



# The radicalization of contemporary educated Indonesian: A case study of university students in Yogyakarta

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## Abstract

This paper explored the process of radicalization of contemporary educated Indonesian Muslims by focusing on the case of radicalization in one of the oldest and largest university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This study is a qualitative study in which data were collected through interviews, observations, and literature reviews. The key informants of this research were students or alumni who were active or had been in Islamist-exclusive groups or who had been involved, directly or indirectly, in incidents of religious intolerance or violence. This study found that there were three groups that dominated the religious lives of Muslim students of Yogyakarta XXX University: *salafis*, *tarbiyah*, and *Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI). The salafi- jihadists group have entered and influenced lecturers and students at the university since the era of the president Soeharto. Meanwhile, the development of the Muslim Brotherhood ideas brought by the preachers of the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council (Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia/DDII) since the 80s finally built the tarbiyah movement. Through the Indonesian Muslim Student Action group (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia/KAMMI), *tarbiyah* group has dominated almost all external campus student organizations. In addition, Muslim students' interest in Islamic political ideas attracted them to HTI, which offered a global Islamic caliphate as an alternative to the existence of a modern state system that was considered marginalizing Muslims. Systematic recruitment and regeneration, and manipulating the Islamic Assistance Program for Muslim students of the University have succeeded in putting their members at the university student organizations into important position.

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## Introduction

A university is a place for intellectuals who have different backgrounds such as culture, religion, and language to enhance their insights (Pirol et al., 2020). However, the ideal condition is not always found in all cases. In the mid-2018, the Indonesian National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) released data on seven top state universities in Indonesia that were exposed to radicalism. They were the University of Indonesia, the Bandung Institute of Technology, the Bogor Institute of Agriculture, Diponegoro University, the Ten November Institute of Technology, Airlangga University, and Brawijaya University. In the 1996, the Research and Development Agency of Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs studied four leading state universities in Indonesia (University of Indonesia, Gadjah Mada University, Airlangga University, and Hasanuddin University) and found that the state universities were more easily targeted by radical movement recruitment than religious universities (Saifuddin, 2011).

There are several studies that raise the issue of Islamic intolerance and radicalism in Indonesia, specifically in higher education (Kraince, 2007; Muhid et al., 2019; Woodward, 2015; Yuniardi, 2018). These studies provide plenty of information on how the phenomenon of Islamic intolerance and radicalism in contemporary Indonesia involves educated circles in universities. However, the studies did not deeply explore the actors, networks and the methods used by radical Muslim groups in universities.

This study started from the question of how the process of radicalization of higher education occurs; who the actors are; and how they penetrate so that they can build a network between radical groups outside and inside of the campus. This research was conducted between December 2018 and April 2019 at one of the leading state universities in Yogyakarta. The data were collected through observation of several Islamic studies at the university mosque; interviews with activists or former activists of the Islamic movement as well as several university officials; documentation and literature review. The key informants of this research were students or alumni who were active or had been in Islamist-exclusive groups or who had been involved, directly or indirectly, in incidents of religious intolerance or violence; the university officials who were supervisors of student activities or who had the authority to make student policies.

The University was chosen as an object of the study because it is one of the oldest and top universities in Indonesia. The university is located in Yogyakarta City, the capital of the Province of the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Yogyakarta is one of big cities in Indonesia. The university has eighteen faculties, one graduate school, one vocational school, and dozens of study programs, with more than thirty thousand students. In addition, thousands of students from various parts of Indonesia study at various universities in Yogyakarta. In 2014/2015 there were 110 universities in Yogyakarta with a total of 351,289 students from all around Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2017).

There are at least three Islamic movements that played a role in the radicalization of Yogyakarta XXX University: *tarbiyah*, *salafi*, and *tahriri*. The *tarbiyah* movement refers to the Islamic movement which is based on the ideas of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*). This movement entered Indonesia in the early 80s, that was brought in by modernist Muslim leaders of Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council (DDII) (Damanik, 2002). This movement controlled the campus mosque. The emphasis is on piouness and personal morality, discipline, and implicit rejection of the Pancasila as an ideology of Indonesia and non-Islamic behaviour in modern Indonesia (Van Bruinessen, 2002). In early 1998, this movement formed a student organization called Indonesian Muslim Student Action Group (KAMMI) (Damanik, 2002).

Meanwhile, *Salafi* entered Indonesia through Islamic and Arabic Sciences Institute (LIPIA) Jakarta. LIPIA is an educational institution funded by the Saudi Arabian Government. As Wahabism, where the ideology of salafism comes from, the main characteristic of salafi is puritanical Islam. Its puritanical character made them close to the *tarbiyah* movement. (Bubalo & Fealy, 2005b; Machmudi, 2008; Shihab & Nugroho, 2008).

