

Research Report

Pandemic, Democracy, and Violent Extremism in Indonesia





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and Violent Extremism
in Indonesia**

The Habibie Center

Jakarta, Indonesia
February 2021





About The Habibie Center

The Habibie Center was founded by Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie and family in 1999 as an independent, nongovernmental, non-profit organisation. The vision of The Habibie Center is to create a structurally democratic society founded on the morality and integrity of cultural and religious values.

The missions of The Habibie Center are first, to establish a structurally and culturally democratic society that recognizes, respects, and promotes human rights by undertaking study and advocacy of issues related to democratization and human rights, and second, to increase the effectiveness of the management of human resources and the spread of technology.

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Preface

Indonesia has recorded the highest COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia. Until today, there has yet to be any sign that Indonesia will be able to tackle the pandemic. The current situation points to a worrying trend as the spread of the virus continues to rise while medical facilities in different regions are collapsing.

While the pandemic is worsening, Indonesia is also grappling with the decline of democracy. This condition is not novel as Indonesia has experienced a downturn in democracy indexes since 2015. Rooms for civil liberties, which have been previously reduced, are even more limited due to physical and social distancing measures imposed by the government. Platforms for democracy no longer function as they normally did before the pandemic.

At the same time, violent extremism persists as a threat in Indonesia. Violent extremist groups exploit the existing crisis and develop a narrative that the pandemic is the right time to increase recruitment and conduct attacks. Such logic makes sense as most of the government's resources are allocated to measures to counter the pandemic.

To investigate the relationship between the pandemic, democracy, and violent extremism, the research team of the Department of Peace and Development at the Habibie Center conducted a research from August to December 2020. This research was supported by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, The Habibie Center extends their greatest gratitude to multiple parties who have provided data and inputs, as well as comments, for this research. This report elaborates on findings of this research.

Executive Summary

This report presents research findings on the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic, democracy, and violent extremism in Indonesia amidst the plummeting global condition due to the pandemic in multiple parts of the world.

The Indonesian Government is not prepared to strategically respond to the pandemic, resulting in the constant increase of active cases until today. Sectoral responses tend to overlap and are uncoordinated, which are then further hampered by national and regional coordination. Meanwhile, limitations of activities in multiple aspects at the societal level have also reduced public participation. Such tendency amplifies the declining trend of Indonesia's performance in democracy indexes.

Within such context, threats from violent radicalism and extremism continue to occur in Indonesia. Terrorist groups exploit socio-economic crises prompted by the pandemic by spreading the narrative that the pandemic is a curse from God. They also build the narrative that the pandemic is the right time to carry out attacks against the government and security forces. The leaders of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), to whom many extremists in Indonesia have sworn their allegiance and loyalty, have also repeatedly encouraged their supporters to commence attacks in order to take advantage of the government's focus on handling the pandemic.

Given the context, this study was conducted to understand the relationship between democracy, which is currently under the pressure of crises inflicted by the pandemic and the rise of violent extremism.

Main findings:

- 1 COVID-19 Amplifies the Decline of Indonesia's Democracy**

Restrictions imposed by the government towards all aspects of activities to curb down the pandemic have limited public participation on important political decisions during the pandemic. The government has also securitized measures against the pandemic, especially by appointing security actors for posts within the institutional structure of pandemic responses, as well as deploying security actors to directly support policies to tackle COVID-19. This research also found that the central government's sectoral responses tend to overlap in countering the pandemic. The existing tug of war between central and regional governments in combating the pandemic also points to the perception that the central government is attempting to centralize its power.

2 Increasing Intolerance Amidst the Pandemic May Become an Enabling Factor for Radicalization

Cases of intolerance are mostly similar with those which occurred before the pandemic, as demonstrated by efforts to prohibit prayers or the constructions of places of worship of other religions. On the other hand, the development of intolerant groups emerges as a platform for violent extremist groups to conduct recruitments. For violent extremist groups, the pandemic is present as the right momentum to disseminate their beliefs.

3 Responses from Violent Extremist Groups Towards the Pandemic

Violent extremist groups build the narrative that the COVID-19 pandemic is a curse from God to avenge the government's tyranny, both at the domestic and global levels. Violent extremist groups have also developed another narrative which states that the pandemic is present as the right moment to carry out attacks as the government is committing almost all of their resources to respond to the pandemic.

4 The Military's Expanding Role in Countering Violent Extremism

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly diminished the abilities of state and non-state actors to respond to violent extremism. Physical and social distancing measures obstruct multiple activities to counter violent extremism and to implement deradicalization efforts. On the contrary, in comparison to other approaches, attempts to securitize measures to combat violent extremism are more prominent during the pandemic. Moreover, the draft of the Presidential Decree on the involvement of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia or TNI) in counterterrorism exceeds the military's role and authority. The draft of the presidential decree's inclination towards strengthened securitization measures in curbing down violent extremism should be further scrutinized, especially pertaining to its implications towards Indonesia's democracy. Additionally, reflecting upon Indonesia's history, when security actors assume excessive power, it will be challenging to commit to desecuritization efforts, which further threatens Indonesia's democracy.

Recommendations:

- 1 Enhancing the role of civil society and freedom of speech.** The declining quality of democracy during the pandemic should be scrutinized by all relevant parties. Efforts to resolve the current situation must be undertaken, for instance by strengthening the role of civil society in supervising and limiting state's authority.

- 2 Ensuring the accountability of, conducting check and balance in, and evaluating the involvement of security actors in COVID-19 responses.** The securitization of pandemic responses results in the active involvement of security actors in activities which span beyond their main responsibilities. It should be noted that this condition is temporary during extraordinary situations, such as a pandemic. Desecuritization and restoration of the usual mechanisms in handling health crises, and all of its ramifications towards normal political platforms, must be carried out as soon as the situation permits.
- 3 Promoting community-based programs, aiming to strengthen social cohesion and solidarity, to reduce exclusivity among different social groups amidst the pandemic.** Community-based initiatives must be constantly supported and facilitated to enhance social cohesion within the society.
- 4 Re-enhancing counternarratives against violent extremism.** Violent extremist groups are able to maintain their resilience against the consequences of the pandemic. They build conspiracy narratives to strengthen violent extremist ideologies and delegitimize the state's authority. Counternarrative programs need to be reinforced to halt any support towards violent extremist groups.
- 5 Improving transparency, public communication on COVID-19 responses, and synergies in cross-sectoral and central-regional policies to curb down violent extremist narratives.** The government needs to push for transparency of public information on responses to COVID-19. Issues revolving synergies in cross-sectoral policies and between the central and regional governments should also be improved. If the citizens see and understand that the government succeeded to present effective responses to the pandemic, the narratives built by violent extremist groups, in their attempts to delegitimize the government, will lose their credibility.
- 6 Promoting inclusive programs to mitigate repercussions of the pandemic.** The government and civil society must ensure that pandemic mitigation programs are inclusively catered to and received by all parts of the society who are in need. Effective and inclusive COVID-19 mitigation programs will prevent marginalized groups from becoming potential recruits for violent extremist groups.
- 7 Extending research for subsequent studies.** Findings in this research must be situated within Indonesia's socio-political context. Some of the tendencies found in this research are unique to Indonesia, while some others are consistent with global trends. Henceforth, subsequent research must encompass an extended locus, such as through a comparative analysis with other states in the region.

List of Abbreviations

ABRI	:	<i>Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia</i> (The Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia during the New Order Era)
ASEAN	:	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BNPB	:	<i>Badan Nasional Penanganan Bencana</i> (Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management)
BNPT	:	<i>Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme</i> (National Counter Terrorism Agency)
UN-CTED	:	United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate
Densus 88	:	<i>Detasemen Khusus 88 Anti Teror</i> (Counterterrorism Special Detachment 88)
EIU	:	The Economist Intelligence Unit
FGD	:	Focus Group Discussion
FPI	:	<i>Front Pembela Islam</i> (Islamic Defenders Front)
GKPPD	:	<i>Gereja Kristen Protestan Pakpak Dairi</i> (Pakpak Dairi Christian Protestant Church)
HKBP-KSB	:	<i>Huria Kristen Batak Protestan Kota Serang Baru</i> (Serang Baru City Batak Christian Protestant Church)
IRA	:	Irish Republican Army
ISIS	:	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JAD	:	<i>Jamaah Ansharut Daulah</i>
JI	:	<i>Jamaah Islamiyah</i>
Koopssus	:	<i>Komando Operasi Khusus</i> (Special Operations Command)
KWI	:	<i>Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia</i> (Bishops' Conference of Indonesia)
MAT	:	<i>Muhajirin Anshor Tauhid</i>
MIT	:	<i>Mujahidin Indonesia Timur</i> (East Indonesian Mujahedeen)
MUI	:	<i>Majelis Ulama Indonesia</i> (Indonesian Ulema Council)
NU	:	<i>Nahdatul Ulama</i>
OSIS	:	<i>Organisasi Siswa Intra Sekolah</i> (Student Council)
PA 212	:	<i>Persatuan Alumni 212</i> (212 Alumni Association)

List of Abbreviations

Perpu	:	<i>Peraturan Pemerintah Pengganti Undang-undang</i> (Government Regulation in Lieu of Law)
PGI	:	<i>Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia</i> (Council of Churches in Indonesia)
PKI	:	<i>Partai Komunis Indonesia</i> (Indonesian Communist Party)
PSBB	:	<i>Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar</i> (Large-scale Social Distancing)
RUU-HIP	:	<i>Rancangan Undang-undang Haluan Ideologi Pancasila</i> (Pancasila Ideology Guidelines Bill)
SAFEnet	:	South East Asian Freedom of Expression Network
TNI	:	<i>Tentara Nasional Indonesia</i> (Indonesian National Armed Forces)
UIN	:	<i>Universitas Islam Negeri</i> (State Islamic University)
UN	:	United Nations
UNICRI	:	United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
UU ITE	:	<i>Undang-undang tentang Informasi dan Transaksi Elektronik</i> (Law on Electronic Information and Transactions)



BACKGROUND

BACKGROUND

Indonesia is the most heavily-affected country by the COVID-19 pandemic in Southeast Asia. Per December 2020, the total number of positive cases exceeded 700,000 cases with 15% out of the total cases being active cases.¹ Java, as the most densely-populated island in Indonesia, contributes the most daily increase in cases. The worsening health crisis is exacerbated by a rather slow economic recovery.²

Indonesia's ill-equipped COVID-19 responses are mostly caused by the government's slow and lenient responses, especially during the early phase of the pandemic. While most countries started to understand the potential consequences of the pandemic and prepared response strategies, the Indonesian Government seemed to be uncertain in deciding upon strategic policies to anticipate the spread of COVID-19. The condition was worsened by overlapping responses without sound coordination, for instance, between the central and regional governments in imposing Large-scale Social Distancing (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* or PSBB). During the early months of the pandemic, the government was heavily criticized as they refused to provide transparent information on the development of the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia's democracy experiences a decline. Multiple surveys and indexes used to measure the quality of democracies demonstrate such trend. Freedom House's yearly index, titled *Freedom in the World*, labels Indonesia as "partly free" with a score of 61 out of 100 in the democracy indicator, encompassing scores amounting to 30 (out of 40) for political rights and 31 (out of 60) for civil liberty sub-indicators.³

1 *Indonesia*. (n.d.). Worldometer. Accessed on 28 December 2020, from <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/indonesia/>

2 Akhlas, Adrian Wail. (2020, 2 September). Indonesia's 2021 economic recovery will not be at 'full power': Sri Mulyani. Accessed on 3 February 2020, from <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/09/02/indonesias-2021-economic-recovery-will-not-be-at-full-power-sri-mulyani.html>

3 *Indonesia*. (n.d.) Freedom House. Accessed on December 28, 2020, from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-world/2020>

Indonesia is deemed to be stricken by problems resulted from systemic corruption, discrimination and violence against minority groups, separatism, and politicization of regulations pertaining to blasphemy. This is Indonesia's fourth consecutive years of decline in the index published in *Freedom in the World*.

