

Research article

Preventing Violence and Extremism in Indonesian Educational Institutions: Policies and Strategies

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This article discusses the policies and strategies of the Indonesian government for preventing the influence of radical and extreme religious ideologies in schools and universities. In their survey, PPIM UIN Jakarta in 2019 and the Wahid Institute in 2020 found that Indonesian educational institutions, from high schools to universities, were vulnerable to the influence of extreme views and intolerance. This article examines a number of elements that play a strategic role in preventing violence and extremism in educational institutions, such as government regulations; education curriculum; and the role of internal and external stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students, government officials, and civil society. The authors argue that the strategies and policies of each university and school in preventing radicalism among students have different levels of effectiveness. Synergies involving stakeholders also contribute to the success and failure of securing educational institutions from the dangers of violence and extremism. The results of this study are based on in-depth interviews with a number of selected sources. This paper recommends the need to synchronize strategies and policies related to the prevention of extremism and violence in educational institutions and the more effective participation of all stakeholders.

Keywords: preventing violence–extremism, educational institutions, strategies, policies, effectiveness

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Published: 28 September 2022

Publishing services provided by Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ICESRE 2021 Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Teenagers and youth are considered as the most vulnerable groups from the influence of violent-extremism ideology. The number of young people involved in acts of violence and extremism has become a global phenomenon. The United Nations in its Plan of Action in Preventing Violent Extremism has urged all governments to give more serious attention to preventing young people from being exposed to violent extremism [1,2]. In Indonesia in recent years, the spread of violent-extremism doctrines from radical groups have been very worrying. Some reports suggest more and more teenagers and youth are being exposed to the doctrines. This condition is partly caused by active role of radical cells in approaching and persuading them to join both in their activities or to

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become their followers. They always take advantage of all available opportunities in spreading their radical belief. The Indonesian National Counter Terrorism Agency or BNPT noted that more than 1500 have joined ISIS, most of them are young people. These include school and university students. One of the bad effects of the ideology of violence-extremism is the increasing intolerance and acceptance of acts of violence.

In 2018, BNPT also stated that there were seven leading Indonesian universities that influenced the ideology of radicalism and extremism, namely the University of Indonesia (UI), Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Sepuluh November Institute of Technology (ITS), Agricultural Institute Bogor (IPB), Diponegoro University (Undip), Airlangga University (Unair) and Brawijaya University (UB). BNPT also found that 39% of students in 15 provinces in Indonesia have been contaminated with radical doctrines[3]. Many other surveys have also confirmed the real threat of radicalism among students. The Indonesian Institute of Sciences or LIPI in its survey[4] found a strong tendency of religious radicalism among young Indonesians, especially among students in schools. In his latest survey the Wahid Institute [5] found a high percentage of students who have intolerant attitudes. They also found the increase of religious beliefs and behaviors among students that tends to be exclusive (close-minded).

During the democratic era, various educational institutions, especially schools and universities have turned into ideological battlegrounds where a number of radical groups, such as Indonesian Hizbut Tahrir, Indonesian Islamic State or NII, Salafism and other radical groups try to spread their influence[5] they take advantage of the atmosphere of academic freedom to organize activities on campuses, campaign and recruit new members

In response to the threat of violent-extremism ideology, President Jokowi have issued Presidential Regulation (Perpres) Number 7 of 2021 concerning the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Extremism (RANPE). This regulation states that all Indonesian educational institutions need to adopted learning materials to prevent violent extremism. In addition, the curriculum in schools and universities must also use learning methods with critical thinking.

Many argue the cases of intolerance and exclusivism among students in public and religious schools, as well as among students at universities, is a failure both of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbud-Ristek) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama). The two ministries are considered to slow and less effective in preventing violent-extremism and promoting religious moderation. Both of them are currently preparing curricula and materials for religious moderation at all levels of education from elementary school to university[6].

2. Research Method

This paper is written based on a qualitative approach. This qualitative method is intended to get a more complete and comprehensive picture of a number of cases studied[7]. The research was conducted at three universities in Indonesia, consisting of two non-religious universities, namely Gajah Mada University and the University of Indonesia, and one religious university, namely UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim. In-depth interviews were conducted with selected sources based on certain criteria (purposive) involving 30 sources (10 people each for each university). They include lecturers teaching religious subjects, students, university and faculty level officials.

The research was also conducted in the city of Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, by interviewing 18 sources in six schools (consisting of two elementary schools, two junior high schools, two senior high schools). In each school, interviews were conducted involving 3 sources (1 principal, 2 teachers).

