

Encrypted Propaganda: Political Manipulation Via Encrypted Messaging Apps in the United States, India, and Mexico | Center for Media Engagement

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October 28, 2020

Encrypted messaging applications (EMAs) such as Signal, Telegram, Viber, and WhatsApp have experienced a usership boom in recent years. This uptick in adoption, with WhatsApp growing its user base by over a billion from 2016 to 2020, has occurred for several reasons: EMAs are a free alternative to SMS texting, they offer secure communication, and they are an alternative to embattled 'traditional' social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. But as EMA use skyrockets worldwide, political groups around the world are working to leverage them as tools for sowing propaganda and manipulating public opinion.

Over the last year, the Center for Media Engagement propaganda research team studied political manipulation on EMAs. Our analysis is focused on the production of influence operations in three countries: the U.S., India, and Mexico. We conducted 32 interviews with producers of EMA-based propaganda and experts on this phenomenon and combined insights from these interviews with an analysis of country-specific and global news coverage of EMAs, dis- and mis- information, and propaganda in order to identify trends in political usage of these apps.

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