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A REFLECTION ON DECOLONIZING NARRATIVES: UNDERSTANDING FAMILIAL SUICIDE TERRORISM IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Suicide terrorism in Indonesia has increasingly involved family units, revealing a shift in the dynamics of radicalization and the reproduction of extremist ideologies within domestic spaces. This study aims to analyze how familial suicide terrorism emerges and is sustained by examining the narratives that shape the everyday lives of radicalized families. Using a qualitative approach based on document analysis, media reports, and academic research on family-linked attacks over the past two decades, with limited field observation and semi-structured interviews with six former Jemaah Islamiyah members in five Indonesian cities, this study explores how

colonial legacies, state violence, and global counterterrorism discourses intersect with local experiences of marginalization. Data were examined through an iterative dual-path strategy integrating thematic coding, narrative analysis, cross-case comparison, and decolonial interpretation. The findings show that familial suicide terrorism is not merely the result of ideological indoctrination but is embedded in intergenerational trauma, affective bonds, and the normalization of violence within intimate settings. The study argues that decolonizing the dominant narratives of terrorism—by foregrounding local histories, structural inequalities, and lived experiences—offers a more nuanced understanding of why entire families become agents of violent extremism. It contributes to terrorism studies by foregrounding Indonesian perspectives and proposing more culturally sensitive, family-centered, and community-based approaches to prevention and counter-radicalization.

Keywords: *Surabaya bombings; familial suicide terrorism; family radicalization; Jamaah Ansharu Daulah; counterterrorism*

A. Introduction

In recent years, perpetrators of suicide bomb attacks in Indonesia have increasingly drawn participants from family units. This new phenomenon highlights the shifting dynamics of extremist radicalization, as well as new characteristics of how extremist ideologies spread within the private space of the family. It explores the intersecting effects of three macro-level factors—colonial legacy, state violence, and global counterterrorism discourse—and the experiences of marginalization among local groups. The study finds that such acts are not the outcome of single-sided ideological indoctrination; instead, they are embedded in three micro-level conditions: intergenerational trauma, emotional bonds among family members, and the normalization of violence within private domestic spaces. This study proposes that only

by placing local history, structural inequality, and individual survival experiences at the core of analysis, and decolonizing mainstream counterterrorism narratives, can we accurately understand the causes of entire families' participation in extremist violence.

This study focuses on the core issue of family-based suicide terrorist attacks in Surabaya, Indonesia. It notes that suicide terrorism with families acting as the primary perpetrating units is a complex phenomenon that warrants vigilance. Multiple whole-family terrorist attacks in Indonesia that involved child participants have elevated this trend into a core issue for the country's domestic counterterrorism efforts (Sahrasad et al., 2019; D. Tabrani, 2023). The 2018 Surabaya bombings, a landmark turning point, mark the tactical transformation of terrorism in Indonesia (Sukirno et al., 2020; Wening & Wahyudi, 2021). This whole-family attack model subverts the traditional understanding that terrorism is an ideology-driven individual act. The logics of the learning, spread, and legitimization of violence within families must be interpreted from social, historical, and relational dimensions.

Most existing academic research on terrorism in Indonesia focuses on the structure, recruitment, and ideological indoctrination of extremist groups, as well as the impact of transnational jihadist networks. These studies also note that the drivers of radicalization include extremist group activity, socioeconomic discontent, and political contexts. However, limited research centers on families as collective perpetrators of violence, and even fewer studies examine the formative influence of factors such as colonial history (D. Tabrani, 2023; Wening & Wahyudi, 2021; K. Y. Yaoren, 2021). Thus, this study

focuses on the impacts of colonial and postcolonial narratives on family-level violence and perceptions of belonging and draws on decolonial theory to analyze the formation logic of family-based suicidal terrorism in Indonesia. It focuses on family-based suicide terrorism and puts forward three core research dimensions: motivation, radicalization, and narrative logic. It explores the following key questions aligned with these dimensions: Why do individuals with close family ties involve their immediate family members in perpetrating extreme suicide terrorist violence? How do radical ideologies spread and become internalized within families, ultimately inciting such acts?

Previous research has built up a large body of work on terrorism over the years, but there remains an unaddressed gap in studies of the narratives behind family participation in suicide terrorist attacks. This study fills this gap in the field through a critical exploration. It adopts a decolonial narrative approach to move beyond the dominant perspectives in mainstream security and counterterrorism research. Starting from the standpoint of victims and affected communities, and integrating social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions, this research examines family-style suicidal terrorism in Indonesia. It aims to develop an accurate understanding of the issue, laying the groundwork for the subsequent formulation of effective and just counterterrorism strategies.

