

A comprehensive examination of women in terrorism

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Abstract

Women are a growing and deadly presence in terrorism; however, existing literature has found that female terrorists are often misunderstood and underestimated as a security threat. Furthermore, existing counterterrorism measures appear to have little effect on female terrorists. There is clear need for a greater understanding of women in terrorism. Most analyses of women in terrorism are qualitative and small-scale, though, and there is little large-scale statistical data on women in terrorism in the extant literature. The relative lack of understanding of women in terrorism represents an important gap in the literature. This thesis presents a unified theory of the entire arc of women's experiences in terrorism, from their choice to participate in politically-motivated violence to the challenges they face when attempting to leave and reintegrate into society. I argue that the decision to join terrorist groups is often gendered for women, and the gendered aspect of women in terrorism accounts for many of the disparate findings in terrorism literature.

I conduct a global regression analysis on the effects of several gendered variables on instances of suicide terrorism. I find that while the impact of women's access to employment and the number of women in the national parliament is not significant, the gender parity of access to education is highly correlated with instances of suicide terrorism in general, and among women. Fertility rate has a complex relationship with women's likelihood to engage in suicide terrorism. Furthermore, instances of suicide terrorism in society in general increase the likelihood that women will engage in suicide terrorism in a given country.

I also analyze the literature on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration programs and post-conflict program analyses, and their impact on women. I find that such programs often systematically exclude or fail women, and that these programs generally do not

include the kind of aid that is most important to female ex-combatants, and which represent the greatest barriers to their reintegration. I argue that significant policy changes are necessary to truly meet the needs of female ex-combatants and terrorists, and to create a safer and more positive post-conflict environment.

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Introduction

Monday, October 29, 2018: a 30-year old woman blows herself up on one of the busiest streets in the heart of Tunisia’s capital, Tunis (BBC 2018; CBS 2018). In London, an 18-year old—Safaa Boular—is taken into custody before she can carry out a planned grenade and gun attack at the British Museum (Khomami 2018b). The teenager had first tried to travel to Syria for terrorism, then passed the London plot on to her sister when she was detained. Her sister—who had already planned her own attacks in central London—was a part of the same group: the first all-female terrorist cell linked to ISIS in Britain (Khomami 2018a; 2018b). Boular’s trial verdict “suggested a pattern at odds with the usual understanding of the role young women within radicalized networks occupy: not as passengers or victims, but as determined perpetrators of violence in their own right” (Khomami 2018a).

Earlier that year, in May, women were considered key to the worst terrorist attack Indonesia has suffered in a decade: three near-simultaneous suicide bombings that killed over a dozen people and injured scores more (Hincks 2018). Two of the attacks—and another, foiled, one—were conducted “by families that included young children” (Hincks 2018). The whole-family attacks were only possible due to the willingness of the women, the mothers who helped to strap explosives to their children and turn them into living bombs (Kelsy-Sugg and Sommer 2018).

These were women who saw foreign female ISIS propagandists from Europe, America, and Australia as “role models for Indonesian women” (Kelsy-Sugg and Sommer 2018). And their sentiment—that “if these women can do that then so can we,”—is not unique among Indonesian women; the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy and Analysis of Conflict has been flagging “increased activity on the part of women, and increased intention to get involved in a

more active combatant role' for some time" (Hincks 2018). Other organizations—like the Institute of Peace Building—are also aware of the problem, and see the situation—women “trying to reach their ultimate goal of being as important as men as perpetrators”—as “moving very fast” (Hincks 2018). Furthermore, current deradicalization tactics don't work if the whole family is radicalized; many professionals characterize this situation as new, unfamiliar territory (Kelsey-Sugg and Sommer 2018).

These women were also not alone; the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) "found there are hundreds of Indonesian women joining ISIS after returning from Syria, who are undetected by the government" (Wargadiredja 2019). The ICSR report also noted the "increasing number of women carrying out suicide bomb attacks," in addition to the key role women play in the spread of extremist beliefs in the family and community (Wargadiredja 2019).

Even more recently, at least one of the suicide bombers who participated in the Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka was a woman. The woman "exploded herself along with her two children" in the aftermath of the attacks to prevent a successful police investigation of her bomber husband, who had just become responsible for one of 2019's most notable tragedies thusfar (Frayner 2019).

These are only a handful of the many recent news stories which share an increasingly-prevalent commonality: female terrorists. While women are hardly a new fixture of conflict or even terrorism—women have long been involved in terrorist organizations, going as far back as the 1800s—the percentage of women involved in terrorism has been rising steadily since 1976, is projected to continue growing for the foreseeable future (Von Knop 2007, 398-9). Perhaps more

importantly, the roles of female terrorists are growing and diversifying—not just among organizations of one type, but across ideologies.

The female terrorist captures the imagination of the public, even as she horrifies them, and presents somewhat of a puzzle to social scientists. While the growing body of literature on terrorism is relatively robust, there are comparatively few studies that focus on women specifically, or that even distinguish between female and male terrorists in their research design or findings. Of those that do, the majority are qualitative or interview-based, and the whole of this body of work represented relatively few conflicts. Several different papers even interview the same group of imprisoned female Palestinian terrorists, for instance, and conflicts in Sri Lanka, Palestine, and Sierra Leone are overrepresented in the literature.

This relative dearth of information is difficult to rectify because there is also a lack of available data on terrorism which distinguishes between female and male perpetrators; the data I use in Chapter Two of this thesis appears to be the only publicly-available large-N study of modern terrorism which allows researchers to focus on the sex of terrorists. I will explain in Chapter Two that, despite this data being a valuable resource, it is not flawless, and the fact that there is no comparable source to compare data to inherently limits the robustness of research and findings based on a singular source.

Overall, less is known about female terrorists than their male counterparts, there has been little attempt at the development of a comprehensive theory of female terrorism, and discourse about women in terrorism has a tendency to slip into stereotypes. Despite an increasing need for understanding of women in terrorism, research into this topic “remains in its infancy,” and “the gendered perspective [of terrorism] remains understudied” (Cruise 2016, 33, 35).

Furthermore, despite the real and growing threat of female terrorists, an acknowledgement and discussion of women in terrorism is shockingly absent during lawmaker's deliberations and within national security bodies. The 2011 United States National Security Plan, for instance, does not mention the increasing role of women in terrorist organizations, despite outlining terrorism as “one of the greatest threats to the country.” Women were also absent from the DHS’s 2004 “terrorist profile,” which identified “only men as potential terrorist threats.” (Cruise 2016, 40). What little recognition of female terrorists does exist often misunderstands women’s roles in terrorism, laboring under misconceptions that women are entirely victims of terrorist organizations, that women are a feature only of left-wing or secular groups, or that women’s roles are limited to that of the supportive wife or medic.

A more complete understanding of women in terrorism is desperately needed for effective counterterrorism measures. Few, if any, extant articles have examined the entire scope of women’s involvement in terrorism, from their initiation to their desertion of that life and the challenges they face reintegrating into civilian life. Nor have prior studies attempted to connect the two. The majority of studies which identify female terrorists specifically focus on their motivations; however, motivation is only one part of the phenomenon of female terrorism.

In this thesis I explore the arc of women’s involvement in terrorism. Chapter One examines the utility of women in terrorism, women’s recruitment by the organizations and how group-level variables affect women’s participation in terrorism, and women’s motivations for becoming terrorists despite the risks. The second chapter is a quantitative regression analysis which tests my hypothesis from the first chapter: that women who choose to become involved in terrorism do so as an alternative route to power, respect, or opportunities when their mainstream options for success are limited or absent. Chapter Three examines women’s exit from violent

organizations and the ways in which the same variables that influence women's participation in terrorism also influence the success or failure of their demobilization and reintegration into society. I conclude with a short policy analysis and recommendations for future research.

I propose a theory of women in terrorism that follows the entire process of women in terrorism, from their decision to join an organization, to their exit from terrorism and the challenges that face them when they attempt to reintegrate into a civilian life. This theory unifies what appears to be disparate sets of research—research on women's roles in, and motivations for joining, terrorist organizations; ex-combatant and recidivism research and interviews with female combatants—to explain the whole arc of women in terrorism, from start to finish. Such a unified theory of women's involvement in terrorism is still absent from literature, which has focused on individual parts of women's journeys, but not yet connected findings into a singular whole.

Rather than examining two separate processes—women joining terrorist organizations, and women leaving them—I explain how these processes are, in reality, one process. Most of the variables which push women towards terrorism in the first place also hinder—or at least significantly impact—their reintegration. While the course of a conflict may have changed, at the individual level, the female terrorist is still the same woman facing the same influences at both the beginning and end of her experience with a violent political organization. As current counterterrorism efforts have largely been unsuccessful in curbing female terrorism, understanding this process will allow governments, community leaders, and NGOs to better prevent and counter women's involvement in terrorism.

My contribution is to present a unifying theoretical framework of women's participation in violent political organizations. I pull from literature on women in terrorism—my primary focus—and women's participation in guerilla, rebel, or combatant groups—to which my theory

also applies, as I will explain—to show how these disparate individual findings speak to a broader trend in women’s participation in violent political organizations. I present evidence that gender unifies the experiences of women across conflicts and violent organizations and impacts women’s participation in these groups in general.

To effectively pull women from terrorism, and prevent female recidivism, it is necessary to understand just what pushes them towards terrorism in the first place, and why current efforts at pulling them away from violence are failing. The counterterrorism, reintegration, and “pull” factors must address the needs of women and their experiences—the “push” factors—in order to be successful. The theory proposed in this thesis has the potential to significantly benefit counterterrorism efforts, and I intend to further study this phenomenon in my future research.

Chapter 1

What drives the female terrorist? Who is she? If common framing were to be believed, she is an abomination—the warped version of the gentle mother—or a pitiable victim. Other research suggests that she is exactly the same as the male terrorist, with the same experiences, motivations, and impact. The misconceptions regarding terrorism, and the difficulties in properly studying terrorists and producing generalizable findings, are only magnified when it comes to female terrorists. In addition, not all supported findings in general (male) terrorist literature apply to women.

I argue that what little research has been done into female terrorists suggests that in many cases female terrorists are influenced by different factors than men, and that, while female terrorists are neither wholly victim or monster, their decisions are shaped by the fact that their lives are different, as women, from their male counterparts. What is clear is that there are significant gaps in the literature surrounding female terrorism, and women are a growing, deadly, presence in terrorism around the world. Understanding what motivates women’s participation in terrorism is important not only to fill gaps in the literature, but also for effective counterterrorism policies.

The percentage of women involved in terrorism has been rising since 1976, and is projected to continue growing for the foreseeable future (Knop 2007, 398-9). Women make up a quarter of suicide bombers across organizations, and in some conflicts—such as in Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Chechnya—women are responsible for half of all such attacks since 2002 (Cruise 2016, 33). A recent Europol report found that 18 percent of all people arrested on terror charges in 2015 were women, and that that number increased to 25 percent in 2016 (Molana-Allen 2019). In other areas, like Iraq, women’s participation in suicide bombings has increased by over 400 percent in

only a few years (Bloom 2010, 449). And unlike men, whose effectiveness is vulnerable to time and improved counterterrorism efforts, female terrorists' deadliness has so far only held strong or increased. Furthermore, more varied types of organization are taking on women, including some of the most threatening and prolific groups in operation, like ISIS.

In addition to their impact as operatives, female terrorists are particularly effective in recruiting other women. Female terrorist recruiters represent a significant security concern for the West, as they have shown to be effective in radicalizing citizens inside target countries. This enables groups to bypass security at ports of entry and to stay further under the radar than a non-citizen. Furthermore, groups like Al Shabaab and ISIS have had "great success in recruiting female fighters and female collaborators" via recruiting techniques and messages specifically targeted at women ¹(Cruise 2016, 40-41). As I will explain later, female terrorists can embody all of the terrorist threats as men, along with additional female-specific advantages that can increase the destruction they, or their team, can inflict.

Safaa Boular—the 18-year-old who had planned the ISIS attack in London—began her radicalization journey through a female influencer online—a Syrian woman on Twitter who "painted the caliphate as a world where 'everyone was equal'" (Khomami 2018a). While ISIS has been especially successful using the internet for mobilization, women associated with terrorist groups are well-known to "play a major role in spreading ideology and encouraging attacks" even if they do not participate front-line attacks (Molana-Allen 2019).

¹ About ten percent of ISIS's European recruits are women, and the highly-strategic, complex online network of recruitment, marketing, and community-building responsible for this statistic is "specifically run by women geared toward recruiting women."

The effectiveness of women’s recruitment of women is also evident in the Eritrean civil war. Women were initially severely limited in admittance to rebel groups, and then only to support roles. Once one group began admitting women to its ranks, though, the initial group of women were so successful in mobilizing others from around the country—even women with very different backgrounds—that when independence was finalized in 1993, women accounted for a third of EPLF combatants (Bernal 2000, 62-63).

The possible snowballing effect of women recruiting women is one of the particular dangers of female terrorists. For women, connections—both formal, such as through membership in social organizations, and informal, such as fraternal or familial—have been found throughout terrorist literature to “strongly predict” female activism and terrorism (Thomas and Wood 2017, 6).

Despite the clear and increasing need for an understanding of women in terrorism, the threat of female terrorists has received little attention from security forces², lawmakers, and researchers. Research into the topic “remains in its infancy” and the “gendered perspective [of terrorism] remains understudied” (Cruise 2016, 33, 35). Few studies of terrorism include gender in their analysis, and those studies which do—or which are devoted to female terrorists—are mostly small in scale. What little recognition of female terrorists does exist often misunderstands women’s roles in terrorism, laboring under misconceptions that women are entirely victims of terrorist organizations, that women are a feature only of left-wing or secular groups, or that women’s roles are limited to that of the supportive wife or medic.

² Notable past exclusions of women from high-ranking policy decisions have included the 2011 United States National Security Plan, which—despite identifying terrorism as “one of the greatest threats”—did not mention the increasing role of women in terrorist organizations; and the Department of Homeland Security’s 2004 “terrorist profile,” which identified “only men as potential terrorist threats” (Cruise 2016, 40).

I explore the evidence regarding women's participation in violent political organizations—drawing from both literature on terrorism and rebel groups/insurgencies, as the experiences of women in both are very similar—and develop a broader theory that women's participation in violent political organizations is influenced by the restrictions they face in society, and the potential violent political organizations offer for women's empowerment relative to their limited mainstream options. I support my theory with evidence from extant literature regarding the qualities of women in terrorism and their motivations for joining terrorist organizations, and the experiences of women leaving violent political organizations, as well as an initial quantitative analysis.

Women join violent political organizations due to a lack of mainstream options for survival, safety, and acceptance. Women also join these organizations when there are limited or no outside options for political participation or economic success. When women are blocked from nonviolent avenues to independence, respect, and influence, they turn to violent ones. Even the human capital of female terrorists supports the argument that women join terrorist groups to gain power, as female terrorists are educated—sometimes more than male terrorists of the same ranking/position—and older than their male counterparts. Terrorist organizations seeking the best and brightest to most effectively carry out attacks are willing to oblige women, regardless of the group's overall opinions on women, due to their tactical advantages.

Women as Terrorists

The societal norms, gender roles, and expectations about women which inform their decisions to join terrorist organizations are also key to the tactical advantages female terrorists hold. Women generate less suspicion and are often subjected to more lax security procedures.

They are often able to get closer to a greater variety of targets than men. The presence of a woman is less suspicious or threatening near soft targets like schools and marketplaces—especially those which are connected to traditionally feminine jobs like childcare—and women are often underestimated as a threat in more securitized environments. This advantage is relatively universal, allowing female terrorists to operate safe houses, run errands, store weapons, and gather or pass intelligence without arousing the attention that men would. (Reif 1986, 154).

Where women are underestimated—a frequent feature of patriarchal societies—female terrorists can pose as wives or mothers, and gain access to restricted areas or get close to individuals for the purposes of spying or assassination. Women in societies which afford them little power or attention are able to use the belittling views of women to their advantage in these tactical situations (Reif 1986, 154). Additionally, female terrorists can use loose/concealing women’s clothing³ and even the female body to hide weapons. Faking pregnancy allows female terrorists to bypass, or severely limit, security, or to disguise explosives and other weapons as a baby bump (O’Rourke 2009, 698; Dalton and Asal 2011, 813). Women couriers are better able to hide messages against their bodies and in nonthreatening places like baby carriages; furthermore, women have been used to lure police and others into dangerous situations in ploys less likely to succeed if they had been performed by a man (Cruise 2016, 37).

While women are increasingly present in all areas of terrorism, one area with a disproportionately large percentage of female participation is suicide terrorism (Cruise 2016, 37). The key to this phenomenon is a simple one: women are highly effective as suicide attackers. If

³Female suicide terrorists are especially effective in societies where women commonly wear loose, full-body coverings; women in traditional clothing can “conceal over twelve pounds of explosives on her body” (O’Rourke 2009). Women have also feigned pregnancy in a number of cases in order to carry even larger explosive devices.

suicide terrorists in general are “smart bombs,” then women represent an upgrade. Not only do women often face less scrutiny due to strong norms against touching and securitizing women, but even in environments where it would be acceptable to subject women to security checks, female terrorists create a “logistical nightmare” for security personnel (Bhatia and Knight 2011, 9). If every single person must be treated as equally dangerous, the resulting increased time and thoroughness of security procedures would increase to the point of limiting free movement in societies, inhibiting economic and social activity, and would require a dramatic increase in resources, personnel, training, and public acceptance in order to function.