Meanwhile, The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) *Democracy Index 2020* ranks Indonesia in the 64th position out of 167 surveyed countries with a score of 6.48. Indonesia is deemed as a "flawed democracy," which is defined as a state in which fair and free general elections are held, but several problems persist in other aspects, such as governance, political culture, and political participation.⁴ This trend has been evident since 2017 when Indonesia's score drastically dropped to 6.39 from 6.97 in the previous year.

Such trend is affirmed by the public at the domestic level. A survey conducted by Indikator Politik depicts the society's perception of an increase of threats from the state towards civil liberties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the respondents agree or strongly agree that the public is increasingly apprehensive of voicing out their opinions (79.6%) and faces greater difficulties to hold demonstrations or protests (73.8%), while security forces are more arbitrary with arresting citizens who hold different political opinions from the ruling elites (57.7%).⁵

Indonesia's democratic regression during the pandemic is exemplified by several phenomena. Pertaining to its policies, the Joko Widodo (Jokowi) administration is perceived to impair democratic principles and

4 Tehusjarana, Karina M. (2020, 22 January). Indonesia, once regional model, falls further behind Malaysia in democracy rankings. Accessed on 3 February 2021, from <https://www.thejakartapost.com/seasia/2020/01/22/2019-eiu-democracy-index-shows-indonesia-falling-further-behind-malaysia.html>

5 Putra, Nanda Perdana. (2020, 25 October). Survei Indikator Tunjukkan Meningkatnya Ancaman Kebebasan Sipil di Indonesia [A Survey by Indikator Noted Increasing Threats to Civil Liberties in Indonesia]. Accessed on 3 February 2021, from <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/4391541/survei-indikator-tunjukkan-meningkatnya-ancaman-kebebasan-sipil-di-indonesia>

decentralization of power, including the enforcement of some controversial regulations, curtailment of freedom of speech, and dependence on the political support of security actors. In addition, the securitization of pandemic responses through the military's active involvement can potentially lead to the decay of democratic norms and customs which will be hard to recover once the condition returns to normalcy after the pandemic. Meanwhile, at the grassroots level, the COVID-19 pandemic amplifies trends of intolerance and the decline of social cohesion. Actions to prohibit prayers and religion-based violence still persist in multiple parts of Indonesia. The surge of intolerance can potentially aggravate preconditions for the existence of violent extremist ideologies and movements.

At the same time, Indonesia still faces threats from the expansion of violent extremist groups' ideologies and activities. COVID-19 serves as an opportunity for violent extremist groups to enhance internal consolidation, for example, by strengthening narratives and recruitment strategies. A report published by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) notes how groups affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) employ social media platforms to disseminate conspiracy theories on the origin of COVID-19 to erode the public's trust towards the government while bolstering the legitimacy of their violent extremist ideologies.⁶

Threats from violent extremist groups' preparation efforts and acts also prevail. Perceptions that the government's capacity to ensure security is undermined and their attention is shifted to tackling the pandemic motivate these groups to conduct attacks. At the early stage of the pandemic, as a case in point, the East Indonesia Mujahedeen (*Mujahidin Indonesia Timur* or MIT), operating in Poso, Central Sulawesi, attacked a

police station. Then, in November 2020, four people in Sigi, Central Sulawesi, were allegedly killed by members of MIT. Consequently, the government decided to extend the implementation of Tinombala Operation to capture MIT members. The Tinombala Operation entered its fifth year of operation in 2020.

With such background, there is a need to undertake a deeper examination on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic towards the dynamics of threats from violent extremist groups within the context of the decline of democracy, especially in Indonesia.

Literature Review

Past publications, both in the forms of policy paper and theoretical analyses, have discussed consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic towards democracy. *Democracy under Lockdown*, published by Freedom House, concludes that the pandemic accelerates the declining quality of democracy which has occurred within the past one and a half decade.⁷ Freedom House's conclusion illustrates that in many states, governments channel their responses to the pandemic through abuses of power, curtailing criticism, and impairing democratic institutions. Not less than eighty states surveyed in the study experience declines in the qualities of democracy and human rights during the pandemic. Freedom House predicts that crises in democratic governance, which have occurred long even before the pandemic took place, will continue to linger even after the current health crisis is resolved. Eliminating legal and normative instruments enforced during the pandemic will be challenging.

A policy paper titled *Addressing the Effect of COVID-19 on Democracy in South and Southeast Asia* released by the Council on Foreign Relations comes to a similar conclusion, especially in Southeast and South Asia.⁸ In

6 Among conspiracy theories shared by groups affiliated with ISIS and Al-Aqida, one states that COVID-19 is "Allah's soldier" which impinges as a punishment to *Kafir* (non-believers) and enemies to Muslims, while another declares that COVID-19 is Allah's curse to Western countries. Refer to Binetti, S. et al., "Stop the Virus of Disinformation: The Risk of Malicious Use of Social Media during COVID-19 and the Technology Options to Fight It" (United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, 2020).

7 Repucci, S., & Slipowitz, A. (2020). *Democracy under lockdown: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Special Report). Washington: Freedom House. See also Carothers, Thomas & O'Donohue, Andrew. (2020). *Political Polarization in South and Southeast Asia: Old Divisions, New Dangers*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

8 Kurlantzick, Joshua. (2020). *Addressing the Effect of COVID-19 on Democracy in South and Southeast Asia*.

multiple states within these regions, the COVID-19 pandemic is present as an opportunity for “illiberal” and populist leaders to consolidate political and economic power while their direct contributions to respond to the health crisis are noted to be absent. Such tendency is depicted by the imposition of new regulations intended to expand the authority of the executive branch, narrow the available spaces for supervision on governments, enforce emergency regulations, marginalize opposition groups, and enhance control over the decision-making process. Moreover, governments in multiple states aggressively conduct disinformation to cover for their failures in handling the existing health crisis.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic towards democracy have garnered great attention from the academic community. In an edition published in October 2020, *Journal of Democracy* published three articles which scrutinize various responses to the pandemic and their consequences in several democracies.⁹ In Brazil, President Bolsonaro’s antagonistic attitude, according to Smith, has strengthened polarization among citizens and partisan politics, which limits the state’s capability to tackle the current health crisis.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Mukherji argues that India’s Prime Minister Modi can aptly capitalize on the health crisis to strengthen “competitive authoritarianism.”¹¹ In South Africa, the government attempts to tackle the crisis through a militaristic approach in law enforcement, which cripples civil liberty.¹²

Meanwhile, not many publications have specifically

Discussion Paper. Washington, D.C: Council on Foreign Relations.

9 The Editors. (2020). Covid vs. Democracy. *Journal of Democracy* 31, No. 4: 74–75. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0056>; Smith, Amy Erica. “Covid vs. Democracy: Brazil’s Populist Playbook,” *Journal of Democracy* 31, No. 4 (2020): 76–90, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0057>; Mukherji, R. (2020). Covid vs. Democracy: India’s Illiberal Remedy. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(4), 91-105. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0058>; Seekings, J., & Natrass, N. (2020). Covid vs. Democracy: South Africa’s Lockdown Misfire. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(4), 106-121. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0059>

10 Smith, “Covid vs. Democracy.”

11 Mukherji, “Covid vs. Democracy.”

12 Seekings and Natrass, “Covid vs. Democracy..”

touched upon the impacts of COVID-19 towards the nature and characteristics of threats from violent extremism. A notable exception is a preliminary study released by the Institute of Development Studies in the United Kingdom in May 2020, which attempts to anticipate potential repercussions from and possible responses to the pandemic against the backdrop of recruitments and radicalization by violent extremist groups.¹³ The report focuses on how COVID-19 enhances factors which drive radicalization and push recruits to join violent extremist networks over short, middle, and long periods of time.

13 Avis, W. (2020). The COVID-19 Pandemic and Response on Violent Extremist Recruitment and Radicalisation, K4D Helpdesk Report 808. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies

A large crowd of people is gathered outdoors, possibly for a protest or public event. The image is heavily overlaid with a red, semi-transparent grid pattern. The text is centered in the middle of the image.

The Dynamics of Democracy During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

Photo: Armin Abdul Jabbar/Pikiran Rakyat

The Dynamics of Democracy During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

A. The Dynamics of Democracy During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Centralization of Power and Securitization

Whilst the pandemic took place, there have been multiple dynamics which may potentially impede Indonesia's democracy. Two of those dynamics—politicization and tendencies of centralization of power and securitization of pandemic responses—will possibly scar Indonesia's state-society relations, which may even outlast the pandemic itself.

Politicization and Centralization of Power

COVID-19 strikes Indonesia amidst current tendencies of democratic decline.¹⁴ Multiple policies taken since Jokowi's first term of presidency have been deemed counterproductive for democratic principles and decentralization of power, such as by invoking several controversial policies, restricting freedom of speech, and depending on networks of security actors for political support. These tendencies, which point towards authoritarianism, have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

Indonesia's response to COVID-19 has been impeded by a lack of coordination between the central and regional governments, most notably during the pandemic's early phase.¹⁵ Relationships between Jokowi and several leaders at the regional level were strained, for example, when the Governor of Jakarta, Anies Baswedan, planned a lockdown in Jakarta as COVID-19 cases spiked.¹⁶

14 See Power, T. P. (2018). Jokowi's authoritarian turn and Indonesia's democratic decline. *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, 54(3), 307-338.; Bland, Ben. (2020). *Man of Contradictions: Jokowi and the Struggle to Remake Indonesia*. Sidney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, chap. 5.

15 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]" (The Habibie Center, September 23, 2020).

16 Gorbiano, Marchio Irfan, and Ghina Ghaliya. (2020, 1 April). Turf War Undermines COVID-19 Fight in Indonesia. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/04/01/turf-war-undermines-covid-19-fight-indonesia-government-jokowi-anies.html>

Similar approaches were also taken by governors of the West Java Province, Ridwan Kamil, and the Central Java Province, Ganjar Pranowo. In multiple surveys, the aforementioned regional leaders are often dubbed as strong candidates for the 2024 presidential election. Henceforth, the ability to display strong leadership, while managing the current crisis effectively in their respective regions, offers an electoral incentive for those who intend to bid for presidency in 2024.¹⁷ The central government responded to the approaches by asserting that the authority to impose lockdowns was under the central government's domain. Thus, the central government decided to enforce Large-scale Social Distancing (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* or PSBB).

Indonesia's COVID-19 strategy has also been accompanied with the establishment of regulations which may potentially enhance executive power. Notwithstanding its missing direct links with measures to counter the pandemic, the process of formulating those regulations, as well as their substances, can potentially propel the establishment of undemocratic governance which may be sustained after the pandemic ends.

The Job Creation Omnibus Law, passed in October 2020, for example, drew broad criticisms due to its seemingly rushed and covert legislative formulation process.¹⁸ The government was perceived to capitalize on the pandemic, which barred civilians' mobility, minimizing the risk of resistance from demonstrations. The law's substance received criticisms as it could potentially strengthen the central government's power as it provides rooms for the central government to nullify the regional government's policies which are considered to hinder investments and

[kartapost.com/news/2020/04/01/turf-war-undermines-covid-19-fight-indonesia-government-jokowi-anies.html](https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/04/01/turf-war-undermines-covid-19-fight-indonesia-government-jokowi-anies.html)

17 Ghaliya, Ghina. (2020, 9 June). Electability of Governors Ganjar, Ridwan Rises amid COVID-19's 'Electoral Incentives': Survey. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/06/09/electability-of-governors-ganjar-ridwan-rises-amid-covid-19s-electoral-incentives-survey.html>.

