PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF WOMEN, GENDER, & VIOLENT EXTREMISM

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Introduction

Policymakers, practitioners, and scholars are increasingly aware of women's participation in terrorist and violent extremist groups; this affects how members of the international community attempt to mitigate risks tied to these threats. Growing concerns about women's interactions with groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Boko Haram appear to have instigated this shift, despite a long and dynamic history of women's participation in terrorism, violent extremism, and insurgencies around the world. Although the intersection of women, gender, and terrorism recently became a higher priority to stakeholders tasked with addressing these threats, international organizations, governments, and civil society groups are still grappling with what it means to pursue this multifaceted agenda.[1] This paper series adds to a small but growing body of research on the topic and highlights some considerations regarding the future of women, gender, and violent extremism.[2]

Before exploring how matters concerning women, gender, and violent extremism intermingle, it is essential to contextualize terminology and to situate this series within the broader discussion of conflict and security. A wide range of analyses examines how sex and gender intersect with political violence and peace.[3] Terrorism, violent extremism, and responses to these challenges represent a small segment of the broader conversation. In the discussion that follows, gender pertains to "how women, men, and nonbinary persons act according to feminine, masculine, or fluid expectations of men and women."[4] Since factors such as culture, personal preference, and time shape conceptions of gender, it is dynamic and highly context-specific.[5] To complicate matters more, "terrorism," "violent extremism," and "extremism," as well as the policies made to address them, are prone to semantic ambiguity. Instead of attempting to pin down elusive terminology, this series embraces the imprecision of these terms to allow the editor and contributors to pull from a more extensive body of research and present a range of perspectives. While imperfect, the priority of this series is to confront the countless ways gender weaves into these challenges and vice-versa.

To lay the groundwork for this series, it is important to emphasize that matters concerning the links between women, gender, terrorism, and violent extremism are a relatively recent endeavor in the field of national and international security.[6] Historically, five main barriers have constricted the field's recognition of these links. First, while women's participation in violent political movements is not unique to the twenty-first century, documentation of group membership, specifically women's involvement, remains inconsistent and unreliable.[7] Second, although there is a propensity to cast individuals as either victims or perpetrators of terrorism and violent extremism, these experiences are not necessarily mutually exclusive.[8] Third, the emphasis on combatants and attackers within much of the academic literature eclipses the non-violent contributions of many participants, especially women, but also men and minors. Fourth, research circles devote disproportionate attention to select conflicts and demographics, which leaves other conflicts understudied. Fifth, Western perspectives and stereotypes dominate discourse on the topic, drowning out a range of alternative assessments of matters concerning sex, gender, and violent extremism.[9] Ultimately, since these barriers make data on men and women's participation difficult to trust, trace, and interpret, it is unsurprising that the security community insufficiently integrates dimensions of gender in contemporary policies. In sum, these challenges make it difficult to learn from the past to inform efforts to cope with the present and prepare for the future.

Today, these barriers endure because latent misconceptions about gender and violent extremism oversimplify complex movements and trends. By dividing experiences into black and white, the security community struggles to see shades of gray. For example, appraisals tend to entangle an individual's motives for participation with the role an individual assumes, without weighing the different opportunities afforded to men and women in violent extremism. To date, there is still "little to no evidence that male and female terrorists are fundamentally different in terms of their recruitment, motivation, ideological fervor, and brutality,"[10] even if there are slight variances from case to case.[11] Validating these claims, a range of scholars note that women's and men's motives for participation in terrorism and violent extremism appear similar.[12] While individual reasons for participation do not vary significantly by gender, men and women's opportunities to serve in select roles are not always equal. Terrorist and violent extremist groups selectively delineate appropriate roles for their members, particularly based on factors like gender and age. Even when organizations draw parameters for engagement, they are not always static, clear-cut, or enforced.[13] One analysis poignantly notes that "while violence and violent actors are easily visible, the norms permitting violence… are less apparent."[14] Whether male or female, the factors shaping an individual's interactions and role within violent extremist movements tend to derive from organizational, ideological, religious, cultural, personal, and logistical considerations. Gender is one dimension that crosscuts all of these factors, touching processes from radicalization and recruitment to detection, disruption, and demobilization.

Despite these nuances, challenges arise as latent gender stereotypes tint contemporary perceptions of women in terrorism and violent extremism. For example, a range of analyses finds that portrayals of women in terrorism tend to be misleading, reductive, and often emphasize personal reasons for participation.[15] Conversely, although little research discusses media portrayals of men in terrorism,[16] men's motives are conventionally assumed to be political rather than personal.[17] If gendered stereotypes like these inform perceptions of the threats posed by violent extremists, additional risks may arise when policymakers and practitioners inadvertently translate misguided views into policies and legal responses.[18] This dynamic is detrimental to security, stability, and human rights for myriad reasons.

As one example, gender stereotypes can weaken security by creating strategic, operational, and tactical benefits for terrorist and violent extremist groups that integrate women. Some analysts posit that since "women are not considered credible or likely perpetrators of terrorist violence, they can more easily carry out attacks and assist their organizations."[19] Scholars believe the practice of recruiting women is spreading as terrorist and violent extremist organizations embrace the "potential of women" members, who better circumvent detection by authorities,[20] but eventually garner more media attention for their actions.[21] In other words, if the opportunity exists, terrorist groups can "exploit gender stereotypes and cultural clichés to their advantage."[22] In some cases, researchers note that women aligned with terrorist groups also appear to leverage gender dynamics for their benefit by claiming ignorance in an attempt to minimize their culpability.[23] Others indicate that extremist groups strategically leverage gender in communications and information operations to mobilize members.[24] Ultimately, creating security gaps is just one of many ways misconceptions about women and gender hinder efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism.

In addition, misinformed perceptions can negatively influence formal responses to terrorism and violent extremism. When officials view men and women adherents as distinct threats bearing different degrees of risk, such perceptions may translate into flawed policy design or implementation. In a preliminary assessment of how gender affects the treatment of terrorists, for

example, one study notes that "from arrest to sentencing to post-conflict reintegration and disarmament programming, evidence suggests that governments tend to be less responsive to women in terrorism" compared to men.[25] Some data show that terrorism-related offenders who are women "are less likely to be arrested, less likely to be convicted, and receive more lenient sentences compared to men."[26] Women, like men, are not monolithic in the ways they contribute to terrorist and violent extremist groups.[27] Consequently, it is vital for justice systems and counter-extremism programs to push against stereotypes and recognize the spectrum of agents who support terrorist and violent extremist groups. Doing so can improve the state's abilities to cope with the range of circumstances that arise from conflict, including stereotype-defying cases where men serve in support roles or women more actively facilitate or perpetrate violence.

Assumptions about gender and political violence are not unique to the study of terrorism, and it is useful to discuss how these premises play out in other security arenas.[28] Beyond the criminal justice system, these factors influence counter-insurgency strategies and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programming. Research on the national DDR program in Sierra Leone, for instance, finds that the effort was "effective in reaching out to male combatants," but ultimately, "women and children were underserved."[29] As an initial condition for entry into the program, individuals had to surrender a weapon and sometimes demonstrate their ability to disassemble and reassemble a gun.[30] While disproportionately affecting women and minors, this standard likely excluded a wide array of people who served as combatants without owning a weapon, as well as those who assumed auxiliary roles such as care providers, facilitators, and spies.[31] Even though the program eventually afforded limited opportunities for "wives" to participate in its final phase, women still faced overwhelming barriers to entry.[32] As demonstrated by the case of Sierra Leone, among others, state-led responses to political violence that chronically fail to see gender as a serious dimension of the conflict are inadequate for security, stability, and post-conflict reintegration.[33]

While perhaps overly optimistic, increasing awareness of the gap between assumptions and reality may help calibrate responses to terrorism and violent extremism. Evolving discourse among policymakers, practitioners, and scholars on how to gender DDR programming, for example, offers some hope to the overlapping community of stakeholders working to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism. Comparatively, the research, analyses, and recommendations concerning DDR programs benefit from more time, experience, and opportunities to reflect on missteps and failure. In many ways, the body of literature on the DDR process offers a greater number of nuanced perspectives on the importance of addressing gender dynamics beyond sex, like masculinity and femininity.[34] Even though the focus of DDR is largely on the post-conflict phase, research on these initiatives may help flag more context-specific, tailored ways to gender counter-terrorism and P/CVE efforts.

Over the last ten years, the international community's thinking on the role of women and gender in terrorism and counterterrorism changed in significant ways.[35] Today, experts note that entities like international organizations and states broadly "know they have to gender their counter-terrorism and P/CVE approaches, [but] there is very little idea of what this actually means in practice."[36] While likely unintentional, this often results in policy measures that synonymize "women" and "gender," and subsequently try to gender approaches to counter-terrorism and P/CVE by integrating women as part of the process.[37] This logic leads to an "oversimplified and instrumental strategy to just 'add women and stir.'"[38] While it is necessary for women to participate in the counter-terrorism and P/CVE agenda, there is no consensus that this approach is a sufficient

or productive way to gender policy design and implementation. Some critics argue that integrating women in counter-terrorism and P/CVE efforts is a facile approach to gender mainstreaming.[39] Others suggest that the approach of leveraging women to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism rests on a lack of evidence and enduring assumptions that women are more peaceful than men.[40] These points, among others, highlight the complexity of the challenges facing stakeholders tasked with addressing the intersection of gender, terrorism, and violent extremism.

Although there is not complete agreement within the field on what should be done, who should do it and how, this lack of consensus may actually improve decision-making. Evidence-based perspectives hailing from different vantage points serve as a critical strength to policy design and implementation in different regions, nations, communities, and networks around the world. Diverse perspectives may help hold governments accountable for balancing priorities like international law, national security, human rights, and gender equality. Ultimately, if gender, terrorism, and violent extremism are relatively context-specific and dynamic phenomena, perhaps approaches to these threats might benefit from adopting some of the same characteristics. It is crucial to see the challenge of integrating gender into counter-terrorism and P/CVE strategies as a work-in-progress designed to enhance mission effectiveness while practicing good governance.

Since matters concerning women, gender, and violent extremism warrant further study, this series adds to the slight but meaningful body of evidence-driven policy work by experts and leaders in the field.[41] The contributors to this series navigate their respective topics in nuanced and purposeful ways. In the first essay, Sara Mahmood shows that viewing violent extremism through a gendered lens hinders practical understanding of people's contributions to violent extremist organizations, and weakens effective policymaking in Indonesia and Pakistan. Turning to mobilization trends in the Western Balkans, Vesë Kelmendi highlights the effects of regional dynamics on women with ties to the conflict in Iraq and Syria, and advocates for context-specific approaches to prevent and counter involvement in violent extremism. Next, Julia Ebner and Jacob Davey posit that while many far-right militant movements in North America and Western Europe remain predominantly comprised of men, the landscape is transforming as women take more responsibility for spreading messages across the spectrum of worldviews that comprise the international far-right. Lastly, Devorah Margolin explores how violent Islamist groups struggle to find consensus on the appropriate roles for women within their ranks, particularly during times of duress. While still directing much of the conversation towards women and their experiences with different organizations, these papers take a more holistic approach in highlighting the various ways in which dimensions of gender affect organizations. A better comprehension of these trends helps policymakers and practitioners anticipate new and evolving threats concerning women, gender, and violent extremism.

By investigating key knowledge gaps and learning from the past to prepare for the future, cross-cutting, evidence-based analyses can help inform responses to emerging challenges. As a research product that is meant to engage a range of stakeholders, particularly those tasked with preventing and countering violent extremism, this series is designed to stimulate thinking and discussion among policymakers, practitioners, and scholars alike. While the collection of papers undoubtedly demonstrates that women make dynamic contributions to their respective movements, it also works to integrate additional perspectives on how gender dimensions affect violent extremism and responses to violent extremism.

