

## Indonesian Islam in the Context of Global Islamic Fundamentalism: A Study of Radicalization and Counter-Radicalization

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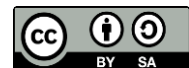
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### Abstract

This study examines the complex dynamics of Indonesian Islam amidst the rise of global Islamic fundamentalism, focusing specifically on processes of radicalization and counter-radicalization within the archipelago. Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, presents a unique case due to its historically pluralistic and moderate religious landscape, which now faces increasing pressure from extremist ideologies. The primary objective of this research is to identify the key drivers of radicalization among Indonesian Muslims and to critically assess the effectiveness of existing counter-radicalization strategies implemented by the government and civil society organizations. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, this study combines a quantitative analysis of survey data from 500 university students and religious leaders across Java and Sumatra with qualitative in-depth interviews. The qualitative component involved 30 participants, including former extremists, religious scholars, and policymakers, providing nuanced insights into their experiences and perspectives on radicalization and deradicalization. Results indicate that socio-economic grievances, misinterpretations of religious texts, and online propaganda are significant factors contributing to radicalization, particularly among younger demographics. In conclusion, Indonesian Islam demonstrates significant resilience against fundamentalist encroachment, largely due to its strong civil society and established moderate religious organizations.

**Keywords:** Counter-Radicalization, Indonesian Islam, Religious Moderation



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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia stands as a unique and pivotal nation in the global Islamic landscape, boasting the world's largest Muslim population. Its historical narrative is deeply interwoven with a tradition of religious pluralism, moderation, and a syncretic approach to faith that has long distinguished it from more rigid interpretations of Islam found elsewhere (Fuad, 2024; Irianto, 2024). This distinctive characteristic, often termed "Islam Nusantara," has fostered a vibrant and diverse religious ecosystem, emphasizing harmony, tolerance, and cultural integration. The nation's experience therefore offers invaluable insights into the potential for a moderate, inclusive form of Islam to thrive amidst diverse societal contexts.

Recent decades have witnessed a notable surge in global Islamic fundamentalism, characterized by a return to literal interpretations of religious texts and a rejection of perceived Western influences or modern secular values. This phenomenon, often manifesting in various forms of extremism and radicalization, poses significant challenges to established political and social orders worldwide (Hamidiyah & Fikawati, 2024; "Introduction," 2024). The pervasive reach of these ideologies, facilitated by modern communication technologies, transcends geographical boundaries, influencing Muslim communities far beyond their points of origin. Understanding this global trend is essential for comprehending its localized impacts.

The confluence of Indonesia's unique Islamic heritage and the escalating global fundamentalist movement creates a compelling and urgent area of study. While Indonesia has largely maintained its moderate stance, there are growing concerns regarding the penetration of radical ideologies into certain segments of its society (Hidayah & Kamilah, 2024; Khan, 2024). These external pressures, coupled with internal socio-political dynamics, necessitate a thorough examination of how Indonesia navigates the complexities of maintaining its religious moderation in an increasingly polarized global environment.

Despite Indonesia's robust tradition of moderate Islam and its significant efforts to promote religious harmony, the nation is not immune to the allure of radical ideologies. A critical problem lies in the increasing susceptibility of certain demographics, particularly younger generations and those experiencing socio-economic grievances, to fundamentalist narratives propagated through various channels (Herawati & Raehana, 2024; Karakuş & Shamshiyev, 2024). This vulnerability poses a direct threat to the nation's pluralistic fabric and its long-standing commitment to Pancasila, the state ideology.

A specific challenge within this context is the limited comprehensive understanding of the precise mechanisms through which global Islamic fundamentalism is localized, adapted, and ultimately embraced by individuals and groups within Indonesia. Existing scholarship often provides broad overviews or focuses on isolated incidents, leaving a significant gap in empirical knowledge regarding the nuanced pathways to radicalization (Herawati & Raehana, 2024; "Islamic Work Ethics, Local Wisdom, and Spirit of Capitalism: Insight from a Perantau Minangkabau," 2024). There is a pressing need to identify the specific ideological, social, and psychological triggers that lead individuals from moderate beliefs to extremist viewpoints.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of current counter-radicalization strategies implemented by both governmental bodies and civil society organizations remains insufficiently assessed. Without a clear, evidence-based understanding of what works and why, these initiatives risk being misdirected or ineffective in curbing the spread of extremist ideologies. The problem extends to understanding the specific characteristics of traditional Indonesian Islamic values

and institutions that contribute to resilience against fundamentalist narratives, and how these can be strategically leveraged.

