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NJOHSP

EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

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ISIS: Social Media Not Primary Recruitment Driver

Recent Western studies and analysis suggest social media is not the primary driver of recruitment for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—revealing that personal relationships are often more utilized in the recruitment of susceptible youth to join the group. Instead, the research shows that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pastebin play a key role in reinforcing existing radical views and amplifying ISIS's extreme messages.

- In January, a UK think tank reported that of 700 foreign fighters who traveled to Syria from Europe in 2014, 90 percent were recruited through personal contacts. A second study from the same think tank released this year revealed that only three percent of the 378 German citizens who traveled or attempted to travel to Syria in 2014 were radicalized online.
- According to the US State Department, ISIS and its followers in February produced an average of 90,000 social messages per day in approximately 25 languages. At the same time, Western media reporting indicates that ISIS recruited only about 30 foreign fighters that month.
- An OHSP review of open-source reporting found that most foreign fighters from Western Europe who traveled to Syria since 2012 came from specific, clustered communities throughout the continent. This finding underscores the strength of personal, community bonds in driving both radical recruitment and travel facilitation.

Contact Information

Any agency with information or comments/questions on this or other analytical products, please contact the OHSP Analysis Bureau at analysis@njohsp.gov or 609-584-4000.