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Negating Stereotypes: Women, Gender, and Terrorism in Indonesia and Pakistan

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Introduction

Although research on women's involvement in Islamist terrorism and violent extremism experienced a rise in attention since the declaration of the self-proclaimed Islamic State in 2014, it remains dominated by Western case studies. As such, literature and policy debates on women's participation in terrorism in parts of South and Southeast Asia remain limited. In Indonesia and Pakistan, androcentric perspectives and women as a minority in numbers within Islamist terrorist groups contributed towards perceptions of women's participation as an anomaly, rather than the norm. This paper discusses how gendered assumptions regarding masculinity and femininity influence women's recruitment, roles, and motivations in terrorism. It aims to counter the gendered assumptions and challenge stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity during conflict through case studies from the terrorist landscape in Indonesia and Pakistan. Islamist terrorist groups in Indonesia and Pakistan are increasingly recruiting women in various capacities. Multiple studies establish the importance of women in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in the South and Southeast Asian context, and yet, they are marginalized within these programs. In this regard, gendered assumptions from states and policymakers continue to underestimate the capabilities of women as violent actors in terrorism, hindering the effectiveness of P/CVE programs and curbing the implementation of holistic policies that encapsulate women as violent and non-violent actors. By examining the cases of Indonesia and Pakistan, this paper moves beyond a static perspective of women as victims and men as perpetrators, and towards promoting gender-inclusive policy responses and increasing the efficacy of existing programs.

Background of Terrorism in Indonesia & Pakistan

Indonesia

Indonesia faces a threat from Islamist extremist groups, whose origins can be traced to Darul Islam, an insurgent movement that sought to impose Islamic law and eventually led to the creation of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in 1993.[1] During the rise of Al-Qaeda, JI was the most significant terrorist group in Indonesia and responsible for the 2002 Bali bombings, which killed more than 200 people. A splinter group of JI continued to engage in violence until the leader of the group, Noordin Muhammad Top, was killed in 2009.[2] By 2011, the Indonesian authorities determined that JI had largely been defeated, as significant segments of its membership were either killed or incarcerated.[3] In 2014, a few JI members, including Aman Abdurrahman[4] and four of his supporters attempted to bring together all pro-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS) organizations in

the country and formed Ansharut Dawlah Indonesia (ADI), which later became Jamaah Ansharut Dawlah (JAD).[5] JAD represents the most violent group in the country, as it is currently coupled with other smaller IS-linked networks.[6]

Pakistan

The Islamist terrorist threat in Pakistan today, and its links to al-Qaeda and the Taliban, traces back to the Soviet-Afghan war and Afghan jihad.[7] Formed in 2007, the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has been one of the major threat groups with links to Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban. Sectarian terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and groups advocating for separation of Indian Administered Jammu & Kashmir from India such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT, now Jamaat-ud-Dawa) have also been involved in violence.[8] Other operationally strong terrorist groups include TTP's breakaway faction, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), and IS-linked Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Alami (LeJ-A).[9] In addition, independent IS cells and networks engaging in recruitment and planning attacks have also been reported since the rise of IS in 2014.[10]

In Indonesia and Pakistan, many of these local terrorist groups, regardless of their affiliations with Al-Qaeda or IS, have sought the creation of an 'Islamic State' or enforcement of 'Shariah' (Islamic law). In the past, these groups relied more on traditional bonds, like kinship, and physical networks to recruit new members.[11] The current wave of international terrorism is broadly underscored by online recruitment, whereas local groups are pairing old recruitment methods with manipulation of the online domain. As such, in both countries, radicalization through social media has reduced the barriers to entry within these organizations. It is essential to distinguish between the enablers of radicalization (social media, physical networks) and the motivations for radicalization (socio-economic background, personal experiences, religious beliefs, and political factors). Each of these groups seeks to recruit women in different capacities, yet the security agencies and policymakers continue to leverage an androcentric approach to respond to the threat.[12]

Masculinity and Femininity in Violent Extremism

Conceptions of gender are overwhelmingly contextual. In that sense, masculinity and femininity are not absolute, but vary across cultures, societies, and time.[13] Yet during periods of political violence and conflict, specific roles for men and women are discernable. In studies on political violence, masculinity is highly militarized and linked to violence, while being dependent on constructions of femininity that are non-violent, "supportive and complementary."[14] As such, men are largely engaged as fighters and protectors of women and children, while women assume roles of the "heroic housewife," "sacrificial mother" and "loving wife."[15] Femininity during violent conflict subscribes women to auxiliary roles, where women are classified as victims rather than initiators.[16] They are not traditionally seen as perpetrators of violence and instead need to be protected by the "gallant" and "naturally violence-oriented" men.[17] Here, femininity also strongly correlates to women's biological capability to give birth, implying that they are largely life-givers as opposed to life-takers.

The narratives on masculine and feminine roles are dictated by patriarchy, hypermasculinity and cultures of misogyny in violent extremist organizations.[18] This is also evident in the structure of Islamist terrorist groups in Indonesia and Pakistan – males make up the majority of those mobilized

to fight. It is worth mentioning that this paper will not deconstruct notions of masculinity and how they affect the radicalization of men within terrorist groups. Since gendered assumptions of both masculinity and femininity are interdependent, one reinforces the other. Thus, detailing the general roles and expectations from men within these groups allows for a better understanding of women's roles and radicalization processes.

In the context of Islamist terrorism, the role of men encapsulates participation in violent jihad to *defend* the ideology or goals of their organizations, while the women's part is to take up a supportive position by *assisting the men in defending* and facilitating violence through supplementary functions.[19] Broadly, the rigidity of masculinity as violent and femininity as non-violent in terrorism contributes to three key misperceptions regarding women's involvement in terrorism in Indonesia and Pakistan. First, the assumption that men are assigned to violence-based roles while women's roles are non-violent is deemed to be absolute and unchanging. Second, women are constructed as secondary actors or recruits due to their presumably non-violent nature in a violent group. This logic correlates to the idea of women's irrelevance to the broader functioning of the group as they represent a fraction of the overall membership. Third, women's motivations are cast as personal and gendered. For instance, men are believed to join extremist groups for political reasons, while women's participation is linked to personal (feminine) reasons. These key misperceptions are challenged through discussing the diversity in roles, recruitment logic, and motivations of women in violent extremism in both Pakistan and Indonesia below.

    (i)   *Women in Non-Violent and Violent Roles*

Masculine and feminine divisions conventionally place both gender identities in categorically different roles based on stereotypical interpretations of their strengths. In both countries, women's roles in terrorism are predominantly confined to the private sphere as mothers, daughters, and wives. Despite the traditional division, women's roles are not static as they continue to evolve with the emergence of new groups and challenges. In addition, they are assigned critical roles in the public sphere as financiers, propagandists, and recruiters. Women showcase their potential to serve in violent roles (as fighters or suicide bombers) at lower rates than men.[20] Security agencies and policymakers still perceive women in combat roles as a complete anomaly and exception rather than the norm.

David Cook discusses the acceptability and prevalence of women waging jihad in Islamist terrorist groups and establishes that women are more visible as suicide bombers in more secular contexts (Chechnya and Palestine).[21] Nelly Lahoud analyzes how the ideology of Islamist terrorist groups traditionally excluded women from combat roles, even though the classical doctrine of jihad urges all Muslims, including men, women, and children to fight and defend their religion.[22] Even within Islamist terrorism, more pronounced changes to these narratives concerning femininity and non-violence were witnessed after the rise of IS in 2014, where women were explicitly called on to become suicide bombers and contribute to 'building the caliphate.' As such, with the rise of IS, tactical considerations and women's attempt to renegotiate their roles have surpassed ideological justifications for women's non-violence in Indonesia and Pakistan as Muslim majority countries. Historically, women mostly contributed within feminine (non-violent) capacities, but there is a somewhat contentious yet growing permissibility for their involvement in fighting.

In Pakistan, women's involvement in terrorism can be traced across three waves – from the Afghan jihad (1980s) to the Kashmir jihad and formation of the TTP (2000s) and now IS-linked groups. During the Afghan jihad, women provided logistic and financial support to the mujahideen and were usually confined to the private sphere.[23] After the formation of the TTP, women's roles became more diversified as Mullah Fazlullah (then emir of the TTP) focused on women as an active support base through his radio broadcasts in the Swat region.[24] Fazlullah urged women to support the group by selling their jewelry to raise funds for the organization. In other roles, women made suicide jackets for men, acted as informants, and raised funds for the group's operations.[25] Some terrorist groups still exclusively tapped into traditional 'feminine roles.' For example, Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD, previously known as Lashkar-e-Taiba) heavily relied on women's roles as mothers and wives, but did not encourage them to engage in violence.[26] In comparison, TTP was more open to violent roles for women by enlisting as suicide bombers, with the first case reported in 2010 in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).[27] In 2017, after the rise of IS, local cells recruited Noreen Leghari to conduct a suicide bombing targeting a church during Easter celebrations in Pakistan.[28] The authorities arrested Leghari before she could conduct the attack and Leghari later admitted to being influenced by IS propaganda. Leghari's efforts are particularly interesting given that IS does not advocate for women to predominantly act as suicide bombers.[29] This then highlights a divergence in women's roles based on the local context of decentralized IS cells and networks in Pakistan.[30]

In Indonesia, a similar trajectory is evident across the three waves of religiously motivated violent extremism – from Darul Islam (DI) to Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and currently IS-linked/inspired groups.[31] DI was formed in 1942 and waged an armed struggle to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. The group only began recruiting women in the 1980s, understanding that they could have a key role in spreading the ideology through religious study groups in schools and universities. While JI also forbade women from getting involved in combat,[32] the group focused on actively recruiting women through family-specific networks. This meant that male JI members' wives, mothers, sisters and daughters also become members of the group. In addition, while women have gone to Syria and Iraq from Indonesia, they did not travel to Afghanistan after the United States invasion in 2001.[33] Some JI members were also encouraged by their leadership to keep their extremist activities private to prevent their wives from "leaking secrets."[34] In comparison, Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), an extremist group based in Poso, enlisted its female members (wives of senior leaders) in combatant roles. In 2014, women were trained in self-defense, shooting and throwing grenades to ward off advances from the Indonesian security forces. In both cases, regardless of the group's assignment of 'feminine' roles to women, women themselves wanted to engage in violence in the hopes of attaining martyrdom. Alternately, in incidences where women are not involved in combat, they still adopt powerful roles. For instance, in 2017, the Philippine authorities arrested Farhana Maute, known as the matriarch of the IS-linked Maute group.[35] Farhana's sons – Abdullah and Omar – were the leaders of IS' Maute group involved in the siege of Marawi City in May 2017. Reports noted that Farhana was the main funder of her son's operations and had links to IS, leading to her arrest by the authorities.[36]

In the cases of both Indonesia and Pakistan, the first two waves of terrorism before the emergence of IS depicted more rigidity in the masculine (violent) and feminine (non-violent) divide. However, despite the continued preference for these traditional divisions, exceptions are becoming common and acceptable. More women are being trained in combat and as suicide bombers, challenging the

absolutist nature of their roles in Islamist terrorist groups in the two countries. Yet, it still remains unlikely that male members of Islamist terrorist groups will permit women to fight alongside them in the battlefield. [37] Instead, they will continue to enlist them as suicide bombers, propagandists, recruiters, fundraisers and, as a last resort, to fight their opposition.

(ii)   *'Strategic Benefits'[38] of Women's Recruitment*

Although men represent the majority of fighters in Islamist terrorist groups, women are actively recruited. The presence of women in smaller numbers is often misunderstood as a sign of their insignificance within these groups. But the inclusion of women is based on a 'strategic logic' that brings terrorist groups closer to their goals in more ways than one. In this sense, there is a significant disparity between what motivates women to join a terrorist group, and what encourages a group to recruit women.[39] In this sense, women's recruitment is explained by the tactical and strategic benefits their participation offers to terrorist organizations.

Women deployed as attackers allow these groups to gain publicity or 'renown' as referred to by Louise Richardson.[40] Other scholars discuss how female suicide bombers generate more shock value and media attention, giving more publicity to a terrorist group's cause.[41] In Indonesia and Pakistan, women dressed in burqas can perpetrate suicide bombings with relative ease because of the lack of physical security checks. Moreover, organizations use the participation of women as a way to shame men into participating in violent jihad, especially if they are trained in combat and enlisted as suicide bombers.

