DAESH Radicalization in Türkiye, Women and Youth Structures, and Strategic Transformation

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Introduction

The loss of territory held by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham/ DAESH) in Syria and Iraq as of 2019 has led to a significant transformation in the organization's regional strategy. The organization, which had a hierarchical structure based on its claim to the caliphate, has since shifted to a more flexible, decentralized network model to maintain its operational capacity. Although the organization has shifted to a network-based structure, its provincial units still retain hierarchical characteristics. This transition has enabled DAESH to operate not only in war zones but also through local networks and processes of individual radicalization in different countries.

Türkiye has become one of the key countries where the strategic transformation of DAESH can be observed due to its geographical location, migration movements, and regional conflict dynamics. In particular, terrorist attacks that have emerged in recent years indicate that the organization in Türkiye has shifted away from a structure directly linked to the central leadership and toward a more flexible model based on small scale networks and individual actors. This pattern is not limited to Türkiye but can also be observed in countries where the organization does not exercise territorial control. It is known that the organization actively encourages attacks described in the literature as "lone actor" attacks, particularly through its own media and propaganda outlets.[1]

Until 2017, DAESH carried out 20 large scale and organized attacks in Türkiye, killing 308 people and injuring 1,167 others. The last widely known DAESH attack in the country was the Reina nightclub attack in Istanbul, carried out by Abdulkadir Masharipov, a citizen of Uzbekistan, in the first minutes of the New Year in 2017. The attack resulted in the deaths of 39 people. Following the 2017 Reina attack, the organization's capacity to carry out attacks in Türkiye weakened significantly, and no major attacks were carried out for a long period. However, after 2024, several new examples of attacks have begun to emerge. An analysis of these attacks reveals three distinct patterns of attack. However, these three patterns are not strictly separated from each other; some attacks may fall under more than one category. Some of the attacks observed in Türkiye have been carried out by networks composed of militants originating from Central Asia. A significant portion of these networks is associated with DAESH's Khorasan branch. On January 28, 2024, an armed attack was carried out at the Santa Maria Church in Sarıyer, Istanbul, by Hamza (K) Amirjon KHOLIQOV, a Tajik national, and David TANDUEV, a Russian citizen.[2] The investigation conducted after the attack uncovered a broad organizational network consisting of individuals from Tajikistan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, China, Ukraine, Tunisia, and Moldova. Statements made by the perpetrators indicate that they were influenced by the ongoing war between Israel and Palestine. Another attack took place on October 10, 2024, in front of the Kayaşehir Shopping Mall in the Başakşehir district of Istanbul. In this attack, Mukhammad GUSEINOV, a Russian Federation citizen born in 2007, injured three people with a knife. It is significant that the perpetrator of the attack was a 17-year-old youth. The investigation revealed that the youth had become radicalized through social media and the internet.[3] This attack can be described as a lone actor attack.

The second pattern of attack involves individual radicalization and young perpetrators. One of the notable developments in recent years is the gradual decrease in the average age of attackers. In some attempted attacks in Türkiye, the attackers were between the ages of 16 and 17. This situation is not unique to Türkiye; a similar trend has been observed in countries such as Europe and Australia. Research shows that youth radicalization is driven by factors such as the search for identity and belonging, online propaganda, and the influence of social networks. In the radicalization process of young people, the sense of belonging and

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1 *Voice of Khorasan*, no. 26, s. 48; *Voice of Khorasan*, no. 32, s. 25; *Voice of Khorasan*, no. 35, s. 67.

2 Anadolu Ajansı. (2025). "Santa Maria Kilisesi'ndeki Saldırının Sanıkları Hâkim Karşısına Çıktı,"

3 Sabah. (2025). "DEAŞ'ın Kayaşehir Saldırganına Ağırlaştırılmış Müebbet Hapis İstemi,"

group identity play a more important role than ideological doctrine. This generally accepted pattern is also observed in Türkiye. The prominent action in this model is the police station attack that took place in Izmir on September 8, 2025. The attack was carried out by a 16-year-old individual identified as E.B. and was not directly planned and organized by a hierarchical DAESH cell. Therefore, this attack is also considered a lone-actor attack. It has been observed that the 16-year-old youth, E.B., was fed radical ideas by his father, Baba, within his family, and later became further radicalized through social media and the internet.[4]

The third and final model of action is family- and community-based radicalization. The common feature in these cases is the organization of individuals through the same family, workplace, or neighborhood networks. The most prominent action associated with this model was the killing of Binali Aslan, a 65-year-old father of three who worked in freight transport at Ankara AŞTİ, by the 14 member Aksoy family on 21 September 2025, after which they seized his vehicle. It was later understood that the family had lived in France until 2023, later moved to Türkiye, and maintained connections with conflict zones in Syria. After committing the crime, the family fled to Syria using the stolen vehicle but was later brought back to Türkiye through a special operation conducted by the National Intelligence Organization (MIT). During the operation, eight members of the family were killed and six were captured. This case is particularly noteworthy in terms of intra family radicalization. Women and children within the family were also involved in the act and were themselves radicalized individuals.

Another important example is the Yalova attack, in which three police officers were martyred, and six terrorists were killed in a clash that began when DAESH militants[5] opened fire on the police during a counterterrorism operation carried out in Yalova in the early hours of December 29, 2025. The attack was carried out by four brothers from the Sordabak family and their colleagues, Z. U. and İ. D. The typology of the Yalova attack reinforces patterns of both intra family radicalization and workplace-based radicalization. The perpetrators of the Yalova attack were found to belong to a network that shared the same workplace, the same neighborhood, and the same Salafi affiliation. This Salafi network, known as "Ahlak ve Sünnet" (Morality and the Sunnah), is led by a religious preacher known as Omar al Kurdi. Available information also suggests that the network has long exercised authority particularly over individuals of Kurdish ethnic background.[6] These examples demonstrate that radicalization is not solely an individual process but is significantly shaped by social environment and network dynamics.

Analytical Framework and Method

The main objective of this report is to analyze the transformation of DAESH's activities in Türkiye and, in particular, to examine this transformation from three critical analytical dimensions. These dimensions of analysis are as follows:

- *The transformation of DAESH's organizational structure in Türkiye toward lone-actor attacks*
- *The radicalization processes of young individuals*
- *The role of women in radicalization and organizational activities*

In this context, the report evaluates DAESH's evolving strategic approach, particularly toward women and young people, in light of recent attacks, security operations, and international literature in Türkiye.

The data used in this report are analyzed using a qualitative security analysis approach. The analysis was conducted using two main data sources. The first of these data sources consists of primary sources. These sources include official statements regarding security operations, indictments, and organizational publications. The second data source consists of secondary sources,

4 BBC News Türkçe. (2025). "İzmir'de polise saldırı: Zanlının ailesi dahil 27 kişi gözaltında."
5 Odatv. (2025). "IŞİD Bağlantılı Ailenin Bilinmeyenleri... Türbedeki Gizli Mezar,"
6 BBC News Türkçe. (2025). "Yalova'daki çatışma Türkiye'de IŞİD'le ilgili riskler konusunda ne anlatıyor?"

including academic literature reviews, think tank reports, and media and open-source analyses. The case study method was specifically used in the analysis of the report, examining attack attempts that occurred or were prevented in Türkiye after 2024. These cases were evaluated comparatively in terms of organizational structure, action models, and radicalization dynamics. The assessment focused on three fundamental levels of radicalization: organizational radicalization, network-based radicalization, and individual radicalization. This approach assumes that radicalization is a multi-layered process shaped not only by individual psychological factors but also by social networks and organizational strategies. DAESH's organizational structure in Türkiye has undergone significant changes over time, gradually shifting toward a lone-actor model. The organization's initial strategy was to establish a structure based on the "province" model, similar to its structure in other countries. However, due to security operations and the organization's global weakening, this structure proved unsustainable. Therefore, the organization has shifted towards smaller and more flexible structures.

