Staying Alive: The Indonesian Pro-IS Community's Online Resilience and the 'Lone Actor' Threat in 2025
Jordan Newton

From *Jihad Tanzim* to *Jihad Fardiyah*: The Renewed Emphasis on Individual Jihad among Pro-IS Militants in Indonesia
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Noor Huda Ismail

EBSCO HOST

Editorial Note

Weak but Persistent and Evolving Threat of Jihadist Militancy in Indonesia

In September 2024, Indonesia's longstanding pro-Al-Qaeda jihadist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)'s decision to formally disband itself surprised everyone. It sparked an intense debate about whether the group has genuinely dissolved itself or made the move to avoid further counterterrorism pressure from Indonesian authorities. At the same time, the pro-Islamic State (IS) Jemaah Anshorut Daulah (JAD), a network of small cells, has also lost steam amidst its struggle to carry out large-scale attacks in recent years. As a result, the jihadist threat in Indonesia has declined significantly with three key characteristics.

First, despite JI's disbandment, its ideological influence continues to inspire self-radicalised individuals and lone-actor terrorists in Indonesia. JI is maintaining its influence through its widespread and well-entrenched network of charities and pesantrens. Likewise, the JAD's ideology remains potent in online spaces and serves as a catalyst for aspiring pro-IS cells and individuals to act violently.

Second, as jihadist groups have weakened, a shift from organised to individual "jihad" has become prominent. As Indonesian jihadist groups have struggled to maintain offline presence due to strong counterterrorism policing in Indonesia, online radicalisation has gained traction among would-be Indonesian radicals. Likewise, since plotting and executing coordinated and large-scale attacks has become difficult, lone-actor terrorism has been the defining characteristic of the existing Indonesian threat landscape.

Third, the use of emerging technologies like cryptocurrency, generative AI and digital marketplaces is very limited among Indonesian jihadists; they make individual terror plots more significant from a future perspective. As these technologies will become more pervasive and user-friendly in the future, they will provide a competitive edge to Indonesian jihadists passing through a testing period currently. Against this backdrop, the current issue has featured three articles examining Indonesia's pro-IS online community, the influence of jihadist doctrines on the country's threat landscape from organised to individual "jihad", and the effect of JI's dissolution on pesantrens.

In the first article, **Jordan Newton** notes that Indonesia's pro-IS online community, though somewhat diminished, continues to adapt, fuelling the emergence of new terrorist plots. Despite counterterrorism efforts, IS supporters have re-established themselves on mainstream social media platforms like Facebook, embedding their narratives within broader local, national, and international discourses. This evolving online presence, combined with the increasing use of technologies such as cryptocurrencies, digital marketplaces, and generative AI, is likely to facilitate the rise of self-radicalised or inspired individuals in the future. Furthermore, the author maintains that as these extremist online networks persist and adapt, counterterrorism authorities face the challenge of addressing this threat while navigating budget constraints and competing priorities in the years ahead.

In the second article, **Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah** and **Nurrisha Ismail** explore the influence of jihadist doctrines on the terrorism threat landscape in Indonesia. In recent years, new small-scale pro-IS cells have continued to emerge in Indonesia, a noticeable shift from the large-scale networks of pro-IS operations in the past. This shift can be attributed to a renewed emphasis on the doctrine of *jihad fardiyah* (individual jihad), in contrast to *jihad tanzim* (organised jihad*)* which prioritises organisation-building. By examining both doctrines, the authors present a clearer understanding of the goals of pro-IS groups in Indonesia and their potential future trajectory. In the future, the deliberate and persistent use of *jihad fardiyah* will likely rise, particularly through a hybridised approach in the form of large pro-IS networks consisting of small and insulated cells.

In the last article, **Noor Huda Ismail** examines the effect of the dissolution of JI on Islamic boarding schools, otherwise known as pesantrens, affiliated with JI. While JI rarely owned or directly funded pesantrens, the strategic placement of the JI members as pesantren teachers allowed the group to exert ideological influence on the wider community, connected it to a support base for potential recruitment and facilitated chosen students for "global jihad." Despite JI's formal dissolution, its ideological influence among segments of Indonesian society is likely to endure, particularly through the vast network of the Forum Komunikasi Pondok Pesantren (FKPP). The author argues that there is a need to reform JI-affiliated teaching systems – including fostering critical thinking skills and prioritising values of inclusivity and respect for diversity – to disrupt the cycle of radical indoctrination.

SOUTHEAST ASIA MILITANT ATLAS

Our centre has launched the **Southeast Asia Militant Atlas**, a dynamic and growing interactive map designed to provide researchers with a consolidated visual database of ISIS and Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist-related incidents in Southeast Asia. Please access it via **https://tinyurl.com/ru8mjwbd**

Staying Alive: The Indonesian Pro-IS Community's Online Resilience and the 'Lone Actor' Threat in 2025

Jordan Newton

Indonesian Islamic State (IS) supporters' small but stubbornly resilient online presence is evolving and underpinning new terrorist plots. Despite years of counter terrorism pressure, IS supporters are back on mainstream platforms, like Facebook, and embedding themselves in broader local, national and international conversations online. Pro-IS redoubts online, coupled with the growing use of emerging technologies, like cryptocurrencies, digital marketplaces and generative artificial intelligence (AI), will help incubate more IS 'self-radicalised' or 'inspired' plots in the future. Counter terrorism authorities will have difficult decisions to make about how to best mitigate this threat as they juggle priorities in the face of budget cuts over the coming years.

Introduction

The internet and social media are playing an increasingly important role in Indonesian extremist networks. In December 2024, the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT)'s annual Outlook document noted that around half of all terrorists arrested between 2013 and 2022 had at least been partly radicalised by activities and materials on the internet.[1] The report also highlighted that terrorists continue to push out hundreds of thousands of pieces of social media content every year,[2] which risks drawing more budding extremists into the fold.

Recent arrests of Indonesian Islamic State (IS) supporters have also highlighted that the internet is not just a part of extremist networks, but, in some cases, has also become central to the formation of cells and plotting of attacks. In 2024, police counter terrorism unit Special Detachment 88 (D88) arrested three young IS supporters who had been radicalised almost exclusively online.[3] The authorities also rounded up several other extremists accused of posting online incitement to conduct attacks ahead of Pope Francis' visit to Indonesia in September of the same year.[4]

This spate of internet-driven plots and incitement is underpinned by a complex and resilient pro-IS community online.[5] IS supporters, despite being pushed into 'survival mode'[6] by arrests offline and takedowns online in recent years, are proving difficult to eradicate. They are back on mainstream platforms and embedding themselves in online conversations on local, national and global grievances, increasing the likelihood they will draw in handfuls of new recruits. Though a resurgence of plotting on the scale of IS' peak in the mid-2010s still seems unlikely, the pro-IS community online will likely seed more self-radicalised 'lone actors' in the years to come.

Resilient Online Community

IS supporters online, including in Indonesia, have been battered in recent years. The Global Coalition's military campaign against IS in Syria and Iraq all but wiped out the group's top propagandists and media producers, dramatically reducing the quantity and quality of official IS releases online.[7] Meanwhile, Europol's virtual takedown operations[8] targeted IS supporters on their app of choice, Telegram, resulting in bans on thousands of pro-IS channels and accounts. Counter terrorism arrests also constrained local Indonesian IS supporters, taking out nascent pro-IS media outfits, like An Najiyah Media.[9]

To some extent, these efforts weakened IS supporters' reach online. Indonesian supporters have been reduced to an anaemic presence on Telegram. Only a handful of hardcore pro-IS chat groups

and channels remain from what was once a catalogue of dozens updated daily with hundreds of messages.[10] Where pro-IS groups were once hives of activity and discussion, most have been reduced to reposting old propaganda and religious advice. Many other chat group participants lie dormant, their access to the platform revoked or their accounts abandoned.[11]

But there is evidence to suggest IS supporters are – to quote the group's slogan – 'remaining and expanding' elsewhere online. They are certainly experiencing a renaissance on Facebook, with hundreds of accounts posting pro-IS news, updates and memes daily.[12] Arrests in recent years suggest WhatsApp has also displaced Telegram as the app of choice for private communications between IS supporters.[13] Recent research even indicates some have set up accounts on TikTok and are deftly harnessing the platform's algorithm to push propaganda.[14] Some supporters are also dabbling in other mainstream platforms, like Instagram and YouTube,[15] while a handful maintain a presence on more obscure platforms, like Rocket.Chat and Element.[16]

Four key pillars of Indonesian pro-IS networks online have been central to their resilience and modest expansion, particularly on Facebook. Propagandists, like Tamkin Indonesia, have played a critical role in ensuring local IS supporters remain connected with their global counterparts[17] by translating attack claims and major audio statements from IS leaders. Memelords, meanwhile, have kept Indonesian IS supporters interacting with one another online by pumping out simple, emotive and shareable memes, videos and stories.[18] Pro-IS Indonesian women in Kurdish-run refugee camps in Syria[19] regularly provide updates on daily life in the camps,[20] serving as symbols of resilience and adherence to IS' ideology during difficult times.[21] Pro-IS charities like Muhzatul Ummah and Gubuk Sedekah Amal Umat (GSAU)[22] leverage their social media presence to attract hundreds of dollars in donations from supporters every month,[23] enabling them to provide support for the families and children of IS-linked terrorist inmates.

These pillars have breathed new life into moribund Indonesian pro-IS networks on social media and revived their sense of community.[24] Friend networks buzz with activity as memelords share posts from IS propagandists,[25] pro-IS women in refugee camps trade prayers and well wishes with supporters back home,[26] and released terrorist detainees link up with fellow inmates in the comments sections of meme posts.[27] Indonesian IS supporters still face bans on social media[28] and arrests offline,[29] but they have rebuilt a small, resilient, busy community online.

Grievance Merchants

The pro-IS community's pillars are playing a key role in promoting the group's narratives online. This includes calling for the restoration of IS' caliphate as the remedy for the Muslim world's political disunity and social and cultural malaise. Secularism, democracy, mainstream Muslim groups,[30] Shia Islam, Iran and Western countries continue to be framed as key adversaries.[31] IS supporters also vehemently oppose rival jihadist organisations, such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI),[32] Al-Qaeda (AQ) and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS),[33] dismissing them as ineffective or compromised. Ultimately, violence remains central to IS' worldview, with the overthrow of these opposing regimes and rivals seen as the only way to achieve its goal of global Islamic government.[34]

But the loss of IS' territorial caliphate and the decimation of its propaganda machinery have reshaped how the pro-IS community engages with audiences online. IS propaganda focused on its proto-state and attacks by militants, which was once supporters' stock-in-trade online, now makes up a small portion of the community's content.[35] Many IS supporters' social media feeds now consist of more general religious content[36] and materials derived from other sources on issues which have little to do with IS' immediate goals. So, while IS supporters are back on mainstream platforms, they are less immediately visible than they were before.

