



The Anatomy of a Russian foreign agent



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Friday is the favourite day of the week for many people. It also seems to be the favourite day of the week for the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation. Almost every Friday, the Ministry replenishes the list(registry) of foreign agents and does it not strictly within the framework of the law, but at its own discretion, choosing those who are “disloyal” to the Russian government, often those who speak out against the war in Ukraine. Both organizations and individuals fill the list.

I’ve decided to analyze the Russian list of foreign agents to find common patterns and maybe interesting peculiarities.

Data source: Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation (minjust.gov.ru) — accessible only with a Russian VPN.

The Russian version of the article is here.

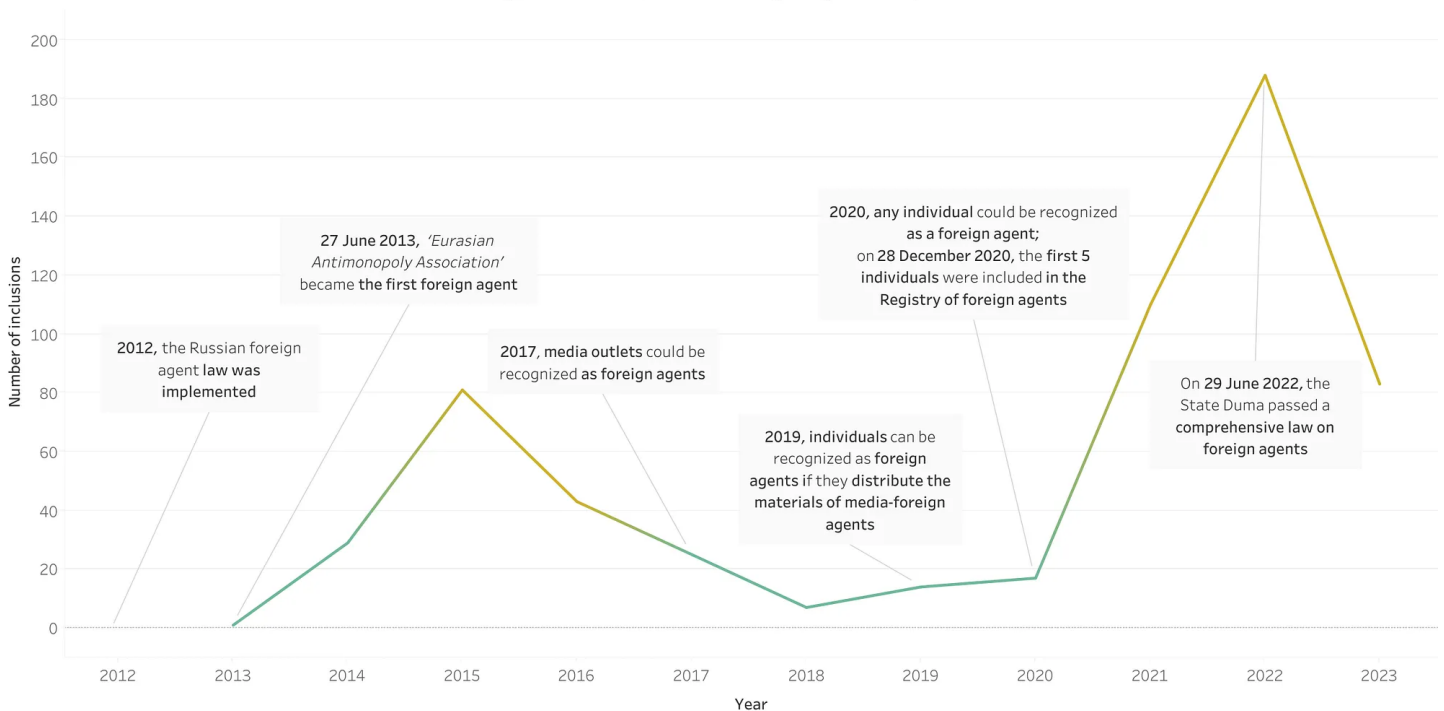


Photo by [Random Institute](#) on [Unsplash](#)

A Bit of History

The Russian Foreign Agents Law has been a topic of controversy and debate since it was introduced in 2012. The law requires non-governmental organizations that receive funding from foreign sources and engage in “political activities” to register as “foreign agents.” Critics argue that the law is a tool for suppressing dissent and stifling civil society, while the government argues that it is necessary to protect Russia from outside interference. The law has been used to target a wide range of organizations, from human rights groups to media outlets, and has been the subject of legal challenges both within Russia and internationally.

History of the Russian foreign agent law through the number of foreign agents by Years



Initially, the law applied only to organizations. The first organization which was included in the list of foreign agents is 'Eurasian Antimonopoly Association', the date of inclusion is 27 June 2013.

In 2017, the legislation introduced the foreign agent status for media.

In 2019, the Russian State Duma passed a law that allows individuals who disseminate materials from media-foreign agents or participate in their creation, with financial support from abroad, to be treated similarly to media organizations acting as foreign agents.

