



Radicalisation

Conspiracy

theories

Polarisation

Nationalism

RESEARCH REPORT / 12

NEW EXTREMIST TRENDS IN SERBIA:

ANTI-SYSTEM EXTREMISM, EXTREMIST
TELEGRAM CHANNELS AND
ECO-EXTREMISM

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for Security Policy

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Summary

This report analyses recent and so far insufficiently explored forms of extremism in Serbia, with a particular focus on anti-system extremism, the role of the Telegram digital platform and the instrumentalization of environmental issues. The research is based on an analysis of the online contents of extremist groups, media reports, Telegram channels, as well as limited field research, primarily in the area of environmental activism. The findings show that since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, anti-systemic attitudes have been on the rise, conditioned by the crisis of legitimacy of the government, the erosion of trust in institutions and growing dissatisfaction with the European integration process. The analysis of the contents on Telegram, as the central platform of extremist communication, points to the connection between digital radicalization and political mobilization in real space. The report also looks at the growing phenomenon of environmental extremism, whereby citizens' legitimate environmental concerns are misused to spread authoritarian and violent narratives.

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Introduction

This report provides an overview and analysis of recent and so far insufficiently explored extremist trends in Serbia. The report is based on an analysis of the contents of websites, media and other reports on extremist groups, Telegram channels, as well as small-scale field research, primarily related to environmental activism and extremism.

Since the coronavirus pandemic in Serbia, there has been a strengthening of anti-systemic extremism – a heterogeneous set of ideas, groups and individuals mutually connected by dissatisfaction with the dominant order, rejection of the authority of the government, but also the generally accepted principles of a democratic society, such as equality, freedom, national sovereignty. In Serbia, numerous factors, such as the crisis of the government's legitimacy and citizens' dissatisfaction with the process of European integration, have made way for the strengthening and growth of anti-system attitudes, as well as for the transition of some anti-system groups to the political mainstream.

The second part is dedicated to the extremism on the Telegram platform. In recent years, Telegram has become a major space for communication, content sharing and discussion among extremists, as its specific features and content moderation policies allow extremists to carry out their activities unimpededly. The consequences of extremist activity on Telegram do not only linger in cyberspace, but spill over into the real world, and the most visible effect is the spread of anti-democratic attitudes and values.

The last part of the report addresses environmental extremism. Over the last decade, the importance of environmental issues and eco-activism has significantly increased in Serbia, attracting the attention of extremist groups, which have begun to take up these topics. The irresponsible attitude of state institutions towards environmental initiatives has led to the radicalization of some environmental initiatives and to sporadic violent incidents. That is precisely why there is a peril of citizens' authentic demands for a healthy environment losing their legitimacy.

Anti-System Extremism

Anti-system extremism (ASE) is generally on the rise during major social crises, to which institutions and elites do not have an adequate response. Major crises – such as the coronavirus pandemic, the global economic crisis of 2008, the migrant crisis of 2015, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 – accelerate the erosion of trust in the institutions of modern democracy and open up space for the emergence of extremist ideas and movements. According to a study conducted by the University of Amsterdam, in the 2022 elections in 31 European countries, 32% of citizens voted for anti-establishment parties (compared to 20% in the early 2000s).¹ In Serbia, the authoritarian tendencies of the government and the protracted political crisis have created fertile soil for the emergence of ASE, which affects democratic institutions and human rights.

Although rooted in the radical left-wing and anarchist ideas of the 19th and 20th centuries, contemporary ASE is predominantly a phenomenon of the right.² It is not a single ideology, but a framework that encompasses different ideas, groups and individuals, bound together by dissatisfaction with the “system” and rejection of the authority of the government.³ The narratives of ASE are directed against the institutions of the dominant order (government, courts, media, universities), but also against the fundamental principles of democratic society, such as equality, freedom, popular sovereignty and the universality of human rights. While legitimate criticism of the system rests on facts and rational arguments, proposing changes that do not undermine fundamental democratic principles, ASE relies on conspiracy theories and often challenges democratic order itself, offering substitutes that lead to backsliding of the principles of equality and democracy.⁴

Anti-System Extremism in Serbia

In nominally democratic, but essentially undemocratic and authoritarian regimes, such as today’s Serbia, criticism of the system is not necessarily ASE: it can be directed at the dominant informal system of government⁵ advocating a return to democratic principles, which the government is dismantling. For years, Serbia has been facing political passivity and a loss of trust in institutions. In addition to global crises, local factors are also impactful: the slow and insufficiently tangible process of European integration, the growing Euroscepticism, the EU’s support for Balkan “stabilocrats” and potentially harmful projects (e.g. lithium mining) at the expense of democracy and the rule of law,⁶ strong government control over media, poverty of broad strata of the population, etc.⁷ All this is conducive to the emergence and development of ASE.

