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Female Violent Extremists: Pawns or Perpetrators?

A qualitative assessment on why the Kenyan government lacks attention to a severe security threat

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Abstract

In recent years an increasing amount of women voluntarily opted to join violent extremist organizations. Governments oftentimes fail to respond to female violent extremism, resulting in the compromising of the international security. This worrisome threat has not yet been examined by academic scholars. In this thesis, the focus lies on Kenya, where Islamist extremist group Al-Shabab has turned its attention towards the recruitment of Kenyan women. The Kenyan government has not yet implemented policies to counter this phenomenon. With theoretical predictions derived from feminist theory and policy inaction theory, this thesis aims to explain the lack of attention of the Kenyan state towards female violent extremism. Government and civil society documents are analyzed with the use of qualitative content analysis as research method. Thereby it is examined whether the theoretical predictions are applicable to the research problem. The findings conclude, in accordance to the prediction emanated from feminist theory, that the Kenyan government has an implemented gender bias. Because of this gender bias Kenyan policymakers neglect the threat that female violent extremism poses. In addition, county governments who do have the will to implement gender-sensitive policies, oftentimes do not obtain the resources necessary for this commitment.

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List of abbreviations

CAP	County Action Plan
CHRIPS	Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
ELF	Earth Liberation Front
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatusuna
GII	Gender Inequality Index
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
KECOSCE	Kenya Community Support Centre
KNAP	Kenyan National Action Plan
MRC	Mombasa Republican Council
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSCVE	National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SCP	Situational Crime Prevention
UN	United Nations

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1. Introduction

The small city of Zabarmari in Nigeria became world news in 2015 when six female Boko Haram insurgents detonated their suicide vests in the middle of the city center, resulting in the killing of more than fifty fleeing people (BBC, 2015). A year later, the Kenyan city Mombasa experienced a similar situation when three women intruded a police station, throwing petrol bombs towards police officers before setting the building on fire (The East African, 2019, para 1). Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, was also targeted when a woman attempted to assassinate the United Nations (UN) envoy in Somalia, killing seven people in the process (Hussein Farah, 2019).

These attacks were widely reported by international media outlets, however, the content of the journalistic coverage was conspicuous. One reporter noted that the terrorist attack in Mogadishu was a rare example of women's involvement in violent extremism (ibid., para. 1). In another article the perpetrators of the attack were referred to as jihadi brides who have become victims to the lure of Islamist jihadism (The East African, 2019, para. 5). The assumption that the participation of women in violent extremist organizations is an extraordinary phenomenon is obsolete. Throughout history women have been involved in up to sixty percent of all armed rebel groups (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019, p. 3). Within these organizations more than ten percent of the members is female (Davis, 2006, as quoted in Wertz & Mbuvi, 2020, p. 2). Women fulfill key operational roles in these violent groups and have for centuries. In the 19th century they were responsible for the assassination of important political figures, and today they often function as female combatants (Spencer, 2016).

Political ideology influences the extent to which women participate in violent extremist organizations. Traditionally, left-wing extremist organizations are more appealing for extremist women as the ideology challenges traditional gender norms (Wood & Thomas, 2016). Whereas female members of Islamist extremist groups, such as al-Qaida, were only allowed to conform to traditional gender roles. These women were tasked with the upbringing and education of their children (Spencer, 2016, p. 77). However, there is an emerging trend whereby a multitude of violent extremist ideologies are increasingly willing to accept more progressive roles for women in their organizations (ibid.). This is also the case for Islamist extremist groups, who nowadays are actively trying to mobilize female members. Their recruitment tactics are adjusted to women, al-Qaida even introduced a magazine, *Al-Shamikha*, with articles responding to the beliefs and objectives of potential female recruits (Bizovi, 2014, p. 21). In addition, Islamist extremist organizations are allocating more responsibilities to women. This prompted a global trend whereby women are active as combatants, recruiters, spies, operational managers and suicide bombers (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019).

1.1 Security risks

The involvement of women in violent extremist organizations, also known as female violent extremism, poses severe security threats. Statistics show that there is a clear increase of women who join violent extremist organizations. This, consequentially, leads to the rise of women-led terrorist attacks (Henshaw, 2016). These attacks, mainly suicide bombings, result in an average of 8.4 deaths. Whereas attacks committed by male suicide bombers cause on average 5.3 deaths (Henshaw, 2016, p. 51). This means that suicide attacks carried out by women are in general more lethal than those of men. Besides, it is reported that women had a smaller chance of a 'failed' attack than men (O'Rourke, 2009).

Female violent extremists are also more threatening in other areas, for example, women are more 'successful' in recruiting new members for their organization (ibid.). These female recruiters are more likely to gain the trust of young girls, and subsequently isolate these girls from their families (Badurdeen, 2018). As an illustration, female members of Boko Haram attempt to befriend young girls and manipulate them in joining violent extremist groups, with the appeal of a promising future (BBC, 2014). Female recruiters have also established strong online networks that have a wide reach for spreading violent extremist messages (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019). In addition, women also indirectly induce the recruitment of male members. As men oftentimes opt to be involved in violent extremist organizations when they feel ashamed that women have obtained dominant positions within these groups (Wertz & Mbuvi, 2020; Von Knop, 2007).

Even though female violent extremism is more menacing than ever, governments have oftentimes not geared their counter-extremist policies to the issue (Cragin & Daly, 2009). This inaction can have disastrous consequences, resulting in local, national and international security risks. For instance, strategies on countering violent extremism (CVE) implemented by governments are fixated on male perpetrators. As a consequence, women can more easily slip through security checkpoints (Wertz & Mbuvi, 2020, p. 18). Violent extremist organizations capitalize on this blind spot in the security apparatus of governments, by recruiting female members to circumvent security measures (ibid.). What is more, women use their sexuality to manipulate security officers (Cragin & Daly, 2009). There are instances reported whereby some Muslim countries and the U.S armed forces were baited by female violent extremists who used sexual advances to make security officers leave their post (ibid., p. 24). This tactic causes a distraction and creates an opportunity for violent extremist groups to commit terrorist attacks (ibid.). It is also observed that female violent extremists fake pregnancies, wear veils and other religious clothing and bring baby carriages to hide their explosive devices or contrabands (p. 116). Moreover, the defect in government CVE policies makes it less likely that women are arrested for their violent activities (Wertz & Mbuvi, 2020).

Additionally, the lack of state responses towards female violent extremism contributes to the voluntary involvement of women in violent extremist organizations. As the neglect of the issue could lead to the

feeling of marginalization among these women. This pushes women to turn their backs to the government, and making them embrace violent extremist ideologies even more (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2014).

1.2 Research Gap

There is little research on state responses regarding female violent extremism. Admittedly, there has been a lack of research on the topic in general (Wertz & Mbuvi, 2020). In political science, and the rest of the academic world, female violent extremists are frequently labelled as vulnerable victims of relentless recruitment tactics carried out by their male counterparts (Tariq & Sjoberg, 2020). Feminist theorists have provided an extensive account on this dominant discourse in global politics regarding female violent extremism. Arguing that women are not merely passive actors, but active agents responsible for their own violent choices. Yet feminist scholars disagree over whether women join violent extremist organizations for the same reasons as men, or, if women's motivations to get involved in these groups are inherently different than those of men.

When examining academic articles that address female violent extremism, it is notable that scholars are oftentimes focused on the radicalization of women in western countries. Particularly, the online recruitment process of terrorist organization ISIS targeted at Muslim women living in European countries is frequently discussed. The attention for this specific topic is in line with the terrorist episodes that shocked Europe in recent years. However, it appears that the danger of female violent extremism in other continents has been moved to the background, whereby Africa draws the short straw. This is extremely problematic, as countries such as Nigeria, Somalia and Kenya are host to the most dangerous violent extremist organizations in the world, who have significant numbers of female combatants (UNDP, 2017).

1.3 Kenya

The East-African country of Kenya has a troubling history with violent extremist organizations. The most significant threat facing the country, and East-Africa as a whole, is Islamist extremist organization Al-Shabab (The Youth). The objective of Al-Shabab is the establishment of an Islamic state in Somalia, but the group also deviates to neighboring countries (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). In contemporary times the emerging trend of female violent extremism is profoundly evident in Kenya, as Al-Shabab has turned its attention towards the recruitment of Kenyan women (Badurdeen, 2021). The female members of Al-Shabab have profiled themselves as recruiters, spies and commanders (ibid., para. 1). The country has already been confronted with violent attacks carried out by women. The increasing threat of extremist women exposes the lack of attention by the Kenyan government towards the issue. Recently implemented national CVE efforts, for example, are silent about the role of women in violent extremist organizations (Idris, 2020). Ndung'u et al. (2017) argue that this lack of gender mainstreaming

in counter-extremist policies is highly problematic, and that it is “crucial for the sustainable peace in the region that efforts are made to fill this gap” (p. 5).

In this thesis, I am interested in this lack of attention by the Kenyan government to female violent extremism. The research question is as follows:

RQ: How can we explain the lack of attention by the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism?

More specifically, I explore whether this lack of attention by the Kenyan government can be explained by feminist theories. I am especially interested in the claims made by leftist feminist scholars, as their work argues that patriarchic norms could lead to an implemented gender bias (Rhode, 1994). This gender bias is said to result in the lack of attention towards issues involving women, including female violent extremism. Moreover, possible additional explanations derived from policy inaction theory are also included in the analysis. This theory argues that a ‘lack of capacity’ and ‘political strategies’ are factors that could explain a government’s inaction towards a certain social issue (McConnell & ‘t Hart, 2019). To evaluate the claims made in the foregoing theories I will conduct a qualitative content analysis, following the approach taken by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). This research method allows for the detailed analysis of documents drafted by the Kenyan government and (international) civil society networks. Whereby, the objective of this thesis is to test the applicability of the aforementioned theories on the research problem.

1.4 Relevance of the thesis

This thesis is relevant to the debate of state responses to female violent extremism on a societal level, as well as on a scientific level. The security risks arising from the involvement of women in violent extremist organizations makes the subject a pressing issue. It is therefore incomprehensible that we know so little about state responses to female violent extremism. The societal relevance of this thesis is manifested in the fact that the thesis provides insight into how violent extremist women are depicted in social and political spheres. Meaning that the discrepancy between the portrayal of violent women and violent men is addressed. Moreover, this thesis is written with the aim to contribute to the recognition of the importance of implementing a gendered lens when formulating security responses. Firstly, because policymakers should acknowledge that women have agency over their own violence, and can play different roles within violent extremist organizations. Secondly, a gendered lens on security measures could safeguard the protection of societies against the threat of female violent extremism.

On a scientific level, this thesis provides insight into state responses on female violent extremism. As there has been little to no scientific research on this topic. In this thesis the focus lies on Kenya, as the country is faced with an increasing number of female violent extremists. Yet, there is “little knowledge about women and violent extremism in the context of Kenya” (Ndung’u et al., 2017, p. 3).

Existing literature on female violent extremism in Kenya is oftentimes based on interviews about personal experiences of female violent extremists (see: Ndung'u et al., 2017). These research reports have significantly contributed to our knowledge about the factors that drive Kenyan women towards violent extremism. Moreover, it has provided valuable insights into the roles of women within violent extremist organizations. Most research reports note that there is a growing number of Kenyan women who voluntarily adhere to a violent ideology, and are capable of committing violent acts. It is striking that we have gained an understanding of the severity of the threat that female violent extremists pose, yet we are still unaware of how the Kenyan state, and governments in general, could effectively respond to the issue at hand. This gap in knowledge is highly problematic as flawed counter-extremist strategies could, as previously discussed, lead to serious security risks. Therefore, the objective of this thesis is to explain why the Kenyan government does not prioritize female violent extremism.

An additional reason for studying this subject is that political scientists have, for the most part, neglected to write with various gendered experiences in mind. It is important to study how women are portrayed in academic literature and government documents. Finally, this thesis elaborates on two theories, namely feminist theory and policy inaction theory, and assesses its applicability to the Kenyan case.

In the next chapter, feminist theory will also be introduced to provide insight into possible explanations as to why the Kenyan government lacks attention towards female violent extremism. Furthermore, additional explanations to state inaction are discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides insight into how various theoretical understandings can help answer the aforementioned research question. Predictions are derived from feminist theory and policy inaction theory and are formulated to address the research puzzle.

2.1 Violent extremism

In recent years scholars have replaced the concept of ‘terrorism’ with that of ‘violent extremism’ (Tariq and Sjoberg, 2021). Despite the increasing use of the term, violent extremism remains a contested concept in the academic world, whereby its definition is often intertwined with the definition of radicalization and terrorism (Bjørge and Horgan, 2009, as quoted in Striegher, 2015). Moreover, violent extremism is such a broad classification that scholars oftentimes label an amplitude of violent movements, such as guerilla and sectarian organizations as violent extremism (Ikechukwu Ogharanduku, 2017).

In his article, Striegher (2015) tries to untangle this complexity by defining the different concepts. He argues that violent extremism refers to the radicalization process of an individual, whereby a person embraces a certain ideology, which can be “religious, race and issue” based (Southers, 2013, p. 22, as quoted in Striegher, 2015). Maskaliūnaitė (2015) agrees with this assessment, but adds that a radicalized individual pleads for social change and is often prepared to use violence to achieve this goal. In this context, ‘violence’ refers to the use of physical violence against another person or group (Tariq and Sjoberg, 2021). Radicalization into violent extremism is in most literature ‘subordinated’ to the prevention of terrorist acts (Maskaliūnaitė, 2015, p. 12). Consequently, the definitions of terrorism are in abundance, although most scholars would agree that terrorism is the act of violence to incite fear in order to achieve ideological goals (Striegher, 2015). Hence an individual or group might radicalize and support an ideology that allows for the use of violence, however, one can only talk of terrorism when the violent act has in fact been committed (ibid.).

