

WHEN POLICIES MISS CHILDHOOD Rethinking Indonesia's Deradicalization Framework

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Abstract

This article examines the gap between regulations and practices concerning children's deradicalization in Indonesia. The study analyses four regulations on deradicalization in comparison to the practices observed in four pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools) in the country between 2019 and 2023. The findings reveal that Indonesian deradicalization regulations remain predominantly adult-oriented and have not systematically addressed the fundamental needs of children. They emphasise nationalism, religious moderation, entrepreneurship, and rehabilitation, while education is framed merely as a mean of instilling nationalist and moderate religious values, concepts more aligned with adult-focused programmes. In contrast, the practical implementation of children's deradicalization highlights education as their primary necessity. Education is viewed as a long-term strategy for social reintegration to ensure a better future for these children. Furthermore, critical aspects such as administrative citizenship, psychological rehabilitation, and disengagement should also receive attention. Future regulations and practices must integrate these dimensions to more effectively support the deradicalization of children associated with terrorism. [Artikel ini mengkaji disparitas antara regulasi dan praktik deradikalisasi anak di Indonesia. Studi ini menganalisis empat peraturan mengenai deradikalisasi dibandingkan dengan praktik di empat pesantren di Indonesia



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antara tahun 2019 dan 2023. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa peraturan deradikalisasi di Indonesia masih sebagian besar berorientasi pada orang dewasa dan belum secara sistematis memenuhi kebutuhan mendasar anak-anak. Peraturan-peraturan ini menekankan nasionalisme, moderasi beragama, kewirausahaan, dan rehabilitasi, sedangkan pendidikan dibingkai hanya sebagai sarana untuk menanamkan nilai-nilai nasionalis dan agama moderat, konsep ini lebih selaras dengan program yang berfokus pada deradikalisasi untuk orang dewasa. Sebaliknya, implementasi praktis deradikalisasi anak-anak menyoroti pendidikan sebagai kebutuhan utama mereka. Pendidikan dipandang sebagai strategi jangka panjang untuk reintegrasi sosial, yang menjamin masa depan yang lebih baik bagi anak-anak. Selain itu, aspek penting seperti administrasi kewarganegaraan, rehabilitasi psikologis, dan pemisahan dari kelompok mereka sebelumnya juga harus dipertimbangkan. Peraturan dan praktik di masa depan harus mengatasi dimensi-dimensi ini agar lebih efektif mendukung deradikalisasi anak-anak yang terkait dengan terorisme.]

Keywords: children deradicalization, terrorism, deradicalization regulation

A. Introduction

The involvement of children in terrorism has become a disturbing global phenomenon, documented in countries such as Indonesia, Iraq, Syria, and Nigeria. Their participation spans a wide spectrum, from passive roles like accompanying their parents in militant environments to active engagement in violent operations.¹ Despite their seemingly minor roles, such as preparing food and smuggling weapons, their involvement cannot be underestimated or overlooked.² On a global scale, the involvement of children in terrorist groups is widely assumed, although precise data is challenging to obtain, but the evidence that

¹ Rezhna Mohammed and Frank Neuner, "Putative Juvenile Terrorists: The Relationship Between Multiple Traumatization, Mental Health, And Expectations for Reintegration Among Islamic State Recruited Adolescent and Young Adult Fighters", *Conflict and Health*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2022), pp. 1-12; Nathan Brooks, Vaishnavi Honnavalli, and Briar Jacobson-Lang, "Children of ISIS: Considerations Regarding Trauma, Treatment and Risk", *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2022), pp. 107-33.

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Targeted by Terrorists: Child Recruitment, Exploitation and Reintegration in Indonesia, Iraq and Nigeria", *United Nations* (February 2024), <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789219100374>, accessed 20 Jan 2025.

does exist is alarming. According to various sources, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has reported that Boko Haram has recruited more than 8,000 children since 2009.³ Similarly, in 2015, the United Nations documented the recruitment of 274 children by ISIS/ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) in Syria, including 124 boys aged 10 to 15 undergoing military training in rural areas of Aleppo and Raqqa.⁴ Additionally, in June and September of the same year, ISIS reportedly kidnapped over 1,000 children from Mosul.⁵ These findings underscore the pervasive and troubling exploitation of children by terrorist organisations, highlighting an urgent need for focused efforts to address this issue.⁶

Indonesia faces similar challenges. In recent years, the country has witnessed a growing number of cases involving children of terrorists. Among the most shocking were the 2018 Surabaya bombings, the 2019 stabbing attack on retired General Wiranto, and the repatriation of several children of Indonesian foreign terrorist fighters⁷ from conflict zones abroad. In the Surabaya attacks, seven children perished in the suicide bombings, while another seven were left orphaned after the deaths of their parents.⁸ In the Wiranto case, an eleven-year-old girl, acting on her parents' instructions, carried a knife and was directed to attack police officers. These incidents reveal that children can no longer be viewed merely as passive victims of radicalization; they may also become active participants in violent extremism. Their dual position, as both victims and perpetrators, demands urgent attention from policymakers, educators, and religious institutions.⁹ Deradicalization programs must therefore

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Rebaz R. Khdir, "Child Recruitment and Use during Armed Conflicts by Muslims between International Law and Islamic Law", *European Scientific Journal*, vol. 18, no. 26 (2022), p. 108.

⁷ "Serangan bom di tiga gereja Surabaya: Pelaku bom bunuh diri 'perempuan yang membawa dua anak'", *BBC News* (Indonesia, 13 May 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-44097913>; Erlina Wiyanarti and Siti Fathimah, "Challenges of Children Left Behind in Indonesia: Can Local Wisdom, Education and Mental Health Be the Answer?", *Journal of Public Health*, vol. 46, no. 3 (2024), pp. 595–6..

⁸ "Serangan bom di tiga gereja Surabaya"; Kustin Ayuwuragil, "Seorang Anak Pelaku Bom Surabaya Disebut Trauma Berat", *CNN Indonesia* (Indonesia, 24 May 2018), <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20180523135953-20-300622/seorang-anak-pelaku-bom-surabaya-disebut-trauma-berat>.

⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Targeted by Terrorists*.

move beyond their traditional focus on adults and develop approaches that address the specific psychological, educational, and social needs of children who have been exposed to terrorism.¹⁰

Advocacy for the children of terrorists in Indonesia has been carried out on a small scale by both government institutions and community initiatives, particularly following the Surabaya attacks in 2018. The Handayani Centre for Social Rehabilitation for Children in Need of Special Protection, under the Ministry of Social Affairs, was the first government institution to address the needs of these children. Similarly, since 2019, several *pesantrens* on Java Island have undertaken efforts to receive and deradicalize children of terrorists. The deradicalization practices implemented there have yielded promising results. The children have been successfully reintegrated into mainstream society, provided with proper education, and supported in meeting their social needs. Some of the children have even demonstrated notable achievements in their schools and communities.¹¹

These practices, however, remain under study. This article seeks to compare the practical implementation of children's deradicalization with the regulatory framework governing deradicalization efforts in Indonesia. The data for this study were collected through document analysis, interviews with children of terrorists, as well as the *kyai* of the *pesantrens* and their teachers, and participatory observation conducted between 2021 and 2024. To ensure confidentiality and protect the identities of the children, the article does not disclose their names, the locations of their schools, *pesantrens*, or the identities of informants. The regulatory data analysed in this study include: (1) Law No. 5 of 2018 on counterterrorism, (2) Law No. 35 of 2014 on child protection, (3) Government Regulation No. 77 of 2019 on the prevention of terrorism and the protection of investigators, prosecutors, judges, and correctional officers, and (4) the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation No. 7 of 2019 on children's deradicalization.

¹⁰ Elizar Ayu Putri, Fentiny Nugroho, and Iqram Sulhin, "Inclusive Education for the Deradicalization of Children Involved in Terrorism in Jakarta Juvenile Correctional Institution", *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, vol. 61 (2024), pp. 12–28.

¹¹ Xin Su, Neil Harrison, and Robyn Moloney, "Becoming familiar strangers: an exploration of inland boarding school education on cultural wellbeing of minority students from Xinjiang province", *The Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2018), pp. 1–12; Eko Mulyadi et al., "Boarding School That Provide Community-Based Mental Health Services", *Proceedings of the Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Business, Law And Pedagogy*, (Sidoarjo: EAI, 2019).

B. Deradicalization Policy: Not for Children

At the core of the national counter-terrorism strategy lies Law No. 5 of 2018 on Counter-terrorism, which provides the principal legal foundation for deradicalization efforts. The law defines deradicalization as a planned, integrated, systematic, and continuous process aimed at eliminating, reducing, or reversing radical terrorist ideologies, conducted in accordance with the principles of human rights and prudence.¹² Within this framework, deradicalization is classified as part of a broader set of prevention programs, alongside national preparedness and counter-radicalization initiatives.¹³ The deradicalization policy is further detailed in Government Regulation No. 77 of 2019 on the prevention of terrorism and the protection of investigators, public prosecutors, judges, and correctional officers. This regulation elaborates on the targets, classifications, and programs of deradicalization. However, it does not specifically address deradicalization programs for children. The identified targets of deradicalization include terrorist suspects, defendants, convicts, prisoners, former prisoners, their families, their networks, and individuals or groups exposed to radical terrorist ideologies.¹⁴

Based on the implementation location, deradicalization targets are categorised into two groups: those “Inside Prison” and those “Outside Prison”. The former group includes suspects, defendants, convicts, and prisoners in terrorism-related cases, while the latter encompasses former terrorist prisoners and individuals or groups exposed to radical ideologies, such as the families of terrorists.¹⁵ Consequently, children of terrorists, as part of terrorist families and networks, are included among the targets of outside-prison deradicalization programs. According to data collected by the Ministry of Women and Child Protection, the Child Protection Division for Victims of Stigmatization and Terrorism Networks reports that approximately 1,800 children in Indonesia have

¹² *Undang-undang (UU) Nomor 5 Tahun 2018 tentang Perubahan atas Undang-Undang Nomor 15 Tahun 2003 tentang Penetapan Peraturan Pemerintah Pengganti Undang-Undang Nomor 1 Tahun 2002 tentang Pemberantasan Tindak Pidana Terorisme Menjadi Undang-Undang* (Republik Indonesia, 2018), Article 43D.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Article 43A.

¹⁴ Robertus Robet et al., “Requisites of Deradicalisation: Study on the De-Ideologisation of Indonesian Ex-Terrorists”, *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*, vol. 6, no. 5 (2024), pp. 53–64.

¹⁵ *Peraturan Pemerintah (PP) Nomor 77 Tahun 2019 tentang Pencegahan Tindak Pidana Terorisme dan Pelindungan terhadap Penyidik, Penuntut Umum, Hakim, dan Petugas Pemasarakatan* (Republik Indonesia, 2019), Article 31-54, p. 77.

been exposed to terrorist ideologies.¹⁶ However, comprehensive data on the children of terrorism perpetrators, those whose parents are involved in acts of terrorism, remains unavailable. This group, often referred to as the children of terrorist offenders, is considered highly vulnerable to radicalisation, and their actual number is likely to exceed the reported 1,800. The available data indicates that 80 children (38%) attend schools unaffiliated with terrorist organisations, while 62 children (29%) are concealed or remain under the custody of imprisoned individuals. Another 29 children (14%) attend schools with minimal affiliation to extremist groups, and 28 children (13%) are enrolled in institutions with strong links to terrorist organisations. These figures highlight a deeply concerning trend: the continued indoctrination of children within terrorist networks in Indonesia. Moreover, only 77 children (36%) are enrolled in government-aligned or moderate educational institutions that actively aim to break the cycle of radicalisation and extremism.¹⁷

