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Topic: Strengthening Legal Frameworks for Combating Human Trafficking and Enhancing Protection of Women and Children

Women in the Proliferation of Terrorism in the Digital Era

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Abstract. *The development of digital technology has brought about significant changes in the patterns of the spread of extremist ideology and the proliferation of terrorism, including in relation to the changing role of women. Women who were previously more often positioned as victims, family members, or passive supporters in terrorist networks can now take on more diverse roles in the digital terrorism ecosystem. Social media, communication applications, and digital spaces allow women to become targets of propaganda, interact with extremist networks, and under certain conditions contribute to the spread of propaganda and the recruitment process. This study aims to analyze the changing role of women in the proliferation of terrorism in the digital era, identify the forms of women's vulnerability to radicalization and terrorist propaganda through digital spaces, and analyze gender-sensitive counterterrorism strategies. This study uses a normative legal research method with a statutory and conceptual approach. The legal materials used consist of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials obtained through literature studies and analyzed qualitatively. The results show that digitalization has expanded the space and forms of women's involvement in terrorist networks. Women can no longer be understood solely as victims or passive parties, but can also play roles as disseminators of extremist narratives, communication facilitators, recruiters, and supporters of terrorist networks. At the same time, women can be vulnerable to digital radicalization through propaganda that uses approaches such as identity, family, solidarity, religion, and the need for belonging. However, exposure to digital propaganda does not automatically lead to radicalization, as the process is influenced by various social, psychological, and environmental factors. Therefore, counterterrorism strategies need to integrate a gender perspective through strengthening digital literacy, preventing radicalization, developing counternarratives, empowering women, and engaging families and communities. From a legal perspective, digital counterterrorism policies must also be implemented based on the principles of legality, proportionality, accountability, and respect for human rights. A gender-sensitive approach is needed so that policies can differentiate*



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women's positions as victims, sympathizers, supporters, and active perpetrators without being trapped by gender stereotypes.

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1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has brought fundamental changes to social life, communication patterns, and the dissemination of information in society. The presence of the internet and social media allows information to be disseminated rapidly without being limited by space and time. On the other hand, these developments have also created new spaces for terrorist and extremist groups to spread ideology, propaganda, build networks, and conduct recruitment processes. This changing nature of threats indicates that terrorism in the digital era no longer occurs solely through physical activity, but also through virtual spaces that enable the formation of broader social and ideological networks. In this context, the involvement of women has become an increasingly important phenomenon to study. (Chaerunnisa, Luq Yana, and Mohammad Andi Hakim; 2023)

Historically, women in terrorism studies have tended to be positioned as victims, partners, family members, or passive supporters of male perpetrators. This perspective is increasingly inadequate as advances in digital technology give women greater access to extremist networks. Women can be targets of propaganda, but under certain circumstances, they can also act as disseminators of extremist narratives, communication facilitators, recruiters, and supporters of terrorist networks. These changes demonstrate a transformation in women's roles from previously marginalized positions to more diverse forms of involvement in the contemporary terrorism ecosystem. (Hidayatika, Arini Sabila, and Pujo Widodo; 2026).

The digital space also presents new forms of vulnerability through the gradual process of radicalization. Terrorist propaganda can be packaged through narratives about identity, religion, family, solidarity, injustice, and the need for belonging. The use of social media allows these messages to be delivered personally and repeatedly to specific individuals. Digital platform algorithms can also amplify exposure to content with similar perspectives, potentially creating an increasingly closed information environment. However, exposure to propaganda does not automatically cause someone to become radicalized or become involved in terrorism, as the radicalization process is influenced by various social, psychological, ideological, and environmental factors. (Macfarlane, Kate; 2024).

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This phenomenon demonstrates the importance of gender-sensitive counterterrorism strategies. Policies that only view men as the primary actors can overlook women's involvement, while approaches that consistently position women as victims can ignore their agency. Counterterrorism strategies need to integrate digital literacy, radicalization prevention, counternarrative development, women's empowerment, and family and community engagement. At the same time, policies for monitoring and prosecuting terrorist propaganda in the digital space must adhere to the principles of legality, proportionality, accountability, and human rights protection. (Shodiq, Shubhan; 2024).

Based on this background, this study examines the changing role of women in the proliferation of terrorism in the digital era, their vulnerability to radicalization and terrorist propaganda, and gender-sensitive counterterrorism strategies. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of women's position in the dynamics of digital terrorism and provide perspectives for developing gender-responsive counterterrorism policies that remain oriented toward protecting human rights. (Ulfa, Maria, and Robi Sugara; 2022).

2. Research Methods

This research uses a normative legal research method with a statutory and conceptual approach. The legal materials used consist of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials obtained through literature studies and analyzed qualitatively.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Women's Changing Roles in the Proliferation of Terrorism in the Digital Era

The development of digital technology has brought fundamental changes to patterns of social interaction, communication, and information dissemination within society. The internet and social media no longer function solely as means of communication, but have evolved into social spaces that enable individuals to build identities, communities, and networks without geographic constraints. These changes also have consequences for the development of terrorism. Terrorist groups can utilize digital technology to spread propaganda, build networks, recruit members, garner support, and maintain relationships among followers. In this context, one development that is gaining increasing attention is the changing role of women in the proliferation of terrorism.

