

# Atomwaffen Division & its Affiliates on Telegram: Variations, Practices, & Interconnections

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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the RESOLVE Network, acknowledged partners contributing to the production of this publication, the U.S. Institute of Peace, or any entity of the U.S. government.*

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# KEY FINDINGS

- More than half the organizations captured in our research dataset appear to be recently formed, indicating that Atomwaffen Division (AWD) affiliate groups continue developing in multiple countries despite increased scrutiny from law enforcement and disruption of well-known groups in a variety of national contexts.
- Local divisions construct and promote individual brands but utilize a narrow aesthetic (colors, font, symbols, slogans) and specific genres of content. The limiting of aesthetics and genres works to create a shared visual vernacular that provides cross-linguistic and intercultural coherence, as well as linking affiliate brands with the meta-brand of Atomwaffen and Siege culture.
- Communicative practices on Telegram show regular reinforcement of members' identification with Siege cultural norms at both the ideological and individual levels. This indicates such reinforcement is necessary for developing coherence across multiple divisions and unaffiliated actors, which work intentionally as a distributed, decentralized transnational network of cells.
- AWD and affiliated groups in the dataset manage channel removal by creating “back up” channels with minimal differences in channel name or brand. This differs substantially from Jihadist channel naming practices, which obscure naming and branding on channels to avoid detection. This difference indicates that Far-Right violent extremist platform removal impacts have not yet reached a scale that would alter AWD and affiliate groups' brand-identification strategies.
- Alliance formation between groups and platform practices that promote strong interconnection between affiliate organizations provide technical as well as practical benefits to these groups. Technical benefits of increased cross-channel membership and content sharing include redundancy (replication of content on multiple channels) and resilience (the ability of channels to reform) in relation to platform moderation and removal policies. Practical benefits include the ability to develop an approximation of “leaderless resistance” or non-hierarchical, small-cell organization intended to resist infiltration and disruption by law enforcement, through a transnational, digitally networked culture.<sup>1</sup>

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1 “As honest men who have banded together into groups or associations of a political or religious nature are falsely labeled “domestic terrorists” or “cultists” and suppressed, it will become necessary to consider other methods of organization — or as the case may very well call for: non-organization.... This understood, the question arises “What method is left for those resisting state tyranny?” The answer comes from Col. Amoss who proposed the “Phantom Cell” mode of organization. Which he described as Leaderless Resistance. A system of organization that is based upon the cell organization, but does not have any central control or direction.... Utilizing the Leaderless Resistance concept, all individuals and groups operate independently of each other, and never report to a central headquarters or single leader for direction or instruction...(2-5)” Louis Beam, “Leaderless Resistance,” *The Seditonist*, #12, Feb. 1992, 1-7. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jeffrey-Kaplan/publication/233097025\\_Leaderless\\_resistance/links/549db77a0cf2d6581ab640a9/Leaderless-resistance.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jeffrey-Kaplan/publication/233097025_Leaderless_resistance/links/549db77a0cf2d6581ab640a9/Leaderless-resistance.pdf).



# INTRODUCTION

Neo-Nazi accelerationist groups that seek to use chaos and violence to speed up (accelerate) societal and governmental collapse have been identified in multiple national contexts as domestic terror threats.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, these groups, while local, utilize digital networking (social and online media) as a framework for developing transnational affiliations and interconnections. Academic and policy research tend to focus either on the broader ideology or on specific groups—such as Atomwaffen, Feuerkrieg, Sonnenkrieg, and The Base—that have come under public and legal scrutiny.<sup>3</sup> These papers and reports highlight the development of transnational interconnections amongst identified local cells that works to increase the global spread of the ideology and build numbers for future mobilization to violent action. However, the features of these groups’ online interactions (e.g., digital modes of engagement and communicative practices) which undergird the formation of such connections remain underexplored.

This research brief details findings from a recent collaborative project exploring different groups related to Atomwaffen Division (AWD) on Telegram. The brief provides an initial foray into understanding the digital communicative practices these AWD-related groups use to maintain their loose structure as a transnational, digitally networked extremist culture.<sup>4</sup> AWD, its affiliate divisions, and related groups are participants in “Siege” culture.” This designation stems from a shared focus on the anti-democratic, neo-Nazi ideology espoused in the text *Siege*, a compilation of tracts written by James Mason in the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> *Siege* promotes neo-fascist accelerationism, a particular form of extremist practice focused on the development of a global network of localized “cells” (attempting to take up a form of “leaderless resistance”). These “cells” are committed to using violence and chaos to speed up worldwide governmental and societal collapse, with the goal of taking over and establishing what adherents believe is the “correct” world order (fascist) and social hierarchy (white supremacy).<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, Siege culture groups affiliated with the meta-brand of Atomwaffen Division, as this research brief shows, are continuing to develop globally and building a transnational, digital networked culture, despite increased scrutiny. This indicates that their structure as a digitally networked, transnational culture provides resilience to traditional policy and law enforcement approaches that otherwise focus on individual actors and discreet organizations. Addressing this threat requires insight into the practices that

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2 Haley Evans. “All You Need to Know About the U.K. Proscribing the Neo-Nazi Group Atomwaffen Division,” *Lawfare*, May 17, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/all-you-need-know-about-uk-proscribing-neo-nazi-group-atomwaffen-division>.

3 This scrutiny includes criminal prosecutions, news exposés, and in some cases designation as “terrorist” organizations by individual governments (e.g., Canada and the United Kingdom).

4 This research is partial given its focus on Telegram (a single platform) and the ethical framework employed by Tech Against Terrorism (limited to accessing only channels that do not require interaction with the administrator to join). This research, however, highlights the importance of developing a larger body of research exploring the variations, interconnections, and practices of “Siege” culture groups online.

5 Bethan Johnson and Matthew Feldman. “Siege Culture After Siege: Anatomy of a Neo-Nazi Terrorist Doctrine,” *ICCT Research Paper*, July 2021. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2021/07/siege-culture-neo-nazi-terrorist-doctrine.pdf>.