Based on the classification of deradicalization programmes as either inside or outside prison, the prison-based programmes include identification and assessment, rehabilitation, re-education, and social reintegration. Conversely, outside-prison programmes focus on identification and assessment, nationalism, religious moderation, and entrepreneurship. However, in practice, there are no significant distinctions between the deradicalization programmes implemented inside and outside prison. For instance, the social reintegration programme, which emphasises economic independence within the prison, is analogous to the entrepreneurship programme conducted outside prison. Similarly, the re-education programme within prison parallels the nationalism and religious moderation programmes outside prison. Interestingly, the duration of deradicalization for individuals outside prison (e.g., former prisoners) is also limited to a maximum of six months, with the possibility of extension to twelve months.¹⁸ Furthermore, Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection mandates that deradicalization efforts include ideological and nationalist re-education, counselling on the dangers of

¹⁶ Kornelis Kewa Ama, “Ribuan Anak Terpapar Paham Radikalisme, Butuh Penanganan Semua Pihak”, *Kompas.id* (22 Oct 2020), <https://www.kompas.id/baca/nusantara/2020/10/22/ribuan-anak-terpapar-paham-radikalisme-butuh-penanganan-semua-pihak>.

¹⁷ Zora Arfina Sukabdi et al., “The Challenge of Terrorism Regeneration: What Schools Do Terrorist Offenders Select for Their Children?”, *Ulumuna*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2025), pp. 115-6.

¹⁸ Indonesia, *Peraturan Pemerintah (PP)* Article 55.

terrorism, social rehabilitation, and social assistance.¹⁹ In summary, the core elements of deradicalization programmes are religious moderation, emphasising values of peace, and nationalism, fostering love and loyalty to Indonesia.²⁰ These components are central to both prison-based and community-based deradicalization efforts.²¹

Law No. 35 of 2014 does not explicitly use the term “deradicalization” concerning the children of terrorists; instead, it employs the term “protection”. The concepts and objectives underlying deradicalization and protection for these children are largely similar. Likewise, the Minister of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation No. 7 of 2019, which addresses children’s deradicalization, remains focused on ideological re-education (emphasizing peaceful religious principles) and nationalism, as well as counselling on the dangers of terrorism and social-psychological rehabilitation. The 2022–2024 action plan associated with this regulation includes programmes aimed at entrepreneurship, social security, and education.²² In general, the concept of deradicalization as outlined in the four Indonesian regulations is largely uniform. It encompasses assessment, rehabilitation, education (focused on religion and nationalism), and reintegration. The core elements of deradicalization include education on state ideology, nationalism, religious moderation (nonviolence), and economic independence (entrepreneurship). However, the regulations lack specific provisions or distinguishing features that differentiate deradicalization programmes for children from those for adults. The overarching goal of deradicalization is to ensure that the targetted individuals adopt the nationalist ideology of the state and abandon violent ideologies and behaviours, an approach primarily shaped by adult needs and perspectives.²³

¹⁹ *Undang-undang (UU) Nomor 35 Tahun 2014 tentang Perubahan atas Undang-Undang Nomor 23 Tahun 2002 Tentang Perlindungan Anak* (Republik Indonesia, 2014), Article 69B.

²⁰ Dian Herdiana, Ariq Putra Fauzan, and Aqshal Septiano Baroga, “Promoting ‘Moderasi Beragama’ As A Unifying Community Value for The Youth”, *Salus Publica: Journal of Community Service*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2023), pp. 28–34.

²¹ Andi Kurniawan and Abdul Malik Fajar Darwis, “Rehabilitasi Napi Teroris Melalui Program Deradikalisasi”, *Al-Manhaj: Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata Sosial Islam*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2023), pp. 851–8.

²² *Peraturan Menteri Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak Nomor 7 Tahun 2019 tentang Pedoman Perlindungan Anak dari Radikalisme dan Tindak Pidana Terorisme*, Article 4.

²³ Muhammad Nur Adnan Saputra et al., “Deradikalisasi Paham Radikal di Indonesia: Penguatan Kurikulum Pendidikan Islam Berbasis Moderasi”, *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Al-Thariqah*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2021), pp. 282–96; Suratno, “Ideology and *Al-Jāmi’ah*”, Vol. 63, No. 1, 2025 M/1447 H

C. *Pesantrens* and Children Deradicalization

The following discussion on deradicalization practices is based on a participatory research at four *pesantrens* in Java, Indonesia, which discreetly accommodate and support the children of terrorists. These *pesantrens* are referred to as P1, P2, P3, and P4. While not specifically established as deradicalization institutions, they function as general *pesantrens* and are closely affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama organisation. The children of terrorists are integrated into these traditional *pesantrens* alongside other *santri* (students). P1 accommodates ten children of terrorists, P2 has one child, and P3 supports two children. The directors of these *pesantrens* are fully aware that these children are the offspring of terrorists and that all of them have been exposed to violence. Although the schools do not have explicit deradicalization programmes or stated objectives, the directors recognise their role in deradicalizing these children and integrating them into normal society. Additionally, these *pesantrens* receive support and monitoring from the police's Anti-Terror Detachment 88 (Densus 88) and a social organisation. In 2019, P1 initially received eight children of terrorists: five girls and three boys. The youngest was an eight-year-old boy, and the oldest was a sixteen-year-old boy.²⁴ Some of their parents died in suicide bomb attacks, one was shot to death, and two are currently imprisoned. These children had limited exposure to formal education and social interaction. While living with their parents, they did not attend school and were prohibited from interacting closely with individuals outside their immediate groups. Following the incidents, they underwent rehabilitation by the government until P1 requested to take them in and provide their education. However, when the children arrived there in 2019, they exhibited signs of trauma and were still affected by violence. Additionally, they had limited administrative documentation, with many only possessing copies of their birth certificates.

