

Illustration: Kate Mellamor for OVD-Info

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Raids, Politically Motivated Cases, and Procedural Violations: How the Draft Became a Tool of Repression

Русская версия

The spring draft campaign is currently underway in Russia. Over the next three months, the Ministry of Defence **plans** to draft 160,000 people — the **highest** figure since 2011. Throughout more than three years of full-scale war in Ukraine, Russian draftees have often been **deceived** and sent directly to the front lines.

At the beginning of 2025, several human rights advocates supporting those seeking to avoid mandatory military service described the previous fall draft campaign as one of the harshest in modern Russian history. Over the course of three months, draftees were subjected to raids, forced enlistment, and violence at the hands of law enforcement officers and military enlistment staff. OVD-Info has also received information regarding authorities having used mandatory military service as a tactic against supporters of Alexei Navalny and other anti-war Russian citizens.

OVD-Info has analyzed statistics provided by several organizations providing assistance to draftees. This article explores how and why military enlistment offices have ramped up pressure on potential draftees — and how the draft has become a mechanism of political repression.

This material was prepared with support from [Get Lost \(Idite Lesom\)](#), [Peace Plea](#), [Draft School](#), and [Stoparmy Movement](#).

The data is based on the number of enquiries received by these initiatives. The number of actual rights violations is likely to be much higher.

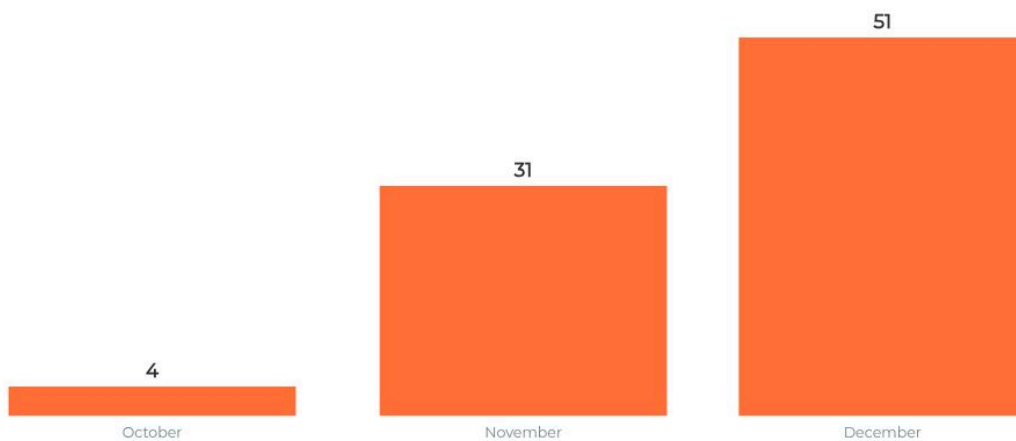
Human Rights Advocates Reported Record Spike in Draft Raids in Fall 2024

In early December 2024, police stopped Pyotr (name changed) in the Moscow metro. He was told he was «wanted by the [military enlistment office](#), ” detained on the spot, and taken to a draft collection point. Pyotr was later released after showing enlistment officers his [military ID](#).

Pyotr has been a victim of a raid — a tactic in which law enforcement seize Russians in public transport, dormitories, shopping centers, and bars. Those detained are then unlawfully drafted on the spot, bypassing the official conscription process, which would typically take several days. According to Pyotr, law enforcement officials were also detaining other individuals not exempt from the draft: university students granted deferments, doctoral researchers, those who had already served or were medically exempt, as well as residents of other regions who were temporarily [visiting Moscow](#).

Between October 1 and December 31, the organization *Peace Plea* recorded 86 raids. According to the legal team at *Peace Plea*, *this is the highest number in recent years*. Coordinators of the *Get Lost Initiative* confirmed the trend — recording 170 raids –1.88 times more than during the fall 2023 draft.