The Province Model

It is still debated whether foreign networks in Türkiye operate through an established DAESH structure and organization within the country, or whether they are present for reasons such as temporary residence, job seeking, or providing logistical support. After the emergence of the DAESH Khorasan structure, it became known after some time that DAESH had entered into a provincial structure in Türkiye. While no such information had been encountered until April 2019, this situation was first observed in a video featuring Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. In the video, Baghdadi was seen receiving reports from DAESH "provinces" in various parts of the world, and one of the files drew attention with the words "Türkiye Province."[7]

Has there been any evidence since then that DAESH established territorial dominance within a regional area in Türkiye? The answer is no. Even though many of DAESH's communications and archives in Türkiye have been seized [8], no serious evidence has been obtained indicating that the organization has been institutionally organized in Türkiye in the same way as in its other provinces.

Nevertheless, there is information indicating that several very important figures known as those responsible for the DAESH Türkiye Province have been captured. These individuals acted in connection with the organization's branches in Syria and Iraq. The highest-ranking figure among them is Mustafa Dokumacı, who is also known as the leader of the group referred to as the "Dokumacılar."[9] It is alleged that he was killed in a drone strike.[10] The first person identified as responsible for the DAESH Türkiye Province was a militant named Nusret Yılmaz. Subsequently, the individual who assumed the position and was likely responsible for the province during the period when Baghdadi appeared in a video holding the "Türkiye Province" file was Kasım Güler. When Güler was captured, he was first replaced by a Syrian militant and later by a person named Şahap Variş. On August 20, 2020, allegations emerged that Mahmut Özden, who had been captured, was the DAESH emir in Türkiye. In 2022, İrfan Çamgöz, who was arrested in Adana during a terrorism investigation, claimed that he had received orders from Mahmut Özden, the DAESH emir in Türkiye, and that he had been active in the organization's Yamaçlı Group.[11] By 2022, all individuals identified as responsible for the organization's Türkiye Province had either been captured or killed. According to the available sources, there is no evidence that the organization has appointed a new emir.[12]

Another issue that should be addressed regarding DAESH emirs in Türkiye is the existence of a broader organizational structure, similar to that observed in other provinces. It is known that DAESH "governors"

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7 Şen, Ş. (2023). "DEAŞ'ın Arşivi Açıldı," ***Yeni Şafak***.

8 Şen Ş. "DEAŞ'ın Arşivi Açıldı."

9 Bozarslan M. (2015). "Kim Bu Dokumacılar?" ***VOA Türkçe***.

10 Alican Uludağ, "IŞİD yöneticisi Mustafa Dokumacı'nın eşi itirafçı oldu," ***Deutsche Welle Türkçe***, 25 Kasım 2021

11 Topaloğlu A. S. B. (2022). "DEAŞ'ın Sözde Türkiye Emiri Özden'in Suriye'den Aldığı Talimatlar İddianamede" Anadolu Ajansı.

12 Topaloğlu, ""DEAŞ'ın Sözde Türkiye Emiri Özden'in Suriye'den Aldığı Talimatlar İddianamede"

operating in Türkiye generally had a consultative council consisting of five to ten individuals. All of these groups operated under the authority of the organization's structure in Syria. As DAESH lost its influence in Syria, the influence of these groups in Türkiye also became significantly limited. In addition, the continuous operations carried out against DAESH in Türkiye are considered to have caused serious losses to the organization's institutional structure.

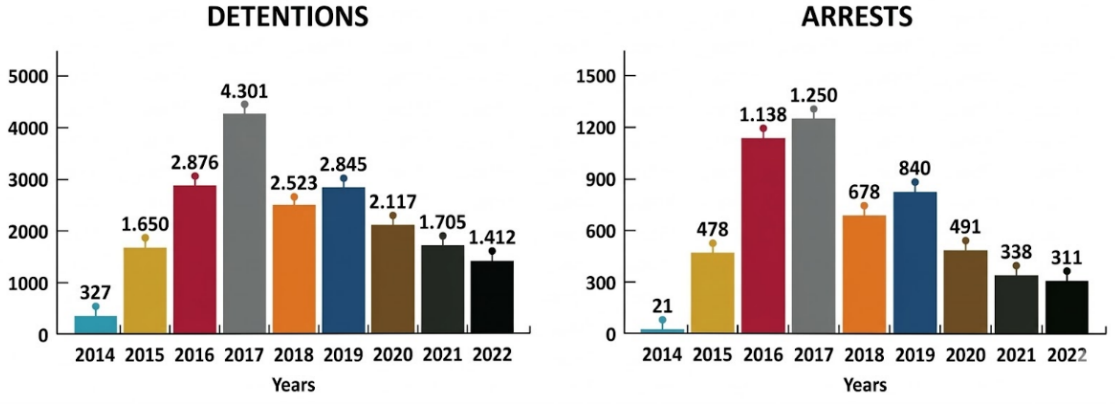
From Province to Battalion: Dispersed Cell Structure

The intensification of operations against the organization has been the most important factor forcing it to shift from the province system to the battalion system. However, this systemic transformation should not be considered a factor that reduces the threat posed by the organization to Türkiye.

It is important not to overlook the information about the DAESH cell that was dismantled in an operation carried out by the National Intelligence Organization and security forces on January 3, 2024, while it was preparing to attack churches and synagogues in Türkiye. During this period, **32 suspects of Iraqi, Syrian, and Moroccan nationality** were detained in simultaneous operations carried out in **Istanbul, Ankara, Balıkesir, Bolu, Düzce, Kırşehir, Konya, Sakarya, and Samsun**. As a result of the operations, **26 suspects were arrested**,[13] including key figures in the cell such as **Michel El-Suveyhi**, codenamed *"Abu Yakin al-Iraki"*; **Muhammed Hilaf Ibrahim Ibrahim**, codenamed *"Abu Leys"*; and **Iyheb El-Ani**, codenamed *"Abdullah al-Cumeyli."* It was determined that the members of this cell and other DAESH members were operating in Türkiye under the name Selman-i Farisi Battalion. The information that has emerged also includes reconnaissance and surveillance footage of DAESH suspects preparing attacks against churches and synagogues in Türkiye. This situation indicates that after DAESH lost territory in Syria in 2017, the organization first initiated changes within its province structure, and later, after Kasım Güler was captured on June 15, 2021, it faced difficulties in recruiting members in Türkiye and was therefore forced to undergo structural changes within the country. Due to intensive operations against the organization within Türkiye, the organization reduced its structure in Türkiye to the battalion level starting in 2022. The capture of the Selman-i Farisi Battalion in 2024 should also be considered proof of this change.[14]

After 2017, Türkiye applied significant pressure on DAESH across the country. As a result of the operations carried out against the DAESH terrorist organization between 2014 and 2022 (as of 01.11.2022), a total of 19,756 individuals were detained, including 8,550 Turkish nationals and 11,206 foreign nationals. During the same period, 5,545 individuals were arrested, including 2,473 Turkish nationals and 3,072 foreign nationals.[15]

Table 1. Number of DAESH members Detained and Arrested in Türkiye Between 2014 and 2022



13 Bal Y.S. (2023). "Türkiye'deki Sinagog ve Kiliseler ile Irak Büyükelçiliğine Saldırı Hazırlığındaki 32 Şüpheli Yakalandı," *Anadolu Ajansı.*

14 Hürriyet, "DEAŞ'ın yılbaşı terör hücresi çökertildi," 2024.

15 Terörle Mücadele Daire Başkanlığı, DEAŞ, Ankara: Terörle Mücadele Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2012, s. 231.

Another issue that perhaps needs to be addressed here is whether the large number of Central Asian Tajik militants captured in Türkiye have any connection with DAESH Khorasan. The answer to this question should particularly be examined beginning in 2023, as operations targeting DAESH Khorasan in Türkiye began in that year. The first of these operations was reported by Anadolu Agency on January 7, 2023, with the arrest of a foreign national identified as K.Z.I., codenamed Abu Maymuna. According to the report, K.Z.I. was a militant connected to the Afghanistan network, specializing in improvised explosive devices and providing training in this field.[16]

The second example is Abdulmusair Gulboev, who was arrested in February 2023. According to statements attributed to him in the press, Gulboev had been tasked with recruiting personnel for the DAESH Khorasan structure through Türkiye.[17] It has been stated that Abdulmusair Gulboev served as the Türkiye representative of DAESH's so called Khorasan Province and the so called Maveraunnehir or Transoxiana Province. However, an examination of Gulboev suggests that rather than planning an attack within Türkiye, he was primarily involved in transporting militants in a controlled manner to the Khorasan region.

