RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN MAJOR CAMPUSES IN INDONESIA

A'an Suryana

TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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Religious Extremism in Major Campuses in Indonesia

By A'an Suryana

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Religious extremism among students in major campuses in Indonesia remains a problem for the Indonesian government, campus authorities and moderate Muslims.
- A substantial number of studies on Islam and religious extremism in Indonesia have focused on security and cultural paradigms. In contrast, this article discusses the factors that cause the rise of religious extremism among university students through an organizational and institutional lens.
- The dissemination and internalization of religious extremist narratives contribute to the rise of religious extremism among university students in Indonesia.
- Counter-extremism policies by the government and campus authorities have not been effective due to the absence of an integrative approach. All stakeholders—the government, campus authorities, parents of university students, communities and student organizations—need to establish a concerted and integrative effort to uproot religious extremism from among university students.

Religious Extremism in Major Campuses in Indonesia

By A'an Suryana[1]

INTRODUCTION

Religious extremism among university students remains a cause for concern for Indonesian government officials, including President Joko Widodo. The president spoke publicly at least twice on the threat of religiously extremist groups that target university students for recruitment. On 13 September 2021, during a meeting with the Indonesian Rectors' Council, the president reminded university rectors to remain vigilant against individuals or groups that introduce and inculcate extremist ideas among students.[2] This statement echoed his request to Indonesian rectors four years ago for universities to play a greater role in tackling religious extremism among university students.

The former Chief of the National Counter Terrorism Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme, or BNPT), Suhardi Alius,[3] has

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[2] Dewi Nurita, "Jokowi Ingatkan Rektor: Hati-hati Ada yang Mendidik Mahasiswa Jadi Radikal", *Tempo*, 14 September 2021, https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1506168/jokowi-ingatkan-rektor-hati-hati-ada-yang-mendidik-mahasiswa-jadi-radikal/full&view=ok (accessed 17 September 2021).

[3] Commissioner General (Police) (Ret.) Suhardi Alius served the agency between 2016 and 2020.

explained that radical groups often target new students to become members of their groups, through the mentorship scheme or by facilitating their entry into university life.[4] In 2017, the Alvara Research Centre conducted a survey and provided comprehensive and elaborate data on rising religious extremism among university students. Hasanuddin Ali et al. found that 19.6 per cent of a total of 1,800 university students in the survey supported sharia bylaws (Hasanuddin Ali et al. 2017, p. 45). Some 17.8 per cent supported the establishment of an Islamic caliphate as a form of government in Indonesia. At the same time, as much as 23.4 per cent were "ready to perform *jihad* to establish Islamic caliphate in Indonesia" (Hasanuddin Ali et al. 2017, pp. 50–52).

This general trend parallels the recent increase in religious extremism in Indonesia noted in various studies. However, few of these works focused on the radicalization of university students in Indonesian campuses. While a substantial number of studies on Islam and extremism in Indonesia have focused on security and cultural paradigms (Saat 2021, p. 327), this article discusses Islamic extremism in Indonesian campuses through an organizational and institutional lens. It investigates religious extremism disseminated by student bodies and studies responses by rival extracampus student organizations. For example, while the student organization Gema Pembebasan supports the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, other student organizations support more moderate forms of Islam, such as the Indonesia Muslim Student Organization (HMI), the Indonesian Islamic Students Movement (PMII) and the Association of Muhammadiyah Students (IMM).

Studying how university students are influenced is important because they will come to play an important role in Indonesia's future. The advanced education and training that they receive from higher education put them ahead of their less privileged peers in getting good careers. Their chances of assuming key positions in Indonesia's private sector,

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[4] Ibid. The chief and former chief of the anti-terror agency (BNPT) spoke at an event to promote religious moderation in North Sumatra province.

public sector or political parties are greater. In 2018, there were between 80 and 107 million people in the age group between 19 and 23 years old (an age bracket where youth usually pursue a bachelor's degree); but, in that year, only 7.5 million of that total population studied at tertiary institutions across the country.[5]

In addition, university students often play big roles in shaping discourses on various themes, including religious ones, and in bringing social and political change to Indonesia. University students played a major role in two massive social upheavals in Indonesia—in 1966 and 1998. The first paved the way for Suharto's authoritarian order and the second signalled the end of that order thirty-two years later.

This article aims to understand the factors that influence university students to subscribe to extreme Islamic ideas, such as the introduction of the Islamic caliphate. This idea of establishing an Islamic caliphate is considered extreme in most quarters, including government officials, scholars (see Wahab 2019, p. 101) and university students. Proponents of this idea actively declare their aim to replace the Indonesian state that is currently based on the Pancasila, a secular ideology, with an Islamic state led by a global Muslim caliph who need not be based in Indonesia, or even Southeast Asia. This article also aims to know whether the policies issued by government and campus authorities, including the aforementioned ministerial decree, have been effective in fighting religious extremism in campuses.

