

TELEGRAM: A BRIEFING



JULY 2020



Contents

Overview of the platform	1
<i>What is Telegram?</i>	1
<i>What makes Telegram so popular?</i>	1
<i>Groups, Channels and Chats</i>	2
<i>Customization</i>	2
<i>Initial Popularity with Islamic State</i>	3
Far-Right Usage	3
<i>Far-Right growth</i>	3
<i>Ideologies</i>	4
<i>Manuals and Literature</i>	4
<i>Boogaloo</i>	6
<i>COVID-19</i>	7
<i>Weapons Manufacturing</i>	9
<i>Deification of Mass Shooters</i>	10
<i>Anniversaries</i>	13
<i>Original Content</i>	14
<i>Incitement to Violence</i>	14
<i>Organized groups</i>	17
<i>Reported Incidents Connected to Telegram</i>	19
Summary and Conclusions	19

Purpose of Report

This briefing is intended to give an overview of the ways in which the far-right are broadly using Telegram’s services to communicate, organize, spread propaganda and incite violence. This briefing is not intended to be an exhaustive study, but rather a general assessment of the overall trends the Simon Wiesenthal Center Research Department has observed. A list of Telegram channels studied in this report is available upon request for academic and research purposes.

Questions? Contact ireport@wiesenthal.com

Overview of the platform

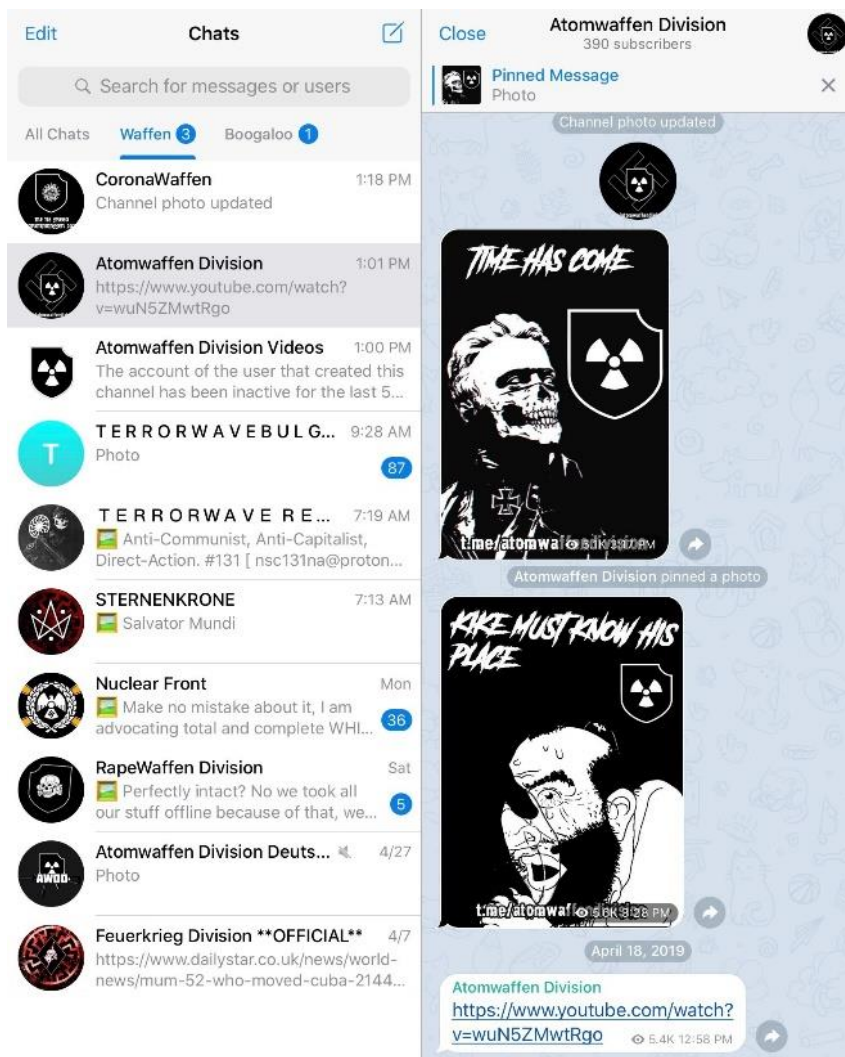
What is Telegram?

Telegram is a unique messaging service available on multiple platforms. Telegram for iOS was launched on August 4, 2013, followed by Telegram for Android on October 20, 2013. It is also available as a web version and a desktop app. Telegram is currently headquartered in Dubai (April 2020) but was originally based in Russia, with many of the developers coming from St Petersburg. They have also had bases in Berlin, London and Singapore.¹

Telegram was created by Russian brothers Pavel and Nikolai Durov. Pavel was the founder of Russian social network VKontakte (VK.com). He sold his shares in VK in December 2013.² Telegram states that “Pavel supports Telegram financially and ideologically while Nikolai's input is technological.”³ In October 2019, Telegram announced they had exceeded one billion users.⁴ This number is an approximation based on ID numbers issued to new accounts.⁵

What makes Telegram so popular?

Telegram is popular with users who are concerned about their privacy and security. Telegram offers a range of encryption features and two-step verification processes that promise the user greater security in messaging digitally. Conversations on Telegram are not end-to-end encrypted by default, but Telegram argues the platform is more secure than other messenger services like WhatsApp or Viber.⁶ For greater security, users can choose between cloud chats or secret chats. Cloud chats are “designed for the majority of users.” Telegram states that cloud chats are encrypted, but a backup is saved in a cloud. Telegram’s servers have access to the encryption key so they could access this information, if desired.⁷ Telegram’s “secret chats” are reportedly secured with end-to-end encryption and records of conversations are only on the devices that are used. Users who might be concerned about the content of their conversations are reassured in Telegram’s FAQs that they will not



process takedown requests relating to “local restrictions on freedom of speech”, but that they will remove terrorist “ISIS-related” bots and channels.⁸ Users sign up for Telegram using a telephone number, but this step can be bypassed by using a virtual phone number.