The final issue that should be addressed in this section concerns the periodical electronic magazine Voice of Khurasan, which has served as the publication outlet of DAESH Khorasan since 2023. Beginning particularly with its fifth issue, Türkiye and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have been directly or indirectly identified as targets in the magazine.[18] Considering that the publication has called for attacks in the countries it identifies as targets, the attack carried out on January 28, 2024 at the Santa Maria Church in Sarıyer, Istanbul once again demonstrated the operational capacity of a cell linked to the Khorasan Province within Türkiye. Although the attack revealed serious amateurism in terms of weapon procurement, it nevertheless showed that despite ongoing operations against DAESH, logistical networks and broader connections remain active in Türkiye and retain the potential to carry out attacks. However, since that date no further indications of operational activity by DAESH Khorasan in Türkiye have been observed. On the contrary, the organization appears to have begun to manifest itself through different variations.

The discourse of "jihadist or revolutionary solidarity" should also be understood within this context, as it symbolically reflects efforts to construct an overarching framework that minimizes factional differences and legitimizes action around a shared enemy. This overarching framework is produced, reproduced, and disseminated most rapidly within the digital network ecosystem, lowering the threshold for imitation. Consequently, the current environment makes it possible for low cost but highly visible lone actor attacks to increase even during periods when organizational hierarchies are weakened. A key factor in this transformation is the redesign of violence within the logic of media, despite the weakening of organizational capacity. Violence is increasingly framed not merely as a physical operation on the ground but as a form of communication suitable for digital circulation.

Practices such as the use of head mounted cameras and live broadcasts recommended in Inspire, the periodical publication once associated with al Qaida, demonstrate that attacks are planned not only to produce physical outcomes but also to generate visibility. From this perspective, the approach of "mediatization" suggests that the capacity of violence to shape agendas and produce symbolic impact has become increasingly dependent on media formats. The digital ecosystem further accelerates this transformation. A form of network-based division of labor emerges through the production of content, its translation, editing, repackaging, and distribution across different platforms. In this way, rather than centralized command structures, remote radicalization is sustained through micro facilitators, short content formats, and repetitive calls to action.

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16 Gökmen E. (2024). "İstanbul'da Terör Örgütü DEAŞ Operasyonunda Bombalı Eylem Hazırlığındaki 2 Şüpheli Yakalandı," ***Anadolu Ajansı.***

17 Şen Ş. (2023). "DEAŞ'ın Katliam Planı," ***Yeni Şafak.***

18 ***Voice of Khorasan,*** no. 5, s. 6; ***Voice of Khorasan***, no. 15, ss. 13-18; ***Voice of Khorasan***, no. 18, ss. 3-8 ; ***Voice of Khorasan***, no. 22, ss. 4-10.

In this context, DAESH appears to have shifted away from centrally directing and organizing large scale attacks and instead toward encouraging the formation of small local groups and networks as well as the digital radicalization of individuals. Within this strategy, younger individuals and women increasingly come to the forefront.

Network Model: Decentralized Action

DAESH's loss of territorial control, difficulties in recruiting members, the involvement of jihadist movements in regional power struggles (e.g., the Taliban, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, and examples in Africa), and Israel's brutality in Gaza are among the factors considered to have prompted DAESH to change its strategy. It is known that most of the recent attacks encountered in the West and Türkiye were not directly organized by DAESH cells. The organized, planned, and hierarchically controlled actions seen in the organization's past have given way to more individual actions. It is assessed that DAESH no longer has strong and extensive networks. This weakness in the organization's model appears to have pushed militants toward individual attacks or efforts to strengthen local networks. Although this situation is referred to in the literature as lone actor attacks, in the case of DAESH, it can be described as decentralized jihad.

Forced to abandon its goal of establishing a region-based caliphate, DAESH has gradually shifted to a less hierarchical structure and a more decentralized network model in order to increase its chances of survival and the resilience of its regional structures. This organizational model change emerges as a method adopted by organizations whose leaders or leadership cadres have been neutralized in order to maintain their capacity for action and ensure the organization's continuity. The clearest example of this transformation is al-Qaeda's organizational model after the September 11 attacks.[19]

Western scholars often overlook one of the most important issues, namely their tendency to interpret radicalization and jihadist violence solely through the perspective of DAESH and to frame nearly every attack within that context. However, for a long time calls for lone actor attacks have also frequently been promoted by al Qaida, and such attacks have been glorified and encouraged by the organization. Attacks carried out in response to these calls have not been directly claimed by either DAESH or al Qaida. Nevertheless, both organizations have recently demonstrated strikingly similar rhetoric, particularly after the events in Gaza, by encouraging attacks against Jews and the West.

In recent years, the language and calls to action found in DAESH's periodical publication al Naba and in al Qaida's publications Inspire and Sada al Thughur have increasingly converged. This similarity can be interpreted as a shared call for action against what they define as a common enemy, namely Jews and Western "Crusaders." It is even possible to interpret this development as a return to the early post September 11 strategy of al Qaida.

After the September 11 attacks, *Inspire* magazine played a significant role in promoting the doctrine of the "Lone Mujahid" developed by Abu Musab al Suri, particularly for jihadists who had lost contact with al Qaida's central command after it went underground. Beginning with its second issue, the magazine repeatedly addressed this topic and called on lone mujahideen to carry out attacks without being tied to a centralized organizational hierarchy. This strategy emerged as a necessity in the post September 11 period, when large, centralized organizations and hierarchical structures became easy targets for security forces and were rapidly dismantled. After losing its centralized caliphate, DAESH in many ways adopted a strategy similar to the one developed by al Qaida in the aftermath of September 11.

From this perspective, examples such as the Sydney Bondi attack, the Yalova attack, and the language used by al Naba in implicitly endorsing attacks without formally claiming responsibility suggest that the current wave represents not only an operational adaptation but also a broader theopolitical reframing.

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19 Kilberg J. (2012) "A Basic Model Explaining Terrorist Group Organizational Structure," ***Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*** 35, no. 11: 815.

In this context, although both al Qaida and DAESH may no longer be able to directly plan large scale attacks, they continue to call for violence against what they define as their common enemies, namely Jews and Western "Crusaders." In doing so, they effectively demonstrate a form of revolutionary or jihadist solidarity. This can be interpreted as a form of solidarity among jihadist actors against the West, framed as a response to what they portray as the solidarity of oppressive states.

The central question, therefore, concerns how this revolutionary or jihadist solidarity may reshape the nature of conflict. It is likely that this dynamic will first lead to the geographical expansion of the conflict and, second, to the globalization of both enemy definitions and targets. As a result, while the repertoire of organizational action expands, global jihadist violence may increasingly spread in the form of individual and loosely organized waves of radicalization.

Individual Youth Radicalization

Peter Neumann, Professor of Security Studies in London, stated in a comment reported in the press on July 25, 2024, that when he examined 27 attacks and foiled plots linked to DAESH, 38 of the 58 suspects were young individuals between the ages of 13 and 19.[20] Several recent cases illustrate this emerging pattern. For example, the arrest of a 16 year old in Singapore for planning terrorist attacks against two mosques[21]; the arrest of a 16 year old in Las Vegas for making threats online[22]; the arrest of a 17 year old in Australia for adhering to a violent extremist ideology and sharing extremist video content[23]; and the arrest of a 15 year old suspect in Zurich, Switzerland, who stabbed an Orthodox Jewish man and recorded a DAESH video[24], all indicate a broader global trend of youth involvement in radicalization.

