authorities.

31 Chronicles of persecution of scientists are available on the T-invariant website: <https://www.t-invariant.org/category/timeline-en/> (accessed 6.11.2024).

32 Svodka antivoennykh repressij. Dekabr' 2023 [Summary of Anti-War Repressions. December 2023] is available at <https://data.ovd.info/svodka-antivoennykh-repressij-dekabr-2023#1> (accessed 4.11.2024).

33 Alesja Marohovskaja and Irina Dolinina, "Ran'she Nikomu v Golovu Ne Prihodilo Schitat' Obrazovanie Ugrozoi Bezopasnosti [It Never Occurred to Anyone before to Consider Education a Security Threat]," Important Stories, 2022, <https://stories.media/investigations/2022/04/08/ranshe-nikomu-v-golovu-ne-prihodilo-schitat-obrazovanie-ugrozoi-bezopasnosti/> (accessed 6.11.2024).

In December 2022, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education recommended that the course “Fundamentals of Military Training” be included in the university curriculum. By the end of 2022, the number of military training centres at universities across the country will increase to 120.³⁴ From May 2022, 10% of state-funded university places will be reserved for children of participants in the “special military operation”. In order to involve students in patriotic education, the national association of student patriotic clubs “I am proud” was established. Many established student organisations also began to actively support the official patriotic rhetoric.³⁵

Since February 2022, the list of “foreign agents” and “undesirable organisations” has grown considerably.³⁶ Employees with “foreign agent” status lost the right to teach and were dismissed by university administrations. A significant number of Russian scholars left the country.³⁷ The dominant destinations became the countries that are visa-free for Russian citizens: Kazakhstan, Georgia, Armenia, Turkey, Serbia, and Montenegro.³⁸ Some estimates allow us to understand the scale of emigration: The Bell’s investigation, for example, suggests that the number of recent Russian emigrants is around 650,000 people.³⁹ According to Novaya Gazeta Europe, the number of scientists who left the country after February 2022 is at least 2,500.⁴⁰

As the data analysis of affiliation changes in ORCID⁴¹ shows, the listed visa-free countries do not offer opportunities to continue an academic career. This analysis also shows that 15% of Russian scholars who changed their place of work after February 2022 reported a new affiliation with an institution in Germany, 7% in Israel, 4% in Kazakhstan, 4% in China, less than 4% in Italy, and 3% in Spain. A 7% share is spread across several post-Soviet countries. Despite significant emigration

34 Pri universitetah budut sozdany 16 novykh voennykh uchebnykh centrov [16 new military training centers will be created at universities]. The news is available at <https://minobrnauki.gov.ru/press-center/news/novosti-ministerstva/62710/> (accessed 6 November 2024).

35 Dmitry Dubrovskiy, “Russian ‘Student Societies,’” Gaudeamus (blog), 2024, <https://cisrus.org/2024/01/29/students-and-war/> (accessed 6.11.2024).

36 The register of foreign agents and the list of undesirable organisations are maintained by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation. t <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/activity/directions/998/>, <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/activity/directions/942/> (accessed 2.11.2024).

37 Maia Chankseliani and Elizaveta Belkina, “Academic Exodus from Russia: Unravelling the Crisis,” *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education* 16, no. 3 (2024): 97–105.

38 “Begstvo Ot Vojny [Escape from War],” 2023, Re-Russia edition, <https://re-russia.net/review/347/> (accessed 6 November 2024); Denis Kasyanchuk, “Skol’ko Rossijan v 2022 Godu Uehalo Iz Strany i Ne Vernulos’ [How Many Russians Left the Country in 2022 and Never Returned],” *The Bell*, 2022, <https://thebell.io/skolko-rossiyan-v-2022-godu-uekhalo-iz-strany-i-ne-vernulos> (accessed 6.11.2024).

39 Denis Kasyanchuk, “Posle Nachala Vojny Iz Rossii Uehali i Ne Vernulis’ Okolo 650 Tysjach Chelovek [After the War Began, about 650 Thousand People Left Russia and Did Not Return],” *The Bell*, 2024, <https://thebell.io/posle-nachala-voyny-iz-rossii-uekhali-i-ne-vernulis-bolshe-700-tysyach-chelovek-issledovanie-the-bell>.

40 Oleg Levin, “Haemorrhaging Brains,” *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, 2024, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/01/30/haemorrhaging-brains-en> (accessed 6.11.2024).

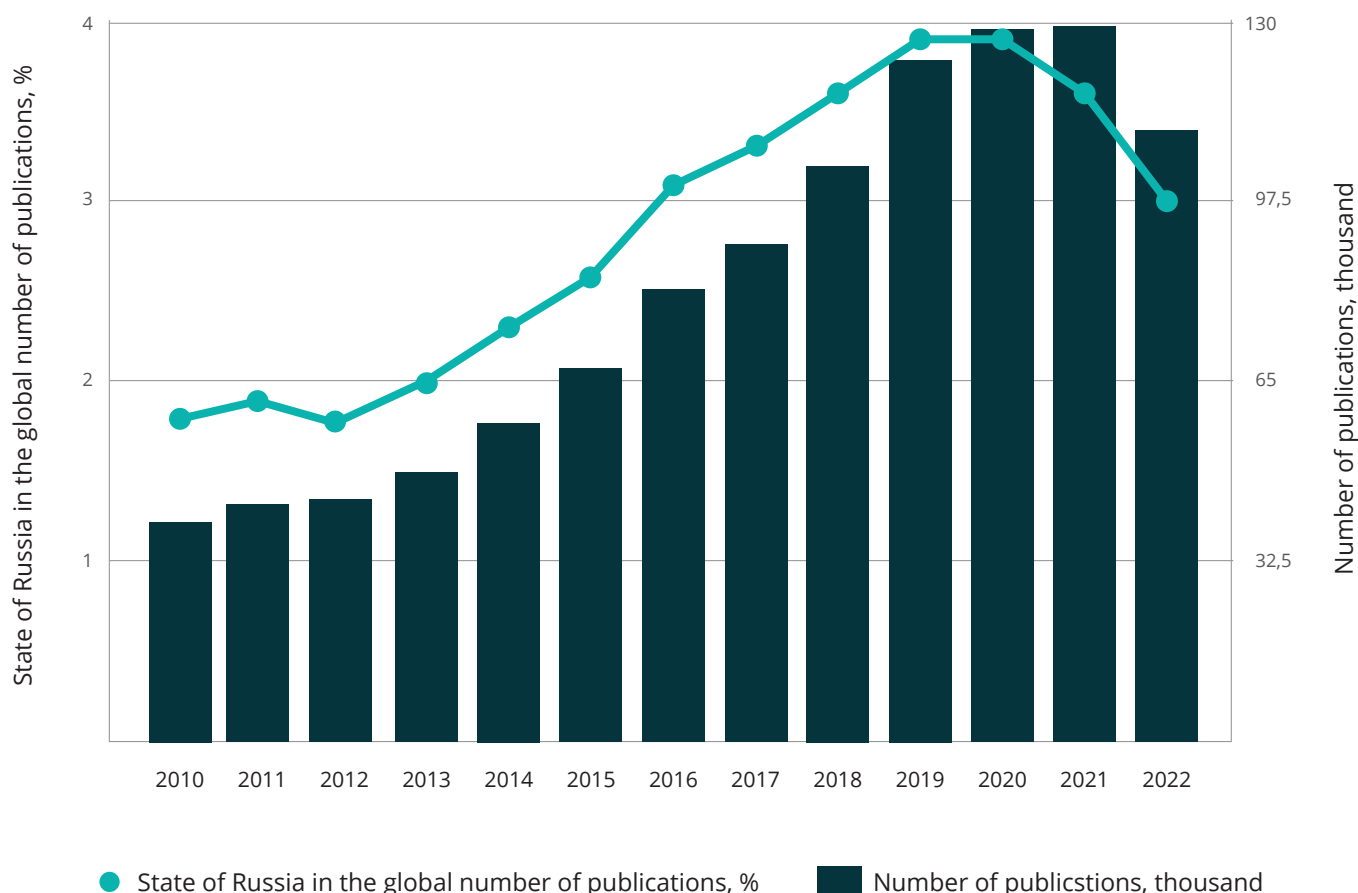
41 Oleg Levin, “Utechka Vysokoj Stepeni [High Degree Leak],” *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, 2024, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/01/18/utechka-vysokoi-stepeni> (accessed 6.11.2024).

of Russians to Serbia, Montenegro, and Turkey, these countries are almost invisible in the employment trajectories.

This emigration of scholars and the discontinuation of collaboration with many international partners is reflected in the reduced number of publications by Russian scholars in Scopus. The total number of articles by Russian authors fell by 13% in 2022 (Fig. 3).⁴²

In response to the international sanctions, Russia moved away from assessing effectiveness of HEIs by the number of publications indexed in Web of Science and Scopus.

Figure 3. Publications by Russian scholars in scientific journals indexed in Scopus



⁴² Publikacionnaja aktivnost' rossijskih uchenyh v novyh realijah [Publication activity of Russian scientists in new realities] The news is available at <https://issek.hse.ru/news/879121802.html> (accessed 6.11.2024).

Part 2

The State of Academic Freedom in Russia 2022–2024

by Dmitry Dubrovskiy

This part of the monitoring report provides a detailed insight into current developments in the Russian science and higher education sector in relation to the five dimensions of academic freedom measured by the Academic Freedom Index.



Freedom to research and teach⁴³

The onset of large-scale aggression marked the beginning of an extensive ideological restructuring of Russian higher education.⁴⁴ The repression of dissenting scholars and students intensified. This directly contributed to a significant decline in the index of freedom of teaching and research. Scholars have become subject to (self-) censorship, administrative, or even criminal prosecution.

