

PAPER II

Socio-economic Demographics and Gendered Recruitment in Tunisia

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction 3
 - Methods 3
- 2. Socio-demographic variables and violent extremism 4
 - Gender 4
 - Age 4
 - Geographical location 6
 - Marital status 7
 - Education status 9
 - Discipline 9
 - Profession 10
- 3. Primary and secondary socialization 11
 - Primary socialization 11
 - Secondary socialization 11
 - Religion as socialization 12
 - Education as socialization 12
 - Marriage as socialization 12
 - Women and socialization to violence 13
- 4. Recommendations for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism 15
 - For Governments 15
 - For Media 15
 - For Civil Society 15
- 5. Conclusion 16
- 6. Work Cited 16

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper identifies potential preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) strategies and programs for policymakers and stakeholders in Tunisia by tracing links between intersectional (social, economic, political and marital) gender inequalities, and recruitment of women into violent extremist groups. The paper expands on arguments that “[v]iolent extremist organizations tailor their recruiting messages around contextualized grievances” by analyzing the relationship between socio-economic factors related to gender and violent extremism.¹

In the first few years after the Jasmine Revolution, extremist groups adapted their methods to evade police control. Tactically, this included recruiting women as logistical support, liaison officers and transmission agents. Women involved in violent extremist groups have been responsible for transmitting orders, and sending money, rations and other necessities to terrorist hideouts. However, women have also participated in operations that are more sensitive, such as assault and suicide missions. As Nabila Hamza has identified, the “latest terrorist operations in Tunisia have shown that the role of women operating in terrorist groups is not limited to support missions and non-combatant actions.”²

Although, the number of women represents only a minority of those recruited, relative to the number of men, a gender perspective is necessary as “the modes used to engage women are considerably different from those of men, [and tend to be] either less visible or less reprehensible in the eyes of the Tunisian justice system.”³ Thus, P/CVE strategies

and programs to reduce violent extremism need to consider gendered differences in the process of radicalization and indoctrination into violent extremism.

Methods

This research draws on primary sources (court documents) triangulated with secondary data from reports and academic research. The Tunisian Centre for Research and Studies on Terrorism (CTRET), based at the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES), collected the original data used in this paper. These findings were first presented in the publication *Terrorism in Tunisia through Court Records*. The data was obtained from the court records of 384 cases between 2011 and 2015, involving 1,000 people charged with terrorism, thirty-five of whom were women. Not all relevant information was available for each of the 1,000 people included in the data set; therefore, some analysis relies on less than 1,000 people as a sample size.⁴

However, there are challenges to collecting data on violent extremism and gender in Tunisia. The data that is accessible tends to be broad and is often not disaggregated by sex. Furthermore, much of the data available from secondary sources does not include a gender framework and relies on “information obtained ... from journalists, the armed forces or judicial sources, [rather than] on evidence or accounts of those involved in violent extremism or those considered deviant.”⁵

2018). <https://maghreb.unwomen.org/fr/ressources-medias/publications/2018/12/penser-le-genre-dans-les-reponses-a-lextremisme-violent-en-tunisie#view>

¹ Geoffrey Macdonald and Luke Waggoner, “Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, 1 (2018): 128.

² Nabila Hamza, “Femmes jihadistes, actrices à part entière ou simples victimes?” [Jihadist women, actresses in their own right or mere victims?] (Tunis, July 2016), 10.

³ Oxfam and UN Women, “Penser le genre dans les réponse à l’extrémisme violent en Tunisie: Enjeux conceptuels, état des lieux, pistes d’action” [Thinking about gender in response to violent extremism in Tunisia: conceptual issues, state of play, possible actions] (Oxfam and UN Women: Tunis, November

⁴ The author of this report was also involved in the research for the study conducted by the Tunisian Centre for Research and Studies on Terrorism. See Ridha Radaoui, Imen Kochbati, Mariem Kzara et al., “Le terrorisme en Tunisie à travers les dossier judiciaires” [Terrorism in Tunisia through Court Records]. (Tunis: Tunisian Centre for Research and Studies on Terrorism, Forum for Economic and Social Rights, October 2016).

⁵ Caroline Guibet Lafaye, “Methodological difficulties posed by the analysis of radicalisation” École thématique du CNRS Paris (seminar), 12 September 2016) (references excluded from quotation).

2. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

This paper focuses on variables such as age, education, marital status, geographic location and unemployment/employment status as potential causal factors for women's recruitment into violent extremist groups. Based on a review of relevant literature on violent extremism in Tunisia and limited available sex-disaggregated data, certain variables were excluded as variables for this paper. This includes data on income, early marriage,⁶ rural/urban population distribution, indebtedness and types of violence against women.

