Who's behind the keyboard?

A gender analysis of terrorism and violent extremism in the online space in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines

UN WOMEN

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RESEARCH BRIEF

1. INTRODUCTION

Whereas terrorist and violent extremist recruitment in the late 20th century was largely reliant on targeting groups in educational or religious settings, the rise of social media and other online platforms has changed the way these groups recruit members. Using the idea of "narrowcasting"[1] (Neumman 2009), terrorist and violent extremist groups can now tailor the content, style, and messaging of their propaganda to fit a particular audience while achieving wide dissemination (Soriano 2012; Weimann 2016). This strategy has been particularly useful in targeting women (Droogan et al 2018).

Gender stereotypes shape the recruitment strategies of terrorist and violent extremist groups globally. These groups cleverly manipulate notions of masculinity and femininity to draw users into their ranks. Recent analysis for UN Women found that ISIS's publications "demonstrate the strategic use of gender roles and relations as a core of how the group sought to govern and control their territory" and to recruit individuals to their cause (Lahoud 2018).

In Asia, many governments, international organizations, and even ASEAN[2] have taken up the idea of online campaigns and digital outreach. However, few online deradicalization and redirect programmes directly target women, despite women emerging as potential security threats now more than ever (Cook and Vale 2018). In the South and South East Asia regions, several high-profile cases since 2015 have made clear that women are no longer simply part of a support network for terrorist and violent extremist groups, but rather are integral to their operations and are being encouraged or inspired to carry out violent attacks (Dwyer and Rhoads 2018).

While we know the online space is being used by terrorist and violent extremist groups to target men and women for recruitment, what is not yet understood is if and how men and women are actively seeking out this material online. This report seeks to build knowledge on this question in relation to South and South East Asia. It presents new data gathered on a large scale on the sex of those attempting to access content related to terrorism and violent extremism online in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The results show that, in total, women performed over 215,000 searches for content related to terrorism and violent extremism in these four countries over a two-month period. Overall, women performed 32% of all recorded searches.

The strongest theme in the data is how similar men and women are in their patterns of consumption. In Malaysia and the Philippines, men and women searched for the different categories of content (such as books, videos, songs, etc.) with similar frequency; the gap between men and women in each content type never exceeded more than a 10% difference. This indicates that overall, women are searching for material and with similar frequency as men. The data in this report should not be taken as an attempt to explain who is being radicalized or where. Rather, the reader should take away that of individuals searching for extremist content, the gap between men and women is narrow and, in some cases, even negligible.

Further, the analysis found that men and women are consuming gendered violent extremist and terrorist messaging via social media. For women, these themes ranged from motherhood to combat; from a freedom from secular States' 'restrictions' on one's faith to finding true love. However, the underlying message was of empowerment. In a terrorist and violent extremist group, a woman can exercise her strength as a mother, as a fighter and as a lover, free from the constraints of her daily life. If terrorist and violent extremist groups are offering empowerment, programmes and strategies to counter this messaging must offer the same.

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[1] The transmission of information to a comparatively localized or specialized audience.
[2] Chairman's Statement of the 24th ASEAN Regional Forum, 2017

2. METHODOLOGY

UN Women commissioned Moonshot CVE to gather this data using their interactive monitoring tool, called *The Tracker*, which maps and analyzes appetite[3] for content related to terrorism and violent extremism on search engines and social media platforms.

The Tracker draws on two main sources of information: metadata from online search traffic from Google[4], from which anonymous quantitative data can be obtained and analyzed, and publicly available Facebook data, which offers qualitative themes of key messages. In both cases, the information was analyzed taking into consideration self-identified sex of searchers and users.

These two sources – Google and Facebook – provide complementary information in order to better understand differences in online behavior between men and women. Social media activities may be perceived as performative, and therefore their analysis sheds lights on how people publicly present themselves through sharing of opinions, interests, experiences and actions. Online search queries are typically carried out privately, without the expectation of being seen or judged. They therefore may be a better approximation to understanding true levels of interest and support for violent extremist material and content.

This mixed methods approach does not just provide a picture of whether women (as a portion of the whole) are accessing content related to terrorism and violent extremism and what types of content they are viewing. The qualitative portion reveals some of the messaging they are receiving from terrorist and violent extremist groups and sympathizers online. This provides a more holistic picture of their engagement with extremist ideas.

BOX 1.
ABOUT THE DEFINITION OF CONTENT RELATED TO TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

It is generally understood that there is no universal definition of violent extremism. The United Nation's Secretary General's Plan of Action says, "Violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition."[5] While there are several broad definitions of "terrorism" within the United Nations, the United Nations Security Council designates particular groups as "terrorist" and places sanctions on individuals as such.[6]

While this analysis does not seek to define "violent extremism" or "terrorism", a process of identification of "content related to terrorism and violent extremism" was necessary for methodological reasons and to ensure relevance at the country level. This identification built on existing databases developed previously by Moonshot CVE and were further refined through custom mapping and an analysis of salient sources of content associated with terrorist and violent extremist groups as understood locally. These sources included names of fighters and groups, anasheed[7], video and audio media, titles of notable publications associated with violent extremism or terrorist and violent extremist groups and phrases specific to their discourse. The process was also informed by discussion with experts and defectors from these groups.

The findings of this identification process were used to identify the public Facebook pages that are the entry points for the social media analysis, as well as to build country-specific databases which were used to analyze online search data.

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[3] 'Appetite' in this case is intended to express capturing a subjective level of desire for certain content rather than just the frequency of access
[4] Preliminary research showed Google has an average of 97% market share across all four countries.
[5] UN General Assembly, Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, 24 December 2015, A/70/674
[6] https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-1/key-issues/UN-designated-terrorist-groups.html
[7] Anasheed: Plural of nasheed, an Islamic song or chant, whose lyrics often reference Islamic beliefs, teachings or history. When anasheed is mentioned here, it specifically refers to songs with themes associated with violent extremist groups and/or content.

2.1 Database of searches for content related to terrorism and violent extremism

For the overall analysis of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, eight country-specific databases were built, two for each country: in English and the official national language – Bahasa in Indonesia, Malay in Malaysia, Tagalog in the Philippines and Bengali in Bangladesh. Data was gathered during a period of eight weeks between 11 January 2018 and 10 March 2018. Box 2 shows some features of these databases.

Each search term in the databases was coded according to a range of variables:

- **Group affiliation** indicates whether the search term is related to a specific terrorist or violent extremist group. This includes ISIS and al-Qaeda and their affiliated groups, non-affiliated groups inspired by them, and other known terrorist and violent extremist groups in the four countries.

- **Subject type** indicates the form of content to which the search term relates, such as magazines and newsletters, books and booklets, media wings and offices, social media accounts and outlets, websites, forums, videos, anasheed[8] (or songs), among others, to add up to a total of 17 unique categories.

- **Target Audience** suggests the motivation behind each unique search (see box 3). This system was informed by consultation with CVE experts and former extremists.

BOX 2.
FEATURES OF THE ONLINE INDICATORS DATABASES ON CONTENT RELATED TO TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Although it is not possible to share Moonshot CVE's proprietary databases, some features and examples are worth mentioning:

- The databases include over 200,000 unique search terms across all five languages (English, Bahasa Indonesia, Malay, Tagalog and Bengali), relevant for Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

- Over 90 terrorist and violent extremist groups were covered in the databases, including local affiliates of ISIS and al-Qaeda as well as country specific groups. Some examples include Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen in Bangladesh; Jemaah Ansharut Daulah in Indonesia, the Maute Group and Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines and Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Islamiyyah and Tanzim Qaedat al-Jihad in Malaysia.

- Over 340 titles of videos released by terrorist and violent extremist groups across the world.

- Over 200 media wings associated with terrorist and violent extremist groups.

- Over 700 names of terrorist and violent extremist fighters and preachers in various languages.

- Over 200 titles of anasheed related to terrorist and violent extremist groups propaganda in various languages.

- Over 1200 titles of magazines and newsletters released by terrorist and violent extremist groups in multiple languages.

- Over 150 titles of books and booklets released by terrorist and violent extremist groups.

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[8] Anasheed: Plural of nasheed, an Islamic song or chant, whose lyrics often reference Islamic beliefs, teachings or history. When anasheed is mentioned here, it specifically refers to songs with themes associated with violent extremist groups and/or content.
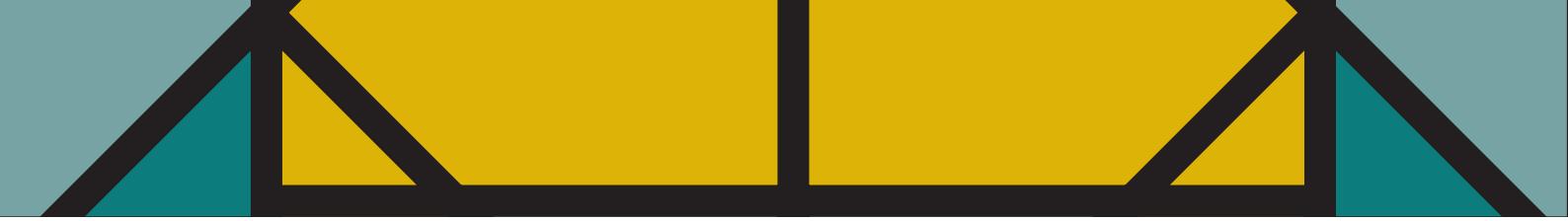
For purposes of this analysis, search terms by sex were cross coded by type of content. Information by target audience is also presented, but not disaggregated by sex.