Apart from interviews, other data were obtained through analysis of government regulations related to policies on strategies for preventing and eradicating of violence-extremism in educational institutions. In-depth interviews with various sources and analysis of regulations are intended to obtain as much information as possible on various strategies and efforts to prevent the spread of extreme ideologies carried out at the schools and universities. The method is also intended to find out how effective these policies are. This study also explores a number of obstacles and difficulties faced by universities and schools in promoting the values of moderation and tolerance for their students.

3. Results and Discussion

Regarding the spread of radical and intolerant religious beliefs among students, universities have a big responsibility to protect them. The university as an educational institution needs to strengthen its orientation and vision and mission to foster the values of pluralism, tolerance, and "moderation" for all of its academic community. These values must not only be present in the learning curriculum but also in all academic and non-academic activities on campus. As an open institution, universities should raise awareness of their external environment. In a number of cases, social relations and religious activities outside the campus contributed to the students' religious understanding which was considered as deviant. Therefore, all policies in preventing violent-extremism need to cover both aspects: internal and external factors. In fact, universities have identified

the factors that contribute to the radicalism of its students. Several prevention and protection efforts have also been carried out.

The three universities, Universitas Gajah Mada, Universitas Indonesia, and UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim, have actually made a number of efforts to prevent violent-extremism which includes the dimensions of the push and pull factors. They also have certain strategies. But, their main focus varies depending on what is considered the most priority issue. They also have involved a number of actors in efforts to prevent violent-extremism among students. As internal actors, university officials, student institutions, religious study forums, and counseling institutions playing very important role in general. Universities has also involved external actors through their cooperation and collaboration with institutions like BNPT, religious organizations (Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, etc) and civil societies. However, the degree of effectiveness of their strategies and policies varies.

The policy making process and its implementation by universities in preventing of violent-extremism is not a simple and easy thing. This is because the factors that drive students to become radical come from various factors: it can come from academic life and interactions on campus, but may also come from the social environment outside campus. Therefore, It is necessary to identify the problem carefully so that a more comprehensive prevention strategy can be formulated. In the case of University Gajah Mada, data shows that interactions outside the campus are one of the important sources that cause some students to be exposed to extreme and radical beliefs.

Several important findings from research conducted at University of Gajah Mada include: First, the process of radicalization of new students has mostly occurred since they were in high school, mainly due to the influence of religious extra-curricular activities. Then, they carry and transmit the “virus” after entering University of Gajah Mada and become students there. Second, it is known that students who are exposed to radical ideologies are not only Muslim students who are involved in Islamic studies activities, but also a number of Christian and Catholic students. Although intolerance and exclusive attitude have infected more Muslim students but they also afflicted some non-Muslim students. Third, religious tutorials and practicum activities that involved senior students also are suspected of contributing to the growth of intolerant and exclusive attitudes among new students. However, a more in-depth study is needed to trace it. Fourth, there are also public and cultural spaces on campus that are still lacking in the values of tolerance and multiculturalism. Many pamphlets and posters were found on campus and in outside campus campaigning for the agendas of radical groups. The Hizbut Tahrir before being banned by the government was notoriously most militant

and actively promoted its ideology. Such conditions become a very serious challenge for the University in preventing and countering radical ideology[8].

Based on the identification of these problems, there are several strategic steps that have been taken by University of Gajah Mada stakeholders. They realized the need for synergy of all parties to formulate effective measures. All parties such as students, communities around campus, lecturers, faculty and university officials, must also have a common awareness about the dangers of intolerance and radicalism. The Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies at Gajah Mada University is one of the important actors actively promoting tolerance and multiculturalism for students. According to the CRCS, intolerance and violence in the name of religion are serious problems. This Center actively also organizes seminars, workshops, Focus Group Discussions, research, and trainings involving students and other academics for the purpose of strengthening a moderate religious spirit and respecting multiculturalism. This institution has also published many books promoting the importance of pluralism values and toleration in society. Beside that, UGM also have involved actors from external. For instance, the Department of Student Affairs or Dirmawa in several times presented a number of the NII Crisis Center activists -an national NGO concerned with preventing radicalism- to give insight to new students about the modes of radical groups activities on campus and how to avoid them.

At the University of Indonesia, students' religious activities are very lively. Several religious organizations on campus compete with each other for followers. Various religious sects are very easy to find on campus. Moslem students in SALAM UI and Lembaga Dakwah Kampus or LDK have a very strong influence in religious education to the new students. Both organizations attracted a lot of students who want to study Islam. Although the SALAM UI and LDK dominated by the Jama'ah Tarbiya, they are still considered moderate.

