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Violent Extremism in Bima, Indonesia: Radical Milieu and Peacebuilding Efforts

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia has been grappling with violent extremist groups since its independence. Among the many places in the country where violent extremist groups have emerged is Bima in West Nusa Tenggara. Bima has a long history of extremist activities, repeated terrorist offences, and, most importantly, sporadic yet strong extremist communities. Bima is often referred to as a place for terrorist recruitment and a safe haven for terrorist fugitives. Yet, despite its significance in Indonesia's terrorist network, violent extremism in Bima remains understudied. This article aims to fill this gap by exploring how and why extremism became deeply rooted in Bima. By making use of the "radical milieu" framework developed by Malthaner and Waldmann, we try to answer two main questions: First, how and why has the interaction between Bima's radical milieu with the local extremist groups escalated and/or de-escalated violent extremism? Second, what are the incentives involved in those interactions which could be useful for strengthening peacebuilding in the future? Based on 35 interviews, including with disengaged extremists, government officials and NGO activists, we argue that extremist groups in Bima have emerged from a social environment that shares similar perspectives with them and, to some extent, is sympathetic to their actions in moral or logistical terms. We further argue that this social environment has both served to escalate and de-escalate violent extremism in Bima.

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Bima is a city and municipality on the island of Sumbawa, located close to the island of Bali. In 2016, the national parliament chose Bima (West Nusa Tenggara), along with Poso (Central Sulawesi) and Solo (Central Java), as one of the sample sites for the then-proposed Anti-terrorism bill due to violent incidents that occurred in the area in the preceding years.[1] Furthermore, Bima and the broader West Nusa Tenggara province remained as priority working areas of Indonesia's anti-terrorist bodies as of 2022.[2]

Several factors contribute to the image of Bima as a vital site for Indonesia's extremist network. First, the Bimanese have an established history of participating in violent extremist activities spanning across the last three decades. Attacks against civilians were few, but there were many occasions when police became the target of terrorist

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operations. Furthermore, Bima extremists have contributed to violent activities in other regions in Indonesia, such as in Poso (Central Sulawesi) and Lampung (Sumatra), as well as at the international level, such as in Syria. A 2020 report calculated that in the five years between 2015 and 2020, no less than 54 Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) members from Bima were arrested or killed in Bima and Poso, including three women.[3] Bima extremists were also among the most active members of Mujahidin in Eastern Indonesia (MIT), one of the most notorious terrorist groups in Indonesia based in Central Sulawesi. One of them, Qatar alias Busron, played a leadership role in MIT.[4] Secondly, Bima has long been known as a safe haven for those on the run from the Indonesian security apparatus, including terrorists. Perhaps the two best examples of those who hid in Bima were MIT leader Santoso and Basri. While hiding in Bima, they married two Bima women and later involved them in military training in Central Sulawesi until they were caught in 2016.[5]

Yet, no systematic study about violent extremism in Bima has been conducted, except for a number of reports from the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) and a 2022 journal article that discusses the role of civil society in counter-terrorism in Bima.[6] IPAC reports suggested that Bima "had all the ingredients for an extremist stronghold: a long history of extremist activity; a critical mass of prisoners and ex-prisoners, many of them with equally committed sisters and wives; charismatic preachers; schools and mosques that could serve as institutional bases; and enough fighters killed by police to keep the revenge motive high".[7] However, it remains unclear how all these ingredients interact, how they influence the formation of terrorist groups in Bima, and how Bimanese society reacts to them.

Our research revolves around two main questions: How and why has the interaction between Bima's radical milieu and the local extremist groups escalated and/or de-escalated violent extremism? Second, what are the incentives involved in those interactions which could be useful for strengthening peacebuilding in the future? To answer the questions, we use a relational perspective to understand the local and dynamic relations between violent extremist groups and their socio-political environment in general. We find the approach useful to address the dynamic patterns of forming, intensifying and de-escalating extremist activities in Bima and beyond. It is imperative to underscore that the prioritisation of this perspective does not entail disregarding personal attribution factors, such as ideology or individual grievances, for radicalisation and individuals' involvement in terrorist groups, nor does it indicate that Bima society is inherently radical. Rather, the principal aim is to underscore the conducive environment that enabled the emergence and endurance of violent extremism in Bima; an area that does not have a history of conflict, like Poso; or is known as the center of radicalisation, such as Solo.

Therefore, this article seeks to address the puzzle using the radical milieu concept. The notion of 'radical milieu' is derived from the social movement literature, such as the works by Alimi and Alimi and Bosi and Demetriou that emphasise the relational and contextual perspectives on political violence.[8] For our analysis, we adopt Malthaner and Waldmann's definition of the radical milieu as a "dynamic and evolving relational field", an interactive environment in both supportive and critical terms.[9] To further expand our analysis, we also discuss the peacebuilding efforts to counter terrorist groups. By 'peacebuilding', we mean both the direct work that intentionally focuses

on addressing the factors driving violence as well as any indirect efforts made to coordinate channels for communication to develop a multi-sectoral strategy to de-escalate violence. The key to peacebuilding here is the relationship that must be established between parties involved in violent conflict. These relationships would be more effective in times of 'restraint', "a process whereby militants choose to drop, downscale or limit an attack or campaign or adopt tactical or strategic innovations that lead them away from violence".[10]

This article explores Muslim extremism in Bima through the analysis of three social circles and the corresponding relationships between (1) the terrorist groups, (2) the radical milieu, and (3) the broader Bima community. The first circle, terrorist groups, refers to groups using violent strategies to achieve their goals. The second circle, the radical milieu, is the immediate and supportive environment that, to some extent, shares similar views and objectives with terrorist groups but disagrees with the violent tactics of terrorist groups. The third and last circle refers to the broader Bima community and the social and political environment.