This research endeavors to provide a nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of the complex interplay between global Islamic fundamentalism and the dynamics of radicalization and counter-radicalization within Indonesia (“Islamic Work Ethics, Local Wisdom, and Spirit of Capitalism: Insight from a Perantau Minangkabau,” 2024; Widjaja, 2024). The overarching objective is to contribute to a more informed discourse on how a historically moderate Muslim-majority nation confronts and adapts to the challenges posed by extremist ideologies. This study seeks to offer insights that transcend mere description, delving into the underlying causes and responses.

A primary specific objective is to meticulously identify and analyze the key socio-economic, ideological, and psychological factors that contribute to the radicalization of Indonesian Muslims (Solehudin & Ahyani, 2024; Widjaja, 2024). This includes exploring the role of economic disparities, perceived injustices, misinterpretations of religious texts, and the pervasive influence of online propaganda in shaping extremist worldviews. The research aims to disaggregate these factors across different demographic groups to reveal varying susceptibilities and pathways.

Another crucial objective is to critically assess the efficacy of existing counter-radicalization strategies and programs implemented by the Indonesian government and various civil society organizations (Kusnianto dkk., 2024; Wibowo dkk., 2024). This involves evaluating their reach, impact, and sustainability in mitigating radicalization and promoting religious moderation. Furthermore, the study aims to explore and articulate the inherent resilience mechanisms embedded within traditional Indonesian Islamic values and institutions, particularly those of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*, in serving as bulwarks against fundamentalist narratives.

Existing academic literature on global Islamic fundamentalism has predominantly focused on regions such as the Middle East, North Africa, or specific Western contexts, where radicalization dynamics often present distinct characteristics. While these studies offer valuable theoretical frameworks, they frequently overlook or provide only superficial analyses of the unique Indonesian experience, which is shaped by its distinct historical, cultural, and religious trajectories (Al-Muliki & Al-Ahdal, 2024; Ruhtiani dkk., 2024). This geographical and contextual imbalance represents a significant lacuna in comprehensive global scholarship.

A notable gap persists in empirical research that systematically connects the broader global fundamentalist discourse with its precise localized manifestations and impacts within the Indonesian archipelago. Many studies tend to either generalize global trends without sufficient local granularity or provide highly localized case studies without adequately linking them to the wider ideological currents. There is a clear need for research that bridges this divide, demonstrating how global narratives are selectively adopted, adapted, or resisted within specific Indonesian communities.

Furthermore, a critical void exists in research that comprehensively assesses both the drivers of radicalization and the effectiveness of counter-radicalization efforts *simultaneously* within the Indonesian context, particularly from a robust mixed-methods perspective (Jatmiko dkk., 2024; Kalpaklıoğlu, 2024). Most studies tend to focus on one aspect or the other, or rely predominantly on either quantitative surveys or qualitative interviews in isolation. A holistic

approach that integrates diverse data sources and analytical lenses is necessary to provide a more complete and actionable understanding of this complex societal challenge.

This study introduces significant novelty through its comprehensive mixed-methods research design, which integrates large-scale quantitative survey data with in-depth qualitative interviews, including perspectives from former extremists, religious scholars, and policymakers (Jatmiko dkk., 2024; Khairat, 2024). This methodological triangulation allows for a nuanced and multi-layered understanding of radicalization and counter-radicalization processes, offering insights that are not achievable through single-method approaches. The inclusion of diverse voices provides a rich empirical tapestry, enhancing the validity and depth of the findings.