6 Zack Beauchamp. “Accelerationism: The Obscure Idea Inspiring White Supremacist Killers around the World,” *Vox*, Nov. 18, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/11/11/20882005/accelerationism-white-supremacy-christchurch>.

Siege culture groups use to interconnect their now multi-nodal, supranational organization to effectively generate similarly networked, transnational, and cooperative intervention approaches.

## CONTEXT

Literature about Siege culture, AWD, and AWD-like groups has been rapidly proliferating in the last several years given the threat they pose and given increasing legal and policy responses that recognize that threat. Academic and policy literature is bolstered by a wide array of news reporting and open source intelligence (OSINT) projects conducted by antifascist and anti-extremism watchdog groups over the last five years.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, contextual work is being done by academic researchers through projects like “Mapping Militant Organizations” at Stanford, which catalogues a variety of extremist groups and includes a write up on Atomwaffen Division/National Socialist Order.<sup>8</sup>

Recent work relevant to situating this brief in the literature spans ideological, open source intelligence (OSINT), and intelligence approaches to understanding Siege culture, Atomwaffen, and high-profile affiliates. Ideological approaches have evaluated the ways white supremacist texts critique members of the in-group as a framework for developing counter-extremist interventions and provided analyses of Siege culture. Such approaches have involved analyzing the writings of James Mason to show how they potentially mobilize violence within the contemporary online context.<sup>9</sup> Intelligence approaches have used detailed case studies of Atomwaffen and well-known affiliates as exemplars of the rise in Far-Right extremist mobilization to violence. Such approaches have provided policymakers and practitioners information on the formation, scope, and scale of AWD as a transnational extremist network and terrorist threat.<sup>10</sup> Literature using both ideological and intelligence approaches aims to provide a basis for increased attention to the threat of Far-Right extremism, the development of potential interventions, and updates to counter-terrorism policy.

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7 See work by *Bellingcat*, *Unicorn Riot*, *Belltower*, and other public research organizations focused on analyzing white supremacist extremism for specific reporting on doxed data such as the Iron March website data dump and Feuerkrieg Division internal group chat leaks.

8 National Socialist Order is the new brand name for the US group formerly known as Atomwaffen, which publicly announced it was disbanding after several high profile arrests of group leaders. The remaining leadership rebranded and refocused the organization in a more explicitly fascist framework. See: Mapping Militant Organizations. “Atomwaffen Division/National Socialist Order.” Stanford University. Last modified February 2021. <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/atomwaffen-division>.

9 J.M. Berger. *A Paler Shade of White: Identity & In-group Critique in James Mason’s Siege*, RESOLVE Network, April 2021. <https://www.resolve.net.org/research/paler-shade-white-identity-group-critique-james-masons-siege>; Bethan Johnson and Matthew Feldman. “Siege Culture After Siege: Anatomy of a Neo-Nazi Terrorist Doctrine,” *ICCT Research Paper*, July 2021. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2021/07/siege-culture-neo-nazi-terrorist-doctrine.pdf>.

10 Jacob Ware. “Siege: The Atomwaffen Division and Rising Far-Right Terrorism in the United States,” *ICCT Policy Brief*, July 2019. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2019/07/ICCT-Ware-Siege-July2019.pdf>; *The Atomwaffen Division: The Evolution of the White Supremacy Threat*, Soufan Center Special Report, August 2020. <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/The-Atomwaffen-Division-The-Evolution-of-the-White-Supremacy-Threat-August-2020-.pdf>.

The most directly related research to this project takes up the issue of neo-fascist accelerationism as a networked digital culture. Research taking this approach details how the networked structure of AWD and related neo-fascist accelerationist groups allow them to endure through fairly rapid cycles of group collapse and reshuffling.<sup>11</sup> This report similarly approaches these groups as a networked digital culture, exploring them with a particular eye to the mechanics of their local variations, communicative practices, and interconnections on the Telegram platform. This work contributes to an understanding of how Siege culture groups interact within and across divisions, how divisions communicate at different “life stages,” and also analyzes the functions and benefits of the communicative practices used by divisions within Telegram specifically.

## METHODS

Before embarking on data collection, the project received institutional ethics approval. To safeguard the welfare of the research team, all data were collected by Open Source Intelligence Analysts at Tech Against Terrorism and then transferred to the research team via a secure file transfer service. For additional security and privacy protection, the collected data were not shared outside of the project team and no channel names are identified in this report.<sup>12</sup>

Data collection took place from 30 July 2021 to 12 September 2021 and comprised three stages. The first stage was to locate potentially relevant Telegram channels. Here, three techniques were employed: keyword searches in the native search bar on Telegram (including names of known media entities, outlets, propaganda videos, and the names of the groups themselves and their known affiliates); monitoring AWD on other platforms, in order to find joinlinks to relevant Telegram channels; and, monitoring known AWD Telegram channels to identify links to new ones.<sup>13</sup> It is also important to note that Tech Against Terrorism has a policy of non-engagement with channel administrators, meaning that channels were not accessed if they could only be joined by seeking the permission of the administrator. The dataset is accordingly limited to public channels and private channels with publicly available joinlinks.

Having located potentially relevant Telegram channels, the second stage was to decide whether they should be regarded as an AWD channel for this project (i.e., channels run by the core group and its regional affiliates and channels run by groups closely aligned with AWD). A group was regarded as closely aligned with AWD if it: espoused similar ideological narratives to AWD (i.e., Siege culture, accelerationism, white supremacy); had similar branding (either through name or logo or use of similar aesthetics); or, if the group’s channel was promoted by other Telegram channels that were linked to or supportive of AWD. Telegram content policies restrict and moderate the sharing of illegal material and the promotion

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11 Alex Newhouse. “The Threat Is the Network: The Multi-Node Structure of Neo-Fascist Accelerationism,” *CTC Sentinel*, 14:5, June 2021, 17-25. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CTC-SENTINEL-052021.pdf>.

