

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING OF TERRORIST GROUPS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The development of terrorism in Indonesia is highly influenced by the political and religious understanding of the members of terrorist groups. With this understanding, they are inspired and motivated to commit various acts of violence as a holy war (jihad). To understand the political and religious understanding of these terrorist groups, the authors conducted qualitative research by collecting data through in-depth interview methods, focus group discussions, and literature reviews. The collected data were analyzed using Nvivo 12 plus. The authors found that the political and religious understanding of terrorist groups in Indonesia is based on limited comprehensive views. They have a high religious spirit, but they have a problem understanding and reading contextual issues, especially those related to politics. Moreover, in the religious aspect, terrorism groups feel like the only righteous people; they want to implement Islamic sharia; they legalize suicide bombings as a form of jihad, and have a political agenda.

Keywords: Understanding, Politics, Religious, Terrorist, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Various terrorist acts connected to Islamic Extremist groups in Indonesia have attracted worldwide attention, especially after the 2002 Bali bombings. In the attack, many victims were the citizens of Australia, Indonesia, and twenty other countries. Therefore, the Bali bombing incidents have become an event marking Indonesia as an unsafe country from foreigners' perspective. Moreover, many other terrorist attacks had occurred in various regions in Indonesia afterward.

Some countries immediately announced travel warnings to Indonesia because they were concerned about the safety of their citizens. Indonesia's image had worsened, especially the view towards Islam because most Indonesians are Muslims, and the terrorist groups claimed themselves as Islamic activists who want to implement Islamic sharia. Some radicalized groups also identified themselves with Islam, such as the Jama'ah Islamia, Al Qaeda, and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). Such conditions were counterproductive to Islam as a religion that teaches its followers to spread peace wherever they are. Meanwhile, some terrorist groups often claim the violence they have committed is in the name of Islam.

According to Rahmatullah, this has happened because of a wrong understanding of Islam contextualized in contemporary time. Understanding Islam within the community is often influenced by their ability to think, economic background, organization affiliations, and religious experience. Those radical groups in their notion often experienced problems to conduct abstract thinking, such as understanding the meaning of jihad and its implementation in the contemporary era. However, because they have various media to promote their beliefs to the majority of people which also have limited knowledge to understand Islam

comprehensively, their radical perspective attracted some groups of people, especially those who have a noble spirit of Islam but are still weak in understanding (Rahmatullah, 2017).

They could be approached quickly, then recruited, and were given the wrong religious doctrine. Usually, the candidates of terrorist cadres were also invited to watch various videos related to atrocities committed against Muslims in various parts of the world. Thus, their empathy arises towards their fellow brothers, since in the Islamic perspective, all Muslims are seen as a body that must share in their siblings' suffering. When this empathy has arisen, and their religious understanding was misled, the efforts to commit terror and violence are prepared. They are promised exciting rewards, especially after death, since their violence was seen as a sacred path of Islamic jihad.

Despite social, economic, domestic, and international conditions, which can cause radicalism (Sumbulah, 2019), political and religious understanding of terrorist groups exert a very significant influence. The urge to commit violence is inseparable from their way of thinking and understanding on issues to find solutions to Muslims' problems. For them, these "noble ideals" are judged as jihad, even though they have to do violence, which is strictly prohibited in Islam (Fenton, 2014). Therefore, in the efforts to deradicalize, Bin Hassan considered that counter-theoretical method by improving the theological understanding of terrorism groups are crucial efforts to do, both among those who are already active in radical movements or the public to prevent themselves from the radical understanding of Islam (Bin Hassan & Pereire, 2006). Even since the September 11, 2001, attack, various attempts to recognize terrorist groups' characteristics and the determinant factors inspiring them to act any violence have already become the public concerns (Hahn et al., 2019).

Based on the background above, this article answers questions relating to the political and religious understanding of terrorist groups in Indonesia?