Groups, Channels and Chats⁹

Telegram supports communication in a variety of different modes. Groups and channels allow digital communication between users. Both channels and groups can be public or private. Groups can have up to 200,000 members and allow users to post messages, link to external sites, share files and have administrator roles. Channels have no limit on subscribers, and can be used to broadcast messages to subscribers. Only the channel administrator can post messages, and they cannot be directly replied to in a channel. Users can also communicate in one-on-one conversations, or in “Discuss” groups connected to specific channels. Telegram users can also make voice calls using the platform. Users can also see how many people have viewed a post – each post shows the number of views next to it.

The desktop version of Telegram allows users to access all content. The Apple App Store restricts access to certain channels deemed to contravene their “review guidelines” on discrimination based on race, religion and other protected categories.¹⁰

Telegram also operates Telegraph, launched in November 2016.¹¹ Telegraph is a web-based publishing platform. Users can upload posts featuring videos, images and files. These links can be shared directly on Telegram or on other platforms.

Customization

Telegram does not support profiles in the style of social media platforms like Facebook. Users are limited on being able to personalize their account, but profile pictures allow users to upload small images to express their personality or association with a belief system or group. Users can create and share “sticker” sets with customized images and gifs.¹² There are many sticker sets that provide users with another avenue to promote hate and bigotry.



Initial Popularity with Islamic State

While Telegram was launched in 2013, usage of the platform by extremists was not reported widely until late 2015. In November 2015, the Islamic State was reported to be using Telegram to plan and conduct attacks, specifically in Paris.¹³ It continued to be popular with Islamist extremists for the following four years. For example, at least nine channels, in different languages, seemingly connected to the ISIS media arm Nashir News Agency, were utilized to spread ISIS messaging to a wider audience. In November 2019, Europol coordinated a joint referral action with Telegram to target channels promoting jihadist material.¹⁴ Telegram's official channel, ISIS Watch, reported that 43215 terrorist bots and channels were banned during November 2019 (compared to 6209 in October 2019).¹⁵ It is not obvious exactly how these channels and bots are selected, but the Europol operation did identify channels promoting specific propaganda files and using particular keywords that raised concern. The removal figures have remained high since, with tens of thousands still being removed, and a peak in April 2020 of 56858.¹⁶ However, at the time of writing, we are not aware of any publicly available plans for a large-scale coordinated effort currently existing to tackle the thousands of far-right wing channels espousing dangerous ideologies and sharing content to incite violent attacks on minority populations across the world.

Far-Right Usage

Far-Right growth

After the initial focus on the use of Telegram by the Islamic State, it became apparent that far-right groups were migrating to Telegram too. Given Telegram's focus on personal security, anonymity if desired, and no cost to use, the platform became increasingly popular with far-right actors who exploit the service to communicate. Significant far-right groups have been active on Telegram for many years. For example, Wotanjugend (Russian neo-Nazi group) set up their first Telegram channel in December 2015, and Azov Battalion's (neo-Nazi Ukrainian National Guard regiment) latest channel has been online since May 2017.¹⁷ Since then, the platform has grown in popularity with far-right users, and waves of suspensions and increased restrictions by mainstream social media platforms have pushed them to embrace alternative platforms.

An analysis of 150 far-right public-facing channels by VICE News found that more than two thirds were created in the first eight months of 2019.¹⁸ According to data shared with TIME, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue found that Telegram channels associated with white supremacy and racism grew by more than 6,000 users during March 2020.¹⁹ Similarly, SITE Intel Group released a report sharing that, from a sample of 374 far-right channels and chat groups on Telegram, 80% were created after the 15 March 2019 attack on two mosques in Christchurch (New Zealand) through October 2019. A sample showed membership to these channels during this period increased by 117%.²⁰

We have observed the removal or suspension of some channels and accounts espousing violent far-right ideologies by Telegram. However, while some channels and groups promoting hateful content may go quiet or lose their administrators, the content can remain dormant, online and accessible, including links and downloads.

Ideologies

Telegram is used by actors promoting a wide range of ideologies across the spectrum of the far-right. Categorizing channels based on their ideology is challenging as they often merge and overlap, but broadly speaking, ideologies represented include²¹:

- neo-Nazism
- white supremacy
- white nationalism
- fascism
- eco-fascism
- Identitarian
- Christian Identity

Beliefs expressed include:

- misogyny/chauvinism
- incel (involuntary celibates)
- racism
- anti-immigrant
- anti-LGBTQ
- anti-Semitism
 - Holocaust denial
- Islamophobia
- xenophobia
- anti-Romani (antiziganism)

Manuals and Literature

Telegram is utilized by some users as a knowledge sharing platform. Files can be easily uploaded, shared, and downloaded, or channels can provide external links. Each channel can have its own file repository, and users can share files up to 1.5GB, which is significantly larger than many email programs. This feature is strongly favored by channels promoting survival techniques, sabotage, violent attacks, as well as historical Nazi content. As well as uploading PDFs and image files, users will also share text-based posts and videos to inform readers about these topics. External sites hosting material include archive.org.