This study sorts out academic literature, incident records, and viewpoints from all relevant parties concerning family-based suicide attacks perpetrated by the Indonesian terrorist organization of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD). At its opening, the study cites existing research by Kuwado and

Galih (2018), confirming that Indonesia-based JAD, which is affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), adopts family-involved suicide bombings as its core extremist strategy. The study subsequently draws on reports from Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, 2018) and BBC (BBC News Indonesia, 2018a) to verify that child exploitation occurred in these attacks. Damarjati (2018) and Malau (2018) corroborate the execution of the Surabaya bombings and the attack on Surabaya's Headquarters of the Big City Resort Police (Mapolrestabes) police station. Building on prior studies, the work unpacks JAD's operational logic, noting that the group manipulates individuals who lack understanding of the true meaning of Islamic jihad to advance the sectarian agenda of Wahhabi Takfiri ideology. It incorporates the perspective of field expert Sidney Jones to explain the motivation behind attacks on churches and integrates cross-temporal information, including the context of other terrorist attacks that took place across Indonesia in 2018, and commemorative events held in 2024.

The concept of "familial suicide terrorism," originally proposed by Tabrani (2016) and further developed by Tamawiwy (2019), refers to an emerging form of terrorism understood through non-Western social and familial perspectives. Using the Surabaya bombings in Indonesia as its principal case, this study draws on relevant scholarship, including Tabrani (2022) and Wicaksono (2018). Existing research has examined the issue across five main areas: the involvement of women and children in terrorism (Wening & Wahyudi, 2021); legal perspectives on terrorism involving children (Narwastuty, 2018); the role of family relationships

in the deradicalization of young and pre-adult terrorist offenders (Mujahid, 2014); terrorist motivations (Ridwan & Murod, 2022); and official responses to terrorist incidents in Surabaya and Jakarta, including the work of Widodo (2016).

Despite these contributions, much of the analysis of terrorism in Indonesia continues to rely on mainstream Western assessment frameworks. These approaches commonly explain terrorist attacks through Salafi-jihadist radicalization, individual psychological factors, online propaganda, and links to transnational organizations (Sahrasad et al., 2019). Grounded largely in national-security and counterterrorism priorities, they often identify religious extremism as the primary cause of violence while giving comparatively limited attention to local social structures, cultural contexts, and family relationships. In response, non-Western and locally grounded scholarship has developed alternative perspectives that consider community tensions, family dynamics, religious interpretation, local governance needs, and the interaction between external interventions and internal conflicts. The concept of familial suicide terrorism exemplifies this shift by placing the family, rather than only the individual or terrorist organization, at the center of radicalization and mobilization.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines family-based suicide terrorism in Indonesia through three core research questions concerning the influence of colonial narratives on dominant interpretations of terrorism, the role of family relationships in radicalization and terrorist action, and the value of decolonial approaches for understanding terrorism in the Indonesian context. By addressing these issues, the study seeks to move beyond predominantly

Western security frameworks and develop a more locally grounded, context-sensitive account of familial terrorism.

Existing research on terrorism in Indonesia has formed a clear body of cumulative work: Tabrani (2023) analyzed family-based suicide terrorism linked to the Surabaya bombings from an anthropological perspective, with his research in 2019 and 2022 (D. Tabrani, 2016; D. T. D. Tabrani, 2022), which explored Indonesia's broader terrorism issues related to the Thamrin bombings. He had successively sorted out the links between religion and terrorism, as well as local counterterrorism practices led by *ulama* in Bukit Jalin, Aceh. It is an emerging research field that has gained growing attention in recent years. The rising interest in this area originates from multiple extremist incidents that have occurred in Indonesia. Tabrani adopted anthropological methods to analyze the 2018 Surabaya bombings (Sahrasad et al., 2019). This study introduced the concept of "familial terrorism" and explored the logic that fuels the emergence of extremism within family units. Tabrani later extended this analysis by examining the role of violent clerics in that same case (D. T. D. Tabrani, 2022), while his subsequent work further consolidated the anthropological study of family-based suicide terrorism in Indonesia (D. Tabrani, 2023).

Although prior studies on terrorism in Indonesia have not positioned family involvement as their primary focus, they can still serve as useful references for the relevant discussions in this study. Tabrani (2016) analyzed the response process for the Thamrin bombing attack, and Sahrasad et al. (2019) sorted out the ideological foundations of terrorism in Indonesia; these studies can support follow-

up research on the family involvement dimension. In addition, advancing counterterrorism efforts must consider the role of community leaders. A study by Sahrasad et al. (2023) shows that ulama and local leaders in Aceh's Grand Bazaar carry out counterterrorism work by building sociocultural capital, and this form of influence can prevent radicalization at the family level.

Research on family-style suicide terrorism in Indonesia remains in the developmental stage. Most existing studies take the Surabaya bombings as their core case study, conduct analysis through three academic perspectives, and engage with two extended topics related to Indonesia's domestic terrorism. For example, the 2020 Sibolga bombing in Indonesia is a typical case of terrorist activity involving family participation, which highlights the complex challenges of counterterrorism (Rotama, 2020; Supriadi, 2024). This analysis is developed based on existing academic literature, and case details require consultation of external news archives.