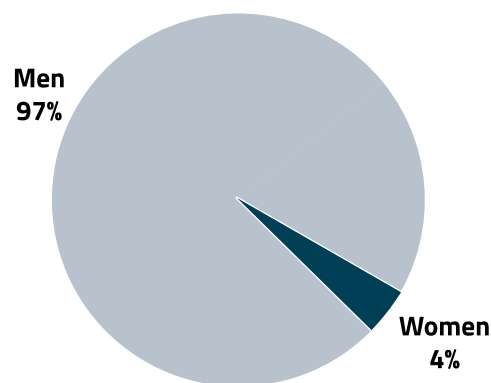
The variable on rural and urban population distribution is excluded as the data is indeterminate, even though there is evidence that this variable influences behavior, representation and attitudes in Tunisia, as explained below. The only available statistics on debt ratio are from the Central Bank of Tunisia, which are calculated by household, not sex, making this data irrelevant in this study on gender and violent extremism. According to the available data on convictions, there was no identifiable relationship found between sociodemographic and economic variables and violent extremism.⁷ According to the secondary literature, there is no causal direct relationship between these factors, rather there is a confluence of other factors influencing these variables.

⁶ Caroline Guibet Lafaye, "Methodological difficulties posed by the analysis of radicalisation" École thématique du CNRS Paris (seminar), 12 September 2016) (references excluded from quotation).

⁷ The relationship between early marriage and recruitment of women into violent extremist group is discussed in more detail in the section of marital status.

Figure 1

Gender distribution of terrorism convictions based on 1,000-person sample



Gender

In Tunisia, the most salient demographic variable among convicted terrorists is that they are mostly male. The number of women charged as terrorists represents only a minority in relation to that of men. The above table, taken from a study on terrorism by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, illustrates the number of women as a relation to the number of men charged as terrorists based on a sample of 1,000 people from 2011 to 2015.⁸

Age

Based on the quantitative findings for this paper, men and women detained in criminal terrorism cases tend to young; however, there are more women than men in the youngest age category of 18 to 24 years old (see Table 1). Men are concentrated in the 18 to 34 age group. In the sample used in this study, there were three male minors (defined as under 18), but no female minors. However, there is anecdotal evidence of women imprisoned for terrorist involvement or terrorist acts that they committed as minors including several cases of minor girls leaving for Syria, either with members of their families or with suitors. For example, [Rahma and Ghofrane Chikhaoui](#),

⁸ According to the latest statistics, the majority of people arrested, were reprimanded for having "liked" pages that were apologists for terrorist acts, or sharing the content of pages with terrorist tendencies.

were radicalized as minors. At 16 and 17 years old respectively, they joined the Islamic State in Libya. Rahma and Ghofrane’s mother, Olfa Hamrouni, has spoken out publicly about the failure of the Tunisian authorities to prevent her daughter, Rahma, from leaving Tunisia.⁹ Mohamed Ikkal Ben Rejeb, founder of the Rescue Association for Tunisians Trapped Abroad, contended that any discussion of women violent extremists is sensitive in Tunisian society as “their choice involves a moral and a sexual component [so that a] woman leaving to fight is thus considered far more shameful for her family.”¹⁰ It is therefore likely to be underreported.

Women tend to be younger than their male counterparts at the point that they are charged with terrorism. Women are typically younger than their spouse is on the date of the marriage, which may explain this trend.

One suggested reason for the recruitment of a high number of adolescents into violent extremist groups, according to a UN Women Tunisia and Oxfam report, is that young people are at a vulnerable moment in their development. There is evidence, for example, that older women mentor adolescent girls to recruit them into violent extremist groups.¹¹ Adolescents question their self-identity and tend to distrust authority, making them more open to radicalization and recruitment into violent extremist organizations.¹² Young people also experience high

⁹ Giulia Bertoluzzi and Costanza Spocci, “Tunisian mother’s grief: Two daughters lost to Islamic State,” Middle East Eye, 1 May 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisian-mothers-grief-two-daughters-lost-islamic-state>.

¹⁰ Bertoluzzi and Spocci, “Tunisian mother’s grief: Two daughters lost to Islamic State.”

¹¹ Farhad Khosrokhavar, “Le djihad au féminin” [The feminine Jihad], Le Point, 2 November 2016, https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/le-djihad-au-feminin-02-11-2016-2080120_23.php#xtmc=farhad-khosrokhavar-le-djihad-au-feminin&xtnp=1&xtr=1

levels of unemployment in Tunisia and have become less engaged with the political process since the end of the 2011 Revolution,¹³ both factors suggestive of a move towards violent extremism.

TABLE 1
Distribution by age and gender on 994-person sample of convicted terrorists¹⁴

Age Category	Gender		Total
	Men	Women	
<18	3	0	3
18-24	204	14	218
25-29	275	10	285
30-34	243	5	248
35-39	123	3	126
40-44	59	1	60
45-49	33	2	35
50-54	13	0	13
55-59	1	0	1
>60	5	0	5
Total	959	35	994

¹² Macdonald and Waggoner, “Dashed Hopes and Extremism in Tunisia,” 129

¹³ Oxfam and UN Women, “Penser le genre dans les réponse à l’extrémisme violent en Tunisie.”

¹⁴ Radaoui, Kochbati, Kzara et al., “Le terrorisme en Tunisie à travers les dossier judiciaires,” 32.

