

GENDER AND FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

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Abstract

In the media and within the literature, far right extremism has been noted as being hypermasculine in character. Yet, the framing of these movements as being male dominated, though accurate, obscures the roles that women play within these spaces. This study furthers the academic understanding of the phenomenon by presenting a comprehensive examination of the role of gender within far right extremism as a political ideology and within far right extremist groups. Gendered differences are found in the actual support for these movements and in the motivating psychological factors behind such support. Gendered differences are also present in the roles that men and women perform within these groups, with women functioning as violent actors, thinkers, facilitators, promoters, activists, and exemplars, but being unable to access leadership positions within far right extremist groups.

Since 2007, 61 per cent of fatalities caused by terrorism have occurred due to religiously-motivated attacks (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022). However, in that same time period and especially within the last decade, there has been a surge in politically motivated terrorist attacks, attributed to an increase in both far left and far right extremist terrorism. Even though far left extremist attacks outnumber those conducted by far right extremists, the nature of the threat posed by the latter is different. Far right extremist attacks are more likely to use a wider array of offensive weapons, such as firearms, knives, and other types of offensive objects (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022). Additionally, far right extremists are more likely to target non-Christian religious figures and institutions, private citizens and property, and ethnic and minority groups (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022). As of 2021, far right extremist attacks account for 30 per cent of all terrorist fatalities in the West since 2007, making it the second leading cause in fatalities as a result of terrorist attacks after religious terrorism (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022). In comparison, far left extremist terrorism has rarely resulted in casualties.

There is no end to the speculation on what has driven the rise of far right politics over the past few years. Threaded through all of the theories, however, is a single, agreed-upon claim: the far right is the realm of men. This is seen both in the media representation of the far right and in the academic literature (Harteveld et al., 2015; Love, 2020). The lack of acknowledgement of female support of far right politics creates blind spots in the study of and policymaking targeted towards the phenomenon.

The present study minimizes this gap in the literature by conducting a comprehensive examination of the role of gender within far-right extremism as an ideology and the application of it within far-right extremist groups. Gendered patterns and differences were found in the support for far-right extremism, the ideologies that drive it, and the roles that individuals fulfill within these groups. To determine this, first, definitions for far-right extremism and gender will be identified. Then, in order to prove that women's support for and participation in far-right extremism are an outlier both generally and within the specific phenomenon, the ideological and voting patterns of women in the aggregate will be examined to establish gender as an area worth investigating within the study of far-right extremism. Third, the gendered elements within far-right extremist ideology will be explored to determine how men and women differ in the motivations behind their support for these movements. A case study of women's roles as participators within far-right extremist movements will be conducted as

a fourth, and final, step of the analysis to highlight both the gendered nature of that participation and to demonstrate that women are salient, active actors within far-right extremism. Together, these four elements provide a comprehensive examination of the role of gender in the support, radicalization, and participation of individuals towards and within far-right extremism.

Definitions: Far-Right Extremism and Gender

Different scholars have used different terms to describe far-right political movements, such as extreme right, right wing populism, and radical right. However, a concrete definition of far-right extremism – delineating not only what it is, but also distinguishing it from what it is not – is essential to the study of the phenomenon.

Defining far-right extremism must begin with a conceptualization of ‘right wing’ politics. The idea of a left-right spectrum is commonly used to distinguish between competing political parties, ideologies, and policy approaches. The terms left and right stem from the French Revolution and are closely associated with the idea of egalitarianism (Bjørge & Ravndal, 2019). This essentialist categorization of the left/right divide focuses on the different attitudes towards (in)equality that distinguish the two ends of the spectrum (Bobbio, 1997). The left strives to reduce social inequalities and seeks to make natural ones less painful. In contrast, the right believes most inequalities are natural and so cannot be eradicated; therefore, it is not the state’s responsibility to reduce social inequalities. To support left-leaning parties is to colloquially be considered liberal-leaning, while to support right-leaning parties is to colloquially be considered conservative-leaning. The left side of the spectrum includes the mainstream left and the far left, while the right side of the spectrum includes the mainstream right and the far right.

Positioned further to the right of mainstream conservative and right-wing movements is the far-right. Ideologically, the far right is characterized by authoritarianism, nativism, and reactionary views such as white supremacy, xenophobia, racism, homophobia, misogyny, and transphobia (Lyons, 2017).

Radical and extreme versions of both the far left and the far right can also be distinguished from each other. Radical movements seek to reform the political and economic system, but they do not explicitly seek the elimination of all forms of democracy (Bjørge & Ravndal, 2019). As such, they are still willing and able to work for change within the institutional framework of democracy. In contrast,

extremist movements reject and are directly opposed to democracy, and are willing to use violence or other non-conventional means to achieve their goals (Bjørge & Ravndal, 2019).

