

Women in Extremist Networks: Their Power, Authority, and "Alpha Female" Roles

Zora A. Sukabdi*

Graduate School of Sustainable Development, Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100601027>

Received: 22 June 2026; Accepted: 27 June 2026; Published: 10 July 2026

ABSTRACT

Women's participation in violent extremist networks has frequently been depicted through narratives of victimization, coercion, or passive endorsement. This article contests reductionist narratives by analyzing female agency and authority within extremist networks in Indonesia. Utilizing qualitative analysis of seven female profiles obtained from law enforcement and case documents, the study examines the extent and manner in which women exert influence beyond conventional supportive roles. Employing an analytically grounded definition of 'alpha female' (female actors who exert ideological influence, relational authority, and/or operational facilitation, and shape the behavior or commitment of others beyond traditional supportive roles), the findings indicate significant variation in women's roles. The study delineates three specific categories: (1) dependent subject whose engagement was ideologically committed yet non-influential; (2) partial alpha females (facilitative/amplificatory), and (3) full alpha females (ideological or mobilizational) who influence or direct others' involvement. The results show that women can be key players in extremist networks by teaching, organizing, and providing infrastructure. These findings improve Bloom's gendered pathways by showing that female agency can progress from relational alignment to autonomous authority. They build on Pearson's distinction between participation and authority by empirically describing how influence manifests in ideological and infrastructural domains. The concept of the alpha female thus serves as a typological tool for distinguishing between influence and involvement. Recognizing varied types of female authority has immediate ramifications for counter-extremism strategy: ignoring women's network-shaping responsibilities risks misidentifying important points of mobilization and ideological replication. This article, therefore, may help in enhancing the comprehension of women's roles in extremism, thereby providing insights for gender-sensitive counter-extremism research and policy.

Keywords: Terrorism; extremism; women; violence; psychology; alpha female

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been more interest around the world in the role of women in violent extremist movements. This is a change from the usual stories that show women as passive supporters, victims, or followers.¹ The global terrorism landscape is constantly changing. Extremist groups are now working across borders and using new ways to recruit members and spread their message, especially through digital platforms. Extremist organizations like the Islamic State (ISIS) have exhibited considerable growth in both their geographical scope and organizational complexity, leading to a resurgence of interest in comprehending the various modalities of participation within these networks.² This changing environment prompts essential

¹ Emma Yarrow, "Gendering Security: The Roles of Young Women and Girls in Terrorism and in Countering Violent Extremism", in Greenbaum, Charles W., Haj-Yahia, Muhammad M., and Hamilton, Carolyn (Eds.), *Handbook of Political Violence and Children: Psychosocial Effects, Intervention, and Prevention Policy*, 2021, pp.541–68.

² Jamille Bigio and Rachel B. Vogelstein, "Women and Terrorism", Council on Foreign Relations, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/reports/women-and-terrorism> [Last seen 23.06.2026]; Gega Ryani Cahya Kurnia BP and Zora A. Sukabdi, "Salience Identity of Women in Terrorism", 7(2) "Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies", 2021, p.135.

inquiries regarding the interplay of gender with authority, agency, and influence in extremist settings.

News coverage and policy analyses reflect this evolving threat environment. For example, NATO continues to emphasize the importance of shared awareness and strategic counterterrorism efforts among member states, highlighting that contemporary extremist threats remain dynamic and multi-faceted.³ Concurrently, violent extremist groups persist in destabilizing regions such as the Sahel, contributing to sustained insecurity in multiple countries.⁴ These global developments underscore the urgency of examining how individuals, regardless of gender, participate and influence extremist networks.

Although academic studies have frequently recorded women's participation in violent movements, recent research introduces complexities to oversimplified narratives. Women have taken on roles that go beyond traditional domestic or supportive roles to include recruitment, propaganda, and operational support. For instance, in the case of ISIS, it has been noted that female recruits play a role in keeping morale high, helping people move to conflict zones, and even running online communities.⁵ These changes make it harder to see gender roles in extremism in black and white terms. They also show that we need more complex ideas that take into account different kinds of power and influence.

Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, represents a critical context for studying extremist networks, particularly concerning female agency. Historically, Indonesia has experienced sustained activity by militant organizations such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), which have been implicated in high-profile attacks and ongoing radicalization efforts. Such trends echo global patterns but are embedded within Indonesia's unique socio-cultural and political landscape. Moreover, the academic literature documents that Indonesian women's participation in extremist networks has expanded beyond peripheral roles to include operational involvement, including recruitment, financing, and online propaganda, for example in the case of Dian Yulia Novi and the Surabaya family bombers.⁶ They are motivated by the promise of heaven and interpretation of jihad, the search for identity, the experience of discrimination/violence, economy, the narratives of oppression against ummah, and the inspiration of previous "women jihadists".⁷ Women are recruited through marriage and control by their husbands or groups, but they also utilize the language of gender equality to get

<https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v7i2.10407>; Lydia Khalil, "Behind the Veil: Women in Jihad after the Caliphate", Lowy Institute, 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/behind-veil-women-jihad-after-caliphate> [Last seen 23.06.2026].

³ NATO, "Countering Terrorism", <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/countering-terrorism> [Last seen 23.06.2026].

⁴ Security Council Report, "West Africa and the Sahel", <http://securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2025-04/west-africa-and-the-sahel-14.php> [Last seen 23.06.2026].

⁵ Khalil, cf. Footnote 2

⁶ Udji Asiyah, Ratna Azis Prasetyo, and Sudjak Sudjak, "Jihad Perempuan dan Terorisme", 14(1) "Jurnal Sosiologi Agama", 2020, p.199, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2020.141-08>; Ahmad Atabik and Moh Muhtador, "Jihad and Interpretation of Religious Texts on Female Terrorists in Indonesia", 11(1) "QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)", 2023, p.1, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v11i1.16342>; Luq Yana Chaerunnisa and Khoiruddin Nasution, "Bina Damai Keterlibatan Perempuan dalam Aksi Terorisme: Pendekatan Interdisipliner dan Multidisipliner", 4(1) "Dirasat Islamiah: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman", 2025, pp.57–66, <https://doi.org/10.56324/drs.v4i1.32>; Kate Macfarlane, "Indonesian Women and Terrorism: An Analysis of Historical and Contemporary Trends", 12 "Politics and Governance", 2024, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.7724>; Aulya Nanda Permana, "Empowered by Extremes: Indonesian Women in Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Jemaah Ansharut Daulat (JAD)", 2(4) "Security Intelligence Terrorism Journal", 2025, pp. 402–8, <https://doi.org/10.70710/sitj.v2i4.76>.

⁷ Nur Kasanah, "Perempuan dalam Jerat Terorisme: Analisis Motivasi Pelaku Bom Bunuh Diri di Indonesia", 2(2) "Indonesian Journal of Gender Studies (IJouGS)", 2021, <https://doi.org/10.21154/ijougs.v2i2.3242>; Dhestina Religia Mujahid, "Pergeseran Peran Perempuan dalam Aksi Terorisme di Indonesia", 9(2) "Jurnal Studi Gender dan Anak", 2023, pp.127–48, <https://doi.org/10.32678/jsga.v9i02.6940>; Chelsea Amelia Purba and Muhamad Syaquillah, "Analisis Kausalitas dan Probabilitas Faktor Penyebab Terorisme Perempuan dan Anak: Korban atau Pelaku?", 4(4) "IJD-Demos", 2022, <https://doi.org/10.37950/ijd.v4i4.344>; Sityi Maesarotul Qori'ah, "Keterlibatan Perempuan dalam Aksi Terorisme di Indonesia", 14(1) "Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender", 2019, p.31, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v14i1.2967>; Jodi Quanandi, Susaningtyas N.H. Kertopati, and Fauzia Gustarina Cempaka Timur, "Keterlibatan dan Pola Pergerakan Teroris Perempuan dalam Jaringan Terorisme di Indonesia", 5(2) "Journal of Education, Humaniora and Social Sciences", 2022, pp.1189–99, <https://doi.org/10.34007/jehss.v5i2.1356>; Januarti Lista Rita Yanti, "Keterlibatan Perempuan sebagai Pelaku Utama dalam Aksi Terorisme di Kawasan Asia Tenggara", 9(1) "Jurnal PIR: Power in International Relations", 2024, pp.89–99, <https://doi.org/10.22303/pir.v9i1.92>.

women to join the fight.⁸ Hence, counter-extremism strategies in Indonesia are increasingly acknowledging the necessity of incorporating gender dimensions into prevention and rehabilitation initiatives. The National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) and the Ministry for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection are two examples of national frameworks and public institutions that have put in place rules and programs to stop radicalization and protect vulnerable groups, such as women and children.⁹ These initiatives demonstrate a policy recognition that gender dynamics significantly influence recruitment and retention processes within extremist environments. Additionally, law enforcement data and criminal justice records show that more women have been involved in extremist activities in the past few years. For example, academic research indicates a rise in women's involvement in both support and operational capacities within JI and JAD networks.¹⁰ Other writings point out specific cases of violence against women,¹¹ which makes it even harder to understand what women do in terrorism. These changes make Indonesia a very important place for real-world research on women's power in extremist situations.

Despite growing recognition of women's roles in extremist movements, several gaps persist in the academic and policy literature. First, much of the literature focuses on female participation in extremist organizations at a descriptive level, often emphasizing either victimization or support roles without adequately theorizing distinct levels of authority and influence. Second, few studies systematically differentiate between supportive engagement and actual empowerment, or authority exercised by women within extremist networks. Third, existing research often lacks frameworks that capture the multidimensional nature of female agency, including ideological influence, operational facilitation, and relational authority.

Although scholars like Bloom¹² have detailed gendered pathways to radicalization and Pearson¹³ has highlighted female authority in extremist movements, there remains a need to empirically and theoretically integrate these strands into a cohesive analytical framework. Moreover, Berger's¹⁴ conception of extremism as a socially embedded belief system provides an important lens for understanding how communication, network structure, and social influence shape radicalization; yet this has not been fully applied to the study of women in extremist contexts. Addressing these gaps is essential for refining our understanding of how women contribute to and shape extremist ideologies and actions. This study introduces the term 'Alpha Female' to describe women who hold ideological influence, authority, and operational control within extremist networks. Its conceptual definition is a female actor within extremist networks who exerts significant ideological influence, relational authority, and/or operational facilitation and shapes the behavior, commitment, or actions of other members beyond traditional supportive roles. Hence, authority in this study is understood as influence, not formal rank.

