

# MISOGYNY & VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN INDONESIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

This brief presents novel research findings on the relationship between support for misogyny, violence against women, and extremist violence in Indonesia<sup>1</sup>. It analyses the underexplored relationship between attitudes and practices indicating misogyny (defined as both fear and hatred of women and/or the feminine), support for violence against women, and support for violent extremism.

## KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Hostile sexist attitudes toward women and support for violence against women are the factors most strongly associated with support for violent extremism. Individuals who support violence against women are three times more likely to support violent extremism.
- ▶ Misogyny is integral to the ideology, political identity, and political economy of current violent extremist groups.
- ▶ Religiosity, age, gender, level of education, employment, or geographic area are not significantly associated with support for violent extremism.

### Additional findings:

- Preference for male leadership in the public and private spheres is increasingly used to justify a variety of gender inequalities, including coercive control and, in some cases, violence against women.
- Violent extremists exploit a doctrine of male leadership and wifely obedience, justified by religion, and promote gendered identities, including men as protectors and breadwinners, and women as caregivers and supporters

of men. Wifely obedience is promoted as a route to heaven by violent extremists and can sometimes be understood as empowerment by some women.

- Women's economic empowerment and shifting labor patterns are threatening male hegemony, particularly as it relates to male leadership and decision-making.
- Youth recruitment by violent extremist organisations is extensive, structured and has strong connections to various groups with extremist, Islamist and/or fundamentalist agendas.
- Education institutions are sites where extremist recruitment occur. Campus-based extremist groups often target women students, initially offering greater status and position within their organisations before exercising tighter gendered control.
- Although women overseas workers are often a hot-button issue for mainstream and extremist news sources alike, they also sometimes provide important economic resources to support extremist fighters across borders. Women's monetary support for these so-called 'just causes' is supported by many of those in the study.
- Recruitment by violent extremist organisations is not limited by socio-economic factors. Recruitment has been successful among both the educated middle classes as well as those living below the poverty line.
- Islamists and extremist groups have been able to effectively mobilise around anti-gender equality interpretations of issues such as inheritance laws, polygamy, divorce, alimony, and female genital mutilation.

<sup>1</sup> In Indonesia, three of the qualitative research sites were in Java (Depok, Cirebon, Klaten) and one was in North Sumatra (Medan). In October and November 2018, the research team conducted a survey of 3,052 people (1479 women and 1527 men) across Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines.

