

Special Issue on Radical and Militant Islamism in Indonesia

This special journal issue of *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* focuses on radical and militant Islamism in Indonesia. It comprises five articles which cut across time and space, covering a range of Islamist organizations such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), the pro-ISIS Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD), the populist “Defend Islam Movement” (Aksi Bela Islam), the Poso-based Mujahidin Eastern Indonesia (MIT), and militant Islamists in Bima. The key questions that tie these articles together analytically revolve around the relationship between radical Islamist ideology, Muslim protest, jihadi training camps, militant activities, and terrorism. These articles draw on a diverse array of qualitative methods from case study to thick description to life history. Collectively, they all utilize deep fieldwork, including iterated interviews over years, with members of the violent and non-violent extremist groups under study.

The discussions taking place on the academic literature on violent extremism, training camps, and non-violent extremism rarely mention Southeast Asian cases. Yet, Southeast Asia and Indonesia, in particular, is where the most open Muslim societies are. Indonesia is the world’s largest Muslim democracy. Its Islamic civil society, is among the most diverse in the world containing within it the world’s largest Islamic mass organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah; Islamist political parties and social movements; and ultraconservative Islamist groups like Hizbut Tahrir. On the fringes of that civil society are a host of violent and non-violent Islamist extremist groups, many of which are small, but all of whom are significant in the role that they play in advocating for their goals and the tactics they use in doing so. This special issue brings those experiences of these movements and the voices of Indonesian scholars into the discourse in a theoretically grounded, methodologically rigorous way.

The first article looks at Indonesian jihadi training in foreign camps in Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Syria as well as domestic training camps and opportunities in Ambon, Poso, Aceh, and Java. It examines the roles that these camps played not only in building military capacity to challenge the secular state and defend the Islamic state they were establishing but also with respect to ensuring organisational continuity, building networks, and fulfilling the obligation of jihad. Focusing on JI, this article argues that foreign training camps were, above all, a place for acquiring military capacity, especially providing

opportunities to train with heavy weapons, as well as a way of being part of the global jihad. It further shows that training camps and opportunities within Indonesia served caderization, the defence of Muslims in conflict areas, and as preparation for foreign training camps. And finally, it demonstrates that both domestic and foreign training camps provided opportunities for network-building, leading to new training opportunities, and a pool from which to put together teams for particular jihadi operations including cross-organisational ones.

JI is also one of the case studies in the second article which analyses the contingent and variegated movements between violent and non-violent extremism in the context of religio-political polarization in Indonesia. It argues that behavioral and ideological change is best seen as a continuum with possible gradations along the spectrum, across which movement is determined by external shocks, reflection, and the role of social networks. Three case studies are examined which represent three types of crossover: the ideological and tactical shift from Salafism to jihadism; the tactical radicalization of a splinter faction of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI); and the hybrid (partial ideological and tactical) deradicalization of Jemaah Islamiyah.

The third article examines the role of radical Islamist groups – the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), and the Salafis - in spearheading the populist Islamist 212 Aksi Bela Islam Movement. It examines why they were such effective forces in leading the movement and why their role diminished over time, which contributed to the decline of the movement. Drawing on political process theory and the literature on populism, this article argues that the movement faltered because they could no longer play an instrumental role due to the unsupportive structure of political opportunities, the disorganization within the social movement, the less relevant framing, and the greater social and political pressure to the social movement.

The fourth article shifts the discussion to eastern Indonesia, looking at violent extremist groups in Bima (West Nusa Tenggara). It explores how and why extremism became deeply rooted in Bima. By making use of the “radical milieu” framework developed by Malthaner and Waldmann, it seeks to answer two questions: First, how and why has the interaction between Bima’s radical milieu with the local extremist groups escalated and/or de-escalated violent extremism? Second, what are the incentives involved in those interactions which could be useful for strengthening peacebuilding in the future? This article argues that extremist groups in Bima have emerged from a social environment that shares similar perspectives with them and, to some extent, is sympathetic to their actions in moral or

logistical terms. It further argues that this social environment has both served to escalate and deescalate violent extremism in Bima.

The fifth and final article looks at the Mujahidin Eastern Indonesia (MIT), focusing on the female members of the group. These include Indonesia's first three female fighters, the wives of MIT's top leaders, who were trained to use guns and run guerrillas in Gunung Biru, a forested mountainous area above Poso City (Central Sulawesi). By using the biographical narratives of four female MIT members, this article discusses how female jihadis negotiated their agency and navigated life pathways before and after joining MIT. This article argues that these women were not just passive 'extensions' of their husbands but exercised their own agency by negotiating gender relations. They actively embraced a more radical Islamism, chose to get involved with MIT, and, after serving time in prison, they reshaped their own life trajectories. Two of them eventually started a new life by leaving Poso's extremist network, while the other two opted to stay but repositioned their roles within the group.

Together these five articles show that the relationship between radical Islamist ideas and militant Islamist activities has been a fluid one and the relationship between behavioral and ideological change has moved along a continuum in both directions. Training does not necessarily translate into violence as it also functions as a way to build a cohesive organisation and to establish networks. Conversely, violence does not necessarily require prior training as willingness to engage and re-engage in jihad is often determined by a radical milieu, local circumstances, unaddressed grievances, and ideology. While the jihadi environment remains a predominantly male one, these same factors have also been the drivers of female engagement with extremist groups as exemplified by the women in MIT. Last but not least, political opportunity to reshape local and national politics has also been tactically embraced by radical and militant Islamists leading to interesting alliances between moderate Muslims, Islamist vigilante groups, violent Islamists, and Indonesian political personalities. However, the returns, as the Aksi Bela Islam movement has demonstrated, have been limited by the single issue-based nature of such alliances as well as by the clever manoeuvring of the state.