



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT *with* RELIGION *and* FAITH *in the* 21ST CENTURY

The Role of Young Adults in Preventing Violent Extremism in Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

Today's generation of young people numbers slightly less than 1.8 billion in a world population of 7.3 billion.¹ The highest proportion of young people today is in poor countries, where barriers to their development and fulfilment of their potential are the highest. Poverty is the most prevalent, access to critical health care and schooling is the lowest, conflict and violence are the most frequent, and life is the hardest. Fully 89 per cent of the world's 10- to 24-year-olds, almost nine out of 10, live in less developed countries.² Similar to the global trend, 28% of Indonesia's 238 million population are youth--aged between 18-30 years.³ There are more young people in urban areas (28 percent) than rural (24 percent) and the gender ratio is close to evenly balanced, with slightly more men than women.⁴

Some of the challenges that young people in Indonesia face are - lack of nationalism, health, education, economic opportunity, technology and internet, citizenship, and lack of safety and security. These challenges are gendered as well. Despite all of these challenges, young people have their potential to be positive agents in society and able to make positive changes. However, the challenges they face lead to further complications. For example, the lack of knowledge, unemployment, discrimination, feeling of injustice and frustration make them vulnerable to provocation and fall for extremist ideologies. Lingering poverty also make them seek work abroad opportunities. One of the destinations is Syria where they are often indoctrinated and trained to become ISIS members. On the other hand, extremist groups use social media to recruit new members, spread their idealism, and "use" religion as their ideology in order to achieve their purposes.

This short essay will examine the root causes that lead young people to get involved in extremism. The paper also explores possible ways to maximize young people to take part as a peace agent, rather than being an extremist. In the first section, I will describe what radicalisation is, the reasons behind youth involvement in extremist groups and examples of some cases from Indonesia. In the second section, I will highlight information on some efforts of preventing radicalisation and how the involvement of young people to be a peace builder in their societies has occurred. The last section includes my conclusion and recommendations.

Objectives

1. To map the root causes that lead young people in Indonesia to extremism, what kind of ideology motivates them, religious norms, and their point of view regarding it
2. Find out the solutions and alternatives that can be given to young people so that they can be peace agents, rather than getting involved in extremist groups

Methodology

Methodology that will be used for this essay are research reports, articles, and case analytical methods. The essay research will use relevant documents in order to give accurate data.

ONE: GENERAL ANALYSIS

Violent Extremism (definition)

Violent extremism describes the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious, or political goals. This includes terrorism, other forms of politically motivated violence and some forms of communal violence. All forms of

violent extremism, no matter what their motivation, seek change through fear and intimidation rather than constructive democratic processes.⁵

Reasons for Violent Extremism

There are several factors that push youth to join violent extremist groups. They include poverty, unemployment, financial inducements from violent extremism groups, ignorance, inequality, climate change, illiteracy, lack of opportunities, misuse of religion and religious ideology, lack of social and political justice, bad governance, wrong interpretation of Quran, force recruitment, and the lack of funds to bribe government officials to get employment.⁶

The 40-odd Pesantren (Islamic schools) affiliated to the extremist group Jemaah Islamiyah, certainly foster radicalization, but the literature differs on the role of the majority—moderate Pesantren. Universities, however, have been targeted by extremists with “success” in recent times. Evidence of increasing extremism at Indonesian universities include rising conservative ideology among students and the involvement of students/alumni in violent extremism.⁷ Perception of life and values come to many illiterate youths from the content of misinterpreted Qur’anic Surahs. The Qur’anic schools have been identified with teachers that have ties to extremist groups who prepare students and young people to join violent extremist groups. Their tactics include misinterpretation of the Qur’an and espousing extremist ideology. Those that join, often pass through a period of radicalization and indoctrination by these teachers, before embarking on missions for extremist groups.⁸ Besides, online radicalization is significant in Indonesia, particularly as ISIS has targeted the country in its online propaganda that reinforces radicalization through Pesantren and in person contacts. Prisons and returning foreign fighters also promote radicalization and recruitment.⁹

