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## Radicalization and Deradicalization in Indonesia: Lessons from the 2018 Surabaya Church Bombing Tragedy (Sociological Perspective)

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### **Abstract**

*This research uses the sociology of religion to study radicalization and de-radicalization in Indonesia. The research focuses on the church bombings in Surabaya in 2018. This research uses a qualitative methodology, collecting data from related literature, previous studies, and other articles. This research aims to identify religious, social, and cultural elements that encourage individuals or groups to engage in extremist acts and evaluate how effective deradicalization efforts have been after the event. The results show that radicalization in Indonesia is often influenced by a combination of internal factors, such as socio-economic marginalization and narrow religious interpretations, and external factors, such as radical ideologies spread through social networks. Meanwhile, deradicalization, which involves interfaith dialogue, critical education, and social reintegration, shows different results depending on the approach and social context. This research provides a new perspective on how religion contributes to radicalization and deradicalization, as well as how it impacts extremism prevention policies and tactics in Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** Radicalization, Deradicalization, Sociology of Religion, Religious Discussions.

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## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of de-radicalization and radicalization is very complex and related to changes in religion and society. Religion is very important in Indonesia because it serves as a source of morals and ethics and as a social force that influences interactions between individuals and groups in society. However, religion can also be used by certain groups to justify violence and extremism. One event that demonstrated the role of religion in the radicalization process was the church bombings in Surabaya in 2018, where the perpetrators claimed to carry out the attacks as a form of struggle in the name of religion. This tragedy raised concerns about the escalation of religious radicalism in Indonesia. Social, economic, and religious factors are often associated with radicalization, which is the process by which individuals or groups change from moderate views to extremism. Deradicalization, on the other hand, is a systematic process undertaken by governments, community organizations, and religious leaders to reverse the process, with the aim of preventing individuals or groups from engaging further in ideologically based acts of violence. In Indonesia, there are many deradicalization programs, but the results vary depending on the local context and the methods used.

Religion is seen in the sociology of religion as a social phenomenon that affects various aspects of human life, such as politics, economics, and relationships between individuals. Sociology of religion figures such as Emile Durkheim and Max Weber argue that religion performs a vital role in building social solidarity but can also cause conflict when used for extreme purposes. Therefore, to understand radicalization in the context of religion, we need to conduct a thorough analysis of how certain religious interpretations can lead to radical views that support violence. In terms of religion, radicalization often begins with experiences of social marginalization, economic injustice, and alienation, which are then reinforced by narrow and exclusive understandings of religion. The sociology of religion helps explain how individuals or groups who feel marginalized seek truth through extreme religious interpretations and how religious communities contribute to spreading or preventing radicalism. In contrast, de-radicalization entails re-understanding inclusive and moderate religious values and the restoration of social solidarity through interfaith discussions and education. This research examines radicalization and de-radicalization in Indonesia from a sociology of religion perspective as well as the factors behind these actions by choosing the Surabaya church bombing tragedy as a case study. This research will use a qualitative approach to collect data from previous studies and scholarly articles on faith-based radicalization in Indonesia. In addition, the research will evaluate how effective programs have been to combat radicalization. By using this method, the research is expected to provide deeper insights into the role of religion in the radicalization process and de-radicalization strategies based on more just and inclusive religious principles. In addition, this research aims to show how important the sociology of religion is for understanding the dynamics of religion-based violence and how this method can be used to make better policies to stop radicalization and promote peace in Indonesia.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach and uses a literature study method (library research). Literature studies can be done by collecting references consisting of various previous studies, which are then compiled to draw conclusions (Mardalis, 1999). The purpose of this research is to study and understand the phenomenon of radicalization and de-radicalization in the sociology of religion, taking into account the 2018 church bombings in Surabaya. A qualitative approach was chosen because it can provide an in-depth understanding of the social, religious, and cultural factors that influence radicalization, as well as how deradicalization efforts can be effectively applied in the context of religion in Indonesia.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The word “radical” is usually derived from the Latin word *radix*, which means the root of a tree. Radicalism is an ideology or group that seeks change through violence to oppose and antagonize those in power and privilege. According to Kartodirdjo (1985), radicalism in a religious context often aims to improve the prevailing social and political structure through violent means (Rubaidi, 2007). Additionally, deradicalization refers to the process of transforming anarchist radicals into more moderate, accommodating, and pluralistic thinkers. In Indonesia's socio-religious context, radicalization and deradicalization are particularly relevant following the church bombings in Surabaya in 2018. This discussion examines the factors driving religious-based radicalization and evaluates the effectiveness of deradicalization programs in Indonesia from a sociology of religion perspective. The sociology of religion views radicalization as stemming from misinterpretations of religious teachings that support terrorism. This radical theory often targets individuals who feel alienated or dissatisfied with their social and political circumstances, leading them to adopt extreme ideologies in search of identity and purpose. Emile Durkheim posited that religion fosters group solidarity; however, it can also reinforce exclusivity and encourage radical actions during periods of social disintegration. In Surabaya, the suicide bombers exemplified a radicalization process rooted in a narrow understanding of religion, where violence was deemed a legitimate means to defend their beliefs. Furthermore, Wibisono et al. (2020) highlight that effective city branding strategies can play a crucial role in mitigating such radicalization by fostering cultural identity and community engagement. By emphasizing Surabaya's rich historical and cultural heritage, branding initiatives can help strengthen social cohesion, thereby addressing some of the underlying factors that contribute to radicalization.