Fall 2024 Draft Raid Statistics

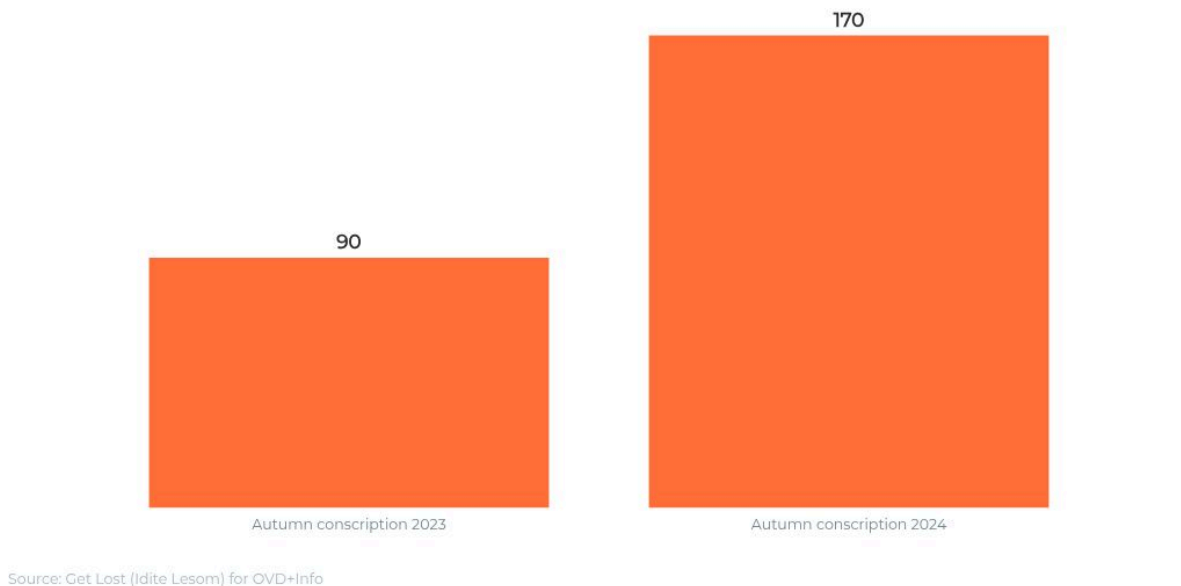


Source: Peace Plea, Draft School, and Stoparmy Movement

* A Flourish data visualization

There is no exact data on the number of raids in previous years, as this data had not been systematically collected until recently. The majority of «same-day draft» cases in 2024 occurred in December. Experts believe this was due to military enlistment offices rushing to meet the president's **quota** for draftees before the draft period ended. For instance, *Get Lost* reported 12 raids on December 4 alone. These raids occurred in dormitories, on the street, in the metro — and on one occasion, a computer gaming club.

Number of raids during the Fall 2023 and Fall 2024 draft campaigns



✳ A Flourish data visualization

MOSCOW TOPS THE LIST IN TERMS OF VIOLATIONS

During raids, law enforcement has resorted to violence.

In November, Artemy Krugovkyh, a student at the Moscow Institute of Architecture and Civil Engineering, was handcuffed, forcibly dragged from a vehicle, and taken to a collection point despite being entitled to a deferment. According to human rights groups, law enforcement and military enlistment officers have also been repeatedly beating and tasering draftees to compel them to agree to military service.

The *Get Lost* team believes that raid methods have become more aggressive compared to previous years. Project coordinators are aware of cases in which individuals were forced to take the military oath and put on a uniform; some were beaten and held at collection points without access to food or water.

Military enlistment officers denied draftees access to lawyers, medical help, and even to police officers who are called to document evidence of beatings. Some draftees were held

at collection points for several days with their documents and phones confiscated –leaving them without any contact with their families or human rights defenders. **According to Alexey Tabalov**, founder of *Draft School*, such actions by enlistment officers and security forces point to «the harshest draft campaign in modern Russian history.»

The highest number of raids was recorded in Moscow. Over a three-month period, the hotlines of *Peace Plea*, *Draft School*, and **Stoparmy Movement** received reports of 69 instances of same-day drafts. Draftees from Kazan, Penza (Volga), Makhachkala (Caucasus), Tyumen (Western Siberia), and several other cities also reported such raids, but the number of incidents in these regions was significantly lower than in Moscow.

In which regions were raids recorded during the fall 2024 draft?



Source: "Appeal to Conscience", "Conscript School", "Movement of Conscientious Objectors" for OVD-Info.

