

ANALYSIS ON THE VARIATION IN PREVALENCE OF FEMALE COMBATANTS IN THE SRI LANKAN AND SECOND SUDANESE CIVIL WARS

AUTHOR

Christie Yan

B.Sc in International Relations (2023)

M.Sc in International Relations (2024)

Contact: c.c.yan@lse.ac.uk

AFFILIATIONS

Department of International Relations, The London School of Economics and Political Science

ABSTRACT

Academic literature on the role of women within violent conflicts has burgeoned in recent years, with thanks to the feminist approach to International Relations. Existing works have focused on female combatants within individual conflicts, gender-based violence and war, and women's agency within conflict. However, further work on cross-conflict analysis is required to assess what factors explain the variation in prevalence of female combatants within civil wars. This study will do so by looking at the Sri Lankan Civil War and the Second Sudanese Civil War and the contexts that gave rise to the difference in prevalence of female combatants between the two conflicts. Specifically, this study will explore the factors that shaped the context in which women became combatants of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/ Army. With particular focus on the treatment of women within these violent political organizations, this study will ultimately propose that group political program and group views on rape help explain the variation in prevalence of female combatants.

OBJECTIVE

This study sought to explore the following:

- What factors led to the significant variation in the prevalence of female combatants in the Sri Lankan Civil War and the Second Sudanese Civil War
- Why the LTTE chose to have a gender-inclusive political program and why the SPLM/A chose to have a gender-exclusive political program

Whilst the following was beyond the scope of focus in this research, it may have implications in the following fields:

- Conflict studies (particularly civil wars and insurgencies)
- Post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction (particularly for NGOs and governmental organizations)
- Policy-making

METHODOLOGY

This study approached the research question through a comparative analysis of two case studies: The Sri Lankan Civil War and the Second Sudanese Civil War. The two cases were selected because of their ethnic tensions, British colonial legacy, nationalistic beliefs, duration, start/ end dates and search for independent nationhood for a specific ethnic group. However, the two civil wars varied significantly in the prevalence of female combatants within the minority violent political group.

This research focuses specifically on group political ideology and group views on rape, to draw conclusions on what factors explain this variation in prevalence.

FINDINGS

- This research draws on Thomas and Bond (2015)¹'s work on women and participation in violent political groups in Africa and their ideologies, and applies the argument that group political program affects the prevalence of female combatants within a violent political group to the LTTE and SPLM/A, whilst simultaneously integrating group views of rape into this analysis
- The LTTE had women integrated into all ranks of the LTTE, including high-ranking leadership, front-line combatants and suicide bombers, whereas women in the SPLM/A were protected for their reproductive capabilities and were sheltered from the front lines
- The LTTE's group political program declared that it was "committed to the emancipation of women from national and social oppression"², and public denouncement on the usage of rape
- The SPLM/A's group political program, conversely, despite its 'Socialist' program, had no reference to women and equality
 - Its combatants also frequently engaged gender-based violence as a method of conquest and commodified women through their acquisition as capital

	Number of Groups	Number of VPOs Including Women Participants	Percentage of VPOs Including Women Participants
Women Participants			
All groups	161	73	45
Small	73	11	26
Terrorist	90	50	56
Positive gender ideology	21	16	76
Self-defense/paramilitary	41	18	44
Overthrow of government	87	45	52
Secessionist/self-determination	50	18	36
Fundamentalist	21	8	38
Women Combatants			
All groups	154	45	29
Small	40	5	13
Terrorist	85	31	36
Positive gender ideology	19	10	53
Self-defense/paramilitary	39	13	33
Overthrow of government	81	25	31
Secessionist/self-determination	50	13	26
Fundamentalist	18	2	11

Figure 1: Frequency of Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations (Thomas and Bond, 2015):

CONCLUSION

- This research found that because the LTTE had a gender-inclusive political program that denounced rape, the dowry system and advocated for women's independence socio-economically, they perceived women as capable combatants and consistently advocated for their advancement
- This gender-inclusive political program led to the inclusion of Tamil women into all ranks of the LTTE, including high-ranking leadership, front-line combatants and suicide bombers
- Conversely, the SPLM/A had a political program that focused on keeping women in the domestic sphere, and called for the focused protection of women to safeguard the reproductive capabilities of Sudanese women
- Gender-inclusive political programs, such as the LTTE's, are more likely to include women in the masculine practices of war and combat
- Gender-exclusive political programs, such as the SPLM/A, are more likely to continue to exclude women from masculine practices of war and combat despite organizational need for more bodies

CITATIONS

- ¹ Thomas, J.L. and Bond, K.D. (2015) "Women's participation in violent political organizations," *American Political Science Review*, 109(3), pp. 488–506. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055415000313>.
- ² Frerks, G. (2019) "The Female Tigers of Sri Lanka," *Perpetrators of International Crimes*, pp. 208–223. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198829997.003.0012>