Some scholarship argues that "state-building jihadi organizations" that seek to build a 'state' through violent means need women to ensure the longevity of the group.[42] This includes family-based efforts, where women supplement the 'people is power' discourse by giving birth and increasing the multi-generational impact of the group. It also extends to women's deployment in social services for women in the form of doctors, teachers and police officers.[43] In comparison, other groups such as TTP, JuD (Pakistan) and JI, JAT and MIT (Indonesia) represent operation-based jihadi organizations that rely on guerrilla warfare. These groups divide into smaller cells and networks which do not hold territory and are unlikely to include women in state-building roles, but still acknowledge their importance in violent and non-violent capacities. Moreover, the active competition from female-centric recruitment campaigns of groups such as IS means that they are more accommodative of women and understand their strategic value in achieving goals. In September 2017, TTP released Sunnat-e-Khaula, its first English magazine targeted towards women after state-led media operations and competition from rival groups (IS and LeJ-A) weakened the organization.[44] The magazine urged women to wage jihad by getting physical training in operating weapons and grenades, distributing the group's propaganda and training their children. Bahrun Naim, Indonesian leader of IS based in Syria, planned several terrorist plots remotely, but failed due to preemptive measures from the security agencies. After these unsuccessful attempts, he decided to incorporate female suicide bombers as a critical tactic because they draw less attention from the authorities.[45]

(iii)   Women's Personal and Political Motivations

Mainstream media and policymakers continue to offer overwhelmingly gendered explanations of participation in violent extremism based on masculine and feminine characteristics. Within this logic, men are seen to join terrorist groups for political reasons, while women's motivations are assumed to be personal.[46] While men's motivations are usually linked to fighting against the persecution of Muslims and defending Islam, women's participation is presumed to be linked to personal reasons, such as finding a husband, protecting her children or taking revenge for atrocities against her family.

In other words, the importance of physical and emotional motivating factors is undermined in research on men, while it is overrepresented and perceived as a powerful determinant in the radicalization process of women. Elizabeth Pearson and Emily Winterbotham state that both personal and political factors are key contributors in the radicalization processes of men and women.[47] This research highlights five key factors that played a role in the radicalization process of both genders: belonging and identity, the internet, youth, status, and inaccurate interpretations of religion. Case studies in Indonesia and Pakistan also indicate mixed motivations for women's participation in terrorism. Both men and women's participation in terrorist groups can be influenced by multiple factors – cultural norms, political and religious reasons. Women, then, are not solely joining terrorist groups to take revenge for their family members, seek romantic relationships with male recruiters or out of coercion by husbands or fathers.[48]

In certain cases, personal motivations can play a role in facilitating the radicalization process. Noreen Leghari, a Pakistani suicide bomber was recruited by a few male IS members, one of whom she later married. Leghari was supposed to conduct a suicide bombing with her husband before her arrest during a raid.[49] In other cases, romantic relationships and male influence is not a vital element of the radicalization process many women undergo. In 2015, Bushra Cheema traveled with her four children to Syria from Pakistan to join IS. Cheema's case received media attention specifically after a voice note to her husband surfaced, where she said, "I want to die a martyr's death…if you can't join us then pray your wife and children die in jihad."[50] This evidence aids to show that Cheema was not radicalized because of her husband joining an extremist group; instead, perhaps she made an independent politically and religiously influenced decision to join IS. In 2016, Ika Puspitasari, an Indonesian domestic worker who had spent more than 17 years in Hong Kong and Malaysia, had plans to conduct a suicide attack at a tourist site in Bali. Ika acted as an independent 'jihadi talent hunter' who formed her own cell and recruited male IS members, planned an attack and attempted to fund the operation. Ika did not wait for approval from IS leadership or networks regarding her permissibility to wage jihad and underwent an independent religious transformation through regular exposure to extremist websites and social media content.

Mainstream media and policymakers regard women as instruments for the male-dominated leadership that manipulates them, undermining their agency.[51] Devorah Margolin discusses the myth of women's victimization at the hands of men and the inability to account for their political agency in terrorist groups.[52] This is linked to the static masculine and feminine roles, where violence for men is linked to power and non-violence for women is associated with passivity and weakness.[53] It also partly explains the label of 'jihadi brides' that has been used to refer to IS recruits who traveled to Iraq and Syria. Brigitte L. Nacos has argued that female politicians are more likely to be identified based on their marital status in comparison to male politicians.[54] She further adds that a similar logic is also applicable to media reports on male and female terrorists.

In this case, while IS also expects male terrorists to get married, the variable is overemphasized for women and rarely discussed in the context of men.

Lessons on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

This paper shows that viewing violent extremism through a gendered lens, which conventionally divides men into violent roles and women into non-violent functions, hinders practical understanding of women's contribution to such organizations. Flawed analysis of women's roles in terrorism, recruitment, and motivations in Islamist extremist groups in Indonesia and Pakistan weakens effective policy-making and action planning at the state level.

First, lack of recognition of women's potential to be violent impedes effective security responses to avert and counter this threat. In Pakistan, according to a 2011 survey by the National Bureau of Police, women represent less than one percent of the police force in the country.[55] In Indonesia, women represent only five percent of the Indonesian National Armed Forces and the National Police.[56] Women's appointment within the security sector is critical due to gender segregation norms that do not permit men to conduct physical checks of women at security checkpoints. In the Counter Terrorism Department of Pakistan, cultural perceptions regarding women in combat have prevented their induction and training in response teams.[57]

Second, when policymakers deconstruct their understanding of women's roles as domestic, in the form of mothers and wives, countering violent extremism initiatives are likely to have reduced effectiveness.[58] Simply restricting women's participation in this context also risks falling within stereotypical gendered perceptions of women as non-violent, while neglecting other crucial capacities in which women can be utilized to their full potential within their communities. Aman Indonesia and Amn-oNisa in Pakistan are two key civil society initiatives, among others, geared towards peacebuilding and CVE through empowering and educating women in their communities. In comparison, PAIMAN Alumni Trust has focused on training 655 mothers to deradicalize 1,024 young boys and men, reintegrating them back into society.[59] This approach rests on the assumption that women are uniquely placed to spot early indicators of radicalization in their children and have the ability to influence their children to denounce violent extremism. While tapping into this potential of women might be beneficial in some circumstances, this maternalistic capability is not applicable in all contexts within traditional societies with a strong family-based structure. For instance, in certain cases of radicalization within Afghanistan, mothers and wives have not been aware of their male family members joining terrorist groups.[60] Anecdotally, Pashtun tribes tend to confine women to the private sphere and limit their decision-making authority and influence over their family members. Within this context, it is pertinent that research and academic studies have established that the inextricable link between female terrorists as mothers is flawed, with women showcasing the capacity to independently engage in violent extremism as well.[61]

For the sake of scope and clarity, the discussion of gender dynamics in terrorist groups focused on women. Conversely, masculinity and the link with violence and fighting in the case of terrorist organizations is not sufficiently studied or understood within existing literature.[62] Some scholars have raised the notion of 'men-streaming' or considering men as gendered beings in the radicalization process and understanding how conventions of hegemonic masculinity are

contributing factors.[63] Ultimately, men's roles centered exclusively on violence need to be critically analyzed to formulate better policies to understand why men fight and how to prevent it.

Lastly, terrorist groups have evolved in their recruitment methods, strategies, and target audiences. In both Indonesia and Pakistan, terrorist groups actively recruit women into a wide variety of roles. In other words, they have moved away from a narrow, static and non-violent jihad to a broader, more fluid and violent conception of jihad for women. States and policymakers need to evolve accordingly and account for the differing key roles women assume within these groups. The gendered presumption that women are 'naturally' non-violent, or agents of peace and are coerced by male-counterparts to engage in violence has acted as an impediment towards effective policy responses to identify and mitigate the threat from female terrorists. As such, the translation of more gender-nuanced initiatives into state-run holistic P/CVE programs remain critical.

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Not Just Victims: Women in Terrorism from the Western Balkans

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Vesë Kelmendi completed her studies at the University of Prishtina, in the department of Political Science. As part of civil society, she conducts various activities related to the promotion and protection of human rights. Since September 2015, Ms. Kelmendi has worked in the Kosovar Center for Security Studies as a Researcher and Project Officer. In this role, she contributes to initiatives related to the prevention of violent extremism in Kosovo and parliamentary oversight of the security sector. She also played a key role in different projects to collect, analyze, and interpret data regarding violent extremism in the Balkan region. Moreover, she partners with local communities, especially the youth, on preventing violent extremism through discussions and focus groups. Ms. Kelmendi is part of the European Networking Exchange program, which aims to develop the best practices and rehabilitation programs for the foreign fighters that have returned from conflict zones. Over the last couple of years, she studied the root causes of violent extremism in the region and honed her expertise of the ideologies that dominate the Balkans. Ms. Kelmendi's research interest includes gender, security, and violent extremists' dissemination of propaganda on social media.

Introduction

A growing body of research sheds light on the complicated relationship between women and violent extremist organizations, as women in terrorism range from victims and forced participants to supporters, facilitators, and perpetrators. These roles are evident in the latest trends of women joining terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS), among other violent extremist movements worldwide. In order to add to the discussion, this paper focuses on the contribution of women from Western Balkan countries and highlights consequences deriving from their involvement in terrorist organizations. The data show that Kosovo is not immune to the ongoing phenomena of violent extremism, and a thorough examination of the experience of women from this region helps explain the nuances of why they participate in conflict, and what roles they assume in violent extremist groups like IS. In addition to discussing women who travel to IS-controlled territory, a significant part of this paper addresses the broader trend of women from Western Balkan countries who support homegrown terrorism. The second aspect of the paper analyzes the response of Western Balkan countries, such as Kosovo and Bosnia & Herzegovina, to women participating in terrorist groups and highlights the demand for rehabilitation and reintegration programs. In sum, it is important to understand these dynamics in the region to help relevant stakeholders do more to prevent and counter women's involvement in terrorism and violent extremism.

Western Balkans: Context of women's participation in terrorist organizations

Broadly speaking, trends in the radicalization and recruitment of women by terrorist organizations in Balkan countries sometimes differ from their European counterparts in countries such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom.[1] At least in part, this difference is likely related to the experience of women in the Balkan region, who face greater challenges concerning domestic violence, discrimination in employment and property ownership, and financial instability, among other issues.[2] These matters are especially common in extremism-related cases from Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where conservative and patriarchal societies deny women empowerment.

Initially, policy discussions concerning people's participation in foreign conflicts treated the topics as an issue that affected men, not women. At least in the beginning, this perspective was offered

despite a lack of research on the driving factors of women's involvement in terrorist organizations from Balkan countries. To date, the involvement of women in modern terrorist organizations like IS is often overlooked, while male violence is cast as the status quo in research and views of the wider society.[3] Some commentators dismiss men's participation in violent extremist groups with the explanation that 'boys will be boys,'[4] suggesting that there is no need to ask 'why?' when men become violent. These assumptions are often based on gender stereotypes rather than evidence,[5] defaulting to qualities that are conventionally ascribed to males and females for biological reasons.

In patriarchal societies such as Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania, husbands serve as authoritative figures within the family, offering some insight to radicalization and recruitment dynamics. In Western Balkan countries, women tend to think that due to the man's assumed power, they must obey their husbands and follow their orders. An Imam in Kosovo articulated this dynamic, suggesting that the mentality of Albanians assumes that "women are behind men or they need to follow their husbands." As such, these women might be influenced to follow their husband's desires to join the conflict in Syria and Iraq.[6] In this context, it is also important to examine the role of domestic violence in countries like Kosovo. While striking, research suggests that citizens of Kosovo are relatively tolerant of physical violence.[7] Statistics from a survey by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics and UNICEF show that about 33 percent of female respondents (age 15-49) from Kosovo stated that beatings from their husbands were justified in instances when she neglects the children, challenges her partner, refuses to have sex, or burns the food.[8] This problem is related to the masculine culture and education in which men and women developed their ideas. Boys are taught by their mothers and family that they should be authoritative, stay prepared for war, hide their emotions, and act strong and protective.[9] Age adds another layer to these dynamics as younger generations in Kosovo grow up in a society that recognizes contributions of men in discussions of war and ignores the efforts of women.[10]

To further contextualize these trends, it is useful to review rates concerning the number of men, women, and children who joined the conflict in Syria and Iraq and highlight the same figures for other countries in the Western Balkans. According to a report by the British Council, between 2012 and 2018, approximately 400 citizens of Kosovo participated in Middle Eastern conflicts as foreign fighters and migrants.[11] The majority of those that remain in conflict zones are defined as "non-combatants," meaning they do not directly engage in fighting; figures show that a total number of 139 non-combatants, consisting of 47 women and 92 children.[12] Moreover, estimates suggest an additional 66 men, who potentially served in combat roles, remain in conflict zones.[13] Furthermore, figures from the police state that 127 citizens returned to Kosovo from Syria and Iraq, including 117 men, seven women, and three children.[14] Data from law enforcement and intelligence in the region indicates that up to 1,075 individuals (women, children, and the elderly) traveled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2016.[15] In the table below, there is data presented from the latest report of the British Council's Western Balkans Extremism Research Forum (ERF).

