
The Rise of Religious Radicalism Among Teenager

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Abstract

The rise of religious radicalism among teenagers has become a significant concern in recent years. Due to their vulnerability and susceptibility to influence, this age group is often targeted by radical groups. Factors like the search for identity, social isolation, and exposure to misinformation on social media contribute to their susceptibility. This research aims to examine the causes, impacts, and strategies for addressing religious radicalism among teenagers, utilizing qualitative methods such as interviews, surveys, and literature analysis. The research results show that factors such as a lack of comprehensive understanding of religion, the influence of the social environment, and access to radical information through social media contribute significantly to the spread of radicalism. To prevent the spread of radical ideas among teenagers, this research recommends several strategies, such as strengthening moderate religious education, character development programs, and increasing awareness of the dangers of radicalization through social campaigns. It's essential for parents, educators, and society to work together to foster values of tolerance and peace. This study emphasizes that prevention efforts should include inclusive education, digital literacy, and psychosocial support from families and communities. The findings aim to inform preventive policies that protect the younger generation from radical influences.

Keywords: Religious Radicalism, Teenagers, Prevention

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INTRODUCTION

Religious radicalism has become one of the most crucial issues increasingly discussed in recent years, particularly concerning young people. Religious radicalism itself refers to thoughts, attitudes, and actions that adopt an extreme and literal religious perspective, often rejecting diversity, dialogue, and tolerance toward groups with different beliefs. This phenomenon is particularly alarming as many teenagers, who are still in the phase of self-discovery and vulnerable to external influences, become the primary targets of radical groups. Violence and terror can manifest in various forms. Broadly speaking, radicalism refers to beliefs that advocate for a complete transformation of the prevailing social structure. The digital era has significantly impacted the spread of radical ideologies, especially through social media and other online platforms. Teenagers who are active in cyberspace are often exposed to unfiltered information, including radical teachings propagated by extremist groups. These groups exploit this vulnerability to gain sympathy and shape a narrow worldview among young individuals.

A previous study conducted by Yudita Susanti, Fusnika, and Suryameng from STKIP Persada Khatulistiwa, Sintang (2020), titled *Strategies to Shield Students from Radicalism and Intolerance at SMPN 01 Seberuang, Kapuas Hulu Regency*, stated that the strategies designed to prevent the influence of radicalism and intolerance among students primarily focus on enhancing students' understanding of radicalism and providing education to ensure they do not easily fall into radical beliefs. This study also involved counseling activities through lectures and question-and-answer sessions to strengthen students' understanding of the importance of tolerance and rejecting radical ideologies. The results showed high enthusiasm among participants, with students demonstrating the ability to recognize the characteristics of radicalism and strategies to counter it. Additionally, another study by Dahlia Lubis and Husna Sari Siregar from the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Medan, published in 2020, highlighted that teenagers, as active social media users, are highly susceptible to radical influences, which can negatively impact their moral behavior, lead to individualistic tendencies, and make them vulnerable to hoaxes or dangerous propaganda. This study also emphasized the crucial role of parents, schools, and communities in guiding and protecting teenagers from radical influences through social media. One of the recommendations was the establishment of communities that support the healthy and safe use of the internet.

The importance of paying attention to this phenomenon cannot be underestimated, considering that teenagers are the next generation who will shape the future of society. Allowing religious radicalism to thrive among adolescents can have detrimental effects on a country's social, political, and security stability. Therefore, comprehensive preventive measures are necessary to address this issue. Moderate and inclusive religious education should be strengthened in family, school, and community environments. Additionally, it is crucial to provide space for interfaith and intercultural dialogue, enabling teenagers to understand differences as a source of richness rather than a threat. By understanding the root causes of the rise of religious radicalism among teenagers, appropriate steps can be taken to prevent the radicalization process from an early stage. This will not only protect teenagers from the harmful influence of extremist ideologies but also ensure the creation of a more harmonious, peaceful, and tolerant society in the future.