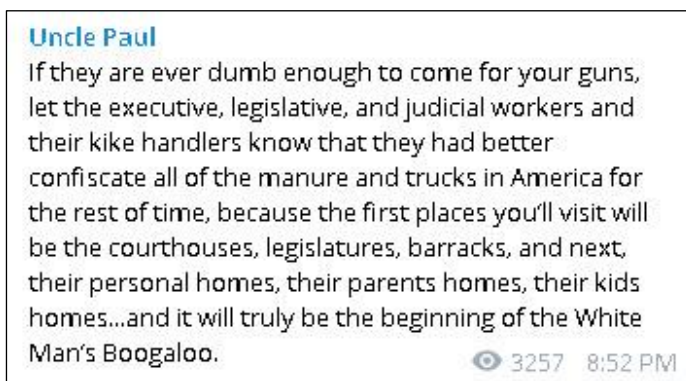
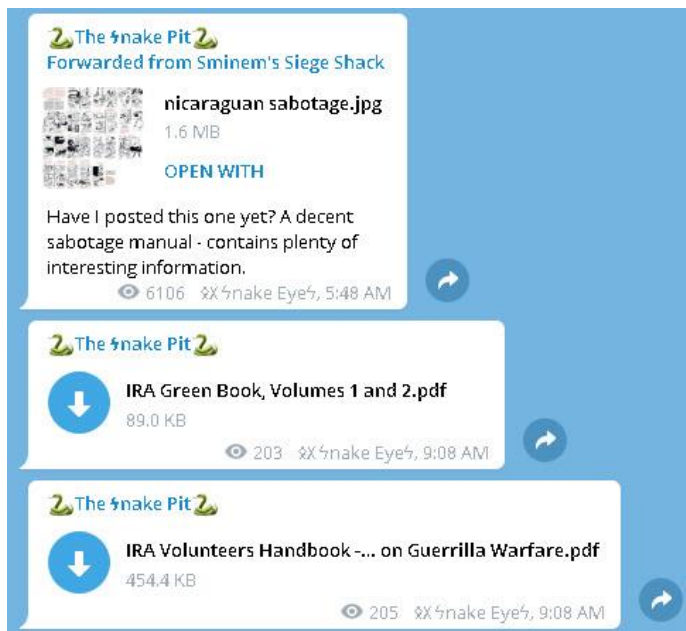
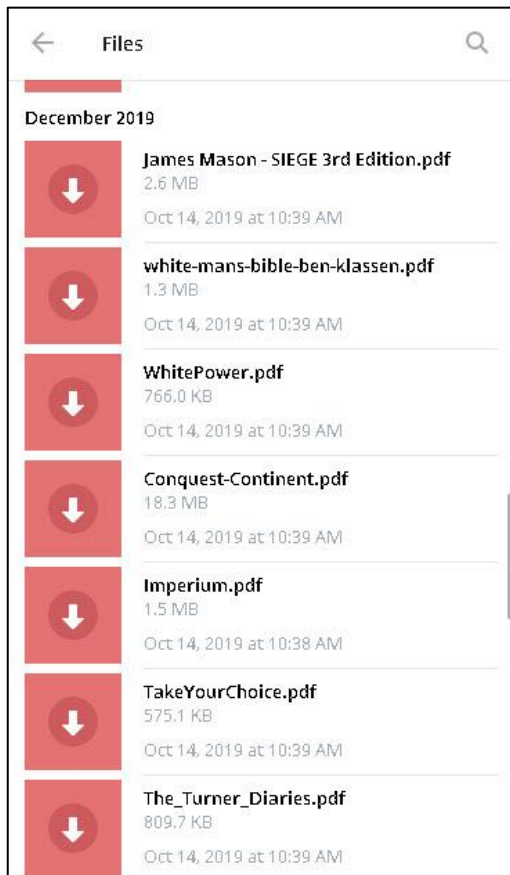
Sharing of historic Nazi manuals in particular is prominent on Telegram. On April 20, 2020 (the anniversary of Hitler’s birth), a crowd-sourced English translation of a German Wehrmacht Fitness Manual was uploaded to several channels, giving readers “the tools – GO OUT AND TRAIN”.²² Other Nazi manuals include the American Nazi Party’s Stormtrooper manual (1961) and the SS Wehrwolf Combat Instruction Manual (translated to English). Other fascist material shared includes Corneliu Codreanu’s Nest Leaders’ Manual (Founder of Romanian Iron Guard). Material from neo-Nazi forums such as Iron March are also accessible. Iron March (now defunct) has been linked to groups including Atomwaffen Division (USA) and National Action (UK).²³



Many manuals are shared with the goal of improving the reader's survival skills, which are seen as a vital component in contributing to the success of the far-right in general. In particular, the increase in references to a so-called "Boogaloo" (see section below – "Boogaloo") has encouraged more sharing of this type of content, as individuals concerned with impending race-based civil war prepare to defend themselves, and fight if necessary. These types of manuals include material on navigation, such as "Finding Your Way Without a Compass", camouflage, and personal survival checklists. Tips on sabotage encouraging general mayhem and damage to public systems including communications and roadways are also common. The Irish Republican Army handbook on guerilla warfare has been uploaded multiple times by several different channels, which includes chapters on weapons, attack and defense.

Many of these channels provide free access to many of the texts historically important to the far-right. They can be downloaded for free in a matter of seconds. Popular titles include: *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler, *Siege* by James Mason (available in Kindle format), *White Man's Bible* by Ben Klassen, *Turner Diaries* and *Hunter* by William Pierce, and *10 Points of Fascism* by Oswald Mosley. Many of these texts are described as "essential" and "must reads". Some channels exist solely as repositories to disseminate literature, such as NS-UK Library (NS - National Socialism).