Under these circumstances, the head of P1 enrolled the children in formal schools outside the *pesantren* based on their respective ages. Six children were placed in a *madrasah ibtidaiyyah* (Islamic primary school), while the remaining three attended a *madrasah tsananiyyah* (Islamic junior high school). The Kyai MJ of P1 ensured that all necessary school supplies for the children, including uniforms, books, and other materials, were prepared in advance. As a result, just two days after their arrival at P1, the

Identity Transformation in The Deradicalization of Muslim Extremists in Indonesia", *Indonesian Journal of Religion, Spirituality, and Humanity*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2022), pp. 189–214.

²⁴ Interview with MJ, leader of P1, 19 May 2024.

children were enrolled in their new schools. One of the teachers there noted that the children appeared excited to attend school, likely due to the novelty of the experience, which they may have longed for. During the first few months, most of the children even arrived at school earlier than P1's other students.²⁵

The children faced two initial challenges related to their education: the lack of necessary documents and their limited skills in reading and mathematics. Although the children had been enrolled in school, they had not provided the required documentation for admission. Consequently, the schools requested that the head of P1 submit all necessary documents for each child, including letters from previous schools, academic reports, records of previous academic achievements and certificates, national identity cards, birth certificates, national identity numbers, family cards (Kartu Keluarga), Indonesian health insurance cards (Kartu Indonesia Sehat), death certificates of their parents, and Indonesian student cards (Kartu Indonesia Pintar). Most of the required documents, however, could not be provided by MJ. The majority of the children only had copies of their family cards and birth certificates. Other documents, such as those from the Ministry of Social Affairs and letters from the police confirming the deaths of their parents (due to suicide bombings), were also available. To prevent future stigmatisation of the children, MJ decided not to submit these documents to the schools until all their identities were consolidated.²⁶ With the assistance of Densus 88 and the local government, P1 successfully registered new family cards for the children and applied for their national identity cards, Indonesian health insurance, Indonesian student cards, and other government social programmes. Ultimately, it took nearly one year for P1 to complete all the required documentation.

The second educational challenge was the children's limited skills in math (numeracy) and reading (literacy). Most of the children struggled with basic mathematical concepts, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. Similarly, they faced difficulties with reading, and in some instances, the teacher had to read aloud for them to understand. To address these issues, P1 implemented additional lessons after school for these children, as well as for other students who faced challenges with basic literacy and numeracy. Interestingly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools were closed

²⁵ Interview with teacher of P1, 19 May 2024.

²⁶ Interview with MJ, leader of P1, 19 May 2024.

starting in mid-2020, which made the extra lessons at P1 more intensive. In addition to addressing literacy and numeracy, the children also received supplementary lessons in the Quran, Arabic, English, computational thinking, and computer skills.

The social challenges that arose, particularly during the first year at the pesantren, included some children's difficulties in interacting with their peers and occasional incidents of violent behaviour. According to a teacher at P1, these issues of social interaction stemmed from the children's previous experiences of living in isolation. During the rehabilitation process, they were also placed in a government safe house, which further deepened their sense of exclusivity. The teacher also acknowledged that a mistake was made in the early months when the children were housed in separate rooms reserved specifically for them. Once the pesantren became aware of this situation, the children were gradually integrated with other students according to their age group. Ultimately, the children adapted quickly to this change as expected. They no longer formed an exclusive group among themselves but instead developed close friendships with other children through shared living spaces and schooling.²⁷

Regarding violent behaviour, some children continued to exhibit signs of embracing a violent culture. During the first six months, the teacher observed that they still accessed terrorist websites and social media, such as YouTube channels that taught how to create bombs and kill those perceived as enemies of God to achieve a righteous Muslim status. On one occasion, two girls were sitting and making a conversation, when they saw a group of police officers. One girl said to the other, "*Sister, I want to bring one of the police here and hit him to death*". The other girl responded, "*Are you brave enough to hit the police?*" To which she replied, "*Yes, my father is a soldier of God, a Mujahidin*". Eventually, one of the girls reported this conversation to her teacher. On another occasion, when some of these girls were punished by senior students for violating the *pesantren* rules, one girl gathered her friends and made plans to kill the senior student who had punished them. In response, the teacher confronted the girls and clarified both incidents. They explained that they did not intend to act on these threats and that their reactions were driven by frustration and fear.²⁸ These incidents illustrate how terrorist propaganda promoting

²⁷ Interview with the teacher of P1, 24 Jul 2024.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

violence had become ingrained in the children's behaviour.²⁹

According to MJ,³⁰ in the initial months, some of the children appeared to be particularly sensitive to terms associated with peaceful Islam, *jihad*, peaceful *da'wah*, radicalism, and terrorism. On one occasion, while the Qur'an teacher was discussing peaceful *da'wah*, one of the girls became visibly irritated. She confided in her friend that the teacher was speaking directly about her and other children of terrorists, and she expressed feeling upset and disgusted by the topic. As a result, the head of the *pesantren* made efforts to avoid discussions involving terminology closely associated with terrorism. However, after one year, he began to occasionally engage in personal conversations with some of the older children about the dangers of terrorism and the principles of peaceful Islam, particularly when discussing their future and educational prospects.³¹

“These young individuals require specialised attention. Initially, we believed that their minds needed to be ‘cleansed’ of any ideological indoctrination or radical beliefs. However, our initial assumptions and teaching methods proved to be flawed. It takes time for children to adapt to an educational environment and to be gradually distanced from radicalism and extremist influences”.³²

During the first three months, two girls occasionally appeared to be isolated and tended to avoid their peers. One of the girls would sometimes speak to herself, expressing to the teacher that her mother and father, with bloody faces, would occasionally appear to her, urging her to join them in heaven.³³ This suggests that she was still grappling with the violent terrorist ideology. Similarly, other children continued to create drawings and writings that expressed admiration for terrorist groups, particularly ISIS, and their desire to join such organisations, as evidenced by the pictures created by three different children (see: Figure 1).³⁴

MJ of P1³⁵ stated that he frequently discussed these issues with members of Densus 88 to determine the best course of action. Densus 88 occasionally sent a team, including a psychologist, to address these

²⁹ Ariel Koch, “Jihadi Beheading Videos and their Non-Jihadi Echoes”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2018), pp. 24–34.

