TOOLKIT

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Integrating Gender into State Threat Analysis: A Practical Toolkit

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RUSI

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Methodology

Research for this toolkit was conducted from June 2025 to March 2026 as part of the Gender-Responsive Approaches to Countering State Threats in Sub-Saharan Africa project.[1]

The paper was submitted on 31 March 2026 and approved for copy-editing on 7 April 2026.

This toolkit is primarily based on three sources:

- An extensive literature review of state threats in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with a focus on capturing existing gender analysis.
- Primary research exploring hostile state actors and threat vectors in SSA, including how gender is weaponised and how gender and other identity factors determine experience of state threats.
- Recognised expertise of the project team on gender mainstreaming strategy design and implementation.

While the authors strive for accuracy and quality, please note that the information provided may not be entirely error-free or up to date. RUSI does not assume any responsibility or liability for the use or interpretation of this content.

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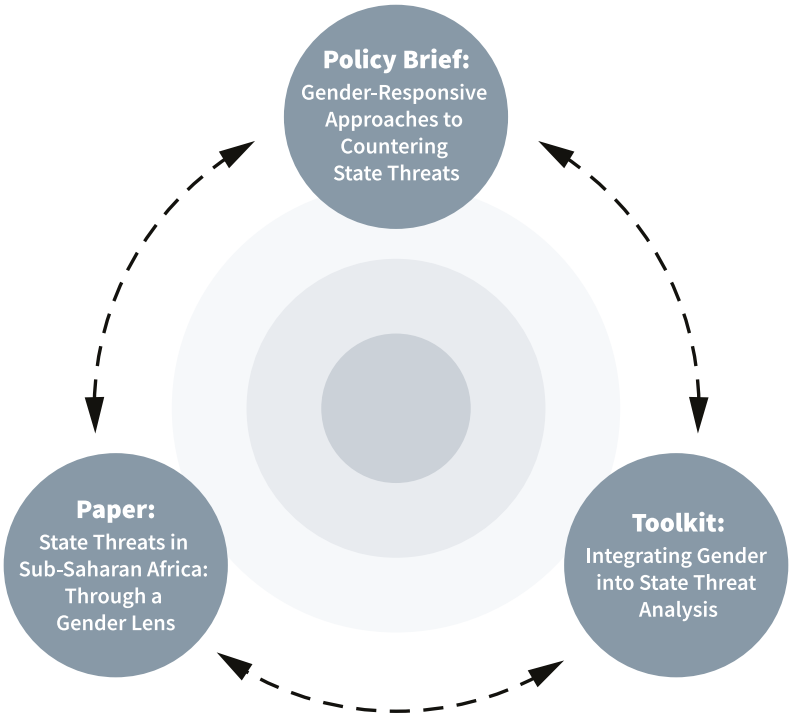
1. RUSI, 'Gender-Responsive Approaches to Countering State Threats in Sub-Saharan Africa', <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/projects/gender-responsive-approaches-countering-state-threats-sub-saharan-africa>, accessed 27 May 2026.

Introduction

This toolkit is part of the 'Gender-Responsive Approaches to Countering State Threats in Sub-Saharan Africa' project and is designed to build capacity for conducting gender analysis of state threats.[2]

It is meant to be used in coordination with the 'Gender-Responsive Approaches to Countering State Threats' Insights Paper, which explores why there has been a lack of gender mainstreaming in state threat analysis and how this work contributes to the effectiveness of countering these threats.[3] It is also complementary to the 'State Threats in Sub-Saharan Africa: Through a Gender Lens' paper, which offers an overview of gender and state threats in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region and provides more context to the examples utilised within the toolkit.[4]

Figure 1: 'Gender-Responsive Approaches to Countering State Threats in Sub-Saharan Africa' Project Outputs



Source: The authors.

2. *Ibid.*
3. Jessica White and Michael Jones, 'Gender-Responsive Approaches to Countering State Threats: A Policy Brief', RUSI Insights Papers (11 June 2026) , <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/insights-papers/gender-responsive-approaches-countering-state-threats-policy-brief>, accessed 11 June 2026.
4. Michael Jones et al., 'State Threats in Sub-Saharan Africa: Through a Gender Lens', *RUSI Research Papers* (forthcoming).

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This toolkit has two main aims, which are to equip state threat analysts and advisors with the practical tools needed to:

1. design and implement gender mainstreaming strategies with an intersectional approach into policy and practice; and
2. apply gender analysis to state threat analysis and response.

The toolkit responds to three main research questions that have driven the overall project:

- How do hostile state actors (HSAs) in SSA contexts co-opt and weaponise gender (norms, relationships and systems of social organisation and governance) as a specific tactic in their offensive aims?
- How does gender impact effectiveness of threat vectors across SSA contexts?
- How are the impacts of state threat activities / vectors gendered?

It is important to note that while the examples utilised here will focus on SSA HSAs and threat vectors, drawing on the experience of the project team, this toolkit aims to provide resources that extend beyond a specific geographic context, HSA and/or threat vector.

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Key Concepts and Definitions

The following key concepts and definitions lay the foundation for the toolkit and are essential to its effective use.

What are State Threats?

'State threats' is a nebulous concept, often encompassing multiple types of threat - or vectors - and conceptions of HSAs. 'Threat vectors' refers to coercive and/or illicit actions that fall short of acts of war but are intended to disrupt and destabilise the perpetrator's opponents. They can be threats such as information or political manipulation, lawfare, illicit finance and force projection. These vectors can be both covert and overt.[5]

HSA is also a subjective conception, as hostility can be defined against many different benchmarks and is subject to the political will, interests and experiences of various actors across different times and places. For instance, military elites in the Sahel may interpret state threats very differently to a democratic government in Western Europe. These issues are defined to some degree by the geopolitical issues of the day but are also informed by historical perspective. For the purposes of this project, HSAs are defined as state actors seeking to undermine democratic resilience using threat vectors that (attempt to) compromise national security but do not amount to an act of war.