METHODOLOGY

The methodology to answer the research question was qualitative research using in-depth interviews, literature reviews, and focus group discussions as data collection methods. The authors interviewed some former terrorists affiliated with the peace circle organization. After collecting data, the authors invited several religious leaders, political scientists, and Islamic activists to join the focus group discussion and discussed the research findings. Data collected are classified, reduced, and analyzed using Nvivo 12 plus. The analysis was strengthened using various literature reviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Terrorist Political Views

Terrorism is an act of violence against civil society in an irresponsible way committed by a group of people to achieve their political interests. The action eventually causes fear among the people to achieve their targets, making the government do the terrorists' expectations. At least, the terrorist wants the media to publish their actions, making their organizations and groups exist (Pyszczyński et al., 2009).

Even though the violence is not only carried out by Muslims, terrorist groups are often identified as having close relations with the Islamic movements. This view emerges due to the power of international public opinion and several radical movements in the name of Islam. Usually, these groups justified their actions to return the Islamic tradition in the whole aspects of their lives as part of efforts to restore Islam's glory.

Therefore, it is essential to map the affiliation of ideology and political orientation of the radical groups. In this way, the generalizing of Islam as the ideology supporting terrorism can be avoided. A monolithic approach to understanding radical Islamism can cause complex effects, such as the government being misleading in making policies to face terrorism. The understanding of facts should be based on government policies, not merely relying on the news of media only.

For some Western societies, terrorist groups are often referred to as fundamentalists, extremists, religious fanatics, or radical groups. Some of their characteristics are described as groups that (a) want to return to authentic Islam and exclude Islam from local practices, (b) support freedom of expression, *ijtihad*, and rejection of *taqlid*; (c) support the need for migration from unbelieving territories (*dar al-kufr*), and (d) trust in legitimate rulers and revolutionary presence (Mustofa et al., 2019).

Usually, Islamic terrorism is characterized by its transcendental, egalitarian, or theological goals. The orientation is entirely for obedience to God, which may not be fully understood by most people's logic. For example, the terrorist groups want to unite all Muslims under one country and change the current world system under the caliphate. Such enthusiasm was promoted to their followers by analyzing the Muslims' conditions in various countries who had been suffering because of the Western world's dominance. For them, what is happening in the Islamic world now is a result of the Western world's hegemony and domination (Harb & Fischer, 2013).

However, their understanding of the world inequality is in a narrow perspective, making them unable to describe the actual real conditions. They could not understand that the domination of the western world developed because of Muslims' internal problems, making the influence of intrusive systems happened. For these groups, the world system's revolution should be realized by carrying out several attacks and violence against the West (far enemy) and its supporters from Muslims (close enemy). Because of their actions to legalize violence in the name of Islam, religious terrorists have no intention to create a better world, but they want to destroy the earth to accelerate the final stage of human history (Gunning & Jackson, 2011).

In other words, political issues often become determinant factors for certain persons or groups to be terrorists. Their motivations are to eliminate non-Islamic practices in politics, against widespread moral degradation, against national governments, and against Christian and Zionist conspiracies to overthrow Islam. In essence, they argued that various injustices experienced by the Islamic world in various parts of the world, such as in Palestine and Myanmar, must be eliminated. For them, America is a central enemy that must be faced together (Fenton, 2014).

The anti-American spirit is used by several terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda, to win people's sympathy. They call America a big satan (evil). They describe that the acts of terrorism must resist the arbitrariness of American policy. By this spirit, they collect public support. Thus, America built the arguments of like or dislike to America as a tool to recognize one group is affiliated to terrorists or no. America builds justification that those who are not in line against terrorism with America are terrorists. Therefore, any anti-Americanism can be categorized as an act of terrorism (Ciftci et al., 2017).

In its development, terrorist groups often adopt the idea of Sayyid Qutb, who divided the object of their violence against far and near enemies. America and the western world are often categorized as the far enemies, governments, or Muslim groups that are seen as obstructing their desires to be called close enemies. Because of this, terrorist groups often criticize the national government on their domestic policies. Sometimes, they also influenced

the student organizations to conduct a national action in responding to various social, political, and economic issues (Mustofa et al., 2019).

For the Islamic terrorist groups, their goal is to convey a protest message to what they call as God's enemy. In their actions, their main goal is not to kill the target being attacked, but to attract the attention of many people. Through this message, terrorist groups want to show their presence in front of the enemy (Hilmy, 2014). Even if possible, they want the enemy to act following their wishes, benefiting terrorist groups' existence.