However, Neumann attributed this increase to the intensifying propaganda influence of DAESH Khorasan and to the Olympic Games. Yet among the 27 plots or attacks he examined, only two involved young individuals targeting the Olympic Games. Moreover, many of the longer-term cases he analyzed were not directly linked to ISKP, contrary to Neumann's claim. Furthermore, most of the longer-term cases examined were not directly linked to ISKP, contrary to Neumann's claim. According to the 2025 report "Lone Wolves and Youth Terrorism" prepared by the Institute for Economics and Peace, one-fifth of terror suspects in the United Kingdom are children under the age of 18. Across Europe, young people constituted approximately two-thirds of those arrested in connection with DAESH in 2024. In Austria, authorities foiled a terrorist plot targeting a concert venue in Vienna by arresting two suspects aged 17–19. In France, an 18-year-old was charged with plotting an attack during the Olympic Games. In Australia, authorities uncovered a network of youths sharing the same ideology as the 16-year-old accused of stabbing the Syriac Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel, with the group allegedly planning attacks.[25]

The declining age of radicalization among young people in Australia has become a major concern in security discourse and counterterrorism policies. Research conducted by Kristy Campion and Emma Colvin examines the processes by which young people join far-right or violent Salafi-jihadist groups, addressing this phenomenon not solely from an ideological perspective but also in the context of unmet psychosocial needs. Another important dimension of extremism is that violence has become the norm rather than the exception in the lives of these young people. In 76% of cases, the young people had previous criminal records (bullying, assault, arson, etc.).[26] For young people who grow up in environments of domestic

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20 Walsh N.P., Karadsheh J. ve diğerleri. (2024). "ISIS-K's Online Recruitment Poses Security Threat to West Ahead of Olympic Games," *CNN.*

21 Zhang L. M. (2021). "16-Year-Old Detained Under ISA for Planning Terrorist Attacks at Two Mosques in Singapore," *The Straits Times*.

22 KTNV Staff (2023) "Police Seize ISIS Propaganda from Home of Teen Arrested for Terroristic Threats," *KTNV Las Vegas.*

23 Australian Federal Police. (2025). "Canberra Teenager Charged with Terrorism and Firearms Offences," *AFP Media Release.*

24 Keaten J. (2024). "Teen Suspect in Stabbing of Jewish Man in Zurich Expressed Solidarity with Islamic State Group," Associated Press News.

25 Institute for Economics & Peace. (2025). Lone Wolf and Youth Terrorism Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace. s.5

26 Campion, K., & Colvin, E. (2025). Community, More than Conviction: Understanding Radicalisation Factors for Young People in Australia. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2025.2478957.

violence or crime, violence becomes a normal method of conflict resolution, so viewing the violent actions of terrorist organizations or extremist groups as legitimate is not a major radical shift for them. However, in the radicalization process of young people, the sense of belonging to the community and group offered by that ideology takes precedence over the doctrinal details of the ideology. Ideologies offer simple explanations for the stress, dissatisfaction, and personal difficulties young people experience in their environment, attributing the source of the problems to an "outgroup." This narrative, which divides the world into "us and them" (e.g., believers and infidels), legitimizes the use of violence against them by demonizing the outgroup. At the same time, this sense of belonging allows individuals to avoid taking personal responsibility for their circumstances and to place the blame entirely on the targeted enemy.[27]

As stated in the IEP report, this increase is largely attributed to media propaganda rather than the organizational activities of DAESH-Khorasan. It seems more accurate to evaluate this situation in the context of the digitization of radicalization processes. Indeed, while in 2002 there was an average period of 16 months between an individual's first contact with radical content and carrying out an attack, today this period has been reduced to only a few weeks.[28]

M.G., 17, who carried out a knife attack in a shopping mall in Kayaşehir, Istanbul, in October 2024, and E.B., 16, who attacked a police station in İzmir, represent the youngest perpetrators we have seen in Türkiye. These examples seen in Türkiye bear a striking resemblance to those in the Western world. Statements made by the family of the Izmir attacker, E.B., also support this situation. According to the family's statement, the attacker had recently visited various websites, and during this period, there was a noticeable change in his speech and behavior. Family members stated that in recent days, the attacker had used expressions such as "you are infidels" towards them, intensified his religious practices, and exhibited behavior inconsistent with his previous personality traits. They also suggested that examining the attacker's phone could reveal who he had been in contact with. These statements indicate that exposure to online content and the influence of digital networks during the radicalization process must be taken into account.[29] The indictment prepared for the İzmir case states that the perpetrator opened a social media account under the name Imuvahid99 and posted a message on this account shortly before the attack, saying, "I will carry out istishhad soon and become a martyr, inshallah." The information in the indictment shows that the perpetrator's radicalization process was not a sudden development but rather the result of a long-term transformation. Indeed, according to statements from his friends, E.B. gradually became known as a "DAESH supporter" and was intensely interested in DAESH videos, songs, and various written and visual propaganda materials.

Furthermore, his friends' statements indicate that E.B. referred to the political leaders, members of the judiciary, and security forces of the time as "infidels" and frequently expressed this view. The indictment also reveals that the perpetrator followed certain Salafi networks and preachers in Türkiye and regularly listened to their sermons. These findings show that the radicalization of young people cannot be explained solely by a process of individual isolation; rather, it involves broader integration into a radical environment through specific ideological circles, digital content, and social networks.[30]

The process by which individuals begin to view violence as a legitimate method as a result of online interactions and exposure to various internet content is referred to as 'online radicalization'. This process usually begins when an individual encounters extreme views on the internet, continues with the consolidation of these ideas within online networks and 'echo chambers', and can ultimately progress to the acceptance of violence as a solution. The concept of an "echo chamber" is used to explain how individuals' constant

27 Campion & Colvin, 2025.
28 Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025
29 NTV. (2025). "İzmir Karakol Saldırısı Hakkında En Son Ne Biliyoruz?," ***NTV,***
30 T.C İzmir Cumhuriyet Başsavcılığı, Terör ve Örgütlü Suçlar Soruşturma Bürosu, ***2026/13 No'lu İddianame***

interaction with people who share similar views contributes to the strengthening of radical beliefs and the legitimization of violent actions. However, it would be incorrect to conclude that the internet alone is a determining factor in radicalization. Therefore, it is necessary to revisit and update the 'bathtub model' presented in the IEP report in order to better explain the radicalization processes of young people.

This model explains the accumulation of motivations leading to radicalization over time using the metaphor of a bathtub filling with water. Three separate taps flowing into the bathtub represent different sources of motivation: ideological, psychological, and personal. The different flow rates of these taps symbolize that these factors can affect the individual with varying intensities and at different times. When the water level in the tub exceeds its capacity and overflows, this represents the critical threshold moment when the individual decides to carry out an attack. Triggers and thresholds are among the model's key components and help explain the dynamics that push individuals toward action. Triggers such as traumatic personal experiences, mental health issues, exposure to propaganda content, or the desire to imitate other attackers act as catalysts that cause the bathtub to fill faster. In contrast, the threshold represents the individual's capacity to control, restrain, and manage these motivations and intense emotions without turning them into action. However, the model assumes that individuals often cross this threshold in isolation from their environment and social networks. In reality, individuals are rarely completely isolated during radicalization processes. Indeed, even perpetrators defined as 'lone actors' are often found to be connected to various ideological circles, digital networks, or social relationships.

When assessing the impact of the internet and digital technologies on radicalization, a reductionist perspective may emerge that views this impact as a 'virus' transmitted through the internet and technology as a 'vector' that carries this virus. This approach tends to rely on the 'Hypodermic Needle Model' (technological determinism), which assumes that communication has a direct effect and treats the individual as a passive recipient. However, the internet or propaganda alone is not a direct cause of radicalization.[31] On the contrary, the internet should be evaluated as a relational environment or social context where individuals construct their identities, produce meaning, and maintain their social relationships. Therefore, in order to correctly understand the impact of the internet on radicalization, it is necessary to go beyond the 'digital dualism' approach, which sharply separates the online and offline worlds.

According to Luciano Floridi's concept of "Onlife," thanks to smartphones and constant connectivity, individuals are no longer entities that "enter and exit" the internet; rather, they live in a continuous "infosphere." Therefore, the term 'online radicalization' is conceptually limited. **Radicalization develops within a single socialization process where there is no sharp distinction between virtual and physical spaces.**[32] Radical interactions or actions that occur in the online environment are often intertwined with real-life experiences that produce concrete results in the physical world. Views that the internet facilitates the radicalization of physically isolated individuals have sometimes led to an overemphasis on the concept of the lone actor. However, the relational sociology perspective shows that absolute isolation is not possible in practice. Even if physically alone, an individual can position themselves as part of the 'imagined community' of a global jihadist movement or a white supremacist group via the internet. In this context, radical individuals often view their actions as a demonstration of loyalty and belonging to these virtual networks and assume that their actions will be appreciated by online communities. The radicalization process cannot, therefore, be considered a passive 'consumption of propaganda' that occurs alone on the internet. Individuals sometimes watch violent content they encounter on digital platforms together with groups of friends in physical environments, creating shared experiences and collective excitement around this content. At the

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31 Archetti, C. (2015). Terrorism, communication and new media: Explaining radicalization in the digital age. *Perspectives on Terrorism,* 9(1), 49-59. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26297326.