Taking all of this into account, far right extremism can be defined as an ideology characterized by authoritarianism, nativism, and reactionary views such as chauvinism, xenophobia, racism, homophobia, misogyny, and transphobia, which explicitly rejects democracy and promotes the use of violence or other non-conventional means to achieve political goals.

Though sex and gender are related, the two are conceptually distinct. Sex refers to the biological distinctions between the sexes (usually established to be ‘men’ and ‘women’) (Spierings et al., 2015). The processes, behaviors, and presentations that are socially manufactured to appear to be sex-specific but are not biologically connected to sexes are referred to as gender. It shapes the accepted, expected, and rewarded behavior and preferences of boys and girls, men and women based on social structures, norms, and institutions (Spierings et al., 2015). While the primary categories of analysis in this paper are masculinity and femininity, the full spectrum of gender identity does factor into far-right extremist narratives. Gender identities and expectations offer a key “sense of meaning” that can shape radicalization, recruitment and participation in far-right extremism and terrorism (Phelan et al., 2023).

Analytically, masculinity and femininity are treated as the same: sets of practices and norms that involve human bodies and what is done with and to them, without those practices and norms being reducible to one’s bodies and especially not to biology. What distinguishes masculinities and femininities is how they fit into the overall system of gender and its ordering of social practices. Systems of male privilege built upon certain ideas of masculinities and femininities have dominated in the West for hundreds of years. Since far-right extremism seeks to promote the straightforward reproduction of those privileges and systems of dominance, gender is a vital component of its ideology.

The Gender Gap

When discussing patterns in support for far-right movements – both radical and extremist in nature – there is often mention of a gender gap: women are more likely than men to be ideologically liberal and more likely to support left-leaning parties (Howell & Day, 2000; Norrander & Wilcox, 2008). This, however, refers to the modern gender gap.

Historically, before the 1980s, women favored right-wing parties more so than males in Western democracies, specifically in the United States and Western Europe (Durverger, 1955; Butler & Stokes, 1974; Inglehart, 1977; Norris & Inglehart, 2000; Norris & Inglehart, 2012; Dalton, 2008). This pattern is characterized by Norris and Inglehart (2000) as the “traditional” gender gap. The traditional gender gap, however, began to lose salience and relevance around the 1980s, due to gender dealignment. Gender dealignment can be defined as the point at which sex differences between men and women in regard to party choice and ideology became minimal to non-existent (Norris & Inglehart, 2000). However, shortly thereafter voting differences between males and females narrowed, and then reversed, with women increasingly supporting parties on the left. This realignment – women’s tendency to be more ideologically liberal and more likely to support left-leaning parties when compared to men – is what is referred to as the “modern” gender gap.

The modern gender gap is still present today. Women are more likely than men to be and to identify as ideologically liberal. This pattern has been shown to be present in Europe (Dassonneville, 2020), the United States (Edlund & Pande, 2002; Norrander & Wilcox, 2008), and Canada (Erickson & O’Neill, 2002). Additionally, women are more likely than men to vote for liberal or left-wing parties, with this pattern also seen in Europe (Abendschön & Steinmetz, 2014; Giger, 2008), the United States (Gillion et al., 2018), and Canada (Erickson & O’Neill, 2002). Furthermore, women are less likely than men to vote for radical right parties. In this case, the literature often makes use of European cases to exemplify this trend (Hartveld et al., 2015; Spierings & Zaslove, 2015; Givens 2004; Norris, 2005), as European countries tend to have a multi-party system in which radical right parties can be more easily differentiated from mainstream right-wing parties. However, some have also argued that the American Republican Party has moved farther to the right and become more radicalized in nature (Kydd, 2021; Miller & Schofield, 2008; Medzihorsky et al., 2014). Therefore, this trend can also be found within the context of the United States (Center for American Women and Politics, 2023; Igielnik, 2020).

The modern gender gap is echoed in the patterns of support for far-right extremism. Men are far more likely to support and be involved in far-right extremist movements (Love, 2020). As such, in the aggregate, women who support and/or participate in far-right extremism deviate from the existing, accepted patterns of their gender. On account of this, gender must be considered a critical variable in the study of far-right extremism. The following two sections

will analyze the role of gender in far-right extremist ideology and in the modes of participation within far right extremist groups, respectively.

