Patterns and Drivers of Repression against Crimean Tatars: Evidence from a New Event Dataset (2014–2024)

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Abstract

Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea marked the onset of a systematic repression campaign against the Crimean Tatar population. We introduce *CriTaRep* v1.0, the first comprehensive, geo-coded event dataset documenting state repression against Crimean Tatars (2014-2024). Drawing on locally sourced materials in Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian, and Russian languages, *CriTaRep* records *n = 690* repression events affecting more than 2,200 individual victims. We inductively identify 22 repression types across three categories: deprivation of liberty, legal and administrative repression, and physical repression. Our data shows a strategic yet adaptive campaign, including a systematic concentration of arbitrary searches on Thursdays, initial physical repression targeting primarily elites, and intensified repression during periods of dissent. Integrating additional disaggregated variables and employing fixed-effects Poisson models, we find that the short-term frequency of repression is significantly driven by protest activity, rather than sanction levels or cultural focal events. Russian authorities respond rapidly and increasingly harshly to dissent, pursuing a dual strategy of immediate protest suppression and long-term deterrence. *CriTaRep* fills critical gaps in existing datasets and provides new opportunities to study patterns and mechanisms of demographically targeted repression.

***Keywords**: Repression, Autocracy, Russia, Crimean Tatars, Minorities*

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Introduction

The occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in February and March 2014 marked the onset of a systematic repressive campaign against the Crimean Tatars, the peninsula's indigenous people. Since the beginning of the occupation, Russian authorities have established a comprehensive social control system that targets, among other non-compliant citizens, both ordinary Crimean Tatars and community elites, including local politicians, journalists, and clerics. The repressive apparatus encompasses a broad repertoire of strategically implemented coercive measures, ranging from administrative pressures and deprivations of liberty to physical violence, including torture and extrajudicial killings. Despite mounting evidence of widespread human rights violations in occupied Crimea, systematic documentation of state repression against Crimean Tatars remains severely limited. Existing accounts are predominantly anecdotal or selective, lacking the systematic and comprehensive data collection necessary to empirically study the scope, spatio-temporal patterns, and drivers of repressive practices. This gap significantly hampers our understanding of the phenomenon and limits efforts to establish accountability for these violations of fundamental rights.

To address this critical shortcoming, we introduce a first comprehensive, disaggregated and geo-coded dataset that documents repressive events against Crimean Tatars at a daily level in the period February 2014 to December 2024 (*CriTaRep*). *CriTaRep v1.0* includes n = 690 repression events, each annotated with close narrative descriptions and systematically coded variables, including the category and specific type of repression, the number of victims, fatalities and injuries, the exact location, time, and responsible actors. The dataset distinguishes between 22 inductively derived types of repression, grouped into three overarching categories: (1) deprivation of liberties, including arbitrary searches and arrests; (2) legal and administrative repression, encompassing deportations and bureaucratic coercion; and (3) severe physical repression, including torture, enforced disappearance, and extrajudicial killings. In total, we document more than 2,200 individual victims over the investigation period.

Our data indicate that in the immediate aftermath of the annexation, Russian authorities employed highly visible and violent forms of repression, often directed at Crimean Tatar elites, to establish clear "red lines" of permissible behaviour. Over time, the repertoire of coercion became more differentiated and routinised, targeting the broader minority

community. After an initial phase of intense repression, we observe a gradual decline until 2020, when repressive activity increased again following the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 did not fundamentally change the established patterns or intensities of repression in Crimea. Overall, Russia's repressive measures appear to follow a highly strategic logic. For instance, arbitrary searches and detentions occur disproportionately on Thursdays – a pattern sufficiently consistent to have become a darkly humorous reference point within the indigenous community.

Our fine-grained event data contributes to a better understanding of the proximate drivers of state repression against ethnic and religious groups (see Botica, Inguanzo, and Mateos 2025). Following a contextual overview of state repression against Crimean Tatars in the post-annexation period and a description of key patterns and developments, we empirically explore the factors influencing the timing and intensity of repressive acts. While the underlying causes of the actions of the occupying forces lie in Russia's autocratization and irredentist-imperialist ambitions, key proximate causes can be identified to explain the temporal variation of repression. To this end, we turn our event dataset into a panel structure and match our data with highly disaggregated data on potential drivers of repression, including the weekly level of sanctions against Russia, the inflation rate in Russia, the level of international awareness, the temporal proximity to cultural events, geographical concentration as well as the occurrence of Crimean Tatar protests on a daily level.

Our models show that the frequency of repressive actions is significantly and positively associated with resistance activities. Poisson regression models with year-fixed effects demonstrate that same-day protest counts are significantly associated with increased repression events. Our findings underscore the tactically strategic yet reactive nature of authoritarian repression and corroborate core insights from the repression–protest nexus, which posits that state repression both responds to and potentially fuels backlash mobilization (Aytaç, Schiumerini, and Stokes 2018; Carey 2006; Francisco 2004; Schulte and Steinert 2023; Sullivan, Loyle, and Davenport 2012). Our results resonate with recent studies which emphasise the adaptive logic of targeted repression against ethnic groups (Beiser-McGrath 2019; Koesel and Sarkissian 2025; Rozenas 2020). Our new disaggregated repression dataset contributes to a more nuanced empirical

understanding of how autocratic states calibrate coercive measures against ethnic minorities in occupied territories.

Background

By the time of Crimea's annexation, Russian authorities had already accumulated substantial experience in suppressing dissent domestically and swiftly implemented previously tested repressive practices in Crimea (OVD-Info 2025; Rogov 2018; Zhirukhina 2018). While also Ukrainians and other ethnic and religious minorities in occupied Crimea faced persecution, including followers of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and Jehovah's Witnesses, the repressive tactics mainly target the Crimean Tatars minority (Coynash and Charron 2019; Shapovalova and Burlyuk 2016). With a long history of persecution under Russian imperial and Soviet rule, Crimean Tatars maintained a strong cultural identity and their own political and cultural organisations (Muratova 2022). Driven by the collective trauma of the 1944 deportation, the prolonged struggle to resettle in Crimea, and the quest for political recognition, the Crimean Tatars in post-Soviet Crimea showed a remarkable degree of cohesion and ethno-political mobilisation (Sasse 2007, 190). Their predominantly pro-Ukrainian orientation and opposition to annexation rendered them a primary target of repression. While some Crimean Tatar leaders accepted the annexation or were co-opted into the Russian system, the broader Crimean Tatar community has shown notable resilience in resisting Russia's occupation of Crimea (Muratova 2025; Shynkarenko 2022).

Following the seizure of strategic sites across the majority-Russian peninsula, including the Crimean parliament, by unmarked Russian troops on February 27, 2014, the occupying forces rapidly established a repressive infrastructure aimed at eliminating all individuals considered as potential obstacles to consolidate full control over the Peninsula and its population. This encompassed Crimean Tatar activists, journalists, politicians, and ordinary citizens who openly supported Ukrainian sovereignty, the Euromaidan movement, and opposed the takeover. A distinctive characteristic of this period was the direct involvement of official state institutions, including police forces, the Federal Security Service (FSB), and Russia's courts and customs. Those state-based actors were considerably supported by non-state paramilitary groups, including local "self-defence" militias, Kremlin-aligned private military companies, and individuals deployed from other Russian regions (Coynash and Charron 2019; Galeotti 2016; Rauta 2016).

During this initial phase (2014–2015), Russian law enforcement initiated the first criminal case in Crimea involving alleged ties to the international Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir.[1] This case, launched in early 2015 and later known as the "Sevastopol group", marked the beginning of systematic repression targeting Muslim groups of Crimean Tatars under the guise of "counterterrorism". Concurrently, Russian authorities criminalised participation in public gatherings, prosecuting Crimean Tatars involved in pro-Ukrainian protests on February 26 and May 3, 2014. These prosecutions set legal precedents for criminalizing dissent and legitimizing punitive action against opponents of the annexation. Alongside legal repression, Russian authorities dismantled core civil society institutions in Crimea. Independent media faced systematic suppression, culminating in the shutdown of *ATR*, the only Crimean Tatar television network, and the subsequent prosecution of its staff. Repression also extended to political organisations with potential mobilisation capacity. After a series of targeted actions against its political leadership, the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People was designated an extremist organisation. By 2016, a fully operational repressive infrastructure had been institutionalized.