BOX 3.
TARGET AUDIENCES LINKED TO SEARCHES FOR TERRORIST AND VIOLENT EXTREMIST MATERIAL

Interest
Indicates that the user is looking for information about terrorist and violent extremist groups without knowledge or prior experience of accessing their propaganda online. It can, but does not necessarily, indicate that the user holds extremist views or ideology.
Examples: ISIS News, Taliban, ISIS leader

Ideologically Extreme but not Violent
Indicates that the user is looking for terms or content that is associated with extreme religious or political ideology, however the term/content itself does not explicitly suggest violence. E.g. an individual believes in the establishment of an Islamic caliphate but does not necessarily specify it should be achieved by using violence.
Examples: Kufur[9], Establish Caliphate

Engagement
Indicates that the user is looking to access terrorist and violent extremist media and propaganda material. Such indicators demonstrate a knowledge of how to find this propaganda online and a desire to access particular media relating to these groups, such as texts, forums or videos.
Example: Dabiq PDF Download

Sympathy
Indicates that the user is sympathetic to terrorist and violent extremist goals and ideology. These may encompass broader issues that cut across the violent extremism spectrum, such as sectarianism or millenarian[10] ideology. This would include, for example, names of famous terrorist and violent extremist leaders with prefixes indicating support or admiration for them.
Example: Osama bin Laden hero

Active Support
Indicates that the user is attempting to support terrorist and violent extremist organizations by taking concrete steps, such as sending resources or joining terrorist and violent extremist groups. This category also includes serious attempts to contact terrorist and violent extremist organizations, for example, through encrypted apps or the Dark Web.
Example: How to join al-Qaeda

Hostility
Indicates that the user feels hostility towards terrorist and violent extremist groups or ideology. This data is gathered to establish a baseline against which we can analyze support for violent extremism in each geography where the Tracker is deployed.
Example: I hate ISIS

Finally, it is important to identify some of the potential weaknesses of this analysis. These relate to five key methodological elements:

1. the sources used,
2. the variable used to code by sex,
3. the languages of analysis,
4. the limitations of the target audience analysis, and
5. the variable measured.

With respect to the sources, the lack of inclusion of other search engines is potentially an issue. However, perhaps a bigger limitation is the inability to capture searches made with Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), which may account for some activity related to terrorism and violent extremism, particularly those more sophisticated actors with greater knowledge of how to stay anonymous online. The same applies to those using the dark web as a source of information.

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[9] Malay word that refers to individuals who do not believe in Allah or believe in Allah and His apostles, commonly translated as infidels into English.
[10] the belief by a religious, social, or political group or movement in a coming fundamental transformation of society, after which "all things will be changed".

Secondly, the variable used to code the results by sex corresponds to self-identified information from Google and Facebook, which in turn is associated with two potential weaknesses. First, it reduces the overall sample, as there is a portion of users that have not self-identified their gender, therefore reducing its robustness. Second, because it relies on self-reported data, there may be some biases generated by users purposely self-identifying as the opposite sex, or even by different users performing searches under the same account.

Next, the languages used for the analysis included only English and the official national language of each country. Local dialects and Arabic were not included and thus, this analysis may not have captured all searches from certain regions. This is especially true in the Philippines, where many living in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao may post online in local dialects.

Fourth, there is an inherent limitation in categorization of target audiences linked to searches for terrorist and violent extremist material (Box 3 above). For this analysis, the database has been refined over time and informed by discussion with experts and defectors from terrorist and violent extremist groups. However, it is not possible to know or understand, with absolute certainty, a user's motivations for each search by analyzing anonymized data.

Finally, the variable measured, as indicated previously, refers to searches performed in Google. Due to the aggregation methods used to measure this variable, it is not possible to identify unique users or unique computers. This means that some users may frequently be performing searches and therefore their searches are recorded multiple times.

2.2 Database of public Facebook pages and groups

Facebook data was gathered by following and recording links between publicly available data on Facebook pages, groups and public user profiles in a propagative manner. First, using research detailed above, 85 Facebook pages and groups were manually identified as entry points to map public users belonging or following these pages per country. To make inferences about this online population, standard statistical sampling procedures were followed in order to generate significant results.

Users that were connected to just one Facebook page or group out of the total sample were marked false positives and, therefore, were excluded from the overall analysis. A quantitative analysis of users per sex and type of page was then performed, in addition to a qualitative analysis of the types of comments and narratives used in these pages.

Facebook pages and groups were analyzed to identify narratives used by their supporters, in consultation with regional experts. To aid thematic analysis of some of the narratives being used by supporters on the platform, the research team, in consultation with regional experts, developed a three-tiered coding system:

- **Page/group Subject:** All the identified Facebook pages and groups were coded according to the main subject type addressed in the most recent 15 posts of the page or group. The page or group subject identifies the types of violent extremist narratives used.

- **Content Type:** The types of content disseminated in the most recent 15 posts were coded. This contributes to an understanding of the media consumption habits of the target audience.

- **Risk Rating:** Facebook pages and groups were coded according to their risk profiles (see box 4).

Because many of the pages and groups were no longer active, they were coded according to the year of the most recent activity. This adds another criterion by which to judge the potential risk of pages and groups. For example, pages and groups codified as pro-terrorist or violent extremist group and still posting in 2018 represent the highest overall level of risk.

In total, approximately 9,500 users were identified across the four countries during the study period. Of those, the majority came from the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, with between 2,700 and 2,800 each. Bangladesh only represented approximately 1,300 total users. The number of users per page ranged from less than 10 to approximately 2,300. The average user number per page was 113.

3. A gender analysis of the terrorist and violent extremist online audience

In most countries, women make up a significant proportion of those consuming content related to terrorism and violent extremism – a total of 215,000 searches of approximately 630,000 searches in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines (see box 5 for an explanation of the sample size). Of total searches, this accounted for about 46% in Malaysia, 35% in the Philippines, 33% in Indonesia and 13% in Bangladesh.

In the case of Facebook users associated with pages linked to content related to terrorism and violent extremism, more than 2,400 female users were found of a total of over 9,500 – between 28% and 30% in Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines, and only 3% in Bangladesh.

These results seem to indicate that women are more likely to search for content related to terrorism and violent extremism than they are to display public support for it on Facebook. Analysis of the 'private' behavior of search queries indicates a hidden interest in violent extremism among women that is less visible when focusing on public behaviors on social media.

Based on this analysis, women were more likely to engage with content related to terrorism and violent extremism when no one was likely to know that they were engaging, such as searches online, i.e. the private sphere. They were less likely to engage when other individuals or the public would be aware, such as posting openly on a public Facebook page, i.e. the public sphere.

These findings support research conducted by UN Women in Indonesia, which found that Muslim women were less likely than men to engage in extremist behaviors such as raids on places of worship or protests (the public sphere) but were as likely as men to engage in extremist behaviors such as donating in material form or convincing others to join the cause (the private sphere).[13]

The findings indicate that women are engaging with content related to terrorism and violent extremism but typically in less visible ways than men.

Note: Some pages have users from more than one country, which means the aggregation of all the pages listed will include some double counting.However, as indicated, the total number of pages (eliminating duplicates) included in the analysis was 85.

[11] Anwar al-Awlaki was a U.S.-Yemeni dual citizen and longtime cleric, propagandist, and operative for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).
[12] Ahmad Musa Jibril is a Palestinian-American Islamist preacher who has reportedly influenced Westerners to fight in the Syrian conflict.
[13] Wahid Foundation with the support of UN Women (March 2018) "Preliminary Findings of the National Survey on the Threat of Radicalization Among Muslim Men and Women in Indonesia".

FIGURE 3.1

SEARCHES FOR VIOLENT EXTREMIST & TERRORIST CONTENT ONLINE, AND FACEBOOK PROFILES ENGAGING WITH VIOLENT EXTREMIST AND TERRORIST CONTENT, BY COUNTRY AND BY SEX
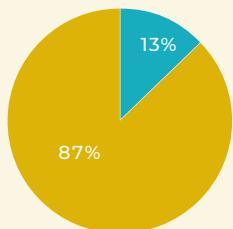
DIGITAL GAP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN PER COUNTRY[14]

BANGLADESH

Search traffic data — Women 13%, Men 87%
Facebook profiles — Women 3%, Men 97%

BANGLADESH

Men 34%, Women 13%
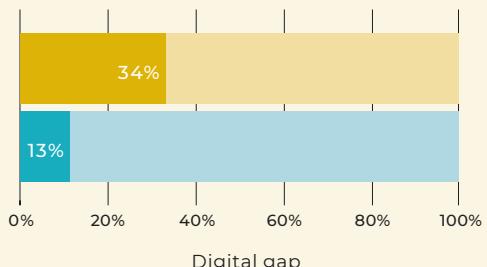
Digital gap

INDONESIA

Search traffic data — Women 33%, Men 67%
Facebook profiles — Women 28%, Men 72%

INDONESIA

Men 27%, Women 24%
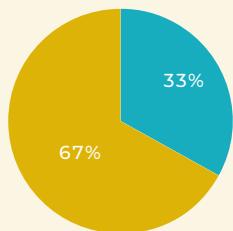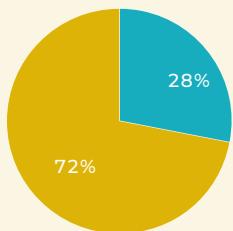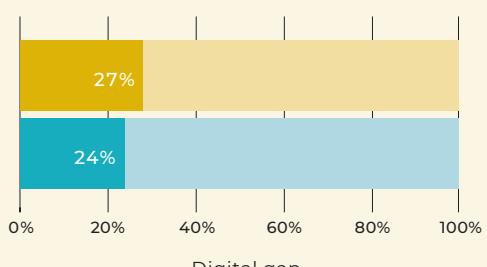
Digital gap