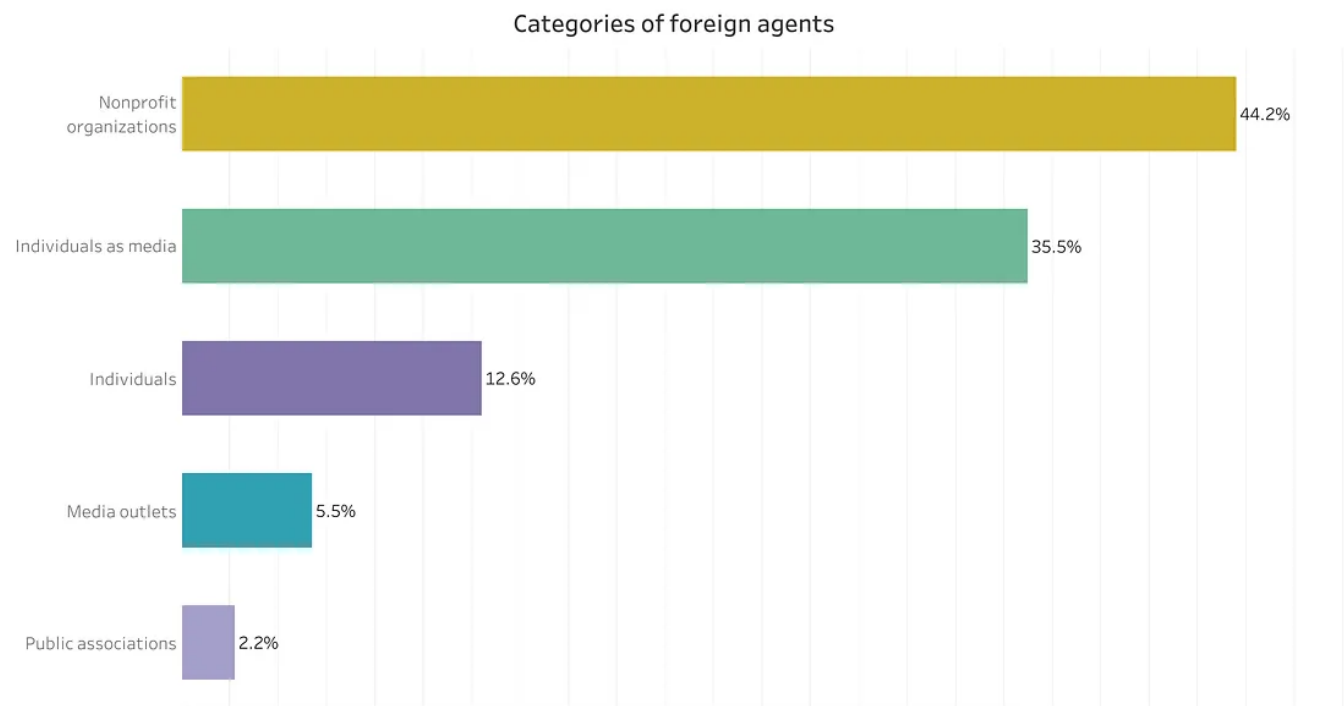
Starting from 2020 onwards, it became permissible to recognize any individuals (not only those who are equated to media) and unregistered public associations as foreign agents.

On 28 December 2020, individuals were included in the list for the first time. This group consisted of five people: human rights activist Lev Ponomarev, artist Daria Apakhonchich, journalists Denis Kamalyagin, Sergei Markelov and Lyudmila Savtsikaya.

On 29 June 2022, the State Duma passed a comprehensive law on foreign agents. Previously, there were four registries for “foreign agents”:

- 1. For non-profit organizations
- 2. For unregistered public associations
- 3. For media outlets
- 4. For individuals

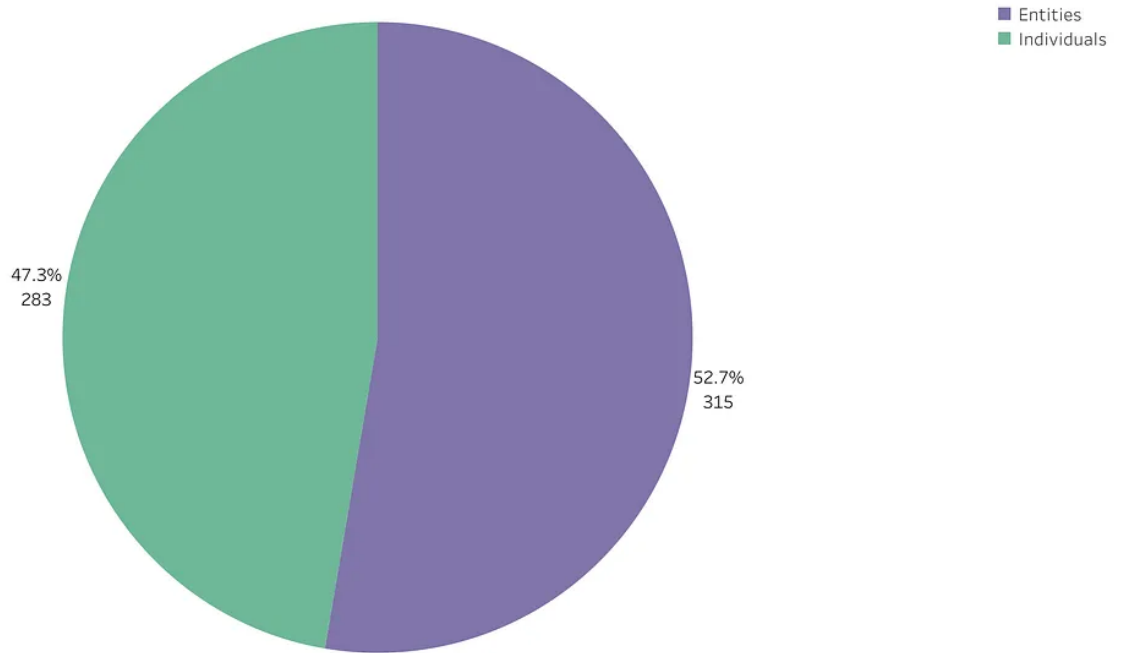
Prior to the implementation of the comprehensive law, the distribution among the aforementioned types of foreign agents unfolded as follows (individuals-media outlets are classified separately because they were included in the registry under a distinct article):



