

**Empowering Educational Actors and Institutions
to Promote Religious Moderation in Preventing Violent Extremism**

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Policy Brief series ini dibuat sebagai bagian dari proyek CONVEY Indonesia yang diselenggarakan oleh PPIM UIN Jakarta dan UNDP Indonesia. CONVEY Indonesia dimaksudkan untuk membangun perdamaian di Indonesia dan mencegah ekstremisme bernuansa kekerasan dan radikalisme melalui serangkaian riset-survei, advokasi kebijakan, dan interaksi publik yang berbasis pada potensi pendidikan agama. Proyek CONVEY Indonesia menyentuh isu-isu toleransi, kebinekaan, dan nir-kekerasan di kalangan generasi muda.

Mainstreaming Engaging Religious Education

**Pusat Pengkajian Islam
Demokrasi dan Perdamaian (PusPIDeP)
Yogyakarta**

Executive Summary

1. The religious educational background of former convicted terrorists, ISIS returnees and deportees will only play a significant role in exposing them to radical and extremist ideology if mediated by external factors such as structural factors, identity, social linkages, and ideology.
2. There are two categories of radical and extremist generation if we take into account the perpetrators' worldview and their method in acquiring religious knowledge: the old and the new generations. The old generation is dominated by those former convicted terrorists, who mainly come from lower-middle-class family backgrounds, and were mainly exposed through such social linkages as *halaqah* (exclusive religious circles) and public religious congregation. Meanwhile, the new generation is dominated by those ISIS returnees and deportees, who generally come from wealthy families with urban cultural backgrounds, and were generally exposed through family networks and the Internet.
3. Women's agency seems less significant among the old generation. On the contrary, among the new generation, women's agency appear to be more salient in disseminating radical and extremist ideas.
4. Informal religious education contributes significantly to shaping individuals to become radical and extremist because formal religious education fails to understand students' agency: exploring their religious personal narratives and aspirations.
5. Some individuals who have been exposed may experience a turning point when they find a new path of upward mobility or new spiritual authority.
6. *Engaging Education* –or education that gives attention to the unique personality, individual backgrounds, and problems of each student's, and connects religious concepts to the socio-religious realities within society– is the weak point of formal religious education in schools, Islamic boarding schools, and universities.
7. As a point of recommendation, actors and discourses promoting religious moderatism in informal religious education need to be encouraged to fill the spaces of public religious congregation and *halaqahs* in order to restrict the latitudes of actors and discourses that promote radicalism and extremism. In addition, contextual readings of Islam need to be encouraged more and more through publications, social media contents, and community engagements so that religion can get a new space for actualization that brings the common good for humanity.

Background

Indonesia's post-1998 democratization contributed to paving the way for the emergence of religion-based radicalism and extremism in public spaces. Apart from ideological factors, existing studies often link radicalism and extremism to structural factors: dissatisfaction with state policies and inadequate access to social justice. Besides, such factors as identity and social linkages or friendships also encourage individuals to have interest in radicalism and to be engaged in some acts of terrorism. The fact that radicalism and terrorism are often associated with a certain educational backgrounds has led a number of researchers to ask to what extent religious educational background contributes to the rise of radicalism and extremism in Indonesia.

A survey conducted in 2017 by Center for the Study of Islam and Society (Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat, PPIM) of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University shows that 58.50% of school and university students have a religious view that tends to be radical. Another survey by PPIM in 2018 links the student radical views with their teachers' religious views (56.90% of the teachers have intolerant opinions, and 46.09% have radical opinions). The above numbers certainly show an alarming condition related to socio-religious life in Indonesia in the post-1998 Reformation. Moreover, the emergence of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (2013-2019) has managed to attract the sympathy from many (educated) Muslims in Indonesia, and encourage some of them to join to Iraq and Syria.