This content shift is partly a strategy to avoid crackdowns on overtly pro-IS content online,[37] but it also enables the Indonesian pro-IS community to position themselves as grievance merchants[38] for trending, emotive issues online. For example, some Indonesian IS supporters are tapping into long-standing anti-Chinese sentiment by reposting videos criticising the controversial Pantai Indah Kapuk (PIK) housing development in Jakarta,[39] and suggesting its (mostly) ethnic Chinese

residents are 'foreign invaders' and therefore legitimate targets for robberies or killings.[40] They are also borrowing memes and videos from anti-vaxxers in the West[41] to rail against government health programmes and push conspiracy theories about Jewish/American/Communist agents presiding over a secret global authoritarian 'new world order'.

IS supporters have attempted to channel broader national and international grievances in a similar manner. In late 2024, IS supporters approvingly reposted photos of anti-government demonstrations featuring mock executions of then President Joko Widodo,[42] fanning calls for violence and a national revolution 'like in Bangladesh'.[43] IS supporters have also attempted to tap into sympathy for Gaza, borrowing memes from other conservative Muslim groups highlighting the suffering of Palestinians[44] as well as memes presenting the Israeli forces as malevolent cowards.[45] By organically adopting the language and themes of other Indonesians and Muslims, IS supporters are embedding themselves in these broader local, national and global conversations online, albeit in ways that still enable them to project IS' calls for violence and global Islamic government.

However, there are limits to the Indonesian IS community's adoption of these grievances, thus restricting supporters' ability to capitalise on them for recruitment. IS supporters' unwavering commitment to a global caliphate has undercut efforts to ride on anti-government protests, as they see opposition forces and the proto-authoritarian rulers they are trying to oust as two sides of the same secularist coin.[46] Even free hits on global Muslim grievances are often turned into big misses. For example, IS supporters' hatred for Iran-backed Hamas[47] places them at odds with many Indonesian Muslims, who view the group as a legitimate resistance movement.

Still, even IS supporters' qualified engagement with these grievances helps lower the bar for exposure to the group. Rather than being cloistered on platforms like Telegram and only sharing IS missives, tracts and propaganda videos, IS supporters are making themselves more accessible to other Muslims by embedding themselves in hot topic conversations about Chinese Indonesians, vaccines, anti-government protests and Palestine. Most Indonesians would likely be turned off by the more IS-themed content on these interlopers' feeds.[48] But some may be disaffected enough to take interest and fall into deeper IS holes online, replenishing the pro-IS community's beleaguered ranks.

Self-Radicalisation and 'Lone Actors'

The resilient pro-IS online community, paired with a highly charged, grievance-filled environment, risks producing more cases of self-radicalised, 'lone actor' terrorism. Lone actors may conduct attacks on their own, but they are rarely truly 'alone'.[49] Instead, many are products of online communities in which they are deeply enmeshed. A plethora of studies has highlighted the dangers of online echo chambers[50] and algorithmic filter bubbles.[51] The January 2025 truck attack in New Orleans also showed that individual personal and psychological issues can make people more vulnerable to these kinds of radicalising messages.[52]

Online communities, like the pro-IS community, help provide 'needs, networks, narratives',[53] which individuals adopt as their own identity and personal struggle.[54] This kind of environment online does not necessarily attract large numbers of supporters or even generate highly capable terrorist cells. But it does provide a venue for vulnerable individuals to be convinced that violence is the only answer for their and the world's ills.

In Indonesia, there have been several cases of self-radicalisation and lone-actor attacks over the past decade. In 2017, a 28-year-old IS supporter, Mulyadi, stabbed several police officers after regularly watching IS propaganda videos at home.[55] In 2021, a 21-year-old pro-IS woman, Zakia Aini, who had been radicalised online, attacked the National Police Headquarters on her own, armed with a pistol.[56] Meanwhile, in 2024, police arrested three suspected IS supporters who had largely been radicalised in pro-IS chat groups. These included Hamzah Omar Khaled, a 19-year-old IS supporter who had ordered bomb-making materials online for a planned attack on police in Malang, East Java.[57]

Regional trends suggest plots like these will become more common in Indonesia. As countries become more effective at shutting down extremists' ability to gather and plot offline, the internet emerges as a last refuge for many would-be terrorists. Singapore – with arguably the most robust counter terrorism legislation and most proactive approach to arrests in Southeast Asia – has recently seen a spike in cases of self-radicalisation, in large part motivated by ongoing outrage over the conflict in Gaza.[58] Malaysia, which is also home to a strong counter terrorism regime, has likewise seen an uptick in online radicalisation.[59] In a similar fashion, the Indonesian authorities' successful suppression of terrorist networks offline could, ironically, drive more IS supporters to radicalising and forging plots entirely online.

Any would-be self-radicalised or lone-actor extremists will have access to more resources to support their plotting online than previous generations of jihadists. The pro-IS community online has already lowered the bar for capability to undertake attacks, with 'how-to' guides by extremists like the now-deceased Indonesian foreign fighter Bahrun Naim still ubiquitous online.[60] Despite the technical deficiencies of these guides,[61] they nonetheless provide opportunities for less capable terrorists to attempt to construct potentially devastating devices.[62] Other guides provide even simpler advice on knife or vehicular attacks,[63] which are even more accessible for the average extremist.

Emerging technologies will also provide further opportunities for IS supporters to enhance their capabilities. Some IS supporters have used digital marketplaces to acquire bomb-making materials[64] and even to purchase firearms.[65] Others have dabbled in cryptocurrencies to transfer thousands of dollars to Indonesian IS women in Syrian refugee camps.[66] Some supporters are utilising automated tools to produce quick translations of foreign language materials,[67] and similar generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools could also be used to communicate with militants overseas and to help plan attacks.[68] Cases of these more creative uses of the internet are still few and far between, but will bear watching as more extremists conduct more of their planning online.

Fired-up Indonesian IS supporters online could present an attractive opportunity for IS' increasingly externally focused structure. Since the loss of its territorial state in Syria and Iraq, IS has reshaped itself into a more nebulous 'pan-provincial' organisation, pooling planning, resources and personnel from different regions to mount attacks outside its traditional Middle East heartlands.[69] Indonesia (or Southeast Asia for that matter) has not yet been incorporated into this new structure. But local supporters' ongoing links with global IS media peers provide potential entry points for IS to seek recruits or support for operations at home or overseas.[70]

All of the above is not to say that self-radicalised, lone-actor or externally directed attacks will become the norm or the predominant form of terrorism in Indonesia, as they have seemingly become in other countries. Offline cells and networking still play a significant role in Indonesian extremist networks, as evidenced by large-scale roundups ahead of last year's elections.[71] But the longer the Indonesian pro-IS community is allowed to fester online, the more likely we will see it seeding new plots and attacks – either 'directed' or 'inspired' – that could slip past the authorities.

Prioritising Counter Terrorism Resources

The persistent challenge posed by online radicalisation comes at a time when counter terrorism efforts are likely to face fiscal constraints moving forward. As part of a government-wide efficiency drive, BNPT is set to have its budget reduced[72] and even D88's funds could be in the firing line.[73] Lone actors and online radicalisation will almost certainly figure further down the list of counter terrorism priorities than issues like the repatriation of Indonesians in Syrian refugee camps[74] and the rehabilitation of former JI members.[75]

Still, the stubborn resilience and modest expansion of the pro-IS community online highlights the need for at least maintaining existing capabilities. D88's cyberteam has performed admirably in tracking down and interdicting threats online, including lone actors.[76] Continuing to monitor key pillars of the pro-IS community online will be key to detecting would-be attackers and restricting the group's reach. Support for officers to understand how new technologies like generative AI,

cryptocurrencies and 3D-printing can be used by extremists will also be critical to staying on top of the pro-IS community's capabilities and any lone actors it might spawn.

Authorities will also need to stay closely engaged with social media tech giants[77] to ensure they do not reopen space for IS supporters to recruit and radicalise online. Facebook's recent announcement that it will essentially be scaling back some of its content moderation efforts,[78] is likely to primarily apply to polarising issues in Western countries[79] rather than opening the floodgates for jihadist propaganda. But the overall setting of fewer and less focused resources for content moderation may nonetheless provide a little more breathing space for extremists.[80]

Offline interventions will still be important but need to evolve. Prioritising family or community interventions ahead of formal arrests in the case of IS supporters in the initial phases of online radicalisation could help relieve some of the burden on the law enforcement, intelligence, judicial and corrections systems.[81] The framework for this kind of cooperation can build on BNPT's current push for a 'whole-of-society' approach[82] to prevent violent extremism by engaging community and civil society groups to provide post-intervention support.

Support for broader efforts to promote tolerance and pluralism are likely to suffer the most under any cuts to preventing violent extremism (PVE) programmes.[83] Counternarratives and public awareness programmes, while well-meaning and having value far beyond their role in counter terrorism,[84] have diminishing returns the further one reaches into active extremist networks.[85] At any rate, the past decade of PVE programmes has already produced hundreds of education modules, training aids, booklets, pamphlets, videos and games.[86] Enterprising civil society groups can (and will likely have to) draw on these existing resources and develop more independent sources of funding[87] to continue promoting positive messages, in the hope of turning at least some vulnerable people away from the path of self-radicalisation.

Even though the pro-IS community online is still well below its peak of the mid-2010s, it has picked itself up off the canvas and is threatening to once again seed new plots. The Indonesian authorities and the Indonesian public will need to maintain vigilance to prevent violent extremists from using social media to recruit, radicalise and mobilise a new generation of jihadists.

About the Author

Jordan Newton is a former Australian Government counter terrorism analyst and has worked as a consultant on CVE programmes under the Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice (AIPJ) and USAID Harmoni.

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Jihan Ristyanti, "Densus 88 Tangkap 2 Terduga Teroris di Jakarta Selatan, Terpapar Paham ISIS Melalui Media Sosial," *Tempo*, August 7, 2024, https://www.tempo.co/hukum/densus-88-tangkap-2-terduga-teroris-di-jakarta-selatan-terpapar-paham-isis-melalui-media-sosial-29078.