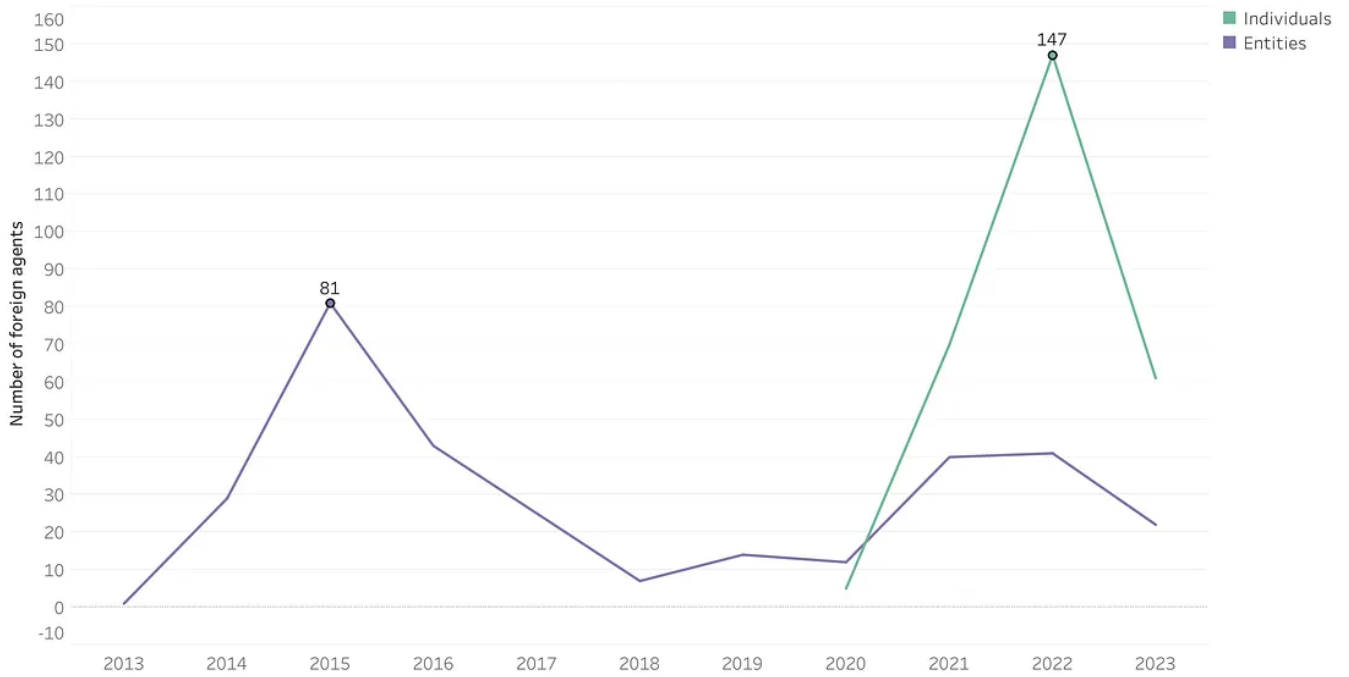
General numbers and trends

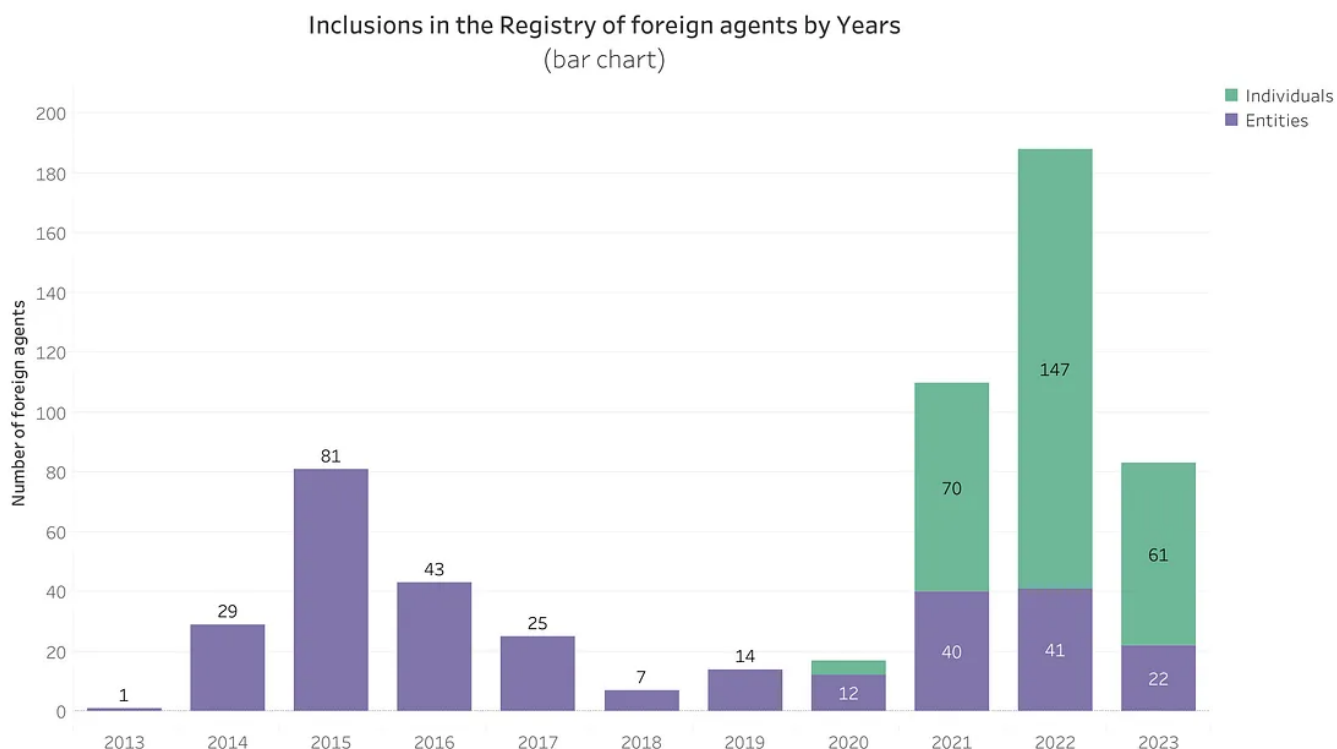
As of 25 May 2023, 598 foreign agents are included in the registry. There are a few more organizations than individuals, however, considering the trend of an increasing number of individuals being recognized as foreign agents, this ratio may change.