This article refers to non-violent extremism in addition to violent extremism. Alex P. Schmid (2014, p. 18) argues that extremism as an idea and extremism as practice are not separate but are interlinked. Hence, he opposed distinguishing non-violent extremism (which discusses extremist ideas) from violent extremism (which discusses acts of violence and terrorism). Schmid argues that non-violent extremism leads to actual violence and that non-violent and violent extremism are merely two

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[5] See Ani Nursalikah, "Jumlah Mahasiswa Indonesia Masih Sedikit", *Republika*, 12 November 2018, https://republika.co.id/berita/pi2o7r366/jumlah-mahasiswa-indonesia-masih-sedikit (accessed 6 February 2022).

sides of the same coin. In addition, he argues that people who support or justify acts of terror should be called extremists, even if they have not yet committed any attack. He states that this is because non-violent extremism is inherently violent (Schmid 2014, p. 2). At the same time, other scholars argue that violent extremism needs to be distinguished from non-violent extremism since not everyone who possesses extremist ideas will resort to acts of violence (see terrorism expert Sydney Jones's statement in Stange 2019, p. 18; Angus 2016, p. 2; Muhtadi 2019, p. 29). This present article concurs with the idea that there is a need to distinguish between non-violent extremism and violent extremism; and that not all extremist ideas result in actual violence. Thus, non-violent extremism needs to be studied in separation from violent extremism.

I have collected secondary data such as survey findings that discuss why Muslim students subscribe to extreme Islamic ideas. This secondary research was conducted to meet my first research objective, which is to understand the factors that drive university students to subscribe to extreme Islamic ideas. I have also gathered similar data from media reports, books and journal articles. However, there are limitations to these data. They lack detailed explanations and individual nuances. Hence, I also conducted in-depth interviews with research participants, in order to dive further into the issue. I interviewed eight student activists from various universities in Jakarta, Bandung and Yogyakarta. These "student cities" are the locus of my research (Rosyad 1995, p. 1). I chose student activists as my subjects because they are better able to understand the social and political dynamics on the ground, and student aspirations as well. They are also behind the dissemination of certain ideas, including extreme Islamic ideas.

To meet the second research objective, I interviewed three high-ranking university officials at three different campuses, respectively, in Jakarta and Yogyakarta. I also interviewed a high-ranking state official from BNPT. In total, twelve people were interviewed for this portion of the research.

I argue that it is existing narratives on extreme versions of Islam in the private and public spheres that result in a rising number of students subscribing to non-violent religious extremism. Government and campus policies tackling the problem have not been effective since stakeholders

have often worked in silos. An integrative approach is needed to reduce religious extremism among university students.

This article begins by explaining the term *extremism* and follows with a discussion on what it is that causes students to subscribe to extreme Islamic ideas. The last part discusses the effectiveness of government and campus policies in tackling religious radicalism in Indonesia's major campuses.

RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

One of the difficulties in researching religious extremism[6] is that it is a sensitive term and different individuals or groups of people tend to interpret the term differently. Brigadier General (Police) R. Ahmad Nurwakhid, who represents the government's view on Indonesia's anti-terrorism drive, defines extremism as "an idea or ideology to change a society's established or approved social and political order, through extreme ways or violence."[7] Nurwakhid, the Director of Prevention at BNPT, further argues that several indicators decide whether an individual or a group of people is categorized as extreme or radical.[8] First, these individuals or groups of people are anti-Pancasila, which is the national secular ideology governing Indonesia's way of life. They want to change the Pancasila ideology with other ideologies and establish an Islamic caliphate. Second, they want to topple the existing government by

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[6] Different groups of scholars have their own preference in using either "radicalism" or "extremism". These terms are close in meaning. Cas Mudde attempts to distinguish between "radicalism" and "extremism" in his study on right-wing political parties, arguing that "radicalism" is an idea to oppose constitution, while "extremism" is an idea that is hostile to the constitution (Mudde 2000, p. 12). This difference is so close so that in practice scholars often do not distinguish between them. This article uses "extremism" such that it is consistent with how it is used by non-violent extremism scholars.

[7] In person interview with Brigadier General (Police) R. Ahmad Nurwakhid, the Director of Prevention at the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT), 11 November 2021.

[8] Ibid.

building people's distrust of the government via hate speeches and the dissemination of hoaxes. Third, they are not tolerant of religious diversity; they easily label others as apostates. Fourth, they are antagonistic about local and traditional religion and folk cultures. Government officials and state apparatuses already have these criteria for categorizing individuals or groups or organizations as extremist.

All these indicators are merely social and cannot be used as a legal tool to prosecute people who are accused of subscribing to extremist ideas. For example, as long as those who are anti-Pancasila do not plan to execute terrorist activities, they cannot be prosecuted. Another example is that people who loathe *tahlilan* (community prayer for the dead; a ritual that is commonly practised by Muslim traditionalists) will not be legally prosecuted, since loathing or despising the practice is not considered a blasphemous act. Nevertheless, the above indicators are useful for the state and government apparatuses to formulate anti-extremism policies. At the very least, these indicators can be used to identify which people or organizations need to be the target of the government's anti-extremism or anti-terrorism programmes.