Western Balkans	Men in Syria and Iraq	Women in Syria and Iraq	Children in Syria and Iraq	Total
Albania	96	13	31	140
Bosnia and Herzegovina	177	63	57	297
Kosovo	255	48	95	398
Macedonia	140	14	No data	154
Montenegro	18	5	4	27
Serbia	37	12	10	59

Table 1. Men/Women and Children who joined the conflict to Syria and Iraq from Western Balkans Countries[16]

Drivers and Profiles of Women joining in Syria and Iraq

A range of internal and external drivers influence the women who join terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq from Western Balkan countries. Research shows that there is no "single profile" of women who join the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.[17] The roles, motivations, and experiences of women are not monolithic, but diverse and shaped by context, community, and history.[18] While some women are compelled or threatened to join the conflict by their husbands or other male family members, other women join IS on a voluntary basis and have unique drivers and motives for participation.[19] Among other precipitants, push and pull factors in this region are often related to socio-economic conditions, ideological views, family relations, identity crises, and trauma.[20] Despite being portrayed as passive agents, women in IS also serve in a range of contributing roles. Even as care providers, women promote violent extremist ideologies and enable others to join the movement.[21]

As articulated earlier, many of the women from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia traveled to conflict zones with their husbands and families in order to perform traditional family-oriented roles and duties.[22] Following the broader trend of family departures, women from Bosnia and Herzegovina started traveling to Syria in 2013.[23] Similar to mobilization trends in other parts of the world and the region, women from Kosovo traveled to Iraq and Syria with their families at increased rates in 2015, after the official declaration of the self-proclaimed Caliphate.[24] Whether forced to migrate or willing participants, women from the Western Balkans living in Iraq and Syria generally serve in supportive roles. Based on a report by the Atlantic Initiative and interviews with Kosovar women who returned from Syria, Bosnian and Kosovar women are generally limited to domestic life, and do not actively engage in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.[25] Furthermore, evidence suggests that most of the women from Kosovo stayed in groups mainly with other women from Albania and some ethnic Albanians from Macedonia due to language similarities. Some of the latest research also suggests that some of the women participants from Albania and Kosovo married foreign fighters from Macedonia, Kosovo, or Albania after their first husband died on the battlefield.[26]

Although women from the Balkans who travel to IS-held territory face grim conditions in Syria and Iraq, it is important to note that some women returning from the conflict still express positive feelings about their experience. As an example, one woman described her involvement in IS as "great opportunity" compared to the lives they lead in their country of origin.[27] Even after leaving IS-controlled territory, some women remain committed to the cause; Kosovo alone has instances where well-educated women continued to support IS after they return to their native country.[28]

Emerging Threats and Ongoing Challenges: Women as Domestic Plotters, Online Supporters, and Returnees

Next, it is important to discuss the latest threats and risks posed by women from the Balkan region who join terrorist organizations. Beyond the issue of women traveling to join IS, some recent cases show that female sympathizers from the region are willing to support or engage in violent extremism from their home countries. Additionally, Balkan countries face major challenges when it comes to addressing the women who return from Syria and Iraq. These instances show that there is an urgent need to address the problem through public policy and adopt approaches that recognize the complicated relationship between women and violent extremist groups.

As one aspect of these evolving threats, some women in Balkan countries appear eager to conduct domestic attacks. Four years after being prevented by authorities in Kosovo from joining IS, a Kosovar with Belgian citizenship named Gramos Shabani was arrested with his girlfriend Edona Haliti for planning a suicide attack on a military KFOR mission in Kosovo.[29]According to the court proceedings, in June 2018 Gramos and Edona planned to commit the terrorist attack together but were stopped when Kosovo Police arrested the couple after being under surveillance. Media reports suggested that her boyfriend recruited her to plan an attack, but there is not sufficient evidence to support this claim. Ultimately, this case demonstrates that the risk women pose should be considered as seriously as that of men. Additionally, transcripts from a prosecutor in Kosovo who works on terrorism-related indictments show that some of the wives of foreign fighters motivate their husbands in the conflict zones by portraying them as heroes and actively supporting their "jihad" in Syria.[30] In text messages, women express their desire to join the group, remind their husbands that their only purpose is jihad, and encourage them not to focus on material earnings like money.[31]

Some of the latest research from Kosovar Center for Security Studies (KCSS) shows instances where citizens of Kosovo living abroad also become part of terrorist organizations.[32] One example of this phenomenon is the arrest of a minor from Kosovo who was living in Vienna, Austria. According to prosecutors, she was in contact with IS operatives for the preparation of a terrorist attack with poison.[33] She was reportedly introduced on social networks to a man called "Davud" and used "chat applications" to connect with other IS supporters to discuss plans to carry out a terrorist attack in Vienna.[34]According to news reports, she was particularly interested in poison attacks in places where food products were sold, and was given information on how to use chemicals such as "Agent Orange."[35] A range of cases from different parts of Europe and North America also suggest that roles for women in terrorist groups like IS are expanding beyond the traditional family-based roles, especially outside of IS-controlled territory, as authorities have identified some attack plots involving women.[36]

Another aspect of the threat involving women in terrorism pertains to their online behavior, a trend that is studied using KCSS's database of extremist social networks on platforms like Facebook,

Telegram, and YouTube. Anecdotally, it appears Balkan countries have started to propagate more for the role of women in the so-called Islamic State. Moreover, individual profiles and pages such as "Caliphate/Hilafet Sisters" or "The protections of Ummah" have been re-activated.[37] On Facebook, one group advertises a Telegram channel that offers operational security instructions like avoiding using their real names or identification when they register for an Apple ID or Android application. More explicitly, the post states: "Our beloved sisters please share and follow this channel (in Telegram). The Kuffar don't want us to be safe but we have a duty to protect our Ummah and our Islamic State. These apps downloaded from this channel ensure that you don't provide your personal information to apple or android, keeping you more safe."[38] Although this type of online activity poses a less immediate threat to society than women who join terrorist organizations or conduct plots, counter-extremism policymakers and practitioners should not overlook or underestimate virtual contributions. Both online and offline, women from the Balkan region continue to make meaningful additions to terrorist organizations without perpetrating violence.

Moreover, the repatriation, reintegration, and rehabilitation of women from the conflict in Syria and Iraq continue to be a point of tension for political debates in Balkan countries. Governments and local communities struggle to address issues related to people that return from conflict zones, and women returnees sometimes complicate the process, particularly when their children are involved. In many Balkan countries, returning women face prejudice from their families and stigmatization from their communities. These issues are, at least in part, made worse by conflict reporting that discusses instances where women married, remarried, or had children with men from non-Albanian nationalities. Patriarchal societies such as Kosovo fail to institute reintegration and rehabilitation programs for these women and the communities lack the understanding needed to address these phenomena without judging their "moral aspect." Recent statistics from Western Balkan countries indicate that 319 citizens have returned to their countries.[39] While data show that the majority of returnees are men, evidence suggests that some women and children remain in Iraq and Syria; researchers explain that women "play a significant role in carrying forward the ideology and legacy of IS after the physical fall of 'Caliphate.'"[40]

A recent report by the International Center for the Study and Radicalization (ICSR) stated that around 41,490 international citizens from 80 countries became affiliated with IS in Iraq and Syria.[41] Figures presented in the report suggest that up to 4,761 (13%) of these individuals were recorded as women, while approximately 4,640 (12%) of the people were thought to be minors.[42] As a result of this mobilization, an enduring challenge for governments today is deciding how to effectively cope with the men, women, and minors who traveled in order to the join the conflict. Data suggest that 7,366 persons have now returned to their home countries (20%), or appear to be in process of repatriation.[43] Out of this figure, however, only 256 (4%) of total returnees are women; this means that a mere 5% of the women who traveled to Syria and Iraq have returned from the conflict zone.[44] Of the women that do make it back to their country of origin, few appear to receive support from the government in the form of reintegration and re-socialization programs. One report that assesses threats posed by returning foreign fighters in the Western Balkans notes, "There are few if any rehabilitation and reintegration programs meeting the needs of both returnees and their families."[45] The assessment goes on, adding, "Notably lacking are programs for non-combatant returnees," which the report classifies as women and children, "who made up one-third of the Western Balkans' contingent in Syria and Iraq."[46]

In the context of Kosovo, there is a lack of awareness among policymakers and the general community on how to handle the problem, and women and children are generally lumped together as non-combatants. For example, in a recent interview, the Kosovo Prime Minister spoke very vaguely about female returnees in Syria and Iraq saying that the problem is "[IS] women have children with non-Kosovars," and that "sometimes we do not know who these women had babies with" or "they could be children of IS commanders.[47] Unfortunately, such statements do not help the problem of prejudice against returnees, nor parse out the unique needs of women returnees compared to their children. When it comes to the reintegration of these demographics, nuanced responses are necessary regardless of the stigma attached to getting married and giving birth in conflict zones.

In a translated interview, the brother of "Nesa," a woman who left Kosovo to join the conflict in Syria and Iraq, discussed his fears about the consequences facing his sister after she moved to the region.[48] At the time of the interview, Nesa was believed to be living in a Kurdish-run camp for internally displaced persons called Ajnisa (also known as Ayn Issa). According to Nesa's brother, prior to her departure for Syria, "she was wise, sometimes sensitive as [a] character and not very sociable."[49] Apparently the man she married only showed signs of increased religiosity after marriage. At the age of 18 and pregnant with her first child, Nesa and her husband left Kosovo for Syria. Nesa's brother explained the events, describing that, "the last time [he] met her she was very sad and crying constantly but [they] as family of her were not informed where she [was] going."[50] Next, Nesa's husband died two weeks before their baby was born, and she was left alone under jihadist-controlled territory.[51]

After the death of her husband, Nesa attempted to return to Kosovo, but it was impossible; according to her brother, Nesa was only allowed to communicate with her family at times when they (the men she was with) let her use the phone and the internet.[52] After a few months, she married a man from a country neighboring Kosovo, with whom she had another child. When she, her husband, and two other families from Kosovo finally attempted to leave Syria, they were caught by the Kurdish forces.[53] Her brother explained, "For two years we did not have any information about our sister [and] we thought she died together with her children. After two years, my phone was ringing, and it was Nesa on the phone telling me that she ended up on Kurdish Camp."[54] Nesa's brother noted that, "she was very worried, bored and hopeless about her fate." According to his conversations with her, the conditions in the camp are terrible, there is not enough food, and life is very difficult.[55] Nesa also told her brother that "all women were separated from their husbands."[56] While the ultimate fate of Nesa remains unknown, her brother expects her to survive and return home; he plans to support her despite the stigma.[57]

While Nesa's case provides some hope, as her brother offers his unwavering support, contemporary responses to female returnees in Kosovo and the Balkan region are broadly insufficient. As one priority, women, like men, need programming that is tailored to their unique needs and experiences. Children deserve similar resources and might benefit from initiatives that involve their parents and family. Ideally, programs for these demographics would include professional social and mental health workers capable of identifying and treating the trauma that arises from living in conflict zones. Practitioners could also account for the challenges that might emerge in the process of reintegration. For example, although rates of sexual violence against women from the Balkans in Syrian and Iraq are difficult to find, media reports about life in the so-called Islamic State regularly highlight the prevalence of rape and torture.[58] Women returning to

Balkan countries from Syria and Iraq will likely find it very difficult to talk about such trauma, particularly sexual violence, given the deeply patriarchal nature of communities in the region.

While working to understand and reintegrate women who return from Syria and Iraq, policymakers and practitioners in the Balkans should not strictly regard women as the victims of violent extremism. As discussed earlier in this paper, there are several instances where women who returned to Kosovo express continued support for the so-called Islamic State. As an example, one woman who left the war-torn region explained, "I missed the life in Syria and Iraq, if there were no conflicts and killings I would continue to live there. The only solution for Muslims around the world is Islamic State and Caliphate."[59] Ultimately, in order to create a sufficient response to the full range of women touched by violent extremism, it is necessary to consider all the factors that affect an individual's involvement, gender-related and otherwise.