[4] Kiki Safitri and Dani Prabowo, "Densus 88 Beberkan Peran 7 Penebar Teror Kedatangan Paus Fransiskus di Medsos," *Kompas*, September 6, 2024, https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/09/06/22115211/densus-88-beberkan-peran-7-penebar-teror-kedatangan-paus-fransiskus-di?page=all.

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[7] Henry Ridgwell, "Huge Decline in ISIS Propaganda Mirrors Losses on Battlefield," *VoA*, December 1, 2017, https://www.voanews.com/a/isis-propaganda-declies-mirrors-losses-on-battlefield/4144838.html.

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[9] Adhyasta Dirgantara, "Densus 88 Tangkap 5 Tersangka Teroris Penyebar Propaganda ISIS Via Medsos," *Detik News*, March 24, 2022, https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5998180/densus-88-tangkap-5-tersangka-teroris-penyebar-propaganda-isis-via-medsos.

[10] Telegram observations, February 2025. The most active pro-IS channels can post over 100 messages a day, though it is usually less than this and much of it is recycled material. In public-facing chat groups, there is rarely any chatter or commentary, except from admins or long-standing group members.

[11] Telegram observations, February 2025. When chat group participants' accounts are removed, they still remain on chat groups but with their names listed as 'account deleted'. That said, some IS supporters online sometimes rename their active accounts to 'account deleted' in order to conceal their presence.

[12] Facebook observations, February 2025. Also supported by BNPT's December 2024 iKhub Outlook, which noted Facebook was the platform with the most detected content on "violent extremism tending towards terrorism". See BNPT, *i-KHub BNPT: Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism Outlook 2024*.

[13] The 2023 disruption of a network led by serial recidivist terrorist Abu Omar alias Muhammad Ikhwan was one of the largest roundups of Indonesian IS supporters in recent years. The network was primarily driven by several offline groupings in different regions, but which were connected to one another via a WhatsApp chat group they had established, "Muslim United". See Muhammad Faizal Armandika, "Lewat Grup WA Muslim United, 42 Teroris Sebar Materi ISIS Bahas Rencana Gagalkan Pemilu," *Jawa Pos*, November 4, 2023, https://www.jawapos.com/nasional/013221405/lewat-grup-wa-muslim-united-42-teroris-sebar-materi-isis-bahas-rencana-gagalkan-pemilu. Also supported by data in the iKhub Outlook, which listed WhatsApp ahead of Telegram for most extremist content detected. See BNPT, *i-KHub BNPT: Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism Outlook 2024*.

[14] Jonathan Suseno Sarwono, "CaliphateTok: How Islamic State (IS) Leverages Social Media in Indonesia and the Power of Counter-Narratives," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, November 28, 2024, https://gnet-research.org/2024/11/28/caliphatetok-how-islamic-state-is-leverages-social-media-in-indonesia-and-the-power-of-counter-narratives/.

[15] See BNPT, *i-KHub BNPT: Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism Outlook 2024*.

[16] Rocket.Chat and Element observations, February 2025. Indonesian pro-IS translation outfit Tamkin Media has a presence on both platforms, which are run off private servers by global IS supporters. Since late 2018, these platforms have been primarily used by IS supporters in countries outside Southeast Asia, with a heavy focus on networking elements of the pro-IS unofficial media landscape. See Peter King, "Analysis: Islamic State's Experiments with the Decentralised Web," *BBC Monitoring*, March 22, 2019, https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200paga.

[17] At Tamkin Media Indonesia, Rocket.Chat, February 2025. For an excellent overview of global unofficial IS propaganda outlets' resilience and expansion online, see Moustafa Ayad, "Teenage Terrorists and the Digital Ecosystem of the Islamic State," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 18, No, 2 (2025), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/teenage-terrorists-and-the-digital-ecosystem-of-the-islamic-state/. Ayad estimated this ecosystem contained more than 93 active or "partially defunct unofficial media outlets supporting the Islamic State across platforms, with some a part of alliances as large as 20 groups, and some being launched at the time of this article". Many are redundant and could be considered third-rate propaganda purveyors, producing recycled content with rather poor graphic design or language. Others "command audiences of more than 20,000 on channels solely dedicated to their content".

[18] See examples from TV on Facebook throughout December 2024 and January 2025, including videos of brawls between gangs in Bandung and Jakarta and fashion parades and concerts in Saudi Arabia. It is worth noting that TV's profile banner image is a riff on the Gen Z/Alpha "skibidi toilet" meme, but with a Salafi preacher's head in place of the usual character in the meme. Another prominent memelord, RU/RI features a profile photo of an edited version of a famous meme of Leonardo DiCaprio from the film *Django Unchained*, but with a carton of Indomilk or Ultramilk in place of the shot glass. The profiles themselves then often adopt or become memes within themselves, adding humour and accessibility.

[19] Two prime examples are Winda Permatasari and Ummu Azzam Hurayrah. See Noor Huda Ismail, "Online Radicalisation of the Indonesian Diaspora," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2023), https://rsis.edu.sg/ctta-newsarticle/online-radicalisation-of-the-indonesian-diaspora/. Both are still active on Facebook, although they have set up new accounts and are operating under pseudonyms.

[20] Winda Permatasari, Facebook, October 10, 2024. Winda posted a half-tongue-in-cheek outline of "the advantages of living in a tent", which included "not having to pay electricity, easy to move, easy to repair if it gets ripped, and don't have to pay rent".

Winda Permatasari, Facebook, October 7, 2023. Winda posted a photo of a vegetable and flower garden run by camp residents.

Ummu Azzam Hurayroh, Facebook, August 30, 2023. Azzam posted a photo of a meal of bread with ketchup, mayonnaise and a sprinkling of vegetables, highlighting the simple food they had access to.

[21] Winda Permatasari, Facebook, November 11, 2024. Winda posted an update in the aftermath of the camps being raided by the Kurdish authorities, hoping that God would "one day repay their oppression with an even greater disaster".

[22] For a comprehensive rundown on these extremist charities and others – both IS and anti-IS – see Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, "EXTREMIST CHARITIES AND TERRORIST FUND-RAISING IN INDONESIA," *IPAC Report*, No. 76 (2022), https://understandingconflict.org/en/publications/extremist-charities-and-terrorist-fund-raising-in-indonesia.

[23] Bangun Rumah Akhirat, Facebook, January 1, 2025, and Bazam Support, Telegram, December 2024. In December 2024, GSAU reported it had spent around AUD$2,600 on programmes for the month. Baitul Maal al Itizam (Bazam) reported receiving over AUD$1,000 in donations for a mosque renovation. Other charities like Muhzatul Ummah, Anfiqu Center and Baitul Mal As Sunnah also reported spending several hundred dollars each in donations and for in-kind support programmes that month.

[24] Amarnath Amarasingam, "What Twitter Really Means for Islamic State Supporters," *War on the Rocks*, December 30, 2015, https://warontherocks.com/2015/12/what-twitter-really-means-for-islamic-state-supporters/. Amarasingam's comments about the pro-IS community on Twitter in 2015 still apply to the community today: "They also cared for each other, celebrated the birth of children, respected online boundaries of marriage and gender ("I'm married, no DMs from brothers please"), developed relationships and got married, expressed condolences at the loss of a fighter, shared news, and served as a support group for youth who are undergoing hardship thousands of miles away. Everything we do in our community, on and offline, they did as well."

[25] Facebook observations of MR's account, February 2025. Reposting or being tagged in posts by propagandists like EA, who frequently uploads IS releases on attacks and pages from the *al-Naba* editorial.

[26] Facebook observations of Winda Permatasari's account, February 2025.

[27] AQ, Facebook, January 7, 2025. In a post about deceased pro-IS foreign fighters and social media propagandists, two purported former prison inmates, "BA" and "AH", crossed paths and realised they had both served time in Gunung Sindur Prison in Bogor, West Java.

[28] AQ, Facebook, February 19, 2025. AQ complained that she was still unable to use Facebook's livestreaming feature after being placed on restrictions by "Mark" (Zuckerberg].

[29] At least 19 IS supporters were arrested in 2024.

[30] TV, Facebook, February 1, 2025. TV posted a video presenting Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) members as "true idiots" for believing that a well in Indonesia was linked to the Zam-Zam wellspring in Saudi Arabia. These kinds of posts are common for TV and other IS supporters and often include criticism of NU leaders and its paramilitary organisation, Banser.

[31] Telegram observations, February 2025.

[32] Telegram, July 3, 2024. IS supporters lambasted JI members' decision to disband the organisation in June 2024, saying that it was a result of members giving up on the struggle and failing to conduct attacks.

[33] UA, Facebook, December 29, 2024. Since December 2024, IS supporters have been particularly focused on attacking HTS and Syria's de-facto leader Ahmad al Sharaa as "idolators" for failing to implement Islamic law and offering some protection to minority religious groups since seizing power in Damascus.

[34] TV, Facebook, October 28, 2024. TV posted a meme declaring that the Prophet Muhammad had ordered Muslims to kill and that "Islam is the religion of conquerors".

[35] Facebook observations, February 2025. Telegram observations, 2025. There are few propagandist accounts on major public platforms, although their content can remain online for weeks after being initially posted. Memelords dominate on Facebook, and the vast majority of their content is not official.

[36] Facebook observations, February 2025. NB II presents a good example of this. This Facebook account largely posts religious content, including stories of the Prophet Muhammad from official Islamic sources and the importance of prayer. Occasionally, it does post more IS-leaning content about the importance of fighting against infidels and striving to implement Islamic law, or religious content with IS overtones, such as a post about the importance of providing children with an Islamic education as a bulwark against Western influence, featuring a still from an official IS propaganda video. The account also serves as a hub for various other accounts, such as RP, SDUT and SK, which tag NB II in their own posts, which are also mostly religious in character but with some IS overtones.

[37] Ali Abdullah Wibisono et al., "Indonesia's Handling of Terrorists' Cyber Activities: How Repressive Measures Still Fall Short," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2024), https://journals.sagepub.com/eprint/H5ABQWTWUVNPXJCQ8DZH/full.

[38] Noor Huda Ismail, "The Grievance Hunters: Extremists Exploit Crises to Bolster Their Image," *RSIS Commentary*, No. 57 (2025), https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/the-grievance-hunters-extremists-exploit-crises-to-bolster-their-image/. Huda provides excellent examples of how extremists, including IS supporters, are also harnessing very local issues and responses to natural disasters in an attempt to gain public sympathy.

[39] MR, Facebook, January 24, 2025. Telegram, January 25, 2025.