The far-right regularly use Telegram's Telegram to share extended blog posts and articles. Telegraph has reportedly been used to host Islamist terrorist material. The flagging of specific propaganda content on Telegram has seemingly pushed some users to share this on Telegraph instead.²⁴



Boogaloo

Telegram is a platform where the term “Boogaloo” has gained popularity. Originally used as a phrase to insinuate a movie sequel would be low quality, in 2019, the term became increasingly popular in far-right circles.²⁵ It is used broadly to refer to the belief that the USA faces an uprising or second civil war in response to increased legislation against guns and “leftist” governance. Boogaloo is a decentralized movement, reminiscent of the US-based militias of the 1990s, enhanced by 21st century communications. Though not necessarily motivated by racism, the meme-like nature of the term often beclouds some of the more sinister racist and extremist rhetoric promoting the preparation and planning for this uprising.²⁶

Many posts encourage self-reliance so in the case of mass outages for communications, individuals will be sufficiently prepared to survive, and participate in any uprising. While much of the conversation surrounding “Boogaloo” focuses on traditional “prepping” and survival skills, some channels focus on the need for armament as they believe the civil war will be race-based. One channel referred to the Boogaloo as “a transitional vacuum of power... [where] your skin color will be your uniform.”

An extensive series of graphics titled “Basic Boogaloo Tactics”, reposted from an Instagram account, encourage readers to purchase assault rifles to have equivalent firepower to law enforcement.²⁷



bloody.revolutions • Follow

bloody.revolutions A basic guide to coping with staying off the radar in an urban environment in a collapse like situation. Sleeping rough, breaking and entering, facial recognition software and common sense. These guides take a long time to put write and these posted to my feed are by no means the final product you'll see in the collected book I'm putting together, think of it as a quick and dirty beta test. I post what I believe to be a solid basic guide to a topic I'd like to write a chapter on and you guys comment and critique what I've put to paper, sometimes all is well, sometimes someone chimes in with ideas I hadn't even considered or advice that makes more sense than what I put down. It's so much a learning experience for me

1,850 likes
NOVEMBER 5, 2019

Add a comment... Post



COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is another key factor in the accelerationism of this type of rhetoric in far-right circles. Many see COVID-19 as part of a wider conspiracy designed to increase government control over US citizens, threatening their first and second amendment rights. Therefore, far-right activists use COVID-19 as a watershed moment, where they contend “we are past the point of going back to normal.” Similarly, the protests that erupted in the USA, after the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minnesota in May 2020, have been co-opted as further evidence of this impending second civil war. Some channels encouraged and incited violence at the protests to further their plan of accelerating the unrest to bring about the “boogaloo”.

Weapons Manufacturing

Channels on Telegram are used as spaces to share information and practical guides on creating, modifying and upgrading weapons, particularly firearms. Conversation on these channels is often focused on helping individuals prepare for civil unrest that many in far-right circles feel is imminent. Mistrust of government agencies and law enforcement has also fueled interest in alternative ways to access firearms without being tracked or monitored. Some channels specifically dedicate themselves to sharing weapons-based content, which can then be shared with a wider audience through forwarding on far-right channels.

Some channels provide guides to building weapons or attachments as free downloads, which can be downloaded and accessed in a matter of seconds. Other channels provide links to websites which feature similar repositories. Videos featuring homemade weapons are also prevalent, showing how the modifications can be created successfully. In April 2020, a video showing a Nerf gun modified to be used as a firearm, was shared across several channels on Telegram. “How To” videos and manuals on manufacturing homemade explosives and other accelerants including napalm have also been shared.

Sminem's Siege Shack

It's easy to 3D-print a firearm. It's easier to make a shotgun using two lengths of pipe, a nail and a bit of welding. 591 11:49 AM

Sminem's Siege Shack

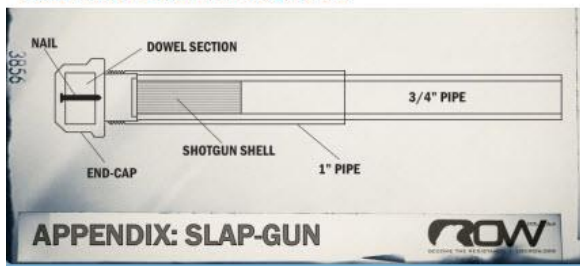
Forwarded from Police frequency



A Ukrainian fascist from the Right Sector organization demonstrates a home-made shotgun. 4135 11:49 AM

Sminem's Siege Shack

Forwarded from Sminem's Siege Shack



Sminem's Siege Shack

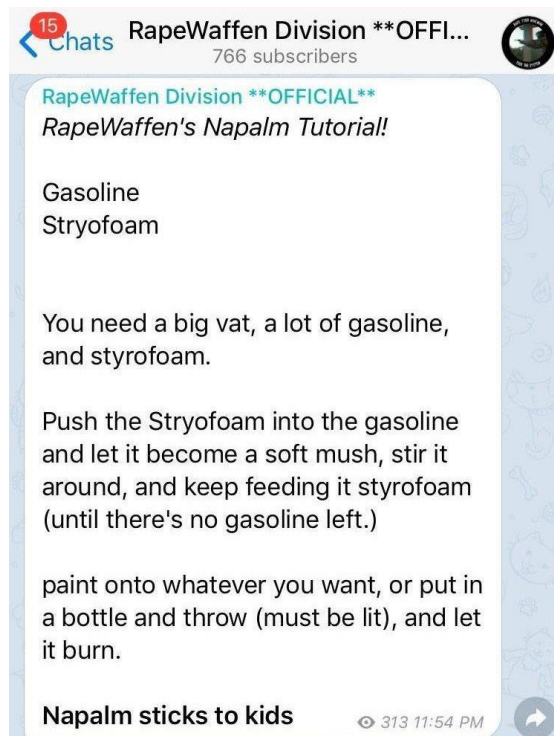
Of course, it's easiest to learn to use weapons that do not require ammunition. 597 11:52 AM

Defense Distributed



Nerf guns are now firearm precursor parts. I wonder what Virginia AG, Mark Herring, would say.. This video was shared with us by a friend who wishes to remain anonymous. 5024 1:26 AM

Many of the guides specifically focus on the use of 3D printers, an increasingly accessible and cost-effective way to manufacture weapons, accessories and ammunition. Other channels focus on weapons that can be made with commonly found materials, such as pipes, nails and simple welding. Videos of an attack on a synagogue in Halle, Germany, in October 2019, were circulated on Telegram channels, showing the assailant using homemade weapons in an attack which left two people dead. There is also discussion of so-called “ghost guns” on some channels – firearms that can be crafted at home and therefore are harder to trace by law enforcement as they do not feature serial numbers.