In contemporary times, violent extremist groups can roughly be divided into four distinctive ideological categories, namely religious, ethno-nationalist, left-wing and right-wing organizations (Windisch et al., 2018, p. 49). Religious extremism, predominantly Islamist extremism, has received a lot of scholarly attention by mainly western academics. However, there are numerous extremist movements that do not necessarily have a religious base, like the environmental extremist group ELF and the national separatist movement ELA. It is important to note that participation of individuals in these groups cannot be explained by merely one causal factor (Borum, 2011). The trajectory to radicalization can differ per extremist ideology and could even vary between individuals (ibid).

2.1.1 Drivers of violent extremism

Academic literature on violent extremism has been fixated on determining whether groups can be classified as violent extremist or not (Ikechukwu Ogharanduku, 2017). The motivations that drive people to radicalize and join extremist groups are less well-known (ibid.). Some scholars have drawn conceptual models to indicate how an individual can radicalize by transforming grievances into hatred. For example, 'Borum's Four Stage Model of the Terrorist Mindset' visualized the radicalization process, an individual suffers from a grievance and feels injustice, subsequently the person blames an individual, policy or nation and demonizes its existence (Borum, 2011). The conceptual model of Moghaddam proposes different steps towards violent extremism, arguing that a person is disappointed when they cannot change their life for the better and takes out their frustrations on the 'enemy', who in their view caused their hardship (ibid.).

Overall, the conceptual models have in common that the pathway towards violent extremism begins with a certain injustice that a person or group might have endured (ibid.). These grievances can be seen as so-called *push-factors* motivating an individual to adhere to an extremist ideology. These factors can be "cultural, political and socio-economic in nature" (Ikechukwu Ogharanduku, 2017, p. 208). Push-factors ought not to be confused with *pull-factors*, which refers to group-dynamics, attracting individuals to affiliate with an organization (Vergani et al., 2020). Moreover, *personal* factors could also contribute to radicalization and therefore violent extremism (ibid.).

Push, pull and personal factors

It seems contradictory that despite an increase of academic articles on the subject of violent extremism, a systematic review of the literature on the topic remains nonexistent. Vergani et al. (2020) attempted to change this by conducting the first quantitative research design analyzing 148 academic articles on violent extremism. With the use of systematic comparing of the inferences made in these articles, the authors intended to give insight into what factors cause individuals to radicalize.

The most frequently mentioned push-factor is that of relative deprivation (ibid.). Relative deprivation theory argues that a person or a group negatively evaluates their own position in society compared to the position of others (Kunst & Obaidi, 2020). In contrast, the concept of objective deprivation refers among other things to the low opportunities to obtain education and the absence of political influence (ibid.). Furthermore, unemployment, poverty and state oppression can also be seen as factors that contribute to a disadvantaged position in society (Ikechukwu Ogharanduku, 2017). These political grievances can, for example, be observed in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Here, "poor governance, corruption, cultural threats, human rights violations and state oppression" are the prevalent push factors that mainly affect the youth from living a fulfilling life (ibid., p. 208).

This is also where the importance of civil society organizations (CSO) come into play. These ‘non-profit’ and ‘non-governmental’ organizations act as a watch dog to preserve good governance and an inclusive society (Mlambo et al., 2019, p. 2). To add to this notion, “no freedom of expression, political exclusion and the shrinking of civil space” can add to the feeling of helplessness and can cause a person to radicalize (UNODC, 2018, para. 1). Therefore, it is said that CSOs are essential in counteracting violent extremism (Allen et al., 2015).

Pull factors take place on a more individual level, whereby violent extremist organizations make use of the aforementioned grievances to gain more followers. It is, therefore, not surprising that propaganda tactics were the most mentioned pull-factor in academic articles (Vergani, 2020). What’s more, the dynamic of a group and the charismatic style of a recruiter or leader is of importance (Maskaliūnaitė, 2015). Theories on coercion and social movements expand on this notion, arguing that peer pressure and ‘psychological manipulation’ tactics are used by leaders in order to secure new recruits for their organization (Maskaliūnaitė, 2015, p. 19). Psychology scholars point out that personal factors can also influence the involvement of individuals in violent extremism. That is to say, mental health, demographic attributes and personality traits can be of importance in the radicalization process (Vergani, 2020). Yet, it is debatable if profiling based on these characteristics is discriminatory and therefore inappropriate to bring into practice. Related to psychological reasons to participate in violent extremism is the work of rational choice theorists. These scholars argue that individuals conduct a cost-benefit analysis to decide whether they join or not (Maskaliūnaitė, 2015, p. 19).

A substantial flaw in the literature on violent extremism is the largely ignored role of gender in the involvement of violent extremism (Carter, 2013). In recent times, feminist theorists try to critically reflect upon the abovementioned dominant theories regarding the concept of violent extremism (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Accordingly, the following section will present why a gendered perspective should be an indispensable part of contemporary literature on this topic.

2.2 Female violent extremism

The involvement of women in violent and extremist activities is anything but a new phenomenon. Nevertheless, theorizing the participation of women in violent activities remains a complicated task (Tariq and Sjoberg, 2021). The first question that a researcher should ask themselves is whether the involvement of women in violent extremism could be examined at all (ibid.). Tariq and Sjoberg (2021) make a qualitative assessment of the literature on female violent extremism and correctly point out that it is arguable that ‘women’ can be considered as a category to be analyzed. Accordingly, several feminist scholars find it questionable on what grounds ‘women’ as a group can be bound together into one overarching category (ibid.). Other academics argue that women can be classified on the base of their sex or their self-identification of gender (ibid.). However, gender is a social structure constantly subjected to change and can have a different meaning over time and in various contexts (Gunnarsson,

2011). Furthermore, gender cannot be seen as an insulated concept from other social constructions such as ‘race and class’ (ibid., p. 34). This makes the categorization of women as a group seem arbitrary. Nevertheless, history shows that dominant discourses portray women as a group and make associations about women and femininity as a whole (ibid.). These patriarchic associations on womanhood resulted in disadvantaged political and societal positions for women (Lily et al., 2019, p. 241, as quoted in Tariq and Sjoberg, 2021). Thus, although women are not a homogenous group, women have “in the basis” some experiences and struggles in common (Gunnarsson, 2011, p. 34). Hence, it is important to study women’s involvement in violent extremism, while women as a group may provide a distinctive outlook on gendered structures (ibid.).

2.2.1 Dominant discourse

Violent behavior is often associated with men, which becomes clear when considering the terms ‘female extremist’ and ‘female terrorist’. Male offenders are simply called extremists or terrorists (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Political scientists and international relations scholars often presume that women involved in violent extremism are recruited against their will (Tariq & Sjoberg, 2021). Feminist (critical) theory exposes this gender bias and explains that in global politics violent women are consistently being depicted through the mother, monster and whore narratives (ibid.). This means that for centuries violent women are portrayed as mentally unsound, evil and sexually deprived, leading to their acts of violence (ibid.). Especially the mother narrative is oftentimes apparent in contemporary journalistic articles. Through this frame women are seen as acting violently because of their “desperate link to motherhood” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 31). Or, alternatively, they are seen as wives used as a strategic pawn by their husbands.

This phenomenon becomes evident when looking at how western media outlets depict women who join terrorist organization ISIS. These Jihadi women are seen as “vulnerable prey for Muslim men” (Martini, 2018, p. 24). Furthermore, female extremists are seen as victims of the Islam or as a victim of personal problems, such as the death of a loved one (ibid.). Some articles even go as far as to state that the ‘sexual power’ of extremist men cause Jihadi women to make decisions based on their hormonal reaction to these men (Iqbal, 2015, as quoted in Martini, 2018, p. 22). These narratives on why women join violent extremist organizations or act violently all have in common that violent women are illustrated as an anomaly to ‘real women’, who are supposed to be innocent and peaceful (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 37). Unlike violent men, violent women are said to be irrational beings and therefore stripped of the agency of their (political) violence (ibid.).

It is highly problematic when scholars use this dominant discourse when addressing women’s involvement in violent extremism. As violent extremist organizations are aware of the manifested gender bias in global politics and use it to their advantage (Mohammed, 2018, p. 8). Al-Shabab’s male suicide bombers have dressed as women to avoid being arrested on several occasions (ibid.). Furthermore, on a

global level, women have been holding high ranking positions within violent extremist organizations. Yet, it is often assumed that women are tasked with supporting roles in the domestic sphere (Arostegui LeMaster, 2017). Female and male violent extremists benefit from the fact that policies combatting violent extremism tend to underestimate women's role as facilitators (Mohammed, 2018).

2.2.2 Drivers of female violent extremism

In recent times, scholars are more aware of the gender bias that goes hand in hand with the subject of violent extremism. However, academics from a range of disciplines are in dispute about the differences and similarities between men and women regarding their motivations to join violent extremist organizations. Studies on the incentives of women to join these organizations have put forward mixed results (Jackson et al., 2011, as quoted in Carter, 2013). Whereas some argue that women participate in extremist groups for the same reasons as men, stating that women are also ideologically motivated to the objectives of the group, others beg to differ (Ortbals & Poloni-Staudinger, 2018). These scholars argue that some motivations to join extremist groups are intrinsic to women. Including the search for gender equality and therefore the confrontation with a patriarchic society (ibid.). These findings complement the four approaches to investigate the relationship between gender and terrorism, as devised by Phelan (2020). Although the author uses the concepts of terrorism and violent extremism alternately, her research provides valuable insight into the different pathways of explaining gendered dynamics.

The first approach is positivist and is focused on differences and similarities between men and women on the basis of their composition in demographics (Phelan, 2020). The second, instrumentalist, approach is interested in the roles of men and women in extremist organizations. Moreover, these instrumentalists focus on the reasons why women have high ranking positions in a certain group and not in other groups (ibid.). The third approach examines the differences in motivations to engage in violent extremism between men and women (ibid.). Some scholars argue that although men and women have similar motivations to join, women are more likely to join a terrorist organization when they have a 'personal connection' and when they are part of a 'group structure' (ibid., p. 4). Furthermore, gender-based violence in a woman's home country could motivate her to join an organization that implements more 'conservative roles' regarding sexuality (ibid.). The final approach, also referred to as 'feminist curiosity', argues that the relationship between masculinity and femininity can influence the radicalization of an individual (ibid., p. 5). For example, domestic violence and other forms of toxic masculinity against women can be seen as a factor that pushes a woman towards supporting violent extremism (ibid.). However, the idea that women join extremist groups to fight patriarchy and an oppressive society is criticized because it supposedly is a romanticized view by western scholars (Herschinger, 2014). Additionally, a substantive amount of academic work is focused on the psychological and physical effects of violent extremism, evidently in the context of sexual abuse, on women (Zeiger, 2018). Including the work of Bloom (2011), a prominent scholar in the field, who argues

that “*revenge, redemption* for past sexual relationships, *relationships* with extremist men and the quest for *respect* are the main reasons women join extremist organizations” (Bloom, 2011, as quoted in Brettschneider, 2014, p. 3). According to Bloom these *four r’s* are influenced by one additional factor, namely *rape* (ibid.).

It is striking that a majority of literature on drivers of female violent extremism and terrorism is fixated on psychological and emotional motivations to join, whereby these motivations are often fueled by men. Whereas scholars emphasize the political motivations of male extremists, these drivers remain largely absent in the literature on female extremism (Tervooren, 2016, p. 14). It is therefore of the utmost importance to deconstruct gender stereotypes. The following sections dive into the state responses to violent extremism, and more specifically female violent extremism.

2.3 State responses to violent extremism

In the previous sections it became apparent that violent extremism is a multi-faceted problem unlikely to be solved with a one-size-fits-all solution. Governments therefore face a challenging predicament on how to respond to the rising threat of radicalization into violent extremism. Nonetheless, it is of the utmost importance that governments take the threat seriously. First of all, because violent extremist ideologies might result in terrorist acts that plague societies with fear (Attree, 2017). Secondly, violent extremism jeopardizes the positive developments that, predominantly African, countries have made over the last years (UNDP, 2017). If governments do not intervene ahead of time, countries can suffer from the negative effects of violent extremism for generations to come (ibid.).

This section will provide insight into the most common state responses towards violent extremism. The theory of LaFree and Freilich (2018) will be introduced, the scholars created a categorization of government responses towards violent extremism. The authors present their overview in the form of a continuum, ranging from repressive to conciliatory measures taken by states (ibid, p. 13.2).

2.3.1 Repressive responses

Firstly, repressive responses undertaken by governments refer to military actions, often legitimized in terms of “retribution, incapacitation or deterrence” (ibid., p. 13.3). The objective of this approach is to take out the rotten apples, ergo the ‘high-risk’ perpetrators. Furthermore, rational choice scholars theorize that governments make rational calculations in order to maximize their self-interests (Blumstein et al., 1978; Nagin, 2013, as quoted in LaFree and Freilich, 2018, p. 13.3; Ganti, 2021). Therefore, some governments are in the disposition that threatening with violence will cause violent extremists to make a cost-benefit analysis, whereby the costs of a potential punishment outweigh the advantages of committing a violent act (LaFree & Freilich, 2018). This military approach should be handled with great caution as violent extremist groups use the violence of governments to justify and propagate their own

violent actions. In addition, so-called ‘labelling theorists’ argue that the labelling of extremists as criminals alter their identity, which results in the reinforcement of their violent behavior (Lemert, 1951, as quoted by LaFree & Freilich, 2018, p. 13.4).