We argue that extremist groups in Bima emerged from a social environment that shares similar perspectives and, to some extent, is sympathetic to their actions in moral or logistical terms. We further argue that this social environment has served to escalate violent extremism in Bima but also, at times, to de-escalate it. Escalation has been driven by the shared ideals of establishing a caliphate in Indonesia, the lack of public condemnation of extremist violence, and active Islamic solidarity, including supporting the wives, widows, and children of Islamists imprisoned or killed by the security forces. De-escalation has occurred through the provision of opportunities for Islamist activism besides joining extremist groups and by accommodating those who want to leave extremist groups but do not want to give up their radical beliefs and commitments or friends and family who are still involved. While external factors, such as strengthened law enforcement, significantly impact restraining terrorist groups, we will also look at the internal factors, including the renouncement of violent extremism among JAD members and the establishment of new links with other groups.

This article is based on semi-structured interviews with 35 informants in multiple visits to Bima between 2018 and 2022. They included members, former members, and leaders of radical groups in Bima, such as Forum Umat Islam (FUI), Jamaah Ansharut Syariah (JAS), and Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), as well as the wives and widows in Bima whose husbands and family members were involved in terror activities. We also interviewed members of the wider community beyond the radical milieu as well as local government officials, police, academics, and NGO activists. In addition to the interviews, we also closely followed the development of violent extremism in Bima through local and national online newspapers and NGO reports.

This article comprises five sections. The first section focuses on the theories of radicalisation and how the radical milieu perspective provides another insight into understanding the dynamic relationship between terror groups and their broader social and political environment. In the second section, we set up the general context for our case study, Bima. This is followed by the third section, where we analyse how terror groups emerged from the radical milieu in Bima and its situational context. In the fourth section, we look into the detailed relationship between terror groups, the radical milieu, and the broader socio-political context in Bima. The fifth section

explains how peacebuilding efforts have been conducted in Bima following the decline of terrorist activities in the past five years. This article concludes with remarks for future peacebuilding work in Bima.

Radical Milieu, Radicalization, Violent Extremism: Putting Bima on the Theoretical Map

Scholars have tried to explain radicalisation from various theoretical frameworks for many years. Some researchers, such as Borum and Moghaddam, see radicalisation as a linear process with distinct stages.[11] Others argue radicalisation occurs through diverse and multiple pathways caused by risk factors within the interaction between individuals and their environment, for instance, the quest for significance or cognitive opening – realisation of perceived injustice, as suggested by Kruglanski and Wiktorowicz.[12] This research underlines the importance of personal attributions that push or motivate someone to join extremist groups and engage in violent activities in line with Trip.[13] While this perspective is helpful for better understanding radicalisation, it does not answer the questions of 'how' and 'why' a terror group as a collective emerges from a particular context, sustains its existence, and even forms and influences a base that supports its missions.[14] Indeed, Hafez and Mullins highlight that such an approach could lead to false positives in identifying violent extremists since many people are being radicalised only at the cognitive level but do not actually engage in acts of violence.[15] Furthermore, existing studies show that radicalism does not necessarily lead to violence. Sometimes, people are driven to violent organisations because of other factors, including personal ties, social bonds, networks and enabling environments.[16]

Social movement theory offers another approach to understanding the radicalisation process in relation to the interaction between terror groups with other groups and broader socio-political aspects within a specific context.[17] Waldmann, in his earlier work on the radical milieu, suggested that the framework is largely under-investigated.[18] Whereas it is important to investigate that rebel groups, including guerrillas and terrorist groups, cannot maintain relevance in the long run without the backing of a supportive environment, he further contends that terror groups, although acting clandestinely, "emerge from and operate within a specific, immediate social environment … which shares their perspective and objectives, approves of certain forms of violence, and (at least to a certain extent) supports the violent group morally and logistically".[19] They call this immediate environment 'the radical milieu'.

The term 'milieu' connotes the process of interaction of various actors, not merely ideas, beliefs or abstract perceptions. Meanwhile, 'radical' implies mainly forms of action, purpose, and absolutist thinking that support acts of violence. The main factor differentiating violent extremist groups from other groups within the radical milieu is accepting violence. As such, the radical milieu cannot be understood as a static and abstract context but as a "dynamic and evolving relational field that includes groups and individuals that pursue their own interests, interacting and to some extent collaborating with, but at times also criticising, challenging, or even confronting the militant activists".[20]

We find the relational perspective best explains why terror groups emerged from the radical milieu in Bima, why terror acts by Bima extremists escalated and de-escalated

both in Bima and in other places, and how the two circles relate to the social and political contexts of Bima's communities in general. By highlighting this perspective, we do not intend to underplay factors such as ideology or personal grievances that bring someone to be involved in a terror group. We are underscoring the enabling environment to show how it allowed violent extremism to grow and persist in Bima despite not being a post-conflict area such as Poso or a place where radical ideology grew exponentially, such as Solo. Following this relational perspective, we unpack the three circles in Bima starting with the outer one, Muslims in Bima generally.

