

Study finds female american jihadists share many of the same roles as their male counterparts

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A first-of-its-kind study examining the roles of American jihadi women found a steep increase in women's participation in terrorist activity in the last five years. Within the wider movement, American women served three main roles: plotters, supporters, and travelers. The study examined 25 cases from January 2011 – September 2016.

"This report refutes the misconception that [women](#) are naively duped into participation or are depraved instigators of violence," said Audrey Alexander, a research fellow at the GW Program on Extremism and author of the paper. "By presenting comprehensive accounts of female jihadist activities, we can see that they are an evolving threat even though they are not the most prominent or visible proponents of jihadi ideology."

Similar to a December 2015 [report](#) from the program that examined ISIS sympathizers in the U.S., the study, "[Cruel Intentions: Female Jihadists in America](#)," found that there is no discernible profile of a female American jihadist. Individuals range in location, age, education, and organization they support.

Using legal documents, [social media](#) accounts, news reports, jihadi propaganda and official press releases, the research identified three key roles that women play in terrorist organizations:

- Plotters: design, attempt or carry out domestic attacks
- Supporters: garner material support within U.S. borders, disseminate propaganda or conceal information about impending threats to advance the agenda of jihadist groups
- Travelers: migrate in order to participate in the movement directly

The report noted that while few female American jihadists appear to act alone or conduct violent plots, many support activities in pairs and trios and with friends, siblings and romantic partners. They are active online and offline, but social media is an especially common medium for women to use.

"The increasing involvement of women in jihadi groups is a global phenomenon," said Lorenzo Vidino, director of the GW Program on Extremism. "Even though women rarely perpetrate violence, their diverse contributions advance and sustain the jihadi movement in the U.S. and abroad."

The report concludes by noting that it is important for policymakers to offer alternatives to arrest and emphasizes that de-radicalization and prevention are necessary steps to countering [violent extremism](#) by women, particularly in instances where individuals engage with the ideology but do not break the law or become violent.

Provided by George Washington University

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