

The Use of Military Narratives in White Supremacist Chatrooms on Telegram

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Abstract

This study investigates the connections between military and white supremacist narratives in extremist channels on the social media platform Telegram. It explores military narratives as both a source of and impetus to insider threat. Narratives about the military, when combined with extremist narratives, can redirect antipathies toward legitimate leadership and drive individuals to commit violence or betray institutions. Moreover, the co-opting of military narratives to support extremism may serve to undermine public trust in and support for the military itself, posing an additional threat to national security.

Scraping data from 224 public Telegram channels between September 2016 and October 2020 and selecting posts that contain military terminology, we explore connections between white supremacist and military narratives through the use of supervised machine learning techniques. We hand-code small portions of our corpus (training set) for these narratives and then label the remaining data (test set) using a machine learning classification process. The results enable analysis of the narrative network underlying the corpus.

We find that white supremacist narratives are prevalent in posts with military-terminology and frequently appear alongside military narratives. The corpus is dominated by what previous research has termed "extinction narratives," or narratives which predict the destruction of one's cultural group. Such narratives are capable motivators of violence. Military actors and themes often form the backdrop for these narratives, which vilify Jews as evil infiltrators of American institutions and cast whites as innocent victims of their machinations and of government betrayal. Military narratives lend urgency and legitimacy to these narratives that underscore white superiority and threats to the white race.

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The particular combination of military and white supremacist narratives is a cause for alarm. Military personnel are high-value recruitment targets for extremist organizations due to their competence and appearance of legitimacy. The narrative network we describe provides insight into how military valor may be stolen and usurped for extremist causes and how military targets may be lured to political violence in service to them.

Introduction

Understanding the Military as a Target for Extremist Radicalization

The participation of military members in the events on January 6th, 2021, reinvigorated concerns regarding the presence of political extremism within the U.S. military (Mitchell 2021; Stafford and LaPorta 2021) and the related potential for insider threat. In a study of 716 individuals arrested for their participation in January 6th, Denbeaux and Crawley (2023) found that 105, almost 15%, had a military background. Of these, 31 were members of the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, or Three Percenters (Denbeaux and Crawley 2023), which are all extremist groups. These relatively high levels of military participation have raised concerns that the military has an extremism problem. Extremist groups have long been suspected of targeting current and former military members for recruitment, if not joining the military themselves, due to the perceived benefits of military experience on extremists' lethality and operational effectiveness (Chermak, Freilich, and Suttmoeller 2013; Simi, Bubolz, and Hardman 2013; B. L. Smith et al. 2011). Successfully radicalized military personnel

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embody potentially destructive insider threats to the U.S. military (Lang 2022; Ware 2023). In this case, insider threat refers to servicemembers or veterans using their special insider knowledge and/or access to betray the government, the nation, or the military.

There have been several examples of this type of insider threat related to extremist, specifically to white supremacist, ideology. Former U.S. Army Private Ethan Melzer conspired with members of the Neo-Nazi organization, the Order of the Nine Angles, to attack members of his unit (U.S. Department of Justice Office for Public Affairs 2020; Ware 2023), sending “sensitive details about his unit – including information about its location, movements, and security...”(U.S. Department of Justice Office for Public Affairs 2020). In another case, Former Airman First Class Andrew Dornan was dishonorably discharged in June 2006, and was reported to have declared support for Adolf Hitler and threatened to bomb a military base (Holthouse 2006; Ware 2023). Former Coast Guard Lieutenant Christopher Hasson was arrested on February 15, 2019, having written a manifesto expressing desires to enact violence to “establish a white homeland” and towards suspected “traitors” (McCausland 2019), which included Democratic members of Congress and several Supreme Court Justices (McCausland 2019; Myre and Romo 2019). More recently, Former Air Force National Guardsman Jack Teixeira was arrested on April 13, 2023, for leaking a number of classified intelligence documents to servers on Discord (Harris, Oakford, and Dehganpoor 2023; U.S. Department of Justice Office for Public Affairs 2023). While Teixeira appeared to be motivated primarily by a desire for fame amongst his followers on Discord (Harris, Oakford, and Dehganpoor 2023; Rawnsley and LaPorta 2023), he also subscribed