³⁰ Interview with MJ, leader of of P1, 9 May 2024.

³¹ As MacVicar discusses this issue in his article, “What About the Camp Followers – and their Children?”, *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 22 (2020), pp. 319–78.

³² Interview with MJ, leader of of P1, 9 May 2024.

³³ Koch, “Jihadi Beheading Videos and their Non-Jihadi Echoes”.

³⁴ The Pictures Were Collected by the Teacher and MJ of P1.

³⁵ Interview with MJ, leader of P1, 19 May 2024.

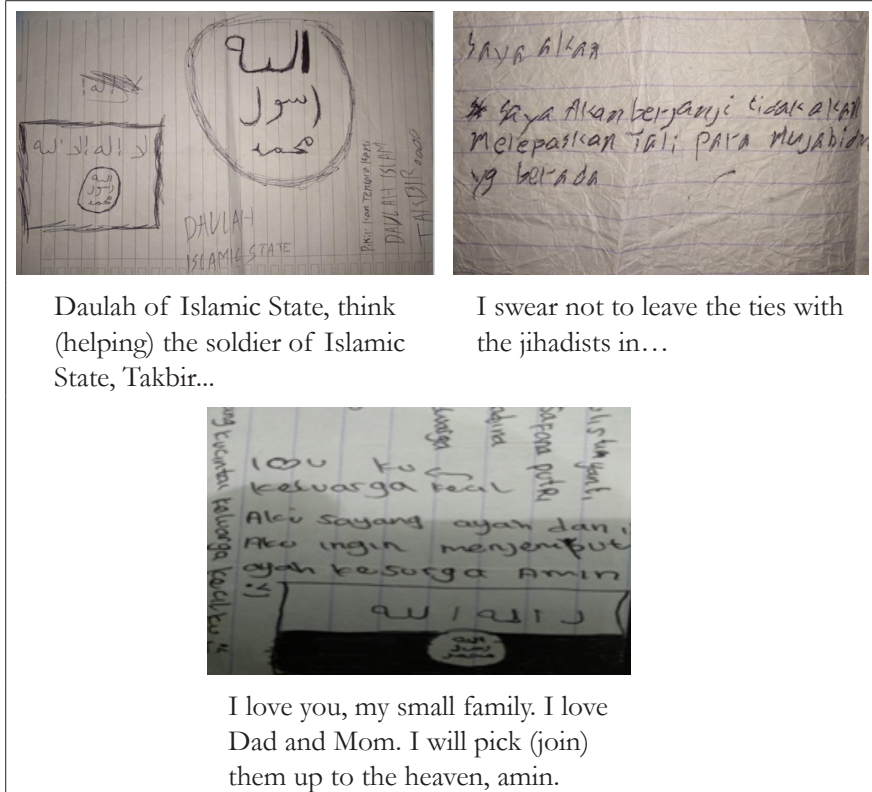


Figure 1. Children's visual materials referencing extremist

concerns, either speaking with the children or the teachers at the *pesantren*. Since the onset of the case, police officers have visited P1 more regularly, wearing their uniforms, in an effort to help the children overcome trauma and reduce their hostility towards the police. The officers once sent gifts to the children without wearing uniforms, but eventually, they began visiting P1 in their official police attire. Additionally, following the incidents mentioned above, the children often spend weekends with the teachers' families, allowing them to heal and experience a more typical family life.

Although P1 does not have a specific programme dedicated to the deradicalization of these children; the institution addresses any issues that arise as they occur.³⁶ MJ emphasised that P1 is affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama, an organisation that strongly promotes the values of nationalism, tolerance, and moderation. As part of this, the children are required to sing the national anthem and the “*Hubb al-Waṭan*” (pledge

³⁶ *Ibid.*

of loyalty to the nation) song at least once a week during the school's weekly performance meeting. Initially, two of the children resisted singing the national anthem, citing their parents' prohibition. However, after the teacher explained the significance of the song, the children agreed to participate.³⁷ According to the teacher of P1,³⁸ the key to successfully integrating these children and addressing their violent and traumatic behaviours lies in disengagement, specifically detaching the children from their families and networks associated with terrorism.³⁹ This includes severing communication between the children and their parents, particularly through cellular phones. The teacher compares the experiences of the seven children whose parents died or were absent to those of the three children whose parents are still alive and maintain regular contact with them.

“This practice is common in traditional pesantren, including our own. Our students are not permitted to bring mobile phones, as this policy ensures they remain focused on their studies and are not influenced by external factors. Moreover, this rule is particularly crucial for the children of individuals involved in extremist activities, as it prevents them from maintaining contact with parents who have been exposed to radical ideologies.”⁴⁰

The seven children who were naturally disengaged faced various challenges, as previously described. However, these issues were resolved relatively quickly, and they have since adapted to normal life. In fact, three of them are now achieving good academic results in their schools. This adjustment was facilitated by the fact that they had no alternative but to adapt to life at P1, which enabled them to more easily integrate into a normal environment.⁴¹ In contrast, one girl whose parent remains in prison continued to exhibit signs of hatred towards the state. For instance, she refused to sing the Indonesian national anthem and the song of loyalty to the nation (*Ḥubb al-Waṭan*), and she also refused to salute the White and Red Indonesian flag. MJ observed that after she reestablished

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Interview with the ustadz of P1, 25 May 2024..

³⁹ See also Mary Beth Altier, Emma Leonard Boyle, and John G. Horgan, “Terrorist Transformations: The Link between Terrorist Roles and Terrorist Disengagement”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 45, no. 9 (2022), pp. 753–77; Rabiah Al Adawiah, “Deradikalisasi Anak dari Pelaku Aksi Terorisme”, *Sosio Informa*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2022), pp. 278-92.

⁴⁰ Interview with a teacher of P1, 25 May 2024.

