TELEGRAM TRACKER
BY THE PROGRAM ON EXTREMISM

ABOUT THE PoE TELEGRAM TRACKER

The George Washington University Program on Extremism's (PoE) Telegram Tracker is a new project within the Program's broader initiative to analyze the activities of English-speaking supporters of the Islamic State (IS) on social media applications. As part of the project, PoE researchers regularly use anonymous Telegram accounts to find, analyze, and code pro-IS Telegram channels that contain English-language content, and maintain a database of selected channels with archived screenshots.

The goal of the project is to trace the developments, trends, and changes in how IS supporters utilize this platform and its features (e.g. encrypted messaging, group chats, etc.) to propagate messaging strategies, share know-how, and direct and inspire attacks. The quarterly Tracker releases a statistical breakdown of the channels added by PoE researchers during three-month spans. The Tracker is coupled with periodic analyses from our researchers on the dynamics of Telegram use by IS supporters.

Starting from a small corpus of channels compiled with assistance and consultation from experts and analysts in various countries, PoE researchers add new channels to the database using "join links" from channels already in the database. Because new channels on Telegram can only be accessed via these "join links" available in other channels, the process of adding new channels relies on snowball collection. Researchers filter these channels using multiple criteria to determine whether the channel in question is a) pro-IS and b) contains English-language content. Channels added to the database must satisfy both criteria. After joining the new channel, researchers take screenshots of the channel for the archive and code it according to the following variables: name; number of followers; languages used besides English; date and time added to the database; date and time of channel creation; accessibility of channel (public or private); topics of English-language conversation on the channel; number of files (photo, video, audio, document, and voice messages) shared on the channel; and any filesharing sites used by the channel. The statistics in the Telegram Tracker reflect the content of the channel in question at its date and time of coding.

This project faces analytical limitations due to the nature of Telegram and our available resources. New channels are uploaded, suspended, and deleted constantly; our accounts are limited in number and do not operate 24/7; and our English language requirement is necessary to maintain consistency but substantially limits the scope of pro-IS channels on Telegram that can be added to our database.

For any questions about the Tracker, please email extremism@gwu.edu.