Gender within Far Right Extremist Ideology

Gender is a vital component of far-right extremist ideology, especially because this political movement is hypermasculine and misogynistic in character. Far right extremism exploits male sentiments of emasculation and appeal to ideas of manhood in their recruitment and participation efforts (Dier & Baldwin, 2022). The gendered narratives of the far right can be directed towards all individuals, both within the movement and society at large. These narratives position individuals within a gender order, thus establishing gender power relations (Phelan et al., 2023). These gendered narratives also delineate the movement's target outgroups. Expectations of masculinity are used to define the role of the ideal male, while misogyny and hostile beliefs towards women and LGBTQ+ are often justified and legitimized as part of these groups' overall ideological frameworks (Phelan et al., 2023). Consequently, understanding the gendered components that underpin far right extremist ideology is important for understanding the drivers of radicalization and modes of participation.

The concept of relative deprivation is critical to understanding how masculinity functions as a driving component of far-right extremist ideology. Relative deprivation results from a social comparison in which a person believes they are being denied something to which they are entitled, usually through the fault of another group. This deprivation can be real, but the phenomenon focuses on the perception of being deprived. People's sense of entitlement to what they believe they are being denied is a fundamental feature of relative deprivation. Relative deprivation research shows a strong connection between relative deprivation and prejudice, with the two being positively correlated (Pettigrew, 2008). Furthermore, relative deprivation and relative gratification, the inverse of relative deprivation, have also been connected. Relative deprivation is not only present amongst groups that are impoverished, but also amongst wealthy individuals. Jetten, Mols, & Postmes (2015) established a v-curve of relative deprivation and relative gratification, finding that groups that are relatively wealthy also showed the same effect. They subsequently argued that the gratification end of the curve is actually a form of fear of future deprivation, therefore further supporting that feelings of deprivation can drive prejudice (Jetten et al., 2015). This may provide, at the very least, a partial explanation for why wealthy and/or white individuals

may support far-right extremist movements even when they are not actually deprived.

Relative deprivation has been specifically linked to support for far-right radical political parties (Doosje et al., 2012; Cena et al., 2022; Urbanska & Guimond, 2018) and far right extremist movements (Agius et al., 2020). In the case of far-right extremism, there is a very specific type of relative deprivation sentiment at play: the feeling that straight, white, Western men have been wrongfully toppled from their rightful pedestal by the changing social and economic conditions, and the feeling that this rightful pedestal needs to be reclaimed by returning others to their “rightful place in society.” Gendered narratives bring together key themes that animate far-right ideology, such as hierarchy, order, power, and a preference for tradition, as well as the insistence that minorities and women benefit at their expense (Agius et al., 2020). This specific type of relative deprivation sentiment is connected within far-right extremist ideology through ideas of hegemonic masculinity and narratives of hypermasculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is “the configuration of gender practices... which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). According to the ideas of hegemonic masculinity, White men should be socially placed above all – women and other, non-White men. Therefore, it is intrinsically tied to white supremacy and male supremacy. As an ideology that overtly advocates for the subjugation of women and the maintenance of rigid, stereotypical gender roles (Phelan et al., 2023), male supremacy is composed of three elements: female control, female compliance, and anti-feminism.

Female control refers to the gendered power relations reinforcing the control of women, including how women should behave within society and the policing of this (Phelan et al., 2023). This is closely associated with male supremacy and white supremacy, in that women are perceived as genetically and naturally inferior to men, and their subordination is necessary for the survival of “the white race” (Phelan et al., 2023). Female compliance, on the other hand, refers to the gender norms that are framed by the group’s ideology to reinforce the compliance of women, including traditional gender roles, in pursuit of the group’s overall ideological objectives (Phelan et al., 2023). Women are specifically depicted in their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers within far-right extremism. Lastly, anti-feminism refers to the backlash to gender equality and even the promotion of gender inequality (Phelan et al., 2023). This often includes

discourse relating to anti-abortion, birth control, women's rights to vote, women's positions as leaders, and general feminist affirmative action.

Narratives of hypermasculinity emphasize and reinforce "masculine ideals and traits" that males should hold or strive towards, particularly in relation to physical strength, aggression, and dominance. Often, men within far-right extremist spaces are portrayed as the "patriotic hero", which relates to men's specific role and duties as "protectors" and "guardians" of the groups in pursuit of the movements' overall objectives (Phelan et al., 2023). This is connected with appeals to "brothers-in-arms" narratives, which highlight the compatriotism within the movement against non-White communities, the LGBTQ+ communities, and women/feminists (Phelan et al., 2023). Particularly, anyone who is not straight (particularly transgender), White (particularly black or Muslim men), or a man (particularly committed feminists) is regarded as part of the targeted enemy outgroup and deemed a threat to the White race (Phelan et al., 2023). The presence of these elements of society, for some far-right groups, are seen as a manifestation of a degenerate society.