Deification of Mass Shooters

A consistent theme, amongst the Telegram channels monitored in research for this report, is the deification of mass shooters motivated by far-right ideologies. The glorification of individuals who have committed hate-motivated crimes plays an important role in encouraging members of these channels to go beyond words and commit acts. On the anniversaries of significant events such as the Poway (San Diego) synagogue shooting, the Christchurch (New Zealand) mosque attacks and the Oklahoma City

Bombing, posts praising the perpetrators become the focal point of many of these channels. Telegram is a platform where videos of these attacks are readily available and shared freely.

The Bowl Patrol Pantheon is a list of such individuals, including actors who killed police officers, that is regularly updated as new incidents occur. The channel is named in honor of Dylann Roof (“Bowl” is a reference to his hairstyle), who murdered 9 African-Americans in their church in North Carolina, in 2015. Each person is identified as a “saint” including Buford Furrow (North Valley Jewish Community Center shooting, CA, 1999), Anders Breivik (Norway attacks, 2011), Brenton Tarrant (Christchurch mosque attacks, 2019) and Patrick Crusius (Walmart shooting, El Paso, TX, 2019), noting the number of people murdered in each attack. These particular individuals are often cited as inspirational figures on far-right Telegram channels, and portrayed as martyrs who “did what no one else would do”, rather than sitting behind a keyboard.

Other convicted terrorists including Timothy McVeigh (Oklahoma City Bombing, 1995) and Ted Kaczynski (“Unabomber”) are often referenced. Alongside images deifying these shooters, images of individuals impersonating them have also been shared, in both illustrations and photographs. These also include women dressing in a similar style to Tarrant.



The Bowlcast

The Bowl Patrol Pantheon as of 4/6/20:

- 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. 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. 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 ☞ 8638 3:06 PM

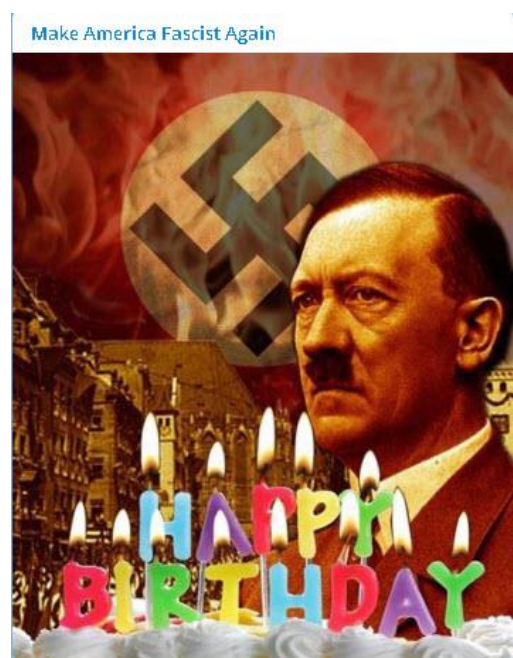


Anniversaries

Anniversaries of significant events also result in outpourings of support for these individuals and tributes to perpetrators of hate crimes around the world.


The end of the siege at Waco and the Oklahoma City bombing both occurred on April 19. April 20 marks the birth of Adolf Hitler and the Columbine school shooting (Colorado). In 2020, April 20 was also Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and the festival of Ramadan began on April 23. Across Telegram, all of these events were used to promote right-wing agendas and ideologies, with many posts encouraging readers to take action.

June 17, 2020, marked the fifth anniversary of the murder of 9 African American congregants at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, perpetrated by Dylann Roof. There were many posts supporting, glorifying and praising his actions on Telegram. Many featured links to videos of Roof entering and exiting the Church, and his FBI interrogation. Multiple posts shared his prison mailing address and links on how to send him money in prison. Other posts shared audio and written copies of his manifesto available for download instantly. There are also many artistic depictions of Roof, depicting him as a hero of the white supremacist movement.



Vorherrschaft division *NEW*
 Forwarded from **TERRORWAVE REFINED**
 For those of you who don't know, today is **ROOF DAY**
 2176 8:57 AM


Vorherrschaft division *NEW*
 Forwarded from **NLB**



Vorherrschaft division *NEW*

6-16-19-lastrhodesia...xed-audio - Copy.mp3
 14:24, 9.5 MB
 113 10:43 AM

MissGorehoundArt



they use.
 If you havent started something already, how
 about a wizard with mean/unfriendly eyebrows or
 a dragon. Or an unfriendly eyebrowed wizard rid
 a dragon. It'd probably be best to do them