32 Floridi, L. (Ed.). (2015). The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era. London: SpringerOpen

same time, radicalized individuals are not merely passive consumers of content; they can also become active producers within the propaganda ecosystem by circulating their own violent actions, the weapons they use, or the manifestos they write through digital networks.

When an individual adopts a belief system or narrative, they often indirectly adopt the community and network that carries that narrative. Psychologically, for a belief to be accepted as "true," it must be validated by others; that is, it must go through a process of social validation. Similarly, for a community or network to ensure its continuity, it needs a common narrative that holds its members together. Therefore, in the radicalization process, the individual does not merely adopt an abstract idea; they also become part of the community that defends that idea. In other words, the individual embraces a 'socio-ideological package' that encompasses both the dimensions of belief and community.[33] In this context, Salafism stands out as one of the most important cultural and ideological contexts that give meaning to action. The influence of DAESH ideology is also widely spread through social and virtual communities that carry it. Salafism should be evaluated not only as an ideology in the classical sense but also as a socio-ideology embedded in strong community and network structures. This is because Salafi thought is primarily produced and transmitted within community and network relationships rather than at the individual level. One of the most prominent features of this approach is that it centers on the idea of the ummah and the community rather than individual identity. For this reason, Salafi networks, social and virtual communities, community houses, shared workplace networks, and madrasas play an important role in the organization of radical ideological circles. In Türkiye, publishing houses also function as one of the key structures that bring together the movement's institutional core, educational centers, and financial resources, going beyond being merely commercial enterprises that publish books.

Our fieldwork conducted on five associations in the provinces of Gaziantep, Istanbul, and Bursa reveals the emergence of a significant Salafi habitus.

The social space shaped by Salafism is not limited to isolated association buildings but can be described as **a self-sustaining physical and social "habitat."** The main characteristics of this environment are as follows:

A Closed Ghetto and Protected Environment: Salafis have located their associations within residential neighborhoods and have effectively turned these areas into a kind of **closed ghetto**, creating an environment that is highly secure and closed to outsiders.

De facto Protection by Traders and Neighbors: The most striking aspect of this habitat is that local traders and residents share similar ideological tendencies. Grocery stores and businesses in the neighborhood often bear emphatic names such as "Tawhid." People and shopkeepers in the area (for example, a gas cylinder dealer or a glazier) act as informal watchmen or messengers, questioning strangers who come to the neighborhood, monitoring the structure, and assuming a role in protecting the association.

Family Focus and Secret Education Centers: Participation in this living environment has gone beyond being purely individual and has become a **family matter**. Shopkeepers and local residents send their children to secret mosques that appear like warehouses from the outside (with whitewashed windows and no signs) to receive religious education instead of official institutions. Separate educational systems have been established for girls and boys within associations and mosques.

Layered Concealment and Front Activities: Salafi groups have constructed a layered (circular) hybrid structure in order to protect this living environment from security forces and possible external intervention. To conceal the actual radical "core" group, they use civil society organizations and bookstores that appear to provide humanitarian aid and seem moderate from the outside as a "front" (showcase).

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33 Campion, K., & Colvin, E. (2025).

Infiltration of Local Religious Structures: It is evident that the ideology is not limited to associations but has penetrated the normal fabric of the neighborhood. For example, the fact that even a Diyanet mosque imam serving in the region defends ideas close to Salafi thinking and recommends Salafi scholars demonstrates how deeply this environment has spread.

The Ecosystem Fueling Radicalization: This isolated ecosystem, consisting of associations, bookstores, and social relationships, functions as the **primary ground for radicalization.** Contrary to popular belief, individuals are radicalized not primarily through the internet but rather through family ties, marriage, and their social circles within this sheltered living environment.

While madrasas and publishing houses form the physical core of the Salafi movement's organization in Türkiye, digital media has become a tool that significantly expands the sphere of influence of this core. Digital platforms eliminate spatial limitations, spreading outreach activities on a global scale and transforming traditional religious education networks into a kind of "virtual madrasa."

According to sources, digital media plays a multidimensional role in the spread and organization of Salafi outreach. These functions can be broadly categorized into three main headings.

The Internet as a "Virtual Madrasa" and Educational Platform

Salafi groups have structured their websites not only as a means of communication but also as a systematic educational platform, or in other words, a "virtual madrasa." In this context, the digitization of the curriculum is noteworthy. Aqidah, Fiqh, and tafsir lessons held in associations, publishing houses, or study circles are recorded in audio and video format and uploaded to websites. Thus, individuals who cannot physically attend study circles in Istanbul or other major cities can access this content through various websites and receive distance education.

Secondly, digital platforms provide broad access to Salafi literature. Some websites serve as digital libraries of Salafi thought, offering free PDFs of works by scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim, and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, as well as treatises by contemporary preachers. This facilitates the dissemination of Salafi knowledge to wider audiences and enables ideological content to reach the grassroots.

Digital Video Platforms as an Alternative to Traditional Media

A significant portion of Salafi groups consider television to be "haram" or "bid'ah" due to elements such as music, images of women, or other visual content, or they lack representation in mainstream media. For this reason, online video platforms have become an alternative media space.

YouTube and similar platforms serve as "digital television channels" through which Salafi preachers can broadcast sermons, lessons, and Q&A sessions to wide audiences. Some preachers active on these platforms develop new communication strategies, using internet slang, humorous content, and pop culture references, specifically to reach young audiences. This new generation of preachers, sometimes referred to in the literature as "hipster Salafis," conduct indirect propaganda by addressing young people through everyday issues.[34]

Visual content production also plays an important role in this process. Jihadist Salafi groups, in particular, use professionally produced videos both to instill fear and to attract younger audiences.

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34 Stockhammer N., Clarke C. (2025). "The August 2024 Taylor Swift Vienna Concert Plot," CTC Sentinel 18, no. 1. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.

Organization and Communication via Social Media

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are important tools that bring together geographically dispersed Salafi individuals and create a sense of "virtual community." Various events, seminars, and aid activities are announced through these platforms, and programs that preachers will carry out in different cities can be quickly disseminated to large audiences. At the same time, question-and-answer sections on social media and websites provide followers with immediate religious guidance and fatwas on current issues. Thus, the hierarchical relationship between the preacher and the followers continues in the digital environment. Digital platforms have also become the primary arena for ideological polemics both among Salafi groups themselves and with other Islamic groups.

In the radicalization process, individuals select and combine elements from the vast flow of information available online that promise them meaning and power. Nasheeds, symbols, sermons, and ideological texts are among the primary components of these elements. When an individual embraces a particular ideological narrative, they often also accept the existence of a community that shares this narrative. In other words, the narrative and the network become two elements that mutually reinforce one another. Without the narrative, the ideological integrity of the network weakens, while without the network, the narrative loses its social counterpart.

Therefore, individuals who enter the radicalization process do not merely adopt an intellectual idea or ideological proposition. They also accept a social identity package, i.e., a socio-ideology, that offers them identity, meaning, and status. The content of ideology can vary; jihadist ideology, racist rhetoric, or anarchist views can emerge in different contexts. However, the function of these ideologies in providing belonging, integration, and identity production is largely similar.

According to Situational Action Theory, an individual's acceptance of violence or terrorism as a legitimate course of action emerges from the interaction between personal susceptibilities and the environment in which the individual operates. This environment refers to a broad social context that includes both offline and online elements. In this sense, an individual's decision is rarely the result of an entirely independent choice; rather, it often reflects the influence of social interactions and echo systems that shape radical Salafi discourse.

Group dynamics play a decisive role in processes of radicalization and the turn toward violence. Group norms, peer pressure, and the search for status can have a strong transformative effect on individuals. When violent action is perceived within a group as behavior that brings prestige, it may become a symbolic necessity for the individual. For this reason, the transition to violence rarely occurs as a sudden outburst. In many cases, the actions of mass attackers and lone actor terrorists are the result of a long process involving planning, the development of violent fantasies, and the accumulation of perceived grievances.