UI is also recognized as a place of activity for a number of extreme religious groups. Hizbut-Tahrir before being banned by the government was one of the most active radical group. They formed the Mosque Youth Forum or "Forum Remaja Masjid" (FRM) UI to spread their ideas about the necessity to support the Islamic caliphate and the implementation of Islamic law in Indonesia. For a long time, Hizbut Tahrir has been actively campaigning for against democracy and the concept of the nation state by considering them both as infidel concepts that are contrary to Islamic teachings. To attract students, they actively organize discussions, demonstrations, and distribute pamphlets in faculties

The map of student religious activities at UI seems to confirm the accuracy of Gambetta and Hertog's that those with science and engineering backgrounds are more easily attracted to radical religious ideologies than those with social science background[9]. From the data obtained during field research, more students from the engineering and science faculties, especially in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (MIPA) have been influenced by religious radical doctrine, while the students from social sciences and humanities faculties are known for their secular and liberal in their lifestyles.

Indonesian Islamic State (NII) is also one of cell of the radical organizations that are still active at UI. In contrast to the other religious movements, until now NII has been operating 'underground'. For UI, the existence of this radical organization is very worrying. Based on the data obtained, NII often encourages its members to commit criminal acts in the name of religion. Some NII's students have been involved in acts of theft (fa'i) and fraud to get some money. A few years ago the UI Chancellor had banned NII, but its members are still active.

UI has made efforts to prevent students from being exposed to violent-extremism ideologies. The strategy includes partnerships with several intra-campus and extra-campus institutions. Like what UGM did, UI also involved the NII Crisis Center to provide students with a better understanding of various ideological deviations and the dangers of the NII.

Some faculties pursue their own strategies in preventing religious extremism. For example, the Faculty of Engineering collaborates with the Forum for Ukhuwah and Study Islam in helping students who have academic problems. The Faculty of Medicine requires all new students to take part in Islamic lessons organized by the Forum for Islamic Studies, so that they know better the basic materials of religion. In this way, it is hoped that the students will avoid the propaganda of radical groups..

A respected Indonesian NGO, the Abdurrahman Wahid Center has also involved in strengthening religious moderation at UI. The Center has been actively conducting religious trainings and discussions for a long time with the aim of strengthening and promoting moderate Islam. Previously, for the same purpose, UI also collaborated with Islamic boarding school or Pondok Pesantren al Hikam. In mid-2021, UI also signed a partnership with Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest moderate Muslim organization in Indonesia.

UI's collaboration with moderate religious organizations is a very good strategy. For example, NU, together with Muhammadiyah, have strong resources to participate in cultivating religious values that are tolerant and peaceful on campus. Both organizations

have long experience and also have scholars who are very competent in their fields. Pesantren Al-Hikam actively promotes moderate Islam or Islam rahmatan lil alamin. In addition, the Pesantren also cooperates with BNPT for the deradicalization program. Unfortunately, those who are involved in the Pesantren activities are mostly people outside the campus. UI should be proactive in involving the Al-Hikam Islamic boarding school to accompany its students' religious activities. Cooperation with Pesantren the Al-Hikam is also very beneficial for UI, because it actively promotes moderate Islam or Islam rahmatan lil alamin. The Pesantren also has many programs, including cooperation with BNPT in the da'wah program to against religious extremism.

The policies and strategies of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang are very interesting in facilitating the protecting their students from violent-extremism doctrines. At same time, helping student to learn basics of Islamic knowledge properly. The policy carried out by UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim is to require all new students to live in student boarding schools or Pondok Pesantren (ma'had) for one year and attend all religious learning programs. This program is integrated with the student academic system. For those who have passed the ma'had will get a certificate that will be used as a condition to take Islamic courses at the faculty.

The integration of the Pesantren's program with the academic program is part of the implementation of the integration of Islam and Science. The integration policy of that traditional boarding school or Pesantren with higher education is a mindset built by the UIN Mulana Malik Ibrahim's academic community for the purpose of internalizing moderat understanding of Islam and avoiding extreme interpretations[10]. As a strategy to prevent the influence of radical ideas, the Pondok Pesantren system is effective. At least, for a year, these new students get protection through intensive religious learning with the guidance of qualified ustadzs. Religious learning in the Pesantren is dialogical and forms critical thinking. The curriculum taught also adopts an integrative approach with peaceful Islamic materials, Islam 'rahmatan lil alamin', and religious insights based on modern sciences.