18 Bardan, Abdul Basith. (2020, 3 November). Pengamat: Ada Dua Poin Kuat Untuk Menggugat Omnibus Law [Analysts: There are Two Strong Points to Contest the Omnibus Law]. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from <https://nasional.kontan.co.id/news/pengamat-ada-dua-poin-kuat-untuk-menggugat-omnibus-law>

employment opportunities. The law was perceived to clash with principles of decentralization as it does not provide leeway for regional governments to set their own regulations in developing their own local economic potentials.¹⁹

Another debate emerged during the pandemic when the government submitted the draft of the Presidential Decree on the Indonesian National Armed Force's (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia* or TNI) Role in Countering Terrorist Acts to the parliament in May. The draft was criticized as it was perceived to provide too much authority to TNI in counterterrorism and stray away from democratic principles and accountability.²⁰ Such militaristic approach in counterterrorism could potentially lead to human rights violations.

The government of Indonesia has also been strongly criticized for circumscribing the freedom of speech for its political interests.²¹ The government and security forces have allegedly utilized Law No. 11/2018 on Electronic Information and Transaction (*Undang-Undang No. 11/2018 tentang Informasi dan Transaksi Elektronik* or UU ITE) to repress criticisms from opposing groups.²² According to the data recorded by the South East Asian Freedom of Expression Network (SAFE-net) and Amnesty International, the total number of cases charged under the UU ITE increased threefold during Jokowi's first term (233 cases), compared to the total number of

cases during the previous administration (73 cases).²³ Throughout 2019, prosecutions under the UU ITE were often made against journalists and media figures, as well as activists.²⁴ They were mostly charged under clauses on defamation and hate speech. Meanwhile, the data collected by Amnesty International stated that from 2014 to 2019, 241 individuals were arrested for criticizing the government, 82 of whom were found guilty of hate speech and insults to the president.²⁵ SAFE-net's 2019 report on the situation of digital rights in Indonesia projects that from 2019 to 2024, the state of freedom of expression in Indonesia will be at the "first alert" level.²⁶

The trend persists during the pandemic.²⁷ In March, the police named 51 individuals as suspects charged with spreading hoaxes on COVID-19 and blocked 38 social media accounts.²⁸ Around that time, the police also arrested three people in Northern Jakarta for circulating information on COVID-19 cases in the region, as well as three other individuals who published false news on blockades at highways due to COVID-19.²⁹ In Palembang, a parking officer was arrested after publishing a recorded video of an alleged COVID-19 patient in a hospital.³⁰

23 Ibid.

24 See Muhajir, Anton. (2020). Laporan Situasi Hak-Hak Digital Indonesia 2019: Bangkitnya Otoritarian Digital [Report on the Situation of Digital Rights in Indonesia 2019: The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism]. Denpasar: Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network

25 Hamid, "Indonesia's Information Law Has Threatened Free Speech for More than a Decade. This Must Stop."

26 Muhajir, "Laporan Situasi Hak-Hak Digital Indonesia 2019: Bangkitnya Otoritarian Digital," 21.

27 Human Rights Watch. (2020, 9 April). Indonesia: Little Transparency in COVID-19 Outbreak. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/09/indonesia-little-transparency-covid-19-outbreak>.

28 Divisi Humas POLRI. (2020, 31 March). Polri Tetapkan 51 Tersangka Hoax Terkait Corona [Polri Announced 51 Suspects due to Hoaxes on Corona]. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from <https://humas.polri.go.id/2020/03/31/polri-tetapkan-51-tersangka-hoax-terkait-corona/>

29 Alfons, Matius. (2020, 31 March). Polisi Tangkap 3 Orang Terkait Hoax Corona di Jakarta Utara [Police Arrested 3 Individuals due to Hoaxes on Corona in North Jakarta]. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4959095/polisi-tangkap-3-orang-terkait-hoax-corona-di-jakarta-utara>

30 Siregar, Raja Adil. (2020, 3 March). Sebar Video Hoax Pasien Positif Corona, Juru Parkir Di Palembang Di-

19 Nalle, Victor Imanuel. (2020, 16 October). Bagaimana UU Cipta Kerja merusak desentralisasi yang dibangun setelah reformasi [How the Job Creation Law Obstructs Decentralization Developed after the Reformation]. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from <https://theconversation.com/bagaimana-uu-cipta-kerja-merusak-desentralisasi-yang-dibangun-setelah-reformasi-148091>

20 Arif, Muhamad. (2020). Menyoal Peran TNI Dalam Penanggulangan Terorisme [On the Role of TNI in Counterterrorism]. *THC Insights*, No. 14

21 Ross Tapsell, "Indonesia's Policing of Hoax News Increasingly Politicised," *ISEAS Perspective*, No. 75 (2019).

22 Hamid, Usman. (2019, 25 November). Indonesia's Information Law Has Threatened Free Speech for More than a Decade. This Must Stop. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from <https://theconversation.com/indonesias-information-law-has-threatened-free-speech-for-more-than-a-decade-this-must-stop-127446>.

Aside from hoaxes on COVID-19 cases, security forces also enhance their cyber patrol capacity to apprehend individuals who are perceived to insult the government's pandemic responses.³¹ A teenager was arrested in early April 2020 after his video, containing statements regarded as hoaxes and insults against the president, was uploaded to social media platforms.³² In October 2020, to anticipate potential protests and labor strikes to resist the Job Creation Omnibus Law, the police conducted another cyber patrol to detain individuals who shared hoaxes under the controversial UU ITE.³³

Securitization in Pandemic Responses

Securitization theoretically occurs when a security actor, which may take the form of a state, portray a non-security issue as a security issue as it is perceived to threaten a certain referent object, which may take the form of the state itself or the society. The process of securitization takes place when a security actor conducts speech act.³⁴

tangkap [Spreading Hoax Videos of a Corona Patient, A Parking Attendant in Palembang Was Arrested]. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4958534/sebar-video-hoax-pasien-positif-corona-juru-parkir-di-palembang-ditangkap>

31 Timdetikcom. (2020, 5 April). Darurat Corona, Polri Patroli Khusus Pantau Hoax dan Penghinaan Presiden [Emergency from Corona, Polri Conduct Special Patrol to Monitor Hoaxes and Insults to the President]. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4966256/darurat-corona-polri-patroli-khusus-pantau-hoax-dan-penghinaan-presiden?utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=detikcomsocmed&utm_medium=btn&utm_content=news.

32 Tim detikcom. (2020, 7 April). Bola Salju Kasus Ali Baharsyah: Hina Jokowi via Isu Wabah [The Snowball Effect of the Case of Ali Baharsyah: Insulting Jokowi through the Pandemic Issue]. Accessed on 29 December 2020, from <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4787954/imparsial-ada-31-kasus-intoleransi-di-indonesia-mayoritas-pelarangan-ibadah>

33 Halim, Devina. (2020, 5 October). Soal Telegram Kapolri Berisi Perintah Patroli Siber, Polri: Untuk Cegah Hoaks Omnibus Law [On the Head of the Indonesian Police Telegram on the Order for Cyber Patrol, Polri: To Prevent Hoaxes on Omnibus Law]. Accessed on 20 December 2020, from <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/10/05/15125181/soal-telegram-kapolri-berisi-perintah-patroli-siber-polri-untuk-cegah-hoaks?page=all>.

34 See Buzan, B., Wæver, O., Wæver, O., & De Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

When an issue becomes a security one, a security actor obtains the space to conduct extraordinary measures, or actions beyond normal political conducts, including the deployment of security forces.

Within the context of Indonesia, the securitization of pandemic responses is evident in multiple trends. *First*, the employment of narratives on a state of "emergency" which emerged within the context of COVID-19 responses. From the perspective of the government, as an unprecedented disaster, COVID-19 cannot be handled with the usual democratic approaches. COVID-19 governance must be undertaken through a flexible and adaptive approach to disaster relief to generate fast responses.³⁵ Within the framework of securitization, the repeated employment of such a narrative can be regarded as a form of speech act.

With the constant increase of cases, the expanded scope of affected regions, and the extended social-economic implications due to the pandemic, the government, through the Presidential Decree No. 12/2020, defines COVID-19 as a national disaster. The decree provides the government with ample room for budget reallocation to fund measures against COVID-19, affecting the budgets of both central and regional governments. Moreover, the COVID-19 Response Acceleration Task Force, which was previously only responsible for conducting and coordinating responses to COVID-19, is now also responsible for commanding such responses.³⁶

Moreover, as the pandemic is conceived as a massive disruption to economic activities and to jeopardize the financial system and economic growth, the government views extraordinary measures to be necessary for the economy. In March 2020, the government released

35 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]," (The Habibie Center, September 23, 2020).

36 Aria, Pingit. (2020, 14 April). Dampak Penetapan Status Bencana Nasional Covid-19 Terhadap Anggaran [Implications of the National Disaster Status of the COVID-19 Pandemic to the Budget]. Accessed on 1 January 2021, from <https://katadata.co.id/pingitaria/berita/5e9a41c97e9e4/dampak-penetapan-status-bencana-nasional-covid-19-terhadap-anggaran>

a Government Regulation in Lieu of Law (*Peraturan Pemerintah Pengganti Undang-undang* or Perpu) on the national fiscal policy and the stability of the financial system in response to the pandemic. The regulation, among many other clauses, relaxes the GDP deficit limit until 2022 and refocuses budget spending on certain activities. It is important to note that, among other forms of regulation in Indonesia, Perpu can only be released by the government in precarious situations.

Second, the involvement of active and retired military officers who assume multiple key positions in COVID-19 responses. In his second term, Jokowi's dependency on a network of security actors, especially those from the military, is increasingly prominent. Several important posts in the cabinet are held by retired military officers, including those which were previously held by civilians, such as the Minister of Health, held by Terawan Putranto, and the Minister of Religious Affairs, held by Fachrul Razi.³⁷ Other military figures who assume important positions in the government include Prabowo Subianto (Minister of Defense), Luhut Pandjaitan (Coordinating Minister for Maritime and Investment Affairs), Moeldoko (the President's Chief of Staff), and Wiranto (Head of the Presidential Advisory Council). Within the Ministry of Health, Terawan was assisted by several retired officers, including Achmad Yurianto, who acted as the government's spokesperson for COVID-19 responses in the early months of the pandemic. The government formed the COVID-19 Response Acceleration Task Force in March 2020 to coordinate a whole-of-government approach in its responses to the pandemic. The task force is headed by Doni Monardo, an active military officer, who also assumes the role of the head of the Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management (*Badan Nasional Penanganan Bencana* or BNPB). The position of one of the deputies for the task force is also assumed by a senior military officer. These officials hold their own important roles in the national pandemic responses within their respective capacities.

37 In a cabinet reshuffle in December 2020, Letjen (Purn) dr. Terawan Putranto and Jenderal (Purn) Fachrul Razi were replaced by Budi Gunadi Sadikin and Yaqut Cholil Coumas as the new Minister of Health and Minister of Religious Affairs, respectively.

Aside from those assuming important positions at the national level, military officers are also involved in COVID-19 responses at the regional level. As of May 2020, approximately 225 military officers were positioned within the decision-making structure of COVID-19 responses.³⁸ Most of these officers were posted as the deputy heads of provincial, municipal, and regency levels of COVID-19 task forces.³⁹ If these trends are put against the backdrop of Indonesia's political system, it can be assumed that they are made possible by how the Indonesian Army's territorial structure of command paralleled the structure of the civilian government, hence the involvement of military officers, especially those from the Army, in collective leadership fora.

