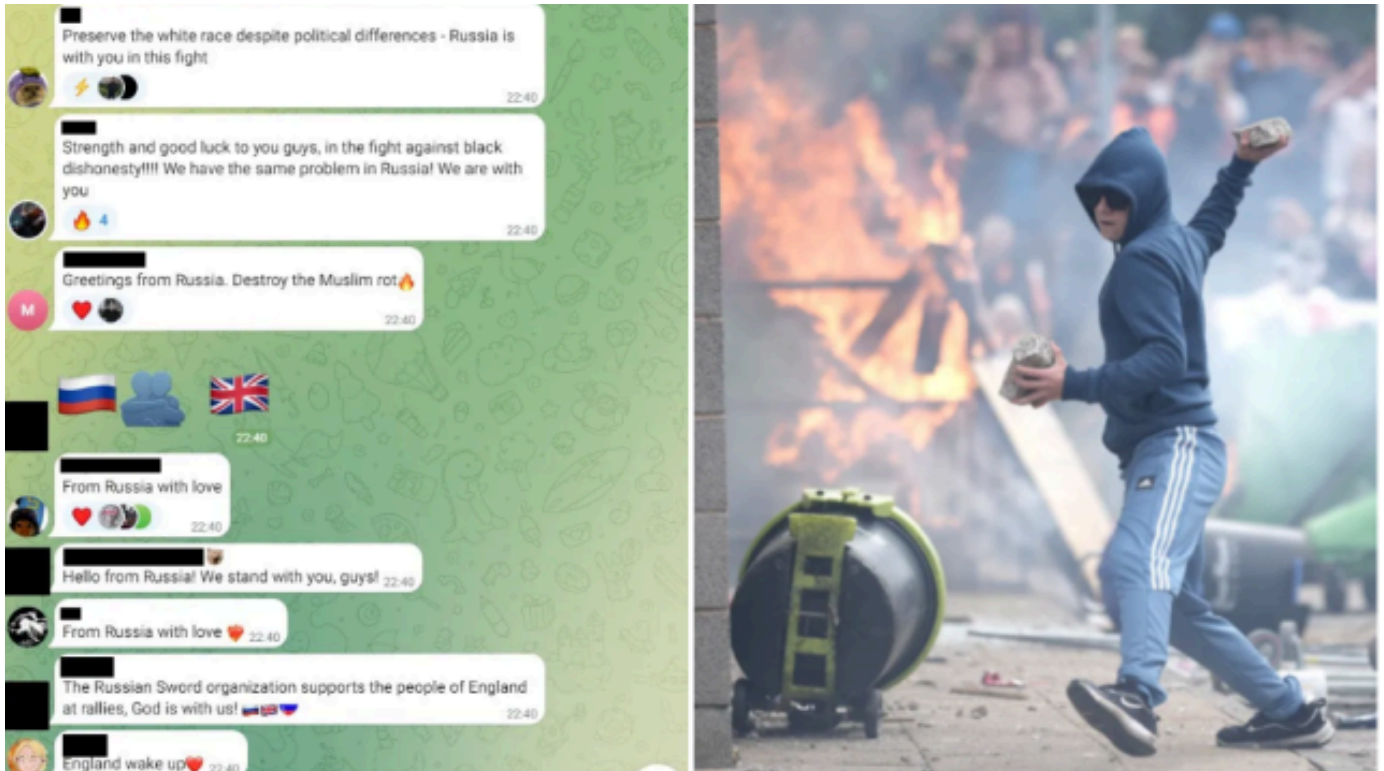




# How Russia-linked social media accounts fanned flames of UK riots

Accounts linked to Russia urged far-right protesters to 'destroy the Muslim rot' and 'kill the enemy'



A UK intelligence source told **i** that social media account 'bots' linked Russia had been responsible for stoking violence during the course of the rioting

## Alexa Phillips

August 06, 2024 5:32 pm (Updated August 07, 2024 3:26 pm)

Russia-linked social media accounts have incited violence and racism in online groups discussing the [far-right disorder](#) that have engulfed the UK, **i** can reveal.