These ideas of hegemonic masculinity and narratives of hypermasculinity may be attractive to men experiencing relative deprivation because of White men's increased levels of social dominance orientation. Social dominance orientation reflects the general preference for social hierarchy and inequality, and people who have higher levels of social dominance orientation tend to favour the dominant group in a society (Pratto et al., 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 2003). The increased levels of social dominance orientation in men may explain White men's increased tendency to support far-right extremism. Scholars have suggested that the worldview provided by the social dominance orientation may offer individuals a coherent justification for adopting extreme beliefs and attitudes that benefit the social groups that are residing on the top of the social hierarchy.

However, women consistently score lower in measures of social dominance orientation (Batalha et al., 2011). A study by Teng and colleagues (2022) also notably showed that experiences of relative deprivation increased men's, but not women's, hostile sexism. If these two things hold true, then what is driving women's support for far-right extremism when it is present?

Internalized misogyny and racism may be two factors that explain female support of far-right extremism. There are other factors – such as the rural-urban divide,

age, education, and religion – that may also be relevant to this discussion. However, the present research will focus on internalized misogyny and racism because of the role gender plays in both of them.

Misogyny is defined as the hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women and/or girls (Szymanski et al., 2009). Women, when consistently exposed from a young age to environments in which the value and skills of women are repeatedly demeaned, eventually internalize those misogynistic beliefs and attitudes, and apply them to themselves and/or other women and girls (Bearman et al., 2009). Women who experience internalized misogyny may express it through minimizing the value of women, mistrusting women, believing gender bias in favor of men, assertions of incompetence, construction of women as competitors, construction of women as objects, and invalidation and derogation of others or oneself (Szymanski et al., 2009; Bearman, Korobov, & Thorne, 2009).

Far right extremist ideology is extremely compatible with the sentiments echoed by women experiencing internalized misogyny, especially when it is found in high levels. In the same way that far-right extremist ideology promotes ideas and values of toxic masculinity, it does the same for the ideas and values of toxic femininity – a code of conformity and social pressure to rigid feminine gender roles, reinforced through (sometimes unconscious) beliefs, such as viewing oneself as unworthy, and imperatives to be consistently pleasant, accommodating, and compliant (Weber, 2019).

The best example of how these elements of internalized misogyny and toxic femininity are promoted within and resonate in the ideology of far-right extremism is the case of the TradWives – a group of female far right extremist “mommy vloggers” who promote the “virtues of staying at home, submitting to male leadership, [and] bearing lots of children” (Kelly, 2018). These women extol a 1950s escapist fantasy of “chastity, marriage, [and] motherhood” (Love, 2020). The “hyperfeminine aesthetic” that the TradWives construct masks the authoritarianism of their ideology (Kelly, 2018). Some of these women further weaponize femininity against feminism with Cosmopolitan-like promotions of fashion and makeup, earning them the label, “fashy femmes” (Love, 2020). These women offer online advice and videos on topics ranging from “how to please your husband” to racist reflections on “ghetto music” and calls to “reassert their vision of the white race” (Jan Trust, 2019). Wolfie James, wife of the alleged white nationalist, Matthew Gebert, exemplifies this approach of far-right

extremist men. James argues that “although men are better suited to the cause” given their greater physical strength and capacity for violence, it is women who can “boost it to the next level” (Hesse, 2019). TradWives, like Wolfie James, claim feminism has failed white women, robbing them of the opportunity to have a male provider, a happy family, and a nice home (Love, 2020). According to this narrative, the #MeToo movement only confirms the dangerous world feminism has created for women, a world where men no longer respect them for their femininity and fertility and, hence, feel free to assault, harass, and rape them (Love, 2020). In contrast, traditionalism does what feminism is supposed to do in preventing women from being made into sex objects and treated like whores (Smith, 2020).

Supporting far right extremism comes with benefits for these women. First, it gives these women some feeling of confidence that these patriarchal and misogynistic ideologies will not target them (Valenti, 2021). This is because they are the “good women” – they are the mothers, wives, and caretakers that submit to male leadership. This is tied to the second component of internalized misogyny that is at play here: victim blaming. When far right extremists do target women, it is because they are the “bad women” (Valenti, 2021). Claiming that women somehow brought on themselves whatever horrible thing happened to them is a form of self-protection. Believing that other women are “bad”, and that that’s why something terrible happened to them, enables one to convince oneself that one is safe from these horrible acts (Valenti, 2021). In reality, though, aligning with misogynist men is no safeguard against the consequences of these gendered ideologies. However, it gives these women a sense of psychological protection even if it is only perceived.