The second phase (2016–2021) saw the expansion and diversification of politically motivated prosecutions, including torture cases, reports about inhumane detention conditions, and increased pressure on lawyers and human rights activists. In this period, large-scale criminal cases were launched under accusations of involvement in the Hizb ut-Tahrir organisation, as well as against activists affiliated with the grassroots human rights movement Crimean Solidarity. The repression linked to Hizb ut-Tahrir prosecutions peaked in 2019, when 37 individuals were targeted. While the pace of new prosecutions slowed slightly during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 12 new cases in 2020 and 10 in 2021, the overall scale of repression remained substantial. To date, at least 127 individuals in Crimea have been prosecuted for alleged association with Hizb ut-Tahrir, 106 of whom are currently imprisoned (OVD-Info 2025). In addition to prosecutions related to alleged association with Hizb ut-Tahrir, there has been at least one documented case (2017) in which Crimean Tatars were charged with participating in the activities of Tablighi Jamaat – a Muslim religious organisation designated as extremist in Russia in 2009. Russian law enforcement has also pursued politically motivated cases against Crimean Tatars under ordinary criminal charges. A notable example is the 2017 case involving Vedzhie Kashka, a revered veteran of the Crimean Tatar national movement,

which led to the prosecution of four Crimean Tatar activists under fabricated criminal allegations.

Since 2018, charges of participation in the Noman Çelebicihan Crimean Tatar Volunteer Battalion have become increasingly prevalent. The battalion, founded in 2015 during the food and civic blockade of the peninsula, primarily monitored cargo movement at the administrative border between mainland Ukraine and occupied Crimea. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the battalion was designated a terrorist organisation, leading to a sharp increase in prosecutions under this pretext. These cases have since expanded beyond Crimea to other occupied territories, including parts of the Kherson region. Other politically motivated prosecutions between 2016 and 2021 involved sabotage charges targeting socially active and politically disloyal Crimean Tatars. One of the most prominent cases involved Nariman Dzhelyal, deputy head of the Mejlis, along with brothers Asan and Aziz Akhtemov, who were arrested in 2021 in connection with an explosion at a gas pipeline – charges widely seen as politically driven. Defense lawyers representing individuals in politically motivated cases have themselves become targets of repression, with authorities frequently employing administrative arrests to intimidate and neutralize defense attorneys.

The third phase starts with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Despite the dramatically altered geopolitical context, patterns of political repression in occupied Crimea largely continued the trends established in earlier years. Repressive actions against the Crimean Tatar population remained central to Russia's coercive strategy. Most criminal cases targeting Crimean Tatars continued to be linked to alleged involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir. Since 2022, at least 38 new prosecutions have been initiated on this basis, four of which predate the invasion. Prosecutions related to alleged membership in the Noman Çelebicihan Volunteer Battalion have also persisted. Since the start of the full-scale war, at least 10 new such cases have been recorded. These prosecutions often concern non-violent protest activities, including participation in the 2015 blockade of Crimea, and are typically based on actions alleged to have occurred between 2015 and 2019. The post-2022 period is also marked by qualitatively new forms of repression linked directly to wartime legislation. In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, Russian authorities began systematically prosecuting Crimean residents, including Crimean Tatars, under newly intensified laws against "discrediting" the Russian

armed forces and disseminating so-called "fake information" about military operations. These charges reflect the broader authoritarian trend of criminalising anti-war expression across the Russian Federation (Kuznetsova 2024; McCarthy, Rice, and Lokhmutov 2023).

Concepts, Variables and Coding Procedure

The control repertoires of modern autocracies encompass various forms of coercion (Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018; Hellmeier 2016; Koesel and Sarkissian 2025). Against this background, we adopt a broad understanding of *repression*, which we define as the exercise of coercive power by state institutions over individuals and social groups within a given territory to control or eliminate opposition and dissent (Davenport 2007; Earl 2003; Kurian 2011; Ritter and Conrad 2016). This conceptualisation captures the multidimensional nature of repressive practices, unified by a common feature – the infringement of fundamental human rights. For the purposes of our dataset, this broad definition proves more appropriate than narrower conceptualisations that focus solely on violent repression, "one-sided" state violence, or only specific categories of human rights abuses (Davies et al. 2025; Hafner-Burton 2005). Our definition excludes unequal treatment and conditions in the form of "structural violence" (Galtung 1969) as well as legitimate law enforcement actions aimed at deterring or punishing criminal behaviour. We recognise the empirical difficulty in differentiating state repression from legal enforcement, particularly when laws themselves restrict basic rights. In our coding process, however, such ambiguity is largely confined to specific types (e.g., arrests and detentions). These cases are assessed based on the state's intent, the legal process followed, and the presence of judicial oversight.

Group-level repression event data remains extremely scarce. Widely used repression datasets such as the Political Terror Scale (Gibney et al. 2024) or the CIRI Human Rights Dataset (Mark et al. 2023) offer valuable insights at the country-year level. However, they are not disaggregated by groups and lack the granularity needed to explore repression against a specific ethnic or religious minority over time. The few group-based datasets, such as the Religion and State-Minorities (RASM) dataset, are typically very limited in scope and do not include event-based information (Akbaba and Fox 2011). Other large-n event datasets, including ACLED or ICEWS, do not measure repression per se (Boschee et al. 2020; Raleigh, Kishi, and Linke 2023) and are thus of limited utility for our purposes.

A second key limitation of existing datasets is their heavy reliance on media reports, typically of widely spoken languages, which introduces significant reporting biases (Demarest and Langer 2019; Dietrich and Eck 2020; Weidmann 2016) – both in terms of what is reported and which societal groups are reported on. As with other minority groups, this gap also applies to the Crimean Tatars. Although Crimea has received increased attention since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, state repression targeting the Crimean Tatars remains markedly underreported and, consequently, understudied, reflecting both the effects of repression and state-enforced censorship as well as language barriers.

To address these limitations, *CriTaRep* draws on first-hand, locally sourced information in Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian and Russian languages, including reports from close observers on the ground, legal representatives, and human rights defenders embedded in the Crimean Tatar community. These largely untapped sources enable a comprehensive mapping of repression events in the post-annexation period, many of which go unreported in international media outlets and existing databases. Specifically, we coded all documented instances of state repression against Crimean Tatars occurring between February 2014 and December 2024 on the Crimean Peninsula. All entries were manually compiled following a rigorous verification process to resolve missing or contradictory information. The dataset was compiled through systematic cross-referencing of data from multiple civil society organisations dealing with Crimean Tatar issues, including the *Crimean Tatar Resource Center*, *CrimeaSOS*, the *Crimean Human Rights Group*, and *Crimean Solidarity*. Source materials include annual and monthly reports, monitoring publications, and a range of textual and audiovisual materials published by these organisations in Ukrainian, Russian, and Crimean Tatar.

In the first step of the coding procedure, we developed detailed descriptive accounts for each event (*event_description*) and coded the exact date (*event_date*) and location (*location, latitude, longitude*) of each repression event, as well as the number of victims (*number_victims*) and the number of injured (*injured*) and fatalities (*killed*). We also coded a "pessimist" variable as a higher-end estimate for casualties and fatalities (*injured_pessimist*, *killed_pessimist*). For instance, in cases of forced disappearance, we often have to assume the individual has been killed. *CriTaRep* includes the identity of the actors responsible for the repression (*actor_name*), distinguishing among institutional actors such as Centre for countering extremism (Centre "E"), Cossacks, court, customs,

Federal Security Service (FSB), law enforcement, local authorities, police, self-defence and special police units (OMON). All data were cross-checked by the authors to ensure the highest possible level of consistency and reliability.

