RUSSIAN OPERATIONS AGAINST EUROPE SINCE THE 2022 INVASION OF UKRAINE

Over the past three years, Russia has conducted a covert campaign of sabotage and subversion against Ukraine's European allies. While specific incidents have been reported, there has been no comprehensive overview of Russia's actions against Europe. This project fills that gap and informs the public debate on how far Moscow appears willing to go to undermine European support for Ukraine.

How to cite:
Bart Schuurman, 'Russian operations against Europe since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine', (The Hague: Leiden University, 2025).

Our overview focuses on the physical domain, excluding cyberattacks unless they had a physical effect (e.g., sabotage). While we have carefully compiled the data, omissions and mistakes are inevitable due to the challenges of attribution. We have erred on the side of caution, only including incidents where Russia was publicly identified by the authorities or members of government as the likely perpetrator, or when patterns of activity suggest as much.

Several findings stand out. First, the number of operations targeting European countries has sharply increased since Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Figure 1). Second, these operations have grown more severe over time, evolving toward more disruptive tactics, such as (attempted) assassinations (Figure 2). This shift is also reflected in the targets of Russian operations, which in 2024 extended to civil aviation, alongside politicians, military and weapons facilities, and energy and communications infrastructure (Figure 3). Third, the geographic reach of these actions has extended westward each year, with Germany and France emerging as priority targets in 2024 (Figure 5).

While Russian operations have several immediate objectives (Figure 4), two overarching goals stand out; (1) undermining European support for Ukraine, and (2) signaling the extent of destruction Russia is willing to cause to achieve this. Our overview suggests what such escalation could look like; significant damage to European energy and telecommunications infrastructure, terrorist attacks against civil aviation, and threats to public utilities that could endanger thousands. Hopefully, our work will serve as a wake-up call—urging a more realistic assessment of the Russian threat and further emphasizing the need for a unified European response.