This study seeks to address the following research questions: 1) To what extent do women within extremist networks exercise agency beyond traditional supportive roles? 2) What forms of authority (ideological, relational, or operational) do female actors exhibit in extremist contexts? 3) How can an analytical typology

⁸ Priscilla Harjanti, Margaretha Hanita, and Eko Daryanto, "Mengintegrasikan Peran Gender Dalam Analisis Intelijen Strategis: Partisipasi Perempuan Dalam Kelompok Teroris Di Indonesia", 8(7) "Syntax Literate: Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia", 2023, p. 4771–4783, <https://doi.org/10.36418/syntax-literate.v8i7.12849>; Sakti Ritonga, Faisal Riza, Muhammad Jailani, and Ahmed Fernanda Desky, "Keluarga Muslim, Perempuan dan Radikalisme di Sumatera Utara", 11(1) "Turast: Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengabdian", 2023, pp.63–85, <https://doi.org/10.15548/turast.v11i1.5730>; Yanti, cf. Footnote 7.

⁹ Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak Republik Indonesia, "Kemen PPPA Perkuat Koordinasi dan Dorong Implementasi Pedoman Teknis Perlindungan Anak dari Jaringan Terorisme", <https://kemenpppa.go.id/index.php/siaran-pers/kemen-pppa-perkuat-koordinasi-dan-dorong-implementasi-pedoman-teknis-perlindungan-anak-dari-jaringan-terorisme> [Last seen 23.06.2026].

¹⁰ Permana, cf. Footnote 6

¹¹ Muhammad Najib Azca and Rani Dwi Putri, "Perempuan dan Peran Regenerasi dalam Lingkaran Ekstremisme Kekerasan: Narasi dari Indonesia Timur", 15(2) "Jurnal Sosiologi Agama", 2021, p. 281, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2021.152-08>; Mujahid, cf. Footnote 7; Dyah Aryati Nugraha Ningsih, Fauzia Gustarina Cempaka Timur, and Rudy Sutanto, "The Role of Women in Organizations Terrorism: Gender Dynamics in the Context of Ideology and Violence", 3(5) "Formosa Journal of Multidisciplinary Research", 2024, pp.1507–22, <https://doi.org/10.55927/fjmr.v3i5.9527>.

¹² Mia Bloom, "Bombshell: Women and Terrorism", University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

¹³ Elizabeth Pearson, "Extremism and Toxic Masculinity: The Man Question Re-Posed", 95(6) "International Affairs", 2019, p.1251–70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz177>.

¹⁴ J.M. Berger, "Extremism", MIT Press, 2018.

differentiate between varying forms of female influence within extremist networks? The primary objective of this research is to develop a nuanced typology of female agency and authority within extremist movements, grounded in empirical analysis of documented cases. By doing so, the study aims to move beyond reductive characterizations of women as passive or ancillary participants and instead highlight the complex ways in which women influence network dynamics and radicalization processes. Nonetheless, this study does not aim to generalize prevalence or represent all female extremists, but to refine analytical distinctions of authority and agency.

This research contributes to the literature in three keyways. First, it advances theoretical understanding by integrating gendered pathways to extremism¹⁵, female authority frameworks, and networked belief systems¹⁶ into a unified analytical model. This synthesis allows for a more comprehensive account of how female actors exercise influence within extremist networks. Second, the study offers empirical specificity by examining documented profiles of women involved in extremist activities in Indonesia, a context that has received comparatively limited scholarly attention relative to Western cases. This focus on Southeast Asia adds critical diversity to the literature on terrorism and gender. Third, by distinguishing between supportive roles and authority positions, the research clarifies conceptual ambiguities and assists policymakers and practitioners in devising gender-sensitive interventions. Understanding female agency in extremism is crucial for effective counter-radicalization and rehabilitation efforts.

Reframing Women's Roles in Terrorism

The evolving role of women in terrorism challenges long-standing assumptions that frame them solely as passive victims or peripheral supporters. Across contemporary research, including Veronika¹⁷, Chaerunnisa and Hakim¹⁸, and Ningsih et al.¹⁹, it is evident that women's involvement in terrorism is complex, multifaceted, and shaped by ideological, socio-political, and gendered dynamics. Historically, women were perceived as secondary actors in terrorist movements, primarily fulfilling supportive roles such as logistics, caregiving, or ideological reinforcement within families. However, recent developments, particularly with the rise of transnational extremist groups such as ISIS, have transformed these roles significantly. Women are now increasingly involved as recruiters, propagandists, intelligence gatherers, and even direct perpetrators of violence, including suicide bombings. This shift reflects not only strategic adaptations by terrorist organizations but also changing socio-political contexts that enable or compel women's participation.

Veronika²⁰ highlights how policy frameworks often fail to capture this complexity due to the persistence of gender stereotypes. Women involved in terrorism are frequently portrayed as "poor," "brainwashed," or "immature," which obscures their agency and reduces their motivations to simplistic explanations. These stereotypes influence counterterrorism (CT) and preventing violent extremism (PVE) policies, leading to ineffective interventions that focus narrowly on economic assistance or psychological rehabilitation. While such factors may play a role, they do not fully explain why women engage in extremist activities.

Similarly, Chaerunnisa and Hakim²¹ emphasize that women's involvement in terrorism cannot be attributed to a single cause. Instead, it is driven by a combination of ideological, political, economic, and personal factors. For instance, ideological commitment and the search for meaning or identity often intersect with grievances such as social injustice, political marginalization, and economic hardship. These factors create conditions conducive to radicalization, particularly when reinforced by strong belief systems and group dynamics. Importantly, the

¹⁵ Bloom, cf. Footnote 12.

¹⁶ Berger, cf. Footnote 14.

¹⁷ N.W. Veronika, "Poor, Brainwashed and Immature: Prevalent Gender Stereotypes in Indonesian Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and Counterterrorism (CT) Efforts", 18(1) "Critical Studies on Terrorism", 2025

¹⁸ Luq Yana Chaerunnisa and Muhammad Alif Hakim, "Women and Terrorism: An Interdisciplinary Study of Peace Building Education", 8(1) "At-Tarbawi: Jurnal Kajian Kependidikan Islam", 2023

¹⁹ Ningsih et al., cf. Footnote 11

²⁰ Veronika cf Footnote 17

²¹ Chaerunnisa and Hakim cf. Footnote 18

authors also highlight the role of family and kinship networks in recruiting women, suggesting that radicalization often occurs within intimate social environments rather than through formal organizational channels.

Ningsih et al.²² further expand this analysis by examining gender dynamics within terrorist organizations. From a feminist security studies perspective, the authors argue that women's roles are shaped by patriarchal structures that both constrain and enable their participation. On one hand, women are often subordinated within these organizations, assigned roles that reinforce traditional gender norms such as caregiving or supporting male fighters. On the other hand, these same structures can be strategically manipulated to expand women's participation, particularly in roles that exploit gender stereotypes, such as intelligence gathering or suicide attacks, where women are less likely to arouse suspicion.

The intersection of gender and ideology is particularly significant in understanding women's involvement in terrorism. Radical ideologies not only justify violence but also redefine gender roles in ways that legitimize women's participation. For example, ISIS propaganda reframes women's involvement as a religious duty, encouraging them to contribute to the establishment of a "caliphate" through both domestic and militant roles. This ideological framing provides women with a sense of purpose, identity, and empowerment, even as it reinforces restrictive gender norms.

At the same time, the concept of agency must be carefully examined. While some women actively choose to participate in terrorism, others are coerced, manipulated, or influenced by structural inequalities and social pressures. Veronika²³ introduces the idea of "hostile pious agency" to describe how women can simultaneously exercise agency and operate within restrictive ideological frameworks. This concept challenges the binary distinction between victimhood and agency, highlighting the need for more nuanced analyses that account for the complex interplay of individual choice and structural constraints.

Another critical dimension is the role of social construction in shaping perceptions of women in terrorism. Gender norms and cultural expectations influence not only women's participation but also how their actions are interpreted by society and policymakers. As Ningsih et al.²⁴ argue, gender is socially constructed through interactions and institutional practices, which can reinforce stereotypes and inequalities. In the context of terrorism, this means that women's actions are often interpreted through a gendered lens, leading to biases in both media representation and policy responses. These biases have significant implications for counterterrorism strategies. Policies that rely on stereotypical assumptions about women's roles are likely to be ineffective or even counterproductive. For example, framing women primarily as victims may lead to lenient legal responses that fail to hold perpetrators accountable, while also overlooking the risk of recidivism. Conversely, ignoring the structural factors that contribute to women's radicalization may result in overly punitive approaches that do not address the root causes of extremism.

To address these challenges, a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach is needed. Chaerunnisa and Hakim²⁵ advocate for peacebuilding strategies that integrate psychological, socio-cultural, economic, legal, and political dimensions. Such approaches should not only focus on deradicalization but also on prevention, community engagement, and empowerment. Importantly, they should recognize women as both potential perpetrators and agents of peace, capable of contributing to counter-extremism efforts.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research design

This study adopted a qualitative analytical typology approach, rather than a prevalence-based or explanatory causal design. The objective was theory generation and conceptual refinement, not statistical generalization. The

²² Ningsih et al., cf. Footnote 11

²³ Veronika. cf. Footnote 17

²⁴ Ningsih et al., cf. Footnote 11

²⁵ Chaerunnisa and Hakim cf. Footnote 18

research focused on identifying and differentiating forms of female agency and authority within extremist networks through in-depth comparative case analysis. Rather than asking how many women occupy leadership roles, the study asks how authority is exercised by women in extremist ecosystems and under what conditions such authority emerges. This approach is consistent with prior qualitative research on extremism, gender, and networked radicalization.

Case selection

The study examined all female cases (seven cases) drawn from a total of 1100 terrorism offenders (male and female) acknowledged/documentated by Indonesian law enforcement and judicial authorities between 2017 and 2026 (i.e., investigation reports/BAPs, autobiographical writings, psychological assessments, and official records). The seven female individuals were included in the analysis based on documented involvement in tangible terrorist activities as acknowledged by law enforcement authorities. These cases show: 1) confirmed involvement in extremist networks (e.g., ISIS, JAD, NII-affiliated milieus); 2) availability of rich qualitative documentation (investigation reports, psychological assessments, autobiographical statements); and variation in roles, levels of engagement, and outcomes (non-violent, operational, ideological, mobilizational). The data are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions and confidentiality agreements.

Data collection and analysis

The analysis is based exclusively on secondary qualitative data, including police investigation reports (BAPs), psychological assessments conducted during detention, autobiographical narratives and interrogation transcripts, official court and correctional records, and digital trace evidence documented by law enforcement (e.g., Telegram, WhatsApp, Facebook activity). All data were accessed through documented legal and forensic records. All personal identifiers were removed, and the subjects' names were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

The study introduces the concept of alpha female as an analytical category, not a biological, hierarchical, or normative label. An alpha female is defined as: *A female actor within extremist networks who exerts ideological influence, relational authority, and/or operational facilitation, and demonstrably shapes the behavior, commitment, or actions of other members beyond traditional supportive roles.* Importantly, the framework does not require all three dimensions to be present simultaneously. Authority may be exercised through one dominant domain (e.g., operational mobilization) or across multiple domains.

