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Russian Woman Reportedly Faces 6 Years in Prison for Insulting Memes

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Maria Frolova / Vkontakte

A woman in Siberia reportedly faces up to six years in prison on extremism charges for posting memes on social media deemed "insulting" by Russian investigators, part of a growing trend of Russians being punished for online activity.

Internet freedom advocates decry what they call skyrocketing government censorship under Article 282 of the Criminal Code, which targets hate speech. Russia's Supreme Court estimated that convictions under the extremism charge more than tripled between 2012 and 2017.

Maria Motuznaya, 23, tweeted Monday that a team of investigators had raided her apartment in early May, confiscated her computer and phone and accused her of posting offensive images on the VKontakte social network, including satirical pictures of priests and Jesus Christ.

A scanned page of what Motuznaya said was a police file described one of her captions as "containing linguistic signs of the white race's superiority over the black race."

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"I was told that I was offending people by storing the images and that I should confess my crime," Motuznaya wrote, saying she was later threatened with incarceration.

Her trial on two charges of hate speech and extremism, which carry a combined sentence of 6 years, has been set for Aug. 6, according to a court ruling that she attached to her tweet.

Motuznaya said she was inspired to "come out" with her story on social media after reading a blog post about a prison torture case that has rocked Russia over the past week.

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