Then what about social-religious picture in Indonesian schools?. Through in-depth interviews with school teachers in the city of Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, it was found that the socio-religious views of public school teachers are plural. In general, their views are more moderate and tolerant when compared to the views of private Islamic teachers. It was also found that religious affiliation in a number of public teachers had an effect on religious attitudes and views. Teachers who are affiliated with the Campus Da'wah Institute or Lembaga Dakwah Kampus (LDK) apparently have an exclusive and less tolerant religious view. Although mostly moderate, a number of teachers have radical

views in certain matters, such as in their understanding of jihad which is defined as "qital" or war. In fact, there are teachers who state that they are willing to carry out jihad in Syria if they have the opportunity

Another important finding in a number of schools in Balikpapan is the lack of activities that strengthen the competence of religious teachers, even though they really need them. A number of teachers often complain about their difficulty in answering students' questions regarding socio-religious issues that are not included in the curriculum, such as why ISIS, who defends Islam, is being hostile, why clerics such as Habib Rizieq and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir are imprisoned because they want to implement Islamic shari'a?. Also the question about the law of respecting the Indonesian flag which according to their ustadz (informal religious teacher) outside of school is considered contrary to Islamic teachings. Teachers are also very concerned about the impact of social media on their students' religious understanding. Students often ask about "different Islam" between what they see on youtube and the material taught by their teacher in the school. The teachers want the government to be more active in organizing trainings, especially to enrich their knowledge on actual socio-religious issues and other matters related to the relationship between Islam and state.

The emergence of salafy schools and educational institutions in Balikpapan is also a serious concern for the local government especially related to efforts to moderate religious understanding in the learning process. The learning process in salafy schools is exclusive and the curriculum is suspected to deviate from the materials recommended by the Ministry of Religion. Supervision by the Ministry of Religion and the MUI on salafy educational institutions often does not run optimally because they always try to avoid it. In various regions in Indonesia, the existence of salafism-oriented educational institutions has indeed raised many problems, especially because their rigid teachings and doctrines often contradict the religious belief held by most Indonesian Muslims [11].

In Balikpapan, the contestation of Islamic groups is also very lively. The activism of groups with extreme ideologies, such as Hizbut-Tahrir (before it was banned), is also high. During that time Hizbut-Tahrir was active in campaigning about the Islamic Khilafah and the implementation of Islamic law. This group has been trying to influence teachers and students for a long time. This environment, which is heavily colored by Islamist groups, has attracted the attention of the local government. Previously, the local government had dismissed a teacher who was indicated to teach radical ideas to his students at school. However, the government's ban on Hizbut-Tahrir significantly reduces the potential for spreading the influence of this radical religion in Indonesian schools.

Universities in Indonesia are still trying to formulate better strategies and policies in preventing radicalism among their students. Various steps have been taken by the universities, including empowering university religious institutions, making regulations that limit or prohibit the activities of radical organizations, facilitating psychological assistance and consultation for students, opening a student boarding school program, collaborating with BNPT for counter terrorism programs, collaborating with moderate Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, and the active involvement of elements of civil society who are concerned with issues of religious tolerance and moderation[5]. Some of these strategies and policies are actually quite holistic in nature, covering many aspects, but they are constrained if the factors that influence them come from outside the campus. The policy also has not reached the role of social media which has a major influence in shaping radical religious understanding among young age groups.

4. Conclusion

A number of universities and schools have taken several strategic steps to protect and prevent their students from being influenced by the ideology of violence-extremism. They empower their internal resources and also collaborate with elements of civil society to make the program a success. They have achieved a number of successes, but they also still face a number of obstacles, especially if the influence of radical-extremism comes from social interactions outside campus. University policies however only cover student activities on campus.

The more active involvement of the government is of course necessary because schools and universities have limited resources. The disbandment of Hizbut-Tahrir in 2017 by the government, for example, even though raised pro and contra, has had a positive impact on educational institutions in strengthening the principles of tolerance and moderate religion for their students. Stronger regulations and prioritizing schools and universities are still very much needed. In addition, what needs to be a priority for the government is to help increase the capacity of religious teachers in schools. The religious teachers need the better skills for organizing interactive, inclusive and dialogical religious education. They also need programs to strengthen knowledge on certain themes that are considered crucial, such as Islam and nationalism, Islam and Pancasila, interpretation of jihad, and other materials.

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