This paper analyses the ideology and activities of six groups, mutually different, and – compared to other extremist groups – evincing the strongest resistance to the dominant system and norms and, to varying degrees, explicitly advocating systemic changes, which are contrary to democratic principles and human rights. The subject of

the analysis was primarily the contents of the websites of selected groups and media reports on their activities, and a quantitative review of their presence on social media was also conducted.

“WE – the Voice of the People”

We – the Voice of the People is a right-wing populist movement which, as a parliamentary actor, belongs to the political mainstream and does not have an explicitly extremist platform. This group was analysed for promoting bizarre conspiracy theories⁸ and anti-system narratives, which are directed at global elites (without clearly opposing the domestic establishment). This movement was founded in 2023 by seven men, the most prominent of whom is Dr. Branimir Nestorović, known for controversial and inaccurate statements during the coronavirus pandemic.⁹ In February 2024, Nestorović and another co-founder left the movement and formed the “WE – the Power of the People” group, which has six seats in the Serbian Parliament.

The “WE – the Voice of the People” movement presents itself as an authentic interpreter and bearer of the people’s will,¹⁰ and the programme of the movement includes: Kosovo as the central issue of statehood; the rejection of European integration; protection of the right to legal possession of firearms; reorganization of the army in order to “preserve Kosovo and Metohija as part of Serbia”; increased investment in agriculture; “decolonisation of Serbia” and liberation from Western influence.¹¹ They formally position themselves as a conservative-populist force, but are recognizable for their conspiracy theories and often dangerous anti-science assertions. The movement’s appeal potentially lies in the fact that it does not oppose the domestic establishment, but the global one, and that it fits in with the dominance of nationalism in Serbian society. While criticism of global injustices is legitimate, conspiracy theories encourage emotional mobilization to the detriment of critical thinking and give rise to the risk of abuse of power.

The “MOBA Movement”

The MOBA movement was founded in October 2023 by merger of multiple groups. It is a right-wing populist movement, ideologically close to the “We – the Voice of the People” movement but falling short of their popularity. It advocates for the abolition of representative democracy and “professional politicians”, as well as for the introduction of direct democracy, in which citizens decide on important issues.¹²

The economic programme of the movement is isolationist (“reliance on our own resources”), but contradictory: while rejecting the “imposed neoliberal concept”,¹³ it advocates intra-country liberalization, the encouragement of entrepreneurship, and even the introduction of a national cryptocurrency (“Vincoin”).¹⁴ Also somewhat contradictory, “MOBA” seeks a branch and root change in the system, but insists on preserving the existing constitution – above all in the part related to the status of Kosovo.¹⁵

The “MOBA movement” (*moba* – Serbian tradition of mutual assistance and solidarity) promotes the militarization of society and traditional values (education within the framework of “Serbian history, culture and tradition”)¹⁶ and relies on non-scientific claims and conspiracy theories, including the narrative that Serbs are descendants of the pre-historic “Vinča civilization.”¹⁷

The “People’s Patrols”

The People’s Patrols is an informal right-wing group, best known for its anti-migrant actions in Belgrade and other places in Serbia. The group’s self-proclaimed leader, Damnjan Knežević, explained that the actions of the “People’s Patrols” are coordinated by about thirty men, who were previously active in various “patriotic” movements and associations. “We are not the government, we are not the police, and we will respond in a popular way, and that is not in anyone’s favour,” he warned in 2020.¹⁸

They are also known for their anti-vax stance: in September 2021, they participated in a rally against mandatory vaccination, COVID-19 passes and child testing, which was described as “anti-globalist”. After the protest, the N1 TV journalist Vanja Djuric said she had been attacked by members of the “People’s Patrols” group.¹⁹ They also oppose Kosovo’s independence and the negotiations: on February 15, 2023, they protested in front of the Presidency against the Franco-German proposal, after which the prosecutor’s office issued an indictment against Knežević and *Srbinfo* journalist Dejan Zlatanović for inciting a violent overthrow of the constitutional order.²⁰

The narratives of the “People’s Patrols” are based on anti-globalism, xenophobia, Serbian nationalism and conspiracy theories about the “global elite”. They stand out for the call to the citizens to take justice into their own hands, which implies the rejection of the authority of institutions.²¹

“Zentropa”

“Zentropa” is an international network of right-wing organizations that promote “revolutionary nationalism”.²² The Serbian branch of “Zentropa” is anti-systemic, i.e., it is openly anti-democratic. This movement promotes an ideology based on the principles of “blood and soil”, rejects mainstream politics – including traditional forms of nationalism, and is openly fascist about certain issues.