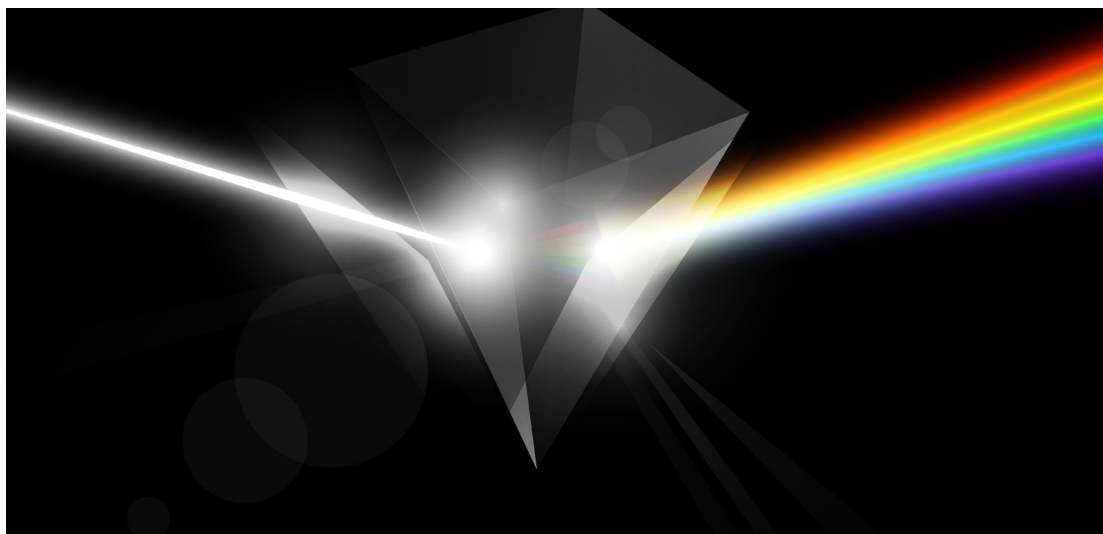


This use of military symbolism by violent extremists may undermine civilian trust in and support for military institutions, with potential consequences for military recruitment, preparedness, and strength



to anti-government and white supremacist ideologies (Hoffman and Ware 2024). Together, these cases exemplify the potential for insider threat from military personnel with ties to extremist groups and ideologies.

In addition to radicalization of current and former servicemembers, another source of insider threat is the use of militaristic language, symbols, paraphernalia, and/or pretense of having served by extremists. In essence, this use amounts to stolen valor, claiming unearned military status and heroism. Such co-option of military symbols and imagery may help them conceal the true nature of their extremism (Schake and Robinson 2021) under the guise of military discipline and patriotism (Schrama 2023), as well as brand themselves as true and authentic defenders of the nation (e.g., Freilich, Pienik, and Howard 2001; Schrama 2023). This use of military symbolism by violent extremists may undermine civilian trust in and support for military institutions, with potential consequences for military recruitment, preparedness, and strength (Schake and Robinson 2021; Ware 2023; Schrama 2023).





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In this paper, we combine social science and computer science approaches to consider the role of military narratives in white supremacist discourse. We define narratives (as detailed in the Methods section) as stories about events and their characters or actants. We examine the most common narratives in white supremacist conversations containing military-related terminology and the network of prominent narratives within these conversations. The use of military stories and protagonists may serve both to aid recruitment of current and former servicemembers as well as develop an association between these widely recognized narratives and protagonists and calls for political violence (Weinberg and Dawson 2021). Our findings have implications for studies of insider threat, recruitment into extremist organizations, the development of conspiracy theories, and other related fields.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Narratives draw their power from the connections they make to other stories of cultural relevance or significance (Polletta 2008; Polletta and Callahan 2017). When connected to other narratives of ingroup threat, they can engender fears of cultural extinction, and drive their audiences to follow through on violent calls to action (Marcks and Pawelz 2022).

The content network surrounding narratives is of particular importance to understanding how and why they are deployed. Media which contains multiple narratives are able to invoke deeper meanings or provide greater emotional resonance (Polletta and Callahan 2017; Weinberg and Dawson 2021; Dawson and Weinberg 2020; Weinberg, Dawson, and Edwards 2022). Narrative combination can also smooth the delivery of a complex moral message. For example, when military narratives of soldiers' sacrifice are combined with narratives of government betrayal, one can deliver a message which is at once anti-government and patriotic (Dawson and Weinberg 2020). Moreover, intentional pairing of mainstream and extremist narratives may provide a point of departure for mainstream audiences to accept fringe narratives (Weinberg and Dawson 2021). Far-right extremists, as discussed above, are frequently attracted to military rhetoric for its legitimizing potential. Military rhetoric enables extremists to portray themselves as sincere patriots and competent political actors (Furlow and Goodall 2011; Marcks and Pawelz 2022; Freilich, Pienik,



Moreover, intentional pairing of mainstream and extremist narratives may a point of departure for mainstream audiences to accept fringe narratives.



and Howard 2001; Schake and Robinson 2021), and we suggest that one way they do this is through sharing military narratives. Combining military narratives with extremist narratives may furthermore offer audiences a familiar and patriotic narrative that serve to legitimize and make palatable the accompanying extremist narratives.