Third, the use of force by security actors, including the military, to implement responses to COVID-19. In May 2020, to enforce disciplinary measures during the "new normal," the government deployed not less than 340,000 personnel from the military and police in four provinces—West Sumatra, Jakarta, West Java, and Gorontalo—as well as in 25 regencies and cities. In Jakarta and cities surrounding the capital city, as of June 2020, TNI stationed up to 6,221 personnel, in addition to 3,909 personnel from the police.⁴⁰ These numbers are substantial if they are compared to TNI's previous military operations other than war. As a comparison, within the period of 2015-2016, TNI deployed 57,000 personnel for counseling programs in agriculture; 3,300 personnel, comprising those from both TNI and the police, in a counterterrorism mission in Poso from 2015 to 2016; 15,000-20,000 personnel to help natural disaster relief in Aceh in 2004.⁴¹

At a broader level, the security sector also includes the

38 Laksmana, Evan A., and Rage Taufika. (2020). How 'Militarized' Is Indonesia's COVID-19 Management? Preliminary Assessment and Findings. CSIS Commentaries, No. DM-RU-075-EN (2020).

39 Ibid.

40 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]," (The Habibie Center, September 23, 2020).

41 Ibid.

intelligence community. In this respect, we can observe the assumption of substantial roles by intelligence agencies, both from the civilian and military sides, during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to activities corresponding with their usual roles, such as conducting analyses on transmission patterns and impacts of the pandemic, intelligence agencies are also very much involved in numerous countermeasures, such as by tracking down COVID-19 cases, holding rapid mass testing, mobilizing volunteers and health workers, distributing health equipment, and participating in joint research activities to seek the cure for COVID-19.⁴² As the pandemic is perceived as a threat to human security, such logic justifies the involvement of intelligence agencies in COVID-19 responses through medical intelligence operations.⁴³

The involvement of security forces, especially the military, is indeed a logical option for the government in response to COVID-19. Aside from inflicting deterrence effect to establish the society's discipline during the "new normal" era, the society also tends to showcase a positive reception towards personnel of TNI.⁴⁴ In multiple surveys, TNI often emerges as the most trusted state institution by the public.⁴⁵ This trend emphasizes the Jokowi administration's dependency on the political support of security forces. Such a condition, should it be sustained, will potentially leave an undemocratic mark

42 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]," (The Habibie Center, January 27, 2021).

43 Timdetikcom. (2020, 28 September). Kenapa Intelijen Terlibat Tangani COVID-19? Ini Penjelasan BIN [Why is the Intelligence Involved in COVID-19 Responses? This is the Explanation from the National Intelligence Agency]. Accessed on 30 January 2021, from <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5191310/kenapa-intelijen-terlibat-tangani-covid-19-ini-penjelasan-bin>

44 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]," (The Habibie Center, September 23, 2020).

45 Sari, Haryanti Puspa. (2020, 22 July). Survei Charta Politika: TNI, Lembaga Dengan Tingkat Kepercayaan Tertinggi [Charta Politika's Survey: TNI, the Most Trusted Institution]. Accessed on 1 January 2021, from <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/07/22/19095841/survei-charta-politika-tni-lembaga-dengan-tingkat-kepercayaan-tertinggi>

within the governance structure after the pandemic subsides.

B. The Dynamics of Democracy During COVID-19 at the Societal Level

The COVID-19 pandemic, since its beginning in early 2020 until today, has led to the emergence of unique dynamics within the democracy at the societal level in Indonesia. One notable trend is the continuance of multiple cases of intolerance which often occurred before the pandemic took place. On the other hand, the pandemic has also amplified the surge of intolerance in the society.

Cases of Intolerance During the Pandemic

A survey conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2019 concluded that all provinces of Indonesia attained high and very high levels of religious harmony.⁴⁶ However, factual accounts still point to continuous instances of intolerance in multiple regions. According to a compilation of data sourced from the media, collected by Imparsial from November 2018 to November 2019, 31 cases of intolerance were recorded, which mostly pertained to prohibitions of religious rituals.⁴⁷

Cases of intolerance, which mostly took the forms of prohibitions against places of worship and prayer activities in the previous year, continued to persist in 2020. Real cases of prohibitions against places of worship were evident in Aceh. Meanwhile, cases of impeding or banning prayer activities occurred in multiple regions, such as in Bekasi, Bogor, and Mojokerto; all of these cases occurred in September 2020.

46 Prabowo, Haris. (2019, 11 November). Daftar Skor Indeks Kerukunan Beragama versi Kemenag 2019 [List of Scores from the Religious Harmony Index According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2019]. Accessed on 10 December 2020, from <https://tirto.id/daftar-skor-indeks-kerukunan-beragama-versi-kemenag-2019-engH>.

47 Alfons, Matius (2019, 17 November). Imparsial: Ada 31 Kasus Intoleransi di Indonesia, Mayoritas Pelarangan Ibadah [Imparsial: Cases of Intolerance in Indonesia, Mostly Prohibit Prayers]. Accessed on 10 December 2020, from <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4787954/imparsial-ada-31-kasus-intoleransi-di-indonesia-mayoritas-pelarangan-ibadah>

In Aceh Singkil, Aceh, a case of intolerance emerged when the regional government prohibited the construction of a vicarage on a land owned by the Pakpak Dairi Christian Protestant Church (*Gereja Kristen Protestan Pakpak Dairi* or GKPPD), implemented through a warning letter from the Regent. The warning letter was based upon the need to maintain order and harmony among different religions in the Aceh Singkil Regency.⁴⁸

Within the same month, another case of prohibition of prayer activities was recorded in Bekasi. Congregation members of the Serang Baru City Batak Christian Protestant Church (*Huria Kristen Batak Protestan Kota Serang Baru* or HKBP-KSB) were disrupted by a mob while a prayer was held. The mob sang loudly and turned on a speaker to disturb the prayer taking place inside the church.⁴⁹ A prayer held in Jonggol, Bogor Regency, was also disturbed by a group of individuals for the reason that the construction of the church violated a clause contained in the Joint Ministerial Decree on Permit for the Construction of a Place of Worship. Prohibitions of prayer activities are not only conducted by citizens but also officials from the regional government.⁵⁰ In Mojokerto, a village head committed an intolerant act through an official letter directed to village members to prohibit the installation of religious symbols and setting up places of worship in private houses.⁵¹

48 innews.co.id. (2020, 27 September). Bupati Aceh Singkil Hentikan Pembangunan Rumah Pendeta [Regent of Aceh Singkil Stopped Vicarage Construction]. Accessed on 10 December 2020, from <https://innews.co.id/bupati-aceh-singkil-hentikan-pembangunan-rumah-pendeta/>

49 Raharjo, Dwi Bowo. (2020, 17 September). Sekelompok Orang Ganggu Ibadah Jemaat HKBP Serang, Ketum PKPI: Memalukan [A Group of Individuals Disrupted Prayers Held by Congregation Members of HKBP Serang: Head of PKPI: Embarrassing]. Accessed on 10 December 2020, from <https://www.suara.com/news/2020/09/17/203950/sekelompok-massa-ganggu-ibadah-jemaat-hkbp-serang-ketum-pkpi-memalukan?page=all>

50 Indonews.com. (2020, 22 September). Umat Gereja di Jonggol Mengaku Dilarang Beribadah [Congregation Members of Churches in Jonggol Admitted to Being Prohibited from Prayers]. Accessed on 10 December 2020, from <https://www.koranindonews.com/2020/09/22/umat-gereja-di-jonggol-mengaku-dilarang-beribadah/>

51 Santoso, Bangun. (2020, 28 September). Heboh Larangan Beribadah di Desa Ngastemi, Ketum PKPI: Tindakan Bodoh! [Uphear on Ban on Prayers in Ngastemi Village, Head

Another form of intolerance is also found within the field and structure of the education sector. An example of such case is how teachers obviously teach and allude their students towards intolerance. In Yogyakarta, on 10 January 2020, a case of intolerance was recorded in a school during an extracurricular activity called *Pramuka* (Boy/Girl Scout), as the instructor commanded students to sing "Islam yes, kafir no."⁵²

Meanwhile, a teacher in Jakarta—capitalizing on her authority—actively influenced and directed the process of election for the chairperson of the Student Council (*Organisasi Intra Sekolah* or OSIS) in their school in accordance with their interest. During the election, in which a Muslim and non-Muslim candidates were pitted against each other, the teacher intentionally created and circulated a message in social media platforms to students, instructing them to not vote for the non-Muslim candidate.⁵³

Almost all cases of intolerance during the pandemic occur between different religious groups. However, such cases may also occur between individuals within the same religion, while both sides carry different perspectives on certain issues. This is demonstrated by a case which occurred in August 2020 in Solo, in which a group of people came to a celebration event of marriage preparation rituals and demanded the event to be stopped. The group also committed acts of violence by persecuting the family members who organized the

of PKPI: A Foolish Move!]. Accessed on 10 December 2020, from <https://www.suara.com/news/2020/09/28/074649/heboh-larangan-beribadah-di-desa-ngastemi-ketum-pkpi-tindakan-bodoh?page=all>

52 Wicaksono, Pribadi. (2020, 14 January). DPRD Minta Pembina Pramuka Ajarkan 'Islam Yes Kafir No' Dihukum [The Regional House of Representatives Request to Punish Scout Coaches who Taught 'Islam Yes Kafir No']. Accessed on 10 December 2020, from <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1295087/dprd-minta-pembina-pramuka-ajarkan-islam-yes-kafir-no-dihukum>

53 Marison, Walda. (2020, 28 October). Kronologi Ulah Rasial Guru SMA di Jaktim, Tiba-tiba Ajak Murid Tak Pilih Ketua OSIS Non-muslim [The Cronology of Racist Act of a High School Teacher in East Jakarta, Suddenly Persuaded Students to not Vote for a Non-Muslim Head of Student Council]. Accessed on 10 December 2020, from <https://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2020/10/28/09441991/kronologi-ulah-rasial-guru-sma-di-jaktim-tiba-tiba-ajak-murid-tak-pilih>

event and ravaging items at the site of the event.⁵⁴

The Pandemic Amplifies Previous Instances of Intolerance Which Has Occurred Long Before the Pandemic

By drawing from the description laid out at the onset of this report, it is fair to conclude that no one is ready to respond to the pandemic. At the societal level, it is evident in a simple issue regarding the prohibition of prayers in places of worship. An appeal for such prohibition was published by all religious institutions, such as the Council of Churches in Indonesia (*Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia* or PGI), the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia (*Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia* or KWI), and the Indonesian Ulema Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or MUI).⁵⁵ MUI, through Fatwa No. 14/2020, encouraged all Muslims to refrain from visiting mosques for Friday prayers. The fatwa was met with various reactions and inflicted tensions at times. Fanatical, ultra conservative, and often exaggerated narratives against prohibitions of prayers in mosques or other places of worship emerged. Negative sentiments and hate speech were also directed to the government. Such reactions did not only come from conservative groups but also from traditional, moderate ones, such as Nahdatul Ulama (NU).⁵⁶ The long period of shutdowns in places of worship also generated negative narratives. These narratives accused the government of being discriminative because the government closed

54 Kompas.com. (2020, 12 August). Kasus Pembubaran Paksa Acara Midodareni di Solo, Kapolda Jateng: Kita Kejar Pelaku Lainnya [Forced Dissolution of Midodareni Event in Solo, The Head of the Regional Police of Central Java: We are Looking for Other Suspects]. Accessed on 11 December 2020, from <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2020/08/12/07000091/kasus-pembubaran-paksa-acara-midodareni-di-solo-kapolda-jateng--kita-kejar?page=all>