Since 2022, Russian higher education has witnessed further enforcement of “traditional values,” particularly in the social sciences and humanities. Whole fields of study, such as gender or queer studies, have become “alien to the values of the Russian people”⁴⁵ and have consequently either been forcibly shut down or euphemistically renamed.⁴⁶ The teaching of human rights has become completely impossible.⁴⁷ Research and teaching in political science and sociology related to the current political regime and its characteristics has become increasingly problematic, mainly due to the rise of state-sponsored patriotism based on militaristic propaganda and anti-Western sentiments.⁴⁸ The aggressive historical policy of the Russian Federation has made historical research into the 20th century a risky endeavour.⁴⁹ The Russian state forces higher education institutions to justify and legitimize the aggressive war against Ukraine, primarily by introducing new ideological courses on the “Foundations of Russian Statehood” and the “History of Russia,” with an aggressive anti-Ukrainian narrative.⁵⁰

43 None of the violations of academic rights and freedoms in Russia described in this report can or should be compared to the horrors of military aggression and the losses suffered by Ukrainian science and higher education. The author calls for the immediate cessation of Russian aggression and the restoration of Ukraine’s internationally recognized 1991 borders.

44 Chirikov, Igor, 2023. “[The Weaponization of Russian Universities: A Neo-Nationalism and University Brief](#)” (accessed 04.12.2024), Center for Studies in Higher Education, UC Berkeley.

45 Buyantueva Radzhana (2018). LGBT rights activism and homophobia in Russia. *Journal of homosexuality*, 65(4), 456-483.

46 Temkina, Anna. Conservative swing and gender studies in Russia. *Gaudeamus*. December 2nd, 2022, <https://cisrus.org/2022/12/02/gender-study/> (accessed 2.10.2024); Academic freedom and freedom of expression in educational institutions. Political and LGBT+ content. Submission prepared by the Sphere Foundation for the Special Rapporteur on the right to education. Sphere Foundation, 2024, Academic freedom and freedom of expression in educational institutions. Political and LGBT+ content (accessed 20.11.2024).

47 Dubrovskiy, Dmitry: Teaching Human Rights in Russian Legal Education: The Re-Sovietization of Rhetoric in Human Rights Courses, *VerfBlog*, 2024/2/14, <https://verfassungsblog.de/teaching-human-rights-in-russian-legal-education/> (accessed 20.11.2024).

48 Khodzhaeva, Ekaterina, Barsukova, Svetlana and Yasaveev Iskender. “Mobilizing patriotism in Russia.” *Russian Analytical Digest (RAD)* 207 (2017).

49 Zajda, Joseph (2017). Ideology, national identity and patriotism in prescribed history textbooks: Secondary teachers’ responses. *Globalisation and National Identity in History Textbooks: The Russian Federation*, 105-116; Kurilla, Ivan. What kind of history will investigators write? *Gaudeamus*, September 28th, 2020, <https://cisrus.org/2020/09/28/kakuyu-istoriyu-napishut-sledovatelyi/> (accessed 2.10.2024).

50 Dubrovskiy, Dmitry. Ukraine and Ukrainians in Russian Higher Education and Science. “Russia’s project anti-Ukraine” Center for Democratic Integrity. (2024) <https://democratic-integrity.eu/dmitry-dubrovsky-ukraine-and-ukrainians-in-russian-higher-education-and-science/> (accessed 2.10.2024).

New legislation marks the de facto start of military censorship in the country, with academics facing criminal prosecution for their teaching or research. According to the “Fake News Law” (Criminal Code, 207.3, adopted in March 2024), the dissemination of “false information about the use of the Russian military” is punishable by up to 15 years in prison. “Discrediting the Russian military” (Criminal Code, 280.3) is punishable by up to 7 years in prison. Supporting restrictive mechanisms against Russia (e.g. sanctions) has been punishable by up to 5 years in prison since November 2024 under Criminal Code, 284.3. Since April 2022, comparing the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany can lead to administrative fines.⁵¹

The discriminatory “foreign agents” law continued to affect the freedom of research and teaching.⁵² The number of scholars labeled as “foreign agents” increased sharply after 2022. While in 2021 only two academics were labeled as “foreign agents,” by mid-2024 48 researchers and twelve research institutions were on this list. All of them lost the formal right to teach in Russia.⁵³ Although the law does not prohibit foreign agents from engaging in other scientific activities besides teaching, including research, in reality, all “foreign agents” lost their university jobs almost immediately.

Data provided by OVD-Info show⁵⁴ that out of 220 cases of political persecution of teachers and school instructors⁵⁵ registered since 2022, 41% are related to pressure from law enforcement agencies and 40% from HEI administrations. 18% of the registered cases involve direct pressure on teachers and school management by Z-activists (those who actively support Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine).

The practice of denunciation has intensified, leading to the persecution of professors and students with anti-war views.⁵⁶ Monitoring by OVD-Info reports 54 cases of pressure on university faculty, 17 of which were based on denunciations, mainly by students.⁵⁷ For example, Irina Sedelnikova, a professor at the Nizhny Novgorod

51 McCarthy, Lauren A., Rice, Douglas, Lokhmutov, Aleks. (2023). Four Months of “Discrediting the Military”: Repressive Law in Wartime Russia. *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 31(2), 125-160.

52 Katarzyna Kaczmarek. Russian ‘foreign agent’ rules are chilling academic freedom. *The Times Higher Education*. January 8th, 2020. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/russian-foreign-agent-rules-are-chilling-academic-freedom> (accessed 2.10.2024).

53 Krupskiy, Maxim. The Impact of Russia’s ‘Foreign agent’ Law on Civil Society. *Fletcher Forum*, Tufts University. June 26th, 2023. <https://sites.tufts.edu/flecherrussia/the-impact-of-russias-foreign-agents-legislation-on-civil-society/> (accessed 2.10.2024).

54 “Either the State’s Opinion or None at All: How Teachers Accused of an Anti-War Stance Are Persecuted.” OVD-Info. September 1st, 2024. <https://reports.ovd.info/teachers#1> (accessed 2.10.2024).

55 The study analysed data on 54 university lecturers, 65 school teachers, and 10 teachers from vocational education institutions who faced politically motivated pressure between February 24, 2022, and July 14, 2024. The sample also included 18 educators working in supplementary education and one kindergarten teacher. We extracted data that concerned academics. It should be noted that OVD-Info provides figures on publicly known cases of pressure and repression against academics and teachers. These figures could be much higher in reality.

56 “Pandora’s Sisters.” *The Anonymous Tips in Post-War Academia*. *Gaudeamus*, August 1, 2024. <https://cisrus.org/2024/08/01/delation/> (accessed 2.10.2024).

57 “Either the State’s Opinion or None at All: How Teachers with Anti-War Views Are Persecuted.” OVD-Info, September 1st, 2024. <https://reports.ovd.info/teachers#1> (accessed 2.10.2024).

branch of RANEPa, was reported by her students and sentenced to a three year probation for “using her official position” to make a statement about Ukrainian children who died as a result of actions by the Russian army.

These data indicate a systematic interference by state bodies in the academic environment and point to a high degree of involvement of academic administrations in political control and censorship. The data also show that pressure on scholars is not only exerted from the top, but also from below through active political groups.

The methods used to persecute scholars are diverse. In addition to administrative and criminal proceedings, scholars have been subjected to extrajudicial pressure, including anonymous threats, online harassment, interrogations and searches, detention without charge, dissolution of the association, suspension from teaching, dismissal, damage to property, recognition as a ‘foreign agent,’ forced apologies, censorship. Pressure from law enforcement agencies includes visits by officials for ‘preventive talks’ or the threat of criminal proceedings. Pressure from university administrations, usually related to anti-war or other civic activism by faculty and students, includes threats of non-renewal of employment contracts, informal ‘preventive talks’ with the university administration, and review of individual cases by ethics committees, often ending in expulsion or dismissal for ‘breaches of the code of ethics.’ A special role in this pressure construct is played by pro-war activists who scour social media for signs of ‘anti-state activity’ by faculty and students and send reports to the police and university administrators. These pro-war activists also directly threaten and intimidate faculty and students. As a result of this multifaceted pressure, academics are forced to either abandon their work and leave the country, or resort to self-censorship.

Freedom of academic exchange and dissemination

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine had a severe impact on the freedom of academic exchange and dissemination. After February 24, 2022, many international research institutions and academic publishers, such as Brill, Elsevier, and Springer, immediately suspended cooperation with Russian scholars. Publications by Russian researchers in international journals were restricted.⁵⁸ At the same time, the Russian authorities exerted pressure on Russian authors by ‘recommending’ them not to

58 Nazarovets, Maryna, Teixeira da Silva, Jaime A. (2022). Scientific publishing sanctions in response to the Russo-Ukrainian war (Chichester : Wiley). Chichester : Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1487>

publish in Elsevier journals because they were allegedly using open access funds to support Ukraine, which is considered 'high treason' under Russian law.⁵⁹ The number of Russian scientists attending international conferences has decreased significantly. This is due to financial difficulties, a direct ban imposed by university administrations,⁶⁰ and the suspension of international cooperation imposed on scientists associated with Russian state institutions.⁶¹ In order to continue participating in international academic events, scientists affiliated with Russian institutions often register as independent researchers and do not declare their affiliation, when registering for conferences.

