

# Russia's Telegram crackdown is putting obstacles in the path of investigative journalists | Coda Story

By Alexandra Tyan

July 26, 2021

In December 2020, a Bellingcat investigation into the apparent attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny revealed the identities of Kremlin secret service agents who are believed to have stalked the Russian opposition leader for years, before he was poisoned with the powerful nerve agent Novichok.

The Netherlands-based news organization's reporting stood out not only because of its findings, but also because of the methods the journalists used to unearth new evidence related to the August 2020 attack. Bellingcat specializes in open-source data gathering, and much of the personal information identifying the Russian intelligence operatives was purchased via bots on the popular messaging app Telegram. Since the investigation was published, the Russian government has made numerous attempts to block access to dozens of similar tools. It is also trying to make their usage illegal on privacy grounds.

Christo Grozev is Bellingcat's lead Russia investigator, focusing on security threats and the weaponization of information. His investigations include the 2018 Salisbury poisoning of former Russian military intelligence officer Sergei Skripal, for which he won the European Press Prize.

We talked about how the Russian government's crackdown on Telegram is limiting the work of investigative reporters.

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