“Zentropa” uses racist motifs (“European man”, “eternal principles embedded into genes”), while at the same time criticizing “nationalist kitsch” and trying to offer an aesthetics of modern, future-oriented nationalism.²³ In Serbia, it is associated with Belgrade’s “Club 451”, which organizes movie nights, book fairs, exhibitions, and guest appearances by foreign right-wingers. They also spread their messages via “ZentroMag” and YouTube podcasts.²⁴

“Zbor” (“The Corps”)

The Corps Serbian People’s Movement, inspired by the pre-war fascist *Assembly*, describes democracy as a “political virus” and a “negation of authority”.²⁵ Although the “Corps” claims to reject the “anti-system struggle” aimed at altering the existing system, in practice it advocates for the establishment of a “parallel system”, which would exist side by side with the incumbent social order, without direct confrontation with it.²⁶

The ideology of this movement relies on seven pillars: St. Sava, the “preservation of racial purity”, patriarchy, the cult of conquest, the absolute estate monarchy, neo-feudal “chivalry”, and an alternative educational system (the counter-reformation of modern education).²⁷ The greatest evils are liberalism, democracy, Marxism/communism, pacifism, and multiculturalism.²⁸ Although it does not openly call for violence, “Zbor” (“The Corps”) implicitly legitimizes violence by condemning pacifism and extolling war.

“Srbska akcija” (“Serbian Action”)

Srbska akcija is one of the oldest and best known far-right organizations in Serbia. The ideology of this group is clerical and ethno-nationalist, with elements of neo-Nazism. It rejects democracy, elections and individual rights, and advocates for an Orthodox monarchy legitimized by “divine will”.²⁹ It opposes both capitalism and communism in economic terms, offering a “third way” (private, state-owned and collective property), but emphasizes that prosperity depends on spiritual transformation and Christian values, with the primacy of the spiritual over material needs.³⁰

According to BIRN, “Serbian Action” maintains ties with neo-Nazi and supremacist organizations from several countries, and some of its members took part in the combats in Ukraine on the side of pro-Russian groups despite the legal ban.³¹

A Comparative Overview of ASE Groups

Table 1: Comparative review of ASE groups

	We – the Voice of the People	MOBA Movement	The People's Patrols	Zentropa	Corps	Serbian Action
Opposition to (representative) democracy		Express/explicit	Moderate/Implicit	Express/explicit	Express/explicit	Express/explicit
Opposition to the domestic establishment		Moderate/Implicit	Express/explicit	Moderate/Implicit	Moderate/Implicit	Moderate/Implicit
Opposition to the global establishment	Express/explicit	Express/explicit	Express/explicit	Moderate/Implicit	Express/explicit	Moderate/Implicit
Conspiracy theories	Express/explicit	Express/explicit	Express/explicit		Express/explicit	
Populism	Express/explicit	Express/explicit	Express/explicit			
Focus on Kosovo	Express/explicit	Express/explicit	Express/explicit			
Xenophobia			Express/explicit	Moderate/Implicit	Moderate/Implicit	Moderate/Implicit
Racism/Neo-Nazism			Moderate/Implicit	Express/explicit	Express/explicit	Express/explicit
Clericalism					Express/explicit	Express/explicit
Violence/threats of violence			Express/explicit		Moderate/Implicit	Express/explicit
Rejection of modernity/return to tradition	Moderate/Implicit	Express/explicit			Express/explicit	Express/explicit

○ Non-existent ● Moderate/Implicit ● Express/explicit

Although the analysed groups differ in size, structure and focus, their common denominator is an antagonism towards representative democracy (the exception is “We – the Voice of the People”, which does not reject it directly), egalitarianism, multiculturalism and the “global establishment”. Some of the ASE groups are openly neo-Nazi/racist and/or clerical, while others resemble conservative-nationalist actors, but even among the more “moderate” ones there are promoters of conspiracies about global elites. In most cases, institutions are portrayed as corrupt, illegitimate or treacherous, while criticism is more often directed at global rather than domestic actors, which fits into the dominance of nationalism and anti-Western sentiment in Serbian society.

The populist rhetoric of “the people vs. the elite” is particularly visible in “We – the Voice of the People”, “MOBA Movement” and “People’s Patrols”, with the narrative of an endangered identity attacked from outside and within. An open fascist orientation of a group becomes the more explicit the more marginal they are. Conspiracy theories are the central discursive pattern of ASE groups. These theories are often intertwined with anti-globalist and anti-Western attitudes, portraying the global establishment not only as a threat to Serbian identity but also to public health and survival – especially through anti-vax narratives.

Clericalism dominates the “Corps” and “Serbian Action”, while the rhetoric of a return to tradition is strong in most groups, especially in the “MOBA Movement”, “The Corps” and “Serbian Action”. Calling for violence is not universal, but the “People’s Patrols” and “Serbian Action” are recognizable for their violent rhetoric, threats and incidents directed at migrants, Roma and other minorities, which they often justify as “defence” against alleged existential threats.

| How Unique is Serbian ASE?

On a global level, ASE is seen as extremism that rejects mainstream institutions and generally accepted democratic norms, while in Serbia, ASE groups are primarily directed against the “global establishment” and considerably less against domestic elites.³² Due to their pronounced ethno-nationalism, they often avoid criticism of national authorities, with whom they share right-wing nationalist views, so the political mainstream does not perceive them as a threat.³³ Although they represent a marginal political force, ASE groups are attractive to disaffected citizens, who have lost trust in democratic institutions and processes. In addition, interpretations based on conspiracy theories rather than facts undermine the capacity for critical thinking and rational public debate on the democratic deficit and other key political issues in today’s Serbia.