Geographical location

The spread of violent extremism ideology across different geographical locations is likely related to the specific region’s history, and such events such as the establishment of politico-religious movements, and the presence of key personalities before or after the regime change in 2011. However, it should be noted that a small number of the sample of terrorism convictions is insufficient to provide a general idea of the distribution of groups in Tunisia (see Table 2). Yet, anecdotal evidence suggests some areas are particularly prone. An example of this is Sidi Bouzid in Central Tunisia and Kasserine in Central West Tunisia, where a large number of terrorist operations or terrorist arrests have been recorded. In Sidi Bouzid, extremism proliferated under the influence of certain local personalities. In this governorate and specifically in the commune of Sidi Ali Ben Oun, Al Khatibe Al Edrissi was able to recruit several young Tunisians to Salafi Jihadism. According to reports, “he is the representative of the Salafist jihadist in Tunisia and North Africa in Sidi Ali ben Oun. He went to Saudi Arabia for work in the 1990s, it was there he learned the theology of the fathers of Wahhabism and he came back to propagate his ideas, he was jailed for giving religious lessons in his house without permission.”¹⁵

Figure 2
Tunisia
Governorates¹⁵



¹⁵ Map of Tunisia, viewed 28 June 2019.

TABLE 2
Number and percent of women convicted by geographical location based on sample¹⁷

Governorate	Number of Terrorism Convictions of women	Percentage
Sidi Bouzid	7	20%
Tunis	6	17.1%
Ben Arous	5	14.3%
Jendouba	4	11.4%
Gabès	3	8.6%
Sousse	3	8.6%
Bèja	2	5.7%
Ariana	2	5.7%
Mahdia	1	2.9%
Kasserine	1	2.9%
Medenine	1	2.9%
Total	35	100.0%

¹⁶ Amel Grami and Monia Arfaoui, Les femmes et le terrorisme: étude genre [Women and terrorism: gender study] (Tunis: Maison Miskilini, 2017), 367.

¹⁷ Radaoui, Kochbati, Kzara et al., “Le terrorisme en Tunisie à travers les dossier judiciaires.”

Marital Status

Based on the sample used for this study, the majority of convicted terrorists in Tunisia are not married, suggesting a link between singlehood and violent extremism (see Table 3). Eighteen of the twenty-nine female respondents from the sample (62.5%) were single (six of the total thirty-five of the sample elected not to respond). The statistic for single men among the sample group is similar (518 out of 754, or 68.7%, not all responded). Therefore, the majority of the sample group is single (and not previously married), pointing to a dynamic of gender relations—recruitment of unmarried youth—in Tunisia.

TABLE 3
Distribution of detainees in terrorism court cases by marital status¹⁸

Marital Status	Men	Women	Total
Single	518	18	536
Married	229	10	239
Divorced	04	1	5
Widowed	3	0	3
No Response	211	6	217
Total	965	35	1000

The statistical distribution in the sample group on marital status corresponds with secondary literature on the subject suggesting links with marriage and forced marriage in violent extremist groups in Tunisia.¹⁹ For example, the 'Jihad al nikah'²⁰ is a

¹⁸ Radaoui, Kochbati, Kzara et al., "Le terrorisme en Tunisie à travers les dossier judiciaires." The distribution of female court cases by gender according to marital status has not been published.

¹⁹ Grami and Arfaoui, *Les femmes et le terrorisme: étude genre*, 260.

²⁰ Jihad al Nikah lit Jihad of Marriage is a contentious term describing

form of marriage with a limited period, for example, the marriage can be valid for a few hours only, and women can have multiple partners in the course of a day. In such marriages, according to some sources, the bride's consent is not necessary; in this case, jihad al nikah is forced marriage. As Nabila Hamza argues, "[t]his practice allows for a temporary marriage to satisfy the sexual needs of fighters and to gain paradise."²¹ Marriage for terrorism purposes is punishable by imprisonment. Forced marriage contravenes the wider Tunisian legal context too, women are free to enter into marriage contracts without the intervention of a male guardian. Minors are required to file a request with their guardian who must be a responsible member of the family and who is the only person able to decide what is in the best interest of the minor.

Jihad al Nikah is also seen as a way violent extremist groups use in-person and virtual suitors and the possibility of a relationship or the promise of marriage to engage women. An argument with popular currency is that violent extremist groups recruit women with the promise of marriage. The promise of a wife is also a reward for men to join a violent extremist organization. Amel Grami and Arfaoui Monia, in their book 'Women and Terrorism', show evidence that women are engaged as a result of the influence of networks specialised in trafficking and the sex trade under the cover of religion, the wives who were used in 'Halal prostitution' and girls who have chosen to so do. For the latter, the jihad is a fall back solution for women who seek to be a heroine on the field, but see its impossibility, and to have social recognition for her direct contribution in the fight, she chooses instead to help the fighter in moments of crisis and sexually via means of so-called 'sexual support.'²²

women marrying men for reasons of "jihad". It can denote women married to violent extremists, women who devote themselves to a jihadi cause by marrying a fighter; women serving as prostitutes for violent extremist groups; women who are sexual/domestic slaves in violent extremist groups.