In the case of Indonesia, several groups have this understanding, including Jemaah Islamiyah, Darul Islam, Jemaah Anshorut Tauhid, and the Indonesian Mujahidin Council. They all have a relatively similar philosophy and are connected and support each other (Fenton, 2014). Based on the information provided by Ali Fauzi, a former terrorist fighter in Indonesia, currently, terrorist groups in Indonesia are affiliated with two movements, namely JAD (Jama'ah Anshar Daulah) and JAS (Jama'ah Ansharusy Shariah). JAD is a group connected with ISIS, and JAS is linked to Al Qaeda. Although previously, they came from one movement group, in its development, these two groups developed into two different movements. Al Qaeda wants to have a strong religious influence in politics, while ISIS is a jihadist group that wants to re-establish an Islamic caliphate and assert divine authority over all Muslims (Ciftci et al., 2017)

Religious Views of Terrorist Groups

The political understanding, as mentioned above, becomes more massive when it is mobilized with religious understanding. Some things related to the religious understanding of terrorist groups in Indonesia can be described as follows:

First, they always feel that they are right. Terrorist groups feel that what they do is a religious order based on their textual understanding of Islam. As a result, it is common for them to see the problems only from one perspective without any different views. They often blame those with different views. As a result, they got complaints from the majority of moderate Muslims.

This feeling of self-righteousness has caused a superficial level of terrorist tolerance attitude. Even among the Islamic movements' followers, while facing different opinions, they often fight each other. They often understand the world only by black and white colors, or right-wrong (Bin Hassan & Pereire, 2006). Meanwhile, contemporary issues require more accurate details and multi-perspective analysis.

In defining sharia, for example, they differ from one another. One group wants to fully restore the Islamic understanding of the early generation of Islam by following a textual approach (Ciftci et al., 2017). Some others want to look more contextually and comprehensively based on current developments. Moreover, the meaning of sharia lies not only in terms of cutting off hands, *rajam*, and *qishos*. In the context of Indonesia, terrorist groups do not see that this country has adopted some or even the majority of Islamic sharia, for example, in terms of prayer, fasting, marriage, inheritance, and some other Islamic rules.

Therefore, the development of terrorism will sustain if this understanding continues to develop. The understanding of Islam based on the fundamental principles of ideology and contextualization to the current issues is crucial. Thus, the success of deradicalization policies can be obtained if these violent and extremist ideologies have been neutralized (Bin Hassan & Pereire, 2006). All factors that support the development of radical and violent ideology and support this violence need to be anticipated. Various parties need to make early detection; for example, those who often describe their desire to implement Islamic sharia and oppose Pancasila's existence tend to support the ideologies of terrorist groups (Fenton, 2014).

It is also necessary to conduct further elaboration on the methods of spreading these ideologies, especially those related to the indoctrination carried out by their leaders and teachers. That teaching spreading the mindset that drives extremism or terrorism needs to be anticipated (Harb & Fischer, 2013). During this time, the teachings of violence developed because of their teachers' abilities to illustrate that what they do as part of an effort to help religion is God's commandment (Mustofa et al., 2019).

In this brainwashing and indoctrination phase, they are motivated to achieve the hereafter salvation and are not deceived by world life, even if they have to sacrifice their lives with suicide bombings (Sosis et al., 2012). Those who are ready to sell their world for the afterlife are promised by heaven and some beautiful wives because of their death on jihad. This jihad is a war against the great satan, to mention the United States and its allies (Pech & Slade, 2006).

Second, terrorist groups have a desire to implement Islamic law. Although most Muslims want sharia in social life, empirical studies have shown that sharia support does not automatically encourage violence against democracy. People find sharia to be more democratic and are tolerant of life (Ciftci et al., 2017).

However, for terrorist groups, the implementation of sharia is not only for individual life but also in the political sphere. They believe that Islam is a perfect religion and encompasses all aspects of life, which should be under the rules of Islam sharia. For them, conditions dominated by western philosophy and culture during Muslim life must be resisted. Therefore, they view that every Muslim is obliged to participate in establishing an Islamic State (Hilmy, 2014).