Individuals vs Organizations



Inclusions in the Registry of foreign agents by Years
(line chart)





Starting in 2021, the number of individuals included in the registry significantly exceeds the number of legal entities.

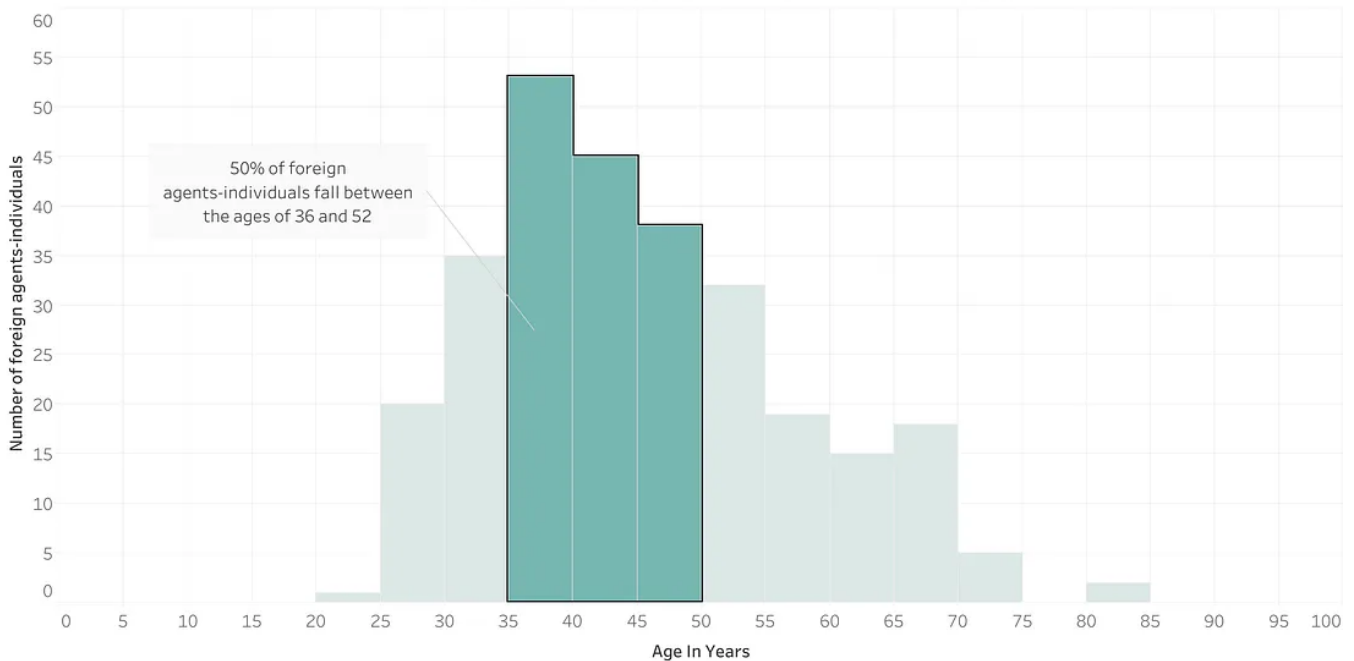
The number of foreign agents-individuals by years:

- In 2020, there were 5 out of 17 (29%).
- In 2021, there were 70 out of 110 (64%).
- In 2022, there were 147 out of 188 (78%).
- As of 25 May 2023, there are 61 out of 83 (73%).

As we can see, the share of individuals is growing every year.

Demographic characteristics and professional occupations

What is the most common age for foreign agents-individuals?



The youngest foreign agent is 24 years old Elena Skvortsova.