Although religious educational backgrounds may explain the emergence of radicalism and extremism, the relationship between perpetrators of radicalism and extremism and their religious educational backgrounds still leaves an important question. The context that makes them motivated and consolidates them to commit some acts of terror and 'treason' with ISIS still constitutes a question that needs tricky answers. This research seeks to examine the religious educational background of former convicted terrorists, ISIS returnees, and deportees to answer the extent this background contributes to forming their radical and extremist understandings. Another aspect that also becomes our concern is some factors that make them quit from their former ideologies and activities. The above questions need to be answered to unravel the tangled threads of religion-based radicalism and extremism in Indonesia in an effort to create a best practice for religious teaching in both formal and informal religious educational settings.

Goal, Theory and Method

This study aims to investigate the educational background of individuals involved in the acts of radicalism and extremism, and interested in the ideas of religion-based violence to explore the narratives of their lives. There are three criteria of informants targeted in this research: former convicted terrorists, ISIS returnees – or those people returning to Indonesia after joining ISIS– and deportees –or those being caught and deported to Indonesia before joining ISIS.

This study focuses on three provinces in Indonesia: West Java, Central Java and East Java. West Java is chosen because it is seen as a basis for DI/TII (Darul Islam/Indonesian Islamic Army). Meanwhile, Central Java, especially Greater Solo in academic studies, is often associated with a basis of radical and extremist Islamic movements having a link to Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's Ngruki network and others. As for East Java, although generally known as the enclave of NU, the church bombing in 2018 and several terrorist cells originating from East Java such as Amrozi's network show the importance of East Java's position as the basis of terrorist networks.



Previous studies have often linked individuals involved in radicalism and extremism to various arguments such as problems of finding identity, indoctrination of certain religious ideologies, experiences of structural marginalization, and socialization through friendship and religious congregation. Meanwhile, research that focuses on educational background mainly highlights the distinction between natural and social sciences. These studies show that most of the perpetrators of radicalism and extremism come from the background of natural sciences, and argue that their black-and-white, clear-cut, worldview plays a vital role in facilitating them to become radical and extremist.

Nevertheless, observation of a particular background of religious education and the extent it plays a role in making individuals radical and extremist seem to be neglected in previous studies. Based on field findings, this study proposes a theoretical argument that educational background and religious knowledge contribute to expose individuals to radical and extremist ideologies, and encourage them to engage in religion-based terror activities when mediated by structural factors, identity, socialization or social linkage, and ideology. In other words, these four factors can shape and direct one's religious understanding toward radicalism and religion-based terrorism.



