

CALIPHATETOK: TIKTOK CONTINUES TO HOST ISLAMIC STATE PROPAGANDA

New research from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue reveals the Islamic State continues to place propaganda on TikTok without consequence.

A new Digital Dispatch from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) demonstrates how TikTok continues to host Islamic State propaganda, identifying a pro-caliphate support network on TikTok that has garnered more than a million collective viewers to date, with seemingly no consequences from the platform.

The report, authored by Moustafa Ayad, ISD's Executive Director for Africa, the Middle East and Asia, analyzes an active Islamic State content producer network of 20 accounts that repurposes official Islamic State video footage and audio for TikTok and uses increasingly sophisticated tactics to counteract automated moderation efforts.

“Violent Islamic State propaganda is hiding in plain sight on Tiktok, and so far the platform seems to be doing nothing to stop it,” said Ayad. “Tiktok has the ability to serve as a potent tool for recruiting and communicating with Islamic State followers, and our failure to reckon with that fact could lead to real violence. This is an urgent problem that demands real attention from regulators and from the platform itself.”

The report also highlights how Islamic State content continues to evade moderation efforts, can be easily searched, and spreads at a faster rate compared to a [previous ISD study in 2021](#). With an audience of 150 million Americans, TikTok’s inability to restrict the use of the platform by Islamic State poses a serious national security risk to the United States.

“Propagandists publishing Islamic State content on Tiktok aren’t simply pushing out their ideology,” said Ayad. “They’re actively directing viewers to other platforms where they can further engage them as supporters. Their activities show a sophisticated understanding of the platform and it’s critical that we address this tactic with the seriousness it deserves.”

Key findings

ISD researchers watched more than **100 videos** produced by the 20 accounts in the network that garnered over **500,000 views per post** and identified the main tactics and features they use to counteract automated moderation efforts:

- Islamic State networks **use original sounds** that often contain more egregious messages than the videos themselves and tend to remain on the platform for longer. Even when the videos are removed, the audio can still be used by others - in this case, Islamic State content producers.
- Although most videos use footage or sounds of speeches by Islamic States ideologues like Abul-Hassan al-Muhajir and Abu Mohammad al-Adnani. Some **call for action** through a combination of images and messages. One video used knife emojis accompanied by the message “you will taste it”, while others encouraged Americans to “take advantage” of their access to firearms to “spray the kuffar with bullets.”

- Islamic State networks often use TikTok to **signpost supporters to other platforms like Telegram** by including channel QR codes in their videos or sharing links to Islamic State websites in their TikTok bio.
- Much like far-right extremists, these users **employ sarcasm and irony** to distort the context of their social media posts and avoid content moderation.
- Only five out of the 20 accounts in the network were removed by TikTok during the period of analysis. The users behind them were able to **pivot to previously dormant accounts** under their control to post more Islamic State content.

Interviews with Moustafa Ayad are available on request.

The Digital Dispatch is available on [ISD website](#).

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