

US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism

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Abstract

Several alternative social media platforms have emerged in response to perceptions that mainstream platforms are censoring traditional conservative ideologies. However, many of these alternative social media platforms have evolved to be outlets for hate speech and violent extremism. This study examines hate-based channels on Telegram from a US perspective. While Telegram has often been studied in relation to ISIS, less is known about its usage by US extremist users and movements. The authors used OSINT and observational methods on a sample of 125 Telegram channels containing hate speech and violent extremist content from far-right and far-left perspectives. The authors hypothesized that there would be a greater and growing presence of far-right activity compared to far-left activity due to current migration trends away from mainstream social media by the far-right. The authors also sought to observe the presence of disinformation campaigns, conspiracy theories, and accelerationism on Telegram. This study had four major findings: (1) the findings supported the hypothesis that more channels were host to far-right dialogues, yet there were several far-left channels present, (2) 64.8% of the channels grew in size over a one-week period, (3) 47 of the 125 channels were connected to well-known violent extremist movements or hate groups, and (4) QAnon and the COVID-19 pandemic were the most prominent sources of disinformation and conspiracy theories on Telegram. The findings of this study highlight that alternative social media platforms are a growing environment for a range of hateful ideologies and are aiding the spread of disinformation campaigns. This study concludes with a discussion on future strategies to combat the influence of the Internet on radicalization outcomes.

Keywords: accelerationism, alternative media, conspiracy theories, disinformation, Telegram, US domestic extremism.

Introduction

Alternative media is theorized as those sources and platforms that challenge traditional media due to perceptions that the traditional media has become biased, or concealed and distorting the reality of information being disseminated.[1] Alternative media producers, at the core, seek to give a voice to groups who feel marginalized in the political landscape.[2] As a result, the alternative media platforms become a “self-perceived corrective” tool of traditional media and often become biased in nature.[3]

Social media platforms such as BitChute, Gab, Parler, and Telegram were largely created due to grievances felt by conservative users on mainstream platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. A recent report by Vogels, Perrin & Anderson (2020) found that US Republicans feel at an increasing rate, and more so than liberals, that large social media companies are censoring political dialogue.[4] The study found that 69% of Republicans feel that these same companies hold a liberal bias.[5] Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have also undertaken significant efforts to remove users and content that promotes white nationalism, anti-Semitism, neo-Nazism, hate groups, or other alt-right ideologies.[6]

Consequently, conservative social media users have shifted away from mainstream platforms to sites that promote greater free speech policies and do not enforce extensive content removal guidelines.[7] Many US conservative activists, politicians, and celebrities have recently endorsed the migration of their supporters to alternative platforms.[8] For example, a report by Politico found that over the summer of 2020, at least 23 GOP members of Congress had moved to Parler in protest of Twitter takedown policies.[9] California Congressman Devin Nunes has been particularly outspoken about Parler and Rumble, often tweeting to his 1.3 million Twitter followers, encouraging them to move to those spaces.[10] Other influential figures, such as Laura Loomer, who endorsed her own Telegram channel after having content removed on other mainstream sites, have encouraged

users to do the same.[11]

Research shows that online communities can often produce similar characteristics of offline communities—they become strong and increasingly supportive of each other's views.[12] Thus, the spaces become oriented toward that particular community, sharing information on topics that target the interest of the specific audience.[13] Alternative social media platforms enable the building of strong and nearly impenetrable virtual communities that can produce echo chambers of hate speech and violent extremist dialogue that would otherwise be removed by mainstream platforms. Further, de la Brosse, Holt & Haller (2019) argued that research on alternative conservative media is becoming increasingly necessary as there is a growing interdependent relationship between right-wing populist politicians and conservative media sources, which are becoming more professionalized overall.[14] This professionalism and support by politicians can further legitimize biased media sources which are then spread to social media and influence the masses. Continued spread and acceptance of disinformation campaigns, conspiracies, hate, and extremism threaten to de-legitimize and build distrust of mainstream media and democratic institutions.[15]

Telegram specifically has been identified as one of the most influential recruitment and planning tools used by ISIS.[16] However, less is known about Telegram activity and usage by US-based users and movements. Thus, this article seeks to examine the nature of Telegram as an alternative social media platform and outlet for hate speech and violent extremism for far-right movements in the US. With a rise in platform migration and far-right activity globally, the authors hypothesized that far-right activity would be more prominent than far-left on Telegram. Further, it is hypothesized that those channels dedicated to current political trends, such as the election or COVID-19, would be actively attracting new followers. The authors also utilized observational methods to examine the types of communication occurring on the Telegram channels, including disinformation campaigns, conspiracy theories, and accelerationism. It is hypothesized that these themes would be significant facilitators of activity on Telegram, considering current extremist trends and political polarization in the United States.

Literature Review

The Role of the Internet in Radicalization Outcomes

There is scholarly debate over the true effect of the Internet, and specifically social media, on radicalization outcomes. As stated by Conway (2016), no single article, including the one at hand, has the capacity to determine the effect of the Internet on violent extremism and terrorism as a whole. However, this current article attempts to address some of the scholarly concerns about research on the Internet and radicalization presented by previous studies.[17] Particularly, Conway (2016) and Scrivens (2020) noted that in terms of the Internet as a facilitator of radicalization, research has to extend beyond the scope of violent jihadist trends and analyze data across multiple ideologies. Further, researchers must engage in more descriptive and comparative analysis, as opposed to explanatory research. Before scholars can determine *why* the Internet is facilitating radicalization in contemporary terrorism, there needs to be a larger focus on descriptive data that could serve to inform scholars on what type of role the Internet is playing.[18] Scrivens (2020) also contended that much of terrorism research tends to focus on individual-level risk factors and there is a need to step outside this trend to collect more data across different types of frameworks and populations, as well as seek different scopes of studies. While the question of the Internet being a factor of radicalization does influence online users at the individual level, the main question of this study is to take a broader look at what parts of Telegram and what content on Telegram is attractive to a broader audience.

The literature is particularly thin when it comes to engaging with former right-wing extremists' firsthand accounts regarding their radicalization pathways and processes. However, some recent findings have shed light on how former extremists feel about the Internet as a factor in their radicalization process. Research by Koehler (2014) found during in-depth interviews with former right-wing extremists in Germany that they personally

felt that the role of the Internet was the single most important factor in their radicalization process.[19] These firsthand insights are important as they allow researchers to gain an introspective analysis that can only be understood through someone who has radicalized. Similar findings were repeated in a study by Sieckelinck et al. (2019) who interviewed former extremists from Denmark and the Netherlands. The subjects of this study also highlighted the importance of the mass exposure to online propaganda in their radicalization process.[20] Gaudette, Scrivens & Venkatesh (2020) interviewed 10 former right-wing extremists, during which the majority of participants heavily pointed to the important role of the Internet when radicalizing toward violence. They largely acknowledged that the Internet allowed constant and mass exposure to violent extremist content at any time and allowed them to create a community of like-minded individuals.[21] With this type of information in mind, it is important to look more analytically at specific online communities to further understand how each platform can uniquely drive engagement and influence radicalization.

Research across different social media platforms outside of Twitter and Facebook is key to understanding the comparative differences between how different platforms are used.[22] The current article seeks to add to the foundation of understanding how smaller social media platforms may be playing a role in far-right radicalization. Specifically, Telegram can be extremely informational and resourceful for researchers who seek to collect big data, as well as conduct more in-depth analyses of extreme online behavior. By engaging on a smaller platform, the current study also could encourage future research to utilize Telegram, as it is a relatively user-friendly platform with relevant data access.[23] The far-right, in the United States and abroad, is rising in prominence in contemporary politics and everyday society. Factor the rise of the far-right with its long history of Internet usage dating back to the early 1990s when Stormfront was created,[24] it is worthwhile to understand how this particular set of ideologies utilizes the Internet as a modern tool. While this article will not single-handedly explain all the factors as to why specific aspects of Telegram are able to radicalize or engage individuals in extremist content, it can add to the literature about the basic nature of user online experiences on Telegram. By understanding the type of content that is most engaging for users within the far-right community, scholars can begin to understand the foundation of how the Internet is a factor in contemporary radicalization.

