

# Pranks and propaganda: Russian laws against ‘fake news’ target Ukrainians and the opposition, not pro-Putin pranksters | The Conversation

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When they launched their war on Ukraine in late February 2022, Russian authorities also unleashed an all-out assault on dissent at home. Within weeks, the Kremlin blocked access to nearly all remaining critical media outlets as well as to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

As part of the communication crackdown, the Russian parliament – the State Duma – passed draconian laws to limit speech relating to the Russian-Ukrainian war, laws that lawmakers deemed necessary to fight against fake news. In its first move, in early March, the legislature unanimously criminalized “public dissemination of false information under the guise of truthful messages” about the Russian army. Sentences for violating the law extended up to 15 years in prison.

Later that month, Russian lawmakers expanded the law’s application to include false information about the work of all officials serving abroad, including the National Guard troops, the Federal Security Service or any other state organs involved in the Ukrainian campaign.

The combination of the law’s intentional vagueness and severity is meant to stifle criticism of the Russian invasion. The “fake news” laws swiftly devastated media organizations that weren’t already controlled by the state.

[...]

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