RUSSIAN OPERATIONS AGAINST EUROPE

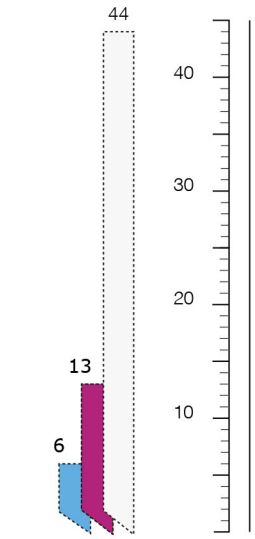


FIGURE 1

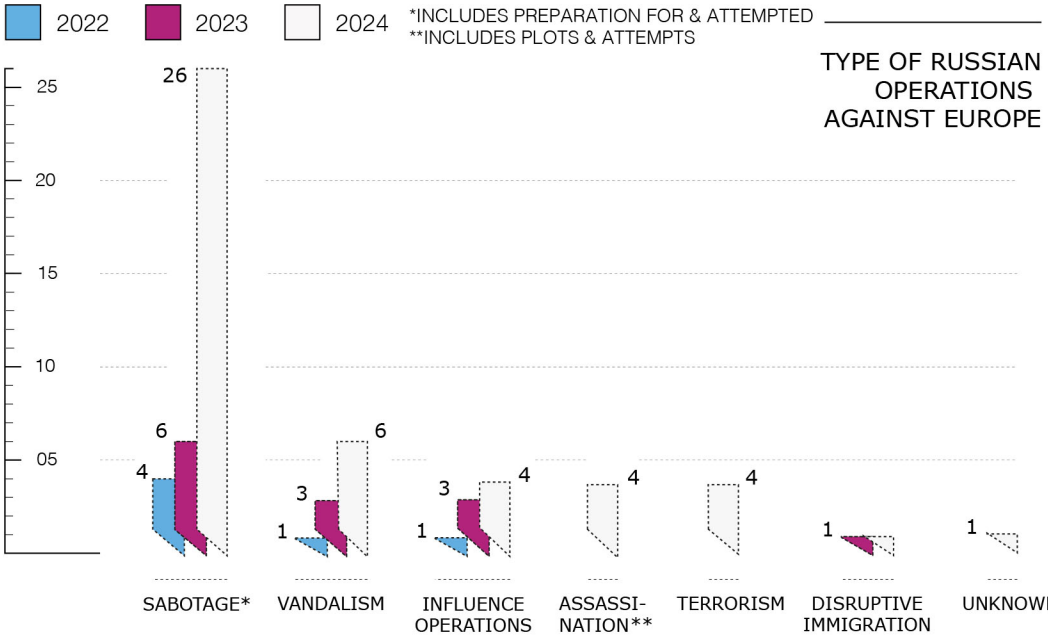


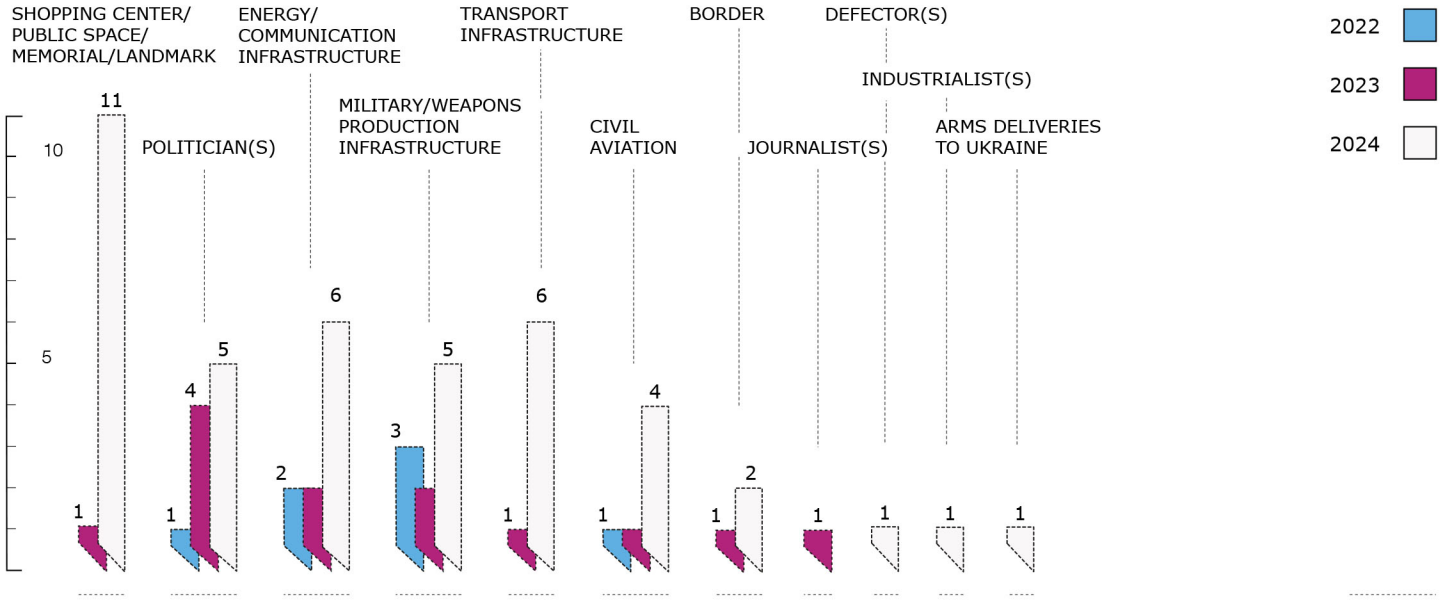
FIGURE 2

CC BY-SA 4.0
Design by: Formae Works
Dataset Repository: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/TQ0FMQ
Project Website: https://bewakenenbeveiligen.universiteitleiden.nl/about

Bart Schuurman, Professor of Terrorism and Political Violence, Leiden University. Dion Jordens and Stijn Willem van 't Land assisted with data collection and validation.This project was made possible by subsidy #3985535, awarded by the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security in June 2022.

