

Digital Jihad: ISIS Narratives and the Transformation of Indonesian Women into Terrorists

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse how the propaganda narrative of ISIS encourages women in Indonesia to commit terrorism. This study contributes to filling gaps in radical movement research by involving gender aspects and narratives in explaining terrorism. This research uses a qualitative method by interviewing former ISIS women to identify how they joined ISIS. Testimonies of former ISIS sympathisers from online media, online magazines, YouTube, and Facebook became secondary sources. The results indicate two aspects. First, Indonesian women are influenced by ISIS through online propaganda on social media. Second, two narrative levels encouraged Indonesian women to join ISIS. The first-level narratives were injustice, unequal law, and infidel governance, which became the initial drivers for women to act terrorism. The second-level narratives were stories about female heroism during the Prophet Muhammad's time that served as reinforcement. To conclude, these findings have implications for the importance of gender-based counter-narratives.

Keywords: ISIS, Propaganda, Social Media, Terrorism, Women.

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1. Introduction

One of the most challenging problems the entire globe is dealing with is terrorism. Its existence and threats are difficult to predict (Brzuszkiewicz, 2023:287-94). Many opinions attribute terrorism to Muslims. But terrorism is also found in non-Muslim countries such as the United States, New Zealand, and Japan (Qurtuby & Aldamer,2021:56-76). The subject of terrorism is diverse, not only group-based but also individual or lone-actor terrorism (Ganor,2021:23-32; O'Connor,2022:261-63; Perry et al.,2019:102-123; Schuurman & Carthy,2023).

International terrorism is becoming increasingly complex due to the rapid advancements in information and communication technologies (Tawadros, 2020:141-159). In the digital technology era, radical movements utilise technology to campaign for issues and encourage people to join the group (Wildan,2022:195-214; Zeiger,2020:374-411). Most terrorist movements, including ISIS, are facilitated by the development of technology and communication. 3N factors, namely "needs, narratives, and networks", motivate someone to get involved in the radicalisation movement (Moyano et al., 2022:492-503).

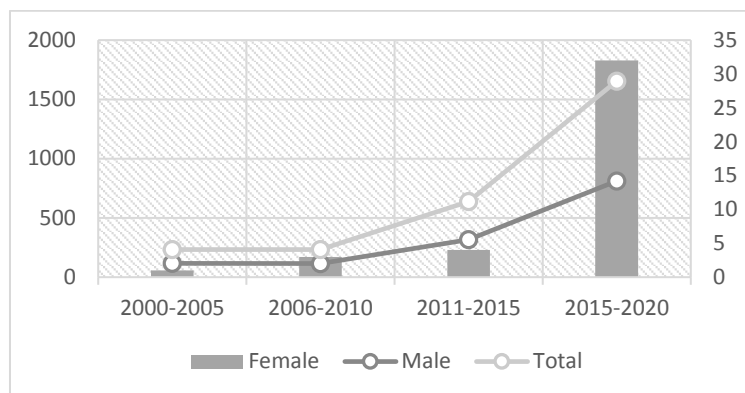
Terrorism is either associated with the world of men or is mainly led by men (Andersen & Sandberg,2020:1506-1526; Shatha, Abdalbaki Al-Ajeely. Mohammad,2023:3206-11; Spadaro,2020:58-80). Men are the primary leaders of terrorist activities in several nations: including Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, ISIS leader in Syria and Iraq; Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda head in the Middle East and Africa; Talal Hamiyah, Hezbollah's commander; Zulkarnaen, Jemaah Islamiyah Southeast Asia's supreme leader; Radullan Sahiron, Abu Sayyaf group's leader in the Philippines; and Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram's leader in Nigeria (Sahrasad & Rusyd,2021:152-162; Pribadi, 2023:1142-47; Subhan, 2020:207-225).

However, the phenomenon in Indonesia shows an increase in women's involvement in terrorism (Haripin et al.,2020:1998-2018; Nakissa,2020:203-39; Usman et al.,2023:755-802). Women's radicalism is seen in acts of terror committed by Indonesian women in various cities. In 2016, a woman was arrested by the Special Detachment 88 Anti-Terror of the Indonesian National Police (Qurtuby & Aldamer,2021:56-76). She allegedly carried out a suicide bombing at the State Palace. In 2017, another woman was arrested for plotting a suicide bombing in Bali (Santoso,2021). The Sibolga bombing terror

incident on 12 March 2019 is also an example of women's involvement in terrorism (Rahmah,2020:21-6).

Another action involving women and children occurred at the Surabaya church on 13 May 2018 (Dimyati et al,2019:1259-64). In 2021, Indonesia was shocked by the action of a woman who carried out a lone wolf attack at the Indonesian National Police Headquarters in Jakarta. She was identified as a member of ISIS (Phelan,2020; Sabella,2023:33-46). In the same year, a bombing at the Makassar Cathedral church was also carried out by a married couple (Qurtuby & Aldamer,2021:56-76).

There are many Islamic terrorist organisations involving women in the Southeast Asian region, ranging from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore to the Philippines (Chen et al.,2023:2814-26; Marchenko et al.,2021:36-50; Milton, 2020:430-50). Women from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore were involved in ISIS whether in their respective countries or Syria and Iraq (Qurtuby & Aldamer,2021:56-76). They have played various crucial roles and have diverse backgrounds (Lawrence & Robertson,2023). Women in Indonesia appear to be the most active and radical, followed by the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore (Sahrasad et al.,2020:56-66).