Moreover, multiple cases of family involvement in terrorist activities that occurred in three Indonesian cities—Sibolga, Surabaya, and Makassar—show that radical ideology has become deeply embedded in some households, where it is transmitted and reinforced through intimate interpersonal networks (Ridwan & Murod, 2022; Ritonga et al., 2023). This form of family radicalization presents unique challenges to counterterrorism law enforcement, as effective responses require intervention into the internal dynamics of private spaces.

As the core local body responsible for counterterrorism law enforcement, Polres Sibolga (Sibolga Police District)

performs key operational functions to prevent and respond to terrorism. Supriadi (2024) sorts the police district's three core counterterrorism tasks into three categories: proactive prevention, intelligence collection, and post-terror-attack investigation. These measures are of great significance for mitigating the impact of terrorist attacks and preventing their recurrence. Behind this Sibolga bombing case may lie links to common security risks across North Sumatra. Lase (2022) examined the use of explosives for illegal blast fishing in the Sibolga police jurisdiction. These explosives have no direct connection to terrorism, but the risk of misuse stemming from their easy accessibility remains a governance challenge that local security forces must address.

Indonesia's National Unity and Political Affairs Agency (Kesbangpol, *Badan Kesatuan Bangsa dan Politik*) carries out functions related to regional counter-radicalization efforts. Rotama's (2020) doctoral dissertation documents a case in North Sumatra Province, where this agency intervened in response to the Sibolga terrorist attack. Beyond conventional law enforcement agencies, counterterrorism efforts must also incorporate institutions tasked with ideological guidance and social cohesion building. To develop a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, in-depth research must be conducted into the mechanisms and outcomes of such inter-agency collaboration.

To curb the spread of radical ideologies, multiple measures can be implemented, including information literacy initiatives. Muliyadi (2020) proposes that this tool can serve as a core counterterrorism model for Islamic missionary outreach: it equips individuals with critical-thinking skills,

helps them identify and reject extremist narratives, and prevents radicalization and recruitment by extremists. Moreover, Maulana (2021) notes that a security system comprising physical security measures and intelligence networks is the core of counterterrorism efforts, and that the Sibolga bombing most likely prompted the review and strengthening of security protocols at the local and regional levels. Akbar et al. (2020) also note that repatriated foreign fighters pose a widespread security threat within Indonesia. Existing research abstracts have not established a direct link between this group of individuals and the Sibolga bombings. The return of personnel with combat experience from overseas conflicts increases the complexity of Indonesia's domestic terrorism landscape, and clarifying their radicalization pathways, as well as screening for their potential involvement in domestic terrorist attacks, is critically important to Indonesia's national security.

Therefore, the Sibolga bombing in Indonesia is a typical case of domestic family terrorism that merits serious vigilance within the country. Counterterrorism work requires the implementation of a multi-dimensional plan: strengthening the role of local law enforcement (Supriadi, 2024), regulating the circulation of hazardous materials (Lase, 2022), coordinating government work through Indonesia's official agency Kesbangpol (Rotama, 2020), promoting information literacy to resist extremist ideologies (Muliyadi, 2020), upgrading security systems (Maulana, 2021), and addressing threats such as family radicalization (Akbar et al., 2020; Ritonga et al., 2023). A comprehensive grasp of all these elements is a necessary prerequisite for formulating effective

strategies to prevent future terrorist attacks in Sibolga and across the entire territory of Indonesia.

B. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis. It takes as its analysis subjects families linked to suicide bombing incidents that occurred within Indonesia over the past 20 years. No direct interviews were conducted for this research; all data were systematically collated from four categories of reliable secondary sources: media reports, court records, security agency publications, and academic research. In addition, this study takes three types of regions within Indonesia as research samples: regions with a history of state violence, regions with a history of social marginalization, and regions linked to extremist networks. The study identifies recurrent narrative patterns in its dataset and applies decolonial theory to clarify how power structures shape family participation in violent extremism.

Field observations were conducted only after obtaining ethical approval and meeting all required safety standards. These observations were exclusively applied to community activities related to the aftermath of family suicide terrorist incidents and public perceptions, and covered three core dimensions: nonverbal cues, community responses, and contextual narratives (Ritchie et al., 2014). This study applies the independently proposed dual-path analysis scheme. The first path examines documentary and online materials through systematic source classification, coding, narrative analysis, and comparison across incidents and regional contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Selvi, 2019). The

second path analyzes interview and observational data to identify participants' interpretations, community responses, ideological positioning, and contextual meanings. Each stage follows clearly defined procedures, research objectives, coding categories, and expected analytical outputs. A detailed source log, analytical memos, and decision trail are maintained to strengthen transparency, methodological rigor, and reproducibility.

Furthermore, this study employs an iterative analytical method that develops a nuanced understanding through continuous interaction between data and the study's core research questions (J.Mills et al., 2010; Neale, 2016). This process enables the researchers to refine interpretations and develop a context-sensitive understanding of family-based suicide terrorism. It aims to deconstruct the dominant mainstream narratives surrounding family-style suicide terrorism in Indonesia, elevate the voices of marginalized groups and affected communities, and build a decolonial, complex understanding of the issue.