Furthermore, the superior effectiveness of female attackers exists “even in the face of increased defensive measures.” As the frequency of suicide terrorist attacks increases, states develop defenses against these attacks. However, unlike the significant decrease in casualty averages observed for male suicide terrorists over time, the casualties from female attackers *increase* slightly over time. These findings suggest that states are better able to defend against male suicide attackers than female ones (O’Rourke 2009, 688). States may be better able to learn and adapt in response to male terrorists than female ones, although the reason for this finding is not yet clear in the literature. This only highlights the necessity of better understanding and countering female terrorists.

Furthermore, women are uniquely useful in the construction and dissemination of powerful propaganda narratives. Female terrorists garner greater media attention than men, and have a greater impact. The image of women—typically thought of as the givers of life—taking lives and becoming violent is considered more disturbing than when men participate in the same behavior. As participating in terrorism falls far outside the bounds of traditional womanhood and the expectations of femininity, narratives often emerge trying to explain or justify their actions

(Knop 2007, 401; Cruise 2016, 37, 40). This can be of great use to the terrorist organization wishing to portray their struggle as righteous, and their opponent as villainous; a female suicide attacker who was raped, or whose family was killed by the government, for instance, will generate sympathy in the media to the benefit of the group.

This gendered response to female terrorists allows terrorist organizations to maximize the impact of and propaganda potential of female attacks (Laster and Erez 2015, 87). Images of female terrorists “attract widespread publicity, and disseminate the organization’s message to a wider audience” than they would otherwise have reached with a male operative (Knop 2007, 401). Furthermore, the symbol of the female terrorist prepared to kill herself and/or others can help to legitimize an organization’s cause and serves to highlight the seriousness of the terrorist’s will (Cunningham 2007, 117; Dalton and Asal 2011, 813). Women’s presence helps to establish a sense of normalcy for the violence committed by terrorist groups, and has an outsized negative psychological effect on the groups’ opponents (Makin and Hoard 2014, 535).

Once the media’s attention is fixed on the female terrorist, she typically holds greater capacity for mobilizing both men and women than a male terrorist. Female terrorists provide “strong role models” to women who may seek to emulate them, and increase the likelihood of more women joining the organization by somewhat legitimizing the group (Knop 2007, 401; Cunningham 2007, 115). Additionally, when women appear to be taking on, or usurping, men’s roles in conflict, female terrorists increase male recruitment by shaming them into joining (Knop 2007, 401).

The positive impact women’s participation has on recruiting additional male and female members is one of the key strategic advantages of female terrorists across societies and organization types (Cunningham 2007, 115). The “use of female attackers may also strengthen

mass backing for the terrorist group” by fostering support by women, broadening the group’s societal base of support, signaling commitment, and “effectively doubl[ing] the population from which [terrorists] can recruit attackers” (O’Rourke 2009, 699).

Terrorist groups with female operatives are able to use several gender-based morays to their clear advantage. Utilizing female terrorists enhances the group’s ability to evade security checks, create “sensationalism” in the media, magnify the societal fear factor, and increase their success rate (Bhatia and Knight 2011, 21). The utility of female terrorists is clear, and outweighs that of men in some areas—and terrorist organizations are clearly becoming aware of this.

Organization Types

Despite the benefits of women to organizations, women’s participation varies significantly between different kinds of terrorist organizations. Thomas and Bond (2015) found that organization-based opportunities for women’s participation explain whether female members are present in a group, regardless of female enthusiasm for the cause. “Leftist” ideology corresponded with an increased prevalence of female fighters, whereas “Islamist” ideologies decreased female presence; overall there was a “general inverse relationship” between the religiosity of a group and the prevalence of female fighters (Wood and Thomas 2017, 33).

If female participation was based purely in ideology or response to aggression against their communities, one would expect roughly the same percentage of women in groups which are left-wing or right-wing or religiously based. Instead, literature has consistently found a significantly higher rate of female participation in left-leaning groups across cultures, conflicts, and decades, compared to the percentage of women in right-wing or religious organizations.

Women's participation tends to reflect not just the religiosity of a group, but often how much the group appears to support women, as well⁴.

The distribution of women across left and right-wing organizations itself supports the theory I detail in later paragraphs that women's participation in violent political organizations is influenced by women's experiences *as women*, and that they selectively join organizations based on a perception that doing so will provide them a much-needed avenue of participation, power, or influence. The distribution differences across organizations are due to the differences in group characteristics and how each group speaks to, and tries to recruit, women.

In their most basic forms, left-wing organizations work to challenge or overturn traditional/current values, institutions, and/or hierarchies and divisions. Said values and hierarchies have been used to exclude women from power, or severely limit their options compared to men. Right-wing organizations, on the other hand, seek to preserve or restore tradition. Sometimes this expressly includes those which are hostile to women, but even groups which are not openly sexist inherently support restoring or preserving a society that limits women's options (Handel 1990, 197; Wood and Thomas 2017, 34).

Women are therefore more likely to see leftist groups—which are “far more likely” to employ female terrorists than right-wing and religious ones—as a way to advocate—directly or indirectly—for their own empowerment (Dalton and Asal 2011, 807). Women who do support the traditionalist views of right-wing and religious groups are less likely to participate in the

⁴ Despite what some groups may promise, across terrorism, civil conflict, and gender literature, there remains no evidence that women's participation in terrorist or insurgency organizations translates to greater women's liberation or rights (Alison 2003, 51; Dalton and Asal 2011, 804, 812; Gonzalez, Freilich, and Chermak 2014, 346). However, when studying women's (willing) participation in such groups, perception among the women matters more than the complex realities of terrorist and insurgent movements' later policies and successes. If a women knows this, but thinks that this movement is different, and joins on that basis, her perception that the movement will advance her interests is the important element for study.

organization due to these beliefs. As traditionalist views of gender generally do not include support for female combatants, women who follow these beliefs are more likely to restrict their own behavior to that which is appropriate for women (Wood and Thomas 2017, 34).

In addition to their varying levels of ideological support for women's participation and empowerment, left and right-wing groups tend to vary in their active recruitment of women, and the types of opportunities available to women within the organization. Leftist groups are both more likely to recruit women and to allow them to hold leadership positions (Makin and Hoard 2014, 541-2; Cruse 2016, 35). Women in right-wing organizations are far less likely to have been actively recruited; instead, they usually have familial or fraternal ties with one or more members, and become involved with the group through that personal connection (Dalton and Asal 2011, 807; Makin and Hoard 2014, 535). Furthermore, once they join, women generally take on subordinate roles consistent with the "traditional" roles for women the groups strongly adhere to (Dalton and Asal 2011, 807; Makin and Hoard 2014, 535, 542). For a woman seeking an avenue to power, a left-leaning group has more to offer.

It must be noted that this relatively clear dichotomy may not be the case for much longer, however; despite lagging behind left-leaning groups by many decades, Islamist and right-wing extremist groups are now more actively recruiting women. While women's roles in some right-wing groups has not changed, there is a growing variety of women's roles and activities among right-wing groups in general (Makin and Hoard 2014, 535). The emergence of female terrorists "in strongly patriarchal organizations marks a significant and culturally contentious shift" (Laster and Erez 2015, 86). And among Islamic fundamentalist groups, recently a "remarkable strategic and ideological shift has been observed [...] regarding the role of women as suicide bombers

from clerical opposition to women's participation in violence, to indifference, and to the recent endorsement of women suicide bombers" (Dalton and Asal 2011, 807).

While this shift may be surprising initially, it is predicted by literature on suicide terrorism and innovations diffusion. Horowitz (2010) made the case that suicide terrorism is a tactic diffused through both learning and emulation; this is consistent with the evidence on the spread of female suicide terrorism as a tactic. Cunningham (2003) argues that the effectiveness of female members often induces leaders toward “actor innovation” to gain a strategic advantage against their adversaries, and that innovations that might result in such an advantage—like suicide terrorism—diffuse across organizations (172). Despite their common association with religious groups, leftist groups are the first to operationalize women in a variety of roles, including as suicide bombers, religious groups learn the tactic from them (Cunningham 2003, 188; O’Rourke 2009, 693; Wood and Thomas 2017, 36).

Wood and Thomas argue that the (increasing) use of female suicide bombers in Islamist organizations is “a strategic response to the use of female bombers among secular groups”—one which the Islamists embrace pragmatically, although not enthusiastically (2017, 36). O’Rourke similarly found that religious groups initially discourage the practice until they engage in conflicts against secular organizations who have adopted it. After they experience the devastation of a female suicide attack by a rival group, religious groups often revise their policies and adopt the practice (O’Rourke 2009, 693, 696). Secular groups in conflict with the religious ones “often [...] set an example by using a female suicide terrorist” (O’Rourke 2009, 696).

The fact that more groups—both secular and religious—are adopting the strategy shows, according to O’Rourke, that “strategy trumps ideology” and that the effectiveness of female attackers led groups of all kinds to use rhetoric justifying and encouraging women to engage in

this tactic (O'Rourke 2009, 693, 695). Both kinds of organization will frame female participation in suicide attacks as necessary to “demonstrate their commitment to the organizations’ cause” (O'Rourke 2009, 699). As a result, women’s numbers are growing in right-wing groups—even in organizations like Al Qaeda which are otherwise generally hostile to women—due to women’s usefulnessⁱ (Cruise 2016, 35, 37).

This illustrates the importance of active recruitment; being structurally appealing to women is not enough to ensure female participation. While left-leaning groups are fundamentally more appealing to women seeking a dramatic change in favor of women’s empowerment, the most important factor in the general disparity between women’s participation in right and left-leaning groups is that left-leaning groups have historically been far more openly welcoming to women. As right-leaning groups begin to allow and actively recruit women this disparity may lessen.

Reif’s (1986) study of four similar movements in Latin America found, unsurprisingly, that groups which worked to appeal to women—including actively recruiting them, allowing them to fill leadership and combat positions, addressing women’s inequality and gender-specific struggles, and including “women’s issues⁵” in their organizational platforms—were rewarded with much higher rates of female participation⁶ (158). This illustrates a general trend Wood and Thomas identified in their 2017 article: positive gender ideology is the greatest determinant of women’s participation in violent political organizations—both generally and in combat roles. (Wood and Thomas 2017, 49).

⁵ This included calling for an end to discrimination against women, equal pay for equal work, an end to prostitution and domestic servitude, eliminating female unemployment, improved childcare and education, encouraging women to organize “in defense of their rights,” and the abolition of “all laws that discriminate against women” (159).

⁶ Compare, for example, the level of female membership in Nicaragua’s Sandinista movement—30 percent in 1979—with the very low levels of female participation in Cuba.

Women's Motivations

Discussions of female terrorists' motivations can be complex. Motives for female terrorists tend to fit into two broad categories: universal motivations—which can and do generate terrorist support and action among men and women—and gender-specific motivations, in which the decision to engage in terrorism is fueled by experiences contingent on being a woman in various societies and environments. While many gender-specific motivations, which I will discuss in detail, are relatively easy to identify, some broader motivations identified in the literature—such as the “communal perception of suffering, oppression, and injustice” and the conjunction of group incentives and individual motives—can be considered applicable to women specifically, depending on the details of “communal suffering, oppression, and injustice,” “group incentives,” and “individual motives” (Alison 2003, 40; O'Rourke 2009, 701). Gender can constitute the boundaries of a community, and the experience of womanhood has been used to generate female terrorist identities and motivations⁷.

Given the extent to which gender shapes one's experiences, worldviews, opportunities, and potential grievances—both personal and communal—it can be difficult, at times, to separate gender-specific, or individual, motivations from communal or ideological ones. Although the literature on female terrorism is comparatively lacking to (male) terrorist literature at large, though, the subject of women's motivations has received more attention than other aspects of the female terrorist experience, and there is a substantial enough base of findings across the literature to identify some notable trends in their findings.

⁷ For one of the clearest examples of this, see endnote ii on the Burmese women's movement.

In general, though, female suicide terrorists are motivated more by personal events than religious or nationalistic factors, while the opposite was true for men (Jacques and Taylor 2008). Women were also as likely as men to be recruited via a drive for self-promotion. Elsewhere in terrorism literature, researchers found that women are “more attracted to the prospect of improved living conditions and life opportunities for their children as well as addressing their needs that are not adequately met by the established political regime” (Dalton and Asal 2011, 804).

Mass rapes and individual rape cases have been cited by many sources a motivation for female suicide bombers across organizations and years, including those in Chechnya, Sri Lanka, and Turkey (O’Rourke 2009, 712-3; Gonzalez, Freilich, and Chermak 2014, 347). On the individual level, a common motive for female engagement in terrorism is a woman’s desire to regain her personal or familial honor. Women in societies governed by strict social, cultural, and religious rules are often ostracized and shamed for their—willing or unwilling—breaking of these rules. In these cases, the terrorist organization may be one of, or the only, source of refuge. Terrorism offers “dishonored” women a place of acceptance and redemption; women are able to “regain their honor” and “gain the dignity in death that they lost in life” by committing terrorist violence (Knop 2007, 400).

In Sri Lanka and other traditional societies, terrorism “is often seen as a viable option for [...] women who are survivors of sexual violence.” Female rape survivors suffer multiple layers of humiliation; not only were they violated, but they are afterwards considered “damaged” and disallowed from marrying or fulfilling childbearing duties. Participating in terrorism compensates for this inability, and “restores their personal and familial dignity” (Knop 2007, 400; O’Rourke 2009, 712).

Disturbingly, there have been cases of members of insurgent or terrorist groups raping or sexually abusing women as they are thereafter “more amenable to recruitment for suicide missions” due to their “stigmatization as fallen women” (Laster and Erez 2015, 91⁸). Even when terrorist organizations are not systematically, tactically employing rape themselves, they are often quick to use existing abuses to their advantage—both through using norms regarding honor, rape, and terrorism to pursue vulnerable women⁹, and through propaganda which uses rape as a justification for attacks (O’Rourke 2009, 713).

There is evidence that when vetting female suicide terrorists, groups will select women whose lives offer the greatest propaganda and sympathy-generating potential. This is especially important as female suicide terrorists’ lives are examined in greater detail by the media (O’Rourke 2009, 714). This is unsurprising, given both the high levels of media attention given to female suicide terrorism, and the media’s focus on these women’s biographies; terrorists organizations therefore have “disproportionate incentive to select women whose personal experiences depict the behavior of the target state in a negative light” which can garner sympathy for the terrorist’s cause (O’Rourke 2009, 702).

At the communal level, sexual violence can have a larger mobilizing effect on women and abused populations¹⁰. “Sexual violence,” Bloom (2010) writes “can become part of the rhetoric to mobilize people” (446). This is true of both men¹¹ and women; the targeting of an

⁸ See also Gonzalez-Perez 2011, 60; Chu and Braithwaite 2017 for further discussion of the strategic use of sexual violence in conflict for fighter recruitment.

⁹ Such as when the LTTE persuaded Tamil women who reported their rapes to become suicide attackers “in order ‘to recover the family honor of having sex with Sinhalese men’” (O’Rourke 2009, 713).

¹⁰ See Bloom 2010, for more detailed examples of women’s mobilization in response to frequent sexual abuse by occupying Israeli and American forces in Palestine and Iraq.

¹¹ Before their increased use of women as operatives, one of al-Qaeda’s ideological lynchpins for radicalization and mobilization was the defense of women’s honor and the horrors of Western “humiliation of Muslim women” (Bloom 2010, 445).

occupied peoples' women has clear "long-term societal effects that contribute to their mobilization into violence" (Bloom 2010, 449). Fear and anger about the systematic targeting of Sri Lankan women for sexual violence directly led women who had not personally experienced this trauma to join the LTTE (Alison 2003, 42-3).

The vulnerability and abuse of women was one of the main reasons women enlisted in the LTTE (Bhatia and Knight 2011,11). While Sri Lankans faced conflict-related hardship in general, "because of their gender, many women also suffered [...] sexual abuse, exploitation, and extortion" including widespread rape and sexual harassment. The rape and molestation of Sri Lankan women by the Indian army in particular had a bitter impact. These experiences "gave rise to the individual motivations of the would-be female suicide bombers" (Alison 2003, 42-3; Bhatia and Knight 2011,11-12).

Unlike "normal Tamil society" the LTTE was perceived as not judging and shaming women who had been raped, which drew survivors to them (Alison 2003, 43). Hundreds of women who had been raped and subsequently isolated by their communities (due to the significance of chastity in Tamil society) "decided to be members of the LTTE and carried out vicious Freedom Birds suicide attacks rather than ending their life by themselves" (Wang 2011, 104). The Chechen experience was similar in that one of the major factors which contributed to the infamous "Black Widows" terrorism was routine rape by Russian soldiers (Knop 2007, 400).

In societies where rape has a debilitating effect on a woman's life—such as preventing them from the one/few avenue(s) to success like marriage or familial support, or leading to social ostracization—and women have no other avenues for support, they turn to terrorism for acceptance and a purpose. Rather than being cast out and struggling alone until they die, many women would rather enjoy some measure of respect and purpose by joining a terrorist

organization—which accepts them despite their “dishonor”—and devoting themselves to the cause (Von Knop 2007, 400).

Similarly, if women fail to succeed in meeting the narrow definitions of female success and acceptability in a society with limited options for, and views on, women, she may find that terrorism is her best option. In this way, restrictive gender roles facilitate female participation in terrorism. Often women who join terrorist organizations originate in societies with limited views of female success. If a woman fails to meet these standards she often has little to no support or other options available to her, and turns to the terrorist organization in lieu of mainstream support or options. Many women around the world join terrorist organizations to escape hard lives, regain their honor, or out of despair for not being able to lead their preferred life—or despair for the unfulfilling one they feel trapped in.