Analysis of posts in [Telegram channels which have promoted violent protests](#) in several towns and cities found accounts claiming to be run by Russian supporters of the far-right urging protesters to “destroy” Muslims in Britain.

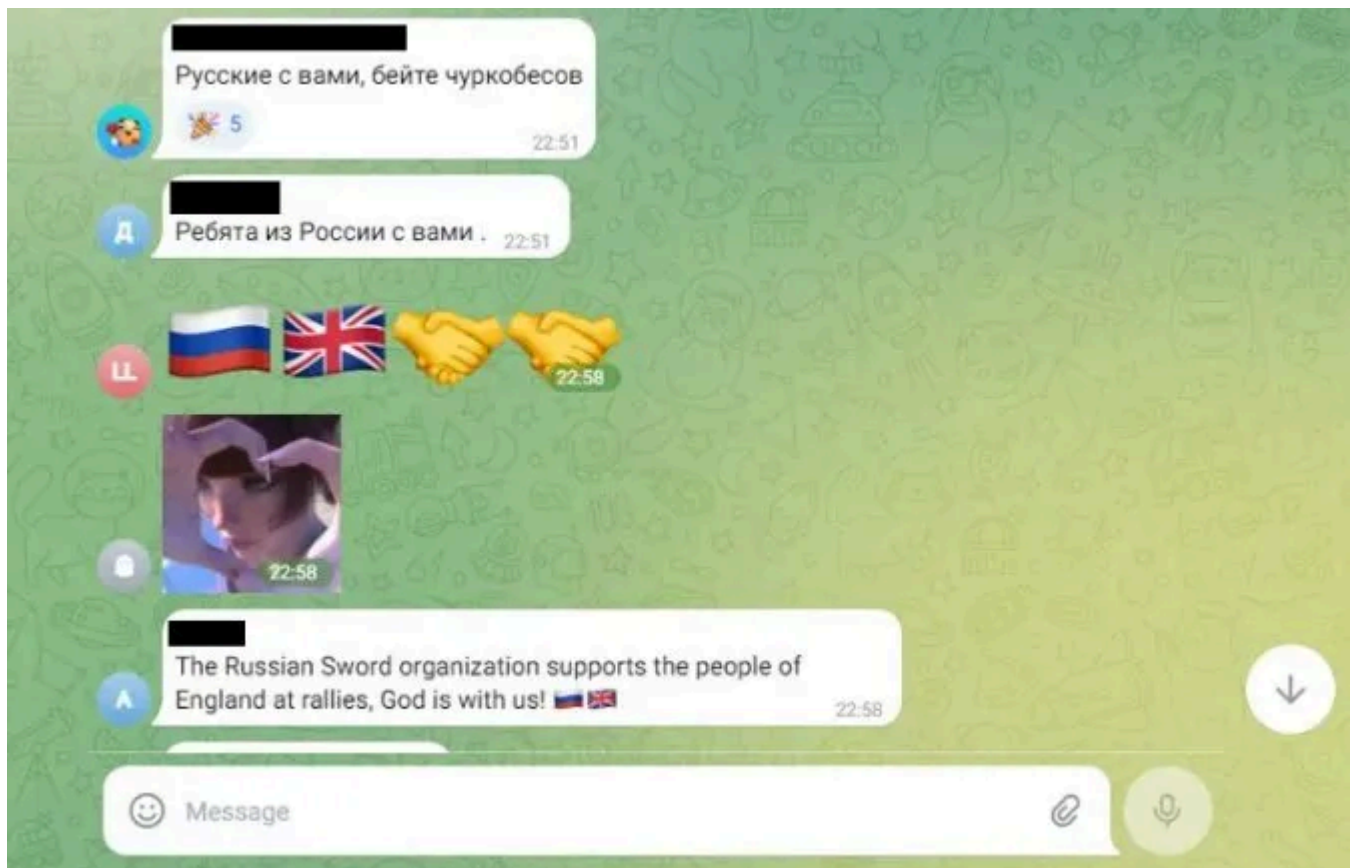
A UK intelligence source told **i** that social media account “bots” linked Russia had been responsible for stoking violence during the course of the rioting as a form of “covert influence”.