MALAYSIA

Search traffic data — Women 46%, Men 54%
Facebook profiles — Women 28%, Men 72%

MALAYSIA

Men 80%, Women 77%
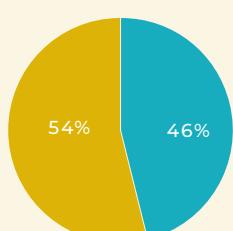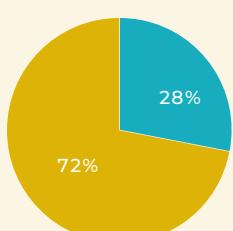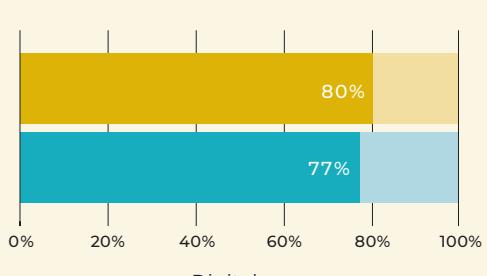
Digital gap

PHILIPPINES

Search traffic data — Women 35%, Men 65%
Facebook profiles — Women 30%, Men 70%

PHILIPPINES

Men 40%, Women 42%
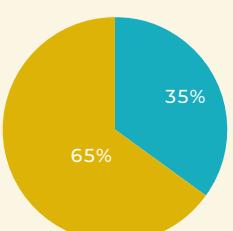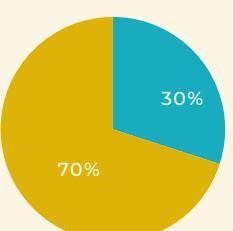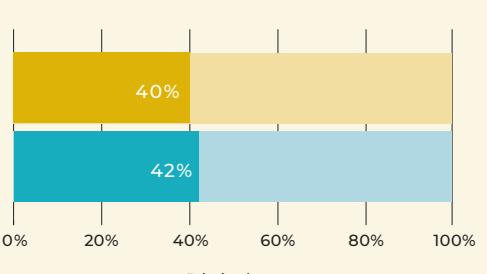
Digital gap

■ Women   ■ Men

■ Percentage of women with access to the internet via mobile phone
■ Percentage of men with access to the internet via mobile phone

Across all four countries, men performed a greater proportion of searches for violent extremist material, which is unsurprising given that internet access is typically lower for women than it is for men. However, when comparing these results with existing gender gaps in internet use across countries, results seem to indicate that the gender gap is only a significant element in Bangladesh (where women's internet access is much lower than men's). In South East Asian countries, the gender gap seemed less important in understanding the different behavior towards online content related to terrorism and violent extremism.[15]

It is also worth mentioning that, in all countries, the majority of searches were performed by the youngest age ranges of 18-24 and 25-34. A noticeable uniformity among countries and sub-nationally was detected, where the number of searches for content related to terrorism and violent extremism tends to decrease with each increasing age range.

When analyzing the risk rating of Facebook pages to which men and women tend to belong, two tendencies emerge. First, male users are overwhelmingly clustered in pages and groups rated as 'ideological' or promoting religious ideas and thinkers that are integral to the violent ideology of terrorist and violent extremist groups. Second, women are grouped into two risk rating types: ideological and 'Venus fly trap'. Venus fly trap pages do not seem to be connected to violent extremism at first sight, however they normally include tell-tale words, symbols and descriptions that point to underlying violent extremist ideology, e.g. a picture of a flower with the link to a telegram account of a recruiter.

While the sample is likely not large enough to draw conclusive trends that could be generalized to individuals outside of this study, these numbers give us clues about the elements that are pulling men and women in the target countries into terrorism and violent extremism. Men are drawn to discussions around religious or political beliefs, and sermons from terrorist and violent extremist thinkers and religious figureheads (such as Anwar al-Awlak, discussed in a later section). While females also express interest in these themes, they also prefer to consume extremist content through less obvious means, such as discussion of everyday household routines interspersed with links back to extremist content. This tendency also reinforces the finding that women are engaging with content related to terrorism and violent extremism but typically in less visible ways than men.

FIGURE 3.2

NUMBER OF TOTAL FACEBOOK GROUP/PAGE USERS, PER SEX, PER RISK RATING

RISK RATING	WOMEN	MEN
Ideological	1188	8266
Venus Fly Trap	1323	1645
Pro-group	128	1281
Pro-violence	67	136
TOTAL:	**2706**	**11328**

Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research. Elaborated by UN Women.

FIGURE 3.2a

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL FEMALE FACEBOOK GROUP/PAGE USERS, PER RISK RATING

Pro-violence   Pro-group
Venus Fly Trap   Ideological

Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research. Elaborated by UN Women.
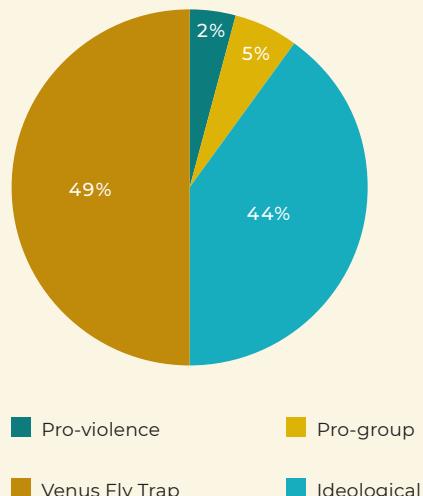
FIGURE 3.2b

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL MALE FACEBOOK GROUP/PAGE USERS, PER RISK RATING
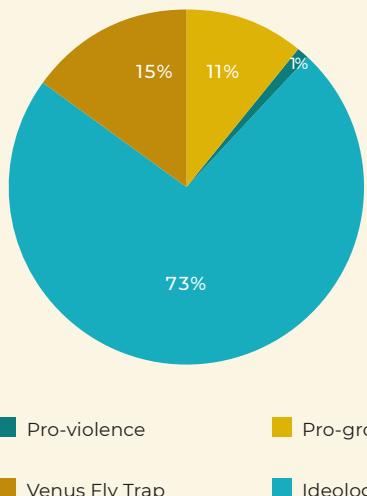
Pro-violence   Pro-group
Venus Fly Trap   Ideological

Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research. Elaborated by UN Women.

BOX 5.
ABOUT THE DATA SAMPLE ON SEARCHES FOR VIOLENT EXTREMIST MATERIAL

Over 900,000 searches were gathered during the period of analysis. However, not all of them contained metadata on the sex of the searcher. Overall, roughly between 60% and 80% of the data was identified by sex, providing an adequate reliability for the analysis (see figure A).

The final analysis relied on data of over 670,000 searches, most of them in Indonesia (see figure B).

FIGURE A

DATA AVAILABILITY OF SEARCH TRAFFIC, BY SEX

Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018.
Moonshot CVE commissioned research.
Elaborated by UN Women.

FIGURE B

NUMBER OF SEARCHES INCLUDED IN ANALYSIS BY SEX

Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018.
Moonshot CVE commissioned research.
Elaborated by UN Women.

In addition, as indicated earlier, searches by type of content were cross-analyzed by gender. This meant that data by target audience disaggregated by sex was not available. However, it is useful to understand how the overall sample is distributed (see Figure C). Overall, the sample is mostly composed of those searching for violent extremism content showed as "interest" or "ideological interest". Searches in the sample demonstrating engagement, sympathy and active support ranged from 8% in Indonesia to 3% and 4% in Malaysia, Philippines and Bangladesh.

FIGURE C

SEARCHES BY TARGET AUDIENCE, BY COUNTRY
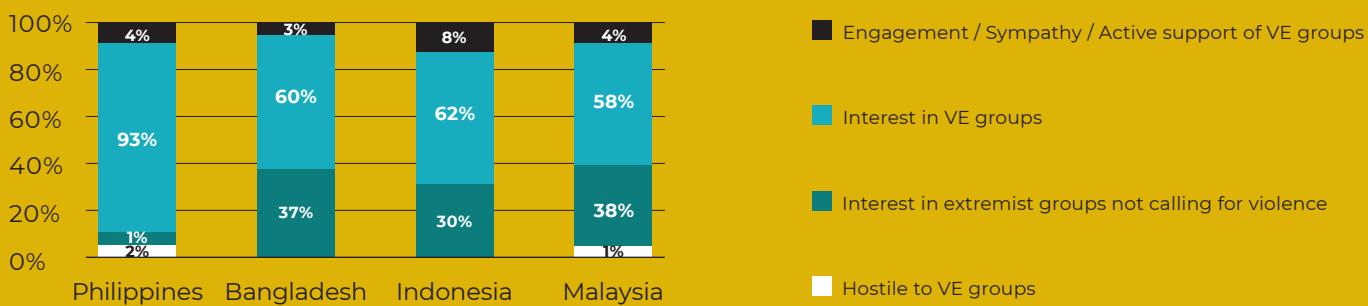
Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research. Elaborated by UN Women.

BOX 6.
ABOUT THE DATA SAMPLE ON USERS OF FACEBOOK PAGES LINKED TO TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

As indicated previously, users of 85 Facebook pages from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines were included in the sample (after removing estimated false positives of users belonging or following only one of the 85 pages). In total, over 9,500 users were included in the sample (see Figure D).

FIGURE D

FACEBOOK USERS, BY COUNTRY
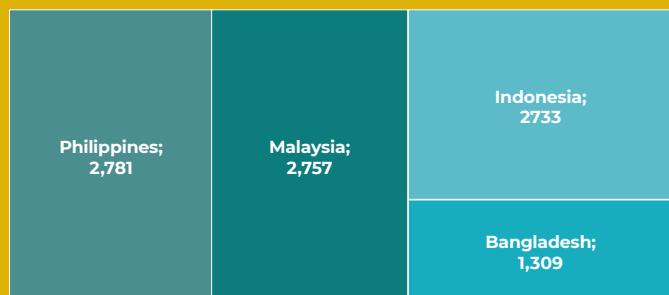
Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research. Elaborated by UN Women.

In Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines, between 28% and 30% of users were women; in Bangladesh, the majority of users were men (see Figure E).