Since the current regime does not treat ASE as a threat to its interests, it remains up to civil society, opposition parties, independent media and academia to oppose this phenomenon. This requires both deconstructing the narrative of ASE and restoring trust in democratic institutions and processes, by involving citizens in decision-making, as well as by focusing on those who have lost trust in institutions.

The Ecosystem of Serbian Far-Right Telegram Channels

Telegram is a messaging application that is user-friendly and equipped with advanced features. It has become globally popular, mostly due to its emphasis on privacy and security, i.e. because of its strong encryption. In March 2025, it exceeded 1 billion active users monthly.³⁴ There are no official data on the number of users in Serbia, but it is estimated that Telegram is used by tens of thousands of people, most often those looking for greater privacy, freedom of expression and functionality.³⁵ Telegram communication takes place through channels (one-way broadcasting of contents: administrators publish, audience follows and reacts) and in groups (two-way communication: members participate in discussion). Channels are typically a means of disseminating information, while groups are more suitable for creating communities and organising activities.

While Telegram has legitimate advantages, its features (encryption, flexibility, looser moderation) attract both criminal and extremist actors. Terrorist organizations (e.g. ISIS) used it for propaganda and recruitment, while cybercriminals abused the platform to sell stolen data and distribute illegal content.³⁶ Existing European research on extremism on Telegram points to the existence of typical patterns: the migration of extremists from “classical” networks due to bans/censorship; hierarchical structure of communication via central and satellite channels; the use of groups and channels for the preparation and mobilization of onsite actions (e.g. protests); the formation of closed information circles, which accelerate the dissemination of messages; the dominance of highly emotional narratives (conspiracy theories, anti-vax discourse) that spread “virally”, thanks to the structure of the platform and to the high engagement of followers.³⁷ This trend of abuse has not bypassed Serbia either.

We analysed the role of far-right Telegram channels in Serbia, with a focus on spreading pro-Russian, anti-Western and anti-system/anti-democratic messages. The analysis includes nine selected channels, where we monitored topics, number of followers, engagement and mutual connections. Particular emphasis was placed on measuring the impact through a combination of quantitative (reach, activity, engagement) and qualitative indicators (presence of conspiracy theories, disinformation, anti-democratic narratives).

The Context of Extremism on Telegram in Serbia

The findings of the *Raskrikavanje* (“Unmasking”) platform from March 2025 indicate that Telegram in Serbia, especially during the coronavirus pandemic and after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, became key to spreading pro-Russian, nationalist and anti-Western narratives.³⁸ The most influential channels (e.g. “Dejan Berić”, “REBELLION is a state

of mind”, “Slavic Bear” (“Slovenski medved”)) are described as an ideologically aligned and cohesive network, which transmits the content of Russian state media, adapts it to the local context, and promotes discourse contrary to the values of liberal democracy. These channels, along with mutual promotion and sharing of content, create the illusion of consensus, and for some accounts there are indications of recruiting fighters for the Russian army.³⁹ Telegram thus appears not only as a propaganda channel but also as an operational platform for spreading disinformation, hate speech, extremism, as well as for destabilization.

An April 2025 research by Radio Free Europe shows that right-wing and pro-Putin channels presented the student protests in Serbia as a “coloured revolution” controlled by the West, ignoring the fact that the students’ demands are aimed at respecting the Constitution, the rule of law and European values.⁴⁰ Channels such as “The Ecumenical” (“Vaseljenska”), “Eurasia” („Evrozija”) and “National Offensive” (“Nacionalna ofanziva”) published hundreds of messages about the protests, which reached an audience of millions, using emotionally charged narratives, conspiracy theories and anti-system discourse: students were portrayed as foreign agents and “traitors”, the protests as part of a geopolitical conflict, and nonviolent actions as destabilization. A strategy of strawman argument has also been observed – the distortion of the goals of the protests in order to make them fit into the narrative of external enemies.⁴¹

Based on this research, we identified typical manipulative patterns: systematic narrative manipulation and substitution, coordinated messaging, the use of emotions and conspiracy theories, the discrediting of civic actors, and the legitimization of the extreme right. Telegram is used as an unregulated channel, which allows for the rapid, uncontrolled and targeted spread of disinformation, especially by monitoring current events (e.g. protests) and “reshaping” them in accordance with ideological goals.

Channels Covered by the Analysis and Narrative Groups

During June and July 2025, data were collected from the following channels: “BUNT (REBELLION) is a state of mind”,⁴² “Bunker”,⁴³ “Princip”,⁴⁴ “CORRIDOR”,⁴⁵ “People’s Patrols”,⁴⁶ “WE – the Voice of the People” Movement,⁴⁷ the “Ecumenical” Movement,⁴⁸ “Serbian Action”⁴⁹ and “MOBA for the Reconstruction of Serbia”.⁵⁰ They were chosen because they consistently promote far-right, anti-Western and anti-establishment narratives. Although they do not represent the entire Telegram space of Serbia, they do provide insight into the patterns of organized radical action.