Several Russian universities, such as Skolkovo or MIPT (Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology), were added to the list of sanctioned institutions for their alleged involvement in providing technological support to the military campaign. In several cases, the sanctions against these institutions were extended to their graduates. For example, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich refused to admit Russian graduates from sanctioned institutions to its master's programme.⁶²

In July 2022, Russia withdrew from the EHEA, officially abandoning the Bologna system and announcing the creation of a "nationally oriented" system based on the "best examples of Russian higher education." Despite official statements about creating a "unique education system," nothing significant has been done so far, except for a pilot project in six universities where the "specialist" degree (typical of Russian higher education since Soviet times and until the country joined the Bologna Process) has been reinstated.

Ideological trends have had a direct impact on academic publishing. Some terms, such as "authoritarianism" (when referring to the Russian political system), were effectively banned in Russian academic publications even before 2022, as confirmed by the analysis of publications by Russian scholars in Part 3 of this report. There were also systemic barriers to publishing articles on LGBTQ+ issues in Russian academic journals. In historical publications, various forms of censorship practices have been observed since 2014.⁶³ Publications by 'foreign agents' have to be marked with this discriminatory status. Their articles cannot be cited in literature published in Russia,

59 "Izvestia": Russian scientists were advised not to publish in Elsevier journals. TASS, August 13, 2024 (RUS) <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/21589903> (accessed 2.10.2024).

60 Lem, Pola. Russia bars academics from international conferences. The Times of Higher Education. March 22, 2022. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/russia-bars-academics-international-conferences>

61 News in depth: Russian researchers disappear from academic conferences as isolation bites. Science/Business, November 14th, 2023, <https://sciencebusiness.net/news/international-news/news-depth-russian-researchers-disappear-academic-conferences-isolation> (accessed 2.10.2024).

62 Faulhaber, Daniel. „Russische Studierende: «Die ETH schlägt uns die Tür vor der Nase zu»“, Beobachter, June 6, 2024. <https://www.beobachter.ch/arbeit-bildung/bildung/russische-studierende-die-eth-schlagt-uns-die-tur-vor-der-nase-zu-718896> (accessed 2.10.2024).

63 Jobert, Véronique. New censorship in Russia in the 21st century. Observations of a French scholar. Istoricheskaja Ekspertisa, 2024, https://www.istorex.org/post/25-07-2024-veronique-jobert?fbclid=IwY2xjawEPloxleHRuA2FbQlxMAABHYM8c-b4rp1iZhTaUa3b9Ky6Mj7A2BI0igYhfFcYShi4xGCatU6Hoj16Blw_aem_3uykyhFAsx-zzO3DdAT07Q (accessed 2.10.2024).

nor can they be made openly accessible in Russian libraries as they are only issued to people over 18 nor are they sold to people under 18.

By classifying foreign research and educational institutions as “undesirable”⁶⁴ (as of October 2024, this list contains 17 organisations) or even “extremist,”⁶⁵ Russia further violates the rights of students and scholars. It devalues education obtained from these organisations on the Russian academic labour market and creates a direct risk of administrative and criminal prosecution for collaboration with them.

Institutional autonomy

As described in the previous part of this report, the Russian government has progressively limited institutional autonomy of Russian HEIs, i.e., their ability to administer decisions regarding their internal governance, finance, and administration. Taking one of the lowest positions among the dimensions of academic freedom in Russia, institutional autonomy has further declined since 2022. In particular, the role of faculty and students in university governance has been further reduced, with academic councils retaining their functions only formally. They still participate in discussions devoted to the content of education (syllabi, new programmes) and approve candidates for teaching and research positions.

The Russian state further continues to interfere in the sphere of higher education, forcing universities to promote nationalism and “patriotism,” and by militarising and weaponising them.⁶⁶ This is done through the introduction of military and patriotic courses into university curricula, the establishment of military training centres and patriotic student organisations at universities throughout the country,⁶⁷ and the allocation of state-funded study places to children of participants in the “Special Military Operation.”⁶⁸ Universities are rewarded for direct cooperation with military structures.⁶⁹

64 The list of “undesirable” organisations includes, e.g., the Kennan Institute, the Institute for East European Studies (ZOIS), Bard College (USA), Central European University in Vienna, and the Free University (Brīva Universitāte, Riga).

65 In July 2024, DGO, the German Association for East European Studies, was classified by the Russian Federation as an extremist organisation.

66 Chirikov, Igor. Weaponisation of universities: a ‘back-to-the-future’ story. University World News. November 9, 2023. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20231109104134745> (accessed 2.10.2024).

67 The Ministry of Education and Science recommended starting military training in universities from September. RBC, December 28th, 2022 <https://www.rbc.ru/society/28/12/2022/63ac85949a7947d0160d4209> (accessed 24.10.2024); Mishustin signed an order on military training centers at universities. (Rus) RBC, December 22nd, 2022. <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/27/12/2022/63ab332d9a794761ede04941> (accessed 24.10.2024).

68 As mentioned in the first part of this report, from May 2022, 10% of state-funded university places should be reserved for children of participants in the “special military operation”.

69 For example, already in November 2022, Nikita Anisimov, the rector of HSE University, was awarded the Medal ‘For Strengthening Military Cooperation’ from the Ministry of Defence (available at <https://www.hse.ru/staff/anisimov>).

Campus integrity

The Russian campus⁷⁰ increasingly resembles a “closed institution,” where the movements and actions of staff and students are regularly monitored and controlled. Vice-rectors for security and youth policy, as well as so-called coordination centres and “E-centers,” directly serve this purpose and constitute a whole system of control that seriously undermines the integrity of the campus.

Vice rectors for security are the heads of the so-called “First Departments,” a legacy of the USSR that has never completely disappeared from the Russian higher education system.⁷¹ Vice-rectors for security are usually retired or active FSB officers. They coordinate the surveillance of students and other personnel, exert psychological pressure on the disloyal and initiate their dismissal. Control measures include checks at university entrances and visits to student dormitories, including illegal searches and intimidation. The ethics committees have also become part of this system and an instrument of repression against dissent. On the pretext of ‘violating academic ethics,’ academics and students are dismissed for taking part in protest movements or making critical statements.⁷²

Following the street protests in 2021, which were triggered by the arrest of Alexei Navalny and involved many students and lecturers, **vice rectors for youth policy** appeared in Russian universities. Their de facto mission is to monitor and prevent students’ political and oppositional activity.

The “**coordination centres**” have been set up at HEIs in every federal district of Russia, mimicking the counter-extremism departments of Russian police forces. These centres monitor social media to collect information on anti-war and oppositional activities of Russian academics and students.⁷³

The seminar rooms of Russian HEIs have become an insecure space exposed to outside interference. Often, state representatives or pro-military vigilantes attend lectures or seminars to exert pressure and monitor the content that is being taught.⁷⁴

70 “Campus” refers to the area and buildings around a university, college, school, etc. Russian universities rarely created such structures. There are three campuses that fit the definition: the Far Eastern Federal University, the Siberian Federal University, and the non-governmental Innopolis University

71 Oleksiyenko, Anatoly V. “World-class universities and the Soviet legacies of administration: Integrity dilemmas in Russian higher education.” *Higher Education Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2022): 385-398.

72 Skibo, Daria. *Ethics Codes: Mere Fashion or a Tool for Resolving Conflicts?* Gaudeamus. October 23, 2021.

73 Dubrovskiy, Dmitry. “The Vertical of Ideological Power.” *Gaudeamus*. November 1, 2023. <https://cisrus.org/2023/11/01/ideological-vertical/> (accessed 2.10.2024).

74 Dubrovskiy, Dmitry. “War and the academic community in Russia.” *Baltic Worlds* 15, no. 1 (2022): 38-44.

Of particular concern is the surveillance of faculty and students by video surveillance systems. Officially, such systems are used to counter terrorist threats and can only be installed in the corridors and entrances of HEI buildings.⁷⁵ However, there is evidence that in many universities video cameras are installed in classrooms and the footage is used to pressure lecturers who deviate from the “official line” in their lectures and seminars.

Freedom of academic and cultural expression

Freedom of academic and cultural expression has experienced the sharpest decline of all dimensions of academic freedom since 2022. Immediately after the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a de facto military censorship was introduced, threatening criminal prosecution for anyone who questioned the official version or reported on civilian casualties and genocidal crimes committed by the Russian army.⁷⁶ Any public statement about the war, especially discussion of violations of the Geneva Convention or war crimes committed by the Russian army, is now punishable by a heavy fine or up to 15 years in prison. Under the amended Criminal Code, many scientists have been prosecuted for their political positions and even past collaboration with foreign colleagues.⁷⁷

The Memorial Human Rights Centre database for 2022-2024 contains information on 600 political prisoners from across the country.⁷⁸ The database lists 154 cases related in some way to science and higher education. Of these, 53 individuals were persecuted or convicted under articles related to the de facto implementation of military censorship (Fig. 4). Ten of these 53 individuals were convicted or prosecuted under Article 207.3 (“public dissemination of knowingly false information on the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation”).⁷⁹ From March 2022 to December 2023, the number of court cases related to the “fakes” about the Russian

75 Information of the Russian Federation in response to the request of the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on the right to education on the topic 'Academic freedom and freedom of expression in educational institutions.' (Rus) February 12, 2024. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/education/cfis/cfi-expression/subm-academic-freedom-sta-ru-federation-input-2.pdf>

76 Legucka, Agnieszka. Russia’s war-time censorship and propaganda. PISM, # 52 (1969), April 1, 2022.

77 Chronicles of persecution of scientists are available on the T-invariant website: <https://www.t-invariant.org/category/timeline-en/> (accessed 24.10.2024).