2.3.2 Criminal justice responses

LaFree and Freilich (2018) make a distinction between three forms of criminal justice responses to violent extremism that governments can adopt, namely “statutory responses, proactive law enforcement and situational crime prevention” (p. 13.6). The first response refers to the implementation of strict anti-terrorism laws, which facilitate the efficient prosecution and exercise more severe punishments of violent extremists (ibid.). Secondly, since the 9/11 attacks the U.S. has adopted a more proactive law enforcement, meaning that intelligence services have received more authority to be vigilant by observing and if necessary, infiltrate terrorist cells, other countries quickly followed suit (ibid.). The final type of criminal justice response is the SCP strategy. This approach is, in contrast to the others, more focused on the motivations of people to support a violent extremist ideology. In addition, to formulate effective counter-extremism policies, the policy maker is required to take the “opportunities that are available” for extremists and the “conditions that facilitate these opportunities” into consideration (ibid., 13.8). Proponents of SCP claim that violent extremists act out of convenience when choosing their targets and weapons, in other words, they make use of situational favorable circumstances (ibid.). The approach can be compared to the foregoing repressive responses, as SCP aims to deter violent extremists from committing terrorist acts. Examples of an effective SCP technique are metal detectors in airports. Their installment deterred violent extremists from committing terrorist acts, thus decreasing the amount of ‘aerial hijackings’ (ibid.). It has been proven that stringent criminal justice responses have had a slight effect on the diminishing of extremist activities. Still, it is questionable whether these limited benefits counterbalance the rising privacy and civil liberties concerns that are associated with the increasing power of intelligence services (ibid.).

2.3.3 Deradicalization and Disengagement Programs

In 2015, at the height of the extremist threat in Europe, hundred world leaders and civil society representatives gathered to discuss the pressing state of counter-extremist procedures (Frazer & Nünlist, 2015). The persistence of violent extremist organizations, like ISIS, Boko Haram and Al-Shabab sparked serious concerns (ibid.). The overall conclusion of the CVE summit was that ‘hard responses’ such as ‘military, police and intelligence’ measures were no longer suffice tools for approaching violent extremism (ibid.). In line with this thought, deradicalization and disengagement programs became more prominent state responses, and can be placed one step further towards the most conciliatory measures on the repressive-conciliatory spectrum. Deradicalization programs are devised to address the root of the problem, namely the radicalization of people towards a violent ideology (LaFree & Freilich, 2018).

The programs are focused on a psychological process whereby a person distances themselves from the ideology, causing a person to no longer be a threat to society (ibid.). Likewise, disengagement responses are also built on ‘rehabilitation principles’ and is directed towards violent extremists who opt to dissociate from using violence (ibid., p. 13.10).

According to criminology scholars, people who choose to distance themselves from violent extremist organizations, oftentimes do that because they clash with their leadership (ibid.). Furthermore, the promise of employment and education foster the chance of a successful reintegration of extremists into society (ibid.). In reality, governments often implement a combination of the deradicalization, as well as disengagement programs. Among scholars deradicalization and disengagement programs are met with varying responses. On the one hand, the idea that violent extremists are deradicalized and disengaged from the use of violence seems like a logical objective. Though, on the other hand it is also a rather simplistic take on the issue as there is no stand vast empirical evidence on the mechanisms that cause people to deradicalize and disengage with violence (Horgan & Altier, 2012). Moreover, in line with the aforementioned literature on grievances, people do not get involved in extremist activities merely because of ideological reasonings. People can also join because of their disappointment with, among other things politics or social standing, something that deradicalization and disengagement policies hardly account for (ibid.).

2.3.4 Community-level and Primary Prevention responses

Lastly, community-level and primary prevention policies are fixated on the prevention of violent extremism and are based on public health frameworks (ibid., p. 13.13). In other words, the programs address social issues by making communities resilient against recruitment tactics used by violent extremist organizations. The emphasis on social issues is also the pitfall of the approach, as community leaders often prioritize issues other than extremism (ibid.). This leads to contested views regarding the allocation of available resources. Another, more conciliatory response, is when governments explicitly focus on the driving factors of radicalization (ibid.). Even so, governments could opt to negotiate with violent extremist groups. However, this would not be the most strategic option, as this could expose the vulnerability of a state and therefore negate the stability of a country (ibid., 13.15).

2.3.5 Women in P/CVE

Groundbreaking at the time, it has now been more than two decades, since the unanimously adoption of Resolution 1325, by the UN Security Council. The resolution acknowledges the unique impact of violent conflict on women and girls (PeaceWomen, n.d., para. 1). In its content, the UN urged their member states to emphasize the role of women in “conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding” (ibid., para. 2). Critics predominantly denunciate the resolution because of its emphasis that states should protect *victimized* women from sexual violence by violent extremist groups (Santos et

al., 2013). In more recent times, the UN adopted complementary resolutions, for example Resolution 2242, that intends to encourage states to implement a gendered perspective on CVE strategies (Security Council, 2015). Patel and Westermann (2018) claim that Resolution 2242, admittedly not very explicitly, recognizes the multitude of roles that women can play within peace, security and conflict (p. 54). The resolution therefore encourages governments to acknowledge the role that women can play in P/CVE efforts, yet traditional views on women as the wives, mothers or sisters of extremist men still seem to prevail (ibid.). This becomes apparent when considering the frequently used gender stereotypes in the formulation and development of these policies. The evident stereotypes portray women by their “maternal, domestic and non-violent” nature (ibid., p. 76). To illustrate, CVE and PVE strategies often exalt women for their personal involvement as mothers, which paradoxically reinforces gender stereotypes (Phelan, 2020, p. 2). This can be seen in the implementation of community-level programs that often glorify the roles of women as mothers, who are portrayed as defenders of the community (Patel & Westermann, 2018, p. 76). Meaning that women are not viewed as adequate leaders in CVE, but their capabilities are once again reduced to traditional gender norms. The neglected roles of women in CVE as introduced by government policies shows that gendered analysis is lacking (True & Phelan, 2019).

In general, academic literature has not yet focused on the systematic evaluation of state responses towards violent extremism, therefore the subject remains under-theorized (LaFree & Freilich, 2018). In addition, there is a lack of data which can be partly explained by the secrecy that oftentimes accompanies the counter-extremist responses of governments (Noordegraaf et al., 2017). Finally, specifically in the context of Africa, miscommunication between government institutions recurrently results in ambiguous responses towards violent extremism (UNDP, 2017). In the next section, it will become apparent that the previously mentioned gender stereotypes and gender bias might also play a part in the lack of state responses to female violent extremism.

2.4 State responses to female violent extremism

The abovementioned state responses to violent extremism have a clear shortcoming, as they do not account for the fact that violent extremism is a severely gendered issue. This claim is supported by the Global Counterterrorism Forum (2014) which reports that, despite the obvious involvement of women and girls in violent extremist activities, the inclusion of women and girls in CVE strategies remains ‘overlooked’ (p. 1). The organization elaborates on this statement by arguing that for a CVE policy to be effective, it is crucial to account for the role of women and girls in violent extremism, and in P/CVE efforts (ibid.).

There will be significant consequences when governments continue to ignore the role of women in counter-extremist measures. The key problem that arises from this neglectful approach is that grievances

stemming from gender inequality, and gender and sexual based violence are left unaddressed (ibid.). This means that the factors that push women into violent extremism are left disregarded by governments.

In regard to repressive government responses, hard security measures can have a detrimental effect on women. As women oftentimes experience the negative effects of repressive government interventions. State harassment, profiling or police brutality, targeted at women and their communities, make women more prone to radicalization (Ndung'u et al., 2017). These women have the feeling that they are negatively affected by government CVE policies and decide to turn against the government (ibid.).

As previously stated, criminal justice responses lack the understanding that women can be active perpetrators. Because men are more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for affiliation with violent extremist organizations than women (Wertz & Mbuvi, 2020). Another serious weakness of current state responses, is the absence of gender-sensitive deradicalization and disengagement programs. Consequentially, the threat of female returnees is oftentimes overlooked. Female violent extremists who return to society pose an imminent threat as they have obtained a range of battlefield skills (Patel & Westermann, 2018, p. 74). That is to say, they have an extensive knowledge on how to manufacture explosive devices and know how to operate weaponry (ibid.). Another danger lies in the fact that female returnees are convinced of their ideological convictions and are connected with an international network of likeminded people (ibid.). Community-level and primary prevention responses are oftentimes fixated on the role that women can play in promoting peace in their communities. As mentioned, stereotypes about the mothering nature of women prevail (Patel & Westermann, 2018). The community-level programs are therefore not aimed at the participation of women in violent extremist organizations.

In sum, the inaction of states towards female violent extremism is closely related to serious security threats. On these grounds, it is pivotal to examine what factors drive the Kenyan government to exclude women from counter-violent extremist policies. Literature from leftist feminist theorists, and possible additional factors derived from policy inaction theory might offer explanations as to why the Kenyan government lacks attention towards female violent extremists. These theoretical understandings will be elucidated in the next sections.

2.4.1 Feminist Theory

Considering the fact that the role of women in conflict resolution was just recently put on the agenda by policy makers, it might not be surprising that the involvement of women as violent extremists is often practically absent. However, as I have established in the foregoing section, the neglect of women as perpetrators could lead to serious security threats, especially in the context of Kenya. Hence, the question remains as to why the Kenyan government lacks attention towards women's involvement in violent extremism. One account that could provide a perspective on this research gap stems from leftist feminist scholars who claim that governments are patriarchic institutions, whereby the idea of male domination

is deeply integrated into political practices (Rhode, 1994). State policies have therefore ‘institutionalized’ the subservience of women (ibid., p. 1184). Shekhawat (2021) agrees on this notion and argues in her work that male decision-makers, for example in relation to UN Resolution 1325, preserve the subordination of women (ibid.). For the reason that these decision-makers write from a male perspective and respond to what they discern as a threat to men (UNODC, 2019). Hence, patriarchic norms, predominantly prevalent in traditional societies, undermine the agency of women.

Shekhawat (2021) even speaks of an “intrinsic patriarchal resistance” instigated by men, whereby the different positions of women in conflict are not recognized (ibid., para. 2). Thereby policymakers fall back on the previously mentioned mother, monster and whore narratives, and subsequently fail to see the threat that a phenomenon as female violent extremism poses. Additionally, critical feminist theorists argue that governments do not acknowledge ‘vulnerable’ women as capable to function in the public sphere. (Patel & Westermann, 2018, p. 76). Therefore, male policymakers do not allow women to have a say in politics. Female politicians are hesitant to address problems concerning women, as this could result in political backlash (ibid.). This is unfortunate, because women could have a crucial role in formulating gender-sensitive CVE policies (ibid.). Ergo, patriarchic norms remain all-powerful which causes the implementation of a gender bias when formulating government responses to issues concerning women, including female violent extremism (Zalewski & Parpart, 1997, as quoted in Pearson, 2016, p. 1269).

2.4.2 Policy Inaction Theory

McConnell and ‘t Hart (2019) have developed a theory on government inaction and the choice of policymakers to not consider responding to certain social issues (p. 645). In earlier work, the authors define policy inaction as the “governments incapacity and/or unwillingness, whether explicit and observable or perceived, to actively intervene in addressing a particular policy problem within its jurisdiction” (McConnell & ‘t Hart, 2014, p. 4). The authors examined and classified the drivers behind government inaction. The first reason for a lack of state response are political ideologies. Political ideologies can play part in government inaction as a neoliberal or minimalist state might opt for a night-watchman state, whereby social issues are for the most part deposited at CSOs (McConnell & ‘t Hart, 2019, p. 650). Importantly, this behavior is not merely assigned to neoliberal and conservative governments, other political ideologies on the ‘political spectrum’ might also decide that the state has no place to intervene in certain issues (ibid., 645). A second explanation for the lack of state response could be that inaction is a ‘coping mechanism’ for governments, meaning that it is inevitable that states do not have the ‘time and space’ to implement policies for all problems facing society (ibid., p. 654). For this reason, a state chooses what issues should be prioritized, whereby problems faced by the ‘common people’ are sometimes overlooked (ibid.). In addition, states sometimes strategically wait to adequately respond to a problem, in the anticipation that the problem will disappear, or that the

conditions necessary for solving the issue are more amicable in the future (ibid., p. 655). Another explanation could be that governments simply do not have the resources to implement policies for a specific problem, or presume that the (political) risks and costs are too high (ibid.).

2.4.3 Theoretical predictions

In sum, feminist literature on patriarchal societies suggests that patriarchal power has an overarching influence on governments responses to violent extremism. In the following section, I will elaborate on the country that is central to this thesis, namely Kenya. It will become clear that Kenya is a patriarchal society where traditional gender norms still prevail. For this reason, it could be reasonable to suspect that the Kenyan government perceives violent extremism through the aforementioned dominant discourse whereby women are seen emotional and vulnerable, and not responsible for their violent choices. Resulting in the fact that policymakers do not take the threat of female violent extremism seriously. I therefore predict that *the Kenyan government does not pay attention to the role of women as perpetrators*. Furthermore, in line with the theoretical frameworks introduced by feminist scholars, I predict that *this gap in attention by the Kenyan government towards female violent extremists can be explained by an implemented gender bias*.

The policy inaction theory as introduced by McConnell and ‘t Hart (2019) could also provide possible additional explanations for the lack of attention to female violent extremism by the Kenyan government. Therefore, when analyzing the government- and civil society documents, I will take the following additional factors into account; *the Kenyan government does not want to respond to the issue because of their political ideology*. Or, alternatively, *the Kenyan government lacks attention to female violent extremism because of strategic considerations*. Moreover, *a lack of capacity might cause the government’s lack of attention towards female violent extremism*.

