

Bloggers Increasingly Face Violence, Legal Cases, Report Says

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A report released by a human rights group said that Russian bloggers have been increasingly subject to criminal prosecutions, physical violence, and administrative measures, such as the restriction of Internet access, Radio Liberty reported.

The report, published by the Agora human rights association, said that in 2013 the number of criminal prosecutions opened against bloggers increased to 226 from 103 cases. At least 30 cases against users of the social network Vkontakte and 37 civil lawsuits were filed against bloggers.

The rise in legal cases corresponded with an increase in physical violence against bloggers. Forty-eight such attacks were carried out in St. Petersburg alone, while the number of attacks in Dagestan, the republic of Altai and the Kostroma region increased as well, the report said.

Administrative measures enabled by Russia's controversial law prohibiting "extremist" content, which has been criticized as a suppression of free speech, have also been used to block access to websites calling for unsanctioned political rallies.

The report highlighted the use of the measure in November to sentence a blogger in Rostov-on-Don to 18 months in prison after he insulted a local judge. The blogger, Sergei Reznik, said that he was also beaten and shot by an unidentified assailants.

Anti-corruption blogger and opposition leader Alexei Navalny, the most prominent Internet figure to be prosecuted last year, was sentenced to a five-year suspended sentence for embezzlement in a case that many believe was motivated by his criticism of the Kremlin.

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