In this way, analysing and countering state threats is a matter of understanding and protecting the citizens, assets and political goals of one's own state, and then assessing and responding to those foreign states that aim to destabilise these goals and assets.

5. Matthew Redhead, 'Old Wine, New Bottles? The Challenge of State Threats', SOC-ACE Research Programme, Research Paper 32, 2025, <https://www.socace-research.org.uk/publications/soc-ace-rp32-state-threats>, accessed 27 May 2026.

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How is Gender Defined and Distinguished?

In order to determine how gender is defined and distinguished, we must first consider how gender is understood, both individually and societally, and what the term 'gender' means. Is the word associated with women? Is gender different from sex? What do the answers to these questions mean for how societal roles, expectations and structures can be understood?

Sex vs Gender

Sex refers to the physical and biological attributes that distinguish males and females.

Gender refers to socially and culturally constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that are considered appropriate for everyone in certain societies at given times. These are otherwise referred to as social norms. Gendered norms set expectations on all individuals based on assigned sex at birth. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men, but to the relationship between them.[6]

> *It is vital to recognise that gender not only shapes self-perception and perception of others, but also shapes life experiences and decision-making processes.*

Gender equality is recognised as a human right by Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,[7] and both sex and gender are recognised as prohibited grounds of discrimination by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.[8]

Gender is a deeply engrained socio-cultural identity factor that is laced with inconsistencies and inequalities impacting not only people on an individual level, but also the distribution of power and resources in society. The main way gender is learnt is through socialisation. It often includes assumptions about and social reinforcement of what is considered appropriate or typical behaviour for individuals of a particular sex.[9] Expectations can be about roles, responsibilities and opportunities, clothing, mannerisms, hobbies, occupations and emotional expression, among other things.

6. UN Women, 'Concepts and Definitions', <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsandefinitions.htm>, accessed 26 March 2026.
7. UN, 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', 10 December 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>, accessed 27 May 2026.
8. UN, 'Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women', <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw>, accessed 27 May 2026.
9. For more information, see World Health Organization, 'Gender and Health', <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1>, accessed 27 May 2026.

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Gender-based roles and expectations change the way individuals experience and enjoy their rights, and the way they experience threats and insecurity. Gender-based expectations are traditionally divided into masculinities and femininities. These sets of expectations are defined by social, historical and political circumstances rather than biology. Gender-based roles and expectations change over time and vary depending on context, which is a result of changes in wider social and cultural environments.[10]

While these expectations are not universal and can change over time, there are common assumptions that underpin these concepts across multiple contexts:

- **Masculinity** is often associated with assertiveness, rationality, leadership, aggressiveness, protectiveness and so on.
- **Femininity** is often associated with the opposite qualities, such as being kind, nurturing, submissive and, fundamentally, peaceful.

In the context of understanding and responding to state threats, it is essential to comprehend:

- how these expectations influence an individual's analysis;
- how HSAs can take advantage of these assumptions; and
- how gendered inequalities impact experience of insecurity.

Patriarchies and the Harms of Gender Inequalities

In patriarchal societies, men are regarded as dominant while women are subservient, leading to imbalanced social, political and economic power structures. These unequal structures also place certain other individuals, such as those who do not identify with binary gender structures or those who wish to participate in roles not matching with their gender-role expectations, at a disadvantage. Harms resulting from these inequalities create rifts in societies that HSAs can exploit through information manipulation illicit economies, and other illicit actions.

10. UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls, 'Gender Equality and Gender Backlash', position paper, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/Gender-equality-and-gender-backlash.pdf>, accessed 27 May 2026.

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What is Intersectionality?

While gender plays a fundamental role in shaping an individual's social and cultural roles, behaviours and activities, it must be recognised that gender is only one component, or factor, of an individual's identity.

Other identity factors by which people may define themselves include but are not limited to:

- age
- race
- ethnicity
- socio-economic status
- ability (physical or mental)
- religion
- education level.

These factors shape:

- how individuals and groups understand themselves;
- how they interact with others;
- how they perceive lived experiences; and
- how external circumstances may affect them.

Intersectionality recognises that identity factors intersect and overlap in complex ways. This is important because in negative scenarios, identity factors can compound multiple forms of discrimination – for instance, racism, sexism and classism – and expose individuals to exponential harms.[11]

Intersectionality is therefore critical for analysis, especially for understanding the vulnerabilities, threats and practical solutions which have different implications for various marginalised groups.

> *It is vital to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to ensure that analysis and responses are tailored to the various experiences of insecurity and entry points for exploitation.*

11. A. H. Monjurul Kabir et al., 'Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit', UN Women, 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/01/intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit>, accessed 27 May 2026.

Applying a gender mainstreaming strategy with an intersectional approach is essential to capturing and analysing the complexity of identity. Even when two people or groups share some of the same identity factors, individuals may prioritise different identity factors.

Identity in Motion

Consider an individual born female, identifying as a woman from a specific nationality, following a certain religion and holding membership of a certain ethnic, middle-class, able-bodied, educated group. There are different points in this individual's life in which one or more of these identities might intersect in complex ways, such as in relation to political participation. Ethnicity, age, gender, education, class and so on might all impact political engagement, including with political parties or the right to vote. One of these identity factors might have more or less impact than another on this experience (for example, age might be more important than class). Multiple identity factors may compound inequalities, such as when discrimination is compounded for women of a certain race or age.

Capturing this level of complexity allows for a more complete analysis of the ways in which HSAs might weaponise gender and other identity factors, for example by targeting different politicians in different ways to successfully influence campaign outcomes.