But the indicators face challenges from scholars. In addition, people who feel that they became the victims in such government labelling also oppose such indicators. Applying all indicator items in one basket can result in the overgeneralization of the "student extremist" term. This government practice can boost stereotyping,[9] a common enough practice among government officials. For example, on 2 September 2020, then Minister of Religious Affairs Fachrul Razi warned other government officials that extremism can develop among civil servants through both "good-looking and religiously capable people"[10] who served as either

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[9] In-person interview with a KAMMI activist of UGM Commissariat in Yogyakarta, 4 November 2021.

[10] "Good looking and religiously capable people" refers to people who look pious in appearance, possess good command of Arabic and of Islam teachings, and are able to memorize the Quran. The minister argues that once they gain sympathy from civil servants in the latter's respective offices, the former will begin disseminating their religious extremist ideas. The minister's statement was

religious tutors or educators in civil servants' education centres or prayer leaders (*imams*) in various mosques in the premises of government offices.

Scholars argue that the term *extremism* needs to be reformulated to avoid overgeneralization. Instead of formulating extremism only on a singular dimension; Wibisono, Louis, and Jetten (2019, p. 5) propose four dimensions of extremism: theological, ritual, social and political. They argue that some Muslims may be extreme in certain dimensions but moderate in others. For example, Salafi Muslims are extreme in their rituals but moderate politically. In the same vein, a senior scholar at a major university in Jakarta argues that a university student is categorized as extremist if he is aggressive in promoting his version of religious faith. If they keep their religious fundamentalism among themselves, they should not be called extremists. Instead, they are supposed to be called religious textualists.[11] Ronald Wintrobe argues that extremism in Islam has two dimensions, namely, the method of struggle (*thariqah*) and the ideology (*fiqrah*) (in Muhtadi, 2019, pp. 21–22). He further argues that Islamic groups or organizations can be categorized into three groups or organizations:

(1) Where their ideology is not extreme, but their methods of struggle are extreme;
(2) Where they have both extreme ideology and methods; or
(3) Where their goals are extreme, but their methods in attaining those goals are not.

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considered controversial and earned public criticism. A national legislator from the Islamist party, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), criticized the minister "for practising stereotyping against people who possess good command of Islam teachings and people who are capable of memorizing the Quran." See *Detik News*, "Menag Ungkap Cara Masuk Paham Radikal: Anak 'Good Looking' hingga Hafiz", 4 September 2020, https://www.dw.com/id/menag-ungkap-anak-good-looking-hingga-hafiz-jalan-masuk-paham-radikal/a-54810504 (accessed 20 December 2021).

[11] In-person interview with Andy, a senior scholar at Jakarta State University (UNJ), 8 November 2021. UNJ is one of largest universities in Jakarta.

Narrowing the definition of extremism is useful and helpful to the description of the religious orientation of students by being more precise and accurate. Despite these efforts, people are still divided and prone to point out whether some organizations or individuals are religious extremists.

In this light, there is common agreement that Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and Gema Pembebasan, which is often accused as a campus wing of HTI, are extremist organizations because they aspire to replace the constitutionally agreed ideology that governs the Indonesian way of life, the Pancasila, with their version of Islam. It also aspires to establish an Islamic caliphate. If we follow Wintrobe's definition, then Gema Pembebasan might fall under the category of organizations that have extremist goals or ideologies. But their methods in attaining those goals are not extreme, because they never engage in violence.

On the other hand, observers are divided over whether or not to call the Indonesian Muslim Students Action Front (KAMMI), which is often titled the Tarbiyah (education) movement, an extremist university student organization. Several scholars, including a respected Muslim scholar Azyumardi Azra, argue that KAMMI is an extremist organization. He argues that KAMMI tends to be "a rightist, Islamist" organization.[12] KAMMI has been a dominant student organization in many Indonesian campuses, and Azyumardi argues that it is responsible for the rise of religious extremism among students on campus. Other moderate student organizations "need to produce counter-movements" to address this rise of religious extremism among students.[13] Researchers from the Indonesian Institute of Science (LIPI) argue that KAMMI is an extremist organization because it is "an offshoot of an international religious

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[12] Bangun Santoso and Nikolaus Tolen, "Azyumardi Azra: LDK dan KAMMI Picu Radikalisme Kampus", *Suara.com,* 10 July 2018, https://www.suara.com/news/2018/07/10/145016/azyumardi-azra-ldk-dan-kammi-picu-radikalisme-kampus (accessed 21 December 2021).