* A Flourish data visualization

Law Enforcement Exploits Draft to Target Navalny Supporters

On rare occasions, forced draft has served as a means of suppressing political opposition.

On the evening of 23 December 2019, security forces **searched** the home of Ruslan Shaveddinov, a supporter of Alexei Navalny and an employee of the Anti-Corruption Foundation (ACF). He was forcibly taken to the Investigative Committee for questioning. The next day, it became known that he had been deployed to a military unit on the Novaya Zemlya archipelago in the Arctic Ocean. The unit was located in a restricted area beyond the Arctic Circle, which prevented lawyers from gaining access to Shaveddinov. Human rights defenders and ACF lawyers **declared** the process unlawful.

During his military service, Shaveddinov was **quartered** with four other servicemen in an isolated building with no access to communication. The only nearby structure was a helicopter landing pad. The soldiers had to walk two kilometers (1.2 miles) to collect water from a river, and food supplies were delivered once a month by helicopter. Shaveddinov was sent to this remote post by direct order of Major General Igor Churkin, Deputy Commander of Russia's 45th Air and Air Defence Army.

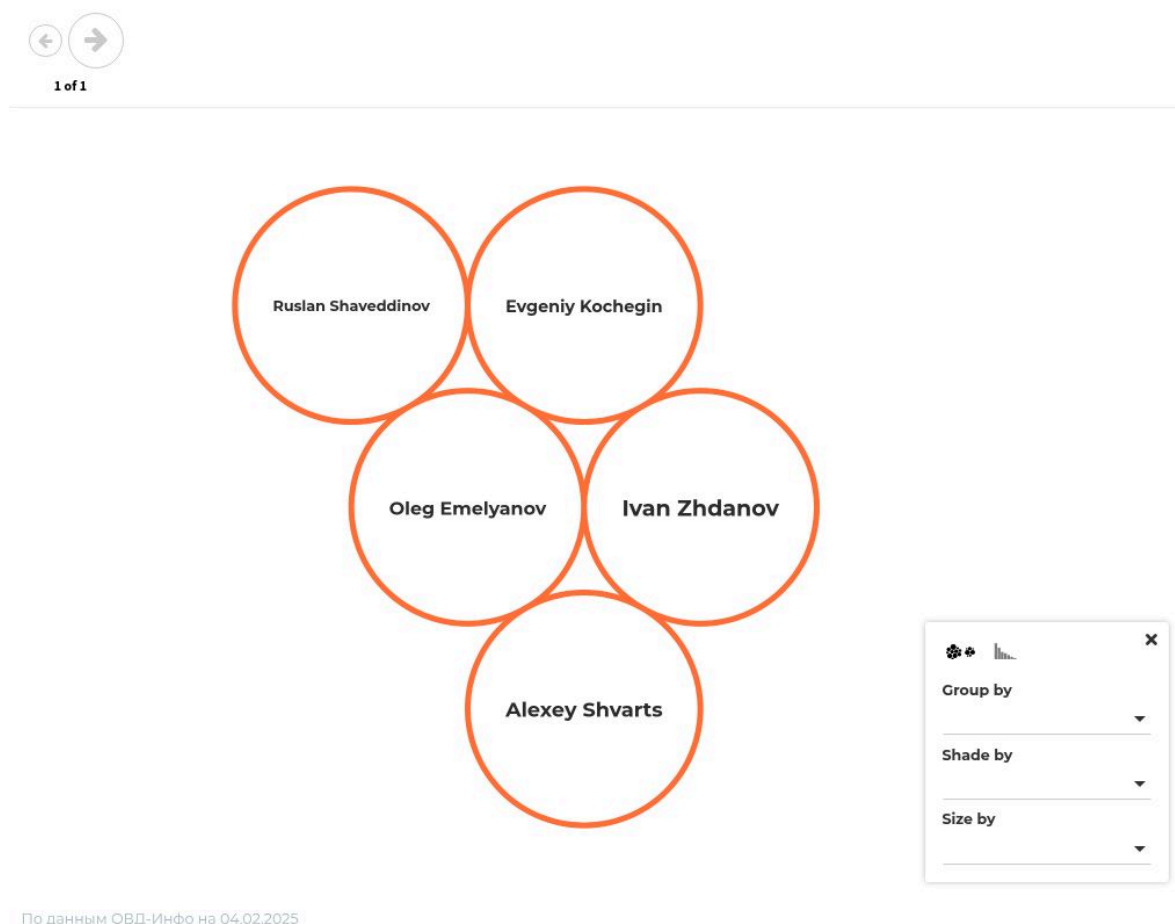
«Everyone in command here knows this is essentially exile, » Shaveddinov said.

