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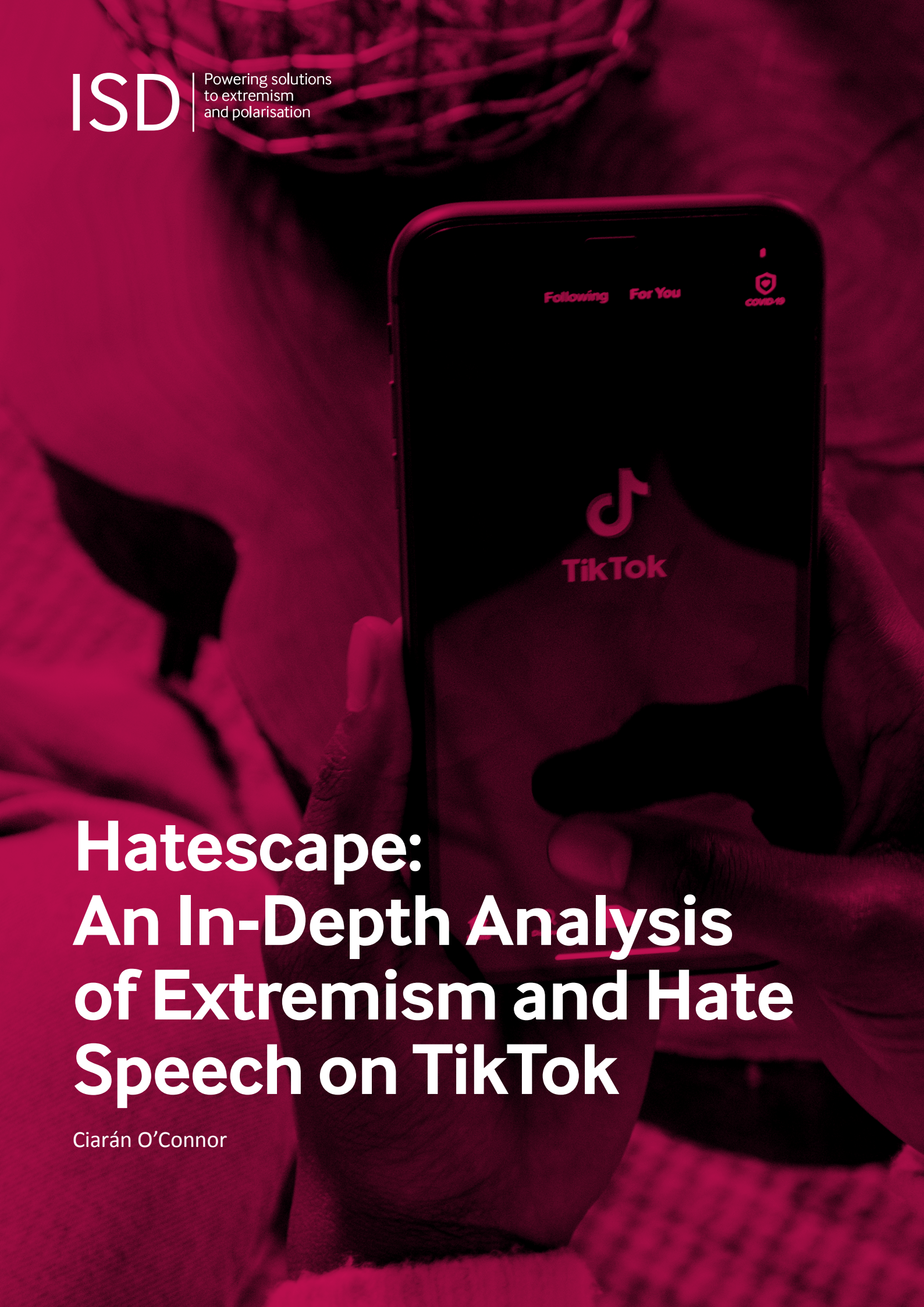

Hatescape: An In-Depth Analysis of Extremism and Hate Speech on TikTok

Ciarán O'Connor

About this paper
This report aims to provide an in-depth analysis on the state of extremism and hate on TikTok. It is the culmination of three months of research on a sample of 1,030 videos posted on TikTok, equivalent to just over eight hours of content, that were used to promote hatred and glorify extremism and terrorism on the platform.

ISD set out to examine the state of hate and extremism on TikTok in two ways. The first objective involved analysing how individuals or groups promote hateful ideologies and target people on the platform based on numerous protected attributes such as ethnicity, religion, gender or others. Second, using the same framework, ISD investigated how features on TikTok like profiles, hashtags, share functions, video effects and music are used to spread hate.

The analysis of the TikTok content featured in this report was conducted between July 1 - 16, 2021. All references to the status of TikTok content being live or removed were accurate as of July 16, 2021. Prior to publishing this report, ISD shared content from its sample with TikTok's Trust and Safety team that was discovered during this research and remained live at the time of writing. TikTok provided ISD with this statement prior to publishing this report: "TikTok categorically prohibits violent extremism and hateful behavior, and our dedicated team will remove any such content as it violates our policies and undermines the creative and joyful experience people expect on our platform. We value ISD's research and collaboration and have removed all violative content in this report. Our teams have also used this research to inform further investigation, which helped us proactively remove a number of additional accounts

About ISD
Founded in 2006, ISD is now the leading global 'think and do' tank dedicated to understanding and innovating real-world responses to the rising tide of polarisation, hate and extremism of all forms. We combine anthropological research, expertise in international extremist movements and an advanced digital analysis capability that tracks hate, disinformation and extremism online, with policy advisory support and training to governments and cities around the world. We also work to empower youth and community influencers internationally through our pioneering education, technology and communications programmes.

About the Author
Ciarán O'Connor is an analyst and investigator on ISD's Digital Analysis Unit. He focuses on the intersection of extremism and technology and with specific expertise on the far-right and disinformation environment online and use of open-source research methodologies. Since the start of 2021, Ciarán has led ISD's COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation Monitor, a series of short-form reports examining the nature and scale of vaccine-related misinformation in Ireland, Canada, MENA and the Netherlands. Before joining ISD, Ciarán worked with Storyful news agency. He has an MSc in Political Communication Science from the University of Amsterdam and is currently learning Dutch.

Acknowledgements
This research was made possible thanks to the support, feedback and encouragement of numerous members of the team in ISD, but special thanks go to Chloe Colliver, Natasha Bach, Milo Comerford, Melanie Smith and Sarah Kennedy in helping complete this work.

Any mistakes or omissions are the author's own.

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Executive summary

TikTok is now one of the world's leading social media platforms, used by millions daily to create videos that are stylish, eye-catching and technically impressive and that inspire others to join in. The platform's videos give rise to countless viral trends across online platforms, with content spread across other social media sites. But TikTok is also popular with those intent on using online spaces to produce, post and promote hate and extremism.

Academic research and news investigations have reported on the problematic side of TikTok, but there is still a significant knowledge gap on how unique aspects of the platform are used at scale to direct hatred at others. What's more, TikTok is a particularly challenging platform to conduct research on. Compared to other social media platforms, TikTok's API does not offer researchers much assistance or capabilities in using the platform beyond what's related to a user's own content (which is primarily targeted at commercial organisations or influencers). In practice, research on TikTok must therefore be conducted manually in order to comply with the platform's terms of use.

ISD set out to examine the state of hate on TikTok in two ways. The first objective involved analysing how individuals or groups promote hateful ideologies and target people on the platform based on numerous protected attributes such as ethnicity, religion, gender or others. The second objective involved using the same framework but investigating how features on TikTok like profiles, hashtags, share functions, video effects and music are used to spread hate.

This research features two sections providing in-depth analysis of TikTok content and TikTok creators. Based on a sample of 1,030 videos, this research examined how TikTok is used to promote white supremacist conspiracy theories, produce weapons manufacturing advice, glorify extremists, terrorists, fascists and dictators, direct targeted harassment against minorities and produce content that denies that violent events like genocides ever happened. Furthermore, the report includes analysis of how users seek to evade takedowns by TikTok.

The report also highlights how users issued threats to public figures, based on COVID-19 conspiracies and misinformation, documenting a worrying intersection that may fuel further extremism, radicalisation or violence.

This report seeks to start a conversation around how platforms like TikTok can improve their own practices to protect users from harm. Additionally, it underscores the clear need for independent oversight of such platforms, which currently leave users and the wider public open to significant risks to their health, security and rights.

Key Findings

- **ISD identified 312 videos promoting white supremacy.** These 312 videos (30% of full sample) range from support for the Great Replacement and white genocide conspiracy theories; multi-part uploads of content taken from white supremacist content creators on other platforms; clips of white supremacists like Paul Miller racially abusing people on other social media platforms; or TikTok Sounds featuring music from white power bands.
- **246 videos feature support for an extremist or terrorist individual or organisation.** ISD identified 246 videos (24% of full sample) that included the praise, promotion, glorification or positive discussion of figures such as Brenton Tarrant, Adolf Hitler, ISIS, Ratko Mladic or Oswald Mosley.
- **Footage related to the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attack is easily discoverable on TikTok.** ISD identified 30 videos that feature support for the actions of Brenton Tarrant, including 13 videos containing content originally produced by Tarrant and 3 videos that feature video game footage designed to recreate the events. Over half of these videos were still live on TikTok at the time of writing, including some that depict the attack.
- **Content originally produced by ISIS is posted on TikTok.** ISD found propaganda footage originally produced and released by ISIS, including a video that featured two Japanese men moments before their murder by ISIS and 7 videos containing aerial drone footage of ISIS car bomb attacks released in 2016/17.
- **26 posts denied the existence of the Holocaust.** These videos ranged from coded and veiled references that claimed the Holocaust never happened, celebrated support for Holocaust denial around the world or contained more explicit examples featuring debunked antisemitic conspiracy theories.
- **Extremist TikTok creators rely on music and video effects.** 279 videos analysed (27% of the full sample) contained music and 172 videos (17% of the full sample) used duet/stitch video creation features or video effects, demonstrating the key role that TikTok's own features play in extremist content on TikTok.

312
videos promoting white supremacy were identified by ISD

30
videos featuring support for the actions of Brenton Tarrant were identified by ISD

of the full sample of videos featured content promoting white supremacy

of the full sample of videos featured support for an extremist or terrorist

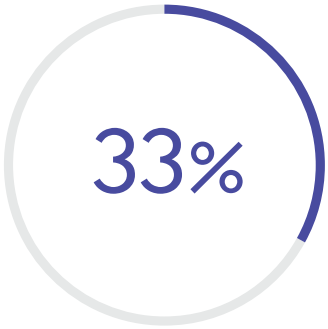
- **Extremist accounts use their profiles to promote hatred.** 33% of the TikTok accounts analysed in this study feature one or more references to hate or extremism in their profile features [username, profile image, biography, etc], highlighting how hatred on the platform is sustained beyond ephemeral video content. 13% of the TikTok accounts analysed throughout this research were removed by the end of the data collection period. The remaining 87% are still live.
- **The most-viewed video in our sample had 2 million views.** This video featured anti-Asian hatred linked to COVID-19. Three of the top ten most-viewed videos, with a collective 3.5 million views, featured content first produced by jailed white supremacist Paul Miller. Two of the top ten most-viewed videos, with 655,800 and 233,000 views, feature comments that mock the victims and deny the existence of the Bosnian genocide and the Holocaust.
- **Content creators promoting hate and extremism leverage the systemic functions of the platform to increase the visibility of their content,** including efforts to use the algorithmic promotion of certain hashtags to achieve views and engagement. Extremist content creators regularly try to make it onto other users' For You page [a viewer's main video feed] and go viral.
- **Evasion tactics to avoid takedowns are simple but effective.** Such strategies include banned users returning to TikTok with almost-identical usernames, using privacy functions and comment restrictions strategically or alternative hashtag spellings, and making use of profiles' video grid layout to promote hatred.
- **Hateful and extremist content is removed on TikTok, but inconsistently.** 191 videos, 18.5% of the full sample, were removed or were no longer available on TikTok by the end of the data collection period. The remainder, 81.5%, were still live at the time of writing.

2m

views for a video, that is still live on TikTok, featuring anti-Asian hatred fuelled by COVID-19

2

of the ten most viewed videos featured content related to genocide denial



of the TikTok accounts analysed feature one or more references to hate or extremism in their profile features

of the videos sampled featuring hateful and extremist content were still live at the time of writing

TikTok – Introduction

TikTok is a social media platform designed for creating, sharing and discovering short videos. Owned by Chinese company ByteDance, they first launched a domestic version of the platform, called Douyin, in 2016. In 2018, TikTok became available worldwide when it merged with another Chinese-developed platform Musical.ly. TikTok is designed to be a mobile-first platform with a smartphone app that allows users to create videos, up to three minutes long (since summer 2021), that often feature music (TikTok Sounds) in the background, and can be edited with effects or filters.[1,2] At the time of writing in July 2021, TikTok is reported to now have over one billion users, including over 100 million in the US, and is particularly popular with young people.[3]

TikTok has given rise to many online viral trends. The platform's features allows users, referred to as creators, to produce creative and technically-impressive content that regularly inspires others to respond to, add to or recreate content, often through the platform's Duet and Stitch video editing functions.[4] Dance trends, comedy and instructional videos, testimonial-style videos featuring someone speaking about their life and open-ended questions inviting responses are wildly popular on TikTok.

Specific, niche communities are a core part of how creators interact with each other on the platform, like #TikTokIreland, #WitchTok and #JewishTikTok. The ultimate aim of most creators is to make it onto the For You Page, with videos commonly posted with the hashtag #fyp, which is a feed of videos recommended to users based on their activity, generated by TikTok's algorithms analysing content liked, interacted with or searched for by a user. If a creator's video makes it onto the For You Page, there is a chance of it going viral.

It's clear that TikTok is popular, but interest in the app also extends to those interested in using the platform to promote, support or encourage hatred and extremism. In its latest Transparency Report, released in July 2021, TikTok said it removed over 300,000 videos in the first three months of 2021 for spreading "violent extremism".[5] The platform's Community Guidelines prohibit videos or content that "threaten or incite violence" or videos that "promote dangerous individuals or organizations".[6] Yet those figures represent just 0.5% of the total 61 million videos removed from TikTok in the same period, the highest proportion related to "minor safety" (36.8%). Despite taking up a smaller proportion of removed content, hate and extremism remain a significant concern on the app.

In 2019, an investigation from the Wall Street Journal uncovered material promoting ISIS on the platform while Vice's Motherboard uncovered support for neo-Nazi groups.[7,8] In 2020, a report in The Sun detailed content that praised terrorists and promoted Holocaust denial, while in 2021, Media Matters released a report highlighting the presence of far-right militia groups in the US who were active on TikTok.[9,10]

There has also been academic interest in examining hate on TikTok, with one paper published in 2020 documenting the "disturbing presence of far-right extremism in videos, commentary, symbols and pictures included in TikTok's postings".[11] ISD aims to expand upon such reports and research by conducting, to date, the most comprehensive examination into how hateful ideologies are used to target individuals and groups on the platform and how the features of TikTok are uniquely used to spread hate.

Glossary

There are considerable variations in definitions of hate, extremism and terrorism in most legal jurisdictions across the world. This presents a challenge for the categorisation and classification of such terms and research based on the same. ISD has developed the definitions listed here through numerous projects and years of research. In this report, we have categorised content as related to hate, extremism or terrorism when it has met these definitions. Some content fell outside ISD's definition of these terms, some was clearly educational or otherwise critical of such content, and some content appeared to be intended to discuss or criticise an extremist individual/group. ISD categorised content as supportive of extremist or terrorist individuals or organisations if the TikTok video, added on-screen text or accompanying caption used in the post by the creator praised, promoted, glorified, discussed positively or uncritically mentioned such figures.

Hate

ISD understands hate to relate to beliefs or practices that attack, malign, delegitimize or exclude an entire class of people based on immutable characteristics, including their ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. Hate actors are understood to be individuals, groups or communities that actively and overtly engage in the above activity, as well as those who implicitly attack classes of people through, for example, the use of conspiracy theories and disinformation. Hateful activity is understood to be antithetical to pluralism and the universal application of human rights.

Extremism

ISD defines extremism as the advocacy of a system of belief that claims the superiority and dominance of one identity-based 'in-group' over all 'out-groups.' Extremists propagate a dehumanising 'othering' mind-set and use any means necessary, including hate speech or acts of violence, to justify their radical or fanatic political, religious or cultural views.

