

Explainer: Meta is an 'Extremist Organization.' What Does That Mean for Russians?

What actions constitute a violation of the new Russian law?

March 25, 2022



Book Catalog (CC BY 2.0)

The crackdown on social media in Russia has accelerated since President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24. Facebook and Twitter have been [inaccessible](#) in Russia since early March, and Instagram was [blocked](#) in the country a week ago.

As part of this campaign to block social media, on Monday a Russian court [banned](#) Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Instagram, and Whatsapp, as "extremist."

The Russian authorities have accused U.S. tech giant Meta of permitting "Russophobia" after it had announced on March 10 that the platforms would allow statements like "death to Russian invaders" but not supposedly credible threats against civilians.

What is “extremism”?

According to Russian law, extremism is the public justification of terrorism, incitement of social, racial, national, or religious discord, such as the use of Nazi attributes or symbols, and so on.

Can regular Russians use Facebook and Instagram?

It is unclear for now whether social media users will be punished if they continue to use Instagram and Facebook.

From a legal standpoint, any user might be considered a member of an extremist organization, which is punishable by up to [six years](#) in prison. However, both the [prosecutor](#)'s office and the Russian censorship agency [Roskomnadzor](#) said that regular users will not be indicted.

However, at least one human rights lawyer disagrees. Pavel Chikov [said](#) neither the court nor the prosecutor could guarantee the safety of Facebook or Instagram users since they can also be prosecuted for displaying Meta symbols. This could become grounds for administrative charges and up to 15 days in jail.

What are Russian social media posters forbidden from doing?

Starting March 21 Russian users cannot buy advertisements on Instagram and Facebook. This could be considered financing an extremist organization and would be punishable by a fine of almost \$3,000 or eight years in prison.

Pavel Chikov [suggests](#) that trading Meta shares may also qualify as financing extremist activity and might be punishable in the same manner.

Additionally, Russian users also cannot show social media logos anywhere, including on their old posts, said civil rights Net Freedom Projects. Anyone posting links to their Instagram and Facebook accounts could be accused of a public demonstration of extremist symbols which could lead to up to 15 days in jail.

Moreover, Russian citizens and media must state that Meta is an ‘extremist organization’ when they mention the organization. This rule will go into effect after Meta’s appeal in court and does not apply to mentioning Meta’s flagship apps, Instagram and Facebook.

What else is punishable?

In theory, Russian authorities can prosecute employees of Meta Platforms Inc. as ‘members of an extremist organization.’

However, to prosecute all of Meta's employees and shareholders is difficult, says specialists at Net Freedoms Project. “If it happens, it will most likely be selective,” they [write](#).

Unlike most criminal cases opened against the opposition in Russia, in the case of Meta authorities can put a person on the international wanted list. This would apply even to people living abroad.

In the past Russia banned groups such as the Taliban and ISIS as "extremist" but later expanded the list to include Jehovah's Witnesses and jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation.

Many Russians are afraid that using Facebook, Instagram, or working for them could lead to the kinds of jail terms many former Navalny associates faced. Net Freedoms Project notes that Meta is a commercial organization, so programmers face lower risks than Navalny's supporters.

“But the disposition of the criminal article also allows for such a development. To understand more precisely, we will have to look at how court practice develops,” the organization [concludes](#).

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/25/explainer-meta-is-an-extremist-organization-what-does-that-mean-for-russians-a77074>