[40] AQ, Facebook, January, 2025.

[41] MR, Facebook, February 9, 2025. MR posted a video of a hearing on vaccines in the United States (US), where a woman provided testimony that vaccines were linked to autism. MR, Facebook, January 26, 2025. MR posted a video about a conspiracy theory suggesting vaccines were an attempt to rewire people's DNA as part of a plot by global elites, including Donald Trump. In an interesting separate case, one IS supporter came across the pro-IS community on social media by way of discussions around the Flat Earth Society. See Arif Budi

Setyawan, "Kisah Mahasiswa Mengalami Radikalisasi Online di Masa Pandemi (2-Habis)", *Ruangobrol.id*, November 6, 2023, https://ruangobrol.id/2023/11/06/fenomena/kisah-mahasiswa-mengalami-radikalisasi-online-di-masa-pandemi-2-habis/.

[42] TV/TR, Facebook, August 22, 2024. A commenter on the post said, "This should be the right moment for the mujahidin to take advantage of the situation and overthrow the oppressors (*thogut*)."

[43] TV/TR, Facebook, August 22, 2024. "Jakarta is in Chaos! Hopefully it becomes like Bangladesh!" AQ, Facebook, February 19, 2025. As another example, AQ and her followers discussed student protests as part of the "Dark Indonesia" (Indonesia Gelap) movement in February demonstrating against government budget efficiency measures. Like the August 2024 protests, IS supporters hoped there would be "chaos" but also saw that both pro- and anti-government forces were essentially secular in their outlook.

[44] EA, Facebook, February 6, 2025. EA posted a video on Gazans returning to their destroyed homes.

[45] PAI reposted on AL, Facebook, January 26, 2025. Photo of a blindfolded Palestinian teenager surrounded by Israeli soldiers, with the accompanying message: "Oh lions of Tauhid in Palestine, weapons are weapons, show them the anger of the descendants of the Companions of the Prophet."

[46] TV/TR, Facebook, August 22, 2024. A comment on the post: "Among the police and students there are provocateurs. We should just watch it all because they are both Pancasila lovers."

[47] DS, Facebook, October 19, 2024. In a particularly vivid post, DS uploaded an image of former Hamas military commander Yahya Sinwar being "greeted" in the fiery pits of hell alongside other Hamas and Iranian figures.

[48] At least up until 2022, recruitment through purely online channels remained a rarity. See Wibisono et al., "Indonesia's Handling of Terrorists' Cyber Activities."

[49] Munira Mustaffa, "The May 2024 Ulu Tiram Attack: Islamic State Extremism, Family Radicalization, Doomsday Beliefs, and Off-the-Grid Survivalism in Malaysia," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2025), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-may-2024-ulu-tiram-attack-islamic-state-extremism-family-radicalization-doomsday-beliefs-and-off-the-grid-survivalism-in-malaysia/. Mustaffa's detailed account of Radin Luqman's radicalisation serves as an example of how some lone-actor attacks are in fact heavily shaped by small, closed networks – in this case Luqman's family circle. The internet also played a role in providing access to the thoughts of Indonesia's pre-eminent pro-IS preacher Aman Abdurrahman, whose writings deeply influenced the family patriarch's outlook.

[50] Ines von Behr et al., *Radicalisation in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation,2013), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR453.html.

[51] Alistair Reed et al., "Radical Filter Bubbles: Social Media Personalisation Algorithms and Extremist Content," *Royal United Services Institute*, July 26, 2019, https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/radical-filter-bubbles-social-media-personalisation-algorithms-and-extremist-content.

[52] Jaclyn Diaz, "The Attack in New Orleans Reveals ISIS' Influence Lingers, Experts Say," *NPR*, January 3, 2025, https://www.npr.org/2025/01/03/nx-s1-5246002/isis-influence-new-orleans-attack.

[53] Arie W. Kruglanski et al., *The Three Pillars of Radicalization: Needs, Narratives, and Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-three-pillars-of-radicalization-9780190851125?cc=id&lang=en&.

[54] Noor Huda Ismail, "Online Radicalisation: How Social Media, Global Conflicts, and Religious Content Create Distorted Narratives," *RSIS Commentary*, No. 7 (2025), https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/online-radicalisation-how-social-media-global-conflicts-and-religious-content-create-distorted-narratives/.

[55] "Mulyadi Terduga Teroris Penyerang Polisi Sering Nonton Video ISIS di Rumah Kos Temannya," *Tribun News*, July 4, 2017, https://makassar.tribunnews.com/2017/07/04/mulyadi-terduga-teroris-penyerang-polisi-sering-nonton-video-isis-di-rumah-kos-temannya?page=all.

[56] A Dadan Muhanda, "Rangkuman 5 Fakta Zakiah Aini, Tidak Sendirian Menyerang Mabes Polri," *Ayo Cirebon*, April 3, 2021, https://www.ayocirebon.com/explore/pr-94825673/Rangkuman-5-Fakta-Zakiah-Aini-Tidak-Sendirian-Menyerang-Mabes-Polri.

[57] "Anak Muda Rentan Terpapar Radikalisme dan Gerakan Terorisme," *Tempo*, August 6, 2024, https://www.tempo.co/hukum/anak-muda-terorisme-radikalisme-408978.

[58] Internal Security Department, *Singapore Terrorism Threat Assessment Report 2024* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024), https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/press-releases/singapore-terrorism-threat-assessment-report-2024/. "In Singapore, the primary threat driver continues to be online self-radicalisation. 52 self-radicalised individuals (comprising 40 Singaporeans and 12 foreigners) have been dealt with under the Internal Security Act (ISA) since 2015. Youth radicalisation is a particular concern. 13 of the 52 were aged 20 or younger."

[59] Rueben Dass, "The Continued Threat of Online Radicalization in Malaysia," *The Diplomat*, February 11, 2025, https://thediplomat.com/2025/02/the-continued-threat-of-online-radicalization-in-malaysia/.

[60] Telegram observations, February 2025.

[61] Bahrun Naim's infamous handbook contains instructions on how to construct a hydrogen bomb at home.

[62] Triaceton Triperoxide (TATP) is increasingly featuring in local terrorist cells' planning. See "Polisi: Terduga Teroris di Batu Malang Gunakan Bom Bahan TATP," *CNN*, August 1, 2024, https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20240801125931-12-1128039/polisi-terduga-teroris-di-batu-malang-gunakan-bom-bahan-tatp. Materials are easy to obtain, though producing a stable explosive can be difficult for a novice bomb-maker. Still, successful use of TATP had devastating impacts in the Manchester (2017), Brussels (2016) and Paris (2015) attacks. See Ben Doherty, "Manchester Bomb Used Same Explosive as Paris and Brussels Attacks, Says US lawmaker," *The Guardian*, May 25, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/may/25/manchester-bomb-same-explosive-paris-brussels-attacks-mike-mccaul.

[63] Sales of hunting knives and other related equipment are common on pro-IS social media accounts. Telegram observations, February 2025.

[64] Hamzah Omar Khaled purchased bomb-making materials online. See Rika Pangesti, "Ngeri! Pelajar di Malang Terduga Teroris Rakit Bom di Rumah dan Beli Bahan Peledak Lewat Online Pakai Uang Jajan Sendiri," *TV One News*, August 4, 2024, https://www.tvonenews.com/berita/nasional/233610-ngeri-pelajar-di-malang-terduga-teroris-rakit-bom-di-rumah-dan-beli-bahan-peledak-lewat-online-pakai-uang-jajan-sendiri.

[65] IS supporter Dananjaya Erbening used popular online marketplaces Shopee and Tokopedia to source firearms. See Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja, "Indonesian Police Uncover Illegal Sales of Firearms on Popular E-Commerce Platforms," *The Straits Times*, November 15, 2024, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesian-police-uncover-illegal-sales-of-firearms-on-popular-e-commerce-platforms.

[66] Verdict of Nur Kholis Bin Sabar Alm alias Abu Yusha, East Jakarta District Court, 2024, No. 510/Pid.Sus/2024/PN Jkt.Tim.

[67] AA, Facebook, September 16, 2025. AA used Google Lens to translate an English-language post criticising Al-Qaeda (AQ) over alleged hypocrisy in Somalia.

[68] Gabriel Weimann et al., "Generating Terror: The Risks of Generative AI Exploitation," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2024), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/generating-terror-the-risks-of-generative-ai-exploitation/.

[69] Aaron Zelin, "A Globally Integrated Islamic State," *War on the Rocks*, July 15, 2024, https://warontherocks.com/2024/07/a-globally-integrated-islamic-state/.

[70] Rocket.Chat observations, February 2025. Indonesian pro-IS translation house Tamkin Indonesia is operated out of the pro-IS Tech Haven server on Rocket.Chat, which also hosts other member organisations of the pro-IS Fursan al Tarjuma translation collective worldwide.

[71] Arlina Arshad, "Indonesian Police Nab Suspected Terrorists Plotting to Disrupt February 2024 Elections," *The Straits Times*, November 14, 2024, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/indonesia-says-arrests-militants-suspected-of-plotting-to-disrupt-election. Court documents from members of the cell highlight that they were largely brought together and radicalised through offline study sessions and religious seminars. The cell leader, Abu Umar, had encouraged members of the network to stay off social media and other electronic communications for security purposes. Nonetheless, members created a WhatsApp chat group, "Muslim United", to communicate with one another. See Verdict of ABDULLAH INDRA KUSUMA ALIAS MUHAMMAD ICHWAN ALIAS ABANG ALIAS ABU UMAR BIN ABDUL AZIS, East Jakarta District Court, 2024, No. 401/Pid.Sus/2024/PN Jkt.Tim. There have been other instances of quite complex pro-IS cells forming primarily online and stretching across multiple provinces, such as the Muhajirin Anshor Tauhid (MAT) in 2020. See Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, "THE DECLINE OF ISIS IN INDONESIA AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW CELLS," *IPAC Report*, No. 69 (2021), https://understandingconflict.org/en/publications/The-Decline-of-ISIS-in-Indonesia-and-The-Emergence-of-New-Cells.

[72] After much back and forth, it appears BNPT and the People's Representatives Council (DPR) have settled on a budget ceiling of IDR 472 billion for 2025, which is lower than the initially hoped-for budget ceiling of IDR 626 billion. See "BNPT Utamakan Pembentukan Satgas Dan Tim Untuk Siasati Efisiensi," *ANTARA News*, March 6, 2025, https://www.antaranews.com/berita/4693941/bnpt-utamakan-pembentukan-satgas-dan-tim-untuk-siasati-efisiensi.