According to the sociology of religion, religion is considered a social force capable of bringing people together and making them into one another. Religion is considered a “social fact” according to the classic Émile Durkheim theory, which helps maintain social cohesion and create collective values. Religion, however, can also be used as a driver to achieve certain goals, especially in situations of conflict or social marginalization. If religion is interpreted radically, it can lead to social breakdown, exclusivity, and even conflict, as seen in radicalization. Complex social, economic, and political factors often lead to religious

radicalization in Indonesia. Radical groups use religion as an excuse to attack “enemies” whom they perceive as threats to their beliefs. For example, the church bombings in Surabaya in 2018 show how religion can be used to fuel conflict by targeting communities perceived as “different” or having radical beliefs.

In the sociology of religion, Max Weber emphasized that religion not only shapes moral behavior but can also drive important social actions. Depending on the context of interpretation and the social situation surrounding it, social action motivated by religion can be directed towards positive or negative ends. In the case of radicalization, religion is often used to legitimize violence by making violence part of a religious obligation. People involved in radical movements may regard their actions as an attempt to “uphold justice,” depending on their religion. Max Weber also emphasized that religion influences social action, and in this case, it was religious interpretations that were used to justify violence as a reaction to social marginalization and injustice experienced. Social and political discontent in Indonesia is often linked to religious radicalization, where people who feel marginalized seek an outlet through radical groups that offer alternative identities and new solidarities. It is impossible to attribute radicalism and various forms of violence in the name of religion to religious, ideological factors alone. Religious radicalization does not occur in a vacuum; it develops in specific social contexts, often in environments where social marginalization or exclusion exists. In the case of Indonesia, radicalization often occurs in areas where there is economic injustice or political discontent. Individuals who feel socially or economically marginalized are more prone to be attracted to radical groups that offer quick solutions to the problems they face. Very often, religious radicalization is linked to identity issues. When religious identity is questioned or threatened, especially in an era of rapid modernization and globalization, certain groups may respond with extreme assertions of their religious identity. Radical groups in Indonesia often use the rhetoric of “struggle” to protect Islamic identity from threats from the West or non-Muslim communities. In this case, radicalization includes not only acts of violence but also how religion is used as a way to demonstrate resistance to social change that is perceived as threatening. In his book “Inclusive Islam,” Alwi Shihab says that radicalism generally denotes political extremism in various forms, such as drastic attempts to change the social order and unreasonable. Although the practice of violence in the form of War is an effective tool for state-building in human history, history shows that none of the religions legitimize, let alone encourage violence, as shown by In addition, Islam and Christianity are considered reformist movements rather than expansive religions. However, in history, with the emergence of violent times (states) founded in the name of religion, the old habit of starting wars for victory and conquest colored the new state. According to the above sociological understanding, there are three general characteristics of the understanding of radicalism: First, radicalism is a reaction to an ongoing situation and appears as an evaluation of rejection or perhaps even opposition. Problems that are rejected can include concepts, ideas, organizations, or principles that can be considered responsible for answers to unacceptable conditions. Secondly, radicalism is not just about rejection; it is about trying to change the system. This picture shows that radicalism is a sometimes unique program or worldview. Radicals strive to create such a system as a replacement for the existing order. Third, radicals have a strong belief in the truth they stand