Military narratives may also lend emotional urgency to extremist messaging. Studies have long found that the use of militaristic language and symbols in political messaging heightens the perceived severity of the threats facing a particular social group (Flusberg, Matlock, and Thibodeau 2018; Furlow and Goodall 2011; Schnepf and Christmann 2022). Militaristic rhetoric imbues narratives with a war-like framing, which elevates conflict to an inherently gruesome struggle for survival against an outgroup. Marcks and Pawelz (2022) define such stories which predict the demise of one's ingroup as an "extinction narrative." P. Smith (2005) finds that such narratives typically call for collective mobilization against an absolute evil which, beyond threatening merely a single group, threatens the "planet or civilization" as a whole (P. Smith 2005, p. 26-27).

In short, we anticipate that military narratives will play a key role in the narrative content network in white supremacist chatroom messages on Telegram that contain military language. We expect that they will serve as a key connector and driver of meaning within the network and that they will lend greater urgency and legitimacy to white supremacist narratives. Given that our data are selected on the presence of military keywords, we hypothesize that narratives drawn from these data will involve the military or soldiers as key actants—whether protagonists, antagonists, or villains—more frequently than other actants (H1). Furthermore, given that Telegram is a hub for extremist communities (Schulze et al. 2022; Urman and Katz 2022), we expect their conversations will connect military and extremist narratives. We hypothesize that military narratives will have high degree centrality in this content network, making them a key connector between various narrative pathways (H2). Specifically, we hypothesize that military-focused narratives are embedded in a content network of white supremacist narratives, including antisemitic, anti-government, and race theory narratives (H3). Finally, we hypothesize that military narratives will lend urgency to this broader set of white supremacist narratives (H4).

Methods

Data

The data were collected from September 2016 to October 2020 by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (Davey and Weinberg 2021). They are drawn from 224 far-right channels on Telegram, which were selected based on the use of white supremacist rhetoric. From these channels, 1,091,878 messages were retrieved, and then filtered using a set of 266 keywords related to the military. The final dataset consisted of 14,000 messages. Using the methods outlined below, we code for 30 narratives in 3,750 sentences and then use them to train a classifier to detect them across all 14,000 messages.

Narrative Detection and Identification

We use both Social Science and Computer Science approaches to detect and identify narratives, combining a researcher-driven, content expert approach with computer-driven approaches. Sociologists Poletta and Calahan note that the most powerful narratives may often be invoked through mere reference to their protagonists (or central actors), for example, David and Goliath (Polletta and Callahan 2017). Following this insight, our narrative detection methods focus on identification of the protagonist, antagonist, and other characters or events central to a given story. We, therefore, use a character-based model (Shahsavari et al. 2020; Tangherlini et al. 2020) or what is also called an “entity-based model” (Chambers and Jurafsky 2009) derived from Computer Science. Following the touchstone work of Chambers and Jurafsky (2009), we operationalize our entity-based narrative references as a “a tuple of an event (most simply a verb) and its participants, represented as typed dependencies ... of the protagonist: (event, dependency).” (p. 791).

Following a process described in Tangherlini et al. (2020), we break the posts down by sentence and then use a Named Entity Recognition model, which maps words to their part-of-speech tags to identify actants (Ranade et al. 2022). We identify entities using Flair, a Python package. We also replace pronouns with their absolute referent using co-reference resolution. We then go sentence by sentence to identify relationships (arg1, rel, arg2). The package then extracts entities from these relationships, and we count them, as do Shahsavari et al. (2020). Thus, the entity count represents how often the entity appears in relationships in the corpus.

From this first-round identification, similar actants may be combined together. For example, “man,” “men,” “guys,” and “fathers” are combined into a category representing “men.” Shasavari et al. (2020) terms these aggregate categories “supernodes” and their individual components “subnodes.” Using the top 20 entities, excluding countries, we have five entities that appear most frequently: Jews, government,

military, men, and Whites. We code the 400 most frequent entities for inclusion in these five actant supernodes.

Our researcher-driven approach to identifying narratives uses a combination of pre-determined labels as well as labels derived while coding our data. We create a practice coding sheet of narratives for each of the five actant supernodes. Multiple coders refine decision criteria for narrative identification and add or modify narratives to the set for coding as needed. Once the narrative list and the decision criteria are finalized for each actant, we create a randomly selected dataset of about 900 sentences for each entity, a total of 4,507 sentences in all, and code each sentence for the presence of their respective entity-specific narratives. Multiple coders independently code the same textual data. Inter-rater reliability between coders is high across each narrative set, with average agreement scores between 0.88 and 0.94. A selection is coded as containing the narrative when the majority of coders agree. Table 1 shows all of the military-focused narratives codes used in our training data.