For terrorist groups, this view is not only the understanding but should be practiced immediately. They cannot accommodate the contemporary condition, which they see as far from the Islamic rules. Meanwhile, moderate groups in Islam can adapt to contemporary developments, which are considered not ideal in applying Islamic law and politics. Therefore, the steps to implement Islamic shariah are possible to do through the bottom-up system following the current system.

Despite planning to implement Islamic sharia, terrorist groups also want to re-establish the Islamic caliphate. Because every Muslim is seen as one soul, they must unite in any hemisphere. Moreover, the nation-state concept in the modern era is considered a product of western colonialism. Therefore, efforts to rebuild the caliphate must be made (Morgan, 2017). In practice, they legalize acts of violence to achieve these goals.

Third, they claim suicide bombings as a form of jihad. It is clear that in Islam's teachings, life affairs is a serious matter, even killing one soul is considered the same as killing all humanity. Even in the level of personal life, it is considered as part of the mandate that must be maintained so that no one can kill himself or sacrifice his soul for any reason that is not justified by religion.

However, the terrorist groups understood that their goals were religious teachings which legalized murder, killing, and suicide bombing because the current situation was judged as not within the auspices of the Darul Islam (Islamic state), but the Darul Harb (war state) because of the lack of sharia. For them, killing others or themselves to achieve the goal of sharia enforcement is considered as the path to true happiness because it is a form of jihad (Bin Hassan & Pereire, 2006).

Moreover, based on their model of movements, suicide bomb attacks attract various groups, even the international world. Their existence emerges, and their desires can be realized. For terrorist groups, suicide bomb blasts are a very cheap method to achieve a great goal: a holy

war (Rahmatullah, 2017). In Bali bombing II, they spent only US\$ 700, and the results affected the constellation of world politics (Zakiyah, 2016).

Fourth, terrorist groups often use religious symbols for political purposes. Violence is not only religious because the root of the problem of terrorist activities mainly has political motives. It is in line with Sosil's view that defined terrorism with several conditions, such as violence and destruction, political motivation, and makes the target feel fear (Sosis et al., 2012). What is raised more often is related to religious terrorism because the methods used to carry out these actions, ranging from recruitment, indoctrination, and motives, carry out attacks with religious justification as part of God's commands (Gunning & Jackson, 2011).

However, religious motives have dominated the intention of persons to become terrorists (figure 1). The combination of political and religious motives makes terrorists even willing to sacrifice their life. For them, the acts of violence they do are forms of goodness that will get heaven's reward from God. This finding is important because it becomes a prominent consideration for priority policies that the government will carry out in dealing with terrorism.

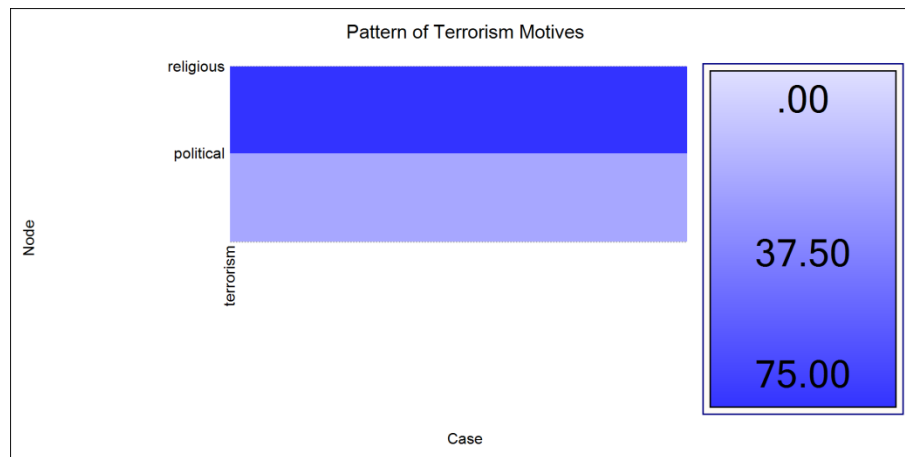


Figure 1. Nvivo 12 plus analysis result

Concerning religious understanding, religious doctrine originating from religious texts has a tremendous influence (figure 2). It also often makes terrorist groups referred to as textual groups and lacks an understanding of religious life contextual in modern times.