The *tahriri* movement refers to *Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI). It can be said that HTI is the Indonesian chapter of Hizb al-Tahrir (Bubalo & Fealy, 2005b). The organization was founded in Jordan in 1952 by Shaykh Taqiy al-Din al-Nabhani and aimed to establish a global Islamic caliphate (Azra, 2004; Hilmy, 2009; Sahid, 2014).

The three Islamic movements do not always have the same Islamic ideology, but they are united in character that is: exclusive, intolerant, and in some cases, permissive, or at least irresponsible, towards religious-motivated violence. Since the fall of the New Order regime of Indonesia in 1998, these three groups have become the new Islamic forces in Indonesia. Through

a solid network, well-ordered member recruitment system, and interesting Islamic study themes, they have succeeded to influence Islamic life on many Indonesia universities (Bubalo & Fealy, 2005a; Lim & Melissa Ng Abdullah, 2012; Mohamed Osman, 2010a; Rapoport, 1993; Roy, 2017; Saifuddin, 2011; Van Bruinessen, 2002)

## Result and Discussion

The history of the radicalization of Yogyakarta XXX University can be traced to the early 80s. This initial movement was led by a salafist-jihadist group, remnants of the *Darul Islam* (DI) movement. *Darul Islam* was the first Islamic movement in Indonesia which aimed to establish the Islamic State of Indonesia in a violent way (Van Dijk, 1983).

In the early period, we find Syahirul Alim, a chemistry lecturer at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of Yogyakarta XXX University. In 1982, one of the leaders of the *Darul Islam* (DI) Yogyakarta, Fihiruddin or Abu Jibril, approached Syahirul Alim, a preacher and activist of DDII. After going through a relatively short persuasion process, Syahirul Alim officially became a leader of *Darul Islam* (DI) Central Java in the same year (Solahudin, 2011).

It needs to be explained here that DDII is a missionary institution founded by M. Natsir, the former leader of the Masyumi, an Islamic party that is very keen to make Islam the basis of the Republic of Indonesia (Hefner, 2011). Masyumi became a phenomenal force of early parliamentary Islamism in the history of Indonesian independence. In 1960, Masyumi was blocked by President Sukarno with allegations of involvement with some of its leaders in armed rebellions in several parts of Indonesia (Barton, 2004). When General Soeharto took over the leadership as a president in 1967, Masyumi remained banned. Natsir and his ex-Masyumi friends decided to get out of politics and concentrate on Islamic propagation. Inspired by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, in 1967, Natsir and his friends established an Islamic propagation institution called DDII.

The radicalization movement in the campus at the time was conducted secretly (Bubalo & Fealy, 2005b). At the time, the campus-based Indonesian salafist-jihadist movement was connected to the international jihadist movement. Aris Sumarno or Zulkarnaen, a student of Yogyakarta XXX University, was an alumni of the first batch of Afghan military training camp for Indonesian jihadists organized by al-Ittihad al-Islamy, an Islamist militant group allied to al-Qaeda (Solahudin, 2011).

After the 1998 Indonesian Political Reformation, the Islamic life of students of Yogyakarta XXX University was enlivened by the *salafi*, *tarbiyah*, and HTI movements. The process of a student entering into the *salafi* movement can be very simple. For a student who has just graduated from high school, when studying in a big city like Yogyakarta, the choice is often black and white: being a bad or righteous person. When they choose to be righteous, the *salafi* groups have prepared the needs of these righteous students with various Islamic accommodations and Islamic teachings in several *salafi* mosques around the campus.

*Salafi* groups also have had regular Islamic studies program at the campus mosque. Being regular, the Islamic studies program seemed to have become the official agenda of the campus mosque. Most of the participants were *salafi* followers from Yogyakarta and surrounding areas. As a campus mosque, the program was also attended by many students who wanted to understand Islam.

In practice, senior students who have entered the *salafi* movement will influence other friends, especially new students. They become regular participants of the *salafi* Islamic studies program held at the campus mosque and various *salafi* mosques around the campus. These students became the main actors in various Islamic activities based in the faculty and university mosques. These people have really coloured Islamic activities at Yogyakarta XXX University.

The *tarbiyah* movement is represented by the Indonesian Muslim Student Action Group (KAMMI). KAMMI became a new power of Islamic student organizations and movements after the 1998 Indonesian Political Reformation. KAMMI was established at 1998 to become the political ride of the *tarbiyah* movement in dealing with the political situation in Indonesia, which at that time had been volatile because of many demonstrations against the regime. *Tarbiyah* activist militancy and the reluctance of the majority of University Islamic Propagation Organization (LDK) members in the political game made *tarbiyah* activists free to dominate and manipulate the University Islamic Propagation Organization (Fakhrurrazi, 2018).