Most of the narrative codes focus on a core narrative. For example, the code “warriors are virtuous” relates to a host of narratives about specific warriors or soldiers and their heroic deeds or attributes. The one exception to this core narrative approach is a catch-all narrative code labeled “miscellaneous military narratives.” This code identifies posts which contain actions by military actors. Rather than represent a single narrative as our other codes do, the code applies to a wide variety of military narratives reflecting a range of time periods, groups, and geographies. Some of them recount the history of ancient empires such as Rome and Persia while others detail contemporary military activity.



Using the narrative codes that appeared at least ten times on any given actant list as targets, we generate BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers, a machine learning large language model) embeddings for each sentence (Devlin et al. 2019). We train individual narrative classifiers that estimate the probability, expressed as a binary outcome (present or not present), of the presence of a single narrative within a sentence and then resample to improve classifier performance. We also train ensemble classifiers that predict the full set of narratives within a sentence for each actant. Our classifiers are fit in Python, using the scikit-learn library (Pedregosa et al. 2011). The individual classifiers are instances of scikit-learn’s SVM class, and the ensemble classifiers are instances of the MLPClassifier class. BERT embeddings are generated using the ‘bert-base-uncased’ model, provided by HuggingFace.io through the Transformers library (Wolf et al. 2020). When resampling cases for our individual narrative classifiers, we use the SMOTE class from the imblearn library (Lemaître, Nogueira, and Aridas 2017).

Our individual narrative classifiers are Support Vector Machines, simple yet robust models that have been widely used in the field of text analysis (Cortes and Vapnik 1995). Our ensemble classifiers are Multi-Layer Perceptrons— essentially simple neural networks consisting of just a few hundred neurons and capable of having a wide variety of outputs, including our multi-outcome narrative annotations (Rumelhart, Hinton, and Williams 1986).

Table 2 shows the F1 scores for classification accuracy of each individual narrative using the final output from our ensemble models. Overall, these scores are relatively high, with an average of 0.894, and suggest that our predictions are accurate enough for use in our analysis. The full row agreement in Table 2 represents the percentage of the time that the ensemble classifiers perfectly predict all narrative outcomes for a sentence within a particular actant group, again showing sufficiently high performance scores, with an average of 0.91. Confusion matrices (not shown) indicate that our ensemble classifiers have a balanced number of Type 1 and Type 2 errors and represent a non-trivial solution.

Table 1. Frequency of Military Narratives in Hand-Coded Data

Miscellaneous Military Narratives	119
Warriors Are Virtuous	60
Military Sacrifice Their Lives	54
Military Betrays Society	36
Society Betrays Military	24
Military Betrays Government	21
Military Is a Jewish Puppet	18
Military Defends Nation	18
Government Betrays Military	18
Military Fights Race War	9
Military Is Israel's Puppet	6
Military Is Slave to Government	6
Woke Military Is Weak	6
Military Is Racist Organization	6
Military Betrays Warriors	6
Soldiers Are Suckers and Losers	0

Table 2. Classification Accuracy Scores by Entity Group

Narrative Set	Lowest	Highest	F1 Average	Full Row Agreement
Government	0.801	0.980	0.870	0.951
Jews	0.740	0.978	0.821	0.873
Men	0.900	1.00	0.925	0.991
Military	0.878	1.00	0.965	0.879
White Race	0.735	0.883	0.946	0.874

We use our classifier models to code all sentences in the dataset. For each actant subnode contained within a sentence, we apply the actant’s individual narrative classifier, and multiple classifiers are applied when sentences contain more than one of our five actant supernodes. The outputs from these classifiers are then concatenated, producing a set of probabilities for the proximity of the sentence to each narrative. These probabilities are input to the ensemble classifier, which outputs a complete set of codes with binary outcomes for each narrative. The outputs from these various classifiers are concatenated after this process, along with values of ‘0’ to represent narratives for which an appropriate entity was not present.

Analysis

We examine the frequency of the military as a key actant relative to the other top entities in the sentences extracted from the full dataset. Next, we examine the frequency of military narratives, both those featuring the military as main actant and those that also feature other actants, relative to the others in our set. For example, the narrative “government betrays the military” would appear as a government narrative, but it is also a military narrative. We then examine the frequency of narratives by actant.

We next examine the narrative content network, examining how often narratives co-occur in the same post. We calculate the degree centrality of the various military narratives in this network and the narratives to which they have the strongest connections (highest edge weights). The narrative networks are undirected graphs where the nodes represent our individual narratives and the edges between the nodes represent how often these narratives co-occur with each other. Before drawing the graph, our sentence-level narrative predictions are aggregated to the post level. The nodes in the network graphs are divided into six distinct communities, or clusters. Membership in these communities is determined using k-means clustering. K-means clustering is an unsupervised machine learning technique that finds k number of central locations within the feature space and associates cases, here individual narratives, with these locations (MacQueen 1967).