Several years before Shaveddinov's case, the authorities used compulsory military service to exert pressure on another supporter of Alexei Navalny, ACF director Ivan Zhdanov. In April 2016, a criminal case **was initiated** against the politician for draft evasion (Article 328 part 1 of the Criminal Code), just as Zhdanov was running for a seat on the municipal council in Barvikha (a prestigious residential area in the Western suburbs of Moscow, where many Russian government officials and successful business people reside in the gated communities). At the time, Zhdanov was 27 years old (the upper age limit for conscription). According to him, the military recruitment service «had not bothered» him while he had been a student and doctoral researcher.

Over the course of that year, the coordinators of Navalny headquarters in several Russian cities, namely, **Kazan** — Oleg Yemelyanov, **Volgograd** — Yevgeny Kochegin, and **Kurgan** (Southern Urals) — Alexey Schwartz, became defendants in similar criminal cases. Law enforcement officers also conducted a preliminary investigation under the same article against Alexander Belyaev, the former head of Navalny headquarters in Chelyabinsk (Southern Urals).

Activists considered their persecution politically motivated. For example, Yevgeny Kochegin **linked** it to his efforts to expose electoral fraud during the State Duma elections in the autumn of 2021.

Navalny supporters who were accused of draft evasion



Under the article on draft evasion, an individual may face up to two years in prison for failing to report to a military enlistment office without a valid reason after being served draft papers. Since 2020,

more than 5,900 such cases have gone to court. While failure to appear can also be treated as an administrative offense (Article 21.5 of the Code of Administrative Offenses), our records show only one such **instance**. Whether a case is pursued as an administrative or criminal matter is left to the discretion of law enforcement officers.

Out of the thousands of criminal cases, at least five appear to have a political motive. In 2021, three men from different cities in the European part of Russia (Cheboksary, Ukhta, and Penza) were convicted of evading draft. Shortly beforehand, according to court websites, these same individuals or their identical namesakes had been prosecuted for violating the established procedure for holding a rally, due to their participation in protests following Navalny's return to Russia. Two further cases are directly related to the war in Ukraine. **Vitaly Sachivka**, from Magadan Oblast (Far East), was a defendant in a «fakes» case, while **Maxim Moiseyev**, from Penza Oblast, had gone into hiding to avoid mobilisation. Both were charged with draft evasion.

During mobilisation, law enforcement initiated persecutions against «draft dodgers» and activists

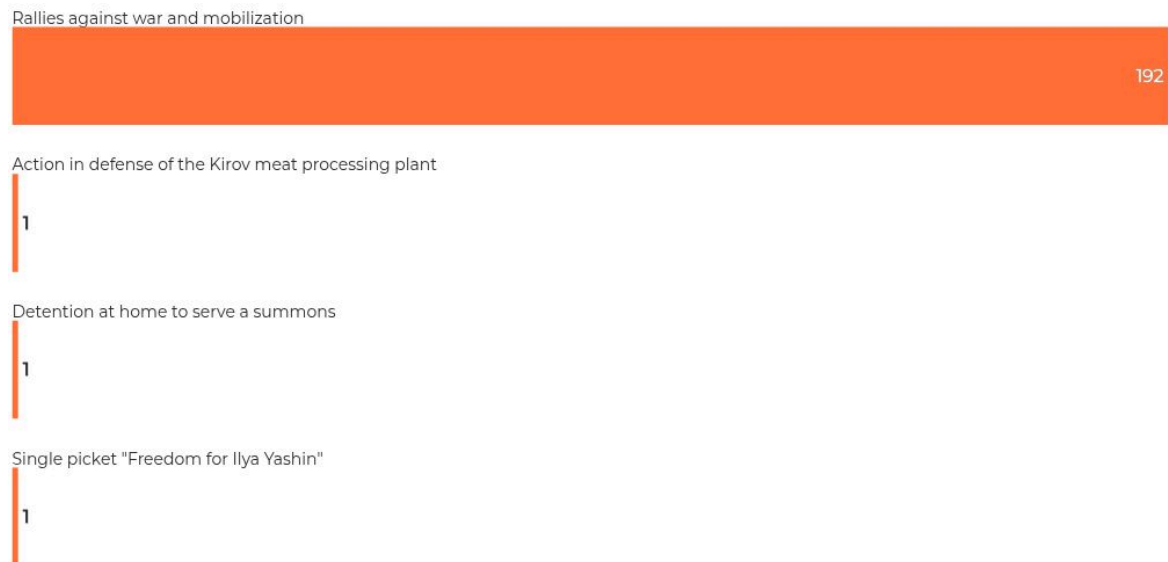
Government officials repeatedly **refer** to military service as an «ordinary obligation» and urge men to simply «repay their debt to the motherland.» However, law enforcement officers and representatives of the Ministry of Defense have been handing out draft papers as a means of deterring opposition-minded Russians.