Telegram's Role as Alternative Social Media

Initially developed in 2013, Telegram is a cloud-based messaging application accessible by computer, tablet, and mobile device. Telegram offers several options for engagement, including private one-on-one conversations, group chats, and both private and public channels controlled by admins. Telegram does not partake in extensive content takedown policies compared to apps like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, only removing pornographic material and some violent rhetoric on its public channels.[25] Telegram creators boast about the multiplicity of security measures taken to protect user data and conversations, including several encryption software and offers of secret-chats, which automatically self-destruct all content.[26] While the company has maintained a strict stance to not share secret-chat information with any third parties, including government and police officials, it did change its terms of service in 2018.[27] The terms of service update stated that if served with a court order that a user was in fact a terror suspect, the company may release IP addresses and phone numbers.[28]

Mazzoni (2019) determined that there are three main categories of Telegram channels: image channels, news channels, and discussion channels.[29] Image channels often feature video propaganda, memes, and infographics to generally inspire viewers.[30] News channels may often be closed for public discussion, but allow admins to provide real-time updates on current events by providing links to other sources and captions that fit their narrative.[31] The discussion channels are open groups where all can participate in open conversation.[32] The type of channels being utilized is important data to collect to understand how information and hate spread and influence users. Similarly, there is also a range of user types on Telegram. There are many online users who are simply seeking information and passively engaging with the content on the channels.[33] Then, there are two more actively involved groups: 1) those who want to engage more fully with militant and violent groups and the other users on the channels and 2) propagandists who are both seeking information and engaging with other users on channels.[34]

The privacy guidelines continue to attract extreme users across a range of hate-based and violent extremist ideologies that are otherwise being banned from mainstream platforms.[35] Much like the migration of conservative Internet users in the United States to alternative social media, ISIS operatives initiated a strategic shift to less public-facing online spaces to conduct information dissemination—and Telegram became the standard.[36] Research by Shehabat, Mites & Alzoubi (2017) found that increased Telegram communications by ISIS, particularly by spreading propaganda, played a role in an uptick in lone-actor-inspired attacks in Europe between 2015 and 2016.[37] ISIS' 'virtual entrepreneurs' were also responsible for "directing 19 out of the 38 IS-related attacks in Western Europe from 2014 to 2016" by hosting conversations with recruits on alternative social media including Telegram.[38]

Far-right movements have also expanded across Telegram channels, notably spiking after the 2019 Christchurch Attack in New Zealand.[39] Research by the SITE Intelligence Group found that following the Christchurch shootings, far-right channels experienced a 117% increase in membership by October.[40] Further, of the 374 far-right channels identified by SITE Intelligence Group, 80% of them had been formed after the Christchurch attack. Unlike ISIS channels, the far-right channels have been largely public facing, granting access to any users seeking hate-based and violent extremist conversations.[41] Also, unlike the highly organized ISIS networks that have both an online and offline presence, white supremacist networks online are often much more loosely connected and highly decentralized networks.[42] Further, Guhl & Davey (2020) analyzed 208 white supremacist Telegram channels and found that the platform was largely being used to glorify terrorist and past lone-actors, call for violence, spread white supremacist material, and degrade minority groups.[43]

In addition to the security protections being particularly attractive, other research has contended that Telegram has some unique and inherently addictive qualities as well.[44] Telegram chats appeal to individuals who want to engage with like-minded individuals. Research on ISIS-Telegram channels found that recruiters and propagandists can function similarly to a "seller of a product," but in this case the product being a photo, video, link, or other propaganda.[45] With links expiring quickly and channels filling up quickly with discussion, users have to be present and logged on to not miss content or the opportunity to engage with others.[46] Engagement with the content and the group can lead to feelings of fulfillment or being part of a community, influencing the likelihood that vulnerable viewers will keep coming back.[47]

Holbrook (2019) also found that there are different types of material and differences in severity of extremism in terms of media material being disseminated online.[48] Holbrook analyzed the types of media material related to 50 individuals and groups connected to plans or acts of terrorism in the UK between 2004 and 2017. He concluded that the majority of content was ideological in nature, such as religious materials, as opposed to facilitative, such as instructions on how to build an Improvised Explosive Device (IED).[49] While his study analyzed Islamist-inspired extremists and did not specify any specific platforms that the media content was found on, it highlights the importance of understanding the different types of material online and what is most influential. Holbrook defined the material as moderate, fringe, and extreme, suggesting a scaled and a nuanced ecosystem of extreme information being distributed. Further, as suggested by Guhl & Davey (2020), there is evidence of a shift in the organizational paradigm, whereby online connection to even loose extreme-right culture and ideology can be equally influential and inspirational for violence as on-the-ground operations and groups.[50] While most online users may be passively engaging with this content and will never act off-line, increased exposure to pro-terrorist channels and the regular calls for violence made to these large audiences increases the risk that one or more of the viewers may eventually act off-line.[51] With rates of engagement increasing on Telegram, it is timely to understand how Telegram is being used as a tool for furthering hate, radicalization, and potentially influencing off-line violence.

Far-Right and Far-Left Online Communities

The theoretical framework on alternative media suggests that it aims to serve a specific community while at the same time forming an antagonist relationship with traditional media sources.[52] Online communities are formed and strengthened through shared opinions, creating a collective identity that is often strengthened in

the face of intergroup conflict.[53] Online hate is typically targeted toward different social groups.[54] There have been both formal and informal hate groups disseminating hateful speech or ideology online with a variety of targets.[55] Far-right communities largely derive from shared ideals about national identity that justify white privilege and racism.[56] Far-left communities derive from a range of ideals, including opposition to capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism, or support for decentralized forms of government, including anarchy.[57] Far-left ideologies have also included animal rights and environmental extremism.[58]

When discussing far-right and far-left extremist movements, it should be noted that these do not align with traditional scopes of political parties but comprise a fraction of individuals that espouse extreme and sometimes violent beliefs. For the purposes of this article, the authors used the terms “far-right” and “far-left” to identify those individuals and groups who are espousing ideologies that justify hate speech and violence. The terms “conservative” and “traditionally liberal” or “liberal” are used when referring to mainstream political parties that are not extreme or violent in their nature. We often differentiate between hate speech and violent extremist content in the results section, as the two terms imply different levels of extreme thought and speech. While hate speech is pejorative and discriminatory in its manner, it does not justify violence in the same way that violent extremist speech does.[59] Hate speech does not reach the threshold of inciting hostility and violence, while violent extremist speech does.[60]

Both far-right and far-left extremists are similar to one another in that they often hold a simplistic “black-and-white” perception of the world, are overconfident in their judgments, and are less tolerant of out-group opinions.[61] While they are based on similar psychological frameworks, far-right and far-left movements may diverge in the spaces they choose to be active online. Research by Freelon, Marwick & Kreiss (2020) found that popular social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram are most often consumed by hashtag activism movements by traditional liberal activists.[62] Traditional liberal activists are also more likely to take to the streets in protest for very public displays of off-line activity. Conversely, conservative users increasingly feel that their beliefs and rights to free speech are being interfered with by content removal policies on popular platforms.[63] Conservative users feel platforms like Twitter and Instagram remove conservative-leaning content at greater rates than liberal-leaning content.[64] Freelon, Marwick, and Kreiss (2020) also found that conservative activists and the far-right are more likely to manipulate traditional media and migrate to alternative platforms, as well as work with partisan media sources to spread their message.[65] Further Krzysztof Wasilewski (2019) argued that far-right media manipulates traditional liberal language to form an “ethnically exclusive collective memory” that presents a version of history that counters the current social-political state.[66] This collective memory is “exclusive for white Americans leaning toward the alt-right or far-right movement.”[67]

Although many alternative platforms have small followings, some have had a larger influence, reach, and circulation.[68] While public-facing platforms like Twitter attract and allow individuals to counter hateful and violent rhetoric, the same pattern may not hold true for alternative platforms with more privatized channels of dialogue. Alternative platforms are not as public facing, popular, or visible to the majority of Americans. In regard to Telegram, a recent study by Urman & Katz (2020) found that Telegram activity began to proliferate with mass bans of far-right actors on other mainstream social media platforms.[69] This trend isolates the far-right dialogue from the rest of the political discourse, forming an asymmetric polarization online.[70] These trends set the framework for the first hypothesis of this article. As conservative activists ‘social media users traditionally shift to alternative social media more so than liberal users, the authors of this study hypothesized that:

H¹: Due to current grievances, the Telegram channels in this study would largely stem from far-right extremism. While there may be evidence of far-left channels, they may be much harder to access than far-right spaces or may be more prevalent on traditional social media platforms, which is outside the scope of this study.