Terrorism

The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism noted in a 2021 report that there is "no universal agreement on the definition of terrorism."[12] In their report they list the different definitions used in countries like the UK, USA or Japan, regional bodies like the EU and UN, and technology companies like Facebook, Twitter and Microsoft. ISD does not have an in-house definition of terrorism, but instead use the definition of "terrorist acts," provided by the UN, that describes them as "criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death of serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population."[13] The use of politically or ideologically motivated violence can include promotion or support of groups associated with this violence, direct calls to violent action or the sharing of ideological material that may inspire others to carry out attacks.

Far-right

ISD's definition of far-right is in line with right-wing extremism expert Cas Mudde who defines the term as groups and individuals that support or endorse political or social belief systems that feature at least three of the following five features: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and strong state advocacy. Mudde's definition of "far-right" includes both radical right-wing and extreme right-wing actors. Mudde states that both radical and extreme right-wing actors believe that "inequalities between people are natural and positive", but have differing attitudes towards democracy. Radical right-wing actors are not against democracy in principle, while extreme right-wing actors reject democracy as a form of government.[14]

Far-right accelerationism

Accelerationism is the belief that societal change should be accelerated to bring forward the possibility for a drastic and dramatic radical social transformation.[15] Far-right accelerationism is the belief that societal collapse should be accelerated by any means necessary, including violence, so that a fascist, ethnostate can be developed in its place.[16]

Esoteric Nazism

Esoteric Nazism is a brand of neo-Nazism that promotes a belief system rooted in mythology and in which followers believe that white people once inhabited an ancient Aryan civilisation in a place known as Hyperborea or Thule. This incorporates mystical and occult-related interpretations of Nazi ideology, deifying Hitler and using symbols that first appeared centuries ago but were later popularised in the Nazi era. These include the well known swastika but also the Sonnenrad (black sun), a lesser-known symbol that is "functionally equivalent" to the infamous Nazi symbol and used widely among white supremacists today, including by the Christchurch shooter.[17,18]

Misogyny

Misogyny is hatred or dislike of, contempt for, or prejudice against women, that is manifested in diverse forms such as mental, verbal or physical intimidation, harassment or abuse of women that targets them based on their gender or sex. This consists of any act, including online speech and content, that seeks to exclude, coerce, shame, stigmatise or portray as inferior, women based on these protected attributes.

Methodology

ISD generated a list of 157 keywords associated with extremist individuals, groups, ideologies and related incidents or events.[19] ISD analysts used the TikTok mobile app to search for any videos, accounts, hashtags or sounds featuring these keywords. In some cases, ISD also performed "Google dork" searches, using Google to search "site:TikTok.com" along with various keywords, for related TikTok content potentially indexed by the search engine.

ISD examined TikTok accounts identified by these keyword searches to assess the presence of videos, comments or profiles that featured support for extremist individuals, groups or ideologies. Through this method we identified 177 TikTok accounts.

ISD found that such accounts typically follow or are followed by other accounts that share their ideological interests. ISD therefore used a snowball methodology to expand the sample of accounts featuring relevant hateful and extremist content, yielding 1,030 videos from 491 TikTok accounts during our data collection period (4-30 June 2021).

Not all content that was discovered using the keyword search was selected for analysis. Some content fell outside ISD's definitions of hate and extremism; some was clearly educational or otherwise critical of the extremist content related to the keywords used; and some content appeared to be intended to discuss or criticise the related keyword. TikTok's Community Guidelines also make exceptions for content such as this that may be "in the public interest."[20]

ISD developed a codebook to perform a content analysis, examining each video and account and coding for up to 20 potential elements, such as the post interactions metrics or categories of hate observed in each video. See Appendix A for the full codebook.

Coding Content

This research had two main objectives: to analyse how individuals or groups promote hateful ideologies and target people on the platform based on numerous protected attributes, including their ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability, and to investigate how features on TikTok like profiles, hashtags, share functions, video effects and music, are used to spread hate.

To accomplish the first objective, ISD coded each video for content that appeared to promote hatred or support extremism. These categories have been developed and used in previous ISD projects related to the targeted hatred against minorities and promotion of extremist ideologies. In many videos, hatred was not expressed exclusively against one group. In other instances, in the act of proclaiming support for an extremist, creators simultaneously denigrated a group of people, highlighting how extremism and hatred are multidimensional and nuanced. To account for this, when applicable, ISD used more than one category to tag content. The categories of hate and extremism in full were:

- Anti-Asian
- Anti-Black
- Anti-LGBTQ+
- Anti-migrant/refugee
- Anti-Muslim
- Antisemitic
- Features extremist symbols embedded in normal media
- Glorifies an extremist person/group/viewpoint
- Misogynist
- Promoting white supremacy
- Terrorism footage
- Uses COVID conspiracies/misinformation to attack or threaten a person or group

In addition to testing the prevalence of hate based on ISD's own definitions, ISD assessed content that was judged to be in direct conflict with TikTok's own Community Guidelines. There are roughly six areas of TikTok's Community Guidelines that relate to the promotion of hatred and extremism and set out what is and is not permitted on the platform, as described in full on TikTok's website.[21] ISD therefore also coded hateful and extremist content for which relevant community guidelines we judged were violated. The six areas are:

1. Threats and incitement to violence
2. Dangerous individuals or organisations
3. Attacks on the basis of protected attributes
4. Slurs based on protected attributes
5. Hateful ideology
6. Regulated goods - weapons

In pursuit of the second objective, ISD coded each video for details related to the use of music, hashtags, video creation (duet and stitch) functions, interaction metrics (likes, comments and shares) and the use of effects or filters. As well as this, ISD noted the number of views, duration and upload date of each video.

ISD examined the profile of the TikTok account from which each video in our sample was posted and analysed the profile for the presence and nature of any references to hate or extremism in the username, nickname, image, biography or featured link. These are all discussed in detail in the following sections. The coding period lasted from 1-16 July 2021.

Analysis of Content

The section features analysis of the content captured in our sample, with specific sections for the categories of hate we examined, support for extremists, and the use of hashtags, video effects and sounds, as well as dates, duration and other interaction metrics.

Categories of Hate

To accomplish our first objective of analysing how TikTok creators promote hateful ideologies and target people on the platform based on numerous protected attributes, ISD coded each video for content that appeared to promote hatred or support extremism using a list of 12 categories (listed in the methodology). In some cases, ISD used more than one category to tag content. The breakdown is as follows:

Category of hate & extremism	No. of videos
Promoting white supremacy	312
Glorifies an extremist individual/group/ideology	273
Features extremist symbols embedded in media	150
Antisemitic	153
Anti-Black	139
Anti-LGBTQ+	90
Anti-Muslim	81
Uses COVID conspiracies/misinformation to attack/ threaten/stigmatise a person or group of people	74
Misogynist	58
Anti-Asian	41
Terrorism footage	26
Anti-migrant/refugee	25

ISD also assessed content that was judged to be in direct conflict with TikTok's Community Guidelines and violated their rules that related to the promotion of hatred and extremism (listed in methodology). The breakdown is as follows:

TikTok Community Guidelines	No. of videos
Attacks on the basis of protected attributes	344
Hateful ideology (incl. claims of supremacy and denying violent events)	341
Dangerous individual or organisations	235
Threats and incitement towards violence	62
Slurs based on protected attributes	33
Regulated goods - weapons	9

Promotion of white supremacy

Content promoting white supremacy was by far the largest category of content discovered during this research. The promotion of white supremacy on TikTok takes many forms, including the promotion of, and support for, the far-right 'Great Replacement' and 'white genocide' conspiracy theories throughout our sample.[22] These theories posit that white people are being systematically replaced and their existence is under threat across the world. These theories were cited as motivation for the terrorist who carried out the Christchurch mosque attacks on 15 March 2019, among other extremists.

One clip that was shared frequently in support of these beliefs featured a Rabbi speaking on Russia Today about the growing solidarity between Jewish and Muslim communities in Europe. When shared in our sample, TikTok creators used the video to support their arguments that these communities are "against Europeans" and that white people are in danger of being wiped out. The Great Replacement theory is closely linked to the Kalergi Plan, another far-right, white nationalist conspiracy that claims that there is a plot to systematically mix and replace white Europeans with other races via immigration.[23]

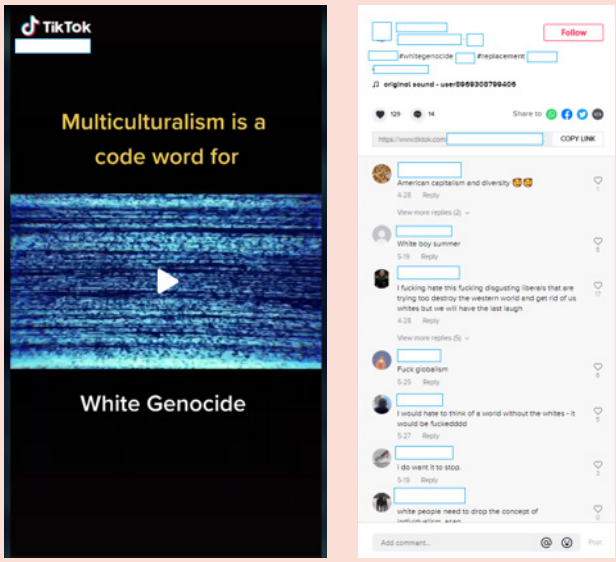


Fig 1: Video posted on TikTok in support of the white supremacist 'white genocide' theory

There are signs that TikTok is being used to post coordinated clips featuring hateful and extremist content. Multiple parts of a white supremacist video series, promoting perceived anti-white hatred in the US, were posted on TikTok in quick order by one creator. Another creator posted 12 videos, each featuring consecutive segments of a longform video produced by a British far-right content creator in support of the Great Replacement theory. A video first produced by the white nationalist website RedIceTV was shared multiple times in support of the 'white genocide' theory. Four videos in our sample promoted the book "Siege" written by the neo-Nazi author James Mason.

Lastly, music from white power bands is discoverable on TikTok. It is possible to use and share segments of songs from white supremacist bands as linkable TikTok Sounds (see Sounds section for more).

Glorification of an extremist individual/group/ideology

The glorification of extremists, fascists, dictators and white supremacists, or the ideologies espoused by such figures, is common on TikTok. Photo slideshows, promotional clips and compilations for dictators like Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini and Francesco Franco, or fascist politicians like Oswald Mosley, featured throughout the dataset. Creators of these videos often made use of TikTok features to create eye-catching and technically-impressive video edits (as detailed in later sections about Sounds and Effects).

Support for mass shooting attackers was evident in a number of videos. One video captured in our sample featured a photo of Robert Bowers, who killed 11 people in a Pittsburgh synagogue in October 2018, along with the text of the post he published on social media prior to carrying out the attack. TikTok users regularly share footage originally recorded or broadcast by these figures. Videos recorded by Elliot Rodger, who killed 7 people in a shooting, stabbing and vehicle attack in California in 2014, were included in our sample, including one in which he laid out his plans to murder people, specifically women, prior to carrying out his attack.

This research found little evidence of established extremist or terrorist groups using TikTok publicly. While our research did find numerous examples of extremist praise and worship, this appears to come from supporters rather than members of such groups. For example, two accounts were named after the neo-Nazi terrorist group Atomwaffen Division (AWD) and they used posters linked to the group as their profile images. Two other accounts featured logos associated with AWD as profile images too, but there were no public signs that AWD was seeking to recruit or promote participation with the group. One such account using the group's logo as its profile image is still live and features a video containing a selfie taken by an alleged member of a white nationalist group outisde Al Noor mosque close to the first anniversary of the Christchurch terrorist attack.

ISD found one extremist group actively using the platform to promote its ideologies and recruit people to its events. The group, a far-right ultranationalist group in Hungary, linked to numerous real world attacks against LGBTQ+, Jewish and Black Lives Matter groups, posted videos advertising a summer training camp, featured footage of previous camps and encouraged people to contact the group to register. This TikTok account featured links for the group's accounts on other platforms where more explicit content is routinely posted.

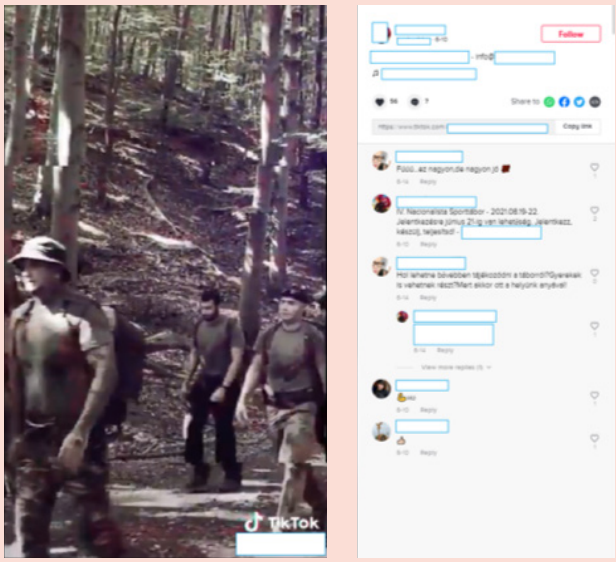


Fig 2: Video posted by Hungarian ultranationalist group promoting a training came for summer 2021

Features extremist symbols

The Sonnenrad, or "black sun," has been described as a symbol that is "functionally equivalent" to the swastika, a symbol at the heart of Nazi imagery.[24] The Sonnenrad features regularly in videos that promote white supremacy and other neo-Nazi ideologies, but also in videos that promote esoteric Nazism. Videos promoting Hyperborea, a mythical land for the ancient Aryan civilisation, are common among extreme right-wing creators on TikTok. The Sonnenrad, and to a lesser extent, swastikas, repeatedly featured in such videos. In one cluster of Hyperborea-related videos, flashing images of President Joe Biden appeared and depicted him standing under a Sonnenrad.

The symbol is frequently embedded in other media as well. In one example seen in numerous videos, Spongebob Squarepants is depicted as wearing martial arts clothing including a swastika headband, and holding a spinning Sonnenrad. Support for far-right accelerationism was captured in other videos like this as well, such as videos in which the creator either spoke themselves or included captions that featured the phrase "there is no political solution".[25] In one such example, a video featured a young woman dancing in a skull mask and wearing a hat emblazoned with a Sonnenrad, as audio of a person speaking said "There is no political solution. All that is left is acceleration. Heil Hitler". As the final line is said, the girl raises her arm in a Sieg Heil salute.

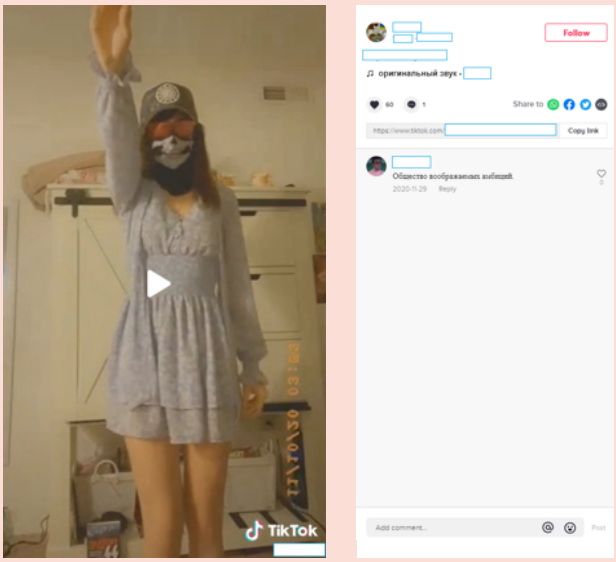


Fig 3: Video featuring Riley Williams promoting accelerationism, featuring a Sonnenrad cap and praising Hitler

Online investigators have reported that this video features Riley Williams, who was arrested in January 2021 on charges that she illegally entered the US Capitol during the 6 January storming of the building and stole Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's laptop.[26] Williams' appearance in this footage only came to light in March 2021, but interestingly, the version captured in our sample was posted by a Russian-language account in November 2020.[27] This video is still live on TikTok.

Antisemitism

Antisemitic slurs, jokes and hate speech are a regular feature of content from extremist creators on TikTok. Creators make use of racist and offensive stereotypes to mock and dehumanise Jewish people and use aspects of Jewish culture, like the folk song Hava Nagila, to promote hatred of Jewish people (see "Sounds" section below).

Four videos captured in our sample contain the same edited clip featuring comments from Israeli-American academic Barbara Lerner Spectre, taken out of context so that it appears she is promoting a Jewish plan to destroy Europe. The video has been shared among far-right online communities since 2015, yet was given new life and used to spread antisemitic hatred when shared on TikTok.[28]

Antisemitic hatred is at its most explicit in Holocaust denial content on the platform, found in 26 videos during this research. The most common form of Holocaust denial found in our sample was that which outright denied that six million people died or suggested that it never happened. This was often done by way of using coded or veiled keywords, especially items of food, along with more overt references such as ovens, to refer to the systematic murder of Jewish people in gas chambers during World War II. The coded language is used to suggest it would not be feasible for a specific amount of "ovens" to "cook" six million items of food in a limited amount of time.