55 Purnamasari, Deti Mega. (2020, 29 March). Imbauan Sejumlah Organisasi Keagamaan Terkait Ibadah di Tengah Pandemi Covid-19 [Calls from Multiple Religious Organizations on Prayers Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic]. Accessed on 11 December 2020, from <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/03/29/09243331/imbau-an-sejumlah-organisasi-keagamaan-terkait-ibadah-di-tengah-pandemi-covid?page=all>

56 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]," (The Habibie Center, October 8, 2020).

down places of worship while allowing other public spaces, such as malls, to stay open.⁵⁷

Most instances of intolerance during the pandemic are still associated with or the same as those which occurred before the pandemic. It can be inferred that only a few of those instances are directly associated with the pandemic. One such case was found in Bekasi, in which a family decided to pray from their home due to the pandemic. Yet, despite being commenced inside a private property and involving only the family members, the prayer ritual was obstructed and not allowed by other people due to the imposition of PSBB.⁵⁸ In that incident, the perpetrators intentionally exaggerated their pandemic pretext as a basis for their intolerant act.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, cases of intolerance within the society are distinct phenomena and contradictive with current disaster responses. Intolerant acts still arise despite the need for unity and humanity to combat the pandemic. These trends and needs are clearly anomalous to psychological tendencies, as humans generally opt for collaboration, in comparison to competition, amidst a pandemic and a catastrophe.⁵⁹

Cases of intolerance during the pandemic are unusual, but it also serves as a sign that the current state of intolerance in Indonesia is a serious and worrying issue. The pandemic is seemingly insignificant to efforts to reduce intolerance in the society. Numerous movement limitation measures implemented by the government and the society to curb down the pandemic do not hamper and dwindle groups of masses or individuals who commit acts of intolerance. Concerns over cases of intolerance

57 Nugroho, AS & Yusuf, Ali. (2020, 21 May). Penutupan Tempat Ibadah Mulai Menggelisahkan [Shutdowns of Places of Worship is Disconcerting]. Accessed on 11 December 2020, from <https://www.republika.id/posts/6874/penutupan-tempat-ibadah-mulai-menggelisahkan>

58 Setiawan, Riyan. (2020, April 21). Agar 'Pelarangan Ibadah' di Cikarang Tidak Terulang [To Prevent A Repetition of the 'Prohibition to Pray' in Cikarang]. Accessed on 11 December 2020, from <https://tirto.id/agar-pelarangan-ibadah-di-cikarang-tidak-terulang-ePXM>

59 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]," (The Habibie Center, September 23, 2020).

during the pandemic are also voiced out by civil society organizations, government officials, and security forces.

Yet, cases of intolerance do not only emerge at the societal level but also among academia. A survey on the perception of religious moderation among student groups and universities in the State Islamic University's (*Universitas Islam Negeri* or UIN) campuses in Indonesia, involving 300 respondents, found that 30 respondents admitted that they are members of the Islamic Defenders Front (*Front Pembela Islam* or FPI). Yet, it should be noted that although they agreed with religious moderation, they believed that FPI's acts of intolerance were justified.⁶⁰ Such findings pointed to a contradiction among the well-educated community: despite principally agreeing with religious moderation, they become a part of an intolerant group.

Cases of intolerance during the pandemic attracted special attention from the president. An important message conveyed through President Joko Widodo's speech at the 11th ASEAN-UN Summit in which he requested the United Nations (UN) to ensure plurality and tolerance. The president's statement was based upon concerns of continuous cases of religious intolerance and violence, which, if ignored, could result in radicalism and extremism.⁶¹

It cannot be refuted that intolerance is the outermost layer of the emergence of radicalism and extremism. These layers interlace with, sustain, and support each other. There are three main patrons of radical extremist groups: first, those which have joined terrorist groups such as the Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and MIT; second, those which belong to intolerant groups and; third, moderate groups which

often adopt radical issues as a tool to promote their populist narratives.⁶² Although intolerance is linked with radicalism and violent extremism, responses towards cases of intolerance employ normal legal instruments instead of those on terrorism.⁶³

The relationship between intolerance, radicalism, and extremism is also recognized by a former leader of a terrorist group. Terrorist or violent extremist groups benefit from the existence of radical and intolerant groups. The recruitment process for terrorist groups is facilitated by these radical and intolerant groups. They only need to observe and focus on members of radical groups who have already become very radicalized, which then are targeted as potential members of terrorist groups.⁶⁴

Continuous acts of intolerance during the pandemic emphasize the need for an elaborate effort from multiple stakeholders to resolve intolerance in Indonesia, as an early step to mitigate the emergence of radical, as well as extremist, groups.

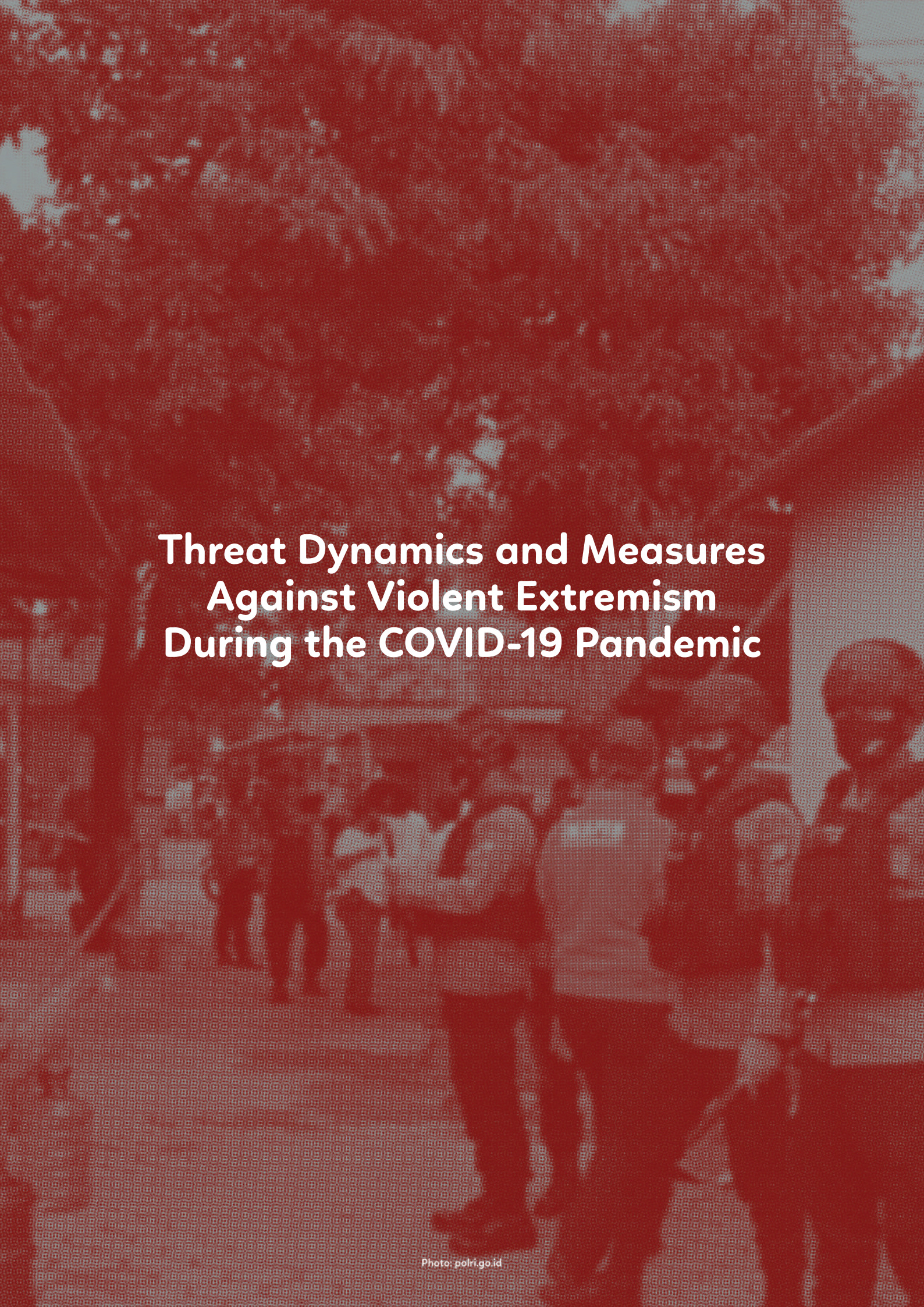
60 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie Center, Oktober 8, 2020).

61 Adyatama, Egi. (2020, 15 November). KTT ASEAN-PBB, Jokowi Minta PBB Bantu Akses Vaksin dan Dorong Toleransi [ASEAN-UN Summit, Jokowi Requested Assistance for Access to Vaccine and to Push for Tolerance to the UN]. Accessed on 11 December 2020, from <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1405526/ktt-asean-pbb-jokowi-minta-pbb-bantu-akses-vaksin-dan-dorong-toleransi/full&view=ok>

62 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie Center, October 8, 2020).

63 Ibid.

64 Interview with a Researcher on Terrorism, 27 October 2020.

A photograph of a group of people in a meeting or conference. A man in a white shirt is speaking into a microphone. Other people are visible in the background, some wearing face masks. The image has a red overlay.

Threat Dynamics and Measures Against Violent Extremism During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Threat Dynamics and Measures Against Violent Extremism During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A. The Dynamics of Violent Extremism During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

During the COVID-19 pandemic, violent extremism continues to occur as a dynamic phenomenon in Indonesia. Violent extremist groups react to the COVID-19 pandemic with various narratives. Moreover, a pattern and dynamic of violent extremism also appeared during the pandemic in 2020. Recruitment efforts are still executed although different obstacles (such as PSBB) are present.

Narratives on the COVID-19 and Violent Extremism

The COVID-19 pandemic, which currently engulfs the world, influences violent extremist movements at the global level. There are at least three perspectives that violent extremist groups have towards the COVID-19 pandemic. *First*, ISIS published a guideline on COVID-19 for their supporters and sympathizers to avoid and not travel to places struck by the pandemic, such as Europe. Meanwhile, supporters who are located at such places are instructed to stay where they live.⁶⁵ On 13 March, as stated in *Al-Naba*, an online news bulletin, ISIS encouraged their supporters and sympathizers to wash their hands and cover their mouths while yawning or sneezing. These directives are cited from Al-Quran and *hadith* (the Prophet's sayings, conducts, and approvals).

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic is considered to be a curse from God towards those who do not believe in God (*kafir*).⁶⁶ According to ISIS, the disease strikes as "an army of God" to destroy enemies of "Islamist groups," especially the West that are deemed as guilty of killing Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and as a punishment to China for their hostile treatment towards Uighur Muslims. Consequentially, as

depicted in a video, women residing in a shelter in Syria expressed their belief that COVID-19 would not affect those who believe in God. Therefore, they did not fear the disease as it would not impinge on ISIS's supporters and sympathizers.

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic is the right momentum to conduct attacks against enemies who are perceived to be weakened by their countermeasures against the pandemic. According to Coleman (2020), ISIS urges their followers to carry out their *jihad* activities and to leverage the weakened security conditions in all states to conduct attacks. Further, a social media publication in the name of Rasyid Nikaz (a French Muslim figure) from March 2020 encouraged Muslims to capitalize on the pandemic as an opportunity to perform *jihad* activities. These encouragements clearly point to calls for the exercise of *amaliyah* (*jihad* activities). While being circulated in English and not translated to Bahasa Indonesia, these instructions are still widely distributed to violent extremist groups in Indonesia. We should, then, question, if there are various global narratives on COVID-19, what are the responses from violent extremist groups in Indonesia?