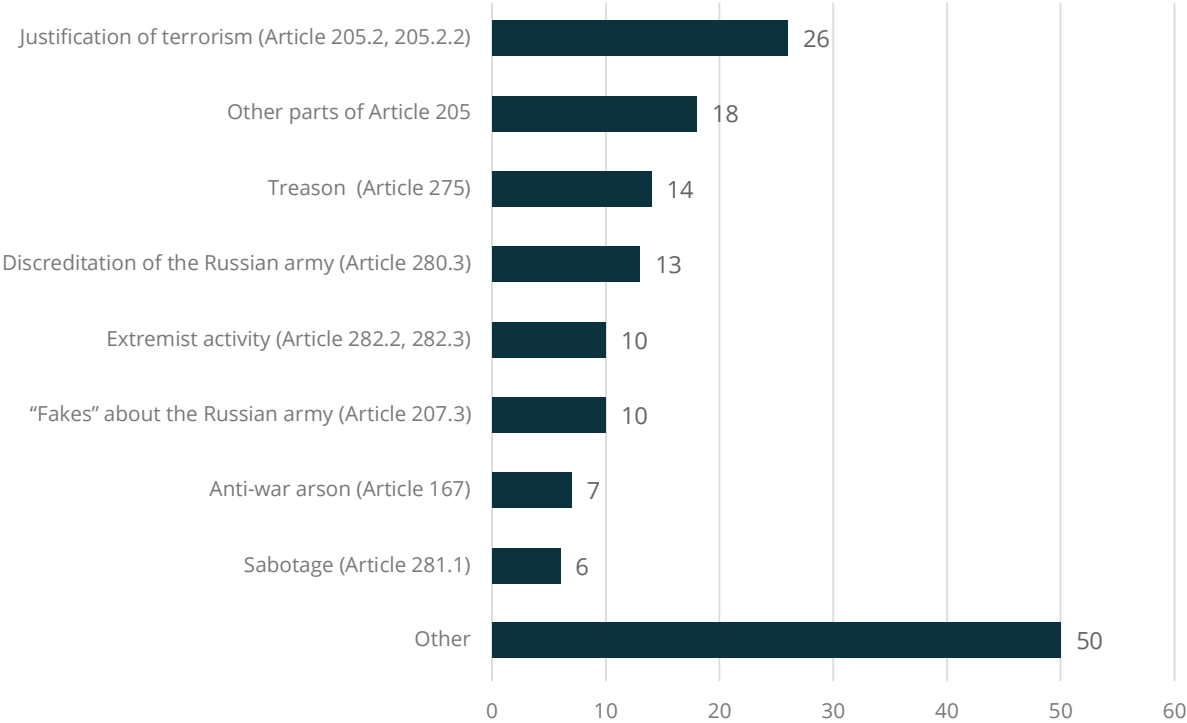
78 In cases involving the prosecution of dissenting scholars and students, it is not always possible to determine the involvement of university representatives.

79 The authors of the report consider all scholars from this list prosecuted under Article 275 (High Treason) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation as victims of political repression and academic freedom violations. These processes are based on the transfer of information or data, which the First Department first approved of the relevant institutions. Then, this same fact is classified by the investigation as treason. All of these cases contain indications of blatant falsification.

Armed Forces exceeded 8,000.⁸⁰ The Memorial’s database also lists 14 scholars convicted of “treason” for allegedly disclosing state secrets (Fig. 4). Most of them were sentenced to long prison terms;⁸¹ two of them died while under investigation.⁸²

Figure 4. Academics as political prisoners

Source: Memorial Human Rights Centre’s Political Prisoners Support Programme



Students and scholars who have expressed their opposition to Russia’s war on Ukraine — ranging from damaging pro-war propaganda posters to writing on walls — are also being prosecuted. Arson at military recruitment offices, which has become another form of protest against forced conscription into the active army, has also been prosecuted, in some cases classified as “terrorism.”

The OVD-Info reports that the persecution of scholars for anti-war statements has decreased significantly as compared to 2022 (from 17 registered cases in 2022 to 7 in 2023 and 3 by September 2024) and has mostly remained at the administrative

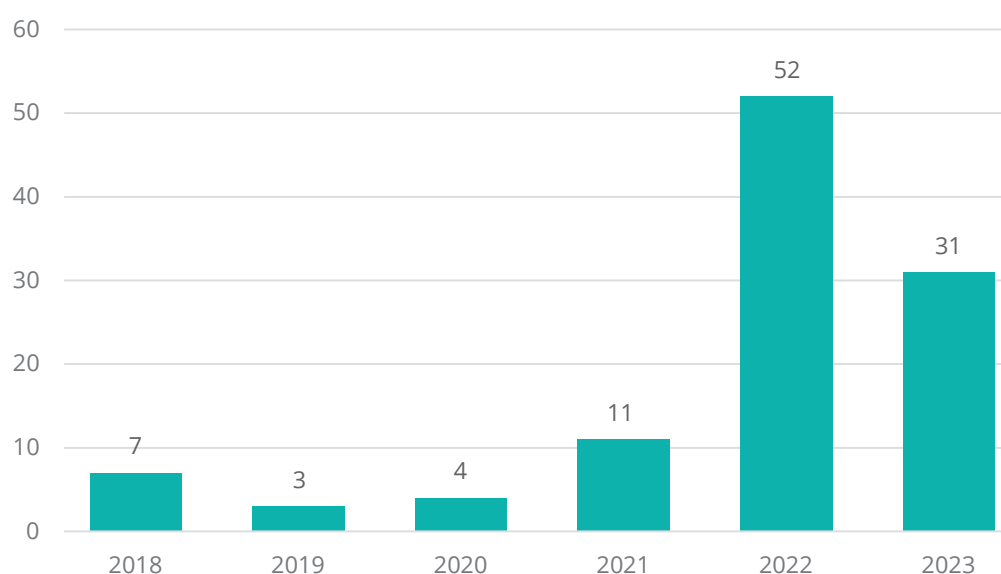
80 The information is available at <https://data.ovd.info/svodka-antivoennykh-repressiy-dekabr-2023#1>
81 Livadina, Mira. [Hypersonic paranoia. As treason cases at the highest level of Russian science pile up, is Kremlin-sanctioned spy mania out of control? — Novaya Gazeta Europe](#), May 30, 2024.
82 Treason and espionage cases are rising in Russia since the war in Ukraine began. Associated Press, July 14, 2024.

level. This can be attributed to the fact that scholars who publicly expressed their anti-war stance either already resigned voluntarily or were dismissed in 2022. Another reason is the introduction of military censorship, which made anti-war statements much more dangerous, with the risk of criminal prosecution.

A separate study on politically motivated expulsions of Russian students from 2018 to 2023 was conducted by the human rights project “Molniya.”⁸³ According to the study, politically motivated expulsions have multiplied with the onset of the war.

Figure 5. Students’ expulsion in Russia, 2018-2023

Source: Molniya project, 2024



More than half of them are due to students’ anti-war or other protest activities. The second most common reason is student sabotage of pro-war events organized by Russian universities. To justify the expulsions, HEIs’ administrations cite “violations of internal regulations” or “violations of the ethical code.”

83 Students against the war. Study on how universities expel students for political reasons. Molniya, 2024, <https://molniya.org/students-against-war#block-fb54cddf24314b4bac0b43cfa43855> (accessed 4.11.2024). It should be noted that the real numbers of politically motivated expulsions might be higher.

Part 3

Changes in the Research Topics of Russian Scholars since the Beginning of Russia's Full-scale Invasion of Ukraine: Evidence from Bibliometric Databases

by Yegor Albitskii



This part of the report provides a preliminary analysis of shifts in the themes of Russian social science research since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, examining how the war — and the accompanying escalation of restrictions on academic freedom — has reshaped scientific discourse. Based on an analysis of article titles in Scopus-indexed journals⁸⁴, with a comparative focus on Russian and English-language publications, this study seeks to elucidate changes in research directions. By examining both war-related topics and areas subject to broader restrictions, such as gender and LGBTQ+ issues, this part of the report aims to provide insights into the impact of external pressures on academic freedom and the integrity of social scientific inquiry in Russia.

Previous research has already highlighted how the conflict has led to a decline in international collaborations involving Russian scientists⁸⁵ and a dramatic increase in the emigration of the most productive researchers in the social sciences.⁸⁶ Despite these shifts, a more insidious concern is the increasing risk to academic freedom in Russia, which can be observed through changes in research topics in scholarly output.

Studies in political science have highlighted a significant war-induced rhetorical convergence among the Russian political class, reflecting a broader narrative alignment shaped by state interests.⁸⁷ Academic institutions in Russia also increasingly serve state agendas. These agendas have shifted from optimising state governance and crafting pretexts for international presence before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine to focusing on ensuring regime stability afterwards.⁸⁸ This research aims to explore these shifts empirically, in order to test claims about broader changes in the scientific sphere, its freedom, and the integrity of scholarship and research in the social sciences and humanities in Russia.⁸⁹

Data, Research Design, and Methods

To analyse shifts in research topics, we compiled a database of research articles indexed in Scopus. We selected publications that were published in journals in-

84 Scopus is a scientific abstract and citation database, launched by the academic publisher Elsevier in 2004.

85 Zhang, L., Cao, Z., Sivertsen, G., and Kochetkov, D., "The influence of geopolitics on research activity and international collaboration in science: the case of Russia," *Scientometrics* (2024): 1-15

86 Albitskii, Y., "The impact of war on the migration of social scientists from Russia," Manuscript in preparation (2024).

87 Dollbaum, J. M., and Kim, S., "Going jingo: a classification of the wartime positions of Russia's 'systemic opposition' parties," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 40/3 (2024): 222-241.

88 Zavadskaya, M., and Gerber, T., "Rise and fall: social science in Russia before and after the war," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 39/1-2 (2023): 108-120.