Some cases observed in Türkiye also demonstrate the importance of group dynamics. In processes of digital radicalization, virtual communities can in some instances reinforce individuals' radical orientations, sometimes alongside family relationships and close social networks. In this context, one of the actors that appears prominently in the cases examined and in DAESH's recent propaganda, yet often remains overlooked, is the role of women.

The Role of Women in DAESH

The use of women by terrorist organizations as suicide bombers or direct perpetrators is not a new phenomenon. Organizations such as the PKK, ETA, and RAF, as well as groups that instrumentalize religious rhetoric such as al-Qaeda and Boko Haram, have used women as suicide attackers. The fact that women can pass through security checkpoints with relatively less suspicion and that a woman who appears pregnant is even less likely to attract attention makes them strategically attractive for such organizations.

In addition, suicide attacks are frequently preferred by terrorist groups because they are low-cost, require limited training, are relatively easy to carry out, and leave little trace of the perpetrator afterward. Such attacks also have the capacity to produce a wide psychological impact by generating fear within society.

There are several examples of women being used in such attacks even before DAESH. For instance, in March 2004, Dilnoza Holmuradova, a 19-year-old recruit of the Islamic Jihad Union, a branch of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, carried out an attack at Chorsu Bazaar in Tashkent that resulted in the deaths of many people.[35] Similarly, in May 2005, two young women, Negat Yassin and Iman Ibrahim Khamis, carried out an attack targeting a tourist bus in Egypt on behalf of the al-Qaeda affiliated Abdullah Azzam Brigades.[36] This incident stands out as one of the early examples of attacks directly carried out by women. The role of women within DAESH initially presented a more complex structure. The organization's early rhetoric emphasized that women's primary roles were to bear children, perform motherhood, and engage in supportive activities within the organization. Indeed, some issues of ***Dabiq*** magazine published in 2015–2016 and other publications close to the organization stated that jihad was not mandatory for women as a rule, but that they could participate in actions for defensive purposes in the event of an enemy attack. However, practices in the field sometimes differed from the official rhetoric. The first DAESH-linked female suicide attack in Türkiye took place on January 6, 2015, targeting the Tourism Branch Office in Sultanahmet. This attack, carried out by Russian citizen Diana Ramazanova, resulted in the death of a police officer. In the San Bernardino attack in the U.S. that same year, Tashfeen Malik's husband, Syed Rizwan Farook, killed 14 people and left behind a small child, and her participation in the attack was praised in the organization's propaganda.[37] In 2016, a major attack planned in Kenya, which included a female medical intern, was prevented by security forces. That same year, three women who attacked a police station in Kenya and were reported to have pledged allegiance to DAESH were killed by security forces. While claiming responsibility for the attack, the organization stated that the women had "taken on the role of men," and although it did not officially encourage women to participate in armed actions, it did not explicitly condemn such attacks. Furthermore, the suicide attack attempt planned by Dian Yulia Novi in Indonesia in December 2016 is another notable example of the use of women in such actions.

The most significant historical turning point in DAESH's approach to female fighters was the serious territorial losses suffered with the fall of Mosul in July 2017. During this period, a noticeable shift in the organization's rhetoric occurred, and the role of women began to be redefined. In the article titled "Our Journey to Allah," published in the 11th issue of the organization's Rumiyah magazine, women were presented not only as supportive wives but also as actors who could engage in direct combat when necessary. In this context, historical figures such as Umm Umayra (Nusaybah bint Ka'b), who is said to have participated in the battles of Uhud, Hunayn, and Yamama, were cited as examples to encourage women to participate in the struggle with courage and self-sacrifice. This discourse became even more pronounced in the article titled "Stories of Female Jihadists," published in the 102nd issue of ***al-Naba*** magazine in October 2017. The article cited examples such as Aisha and some of the companions, arguing that women's presence on the battlefield had precedents in Islamic history and attempting to ideologically legitimize women's participation in jihad activities.

Following this ideological shift, there was a noticeable increase in the deployment of female militants. The attacks on May 13, 2018, targeting three churches in Surabaya, Indonesia, carried out by a family that included Puji Kuswati and her husband, Dita Oepriarto, were among the most notable attacks involving women and children.[38] On the same day, a similar attack attempt also emerged when explosives belonging

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35 Farhana A. (2025). "Muslim Female Fighters: An Emerging Trend," ***Terrorism Monitor*** 3, no. 21 Jamestown Foundation

36 Keath L., (2005). "Attacks Wound 9 People in Cairo," ***The Washington Post.***

37 CNN. (2015). "San Bernardino Shooting"

38 Azra Hidayatullah, "Making a Female ISIS Bomber," ***New Naratif,*** August 4, 2018, https://newnaratif.com/making-female-isis-bomber/

to another family detonated prematurely. The attack carried out on Sunday morning, January 27, 2019, at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Cathedral on Jolo Island in Sulu Province in the southern Philippines is another notable case involving a married couple. The perpetrators were an Indonesian husband and wife, Rullie Rian Zeke and Ulfah Handayani Saleh. The primary aim of this family-based attack was to inspire Filipino militants and encourage them to replicate family suicide attacks as part of the broader objective of establishing a Southeast Asian caliphate encompassing Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. It is claimed that the family was inspired by the Puji and Duti couple mentioned earlier.[39]

Attacks in which female perpetrators played an active role continued to appear in later years. For example, the attack carried out by Zakiah Aini on a police station in Indonesia on January 31, 2021, demonstrates that this trend has persisted.[40]

The organization's loss of the territories it considered its caliphate center and its shift towards a more flexible, network-based structure increased the need for female activists. This strategic change was also reflected in the organization's propaganda publications. This rhetoric is clearly seen in the Voice of Khurasan magazine, which became one of the publications close to DAESH Khorasan, especially after 2017. The 30th issue of the magazine, dated September 2023, declared that jihad is a "farz-ı ayn" (an individual obligation) for the entire ummah, without distinction between men, women, or the elderly. The statement in the 37th issue dated June 2024, "If there are no men to wage jihad, allow women to wage jihad," shows the transformation the organization has undergone in its discourse and practice throughout history and how defeats on the ground have led to a strategic reinterpretation within the ideological framework.

The image of an armed woman in the article titled "Message from the Commander of the Faithful," published in the DAESH publication Al-Bettar in 2026, is also a striking example in this context.

Image 1: "Message from the Commander of the Faithful," Al-Bettar Magazine

39 Al Chaidar, Herdi Sahrasad, Dedy Tabrani. "The Batih Family as a Weapon: Analysis of the Jolo Cathedral Bomb, Philippines". ***Aceh Anthropological Journal,*** Cilt 3, Sayı 2, Sayfa: 114-128.

40 Macfarlane, K. (2024). Indonesian Women and Terrorism: An Analysis of Historical and Contemporary Trends, Politics and Governance,,Volume 12, Article 7724.