[13] Ibid.

extremist organization, Ikhwanul Muslimin" and "plans to establish an Islamic state of its version".[14]

In contrast, some other scholars and students argue that KAMMI is not an extremist organization, at least not yet. These often claim that it is a right-leaning organization, but "their members are not aggressive". For example, KAMMI members usually do not label or terrorize others as apostates, hence it does not qualify as an extremist organization.[15] Competition to win social and political influence among different student organizations is common in Indonesian campuses. However, members of rival student organizations acknowledge that, unlike HTI and its similar organizations, KAMMI is not an extremist organization. The students complained that KAMMI members are "socially exclusive" because they keep their distance from members of other organizations. Instead, they often socially engage only with people from the same student organization (KAMMI),[16] and it does not aim to establish an Islam caliphate and refrains from using violence in attaining its objectives.

Based on the above discussion, the government's definition of extremism looks more expansive than the definition of extremism expressed by scholars and students, in the sense that the government includes some additional indicators on top of common socially accepted

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[14] Prima Gumilang, "Radikalisme Ideologi Menguasai Kampus", *CNN Indonesia*, 18 February 2016, https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20160218193025-12-111927/radikalisme-ideologi-menguasai-kampus (accessed 21 December 2021).

[15] In-person interview with Andy, a senior scholar at Jakarta State University (UNJ), 8 November 2021.

[16] In-person interviews with two activists of the Yogyakarta State University (UNY) chapter of the Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (student wing of Muhammadiyah, the second-largest Muslim organization in Indonesia). The interview was held on 3 November 2021 in Yogyakarta city. Similar views that KAMMI is not an extreme student organization is also expressed by some student activists with the Pajajaran University (Unpad) chapter of Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam during our in-person interview in Bandung, West Java, 15 November 2021.

indicators, such as categorizing people who are antagonistic towards local and traditional religious practices as religious extremists. This expansive understanding of extremism can lead to stereotyping of certain Muslim groups, which could be unfair to them. Generally, various social actors, including government and students, consider organizations or individuals who support the establishment of an Islamic caliphate and who are involved in terror activities, such as bombings, as religious extremist organizations or individuals. This means that organizations that promote or are involved in causes such as HTI and Gema Pembebasan are all extremist organizations. As explained earlier, some scholars often accused KAMMI of being an extreme organization because it is an offshoot of Ihkwanul Muslimin and aspires to establish an Islamic state. However, KAMMI's organizational constitution has not shown that it aspires to establish an Islamic state. Narratives that its students promote on social media involve leadership and the self-improvement of character. Had KAMMI been promoting extremist ideas of Islam, campus authorities would have prevented them from being active in campuses. In contrast, KAMMI has been a dominant force in many campuses nationwide. Hence, it is too far-fetched to consider KAMMI a religious extremist organization at this point.

STUDENTS AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Some surveys found that the rising number of students who subscribe to extreme Islamic ideas was due to the lack of alternative discourses in campuses. Based on a 2019 survey in ten state universities in Indonesia, the human rights institute Setara Institute found that students have no access to alternative discourses.[17] Islamists—which refer to people or organizations that believe political systems must be based on Islam

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[17] See Setara Institute, "Wacana dan Gerakan Keagamaan di Kalangan Mahasiswa: Memetakan Ancaman atas Negara Pancasila di Perguruan Tinggi Negeri", *Setara-Institute.org*, 31 May 2019, https://setara-institute.org/wacana-dan-gerakan-keagamaan-di-kalangan-mahasiswa-2/ (accessed 24 December 2021).

sharia, such as Tarbiyah and Islamic caliphate movements—had been increasingly popular in universities after a substantial number of students were exposed to their respective ideologies, which their activists disseminated systematically and militantly. A similar result was found in another survey carried out by a research unit at Universitas Nadhlatul Ulama Indonesia (LPPM UNUSIA), between December 2018 and January 2019 in eight state universities. In addition to Tarbiyah and HTI, another increasingly popular movement is the Salafi movement, although they are still a minority in terms of numbers.

These "extremist" movements attempt to dominate religious discourses by taking control of student associations, such as Student Executive Bodies (BEM) and campus mosques, and establishing regular religious gatherings in boarding or rental houses near the respective universities. For example, Gema Pembebasan, through several of its branches across the nation, actively organize discussions on various topics, including those that they aggressively and continuously promote, namely the Islamic caliphate. These discussions are categorized into:

(1) *Dialogika* (Dialog Intelektual, or Intellectual Dialogue) where speakers from the organization and other extracampus student organizations are expected to engage in debate on publicly controversial issues;
(2) *Ngopi* (Ngobrol Pemikiran Islam, or Discussion of Islamic Thought) where speakers from Gema Pembebasan and other organizations discuss current affairs related to Islamic thought; and,
(3) *Focus Group Discussion* (FGD) where the speaker is only from Gema Pembebasan.

The transmission of "extremist" ideologies occurs at these places and events.[18] All the events are open to the public, although activists from Gema Pembebasan who organize the events usually impose stringent

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[18] Fahreza Rizky, "8 Universitas Negeri Terjangkit Gerakan Islam Eksklusif", *Okezone.com*, 25 June 2019, https://nasional.okezone.com/read/2019/06/25/337/2070647/8-universitas-negeri-terjangkit-gerakan-islam-eksklusif (accessed 25 December 2021).

vetting in granting access. All these events result in a good number of students who subscribe to their ideas.

