

Caliphate protests in Hamburg: What is Muslim Interactive?

From [Deutsche Welle](#)

It's estimated that some 1,000 people gathered at Hamburg's popular street Steindamm late April, following a call to protests by an organization called Muslim Interactive (MI). Some demonstrators chanted "God is great," and held up signs that read "caliphate is the solution," and "Germany = a dictatorship of values."



Public outcry was quick to follow, with many [calling for the organization to be banned](#). A second demonstration is this weekend.

Necla Kelek is a sociologist and head of the Secular Islam Initiative, which is based in Hamburg. She said that she, like many others, had been surprised by the sudden demonstration

that MI organized. . . . “This is a group that organizes itself through social media, such as TikTok,” she told DW. “That makes it all the more dangerous. At least a mosque would give people a place to go and ask questions.”

Germany’s domestic intelligence authorities have been observing the MI group. Hamburg’s security authorities have listed the organization in recent reports. Founded in 2020, authorities believe the group is affiliated with the Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT) organization, which was banned in 2003 after promoting violence and the killing of Jewish people. Following the ban, authorities report that “informal HuT networks” came into being, including the MI group. German security services believe the groups Generation Islam and Reality Islam are also associated with HuT.

Security authorities classify MI as extremist. The group calls for a worldwide caliphate, which rejects the democratic order enshrined in Germany’s Basic Law.

“This is a genuinely political program being rolled out, based on Islam and Sharia law,” Andreas Jacobs, head of the division for societal cohesion at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, told DW. “Put delicately, this is a revolutionary political movement pursuing a fundamental upheaval of the ruling order, not only in the Muslim world, but worldwide.”

The MI group has over 20,000 followers on TikTok. The videos it posts are professional, and portray prominent movement leaders as modern and eloquent. They conduct street surveys to suggest close ties with the Muslim community.

The strategy seems to be working: The German news portal t-online.de published an article in which an anonymous teacher spoke of how MI leaders were celebrated like pop stars, and how his students were eager to join demonstrations just to meet their “heroes.” . . . At the same time, it portrays Muslims as a minority that are discriminated against and ostracized

from society – even more so since the Hamas-led attack in Israel on October 7, 2023,

Navid Wali from the nonprofit organization Violence Prevention Network, which combats political extremism, told DW that the language MI and similar organizations employ has become sharper in recent months.

Wali believes MI is something like a political sect. Its videos are all in German, and the content is usually broken into short analytical segments. “Muslim Interactive is geared toward students, academics even,” he said. “But the movement isn’t primarily focused on gathering more followers as much as it is seeking to become as widely known as possible. Its plans can later be enacted by a small circle of insiders,”

Jacobs and Wali agree that it would be strategically unwise for MI to take to the streets again, and thereby possibly provoke fresh calls for the group to be banned. “But from a legal standpoint, the group has positioned itself well,” Wali said. “I believe we wouldn’t see any extremism at the next protest. The group is more interested in attracting attention.”

At the first demonstration in late April, demonstrators were seen wearing sweaters depicting the outline of the state of Israel, with the word “caliphate” written across it. Wali does not expect to see similar provocations at the upcoming demonstration that has been announced.

Wali is concerned that banning MI would play into the victim narrative the organization propagates.

“In that case, we’d probably have to explain to the youth we work with that it’s not about banning Muslim life altogether,” the educator said. “Instead of a ban, it would be better to show young people alternatives for how Muslim life might look like in Germany.”

The Middle East expert Jacobs was critical about the overall lack of knowledge about groups such as Muslim Interactive. "So far there is little systemic inquiry into groups like this – their size, an analysis of their video platforms, links to messages by Hizb ut-Tahrir," he said. "Compared to other Islamist groupings, this is still in its infancy."

He believes banning the organization would have a number of benefits. "First of all, it would send an important message, and secondly, it would buy security agencies some time to take a closer look at its structures and consider how to deal with replacement organizations."

Kelek told DW that so far, there are no counter-protests planned this weekend. Now that civil society had sent its message, she said, it was time for politics to take action. *I think that's a little naive.*

This article was originally published in German.