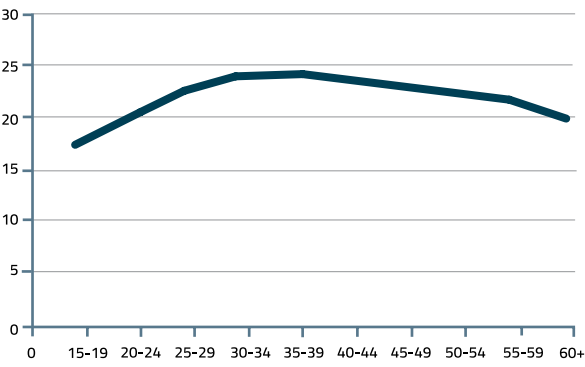
²¹ Hamza, "Femmes jihadistes, actrices à part entière ou simples victimes?" 9.

²² Grami and Arfaoui, *Les femmes et le terrorisme: étude genre*, 260.

From 2011, post-revolution, the incidence of group marriages—where several couples would marry on the same day to lower costs associated with weddings—increased supported by currents in Islamist groups. Salafist groups may also subsidize group weddings. It aims to help couples who want to get married and cannot do so because marriage is costly, which is accentuated by the economic crisis and the decline in the standard of living. Moreover, is also a way of attracting sympathizers and guaranteeing group cohesion and perpetrate endogamous marriage between members who have the same ideology.

In the broader Tunisian context, early marriage continues to be widespread, although rates may be declining (see Table 4). As per the Tunisian general population and housing census in 2014, there has been an increase in the average age at the time of first marriage (see Figure 3).²³ This trend has developed over the last 50 years and is attributable to the propensity of men and women to marry later. Another, no less important finding is the decrease in the last 50 years of the gap between men and women of the average age at first marriage. This gap declined gradually from 1966 to 2004, falling from 6.2 years to 3.6 years, before increasing in 2014 to reach 4.4 years, which can be accounted for by a drop in the women’s average age at first marriage.

Figure 3
Graph of average age of women at first marriage in Tunisia, 2014



²³ National Institute of Statistics, “General Census of Population and Habitat 2014: Volume 3 Demographic Characteristics,” (Tunis: National Institute of Statistics, January 2017), 23.

TABLE 4
Average age of women at first marriage in Tunisia, 2014

Age	Average age in years at first marriage
15-19	17.0
20-24	20.0
25-29	22.7
30-34	24.2
35-39	24.4
40-44	23.9
45-49	23.2
50-54	22.5
55-59	21.8
60+	19.9
Average	22.5

Educational status is the main determinant of the age at which women marry for the first time. A women’s level of education is statistically correlated with the age at which she first marries, that is, women with higher levels of education tend to be older when they first marry compared to women with less education.²⁴ A woman with little to no education, on average, gets married under the age of 21. Women’s average age increases to 22.5 for women with primary level education. For women with a secondary level education, the average age of first marriage is 23.3 years. Finally, women with a tertiary level education, on average, are married at 25.5 years old. The difference between the average age of women at first marriage with no education and those at first marriage with a high level of education is 4.5 years.

²⁴ National Institute of Statistics, “General Census of Population and Habitat 2014: Volume 3 Demographic Characteristics,” 28.

There are power dynamics that affect women’s age at first marriage and the relationship of women’s marital age and status to violent extremism is underexplored.

Education Status

The data set examined in this study found no correlation between education status and conviction for terrorism charges among women studied (according to available data).

TABLE 5
Distribution of detainees in terrorism court cases by gender and education level

Education Status	Men	Women	Total
Primary	34	2	36
Secondary (without having graduated)	112	6	118
Secondary School (having graduated)	9	6	15
University Level (without having graduated)	98	2	100
University Diploma	41	0	41
Vocational School	46	1	47
No Response	625	18	643
Total	965	35	1000

In 1990, the primary school dropout rate was 7% for both girls and boys. This declined by 2016 to 1.3% for boys and 0.6% for girls. Overall, the number of women in tertiary education is increasing, with the proportion of female students in university increased to 58% in 2016–2017.²⁵

²⁵ National Institute of Statistics, “General Census of Population and Habitat 2014: Volume 3 Demographic Characteristics,” 113.

Discipline

As the findings show in Table 6, recruited students were more likely to have studied science than social science. This is a common factor between men and women and could correspond with the prevalence of student unions with an Islamist affiliation in science faculties.²⁶

There was a similar trend among the bombers from the 11 September 2001 attacks, several of whom had backgrounds in engineering.²⁷ A study by Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog concluded that engineering courses have the potential to a rigid mentality, making these individuals ‘good customers’ for radicalization.²⁸ Thomas Lindemann calls this ‘professional socialization.’ He also argues that there are similarities between the professional scientific backgrounds of French and Arab-Muslim terrorists.