Unlike *salafi* activists who were more concentrated in the university Islamic students institutions, KAMMI cadres spread and controlled various student organizations (Daryanto & Usman, 2013). They controlled the University Islamic Propagation Organization, Student Executive Board, Student Representative Council, even study groups (Arrobi, 2014).

In the recruitment strategy, the *tarbiyah* movement is more or less the same as *salafi*, which influences new students who are interested in Islamic activities. These new students will be directed to join LDK, which they have controlled. This new student became an important force in seizing the leadership of the intra-campus student organization through a voting mechanism.

On the other hand, the militancy and political orientation, which is strongly voiced by HTI, makes it a new favourite among Muslim students who are dissatisfied with Indonesian political conditions. The influence of HTI on Yogyakarta XXX University can be seen in 2018 when some media reported that there were two Faculty of Engineering lecturers suspected of being affiliated with HTI in rejecting Pancasila as a state ideology. In the same year, the campus mosque-based Islamic student organization invited HTI spokesperson, Ismail Yusanto, to give Islamic preaching at the campus mosque. In fact, around that time, in 2017, HTI was declared as a prohibited Islamic organization by the government of the Republic of Indonesia.

Among the three movements, the *tarbiyah* was the main actor in the dynamics of Islamic students at Yogyakarta XXX University. This movement has successfully controlled the University Islamic Propagation Organization at the faculty level with massive influence in the 90s. The Islamic Assistance Program (*Asistensi Agama Islam/AAI*), the official assistance of Islamic teaching for Muslim students of the university, which was implemented in the late 90s, provided the path for the *tarbiyah* movement to massively Islamize Yogyakarta XXX University. The Islamic Assistance Program is an Islamic education program that must be taken by every Muslim student at the University. In practice, those who educate are assistants consisting of senior students who are almost entirely *tarbiyah* activists.

The regeneration in the body of the *tarbiyah* movement was very systematic. This movement entered into senior high school through Islamic Studies Unit, an intra-school Islamic student organization. Students who are active in the Unit when going to university level are directed by their mentors to meet Islamic mentors (*murabbi*) at the university. Usually, the mentors of Islamic Studies Unit of a senior high school are the senior high school alumni, who have already become a member of the *tarbiyah* group at the university.

In the university, *tarbiyah* members are organized and strengthen their militancy and Islamic understanding through *liqa'* activities, which deepen Islamic study but

to limited members. *Liqa'*, literally meeting, is a closed and limited Islamic teaching with a maximum number of 12 students. In this *liqa'*, the process of formation and establishment of *tarbiyah* activists took place. To some extent, *liqa'* is the real manifestation of the University Islamic Assistance Program. Students who have taken part in *liqa'* are increasingly integrated with the *tarbiyah* network on campus. *Tarbiyah* network consolidation continues even though students have completed their studies.

The rise of *tarbiyah*, *salafi*, and HTI groups on Yogyakarta XXX University is the result of this group's carefulness and militancy in exploiting political opportunities. They succeeded in recruiting the University's students, lecturers, and administrative staff. This ability was combined with the late response and disregard of the University leaders in the ability of this group to perform self-reproduction. Even the campus mosque, which had become the center of the group's activities, seemed to be neglected territory. In fact, this movement, instils Islamic ideologies that are exclusive, intolerant, and in some cases pro-violence.

The faculty or university mosque is the group's favourite location. It could be said that the mosque is the movement's main headquarters. Almost all of their movements are centered at the mosque. This is not surprising because the University Islamic Propagation Organization as the university mosque-based Islamic student organization is the most important Islamic student organization, where they seed and strengthen their Islamic ideology.

Their dominance over Islamic activities on campus automatically eliminated moderate Islamic groups, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. In fact, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have been known as two important pillars of moderate Islam in Indonesia. Nahdlatul Ulama represents traditionalist Muslim groups, while Muhammadiyah represents modernist Muslim groups (Hamdi, 2013; Hilmy, 2013).

According to a former activist of Yogyakarta XXX University mosque, there is a kind of unwritten rule that Islamic organizations at the university mosque only accept *salafi*, *tarbiyah*, and HTI students. If there are students outside the groups, they cannot take any initiative.