Conclusive Recommendations

The issue of women in terrorist organizations has gained increasing attention at the international level, as entities like the United Nations Security Council address the matter through channels like the Counter-Terrorism Committee, and the Committee's Executive Directorate (CTED).[60] This recent focus appears motivated by increasing awareness about the participation of women in terrorism, along with a broader push to identify and promote roles for women in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. Several governments in Europe and the Western Balkan countries also see women in terrorism as a problem, but they do not usually approach the issue with the same treatment or sincerity as male fighters who join in the conflict to Syria and Iraq. In Kosovo, for example, the national strategy for the prevention of violent extremism leading to terrorism emphasizes the role of male foreign fighters the main risk.[61] Moreover, the strategy only mentions the role of women preventing violent extremism once,[62] further illustrating that gender-related considerations are not a priority.

Policymakers, practitioners, and scholars in the Western Balkans and beyond should consider the following points to create a more gender-aware response to terrorism and violent extremism:

- Governmental and non-governmental organizations working to prevent and counter violent extremism should advocate for programs that address the experiences of all people returning from conflict zones, including women, rather than focusing exclusively on men as foreign fighters. In this way, policymakers who are responsible for creating action plans to prevent and counter violent extremism can also pay greater attention to the social fabric of terrorist groups and work to understand the involvement of women.

- Women returning from the conflict in Iraq and Syria must be taken seriously by authorities, including law enforcement, because some women continue to carry extremist ideology into their communities. At the same time, government institutions and communities should also offer assistance to reintegrate women that are not believed to be dangerous.

- Community engagement is critical to the success of state-sponsored programs designed to prevent and counter violent extremism. When it comes to reintegration, for example, the government must work with communities to reduce the stigmatization of men, women, and children returning from conflict zones. Government officials, for example, must be especially careful about the language and rhetoric they use to discuss returnees because their voices

influence the public's perception of the problem. Ultimately, women returning from Syria and Iraq appear disproportionately affected by prejudice and rejection from society, particularly if they remarried or had children abroad. While challenging, overcoming this barrier is crucial for the integration of these individuals.

- Entities tasked with preventing and countering violent extremism should promote the voices of those who can credibly speak against terrorist organizations, including women. The families of violent extremists, returnees, and others touched by violent extremism can provide especially compelling narratives and perspectives to condemn such actions. Additionally, in the Balkans, some women resisted pressure from their families and husbands to join the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Unfortunately, many of these women, particularly those who still have relatives living in Syria, are excluded from institutions. These women should be treated better and highlighted as role models for pushing against violent extremism. These women could be especially good at educating others in at-risk communities.

- Although increasing the participation of women in government and counter-extremism efforts is not necessarily a solution to terrorism and violent extremism, the empowerment of women in the Western Balkans is critical to progress. If women become a more significant part of the government's make-up and agenda, perhaps with time, there will be greater chances to address systemic issues regarding gender dynamics in these countries. The prevalence of domestic violence, for example, appears to relate to mobilization trends. Consequently, without addressing these underlying dynamics, governments may struggle to prevent and counter radicalization and recruitment in the future.

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How Women Advance the Internationalization of the Far-Right

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Traditional Gender Roles in Extreme-Right Movements

In 2016, an image of a young Scottish woman wearing the runic insignia of the Schutzstaffel while performing Hitler salute made global headlines as National Action, a British far-right terrorist organization, crowned her "Miss Hitler" in the organization's beauty pageant. According to National Action, the purpose of the event was to raise awareness of their female supporters, who "rarely get much spotlight or recognition."[1] In statements promoting the event, the group said, "We hope this will grant a unique insight into our movement that will challenge the widely held preconceptions society has about the far-right."[2]

Women are traditionally underrepresented in neo-Nazi movements. When thousands of white supremacists took to the streets in the 2016 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, few female faces were visible among the protestors. However, while many militant movements remain predominantly male, the far-right landscape is currently in the process of flux. Women are becoming increasingly important as broadcasters, dramatically amplifying messages across the spectrum of worldviews that comprise the international far-right, ranging from European cultural supremacists and anti-Muslim activists, to the United States alt-right, to more traditional neo-Nazi and Skinhead groups.

As the specter of internationalized right-wing extremists continues to grow, the success of women in the virtual sphere becomes particularly problematic, with these broadcasters often serving as a soft introduction to hard edge ideology, facilitating the 'redpilling' of individuals who are vulnerable to radicalization.

The past two decades have seen a sharp increase in the number of female supporters of far-right movements and the creation of many female-centered groups.[3] In 1999, the Southern Poverty Law Center concluded that the Internet gave rise to a number of newly emerging female-led white supremacist websites, as sympathizing women were carving out their own niches in the digital space.[4] The age of social media, viral selfies, and online guerilla marketing has further accelerated this dynamic and made women a key asset in the branding and outreach strategies of extremist movements.

The rapid growth in the number of female far-right supporters demonstrates that women are not immune to racist mindsets and more broadly extremist ideologies, which hold contempt for human nature.[5] A recent study conducted by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung even concluded that women are more susceptible to xenophobic, racist and anti-Muslim attitudes than men and equally prone to ingroup-outgroup thinking.[6] Likewise, a survey conducted in 2016 showed that women had a significantly higher tendency to privilege the rights of native Europeans than men and were slightly more inclined to sympathize with "new right attitudes."[7]

Today, women are seen on the frontlines of protest marches and act as the public faces of extreme-right social media campaigns. University of Pittsburgh scholar Kathleen Blee, who conducted ethnographic studies and traced the evolution of female participation in the Ku Klux Klan, concluded that women have increasingly become the target of white supremacist recruitment campaigns.[8] The widespread presence of women in far-right movements has played a significant role in the mainstreaming and normalization of white nationalist, anti-migration and anti-Muslim views. Female social media influencers have helped to generate millions of views and media attention for far-right causes, and these figureheads are becoming more and more important in the internationalization of the far-right, using their influence to market extreme right-wing ideology to audiences across the Western world. Despite the increasingly prominent role of women, gender remains a heavily contested issue in the far-right space; for instance, female figureheads often have to negotiate their identity within a hyper-masculine ecosystem.

Hyper-Masculinity, Male and Female Anti-Feminism and Alt-Right Counter-Culture

The Gamergate Controversy is the name given to a prolonged organized harassment campaign in August 2014, which was waged by a loose connection of trolls organizing across online platforms such as Reddit and 4chan and targeted women in the video-game industry.[9] The event was initially sparked by a blog-post written by Eron Gjoni attacking his former girlfriend, independent game maker Zoe Quinn, and is seen by many to be a crucial junction in the formulation of the alt-right, helping to launch the careers of figureheads such as Milo Yiannopoulus, whilst providing political realization to communities of online trolls.[10] As a result of this, a counter-cultural backlash against feminism was cemented as an ideological cornerstone of the alt-right. It also meant that the pushback against progressivism became a valuable recruiting tool for young white men who feel alienated by mainstream liberal culture both online and on campuses. This left vs. right divide mirrors the cumulative radicalization process which has been observed between Islamist and far-right groups.[11]

Against this backdrop, masculinity– a long established trait among extremist groups – has grown as a core component in the way emergent far-right communities broker their identity against mainstream culture. By fetishizing physical strength and traditional family values, the contemporary far-right embraces conventional notions of masculinity and uses narratives around the reclamation of masculinity as an important recruitment tool.[12] In contrast to this perspective, weak masculinity is identified as a defining trait of progressive culture, with tropes of cuckoldry and effeminacy being used to ridicule left-wing men. One interesting, yet bizarre, example of this is the so-called 'soy boy' meme, which associates progressive men with the consumption of soy products, and the consumption of soy products with raised levels of estrogen.[13]

Within this context, a new wave of women are situating themselves within the movement, leading to the growth of communities such as the 'Tradwives,' who see the rejection of feminism as a key component in 'redpilling' (the alt-right's term for radicalization), a trend which mirrors the empowerment that western women joining the Islamic State felt through embracing traditional gender roles.[14] In particular, women identify the apparent un-yielding orthodoxy and hostile atmosphere against conservatives from contemporary feminist culture as being driving factors for their radicalization.[15] As prominent far-right influencer Lauren Southern summarizes, "I believe anyone who supports feminism is anti-woman even if they are not conscious of it."[16]

By embracing this anti-feminist stance, individual women have found an effective mechanism to advertise their radicalism. Doing so in an overt way appears to guide the trajectory of several figureheads. Lauren Southern provides a notable example of this trend, starting her activist career by publically campaigning against feminism, promoting a campaign called #TheTriggering, which was designed to provoke feminist activists.[17] Controversy has been crucial in driving digital celebrity,[18] and by embracing such a contentious topic, Southern's fame rocketed, providing her with a platform from which to broaden international support for far-right ideology.

One of the key drivers behind the contemporary trend for internationalization, which can be observed in the far-right, is the creation of an active counter-culture which pushes back against the mainstream liberalism which, until recently, has united the Western world. By identifying common enemies in the form of institutions like the mass media, and out-groups including both Muslims, non-whites, and feminists, European and North American far right communities construct a shared world-view, which proves effective in attracting large-scale global support.[19] The crucial power of this counter-culture lies in the assertion of its radical difference from the status quo. Here it is suggested that the rejection of feminism, something which is cast as sacred to many is, through its overt and innate controversy, one of the most effective ways of establishing the international far-right as an alternative to the contemporary order.

Generation Identity's Influencers and the Hijacking of #MeToo

As part of the far-right's effort to mainstream this new counter-culture, the past few years have seen white nationalist recruiters and propagandists in Europe and the U.S. step up their efforts to reach out to female audiences. Women have become powerful amplifiers of their rhetoric and can be seen as part of a larger attempt by far-right movements to rebrand themselves as modern versions of patriotic, Identitarian rebellion that have little in common with traditional neo-Nazi movements.

The pan-European white nationalist movement Generation Identity was originally founded in the South of France and often described as the European alt-right equivalent. Generation Identity

proactively tries to recruit young white women into their networks by playing on widespread fears of rape and sexual harassment committed by migrant communities, and by framing themselves as the only defenders of women's rights. At the same time, Generation Identity's Handbook for Media Guerilla Warfare recommends targeting "young women, who come straight from university" in online intimidation campaigns. The Handbook elaborates, noting, "These are classic victims and not used to being confronted. You can usually easily take the piss out of them."[20]

In the summer of 2017, Generation Identity started its controversial #DefendEurope campaign, attempting to prevent NGOs from rescuing drowning migrants in the Mediterranean. An original analysis of the #DefendEurope hashtag showed that female influencers were decisive for the campaign's global reach. Between May and September 2017, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue's social media monitors identified roughly 300,000 supportive tweets, coming from all across Europe and North America. Prominent American YouTuber Brittany Pettibone, Canadian activist Lauren Southern, and British commentator Katie Hopkins were all key in the dissemination of campaign contents to audiences in their respective home countries.[21]
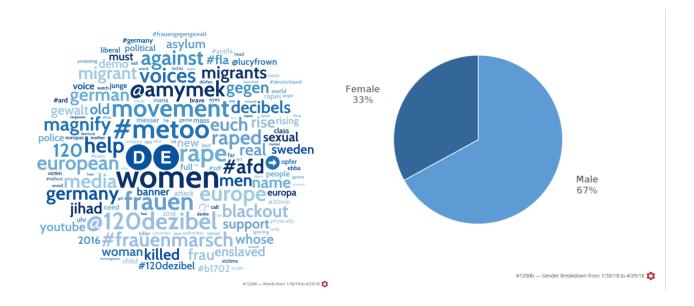
Brittany Pettibone, who is now engaged to the European figurehead of Generation Identity, Martin Sellner, plays a vital role in bridging the gap between Europe and North America. Since founding the podcast "Virtue of the West" with the white supremacist vlogger Tara McCarthy, Pettibone has become a prominent figure among the U.S. alt-right. On Twitter, Pettibone describes herself as 'Barbie Fiancé,' and draws over 135,000 followers. Pettibone's YouTube channel features videos of her talking to her twin sister about topics such as 'Why is Dating Becoming So Difficult,'[22] 'Women Are Losing Their Femininity' and 'Women Want Love, Men Want Respect?' attract more than 100,000 subscribers. Videos like these make traditional gender constructs that are popular among the far right more accessible to a general audience. White and male supremacist organizations may take advantage of this effect, and strategically use women to soften their image and make regressive values appear normal and even attractive.