[73] Public budget figures for D88 are difficult to obtain, but in 2022, D88 received a budget ceiling of IDR 1.5 trillion. See Yustinus Paat, "DPR Sepakati Anggaran Densus 88 Antiteror 2022 Rp 1,5 Triliun," *Investor.ID*, March 21, 2022, https://investor.id/national/287616/dpr-sepakati-anggaran-densus-88-antiteror-2022-rp-15-triliun.
In February 2025, the government announced the Indonesian National Police's overall budget would be reduced from around IDR 126 trillion to around IDR 100 trillion. See Tria Sutrisna and Dani Prabowo, "Anggaran Polri Dipangkas Rp 20,5 Triliun, tapi Belanja Pegawai Tak Berkurang," *Kompas*, February 12, 2025, https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2025/02/12/13404041/anggaran-polri-dipangkas-rp-205-triliun-tapi-belanja-pegawai-tak-berkurang.

[74] Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah, "Indonesia Prepares to Bring Ex-ISIS Families Home," *East Asia Forum*, December 28, 2024, https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/12/28/indonesia-prepares-to-bring-ex-isis-families-home/.

[75] Dini Suciatiningrum, "Kemensos Siap Rehab 8 Ribu Mantan Anggota Jamaah Islamiyah," *IDN Times*, January 22, 2025, https://www.idntimes.com/news/indonesia/dini-suciatiningrum/kemensos-siap-rehab-8-ribu-mantan-anggota-jamaah-islamiyah.

[76] See the arrests of RIJAL alias ABU MORGAN AL SOMALIA Bin MEMET and ANDRI MOHAMAD MAULANA alias ANDRI MAULANA alias ANTON bin RAHIM in 2024. Both were reported by the police's social media monitors.

[77] Engagement has been ongoing since the mid-2010s. See Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, "INDONESIA AND THE TECH GIANTS VS ISIS SUPPORTERS: COMBATING VIOLENT EXTREMISM ONLINE," *IPAC Report*, No. 48 (2018), https://understandingconflict.org/en/publications/Indonesia-and-the-Tech-Giants-vs-ISIS-Supporters.

[78] Joel Kaplan, "More Speech and Fewer Mistakes," *Meta*, January 7, 2025, https://about.fb.com/news/2025/01/meta-more-speech-fewer-mistakes/.

[79] Liv McMahon et al., "Facebook and Instagram Get Rid of Fact Checkers," *BBC News*, January 8, 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly74mpy8klo.

[80] EA, Facebook, February 4, 2025. EA posted an update of an IS militant attack in Mozambique, including four photos. In the comments, she posted an additional photo. One commenter asked why "posts with the black flag" were not being banned like they were in 2017. EA said two other photos had been banned, but as of a week after

the original post, five photos still remained, including at least two clearly depicting militants displaying IS' flag and firing weapons.

[81] There is now plenty of precedent for authorities conducting interventions with members of terrorist networks without necessarily pressing charges against them, though much of this has been related to JI members, who likely pose less of an immediate risk of violence. See Arif Budi Setyawan, "Mengawal Proses Lepas Baiat Anggota Jamaah Islamiyah (2)," *Ruangobrol.id*, February 28, 2023, https://ruangobrol.id/2023/02/28/ulasan-mengawal-proses-lepas-baiat-anggota-jamaah-islamiyah-2/. Noor Huda Ismail's suggestions for Singapore also apply in the Indonesian context. See Noor Huda Ismail, "Radicalisation in the Digital Age," *RSIS Commentary*, No. 30 (2025), https://rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CO25030.pdf.

[82] Chaula Rininta Anindya, "An Indonesian Way of P/CVE and Interpreting the Whole-of-Society Approach: Lessons from Civil Society Organisations," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2024), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/18335330.2024.2326439.

[83] Haris Fatwa, "Menelisik Penanggulangan Terorisme di Zaman Efisiensi," *Islami.co*, February 23, 2025, https://islami.co/menelisik-penanggulangan-terorisme-di-zaman-efisiensi/. Besides BNPT's cuts, the US government's freeze on foreign aid will likely have an impact over time. USAID had previously funded large-scale programmes promoting tolerance, such as the Harmoni programme, which ran from 2019-2024. See Umelto Labetubun and Shashi Jayakumar, "US Aid Cut Will Undermine Indonesia's Counterterrorism Efforts," *The Jakarta Post*, February 28, 2025, https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2025/02/28/us-aid-cut-will-undermine-indonesias-counterterrorism-efforts.html.

[84] Lydia Wilson, "Gone to Waste: The 'CVE' Industry After 9/11," *New Lines Magazine*, September 10, 2021, https://newlinesmag.com/argument/understanding-the-lure-of-islamism-is-more-complex-than-the-experts-would-have-you-believe/. "I have quickly sketched what we know about the drivers of violent extremism, arguing that there's nothing special about it; the very same factors of social marginalization and humiliation, a sense of grievance and injustice, and a lack of hope in the future all feed many other social and personal ills from petty crime to alcoholism to suicide. I suggested that we quit the disastrous CVE approach to focus on making our societies more inclusive and hopeful, thereby addressing many social problems at once, and simultaneously avoiding the stigma of accusing communities of potential terrorism." Kate Grealy, "Challenges to Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia," *New Mandala*, March 7, 2019, https://www.newmandala.org/the-problems-of-countering-violent-extremism-in-indonesia/. "Another concern that I have found is around the CVE-isation of violence prevention, development and aid sectors. This is particularly a dilemma for CSO workers, who increasingly design and apply for CVE programs because there is more funding in CVE in international aid."

[85] Alastair Reed, Andrew Glazzard and Samantha Treacy, "Do CVE Counter-Messaging Campaigns Work?" *Vox*, March 12, 2025, https://voxpol.eu/does-cve-counter-messaging-campaigns-work/; Eric Rosand and Emily Winterbotham, "Do Counter-Narratives Actually Reduce Violent Extremism?" *The Brookings Institution*, March 20, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-counter-narratives-actually-reduce-violent-extremism/.

[86] BNPT's i-KHub (https://ikhub.id/) and the civil society organisation (CSO)-run Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Hub (https://khub.id) have a wealth of modules, booklets and videos for use by activists. Peace Generation (https://peacegen.id/en/program/default) has taken a particularly innovative approach to public awareness campaigns through the use of board games.

[87] There are already some pioneering actors in this space, particularly the youth-oriented PeaceGen led by Irfan Amalee, who for years has been pushing CSOs to develop "'social entrepreneurship" to ensure consistent funding streams without reliance on state or international donors. See Irfan Amali, "Rethinking Civil Society Funding: Embracing the Long Tail Strategy," *LinkedIn*, March 6, 2025, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/irfanamalee_rethinking-civil-society-funding-embracing-activity-7303190508934217729-xdRO. Some have also suggested mass organisations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah should take on some of the burden of funding PVE programmes. See Haris Fatwa, "Menelisik Penanggulangan Terorisme di Zaman Efisiensi," *Islami.co*, February 23, 2025, https://islami.co/menelisik-penanggulangan-terorisme-di-zaman-efisiensi/.

From *Jihad Tanzim* to *Jihad Fardiyah:* The Renewed Emphasis on Individual Jihad among Pro-IS Militants in Indonesia

Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah and Nurrisha Ismail

While the threat of pro-Islamic State (IS) groups in Indonesia has largely diminished following widespread leadership arrests in 2018, new pro-IS cells have continued to emerge in recent years. These cells exist as small operations comprising one to five individuals, a noticeable shift from the large-scale networks of pro-IS operations in the past. The decision to operate as small cells is not arbitrary – it is rooted in the doctrine of jihad fardiyah (individual jihad), a competing doctrine with jihad tanzim (organised jihad) which prioritises organisation-building. By examining both doctrines, we can gain a clearer understanding of pro-IS groups' goals and their potential future trajectory. This article applies the jihad tanzim and jihad fardiyah framework to Indonesian pro-IS supporters over the years, including recent key developments. Moving forward, the deliberate and persistent use of jihad fardiyah will likely rise, driven by IS central's increased emphasis on individual attacks and prevailing environmental pressures. In Indonesia, a hybridised approach is likely to emerge in the form of large pro-IS networks consisting of small, insulated cells.

Introduction

Islamist terror groups over time have typically shuttled between two key schools of thought, *jihad tanzim* and *jihad fardiyah,* depending on subjective organisational goals, capabilities, and guiding ideology. *Jihad fardiyah*[1] refers to the practice of individual jihad. The idea of *jihad fardiyah* was proposed by Al-Qaeda (AQ) ideologues Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Qatada al-Filistini. Al-Suri campaigned for decentralised, "non-hierarchical networks", as he believed organisations restricted the growth of the jihadi movement.[2] Similarly, al-Filistini argued that individual jihad is obligatory for all Muslims, and "did not require the permission of their organisation".[3] Both believe that jihad goals are best achieved through *qital nikayah* (repeated strikes to weaken the enemy),[4] achieved more easily through isolated individual cells. Though the size of cells is never explicitly stated, they usually range from one to five members in practice.

In *jihad fardiyah*, the role of central leadership, including the *amir* (leader) of the movement, is diminished. The central leadership's role is only to provide a "common aim, the common name, a programme of beliefs and a method of education".[5] Abu Musab al-Suri described this movement as "*nizam, la tanzim",* meaning system, not organisation,[6] referring to the non-necessity of a top-down chain of command. The *jihad fardiyah* doctrine for "leaderless resistance" was widely disseminated through al-Suri's 2004 "Call for Worldwide Islamic Resistance" manifesto,[7] and was consistently promoted through AQ's *Inspire* magazine after al-Suri's arrest in 2005.[8] Later, the *jihad fardiyah* doctrine was also adopted by influential IS ideologues such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi,[9] who laid the foundation for Al Qaeda in Iraq and subsequently, the birth of IS.[10]

In contrast to *jihad fardiyah*, some militants were proponents of *jihad tanzim* (organised jihad), which typically takes the form of *qital tamkin* i.e. seizing territory to build a secure base from which the group can apply Islamic law.[11] Because the goal is to control a territory from which the group can govern, attacks are thus planned systematically to bolster the overarching goal of gaining territory and support, to maintain the organisation's longevity.