12 Names of organizations captured and mentioned in the dataset are included in tables for reference as part of the aims of this subproject, however, no channel names, identifying information, or direct quotes are included to ensure compliance with the ethical requirements of the larger project.

13 Joinlinks are hyperlinks that enable users to join specific Telegram channels. Joinlinks are needed to access private channels, which cannot be directly accessed through the public parts of the Telegram platform.

of violence on public channels only; private channels are not moderated.<sup>14</sup> Given the collection of primarily public channel data and Tech Against Terrorism’s reporting policy, multiple channels were expected to be removed during the data collection period. As a result, Tech Against Terrorism continued to monitor for any new AWD channels that appeared during the data collection period and added them to the dataset. AWD channels were significantly disrupted by the platform, such that by the end of data collection all the specific channels in the dataset had been taken down.<sup>15</sup>

The third stage was the extraction of data. Given the significant disruption of AWD channels, data were extracted daily throughout the data collection period. Channels were downloaded using Telegram’s in-built channel download feature. All data were downloaded in HTML format. Telegram’s export chat history function was also used to export all other available data, including photos, videos, voice messages, video messages, stickers, GIFs, and files. Data collection commenced on July 30, 2021, and by this date some channels had been in existence for several months. For these channels, it was therefore possible to collect posts and other content that pre-dated the data collection period.

For this subproject, textual analysis of posts was the primary method employed to analyze the AWD channels’ content including messages, images, and videos using both the HTML logs and the dataset files (Excel format). Themes and content were analyzed using a grounded interpretive approach focused on identifying emergent patterns in narratives, meaning-making practices, aesthetic preferences, and communicative purposes of posts and content from within the empirical data.<sup>16</sup> The HTML logs provided a view of the channel conversations in the format seen on telegram by users to assess communicative purpose, interactions between users/channels, and affiliate aesthetics. The dataset file was used to assess channel type (broadcast or interactive), life stage of individual affiliate organizations, and to code broad qualitative and communicative trends across the included channels.

## FINDINGS

### Variations: AWD, Affiliate, and Related Channels

The dataset captured seven separate organizations referred to as “divisions” within the language of Siege culture. These seven divisions were using thirteen channels on Telegram during the data collection and analysis period.<sup>17</sup> The seven affiliate divisions mentioned or shared content from an additional eleven

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14 See Telegram Terms of Service (<https://telegram.org/tos#:~:text=By%20signing%20up%20for%20Telegram,Telegram%20channels%2C%20bots%2C%20etc.>) regarding disallowed content on public channels. More detail can be found in both the Telegram FAQ and privacy policies.

15 Tech Against Terrorism’s policy requires reporting of identified extremist channels to platforms for removal. The channels recorded in the dataset have been removed by Telegram, although given the discussion on the channels regarding the practice of creating backup channels, new versions of the removed channels may have been created and repopulated by prior channel members.

16 Robert Thornburg and Kathy Charmaz, “Grounded Theory and Theoretical Coding,” *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, Ed. Uwe Flick, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014), 153-169.

17 An 8th organization was captured in the dataset that initially appeared to be an AWD affiliate, but closer research has indicated that it is not an affiliated organization.

ideologically-related organizations that were primarily based in Siege culture, but inclusive of other neo-Nazi, white supremacist, nationalist, and anti-Semitic organizations. In total, the dataset offers a view of a transnational network of eighteen far-right, primarily neo-Nazi accelerationist extremist organizations located in various geographies across the world and using at least seven languages (listed in the table below), although English was the dominant language used in all channels regardless of geographic location.<sup>18</sup> Where other languages were included in posts, digital translations of material were reviewed as part of the analysis.

Three divisions had more than one channel set up with one moderator, specifically indicating that their additional channel was created as a “backup” channel should their primary channel be removed by the platform. Along with this, multiple channel moderators discussed channel removal and having to recreate channels, a common response practice for extremist groups to address platforms’ application of content moderation policies.<sup>19</sup> The channel names of backup channels were minimally changed from the primary channel name—altering a letter or character—with the stated intention of retaining the channel’s brand. Channel moderators articulated their attempts to keep names consistent on newly created and backup channels highlighting the use of branding as part of their communications strategy, even considering some impact of policy-based platform removals.

As such, AWD channels did not seek to hide their presence by altering their names or descriptions, a tactic more commonly seen with Jihadist extremist channels.<sup>20</sup> This indicates a proactive tactical response to content moderation and attempts to create a mechanism for addressing the impact of channel suspension and removal without leaving the platform entirely. However, its difference from the tactics employed by Jihadist channel moderators indicates that Far-Right extremist platform removal impacts have not yet reached a scale that is altering AWD and affiliate brand-identification strategies.

## ESTABLISHED AND DEVELOPING DIVISIONS

The division organizations captured in the dataset included known AWD, affiliate, and related organizations as well as previously unknown organizations.<sup>21</sup> These were split into two “life stages,” either established or developing, based on two factors: 1) prior empirical knowledge about the organization (news

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18 Geographic location was often implied rather than listed based on chat commentary or identified through secondary research sources such as news information about specific groups.

19 Tim Mak. “Across the Internet, a Game of Whac-a-Mole is Underway to Root Out Extremism,” *NPR*, March 16, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/16/972519460/across-the-internet-a-game-of-whac-a-mole-is-underway-to-root-out-extremism>.

20 Maura Conway, Moign Khawaja, Suraj Lakhani, Jeremy Reffin, Andrew Robertson & David Weir (2019) “Disrupting Daesh: Measuring Takedown of Online Terrorist Material and Its Impacts,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 42:1-2, 141-160, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1513984. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1513984>.