Bima: The General Context

Bima has a strong Islamic culture rooted in the Bima Islamic Sultanate, which reigned on the eastern half of the island of Sumbawa from 1620 to 1958, with the present Bima City as its capital. Muslims are the majority religious group in the area, comprising 98.51% of the population in Bima City and 99.50% in Bima Regency.[21] Although this composition resembles Indonesia's religious map in general, Muslims in Bima have a particularly strong attachment to Islam because of the role of the Islamic Sultanate in the past and the location of Bima in present-day Indonesia. For them, it is Islam that characterises Bima's distinctive identity compared to its neighbour in the west, Bali Province, which is dominated by Hindus, and its neighbours in the east, East Nusa Tenggara Province, which is predominantly Catholic. As one Bimanese explained: "A young Muslim in Bima may or may not be a devout Muslim, but he will never mess around with his religion…. He is more than willing to be recruited to defend Islam or be killed for the sake of Islamic solidarity".[22] Indeed, according to a popular joke, "In Bima, even a thief will utter *bismillah* before stealing a motorcycle".[23]

Importantly, unlike other places in Indonesia where the largest Muslim organisation is the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the more prominent Muslim organisation in Bima is the modernist Muhammadiyah, widely known for its more purist and literal interpretation of Islamic teachings. Besides, almost all Muslims in Bima are Sunni and mostly conservative. Although this does not mean that they are against pluralism or are intolerant toward other religious groups, they strongly support political Islam, the idea that Muslims should be given priority in public policy making and implementation given their absolute majority in number; some of them even believe that this is what democracy really means.[24] While this also echoes the general pattern of Muslim conservatism in Indonesia,[25] in Bima it took on stronger connotations which are relevant to our discussion on the radical milieu. One strong indicator of Muslim support for political Islam in Bima is the results of the last two Indonesian presidential elections in 2014 and 2019, which staged the same candidates: Joko Widodo (Jokowi), who ran on a pluralist platform, and Prabowo Subianto, who ran on Islamist platform. Despite losing the election in 2014 and 2019 at a national level, Prabowo was extremely successful at a local level in Bima where he captured an absolute majority of vote: 76% in Bima City and 71% in Bima Regency in 2014, and 71% in Bima City and 84.61% in Bima Regency in 2019. It was Jokowi's second loss in Bima while running against the same opponent despite selecting Ma'ruf Amin, a deeply conservative Muslim leader from NU and former Head of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama

Indonesia, MUI), as his running mate. The incumbent was able to increase his share of the vote by five per cent in Bima City but lost more than 14% in Bima regency. In short, for Muslims in Bima, Jokowi's pluralist platform plus an Islamist running mate was still less appealing than Prabowo's Islamist platform.

In this general environment of Muslim conservatism and strong support for political Islam, it is relatively easy to understand why the radical milieu emerged in Bima, in which various Muslim actors interact and form alliances to secure the general interest of Muslims in Bima. Even though the radical milieu does not have to be in the form of formal institutions, the best institutional representative in contemporary Bima is the Islamic Community Forum (Forum Umat Islam, FUI). FUI-Bima includes organisations such as JAS, the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council (Madinah), the Mosque Brigade (Brigade Masjid), and many others. This forum was initially established in 2014 to protest the construction of Tambora Pura, a Hindu house of worship. In the last five years, FUI has also conducted "moral sweeping" on New Year's Eve to ensure no alcohol is served. When they run this activity, they receive much support from the local government or the police. Despite the similar name, this forum does not have any affiliations with al-Khaththat's Islamic Community Forum (FUI), which took part in the 2016 mass mobilisations over the blasphemy case against then Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (also known as the 212 Movement).

The emergence of the radical milieu in Bima for the last two decades occurred when various Muslim organisations strengthened their religious campaign "to promote virtue and to forbid vice" (*amar makruf nahi munkar*), which was made possible because of Indonesia's re-democratisation after the fall of Suharto in 1998. Although all activists in Bima's radical milieu agreed on this common goal, they had different views on achieving it. The two most controversial issues separating these activists were: (1) whether it is justified to change the entire Indonesian political system with an alternative system of governance such as a caliphate (*khilafah*); and (2) whether it is Islamically permissible to use violence to achieve that goal. On the first issue, activists from organisations such as FUI opposed the idea of establishing a caliphate in Indonesia. Similar to Muslim activists from the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI) in Java, they preferred to push the realisation of *amar makruf nahi munkar* ideals through various channels provided by the current democratic system, for instance, by conducting 'moral sweepings' when deemed necessary. In contrast to this, Bima activists from other organisations, such as JAS, generally believe that Muslims are currently facing the fifth phase of "*khilafah' ala minhaj al-nubuwwah*" (the caliphate according to the prophetic methodology), which clearly indicates their support for its possible establishment in the future. As Abdul Hakim, a former head of JAS in Bima, explained: "All Muslim groups fighting for a *khilafah* are basically the same: They are 'small boats' of *jama'atun min al-Muslimin* (communities of Muslims) who sail towards the big house of *jama'atul Muslimin* (the one and unified Muslim community)".[26]

JAS' position on the issue of the *khilafah* has located them close to terrorist groups such as JAD. However, the two organisations have contrasting opinions on whether establishing a *khilafah* should be achieved by violent means. While JAD officially justified the use of violent strategies and tactics and even made it obligatory for Muslims when necessary, JAS largely opposed it. Here lies the boundary separating

the radical milieu from terror groups in Bima or other places. Yet, while the borderline between the two appears to be clear on paper, in reality, it is more complex, and the relationship between them is more dynamic and fluid, the subject of our discussion in the next section.