In the second step, we used the narrative accounts to inductively categorise the events into specific repression types. We identified 22 distinct types that allow researchers to explore the full repertoire of state repression used in this context (*repression_type*). In the third step, these types were organized into three higher-order categories: Deprivation of liberty, legal and administrative repression and physical repression (*Table 1*). Finally, we classified the victims of repressive actions into seven groups: activists, civilians, politicians, clerics, lawyers, journalists, and businesspersons. Where available, information regarding the victims' affiliations with political, religious, military, or journalistic organisations was also recorded.

Table 1: Repression types and categories in CriTaRep

Category	***Type***
Deprivation of Liberty	Arbitrary search, Arbitrary search with detention, Arbitrary search with arrest, Detention, Detention with arrest, Detention with interrogation, Arrest, Imprisonment, Interrogation
Legal / Administrative Repression	Administrative penalty, Administrative pressure, Criminal prosecution, Deportation, Entry ban
Physical Repression	Extrajudicial killing, Extrajudicial violence, Forced disappearance, Torture, Interrogation with torture, Detention with torture, Detention with violence, Arbitrary search with violence

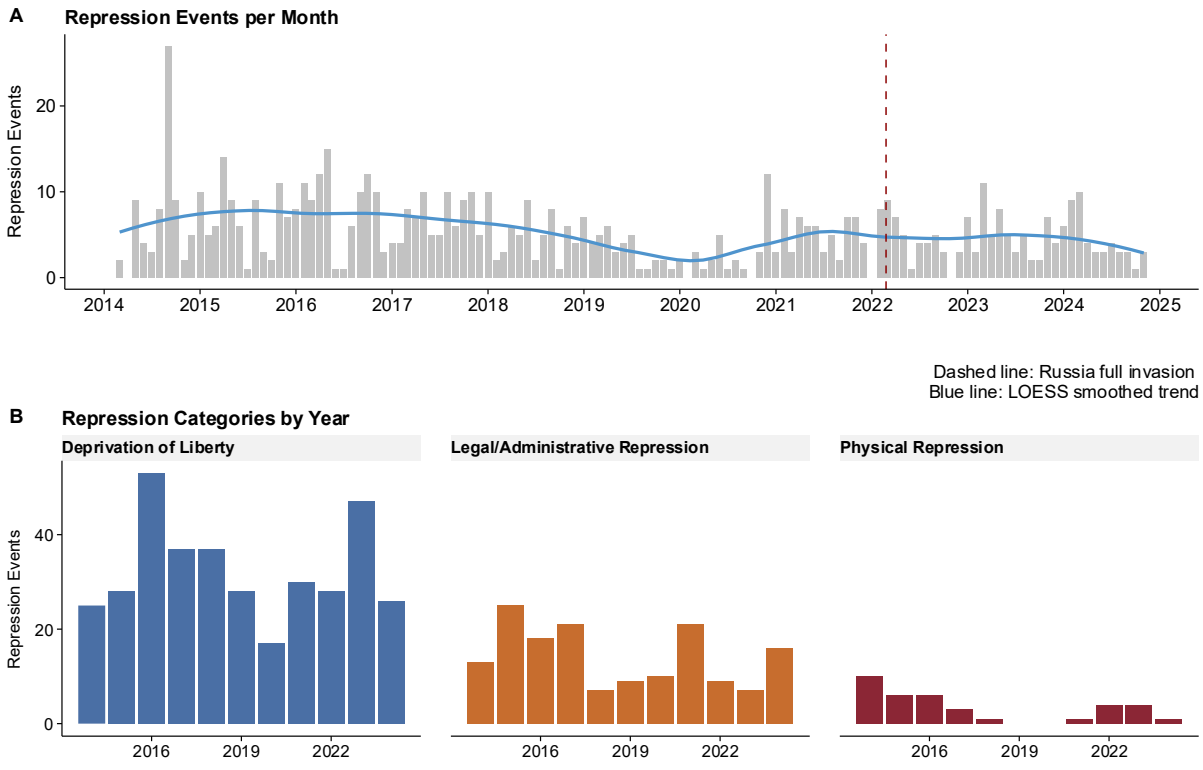
CriTaRep is available in two formats: a) an event-based dataset, with detailed records of individual repression events, and b) a panel-structured dataset, aggregated by *event_date*, which provides a summary of events and their characteristics per day. This format can be readily aggregated into week-, month-, or year-level units for further spatio-temporal analyses.[2]

Descriptive Analysis

Frequency and Types of Repression

Our data show a persistently high level of repression throughout the post-annexation period. Aggregating the number of repression events on a monthly basis uncovers a wave-like pattern. A particularly notable escalation occurred five months after the annexation in September 2014, when the first coordinated repression campaign unfolded across the peninsula. This campaign comprised widespread searches, detentions, and administrative prosecutions targeting both prominent Mejlis activists and ordinary civilians. Law enforcement agencies conducted searches in private homes, mosques, and educational facilities, officially citing the search for narcotics, weapons, and prohibited religious literature. Individuals were subsequently detained and subjected to interrogation. We document the forced disappearance of three Crimean Tatars, one of whom was later found deceased. After this initial wave, repression gradually declined, reaching its lowest point during the pandemic year of 2020. In 2021, levels increased again, approaching pre-COVID levels (*Figure 1, Panel A*).

Figure 1: Frequency and Types of Repression



In the post-annexation period, the most prevalent form of repression against Crimean Tatars is deprivation of liberty, which accounts for 67.6% of all cases (*Table 2, Panel B*). Within this category, the most common modality is arbitrary searches, which account for 130 events (18.8%) – the single most frequent repression type in *CriTaRep*. Typically executed at dawn, these operations are carried out by officers of the Federal Security Service, the Centre for Countering Extremism, or special police units. Arbitrary searches often serve as a prelude to further coercive measures, including detention and subsequent criminal prosecution. Law enforcement personnel often forcibly enter private residences, employing physical violence, particularly against male occupants. Surrounding streets are commonly cordoned off, and so-called "neutral" witnesses, typically selected in advance by security personnel, are present to provide nominal legal cover. Standard procedures also include the confiscation of mobile phones, computers, and other digital devices, while access to legal counsel is often delayed, denied, or otherwise obstructed.

With the exception of the pandemic year 2020, when most forms of coercive activity declined, arbitrary searches remained consistently frequent between 2014 and 2024. Two notable surges are noteworthy: the first in 2016, the second in 2023. The 2016 spike coincided with the transition to a second, institutionalised phase of repression, during which the coercive infrastructure assembled in 2014–2015 was deployed at full capacity. During this phase, mass search operations targeted the homes of Hizb ut-Tahrir activists and members of the Mejlis, mosques operating outside the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (DUMK), and private homes of civilians perceived as politically disloyal by the occupying authorities. The second surge, recorded in 2023, reflects a broader escalation of coercive practices that followed Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. During this period, security agencies broadened the scope of "high-risk" categories beyond established targets such as Mejlis and Hizb ut-Tahrir affiliates to include individuals suspected of links to the Noman Çelebicihan Battalion. Many of these individuals had previously resided in the Kherson region, occupied after February 2022, before being detained, transferred to Crimea, and prosecuted under criminal statutes. Additionally, Russian law enforcement increasingly targeted individuals accused of sabotage or of disseminating anti-war content via social media, thereby expanding the range of politically actionable behaviours.