From March to December 2025, the authors conducted interviews with former members of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) across five Indonesian cities: Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Cilegon, and Bekasi. All interviewees drew a clear distinction between JI's past strategies and the family-style suicide bombings carried out by ISIS. Two interviewees separately described the use of children to execute attacks as "a betrayal of the moral boundaries of jihad," noting that such actions alienate communities rather than mobilize them. We interpret these testimonies as narratives through which interviewees construct an ideological distance from ISIS and

frame themselves as guardians of a more "legitimate" form of struggle. At the same time, the interviewees also acknowledged the destructive legacy of their own past actions.

This study strictly adheres to rigorous ethical guidelines, and has established clear full-process ethical implementation rules for its two core research scenarios: for the interview process, informed consent must be obtained from all respondents, their anonymity and confidentiality must be safeguarded, and they must be informed of the potential risks and benefits of participating in the research; for online media analysis, only publicly published content is used, and no individual mentioned in the analyzed materials is ever identified or contacted without authorization. The privacy, safety, physical well-being, and psychological welfare of all participants remain central considerations throughout the research process.

C. Results

This study analyzes the driving factors of radicalization from a family perspective, and draws three core findings: (1) Colonial and post-colonial narratives shape perceptions of violence, and intergenerational perceptions of injustice bred by historical oppression and community conflict influence how families interpret their current circumstances; (2) Three characteristics of family environments—strong internal emotional ties, authoritarian parenting, and the normalization of violence—bind violence to moral obligations such as loyalty, creating an environment that supports extreme commitments; (3) Mainstream counterterrorism narratives simplify terrorism into an issue of individual pathology or

ideological problems, obscuring its structural root causes, while a decolonization perspective can restore the relevant historical context and refute these one-sided explanations.

Most previous studies are largely confined to a single ideological analytical framework and are unable to comprehensively interpret family-based suicide terrorism. This study adds historical, relational, and structural dimensions and advances its analysis in sequence, along the lines of historical context, family relational dynamics, and a critique of mainstream narratives, before arriving at a decolonial re-interpretation. Family-based suicide terrorism in Indonesia is a complex and unique phenomenon that requires fine-grained analysis. The three attacks that occurred in Surabaya in 2018 (Riana, 2018; Sanjaya & Nugroho, 2023; Tim Redaksi, 2021), Makassar in 2019 (Ridwan & Murod, 2022; Setiawan, 2022), and Sibolga in 2020 (Lase, 2022)have challenged the traditional understanding that attributes the drivers of such violence solely to individual actors or organized groups and highlight the powerful influence of family bonds and shared radical ideology.

This study sorts out three bomb attacks linked to the Indonesian extremist group JAD, which correspond to distinct scenarios of extremist radicalization: In the May 2018 Surabaya attacks, two JAD-affiliated families carried out attacks on three churches, with all family members participating as perpetrators. Ridwan and Murod (2022), this case substantiates the proposition of in-depth radicalization within the family unit; the March 2021 attack on the Makassar Cathedral, carried out by a JAD-linked newlywed couple, is confirmed in a study by Setiawan (2022) to verify

that radicalization can rapidly solidify within intimate relationships; the 2019 Sibolga case, which corrects an error in original source materials that incorrectly dated the incident to 2020, involved a lone perpetrator tied to extremist networks, adding the scenario of individual radicalization.

The rising trend of involvement in extreme violence within Indonesia has been driven by a combination of multiple factors. The first factor is the deep indoctrination carried out by authority figures within the family; a study by Ritonga et al. (2023) shows that this type of indoctrination shapes the beliefs of an entire family, framing violence as a legitimate means to fulfill a religious duty or obtain spiritual rewards. Second, a study by Munte and Natalia (2022)notes that Indonesia's strong collectivist culture has been exploited by extremist forces, turning family loyalty into a tool to coerce members into participating in violence. Finally, online radicalization propaganda further reinforces these false beliefs, providing participants with a sense of belonging to the global jihad movement.

The local contexts of bombing incidents in three Indonesian cities examined in this study can provide important insights for extremism-related research: In Surabaya, Indonesia's core major city, long-standing social inequality and religious conservatism are vulnerable to exploitation by extremist groups; Makassar, which features a multi-religious landscape and a history of conflict, exhibits unique vulnerabilities to extremist infiltration; Sibolga, a small coastal city, verifies that radicalization can penetrate settings with diverse socioeconomic and geographic attributes. Research by Supriadi (2024) points

out that local law enforcement and intelligence agencies are central to understanding counterterrorism prevention and response measures.