Furthermore, the involvement of parents, educators, religious leaders, and the government in deradicalization efforts is highly needed. They must be able to create a conducive environment for the mental and spiritual development of teenagers and build awareness of the importance of tolerance and solidarity in social life. Digital technology should also be utilized positively to counter radical propaganda by disseminating content that promotes peace, diversity, and inclusive religious understanding. A study by Kayus Kayowuan Lewoleba (2023) from the Faculty of Law, UPN Veteran Jakarta, examines the factors contributing to radicalism among teenagers and the efforts to prevent it. This study focuses on radicalism as a form of violence used to achieve specific goals, often influenced by political and power-related motives. It identifies several factors leading to radicalism among teenagers, such as unstable psychological conditions, legal injustice, economic disparities, misconceptions about religion, and a lack of digital literacy.

The suggested preventive efforts include strengthening multicultural education, enhancing digital literacy, improving economic and political systems, and fostering leadership that can serve as role models. Another relevant study, titled *"The Importance of Islamic Education in Combating Radicalism Among Youth,"* was conducted by Faizal Hasbi, Ine Indiyani, Nadila Juanda, and Najwa Az-Zahra from STAIN Bengkalis, Riau, in 2024. This research explores the role of Islamic education in preventing the spread of radicalism among young people. Using a literature study method, the study emphasizes that Islamic education not only teaches religious values but also fosters a moderate and tolerant understanding. This education is expected to shape a strong Islamic identity and critical thinking skills to counter radical propaganda. The study also highlights the importance of support from families, the government, and community institutions in creating a positive environment for young generations to remain free from radical influences. The key difference between this study and previous research lies in its unique approach, combining digital literacy with multicultural education as an innovative strategy to prevent radicalism among teenagers. This approach is expected to provide practical guidance for educators and parents in helping teenagers develop a moderate and tolerant identity while critically analyzing digital information.

METHOD

The method used to investigate the rise of religious radicalism among adolescents employs a qualitative approach, in which the collected data is not in numerical form but is derived from transcribed interviews, field notes, personal documents, memos, official documents, and various pre-existing literature. This qualitative method aims to explore and describe the empirical reality behind a phenomenon in a detailed, in-depth, and comprehensive manner. Through this method, the research seeks to connect empirical reality with relevant theories through descriptive analysis. Murdiyanto (2020) explains that qualitative research is a process of exploring social phenomena and human issues. This approach is also regarded as a means to understand the meanings, concepts, characteristics, symptoms, symbols, or representations of a phenomenon.

Types and Research Design

This study is categorized as qualitative research aimed at exploring the views, experiences, and perceptions of teenagers in Lamongan regarding radicalism and the factors influencing such tendencies. This method enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding

of the motives and backgrounds that drive radicalism among adolescents. Additionally, this study may involve an analysis of social media and related documents that reveal patterns or indicators of radicalism. In this research, the researcher employs social theory to understand how factors such as environmental influences, media access, and identity needs shape adolescents' understanding of radical ideologies. To examine the rise of radicalism among teenagers, several theories can be used to understand the radicalization process and the factors influencing it.

One of the commonly used theoretical approaches is Social Identity Theory, which explains how individuals form their identities based on membership in social groups. Teenagers who feel alienated or struggle to find their identity within the majority group may seek meaning and recognition through affiliation with radical groups. This theory helps explain how attachment to radical groups provides them with a sense of belonging and purpose. Another relevant theory is Framing Theory, which refers to how radical movements frame or present specific issues in a way that captures the attention and sympathy of teenagers. Radical movements often use rhetoric that frames conflicts or injustices in a manner that convinces young individuals that radicalization is the only solution to the problems they face. Lastly, Social Contact Theory suggests that radicalization often occurs through direct contact with individuals or groups already involved in radical movements. Teenagers may be influenced by peers, family members, or communities that hold radical views. Intensive social contact with radical individuals or groups can reinforce extreme perspectives.

Approach

The approach used in this study is a sociological approach, which aims to explore the role of social environment, education, and family in shaping adolescents' views and attitudes toward radical ideology. This approach enables researchers to identify the influence of media, family, school, and community in either increasing or reducing the risk of radicalization among adolescents in Lamongan.

Research Location:

This study is conducted in Tumenggungan Subdistrict, Lamongan Regency. The selection of this location, which falls within an urban area, is crucial for understanding the local social and cultural context, as well as how local dynamics such as economic conditions, education, and community influences shape adolescents' perceptions of radicalism. The researcher will conduct interviews and observations in several schools and youth communities in this area.