In February 2024, residents of St. Petersburg who were arrested for laying flowers at makeshift memorials to Alexei Navalny **were served** with draft papers. They also **were threatened** with having their fingers broken with a hammer and were told they would be sent to «kill the Ukrops (frequent pejorative term for Ukrainian nationals).»

On 192 occasions, law enforcement officers also served draft papers to detainees after rallies and solitary pickets in various

Russian cities, including Moscow, St Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Smolensk (West of European Russia), and Nizhny Novgorod. Many of these actions were connected to anti-mobilization protests. One of the protesters, St. Petersburg activist Dmitry Kuzmin, was detained twice. Draft papers were served to him on both occasions.

Number of cases where activists and protesters were served draft papers



Источник: «Призыв к совести», «Школа призванного», «Движение сознательных отказчиков» для ОВД-Инфо

* A Flourish data visualization

Law enforcement officers have been also **initiating** politically motivated criminal cases against mobilized individuals who refused to take part in combat operations. Six people were charged with offenses, including draft evasion; failure to comply with a wartime order (Part 2.1 of Article 332 of the Criminal Code); unauthorized absence from duty station for more than 10 days during the mobilization period (Part 3.1 of Article 337 of the Criminal Code); desertion (Article 338 of the Criminal Code); and illegal border crossing (Article 322 of the Criminal Code).

More violations against «draft dodgers» and naturalized Russian citizens

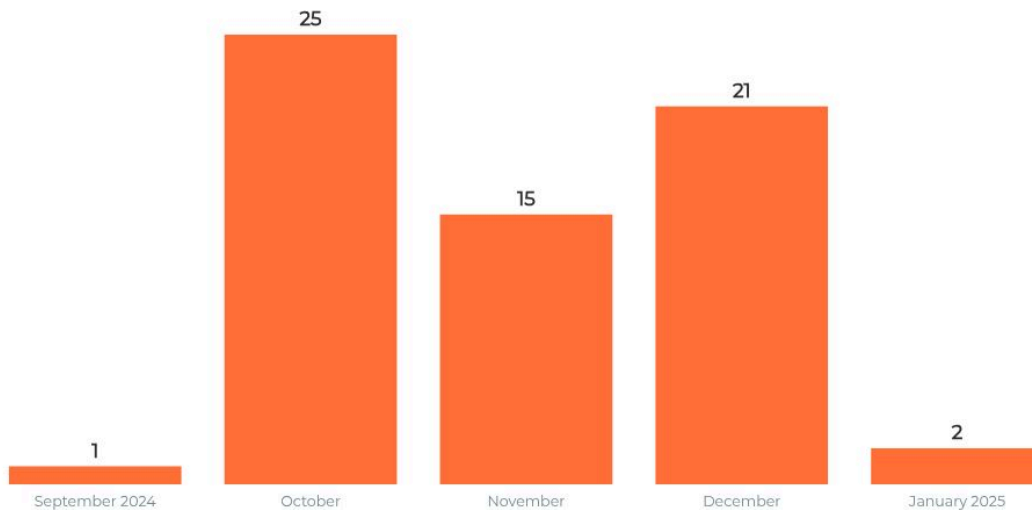
During the autumn draft campaign, military enlistment offices in Moscow, as OVD-Info reported on *Peace Plea* media, targeted certain individuals on the so-called «draft dodgers list.» This list comprised individuals not granted deferments and those who had ignored their draft papers during the spring campaign among others.

