

## Women Radicalization in the Arab World

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### Abstract

*The study explores the drivers of radicalization among females from 12 Arab states (Kuwait, UAE, Oman, KSA, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Lebanon, and Egypt). A sample of 2624 young female students was selected, of whom 11.7% were expatriates and 88.3% were citizens. A 44-item questionnaire with relevant scales was used. The instrument has a strong reliability ( $\alpha=0.96$ ) and a construct validity (LSC and Radicalization Scale) of ( $r= 0.723$ ,  $\alpha=0.00$ ). Findings showed that all independent variables combined explained 67% of the variance of female radicalization, and a significant overall impact of independent variables on female's radicalization ( $F 214.806$   $\alpha=0.00$ ). Results showed a uniquely significant contribution of all predictors with the exception of location, father's work, and religiosity. However, significant differences were found in females' radicalization attributed to religion, ( $F=123.932$ ,  $\alpha=0.000$ ) and residence (citizen vs. Expat) ( $F=4.349$ ,  $\alpha=0.03$ ). Security implications such as understanding factors behind women terrorist radicalization and the women's roles in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization were discussed.*

**Keywords:** Females, Radicalization, Young youth, Arab World.

### Introduction

Radicalization, terrorism and counterterrorism have frequently been molded by the false belief that women are not involved in violent extremism or terrorist radicalization. This has resulted due to the low participation rate by women in Crime, women limited access to crime (Campaniello, 2019), and in women being excluded from decision-making processes and being significantly underrepresented among law enforcement and security officials. Nonetheless, gender plays a significant role in security. Women contribute valuable viewpoints to the conversation that shouldn't be disregarded, as men and women have distinct perspectives on security, war, terrorism, and counterterrorism. Since women are often the targets of both terrorist acts and counterterrorism operations, they are able to identify instances in which preventive measures backfire and are ineffective. This kind of information can be vital in preventing the establishment or maintenance of environments that encourage terrorism. The topic of women becoming radicalized terrorists is fraught with prejudice and false beliefs since violent extremism and terrorist radicalization are still frequently seen as male-only problems. Women are generally viewed as powerless, submissive, passive, victims, and mothers in violent and conflict circumstances. These assumptions underlie gender norms. As such, women are not viewed as prospective terrorists and are not thought to be as dangerous as men if they were to engage in terrorist activities. However, it is important to remember that a woman is neither inherently more or less dangerous than a man, nor is she more likely to value cooperation, non-violence,

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and peaceful discourse. Thus, by emphasizing the participation of women in their organizations, terrorist groups have exploited the same image of the tranquil woman to attract new members and project an innocent, nonviolent persona (OSCE (2013).

Raising awareness of violent extremist messaging and recruitment tactics aimed at girls and women, as well as the possibility of women becoming radicalized terrorists, is essential. It is crucial to raise awareness of this issue among parents, educators, social workers, front-line police officers, journalists, and judges. Numerous terrorist-friendly environments have an effect on both men and women's propensity for violent radicalization. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that various genders may experience these influences in different ways. It is possible for discrimination based on gender to coexist with and worsen rights violations and discrimination based on other factors, such as race, ethnicity, or religion. In addition, certain factors that can contribute to the radicalization of women into terrorists include discrimination and inequality based on gender, violence against women, limited access to economic and educational opportunities, and limited opportunities for women to exercise their civil and political rights and participation in politics through legal and peaceful means. This can improve knowledge of the radicalization processes of female terrorists and the roles played by women in thwarting and opposing violent extremism and radicalization that breed terrorism (VERLT). This has led to the creation of suggestions for potential follow-up activities by OSCE executive entities, within the parameters of their respective mandates, as well as recommendations for measures to be undertaken by civil society and OSCE participating States. the factors that lead to female terrorist radicalization and strategies for gender-sensitive, human rights-compliant prevention. The second seminar highlighted the potential human rights and gender concerns that may develop in this environment, focusing on best practices and lessons learned from women's activities to avoid VERLT (Patel, 2017; OSCE, 2013).

Despite the critical role that girls and women play in both prevention and in terrorism and violent extremism, the involvement of girls and women and gender mainstreaming are frequently disregarded in efforts to combat violent extremism. Despite their underrepresentation in the ranks of terrorist fighters, girls and women have historically played a crucial role as ideologues, organizers, fund-raisers, and recruiters for violent extremist groups, encouraging others to join them. Throughout history, there have been several cases of women resorting to political violence. However, because women are still mostly viewed as housewives and mothers, there is still doubt regarding female violent extremists (Praxl-Tabuchi, 2019). Bloom, for instance, discusses the "four Rs": retribution, atonement, relationship, and respect, as well as the prevalence of rape among violent extremist women (Bloom, 2007). However, there is nothing like the manner in which women are joining ISIL. The importance of the family and ISIL's territorial goals, which include establishing an autonomous state and recruiting individuals for roles like husbands, police, doctors, and nurses, allow for a closer examination of women's participation in violent extremism. In fact, current estimates suggest that in places under ISIL control, women may make up as much as 20% of the workforce (Patel, 2017).

