

Why women go to war – new study reveals motivations of female militia fighters

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Women militia fighters make a positive choice to join combat units and are motivated by similar factors to male fighters, according to a new study by Dr. Jennifer Philippa Eggert of the University of Warwick's

Department of Politics and International Studies, which draws on the experiences of women fighters in Lebanon to challenge current theories about female fighters.

Based on interviews with former combatants and activists, Dr. Eggert's findings:

- Challenge existing theories that women are coerced or conned into joining militias. In Lebanon women actively chose to fight, to the point of setting up their own combat units if they were not welcomed in the main militia, and had to defy family and social expectations to do so.
- Challenge current thinking that women are less politically-motivated than men. Women were mainly motivated by political and ideological reasons, not personal factors – just as men were. While a small proportion of the women interviewed by Dr. Eggert were motivated by a desire for adventure and to fight for gender equality, the majority were motivated by the wish to defend their communities and fight against an unjust political system.
- Challenge the view that women are more motivated to join organisations that fight for women's equality. Women fought both in militias pledged to overturning traditional gender roles, and in those which remained committed to traditional gender expectations.

Dr. Eggert's paper, *Female Fighters and Militants during the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways and Motivations*, is one of only a handful of studies looking at why women took part in the Lebanese civil war as fighters: most accounts of the war focus on men's roles during the war, as is the case in most conflict and post-conflict contexts worldwide.

The study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL), is the first to explore the motivations of women within all the major militias.

In the course of her research Dr. Eggert interviewed former fighters on both the left and the right, including Christian, Shia, Druze, Palestinian and socialist groups.

She found that women fighters were typically aged from mid-teens to mid-twenties and unmarried, and that women were more likely to join a militia if they had relatives already fighting, or a history of non-violent activism.

Women on all sides of the conflict reported a sense of duty to fight as a response to the political situation:– "Our parents hadn't raised us to go to war. It was the war that made us that way...we were obliged."

Some women, particularly from more conservative backgrounds, defied family expectations in order to enrol:– "when a young woman decides to go to war, she will not ask her parents."

While women were motivated to join both gender-conservative and gender-open militias, the degree to which they were welcomed depended on the militia's views on the role of women. Militias on the left had a greater proportion of female combatants – around 15 percent in militias of the far left, compared to less than half that in Kataeb and the Lebanese Front (LF).

Dr. Eggert suggests this may be because left-wing activists were more committed to gender equality than the right and already had a track record of including women in activism; or because there were more female fighters acting as role-models on the left, encouraging others to

follow their example.

Commenting on her research, Dr. Eggert said: "Women tend to be seen as victims or peacemakers rather than supporters or perpetrators of violence.

"My study challenges this view. It stresses that [women](#) were involved as fighters in nearly all of the major militias in the war.

"What makes this study unique is that it takes the situation in all key militias into account—unlike previous studies which have mostly focused on Christian and/or Palestinian armed groups.

"I am really excited the study is out now."

More information: Jennifer Philippa Eggert. Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1529353](#)

Provided by University of Warwick

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