An intersectional lens is vital to data collection and analysis, as well as to better inform decisions about policy or programming requirements.

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The Relevance of Gender

> *One might wonder, 'Of all the things to consider in analysis why gender?'*

A few factors have contributed to the omission of gender and identity from analysis.

First, historically gender and other identity factors have not been part of mainstream analytical frameworks. A lack of gender data suggests a paradox for those trying to provide evidence of the relevance and importance of gender – as without the presence of data, it is hard to make the case for why the data needs to be collected. However, there is growing international recognition that identity-based targeting, including as part of transnational repression and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), plays a significant role in contemporary authoritarian playbooks.[12]

Second, due to state threat analysis being predominantly gender-blind (meaning that gender or the impacts of gender inequalities have not been considered), this space has missed gendered drivers, failed to anticipate gendered mobilisation tactics and more. This is often due to ignorance, lack of diversity and sometimes institutionalised resistance to intersectional gender analysis within security institutions. It is also because, historically, the state security framework guiding intelligence – which has a utilitarian focus on assets of the state – has largely overlooked the different experiences of different identities and human security needs of the population it serves.[13]

Third, the common assumption is that gender means understanding how and why women are relevant to this work. However, gender applies to everyone and matters in security analysis, not just for equity, but for insight. In the definition of state threats above, citizens at home need to be protected, and populations of target states need to be understood. While it would be easier to define a population as a homogenous group with a key identity factor of nationality, doing this minimises the complexities that make up these diverse groups of people.

The Insights Paper goes into more detail on the consideration of gender in the state threat analytical space and identifies the international normative frameworks that underpin gender mainstreaming.[14]

12. Claudia Wallner et al., 'Hostile States and the Far Right: Converging Tactics', RUSI Insights Papers (March 2026), <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/insights-papers/hostile-states-and-far-right-converging-tactics>, accessed 27 May 2026; Joana de Deus Pereira et al., 'Tracking Money and Influence in the UK and Europe', RUSI Insights Papers (March 2026), <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/insights-papers/tracking-money-and-influence-uk-and-europe>, accessed 27 May 2026.
13. White and Jones, 'Gender-Responsive Approaches to Countering State Threats'.
14. *Ibid.*

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Potential Harms of Gender-Blind Work

Improper or limited comprehension of gender and other identity factors can result in significant analytical errors and potential policy and programming failures. To avoid harms in the future, it is vital to identify where these limitations exist and to override the institutional tendency to simplify analysis to fit processes.

The following four key analytical pitfalls should be avoided:

- **Homogenisation**: Stereotyping individuals within given gender or other identity groups (all men, all women, and so on) as uniform or similar in their characteristics and experiences. Doing this results in a failure to consider diverse lived experiences.
- **Gender binary:** Assuming that everyone is either male or female. A gender binary approach misses the indicators of exploitable social divisions around those who identify outside the binary. Additionally, it pits men and women against each other in power structures.
- **Essentialisation**: Assuming that a trait is inherently and permanently biological (for example, that male equals masculine and female equals feminine). This includes the idea that all men and women are born with distinctly different and predefined natures (such as men are more violent and women are more peaceful), rather than natures shaped by cultural and social constructs.
- **Instrumentalisation**: Utilising people in preconceived roles based on essentialised assumptions about their capabilities – for example, using women as community liaisons based on the assumption that femininity makes them more caring and patient mediators, while using men for pursuit or interdiction of threat actors based on the assumption that they are more aggressive and thus suited to action-oriented roles.

The literature shows how gender bias and more often blindness have shaped our understanding of state threats and how to counter them.[15] This can lead to both direct and indirect harms to women and other marginalised groups due to the misuse or lack of understanding and care taken in the design and implementation of counter-state threat programming. Therefore, it is essential for analysts and advisors to implement gender mainstreaming strategies to overcome these legacies and move towards gender-responsive counter-state threat approaches.

15. *Ibid.*

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Mainstreaming Gender in State Threat Analysis and Response

Mainstreaming gender with an intersectional approach is essential to enhancing detection and analysis of state threats, as well as improving the effectiveness and impact of on-the-ground counter-state threat programming. Evidence shows the relevance of gender and other identity factors to the effectiveness and impact of state threat vectors. Thus, continuing to disregard them risks missing threat patterns, formulating ineffective policy and reinforcing inequalities with programming.[16]

Building a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy

Gender mainstreaming strategies must be comprehensive, employed by all individuals and backed with institutional commitment to improve operational outcome and strategic impact with gender-responsive counter-state threat efforts.

While focusing on diversity and equity is important, it is not enough to simply add more female state threat analysts and advisors or achieve gender parity among counter-state threat beneficiaries. Effective mainstreaming strategies must be multifaceted, intersectional, adapted for the local context, and employed at multiple levels with multiple steps.

> *There are two main levels at which gender must be mainstreamed with an intersectional approach: the institutional level and the substantive level.*

Other resources (see the Annex) have tended to separate these two levels and their requirements, as they are often related to different departments and areas of responsibility. However, the strategic need for both is worth noting, even if all the required changes cannot be implemented singlehandedly. For example, it is important to be aware of how institutional perspectives impact intelligence collection requirements and prioritisation. Also, the environments in which individuals are trained, the expectations against which intelligence reporting is assessed and the contexts within which it is used all potentially impact the framing of intelligence for shaping policy and practice. Lack of awareness of this can feed into detrimental blind spots and groupthink approaches.

16. Jones et al., 'Understanding State Threats in Sub-Saharan Africa Through a Gender Lens'.

What Needs to Happen at an Institutional Level?