The analysis employed thematic narrative analysis combined with comparative case analysis. Each case was coded along three analytically defined dimensions, mainly:

1. Ideological influence: a) teaching, framing, interpreting, or legitimizing extremist ideology; and b) producing or curating doctrinal content beyond mere consumption.
2. Relational authority: a) ability to influence decisions, compliance, or commitment of others; and b) leadership within family, gender-segregated groups, or community networks.
3. Operational facilitation: a) managing communication infrastructure; b) coordinating propaganda dissemination; and c) mobilizing resources, logistics, or recruitment.

A case was classified as: a) full alpha female if influence was sustained and network-shaping, b) partial/operational alpha female if authority was limited to facilitation or amplification, and c) non-alpha if involvement remained individual, dependent, or non-influential. To enhance analytical rigor, 1) triangulation was conducted across multiple data types per case, 2) preliminary classifications were reviewed through expert consultation with four forensic psychologists familiar with extremist casework (inter-rater judgment), and 3) an audit trail was maintained documenting coding decisions. This study does not claim statistical representativeness. Instead, it aims for analytical validity, conceptual clarity, and theoretical contribution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Maya

Psychological profile

When examined, Maya (aged 24) had intellectual functioning below the average range for her age group (IQ score = 55 on the CFIT scale). This classifies as severe intellectual disability. Psychological testing on her using the MMPI-II-RF yielded invalid results and therefore could not be interpreted. Her psychological profile suggested limited responsiveness, somewhat exaggerated reporting, emotional immaturity, instability, rigid thinking patterns, and lack of focus. No indications of anxiety or depression were found, with anxiety and depression scores of 0.9 and 1.2 respectively on the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist. However, she demonstrated impaired self-awareness and mild religious delusional ideation, though without hallucinations or severe psychotic delusions that disrupt consciousness.

Early life and family background

Maya was born in Jakarta. She was the fourth of five siblings, all her older siblings being male. Her youngest sibling died at age 15 due to drowning during a religious boarding school program in Yogyakarta. She described limited communication with her older brothers due to the age gap. Her father (aged 65) previously worked as a scrap dealer and was perceived as kind but emotionally distant and prone to anger due to hypertension. Her mother (aged 60) was described as affectionate and caring. Maya felt closer to her mother. Her parents separated when she was in elementary school (between Grade 3 and 6). Her father later remarried and had additional children. Maya reported feelings of sadness and emotional neglect due to her father's absence and perceived indifference.

Education and adolescence

Maya began elementary school in 2004. She described herself as active in scouting and social play but academically unremarkable. She disliked mathematics and had no favorite subjects. In 2010, she attended an Islamic junior high school, chosen by her mother. She joined volleyball extracurricular activities and began frequently using her phone for chatting. She started dating during junior high school and later described these relationships as sinful, generating guilt and shame. In 2013, she entered vocational high school majoring in tourism/hospitality, primarily because her friends chose that path. She joined a youth scientific group and an Islamic spiritual organization (*Rohani Islam*). She completed a six-month internship in Malaysia in 2016.

Initial religious involvement and recruitment

In early 2015, Maya began attending religious study circles (*kajian tahfidz*), reportedly invited by a classmate. The studies were led by Mr. F and later by others. Topics included monotheism (*Tauhid*), knowledge of God (*ma'rifatullah*), knowledge of knowledge, and knowledge of the Prophet. She actively donated between 500,000 and 1,000,000 rupiah during this period. She initially claimed not to know that the group was affiliated with the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII), an underground Islamist organization seeking to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. In 2016, she participated in a *bai'at* (oath of allegiance) ceremony in Bogor led by Mr. B. At that time, she became aware that the group was NII, although she claimed she did not know it was banned. She was incorporated into the female branch (*akhwat*) structure of the Koja district. She attended regular religious meetings in members' homes and at a local mosque. Within the group, she was embedded in a structured network under designated leaders.

Marriage and Increasing Religious Commitment

In 2017, at age 19, Maya married Bubu (aged 29), also a participant in the same study circle. They had two daughters (born in 2019 and 2021). They lived with Maya's mother. Maya worked from 2018 to 2021, though details of her employment remained unclear. After giving birth to her second child, she stopped working and became a full-time homemaker. Her daily routine included early morning prayers, childcare, and religious

consumption via YouTube sermons by prominent Indonesian preachers. Marital conflict escalated after 2019, often centered on childcare issues. By mid-2022, her husband had left the home, though he continued financial support. In 2022, she declared herself divorced after her husband allegedly pronounced divorce three times. She believed continuing to live together would constitute adultery under Islamic law. Her mother advised remarriage (renewed *ijab qabul*), but Maya refused.

Escalation toward violent extremism

According to her mother, Maya began claiming she was a prophetic successor tasked with enforcing full implementation of Islamic law. She became increasingly neglectful of her children and withdrawn. On October 18, 2022, Maya attempted to reach the Presidential Palace in Jakarta via motorcycle taxi but was turned back. On October 20, she returned but was denied entry due to the late hour. On October 25, 2022, she again traveled to the Presidential Palace. She had retrieved firearms and ammunition from her uncle's home (a retired naval officer). Upon arrival, she pointed a firearm (FN type pistol) at Presidential Security Forces, claiming she wanted to deliver *da'wah* (religious admonition) to President Jokowi, whom she believed had failed to fully implement Islamic law. She was arrested carrying a firearm, magazine, and ammunition. She acknowledged wrongdoing but did not express remorse, asserting that her intention was religious preaching. A search of her home uncovered multiple air guns, ammunition, CO₂ cartridges, and sharp weapons. During detention, she reportedly attacked an investigator by choking him when pretending to go to the restroom.

Analysis on Maya case

She did not fully meet the criteria of an “alpha female” within extremist networks. While she demonstrated strong ideological conviction, autonomous operational action, willingness to use violence, and moral absolutism, she lacked documented ideological leadership over others, relational authority within the network hierarchy, and operational facilitation of collective action. Maya was portrayed as a strongly ideological, obedient individual willing to take extreme measures (including operational readiness), but her role was individual and reactive, not relational or structural. Evidence from documents shows that Maya received direction, not gave it, and her involvement occurred in the context of obedience to a male authority figure (husband/network). In terms of ideological influence, there is no evidence of recruiting other women, fostering an ideological cell, or directing strategy. Her profile aligns more closely with: 1) a self-radicalized female actor within an extremist milieu, 2) a psychologically vulnerable individual with rigid doctrinal thinking, and 3) a lone-actor escalation influenced by structured extremist indoctrination. Therefore, Maya case represents a case of a high-commitment follower. She demonstrated radical devotion. In terms of relational authority, no documentation indicated she held formal leadership positions. Her belief that she could not cohabit due to “religious adultery” reflects doctrinal rigidity and moral authority within her own reasoning framework, but not necessarily relational authority over others. There is no evidence that others followed her lead or that she functioned as a relational hub. In terms of operational facilitation, Maya independently retrieved weapons from a relative's home, conducted multiple reconnaissance-like visits to the Presidential Palace, transported firearms, aimed a weapon at state security forces and physically attacked an investigator during detention. Her violent action resembled a self-initiated lone-actor escalation rather than a facilitated network operation.

Nuna

Psychological profile

Nuna (aged 30) was estimated to have intellectual functioning below the average range for her age group (IQ score = 75 on the CFIT scale), suggesting borderline intellectual functioning. Her psychological assessment using the MMPI-II-RF produced invalid results and therefore could not be interpreted conclusively. However, clinical impressions indicated a psychological profile characterized by defensiveness and somewhat exaggerating reports, rigidity, indecisiveness, low self-confidence, stubbornness, repetitive thinking patterns, and a tendency to become fixated on certain ideas. There were indications of a past history of suicidal ideation or attempts. She demonstrated difficulty in making decisions, feelings of inadequacy, high levels of stress and anxiety, and multiple specific fears. Emotional instability was evident, alongside responses suggesting possible thought disturbances, persecutory ideas, limited insight, and distrust toward others (believing that people

generally act out of self-interest). She reported several psychosomatic complaints, including gastrointestinal problems, chronic headaches, and neurological symptoms. Despite these vulnerabilities, she demonstrated relatively intact self-awareness. No hallucinations or severe delusions impairing consciousness were identified.

Family background and early life

Nuna was born and raised in Cilacap. She was the second of two siblings. She described her relationship with her older sister as distant, marked by minimal communication and lack of emotional support. Her father (aged 70) worked as a farmer and was described as quiet, caring, understanding, and affectionate. Her mother (aged 60) also worked as a farmer and was described similarly as quiet and caring but somewhat emotionally distant. Her parents divorced when she was two years old (1994). Following the divorce, she lived separately from her father and sister and only reunited with her father at around age 12. She rarely visited him afterward. During childhood, she was largely raised by neighbors because her mother worked in Saudi Arabia. Although she described her family as religious and economically sufficient, she did not feel emotionally close to either parent and recalled as never being scolded or advised. Both parents later remarried, resulting in several half-siblings with whom she maintained distant relationships.

Education and employment trajectory

Nuna began formal education in 1998 at an Islamic elementary school (*madrasah ibtidaiyah*). She excelled academically, consistently ranking in the top ten and achieving second and fourth place in certain grades. She particularly enjoyed Islamic Studies and Arabic but disliked mathematics and sports. Religious activities such as Qur'anic recitation and TPQ (Qur'anic learning center) were pursued both voluntarily and as part of community norms. After junior high school, she briefly attended vocational school but left after one month to work as a domestic helper in Bandung. Between 2010 and 2012, she worked in Singapore as a domestic worker, caring for a three-year-old child. In 2013, she returned to Indonesia, got married, and had a son. They divorced in 2016 due to in-law conflicts. She continued working abroad (Singapore 2015–2018, Macau 2018–2021). Health problems (ovarian cyst) eventually led her to return to Indonesia. On April 1, 2022, she got married again to a man she had met while working in Singapore.

Pathway to radicalization

Nuna's exposure to ISIS-related ideology began in 2019 through Facebook. She encountered posts about "*Ilmu Dakwah Tauhid*" (monotheistic preaching) uploaded by accounts such as Abu Rantixi and Labirin Thuay, the latter managed by Mr. Z. These posts included ISIS propaganda videos, sermons, and violent execution footage. She began engaging actively in online discussions with Mr. Z, developing an understanding of "Daulah Islamiyah" (Islamic State). When Mr. Z's account was blocked, she offered him access to her own account, sharing login credentials. This marked a significant shift from passive consumption to active facilitation. She later received friend requests from other pro-ISIS accounts. She created additional Facebook accounts to assist others whose accounts were blocked. At Mr. Z's suggestion, she joined Telegram and began communicating through encrypted channels. Curiosity evolved into commitment. She began translating, editing, and disseminating ISIS propaganda materials, including news updates and jihadist messaging.