21 Known organizations include Atomwaffen Division (US), Feuerkrieg Division, Sonnenkrieg Division, Atomwaffen Germany, Atomwaffen Russland (RUS), Antipodean Resistance, and The Base. Unknown organizations (in the context of research reporting) include divisions developing in Argentina and mentions of groups in Brazil (which may appear in Portuguese language research), along with several smaller organizations with unclear geographic origins. Content also shows highly organized membership in Ukraine (a known site of activity) without a formalized division name association. Mentions include groups like Injekt Division that are included in news reporting on arrests and prosecutions, but not yet included in academic/research literature. Injekt Division is of particular concern given its focus on recruiting current and former addicts acting as an extremist “12-Step” program, according to their messaging.



reports, legal proceedings, and terrorist designations) and 2) the division’s posts related to their recent establishment and goals of growth as “new” organizations. This categorization enables a view of how the life stage and hence wider awareness of the of various divisions impacts the types of propaganda and communicative practices they use to mobilize local recruitment, division growth, and inter-divisional networking.

The channels used by established divisions included the highest volume of posts, widest range of content, and included the most interactive channels where ideological reinforcement and adherence were promoted through chat-based discussions. These channels also incorporated the most cross-divisional engagement as multiple members of the channels were also members of other channels. This cross-membership in interactive channels provides a framework for networking the various divisional groups and ensuring a relatively consistent ideological framework across that network.

**Figure 1.** Established AWD, Affiliate, and Related Groups in the Tech Against Terrorism Dataset

<b>Division Name</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Broadcast/ Interactive</b>	<b>Focus of Channel</b>	<b>Purpose of Channel</b>	<b>Volume of Content</b>	<b>Interconnection with other AWD Affiliates</b>
Atomwaffen Division	English/ German/Ukrainian/Russian/Czech	1 Interactive	Inter-group Chat	Ideological Reinforcement/ Community Engagement	Very High	Unclear as chat is likely cross-group so individuals post from variety of affiliates
Feuerkrieg Division	English/ Dutch/Spanish	2 Broadcast/1 Interactive	Propaganda Dissemination & Inter-group Chat	Community Building	High	Injekt Division/Antipodean Resistance/Hunt the Pedophiles/Atomwaffen Argentina/Totenwaffen/Cult 88 Division/Union of European Descendants/National Partisan Movement/Ghost of Asia/NZD/The Base/The Green Brigade
Kriegwaffen Division (formerly Blutkrieg)	English	1 Broadcast	Ideological Reinforcement	Community Building	Very Low	National Partisan Movement/Cult 88/Injekt Division/ Black National Socialist Movement/Nationalists United/Iron Order

Two of the three channels used by established divisions are interactive channels that have high (multiple hundreds of posts) and very high activity (thousands of posts) compared across all organizations in the dataset. The third established channel, a broadcast channel (non-interactive) has a very low volume (tens of posts) compared to other established division channels. This difference in posting volume may indicate that Telegram use is more recent in low volume, but longer established channels.

**Figure 2.** Posting Behavior and Volume by Group

Group	Poster	Volume
AWD Chat (interactive channel)	92	3639
LGBTQ Chat (interactive channel)	26	738
Feuerkrieg Division (broadcast channel)	1	290
Valknot Chat (interactive channel)	9	145
AWD Argentina (broadcast channel)	1	131
Totenwaffen (broadcast channel)	1	41
Kriegwaffen(broadcast channel)	1	29
X network/C88 (Broadcast channel)	1	18
Valknut (broadcast channel)	1	11

*\*Multiple Channels for single groups have been condensed*

The highest volume channel is linked to the longest established group (AWD) and is structured as an inter-divisional chat forum where members engage in both general posting as well as in-depth conversations about ideology, goals, and other topics of interest. The other two established groups regularly share propaganda from other divisions and external, but ideologically similar, organizations. These practices serve to indicate that established divisions’ public channel aims and goals for communicating on Telegram focus on shoring up the broader network of members across the other divisions rather than specifically on their own growth or development.

Divisions in the dataset that are still developing are primarily structured as broadcast channels (not interactive) and have a more modest content volume (tens to low hundreds of posts) and fewer members (based on commentary shared by the channel moderators). Broadcast channels provide for one-way dissemination of information by channel moderators. As such, they have a limited range of content, often the divisions’ branded materials and selected external groups’ content. This shows that developing divisions use broadcast channels for building and reinforcing divisional identity and cohesion.

**Figure 3.** Developing AWD, Affiliate, and Related Groups in the Tech Against Terrorism Dataset

<b>Division Name</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Broadcast/ Interactive</b>	<b>Focus on Channel</b>	<b>Purpose of Channel</b>	<b>Volume of Content</b>	<b>Interconnection with other AWD Affiliates</b>
Atomwaffen Argentina	Spanish/ English	3 Broadcast	Growth/ Propaganda	Community Building	Medium	Union of European Descendants/Inject Division/Totenwaffen/Feuerkrieg Division/WaffenWolf Division/Acao Falangista Brasileira/Valknot Division/Cult 88 Division/ National Partisan Movement
Vaulknot Division	English	1 Broadcast/1 Interactive	Growth/ Propaganda	Community Building	Medium	Feuerkrieg Division/ Injekt Division/AWD Chat/ Totenwaffen
Totenwaffen Division	English	2 Broadcast	Recruitment/ Growth	Community Building	Very Low	Feuerkrieg Division/AWD Argentina
X Network (Cult 88)	English	1 Broadcast	Transnational Networking/ Propaganda	Community Building	Very Low	AWD Argentina/Injekt Division/Totenwaffen/Feuerkrieg Division/WaffenWolf Division/Acao Falangista Brasileira/Valknot Division/Cult 88 Division/National Partisan Movement

Within this framework, content focuses on building and developing divisions’ brands with very early stage channels discussing creating division badge symbols and organizational posters, while more advanced, but still developing, divisions focused on sharing their branded materials and promoting support for the organization on their channels. Several of the developing divisions’ channels posted links to their applications for membership as a way to increase recruitment. One of these divisions posted the text of its application, which seeks information on the individual applicant’s background including military training, survival and other skills, ownership of weapons, and knowledge of the texts and beliefs of Siege culture. Along with this, all of the developing divisions’ channels included discussions of interconnections with other divisions, both those captured within the dataset and other divisions on Telegram not included in the dataset. Two of the developing divisions’ content moderators included shared materials from other division channels and external groups as well as their own materials, further shoring up their interconnections while increasing their content volume.

## EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

The content shared by both established and developing divisions' channels includes shares of joinlinks and content from external organizations. Most of the external organizations mentioned in the dataset channels also fall under the broad rubric of Siege culture, although a small group includes markers of general neo-Nazi and Identitarian ideology.<sup>22</sup>

For the division channels in the dataset, sharing an array of channels' joinlinks (e.g. access links) and content helps build wider and more deeply interconnected networks of relationships. Importantly, the mentioned external organizations—from all ideological frames—are also accessible for interaction via Telegram. As such, these inclusions highlight the ways networked digital cultures beneficially increase users' ability to participate in multiple ideological milieus and promote personal connections between members of different ideological organizations. Here, the selection by channel moderators of specific groups' joinlinks and content to share works to curate "appropriate" ideological affiliations for their members.

**Figure 4.** Additional Groups Mentioned in Captured Channels

<b>Mentioned Groups</b>	<b>Siege Culture</b>	<b>Shared Content</b>	<b>Shared Joinlink</b>
Injekt Division	Yes	Yes	Yes
The Base	Yes	Yes	Yes
WaffenWolf Division	Yes	No	Yes
Antipodean Resistance	Yes	Yes	No
Ghost of Asia	Yes	Yes	No
Iron Order	Yes	Yes	Yes
Union of European Descendants	Yes	No	No
Acao Falangista Brasileira	Yes	No	No
National Partisan Movement	Neo-Nazi	Yes	Yes
Black National Socialist Movement	Neo-Nazi	No	No
Nationalists United	Identitarian	No	No

<sup>22</sup> For more specifics on ideologies see: [https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Surveying%20The%20Landscape%20of%20the%20American%20Far%20Right\\_0.pdf](https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Surveying%20The%20Landscape%20of%20the%20American%20Far%20Right_0.pdf).



# Practices: Telegram Channel Types and Functions

AWD channels' practices on Telegram are bounded by the affordances of the platform where channels can be structured by their creators to work either as interactive or broadcast channels. Interactive channels work as forums where channel members can talk with each other and post materials. Broadcast channels only allow channel moderators to post and as such disseminate information from the channel to its audience (members) in a single direction. Within either type of channel, members can communicate with each other through private messaging features, although those messages are not captured in the download functions used to collect data for the project. Thus, this analysis includes only posts in the public interactive and broadcast channels within the dataset.

The dataset captured three interactive channels and eleven broadcast channels across the AWD, affiliate, and related groups (see figure 2 above). The lower proportion of interactive "chat" channels relates to their use as cross-divisional communal forum boards while the higher proportion of broadcast forms is related to their use for "organizational" messaging by variant divisions. Content across both types of channels includes text, images, and videos although different division channels may have more or less of each type or combinations of types of content. On the interactive (chat) channels, content comprises discussion-based interactions, utilizing written texts, memes, and videos. The communicative behaviors on these chats include practices common to other forum-based social media platforms such as Reddit or Chan forum boards (e.g., 4Chan, 8Chan, 8kun, EndChan, 16Chan, etc.). This includes trolling commentary and provocation of other members alongside more earnest conversations.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the chats show a mix of topical discussions encompassing in-depth, involved discussions and relatively shallow, baiting comments posted "for the lulz".<sup>24</sup> Alternately, the text-based content on broadcast channels tends to be short, informational and division specific messaging paired with image and video content produced by the division or shared from other affiliate divisions. The following section briefly outlines some key narratives and practices found in the dataset.

## INTER-GROUP NARRATIVES AND FUNCTIONS (INTERACTIVE CHANNELS)

The interactive, "chat," channels function as sites of peer-to-peer ideological reinforcement. In these channels, members discuss topics of interest, share media, and debate concerns. Some "discussions" occur entirely through images (often memes) and videos with no written commentary within an entire thread of conversation. This framework of communication is especially important in interactive channels which include memberships across a variety of countries and incorporate multiple languages. Moreover, drawing on communicative practices from other social media platforms, like Reddit and the Chans, similarly provides a common set of cross-cultural communicative norms.

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23 Marc Tuters and Sal Hagen. "(((They))) Rule: Memetic Antagonism and Nebulous Othering on 4chan," *New Media and Society*, 22:12, 2018, 2218-2237. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1461444819888746>.

24 The term "lulz" refers to a form of taking pleasure from trolling other people online. According to Whitney Phillips lulz is "[a] corruption (or as the trolls might argue, perfection) of "Laugh Out Loud," lulz celebrates the anguish of the laughed-at victim" (27). See: Whitney Phillips. "The Only Reason to Do Anything: Lulz, Play, and the Mask of Trolling," *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 27-36.

Threads with written text are primarily written in English and often touch on more involved topics of discussion. These discussions include various types of ideology-reinforcing narratives such as what members are planning to do after the “collapse” of society and discussions of proper adherence to Siege ideology. Additional narratives include disparagement of other Far-Right extremist groups that members believe are weak. And they include concerns over disruption and infiltration of groups by federal agents inclusive of accusations that other members may be agents.

Discussions of post-collapse planning reinforce ideology through a shared focus on preferences and planning for an imagined future. Members discuss their access to weapons, training, and the ease or difficulty of protecting their homes from violence. Within the rubric and function of adherence to Siege ideology, general engagement practices include regular posting of homophobic and anti-LGBTQ+ content as a mode of building homosocial (social bonds between persons of the same sex) affinity within the framework of the ideology. Here, members bash LGBTQ+ people, women, black, and Jewish folk, as a way of engaging with each other and building bonds through participating in “politically incorrect” and hateful humor. Similarly, disparagement of external extremist groups serves as a form of rhetorical conquering of other extremist groups. It is used to narratively promote the dominance—superiority, strength, and righteousness—of Siege culture and provides an additional (extremist, in-group) framework for the development of intra-cultural homosocial affinities between members while reinforcing their identification with the ideology.