From the explanation above, the differences between *jihad fardiyah* and *jihad tanzim* can be seen in: (1) command structure, that is, either a hierarchical chain of command or decentralised cell network; (2) method and frequency of attacks; (3) size of cells; and (4) importance of seizing territory. Choosing one doctrine over the other impacts the movement's priority and subsequent activities. In the Indonesian context, proclivity for *jihad tanzim* or *jihad fardiyah* has consistently fluctuated. At various junctures, either camp would emerge as the preferred modality of jihad, "in response to environmental pressures" and circumstantial perceptions.[12]

The failure of the Aceh militant training camp experiment in 2010 is a distinct example of how Indonesian pro-IS supporters have oscillated between *jihad tanzim* and *jihad fardiyah* based on the practical aspects of feasibility and continued survival. The camp, originally initiated by former Bali bomber, Dulmatin, sought to bring together militants from disparate schools of *jihad tanzim* and *fardiyah* to collectively calibrate a 'frontal' style of jihad against government forces.[13] He was particularly interested in claiming secure parcels of territory to govern from, with the intention of waging war against the government and implementing Islamic law.

Ultimately, the camp dissolved in February 2010 following stringent counterterrorism operations, which included the arrest of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and other senior JAT leaders, as well as the decimation of Ring Banten[14], a group that was responsible for the bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta in 2004.[15] *Jihad fardiyah* was consequently upheld as the ideal path forward within Indonesia's jihadi sphere in order to better evade detection and circumvent group-related arrests.[16] The concept was also used as a justification by factions that wanted to carry out attacks despite their wider organisation's stance against attacks in Indonesia – the prominent militant Noordin M. Top often used *jihad fardiyah* as a justification for continuously carrying out attacks without Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)'s leadership approval.[17]

The brief discussion above illustrates how scholars have examined the unfolding of the *jihad fardiyah* vs *jihad tanzim* dilemma among Islamist groups in the past. However, there has been little systematic application of the framework to Indonesian IS supporters, particularly in recent years.

Doctrinal Differences among Indonesian IS Supporters

Like other terror groups, pro-IS militants in Indonesia have also internally debated the merits of organised and individual jihad. While pro-IS groups can be characteristically defined by their (1) swearing of allegiance (*baiat)* to former IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi; (2) strong anti-government stance; (3) pro-*takfiri*[18] ideology; and (4) approval of conducting violent attacks within Indonesia, there are notable differences in the preferred modality to support Baghdadi's caliphate project.

The largest pro-IS coalition, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), was first established in 2015. JAD initially adhered to the *jihad tanzim* doctrine, replicating the hierarchical structure of earlier organisations.[19] JAD's chief ideologue, Aman Abdurrahman, had championed *jihad tanzim* since 2005, believing that it is important to seize territories through armed struggle in order to establish Islamic governance.[20] JAD was responsible for some of the most brutal attacks in Indonesian history, including the Surabaya church bombings in May 2018 which killed 15 civilians, the August 2018 police shooting in Cirebon which caused two fatalities, and the Jakarta Sarinah bombing in January 2016 which killed five. However, despite proclaiming the importance of seizing territory to establish governance, JAD never accomplished this. After 2018, JAD's organisational structure largely dissolved due to strong police action, and the group functioned more as a loose network of cells.[21]

Another pro-*jihad tanzim* IS group in Indonesia, Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), got notably closer to governing territory. Reports of member arrests reveal that MIT's organisational structure included individuals tasked with recruitment, military training, weapons and logistics.[22] Santoso,

the leader of MIT, had attempted to establish a *qoidah aminah* (secure base) multiple times in various areas in Poso,[23] ultimately taking control over the area of Mount Biru, Central Sulawesi by 2016 where it regularly terrorised the local community to obtain basic goods.[24] This control was short-lived as the Indonesian police and military neutralised Santoso in July 2016.[25] Nevertheless, MIT maintained a degree of resilience and continued active attacks until 2021.[26]

Meanwhile, other pro-IS militants in Indonesia have espoused *jihad fardiyah*, valuing a higher frequency of attacks over organised movement. The biggest supporter of *jihad fardiyah* was the now-deceased Bahrun Naim, who opposed JAD's territorial goals, believing that IS only gave two orders: "migrate to Syria or wage war".[27] These instructions did not include establishing an organisation.[28] Bahrun thus strongly supported autonomous cells, believing they were best for conducting attacks.[29] Ultimately, none of the cells linked to Bahrun succeeded in attacking as all were preventively arrested by police. Regardless, Bahrun's legacy of encouraging individual attacks and empowering individual action, through his various manuals on creating explosives, remains.[30]

Many similar cells also sprouted between 2018 and 2019, including the Lion of Allah, Ansharul Kholaqoh and the Sibolga cell.[31] These unaffiliated cells included individuals who were either rejected from joining JAD – due to a perceived lack of commitment – or were never interested in JAD at all, deeming the organisation "arrogant and elitist".[32] Additionally, while JAD initially functioned as a more robust *jihad tanzim*-style organisation, it has since shifted into a more *jihad fardiyah* style of a decentralised network, particularly after mass arrests in 2018. Once the organisation became leaderless, many local branches functioned more autonomously with most cells conducting attacks independently.[33]

Recent Indonesian Pro-IS Activity

The authors' review of IS activity in 2024 indicates that *jihad fardiyah* has dominated as the preferred doctrine among IS supporters. Concerted analysis of recent pro-IS offline and online activities points to the emergence of a hybridised doctrine of *jihad tanzim* and *jihad fardiyah*, operationalised through large networks consisting of small, insulated cells.

Over 40% of pro-IS militants arrested in 2024 were not affiliated with any specific organisation in Indonesia and were part of either a one-person or two-person cell. Despite the small size, these cells were actively manufacturing improvised explosive devices (IEDs). One individual, HOK, plotted a suicide bombing attack at two worship houses in Malang, East Java.[34] Another individual, AAR, was making explosives while masquerading as a porridge seller in Karawang, West Java.[35] A duo based in West Jakarta, known as RJ and AM, were arrested after police found evidence of explosive materials, an airsoft gun, and IS paraphernalia.[36] Finally, a pro-IS militant by the initials of ER had threatened to bomb Pope Francis' visit to Istiqlal Mosque in September 2024.[37]

While some of the other pro-IS supporters arrested this past year were affiliated with JAD, the largest cell only consisted of three individuals: BI, ST, and SQ.[38] The suspects were reportedly plotting an attack as part of an East Java-based JAD cell and had prepared 20 sharp weapons.[39] This is in stark contrast with past JAD related arrests which uncovered large cells. For example, after the JAD-linked suicide bombing in Makassar in 2021, police arrested 18 suspected JAD members in Makassar in total.[40] Similarly, in 2019 the Medan police station bombing uncovered a JAD cell consisting of 23 people,[41] while another 11-member JAD cell was arrested for plotting to bomb election announcement venues.[42]

Even so, the arrests of some pro-IS suspects in 2024 indicated there may still be efforts at building organisations, as police found evidence of more structured outreach, recruitment and training. LHM, a co-founder of a Bima JAD cell who was arrested in 2024, frequently organised *halaqoh* (Quranic study) meetings and physical training sessions for members in Bima, West Sumbawa, and

Lombok.[43] LHM also delivered Friday sermons to the public,[44] indicating an interest in wider recruitment to grow the organisation. His Bima JAD cell included another individual who was arrested in 2024,[45] initialled MW[46], who gave lectures on IS and the pro-IS book "Seri Materi Tauhid",[47] and trained JAD cadres.[48]

Similarly, the arrests of three MIT members recently indicate that remnants of the organisation may still be functioning, despite previous announcements from the police that the group had been eradicated in 2022 following the death of its last remaining member.[49] Two of the MIT members were arrested in January 2025 in Bailo, Central Sulawesi, while the third was discovered to be an earlier-arrested JAD Bima member, MW.[50] Taken together, these arrests, albeit a small sample, point to the possible presence of members who may want to rebuild MIT or JAD organisationally. However, considering the current weaknesses of both organisations, it is unlikely that this will happen soon.

Moving forward, pro-IS organisations could seek to adhere to an amalgamation of *jihad tanzim* and *jihad fardiyah* doctrines in the form of large networks consisting of small, insulated cells. This is evident in the Abu Oemar group discovered in 2023. Over 42 members of this JAD and Negara Islam Indonesia (NII)-affiliated group were arrested across West Java, Jakarta, and Central Sulawesi.[51] While Abu Oemar grew his quasi-organisation by recruiting former terrorists and creating functional cell divisions, he maintained limited contact with the cells until a plotted attack was imminent in order to avoid police detection.[52] Pertinently, while some pro-IS suspects maintain an interest in operating a large-style network, the strategic advantages of organising as small insulated cells persist in the current terrorism landscape.

The offline activities of pro-IS cells have also been complemented by online support for *jihad fardiyah* in Indonesia. For instance, a key Indonesian pro-IS media centre has drawn from central IS materials, disseminated via an encrypted chat platform, and repurposed propaganda collaterals to promulgate the narrative that "soldiers of the Islamic State" should strengthen their attacks "one by one" and fight in the way of God "against the apostates". They also assert that the mujahideen should pursue jihad even if they find themselves alone in their willingness to do so, regardless of whether others change their minds or retreat.

Calls for lone actors to take up arms have also remained salient within the Indonesian pro-IS ecosystem on Facebook. For instance, in a post titled "Lone Wolf" published in December 2024, one supporter exhorted followers to kill infidels where they find them – a call where "few are chosen by God" and which "can only be performed by [them]". Citing Abu Musab al-Suri's manifesto, the post contends that believing men have no excuse to avoid jihad and advises supporters to learn more about how "lone wolves" should launch and claim attacks.

At the same time, despite appeals to individuals to engage in jihad in their own capacity, pro-IS online discourse in Indonesia, as drawn from IS central, continues to reiterate the need to "invite other believers" and "live among your brothers" in the "arena of jihad". Assessed holistically, current online narratives indicate that Indonesian pro-IS networks are likely to adhere to a hybridised doctrine of *jihad tanzim* and *fardiyah* in the interest of operational survival.

Why Jihad Fardiyah?

It should be acknowledged at this juncture that radical organisations have significantly weakened in Indonesia; thus, the individual cells which subscribe to *jihad fardiyah* have become more visible even though the frequency of small cell operations may not have changed over the years. That said, the prevalence of *jihad fardiyah* in recent pro-IS activity in Indonesia can be attributed to three factors: Indonesia's strong counter terrorism regime, global IS influence, and the greater sense of accomplishment.