There is no suggestion that the accounts identified by **i** are linked to the Russian state.

The Prime Minister’s spokesman said the Government has “seen bot activity online, much of which may well be amplified by foreign-state actors amplifying some of the disinformation and misinformation that we’ve seen”.

The official declined to give more detail about which states may be involved, but added: “The disinformation that we’ve seen online attracts amplification from known bot activity, which, as I say, can be linked to state-backed activity.”

He added the National Crime Agency and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology are “looking at” the issue.



Posts in the Patriotic Alternative Telegram channel urged protesters to ‘kill the enemy’. Account names and photographs in these screenshots have been redacted by i for legal reasons

It comes after it emerged that initial disinformation that the teenager accused of killing three girls in Southport was an asylum seeker who had crossed the English Channel can be traced back to [Channel3 Now](#), a Russia-linked website that claims to be a legitimate American news outlet. [i’s](#) research previously revealed it had [previously shared content published in Russian](#).

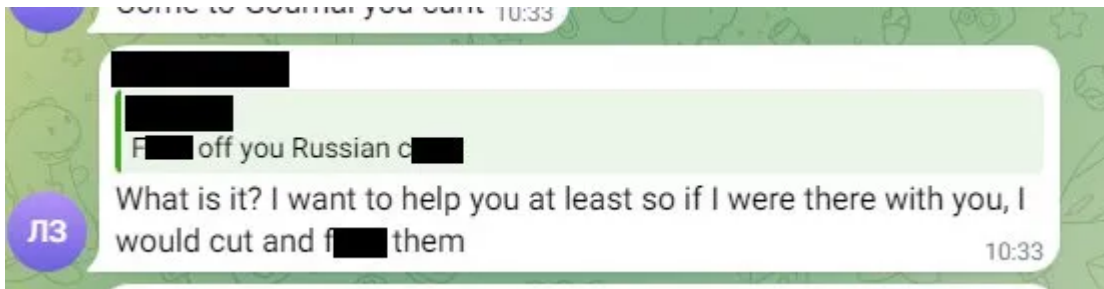
Channel3 Now incorrectly claimed the suspect was an asylum seeker named Ali Al-Shakati, and circulation of the name was boosted by thousands of other accounts on X, formerly known as Twitter.

As the protests unfolded, two key far-right Telegram channels linked to the protests were flooded with words of encouragement from people purporting to be from Russia, [i](#) has found.

Telegram, an encrypted messaging service, has become a popular forum for protest groups due to the ease with which information can be disseminated and its stringent privacy settings.

One Telegram channel, which I have chosen not to name, had more than 14,000 members before it was taken down and played a key role in spreading the word about rallies that turned violent, including the first one in Southport last Tuesday.

Messages in the channel include one user saying: “Hello everyone, my name is Luka, I am a right-wing Russian nationalist”. The user then describes wanting to help rioters in the UK, before saying they would turn to violence if they were involved.



A user says he wants to help after introducing himself as a right-wing activist in Russia in a Telegram channel used to organise protests