In the following chapter it will become clear which research design and methodology are used. Furthermore, the variables will be operationalized. Government and (international) civil society documents will be analyzed with the use of qualitative content analysis, to assess whether the theories are applicable on the research problem presented in this thesis.

3. Research Design & Methodology

This chapter will clarify the choice for a qualitative research design. Moreover, it will be explained why Kenya is selected as a case of interest in this thesis. In addition, qualitative content analysis, the research method used in this thesis, will be discussed. Finally, the variables will be operationalized and it will become apparent what methods are used for data collection, and how the quality of this study will be assured.

3.1 Qualitative research design

In this thesis, I have opted to make use of a qualitative research design. The qualitative research tradition has its roots in interpretivism and is known for its idealistic standpoint (ibid.). This idealist perspective points out that there is no single reality, as an individual interpretes his or her own reality (Smith, 1983, as quoted in Slevitch, 2011, p. 77). Therefore, qualitative research is aimed at understanding the experiences of people (Jackson II et al., 2007). It is said that qualitative scholars adopt a subjectivist understanding, expressing that “facts cannot be separated from values” (Slevitch, 2011, p. 77). In reality, there are also qualitative scholars who opt for a more positivist approach of conducting research. Moreover, qualitative research is oftentimes associated with inductive reasoning, but is also suitable for a deductive study (Soiferman, 2010, p. 7).

It is sometimes said that the more subjective approach of qualitative methods, in contrast to quantitative research, is untrustworthy and can lead to a bias (Jackson II et al., 2007). However, I choose to use qualitative research methods as these lend itself perfectly for a research whereby data is not available in abundance (Gaille, 2017). Additionally, a qualitative inquiry provides a detailed assessment on the topic of interest (ibid.).

One of the most used methods in qualitative research is the case study method (Rashid et al., 2019). Case study research is known for its in-depth investigation of a single or a few cases (Gerring, 2004). A formal definition of this research method could be: “(...) an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution or program in real life” (Simons, 2009, as quoted in Starman, 2013, p. 32). Political scientists are often skeptical about the use of case studies as a method of research, as the method oftentimes does not lend itself for widespread generalization (Gerring, 2004). Nonetheless, case studies contribute to a substantive proportion of our knowledge about the ‘empirical world’ (Gerring, 2004, p. 341). Furthermore, case studies are especially practical when a scholar is interested in a concept that is hard to statistically measure.

For these foregoing reasons, a case study is ideal for this thesis. More specifically, I focus on a single case, as this enhances a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon (Gustafsson, 2017). Moreover, this approach provides a ‘context-specific’ and ‘holistic account’ and can contribute to theory building as well as theory testing (Willis, 2014, p. 5).

In this thesis, the case of Kenya serves as a plausibility probe. This is a type of case study that “holds the middle between generating and empirically assessing theoretical arguments” (Levy, 2008, as quoted in Mos, 2020, p. 404). Plausibility probes make the reader acquainted with a certain theoretical argument and offers an example of its application (Levy, 2008, p. 6). When the theoretical proposition is applicable on the case of interest, it “can be expected to apply more generally” (Mos, 2020, p. 405). It is therefore said that plausibility probes are used to ‘test the water’ to see if further research is warranted (ibid.).

In this thesis I am interested in testing the applicability of feminist theory, and possible additional explanations derived from policy inaction theory, on the previously established research problem. For the reason that I focus on one country, it is unwanted to make any generalized claims, as Kenya does not represent other countries. Nevertheless, when the abovementioned theories are proven to be successful in explaining the lack of attention of the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism, it might be desirable to test the theories on other countries that face a similar issue.

3.2 Case selection: Kenya

This thesis is focused on the lack of attention and inaction of the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism. In this section it is made clear why Kenya is chosen as the case of interest. Furthermore, it becomes clear why it is of the utmost importance that the Kenyan government adequately responds to the issue of women’s involvement in violent extremism.

3.2.1 *Government of Kenya*

The East African country Kenya has experienced a turbulent history, which resulted in the independence of the country from the British authorities in the year 1963 (BBC, 2018). Following the era of colonial oppression, Kenya chose to implement a presidential system. For a few decades, this political system brought ‘peace and stability’, making the country an alluring option for tourists, international organizations and multinational corporations (Nyadera et al., 2020, p. 2). However, in the year 2007, a turning point took place when a contested general election resulted in large-scale election violence, whereby more than 800 people lost their lives (ibid.). This violent episode almost unleashed a civil war, but was fortunately avoided by a peace deal that pleaded for the implementation of more democratic principles in Kenya’s constitution (ibid.).

In the following years, Kenya continued to develop as a host to a multitude of ethnically diverse groups (BBC, 2018). In addition, the country has gradually introduced more democratic freedoms for its

citizens. Nonetheless, critical observers claim that Kenya is still anything but a vibrant democracy (Nyadera et al., 2020). In recent times, President and Head of State, Uhuru Kenyatta, fulfills the leadership role of the country. Under his rule, the Kenyan government received a significant amount of criticism by political scientists and human rights advocates regarding the government's adherence to democratic values (ibid.). Especially, the government's promise of free and fair elections and the guarantee of freedom of expression are left unsatisfied. For instance, during the general elections of 2017, the Kenyan government was accused of corruption, leading to the 'loss of taxpayer's money' (ibid., p. 10). Moreover, it is apparent that the freedom of expression is far from perfect, as the Kenyan government endorses a hostile environment for journalists (Human Rights Watch, 2020). In addition, the state does not live up to the protection of human rights, as the government continues to neglect the abuses committed by Kenyan security forces (ibid.). These misconducts have resulted in the deaths and disappearances of Kenyan civilians on several occasions (ibid.).

Currently, women obtain only twenty percent of all elected seats in Kenyan parliament. This number can be seen as a depiction of Kenya's highly patriarchic society (Musila, 2019). Women are expected to raise children and fulfill domestic duties (Machira, 2013). Musila (2019) even suggests that the Kenyan government refuses to accept more women in parliament. A bill that was devised to increase gender representation in Kenyan politics was halted by male politicians (ibid.). The dominance of these male politicians reinforces the marginalization of women, as Kenya's male political circle is not willing to accept more representative politics (ibid.). The Kenyan government did introduce a Ministry of Public Services and Gender, however, despite its efforts gender inequality is sustained. It is therefore not unexpected that Kenya only ranks the 143rd position of 178 countries in the Gender Inequality Index (GII), indicating that women still have a disadvantaged position in Kenya's society, vis-à-vis men (HDR, 2020).

In general, the Kenyan population faces hardships caused by unemployment, poverty, crime and climate change on a daily basis (BBC, 2018). These problems were only aggravated by the COVID-19 epidemic (Amnesty International, 2020). A transcendent and long-lasting issue is the emergence and remaining of violent extremist organizations in the country, this will be covered in more detail in the next section.

3.2.2 Violent extremism in Kenya

Kenya has been the victim of violent extremist attacks for multiple decades (ibid.). Well-known examples of Kenya's vulnerability to violent extremism are the attacks on the U.S. embassy in 1998, and the bombing of a hotel in Kikambala in 2002 (Sharamo & Mohamed, 2020). Another, more recent example, of a terrorist attack committed by a violent extremist organization is the attack on the Westgate mall in Kenya's capital, Nairobi (The Guardian, 2013). The terrorist siege, committed by Al-Shabab militants, lasted more than eighty hours and took sixty-seven innocent lives (ibid.). The Islamist insurgent group Al-Shabab is perhaps the most infamous violent extremist threat in East Africa and

therefore also in Kenya (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). Nevertheless, there are other violent extremist organizations that pose a significant threat to the Kenyan society. Examples are the separatist movement Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) and the Islamist movement Uamsho (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). The former pleads for the independence of Mombasa County, whereas the latter is originated in Zanzibar, and is said to be increasingly focused on mobilizing Kenyan Muslims in the country's coastal area (ibid.).

Undoubtedly, however, the Somalia founded Al-Shabab poses the greatest threat to the Kenyan population, as the organization perpetrates an excessive amount of attacks on the country (ibid.). The original objective of the violent extremist organization was the establishment of an Islamic state in Somalia (ibid.). However, the violent organization is increasingly focused on a transnational implementation of the Sharia law. Consequently, Al-Shabab has been expanding to neighboring countries, whereby Kenya is especially targeted (ibid.). The reason why Kenya is being singled out is because of the country's active involvement in the fight against the violent extremist organization in Somalia (Crisis Group, 2018).

The threat of violent extremism in Kenya is not merely a phenomenon instigated by outside forces, extremist sentiments are also increasing within the Kenyan society. Ikechukwu Ogharandukuu (2017) conducted research on violent extremism in Sub-Saharan Africa and argues that people decide to join violent extremist organizations because of their disappointment in the functioning of their government. This disappointment can arise due to the previously mentioned government failures, namely state oppression, lack of social protection and a disregard for human rights (ibid.). Furthermore, a disadvantaged position in society, political discrimination, ongoing corruption scandals and an obstruction to political decision-making are all factors that cause people to obtain political grievances that push them towards violent extremist ideologies (ibid., p. 210). Kenyan extremist groups have made use of these grievances by spreading religious propaganda in order to impede citizens from trusting their government' (ibid.). For example, Allen et al. (2015) argued that there is a trend whereby Al-Shabab is recruiting more members when the economic situation in Kenya, predominantly in the coastal and North Eastern provinces, is dire (p. 44).

3.2.3 Kenya's response to violent extremism

Until recently, the Kenyan state invested in a hard, repressive, response to violent extremism (Ndung'u et al., 2017). This response, whereby the state assigned the military to combat violent extremism, has not been successful. These measures were accompanied with the violation of human rights and severe discriminatory treatment of many people (Ali, 2017). This inevitably led to the mistrust of Kenyan citizens towards national police forces and their government (Sharamo & Mohamed, 2020). Due to harsh criticism on this repressive approach, the Kenyan government decided to direct its attention towards community-level programming, whereby the state introduced CVE strategies to counter the

radicalization of Kenyan citizens (Sharamo & Mohamed, 2020). Thereby, the national government encouraged county authorities to introduce County Action Plans (CAP) for the same reason. Remarkably, the national government has decided to withhold the national CVE strategy from the public. Meaning that the strategy cannot be accessed online. The national government did not provide a reason for this decision, it can only be speculated that the government felt that security issues should be handled with secrecy (Ogada, 2017).

3.2.4 Female violent extremism in Kenya

As previously mentioned, recruitment strategies of Al-Shabab are increasingly focused on Kenyan women. The majority of radicalized women are young, from a middle-class family, and are well educated (Ogenga, 2016b). Female members of the violent extremist organizations are predominantly offered positions as planners and recruiters (ibid.). This trend is most evident in the Coastal and North-Eastern regions, but also prevalent in many more counties (Badurdeen, 2021, par. 1). The factors that drive Kenyan women into violent extremist organizations are personal as well as socio-economic and political motivated (Ndung'u et al., 2017). There are examples of Kenyan women who are radicalized because of the influence of their male relatives, partners and sons. Furthermore, coercion and revenge for the mistreatment of loved-ones by the national police were motivations mentioned by violent extremist women (p. 38). Important push factors were the everlasting situation of poverty, unemployment and economic issues in general. Moreover, some women felt neglected by the Kenyan government due to social marginalization and lack of education, causing political grievances to arise (p. 35). In addition, ideologic and religious beliefs were identified as drivers causing women to join violent extremist organizations. Ndung'u et al. (2017) mention that the interplay between these economic, socio-political, relational, ideological and religious are the “main drivers behind women’s involvement in violent extremism” (p. 32).

3.3 Qualitative Content Analysis

In this thesis the choice has been made to utilize qualitative content analysis as a research method. Content analysis is an approach whereby a researcher examines written texts and or verbal/visual communication (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 107). Benoit (2010) argues that content analysis is of great importance for political scientists, in particular for the subdiscipline of political communication. The aim of the research method is to obtain an extensive description of a phenomenon, whereby the outcome reveals a number of categorizations describing the phenomenon (ibid., p. 108). The approach is sometimes critiqued by quantitative scholars who contemplate whether the technique is useful for an extensive statistical analysis (ibid). Nonetheless, content analysis lends itself to quantitative, as well as qualitative research. As it is a ‘content-sensitive’ approach that is used to identify meanings, intentions, consequences and context (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, as quoted in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 108).

Quantitative content analysis focuses on the counting and frequency of specific words whereas the qualitative way of conducting content analysis allows for a more interpretative understanding of the texts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1283).

Besides the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research, one can also distinguish inductive and deductive ways of approaching content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In this thesis I have opted to follow the deductive phases to qualitative content analysis, as devised by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). The deductive pathway is chosen to adequately assess the applicability of the theories on the case. Hence, the theories, as mentioned in the *second chapter*, will function as guideline. In contrast to other forms of textual analysis such as discourse analysis and grounded theory, qualitative content analysis offers a more structured approach for conducting a research.

3.3.1 Data selection

Due to the fact that female violent extremism is still an understudied phenomenon and data on the subject is scarce, I opted to select documents that are linked to the topic of research, publicly available and written in the English language. Furthermore, in this thesis the focus lies on the analysis of recent documents, therefore the time frame extends from 2010 to 2021. Government documents were mainly selected from the websites of the National Counter Terrorism Centre and the National Crime Research Centre. The government documents have been divided into three classifications. Namely, texts with a focus on violent extremism, texts with the focus on the role of women in conflict, and lastly regional action plans.