Furthermore, racism may be another factor influencing women’s support for far-right extremist ideologies. Mentions of the “White race”, “white men”, and “white women” have permeated this section on gender within far-right extremist ideology. That is because racist elements are just as deeply ingrained within the discourse of these movements as gendered narratives are. The patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby, 1990). On a deeper level, however, the patriarchy is a dominance hierarchy that involves the stratification of everyone in society. Different people and groups of people each have a place in the hierarchy – and not all men are at the top, nor are all women at the very bottom. In this hierarchy, White, straight, Western men are at the very top. However, non-White, non-straight, non-Western men are not at the very top; they are positioned below the

White, straight, Western men within the patriarchal hierarchy (Beau, 2019). White women, notably, are “second in sex to men, but first in race” to other minorities when it comes to the hierarchical structuring of the patriarchy (Junn, 2017; de Beauvoir, 2001). As such, White women are specifically positioned within far-right extremist ideology as still being superior to others within the “ideal society.” Within far-right extremism, narratives of White womanhood are constructed to depict White women in terms of purity and virtue, in contrast to the undesirable traits of people of color, especially women of color (Junn, 2017). These narratives support the preservation of White women as second in sex but first in race, something which may also be attracting some White women towards far-right extremism.

However, this does not provide an explanation for why people of color might be attracted to participate in far-right extremist movements; and, they do, especially men of color (Allam & Nakhlawi, 2021; Ngangura, 2021). Though a full discussion of the role of racism is outside of the scope of this study, it should be kept into account in the formation of a nuanced and inclusive understanding of far-right extremism.

Women’s Roles in Far-Right Extremism

Historically, women within far-right extremist movements are viewed as passive actors, despite evidence to the contrary. In fact, even when women are active actors, they are still framed as being passive. When women are implicated in far-right extremism, their roles are diminished (see Samuels & Shajkovci, 2022 for a detailed example of this). Curtailing the degree to which women are involved in these types of incidents of far-right extremism allows them to remain relatively unscathed by the media and the criminal justice system, to fly under the radar of academic study, and undermines counterterrorism efforts by underestimating the threat posed by far-right extremist women. In an effort to shed light on the involvement of women within far-right extremism, the forms of female participation within these movements will be analyzed. The focus here is on female participation, specifically, because gender denotes participation for women in a way that it does not for men within these movements. Women, specifically, encompass six forms of participation: violent actors, thinkers, facilitators, promoters, activists, and exemplars.

Violent Actors

Contrary to popular belief but as the literature suggests, women can operate as violent actors in a variety of terrorist movements (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019). Far right extremism is no different. The term “violent actor”, as used by Campion (2020), does not exclusively imply acts of terrorism, but covers the spectrum of extreme right terrorism, to extreme right violence, to hate crimes. By academic definitions mentioned earlier therefore, violent actors fit within definitions of far-right extremism because they engage in illegal violence against enemies. Individuals who fit this category are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Violent Actors

Name	Organizational Links	Activity
Kathy Ainsworth (USA)	White Knights of the KKK	In 1970, Ainsworth and two men were implicated in a string of bombings against black and Jewish targets in 1967 and 1968 (Wexler, 2015).
Melany Attwood (Australia)	Aryan Nations, Aryan Girls	Attwood, with lover Robert Edhouse and friend Corey Dymock, allegedly murdered Attwood’s former partner, Alan Taylor. Attwood was the leader of Aryan Girls (Clarke, 2018).
Franziska Birkman (Germany)	Paramilitary Sports Group Hoffman	Birkmann, along with Uwe Behrendt and Karl-Heinz Hoffmann, was implicated in the murder of a Jewish publisher and Rabbi, Schlomo Lewin and his partner in 1980. Birkmann’s sunglasses were found at the scene of the crime, although she was acquitted of conspiracy to commit murder (Manthe 2019b).