The hunt for individuals on the «dodger list» began even before the official start of the draft campaign. According to human rights activists, police used surveillance cameras to track down men, detaining them in the metro or at their homes. There are reports of attempts to seize individuals from hospitals. At the same time, **according to** *Peace Plea*, the procedure itself is unlawful: the term «dodger list» does not appear in the official draft regulations, and draftees are required to report to the military enlistment office unassisted.

Another vulnerable group consists of foreign nationals having obtained Russian passports. Under the new **law**, individuals may lose their naturalized status for refusing to take the oath or to register for military service. The first known case **occurred** at the end of September, just 1.5 months after the law came into effect.

As a result of failing to register for military service, 63 individuals were stripped of their Russian citizenship. Human rights activists assisting draftees consider this practice unlawful. From their standpoint, it creates a disparity in rights between individuals who acquired Russian citizenship by birth and those who obtained it through naturalization.

Documented cases of Russian citizenship being revoked for failure to register for military service after naturalization



Source: Peace Plea, Draft School, and Stoparmy Movement.

* A Flourish data visualization

According to human rights activists, individuals having acquired Russian citizenship through naturalization often lack information about the possibility of alternative civil service (ACS), as well as their right for deferment or exemption from military service on health grounds. Military enlistment officials exploit this lack of awareness to draft individuals immediately after forcibly registering them for service.

At the same time, foreign nationals who have not obtained Russian citizenship also face pressure from military enlistment offices. During raids, law enforcement has been targeting locations where foreign nationals were believed to be present—mosques, dormitories, construction sites, markets, and warehouses—pressuring migrants to enlist and be sent to Ukraine.

According to statistics gathered by *Draft School* and *Get Lost* initiatives, aggressive recruitment efforts are not limited to individuals with acquired citizenship. Draftees and university students enrolled in military training programs (similar to Reserve Officers' Training Corps) have been coerced—through deception or threats—into enlisting with the Ministry of Defense, despite the unlawfulness of such practices. These instances are especially

frequent during mandatory military service; there is information on a drafted soldier being essentially **executed** for refusing to enlist (to continue serving under a contract).

Ministry of Defence has been routinely deceiving draftees to boost army numbers

Military enlistment offices have a history of violating draftees' rights. For the third consecutive draft campaign, officials have been ignoring medical information regarding those unfit for service on health grounds. As human rights activists point out, drafting individuals with serious health conditions not only violates their legal right for military service exemption, but also poses a direct threat to their lives.

Other violations include mass rejections of applications for alternative civil service, despite conscripts' proclaimed pacifist beliefs and distribution of fake electronic draft papers. There are reports of individuals receiving SMS messages and notifications via the mos.ru web portal (official Moscow city resource). Enlistment officials pretended that these messages have the validity of official electronic draft papers, using threats of administrative penalties and criminal prosecution in order to intimidate draftees. In fact, electronic draft papers have not been officially enforced yet, so only physical draft papers that are directly served to an individual are valid.

The exact number of such instances remains unknown. However, the number of attempts by Russian citizens to appeal the decisions of military enlistment offices and draft boards has been steadily increasing. By the end of 2024, residents of Moscow — where most violations have been recorded — had filed over 4,400 lawsuits against enlistment offices, **according** to *Cherta* media, based on publicly available data from the city courts. This is twice as many as in 2023, three times as many as in 2022, and ten times the 2020 number.

Human rights defenders working for the *Peace Plea*, *Draft School*, and *Stoparmy Movement* agree that the arbitrariness of law

enforcement and military enlistment officials is driven by wartime challenges. The authorities' top priority remains boosting the troop numbers by any means available. Meanwhile, draftees risk ending up on the front lines, either through forced enlistment or after being deployed in regions bordering Ukraine.

Timur Khairutdinov