

Fostering Tolerant Religious Education to Prevent Violent
Extremism in Indonesia – **CONVEY Indonesia**

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CONVEY Indonesia is intended to build peace in Indonesia and prevent violent extremism and radicalism through a series of research-surveys, policy advocacy, and public interactions based on the potential of religious education. The Indonesian CONVEY Project touches on issues of tolerance, diversity and non-violence among the younger generation.

Becoming Religion Teachers Amidst the Strong Current of Intolerant and Radical Islamism

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A. Context of the Study

The result of a study conducted by PPIM UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and Convey Indonesia (2018) titled “A Dimming Light: A Portrait of Indonesian Teachers’ Religiousness” revealed a growing concern: teachers have grown intolerant (37.77%) and radical (41.26%). The study that involved 2237 Moslem teachers in Indonesia from kindergarten/Islamic kindergarten until high school/Islamic high school level in its survey confirmed the result of a previous study conducted by PPIM (2017) and MAARIF Institute (2017), which saw the link between the roles of teachers, a growing intolerance and radicalism among students, and the lack of school roles in preventing and countering radicalism.

The growing concern mentioned above prompted the Center for the Study of Islam and Social Transformation (CISForm) of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga to conduct a further study on how the Islamic Religion Teachers are produced. The aspects to research on were new student admission systems, curricula and syllabi, teaching-learning processes, lecturer and student religious competence and attitudes, and educational environment that might affect the student’s religious understanding such as intra-campus activities, halaqah and liqa’ (Islamic study groups), other formal and informal Islamic study groups, and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools/retreats).

Titled “How Islamic Religion Teachers are Produced in Indonesia”, this study wished to explore answers to the following questions: 1) How are Islamic religion teachers produced? 2) What are the views and attitudes of students of Islamic Religion Education Institutions (IREIs) on issues of intolerance, radicalism, and extremism? 3) How does the System in Islamic Religion Education (IRE) contribute to the prevention of the growth of intolerant, radical, and extreme ideologies in Indonesia?

To assess the level of religious understanding, the study used the concept of Islamism introduced by Bassam Tibi (2012), which politically interprets Islam as a religion with a world-order vision

based on Islamic Syariah and, at times, with a commitment to the use of violence. Bassam Tibi used 6 Islamism parameters, namely: (1) Islamic Purification; (2) Formalization of Islamic Syariah; (3) Anti-democracy; (4) Anti-other religions; (5) Anti-Western, and; (6) The Use of Violence.

The study used a mixed-method approach (i.e. quantitative and qualitative), conducted in four phases. The first phase was a desk study on the policy documents, syllabi, curricula, textbooks and Semesterly Lesson Plans (RPS); the second phase was set for surveys that involved 169 lecturers and 981 higher education students; whereas the lecturers were selected based on a balanced proportion of gender, seniority, and subjects they teach, the students selected were all in their last semester (semesters 5 and 6) on a balanced gender proportion. The third phase included semi-structured interviews to 119 lecturers and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) held for 188 students. The final phase consisted of class and field observations for religious activities done within the campus. The study was conducted in 19 Islamic Religious Education Institutions (IREIs) in 8 cities, namely: 1) Padang, 2) Lampung, 3) Jakarta-Banten, 4) Yogyakarta-Solo, 5) Malang, 6) Makassar, 7) Banjarmasin, and 8) Lombok.

The 19 IREIs sampled in the study were: 1) UIN Imam Bonjol Padang; 2) STAI Pengembangan Ilmu Al-Qur’an Padang; 3) UIN Raden Intan Lampung; 4) Universitas Muhammadiyah Lampung; 5) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta; 6) UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten; 7) Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta; 8) UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta; 9) Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta; 10) Institut Islam Mambaul Ulum Surakarta; 11) UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang; 12) Universitas Islam Malang (UNISMA); 13) UIN Antasari Banjarmasin; 14) IAI Darussalam Martapura; 15) UIN Alauddin Makassar; 16) Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI) Makassar; 17) UIN Mataram; 18) Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Nurul Hakim Mataram, and; 19) Institut Ilmu Al-Qur’an (IIQ) Jakarta. The data for IIQ Jakarta were quantitative with neither interviews given to the lecturers nor FGD with the students.

