

CyberHate in Russia: Current Trends

CyberHate in Russia has two main targets within the country. The first is labor migrants (primarily from Central Asia), who are often conflated in hate speech with Russian citizens of non-Slavic origin – making the concept of "migrant" in Russia more racial than legal. The second main target is individuals who do not conform to the ideal of moral conservatism, particularly LGBT+ people.

CyberHate in Russia can be described across three levels: state propaganda (actively disseminated online), agitation by legal nationalist organizations, and agitation by illegal militant far-right groups. At all three levels, hate speech is directly linked to real-world discriminatory actions.

The authorities launched a large-scale media campaign against migrants in mid-2021. Since then – with only a six-month pause at the start of the full-scale war – the campaign has continued to intensify. Its main thesis is the claim of increased and growing criminality among migrants, although official data contradict this narrative. Other accusations include competition in the labor market (which has actually been decreasing in recent years), the high number of poorly Russian-speaking children in schools (a long-standing but neglected issue), and alleged "disrespect" for the culture and social norms of the host society. Numerous laws have been passed to limit migrants' opportunities, and negative rhetoric about them has become an almost obligatory part of official speeches.

A key component of state ideology is the defense of "traditional values," both domestically and globally. In practice, this has led to increased restrictions and repressive measures in the moral sphere. In November 2023, an imagined "LGBT movement" was designated as an extremist organization, paving the way for criminal prosecutions of LGBT+ activists. Laws were also passed banning the "propaganda" of "non-traditional" sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as the denial of procreation. As a result, topics related to these issues are being systematically removed from the public sphere, including books, films, and other media. Beginning in 2023, a campaign to restrict access to abortion has also unfolded. While the state officially tries not to incite hatred against affected social groups, such as LGBT+ people, manifestations of intolerance are inevitable in mass media under such policies.

State policy is perceived by Russian nationalists as a *carte blanche*, and we are seeing an increasing number of anti-migrant publications in far-right media, primarily on Telegram channels. The far-right consistently highlights conflicts and criminal incidents involving migrants and non-ethnic Russian citizens. SOVA Center monitors these Telegram channels. From April 2023 through April 2024, we recorded dozens of such publications per week in just three popular channels, all clearly aimed at inciting hostility toward these groups. Among them, around one to two dozen weekly posts reported actual raids against migrants carried out by far-right vigilantes, often with police involvement.

This activity peaked in the summer of 2024, with an average of up to 25 raids and up to 100 related publications per week in these three channels. Although there was a slight decline afterward, since early 2025 we have observed a gradual return to these record numbers.

Another important theme for Russian nationalists is the defense of conservative values and the fight against those whose lifestyles or art, in their view, do not align with these values. Nationalists voice their opposition to their "moral enemies" – primarily LGBT+ people – in the same genres and formats they use against migrants, though still less actively. In the same three Telegram channels, between 8 and 27 such posts were recorded weekly during the same period, with the trend moving upward, especially in the spring of 2025. Reports of raids targeting these groups ranged from 2 to 5 per week.

All of this nationalist vigilante activity faces almost no resistance from the authorities; on the contrary, it is often tacitly or even openly supported by them.

Since the spring of 2023, illegal militant neo-Nazi groups have become increasingly active, reviving the style and tactics of the Nazi skinhead movement of the 2000s. Based on photos and data on those detained, the perpetrators of this new wave of hate crimes are extremely young – often just 13 or 14 years old. These groups systematically post videos of street assaults targeting individuals with “non-Slavic appearance,” intoxicated individuals or those suspected of drug use, gay people, or those labeled as pedophiles – often lured through fake online dates. Telegram channels that collect and distribute such content are rapidly multiplying.

The most comprehensive data on attacks against individuals and property committed by these groups is gathered by our collaborator, the Nazi Watch Monitoring Project. Between October 2024 and March 2025, the number of newly surfaced hate crime videos ranged from 40 to 70 per month. Overall, according to SOVA Center’s data, the number of serious hate crimes is rising sharply and has already returned to the levels last seen in 2011.

The police are making efforts to combat these crimes and shut down the associated Telegram channels, but these measures have so far proven insufficient.

We have no doubt that eliminating widespread intolerance is far from easy – nor is it simple to eradicate CyberHate from the Russian-speaking segment of the Internet. However, the most crucial step the state could take in this area would be to reverse its current course and begin publicly and unequivocally opposing discrimination. Such a shift in official policy would fundamentally change the national atmosphere and significantly reduce the activity of nationalist groups.