Kiyomi Brewer (USA)	N/A	Brewer, with partner Nolan Brewer, allegedly vandalized an Indiana Synagogue with swastikas and set fire to the yard in 2018. Plans to use Drano bombs (pressurized IEDs) were changed at the last minute (Mettler, 2019).
Erica Chase (USA)	World Church of the Creator, Prison Outreach Program	Chase, with partner Leo Felton, was convicted of bank robbery. It is also alleged they engaged in counterfeiting, purchased firearms, and began construction of an explosive device in 2002. They planned to bomb Jewish targets, or kill Jewish, black, or civil rights leaders to trigger a race war (United States of America v. Leo v. Felton; Erica Chase, 2005).
Jean Craig (USA)	The Order, Bruder Schweigen	Craig, in addition to other Order members, was implicated in the killing of Jewish radio host Alan Berg in 1984. Craig allegedly followed Berg for weeks before the attack, filming and taking photographs (Hilliard, 1987)
Holy Dartez (USA)	Klavern 1500, Invisible Empire, KKK	Dartez, along with four men, was indicted for three counts of cross burning the home of three black men, in addition to intimidation, and using fire to commit a felony in 2003. She was the driver for the attack, and also held a role as Klavern secretary (United States of

		America v. David Anthony Fuselier, 2004).
Tristain Frye (USA)	Volksfront	Frye, along with three men, allegedly beat a homeless man to death, believing he was a drug dealer in 2003. Frye was pregnant with an accomplice's child at the time of the attack, which was believed to be an initiation for red shoelaces (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2004).
Francine Graham (USA)	Black Hebrew Israelite Movement	Together with partner David Anderson, Graham is accused of murdering a Jersey City detective and shooting three individuals at a Jersey City Kosher supermarket on 10 December 2019. The attack was later described by FBI officials as domestic terrorism. They are also suspected of the murder of Michael Rumberger earlier on 7 December 2019 (Gold, 2019).
Christine Greenwood (USA)	Blood and Honor, Women for Aryan Unity	Greenwood, with partner John McCabe, was charged with possession of bomb making materials, including 50 gallons of gasoline and battery-operated clocks. Greenwood also founded Women for Aryan Unity and launched the Aryan Baby Drive (Blee, 2005).
Christine Hewicker (Germany)	Otte Group and Uhl/Wolfgram Group	Hewicker and the Otte Group allegedly participated in several crimes including targeting courts of law to disrupt with lawsuits

		against comrades. Among these crimes was a bank robbery, for which Hewicker received a six-year prison sentence (Manthe, 2019a; Kruglanski et al., 2020).
Rebecca Matathias (USA)	N/A	Together with partner Andrew Costas, Matathias was arrested for allegedly defacing religious property, arson, and malicious destruction of property targeting places of worship (AP, 2020).
Shelley Shannon (USA)	Army of God	Shannon was allegedly involved in firebombing six abortion clinics, two acid attacks, and was found guilty of shooting and wounding a Wichita abortion doctor in 1993 (Thomas, 2018).
Lindsay Souvannarath (Canada)	N/A	Together with partner James Gamble, Souvannarath allegedly planned a firebombing and shooting attack on Halifax Shopping Centre in 2015. She also ran a blog called Cockswastica (Lamoureux, 2019).
Sibylle Vorderbrugge (Germany)	Deutsche Aktionsgruppen	Vorderbrugge committed several lethal arson attacks in Hamburg in August 1980, killing two Vietnamese refugees. She received life imprisonment for murder (Manthe, 2019a).
Tammy Williams (USA)	Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord	Williams, along with husband Londell, was charged with threatening an informer, possessing an automatic rifle, and planning to assassinate Democratic presidential

		candidate Reverend Jesse Jackson in 1988 (Canberra Times, 1988).
Beate Zschape (Germany)	National Socialist Underground	Zschape, along with two men, was convicted for her part in a campaign of assassination against ten migrants and a police officer between 1999 and 2011 (Hillebrand, 2018)

Note. A list of female far right extremist violent actors by alphabetical order of names, with their organizational links and a description of their actions.

Of note, female violent actors are more likely to be part of, or connect with, a formal organization or act as half of a dyad (Campion, 2020). Of the 18 cases of female violent actors that Campion (2020) investigated, only two could be considered cases where women acted alone without a male partner or connection with an organization. Even then, in the case of Shelly Shannon, her relationship with the Army of God may obfuscate the lone nature of her actions. Women have, so far, rarely initiated violence as lone actors within far-right extremist movements, something which is of note when understanding the gendered nature of the phenomenon.

Thinkers

Thinkers are heavily embedded in the creation and propagation of both extreme and radical far right ideas. They may not engage in violence themselves, but they create the justifications which may enable others to validate violent actions (Campion, 2020). The term “thinker” is used here to describe the intellectuals who make original contributions to the pool of ideas that make of the ideology of far-right extremism, or who have established sophisticated intellectual positions (Campion, 2020). Importantly, the ideological alignment of the thinker does not always correspond with the incorporation of their ideas by seemingly ideologically dissimilar elements of the far-right environment. Therefore, a radical may find their ideas popular amongst extremists with which they have no organizational relationship. This appropriation of ideas is common in the extreme and radical far right spaces (Campion, 2020).