Documents published on the website of the National Counter Terrorism Centre are especially useful, as this centre has obtained a mandate regarding the developing and implementation of counter-extremist strategies. The website published three main documents that represent the Kenyan governments take on violent extremism, namely a regional CVE conference, the national terrorist act and a fatwa on terrorism and suicide bombings. The latter is a religious advice in the Islam given by an established authority. It was included in the analysis because the government marked the document as important, regarding the topic of terrorism and violent extremism.

The Kenyan government has encouraged Kenyan counties to adopt counter-extremist strategies. Some counties have heeded the call and published CAP's, sometimes with the assistance of CSOs. These county-level documents have been included in the analysis. For the reason that these CVE initiatives can provide insight into how regional authorities view the role of women in violent extremism. Also, due to the fact that the Kenyan government decided to make the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (2016) unavailable, the county plans can contribute to an understanding of what the national strategy entailed. With the exemption of Isiolo -and Nakuru County, the included CAP's are formulated by coastal counties who suffer the most from (female) violent extremism.

Documents drafted by (international) CSOs play an important part in this thesis. As CSOs might provide an explanation for the gap of attention by the Kenyan government regarding female violent extremism. To illustrate this, CSOs have the task to function as a watchdog by holding the government accountable for their actions. In this thesis, CSOs are defined as “all non-market and non-state organizations outside of the family in which people organize themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain” (OECD, 2018, par. 4). I have also made the choice to include documents drafted by international (civil society) organizations. This is necessary as the number of documents published by local CSOs are limited. The scarcity of local CSO documents can be explained by the sometimes oppressive environment created by the Kenyan government, whereby CSO employees might be afraid to express criticism (Niyiragira, 2015).

The (international) CSO documents were selected if the texts elaborated on the situation of female violent extremism in Kenya. The articles were collected with the use of internet search engines. Furthermore, I have examined lists of Kenyan local and national CSOs and assessed whether their publications were useful for this thesis. Thereby, I have contacted Fredrick Ogenga, a Kenyan professor, who pleads for more attention to female violent extremism in Kenya. He provided a list with CSOs, that addressed the subject of research.

It must be noted that some government and (international) civil society documents exceeded 200 pages. Therefore I chose to select chapters relevant to this research, while preserving the core argument of the document. A complete overview of the analyzed documents, with their criteria of inclusion, the medium where it was published, the genre, the number of analyzed pages and the year of publication, is included in the appendices.

3.4 Data analyzing process

Qualitative content analysis does not restrain a researcher to strict rules for analyzing data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 109). There are, however, three important phases that deductive as well as inductive orientations could use during the analysis process, namely the preparation-, organizing-, and finally the reporting phase (ibid.). I opted to follow these pathways, as developed by Elo and Kyngäs (2008), to provide a structured method of analysis.

3.4.1 Preparation phase

During the first phase I selected the abovementioned documents, based on the research question central to this thesis. Then, the *unit of meaning* was established, meaning that I opted to focus on the presence and positioning of certain themes and concepts, derived from theory (see: chapter 2). Qualitative content analysis is also suitable for analyzing *latent* content, allowing for the interpretation of hidden meaning, such as silence (ibid.). Besides the examination of *manifest* document, I have also implemented a latent

approach. Following the line of thinking by Dey (1993) I have considered a number of questions concerning the documents to familiarize myself with the data, as presented in Table 1 (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 109).

Familiarizing with the data
<i>Who is telling?</i>
<i>Where is this happening?</i>
<i>When did it happen?</i>
<i>What is happening?</i>
<i>Why?</i>

Table 1: Exploratory questions (Dey, 1993)

3.4.2 Organizing phase

The organizing phase is the stage whereby the paths of deductive and inductive content analysis separate (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 111). I opted to follow the deductive approach, as I want to know if certain concepts are mentioned in the documents, and thereby testing the applicability of the theories on the case. The first step when conducting a deductive method of reasoning is to establish the categories of interest. These categories, derived from theory or a particular interest, are displayed in matrices (see: Table 2, Table 3, Table 4). Although the qualitative way of conducting content analysis is open to a certain degree of interpretation, a matrix provides a form of structure. To promote more structure, I have included coding rules for every category, based on the theories or definitions of the concept (Appendix C). When analyzing the documents I selected words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs, the so-called *meaning units*, that relate to the categories. This approach reduces the chance of a bias as it guarantees that all the texts are looked at in the same way.

In the following section the dependent variable will be operationalized. It will be examined whether the Kenyan government indeed lacks attention to female violent extremism. Moreover, I added categories to gain insight in the Kenyan government's attitude to violent extremism in general. The CSO documents are analyzed to assess the presence of the independent variables. The documents will be coded in accordance with the established categories. An overview of the definitions that formed the base of the categories and coding rules is presented in Appendix C.

Kenyan government

The dependent variable central to this thesis is the attention of the Kenyan government towards the involvement of Kenyan women in violent extremism. To establish that there is in fact a neglect on the part of the Kenyan government regarding the phenomenon, government documents have been analyzed. Following the line of thinking by feminist theorists, I expect a lack of attention on the subject of female violent perpetrators. However, if the role of women as violent extremists is mentioned, I expect that women are not seen as rational agents responsible for their actions. Instead I expect the use of gender

stereotypes. Next to the category of female violent extremism and gender stereotypes, I have also included the categories *government strategies*, *the role of women in P/CVE*, *violent extremist threats* and *drivers of violent extremism* in the analysis. These categories provide an interesting outlook on what the Kenyan government deems as important topics. Hence, these categories rule out that the Kenyan government also lacks attention to violent extremism in general.

When the Kenyan government does not mention female violent extremism, or mentions the issue only briefly, it can be said that the Kenyan government lacks attention towards the security threat. An overview of the categories and coding rules that have been used when analyzing the government documents is displayed in *Table 2*.

Category	Q1-1	Q1-2	Q1-3	Q1-4	Q1-5	Q1-6
Q: What do government documents regarding violent extremism encompass?	Mention of female violent extremism	Women are vulnerable	Repressive measures	Gender equality	(Lethal) Terrorist acts	Radicalization
	Female violent extremists not dangerous	Women are not dangerous	Criminal justice measures	Women empowerment	Social unrest	Push factors
	Supporting tasks	Women are peaceful	Deradicalization measures	Women in peacebuilding	Economic downfall	Pull factors
	Recruited against their will.	Women are not natural leaders	Disengagement measures	Leadership roles	Disregard democratic values	Personal factors
	Influenced by male	Women are caregivers	Community level measures	Gender mainstreaming	Political disruption	
	Join for personal motivations	Women are nurturers	Primary prevention measures	Active involvement		
		Women are irrational	International measures	Women part of decision-making		
		Women do not belong in the public sphere				
		Women are more dependent than men				
		Women are subordinate to men				
	Women are sexual property of men.					

Table 2: Categories with coding rules * Q 1-1: Female Violent Extremism; Q1-2: Gender stereotypes, Q1-3: Government strategies in P/CVE, Q1-4: Role of women in P/CVE, peacebuilding Q1-5: Threats (of Violent extremism), Q1-6 Driver(s of Violent Extremism).

Gender bias

Following the line of thinking by the feminist theorists as introduced in the second chapter, it is expected that the Kenyan government lacks attention to female violent extremism because of the prevailing patriarchic norms in Kenyan politics. These norms correspond with the dominant discourse whereby women are not seen as rational agents, responsible for their own violent choices. This results in government policies whereby a gender bias is the norm. To investigate whether a *gender bias* can explain the lack of attention towards female violent extremism by the Kenyan government, CSO documents have been examined. Categories and coding rules have been derived from feminist theories, data are divided into so-called ‘meaning units’ when related to the category.

Category	Government has a gender bias
<i>RQ: How can we explain the lack of attention by the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism?</i>	Government treats women differently than men
	Policies and strategies directed at men
	The government is gender blind
	The government lacks a gendered lens
	The government uses gender stereotypes
	The government implements the dominant discourse on female violent extremism

Table 3: Categories with coding rules, derived from Feminist Theory

Policy inaction theory

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, this thesis focuses on applying a gendered lens on the state responses by the Kenyan government. However, there is of course a chance that other factors come into play in explaining why the Kenyan government lacks attention to female violent extremism. The following plausible explanations were derived from the policy inaction theory of McConnell and ‘t Hart, namely; political ideology, political strategy and lack of capacity. To examine whether these factors influence the Kenyan government’s inaction towards female violent extremism, (international) CSO documents have been analyzed. Categories and their coding guidelines have been derived from the policy inaction theory.

Category	Political ideology	Political strategy	Lack of capacity
<i>RQ: How can we explain the lack of attention by the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism?</i>	Neoliberal/ minimalist	Waiting for problem to disappear	Costs to high
	Conservative	Wait for improved conditions for solution	Lack of time
	Liberalist	Focus on elite.	Lack of space

Table 4: Categories with coding rules, derived from Policy Inaction Theory

Coding program

Data analysis software are oftentimes used in content analysis, as these coding programs provide a more structured data analysis process. On this note I opted to use the coding program QCAmap, which is specialized in the systematically categorizing of qualitative data for content analysis. The steps involved

in using this coding program are as follows; first I have opted to use a deductive approach whereby I established categories and coding rules. Thereafter, I have analyzed when data corresponds with the categories, and labelled this word, sentence or paragraph accordingly. The program counts the amount of times that a category is assigned to data and provides an oversight of all meaning units and their corresponding categories. The computer program fosters an effective data analysis, as qualitative content analysis does not promote a fixed set of steps. Instead, the research method is an iterative process that requires a back and forward between coding of data into categories to optimize the fitting of the data.

3.4.3 Reporting phase

To ensure that the analyzing process is transparent, the results of the examination will be presented in great detail. Meaning that the most important findings of the text analysis are presented, for example in the form of quotations. The statistics of the qualitative content analysis are presented in the appendices. In the following section, it becomes evident in which other ways the quality of this research is guaranteed.

3.5 Quality assurance

Qualitative content analysis requires a certain degree of interpretation, which is useful when considering the context of a text. Content analysis researchers each have different styles, and choices of categorization depend on the judgement of a particular person (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The level of interpretation also brings an increasing chance of a bias. In addition, when adhering to a deductive approach, a bias can emerge when researchers favor data that fits the theory (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). It is therefore important that a researcher is aware of this risk, and remains open to other interesting statements in texts.

There are other limitations to this thesis, i.e. lack of data availability, and the fact that all documents are obtained online increases the chance of a selection bias. Moreover, it is necessary for me to address the chance of a bias stemming from my background as a 'European student'. To counter these biases, I have focused on assuring the five criteria central to qualitative research, namely "credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and reflexivity" (Korstjens & Moser, 2017, p. 121). The first criterium refers to the qualitative variant of internal validity and assures the trustworthiness of a research (ibid.). Moreover, the values of dependability and confirmability ensure a transparent course of investigation, whereby it is clear which steps the researcher undertook (ibid.). The 'transferability criterium' refers to the context of the data, and finally, 'reflexivity' is called in life to be aware of one's own conceptions that might cause bias. (ibid.). In the next chapters, the results of the qualitative content analysis will be presented. A distinction has been made between the results stemming from the analysis of government documents and CSO documents.

4. Analysis: Government Documents

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative content analysis regarding documents formulated by the Kenyan government. These findings will be presented per category, by which the most relevant data ascribed to that category are discussed.

Qualitative content analysis is not merely focused on counting how often data correspond to an identified category. Nonetheless, I added *figure 1* to provide an overview of how many times the categories were mentioned in the documents. To give as sense of what the Kenyan government deems important in their documents regarding violent extremism. It is striking that of all the coded data, only 1 percent is related to the category of ‘female violent extremism’. Meaning that this subject is hardly mentioned in the government documents. In contrast, the category ‘government strategies in P/CVE’ has been cited the most in the documents. A complete overview of coding statistics per government document is included in Appendix D. The most interesting findings related to each category are presented in the following sections.

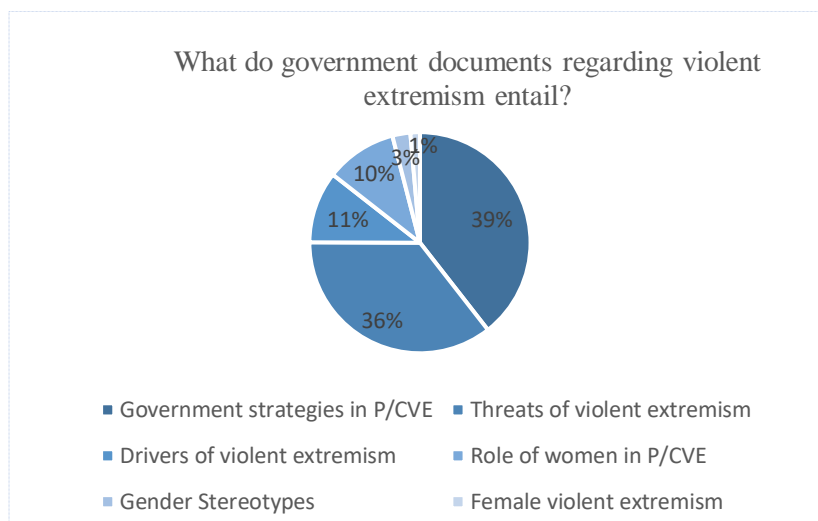


Figure 1: An overview of how often categories are mentioned in the texts, displayed in percentages.

4.1 Female violent extremism

The involvement of women in violent extremism was only briefly mentioned in the national government reports. The Borderland Security Report mentions that “men, women, youth, the elderly” and “business operators, traders, fishermen and pastoralists” have either been involved in crime as perpetrators or victims (National Crime Research Centre, 2018, p. 15). This rather vague way of describing the involvement of women in violent extremism is a repeated occurrence. For instance, the following was said in the Kenyan National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 (KNAP): “pay attention to the particular needs of women and girls during repatriation, demobilization and reintegration”. It remains unclear as to whether the women and girls need to demobilize and reintegrate

because of their involvement in violent extremism or for different reasonings (Ministry of Public Service and Gender, 2016, para. 4).