In Iraq, female suicide bombers were often women “deemed unsuccessful in their own society” who were therefore more susceptible to terrorist recruitment. The head of Iraqi Army operations in a province from which many female terrorists originated explained that the “traditional gender roles and lack of rights [...] often leave women vulnerable to al-Qaeda recruiters” as a result of desperation (Gonzalez-Perez 2011, 60, 62). In Palestine, many women viewed terrorism, and particularly suicide bombing, as a way to “escape difficult marital circumstances,” “resolve the despair of being prohibited from the relationships that they desired,” or exit “undesirable lives in a manner that would bring honor to, or at least minimize the dishonor of, the women’s families” (Berko, Erez and Globokar 2010, 679-80¹²).

¹² These included a woman of 25 who was unlikely to get married at such an “advanced age” and whose life therefore was useless, unless she martyred herself, and a woman whose husband had abandoned her but who could

These examples illustrate a few broader findings in terrorism literature. Compared to men, women are far more likely to be motivated to suicide terrorism “by a desire to end their life, unhappiness with their personal situation, or family and personal problems” (Jacques and Taylor 2008, 315). Terrorist groups are aware of this potential source of recruits, and often use “gender specific” rhetoric designed to attract “females who have failed to adhere to their societies’ behavioral gender norms” to suicide missions (O’Rourke 2009, 684). Groups will offer redemption for women who have violated the gender roles of her community and may be the only place where she can find acceptance (O’Rourke 2009, 701).

Marriage—or, rather, the lack thereof—is an important element of female terrorism. A study across terrorist groups found that fewer than 10 percent of female attackers were married. Overall, just under 40 percent of women were past the age by which three-quarters of the women in their society had already married, and for some groups this percentage was even higher—over half of female Chechen suicide attackers had exceeded this age, along with over 42 percent of PKK female suicide attackers (O’Rourke 2009, 708). Female suicide terrorists are far more likely than males to be in their late twenties or older, and single (O’Rourke 2009, 707-8). Female suicide terrorists’ societies of origin generally place great emphasis on family and married life “as the appropriate realm for females,” and—far more so than men—as women grow older, their prospects for marriage decrease significantly (O’Rourke 2009, 708). Women who are otherwise unable to marry—such as single formerly imprisoned women—and devoid of other options or respect in traditional societies “fall into the hands of terrorist organizations” like the women who aged out of marriageability (Bloom 2010, 449).

not seek a divorce without great social consequence and “sought to end her humiliation [...] in an honorable way” (Berko, Erez and Globokar 2010, 680).

Divorced women fare no better; despite having succeeded in getting married, divorce often poses a great threat to a woman's honor "by suggesting that she is unable or unwilling to fulfill the expected gender norms" of her society, regardless of the circumstances of her divorce (O'Rourke 2009, 712). A divorced woman often has little value or prospects; she is unlikely to marry due to her age or lack of sufficient "purity," she is a burden to her family if they take her back at all, and she is often shunned by her community. Although divorced women are relatively uncommon in terrorism-stricken societies, "female suicide terrorists were more likely to be divorced than married at the time of their attack" (O'Rourke 2009, 712).

Women's participation in terrorism is also indicative of the limited opportunities for women to be politically active and pursue opportunities for their personal and communal benefit. Whereas women are often restricted or barred from mainstream political participation, terrorism allows women to bypass the gender-based restrictions and pursue otherwise-unattainable opportunities. Knop (2007) found that the motivations for female terrorism are "indicative of the second-class status of women" in their region and participation in terrorism "is a means through which women can pursue a misinterpreted understanding of female liberation or emancipation" (Knop 2007, 399-400). Even if a terrorist organization treats women merely as smart bombs, or is itself sexist, if it also provides women more access to political participation than she has access to through nonviolent, mainstream means, then this is still a benefit to her. Some influence is better than no influence, after all. An organization need not be a bastion of feminism and equality to be a better option than the society surrounding it.

Given the prevalence of political motivations—either those that speak to dissatisfaction with the current system, or those that speak to a different view of the future which the women consider to be both more beneficial to them, and unlikely to occur in mainstream politics, like

greater gender equity—I anticipate that countries with higher rates of women in government will experience lower levels of successful terrorist attacks. I choose rates of female participation in government as a proxy for the amount of care and attention a government shows towards “women’s issues” like equality, safety concerns like sexual harassment, or childcare.

While the presence of women in a government does not necessarily mean the government will exert greater focus in these and similar areas, it is unlikely that a government will suddenly decide to raise the quality of life of women without the presence of women. I argue that the presence of women is a necessary, although perhaps not sufficient, step to governments representing women and their concerns to a degree of satisfaction that women do not feel the need to seek alternative paths to political participation or change. I therefore operationalize women’s political power as the rate of female participation in the government.

Hypothesis 1: Countries with higher rates of women in government will experience lower levels of successful terrorist attacks.

One need only to examine the relative dearth of female suicide terrorists from societies with greater gender equity and more gender-neutral cultural norms to consider that the character of societies in which women live plays a not-insubstantial role in their motivation of to become suicide terrorists. O’Rourke (2009) wrote that a “United Nations report [...] classified each female attacker's state as less or least developed on the progress of women,” many of which “place high value on the marital fidelity of women—even to the point of the continued presence of honor killings—and each of these societies have been established in past studies as patriarchal in nature” (O’Rourke 2009, 707).

Terrorism, especially suicide terrorism, allows women to enter public and political realms from which they are normally excluded, and to gain some measure of power and honor in a society that usually does not value them beyond their utility as mothers and wives. Knop (2007) found that cultures from which female suicide bombers have originated restrict women to the private sphere (taking care of the home and children) while men conduct business in the outside world (399). Knop argued that women are interested in power, within their society's boundaries of acceptability. For women in fundamentalist societies, their scope is normally the family, and so some gain some power and access to the public realm by facilitating male relatives' participation in terrorism. Other women choose the "only way to become a female hero" and carry out a suicide attack (Knop 2007, 400). Terrorist organizations "take advantage of the social vulnerability" of women who have been abandoned by society and offer them a way to belong and be valued, if only for their deaths (Bhatia and Knight 2011, 8).

Many female terrorists have chafed against the constraints of their society's traditionalist gender roles, and have used terrorist participation either as a way to escape from, or attempt to change, women's limitations. Unlike men, female suicide terrorists have considered the act as "a way to escape the predestined life that is expected of them" (Wang 2011, 104). Berko, Erez and Globokar found that female Palestinian terrorists expressed disgruntlement with the gender-based restrictions placed on them, and described their desires to attain equality with men. They referenced "the restrictive regime applied to females" and the differences between how women were treated in society than the men, who they perceived as freer. Some participated in terrorism in order to achieve gender equality (Berko, Erez and Globokar 2010, 677-8). Others saw themselves and/or the act of participating in terrorism as a fight for women's rights. Several women "thought that their involvement in terrorism would narrow the status gap between men

and women” and others saw terrorism as a way to “resist gendered restrictions” and rebel against the “strict patriarchal” society (Erez 2007, 502-3). While many of the women expressed pride in their Palestinian womanhood, they also openly disagreed about the constraints placed on them (Berko, Erez and Globokar 2010, 678).

Another common motive for the Palestinian women was the fact that terrorism offered them an escape from the restrictive boredom of their everyday “good girl” lives, and the chance to pursue exciting experiences like wearing tight jeans, removing their veils, or spending unsupervised time with men (Erez 2007, 503; Berko, Erez, and Globokar 2010, 678-9). They reported feeling empowered and exceptional due to being a woman involved in terrorism. Terrorist missions and training allowed them to rebel in a way that was still somewhat acceptable. Despite keeping their involvement a secret from their families, the nationalistic goals of the group and the concurrent change in rhetoric from Islamic leaders to describe female martyrdom more favorably gave the women’s rebellious actions a veneer of respectability they would not otherwise have (Berko, Erez and Globokar 2010, 679).

What extant literature appears to indicate on a grander scale, then, is that the lower women’s status in society is, the more attractive a terrorist organization may be to her, as a way to participate in her society, as a way to escape the social restraints put on her, or as a way to deal with trauma or despair rooted in the gender inequality of said society. Based on this, I expect that countries which indicate higher measurements of gender inequality will experience greater instances of terrorism.

I argue that fertility rate would indicate this, as a high fertility rate would indicate that women are primarily seen first as baby makers, and as members of society who can contribute in other ways second. High fertility rate would suggest that women likely spend their lives in the

home, caring for their children, rather than engaging in activities, jobs, or social/political engagement outside the home. In short, I argue fertility rate could act as a proxy for how valuable a society sees its women, and how much social freedom they tend to have—do they live lives in relative equity compared to men, or are they restricted to the home and traditional, limiting roles? I therefore operationalize fertility rates as the status of women in the family specifically, and society more broadly. I argue countries where women’s status (in the family and society) is lower will experience greater levels of terrorism.

Hypothesis 2: Countries with higher fertility rates will experience higher rates of successful terrorist attacks.

Another force that drives women to terrorism, especially in the most war-torn and dangerous of areas, is that of protection. Women are particularly vulnerable to violence during civil conflict and war, and participation in terrorism is a “means for protecting [women’s] security” (Thomas and Bond 2015, 489). Joining a terrorist or rebel force means a woman has access to food, shelter, and a level of safety that she would not have on her own.

Examples of this phenomenon can be seen in Sri Lanka and Iraq, where women frequently joined the LTTE and al-Qaeda to survive war or its aftermath—women suffered danger, deprivation, and an inability to provide for their families especially when their husbands were dead, imprisoned, or had emigrated (Knop 2007, 401; Gonzalez-Perez, 59). The common profile of a woman in al-Qaeda is a woman “trying to survive in the aftermath of a war with no political, economic or social collateral.” Despite being treated as “expendable tools” the terrorist group was the best option for these women’s survival and relative security (Gonzalez-Perez

2011, 59). The LTTE in Sri Lanka was perceived by women as the only way to be safe from rape and other conflict-related danger. The threat of rape was a common theme among women who had joined the LTTE; women thought they were in great danger and had to protect themselves as no one would help them, and the only way to be safe was to join the LTTE (Wang 2011, 103; see also Allison 2003).

The impact of war-related risk to women and how a lack of other security options drive women to terrorist groups can be observed in the differences in female participation in Sri Lanka and Kashmir. In Sri Lanka, the LTTE actively engaged women with the rhetoric of equality and liberation; however, a factor identified by many women who participated in the LTTE was the conflict itself. Many women joined because of their personal experiences with trauma, in response to the abuse of others, and/or out of fear that the only place they could be assured of safety was under the wing of the LTTE. Kashmir, in contrast, did not experience widespread societal degradation, and its militant organizations were “largely externally guided and funded” (Bhatia and Knight 2011, 22). The different socio-political conditions in Kashmir did not support the emergence of widespread female suicide terrorism like in Sri Lanka.⁷

On a broader scale, the “widespread poverty and lack of economic opportunity that historically have afflicted third-world nations” played a central role in “set[ting] the stage” for women to enlist in violent political organizations (Ness 2005, 358). Vulnerable women with no escape from absolute poverty, inequality, and danger have turned to nontraditional (violent) organizations as a way to meet their needs. Involvement with such groups “afford females the chance to acquire potentially valuable skills that can later be transferred to civilian life” (Ness 2005, 358). As the women fill a range of roles—including intelligence gathering, the dissemination of propaganda, and acting as liaisons in the community—they gain experiences

that can later be used in conventional employment. When women have few options for economic independence or training/experiences, that violent political organization offers this can be notable for women.

Hypothesis 3: Countries with a greater percentage of women in the labor force will experience lower levels of successful terrorism than countries with a lower percentage of women in the labor force.

Sadly, women and girls are often coerced into participation in violent political organizations. This remains a particular problem in some organizations. As this thesis is focused on willing participation, I will not dwell on coercion; however, it should be noted that coercion as a determinant of terrorist and insurgent participation is also a gendered process. Due to the perceived lesser “value” of females compared to males in many traditional societies, prior literature has found women and girls are at particular risk for coercion. Women are also often less able to leave areas where they may be subject to forced recruitment due to their greater vulnerability and lack of resources compared to men (Jacques and Taylor 2008, 310).

For example, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) widely practiced the abduction of civilians, and the only “real strategy” to avoid this fate was out-migration until the end of the conflict. This was problematic for women, as women who emigrated “risked being forced into prostitution and were considered more vulnerable to exploitation.” As a result, migration was “a male phenomenon,” and the women who remained in Nepal were subject to coercion (Eck 2014, 389). The power, resource, and value imbalance between the sexes in many societies contributes to women’s participation in violent organizations, willing or unwilling.

Finally, the struggle for gender parity is also a highly salient motivation for many female terrorists. Women who join terrorist organizations often labor under the conception that their participation can be used as an avenue to improve the standing of—or opportunities for—women. For women in societies “where gender roles are tightly regulated by tradition” participating in armed groups often afford women status they otherwise would not experience (Ness 2005, 358). Female suicide bombers have been found to hold the intent of “mak[ing] a statement not only in the name of a country, a religion, a leader, but also *in the name of their gender*” (Wang 2011, 104; emphasis mine)

Women not only gain status and respect from participation in terrorism, but terrorist organizations can serve as a substitute for traditional representation for people who have been marginalized or overlooked by existing political structures. Extant research has found that topics such as women’s equality “tend to feature prominently” in nontraditional political organizations’ rhetoric, and particularly in the policy preferences of women in violent political organizations (Thomas and Bond 2015, 489). For women in societies with strong gender divides, or where mainstream politics overlooks topics important to them, terrorist organizations can offer women representation and the ability to make a difference and even gain respect while doing so. In environments where women are socially repressed and economically dependent, some women attempt to challenge this status quo “by alternative means” and attempt to use terrorist militancy to combat inequality (Dalton and Asal 2011, 811).

Terrorists often make the link between terrorism and equality explicit, in order to recruit women. Groups often promise women’s liberation as a reward for participation in their conflict, and this promise is potent motive for many women who join terrorist organizations; for example,

many female LTTE combatants joined due to this promise (Dalton and Asal 2011, 804; O'Rourke 2009). Despite lack of empirical evidence that terrorist groups act as a feminist force on societies and governments, groups that “accommodate women’s socio-political equality demands [...] appeal to women as a potential change agent” (Dalton and Asal 2011, 812). Female suicide attacks are also connected to women’s struggle for equality; Bhatina and Knight (2011) argued that they “blow themselves up with the promise of achieving equality and glory in martyrdom” (22).

Extant research also provides support that increases in gender equality are, on average, linked with decreased likelihood of the onset of violent conflict (Schaftenaar 2017). Greater women’s rights in society has been found to decrease women’s participation in terrorism, as well. These findings, in combination with the above findings on women’s motivations, lead to the argument that “where women are more socially empowered and autonomous, they are less likely to be involved in terrorism” (Dalton and Asal 211, 810).

Terrorists’ Human Capital

Despite the findings of the prior sections, one might still question why educated women would turn to terrorism, rather than the employment marketplace or marriage market. Would an educated woman not have better options there than in a violent political organization? An understanding of the relationship between education and terrorism helps to contextualize findings about women.

Contrary to what one might assume, increased education does not have a universally negative impact on terrorism. When a state has sound institutions and economic development—

in other words, when conditions in that country are favorable and are likely to reward the acquisition of education—increased education leads to reduced terrorism. On the other hand, when country-specific conditions are poor, higher education can fuel terrorism (Brockhoff, Krieger, and Meierrieks 2015, 1187). Terrorism can sometimes offer greater benefits for those with more education than traditional economic opportunities (Kruegar and Maleckova 2003). Education helps individuals to contextualize political problems “and resort to violence as an acceptable means of achieving change” which further links education to support for violent terrorism (Brockhoff, Krieger, and Meierrieks 2015, 1191).

Furthermore, when socioeconomic and politicoinstitutional constraints limit the rate of return from education from ordinary economic activity, “nonmarket means”—like “employment” in terrorist groups—can offer more appealing returns than traditional means (Brockhoff, Krieger, and Meierrieks 2015, 1193). In situations of limited opportunities from regular markets, terrorism may prove attractive to individuals “that are otherwise well qualified but cannot succeed in the non-terrorism marketplace because of, for example, their heritage or social standing.” In turn, more highly educated recruits increase the efficacy of the terrorist organization. (Brockhoff, Krieger, and Meierrieks 2015, 1193)

From the organizational standpoint, terrorist groups have incentives to “hire” those with better education as high levels of education is considered “a signal of commitment as well as ability to carry out an attack” (Benmelech and Berrebi 2007, 224). Groups which use suicide attacks often select better educated and more affluent individuals for missions “because they are more reliable and competent” than other volunteers (Piazza 2008, 37).

As the link between terrorist efficacy and education is so strong, and given that organizations will use women regardless of their ideological views on women in general, it is

unsurprising then, that terrorist groups are “more likely to recruit and utilize women in terror attacks in countries where women are better educated” (Thomas and Wood 2017, 5). Even in groups like al-Qaeda, women tend to have an education level that is above-average compared to their peers (Knop 2007, 399, 409). Other researchers have described the reality of female martyrs as “often well-educated, disappointed [...] powerless women who find suicide terrorism the only way to express influence” in their restrictive cultures (Laster and Erez 2015, 93). Palestinian female terrorists are generally well-educated, as well (Berko, Erez, and Globokar 2010, 674), and Bernal (2000) found that the greatest support for Eritrean independence among women came from those with “urban and educated backgrounds” (63). Even studies of women in far-right groups found that women usually had college educations, while men often only had high school educations (Makin and Hoard 2014, 539-40).