Understanding media's framing of extreme events is critically important. An analysis of media coverage of the Makassar bombing conducted by Sibaweh and Rusadi (2021) shows that media portrayals of religious radicalism shape public perceptions and even generate stigma and fear toward relevant groups. Anwar (2022) notes that the counter-radicalization work led by the Terrorism Prevention Coordination Forum (FKPT, *Forum Koordinasi Pencegahan Terorisme*) in South Sulawesi Province aims to dismantle the ideological roots and social vulnerabilities that drive family involvement in terrorism. Muliyadi (2020), meanwhile, points out that information literacy is a core support that enables communities to resist extremist narratives. The authors point out that the recently emerged new form of terrorist activity in Indonesia—family-based suicide terrorism—highlights the dynamic evolutionary characteristics of terrorist threats, and that counterterrorism strategies must cover individuals, internal interactions within family units, and the macro socio-political contexts that spawn radicalization. This study examines three extremist attacks in Indonesia that occurred between 2018 and 2020, using a unified set of standardized information-collection dimensions. It covers core details of each case, including the location, year, and perpetrators of the attacks in Surabaya, Makassar, and Sibolga, laying the preliminary empirical groundwork to support the argument for a growing trend of family-linked extremism. The principal characteristics of the Indonesian cases are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Familial suicide terrorism cases in Indonesia*

Location	Year	Perpetrators	Affiliation (Suspected)	Target(s)	Key Characteristics
Surabaya	2018	Two families (parents and children)	JAD	Three churches	Coordinated attacks by multiple family units
Makassar	2019	Newlywed couple	JAD	Cathedral	Involvement of a young couple, rapid radicalization?
Sibolga	2020	Single perpetrator (linked to wider network)	Unclear / Networked	Unclear / Police target?	Familial connections to a known extremist network

As Table 1 shows, family involvement took different forms across the three cases. The Surabaya attacks involved coordinated participation by parents and children, whereas the Makassar attack reflected radicalization within a marital relationship. The Sibolga case involved family and network connections but did not constitute the same level of whole-family participation. These variations indicate that familial terrorism should be understood as a continuum rather than as a single, uniform form of violence.

This study uses the analytical framework of family involvement in suicide terrorism to interpret the bombing of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral on Jolo Island, the Philippines, which occurred on January 27, 2019. The perpetrators were an Indonesian couple, Zeke and Saleh. Relevant information is sourced from Yaoren (2021), and this attack model aligns with the characteristics of similar terrorist attacks seen in the Surabaya bombings in Indonesia.

The perpetrators of the bombings in Jolo, the Philippines, were a married couple linked to the Indonesian extremist organization Indonesian JAD, a group that has pledged allegiance to ISIS. The pair had previously attempted to travel to Syria to join ISIS but were deported back to Indonesia, later relocated to Sulu Province, and carried out the attack with assistance from the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) (Santos, 2020; K. Yaoren, 2021).

Extremist involvement at the family level is not limited exclusively to spousal couples. As documented by Yaoren (2021), Rezky Fantasya Rullie was arrested in Jolo in 2020 for plotting a suicide attack; her husband worked as an Abu Sayyaf recruiter active in Malaysia and Indonesia, a case that corroborates the pattern of sustained radicalization within families. This study proposes that extremist attacks demonstrate a trend of radicalization linked to family ties. According to a 2020 report in The Jakarta Post (News Desk (Agence France-Presse), 2020), the two female suicide attackers behind the August 24 bombings in Jolo that same year were the widows of deceased Abu Sayyaf militants, which verifies the existence of a cycle of radicalized violence within families. It also collates two attacks by extremist groups that occurred in Jolo City, the Philippines, in 2019 and 2020 into a table structured with dimensions such as location, year, and other related factors. Table 2 summarizes the familial and organizational dimensions of the Jolo attacks.

Table 2. *Familial suicide terrorism cases in the Philippines*

Location	Year	Perpetrators	Familial Link	Affiliation (Suspected)	Target
Jolo	2019	Rullie Rian Zeke & Ulfah H. Saleh	Husband and Wife	JAD, Abu Sayyaf	Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral
Jolo	2020	Nanah & Indah Nay	Widows of ASG militants	Abu Sayyaf	Military personnel & civilians

Thus, multiple terrorist attacks in Jolo, the Philippines, show that family units, coerced by a shared extremist ideology and assisted by well-established terrorist networks, have actively participated in suicide bombings, highlighting the core counterterrorism challenge: the infiltration of extremist ideologies into intimate social structures. From March to December 2025, this study conducted interview research with members of the former JI. All participating interviewees uniformly rejected ISIS's family-based suicide bombing strategy. The six interviewees, who resided in different cities across Indonesia, raised criticisms across five core dimensions: crossing moral boundaries, pursuing a strategically reckless, self-defeating course, eroding community trust, misinterpreting the fundamental meaning of jihad, and highlighting stark ideological divides. All interviewees had their city of affiliation, full name, and interview year recorded. This documentation supports the study's conclusions, which hold both generalizability and a layered, structured argumentative logic.