Moderate extracampus organizations that could have offered alternative discourses, such as HMI, PMII and IMM, were largely absent.[19] These had left the campuses in 2002 when Megawati Sukarnoputri's government banned extracampus organizations from operating in campuses for fear of politicization. Also, these student organizations tended to neglect religious issues, and hence they failed to offer religious lessons to students, especially freshmen or sophomores. These juniors, who aspire to not only learn about politics or leadership during their student years, but also wish to learn about Islam through extracampus organizations, are attracted to join student organizations that are part of global Islamic movements. These include KAMMI, which promote Tarbiyah values and Gema Pembebasan, which supports the idea of an Islamic caliphate. These student organizations also give students religious lessons.

In recent years, due to concerns over student extremism, the government welcomed extracampus student organizations that are seen as religiously moderate organizations back to compete with the Tarbiyah and Islamic caliphate movements that are the dominant student movements in a substantial number of campuses nationwide. Through the regulation issued in 2018, members of extracampus student organizations are expected to join a university student activity unit called Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa Pengawal Ideologi Bangsa (the Guardian of National Ideology Student Activity Unit).[20] Universities will work

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[19] See Setara Institute, "Wacana dan Gerakan Keagamaan di Kalangan Mahasiswa". Also see Arbi Sumandoyo. "Interview with Azyumardi Azra: Radikalisme di Kampus Berkembang Karena Tak Ada Gerakan Tandingan", *Tirto.id*, July 2018, https://tirto.id/radikalisme-di-kampus-berkembang-karena-tak-ada-gerakan-tandingan-cPqQ (accessed 26 December 2021).

[20] Yohannes Enggar Harususilo, "Cegah Radikalisme, Kemenristek Rilis Peraturan Menteri Ini", *Kompas.com*, 5 Februari 2019, https://edukasi.kompas.com/read/2019/02/05/23440381/cegah-radikalisme-kemenristek-rilis-peraturan-menteri-ini (accessed 24 December 2021).

together with members of extracampus student organizations to alleviate rising extremism in campuses. By August 2021, such student units, which the rector directly supervises, have been set up in numerous universities nationwide, and they have organized activities that promote Pancasila. For example, the one in Semarang State University (USM) organized a leadership training on 19 August 2021 titled "Pancasila Leadership in Transformation System in the Millennial Era".[21] Encouragingly, as many as 433 students took part in this training.

Research on student religious radicalism appears to confirm the survey's findings. A study led by Rita Pranawati of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN Jakarta) was carried out at UIN and the University of Indonesia. The researchers interviewed some 300 students from both universities and found transnational Islam manifested in the Tarbiyah, Salafi and Islamic caliphate movements and dominating religious discourses at universities. Claims made by these narratives include the following: (1) Capitalism results in the income or wealth gap in the economy; (2) Palestinians suffer due to Israeli occupation, and; (3) The United States is the enemy of Islam (Pranawati 2012, pp. 205–6). Also, the movements tend to limit themselves to the teachings of certain religious figures who hold radical and exclusive views. In addition, the availability of reading materials such as magazines or bulletins that promote religiously extremist views of Islam plays an important role in shaping students' minds. The research found that students at UIN hold more extreme views than students at UI because they read more religiously extremist reading materials (Pranawati 2012, p. 206).

Another team of researchers found that the role of Islamist literature is crucial in "the popularization and the indoctrination of Islamist ideology to Muslim millennials", which include university students (Noorhaidi Hasan et al. 2018, p. 44). The project found that the dissemination

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[21] Jati Prihatnomo, "UKM PIB USM Gelar Pelatihan Kepemimpinan Pancasila, 433 Peserta Ambil Bagian", *SuaraMerdeka.com*, 19 August 2021, https://www.suaramerdeka.com/pendidikan/pr-04918799/ukm-pib-usm-gelar-pelatihan-kepemimpinan-pancasila-433-peserta-ambil-bagian?page=all (accessed 26 December 2021).

of Islamist ideologies was largely done through Islamist books and magazines available in bookstores, and that five categories of Islamist literature are involved (Noorhaidi Hasan et al., 2018, p. 44):

1. Jihadi literature that describes the Islamic world as being at war, and that Muslims must wage war to salvage their religion by destroying the enemy of Islam;
2. Tahriri literature which proclaims that the West is dominating Islam;
3. Salafi literature that appeals to Muslims to return to the literal interpretation of the Quran and the religious practices of early generations of Muslims (Al-Salaf Al-Shalih);
4. Tarbawi literature that promotes the Tarbiyah (education) movement, inspired by Ikhwanul Muslimin religious and political movement in Egypt.
5. Popular Islamism literature that promotes an emphasis on personal purity, such as how to dress in line with Islamic values and the best practices in nurturing relationships between men and women.