Table 2: Frequency of repression types in CriTaRep

Repression Type	***Count***	***Percent***
Arbitrary search	130	18.84
Administrative penalty	115	16.67
Arbitrary search with detention	83	12.03
Detention	75	10.87
Imprisonment	62	8.99
Detention with arrest	46	6.67
Criminal prosecution	27	3.91
Arbitrary search with arrest	25	3.62
Administrative pressure	23	3.33
Interrogation	19	2.75
Forced disappearance	18	2.61
Arrest	17	2.46
Detention with interrogation	9	1.30
Detention with violence	9	1.30
Detention with torture	7	1.01
Extrajudicial violence	6	0.87
Arbitrary search with violence	5	0.72
Extrajudicial killing	5	0.72
Entry ban	4	0.58
Deportation	3	0.43
Interrogation with torture	1	0.14
Torture	1	0.14
Total	***690***	***100***

Forms of legal and administrative repression account for 24.9% of cases. Within this category, administrative penalties are the most prevalent form of coercive action and constitute the second most frequent repression type in *CriTaRep* (n = 115, 16.67%). As mentioned above, these penalties typically follow earlier intrusions, most often searches of private homes, mosques, or administrative premises associated with Crimean Tatars, and the subsequent initiation of administrative proceedings. Sanctions are frequently imposed on individuals accused of possessing prohibited religious literature, participating in unauthorised public gatherings, conducting missionary activities without formal authorisation, disseminating materials linked to proscribed organisations, or publishing "separatist" (i.e., pro-Ukrainian) or allegedly false information about the Russian military on social media. Administrative penalties serve a dual function: they operate both as punitive measures and as instruments of deterrence, aimed at suppressing dissent and restricting religious and political activism.

We categorise 7.5% of events as forms of "physical repression" representing the most direct, somatic and extreme forms of state repression. We observe such measures consistently throughout the post-2014 period, with the notable exception of 2019 and 2020, when the frequency of such incidents declined, likely due to COVID-related restrictions. We observe the highest number of violent events in the first annexation year, 2014 (*Figure 1, Panel B*). Lacking a fully developed administrative infrastructure, Russian authorities started the occupation of Crimea with a heavy reliance on physical violence as a swift and effective means of establishing behavioural boundaries and silencing dissent. This high-intensity repression functioned as a blunt but proven tool for signalling the severe costs of opposition.

A key driver of the high intensity of repression in the first year is the active involvement of non-state paramilitary actors, such as the "Crimean self-defence" units, Cossack formations, the so-called "Crimean Liberation Army," as well as members of the political party *Russian Unity (Galeotti 2016; OVD-Info 2025)*. While a majority of repressive actions (94.1%) were carried out by state-based actors, including law enforcement agencies (31.9%), courts (26.8%), the FSB (15.7%), and the police (11.0%), non-state actors played a significant role in the occupation, often executing acts of violence against individuals opposing annexation. Operating with considerable autonomy and de facto impunity, these actors contributed to the normalization of extrajudicial violence and the broader entrenchment of coercive control during the early stages of Russian rule over Crimea. The practice of enforced disappearances emerged as a systematic and widespread tactic during the initial phase of Russia's occupation. Throughout the occupation period, at least 18 Crimean Tatars have been subjected to enforced disappearance, with a substantial proportion of these cases resulting in death. Instances of physical violence, including torture and other forms of mistreatment, have been documented in connection with searches, arrests, and interrogations conducted by Russian security forces. Such practices exemplify the broader pattern of repressive strategies deployed to instil fear, suppress dissent, and maintain control over the Crimean Tatar population.

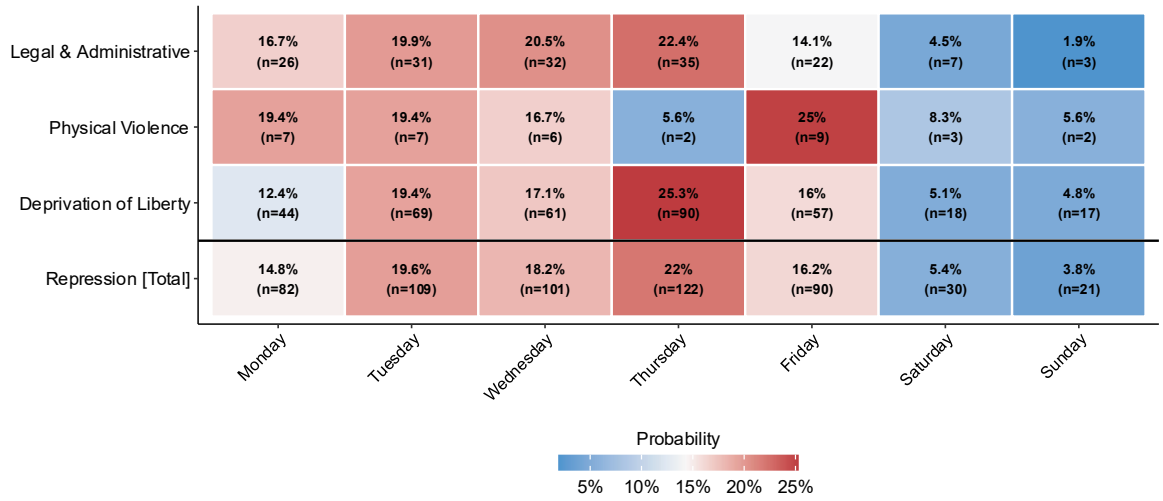
Repression Calendar

Authoritarian regimes rarely repress at random but strategically calibrate *when*, *where*, and *whom* to target. A rich literature shows, for instance, that coercive actions follow

episodes of dissent (Lewis and Ives 2025; Sullivan, Loyle, and Davenport 2012) and tend to cluster around focal moments such as cultural holidays, anniversaries, elections, and sports events (Bhasin and Gandhi 2013; Scharpf, Gläßel, and Edwards 2023; Truex 2019). Beyond such reactive patterns to exogenous events, repression may also be driven by endogenous bureaucratic routines, shaped by institutionalized schedules and organizational workflows (Arendt 2006; Gieseke 2011; Thomson 2024). In China, for instance, the state bureaucracy is heavily involved in digital surveillance (Pei 2024; Qiang 2019). In East Germany, the Stasi conducted "conspirative searches", faked burglaries, which were meticulously prepared and which followed a highly bureaucratic logic (Bundesarchiv 2025).

Calculating the probability distribution of each repression category across weekdays, we find that the campaign against Crimean Tatars largely adheres to a weekly rhythm. Repressive actions typically occur between Monday and Friday, with numbers dropping on weekends. Within the workweek, incidents are less frequent on Mondays and Fridays. One exception is physical violence, which also occurs with notable frequency on Saturdays. This reflects the involvement of non-state or semi-official actors, such as paramilitary groups, who are less constrained by bureaucratic schedules. Thursday emerges as the most frequent day for repressive actions against Crimean Tatars (Table 3), a pattern particularly evident for the most common forms of repression, namely searches and detentions. The concentration of such incidents on Thursdays has not gone unnoticed by journalists and human rights defenders, who have aptly coined the term "Black Thursday" (Evchin and Annitova 2019).