Figure(1): Terrorism Perpetrators in Indonesia 2000-2020

(Source: Database Application Criminal Acts Cases,2024)

Fig (1) shows that the number of Indonesian women involved in terrorism has been increasing since 2015. This phenomenon coincides with the increasing power of ISIS in Syria and Iraq. The ‘glory’ of ISIS encourages the development of acts of terrorism in various countries, including Indonesia (Database Application Criminal Acts Cases,2024; Qurtuby & Aldamer, 2021). Based on the background of women’s involvement in terrorism, little has been explored how the propaganda narrative of ISIS encourages women in Indonesia to commit terrorism. This paper aims to explain this critical phenomenon to gain an in-depth understanding of their roles. It is even crucial because Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation in the world. Through in-depth interviews with women involved in terrorism in Indonesia, this paper will explain how ISIS narrative propaganda drives Indonesian women to commit terrorism. The gender lens is used to how women are attracted to ISIS, join the movement, and are even willing to carry out suicide bombings (Sahasrad et al.,2020:56-66; Patel,2022:453-78; Rahmah,2020:21-6; Sabella, 2023:33-46). The analysis of the linkage between gender aspects and narratives of terrorism contributes to the novelty of the study of terrorism.

2.Literature Review

2-1.Contemporary Terrorism in the Global Context

The United Nations defines terrorism as acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic,

religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them (Sahrasad et al.,2020:56-66; Lepskiy & Lepska,2023; Pochta,2021:734-46; Voloshyn & Zamula,2019:491-501). But there is no Comprehensive Convention on terrorism that establishes a consensus definition of what qualifies as "terrorism" (McCann & Pimley,2020:807-30; Nazir,2022; Simeon,2019:5; Treistman,2021:192-201). The most frequently included elements in definitions of terrorism were "violence," "fear", "terror" and "target" (Salim et al.,2019:102-114). More importantly, the definition signalled the increasing power of non-state actors at the expense of the weak and the most vulnerable.

Perhaps we can argue that Global War on Terror 2001, has associated terrorism with Islamic-based (Githing'u et al.,2020; Pochta,2021:734-46; Rehman,2020:168-78). Although secular radicals and extremists of other faiths have committed acts of terrorism, the West has traditionally held Moslem-majority nations, particularly those in Islamic countries, accountable for the rise in extremism and terrorism worldwide (Subhan,2020:207-25). The creation of propaganda linked to terrorist and Islamic militant movements (Ejiofor,2023:133-60; Khan,2023:104-13; Lepskiy & Lepska,2023). Moreover, the idea that radical Muslims are drawn to Islamist organisations is supported by the substantial correlation between terrorism and rising religious observance (Egger & Magni-Berton,2021:581-604).

But to identify terrorism with Islam or Moslem is misleading because terrorism is also found in the West and other parts of the world (Qurtuby & Aldamer,2021:56-76). Far-right terrorism refers to acts of violence and plans for acts of violence motivated by ideas of White supremacy and anti-Christian sentiment (Lepskiy & Lepska,2023; McCann & Pimley,2020:807-30). It should be noted that the 9/11 attacks have changed the way governments portray terrorism. Some separatist organisations are categorized as terrorist associations despite their political motivations (Falk & Falcone,2021:269-83 Rahayu & Mediyansyah,2020:51-66).

The dynamics of the battlefield and the prerequisites for successful mobilisation combine to determine the choice and timing of acts of terrorism (Sahrasad et al.,2020:56-66; Sabella,2023:33-46). Terrorist groups typically pursue a variety of political goals, and the location and geography of attacks by these terrorist groups varies depending on the type and nature of the political goal (Etaat et al.,2023:152-75; Etaat & Dabiri,2016:24-47).

However, battlefield casualties affect attack timing and make insurgents more dependent on mobilising civilian assistance. The techniques are used by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in both Iraq and Syria (Bayrakli & Hafez,2023:221-25). Nowadays, there is a trend from actual combat zones toward virtual ones where terrorist organisations use the internet and apps like Telegram (Sahasrad et al.,2020:56-66). It contributes to the unpredictability of terrorist threats and the ideological malleability of modern radical milieus, particularly those that exist online (Brzuszkiewicz,2023:287-94).

In recent years, there has been a tendency for terrorism to be carried out independently, rather than in networks or groups (Database Application Criminal Acts Cases,2024; Egger & Magni-Berton,2021:581-604; Qurtuby & Aldamer,2021:56-76). They are classified as "lone wolves", who carry out terrorism without the assistance of terrorist groups in the conception, development, or implementation of the attack (Sahasrad & Ibnu Rusyd, 2021:152-62; Pribadi,2023:1142-47; Subhan,2020:207-25). Without formally joining a terrorist organisation, they are exposed to extremist information via social media and the internet, which ultimately results in self-radicalisation (Lepskiy & Lepska,2023). Despite low fatality, lone-actor attacks have been resurrecting and this trend should not be disregarded or undervalued (Brzuszkiewicz,2023:287-94). Lone actors have fewer criminal antecedents and lower exposure to social settings that enable group-based participation in terrorism. Limited perceived social skills and high social isolation may inhibit their ability to join terrorist groups (McCann & Pimley, 2020:807-30).

2-2.ISIS and Women Terrorism

Women's motivations for committing acts of terrorism vary widely. They believe by committing terrorism, they will be martyred (Haripin et al.,2020:275-99; Nakissa,2020:203-39; Usman et al., 2023:755-802). Economic factors are also driving women to commit terrorism. Financial limitations and lack of attention from those around after the husband is arrested or dies due to terrorism cause a woman to commit the same act (Ganor,2021:23-32; O'Connor,2022:261-263; Perry et al.,2019:102-123; Schuurman & Carthy,2023). Economic inequality is also why terrorists attract supporters (Githing'u et al.,2020). Next is the social factor, terrorists influence those closest to them and create social identities out of solidarity with fellow Muslims, giving rise to feelings of revenge for what fellow

Muslims experience abroad, such as in Syria and Palestine (Pochta,2021:734-46).