The only instance whereby female violent extremism was explicitly mentioned by a national state department was in the second Kenyan National Action Plan (2020). Herein, the threat of the recruitment of women and girls by Al-Shabab was brought up. Therefore, albeit in the context of terrorism, it was said that the focus needs to be on “the role of women and girls as victims and as perpetrators, facilitators, and supporters of terrorism; but also, more importantly, there must be a focus on women as agents in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism (...)” (Ministry of Public Service and Gender, 2020, p. 7). Thus, the role of women as perpetrators is mentioned, but immediately followed by a statement on women in P/CVE which is labelled as ‘more importantly’ (ibid.).

In contrast to the national government, several of the County Action Plans have explicitly mentioned the existence of female violent extremists. However, these observations are accompanied by the vision that women are passive actors, dependent on their male relatives. As an illustration, the Lamu County Action Plan (2018b) elaborates on the threat that women pose when their husbands join a terrorist organization. Women could be “willing accomplices supporting the course taken by their husbands” (Kecosce, 2018b, p. 25). Alternatively, it was declared that women are forced to support their husbands, who encourage their wives to “stay silent” (ibid.).

In the same action plan it was also acknowledged that women could deliberately choose to adhere to a jihadi ideology. This statement was followed by: “the majority are mothers, sisters, daughters and wives who are left destitute and devastated by the loss of their kin (...)” (ibid., p. 25). A similar notion was made in the counter violent extremist strategy of Garissa County, whereby marriages and divorces are mentioned as reasons why women are pushed to violent extremist organizations (Kecosce, 2018c). The CVE plan claimed that women accept marrying men, while not being aware of their husband’s ties with Al-Shabab (ibid.). Food and money are used as a ‘bait by men’ to manipulate women into assisting men in violent activities (ibid.). Local and national authorities are not aware of girls who join violent extremist organizations, as “it is difficult to suspect a young girl of being linked to Al-Shabab” (ibid., p. 14).

4.2 Gender stereotypes

On multiple occasions data was assigned to the ‘gender stereotypes’ category, as government documents frequently displayed the view of a traditional division of roles in the public and private sphere.

In the reports and laws established by the national government of Kenya, the use of gender stereotypes was implicitly present. As an illustration, the documents use the gender-neutral term ‘person’ when referring to perpetrators of violent extremist and terrorist acts. Nevertheless, this gender-neutral terminology is frequently linked to a gendered pronoun. Third person references often include the use

of male pronouns, such as ‘he’, ‘him’ or ‘his’. The following was said in reference to a person arrested for their affiliation with a terrorist organization: “*A person arrested under section 24 (referred to as the suspect) shall not be held more than twenty-four hours after his arrest*” (Counter Terrorist Centre, 2012, para. 32.1). The use of the word ‘his’ suggests that the suspect of the terrorist crime is a man. Likewise, similar pronouns were used when addressing highly regarded government functions. In reference to the decision-making process of the Inspector General of the Kenyan National Police Service it was said that “*he may recommend to the Cabinet Secretary that an order be made under subsection (...)*” (ibid., part 2, para. 3).

Next to gendered pronouns, women are also portrayed as a vulnerable group in the government documents. For example, the Islamist extremist ideology was denounced because terrorists support the bloodshed of women and schoolgirls shopping in markets (Counter Terrorist Centre, 2010). In addition, in the second KNAP it is said that Kenyan women and girls are the group that is most affected by violent extremism and terrorism. The argument given was that “women and girls suffer the most due to their reproductive role in the family” (Ministry of Public Service and Gender, 2020, p. 6). The emphasis on women fulfilling traditional roles in the domestic sphere became especially prevalent in the CAP’s. The report prepared by policy makers of Kwale County argued that women are victims of violent extremism. Furthermore, women are said to be merely ‘silent observers’ of violent extremist threats (ibid.). According to the report the role of women lies in the promotion of family values and a peaceful society (Kwale County Action Plan, 2017). Similarly, the P/CVE action plan as proposed by Isiolo County argues that women are a priority regarding the issue of violent extremism as women are “caregivers, educators and homemakers, which clearly points to women potential in preventing violent extremism” (Kecosce, 2018a, p. 21).

It can also be observed that women are recurrently grouped with ‘vulnerable groups’, such as children, elderly and disabled people. For example, in the second KNAP women are clustered with “youth and persons living disability” (Ministry of Public Service and Gender, 2020, p. 6). In the same document, it is said that “women and girls and other vulnerable groups, including migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons” should be protected (ibid., p. 30).

4.3 Government strategies

The majority of words, phrases and paragraphs were assigned to the category of government strategies in P/CVE (figure 1). The analysis of government documents clarified that the Kenyan government attaches great importance to fighting violent extremism. Moreover, the Kenyan government is presenting itself as a forerunner in CVE efforts, compared to other countries in the region. As an illustration, president Kenyatta underscores that the Kenyan’s CVE measures provide lessons for the region and the rest of the world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

In recent years, Kenya has implemented a renewed approach to CVE, as it moved away from its widely criticized repressive measures. President Kenyatta argues that these hard measures are no longer sufficient for combatting the ‘spread of an evil ideology’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016, p. 1). The focus is now shifted to community- and grassroots level responses. Hereby the emphasis lies on multilateral approach whereby a crucial role is reserved for civil society actors, communities, the private sector and international actors (ibid.). The Kenyan government has the objective to engage families, friends, NGO’s and local politics in the prevention of radicalization (ibid.). The national government has therefore encouraged regional governments to implement complementary strategies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). Notwithstanding this new approach of the Kenyan government, whereby the focus lies on preventing violent extremism, the national government still imposes severe penalties for people involved in violent extremist and terrorist activities. In the Terrorism Act it is frequently mentioned that affiliation with a violent extremist or terrorist organization can result in a prison sentence of up to thirty years (Counter Terrorism Center, 2012).

Some regional governments have complied to the request of the national government, and formulated CAP’s. Most of these plans are focused on the prevention of the radicalization of Kenyan youth, via online communication. In addition, the CAP’s include pillars that are relevant to the problems facing their counties. For instance, Kilifi County extended its CVE to include witchcraft, as this instigates violent extremism in the region (Kecosce, 2019a). The counties also express their criticism on the approaches adopted by the Kenyan government. Arguing that the national government lacks budget allocation to realize CVE approaches. In the Kwale County Action Plan it is argued that the investment in security resources meant the neglect of other pressing issues, such as drug abuse and farmers disputes (p. 10). Likewise, Lamu County documents state that the Kenyan government “must prioritize adequate resources for CVE” (Kecosce, 2017a, p. 23).

Despite national government’s claim that it switched to a soft manner of approaching violent extremism, counties say otherwise. Counties express their concerns, stating that their civilians suffer from the hard security measures executed by the Kenyan National Police Service. Consequentially, there is a lack of trust in communities towards security services (ibid.). This was, for example, reflected in the Kilifi County Action Plan, which claimed that citizens are afraid to share their witness stories regarding violent extremists with the police (Kecosce, 2019a).

4.4 Role of women in P/CVE

The role of women in P/CVE was only explicitly highlighted in the two KNAP documents. Even then, the role of women in violent extremism has been pushed to the background, as the Kenyan government mainly expresses its ambition to increase women’s political participation. Furthermore, the Kenyan government expresses its commitment to gender equality in the national defense forces (KNAP, 2020). Other issues that are prioritized in the action plans are the vulnerability of women to climate change and

humanitarian disasters. Gender-based violence in the form of domestic and sexual abuse is especially reiterated in the documents (ibid.).

The first KNAP expresses concern towards patriarchic norms that prevent women from participating in P/CVE efforts. According to the strategy it should be promoted that a gender perspective is integrated in “conflict prevention, peacebuilding and conflict resolution” (Ministry of Public Services and Gender, 2016, p. 9). Women are now predominantly involved in the realization of soft security measures. The successor of the first KNAP affirms the need of gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding activities (ibid.). The second KNAP is more focused on the combined effort between governments and counties. As well as, ratifying policies that recognize how women are affected by conflict situations (Ministry of Public Services and Gender, 2020).

In the County Action Plans, women’s involvement in P/CVE is only briefly touched upon. Garissa County mentions that the county intends to include a gender pillar that is absent in national CVE endeavors (Kecosce, 2018c). Other counties merely argue that communities should be more involved in combatting violent extremism. According to most counties, women and women’s organizations are part of this community.

4.5 Threats of violent extremism

That the Kenyan government firmly distances itself from violent extremism is unmistakable evident when analyzing the written documents. In his speech president Kenyatta states that “fanatical ideologies and savage violence threatens democracy, constitutional rule, and economic development” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016, p.1). He continues to plead that violent extremists reject Kenya’s social and democratic values. Furthermore, he underscores that on “their quest to change the course of humanity, they have committed unspeakable atrocities” (ibid., p.1). Violent extremist organizations are seen as an existential threat to the survival of nation-states (ibid.).

It is noticeable that the national government primarily talks about the threat of Islamist violent extremist ideology. This is striking as the government previously claimed that violent extremism does not insulate itself to one particular religion or race. In a regional CVE conference, the following was contemplated: “(there is) the necessity to resist the political goal of extremist of imposing a perverted form of Islamist globalization” (Counter Terrorism Centre, 2015, p. 5). The Fatwa on Suicide Bombings and Terrorism expresses its concern to this image of the Islam, as it drives Muslim youth in the arms of extremist ideologies (Counter Terrorism Centre, 2010). Kwale County identifies a different extremist threat, namely the MRC. This is the only instance whereby a violent extremist organization other than Al-Shabab is perceived as a threat.

Central to most CAP’s is the danger of the fear that violent extremists imposes on citizens. The documents emphasize that violent extremists have the objective to silence the voices of the Kenyan

people. Other encompassing threats faces by counties is the danger of radicalized returnees and the effect of violent extremism on attracting investors and tourists.

4.6 Drivers of violent extremism

The Kenyan government argues that violent extremism is a global ideology driven by “self-affirmation rather than a reactive phenomenon” (Counter Terrorism Centre, 2015, p. 5). In other words, it is said that violent extremists do not react to state oppression or their marginalized place in society. Paradoxically, in the same document on of the CVE conference, it is said that historical grievances and social alienation are identified as main drivers of radicalization (ibid., 6). This is in accordance with theoretical literature on grievances that can become factors that push people to join violent extremist organizations (Ikechukwu Ogharanduku, 2018).

When analyzing the government documents a pattern can be observed, by which regional governments are seemingly more concerned with the drivers behind the radicalization of the Kenyan population, than the national government. Drug addiction, unemployment, lack of education, land injustices and poor governance are the dominant push-factors in the counties (Kecosce, 2017a). The significance of these push and pull factors differ per county, where some counties primarily struggle with historical grievances, and others with a total distrust from citizens to government authorities. The most prevalent pull factor is the recruitment by violent extremist groups via the internet. Via this medium counties claim that extremists can manipulate Salafist-jihadist messages (ibid.).

Personal factors were not cited as much as push and pull factors of violent extremism. However, “poor inter-generational relations” and “challenged parenting” are factors that contribute to the radicalization process of an individual (Kecosce, 2017b, p. 16). As previously mentioned, personal factors were also mentioned in the context of female violent extremism, whereby marriage, divorce and loss of kinship were identified as motivations to join violent extremist groups. All county documents noted that the involvement of people in violent extremist organizations does not depend on one factor, but is a combination of multiple incentives.

In sum, the government documents provided insight into what the Kenyan government deems important regarding violent extremism. A pattern can be recognized whereby data is mainly attributed to the ‘government strategies’ and ‘threats of violent extremism’ categories. It must be said that the Kenyan government makes an effort to expand the role of women in P/CVE. However, gender stereotypes are still prevailing. More importantly for this thesis, the subject of female violent extremist is barely mentioned. When the topic is discussed there is no acknowledgement of the threat that women as active agents pose. The next chapter dives into the analysis of (international) civil society documents, with the objective to further explain the lack of attention by the Kenyan government to female violent extremism.

5. Analysis: Civil Society Documents

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative content analysis regarding the (international) CSO documents. These findings will be presented per category, by which the most relevant data ascribed to that category are discussed.

Figure 2 provides insight into how often data were assigned to the established categories, presented in percentages. The most references in the (international) CSO documents were ascribed to the ‘gender bias’ category, followed by the ‘lack of capacity’ category. Of all coded data in the (international) CSO documents, only 3 percent belonged to the ‘political strategy’ category. The ‘political ideology’ category was not once mentioned in the texts, and is therefore left out of the figure. A complete overview of coding statistics per government document is included in Appendix E. The most interesting findings related to each category are presented in the following sections.

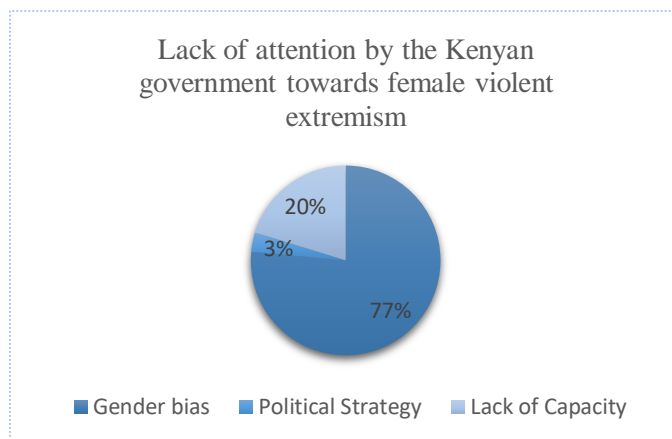


Figure 2: An overview of how often categories are mentioned in the texts, displayed in percentages.