Other videos celebrated news reports or headlines that featured statistics about the level of Holocaust denial in populations around the world, while one user, who frequently posted antisemitic Holocaust

denial diatribes, posted a video in which he shared a pseudoscientific report that has been at the center of much Holocaust denial since the 1980s.

Anti-Black

The dataset contained numerous examples of hatred directed at George Floyd and the wider African-American community in the US. In an example that demonstrates the multi-dimensional nature of hatred, two videos featured visuals of George Floyd speaking on camera, but the audio was replaced with the sound of someone promoting Holocaust denial by claiming it was logistically impossible to kill six million Jewish people during World War II. No reason was given for why Floyd was used to promote Holocaust denial here, though far-right communities have repeatedly denigrated and ridiculed Floyd since his murder, using extremist, offensive trolling and mockery to belittle and defame him.

Videos that feature white supremacists using livestream video chat platforms like Omegle to spread hate speech and racist slur words are highly popular on TikTok. Clips from these videos, known as "Omegle Redpilling", according to the Anti Defamation League, are then shared on TikTok by extremist supporters.[29] 12 videos within our sample featured footage of Australian white supremacist Tor Gustafsson Brookes (aka Catboy Kami) dressed in blackface or dressed as a police officer and "reenacting" the murder of George Floyd.[30] Another 15 videos featured footage of white supremacist Paul Miller (aka Gypsy Crusader) dressed as the Joker, Super Mario or in military clothing and using slurs and racist material that promoted hatred against Black people or described them as criminals.

Anti-LGBTQ+

Expressions of hatred toward members of the LGBTQ+ community, and in particular transgender people, were captured in our sample. In recent years, alt-right and far-right activists have regularly sought to portray LGBTQ+ individuals or groups as supporters or enablers of paedophilia and make use of conspiracies and disinformation in spreading these claims. One example, appearing in three videos, featured a screenshot of a comments section from a Facebook page where a user claimed that gay men make up "40% of convicted paedophiles".

Other anti-LGBTQ+ content captured in this sample routinely celebrated the persecution of gay people in authoritarian or undemocratic regimes such as Nazi Germany, modern-day Russia and in Syria and Iraq under ISIS control, and celebrated the suicide of transgender people too. Anti-LGBTQ+ hatred is nuanced, with hate creators making use of other media and coded references to promote hatred without any text in their post. Two such videos featured a screenshot of a 2018 news report headlined "suicide attempt rate among transgender youth hits 50 percent, study finds", and following this, the videos then cut to the Bon Jovi song "Livin' on a Prayer", just as Jon Bon Jovi sings "we're halfway there," used a way to reference the the headline and celebrate the rate of suicide among transgender youth.

Anti-Muslim

In our sample, anti-Muslim hatred mainly took the form of content related to the Yugoslav Wars and murder of Bosnian Muslims. This included content about the 1995 genocide at Srebenica, denial of this event, and glorification of those responsible, such as convicted war criminal General Ratko Mladic. Songs used to celebrate Mladic were common in our sample and are featured in further detail in the Sounds section. These videos were used to spread hatred against Bosnian Muslims, in addition to other more general videos about the conflict. In one example, comments on videos that contain clips from a Spanish movie about the conflict called "Quo Vadis, Aida?" included Serbian-language posts claiming "it never happened", "there was no genocide" or one comment that said the movie should be called "the Myth of Srebenica" because, they claimed, the genocide never happened. 12 examples like this were discovered by ISD, which raises the question of what TikTok's policies are in regard to comments, especially in cases where content is arguably educational but the reaction generated is hateful.

Other examples of anti-Muslim hatred included footage claiming there is a systematic Islamification of Europe under way and promotion of the racist stereotype that portrays all Muslims as supporters of terrorism.

COVID-inspired Hatred and Threats

COVID-19 conspiracies, false claims and misinformation on TikTok were cited in videos that issued threats and called for violence and the death of public health officials tasked with leading the response to the pandemic in numerous countries. This includes Dr Anthony Fauci, Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and Theresa Tam, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer. Other public figures like Bill Gates and George Soros were issued with COVID-related threats to life or safety. 7 videos featured hashtags and captions that called for Fauci to be hanged, 7 videos featured similar calls for the execution of Gates. Two videos, posted in April and May 2020, also featured hashtags and captions that called for then-President Donald Trump to be hanged over his handling of the pandemic shortly after its outbreak in the US.

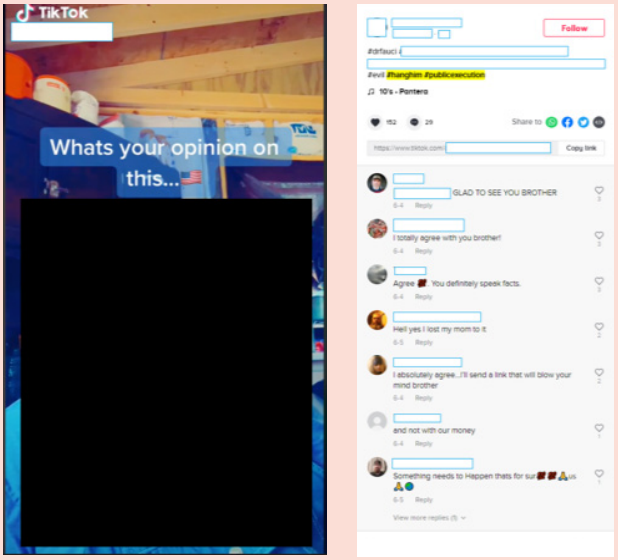


Fig 4: This video calls for Dr Fauci to be hanged and publicly executed. This video is still live but we have removed identifiable details about the creator

Misogyny

Misogynistic videos were captured in our sample, in particular a number of videos that were posted by accounts promoting Men Going Their Own Way, which is a social movement that is part of the wider manosphere, a collection of mostly online communities that are marked by their overt and extreme misogyny and rejection of feminism which they believe has come to dominate society at the expense of men.[31] One such channel posted numerous videos featuring Stefan Molyneux, a Canadian content creator who frequently amplifies "scientific racism", eugenics and white supremacism, belittling and dehumanising single mothers and their role in society.[32]

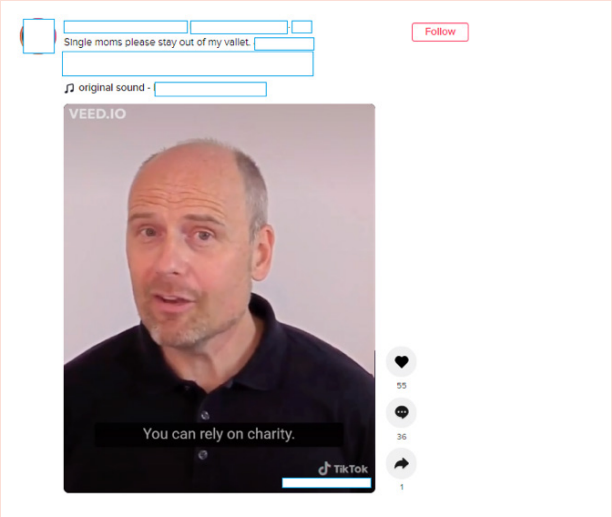


Fig 5: This video, from an account promoting the Men Going Their Own Way movement, features Stefan Molyneux speaking about single mothers

Other videos combined misogyny with other forms of hate, such as white supremacy. Here, videos featured clips or screenshots from news reports showing white women in mixed race relationships and presenting them as white race traitors. Images of the extremist bomber Theodore 'Ted' Kaczynski were used to project hatred against women as well. This is interesting as Kaczynski did not specifically target women or people based on their gender. Rather, Kaczynski was opposed to technology, industrialisation and rejected modern society. It appears that that last feature is the reason why his image and name were frequently cited in videos in our sample and elsewhere online.

In short, Kaczynski is used as a meme to demonise LGBTQ+ people or women who are portrayed as alternative, promiscuous or supportive of body positivity, i.e. don't conform to the user's "traditional" view of society. See the Sounds section for further details.

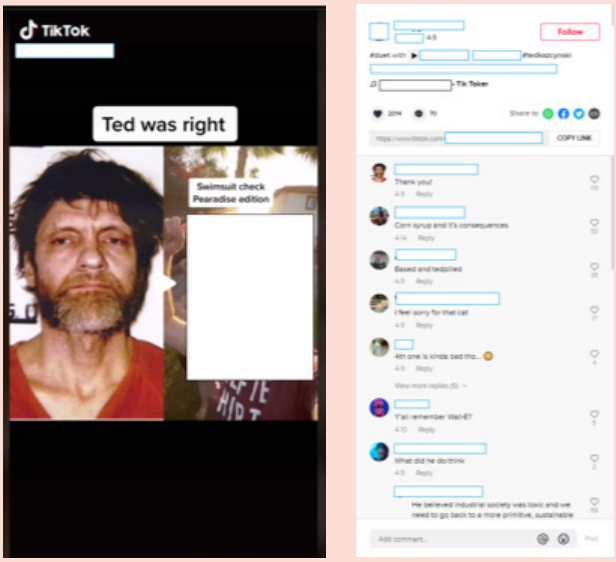


Fig 6 This video, with identifiable details obscured, is a duet with an original video that featured photos of plus size women in swimwear, this user duetted by using a photo of Theodore Kaczynski to shame and mock them

Anti-Asian

Anti-Asian hatred and racism contained in our sample was primarily linked to COVID-19, especially content targeted at Chinese people. This was closely linked to the use and promotion of the phrase "China virus" by President Trump which, research has shown, was linked to a spike in anti-Asian vitriol online, while the phrase has been labelled "xenophobic" by experts.[33,34] One example of such Anti-Asian hatred in our sample was featured in a TikTok duet chain. Duets allow creators to record alongside existing TikTok videos and a duet chain is a term to describe when TikTok users use the function to share each other's video and add to it with their own content, often using the same Sound as the basis for a trend. See the Sounds section for more details on this example.

Terrorism footage

ISD created this category to capture the extent to which content originally produced by or documenting acts of terrorism or violent extremism as propaganda were shared in our sample. Such content did not feature critical coverage, educational materials or counterspeech, these videos were used to praise, promote and lionise terrorists.

30 videos captured in our sample feature support for the actions of Brenton Tarrant, including 13 directly produced by Tarrant himself and 3 videos that featured video game footage designed to recreate the events of the attack in Christchurch on 15 March 2019.. These videos were used to signpost to other social platforms where additional terrorist material could be accessed. One TikTok creator who shared footage from the Christchurch livestream shared the URL to a Discord server chat in the comments of their post and encouraged people to join to watch other white supremacist content and "join for the right for the whiterace [sic]". This video is still live and has been viewed over 11,300 times.

8 videos originally released by ISIS were discovered too, 7 of these posted by one creator. The videos were all posted in February 2021 and used a hashtag that is a Spanish-language translation of another widely-known name for ISIS, "Islamic State." 2 of these videos feature an added TikTok tag that states "The action in this video could result in serious injury" - one that shows ISIS militants firing rocket launchers and rifles and another that shows an ISIS-orchestrated suicide car bomb attack. The other videos depict the same content but feature no tag. The user even commented under one of their videos and said that "I have some pretty heavy ones [videos], with a lot of blood and deaths." This account is still live, meaning these videos, along with potential future uploads featuring such "heavy" content, would possibly face few obstacles in spreading ISIS propaganda on TikTok.

See the section on extremist and terrorist support for more details on these.

Hate Directed at Refugees and Migrants

TikTok videos encouraging hatred against refugees and migrants captured in our sample also featured promotion of white supremacy and white nationalism. Typically, videos of unrest, rioting or vandalism depicting people of colour in European cities as the supposed culprits were shared as demonstrative of the actions of all refugees or migrants on the continent. In one example, a video originally broadcast on the white nationalist website RedIceTV was used to promote the anti-immigrant slogan "Europe for the Europeans". In another example, anti-migrant video posted on TikTok, originating in the US, a speaker with the white supremacist, neo-Nazi group Vanguard America

referred to migrants on the southern US border as "enemies" before saying "God bless the white man". This video is still live on TikTok.

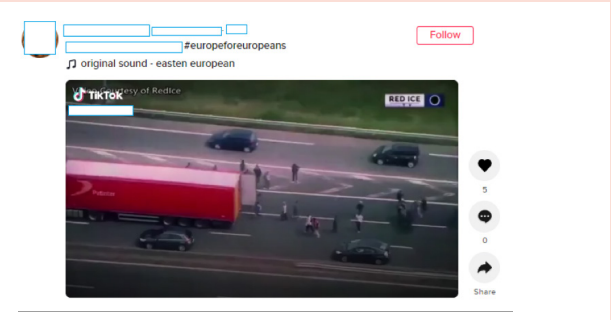


Fig 7: Anti-migrant video first released by white nationalist website, shared on TikTok, stating "Europe for Europeans"

Other: Instructional Material and Firearms

ISD discovered 9 videos that depicted or promoted firearms and explosive weapons. 5 videos featured instructions on how to manufacture 3D guns, showed the creator printing their own components or advertised where to find guides for such weapons online. 2 videos included instructions on how to manufacture DIY guns at home and advice on how to get an "unregistered AR" rifle. 1 video, since removed, promoted a book on how to manufacture "homemade C-4". The same book was found in the possession of the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh in 1995.

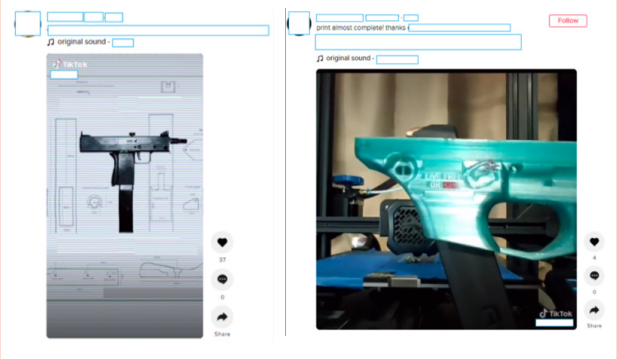


Fig 8: Two videos, one (left) featuring an instruction guide for making a DIY firearm and the other (right) featuring instructions on how to manufacture a 3D firearm, along with an added inscription on the weapon that says "live free or die"

Mentions of Public Figures and Support for Extremists

Among our sample of 1,030 videos that promote hatred and extremism, ISD measured the mentions of public figures to gauge who was discussed, featured or targeted. ISD counted mentions of figures who were the subject of videos or who were referenced in the accompanying video captions.

Public figure	Note	No. of posts
George Floyd	African-American man murdered by a police officer during an arrest in Minneapolis in May 2020	28
Bill Gates	American philanthropist, founder of Microsoft and investor in COVID-19 vaccine development	26
Anthony Fauci	Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases	16
Joe Biden	President of the United States of America	13
Donald Trump	Former president of the United States of America	11
Derek Chauvin	Police officer charged with the murder of George Floyd	7
Stefan Molyneux	Canadian right-wing content creator and online commentator on political and social issues	7
George Soros	Investor and philanthropist	6
Vince McMahon	CEO of the World Wrestling Entertainment corporation	6
Theresa Tam	Canada's Chief Public Health Officer	5
Barbara Spectre	American-Israeli academic	4
Alex Jones	Far-right conspiracy theorist and content creator	4
Tucker Carlson	Fox News host	3
Billie Eilish	American singer-songwriter and pop star	3
Vladimir Putin	President of Russia	2

Videos that referenced George Floyd and Derek Chauvin were primarily used to promote hatred against Floyd and the African-American community, whilst videos featuring Bill Gates, Anthony Fauci and Theresa Tam were used to issue threats and call for violence against figures at the center of efforts to combat COVID-19 in the US and Canada. George Soros was often mentioned in the same context. Clips of Stefan Molyneux were popular among channels that promote the misogynistic Men Going Their Own Way movement, while a specific clip of WWE CEO Vince McMahon counting money in an over-the-top, theatrical style for TV was used in numerous videos to promote hatred against Jewish people, women and the LGBTQ+ community.

Lastly, a clip of Billie Eilish saying "everyone is gonna die and no one is gonna remember you, so fuck it" was used in three videos that feature footage from the Christchurch attack livestream. Here, when Eilish says this, the videos cut to footage of the Christchurch attacker getting out of his car prior to beginning the attack, with the added on-screen caption saying "you're right... fuccck ittt" [sic]. These videos, posted in January, February and June 2021 respectively, are still live on TikTok.