Gender mainstreaming at an institutional level means formally adopting and practically implementing an organisation-wide strategy to work towards equality and ensure diversity of input into intelligence collection and analysis, policy development, operational decision-making and practical implementation. This might include:

- **Staffing policies**: Revisiting staffing requirements and policies to promote and allow for greater inclusion.
- **Culture and equality**: Internally fostering a culture committed to equality, including by ensuring meaningful inclusion of diverse staff and practical support for equal access.
- **Core performance criteria**: Embedding the promotion of gender equality as a core leadership competency and performance criterion, including through performance evaluations, leadership training and recruitment for senior-level roles.
- **Resource allocation**: Committing sufficient resources and expertise to support gender mainstreaming training, strategy building and implementation.
- **Review structures**: Broadening review structures (such as information control points) to be more horizontal, allowing for more diversity of perspectives at all levels of analysis and decision-making to facilitate a wider range of technical inputs and relevant policies.

Adding Context to Gender Mainstreaming Strategies

Gender mainstreaming strategies can be based on international standards and promising practices (see Annex for further resources) but must be context-specific. A single recipe is not possible; rather, a multifaceted strategy must be developed that is adaptable to institutions' specific needs and cultural environments and aligned to their missions.

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What Needs to Happen at a Substantive Level?

At the substantive level, gender mainstreaming ensures that gender dynamics are informing every step of analysis, as well as policy and programme development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This might include:

1. At an early analysis stage, ensuring either that gender and intersectionality inform state threat analysis or that a standalone gender analysis is completed to inform counter-state threat policy development and responses from the start.
   1.1. Locally-situated understanding of gender dynamics with an intersectional lens is critical as it becomes immensely difficult to back-fill after an intervention commences.
   1.2. Early consultation with local women's rights organisations (WROs) and other marginalised identity groups allows for a genuinely participatory design process rather than extractive and performative later-stage involvement.
2. Mainstreaming gender across strategic planning to articulate human-rights-based and gender-responsive goals, encouraging 'do-no-harm' and human security-centred and contextualised counter-state threat efforts.
3. Adapting operational response planning to ensure that the design and implementation of interventions/programmes are grounded in gender-sensitive early-stage analysis, including decision-making, monitoring and compliance strategies. Planning should consider human rights and the gendered impacts of protecting critical infrastructures, compliance with international law and embedding protections in planning.
4. As part of a risk management approach, putting mechanisms in place to pilot programmes, track and understand the risks of backlash and harm to WROs, and establish protective factors and mitigations to protect human rights defenders from reprisals.
5. Embedding gender across monitoring and evaluation to set benchmarks, create indicators to monitor progress, and evaluate external policies and practice for human rights and gender mainstreaming compliance.

At the substantive level, gender mainstreaming can be more prescriptive, with clear benefits for following certain steps and including key elements. However, strategies should be adapted to the respective cultural and institutional environments and to institutional roles in analysing and countering state threats.

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Core Principles of Gender Analysis

The next sections of this toolkit aim to build capacity for intersectional gender analysis to improve understanding of identity-based harms as core, not peripheral, to state threats.

What is Gender-Disaggregated Data?

Start by gathering gender-disaggregated data, as well as data disaggregated by other identity factors. Disaggregating data is the recording of gender and other identity factors within the collection of data. To avoid any gaps or potential harms caused by a gender-binary approach, it is important to provide multiple options when recording gender (for example, by including categories such as 'non-binary' or 'other').

Example: Collecting Information on FIMI Campaigns

When collecting information on politicians targeted by FIMI campaigns, disaggregating data ensures that the different identity factors of these politicians are recorded, including gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status and so on.

Considering gender as a disaggregated category is often a benchmark by which to work towards gender parity. Analysing where persons of all genders are not equally included allows analysts / researchers to better understand why these inequalities exist and/or how to remedy them. Encouraging requirements or quotas for inclusion and/or empowerment of women in security spaces and solutions has been a common approach to fulfilling commitments to the Women, Peace and Security agenda.[17]

Example: Disaggregating Data to Counter State Threats

When designing counter-state threat policy or programming, disaggregating data on beneficiaries can help to ensure diversity and even equity in participants/recipients.

17. UN Women, 'What is the Women, Peace and Security Agenda?', 20 October 2025, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/what-is-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda>, accessed 27 May 2026.

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These requirements and quotas can be useful when trying to overcome institutional resistance to inclusion of women, with a focus on diversity in recruitment and career progression. However, there are limitations to using gender-disaggregated data alone:

- It does not address fundamental resistance. While there might be more women present, this does not necessarily mean that they are included meaningfully and safely and have the same advantages as men.[18]
- When men and women are viewed as categories, they are often homogenised, meaning that there is no comprehensive consideration of their identities and accompanying security experiences.

Nonetheless, when gender-disaggregated data is routinely collected, analysed, reflected upon and responded to, it lays a foundation for gender analysis and can help guide evidence-based, gender-responsive counter-state threat efforts.

What is Gender Analysis?

Gender analysis is context-specific and can help us better understand the gender dynamics of state threat vectors and HSA strategies, as well as the varying impact of these actions on the ground. Gender will mean different things in different places, and as an intersecting identity factor will compound inequalities in different measures.

> *Gender analysis is a critical, intersectional examination of how differences in gender roles and expectations, activities, needs, opportunities, rights and entitlements affect all individuals.*

Analysing gender enhances understanding of power and structures in society, which improves analysis of threat and response.

18. The inclusion of women as a categorical exercise is often referred to as 'gender washing'. See Development Intelligence Lab, 'When Does "Gender Mainstreaming" Become "Gender Washing"?', 10 March 2026, <https://www.devintelligencelab.com/intel/10march2026>, accessed 27 May 2026.

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What are Gender Lenses?

As indicated above, gender is multidimensional and intersectional. As a deeply embedded socio-cultural construct, it affects individuals' lives in a multitude of ways. Therefore, to analyse it effectively, gender and its influence should be considered through multiple lenses.