The experience of educated women and terrorism acts somewhat like a microcosmic reflection of the educated but corrupt state. Women’s education has increased over the decades, but this has not always corresponded with increased options for political and economic participation. Many women are now educated, but their market options are restricted not due to a poor economy or corrupt government, but because they are artificially limited due to their gender. Their actions reflect those of the educated population in countries with these problems. Not only would an educated woman’s potential prospects—and thus her expectations for her personal success and advancement—be higher due to her education, but said education increases her ability to recognize the unfair gender-based bias keeping her from achieving her potential. To such a constrained woman, whose only market return for her education may be that she can seek a more educated husband to look after, terrorism may offer greater returns. And the terrorist organization is willing to take her in, as an educated woman is a more useful operative than an

uneducated one. This would explain why women are almost universally more educated than men in terrorist organizations.

This research speaks to the individual woman; in broader contexts where a women's education provides a minimum return on investment, so to say, an educated woman may see value in a terrorist organization, and the organization likewise sees value in her. On the country level, though, I expect to see the opposite: that terrorism will be more prevalent in countries with an overall lower rate of education for girls. I argue this is likely to indicate a greater lack of options for women in society, as well as less concern over their preparedness for life outside the home. A women who manages to become highly educated in this environment is less likely to be able to see the traditional return on investment outside violent organizations that education should have, and does for men. Therefore, countries with a low level of education among women are likely to generate the circumstances which lead educated individual women to terrorism.

Hypothesis 4: Countries with lower levels of education among girls will experience greater levels of successful terrorist attacks.

Women are not only more educated, but often older—sometimes significantly—than their male counterparts (Cruise 2016, 34; O'Rourke 2009, 707; see also the extant works of Bloom, Sjoberg and Gentry, and Ness). This could be the result of aging out of marriageability, being divorced (and therefore likely to be older), or having dutifully married and procreated, but then having lost their little value and options as a young bride. Many societies have no use for an unmarried woman, especially an older one. If a woman cannot go back to her family after a divorce, or if her husband leaves her, she may have a choice between starving or joining a

terrorist organization. Even in less extreme cases, traditional societies hold little respect or options for older women; if a woman has fulfilled her duty to marry young and bear children, and then wishes to politically engage, work, or have an impact on her society, she may have little recourse outside of terrorism. This explains why women are generally older and more educated in terrorist organizations than their male peers. Males with the same human capital can seek mainstream successes which are barred to women, and men with less capital join the terrorist group. These factors, combined with the political disenfranchisement of many women, explain the otherwise-puzzling trends of women's involvement in terrorism.

Without forgetting the autonomy and decision-making capacities of most female terrorists, it is indeed vital to consider the societal context and pressures which form the backdrop to these women's decisions. Women who join terrorist organizations out of desperation, to break with stifling traditional gender regulations, to be involved in their communities, and other reasons born out of the social rules of the societies in which they live, would either not become terrorists, or would do so less readily, in societies with fewer restrictions on women. It seems unlikely most women would choose to join a violent organization to meet a goal they can meet more easily through mainstream avenues. Even women who join violent political organizations today generally try to hide their current or past involvement from their family and social groups due to the associated stigma and negative reactions. If my theory is correct, increasing mainstream political and social avenues to women's empowerment will see a corresponding lower level of female participation in terrorism in societies which currently limit women's options and experience terrorism.

In conclusion, I have hypothesized that: (1) countries with higher rates of women in government will experience lower levels of terrorism; (2) countries with higher fertility rates will experience higher rates of terrorism; (3) countries with a greater percentage of women in the labor force will experience lower levels of terrorism compared to those with a lower percentage of women in the labor force; and (4) countries with lower levels of education among girls will experience greater levels of terrorism. To these hypotheses I will add a fifth: that countries with higher levels of terrorism in general are more likely to experience female terrorism, given the way that terrorism can “inspire” others. The first part of this section covered some cases in which women were inspired to commit terrorism after others did so; if a woman who meets the motivational or human capital criteria discussed in this chapter is exposed to the possibility of terrorism in her country, she may be more likely to take the prospect seriously and is therefore more likely to come to the conclusion to participate than if the possibility of terrorism is never presented to her in a “real” way, close to home.

Hypothesis 5: The presence of terrorism in a country increases the likelihood of female terrorism in that country.

The next chapter explores an initial quantitative testing of my theory, my findings, and possible explanations of these findings, and their potential implications for my theory and counterterrorism policy. I create a model which incorporates the aforementioned measures of women’s political power, women’s social status, women’s education level, women’s participation in the labor force, and the presence of terrorism in general. I then test both the model and the individual components against country-year data on suicide terrorism.

Chapter 2

This section details my initial quantitative testing of my theory. Using the Chicago Project on Security and Threats (CPOST) Suicide Attack Database, I conduct regression analyses testing various incarnations of my broader theory. I find that of the independent variables, the percentage of women in parliament and gender parity in education are the most influential in the likelihood that women will engage in suicide terrorism; however, the significance of the independent variables is contingent—at least to some degree—on the broader societal context for women.

I also find in all versions of my model that the existence of male terrorism increases the likelihood that women will also engage in terrorism, and that women's participation in the labor force is generally unimportant compared to the political and social variables. Given the nature of my theory and the reasons I believe women choose to become involved with terrorist groups, I intend to not only subject this theory to further, more rigorous quantitative tests, but to also conduct qualitative analyses—such as interviewing women in around the world—in my future research.

The CPOST Suicide Attack Database is a list of suicide attacks covering the years of 1974-2016 and includes 4,797 observations is based on information collected from newspapers and newswires; social media; blogs and live maps; militant group websites and publications; and martyr videos, which have been verified multiple times. For an incident to be included in the database, at least one attacker must kill him or herself to kill others, and the attack must be verified by at least two independent sources. Failed suicide attacks are not collected; neither are attacks where sources conflict as to whether an incident was a suicide attack or not; attacks with

only one source; or attacks that only appear in group claims without verification from independent sources. Additionally, the attack must meet “the non-state qualification”; beyond that, any attack that “meet[s] the definition of suicide attack and our two-source requirement is included” (Chicago Project....).

I use the instances of verified female-led suicide attacks from the CPOST database as my dependent variable. To control for the fact that women are more likely to be involved in terrorist acts when a country experiences higher instances of terrorist action in general, I also include all attacks from the database as a control variable. In addition to other suicide attacks, I use the Correlates of War Project databases on intra- and inter-state wars¹³ to control for the fact that countries in conflict are more likely to have the conditions for—and be under enough stresses to instigate—terrorism and other violent acts. To ensure my results do not simply reflect a country’s development, I also control for GDP per capita, using data from the World Bank’s Open Data Indicators¹⁴.

As proxies for women’s political power, social standing/value; and economic opportunities, I use data on the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%) by country; primary and secondary school enrollment Gender Parity Index (GPI) and fertility rate

¹³ <http://cow.dss.ucdavis.edu/data-sets/COW-war>

¹⁴ Although accumulated on the World Bank’s website, and downloaded from the World Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator>), the original sources of the data are as follows:

- Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%): the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
- School enrollment primary and secondary (gross) Gender Parity Index (GPI): UNESCO Institute for Statistics
- GDP per capita: World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files
- Fertility rate, total (births per woman): United Nations Population Division; World Population Prospects; Census reports and other statistical publications from national statistical offices; Eurostat: Demographic Statistics; United Nations Statistical Division: Population and Vital Statistics Report; U.S. Census Bureau: International Database; and Secretariat of the Pacific Community: Statistics and Demography Programme.
- Labor force, female (% of total labor force): International Labor Organization, ILOSTAT database and World Bank population estimates

(births per woman); and the percentage of the total labor force that is female. Unfortunately political data is limited, as the measure of the proportion of female representatives is only available from 1990, unlike some of the other measures—such as GDP per capita or states’ fertility rate—which have been measured since the 1960s. Despite this shortcoming, though, this variable was still the best available measurement of women’s political power across countries. I included fertility rate as a common measure of how much value is placed on women as child bearers—as opposed to actors that have lives outside of the home like men—and thus, a proxy measurement of women’s social status in a country.

I also included education parity as a second measure of women’s worth in societies. As some countries are more educated than others, I did not include measures of absolute educational attainment by women, which could experience troubles with collinearity and actually measure the availability of education in a country or poverty. I also chose this measurement as it did not measure only one type of education. More information is available for primary education worldwide; however, societies which do not value women to an extent that terrorism may become attractive to them may wish for all children to have a basic education in reading and writing, for instance, but then pull girls out of school when they are older. This may be to engage in “women’s work” or because it is not necessary for girls to have an education—which would suggest that women have little to no prospects in the political sphere or higher economic or social pursuits where an education would be either necessary or a great aid—or for early marriage. Therefore, I chose a measurement which compared the rate of educational attainment by sex—avoiding endogeneity concerns over poverty or lack of access—for all pre-college/university schooling, which should provide a more complete picture of girl’s educational prospects in a given country.

I acknowledge that this initial analysis is imperfect as the data likely includes some transnational terrorism along with the domestic incidents, due to the fact that I cannot separate out transnational and domestic terrorism using the CPST database. However, these findings should still be generally valid, as—despite what impression the greater focus on transnational terrorism in the literature may suggest—“most terrorism occurs domestically,” at least according to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) (Young and Findley 2011, 7). This fact only mitigates the negative effect of this study’s flaws, though; I recognize that the lack of separation between domestic and transnational terrorism is a notable flaw in my work.

As of yet, there is no widely-available terrorism database which includes all important terrorism variables and which includes gender as a perpetrator variable, and I intend to rectify this situation by creating such a database in my future research. For now, acknowledging this limitation of my work and proceeding anyway with the assumption that the majority of terrorist attacks in this database are domestic is the best solution I have available to me. Given the choice between an admittedly-flawed, but perhaps useful analysis and no analysis because all factors are not perfect, I prefer to subject my theory to this test.

I must also consider the fact that my dataset contains a lot of missing data. While this is a flaw I hope to rectify in the future by coding a more complete dataset for further study of female terrorism, it is also currently an unavoidable flaw of my analysis. For instance, the GDP per capita and parliamentary data is missing for some years for some countries. Few, if any, countries are missing all data for these variables; the years which are missing tend to be random, although there is a bias in that, if a country is missing some data, it is more likely to be missing data from the 1970s than later decades. The countries affected, though, are truly random, encompassing such varied ones as the United States and United Kingdom, Suriname, Slovakia,

San Marino, Azerbaijan, Benin, Somalia, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Bhutan and Cambodia.

Data is not missing systemically in terms of the countries affected, although there may be concerns about data biasing towards more recent decades as information became easier to collect. I argue that my results are still valid as the problem of missing data is still relatively random, and my analyses are relatively broad. I have not performed complex analyses which rely on having perfect data for any one country; rather, I seek to observe global trends in women's treatment in society and their participation in terrorism. In this case, the absence of data from any one country should not negatively affect my results significantly.

Additionally, the timelines of some variables are longer than others; the gender variables (the school enrollment GPI; percentage of women in the labor force; and proportion of female seats in the national parliament) have been studied for several fewer decades than the general measurements of GDP per capita, instances of inter and intra-state war, and countrywide fertility rates.

Furthermore, it must be noted that, given that only one widely-available terrorism database delineates the gender of terrorists, the quirks, biases, or parameters of this database may affect my data. While the CPOST contributors took several steps to ensure that their data is as accurate as possible, I am unable to compare their findings with another dataset to increase the likelihood that my analysis is robust. The CPOST dataset only covers suicide terrorism, and one could argue that even within these parameters, the database does not code certain acts of terror as suicide attacks which could be argued to meet the criteria for such a label. For example, the September 11 attacks in the United States could be considered suicide missions, but this incident

is not in the database. This again speaks to the need for more research on this topic, and a more comprehensive terrorism dataset.

Finally, it must be noted that while my theory is global in nature, suicide attacks have not occurred in every country, nor have they occurred in every country in which one could argue “terrorism” has occurred. The graph below shows the 20 countries from the CPOST data which account for the greatest suicide terrorism numbers. Regions of the world in which there have been conflicts and/or groups which one might consider “terrorist”—such as Central and South America or East Asia—are noticeably absent from this data. The Middle East and Africa, on the other hand, are highly represented in this data¹⁵.

This could be a result of the way in which suicide terrorism spreads—as a tactic passed along via contact from one group to another, usually via social connections between the groups—and groups in the Middle East, for example, are unlikely to have connections to groups halfway around the world with different characteristics—and the fact that this data only represents one kind of terrorist tactic—suicide terrorism—and not all terrorist attacks. This is one of the limitations of the data I am using; however, it is an unavoidable limitation, given that the CPOST data is the only available dataset which differentiates between the gender of terrorist attackers.

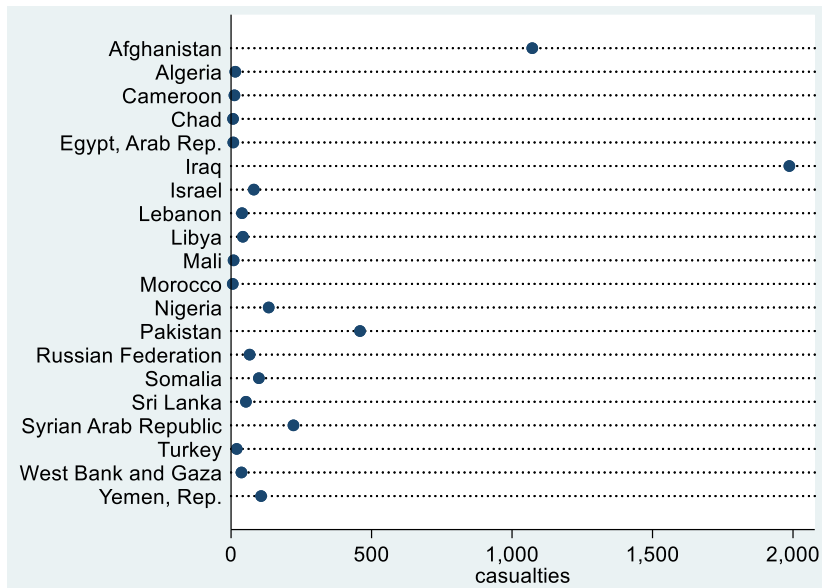


Figure 1: Top 20 Terrorism Countries



Figure 2: Top 20 Terrorism Countries Map

It is worth noting, though, that the distribution of countries in which successful female suicide terrorists have been most prominent between 1974 and 2016 is broader and less stereotypical of terrorism, which, in the United States, tends to conjure up images of the Middle East among at least the general public. While countries in the Middle East and Africa are certainly represented in the data—Afghanistan, Algeria, and Egypt are among the top countries for successful female suicide terrorism, according to this data—so too are countries in Asia—China, India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, for instance—Europe—Georgia, Bulgaria, Belgium, and France make appearances in the top 20—and South America—Bolivia and Argentina. In fact, successful female attacks in Bolivia, China, India, and Indonesia outnumber successful attacks in several Middle Eastern and African countries, including Djibouti, Chad, and Cameroon. Potential problems related to geographic clustering, then, are likely to be less significant for female suicide terrorism than for suicide terrorism as a whole.

Results

After lagging my independent variables to increase the robustness of my findings, I ran simple regressions testing the impact of four “gendered” variables on the occurrence of suicide terrorism in general, and among women. These variables all relate to women’s access to education, influence in politics, jobs, and their value as wives and mothers versus autonomous adults, as proxied by fertility rates. For both suicide terrorism in general and female suicide terrorism, I first analyze the relationship between these dependent variables and the gendered independent variables; I then re-examined these relationships with the additional control variables of GDP per capita, the presence of internal or external war in the country, and—for female suicide terrorism—the existence of suicide terrorism in general. The four “gender” or “woman” variables have low to very low collinearity, and so they are all presented in this single model.

The results, shown in Table 1, show that while increased fertility rate is associated with an increase in suicide terrorism in general, an increase in fertility is not significantly associated with an increase in terrorism for women. Despite the fact that many female terrorists interviewed in the extant literature spoke of political influence as a motivating factor for their participation in terrorism, the result in Table 1 do not empirically support the idea that increased female parliamentary representation has a significant influence on female suicide terrorism.

In contrast with parliamentary representation, the school enrollment (primary and secondary) gender parity index (GPI) is strongly negatively associated with both suicide terrorism in general and female suicide terrorism. While the negative effects of GPI is stronger on terrorism in general, it is by far the most significant variable with regards to women’s participation in suicide terrorism. The percentage of women in the labor force has no significant

Table 1: Effect of Gender Variables on Terrorism

	Suicide Terrorism	Female Suicide Terrorism	Suicide Terrorism	Female Suicide Terrorism	Female Suicide Terrorism
	1	2	3	4	5
L.fertility rate	0.234**	-0.001	0.301**	-0.002	-0.006
	(0.114)	(0.003)	(0.144)	(0.004)	(0.004)
L.Women (%) in the national parliament	-0.013	-0.000	-0.009	-0.000	0.000
	(0.022)	(0.001)	(0.027)	(0.001)	(0.001)
L.School enrollment gender parity index (GPI)	-5.646***	-0.233***	-8.337***	-0.329***	-0.237***
	(1.379)	(0.042)	(1.904)	(0.058)	(0.054)
L.Women (%) of the labor force	0.034	0.001	0.030	0.001	0.000
	(0.021)	(0.001)	(0.026)	(0.001)	(0.001)
L.country at war			-1.292	-0.017	-0.002
			(2.081)	(0.064)	(0.059)
L.GDP per capita			-0.000	0.000	0.000
			(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
L.all suicide terrorism					0.011***

(0.001)

Observations	1643	1643	1352	1352	1352
r2	0.016	0.020	0.023	0.025	0.167
ll	-5842.665	-116.851	-4933.483	-217.134	-111.045

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

Table 2: Effects of School Access Parity

	ST	FST	ST	FST	FST
	6	7	8	9	10
L.less than 33%	-2.337	-0.049	-3.409	-0.250	-0.223
GPI	(2.869)	(0.214)	(3.334)	(0.251)	(0.249)
L.66-94% GPI	-2.003***	-0.151***	-2.826***	-0.222***	-0.201***
	(0.453)	(0.034)	(0.576)	(0.043)	(0.043)
L.95%+ GPI	-1.959***	-0.155***	-2.758***	-0.225***	-0.203***
	(0.413)	(0.031)	(0.536)	(0.040)	(0.040)
L.country at war			1.072	0.017	0.018
			(1.048)	(0.079)	(0.078)
L.GDP per capita			-0.000*	-0.000	-0.000
			(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
L.all suicide terrorism					0.009***

(0.001)

Observations	8106	8106	6765	6765	6765
r ²	0.003	0.003	0.005	0.005	0.018
ll	-28390.955	-7352.281	-24241.079	-6738.592	-6694.324

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

impact on suicide terrorism or female suicide terrorism. Lastly, the presence of general suicide terrorism is significantly associated with an increase in the likelihood of female suicide terrorism.