### *The Environment the Campus and Network*

The socio-religious environment surrounding Yogyakarta XXX University is mostly *salafi*, *tarbiyah* and HTI dominated. They "surrounded" the campus

through dorms and mosques that offering various Islamic studies. New students who find it difficult to find a boarding house will be accommodated or directed by these groups to the accommodations they have prepared. Their Islamic system and studies are integrated with the needs of these students.

In the campus, some lecturers who have entered the *tarbiyah* or *salafi* or HTI movements have become patrons as well as protectors of these students (Zainuddin & Suryaningsih, 2018). The involvement of lecturers in supporting and raising the *salafi*, *tarbiyah* and HTI movements cannot be denied. For example, an HTI-affiliated lecturer who becomes a supervisor of one of the university student organizations will introduce his Islamic ideology to students of the organization.

In short, the network map is more or less like this: The Islamic Movement outside the campus has followers on campus; students, lecturers and administrative staff. Lecturers play a role as patrons, or are even actively involved in the spread of *salafi* or *tarbiyah* or HTI ideologies both among lecturers and students. Students who have entered into the *tarbiyah* or *salafi* or HTI movements influence their friends, especially new students. These new students then also invite other friends. Through members on the campus, leaders of the *salafi* or *tarbiyah* or HTI movements are invited as speakers or preachers in Islamic events on the campus.

The environment around the campus seems to have been surrounded by various forums and places that attract students to enter the *salafi* or *tarbiyah* or HTI. The regeneration of *salafi*, *tarbiyah*, and HTI groups does not always rely on the internal campus environment. They take advantage of boarding houses that they have rented and transformed into a kind of “Islamic boarding school” (Mohamed Osman, 2010b). They not only offer Islamic studies, but also various training (personal development, business, entrepreneurship, motivation, etc.) and other social activities.

In addition, social media is an interesting factor that can influence the students in joining the movement (Nur Fuad, 2017; Slama, 2018). Almost all movements around the campus have social media accounts, that can reach students of the university. It is imperative that such media are given serious attention since, based on research by the Center for Cultural Studies and Social Change of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, Islamic social media is dominated by hate speech. Furthermore, these religious hate speeches are accessed by young people (Qodir, 2016).

When BNPT declared the seven top state universities in Indonesia that were exposed to radicalism, it was not really surprising for previous several researches. However, the point is how university members have been radicalized in such a way. The answer is that the *salafi*, *tarbiyah*, and HTI networks, from where the ideology of radicalism comes, control almost all lines in and out of campus. When lecturers and students need to understand Islam, what is available is Islam that these groups offer. Indeed, almost all the needs of new students, from boarding houses to various self-development training, even kind friendships, are provided by the groups. All these make the network grow stronger, where each part functions to radicalize the campus deeper.

### *Theoretical Reflections*

There are several scholars who have attempted to explain the process of radicalization of Indonesian Islam. The first states that the majority of Indonesian Muslims are basically conservative (Bruinessen, 2014). Another explanation is that the collapse of the authoritarian-centralistic of the New Order regime brought room for the emergence radical groups that was suppressed before (Abuza, 2006). There are also some scholars who explain that the radicalization is an Indonesia Muslim way to bargain for power after the exclusion of Muslim for so long (Thufail, 2011). The next explanation is the influence of the Middle East (Bubalo & Fealy, 2005b; Rahmat, 2005). Among the various theories, no one has seriously focused on radicalization in the university environment.

Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog conducted research on various radical movements in the Islamic environment and hundreds of activists from thirty countries in the Middle East and Africa. They found that students majoring in exact sciences, especially engineering, entered into the radical movement easier than students of social-humanities department. The explanation is that people with exact backgrounds are obsessed with order, precision and certainty. In terms of religion, they have a strong tendency to choose rigid and certain religious teachings and ideologies. A flexible and nuanced explanation of Islamic understandings, as is usually developed by progressive Muslims, does not fit into their thinking scheme (Gambetta & Hertog, 2017).

In this study, the separation between the exact and social-humanities majors and their relation with radicalism is not significant. A mindset that is rigid can certainly be associated with a rigid radical Islamic



ideology. But there are at least two things to consider as to why there is no relationship between the exact mindset with the rigidity of the ideology of radical groups at Yogyakarta XXX University. First, the process of radicalization at the University became so massive that almost no faculty was untouched. Students who want to be “righteous Muslims” and are interested in understanding Islam as a mechanism of self-defence in facing modern life, have no other alternative. Second, for students who enjoy their world as “bad persons”, the Islamic teachings that are offered by the radical Muslim groups still do not interest them. This is why one of the departments that was hardly touched by the *salafi*, *tarbiyah* and HTI movements is the civil engineering department. One of the reasons is because the majority of the department students are not interested to be “righteous Muslims.”