These lines of thought were increasingly popular among students and were discussed at various events, including study circles, public seminars and book discussions. These ideologies are appealing in offering "a novel way to practise religion" and "responses to the development of the world" (Noorhaidi Hasan et al. 2018, p. 44).

My research supports these findings. In my fieldwork, I found how the domination of narrative was a crucial factor behind the rising religious extremism among students. The internalization of the religiously extremist narratives in systematic and structured ways, facilitated by the relative absence of moderate discourses of Islam, contribute strongly to the growth of extremist ideas about Islam. For example, a top activist at Gema Pembebasan recalls that he joined the movement after participating in some of its discussions.[22] He was attracted by the idea

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[22] Zoom interview on 21 October 2021 with the top activist from Gema Pembebasan, a major student organization in Indonesia that promotes Islamic caliphate. Activists in this organization reject accusations that it is linked with HTI, a large and influential community organization that promotes the same idea, but that was banned by the government in 2017.

of establishing an Islamic caliphate and the idea that Islam provides a comprehensive solution to human problems. This is an example of how an idea disseminated and communicated in systematic and structured ways appeals to youngsters.

In contrast to other student organizations such as HMI which capitalize on their powerful network of successful alumni to attract new members, Gema Pembebasan believes on the strength of ideas. These include the need to establish an Islamic caliphate and the idea that Islam provides comprehensive solutions to human problems. Its activists disseminate these ideas regularly through social media, such as their Instagram accounts, and offline or Zoom meetings. In the course of my fieldwork for this research, various branches of Gema Pembebasan posted invitations for public meetings such as webinars (in which participants are carefully selected before the meetings). The themes of the webinars are confined to issues such as the benefits of establishing an Islamic caliphate, the benefits of having Islam as a comprehensive solution to human problems, and criticism that aims to undermine the government of Joko Widodo, which they consider hostile to their cause. Activists of this organization throughout Indonesia have also been active in approaching activists of other organizations to discuss contemporary social and political issues, or discuss issues that have become their interest, such as the Islamic caliphate. The emphasis on influencing people through ideas is a distinct character of Gema Pembebasan, which is not found in other student organizations.

This organization faces challenges in recruitment though, due to the increasing pragmatism among university students.[23] In addition, the organization's growth is also likely hampered by the government's and campuses' hard approach against HTI, which is often considered a parent organization to Gema Pembebasan. A deputy rector at Yogyakarta State University (UNY) had instructed students not to participate in a discussion organized by Gema Pembebasan in the campus. The instruction was largely not followed, and the event successfully went

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[23] Ibid.

ahead as scheduled.[24] However, this incident did send the signal out that the university disapproved of Gema Pembebasan, and this can affect students' appetite to join this organization. Despite the challenges they face, some of the organization's branches are still lively in conducting activities. Some of Gema Pembebasan's branches have turned out to be major organizations alongside old student forces, such as in Makassar, South Sulawesi[25] (see Syahrul 2019, p. 514). Although this organization only relies on "the strength of ideas to establish an Islamic caliphate and that Islam is a comprehensive solution to human problems" in their recruitment endeavours, they do gain many followers.

While Gema Pembebasan persists in disseminating its ideas on establishing an Islamic caliphate to prospective members, KAMMI is a student organization with a rigorous cadre recruitment system. This allows the organization to transmit its ideas to prospective members in systematic and structured manners. Although there is some uncertainty over whether KAMMI should be included in the religiously extremist category, I shall here discuss how KAMMI activists transmit their organization's ideas to prospective members. This is important in order to show how a systematic and structured transmission of ideas can ensure success in recruitment.

KAMMI undertakes open recruitment to grow the organization and publicly invites students to participate in its branch-level Daurah Marhalah (Training Session), or through senior members of KAMMI personally approaching new students. To assume a senior position at KAMMI, a cadre needs to participate in three levels of Daurah Marhalah (DM): DM 1, DM 2 and DM 3. DM 1 is for introducing new members to KAMMI's vision and mission; while at DM 2, members learn to be

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[24] Khansa Nabilah, "Gema Pembebasan: Dakwah Khilafah di Kampus Pendidikan", *EkspresiOnline.com*, 29 April 2020, https://ekspresionline.com/gema-pembebasan-dakwah-khilafah-di-kampus-pendidikan/ (accessed 29 December 2021).

[25] Gema Pembebasan is one of eight major student organizations in terms of number of activists.

the movers of the organization and are trained to create programme proposals that support KAMMI's vision and mission. At DM 3, members "are trained on how to formulate KAMMI's strategic policies".[26]

In addition to such formal, systematic and structured initiatives, KAMMI also establishes the *liqo* mentoring system, which is not commonly implemented in other student organizations. This is an informal cell system in which every member of KAMMI who has passed Daurah Marhalah serves as a mentor (*murabbi*). The *murabbi* is encouraged to look for mentees and establish a cell that comprises up to twelve people. They meet once a week to discuss various topics, such as religion, contemporary social developments, personal problems and others, for about two hours. This meeting allows *murabbis* to inculcate Tarbiyah values to the mentees—values that are extrapolated in certain books recommended by KAMMI leaders. These meetings do not only discuss Tarbiyah values, and cell members can share and consult with *murabbis* about their problems, and it is through this informal engagement that KAMMI's values are transmitted. This bond can last a lifetime, although in some cases, some cell members can be transferred to other *murabbis*, or some members leave *murabbis* after several months or several years as all of them have their careers or family lives to pursue. When members join this *liqo* cell for a longer period, the internalization of these values naturally deepens (Sudarsono 2016, p. 19).