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Historically, women in terrorism studies have often been placed in a relatively passive position. Women are often perceived as victims of violence, family members of perpetrators, partners of terrorist group members, or individuals who follow the decisions of men around them. This view is influenced by gender constructs that identify political violence and terrorism as activities primarily carried out by men. As a result, women's involvement is often understood as secondary and does not demonstrate significant agency. However, developments in research on women and terrorism demonstrate that women can play a variety of roles, ranging from supporters and facilitators to propagandists, recruiters, and communication network managers, to, in some circumstances, directly involved in acts of violence.

This transformation has become even more complex with the emergence of the digital space. The internet has enabled terrorist groups to reduce their reliance on physical meetings and conventional organizational structures. Individuals who previously lacked direct access to extremist organizations can obtain information, communicate with sympathizers, and build relationships within extremist networks through digital tools. This presents new opportunities for women to enter extremist environments without first having direct connections with members of the organization in the physical world. In other words, digital technology can reduce the geographic and social barriers that previously limited women's involvement in terrorist networks.

The changing role of women in the proliferation of terrorism is also related to changes in how terrorist groups view and utilize women. Extremist groups are increasingly recognizing that women can make strategic contributions to organizational sustainability. Women are viewed not only as partners or family members who support men, but also as individuals capable of carrying out functions such as communication, propaganda, recruitment, community management, and ideological dissemination. In the digital space, these capabilities can even be achieved without direct involvement in high-risk operational activities.

Social media has become a crucial instrument in this change. Digital platforms allow users to quickly produce and distribute content to a wide audience. Extremist groups can exploit these characteristics to create narratives tailored to specific audiences. In the context of women, propaganda can use narratives about family, identity, solidarity, religion, injustice, protection of certain groups, or the search for meaning in life. These narratives can be designed in such a way that they are not always perceived as violent propaganda at the initial stage of interaction.

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Women who interact with such content are not always immediately led to violent acts. The process can be gradual. Initially, individuals may be primarily interested in content related to a particular identity or social issue. Interactions can then evolve into involvement in online communities with increasingly exclusive views. Once social connections and trust are established, individuals may be introduced to more extreme narratives. This process demonstrates that the changing role of women in digital terrorism is inextricably linked to the gradual and complex process of radicalization.

Beyond being targets of propaganda, women can also act as producers and distributors of extremist narratives. Women with a certain level of involvement can use digital media to convey ideological views to others. The presence of women as communicators can differentiate extremist propaganda because their messages are perceived as more relevant to the social experiences and daily lives of other women. This has the potential to be exploited by extremist groups as a strategy to expand their support base and create more diverse networks.

In this context, it is important to understand that women's involvement cannot always be explained by a single factor. Women's motivations for entering extremist networks can be influenced by various factors, such as the search for identity, experiences of marginalization, the need for belonging, interpersonal relationships, social pressure, economic factors, and ideological beliefs. Romantic and family relationships can also play a role. In some cases, women may follow partners or family members who have already been exposed to extremist ideology. However, such explanations should not be used to generalize that women are always victims of male manipulation.

3.2. Digital Radicalization and Women's Vulnerability to Terrorist Propaganda

The development of digital technology has significantly changed the spread of extremist ideology and the process of radicalization. The internet, social media, and various communication applications provide terrorist groups with the opportunity to disseminate propaganda quickly, widely, and relatively difficult to limit geographically. In this context, women are a group that requires special attention, as digital radicalization can occur through approaches that are personal, emotional, and tailored to women's social experiences.

Digital radicalization is essentially the process by which an individual gradually accepts, internalizes, and validates extremist ideas through interactions in digital spaces. This process doesn't always begin with content that explicitly calls for violence. Propaganda can be packaged through narratives about identity, social

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injustice, group solidarity, family values, religion, or feelings of alienation. This approach allows extremist groups to build emotional connections with potential sympathizers before introducing more radical ideas.

Women's vulnerability to terrorist propaganda cannot be explained solely by gender. Social, psychological, family, and environmental factors, experiences of marginalization, the need for belonging, and interpersonal relationships can interact to shape a person's level of vulnerability. In some situations, extremist propaganda can offer an identity and community perceived as providing meaning, acceptance, or purpose in life. Digital media then serves as a space to build these social connections without the need for in-person encounters.

Terrorist groups can also use narratives specifically targeted at women. Messages about women's roles in the family, child protection, solidarity with specific groups, and depictions of idealized life within extremist communities can be used to attract female audiences. This strategy demonstrates that terrorist propaganda is not always conveyed through overtly violent messages, but can instead utilize symbols and narratives that seem relevant to everyday life.