Escalation into operational propaganda activities

Within two months of initial engagement, she received numerous friend requests and was encouraged to create her own Telegram channel for sharing Daulah news. She created a channel named "SHARENEWSOK," which was repeatedly blocked by Telegram. Despite repeated shutdowns, she persistently recreated channels under the same or similar names. She also helped manage or create other channels, including: Jund Rahman, Newsok, Sharenewsok (multiple iterations), and Berbagi Link / Bismillah Link. Around 2020, she joined Telegram groups such as Tamasya Ilmu and Sahabat Dunia Akhirat (SDA), which distributed jihadist calls, Daulah news, and propaganda from Annajiah Media Center and other pro-ISIS media outlets. In June 2020, she became an administrator of Annajiah Media Center alongside Mr. Z. Her tasks included editing, translating, and distributing Daulah-related materials. She resigned after receiving complaints from the channel owner. She later became admin of JUND NEWS under Mr. O and managed 35 sub-channels (OPPO). She created infographics using

Pixellab for correction by Mr. Z. In November 2021, she created another group, Sahabat Dunia Akhirat, using an alternate account (“Young Che”) and granted account access to Mr. J. She served as JUND NEWS representative in Produksi Anshor Indonesia channel networks. Her role evolved into consistent media production, translation, digital distribution, and network coordination.

Disengagement attempts and arrest

In March 2022, after learning that the owner of Annajiah Media Center had been arrested, she briefly considered withdrawing from propaganda activities. She informed an associate (Yaya) that she would stop translating Daulah materials. However, she resumed Telegram activity shortly, thereafter, maintaining communication with Mr. Z and Mr. O. Personal dynamics intertwined with ideological commitment (Mr. Z questioned her marriage to another man, suggesting relational tension). In October 2022, after marital conflict involving her husband’s infidelity, she contacted Mr. Z for financial assistance and received Rp. 1,900,000. She oscillated between intentions to delete Telegram and returning to activism. In November 2022, she reinstalled Telegram using her father-in-law’s phone number and resumed her admin role in Jund News. On November 15, 2022, she was arrested at her in-laws’ residence. She stated she did not initially understand that her actions were illegal. She admitted believing in and supporting Daulah Islamiyah by editing, translating, and spreading propaganda advocating hatred toward the Indonesian government, rejecting Pancasila (Indonesia’s constitution), democracy, and national law, and endorsing violent enforcement of Islamic law. During detention, she underwent rehabilitation and claimed to have renounced jihadist aspirations. She expressed remorse and intended to focus on family life if released.

Analysis on Nuna case

Nuna case partially fits the alpha female category, particularly in terms of operational facilitation within digital extremist networks. Although she 1) sustained propaganda production, 2) channel administration authority, 3) cross-network coordination, and 4) persistence despite platform suppression; she lacked evidence of ideological authorship or doctrinal leadership, clear relational dominance over other members, and strategic decision-making power at higher organizational levels. Therefore, Nuna case is best categorized as a mid-level operational propaganda facilitator with emerging alpha characteristics in digital extremist ecosystems, rather than a fully network-dominant alpha female. In terms of *ideological influence*, evidence does not clearly show that she produced original ideological doctrine or shaped doctrinal direction. She amplified rather than authored ideology. In terms of *relational authority*, although she held administrative roles in multiple Telegram channels and managed up to 35 sub-channels (OPPO) and coordinated networks, her interactions suggested she operated collaboratively rather than hierarchically. There is no evidence that others acted under her command or that she directed operational strategy beyond content distribution. Her emotional dependence on Mr. Z (including financial reliance) suggested relational vulnerability rather than dominance.

Operational facilitation is where her role is strongest. She created and recreated Telegram propaganda channels, served as admin in multiple extremist media platforms, managed sub-channel networks, translated and edited propaganda content, distributed materials across cross-platform ecosystems, and provided account credentials to other operatives. These activities represented operational facilitation within the propaganda and digital infrastructure of ISIS-support networks. Although she did not engage in violence, propaganda and media production constitute core pillars of modern extremist ecosystems.

Tianna

Psychological profile

Tianna (aged 44) was estimated to have intellectual functioning below the average range compared to her age cohort (IQ score = 55 on the CFIT scale), which falls within the category of moderate intellectual disability. Her psychological assessment using multiple testing methods indicated a profile marked by limited responsiveness, non-transparent self-reporting, rigidity, indecisiveness, emotional immaturity, emotional instability, low self-confidence, stubbornness, and chronic emotional distress. She reported persistent feelings of sadness,

dissatisfaction, worthlessness, and emotional pressure. There were indicators of a history of suicidal ideation or attempts. She experienced various fears that significantly interfere with daily functioning. Her responses suggested cognitive dysfunction, including persecutory ideation and limited insight, alongside a tendency to withdraw socially, preferring isolation and avoiding interpersonal engagement. Tianna also reported numerous psychosomatic complaints, including chronic fatigue, physical weakness, poor overall health, headaches, chronic pain, neurological symptoms, and irregular cognitive difficulties. Despite these vulnerabilities, her level of self-awareness was assessed as relatively intact. No hallucinations or severe delusions disrupting consciousness were identified. Overall, her psychological profile reflected high vulnerability, dependency, cognitive rigidity, and emotional fragility, rather than autonomy or assertive agency.

Family background and early life

Tianna was raised in South Sumatra. Her place of birth was later administratively changed to Indramayu by her first husband, a decision she accepted without objection. She was the second of seven siblings. From an early age, she assumed caregiving responsibilities for her younger siblings. She described her family as understanding but noted that she never shared her personal struggles with them. However, when financially able, she willingly helped her siblings. Her father (deceased) was a farmer originally from Semarang and was described as firm, responsible, and affectionate. Her mother (aged 70), originally from Jember, was described as caring and understanding. The family participated in Indonesia's transmigration program before Tianna was born. Tianna reported emotional concern over her mother's declining health following her detention, though she acknowledged age as a contributing factor.

Education and early employment

Tianna completed elementary school between 1986 and 1992 while simultaneously caring for her siblings. She continued to junior high school but dropped out in her second year to attend an Islamic boarding school, where she remained for only six months due to discomfort. In 1993, she completed a three-month sewing course. By 1998, she was working as a seamstress in a garment factory in Jakarta, living with her sister until 2001. It was during her daily commuting by train that she encountered members of the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII) network, marking the beginning of her exposure to extremist ideology.

Initial radicalization: NII Involvement

Through repeated social interaction, joint Qur'anic study, and religious gatherings, Tianna became increasingly embedded within NII-affiliated circles. She attended short-term religious study sessions led by multiple instructors and, after approximately three months, took a *bai'at*, formally joining NII. She justified her decision by describing NII teachings as logical, detailed, and aligned with the Qur'an. Central to her belief system was the notion that the existing world (and the Indonesian state) was impure, secular, and "infidel," necessitating separation (*hijrah*) and the eventual establishment of a pure Islamic state that rejected Pancasila and national symbols. At this stage, her radicalization was ideological and doctrinal, not operational.

Marital trajectories and ideological continuity

Tianna's first marriage in 2000 was to an NII member arranged through organizational channels. They moved to Indramayu, where her husband worked as a security guard at Al-Zaytun Islamic boarding school. They had two children. In October 2012, her husband died in a fatal workplace accident. Following his death, Tianna survived by selling snacks and receiving modest financial assistance from Al-Zaytun. During this period, she attended general religious lectures led by Mr. H, who later became her in-law through her daughter's marriage to a former terrorism convict.

Second marriage and exposure to Daulah Islamiyah

In 2015-2016, Tianna entered a second, unregistered marriage with a man, arranged by Mr. H. Despite expressing hesitation, she felt unable to refuse due to religious reasoning presented to her and her self-identification as "*fakir ilmu*" (lacking religious knowledge). Following the marriage, she renewed her *bai'at*

under Mr. H's guidance. She began wearing *syar'i* clothing and later adopted the niqab. She understood that the ideological framework of Daulah Islamiyah was largely similar to NII, with the key distinction being an emphasis on jihad and polygamy (concepts not previously taught within NII). She accepted this ideology on the basis that it was framed through Qur'anic justification. Three months into the marriage, her husband was arrested for terrorism-related charges linked to the Thamrin bombing case. Tianna claimed she neither knew nor questioned his activities, citing her lack of understanding and her focus on domestic survival. This marriage lasted until 2021, ending after her husband failed to provide financial support post-release.

Third marriage and proximity to violence

In August 2021, Tianna married a man, the third husband, a former terrorism convict from Nusakambangan. She was aware of his incarceration history but not the specific charges. Despite this, she assessed him positively and did not anticipate violent action. She described their marriage as emotionally supportive, modest but stable, and religiously instructive. She emphasized that this third husband never taught her about jihad, asserting that jihad was not a woman's responsibility. In late 2022, her husband carried out a suicide bombing at the Astana Anyar Police Station in Bandung. Tianna claimed that she did not know about the plan, materials, or ideological preparation. She reported hysteria upon learning of the attack and denied ever observing suspicious behavior. Police investigations found no direct evidence of her involvement in planning or execution.

Post-attack behavior and arrest

Following the bombing, Tianna was questioned by multiple police units. When initially sought for arrest in May 2023, she temporarily disappeared, allegedly assisted by another individual. She was later apprehended in July 2023. She acknowledged awareness that NII and Daulah Islamiyah were prohibited organizations but claimed having limited ideological knowledge. She asserted that her involvement was rooted in obedience (*sami'na wa atho'na*), not ideological leadership. Investigators identified a Facebook account and a Telegram account linked to her that followed ISIS-related channels, though she minimized her engagement and denied active dissemination.

Analysis on Tianna case

Tianna did not meet the criteria of an alpha female. She demonstrated psychological vulnerability, ideological dependency, relational subordination, and absence of operational agency. Her case represents passive radical alignment through marital and social proximity, rather than active participation or leadership. Tianna case is best categorized as a low-agency extremist affiliate shaped by obedience, dependency, and relational exposure rather than influence or facilitation.

In terms of *ideological influence*, there is no evidence that Tianna shaped or disseminated ideology to others. In terms of *relational authority*, Tianna consistently occupied subordinate relational positions that marriages arranged by male authority figures, inability to refuse marriage proposals, lack of agency in ideological or marital decisions, and deference to religious authority. There is no evidence that she exercised authority over spouses, children, or network members. In terms of *operational facilitation*, there is no evidence that Tianna provided logistical support for violence, assisted in operational planning, facilitated financing, or enabled communication or concealment. Her proximity to violent actors was relational, not functional.