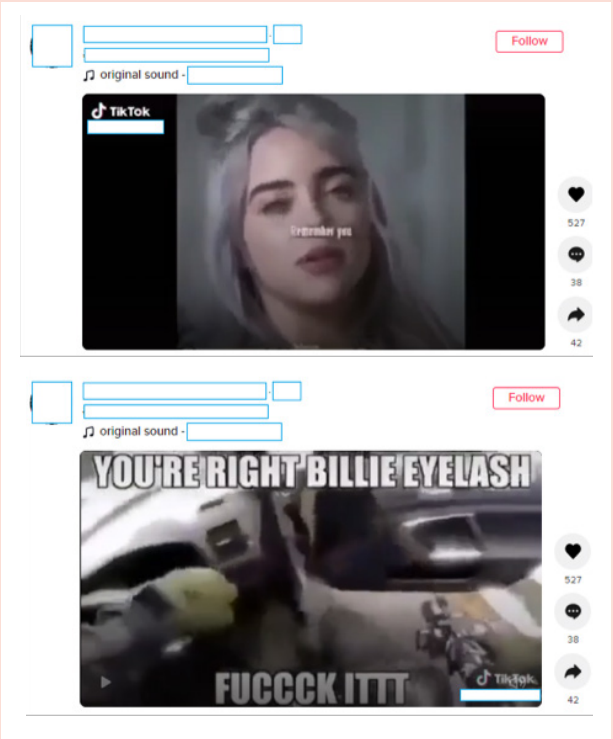


Fig 9: Two segments from the same TikTok video, first (top) featuring Billie Eilish before cutting to (above) footage from the Christchurch attack livestream

Extremist and Terrorist Support

ISD examined the extent to which content in our sample expressed support for extremist figures or terrorist individuals or groups. ISD categorised content as supportive of extremist or terrorist individuals or organisations if the TikTok video, added on-screen text or accompanying caption used in the post by the creator praised, promoted, glorified, discussed positively or mentioned uncritically such figures. Across our sample of 1,030 videos that promote hatred and extremism, ISD found that 246 videos (24%) featured content that supports an extremist or terrorist individual or organisation.

Terrorist/extremist individual/organisation	No. of posts featuring
Oswald Mosley	45
Brenton Tarrant	30
Ratko Mladic	30
Theodore Kaczynski	23
George Lincoln Rockwell	15
Stephen Yaxley Lennon (Tommy Robinson)	15
Adolf Hitler	13
ISIS	11
Benito Mussolini	9
Francisco Franco	8
Elliot Rodger	6
Joseph Goebbels	4
Atomwaffen Division	3
Anders Behring Breivik	3
Heinrich Himmler	3
Ku Klux Klan	3

Videos promoting Oswald Mosley are common among extreme right-wing accounts on TikTok. Typically, videos supporting Mosley featured audio of him giving a speech, railing against migrants and promoting his party, the British Union of Fascists. Stylish video edits and photo slideshows, incorporating popular TikTok Sounds, were used frequently to glorify and praise Mosley. Mosley led Britain's fascist movement during the 1930s and was involved in violence against Jewish people and left-wing opponents.[35] Mosley was friendly with Mussolini, Hitler and Goebbels and frequently campaigned on anti-immigration platforms. He has been cited as an inspirational figure for notable extreme right-wing figures in recent years, including Brenton Tarrant and convicted British neo-Nazi Andrew Dymock.[36,37]

Videos that praised the actions of dictators and fascists like Hitler and Mussolini typically involved clips of these figures accompanied with a caption expressing support or desire for similar modern-day leaders. Support for other senior Nazi figures like Himmler and Goebbels was similar in nature, though in the case of Goebbels, videos included portions of his speeches in which he mentions Jewish people negatively. These are used to promote antisemitic hate on the platform.

Our research also revealed footage originally produced by terrorist individuals and groups. 30 videos feature support for the actions of Brenton Tarrant, the white supremacist who carried out the Christchurch terrorist attack in March 2019 and livestreamed the attack online. 13 of those videos feature content directly produced by Tarrant, while an additional 3 videos feature video game footage designed to recreate the events. Of these 19 videos, 10 are still live on TikTok, including some that show moments of death (which is a direct violation of TikTok's guidelines on violent and graphic content). Other videos typically feature news reports or screenshots of headlines indicating support for Tarrant's actions.

Content promoting Anders Behring Breivik appears in a similar format. We also found footage originally recorded by Elliot Rodger being used in videos to praise him and his actions.

Videos that feature support for white supremacist, far-right extremists and terrorist organisations were common in the dataset. This includes videos promoting Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, George Lincoln Rockwell, Atomwaffen Division and the Ku Klux Klan. For example, one video promoting the KKK features footage of Black men running from figures in the organisation's distinctive white robes, with emojis added to the video depicting a Black person and a rope, while another

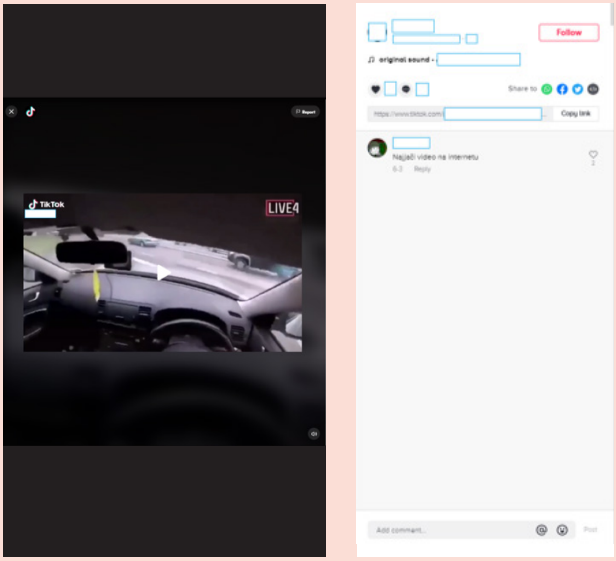


Fig 10: TikTok video featuring footage from the Christchurch shooting livestream

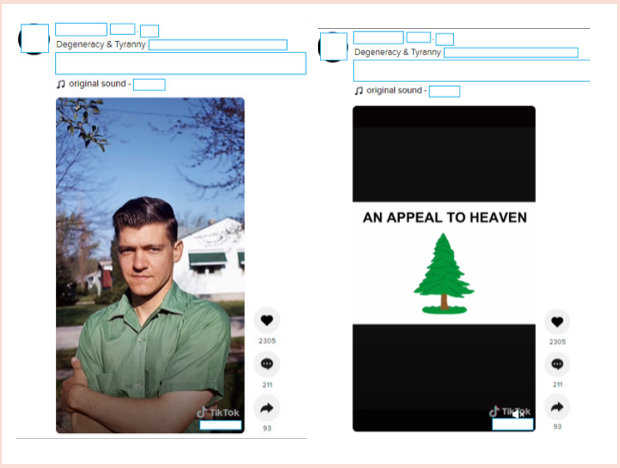


Fig 12: Two screenshots from the same video showing (left) Ted Kaczynski and (right) a flag also used by eco-fascist community online (and which was first used during the American Revolution)[39]

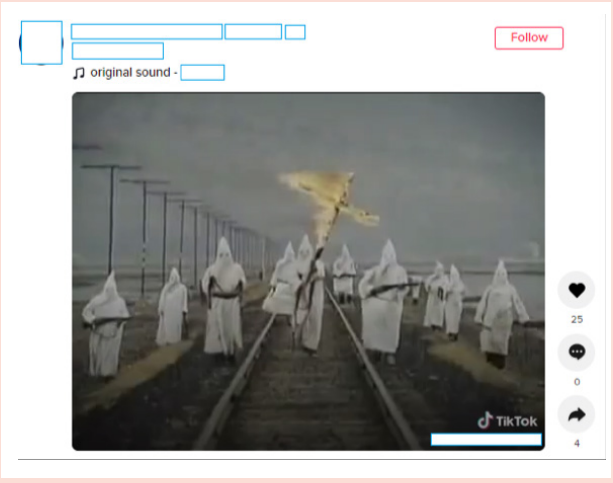


Fig 11: Video featuring footage that supports the Ku Klux Klan

video simply features footage of figures in white robes walking along a train track, carrying a rope, rifles and a burning cross. This video, posted by a creator that uses the phrase "white power worldwide" in its username, is still live on TikTok.

Support for Ratko Mladic is used to promote anti-Muslim hatred on TikTok, and in some cases, features clear statements that deny the Bosnian genocide happened.

Praise for Theodore Kaczynski is common in the dataset and is typically referenced by creators to express hatred toward people they deem representative of the downfall of modern society. Typically, those targeted are females and LGBTQ+ individuals and groups. Kaczynski is also praised in a variety of videos promoting eco-fascism.[38]

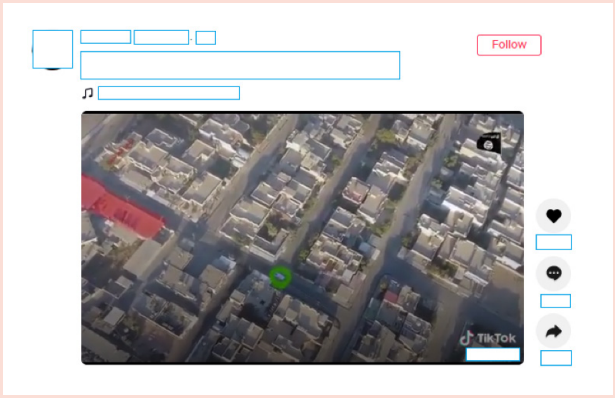


Fig 13: Video featuring footage originally produced and released as propaganda by ISIS

Support and praise for ISIS was observed in 11 videos. In one cluster of videos, creators used an illustration of an ISIS militant stood back-to-back with a Nazi SS soldier to promote antisemitic hate and depict their imagined partnership in their mutual hatred of Jewish people. Separately, ISD also discovered propaganda footage originally produced and released by ISIS, including a video that featured a still from an ISIS video that showed Japanese journalist Kenji Goto and businessman Haruna Yukawa. Both were later beheaded by ISIS, though this was not included on the TikTok video. ISD also one creator who posted 7 ISIS videos, 5 of which featured aerial drone footage released by ISIS in 2016/17 showing suicide car bomb attacks in Mosul, Iraq. These videos were all posted in February 2021, shared a further 48 times on the platform and are still live on TikTok.

Hashtags

This section includes findings related to the use of hashtags posted in the captions of the videos in our sample. Like all social platforms, hashtags are chosen by users to tag their content with related keywords, engage with larger trends. Hashtags are generally chosen by users to make their content more discoverable and are used as part of a growth and engagement strategy. In total, across the 1,030 videos analysed, 4,607 hashtags were used, of which 1,747 were unique hashtags. The research reveals that creators who post hateful and extremist-related content make use of generally popular hashtags on TikTok like #FYP, #foryou and #foryoupage.

For TikTok creators, having their content appear on other users' For You Page is akin to going viral, leads to their videos being seen by more people and allows them to grow their following. This is why so many creators tag their content with these common words and phrases. For TikTok hate creators, the logic is most likely the same, suggesting that they tag their hateful or extremist content with these terms with the aim of having more people see their content and engage with their account.

The findings also reveal how creators who post hateful and extremist-related content make use of hashtags related to general political discussions and trends on TikTok, using hashtags like #Conservative, #Politics, #BLM [Black Lives Matter], #Republican and #Trump in large numbers. This suggests that these creators know that the algorithmic systems of platforms like TikTok promote certain trending topics to wider audiences and seek to use these systemic functions to their benefit.

Further to this, among our sample, there was also frequent use of terms directly associated with extremist communities and movements, with popular hashtags including:

- #MakeEuropeGreatAgain and #EuropeForEuropeans
- #Hyperborea (meant as a reference to esoteric Nazism)
- #WBS and #WhiteBoySummer (widely adopted by white supremacist communities online[40])
- #Fascism, #ThirdPosition (a neo-fascist political ideology[41]) and #Mosley
- #TheGreatReplacement, #NoWhiteGuilt and #WhiteGenocide

It's also worth noting the large usage of the term #based. This is a slang expression that originates from the rapper Lil B who said that being based means "being yourself....Not being afraid to do what you wanna do. Being positive".[42] More recently, however, the term was adopted by users on 4chan and popularised by alt-right communities online like Reddit's pro-Trump forum r/The_Donald.[43] The term is often used to support someone who expresses a hateful, racist or extremist viewpoint. Examples of the hashtag in our sample include one video, viewed over 66,000 times, that features a photo of Elliot Rodger (featured in the screenshot below). Another video, viewed over 48,000 times, praises Oswald Mosley. A final video, viewed over 35,000 times, features a clip that attacks LGBTQ+ people and suggests they will burn in hell. In the eyes of extremist creators in our sample, these figures and viewpoints are #based.

What's also evident are the absence of some hashtags. Whilst #Hitler and #Mussolini were used in 4 posts in total, for example, both hashtags are deactivated and banned by TikTok, meaning users cannot click through to the hashtag page to view similarly-tagged videos. Though there was significant Hitler and Mussolini-

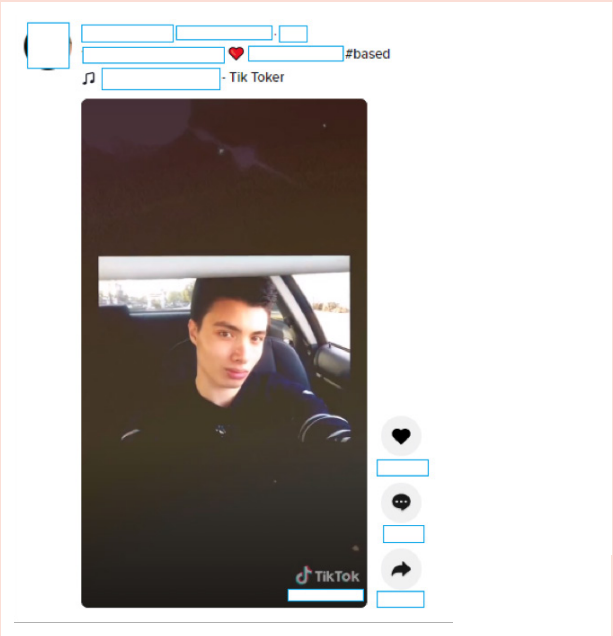


Fig 14: This video features a clip glorifying Elliot Rodger and uses #based in the caption

related content featured in our sample, users were not able to, or perhaps chose not to, promote their videos with these hashtags, demonstrating how effective TikTok's actions can be in limiting activities that seek to promote or glorify extremists when enforced appropriately and consistently.

Below is a breakdown of the top 50 hashtags that featured in our sample.

Hashtag	No. of videos:	Hashtag	No. of videos:
#fyp	221	#makeeuropegreatagain	19
#based	185	#whiteboysummer	19
#foryou	73	#ww2	19
#hyperborea	66	#gypsycrudarer	18
#foryoupage	59	#xyzbca	18
#fyp	58	#europeforeuropeans	17
#blm	47	#israel	17
#redpilled	47	#oswaldmosley	17
#conservative	44	#Republican	17
#meme	36	#usa	17
#politics	34	#Americafirst	16
#tedpilled	34	#lgbt	16
#nationalism	30	#thegreatreset	16
#europe	29	#wlm	16
#fy	29	#diversity	15
#funny	28	#redpill	15
#white	28	#thirdposition	15
#lgbtq	25	#europa	14
#duet	23	#mosley	14
#nationalist	22	#tedkazcynski	14
#fascist	21	#anprim	13
#history	21	#greenscreen	13
#memes	21	#hyperborean	13
#rightwing	20	#serbia	13
#viral	20	#trump	13

Creation Features and Video Effects

TikTok offers users a variety of video creation and sharing features like the Duet and Stitch functions. Duet allows creators to record alongside existing TikTok videos, while Stitch offers creators the option to crop existing videos and add their own part to create a new recording that is then published on their account. The tools are designed by TikTok to help users share videos and react to others' content and, in short, make content more popular and develop trends. Other features designed to help TikTok users create content include photo slideshows, which can then be customised using filters and/or effects.

As TikTok states, Effects are used to customise and add details to videos.[44] Along with Filters, these are highly popular with creators on the platform and used in many creative and visually-impressive ways. These are instantly recognisable, with popular options including the Green Screen effect where a user can feature external media in their video and appear in front of it on their recording, usually to comment on its content. Effects for face morphing, vintage or retro filters, colour customisers for altering videos are all popular as well.