The Formation of Terrorist Groups in Bima

Malthanaer and Waldmann explain three formation mechanisms of terrorist groups in relation to the radical milieu. Firstly, they emerge gradually from an already established radical milieu. In this process, the escalating friction between state apparatuses and protest movements pushed some groups within the radical milieu to take extreme positions as they concluded that protests were no longer sufficient to achieve social change, thus choosing violence as their new strategy. The second mechanism is called 'co-constitution'. Here, the radical milieu and clandestine groups develop simultaneously but independently from one another as a response to perceived threats or repression. The two entities may interact at some point, have a sense of solidarity, or share some foundational principles. It is even possible for groups in the radical milieu to ask violent extremists to carry out attacks for their protection or revenge. Yet, they also have boundaries that hinder their unity. The third and last mechanism is the supportive or secondary milieu sympathetic to extremist causes. This secondary milieu usually emerges later in terrorist groups, often as a by-product of their propaganda by exploiting stories of torture and hardship of the detained and killed members. All three of those mechanisms are evident in Bima.

Emerging from the Pre-Existing Radical Milieu

Like many other radical groups in Indonesia, the extremists in Bima stemmed from a long-standing Islamic radical movement called Darul Islam (DI), initiated in 1948, just a few years after Indonesian independence, which sought to establish the Islamic state of Indonesia.[27] They pushed for the implementation of Islamic law by organising rebellions in their strongholds in West Java (where its founder, Kartosoewirjo, lived), South Sulawesi, Aceh, and South Kalimantan. The Indonesian government captured Kartosoewirjo in 1962, tried him for subversion, and sentenced him to death. The crackdown pushed DI underground, where its members and sympathisers created splinter groups or joined other groups to voice their anti-government sentiments.

The earliest record of Bimanese militant Islamist action was the attempted assassination of President Soekarno in 1957 near his house at Cikini, Jakarta. It was orchestrated by an anti-communist Bimanese group with heavy influence from Darul Islam.[28] The group disliked Soekarno for his rejection of the idea of an Islamic state in Indonesia. Following Soekarno, who called the incident a "terror" act, some Indonesian historians designated this incident as "the first generation of terrorism" in Indonesia.[29] They decided to use violence as they perceived that confronting the president through legal, democratic means, was no longer sufficient. The incident failed to achieve its primary goal but succeeded in killing eleven people and injuring more than 30 civilians.[30] In the 1970s, another violent incident involving Bimanese occurred when a

religious teacher from Bima, Abdul Qadir Baraja, was arrested for securing weapons for Darul Islam through raids on police stations in Sumatra.[31] After three years in prison, he became a teacher at Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's al-Mukmin Islamic Boarding School in Ngruki, Solo, but then was arrested again, this time for supplying explosives used in the January 1985 bombing of the Borobudur temple in Central Java. In 1989, Bima activists were also involved in the so-called Talangsari/Lampung 'incident', when a new generation of Darul Islam fighters tried to use a local Islamic boarding school to launch an uprising. Those arrested and sentenced for this incident returned to Bima after their release. One of them was Muhammad Abdul Gani, the father of Abrory, who later played a significant role in Bima's extremist connections. Gani sent his son Abrory to an Islamic boarding school in Jepara, Central Java, which was affiliated with Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), a splinter group of Darul Islam that later became Southeast Asia's largest militant Islamist group.[32] This school provided Abrory with a network of extremist communities. Later, in 2001, Abrory went to Buru (Maluku) at the height of the Ambon conflict for bomb-making training. In 2003, he returned to Bima, where he established the Umar bin Khattab (UBK) Islamic boarding school in Bolo and recruited Mujahidul Haq alias Uqbah, another graduate of one of JI schools, as a senior teacher.[33] This school was part of JI's larger missionary (*dakwah*) strategy to disseminate their teachings to future generations.

Co-Constitution of Extremist Groups in Bima

The formation of extremist groups and the radical milieu in Bima underwent a series of complex and dynamic processes involving two main groups: the UBK-related group led by Abrory and Uqbah and the Tauhid wal Jihad group, which was founded by Iskandar and based in Penatoi. Although they had different approaches and strategies, the two groups shared a similar goal of establishing an Islamic state in Indonesia, which led to close interaction between them, sometimes antagonistic and sometimes supportive. Their interaction resulted in four stages of extremist activism in Bima: first, UBK as the centre of extremist activities; second, UBK versus Tauhid wal Jihad; third, their unity under Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT); and fourth, the split over whether to pledge loyalty to ISIS.