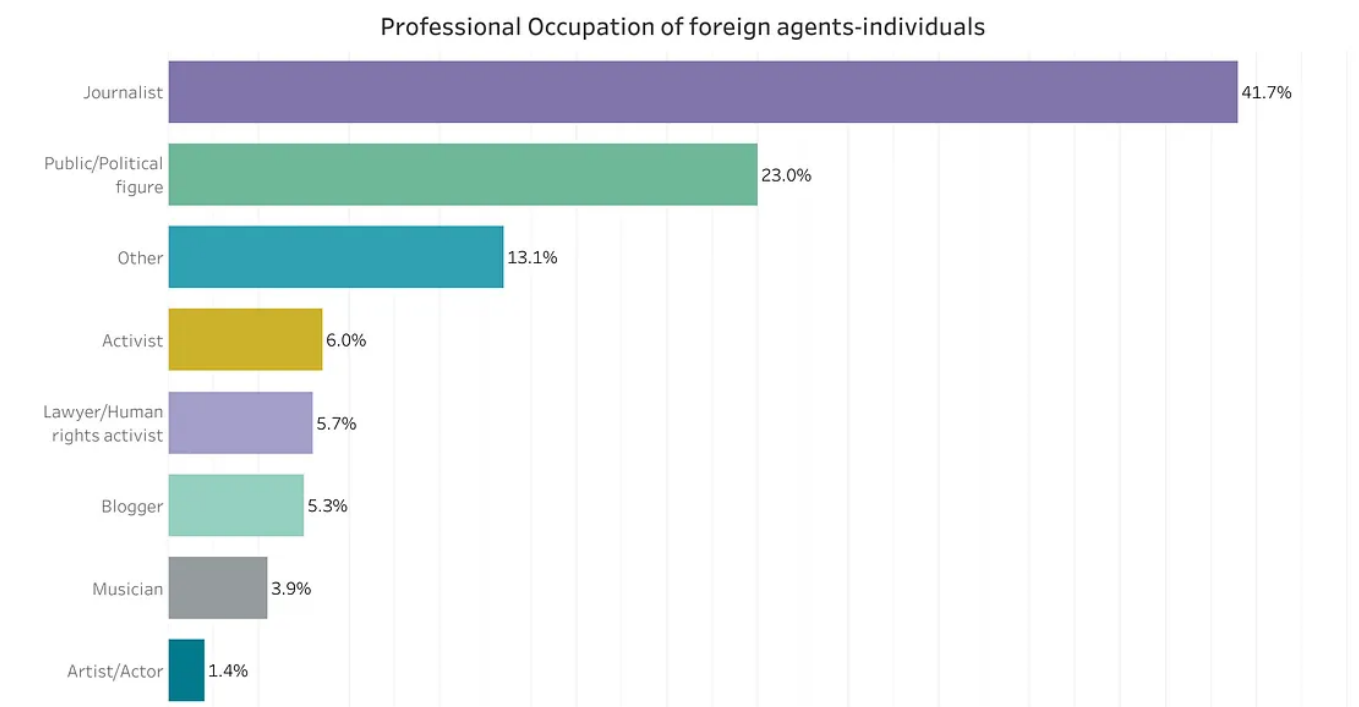
The oldest foreign agents are 81 years old Lev Ponomarev and Svetlana Ganushkina.

The average age of a foreign agent-individual is 44 years old. 50% of individual foreign agents fall between the ages of 36 and 52.

68% of foreign agents are male, while 32% are female.

The most popular professions among foreign agents-individuals are journalist (41.7%) and public/political figure (23%). The list also includes human rights activists, bloggers, scientists, writers, musicians, entrepreneurs, and representatives of other professions.

The most peculiar case is the inclusion of Ekaterina Bosov, the widow of entrepreneur Dmitry Bosov, in the list of foreign agents. She was included in the registry presumably due to an interview she gave to the Facta.Media portal. In the interview, Ekaterina expressed doubts about her husband's suicide and suggested that he may have been "eliminated by special services" due to his refusal to sell his business at a low price. It is also mentioned in the interview that Ekaterina had been participating in protests in support of democratic processes in Russia since her student days and that the "special operation" in Ukraine was the "last straw" for her. Ekaterina claims that the interview is fake.