for. Often, in social movements, the truth about the beliefs of the program or philosophy is combined with methods of achievement that use ideals such as populism or empathy, but this strong belief can lead to emotions that lead to the use of violence. Therefore, we need to know the motives of the bombers and the factors that influence radicalization, among others;

### **Ideological spiritualism**

They reject hermeneutics, a study that departs from the tradition of philosophy of language that ensures that the text of understanding, interpretation, translation, and dialogue of the Quran is important in the context of interpreting social reality.

### **Response to secularization, global politics, and modernization**

Muslims, including Muslims in Indonesia, give diverse responses to the contemporary situation. First, most Muslims show an extreme attitude towards the situation of influence from the Western tradition. Second, some Muslims totally accept the West. Third, some Muslims adapt selectively to the contemporary situation while maintaining Islamic values.

### **The problem of poverty and global capitalism**

Capitalism played by Western countries not only excludes economically weak people but can also politically rule government policies. Therefore, it makes sense that Muslims are entirely isolated economically and politically from making any protest over their plight. The helplessness of the Muslim community towards Most Muslims affected by the economic hegemony of Western capitalism exercise resistance. This is done by writing, speaking, or doing militant research, creating symbols of resistance (including in costumes), and even developing pilot projects of closed systems of economic systems and societies that are alternative concepts to capitalism.

### **Islamism, terrorism and radicalism**

Terrorism typically operates through a two-location mapping. First, terrorist acts occur in areas where there has been conflict or as a form of revenge. Second, terrorism can manifest in regions experiencing legal injustice, even in otherwise peaceful areas. Generally, terrorism does not arise in safe zones due to factors such as ideology, identity search, group solidarity, and the global environmental situation. To date, the prevailing conclusion among scholars and policymakers regarding the primary triggers of terrorist acts is the ideological factor. Consequently, responses often involve adopting a religious approach grounded in ideology. While this perspective is not entirely correct nor completely wrong, the influence of religious ideology remains challenging to eliminate, particularly concerning terrorism in Indonesia (Ethic, 2015; Kandoko & Tondok, 2023; Mubarak, 2015; Mustofa & Mahmudah, 2019; Setiadi & Syauqillah, 2023; Setiawan, 2019).

### **Social and Economic Marginalization**

Two things often trigger radicalization. This is especially true for marginalized individuals or groups. People who feel left behind or mistreated by social, political, or

economic systems are more susceptible to extremist ideologies. They see radicalization as a way to show their discontent and seek justice.

### **Identity Crisis**

Individuals who feel disoriented or lack a sense of belonging in society often experience an identity crisis, particularly exacerbated by cultural shifts and the pressures of modernization in a globalized world. This phenomenon is especially prevalent among the younger generation. Radical groups provide a simplistic solution to this confusion by offering a strong identity based on a particular religion, ideology, or group. In the sociology of religion, strong religious identities are frequently utilized to form isolated communities that attract those seeking conviction and belonging. As highlighted in recent literature, social identity theory (SIT) plays a crucial role in understanding how identity crises can lead individuals to extremist groups that offer clear solidarity and purpose (Borum, 2011). These groups often present themselves as highly entitative, possessing a well-defined identity and belief system that appeals to those grappling with uncertainty about their place in society (Hogg & Blaylock, 2015). Furthermore, Truna (2021) emphasizes that addressing the underlying issues of social discontent and injustice through effective deradicalization programs can mitigate the allure of radicalization. By fostering social relations and providing access to education and economic opportunities, these programs aim to reshape identities in a way that promotes peace and tolerance rather than violence and extremism. Thus, the intersection of identity crises and radicalization highlights the importance of understanding social dynamics in combating extremist ideologies.