These lenses can help to identify, clarify and prioritise frequently missed or misread identifiers. The following sections offer some examples, highlighting both their advantages and disadvantages.

Gender in Power Structures

Power hierarchies and inequalities are fundamental to societal structures, even though there are many societies seeking to reduce them. Inequalities within power structures are due to many different identity factors such as race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and – importantly – gender.

Using this lens is about analysing the gendered power dynamics that feed division and inequalities in society, as HSAs can take advantage of these exploitable weaknesses. For example, the patriarchal structures that deny women the opportunity to engage in areas that are traditionally reserved for those in power, such as security, finances and family decisions, give opportunities to HSAs to exploit grievances in societies to influence politics or law. Another example is how some 'traditional values' power structures do not allow LGBTQIA+ individuals to exercise their rights, feeding grievances for those individuals but also offering a platform for population-wide conflict and disenfranchisement over perceived abuses of traditional norms or belief systems.

> *Analysing power structures with an intersectional gender lens helps to map power and visibility, which enhances early warning of where HSAs might be trying to weaponise identity-based inequalities.*

While accounting for the defining influence of power, this lens sometimes also homogenises identity groups and does not account for the compounding impacts of intersectional inequalities such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, class and ability. Additionally, as a singular lens it often does not consider how gender in social structures and language also reinforces the impact of gender inequality within power structures.

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Gender in Social Institutions and Customs

Analysing gender as part of social institutions and customs means considering institutional structures and how these structures allow or deny access to individuals based on identity factors. At a high level, this encourages analysis of how and why social institutions and customs are often built on the gendered assumption of women's influence being limited to the private sphere, such as in the family, versus men being welcomed in the public sphere, such as in politics or leadership roles.

Practically, this means thinking about how gender roles and expectations influence things like:

- where people gather in communities and spend time, and with whom;
- where and how people consume and share information; and
- where and how people can express their identity, and whether this denies them access to social participation such as marriage or political office.

> *Gender dynamics of social institutions and customs often define where and how HSAs target their vectors to most effectively achieve their goals.*

However, this lens also has the disadvantage of often homogenising people without consideration of their range of identity factors. Also, while this lens is valuable in drawing out gendered experiences of social structures and customs, used alone it does not fully account for how these are intertwined with power structures.

Gender as Discourse

In analyses of transnational repression and FIMI, with the strategic use of narratives as a threat vector, the way in which language itself is gendered (and how it shapes the way that people think about gender) is already proving highly relevant.

In most societies, words like 'male' and 'female' are imbued with meaning that can be essentialising and/or homogenising – making the language itself gendered. When these words are used, there is likely an image that comes to mind of how a 'man' or a 'woman' should look and behave, and maybe even what their roles might be.

Additionally, language shapes how people think about gender.

> *Discourse reinforces gender roles and expectations, with HSAs being able to use this to manipulate information to shape thought and perception, as well as politics, education and even the law.*

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When discourse is not considered, modes of idea formation and transmission are often overlooked. However, discourse analysis must also not be used as a singular lens to capture the full picture.

What is a Gender Analysis Framework?

As identified above, each gender lens has strengths and weaknesses. Thus, fitting more than one of these lenses together into a framework enables a more comprehensive analysis of relevant subject matter and its intersectional gender dynamics.

> *An analysis framework is an adaptable tool, in which various lenses can be combined and organised as necessary to make it accessible for different contexts and varied levels of expertise.*

Ideally, a comprehensive gender analysis would be conducted with a specifically tailored gender analysis framework. This would yield the best results in exploring both overtly and covertly gendered dynamics of state threats in each context. In a space like state threat analysis, which is in its nascent stages regarding inclusion of gender and other identity factors, this would be the most conducive to achieving the best results. However, it will require gender expertise and investment.

If there is not sufficient time or resource for this approach, gendered analytical prompts can be included in existing analytical tools to encourage inclusion of gender analysis.

The most important factor to remember when designing a gender analysis framework is to ensure that it encourages analysis on multiple levels from multiple perspectives.

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Applying Gender Analysis to State Threats

A gender mainstreaming strategy with an intersectional approach will ensure that gender and other identity factors are integrated into workflows and not treated as a parallel system or extra requirement. The following section showcases how to put together a gender analysis framework; subsequent sections provide some sample indicators and present a hypothetical case study applying the framework.

How to Build a Gender Analysis Framework for State Threats

Using the above tools, a state threat gender analysis framework can be formulated that is effective for different people in different roles. There are existing general frameworks for gender analysis (such as the Moser Framework and the Harvard Analytical Framework, and so on) which can be considered, but these would all need to be tailored to individual needs.[19]

Big Picture

STEP 1

Think about a comprehensive analysis in the first approach, identifying useful intersectional gender lenses to help assess the overall situation and the social, political and economic dynamics at play. This may include intersectional, gender-sensitive:

- political economy analysis of target countries / populations; and
- contextual analysis of target countries/populations.

19. European Institute for Gender Equality, 'Gender Analysis', Method/Tool, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/tools-methods/gender-analysis?language_content_entity=en>, accessed 26 March 2026.

Threat Detection

STEP 2

Think about assessing potential HSAs and what goals they may be trying to achieve. This may include gender-responsive:

- early warning and detection of HSA activity;
- threat assessment;
- understanding of whether and how gender and other identity factors are part of the threat logic; and
- analysis of whether these factors are being weaponised (such as through the strategic use of gendered narratives).

Evidence Collection

STEP 3

After this more comprehensive, zoomed-out approach, start thinking about the details of where more specific analytical prompts might be added to capture relevant gender dynamics. This may include gender-sensitive:

- evidence curation and attribution, to identify gendered patterns of exclusion, exploitation or erasure; and
- threat impact assessment, including better understanding of who is affected, how they are affected, and why, as well as what power shifts are occurring.