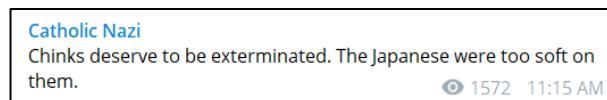
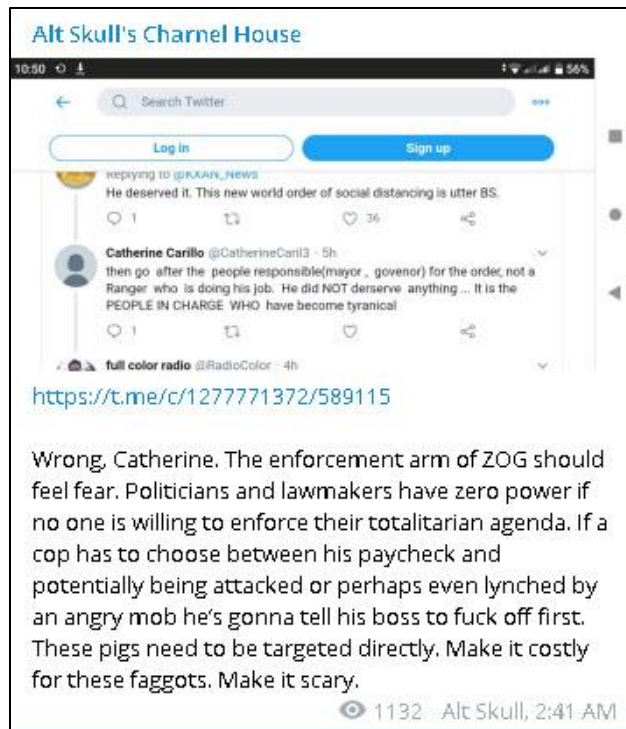
Finished Dylann's wizard! 🙏🔥⚡ #saintmail
 2551 edited 4:05 PM

Original Content

There are multiple channels dedicated to developing “original content” – artistic pieces that promote and glorify far-right individuals and ideologies. These images are often computer generated, using digital art programs to draw and illustrate, or to edit existing photos. Other content includes cartoons, propaganda posters and videos. Channels consistently promote each other, reposting artwork and encouraging users to follow specific channels. One channel posts artwork they reportedly send to Dylann Roof, based on requests he sends in letters from prison. This channel also runs “Right Wing Art Squad”, a collective of far-right artists on Telegram.

Incitement to Violence

Telegram is also utilized as a space to post “calls to action”, often stating that “the only way forward is real violence.” Alongside the deification of significant actors, there are many calls for individuals to mobilize, in no uncertain terms. Often these calls to action imply that it is the duty of the individual to take responsibility and act – “it's your duty to see our people continue to exist and take back what is rightfully ours.” There are references to a coming “RaHoWa” – a “Racial Holy War” that white supremacists predict will result in the destruction of minority groups and the rule of the white race.



Multiple posts incite violence against law enforcement, frequently using the term “pigs”. One posting states: “These pigs need to be targeted directly. Make it costly for these faggots. Make it scary.” Videos depicting violent assaults against individuals from minority groups, particularly African Americans, frequently circulate, glorifying the level of pain inflicted on the victim of the attack. Another argued that “Ghettos and no go zones are the perfect scenario for a racial dissident willing to become a saint. We should frighten and attack non whites wherever they feel most secure.” Another post stated “Someone really ought to kill *Don lemon”, CNN’s news anchor, who is black and a member of the LGBTQ community. Other accounts are blatant in their calls for violence, with one posting on separate occasions, “Chinks deserve to be exterminated” and “Niggers deserve to be exterminated”.

ZYK LON BEAST



Someone really ought to kill *Don lemon

1372 edited 11:01 PM



There is a community of channels that promote violence and neo-Nazism as the basis for their existence, which can loosely be categorized as “terrorwave”. These terrorwave channels have 1000s of members and promote violent action as the only solution to the perceived decline of the white race across the West.

In a similar vein, a group of channels promoting the use of “rape” as a political tool to incite change. Rapewaffen Division advocates for rape as the “only political solution”. Amongst numerous references to the act of rape, the group also uses it to represent their desire for damage, destruction and violation. This group stated that “The RapeWaffen Division will violate your minds, bodies, and lives, and will shatter your reality”. Individuals wearing masks to disguise themselves appear in this Telegram channel. One post from 2019 states the masked individual in the photo is “On my way to deliver a drum of .223s to an unstated mosque like building”. Their propaganda posters are designed in a similar manner to propaganda posters shared by Atomwaffen Division. Other groups utilizing similar names have also been created, sharing similar violent content and calls for action.



Organized groups

Many organized groups that promote hateful or harmful rhetoric towards minority groups have been utilizing Telegram as a space to organize. Many of these groups had to find alternative platforms after being removed by mainstream social media sites including Facebook and Twitter. Coupled with the functionality that Telegram offers, it has become a popular place for groups to connect quickly with their current membership, and to recruit new individuals to their cause. Some of the groups found in conducting research for this report emanate from countries including Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Germany, Switzerland, France, Canada, UK, and USA.

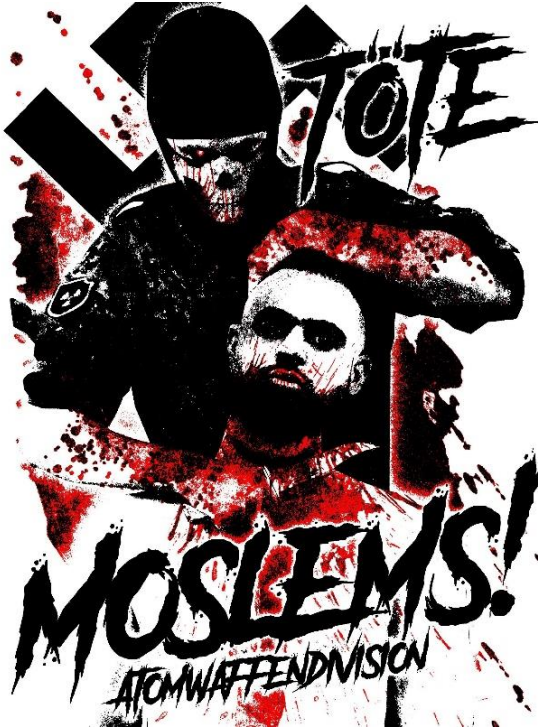
In particular, Telegram channels belonging to a variety of neo-Nazi groups can be found on the platform. Many of these regularly post Nazi propaganda, idolizing prominent Nazi figures including Adolf Hitler, Rudolf Hess and Dr Josef Mengele, and praising the genocidal policies that the Third Reich enacted. Historic publications, posters, videos and photos are readily accessible. In addition, many of these channels also promote neo-Nazi content, embracing National Socialism, fascism and racist politics as the cornerstones of society. Prominent European groups with neo-Nazi links that use Telegram include the Nordic Resistance Movement, Misanthropic Division and Azov Battalion.