# WHAT DID WE FIND?

## Sexism and support for violence against women correlated with support for violent extremism

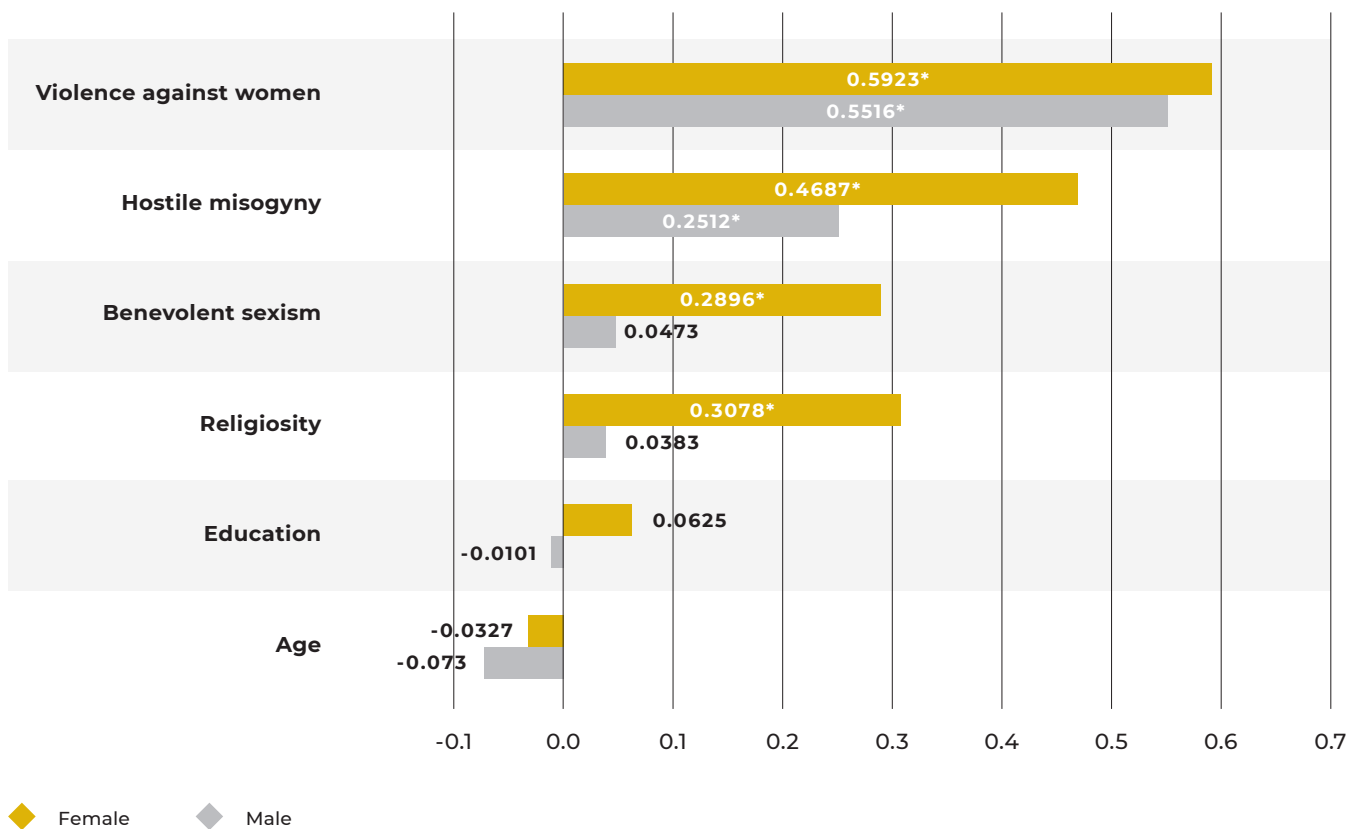
Correlations from a countrywide survey reveal the connection between gender regressive views, including support for violence against women and hostile misogyny, and violent extremism in Indonesia. There is a positive and significant correlation between supporting violent extremism and supporting violence against women, across both genders. That is, people who support violence against

women are more likely to support violent extremism. The survey also showed that the relationship between gender regressive views, and support for violent extremism is stronger for women than men in Indonesia. Anti-women's human rights sentiments are reasonably widespread in Indonesia with almost half of men and a third of women agreeing that women seek special favours and preferential treatment under the guise of equality.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the survey shows that attitudes in support of violence against women and hostile misogyny explain more of the variation in support for violent extremism than other factors, such as youth, education, socio-economic background or religiosity.

Figure 1.

Correlation between support for violent extremism and other variables in Indonesia, disaggregated by sex



\* Indicates statistical significance.

The Pearson correlation coefficient ('r') shows the strength and direction (positive or negative) of the association between the variables and support for violent extremism. A coefficient of 1 indicates a strong positive relationship. A coefficient of -1 indicates a strong negative relationship. A result of 0 indicates no relationship at all. The definition of terminology included is available in the full research paper.

Gender regressive views manifest themselves in various ways in society in Indonesia, including notably through the preference for male leadership in the public and private

spheres, which has implications for the intersection of sexism, violence against women, and extremist violence.

## Preference for male leadership, a hostile sexist attitude

In Indonesia, there is a strong preference for male leadership in society, with the view that men should make decisions on behalf of communities. Men and women alike noted that women were unfit for leadership on the basis of their gender, as women are too emotional. Men further stated that women did not possess the skills or talents required for leadership, suggesting these attributes were innate in men. When people did support women's leadership, it was done so on the proviso that women must be very qualified. In this regard, in Klaten, which has had a woman Regent since 2017, women's leadership was more accepted. In line with greater participation of women in Klaten, women religious leaders are able to preach to male audiences in that regency.

Male leadership and decision-making in the household is even more widely supported in Indonesia than male leadership and decision-making in the public sphere. This is reflected in the 1974 Indonesian Marriage Law, which stipulates that men are the head of the household, and women are the housewife. Overall, women agreed that wifely obedience was necessary and that they ought to ask for a husband's permission in general, and especially when women wished to travel or work outside the home.