This section details how these creative features are used by extremist creators to post racist, threatening or divisive content, modify and edit footage to make it more appealing and slick or to feature veiled or coded support that glorifies extremists.[47]

For this research, ISD examined the use of the Duet and Stitch creation features, as well as photo slideshows and videos that featured the following effects: Green Screen, Colour Customiser, 3D or Slow Zoom, Face Morph and Vintage or Retro filters. ISD found that, among our sample of 1,030 videos, 172 videos (17%) made use of some form of creation features or effects on TikTok. The breakdown is as follows:

TikTok Function	No of videos used:
Vintage/Retro	42
Photo Slideshow	37
Stitch	27
3D/Slow Zoom	25
Duet	25
Green Screen	12
Other	6
Face Morph/Shapeshifting	5
Colour Customizer/Modification	2

Duet

Among our sample, Duets were used by extremist creators to post inflammatory, hateful and offensive content in response to other creators' videos. Typically, an extremist creator would Duet or respond to an original video in order to target a hateful response to someone's original content. For example, one creator duetted a video that showed a selection of plus size women posing in bikinis. The creator duetted this video and added a photo of extremist Ted Kaczynski, which appeared alongside this bikini clip, and added the on-screen caption saying "Ted was right", suggesting that Kaczynski's criticisms of modern society were correct.

A genre of videos highly popular on TikTok are those that ask open questions and encourage others to reply by duetting or stitching their answers. This format is

also favoured by TikTok creators promoting extremism. For example, one video in our sample featured a video of a girl who added the on-screen caption to her video saying "I don't find anyone attractive... but him" with this last line serving as a prompt for others to reply. A creator then duetted her clip with a compilation of photos of the British fascist politician Oswald Mosley, using the Duet function as a means to glorify and promote Mosley, as seen in the screenshot below.

Another user duetted a video that featured a graph showing countries with high child mortality rates, and in response, added their own on-screen caption to promote white supremacy and say "notice how none are white ran [sic] countries". In many ways, Duets are used by extremist creators as an open prompt to spread hate and glorify extremists.

Duet videos also give rise to Duet chains, which allow users to feature an existing video and add to it. The feature has given rise to incredibly creative TikTok trends but is also used to promote hatred, as evidenced in our sample. A string of duetted videos was used to promote anti-Asian racism in relation to COVID-19.[48]

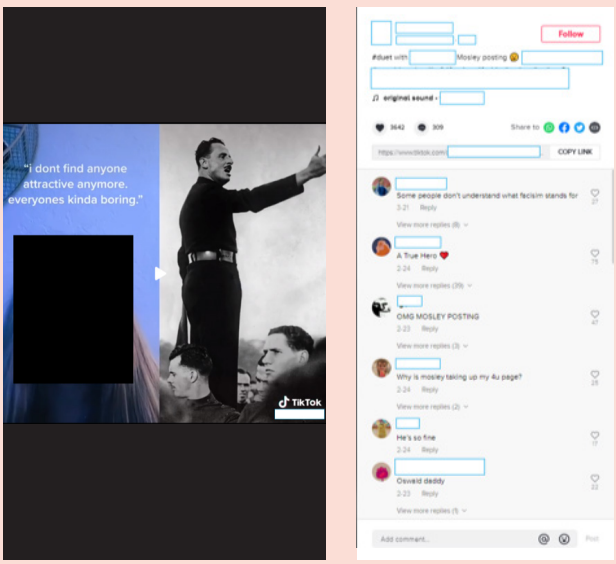


Fig 15: Duet video used to glorify Oswald Mosley (Identifiable details obscured)

Stitch

The Stitch function is used in many similar ways to the Duet feature. Among videos in our sample, creators primarily used the Stitch function to directly react to another user who is a member of a protected or minority group with a piece of content designed to demonise or attack them. In other cases, it was used to reply to a generic open question, like the ones described in the Duet section, with a hateful statement.

For example, when a LGBTQ+ creator posted a video about the "things I've learned after coming out", one creator in our sample used the Stitch function to reply to this video by featuring a graph that, they claimed, showed the higher rate of "suicide attempts" among transgender, lesbian, gay or bisexual people compared to the "overall population". In a different example, a creator used the Stitch function to reply to a video of two men sharing a kiss with a clip that featured footage of a building being bombed from above, with the implied meaning here being that the two men were the targets of the bomb.

Generic and open-ended questions are incredibly popular on TikTok, allowing creators to share their

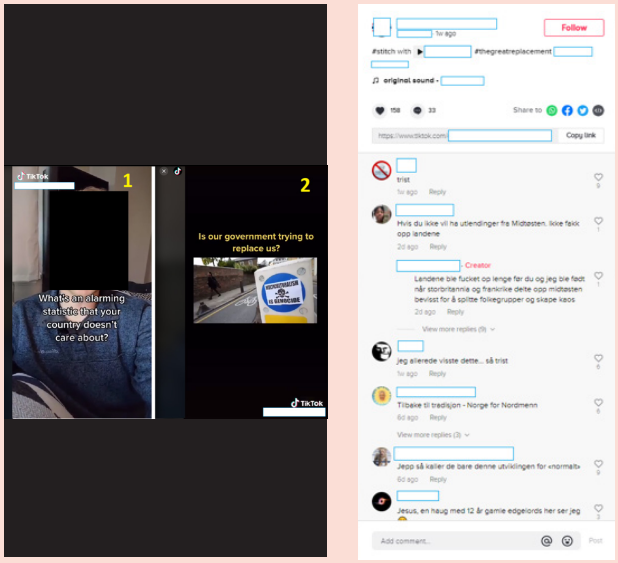


Fig 16: Screenshot features two parts from the same video; the original generic question (1) and the answer (2) posted with the Stitch function which was used to promote the Great Replacement theory (Identifiable details obscured)

experiences and opinions about various topics or issues. The format also provides hate creators with an open prompt to share a hateful opinion, attack a group on the basis of protected attributes or use slurs . In one example, when a creator asked people to share videos about "an alarming statistic that your country doesn't care about", a creator in our sample used the Stitch function to reply with graphs highlighting the declining birth rate in Norway, which they then blamed on "immigration" and "multiculturalism" before ending with an image that promoted the white supremacist Great Replacement conspiracy theory.

In another example, when a creator asked people to share videos about that "flip of the switch" moment that permanently changed your life or perspective", a creator in our sample used the Stitch function to reply. The creator first targeted women with a series of misogynistic slurs and claimed feminism led him to learn about Marxism, which, he then said, taught him about the "true villains" who control the world — a coded reference to Jewish people. Another user replied to a generic question asking people what they were doing with a stitched answer that promoted a video game linked to a German far-right group.

Green Screen

The Green Screen effect presents TikTok creators with the template to superimpose themselves over additional content and "make their backgrounds come to life", according to TikTok.[49] The effect was used in a number of videos in our sample. In one such example, the generic open-ended question format formed part of a video used to promote extremism. A TikTok user posted a video of themselves standing in front of a green screen saying "now this...I love this", prompting others to edit in something. A creator in our sample used the clip as the basis to use the Green Screen effect and add in the flag for the Falange fascist political movement in Spain.

The effect was also used to produce antisemitic content. In one example, a creator used the interior of a concentration camp barracks as the backdrop for a video in which a person appeared in the barrack dressed in a skull mask, mocked Jewish people and used ash to reference the Holocaust. This video is still live.

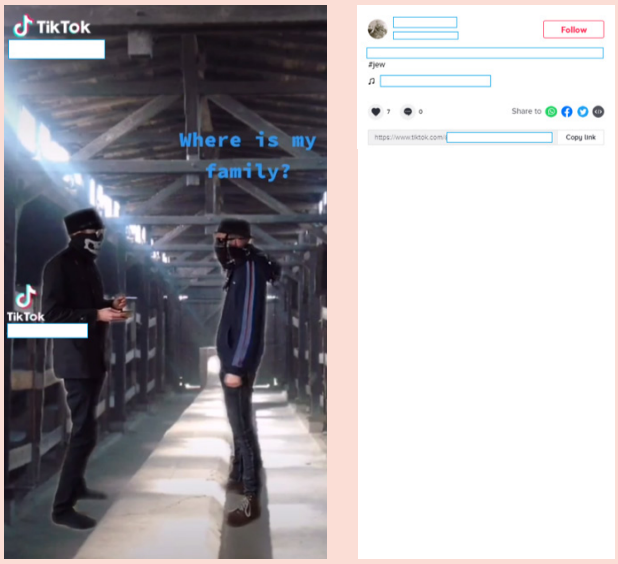


Fig 17: Screenshot of video that uses the Green Screen effect to produce antisemitic content. Identifiable details obscured

Photo Slideshow

Photo slideshows are popular with all kinds of creators on TikTok, including those intent on using the platform to promote hatred and glorify extremists. In our sample, creators typically used photo slideshows to post compilations of photos of political and military extremists like Adolf Hitler and Ratko Mladic. Music is usually central to these photo slideshows. One such video starts with an on-screen caption that reads "people who influenced my political views" and then proceeds to play a slideshow of photos featuring prominent fascists and dictators from the past 100 years including Oswald Mosley, Francisco Franco, José Antonio Primo de Rivera and Benito Mussolini.

Slideshows are also used to promote hatred against refugees and migrants. One such video starts with an on-screen caption that reads "results of Swedish immigration" and then features a slideshow of pro-immigration statements from Swedish political parties, interspersed with headlines, from mainstream news and conspiracy websites, documenting crimes committed by refugees in the country. The aim is to portray all refugees as violent criminals and position Sweden's main political parties as those responsible for allowing these people into the country.

3D/Slow Zoom

TikTok offers creators various ways to customise photos or slideshows, with some of the most popular being those that help freeze a frame and slowly zoom in on a photo or add a 3D dimension to a photo. Like other features discussed in this section, these effects are generally very popular with all TikTok users and are used to make creative videos. However, among extremist creators, these effects are typically used to enhance photos of extremists in an effort to glorify them.

In one such example, a video features a stylistic slideshow of 3D photos of Oswald Mosley speaking to a crowd, marching on a street and surrounded by other members of the Britain Union of Fascists, all set in time to the song Phonky Town by Playaphonk, a highly popular song on TikTok. (A later section will explore the role of music among hate and extremism on TikTok.)

The slow zoom effect is also often used by hate creators to direct hate against groups and minorities. In one example, a video features a full-length graph displaying what are labelled as different religions' views on abortion. The footage pauses and the video slowly zooms in on the section for Jewish people, emphasising that, according to the graph, they are the biggest supporters of abortion. The comments section featured a number of posts boasting antisemitic and hateful remarks about Jewish people.

Retro/Vintage

TikTok offers creators a variety of different effects that allow them to give their videos a retro or vintage feel. This typically involves adding a greyscale, monochrome or sepia shade to visual content or adding a grainy effect or watermark with date and time information to present the video like a VHS recording. These are also widely popular across all of TikTok and these kinds of effects were the most popular choice among videos in our sample.

It is especially clear that vintage and retro effects appear to be popular among far-right videos and creators who used these effects to reminisce about the past, promote tradition over modernity and to evoke nostalgia in these videos. The intended message in such videos states that the past is preferable to the current day because there was less diversity in the US and Europe, cultures were more homogenous, religion (especially Christian religions) held more influence in the daily lives of people, and generally, it is viewed as a simpler, purer time. Such narratives are central in videos that use these effects.

The use of these effects in videos also appear to take their cue from other aesthetics popular among far-right communities across the web, namely vaporwave-inspired video edits,[50] which are frequently used to promote facets of traditionalism, a worldview also popular in far-right circles that presents progress and equality as "poisonous illusions".[51]

Fig 18: TikTok post that uses retro/vintage effects to promote white supremacy and far-right ideologies

In one example, a video features audio of Oswald Mosley criticising multiculturalism. As this plays, grainy footage of Mosley and other fascists is featured while the post's caption states "Our home is Europe. Protect it". Another video featured synth music as images of historic buildings in Germany were shown in the footage and the on-screen caption blamed migrants for the apparent decline of the country. A third video, whose post caption states "this is a war for the west", featured grainy photos of Christian iconography and ancient Greece, alongside the on-screen caption "this is war and we can't afford to lose". A fourth video featured flickering clips of a cartoon showing two white boys with the on-screen caption, "abandon your white guilt".

Lastly, another video used retro vaporwave-inspired effects by featuring wavey, grainy footage as clips of various European towns or cities played throughout, intercut with graphs about the supposed differences in the IQs of different races, before ending with footage from Nazi Party rallies, as seen in Figure 18. The post also features hashtags promoting white Europeans and white supremacy and is still live and viewable on TikTok.

Sounds

Audio is central to the user experience on TikTok. Songs, music, clipped fragments of popular TV shows or movies, the sound of someone speaking as they record a video — these all make up Sounds on TikTok. Sounds are used to express creativity and create trends around specific clips or pieces of audio. For example in March 2020, when a creator used a portion of The Weeknd's song "Blinding Lights" as a Sound in a dance video, they created a global trend.[52] However, Sounds are also open to misuse and abuse and have been used to promote harmful COVID-19 vaccine misinformation.[53]

Creators can choose to use a Sound that is already in use on TikTok and these typically feature a snippet of a song. The name of the artist who wrote the song or the username of the TikTok creator who first used the Sound will usually be listed on subsequent videos that feature the Sound. However, Sounds will usually be just titled "Original sound" by default when the video instead features the natural audio of someone speaking to their camera.

In our sample of 1,030 videos, 689 used "Original sounds" in their video. 279 videos — 27% of the sample — made use of a Sound already live and linkable on TikTok. In total, 205 unique songs appeared in our sample.

It is evident that Sounds that are popular among large swathes of TikTok users and central to trends that are also popular among those interested in promoting hate and extremism. There are similarities in how they are used to structure a video or to act as a soundtrack for a photo slideshow, yet the subject matter and content of the videos in our sample is vastly different.

Title	No of videos used in:
MGMT - "Little Dark Age"	27
Roki Vulovic - "Generale, generale"	20
"Hava Nagila" (Jewish folk song)	17
Playaphonk - "Phonky Town"	11
"Serbia Strong" (Serbian nationalist song)	11
Gotye - "Somebody That I Used to Know"	7
"IT CAME FROM CHINA by Vinny Vendetto and YNIQ" (Sound is based on comments made by President Trump in March 2020)	6
Kate Bush - "Running Up That Hill"	6
"Don't be surprised if one day I" (Sound is based on the song "Go Down on You" by the Memories)	6
Grover Washington Jr. - "Just the Two of Us"	5
"Fallschirmjäger Remix" (Sound is based on a Nazi Germany era military song)	5

MGMT - "Little Dark Age"

This is by far the most popular Sound among extremist creators on TikTok. The song itself has no extremist connotations and first exploded in use on the app in late 2020 when it formed the backdrop for a trend that saw creators dress up and pose as a character in a painting when, just as the chorus starts, the painting then appears on the video.[56] When used by creators captured in our sample, the song is used as the backdrop in a variety of video trends.

The song is frequently featured alongside photo slideshows or compilations of prominent fascists, white supremacists or dictators. As noted in the Effects section, music is central to the photo slideshow format. Typically, like the original trend, videos start by featuring one image or a title about a figure like George Lincoln Rockwell (as featured below), and then as the chorus starts, so begins a fast-paced slideshow of photos changing in time to the music.

This MGMT song is also central to a cluster of videos that are used to promote Hyperborea and a wider trend of esoteric Nazism that is popular on TikTok, in which videos feature memes, fictional characters,

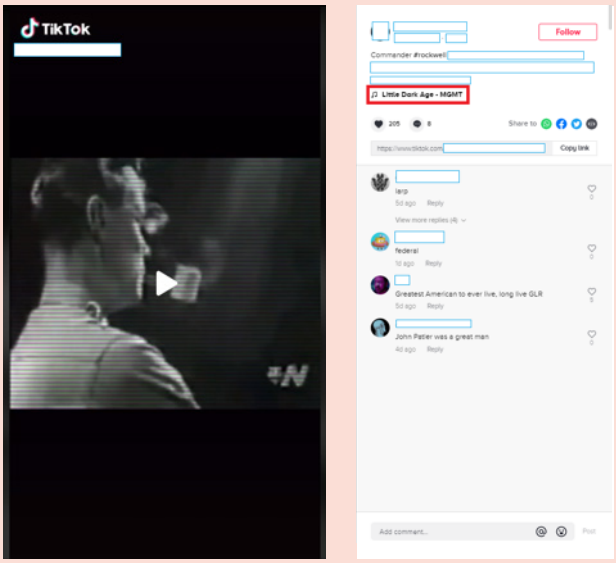


Fig 19: Video which uses the Sound "Little Dark Age - MGMT" (in red), featuring a photo slideshow of the American white supremacist George Lincoln Rockwell

illustrations and extremist-linked symbols such as the Sonnenrad. Gotye's "Somebody That I Used to Know" and Kate Bush's "Running Up That Hill" were used in similar ways to accompany Hyperborea-related and esoteric Nazi content.