The channels are grouped according to the dominant narratives (see Table 2):

- Nationalist-patriotic (“REBELLION is a state of mind”, “People’s Patrols”, “Serbian Action”, “Princip”) – emphasize identity and traditional values;
- Pro-Putin/anti-Western geopolitical (“Bunker”, “Corridor”, “The Ecumenical”) – they support Russia and oppose NATO and the West;

- Patriotic and anti-system, with conspiracy theories (the “WE” Movement and “MOBA for the Reconstruction of Serbia”) – they mix sovereignty, conspiracy theories and calls for mobilization.

What all groups have in common is that they are pro-Russian (most pronounced in the second group) and have an anti-systemic character: distrust of institutions and the democratic order, conspiracy theories, alternative authorities and calls for resistance in the national and spiritual framework.

Table 2: Characteristics of Serbian far-right Telegram channels

Telegram Channels	Ideological orientation	Presence on other platforms	Network of connected channels	Special features
Serbian Action	Nationalist	It has a website and social media	Separated	Historical revisionism, anti-communist tone
REBELLION is a state of mind	Nationalist	No website	A central hub of far-right channels	Strong nationalist tone
The People’s Patrols	Nationalist	No website	A network of local Telegram groups	Organization of protests and street actions, anti-migrant attitude
WE – the Voice of the People	Anti-system	It has a website and social media	Private network	The People as the Bearers of the Truth
Bunker	Pro-Russian, anti-Western	No website	Connected to the CORRIDOR.	Ideological focus on Russia and opposition to the West
CORRIDOR	Pro-Russian, spiritual	No website	Connected to the Bunker.	Emphasis on spirituality, as well as resistance to the West
Princip	Nationalist	It has a portal	Connected to Bunker.	A high level of follower engagement
Ecumenical	Pro-Russian, info portal	It has a portal	A separate ecosystem	Regular posts from the portal
MOBA for the Reconstruction of Serbia	Anti-system	It has a website and social media	A separate ecosystem	Mobilization of the people

Within the first group, the “Serbian Action” movement relies on revisionism and symbolism, the “People’s Patrols” promotes self-initiated “street control” and anti-migrant stance, “Princip” develops a pro-Russian propaganda framework (moral East vs. perverted West) and Kosovo as a matter of survival, while “BUNT” combines nationalism,

anti-Western and conservative discourse, with attacks on LGBT, promotion of alternative media, humour and emotions for mobilization. The work and activities of the “Bunker”, “Corridor” and “Ecumenical” channels are shaped by a series of patterns that position them as key actors in the digital infrastructure of the pro-Russian and anti-Western narrative in Serbia. Their mutual complementarity – the ideological dimension in “Bunker”, the spiritual component in “Corridor” and the informative function in “Ecumenical” – enables the creation of a coherent and closed media framework. The third group (“MOBA”, “WE – the Voice of the People”) opposes the political system, global power structures and EU integration, with conspiracy theories, calls for mobilization outside the formal framework and highlighting Kosovo as the focal point of the sovereigntist narrative, as well as with motifs of tradition and Orthodoxy.

Reach and Impact: What the Numbers and Content Show

The influence of a channel is measured quantitatively (number of followers, frequency of posts, engagement, changes during crises) and qualitatively (conspiracy theories, disinformation, anti-democratic narratives, ability to reframe events). The most followed channel is “BUNT” (“REBELLION is a state of mind”) with about 86,000 followers. The “Bunker”, “Princip”, “Corridor” and “People’s Patrols” channels have between about 23,000 and 10,000 followers, while “Serbian Action”, “Ecumenical”, “MOBA” and “WE – the Voice of the People” have less than 10,000 followers.⁵¹

Engagement, which the TG Stat methodology⁵² defines as the average number of views per post relative to the number of followers, shows that the number of followers is not decisive for the activity and influence of a channel. “Princip” has an extremely high engagement rate (71%), “People’s Patrols” (43%) and “Corridor” (41%) also have a high engagement, followed by “Serbian Action” (36%) and “MOBA” (31%), while “Ecumenical” and “WE – the Voice of the People” have significantly lower. The conclusion would be that smaller channels with a loyal audience can have a disproportionately large impact on the dissemination of messages and the shaping of the narrative.

The “BUNT” channel, with the largest number of followers, has the widest potential reach and influence on public opinion. In contrast, “Princip”, although significantly smaller, has an extremely loyal following and a strong influence within the target audience. The “People’s Patrols” combine digital influence with activism in physical space by participating in events on the ground.⁵³ Taken together – the number of followers, the level of engagement, and the capacity for public action – they provide a more realistic estimate of the actual impact of a Telegram channel.