The involvement of women in terrorism is characterised by the role they carry that influences their social behaviour according to the role they play as terrorists (Lawrence & Robertson,2023). The role of women in terrorism varies significantly according to the prevailing culture. Women are radicalised for three reasons: relationship, respect and redemption. Marriage also affects the level of women's role in terrorism and becomes the triggering factor. Women seem to have a high level of obedience and loyalty to their husbands so that whatever is ordered or decided by the husband will be obeyed by the woman as a wife (Egger & Magni-Berton,2021:581-604).

Some studies show that women are victims of terrorist networks (Lepskiy & Lepska,2023). Terrorist groups exploit their helplessness and ignorance to hide terror perpetrators (i.e. husbands), and carry out intelligence activities to collect information on terror targets (Egger & Magni-Berton,2021:581-604; Qurtuby & Aldamer,2021:56-76). Women are more effective in carrying out their actions without arousing suspicion. The diversity of roles makes them feel they have an identity as jihadists (McCann & Pimley,2020:807-30; Nazir, 2022; Simeon,2019:5; Treistman,2021:192-201). Women as wives also believe that obeying their husbands guarantees their place in heaven, so they have high intolerance that no religion deserves to be upheld or defended, only Islam (Haripin et al.,2020:275-299; Nakissa,2020:203-239).

However, other studies show that women are not victims but agents of terrorism (Hudson & Hodgson,2022:605-32). Political autonomy and its relation to the moral subject in the face of power push women to be involved in patriarchal religious traditions such as Islam (Wickham et al.,2020:9530-68). According to Amusan et al. (2019:345-59), women's involvement in ISIS terrorist acts and networks is more as perpetrators than as victims of patriarchal society and supporters of their husbands' actions in terrorism. Another study indicates that the increasing number of women involved in ISIS is due to a sense of emancipation (Sahrasad et al.,2020:56-66).

Margolin (2022:221-42) points out how the messaging tactics of ISIS have evolved in response, to changing conditions while still emphasizing gender appeals related to statehood aspirations and religious duties. Windsor (2020:759-81) discusses the ways in which women associated with ISIS utilized media platforms to build personal relationships, with potential

recruits and fostered what she describes as "digital sisterhood." This online bond not offered encouragement but also offered practical advice to women contemplating relocating to ISIS held areas. Alexander and Turkington (2023:32-51) highlighted changes in ISIS propaganda towards women following losses; focusing less on migration (known as hijrah) and instead promoting support activities within their home countries regionally. Their research highlights how ISIS adapted its recruitment strategies, for women by adjusting messaging to suit challenges while upholding beliefs consistently. Recent studies provide an overview of the process of women's radicalism into extremism movements (Amusan et al.,2019:345-59; Hudson & Hodgson, 2022:605-32; Wickham et al.,2020:953-68). One of the changes that occur in the world order is a transnational phenomenon; internet technology making boundaries and barriers between countries no longer relevant and transnationalism can threaten the global community, namely terrorism and activism (Egger & Magni-Berton,2021:581-604; Falk & Falcone,2021:269-83; Rahayu & Mediyansyah,2020:51-66). Terrorists use technologies such as printing presses, copiers, satellite phones, videos, email, chat rooms, websites, blogs, and encryption software (Atsa'am & Wario,2023:128-36; Hamm,2021:63-93; Polo,2020:235-50). Bayrakli & Hafez (2023:221-25) state that Islamic fundamentalist groups use the internet as a "portable homeland" and that the news media often associate "Islamic fundamentalism" with "Islamic terrorism". Netwar, therefore, refers to offensive actions carried out by geographically separate, diverse, and interconnected non-state actors (Atsa'am et al.,2021). Terrorists utilise online communication (McMillan et al.,2020: 559-81; Singh et al.,2023) and access to certain ideologies through cyberspace justify radicalism among women (Lee & Tominaga,2024:53-79; Rahmah,2020:21-6).

3.Methodology

3-1.Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach, encompassing various material and interpretive methods that bring the world to life (Khairunnisa et al.,2022:231-36). This approach was chosen because the researchers wanted to explore women's experiences in terrorism. Between April and November 2023, researchers conducted the study in Yogyakarta, Purworejo, Jakarta, and Semarang.

3-2.Data Collection Methods

The data are collected through interviews and internet-based document studies. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews (Adams,2015; Lamont,2015) to gain deeper insights into the views and experiences of women involved in terrorism, and to obtain informants, the author used the snowball sampling method. The researchers choose the snowball sampling method because studying female terrorists requires high trust from potential informants (Naderifar et al.,2017). Gaining trust is important for researchers because some are tired of being interviewed by various parties, journalists, and researchers and want to live a new, peaceful life (Lee & Tominaga,2024:53-79; Rahmah,2020:21-6). In addition, Snowball sampling is beneficial for reaching populations that are difficult to access or hidden, such as drug consumers, illegal immigrants, or other vulnerable groups, including terrorists (Pasikowski,2024).

In the first step, the researcher identified potential sources by asking one of the activists of Serve Indonesia about female former terrorists who could be interviewed. Serve Indonesia is a Non-Governmental Organization that aims to empower former women terrorists in Indonesia. After building trust and successfully conducting interviews, the researcher asked for recommendations from the first respondent to find other individuals with similar characteristics. With this method, the researcher created a "snowball" effect in duration. This process is repeated until the network of respondents grows and the data obtained reaches the saturation point, where additional data collection no longer produces significant new information or different insights (Naderifar et al.,2017). This study successfully interviewed five informants, including a woman still in prison (when the interview was conducted). In addition, the author also collected data from various documents regarding the ISIS organization, the ideology of the movement, and the narrative of femininity built by ISIS. The data sources used were (1) online newspapers, (2) YouTube films, and (3) Facebook and Instagram, which were used to spread ISIS propaganda.

3-3.Data Analysis Methods

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive-qualitative techniques. All data were organized into categories and given a narrative-qualitative analysis by interpreting and juxtaposing them with findings from similar studies and relevant theories (Hamilton & Finley,2019; Niñerola et

al.,2019:1377). The result is an enrichment of terrorism theory by adding gender perspectives and narratives through social media as a driving factor for the increase in female terrorism (McCann & Pimley,2020:807-30; Nazir,2022; Simeon,2019:5; Treistman,2021:192-201).

4.Results and Discussions

4-1.The Spread of ISIS in Indonesia

ISIS is a radical Islamic organisation founded in Iraq, in 2013. The organisation is an Al-Qaeda branch as a response to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. ISIS's goal is to establish a worldwide caliphate and fight governments that are not in line with ISIS ideology (Alishahi,2017:173-95). To realise its goals, ISIS uses violence and terrorism (Sahrasad et al.,2020: 56-66). ISIS experienced glory when it occupied the Syrian city of Raqqa in 2013 and Mosul in Iraq in 2014 (Sahrasad & Rusyd,2021:152-62; Pribadi, 2023:1142-47; Subhan,2020:207-25).

The ease of propaganda and internalisation of ISIS ideology are supported by the spread of global communication through the Internet (Sahrasad et al., 2020:56-66). ISIS utilises social media as a tool for its radicalisation (Sahrasad & Rusyd,2021:152-62). ISIS has organised and radicalised through propaganda by producing informational materials including videos, photos, and writings published professionally through the Al-Hayat Media Center and broadcast in German, English, French, and Russian (Pribadi,2023:1142-47; Subhan,2020:207-25).

Propaganda carried out by ISIS relies on social media, such as websites, Facebook, and Twitter (Lepskiy & Lepska,2023). The ISIS propaganda machine generates 90,000 daily posts on Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and other social media platforms (Atsa'am et al.,2021:125-38). ISIS films use Hollywood-style production tricks and special effects to portray ISIS terrorists as heroes and portray ISIS struggle. ISIS also spreads narratives of hatred and incitement to join, guidelines for assembling bombs and other terrorist activities (Phelan,2020; Sabella,2023:33-46).

Through propaganda in social media narratives, ISIS ideology successfully spread to other countries. Propaganda focused on the hope of a better financial life is a powerful strategy to attract followers, especially from countries with economic difficulties (Bellutta et al.,2020). The numerous benefits and conveniences promised by the ISIS group attracted many people from various

parts of the world to support their struggles and who are willing to immigrate to Iraq and Syria (Lee & Tominaga,2024:53-79; Rahmah,2020:21-26).

The oath actions of various community groups in Indonesia mark support for ISIS in Indonesia. In March 2014, the radical Islamic movement in Indonesia made a declaration to support ISIS. In July 2014, radical Islamist Abu Bakar Ba'asyir took the oath of allegiance to ISIS. At the time Abu Bakr Ba'asyir was serving a prison sentence for alleged involvement in terrorism. In August 2014, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir led the oath of a group of inmates in prison (Database Application Criminal Acts Cases,2024).

The swearing of allegiance to ISIS by radical Islamic leaders encouraged Indonesian sympathisers to go to Syria. A hard-line Islamic figure, Aman Abdurrahman, has a central role in spreading ISIS ideology in Indonesia through social media. He disseminated the jihad narrative to recruit ISIS sympathisers. The recruitment of ISIS networks in Indonesia uses two ways: first, recruitment through conventional networks related to Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, and second, recruitment through social media.

Support for ISIS is increasing rapidly in several regions in Indonesia. This is due to a fatwa (an official statement from an Islamic leader) issued by the Islamic State through its spokesman, Abu Muhammad Al-Adnaniy Asy Shami, who released a statement entitled *Inna Rabbaka Labilmirshaad* (Surely your God is indeed lurking) in response to the American coalition's attacks on Islamic State territory in Syria and Iraq. The fatwa ensued reactions from radical Islamist groups in Indonesia (Database Application Criminal Acts Cases,2024; Egger & Magni-Berton,2021:581-604; Qurtuby & Aldamer,2021:56-76).

These radical groups use internet media to spread ISIS propaganda in Indonesia. Aman Abdurrahman's Millah Ibrahim website, for example, uploaded 155 posts containing ISIS propaganda in 2013-2014. Aman also uses Facebook and Telegram to promote ISIS. Throughout 2016-2017, there were more than 60 Indonesian-language Telegram channels affiliated with ISIS (Lepskiy & Lepska,2023).

Table (1): Sites for ISIS Deployment in Indonesia

Name	Sitelinks	Current Status
Al-Mustaqbal.net	http://al-mustaqbal.net	Inaccessible, domain already sold
Arrahmah Media	http://arrahmah.com	Blocked by the Indonesian government
Shautussalam	http://shoutussalam.com	Blocked by the Indonesian government
Kompas Islam	http://kompasislam.com	Inaccessible, domain already sold
VOA-Islam	http://voa-islam.com	Site not found
Milah Ibrahim	http://milahibrahim.wordpress.com http://milahibrahim.org http://milahibrahim-news.com	Site not found
Prison of Joy	http://prisonofjoy.blogspot.com	Blog not found
Muqawamah media	www.isid.esy.es http://muqawamah.com	Blocked by the Indonesian government
Save Islam	http://www.save-islam.com	Site not found
WA Islam	http://www.waislama.net	Site not found
Anshar Islam	http://www.ansharulislam.com	Site not found
Lasdipo	http://www.lasdipo.com	Blocked by the Indonesian government

(Source: Compiled by Researchers,2024)

Table (1) indicates that radical networks affiliated with ISIS in Indonesia use the internet as a propaganda tool. Almost all networks are inaccessible as the Indonesian government blocks them. The use of social media drives the spread of radicalism in Indonesia. Based on research conducted on 75 terrorism prisoners in Indonesia, approximately 85% of them were subjected to radicalism through conversation applications and social media. The ISIS network in Indonesia had more than 60 channels and 30 private discussion forums on Telegram as of 2017. In each channel, ISIS spreads 80-150 messages of violence every day (Lepskiy & Lepska,2023).

ISIS does not have a specific account to represent its presence. ISIS narratives were conveyed by ISIS-affiliated support groups and individuals using anonymous accounts. Each ISIS member has dozens of SIM cards to create different accounts. The members also actively conduct discussions in Facebook groups with anonymous accounts. Some potential targets that are already interested in ISIS Facebook content will be directed to a private Telegram group. Telegram is divided into large and small groups. The smaller

the group members, the more sensitive the issues discussed (Respondent 1, 2023).

Through Dabiq and Rumiya online magazines, ISIS shared propaganda of establishing a caliphate state based on Islamic Sharia law and influenced its readers to support and become members of ISIS. These magazines were translated into various languages, including Indonesian. Facebook and Telegram also served to upload videos and content of persecuted Afghan and Palestinian Muslims. The dissemination of this content was intended to stir the spirit of jihad (Respondent 1,2023)

Table (2): Audience Scale, Type, and Content of ISIS Social Media Content

Aspects	Types of Social Media		
	Facebook	Telegram	WhatsApp
Form	Community groups, anonymous accounts	Private groups	Private groups
Audience scale	Widespread and general	Specific target	Specific target
Types of content narration	Online newsletter; Fragments of verses; Narratives of criticism of injustice and democracy; Videos of Muslims in conflict countries Criticism of injustice; Video about warfare in conflicting Islamic countries; Description of the state that enforces Islamic law	Broadcast messages; Pdf; Poster; Bulletin; Books; Films; Articles System of Government in Islam; Network coordination and gathering selected people willing to commit violence; Fighting spirit; The story of women who fought in the time of the Prophet Muhammad	Broadcast messages; Pdf; Poster; Bulletin; Books; Articles Network coordination and gathering selected people willing to commit violence; Fighting spirit

(Source: Compiled by Researchers,2024)

ISIS also optimises the use of WhatsApp to accommodate sympathisers already interested in jihadist issues. WhatsApp groups used by ISIS are also made implicit, such as using pseudonyms (Respondent 1,2023). Table (2) indicates differences of target audiences, types of content disseminated, and narrative from each ISIS social media. In short, ISIS uses Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp to share propaganda for different purposes and targets.

4-2. How Do Indonesian Women Know ISIS and Why Join ISIS?

Social media has played an essential role in increasing women's involvement in ISIS. This organisation uses social media to disseminate propaganda narratives and recruit various groups, including women (Zeiger, 2020:374-411). Cyberspace became a path for women to extend their participation in the organisation without physically leaving their homes. Open media platforms such as Facebook, and Twitter, and closed media platforms (Telegram and WhatsApp) increased women's radicalisation (Moyano et al., 2022:492-503). The radicalisation of women became a possibility in the virtual world due to strict gender segregation that did not allow them to interact with male ISIS members physically.

One of the women perpetrators of terrorism in Indonesia (formerly migrant worker) said that she was influenced by terrorism through several articles from Facebook and millahibrahim.net websites that convinced her to follow the ideology of terrorism and participate in acts of terrorism. Her recruitment was carried out by intensive communication via telegram with her husband and the leader of the ISIS network in Indonesia. They trained and prepared her to carry out terrorist attacks through a suicide bomb at the State Palace in Jakarta (Haripin et al., 2020:275-99; Nakissa, 2020:203-239; Usman et al., 2023:755-802).

Another female former ISIS member said she knew ISIS due to active discussions in *Facebook* groups. She also actively created an anonymous account to debate online with Islamic sects opposed to ISIS. The social media content ignited her enthusiasm to go to Syria to defend Muslims.

"Social media is very influential in attracting women to join ISIS. I was also interested in the verses that ISIS spread through social media. The narrative that makes women willing to commit violence is also about martyrdom. ISIS led the women to die to be martyred. The state of martyrdom can wash away sins and intercede for oneself and family (Respondent 1, 2023).

Respondent 1 came into contact with ISIS through war news that she accessed when she became a migrant worker in Hong Kong in 2013. She watched videos about the war in Palestine and Afghanistan on YouTube during her leisure time. She accessed more and more information about warfare until finally, in 2015, she met a leading terrorist through his blog and learned about the spirit of war and how to make bombs. She frequently visited Indonesian

extremist websites such as Arrahman and also created Facebook accounts to spread violent jihad. Due to the extremist nature of her postings, her accounts were often taken down. However, she never gave up and created hundreds of Facebook accounts to sustain her online presence.

She also connected with the ISIS network through her interactions with Front Pembela Islam (FPI) or Defenders of Islam Front and Hizbuth Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) members on Facebook. Soon, she decided to pledge to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi online. In the spirit of jihad, she donated 2/3 of her salary to support ISIS. In 2015, she began her network in Indonesia with online recruitment via Telegram. But in 2016, her husband was arrested by the authorities which propelled her to engage in "war" herself (Haripin et al., 2020; Nakissa,2020). She decided to commit Amaliyah (getting closer to God) by blowing herself up in 2016. Unfortunately, her plan failed because when she arrived in Indonesia, she was arrested by the Special Detachment 88 Anti-Terror (Respondent 1,2023).

Another former ISIS member explained that she knew ISIS from a magazine translated into Indonesian from a private Telegram group. Her involvement in the ISIS network began when she joined student study groups at her university in 2015, where she actively participated in an Islamic State discussion. However, she realised that the concept of Indonesia Islamic State is hard to implement. She looked for new information via Telegram and found several channels. After entering the channels, she joined a more private WhatsApp group with around 40 people. This WhatsApp group was led by an online ustazah (female cleric) and intensely discussed ISIS. The authorities eventually arrested her on charges of an attack at the Jakarta Mobile Brigade Command Headquarters (Respondent 2,2023).

Information from the internet has also encouraged women to go to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS. L (initial name), a housewife went to Syria with six other women to join ISIS. She was very interested in ISIS after reading and watching the film. She decided to move to Syria and live with ISIS in the hope of getting a better life (Lee & Tominaga,2024:53-79; Rahmah,2020:21-26). N told a similar experience that she obtained information about the beautiful experiences of people living under the ISIS caliphate through Facebook. She also looked for other materials about ISIS from Tumblr, and the Diary of Muhajirah (women who emigrate) channel which contain the experiences of people who migrate to Syria. N began communicating with

ISIS supporters in Syria and believed that to become the real Muslims she had to move to Syria. Finally, in August 2015 her family went to Syria to live with the ISIS community (Amusan et al., 2019:345-59; Hudson & Hodgson,2022, 605-632; Wickham et al.,2020:953-68).

A somewhat different story was told by Respondent 3, a housewife from a rich family. She was first introduced to ISIS by her family. Her father wanted to migrate with his family to Syria, but she had different views. She argued that legitimate leaders and governments should be respected, so she disagreed with establishing an Islamic state. However, her parents were relentless and intensively introduced ISIS to her, so she finally wanted to know more about ISIS and access it through videos on YouTube. Later she followed her parents to Turkey. When she got there, she realised that she was in a community of ISIS supporters, and was preparing to leave for Syria. It was during this period that she delved deeper into ISIS, participated in studies and associations at the ISIS Community Camp in Turkey (Respondent 3,2023)

The internet has opened up opportunities for women to be directly involved in terrorism (Atsa'am & Wario,2023:125-38; Hamm,2021:63-93; Polo,2020:235-50). Unlike other radical organisations that recruit members and sympathisers directly, ISIS uses the internet, especially social media, to attract supporters, including women (McMillan et al.,2020:559-81; Singh et al.,2023). The involvement of women in ISIS also exemplifies that the role of women in terrorism has shifted from a supporting role (as a terrorist's wife) to a leading role as a perpetrator of terrorism (Egger & Magni-Berton,2021: 581-604). The intensity of this role is different from other radical Islamic organisations that tend to place women in behind-the-scenes or domestic roles.

4-3.Driving Narrative: The Infidel State and Injustice

According to ISIS, the secular regimes and systems of life in Muslim countries today are infidel practices (thagut). Muslims need to repair the broken system of government and create a caliphate orderliness of government (Khilafah Islamiyah). Democracy is incompatible with the shura (discussion) system in Islam (Sahasrad et al.,2020:56-66; Lepskiy & Lepka,2023; Pochta,2021:734-46). Therefore, the secular system of power must be replaced by the Islamic Caliphate system (Salim et al.,2019). Respondent 4 told that in a private WhatsApp group of female migrant workers spreading the narrative that they were working in an infidel country.

Thus, the money they earned was *haram* (forbidden by Islamic law) and needed to be purified. With this narrative, ISIS persuaded migrant workers to donate their money to purify their wealth (Respondent 4,2023).

ISIS has also developed an awareness of injustice in democracy and the importance of the Islamic state (Egger & Magni-Berton,2021:581-604). The ISIS group actively conducts online studies via Telegram that specifically discuss the concept of the Islamic State. In the Telegram group, the system of government in Islam is also conveyed by spreading the spirit of war (Atsa'am & Wario,2023:125-138; Hamm,2021:63-93; Polo,2020:235-50). ISIS corroborates this narrative by quoting fragments of verse quotations in Scripture. Respondent 2 explained that Telegram groups are used to spread narratives about the importance of law and Islam. ISIS shares narratives that Indonesia is a country characterised by corruption and dirty practices, so the caliphate state is more suitable to be applied (Respondent 2,2023).

The weekly newspaper published by ISIS, *Al Fatihin*, became one of the reading references for ISIS members (Atsa'am & Wario,2023; Hamm,2021). The newspaper is accessible online and translated into many languages, including Indonesian. In the 03 edition this bulletin featured a radical headline entitled "Kill the Infidel Leaders, Because They Cannot Keep Their Promises". The content of the news calls for fighting against the infidel leaders (Salim et al.,2019:102-14).

Various provocative narratives were conveyed in the *Al Fatihin* newspaper, including "Muslim communities are oppressed", "we must defend Muslims to gain martyrdom and the pleasure of Allah", "the enforcement of Islamic Sharia in Indonesia", "Muslims accused of radicalism or terrorists", "apocalypse is near", "signs that mark the end of the world have appeared", "corruption rife and poverty rampant", "unfair law sharp down blunt up", "Indonesia kufr state and its leaders are thagut, and caliphate is the solution" (Ejiofor,2023:133-60; Khan,2023:104-13; Lepskiy & Lepska,2023).

The jihadist narrative campaigned by ISIS attracts hard-line Islamist activists to immigrate to Iraq and Syria (Haripin et al.,2020:1998-2018; Nakissa,2020: 203-239; Usman et al.,2023:755- 802). The desire for martyrdom and against an un-Islamic government are the main reasons often cited by those interested in joining ISIS (Qurtuby & Aldamer,2021:56-76). One of them is DYN (initial name), who planned a suicide bombing at the State Palace in Jakarta on December 11, 2016. She pointed out her reasons:

"As for what motivates me for Istisyhadyah (martyrdom) to carry out suicide bombings is to want to get the virtue of martyrdom or jihad fisabilillah and want to get the pleasure of Allah SWT, in the context of upholding Islamic law in Indonesia by taking a way to fight the infidels (thagut) in Indonesia and even the world who have fought Muslims in countries such as Iraq and Syria. To achieve this goal, I believe that all our ideals can only be upheld or realised by taking up arms (physical warfare) against our enemy, namely the thagut or Shia infidels, so I intend to carry out suicide bombings against the infidels who are training in the palace." (Respondent 5,2023).

Respondent 2 emphasized the social and political problems in Indonesia that could only be solved by Islamic law and the Islamic State. She put forward: "...Indonesia with a democratic system, much chaos, corruption, some are oppressed. So, I feel that the caliphate is suitable". She was desperate to go to Syria to join ISIS: "I had the intention of migrating. Whether there is a (Syria) war or what, we care less who thinks about hijra by going there because it is the land of the prophets, enforced by Islamic law, calmer, and more peaceful (Respondent 2,2023).

Meanwhile, Respondent 3 shared that ISIS offered the concept of jihad and hijra that she knew during interactions with ISIS members in Turkey. During her one year in Turkey, she participated in meetings with ISIS sympathizers from various countries who were waiting to go to Syria. She learned the true meaning of jihad and hijra. She described her daily activities in Turkey until she was deported back to Indonesia with her parents:

The activity was meetings, occasionally visiting each other's apartments of our brothers who were there. We discussed what jihad is, what hijra is, and what the true meaning of hijra is. Sometimes, there were studies, too, but the studies were closed. We discussed how to go inside and penetrate Syria and what steps can close the possibility if we are people who want to migrate. We focused on how to enter Syria (Respondent 3,2023).

ISIS and radical organisations affiliated with it have succeeded in framing the issue of injustice and irregularity in the Indonesian government as a crucial agenda of struggle (Haripin et al.,2020:275-99). The Indonesian government is labelled as thagut or tyrannical government, so it becomes a big enemy that must be fought (Nakissa,2020:203-239; Usman et al.,2023:755-802). Based on framing the issue of injustice, activists of terrorist movements in Indonesia

oppose the government and carry out acts of terror (Qurtuby & Aldamer, 2021:56-76).

The statements of women involved in terrorism in Indonesia affirm the importance of the injustice frame as the primary driver of involvement in terrorism (Chen et al.,2023:2814-26; Marchenko et al.,2021; Milton,2020: 430-50; Phelan,2020; Sabella,2023:33-46). They want to be part of acts of terror against oppressive governments and encourage Islamic rule following sharia. These factors underlie radical groups in Indonesia, including women in the terrorist movement, to fight against the government (Dimiyati et al.,2019:1259-64).

4-4.Women's Jihad as Strengthening Narrative

To convince women to fight, ISIS developed a women's jihad campaign. The heroic story of Ummu Umarah is used to motivate women. Ummu Umarah was an extraordinary woman who fought and protected the Prophet Muhammad in the Battle of Yamamah, the Battle of Uhud, and the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. She is a figure who motivated women to appear as pioneers in the struggle. A campaign appeared in Naba magazine titled "The obligation of women to engage in jihad against the enemy." The involvement of women in terror movements emphasizes that women have a significant role in terrorism. ISIS propaganda asserts that women are also capable and have equal responsibility in defending Islam (Haripin et al.,2020:275-99; Nakissa, 2020:203-279).

The women ex-ISIS members interviewed in this study said that no specific narrative of womanhood encouraged them to join the group (Egger & Magni-Berton,2021:581-604). They were interested in joining ISIS because they wanted to fight against the infidel government and establish a caliphate. However, their interest in ISIS was further fostered because ISIS developed female narratives when they entered the network. They burned their jihadist spirit when they were indoctrinated with stories of women's struggles in the time of the Prophet Muhammad through Telegram groups (Atsa'am & Wario, 2023:128-36).

ISIS propaganda about women's jihad is conveyed through online mass media. In the 06th edition of the ISIS online newspaper Al Fatihin, a section entitled "The Duty of Muslim Women in Fighting Against the Enemy" encourages women to wage jihad. The narratives informed that "The state is in a condition of emergency; fighting for women is a must" and "Women

should wage jihad in the cause of Allah and rush to defend their religion with their souls as ransom and also motivate their husbands and children as did the first generation mujahideen".

Social media plays an influential role in changing women's views (Hamm, 2021:63-93). With compelling narratives and propaganda, many women are attracted and captivated by the radical narratives published by this media. They take on roles according to their capacity and potential. In Indonesia ISIS provides a broader space for women's participation, opening up new opportunities for women to participate and take roles. ISIS claims that women are not just sexual objects but are mothers to the next generation and guardians of ISIS ideology (Ganor,2021:23-32; O'Connor,2022:261-63; Perry et al.,2019:102-23; Schuurman & Carthy,2023).

Respondent 2 said that a book entitled "Queen Mujahidah" was inspiring her. It described the struggle of the mothers who prepared their children to defend their religion. In addition, there are stories of Indonesian women's journeys who migrated. They passed through various obstacles, such as giving birth on the road, running out of supplies, getting sick, and so on, until they reached the land of ISIS in Syria. She wanted to have such a role in jihad and to be a strong woman:

Before I was arrested, I watched a video, a female figure could go down on the battlefield of jihad, the war in the desert, and carry a K 47 weapon. Previously, the caliphate did not allow women to go to war. I was there at that time for the first time allowed in that video. That could be one of the sides shown. What is narrated in the article is how the condition of ummahat (mother) in educating their children, how do they survive? Last, I saw a video of an akhwat (sister) descending into the field of jihad carrying weapons. I also want to be one of those figures—a formidable woman who can survive the storm of enemy threats (Respondent 2,2023).

Respondent 3 shared a similar experience and said that ISIS shaped her into a robust woman. She was ready to lose her husband, children, and family to support the jihad struggle: "We are women who are ready to lose, both children and husband. Bringing the family to the battlefield is a challenging task. Even though I know my brother in Syria, in jihad, I sometimes miss him and want him to return to my arms. But what else? It is his duty until Palestine is independent" (Respondent 3,2023).

The experiences of Indonesian women reflect that social media has a significant influence in introducing radical ideologies and encouraging them to enter terrorist networks. This fact is in line with the argument of Perry et al., (2019:102-23) and Ganor (2021:23-32) that digital technology facilitates the spread of propaganda and the development of terrorist networks. The use of internet technology is an essential factor that allows for the radicalisation process and the ability to carry out terrorism (Brzuskiewicz,2023:287-94). A person's sense of displacement can be heightened and radicalisation may be sparked by alternative and informal education through traditional or social media (Salim et al.,2019:102-14).

Social networking sites provide people with information about terrorism that can negatively impact their sense of pleasure in life and it is correlated with life dissatisfaction (Salim et al.,2019:102-14). Based on Shah's argument, respondents in the study experienced life disappointment in the form of dissatisfaction with the ruler. As compensation, they were encouraged to commit terrorism against the government.

The needs, narratives and networks or 3N mentioned by Perry et al., (2019:102-23) and Ganor (2021:23-32) drive the Indonesia women to engage in terrorist movements. Ideological narratives, support systems, and personal needs are the root causes of radicalisation. When people's need for significance and belonging intertwine with a narrative that promotes using violence as a means of achieving purpose and a network that socially validates this narrative, it can ignite a psychological fire that endangers both social stability and international peace (Sahasad et al.,2020:56-66; Lepskiy & Lepska,2023; Pochta,2021:734-46; Voloshyn & Zamula,2019:491-501). However, in Indonesia, there are two levels of narrative, namely the main narrative and supporting narratives, that use social media to disseminate narratives and networks.

In the context of Indonesia it is a must to create counter-terrorism programs that directly address the narratives used by terrorist organizations. These programs must provide religious education that counters extremist interpretations. Educational initiatives should be designed to help women critically evaluate online content and recognize manipulation tactics used in terrorist propaganda. This should include working with religious scholars and community leaders to create counter-narratives that resonate with women seeking purpose and meaning in their lives and be combined with digital

literacy programs that educate women how to recognize and resist online radicalization attempts.

5. Conclusion

This research reflects the complex mechanisms through which Indonesian women become radicalized and join ISIS, revealing significant implications for counter-terrorism efforts and understanding gender-specific radicalization processes. The findings demonstrate that Indonesian women's radicalization follows distinct patterns focused around social media recruitment, powerful ideological narratives, and gender-specific appeals to jihad.

The study contributes to the understanding of women's radicalization. First, it challenges previous conceptions by revealing that Indonesian women are not merely passive participants but active agents in terrorist organizations, motivated by ideological convictions and a desire for significance. Second, the findings confirm the central role of social media platforms in the radicalization process. And third, the research identifies the powerful dual-narrative structure employed by ISIS to attract Indonesian women: a primary narrative condemning secular governments as illegitimate (*thagut*) and unjust, complemented by a supporting narrative of women's jihad that appeals to female empowerment. This nuanced understanding of narrative structures provides valuable insights for developing effective counter-terrorism strategies.

But several limitations should be acknowledged. The reliance on interviews with former ISIS members raises questions about the reliability of self-reported motivations and experiences. The sample size, while providing rich qualitative data, may not represent the full spectrum of Indonesian women who joined ISIS. The study is also limited by its focus on Indonesia, potentially overlooking regional and cultural variations in women's radicalization processes.

Based on the result of this study, future research should address several directions: 1. comparative research examining women's radicalization across different cultural contexts that could identify universal patterns and culture-specific factors; 2. interdisciplinary studies integrating psychological, sociological, and technological perspectives would enhance our understanding of the complex interplay between individual vulnerabilities, social dynamics, and digital technologies; 3. research on the effectiveness of gender-specific counter-messaging strategies is needed to develop evidence-

based prevention programs; and 4. studies exploring the intersection between women's rights movements and counter-terrorism efforts that could reveal innovative approaches to prevention.

The findings of this study underscore the need for comprehensive gender-sensitive counter-terrorism strategies that address both the ideological narratives and the digital platforms used for recruitment. By understanding the specific pathways through which Indonesian women become radicalized, the security agencies, community organizations, and religious leaders can develop more effective efforts to prevent radicalization and promote deradicalization campaigns among vulnerable populations.

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