As I explain in previous paragraphs, Gema Pembebasan and KAMMI have developed a systematic and structured internalization of values to attract prospective members. But what limits its efficacy? Why are not more students attracted to join religiously extremist student organizations and practise extremist versions of Islam? A 2017 survey by Mata Air Foundation and Alvara Research Institute shows that only 17.8 per cent of university students support the establishment of an Islam caliphate in Indonesia. In contrast, most university students in the survey still support the Unitary State of Indonesia. The answer to the question lies in the

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[26] In-person interview with a KAMMI activist from UGM Commissariat in Yogyakarta, 4 November 2021.

rising economic pragmatism among university students.[27] Students want to finish their studies as soon as possible and then join the job market because, in many universities, the period of candidature is limited to a certain number of years. If they fail to meet this requirement, they will be expelled.[28] Also, the mentorship system does not work well in many cases because mentors often fail to maintain their mentee's commitment to the organization's vision and mission.[29] Nevertheless, the transmission of the religiously extremist ideology has been mildly successful as a substantial number of university students do subscribe to extreme Islamic ideas, as shown by the surveys.

I have explained in this section that the relative absence of moderate narratives facilitates the internalization of increasingly ubiquitous extremist ideas of Islam in the minds of university students. The following section discusses government and campus policies tackling religious extremism among university students.

THE GOVERNMENT'S AND UNIVERSITIES' ANTI-EXTREMISM DRIVE

The campuses and the government have been implementing some policies to address religious extremism, but they face daunting tasks to make these policies effective. Campus authorities, for example, have required students to participate in anti-extremism workshops. They also abolished tutorial sessions for a mandatory religious course on Islam in some universities in Indonesia, due to the fact that these sessions are prone to infiltration by religious extremist tutors.

In addition, through the Ministry of Research and Technology, the government issued a ministerial decree in 2018 to allow extracampus student organizations (OMEK), especially Muslim ones, to return after

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[27] Zoom interview on 21 October 2021 with a top activist from Gema Pembebasan.

[28] In-person interview with a KAMMI activist from UGM Commissariat in Yogyakarta, 4 November 2021.

[29] Ibid.

their presence on campus had been banned for nineteen years. The new decree now allows these organizations onto campuses under the "*Nation's Ideology Guardian [Pengawal Ideologi Bangsa]* Student Activity Unit". This unit is under the supervision of each campus authority respectively.

This policy was established mainly in response to the rising influence of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, the organization that, along with its campus wing Gema Pembebasan, introduced and spread ideas on the establishment of an Islamic caliphate to the students. The policy also aims to reduce the influence of ISIS thought on students, and to facilitate the return of moderate OMEK to campuses. With OMEK's return to campus, students will no longer be solely exposed to ideas that promote Islamic extremism.[30] Indeed, some OMEKs are culturally part of moderate Islamic organizations in Indonesia. For example, the Indonesian Islamic Students Movement (PMII) is culturally part of Nadhlatul Ulama (NU), while Muhammadiyah Student Association (IMM) is culturally part of Muhammadiyah.

However, these government efforts have not been effective. Mubarak, Zulkifli and Halimatussa'diyah (2018, p. 25) argue that these measures were too general and all-encompassing, and were not tailored to suit the situation on the ground. For example, the initiatives have yet to clarify whether they were meant to prevent students from being exposed to extremism, or whether they were meant to deradicalize students who have already subscribed to extremism (Mubarak, Zulkifli, and Halimatussa'diyah, 2018, p. 25).

Some academic works suggest that to address religious extremism effectively, the government needs to join forces with other interested parties, especially since the causes of religious extremism among students are complex. Alana Siegel et al. (2019, p. 18) suggest that effective government intervention requires synergy with various stakeholders, including the family, school, prison, community, Internet

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[30] Jurnalis, "Ristekdikti Keluarkan Permen Bina Ideologi Bangsa", *Komite.id*, 30 October 2018, https://www.komite.id/2018/10/30/ristekdikti-keluarkan-permen-bina-ideologi-bangsa/ (accessed 1 September 2021).

and government. For example, the university can support a family in preventing their children from exposure to online extremism. In his study on government handling of religious extremism in four countries in Europe: Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium; Alexander de Boer (2017, p. 34) also found that anti-extremism policies can be effective if all stakeholders—governments, security and police services, educational institutions, clergy and societal circles—work together.