Figure 2: Repression Events by Weekday and Type

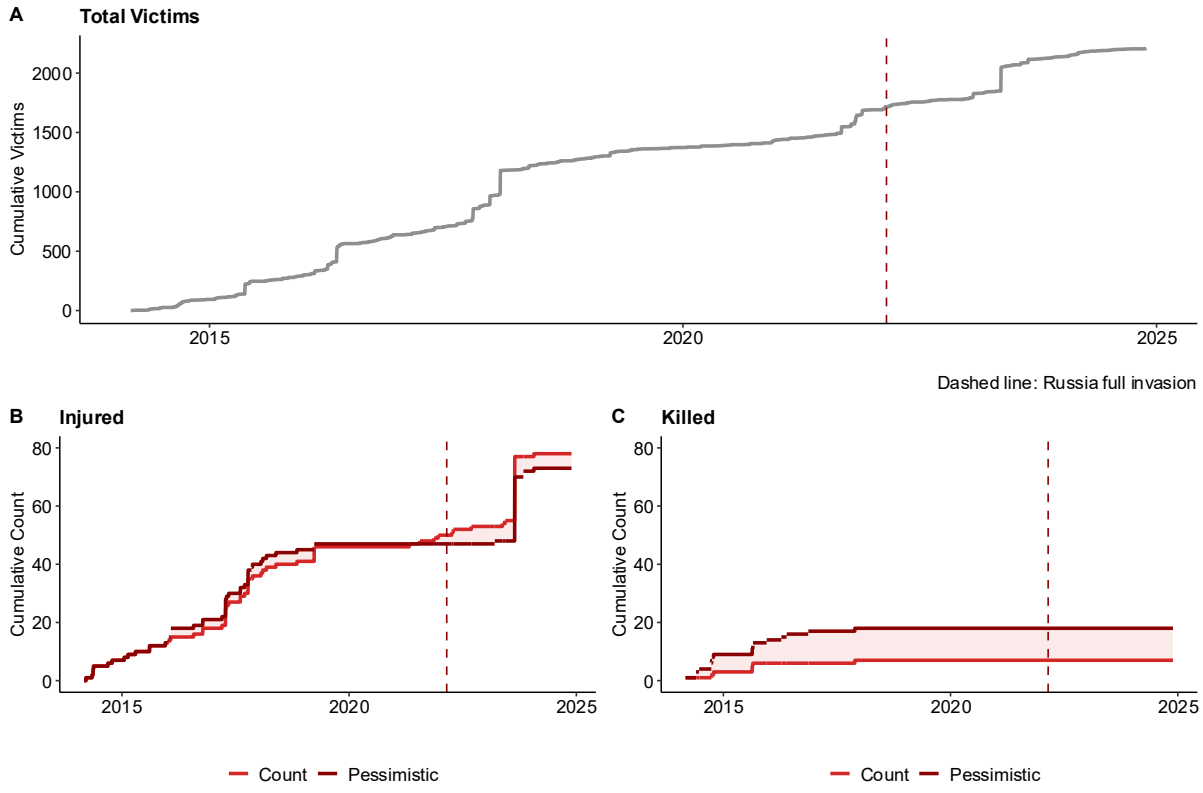


This pattern is not coincidental but driven by legal-strategic considerations aimed at maximizing the psychological impact of coercive measures, as well as by practical operational logic. First, Russian law permits authorities to detain an individual for up to 48 hours without formal charges. When a detention occurs on a Thursday, this effectively allows authorities to hold the person through the weekend, since investigative and detention facilities – including pre-trial detention centers (SIZO) – typically do not operate on weekends, and access to legal counsel is limited or entirely unavailable on Saturdays and Sundays. Consequently, authorities gain two additional days during which the detainee can be subjected to various forms of pressure to extract information or confessions. Second, the preference for Thursday is shaped by the internal scheduling of law enforcement agencies. Mondays through Wednesdays are typically reserved for routine activities such as firearms training, instruction sessions, and other forms of professional development. When searches are planned, central command dispatches officers to the region to conduct the operations on Thursday, allowing them to return to their home base on Friday and spend the weekend with their families (Evchin and Annitova 2019). Thus, Thursday emerges as the most practical day for executing repressive actions.

Repression Intensities and Victims

CriTaRep v1 documents a total number of 2,210 victims. The cumulative victim count shows a sustained increase since 2014, driven by durable levels of coercion and episodes of intensified enforcement that coincide with key phases of Russia's occupation strategy: consolidation (2014–2015) and wartime securitisation (2022-present). Both our main estimate and the upper-bound (pessimistic) assessment of injured Crimean Tatars rise gradually between 2014 and early 2022, followed by a pronounced spike after the full-scale invasion in 2022 (*Figure 3, Panel B*). While in the pre-invasion period (2014–2021), injuries stem predominantly from coercive searches, detentions, and the policing of public dissent, injuries in the period 2022–2024 are more strongly linked to punitive violence intended to enforce loyalty under conditions of large-scale interstate conflict. Lethal violence is, as discussed above, temporally concentrated in the initial period. After 2016, the curve stabilizes, reflecting both the effectiveness of early high-intensity measures and a subsequent shift toward institutionalized, non-lethal forms of coercion. The near congruence of our main and pessimistic estimates indicates comparatively reliable documentation of both fatalities and injuries.

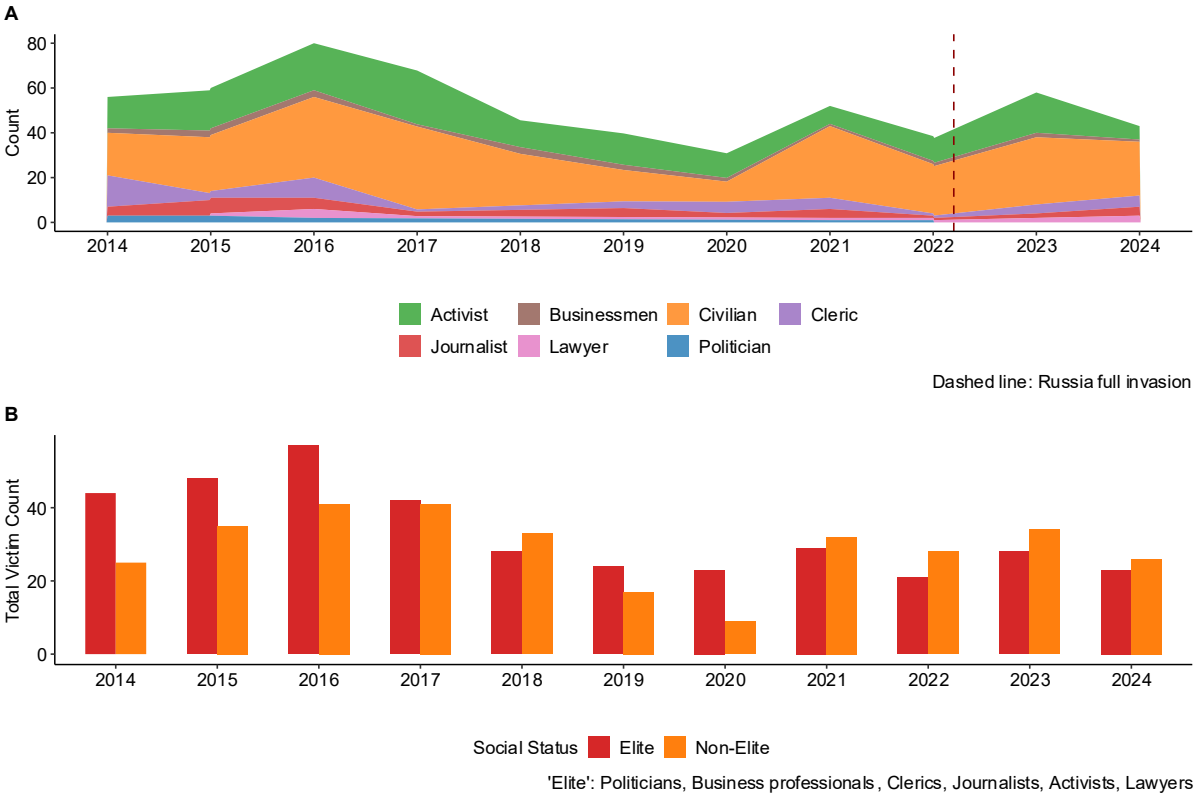
Figure 3: Repression Intensities over Time



The Russian authorities adapted their repression targets dynamically to certain political and social developments (*Figure 4, Panel A*). In the first three years, we observe a higher number of elites being targeted compared to civilians (*Figure 4, Panel B*). With this, the authorities targeted a number of potentially dangerous individuals with mobilisation capacity, including politicians, clerics, journalists and activists. Once this purge was successful, repressive tactics shifted to a broader approach, moving beyond the targeting of individuals through criminal and administrative proceedings to include more collective forms of repression to implement a more comprehensive control system. By 2016, law enforcement agencies began conducting coordinated raids on public spaces, notably mosques during Friday prayers, as well as markets and cafés, where large groups of Crimean Tatars were detained, interrogated, and subjected to document checks.