Additional scientific investigation of VERLT is necessary. To close this gap, researchers must, however, critically examine the methods they employ to gather data, the potential assumptions underlying their findings, and the cultural context(s) in which their research is being conducted. They must also take a gender-sensitive stance, consider their informational sources, and critically assess the way that discussions and queries about women being radicalized terrorists are phrased and presented. Further investigation is necessary to determine whether particular circumstances can encourage women to become radicalized terrorists. Finding recurring trends in women's participation could be beneficial in this context. But since women may become radicalized in different ways, it is important to consider the unique historical, social, political, and psychological

circumstances of each instance to make sure the underlying causes are recognized and dealt with (OSCE, 2013).

The processes of radicalization are distinct and non-linear, and the circumstances that facilitate them varies amongst people. Comprehending a particular case of radicalization necessitates considering the unique personal and contextual elements involved, such as historical, political, socioeconomic, and psychological aspects. It is imperative that governments, civil society, and international organizations reiterate and abide by the premise that terrorism ought not to be linked to any one religion, culture, race, or ethnic group. To prevent concentrating unduly on particular groups, governments should also react to terrorist threats that stem from a variety of ideologies in a fair and reasonable manner. Gender is not the only barrier that VERLT crosses; it also overcomes socio-political, national, cultural, geographic, and age limits. Terrorist groups have recruited women as their target audience for decades. Although the possibility of women becoming radicalized and joining violent extremist groups has always existed, it is currently often ignored due to the persistent belief that violent extremism and terrorism are solely the domain of men. Women may also be very effective in overcoming VERLT. Women's participation in the community, as educators, activists, and policy makers, is crucial to addressing the conditions that encourage terrorism and successfully preventing it. Women are well positioned to offer critical input on the international community's ongoing counterterrorism initiatives and to identify instances in which preventive measures are negatively affecting their communities. In order to support women's organizations in identifying and addressing specific political, social, economic, cultural, or educational concerns that may lead to violent extremism and terrorist radicalization, it is imperative to remove the obstacles that prevent women from actively participating in the fight against terrorism. In order to fight violent extremist and terrorist propaganda, women are effective initiators of projects and storytellers, and they may have a particular influence on female audiences (Elizabeth & Winterbotham).

The theoretical foundation is found in the radicalization pyramid model, which acknowledges that terrorists originate from larger networks of support. The reasoning goes that violent groups might target the large potential support bases at the bottom. This large community gives rise to the immediate social milieu—what Waldmann refer to as the "radical milieu"—and the receptive support base for extreme actors. These communities come together to form the social or physical environment that fosters radicalization (Waldmann, 2008). There are very few people at the top of the pyramid who are truly willing to use violence. Salafi-Jihadi organizations have specifically, though not solely, targeted their messaging to young Muslims in the larger community and the communities with Muslim heritage. They have done this by taking advantage of debates concerning common problems like unfair foreign policy, discrimination, or injustice. This has consequences for related CVE methodologies (Pearson, 2018; Pearson, & Winterbotham, 2017).

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

A sample of 2624 young females from 12 Arab countries was selected, of whom 1180 (45%) gulf states and 1144 (55%) non-gulf states.

### **Research tool**

The questionnaire developed by (Al-badayneh, et al., 2016, and Al-badayneh, et al., 2023) was used as a research tool. It consists of demographic information and a radicalization scale (44 items).

### Validity and reliability

Construct validity of the scale was estimated by calculating the correlation between radicalization scale and low self-control scale and showed a positive significant relationship (0.723,  $\alpha = 0.000$ ), a sign of validity of the scale. The scale reliability and internal consistency was strong as estimated by Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha = 0.96$ ).

### Findings

Findings of the present study showed the highest four radical beliefs and thoughts among females were about the rape of a girl of my religion (mean=3.57), the offend to a man of religion (mean=3.3), martyrs revives the religion (mean=3.0), the trial of a young man of my religion, is a trial for my brother (mean= 2.9)

#### Determinants of female's radicalization

All determinants of radicalization explained 67% of the variance on radicalization and were significant (F 214.806  $\alpha=0.00$ ) (Table 1).. Results showed a uniquely significant contribution of all predictors except location, father's work, and religiosity (Table 2).