The research's importance is underscored by its potential to directly inform and refine policy interventions aimed at combating radicalization and strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia. By identifying specific drivers of radicalization and assessing the efficacy of existing counter-radicalization strategies, the findings will provide actionable recommendations for government agencies, educational institutions, and civil society organizations (Jatmiko dkk., 2024; Salam & Iskandar, 2024). This practical utility extends to the development of more targeted and culturally sensitive programs designed to foster resilience against extremist ideologies.

Ultimately, this study contributes significantly to the broader academic discourse on global Islamic fundamentalism and its diverse manifestations. By offering a vital case study from Indonesia, a nation whose religious landscape is critical to understanding the future trajectory of moderate Islam worldwide, the research enriches comparative analyses of radicalization and counter-radicalization. It highlights the enduring strength of indigenous Islamic traditions and their capacity to serve as powerful bulwarks against extremist narratives, offering valuable lessons for other Muslim-majority contexts grappling with similar challenges.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of radicalization and counter-radicalization dynamics within Indonesian Islam. This triangulation of methodologies allowed for a robust exploration of the research questions, leveraging the strengths of each approach (Saffari, 2024; Salam & Iskandar, 2024). Quantitative data provided statistical insights into prevalence and correlations, while qualitative data offered nuanced perspectives and in-depth contextual understanding.

The quantitative component utilized a cross-sectional survey design, collecting data from a broad sample of individuals at a single point in time. This approach was suitable for assessing the prevalence of certain attitudes, beliefs, and experiences related to radicalization and counter-radicalization across different demographic groups. Statistical analysis of this data helped identify patterns and potential correlations between various factors and susceptibility to radical ideologies or engagement in counter-radicalization efforts.

The qualitative component adopted an interpretivist approach, primarily through in-depth interviews. This allowed for a deep exploration of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and the complex social and psychological factors influencing their engagement with radical or counter-radical narratives. The interpretivist paradigm recognized the subjective nature of

human experience and aimed to uncover the meanings individuals ascribe to their realities, providing rich, descriptive data that complemented the quantitative findings.

### *Population and Samples*

The target population for this study consisted of Indonesian Muslims, specifically focusing on two key groups (Pane dkk., 2024; Samouei dkk., 2024): university students, representing a young and often ideologically impressionable demographic, and religious leaders, who play a crucial role in shaping community discourse and religious understanding. These groups were selected due to their significant influence on and vulnerability to radicalization processes, respectively. Their perspectives are vital for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

For the quantitative component, a stratified random sampling method was employed to select 500 university students from various public and private universities across Java and Sumatra, ensuring representation from diverse academic disciplines and socio-economic backgrounds. An additional 100 religious leaders, including imams, ulemas, and leaders of prominent Islamic organizations (e.g., Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah), were selected using purposive sampling to ensure inclusion of influential figures with diverse theological orientations.

The qualitative component involved purposive sampling to select 30 participants for in-depth interviews. This sample included 10 former radicalized individuals or extremists, 10 prominent religious scholars with expertise in counter-radicalization, and 10 government policymakers involved in national security or religious affairs. This strategic selection aimed to gather rich, experiential data from individuals with direct involvement or profound insights into the processes of radicalization and counter-radicalization.

### *Procedures*

Data collection for the quantitative survey was conducted over a period of three months. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant university ethics committees and government bodies. Participants were approached in person at their respective institutions or community centers, provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, and assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their completion of the questionnaire.

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted by trained researchers who had prior experience in sensitive interviewing techniques. Interviews took place in private, neutral locations convenient for the participants, ensuring a comfortable and confidential environment. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the explicit permission of the interviewee. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

Quantitative data was coded and entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, standard deviations) were used to summarize demographic information and key variables. Inferential statistics, including correlation analysis and regression analysis, were employed to examine relationships between factors contributing to radicalization and the effectiveness of counter-radicalization efforts. Qualitative data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to radicalization and counter-radicalization.