Another source of recruitment to violent extremist groups is through family structures. Parents, due

to their inability to communicate, bond, or provide safe environment, education and upbringing, create the impression of lack of care and foster rebellion in youths. This leads some to join or be bullied into extremist groups. Family members are also targets of recruitment by other family members who are already involved with extremist groups.¹⁰ “Inherited jihadism” is identified as a phenomenon distinct to Indonesia, whereby the involvement of parents/older siblings/relatives in extremist groups pushes young people to follow their footsteps.¹¹

Young people who do not feel accepted or integrated in mainstream society for various reasons often look for an alternative form of recognition. Thus, belonging to groups where they can experience acceptance helps young people to build up self-esteem and gain respect. Research on right-wing extremism highlighted that this was the case for some young men who were not accepted in other circles. Among young right-wing activists, they felt part of a larger community and did not feel ousted because of their educational or social background, which may have excluded them from other well-defined groups in the past. . The feeling of belongingness is an important factor for many youths who chooses to be identified with radical ideologies. In some circumstances, radical groups can be substitute for families or other groups of friends. Over time, these radical groups create echo chambers among themselves barring any different perspective or criticism from third parties.¹²

It is clear that the main reasons why young people join extremist violent groups are lack of knowledge (general knowledge, Qur’anic knowledge, and nationalism), and failure of the educational system.

Young people voluntarily join terrorist groups based on a range of motivations including:

- Search for group-based identity
- Ideological appeal of the group

- Real or perceived exclusion, grievance, or cultural threat
- Potential for economic gain or long-term economic stability
- Prospect of fame, glory, or respect, and
- Personal connections, including family and friendship networks¹³

Violent Extremist Groups and Youth Involvement in Indonesia

The main violent extremist groups operating in Indonesia are Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Jamaat Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and, increasingly, ISIS. As noted, JI has been relatively inactive since the government crackdown on the group, but it is a significant source of resources and fighters for other terrorist networks. Though originally affiliated to Al-Qaeda, its cofounder Abu Bakar Bashir, pledged loyalty to ISIS in July 2014. Jemaahn Islamiyah still has the biggest following in Indonesia, but ISIS is making inroads and expanding recruitment in the country. ISIS has been working actively to raise its profile in Indonesia. It sees the country both as a source of fighters to join in Syria and Iraq, and as an arena for extremist violence-for which it has also been recruiting locally. As noted, the group has been responsible for a number of attacks in the country since January 2016. Indonesia has also been a major source of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. As of December 2015, official government estimates put the number of Indonesians who have left to fight at 800. Most joined ISIS, while some joined the Nusra Front. Between December 2016 and May 2018, Turkish authorities repatriated more than 220 Indonesian citizens, detained while attempting to enter Iraq and Syria to join ISIS through Turkey. Jawaaid writes that the sheer number of Indonesians and Malay-speaking foreign fighters has been enough for ISIS to form their own fighting unit in Syria, known as Katibah Nusantara, and formalized in

September 2014. Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) is an ISIS-linked group believed to have been formed in 2015 and involved in the January 2016 attack in Jakarta. Indonesian police believe that the three families who carried out the May 2018 attacks in Surabaya, East Java, were all members of the group. The literature does not give a profile of those recruited to violent extremist groups, but from those who have carried out attacks or been caught planning such acts, it is clear that they are predominantly young. The 2009 bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta was carried out by an 18-year-old. The May 2018 suicide attackers included two teenage boys, aged 16 and 18, as well as two young children, aged 9 and 12. Zahid cites a number of surveys which indicate an increase in extremist ideology among youth, “who are idolizing radical figures.” In 2011 a series of book bombs sent to leading Indonesian figures and bombs planted at a Chinese church in Jakarta were both conceived and designed by a group of young Indonesian Muslims, suspected of being associated with ISIS. Several of those responsible for violent extremism in Indonesia have been students/alumni of educational institutions.¹⁴ The interesting thing is they were attracted to join the extremist groups because they were promised about the reward they will get—which are heaven and angels who will serve them once they died. The ideology about jihad, syuhada, pahala (reward), heaven and many other things seems absurd in their understanding.