Vivi

Psychological profile

Vivi (aged 60) was assessed as having intellectual functioning within the range of moderate intellectual

disability for her age group (IQ score = 55 on the CFIT scale), indicating limited cognitive capacity and suboptimal adaptive functioning. Results from the MMPI-II-RF to her were deemed invalid and could not be interpreted; however, supplementary assessment methods allowed for a general psychological profile to be inferred. Her profile from several psychological tests suggested tendencies toward inaccurate self-reporting

(deceiving), exaggeration, indecisiveness, emotional immaturity, emotional instability, stubbornness, anxiety, and aggression. Notably, she was described as possessing strong ambition and expansive thinking, paired with low social anxiety, which differentiates her from more withdrawn or passive profiles. Her presentation reflected a combination of cognitive limitation and assertive behavioral drive. Vivi demonstrated relatively intact self-awareness and insight into her actions. No hallucinations or delusions impairing consciousness were identified, indicating that her extremist engagement was ideologically driven rather than psychotic.

Family background and life course

Vivi was born and raised in Purwokerto and later moved to Lombok following her marriage in 1984. She was the eldest of seven siblings. She reported generally good relationships with her siblings, though emotional closeness diminished as each formed their own families. Her father (deceased) was a civil servant and described as authoritarian, disciplined, and emotionally distant. Her mother (aged 84) was characterized as gentle, patient, affectionate, and religiously observant. The family maintained a middle-class economic status and practiced Islam in a conventional, non-radical manner. Vivi identified her mother as her primary emotional anchor, citing her father's occupational distance and authoritarian demeanor as shaping her upbringing.

Education, personality formation, and early adult life

Vivi demonstrated relatively strong academic performance in primary and secondary education, consistently ranking near the top of her class. She preferred language-based subjects and disliked mathematics. Her extracurricular activities reflected high physical engagement and leadership inclination, including scouting, sports (volleyball), outdoor activities, and mountain climbing. After graduating from a vocational agricultural high school in 1981, she briefly worked in agricultural administration in Yogyakarta. In 1984, she married Riri, whom she described as patient and gentle. Following marriage, she became a full-time homemaker while occasionally engaging in small-scale food vending. Vivi and her husband raised five children. Over time, her husband and children repeatedly advised her to stop posting extremist-related content on social media, warning her of legal risks (advice she initially disregarded).

Religious seeking and early ideological exposure

Vivi's path toward radical ideology began in 1994, motivated by a desire for salvation in both worldly life and the hereafter. She was introduced by a neighbor to religious studies at *Pesantren B*, an institution affiliated with Jamaah Islamiyah (JI). She regularly attended study sessions led by Mr. L, covering Tauhid Rububiyah, Islamic law and worship, women's jurisprudence, concepts of *bid'ah* (religious innovation), Islamic commercial law, and *ruqyah syar'iyah*. She also briefly attended lectures associated with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) but discontinued participation, ultimately returning to *Pesantren B*. By mid-2014, she withdrew from the *pesantren* entirely, perceiving ideological deviation due to perceived affiliation with the Front Pembela Islam (FPI), which she considered doctrinally deviant.

Entry into ISIS ideology and online radicalization

In early 2015, Vivi encountered ISIS ideology through a former school acquaintance, Umi O, via WhatsApp and Facebook. She was exposed to ISIS propaganda portraying battlefield victories in Syria, framed as legitimate jihad against perceived heretical groups. After engaging with and resharing such content, Vivi began receiving friend requests from like-minded individuals. Her social media feed became increasingly saturated with extremist content, including materials from prominent radical ideologues such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Aman Abdurrahman. She reported reading, watching, and internalizing this material, which reinforced her belief that ISIS was acting in accordance with Qur'anic mandates to establish a caliphate. In the same year, she changed her Facebook identity to "Umi Lombok," restricted her network to ideologically aligned users, and began actively disseminating ISIS-related narratives.

From dissemination to organization

Between 2015 and 2018, Vivi regularly shared extremist propaganda, including anti-democracy narratives, rejection of Pancasila and the Indonesian legal system, *takfiri* interpretations of governance, justifications for jihad, and End-times eschatology. In 2017, she established a WhatsApp group titled “*Tauhid Harga Mati*”, enrolling her husband, children, and other acquaintances. The group served as a platform for ideological indoctrination. Despite limited engagement from her family, the group expanded to approximately 20 members before being disbanded following heightened police surveillance in 2018. That same year, Vivi formally pledged allegiance (*bai‘at*) to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, independently performing the oath after obtaining the text online.

Leadership roles and offline mobilization

In 2019, Vivi created a larger WhatsApp group, “*Kajian Islam Kaffah*,” with approximately 80 participants drawn from Lombok and her online networks. She functioned as the central administrator and ideological curator, actively distributing ISIS propaganda sourced from Facebook and Telegram channels such as “Sahabat Dunia Akhirat” and “An-Najiyah”. Her activities expanded beyond online spaces: 1) she organized in-person gatherings during Eid holidays, 2) she facilitated religious meetings discussing tauhid and Daulah ideology, 3) she assisted in fundraising and community labor for Quranic institutions linked to pro-ISIS networks, 4) in 2020, she served as a female religious instructor, teaching women’s study sessions for three months, and 5) she assisted in arranging a marriage for a woman whose parents were deemed “polytheists,” bypassing traditional guardianship norms in 2021. Vivi repeatedly renewed her *bai‘at* to successive ISIS leaders and continued organizing gatherings into 2023.

Arrest and post-detention position

Vivi was arrested on 14 July 2023. She admitted to supporting ISIS, spreading propaganda, encouraging jihadist ideology online, and organizing sympathizer gatherings. While expressing regret for violating Indonesian law, she maintained that her actions were religiously justified. She denied endorsing bombings and claimed to discourage violent attacks, though she continued to endorse jihad conceptually and rejected democratic governance. Following detention, she stated she no longer supports ISIS and acknowledged her previous beliefs as excessive (*ghulu*). She agreed to recognize the Indonesian state and expressed intent to disengage from extremist activity after release.

Analysis on Vivi case

Vivi case meets the criteria of an alpha female within extremist networks. She operated as 1) an ideological influencer, 2) a relational authority figure, as well as 3) an operational facilitator. Her case represents a non-violent but high-impact female extremist leadership profile, particularly within localized and gendered networks. Vivi case can be classified as a community-level alpha female extremist actor who shaped ideological commitment, social alignment, and organizational continuity within pro-ISIS networks in Indonesia. In terms of *ideological influence*, Vivi 1) she actively disseminated extremist doctrine, 2) she curated ideological content for large online groups, 3) she functioned as a religious instructor, and 4) she normalized ISIS ideology within family and community networks. Her role extended beyond amplification into interpretive guidance and doctrinal framing, especially for women. Her direct ideological influence included serving as a lecturer in women-only study sessions (topics: the ten nullifiers of Islam, *al-wala’ wal-bara’*), actively and consistently disseminating ISIS ideological narratives (2015–2023), and becoming a reference point for Daulah Islamiyah’s understanding of tauhid within her social environment.

In terms of *relational authority*, Vivi exercised relational authority as she compelled family participation in extremist groups, she was a central figure in multiple networks, she facilitated marriages and gatherings based on ideological criteria, and her leadership persisted over multiple years. Participants engaged due to her position, not merely ideological alignment. Her relational authority included establishing and managing multiple WhatsApp groups (approximately 20 members expanding to around 80 members), enforcing relational compliance: her husband and children joined the groups due to her authority, and initiating regular *ikhwan-akhwat* gatherings and ideologically driven religious events. In terms of *operational facilitation*, Vivi engaged

in online propaganda dissemination, group administration, offline meeting coordination, fundraising for ideological institutions, and recruitment through social and religious networks. These actions constituted operational facilitation, even without direct involvement in violence. Her operational facilitation included initiating fundraising activities, connecting individuals with *amirs* and AD/JAD networks, assisting ideologically driven marriages without a state-recognized legal guardian, and functioning as an offline–online node (Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and in-person meetings).

Suzi

Psychological profile

Suzi (aged 33) was assessed as having average intellectual functioning relative to her age group (IQ score = 103 on the CFIT scale), indicating cognitively adequate and optimally functioning intellectual capacity. Unlike profiles characterized by cognitive impairment, Suzi demonstrated intact reasoning ability and sufficient adaptive functioning. Comprehensive psychological testing to her revealed a profile that was relatively mature and emotionally stable in general presentation. Yet, she exhibited several significant vulnerabilities: low responsiveness, low self-confidence, emotional withdrawal, stubbornness, chronic anxiety, and a history of negative emotional experiences. She reported feelings of worthlessness, indecision, helplessness, and passivity. Psychological reports also indicated a history of suicidal ideation or attempts, alongside psychosomatic complaints including fatigue, gastrointestinal problems, neurological disturbances, and fluctuating cognitive difficulties. Her level of environmental engagement was low, and she tended toward passive and submissive behavioral patterns. Her insight remained intact, which is no hallucinations or delusions impair her reality testing. This suggested that her engagement with extremist ideology was not driven by psychosis but by ideological conviction combined with psychological vulnerability. Overall, Suzi's profile reflects a combination of adequate cognitive capacity, emotional fragility, dependency tendencies, and susceptibility to external influence, particularly from authoritative or charismatic figures.

Family background and developmental context

Suzi was born in Padang and the only child. Her parents divorced during her childhood, and she reported having no meaningful relationship with her father. Emotional distance also characterized her relationship with her mother, who remarried when Suzi was nine years old. Following her mother's remarriage, Suzi spent significant periods living with her grandmother in Batu Sangkar. Her upbringing was marked by emotional discontinuity and attachment instability. During elementary school, she lived with her grandmother; during junior high, she returned to live with her mother. During high school, she lived with her grandmother again. From her mother's second marriage, she had two younger half-brothers with limited communication with her. This fragmented familial environment appeared to have contributed to Suzi's emotional insecurity and low sense of belonging (factors often associated with vulnerability to ideological recruitment).

Education and early adulthood

Academically, Suzi performed well. She consistently ranked in the top three during elementary school and favored history as a subject. She was active in helping her grandmother sell candlenuts, attended Qur'anic lessons, and participated in ordinary childhood play. During junior high school, she moved to Riau and continued to excel academically, even receiving a scholarship. She later returned to Batu Sangkar to attend vocational school in business management while continuing to assist her grandmother's small-scale trading. Her early employment history included retail employee (2009–2010) at a big retail shop, and administrative staff at PT Kiat (in 2011). In 2011, she got married. They had one surviving child; their second child died at 20 days old in 2014 (an event likely contributing to psychological distress). Since 2012, Suzi had primarily functioned as a homemaker.