FIGURE E

FACEBOOK USERS, BY SEX AND COUNTRY
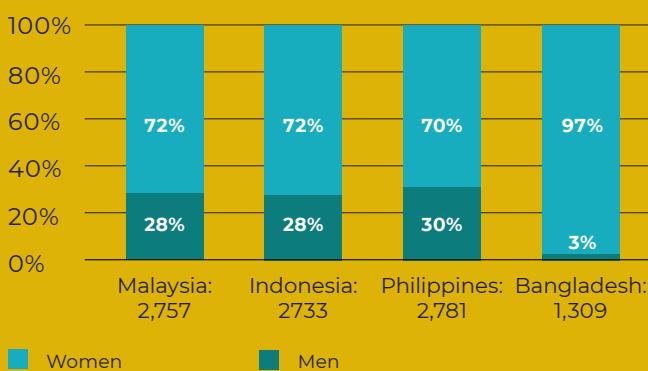
Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research. Elaborated by UN Women.

4. The types of content related to terrorism and violent extremism for which women and men search

Women are searching for content related to terrorism and violent extremism online to varying degrees across the region. Overall, the data shows men searched more for videos, blogs, forums and magazines, whereas women performed more searches for anasheed and media wings in all four countries.

SEARCHES FOR MEDIA OUTLETS AND ANASHEED ACROSS FOUR COUNTRIES, BY SEX OF THE USER

MEDIA WINGS & OFFICES

20% of all searches by women for media content

ANASHEED

13% of all searches by women for media content

■ Women   ■ Men
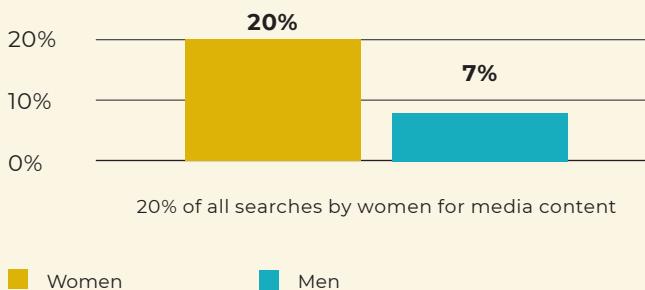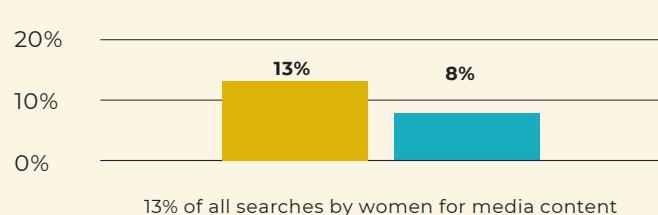
Searches by men and women for different content types as percentage of their individual total. Excludes searches for Groups and Influential Personalities.

*Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research. Elaborated by UN Women.*

In broad terms, this could indicate a preference for the content's level of violence. For instance, in Malaysia, the number of estimated searches carried out by women decreases as the level of violence in the content increases. This was mostly evident in four categories: magazines and newsletters, and videos, which were favored by men; and media outlets and books, which were favored by women.

The magazines and newsletters category refers to publications of terrorist and violent extremist groups, such as ISIS's magazine, Dabiq. While the amount of violent imagery fluctuates with every issue, it is always present to some degree. This is also true for videos, which are often characterized by extreme, graphic violence. Books, on the other hand, tend to be restricted to ideological and theological discussion.

This pattern is to some extent also true for the media wings of terrorist and violent extremist groups - referred to as media outlets. Although they do publish a variety of content, some violent and some less so, they still provide individuals with a choice as to which content they want to consume. Searches for media outlets could also indicate a lack of pre-existing knowledge about specific titles of terrorist and violent extremist material.

In Indonesia, female searches for the media wings of terrorist and violent extremist groups—in absolute numbers—outnumbered those performed by men, despite the fact that men performed two-thirds of all searches recorded. In Malaysia, of all searches for content related to terrorism and violent extremism, 44% were performed by women.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION BROKEN DOWN BY SEX
INDONESIA
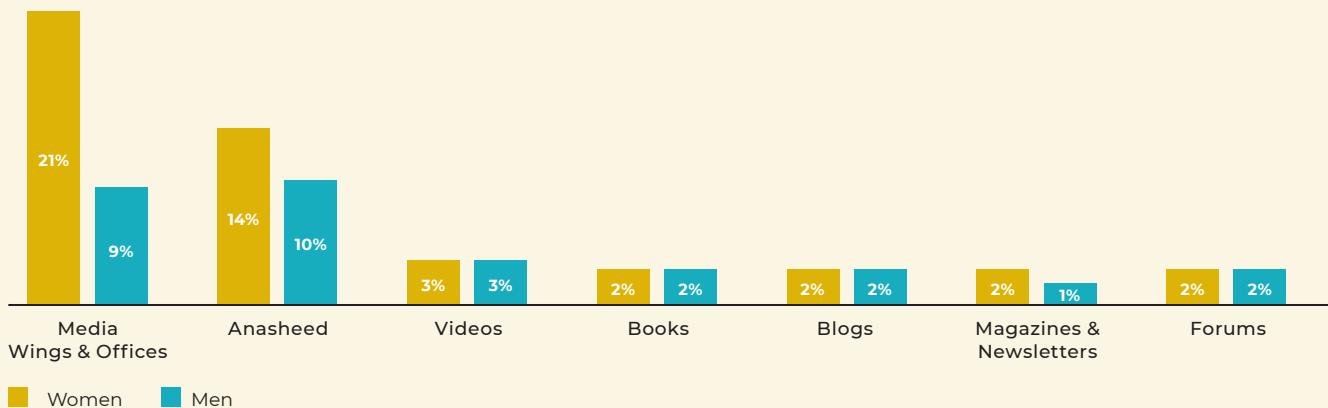
	Media Wings & Offices	Anasheed	Videos	Books	Blogs	Magazines & Newsletters	Forums
Women	21%	14%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Men	9%	10%	3%	2%	2%	1%	2%

*Searches by men and women for different content types as a percentage of their individual total.
Excludes searches for Groups and Influential Personalities.*

Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION BROKEN DOWN BY SEX
MALAYSIA
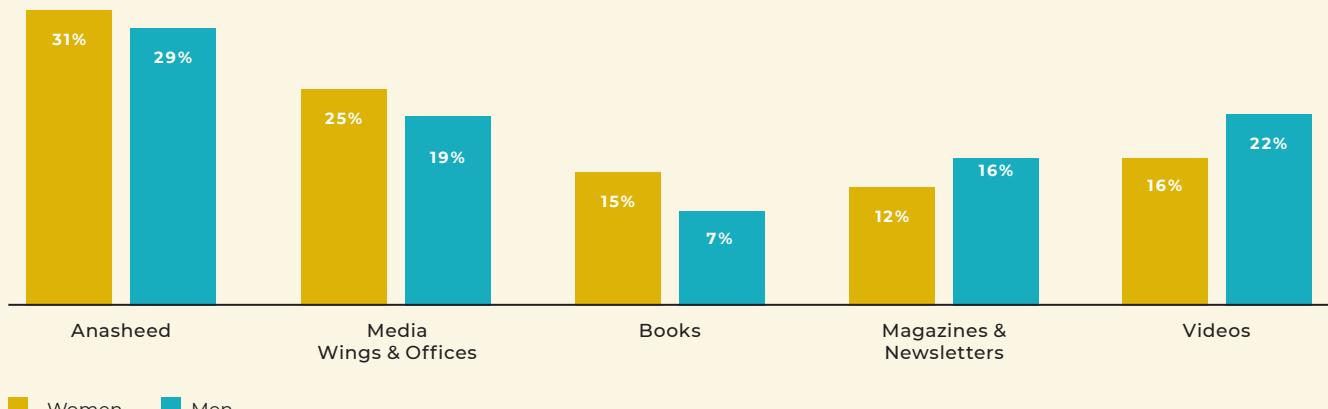
	Anasheed	Media Wings & Offices	Books	Magazines & Newsletters	Videos
Women	31%	25%	15%	12%	16%
Men	29%	19%	7%	16%	22%

*Searches by men and women for different content types as a percentage of their individual total.
Excludes searches for Groups, Jargon and Influential Personalities.*

Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research.

The interests of women engaging in content related to terrorism and violent extremism in the Philippines were more diverse than those in Malaysia, Indonesia or Bangladesh. While in the other three countries, there was a male bias in the category of 'searches for terrorist and violent extremist groups', in the Philippines, the category accounted for 83% of all searches by women and 82% of all searches by men. This pattern held true in all other content categories, with the only difference being in the absolute number of searches recorded – two-thirds performed by men.