Roki Vulovic - "Generale, generale"

This is a song by Serbian folk singer, and former member of the military, Roki Vulovic. The song is about Ratko Mladic, a Bosnian Serb general during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and a convicted war criminal. The song glorifies Mladic's "heroic" actions in "defending" Serbian people, but does not mention Mladic's role in the siege of Sarajevo or in the genocide of over 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in 1995. Creators typically use this Sound in videos that are also designed to glorify the actions of Mladic and usually feature photo slideshows or video clips of the convicted war criminal. In some instances, videos featuring this Sound play host to TikTok comments that support denial of the Bosnian genocide.

"Hava Nagila"

This is a well known Jewish folk song that is used widely on TikTok, primarily by Jewish people to celebrate or highlight aspects of their culture.

However, the song is also used frequently in videos that promote antisemitism on TikTok. For example, numerous videos that use this Sound featured footage of a crying baby, with captions that read "Jewish baby". When the baby is given money, the baby stops crying and the song starts to play, reinforcing and promoting a hateful Jewish stereotype.

Playaphonk - "Phonky Town"

Much like the MGMT song, this song is very popular in general on TikTok. Yet, also like MGMT's song, "Phonky Town" is also used in photo slideshows featuring fascists, white supremacists or dictators. At least two accounts that featured the name Atomwaffen Division also used this Sound as a backdrop for identical videos that featured a propaganda poster for the extremist group. In the video, as the Sound plays, the poster featuring a person standing in front of a swastika flashes in time to the music. One of these videos is still live on TikTok.

"Serbia Strong"

This is a Serbian nationalist song that was released in 1993 during the Yugoslav Wars. The song celebrates the killing of Bosniaks and Croats and praises Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić, who was also later found guilty of genocide and war crimes for his actions during the conflict. Online, the song is often referred to as "Remove Kebab" and the song and phrase have become popular among neo-Nazi and white supremacists as a means of promoting anti-Muslim hatred. The Christchurch shooter scrawled the phrase on one of his weapons and played the song on his livestream prior to committing the attack on 15 March 2019. In our sample, the video was used in combination with actual footage from the Christchurch attack and in videos that featured video game footage recreating the attack.

ISD also uncovered what appears to be a flaw in TikTok's approach towards limiting the use of offensive or hateful sounds on the platform. In compliance with copyright law, TikTok forcibly mutes videos that may contain audio that infringes these rights or violate its community guidelines.[57] ISD found evidence of hateful videos with muted audio that still could be played when downloaded. ISD discovered a video of a TikTok creator who recorded themselves playing "Serbia Strong" on an accordion and posted the video on TikTok in 2019. At some point, for unknown reasons,

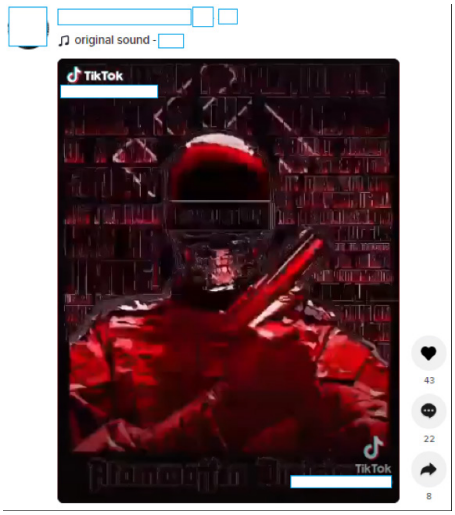


Fig 20: Video which uses the Sound "Playaphonk - Phonky Town", featuring a poster for the extreme right-wing group Atomwaffen Division

the audio was muted by TikTok, possibly because the song may have violated a community guideline. However, when ISD researchers downloaded the video, the audio was still attached and playable on the file. ISD confirmed this by testing out a number of other muted videos. If TikTok deliberately mutes videos with offensive or hateful audio, but the audio can still be listened to by downloading the video, this represents an oversight in the platform's approach to tackling hateful content.

"IT CAME FROM CHINA by Vinny Vendetto and YNIQ"

This Sound features comments made by President Trump during a press conference where he defended his use of the phrase "China virus" in referring to COVID-19.[58] The creator of the Sound also incorporated a beat and edited some of the comments to turn this into a dance track. Research has linked the former president's use of the phrase to a spike in anti-Asian vitriol online, while the phrase has also been labelled "xenophobic" by medical experts.[59,60] The Sound has formed the backdrop for a trend featuring over 1,000 videos, some of which were collected in our sample and feature creators using the Sound to promote hatred against Chinese people or call for violence against Anthony Fauci.

"Don't be surprised if one day I..."

This Sound features a segment of the song "Go Down on You" by The Memories.[61] This Sound was originally used in a video where it served as a backdrop for a photo slideshow about Christopher McCandleless, a man who hiked across North America into the Alaskan wilderness in the early 1990s and was the subject of the book and movie "Into the Wild". Other creators have used this Sound along the same lines, imagining themselves moving to the wilderness. Creators in our sample used the Sound in similar ways, but did so to produce videos that praised the actions of Theodore Kaczynski, an extremist who moved to a remote cabin in Montana in 1971, withdrew from modern society and killed three people and injured 23 others with a series of bombs between 1978 and 1995. In our sample, this Sound was primarily used as a backdrop for photo slideshows glorifying Kaczynski and his actions or as a soundtrack for videos in which creators read out passages from his manifesto.

Grover Washington Jr. - "Just the Two of Us"

The videos using this song featured footage first broadcast on a livestream by white supremacist Paul Miller, showing him encountering another white supremacist who was also using the livestream video chat platform Omegle to racially abuse people, as Miller often did. Upon seeing each other, both instinctively performed the Sieg Hiel salute. In TikTok videos featuring this clip, when the two both raised their right arms, the song "Just the Two of Us" began.

"Fallschirmjäger Remix"

According to forums and various websites, this Sound is potentially a remix of an old German paratrooper song "Grun ist Unser Fallschirm" (Green is our parachute). Though questions over its origin remain, what is known is that this remixed version of the song was played by the Christchurch attacker during his livestream in March 2019. Among our sample, it was used in videos to promote white supremacy and hatred of Black people.

Other Sounds: Christchurch, Nazi Germany and White Power Music

There are a number of other Sounds or songs that are linked to far-right extremism in the dataset. The traditional British marching song "The British Grenadiers", which was played by the Christchurch attacker during his livestream, was used in two videos;

one which featured video game footage recreating the attack and in another, remixed as a dance song, and featured as the backdrop to a spinning Sonnenrad symbol with an on-screen caption stating "accept death, embrace infamy, achieve victory". Nirvana's song "In Bloom" is used in videos to promote the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attack, specifically in videos showing an alleged member of a white nationalist group outside the Al Noor Mosque, as the lyrics "I'm so happy" play over and over

"Erika", a German military marching song written in the 1930s, was used five times in our sample: in two separate videos featuring footage of Oswald Mosley and George Lincoln Rockwell, and in three videos featuring soldiers in Nazi Germany marching with banners bearing the swastika.

ISD also discovered a number of songs by extremist white supremacist bands that are active as official TikTok Sounds, shareable by users on the platform.

Dates, Durations, Views & Post Metrics

This section includes insights on the videos analysed during this research, findings related to information like dates posted, duration, numbers of views and key video engagement metrics such as likes, comments and shares.

Dates

1,030 videos were analysed as part of this research. The data collection period took place throughout June 2021 and the vast majority of videos — 83% — were posted on TikTok within the three months prior to this period. The low proportion of older content may point to content takedowns by TikTok. In their most recent Transparency Report, covering content and accounts removed from the platform between 1 January - 31 March 2021, TikTok said they removed 61,915,327 videos for violating the Community Guidelines or Terms of Service (less than 1% of all videos uploaded on TikTok).[62] TikTok also said that 93.1% of these videos were removed within 24 hours of being posted, and in their previous Transparency Report, TikTok said this figure was 93.5%.[63] Yet, in our sample of 1,030 videos, 191 videos, or 18.5%, were removed or were no longer on TikTok by the end of the data collection period. The remainder, 81.5%, are still live — long past 24 hours after being posted.

There have yet to be any longitudinal studies external to TikTok analysing the average time that a hate or extremism-related video survives on TikTok, so there are no figures to compare this research to yet.

The breakdown of the dates in which the videos captured in our sample were posted is:

Date Posted	No. of videos
2018	1
2019	2
Jan - June 2020	16
July - Dec 2020	49
Jan 2021	40
Feb 2021	70
March 2021	103
April 2021	191
May 2021	299
June 2021	258

(Note: Due to an archiving error, the date on one video, since removed, was not accessible)

Duration

Originally, TikTok videos could be at most 15 seconds long. Creators were then permitted to create videos that were up to 60 seconds long. The most common length for videos in our sample of 1.030 videos is 59 seconds long. 199 videos — or roughly 19% — of the full sample were 10 seconds or shorter.

On 1 July 2021, TikTok formally announced that they were rolling out longer videos to all creators, enabling them to post videos up to three minutes long.[64] The feature was available to some creators prior to this date. As TikTok's announcement states, they had been "letting creators around the world experiment with the expanded format". Based on our research, there are already signs that extended legth is already aiding creators to post extreme right-wing and hate-filled content. In particular, this format has been used by creators to post separate parts of documentaries or longform videos made and published elsewhere that promote extremist ideologies.

12 videos captured in our sample were longer than 60 seconds. Of these, one video featured footage from a documentary demonising members of the LGBTQ+ community and two videos were used to post separate

parts of a person promoting the white supremacist Great Replacement conspiracy theory. Another creator posted three videos — 180, 180 and 178 seconds in length — that each featured consecutive segments from a documentary about South Africa that promotes the white genocide conspiracy theory.[65] Lastly, a three minute video was posted in June 2021 that features a video originally produced by a white supremacist that promotes and defends the white supremacist website American Renaissance. This video is still live on TikTok.

These videos received an average of 7,300 views each. Of the 1,030 videos in our sample, 725 videos received less than this number of views, meaning videos over 60 seconds long performed better than 70% of the videos in our sample.

Views

The average number of views each video in our sample received was 13,300. However, this is skewed by a small cluster of videos with large view numbers, and 760 videos received less than this average figure. 15 videos in our sample received over 100,000 views, while 168 videos received less than 100 views.

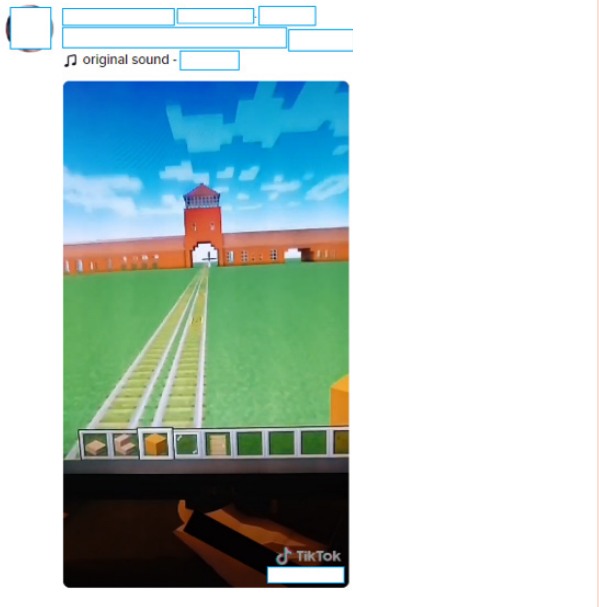


Fig 21: This video features video game footage depicting the Auschwitz concentration camp. The caption contains "six million", a reference to the victims of the Holocaust while the comments feature outright Holocaust denial

Below is a breakdown of the 15 most-viewed videos captured in our sample.

Description	No. of views*
Video related to COVID-19 used to spread anti-Asian hate	2,000,000
Video featuring video game footage of Auschwitz concentration camp, used to mock victims of, and deny, the Holocaust	1,800,000
Video featuring racist footage originally produced by white supremacist Paul Miller	1,200,000
Video that supports claims the Bosnian genocide never happened	655,800
Video featuring racist footage originally produced by white supremacist Paul Miller	354,500
Video features a reading of an extremist's manifesto	334,900
Video related to COVID-19 used to spread anti-Asian hate	284,500
Video featuring footage originally produced by British extremist Stephen Yaxley-Lennon	257,900
Video featuring video game footage of Auschwitz concentration camp, used to mock victims of, and deny, the Holocaust	233,000
Video related to COVID-19 used to spread anti-Asian hate	219,400
Video featuring footage originally produced by British extremist Stephen Yaxley-Lennon	135,600
Video related to COVID-19 used to spread anti-Asian hate	118,500
Video related to COVID-19 used to spread anti-Asian hate	113,400
Video celebrating the murder of Kurdish people on the orders of Saddam Hussein	112,100
Video featuring footage originally produced by British extremist Stephen Yaxley-Lennon	104,000

* View figures based on statistics available via the platform, which provides only rounded numbers.

Interaction Metrics - Likes, Comments and Shares

This paragraph details findings related to the level of engagement the videos in our sample received — specifically the number of likes, comments and shares on each video. By and large, the level of engagement on these videos was small.

Of the 1,030 videos in our sample:

- 36 videos (3.5% of the full sample) received 0 likes, 266 videos (26% of the full sample received 0 comments and 327 videos (32% of the full sample) received 0 shares.
- 976 videos (95%) received at least one like and 352 videos (34%) received over 100 likes. Due to removal of content or archiving errors, data on the number of likes for 18 videos was not accessible.
- 740 videos (72%) received at least one comment and 241 (23%) received over 25 comments. Due to removal of content or archiving errors, data on the number of likes for 24 videos was not accessible.
- 597 videos (58%) received at least one share and 134 videos (13%) received over 50 shares. Due to removal of content or archiving errors, data on the number of likes for 106 videos was not accessible.

Low engagement figures on hateful and extremist content are a positive sign of the lack of mainstream engagement achieved by these creators. Yet, as detailed in the notes above, this research has demonstrated that the vast majority of videos that feature hateful and extremist content do receive some engagement, and a handful receive millions of views.

Analysis of Creators

The section features analysis of the accounts captured in our sample, with specific sections on how TikTok creators use their profiles to encourage hate and extremism, examined account and content takedowns by TikTok, as well as evasion tactics used by creators to evade such actions.

Creators, Profiles and TikTok Takedowns

This subsection includes findings on the accounts analysed during this research.

Videos and Video Removals

1,030 TikTok videos were analysed as part of this research.

191 of the 1,030 videos analysed during this research— or 18.5% — are no longer live or viewable on TikTok. This appears to be primarily because of takedown actions by TikTok.

- 3 of the 191 removed videos come from accounts that are now private.
- 3 of the 191 removed videos come from accounts that no longer feature any video content though the account is still live and can presumably still post or comment.
- 9 of the 191 removed videos are now listed as private, though the account is still live and has other public content.
- 20 of the 191 removed videos are deleted or banned, and come from accounts that remain active and have other public viewable videos on the account.
- 156 of the 191 removed videos come from accounts that have been deactivated or banned.

Creators

491 unique TikTok accounts (i.e. creators) were analysed during this research.

193 of the 491 accounts had more than one video analysed. There were 10 TikTok accounts that had ten or more videos analysed, including one account that had 23 videos analysed. This creator's account, still live at the time of writing, was populated with videos featuring misogynistic rants, anti-Black and anti-Asian postings, as well as a series of antisemitic videos that promoted Holocaust denial.

62 of the 491 accounts analysed during this research— or 12.6% — are no longer active and have been deactivated or banned.

Profiles

In our analysis, ISD examined whether any sections of the profile of accounts captured during this research contained references to or promoted hateful or extremist ideologies, persons or groups. These profile sections (see Fig. 22) include the account username (1), account nickname (2), profile image (3), profile biography (4) and any featured links (5).

Fig 22: The TikTok account for @TikTok_Australia, used here to demonstrate the various elements of a profile

162 of the 491 accounts analysed during this research — or 33% — featured one or more references to hate or extremism in their account profiles.

The section above stated that 62 of the 491 accounts analysed are no longer active. 42 of those accounts are among the 162 accounts that contained references to hate or extremism in their account profiles, meaning that there are still 120 with hateful and extremist references in their profiles from our sample still live on TikTok.

Of the 162 accounts, the profile feature that contained a hateful or extremist reference was:

Profile Element	No. of accounts
Username	16
Profile image	32
Nickname	6
Profile biography	30
More than one	78
Link	0

78 accounts included more than one profile feature that referenced hate or extremism in their profiles. Those elements were:

Profile Element	No. of accounts
Username	71
Profile image	31
Nickname	57
Profile biography	27

Below is a breakdown of references that were amongst the most popular in our sample.