Initially, with its strong links to JI, UBK was the centre of extremist activities in Bima. However, this changed with the return of Iskandar in 2004 to Bima. Iskandar was born and spent most of his childhood in Java, but his Arabic skills and solid extremist background helped him to gain a good reputation among Bima extremists. He emerged as a popular *guru* among the extremists. He played a crucial role in linking the Bimanese radicals to Islamist militants in Indonesia, such as the Mujahidin of Western Indonesia (Mujahidin Indonesia Barat, MIB) and the Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia (Mujahidin Indonesia Timur, MIT), as well as Islamist militants abroad such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). His father, M. Natsir from Dompu (West Nusa Tenggara), was an early JI member directly involved in forming JI in Malaysia.[34] Iskandar spent years studying in various Islamic boarding schools in Java and briefly attended Arabic literature classes at the State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta. JI local leaders at UBK welcomed Iskandar's return to Bima with an open heart. They hired him as a teacher and created a space for him to preach through a JI-linked foundation called Mizanul Amal.

The harmonious relationship, however, did not last long. When Iskandar started to label people involved in political parties as infidels (*kafir*), friction emerged between Iskandar and local JI members, who had a more lenient view toward political parties. Indeed, their charity organisation, Mizanul Amal, often received donations from parties such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). The infidel designation offended many PKS members, causing them to withdraw support from the foundation. JI *ulama* confronted Iskandar because of the funding and because branding someone an apostate is a severe matter with dire consequences – deserving of death. Regardless, Iskandar persisted.[35] After a series of discussions with no solution, the JI *ulama* cut their ties with Iskandar, expelling him from UBK and excluding him from JI activities. This marked the beginning of the second stage of Bima extremists' dynamics.

Iskandar turned this exclusion into an opportunity to build a new radical circle in the Istiqomah Mosque in Penatoi. Penatoi is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Bima City. While this had attracted Bima economic and political dignitaries to settle there, the neighbourhood also had its fair share of cockfighting, gambling, consumption of alcohol, and drug abuse – an environment which, according to Iskandar, was suitable for a religious mission.[36] He gained influence there, by approaching young people and holding fun activities such as hiking and camping. His charisma, knowledge, and Arabic skills grabbed the youngsters' attention and led them to become regulars at the mosque. JI *ulama*, previously active in Penatoi, slowly left as people were more interested in Iskandar's teachings. He proceeded to consolidate his community while, at the same time, expanding connections with other extremist networks outside Bima.

The third stage began with the establishment of Ba'asyir's new group, Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), in 2008. Ba'asyir's followers, including the UBK group, left JI and joined JAT. Aman Abdurrahman, a renowned extremist intellectual and Iskandar's teacher, was also briefly part of JAT. In 2009, he visited Bima for a month to preach about Islam's concept of the oneness of God (*tawhid*) and struggle (*jihad*). Iskandar knew that he was under the same roof as the UBK group in JAT. He approached Abrory and offered him to host a study circle (*pengajian*) in UBK with Aman as the speaker. Abrory accepted the offer.[37] People in UBK were pleased with Aman's session, and it was followed up with more study circles managed by both the Penatoi and UBK groups. This opened communication and improved the relationship between the two groups. Aman's hardline views convinced teachers and students in UBK to take further action in fighting against the infidels: the Indonesian government and its apparatus. In 2011, a UBK student stabbed a police officer with a knife, resulting in the security forces laying siege to UBK, followed by the arrest of UBK students and teachers, including Abrory.[38] Those who managed to escape the siege joined extremists in Penatoi or went to Poso to join MIT.

The last stage of the dynamics of Bima extremists resulted from ISIS's declaration of their caliphate in 2014, which resulted in a debate among Indonesian extremists on whether to support Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Ba'asyir, who was in prison when he received advice from Aman Abdurrahman and other pro-ISIS extremists, pledged allegiance to ISIS.[39] However, many JAT members disagreed with the use of violence and its practice of accusing another Muslim of apostasy or declaring another Muslim as infidel (*takfiri*). They also rejected the way al-Baghdadi declared himself as caliph. JAT thus split in two: The pro-ISIS members joined the newly formed coalition called

Jamaah Anshorut Daulah (JAD), while the dissidents, led by an East Java cleric, Muhammad Akhwan, created a new group called Jamaah Ansharut Syari'ah (JAS). JAT in Bima also split. Uqbah, a senior UBK teacher, was anti-ISIS and exercised his influence to persuade as many people as possible, mostly his students and colleagues in UBK, to go against ISIS and join JAS.[40] Meanwhile, Bima extremists in Penatoi were among the first to declare support for al-Baghdadi and announced themselves as the JAD branch in Bima.[41]

The Secondary Milieu: Grievances of Jihadists' Families

The pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi by pro-ISIS extremists had two immediate consequences. First, it strengthened the desire of Bima extremists to go to Syria and join ISIS there. Second, it convinced other members to follow ISIS's appeal that if they could not get to Syria, they should wage war at home, which led to a surge in attacks on the police and the sending of Bima extremists to Poso to join MIT.[42] The increase in violent activities in Bima, in turn, caused more extremists to become the target of operations by the security forces. Many were arrested or killed, leaving their families behind with traumatic experiences. Stories about police torture of the detainees were pervasive, causing more distrust and hatred toward the state apparatus. A widow whose husband was killed in a 2013 police shootout told us she was adamant that her husband was tortured as some parts of his body were broken, even missing. She hoped that her children could take revenge. She said: "Later, let me tell them who killed their [father]. Let them find the person. His three children are all boys. They all will be *mujahidin*, God willing".[43] These narratives, which are easily exploited for re-radicalisation to form the next extremist generation, are referred to by Malthaner and Waldmann as the "secondary milieu".