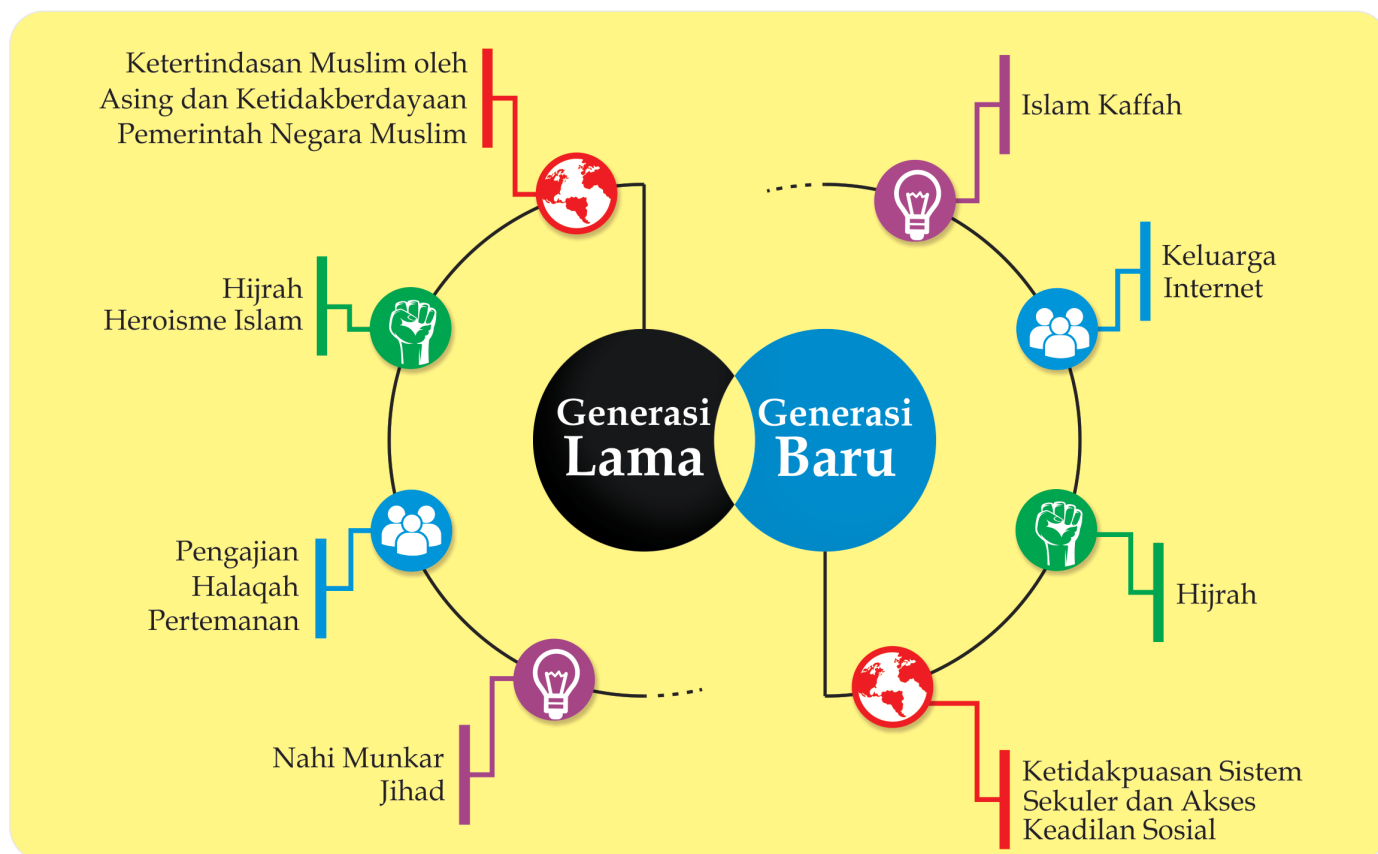
Data gathering is first carried out through a desk study by exploring information from the media, previous existing studies, and Investigation Reports (BAP). To get into deeper information, this study involves 20 informants in in-depth interview: 13 (thirteen) former convicted terrorists, 6 (six) returnees, and 1 (one) deportee coming from those three provinces. This study uses a 'life narrative' approach that delves into the life history of former convicted terrorists, returnees, and deportees by exploring their educational backgrounds, life aspirations, and worldviews.

Religious Education Mediated by Other Factors

Religious education does not necessarily attract someone to religious-based radicalism and extremism. The fact that only a few people are exposed to radicalism or extremism even though they have studied religion from the same school, *pesantren*, or university where the perpetrators of terrorism studied, is evidence of the above statement. The background of religious education **will only** become significant in exposing individuals to radicalism and extremism if mediated by structural factors, identity, social linkages, and ideology.

This research finds two categories of generations exposed to radicalism and extremism. This generational difference is seen from the way they see the world (worldview). The first generation's worldview is mainly shaped by their social linkages, while the second generation is characterized by their openness to information related to their religious aspirations. The first generation is dominated by those former convicted terrorists. In general, they come from lower-middle-class family backgrounds. They are exposed to radicalism and extremism through their social linkages: public religious congregation, more exclusive religious gatherings, and friendship. In comparison, the second generation is dominated by those ISIS returnees and deportees. They generally come from wealthy family and live in urban culture. Family networks and the Internet are the essential contexts that make them exposed to radicalism and extremism.