⁴¹ Interview with MJ, 19 May 2024.

contact with her parent in prison, she frequently displayed hostility, such as remaining silent during the anthem and repeatedly requesting to meet her father. Subsequently, MJ reduced her communication with her parents, which facilitated the girl's social integration within the *pesantren*. Recently, this girl asked the teacher how to become a good conductor of the national anthem.⁴²

The other two boys, whose father was in prison, also presented challenges, such as drawing ISIS flags, planning hypothetical suicide attacks in Jakarta, distributing terrorist-related materials to their peers, and discouraging their friends from singing the national anthem. Furthermore, P1 faced significant difficulties integrating these boys into age-appropriate educational settings. Their parents actively opposed their enrolment in mainstream schools. The teachers at P1 consistently worked to correct any behaviours or beliefs that aligned with terrorist ideologies. However, addressing these issues required considerable time and effort, particularly for children who maintained contact with parents holding violent ideologies and ties to terrorist networks. Unfortunately, these two boys were eventually taken back by their parents following their father's release from prison.⁴³

The other three *pesantrens* do not face the complex challenges encountered by P1. Both P2 and P3 have only one child of a terrorist in their care. The child at P2 is a student at an Islamic university. His father was released from prison in September 2022, having been classified as a "green prisoner", which allowed for a reduced detention period. Following his father's imprisonment for involvement in terrorism, the family experienced significant financial difficulties, preventing the child from continuing his university studies after graduating in 2020. To support his family, he had to work instead of pursuing further education. However, an activist from Nahdlatul Ulama provided him with a scholarship to resume his university studies while residing in a *pesantren* affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama. According to the Kyai GF of P2, this student has shown no indications of supporting terrorism.⁴⁴

"One *santri* (the child of a terrorist) who stayed here has grown up and pursued higher education. Perhaps due to his interactions with other students at the university, his perspective has become more open. As a result, he has come to understand that radical actions and terrorism are

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Interview with GF of P2, 2 Jun 2024.

harmful, preventing him from developing extremist tendencies.”⁴⁵

The student has been enrolled in the English Education programme since August 2022 within the Faculty of Education. The scholarship he received required him to reside at the *pesantrens* and actively participate as a member of the Nahdlatul Ulama student association. Unlike some other cases, he did not face administrative challenges since he had previously attended formal schooling. Instead, his primary issue was the loss of educational opportunities due to financial constraints.⁴⁶ Similarly, the child at P3, whose father was recently released from prison, joined the *pesantren* in July 2022. He received the same scholarship as the student at P2. Following his father's imprisonment and subsequent acknowledgement of his mistakes in joining a terrorist group, as well as his alliance with the state, becoming classified as a “green terrorist prisoner”, the family faced significant financial and educational challenges. The father's radical network ceased providing financial support to the family and expelled the child and his sibling from schools affiliated with the group. Recognising the severity of the situation, prison staff reached out to an individual who had previously provided scholarships for the children of terrorists. As a result, the child was admitted to the *pesantren* at IBThree on a full scholarship.

According to the Kyai WD of *Presantren* IBThree,⁴⁷ the child appeared content and enthusiastic about his studies. Initially, he encountered two challenges. First, he had lost his junior high school diploma and student identification number, which took three months to resolve. Second, the head of the *pesantren* initially felt apprehensive and uncertain upon learning that the child's father had been a terrorist prisoner. However, after observing the child's positive attitude and enjoyment of his studies at IBThree, the head became more confident in managing his case. Notably, the child's closest friend in his school community is a Christian and the son of a priest. The child has expressed a desire to pursue higher education, with a particular interest in informatics, and aims to become a skilled programmer, envisioning a stable and normal life for himself in the future. In summary, there are no major issues with the children at these two *pesantrens*. However, the schools continue to conceal the children's identities to prevent stigma and mitigate potential

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Interview with WD of P3, 23 Jun 2024.

challenges during the social integration or deradicalization process.⁴⁸

The two children at the final *pesantren*, P4, face significant challenges with integration. One of the children lacks any form of registered identity, while the other only possesses a family identity card, despite both being 17 years old. They were raised in school systems that were not officially recognised by the state and were not legally registered in the national education system. These children were placed in P4 in September 2022 following a court verdict. They had been sentenced to one month in prison and subsequently assigned to P4 for three months of rehabilitation. Both children received scholarships from the same benefactor, who had previously provided financial support to the children at P2 and P3.⁴⁹ The Kyai NJ of P4 states that these children aspire to pursue higher education at the university level.⁵⁰ However, they face significant challenges related to their citizenship documentation, as their previous schools were not officially registered with the state. The head of P4 notes that, while the process of deradicalization is relatively new, there are encouraging signs: the children are demonstrating a willingness to integrate into the social fabric of the nation. They have also expressed a desire to sever ties with their former groups and have no intention of returning to them.

“As the *santri* (children of terrorists) here mature, they appear to recognise that the radical ideologies embraced by their parents are misguided. They show little desire to return to that way of life. Instead, they aspire to transform their futures by striving to become better individuals and pursuing educational qualifications”.⁵¹

On one occasion, the benefactor who provides their scholarships assured the children that if they wished to live in the city and attend university, he would fund their education for at least three years. He also urged them to refrain from reconnecting with their former groups. One of the children expressed a desire to attend an Islamic university in the city and live a normal life. However, as of the time of writing, these administrative issues remain unresolved. The head of the *pesantren* emphasises that the children are still socially vulnerable. Until their administrative challenges are addressed, they will be unable to continue their education or access government social and safety programmes,

⁴⁸ Pat Friday, “Pastoral Care and the Academic Child”, *Pastoral Care in Education*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1984), pp. 15–23.

⁴⁹ Interview with NJ of Pesantren P4, 21 Jul 2024.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

which could hinder their long-term stability and reintegration.⁵²

D. Addressing Gaps in Regulation and Practice

In Indonesia, the general concept of deradicalization is outlined in two key regulations: Law Number 5 of 2018 on Counterterrorism and Government Regulation Number 77 of 2019 on the Prevention of Terrorism and the Protection of Investigators, Public Prosecutors, Judges, and Correctional Officers. Additionally, the specific concept of deradicalization for the children of terrorists is further elaborated in two other regulations: Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection and the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation Number 7 of 2019 on Children's Deradicalization.