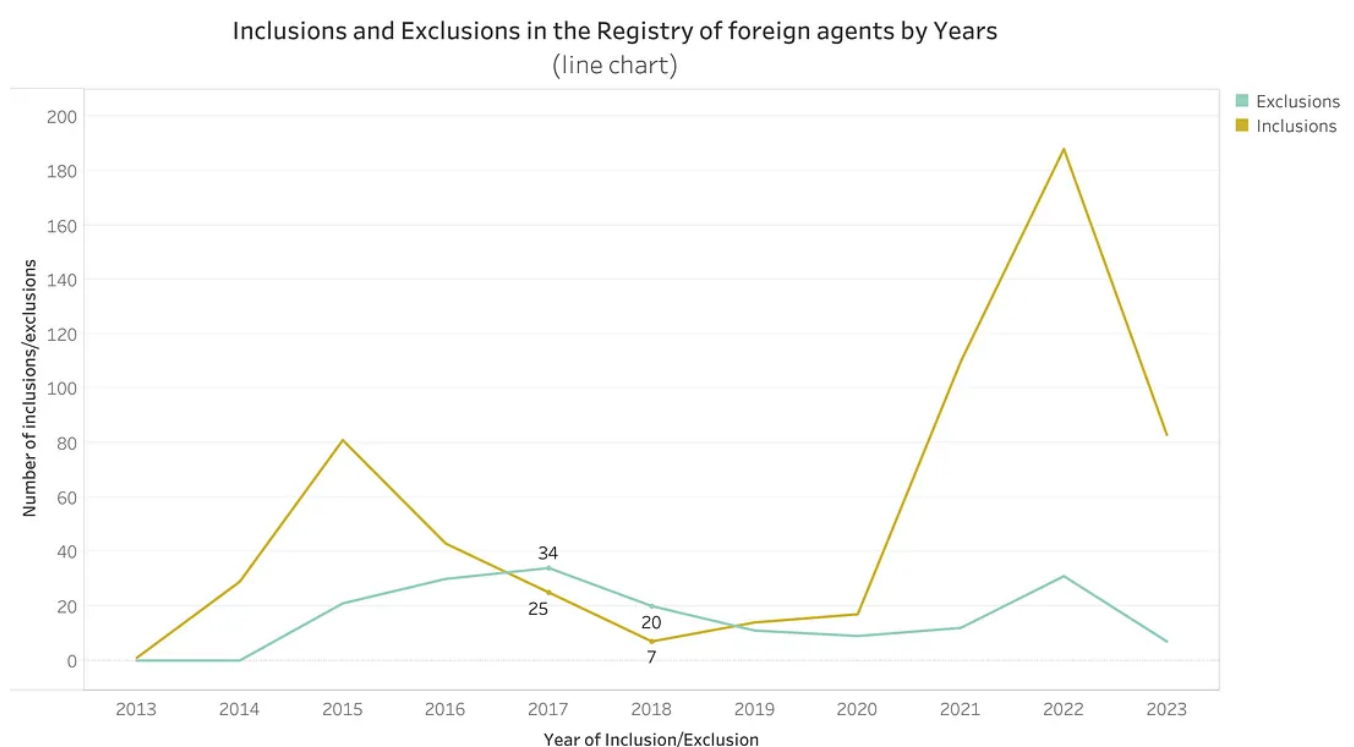


Thus, the average foreign agent-individual is a 44-year-old male journalist, or, more broadly, a male journalist or public/political figure between the ages of 36 and 52.

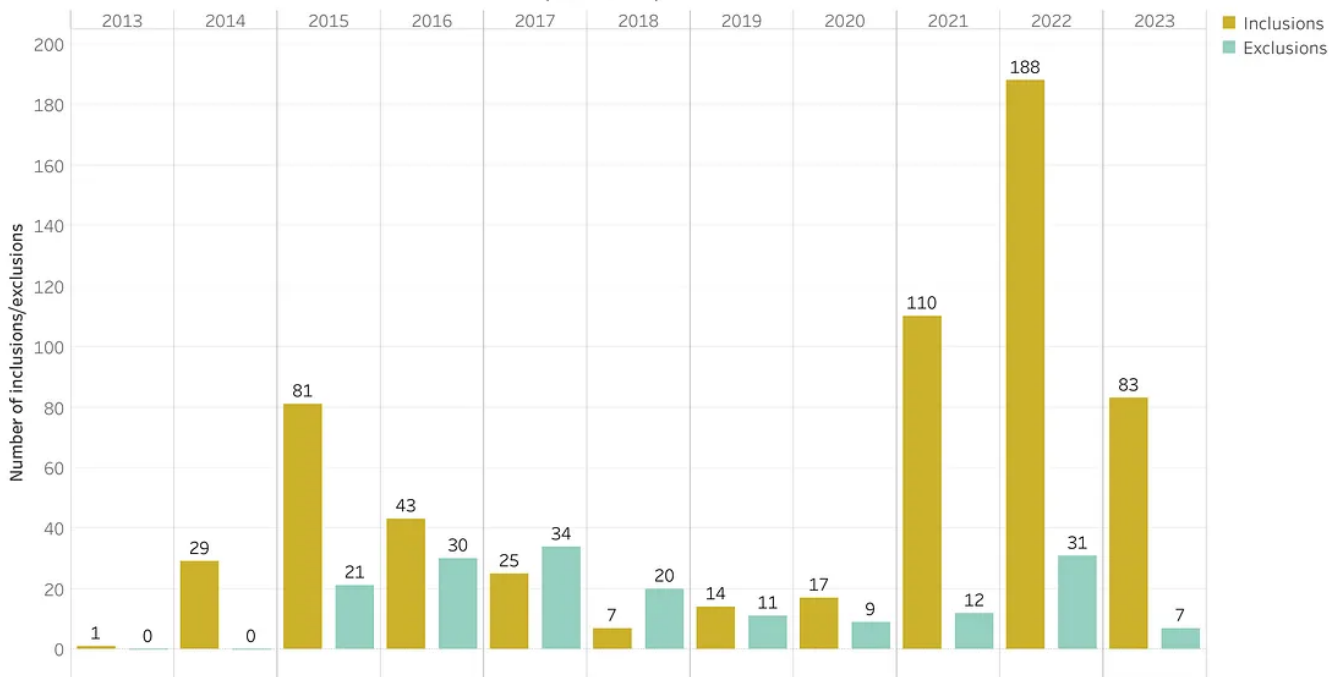
Not only inclusions but also exclusions

Individuals and organizations are not only included in the registry of foreign agents but also excluded from it. 175 foreign agents out of 598 (29%) have been removed from the list.

In 2017 and 2018, there were even more exclusions than inclusions.