Finally, we examine textual examples of posts in which military and other frequent narratives co-occur to examine what rhetorical role the military narratives play.

Results

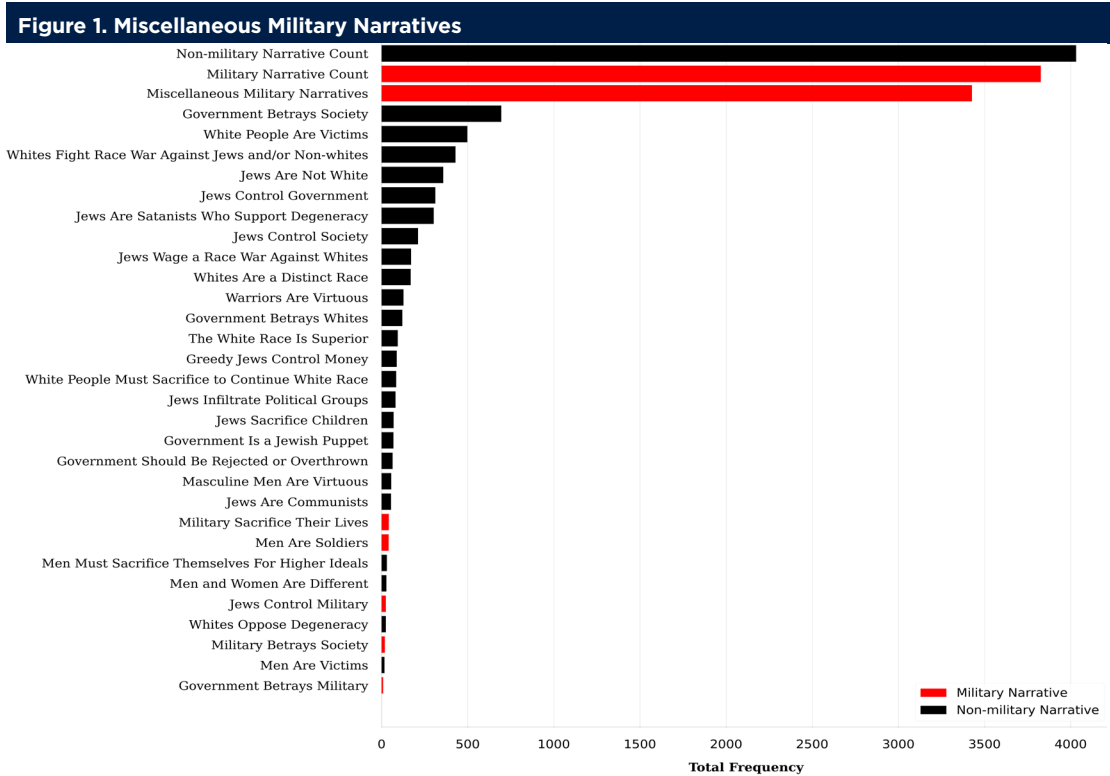
Frequency and Centrality of Military as Key Actant

Contrary to our first hypothesis that military actors and narratives will be dominant within the corpus, we find white supremacist content

Table 3. Frequency of Actant Appearance Within Narratives

Supernode	Number of Narratives
Government	19566
Jews	15102
Military	14755
Whites	5649
Men	5091

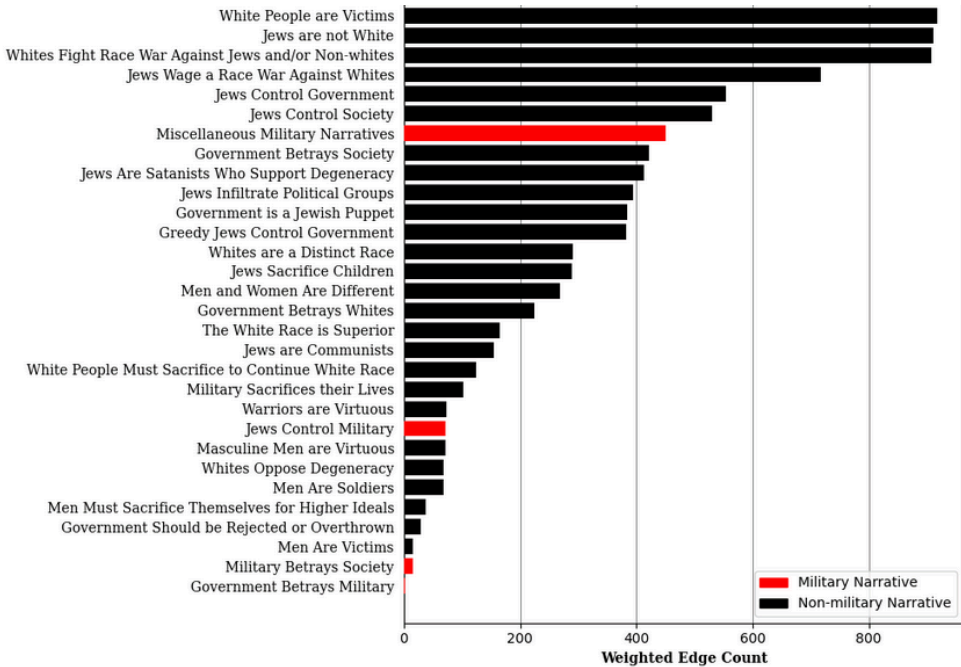
is more substantial than military content both in terms of the actants and narratives present. Table 3 shows the sentence-level frequency of our main actants. Military represents the third, rather than the first, most frequent group.



