

Islamic State Online: A Look at the Group's South Asian Presence on Alternate Platforms

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This report provides an in-depth analysis of the consequences of deplatforming and platform migration of IS supporters to lesser-known encrypted social media platforms, with a focus on South Asia-centric supporter channels. The authors collated data from more than 25 South Asia-centric channels and further analysed narratives pertaining to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan in these channels.



Since the inception of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria in 2014, the militants and their supporters have constantly sought to propagate IS narratives on social media. In 2019, Telegram took extensive action to remove IS channels and supporters of the group from its platform. Telegram's crackdown led to the attempted migration of IS supporters to lesser-known encrypted social media apps like Hoop Messenger, Rocket.Chat, and TamTam. These platforms are less than a tenth as popular as Telegram (based on download numbers).

This report identifies distinct variation among IS narratives across channels dedicated to individual countries in South Asia. In channels dedicated to Afghanistan, narratives criticised the Taliban for not being Islamic enough. In channels dedicated to Pakistan, narratives focused on criticism of the state for allying with the United States. Indian IS channels focused on the mistreatment of and violence towards Muslims. In Bangladesh IS channels, the narrative focused on reconnecting Bangladesh and its citizens with their Muslim roots.

Finally, the report asserts that the waves of deplatforming targeting IS channels from open social media to Telegram have reduced the number of users and followers migrating to smaller apps and the overall volume of disseminated propaganda. However, IS continues its efforts to adapt and evade content moderation strategies. The authors also highlight the need to support smaller platforms to continue their deplatforming efforts to deny IS supporters a haven to propagate their narratives.