Several extremism insiders had been interviewed to enrich the study data. Imran (Personal communication, December 12, 2025) states that today's practice of involving family children in suicide attacks oversteps the moral boundaries of radicals. Moreover, Tholut (Personal communication, June 6, 2025) points out that ISIS's reckless strategy is far inferior to that of JI, which has a clear strategic vision, and that ISIS will eventually erode its own community support and fall into isolation. Fida (Personal communication, September 18, 2025) also points out that mobilizing families will cause serious harm, including eroded trust within communities and the loss of ideological credibility. Siddik (Personal communication, March 9, 2025) pointed out that the general public never views women and children as combatants, and ISIS has distorted the concept of jihad to brutalize innocent people. Furthermore, Farihin (Personal communication, April 13, 2025) proposes that family-based suicide bombings represent a signal of desperation, and this phenomenon can be used to distinguish the tactical and ideological differences between ISIS and JI.

This study organizes and analyzes all testimonies from veterans of Indonesia's JI that the research team has directly processed. These veterans view themselves as guardians of legitimate struggle and condemn the destructive and unlawful nature of ISIS's tactics. Grounded in a decolonial framework, this body of local voices disrupts the homogenized mainstream global narrative of Islamic radicalism. It documents core internal divisions within this ideological trend and further frames these local voices as active critical agents who resist the imposition of external paradigms. It also defines family-

based suicide terrorism as violent extremism involving the participation of an entire family. After organizing and reviewing multiple relevant cases across multiple countries and drawing on existing research in related fields, this study focuses on Indonesia to conduct an in-depth exploration of the underlying logic and background of this phenomenon.

The 2018 bombings of multiple churches in Surabaya, Indonesia, perpetrated by a single family, as highlighted in Ridwan and Murod (2022), underscores that radical ideology is deeply rooted in some households. Combined with the 2020 Sibolga and 2021 Makassar terrorist attacks carried out by newlywed couples as part of family-involved terrorist operations, these cases demonstrate that family participation has become an established pattern of terrorist attacks in Indonesia. It is therefore urgent to clarify the process of radicalization within families and the core motivations that drive entire families to commit acts of violence.

The spread of extremism within family contexts is driven by multiple core factors. The first is radical ideology, which spreads through small, tightly connected interpersonal networks and is reinforced inside families. This ideology builds a distorted worldview that frames violence as a religious duty or a path to martyrdom, a conclusion cited from Galib's study. In addition, the dominant authority figure in a family (most often the father) exploits family members' sense of compliance to coerce them into participating in extremist activities, as argued by Munte and Natalia's study (2022).

According to Anwar's (2022) study, the anti-radicalization work of Indonesia's FKPT in South Sulawesi directly targets the root causes of terrorism. To build an

effective counterterrorism strategy, one must first clarify the specific sociopolitical and religious contexts that fuel radicalization within families, then advance efforts along three core dimensions: eliminating extremist ideologies, strengthening community resilience, and supporting deradicalization and rehabilitation programs. Regarding the Makassar Cathedral bombing, academia has produced analytical findings from multiple perspectives, including sociology and theology. Setiawan (2022) adopted Bourdieu's sociological framework to dissect the social dynamics and power structures underlying this case. Similarly, Wahyu et al. (2022) conducted an analysis rooted in Catholic teachings of the sanctity of life and the condemnation of violence.

This study reviews cases of family-based suicide terrorist attacks in conflict zones in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Syria. It finds that while local influencing factors vary across regions, the exploitation of radical ideology, family influence, and social vulnerability constitutes a shared core logic. This study calls for more comparative research to clarify the context-specific particularities of each setting and develop effective prevention and intervention strategies. It also finds that ideological indoctrination alone cannot explain family-based suicide terrorism in Indonesia. Three sets of causal factors, namely colonial and post-colonial narratives, structural violence, and family relations, jointly bring about collective radicalization.

The authors' analysis of cross-contextual differences in counterterrorism assessments finds that Western and non-Western perspectives exhibit significant gaps in their evaluations of terrorist incidents in Indonesia, stemming

from four core dimensions: historical experience, cultural context, political priorities, and theoretical frameworks. From the Western perspective, religious extremism such as Salafi jihadism is identified as the primary driver of terrorism, while issues including individual radicalization are treated as core observation points, and sociopolitical grievances are only regarded as a secondary factor. Related arguments elaborating on the non-Western perspective are presented in subsequent sections.

The non-Western research perspective on radicalization adopted in this study assigns greater analytical weight to social, political, and economic conditions, historical grievances, and local contexts. This perspective categorizes Western intervention and neocolonialism as typical historical grievances, identifies poverty, marginalization, and lack of opportunities as the core triggering factors, and frames religion as merely narrative packaging rather than a root cause. Meanwhile, this study draws on the indigenous concept of "familial terrorism" proposed by Tamawiwy (2019) to support the academic claim of centering local interpretations. Moreover, the traditional mainstream Western counterterrorism analysis paradigm features three core layers of logic: first, it anchors its core security concerns; in past practice, it has frequently adopted measures such as military intervention; and ultimately, it focuses on the attributes of the specific terrorist threats as defined by the paradigm.