I further examined the relationship between the gender parity of educational access and suicide terrorism by breaking down the GPI into four categories—a “low” category of less than 33%; a “medium”, omitted here, of 33-65%; a “high” of 66-94%; and a “very high” of 95%+—and running regressions using these categories as my independent variables. Like the general model above (Table 1), I first explored the relationship between the GPI levels and terrorism without adding general and female-specific control variables, and then with the controls.

At both stages, for both general and female suicide terrorism, increased GPI is associated with a significant decrease in suicide terrorism. Compared to the “medium” GPI, a GPI of less than 33% is not significantly associated with decreased terrorism in general or female terrorism; however, the 66-94% and 95%+ GPIs are significantly negatively associated with suicide terrorism for all groups. Like in the first model, the presence of general suicide terrorism is correlated with an increase in female suicide terrorism.

Table 3: Effects of Female Representation in the National Parliament

	ST	FST	ST	FST	FST
	11	12	13	14	15
L.fewer than 10% women in parliament	0.117 (0.452)	0.006 (0.034)	0.046 (0.536)	0.004 (0.040)	0.004 (0.040)
L.10-19% women in parliament	0.765* (0.425)	0.004 (0.032)	0.897* (0.505)	0.003 (0.038)	-0.005 (0.038)
L.30-39% women in parliament	0.236 (0.510)	-0.018 (0.038)	0.291 (0.612)	-0.023 (0.046)	-0.025 (0.046)
L.40%+ women in parliament	0.012 (0.406)	0.025 (0.030)	-0.019 (0.483)	0.028 (0.036)	0.029 (0.036)
L.country at war			1.038 (1.048)	0.012 (0.079)	0.013 (0.078)
L.GDP per capita			-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
L.all suicide terrorism					0.009*** (0.001)

Observations	8106	8106	6765	6765	6765
r2	0.002	0.000	0.003	0.001	0.015
ll	-28395.747	-7363.406	-24247.520	-6752.649	-6704.913

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

To ensure that any highly-specific impacts of parliamentary gender parity were not being obscured by the overall effects of parliamentary representation in my regression analysis in Table 1, I broke down different levels of female participation in national parliaments. Similarly to the analysis of different GPI levels' effects on suicide terrorism in Table 2, this consisted of five categories—"very low" of less than 10%; "low" of 10-9%; "medium", omitted here, of 20-29%; "high" of 30-39%, and "very high" of 40%+ seats occupied by women—four of which are listed in Table 3.

Breaking down parliamentary representation in this fashion did not reveal any hidden effects of this variable on suicide terrorism; I found no empirical support for the theory that greater female representation in the national parliament has a significant negative impact on suicide terrorism in general, or among women. The only significant effect of women in parliament on female suicide terrorism is when 10-19% of seats in the parliament are filled by women, at which point this variable has a positive effect on female terrorism. This effect is in isolation, though, and does not appear representative of a broader trend of parliamentary influence on terrorism, and is only significant at the lowest level of significance.

This finding may also be reflective of some other effect—for instance, it could be that countries with this level of female participation in the parliament use gender or ethnic quotas. It is also possible that countries with this level of female parliamentary participation share some

third variable that influences terrorism, or that the women in question are members of an elite, who allow women in politics to an extent but which do not represent, or look after the interests of, ordinary women in the country. In this situation, ordinary women would technically have “representation” but still have the basis for politically-based grievances which could lead to their participation in terrorism.

Additionally, it is possible that the women in the parliament were representative of women in the country, yet, given the relatively low gender parity their low numbers suggest, they faced sexism in the government, such as not being respected by their fellow lawmakers. This finding, and the additional absence of significance among the other models, could also indicate that political representation—while important for other reasons—is not as strong a determinant of female terrorism as initially thought, and informal social restrictions on women—which are more difficult to capture in large-n studies—influence women far more than political representation.

I will further examine this finding in future research; however, at this time, it does not appear to be strong evidence of a trend that female participation in parliaments leads to female suicide terrorism.

Table 4: Effect of Fertility Levels on Terrorism

	ST	FST	ST	FST	FST
	16	17	18	19	20
L.less than 2.5 children	-0.540**	-0.031*	-0.623**	-0.036*	-0.030
	(0.234)	(0.017)	(0.276)	(0.021)	(0.021)
L.4.5+ children	0.321	-0.029*	0.361	-0.032	-0.034*
	(0.227)	(0.017)	(0.269)	(0.020)	(0.020)
L.GDP per capita			-0.000**	-0.000	-0.000
			(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
L.country at war			0.767	0.016	0.019
			(1.050)	(0.079)	(0.079)
L.all suicide terrorism					0.009***
					(0.001)
Observations	8106	8106	6765	6765	6765
r2	0.002	0.000	0.003	0.001	0.014
ll	-28393.705	-7363.140	-24246.701	-6752.555	-6705.655

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

Next, I examined more deeply the effects of different rates of fertility. I constructed three categories of fertility—low, medium, and high—which represent less than 2.5 children per woman, 2.5-4.4 children per woman, and 4.5+ children per woman, respectively. As with

previous tables, the medium option is omitted here. Compared to “medium” fertility rates, low fertility rates of less than 2.5 children per woman is negatively associated with suicide terrorism in general, and with female suicide terrorism (although not when suicide terrorism in general is used as a control variable).

High fertility generally had no significant impact on suicide terrorism—either general or female—except in Model 20, where suicide terrorism is used as a control variable for the likelihood female suicide terrorism. Here, high fertility rates are associated with a slightly lower likelihood of female suicide terrorism. While this finding does not appear to be indicative of a trend, it is certainly warranted further study, to determine whether this finding is substantiated upon further tests and research, and if so, the causal mechanism behind it. It could be that women with many children have the motivations, but not the means or resources, to become terrorists. That is, they could be so burdened by children and domestic work that they have too many responsibilities and no time to engage in terrorist activities. On the other hand, perhaps women with so many children are more likely to be found in societies which see women primarily as mothers, and who are therefore not as likely to be educated or acquire other resources or human capital which would make them valuable to terrorist organizations and give them an avenue to join.

If these findings are correct, then limitations on women which result in greater responsibilities for them—such as child rearing/child care—may not result in increased likelihood of terrorism like limitations which only remove possible options from women, but do not result in time-consuming responsibilities. Women who experience gendered restrictions on their ability to study, work, or lead, but whose time and energy are not simultaneously filled with caring for children may fit my theory more than women whose days are very full, yet restricted

to the home. At this stage, however, the causal mechanism behind this finding remains unknown, and the impact of fertility on terrorism is an avenue for further research I plan to pursue in the future.

Table 5: Effect of Women’s Employment Levels

	ST	FST	ST	FST	ST
	21	22	23	24	25
L.less than 20% of labor force	-0.702***	-0.021	-0.782***	-0.025	-0.019
	(0.221)	(0.017)	(0.267)	(0.020)	(0.020)
L.40%+ of labor force	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)
L.country at war			1.163	0.018	0.017
			(1.050)	(0.079)	(0.079)
L.GDP per capita			-0.000**	-0.000	-0.000
			(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
L.all suicide terrorism					0.009***
					(0.001)
Observations	8106	8106	6765	6765	6765
r2	0.001	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.014
Ll	-28397.405	-7364.225	-24250.364	-6753.492	-6706.829

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

Finally, I more deeply examined the impact of women's participation in the labor force on suicide terrorism. As Table 5 shows, compared to when women make up 20-39% of the labor force, there is a negative association between when women make up less than 20% of the labor force and suicide terrorism in general. An increased level of female participation in the labor force does not appear to lead to a decrease in female terrorism, nor does a decrease in female participation positively affect female suicide terrorism—in fact, levels of female participation in the labor force does not have any significant impact on female suicide terrorism in any of the above models (22, 24, 25).

It is possible, though, that these findings reflect the folly of a simplistic understanding of women and economic participation—that it is not only access to economic participation that is important, but also the quality of jobs, as well. The next chapter will include instances, for example, where women were offered far less lucrative or prestigious jobs post conflict compared to men; perhaps, as with women's participation in parliament, sheer numbers are not sufficient alone. Further research will enable me to explore this phenomenon further.

As they stand, though, these findings run counter to my hypothesis, the conventional wisdom of terrorism rehabilitation programs (discussed in the next chapter), and some of the interviews in the first chapter, which suggest that jobs are important to preventing terrorism and successful terrorist rehabilitation alike. If these findings are true, they suggest that the focus of many of these programs are relatively misguided, at least inasmuch as they are attempting to eliminate terrorism.

Even if my analysis of these preliminary findings turns out to be correct—that the quality of jobs impacts terrorism levels—this still challenges many post-conflict programs and assumptions, which do not focus on ensuring women have access to high-quality jobs or training.

As the next chapter will show, women are often systematically excluded from the best education, training, and resources such programs offer, and thus even this simplistic analysis may be a helpful test of the impact of these programs on female terrorism, given how simplistic the programs' approaches to women's economic stability tend to be.

The findings of Tables 1-5 reveal the need for further, more complex research into the impact of various social, political, and economic variables on suicide terrorism in general, and specifically with regards to female suicide terrorism. While large-scale quantitative analyses and data are essential—and the absence of such data on female terrorists is one of the main hurdles to a greater, more accurate body of literature on women in terrorism—large-n studies can sometimes obscure causal links or the relationships between variables, especially with regards to human decision-making.

Even without the afore-mentioned concerns about my data, or my statistical analysis was more complex, there would remain both a greater need for more extensive quantitative and qualitative study. Terrorist literature would benefit from a more comprehensive database which distinguishes between different kinds of terrorism; between domestic and international terrorism; gender of attackers; different conflicts; and which spans multiple decades. It will also be necessary to add a dimension of qualitative fieldwork to my study: to test my theory and understand the causal links between variables, I intend to interview and study the women of multiple conflicts around the world. Most of the qualitative work on female terrorists or female combatants has focused on a handful of conflicts; there is a need for more comprehensive qualitative work on female terrorism, as well.

Finally, I must address the fact that my analysis is potentially limited or skewed due to the fact that terrorism constitutes a rare event. There are over 8,000 observations in my dataset; yet, in 96.77% of these, no terror attacks occurred, and 99.16% of cases were not cases of female suicide attacks. Terrorism is already a rare event, and confirmed cases of female terrorist attacks are even rarer. My initial analysis here is built on regression analyses; however, there is an argument that alternative analyses should be used for rare events data.

The problem with rare events "is not specifically the rarity of events, but rather the possibility of a small number of cases on the rarer of the two outcomes" (Williams 2018, 1). Maximum likelihood explanations are "well-known to suffer from small-sample bias", which is strongly dependent on the number of cases in the less-frequent of the two categories. In the case of this thesis, this would be instances where suicide terrorism did occur. The degree of bias depends on how frequent suicide terrorism events are, and not on my overall sample size. So although my sample size appears to be well above the minimum required to attain statistical significance, my analysis is potentially compromised by the fact that the variable I am analyzing—suicide terrorism events—is relatively rare.

There are questions, then, about whether one can legitimately use conventional logistic regression for rare-events data. One proposed solution is to use a penalized likelihood (aka Firth) method, an approach meant to reduce small-sample bias in maximum likelihood estimation. Williams argues that "a case could be made for *always* using penalized likelihood rather than conventional maximum likelihood for logistic regression, regardless of the sample size" (Williams 2018, 1). I did test all of my models and combinations of variables using the Firth method; however, no variables were considered statistically significant when I did so.

Others—such as Heinz Leitgöb—suggest different methods, such as using exact logistic regression—only if the N is very small, and if the covariates are few and discrete—or a bias correction method—relogit—which has been "popular with political scientists but it may not be the best approach" (Williams 2018, 2). Despite criticisms against it, I did attempt to use this bias correction method in my analysis; however, relogit is an old STATA command that is no longer available through the software or STATA's online support, and I was unable to do so.

King and Zeng (2001) argue that "popular statistical procedures, such as logistic regression, can sharply underestimate the probability of rare events" and recommend an approximate Bayesian estimator over the "traditional approach based on the logit model or the approximately unbiased alternative" (King and Zeng 2001, 137, 157). Georg Heinz (2017) argues that among the more well-known problems of rare events—such as a low event rate and a need for big studies to observe enough events—is one which concerns interpretation and analysis directly: it is "difficult to attribute events to risk factors" (Heinz 2017, 2). This poses a potential concern for this thesis, as that this section attempts to analyze whether my theory correctly identifies risk factors for women's participation in terrorism. Heinz also criticizes the use of Bayesian analysis as an easy solution to the problems of rare events, noting that there is "no general rule to avoid" Bayesian non-collapsibility/anti-shrinkage except in multivariable models, and recommends Firth's Logistic regression with an added covariate as the best way to handle the problems of analyzing rare events.

The study of rare events is contentious and complicated; creating an analysis which responds to all possible shortcomings identified in statistics literature is beyond the scope of this thesis. In future analysis, I will test my theory using all available statistical methods—including Bayesian statistics—which are considered valid for rare events. The combination of more

complex statistical analyses and better data will hopefully yield stronger results than this initial analysis.

In the next chapter, I will examine how women leave violent political organizations, and the gender-based challenges they face to reintegration into civilian society and a successful post-conflict life.

Chapter 3

This final chapter examines how the forces that pull women into terrorism are important for pulling them out of violent political organizations. The gender-based elements that led to women's initial participation in violence, when unacknowledged by post-conflict reconstruction initiatives, make it less likely that women will leave violent groups and successfully reintegrate into society. Alternatively, women may initially leave, yet be more likely to return to violence if these conditions are not properly addressed. If women do are lacking status and drawn to terrorism as a way to gain status or access opportunities otherwise unavailable to them, it is important to make sure women can keep their increased status they obtained through terrorism, and that they are given opportunities for peaceful success, in order to successfully draw them out of violent organizations and reintegrate them into society.

While my theory speaks specifically to women in terrorism, it should also be applicable to the experiences of women who join other violent non-government organizations such as rebel organizations or other combatant/guerilla groups. Setting aside the women who are coerced into joining such violent political organizations, extant research into women's involvement in guerilla, rebel, and other combatant organizations suggests that female combatants share similar push and pull factors as female terrorists. Furthermore, their roles within these organizations are similar, as are the experiences of both abuse and empowerment shared by women in violent organizations.

Many, for example, join out of the hope that doing so would lead to their own—or general women's—empowerment. For instance, Wood and Thomas (2017) found that groups challenging existing social hierarchies were most likely to recruit large numbers of female fighters, and female fighters were most common in Marxist and other leftist insurgencies which

specifically addressed gender inequality (43); also "female rebels often seek out combat roles because these positions are typically viewed as more prestigious than support roles, partially because of the associated risks" (32). Upreti and Shrestha (2018) also found that women interviewed specifically joined the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to create an equitable society, or that they thought that since the Maoist ideology "was so progressive," that thousands of women joined so that they could achieve a social and political transformation and cease being marginalized (48).

Furthermore, female combatants play similar roles—both supporting, and as fighters and/or leaders; like with terrorist organizations the relative percentage of women in these roles is dependent on the group's ideology and necessity—and they share the same tactical advantages as female terrorists¹⁶. Additionally, they both experience some benefits to their time in the combative group—including skill acquisition, relatively more respect or inclusion than in broader society, sometimes leadership—and harm—including still being unequal to men, rampant abuse including sexual assault, post-conflict trauma and difficulties greater than men with regards to both-gender activities and norms during the conflict, and the trauma of war. And like female terrorists, they are often not recognized as, or considered, combatants due to their gender, regardless of whether they fought or were otherwise essential to the success of their group.

Having established the great similarities in the collective experiences of women in violent political organizations—whether terrorist or otherwise—I turn in this section to the combatant

¹⁶ i.e. using cultural norms and a relatively-nonthreatening/unassuming appearance to act as decoys, using "their femininity to confound security authorities," etc. (See Cragin and Daly 2009, 30)

literature. While there is relatively little research on the difficulties women experience following their times as combatants, there is even less terrorist literature which examines this aspect of female terrorists' experiences. The majority of research on female terrorists examines either their motivations or their roles within the organization—this is consistent with the general framing of women in terrorism as an anomaly that must be explained, rather than a rational response to circumstance. Why “naturally-gentle” women would join terrorist groups, and what they even do once they have, has drawn the vast majority of researcher's focus over the years, and few have examined what happens to women upon leaving terrorist organizations. Combatant literature, on the other hand, is more fruitful, and in the absence of terrorist-specific research I turn to research on female ex-combatants.