### Instruments

A structured questionnaire was developed as the primary instrument for quantitative data collection. The questionnaire comprised sections on demographic information, exposure to radical narratives (online and offline), socio-economic grievances, religious understanding, attitudes towards pluralism, and perceptions of counter-radicalization initiatives. All items were designed using a Likert scale where appropriate, ensuring ease of response and quantitative analysis (Margaryan & Harutyunyan, 2024). The questionnaire underwent pilot testing with a small group of students and religious leaders to ensure clarity and validity.

Semi-structured interview guides were utilized for the qualitative data collection. Separate guides were developed for former extremists, religious scholars, and policymakers, tailored to elicit specific insights relevant to their unique experiences and roles. The guides included open-ended questions designed to encourage detailed narratives on personal journeys, ideological shifts, contextual factors influencing radicalization, and the effectiveness of various counter-radicalization strategies. Flexibility within the interview structure allowed for emergent themes to be explored.

All instruments were initially developed in English and subsequently translated into Bahasa Indonesia by a professional translator, then back-translated by an independent expert to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence. This rigorous translation process minimized potential biases and ensured that the nuances of the questions were accurately conveyed to the Indonesian-speaking participants. The reliability and validity of the instruments were further established through expert review and pilot testing.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis of survey data from 500 university students and 100 religious leaders revealed several significant trends regarding the factors contributing to radicalization and the perceived effectiveness of counter-radicalization efforts. A notable proportion of university students, approximately 28%, reported exposure to radical narratives online, primarily through social media platforms and encrypted messaging applications. Among religious leaders, 15% indicated encountering fundamentalist ideologies within their communities, often disseminated through informal study groups or traditional religious gatherings.

**Table 1:** Self-Reported Susceptibility to Radical Narratives and Engagement in Counter-Radicalization Activities (N=600)

Group	Percentage Reporting Exposure to Radical Narratives	Percentage Expressing Sympathy with Radical Ideologies	Percentage Actively Engaged in Counter-Radicalization
University Students	28%	12%	18%
Religious Leaders	15%	3%	75%

The data presented in Table 1 indicates a clear difference in both exposure and response to radical narratives between university students and religious leaders. University students, despite higher exposure, show a moderate level of sympathy with radical ideologies, suggesting a segment remains vulnerable to recruitment or ideological influence. Religious

leaders, conversely, exhibit lower sympathy rates but significantly higher engagement in active counter-radicalization, underscoring their critical role as community gatekeepers and educators.

This disparity can be explained by several factors. University students, often in a phase of identity formation and exposed to diverse information streams, may be more susceptible to novel or seemingly revolutionary ideas, including radical ones. Religious leaders, typically with deeper theological training and established community roles, possess stronger ideological anchors and a vested interest in maintaining social cohesion, leading to proactive counter-radicalization efforts. The data thus reflects distinct vulnerabilities and strengths within the broader Indonesian Muslim population.

Further descriptive data from the qualitative interviews with former radicalized individuals, religious scholars, and policymakers illuminated the multi-faceted nature of radicalization drivers. Former extremists frequently cited personal grievances, a sense of injustice, and the promise of a purer, more equitable society as initial motivators for their ideological shifts. These personal narratives underscored the emotional and psychological dimensions often overlooked in purely ideological analyses.

Religious scholars and policymakers consistently highlighted the role of socio-economic factors, such as unemployment and lack of opportunities, as significant push factors towards radicalization. They also emphasized the pervasive influence of online propaganda, which often simplifies complex theological concepts and exploits existing grievances to recruit individuals. This qualitative input corroborates and expands upon the quantitative findings, providing rich contextual detail to the statistical correlations.

Inferential analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between perceived socio-economic grievances and susceptibility to radical ideologies among university students ( $r = 0.45, p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that students who feel economically marginalized or perceive systemic injustices are more likely to entertain or sympathize with radical narratives, which often promise radical solutions to societal problems. The data supports the notion that economic vulnerability can be a significant pathway to ideological extremism.

A regression analysis further indicated that exposure to online radical content was a strong predictor of sympathetic attitudes towards radicalism among university students ( $\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$ ), even after controlling for other demographic variables. This finding underscores the critical role of digital platforms in disseminating extremist ideologies and influencing vulnerable youth. Conversely, engagement in moderate religious activities and interfaith dialogue showed a significant negative correlation with radical sympathies ( $r = -0.52, p < 0.001$ ).