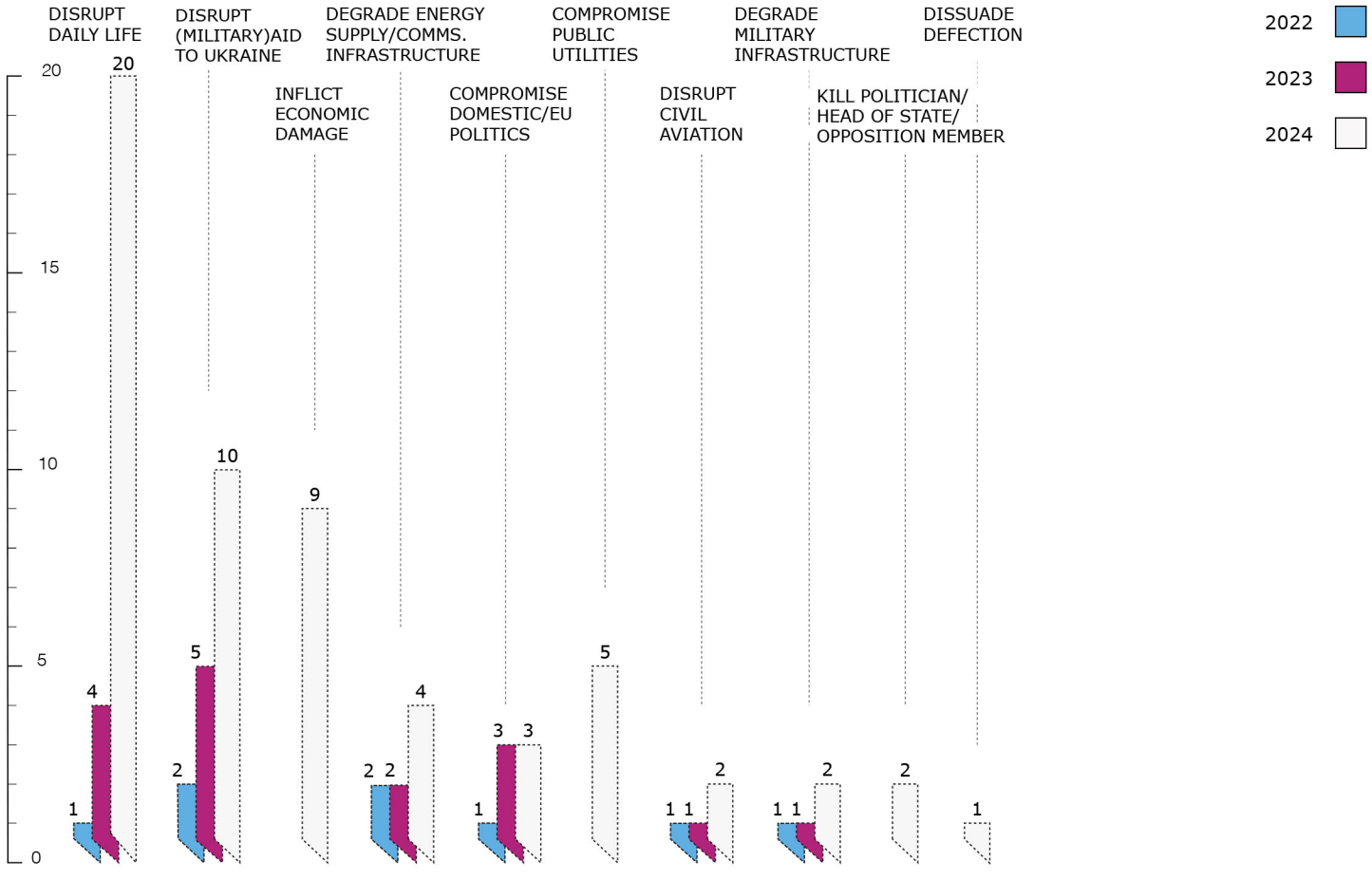
Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