Other prominent women that Generation Identity uses as influencers for the movement's campaigns include Berit Franziska and Franziska M. They both featured as the main public faces of Generation Identity's initiative #120dB, which stood under the motto "women defend yourselves" and was labeled as the far-right's #metoo equivalent.

The following analysis of the campaign was created using the social listening tool Crimson Hexagon to examine all Tweets which used the hashtag #120db between February and April 2018. Nearly 300,000 tweets with the hashtag #120db were identified in that period. The graphic below visualizes the words that were most commonly used in conjunction with #120db. It illustrates that the campaign hijacked the #metoo hashtag as well as spreading anti-Islam messages and campaign against migrant rape crimes. The #120db hashtag was also paired with hashtags used in the context of campaigns for the empowerment of women such as #frauengegengewalt (#womenagainstviolence). It is notable that despite this focus on women's rights, about 67 percent of the tweets using the hashtag #120db originated from male accounts.[23]

#120db — Words from 1/30/18 to 4/29/18   #120db — Gender Breakdown from 1/30/18 to 4/29/18

#120dB originally started as an unbranded, seemingly independent campaign, but was soon exposed as a communications operation initiated by Generation Identity. The group framed the campaign as a female-led initiative against acts of sexual violence targeting women, but only highlighted rape crimes committed by migrants and refugees. It instrumentalized white female victimhood to fuel anti-Muslim and xenophobic sentiments and positioned itself as a counter-movement to #metoo. Even though Generation Identity had long been among the loudest anti-feminist voices in Europe, the movement has managed to co-opt the topic of women's rights for the sake of denouncing foreign cultures in Europe.

Far-right activists have increasingly been able to capitalize on victimhood narratives that put white women at the center of their propaganda about the threats experienced in multicultural societies, whilst at the same time advocating fundamentally backward gender perceptions and a return to traditional power relations between men and women. For example, the prominent British far-right activist and founder of the English Defense League, Tommy Robinson, used migrant rape crimes and oppression of women in Islam to paint all Muslims as potential rapists and a threat to white, non-Muslim women. Yet, extremist groups tend to converge rhetorically in their calls for protecting in-group women from aggression by out-group men in order to fuel anger and hatred against the perceived enemy. Their traditionalist perceptions of gender roles and claims of ownership over women are, however, reflected in their language. For example, many counter-jihad

accounts warn that Islam destroys "our women, our country, our sense of right and wrong and our lives,"[24] claim that the "U.K. police let Muslim gangs rape our girls" or argue that they won't let migrants "treat our women as easy meat."[25]

Conclusive Discussion and Policy Considerations

As this piece demonstrates, a range of factors drive female involvement in contemporary far-right movements. These include a fragility of feminine identity, reaction against the abuse of women, and a backlash against contemporary progressive ideology and feminism. Although these issues remain understudied, policymakers and practitioners can use this information to further develop measures to prevent and counter extremism with strategic communications and counter-radicalization intervention programming.

Greater attention could be paid to perceived hostility in contemporary feminist circles and the potential this has for polarization. It is clear that the anti-feminist ideology of the contemporary far-right has its roots in deeply ingrained misogyny and a culture of hegemonic masculinity. However, in an oxymoronic trend, this anti-feminist ideology is proving effective in the recruitment of women to far-right causes. A number of women identifying with far-right groups highlight conflict with feminists and hostility towards conservatives as being driving causes for their radicalization. Accordingly, it is suggested that further attention is paid to the apparent lack of civil discourse in spaces for women.

Counter-strategy should focus on the apparent hypocrisy of contemporary far-right ideology. This paper demonstrates the inherently misogynistic context within which contemporary far-right gender politics has evolved. Even if women find empowerment through the rejection of progressive conceptions of feminism this empowerment is nevertheless at odds with the overt and rampant misogyny which is held by the contemporary far-right. Furthermore, even if a small number of women rise to prominence within the movement and gain respect for their actions, most women operating within far-right circles are simultaneously marginalized and denigrated by the groups that claim to protect them. By publicly highlighting this fact in messaging, strategic communicators can possibly weaken the narrative of anti-feminist far-right activists.

Women are increasingly essential to the global far-right, especially as effective figureheads who use controversy to broadcast extreme-right wing ideology to potential recruits. As this paper shows, the pathways of women into these movements are multifaceted and triggered by a range of grievances. Intervention programs that focus on deradicalization from extremist ideology and disengagement from extremist groups are a crucial tool in the push-back against extremism. Ultimately, the most effective interventions rely on an in-depth understanding of the motivations behind radicalization and recruitment. Consequently, relevant stakeholders should do more to research the trends outlined above and use the gathered information to develop interventions designed to engage women in the far-right.

The growing pool of female recruits is a tremendous asset to far-right groups that seek to bolster their image and movement. As these groups continue to expand this will remain a pressing issue, with women serving in valuable roles within movements, both at an ideological and a practical level. Organizations within the far-right regularly frame white women as the victims of aggression to rationalize radical action and justify women's need for protection. Although these organizations marginalize and subordinate most of their female members, some women social media influencers and activists undoubtedly help generate massive amounts of media attention and enhance the

appeal of the far-right. By acting as an accessible and enticing part of fringe groups, these women help normalize misogynistic gender dynamics, as well as xenophobic and racist ideologies.

In recent years, the migration crisis has sparked new anxieties and grievances that extremist movements have skillfully leveraged to recruit women into their circles. By fueling women's fears of sexual crimes committed by migrants and denouncing the authorities as being inactive or even complicit, the organizations frame themselves as the sole protectors of women's rights. Additionally, traditionally male-oriented agendas of the far-right have been repackaged as reconcilable with female interests, now making an appealing offer to women searching for clear gender roles in an increasingly fast-paced culture. By playing on female identity crisis in an age of what Brittany Pettibone refers to as "hook up culture" or the "Tinder age," deeply misogynistic movements sell a return to traditional power structures as a step towards empowerment. Furthermore, the rejection of a feminist status quo has proven essential in the establishment of far-right ideology as a radical alternative to mainstream ideology, proving an effective recruitment mechanism for both men and women.

The contemporary growth of far-right ideology is an issue of pressing concern. However, without a clear understanding of the role gender dynamics have played in the creation and dissemination of extremist ideology; the mobilization of activists; and the ideological rejection of the liberal status quo, it will be difficult to effectively counter this threat. Most importantly, there is a need for greater knowledge around the role women are playing - actively or passively - in the ongoing culture wars which the far-right are propagating, and to turn this knowledge into effective counter-measures.

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The Changing Roles of Women in Violent Islamist Groups

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Introduction

An increased focus on the participation of women in violent Islamism[1] has not ended misconceptions plaguing Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) policies[2] and questions remain about the threat posed by women associated with violent Islamist groups.[3] Ill-informed perceptions of women's contributions to these movements can have serious ramifications, including deferential treatment in courts, insufficient intervention programming, and failure to disrupt the next wave of women involved in violent-Islamist inspired activity. While it is important to understand the motivations of women participating in violent Islamist movements, it is also critical to recognize the ideology of the organizations they join. A better comprehension of this phenomenon helps policymakers and practitioners anticipate new and evolving threats concerning women in violent extremism.

Conventionally speaking, Islamism seeks to create a political order defined by Islam, specifically in the form of a Sharia-based state.[4] While institutional Islamists strive to create a Sharia-based state through the existing political system, violent Islamists attempt to create such a state by any means necessary, including acts of violence.[5] While all violent Islamist groups desire a society ruled by Sharia law, they differ significantly over the interpretation and implementation of Sharia law as well as what constitutes appropriate uses of violence. Strategic and ideological differences exist between global jihadi groups like the Islamic State and other violent Islamist groups such as Hamas.[6] For example, groups like Hamas believe in "revolution from below," which pushes for change by gathering support through *da'wa*[7] and taking part in local politics. On the other hand, global jihadi groups like the Islamic State seek "change from above" while breaking – or even destroying – the political status quo.[8]

Focusing on the strategic logic and communication tools used by violent Islamists allows for an understanding of the tactics different groups use to recruit both men and women. While some preliminary research on authoritarian institutions suggests that an entity's relationship with women can be an indicator of stability and the future success of the group, more scholarship is necessary to understand if such dynamics manifest in violent extremist groups.[9] Perhaps studying the evolution of an organization's relationship with women, and the group's gendered narratives, can help to highlight the direction of the organization and its future success.

This paper seeks to forecast the potential threat from women by looking at different violent Islamist groups and examining their rhetorical shifts concerning women's roles in combat. In order to do

this, this paper will first look at the historical relationship between violent Islamist ideology and women. Next, this paper will look at Hamas and the Islamic State as case studies, both before and after they became governing actors, to showcase that across groups of Islamist persuasion, women's roles tend to be dynamic and shaped by a range of factors. Finally, this paper will show that when violent Islamist groups break from convention, they open the doors to female participation in violence.

Violent Islamist Ideology and Women

In violent Islamist ideology, traditional gender roles are central, with women encouraged to remain in the private sphere, the home, or in supporting roles. These groups do not see themselves as trivializing women's roles; rather, they emphasize the importance of returning to and upholding conventional women's roles in the family, support network, and as educators of the next generation.[10]

Violent Islamist groups have consistently struggled with determining the appropriate role for women within their ranks. Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood member, and one of the chief ideologues of early al-Qaeda, Abduallah Azzam, opened the doors to debates on women and jihad. In his book, *Defense of the Muslim Lands*, Azzam argued that defensive jihad was an individual duty for all Muslims when Muslim lands were under attack[11]; under these conditions, Azzam suggested that a wife could participate "without the permission of her husband."[12] Later, in his 1987 book *Join the Caravan*, Azzam reiterated women's duty to carry out defensive jihad, but stipulated that "Arab women may not come without a non-marriageable male guardian (*mahram*). Their duties are confined to education, nursing, and assisting refugees. As for fighting, Arab women may not fight because until now, Afghan women are not participating in the fighting."[13] While open to having women play a greater role in public life, Azzam was unwilling to give women explicit permission to fight.

Sayyed Imam Al-Sharif, also known as 'Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz and Dr. Fadl, was a former mentor to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Sharif reiterated women's duty to carry out defensive jihad, but added: "[f]or this reason, women can receive basic training so they can be prepared to repel their attackers."[14] Yusuf al-'Ayyiri, an ideological leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia[15] killed in 2003, took this a step further in *The Role of Women in the Jihad against Enemies*, where he wrote about contemporary women fighters and also emphasized that jihad was defensive and a personal duty in the current time, giving women permission to carry out jihad.[16]

While ideologues of violent Islamism were not actively encouraging women to participate in jihad, it is interesting to note that they were also unwilling to condemn the women who did engage in violence.[17] For example, after the June 2000 attack by the first female suicide bomber in Chechnya, Hawa Barayev, Yusuf al-'Ayyiri issued a *fatwa* titled *Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Self Sacrifice (Martyrdom) Operations*.[18] Though calling her "the great Mujāhidah, Hawwā' Barayev," the document ruminated on the permissibility of martyrdom operations in general but did not focus on women and jihad. Another example of this mixed-signaling was Ayman al-Zawahiri's speech in November 2010, titled "*Who Will Support Scientist Aafia Siddiqui?*"[19] Coinciding with the trial of Aafia Siddiqui, a woman convicted of attempting to kill U.S. employees in Afghanistan, Zawahiri's speech praised Siddiqui's actions but did not call for other women to follow her lead.

Groups like Hamas and the Islamic State have tried to reconcile the differences between their radical Islamist ideology and the practical role that women play in their organizations. While both groups have Islamist roots, the divide between national-Islamist groups like Hamas, and global jihadi groups like the Islamic State, remains vast. Nevertheless, each of these groups has broken from convention and encouraged women to take up arms, at least rhetorically, but only under specific circumstances and for limited periods of time.

Hamas

Hamas emerged as a wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestinian arena in 1987, seeking to fight not only against Israel, but against non-Islamist forms of governance. While Hamas saw women's roles as being limited to the private sphere, several key events, including ongoing struggles with Israel and other Palestinian groups, created policy changes on women's involvement in jihad and resistance.