Reflecting the frequency of government and Jewish actants, the most common narratives in the dataset deal with white race and antisemitic themes. These include government betrayal, white victimhood, white racial boundaries, and Jewish infiltration of institutions. Military narratives make up less than half of the narratives we observe, and this high representation is largely due to our narrative catch-all, “miscellaneous military narratives.”

Contrary to Hypothesis 2 that military narratives will have the highest degree centrality in the network, we find that the most central narratives are not military narratives but are instead narratives about white victimhood, race war, and a variety of antisemitic conspiracy narratives. We calculate degree centrality for each narrative in terms of the total number of edges each narrative shares with each other narrative (displayed in Figure 2). Although many of our military narratives are relatively unconnected to the others, our catch-all for miscellaneous military narratives is in the top quarter in terms of centrality.

Figure 2. Miscellaneous Military Narratives



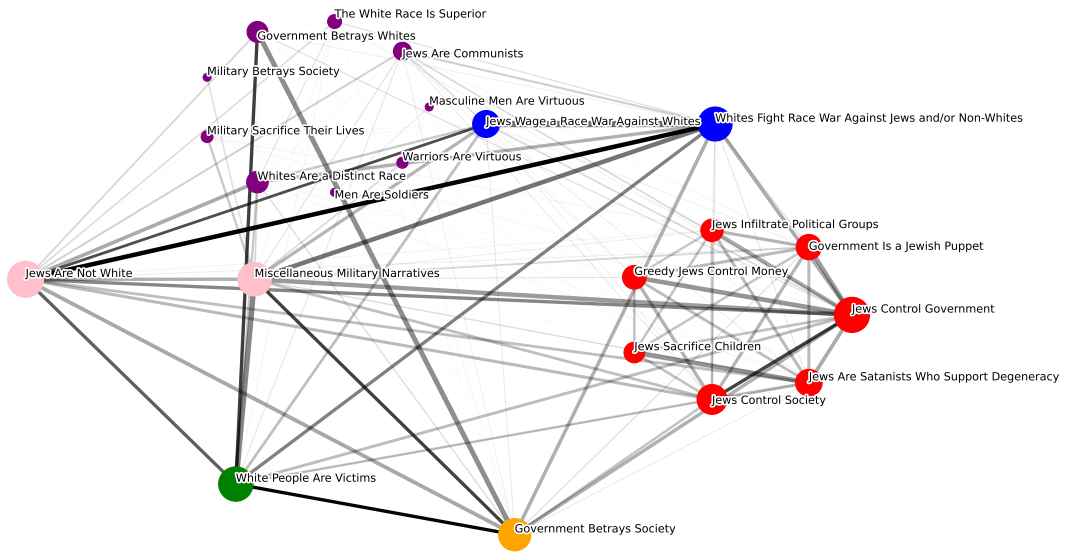
We thus find that, despite selecting on military content for inclusion in our corpus, military narratives do not dominate the corpus but rather are mixed into a larger body of white supremacist narratives. Miscellaneous military narratives are featured far more frequently than any other narratives within the posts, but are less central to the narrative network than white supremacist narratives. In other words, military narratives form the backdrop upon which play out complex compound narratives about white supremacy, government betrayal, and Jewish villainy and control of institutions.

Narrative Network

Our third hypothesis expects that military narratives are embedded within a content network of narratives related to white supremacist concerns, including white victimhood, antisemitic, and anti-government narratives. We see evidence of the role military narratives play in the content network when we examine the network of individual narratives (Figure 3).