5.1 Gender bias

There is a noticeable pattern in the data whereby CSOs address the problematic exclusion of female violent extremism by the Kenyan government. It is said that countering violent extremism programs have “overwhelmingly been designed for and directed at men, because violent extremism is believed to be a male endeavor” (Alliance for Peacebuilding, 2018, p.1). The argument that the Kenyan government shows a total lack of gender perspective towards the issue has been remarked several times. The CSOs therefore urge the national government to pay attention to women in security initiatives and “dismantle pervasive and harmful gender norms” (ibid., p. 1).

The Southern Voices of Peacebuilding is a transnational organization that encourages dialogue between African peacebuilders (Wilson Center, 2016). The organization invited two guest speakers to discuss the topic of female violent extremism in Kenya. In this debate dr. Fredrick Ogenga and dr. Kathleen Kuehnast underscore the fact that the Kenyan government lacks gender analysis in their

counterextremist and counterterrorism strategies. Both speakers argue that the state should “move beyond simplistic narratives of women as victims and bystanders” (ibid., p. 1). In addition, the Kenyan government is criticized for the misunderstanding of gender in ‘policy circles’, as “gender is not another name for women” (p. 1). The spokespersons urged the Kenyan government to implement a gendered lens and to acknowledge the threat that female violent extremists pose (ibid.).

In a later published paper, dr. Ogenga, also head of the Center for Media, Democracy, Peace & Security (CMDPS) in Kenya, elaborates on the responses of the Kenyan state regarding female violent extremism. Women who joined violent extremist organizations are labelled by the media as jihadi brides. Resulting in the disdain of the Kenyan population towards these women, for example, Kenyan civilians call these women ‘deviant’ (Ogenga, 2016a, p. 1). This portrayal of female violent extremists has its effect on the “interventions aimed at preventing female violent extremism in Africa” (ibid.). Ogenga urges the Kenyan government to not view women as passive actors and to implement a more informed, gender-sensitive, response to female violent extremism (ibid.). Moreover, Ogenga points out that state responses are influenced by a “prevailing culture of patriarchy” that causes the “widespread subordination of women” (Ogenga, 2016b, p. 4). Ogenga pleads for the implementation of gender sensitive CVE policies, for national-level, as well as community-level CVE practices (ibid.).

The observation that the Kenyan government uses gender stereotypes is shared by other (international) CSO representatives. Stating that debates on the national level are “dominated by gender stereotypes based on the idea of women as wives, mothers and victims of extremism” (Idris, 2020, p. 1). Consequentially, this “bias manifests in political responses to violent extremism” (Moonshot CVE, 2019, p. 3). Thus, resulting in the exclusion of women in CVE policies. This is accurate in the National CVE Action Plan as proposed by the Kenyan government, as it did not mention the role of women in violent extremism at all. There is a pattern in the documents whereby CSOs explicitly accuse the Kenyan government of the implementation of gender-blind approaches.

In a workshop organized by Mombasa’s civil society it was argued that gender mainstreaming and implementing effective government policies is crucial for the roles that women play in propagating violent extremism (CHRIPS, 2020a). Importantly, it noted that the state’s security apparatus makes use of gender stereotyping and gender-based discrimination. For example, women are not seen as agents, but again referred to as jihadi brides “radicalized through marriage links and family ties” (Ogenga, 2016a). Mombasa’s civil society therefore calls for the government to actively withstand its gender bias. Thereby underscoring that the Kenyan state and important stakeholders should ‘demystify myths’ relating to the role of women in instigating violent extremist activities (CHRIPS, 2020a, p. 2).

When analyzing the documents, it becomes very clear that CSOs feel obligated to fill the gender gap that the government so clearly neglects to recognize. Policy frameworks now “largely favor men, who dominate as authorized economic operators” (USAID, 2020, p.12). Thereby, it is claimed that gender

equality is not a moral objective, but a ‘strategic necessity’. Gender-blind security measures created by the national government bolster the root causes of women to join violent extremist organizations. Consequentially, the Kenyan government is pressed by (international) CSOs to analyze the role of women prior to devising programs and policies. Hence, the organizations try to compel the government to conduct a thorough gender analysis regarding women’s contribution to violent extremism.

Authors working for the organization ISS Africa argue that gender analysis would probably expose that gender norms and roles lead to ‘unequal gender power relations’ (Ndung’u & Shadung, 2017, p. 3). Much of the criticism towards state responses regarding female violent extremism is aimed at Kenyan policymakers. These policymakers should avoid stereotyping women when formulating security policies. Furthermore, policymakers should not treat the involvement of women in violent extremism and in P/CVE as an ‘afterthought’ (ibid.).

The CSO documents also call out the influence of the patriarchal society on security policies. In the K4D Factsheet, drafted by Idris (2020), it is noticed that the national government is fixated on Al-Shabab as “source of violent extremism” this deepens the “public-private dichotomy reflecting a male perspective on violence” (p. 19).

5.2 Political strategy

There have been few instances whereby data was allocated to the ‘political strategy’ category. Which could indicate that the government does not wait to address the issue of female violent extremism when the timing is more amicable. There is, however, one an observation that might suggest that the Kenyan government has different priorities than female violent extremism. As an illustration, the following was said regarding the implementation of gender in policies “(gender is) rarely translated into editorial reform or definitive policy” (Moonshot CVE, p. 3). The report stated that this could be explained by the threat of terrorist organizations after the 9/11 attacks. As the Kenyan government had to focus on combatting terrorist organizations al-Qaida and ISIS (ibid.). This, supposedly, makes it difficult for the national government to broaden its view for other rising extremist threats.

Another statement that can be grouped under the category of ‘political strategy’, is the sentence that CSOs provide ‘time’ and ‘space’ to efficiently respond to female perpetrators and returnees, an approach that ‘bypasses’ the bureaucracy of the Kenyan national government (ICAN, 2019, p. 76). This account insinuates that the Kenyan government lacks the time and space to give prominence to female violent extremism, something that CSOs can offer.

5.3 Lack of capacity

Next to ‘gender bias’, the category with the most ascribed data, in (international) CSO documents, is the ‘lack of capacity’ category. It becomes apparent that organizations criticize the Kenyan national

government for its lack of budget allocation towards CVE measures. In a report formulated by Sharamo and Mohamed (2020), for ISS Africa, it is claimed that the national state and county governments have “insufficient financial resources or capacity to effectively monitor the implementation of CVE policies” (p. 2). Moreover, the Kenyan Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS) claims that the Kenyan state lacks transparency on their budgeting plans regarding CVE efforts. The financial plans of the national government are nowhere to be found, and cannot be requested from the national Ministry of Finance (CHRIPS, 2017).

The national government is especially critiqued for its lack of gender-sensitive counter-extremist measures. More specifically, it is said that there is a “lack of capacity to deal with gender issues” (Ndung’u & Shadung, 2017, p. 6). Counties in particular suffer from this lack of resources allocated to gender-sensitive CVE efforts by the national government. As an illustration, it is said that “gender-responsive planning and budgeting had not been rolled out fully in counties” (USAID, 2020, p. 8). This means that counties are faced with serious constraints, and cannot adequately implement gender-sensitive CVE responses. Even though some counties are willing to implement a response to the issue of female violent extremism, they lack resources and skills (Ndung’u & Shadung, 2017).

Remarkably, in the (international) CSO documents, it is stated that the Kenyan government perceives P/CVE operations as a lucrative business (Idris, 2020). For the reason that the Kenyan state receives a profitable revenue from (international) donors. This results in the fact that the government is more concerned with the wants of the international community (ibid.). Another consequence of the resources that have been made available by donors, is the quest for this money by unqualified civil society organizations (ibid.). Because these organizations have the objective to chase resources, they are an inevitable threat for communities and local civil society organizations who desperately need these funds. It is said that especially women’s rights organizations are deprived of financial resources, as these organizations are “vulnerable to the influences of the P/CVE industry” (ibid., p. 18).

When analyzing the data, there was no explicit or implicit insinuation that the political ideology of the government influences policies vis-à-vis the involvement of women in violent extremism. In sum, most data in (international) CSO documents were ascribed to the ‘gender bias’ and ‘lack of capacity’ categories. The findings of chapter 4 and chapter 5 will be interpreted in the following concluding chapter, where I will also reflect on the limitations of this thesis. Moreover, the next chapter will provide suggestions for future research.

6. Conclusion & Discussion

This thesis focused on explaining the lack of attention of the Kenyan state towards female violent extremism. The increasing threat that female violent extremists pose to regional, national and international security is severe. As there is an increasing amount of women-led terrorist attacks and an ever-growing number of women who fulfill high-ranking positions within violent extremist organizations. State responses towards this security threat is oftentimes absent, for which violent extremist organizations are grateful, as female violent extremists are left unnoticed by the security apparatus. I have displayed that the growing threat of female violent extremism is especially evident in Kenya, where Al-Shabab extremists have started to actively recruit Kenyan women. The significance of this menace stands stark contrast to the inaction of the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism. I formulated the following research question:

RQ: How can we explain the lack of attention by the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism?

In this thesis feminist theory and policy inaction theory were tested for their applicability on the research problem. The following theoretical predictions were derived from the theories: *the Kenyan government does not pay attention to the role of women as perpetrators*. Additionally, I predicted that *this gap in attention by the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism can be explained by an implemented gender bias*. Furthermore I took the following additional factors into account; *the Kenyan government does not want to respond to the issue because of their political ideology*. Or, alternatively, *the Kenyan government lacks attention to female violent extremism because of strategic considerations*. Moreover, *a lack of capacity might cause the government's lack of attention towards female violent extremism*.

The present findings, based on qualitative content analysis, are in accordance with the first theoretical prediction, stating that the Kenyan government lacks attention towards female violent extremism. The national government did not implement a gender-sensitive perspective on CVE efforts. The involvement of women in violent extremist activities was only briefly mentioned in the KNAP documents. For these reasons I conclude that the issue of female violent extremism is not prioritized by the Kenyan government. These findings were affirmed by the analysis of (international) CSO documents. These organizations expressed harsh criticism on the lack of government approaches to female violent extremism. Moreover, I included additional categories to rule out that the Kenyan governments lacks attention to violent extremism as a whole. The coded data indeed showed that the Kenyan government does in fact view violent extremism as an immense threat.

The second prediction, also derived from feminist theory argues that the Kenyan government lacks attention towards female violent extremism because of an implemented gender bias. The analysis led to

the following conclusions. First, data in the County Action Plans were frequently ascribed to the ‘gender stereotype’ category. Meaning that the county authorities have traditional view of women’s roles in society. The counties do acknowledge the existence of female violent extremists, but gender stereotypes regarding the vulnerability of women prevail. Secondly, the gender bias in national government CVE policies became apparent when analyzing the (international) CSO documents. The organizations were concerned with the gender-blind attitude of the government towards combatting violent extremism. Finally, as stated in feminist literature, the patriarchic norms of the Kenyan society were said to have influenced the lack of state responses regarding female violent extremism. Kenyan policymakers were too often influenced by prevailing gender stereotypes, resulting in the institutionalization of a gender bias. Importantly, the results are consistent with the predictions derived from feminist literature.

There was no evidence that the ‘political ideology’ of the Kenyan state can provide an answer to the research question. Moreover, there was only little evidence that ‘political strategy’ plays a part in the inaction of the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism. It was briefly mentioned that the Kenyan government opts to focus on other, more prioritized, issues. But there was no visible trend that indicated that the ‘political strategy’ is an important factor. This might be explained by the earlier finding, that indicates that the national government does not view female violent extremism as a threat to be considered at all.

In line with the fifth theoretical prediction, it can also be concluded that the national government does not provide the resources necessary for the effective implementation of gender-sensitive CVE measures. This predominantly influences CVE programs on county-level. Despite the fact that the county authorities do not fully acknowledge the widespread threat of female violent extremism, there are some counties who express the will to implement gender-sensitive CVE programs. However, the national government prioritizes the needs of the international community. Leaving local policymakers with little resources to implement a gendered lens on CVE policies.

In sum, this thesis shed light on the pressing issue of female violent extremism in Kenya. The results of the analysis show that an implemented gender bias on national-level partly causes the lack of attention by the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism. Thereby providing an answer to the research question. A gender bias, which was expressed through the use of gender stereotypes, was also prevalent in county-level policies. However, some counties simply lack the resources to implement gender-sensitive CVE responses, even though they want to. This thesis made use of a plausibility probe case study to see how well the theory of feminist theory can explain the lack of attention of the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism. The evidence, derived from the data, fits with the feminist explanation. The applicability of policy inaction theory was also tested, resulting in the conclusion that the a lack of capacity can be seen as an additional factor in explaining the research problem. What these conclusions mean for future research is presented in the next section.

Discussion

As mentioned, the lack of attention by the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism can at least be partly explained by an implemented gender bias, resulting from patriarchic norms. These findings are in line with the theoretical predictions presented in the theoretical chapter.

The method of choice, qualitative content analysis, provided a structured framework in analyzing the documents. As previously mentioned, when adopting a deductive approach, one is focused on finding data that corresponds with the formulated categories. To prevent this bias, I have ought to take all relevant information into account. However, the risk of this bias cannot be precluded. It should also be noted that the coding of the data presented some difficulties when categories overlap. For example, when a word, sentence or paragraph could be ascribed to the threat of violent extremism, as well as a driver of violent extremism. This choice eventually depends on the decision-making process of the researcher. Meaning that this qualitative research technique highly interpretative, this can be seen as an advantage, as the context of the data was included in the research. However, this research technique also prevents the researcher from making generalized inferences.