In line with the publication in *Al-Naba*, the perceptions held JAD leaders in Java affirm the understanding that COVID-19 is a soldier of Allah.⁶⁷ Moreover, the pandemic is a curse from Allah befalling Indonesian people. Amidst these narratives, these extremist groups continue to carry out a "two-sided" strategy; on the one hand they attempt to survive from the pandemic while, while on the other hand, they try to actively mobilize public support during the pandemic, especially in medial social platforms. Their tactic during the pandemic, which predominantly uses social media platforms, also has its own rationale. In March 2020, PSBB started to be imposed in almost all provinces in Indonesia, prompting citizens to stay at home and spend more time on the internet. Thus, these violent extremist groups wish to have more opportunities to reach out to a wider scope of audience and attain longer social media engagements while disseminating their agendas and ideologies to

65 SITEIntelligence Group. (2020) "Global Jihadist Response to COVID-19 Pandemic," SiteIntelligence Special Report. (see tweets from @Rita_Katz)

66 Ibid

67 Interview with a Researcher on Terrorism, 27 October 2020.

social media users.

Moreover, violent extremist groups in Indonesia still assume that if the COVID-19 pandemic develops extensively and spreads massively, the state will be weakened by the government's concentrated efforts towards tackling the pandemic.⁶⁸ Such a condition is deemed to be a potential weakness for the security sector, especially with regards to the alertness of the police and TNI. An officer who was involved in a focus group discussion (FGD) for this research stated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, JAD still maintains their focus on the police and government apparatus as their main targets for their violent activities.

Not different from JAD, MIT, led by Ali Kalora, also makes use of the pandemic as an opportunity to carry out attacks. In a widely-shared video in social media platforms, Ali Kalora called out the public, especially those located in the Poso, to commit *amaliyah* by leveraging on the COVID-19 pandemic. The narrative they pursue is, "*thogut* (those whose behaviors are evil) will collapse and be defeated by the coronavirus, as the war will, *insya Allah* (if God is willing), come soon." The group believes the pandemic as a form of support from God to defeat supporters of *thogut*, including the government, the police, and TNI. Therefore, they see the pandemic as an opportunity as God's help has come and God has granted His blessing to support their resistance.

Patterns and Dynamics of Violence

As previously stated, the COVID-19 pandemic does not stop violent extremist groups' efforts and attacks. During the onset of the imposition of PSBB in Indonesia, MIT, for example, carried out an attack against a police station in the Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi, on 27 March 2020. Not long after, precisely on 15 April 2020, two followers of Ali Kalora descended from their hiding in the mountain to the city and attempted to rob the police's weapons in front of Syariah Mandiri Bank in Poso. The perpetrators were killed on site as they were

68 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie Center, Oktober 8, 2020).

involved in gun fights with the police. On 19 April 2020, MIT kidnapped and killed Ajeng or Bapak Angga, who was alleged as an informant for the police due to his membership in the Police Assistance Corps (*Bantuan Polisi* or Banpol). Attacks commenced by MIT were sustained until murders against a family occurred in the Sigi Regency, Central Sulawesi, on 27 November 2020.

As concluded from the FGD conducted for this research, JAD still carries out attacks against police officers. For example, an attack occurred in the headquarter of the sectoral police of Daha Selatan, South Kalimantan, which was allegedly carried out by the Southern Kalimantan branch of JAD in June 2020. Furthermore, members of JI, who were arrested in Surabaya from May to June 2020, attempted to build up their power and leverage the government's vulnerability by infiltrating a motorcycle gang.⁶⁹ At that time, those members also attempted to provoke chaos in multiple areas in Tasikmalaya. They wished to commit murders against shop owners of Chinese descent, among other potential victims, by using the weapons they obtained from a network of weapon traffickers during the chaos.

The Muhajirin Anshor Tauhid (MAT) group also carried out an attack against the TNI-Police Headquarter in the West Nusa Tenggara Province. The attack was halted by the Indonesian National Police's Counterterrorism Special Detachment 88 (*Detasemen Khusus 88 Antiteror* or Densus 88) on 8 June 2020. During the attack, social media serves as a medium to facilitate the attack. The scheme of the attack, along with efforts to boost MAT members' spirit for *jihad*, was shared and commenced through a WhatsApp group.

Efforts by Violent Extremist Groups

The Soufan Center (2020) found that the COVID-19 pandemic is a rare phenomenon which could potentially be utilized by terrorist and extremist groups to promote their ideologies and narratives. The COVID-19 pandemic has driven violent extremist groups and supporters to

69 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie Center, September 23, 2020)

adapt with and plan elaborate recruitment efforts in Indonesia. For example, in multiple regions in which PSBB is imposed strictly, violent extremist groups also practice restraint as public activities and gatherings are prohibited. Furthermore, at the beginning of PSBB, most activities which required social gatherings in mosques were cancelled. For instance, JI's Abu Ruzdan, who is usually busy with religious events, refrained from travelling around to attend such events.⁷⁰

At the beginning of the pandemic, internal consolidation within violent extremist groups was conceived to be important and was carried out online. Online media platforms have long been employed, even way before PSBB. Online consolidations were intensively commenced at the start of the pandemic by circulating the narratives that COVID-19 was an opportunity to practice *amaliyah*. An interview with a researcher on terrorism in Indonesia revealed that WhatsApp groups are still commonly utilized, especially in *pengajian* (religious gathering and discussion groups).⁷¹ The main topics of discussion still pertain to the ideas that COVID-19 is a soldier of God and preaching violence against *thogut*. Moreover, discussions on how they contextualize current everyday challenges with religious narratives become one of the primary topics.

Within the context of the pandemic, violent extremist groups regard the pandemic as the right time to commence retaliatory attacks and recruitment. Recruitment efforts are undertaken to garner sympathy through multiple activities which correlate with COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic is perceived by violent extremist groups as an opportunity to consolidate their financial and human resources capacities. They establish humanitarian aid centers, as well as alternative and accessible education for the community (*tahfizh* schools, boarding schools, and mandatory education institutions, ranging from preschools to high schools).⁷²

70 Interview with a Researcher on Terrorism, 30 October 2020.

71 Interview with a Researcher on Terrorism, 27 October 2020.

72 Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie

ISIS *Akhwats* (female members) have expressed their willingness to employ ISIS members and sympathizers who are fired from their jobs due to COVID-19. In addition, they also accept individuals who are laid off from their jobs, but not yet members of ISIS. Social media platforms affiliated with ISIS and JI groups have also announced that they will do their best to recruit new members. Such announcements are circulated to encourage supporters, sympathizers, and public to develop their capacities, including those in carrying out attacks, while countries are crippled by the pandemic. They argue that such activities do not need to be manifested through terrorist attacks, but can also be implemented through a wide array of activities, such as fundraising and disseminating propaganda in social media platforms.

Further, during the pandemic, online meetings are important for internal consolidations, such as *Bay'ah* (allegiance swearing). However, attacks are also conducted offline, for example as demonstrated by a member of JAD who attacked the headquarters of the Sectoral Police of Daha Selatan, South Kalimantan, in June 2020, and by a member of MAT who attacked the Armed Forces-Police headquarters in West Nusa Tenggara in June 2020.⁷³ Henceforth, efforts to practice *amaliyah*, as well as the direct role and involvement of small groups, are still highly necessary.

Intolerance and Violent Extremist Groups' Strengthened Positions

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the rampant cases of intolerance become an enabling environment for violent extremist groups to strengthen their radicalization efforts towards their supporters and sympathizers. At the beginning of the pandemic, anti-Chinese rhetoric was intensified in various pro-ISIS, extremist social media sites. Such rhetoric departed from the fact that the virus originated from Wuhan, China. Moreover, they

Center, January 27, 2021)

73 CNN Indonesia. (2020, 8 June). Densus 88 Bekuk Terduga Teroris JAD di Cirebon dan Kalsel [Densus 88 Defeats Alleged Terrorist from JAD in Cirebon and South Kalimantan]. Accessed on 1 December 2020, from <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20200608174922-12-511144/densus-88-bekuk-terduga-teroris-jad-di-cirebon-dan-kalsel>

believed that the virus was made as a biological weapon to wipe out Uyghur Muslims, but the virus was leaked and spread in Wuhan.⁷⁴ Anti-Chinese sentiments were further worsened by news on the entry of 49 migrant workers from China to Kendari, South Sulawesi, in March 2020.⁷⁵ A video depicting the arrival of those workers was uploaded and titled “*Satu pesawat, semua korona* (Flying in one airplane, everyone is infected with the coronavirus),” which went viral and triggered extensive public protests. A report released by IPAC in April 2020 states that such issues have provided the opportunity for pro-ISIS groups in social media platforms to develop racist narratives.⁷⁶

Other cases of intolerance are also correlated with sentiments against the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia* or PKI) which are widely developed whilst the pandemic takes place. Such a condition is aggravated by the government and the House of Representatives’ efforts to formulate the Pancasila Ideology Guidelines Bill (*Rancangan Undang-undang Haluan Ideologi Pancasila* or RUU-HIP). Civil society alliances, which are affiliated with the 212 Alumni Association (*Persatuan Alumni 212* or PA 212) and FPI, partook in a series of demonstrations throughout June and July 2020 to resist the passing of the bill. They deemed the bill as a weakening force for Islamist groups and would drive the resurgence of Neo-PKI groups.

According to an interview with a terrorism observer in Indonesia, these series of movements and protests are

74 Salim, Hanz Jimenez. (2020, 5 February). *Cek Fakta: Klaim Virus Corona untuk Musnahkan Uighur tapi Malah Bocor di Wuhan, Faktanya?* [Fact Check: Claiming Corona Virus Abolishes Uighur but Was Leaked in Wuhan, What is the Truth?]. Accessed on 1 December 2020, from <https://www.liputan6.com/cek-fakta/read/4172296/cek-fakta-klaim-virus-corona-untuk-musnahkan-uighur-tapi-malah-bocor-di-wuhan-faktanya>

75 *Warta Ekonomi*. (2020, 2 December). *Buset!! 49 Pekerja China yang Masuk Indonesia Ternyata Orang Baru* [Shocking!! 49 Workers from China Enterring Indonesia are Apparently Newly Hired]. Accessed on 1 December 2020, from <https://www.wartaekonomi.co.id/read276842/buset-49-pekerja-Tionghoa-yang-masuk-indonesia-ternyata-orang-baru>

76 Institute for Policy Analysis Conflict. (2020). *Covid-19 and The Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia* (MIT). IPAC Short Briefing No.3.

exploited by violent extremist groups to put forward their agenda.⁷⁷ They also participated in demonstrations which facilitate demonstrators to discredit the government. They participate not on the basis of their approval of those issues, but in order to be more familiar with other groups to facilitate their recruitment process. They believe that recruiting individuals who are affiliated with radical or intolerant groups will be far easier than those who are not. Such a trend occurred within radical or intolerant groups, especially in instilling a sense of rage, desire for revenge, and hatred towards the government and other opposing groups. This phenomenon can be seen in the active involvement of the perpetrator of an attack against a mosque in the headquarters of the Sectoral Police of Cirebon in 2011 in anarchist demonstrations. Afterwards, the perpetrator was targeted and recruited as an executor for a suicide bomb attack due to their high enthusiasm in the fight to “stand up for” their religion.

B. Measures Against Violent Extremism During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As previously noted, violent extremist groups are still active during the pandemic. These organizations are currently taking most of their time to disseminate their radical-extremist thoughts. However, this does not mean that they are not engaged in activities to plan for terrorist attacks. The Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs, Mahfud M.D., stated that the pandemic did not reduce the risk of threats from radicalism and terrorism.⁷⁸ On the other hand, allocating most of the resources to pandemic responses has influenced Indonesia’s capacity in combating violent extremism. In understanding such conditions, it is important to scrutinize both state and non-state actors’ levels of preparedness to counter violent extremism during the pandemic.