Inclusions and Exclusions in the Registry of foreign agents by Years
(bar chart)



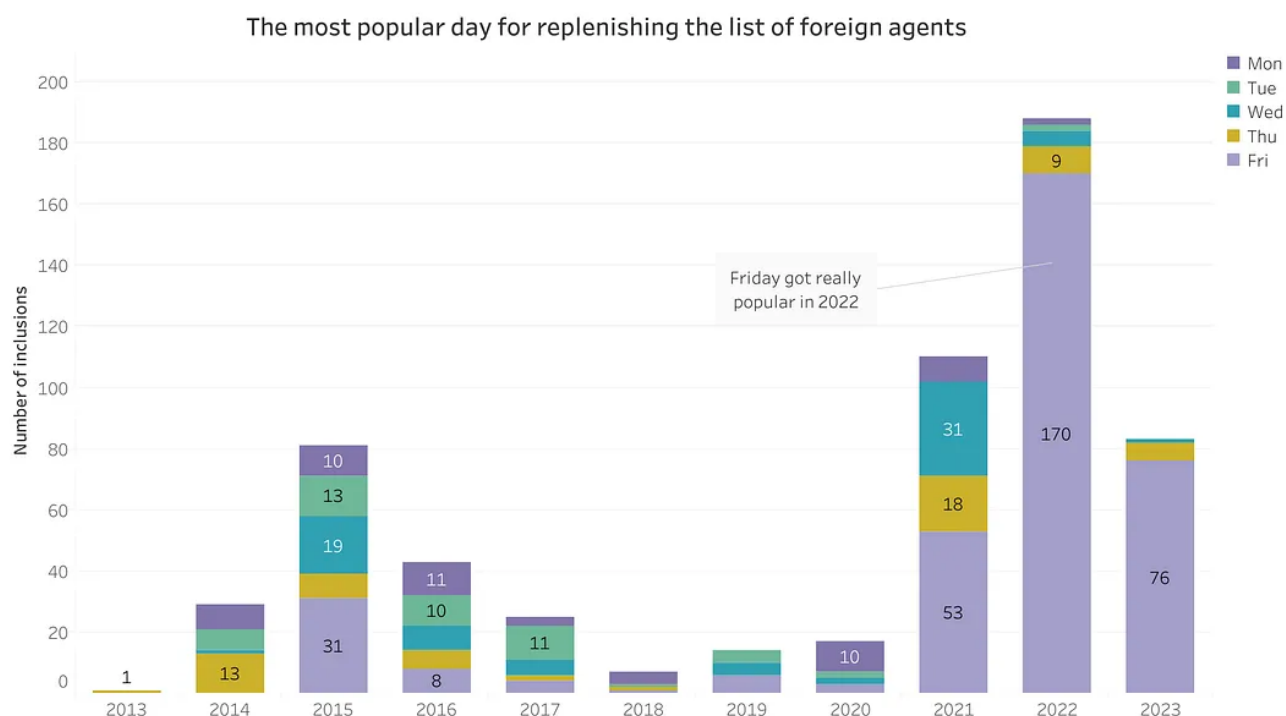
Who is excluded?

- Mostly organizations: 165 out of 175 excluded agents (94%) are organizations.
- 9 out of the 10 individuals excluded from the registry are coordinators of "Golos" and all of them were included in the registry on the same day. The 10th excluded individual is Vladimir Voronov, a 'Radio Liberty' journalist.
- Vitaliy Kovin, the coordinator of the Perm office of the "Golos" movement, was included in the registry twice. Firstly, he was declared a foreign agent on 29 September 2021, but excluded from the list on 5 October 2022. Just one and a half months later, on 25 November 2022, he was included in the registry again.
- The fastest exclusion time is 2 months (49 days) — the Omsk City Public Organization "Photo Club 'So-bytie' ('Event')" (included on 28 October 2015, excluded on 16 December 2015).
- The longest exclusion time was nearly 8 years for the Private Institution in St. Petersburg for Administrative Support of the Implementation of Programs and Projects of the Council of Ministers of the Northern Countries (included on 20 January 2015, excluded on 6 December 2022).
- The average exclusion time is 2 years.

Has Friday always been the most popular day?

Friday became the most popular day for foreign agents' declaration in 2015 but with a narrow win. In 2016, it yielded the top spot to Monday, and in 2017 to Tuesday. However, starting in 2021, Friday has become an absolute favourite for the Ministry of Justice to replenish the “foreign agents” list.

59% of all foreign agents were included in the registry on Friday.



Conclusions

The results of this study have primarily entertainment value. They cannot be used to predict who will become a foreign agent next Friday. For instance, the finding that 50% of foreign agents-individuals fall between the ages of 36 and 52 does not mean that people within that age range are more likely to be at risk. Age is not a direct cause for inclusion but rather a reflection of the higher political and social activity among individuals in that age group compared to other age groups. Nevertheless, here are the key findings and observations from this study:

- Until 2020, individuals were not included in the registry of foreign agents. Starting in 2021, the number of individuals included in the registry has significantly exceeded the number of organizations. In 2022, the number of individuals included in the registry accounted for 78% of the total number of agents included in the registry.
- The most popular professions among foreign agents-individuals are journalist (41.7%) and public/political figure (23%). The list also includes human rights

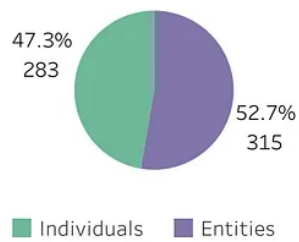
activists, bloggers, scientists, writers, musicians, entrepreneurs, and representatives of other professions.