The extremist community in Bima played an active role in the formation of the secondary milieu. The small, closely-knit pro-ISIS groups often initiated community-led charities to help needy families.[44] Aside from financial support, they provided free education for children in the Abu Bakar Asshidique Quranic recital house in Penatoi. By doing so, they could help parents while nurturing the regeneration of extremists. As the Quranic recital house does not comply with the national curriculum, it is not registered under the Ministry of Education or Religious Affairs. Thus, when schools were generally closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, they remained open, and the school became the only alternative for children's education. Furthermore, the extremist community would also support the children to continue their education in extremist-linked schools.[45] The eldest son of Bahtiar, who was shot by police in 2013, received support to finish his education at al-Madinah Boarding School in Bima, a JAS-linked institution. After finishing his education, he was given a scholarship to continue his studies at a JI-linked school in Pare, Kediri, East Java. The formation of this secondary milieu through the social activism of the extremist community in Bima contributed to the resilience of the terrorist groups who continued to be supported by the solid in-group ties and solidarity, as well as its relations with the existing radical milieu and broader social and political issues. Thus, while the strengthened law enforcement was able to restrain some of the extremist community in Bima, it did not wipe it out.

Interaction Between Extremist Groups, the Radical Milieu, and the Broader Social and Political Context

Some activists in Bima's radical milieu, such as those from JI or JAS, shared the same goals with the terrorist group JAD, namely to establish an Islamic caliphate in Indonesia. However, they interpreted their shared objectives differently pertaining to their own interests, which led to diverse strategies and methods for achieving them. Among the various groups in the radical milieu in Bima, JAS arguably was closest to JAD as members came from the same reference group, JAT. JAS activists, however, could not tolerate JAD's *takfiri* stance and rejected the brutal acts conducted by ISIS supporters, including JAD. In contrast, JAS activists preferred a non-violent strategy and tactics. These differences soured the relationship between JAS and JAD activists, even at the individual level. For instance, Hakim, the aforementioned former head of JAS, told us that his former mentors and students turned away from him whenever they met.[46] The dispute also disrupted familial ties, as experienced by Mustakim, a former terrorist prisoner who was involved in the 2011 UBK siege but then joined JAS. His family has an extremist background, and all his siblings are associated with either JAS or JAD. He decided to stay with JAS after his release in 2012, but his older sister married a JAD member. Mustakim's relationship with his sister has been strained ever since as he campaigned against ISIS while his sister remained an ardent ISIS supporter who condemned his decision to join JAS.[47]

Although the split of JAT was a bitter experience, JAS members still respected their former pro-ISIS teachers, such as Ba'asyir. As Abdul Hakim explained: "Ustadz Abu Bakar Ba'asyir is like a parent to us".[48] Moreover, even though they opposed JAD's *takfiri* stance, they never openly condemned its goals. JAS's experience in Bima allows us to draw two conclusions. First, the radical milieu provided opportunities for radical Islamist activism besides joining terror groups. It also accommodated those who wanted to leave terror groups but did not want to give up their beliefs, commitments or friends. In short, this radical milieu was able to channel their political aspirations non-violently. Second, although some parts of the radical milieu rejected violent tactics and stopped supporting terror groups logistically, they benefitted from the dissemination of the shared goals to a broader audience. Additionally, non-violent extremist groups such as JAS gained political benefits by facilitating extremist-minded individuals while operating in a safer zone. Here we find the development of what Malthaner and Waldmann have called an "almost symbiotic relationship … in which the radical milieu 'authorises' and 'delegates' the use of certain forms of violence to the armed group and acts as its legal arm, publicly legitimising attacks and seeking to transform them into political momentum".[49]

This brings us to the relationship between the radical milieu in Bima and the broader community, which is strongly connected to the social and political issues in local and national contexts. The heightened polarisation in Indonesia following the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial and 2019 presidential elections had a knock-on effect on Bima politics, resulting in the changing public perception of the lines between the radical milieu and terrorist groups. With its open structure, the radical milieu became the frontline of the state's repression and appeasement, so they needed to negotiate their position vis-a-vis the government and terror groups. When the Islamists gained

popularity in late 2016 because of the blasphemy case against Christian-Chinese Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok, it crystallised[2] the nationwide mobilisation for political Islam. This affected the national sentiment before the 2019 presidential election and pushed Jokowi to select Ma'ruf Amin as his running mate to strengthen his Islamic credentials, particularly among NU voters.[50] It is crucial to note that when he was the Head of MUI, Amin was one of the masterminds behind the well-known "Defend Islam" protest on 2 December 2016 in Jakarta which demanded the arrest of Ahok.[51]

This political development on the national level empowered the radical milieu in Bima for two related reasons. First, following his success in the 2019 presidential election, Jokowi's public policies have been characterised by their inclination toward more Muslim majoritarianism in Indonesia, which the radical milieu in Bima certainly favoured. Secondly, their "unsung hero", Prabowo, who lost the national election but won significantly in Bima City and Bima Regency, played a significant role in this shift in national policy. As Bouchier has accurately observed: "The success of Prabowo in marrying his nativist brand of authoritarian populism with Islamist sectarianism … has created a new dynamic in Indonesian politics".[52]

