

Research Project

Gendered Security Strategies: How Women Matter in the Policy and Practice of Countering Violent Extremism

Third-party funded project

Project title Gendered Security Strategies: How Women Matter in the Policy and Practice of Countering Violent Extremism

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Over the last decade, the “soft” approaches of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) have emerged to supplement the “hard” security approaches of counterterrorism (CT). P/CVE approaches, which work to address the structural drivers of violence through collaboration between the governance, development, and peacebuilding sectors, have identified women and gender as critical elements for its success. Indeed, within the last five years there has been a sharp increase in policy and programming emphasizing the importance of “women’s empowerment” and “gender equality” in P/CVE activities. While academic research has examined the impact of CT on women, women’s rights, and women’s civil society organizations, no such studies exist for P/CVE. This project fills this research gap by examining gendered P/CVE policy and practice across three overlapping sectors: 1) multilateral development agencies 2) civil society organizations and 3) military and state institutions. In order to understand how gender is conceptualized as instrumental to security strategies within these different sectors, the project focuses on one context - Kenya - in order to produce a groundbreaking and nuanced study of how and why gendered security strategies are developed, and how they impact, and are impacted by, the local context in which they are implemented. As P/CVE continues to gain traction within the international cooperation and security sectors, academic research must study the implications of instrumentalizing women and gender in the fight against terror. The objectives and aims of this project are as follows: 1) To make a unique contribution to, and address a gap in, literature on women, gender, security, and preventing and countering violent extremism by theorizing gender as a discursively constructed, fluid, and embodied technology rather than a stable, coherent signifier. 2) To produce an in-depth empirical study of the phenomenon of gendered P/CVE policy and practice as enacted across intersecting security sectors in one context and to assess the analytical generalizability of those results at the global level. 3) To understand how gender matters, both at the symbolic, discursive level and the material, empirical level, for the development and implementation of P/CVE activities. 4) To understand the potential ramifications or benefits of integrating the principles of the women, peace, and security agenda with the P/CVE agenda on women, women’s rights, and women’s civil society organizations. This project employs a unique combination of feminist ethnographic and discursive methods in a top-down and bottom-up approach to understanding gendered security strategies. Such a mixed-methods approach results in varied sources of qualitative data on these strategies both at the level of discursive conceptualization (i.e. policy, programming, political discourse) and at the level of practical implementation (i.e. what these strategies actually look like on the ground). Further, this approach will produce a comprehensive understanding of how multilateral development agencies, civil society organizations, and state and military institutions

understand gender as relevant to P/CVE, as well as the impact of P/CVE activities on the communities in which they are implemented. This unique in-depth case study will add empirical depth to the academic and policy debates regarding how women and gender matter for P/CVE strategies, as well as the impact of these strategies on women, women's rights, and women's civil society organizations. Further, it will significantly advance the field of feminist security studies, as it makes clear the relevance of gendered analysis and feminist theory for understanding issues of security and violent conflict. Lastly, this study has the potential to influence policymakers and practitioners in how they approach the role of gender in P/CVE in ways that could have tremendous and positive ramifications for women's lives.

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