Following a decrease in the absolute number of victims, we observe a new increase post-pandemic. The increase in civilian victims in 2021 is primarily attributable to the detention of individuals participating in public demonstrations protesting earlier acts of repression against Crimean Tatars. These arrests frequently took place in the vicinity of court buildings where hearings or sentencing of previously detained individuals were held, indicating a criminalisation of protest and solidarity. In 2023, the rise in repression again involved both collective and individual targeting. Our data shows a dual pattern of victimisation: raids on mosques continued, while additional arrests occurred during protests near court buildings.

Figure 4: Repression Victims by Type and Year



Civilians constitute the largest group of individuals subjected to repressive practices in post-2014 Crimea, accounting for nearly half (48.83%) of all documented cases in *CriTaRep*. Following civilians, activists represent the second-largest category of victims (28.29%). These individuals are often affiliated with organisations such as the Mejlis, the Qurultay (national congress), Hizb ut-Tahrir, and Tablighi Jamaat, all of which have been consistently targeted by the occupying authorities due to their perceived oppositional stance or mobilizational potential. Clerics represent the third most affected group (9.37%). The relatively higher incidence of repression against this category in the initial two years of the occupation can be explained by the Russian security services' efforts to exert control over the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (DUMK), including through raids on mosques and madrasas under its jurisdiction (Muratova 2025). Once DUMK acquiesced to collaboration, repressive measures increasingly targeted religious actors and institutions outside of its control, particularly those critical of its alignment with the occupying authorities. In some cases, these repressive actions occurred with the direct support or cooperation of DUMK-affiliated actors.

Journalists represent 6.85% of victims and have been systematically targeted throughout the investigation period. This reflects the regime's intent to monopolise the information space and shape the narrative of a "Russian Crimea" for both domestic and international audiences. In the early years, repression primarily affected personnel from pre-2014 media outlets, such as the *ATR* television channel and the newspaper "Avdet". As control over the media landscape solidified, the focus shifted to independent civic journalists, particularly those associated with the NGO "Crimean Solidarity", and Crimean Tatar journalists based in mainland Ukraine. These individuals have increasingly faced criminal prosecution. Politicians, alongside lawyers and human rights defenders, have also been targeted as part of the broader coercive environment. However, they represent only a smaller proportion of victims with a share of 1.8% and 1.98%, respectively. While there was originally only a small number of those elites, many fled the country or, in the case of politicians, were co-opted by the Russian authorities. Pressure on legal professionals intensified during 2015–2016 and surged again after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Repression against non-loyal Crimean Tatar business professionals accounts for 2.88% of cases. These incidents, however, appear sporadic and do not reflect a systematic targeting trend.

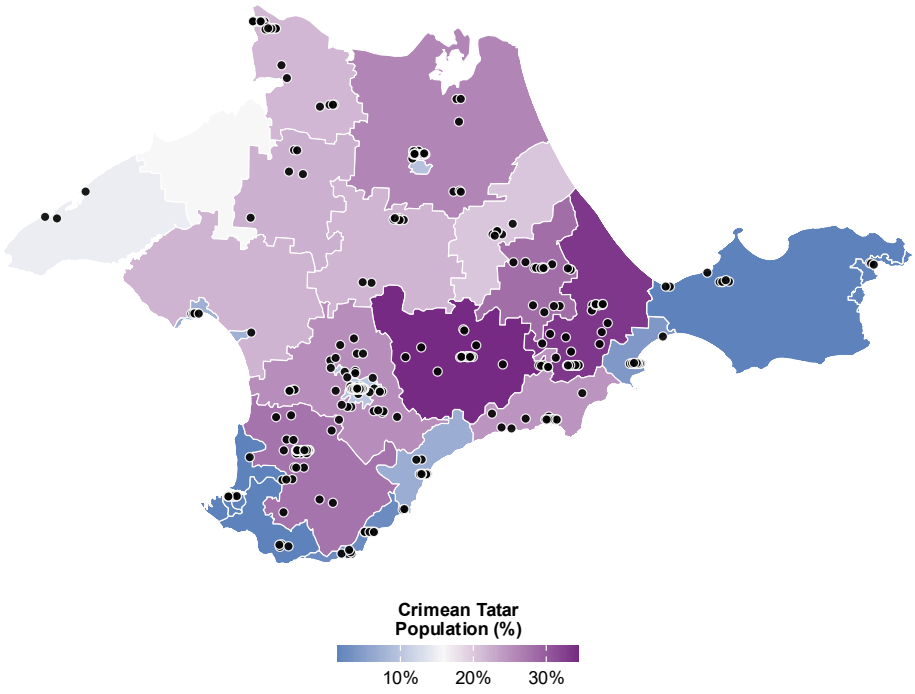
Geographical Patterns

Merging our data with the population census conducted by the Russian occupying authorities in September 2014, we find that early half (47.5%) of all recorded instances of repression against Crimean Tatars between 2014 and 2024 occurred within two administrative units of Crimea – Simferopol and the Bakhchisaray region (including the city of Bakhchisaray).[3] The concentration of repressive acts in Simferopol can be attributed to the city's status as the administrative and institutional centre of the Russian-controlled security apparatus in Crimea. Key state structures responsible for implementing coercive measures, such as the FSB department, law enforcement agencies, and judicial institutions, are located there. Beyond formal, targeted acts of repression conducted within these institutions, the high incidence of repressive episodes in Simferopol also reflects the prosecution of Crimean Tatars who gathered near these buildings in solidarity with detained individuals or to publicly express dissent against state violence and arbitrary detentions. The elevated level of repression in the Bakhchisaray region is attributable to the comparatively high degree of political

mobilisation among the local Crimean Tatar population, as well as their active participation in organisations that Russian authorities have designated as extremist or terrorist, most notably the Mejlis and Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Drawing on our panel dataset, we observe a statistically significant positive correlation between the *number* of repression events and the share of the Crimean Tatar population per district ($\rho = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$; see *Figure 6*).[4] While areas with larger Crimean Tatar communities face more frequent repression, there are notable exceptions. For instance, while Crimean Tatars constitute approximately 9.93% of Simferopol's population, they account for nearly 33% of repression cases in the city (*Table 5* in the Suppl. Material). In contrast, in the Belogorsk region, where Crimean Tatars make up over one-third of the population (34.36%), only 5% of recorded repressive incidents took place. Importantly, we find no correlation between repression *intensity* and indigenous demographic share ($\rho = -0.07$, $p > 0.05$). This suggests that while the *frequency* of repressive events correlates with Crimean Tatar population density, the *severity* of individual incidents follows different logics – likely shaped by the regime's perception of threat and the degree of organisational mobilisation within local communities.