After legislative changes in 2018, Indonesian CT force Special Detachment (*Densus*) 88 gained extensive powers to conduct pre-emptive arrests. This led to mass arrests of JAD leaders, many of whom provided funding, strategic guidance, and logistical support for cells. The strong policing regime continues presently, effectively curtailing militant operations due to the threat of detection and arrest. In such a restricted environment, more small autonomous cells have emerged, in which there is little to no communication between discrete cells and plots involve fewer individuals. However, plots are inevitably rudimentary as a result. For example, HOK's plot to conduct two suicide bombings by himself was easily detected by police surveillance.

Globally, the pro-IS community has also encouraged *jihad fardiyah.* Besides the Indonesian online posts derived from IS central, global IS supporters have also maintained an enduring interest in promoting "lone wolf" operations. On an encrypted chat platform, international pro-IS users were observed requesting dedicated channels for "lone wolf" content to centralise knowledge of weapons making, operational training, and guidance. Other users have also offered general guidelines for potential lone actor militants, such as contributing ideas for suitable target locations, ideal attack methods to maximise fatalities, and instructions on assembling improvised explosives.[53]

Finally, *jihad fardiyah* has a specific appeal to individuals who are looking to obtain superior militant roles in jihad. Instead of enduring rigorous selection processes and training prior to being offered to participate in an attack plot, *jihad fardiyah* allows individuals to reach the stage of combatant faster. For many Indonesians vulnerable to radicalism, this was the appeal of joining terrorist movements – they believed that *qital* (war) is the "most noble form of worship apart from recognising the oneness of God".[54] In addition, some individuals grow dissatisfied with an organisation's slow progress in establishing the caliphate. In fact, this was the reason why numerous JAD members chose to leave the organisation and form independent cells in 2015.[55]

Countering Jihad Fardiyah

The prevalence of individual jihad, as opposed to organised jihad, necessitates the targeted adoption and implementation of appropriate CT strategies. Two key challenges arise from the escalation of *jihad fardiyah*: (1) less visible recruitment and unpredictable operations; and (2) faster regeneration of cells.

Firstly, with *jihad fardiyah* comes less visible recruitment and operations. In the past, many terrorist supporters were produced from repeated in-person interactions with extremist thought-leaders through either formal settings like *pesantren* or informal meetings like *halaqoh.* However, such in-person meetings have become increasingly difficult due to a restrictive CT regime. Instead, individuals wishing to learn about jihad have turned to the online sphere. Many of the non-affiliated pro-IS militants arrested this past year were radicalised through social media and planned their attacks from terror manuals available online.[56] Since there is no oversight or discipline from a leader, these individuals are more likely to "go rogue" in planning their own individual attacks.

Secondly, the regeneration of cells and plots is significantly quicker. Due to the nature of the movement being leaderless, targeting the leaders of movements in CT operations will be less effective. *Jihad fardiyah* cells are purposefully designed to be rudimentary so that they can be mobilised and replaced easily.

Since the security challenge has shifted substantially from large networks to individuals and smaller cells, authorities should prioritise early threat detection within the digital sphere. This should be done through consistent online monitoring and the dismantling of contentious extremist ecosystems to curtail pathways to radicalisation. Difficulties in detecting threatening operations in a timely manner will remain a significant concern. As such, national policies that target the

cultivation of safety nets at the family and community levels are vital for countering online influences and inhibiting the likelihood of radicalisation.

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Jemaah Islamiyah's Affiliated Pesantrens: Legacy and Influence After Its Dissolution

Noor Huda Ismail

The formal dissolution of the regional terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in mid-2024 does not mark the end of terrorism in Indonesia. Rather, the development signals the beginning of a new phase in the evolving transformation of jihadist networks in the country. Going forward, the organisation's ideology will likely undergo a metamorphosis, adapting to changing circumstances and continuing to spread through various channels, particularly its network of Islamic boarding schools and the exploitation of digital technology.

Introduction

In December 2024, as Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) made rapid territorial advances in Syria, a video featuring an Indonesian militant celebrating jubilantly was circulated online by the Islamist social media account *Arrahmah.id*. It later emerged the Indonesian militant, believed to be based in Syria, had several years prior studied at the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)-affiliated Al Muttaqin pesantren in Jepara, Central Java. His example, amongst others, exemplifies the role of JI-affiliated pesantrens in advancing global jihad, particularly in the past decade.[1] Since 2013, 66 JI recruits, many from these pesantrens, have sharpened combat skills and strengthened transnational connection ties in Syria.[2]

Pesantrens or Islamic boarding schools hold a special place in the JI ecosystem. While JI rarely owned or directly funded pesantrens, they nevertheless served multiple functions for the organisation. These included allowing JI to exert ideological influence through the placement of JI members as teachers, connecting JI to a support base for potential recruitment, and preparing chosen students for global jihad.[3] Because pesantrens have held such a key role in JI's history, analysing the role of JI-affiliated pesantrens – post-JI's dissolution – is instrumental to understanding the group's future trajectory. The challenge going forward is whether counterterrorism efforts should dismantle the ideological foundations of these institutions, or allow them to pursue reform and rehabilitation.

This article explores JI's post-dissolution shift and argues that without systematic reform, the JI pesantren system will likely continue fostering global jihad ideology. It will discuss the challenges of implementing reforms and propose educational strategies to disrupt the proliferation of radical thought. The article will conclude by emphasising the need for comprehensive ideological and educational reforms in the years ahead.

JI's Strategic Shift and the Metamorphosis of Ideology: Influence Beyond 2024

Despite JI's formal dissolution on June 30, 2024,[4] its ideological influence among segments of Indonesian society is likely to endure. This is particularly relevant for the vast network of Islamic boarding schools or Forum Komunikasi Pondok Pesantren (FKPP), that is, JI-affiliated pesantrens[5] around the country. FKPP is a consortium of pesantrens that standardises curricula, trains teachers, and distributes educational resources. It expands organically through alumni networks, primarily via Pesantren Darusy Syahadah in Boyolali, Central Java, with leadership largely JI-affiliated, despite many holding diverse administrator backgrounds. All FKPP pesantrens operate legally, with state intervention limited to cases of clear extremist activity.

The fact that 42 pesantrens sent representatives to attend JI dissolution events in recent months, in which JI seniors communicated the reasons for the organisation's disbandment and participants pledged loyalty to the Indonesian state, underscores the pesantrens' continued recognition of JI's movement and its ideas.[6] Detachment 88 estimates that over 100 schools affiliated with JI are currently operating across Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and West Nusa Tenggara, and educate approximately 18,000 students. This vast network ensures the persistence of JI's ideological legacy and poses ongoing challenges for counterterrorism efforts in the region.[7]

This assessment was echoed by Arif Siswanto, JI's caretaker leader in 2019. In an interview with this author, he described the lingering influence of radical teachings within JI-affiliated pesantrens as a "distant threat" that necessitates a multi-stakeholder approach.[8] He further acknowledged that while JI's leadership may have stepped back from its operational role, the ideological seeds planted within these institutions can take root for generations, reinforcing extremist worldviews long after the group's official demise.

Since its inception, JI has never been a monolithic group, constantly evolving its strategy and persisting through fractures and splinters. Under Para Wijayanto's decade-long leadership until 2019, JI shifted its ideological and operational strategy, adopting the 'Ahlul Qibla' doctrine. The doctrine prohibits violence against fellow Muslims and repositions Indonesia as a logistical and ideological hub for global jihad.[9] JI's stance of not considering the Indonesian government as an enemy of their organisation arguably can be interpreted as not necessarily eliminating threats toward foreigners, particularly non-Muslims, such as diplomats or businesspeople from Western or other non-Muslim countries present in Indonesia.

With senior leaders like Para Wijayanto and Abu Rusydan refraining from condemning international jihad in the group's recent dissolution announcement, this strategic shift is expected to persist, allowing JI to continue facilitating recruitment, resource mobilisation, and propaganda for jihadist efforts in conflict zones such as Syria and Yemen.[10] As such, while the immediate domestic threat may diminish, JI's involvement in transnational jihad – particularly through graduates of its pesantrens connected to Middle Eastern networks – highlights the need for a broader, proactive counterterrorism strategy beyond Indonesia.[11]

The JI Pesantren System: A Trojan Horse for Radicalisation?

Indonesia's pesantrens have long been pillars of religious education, particularly in rural areas.[12] Traditionally, they serve as centres of Islamic learning, where students study under clerics and scholars.[13] At the same time, militant recruitment within these pesantrens predates JI's official establishment in 1992. As early as the mid-1980s, certain teachers, such as Abdurrohim aka Abu Husna in Al Mukmin Pesantren in Ngruki were actively scouting promising students and facilitating their enrolment in military training camps in Pakistan.[14]

This practice laid the foundation for a generation of Indonesian jihadists who later played key roles in JI's militant operations. Following the precedent set by Darul Islam (DI) – which sought to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia – JI embedded its ideological strategy within pesantrens, transforming them into recruitment hubs and ideological training grounds.

Thomas Hegghammer's concept of "Jihadi Culture" helps explain how JI used pesantrens to instil a deep sense of belonging and purpose among young recruits.[15] Historically, these institutions normalised radical views, making them fertile ground for indoctrination.[16] Importantly, radicalisation often took place outside formal classroom settings – through study groups, extracurricular activities, and private mentorship – making it difficult for authorities like the Ministry of Religious Affairs to detect and counter these influences.[17] Even after JI's structural disbandment, the radical subculture it cultivated persists within certain pesantrens, reinforcing extremist narratives.[18]

A common misconception is that JI owns a vast network of Islamic boarding schools. In reality, JI's strength lay not in physical infrastructure, but in the human resources within these institutions. Arif

Siswanto emphasised that the organisation's most valuable assets were its people – students, teachers, and religious scholars who carried its ideology forward, even when JI as an organisation was weakened.[19] Although JI did not directly own or fund most of these pesantrens, it maintained strong informal ties with them, particularly through influential members who served as alumni, teachers, or religious leaders within the pesantren system.[20] This network allowed JI to exert ideological influence without the need to control the institutions outright.

This strategy mirrored the early operational framework of JI, which categorised the broader Muslim population into four distinct groups. The first group, *Multazim*, represented the core of JI's movement, consisting of fully committed *members* who actively participated in its activities and jihadist struggle. The second group, *supporters*, included individuals who were not formal members but sympathised with JI's cause and provided support. The third group, *sympathisers*, consisted of those who aligned with JI's ideological goals but contributed selectively. Finally, the *neutrals* were individuals who neither supported nor opposed JI's ideology.[21]

JI's ultimate goal was to create a neutral societal environment, where individuals were either sympathetic to the cause or passive, neither supporting nor opposing the group's goals.[22] Through its pesantren networks, JI expanded its influence, recruited future members, and sustained its ideological base across generations.