Discussions of proper adherence to Siege ideology include topical debates over the ideology and practices exemplified by an ongoing debate about the Order of the Nine Angles (O9A/ONA). O9A is an accelerationist, Nazi Satanist group oriented toward occult ritual violence. The group promotes immoral actions including murder and sexual violence, specifically pedophilia, as its framework for chaos and bringing about social collapse because it sees contemporary morals as a sign of social decay.<sup>25</sup> The in-chat debate revolves around the moral identity and ideology of Atomwaffen Division and affiliated groups, specifically whether making alliances with a group that promotes pedophilia is tolerable. Arguments on one side of the discussion include strong sentiments for maintaining ideological purity and thus rejecting affiliation with O9A. And on the other side, arguments focus on the need to build a large network to accelerate social collapse with the caveat that any such alliance would end after identified goals have been achieved. The debates over ideological purity regarding O9A generated offshoot discussions about whether Nazism is properly a “pagan” or “Christian” ideology inclusive of arguments made using passages from *Mein Kampf* and the *Bible* as references within the debate. Further complicating the debate was a subsequent discussion about whether O9A is a US Federal sting operation intended to impugn AWD. This discussion hinged on assertions that a publisher of O9A material was a “Fed” after he was associated with descriptions of an FBI informant in court documents filed in a case against a leading AWD member.<sup>26</sup>

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25 “Order of 9 Angles,” European Ethno-Nationalist and White Supremacy Groups. *Counter Extremism Project*, n.d., <https://www.counter-extremism.com/supremacy/order-nine-angles>.

26 Matthew Gault. “FBI Bankrolled of Occult Neo-Nazi Books, Feds Claim,” *Motherboard*, Aug. 25, 2021. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dyv9zk/fbi-bankrolled-publisher-of-occult-neo-nazi-books-feds-claim>.

Finally, discussions of federal interference in the channels and disruption of groups stems from anxieties produced by a spate of arrests and prosecutions.<sup>27</sup> Additional pressures in this context include increasing terrorist designations in a variety of national contexts (e.g., United Kingdom and Canada).<sup>28</sup> Each of these measures has increased pressure on local groups as well as impacted the global AWD brand over the last several years. Within the chats, levelling accusations at members of “being feds,” is used to enforce acceptable ideas and content being shared as a form of ideologically-driven, peer-to-peer content moderation.

## DIVISION-SPECIFIC NARRATIVES AND FUNCTIONS (BROADCAST CHANNELS)

The broadcast channels identified in this study were used to announce division news and share media focused on promoting division-specific identity reinforcement and group cohesion both internally and with other associated divisions. This messaging includes narrative posts, images, and video content within a relatively narrow focus on the division and its members. Narrative posts include shares of news stories (e.g., FBI infiltration of groups), commentary about events (e.g., the Kenosha shooter, a young man who killed two Black Lives Matter protestors in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in the summer of 2020), and passages from ideological texts (e.g., *Mein Kampf*, *Siege*, *21st Century Fascist*) that moderators deem important to the division. Across all broadcast channels, a high percentage of content is image-based rather than video-based and focuses primarily on divisional posters and flyers. The inclusion of video materials is more limited. Some videos are propaganda material shared from other channels including both ideological videos and recordings of other divisions’ offline actions.

The focus on divisional posters and flyers indicates that the broadcast channels provide printable and sharable “branded” materials for group members via the Telegram platform. The flyers and posters are used in both digital and offline contexts. In the digital context, they are shared among members and between divisions. In the offline context, these posters and flyers are meant to be used in the “offline” actions committed by group members. A common offline engagement practice of these groups is to post the images as flyers or as stickers in a variety of local geographic contexts (e.g., public squares, strip malls, university campuses, etc.) with the goal of showing the division’s presence within a local “normie” community. Moreover, these flyers and posters often include contact information (links to email or social media accounts) and recruiting messages—e.g., “Join Your Local Nazis” or “Race War Now” etc.—promoting the specific local divisions. Members then send back images of the posters they have put up, which are subsequently shared via the broadcast channels. This online/offline cycle of promoting material is a tactic common to Far-Right extremist propaganda dissemination.<sup>29</sup>

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27 Jason Wilson. “Sweep of Arrests hits US Neo-Nazi Group Connected to Five Murders,” *The Guardian*, Mar. 6, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/06/neo-nazi-arrests-deals-blow-us-group-atomwaffen-division>.

28 “Atomwaffen Division / National Socialist Order.” *Mapping Militants Project*, Stanford University, Feb. 2021. <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/atomwaffen-division>.

29 J.M. Berger, Kateira Aryaeinejad & Seán Looney. “There and Back Again: How White Nationalist Ephemera Travels Between Online and Offline Spaces,” *The RUSI Journal*, 165:1, 2020, 114-129, DOI: 10.1080/03071847.2020.1734322.

While poster content is often highly curated and aimed at group organizing and projecting power, one genre of posters stands out among the rest. There are several posters specifically developed to promote individual radicalization with an eye to developing recruitment. One is a detailed, double-sided hand-out structured to work as a tri-fold pamphlet when printed. The format of this is less useful for flyering and more likely to be used as a handout. Another poster, however, was developed specifically for use in flyering as a single-sided image-driven (limited amount of written text) to show the “four steps” of self-radicalization listing reading material for each step and then providing a link to a file sharing site where the texts could be downloaded. These posters depart from the typical function of “marking” local geographies (although they do achieve that as well), and focus on spreading the ideology more directly to potentially interested parties. They offer a type of “do it yourself” training for terrorism, although the branding and links available on the posters enable and promote connections with the group.<sup>30</sup> By including “appropriate” reading materials on the posters, they also provide the basics of a radicalization “canon” into Siege ideology.

