

# Student studies Twitter tactics of ISIS supporters

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This year BYU student Alex Miller has been using Twitter to keep up with a new crop of terrorists.

But he's not in danger of being radicalized. Instead, he conducted a class research project that earned recognition from his college. It also offers some very timely lessons for the U.S. intelligence community.

In the recent attacks by two men in Garland, Texas, one of the gunmen had previously tweeted his support for ISIS and hinted that an attack was

coming.

Months earlier, several accounts of British and American women joining ISIS in Syria made the news.

"Why they would want to do that was the natural question, so I focused my project on the rhetorical styles women use on Twitter to support ISIS," Alex said.

With mentoring from political science professor Celeste Beesley, Alex began searching Twitter for accounts belonging to Western women who publicly supported ISIS. Of the many he found, Alex focused on well-established accounts who posted frequently and had gained a following of at least 300 people.

Of the 30 accounts that met these criteria, Alex randomly selected 10 to observe and analyze for a full week.

One of the women in his sample recently left her home in Alabama to join ISIS in Syria. She and others Alex studied don't shy away from the brutality of ISIS. In fact, they frequently celebrate acts of violence with text, video and images.

That's surprising in one regard: Many experts assume women who sympathize or support ISIS are motivated by narratives of romantic adventure or a humanitarian appeal.

The U.S. State Department and others in the intelligence community act based on those assumptions. They run hundreds of social media accounts that try to get recruits to "think again."

Based on Alex's work, Professor Beesley thinks they may be doing it wrong.

"The [intelligence community](#) tries to counter recruitment by using violent imagery, trying to show that it is barbaric," said Beesley.

"According to Alex's research, that is actually a recruitment technique that they (ISIS) are using, especially through these [women](#). Somebody is misunderstanding the audience, and that's a problem."

The State Department is no stranger to Alex. Last summer they sent him to Madagascar on a diplomacy and public affairs internship. This summer, they're sending him to Washington, D.C. and Indonesia for the "Critical Languages Scholarship" program.

Provided by Brigham Young University

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