### **Past Trauma and Violence**

People who have experienced trauma, such as violent conflict, oppression, or family violence, are more vulnerable to radicalization because this trauma can make them more receptive to extreme worldviews. This is especially true when radicalism serves as retribution for the pain or injustice they have experienced. Radical groups can use anger, hatred, and a desire for retaliation as a result of violence and trauma.

### **Peer Group Influence**

Peer groups often significantly influence a person, especially adolescents. Many times, friends involved in radical groups influence those involved in radicalization. Due to group pressure, social solidarity, and the whims of friends, one can engage in extremist ideologies without having any prior inclination.

### **Globalization and Access to Information Technology**

Globalization and technological advances, especially the internet and social media, have opened up new avenues for radical ideologies. Radical propaganda is now available worldwide, and people who feel alienated or marginalized can easily find groups with similar views on the internet. In addition to inspiring people to engage in violence, these online platforms often offer extreme stories that simplify the world into a conflict between “us” and “them.” Social media algorithms also aid online radicalization by promoting extreme content

to users who are attracted to similar ideas. This results in echo chambers, or voice rooms, where people are increasingly exposed to radical ideologies and increasingly drawn to groups that share extremist goals or identities.

### **Religious Exclusivism and Polarization**

Some radical groups espouse religious exclusivism, which means that their religion is the only true religion and that all other religions or interpretations of religion should be opposed. Exclusivism causes polarization in society and makes people or groups feel the need to fight those who hold different views. This polarization increases social tensions and makes radicalization easier, especially in heterogeneous and plural societies.

These factors are correlated and contribute to the formation of radicalization. By understanding these factors, efforts to prevent radicalization and design effective deradicalization programs can be more focused and comprehensive. These efforts can also consider ideological aspects and the broader social context.

One of the most shocking terror attacks in Indonesia was the church bombings in Surabaya in May 2018, carried out by a family group. This attack became a pivotal point in the government and society's efforts to prevent and tackle radicalization, particularly those involving religious-based extremism. In the sociology of religion, this case shows the dynamics of religious radicalization that occur not only among individuals but also among families, communities, and ideologies as a whole. Deradicalization efforts are becoming increasingly important to reduce the threat of future terrorism after this event. In the case of Surabaya (2018), deradicalization includes dealing with perpetrators directly, controlling individuals or groups exposed to extreme ideologies, and preventing radicalization in vulnerable communities. The sociology of religion sees religion in relation to social dynamics and not as a sole phenomenon. Therefore, deradicalization should be done holistically, taking social and religious considerations together. One of the new ways to deal with terrorism is deradicalization, which is related to deideologization. The term deradicalization comes from the English "deradicalization" and "radical" in the root word. In English, radicalization has the initial affix "de," which means "opposite, reverse, remove, reduce, and get off," and the final affix "ize" means "cause to be or resemble, adopt, or spread the manner of the activity or the teaching of." So the affix "de" in Indonesian does not change, and the final affix "ize" changes to "easy," which gives the base word a process meaning. Therefore, "deradicalization" is a term that refers to a process involving the elimination of radicalism. Religious factors are not the only ones that drive groups or individuals to religious radicalism; social disillusionment, injustice, marginalization, or alienation are also other factors. In the long run, de-radicalization efforts that only emphasize theological aspects are often unsuccessful.