The US group Atomwaffen Division has also seemingly operated a series of different channels under a variety of different names. This appeared to inspire the creation of multiple channels inspired by AtomWaffen, using the same language and style of propaganda. Some claim to be international offshoots or branches of the US movement, including channels from Germany and Russia.

Other groups use Telegram to show their activity in different regions of the countries they are associated with. Several American channels use Telegram to post numerous photos of their propaganda stickers and posters being stuck in prominent places across US society, particularly on college campuses, overpasses and lampposts. They also use Telegram to show photos of their groups gathering in real life, for social or political reasons. Groups such as the white supremacist Rise Above Movement, guised under other names,

showcase young men engaging in fitness training and so-called “combat sports”. Other white nationalist groups such as Proud Boys and Patriot Front frequently post photos and videos of their activities, encouraging others to join their efforts. Some of these larger groups also have regional chapters with separate channels on Telegram, to further delineate and organize their efforts and showcase their impact.



Patriot Front

#PatriotFront activists placed promotional materials around:

- Cambridge, Massachusetts
- El Segundo, California
- Austin, Texas
- Frederick, Maryland

563 5:45 PM

Individuals who have been banned from other mainstream platforms can also be found using Telegram as an alternative option to share their messages. Prominent individuals from across the far-right spectrum politically and geographically include Nick Griffin, Blair Cottrell, Mike Peinovich, Laura Loomer, Milo Yiannopoulos and Patrick Casey.

Channel Info X

Nick Griffin
1,187 subscribers

t.me/NickGriffin
Link

"Been there, done that, know a better way".
Using unrivalled experience to help
Generation Z win a future for white children.
Description

Channel Info X

Blair Cottrell
3,154 subscribers

t.me/realblaircottrell
Link

My thoughts, things that make me laugh
and other stuff I think you should see.

Personal: @BlairCottrell
Description

Reported Incidents Connected to Telegram

There is a precedent for incitement and planning of attacks taking place on Telegram, as evidenced by the use of the platform by groups such as the Islamic State. Recent reports suggest there is evidence that far-right actors are also utilizing the space to communicate and plan, prior to attempting to execute attacks on the general public.

In September 2019, Jarrett William Smith, a US soldier from Kansas, was charged with distributing bomb-making information over social media.²⁸ Smith purportedly engaged with an undercover FBI agent on Telegram, sharing instructions for a car bomb.

In March 2020, Timothy Wilson was shot and killed by the FBI in Missouri, after he prepared to attack a hospital where patients with COVID-19 were being cared for.²⁹ Wilson allegedly had posted antisemitic messages on two channels on Telegram in the hours before his attempt.³⁰

While these incidents were widely reported by the media, the fact remains that much of the communication between far-right actors on Telegram remains private. Therefore, it is impossible to assess the number or level of real threats that exist on Telegram. However, if engagement with rhetoric and incitement can be considered as a gateway to acting on the hateful ideologies peddled by the far-right, then it would appear that Telegram is currently one of the most obvious and fertile choices for those interested in taking action.

Summary and Conclusions

- Telegram has grown to be the current medium of choice for far-right extremists. The overall findings presented in this report should serve as a wake-up call for online activists, policy makers and law enforcement to better understand the use of Telegram by extremists, and to develop appropriate responses to this deeply disturbing and dangerous trend.
- Telegram is openly used as a platform for communication across the political and ideological spectrum of the far-right.
- Far-right channels on Telegram are used as spaces for the glorification of terrorist actors and movements, past and present.
- The sharing of harmful material and incitement to violence regularly occurs on these channels.
- There are no clear policy guidelines from Telegram regarding extremist activities on their platform, and the removal of content and channels appears to be disjointed and irregular.

The SWC urges Telegram to introduce clear and comprehensive policy guidelines to stop the proliferation of hate, extremism and terrorism on their social media platform.

To report online hate and terrorism, please email ireport@wiesenthal.com

The Simon Wiesenthal Center

The Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) is a Jewish global human rights organization dedicated to researching the Holocaust and hate in a historic and contemporary context. The Center confronts anti-Semitism, hate and terrorism, promotes human rights and dignity, stands with Israel, defends the safety of Jews worldwide, and teaches the lessons of the Holocaust for future generations. With a constituency of over 400,000 households in the United States, it is accredited as an NGO at international organizations including the United Nations, UNESCO, OSCE, Organization of American States (OAS), the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO) and the Council of Europe.

For decades, the SWC has researched the promotion of extremism in digital spaces. The Digital Terrorism and Hate Project has produced an annual interactive report annually since 1997. The report focuses on tens of thousands of websites, detailing how the Internet has become a virtual university for terrorism and has emerged as the nerve center for training, recruitment, and terrorist activities around the world. Digital Terrorism and Hate has been distributed to government agencies, community activists, educators, and members of the media.