TWO: THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN PREVENTING EXTREMISM GROUPS

Prevention and Detection

It is not enough to counter violent extremism. Forms of “soft power,” can prevent threats driven by distorted interpretations of culture, hatred, and ignorance. No one is born a violent extremist—they are made and fueled. Disarming the process of radicalization

must begin with human rights and the rule of law. This will require dialogue across all boundary lines, empowerment of all young women and men, and a concerted effort starting from early childhood education.¹⁵ UNESCO has also committed to the UN Secretary General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, with focus on priorities of direct relevance to UNESCO’s work: (i) education, skills development and employment facilitation; (ii) empowerment of youth; (iii) strategic communications, the internet and social media; and (iv) gender equality and empowering women.¹⁶

Education as a tool to prevent violent extremism

UNESCO seeks to assist countries to deliver education programs that build young people’s resilience to violent extremism messaging and foster a positive sense of identity and belonging.

Youth participation and empowerment

The UNESCO Youth Team focuses on creating an enabling environment for the empowerment and democratic participation of youth, in order to ensure that young women and men have the opportunities to become active global citizens.

Media and online coalitions for PVE

UNESCO is mobilizing stakeholders —particularly youth, policy makers, researchers, and media actors to take effective actions, both online and offline, to prevent and respond to violent extremism and radicalization on the internet.

Celebrating cultural diversity

UNESCO is engaging youth in the protection of all forms of heritage and the promotion of cultural diversity to foster more fair, inclusive, and peaceful societies.¹⁷

Over time, the youth information sector has adopted to young people's request and information needs. At the same time, youth information has to adapt to changing societies, technological and information developments, the difficulties that young people come across as they try to find their place in society, and a growing demand for guidance as they enter adulthood. Today the sector continues to evolve and adapt. The aim of youth information is not only to meet the needs of the general public-its principle objective-but also to anticipate their needs and prepare preventative measures accordingly. Some of these needs will relate to key issues in society, notably, physical and mental health, high risk behaviour, interpersonal relationships, discrimination, citizenship, active participation in society and access to social rights. Only by being adequately informed about one's rights and duties is it possible to find a place in society and be a well-informed citizen.

Creating an information culture

Today, young people are inundated with information and exposed to a variety of different media. This access to information is unprecedented and brings with it a previously unseen tendency to also want to create media content, often in a personal and uncontrolled manner. In order to be a conscious citizen, it is important that one looks at this content with a critical eye, evaluating the quality, reliability, strategy and interest of those producing the information. In this context, youth information takes on a new aim; to educate young people on media and information literacy. Youth information services are fully equipped to advise young people on how to research, evaluate and appreciate information and how reliable it is. For this reason, media and information literacy occupies an important part of this toolkit and is part of the wider efforts to prevent violent extremism among young people.¹⁸

Local prevention of violent radicalisation and extremism is very important. Individuals and groups become radicalised and operate locally and are part of local social networks and communities. Violent extremist groups locally influence the safety and security and sense of security of people and communities. Violent extremist groups make efficient use of local incidents and create their own interpretations about them that support their ideology and goals and spread the interpretations especially through social media. This multiplies the consequences and effects of individual incidents locally, especially if the matter is not reacted to quickly and efficiently. Effective local prevention of violent radicalization and extremism calls for cooperation between different authorities and with nongovernmental organizations. It also involves young people, women, and religious communities in the operations, sustaining a knowledge-based overview, training different actors, introducing broad preventive measures as well as effective, correctly timed interventions and referring individuals who have been or are in danger of being radicalized to the necessary services.¹⁹

The commitment of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia in countering terrorism is an important part of the mandate of Pancasila, as a way of life as well as the ultimate source of law. This is also part of the effort to achieve the goals of the State, mainly to protect all people of Indonesia and the entire homeland of Indonesia, as well as contribute to the implementation of a world order, as confirmed in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic Indonesia. In particular, Article 28G section (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic Indonesia has affirmed that everyone "has the right to feel secure and to be protected against threats from fear." Furthermore, this commitment has been institutionalized through Law Number 15 of 2003 on Enactment of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 1 of 2002 on Eradication of Criminal Acts of Terrorism to Become a Law.²⁰