In Bangladesh, results reflected the greatest disparity between the number of searches performed by men and women for extremist content and engagement with terrorist and violent extremist Facebook pages/groups. Although female violent extremists have been highly active offline in Bangladesh, this has not translated into online activity. It is likely that this reflects lower levels of internet penetration and internet usage by women. Of the searches performed by Bangladeshi women, most were for violent extremist songs (anasheed) and media outlets of terrorist and violent extremist groups, mirroring the trend observed in Malaysia of women preferring less violent content.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION BROKEN DOWN BY SEX
PHILIPPINES
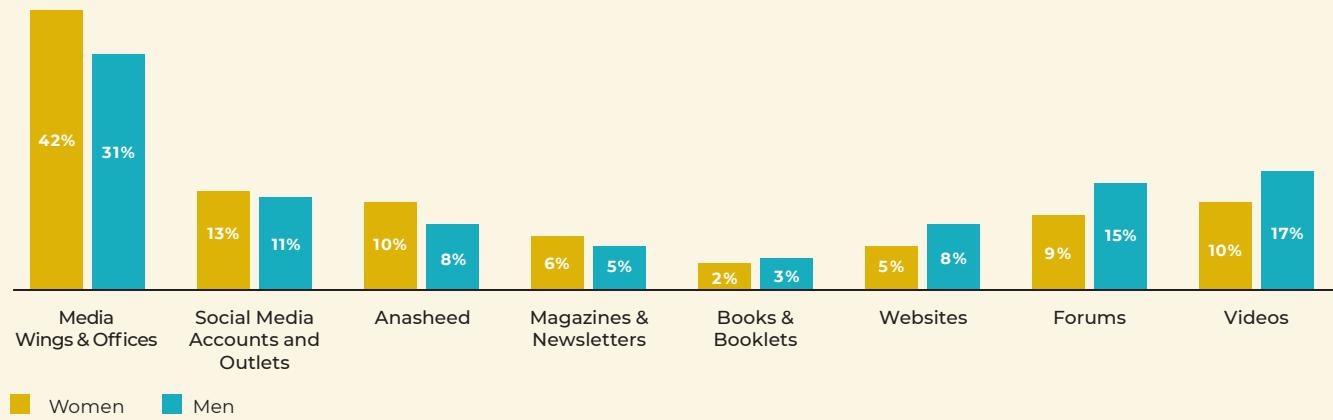
|	Media Wings & Offices	Social Media Accounts and Outlets	Anasheed	Magazines & Newsletters	Books & Booklets	Websites	Forums	Videos
Women	42%	13%	10%	6%	2%	5%	9%	10%
Men	31%	11%	8%	5%	3%	8%	15%	17%

*Searches by men and women for different content types as a percentage of their individual total.
Excludes searches for Groups and Influential Personalities.*

Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION BROKEN DOWN BY SEX
BANGLADESH
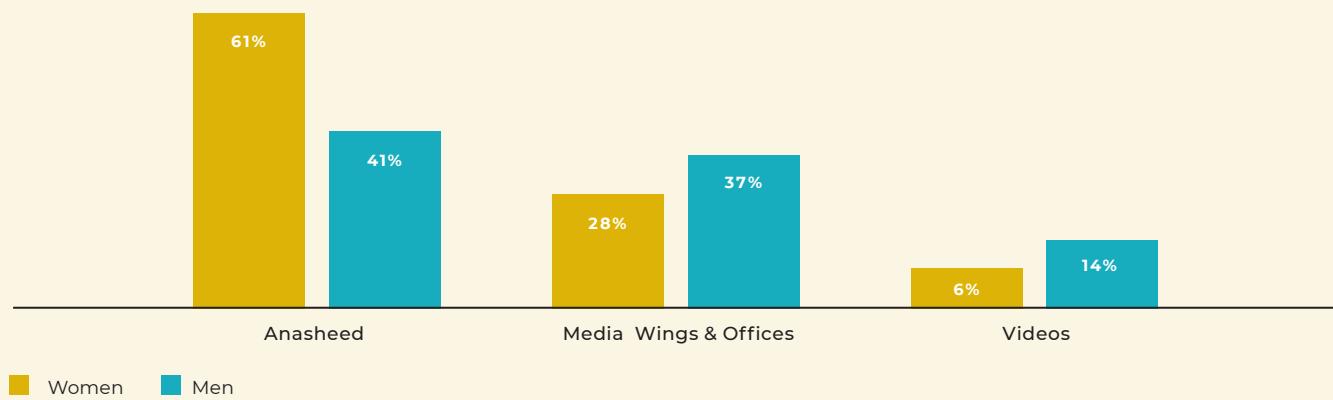
	Anasheed	Media Wings & Offices	Videos
Women	61%	28%	6%
Men	41%	37%	14%

*Searches by men and women for different content types as a percentage of their individual total.
Excludes searches for Groups and Influential Personalities.*

Source: Data gathered from 11 January - 10 March 2018. Moonshot CVE commissioned research.

Despite these differences in search behavior, the strongest theme in the data is how similar men and women are in their patterns of consumption. In Malaysia and Philippines, the relative gap between searches by men and women across all categories of content never exceeded 10%, indicating that overall women are searching for similar material and with similar frequency as men.

BOX 6.
TRENDS IN MEDIA CONSUMPTION ACROSS THE REGION

MOST POPULAR ANASHEED

Anasheed relating to ISIS were by far the most commonly sought at the regional level. Many queries were general in nature. Users searched for "songs", "nasheed" or "mp3" preceded by "ISIS", "Islamic State", or "Daesh", thus indicating low levels of prior or specific knowledge of anasheed. Some searches were even more general in all of the countries, with users seeking anasheed relating to jihad that were not specific to a group.

Searchers in both the Philippines and Indonesia displayed considerable interest in non-English and Arabic ISIS anasheed, seeking specific titles released in Turkish and French. Aside from ISIS, there was a region-wide appetite for Taliban anasheed, although these search queries tended to be more general in nature, with no searchers specifying titles.

Of the titles specified, one theme emerged of retribution for wrongs done to children by non-believers. An example of this in Indonesia includes the song "Sang Pour Sang" (Blood for Blood). The hymn is sung in an adolescent's voice in the French language with Bahasa subtitles. The visual shows a child wandering alone in what looked like a battle-damaged district in Syria intermixed with footage of children's sufferings and images of world leaders, who are being perceived as those responsible for the affliction. The video culminates with the formation of an all-children militia equipped with weapons sending a chilling warning of vengeance to these leaders, "Beware, we have what we need to defend ourselves; Well-armed soldiers are ready to kill you." Given that women are more prone to search from anasheed in all four countries, this could indicate a source of motivation for women to join terrorist and violent extremist groups and/or carry out attacks.

MOST POPULAR MEDIA OUTLETS

Several media outlets were popular across the region, but the dominant trend was content published by al-Hayat Media Centre and Amaq News Agency. They are the largest and most established of ISIS's media outlets and both publish content in English as well as other languages. Al- Hayat is the publisher of several pieces of content noted for their popularity in other categories, including the video series Inside the Caliphate, and the anasheed For the Sake of Allah and Mujahid.

Of the other media outlets, al-Furqan was popular in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, but less so in Bangladesh. Bangladesh was the only country of the four to register significant searches for outlets known to publish localized content, with searches for Titumir Media and Balakot Media – both affiliated to al-Qaeda. Likewise, Bangladesh was the only country analyzed in which men searched more often for media outlets than women.

MOST POPULAR TEXTS: BOOKS

The two dominant regional search trends relating to books were general queries and searches for specific titles. Searches for ebooks, PDFs, and books related to ISIS and the Taliban were popular in all countries.

In terms of searches for specific titles, Sayyid Qutb's *Fi Zilal al Quran*[16] was highly sought-after in three of the four countries. This is unsurprising given the text's centrality to the development of the global jihadist movement. Nonetheless, this is an interesting finding, as the book was not produced to explicitly invoke terrorist activity, instead serving as a commentary on Islamic practices and experiences, only later being adopted as seminal text by al-Qaeda members. As a result, the interest in this text may be indicative of early engagement with violent extremism, with searchers seeking to develop ideological grounding before moving on to more violent content.

Anwar al-Awlaki's '44 Ways to Support Jihad' was another popular text. The text – more practical than theological – provides guidance on fundraising and recruiting, and the means of waging jihad. Interest in this text was most pronounced in Bangladesh, where al-Awlaki features as one of the most influential personalities in online searches. Given women's propensity in Bangladesh to search for books, this search could indicate that those who are searching are interested in practical guidance online, not just theological study. Queries for guidance-based texts are further demonstrated by searches for "bomb instructions" in all four countries, showing an active interest in perpetrating violent acts.

MOST POPULAR TEXTS: MAGAZINES AND NEWSLETTERS

Dabiq[17] was the single most searched for item in this category across all four counties, as well as the most popular within each country except the Philippines, where it came second to al-Naba[18]. While this is not surprising given the popularity of ISIS content in general, Dabiq's dominance is noteworthy given that it was replaced two years ago with a new magazine, Rumiyah, which has not reached the same level of impact. Part of the explanation for Dabiq's search traffic will simply be that it was the first ISIS magazine. That fact, coupled with its shocking but accessible English-language content, garnered it international attention and it is still frequently and widely cited.

While there was a large volume of general searches for Dabiq (e.g. "Dabiq PDF", "Dabiq Indonesia"), in all four countries users also searched for specific issues. Moreover, three countries registered searches for the exact same issue of Dabiq - #15, or 'Break the Cross'. This issue focuses on discrediting Christianity and Western secularism and includes a conversion story "Why I came to Islam" from a former Christian woman from Finland. In a section entitled 'Contemplate the Creation', the author discusses "the physical attraction and emotional longing Allah placed in the hearts of men for women and the hearts of women for men." The author romantically portrays this relationship, "Unlike hunger, the life of the individual man is not dependent on this yearning. And yet he constantly longs for another soul."[19]The article continues to discuss how the five senses enable the spouses to perceive the beauty of one another, and then the miracle and obligation of these individuals to conceive children. Another section of the magazine entitled "FOR WOMEN" discusses the debased state of Western society and contrasts 'good' Muslim women, who have the characteristic of 'shyness' with Western women or 'Pagans'.

Issue-specific searches were also recorded for the al-Qaeda magazine Inspire, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham's al-Risalah and ISIS's al-Naba and Rumiyah. Searching for a specific issue suggests prior knowledge of that issue's content. Searching for an old issue of Inspire, or any specific issue of Dabiq today, suggests that, while these are referred to as magazines, in reality they are more commonly used for general reference than timely consumption. In support of this idea is the fact that no searches were recorded in any country for the "newest", "latest", or "most recent" issue of any magazine or newsletter.

