

**Delegitimizing the Legitimate:
Dark Social Movements on Telegram**

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Abstract:

In this study, we empirically examine conspiracies on the end-to-end encrypted instant messaging platform Telegram. Using the theoretical framework of dark social movements, we provide a first look at conspiratorial topics disseminated by right-wing extremists in Canada. This study examines conspiracies related to the Great Reset, Great Awakening, United Nations, technology, China, deep state, COVID-19, Islamophobia, and the New World Order. To conduct our study, we downloaded all 270,806 posts available across 21 Telegram channels selected based on their affiliation and/or association with the far-right in Canada. Using mixed-methods entailing traditional content analysis of sampled data as well as a digital investigation of the overall dataset, our findings illustrate a tendency to delegitimize the legitimate with seven conspiratorial topics and trends related to COVID-19, the interconnected nature of conspiracies, technology (5G Network, QR Codes, etc.), the Great Awakening, the deep state and political polarization, children-saving, and critical race and/or religion. We discuss how dark social movements on Telegram orbit around increasingly mainstream conspiracies that enable the far-right to coordinate activities, share similar ideas, and troll opponents.

Keywords: Telegram; Canada; conspiracy theories; Far-right; social media; social movements