In Bima, there is no stronger evidence for this shift in Jokowi's policy than the relationship between the local government and FUI, the prime institutional representative of the radical milieu. When FUI was initially established in 2014, the local government viewed it as a radical organisation. In the last few years, however, FUI slowly but surely gained the trust of the local government, which they used to negotiate their radical agenda. For example, when FUI planned to stage a big "Defend Islam" demonstration in Bima on 2 December 2016, Bima's Regional Leadership Coordination Forum (FKPD) initially opposed the plan. However, FUI kept pushing its agenda until it obtained permission. As Asikin, the head of FUI, explained: "We did not give a damn… We had no intention to take radical action. When they decided not to give permission, the ulama countered their argument. Finally, they accepted it".[53] Nowadays, the relationship between FUI and the government has become even closer; every time FUI plans to take action, they inform local officials to secure their permission and often ask for assistance. However, the enactment of the new 2018 anti-terrorism law has affected Bima's radical milieu in a different direction. This time, it forced the extremist activists within the radical milieu to keep their distance from terror groups and not assist them in any way. With a broader definition of terrorism in the law, those who share the same views as the terror groups need to be careful not to give the impression that they and JAD are associated in any way.[54] For this reason, JAS leaders openly rejected the terror groups and proclaimed their support for the government.

Peacebuilding and Deradicalisation in Bima

Over the last five years, there has been a downward trend in Indonesia's extremist activities, including in Bima. Although the defeat of ISIS in Syria in March 2019 may have contributed to the slowdown of extremist activities in Indonesia, various national and local initiatives also played a crucial role. The Indonesian government applied two general methods in countering extremism. The first "hard" approach was through

law enforcement and continuous monitoring of the terror groups, which became a major external brake that restrained terrorist movement.[55] The central figure of JAD Bima, Iskandar, was re-arrested in 2017. A year later, in 2018, the government passed a new and strengthened anti-terror law, enabling the security apparatus to conduct "preventive strikes" against suspected terrorists. This allowed for mass arrests of JAD officials, financiers and members. In 2019, the police arrested their leader, Muhammad Zedon, and other members. Later, in early 2023, Zedon himself renounced extremism. Meanwhile, MIT, which many Bima extremists were part of, was claimed to have been wiped out in 2022.[56] Funding was also in decline with stricter law enforcement.

The second, "soft" approach was through personal communication with members of the extremist groups, ex-terrorist convicts, and their family members. By establishing relationships between local police officers and members and sympathisers of terror groups, it was hoped that the latter group would change their views regarding the police and government apparatus. In Bima, for instance, a local police officer, who originally came from Penatoi often helped JAD members with their daily needs, such as obtaining personal documents and distributing government aid to extremist families.[57] Religious leaders and civil society activists also played an essential role. One example is the initiatives made by Eka Zulkarnain, the head of the Islamic Community Guidance Section (Kasi Bimas Islam) in the Bima Ministry of Religion Office and the chair of the Muhammadiyah Youth. In addition to his role as a state official and a leader of a Muslim organisation, Zulkarnain has played the role of bridge builder between the government and the community. This was most prominent from 2006 to 2018 when he led the Inter-Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB). Under his leadership, the FKUB routinely organised forums on sensitive issues such as *jihad* according to Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Due to his social standing and extensive network, Zulkarnain was able to invite prominent figures from radical organisations such as JAS, JAT, or FUI to participate in these forums. In this, he was supported by his colleagues in the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Muhammadiyah. Crucially, Zulkarnain also encouraged Ustad Gunawan, an influential figure among the terror groups in Penatoi, to leave his extremist circle. This started when Zulkarnain helped Gunawan's wife when she was about to give birth: "I helped them from getting an ambulance to the delivery of the child at the Muhammadiyah Hospital in Bima. Previously, we did not know each other. [He] began to accept me, and since then, we have been on good terms". More than that, Zulkarnain also convinced Gunawan's wife to buy a car on credit: "So that they will always be tied to [formal] institutions".[58]

Ustad Gunawan turned away from JAD for several reasons. First, he considered JAD Bima careless and lacking long-term planning while conducting terror acts, leaving its members to be easily targeted or captured.[59] His second reason was his family, especially his wife. She worked at Zulkarnain's office as a civil servant and had always opposed her husband's involvement in terrorist groups: "If a husband wants to do *jihad*, he has to do it in Afghanistan or Syria, which is a battlefield, not a peaceful country like Indonesia".[60] She always reminded her husband that his primary *jihad* was to become an *imam* for his family and to be a good father to his children.

Ustad Gunawan's case shows that self-initiated disengagement and deradicalisation are more effective.[61] Ustad Gunawan is not the only one who disavowed his pledge to ISIS and fought against extremist teachings in Bima. Iskandar, repeatedly mentioned

here as the key figure of JAD Bima, also embarked upon this path in 2021. His renouncement caused a commotion within the pro-ISIS community in Indonesia. Many of his former students regarded him as an apostate and turned away from him. The road to breaking off the ties with extremist groups is not simple. Iskandar contended that many prisoners are willing to renounce.[62] However, their radical wives and family members have hampered the decision as they would turn against their husbands once they knew their husbands wished to de-radicalise or have de-radicalised. Indeed, some women quickly remarried other jihadis even before being lawfully divorced.