The content of these deradicalization regulations is largely similar, focusing on aspects such as nationalism, religious moderation (or addressing the dangers of violence), social and psychological rehabilitation, economic development, and education. While these approaches may be effective when targeting adults, they are less aligned with the fundamental needs of children of terrorists. Numerous studies indicate that the roots of violent extremism among adults include factors such as unemployment, poverty, political ideology, and extreme religious sentiments.⁵³ Similarly, other research highlights the push and pull factors leading individuals to disengage from terrorism, including unmet expectations, disillusionment with the strategies or personnel of terrorist groups, difficulty adapting to a clandestine lifestyle, inability to cope with the physiological and psychological effects of violence, loss of faith in ideology, burnout, competing loyalties, positive interactions with moderates, employment or educational opportunities, the desire to marry, financial incentives, and amnesty.⁵⁴ However, many of these factors fail to address the specific and unique interests of children of terrorists.

The regulations impose a time limit on deradicalization programmes, such as those focused on religion, nationalism, and

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*; Mohd Mizan Aslam and Siti Zubaidah Abu Bakar, "Terrorist Deradicalization Programs in Saudi, Yemen and Malaysia", *UMRAN - International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2020), pp. 1–9; Kurniawan and Darwis, "Rehabilitasi Napi Teroris Melalui Program Deradikalisasi".

⁵⁴ Adesoji O. Adelaja, Abdullahi Labo, and Eva Penar, "Public Opinion on the Root Causes of Terrorism and Objectives of Terrorists: A Boko Haram Case Study", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2018), pp. 35–49.

entrepreneurship, restricting them to six months, with the possibility of extension to twelve months. Consequently, government institutions, such as the Parole and Probation Office (Balai Pemasyarakatan) and the social rehabilitation offices under the Ministry of Social Affairs, are not mandated to provide deradicalization programmes beyond this period. This time-bound approach contrasts sharply with the educational needs of children, which require a lifelong commitment to gradually disengage them from their previous radicalised environments and to secure their future. For instance, in the case of children at P1, even after participating in social and psychological rehabilitation programmes for over a year at the Handayani Children's Centre, they continued to exhibit violent behaviours and trauma. This underscores the necessity for deradicalization efforts to extend beyond fixed timeframes to achieve meaningful and lasting outcomes.⁵⁵

Regarding the programmes aimed at instilling religious moderation and nationalism, the experience of deradicalization in four *pesantrens* reveals that introducing these values during the early stages of the learning process has created discomfort for the children. Such an approach may disrupt the social integration of the children into their new environment at the *pesantren*. Similarly, the teachers in these four *pesantrens* tend to avoid discussions on topics such as terrorism, religious moderation, and nationalism, even when the children express an interest in these subjects. Instead, some teachers simply encourage older children to aspire to be “normal individuals” and good Muslims. It emphasises that countering violent ideologies requires cultural and social approaches rather than solely relying on rational methods to deconstruct extremist values.⁵⁶

The entrepreneurship programme was not an immediate necessity for the children. This is because the children in the four *pesantrens* range in age from 10 to 17 years old. However, one of the *pesantrens*, which accommodates eight children of terrorists, recognises the importance of equipping them with life skills and entrepreneurial capabilities as part of their education. Consequently, all children in grades 10 through 12 are enrolled in vocational senior high schools to ensure they can achieve

⁵⁵ Sarah Marsden, “27. Disengagement and Deradicalization Programmes”, in *Contemporary Terrorism Studies*, ed. by Diego Muro and Tim Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 538–57.

⁵⁶ Munajat, *Konsep Deradikalisasi Anak-anak Teroris di Pondok Pesantren untuk Ketahanan Nasional*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Lembaga Ketahanan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2021).

economic independence upon graduation. Rather than prioritising programmes centred on nationalism, religious moderation (or countering the threat of terrorism), and entrepreneurship, the practice of children's deradicalization indicates that efforts should primarily focus on resolving administrative citizenship issues and facilitating educational reintegration. This is because many children of terrorists are not adequately integrated into society. Some do not attend formal schools and deliberately avoid engaging with government administration. Consequently, many of these children lack essential legal documents, such as national identity cards, family registration numbers, and student identification numbers. This aspect has not been extensively discussed or explored by the proponents of the deradicalization programme,⁵⁷ creating significant challenges for these children in integrating into society, particularly within their peer environments, student communities, and schools. Schools require a valid database for students, including a student identification number, national identity number, and family registration number. Without these identification documents, it is impossible to enrol the children in schools or include them in the formal educational system.

The government offers programmes such as health insurance, scholarships, and financial assistance for children of terrorists and their families. However, access to these programmes depends on the availability of valid and complete recipient data. In summary, integrating children of terrorists into national life and providing them with access to the best societal environments, such as schools and *pesantrens*, cannot be achieved without first addressing their administrative documentation issues. In addition to addressing administrative issues, integrating children of terrorists into the national education system is a critical component of deradicalization programmes. Schools and *pesantrens* play a strategic and effective role in disengaging these children from their previous radical environments and instilling new values of peace and coexistence. As highlighted in the cases, children who are directly integrated into schools and *pesantrens* are more readily "normalised" compared to those educated exclusively in *pesantrens*. Values such as nationalism and religious

⁵⁷ John Horgan, "Deradicalization or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and A Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation", *Revista de Psicología Social*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2009), pp. 291–8; Jerry Indrawan and M. Prakoso Aji, "Efektivitas Program Deradikalisasi Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme terhadap Narapidana Terorisme di Indonesia", *Jurnal Pertahanan & Bela Negara*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2019), p. 1; Adawiah, "Deradikalisasi Anak dari Pelaku Aksi Terorisme".