- The average foreign agent-individual is a 44-year-old male journalist, or, more broadly, a male journalist or public/political figure between the ages of 36 and 52.
- The youngest foreign agent is 24 years old Elena Skvortsova. The oldest foreign agents are 81 years old Lev Ponomarev and Svetlana Ganushkina.
- 68% of foreign agents-individuals are males, and 32% are females.
- Individuals and organizations are not only included in the registry of foreign agents but also excluded from it. 175 foreign agents out of 598 (29%) have been removed from the list. In 2017 and 2018, there were even more exclusions than inclusions. Individuals are almost not excluded: 165 out of 175 excluded agents (94%) are organizations.
- Vitaly Kovin, the coordinator of the Perm representative office of the 'Golos' movement, was included in the registry twice: the first time he was included on 29 September 2021, but on 5 October 2022 he was excluded; after a month and a half, on 25 November 2022 he was included in the registry again.
- 59% of all foreign agents were included in the registry on Friday.

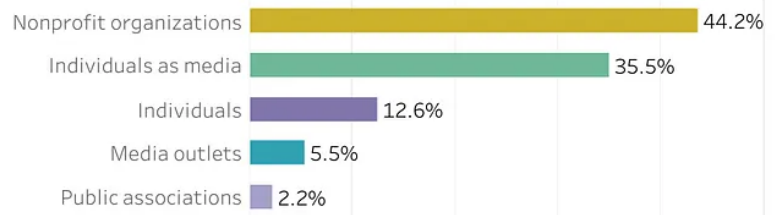
Here is the dashboard with the key figures

Russian Foreign Agents

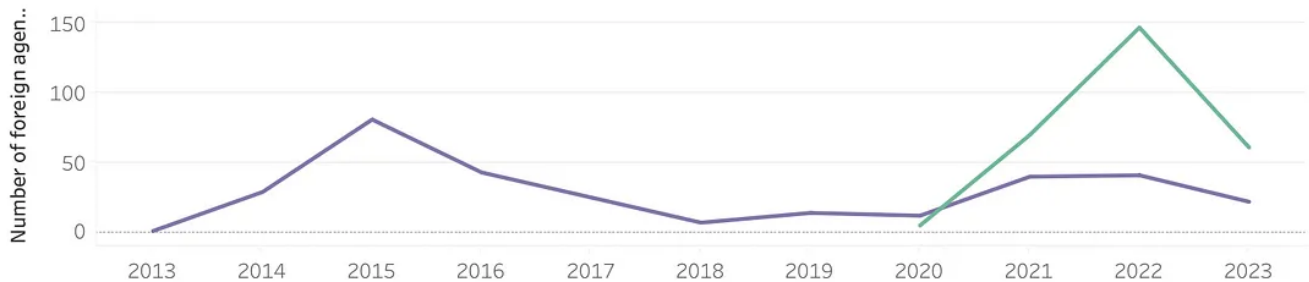
Individuals vs Organizations



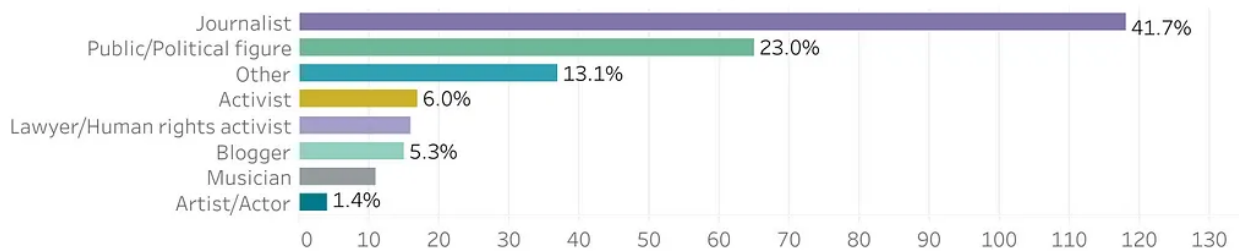
Categories of foreign agents



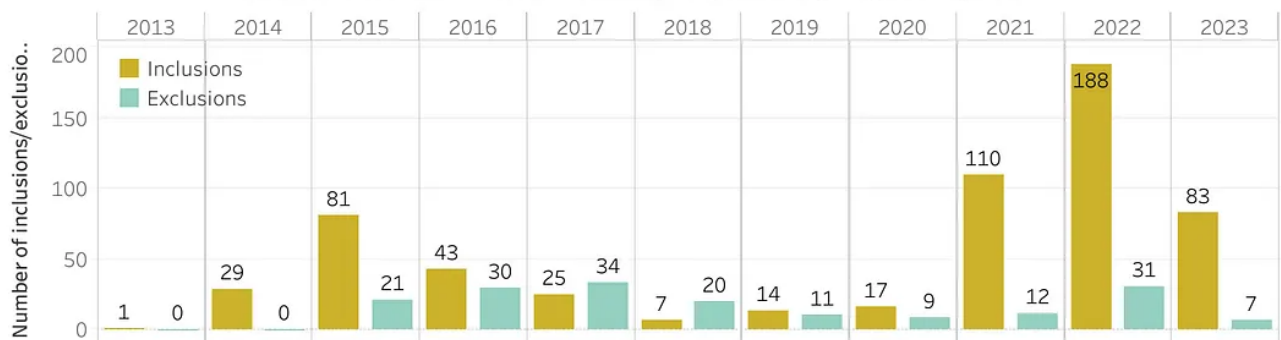
Inclusions in the Registry of foreign agents by Years (line chart)



Professional Occupation of foreign agents-individuals



Inclusions and Exclusions in the Registry of foreign agents by Years



The most popular day for replenishing the list of foreign agents