Social media algorithms also present their own challenges. When users repeatedly interact with content that shares similar perspectives, recommendation systems can match them with other content that shares similar characteristics. This situation has the potential to create an increasingly homogenous information space, or echo chamber. In such an environment, extreme views can undergo a process of normalization as individuals continually encounter information that reinforces their prior beliefs and become less exposed to alternative perspectives.

However, it's important to emphasize that exposure to digital propaganda does not automatically lead to someone becoming a terrorist. Radicalization is a complex process influenced by various factors, and each individual responds differently to extremist content. Therefore, prevention policies need to avoid stereotyping women as inherently vulnerable to terrorism.

A more effective approach is to increase digital resilience through media literacy education, critical thinking skills, community empowerment, and the provision of constructive alternative narratives. Women can also be involved as active actors in preventing extremism, particularly through family, education, and community engagement. Thus, the digital space should not only be viewed as a threat arena but also as a strategic space for building community resilience against extremist propaganda and radicalization.

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3.3. Gender-Sensitive Counter-Terrorism Strategies in the Digital Era

Counterterrorism strategies in the digital era need to integrate a gender perspective to understand the diverse roles, experiences, and vulnerabilities of women in the radicalization process. An approach that solely positions men as the primary actors potentially overlooks women's involvement in the dissemination of propaganda, recruitment, network communications, and support for extremist groups. Conversely, women cannot always be positioned as passive victims, as under certain circumstances they possess the capacity and agency to make decisions and participate in terrorist networks.

A gender-based approach can be realized through improving women's digital literacy, particularly the ability to recognize propaganda, information manipulation, and online recruitment strategies. Furthermore, women can be involved as prevention agents through families, educational institutions, communities, and civil society organizations. This involvement is crucial because women have strategic potential in building social resilience and disseminating alternative narratives that reject violence.

From a legal perspective, countering digital terrorism must adhere to the principles of legality, proportionality, accountability, and human rights protection. Monitoring and restricting extremist content must have a clear legal basis and not lead to gender-based discrimination. Thus, a gender-sensitive counterterrorism strategy can strike a balance between security interests, community protection, and respect for women's rights in the digital space.

Gender-sensitive counter-terrorism strategies in the digital era require an inclusive and multidimensional approach that recognizes the different experiences, vulnerabilities, and roles of women and men in preventing and responding to terrorism. Digital platforms have created new spaces for radicalization, recruitment, financing, and propaganda, while simultaneously providing opportunities for prevention, education, and early intervention. Therefore, counter-terrorism policies should integrate gender perspectives into digital monitoring, law enforcement, community engagement, and rehabilitation programs. Strengthening women's participation in counter-terrorism initiatives is also essential to enhance resilience and address gender-based drivers of extremism. Ultimately, combining technological innovation with gender-responsive policies can contribute to more effective, equitable, and sustainable counter-terrorism efforts.

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Furthermore, the development of gender-sensitive counter-terrorism strategies must be supported by stronger institutional cooperation, digital literacy, and human rights protection. Governments, law enforcement agencies, technology companies, civil society organizations, and local communities should work collectively to identify and address emerging forms of online extremism without reinforcing gender stereotypes. Women should not only be viewed as victims or vulnerable groups but also as active agents of prevention, peacebuilding, intelligence gathering, and community resilience. At the same time, digital surveillance and counter-radicalization measures must remain subject to legal safeguards to prevent discrimination, excessive monitoring, and violations of privacy. Capacity-building programs should equip women and marginalized communities with the knowledge and resources necessary to recognize online manipulation and resist extremist narratives. By adopting a gender-responsive and rights-based framework, counter-terrorism policies can become more comprehensive and adaptive to the evolving digital environment. Such an approach ultimately strengthens social resilience while promoting equality, security, and sustainable peace.

4. Conclusion

The development of digital technology has resulted in significant changes in the patterns of terrorism proliferation and women's involvement within it. Women are no longer understood solely as victims or those who follow men's decisions, but can engage in various forms of digital terrorism ecosystems, including the dissemination of propaganda, network communication, recruitment, and support for extremist groups. At the same time, women can also be targets of radicalization through various digital platforms that enable propaganda to be delivered in a personalized and ongoing manner. Vulnerability to terrorist propaganda cannot be understood solely on the basis of gender, as the radicalization process is influenced by a combination of social, psychological, environmental, identity, and interpersonal factors. Therefore, counterterrorism approaches need to avoid stereotypes that position women solely as victims or perpetrators. Counterterrorism strategies in the digital era need to integrate a gender perspective through increasing digital literacy, preventing radicalization, developing counternarratives, empowering women, and engaging with families and communities. Furthermore, policies for monitoring and taking action against terrorist propaganda must remain based on the principles of legality, proportionality, accountability, and respect for human rights. A gender-sensitive approach is ultimately needed to create a more responsive, inclusive, and effective counter-terrorism policy in the face of the growing threat of terrorism in the digital space.



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