Thinkers not only engage with ideology but can interpret and situate ideology in a landscape of meaning. Women who perform as thinkers can work to counter

left progressivism and feminism by engaging in dialogues on identity politics, femininity, and gender relations. This provides a cohesive social formation which firmly bridges seemingly harmless gendered lifestyles and fringe interpretations of conservatism with a network of other ideas and beliefs.

Women often fill these positions specifically as relating to discussions of traditional values, the traditional family, femininity, and the proliferation a transcendental identity for conforming women. Within far-right extremist spaces, the most prominent contemporary voices are Lana Lokteff, Lauren Southern, and Tara McCarthy (Campion, 2020). These individuals lead the charge against feminism and dominate far right discourses on women. They achieve this by creating narratives regarding traditional values, the traditional family, femininity, and extolling a transcendental identity for conforming women. These three thinkers, in addition to Rachel Summers and Robyn Riley, appear to have cooperated in the past (Campion, 2020). This indicates that, while they develop these ideas seemingly on their own, networks exist between them which may promote the cross-pollination, sharing, dismissal, or strengthening of ideas within the far-right extremist environment.

Facilitators

The third form of participation is as facilitators. This form describes individuals who act in an enabling, organizational, or logistics roles as part of, or on behalf of, a movement or group (Campion, 2020). Facilitation encompasses a range of illegal actions that support or carry out a terrorist mission or objective. These illegal activities include providing safe accommodation for violent actors, obtaining illicit weapons and materials for others to use (ergo, making some of them extremists by definition), and handling the proceeds of crime to facilitate organizational goals (Campion, 2020). The more recent examples of facilitation come from the women of Blood and Honor who supported the NSU in Germany, providing passports, aliases, safe houses, and securing materials, resources, or equipment (Campion, 2020). These actors can work below the threat detection threshold because they may not be physically present at meetings. As a consequence, facilitators can be hard to detect and quantify as members of far-right extremist movements. Because facilitation infers the assistance of others, it is not observable in instances of dyads or lone actors. Therefore, it is more commonly linked to a specific movement or group.

Promoters

In contrast to the thinkers, promoters are individuals who engage in information sharing, dissemination, and provocation (commonly online, as “trolls”), but who largely repackage and share ideas rather than create them (Campion, 2020). Though these individuals may be promoting misinformation, there is little evidence to suggest that individuals in this domain are being deliberately deceptive. Rather, they may simply subscribe to ideological worldviews in which far right extremist content is accepted as truth while the questioning of that truth is not allowed. Few female promoters explicitly call for violence, and as such could be considered within the radical right sphere rather than the far-right extremist sphere. However, as stated before in the section on thinkers, radical right ideological material can be incorporated within extremist wings of far-right movements, often through the promotion and propagation of these ideas.

This may be because promoters play a significant role in ideological magnification (Campion, 2020). They are skilled at repackaging the ideas of others by taking abstract theories and making them readily understandable. This can provide a translation-type service between thinkers and various audiences. This is also where the “pink-washing” of far-right extremism occurs – the softening of their image to make them more acceptable for the general public, drawing them into the movements. The visibility of women in far-right extremism softens the hard, masculinist image of such movements, a process mediated by feminine stereotypes attributed to women (vs. men) (Ben-Shitrit et al., 2022). The gender mainstreaming process could be particularly effective in drawing women to such movements, as it removes some of the reluctance women have when it comes to the far-right, painting it as less cold, aggressive, and alienating, without changing or moderating its hard-line ideology (Ben-Shitrit, Elad-Strenger, & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2022).

Activists

Activism is the fifth form of participation for women within far-right extremist spaces. Activism is the largest domain of participation, and most individuals noted in all other forms are often activists as well (Campion, 2020). Activism here specifically describes the active participation and support for individuals, organizations, and movements associated with far-right extremist movements.

Female activists are most commonly aligned with radical far right movements and rarely actively engage in the violent or illegal actions that define extremism

(Campion, 2020), as noted in the small number of women actually found to have been active violent actors in far-right extremist movements. In the public sphere, activists are individuals who front and attend rallies, protests, political meetings, and/or social meetings. They often run blogs, magazines, and websites, canvassing for donations, managing finances, and dispersing donations through networks. This is demonstrated most clearly by the Women for Aryan Unity (WAU), which runs raffles, competitions, and canvasses for donations (Campion, 2020). These funds are apparently distributed to white children and to incarcerated right-wing extremists through the Adopt a Bruder program (WAU, 2020). Activists are often intrinsic to the establishment and maintenance of formal and informal networks through such activity. Activism can also take place in the private sphere with respect to unrestricted procreation, which is championed by some in far-right extremism to boost White birth rates as part of a defense against ethnic replacement (Campion, 2020). Activism, therefore, spans both the public and private spheres and encompasses an array of activities.

