

Conspiracy Theories Affecting Radicalization Trajectories: Anti-Government Conspiracy Theories and Great Replacement Narratives on Telegram

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Abstract

How does engagement with radical-right-wing conspiracy theories influence a person to join a protest, or commit a violent crime? Radicalization to violent extremism continues to produce strenuous challenges for private citizens, businesses, and political institutions around the world. Namely, the proliferation of potentially harmful content such as conspiracy theories and disinformation. Previous research has implicated the involvement of various socio-cognitive mechanisms, group processes, and individual personality traits in the facilitation of an individual's pathway to committing non-violent/ violent actions. This research conceptualizes propagandist content as an influencer of an individual's cognitive processes, in which the content contains highly polarizing and emotionally charged issues that may have moderate efficacy in activating a person's affective states and may increase the chances of nonviolent/violent mobilization. The present research compares narratives and conspiracy theories that are being shared in anti-government and white supremacist extremist communities on Telegram. The present research utilized an exploratory-observation methodology to collect comments, video clips, photos, and news articles in four open communities (n= 200). Comparative analyses performed on the narratives coded (n= 247) report that 37% and 40% fit into alleged mass corruption and anti-diversity narrative domains, respectively. A total of 18% pushed false and often fabricated information concerning the COVID-19 pandemic while 2% focused on LGBT+ issues, and 3% of narratives targeted migrants and Immigration policies.

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