

AFGHANISTAN-CONFLICT

Western far-right groups claim Taliban victory as their own

Thursday 19 August 2021, by [SCOTT Mark](#) (Date first published: 18 August 2021).

Western extremists heralded the Islamic militants' military success as part of their own fight against liberal values.

The Taliban have some unlikely cheerleaders: the far right in Europe and the United States.

White supremacists, QAnon followers and others in extremist online communities praised the group for their overthrowing of liberal values in the days following their victory across Afghanistan, according to a review of encrypted Telegram channels, online message boards and posts within more mainstream social networks like Twitter by [Digital Bridge](#), POLITICO's transatlantic newsletter.

While far-right groups have typically railed against the Islamification of the West, they were quick to piggyback on the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan to promote their own anti-LGBTQ+, anti-women and anti-liberal agenda — one that shares many tenets with that of Afghan militants.

On Twitter, supporters of the Capitol Hill riots in Washington [posted pictures](#) of American rioters next to images of Taliban fighters inside the presidential palace in Kabul. On Telegram, white supremacists openly debated if the Taliban should be considered good guys because of their homophobic views. On 4Chan, a message board frequented by the far right, the Taliban's military success was promoted as evidence that Western governments would similarly soon be toppled.

"The extreme far right-Taliban nexus is particularly worrying and probably surprising to many," said Adam Hadley, director of Tech Against Terrorism, a nonprofit that works with smaller social networks in combating the rise of extremist content online. "I suppose it makes sense given their share bigotry."

Ever since the January 6 riots in Washington, mainstream social media platforms have become more vigilant in policing their platforms for extremist material.

Yet POLITICO's review of Facebook, Twitter and Google's YouTube over the last two weeks found scores of Taliban-related content still widely available — often shared by groups or accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers, respectively.

In response, the companies said their existing policies against the promotion of violent groups equally applied to the Taliban and its supporters, and that they were actively removing such content whenever they came across it.

"We remove accounts maintained by or on behalf of the Taliban and prohibit praise, support, and representation of them," a Facebook spokesperson said in a statement. "We will continue to

proactively enforce our rules and review content that may violate Twitter rules,” said a company representative.

The far right goes global

Still, the widespread sharing of such content quickly came to the attention of far-right groups in both the U.S. and Europe. They shared these posts and videos within their own online communities — many openly praising the Taliban’s rise to power, strict conservative views and antagonism towards Silicon Valley’s attempts to remove them from the online world.

Several white supremacist Telegram channels cheered the Taliban’s criticism of Facebook and other social media companies for deleting their posts, [directly linking](#) these takedowns to how these companies barred former U.S. president Donald Trump from these global platforms.

“I don’t think this ‘Taliban’ are all bad,” said one anonymous Telegram user. “I think they’ve been infiltrated by good guys.”

Such cross-promotion between the Taliban and Western far-right groups wasn’t limited to fringe social networks and message boards.

According to research provided to POLITICO by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a think tank tracking online extremism, a Twitter [account](#) portraying itself as a news feed for all things Taliban — posting both in English and Pashto — promoted its ties to the American Populist Union, a pro-Trump conservative movement. The account did not respond to requests for comment.

Since its creation in early August, the account has promoted attacks on U.S. President Joe Biden over his handling of the U.S. military’s withdrawal in Afghanistan, showered praise on Capitol Hill rioters and linked the Taliban’s rise to power to the U.S.’ culture wars. It has also reshared content from U.S. far-right commentators, as well other American accounts portraying Taliban fighters.

Elsewhere on Twitter, far-right supporters [associated](#) the Islamic militants with the Confederate States of America, the pro-slavery side in the U.S. Civil War. Others [made direct comparisons](#) between the Taliban and the U.S. founding fathers. And under the tagline “one struggle,” another [highlighted](#) how both the far-right and the Taliban shared a common purpose against liberal values.

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P.S.

• Politico. August 18, 2021 7:09 pm:
<https://www.politico.eu/article/far-right-taliban-afghanistan-social-media-facebook-twitter/>