

New study analyzes tweets to reveal how ISIS still inspires low-level attacks

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By analyzing 26.2 million Twitter comments in the Arabic language, researchers found that despite losing territory, ISIS remains successful at inspiring low-level attacks because of its messaging for a "call for lone jihad." The study, "ISIS at its apogee: The Arabic discourse about support for ISIS on Twitter and what we can learn from that," was

recently published in *SAGE Open*.

The researchers analyzed Tweets from July 2014 to January 2015, when ISIS's strength reached its peak and the group was expanding its territory. Assessing the connection between ongoing events and Tweet timing, the researchers found:

1. Heavy media coverage leads to increased expressed support of ISIS online.
2. When online conversations surrounding ISIS surged, many individuals who did not normally engage in the debate entered to express their negative views towards the group.
3. Online support changes according to the target of action. For example, [terrorist groups](#) often gain legitimacy by claiming they are acting on behalf of a larger cause, but if they choose a target considered unpopular by their constituents, they lose support.
4. There is no clear evidence of ISIS members backlashing against ISIS leaders for their actions towards prisoners (such as beheadings).

The researchers also noticed that foreign fighters often lived in countries with a lower share of support towards ISIS, geographically isolating them from the group.

"This correlation suggests that ISIS sympathizers living in countries with a lower support towards the group might feel marginalized, leading them to radicalize their views and join ISIS," said the study's authors Andrea Ceron, Luigi Curini and Stefano M. Iacus. "Because they don't have an easily accessible way to join or support the organization in their own country."

The researchers concluded that policy that increases censorship is not a solution to the ISIS threat as decreasing expressed support for the group can favor radicalization.

More information: Andrea Ceron et al, ISIS at Its Apogee: The Arabic Discourse on Twitter and What We Can Learn From That About ISIS Support and Foreign Fighters, *SAGE Open* (2019). DOI: [10.1177/2158244018789229](https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018789229)

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