Disinformation and Conspiracies

Previous studies have also found that the far-right uses disinformation campaigns and conspiracy theories more than the far-left.[71] Social media platforms are used to react to real-world events in a multitude of ways.

Social media can help mobilize support and assistance in the aftermath of tragedy, share truthful information, as well as serve as a platform for the “socially disruptive” to spread misinformation and antagonist commentary. [72] Research on media manipulation by Marwick & Lewis (2017) contended that the far-right has become apt at exploiting vulnerable young men who have an inclination for rebellion and dislike of political correctness in order to spread violent ideologies, create distrust of legitimate media sources, and further help to radicalize individuals.[73] Large and influential Telegram channels can quickly spread false information to hundreds if not thousands of vulnerable followers, thereby increasing the influence that disinformation and conspiracies have on online users.

Conspiracy theories are often developed in response to major events in order to allow people to better accept the unpredictability of these events.[74] Furthermore, conspiracies are more likely to circulate in reaction to government mistrust, weakening institutions, and when groups feel they are excluded from the democratic-process.[75] Presently, the United States and the global community are facing two of the most dangerous and adaptive conspiracy sources and disinformation campaigns in history: the QAnon conspiracy and another referring to the origins and nature of COVID-19. In the wake of these two societal factors, the authors’ second hypothesis in this study regarded the content within the Telegram channels, specifically:

H²: The public-facing Telegram channels the authors could access in this study would not necessarily be used for planning future attacks or specific violent encounters, but would be filled with general dialogue of disinformation and conspiracies, especially considering the current environment in the US. With the 2020 Presidential Election, COVID-19, grievances, real or perceived, over police brutality, gun rights, and race at the forefront of the national conversation, tensions are high, and individuals will use disinformation and conspiracies to not only cope with but also to further their indoctrinated beliefs.

A New “Accelerationism”

The term accelerationism is largely understood as a fringe philosophy relating to Marxist views on capitalism. [76] It is meant to suggest that intensification of capitalism will eventually lead to its collapse. However, the use of the term, being so recently adapted by members of the far-right, has not been studied in depth. In the far-right movement, accelerationism has come to mean that the far-right must increase civil disorder, or accelerate violence and aggression, in order to create further polarization and bring about a societal collapse that fits their agenda.[77] Several high-profile white supremacist perpetrators have used the term in their manifestos and other writings, including Brenton Tarrant, John Earnest, and neo-Nazi James Mason.[78] Accelerationists see violence as a chain reaction that can ignite, or “fan the fire,” creating chaos, collapse, and revolutionary change that promotes white power.[79]

Telegram recently came under scrutiny as Black Lives Matter protests erupted throughout the United States in the summer of 2020. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) warned intelligence officials of a white supremacist Telegram channel that was encouraging its followers to infiltrate and start a “boogaloo” at the protests.[80] Analysis of far-right social media activity reveals that many white supremacists also believe a civil war is inevitable and that individuals should train, arm themselves, and prepare to incite violence.[81] Accelerationism has also expanded out of the COVID-19 pandemic, with some white supremacists accusing Jews and migrants of creating and spreading the virus.[82]

H³: The most extreme users would argue the effectiveness of accelerationist tactics. The authors strove to discern which movements are most embracing of accelerationism.

Methodology

Channel Access

Accessing the virtual spaces which host hate speech and violent extremism on Telegram can initially be challenging. Semenzin & Bainotti (2019) developed two methodological approaches to access channels when studying Telegram: a cross-platform (external) approach and an in-platform (internal) approach.[83] The cross-platform approach uses links from other sites and blogs to enter into Telegram spaces, while the in-platform approach relies on creating a list of topic-related words based on previous literature.[84] Once the list of access words is created, researchers simply use the search bar on Telegram to locate channels relating to the topic and then can use a snowball sampling logic to locate more similar and connected channels.[85] The authors employed the in-platform approach in this study, creating a list of 59 initial keywords. The authors applied the keywords related to far-right and far-left ideologies and movements, as well as focusing on general topics that are popular in the US discourse that could evoke extreme views. These general topics included terms such as “coronavirus,” relevant conspiracy theories such as “QAnon,” racial and religious terminology, and alternative media sites previously studied within the field. In total, 34 of the words related to the far-right, 9 words related to the far-left, and 16 words related to general topics were applied. The full list of access words is available in Appendix A.

Initial search results using the keywords returned 79 channels across a range of extreme ideologies. The authors then extended the database of channels through a snowball technique. Since white supremacist Telegram channels have been found to be highly networked with much of the content being shared from one channel to another, they easily link researchers to more and more channels.[86] The snowball technique gained access to another 46 channels for a total of 125 Telegram channels analyzed in the final data set. The scope of this project was to look at channels relevant to current extremism trends in the United States. The authors determined channels were related to domestic extremism and hate-based ideologies on the basis of a number of factors.

Firstly, channels were included if their names were associated with US-based movements, even if they have grown to have a global presence. For example, several channels contained “Atomwaffen,” “Proud Boys,” and “QAnon” in their channel names. While movements such as Atomwaffen and QAnon have gained global traction, they originated in the United States and the Telegram audience was largely US-based.

Secondly, many channels that did not directly name extremist movements in their titles did so in their channel bios or profile images. For example, a channel titled “The Great Awakening” wrote in their bio “Safe place for all things Q and Trump related,” with several American flags. Their profile picture also depicted the “Where We Go One, We Go All” phrase with the letter “Q,” to represent affiliation with the QAnon conspiracy theory movement.

Thirdly, some channels were connected to movements that did not originate in the United States, such as the racist Skinhead movement. However, channels relating to international movements were included if they hosted conversations or shared symbols relating to the movement’s factions in the United States. For example, one racist Skinhead channel included several memes depicting the US confederate flag, among other American-oriented images.

Lastly, some channels did not elucidate their affiliation to US movements and ideologies so clearly, but that could be determined based on simple analysis of the recent content in the channels. For example, a group called “Great Kingdom of Zombe” was found through snowball techniques but had no clear affiliation to any movements based on its profile description. However, the most recent conversations suggested that the channel was aimed at discussing the Proud Boy movement and was connected with several other Proud Boy-affiliated channels. Several channels were found in this manner, as they had ambiguous titles and bios. However, the channel was clearly dedicated to share hate-based beliefs based on recent dialogue.

Descriptive Data Collection

Using open-source intelligence readily available on the Telegram channels, the authors collected a range of descriptive data from each channel. The channel name, channel function (news, image, or discussion), and follower size were recorded at the time the channel was first located. One of the hypotheses of this study was that Telegram channels would be growing in audience and engagement due to migration away from popular platforms. The authors also recorded the follower size seven days after locating each channel. Although this is a small period, it is useful to gain a preliminary understanding of which channels may be attractive to new followers and understand which channels are producing consistent content, as opposed to channels that may be more dormant.

Secondly, the authors examined each channel for underlying ideologies based on channel names, bio information, as well as recent content. For the purposes of this article, the authors considered ideologies to be the simplistic belief system that each Telegram channel was predominately embracing. The authors broke down the far-right and far-left to better capture the presence of unique belief systems. In total, 13 categories were created: *Alt-Right*; *Anti-Fascist/Far-Left/Anarchist*; *Anti-Government*; *Black Nationalist*; *Cybercrime*; *Eco-Fascist*; *General Far-Right/Hate*; *Glorifying Violent Extremism*; *Neo-Confederate*; *Neo-Nazi*; *Racist Skinhead*; *White Nationalist*; and *White Supremacist*.