In Hamas' 1988 charter, articles 17 and 18 state that women are vital to the dissemination of their ideology. After calling Muslim women the "maker of men," the charter notes that women play "the most important role in looking after the family, rearing the children and imbuing them with moral values and thoughts derived from Islam."[20]

From 1993 and 2000, increased counter-measures by Israeli forces made it so 30 percent of Palestinian male suicide bombers were caught before carrying out their attacks.[21] Due to the perception of women as less violent, Palestinian women were able to have greater freedom of movement and access to potential targets. In this climate, Palestinian groups, including Hamas, were aware of women's strategic and operational advantages and leveraged women as a way to circumvent detection and carry out attacks.

In the 2000s, Hamas' initial stance towards women as solely wives and mothers began to shift. In 2001, Ahlam Mazen Al-Tamimi was arrested for her supporting role in the bombing of a Sbarro restaurant in Jerusalem.[22] On Hamas' own Al-Qassam website, the organization praised Al-Tamimi and called her "the first female member in Al Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas." [23]

In January 2002, Wafa Idris became the first Palestinian female suicide bomber in Israel, carrying out an attack for Fatah, Hamas' main rival. While acknowledging women's practical roles in violence, Hamas continued to refuse to allow female suicide bombers but also suggested that there was room for future female participation. As an example of this position, Sheikh Yassin, a spiritual leader of Hamas, argued:

> *At the present stage, we do not need women to bear this burden of jihad and martyrdom…meanwhile, women have no military organization in the framework of the [Islamic] movement. When such an organization arises, it will be possible to discuss wide-scale recruitment of women.[24]*

In February 2002, Darin Abu Aisheh became the second Palestinian female suicide bomber, conducting an operation for Fatah. However, she initially sought to carry out the attack in the name of Hamas, before the organization told Aisheh, "your duty is not [to] be a suicide bomber, your duty is to take care of children."[25]

In March 2003, Yusuf al Qaradawi, Dean of Islamic Studies at the University of Qatar, noted women's strategic advantage in carrying out attacks and reiterated Azzam's argument that defensive jihad was incumbent on all, men and women.[26] Hamas took this ruling very seriously, and Qaradawi's *fatwa* regarding jihad as an obligation for all was still cited on the Hamas' Al-Qassam website as recently as 25 June 2018.[27]

Three key factors forced Hamas to re-evaluate its policy regarding female suicide bombers. First, increased strategic restraints on men (such as age restrictions upon entering Jerusalem). Second, successful female suicide attacks by both Fatah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Third, outside religious justifications such as those by Qaradawi.

In 2004, Reem Riyashi became Hamas' first female suicide bomber.[28] While Hamas claimed the attack and praised Riyashi, the group also continued to emphasize that its use of women was only a strategic necessity. In 2005, Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zurhi said: "The Palestinian resistance, at times, purposely uses women in some operations that men cannot carry out, especially in high-security areas, which male Palestinian Mujahideen cannot easily reach. This is why the Palestinian woman has an important role in the Palestinian resistance, and at times she may even have roles that the young male Palestinian Mujaheed cannot fulfill."[29] In this context, Hamas did not encourage women to take up arms or carry out attacks unilaterally, but rather, condoned women's participation in only limited circumstances.

In January 2006, under the "Change and Reform" block, Hamas won a majority of the seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council, outmaneuvering its biggest electoral rival, Fatah. In June 2007, relations broke down, and Hamas has since been the de-facto ruler of the Gaza Strip. Between 2002 and 2006, there were nine Palestinian female suicide bombers, two which carried out attacks for Hamas. Hamas' assumption of electoral power was accompanied by a drop in female suicide attacks, with the last female suicide bomber carrying out her attack in 2006, just months after Hamas won power.[30]

A new wave of violence in the Palestinian arena occurred between 2015 and 2016 mostly consisting of low-intensity stabbing and shooting attacks.[31] This period was marked by higher rates of female participation, with women carrying out 27 of the 170 attacks (or 15.8 percent).[32] During this period, Hamas released several statements across their social media platforms articulating the organization's support for women who conducted violence.[33] While Hamas spoke encouragingly of the women who took up arms, the group itself did not seem to be organizing these women.

Recently, in May 2017, Hamas updated its charter, noting that "[t]he role of Palestinian women is fundamental in the process of building the present and the future, just as it has always been in the process of making Palestinian history. It is a pivotal role in the project of resistance, liberation and building the political system."[34] While not clarifying if resistance is ideological or physical,

Hamas' new charter clearly encourages women to assume a more active role in public life and politics.

Islamic State

The Islamic State, which declared its so-called Caliphate in 2014, emerged out of the ashes of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Crucially, the Islamic State differed from its predecessor AQI over the use of female suicide bombers; AQI regularly used female suicide bombers and combatants in their operations. However, the connections between AQI and the Islamic State cannot be underestimated because, despite its numerous name changes, the organization at its core remains the same.[35] It is therefore necessary to go back and look at AQI and the practical experiences that led to the Islamic State's rhetorical evolution on women in combat.[36]

In early 2004, AQI leader Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi released a message titled "*Follow the Caravan,*" where he stated: "The war has broken out and the caller to Jihad has called for it, and the doors of the heavens have opened, if you don't want to be [one] of the knights, then make room for the women to commence, and take the eyeliner O you women with turbans and beards, if not then to the horses and here are the reins and shackles."[37] Although this was not an unbridled call for women to participate in jihad, Zarqawi was reminding his followers that defensive jihad is incumbent on all to fight, which was especially pertinent considering the influx of foreign military forces accompanying the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Months before AQI's first female bomber conducted an attack, Zarqawi released another message titled, "*Will the Religion Wane While I Live*" (2005).[38] He unambiguously discussed the role of women in jihad, referring to the precedent set by Umm Amarah, a female companion of the Prophet Muhammad and noted that there are "many mujahidah sisters in the Land of the Two Rivers [Iraq] who are requesting to perpetrate martyrdom-seeking operations." In this announcement, Zarqawi foreshadowed AQI's systematic use of female suicide bombers.

In April 2007, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, a successor of Zarqawi,[39] released a statement titled "*The Harvest of the Years in the Land of the Monotheists.*"[40] Highlighting violent Islamist groups reluctance to give women unchecked permission to carry out acts of jihad, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi said, "[e]ven Iraqi women were pleading for martyrdom operations, but we forbade them from what men can do unless it is in special circumstances where men are unable to. Oh, what anguish, for those whom [sic] were less brave than women." [41] This speech pinpoints the struggle faced by violent Islamic groups over the use of women in combat roles by both shaming men into action and allowing for women's participation under 'special circumstances.'

The surge of female suicide bombers peaked in 2008, partially due to operational pressures on the group, including coalition forces.[42] At the turn of the decade, however, the organization seemingly stopped using female suicide bombers. Although the organization did not formally state that women were not supposed to engage in violence, it seemed as though the operational necessity that led to their involvement began to dissipate with the slow withdrawal of U.S. military troops. In other words, women's participation in suicide attacks were, in all appearances, a pragmatic decision, and the organization's ideological stance could conform accordingly.

In June 2014, at the height of its power, the Islamic State declared its so-called Caliphate. Unlike its predecessor AQI, the Islamic State framed its jihad as offensive, not defensive, and used its magazines Dabiq, and later Rumiyah, to consistently encourage women to return to conventional roles and be wives, mothers, and educators. In Dabiq issue 7, there was even a dedicated section in the magazine titled "to our sisters," which encouraged women to "[b]e a base of support and safety for your husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons."[43]

August 2014 also heralded the start of the military offensive against the Islamic State by coalition forces. In early 2015, an organization alleging to be the media wing of ISIS's all-female al-Khansa Brigade released a manifesto articulating the ideal role of women in the Caliphate, as first and foremost wives, mothers, and homemakers. However, the manifesto also acknowledged several exceptions, including allowing women to provide medical care or teach. It even stated that under very specific circumstances, there were cases where women could participate in combat, "if the enemy is attacking her country, the men are not enough to protect it, and the ulama have given a fatwa for it."[44] The document provided the legal authority for women to commit violence within the framework of defensive jihad, while noting that those conditions were not yet met.

Between 2015 to 2016, the Islamic State continued to release several documents which began to tease out women's roles in combat, while simultaneously emphasizing that women were only allowed to participate in jihad under very particular, defensive circumstances. The group reiterated these points in Dabiq issue 11 (2015) and Dabiq issue 15 (2016),[45] as well as by the Zawra' Foundation, a female-focused pro-IS media agency, in 2015.[46] In December 2016, the Islamic State's Arabic-language newspaper, al-Naba, argued that "jihad is not, as a rule, an obligation for women, but let the female Muslim know as well that if the enemy enters her abode, jihad is just as necessary for her as it is for the man, and she should repel him by whatever means possible."[47] The Islamic State continued to echo the teachings of Azzam and Zawahiri, that women can only participate in combat in defensive actions.

While not actively encouraging women to participate in combat, the Islamic State has praised or spoken ambivalently about women who carried out operations. Specifically, this trend speaks mostly to women who operated beyond the organization's territory and control. In February 2015 Sajida al-Rishawi, a failed AQI suicide bomber who was arrested in Jordan in 2005, was praised by the Islamic State, who demanded her release from a Jordanian prison in exchange for the lives of two hostages.[48] After the 2015 San Bernardino attack, the Islamic State, while praising the attack and actions of Tashfeen Malik to join her husband and leave behind a child for the sake of jihad, refrained from referring to her as one of its "soldiers."[49] And finally, in 2016 when three young women attacked a police station in Kenya, its celebration was only tentative, noting these women "shoulder[ed] a duty that Allah had placed on the shoulders of the men of the Ummah."[50] Despite not wanting women to actively take up arms, the Islamic State did not condemn these women for their actions. This contradiction highlights the Islamic State's uneasy relationship with women and combat.

In 2017, the Islamic State began to incur significant territorial losses, including losing Mosul to the Iraqi government in July 2017. These losses shifted the Islamic State from the offensive to the defensive. In response to these new realities, the Islamic State has seemingly made a point to change its rhetoric, as evidenced in an article published in Rumiyah 11 (2017), entitled "Our

Journey to Allah." While it touched on women's roles as supporters, wives, and mothers, the article then veered off, calling women to

> [r]ise with courage and sacrifice in this war as the righteous women did at the time of
> the Messenger of Allah, not because of the small number of men but rather, due to their
> love for jihad, their desire to sacrifice for the sake of Allah, and their desire for Jannah.
> Among those blessed women were Umm Amarah Nasibah Bint Kab al-Ansariyyah.[51]

The reference to Umm Amarah signaled a return to AQI's call for women to take up arms and carry out suicide attacks back in 2005. An al-Naba (2017) article titled "The obligation on women to engage in jihad against the enemies" supported this point.[52] Using examples of women from the time of the Prophet Mohammed, it called for female supporters of the Islamic State to follow their example. The commentary in al-Naba was supported by further articles in the publication encouraging women to follow in the footsteps of those before them who took up arms.[53]

Finally, in February 2018, the Islamic State released an English-language video titled "Inside the Caliphate 7," purportedly showing women, covered from head to toe, shooting guns and preparing for battle.[54] Although interpretations vary, including discussions about whether the figures in the video are actually women, this footage seemingly legitimizes women's ability to take up arms in the conflict while maintaining their modesty under the pretext of defensive jihad. While the Islamic State has given the impression of a change, it appears largely rhetorical.

The Threat and Conclusions

Throughout their respective evolutions, both Hamas and the Islamic State continue to emphasize women's traditional roles as wives and mothers. Though very different organizations with dissimilar strategies, both groups have struggled in their relationship with women and jihad. Under the guise of defensive jihad and strategic necessity, however, both groups demonstrate a willingness to incorporate women in jihad in select circumstances. As such, policymakers and practitioners might work to anticipate evolving threats in the future, as both organizations will likely employ women in more violent roles if the outlined conditions are met.

Hamas and the Islamic State's rhetorical evolution on women's roles in combat offers a deeper understanding of how other violent Islamist groups might change and adapt to shifting landscapes. While Hamas has evolved into a more stable political actor seeking to incorporate women into political roles, the Islamic State has lost its territory and has seemingly begun to call women to arms. These groups have a complex relationship with women and their positions within the organizations, and they have tried to reconcile the differences that lie between radical Islamist ideology and the practical role that women play in the organizations. This relationship will not remain static and will evolve as organizations continue to face different strategic threats.