TABLE 6
Distribution of women detained in terrorism court cases by academic discipline²⁹

Area of Study	Number	Percentage
Social Science	1	2.9%
Science	7	20.0%
No Response	27	77.1%
Total	35	100.0

²⁶ See Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad: The Curious Connection between Violent Extremism and Education* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016).

²⁷ See Thomas Lindemann, “La pensée scientifique du terroriste djihadiste” [The scientific thinking of the jihadist terrorist]. *The Conversation*, 13 October 2016, <https://theconversation.com/la-pensee-scientifique-du-terroriste-djihadiste-65750>

²⁸ Mohamed Dhayfalah, “The stories of activists from the Tunisian student movement” (*Etudes et Publications de l’Université Tunisienne*, 2014), 220.

²⁹ Radaoui, Kochbati, Kzara et al., “Le terrorisme en Tunisie à travers les dossier judiciaires” The distribution of female court cases by gender according to marital status has not been published.

Profession

The economic and social vulnerability of women is a salient feature of the women surveyed in the study as captured in the table below (Table 7). Of those women describing their profession, most women convicted of terrorism charges in Tunisia were housewives, followed by merchants, then students. These findings reflect employment trends. In general, the workforce participation rates of men/boys are higher than those of women/girls; however, these rates vary depending on age group. In 2014, the date of the last census, there were roughly 445,000 unemployed youths (age 15 to 34). This represented 25.5% (or one in four) of economically active youth. The census data also showed that the unemployment rate was higher for women than for men. One in three women were recorded as unemployed, whereas, only one in five men were unemployed.³⁰

Men and women's participation rates in the labor market were near stagnant between 2006 and 2017. In this period, men's participation rate in the market was two and a half times that of women, with the proportion of women represented in the market increasing from 27% to 28.7%.³¹ Across all regions of Tunisia, in the period from 2006-2017, the proportion of women employed did not exceed one third of the total labor force.³² This statistic is inclusive of women across all socio-economic and education levels.

³⁰ Radaoui, Kochbati, Kzara et al., "Le terrorisme en Tunisie à travers les dossier judiciaires," 140; National Institute of Statistics, "Tunisia's unemployment rate in 2018," National Institute of Statistics, 15 May 2019, <http://www.ins.nat.tn/en/themes/emploi#1908>

³¹ Radaoui, Kochbati, Kzara et al., "Le terrorisme en Tunisie à travers les dossier judiciaires," 139.

³² Radaoui, Kochbati, Kzara et al., "Le terrorisme en Tunisie à travers les dossier judiciaires," 140.

TABLE 7

Distribution of women detained in terrorism court cases, by current profession ³³

Profession	Number	Percentage
Housewives	7	20.0%
Traders, sellers, etc.	6	17.1%
Students	4	11.4%
Unemployed	3	8.6%
No profession	3	8.6%
Unskilled Industrial laborers	1	2.9%
Intermediate professions for education and training	1	2.9%
Retirees	1	2.9%
Office employees	1	2.9%
No response	8	22.9%
Total	35	100.0%

³³ Radaoui, Kochbati, Kzara et al., "Le terrorisme en Tunisie à travers les dossier judiciaires." The distribution of female court cases by gender according to marital status has not been published.

The high unemployment rate, and consequent precarious economic circumstances for many women, is potentially indicative of a feeling of dissatisfaction and failed expectations, especially following the Jasmine Revolution. The CAWTAR report reinforces these ideas and presents the vulnerability of young women in the same perspective as marginalization and lack of access to social, economic and cultural capital. Such processes of marginalization lead to the same relationship and interest in a disruptive anti-systematic policy.³⁴ As Amel Grami has argued: "The will to go to jihad is in the continuity of the will to change one's situation and to get out of one's current situation, in other words getting away from the "powerless to change one's future."³⁵ Therefore, a tentative conclusion is that socio-economic vulnerability promotes the disenchantment of women's status, which is a potential causal factor for their support and engagement with violent extremist groups.

Since the turn of the century, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women who have expressly moved away from or reject feminism in Tunisia. On the one hand, there has been a push back against accepting and identifying women as economic agents due to the rigidity of prevailing masculine and feminine social constructs; while on the other hand, traditionalists have introduced greater pressure and responsibilities on women, without also acknowledging that women's social and familial commitments do not offer financial compensation.³⁶

3. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOCIALIZATION

Primary socialization

Primary socialization happens in the household among family members. For example, children may be exposed to intolerance and philosophies from their families that advocate for violent extremism. There is anecdotal evidence of Tunisian women joining violent

extremist groups, alongside, or to reunite with, family members. There are accounts of sisters, brothers and whole families being members of the same violent extremist group. One example (as discussed above) is Rahma and Ghofrane Chikhaoui, who attempted to blow up Tunisian parliament.³⁷ Court records show that when girls (minors) are charged with terrorism, that a member of their family is also being charged.