Conclusion

We wish to highlight three conclusions. First, although they are closed and operating clandestinely, violent extremist groups in Bima are inseparable from their radical milieu, including supporters of legal organisations such as JAS and FUI. They all share the aims of establishing a caliphate and implementing Islamic law, although they have different strategies and tactics. The boundaries separating the two cannot always be drawn clearly. While the radical milieu in Bima is sometimes aggrieved by violent acts carried out by the ISIS-inspired extremist groups, and they were involved in the dispute, it is safe to say that they also provided at least moral support. Moreover, in the name of Islamic solidarity, they sometimes helped vulnerable children and widows in areas such as Penatoi whose fathers and husbands had been killed. However, this milieu could also be an environment that prevented activists from getting involved in violence by providing other forms and opportunities for activism besides joining extremist groups. This milieu also accommodated those who wanted to leave extremist groups but did not want to give up their beliefs, commitments or friends.

Second, the formation of the radical milieu in Bima preceded but also coincided with the formation of extremist groups. For example, some groups dissatisfied with the more moderate groups moved down a harder path from the radical milieu. A radical milieu can also emerge later, following the rise of extremist groups. Here, underground extremist groups formed supporting legal or semi-legal organisations to support their operations, exert pressure, and mobilise public support.

Third, although there are terrorist groups and a radical milieu in Bima, we saw the initiatives to strengthen the peacebuilding infrastructure there. Among the radical milieu in Bima, these efforts provided restraint. These efforts were complemented by the national government's attempts to counter terrorism through hard and soft approaches to deradicalisation. We need to pay more attention to these local initiatives because they came from the Bimanese closest to the terror groups. We concur with Busher and Bjørgo that "however abhorrent we might find certain groups, we are likely to understand them better if we understand them as individuals, as human beings and all that this implies, rather than falling back on demonisation and stereotypes".[63]

Notes

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22. Interview with Zulkarnain, 19 October 2018.

23. Interview with Makka, 11 December 2018.
24. Support for political Islam is reflected in views such as: Islamic law or *sharia* should be implemented throughout Indonesia; regions in Indonesia should be allowed to implement Islamic law at the local level; blasphemy against Islam should be punished more severely; or when participating in general elections, it is imperative for Muslim to choose a Muslim leader.
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32. Solahudin, *Dari NII ke JI*.
33. Uqbah attended JI-linked schools Darus Syahadah in Boyolali and Ma'had Aly in Solo, both in Central Java, where he met JI senior figure Lutfi Hadairoh alias Ubaid. In 2010, both were arrested for financing the Aceh training camp. It was also due to Ubaid's advice that Uqbah decided to fight against ISIS teachings in Bima after his release in 2014.
34. Trial dossiers of Iskandar alias Abu Qutaibah alias Alex, 2 April 2018. Unless we mention otherwise, all our information on Iskandar is based on this source.
35. Interview with Iskandar, 17 September 2022.
36. Ibid.
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41. Court document of Muhammad alias Abu Silmi alias Abu Abdurrahman alias Abu Khodijah bin Zaidon, No. 1076/Pid.Sus/2020/PN Jkt.Utr, 23 November 2020.
42. See testimony of Kurniawan alias Kurnia bin H. Hamzah, document of North Jakarta District Court, No.1390/Pid.Sus/2017/PN.Jkt Utr, 2 April 2018.
43. Interview with Ummu Fathanah [pseudonym], 16 October 2018.
44. Pro-ISIS charities provide a monthly stipend of around Rp. 200,000 (USD 13) for families of detained or killed extremists. Court document of Salman alias Nasi Kuning, No. 239/Pid/Sus/2015/PN.Jkt.Tim, 15 July 2015.
45. Interview with Ummu Nuraini, the wife of Bahtiar who was shot death in 2013, 8 December 2020.
46. Interview with Hakim, 12 February 2019.
47. Interview with Mustakim, December 2020.
48. Interview with Abdul Hakim, 12 February 2019.
49. Malthaner and Waldmann, "The Radical Milieu", 991.
50. Jokowi chose Maruf because the two Islamic parties in his coalition disagreed with Jokowi's choice and threatened to leave the coalition. This could potentially lead to the loss of votes

from NU and the possibility of a new axis emerging in the 2019 elections; something he wanted to avoid. The selection of Maruf Amin was the safest option as Amin had no ambition to run in the next elections. See: IPAC. 2019. "Anti-Ahok to Anti-Jokowi: Islamist Influence on Indonesia's 2019 Election Campaign". IPAC Report No. 55. 15 March 2019.

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52. Bourchier, "Two Decades of Ideological Contestation in Indonesia", 18.
53. Interview with Asikin, 12 February 2019.
54. Interview with Mustakim, December 2020.
55. Busher and Bjørgo, "Restraint in Terrorist Groups and Radical Milieus", 3.
56. In 2022, Security apparatuses killed the last leaders of MIT and declared that MIT had been wiped out. However, a 2023 IPAC report shows that the potential for violent extremism is still present despite weakening. See: IPAC. 2023." Militant in Poso: Down but Not Out", IPAC Report No. 86, 27 June 2023.
57. Interview with Sandi, 9 February 2019.
58. Interview with Zulkarnaen, 12 February 2019.
59. Interview with Ustad Gunawan, 11 December 2018.
60. Interview with Ummu Tetty, 17 October 2018.
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63. Busher and Bjørgo, "Restraint in Terrorist Groups and Radical Milieus", 5.

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