This situation demonstrates that the common assumption that women within DAESH only play passive roles is not always valid. Indeed, there are numerous cases in Western literature showing that women have taken on active roles within the organization. One of the most notable examples is the case of Allison Fluke. Allison Fluke, also known as Allison Ekren, Umm Mohammed al-Amriki, or Umm Mohammed, participated in DAESH-related activities in various regions, including Syria, Libya, and Iraq, between approximately September 2011 and May 2019. Fluke-Ekren later served as the leader and organizer of a DAESH military battalion known as Khatiba Nusaybah; she provided military training to women in this unit on the use of AK-47 assault rifles, hand grenades, and suicide belts. It is reported that over 100 women and young girls, including some as young as ten years old, received military training from Fluke-Ekren on behalf of DAESH in Syria. Such examples show that women can be actors who not only provide ideological support or take on logistical roles but, in some cases, can also develop direct military capacity and rise to leadership positions within the organizational structure. The case of 36-year-old Farishta Jami, who lives in Stratford [41] and has been convicted of multiple terrorism offenses, is another notable example in this context. Jami was arrested by security forces while attempting to travel to Afghanistan with her children.[42]

In this context, the case of Zulfia S., a Tajik woman arrested in Istanbul in 2024 during a cell operation while preparing for an attack, is another noteworthy example. During the search conducted in the operation, gendarmerie uniforms, police vests, vehicle sirens, police caps, vehicle radios, knives, and gun holsters were seized, along with digital materials containing operational instructions.[43]

Indeed, the example of the 14-member family known in Türkiye as the "Aksoy family," who killed bus driver Binali Aslan and then fled to Syria, also illustrates this situation. It is known that women within the family participated in clashes with security forces during the operation carried out against the family in Syria. Similarly, in the DAESH-related operation in Yalova, it was seen that women were moving towards the house[44] to participate in the clash and that audio messages sent by the women inside were leaked to the press. One of the messages stated that "The infidels have raided our home and are oppressing us because we chose Allah as our god. We are resisting for the glory of religion so that the infidels may be humiliated," while another message stated, "They are attacking Allah's religion. Allah has prepared hell for them, inshallah. We have two options: either martyrdom or victory." These statements show that women are not merely passive actors providing ideological support; on the contrary, in some cases, they actively participate in the conflict and directly internalize radical ideological discourse.[45] Reports circulating on social media also stated that evidence was found indicating that the women captured by the police after the clash had participated in the fighting.

In the Turkish context, the dynamics of women's participation in DAESH differ to a certain extent from the psychology of 'minority status' or 'social exclusion' frequently emphasized in Western literature. In Türkiye, geographical proximity, local religious networks, and processes of radicalization within the family emerge as more decisive factors in women's participation in the organization. Indeed, in some cases, women have been seen to deeply embrace DAESH ideology, play an active role as subjects in the radicalization process, and even convince their husbands or family members to go to conflict zones.[46] In some cases, women have been seen to leave their husbands, whom they consider to be serving a state they deem 'infidel,' behind and migrate to Syria of their own free will. For example, in a case recorded in Konya, it is stated that a woman

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41 U.S. Department of Justice. (2022). "American Woman Who Led ISIS Battalion Sentenced to 20 Years,"

42 Counter Terrorism Policing. (2025). "Stratford Woman Sentenced to Life for Terrorism Offences,"

43 Memurlar.net. (2024). "Terör Saldırısı İçin Hazırlık Yapan 2 DEAŞ'lı, İstanbul'da Yakalandı".

44 Instagram, "Yalova'da DEAŞ'lılarla çatışma yaşanan eve bir kadının girmeye çalıştığı anlara ait video," ***Instagram Reel.*** https://www.instagram.com/reel/DS2Hab0gRB6/

45 Saymaz, İ. (2026). "Yalova'daki IŞİD evinden sesli mesaj: Ya şehadet ya zafer," ***Halk TV.***

46 Ulaş, G. (2024). "Encounters with ISIS-Affiliated Women: Radicalisation Process, Motivations, and Their Journey," ***Small Wars & Insurgencies*** 35, no. 7. s. 902.

married to a former police officer left her husband and went to the conflict zone.[47] This situation shows that women are not merely passive victims acting on romantic expectations but can also be determined carriers of ideology. For some women who voluntarily joined DAESH from Türkiye, one of the main motivations is the desire to live a religious life under stricter rules and to raise their children according to these rules. Rather than living in a secular social order, emigrating to lands where they believe Sharia rules are fully enforced is seen by these individuals as a final religious duty (farz-ı ayn).[48] The case of Svetlana (code name Asiya Ummi Abdullah), as reported by Ulaş (2025), strikingly illustrates this situation. Svetlana, who is of Kyrgyz origin and has a Christian background, converted to Islam in Istanbul and then left behind a wealthy and comfortable life to take her three-year-old son to Raqqa, which was DAESH's headquarters at the time. It is stated that the main motivation behind this decision was to protect her child from moral decay, represented by phenomena such as 'crime, drugs, and homosexuality,' which she believed were prevalent in secular Türkiye, and to raise him in a more 'pure' Islamic environment.[49]

A similar case that draws attention is that of Serap Kırgıl, a mother of three living in Izmir. Kırgıl stated that, unlike her family, she embraced an extremely religious lifestyle and personally proposed going to Syria with a DAESH militant she met on Facebook (Ulaş, 2025, p. 907). Such cases demonstrate that the internet can function not only as a communication tool but also as a space that opens the door to an alternative ideological world promising paradise, meaning, and a "honorable jihad" to individuals. Logistical support networks within Türkiye also constitute an important factor that facilitates women's involvement in this process. In particular, structures referred to in the literature as "sister houses" (bacı evleri), where some women whose husbands had died in Syria were sheltered after returning to Türkiye through irregular routes, indicate that the organization's structure inside Türkiye operates within a certain system. In these houses, reportedly established in cities such as Kocaeli and Istanbul, women staying there are said to receive regular financial support under the name of "infak" from male militants affiliated with the organization. Such support mechanisms create a structure that enables women both to remain committed to the organization's ideology and to be maintained within its organizational networks.[50] Hale Gönültaş's report on an 18-year-old DAESH member named Handan is a noteworthy example in this regard. According to the information in the report, "sister houses" are defined as places where women whose husbands are fighting for DAESH in Syria or have been killed in bombings, and who have no source of income or place to live, stay together. The functions of the women staying in these houses within the organization and the purposes of these structures can be evaluated under several headings:[51]

Financial Resource Generation: It is stated that some women staying in sister houses earn income through religious or traditional practices such as "rukye" (recitation of religious verses) and "hacamat" (bloodletting), and that the financial resources generated from these activities are collected by networks affiliated with the organization. This situation shows that these houses can function as one of the organization's financial resource generation mechanisms.

Exploitation and Abuse Within the Organization: Various field studies and journalistic investigations reveal that women staying in sister houses are sometimes abused by male members of the organization. It is stated that religious justifications, such as "imam nikah" (religious marriage), are used in this process and that women can be exploited through short-term marriages.

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47 Ulas, G. 2024, s. 903.
48 Ulas, G. 2024, s. 1240
49 Ulas, G. 2024, s.
50 Ulas, G. 2024, s. 908.
51 Gönültaş, H. (2022). "IŞİD'li Kadının Bıçaklı Cihat Videosu Millet Bahçesi'nde Çekilmiş," *Kısa Dalga.*


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Use for Propaganda and Threats: Some women staying in sister houses are also used for organizational propaganda. In particular, the recording of videos containing violent, threatening messages and the circulation of these images on social media platforms show that women can be used as propaganda tools.

Dependency and Control Mechanism: It is stated that the movement of women living in sister houses is largely controlled by the organization, that they are moved to different houses at regular intervals, and that they are made economically dependent on aid networks linked to the organization. The fact that the basic needs of these women, who have limited financial resources, are met by individuals connected to the organization can create a control mechanism that reinforces dependency and obedience.

In this context, it is argued that the discourse of "rescuing women in camps in Syria," which is sometimes voiced within organizational circles, can be interpreted not only as a humanitarian initiative but also as a mobilization strategy aimed at reproducing the organization's ideological and logistical networks. Indeed, the propaganda materials of campaigns conducted by certain associations and circles in Türkiye include calls for the rescue of women in the camps. Such rhetoric is also significant in terms of reproducing the social and ideological networks that could ensure the continuity of structures such as sister houses. For example, the propaganda poster of the Morality and Sunnah Association, which is said to be linked to the DAESH attack in Yalova, calling for the rescue of women in these camps, can be interpreted as an effort to ensure the continuation of sister houses.