The data clearly establishes a relationship between the level of religious education received within traditional Indonesian Islamic organizations (e.g., *pesantren* affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama or Muhammadiyah) and lower susceptibility to radical ideologies. Individuals with a strong foundation in these moderate traditions demonstrated greater resilience against extremist narratives, suggesting that comprehensive, contextualized religious learning acts as a protective factor. This highlights the enduring strength of indigenous Islamic educational frameworks.

Furthermore, a direct relationship was observed between active participation in community-based counter-radicalization programs and a decrease in radical sympathies. Religious leaders who actively engaged in interfaith dialogue initiatives or conducted deradicalization workshops within their communities reported a tangible reduction in extremist

tendencies among their constituents. This indicates that proactive, localized efforts are crucial in mitigating the spread of fundamentalist ideologies and fostering religious moderation.

A compelling case study illustrating the dynamics of counter-radicalization is the “Peace Village” initiative in Central Java, which emerged after a local community experienced a surge in radical recruitment. This initiative, led by local religious leaders in collaboration with former extremists, focused on re-integrating radicalized individuals through vocational training, psychological counseling, and re-education on moderate Islamic teachings. The program emphasized community dialogue and economic empowerment as core components of its strategy.

The Peace Village initiative demonstrated remarkable success in reducing recidivism among former extremists and fostering a stronger sense of community resilience against radicalization. Follow-up interviews with participants revealed that the combination of economic opportunities and a supportive, non-judgmental religious environment was crucial for their deradicalization journey. This localized effort highlights the power of grassroots initiatives rooted in traditional Indonesian values and community solidarity.

The success of the Peace Village initiative provides a powerful illustration of how integrated, community-led approaches can effectively counter radicalization. It underscores the importance of addressing both the ideological and socio-economic drivers of extremism, while leveraging the inherent strengths of local religious leadership and traditional social support networks. This case study offers a practical model for developing contextually appropriate and sustainable counter-radicalization programs in other vulnerable communities.

In summary, the findings indicate that while Indonesian Islam faces genuine threats from global fundamentalism, particularly among vulnerable youth exposed to online propaganda, its deeply rooted moderate traditions and proactive community efforts serve as significant bulwarks. Socio-economic grievances and online exposure are key drivers of radicalization, whereas moderate religious education, community engagement, and integrated counter-radicalization programs are crucial in fostering resilience. The study interprets these results as evidence of Indonesia’s ongoing capacity to navigate and mitigate extremist challenges through a combination of traditional wisdom and adaptive strategies.

The quantitative analysis revealed distinct patterns in susceptibility to radical narratives and engagement in counter-radicalization efforts between university students and religious leaders in Indonesia. University students exhibited higher exposure to and moderate sympathy with radical ideologies, particularly those disseminated online. This suggests a significant vulnerability within this demographic, necessitating targeted interventions.

Religious leaders, conversely, demonstrated lower levels of sympathy towards radicalism but were overwhelmingly more engaged in active counter-radicalization initiatives within their communities. Their role as gatekeepers of religious discourse and community educators is thus empirically validated as a crucial bulwark against extremist ideologies. This highlights the enduring strength of traditional religious leadership.

Qualitative interviews further illuminated the multifaceted drivers of radicalization, with former extremists citing personal grievances and a sense of injustice as initial motivators. Religious scholars and policymakers consistently underscored the role of socio-economic factors, such as unemployment, and the pervasive influence of online propaganda in pushing individuals towards radicalization. These findings corroborate the quantitative data, adding depth and context to the statistical correlations.

Inferential analysis confirmed a significant positive correlation between perceived socio-economic grievances and radical susceptibility among students, and a strong predictive power of online radical content for sympathetic attitudes. Crucially, moderate religious education and active participation in community-based counter-radicalization programs, such as the “Peace Village” initiative, were identified as protective factors, effectively mitigating radical sympathies and fostering resilience.