89 Empirical research has extensively studied censorship, particularly academic censorship, with a strong focus on China. Reny (2016) explores the impact of Chinese authoritarianism on political science, highlighting researchers' strategies for navigating restrictions. Corduneanu-Huci and Hamilton (2018) analyse around 9,000 cases of censorship across 196 countries, finding that politically influential media are most targeted. Wong and Kwong (2019) document censorship requests from Chinese authorities to *The China Quarterly*, highlighting China's influence on global scholarship. Clark et al. (2023) examine self-censorship among scholars driven by prosocial motives, adding complexity to the understanding of censorship. In contrast, research on censorship in Russia remains sparse.

dexed under the topics of Social Sciences, Economics, and Arts and Humanities, and where at least one author was affiliated with a Russian research institution. We chose Scopus because it includes most journals with at least minimal quality restrictions in both English and Russian, which allows it to be perceived as the most comprehensive source on Russian social sciences and humanities.

The dataset we use includes titles, keywords, abstracts, and metadata of peer-reviewed articles from January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2023. This period allows us to examine how several significant exogenous shocks (such as the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, COVID) have thematically influenced the content of academic journals. In total, the database consists of 103,434 articles (57,027 in Russian and 46,407 in English) indexed in Scopus, with the titles alone providing 1,856 million tokens.

This study uses natural language processing techniques, focusing primarily on word frequency analysis. We measure popularity by ranking terms in article titles according to their frequency of occurrence. The logic is that titles typically reflect the focus of an article, allowing us to concentrate on specific thematic areas/topics. Following this logic, the repetition of terms indicates their importance. This approach is similar to that used in a study regarding content changes in media produced by the Russian political class.⁹⁰

In terms of metrics, we focus on the relative frequency of certain keywords that denote significant themes, such as “war,” “warfare,” and “military” for the war. Prior to the analysis, we perform tokenisation and lemmatisation and compile dictionaries so that terms and word forms like “China,” “Chinese,” and “China’s” are combined into a single token. We also remove stop words such as “in,” “of,” etc., leaving only content-rich words.

We have pre-identified the following themes of interest:

(1) The first set of themes focuses on countries and regions. First, we examine the dynamics of scholarly interest in Ukraine, as well as Crimea and Donbas. We also track Belarus as a control term to analyse trends in its use compared to more prominent regions and countries for Russian foreign policy. In addition, we track the following terms: “the USA,” “China,” “Europe,” “India,” and “Asia⁹¹.”

(2) The second theme we found is directly related to war. This topic includes terms such as “war,” “military,” and “warfare.” We consider the term “conflict” as a control term for this theme.

(3) Another set of concepts revolves around the description of political processes, using the following terms: “democracy,” “authoritarianism,” and “elections.” With regard to elections, we also look separately at the term “voting,” which has a

90 Dollbaum, J. M., and Kim, S., “Going jingo: a classification of the wartime positions of Russia’s ‘systemic opposition’ parties,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 40/3 (2024): 222-241.

91 In all cases, we also consider variations of names, such as “USA” and “America” when referring to the United States.

slightly different meaning in Russian and characterises more of an “electoral procedure” than typical democratic elections.

(4) The fourth theme encompasses two sets of concepts: one related to gender, primarily in the context of gender identity and representation, with a core in women’s studies; the second relates to LGBTQ+ related topics, such as gay, lesbian, queer, transgender, etc. To control the use of the term “gender,” to which (as well as to gender studies in general) the Russian state has objections. In article titles, we also search for “women” separately, which for us indicates a general interest in women’s studies.

As a control theme, we have added COVID, which has emerged as a significant theme in the social sciences since the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020.

The unit of analysis is the words/terms/concepts in the titles of the articles and the topics they contain, which allows us to analyse thematic changes en masse. This approach allows us to understand the collective thematic response to particular developments, providing a more comprehensive view of shifts in academic discourse over time. In the next step, we counted the frequency of each term and assigned it a rank among all other words. The final dataset consists of 4,636 terms. Each is given a rank that reflects its popularity relative to the others, based on the number of mentions. The most popular term, “Russia/Russian,” was used 2,650 times in 2021 and 2,611 times in 2023, taking first place. The other 24 most popular terms are shown in Figure 6.

Our research also focuses on how interest in various themes has shifted between publications in Russian and English. We believe that these shifts may differ in inten-

Figure 6. The 25 Most Popular Terms in Social Sciences and Humanities Articles by Authors from Russia Indexed in Scopus in 2023

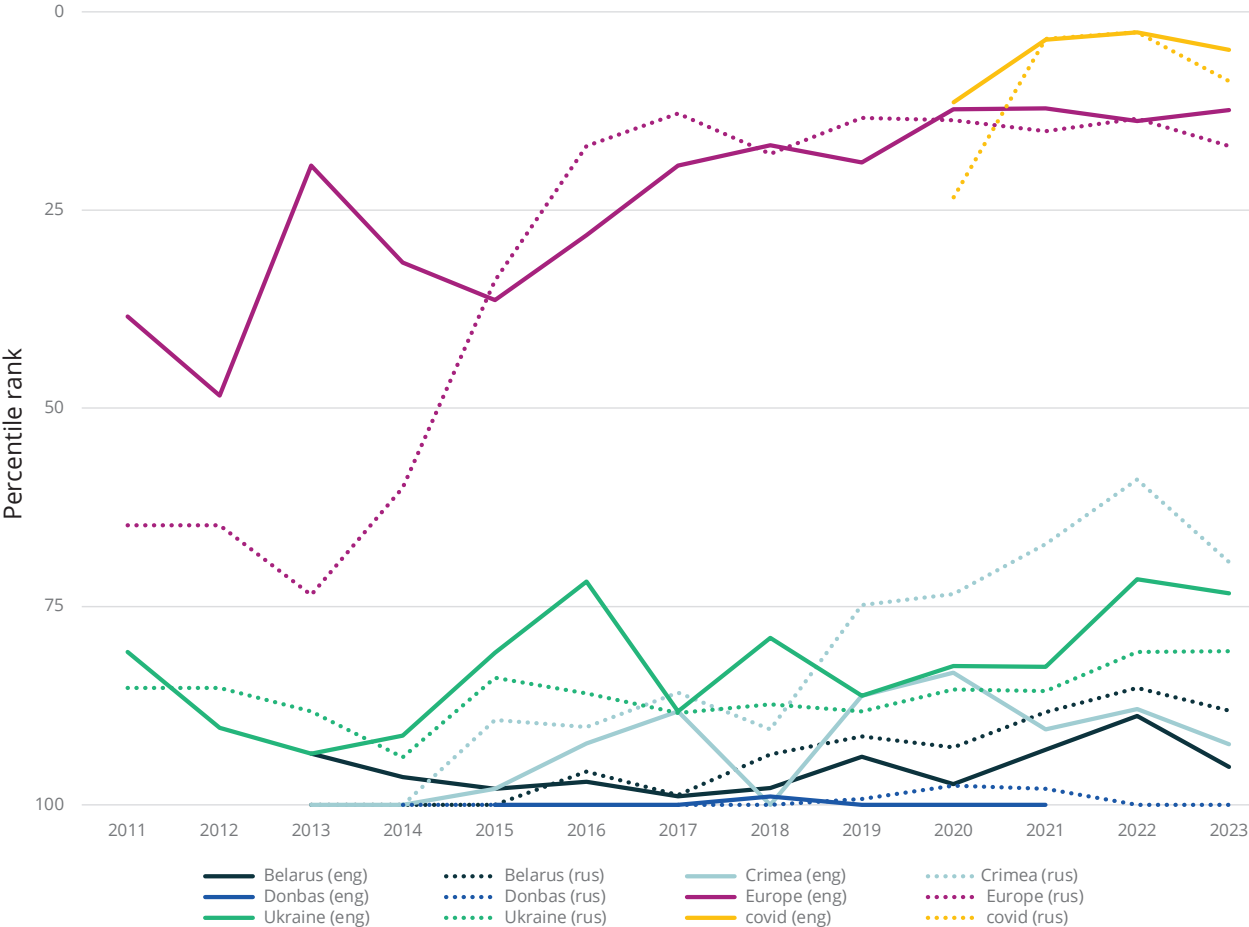


sity. We expect shifts in interest in politically controversial topics to be more pronounced for publications in Russian, as the vast majority of journals in Russian are registered in Russia and are accordingly more susceptible and/or subject to censorship, as shown by the data from another authoritarian regime with the ability to interfere in science — China.⁹² International journals are independent of the Russian state and maintain their own formats, making them less susceptible to the influence of regime-oriented discourse. Therefore, thematic shifts or the infiltration of pro-regime rhetoric are less likely to occur in these venues. At the same time, we hypothesise that the neglect or underrepresentation of important issues may be the result of direct or self-censorship rather than mere oversight within the scholarly community.