[16] Fi Zilal al-Qur'an is a highly influential commentary of the Qur'an, written during 1951-1965 by the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, a leader within the Muslim Brotherhood. "Qutb's writings expanded the concept of jahiliyya, which Maududi used to describe the barbaric, ignorant state before the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad. Qutb argued that the world was in a state of new jahiliyya, and that Muslims everywhere were living as blindly and ignorantly as civilization had in the time before Mohammad. Qutb argued that Muslims must return to living in a state of "pure Islam," which they could accomplish only by waging violent jihad against the non-believers."
Source: Counter Extremism Project
[17] A monthly online magazine published by ISIS
[18] A weekly online newsletter distributed by ISIS
[19]Accessible at https://clarionproject.org/factsheets-files/islamic-state-magazine-dabiq-fifteen-breaking-the-cross.pdf

TOP TEN INFLUENTIAL PERSONALITIES

One of the most notable regional trends identified was the split between searches for influential personalities associated with both domestic and global groups, most notably al-Qaeda and ISIS.
Interest in individuals associated with the 9/11 attacks was displayed in all four countries. Attack financiers and masterminds Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri feature highly, but interest in the individual hijackers was also identified in all four countries. Interest in 9/11 and its key protagonists is not surprising given the significance of the event and the subsequent rise of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in the region. Less expected was specific interest in 14 of the 19 hijackers more than 16 years later.

Searchers also expressed interest in individuals associated with terrorist attacks in the South and South East Asian regions, most notably the Bali Bombings (2002) and the failed "Bojinka" plot (1995), which targeted airliners in South East Asia. Figureheads in domestic groups were commonly sought by users in all of the countries. This trend is most salient to the Philippines and Indonesia, where searches reflect domestic experiences with the Bali Bombings (Amrosi bin Nurhasyim, Imam Samudra), recent bomb attacks linked to ISIS (Aman Abdurrahman, Nur Rohman in Indonesia), and the siege of Marawi (Isnilon Hapilon, Abdullah Maute, Farhana Maute). Relatedly, users in these countries displayed a real interest in the founders and current leaders of domestic organisations, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, Ansarullah Bangla Team, Mujahidin Indonesia Timur, and the Abu Sayyaf Group. Given that these groups have all been linked either to al-Qaeda, ISIS or both, the identified nexus between global and domestic influential personalities is useful but unsurprising.

Interest was not confined to fighters, however, with high numbers of searchers for influential preachers and scholars, such as Abdullah Azzam[20], Sayyid Qutb[21], and Abu Muhammad Asem al-Maqdisi[22]. These patterns reflect those displayed by searches for books, where the at-risk audience displayed an appetite both for religious and ideological texts, as well as more explicitly violent and practical works.

Notably, none of the top ten personalities searched in any of the four countries of analysis included females. This could indicate that women in the countries of analysis are not necessarily inspired by female attackers or religious leaders or perhaps that they do not know of female personalities for which to search.

SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS AND OUTLETS

Comparatively few searches for social media accounts and outlets were recorded. When Twitter purged vast numbers of violent extremist accounts in 2015, there was a general move towards encrypted platforms and channels, such as Telegram and Wickr. The difficulty inherent in tracking channels on those platforms is that they are regularly shut down by the service, so any database of entries quickly becomes obsolete. This could also indicate that men and women are finding online networks through other means, such as through contacts on social media or in real life.

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[20] Also known as Father of Global Jihad, Abdullah Azzam was a Palestinian Sunni Islamic scholar and theologian and a founding member of al-Qaeda.
[21] Sayyid Qutb was an Egyptian author, educator, Islamic theorist, poet, and a leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1966, he was convicted of plotting the assassination of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and was executed by hanging.
[22] al-Maqdisi is best known as the spiritual mentor of Jordanian jihadist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the initial leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq

VIDEO

Searches for video content represented a substantial share of media-based queries in all four countries. In the "interest" category, broad queries for videos relating to ISIS were common in all four countries. In terms of searches for more specific titles, ISIS was also the dominant group. There appears to be a regional interest in military footage, evidenced by the frequency of searches for ISIS battles in all countries.

Searchers with a level of prior knowledge of the group sought more specific titles, most notably *Inside the Caliphate*, a documentary-style video series including on-the-ground footage of battles and training camps in ISIS-held territories and interviews with fighters, reflecting the broader interest in military footage. The series also documents daily life, including footage of children, and is filmed in local shops and public spaces.

Other ISIS-related queries illustrate an appetite for extremely violent content. A significant number of searches for ISIS killings, shootings, and executions were identified, with searchers most commonly seeking to view this content on LiveLeak, a video hosting website which has become a popular platform for sharing and viewing content that is designed to shock, usually through violence. The interest in extreme violence was most pervasive in the Philippines, where users also sought videos of ISIS drowning people and carrying out massacres, as well as of ISIS members being killed. While these searches may be indicative of active support or hostility toward the group, they may equally reflect a more general interest in engaging primarily with violent content, where the interest in ISIS is secondary at most. Given that more men than women in all four countries tended to search for video content, this could indicate a higher propensity to consume violent content for men.

5. ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC FACEBOOK PROFILES ENGAGING WITH CONTENT RELATED TO TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Overall, the analysis found that women do engage with terrorist and violent extremist groups on Facebook across the four countries. However, women made up a smaller proportion of the total audience engaging with violent extremism in this way. This could be due to the limitations of the study, in which necessarily only public Facebook profiles and publicly viewable groups could be included in the analysis. Women may be engaging via private groups and private profiles, which would be consistent with other data that indicated women are more likely to engage privately.

This section presents a qualitative analysis of trends that emerged in gendered messaging and forms of content used on violent extremist Facebook pages to spread violent extremist ideology in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Bangladesh.

5.1 The manipulation of masculinity and femininity

In Malaysia, Indonesia and Bangladesh, a dominant narrative is the importance of finding a husband and being subservient to him. Gendered expectations of behavior feature heavily; women are presented as prone to jealousy and excessive sentiment. One pro-ISIS page, 'Kabar Akhir Zaman', lists acts of 'disobedience' within marriage, such as clashing with one's in-laws and not tending to one's home or appearance. Bengali Facebook pages promote the "ideal Muslim woman" as religious, meek and serving her husband to ensure he can fulfil his combat role.

Feature: *'La Tahzan'*

Posts by 'La Tahzan' consist of images of flowers, hearts and jewelry while dealing with banal everyday issues such as eating fruit on an empty stomach or honey crystallizing in a freezer. These non-extremist posts also include links to extremist Telegram accounts, enabling recruiters to move potential sympathizers to closed messaging platforms. 'La Tahzan' also disseminates links to ISIS media such as al-Fatihin, the ISIS Malaysian magazine. This page would be an example of the "Venus fly trap" category.

Images of 'La Tahzan'

This theme is reinforced by Al Qaeda doctrine in the region. In a recently released issue of the group's magazine for women, they discussed an old dilemma: *"Men get virgins in Paradise but what do women get?"*. Al Qaeda scholars say that a women's reward will be to be reunited with her husband and recreated as a virgin.

Similarly, in the Philippines,[23] violent extremist propaganda promotes patriarchal notions of femininity. A post on the pro-ISIS historical trivia page *"Did you know?"* claims that the Crusaders were victorious because Muslim women had stopped following God's law. The resilience of the *Ummah*[24] is linked to female morality, making a woman's submission a powerful act. Women have the power to doom or save their community.

The female audience is encouraged to sacrifice all for her husband's jihad and to follow strict dress and moral codes. A further post praises Ismat as a good practice example. Ismat did not inform her husband, Saladdin, an icon in violent extremist mythology, that she was dying so as not to disturb his fight against the Crusaders. These expectations of women's roles and behavior, connecting their 'morality' to the survival and success of the *Ummah* may also be interpreted as a source of purpose, comfort and empowerment.
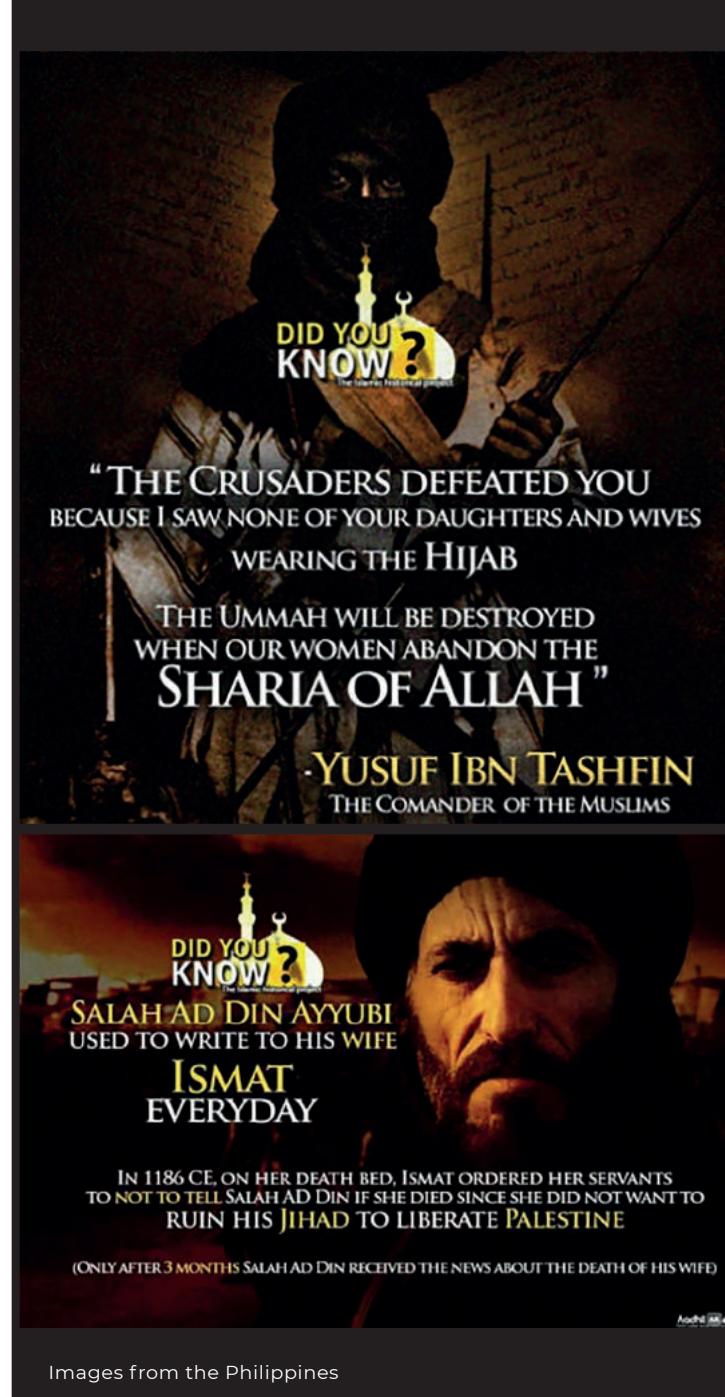

Images from the Philippines

5.2 "Freedom from vs Freedom to"[25]: a false sense of empowerment for women

In Malaysia and Indonesia, many pages contrast positive visions of the female Islamic experience with negative portrayals of women's lives in non-Islamic societies. Marriage is presented as a source of security in which husbands are dutiful to their wives. Women are encouraged not to succumb to pressure to remove their Islamic clothing, as female beauty is about being comfortable socially while still staying true to one's Islamic identity. The status of Muslim women is also presented as higher than that of non-Muslim women. The 'Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad al-Fahd' page contains several hadiths[26] which condemn the practice of marriage between Muslim men and non-Muslim women.