Deradicalization in the sociology of religion involves revamping the theological understanding of religion as well as addressing the social, economic, and political factors that influence radicalization. Efforts to reverse the radicalization process are known as deradicalization. This process requires a social approach that can address the discontent and injustice experienced by radicals, promoting better social relations, access to education, and

financial resources. In Indonesia, effective deradicalization programs have shown that combining religious change with social and economic empowerment can lead to positive outcomes. The government, alongside various agencies, implements these deradicalization programs to help radical groups recover from violent beliefs and gradually accept current socio-economic and political changes. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), there are four stages to radicalization: pre-radicalization, identification, indoctrination, and action. Many perpetrators of terrorism, including those linked to broader networks of radical groups, have been arrested following these attacks. The National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) in Indonesia has strengthened its deradicalization program within prisons, focusing on convicted terrorists involved in the Surabaya bombings. This program aims to transform narrow and radical religious ideologies through psychological assistance and moderate religious teachings provided by peaceful Islamic scholars (Truna, 2021). The goal is to offer a new perspective on religion that emphasizes peace and tolerance rather than violence and extremism. By integrating theological reform with social empowerment strategies, Indonesia's deradicalization efforts seek not only to rehabilitate individuals but also to foster a more inclusive society that mitigates the factors leading to radicalization.

People who were once involved in terrorist groups such as Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) or ISIS now play an active role in spreading stories that contradict terrorist beliefs in Surabaya and other areas. Deradicalization efforts were undertaken after the Surabaya church bombings in 2018 in response to the threat of terrorism stemming from religious radicalization. This was the result of an attack planned by a family belonging to Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), a group associated with ISIS. The attack shows that radicalization does not only occur in individuals but can also spread within families and communities. Some efforts to stop radicalization were made after the incident:

### **Deradicalization Program for Terrorism Convicts**

The Indonesian government, through the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), has strengthened its deradicalization program. This program includes terrorism convicts involved in the Surabaya church bombings network. Strengthening national values, religious guidance by moderate scholars, and psychological counseling are all part of the program. The convicts are allowed to reflect on their actions and understand the negative impact of terrorism on their families and society. The program also encourages them to consider a more peaceful and inclusive interpretation of religion.

### **Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Perpetrators' Families**

Since the attack was carried out by a single family, surviving children of the perpetrators and other family members potentially exposed to extremist ideology are also targeted by the deradicalization program. This approach aims to prevent these children from becoming part of the cycle of violence and radicalism. Children involved in or victimized by family radicalization have access to social reintegration and psychological rehabilitation programs. To help them return to a normal life in society, they receive intensive mental and social assistance. Additionally, this effort is conducted in collaboration with psychological



institutions, social organizations, and local religious figures.

Current literature emphasizes the importance of addressing the needs of these children through comprehensive support systems. Nazir (2016) discusses how Islamic law and positive law in Indonesia can inform deradicalization efforts, highlighting the need for a legal framework that supports rehabilitation. Oktaviana (2021) further elaborates on the role of religious counselors in preventing the spread of radicalism, emphasizing community engagement as a crucial element in these programs. Syamsurrijal (2021) underscores the significant role of pesantren and madrasah in countering radical ideologies through education and community involvement. Shofiyah and Paturohman (2022) explore how family education can play a pivotal role in deradicalization, advocating for programs that promote moderate interpretations of Islam within family settings. Finally, Pujiati (2020) highlights the voices from pesantren as essential in shaping counter-narratives against extremism. Together, these studies illustrate a multifaceted approach to deradicalization that integrates legal, educational, and community-based strategies to effectively address the challenges posed by radicalization.

### **Strengthening the Role of Religious Scholars**

Moderate religious scholars from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah play a crucial role in the deradicalization process by spreading a peaceful and tolerant understanding of religion. They actively participate in outreach activities within communities vulnerable to radicalization. Moderate scholars provide a broader understanding of Islamic teachings by emphasizing unity, peace, and humanity. The involvement of religious leaders is essential in countering extremist narratives that often misuse religious verses to justify acts of violence.

### **Involvement of Former Terrorists**

In Indonesia's deradicalization program, former terrorists who have abandoned radical ideologies are involved as deradicalization agents. Individuals who were once part of terrorist groups, including networks like JAD, help spread counter-radicalism messages to communities vulnerable to radicalization. Former terrorists often share their personal stories about how they were trapped in extremist narratives and how they managed to escape the cycle of violence. Speaking from an insider's perspective, these individuals offer a unique viewpoint, making them valuable agents in preventing others from falling into the same ideology.