It is assessed that these camps in Syria, which are gradually emptying, carry the risk of transforming into structures that could take on functions similar to 'sister houses' over time. It can be argued that such structures have the potential to evolve into networks that can meet the organization's needs, such as generating economic resources, maintaining internal relations, and recruiting new members. These examples demonstrate that the widespread belief that women do not participate in DAESH as suicide bombers or direct combatants is largely a myth. Therefore, viewing women's role within the organization as limited to passive support activities does not reflect reality. This situation necessitates a more careful assessment, particularly for women in camps located in conflict zones. The potential for radicalization among women living in a total of 14 camps in different regions, primarily the al-Hol camp in Syria, is an issue that needs to be closely monitored in this regard. Indeed, the study by Esholdt and Nilsson, which analyzed the social media posts of women in the al-Hol camp, reveals noteworthy findings. According to the research, a significant portion of the DAESH-affiliated women held in the camp continue to maintain their commitment to radical ideologies and express their desire to participate in armed struggle, despite the organization's military defeat and the harsh living conditions in the camp.[52] Analysis of women's social media posts shows that they interpret their captivity and the difficulties they face as a 'divine test' of their faith and devotion.[53] Despite feeling excluded by the international community and abandoned or forgotten by the 'ummah' they believe they belong to, especially by DAESH men, a significant portion of these women have not wavered in their commitment to DAESH ideology.[54]

The classical doctrine of defensive jihad limits women's participation in armed conflict under normal circumstances, except in emergencies. However, some women in the Al-Hol camp position themselves as active fighters (mujahideen) and express their desire to participate directly in armed actions.[55] They express these desires by sharing images of 'mujahideen,' depicting female figures from early Islamic history who are said to have participated in wars, showing them shooting arrows from horseback. This desire for active armed action observed among women is also linked to their disappointment with DAESH men, whom they consider to have failed to protect women in captivity. This situation leads some women to develop a

52 Esholdt, H. F., & Nilsson, M. (2026). Hardship is part of jihad: ISIS-affiliated women in the al-Hol camp dealing with military defeat through social media "prison writings". Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 49(3). https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2025.2575466

53 Esholdt, H. F., & Nilsson, M. (2026). s. 44.

54 Esholdt, H. F., & Nilsson, M. (2026). s. 30

55 Esholdt, H. F., & Nilsson, M. (2026). s. 60

discourse that reflects their desire to take initiative and participate directly in the struggle on the battlefield, where men are perceived to have failed.

Finally, women's loyalty to the organization and the continuity of its ideology of action are reproduced through their maternal roles.[56] One of the most fundamental roles of women within the ideological structure of terrorist organizations is to radicalize the family from within, thereby ensuring the continuity of the organization and the transmission of its ideology to new generations.[57] Despite the difficult conditions they face, some women appear to equate their maternal duties with transmitting the ideology of jihad to their children. While they desire their sons, whom they call "lion cubs," to become future warriors, they position their daughters as "ideological teachers" and "role models" who will play a critical role in the continuity of the movement. This approach demonstrates the continuation of a socialization process aimed at transmitting DAESH's armed and ideological struggle to new generations.[58]

Although women do not have the physical capacity to defend DAESH, they see the transmission of ideology to new generations as the most important achievement of motherhood. In this context, raising girls in particular to be future "ideological transmitters" and potential leaders emerges as an important goal. Some women, who romanticize life during the caliphate in a nostalgic way, continue to glorify death and violence with statements such as "I would rather be the widow of a hero than the wife of a coward." Furthermore, actions such as burning tents and murdering other women in the camps who are thought to have violated Sharia law show that the organization's practices of violence (hisba) continue to a certain extent.

There are various reasons behind women's desire to go beyond their traditional roles within DAESH and become mujahideen participating in armed actions. The first of these is the expectation of fighting that arises during the process of joining the organization. It is seen that some women who joined the organization, especially from Western countries, acted with the idea that they would fight alongside men from the moment they arrived in Syria. However, their exclusion from armed struggle within the organization and their reduction to the roles of wives and mothers rather than "soldiers of the caliphate" created significant disappointment among these women and led to the emergence of a suppressed desire for armed action.

Another factor fueling women's desire to engage in armed struggle is their disappointment with male DAESH members. Some women believe that the men in the organization have failed in their duty to protect and defend them. The inability of men to fulfill their traditional protective roles has created deep disappointment among women and, in some cases, motivated them to take initiative on the battlefield.

Conclusion

As analyzed in detail throughout the report, DAESH's loss of territorial control in Syria and Iraq after 2019 did not spell the end of the organization; rather, it transformed it into a more flexible, asymmetric, and difficult-to-detect network model. The answer to the question "What lies ahead for us regarding DAESH?" clearly demonstrates the need for a radical update of traditional counterterrorism methods and our perceptions of security. The threat landscape awaiting us in the future stems not from hierarchical province models and large, centrally managed operations, but rather from a decentralized structure consisting of lone actors fed by the digital ecosystem, increasingly younger individuals, and women who have shifted their roles from passive supporters to active participants.

First, we anticipate that the average age of perpetrators involved in future terrorist acts will continue to decline significantly and that individual youth radicalization will become one of the most serious challenges. Lone actor attacks carried out by individuals aged 16–17 in Türkiye are not unique to the country but rather

56 Esholdt, H. F., & Nilsson, M. (2026). s. 86

57 Baz Şahin, C. (2024). Suriye İç Savaşında Kadın Militanlar: YPJ ve DEAŞ Örneği [Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi], s. 31, 47-48.

58 Esholdt, H. F., & Nilsson, M. (2026). s. 74.

reflect a broader global trend. The emerging generation of radicalization appears to occur less through deep theological study or systematic ideological indoctrination and more through the rapid integration of young people seeking identity, belonging, and status into online networks shaped by "echo chambers." As captured by the concept of "onlife," in this new reality where the virtual and physical worlds are deeply intertwined, young people experience the internet not merely as a passive source of information but as an ecosystem of socialization and meaning making in which they actively live. The fact that digital platforms function as "virtual madrasas," that so called "hipster Salafi" preachers appeal to youth through references drawn from popular culture, and that the incubation period of radicalization has reportedly declined from an average of sixteen months to only a few weeks indicates that "micro cells," which are far more difficult to detect, are likely to increase in the coming period. In such an environment, the accumulation of psychosocial and personal crises among young people, combined with ideological propaganda triggers, can rapidly reach a tipping point. As illustrated by the "bathtub model," these pressures may suddenly overflow, leading to abrupt and destructive acts of violence. Second, it is essential to emphasize that the role of women within terrorist organizations has undergone a profound transformation and that the disruptive effects of this change will likely be felt much more strongly in the future. The traditional assumption that views women merely as passive ideological supporters or victims following men has now completely lost its validity. In the period ahead, women will appear not only as "mujahidat" who directly engage in armed confrontation with security forces or carry out suicide attacks, but also as the primary carriers ensuring the ideological continuity of the organization. Particularly in camps in Syria and within logistical and financial support networks established in Türkiye, such as the so called "sister houses" (bacı evleri), women have taken on the mission of raising girls as the "ideological teachers" of the future and boys as "lion cubs." The fact that women leaving these camps are often not included in reintegration programs, are unable to return to their home countries, or are not accepted by their families frequently forces them to become residents of these sister houses. This situation secures the intergenerational transmission of DAESH ideology and stands as a clear indicator of the new waves of militancy that may emerge in the coming years. Fourth, it is also necessary to briefly address the claims that some DAESH members linked to the attacks that came to the public agenda following both the Santa Maria Church attack and the Yalova attack had previously been detained and were already undergoing investigation or prosecution. In Türkiye, the release of individuals against whom judicial proceedings have been initiated on charges of DAESH membership or providing support to the organization is directly related to the functioning of judicial processes rather than to administrative decisions by security authorities. In particular, the lengthy duration of trials, the limited deterrent effect of sanctions related to terrorist propaganda, and the legal constraints that arise when individuals have not directly participated in an armed attack can allow many individuals detained or arrested due to links with DAESH to be released at later stages of the judicial process.

In short, the primary threat posed by DAESH today is not a caliphate with fixed territorial boundaries or a hierarchical army, but rather flexible and autonomous cells connected through digital networks, nourished by local dynamics yet sharing a global revolutionary hostility. This new organizational model, sustained through intra-family radicalization, virtual communities, youth experiencing crises of belonging, and so called "sister houses" that risk transforming into institutionalized exploitation or financial networks, cannot be countered solely through security focused or military measures. Preventing this threat requires urgent, multidimensional social policies that address the unmet psychosocial needs of young people, disrupt echo chambers within the digital ecosystem, restrict the physical and virtual spaces of Salafi networks, include the rehabilitation of radicalized women and children, and accelerate judicial processes. The organization has undergone a strategic and structural transformation; therefore, reconstructing our methods of prevention and counteraction in accordance with this asymmetric, decentralized, and "onlife" reality has become an unavoidable and vital necessity.

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