Attribution of Evidence Collection

Ensuring attribution of evidence collected is essential. Distinguishing between legitimate domestic discourse and HSA weaponisation of gender and other identity factors is impossible without attribution, as HSAs often amplify existing societal divisions. Attribution requires verification of evidence sources and can be particularly complex in open source online information environments (see Annex for further resources).

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Design and Implementation

STEP 4

Consider how the gender analysis conducted informs understanding of effective and impactful counter-state threat policy and programming. This may include gender-responsive:

- policy and programming formation, including better understanding of who is affected, how they are affected and why, ensuring that the human security needs of whole populations are considered and gendered harms avoided; and
- programming decisions such as design, risk assessment, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

These steps are meant to be indicative, not prescriptive, of processes that can be followed to build a gender analysis framework for state threat work.

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Sample Gendered Analytical Prompts, Indicators and Patterns

The following is a non-comprehensive list of sample prompting questions, indicators and overlooked patters that may aid analysis of threats. For further samples, see the RUSI Research Paper 'Gender and Identity Analysis Framework for Hybrid Threats'.[20]

General Threat Assessment

Prompting Questions

- What gender norms / roles are being exploited or reinforced (if any)?
- Are gendered narratives involved?
- Is there identity-based targeting or mobilisation?
- Are identity-based grievances being activated or manipulated?
- Whose voices are amplified or silenced? (Are women, youth and/or LGBTQIA+ voices delegitimised or excluded?)
- Are stereotypes about masculinity (warrior, protector and/or breadwinner) being mobilised in narratives, recruitment or resource control?
- Is the threat vector using gendered or sexualised imagery or targeting? Who is vulnerable or silenced as a result?
- Are legal / policy impacts reinforcing exclusion or vulnerability?
- Do these threats exacerbate existing gender inequalities in access to information, livelihoods or security?

20. Claudia Wallner and Jessica White, 'Gender and Identity Analysis Framework for Hybrid Threats', *RUSI Research Papers* (May 2026), <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/research-papers/gender-and-identity-analysis-framework-hybrid-threats>, accessed 27 May 2026.

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Information Manipulation and Interference

Prompting Questions

- Are disinformation campaigns using gendered tropes (such as portraying women politicians as unfit, sexualised or corrupt, or portraying LGBTQIA+ communities as Western threats to African values)?
- Are women more exposed to disinformation via platforms like WhatsApp groups (often used in community or family spaces), while men are targeted via political forums or sports / military pages?
- Do women and men differ in which sources they trust (such as religious leaders, community elders and/or online influencers), and are those being co-opted?
- Does online gendered harassment / disinformation discourage women from political participation, civil society activism or journalism more than men?
- Are manipulated narratives contributing to spikes in gender-based violence (such as scapegoating LGBTQIA+ people or women's rights activists)?

Indicators

- Gendered disinformation or sexualised content on social media surges during key political events.
- State media or patriotic influencers are involved in spreading gendered hate speech.
- Coordinated online harassment campaigns are aligned with foreign policy interests.

Overlooked Patterns

- Female civil society leaders are discredited as being foreign agents or immoral.
- Gendered memes or humour are used as deniable vehicles for state messaging, such as where a malicious or degrading message is masked with humour.

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Illicit Economies

Prompting Questions

- What gendered roles exist in illicit economies (such as men in artisanal mining or smuggling, or women in informal trade, transport or transactional sex linked to extractive industries)?
- Are gendered labour roles being exploited or manipulated through illicit networks?
- Are women disproportionately exposed to trafficking, sexual exploitation or coerced labour in resource zones or transit hubs?
- How do illicit economies affect men's and women's livelihoods differently (such as men being recruited into armed groups protecting illicit supply chains and women losing access to land / resources)?
- Do illicit profits reinforce patriarchal patronage networks, privileging male elites and marginalising women from decision-making?
- Are women-led community organisations responding differently to the harms of illicit economies (such as by protesting environmental degradation and/or organising alternative livelihoods)?

Indicators

- Trafficking networks that target women or LGBTQIA+ persons are protected.
- Corruption (for example, sexual extortion) linked to state-affiliated actors is found in service delivery.
- Strategic alliances occur between state elites and criminal actors operating in gendered sectors (such as cosmetics, hospitality or sex work).

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Overlooked Patterns

- Informal economies (where women dominate) are under-analysed in threat finance frameworks.[21]
- Gendered favours or exchanges are used as soft corruption mechanisms.
- Security, intelligence and policy actors may fail to identify gender-based coercion, including sexual blackmail, as a tool of political control used to compromise, silence or discipline opponents, officials, activists and journalists.

Force Projection

Prompting Questions

- Do external security deployments reinforce militarised masculinities (such as by valorising male fighters or marginalising women's voices in peace / security policy)?
- Do foreign security actors contribute to conflict-related sexual violence, exploitation or harassment of local women?
- How do foreign troop presences affect local gender dynamics (such as through increases in transactional sex, unequal access to security resources or heightened gender-based violence risks)?
- Do states offering security-for-resources deals bypass women's civil society and peacebuilding networks in favour of elite male political and military leaders?

21. International Monetary Fund, 'The Close Relationship Between Informality and Gender Gaps in Sub-Saharan Africa', in Corinne C. Deléchat and Leandro Medina (eds), *The Global Informal Workforce: Priorities for Inclusive Growth* (Washington, DC, US: International Monetary Fund, 2021).

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Indicators

- Force is disproportionately used against female or LGBTQIA+ protestors.
- Gender-based moral policing (dress codes and/or curfews) are used as part of security strategy.
- Gendered threats or sexual violence in military or paramilitary operations are used.