As can be seen in both cases, the interplay between competing violent Islamist groups is also important for counter-terrorism officials to consider, as the actions and religious edicts of one group can influence the actions of other organizations and individuals. There also remains a risk from women who are inspired by the ideology of these groups, but who act outside of an organization's command and control, as their actions are less predictable when compared to

women operating under organizational control. This is due to the violent Islamist ideology that encourages women to be in the private sphere, as well as strict gender roles which govern aspects of daily life under the control of groups like Hamas and the Islamic State. The Palestinian case has seen women carry out low impact or stabbing attacks, outside of Hamas' control. The Islamic State case has seen women inspired by the goals of the Islamic State seeking to carry out attacks in North America and Western Europe.

The threat remains that due to the deeply gendered ideology of these groups, policymakers and analysts could see more all-female cells,[55] as well as more family and relationship-based networks.[56] Scholars and practitioners will expect to see both Hamas and the Islamic State continue to praise attacks carried out by women when they align with their goals. It is crucial to question the impact these trends will have on other women around the world who are sympathetic to violent Islamist groups.

Independent of women's participation in combat, violent Islamist groups will certainly continue to use women in non-combat and in support roles. Women are financiers, recruiters, the carriers of the ideology to future generations, and in some cases, even combatants. Women play a vital role in the continuation of the ideology and are critical to the survival of violent Islamist groups.

Future research should continue to track the evolving rhetoric of violent Islamist groups, seeking to pinpoint when conditions are ripe for female participation in violence. Furthermore, despite the international focus on global jihadi groups, research should continue to look comparatively at other cases, seeking to find lessons learned. As policy makers and practitioners continue to create CVE policies, they must take into consideration that misconceptions regarding women's contributions to these movements can have serious ramifications and that, even when not mobilized as combatants, the threat women pose should not be underestimated.

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[2]Margolin, Devorah. 2018. "Neither Feminists nor Victims: How Women's Agency Has Shaped Palestinian Violence." The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.
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[4]Mandaville, Peter. 2010. *Global Political Islam*. Routledge.
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[7]*da'wa*, or missionary work, means literally a "call or summons". The missionary work performed by these groups is used by these and other radical Islamists to spread "the word" based on their interpretation of Islam.
[8]Paz, Reuven. 2010. "Jihadis and Hamas." Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within Al-Qa'ida and Its Periphery, edited by Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman. Harmony Project: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point: 183-201.

[9]Donno, Daniela, and Anne-Kathrin Kreft. 2018. "Authoritarian Institutions and Women's Rights." *Comparative Political Studies.*

[10]Lahoud, Nelly. 2014. "The neglected sex: The jihadis' exclusion of women from jihad." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26:5, 780-802.

[11]Prior to the modern nation-state, Muslim scholars created a legal theory of warfare to distinguish between times of war and peace. One of the most cited interpretations of this legal theory comes from Abdullah Azzam in his book, *Defense of the Muslim Lands.* Azzam argued there were two types of jihad against non-believers, describing this as offensive and defensive jihad. Azzam described offensive jihad as "[w]here the Kuffar [non-believer] are not gathering to fight the Muslims. The fighting becomes Fard Kifaya with the minimum requirement of appointing believers to guard borders, and the sending of an army at least once a year to terrorize the enemies of Allah." On the other hand, Azzam argued of defensive jihad, "[t]his is expelling the Kuffar from our land, and it is Fard Ayn, a compulsory duty upon all. It is the most important of the compulsory duties…" While most violent Islamists agree on this definition, there is less consensus about when defensive jihad should be declared and if this individual duty is incumbent on all, including women.

[12]Azzam, Abduallah. 1979. "*Defense of the Muslim Lands.*"

[13]Azzam, Abdullah. 1987. "*Join the Caravan*", Al-Jihaad Fesibillah (The Forgotten Obligation). 32.

[14]`Abd al-Qadir b. `Abd al-`Aziz, (Translated): "*The Mainstay on Preparing Provisions for Jihad.*" Date unknown. Publisher: Minbar al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad (McCants et al. 2006). 29.

[15]Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia merged with Al-Qaeda in Yemen in 2009 to form Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

[16]al-'Ayyiri, Yusuf. "*The Role of Women in the Jihad against Enemies.*" At-Tibyān Publications. (undated).

[17]It is important to clarify that at the organizational level, violent Islamist groups conceptualize suicide attacks/martyrdom operations differently from combat. However, it is equally important to note that at the operational level this distinction is often ignored. For example, Hamas and the Islamic State have praised both suicide attacks and combat operations by women after they have already occurred.

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[30]Erlanger, Steven. 2006. "Grandmother Blows Self Up in Gaza Suicide Blast." *New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/24/world/middleeast/24mideast.html.

[31]A low intensity attack often involves little preparation, or even premeditated thought, and the attacker is likely to use knives, light weapons or vehicles. A high-intensity attack is a multifaceted one involving planning and preparation or leading to mass killing and injuries, or both. These are the author's definitions, which are expanded on in Margolin, Devorah. 2016. "A Palestinian Woman's Place in Terrorism: Organized Perpetrators or Individual Actors?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism:* 1–23.

[32]Data set created by the author, monitoring attacks between 13 September 2015 and 23 January 2016.

[33]These statements were collected by the author for a dataset.

[34]"Hamas in 2017: The document in full." The Middle East Eye. https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/hamas-charter-1637794876.

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[36]Winter, Charlie, and Devorah Margolin. 2017. "The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State." *CTC Sentinel* 10:7, 23-28.

[37]al-Zarqawi, Abu Mus'ab. 2004. "*Follow the Caravan.*"

[38]al-Zarqawi, Abu Mus'ab. 2005. "*Will the Religion Wane While I Live.*"

[39]Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was leader of the Islamic State in Iraq, another incarnation of AQI as it transitioned into the Islamic State.

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Key Considerations: Forward Thinking About
Women, Gender, and Violent Extremism

Although definitive policy prescriptions may sound attractive to those tasked with countering and preventing terrorism and violent extremism, it is critical for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars to recognize how responses concerning women and gender may have varying effects on different countries, communities, and individuals. The elements shaping an individual's involvement in extremism range from ideological and organizational factors to logistical and personal considerations. The papers in this series demonstrate that gender is one of the components that transcends these forces, continually guiding the behaviors of a group and its adherents. As terrorist and violent extremist groups grapple with the roles they want men and women to assume, adherents themselves concurrently attempt to advance their movements in manners that converge, and sometimes diverge, from the roles ascribed by their organizations. In short, these dynamics suggest that intersectional and evolving security challenges require intersectional and adaptable policy solutions.

Policymakers, practitioners, and scholars tasked with assessing and countering the threats posed by extremists must consider women and gender in their analysis of existing and emerging security challenges. This is particularly important because ignoring the effects of gender dimensions like femininity and masculinity "creates blind spots that hamper the effectiveness of prevention and counterterrorism policies, undermining stability, security and human rights across the globe."[1] Ideally, the papers presented in this series, and the following list of considerations they inform, can help relevant stakeholders identify responsible ways to ingrain women and gender in efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism.

Discussion on Context-Specific Considerations for the Future:

Since assumptions about women, gender, and violent extremism tend to translate into official policy, the onus for creating more pragmatic and nuanced approaches to these issues rests on the national and international security community. Stakeholders ranging from political leaders, policymakers, intelligence analysts, law enforcement, court officials, academics, civil society, and news producers must stay vigilant about fostering a nuanced, evidence-based discussion about women, gender, and extremism. The discourse officials use to describe this problem-set influences how other members of the security community, and the public writ large, perceive women, men, and minors connected to extremist movements. Beyond reducing the use of sensationalized misnomers like "jihadi bride," thought leaders should be aware of how watchwords can conflate demographics with culpability in ways that are detrimental to security, international law, and human rights.[2] Ultimately, a genuine course correction requires entities tasked with countering and preventing terrorism and violent extremism to (1) emphasize gender, not just women, as part of the agenda; (2) actively push back against assumption-based threat appraisals; and (3) earnestly look for just and context-specific ways to gender policy design and implementation. The following sections offer some illustrations of how these tenants could play out in practice.

The intersection of gender and terrorism does not exist in a vacuum, so officials must try to discern how changing conditions influence the actions of extremist organizations and their supporters. In some scenarios more than others, information communications technologies (ICTs), and social media especially, optimize connectivity between like-minded sympathizers. While some

policymakers and practitioners already consider counteracting the use of ICTs by extremists as a priority, it is crucial to consider how such tools can alter gender norms online. Beyond reducing the geographic barriers for supporting an organization, ICTs can make extremist groups more accessible to a range of demographics, especially women. Opportunities afforded by features like anonymity, public and private messaging, and moderated groups, for example, concurrently offer ways to either reinforce or subvert gender norms set by an extremist organization's leadership. Similarly, as discussed in this paper series, the virtual sphere may pave the way for women to garner influence online in ways their masculine-dominant organizations might not condone in their physical networks. These observations on gender, technology, and extremism may have crucial implications for the future.[3] As new trends emerge, relevant stakeholders should scrutinize how such changes relate to women, gender, and extremism.

The security community should look for more opportunities to responsibly collect and share qualitative and quantitative data regarding the intersection(s) of women, gender, terrorism, and violent extremism. Since an individual's roles and experiences within extremist organizations represent a vital part of their participation, the field must continue to assess the myriad factors that guide an individual's trajectory. As a critical first step, those following these trends should "delineate all data of persons affiliated with terror and extremist groups by age and gender,"[4] along with other demographic details when possible. Data and analyses recording all paths *to* membership in extremist groups, not just violent roles, are critical to understanding how sex and gender tie into processes of radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization. Conversely, research of this nature is also vital to examining paths *from* violent extremism. Subsequent inquiries should specifically assess these nuances in processes such as deradicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration. By building datasets that represent extremist movements and raising questions about masculinities and femininities early and often, the security community can enhance its ability to provide pertinent responses, tailor interventions, and predict emerging trends

Though often intersecting, the needs of the women, men, and minors touched by violent extremism are varied.[5] Whether an individual is disrupted from mobilizing or returning from a conflict zone an, comprehensive assessments can help countries and communities identify pragmatic approaches to deradicalize and rehabilitate individuals, families, and groups. While gender must factor into these assessments and play a role in counter-extremism programs, the nature of that role should be context-specific. In some scenarios, tailored measures may be the most viable solution; masculinities and femininities, like other facets of identity, would factor into interventions as needed. In other conditions, there may be a greater appetite to address gender-linked drivers and experiences as a first-order priority. This approach would create a demand for initiatives that silo the demographics into different intervention programs. As another model, alternative courses of action are necessary when groups and families might benefit from a mix of tailored and cohort-centric interventions. In practice, these approaches are not mutually exclusive, so countries might blend an array of these measures to address the needs of populations affected by extremism.

Before concluding, it is essential to discuss where this series places the role of women in counter-terrorism and P/CVE. While "it depends" serves as a satisfyingly short answer, the longer response is far more important. Ultimately, the integration of women in efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism is absolutely necessary, but for several reasons, this step alone is an insufficient way to gender such measures.[6] Although there is not agreement on which approach to take, debates on the subject can be productive. Since gender, terrorism, and violent extremism

are relatively dynamic and context-specific problems, responses could benefit from mirroring these qualities. It is vital to see the challenge of integrating gender into counter-terrorism and P/CVE strategies as an ongoing process that prioritizes efficacy, security, and human rights.

Political responses to contemporary issues, particularly concerning how to cope with the returnees from the conflict in Iraq and Syria, highlight the timeliness of the topics discussed in this paper series. By understanding how gender dynamics are ingrained in violent extremist organizations, those tasked with confronting these threats can more comprehensively address networks in their entirety. Piqued interest in this issue provides policymakers, practitioners, and scholars a chance to draw from qualitative and quantitative assessments of present challenges to enhance policy responses. In addition to understanding women's links to violent extremism, it is useful to examine how other aspects of gender affect individuals, organizations, and movements. Calls to better integrate gender dimensions into counter-terrorism and P/CVE strategies demand further consideration of how masculinities and femininities guide paths to and from extremism.[7] Simply stated, "a more productive way forward requires a comprehensive understanding of how gender affects recruitment, radicalization processes, operational roles, sentencing, and rehabilitation—for both men and women."[8] By recognizing the ways in which violent extremist groups are more than the sum of their parts, those tasked with preventing and countering violent extremism can begin to develop synergistic, gender-aware, and just solutions to current and evolving threats.

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