

Telegram's Durov Tells Tucker Carlson That Kremlin Pressure Forced Him Out of Russia

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Pavel Durov. @TuckerCarlson / X

Telegram founder Pavel Durov [said](#) he fled Russia over Kremlin pressure to share Ukrainian pro-democracy protesters' personal data in 2013 in a rare interview with U.S. right-wing journalist Tucker Carlson.

The eccentric tech CEO told Carlson that he and Telegram — one of the world's fastest-growing messaging apps — relocated to Dubai in 2017 to avoid being "geopolitically aligned" or "select winners in any political fight."

"I would rather be free than to take orders from anyone," Durov said in the hourlong interview published on Carlson's YouTube channel Wednesday.

During the 2011-12 mass protests against rigging in Russia's parliamentary elections, Durov [said](#) he had refused state orders to take down opposition communities on VKontakte,

the social network he co-founded in 2007.

In 2013, Durov said a similar Russian request during Ukraine's Euromaidan protests left him with "two sub-optimal options": complying or resigning as CEO of VKontakte and fleeing Russia.

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"I chose the latter," said Durov, whose stops included Berlin, London, Singapore and San Francisco — where he recounted being mugged after meeting ex-Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey — before settling in Dubai.

"Our response was, 'Wait a minute, this is a different country. We won't betray our Ukrainian users because you asked us to do that'," Durov told Carlson of his viewpoint. "We decided to refuse and that didn't go [over] too well with the Russian government as well."

VKontakte later [fell](#) under the control of Kremlin-aligned tycoons and is now [headed](#) by the son of a Kremlin insider.

Durov denied concerns that Telegram, which is highly influential in Russian-speaking countries, was controlled by the Russian state and suggested that his Western competitors may have spread the rumor over fears about its growth.

He also claimed that the FBI attempted to secretly recruit one of Telegram's developers to build a backdoor into the messenger during his most recent visit to the United States.

Durov forecast that Telegram, which has 900 million active users, would cross 1 billion active monthly users within one year.

The app, which touts itself as a safe and secure communications tool, [does not use](#) end-to-end encryption by default.

Carlson, who is known for spreading conspiracy theories and far-right views, [interviewed](#) Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in February.

The interview with Durov marked the debut of the Telegram channel for his Tucker Carlson Network.

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