Table (1) Regression ANOVA table for all independent variables on females radicalization

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2978962.968	21	141855.379	214.806	.000
Residual	1456154.338	2205	660.387		
Total	4435117.306	2226			

Table (2): Regression coefficients table for the drivers of females' radicalization

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	sig
	B	S	Beta		
constant	63.591	5.380		11.819	.000
State	-.982	.373	-.081	-2.631	.009
Location	-.935	2.684	-.010	-.348	.728
Religion	-13.53	1.271	-.144	-10.643	.000
Nationality	5.715	1.997	.040	2.861	.004
Family size	.657	.338	.028	1.945	.052
Employee16+	2.061	.512	.060	4.027	.000
Friends	.270	.087	.043	3.092	.002
Father's education	1.313	.564	.036	2.329	.020
Mother's education	3.116	.531	.094	5.866	.000
Father's work	-.698	.561	-.016	-1.244	.214
Mother's work	.968	.465	.028	2.080	.038
Violence Perpetrator	4.887	1.438	.045	3.398	.001
Fight participation	-2.824	1.296	-.031	-2.179	.029

Anger	-3.713	.643	-.076	-5.772	.000
Fear	1.830	.616	.041	2.972	.003
Internet usage	-6.460	.650	-.125	-9.940	.000
Cheat in Exam	-2.540	1.233	-.026	-2.060	.040
Use Force	-4.961	1.232	-.054	-4.026	.000
LSC	3.700	.083	.677	44.680	.000
LSE	1.467	.391	.054	3.746	.000
Religiosity	-.001	.272	.000	-.003	.997

## Conclusion & Discussion

The study explores the drivers of radicalization among young females from 12 Arab states. Findings showed that all predictors explained 67% of the variance of female radicalization. The significance of this research is its contributions to understanding and determining the factors behind young females' radicalization in the Arab world. The question becomes why young Arab females are radicalized across all Arab countries? Girls and women often experience distinct 'push' factors that increase their vulnerability to radicalization and recruitment and specific 'pull' factors that violent extremist organizations use to target and recruit them. However, significant differences were found in Females' radicalization attributed to religion. Marion et al. (2013, p. 276) used the phrase "from zero to hero" to explain the process of joining a radical group and to identify the factors that lead to young people becoming radicalized. The fundamental premise is that young people are more susceptible to radicalization than adults. Among them is a more susceptible subset that is alienated, jobless, and excluded. Youth have wants that society must meet and balance. A radical group offers a membership that functions as a standard for mature conduct and deeds. It offers stability, safety, and a sense of identity. It provides context and significance in life. Youth internalize zero-order radical ideologies and ideas as a result of their adherence to radical groups. These ideologies and beliefs increase the value that group members and their significant others place on belonging to, and being a part of, the group (Al-badayneh & Al hasan, 2016). A new recruit has an unparalleled sense of joy when they go from being "invisible" to "recognized." It makes a significant impact and gives these adolescents a fresh outlook on life (Marion et al., 2013, p. 276).

Amadeu Antonio Stiftung (2017) notes that, despite the large number of documented cases of women who played active roles in their extremist groups, there used to be a tendency to ignore and undervalue women and their role in extremism. Women are generally underrepresented across the spectrum. White women are stereotyped as "peaceful, non-violent, loving and caring" (Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 2017: 2).

A significant overall impact of independent variables on female's radicalization. Results showed a uniquely significant contribution of all predictors except location, father's work, and religiosity. Most people agree that radicalization is a very complicated process that varies from person to person. It is frequently believed that a person may be drawn or drawn away from a violent extremist group by a variety of causes. These kinds of factors can contribute to the explanation of why someone is more receptive to extremist discourse than others. Feelings of social alienation, the pull of a cause, shifts in group dynamics, economic hardship, and perceived injustices. (Al-badayneh, et al., 2016, Andrew, 2013; Allan, et.al, 2015, Bakker, 2015).

However, significant differences were found in Females' radicalization attributed to residence (citizen vs. Expat). Terrorists "do not fall from the sky... they emerge from a

set of strongly held beliefs," according to terrorism specialist Brian Michael Jenkins. They have become politicized, they then turn into terrorists. one important role that women play in terrorist organization which is sexual jihad was not mentioned in the paper. This is one of the key roles women play in radical terrorist organizations as their services provide the required stability and moral for the male fighters and as they reproduce they give new babies which with time become the next generation of radicals.

Most nations have seen significant increases in women's labor market involvement in recent decades, and this rate is now approaching that of men. Similar trends toward gender convergence appear to be happening in the criminal justice system, but on a smaller scale—despite the fact that much more males than women still commit crimes. Women are becoming more involved in the job market and in the criminal justice system due to societal norms and technological advancements that have liberated them from the house. Since crime is no longer just the domain of men, it is crucial to look into the criminal conduct of women in order to decide whether policies aimed at reducing crime should be different for them. Technological progress and social norms have freed women from the home, increasing their participation in both the labor market and the crime market. A higher participation of women in the labor market might increase female participation in the crime market (Campaniello, 2019).

### **Security Implications**

Women are often underrepresented in decision-making and law enforcement due to their involvement in violent extremism. Gender is crucial for security as it helps identify inefficient preventive measures and prevents terrorism. Understanding female radicalization causes and including them in counterterrorism programs is essential. Gender and social norms must be considered in these efforts. The strongest defense against females' radicalization is to address its root causes and comprehend why young females turn violent and extremist. Fostering stronger social bonds, enhancing youth social capital in society, can be immunizing for young people on a cultural and social levels against extremist ideas and viewpoints.

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