Feature:
'Official: Tahukah Anda?'

This pro-ISIS page poses as a historical trivia page, displaying 'facts' to rally female support. One post cites the rape of Muslim women in Kashmir as exemplifying the double standards of those who claim that Muslims are terrorists. By the way of contrast, a post on Fatima al-Fihri, founder of Kariawan University, lists a variety of ways in which women could be empowered in an Islamic caliphate that would be impossible in a non-Islamic society.

Posts from 'Official: Tahukah Anda?' Facebook page, which highlights the rape of Muslim women in Kashmir

Post about Fatima al-Fihri from 'Official: Tahukah Anda?' Facebook page

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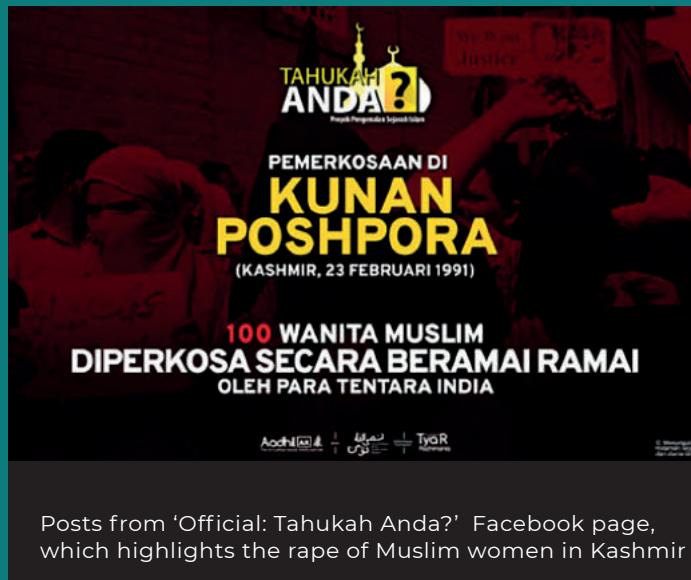
[25]This idea originated from the concept of positive or negative liberty (Berlin 1958), in which "I am slave to no man" represents negative liberty or freedom from another individual's direct interference and "I am my own master" represents positive freedom or a freedom to choose one's own pursuits in life. A feminist example of this concept is explained by Atwood (1985) as *freedom for* the individual to do what he or she wants, which may seem desirable but can lead to anarchy and *freedom from*, where rules and restrictions protect individuals from the results of amoral or anarchic behavior.

[26] Hadith: Narrative record of the sayings or customs of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, considered a major source of religious law.

In the Philippines, Islam is presented as the true guarantor of women's rights and dignity. The gender dynamic is transactional – men's lives are deficient without women, while marriage to a violent extremist protects women from being treated as disposable goods. The "Companions of the Prophet" page attacks high bridal prices that prevent young people from marrying, a message that also appeared in the Bengali and the Malay/Indonesian pages. The message aims to undermine the authority of parents who are more likely to choose husbands with better career prospects than violent extremists.

Female suffering is also linked to non-Islamic political systems. For example, on *"Awakening Ummah",* the Philippine government is accused of encouraging soldiers to rape Muslim women during the offensive against ISIS-affiliated groups in Mindanao.[27]

Many of the terrorist and violent extremist Bangladeshi pages promote the view that Islamic traditions are being undermined by increasing secularism. Secularism is conflated with premarital sex, adultery and homosexuality, and the increasing strain placed on marriage by excessive bride prices. The Bangladesh government's attempts to stop child marriage are described as an attack against Islamic tradition, while the alleged treatment of Kashmiri girls by Indian security forces is flagged as an example of the moral bankruptcy of non-Islamic society. By rallying support against secularism and non-Islamic practices, these violent extremist pages present themselves as the standard bearers of Islam, where promoting the values of the caliphate will in turn restore the moral status and rights of women. See for example, the *"I am a Jihadi Girl"* page which defends the practice of gender segregation ('purdah').

On pages such as 'Inspire the Believers', recruiters in Malaysia and Indonesia offer women a highly romantic vision of eternal love. The phrase 'Fi dunya wa Akhira insha Allah' ('in this world and the next, God willing') is recycled across pages to reassure wives of violent extremists that their love will remain intact beyond their husbands' deaths and they will be reunited in *Jannah*[28]. This narrative contrasts with the oft-reported violent extremist promise of virgins awaiting martyrs in paradise in favor of a hyper-romantic vision of love in which the dutiful wife is rewarded for her patience and subservience.

Image from the 'Companions of Prophet' page

Images from 'Awakening Umm'

27 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/27/rodrigo-duterte-jokes-to-soldiers-that-they-can-women-with-impunity
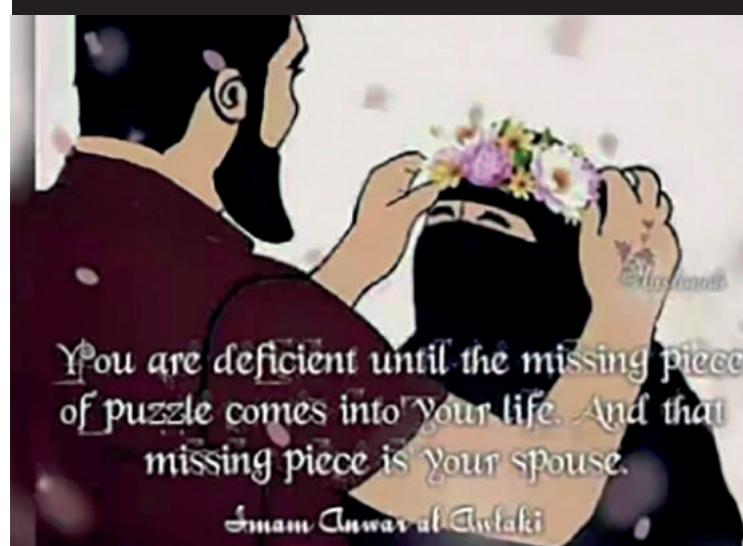
28 Jannah: Paradise (lit. "garden").

পর্দা ফরজ

দৈনিক ইসলামীক সংবাদ .

Cover photo of 'I am a jihadi girl' Facebook page
(Caption: Purdah [segregation] is obligatory).

Kashmiri girls protesting against Indian security measures,
posted on [Ghazwat al-Hind-Arakan, Kashmir, Afghanistan]
Facebook page.

Don't Pellet My Exams

An ISIS-affiliated page praises "cubs of Jihad" in a propaganda poster written in Arabic.
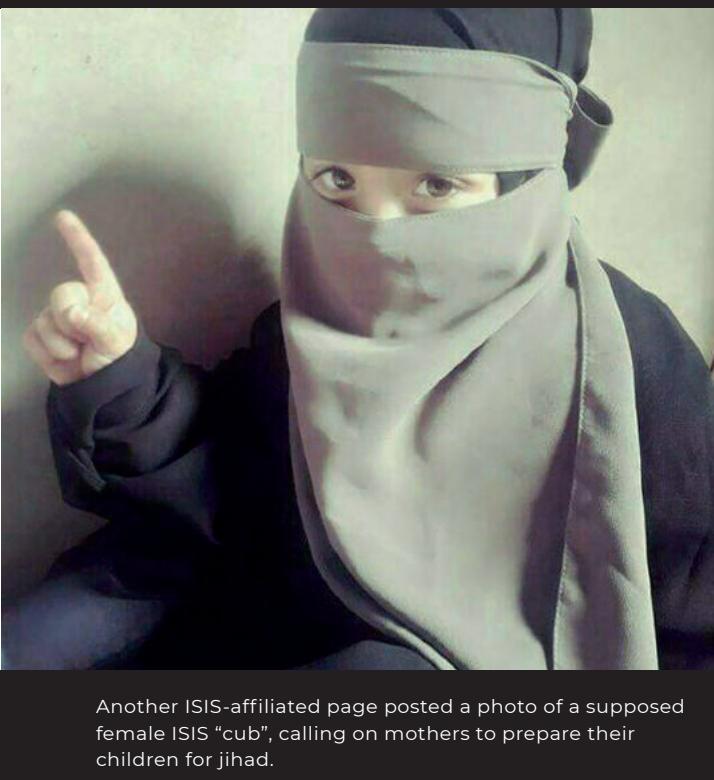
## 5.3. Lionesses and cubs: mothers and children

Furthering the idea that women should seek marriage, pages also urge women to use their positions as mothers to further the family's duty to carry out violent acts as 'jihad'. ISIS-affiliated pages praised children who were involved in violent extremist activities and encouraged families, particularly mothers, to prepare their children to be involved in these activities.

ISIS-affiliated sites in other regions have established patterns of showing children present at executions or acting as executioners using firearms. In the countries analyzed for this report, this trend was not observed. However, violent imagery involving children did appear occasionally in Facebook groups and pages in Indonesia and Malaysia.

