

Introducing the Extreme Gender Typology: A Gendered Framework for Analysing Extremisms¹

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Summary

The extreme gender typology enables theoretically informed and gender-responsive approaches to preventing extremism in policy and practice. Research has demonstrated the role of gender in early warning signs that can help prevent extremism, including violent acts.² The typology encourages systematic gender analysis of existing and potential extremisms¹ to empower policymakers and practitioners to reduce violence and enhance gender equality.

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Research on extremism and programs to combat it have increasingly incorporated a gender perspective. We now recognise that extremist groups and ideologies interact with gender norms, often in mutually reinforcing ways. For example, we can appreciate the significance of hegemonic masculinity within far-right or Islamist extremism.³ But we don't understand the multiple ways and distinct mechanisms through which gender relations may promote and/or counter extremisms.

An analytical framework is not just vital for research; policymakers and practitioners need a framework to understand how gender operates within and across extremisms to challenge and reduce the presence of extremism in communities, that may also be conducive to violence. The *Extreme Gender Typology* based on feminist theory and extremism research addresses this need.

The typology disaggregates gender as an analytical category to investigate different extremisms. As shown in Table 1, the typology highlights the distinct types of gender dynamics that manifest in extremist organisations or states: Gendered identities, gendered ideologies, and gendered power dynamics.

Gendered identities refer to the concept of a person's gender and are crucial in the targeting of individuals for recruitment as well as their motivations for joining and leaving a group. The concept of *gendered ideologies* refers to the role that ideas about gender play in the political ideologies of states, non-state organisations or groups, and societies. *Gendered power* dynamics describe the hierarchical order of femininities and masculinities that structure the environments in which extremism takes root.

Table 1: 'Extreme Gender' Typology

| | Definition | Application | Organising Principle |
|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------|--|
| Gendered Identity | Concept of a person's gender crucial in recruitment and motivation to join or leave an extremist group | Individual | Who is targeted? |
| Gendered Ideology | Role that gender plays within the political ideologies of states, non-state organisations or groups, and societies | Collective, Organizational | How is extremism mandated and promulgated? |
| Gendered Power Relations | A hierarchy of masculinities and femininities that is often racialized and culturally specific, structuring the environments in which extremism takes place | Macro, Meso, Micro | How is extremism normalized? What is the practical implication of the gendered ideology? |

Applying the typology to far-right, Islamist, and Buddhist extremisms, in a recent paper, provided nuance and context on how gender dynamics may underpin and reinforce extremism. With a gender frame, the typology reveals the connections among different forms of extremism from across the ideological spectrum and how they may fuel each other. It has global applicability to analyse various extremist groups, which we show for an antifeminist party in Germany, an extremist organisation in the Middle East, and the Burmese military state.

Applying the Typology: Example ISIS

To apply the typology, the organising principles shown in Table 1 are illustrated with the well-known ISIS example:

- 1 The gendered identity of an extremist actor on an individual level may be investigated with the guiding question: ‘Who is targeted?’. In the example of ISIS, it could be investigated who is targeted by the recruitment or who is susceptible to propaganda. Who could be motivated to join based on their gendered identity? Analysing these questions may reveal relevant information on why ISIS was so successful in recruiting young women.
- 2 To assess the collective and organisational dynamics of an actor, that is, their gendered ideology, the researcher can ask: ‘How is extremism mandated and promulgated?’. This involves analysing what role gender plays within the political ideology of ISIS. What were the prescribed gender norms and roles? Did men have to fulfil particular roles? What about women? What about people with diverse gender identities and sexualities?
- 3 To understand the gendered power dynamics on various levels, ‘How does ISIS normalise extremism?’ needs to be asked, as well as ‘What are the practical implications of the gendered ideology?’. Did all men hold power equally? How are gendered power dynamics used to normalise violence against ethnic and/or religious minority groups?

Endnotes

- 1 This research brief is based on an article titled “The global rise of extremisms: towards a gendered analytical framework”, published in *European Journal of Politics and Gender*. The initial idea was inspired by a project and report the authors completed for the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety in 2019.
- 2 Davies, S. E. and True, J. (2024) *Hidden Wars: Gendered Violence in Asia’s Civil Conflicts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; True, J. and Eddyono, S. (2021) Preventing Violent Extremism – What Has Gender Got to Do With It? *European Psychologist*, vol 26, no 1, pp 55–67.
- 3 Blee, K. (2020) Where Do We Go from Here? Positioning Gender in Studies of the Far Right, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, vol 21, no 4, pp 416–431; Brown, K. (2020) *Gender, Religion, Extremism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.