moderation are naturally internalised by children when they are fully immersed in a positive educational environment. This is particularly true in schools and *pesantrens* overseen by the government or moderate organisations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). These institutions provide an atmosphere that fosters the development of peaceful and inclusive ideologies.⁵⁸

The selection of positive educational institutions is a critical component of deradicalization programmes. The *pesantrens* and general schools mentioned above, which promote the values of nationalism and religious moderation, offer a supportive environment conducive to this process. Through their curricula, extracurricular activities, and other programmes, these schools instill values of diversity, peace, moderation, and nationalism. For instance, as these schools are affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), students participate in activities such as listening to and singing the national anthem and the song of loyalty to the nation (*hubb al-waṭan*).⁵⁹ Psychological rehabilitation and disengagement programmes also play a vital role in deradicalization. Many children of terrorists experience significant trauma due to their parents' involvement in extremist activities, particularly in cases where parents were arrested or killed during counterterrorism operations.⁶⁰ This trauma manifests in various psychological impacts, including hatred towards law enforcement for those who witnessed the imprisonment or shooting of their parents, hallucinations involving conversations with deceased parents for those who witnessed their deaths, and an eagerness to join extremist groups in Syria and Iraq. Addressing these psychological challenges is essential for supporting the children's reintegration into society.

The experiences of the *pesantrens* illustrate that disengagement is both a physical and emotional process. It involves completely

⁵⁸ Muhammad Dian Nafi, "Moderasi Beragama ala Pesantren", *Kementerian Agama* (20 Apr 2022), <https://kemenag.go.id/opini/moderasi-beragama-ala-pesantren-upjuu4>.

⁵⁹ Maulana Mukhlis and Imam Mustofa, *Kolaborasi Penanggulangan Radikalisme Berbasis Pondok Pesantren*, 1st edition (Yogyakarta: Idea Press Yogyakarta, 2020); Munajat, *Konsepsi Deradikalisasi Anak-anak Teroris*; MA Achlami, "Peran Pondok Pesantren Sebagai Lembaga Pendidikan, Dakwah dan Sosial dalam Menangkal Radikalisme dan Terorisme", *At-Tarbiyah: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pendidikan Agama Islam*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2024), pp. 118–26; Nafi, "Moderasi Beragama ala Pesantren".

⁶⁰ Brooks, Honnavalli, and Jacobson-Lang, "Children of ISIS"; Wiyanarti and Fathimah, "Challenges of Children Left Behind in Indonesia"; Osbenardus Sirait, Muhamad Syauqillah, and Margaretha Hanita, "Deradicalization Program in Indonesia", *Journal of Terrorism Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2021), pp. 1–15.

severing the children's ties to their previous negative environments, particularly those associated with their parents. The failure to achieve effective disengagement often hinders the children's reintegration into society. Several studies indicate that disengagement is closely linked to reintegration. A well-designed disengagement programme facilitates the individual's complete detachment from their prior extremist and exclusionary environment, thereby simplifying their reintegration into mainstream society.⁶¹ This case study provides compelling evidence that disengagement serves as a critical precursor to deradicalization and addresses key research questions concerning the relationship between disengagement and deradicalization. The deradicalization regulations in Indonesia fail to adequately address the specific needs of children of terrorists, as these regulations are primarily designed to meet the needs of adults. They focus on aspects such as nationalism, religious moderatism (or the danger of terrorism), social and psychological rehabilitation, entrepreneurship, and education. In contrast, the actual practices of deradicalization suggest that the essential programmes for children should prioritise formal education, particularly by integrating them into the state educational system, which includes formal schools, *pesantrens*, and school-based communities under state supervision.⁶² However, many children of terrorists face administrative challenges related to citizenship, making the resolution of these administrative issues equally crucial to their educational reintegration. Additionally, psychological rehabilitation and disengagement are vital programmes that must also be addressed in the deradicalization process.

E. Concluding Remarks

This study underscores a critical mismatch between Indonesia's current deradicalization policies and the specific realities of children affected by violent extremism. Existing frameworks are still largely modeled on adult rehabilitation, prioritizing civic nationalism, moderate religiosity, entrepreneurship, and general reintegration efforts. Within these regulations, education is treated primarily as an instrument for

⁶¹ Peter R. Neumann, *Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and de-Radicalisation in 15 Countries* (London: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2010),.

⁶² Imam Mustofa and Nurul Mahmudah, *Radikalisasi dan Deradikalisasi* (Yogyakarta: Idea Press Yogyakarta, 2019); Mukhlis and Mustofa, *Kolaborasi Penanggulangan Radikalisme*.

promoting patriotic and moderate values rather than as a comprehensive developmental need. Field observations, however, demonstrate that education plays a far deeper role; it provides stability, restores a sense of normalcy, and opens genuine prospects for social and economic participation. To build a more effective system, future policies must move beyond ideological reformation and adopt a holistic approach that includes access to formal education, psychosocial healing, civic documentation, and sustained disengagement support. Only through such a child-centered framework can deradicalization efforts contribute to lasting reintegration and the protection of children's rights.

The core objective of the deradicalization programme for children is education, particularly their integration into the state education system. However, several key issues must be resolved before this integration can occur, namely, administrative barriers, psychological rehabilitation, and disengagement. Religious moderation (peaceful religion) and nationalism, as outlined in all relevant regulations, are envisioned outcomes of successfully integrating these children into the educational system. Consequently, selecting educational institutions that firmly uphold the values of moderation and nationalism is essential to ensuring the long-term success of children's deradicalization. Current deradicalization policies, particularly those targeting the children of terrorists, continue to prioritise the reinstillation of religious moderation and nationalism, alongside counselling on the dangers of terrorism, entrepreneurship training, and social and psychological rehabilitation. While education is recognised as a component, it remains insufficiently conceptualised and defined. Yet, education, as a strategic instrument of social reintegration, plays a pivotal role in determining the success of deradicalization efforts. Moreover, education represents a long-term investment that not only enhances the effectiveness of deradicalization programmes but also secures a more promising future for both the children and society at large.

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