

The Rise of Female Radicals in Indonesia

The role of women in Indonesia's extremist groups is changing. In the past, they have operated mostly on the sidelines, building bridges and helping jihadists to make local connections in new places. While Indonesia's female extremists are not as active as the infamous women of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers, they are beginning to play more than simple supporting roles.

A look at some Facebook pages, including that of Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid, the hard-line group founded by convicted terrorist Abu Bakar Bashir, reveals young women participating in radical and violent discussions. Some say that Indonesian police are *thoghut*, or apostates, who have turned their back on Islam and deserve to be killed. One young radical girl from West Java boasts about how she has been learning how to make bombs from the Internet. Some are actively seeking out husbands who are willing to conduct a suicide bombing or to "take the head" of a Detachment 88 officer as a dowry.

In a private conversation during the course of our research, one girl spoke of her search for a husband who would carry out a suicide bombing. She was courting a man and had asked him. When he declined, saying he wasn't ready, she went in search of another man.

All this online discussion is beginning to lead to real-world action.

Earlier this month, four teenage girls wearing the *cadar* were arrested after leaving a book bomb in front of a police brigadier's house in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara. The bomb squad was called and safely detonated the bomb.

Perhaps the most well-known woman linked to the jihadist movement in Indonesia is Putri Munawaroh, who hid Islamist militant Noordin Mohammad Top in her home in Solo and was subsequently sentenced to three years' imprisonment. There is also Faridah Abbas, the wife of Bali bomber Mukhlas, who wrote a book called "Mereka Bilang Ayah Teroris" ("They Call My Father a Terrorist") aimed at inspiring other women to support their husbands' jihad.

These events raise several important questions. Why are women becoming more involved? How are they accepted in the historically male-dominated radical community? How might their shift to more active and violent roles change the nature of terrorism? And how must counter-terrorism and deradicalization efforts adapt to this change?

Our observations indicate that most of the women who are talking about and participating in violent terrorism are young and are influenced by a growing amount of jihadist propaganda that targets females. Though women also have access to the radical messages through *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), the primary way they are exposed to this ideology — especially those who were not born into 'radical' families — is through radical publications with sections that specifically target females.

Many young women in particular have never experienced any other narrative. They live in an era with ready access to information technology that gives them a clear picture of their reality — corruption, poverty, a secular state — but also allows them access to ideas about what might be.

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highly susceptible to radical influences — and they want to make a difference.

Traditionally, Muslim girls growing up in Indonesia have been expected to fulfill the traditional role of wife and mother. However, our research indicates that this has not stopped women who seek a more active role from being accepted in the jihadist community.

In the future, extremist recruiters may well actively seek out females who will not only support and participate in the movement but also motivate the men they marry to play a greater role. This trend is already worryingly on display in Pakistan, which saw its first husband-and-wife suicide bombing just last month.

Jihadist women introduce a new variable into Indonesia's extremist community that could change how attacks are planned and executed. It is impossible to predict exactly in what way, but it will likely challenge the current counterterrorism paradigm.

Just as the introduction of female suicide bombers in other parts of the world forced a new defensive strategy, Detachment 88 must be

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prepared to adapt quickly to any shift in terrorism tactics.

The unit has already faced this problems when they attempted to question the wife of Dulmatin, a man believed to be one of the masterminds behind the 2002 Bali bombings. The woman, Istiada, lived in the all-female Ulil Albab *pesantren*. With no female field officers, Detachment 88 had no choice but to send in a man. Their cover was blown.

With women playing an increasing role in terrorism, it would be prudent of the force to start training female officers. They must also pay attention to radical female *pesantren* and start compiling a database of women of interest.

Comprehensive deradicalization and community engagement programs also need to be established and must target females as well as males. This might require completely separate channels and methods, with a staff of highly trained female *ustadzah* (clerics), psychologists, social workers and vocational trainers.

The government needs to work with NGOs and social organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama, using their networks to spread values of tolerance and pluralism and build resilience to radical teachings. A national peace curriculum in schools would also go a long way toward reaching young women before they reach an age where they will move into a more family-oriented life and away from the public arena.

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