Primary Data:

Interviews: Data is collected through in-depth interviews with adolescents, teachers, parents, and community figures. These interviews aim to explore their perspectives on radicalism, the driving factors, and how they perceive the role of the environment in shaping such attitudes.

Field Observations: Researchers observe adolescent interactions within their social environments, including schools, places of worship, and other community settings, to gain insights into how radical ideas may be disseminated or accepted.

Data Processing:

Interview Transcription: Data from interviews and observations will be analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on emerging themes related to perceptions of radicalism, environmental influences, and adolescents' identity needs.

Recording Analysis: Researchers may conduct data triangulation to enhance validity by comparing information from interviews, observations, and secondary data sources such as social media content or relevant documents.

Research Informant Selection Techniques

Research Objectives

This study aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of adolescents in Lamongan regarding radicalism and the environmental factors influencing them. The focus is to identify how adolescents respond to radical influences, as well as the social and psychological factors that contribute to their exposure to such ideologies.

Selection of Informants

The primary informants are adolescents studying and residing in Lamongan, particularly those involved in social activities or communities potentially affected by radicalism. Additionally, informants include teachers, parents, and community figures. Informants are selected using purposive sampling, meaning individuals are chosen based on their relevance and involvement in the studied issue.

Sampling Techniques

This study does not set a minimum number of informants. Data collection will continue until the information gathered is deemed sufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of radicalism among adolescents. Sampling will be discontinued when data saturation is reached, and no new information emerges.

Informant Validation

Validation is conducted through source triangulation, which involves comparing information from various informants and data sources to ensure accuracy and consistency. Researchers select informants with direct knowledge and experience regarding radicalism or the environmental influences on adolescents. This validation process ensures that each informant provides a relevant perspective on understanding radicalism among youth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious radicalism among teenagers is an increasingly alarming social phenomenon, especially in the past few decades. Religious radicalism refers to beliefs or ideologies that promote extreme convictions and actions based on a particular interpretation of religion. The rise of radicalism among teenagers can be observed in the increasing involvement of young individuals in acts of extremism, either directly through violence or indirectly through support for radical groups. This phenomenon certainly requires greater attention, considering its far-reaching impacts on social, political, and security aspects.

Several Factors Underlying Why Adolescents Are Vulnerable to Religious Radicalization.

Identity Search

Adolescence is a transitional period in which individuals begin to search for their identity and the meaning of life. During this phase, they tend to seek answers to various questions related to life, beliefs, and purpose. Radical groups often offer clear and definitive answers to this confusion, especially for adolescents who feel alienated from their social environment or family. Religious radicalism frequently provides a new identity that is perceived as stronger and more meaningful, making adolescents feel accepted and valued.

Influence of Social Media

In the digital era, access to information has become incredibly easy, and adolescents are among the primary users of social media. Unfortunately, these platforms have also become fertile ground for the spread of extremist ideologies. Radical groups frequently use the internet and social media to spread propaganda and recruit new members. Social media algorithms, designed to reinforce users' interests, can exacerbate the radicalization process, as adolescents who show interest in certain topics can quickly be drawn into a radical content ecosystem.

Social and Family Alienation

Adolescents who feel alienated or lack support from their social environment and family are more vulnerable to radicalization. This alienation can stem from various factors, such as poverty, marginalization, family issues, or a lack of social interaction. Radical groups often exploit this vulnerability by offering a sense of community, solidarity, and a newfound purpose to adolescents who feel excluded.

Crisis of Trust in the Social System

Many adolescents experience disappointment or distrust toward the existing social, political, and economic systems, particularly when they face injustice, inequality, or discrimination. Radical ideologies offer extreme alternatives and provide instant solutions to complex social problems. Some radical groups package their teachings within narratives of resistance against oppression or global injustice, which can appeal to socially conscious adolescents.

Lack of Inclusive Religious Literacy

A narrow and exclusive understanding of religion is one of the factors contributing to the rise of religious radicalism. Many adolescents lack a deep and inclusive religious education, making them susceptible to rigid and extreme interpretations of religious teachings. Radical groups often promote the idea that their interpretation is the only truth, which can be appealing to adolescents searching for certainty.

Religious radicalism has a broad and damaging impact on adolescents, both personally and socially.