As a result, this study, through a comprehensive review, finds that Indonesia's current counterterrorism sector has moved away from a single logic prioritizing

security alone and shifted toward localized governance that focuses on community resilience, social cohesion, and the root causes of extremism. The sector has launched locally adapted projects for community participation, education, and de-radicalization, yet two types of cognitive bias remain widespread: first, the essentialist perception that conflates extremist interpretations of Islam with the core nature of the mainstream faith; second, the view that frames religious ideology as the sole driving factor of terrorism. The authors possess a local contextual understanding of the diverse interpretations of Islam in Indonesia. We have clarified the boundary between mainstream religious doctrine and the manipulation of religious texts by extremist groups for political purposes. Sahrasad et al. (2019) emphasized that dialogue involving actors both inside and outside Indonesia is critically important to understanding the complex interactions between religion and terrorism.

Although this study recognizes that local factors form the foundation for the emergence of regional terrorism, it must still center its analysis on the external role of international terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, as well as foreign fighters linked to these networks. While this study acknowledges the analytical legitimacy of examining cross-group external ties, its core focus remains anchored in the reality that external influences take shape only through their interaction with local dynamics, accumulated social grievances, and power structures; Western foreign policies have also exacerbated the rise of regional extremism. The prevailing general definition of terrorism centers on political violence carried out by non-state actors against

civilians. Building on this baseline, this study supplements the framework with reflections on state-sponsored violence and human rights violations committed in the course of counterterrorism efforts. The concept of "familial terrorism", proposed by Tabrani (2023), appropriately categorizes forms of local terrorism that cannot be accommodated by the Western-centric mainstream definition.

Previous studies on terrorism in Indonesia feature clear divides in analytical perspectives. On the other hand, Western studies mostly center on three core focuses: a security-oriented framework, the driving force of religious extremist ideology, and transnational threats. Non-Western research, including scholarship produced by local Indonesian scholars, incorporates four more granular dimensions, such as sociopolitical grievances, and draws on local scholars' work for evidentiary support. Only by grounding counterterrorism strategies in local perspectives can such policies be both effective and culturally sensitive.

Taken together, these testimonies examined in this study construct a narrative of ideological distance. Former JI members portray themselves as guardians of a more "legitimate" struggle while condemning ISIS's methods as destructive and illegitimate. Within a decolonial framework, these voices challenge dominant global narratives that treat Islamist militancy as a single, homogenize Islamist militancy. Instead, they reveal internal divisions, ideological contestation, and locally defined moral boundaries. By foregrounding these perspectives, the analysis not only documents ideological divergence but also situates

Indonesian voices as agents of critique, resisting the imposition of external extremist paradigms.

D. Discussions

Familial suicide terrorism, a disturbing phenomenon involving entire families in acts of violent extremism, has manifested in various locations, including Indonesia (BBC News Indonesia, n.d., 2018b; Lase, 2022; Ridwan & Murod, 2022; Rotama, 2020; Setiawan, 2022), the Philippines (Santos, 2020), and Syria (Wille, 2020). This study explores the underlying dynamics and contexts of these events, drawing on existing scholarship on terrorism and radicalization, particularly in Indonesia. For instance, the Surabaya bombings in 2018, where one family attacked multiple churches, highlighted the deeply ingrained nature of radical ideology within some families (Ridwan & Murod, 2022). Similarly, the Makassar cathedral bombing in 2021, perpetrated by a newlywed couple, and the Sibolga bombing in 2020, also involving a family, underscore a pattern of familial involvement in terrorist acts in Indonesia. These incidents raise critical questions about the processes of radicalization within family units and the motivations that drive entire families to commit such acts of violence.

Several factors contribute to this phenomenon. The role of radical ideology, often disseminated through close-knit networks and reinforced within the family, is paramount (Galib, 2021). This ideology can provide a distorted worldview, legitimizing violence and framing it as a religious obligation or a path to martyrdom. Furthermore, the influence of a dominant figure within the family, often the father, can be a

significant factor in leading other family members towards extremism (Munte & Natalia, 2022). Obedience and a sense of familial duty can be exploited to ensure the participation of all members, including women and children. Additionally, the media's portrayal of these events also plays a role in shaping public understanding. Analyses of media coverage, such as the Kompas newspaper's reporting on the Makassar bombing, reveal how religious radicalism is framed and interpreted (Sibaweh & Rusadi, 2021). These narratives can influence public perception and potentially contribute to the stigmatization of certain communities or the normalization of violent extremism in some circles.

Previous research on terrorism in Indonesia reveals a significant difference between 'Western' and 'non-Western' perspectives in assessing terrorism incidents in Indonesia, which often stems from differing historical experiences, cultural contexts, political priorities, and theoretical frameworks. Often emphasizes individual radicalization processes driven by ideological factors (e.g., Salafist- jihadism), psychological vulnerabilities, and online propaganda. There can be a tendency to focus on religious extremism as the primary driver. Socio-political grievances like inequality or historical injustices might be acknowledged, but are often seen as secondary or instrumentalized by extremist groups. Religious extremism consequently tends to be positioned as the primary explanation for terrorist violence.