**Figure 5.** Blurred Examples of DIY-Materials



Along with the posters, some of the limited video content reinforces the divisions’ usage of posters and offline activity employing a more traditional AWD “plug-n-play” style with posterized videos—moving images made up of a string of still images set to music—showing division flyers and members wearing field gear to highlight offline practices.<sup>31</sup> In turn, as with still images, offline actions provide additional content for the digital media channels because members also video record themselves posting the flyers or stickers, then share the videos. This specific genre of video and sharing of still images used to make the videos is especially common to projecting identification with Siege cultural norms and practices. This

30 I do not use the term “self-radicalize” to describe these materials because they seem to be intended to serve as an entryway into the ideology (and thus group membership) more than directing individuals to act entirely as lone wolves.

31 Ashley Mattheis, Mark Robinson, and Austin Blair, “Plug-and-Play Propaganda: Understanding Production Quality in Atomwaffen Division Videos,” GNET Insights Blog, July 23, 2020. <https://gnet-research.org/2020/07/23/plug-and-play-propaganda-understanding-production-quality-in-atomwaffen-division-videos/>.



is clear from developing divisions' broadcast channels specifically posting to ask members to commit offline actions (e.g., flyering their local community), then email back images or recordings showing members committing these types of actions.

The visual content in broadcast channels is focused on specific aesthetic genres including division flyers and topical posters. Here colors, symbols, fonts, and topical inclusions can be replicated with slight tweaks by individual divisions, which also works to create a unified “brand” aesthetic across divisions transnationally. A benefit of using poster-based images and posterized videos is that they are easier to produce and reuse with limited production skills when compared to video materials. This style of production creates a “visual vernacular” across the divisions that can be understood irrespective of the specific languages or local issue topics used in the image.<sup>32</sup> Videos comprised of recordings of division members participating in offline “actions” such as missions to post flyers or hang banners in local communities and members attending “hate camps” are crucial because they highlight engagement outside digital space, particularly team-building exercises commonly used by Siege culture groups to reinforce group cohesion.<sup>33</sup> These specific genres of content used by the multiple affiliates in the dataset also reinforce Siege cultural identity because they approximate the aesthetics and content topics of original propaganda content produced and shared by AWD members when the division was initially expanding in the US.

The usage of interactive and broadcast channels within the dataset highlights the importance of ideology, identity, and group cohesion within and across Siege cultural groups in online contexts. The necessity of regular reinforcement of members' identification with Siege cultural norms at both the ideological and individual levels is rooted in the need to develop coherence across multiple divisions and unaffiliated actors which work intentionally as a distributed, decentralized transnational network of cells.

## Interconnections: A Networked, Transnational Extremist Culture

The dataset provides a view of the practices and modes of communication through which Siege culture organizations develop a framework of coherence within and across their transnational network and within the broader digital culture of Far-Right extremism online. The dataset shows two primary practices—alliances and cross posting—which function to create that coherence across divisions and with external, but ideologically similar, organizations.

### INTERNAL CONNECTIONS: ALLIANCES

A prevalent practice on several of the broadcast channels is announcing alliances between divisions. This genre of post is specifically aimed at developing a broader narrative of identity reinforcement and group cohesion across geographic and divisional boundaries and increasing members' sense that the ideology of Siege accelerationism is growing. The posts are also typically image-based with posters that have

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32 Ibid.

33 “Atomwaffen Division,” *SPLC Extremist Files*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/atomwaffen-division>.

been created to show the badges (division symbols) of the allied groups—often two groups but sometimes three—which have made an alliance. The dataset contains multiple announcements of cross-divisional alliances linking both divisions captured within the included channels and mentioned channels.

**Figure 6.** Intergroup Connections Indicated in the Dataset

<b>Group (in capture and mentions)</b>	<b>Transnational Connections*</b>
AWD	US/Germany
Totenwaffen	US/Estonia/UK
Feuerkrieg	UK/US/Netherlands/Argentina
Valknot/Valknut	US/UK
AWD Argentina	Argentina/Brasil/US/UK
Kriegswaffen	US/UK
Cult 88	US/UK
Antipodean Resistance	Australia/US/UK
Injekt Division	US/UK/Argentina
Falangista Brasileira	Brasil/US/UK
WolfWaffen	US/UK
The Green Brigade	US/UK
NZD	US/UK
Iron Order	US/UK/Argentina
National Partisan Movement	US/UK/Argentina
Ghost of Asia	US/UK
Nationalists United	US/UK/Argentina
Black National Socialist Movement	US/UK
The Base	US/Canada

*\*Determined within the dataset and verified using secondary research where possible.*

The dataset captures multiple announcements of alliances between a variety of captured groups and mentioned groups. The posting and cross-posting of these announcements shows their circulation across channels and suggests that such announcements provide a mechanism for established divisions to certify and offer support to newer divisions both by allying with them and by promoting the developing divisions' alliance notifications. In this way, more established divisions can support developing local organizations and offer them a public Siege cultural stamp of approval. Moreover, the alliance announcement materials provide specific content as well as a rubric for and access to sharing posts and materials between allied divisions and their affiliates. The network produced by alliances works to increase the volume of communication on allied channels, which is particularly important for developing division channels that may have fewer members contributing to the growth and development of the local organization.

The overall effect of alliances is to show the reach and growth of Siege culture transnationally, giving the sense that the "movement" is expanding (not simply enduring). This is suggestive of a response to the highly publicized disruption of groups and individual members by platforms and law enforcement. Alliance announcements as a responsive communicative strategy can be seen in thematic content in the dataset. Multiple divisional posters, particularly those that act as alliance notifications include the phrase: "One Struggle." Variations on the "one struggle" theme include the phrase "the same fight," and terms suggesting "unity." Siege cultural groups seem to find utility in this communicative approach and, shortly after the research project period, the alliance strategy has developed even further with the announcement of the first named coalition of groups: the United Acceleration Front.<sup>34</sup>

Only two of the groups in this coalition were mentioned in the dataset. None of their channels were captured, although the announcement of the coalition formation occurred on Telegram and was shared widely by a variety of channels across the Siege cultural scene. This indicates networking and growth beyond the channels captured or groups mentioned in our research, further illustrating how Siege groups work as a distributed, decentralized networked culture which is strengthened by alliance formation and narratives as well as posting strategies.

## EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS: CROSS-POSTING

As a networked digital culture, propagation of the ideology and information-sharing are essential aspects of creating coherence across the array of divisions. These interconnections produce multiple benefits including amplifying the meta-brand, increasing the strength of the network through the propagation of content, and as a strategy for responding to countering attempts such as content moderation and channel removal.

Four of the seven divisions within the dataset show strong interconnections with other divisions through their curation of materials on their broadcast channels. These channels function as propagation hubs by cross posting joinlinks to other channels and sharing other channels' posts and content. Established divisions participate in cross-posting as a framework for shoring up the broader network of members across

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<sup>34</sup> See: <https://twitter.com/rosefire4/status/1453909150715482113>.

the other divisions rather than specifically on their own growth or development. While developing divisions can utilize their allies' materials to create a larger pool of media content for sharing on their own channels. In addition, this provides another layer of curation and ideological reinforcement within the network as developing division channels share posts from more established channels (particularly those that are official allies). Acting as propagation hubs also offers channels easy access to higher volumes and varieties of content enabling them to focus on their recruitment and organization-building functions.

Notable image and video materials incorporated from external groups focus on the veneration of Far-Right extremist attackers. This content often shows images and footage from widely publicized mass attacks including the Oklahoma City, Utøya, Charleston AME, and Christchurch attacks, even though these attackers were not affiliated with Siege cultural groups.

This type of visual content promotes members' identification with acts of violence in service of white supremacy and chaos, broadly speaking. While interpreted within the divisions through the rubric of Siege aims and goals, these videos also work to show violent action as an interest-based affinity. Such material positions violent acts as a connector between the varied ideological orientations of the fragmented cultures of Far-Right extremism both on and offline. Whilst Siege cultural groups tend toward insularity, and most often interact with like-minded organizations, violent action positioned in this way suggests that venerating violent actions conducted by members of the wider Far-Right extremist scene is beneficial with respect to recruiting and ideological reinforcement.

Importantly, there are tactical and strategic functions of the communicative practices employed in AWD's interconnected propagation of materials and cross-channel networking. These tactics provide mechanisms of resilience, or the ability for groups to recover quickly, in response to attempts to combat extremist ideologies in digital contexts. Cross posting joinlinks serves an important purpose in encouraging members to follow multiple division channels. This practice offers a type of redundancy, providing users multiple sites of access to information, across the various channels in terms of support and growth. Moreover, the divisional interconnections work by replicating content and posts across the network making removal more difficult unless all interconnected channels are removed simultaneously. As such, divisional interconnections (alliances) and user redundancy (multi-channel membership) strengthen resilience for the broader network against content moderation and removal policies. Thus, when channels are removed, announcements of channel reformation can be shared rapidly through cross-posting across a wide array of existing channels, quickly reaching interested members to ensure easy repopulation of members to reformed channels.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis of data captured on a specific set of identified AWD, affiliate, and related channels on Telegram over a six-week period from July - September 2021, provides an initial view of how Siege culture groups interact within and across divisions as a networked digital culture. Attention to the modes of com-



munication and interactive practices divisions used on their Telegram channels illustrates how localized organizations interact differently depending on the groups' "life stage" to mobilize support, growth, and interconnection with other organizations.

In addition, analysis of the types of channels—broadcast and interactive—available for use on Telegram illustrates the ways in which divisions and members promote, reinforce, and police ideological adherence and cohesion. Moreover, this analysis shows that specific genres of content provide a common visual language and a "meta-brand" aesthetic enabling coherence among affiliates despite localized differences between and across the variety of divisions. Key narratives found within discussions highlight a focus on glorifying violence inclusive of venerating the perpetrators of mass attacks, while key communicative practices are aimed at creating homosocial affinities through the demonization of identified outgroups and enemies as well as members' participation in imagining their collective future.

The data show a clear focus on creating interconnections between divisions such as patterns of cross posting materials and joinlinks as well as the formation and announcement of alliances. The dataset also illustrates how moderators manage channel removal by creating "back up" channels with minimal differences in channel name or brand. This differs substantially from Jihadist channel naming practices, which obscure naming and branding on channels to avoid detection. This difference indicates that Far-Right extremist platform removal impacts have not yet reached a scale that has altered AWD and affiliate groups' brand-identification strategies. These practices provide multiple benefits as strong interconnections between channels, the promotion of multi-channel membership, and the easy recreation of channels with minimally altered names provides a base of resilience and redundancy to moderation disruptions. Moreover, they enable faster rebuilding of member followings as replacement channels are created. From the broader view, these practices also present Siege culture as a more robust and growing network on Telegram, in digital cultures, and in offline contexts, which is particularly important for managing morale and optics considering the dampening effects of recent high profile interventions.

As this brief and previous studies illustrate, Siege culture groups continue to develop localized cells and globally network them into a larger movement even under disruptive pressure by multiple governments, local law enforcement, and platforms.<sup>35</sup> This indicates that policy, prevention, technical, and legal frames for addressing Siege Culture groups, their digital presence, and their potential to mobilize to violence will likely require attending to them as a networked (i.e., simultaneous global/local and on/offline) culture. Thus, there is a need for policy and intervention approaches that foreground cross-sector (interorganizational) cooperation, international partnerships, and collaboration between researchers and practitioners in identifying and building adaptive "networked solutions" approaches.

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35 Alex Newhouse. "The Threat Is the Network: The Multi-Node Structure of Neo-Fascist Accelerationism, *CTC Sentinel*, 14:5, June 2021, 17-25. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CTC-SENTINEL-052021.pdf>.

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