In other cases, family authority in society as a whole continues to diminish in comparison to that of the traditional patriarchal family. The proliferation of non-family sources of socialization and the development of children disrupted traditional child/family relationships, and increased feelings of anguish in adolescence, a time already filled with uncertainty. Amal Grami argues that:

adolescence is a time of character building and a period of gradual transition to maturity, the absence of family members capable of understanding this process and a failure to take responsibility for their child's development accelerates and pushes teens to seek an alternative and adapt their relationships with 'new players' that gives them the opportunity to build a new life and life goals.³⁸

Secondary socialization

The second category of socialization relates to "mentors, membership groups, social networks and ideological associations, [and] online communities."³⁹ There are several and overlapping circles of socialization that influence women's support and engagement with violent extremist groups.

Radicalization along gendered lines in Tunisia is a process of gradually replacing one culture with another, as documented elsewhere.⁴⁰

³⁴ Oxfam and UN Women, "Penser le genre dans les réponse à l'extrémisme violent en Tunisie."

³⁵ Grami and Arfaoui, *Les femmes et le terrorisme: étude genre*, 90.

³⁶ Imen Kochbati, "La vie conjugale des femmes cadre Tunisiennes" [Tunisian women's married life] (PhD thesis, Faculty of Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris-I, 2007).

³⁷ Grami and Arfaoui, *Les femmes et le terrorisme: étude genre*, 346.

³⁸ Grami and Arfaoui, *Les femmes et le terrorisme: étude genre*, 88.

³⁹ Oxfam and UN Women, "Penser le genre dans les réponse à l'extrémisme violent en Tunisie."

⁴⁰ A study in the UK of Muslim women who were affiliated with Islamic political groups Muslims against Crusades (banned in 2011) and Women4Sharia mention this very point. This study recounts the fact that discussions are underway between women on the perceptions of religion and the duty of Muslim women. Mohammed Ilyas, "Women affiliated with Muslims Against Crusades and Women4Sharia," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 3, 1 (2014): 49-65. DOI: 10.1163/22117954-12341275

Religion as socialization

During the first few years after the 'Arab Spring' there was a measurable increase in the vocalization and adoption of violent extremism ideologies in religious institutions. This was most evident in certain mosques, Koranic schools, associations and other more exclusively male spaces, such as men-only cafes. Gender segregation played a role. In information obtained by reading court documents as part of the data collection process, "young participants [from economically deprived areas] mentioned that they knew girls who had been recruited from mosques and schools."⁴¹ Even in Hammams (bath houses) that are reserved for either men or women, which traditionally separate sexes during ceremonies, indoctrination tends to be carried out by someone of the same sex or by a preacher.⁴²

More recently, recruitment through religious socialization has become more common on the internet. Solidarity for jihad on pro-jihadist websites is just one of the explanations given by recruited teenagers as to why they embrace the terrorist cause. Young people newly recruited into terrorist groups in interrogations often state that they have been influenced through specialized pages, network groups, closed groups on social media discussing the situation of Muslim countries, and the absence of the 'sharia' or religion of 'salafes ala salah', the first caliphs. Recruiters exploit the often feeling of helplessness experienced by many young people who feel unable to change their lives, so they transfer their anger towards their own society. Recruiters speeches, which typically highlight injustice and the inability to act, seems to collude with their own experiences where they have mixed feelings of loss, abandonment, incomprehension, frustration and victimization.⁴³ It is a speech directed simultaneously to men and women to invite them to join the 'Islamic State' (ISIS), the only state in their eyes, according to

⁴¹ Information gathered from reading court records.

⁴² Information gathered from reading court records.

⁴³ Cindy Duhamel and Alexandre Ledrait, "Djihad au féminin: promesse d'une solution aux épreuves pubertaires" [Female jihad: promise of a solution to pubertal trials], *Adolescence* 35, 2 (2017): 413-432. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-adolescence-2017-2-page-413.htm>

them, where a 'true' Muslim can practice their religion in peace and quiet without being afraid of being harassed by a Muslim state that has become non-believer.

Education as socialization

Places of study, especially universities, play an important role in the propagation of extremist or violent ideas.⁴⁴ In court documents of the trial of terrorist Fatma Zouaghui, students who had been recruited by Zouaghui reported that female student recruiters play a role. They involve their fellow students to the cause of Ansar Al Sharia: "They recruit young men and women on the internet" and in person.⁴⁵ Thus in Tunisia and elsewhere, radicalized groups operate in places of study where there is a concentration of young people and where contact is easy.

Marriage as socialization

Marriage is a common recruitment method as young men in combat zones promise young women a life of happiness in the land of God. The messaging tactic tends to focus on the rejection of modern culture that is deemed responsible for creating a society of decadence and a state of malaise and feminine weakness. It calls for women to seek fulfillment in the promise land where ISIS reigns and where women are promised an "ideal husband." In Tunisia, there have been several cases of girls going to Syria to join men they met on social media networks, Tunisian or otherwise. Some women cite being attracted to the narrative of the man as a 'war hero' who fights the disbelievers and performs bravery as male supremacy.