Figure 3 shows the narrative network, which is a network where the nodes represent individual narratives and the edges represent the frequency of co-occurrence between two narratives. Overall, we find that 6 communities best represented our data, and the various colors represent different communities of narratives. Two of the communities have obvious substantive significance: the red cluster, which is

Figure 3. Narrative Network



largely a self-involved set of narratives referring to antisemitic conspiracy narratives, and the blue cluster, which contains two reciprocal race war narratives, one with Jews as the protagonist actant and the other with the White Race as the protagonist actant. The pink cluster contains the military narrative "Miscellaneous Military Narratives" and the racial narrative "Jews Are Not White." The green and yellow communities are each defined by a single narrative: "White People are Victims" and "Government Betrays Society," respectively. Finally, the purple community acts as a catch-all, collecting nodes which did not fit into any other cluster. In this community we find low frequency narratives with relatively few edges. These include most of the military narratives, including "Military Betrays Society," "Warriors are Virtuous," "Military Sacrifice Their Lives, and "Men are Soldiers," as well as narratives with Men as an actant and narratives about white superiority.

Along with its co-community member, "Jews Are Not White", "Miscellaneous Military Narratives" forms the dominant conduit between the antisemitic narrative cluster (red) and the rest of the network. "Miscellaneous Military Narratives" also connects strongly to government betrayal narratives—"Government Betrays Society" (yellow) and "Government Betrays Whites" (purple)—which are also primarily connected to the narrative "White People Are Victims" (green). Finally, "Miscellaneous Military Narratives" frequently co-occurs with more specific core military narratives (purple), including "Military Betrays Society, "Warriors are virtuous," and "Men are Soldiers," while its co-community member "Jews are Not White" connects to narratives related to white superiority and victimhood: "Government Betrays Whites,"

“Whites are a Distinct Race,” “White Race is Superior,” and “White People Must Sacrifice to Continue White Race.”

In short, within our corpus, military narratives form a primary network pathway leading to narratives concerned with government betrayal, white victimhood and superiority, and antisemitism.

Role of Military Narratives

Finally, our fourth hypothesis is that military narratives are used to heighten the urgency or emotional appeal of the other narratives present in a post. Indeed, we see that this is the case within the corpus. Below we provide two examples. The first contains references to the narratives “Jews Are Not White,” “Jews Control Government,” and “Miscellaneous Military Narratives.” In this case, the military actant is a United States Army Air Corpsman who served in World War II and helped defeat the Nazis. The post refers to the obituary of this veteran, a white man, whose ten-year-old son was sexually assaulted and brutally murdered:

“*... I found the obituary of the father of the boy listed above. ... "Mr. Fife passed away on September 11, 2006 - exactly twenty-one years to the day that his son, Raymond, died. Mr. Fife was born August 24, 1927, in Weirton, West Virginia, the son of Isaac Danford and Pearl McNurlan. He was a member of the United States Army Air Corps and served in World War II. Mr. Fife was employed at Republic Steel for ten years."*

A World War 2 vet and a steel worker—and how does Uncle ZOG repay his service to his country? By unleashing the very worst black criminal subhumanity against his family, and then failing to put to death his son's murderers so that both the killers outlived the old man.

This is why vigilante violence happens—the people taking the law into their own hands. This white father served the system faithfully during the war, he worked in a steel mill and paid taxes to support the system, and the system pays him back by taking those taxes to provide food, clothing, shelter and medical care to his son's killers so that they may outlive him in prison.

A member of the Greatest Generation who helped defeat the Nazis so we could live in the multiracial paradise of today. This is the story of what the Jews and the system have done to white America over the past century. They use them as cannon fodder in their wars, they work them and tax them all their lives, they expose their children to violence, rape and murder by blacks, they give them no justice for what was done to them—then they call them "racist" and say they benefit from a lifetime of "white privilege."

The author highlights Fife's service to the country and lays out the tragedy of a sacrifice made on behalf of the ungrateful, power-hungry Zionist Occupied Government, or ZOG. Rhetorically, Fife's military service deepens the wrong committed, and further vilifies the alleged perpetrator, embellishing the antisemitic narratives present in the post and adding to the sense of threat.

In another example, we see a wide variety of white supremacist and antisemitic narratives present in a post which also contains our "Miscellaneous Military Narratives," in this case a narrative related to the bombing of Dresden by British fighters during WW2. The post is a rant against Jews, referred to in the post as "your people," accusing them of white genocide and other villainous deeds:



...Your people have routinely practiced child sacrifice.

Your people have routinely practiced blood libel during passover; the consumption of the blood of children.

You murdered Jesus.

You enslaved Africans and brought them to the Americas as cheap labour.

You constantly practice usury.

The governments of UK, US and USSR during WW2 were almost exclusively Jew run which your people used to slaughter over 100 million White's.

Jewish run British fighters bombed Dresden, a city with no military installations, killing 600,000 unarmed women and children with fire.

Your people and especially your nation drain white nations of wealth.

Your people encourage the race mixing of our people, in movies, films, music, from positions of education, power, etc.

From positions of political power, Jews braggingly lead the charge in third world immigration to white nations and jail whites who speak against it.