Findings

(1) Countries and regions

Figure 7.1. Changes in the popularity of terms related to the selected countries and regions (English- and Russian-language publications)

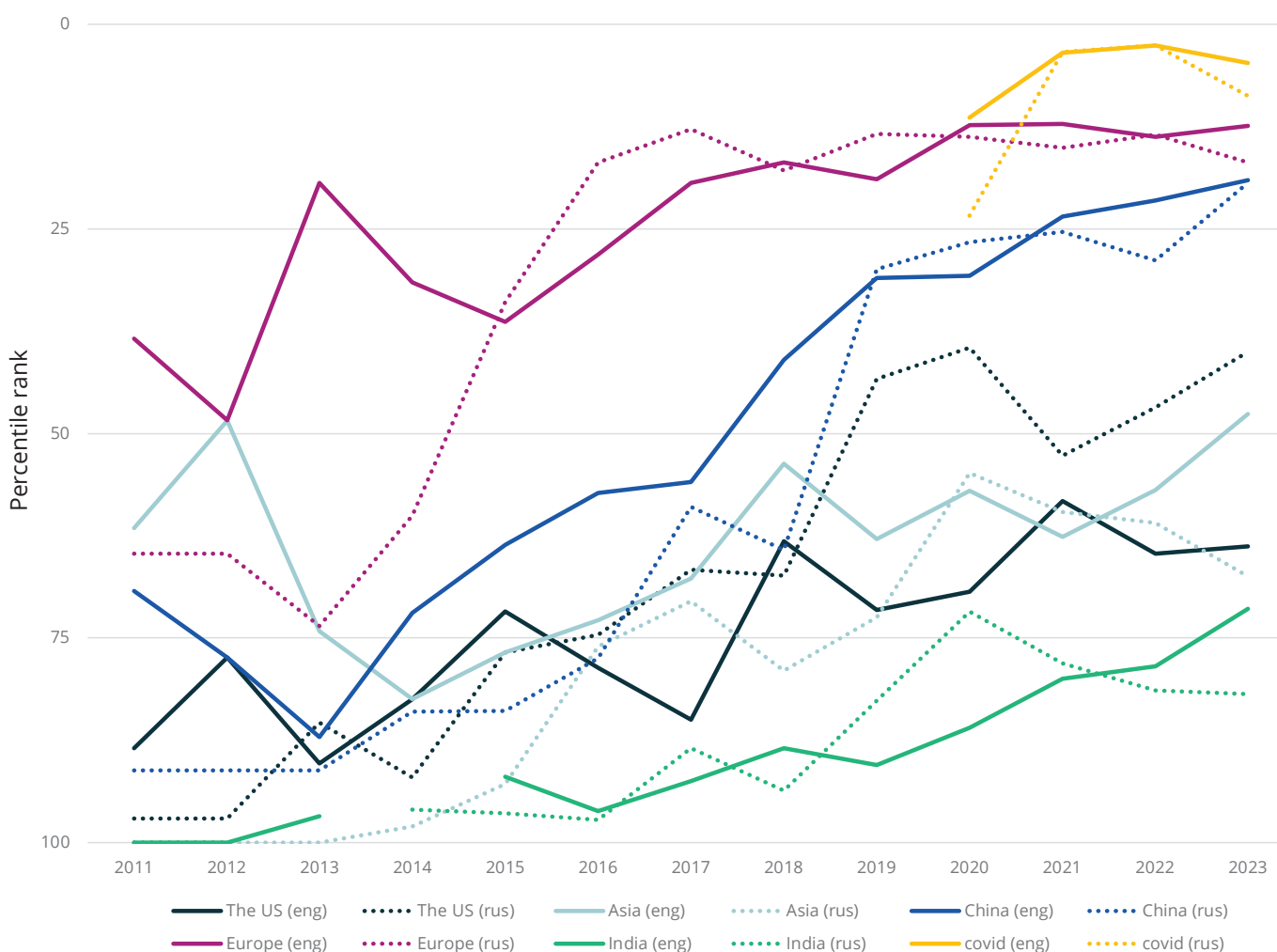


92 Wong, M. Y., and Kwong, Y. H., "Academic censorship in China: The case of the China Quarterly," PS: Political Science & Politics, 52/2 (2019): 287-292.

Figure 7.1 indicates that interest in **Ukraine** among both English- and Russian-language publications remains moderate and significantly lower than interest in Europe and some other countries and regions. A peak of scholarly interest in Ukraine occurred in 2015 in the Russian-language articles and was much more pronounced in 2016 in the English-language publications, coinciding with the first years of Russian aggression and suggesting an intense focus during periods of hybrid military conflict. The later increase in English-language journals may be related to the duration of the publication cycle. With an increase after the full-scale invasion (much less pronounced in Russian-language publications), the overall level of interest did not exceed the years 2015/2016 for publications in both languages.

Since 2019, the interest in **Crimea** is at least twice as high as the interest in Ukraine in Russian-language publications. At the same time, Crimea has never surpassed Ukraine in articles written in English. The **Donbas** remains a topic of marginal interest in publications in both languages. These findings suggest that Russian scholars do not focus on Russia's aggression on Ukrainian territory, but rather on the integration of Crimea into the Russian Federation.

Figure 7.2. Changes in the popularity of terms related to the selected countries and regions (English- and Russian-language publications)



The interest of Russian scholars in Crimea decreased in 2023 in publications in both languages. This shows that academics are increasingly avoiding certain topics as censorship regulations become stricter.

Belarus — another country historically close to Russia — occupies a moderately low position among the countries of interest to Russian scholars. Appearing in the data for the first time in 2013, Belarus has experienced a gradual rise in interest, particularly after 2020, which suggests that the mass political protests following the fraudulent presidential elections in Belarus have influenced scholarly attention to some extent.

Among the selected regions, **Europe** continues to rank highest in the academic interest of Russian scientists. Interest in **China** has been growing steadily since 2013, and in recent years has approached the level of interest in Europe. It is possible that by the end of 2024, China will finally equal or even surpass Europe in Russian-language publications. **The US** showed a general growth trend during the observation period but was less interesting than China since 2013 in English and since 2017 in Russian-language articles. **India** first appeared in the publications of Russian scholars in 2015 and has gradually increased, with a sharp increase between 2022 and 2023. Together with the strong interest in China, this shows that the ‘turn to the East’ of Russian foreign policy is reflected in academic output.

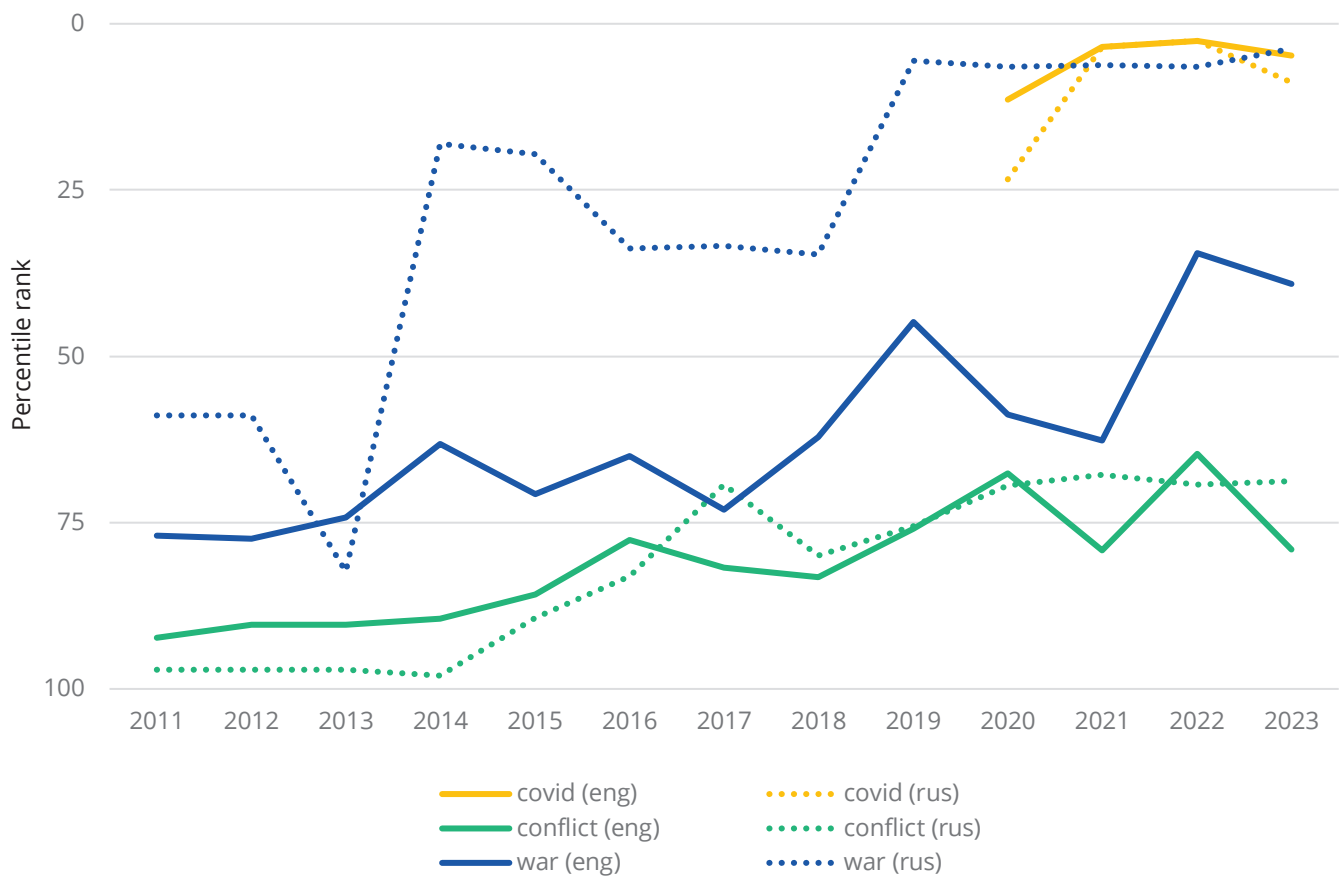
(2) War

Figure 8 shows the changes in the frequency of terms related to war in English- and Russian-language publications, i.e., terms directly related to war (topic includes words such as “war,” “warfare,” and “military”). In general, the popularity of the topic of war increased dramatically between 2011 and 2023 in publications in both languages. Notably, the topic of “war” has been much more popular in Russian-language publications throughout the entire observation period. We attribute this to the generally high interest in the study of war, especially World War II (the Great Patriotic War), especially considering that history is a significant part of the social sciences and humanities in Russia.