Figure 5: Geographical Distribution of Repression Events



Drivers of Repression

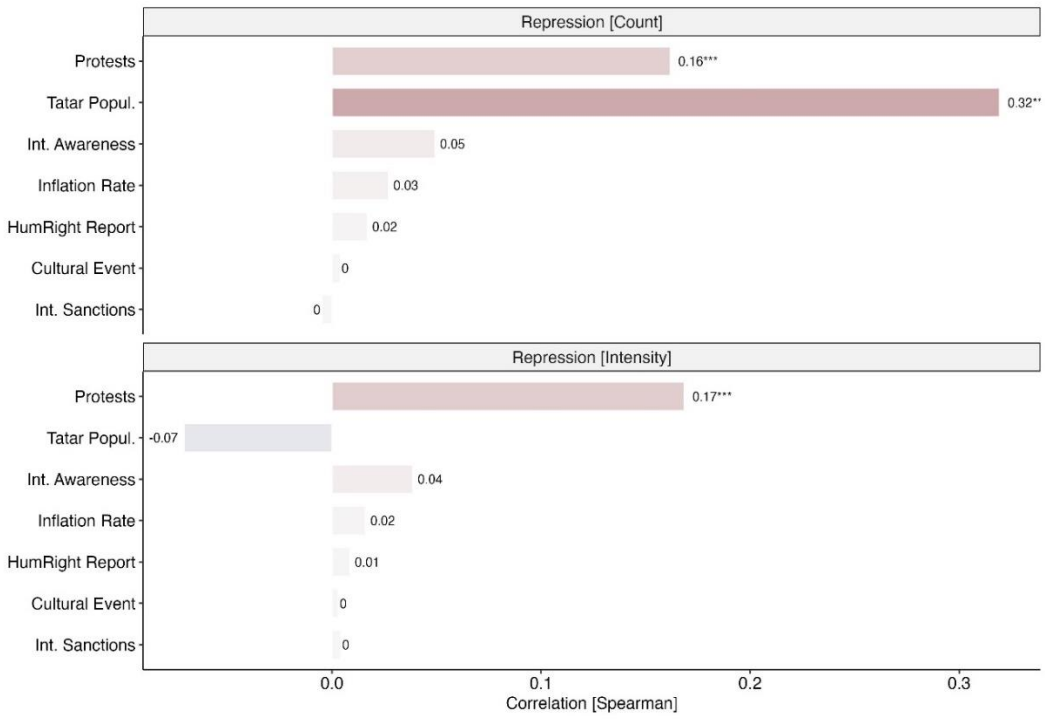
To explore key drivers of state repression against Crimean Tatars in the post-annexation period, we select relevant factors identified by previous studies. State repressive behaviour may respond to external pressure through international political and economic *sanctions* imposed on Russia. Research indicates that, although well-intended, sanctions may have a contrary effect and deteriorate human rights conditions (Hultman and Peksen 2017; Kang, Lee, and Whang 2023; Peksen 2009). We operationalize the level of international sanctions using a weekly count variable that measures the aggregate number of new sanctions or extensions of existing sanctions announced by the European Union and the United States in a given week.[5] Beyond sanctions, the visibility of human rights violations and international awareness thereof may influence the level of state repression against minorities (Heinze and Freedman 2010; Mcloughlin 2011). To account for the level of *international awareness*, we include a monthly count variable quantifying formal reports, declarations, and statements issued by major international organisations that specifically address the situation in Crimea. We code a second variable which captures specifically the publication of a *human rights report* by a major international organisation focusing on conditions in Crimea and the treatment of Crimean Tatars on a given day.

To capture resistance levels, we systematically code Crimean Tatar *protest* events on a daily level. Our primary source consists of news reports from Crimean Solidarity, a civil society organisation that has systematically documented and disseminated footage of Crimean Tatar protests through its YouTube channel and Facebook presence. These platforms contain thousands of videos and posts in Russian and Crimean Tatar languages, documenting resistance to arbitrary searches, judicial proceedings, and broader repressive measures implemented since 2014. To ensure comprehensive coverage and mitigate potential selection bias, we supplement this primary source with materials from KrymRealii, Google News, KrymInform, and Day Kyiv. Building on existing studies that demonstrate the tendency of repressive episodes to cluster around symbolically salient or politically sensitive *cultural events*, we code the Crimean Tatar cultural calendar (Bhasin and Gandhi 2013; Truex 2019). Our dummy variable gives information on whether there was a Crimean Tatar holiday or commemoration on a specific day.

Finally, we include two structural variables: First, our demographic variable and the *percentage of Crimean Tatars* residing in the district where a repression event took place; Second, we include the monthly *inflation rate* in Russia, which serves as a proxy for macroeconomic conditions and the state's fiscal capacity to conduct repression. To assess the robustness of our findings, we construct a numerical measure of the *repression intensity*. This continuous variable captures the severity of each repressive incident, based on the repression types included in *CriTaRep* and is aggregated into a daily average score. For instance, administrative punishment receives a lower severity weight than instances involving physical violence (see codebook for the weighting scheme).

Using Spearman rank-order correlations, we find that the *frequency* of repression events correlates significantly with two key variables (*Figure 6*): Crimean Tatar population share ($\rho = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$) and protest activity ($\rho = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$). All other variables – international sanctions, cultural events, inflation rates, human rights reports, and international awareness – do not show any substantial associations with our repression variable ($p > 0.05$). In contrast, repression *intensity* is significantly correlated only with protest activity ($\rho = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$), and shows no meaningful association with Crimean Tatar population share ($\rho = -0.06$, $p > 0.05$). This pattern remains when we aggregate to the weekly level (Suppl. Material, *Figure 1*).

Figure 6: Correlation Analysis



To further examine the impact of resistance activities on both the frequency and intensity of repression, we estimate a series of regression models using our daily-level panel data. Given that repression frequency is a count variable, we employ a Poisson regression model of the form:

$$log(\mathbb{E}[repression\_events_i]) = \beta_1\, protest_i + \beta_2\, sanctions_i + \beta_3\, int\_awareness_i + \beta_4\, TatarPopul_i + \beta_5\, CultEvent_i + \beta_6\, Inflation_i + \sum_j \gamma_j\, year_{ij},$$

where protest$_i$ represents different temporal specifications of protest activity: on the same day (Model 1), one-day lagged protests (Model 2), seven-day lagged protests (Model 3), one-day leading protests (Model 4), and seven-day leading protests (Model 5).6 The γ_j terms capture year fixed effects. For repression *intensity*, which is a continuous average score, we estimate standard linear models with the same control variables:

$$repression\_intensity_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1\, protest + \beta_2\, sanctions_i + \beta_3\, int\_awareness_i + \beta_4\, TatarPopul_i + \beta_5\, CultEvent_i + \beta_6\, Inflation_i + \sum_j \gamma_j\, year_{ij} + \varepsilon_i$$

