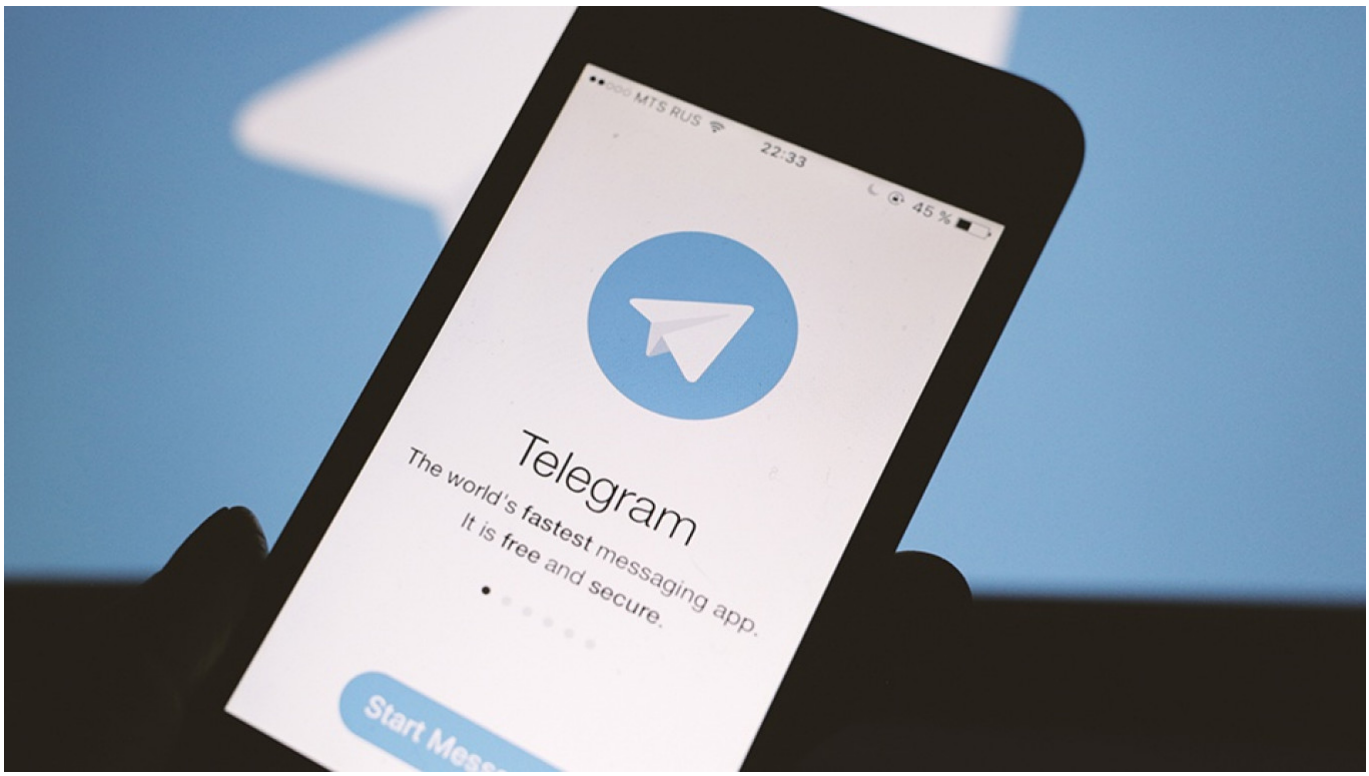
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Russian Man Sentenced for 'Extremist' Social Media Posts

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Tatyana Flegontova / TASS

A Russian taxi driver has reportedly been jailed for extremist social media posts just as federal lawmakers take initial steps to minimize charges solely for violent or threatening speech.

Russians are increasingly receiving prison sentences for their social media activity under anti-extremist legislation, with convictions tripling over the past five years. Civil society groups have accused the government of misusing the charge.

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Kaliningrad resident Alexander Petrovsky, 35, was sentenced to two years in a penal colony for posts inciting acts of terrorism, his lawyer Rostislav Kulikov told the city's New Kaliningrad news website.

“He took the sentence stoically,” Kulikov said Tuesday, noting that Petrovsky had denied his guilt.

Kulikov argued that his client’s audio posts on the Telegram messaging app were taken out of context.

Sentences like Petrovsky's could become less common. His sentence was handed down only weeks before Russian lawmakers submitted a bill seeking to amend the criminal code’s approach to inciteful social media posts.

“It should be acknowledged that the deficiency in Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code could lead to mass errors in the future,” the proposal to change the criminal code reads, describing the law’s use as “excessively repressive.”

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