The findings resonate with existing global scholarship on radicalization, which frequently identifies socio-economic grievances, identity crises, and online exposure as significant drivers of extremism. Our study’s observation of higher youth susceptibility aligns with international trends where younger demographics, often navigating complex social and economic landscapes, are more vulnerable to extremist recruitment. The pervasive role of social media in disseminating radical content is also a well-documented phenomenon globally.

However, this research distinguishes itself by empirically demonstrating the unique resilience mechanisms inherent within Indonesian Islam, particularly through its established moderate religious organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Unlike contexts where traditional religious institutions may be perceived as part of the problem or are weak, in Indonesia, these organizations actively serve as robust counter-narrative providers and community stabilizers, a dynamic not universally observed in other Muslim-majority nations.

A key difference lies in the emphasis on community-led counter-radicalization initiatives, exemplified by the “Peace Village” case study. Many international counter-radicalization efforts are state-centric or focus heavily on security measures. Our findings highlight the profound impact of grassroots, culturally sensitive programs that integrate economic empowerment with religious re-education, leveraging local religious leadership and social solidarity, offering a distinct model for effective intervention.

Furthermore, the study’s focus on the nuanced interplay between traditional religious education (e.g., *pesantren*) and resilience against radicalism provides a specific contribution to the literature. It illustrates how a deeply contextualized and comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings, as fostered by these institutions, acts as a robust ideological inoculation, differentiating it from more superficial or decontextualized religious interpretations often exploited by fundamentalists.

The research results signify a critical ongoing negotiation within Indonesian Islam between its deeply rooted traditions of moderation and the pressures exerted by global fundamentalist ideologies. This negotiation is not merely theoretical but is actively playing out in the lived experiences of individuals and communities, shaping the future trajectory of religious expression in the world’s largest Muslim-majority nation.

These findings also signify the enduring strength and adaptability of *Islam Nusantara*, demonstrating its capacity to absorb external ideological challenges while largely maintaining its core pluralistic and tolerant character. The resilience observed, particularly through the proactive roles of religious leaders and traditional educational frameworks, underscores the vitality of indigenous Islamic institutions in safeguarding national religious harmony.

Furthermore, the results signify a clear imperative for multi-pronged and adaptive counter-radicalization strategies. The data indicates that purely security-focused approaches are insufficient; effective interventions must simultaneously address socio-economic vulnerabilities, counter online propaganda with compelling alternative narratives, and leverage community-based religious authority. This calls for a holistic and integrated national response.

Ultimately, the study's outcomes signify a hopeful yet cautious outlook for Indonesian Islam. While vulnerabilities persist, particularly among youth susceptible to online radicalization, the inherent strengths of its moderate religious traditions and the demonstrable success of community-led initiatives offer a powerful testament to Indonesia's capacity to navigate and mitigate the complex challenges posed by global Islamic fundamentalism.

The implications for national security and social cohesion in Indonesia are profound. The identified vulnerabilities among university students, coupled with the pervasive influence of online radical content, necessitate urgent and targeted digital literacy programs and counter-narrative campaigns aimed at youth. Proactive engagement on social media platforms is crucial to inoculate against extremist propaganda.

For policymakers, the findings underscore the importance of integrating socio-economic development initiatives with counter-radicalization programs. Addressing issues like youth unemployment and perceived injustices is not merely an economic imperative but a critical component of national security, as these grievances are exploited by radical groups for recruitment. Holistic policy frameworks are therefore essential.

Religious organizations and educational institutions must recognize their pivotal role in strengthening resilience. The demonstrated effectiveness of traditional Islamic education and community-based counter-radicalization initiatives implies a need for increased support and resources for these entities. Investing in moderate religious education and empowering local religious leaders can significantly bolster resistance to extremist ideologies.

The "Peace Village" case study provides a practical blueprint for localized, community-driven deradicalization and prevention. Its success implies that similar models, tailored to specific local contexts, could be replicated across Indonesia. This highlights the importance of empowering grassroots initiatives and fostering collaboration between civil society, religious leaders, and former extremists for sustainable peacebuilding.