Lastly, the authors examined each Telegram channel to determine if they were in connection with specific hate-based or violent extremist movements that are currently operating in the United States. The authors differentiated between ideology and movement affiliation, as the former gives a basic understanding of content on channels, while the latter elucidates in more specificity which known movement may be operating on alternative platforms. While each channel in the data set had ideologies that were driving the conversations, not every channel was connected to any specific movement. Many channels were simply host to general ideologically based hate without propagating the agenda of an established movement. While the QAnon conspiracy following and the “Boogaloo bois” have not been officially named violent extremist groups, their ideologies have been driving the creation of violent extremist propaganda and raising security concerns in recent months. Therefore, QAnon and Boogaloo were both included as respective categories. Other movements found were Atomwaffen, Proud Boys, Antifa, Patriot Front, Skinhead Nation, National Alliance, League of the South, National Vanguard, New Black Panther Party, the NSDAP, Pine Tree Party, Sparrows Crew, the Base, the Right Stuff, and Vinlanders Club.

Content Observations

In addition to the quantitative descriptive statistics collected, the authors also observed recurring topics and themes in the Telegram channels. While the authors hypothesized that there would be disinformation and conspiracy theories amidst the Telegram channels, such observations were intended to elucidate which particular conspiracies are currently most influential. In regard to observational research methods, the authors used a full-observer approach, meaning they did not interact with any users or discussions in the Telegram channels in order to not manipulate the subjects and topics of conversation.[87] This approach negates the possibility of reactivity, which could skew our perceptions of user beliefs and language used (i.e., how extreme they are).[88] While there are certainly hundreds of topics of conversations across the channels, the results were focused on the key themes that were most often recurring.

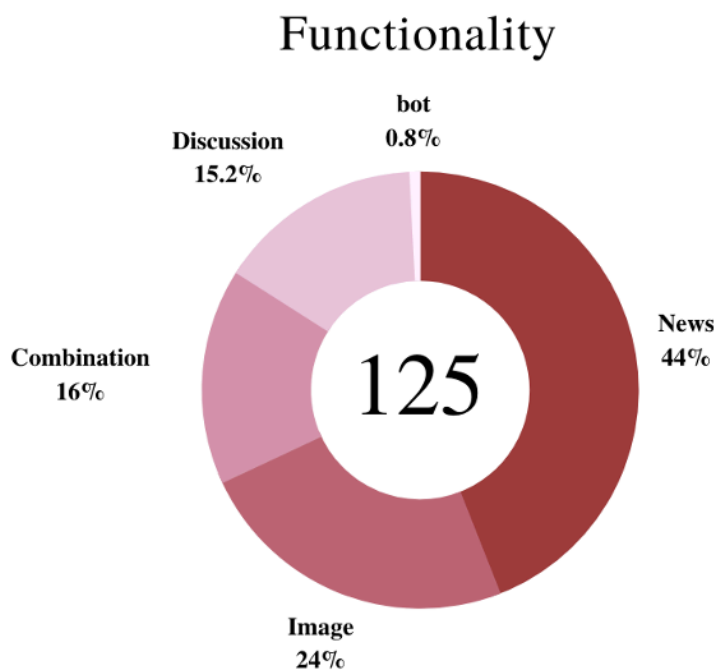
Results

Channel Type: Discussion, News, and Image

Each channel in the data set was categorized by its function either as a discussion channel, image channel, or news channel. While most channels in the data set were defined as one of the three categories, 20 (16%) of the

channels did display characteristics of multiple functions. These channels were characterized as combination channels, which would share both large quantities of news articles and original content, including images and videos. Image channels made up a slightly larger proportion of the data set, with 24% (30 channels) being solely image and video messages. The image channels were hubs for original content largely in the forms of memes. Discussion channels made up 15.2% (19 channels) of the data set. Discussion channels were those that were filled with original content by several subscribers, as opposed to admins, creating original dialogues about politics, current events, and their ideologies.

Figure 1: Pie chart representing the breakdown of channels by functionality type.



Finally, the majority (44%) of the channels were news based. However, the news that was being shared ranged in its validity. Some channels would repost articles from actual news sources, while others, especially in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and QAnon, would post news links to unreliable and unchecked sources. This elucidates a strong connection between alternative news media and alternative social media. The social media channels would echo disinformation from alternative new sources, revealing active participation in disinformation campaigns and conspiracy theories. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of channels by functionality.

Channel Size

The channel size ranged throughout the data set. One channel was not able to be measured since it was a bot channel and did not have subscribers. The minimum number of subscribers was 2 and the maximum was 22,368. However, these two counts can be considered extremes, as the average number of subscribers was 1664.79 and the median number of subscribers was 473.5.

Only 4 (3.2%) of the channels had large followings of more than 10,000 subscribers. Each channel was news-based or news/image-based with no chat option available for subscribers. These channels shared news relating to their specific ideology or beliefs, oftentimes spreading conspiracy theories or misinformation from unreliable or unchecked sources. One of these channels was a QAnon-driven channel, which provided updates to followers with every single piece of QAnon content that gets posted to the official QAlerts website. The QAnon channel further supports evidence that far-right movements continue to engage in large-scale conspiracy theories and disinformation campaigns. Figure 2 provides a breakdown of all the channels in the data set based on subscriber count.

Channel Size Change

Due to recent migration trends of the far-right leaving popular social media platforms, the authors hypothesized that some channels with particularly relevant ideologies, such as QAnon, may be actively engaging new followers even over short periods of time. In total, 81 of the 125 channels gained followers during a one-week period (see Figure 3). Twenty-one channels saw decreases in subscriber counts while 22 remained the same size. Changes in subscriber count, both positively and negatively, were not necessarily drastic, with the exception of one QAnon channel. The average size change was 23.11 followers, with some channels only gaining one or two subscribers over the week. Similarly, channels that decreased in size were not decreasing by significant numbers either. One QAnon channel was an outlier, gaining 566 followers in just one week—a much larger change than the 21.11 average gain. This pushed the subscriber count to more than 15K globally for that specific channel. For comparison, the next highest gain was 186 followers over the course of the week. A channel which was categorized as a cybercrime channel for its abundance of financial scams lost 102 followers—the largest size decrease in the data set. Another pattern worth mentioning was that all seven of the Proud Boys-affiliated channels increased membership over the course of one week. While this time period is small and may not be representative of large fluctuation patterns, it suggests that channels related to the most trending movements, such as QAnon and Proud Boys, may garner interest quickly. This may especially hold true as media coverage has increased drastically when reporting on Proud Boys and QAnon. With more coverage and more spotlight on these lines of thinking, more online users may seek information relating to the movements. Future studies should consider a more profound analysis into channel growth over longer periods of time, as well as seek to analyze which ideologies remain prominent and which ones have the longest lifespans on Telegram channels.

Figure 2: Chart showing the percentage breakdown of the Telegram channel sizes, based on number of subscribers (subs).