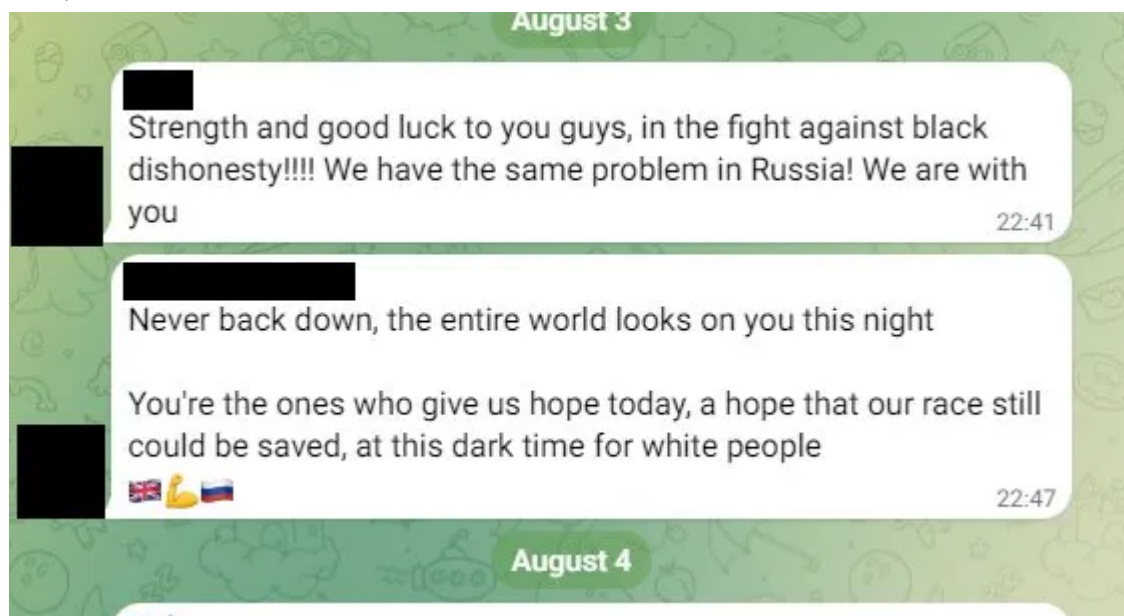
A post discussing leafleting about the “demographic demise” of Britons “because of mass immigration” in the channel of far-right group Patriotic Alternative received praise from several accounts claiming to be run by Russians on Saturday.

One user, who signed off the post with a Russian flag, wrote: “Never back down, the entire world looks on you this night. You’re the ones who give us hope today, a hope that our race still could be saved, at this dark time for white people”.

The same message was posted by another account within minutes – an indicator of bot activity.

Another account posted: “Strength and good luck to you guys, in the fight against black dishonesty!!!! We have the same problem in Russia! We are with you”. The message was posted more than once in the channel by the same account at the same time.

A third account urged channel members to “preserve the white race despite political differences”, adding that “Russia is with you in this fight”.



Some messages were repeatedly posted in the Patriotic Alternative channel

One who offered “greetings from Russia” also wrote a message encouraging violence against Muslims.

The same message of support purportedly from the “Russian Sword organization” was posted at the same time from different accounts.

An account with a name written in Cyrillic – the alphabet used in Russia and other Slavic countries – proclaimed: “White Power!”

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More encouragement of violence was posted in Russian – translated as “the Russians are with you, beat the idiots”.

One user asked “What’s with all the Ruskis? [a disparaging slang term for Russians]”. Following this, an administrator said on Sunday that they had woken up to 1,700 notifications about that message.

**i** found more indicators of Russian activity in another Telegram channel named after Mark Collett – but without involvement by Mark Collet as far as **i** understands – which features a picture of the founder of Patriotic Alternative and former British National Party member of the same name.

One of the posts in Russian on Tuesday in the group, which had 18,545 members at the time, can be translated as: “Migrants are already openly telling you that this is their land, and you are guests there.”

Another post in Russian defends the country’s invasion of Ukraine.

A Telegram spokesperson said: “Telegram’s moderators are actively monitoring the situation and are removing channels and posts containing calls to violence. Calls to violence are explicitly forbidden by Telegram’s terms of service.

“Moderators use a combination of proactive monitoring of public parts of the platform,

sophisticated AI tools and user reports to ensure content that breaches Telegram’s terms is removed.”

**i** contacted the Russian Embassy for comment.