Initial radicalization (2019)

Suzi's exposure to ISIS ideology began in 2019 through Facebook posts by Nuna and Mr. Z. The content centered on Daulah Islamiyah narratives. By mid-2019, she initiated contact with Nuna and joined a Telegram

channel named “JUND NEWS,” which functioned as a content-production platform for ISIS propaganda. In March 2020, Suzi formally became an admin of JUND NEWS. She later discovered that Nuna was the account owner. She joined a closed Telegram group consisting of JUND NEWS administrators, where tasks were distributed. Suzi was assigned responsibility for designing and editing posters containing calls for jihad and hijrah. This marked a transition from passive consumption to active propaganda production.

Oath of allegiance and continued engagement

In mid-2020, Suzi pledged allegiance (*bai'at*) to Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi. Although she was aware that the organization was banned, she rationalized her involvement as limited to “poster-making.” In 2021, Nuna offered Suzi expanded responsibility, inviting her to join the Telegram group “Sahabat Dunia Akhirat” and follow channels OPPO 1 through OPPO 35, with the contingency that Suzi might replace her if necessary. The content included ISIS battlefield updates in Syria, Daulah Islamiyah doctrinal materials, jihadist propaganda articles, execution and combat videos, and motivational posters encouraging martyrdom and violent action. Suzi continued to renew her *bai'at* to successive ISIS leaders in 2022 and 2023.

Escalation to independent propaganda administration

In March 2023, after JUND NEWS was blocked by Telegram, Suzi independently created a new channel named “NEWS MEDIA.” This step demonstrated initiative rather than mere compliance. By August 2023, she had created additional channels (NEWS MC), managed subchannels (BERY01–BERY08), distributed links to multiple Telegram groups and Facebook accounts, and served as administrator across multiple propaganda platforms. Her activities expanded beyond assigned tasks into network reconstruction and operational continuity management after disruption.

Arrest and admission

On October 2023, Suzi was arrested. She admitted that she believed in ISIS propaganda, joined and administered Telegram groups, took *bai'at* three times, supported violent change of Indonesia’s state ideology, and intended to replace the governmental system with Daulah Islamiyah. She expressed remorse and willingness to cooperate but acknowledged prior endorsement of violent ideology.

Analysis on Suzi case

Suzi partially met the criteria of an alpha female but did not fully reach the highest threshold. She did not function as a source of ideology; rather, she served as an operational enabler and amplifier. She demonstrated 1) strong digital operational facilitation, 2) moderate ideological amplification, 3) Limited relational authority, and 4) initial dependency on a higher-ranking female actor (Nuna). Thus, she did not appear to be a central network shaper or primary influencer, but rather a mid-tier operational node. She did not recruit others ideologically or teach or provide doctrinal guidance.

In terms of *ideological influence*, Suzi actively produced jihadist propaganda posters, distributed extremist materials across Telegram and Facebook, maintained continuity of propaganda channels after shutdown, and reinforced doctrinal narratives within digital ecosystems. However, there is limited evidence that she functioned as an ideological authority figure or doctrinal interpreter. In terms of *relational authority*, Suzi’s relational positioning showed dependency, mainly: 1) initial recruitment and tasking by Nuna, 2) persuasion by Nuna to rejoin after hesitation, and 3) expansion of responsibilities granted externally. There is no evidence she commanded offline gatherings or imposed compliance on close family members. Suzi’s strongest domain was *operational facilitation*, specifically: 1) admin of propaganda channels, 2) designer of jihadist recruitment materials, 3) creator of replacement networks after disruption, and 4) multi-channel administrator with segmented subchannels. She served as admin and editor for multiple Telegram channels (JUND NEWS, NEWS MEDIA, NEWS MC), created and distributed jihad, *hijrah*, *bai'at*, and ISIS propaganda posters, managed numerous sub-channels with different member bases, and willingly acted as a backup administrator if the primary figure became inactive. She functioned as a digital operational facilitator, ensuring the continuity and

dissemination of ISIS propaganda infrastructure. Unlike passive supporters, she contributed materially to the movement's online presence.

Runi

Psychological Profile

Runi (aged 48) was assessed as having below-average intellectual functioning relative to her age group (IQ score = 67 on the CFIT scale). While not falling into severe cognitive impairment, this range suggested limited abstract reasoning capacity and potential difficulties in complex judgment and long-term consequence evaluation. Psychological assessment to her indicated several significant vulnerabilities. Runi demonstrated tendencies toward inaccurate self-reporting, persecutory thinking, chronic fear that restricted normal functioning, and psychosomatic complaints (particularly gastrointestinal issues). She had reported suicidal ideation and past suicide attempts. Despite these vulnerabilities, her reality testing remained intact, as no hallucinations or delusions impairing consciousness were identified. She retained adequate self-awareness. Her developmental history revealed emotional deprivation. She reported feeling unloved and incompatible with both parents. Her father was described as harsh, temperamental, rigid, and emotionally distant; her mother as similarly strict, self-focused, and socially withdrawn. Runi stated she was frequently forbidden from socializing, resulting in limited peer interaction and social isolation during formative years. This environment likely contributed to social inhibition, emotional insecurity, identity fragility, and a strong desire for belonging and recognition. Academically, Runi performed consistently well (top five in class), with a strong preference for arts. However, much of her childhood and adolescence was spent helping with family businesses rather than building peer relationships. These early patterns suggested a personality characterized by compliance within authority structures, internalized emotional distress, limited independent social network formation, and latent need for validation and ideological certainty.

Early Adult Life and Identity Construction

After high school, Runi trained in bridal makeup and salon management, eventually opening her own salon and wedding organizing business in 1994, which operated successfully until the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This entrepreneurial history indicated functional competence and persistence. She married in 1997 and had four children. Her marriage lasted 24 years before ending in divorce in 2021. She attributed the divorce to her husband's lack of religious commitment and unwillingness to quit smoking. This detail suggested that religious ideology became central to her value system, influencing intimate relational decisions. In 2023, she remarried a man described as affectionate and firm, who encouraged her to adopt what she viewed as "correct creed." This second marriage coincided with her ideological reconsideration after arrest.

Initial Radicalization (2017)

Runi's involvement in Daulah Islamiyah ideology began in early 2017 through her uncle. She joined a WhatsApp group named "WAL ASHR," where members shared content related to enforcement of Sharia in Syria, ISIS battlefield videos, caliphate leadership, and doctrinal themes such as tauhid and takfir. During this period, Runi internalized extremist doctrine to the extent that she reported declaring her own parents as unbelievers (*takfir*), indicating deep ideological penetration. Her engagement was initially doctrinal and group-based, not operational.

Reinforcement Through Symbolic Violence (2019)

In October 2019, her uncle carried out a stabbing attack against Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (Mr. Wiranto). Rather than deterring her, this act of violence motivated Runi to deepen her ideological commitment. This reaction demonstrated a critical psychological turning point: violent action by a close family member functioned as symbolic validation rather than cautionary warning. Such reinforcement often strengthens radical identity formation.

Formalization of Commitment (2021)

In 2021, Runi joined another WhatsApp group to read and pronounce *bai'at* to ISIS leader Abu al-Hussein al-Qurashi. She initially feared the consequences but concluded that obedience to ISIS leadership was religiously obligatory. She articulated a doctrinal framework: 1) establishing Daulah Islamiyah requires *da'wah* and *jihad*, 2) if preaching failed, physical *jihad* becomes necessary, and 3) government institutions (including military and police) are enemies of the cause. While she stated she did not intend to migrate to Syria, she supported *jihad* “through media,” indicating a shift toward digital activism.

Transition to Operational Propaganda (2021–2023)

By late 2021, Runi publicly declared herself an Anshor Daulah supporter and began systematic propaganda dissemination. She created numerous WhatsApp groups, including “Hijrah Bareng”, “Perindu Surga”, “Bidadari Surga”, “Inside Khilafah”, “Belajar Islam Kaffah”, and Donation-related groups (e.g., “Khusus TF”). In these groups, she regularly distributed ISIS battlefield videos, martyrdom glorification, calls for physical *jihad*, anti-democracy and anti-state narratives, explicit references to explosive materials (e.g., RDX discussion), and posters encouraging repetition of Bali bombing. Her content went beyond passive sharing. She initiated multiple groups, administered ideological ecosystems, encouraged physical *jihad*, and circulated material inciting violence against state figures. A January 2023 post included graphic propaganda depicting the beheading of President Jokowi in front of a burning Monas monument with ISIS flag imagery. This demonstrates explicit endorsement of violent overthrow.

Arrest and Post-Detention Reflection

Runi was arrested on 24 October 2024. She admitted declaring *bai'at*, supporting ISIS, intending to replace Indonesia’s state system, and disseminating provocative propaganda. In detention, she claimed to have reconsidered her views, acknowledging that Daulah Islamiyah ideology brought more harm than benefit. She rejected her previous refusal of Pancasila and attributed her transformation partly to her second husband’s influence. She expressed remorse and future intent to focus on family and lawful livelihood.

Analysis on Runi Case

Runi met an alpha-female criteria (an operational–mobilizational type), particularly in ideological amplification, relational group authority, and digital operational facilitation. Her influence was infrastructure-based and mobilizational rather than doctrinal. Although she did not originate extremist doctrine, she constructed and managed digital ecosystems that amplified violent narratives, encouraged physical *jihad*, and shaped the commitment of others through sustained propaganda dissemination and network leadership. Her case represents a digitally mobilizing female extremist node. Runi exceeded traditional supportive roles (e.g., passive sympathy, spousal alignment, casual reposting). In terms of *ideological influence*, Runi demonstrated substantial ideological dissemination, such as created and managed numerous WhatsApp groups, repeatedly distributed ISIS propaganda, encouraged physical *jihad* explicitly, circulated technical content referencing explosives, and performed and promoted *bai'at*. Nonetheless, she did not originate doctrine or serve as a recognized theological authority. Her ideological framing appeared derivative of group narratives rather than independently constructed. In terms of *relational authority*, Runi established and controlled multiple group spaces. She determined membership, curated content, and maintained sustained engagement over multiple years. Evidence of relational authority included founding numerous groups, positioning herself as content gatekeeper, influencing group norms toward pro-violence narratives, and sustained ideological encouragement despite dissent. Unlike passive participants, she acted as a central organizer within her network clusters. Moreover, Runi’s *operational role* was significant as she built digital infrastructure (multiple groups), distributed incitement materials, encouraged physical action, shared content referencing bomb materials, and maintained continuity over a multi-year period. Although she did not execute or directly plan attacks, her digital mobilization efforts contributed to operational ecosystems of extremist networks.