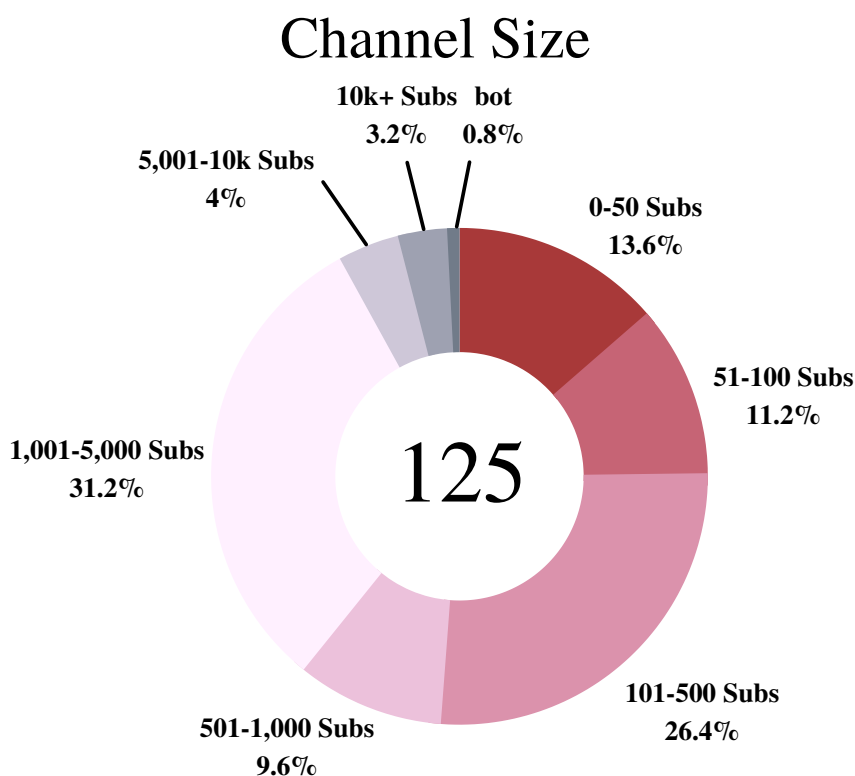
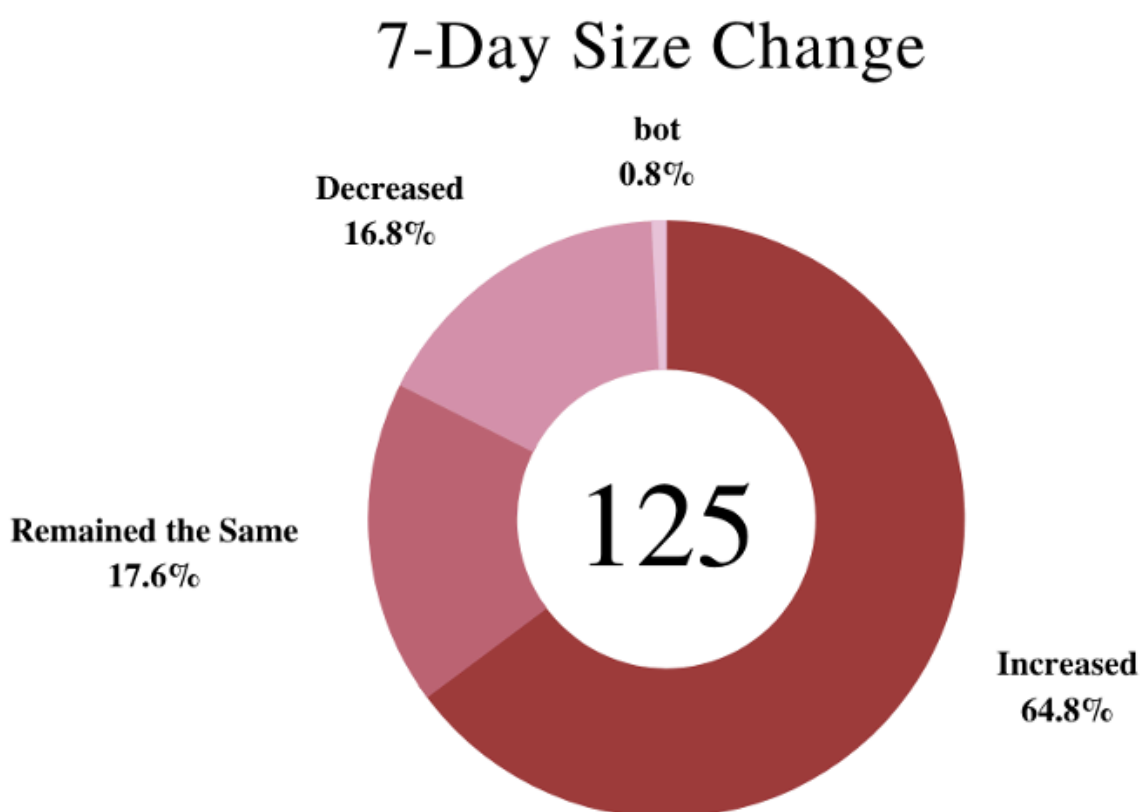


Figure 3: Chart showing how channel subscriber counts fluctuated over a seven-day period.



Ideology

The majority of the 125 channels in the dataset were host to far-right content as opposed to far-left. While it is important to acknowledge that the far-right may be more prevalent on Telegram than the far-left, the more important takeaway is understanding which ideologies are currently popular in the US discourse and on alternative social media.

Alt-Right, Neo-Nazi, and White Nationalist ideologies accounted for more than half of the channels with a combined 69 (55.2%) of the channels in the data set. White supremacist, neo-confederate, and racist Skinhead channels were also present; however, at a much smaller percentage, amounting to 22 channels (17.6%) of the data set. Another eight channels (6.4%) were considered to host general far-right/hate content.

It was common to see a combination of ideologies and symbology on the Telegram channels. Several channels had many neo-Nazi symbols present, but also called for a separate nation for the White race, leaning toward a White separatist ideology. Further, it was common to see channels reposting from other far-right channels even if they did not necessarily share exactly the same ideologies. Popular propaganda pieces and original content would often be posted across many of the channels. The same trend occurred with many news articles. The same stories, images, and memes would continuously appear across many of the channels. Therefore, many channels fed off one another, despite the far-right being made up of a vast range of movements and ideologies. Future studies should consider examining the social movement of Telegram channels further.

Far-left movements, specifically those with anti-fascist ideologies, are a major topic of discussion with the current protests taking shape across the United States. These channels accounted for seven (5.6%) of the 125 channels in the data set. While there were certainly not as many easily accessible far-left channels, this finding does not simply imply that the far-left does not represent a violent extremist threat. This finding is in line with previous literature suggesting that the far-left may be less likely to utilize alternative social media platforms for recruiting but is more likely to participate in hashtag activism on popular platforms or off-line activities.

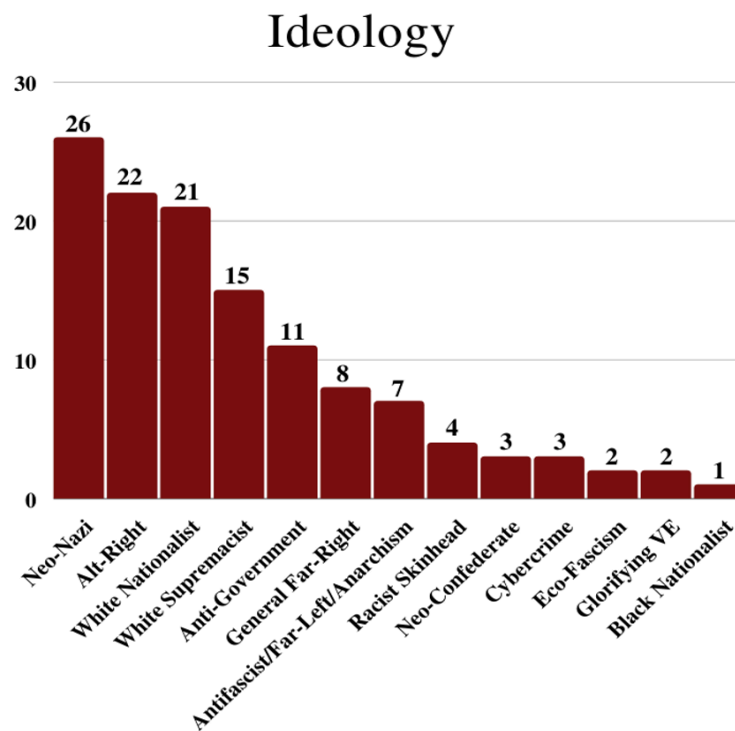
The lack of finding far-left channels is an important finding in the sense that it supports claims that alternative platforms still largely remain hubs for far-right activity and that far-left activity takes place elsewhere. Figure 4 shows the specific breakdown of different ideologies that defined each of the Telegram channels.

The analysis also revealed evidence of a few ideologies that are often under-studied. One important finding was the discovery of a channel that fell under the category of Black Nationalism. While the channel was not very active, it does suggest that there is a diverse range of ideologies on Telegram. With heightened race tensions in the United States, it is also important to consider how Black Nationalist movements may be escalating and reacting to the rise of far-right movements.

Three of the channels in the data set were not given traditional ideologies but were rather labeled as “cybercrime” channels. These channels were originally found through the terminology search because of their titles, which included violent extremist terms. While they did not show significant evidence of violent extremist discussions, they did all have a range of financial scams under the guise of a channel name that was connected to other violent extremist channels. This finding also points to the dangers of alternative platforms that are not as public facing, which can provide a haven for a range of criminal online activity.