77 Interview with a Researcher on Terrorism, 30 October 2020.

78 CNN Indonesia. (2020, 3 December). *Mahfud MD: Terorisme Tak Berkurang di Tengah Pandemi Covid* [Mahfud MD: Terrorism Does Not Subside Amidst the COVID Pandemic]. Accessed on 7 December 2020, from <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20201203161646-20-577164/mahfud-md-terorisme-tak-berkurang-di-tengah-pandemi-covid>

The Development of Measures to Counter Violent Extremism During the Pandemic

The United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (UN-CTED) has identified short- and long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. The short-term implications pertain to how violent extremist organizations respond to changes in the public's behavior due to physical and social distancing measures during the pandemic. One notable issue is a phenomenon dubbed as "captive audience," in which people are committing more time for online activities during the pandemic. Meanwhile, terrorist groups have extensive capabilities and opportunities to distribute their propaganda in cyberspace. Terrorist groups also exploit the pandemic by commencing humanitarian activities with the actual purpose of supporting terrorism.⁷⁹ As an example, security forces noted that violent extremist groups collected humanitarian aids from the public by placing charity boxes in mosques to fund terrorist activities.⁸⁰

Then, according to UN-CTED, the pandemic leads to the decline of resources allocated towards counterterrorism programs, both by state or non-state actors, as the long-term consequence. The pandemic also reduces available funding opportunities from international aids for programs to counter violent extremism as the global economy collapses.⁸¹

79 United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, "The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, and Countering Violent extremism, June, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CTED-Paper%E2%80%93The-impact-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-on-counter-terrorism-and-countering-violent-extremism.pdf>

80 Rezkisari, Indira. (2020, 3 December). Kotak Amal Minimarket dan Dugaan Pendanaan Jamaah Islamiyah [Charity Boxes in Minimarkets and Allegations of Fundings for Jamaah Islamiyah]. Accessed on 8 December 2020, from <https://republika.co.id/berita/qkr3ej328/kotak-amal-em-minimarketem-dan-dugaan-pendanaan-jamaah-islamiyah>

81 United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, "The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, and Countering Violent extremism, June, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CTED-Paper%E2%80%93The-impact-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-on-counter-terrorism-and-countering-violent-extremism.pdf>

These challenges in counterterrorism during the pandemic are present at the global level, including in Indonesia. As previously noted, violent extremist groups attempt to leverage the government's oversight with its focused attention towards pandemic responses. With such a condition, the security forces' alertness serves as a key to contain and curb down terrorist attacks.

From 1 January to 8 October 2020, Densus 88 succeeded in detaining 170 individuals. Most of them were affiliated with JAD (105 detainees), JI (25 detainees), MIT (20 detainees), not affiliated with any specific organizations but support ISIS Global (15 detainees), and the rest are unidentified.

Data from Densus 88 noted an increase in the total number of arrests of alleged terrorists since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020. These arrests were taken as preventive measures against potential terrorist attacks.⁸² Some of these plotted attacks were planned before the pandemic reached Indonesia. The security forces' ability to conduct espionage and arrests was responsible for ensuring that the terrorist groups failed to implement these plans.⁸³

It is important to note that, despite such successes, reallocation towards the government's resources for COVID-19 responses has resulted in changes in three aspects: the security forces' reduced ability in technological advancement to support monitoring programs towards violent extremist groups; reduced opportunity for the security sector to hold deradicalization programs; and reduction of support programs targeting survivors of terrorist attacks. Further descriptions of these three aspects are as follows.

First, until today, the reallocation of the government's resources for pandemic responses has yet to influence routine operational counterterrorism activities.

82 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie Center, October 8, 2020).

83 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie Center, September 27, 2020).

However, pandemic responses consequentially lead to limited ability to advance or improve technological capabilities to support Densus 88's capacity. Moreover, the budget cut also influences the intensity of enforcement activities, which points to the need for a strong strategy in mobilizing troops in accordance with strategic priorities.⁸⁴

The security forces' reduced capability potentially provides more extensive opportunities for extremist groups, especially in the cyber realm. On the other hand, as stated by UN-CTED, increased use of the internet during the pandemic, especially by kids and teenagers, raised the probability of their exposure to narratives developed by extremist groups who infiltrate social media platforms or online gaming groups.⁸⁵

Second, the pandemic and the government's responses to the pandemic have also influenced deradicalization programs. There are at least two challenges to deradicalization programs during the pandemic. First massive reallocation of resources to pandemic responses has impaired abilities to commence visitations to deradicalization activities by officers from the National Counter Terrorism Agency's (*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme* or BNPT) who are specifically trained for such activities, leading to the commencement of deradicalization activities only by officers from correctional institutions who have limited capability in deradicalization. Second, physical and social distancing measures during the pandemic present difficulties for deradicalization activities due to prohibitions against direct meetings and crowds.⁸⁶

The pandemic emphasizes the need for decentralizing

84 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie Center, October 8, 2020).

85 Kruglanski, A. W., Gunaratna, R., Ellenberg, M., & Speckhard, A. (2020). Terrorism in time of the pandemic: exploiting mayhem. *Global Security: Health, Science and Policy*, 5(1), 121-132.

86 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie Center, October 8, 2020).

the central government's competence to regional governments. If efforts to decentralize capacities in deradicalization are in place, officers from the central government can act as supervisors, instead of acting as direct executors in the programs. Such distribution of competence will also allow deradicalization programs to take place despite limitations against visitation programs from the central government. Moreover, decentralizing competence will allow for an equal distribution of responsibilities between the central and regional governments, as well as cutting down on operational costs allocated, for example for visitations.

Third, the pandemic and pandemic responses have influenced supports for or the commencement of assistantship programs for survivors of terrorist attacks. Social distancing measures imposed during the pandemic have made direct meetings with the survivors impossible to carry out. To accommodate the current situation, assistantship programs which do not require direct meetings need to be planned to ensure constant support for the survivors.⁸⁷

Securitization in Counterterrorism

Securitization in counterterrorism has also been discussed during the pandemic. Such discussions have risen to prominence since the draft on the Presidential Decree on TNI's involvement in counterterrorism started to ensue in the House of Representatives. Some voiced out criticisms against the draft, especially on issues regarding the accountability of military operations in counterterrorism, potential human rights violations, and threats against civil supremacy against the backdrop of Indonesia's democracy.

On 30 July 2019, TNI released the Special Operations Command (*Komando Operasi Khusus* or Koopssus) on the basis of the Presidential Decree No. 42/2019. The Decree stated that Koopsus would be responsible for performing and supporting activities related to special operations requiring speed and success to protect

87 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie Center, October 8, 2020).

national interests, both within and beyond the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, to support TNI's main tasks. The Commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces stated that members of Koopsus were qualified in undertaking various forms of special operations in counterterrorism with their three scopes of function, namely deterrence, enforcement, and recovery.⁸⁸

TNI's extensive role in counterterrorism has been deemed to exceed its domain of authority. For instance, the National Commission of Human Rights asserted that the National Armed Forces are not law enforcers, but instruments for national defense. Thus, the military's involvement should not be included within the framework of law enforcement, except when terrorist attacks have threatened national sovereignty.⁸⁹ One civil society coalition also views that as instruments for national defense, the military should not acquire any role in preventive and recovery measures against terrorism as these roles should be coordinated by BNPT. The military's involvement in these aspects may potentially create interagency conflicts in counterterrorism programs.⁹⁰

Law No. 34/2004 on the Indonesian National Armed Forces stipulates the military's role in counterterrorism, those specified under the military's main tasks in protecting national sovereignty and clauses specified as

88 Ardito Ramadhan. (2019, 30 July). Mengenal Koopssus TNI, Satuan Elite Gabungan Tiga Matra TNI [Understanding Koopssus TNI, An Elite Unit with Three Components of TNI]. Accessed on 7 December 2020, from <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/07/30/11254361/mengenal-koopssus-tni-satuan-elite-gabungan-tiga-matra-tni?page=all>

89 Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia Republik Indonesia. (2019, 8 August). Press Release, Perpres Pelibatan TNI Dalam Tindak Pidana Terorisme, Anomali Dalam Penegakan Hukum di Indonesia. [Press Release, The Presidential Decree on the Involvement of TNI in the Criminal Act of Terrorism, Anomalies in Indonesia's Law Enforcement]. Accessed on 7 December 2020, from <https://www.komnasham.go.id/files/20190808-perpres-pelibatan-tni-dalam-tindak-5J0DSM.pdf>

90 Siaran Pers Koalisi Masyarakat Sipil. (2020, 9 May). Rancangan Perpres tentang Tugas TNI dalam Mengatasi Aksi Terorisme Mengancam HAM di Indonesia [The Draft of the Presidential Decree on TNI's Duty in Combating Terrorist Acts Threatens Human Rights in Indonesia], accessed on 7 December 2020, from <https://icjr.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Siaran-Pers-Perpres-TNI-9-mei-2019.pdf>

military operations other than war. Within the context of military operations other than war, the deployment of TNI is deemed as a last resort by firstly considering the severity of threats from terrorism towards national sovereignty, instead of regarding such measures as law enforcement activities. The decision to include the military should also be taken through a political decision by the government, accompanied with the approval of the House of Representatives. Therefore, the decision to include the military in counterterrorism as a presidential decree is not appropriate. It is, instead, necessary to formulate a law regulating schemes, procedures, and mechanisms which would allow for the military's assistance in measures taken by the civilian government. TNI's involvement in counterterrorism should be specified in said law.⁹¹

Further, TNI's involvement in counterterrorism has yet to be regarded as an urgent matter considering current terrorist attacks in Indonesia are still small in scale with relatively successful countermeasures. Deploying troops, which will take up high costs, are not guaranteed to yield proportional results, as demonstrated by the Tinombala Operation in Central Sulawesi.⁹² The deployment of troops for the Tinombala Operation in 2020 was undertaken in three phases, yet dozens of MIT members could not be arrested.⁹³ Instead, MIT members were still able to burn down and kill a family of four in the Sigi Regency, Central Sulawesi, on 27 November 2020. Henceforth, it is imperative that the government conduct an evaluation to understand whether the large-

91 Briantika, Adi. (2020, 15 May). Mengapa Perpres TNI Tangani Terorisme Dianggap Bermasalah? [Why is the Presidential Decree on TNI's Involvement in Combating Terrorism Deemed to be Problematic?]. Accessed on 8 December 2020, from <https://tirtoid.com/mengapa-perpres-tni-tangani-terorisme-dianggap-bermasalah-ftQI>

92 DA, Ady Thea. (2020, 11 June). Akhiri Polemik Pelibatan TNI Tangani Terorisme, Ketentuan Ini Perlu Dicabut [To End the Debate on the Involvement of TNI in Counterterrorism, This Clause Needs to be Repelled]. Accessed on 8 December 2020, from <https://www.hukumonline.com/berita/baca/lt5ee0d0420950a/akhiri-polemik-pelibatan-tni-tangani-terorisme--ketentuan-ini-perlu-dicabut>

93 "Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Demokrasi, dan Ekstremisme Berkekerasan [Focus Group Discussion Covid-19, Democracy, and Violent Extremism]." (The Habibie Center, September 27, 2020).

scale deployment of troops in this operation is effective or if deploying a small number of troops will still be adequate to result in an efficient operation. In addition, it should be admitted that threats from violent extremism take different forms in different places and times. Yet, there is no information which indicates that the military's involvement in counterterrorism is deemed to be necessary and urgent within the current situation.

Despite criticisms from multiple sides, the discussion of the presidential decree which took place towards the end of the House of Representatives' assembly was accused to be an attempt to make the discussion end in a prompt manner.⁹⁴ This indicates the public's limited participation in the formulation of such an important policy in Indonesia.

