

# Russia's 2023 Treason Cases Hit Record High – NGO

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People ice-stake at the VDNKh, Moscow. **Sergei Kiselev / Moskva News Agency**

Russian authorities have opened a record number of treason cases in 2023, the human rights project Perviy Otdel, which specializes in cases under investigation by the Federal Security Service (FSB), [said](#) Thursday.

A historical maximum of 70 cases have been submitted to courts, 63 of which were for high treason. Seven others were for "confidential cooperation with a foreign state or organization."

The courts have reportedly handed down 37 verdicts, all of them guilty.

"This clearly demonstrates the trend toward military spy mania," said Dmitry Zair-Bek, the head of Perviy Otdel, referring to the domestic fallout from Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

Overall, Perviy Otdel said Russia's trial courts and appeals courts together had 98 treason

cases on the docket in 2023.

For comparison, Russian authorities launched 101 treason cases over the 20 years between 1997–2017, the independent news website Kholod [reported](#) this summer.

Zair-Bek forecasts a twofold increase in treason convictions in 2024 due to the growing number of court cases this year.

"We know almost nothing about the defendants in these cases because the hearings are held behind closed doors without the participation of journalists, and the courts erase information about the defendants," the project said.

Perviy Otdel attributed the record number of treason cases to "provocations by FSB officers" who entrap anti-war Russians into incriminating themselves online.

"This is a signal that the FSB demands results [in the form of] people being sent to [prison] camps," said Yevgeny Smirnov, a lawyer at Perviy Otdel.

Espionage charges carry a maximum prison sentence of 20 years. Amendments that President Vladimir Putin signed into law in April increased the maximum penalty for "high treason" from 20 years to life imprisonment.

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