Two channels were related to a rising eco-fascist movement known as the Pine Tree Party. The rise of the Pine Tree Party and its influence on Telegram suggests a recent revival in eco-fascist thought. The first public surfacing of the Pine Tree Party was through an Instagram post by Mike Ma on November 3, 2017.[89] Ma, a potential leader of the Pine Tree Party, has stated in previous interviews that his ideal form of government would be “no government, but obviously that would require a way smaller population”.[90] Eco-fascism rests on the idea that in order to restore a higher natural order, the human population must be reduced dramatically, and this would ideally mean removing immigrants to form a higher population of White people who can then live in solitude and produce more eco-sustainable patterns of life.[91] Eco-fascism has historically been a large driver of violence, inspiring several recent major violent extremists, including Patrick Crusius, Brenton Tarrant, and Anders Breivik.[92]

Figure 4: Bar graph showing the breakdown of ideology type across the data set of Telegram channels.



Movement Affiliations

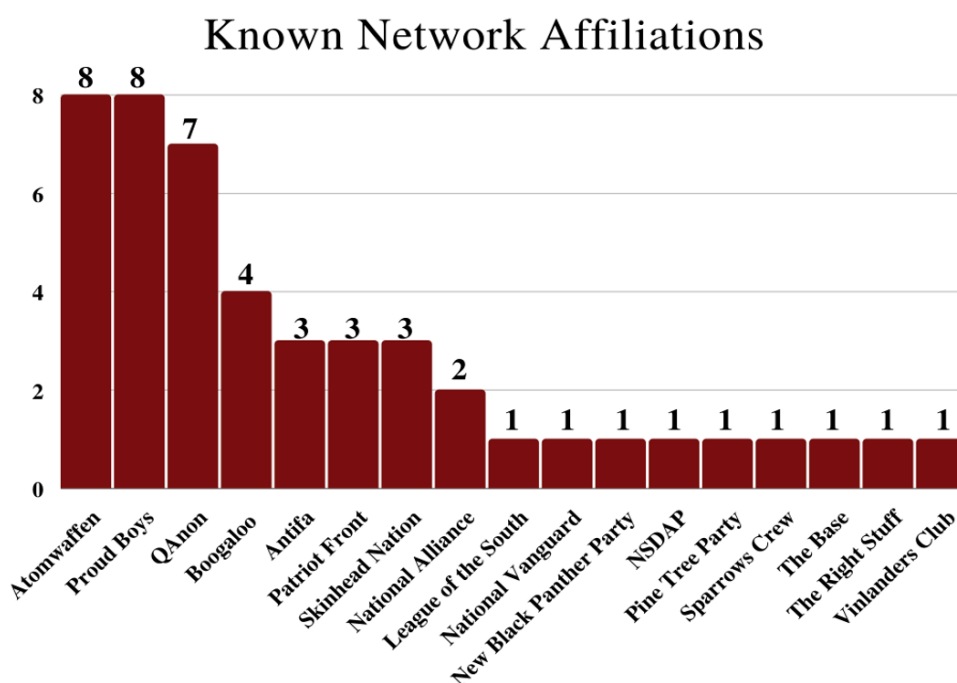
In total, 47 of the 125 channels in the data set were found to be associated with known hate-based movements (see Figure 5).

The Proud Boys movement, which continued to make national news as protests erupted in Portland, WA, was one of the most prominent movements active on Telegram, with eight channels connected to the group. Atomwaffen, a widely followed neo-Nazi accelerationist movement that originated in Texas, was also represented with 8 channels.[93] While Atomwaffen had a relatively large number of channels, not all of them were highly active or had large followings. In fact, the Atomwaffen channel with the largest following of 898 subscribers has not been active since November 29, 2019.

However, 10 days prior to ceasing activity, another Atomwaffen channel was created under the same name. The bio of this channel reads, “New archive because the old one is going to be deleted”. It is not uncommon for admins to create new pages and re-share content from the old channel to the new channel if they suspect the original has been infiltrated by “feds” or was flagged by Telegram. This behavior elucidates the “whack-a-mole” problem with violent extremist activity on social media. Just as quickly as one account can cease activity or be shut down, another with the exact same content and propaganda can be created. This pattern was continuously noted in this Telegram study, as many channels that were found to be inactive would link followers to their new channel names before going dark. Simply removing a channel does not necessarily cut off access to an audience.

QAnon-related channels closely followed in frequency with seven channels dedicated to new Q “drops” and conversations regarding the conspiracy. The QAnon channels with discussion capabilities were often engaged in disinformation campaigns and with news articles being posted from fake or unreliable sources. The Boogaloo movement, Skinhead Nation, and Patriot Front all had operating channels that were actively creating original content to attract new members. Other movements represented include National Alliance, Antifa, Pine Tree Party, League of the South, Aryan Nations, New Black Panther Party, Stormfront, National Vanguard, National Socialist Movement, National Justice Party, the Vinlanders Social Club, and the Base.

Figure 5: Figure showing the number of Telegram channels that were found to be affiliated with known hate groups, conspiracy followings, and violent extremist movements in the United States. Forty-seven of the 125 channels in the data set were found to be associated with known movements.



Disinformation Campaigns and Conspiracy Theories

In line with findings by Guhl & Davey (2020), explicit anti-minority ideas, hostility toward minorities, and racist slurs were abundantly present in our data set. The study also supported Holbrook's (2019) analysis, which found that the majority of content online may not be facilitative in nature but rather more ideological and part of a larger discussion that justifies future violence without actually making any definite plans or means to commit acts of violence.[94] Specifically in relation to the far-right network on Telegram, the authors found that there were very explicit racist ideas present, as well as influential disinformation campaigns that were particularly engaging. QAnon was the most popular conspiracy theory to surface on the channels; however, some of the channels simply shared the latest "Q drop" without a chat function. QAnon channels often aimed to discredit traditional liberal politicians, claiming they were members of a deep state cabal of pedophiles. Further, Q-adherents expressed the belief that former President Trump was the only savior combatting the deep-state and was communicating with "Q" through tweets.

There was also a dangerous intersection between QAnon and COVID-19 conspiracies. Many users on Telegram spread anti-vaccination propaganda in regard to COVID-19, urging followers not to participate in social distancing or adhere to mask guidelines, claiming the virus was not real, or urging followers to not follow guidelines as these allegedly infringe on their human rights.

The largest source of disinformation surrounded the COVID-19 pandemic. The far-right has been the most active influencer of misinformation and propaganda sharing, especially online. When combined with how the pandemic itself fuels more online activity, as thousands are laid off and more likely to find themselves sitting at home facing a computer screen, it becomes a great deal easier for online recruiters to attract more people and expose them to disinformation campaigns.[95] Miranda Christou (2020) argued that "the radical right does not simply reject science; it invents its own scientific rhetoric to provide an 'alternative interpretation'", and that is exactly what is happening due to the coronavirus on Telegram channels.[96] Telegram is overwhelmed with conversations about how the virus is a deep state control tactic, a control tactic used by elites like Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos to wipe out the population and train individuals into obedient slaves, that masks are ineffective, or that nobody has actually died from the virus. Oftentimes links to fringe healthcare sites are shared on Telegram channels. Others are using memes and videos to delegitimize the actual health guidelines necessary to control the spread of the virus. These belief systems continue to threaten public health and build distrust of science, political institutions, and health-care institutions.

With QAnon and COVID-19 dominating the majority of the conspiracy conversations, the "boogaloo" beliefs did not come up as much as the authors of the study had expected. However, there were certainly still many users who expected a civil war was coming. One anti-government channel shared several audiobook-style downloads explaining exactly how the breakup of America was going to happen. Many other channels shared this sentiment and directly predicted that the 2020 presidential election was going to increase violence, and potentially spiral into a civil conflict.

Accelerationism

Proud Boys, Pine Tree Party, and many of the White supremacist-related channels expressed that accelerationism of chaos, conflict, and violence is a goal of many of their off-line actions. Posts included propaganda with the caption "an appeal to acceleration" and users explaining how they wanted to see former President Trump win the 2020 presidential election "because of the apocalyptic meltdowns from shitlibs, which would result in them becoming more openly radical, and their radicalism gives us more justification to resist and counter them". Several channels continue to discuss which presidential candidate is the "acceleration option." Many channels are spreading messages and sharing information such as "the more people realize that there is no political solution, the more of them will start acting accordingly". While these messages are not discrete plans for attacks, they elucidate a potential desire for future conflict as more and more users are beginning to believe that no politics can solve the tensions in the United States.