Exemplars

The last form of participation is as exemplars. This form is not defined solely by the participation of women, but by the cultural constructions and celebrations of them (Campion, 2020). These constructions turn women into symbols and subcultural heroines which are elevated within subcultures for displaying certain behavioral norms, values, or virtues worthy of imitation.

Exemplars epitomize a desired, gendered, and idealized identity. They become symbols of the movement through sacrifice and martyrdom; by being attributed certain value-sets including devotion to male partners; by personifying a way of life glorified within far-right extremism; or through their own political agency and actions (Campion, 2020). The exemplars, through their actions and also through the narratives which are created to interpret these actions, can become the idealized feminine models in radical and extreme far right spaces. One of these feminine models is the TradWife movement, which encompasses women who engage with nostalgic interpretations of the traditional family and have political opposition to feminism, Islam, immigration, and multiculturalism (Stendahl, 2020). Among participants, the TradWife life is seen as a way to reclaim an idealized interpretation of White womanhood.

Of note, leaders are not a mode of participation that is listed here. This is because women very rarely, if ever, occupy leadership positions within far-right

extremism. There are several female leaders within radical far right movements – women such as Marine Le Pen, Frauke Petry, Pia Kjaersgaard, and Siv Jensen come to mind (Worth, 2021). However, the same cannot be said for far-right extremist movements. This might be by virtue of its ideology – if far right extremism is built upon an idea of hegemonic masculinity in which women are submissive to men’s leadership, then these women cannot occupy positions of leadership.

This exemplifies the extremely gendered nature of far-right extremist ideology and of female participation within these movements. While women are allowed and even encouraged to participate, they are only allowed to do so up to the point that it reflects and upholds hegemonic masculinity. This can be seen not only in the notable lack of women in leadership positions within these types of groups, but in all of the forms of participation listed above. Women are violent actors – but they rarely, if ever, act alone. Instead, they act with male partners or within a larger, male dominated group. As thinkers, facilitators, activists, promoters, and exemplars, women are still only allowed to participate in so far as these roles help to create, reflect, and reproduce the gendered dynamics within far-right extremist ideology.

Conclusion

There are distinct, gendered patterns and differences in the support for far-right extremism, the ideologies that drive it, and the roles that individuals fulfill within these groups. The modern gender gap characterizes support for all right-wing movements, including radical and extreme forms of the far right. Gender is also a key component of far-right extremist ideology, as it shapes radicalization, recruitment, and participation. Relative deprivation and social dominance orientations are made particularly salient to men within far-right extremist ideology through notions of hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity. However, though women reproduce ideas of hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity through their participation within these movements, relative deprivation and social dominance orientations do not hold the same salience for them as they do for men. Alternatively, internalized misogyny and racism may be the driving factors for female participation within far-right extremism.

When women do participate within far-right extremist movements, they are often viewed as passive actors by the academic literature, the media, and counterterrorism efforts, despite evidence to the contrary. Women participate

within far-right extremist movements in six distinct forms: as violent actors, as thinkers, as facilitators, as promoters, as activists, and as exemplars. One of the most notable findings is that even as violent actors, women rarely – if ever – take on the role of lone violent actors. They act as part of a dyad with a male counterpart or as part of a wider group. The other very notable finding is that women do not occupy leadership positions within far-right extremism. This is due to the gendered nature of its ideology, which is strongly based on the idea of women are subservient to men and subject to their authority. As such, men cannot be subject to the authority of women under their leadership. Even in their participation within these movements, women must uphold and reproduce these ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

Ignoring or underestimating the gendered differences and dynamics within the support for and participation within far-right extremism leads to an incomplete study of the phenomenon and, as a result, undermines counterterrorism efforts. Future research should seek to further clarify and solidify the gendered distinctions in the psychological factors driving support for far-right extremism in an effort to decrease this gap in the literature. Furthermore, the intersection between far-right extremist ideologies and racial and ethnic identities should also be investigated further to shed light on why people of color might choose to join these movements. Especially as, going forward, it seems that far right extremism will remain as one of the most salient threats within the political and security landscape within Western societies.

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