The educational background here includes not only formal education – such as schools, madrasas, universities and Islamic boarding schools– but also informal education, such as public religious congregation, more exclusive religious gatherings, social linkages, and the Internet. It should be kept in mind that the formal religious education background does not directly encourage individuals to have interest in radicalism and extremism when we take into account the general structure of the curricula of religious learning. However, the “milieu” of particular schools, universities, or Islamic boarding schools may introduce students to radical Islamic ideas and movements through informal religious learning channels by individual teachers or lecturers, or through school religious activities (Rohis), and student religious proselytization communities.



However, we need to consider these former convicted terrorists, returnees, and deportees not merely as objects of indoctrination of radical and extremist ideology, but more as “agents”. As agents, they have their individual capacity to act independently in determining their own life choices. It seems that Islamic religious education in formal institutions is not yet fully capable of exploring their students’ religious aspirations, individual narratives, and agency. This condition encourages students to look for informal religious education channels outside their schools, universities, or *pesantrens* that they deem fit their aspirations and narratives. Amid the identity crisis and the structural problems that they encounter and the inability

of formal religious education to capture their aspirations, a number of students are looking to informal education outside of formal educational institutions. In this context, radicalism and extremism develop in a more accelerated pace.

Among the former convicted terrorists, as this research suggests, formal Islamic religious education was unable to accommodate their individual religious aspirations related to, for example, heroism in Islam. They then look for outside sources of education until they find a narrative that 'suits' their aspirations. Heroism in Islam is then translated as being involved in acts of "amar makruf nahi munkar" (commanding good and forbidding evil). Their involvement in this action answered the questions about the idea of *kaffah* (perfect) Islam, which is not sufficient to be "known" only, but should be "practiced". This matter encourages them to get involved in raids against immoral practices and places. At the next level, this heroism is demonstrated as *jihad* (war). The justification for *jihad* is deduced from their understanding that the Prophet Muhammad's job after the age of 40 was none other than war.

Among the returnees and deportees, family-based religious information and the Internet accommodate their individual aspirations in responding to structural and identity problems. ISIS is considered not only as an opportunity for a better life but also as an answer to structural problems in Indonesia. The transformation of new identities through the consumption of religious information from their families and the Internet encourages them to do something meaningful in their lives, namely migrating under the banner of ISIS.

Regarding women's role in disseminating ideology and movement strategies, this study sees that women's agency seem less significant among the old generation. On the contrary, among the new generation women appear to be prominent in disseminating radical and extremist ideas.

It should be remembered that a turning point also occurs among some individuals having been exposed to radicalism and extremism. A number of individuals have decided to get out of radicalism circles when they find a path toward upward-mobility. Indeed, structural factors are not the only motive for this turning point. Some experience a turning point when they find a "new teacher" who can help them explore their religious aspirations -and surely after they were able to reflect on their previous experiences. Gus Baha' (a popular name for Ahmad Bahauddin Nursalim, a cleric of an NU pesantren) is often mentioned in this turning point story.

Policy Recommendations

This research offers several points of recommendation that should be considered by the government, stakeholders, and society, as follow:

1. The importance of mainstreaming “engaging education” in religious teachings in schools, boarding schools, and universities, i.e., education that gives attention to student’s unique personality, individual background, and problems, and connect religious concepts to social-religious realities within society.
2. The importance of emphasizing communicative and persuasive methods in religious learning system in schools, *pesantrens*, and universities so that students can be more explorative.
3. Within informal religious education, actors and discourses with moderatist views need to be encouraged to take part in public religious congregation and *halaqahs* in order to restrict the spaces of hardline religious actors and discourses.
4. Encouraging contextual understanding of Islam through publications, social media contents, and community engagements so that religion can get a new space for actualization that brings the common good to humanity.
5. The idea of “engaging education”, which gives attention to each student’s unique personality, individual background, and problems, and involves them in socio-religious activities within a given society, can be channeled to the Ministry of Education and Culture’s program of *Cerdas Berkarakter (smart with strong character)*, and the Ministry of Religion’s program of Moderasi Beragama (religious moderatism).