The most notable calls to action were in the Proud Boys channels after the first presidential debate, namely when former President Donald Trump made reference to the group. Channels quickly responded by making t-shirts and symbols quoting the former President, warning followers to “get ready” and “prepare” for a looming war, as well as users suggesting “Let’s go back to Portland”. Other comments included users suggesting that individuals conduct actions as they see fit, either alone or with a small group of friends in order to avoid increased surveillance by federal agents. This call for lone-actor violence is one that ought to be monitored. As public awareness of some violent extremist movements heightens, movements may attempt to move underground further. Some Proud Boys chapters released statements saying that they were not racist or violent; however, the channel’s actual content suggests otherwise. While some followers may have originally joined the group when it was considered a chauvinist drinking club, it is evident that the movement has evolved and gained followers with racist and violent ideologies.

A common theme of channels was to glorify past lone-actors, calling them “Heroes” and “Saints” of the greater White supremacist movement. A list circulated on many channels, dubbed many violent domestic terrorists and mass murders, such as Charles Ray, the assassin of Martin Luther King Jr., Theodore Kaczynski, Eric Rudolph, Anders Breivik, Dylann Roof, and Tobias Rathjen, as “saints” (see Appendix B). The authors of this study believe this is the same list identified by Guhl & Davey (2020) in their report on White supremacist Telegram channels. While this repeated finding is not surprising considering the interconnectedness of Telegram channels, it does suggest that this content continues to be circulated unabatedly, despite potentially breaching Telegram’s terms of service.

Many of the contemporary violent extremists on the list utilized alternative platforms such as Telegram, 8chan, and 4chan to espouse their hate for the groups or individuals that they ended up targeting in their attacks.[97] These perpetrators are seen as inspiration for new extremists. There is a pattern of online activity inspiring one individual to take action, who then inspires the next perpetrator. Examples include the Unabomber, whose manifesto was published in the Washington Post, later being used as inspiration for Brenton Tarrant, who in turn inspired Patrick Crusius.[98] Glorification of violence is playing a large role in the radicalization of new violent extremists and must continue to be analyzed to better understand what type of potential counter messages can be utilized to stop this cycle.

Discussion

The findings of this study largely supported the authors hypotheses that Telegram is an actively growing environment for US-based hate speech and extremism with a range of ideologies present. While more far-right content was present in this study, the radicalization is occurring on both sides of the political spectrum.

Perhaps the most critical finding of this study is that the United States is facing a pressing disinformation crisis which is being exponentially furthered by the increased usage of alternative social media platforms such as Telegram. There is an underlying connection by alt-right news media sources and far-right social media users. The biased news being produced is shared on social media platforms such as Telegram, introducing it into the daily lives of users. By questioning the authority of traditional media, the alternative platforms not only build their own sense of legitimacy but also create distrust of mainstream media that share truthful information.[99] This has led to a widespread decline in media trust and gives rise to alternative conservative media, disinformation, and conspiracies gaining influence in national politics.

QAnon best exemplifies how disinformation is delegitimizing democratic institutions and gaining influence in politics. The conspiracy has effectively seeped into the United States government, with more than a dozen US House and Senate candidates who have openly endorsed the conspiracy running for office.[100] There have also been several criminal and/or violent incidents related to QAnon beliefs, including several kidnappings and threats to prominent politicians.[101]

Further, the spread of disinformation is having detrimental effects on public health. The far-right has continued

to undermine and discredit mainstream medical science, education, and public policies in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The rhetoric online, contending that the virus was created by politicians to control citizens, has convinced many Americans not to follow social distancing and mask use guidelines and spread anti-vaccination beliefs. Some far-right members have gone so far as to weaponize COVID-19. Reports from the United Kingdom noted that far-right movements operating online had been encouraging followers to “intentionally infect Jews and Muslims”.[102] In this sense, the virus is exploited to further a xenophobic, racist, and violent ideological agenda. In March 2020, a Missouri man with racist and anti-government beliefs went so far as to plan to bomb a hospital that was facing full capacity with COVID-19 patients.[103] Another man in Massachusetts with White supremacist views also planned on bombing a Jewish assisted living community that had reached capacity due to COVID-19.[104] Hate crimes against Asian-Americans have also increased since the onset of the pandemic.[105]

The growing distrust of experts and political leaders and the momentum that conspiracy theories are gaining in the United States is one of the most pressing threats to its democracy and national security. Alternative social media, when used for the purposes of extremist dialogues and movements, are accelerating this distrust through echo chambers of hate, disinformation, conspiracies, and accelerationism. The solution is not necessarily to censor speech and political dialogue further, but to focus efforts on building trust of traditional media sources that are spreading information based on science and empirical facts and not on mere opinions and beliefs. Further, the country as a whole needs to examine factors contributing to its increased polarization, which limits the political middle ground and the public space for tolerant bipartisan dialogue.

Limitations

While there was a large percentage of far-right channels in this study, it should be taken into account that there are other keywords that could be used to find channels related to far-right activity. One of the limitations of this study was the lack of knowledge surrounding similar keywords and catchphrases used by far-left movements. Many far-right movements have been well studied and patterns such as phrases, hate symbols and numbers, and even clothes and music choices have been well documented. While it is known that many far-left ideologies consist of anti-fascist and anarchism-related ideas, their evolving phrases and symbols are less well known. Future studies should continue to identify and analyze the speech patterns, symbology, and code words of far-left movements. Many of the channels were found through the snowball technique, revealing the connectedness among the far-right channels. The far-left channels found in this study did not reveal the same connectivity or lead the authors to more channels with similar ideologies.

Further, the authors only tracked a seven-day growth change, and while there was higher engagement, increased longitudinal measures should be considered. By measuring channel size over greater periods of time, researchers can gain further insight into the rates at which certain ideologies are growing. Longer time intervals may also reveal insights into the lifespan of hate-based Telegram channels, as channels may be removed or become inactive over time.

While it is important for P/CVE stakeholders to understand how Telegram influences the spread of far-right ideologies, far-left online behavior must be examined further, especially as tensions continue to rise between anti-fascist groups and far-right groups in the United States. If far-left conversations are not widely taking place in spaces such as Telegram, they are taking place elsewhere. Understanding differences in patterns of behavior across different ideologies is necessary to understand how different movements will recruit, mobilize, and create potential violence, and in turn allow P/CVE stakeholders to thwart those efforts.

Conclusion

This study situated Telegram into continuing debates over the constitutionality of free speech versus content removal by social media platforms, the latter of which leads to deplatforming and gives rise to alternative platforms. The formation of alternative media is reactive to the increased polarization within the United States,

both off-line and on mainstream platforms that censor specific content.[106] The authors' findings support previous literature suggesting that grievances by prominent far-right actors over being banned from mainstream platforms has an impact on the number of users, activity, and effectiveness of propaganda on alternative sites like Telegram.[107] This has led to further deplatforming by masses of far-right users of mainstream sites and also led to an overall network evolution to alternative spaces that may be less detectable or conducive for counter-narratives. Overall, the study reported in this article supports the idea that de-platforming has a limited effect on decreasing the presence of extremist content online and its effects on radicalization; it simply shifts the problem to a different space. Therefore, in order to curb the migration trends and its detrimental effects, greater inclusivity and tolerance is needed within the mainstream dialogue online. While counter-narrative options for Telegram and other alternative platforms should be explored, the magnitude of echo chambers and groupthink patterns on Telegram may perhaps already be too much for counter-narratives to make a significant impact. This, in part, is due to the fact that by the time individuals turn to alternative platform channels that are clearly extreme, their ideologies and views are generally fixed. These users have shown that they do not want to hear an alternative narrative and chose to move to spaces that only propagate their viewpoints through echo chambers. Without motivation to change their minds, the messages of any counter-narrative may simply be removed or disregarded.