Research on ex-combatants indicates that women experience the reintegration process differently than men, and generally face greater constraints in the process than their male counterparts (Negewo and White 2011, 168). Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) initiatives—the main, and sometimes only, form of assistance available to former fighters—systemically underrepresent, exclude, or fail to adequately provide for the needs and experiences of women, and women experience greater social, political, and economic barriers to post-combat success and reintegration than men. The following sections provide a brief overview and analysis of the DDR process; a review of ex-combatant literature on women in combat and the gender-specific challenges they face post-conflict; a discussion of how women are underrepresented and underserved by DDR initiatives; and suggestions on how reintegration processes can better serve women.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration initiatives refer to the process by which combatants are disarmed, their military structures are demobilized and disbanded, and combatants are reintegrated and (re)adapt to a productive civilian life (Bowd and Özerde 2013, 457). These programs have allowed states to lower the potential threat from combatants and while also facilitating combatant's reintegration into society.

Non-reintegrated combatants can pose a significant threat to the security and stability of a state. At the same time, they constitute a vulnerable population ill-equipped to deal with the postwar society and economy without assistance. If combatants do not see a role for themselves in the postwar order, there is a risk that individuals or groups may engage in crime like banditry, rather than return to society. DDR programs which target ex-combatants for assistance can effectively discourage this kind of "self-mobilization" and encourage pro-social behavior, as without tangible benefits to them, combatants generally do not support disarmament and demobilization activities (Özerdem 2002, 468).

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs ideally address reintegration on three fronts: economic, political, and social. Of the three, economic reintegration is the most represented across all DDR programs, and continue to be the main approach undertaken by DDR programs worldwide. Initiatives to foster economic reintegration are viewed as necessary to reduce the incentive for ex-combatants to return to arms. DDR approaches to economic reintegration are usually similar, encompassing vocational training programs, micro-enterprise development, rehabilitation of agriculture, and providing opportunities for employment in the post-conflict security sector or national army (Bowd and Özerde 2013, 457).

A common line of thinking follows that once former fighters are provided with opportunities for employment and a livelihood, then political and social reintegration will occur in a more gradual, “natural” way. Despite the clear dominance of economic initiatives, political reintegration is not always absent from DDR arrangements, as it might be dealt with as part of wider negotiations and political settlements¹⁷. (Bowd and Özerde 2013, 457).

The social reintegration of former combatants, however, is particularly challenging. Combatants must change their identities in response to a more peaceful environment; they are routinely rejected by communities and face active stigmatization for their association with the war; and any targeted DDR assistance they receive¹⁸ can lead to resentment by communities which view this as rewarding violence (Bowd and Özerde 2013, 457-8; Folami 2016, 8).

Social marginalization which may result from this can “produce a volatile, angry and frustrated, socially excluded population who pose a credible threat to the immediate security of society” (Bowd and Özerde 2013, 458). Social reintegration is not merely the business of private individuals, but is essential to the success of post-conflict reconstruction and lasting peace. Despite this, social reintegration almost universally tends to receive limited focus in the design and implementation of DDR programs. The lack of attention and resources given to social reintegration, especially for women—as I will explain—is particularly troubling given that weak family ties and social restraints is one of the factors most highly correlated with recidivism (Kaplan and Nussio 2018, 81).

¹⁷ Political reintegration also encompasses the transformation of non-state armed groups into political parties as part of, or following, peace agreements; Bowd and Özerde (2013, 457) mention, among others, the cases of Sudan (SPLA) and El Salvador (FMLN).

¹⁸ There is consistent evidence that former fighters will not cooperate with the DDR process without incentives; thus, solutions to the resentment problem cannot depend on removing these vital benefits (Özerdem 2002, 469).

While DDR programs should ideally address all three areas of reintegration, analyses of DDR programs, designs, and implementation show that their primary aim is to economically assimilate ex-combatants (Bowd and Özerde 2013, 458-9). Across the world, DDR programs overly focus on the tangible benefits of economic reintegration to the detriment of social reintegration. This emphasis is also clear in DDR evaluation by policymakers and some academics. Social reintegration initiatives are not only less likely to be evaluated, but when they are, they tend to be measured “at the performance (output) indicator level rather than the outcome level which measures the impact of the intervention” (Bowd and Özerde 2013, 459, 461). Overall, despite its importance, social reintegration is often left for communities to address with their own limited resources and capacities, rather than making up a true goal of peace and reintegration efforts (Bowd and Özerde 2013, 471).

The neglecting of social reintegration is but one of the criticisms DDR programs have been subject to. DDR programs are also frequently limited by poor funding, coordination problems, lack of expertise, and weak political commitment (Folami 2016, 8). Furthermore, these initiatives also tend to expend resources only on those who are perceived as threatening. Such exclusively short-term security-focused approaches to peacebuilding tend to systematically exclude or overlook women and children (McMullin 2013, 413). These limitations may contribute to the argument proposed by some scholars that DDR’s effectiveness owes more to assumption than evidence (Jennings 2008).

One consistent weakness of DDR programs is that they are typically developed without women’s input, resulting in programs which are gender blind or actively discriminatory against women. Programs which fail to consider gender, the needs and experiences of women, and the different support male and female ex-combatants may need attempt a one-size-fits-all approach.

This results in programs which underserve women; women face greater challenges than men in some aspects of reintegration, and a DDR approach which does not differentiate between men and women's needs will not adequately respond to help women overcome these challenges.

Not only are women routinely absent from peacemaking and the construction of DDR initiatives, but programs for women are often developed without their input. Programs for female war victims and abducted girls and women in Sierra Leone, for instance, were developed "in the absence of women's own accounts of what roles they took up during the war" (MacKenzie 2009, 255). Other development actors made "little effort" to understand the motivations and experiences of women and girls during conflict, and initiatives designed to address their post-conflict needs were therefore ill-informed (Mackenzie 2009, 213). At their worst, DDR programs have actively excluded women from participation, provided options for women built from gendered ideas of what is appropriate for them, rather than women's needs, or ceased assistance for women when faced with budgetary or administrative challenges.

DDR programs have a persistent, well-known difficulty attracting female ex-combatants. The following section explores the institutional and personal/social reasons why women are underrepresented in DDR initiatives, relative both to male ex-combatants and to the numbers of women in violent political organizations and on the battlefield.

Obstacles to Women's DDR Participation

Women have frequently participated in wars and conflicts across the globe and over time, just as women have participated in terrorism. Their roles are also similar: more women occupy "support roles" than are soldiers and military leaders, but women in violent political

organizations fill a variety of roles, from medics and cooks to soldiers and combatants, and even as leaders on and off the battlefield (Hudson 2009, 295; Mackenzie 2009b, 249; MacKenzie 2009a, 206).

Women's participation is hardly incidental, either; their numbers have been essential to several violent groups. In Nepal, about a fifth of the CPNM's fighting force was female, and in Ethiopia women not only "comprised approximately a third of the fighters" in the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) during the civil war but their presence has been credited with the group's success (Negewo and White 2011, 164; Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 137).

Many conflicts are characterized by significant participation from women and girls, who work alongside men in liberation armies, rebel groups, and other militia. Their roles "are often the foundation upon which these fighting forces rely" (Negewo and White 2011, 167). Women are particularly important to non-government forces, as "nonconventional armies" cannot rely on conventional recruitment tactics or state structures to gain an advantage. Therefore, "gender roles are often manipulated and expanded in order to help the nonconventional fighting force gain an advantage" (Negewo and White 2011, 167).

For many guerilla armies, in fact, the nature, length, and intensity of their wars require training women for combat and other critical roles. They cannot succeed on men alone. The TPLF in Ethiopia succeeded through liberalizing social gender norms in areas under their control and training women as combatants. By using women, the group was able to "ensure the downfall of one of the largest armed forces in Africa" (Negewo and White 2011, 167-8). Other researchers have found that women are more often a feature of prolonged conflicts and older groups; the "long-term survival of a terrorist group is often dependent on female participation to fill the

ranks by themselves or by the men they persuaded to join the organization” (Von Knop 2007, 401; Bhatia and Knight 2011, 8-9).

Female ex-combatants from Sierra Leone¹⁹ admitted to playing roles ranging from “leading lethal attacks,” “screening and killing pro-rebel civilians,” and “killing and maiming pro-government forces and civilians,” to committing executions, planning and carrying out public attacks, gun trafficking, spying, looting, raping, burning houses, and murdering children. Members of local development organizations reported that “some of the most vicious soldiers and commanders were women” (Mackenzie 2009b, 249; MacKenzie 2009a, 206).

If these female ex-combatants were men, there would be no question of their status as ex-combatants. However, the numbers of women in various armed groups and conflicts are not reflected in DDR statistics. In Sierra Leone, for instance, women represented “between 30 and 50% of the various factions fighting forces,” yet accounted for less than one-fifteenth of DDR recipients, and only 8% of child soldiers who received DDR assistance were girls (MacKenzie 2009a, 207; Mackenzie 2009b, 245). Of DDR beneficiaries in the Niger Delta, only 0.6% were women (Folami 2016, 8).

One of the main reasons why women are notably absent from DDR programs is because they are often not recognized as combatants or soldiers, and therefore do not qualify for DDR assistance. A commonality among DDR and reintegration programs is a notable resistance to considering and classifying women as combatants or soldiers (Kinsella 2006, 165, 167; Mackenzie 2009b, 245; Berdak 2015; Folami 2016, 8). This resistance leads to using strict definitions of these terms to scrutinize female combatants to a much greater degree than for men. In this way, women

¹⁹ Sierra Leone featured prominently in recent extant literature, and was characterized by high rates of female combat participation; therefore, it is referenced frequently in this thesis.

are systematically excluded from DDR and reintegration activities, which hinders their successful reintegration.

In Sierra Leone, the number of female ex-combatants “was grossly underestimated, informed by conventional views of gender roles, which tend to regard armed conflict as a male field of operation” (Folami 2016, 7). Both the international community and the Sierra Leone government over-classified female members of combatant groups as “abductees,” “camp followers,” “sex slaves,” “females associated with the war,” “dependents,” and “wives.” This resulted in a security-focused DDR process which excluded women as they were not considered “real soldiers” (Mackenzie 2009b, 245). When it comes to views of women in violent political organizations, far too many individuals and institutions can only see their gender, and the stereotypes and misnomers attached to the idea of “woman.” Too often, incorrect or oversimplified assumptions about women in combatant or terrorist groups overshadow science, evidence, and the women’s experiences, and women find themselves once again defined, and restricted, by their gender.

This biased classification affects both female combatants and women who performed vital supportive duties. The latter are still key members of armed groups, though; in armed groups just as in official armies, both soldiers and support staff are necessary for the group’s functioning and success. Men who fill support roles—such as spies, messengers, medics, and cooks—rarely face questions of whether they “count.” For women, though, there has been “extensive debate about the functions of female soldiers [...] and the extent to which their work counts as soldiering” (Mackenzie 2009b, 255-6).

When women are labeled as something other than “soldier,” they are not considered a security priority, and are consequently eliminated from policy discourses (Mackenzie 2009b,

257). Narrow definitions “of who is a soldier or fighter often discriminated against women and girls involved in fighting” which prevents demobilized female combatants from accessing resources post conflict (Kinsella 2006, 165). While men’s reintegration is “emphasized as an essential element of the transition from war to peace,” women’s reintegration is considered a social and private concern, making reintegration more difficult for female ex-combatants (Mackenzie 2009b, 243).

Additionally, women tend to be the first to suffer from unexpected difficulties DDR programs experience. For example, women “were the first to be excluded” from Rwanda’s DDR program after an unexpectedly large number of ex-combatants reported for disarmament, which strained the dwindling budget (Folami 2016, 7). In Ethiopia, rehabilitation plans were to have provided women with education options; however, insufficient funds and hasty implementation prevented many women from accessing educational and training programs (Negewo and White 2011, 169).

Situations in which women do not receive education through DDR initiatives are particularly negative for female ex-combatants due to the great importance of education, in particular, to recidivism and reintegration rates. A lack of educational attainment is “highly correlated with recidivism” and increased educational attainment during the DDR program is associated with decreased recidivism (Kaplan and Nussio 2018a, 81-2). Ex-combatants themselves also highly valued education; a plurality of surveyed ex-combatants cited the education program as the element most helpful in their reintegration, and education programs appeared to “aid [the ex-combatants] in the following alternative life paths” (Kaplan and Nussio 2018a, 84, 87).

The infrastructure of DDR programs also inadvertently leads to the exclusion of women when programs necessitate ex-combatants turn in a weapon (most often a gun) in order to receive DDR

benefits. Women who participated in conflicts are less likely than men to be able to submit a weapon in exchange for reintegration assistance. When submission of a weapon is a criterion for participation in the DDR, this disproportionately affects women.

The ownership of weapons during conflicts—especially those like the eleven-year war in Sierra Leone, characterized by several phases of fighting amongst various armed factions—can be complicated. Individual combatants “did not necessarily possess his or her own weapon,” and weapons were acquired, lost, stolen, or transferred between factions and areas over the years (Mackenzie 2009b, 250). It is not only possible, then, but common for ex-combatants not to have the “proof” they need to access DDR assistance. Furthermore, even among combatants who possess a weapon, the types of weapons used in many conflicts cited throughout the literature are diverse; in several conflicts, for example, some combatants used machetes, rather than guns.

Additionally, women are sometimes stripped of their weapons by their commanders or comrades who “deliberately took weapons from women and girls before the disarmament process so they would not be eligible for the program” (Mackenzie 2009b, 250). Another reason that female ex-combatants do not meet the criterion of weapon submission is that when women escape from their groups, they usually leave behind—or are unable to take—their weapons (Mackenzie 2009b, 251).

Most significant to this finding, though, is the distribution of work within armed groups. Members—both male and female—who perform support roles during a conflict may never possess a gun (MacKenzie 2009b, 249). Although some conflicts are characterized by an unusually high percentage of female soldiers, in many, most women are not part of the militants who submit weapons (Folami 2016, 7).

I am not alone in considering the state of women's treatment through DDR programs to be lacking. Just this year, the United Nations' Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate warned that the flawed (and unequal) way female ex-combatants are treated is of great concern. The report highlights the main concerns I mention in this thesis: that women are both more likely to not be treated as serious security risks due to their gender, regardless of their actual experiences; and that women receive too little rehabilitation and reintegration support, which puts them at risk of recidivism or re-radicalization, and "potentially undermin[es] their successful reintegration into society" (Molana-Allen 2019).

The picture this all paints is an embarrassing one for DDR programs, which sometimes couch themselves in the language of equality and empowerment—instead of overcoming the gender biases which led to the female combatants in the first place, and helping them marry any empowerment they received from the conflict with the peacefulness of ordinary society, DDR programs often inadvertently worsens women's situations through their failures. However, while there are significant institutional barriers to women's access to DDR support, women also often choose not to try to access these initiatives. The next section explores the demand-side reasons why women often avoid DDR programs.

In addition to these institutional obstacles to female DDR participation, women also choose to avoid DDR programs out of shame, fear, and because of conflicting domestic duties and poor communication regarding the nature of DDR and their eligibility.

The most frequently-identified reason in the literature for why women avoid DDR is the shame and stigma they associate with it. Women "often [do not] reveal their past experience as ex-combatants for fear of alienation in their communities" (Folami 2016,7). Women who went

through great—often life-risking—effort to escape are not eager to return to their groups in order to receive DDR benefits. Association with a program designed for former soldiers “mean they were continually identified with the conflict” they had worked so hard to leave. Women who wish to start their life over, or who wished to hide their involvement in the war, did not participate (Mackenzie 2009, 252).

Women also faced pressure from their families not to participate in DDR, out of a fear of stigma and shame. Association with armed groups—especially for women—is shameful for many ex-combatants and their communities. Sometimes, as in Sierra Leone, the actual process of DDR itself is stigmatized. There, the perception that DDR was a shameful practice which would have a negative effect on their families also kept women away (Mackenzie 2009, 251). Women were particularly worried about the identification process of former soldiers, and that their involvement might be used to harm them later.

Female ex-combatants reported fearing retaliation from other rebel factions or community members if were they to be seen publicly as an ex-combatant. Others feared that the DDR was a trap and they would be killed, or that the fighting was not truly over. If the war had not actually ended, openly labeling themselves at DDR would have been not only shameful, but dangerous. Some women also face being disowned by their families or husband if she were to involve herself in DDR (MacKenzie 2009b, 252; Folami 2016, 11). Women who rely on their family for survival cannot afford to bring shame to—or anger—they.

In some instances, pride, rather than fear, kept women away from DDR. In one study, interviewed female ex-combatants stated that they thought they would have better prospects elsewhere or that they would not need DDR help. Women who had achieved high rank in their faction stated the “notion of attending the DDR with lower ranking solders was insulting." This

example shows how DDR programs tend not to account for the shifts in power that occur during wartime and the difficulty women had with losing this new power (MacKenzie 2009b, 253). The loss of status or prestige as a result of demobilization and disarmament has been identified as a barrier to reintegration, one which “may merit special attention from DDR programs” along with social isolation, due to both the power of these factors and the difficulty individuals have in overcoming them alone (Kaplan and Nussio 2018a, 87).

Another factor which prevents women from participating in DDR activities are their duties as women to their family. Women with children, or adult family members requiring care (for instance, severely injured husbands) must stay home, and are not free to attend DDR activities like their husbands are. Household commitments frequently prevent female ex-combatants from attending vocational training or pursuing education, and they lose out on opportunities to integrate more fully into the economy and society (Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 137, 141).