Vera

Psychological Profile

Vera (aged 23) demonstrated superior intellectual functioning relative to her age cohort (IQ score = 139 on the CFIT scale), indicating very high cognitive capacity, strong abstract reasoning ability, and advanced analytical skills. This placed her in a markedly different cognitive category from many female extremist affiliates whose involvement was often shaped by intellectual limitation. Yet, Vera's high intelligence coexisted with notable psychological vulnerabilities. Her psychological assessment revealed that she tended to provide guarded or incomplete self-reports, showed emotional immaturity, emotional instability, and mood sensitivity, and displayed rigid, stubborn traits. She was socially withdrawn, restricted interpersonal interactions, and preferred solitude. She reported pessimism, hopelessness, and a history of suicidal ideation or attempts. Importantly, despite these vulnerabilities, there was no evidence of psychosis. Her reality testing remained intact with no hallucinations or delusions were identified. Standardized screening (HSCL) on her did not indicate clinical anxiety or depression. This suggested that her extremist engagement was cognitively deliberate, not driven by mental illness. A key paradox defines Vera's profile as an individual with exceptionally high intelligence combined with social isolation, emotional volatility, and identity rigidity. This increased her susceptibility to ideological systems that offer intellectual coherence, moral certainty, and existential meaning.

Family Background and Developmental Context

Vera was born in Buton, Southeast Sulawesi. She was the third of eight siblings. Her family's socioeconomic condition was modest, with her father working multiple informal jobs and her mother earning income as a tailor and domestic helper. Emotionally, Vera reported a stronger attachment to her mother, whom she described as warm, gentle, charismatic, and emotionally available. In contrast, she perceived her father as strict, rigid, and prone to exaggeration, which created emotional distance. From an early age, Vera assumed caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings, while excelling academically. She entered elementary school earlier than typical age, with administrative age adjustments that continued into later schooling. These circumstances likely reinforced a self-concept centered on exceptionalism, responsibility, and precocity.

Education, Religious Socialization, and Identity Formation

Academically, Vera consistently ranked among the top students throughout elementary and junior high school, with a strong preference for mathematics and science. She was also an avid reader and spent significant time teaching younger children at TPA and offering private tutoring, indicating early pedagogical competence and leadership potential. During adolescence, she became increasingly involved in religious activities, including tarbiyah programs and frequent religious study circles. Her religious teachers (particularly female instructors wearing niqab) became influential role models. Her adoption of more conservative dress led to bullying, including being labeled "ISIS," which became a formative experience. Rather than deterring her, stigmatization triggered curiosity and intellectual inquiry. After discovering the historical figure Santoso (MIT leader), she began independently researching MIT, Poso violence, and jihadist narratives. This phase marked a shift from passive exposure to self-directed ideological investigation.

Early Exposure to Extremist Narratives (2012–2018)

Between 2012 and 2016, Vera encountered stories of Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) through radio broadcasts, family conversations, and peer-shared videos depicting violence in Poso. These narratives were emotionally impactful and framed as moral struggles rather than criminal acts. By 2018, Vera deliberately sought information on ISIS and Daulah Islamiyah online. Despite encountering negative portrayals, she became interested in alternative ideological explanations that framed ISIS as defenders of Islam rather than perpetrators of terror. Her adoption of the niqab further intensified social alienation, reinforcing an "us versus them" worldview.

Online Radicalization and Network Entry (2019–2021)

In 2019, Vera's radicalization accelerated through social media. She encountered extremist symbolic content (such as: Pancasila reframed as idolatry) and proactively initiated contact with pro-ISIS accounts. This resulted in rapid network expansion as she received multiple friend requests from Daulah Islamiyah supporters.

She purchased and read Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's *Seruan Tauhid di Bawah Ancaman Hukuman Mati*, which she found deeply inspirational. She began engaging with extremist terminology (e.g., *sijin*, *istisyhadiyah*) and directly contacted individuals claiming affiliation with MIT logistical support networks. Repeated account suspensions did not deter her. Instead, she systematically tested platform enforcement by creating multiple new accounts under different names, indicating strategic persistence and experimentation.

Transition from Consumer to Producer (2021–2023)

By 2021, Vera was no longer merely consuming content. She became actively involved in multiple WhatsApp and Telegram groups discussing ISIS ideology, historical justification, internal conflicts, and global expansion (Africa, *tamkin* narratives).

Significantly, she co-created a Telegram channel ("Muhibbin Syekh Atturaifi") with Bibi, curating ideological content about imprisoned clerics. This marked her transition into content production and curation, not just amplification. She engaged in ideological debates, translated and posted ISIS nasheeds on TikTok, and openly argued doctrinal distinctions between ISIS and other Islamist groups. Her engagement was analytical, discursive, and sustained.

Late-Stage Activity and Arrest (2023–2025)

From 2023 onward, Vera remained embedded in ideological discussion groups such as "GSO V4," "One Ummah," and "Al Baqarah 256." She recreated groups after arrests of other members, demonstrating continuity behavior. In 2025, following arrests of associates, she created a new WhatsApp group to maintain ideological discussion. She was arrested on 22 September 2025.

Post-arrest, she denied *bai'at*, military preparation (*i'dad*), or plans for hijrah, but continued to express ideological sympathy for ISIS as a group enforcing Sharia and defending Muslims. She admitted regret over possession of ISIS symbols but remained ideologically ambivalent.

Analysis on Vera Case

Vera did not meet the criteria of an alpha female, either ideological or operational. She was best categorized as a high-intelligence ideological node and discursive facilitator within extremist networks, but not an alpha female actor.

In terms of *ideological influence*, there is limited evidence that she shaped others' ideological commitments. In terms of *relational authority*, Vera did not exercise strong relational authority. Although respected intellectually in discussions, she did not command compliance, organize offline gatherings, or direct others' behavior.

Her relationships were primarily horizontal and discursive, not hierarchical. In terms of *operational facilitation*, she did not manage large-scale propaganda infrastructure, fundraising, or mobilization. Her activity was networked but not mobilizational.

Comparative Authority Typology Across Seven Female Actors

This comparative assessment applies the operational definition of alpha female advanced in the Methods section: a female actor who exercises sustained influence over others that shapes beliefs, decisions, or behaviors beyond supportive roles. Based on this definition, authority is evaluated according to (1) durability of influence, (2) behavioral or decisional impact, and (3) independence from male-mediated authority.

To avoid reductive ranking, two forms of full-spectrum authority are identified: ideological authority and mobilizational authority.

Full Alpha (Ideological Authority)

Vivi case demonstrates sustained and independent influence through doctrinal transmission and belief formation. She actively taught ideological concepts, framed moral obligations, and shaped how others interpret religious duty and action. Her authority extended beyond logistical support and results in observable behavioral alignment among followers.

Her influence is characterized by repeated doctrinal instruction, normative framing of conduct, independent authority not derived from male mediation, and behavioral shaping through belief structuring. Under the study's definition, Vivi met the threshold of alpha status because her influence was sustained, independent, and shaped the decisions and orientations of others.

Full Alpha (Mobilizational Authority)

Runi case exercises sustained influence through the construction and management of communication infrastructure. She created and administered multiple WhatsApp groups, disseminated mobilizing content, and facilitated coordinated participation.

Her influence directly shaped collective behavioral engagement beyond passive support. Her authority was characterized by structural control of communication channels, repeated mobilizing messaging, facilitation of coordinated participation, and influence over collective decision-making. Her role exceeded supportive assistance and demonstrated sustained capacity to shape others' actions at the network level.

Partial Alpha (Upper Tier, Coordinative–Amplificatory)

Nuna demonstrated meaningful but not comprehensive authority. She founded channels, delegated responsibilities, and amplified ideological material. While she shaped participation within her immediate network, her influence did not reach the sustained doctrinal depth of Vivi nor the structural scale of Runi. Her authority includes coordinative influence, delegation of roles, and ideological amplification. However, her role remains intermediate in scope and durability.

Partial Alpha (Operational–Secondary)

Suzi contributed to platform maintenance and content continuity. Although her participation supported ongoing communication ecosystems, her influence did not independently shape the beliefs or decisions of others. Her authority remained derivative and operational.

Non-Alpha Actors

Maya case shows high personal commitment but no sustained influence over others. Furthermore, Tianna case shows participation mediated through relational dependence; no independent authority. Lastly, Vera case shows discursive engagement without sustained behavioral influence.

Table 1. Comparative overview table across seven female actors

Subject	Alpha Category	Type	Dominant Mechanism	Behavioral Influence	Network Scope	Key Evidence of Influence
Vivi	Full Alpha (Ideological)	Ideological–Comprehensive	Doctrinal authority	Cognitive and normative shaping	Community-level	Teaching, large groups, fundraising,

						relational authority
Runi	Full Alpha (Mobilizational)	Operational–mobilizational	Network activation	Collective action shaping	Multi-group digital network	>15 WA groups; violent propaganda; donation management
Nuna	Partial Alpha (Upper Tier)	Ideological–operational	Coordination and amplification	Mid-level behavioral influence	Channel-level	Channel founder; task delegation; propaganda translation
Suzi	Partial Alpha (Secondary)	Operational alpha	Infrastructure maintenance	Limited operational shaping	Platform-level	Admin multi-channel; poster production; platform regeneration
Maya	Non-Alpha	High-commitment follower	Individual commitment	None (self-directed)	Isolated	No recruitment; no group leadership; lone-actor violence
Tianna	Non-Alpha	Dependent supporter	Relational dependence	Minimal	Domestic sphere	Subordinate marital role; no propaganda or mobilization
Vera	Non-Alpha	Ideological node	Discursive engagement	Minimal	Limited	High literacy, debate, translation; no mobilization

The comparative findings complicate existing portrayals of women in extremist movements advanced by Bloom²⁶ and Pearson.²⁷ Bloom's early framing of women as primarily relational actors (mobilized through marriage, kinship, or victimhood narratives) only partially captures the spectrum observed in this study.

While Tianna and Maya reflect relational or dependent pathways consistent with Bloom's characterization, Vivi and Runi exceed that framework by exercising sustained and independent influence over others. Their authority is not derivative of male actors but structurally embedded: whether through doctrinal instruction (Vivi) or communication infrastructure and mobilization (Runi). This suggests that female agency in extremist ecosystems can evolve beyond relational radicalization into autonomous authority formation.

Berger and Pearson's discussions of women's expanding operational and ideological roles in digital extremist spaces are more closely aligned with the present findings. Runi's mobilizational authority exemplifies Berger's

²⁶ Bloom, cf. Footnote 12

²⁷ Pearson, cf. Footnote 13

observation that online ecosystems enable women to exercise structural influence without formal hierarchical recognition.

Similarly, Vivi's doctrinal shaping reflects Pearson's argument that women increasingly participate in ideological reproduction and norm enforcement within extremist milieus. However, this study refines those arguments by distinguishing between ideological authority and mobilizational authority as separate but equally qualifying forms of full alpha status under the operational definition.