In terms of solutions to stop the spread of disinformation and terrorist content, the authors of the study recommend a hybrid cascading strategy, as described by van der Vegt (2019) for content-takedown to be implemented within Telegram.[108] Automated detection infrastructure that can target material related to violent White supremacist content can help to mitigate widespread sharing.[109] However, there are major concerns over the accuracy of fully automated approaches to content removal. While automated content-removal strategies may be great for detecting masses of content, human decision-making cannot be understated as an integral part to combating terrorist and extremist content online. Humans are better able to understand nuances in speech and the context of content, better informing decisions over content takedown that protect against terrorism while at the same time protect rights to free speech.[110] However, smaller platforms may not have the resources to put together large teams of human-based content-review boards. This is where a hybrid between human and automated strategies is going to be most beneficial.[111] Automation can detect content as long as it is up to date on terminology trends, while human beings can make the final decision, based on language, context, and other pieces of the behavior surrounding a particular case.[112]

Further, when utilizing databases to detect and remove content, there should be a broader set of terms in the database to include more borderline content.[113] Databases should also be consistently updated as new movements arise. For example, the QAnon conspiracy theory movement has brought out many unique phrases that do not seem violent on the surface level but that point to adherence to the conspiracy and future off-line actions. Van der Vegt (2019) found that some Internet review units (IRU), which are select teams established by law enforcement agencies dedicated to content moderation, are mostly concerned with removing propaganda that bears the 'brand' of a terrorist organization. IRUs do not decide whether a social media platform removes content, but flag questionable content and relay their findings to the social media platform for the final say. While it is important to remove terrorist propaganda that is connected to a specific brand of a terrorist organization, this literature points to an evolution where the network is decentralized and disconnected and may not relate to specific terrorist organizations. In this sense the automated and human-based decisions on content removal must take into consideration that these networks are less organized than traditional transnational groups. When it comes to far-right content, the networks may be sharing a great deal of content with each other, but they span a range of ideologies and specific organization connections. Thus, the content-removal strategies have to be able to target content even when it is not as easily identifiable in connection with a specific organization.

There is also a clear need for greater global consensus and information sharing between large and small tech companies to combat terrorist content. The push to strengthen Telegram's enforcement of its terms of service should come from large companies in the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), which is tasked with assisting smaller companies. This forum was founded by major digital platforms—Facebook,

Microsoft, Twitter, and YouTube—in 2017 to foster collaboration among companies to counter terrorists and violent extremists from exploiting the digital ecosystem, as well as share relevant information with smaller platforms.[114] As disinformation online becomes more of a threat, it is necessary to consider how important these global collaborations are for maintaining a standard across all types of digital platforms. When terrorist organizations and other extreme movements identify a platform as a convenient space to spread content, smaller platforms can produce an even larger risk than major platforms.

As emphasized by Conway et al. (2019), consistent content takedown strategies and constant enforcement of terms of service on Twitter has produced significant effects in terms of disrupting the ISIS community on Twitter, to the point that the ISIS Twitter English-language community is nearly nonexistent. Accounts get taken down often within minutes or days, highlighting the importance of content removal across time.[115] However, the same study noted that as Twitter was able to curb its ISIS community, Telegram became the new home. This again highlights the need to target stricter guidelines on Telegram specifically, as it is becoming the desired digital environment across extremist networks and ideologies. Similar findings were made by Amarasingam (2021) in a study that specifically sought to disrupt ISIS ecology on Telegram. The study found that while disruption attempts in 2019 may not completely remove the entire ecology, they did have a profound effect on the reach and their lifespan.[116] In the 30 days following the coordinated takedown Action Day, there was a 65.5% drop in organic ISIS posts, a 94.7% drop in forwarded posts, and new channels in 2019 had a significantly shorter lifespan.[117] While Telegram has notably stepped up its game with regard to ISIS-specific content removal and account suspension, it is evident that it ought to take the same steps for extreme far-right movements.

Solution attempts also need to target the cyclical nature of content removal, migration to alternative platforms, and early forms of radicalization. While violent videos, images, and targeted violent extremist speech should be removed from online platforms, moderators also need to ensure that spaces are made available for intergroup contact and perspective taking.[118] When individuals are able to remove political blinders and consider the perspectives of others more openly, many, perhaps most, people are able to accept more moderate views.[119] By targeting the political polarization in the United States, P/CVE and political experts can decrease the likelihood of falling victim to disinformation, conspiracy theories, and alternative platforms in the first place. Countermeasures are certainly necessary, but it is even more critical to take preventative measures when combating the migration to alternative social media and its consequences.

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Appendix A: Access Words Used to Locate Telegram Channels

	Far-Right	Far-Left	General Topics
All Lives Matter	Nazi	Alt-Left	4chan
Amerika	New Patriot	Antifa	America
Aryan	Patriot Front	Anti-fascist	Black
Atomwaffen	Pine Tree***	Black Lives Matter	Catholic
Based	Proud Boys	Black Panther*	Christianity
Black-Pilled	Red-Pilled	Left	Civil War
Boogaloo	Rhodesia	Leftist	Corona
Brenton Tarrant	Roof	Lib	Coronavirus
Brotherhood	Skinhead/Skinhead Nation	Marxism	COVID-19
Great Awakening	Stormfront		Diversity
Hitler	Ted Kaczynski/The Unabomber		Fascist
League of the South	The Base		Hate
Libtard	Vinlanders		Immigration
Make America	White		Q
National Alliance	White Lives Matter		QAnon
National Socialism**	White Supremacy		Shitpost
National Vanguard	WWG1WGA****		

*Used in reference to the extreme Black Nationalist New Black Panther Party and not related to the original and non-extreme Black Panther Party

**Used in reference to the German Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP), otherwise known as the Nazi Party

***Used in reference to the novel eco-fascist Pine Tree Party

****Refers to the QAnon-related phrase “Where We Go One, We Go All”

Appendix B: List of “Saints” Used to Accelerate and Inspire Violence

The Bowlcast
The Bowl Patrol Pantheon as of 6/14/20:

St. Ray ♣ (1) - 4/4/68
 St. Cowan ♣ (6) - 2/14/77
 St. Franklin ♣ (22) - 8/7/77 - 8/20/80
 St. Kaczynski (3) - 5/25/78 -- 4/24/95
 St. Jones ♣ (917) - 11/18/78
 St. Kahl ♣ (3) - 2/13/83 -- 6/3/83
 St. Snell ♣ (2) - 11/3/83 -- 6/30/84
 St. Huberty ♣ (21) - 7/18/84
 St. Ausonius (2) - 8/3/91 -- 1/30/92
 St. McVeigh ♣ (168) - 4/19/95
 St. Shoemake ♣ (1) - 4/12/96
 St. Rudolph (2) - 7/27/96 -- 1/29/98
 St. Brannan ♣ (1) - 1/12/98
 St. Kopp (1) - 10/23/98
 St. Copeland (3) - 4/17 -- 4/30/99
 St. Smith ♣ (2) - 7/2 -- 7/4/99
 St. Furrow (1) - 8/10/99
 St. Baumhammers (6) - 4/28/00
 St. Mangs (3) - 6/13/03 -- 10/21/10
 St. Adkisson (2) - 7/27/08
 St. Luke ♣ (2) - 1/21/09
 St. Poplawski (3) - 4/4/09
 St. Cartwright ♣ (2) - 4/25/09
 St. Roeder (1) - 5/31/09
 St. von Brunn ♣ (1) - 6/10/09
 St. Stack ♣ (1) - 2/18/10
 St. Breivik (77) - 7/22/11

St. Breivik (77) - 7/22/11
 St. Pedersen (4) - 9/26 -- 10/3/11
 St. Page ♣ (7) - 8/5/12
 St. Bourque (3) - 6/4/14
 St. Frein (1) - 9/12/14
 St. Hicks (3) - 2/10/15
 St. Roof (9) - 6/17/15
 St. Houser ♣ (2) - 7/23/15
 St. Pettersson ♣ (3) - 10/22/15
 St. Dear (3) - 11/27/15
 St. Mair (1) - 6/16/16
 St. Greene (2) - 11/2/16
 St. Bissonnette (6) - 1/29/17
 St. Purinton (1) - 2/22/17
 St. Selis ♣ (1) - 4/30/17
 St. Christian (2) - 5/26/17
 St. Reinking (4) - 4/22/18
 St. Bush (2) - 10/24/18
 St. Bowers (11) - 10/27/18
 St. Tarrant (51) - 3/15/19
 St. Earnest (1) - 4/27/19
 St. Ernst (1) - 6/2/19
 St. Crusius (23) - 8/3/19
 St. Luther ♣ (1) - 8/12/19
 St. Rathjen ♣ (10) - 2/19/20

Hail the Saints 👁 2796 2:22 AM

Source: Screenshot from Telegram Channel ‘The Bowlcast’