The relationship between the number of followers and engagement is a key indicator of authenticity on Telegram. While the number of followers indicates potential range, views and reactions show actual activity. Practice often shows that large channels have lower engagement, while channels with 20–60% views per post tend to have a loyal community.⁵⁴ Conversely, a large discrepancy between followers and views may

indicate a decline in interest or artificially inflated audience.⁵⁵ The format of the content also plays an important role, as shorter and visual formats are more likely to encourage interaction.⁵⁶

Unlike other social networks, Telegram does not use algorithmic content selection, so a drop in engagement directly indicates a loss of audience attention or inefficiency of the content. That is why engagement is a more reliable indicator of actual impact than the number of followers alone. The rapid growth of the audience is most often related to political and social events, as in the case of the “WE – the Voice of the People” channel, where the increase in followers was associated with electoral success, while the subsequent decline was probably due to internal divisions.

The time of creation of individual channels does not determine their impact: newer channels can quickly become highly influential if they target their audience precisely. The frequency of posts strongly affects engagement: too many messages can lead to audience fatigue, as in the case of the “Vaseljenska” (“Ecumenical”) and “BUNT” channels, while a moderate rate, such as “Princip”, contributes to high engagement. The channels also differ in their communication strategies – some have their own portals and are present on other networks, while others operate exclusively on Telegram. Particularly noteworthy are the “People’s Patrols” and “WE – the Voice of the People”, which have developed networks of local channels for mobilisation, with the “People’s Patrols” being known for organising protests and street actions.

Channel Connectivity and Network Roles

Links are analysed on the basis of a network of mentions (incoming/outgoing mentions). The “BUNT” acts as a central node, which distributes the content of ideologically related channels (“Bunker”, “Corridor”, “People’s Patrols”), with mutual downloading and the creation of a closed information circle. “Ecumenical” and “WE – the Voice of the People” are described as part of a more separate pro-Russian ecosystem, which distributes content from Russian sources, more independent of domestic channels. “Serbian Action” operates from a nationalist environment ideologically more closed. “Princip” has a different role: it is often mentioned by others, but it rarely shares other people’s content, suggesting a status of authority with focused and “ideologically pure” messages, which generate high engagement (see Figure 1).

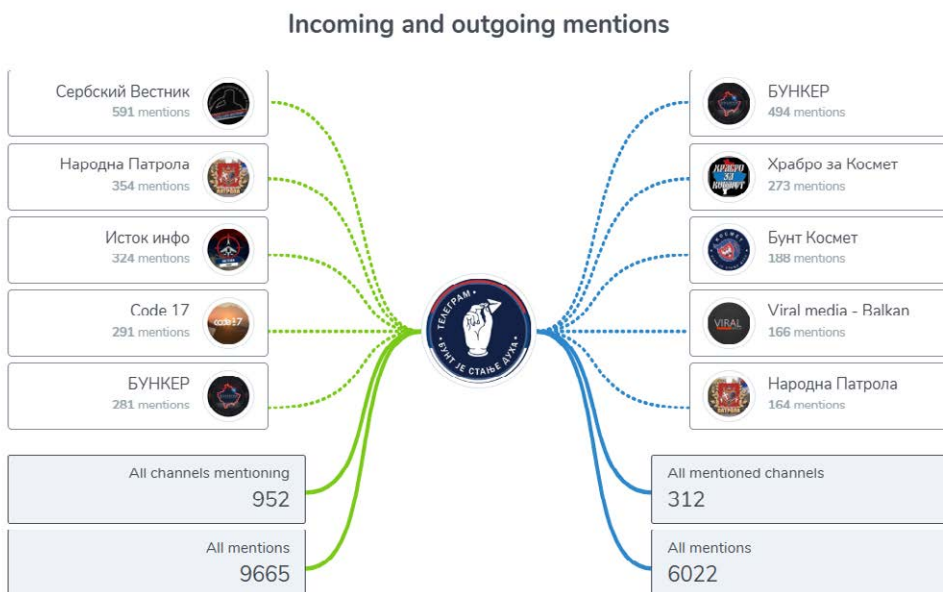


Figure 1: The “BUNT” (“REBELLION is a state of mind”) channel as a central node in the network of right-wing Telegram channels

Source: TG Stat, July 31, 2025.

Eco-Extremism

Introduction: New Jadar, Old Narratives

On July 16, 2024, the Government of Serbia adopted a decree allowing the continuation of the project of building a lithium mine in the Jadar Valley.⁵⁷ This investment was suspended under public pressure and due to protests in 2021,⁵⁸ and the decision to renew it caused a wave of discontent across Serbia. The protests culminated after the visit of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the signing of the Memorandum⁵⁹ of Understanding on the Strategic Partnership in the Field of Sustainable Raw Materials between Serbia and the European Union.

Although the protests against the Jadar project were nominally focused on environmental protection, their intensity and broad social visibility attracted significant attention of various political actors, including far-right groups. In this context, an analysis of the posts of seven right-wing channels on Telegram – “Bunker”, “BUNT”, “Corridor”, “People’s Patrols”, “Serbian Action”, “Princip” and “Ecumenical” – points to a far wider and deeper political-ideological spectrum. A content analysis of the posts of seven right-wing Telegram groups in the period from July 17 to August 28, 2024, examines the way in which the topic of Rio Tinto was instrumentalized to delegitimize the government and the opposition, promote anti-Western and pro-Russian narratives, as well as to mobilize citizens.