Explore the report at www.digitalhate.net

Report to ireport@wiesenthal.com

www.wiesenthal.com



Sources

- ¹ Telegram Frequently Asked Questions – available at: <https://telegram.org/faq#q-what-is-telegram-what-do-i-do-here>
- ² Vivienne Walt, “With Telegram, A Reclusive Social Media Star Rises Again”, Fortune, February 16, 2017, <https://fortune.com/longform/telegram-pavel-durov-mobile-world-congress/> [accessed July 7, 2020]
- ³ Telegram Frequently Asked Questions – available at: <https://telegram.org/faq#q-what-is-telegram-what-do-i-do-here>
- ⁴ “We are already one billion!”, October 30, 2019, <https://t.me/tontelegramnews/580>
- ⁵ Telegram’s competitor, WhatsApp messenger, announced they had reached two billion users in February 2020. WhatsApp was established in 2009 and was purchased by Facebook in 2014. <https://blog.whatsapp.com/two-billion-users-connecting-the-world-privately> [accessed July 7, 2020]
- ⁶ Pavel Durov, “Why Isn’t Telegram End-to-End Encrypted by Default?”, August 14, 2017, <https://telegra.ph/Why-Isnt-Telegram-End-to-End-Encrypted-by-Default-08-14> [accessed July 7, 2020]
- ⁷ Pavel Durov, “Why Isn’t Telegram End-to-End Encrypted by Default?”, August 14, 2017, <https://telegra.ph/Why-Isnt-Telegram-End-to-End-Encrypted-by-Default-08-14>
- ⁸ Telegram Frequently Asked Questions – available at: <https://telegram.org/faq#q-there-39s-illegal-content-on-telegram-how-do-i-take-it-down>
- ⁹ Telegram Frequently Asked Questions – available at: <https://telegram.org/faq#telegram-basics>
- ¹⁰ Ali Breland, “Ahead of Richmond Rally, Apple and Google Are Letting Nazis Use This App to Coordinate”, Mother Jones, January 19, 2020. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/01/telegram-nazis-richmond/> [accessed July 7, 2020]
- ¹¹ “Instant View, Telegraph, and Other Goodies”, Telegram blog, November 22, 2016, <https://telegram.org/blog/instant-view>
- ¹² “Custom Sticker Sets”, Telegram blog, May 15, 2015, <https://telegram.org/blog/stickers-revolution>
- ¹³ Bennett Clifford and Helen Powell, “Encrypted Extremism: Inside the English-Speaking Islamic State Ecosystem on Telegram”, Program on Extremism – The George Washington University, June 2019, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/EncryptedExtremism.pdf>, p.10
- ¹⁴ This action also included eight other providers, including Google, Files.fm, Twitter and Instagram. Europol, Press Release, November 22, 2019, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/referral-action-day-against-islamic-state-online-terrorist-propaganda> [accessed July 7 2020]
- ¹⁵ ISIS Watch, Telegram Channel, December 1, 2019, <https://t.me/ISISwatch/1079>
- ¹⁶ October 2019 – 6209; December 2019 – 56186 ;January 2020 – 25358; February 2020- 24311; March 2020 – 30681; April 2020 – 56858. ISIS Watch, Telegram Channel, December 1, 2019, <https://t.me/ISISwatch/1231>
- ¹⁷ A list of Telegram channels studied in this report is available upon request.
- ¹⁸ Tess Owen, “How Telegram Became White Nationalists’ Go-To Messaging Platform”, Vice News, October 7, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/59nk3a/how-telegram-became-white-nationalists-go-to-messaging-platform [accessed July 7 2020]
- ¹⁹ Billy Perrigo, “White Supremacist Groups Are Recruiting With Help from Coronavirus – and a Popular Messaging App”, TIME, April 8, 2020, <https://time.com/5817665/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-white-supremacist-groups/> [accessed July 7 2020]
- ²⁰ Rita Katz, “Telegram has finally cracked down on Islamist terrorism. Will it do the same for the far-right?“, The Washington Post, December 5, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/12/05/telegram-has-finally-cracked-down-islamist-terrorism-will-it-do-same-far-right/> [accessed July 7 2020]
- ²¹ A list of Telegram channels studied in this report is available upon request.
- ²² Citations for quotations and references directly from Telegram channels available upon request.
- ²³ Team Ross, Bevenssee, and ZC, “Transnational White Terror: Exposing Atomwaffen And the Iron March Networks”, Bellingcat, December 19, 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2019/12/19/transnational-white-terror-exposing-atomwaffen-and-the-iron-march-networks/> [accessed July 10, 2020]
- ²⁴ “Extremist Content Online”, Counter Extremism Project, January 27, 2020, <https://www.counterextremism.com/press/extremist-content-online-anti-semitic-instagram-account-has-advocated-violence-against-jews> [accessed July 7, 2020]
- ²⁵ Electric boogaloo” is typically used to suggest the sequel to a movie is of poor quality, an homage to the 1980s movie about breakdancing, Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo. Ben Zimmer, “Phrasal Patterns 2: Electric Boogaloo”, Oxford University Press blog, August 9, 2007, <https://blog.oup.com/2007/08/patterns/> [accessed 7 July, 2020]
- ²⁶ A Facebook page titled “Civil War 2 Electric Boogaloo” was created in June 2018. The name was changed to “Civil War 2: Zucc’s Big CNN Ice Cream Social” on July 2, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/Civil-War-2-Electric-Boogaloo-673060509695548/> [accessed July 7, 2020]
- ²⁷ This Instagram channel has over 20,900 followers as of July 2020. Link available upon request.
- ²⁸ Hannah Allam, “U.S. Soldier Charged With Teaching Bomb-Making to Far-Right Extremists”, NPR, September 23, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/23/763544037/kansas-soldier-charged-with-teaching-bomb-making-to-far-right-extremists> [accessed July 7, 2020]
- ²⁹ “FBI Statement Regarding March 24, 2020 Incident in Belton, Mo.”, Lee’s Summit Tribune, March 25, 2020, <https://ltribune.net/index.php/2020/03/25/fbi-statement-regarding-march-24-2020-incident-in-belton-mo/> [accessed July 7, 2020]
- ³⁰ Billy Perrigo, “White Supremacist Groups Are Recruiting With Help from Coronavirus – and a Popular Messaging App”, TIME, April 8, 2020, <https://time.com/5817665/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-white-supremacist-groups/> [accessed July 7, 2020]