B. How Islamic Religion Teachers are Produced and Stronger Islamism

1. Student Admissions

The students majoring in IRE were selected through the following five types of process: internal admission tests (52.2%); national academic achievement selection (21%); national admission tests (18%); others mechanism (8%), and; no information/answer (1%).

The percentage of news students admitted in public IREIs through the national academic achievement selection stood at 43.5%, through at through at

Meanwhile, most new students admitted in private IREIs were through internal admission tests. Since the national academic achievement selection only assesses students based on school reports and the National Examination results, students from general high schools/vocational high schools typically have higher better chance of being admitted as they tend to show better results in the National Examination. This type of selection process tends to set aside students who graduate from Islamic High School/Boarding schools, even though they tend to have adequate knowledge of Islam.

The above findings are consistent with data on the educational backgrounds and the motivation of IRE major students. Firstly, according to the data, 32.9% of IREI students graduated from general/vocational high schools. The study reveals that 3 out of 10 of students did not have adequate basic knowledge on religion compared to their peers who graduated from Islamic high school/boarding schools. Secondly, 30.5% of IREI students enrolled in IRE major since they wanted to spread Islam and to increase their level of piety. They were encouraged by their religious mentors to select this major when they were active in the school's Islamic organization unit during their high school years.

2. Curriculum Policy

The contents of IRE major curricula can be divided into three competence groups: 1) profession (Islamism); 2) pedagogy, and; 3) support. The proportion of three groups is

45% for the pedagogy, 30% for the profession-Islamism, and 25% for the support. The lack of strong Islamic knowledge content provides a leeway for intolerant and radical views of the religion for prospective IRE teachers. These types of curricula do not equip the students with the resilience against the strong current of intolerant and radical Islamism. This is the context and the relevance in which intolerant and radical views of religion ooze into the IRE teachers' production.

Such composition, however, needs to be reviewed to assess its relevance. The Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No 15 Year 2018 on Islamic Religion Education Institutions regulates three competences with a clear proportion, namely: national or institutional contents (10%), subject contents (70%), and pedagogical contents (20%). By attributing 70% dominance on contents (which, in this case, concern Islamic knowledge), the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation focuses on the strengthening of prospective IRE teachers in countering intolerant, extreme, and radical views and terrorism.

3. Lecturer Competence

Ideally, the lecturers for IRE major possess good Arabic language competence. They, therefore, are expected to access primary sources of Islamic teachings and do not rely on other sources such as internet and social media. This study found that only 36% of IRE major lecturers possessed good and excellent oral proficiency while less than half (44%) possessed good and excellent written proficiency. Seen from their knowledge of Islam, 14.2% of IRE major lecturers agreed that an Islamic country was the only way to implement Islam and 16.6% agreed that violence was permissible to defend the religion.

4. Student Competence and Views

Unfortunately, most IRE students did not have high competence in the Arabic language. Only 11.5% of them possessed good and excellent oral proficiency while most of them (88.4%) only possessed fair and poor oral proficiency. Moreover, the test result of reading and translation of Arabic texts shows that only 38% had good proficiency while the rest (54%) possessed fair and poor proficiency.

Consequently, the students' access to the primary sources of Islamic teaching was inhibited by the language proficiency and they compensated

it by accessing materials from the internet and social media.

The students' opinions on nationalism and the country's governing system were equally worrying. Generally, they believed that Pancasila (the Five Pillars of Indonesia) was in line with the values of Islam although about 10% believed otherwise. More concerning was the fact that 47.5% of the students agreed that an Islamic country was the only way to implement Islam. In terms of tolerance, most of the students (94%) agreed that it was important to live peacefully with people of different faiths whereas more than half (52.0%) stated that the Ahmadiyah and Syiah followers were not Moslems.

