

ABSTRACT

This dissertation will analyse the phenomenon of female terrorism in Arab Muslim societies, and the consequent national strategies aimed at countering it. Scholars have recently focused on the gendered aspects of jihadi terrorist organisations, looking at both the motivations behind women's radicalisation and their operational roles, particularly as suicide bombers. Yet, little attention has been paid to the operativity of gendered norms in informing female terrorists' identity and agency, leading toward biased and partial understandings of the issue at hand. As such, this study will first focus on examining female jihadi terrorism from a gender-based and context-sensitive perspective, and it will then check national counterterrorism efforts against those findings. The purpose of this research is to highlight the modalities and the extent to which gendered norms informing female behaviour have been integrated into counterterrorism approaches. A qualitative research design will be adopted, analysing terrorist women's first-hand accounts and lived experiences and evaluating Iraq's and Jordan's National Action Plans on Women Peace and Security. Findings will show that female terrorism has been evolving in the past two decades, not distancing itself from gendered religious values, but rather re-signifying their applications in the realm of terrorism. It will be argued that, tied to previous understandings of gendered societal beliefs, and not envisioning women's identity and agency as they currently are operating in terrorist organisations, national counterterrorism strategies are not fit for adequately tackling female terrorism. The dissertation has both theoretical and policy-relevant implications, generating knowledge in an often-neglected area of female terrorism, and highlighting the gaps and consequences of biased counterterrorism efforts.