### **Counter-Radicalization Education in Schools and Communities After the Surabaya Bombings**

The government has placed greater emphasis on counter-radicalization education. To increase awareness among young generations about the dangers of radicalism, curricula emphasizing tolerance, diversity, and national values have been strengthened. Additionally, the government collaborates with educational institutions to teach students how to resist extremist ideologies, both online and within their communities. This educational approach is expected to protect young generations from radical propaganda, which is often spread through exclusive religious groups or social media.

Research indicates that integrating local wisdom and religious moderation into educational curricula can significantly contribute to countering radicalism (Rasyid et al., n.d.). Harris (2021) highlights the experiences of former members of radical organizations, emphasizing the importance of education in their reintegration into society. Furthermore, Hasibuan et al. (2025) discuss the role of religion as a social institution in shaping attitudes towards extremism, suggesting that educational frameworks should incorporate comprehensive religious teachings that promote peace and tolerance. Iqbal (2015) explores the construction of radicalism among students in Surabaya, underscoring the necessity for educational interventions that address underlying ideological factors. Nazir (2016) provides insights into how Islamic law can inform counter-terrorism strategies, reinforcing the need for a robust educational response. Oktaviana (2021) emphasizes the role of religious counselors in preventing radicalism through community engagement and guidance. These findings collectively underscore the critical role of educational initiatives in fostering resilience against radical ideologies among youth.

### **Interfaith Dialogue and Community-Based Approaches**

Following the Surabaya bombings, various interfaith dialogue programs were strengthened to enhance social resilience and prevent further radicalization. Religious leaders from different backgrounds frequently gather to discuss peace and tolerance. These programs also involve local communities, where people of various faiths are encouraged to work together in social and community activities. This community-based approach helps build stronger relationships among citizens and reduces the likelihood of religious conflicts, which often serve as breeding grounds for radicalization.

### **Psychological Approaches for Trauma Victims and Perpetrators**

Psychological assistance is a crucial component of the deradicalization process. Not only do the victims of attacks receive counseling, but so do the surviving perpetrators and their families. This psychological approach aims to heal the trauma experienced by perpetrators and help them process their lives in a healthy way without resorting to violence. Psychologists working in deradicalization programs focus on providing a deeper understanding of the psychological effects of violence and helping these individuals reintegrate into normal life.

After the Surabaya church bombings in 2018, various deradicalization strategies were implemented, including rehabilitating terrorism perpetrators, strengthening moderate religious education, and controlling extremist ideologies on social media. The effort is not solely targeted at the perpetrators but also involves vulnerable communities, the perpetrators' children, and society as a whole. By using a comprehensive strategy that involves the government, religious leaders, families, and communities, deradicalization aims to prevent similar incidents from occurring and create a more tolerant and peaceful environment in Indonesia.

## **CONCLUSION**

The phenomena of deradicalization and radicalization are highly complex and closely

related to religious transformations in society. Religion plays a significant role in Indonesia as a source of morality and ethics and as a social force influencing interactions between individuals and groups. However, religion can also be exploited by certain groups to justify violence and extremism. One event that highlights the role of religion in radicalization is the 2018 Surabaya church bombings, where the attackers claimed their actions were a form of struggle in the name of religion.

The word "radical" originates from the Latin word *radix*, meaning "root." Radicalism is an ideology or movement that seeks change through violence, opposing and confronting those in power and privilege. Several factors contribute to radicalization, including scriptural-ideological influences, reactions to secularization, global politics and modernization, poverty and global capitalism, and social and economic marginalization. In the sociology of religion, this case illustrates the dynamics of religious radicalization that occur not only among individuals but also within families, communities, and ideologies as a whole.

Deradicalization efforts have become increasingly important in reducing the future threat of terrorism following this event. One innovative approach to countering terrorism is deradicalization, which involves de-ideologization. Several efforts to combat terrorism include the Deradicalization Program for Terrorism Convicts, rehabilitation and reintegration of perpetrators' families, strengthening the role of religious scholars, and interfaith dialogue and community-based approaches. By employing a comprehensive strategy involving the government, religious leaders, families, and communities, deradicalization is expected to prevent similar incidents and foster a more tolerant and peaceful society in Indonesia.

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