In English-language publications, we observe three peaks in the popularity of the war theme: in 2014, 2019, and 2022. While we attribute the 2019 peak to the coincidence of several simultaneous anniversaries: the centenary of the end of the First World War, the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War, and the 30th anniversary of the end of the Cold War; the first and third peaks could be associated with the Russian military action in Ukraine. However, the relatively low interest in Ukraine, Crimea and Donbas (Fig. 7.1) and the long publication cycles make this less likely.

For Russian-language publications, we observe two peaks in 2014 and 2019 and a subsequent high level in the top 4th percentile of interest, with a further increase in 2023. The peak of interest in 2014 and the increase in 2023 are less likely to

Figure 8. Changes in the popularity of terms related to war (English- and Russian-language publications)



be directly attributable to the occupation of Crimea and the hostilities in Donbas, as academic interest in Ukraine, similar to English-language publications, remains rather low (Fig. 7.1). Instead, it is more plausibly linked to a broader shift in focus towards war-related issues within the Russian academic sphere. This shift was largely influenced by the Russian government, the main funder of scientific research in the country, which increasingly perceived its military capabilities as a significant asset. This perspective became particularly relevant in light of the occupation of Crimea and the beginning of military actions in Ukraine. As a result, after 2014, Russian scholars focused more on themes surrounding military power and strategy than on analysing, criticising, or justifying specific military actions in Ukraine. The anniversaries of the wars mentioned above also contributed to the peak in 2019.

(3) Politics

Figures 9.1. and 9.2. illustrate the dynamics of interest in different political themes over the recent years. Overall, interest in “democracy,” “authoritarianism,” “elections,” and “voting” remains moderate over the observation period, with elections being the most frequent topic among those selected. As shown in the previous parts of this report, research on the current political regime in Russia and

Figure 9.1. Changes in the popularity of political terms (English- and Russian language publications)

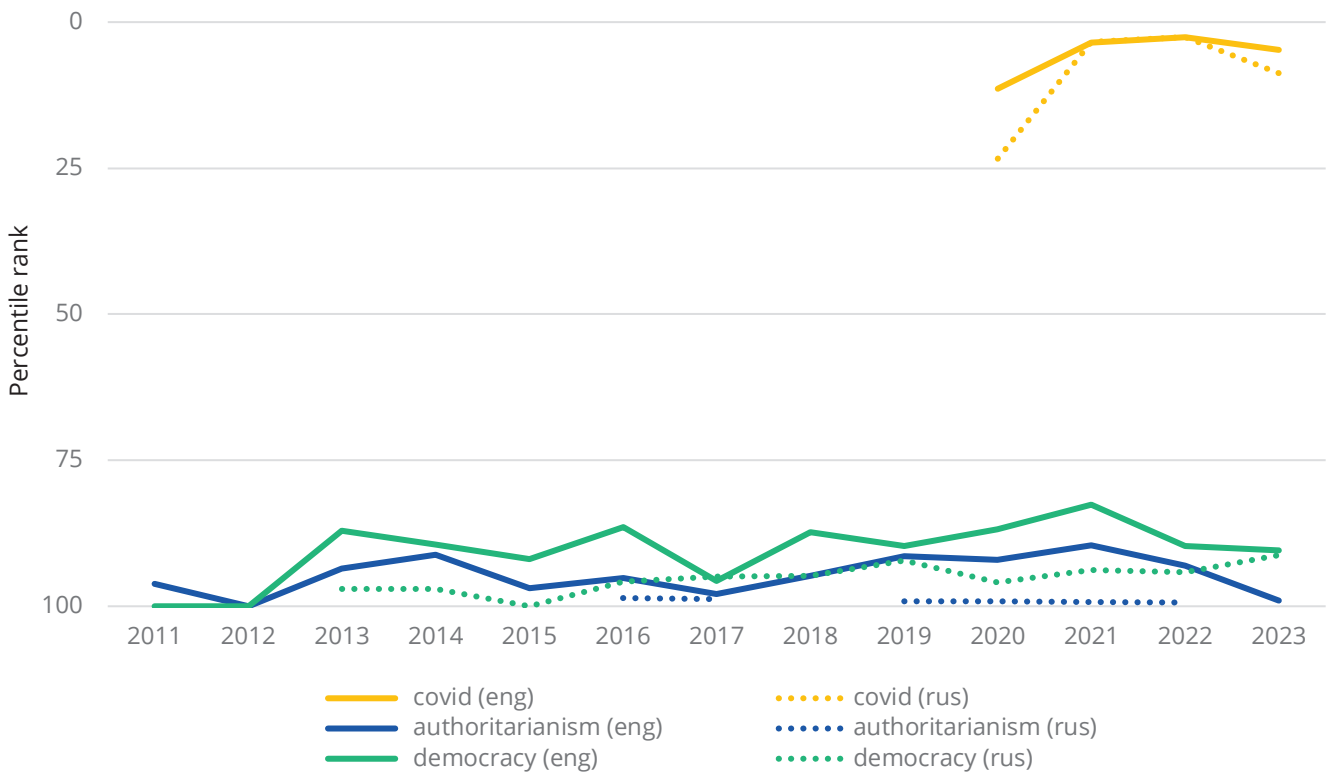
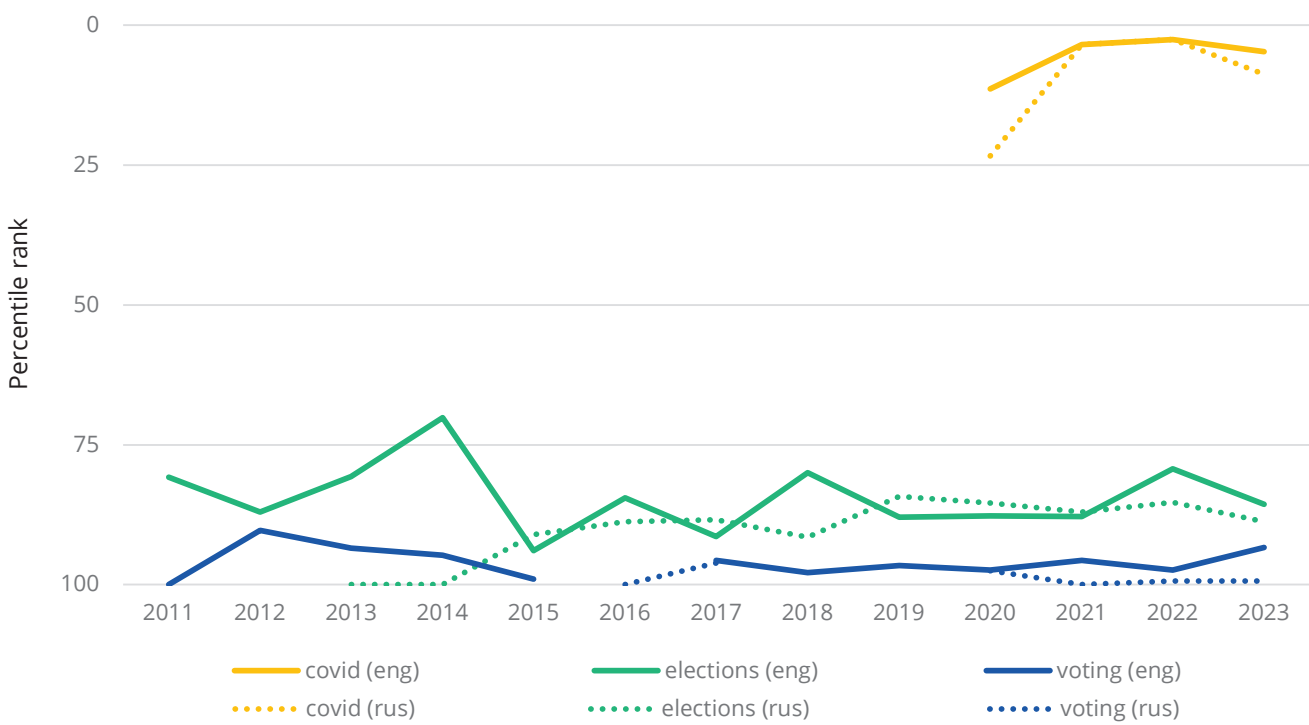


Figure 9.2. Changes in the popularity of political terms (English- and Russian language publications)



its characteristics has become increasingly problematic even before 2022. Some terms, such as “authoritarianism” (when referring to the Russian political system) have been effectively banned in Russian academic publications. This is particularly visible in Russian-language publications, where “authoritarianism” fully disappears in 2023. Notably, Russian authors write more about democracy than about authoritarianism in both languages.

An analysis of the terms “elections” (same level) and “voting” also reveals an interesting dynamic. Despite some ups and downs, interest in “elections” has generally remained at the same level as at the beginning of the observation period or its first appearance in the data. In contrast, interest in “voting,” a term often used as a synonym for undemocratic elections, differs significantly between the English and Russian articles. While ‘voting’ has never been very popular in Russian, there is much more interest in this topic in English-language publications, with a notable increase in 2012 and 2023. Although this could be a data artefact, it is likely to reflect the tightening of censorship restrictions, which are more pronounced in Russian-language journals.

(4) Women’s and LGBTQ+ studies

Two other fields of study, gender and queer studies, have been severely restricted in Russia in recent years. Figure 10 demonstrates the changes in the frequency of terms related to these fields of study.