It has been argued that an 'ideal' representation of women and men's married lives based on traditional notions of masculinity and femininity may, in fact, attract women to violent extremist groups. This argument has been linked to the notion that women accept myths around the promises of life in ISIS areas because of disillusionment following the promises for a better life after the Arab Spring.

⁴⁴ Mohammed Ilyas, "Women affiliated with Muslims Against Crusades and Women4Shariah."

⁴⁵ The author's own Reading of Fatma Zouaghui's court case.

Violent extremist recruiters present marriage in extremist communities as representing as a safe world where a woman can find emotional and economic insecurity. She can live in a largely gender segregated governed by specific and known gendered codes of behavior. This reduces her freedom, or, as extremists put it, saves her from committing sins that will prevent her from gaining access to paradise.

In contrast, according to such ideologies, in the contemporary world, women have more worries—relationship insecurity, the risk of divorce and newfound working responsibilities as a modern woman. Géraldine Casutt suggests that the power and acceptance of this myth and the disintegration of gender equality in Tunisia “is a reaction, [and] that these women are disappointment[ed] by real gender equality in Western societies: girls prefer to adhere to another myth [which the Casutt calls feminislamism], that of a natural complementarity idealised between the husband and his wife, who are also subjected to God.”⁴⁶

Research shows that some women who choose this existence do not identify as victims; on the contrary, they see themselves as fighters.⁴⁷ Within traditional gender relations, women take on missions in the field by helping men on the front line, they play classic roles such as wife, nurse, logistical aid, and they monitor law enforcement in areas dedicated to women.

There can only be limited progress towards understanding this phenomenon without evaluating it more comprehensively; several factors come into play and must be evenly considered. Each environment has its own characteristics which leads to multiple explanations for violent extremism. Fieldwork, both qualitative and quantitative, will be required to better understand this complexity while also considering the multiplicity of factors and influence of variables.

⁴⁶ Francesca Prescendi, Geraldine Casutt and Agnes A Nagy, “Les rituels sacrificiels de l’antiquité à nos jours: Regards croisés (Table ronde)” [The sacrificial rituals of antiquity to the present day (Round table)], MEG, 3 February 2015, <https://unifr.academia.edu/GeraldineCasutt>; Duhamel and Ledrait “Djihad au féminin: promesse d’une solution aux épreuves pubertaires.”

⁴⁷ Grami and Arfaoui, *Les femmes et le terrorisme: étude genre*.

Women and socialization to violence

As mentioned previously, some women do take on combat or active roles in violent extremist groups active in Tunisia. In these exceptional roles, women can play the same role as men on the field and convey the same messages of hatred and extermination. These women want to be heroines and female fighters, either succeeding or suffering in the effort.⁴⁸ They mention “the increasingly important role they play in operation areas and their participation in violent acts.”⁴⁹ Some scholars discuss these women’s apparent ‘fascination’ with violence.

Speculation exists that such women are vectors of violence, encouraging their sons and husbands in violence. Some experts argue that that women are tougher than men are; the “hardness” of radicalized women is far from traditional gender stereotypes we have previously encountered. Tunisian counter-terrorism authorities have noted this finding: “These women were ... very committed to their causes and extremely radical, sometimes much more than men in the same situation. These women were much tougher and much more resilient during interrogations than men.”⁵⁰ This perceived hardness and toughness could be the contrast to acceptable gender norms, or the need for women to ‘prove’ their ability in the face of skepticism from male peers.

Given the economic differences between men and women outlined above, economic factors may play a role in the recruitment of young women and men to violent extremist groups. Young people who reject society due to a lack of economic and social justice are not only young men and women from lower class backgrounds who live in poor suburbs areas of large cities. Many middle class children and working-class people in Tunisia desperate, they share hopes of a brighter future and social betterment. This tendency

⁴⁸ Khosrokhavar, “Le djihad au féminin.”

⁴⁹ Hamza, “Femmes jihadistes, actrices à part entière ou simples victimes?” 12.

⁵⁰ Oxfam and UN Women, “Penser le genre dans les réponse à l’extrémisme violent en Tunisie.”

seems to have spurred from the economic crisis in 1984, in addition to the effects of inflation, the rise of unemployment and the rampant deterioration of purchasing power.⁵¹

According to the few cases discussed here, women who are charged with terrorism are, in general, from lower middle class or working-class backgrounds (even if they have an above average level education such as a university degree). In an article published in newspaper *Le Monde*: "Among the middle classes, the political referent has undergone a major crisis since the 1980s and an entire generation has been formed that no longer bases its identity on this event. For some, jihadism is the consequence of the failure of politics as a collective project that brings hope."⁵²

State actions in counter terrorism may also play a role in women's and men's socialization to violence. The study of Douar Hicher and Hay Ettadhamen illustrates that there is an atmosphere of resentment when it comes to police violence and corruption. The relationship between the population and the police occupies a central position in the perception of the role of the state, especially among the working classes. There is thus a significant gap between citizens and the state, which is accentuated in semi urban areas controlled by police and where violence is more frequent.⁵³