Despite the recommended best practices, integrated responses to address religious extremism among university students hardly exist in Indonesia. BNPT has worked together with numerous stakeholders to tackle religious extremism in Indonesia campuses; such as universities, educational foundations and non-governmental organizations; but they are primarily bilateral programmes instead of multilateral ones. For example, it has joined forces with numerous campuses, including six in the Central Java capital of Semarang, in combating religious extremism among students, for example, by helping to educate university students on the dangers of religious extremism.[31] The institution has also developed a "counter-propaganda" programme in thirteen provinces. Through this programme, BNPT worked hand in hand with 780 anti-extremism youth ambassadors to promote, among others, a moderate version of Islam. The ambassadors, including university students, are chosen among students who "are militant in using social media".[32] Given that religious extremism in campuses involves numerous stakeholders, such as students, senior students, parents, campuses, and government

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[31] Sigit Pinardi, "BNPT-PT Teken MoU Penanggulangan Radikalisme dan Terorisme di Lingkungan Kampus", *Antaranew.com*, 18 September 2018, https://www.antaranews.com/berita/749447/bnpt-pt-teken-mou-penanggulangan-radikalisme-dan-terorisme-di-lingkungan-kampus (accessed 31 December 2021).

[32] In-person interview with Brigadier General (Police) R. Ahmad Nurwakhid, the Director of Prevention at the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT), 11 November 2021.

officials, such bilateral programmes will not effectively tackle religious extremism. More integrated programmes involving several or even all stakeholders in tackling this problem of extremism are needed.

Further evidence that the integrated programme has not been high on the agenda of the Indonesian government and campus authorities is that campus officials have focused mainly on preventing their students from being exposed to religious extremism within campus perimeters. Universitas Gadjah Mada has developed a vetting system to ensure that people who run activities at campus mosques or manage student dormitories are not influenced by extremist Islamic ideas.[33] Second, in Banten province, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah) has made it compulsory for students in all faculties and departments to enrol in the Introductory to Islam course that explains a moderate version of Islam. In addition, a senior official in charge of student affairs at the university also confirms that he always encourages students to join extracampus student organizations that promote a moderate version of Islam, such as HMI, PMII and IMM.[34]

Due to limitations in campus supervision, campus authorities have not pursued issues that fall outside the campus perimeters. For example, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah has not developed a programme to counter students' exposure to online extremism, since "it is hard to detect such problem. It is hard to monitor students one by one, except where they engage in such discussion in campus premises."[35] This issue can be tackled if campuses work hand in hand with other stakeholders, such as parents through the parents' associations in respective universities. Not all departments or faculties in Indonesia's universities have parents' associations. But, the number of such associations is quite significant in Indonesia, and they

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[33] In-person interview with Prof. Djagal Wiseso Marseno, Universitas Gadjah Mada's Deputy Rector for Education, Teaching and Student Affairs, 4 November 2021.

[34] In-person interview with the senior official at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, 26 October 2021.

[35] Ibid.

can assume an important role to help universities address the problem. Campuses working together with parents' associations can boost student monitoring endeavours. They can at least work together to formulate an effective early detection system through this cooperation.

They also need to join forces with BNPT, which has the experience and expertise in dealing with religious extremism. Through its extremism prevention directorate, the institution has worked and coordinated extensively with a network of bureaucracies and state apparatuses (Terrorism Prevention Communication Forum or FKPT) in all thirty-four provinces in Indonesia. A high-ranking government official at the provincial level, often from the province's Nation's Unity and Political Office, chairs this forum and is responsible for organizing events that counteract religiously extremist narratives. At the same time, the forum also promotes moderate religious narratives. Youth, women and former terrorists are among the targets of FKPT programmes. For example, a forum held in the province of South Sumatra organized a short-movie competition meant to promote religious moderation. The title and the winner of the movie were determined by BNPT (Arjulin 2018 pp. 106–7). Better results can be achieved if these three parties work together to reverse the influence of religious extremism among university students.

CONCLUSION

This article has found that increasing religiously extremist narratives in both the private and public spheres is a major contributing factor to rising religious extremism among university students. Secondly, government and campus policies have not been able to effectively dampen religious extremism among students since policy implementers predominantly work in silos. Stakeholders—such as the government, campuses, the community and families—will therefore need to work in concert to prevent students from subscribing to religious extremist ideas.

BNPT has been active in building cooperation with various segments of society, including campuses, but they will only be useful only as far as socializing or disseminating moderate religious narratives is concerned. More systemic and comprehensive counter-extremism efforts can only

be done through an integrated programme that involves some or even all stakeholders. BNPT needs to work together with campuses, parents of students and communities where students are active, such as student organizations or mosque communities, to build an integrated programme that can detect early symptoms of religious extremism among students. Such an integrated programme will be useful for expanding the range to which stakeholders can monitor religious extremism, something that cannot be done if each stakeholder works in a silo fashion. Furthermore, early handling of religious extremism will lead in a more effective cure.

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