Also, of notable concern were their views on violence. In defending the religion, about 27.4% of the students believed that violence was permissible whereas 6.2% of them believed that the people who committed suicide bombings went to heaven (syahid death).

5. Teaching-Learning Process

In terms of teaching-learning process, generally the IREIs carried out andragogy (adult education). The survey conducted on IRE students confirmed that most lecturers included teaching materials that discussed the importance of tolerance (96%) and the danger of extremism in religion (76.7%). This, however, means that the 22.4% of the lecturers did not include these materials and the students obtained the actual religious dynamics from outside the classroom. As this happened, the lecturers did not have the capacity to understand the level of nationalism of their students.

6. Campus Environment

Based on observation in a few IREIs under the study, among the intra-campus activities that might have influenced students' religious understanding and attitudes were those run by Islamic Organizations in the premises such as Lembaga Dakwah Kampus /LDK through halaqah and liqa' (Islamic study groups), and in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools/retreats). Prior the Reformasi era, among the dominant intra-campus organizations were Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI), Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (PMII), and Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM). Post-Reformasi, new student organizations spawned with diverse

ideologies including tarbawi and salafi that are not only intra-campus activities but also intra-campus organizations in the forms of Student Organization units that receive formal funding from higher education institutions.

These student organizations provided many incentives for the students such as in the forms of access to various activities designed to create collegiate closeness, sharpen leadership skills, expand networks, or develop careers. For religious mass-organizations, the perfect havens for caderization were indeed campuses and, therefore, campuses became the arena to promote a spectrum of tolerant-inclusive or intolerant-radical ideologies. In their efforts to promote their ideologies, the mass organizations approached the students in different ways. An online approach such as conveyance of religious messages through social media was but one way; other ways included offline face-to-face meetings, Islamic study groups, and caderization training methods.

Lastly, the study also found that a growing number of IRE major students did embrace intolerant and radical ideologies and their number in private IREIs was higher than that in public IREIs.

C. Policy Recommendations

In line with other studies, the data above show that there were a few of gaps looming in the system that allows for radicalism to enter the IRE major in Islamic Religion Education Institutions. To produce visionary religion teachers who possess adequate knowledge on Islam and who are able to counteract intolerant, radical and extreme ideologies, the following are policy recommendations, divided into two levels:

1 For the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia

- a. Ensuring that the curricula in Islamic Religion Education Institutions (IREIs), especially in IRE major, adhere to the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No 15 Year 2018 on Islamic Religion Education Institutions, which states that IREIs must include national or institutional contents (10%), subject contents (70%), and pedagogical contents (20%).

- b. Ensuring that the curricula of IRE major are reorganized and include subjects that teach students how to think critically and how to love their country, such as through logics, disciplinary philosophy, multiculturalism, and nationalism.
- c. Monitoring the curricula including for supporting subjects in IRE major in private higher education institutions to ensure that they possess the capacity to counteract the strong current of extreme and radical Islamism and to support moderate views of the religion.
- d. Improving the lecturer recruitment system for IRE major to prioritize those who possess sound knowledge in Islam and good proficiency in the Arabic language.
- e. Improving the new student admission system for IRE major to provide a greater opportunity for the students of Islamic High Schools/ Boarding Schools to be enrolled so that new students possess adequate basic knowledge of Islam.
- f. Monitoring the national demand for IRE teachers and comparing the number of IRE major and the graduates to ensure that a sustainable quality of the graduates is maintained.

2 For the Universities, Faculties and the Majors

- a. Improving the Arabic language competence for their lecturers so that they have a deeper understanding in Islamic literacy.
- b. Continuously monitoring and evaluating the lesson plans and the practical lessons to ensure that the teaching-learning activities produce students with moderate religious views within and outside the classroom.
- c. Reorganizing and implementing stricter regulations for intra-campus activities to minimize the spread of intolerant and radical ideologies.
- d. Adopting and implementing best practices from several IREIs (both public and private) that have been proven to improve students' religious capacity and moderate religious views as well as to increase their knowledge on nationhood.



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