The interplay between the topics of “gender” and “women” is particularly striking. Firstly, these topics are more frequent in Russian-language publications than in English-language articles. Secondly, while “women” has consistently been more popular than “gender” in Russian-language articles, there has been a noticeable decline in interest in “gender” since 2020, likely influenced by the regime’s stance as expressed in the constitutional amendments promoting traditional values. This shift may be indicative of reorientation of the focus of permissible academic research and a strategic reorientation towards less contentious aspects of gender discourse.

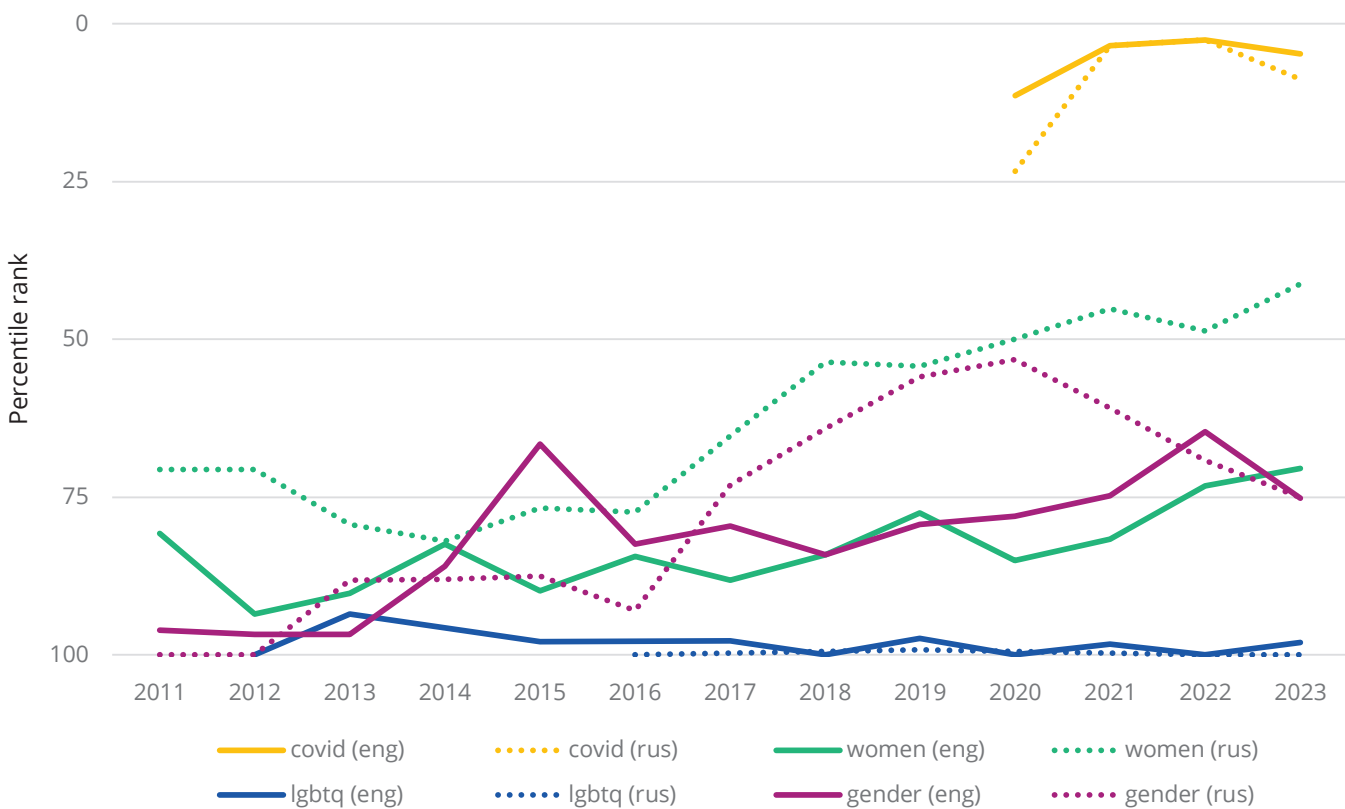
The military years have seen a continuation of this steep decline in the concept of gender. In English-language publications, where “gender” has been on the rise, outnumbering “women” (with one exception in 2019), the situation reversed in 2023.

The topic of LGBTQ+ remains very marginal for Russian academics. While it has been consistently present in English-language publications, it only appeared on the surface in 2022 in articles written in Russian. This emergence suggests a cautious engagement with LGBTQ+ issues, possibly in response to anti-LGBT legislation in Russia, which has likely stimulated both academic and public interest in these issues. The increased interest in English-language journals could be attributed to the fact that scholars engaged in LGBTQ+ studies who are proficient in English may

choose to publish their work outside of Russia, where there is greater acceptance, institutional support for research on LGBTQ+ issues, and the potential to secure academic positions.

Overall, the Russian scientific environment, with its considerable volume of both English- and Russian-language publications, does not appear to have become a propagandistic echo chamber. However, it is evident that research themes are increasingly aligned with state-established rules (e.g., the decline in the use of “gender” and the continued rise of studies on “women”) or avoiding discussion of sensitive topics, such as Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This reorientation is not entirely surprising, given the limited autonomy and pressures on academia in Russia. It suggests a nuanced adaptation within the academic community to explore topics that are generally permitted, or at least not directly contrary to state policies. In sum, these findings point to some shifts in the landscape of the social sciences and humanities, influenced by political events and state policies, especially recent ones. The complex interplay between topic selection and political dynamics continues to shape Russian social sciences and humanities, reflecting both constraints and strategic adaptations in a politically challenging environment.

Figure 10. Changes in the popularity of terms related to women’s and LGBTQ+ studies (English- and Russian-language publications)



Conclusion

The evolution of Russian higher education shows that the country has been unable to maintain the gains in academic freedom made in the 1990s. Although the oil revenue-funded reforms of the 2000s promoted international integration, including accession to the Bologna process, and increased the research capacity of Russian universities, these reforms came at the expense of university autonomy and democratic governance. The institutional autonomy of Russian higher education institutions has remained one of the lowest aspects of academic freedom over the years. This contributed to the Russian state's efforts to regain control and reverse the initial processes of democratisation and liberalisation.

Following the start of Russia's war in Ukraine in 2014, and especially since the full-scale invasion, academic freedom in the country has been significantly eroded. Freedom of research and teaching has been drastically reduced due to increased repression, ideological restructuring and military censorship. Academics and students face self-censorship, administrative pressure and even criminal prosecution, while new compulsory ideological courses promote anti-Ukrainian narratives and militaristic propaganda. Freedom of academic exchange and dissemination has been severely curtailed, with international publishers and institutions cutting ties with Russian academics. The abandonment of the Bologna system has further isolated Russian academia. Institutional autonomy has been eroded, with increased government interference in HEIs' governance, curricula, and the establishment of militarised oversight bodies within universities. There has also been a sharp decline in campus integrity, as Russian universities have become tightly controlled spaces with a whole infrastructure of repression and surveillance that actively stifles dissent and creates an atmosphere of fear and anxiety at Russian universities. Freedom of academic and cultural expression has suffered the most. Military censorship has criminalised anti-war expression, with harsh penalties (ranging from dismissal to imprisonment) for academics and students who oppose the war. The report highlights the multiple sources of pressure on scholars, whether from state bodies, university administrations, or grassroots political groups, and illustrates the multifaceted process of political prosecution within educational institutions, including denunciations, the use of ethics committees and administrative procedures to punish opposition and anti-war activities, and direct interference by law enforcement agencies.

Censorship and self-censorship have started to dominate academic life and influence research agendas. Although the baseline of academic integrity appears to have been maintained, academics are resorting to hiding within certain "neutral"

areas of research or minimising discussion of sensitive issues. The social sciences and humanities have suffered particularly, as ideological conformity undermines their achievements.

At the same time, despite the odds, some Russian academics and students are showing resistance to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, trying to organise covert protests or acts of resistance,⁹³ signing open letters against their country's military action in Ukraine,⁹⁴ or asking their rectors to withdraw their signatures from the letter of the Union of Rectors supporting the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.⁹⁵

An alternative strategy for Russian scholars has been to seek refuge in another country. While the full extent of this process is difficult to assess, it is evident that especially those who once served as bridges for the globalisation of Russian academia have fled the country.⁹⁶ In exile, Russian scholars often face marginalisation, mainly through visa and funding restrictions. The Russian government continues to retaliate against dissenting academics, labeling them as "foreign agents" or their initiatives as "undesirable organisations." Nevertheless, Russian scholars incessantly attempt to establish alternative education and research initiatives outside of Russia, such as the Free University, Smolny Beyond the Borders, the Boris Nemtsov MA in Russian Studies at Charles University, Academic Bridges, and others; all contribute to global scholarship, building resilience to repression, and paving the way for a more open future.

Support for Russian scholars in exile, such as simplified visa documentation, extension of residency programmes beyond two years, as well as mentorship programmes, subsidised language courses, and networking opportunities would facilitate their integration into academia in host countries. Combined with the promotion of joint research and educational projects with independent academic platforms initiated by Russian academics in exile, these measures would preserve independent Russian scholarship and strengthen its position in the future development of the Russian society.

93 Zavadskaya, Margarita, and Theodore Gerber. "Rise and fall: social science in Russia before and after the war." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39, no. 1-2 (2023): 108-120.

94 E.g., an open letter of Russian scientists and scientific journalists against the war with Ukraine has gathered 8,489 signatures. Available at <https://www.t-invariant.org/2022/02/we-are-against-war/> (accessed 12.9.2024).

95 Dubrovskiy, D. (2022). War and the academic community in Russia. *Baltic Worlds*, 15(1), 38-44.

96 Chankseliani, Maia, and Elizaveta Belkina. "Academic Exodus from Russia: Unravelling the Crisis." *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education* 16, no. 3 (2024): 97-105.



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