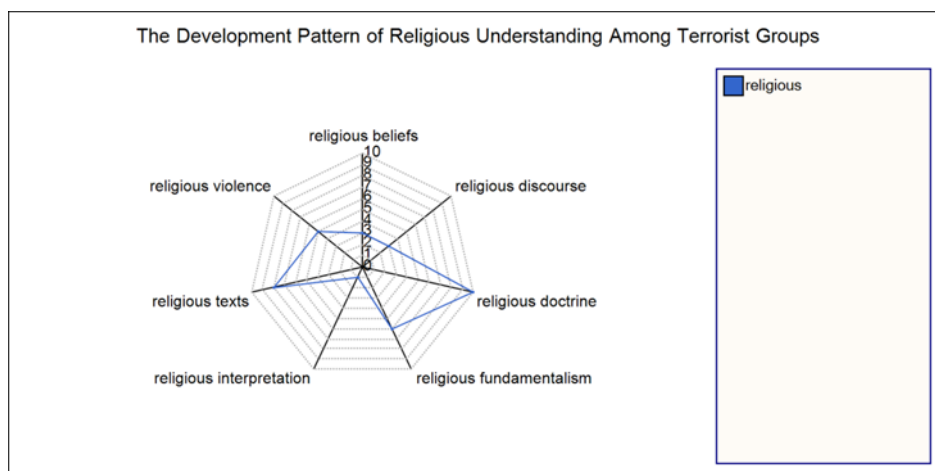


Figure 2. Nvivo 12 plus analysis result

Meanwhile, in the political aspect, the motivation to join a terrorist movement often arises because of the elements of political interests and ideology. Those terrorists commit to violent action by the justification of religious interests. Therefore, political ideology and political violence have become dominant factors among terrorist groups to strengthen their commitment (figure 3).

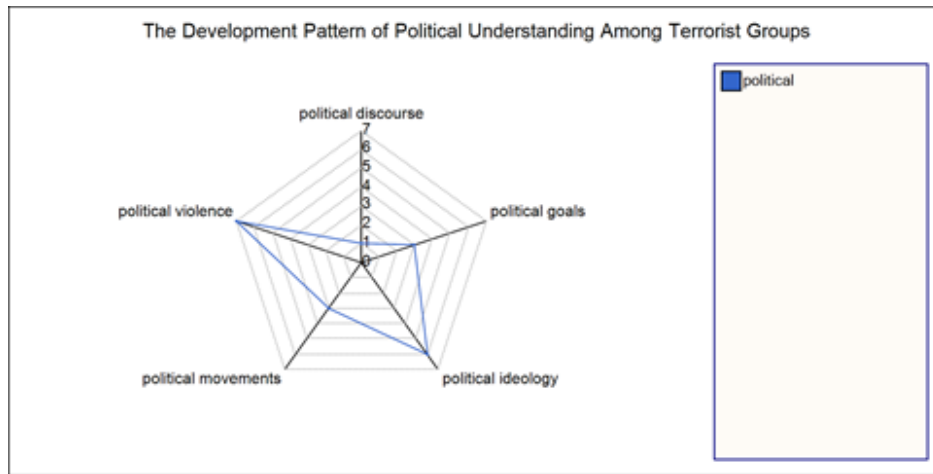


Figure 3. Nvivo 12 plus analysis result

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, terrorist groups in Indonesia have a strong motivation to implement Islam sharia as a guide in their lives and even want to make Islam a social, economic, cultural and political system in the state's level, even caliphate. However, their understanding of political and religious realities is problematic because they do not see it comprehensively.

In the political context, they see the western world as a far enemy, and their allies from among the Muslims who are near enemies as the cause behind all the problems emerged among Muslims. An analysis of Muslims' weaknesses that can be used to evaluate from its inner side is rarely conducted. Moreover, in terms of religious understanding, these groups cannot accept differences with the others and always consider themselves the most righteous groups. They want to implement Islamic sharia to legalize violence, including suicide, as a form of jihad and have vital political interests.

Therefore, in handling the issue of terrorism and deradicalization programs, efforts to straighten out and to counter these groups' understanding of politics and religion need to be done to prevent their influence among people. The collaboration with the former terrorist prisoners also needs to be built by giving agents the roles to socialize the counters of their political and religious understanding when being involved in radical movements.

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