Mcauley and Moskalenko classify the degree of radicalization in four levels. First, the sympathizers, people who do not do violence but agree with the goals and reasons of the violence groups. Second, the supporters, people who provide justification for acts of violence. Third, the activists, people who start to engage in illegal activities by providing the necessary things, for example, conducting recruitment, providing political or financial support, etc. Fourth, the radical, people who are not only sure but are also willing to commit acts of violence and other illegal actions (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009).

By using the level of radicalization above, this study did not find any violence for the sake of Islam. However, Islamic narratives developed by students who are active in *salafi* or *tarbiyah* or HTI clearly sympathize and provide justification for various acts of violence, which they consider to be the fulfilment of the teachings of jihad in Islam. This situation provides an opportunity for Islamic violence-extremism groups to recruit supporters from among the students.

In short, the process of radicalization is not instant. The process of becoming an agent of radical movement always starts from cognitive operations. Moghaddam stated that the process of radicalization begins with the perception of injustice or the gap between the conditions faced and those idealized. This thought is followed by anger towards those who are perceived as agents of injustice. Furthermore, the radical movement member feels that they have sympathy with people who do acts of violence since they think that the people struggle to uphold justice. As a result, the members finally join an extreme group and are eager to commit violence because the violence has been justified (Moghaddam, 2005).

The macro approach to the phenomenon of radicalization emphasizes more on structurally economic injustice as offered by relative deprivation theory. The theory describes that radicalisation is the result of political economy marginalisation (Mousseau, 2011; Obaidi et al., 2019). Included in this approach is religious social movement theory, which describes that a religious community can be transformed to be a social movement not only because of public grievances, but also political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing process. In this case, religion functions as a mobilizing structure and world view which frame the public grievances (Wiktorowicz Quintan, 2012).

However the data show that level of exposure is the dominant factor in radicalizing people. A person becoming radical is more determined by exposure to radical ideas and networks, which shape a person's identity and religious behaviour (Moghaddam, 2005). This micro approach sees that relative deprivation is only a small-initial step that needs some other stage to turn someone into a radical. A person becomes a radical religiously when he/she meets another person who succeeds in transcending the situation into a certain moral formula. The moral formula makes him/her able to formulate new moral views that make him/her accept religious intolerance or even violence as morally legitimate.

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## Conclusion and Recommendation

This research shows that radical Muslim groups influenced the campus environment even before the phenomenon of intolerance and radicalism succeeded in Indonesia recently. The Indonesian political situation in the New Order era, before 1998 political reformation, which was very repressive, resulted in this group not being free to carry out its indictment activities. On the other hand, the campus politicization policy adopted by the New Order regime led students to concentrate on religious activities in the campus mosques, where the mosques, especially in some of Indonesia's top state universities, had been infiltrated by Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council (DDII) missionaries who had an ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Along with post-Reformation 1998 political openness, *salafi*, *tarbiyah*, and HTI groups are free to offer their ideology to the campus community, especially to students, through various Islamic studies that are creatively packaged. These groups have also prepared various infrastructures in the form of Islamic studies at mosques

around the campus and Islamic dorm around the campus environment.

Through a systematic recruitment and regeneration system, these three groups, especially *tarbiyah*, succeeded in controlling intra-campus student organizations. While the mosque and the University Islamic Propagation Organization remain their main home base, these groups have successfully controlled almost all student activities in the campus.

Through several lecturers and students, *salafi*, *tarbiyah* and HTI groups have massively dominated the university life. In addition, *salafi*, *tarbiyah*, and HTI figures were invited to be speakers in Islamic studies and scientific seminars on the campus. Islamic media published by them also become the main reading of the university students who want to understand Islam. The dominance of this group is always improved and continued through the recruitment of new students. This dominance was also maintained by utilizing the doubts of university leaders to intervene the University Muslim student activities in the campus mosque. Even the Islamic Assistance Program, the university's official Islamic education, is secretly seeding its ideology to Muslim students of the university.

No movements have been found at the university that lead to violent extremism. However, Islamic study themes developed by these group are full of messages of intolerance and statements of supporting acts of Islamic-motivated violence. Hatred of the West, Jews, Christians, Muslim minorities like Ahmadiyah, ideas of tolerance, pluralism, and human rights are themes that are commonly discussed in Islamic studies conducted by these groups. If now we find that the phenomenon of intolerance and religious-motivated violence have become characteristic of contemporary Indonesian religious life, it is because intolerant and pro-violent Islamic ideology has massively shaped the higher education Islamic students' consciousness.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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