Overlooked Patterns

- Gendered violence is dismissed as a community-level problem rather than a state tactic.
- Proxy violence against gender / sexual minorities is used to test state distance or plausible deniability.
- Hypermasculine norms within security institutions may be reinforced through recruitment, training and command culture, shaping both internal hierarchies and external conduct towards civilians.

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How to Apply a Gender Analysis Framework to State Threats

To showcase how to apply a gender analysis framework to state threats, the following hypothetical example explores the use of a gender analysis framework from the perspective of a UK state threat analyst assessing Russian FIMI operations in Country X in SSA.

Understanding the Playing Field

STEP 1

First, based on existing analysis of what makes Russia an HSA and the threat vectors that it is using, such as FIMI, it is especially necessary to understand the social, political and economic context of Country X to comprehend how and why Russia might use FIMI to destabilise and undermine the country. This should include gender-sensitive political economy analysis and wider contextual analysis of Country X in SSA and its relationship to the UK's national security interests.

FIMI is a tool specifically wielded against populations, seeking to manipulate the information space and alter public views. Understanding the population of Country X and the variety of their experiences, which can be exploited for influence campaigns, requires thinking about the identity factors represented and the intersectional ways in which inequalities based upon these factors might compound in Country X.

Next, it is necessary to understand how **power structures** work in Country X.

- Is Country X a patriarchy? Is there a dominant ethnicity or clan that retains most of the political or economic power? A dominant region?
- What are the resource dependencies? What impact do relationships with external powers have on these dependencies?
- Who are the marginalised groups?
- Which identity factors contribute to the marginalisation of those groups (religion, race, sexual orientation and so on)?
- Are there gendered dynamics to their marginalisation?
- Do men and women of the majority group in power have the same experience of rights and power, or are there distinctions?

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It is also necessary to understand how the **discourse** in Country X refers to marginalised groups and whether mass communications commonly refer to or frame perceptions of the inequalities of Country X in a way that heightens social tension.

- Are certain marginalised groups publicly vilified or targeted with historic narrative associations?
- Are certain marginalised groups blamed for political or economic challenges?
- How does Country X use language to blame identity-based groups for challenges?
- Is there a narrative link formed between challenges in Country X, those marginalised groups and UK positions on issues?

It is also necessary to analyse whether existing perceptions and power structures influence **social institutions and customs** in Country X.

- Do men and women gather in the same social spaces? Are women allowed to gather in social spaces?
- Do marginalised individuals spend more time online because they fear or do not have access to public spaces?
- Do marginalised individuals have the same access to jobs or economic opportunities? Do they have access to money?
- Are political access or legal frameworks adjusted according to social perceptions of identity factors?

These questions are about context, which is influenced by gender and other identity factors. Therefore, gender-sensitive analysis of the target population of Country X is essential to understanding the nuances that Russia may target or weaponise for its FIMI operations.

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Getting to Know the Players

STEP 2

Using the insights gained about Country X from the above analysis, it is essential to analyse how Russia intends to use FIMI operations to achieve its goals.

This analytical effort would be aided by gender-responsive early warning and detection of Russia's FIMI operations. This requires an intimate knowledge of the population of Country X in order to know where to start looking for entry points, such as:

- identity-based inequalities and the often intense social divisions that can occur around these issues, especially when framed in terms of traditional values or morality and belief systems;
- travel of traditionalist activists to Russia or Russia-adjacent countries; and
- commercial relationships between local and international media groups.

Understanding the mechanics of how Russia seeks to manipulate or interfere with information in Country X will aid early warning and detection. Consider the following:

- Is radio a primary media source, or is social media the primary media source? How do they relate to each other? What are the relationships between domestic, regional and international outlets?
- Does geography, age or gender impact the consumption of information?
- If marginalised identity groups do not appear in public spaces as significantly then are these groups more reachable online?

To determine Russian goals and targets, consider the threat assessment, along with understanding if and how gender and other identity factors play roles in the threat logic. Additionally, the Step 1 analysis will help to determine whether there are divisive identity-factor-based issues that can and are likely to be weaponised (such as the strategic use of gendered narratives).

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Consolidating a Knowledge Base

STEP 3

Now, consider the details of where more specific analytical prompts to capture gender dynamics of relevance could be added. Work on curating gender-sensitive evidence utilising predictive assessments based on knowledge of Country X and of Russia and how Russia wields FIMI operations.

Knowledge Base for Russian FIMI Operations

Russia is known for wielding gender and other identity factors as weapons in FIMI operations, as revealed by background research, including the accompanying paper 'State Threats in Sub-Saharan Africa: Through a Gender Lens'.[22]

Seek evidence to answer the following analytical prompts which were identified as useful and relevant for this case study from the list of samples in the previous section:

- What gender norms / roles are being exploited or reinforced (if any)?
- Are gendered narratives involved?
- Is there identity-based targeting or mobilisation?
- Are identity-based grievances being activated or manipulated?
- Whose voices are amplified or silenced? (Are women, youth and/or LGBTQIA+ voices delegitimised or excluded?)
- Are stereotypes about masculinity (warrior, protector and/or breadwinner) being mobilised in narratives, recruitment or resource control?
- Is the threat vector using gendered or sexualised imagery or targeting? Who is vulnerable or silenced as a result?
- Are legal / policy impacts reinforcing exclusion or vulnerability?
- Do these threats exacerbate existing gender inequalities in access to information, livelihoods or security?

Threat impact assessment allows for a better understanding of who is being affected by Russian FIMI operations in Country X, and by extension the UK, both immediately and in the long-term. An intersectional, gender-sensitive approach can identify the differing impact that Russian operations could have on UK national security.