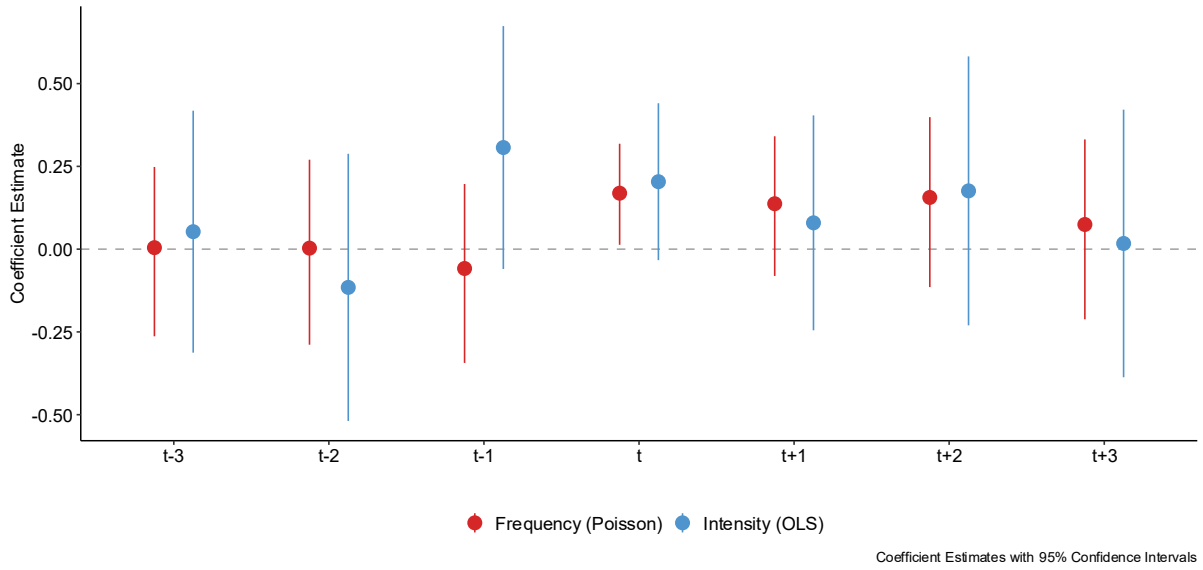
Table 3: Summary statistics

Outcome	***Time***	***Coeff.***	***Conf. Interv.***	***p***	***Significance***
Frequency	t-3	0.004	[-0.263, 0.248]	0.972	No
Frequency	t-2	0.003	[-0.289, 0.270]	0.983	No
Frequency	t-1	-0.058	[-0.344, 0.197]	0.671	No
Frequency	t	0.169	[0.013, 0.318]	0.029	Yes
Frequency	t+1	0.137	[-0.081, 0.341]	0.202	No
Frequency	t+2	0.156	[-0.115, 0.399]	0.231	No
Frequency	t+3	0.074	[-0.212, 0.331]	0.589	No
Intensity	t-3	0.053	[-0.313, 0.418]	0.777	No
Intensity	t-2	-0.115	[-0.519, 0.288]	0.574	No
Intensity	t-1	0.307	[-0.060, 0.674]	0.101	No
Intensity	t	0.204	[-0.033, 0.441]	0.092	No
Intensity	t+1	0.079	[-0.245, 0.404]	0.631	No
Intensity	t+2	0.176	[-0.230, 0.582]	0.395	No
Intensity	t+3	0.017	[-0.387, 0.421]	0.933	No

Consistent with our previous findings, protest activity emerges as a significant predictor of repression frequency (*Table 3*).[7] In the Poisson models, current-day protest count predicts the expected number of repression events (β = 0.169, p = 0.029), indicating that each protest is associated with an approximately 18% increase in daily repression

frequency. This effect disappears when protests are lagged or led by up to three days. This suggests that repression occurs rapidly and is tightly coupled to resistance activities of Crimean Tatars. For repression intensity, the results are more ambiguous. Although coefficients remain consistently positive from t-1 through t+3, with a notable elevation at t-1 ($\beta = 0.307$, $p = 0.101$), none achieve conventional statistical significance. In other words, while our findings provide tentative empirical evidence that protest increases the frequency of repressive events, whether it also intensifies the severity of individual repressive acts remains uncertain. This may partly reflect that CriTaRep v1.0 does not (yet) provide a sufficiently large sample for detecting such effects.

Figure 7: Effects of Protests on State Repression



This finding suggests a dynamic where the Russian authorities respond swiftly following protests by Crimean Tatars. This is consistent with a strategy that aims not only at immediate crowd control but also at deterring future dissent through intensified punitive measures against the most active participants in the protests. Our qualitative evidence indicates that protest participants are typically targeted through newly initiated administrative and criminal prosecutions; however, whether this translates into measurably more severe repression requires further investigation with a larger sample. The insignificant lead variables support the temporal ordering of protest preceding state repression, though establishing definitive causal claims require additional analyses to address potential simultaneity and confounding factors.

Conclusion

This study introduces *CriTaRep* v1, the first comprehensive, disaggregated event dataset documenting state repression against Crimean Tatars from February 2014 to December 2024. *CriTaRep* records over 2,200 individual victims across a diverse range of social categories, highlighting the extensive and systematic nature of Russia's repressive campaign in annexed Crimea. Our data shows that the Russian authorities quickly established a comprehensive system of social control in Crimea and have maintained a high level of repression since. State repression targeting Crimean Tatars is multifaceted – including administrative harassment, deprivation of liberty, and physical violence – and is carried out in a deliberate and strategic manner. For example, the initial phase of annexation was characterised by intense physical repression and the targeted elimination of oppositional elites. During the post-annexation period, a sustained level of repression has aimed to intimidate ordinary citizens, instil fear, and deter dissent. Periods of increased political activism are often met with a short-term rise in repression, demonstrating an adaptive and calibrated approach to authoritarian governance in annexed territories.

By systematically collecting and manually coding almost 700 repression events targeting ethnic group members, we address a critical empirical gap in the comparative study of authoritarian coercion and demographically targeted repression in the widely understudied context of occupation. Drawing on locally sourced, indigenous-language reports, the dataset illustrates the value of such documentation for studying state repression against marginalised populations and addresses critical biases of existing datasets, which do not, or only to a very limited extent, cover repression events against Crimean Tatars. The dataset's disaggregated structure enables fine-grained analysis of repressive repertoires while maintaining the temporal and spatial precision necessary for rigorous empirical analysis. In this way, we advance beyond existing data available only at the country-year level or those that include only very aggregate measures of repression.

Our findings contribute to three key theoretical debates in the literature on state repression, ethnic conflict, and authoritarian governance. (1) First, our study contributes to existing works on how authoritarian regimes adjust coercive strategies across different phases and targets (Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014; Hellmeier and Weidmann

2019; Rozenas 2020). The shift from high-intensity violence (2014–2015) to institutionalised administrative coercion (2016–2021) and then to wartime securitisation (2022–present) highlights the temporal dynamics of repressive adaptation. Notably, the 2022 escalation in Ukraine did not fundamentally change established patterns in Crimea, indicating that once institutionalised, repressive infrastructures show remarkable durability. (2) Second, our findings provide further empirical support for the repression-protest nexus, with Poisson regression models demonstrating significant positive associations between protest activity and the frequency of repressive events. Our models provide evidence for same-day responses rather than lagged or pre-emptive reactions to repression. Again, this highlights the reactive and dynamic nature of authoritarian coercion. (3) Third, we advance understanding of bureaucratic repression through our documentation of systematic temporal patterns, particularly the concentration of arbitrary searches on Thursdays. This "Black Thursday" phenomenon exemplifies how organisational routines and legal frameworks shape repression patterns and demonstrates the banality of authoritarian rule (Arendt 2006; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2023).

Despite a careful coding process, several limitations warrant acknowledgement. First, a number of repression events may remain undocumented, which may be itself a consequence of repression and state censorship. Second, we can also not fully rule out the possibility that the sources we use have implicitly or explicitly prioritized certain types of repression (e.g., high-profile arrests) over others (e.g., subtler forms of intimidation or bureaucratic punishment). This may lead to certain biases in our dataset. Third, and related to the former aspect, the increasing consolidation of the state's system of social control may result in temporal bias, particularly underreporting of more recent repression occurring under tighter surveillance and restrictions for journalists and civil society actors to document human rights abuses. Fourth, our focus on Crimean Tatars limits generalizability to other minority groups or contexts.

CriTaRep provides an essential empirical foundation for understanding Russian repression in annexed territories against minorities and, more broadly, makes a significant contribution to the theoretical and empirical advancement of the study of demographically targeted repression. In light of the global wave of autocratization and the surge in conflicts worldwide, systematic documentation of minority-targeted state

repression is increasingly vital not only for scholarly understanding but also for supporting accountability efforts and upholding human rights standards.

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[1] See *Table 10* in the Suppl. Material for description of this and other Crimean Tatar and transnational religious organizations.

[2] See https://www.ecmi.de/research-clusters/special-research-themes/repression-against-crimean-tatars for further information.

[3] This data has been justifiably criticized for undercounting the Crimean Tatar population and reporting a biased representation of their actual presence on the peninsula. However, this data nevertheless offers more recent data than the last all-Ukrainian census conducted in 2001. To mitigate the issue of potential underrepresentation, we aggregate individuals who identified as "Crimean Tatars" with those who reported their ethnicity as "Tatars" in the 2014 census, acknowledging the likely overlap between these categories in the specific context of Crimea.

[4] A simple spatial aggregation at the district level may lead to Modifiable Areal Unit Problem (MAUP).

[5] We provide further details in the codebook.

[6] We exclude the variable on human right reports due to multicollinearity issues with *int_awareness*.

[7] We provide full regression tables in the Suppl. Material.