Finally, in some cases communication about the DDR initiatives was poor, resulting in misunderstandings among females regarding the nature of the program and their eligibility. Mackenzie (2009b) found “the primary understanding of the DDR for a striking number of the women interviewed was that it was ‘just about men with guns’ or that it was a ‘gun for money’ program directed at male rebels” and that the program was not “for” them (250).

Mackenzie and others have also identified confusion regarding child soldiers; many ex-combatants in conflicts like Sierra Leone, Ethiopia (Negewo and White 2011), and Uganda (Baines 2011) were under the age of eighteen at the time of the DDR initiative. As such, they would have been considered a child²⁰ and been eligible for the children’s DDR. However, many of them did not see themselves as children because they were already mothers, or had had sex or taken on adult

²⁰ According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

roles and behaviors during the war. While they were legally children for the purposes of DDR, from a societal perspective, they were not considered children (Mackenzie 2009, 252). The DDR initiatives did not consider this potential confusion, or attempt to reach out to girls and explain that they were eligible. As a result, many girls received no assistance at all.

Low levels of participation are not the only way in which DDR programs underserve female ex-combatants; even for women who do engage with them, DDR programs respond poorly to the economic challenges facing female ex-combatants, provide little to no assistance for women's social reintegration, and fail to consider the impact of war on women.

Flaws and Importance of Reintegration

Economic reintegration is difficult for female ex-combatants; they typically lack resources and skills and are not competitive in the job market. Compared to their male counterparts they are also more likely to be faced with restricted mobility. Their livelihoods are usually insecure or they are unemployed, and their situation post-conflict is often worse than during the war. (Bernal 2000, 61; MacKenzie 2009a, 211; Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 143, 149; Negewo and White 2011, 177).

Additionally, female ex-fighters are curbed by family and domestic obligations—such as childcare—in a way that men are not. These extra responsibilities make certain kinds of employment difficult to obtain, and ex-combatant women struggle with discrimination (Negewo and White 2011, 168; Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 143; Negewo and White 2011, 177). Female ex-fighters commonly feel that they wasted their best years on the conflict and have little or nothing to show for it (Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 142, Negewo and White 2011).

Despite the significant, often gendered, challenges female ex-combatants face, DDR initiatives on the whole respond poorly to women's economic reintegration needs. Female ex-combatants often receive unsatisfactory training and assistance, particularly in comparison to men. Decisions regarding their options are influenced more by their gender than by market forces, international standards, or their needs. Given that their economic situations are more precarious than men's, this failure often poses a significant barrier for women fighter's reintegration and success post conflict.

In Nepal women struggled with very limited options after “no sincere efforts [were] made to ensure their livelihoods” post conflict and the DDR program failed to train them in skills or entrepreneurship (Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 149). In Sierra Leone, the training options offered to women were “markedly different for them than for males²¹.” Their limited options were highly gendered, largely non-lucrative, and “based on gendered ideas of what women *should* do in the marketplace rather than an assessment of trades that would allow women to make money and succeed in the marketplace.” The small number of trade options for women led to an overabundance of women trained in a few areas, which further diluted the worth of their trades. Without skills training that had value in their communities, the female soldiers are forced to find other options for survival. In war-torn communities, options for women are limited and “a large number of ex-combatant women and girls turn to prostitution for survival” (MacKenzie 2009a, 212).

²¹ Men received apprenticeships and vocational training in areas such as carpentry, soap-making, construction, plumbing and masonry, electrical work, and similar trades. The choices for women “included gaga tie-dyeing, soap-making, tailoring, catering, hairdressing, and weaving.” This was consistent across the few programs targeting female soldiers, which “consistently offered these same select trades.” (Mackenzie 2009a, 208)

Despite an ostensible focus on economic aid, DDR programs tend not to focus on the economic conditions that disproportionately affect women (Yolanda 2010, 51). Many programs offered for women and disabled ex-combatants were meant to “provide financial support to ex-combatant families in order to reduce family pressures on male ex-combatants” rather than truly support the women themselves (MacKenzie 2009a, 206). Women’s micro-economic initiatives presumed that women are married, that their husband is the primary wage earner, and that the women wish to stay married. Hence, even some economic programs specifically targeting women do not provide adequate support for women who are abandoned/divorced, single, or whose husbands are not successfully supporting them (MacKenzie 2009a, 212-3).

Successful social reintegration may be the area where the needs of female ex-combatants are greatest, and where the support and recognition from DDR programs the scantest. During wartime, social standards regarding sexuality, marriage and divorce, gender roles, and violence are relaxed; however, they usually revert once the conflict is over. While men and women participate in socially-unacceptable acts during the conflict period, female ex-combatants face greater stigmatization than men post conflict.

Compared to their male counterparts, female ex-combatants have fewer avenues for success post-conflict, and they are socially shunned and rejected at greater rates. (Bowd & Özerdem 2013, 457; Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 142). Overall, women face significant, gendered obstacles to reintegration. Of the three reintegration fronts—economic, political, and social—the challenges female ex-combatants face in social reintegration are perhaps the most difficult (Humphreys & Weinstein 2007, 546). Given that it is in the social sphere that female ex-

combatants needs are greatest, the fact that most DDR programs offer little to no social assistance poses a significant problem for women combatants.

Female ex-combatants commonly face concerns over their marriageability and sexuality, their participation in violence and other actions which go against gender conventions, and their experience with forms of relative equality and independence. Across the world, women who have participated in combat are often seen as having “acted against culturally determined gender roles, particularly in inter-caste [or ethnic] marriages or behaving in ways regarded as 'promiscuous' or 'aggressive.’” This perception not only makes it more difficult for women to marry, but also for female ex-combatants to reintegrate into their families and communities as a whole (Bowd and Özerde 2013, 458). When combatants take part in marriages which are socially impermissible, yet prevalent during war, women are ostracized for these marriages far more than men (Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 142).

Female ex-combatants are at great risk of being marginalized, as the identity of the woman fighter “cannot be easily reconciled with predominant, traditional gender ideologies.” Regardless of the suspension of certain traditional norms—including that of “womanly” behavior—during war, “women are expected to return to their ‘normal’ (traditional) behavior in peacetime” (Negewo and White 2011, 181).

While men strengthen their gender roles through military activity, women who participate in conflict “were seen to have violated 'deeply anchored preconceptions of gender identity’” and were perceived as an aberration. Women who had participated in armed combat were perceived to be “highly aggressive or highly sexual”—traits which run counter to what makes a desirable and socially acceptable woman (Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 142).

Given the prevalence of sexual assault during the war, in Sierra Leone communities there was particularly “great concern about the marriageability of female soldiers largely because it was assumed they had been raped or they had given birth to children out of wedlock” during the conflict (MacKenzie 2009, 257). Marriage was considered so important for women in Sierra Leone that some organizations “encouraged former female soldiers to marry their rape perpetrators in order to avoid shame and to blend into the community.” (MacKenzie 2009, 258).

When rebel groups and other violent organizations organize or encourage marriage, flexibility of gender rules, and premarital sex, women disproportionately suffer for it. This management of the sexual needs of group’s combatants—and, for leftist groups, a demonstration of their ideals—becomes “a severe social burden and barrier in post-conflict social reintegration for women” (Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 142-3). Female ex-combatants are “the ones who were blamed for breaking social norms and values” once said norms revert to a more conservative post-conflict status (Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 141).

Eritrean female fighters found “the very qualities that made them good soldiers and comrades stigmatize them as wives and potential wives.” Had they been men, they would have been recognized as “heroes of the nationalist struggle;” however, because they fought as women, “their morality is suspect, their femininity is doubtful, and their ability to behave as obedient wives is questionable” (Bernal 2000, 61). Many women who have fought have experienced independence, sexual freedom²², and equality with men; not only that, but they have fought with

²² Marriages, divorces, and sexual relationships between fighters were common, and the relaxed social rules of the battlefield gave female fighters greater freedoms in this arena than was common in the civilian world. Practices that “would be regarded as scandalous promiscuity in Eritrean society-at-large was apparently tolerated in the field.” Premarital sex was “encouraged,” and the Front made contraceptives available to the combatants. Most fighter couples engaged in premarital sex, and “this has a liberating effect because in Eritrea female chastity has been

men, and killed people²³. These strengths and experiences which were so important for military success make them undesirable as wives and women in peacetime (Bernal 2000, 65)

The presumption of promiscuity has a tendency to cling to female ex-combatants, regardless of circumstance, which serves as a barrier to their successful reintegration. Female ex-combatants “are often rejected by their communities as impure and therefore cannot get married,” (Folami 2016, 7; see also Mackenzie 2009, 257; Bowd & Özerdem 2013, 457). The stigma attached to female combatants “is a reality that has faced women ex-combatants globally,” and acts as one of the strongest barriers to women’s successful reintegration (Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 141).

An additional barrier to marriage facing ex-combatant women is that they have often aged out of the preferred bridal age and spent their peak child-bearing years in the war. In post-conflict environments, where there is often “renewed focus on child-bearing,” the concerns over female ex-combatant’s possible infertility can inhibit their ability to marry (Bernal 2000, 65; Bowd & Özerdem 2013, 457). In cases where women return to their communities already married, they are frequently divorced for civilian women, who are perceived to be more feminine, modest, and manageable as wives (Bernal 2000, 61, 65; Baines 2011, 489; Bowd & Özerdem 2013, 457; Folami 2016,7; Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 144).

traditional associated with the honor of the family." In the Front’s carefully-controlled environment, sexuality belonged to individuals, not their family (Bernal 2000, 69). Once the EPLF did not organize the fighter’s lives for them, though, the gender equality the Front achieved could not be maintained (Bernal 2000, 72).

²³ One quote from a female ex-combatant which exemplifies this is: "A man thinks 'she has fought and killed. She is more man than me.' He thinks he won't be able to control her. She is strong." (Bernal 2000, 65).

Despite significant involvement from international organizations, and often being held up as an example of a well-executed DDR program, in Sierra Leone the reintegration of women and girls was largely treated “as a social process, a returning to normal that would either happen naturally, with time, or through sensitization—meaning talking to communities and families about the need to take women and girls back” (Mackenzie 2009b, 257).

Research indicates that for former combatants and terrorists, the support of the community and family as key to successful reintegration. The transition from violent groups back into the community relies on social institutions to offer non-extremist social networks, economic support, and resources that can positively influence the process of reintegration (Cherney 2018, 9). Despite the importance of social reintegration to successful reintegration of ex-combatants, and a clear need for DDR social reintegration assistance, female ex-combatants are frequently left to struggle with these barriers to reintegration on their own. Women’s reintegration is often conceptualized as both a moral and natural thing, whereas men’s reintegration is recognized as difficult and important to facilitate.

Context in Reintegration Initiatives

Recent academic literature on DDR and a 2001 report from the UN secretary-general emphasize the importance of context in designing reintegration programs (McMullin 2013, 390). While these reports specifically mention historical and political context, DDR programs should also recognize the human context of combatants and the society around them, as well. Different types of combatants might require differently tailored programs. Male and female ex-combatants have different needs and contexts; while such a statement seems obvious, DDR programs often reflect a “one-size-fits-all” approach which does not consider the different needs and experiences

of participants (McMullin 2013, 390-1). As DDR programs are typically designed by men for men, without actively considering gender and women's needs, this approach tends to disadvantage women.

One facet of women's experiences currently underexplored in DDR policies is the understanding that female ex-combatants are often both victim and perpetrator. Because women and girls are often horrifically victimized during war, it can be difficult to understand that there is also growing evidence that female soldiers are "both perpetrators and empowered through their roles" in conflict (MacKenzie 2009a, 206). For example, many women in Sierra Leone were simultaneously dangerous combatants and acted as sex slaves. While the sexual violence of the Sierra Leone conflict was acknowledged by the media and government, women's participation in the conflict was so unacknowledged that even the peace accords made mention only to female victims, and not female soldiers (MacKenzie 2009, 206).

Female ex-combatants require consideration as both combatants—and all that entails, such as being potential threats and requiring assistance to reintegrate—and victims who require resources to deal with the physical, psychological, and social effects of their trauma. Often, DDR provides women with neither.

Another flaw in DDR programs with regards to women's reintegration is the failure of DDR to reflect the complicated relationship of women, war, and empowerment. Many women suffer disproportionately in conflict; on the other hand, many women also gain from conflict (MacKenzie 2009a, 206). There is evidence that in some cases "female soldiers had more access to resources, more social freedom and more political power during the official war" compared to the pre- and post-war context (MacKenzie 2009a, 213).

Where women suffer from conflict, the peacebuilding process must take this into account, and where women have benefitted from conflict, it is “equally crucial” that these gains are acknowledged and consolidated. For situations “where both occur (which is in the majority of conflicts in Africa and around the world) peacebuilding processes have the complicated task of paying attention not only to the many and varied roles that women play in war, but also to the many and varied impacts of war on women” (Hudson 2009, 296).

For many female ex-combatants, “reintegration” entails great pressure to return to a role more subordinate to men than they had held as soldiers, both within their families and in general society (Negewo and White 2011, 168). The popular call to “return to normal” and “return society to a stable status quo” following conflict affects women differently than men. This “status quo” involves returning women to their subordinate positions—however, women are often uninterested in doing so (Hudson 2009, 298; Negewo and White 2011, 168).

Encouraging women and girl soldiers to return to their “normal places” involves stripping from them any new positions of authority or roles they may have gained during the war. Furthermore, this approach to reintegration limits opportunities for the post-conflict society to rethink gender stereotypes and hierarchies (Mackenzie 2009b, 258). Rather than acknowledging women’s roles in the conflict and building on the gains they made toward gender equity in the process, women’s participation is downplayed and equity is replaced with a return to restrictive, traditional views of gender and “women’s place” (Negewo and White 2011, 167).

If reintegration for women is viewed as a “return to normal,” shaped by gender stereotypes with the intent of returning prewar limiting understandings of women’s capabilities, then DDR risks not only underserving women, but entrenching gender inequality (Mackenzie 2009b, 261). If, as evidence suggests, there is a link between discrimination against women and state violence

and conflict, then “the success of post-conflict reconstruction can be seen as dependent on the inclusion of women and the pursuit of gender equity.” Considering gender in peacebuilding and DDR initiatives is not optional, or a “special issue,” but “essential to constructing responsible and comprehensive peacebuilding policies and practices” (Hudson 2009, 288).

Acknowledging, and building on gains women make through war also has the potential to allow women to become important resources for the state’s reconstruction. DDR programs which meet women where they are and provide them the assistance they need to fully reintegrate socially, politically, and economically will greatly increase the success rate of women’s reintegration. Furthermore, the investment made into successfully reintegrating and empowering female ex-combatants can become an investment into their communities and countries, as well.

There is growing acknowledgement that targeted DDR programs should be viewed as an investment in the productive potential of former combatants, rather than a bribe to keep them out of trouble (Özerdem 2002, 468). This attitude should extend to female ex-combatants as well. Reintegration programs which are designed to respond to the wider needs of the community, and which view ex-combatants as potential investments, can have an outsized positive impact. This approach was taken in Kosovo, and the benefits of targeted assistance for ex-combatants spread throughout the community. It is estimated that the DDR program in Kosovo may have affected as much as 10% of the state’s population (Özerdem 2002, 468-9). Choosing to invest in both male and female ex-combatants could have a significant positive impact on post-conflict states.

Female ex-combatants depend heavily on DDR institutions, yet their input is not considered in their development. This not only harms female ex-combatants, but there is growing evidence in the literature that women’s participation is important to successful peacebuilding and societal

development. Comparisons of African peace processes with varying levels of women's involvement "suggest a general pattern that women's involvement in African peace processes is beneficial to the long-term sustainability of the peace negotiated" (Hudson 2009, 317). The shortcomings of DDR initiatives begin with women's exclusion from their development, and a failure to consult female combatants about their experiences and needs. Increasing women's input in the DDR process is a necessary step to improving its success rate with female reintegration.

There is ample evidence that men and women have unequal access to resources, and men usually benefit more from DDR programs, in post-conflict scenarios. Furthermore, common barriers to women's participation in DDR are known; special attention, therefore, should be given to ensuring women are not marginalized or excluded (Upreti, Shivakoti, and Bharati 2018, 141). Additionally, it is important for DDR programs to begin including measurement of success or failure of demobilization and reintegration from a gender perspective (Aolain 2009, 1076). These analyses are currently absent from DDR initiatives; without this feedback, DDR initiatives cannot improve their approach to women's needs and success (or lack thereof). Beginning to include gendered analysis of program's success will allow relevant actors to identify areas for improvement, and build on changes that see success in women's reintegration.

DDR initiatives should recognize that the needs of different recipients may differ based on a number of factors, including gender, and make decisions regarding training, resource allocation, communication, and assistance based on research and consultation with ex-combatants rather than assumption or stereotypes. Rather than providing "acceptable" job training for women, for instance, programs should offer job training based on market analyses and input from women about what they need. Programs could provide childcare during training sessions so that childcare duties

do not prevent women from attending DDR activities. Programs should also specifically target women, escapees, and children to inform them of their eligibility for DDR.

While women struggle particularly on the social front, there is also evidence that the relative inclusion or alienation of ex-combatants in society can be somewhat mitigated by increased opportunities and invitations to participate socially (Kaplan and Nussio 2018b, 148). Should DDR initiatives begin to include measures to improve the social vibrancy and resources of communities, they would not only stimulate the community (and decrease the likelihood of community-combatant resentment over unequal resource allocation) but may also “provide openings for ex-combatants looking for new notions of belonging” (2018b, 148). Investments in communities in general, and specifically in resources and initiatives for women which can be sustained locally and which address the issues women identify themselves may act as the front of a wedge that allows women to enter back into their communities as valued, supported members, or at least be able to support themselves.