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Here, conspiracy theories about Jewish infiltration of western governments and militaries are heightened by identifying specific battles and incidents of mass casualties—casualties of millions of white people—that are blamed on Jews. Both textual examples show instances of military narratives being combined with white supremacist and antisemitic narratives to heighten the urgency or emotional appeal of these other narratives. In this way, the claims made by the accompanying narrative references (e.g. that whites are victims or that Jews control the government) become exaggerated, and the military narratives contribute rhetorically to a sense of existential threat and high stakes.

Discussion

In this article, we analyze the narrative content of a set of posts from white supremacist chatrooms on Telegram, with an eye to understanding the use of military narratives in these chatrooms and the potential for insider threat related to the military. Despite the narrow focus of our corpus on posts containing military keywords, we find that military narratives play a supporting rather than a leading role in these posts. In aggregate, narratives about the military are not as frequent as narratives about other actants, and individual military narratives are not the most central narratives to the network, which is dominated by narratives about white victimhood, the race war, antisemitic conspiracy narratives, and narratives of government betrayal. Nonetheless, we find that military narratives play an important role within this broader narrative network.

Previous research has suggested that narratives may legitimize violence or hostility against threatening outgroups by reinforcing the ingroup's sense of injury and virtue, while at the same time, emphasizing the evil and danger posed by outgroups (Marcks and Pawelz 2022; Rothbart and Korostelina 2006a; 2006b). A war-like framing of group conflict validates violence as collective self-defense, retribution, or



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even heroism in combating a world-destroying evil (Fiske and Rai 2015; Furlow and Goodall 2011; Marcks and Pawelz 2022). Moreover, would-be warriors of the ingroup are cast as morally responsible for killing and destroying the enemy (Fiske and Rai 2015). Finally, narratives about the military, particularly narratives of soldiers' sacrifice, may be used to impart sacred honor to these warriors and their causes (Dawson and Weinberg 2020). In this study, we find that military narratives play all of these roles within the white supremacist narrative network.

In this study, military narratives serve in the narrative network rhetorically to heighten the stakes of white supremacist narratives contained within the same post. The posts themselves are rarely motivated by their military themes; rather, military narratives serve as background material, lending greater urgency, realism, and gravitas to extremist narratives. The narrative networks in the posts focus on the Jews and the government as key antagonists, the threatening outgroups. Government betrayal narratives connect strongly to narratives of white victimhood. A variety of antisemitic conspiracy narratives in the corpus feature Jews as puppet masters who control government and society. These antisemitic conspiracy narratives connect in the network to narratives of government betrayal and white victimhood but even more strongly to race war narratives, wherein Jews seek to enact white genocide or replacement of the white race. These narrative combinations feature both the language of war and the threat of annihilation. Warrior narratives and narratives of government betrayal of Whites, moreover, combine to depict Whites, especially white men, as noble warriors fighting injustice and the victimization of whites. Furthermore, the separateness of Jews from the white race, a further indication of Jews as the outgroup, is often conveyed in conjunction with stories about the military. These stories are often long-winded and historical in nature, shared with a measure of assumed authority and expertise, serving to provide legitimacy to claims that set Jews apart as a dangerous other. Military narratives are also used to deepen the sense of victimhood or betrayal in accompanying narratives, highlighting unjust military action or unfair treatment of military actors or veterans whose sacrifices deserve honor.

We conclude that far-right chatrooms on Telegram use military narratives to legitimize and heighten the stakes of narratives related to a white supremacist agenda, to vilify Jews, and to glorify violence by warriors for the white race. Military narratives thus becomes part of a rallying cry against outgroups—in this case the Jews and the government—and to heroize warriors for the white race in an effort to recruit and radicalize users to white supremacist causes.

Our findings are limited in that we cannot speak directly to the role of these narratives in the day-to-day recruitment of servicemembers and veterans to extremism. Although we see that white supremacists use military rhetoric to great effect in their own spaces, to what extent military personnel participate in these discussions is unknown. What is also unknown is the generalizability of the particular narrative network we describe to other platforms or audiences. However, the content we observe is well-suited to elicit violence-provoking emotional responses from military audiences and audiences that respect the military.

Our findings have implications for understanding the risk of insider threat related to the military. The use of military language and narratives presents opportunities for insider threat both in relation to recruitment and radicalization of military personnel and veterans and also through the co-option of these narratives in service of extremist causes. In many of the white supremacist Telegram posts, military and government leaders are cast as allies of darkness, at best willing accomplices and at worst the active perpetrators of great crimes against humanity. In contrast, they cast soldiers as victims of manipulation, conspiracy, and betrayal or alternatively as the last bastion against evil forces seeking to annihilate the white race. Lending military honor to extremist causes, these narratives may encourage violence by those who fancy themselves warriors. They may also direct the antipathies of servicemembers and veterans toward government and civilian leaders, creating the dangerous potential for insider threat. ✓

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