Youth as a Peace Builder and Agent of Changes

To understand the engagement of youth in peacebuilding, first, the youth mobilization and reintegration factors such as who they are, what they did before the conflict, how they were recruited, what specific fighting roles they undertook, what they experienced physically, socio-economically and physiologically, during the armed conflict, and what “home” context they will be reintegrating into will all be critical for the youth’s trajectories in peacebuilding. Second, the involvement of youth in non-violent politics, and from a wider perspective, the enablement of their political agency in a more positive and peace-oriented role in post-conflict environments, is likely to depend on how these trajectories are shaped by the overall political and governance context. Third, the enablement of youth as an active agent in peacebuilding cannot be considered without considering such challenges, they tend to face due to the armed conflict such as the loss of education, a lack of employable skills and the destruction of a stable family environment. The wider socio-economic needs of youths are often ignored in post-conflict contexts as they are not seen as a “vulnerable” group. Fourth, it is important to provide youths with training opportunities to take an active part in peacebuilding. With their youthful energy and capabilities, and ability of adaption to new technological trends, for example, youths could act as mediators, community mobilisers, humanitarian workers and peace brokers. Like any particular conflict affected population group, the mobilization of youths’ capacities requires a targeted and long-term approach. Fifth, the engagement of youth in peacebuilding in a wider perspective can be ensured through the arts, culture, tourism, sports and education. The innovativeness and creativeness of young people in those areas could be mobilised effectively by connecting them with wider peacebuilding objectives such as building bridges between divided communities and ensuring a viable process of reconciliation.²¹

Young people can be important drivers and agents of change in the development of their societies. This may be because they demonstrate openness to change, feedback and learning, tend to be more future-oriented, more idealistic, innovative, and more willing to take a risk. For example, research has highlighted that a large youth cohort need not be a problem if there are sufficient socioeconomic opportunities for young people and they can be engaged in meaningful, democratic national projects that will unleash their positive potential to contribute to their societies and the national economy. However, this “demographic dividend” only occurs when fertility declines substantially, reducing the number of economic “dependents” in society.²²

Youth work to prevent violence and sustain peace can engage youth at the community level but can also translate into policy and advocacy between communities, and with national, regional and multilateral authorities and institutions. Where youth initiatives achieve this intermediary function of both “listening in” and “speaking out,” youth peacebuilding can serve as a powerful connective tissue between these different levels of engagement. These roles as intermediaries are sometimes played by young people and youth organization within their communities—“bonding social capital.” In other instances, their intermediary function is between local communities—“bridging social capital.” Sometimes, they have this connective role at the interface with the national level or international community—“linking social capital.”²³

CONCLUSION

For many years young people have demonstrated their ability in leadership and many other roles. Young people are vital stakeholders in conflict and in peace building and can be agents of change. Therefore, they have an important role in the society and the community where they belong. Unfortunately, the opportunities for young people to engage in

governance, participate in political decision making, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts were still inadequately. It is important to involve and encourage them to participate and play role in many forms, so that they will feel more accepted, respected, and responsible to their environment and will not be involved to the extremism groups. In response to this issue, some recommendations below:

1. Government and intergovernmental:

- a. Involved young people in some important places both in government, public spaces, and policy decisions no matter their identity background, ethnic, religion, social status, etc.
- b. The government should prioritize the concern in education and allocated the national budget for it and social defend. The education should be equal for all the people and can be accessed by all people. This curriculum education should be included by nationalism education, especially among the youth.
- c. The government should protect all the religions including the minorities and those vulnerable groups from being attacked by the majority. The regulation has to be clear, strict, and not partial to a particular group or majority. For example, the policy about no longer accepts the fighters who came back from Syria, Iraq, and other countries has to be set up strictly without any exceptional, same thing goes to the stipulation sentencing of Bashir whose rather pledge loyal to ISIS than Indonesia.
- d. Promote interreligious and inter-cultural dialogue to build understanding, avoid the prejudice, and bridging the diversity.

2. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)

Gives some more trainings, workshops, seminars to educate young people about extremism violent groups and basic understanding to prevent it, beside of that also empowering young people to improve themselves. NGO can also cooperate with the government to supervise the activities of young people in order for not having tendency to join the extremist groups.

3. Religious Leaders

Religious leaders have an important role to give the right education to all the people. It is important to re-interpret the Holy Books and adjust it to the present context. Besides of that, give the correct dogma that leads people to be more open minded, tolerance, respectful, and put humanity beyond of all.

Through the cooperation from the Government, NGOs, Religious leaders and the stakeholders we can maximize the potential of young people to be more effective and significant in the development.

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ENDNOTES

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- 3 According to Indonesia's 2009 Law No. 40 on Youth, young people are citizens aged 18-30 years.
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