Recruitment Patterns in JI-Affiliated Islamic Boarding Schools

An analysis of court documents on 21 convicted JI recruits reveals a clear pattern of recruitment and ideological indoctrination through JI-affiliated pesantrens such as Al Muttaqien (Jepara), Baitus Salam (Solo), Baitussalam (Semarang), Darusy Syahadah (Boyolali), and Al Muhsin (Metro-Lampung). Individuals like Jundi Al Muhlis, Ahmad Ulul Albab, and Qowie Muqimudin exemplify this connection.

Their origins – Solo, Magetan, Kudus, Sukoharjo, Klaten, and Metro-Lampung – are historically JI strongholds, reinforcing the geographical concentration of radical networks. Born mostly between 1991 and 1998, these recruits were likely exposed to JI ideology during their formative years through pesantren-based education. While the number of JI members directly recruited from affiliated pesantrens has been relatively small compared to those recruited from outside these institutions, the recruitment process nevertheless became more structured under the leadership of Para Wijayanto.

Under Para Wijayanto, JI established the *Multazim bin Multazim* (MBM) programme. The term "*Multazim*," meaning a fully committed JI member, referred to those who actively participated in the organisation's activities. "Bin," meaning "the child of" in Arabic, described a kinship-based recruitment model in which parents indoctrinated and enrolled their children into JI-affiliated pesantrens.[23] This programme required members to enrol at least one son in the family in an FKPP-JI pesantren, ensuring the ideological and operational continuity of JI's mission across generations. This familial cycle reinforced JI's long-term resilience.[24]

Through the MBM programme, students were subjected to a covert selection process to determine their eligibility for recruitment. Only a few were chosen for specialised training, while the majority were sent back to their pesantrens for regular education. After graduation, MBM students underwent further training to assess their commitment, with those who passed sent for specialised training programmes, while others were returned to their pesantrens. Not all MBM students became JI members; this depended on a screening process led by JI-appointed selectors.[25] Despite its covert nature, the MBM programme raised concerns as it allowed JI to infiltrate neutral educational environments and prepare future recruits for global jihad. The pesantrens served as ideological incubators, producing successive generations of individuals aligned with JI's vision of a global Islamic state governed by Sharia law. The scale of this influence was alarming: JI's International Relations Division sent over 120 Indonesian recruits to Syria, some of whom came from JI's MBM programme.[26]

Although the formal dissolution of JI may prevent the organisation from sending its cadres to join the global jihad cause, it cannot eliminate the spirit of jihad fuelled by "the imagined solidarities" of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) – especially if Muslims worldwide continue to face violence and oppression.[27] This sentiment is not limited to JI members alone; it is shared by Islamic activists more broadly, even those outside JI's sphere.

The case of Palestine, widely supported by various Islamic activist groups, demonstrates that the ideology of jihad transcends JI's organisational structure and may continue to inspire future generations of jihadists.[28] A recent *tabligh akbar* (mass preaching) event was held at Al Ikhlas Pesantren in Lamongan, East Java, on March 1, 2024, with the theme "*Jaga Persatuan dan Jangan Lupakan Palestina*" (Preserve Unity and Don't Forget Palestine). Al Ikhlas Pesantren, known for its JI ties, was led by Azhari Dipo Kusumo, who was arrested for his involvement in the 2002 Bali bombings. The event's main speaker, Mas'ud Izzul Mujahid, is also linked to JI-affiliated institutions. This example highlights how JI-affiliated pesantrens use the Palestinian cause to foster solidarity and advance their agenda, potentially radicalising individuals by tapping into Muslim grievances.

Breaking the Cycle: Can Pesantren Be Reformed?

While the government has taken steps to dismantle JI's formal network, the ongoing influence of certain pesantrens complicates efforts to rehabilitate former extremists and prevent future radicalisation. These efforts to intervene in JI-affiliated Islamic boarding schools should focus on promoting a more moderate interpretation of jihad that aligns with the Indonesian context.[29] For instance, since JI is integrated within the Republic of Indonesia, it should refrain from sending cadres to conflict zones abroad or establishing funding networks to support Muslims in those areas. Instead, such matters should be left to the Indonesian government or channelled through official institutions designated by the state.

For this reform to succeed, the government must collaborate closely with Islamic boarding school leaders to design educational reforms that prioritise peacebuilding, tolerance, inclusivity, respect for diversity, and critical engagement with Pancasila as Indonesia's unifying ideology. This could include the development of educational programmes that promote tolerance, pluralism, and democratic values while actively preventing the spread of extremist narratives. A key focus should be ideological shifts, particularly with regard to *Wala' wal Bara'* (Loyalty and Disavowal), which was once used to justify rejecting the Indonesian state as "un-Islamic" but is now being reinterpreted to support coexistence within the national framework.

The reliance on religious prophecies to frame contemporary conflicts by some JI-affiliated pesantrens also needs to be addressed. Extremist groups have long exploited eschatological narratives, such as the *Malhamah Kubra* (the final war), the black banners from Khorasan, and the coming of Imam Mahdi (Messiah), to justify violent jihad and instill a sense of urgency among recruits.[30] These interpretations oversimplify complex geopolitical conflicts, fostering a binary "us versus them" worldview that makes individuals susceptible to radicalisation, particularly global jihad narratives.

Beyond curriculum changes, it is also crucial to foster critical thinking skills and resilience among students, enabling them to recognise and reject extremist propaganda. Additionally, teacher training programmes should be established to help educators detect early signs of radicalisation and equip them with the necessary tools to address ideological extremism in the classroom. This effort must extend beyond directly affiliated JI schools and encompass the wider educational ecosystem to prevent the spread of extremist ideology. Establishing partnerships with civil society organisations and local communities dedicated to promoting an inclusive, non-violent interpretation of Islam is essential to this initiative.

Fighting Ideology with Education: Progress So Far

In response to these concerns, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has initiated significant early intervention efforts. One such initiative was a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) between the Directorate of Early Education and Islamic Boarding Schools and representatives from FKPP-JI, alongside academics and Detachment 88. Held in Jakarta on August 28, 2024, this discussion aimed to explore strategies for curriculum reform. During the event, the Director of Islamic Boarding Schools at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Basnang Said, emphasised the need for a new curriculum designed to foster patriotism among young students and strengthen their commitment to the Republic of Indonesia.[31]

FKPP-linked pesantrens, which historically viewed Indonesia as a non-Islamic entity, are undergoing reforms that distinguish between the nation-state and its governance. Additionally, theological interpretations – especially regarding *takfir* (excommunication) and Islamic governance – are being revised to align with mainstream religious discourse. However, these efforts must extend beyond JI-affiliated schools and encompass the broader educational ecosystem to prevent the continued spread of extremist ideology.

This effort will require extensive follow-up and long-term commitment, and it will be particularly challenging amid President Prabowo's massive government cuts, including within the Ministry of Religious Affairs.[32] The primary challenge lies in the disparity in understanding between the central Ministry of Religious Affairs and its regional offices. While the central government has clear policies to address extremist threats, regional authorities – particularly in areas with strong Islamic conservatism – may resist or fail to enforce these measures. Pesantrens, often influential in local communities, can exploit their religious status to avoid scrutiny. This misalignment leads to inconsistent responses, allowing radical pesantrens to thrive where local governments are unwilling or unable to act effectively. Additionally, variations in human resources and budgets across regions present further hurdles. As a result, initiatives pioneered at the central level may not be easily replicated or implemented at the regional level.

Additionally, programmes should explore the effective use of digital platforms to combat online radicalisation.[33] As some individuals who are linked to JI increasingly leverage the internet for recruitment and spreading propaganda, it is essential that Islamic boarding schools and their leaders are equipped with digital literacy to counter extremist narratives in cyberspace. By aligning educational reform with a broader anti-terrorism strategy, Indonesia can strengthen its position as a model for addressing both domestic extremism and transnational jihadist networks. A comprehensive and accessible digital platform will also help to bridge gaps in programme implementation across regions.

Conclusion

For years, JI-affiliated pesantrens have served as safe spaces for families sympathetic to JI's ideology, allowing radical beliefs to be passed down across generations. While the dissolution of JI has weakened its formal organisational structure, there remains a need to ensure that its ideological influence does not persist in continuing to shape the perspectives of former members and the future community. A critical aspect of addressing this challenge lies in reforming JI-affiliated teaching systems. Without intervention, JI's legacy will continue to shape Indonesia's security dynamics, subtly influencing future threats.

Compounding this challenge is JI's inherent lack of cohesion. Historically, JI has functioned more as a network than a monolithic organisation, adapting and splintering in response to external pressures. While its official structure may have been dismantled, its ideology remains fluid and capable of evolving into new forms. Future splinters – whether small and localised or more structured – could emerge, driven by ideological persistence, generational indoctrination, or shifts in the regional security landscape.[34] Understanding this adaptive nature is crucial for anticipating long-term threats.

To counter this, Indonesia must integrate geopolitical literacy into Islamic boarding school curricula, equipping students with critical thinking skills to analyse conflicts beyond religious dogma.[35]

Encouraging a nuanced understanding of history, politics, and economics will help dismantle extremist narratives and promote resilience against ideological manipulation. Additionally, fostering interfaith dialogue, pluralism, and alternative educational pathways will further disrupt the cycle of radical indoctrination.

By addressing these ideological legacies and preparing for potential splinter groups, Indonesia can disrupt the intergenerational spread of extremism and cultivate a generation that is informed, tolerant, and resistant to radicalisation. A holistic approach – combining educational reform, nuanced conflict analysis, and strengthened community engagement – will be key to ensuring a more peaceful and resilient future.[36]

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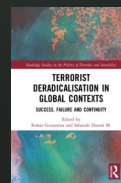
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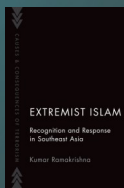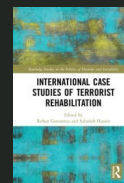
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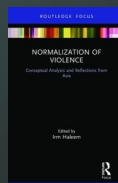
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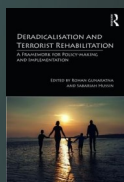
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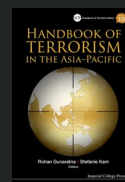
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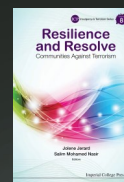
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