- 26 profiles featured "88", a popular white supremacist numerical reference to "HH", or "Heil Hitler".[66]
- 24 profiles featured the SS bolts, a common neo-Nazi symbol that references the Schutzstaffel (SS) of Nazi Germany. In particular on TikTok, these were typically referenced using lightning bolt emojis - i.e.⚡⚡.[67]
- 16 profiles feature versions of the word "fascist" or references to famous fascists in profile images or biographies.
- 16 profiles feature the Sonnenrad in their profile image.
- 15 profiles featured "14", another popular white supremacist reference for the "14 words".[68]
- 9 profiles feature the terms "national socialist" or "nat soc" in one of their profile elements.
- 6 profiles reference Brenton Tarrant and the Christchurst terrorist attack in their profile image.
- 6 profiles feature references to Paul Miller through numerous profile elements.
- 4 profiles feature the logo for the Atomwaffen Division in their profile image.
- 4 profiles feature Oswald Mosley in their profile image.
- 4 profiles feature antisemitic slurs and references to Holocaust denial.
- 4 profiles feature images of prominent Nazi collaborators from World War II, such as Leon Degrelle, Ion Antonescu or Jonas Noreika.
- 4 profiles contained "✋" in one of their profile elements, which were typically used as a reference to white power and white supremacy.
- 3 profiles feature George Lincoln Rockwell in their profile image.
- 2 profiles feature references to "Remove Kebab", also known as Serbia Strong, an anti-Muslim propaganda song written during the Yugoslav War in the 1990s.[69]
- 1 profile features a biography that contains a link to an article promoting Black-on-white crime.

Separate to direct and obvious references to hate and extremism, some profiles also featured coded terms and references that are intended to be understood by a small circle of like-minded people. These included one profile that featured the fictional name "Nating Higgers", where the first letter of each word is meant to be swapped around to reveal the true racist meaning of this reference.

Another profile, seen in Fig. 25, references "jogger exterminator" as a username. This is a racial slur used to describe people of colour that originated as a meme on 4chan following the fatal shooting of Ahmaud Arbery in the US in February 2020.[70] What's more, this account not only uses this term, but also contains two other known white supremacist terms. And lastly, the profile image features a selfie photo taken by an alleged member of a white nationalist group outisde Al Noor mosque close to the first anniversary of the Christchurch terrorist attack. The account is still live,

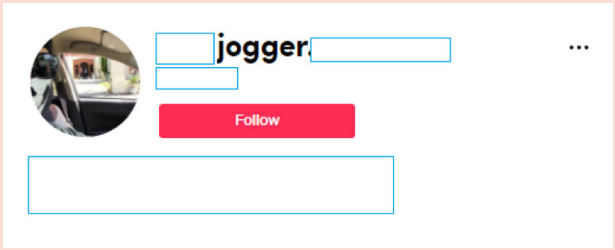


Fig 23: A TikTok account that contains numerous references to hate and extremism in its profile details

follows hundreds of accounts, and while it is public, it has not posted any video content. It could be active in posting comments on other user's videos, but is not possible to manually search for comments from a specific user through the TikTok platform or API to confirm this.

Extremist creators on TikTok routinely make use of all the features of their profile to promote hatred and likely signal to ideologically-similar users what their interests are. For example, the screenshot seen in Fig. 26 features numerous extremist references. The username contains the white supremacist slogan "white pride", the profile features an image that includes a flag displaying support for Milan Nedić, a Serbian Nazi collaborator, and the biography features two lightning bolt emojis, likely references to the SS, and a white hand emoji, another likely white supremacist reference.[71] The account has posted numerous videos promoting hatred by way of glorifying famous fascist politicians and war criminals, promoting the Ku Klux Klan and featuring antisemitic content. The account is still live.

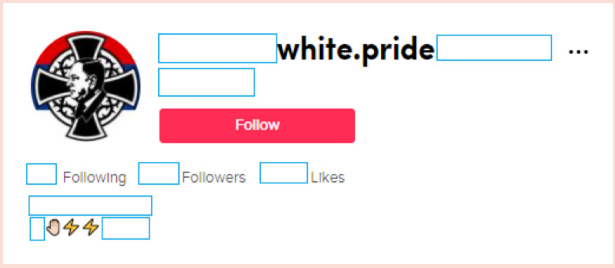


Fig 24: This TikTok account features numerous extremist references

Analysis

It is unclear what policies TikTok has on the promotion of extremism or glorification of terrorism through profile characteristics. Each of the insights and examples above raises questions about the ease with which explicit or implicit support for extremism and terrorism is allowed through TikTok profiles. These examples suggest that TikTok has failed to to take action against content that is not explicit in its support for extremism or terrorism, particularly those that convey support via symbols and emojis. This may prove to be a significant gap if the insights from this sample are extrapolated.

How do we determine whether a reference featured in a profile is supportive of hatred or extremism? In most cases there are clear and obvious references in text or photos, such as admiration of a high profile extremist, extremist ideology or a known slur about a group of people. In other cases, it's vital to consider the full nature of an account to understand the reference. Some TikTok accounts featured photos of known Nazi collaborators, which, along with videos that glorified other central Nazi figures like Hitler or Himmler, could be interpreted as an expression of support.

There are exceptions, and indeed, not all accounts discovered by ISD that included such references were selected for analysis. The intricacies of classifying these types of profiles suggest that content moderation judgements should be based on an account's full activity, rather than account characteristics in isolation. For TikTok, one of the lessons still to be learnt is that obvious terms and veiled or coded references to hateful terms, "out groups" or extremists are used to signal support for hateful and extremist ideologies. These factors should be included in account reviews when considering whether or not to issue strikes against an account, if this is not already being done.

Of the 1,030 videos analysed as part of the research, 18.5%, or almost one fifth, are no longer available on TikTok. The majority of the removed videos come from accounts that are also no longer live on TikTok. Of the 461 accounts captured during this research, almost 13% are no longer active and have been deactivated or banned. It is encouraging to see TikTok taking action against some such activity and actors, yet the vast majority of hateful and extremist content and accounts identified during this research are still live.

Evasion Tactics

TikTok creators use a variety of methods to evade bans or content takedowns on their accounts. In our research, tactics that made use of relatively simple methods were observed numerous times, an approach that is not unique to TikTok. Previous research by ISD highlighted how ISIS supporters sought to navigate past Facebook content moderators utilising similar tactics like breaking up text and using strange punctuation to posts or using Facebook's own video effects".[72] Yet some large platforms have started to learn how to detect and remove this kind of activity. It should therefore be possible for a platform of Tiktok's size to also find ways to identify and prevent such tactics being used to avoid enforcement action on the platform. Below we have included a sample of evasion tactics ISD observed during this research. We have included these examples to encourage a conversation about the creation of policies and enforcement actions to prevent and react to such evasion tactics from extremist TikTok creators.

Respawned Accounts

A common tactic among creators for accounts that are banned is to return to TikTok by slightly altering a username or by simply adding a "v" and a number to the username, for example, @TikTokUserV2, signifying that this is the second version of the account. Judging by activity observed by ISD during this research, it appears that these creators then inform previous followers they have returned by stating this in in their profile biography, commenting on other users' videos reiterating this, reposting much of the same content they had posted on their previous account or referencing the removal of earlier content when posting it again.

This type of activity is demonstrated by the screenshot below. The creator has posted a video of Elliot Rodger, a misogynist who killed six people in Isla Vista, California in 2014, taken by Rodger himself. The caption on the video states "reposted a third time", suggesting the creator has posted this video before and likely had it removed or was banned because of this. The creator's username features "v17", suggesting this is the seventeenth version of this account that they have created. The video also features a floating watermark (bottom right in the image) featuring the same username, only this version contains "v16", suggesting

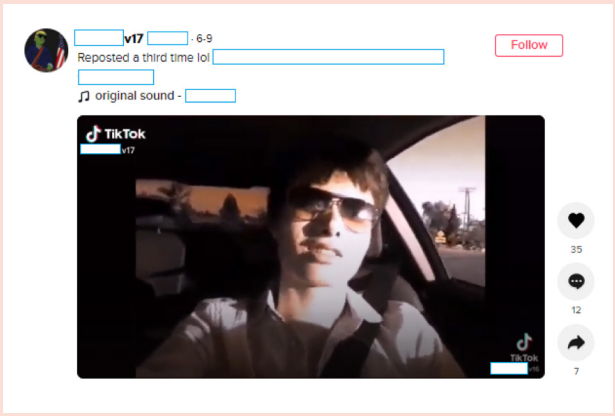


Fig 25: This video is likely the third time this user has posted this clip, on what appears to be the 17th version of their account

this watermark was placed on the video when the user posted it previously on the sixteenth version of this account which is no longer live. This latest version of the Rodger clip, however, is still live.

In total, ISD observed 21 accounts within our sample that used this "v" plus numbers method to likely signal their return to TikTok after the removal of a previous account. ISD also identified 37 other accounts within our sample that used numbers in their username in the same way and other accounts where users plainly stated in their bio that this was a respawned version of a previous account. All of this suggests that creators intent on returning to TikTok to promote hatred and extremist content after being banned face little difficulty not only in returning to the platform but in their attempts to reclaim their follower base and resume their activity.

Going Private

ISD analysed a number of public accounts that, for a time during our research period, were turned private, before changing back to public after a few days. During this period, one of these accounts was the subject of criticism on Twitter by a number of researchers for the high volume of antisemitic content that it featured. The account was likely turned private to stop others from accessing or viewing the content and potentially reporting it to TikTok. This creator was the most prolific in our sample, with 23 videos featuring misogynistic, anti-Black, anti-Asian and antisemitic content,

including outright Holocaust denial. After a few days, possibly when they felt the focus on their account had waned, the creator turned the account public again.

ISD also noted that 9 videos from our sample are now listed as private, though their creator's account is still public and features other public, viewable content. Similarly, these videos were possibly turned private to evade an outright ban from TikTok after they may have received a strike for violating one of the platform's community guidelines.

In other instances, some accounts were observed to have changed their username, possibly to avoid criticism or evade action from TikTok. In one example, an account that posted a video featuring a selfie of taken by a white nationalist outside Al Noor mosque in Christchurch changed their username by adding letters to it. The video, as well as the account, are still live on the platform.

Restricting Comments

There is evidence among our sample that creators who post videos that feature hateful or extremist content often choose to disable comments or restrict comments to followers. (It is possible for TikTok to restrict comments in certain cases as well, such as for young users, yet in our examples, the comments section generally featured a notice saying "this user has limited the comment to certain people".) There are numerous valid reasons why any TikTok user may wish to do this and maintain a high level of privacy on their account. When done in videos that seek to spread hateful content or promote extremist figures, it is likely such actions are taken to limit the potential for negative comments or reports against this content and lower the potential for content or an account to be banned. Users can then only like or share such a video, potentially creating the impression that the video is highly popular and is not the recipient of criticism.

In one example, seen below, the creator has posted a video that was liked over 2,300 times and shared more than 360 times, but they have restricted the comments. The video promotes a form of Holocaust denial. The clip features the 'Confused Travolta' meme which is a gif that features John Travolta's character in the film Pulp Fiction, repeatedly looking around him for something. The added on-screen caption reads "me in heaven looking for the 6 million". The figure references the number of Jewish people killed in the Holocaust. This video, posted in April 2020, has been viewed over 25,000 times and is still live.

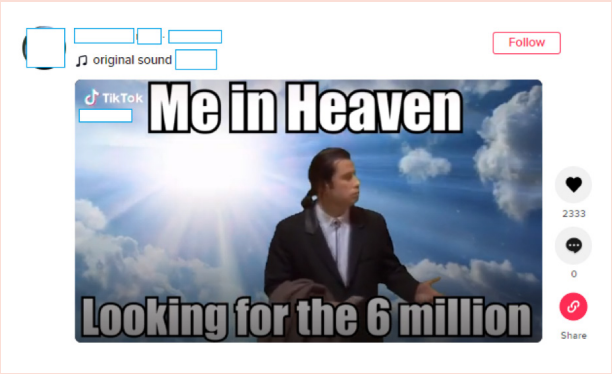


Fig 26: This creator has restricted the comments on their video, possibly to limit the chances of their content being reported to TikTok

Alternative Hashtag Spellings

One measure used frequently by TikTok in combating the spread of hate, extremism, misinformation or conspiracies is the deactivation of specific hashtags or banning specific terms from being used in hashtags. Yet this measure has proved inadequate and by using simple techniques like spelling hashtags differently or using a similar keyword, users are able to bypass TikTok's blocks and continue to spread hate and extremism, as evidenced in our sample.

- #BrentonTarrant is blocked on TikTok, but #BrentonTarrent is not and features in two videos captured in our sample.
- #RemoveKebab is blocked, but #RemoveKebob is not and features in three videos captured in our sample.
- #ChinaVirus or #WuhanVirus are both blocked, yet #ChinaFlu is not and features in 5 videos captured in our sample and has 1.4 million views on TikTok outright.[73] #WuhanFlu is live on TikTok with 3.7 million views and features in 3 videos included in our sample.[74]
- #GypsyCrusader (a reference to white supremacist Paul Miller) is blocked, but #gypseycrusadur is not

and features in 5 videos in our sample. Additionally, #gypsycrudarer features in 18 videos in our sample. On TikTok, the page for this hashtag indicates there are currently 88 videos on the platform using this hashtag and they have been viewed a collective 4.9 million times. [75]

Video Grid Layout

TikTok is a visual-first platform like other social media apps such as Instagram. Like Instagram, creators on TikTok make use of the grid layout of their videos on their profile to sometimes tell a story or, taken together in 3, 6, 9 or more videos, form a complete photo or image. This trend is also used by racists on TikTok to spell out slurs about groups of people. Two such accounts included in our sample used this tactic to promote hatred against Black people and spell out a related slur. Each video features just one letter and when viewed individually, there is nothing obvious or clear about the intended message of the video. Yet when users view the video grid of these accounts, they will see the full slur.

Other Evasion Tactics

ISD observed two other methods evident among creators in our sample that are potentially used to evade action by TikTok. One user posted themselves reading a passage of an extremist's manifesto, only the audio and video were sped up. It's not clear if this was done deliberately to evade any potential strike from TikTok. In another example, ISD observed a selection of creators who always posted hateful content that was under 10 seconds long. This cluster is made of 16 videos from 4 differerent creators whose content was supportive of white supremacy, racism, and antisemitism, including one video that was supportive of slavery. These videos also typically feature no caption or anything to signal to casual viewers what the content may relate to without watching it. Again, it's not clear if this was done deliberately to limit the visibility or spread of these videos and any potential takedown action from subsequent reporting.

Another tactic observed in some videos was the removal of captions some time after a video was posted. In one such example, a video was posted that featured video game footage of Nazi SS soldiers dancing, under swastikas, outside the gates of Auschwitz, adorned with the 'Arbet Macht Frei' sign. The post accompanying the video featured the hashtags #Hitler, #ArbeitMachtFrei and #Auschwitz, along with other hashtags. Some time between the discovery and analysis of this video, the hashtags and full caption were removed, possibly as a way of decreasing attention on the post. The video itself is still live.

One last tactic observed in our sample saw a creator post three clips from a documentary produced by a Canadian white nationalist. Here, the creator shared their frustration in struggling to post the documentary clips, claiming "censorship" was resulting in the clips being repeatedly removed. The creator then used a TikTok Sound of a generic piece of classical flute music, displayed this on the video, yet the sound was barely audible over the audio of the documentary clip. In their caption, they said "music added to hopefully get past the censorship", adding that "it was the only way to get this uploaded".

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

ISD set out to examine the state of hate and extremism on TikTok in two ways. Firstly, we explored a variety of categories of hateful content on the platform and analysed extremist ideologies targeting an individual or group's protected characteristics. Secondly, we moved beyond content-based analysis to investigate how TikTok features are used to spread hate.

ISD's research demonstrates that TikTok has a content moderation problem: extremist and even terrorist-related footage is easily discoverable on TikTok, despite contravening the platform's terms of service. Content that praises and celebrates the actions of terrorists and extremists, or denies the existence of historically violent incidents such as genocides, is captured in our data, demonstrating how the platform operates as a new arena for violence-endorsing, hateful ideologies.

The breadth of this enforcement gap is concerning. The platform enables hatred targeting Muslims, Jews, Asians, Black people, refugees, women and members of the LGBTQ+ community, including content celebrating the death of people within these communities, mocking victims of racism and persecution, and both implicit and explicit manifestations of hate against these communities.

