

Ethical Approaches to Closed Messaging Research: Considerations in Democratic Contexts | The Carter Center

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“Closed” messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram have grown in reach and adoption in recent years and have transformed elections-related communications. However, understanding their impact upon larger public discussion poses a conundrum for researchers. On the one hand, widely accessible conversations of public importance exist in these spaces, but on the other, message encryption challenges existing professional ethics of access and collection. In order to study what messages are flowing through these channels, analysts and researchers must join potentially private chat groups. This raises the question: What considerations should be taken into account when conducting research into closed messaging spaces within democratic contexts, in which the individual right to privacy also prevails?

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