As a response to state actions and neglect, young people, including women, seek a 'just' state; which many they believe they can find in the 'Islamic State', the latter represents for them a state of purity. Which could have been any Muslim country had applied the

⁵¹ Wafa Samoud, "L'ITES s'inquiète: La classe moyenne tunisienne s'appauvrit de plus en plus" [ITES is concerned: Tunisia's middle class is getting poorer and poorer], Huffpost Maghreb, 21 December 2018, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/lites-sinquiete-la-classe-moyenne-tunisienne-sappauvrit-de-plus-en-plus_mg_5c1cce3ce4b0407e90799a32

⁵² Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Expliquer la radicalisation: portrait-robot d'un terroriste 'maison'" [Explain radicalisation: sketch of a 'home' terrorist], *Le Monde Afrique*, 15 July 2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/07/15/expliquer-la-radicalisation-portrait-robot-d-un-terroriste-maison_4970244_3212.html

⁵³ Oxfam and UN Women, "Penser le genre dans les réponse à l'extrémisme violent en Tunisie."

'Sharia' to the perceptions of God. They attribute this injustice to a modern state modelled on Western society. Engaging with brothers and sisters in this fight for a just, not corrupt, and not western state, is a duty in the eyes of their religion according to an extremist interpretation of certain verses of the Qur'an.

Women's socialization to violence occurs inside violent extremist groups through role adoption. In Tunisia, some women operate alone or in groups controlled by men, under the influence of social networks, among groups of men as activists, or as liaison and enforcement officers. Each of these women is given a task whether it be minimal or highly important. There are those who go to Syria as 'recruiters'. They send e-mails, maintain blogs, and give an idyllic picture of 'mujahids' (jihad fighters) wives in Syria. Sometimes, once there, the 'muhajirat' (immigrants) marry Europeans who join the ranks of jihadist fighters in Syria. This raises the question of the evolution of the relationship between jihadist culture and women; specifically, in relation to the developing needs of the field, that attributes more responsibilities, commitment and decision-making to women.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

For Governments

- More primary research is needed on: violent extremism's links to social and political inequality and marginalization; specialized research on P/ CVE with a focus on vulnerable groups, especially women; the creation of focus groups, interviews and discussion reinforced by quantitative surveys in regions and neighborhoods most affected by violent extremism. It seems as if there is a spread of violent extremism ideology across different geographical locations likely related to the specific region's history, but more research is needed.

- Government protection of vulnerable groups is required comprising: a strategy to provide vulnerable communities, including youth and women; prioritize education courses on equal rights; emphasize the creation of jobs for both sexes and employ regionally specific development strategies, taking into consideration the different experiences of men and women.
- The government should “develop a more coordinated anti-terrorist policy in Maghreb, Arab and European countries.”⁵⁴
- The government needs to prioritize funding and target programs to regions, population groups and age groups that are most vulnerable to violent extremism, from a strong evidence base.

For Media

- Social media messaging: creative engagement with home grown and foreign violent extremist websites is needed. Bans and alternative messaging and platforms need careful planning.
- Stakeholders should engage emerging social media influencers and actors in the production of a new discussion on current topics, whether religious or not.
- Related to government accountability and programming above, it is essential to make adaptations to the demands of citizens moving away from direct political participation and towards democratic expression and new forms of participation.
- Promote political participation and engagement. It is imperative to raise media awareness of the necessity of producing content that contributes to the fight against violent extremism, in order to dissect radicalized religious and secular discourses. In particular, young women’s voices need to be emphasized.
- Future research should look at messaging on social

media from a gender perspective

- Further research needs to look at the impact of internet recruitment on men and women.

For Civil Society

- Inclusion and empowerment of women by: empowering civil society organizations to create and facilitate partnerships between and within organizations at regional, national and/or local levels.
- There need to be more platforms for dialogue for information exchange, sharing experiences, organizing meetings, and advocating for the values of tolerance, sharing and inclusion.
- More training is needed to for civil society and women leaders on counter narratives and alternative solutions.
- There needs to be more funding of civil society organizations, especially women’s-based organizations.
- Women’s organizations and civil society need to be included in intersectional common strategies to combat violent extremism.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed seven variables affecting men and women’s radicalization: gender, age, marital status, education status, discipline and profession. Age, gender and marital status had some correlations. Most importantly, the overwhelming number of those convicted of terrorism were men, making it a highly gendered phenomenon.

Drawing together demographic data with secondary data analyzed some of the processes of socialization. While primary socialization is a crucial vector of radicalization, socialization through religious and educational institutions emerged as important factors. For women in particular, marriage—including both forced marriage and the search for an ideal

⁵⁴ Hamza, “Femmes jihadistes, actrices à part entière ou simples victimes?” 19.

husband in the face of economic insecurity—appears to drive some women to join such groups. Finally, it is clear that gendered role adoption, that is, different roles for men and women in violent extremist groups, socializes Tunisian women to particular forms of violence, including supporting and endorsing violent acts, but more research on former female members is required to fully flesh out this conclusion.

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