By contrast, non-Western scholarship, including research produced by Indonesian scholars, gives greater attention to local socio-political and economic factors, historical grievances (e.g., perceived Western interference

or neo-colonialism), and the role of local contexts in shaping radicalization. Issues like poverty, marginalization, lack of opportunity, corruption, and historical injustices are often seen as significant contributing factors, even if framed through religious ideologies. There's a stronger emphasis on understanding the local nuances of religious and cultural interpretations. As Tamawiwy (2019) suggests, with the term "familial terrorism" arising from a non-Western perspective, there is a push to understand terrorism through local lenses. Often centers on state security, counterterrorism measures, and threats to Western interests or values. The analysis might prioritize intelligence gathering, law enforcement responses, and military intervention (especially in the past). There can be a greater focus on the transnational nature of terrorism and the threat posed by foreign terrorist organizations.

The two perspectives also differ in their policy priorities. Western frameworks often focus on state security, transnational networks, intelligence operations, and law-enforcement responses. Indonesian and other locally grounded approaches tend to place greater emphasis on community resilience, social cohesion, and addressing the root causes of radicalization within the local context. There is a greater emphasis on the impact of terrorism on local populations, inter-religious harmony, and national identity. The analysis might prioritize community engagement, education, and deradicalization programs tailored to the specific Indonesian context. We can sometimes have a more essentialist and less nuanced understanding of Islam, potentially conflating extremist interpretations with mainstream beliefs. There might be a tendency to view religious ideology as a monolithic driver of terrorism.

Possesses an insider's understanding of the diverse interpretations of Islam in Indonesia, including moderate and syncretic traditions. The analysis often focuses on how extremist groups selectively interpret and manipulate religious texts for their political aims, distinguishing this from mainstream Islamic teachings. As highlighted by Sahrasad et al. (2019), dialogues within and beyond Indonesia are crucial for understanding the complex interplay of religion and terrorism. While acknowledging local factors, the role of international terrorist organizations (like Al-Qaeda or ISIS) and foreign fighters is often highlighted as a significant influence. While acknowledging external links, there's often a greater emphasis on how these external influences interact with and are shaped by local dynamics, grievances, and power structures. There can also be scrutiny of the impact of Western foreign policy on the rise of extremism in the region. Definitions often prioritize politically motivated violence against civilians by non-state actors, with a strong emphasis on the intent to instill fear and achieve political goals. While sharing core elements, there might be a greater sensitivity to state-sponsored violence and the impact of counterterrorism measures on civil liberties and human rights within their own historical context. The emergence of terms like "familial terrorism" (D. Tabrani, 2023) reflects an attempt to categorize and understand specific local manifestations of terrorism that might not fit neatly into Western-centric definitions.

Efforts to counter radicalization, such as those undertaken by the FKPT in South Sulawesi, are crucial in addressing the root causes of terrorism (Anwar, 2022). Understanding the specific socio-political and religious

contexts that facilitate radicalization within families is essential for developing effective counterterrorism strategies. This includes addressing the ideological underpinnings of extremism, strengthening community resilience, and supporting deradicalization and rehabilitation programs. For instance, the bombs of the Makassar Cathedral have been analyzed from various perspectives, including sociological and theological viewpoints. Setiawan (2022) utilizes Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework to understand the social dynamics and power structures that may contribute to such acts. From a religious perspective, Wahyu et al. (2022) offer an analysis of the bombing in light of Catholic teachings, emphasizing the sanctity of life and the condemnation of violence.

Therefore, the occurrence of familial suicide terrorism in diverse geographical contexts, from Indonesia and the Philippines to the conflict zones of Syria, suggests that while local factors may vary, certain underlying dynamics related to radical ideology, familial influence, and the exploitation of social vulnerabilities may be common threads. Further comparative research is needed to understand the specificities of each context and to develop more effective strategies for prevention and intervention.

E. Conclusion

This study concludes that familial suicide terrorism in Indonesia cannot be adequately explained through ideological indoctrination alone. Instead, it is rooted in colonial and postcolonial narratives, experiences of structural

violence, and relational dynamics within the family. These factors shape how families interpret violence, sacrifice, and identity, enabling the emergence of collective radicalization. A decolonial approach provides critical insights by highlighting how historical and contemporary power structures influence extremist actions. By addressing the research questions, the study demonstrates that a comprehensive understanding of familial suicide terrorism must incorporate historical analysis, affective relationships, and the narratives that shape everyday life. This perspective offers a more nuanced foundation for future research and policy responses.

Western perspectives on terrorism in Indonesia often prioritize security, ideological drivers rooted in religious extremism, and the transnational threat. Non-Western, including Indonesian, perspectives tend to offer a more nuanced understanding that incorporates socio-political grievances, local contexts, diverse interpretations of religion, and the impact on local communities. The emergence of terms and analyses from Indonesian scholars, as seen in the provided references, underscores the importance of understanding terrorism through local lenses to develop more effective and culturally sensitive counterterrorism and prevention strategies. Further research should examine the experiences of affected communities, former extremists, women, and children across different Indonesian regions.

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