Implications of Dependence on Security Forces During and After the Pandemic

The long-term implications of the pandemic towards programs to counter violent extremism are far more worrying than the short-term ones. This resulted from several factors, such as the government's greater priority towards economic recovery, surging poverty, expanding poverty gaps due to the plummeting economy, and the youth's vulnerability to recruitments by terrorists due to poverty and unemployment.⁹⁵ These long-term factors emphasize the need to anticipate the implications of economic slowdown, which, in the long run, may result in a significant decline of resources allocated for counterterrorism.⁹⁶

As specified in the previous section, the civilian

government's enhanced dependence on the security sector is becoming more pronounced in Jokowi's second term. The pandemic and responses to the pandemic have amplified such dependence, especially as security actors have the capability to perform fast responses and clear lines of command.

With regards to the implications of TNI's involvement in counterterrorism in the post-pandemic era, the government should learn from the past experience of multiple countries that employed excessive militaristic responses to terrorism that later inflicted resistance and long-term conflicts. This can be seen, for instance, from the United States' decision to carry out a military operation in Afghanistan under the Bush administration, which notoriously became long campaigns, as well as the United Kingdom's excessive deployment of troops to counter the Northern Ireland paramilitary force, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which resulted in public's increasing support for nationalist groups.

In addition, TNI's involvement in counterterrorism can potentially be irreversible in the future.⁹⁷ Indonesia has previous experiences with difficulties to desecuritize the military's role in the civilian domains, for example in the case of the *dwifungsi* (dual function) of the Republic of Indonesia's Armed Forces (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* or ABRI) during the New Order era, where ABRI allowed to take on civilian roles in government. Therefore, the authority, procedure, and mechanism for the involvement of TNI in counterterrorism should be clearly spelt out by considering the degree of threats from terrorism towards national sovereignty.

94 CNN Indonesia. (2020, 4 October). Perpres Pelibatan TNI Tangani Terorisme Disebut Akal-akalan [The Presidential Decree on TNI's Involvement in Counterterrorism is said to be a Deception]. Accessed on 8 December 2020, from <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20201004030725-32-554082/perpres-pelibatan-tni-tangani-terorisme-disebut-akal-akalan>

95 Mullins, S. (2020). Assessing the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: Practitioner Insights. Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies.

96 Gary, A., & Hayley, P. (2020). Terrorism and COVID-19: Actual and Potential Impacts. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 14(3), 59-73.

97 Tim Peneliti The Habibie Center. (2018). Peran dan Keterlibatan TNI dalam Penanggulangan Terorisme. *Kajian Kontra Terorisme dan Kebijakan [The Role and Involvement of TNI in Counterterrorism. A Study on Counterterrorism and Policies]*, the Habibie Center, Edisi 01/March 2018.



Main Findings and Policy Recommendations

Main Findings

This study attempts to explore the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic, democracy, and violent extremism. The relationships between the pandemic, both with democracy or violent extremism, are not unidirectional in nature; whilst the pandemic influences democracy and violent extremism, responses from democratic institutions and violent extremist groups towards the pandemic are also present. This research found that, to a certain extent, the pandemic has also influenced measures to combat violent extremism, both by the government and non-governmental actors. This section elaborates on the findings of this research.

1 COVID-19 Amplifies the Decline of Indonesia's Democracy

Pandemic responses may appear to be similar with total warfare as both the people and the government are struggling together. However, the government applies extensive restrictions, leading to curtailment and limitations to the public's participation during the pandemic, as demonstrated by discussions on the Job Creation Omnibus Law by the government and the House of Representatives. The government has also applied contradicting policies, such as by suggesting people to stay inside while simultaneously allowing malls and other public places to open. Then, the government also securitizes pandemic responses, especially by appointing security actors to fill positions within the institutional structure of pandemic responses, as well as deploying security forces to support policies on pandemic countermeasures at the operational level.

With regards to pandemic responses and democracy in Indonesia, this research identifies overlaps between sectoral responses from the central government. Moreover, the central and regional governments' unsynchronized responses are evident. Initiatives from regional governments and the civil society emerged before the central government could come up with any response at the initial stage of the pandemic. However, the central government problematized policies taken by regional governments upon the basis of the dichotomy between central-regional authorities, especially in

regions where the leaders were known to have opposing political stances from that of the central government. The existing tug of war between the central and regional responses to the pandemic has led to perceptions of the central government's desire to enhance the centralization of power.

Furthermore, despite criticisms from multiple sides, the central government has released many policies which are deemed to be rather irrelevant with the current situation and needs, such as the Job Creation Omnibus Law, the draft of the Presidential Decree on the involvement of the TNI in counterterrorism, as well as strict implementations of laws to curtail freedom of speech. There are strong indications that public participation is becoming heavily limited in important political decisions during the pandemic.

With regards to the Presidential Decree on the involvement of TNI in counterterrorism, this study finds two important possibilities which need to be further scrutinized, namely: (1) the draft was released as the government perceived that there was an increase of threats from violent extremist groups during the pandemic, or (2) the draft was released amidst the pandemic to prevent strong resistance from the civil society.

2 Increasing Intolerance Amidst the Pandemic May Become an Enabling Factor for Radicalization

Cases of intolerance still mostly retain the same form as they were before the pandemic, as some parts of the majority group still impede other parts of the population to conduct religious rituals in accordance with their beliefs or obstruct constructions of places of worship of other religions. In addition, the government and religious organizations have also banned prayers in places of worship during the pandemic. The ban receives criticisms from multiple parties as other public places, such as malls, are still allowed to open. This results in enhanced negative sentiments towards the government among conservative and intolerant groups.

On the other hand, the development of intolerant groups

presents violent extremist groups with opportunities to recruit members. For instance, demonstrations to resist the government held by intolerant groups are utilized by violent extremist groups to locate targets for recruitment. Furthermore, they augment their senses of hatred towards the government upon the basis of their religions, pushing members of these intolerant groups to be radical and hold extremist views. Consequently, for violent extremist groups, the pandemic serves as the best time to disseminate their beliefs.

3 Responses from Violent Extremist Groups Towards the Pandemic and the Decline of Democracy

Violent extremist groups construct the narrative that the COVID-19 pandemic is a curse from God to avenge tyranny in governments, both within the country and at the global level. Violent extremist groups in Indonesia, which are affiliated with ISIS, also affirm such a narrative through their understanding that the pandemic is a soldier of God in revenge for the death of their leaders. Then, they develop the narrative that the pandemic era is the war of the end of time after their loss in Iraq and Syria. Besides, violent extremist groups also consistently conduct active surveillance. They deem that the pandemic is the right time to conduct attacks while the government is weakened and unguarded as they are busy responding to the pandemic. Such a trend was confirmed with arrests by security forces, indicating the abundance of attack plots planned by violent extremist groups, for instance, in Poso, Central Java, South Kalimantan, and West Nusa Tenggara. However, most of these plans were thwarted by security forces.

4 The Military's Expanding Role in Countering Violent Extremism

Responses to violent extremism ideally place equal importance on state and non-state actors. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic hindered civilian or non-state actors to freely mobilize due to physical and social distancing measures to prevent the spread of the virus. As previously mentioned, activities to counter violent extremism and deradicalize terrorist recruits are hampered by the pandemic. On the contrary, attempts

to securitize measures to combat violent extremism during the pandemic are more prominent in comparison to other approaches.

To a certain extent, the COVID-19 pandemic has certainly undermined state and non-state actors' abilities to respond to violent extremism. Substantial reallocation of resources has impaired Densus 88's technological upgrade. Visitations by staffs of BNPT for deradicalization programs are also reduced, not only due to budget reallocation for pandemic responses, but also due to challenges to hold direct meetings amidst the pandemic. The same difficulties are also experienced by civil society organizations seeking to counter violent extremism, as the pandemic harm their ability and opportunities to commence dialogues and preventive measures against radicalism.

In addition, the draft of the Presidential Decree on the involvement of TNI in counterterrorism provides greater legitimacy for securitizing measures to counter violent extremism. The draft receives severe criticisms from the public as the draft might allow the military to overstep its role and domain of authority. The tendency to enhance securitization measures in countering violent extremism, as detailed in the draft, must be further scrutinized, especially on its implications to Indonesia's democracy.

The securitization of TNI's role in counterterrorism can also lead to long-term consequences which might outlast the pandemic. Inclinations towards securitization, paired with implications of the pandemic, can result in greater dependency on security actors, especially TNI. The condition which will emerge post-COVID-19 may lead the government and other relevant parties to focus more on economic recovery, further challenging Indonesia to opt out of securitizing counterterrorism. Moreover, Indonesia's past experience emphasizes that when security forces gain too much power, desecuritization will be too difficult to undertake, further threatening Indonesia's democracy.

Recommendations

Enhancing the role of civil society and freedom of speech

The plummeting quality of democracy during the pandemic should be heavily scrutinized by all relevant parties. Efforts to recover the condition must be undertaken, for example by strengthening the role of civil society groups in supervising and containing state's authority.

1 Ensuring the accountability of, conducting check and balance in, and evaluating the involvement of security actors in COVID-19 responses

The securitization of pandemic responses has led to the active involvement of security actors in roles beyond their main duties. It should be noted that such a condition is temporary and taken in extraordinary situations, such as the pandemic. Desecuritization and recovering health crisis responses, and all of their implications to normal political mechanisms, must be commenced as soon as the situation allows. To maintain the professionalism and accountability of security actors, as well as the democracy as a whole, the involvement of security actors in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic must be evaluated. In a broader context, evaluations should also include deeper discussions on the mechanism to involve security actors in emergency situations, including definitions, the duration, limitations, etc.

2 Promoting community-based programs, aiming to strengthen social cohesion and solidarity to reduce exclusivity among different social groups amidst the pandemic

In multiple regions, the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted social exclusions and discrimination. However, amidst such trying time, people are also able to demonstrate solidarity and care for each other, such as through charitable activities and the provision of aids. Such community-based initiatives must be supported and facilitated to enhance social cohesion within the society.

4 Re-enhancing counternarratives

Similar to other societal phenomena, violent extremist groups also demonstrate their resilience against the consequences of the pandemic. The pandemic serves as an opportunity to construct conspiracy narratives to strengthen violent extremist ideologies and delegitimize state's authority. To cut off supports to violent extremist groups during and after the pandemic, programs to counter such narratives need to be re-enhanced.

5 Improving transparency, public communication on COVID-19 responses, and synergies in cross-sectoral and central-regional policies to curb down violent extremist narratives

With regards to counternarratives, the government needs to consistently ensure transparent information on COVID-19 responses to the public. Issues on synergies between cross-sectoral policies and the central and regional governments should be resolved. When the public can witness and put their trust in the government's effective pandemic responses, the narratives built by violent extremist groups, which are intended to delegitimize the government, will lose their credibility.

6 Creating inclusive programs in mitigating repercussions of the pandemic

To strengthen societal resilience, especially among groups vulnerable to violent extremist ideologies, the government and civil society must ensure that programs developed to mitigate the pandemic will inclusively target and be received by all parts of the society who are in need. Effective and inclusive programs to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic will prevent marginalized groups from being targeted for recruitments by violent extremist groups.

Besides, cooperation between security actors and other actors, including non-state actors, is highly imperative. Numerous civil society organizations have actively and strategically participated in efforts to

tackle violent extremism, both in efforts to prevent the spread of radical-extremist views and in deradicalization initiatives.

7 Extending research for subsequent studies

Findings discovered in this research—the decline of democracy and the dynamics of violent extremism during the pandemic—must be situated within Indonesia’s socio-political contexts. Parts of such trends are unique to cases occurring in Indonesia while others are consistent with trends at the global scale. Therefore,

subsequent research needs an expanded locus, such as by undertaking a comparative analysis with other countries in the region. Such research will contribute to enhancing understandings on the consequences of the pandemic towards democracy and violent extremism at the national, regional, and global levels.

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