The research also demonstrates how features of the platform — profiles, Sounds, video filters and effects — are all part and parcel of the system that has enabled targeted hate and extremism to proliferate on the platform. Products built by TikTok to encourage engagement, creativity and virality are being exploited to help spread hate and extremism.

This type of content is reaching significant audiences. Examples discovered during the study have received millions of views in some instances and tens of thousands of interactions. The algorithmic systems underlying TikTok's product are evidently helping to promote and amplify this content to audiences that might not otherwise have found it.

As other social media platforms have discovered over the past few years, TikTok now faces the added challenge of dealing with users who find ways to evade the existing systems that catch and respond to transgressions of terms of service on the platform. The research exposed numerous ways in which extremist TikTok creators are attempting to evade takedowns and platform actions against their content.

Even among the small cluster of the world's most popular social media platforms, TikTok is unique. It only became available outside of China in the latter half of 2018 and yet, in a staggeringly short space of time, has amassed over one billion users. In 2020 it was the most downloaded app of the year whilst also the subject of a geopolitical tussle between the US and China.[76] It's not an exaggeration to say that TikTok has had to grow up fast. The platform has undoubtedly encountered challenges in designing and enacting policies that complement and protect the user experience without stymying user growth or risking the over-censorship of legitimate speech — an obvious priority for any platform, but even more so for TikTok, since its ties to China means that it faces persistent questioning over the potential for state influence on the platform.[77, 78]

TikTok has taken steps to acknowledge these challenges through initiatives including its "Content Advisory Councils" in the US, Europe and Asia. These are intended to provide "subject matter expertise and advise on TikTok's content moderation policies and practices to help shape regional and global guidelines."[79] Since the end of 2019, TikTok has released five transparency reports, featuring insights into its efforts to remove content that violates its community guidelines. It has opened a global "Transparency and Accountability Center" in Los Angeles, with another planned for Dublin, Ireland, where people will have the opportunity to review content moderation and data security processes.[80]

By and large, the platform's policies are comprehensive and wide-ranging in their consideration of objectionable and offensive activity, contain nuanced understandings of the nature of online speech and clearly highlight that TikTok has learned from the lessons of older, more established social media platforms in dealing with problematic content.

And yet, as highlighted in this report, there is clearly a considerable enforcement gap in the platform's application of these policies. Policies are only as good as their application, and that application is currently lacking in accuracy, consistency and transparency. Furthermore, our research suggests the powerful algorithmic systems of the app serve to further amplify and promote content that remains on the platform, despite violating terms of service. The recommendations below suggest routes forward to prevent the further exploitation of TikTok by extremists and those seeking to spread hate, both for the platform itself and for other stakeholders with the power to make a difference.

Policy Recommendations

Policies and Enforcement

Removal of terrorist content from the platform. TikTok's community guidelines explicitly state that users are prohibited from posting, uploading, streaming or sharing content that glorifies "dangerous individuals or organisations" or their hateful ideologies. Terrorist individuals and organisations fall under this classification, according to TikTok, who describe them as "non-state actors" that threaten or use violence or "serious crimes (such as crimes against humanity) against civilian populations in pursuit of political, religious, ethnic, or ideological objectives". Preventing the posting, promotion or glorification of terrorists, in all forms, must be a top priority and is a basic requirement for content moderation on all platforms, yet this research showed that a significant amount of such content is still allowed to be posted. TikTok must prioritise the robust, accurate and systemic enforcement of these policies to limit the spread of such material across its ecosystem.

Definitional clarity for policies about extremist individuals and groups. TikTok's community guidelines include a number of provisions aimed at targeting "violent extremism", which includes specific definitions of terrorism and "organised hate", refering to individuals or groups that "attack people based on protected characteristics". In this context, attacks are defined as "actions that incite violence or hatred, dehumanize individuals or groups, or embrace a hateful ideology". In theory, this suggests a category of illicit content that goes beyond a narrowly defined conception of extremism defined in terms of violence and terrorism, and TikTok claims to consider cross-platform and offline information to identify violent *and* extremist individuals. But it is currently unclear exactly how extremism is defined by the platform, and what constitutes a hateful ideology. Does TikTok for example clamp down on political figures that promote and practice fascistic ideologies, who might not explicitly call for violence?

Our research suggests major loopholes in how such challenges are defined or how they are enforced. TikTok must provide a clear and proportionate definition of extremism in their terms of service — one that takes into account the complex nature of post-organisational extremist movements online, which often forgo traditional membership and branding structures. This is a prerequisite to effectively restricting the glorification and support for harmful individuals and groups on the platform, along with related propaganda or promotional materials.

Enforcement of policies around hate speech and promotion of protected attributes. Slurs, racist terms and veiled hateful references that attack people based on their protected attributes are popular among extremist and hateful creators on TikTok, despite being in direct violation of the platform's existing policies. TikTok must work to comprehensively enforce its policies around hate speech and widen its understanding of how creators on the platform use profile features or non-visual and non-text elements of TikTok videos to promote hatred against groups and individuals based on their protected characteristics. TikTok must work with affected communities to better incorporate their experiences of abuse and hatred on the platform into the platform's decision-making, policy formulation and content moderation training.

Language gaps in content moderation. Across a range of online harms, there is evidence of language gaps in content moderation design and enforcement. English-language content and users receive disproportionate attention and automated recommendations are worse for non-English speaking users. This research captured content that includes Spanish-language terms promoting ISIS and widespread denial of the Bosnian genocide and slurs aimed at Bosnian Muslims posted

in Serbian. These examples highlight gaps in TikTok's efforts to moderate non-English content effectively. TikTok says they now employ over 10,000 content moderators worldwide in centers in places like San Francisco, Singapore and Dublin, but this research suggests that adequate resources to enforce content moderation policies universally, appropriately and consistently are still required.[81]

Products and Risk

Understanding how profiles spread hatred. This report detailed how extremist TikTok creators use features of their profile to promote hatred, endorse extremists or signal their support for extremist ideologies to like-minded users on the platform. Veiled references are included in profile images, explicit terms are featured in profile biographies or hateful slurs are literally spelled out in usernames or video grid layouts on profiles. TikTok must improve its understanding of how extremist creators use every aspect of their profiles to spread hatred on the platform and design policies or procedures that will limit such activity.

Evolve policies beyond narrow hashtag bans. This research has shown how alternative spellings or similar words are used by extremist creators to evade banned hashtags, demonstrating that hateful actors on TikTok are aware of and skilled in evading the platform's efforts to limit the spread of violating content. TikTok must consider the efficacy of blanket hashtag bans with this in mind, developing clear policies that include alternative spellings, similar words and deliberately misspelled terms related to the original violating content. This will require that the company develop a deeper understanding of the evolving tactics and terminology of extremist and hate groups instead of a simplistic application of single-term hashtag bans.

Permanently mute disabled audio. TikTok has the power to disable the audio of videos that violate their community guidelines or infringe on copyright laws. Yet, in this research, ISD discovered evidence that when such videos are downloaded off the platform, the audio is still attached to the file and can still be played, meaning potentially hateful or extremist audio can be saved and shared. TikTok should permanently mute and disable audio on videos deemed to be in violation of their guidelines in all formats.

Safety by design. Even where social media platforms take up large-scale efforts to moderate content on their services, platforms and products continue to pose risks to user safety online. Products that are built to retain attention and achieve online engagement can have negative side effects for users, including an innate risk of exposure to sensationalist content that grabs attention, which can often include harmful or dangerous content, as well as a lack of access to accurate information. Efforts to counter hateful and extremist content online should focus as much on the channels of distribution as the nature of content itself. This will rely on democratic governments designing and enforcing risk mitigation requirements through regulation of technology platforms.

A systemic approach to such regulation would see regulators compel online platforms like TikTok to move towards 'safety by design' and to encourage proactive consideration of potential risks to users or negative societal externalities that could arise from the use of their products or services. Safety by design regulation must include risk assessment and risk mitigation obligations for large online services, as has been suggested in the Digital Services Act proposals from the European Commission. Such proposals should take into account ways to monitor and respond to the outcomes of algorithmic decision-making on platforms. They must also encourage risk mitigation steps, so that platforms are prompted to consider risks at the earliest stages of product and policy development and to take appropriate actions to reduce the risk of harm from the outset.

Transparency

Prioritise data access for researchers. TikTok's API is severely limited in the data it provides to researchers or the public. The content discovery and analysis for the 1,030 videos analysed in this study was completed manually, both to comply with TikTok's Terms of Service and due to the lack of tools available to effectively research content on the platform at scale. Online platforms should establish, maintain, and where possible, expand, the data available via their API, with all necessary privacy protections in mind. This means that all functions and content on the platform that is public should be made computationally accessible and transparent.

A gold standard API should include: all content circulating in a public space, searchable by identifiers; all images, videos and other content in a machine-readable format; search functionality by text, by author or by date range; live and historical data; and an ability to download a week's worth of data in less than six hours and a day's worth of data in less than one hour. Where companies are unwilling to provide such information voluntarily, democratic governments should explore responsible and rights-compliant routes to enforce the provision of privacy-protecting data from social media companies to researchers via regulation.

Educate users and researchers about the algorithm. TikTok's algorithms are central to the user experience on the platform. They provide users with a feed of content curated specifically for them, based on their use of the platform. They also have the power to promote content from creators and help them go viral. Research and investigations continue to shed light on how TikTok's AI makes these decisions for users, but very little is known about how the algorithm elevates hateful or extremist content.[82] Despite TikTok's stated dedication to providing details around its algorithm to the public, there is a clear need for the company to provide still greater transparency. This might include the relevant weighting of different criteria determining algorithmic outputs and the processes, rules and human oversight of algorithmic systems in place at the company.

A number of initiatives, including the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism and the Christchurch Call, have laid out proposals to encourage joint work between technology companies, civil society and governments to better understand the impact of algorithms on user journeys relating to terrorism and extremism. ISD contributed to the recommendations from these initiatives, which include calls to build out public-private data-sharing collaborations "to sample from the outputs of an algorithm without having access to the underlying software or training data".[83, 84] Where possible, TikTok should engage in such efforts to enhance transparency of the outcomes of its product design.

Guided by the overarching principle of transparency, regulators and researchers need effective means to understand the policies, processes and outcomes of algorithmic systems, to help shed light on the underlying architectural features of platforms that might drive users towards conspiratorial, hateful or extremist content. Regulators and researchers need to develop the means to test the algorithms and undertake inspections. A robust algorithm inspection requires detailed evidence on what platforms' policies define as harmful content and what are the criteria for intervention, documentation around the processes by how harmful content is flagged and how guidelines are created and refined, and finally, the outcome of these policies, including data on platform metrics to enable further analysis on the impact of these processes and practices.

Transparency around content moderation. Due to extenuating circumstances brought on by COVID-19, TikTok's planned opening of its Los Angeles Transparency and Accountability Center has been delayed and only virtual tours have been granted to date. (ref) TikTok has also released five Transparency Reports since 2019 detailing how it enforces its Community Guidelines. These reports typically feature statistics on the quantity and percentage of content removed over a period of time as they relate to each category in the guidelines and insights on the processes and decision-making behind these actions. Within each category, the reports do not publicly include information on the nature of content removed, leading to a blindspot for researchers interested in the various areas of online threat. These would make for an obvious addition to future reports and transparency efforts. In cases when extremely violent or graphic content slips through TikTok's AI filters and remain live on the platform for months, such as Christchurch or ISIS footage discovered in this research, TikTok would benefit from explaining how their systems failed to catch this content and explain what steps it will take to prevent this from happening again.

Content moderation must always be conducted with reference to clear and well-defined policies, with explanations available to users for any actions applied to their profiles or content, including opportunities for appeal and redress. Without sufficient safeguards and human review, content moderation risks removing content that does not violate terms of service. Where technology companies are unwilling to provide such transparency voluntarily, democratic governments should explore proportionate and responsible regulation that can mandate transparency in content moderation processes, policies and outcomes from social media platforms.

Activities and Partnerships

Incorporate extremism expertise into partnerships. Throughout its Content Advisory Councils in the US, Europe and Asia, TikTok liaises with experts and organisations who specialise in minor safety, anti-bullying groups, cybersafety and mental health professionals, which are all a positive sign of TikTok's efforts to make its platform a safe space. Yet, across these same boards, there appear to be no professionals or organisations whose area of expertise relates to extremism, terrorism or violent and hateful ideologies. TikTok should seek to add such voices to these partnerships, thereby ensuring issues like white supremacy, violent extremism or genocide denial remain front and centre in its efforts to make TikTok safe. The linguistic, cultural and geographic scope of those Councils should be expanded to ensure that concerns and expertise from global communities are included in the company's considerations on threats, policy and enforcement.

Working with other social platforms. Questions remain over TikTok's partnerships with other social platforms and technology companies as it relates to violent, graphic or terrorist content. News reports in November 2019 stated that TikTok has sought to join the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, but it was not granted membership because it does not meet GIFCT's criteria.[85] Then, in September 2020, TikTok proposed its own global coalition and stated that it sent letters to social and content platforms proposing a Memorandum of Understanding encouraging companies to warn one another of such violent, graphic content on their platforms via digital hashes.[86] The status of this proposal is unclear. Partnerships between companies can help to recognise and react to known terrorist threats more quickly than otherwise possible, and reflect the cross-platform nature of online threats. However, any such effort should be transparent and clearly defined, making the objectives, processes and outcomes of such collaboration clear from the outset, with opportunities for auditing and evaluation by independent experts from civil society and the research community.

Appendix A – Codebook

Bold questions were OPTIONAL to answer
Regular questions were MANDATORY to answer

Question	Instructions	List of options
Video URL	Input URL of the TikTok video	
ACCOUNT: Does any of the account's profile features contain a reference to hateful or extremist ideology/activist?	Choose answer from list of 5 options. (If none, leave blank. If more than one, note them in Description field)	Profile image, Username, Nickname, Profile biography, More than one - see description
ACCOUNT: Description (if required)	Add a short description if necessary	
POST: Date video was posted	US date format, per TikTok format	
POST: Caption used, including hashtags	Direct copy & paste from the post	
VIDEO: Number of views	Direct copy & paste from source code for "playCount"	
VIDEO: Duration (in seconds)	Direct copy & paste from source code for "duration":	
SOUND: Enter name of Sound. (If it's an "Original Sound" by video Creator, then "OS" is fine)	Enter "OS" if "original sound" by Creator or enter Sound name if Sound is listed/ linked. If Sound is titled as "original sound", but Sound can be identifed, include name in [Band], [Song] format	
SOUND: Description (if required)	Add a short description if necessary. For example, sometimes a sound will be named "original sound" but feature music from a popular Sound, like MGMT's Little Dark Age.	
SOUND: URL (if required)	Only necessary if Sound is used widely and has its own live page on TikTok	
POST: Number of Likes	Direct copy & paste from the post	
POST: Number of Comments	Direct copy & paste from the post	
POST: Number of Shares	Direct copy & paste from the post	
POST: The post potentially violates a Community Guideline related to:	Choose answer from list of 6 options (taken from TikTok's Community Guidelines)	Threats or incitement towards violence, Dangerous individual or organisations, Attacks on the basis of protected attributes, Slurs based on protected attributes, Hateful ideology (incl. symbols & claims of supremacy), Other (weapons or drugs)

Bold questions were OPTIONAL to answer
Regular questions were MANDATORY to answer

Question	Instructions	List of options
POST: Content (video, caption or comments) expresses or promotes hate, division, hostility, violence or extremism by posting/hosting content that is:	Choose answer from list of 12 options for the PRIMARY form of hate in video. (Categories developed based on previous ISD research)	Anti-Black, Anti-LGBTQ, Misogynist, Promoting white supremacy, Anti-Semitic, Anti-Muslim, Anti-Asian, Anti-migrant/ refugee, Terrorism footage, Glorifies an extremist person/group/viewpoint (modern/historic), Features extremist symbols in propaganda/embedded in normal media, Uses COVID conspiracies/ misinformation to attack/threaten/ stigmatise a person or group of people
POST: If required, choose a second category for the same question	Choose another if needed	Same as above
POST: If required, choose a third category for the same question	Choose another if needed	Same as above
POST: (Leave blank/write in accepted) Content potentially uses a Filter/ Editing effect, such as:	Choose answer from list of 6 options	Duet, Stitch, Green Screen, 3D/Slow Zoom, Vintage/Retro, Face Morph/Shapeshifting
POST: Short description of content:	Include a short description of the video content and explain, if necessary, how the content is framed or contextual to the caption/account, other relevant details.	
EXTREMISM: Does the content/ activity/account display any support for a terrorist or extremist individual/ incident/organistion?	Choose answer from list of 3 options	Yes, No, Unclear

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