## Male leadership is exploited by violent extremists

The doctrine of male household leadership and wifely obedience has a bearing on extremism and violent extremism for two reasons: (i) male household leadership is an ideology promoted by many fundamentalist, extremist, and violent extremist groups; and (ii) wives of violent extremist husbands feel compelled to support their husbands in acts of intolerance or violence, as stated by survey participants. In particular, household leadership is seen by violent extremist groups to counteract a Western ideal of liberalism and secularism associated with women's human rights. Additionally, being able to provide for a family is considered the dominant marker of masculinity. The strength of this imperative likely fuels financial motivations for men to join violent extremist or extremist groups who seek to provide financial incentives to members.

Nevertheless, there is widespread evidence of changing gender roles in society, chiefly regarding women's paid employment. Because earning a cash income is a condition of household, many women said that if women earned income, they would be considered to have equal leadership of the household. Younger men and women supported joint decision-making in households in greater numbers.

## Education institutions as sites for radicalisation

Universities are a site for mobilization both for and against extremism and violent extremism in Indonesia. Focus groups

explained that students joined religious communities and cadres, forming campus communities with radical and intolerant views, with significant overlaps between campus Islamists and political Islam. Similarly, to the preference for male leadership in public and private life, there is little space in campus religious organisations for women's leadership, although women make up a significant number of the regular members. As women enter a campus Islamist organisation, they acquire more prestige and responsibility but at the same time are subject to stricter application of the gender rules. Again, the ideology of male authority takes precedence.

## Social media and violent extremist organisations

Social media was confirmed as an increasingly important mode of recruitment and movement building in Indonesia. Social media activity among extremist and violent extremist organisations was shown to be extremely gendered, with separate spheres for men and women. Moreover, gender regressive ideology, including violence against women, was used to mobilise support. In the online spaces of recruitment, contradictory messages (the empowered woman, the vulnerable woman in need of protection, and the sexualised woman available for the gratification of men) highlight the complexity of gendered messaging. Seemingly contradictory gendered messaging are used to target different audiences and are exploited by violent extremist groups. In Indonesia, despite women's lower incidence of internet use, they identified online material as 'incitement to jihad' more frequently than men did.

## Women's participation in extremist activities

A number of participants in focus groups thought women's obedience to violent extremist husbands was a reason for women's support of violent extremist groups. Wifely obedience as a route to heaven is a key part of extremist gender ideology. In place of women's empowerment, extremist groups' promote gender complementarity, which holds that men and women have complementary, fixed roles with men typically the head of the family or household, the income earner and protector and women as the one who takes care of the household work and the emotional care of its members. This suggests that while extremist groups do project a conservative view of women's roles, they cannot afford to be openly hostile to women or the women's movement and must use different strategies to recruit women.

In addition, women overseas domestic workers can provide important economic resources to violent extremist groups and are in a good position to network across borders. They often use funds to support fighters. The survey material indicated a significant support for women acting as fundraisers in this way. While women violent extremists may be shocking, women's monetary support for "just causes" was accepted by many in Indonesia.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Promote women's participation in the public and private spheres.**

Variations in the traditional gender roles assigned to women, with space for negotiation of power, are crucial in understanding the politics of supporting and preventing violent extremism. Shifting gender norms in Indonesia creates opportunities both for women and men, as well as mechanism for increased protection of women's human rights, reducing the risks associated with gender-based recruitment and exploitation by violent extremist groups, and can inform strategies for preventing violent extremism.

- **Presence of gender regressive views utilised as an early warning sign of violent extremism.**

There is a positive and significant correlation between "Supporting Violent Extremism" and "Supporting Violence Against Women" across both genders. Risk assessment tools for violent extremism should routinely consider gender norms, including attitudes such as hostile misogyny and perceptions regarding violence against women. In addition, evidence on individuals perpetrating violence against women should inform efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism.

- **Further research is needed to understand the link between women supporting gender regressive views and violent extremism.**

Analysis illustrates that the relationship between gender regressive views, including support for violence against women, and support for violent extremism is stronger for women than men in Indonesia. Further research on this is required to understand the drivers of this association, including the emphasis placed on wifely obedience, coercive control and women's empowerment through radicalisation, and how it impacts women's ability to contribute to or prevent violent extremism.

- **Women identifying and preventing online recruitment by violent extremist organisations.**

Social media was confirmed as important mode of recruitment by violent extremist organisations in Indonesia. Despite women's lower incidence of internet use, women identified online material as 'incitement to jihad' more frequently than men did, indicating a possible intervention point in the online space in Indonesia.

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To read the full research paper and find more information, please visit:

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/peace-and-security/preventing-violent-extremism>