On the Subject of Lithium Mining, They Concur: “You Can’t Dig!”

All analysed groups, regardless of differences in tone and ideology, strongly oppose the “Jadar” project and lithium mining on the territory of Serbia. The environmental narrative dominates, but is often intertwined with elements of conspiracy, religion, and open xenophobia.

The “Ecumenical” channel warns: “Lithium is a death sentence for all of us”,⁶⁰ while “Serbian Action” further contextualizes it in terms of colonial exploitation.⁶¹ “Bunker” reports statements claiming that the Rothschilds own 40% of Rio Tinto,⁶² relying on common conspiracy theories linking global financial elites to the exploitation of natural resources. The “Ecumenical,” on the other hand, implies that “German funds support the protests, but are asking for lithium”,⁶³ in an attempt to compromise the opposition parties.

The “Corridor” group places a special emphasis on the religious aspect, pointing out that Metropolitan Fotije (Photius), as a representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church, is against lithium mining.⁶⁴ The “Ecumenical,” in its efforts to avoid direct accusations against the ruling structure, uses complex technical arguments, such as the lack of mining inspectors and the negative experiences of other countries, to reinforce a sense of justified fear.⁶⁵ “Serbian Action” goes a step further, presenting the fight against Rio Tinto as a national liberation from the “mondialist occupation.”⁶⁶

Attitudes Towards the Government and the Opposition: “Everyone is a Traitor”

The attitude towards the government and the opposition is based on a radical binary division: domestic traitors and foreign occupiers. All the analysed groups, although in different shades, portray the government as corrupt, subservient and non-sovereign. However, it is important to note the differences in the way this criticism is articulated: while anti-regime actors openly target the top of the government, certain groups closer to the regime, such as the “Ecumenical” and “Princip” groups, avoid direct accusations against the president and central figures of power, and shift responsibility for problematic decisions to individuals within the system. The “People’s Patrols” are at the forefront of open aggression against the regime, calling the President of the Republic derogatory names and accusing him of collaborating with the occupiers: “The regime will defend the enormous money they have stolen.”⁶⁷ The groups “BUNT” and “Bunker” also criticize the government for its alleged “courting” of Rio Tinto,⁶⁸ but with considerably less intensity, using different language. On the other hand, “Corridor” keeps its distance – it does not attack the government directly, but shifts the focus to criticism of the West. In other words, they believe that the government may not be ideal, but they must defend it against the Western attempts to dismantle the state.⁶⁹ Similarly, the “Ecumenical” selectively targets individuals within the regime, especially with

accusations of corruption, but the dominant narrative remains – “it is not the fault of the government, but of the evil West”.⁷⁰ “Princip” hardly engages in criticism of the regime at all, and lithium mining was not the focus of this channel during this period. Their communication remained neutral, although they shared posts related to a large protest rally in Belgrade. In contrast, “Serbian Action” takes an extremely hostile stance,⁷¹ seeing the government as a servant of the colonial powers⁷² and calling for a national revolution as the only solution.⁷³

As for the opposition, all groups share a negative attitude and reject the possibility of cooperation. “BUNT” and “Bunker” use the term “so-called opposition”⁷⁴ and accuse⁷⁵ opposition actors, such as the “Sviće” (“Sunrise”) group, of false representation and treason. “Corridor” believes that the opposition’s protests work in favour of foreign interests,⁷⁶ while the People’s Patrols go a step further claiming that the opposition is not only incompetent, but also actively helping the regime maintain the *status quo*. In the rhetoric of the “Ecumenical” group, the opposition and non-governmental organizations are extended bureau of the CIA and instruments of destabilization,⁷⁷ and so is ProGlas.⁷⁸ “Serbian Action” consistently advocates the thesis that the government and the opposition are “two sides of the same coin”,⁷⁹ part of the same anti-national system, while profiling themselves as *the only real alternative*. “Princip”, as well as in its attitude towards the government, retains the appearance of political neutrality – it does not comment on the opposition in this context.

Anti-Western sentiment is present in all groups – the West is the main cause of all problems, be it due to economic exploitation (Rio Tinto), political destabilization (CIA/NATO) or some other kind of indirect influence. Conspiracy theories are present, with constant references to “foreign agents”. Although the thematic focuses vary, ranging from the environment to Kosovo, the hypotext often remains the same: the system is hostile, the people are left with rebellion as the only option.