The narrative of mothers preparing their children for violent acts is especially salient following the attacks that took place in Surabaya, Indonesia in May 2018. The bombings were regarded as one of the most sophisticated and complex terror attacks in Indonesia. It was also the first of its kind in Indonesian history in which children as young as nine years old participated.[29]

Following the attacks, ISIS-affiliated sites released photos specifically identifying women as "mothers" and calling them to take up jihad. They also circulated photos of the churches targeted in the attacks stylized as action movie posters or videogame covers, in which a male hero stands victoriously in front of a burning backdrop. These two types of posts following the attacks exemplify how online messaging is targeted and personalized based on the audience it is intended to reach: men or women.

Another ISIS-affiliated page posted a photo of a supposed female ISIS "cub", calling on mothers to prepare their children for jihad.

29 http://time.com/5275738/indonesia-suicide-bombings-isis-surabaya/

Feature: Children as fighters

PERSATUAN BANGSA-BANGSA BERSATU MELAPORKAN SEKURANG-KURANGNYA 284 KES KANAK-KANAK DIREKRUT SEBAGAI ASKAR OLEH ISIS PADA TAHUN 2017.

A pro-ISIS group in Malaysia circulated a photo showing a child with weapons and claiming recruitment of a large number of supporters since 2017.

Photos circulated of a controversial kindergarten Independence Day Parade in Probolinggo, East Java, Indonesia. In August 2018, girls and boys marched in black robes and niqabs, carrying toy assault rifles in the parade, themed "Fight with the Messenger of Allah to increase Faith and Piety". Photos and videos of the parade went viral on social media, accusing the school of promoting radicalism among its students and indicating a lack of state supervision over the Indonesian early childhood education system.

Multiple pro-ISIS pages circulated the photo showing women with an ISIS flag, calling "mothers" to join terrorist and violent extremist operations around the world.


Following the Surabaya attacks, ISIS supporters in Indonesia circulated a poster featuring the churches that were targeted in the attacks saying to 'hit them where they attack you.'

5.4 Changing roles of women

Recent terrorist activity in Indonesia,[30] like the Surabaya attacks mentioned previously, and Bangladesh[31] involving female suicide bombers highlight how women are increasingly taking on active and combat roles. Tactical realities on the ground in both countries have prevailed over traditional violent extremist ideas of gender roles, i.e. men as combatants and women as non-combatants. This is reflected in issues of Rumiyah, an online magazine used by ISIS for propaganda and recruitment, where women are increasingly called on to take up combat roles.[32]

One Indonesian/ Malay Facebook page, "Mujaddid[sic] and Mujahid", reflects the changes in attitudes among pro-ISIS Facebook page administrators. Back in March 2011, the page posted some text explaining the characteristics of mujahidin.[33] The image accompanying it (a woman carrying a baby with her index finger raised to the sky), implying that women were to raise these mujahidin. In December 2016, the page posted an image with four women dressed in black holding semi-automatic rifles with the description 'Mujahidah'[34], indicating increasing acceptance of women's active roles.

Post on a pro-ISIS page in the Philippines

Feature: Before and after

31 March 2011

25 December 2016

Images posted on the Facebook page "Mujaddid and Mujahid". The top one was posted on 31 March 2016, while the bottom one was posted on 25 December 2016.

In the Philippines, this line has been reflected on pro-ISIS Facebook pages, such as *"Did you know?"* A post in March 2018 mentioned "Virago of Entella", a woman who led a violent extremist insurgency in Sicily in 1091 CE. However, this ideological shift was not evident in Bangladesh pro-ISIS pages. Indeed, more recent posts on the *"Did You Know?"* page in the Philippines return to emphasizing the submissive supportive role of violent extremist women. It appears that ISIS supporters use both messages, despite their seeming inconsistency, depending on the time and audience.

In contexts where young women and girls have severe mobility and social interaction restrictions, the narratives promised in the online space essentially become a strategy for liberation.

[30]https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/13/world/asia/indonesia-church-suicide-bomber.html
[31]https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2016/12/24/bangladesh-sees- first-female-suicide-bomber
[32]Our Journey to Allah," in Rumiyah Issue XI, pp. 12–15.
[33]mujahidin: Plural of mujahid, "one who engages in jihad".
[34]mujahidah: Feminine of mujahid, "one who engages in jihad".

6. CONCLUSIONS

Women are engaging

One principle emerges above all others: women are engaging with terrorist and violent extremist ideologies, and the ways in which they engage – in South East Asia at least – are not very different than that of men. Women are searching for content related to terrorism and violent extremism on the web and presumably they are downloading and consuming the content that they find.

This is not to say that women are necessarily becoming radicalized, or even that this process happens online for the majority of women. The analysis simply shows that women are searching online for information about terrorism and violent extremism. This could be a key inflection point for governments, international organizations, and other groups in their strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism.

Gendered messaging

Terrorist and violent extremist groups are also targeting women with specifically gendered messaging on social media and in online content, like magazines and anasheed. Groups manipulate gender stereotypes to gain sympathy and recruit, while most approaches to countering and preventing violent extremism, especially online, continue to be targeted to young men. Thus, women and girls continue to slip through the cracks.

Twisted notions of empowerment

The underlying theme of every message was that of empowerment. If a woman wants to be a strong mother, she can find that in terrorist and violent extremist circles. If a young girl's dream is to be wooed by a lover and live happily ever after, that is also available. If a female wants to become a warrior, there is a place for her as well. In following the moral code of these groups, women can essentially ensure the success of her husband and the Ummah at large.

The messaging is clear: by forsaking society and joining the cause, women have agency and power. This can prove to be a potent calling, especially in societies where women face restrictions on their freedoms/rights.

If violent extremist groups are offering empowerment, programmes and strategies to counter this messaging must offer the same. Further, empowerment should not just be offered in counter-messaging strategies. Women must be provided alternative choices in life via economic empowerment and awareness raising, and not only alternative narratives.

A role of the family

ISIS messaging touts a whole of family approach, in which there is a distinct role for every member of the family. Beyond just the wife's role of supporting the husband and raising the 'cubs', women now have the prerogative to carry out violent acts or even engage their children to complete these attacks. Further, these groups assert that they can actually enable young men and women to find spouses and marry. Pages in Bangladesh discuss high bridal prices, with which young men may not be able to afford a wife and young women may not be able to find a husband. Joining a terrorist or violent extremist group alleviates this problem.

Programmes to counter and prevent violent extremism should take into account the private sphere of family and intimate relations as well as the public realm. Women's role in the prevention of violent extremism, especially as mothers, has been the most consistent message in countering violent extremism, in some cases used from a purely instrumental approach of intelligence and information gathering. UN Women research conducted in Bangladesh and Indonesia strongly highlighted the role of mothers in the community.[35] However, focusing solely on women's role as mothers not only essentializes them but risks missing the bigger picture and the greater gender dynamics at play – a message that is not lost on terrorist and violent extremist groups.

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[35]Monash University supported by UN Women (2018) "Empowering women for peaceful communities: Evidence from Indonesia and Bangladesh")

Public vs. private

Women seem to engage with extremist messaging more in private than public, and perhaps more than we have captured to date. These results seem to indicate that women are more likely to search for content related to terrorism and violent extremism than they are to display public support it on Facebook. Analysis of the 'private' behavior of search queries indicates a hidden interest in violent extremism among women that is less visible when focusing on public behaviors on social media. By targeting women where they tend to engage most, programmes to counter these messages can be more effective.

Changing paradigms and roles

Although women seemed to prefer to search for less violent content than men, perhaps women's preferences for violence are changing. Searches for media wings could indicate a desire to educate themselves. Although media outlets do publish a variety of content, some violent, others less so, they still provide individuals with a choice as to which content they want to consume. For example, in Indonesia, the fact that women carried out over 600 more searches than men in this category indicates, at the very least, a desire to explore or consume the products that these media wings release, ranging from anasheed to videos and magazines. Even if men still performed more searches in every other content category, women's interest in media platforms could point to their desire to bridge the gap in knowledge that currently exists about content related to terrorism and violent extremism. Qualitative findings also indicate changing narratives. The change in portrayal of women as supporters and wives to suicide bombers and fighters mirrors the shift in ideology from ISIS to the use of females as combatants.[36]

Contradicting messaging

As the paradigms seem to be shifting, the messaging from terrorist and violent extremist Facebook groups varies and is sometimes contradictory. For example, in the Philippines, pages showed both the paradigm of women as fighters and also as submissive terrorist and violent extremist wives. In Malaysia and Indonesia, pages promote contradictory narratives of the promise of virgins awaiting martyrs in paradise against a hyper-romantic vision of love in which the dutiful wife is rewarded for her patience and subservience.

It appears that terrorist and violent extremist supporters use each message, despite their seeming inconsistency, depending on the time and audience. This could indicate a deliberate strategy to target different groups with the appealing messaging to them, such as narrowcasting discussed in the introduction to this analysis. Further, it might represent a desperation to recruit or even a discrepancy in beliefs among different supporting groups. What is clear is that these groups can offer something for everyone.

More research needed

The countries analyzed in Southeast Asia appear to show specific trends that are more or less in line with one another. Bangladesh presented an outlier in this study, perhaps due to the small sample size, lack of internet penetration, or geographic location and culture. More research is needed to understand trends in Bangladesh vis a vis other south Asian countries and as a part of the Asia region as a whole.

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[36]In July 2017, an article in Rumiyah called "Our Journey to Allah" mentioned women taking part in offensive jihad (as opposed to self-defense). In October 2017, al-Naba' explicitly called on women to take up arms, framing it as an "obligation" in an article titled "The Duty of Women in Waging Jihad against the Enemy". (source: https://ctc.usma.edu/the-mujahidat-dilemma-female-combatants-and-the-islamic-state/)

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