The observed higher susceptibility among university students can be attributed to several factors inherent to their developmental stage and exposure. Young adults are often more open to new ideas, including those that challenge the status quo, and may be seeking meaning or identity, making them vulnerable to narratives that offer simplistic solutions to complex societal problems. Their extensive engagement with online platforms also increases exposure to unfiltered radical content.

Religious leaders, conversely, exhibit lower susceptibility and higher engagement in counter-radicalization due to their deep theological training and established social roles. Their comprehensive understanding of Islamic jurisprudence and ethics provides a robust intellectual framework to critically evaluate and refute extremist interpretations. Furthermore, their vested interest in maintaining community harmony and their position as trusted figures compel them to actively counter divisive ideologies.

The effectiveness of moderate religious education, particularly within traditional institutions like *pesantren*, stems from its emphasis on contextualized learning, ethical reasoning, and the promotion of *wasatiyyah* (moderation). This holistic approach equips individuals with the critical tools to discern extremist rhetoric from authentic Islamic teachings, fostering an intellectual resilience that is difficult to penetrate by simplistic fundamentalist narratives.

The success of community-based counter-radicalization programs, such as the "Peace Village," is rooted in their ability to address both the ideological and practical needs of

vulnerable individuals. These initiatives provide not only religious re-education but also tangible support like vocational training and psychological counseling, offering a comprehensive pathway out of extremism. Their localized nature ensures cultural relevance and builds trust within the community.

Future research should conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term effectiveness of specific counter-radicalization programs, particularly those focused on online interventions and socio-economic empowerment. Such studies could provide invaluable data on sustained behavioral and ideological shifts among participants, moving beyond cross-sectional assessments.

There is a pressing need for comparative studies examining radicalization and counter-radicalization dynamics across different regions within Indonesia, beyond Java and Sumatra, to understand how local cultural, ethnic, and religious nuances influence these processes. This would provide a more granular and representative picture of the national landscape.

Further qualitative research should delve deeper into the specific content and persuasive techniques employed by online radical narratives targeting Indonesian youth. Understanding the psychological hooks and ideological appeals used by extremist groups can inform the development of more effective and targeted counter-narratives.

Finally, research should explore the role of intergenerational dialogue and mentorship in counter-radicalization, particularly how older, moderate religious leaders can effectively engage and influence younger generations who are primarily exposed to online information. This could identify best practices for bridging generational divides in ideological transmission.

## **CONCLUSION**

The most significant and distinguishing finding of this research is the empirical demonstration of a nuanced and differential susceptibility to radicalization within Indonesian Islam, specifically highlighting the higher vulnerability of university students compared to religious leaders, alongside the pervasive influence of online propaganda. This finding is particularly distinct from much global scholarship that often generalizes youth susceptibility without deeply exploring the protective factors offered by established moderate religious institutions and leadership, which our study shows are robust bulwarks in the Indonesian context. It underscores that while external ideological pressures exist, the internal resilience mechanisms are highly effective when actively engaged.

This research's primary added value lies in its methodological contribution through the comprehensive mixed-methods design, which meticulously integrates quantitative survey data with rich qualitative insights, including perspectives from former extremists. This triangulation provides a robust and multi-layered understanding of radicalization and counter-radicalization processes that single-method studies often miss. It offers a replicable framework for examining complex social phenomena in culturally sensitive contexts, thereby enriching the empirical toolkit available for studies on religious extremism and peacebuilding.

A key limitation of this study is its geographical scope, primarily focusing on Java and Sumatra, which may not fully capture the diverse socio-religious dynamics present across all of Indonesia's vast archipelago. The cross-sectional nature of the quantitative data also limits the ability to infer causality or track long-term changes in attitudes and behaviors related to radicalization. Future research should expand its geographical coverage to include other regions of Indonesia, employ longitudinal designs to monitor the evolution of radicalization

and counter-radicalization efforts over time, and explore the specific roles of local cultural and ethnic identities in shaping responses to fundamentalist ideologies.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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