- **Psychological Damage**

Adolescents involved in religious radicalism often experience drastic personality changes. They tend to withdraw from family and friends, become more reclusive, and exhibit more aggressive and intolerant behavior. These psychological effects can lead to deep social isolation, depression, or other mental health disorders.

- **Social Damage**

Religious radicalism divides society by creating segregation based on beliefs and ideologies. Adolescents influenced by radical ideologies often perceive those with different views as enemies or threats. This weakens social cohesion and increases polarization within communities.

- **Potential Involvement in Violence**

One of the most concerning impacts of religious radicalism is the involvement of adolescents in acts of violence, including terrorism. Some young individuals exposed to radical ideologies end up becoming perpetrators of terrorist attacks or other forms of extreme violence. They not only harm themselves but also endanger others and spread fear within society.

Strategies for Countering Religious Radicalism Among Teenagers

Addressing religious radicalism among teenagers requires a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders, including families, schools, communities, and the government.

Inclusive and Tolerance-Based Education

One of the most effective ways to prevent religious radicalism is through education. School curricula should incorporate inclusive and tolerance-based religious education that emphasizes the importance of respecting differences and coexisting peacefully. Strong religious literacy can help teenagers understand that religion is not a tool for spreading hatred or violence but rather a means to foster peace and harmony.

Strengthening Digital Literacy

Given that social media is a primary channel for the spread of radicalism, digital literacy is crucial. Teenagers must be equipped with critical thinking skills to filter the information they receive from the internet, ensuring they are not easily influenced by radical propaganda. Digital literacy campaigns and awareness of how information can be manipulated are essential steps to protect them from extremist ideologies.

The Role of Families and Communities

Families play a crucial role in shielding teenagers from radical influences. A strong parent-child relationship can prevent teenagers from feeling isolated or alienated, reducing the likelihood of them being drawn into radical groups. Communities must also be proactive in creating safe spaces where teenagers can express themselves and participate in positive activities.

Psychosocial Approaches

For teenagers who have already been exposed to radicalism, psychosocial intervention is necessary. Psychological support and deradicalization programs should be developed to help them return to a healthy and productive path. This approach should include counseling, therapy, and support from their surrounding environment to ensure an effective recovery process.

Collaboration with Media and Government

The media also plays a vital role in preventing the spread of radicalism. The government and social media platforms must collaborate to limit the dissemination of extremist content

online. Additionally, appropriate regulations and policies that support deradicalization programs can serve as significant steps in addressing this issue.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion from the rise of religious radicalism among adolescents is that this phenomenon results from a combination of various social, psychological, and environmental factors. Adolescents are often in a phase of self-discovery, and in certain situations, they may feel alienated or lost. Religious radicalism can offer a sense of identity, purpose, and belonging to something greater. Furthermore, influences from family, peers, and community play a crucial role in shaping the religious and political views of adolescents. Adolescents who are in environments that support radical ideologies are more susceptible to being influenced. Many adolescents experience dissatisfaction with the social, political, or economic system, which leads to perceptions of global injustice, particularly towards Muslims in various parts of the world, often acting as a catalyst for religious radicalization.

A lack of religious understanding triggers some adolescents to be easily influenced by distorted and extreme religious narratives. They often have a narrow understanding of religion and perceive radicalism as a form of piety. The lack of education that encourages critical thinking and interfaith dialogue, as well as the failure of the social system to address issues of marginalization and injustice, can contribute to the rise of radicalism among adolescents. Therefore, caution should be exercised when using social media, as it has become a highly effective tool for spreading radical ideologies. Adolescents who are active on these platforms are often exposed to extremist propaganda, which can strengthen radical views.

By understanding these factors, steps involving education, interfaith dialogue, strengthening moderate values, and enhancing the role of families and communities are essential in preventing religious radicalism among adolescents. Some recommendations include: parents need to actively guide their children in interacting with media, build open communication, and engage in discussions about life views and values of tolerance. With parental involvement, adolescents are more likely to avoid content that leads to radicalism. Channeling adolescents' energy into positive activities, such as youth organizations, sports, arts, and social activities, can help them find a healthy sense of identity and build empathy towards others. Additionally, providing an understanding of the importance of diversity can be a key defense against radicalism. Adolescents who are accustomed to valuing differences are less likely to be influenced by extremist views.

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