Understanding the Radicalisation Patterns of Indonesian Pro-IS Supporters

By Alif Satria

SYNOPSIS

In-depth empirical research on Indonesian pro-IS supporters has shown that most of them had been radicalised through offline propaganda. This is contrary to the widely held belief that online radicalisation was mainly responsible. As such, Indonesian authorities need to continue addressing the influence of extremist rhetoric in offline settings, and closely monitor social ties between pro-IS supporters and potential recruits to their organisations.

COMMENTARY

Indonesian pro-Islamic State (IS) terrorist organisations are significantly less lethal today than in the recent past. Largely due to the mass arrest of senior leaders in 2018, well-known organisations like the Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) are now decentralised, leaving their cells unable to formulate a common strategy and to mobilise resources collectively. Consequently, the frequency and lethality of pro-IS attacks have declined significantly.

In 2022, Indonesia experienced only one attack by JAD – the Astana Raya Bombing – which resulted in ten casualties. Notably, this attack was significantly less lethal than its earlier attacks, such as the 2018 Triple Church Bombings in Surabaya which caused 58 casualties.

Despite their declining operational capacity, pro-IS groups have shown a degree of resilience in their ability to recruit members and to establish new cells. A report by the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) noted as of 2020, that pro-IS cells continued to emerge in areas that "had no recent history of terrorism". These included Pohuwanto, Gorontalo, where seven pro-IS men were arrested for plotting attacks,

and Banjar Baru, South Kalimantan, where attack preparations were plotted. In 2021, new pro-IS cells were still forming in Nganjuk, East Java.

To better understand how pro-IS cells are being regenerated, this author examined 996 court documents of terrorists arrested and convicted between 2011 and 2021. Relevant information about them were stored in the Indonesian Terrorist Inmate (ITI) Dataset, which has been helpful in our understanding of the radicalisation pathways, organisational careers, and violent operations of convicted Indonesian terrorists.

The analysis in this commentary is based on 235 cases involving members of pro-IS cells and groups arrested in 2018 (182 cases) and 2021 (53 cases). They included members from pro-IS groups such as JAD, Jemaah Darussalam al Mubaroqah, and Anshor Daulah Villa Mutiara.

Indonesian Pro-IS Terrorists' Radicalisation Patterns

Based on information from the ITI Dataset, two radicalisation patterns among pro-IS organisations were observed to persist between 2018 and 2021.

First, it was observed that most of their members were radicalised offline even though they were savvy with social media and the Internet. In 2018, the data showed that 67 per cent of Indonesian pro-IS supporters were radicalised through offline processes. They were mostly influenced at mosque sermons delivered by extremist *ulamas* (religious scholars and teachers) and at radical Quranic recital groups, both being the starting point of 80 per cent of offline radicalisation cases in 2018.

While some were radicalised online by propaganda disseminated through Facebook and Telegram, most of them were concurrently influenced offline by extremist sermons and Quranic recital groups. In most instances, the commitment to the IS cause that developed online became stronger, manifesting into action only after it was reinforced by group activities – as in the case of JAD Bogor and Bekasi members, Baban and Iswahyudi. Overall, the data showed that only 9 per cent of pro-IS radicalisations in 2018 took place exclusively online.

Offline radicalisation of pro-IS supporters was also prevalent in 2021. Notably, about 60 per cent of those arrested in 2021 were radicalised through solely offline means. As in 2018, mosques and private Quranic groups were the most common starting point of an individual's radicalisation, accounting for 86 per cent of all offline radicalisation cases in 2021. Although the proportion of pro-IS supporters radicalised online increased from 35 per cent in 2018 to 40 per cent in 2021, many were still simultaneously involved in offline processes as well. Overall, purely online radicalisation occurred in only 13 per cent of cases in 2021.

The *second* pattern that persisted in 2018 and 2021 was the role of social ties in facilitating the radicalisation process. Despite some claims that online self-radicalisation is a major threat, data actually suggested that most members of pro-IS terrorist organisations were radicalised either by or with someone they were personally familiar with. Data from the ITI Dataset found that 73 per cent of all pro-IS supporters who were arrested in 2018 had a social relationship with another supporter who

facilitated their radicalisation process. In 2021, this percentage remained high at 77 per cent.

The data also showed that the most common social ties which facilitated radicalisations were the individuals' relationships with their *ulamas* followed by friendships and family ties. In 2018, 32 per cent of the people radicalised involved a radical *ulama* they were close to, and 22 per cent involved introduction to radical materials by a friend or family member who was part of or on the way to joining a pro-IS group. In 2021, these numbers remained about the same, with 34 per cent involving radical *ulamas* and 28 per cent involving a friend or family member.

The case of the Anshor Daulah Villa Mutiara group highlights the significance of social ties in the radicalisation of pro-IS supporters. This group, located in Makassar, South Sulawesi, was brought together by Rizaldy whose radicalisation was facilitated by Ustad Basri, his *ulama* while he was a member of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI).

Rizaldy established private Quranic recital groups and invited his siblings, their spouses, and former FPI colleagues to participate. Eventually, the group expanded to 80 people and its most infamous terrorist couples, Ulfa and Rullie along with Lukman and Dewi, went on to perpetuate, respectively, the 2019 Jolo cathedral bombing and the 2021 Makassar bombing.

Looking Ahead

In view of the persistent patterns of offline radicalisations involving social networks observed in 2018 and 2021, it is likely that these trends are still prevalent today. It is therefore vital for the Indonesian government to conduct two things. Firstly, it needs to collaborate with and expand the reach of civil society groups involved in the battle against extremism in offline settings.

Secondly, it needs to coordinate with and support "Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)" organisations in implementing a "whole of society" approach to identify and to intervene early in radicalisation processes. It is important, however, that this focus on offline radicalisation is not done at the expense of combating online radicalisation.

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