For the analysis I used a total of sixteen government documents and eighteen (international) civil society documents. The lack of availability of relevant documents was a challenge in this thesis, once again confirming that the topic does not receive enough attention. As previously mentioned, the lack of data could also be explained because there is secrecy associated with state responses in CVE. Causing governments to think twice about the publication of their plans in combatting violent extremism.

In addition, the inclusion of more CSOs operating at grassroots and national level would have been a positive contribution to this thesis. However, in the current climate local CSOs are oftentimes still repressed by the national government. This could lead to an awaiting attitude of CSOs, that fear for repercussions by the government when expressing criticism on government policy. It should also be noted that local CSOs operate in a strongly patriarchic society, meaning that they may have also be influenced by these patriarchic norms. However, I have not encountered this gender bias in the civil society documents.

In recent times, scholars have been increasingly paying attention to factors that makes women join violent extremist organizations. Meaning that we are more and more aware of the drivers of female violent extremism. This thesis demonstrated that female violent extremists oftentimes have full agency over their actions and pose a significant security threat to national, as well as, international security. It is important to note that I do not wish to diminish the experiences of women who have been forced to join violent extremist organizations. The objective of this thesis is to acknowledge that there is also a significant number of women who voluntarily join these organizations. Furthermore, I argue, in

accordance with the CSO documents, that for CVE policies to be adequate and effective, this group should not be overlooked.

I plead that now is the time to move the debate on the motivations of female violent extremists towards adequate state responses to this phenomenon. This thesis contributes to an understanding of what drives the lack of state responses by the Kenyan government towards female violent extremism. To my knowledge, there is no further academic research that is focused on state responses to female violent extremism. Therefore, the relevance of this thesis is based on the fact that it contributes, albeit a little, to the enormous puzzle that female violent extremism. In addition, the applicability of feminist theory, and policy inaction theory, were assessed, whereby it appears that predominantly feminist theory is useful for addressing the research problem in the case of Kenya.

For this reason, I recommend that future research should dive deeper into the drivers of state responses towards female violent extremism. In particular, feminist theory could be applied to other countries who lack action towards this issue. Moreover, additional explanations that could cause this lack of attention should also be included. Case studies on countries like Nigeria and Somalia might be beneficial to gain an in-depth knowledge of state responses towards female violent extremism in Africa. Moreover, future studies could also conduct a large-scale research, comparing a substantive amount of state responses to female violent extremism with one another. I am hopeful that future research can also address which state responses to female violent extremism are the most efficient. These most effective measures should be implemented by governments, to safeguard societies from the threat that is female violent extremism.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Government Documents

Government Documents	Criteria for inclusion	Medium	Genre	Number of pages	Year of publication
Speech president Kenyatta	CVE	Website Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Speech	1	2016
Regional CVE Conference Outcome	P/CVE	Website of the National Counter Terrorism Centre	Conference document	15	2015
Prevention of Terrorism Act	PVE	Website of the national Counter Terrorism Centre	Act	31	2012
Borderland – Related Crime and Security threats in Kenya	Violent extremism	Website of the National Crime Research Centre	Report	25	2018
Summary of Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings	Islamist violent extremism and terrorism	Website of the National Counter Terrorism Centre	Islamic law	8	2010
KNAP 2016-2018. Chapter 3 on Strategies and Objectives of Kenya Action Plan.	Implementation role of women in conflict.	Website Ministry of Public Service and Gender	National Action Plan	6	2016
KNAP 2020-2024	Implementation role of women in conflict.	Website Ministry of Public Service and Gender	National Action Plan	26	2020
Kwale County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism, Chapter 1 and 2	CVE	Website Kecosce	County Action Plan	9	2017
Kilifi County National Stakeholders Conference	CVE	Website Kecosce	Conference document	3	2019
Kilifi County Action Plan (Strategic objectives)	CVE	Website Kecosce	County Action Plan	9	2019
Isiolo County Plan on Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism (Executive Summary)	P/CVE	Website Kecosce	County Action Plan	4	2018
Nakuru County Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (Chapter 1)	CVE	Website Midrift Hurinet	County Action Plan	4	2019
Lamu County Action Plan (Chapter 3)	CVE	Website Kecosce	County Action Plan	10	2017
Lamu County CVE Dialogue Forum Summary	CVE	Website Kecosce	Forum Dialogue	1	2018
Garissa County Action Plan (Executive Summary)	CVE	Website Kecosce	County Action Plan	3	2018
Tana River County Action Plan (Executive Summary)	CVE	Website Kecosce	County Action Plan	2	2019

Table A1: Overview of the government documents that were used for analysis. The criteria for inclusion, the medium where the document was published, the genre, the number of pages and the year of publication are included.

Appendix B – Civil Society Documents

Name of CSO	CSO document	Criteria for inclusion	Medium	Genre	Number of pages	Year of publication
Alliance for Peacebuilding	Gender and CVE	Female violent extremism	Website Alliance for Peacebuilding	Policy brief	4	2018
CHRIPS	VE and Radicalization in Isiolo County	Female Violent Extremism	Website Isiolo Peace Link	Workshop Note	4	2020
CHRIPS	VE an Radicalization in Mombasa County	Female Violent Extremism	Website CHRIPS	Workshop Note	3	2020
CHRIPS	Trends and Violent extremist attacks and arrests in Kenya	Female violent extremism	Website CHRIPS	Report	11	2021
CHRIPS	Evaluation of Kenya's CVE	NSCVE	Website CHRIPS	Evaluation	10	2017
Coast Education Centre (Gender and the Nine Work Pillars)	Coast Women CVE Charter	Female violent extremism	Website Coast Education Centre	Report	6	2018
Green String Network	Growing connection, agency and resilience	Female violent extremism	Website Green String	Report	4	2019
ICAN	Gendered Dimensions of CVE (Case 2: Kenya)	Female violent extremism	Website UNDP	Report	4	2019
ISS Africa (Ndung'u & Shadung, 2017.)	Gendered approach to VE	Female violent extremism	Website ISS	Policy brief	15	2017
ISS Africa (Sharamo & Mohamed, 2020)	Countering violent extremism in Kenya	Female violent extremism	Website ISS	Policy brief	16	2020
K4D Factsheet Chapter Women and CVE in Kenya (Idris, 2020)	Gender and CVE	Female violent extremism	Website Reliefweb	Report	7	2020
Learning Alliance	Youth inclusive P/CVE measures	Female violent extremism	Website OSSREA	Workshop note	3	2019
Moonshot CVE (Chapter 1 and 2)	Integrating gender into CVE programs	Female violent extremism	Website Moonshot	Report	2	2019
Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding (Ogenga, 2016)	Media and Society approaches to countering female violent extremism	Female violent extremism	Website Wilson Center	Paper	4	2016
Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding (Ogenga, 2016)	Alternative Pan-African Media and Society Approaches to Countering Female Violent Extremism	Female violent extremism	Website Wilson Center	Paper	8	2016
UNWOMEN Kenya	Gendered vulnerabilities and violent extremism in Dadaab	Female violent extremism	Website UNWOMEN	Policy Brief	10	2020
USAID (Key findings and recommendations)	Final Gender Analysis Report	Female violent extremism	Website USAID	Evaluation	4	2020
Wilson Center	Countering Female Violent Extremism in Kenya	Female violent extremism. Government approaches.	Website Wilson Center	Written overview podcast	1	2016

Table A2: Overview of the CSO documents that were used for analysis. The criteria for inclusion, the medium where the document was published, the genre, the number of pages and the year of publication are included.

Appendix C – Codebook

Category	Definition
<i>Government Strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repressive measures - Criminal justice measures - Deradicalization and disengagement programs - Community-level and primary prevention programs (LaFree & Freilich, 2018)
<i>Women in P/CVE</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender equality - Women empowerment - Women in peacebuilding - Women in leadership roles - Gender mainstreaming - Active involvement of women - Women part of decision-making (PeaceWomen, n.d.)
<i>Threats of violent extremism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -(Lethal) Terrorist acts - Social unrest -Economic downfall - Disregard democratic values - Political disruption (OHCHR, n.d.).
<i>Drivers of violent extremism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Radicalization - Push factors - Pull factors - Personal factors (Ikechukwu Ogharanduku, 2017)

Table A3: Definitions and concepts of categories 'government strategies', 'women in P/CVE', 'Threats of violent extremism', 'Drivers of violent extremism'.

<i>Concepts derived from feminist theory</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Gender bias</i>	"Inclination towards or prejudice against one gender" (Oxford Languages).
<i>Gender blindness</i>	"Failure to recognize that the roles and responsibilities of women/girls and men/boys are ascribed to, or imposed upon, them in specific social, cultural, economic and political contexts" (EIGE, n.d.).
<i>Patriarchic Norms</i>	- "The power relationship between men and women" (Sultana, 2011). - "The domination of men over women in public and private sphere" (Sultana, 2011).
<i>Gender stereotypes</i>	"Generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics or the roles that ought to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men" (OHCHR, n.d.).
<i>Traditional Gender Roles</i>	- Women are nurturing - Women are caregivers - Men are natural leaders, women are nurturers -Women as too emotional -Women should not be in the public sphere. -Women are sexual property of men. -Women are peaceful -Women are not dangerous -Women are subordinate to men. -Women are more dependent than men (OHCHR, n.d.)
<i>Dominant discourse on female violent extremism</i>	Violent behavior is associated with men not with women. Women are portrayed through the 'mother, monster and whore' frame (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007).
<i>Stereotypes on female violent extremists</i>	- Female violent extremists are recruited against their will. - Female violent extremists are influenced by a male family member. - Female violent extremists are used as a pawn by their extremist husbands. - Female violent extremists use violence out of revenge for the death of a loved one. - Female violent extremists join for personal reasons, not political motivations. -Violent women are acting out of hormones -Violent women are evil. -Violent women are sexually deprived. -Violent women are not real women. Violent women are mentally unsound (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007).

Table A4: Definitions of concepts derived from feminist theory. .

<i>Concepts derived from policy inaction theory</i>	<i>Definitions</i>
<i>Political Ideology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "(...) ethical ideals, principals, doctrines, myths or symbols of a social movement, institution (...) that explains how society works and offers some political and cultural blueprint for a certain social order" (Lumen, n.d). - Main examples mentioned by McConnell and 't Hart: liberalism, neoliberalism, conservatism
<i>Political strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Plan to win and sustain formal power over major systems, such as society, community and organization" (Spacey, 2019). - e.g., delay of the issue, ignore the issue, other priorities.
<i>Lack of capacity</i>	Lack of resources, costs are too high, lack of expertise.

Table A5: Definitions of concepts derived from policy inaction theory.

Appendix D – Statistics of Qualitative Content Analysis

Document	RQ1-1	RQ1-2	RQ1-3	RQ1-4	RQ1-5	RQ1-6
Speech Kenyatta	0	1	11	0	5	0
Regional CVE Conference	0	0	66	0	18	11
Terrorist Act	0	10	102	0	173	6
Borderland Related Crimes Report	4	2	63	0	84	12
Summary of Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings	0	1	0	0	29	9
KNAP 2020	4	8	6	102	11	1
KNAP 2016	1	0	0	21	0	0
Kwale County CVE	0	2	41	0	46	50
Kilifi County Annual Conference	0	0	8	0	4	0
Isiolo County Action Plan	0	3	11	0	2	2
Chapter Three Lamu County CVE	3	2	49	2	29	15
Garissa County	5	1	13	2	7	1
The Lamu County CVE Action Plan Dialogue Forum	0	0	6	0	2	1
Kilifi County Strategy	0	1	87	0	14	11
Tana River Action Plan	0	0	4	0	5	1
Nakuru County Action Plan	0	1	14	0	5	8

Table A6: Overview of Statistics of the Qualitative Content analysis of Government Documents. Q1-1: Female Violent Extremism; Q1-2: Gender stereotypes, Q1-3: Government strategies P/CVE, Q1-4: Role of women in P/CVE, peacebuilding Q1-5: Threats (of Violent extremism), Q1-6 Driver (s of Violent Extremism)

Appendix E– Statistics of Qualitative Content Analysis

(International) Civil Society Documents	RQ1-1	RQ1-2	RQ1-3	RQ1-4
Alliance for Peacebuilding	10	0	0	0
CHRIPS Isiolo County	3	0	0	0
CHRIPS Trends of Violent Extremist and Arrests in Kenya	0	0	0	0
CHRIPS Policy Evaluation of Kenya’s National Strategy	1	0	0	3
CHRIPS Mombasa County Workshop Notes	3	0	0	0
Coast Education Centre (Gender and the Nine Work Pillars)	2	0	0	2
Green String Network	2	0	0	0
ICAN	1	0	1	1
ISS Africa (Ndung’u & Shadung, 2017)	29	0	2	7
ISS Africa (Sharamo & Mohamed, 2020)	3	0	0	8
K4 Factsheet Chapter Women and CVE in Kenya (Idris, 2020)	15	0	0	3
Learning Alliance	0	0	0	1
Moonshot CVE	6	0	1	2
Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding (Ogenga, 2016a)	10	0	0	0
Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding (Ogenga, 2016b)	14	0	1	1
UNWOMEN	4	0	0	0
USAID	10	0	0	3
Wilson Center	4	0	0	0

Table A7: Overview of Statistics of the Qualitative Content Analysis of CSO documents. RQ1-1: Gender bias; RQ1-2: Political Ideology; RQ1-3: Political Strategy; RQ1-4: Lack of Capacity.