TARGETS & GOALS OF RUSSIAN OPERATIONS AGAINST EUROPE



SPECIFIC TARGETS OF RUSSIAN OPERATIONS AGAINST EUROPE

FIGURE 3



APPARENT GOALS OF RUSSIAN OPERATIONS AGAINST EUROPE

FIGURE 4

CC BY-SA 4.0
Design by: Formae Works
Dataset Repository: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/TQ0FMQ
Project Website: https://bewakenenbeveiligen.universiteitleiden.nl/about

Bart Schuurman, Professor of Terrorism and Political Violence, Leiden University. Dion Jordens and Stijn Willem van 't Land assisted with data collection and validation.This project was made possible by subsidy #3985535, awarded by the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security in June 2022.

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

LOCATIONS TARGETED BY RUSSIAN OPERATIONS AGAINST EUROPE PER YEAR

GEOGRAPHIC EXTENT OF OPERATIONS

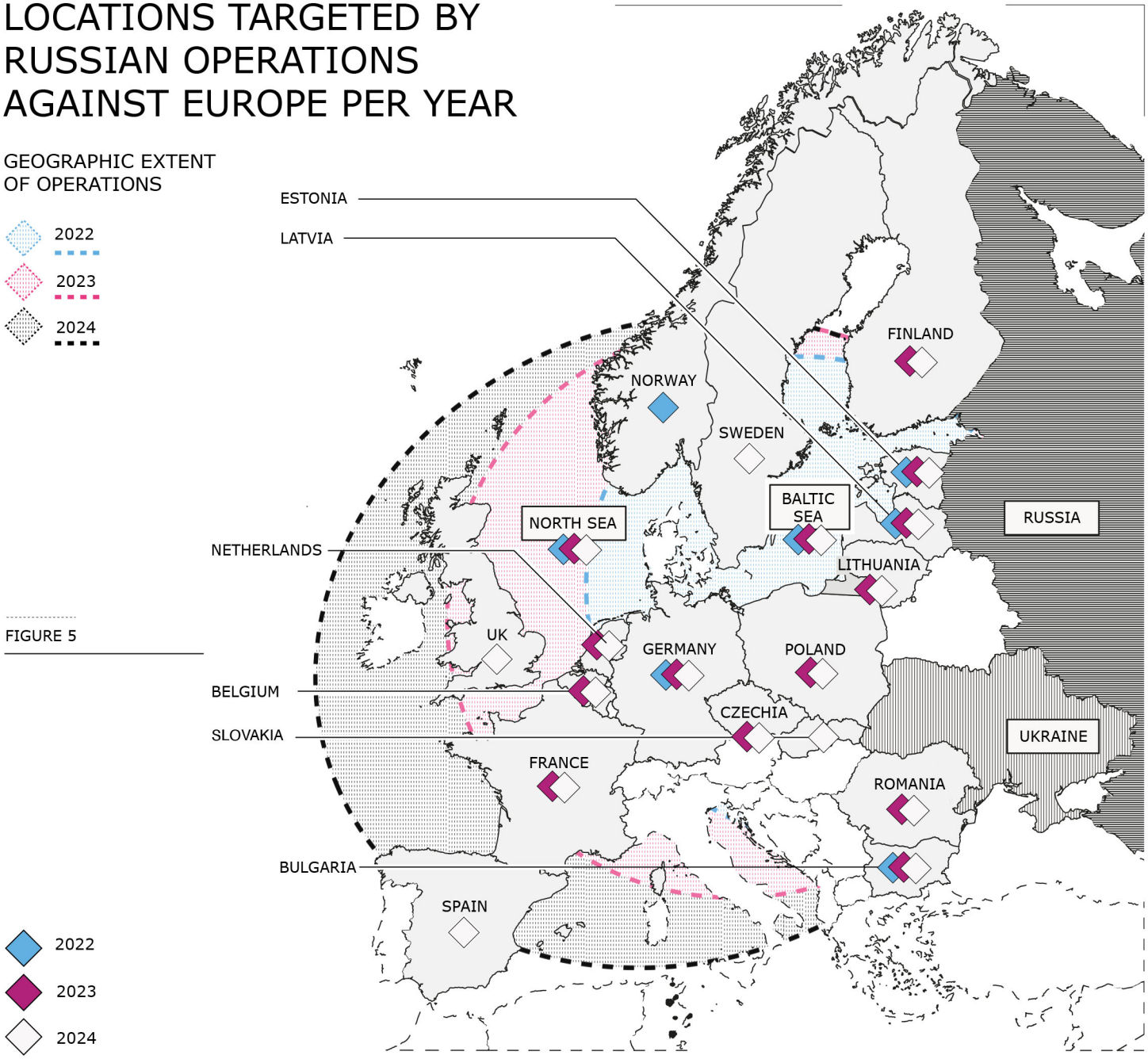
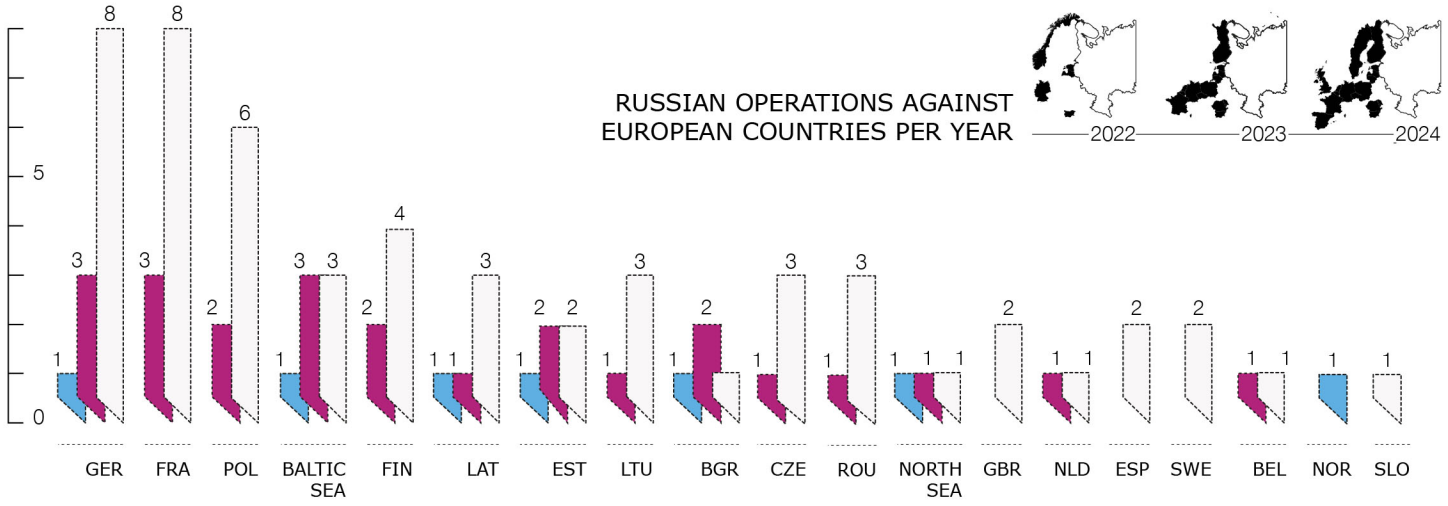


FIGURE 5



CC BY-SA 4.0
Design by: Formae Works
Dataset Repository: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/TQ0FMQ
Project Website: https://bewakenenbeveiligen.universiteitleiden.nl/about

Bart Schuurman, Professor of Terrorism and Political Violence, Leiden University. Dion Jordens and Stijn Willem van 't Land assisted with data collection and validation.This project was made possible by subsidy #3985535, awarded by the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security in June 2022.

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands