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From Extremism to Moderation: Examining the Impact of the Densus 88 Assistance Program on Ex-Terrorism Convicts in Cirebon, West Java

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This study examines the influence of Indonesia's Counterterrorism Special Detachment 88 unit (Densus 88 AT) assistance program on former terrorism convicts in Cirebon Regency, West Java, focusing on changes in their religious beliefs and attitudes. With security concerns surrounding violent extremism and terrorism in Indonesia, this research addresses the challenge of managing terrorism convicts who have completed their sentences, given the significant number of former terrorist offenders in certain regions. Using a case study approach, the research employs narrative analysis to collect primary data through observations, interviews, and a literature review. The fieldwork occurred in two phases between February and May 2021, involving former terrorism convicts, Densus 88 AT personnel, and Ministry of Religious Affairs officials. The study's findings demonstrate shifts in socio-religious beliefs among the four informants, moving from extremist takfiri views to more moderate perspectives. Their paths to radicalization were diverse, influenced by groups like JAD and NII. The research highlights prisons as spaces for both radicalization and deradicalization, with interactions and exposure to alternative knowledge influencing changes in religious views. While Densus 88 AT's economic recovery activities did not directly impact religious beliefs, they fostered attitudes conducive to religious interventions, such as flexible thinking and positive emotional attitudes. The study recommends involving religious leaders and educators to support economic recovery initiatives and promote a more moderate religious outlook among former terrorists. Enhanced collaboration among stakeholders is crucial to reinforce and effectively implement such programs, particularly with many terrorism convicts nearing the end of their sentences.

Keywords: Deradicalization; Former Terrorist Convicts; Moderation; Religious Beliefs; Violent Extremism

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INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the Indonesian National Police officers from the Counterterrorism Special Detachment 88 unit (Densus 88 AT) arrested 228 members of terrorist networks in various parts of Indonesia (CNN Indonesia 2020a). They also discovered a training camp for young cadres of the al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah (JI) group in Gintungan Village, Bandungan, Semarang, Central Java, where seven batches of 96 young people had already been trained (CNN Indonesia 2020b).

From January to March 2021, Densus 88 AT personnel apprehended at least 93 suspected terrorists in different regions of Indonesia, including Aceh, West Kalimantan, East Java, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, South Sulawesi, Jakarta, West Java, and Banten (Fauzan 2021; Mappiwali 2021; Melda 2021; Rahma and Ibnu Sani 2021; Setyadi 2021). Thirteen of them were captured in connection with the suicide bombing at the Makassar Cathedral Church in South Sulawesi (CNN Indonesia 2021). In addition to the suicide bombing, a 24-year-old woman attempted to attack the headquarters of the Indonesian National Police towards the end of March 2021. These events underscore the ongoing security concerns related to violent extremism and terrorism in Indonesia.

Managing former terrorist convicts presents a pressing challenge for the Indonesian government. By 2021, the number of former terrorist offenders had reached 166 individuals in Lampung, Banten, and West Java (Densus 88 AT official, personal communication, March 31, 2021). Meanwhile, as of mid-2024, West Java Province alone houses 286 former prisoners, including 86 individuals in the region of Ciayumajakuning, which stands for Cirebon, Indramayu, Majalengka, and Kuningan, the cities and regencies that make up the eastern part of West Java's north coast (Densus 88 AT official, personal

communication, September 30, 2024). Various stakeholders have engaged in deradicalization efforts, yet comprehensive research on their effectiveness remains scarce. Notable studies by Osman (2014) and Hiariej et al. (2015) have pointed to the inadequacies in current deradicalization programs, highlighting issues of governance and integration.

Osman's research focused on deradicalization programs in correctional institutions, both police-run and those managed by non-governmental organizations. She highlighted the role of weak and corrupt prison administrations in facilitating radicalization, and she also questioned the effectiveness of counter-radicalization initiatives undertaken by non-governmental groups. According to Osman, the police's 'deradicalization' program, involving efforts to build positive relationships with terrorist convicts and provide assistance, may clash with programs run by correctional institutions (Osman 2014).

In 2014, the INSEP research team evaluated deradicalization programs in Indonesia, implemented by the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), correctional institutions, and non-governmental organizations. The evaluation revealed that these deradicalization efforts were carried out separately, partially, incompletely, and with poor integration. They primarily focused on addressing radicalism rooted in poverty, lack of welfare, religious fundamentalism, and psychological issues. However, crucial factors like resource mobilization and identity politics contributing to radicalism had not been adequately addressed (Hiariej et al. 2015).

There has been insufficient attention to the specific initiatives of Densus 88 AT in supporting former terrorist convicts post-release. Densus 88 AT not only conducts law enforcement activities but also undertakes

prevention and rehabilitation initiatives for offenders both during and after incarceration. The Deradicalization Sub-Directorate, operating under the Prevention Directorate, was tasked with the rehabilitation of these individuals, as outlined in the Regulation of the Head of the Indonesian National Police Number 21 of 2010 regarding organizational structure and procedures. Following the introduction of Chief of Police Regulation Number 6 in 2017 and subsequently Regulation Number 5 in 2019, Densus 88 AT established a dedicated Directorate of Identification and Socialization to further these efforts.

Under this framework, Densus 88 AT has initiated various deradicalization programs, which include providing support during incarceration, post-release assistance, and engaging with the families of former convicts. Recently, a novel approach has been adopted, focusing on economic empowerment through the establishment of assistance groups aimed at supporting the families of former terrorists. This initiative arose in response to the increasing number of offenders completing their sentences. Notable projects have been launched in West Java, including coffee plantations in Subang and Tasikmalaya, alongside a fish aquaculture initiative in Cirebon.

This study aims to fill the gap in existing research on Indonesia's deradicalization efforts by examining the impacts of Densus 88 AT's assistance program for ex-terrorist convicts in Cirebon Regency, West Java. Given that participants in this program hail from diverse regencies within the Ciayumajakuning region—home to the highest concentration of former terrorist detainees in West Java—this area is particularly crucial for understanding deradicalization efforts. Utilizing a case study approach, the research will focus on a specific cohort of ex-terrorist convicts to gain in-depth insights into shifts in their religious beliefs and attitudes. This

methodology is particularly suited for understanding the nuanced effects of the assistance program, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of participants' experiences. By assessing whether the program successfully mitigates ideologies that justify violence in pursuit of sociopolitical goals, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of effective deradicalization strategies in Indonesia.

Literature Review

Radicalization and Extremism

The concept of radicalization remains a subject of intense debate in the study of radicalism. Scholars hold divergent views on whether radicalization always involves violence (Stephens, Sieckelinck, and Boutellier 2019; Winter and Feixas 2019) or if support for violence is a defining characteristic of the radicalization process (Jensen, Atwell Seate, and James 2020; McCauley and Moskalkenko 2008; Stevens and Neumann 2009; Wilner and Dubouloz 2011). Additionally, the definition of radicalization can vary across different social, cultural, and temporal contexts (Bartlett and Miller 2012; Borum 2011; Mandel 2009; Neumann 2013). For instance, McCauley and Moskalkenko define radicalization as “increasing extremity of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup” (McCauley and Moskalkenko 2008:416). Meanwhile, based on current definitions, Stevens and Neumann conclude that radicalization refers to “the process (or processes) by which individuals or groups come to approve of and (ultimately) participate in the use of violence for political purposes” (Stevens and Neumann 2009:10). Later, Stephens, Sieckelinck, and Boutellier (2019:2) define radicalization as “a process through which groups or individuals grow in commitment to engage

in conflict, adopting more radical or extreme positions.”

In discussing the terms “radicalism” and “extremism,” these concepts are often used interchangeably, though their relationships are nuanced. Based on an extensive review, Torregrosa et al. (2022) identify three perspectives regarding their relationship: (a) they are synonymous; (b) they differ, but one subsumes the other; and (c) they are distinct without a necessary connection. They propose a straightforward definition of extremism as an ideological movement opposing democratic values, which may include the use of violence.

Mechanisms of Radicalization

Modern research views radicalization as a complex process, leading scholars to focus on the factors that drive individuals toward violent extremism or terrorism rather than their personal characteristics or profiles (Edwards and Gribbon 2013; Horgan 2008; Hwang and Schulze 2018; McCauley and Moskaleiko 2008; Zhou, Sullivan, and Milante 2017). Moreover, radicalization is not a linear process; it is multifaceted and dynamic, with numerous paths that individuals can follow to become violent extremists (Hardy 2018; Jensen et al. 2020).

Mechanisms and processes of radicalization can occur at three levels: structural, group, and individual. Structural processes involve factors like lack of economic opportunities, marginalization, discrimination, bad governance, human rights abuses, unenforced laws, and continuous conflict. At the group level, mechanisms include the creation of extremist narratives that mobilize grievances and perceptions of injustice into collective action, as well as recruitment through close ties and anonymous networks using communication and information technologies. Mechanisms at the individual

level can include experiences of persecution, witnessing abuse, the loss of loved ones at the hands of security forces, property loss, and personal humiliation (Jensen et al. 2020; United Nations 2015).

Scholars have used different categories to identify mechanisms or factors contributing to radicalization toward violent extremism. Some classify them as the 3N—needs, narrative, and network—(Kruglanski et al. 2018), while others use the 3P—push factors, pull factors, and personal factors—classification (Vergani et al. 2020).

Deradicalization

Deradicalization, like radicalization, is a complex and multifaceted process. Various factors play a role, and their significance varies from person to person. Psychological factors such as disappointment, awareness, changes in priorities, and physical factors like intentionally leaving a terrorist group, being caught, or migrating can influence an individual’s disengagement from terrorist activities (Horgan 2008:21–22).

It is essential to distinguish between disengagement and deradicalization. Disengagement refers to behavioral adjustments, whereas deradicalization involves fundamental changes in cognitive aspects (Fink and Hearne 2008; Horgan 2008). Deradicalization does not occur immediately after an individual ceases to participate in terrorist groups or operations; additional mechanisms or processes are required to prompt former members to change their thoughts and beliefs.

Deradicalization may refer to both a process and a program. As a process, Horgan (2008:153) defines deradicalization as “the social and psychological process whereby an individual’s commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and involvement in

violent activity.” In contrast, as a program, he defines it as “any initiative that tries to achieve a reduction of risk of re-offending through addressing the specific and relevant disengagement issues.” Another scholar (Koehler 2017:29) defines a deradicalization program as “any approach, action, or program aimed to reduce individual or collective physical and ideological commitment to a group, milieu, or movement designed as ‘extreme’ or aggressively radical.”

The Role of Religion

The role of religion in radicalization and terrorism is a matter of scholarly debate with three main perspectives. The first group believes that there is no inherent difference between “religious violence” and “secular violence,” as these categories are social constructs, making religious violence a myth (Cavanaugh 2009). The second group suggests that certain faiths possess internal resources, such as religious doctrines, that can justify violent activities, including terrorism (Selengut 2003; Taheri 1987). The third perspective maintains that some believers use religion or religious texts to justify violent activities, including terrorism (Jones 2008; Juergensmeyer 2000; Sedgwick 2010; Smith et al. 2018). Following the third perspective, it can be argued that religion may play a role in radicalization and deradicalization processes. Religious texts can be used to justify violence or, conversely, to condemn violence.

Several studies in the Indonesian context highlight the influence of religion in inciting participation in terrorism. An INSEP research team found that about 45.5% of the 110 terrorism offenders interviewed confessed to ideological-religious motivations (Mufid et al. 2012). Interviews with former terrorism convicts indicate that their understanding of religious texts, whether correct or incorrect,

provided justification for their violent acts, which they claimed were part of a struggle in the name of Allah or *jihad fi sabilillah* (Mulyana, Alam, and Priyanto 2020). Confessions from individuals involved in terrorist groups underscore the key role of religious beliefs in legitimizing terrorism, such as the doctrines of *al-wala’ wa al-bara’* (Bin Ali 2016) and *takfir* (Alam, Priyanto, and Mulyana 2020). Furthermore, Alam et al. (2021) discovered that different groups employ the same key terms or religious concepts with varying degrees of extreme interpretation, such as the doctrine of the ten nullifiers of Islam and the *iman-hijrah-jihad* trilogy.

Conceptual Framework

We base our approach on a theoretical framework rooted in previous research on deradicalization processes. Similar to radicalization, deradicalization is a complex and intricate process, as depicted in Figure 1.

The process of deradicalization commences with the disengagement of perpetrators from terrorist organizations, often involving their arrest by law enforcement. Subsequently, after facing judicial proceedings, the perpetrator receives a prison sentence. During their time in prison, terrorist convicts undergo a dynamic process influenced by external interactions or internal psychological changes. Factors such as interactions with deradicalized inmates, engagement in deradicalization initiatives, and positive family support contribute to deradicalization. Conversely, contact with radical inmates or influential figures within terrorist circles may lead to further radicalization.

Terrorist convicts who were former leaders within their groups may encounter greater challenges in deradicalizing due to factors like pride, shame associated with abandoning radical ideologies,

stubbornness, an unwavering belief in their righteousness, and self-imposed isolation from potential moderate influences.

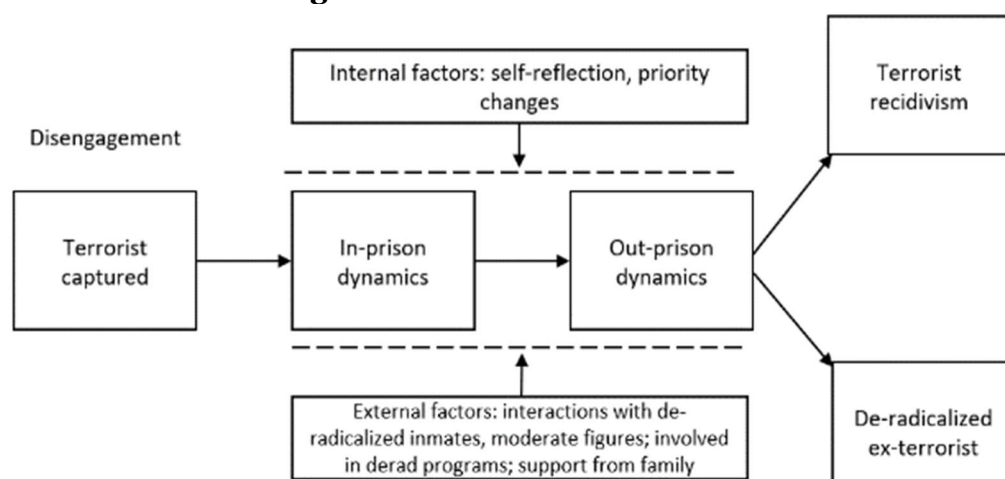
Upon release from prison, the extent of successful deradicalization depends on the individual's receptiveness to diverse religious perspectives and psychological willingness to embrace change. If positively influenced, they are more likely to achieve total deradicalization. Conversely, negative factors like continued influence from former terrorist associates, lack of familial support, or mistreatment are more substantial. In that case, they may be tempted to participate in terrorist activities again, potentially becoming a recidivist in terrorism.

RESEARCH METHOD

we gathered insights from Police personnel involved in the assistance program, officials from West Java Province's Regional Ministry of Religious Affairs Office, and officials from the Cirebon Ministry of Religious Affairs Office. Fieldwork was conducted in two phases: February-March 2021 and April-May 2021.

To gain an understanding of how former terrorist convicts construct and convey meaning through their narratives, starting from their involvement in terrorism to their participation in the Densus 88 AT assistance programs, we employed narrative analysis. Our aim was to explore the impact of the assistance programs on changes in the religious views of these individuals and identify any other factors that might influence these changes.

Figure 1. Paths of Deradicalization



Source: Authors' conceptualization

To investigate the impact of the assistance program conducted by Densus 88 AT on the religious beliefs of former terrorist offenders working in a fish farming group in the Cirebon area, we utilized a case study approach (Yin 2014, 2018). Data collection methods involved observation, interviews, and a literature review.

The primary data sources comprised observations and interviews with former terrorism convicts currently under the supervision of Densus 88 AT. Additionally,

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Densus 88 AT serves as the Indonesia National Police's counter-terrorism unit, commonly engaged in policing operations such as arrests, searches, and neutralization of terrorist group members. However, Densus 88 AT's responsibilities extend beyond prosecution; they also encompass prevention and assistance to offenders within and outside of prison. The Deradicalization Sub-Directorate, operating under the Prevention Directorate as per

Regulation of the Head of the Indonesian National Police Number 21 of 2010 regarding Organizational Structure and Work Procedures of Organizational Units at the Indonesian National Police Headquarters Level, handles the task of dealing with (former) terrorism convicts. Since the introduction of Chief of Police Regulation Number 6 in 2017, later modified by Regulation of the Indonesian National Police Number 5 in 2019, this role has been carried out by a distinct unit called the Directorate of Identification and Socialization.

With the establishment of the Directorate, Densus 88 AT initiated a deradicalization program, encompassing activities such as accompanying convicts during their prison terms, providing post-prison assistance, visiting families of former terrorism convicts, and facilitating economic projects to improve the financial well-being of these families. Notably, two economic recovery initiatives were established—a coffee plantation project in Subang and Tasikmalaya and a fish aquaculture project in Cirebon.

The fish farming group in Cirebon Regency commenced its operations in November 2020, supervised by Commissioner (Pol.) Satori. The main focus of this group is fish enlargement, involving species such as Nile *tilapia*, Mozambique *tilapia*, and catfish. The Technical Implementation Unit for Freshwater Fish Seeds at the Cirebon Regency Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Office in Dukupontang District partnered with Densus 88 AT for this endeavor. The Cirebon Regency Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Office provided two fish ponds measuring 15 by 20 meters each, while Densus 88 AT supplied the fish seeds and nutrition. After the harvest, group members receive a portion of the proceeds, and at the time of the fieldwork, the fish enlargement project generated a net profit of IDR 7.5 million

(Satori, personal communication, April 24, 2021).

The fish farming group comprises terrorism convicts who have served their sentences, mostly hailing from Cirebon, Indramayu, Kuningan, and Majalengka regions. Participation in the group is voluntary and dependent on the willingness of the former terrorists themselves. The group's size varies, and during the field research, the group initially had nine members, but by the completion of the research, only seven remained.

Members of this fish farming group have previously been involved in acts of terrorism. Some were implicated in rioting at the Mobile Brigade Command Headquarters in Depok, West Java, on May 8-10, 2018. Others were arrested for aiding individuals in traveling to foreign combat zones and participating in Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD) activities, resulting in an average prison sentence of 2-3 years.

Figure 2. Former terrorist convicts are harvesting fish



Source: RHA's personal document, 2021

Informant 1: SAP

SAP, aged 23, was involved in the attack on the Mobile Brigade Command Headquarters on May 13, 2018, for which he received a prison sentence of 2 years and 8 months. Due to remission, his sentence was reduced to 2 years and 2 months. After

enduring his punishment at Bandung Banceuy Penitentiary, he was transferred to Bandung LPKA and released on August 17, 2020.

Before his radicalization, SAP attended a university for two semesters but dropped out, influenced by an extremist religious group. He had previously attended elementary school in a district in Cirebon Regency, where he was born, and graduated from Cirebon City's Junior High School and Vocational High School. SAP's parents were small vendors, running an *angkringan* stall in front of a public high school in Cirebon City, but eventually had to give up due to financial struggles.

SAP's exposure to extreme religious ideas began during interactions with Rajendra Sulistiyanto, who also worked at his parents' *angkringan* stall. Their conversations delved into the implementation of Islamic Sharia. Rajendra was the son-in-law of Ahmad Surya, the mastermind behind the 2018 attack on the Mobile Brigade Command Headquarters in Depok. Rajendra was also linked to the shooting of two Highway Patrol officers on the Pejagan-Cirebon toll road on August 24, 2018. He was killed during an attempted arrest by Densus 88 AT Polri personnel on September 3, 2018.

This exposure further radicalized SAP, and he adopted the *takfiri* doctrine, denouncing the Indonesian government as infidel and *ṭagūt* for not adhering to Islamic law. Supporters of Indonesia's democratic system, including the police, military, and civil apparatus, were also labeled as infidels. SAP extended this designation to include Islamic organizations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). He believed that demonstrations were not endorsed in Islamic texts and saw these organizations as acknowledging Indonesian laws, which he considered *ṭagūt*. He also considered election voters as unbelievers due to their

support for secular laws that contradicted God's laws. However, SAP exempted his parents from this categorization as they were not government personnel.

As his radicalization intensified, SAP decided to discontinue his studies during semester 2 because he refused to take Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PPKN) courses, which conflicted with his beliefs. He returned the money his parents had given for the canceled Final Semester Examinations, deeply disappointing them, but SAP no longer heeded their advice (SAP, personal communication, April 27, 2021).

Informant 2: NY

NY, aged 46, did not complete elementary school as he preferred working rather than attending school. He was sentenced to 3 years in prison for his involvement in the planned attack on the Mobile Brigade Headquarters in Depok, West Java, in 2018, intending to aid terrorism convicts who were causing riots at the detention house. His arrest followed a bombing incident in Surabaya. At the time of his arrest, NY worked as a laborer in a plywood plant and was a father to two children, a boy and a girl. However, NY and his accomplices, like others planning the attack, could not reach the Mobile Brigade Headquarters due to a one-kilometer radius blockade.

Before his involvement in extremism, NY worked as a rickshaw puller and operated a small sandal-making business. In 2015, he was approached by a person named Dani at the rickshaw stop, inviting him to explore religious ideas. Their discussions, often held at the pedicab base while drinking coffee, primarily revolved around monotheism. NY also obtained Aman Abdurrahman's lecture materials in the form of sound files (*.mp3) and delved into the concept of *ṭagūt*, considering the Indonesian government as *ṭagūt* for not

ruling based on Islamic law but Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Consequently, he regarded the police, military, and civil workers supporting this system as unbelievers.

Aside from the religious study, NY immersed himself in videos depicting conflicts and oppression of Muslims in various countries, fueling his enthusiasm for armed jihad. Although he had aspirations to defend Muslim communities in war zones like Syria, financial constraints prevented him from traveling there, despite obtaining a passport in 2015 from the district Immigration Office.

Nevertheless, NY refrained from considering the broader population as infidels. He referred to groups like the Salafi, who did not vote in the General Election, as '*murji'ah*', a group with weak faith, despite recognizing the legitimacy of the Indonesian government.

In 2015, NY joined the JAD Cirebon group, serving as a training instructor for members known as '*i'dad*' (preparation), despite lacking special martial arts skills. Before joining JAD, NY had been associated with the NII (Indonesian Islamic State) group in Jakarta since 2010. A friend in Tasikmalaya recruited him. While part of NII, NY engaged in preparatory exercises like sprinting, martial arts, and somersaulting. He acquired skills in using an airsoft pistol and practiced in various locations in West Java. Although he learned about faith, migration (*hijrah*), and jihad, NY claimed that NII did not openly promote jihad (NY, personal communication, April 25, 2021).

Informant 3: WR

WR, aged 35, was born in a town in West Java and married to MM, 31, with whom he has three children: a 7-year-old daughter, a 5-year-old son, and a 3-year-old son. Due to financial constraints, WR's education was limited to elementary school,

and his parents worked as farm laborers. Following in his parents' footsteps, WR's older brother is also employed as a farm laborer.

Since his adolescence, WR has resided in the Muara Angke neighborhood of North Jakarta. Initially, he worked as a *gado-gado* (mixed vegetables with peanut sauce) seller using a street food cart. However, constant surveillance and eviction by municipal police officers hindered his career as a *gado-gado* seller. Subsequently, a parking boss approached him, offering him a job as a parking attendant in front of various office and minimart buildings. This parking boss invited WR to a religious learning forum, which later turned out to be associated with the NII group, particularly the faction led by Tahmid, one of Kartosuwiryo's sons.

After some time, WR joined a religious study group affiliated with Jamaah Anshor Daulah (JAD). Dissatisfied with the NII's policy on operating area division and the removal of senior *ustadz* from their learning group, WR decided to leave the NII after four years of membership in 2016. Upon leaving NII, WR joined JAD Katibah Bekasi, where he assumed the role of '*anfus*,' a neighborhood leader responsible for other members. In 2017, WR pledged loyalty to Abi Mubarak, who claimed to be the *amir* of JAD, via remote video communication during a religious learning event at a residence in the Bogor area.

The JAD religious study sessions took place at the home of Ustad Dedi Iskandar Santoso, also known as Abi Mubarak, where WR studied the Quran twice a week. Apart from Quranic studies, WR's JAD activities involved mountain climbing and martial arts practice. He was responsible for cooking during mountain climbs and attended Thai boxing training weekly in North Jakarta.

WR stated that the teachings in both JAD and NII were similar, with the

difference being that JAD's teachings focused on taking action, whereas NII's teachings were more theoretical. He was taught to be hostile toward the Indonesian government, viewing it as *ṭajūṭ*, and to consider outsiders as infidels, even refusing to pray behind an imam who was a state official.

Although WR acknowledged that he did not openly label outsiders as infidels, he admitted to holding such thoughts. He believed that since their group was still small, it was more important to gently invite outsiders rather than declare them as infidels to avoid difficulties in convincing them to join.

Due to his involvement in JAD's activities, WR was apprehended on July 9, 2018, along with 34 others by Densus 88 AT personnel. He was sentenced to 24 months in prison before being released on July 23, 2020 (WR, personal communication, February 25, 2021).

Informant 4: RS

RS, 41 years old, was arrested by Densus 88 AT for aiding the transportation of individuals intending to carry out jihad in the Philippines through the Tarakan-Nunukan route in North Kalimantan. Originally from Tasikmalaya, RS's education was limited to grade 2 at the city's State Junior High School due to the long and challenging journey from home to school, involving a river crossing.

Since 2000, RS has been residing in Cirebon, where he worked as a motorbike mechanic in a garage. He eventually became the repair shop manager and expanded his motorbike service business. However, his repair shop business declined as he became preoccupied with religious learning activities and involvement with the *nahy munkar* group.

RS's involvement in extremist Islamic groups began in 2005 after the birth of his first child. Feeling inadequate in imparting religious knowledge to his daughter, he sought to increase his understanding of religion. "How can I teach my child about religion if I lack religious knowledge myself?" pondered RS. He also frequently left obligatory prayers. Initially, RS joined the Asy-Syafi'i religious learning forum near his house, where he encountered members of the *Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid* (JAT) group who came to leave a charity box. Later, RS joined the *Gerakan Anti Pemurtadan dan Aliran Sesat* (GAPAS) group, which campaigned against religious groups considered 'deviant' and Christian missionary efforts. In 2013, several Islamic groups, including JAT, FPI, and Garda, formed the umbrella group Al-Manar.

RS was drawn to the members of the JAT group because of their appearance and demeanor, and he eventually decided to join them. He stopped attending the Asy-Syafi'i group's Quranic study and devoted himself to JAT's religious study forum at a mosque in front of Cirebon Mall.

At the JAT study group, RS learned about factors that could nullify one's status as a Muslim, and he seemed to accept the teachings without questioning them due to his lack of basic Islamic education. He also engaged in physical activities, preparing himself in case he was ever sent to war, although he did not have time to learn how to use firearms.

In 2015, RS was introduced to AB alias AF, the Cirebon region's JAD *amir*, by a person named R, who turned out to be a member of the JAD group. RS's involvement in JAD activities led to neglecting his livelihood, and he had to sell his possessions to sustain himself. Eventually, AB hired him to market in North Kalimantan's Tarakan and Nunukan areas, and he recruited a friend to assist him in selling.

The offer to sell was part of a JAD plot to facilitate the crossing of individuals heading to conflict zones abroad. However, the activity was short-lived as security forces discovered it, leading to the arrest of three people, including RS. He was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison but, due to remission, served only 2 years and 10 months (RS, personal communication, February 25, 2021).

Moderation of Religious Views of Former Terrorism Convicts

The four informants who participated in this study ranged in age from 20 to 43 years when detained for being involved in terrorist organizations and activities. Three of the four informants have only an elementary education. Only one of them had attended, but not completed, tertiary education. The four informants' religious education backgrounds are insufficient. This seems to be one of the main structural factors that affected the four informants' susceptibility to extreme religious views, such as their perception of Muslims outside of their group as unbelievers and their belief that the Indonesian government was *ṭagūt* since its laws and regulations did not follow Islamic law.

As mentioned earlier, many scholars consider radicalization to be complex and dynamic, with multiple avenues that people might take to become violent extremists, as opposed to perceiving it as a linear process (Hardy 2018; Jensen et al. 2020). The four informants for this study also took different pathways to radicalization. JAD members recruited SAP directly, while RS had joined a group that consistently campaigned against the apostasy and immorality before eventually joining JAT and then JAD. NY and WR's involvement in JAD stemmed from their prior membership in the NII group.

Concerning the emergence of the NII in the route of radicalization, the four informants confirmed the conclusions of another study (Alam et al. 2021), which found that in some circumstances, the NII acted as a breeding ground for perpetrators of violent extremism. This is also consistent with the findings of previous studies, which show that the exponents of recent violent extremism groups in Indonesia have ideological and biological ties with the exponents of *Darul Islam*, which was proclaimed on August 7, 1949 (Mubarak 2015; Solahudin 2011; Solahudin and McRae 2013). For more on *Darul Islam* and Kartosuwiryo, see, among others, Van Dijk (1981) and Formichi (2012).

One of the sources said that parts of the teachings obtained at JAD, such as the idea of the ten nullifiers of Islam and the doctrine of *takfiri*, had also been studied at NII. Although it does not overtly incite its members to commit acts of violence, the NII instills into its members the concept of rejection of the current law and political system in Indonesia. As a result, a former JAD commander in the East Priangan region described NII as a "kindergarten for would-be violent extremists" (AH, personal communication, November 20, 2021).

The four fish farming participants who became informants in this study claimed to have changed their socio-religious beliefs. They called their former religious beliefs *ghuluw* (exaggerated or extreme). Previously, they believed that the truth belonged only to their group and labeled Muslims who did not belong to their group as infidels; however, they now recognize that other groups have the right to claim the truth of their religious beliefs as well. The most crucial issue is that diverse Islamic groups do not acquire anti-other attitudes. Changes are also noticeable in religious practice. They used to only want to worship in congregation with members of their own group, but now they want to pray

in congregation with Muslims from other groups.

The informants reported changes in religious views and attitudes as a result of interactions with parties with more moderate views, both while still serving time in prison and after leaving prison. For example, WR witnessed terrorism offenders labeling each other as infidels while in prison. “Which group should I join if these two groups label each other as infidels?” WR paused. This prompted him to examine the reality of the religious viewpoint he advocated.

While in prison, WR frequently attended lectures by preachers with moderate religious beliefs, including former terrorism convicts from previous trials. Based on his interactions with the speakers, WR ultimately realized that the religious knowledge he had gained from the JAD religious learning group included extreme or exaggerated religious understandings (*ghuluw*).

This case demonstrates that while prisons can serve as places of radicalization (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict 2016), they actually can also be a place of deradicalization, providing opportunities for perpetrators of violent extremism to reflect on or reassess their views and attitudes. Egyptian al-Jamaah al-Islamiyah (JI) luminaries such as Najih Ibrahim, Karam Zuhdi, Usamah Ibrahim, and others have also gone through the process of reflection or reconsideration in prison. The results of this reflection were published in *Hurmat al-ghuluw f al-din wa takfir al-muslimin* [Prohibition of religious extremism and accusing Muslims of being unbelievers] (2004) by Usamah Ibrahim Hafiz and ‘Asim ‘Abd al-Majid Muḥammad.

In terms of religious understanding, the informants currently appear to interpret Islam through a *Salafi* lens, even though they no longer regard changes through

violence to practice Islamic doctrines as necessary. According to SAP, reciting the *qunut* in the Fajr prayer and reciting *zikir* together after the prayer is *bid’ah* (illegal ritual innovation). Meanwhile, NY acknowledges that he continues his religious studies by attending Salafi group lectures via social media.

The Salafi group, referred to as “neo-revivalist” by Rahman (1979) and “puritan-theological” by Saeed (2007), claims to be a group that refers to the views and practices of the Salaf generation, which lived two to three generations after the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. They frequently highlight efforts to rid society of beliefs and activities that are regarded as incompatible with Islam, such as saint adulation, sorcery, some Sufi practices, and so-called *bid’ah* practices. This group does not adhere to any particular school of thought regarding fundamental aspects of Islam. Yet, they generally adhere to the Hanbali school in terms of *furu’iyah* (other than fundamental affairs). They favor a literal interpretation of Islamic texts (the Qur’an and Sunnah) and have a conservative attitude toward women and the family.

The informants felt positive about the support activities implemented by Densus 88 AT despite being limited to efforts to rebuild the economic lives of former terrorism offenders’ families. Even if it was on a modest scale, they saw that this activity was more concrete than the activities promised to them by other government entities while they were still in prison.

Did this economic recovery activity affect the changes in the religious perspectives of former terrorists? The Densus 88 AT support programs for ex-terrorism offenders were not primarily designed to alter the religious beliefs of former terrorists. The participants in the activity are former terrorism convicts who have, to some extent, experienced religious

moderation while still in prison. However, this activity indirectly fosters a positive atmosphere, allowing terrorism ex-convicts to broaden their perspectives and develop pro-social attitudes.

Based on the study conducted by Muluk et al. (2020), cognitive flexibility and emotional communication play a crucial role in facilitating constructive dialogues about civic life, including discussions on religious concepts such as jihad and justification for violent acts. Conversely, without an open attitude, discussions on religious matters are unlikely to yield constructive outcomes. These findings align with previous research by scholars like El-Said (2015) and Kruglanski and Fishman (2009), who stress the significance of addressing the cognitive and emotional aspects of individuals involved in violent extremism before engaging in debates or interventions on religious issues.

Densus 88 AT's efforts to economically empower the families of ex-terror convicts should be complemented with additional activities aimed at providing these former terrorists with religious insight. This will help them to build resilience against the influence of extreme religious ideologies propagated by violent extremist groups, both online and offline. Furthermore, it is crucial to free them from the misleading logic of comparison that recruiters from these extremist networks often use to recruit members. These recruiters create false contrasts between God's laws and human laws or between prophets and political leaders, exploiting such comparisons to incite opposition to state laws and government authorities. One of the informants, WR, continued to rely on similar erroneous comparisons even after his involvement in extremist activities.

Considering that a significant number of terrorism convicts will soon complete their sentences, there is a crucial need to enhance collaboration among different

parties, such as government, educational, and religious institutions, in the fight against terrorism, including the treatment of ex-prisoners involved in terrorism cases. Densus 88 AT expects that the Ministry of Religious Affairs and other policymakers extend their support to this assistance program for former terrorists. For instance, the Ministry of Religious Affairs could send religious educators to collaborate as partners in religious studies for these individuals, and this initiative could be integrated into the ongoing economic empowerment activities (Satori, personal communication, April 24, 2021). Living values education was also proposed as an alternative approach to extremism prevention (Hidayatullah 2019).

However, up until the conclusion of the fieldwork, the authors did not observe any support from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to reinforce these empowerment activities. Without well-planned coordination among stakeholders, former terrorism convicts are susceptible to being lured back into networks of violent extremism. Therefore, it is vital to establish support groups that involve ex-terrorist convicts to aid in their recovery from the influence of violent extremist groups or networks they were once associated with.

It should be noted that this study has some limitations. First, it was geographically focused on one assistance program carried out by Densus 88 AT in the Cirebon Regency, West Java, even though the program participants came from various regencies, including Indramayu, Majalengka, and Kuningan. As a result, applying the study's findings to all deradicalization initiatives in Indonesia is impossible. Second, four of the seven ex-terrorist inmates who took part in the program served as informants for this study. We could not meet the remaining former terrorists during the fieldwork because program members switch between

participating in the fish rearing program every two to three weeks. Third, although Densus 88 AT ran a coffee plantation program for ex-terrorists in West Java's regencies of Subang and Tasikmalaya, this study only looked at the fish-rearing program. As a result, we were unable to determine whether various assistance programs had varying effects on the beliefs and attitudes of former terrorists. We anticipate being able to compare this research to various types of assistance programs in order to determine whether they have different effects on the shifts in the beliefs and attitudes of former terrorists.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that former terrorism convicts, who are now part of the fish farming group supported by Densus 88 AT, have undergone a shift from *takfiri* beliefs to more moderate religious perspectives. Presently, they show a greater interest in Salafi views, which do not advocate violence as a means to enforce Islamic law.

The moderation of the ex-convicts' socio-religious views can be attributed to their interactions with individuals considered influential figures among former terrorist organization members who held more moderate religious viewpoints. Additionally, exposure to alternative knowledge that challenges their previous beliefs and a focus on improving their family lives significantly influenced these shifts.

Densus 88 AT's deradicalization programs in the form of economic recovery activities for former terrorist offenders did not directly impact changes in their religious views. However, these activities contributed to fostering attitudes essential for engaging in interventions regarding religious beliefs, such as cultivating more flexible thinking and positive emotional attitudes. It is essential to involve religious

leaders and educators in supporting these economic recovery initiatives to foster a more moderate religious outlook among former terrorists.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend that the Ministry of Religious Affairs extend support to Densus 88 AT's programs, which encompass economic rehabilitation and family empowerment. This can be achieved by assigning Ministry of Religious Affairs officials, including religious counselors, priests, heads of sub-district Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), and heads of district/city Ministry of Religious Affairs, to carry out the several tasks, including developing a coordinated and collaborative program plan with Densus 88 AT to assist former terrorists within their respective working areas. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' officers involved in the assistance must be equipped with the necessary knowledge and expertise. Print and digital resources for mentorship and related activities need to be produced. Finally, there should be regular monitoring of the progress of the assistance programs as well as evaluations to assess the outcomes of the collaborative assistance activities, which can be used to plan subsequent programs.

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