One thing DDR initiatives should *not* do is exclude women or entrench gender inequality. One of the complexities of the topic of women and conflict and reconstruction is that women often experience gains during war, and their inclusion in post-conflict initiatives and society can have outsized positive effects; however, women are often pushed back into their old roles in the private sphere with few resources, and ignored once the conflict is over²⁴. There is reason to

²⁴ There is a trend identified in conflict literature that once a movement's broader aims have been achieved "women's public role and the concern for gender differentiated interests diminish in the post-conflict society" (Campbell 2005, 378). Women are asked to return to "their natural or 'proper' role in the private sphere," and "their gender specific interests are placed on the back burner as consolidation of the new regime becomes the paramount concern" (Campbell 2005, 378). That "issues of concern to women are no longer on the front burner" and there is little representation of women in government is true even in Eritrea, a country where the government owes its success to women combatants. Although the government nominally honors women's participation in the government, and has

avoid gender inequalities on a societal level due to the benefits of equality, and societal detriments of inequality—such as the inverse relationship between gender equality and violent opposition movements—(see Shaftenaar 2017 762, 769, 770)—but this is especially important for successful reintegration of female ex-combatants.

Gender inequalities and restrictions influenced women’s decision to join a violent political organization initially, and despite what they suffered during the conflict, they also often gain more respect, skills, or higher expectations that they will be involved in the post-conflict society and government. DDR initiatives should not erase this new, higher baseline of competence or social capital, and rise to meet the women where they are rather than drag them back down into the unsatisfying position they occupied before they joined the conflict. Decisions made from this perspective are more likely to meet ex-combatant women’s real needs, difficulties, and expectations, and thus are more likely to be successful. Societies carry the imprint of conflicts once they end; in societies where women fought, this includes a new view of women.

The above research shows how detrimental current DDR approaches are, for individual female ex-combatants and the overall success of DDR and reconstruction initiatives. Surely an approach which does not underestimate women—either as violent actors, or in erasing the gender-specific needs and challenges they carry²⁵—would do better. Women-inclusive decision-making and women-centric programs are more likely to succeed, and more likely to make the post-conflict civilian world more appealing to women than a violent group. If not, they could

erected statues in their honor, women are not truly supported as the "male prerogative" has re-emerged even in this state (Campbell 2005, 393).

²⁵ Such as needing to provide childcare for women to be free to attend DDR training, or ensuring that they are given the training and resources to survive independently of their families, as they are in danger of being cast out and unsupported through traditional means.

return to conflict, or, if war breaks out again, an unchanged society would yet again see women join, legitimize, and contribute to a violent groupⁱⁱ.

More important than individual policy changes—although these are certainly necessary—is a paradigm shift that must occur in DDR. Rather than treating the reintegration of female ex-combatants as a private matter, DDR initiatives need to consider women with the same level of attention as men. Instead of treating women’s reintegration as an afterthought or a natural conclusion, programs need to recognize the real challenges to women’s reintegration, and attempt to overcome these through policy, training, and institutional support. The reintegration of female ex-combatants is as much a public health and development concern as men’s. While more research is needed to determine the best way to address the needs of female ex-combatants—particularly in how DDR programs can provide women adequate support to overcome barriers to social reintegration—knowledge on women’s reintegration needs and experiences mean nothing if DDR programs are not willing to act on it.

Conclusion

In this thesis I presented a unifying theoretical framework of women's path into and out of terrorism, and shown how a lack of opportunities or respect in the civilian world encourages many women to join violent political groups as an alternative path to political influence, social status/acceptance, or advancement opportunities. I found some quantitative support that gender variables—specifically, women's access to education relative to men, and their status in the family and society—affects the likelihood a country will experience successful female suicide terrorism.

While I also experienced negative findings—for instance, that female parliamentary presence appears not to influence women's participation in suicide terrorism—these can be explained by the fact that I took a very broad, blunt quantitative approach in these initial analyses. On the subject of political representation, for instance, there is research that suggests that quantity of women in government does not necessarily translate to “quality” of women in government, and a government which reflects the needs and policy preferences of women. I will conduct further, more detailed research which will seek to further explore and explain both my positive and negative findings from this thesis.

As I showed, extant research has broadly found that a conflict has ended, or women leave the violent group, the same forces which initially led them to participation in violence also hinder their reintegration and post-conflict successes. Most programs intended to facilitate the disarmament and reintegration of combatants do not reflect women's realities or needs, and governments, NGOs, and societies alike consistently fail to provide adequate incentives and resources for women to avoid their recidivism or isolation post-conflict.

Although I have examined the broader relationship between women's opportunities and terrorist participation in this thesis, the particulars of the causal relationship between any one variable, or combination of variables, and women's participation in violence is an area for future research. Additionally, my analysis and theoretical development are both based on relatively limited information. I intend to create a more comprehensive database for terrorist research, and pair this with more comprehensive qualitative analyses based on interviews with former female terrorists.

This database would include a variety of terrorist attacks—including suicide attacks, bombings, military initiatives, kidnappings, and murders—over the last 50 years. The database would delineate between the gender of the terrorists—or acknowledge when such data is unknown—and whether an attack is domestic or transnational in nature. The database would also include standard information such as the terrorist organization responsible—or lack thereof/the group that “inspired” an attack—the country or countries involved in the attack, whether the attack was independent or conducted in concert with a supportive regime, the year(s), casualty information, whether the target of the attack was civilian, military, government, or other, and be searchable by country, year, gender, organization, attack type, destructiveness, target, and government affiliation.

I intend to draw on existing databases and sources—such as traditional media coverage, government reports, social media—to identify terrorist incidents and their details. I will use a similar methodology as the Chicago Project on Security and Threats (CPOST) to ensure the accuracy of my details. I will also check my database against existing terrorist databases—like the Global Terrorism Database (GTD)—and I will attempt to access the terrorism records of

relevant governments (of states which experience terrorism, like Sri Lanka, or which are engaged in counterterrorism actions, like the United States) as well.

My goal is to create the most comprehensive terrorism database available to researchers and the public for both my research and the betterment of terrorism and security research in general. However, I also intend to supplement my large-n quantitative analysis with fieldwork and interviews of female terrorists from several different conflicts. I intend to arrange interviews with female terrorists (or combatants, if terrorists are found to be impractical to meet with) who have both terrorism experience and who experienced the DDR process. These interviews will focus on their personal experiences, grievances, motivations, and their perspective on terrorism and post-terrorism life.

These interviews will attempt to clarify the causal linkages between variables, and to detail the entire experience of women in terrorism. These interviews should help to clarify the findings of the quantitative studies, and may allow me to identify additional variables for quantitative study. Ideally, I would interview multiple women from four or five different conflicts in different countries or regions to ensure the greatest robustness of my findings. If women from different societies, different terrorist organizations, different countries, and different years all experience the same general trend that I have theorized in this thesis, these interviews will be valuable support for my theory. At the very least, they will contribute to the literature in a meaningful way, as the majority of interviews with female terrorists or combatants have focused on a few conflicts—namely Palestine, Sri Lanka, and Sierra Leone. While the insights gained from these interviews are valuable, the literature on female terrorism will be more robust with contributions from a greater variety of conflicts.

This research should lead to the improvement of DDR programs, as understanding the needs, experiences, push factors for women will enable officials to craft initiatives which “pull” women from terrorism more effectively, by addressing the needs of women in ways that initiatives currently do not. If women are drawn to violent political organizations out of a search for respect, influence, power or opportunities they feel otherwise cut off from, and if they experience gains through conflict, then DDR programs must offer enough incentives on this basis to draw and keep them out of conflict.

The aftermath of conflict is a difficult time for states; however, it can also represent an opportunity to change gender roles and improve the situation of women in society to an extent that civil society—and not violent organizations—offers women the greatest opportunities for personal advancement, influence, and respect. Anderson (2016) argues that “social rupture, including armed conflict, is often credited with creating opportunities for changes in gender roles” (4). Anderson is speaking of women “tak[ing] on new social roles during conflict that may propel them into the public sphere”; however, officials can take advantage of these existing phenomena and deliberately craft a more gender-equal society in the aftermath of a conflict as a deliberate counter-terrorism effort.

Current DDR measures often attempt to return women to the positions they held before the conflict; however, conflict changes not only society, but the women involved in violence. DDR programs which ignore the advancements women make during conflict, and which pressure them to turn to their “proper place” in the home and private sphere fail women. Surely those which do not attempt to strip them of the benefits they incurred from their experiences as terrorists, and which invite women into the DDR and reconstruction process, will fare better. The results of leaving terrorist organizations must outweigh the benefits of staying—for many women, leaving

means they will lose power, face social misery, and be offered the consolation prize of programs which do not even meet their needs or which do not accept them as valid applicants. In a state with poor or no support for women who leave violent organizations, why should women leave?

Horgan (2008) argues for the importance of thinking about involvement in terrorism as part of a process, and not the result of an individual's psychological shortcomings, as some are wont to do. When terrorist involvement is framed "within a broader process of involvement and engagement," Horgan writes, "we can identify a shared characteristic: that a powerful incentive is the sense of reward" (91). Counterterrorism programs "may be more effective in concentrating on the 'pull' factors [...] since they tend to be narrower, more easily identifiable, and specific to particular groups and contexts" (Horgan 2008, 91).

In the case of female terrorists, their needs are not being met largely because they are left out of the DDR process, and are spoken for by men. Designing DDR programs and "pull" initiatives for women *with women*, especially those who have been involved in such organizations themselves, and with the intention of building off the gains and experiences of women during the conflict—not simply returning them to "women's place"—is perhaps the most important single policy change I recommend, as it informs the character and likely success of all others.

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Appendix A - Suicide Terrorism Data

sum terror attacks	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	8,031	96.77	96.77
1	92	1.11	97.88
2	36	0.43	98.31
3	23	0.28	98.59
4	11	0.13	98.72
5	9	0.11	98.83
6	8	0.10	98.93
7	9	0.11	99.04
8	5	0.06	99.10
9	3	0.04	99.13
10	4	0.05	99.18
12	4	0.05	99.23
13	4	0.05	99.28
14	3	0.04	99.31
15	2	0.02	99.34
16	1	0.01	99.35
17	2	0.02	99.37
18	2	0.02	99.40
19	3	0.04	99.43
20	3	0.04	99.47
21	1	0.01	99.48
22	1	0.01	99.49
25	1	0.01	99.51
26	1	0.01	99.52
27	1	0.01	99.53
31	2	0.02	99.55
36	2	0.02	99.58
40	2	0.02	99.60
44	1	0.01	99.61
47	2	0.02	99.64
50	1	0.01	99.65
52	2	0.02	99.67
54	1	0.01	99.69
55	1	0.01	99.70
60	2	0.02	99.72
71	1	0.01	99.73
76	1	0.01	99.75
77	1	0.01	99.76
78	1	0.01	99.77
81	1	0.01	99.78
85	1	0.01	99.80
86	1	0.01	99.81
91	1	0.01	99.82
101	3	0.04	99.86
110	1	0.01	99.87
112	1	0.01	99.88
114	1	0.01	99.89
120	1	0.01	99.90
138	1	0.01	99.92
177	2	0.02	99.94
180	1	0.01	99.95
192	1	0.01	99.96
206	1	0.01	99.98
274	1	0.01	99.99
278	1	0.01	100.00
Total	8,299	100.00	

female attacks	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	8,229	99.16	99.16
1	30	0.36	99.52
2	19	0.23	99.75
3	11	0.13	99.88
4	3	0.04	99.92
5	1	0.01	99.93
7	2	0.02	99.95
10	1	0.01	99.96
11	1	0.01	99.98
31	1	0.01	99.99
37	1	0.01	100.00
Total	8,299	100.00	

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
country	0				
ccode1	8,299	470.3005	266.0237	2	999
year	8,299	1995	12.41042	1974	2016
terrorattack	8,299	.5780214	7.951015	0	278
femaleattack	8,299	.0266297	.5933181	0	37
dummywar	8,299	.0108447	.1035778	0	1
GDP	6,926	9074.656	16153.94	72.97684	185152.5
Parliament	4,497	16.5102	10.36625	0	63.8
verylowgov	8,299	.1547174	.3616569	0	1
lowgov	8,299	.2828052	.4503897	0	1
medgov	8,299	.1383299	.3452667	0	1
highgov	8,299	.0536209	.2252817	0	1
veryhighgov	8,299	.4717436	.499231	0	1
school_par~y	4,906	4.201338	81.21297	0	2017
lowschool	8,299	.000964	.0310348	0	1
medschool	8,299	.0496445	.2172226	0	1
highschool	8,299	.1774913	.3821069	0	1
veryhighsc~1	8,299	.7719002	.4196326	0	1
fert	7,845	3.754073	1.936983	1.076	8.866
lowfert	8,299	.3522111	.4776881	0	1
medfert	8,299	.2484637	.4321481	0	1
highfert	8,299	.3979998	.4895149	0	1
f_perc_labor	4,782	40.19844	8.882661	7.664766	55.9051
lowlabor	8,299	.2047235	.4035237	0	1
medlabor	8,299	.3714905	.4832323	0	1
highlabor	8,299	.423786	.4941871	0	1
C_Code	0				

ⁱ As for why women would willingly join terrorist organizations that follow religious ideologies which view women as clearly subordinate to men, some clues might be found in Blaydes and Linzer's (2008) examination of why Muslim women adopt and identify with fundamentalist belief systems.

Blaydes and Linzer found that women with limited opportunities—or likelihoods of success—for economic security via employment in the job market turn to a favorable marriage as an alternative source of security. Fundamentalist views are valued in the “marriage market,” and so women adopt them, despite the fact that these views limit her social options and employment prospects. (Blaydes and Linzer 2008, 580)

While fundamentalist perspectives can harm women's success in the job market, when economic conditions are unfavorable—in general, to women overall, or to any one particular woman—she may use marriage as a substitution for paid employment. In this circumstance, fundamentalist beliefs not only make the woman a more desirable marriage partner, but serve as a bulwark against concerns that she is not “pure” enough for marriage. (Blaydes and Linzer 2008, 583, 585) If she is highly fundamentalist, not only does her usefulness as a good wife and mother increase, but she is less likely to be accused of dishonor, which could prevent her from ever marrying. (Blaydes and Linzer 2008, 585)

Not only do women with fewer opportunities exhibit greater fundamentalism, but at the national level, “countries that are poorer and provide fewer economic opportunities for independent women contain more women (on a percentage basis) who hold fundamentalist beliefs” (Blaydes and Linzer 2008, 604). Women with few or no alternative economic, political, or marital prospects may similarly adopt beliefs beneficial to them with regards to terrorist organizations. It is possible that the near-monopoly terrorist organizations sometimes hold on opportunities for women results in a similar phenomenon among women as that observed by Blaydes and Linzer. Women with no alternative prospects—for safety, marriage, a career, political involvement, or respect—may adopt the more extreme stances necessary to join, and be valued in, terrorist organizations.

ⁱⁱ It is worth noting that just because female ex-combatants are comparatively significantly less likely to return to violent political organizations that does not mean that dissatisfied or socially-isolated female ex-combatants pose no risk (Kaplan and Nussio 2018a, 81, 87). Not only is “a majority” not “all”, but cases like that of Burma show that dissatisfied women can band together based in gender solidarity to fight against systems they feel are unjust to them.

Hedström's 2013 article examines how, after being neglected and abused by, and kept out of decision-making or influential positions in, the government and various NGOs, Burmese women came together to resist post-conflict initiatives and systems that ignored or harmed them. Unlike the rest of Burmese society, the violent political organizations which had suppressed them, or the government, the women overcame ethnic, religious, and other cultural divisions to create a movement based on gender solidarity; while their experiences and worldviews were in part shaped by their different ethnic backgrounds, all the women were dissatisfied with their secondary position in armed opposition groups, their exclusion from government, and their place as second-class citizens in society. Their movement was able to briefly gain international attention and support, and the women attempted to claim their militarism (they had participated in armed opposition and rebellious activities as much as they could), their agency, and political involvement, and oppose male-centered efforts which ignored or minimized them.

This movement represents two key ideas that should be kept in mind when discussing the impact of gender on recidivism, DDR success, conflict participation, government representation, and other socio-political phenomena. 1): Although women are not defined by their gender, their lives are heavily influenced by it, and the experience of being a woman is universal enough that it can serve as a commonality stronger than the differences which typically divide groups in this field; and 2): women can and will become active when their needs are not met.

This can, as I argued in this thesis, manifest in participation in violent political organizations, but it may also manifest in women's movements—either nonviolent or even, potentially, violent ones. Female ex-combatants who are not accepted by society, have little to no influence, and who have the experience and skills of an ex-combatant

may present a unique danger to sexist societies as their frustration may turn to effective mobilization and violence in ways their civilian counterparts are less likely to do.

Gendered political consciousness arose from a relatively small conflict in Burma; leaders which seek to put women back in their “place” after larger conflicts may do well to worry what the consequences of policies which ignore the lived experiences, needs, and desires of women may be. In fact, due to the likelihood of women being underestimated, such a scenario may spiral out of control quickly as “they’re just women, what can they do?” becomes a significant movement. While women tend to have a pacifying effect on movements, it is still a possibility that, as women’s conflict experience and expectations regarding their opportunities, participation, and respect in society grow, that they may pose a mobilization threat to regimes, as well.