22. Jones et al., 'Understanding State Threats in Sub-Saharan Africa Through a Gender Lens'.

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For example, if Russia identifies that LGBTQIA+ rights are a particularly divisive issue in Country X, due to recurring narratives about upholding traditional values and morality, it might weaponise this issue to further divide and thus destabilise Country X – but the UK could also be affected by the additional narrative that liberal interpretations of rights are a result of Western colonialism.[23] This works on many levels. Feeding off existing domestic sentiment by encouraging further social and political division, this narrative exploitation further weakens Country X as well as turning sentiment against the UK and its values, diminishing the UK's relationship and prospects with Country X. This can result in geopolitical power shifting towards countries like Russia that portray themselves as supporting Country X.

Planning and Executing A Defence

STEP 4

Think about how the intersectional gender analysis conducted informs understanding of effective and impactful counter-state threat policy and programming. A gender-blind assessment of Russian FIMI operations in Country X may not have resulted in a full understanding of the target population, the logic behind targeting the population, the logic of threat vectors used to target the population or the mechanisms of successful threat vectors. A gender-sensitive assessment provides the knowledge base from which to plan, test and implement intersectional, gender-responsive policy and programming that will be more effective and impactful, including being able to identify and avoid harms and unintended consequences.

Policy and programming are enhanced by a better understanding of who is affected, how they are affected, and why, ensuring that the human security needs of whole populations are considered and gendered harms avoided.

Programming decisions such as design, risk assessment, implementation, monitoring and evaluation for counter-state threat efforts are enhanced by a more comprehensive understanding of who needs to be reached, how to reach them, who to partner with, how to protect them, how to be the most efficient, and many other factors.

23. Ghia Nodia, 'Why the Defenders of Liberal Democracy Need to Stand Up', *Journal of Democracy*, August 2023, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/why-the-defenders-of-liberal-democracy-need-to-stand-up/>, accessed 27 May 2026.

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We can theorise that Russian FIMI operations in Country X might indicate that:

- Knowledge of Country X's gender and other identity-based inequalities would strengthen the efficacy of Russian FIMI operations by enhancing Russia's understanding of and ability to exploit Country X's population.
- Russia would try to co-opt gender norms, relations and systems of social organisation and governance as a specific tactic in its FIMI operations and its offensive aims, weaponising identity as a defining social, political and ideological issue.
- The UK's policy and programming response would need to be gender-responsive with an intersectional approach to effectively counter Russia's FIMI operations, encourage resilience in Country X, mitigate harm and protect UK national security.

While a more nuanced strategy is required, effective intersectional, gender-responsive efforts to analyse and counter state threats perhaps prove that, in hybrid warfare, the best offence is a good defence.

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Conclusion

Historically, state threat analysis has been a largely gender-blind space. Even when threats are recognised, their gendered impacts and gendered drivers are often unseen or seen as secondary. This has weakened intelligence collection and analysis, enabled blind spots and in some cases contributed to the harms of groupthink.

Scholars, practitioners and policymakers increasingly recognise that identity-based targeting is core to contemporary authoritarian playbooks. Ensuring that gender is mainstreamed with an intersectional approach across state threat analysis and response produces more effective and impactful results by calibrating a wider lens, revealing gendered patterns across threat vectors and harms.

This toolkit provides the basic tools and understanding needed to mainstream gender. However, it is not comprehensive and should be used in conjunction with other resources and in line with national, regional and international commitments to gender equality and social inclusion.

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Annex: Additional Resources

Table 1: Table 1: Selected List of Gender Research Resources

Resource Title	Topic	Year
'Holding Our Digital Ground: A Playbook to Mitigate Gendered Disinformation During Elections and Beyond'[24]	Disinformation and Gender	2024
'How to Detect & Analyse Identity-Based Disinformation/FIMI: A Practical Guide to Conduct Open Source Investigations'[25]	Gender and Research (OSINT)	2024
'Insights from the Field: Gender Equality, Challenges, and Opportunities in Open-Source Research'[26]	Gender and Research (OSINT)	2025
'Integrating Gender Across OSINT Cycles: Good Practices for Practitioners'[27]	Gender and Research (OSINT)	2023
'Women in OSINT: Diversifying the Field, Part 1'[28]	Gender and Research (OSINT)	2015

24. Centre for Information Resilience, 'Holding Our Digital Ground: A Playbook to Mitigate Gendered Disinformation During Elections and Beyond', October 2024, <https://www.info-res.org/app/uploads/2024/11/CIR-Gender-Disinformation-Playbook.pdf>, accessed 27 May 2026.
25. EU External Action, 'How to Detect & Analyse Identity-Based Disinformation/FIMI: A Practical Guide to Conduct Open Source Investigations', November 2024, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/how-detect-analyse-identity-based-disinformationfimi-practical-guide-conduct-open-source_en>, accessed 27 May 2026.
26. Tanna M Krewson, Rehobot Ayalew and Rachel Winny, 'Insights from the Field: Gender Equality, Challenges, and Opportunities in Open-Source Research', Centre for Information Resilience, 28 March 2025, <https://www.info-res.org/app/uploads/2025/05/Open-Source-Gender-Research-Report-Final-Copy.pdf>, accessed 27 May 2026.
27. Clara Ribeiro Assumpção, 'Integrating Gender Across OSINT Cycles: Good Practices for Practitioners', Global Network on Extremism & Technology, 24 November 2023, <https://gnet-research.org/2023/11/24/integrating-gender-across-osint-cycles-good-practices-for-practitioners/>, accessed 27 May 2026.
28. Bellingcat, 'Women in OSINT: Diversifying the Field, Part 1', 8 December 2015, <https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/articles/2015/12/08/women-in-osint-diversifying-the-field/>, accessed 27 May 2026.

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