The findings therefore extend the literature by demonstrating that female dominance in extremist networks is not monolithic but differentiated, measurable, and typologically classifiable according to durability of influence and behavioral impact.

Contemporary research findings consistently demonstrate that women's roles in terrorism are significant and cannot be diminished through simplistic stereotypes such as being "weak" or "poor/ignorant." Rather than acting merely as passive supporters, women have been shown to take on active and strategic roles, including as recruiters, propagandists, intelligence gatherers, and direct perpetrators of violence, including suicide attacks²⁸. Their involvement is shaped by a complex interplay of ideological, political, social, and personal motivations, indicating a level of rationality and agency that contradicts narratives of helplessness or manipulation²⁹.

Furthermore, critical scholarship highlights that labeling women as "brainwashed" or merely victims obscures their capacity for conscious decision-making within ideological frameworks, a phenomenon conceptualized as "hostile pious agency". Such reductionist assumptions are not only empirically inaccurate but also problematic for policy, as they risk producing ineffective counterterrorism strategies that fail to address the true dynamics of gender, power, and motivation underlying women's participation in violent extremism³⁰.

CONCLUSION

This study examined whether women engaged in extremist networks exercise authority beyond conventional supportive roles and how such authority is structured. The findings demonstrate that female participation in extremism is not uniform but stratified. The study argues that framing women as "brainwashed" or passive victims obscures their capacity for conscious decision-making (conceptualized as "hostile pious agency" or as forms of religion-based exploitation).

The role of women in terrorism is far more complex than traditional narratives suggest. Women are not merely passive victims or peripheral actors but active participants whose involvement is shaped by a range of ideological, socio-economic, and gendered factors. Addressing this complexity requires moving beyond stereotypes and adopting a gender-sensitive, interdisciplinary framework that acknowledges both agency and structural constraints. By doing so, policymakers and researchers can develop more effective and equitable strategies to counter violent extremism and promote sustainable peace.

Across seven cases, three analytical categories emerged: non-alpha participants (Maya, Tianna, Vera), partial/operational alphas (Suzi, Nuna), and full alpha females (Vivi, Runi). Crucially, alpha status was determined not by ideological fervor or proximity to violence, but by sustained influence over others' beliefs, decisions, and network dynamics.

These findings refine Bloom's gendered pathways by demonstrating that female agency may evolve from relational alignment to autonomous authority. They extend Pearson's distinction between participation and authority by empirically operationalizing how influence manifests in ideological and infrastructural domains. Consistent with Berger's networked understanding of extremism, the study shows that authority can emerge through doctrinal leadership or communication infrastructure control, even in the absence of formal hierarchy.

²⁸ Chaerunnisa and Hakim cf. Footnote 18

²⁹ Ningsih et al., cf. Footnote 11

³⁰ Veronika. cf. Footnote 17

The concept of the alpha female thus provides a typological tool for distinguishing influence from mere involvement.

This study highlights the importance of reconceptualizing women not merely as supporters or followers within extremist movements, but as actors capable of exercising varying degrees of leadership, influence, and operational autonomy. By demonstrating that female authority is stratified rather than uniform, the proposed typology provides a more nuanced framework for understanding women's differentiated positions within extremist networks.

These findings have important implications for counter-extremism policy and practice. Recognizing differentiated forms of female authority is essential for identifying network-shaping actors whose influence on recruitment, mobilization, and ideological reproduction may otherwise be overlooked, thereby reducing the risk of misidentifying critical nodes within extremist networks.

At the same time, interventions should avoid reproducing gendered assumptions that portray women as inherently passive or, conversely, overgeneralizing their roles as uniformly central. Instead, prevention, disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration strategies should be tailored to women's diverse functions and levels of authority within extremist organizations. Future research should test, refine, and extend the proposed typology across broader ideological, geographical, and organizational contexts to evaluate its explanatory power and examine how it can inform more effective, evidence-based counter-extremism interventions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the institutions for their support.

Declaration of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethical Statement

This study did not involve human participants or animals. Ethical considerations followed the principles outlined in the Indonesian National Guidelines for Health Research Ethics and adhered to protocols concerning confidentiality, anonymization, and the responsible management of sensitive information.

Zora A. Sukabdi is a forensic psychologist who specialized in counterterrorism, criminal profiling, risk assessment, and the human errors in the use of CBRNE (Chemical, Biological, Radioactive, Nuclear, and Explosive) weapons. Among her notable contributions is the development of the 3D-Model of Motivation-Ideology-Capability (MIKRA) Terrorism Risk Assessments and Rehabilitation for offenders.

This patented model has been pivotal in assessing and rehabilitating individuals involved in terrorist activities. Currently, she serves as the Head of Terrorism Studi Programme, at the Graduate School of Sustainable Development, Universitas Indonesia. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4175-7339>.

REFERENCES

1. Asiyah, Udji. Prasetyo, Ratna Azis. Sudjak, Sudjak. "Jihad Perempuan dan Terorisme." *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama*, 14(1), 2020.
2. Atabik, Ahmad. Muhtador, Moh. "Jihad and Interpretation of Religious Texts on Female Terrorists in Indonesia." *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)*, 11(1), 2023.
3. Azca, Muhammad Najib. Putri, Rani Dwi. "Perempuan dan Peran Regenerasi dalam Lingkaran Ekstremisme Kekerasan: Narasi dari Indonesia Timur." *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama*, 15(2), 2021.
4. Berger, J.M. *Extremism*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018.
5. Bigio, Jamille. Vogelstein, Rachel B. "Women and Terrorism." Council on Foreign Relations, 2019. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/reports/women-and-terrorism> [Last seen 23.06.2026].

6. Bloom, Mia. *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
7. BP, Gega Ryani Cahya Kurnia. Sukabdi, Zora A. "Salience Identity of Women in Terrorism." *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies*, 7(2), 2021.
8. Chaerunnisa, Luq Yana. Hakim, Muhammad Alif. "Women and Terrorism: An Interdisciplinary Study of Peace Building Education." *At-Tarbawi: Jurnal Kajian Kependidikan Islam*, 8(1), 2023.
9. Chaerunnisa, Luq Yana. Nasution, Khoiruddin. "Bina Damai Keterlibatan Perempuan dalam Aksi Terorisme: Pendekatan Interdisipliner dan Multidisipliner." *Dirasat Islamiah: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman*, 4(1), 2025.
10. Harjanti, Priscilla. Hanita, Margaretha. Daryanto, Eko. "Mengintegrasikan Peran Gender Dalam Analisis Intelijen Strategis: Partisipasi Perempuan Dalam Kelompok Teroris Di Indonesia." *Syntax Literate: Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia*, 8(7), 2023, 4771–4783.
11. Kasanah, Nur. "Perempuan dalam Jerat Terorisme: Analisis Motivasi Pelaku Bom Bunuh Diri di Indonesia." *Indonesian Journal of Gender Studies (IJouGS)*, 2(2), 2021.
12. Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak Republik Indonesia. "Kemen PPPA Perkuat Koordinasi dan Dorong Implementasi Pedoman Teknis Perlindungan Anak dari Jaringan Terorisme." Available at: <https://kemenpppa.go.id/index.php/siaran-pers/kemen-pppa-perkuat-koordinasi-dan-dorong-implementasi-pedoman-teknis-perlindungan-anak-dari-jaringan-terorisme> [Last seen 23.06.2026].
13. Khalil, Lydia. "Behind the Veil: Women in Jihad after the Caliphate." Lowy Institute, 2019. Available at: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/behind-veil-women-jihad-after-caliphate> [Last seen 23.06.2026].
14. Macfarlane, Kate. "Indonesian Women and Terrorism: An Analysis of Historical and Contemporary Trends." *Politics and Governance*, 12, 2024.
15. Mujahid, Dhestina Religia. "Pergeseran Peran Perempuan dalam Aksi Terorisme di Indonesia." *Jurnal Studi Gender dan Anak*, 9(2), 2023.
16. Nanda Permana, Aulya. "Empowered by Extremes: Indonesian Women in Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Jemaah Ansharut Daulat (JAD)." *Security Intelligence Terrorism Journal*, 2(4), 2025.
17. National Commission on Health Research Ethics. (2017). *National Guidelines for Health Research Ethics*. Ministry of Health Republic of Indonesia
18. NATO. "Countering Terrorism." Available at: <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/countering-terrorism> [Last seen 23.06.2026].
19. Ningsih, Dyah Aryati Nugraha. Timur, Fauzia Gustarina Cempaka. Sutanto, Rudy. "The Role of Women in Organizations Terrorism: Gender Dynamics in the Context of Ideology and Violence." *Formosa Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(5), 2024.
20. Pearson, Elizabeth. "Extremism and Toxic Masculinity: The Man Question Re-Posed." *International Affairs*, 95(6), 2019.
21. Purba, Chelsea Amelia. Syauqillah, Muhamad. "Analisis Kausalitas dan Probabilitas Faktor Penyebab Terorisme Perempuan dan Anak: Korban atau Pelaku?" *IJD-Demos*, 4(4), 2022.
22. Qori'ah, Sityi Maesarotul. "Keterlibatan Perempuan dalam Aksi Terorisme di Indonesia." *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender*, 14(1), 2019.
23. Quanandi, Jodi. Kertopati, Susaningtyas N.H. Timur, Fauzia Gustarina Cempaka. "Keterlibatan dan Pola Pergerakan Teroris Perempuan dalam Jaringan Terorisme di Indonesia." *Journal of Education, Humaniora and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 2022.
24. Ritonga, Sakti. Riza, Faisal. Jailani, Muhammad. Desky, Ahmed Fernanda. "Keluarga Muslim, Perempuan dan Radikalisme di Sumatera Utara." *Turast: Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengabdian*, 11(1), 2023.
25. Security Council Report. "West Africa and the Sahel." Available at: <http://securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2025-04/west-africa-and-the-sahel-14.php> [Last seen 23.06.2026].
26. Veronika, N.W. "Poor, Brainwashed and Immature: Prevalent Gender Stereotypes in Indonesian Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and Counterterrorism (CT) Efforts." *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 18(1), 2025.
27. Yanti, Januarti Lista Rita. "Keterlibatan Perempuan sebagai Pelaku Utama dalam Aksi Terorisme di Kawasan Asia Tenggara." *Jurnal PIR: Power in International Relations*, 9(1), 2024.

-
28. Yarrow, Emma. "Gendering Security: The Roles of Young Women and Girls in Terrorism and in Countering Violent Extremism." In Greenbaum, Charles W., Haj-Yahia, Muhammad M., and Hamilton, Carolyn (Eds.), *Handbook of Political Violence and Children: Psychosocial Effects, Intervention, and Prevention Policy*. 2021.