Mobilization with Emotional Rhetoric and Wreaking Panic

Mobilization and calls to action are the central mechanism by which right-wing groups on Telegram seek to articulate discontent and transform it into concrete forms of action. Almost all groups use incendiary calls to action, combining the idea of peaceful resistance with a narrative of a threat to the existence of nations or individuals. The “Ecumenical” relies on documenting “successful” actions on the ground,⁸⁰ while at the same time delegitimizing similar protests organized by “traitorous NGOs”⁸¹ and often downplaying some successful actions.⁸² This group stands out for its inconsistency in attitudes, which was manifested in the example of the protest in Valjevo, which it initially glorified,⁸³ and later labelled as anti-Serb due to the presence of foreign services.⁸⁴ “Corridor” and “Princip” redirect the mobilization using a religious framework and call for processions and gatherings in front of churches. They often quote Metropolitan Fotije and other religious officials: “God forbid that Serbia be dug up!”⁸⁵

The “Princip” group has taken a somewhat specific approach, which as a rule avoids direct criticism of the government, but at the same time calls for protest, framing the issue of mining as an existential and national issue, which transcends political divisions.⁸⁶

Religious symbolism and the motifs of “national shrines” serve as a bridge between the ecological struggle and the wider national ideology, which is most noticeable in the example of the group “Serbian Action”, which is the most ideologically rigid, as well as in the example of the group “Princip”, which directly links the issue of the “Jadar” project with Kosovo: “The fight for Jadar is part of the struggle for Kosovo and Metohija!”⁸⁷ In addition, the tried and tested narratives of the victim and the hero play an important role. “Bunker” and “Rebellion” seek to paint a picture of how, for the umpteenth time, a small but righteous nation is fighting against global elites and global capital.⁸⁸ In addition to linguistic symbolism, visual messages also play an important role in mobilization: the “Ecumenical” spreads apocalyptic images of red water from Jadar as a warning of an impending catastrophe of Biblical proportions.⁸⁹

Although explicit calls for violence are almost non-existent and although the contents that could be sanctioned are very skilfully avoided, violent tendencies are present in a more latent form and are often presented as a necessity and the last line of defence against betrayal and neocolonialism. “People’s Patrols” use aggressive and inflammatory rhetoric, while “Serbian Action” emphasizes the necessity of “preparation” by acquiring military skills⁹⁰ and strengthening the ideological foothold. “Ecumenical,” on the other hand, is trying to play a double game, so that during this period it has simultaneously spread conspiracy theories about “bloody September”,⁹¹ which is being prepared by opposition actors and NGOs, even though they themselves were against the Rio Tinto project. What all the analysed groups have in common is that violence is not promoted openly but is presented as a legitimate method in borderline cases, gradually creating an atmosphere in which violence can be justified. If individual messages from the group are interpreted, this tone is not obvious, but there is a clear thread that leads to the legitimization and justification of violence in order to achieve a higher goal.

Crucial to this analysis is the attempt by far-right groups to instrumentalize the topic of Rio Tinto. The environmentalist framework is used as a basis for the distribution of pre-existing right-wing ideological narratives and matrices. One approach relies on existing or new conspiracy theories, in which the project is associated with global financial elites and colonial capital, always traceable to some domestic actors, who are antagonized by these narratives. The second method involves presenting the fight against mining as a moral or even religious mission, while others use the theme solely to legitimize extremist activity, calling for a “final showdown” with Western values. In all cases, the fight against Rio Tinto has no inherent value, that is, it is not an end in itself, but a means and an occasion to establish existing narratives.

Conclusion

The analysis of new extremist trends shows that in the contemporary context of Serbia, extremism assumes a multi-layered character and manifests itself through different types and areas of activity.

Anti-system extremism in Serbia is developing in a specific political and social environment, marked by authoritarian tendencies, erosion of trust in institutions, prolonged political crisis and profound dissatisfaction with the process of European integration. Although the analysed extremist groups vary in size, ideological rigidity and attitude towards violence, their common denominators are the rejection of democratic values, conspiracy theories as the basic interpretative framework of reality, antagonism towards the “global West” and a tendency towards authoritarian, clerical or openly fascist models of social order.

The far-right Telegram ecosystem, as a parallel media space with weak moderation, enables the rapid spread of disinformation, conspiracy theories and anti-democratic narratives, but also links digital radicalization with physical mobilization. The analysis shows that the real impact of far-right channels does not depend solely on the number of followers, but on the degree of engagement and ability to build a loyal community, which is ready for political action in real space.

A trend of particular concern is the instrumentalization of legitimate environmental issues, such as the “Jadar” project, which extremist actors use as a pretext for spreading authoritarian, anti-Western and violent narratives. Citizens’ authentic concerns for the environment are relegated into the background, while environmental protests are transformed into a means of political radicalization, the delegitimization of democratic pluralism and the normalization of violence as “necessary self-defence”.

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Among the BCSP's strategic objectives are: supporting the development of civil society organisations and agents of change in order to create an environment conducive to more transparent and accountable functioning of state institutions; producing analyses on issues related to security, the rule of law, and Serbia's foreign and security policy; and providing support to human rights activists, freedom fighters, and whistleblowers in order to strengthen their mission and enhance the democratic capacities of society as a whole.

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