

Radicalization Processes of Female Extremists: Risk Factors, Thought Reform and Social Networks

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Question: what drives women to join terrorist organizations? And are these drivers different than those of male members of terrorist organizations?

Research until now has taken two paths:

1. Radicalization theories have been “non-gendered” but tend to ignore the role women play in extremism
2. Radicalization theories have been explicitly gendered, tending to adopt a feminist IR approach or a focus exclusively on female extremists.

The Theory

Leistedt's three part theory of radicalization:

- Presence of risk factors
- Persuasion techniques – brainwashing, thought reform
- Social networks (particularly social media) for propaganda

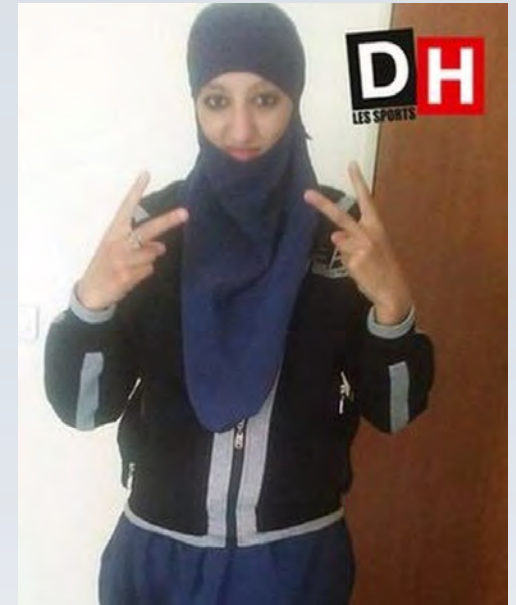
The Cases



Wafa Idris



Tashfeen Malik



Hasna Ait Boulahcen

Findings

- All three factors were present to some degree
- Brainwashing/thought reform was the least relevant
- This framework can be extended to female terrorists, but his conceptualization of particular risk factors must be broadened to include factors particularly salient to women (role of motherhood, etc.)

Implications

- We need to incorporate these additional risk factors, such as the role of motherhood or family dynamics into frameworks of radicalization
- Theories which ignore the role women play in extremism cannot account fully for their radicalization
- More work is necessary to incorporate gender into radicalization theories