



Identifying the Driving Factors and Individual Attachment to Terrorist Groups: A Case Study of a Former JAD Member

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Abstract

Terrorist radicalization has become a tangible threat to global security, including in Indonesia, as many individuals remain exposed to radical ideologies and join terrorist groups. This study aims to understand the driving factors behind individuals' decisions to enter and the causes of their attachment to terrorist groups, using the case study of SMA (a former member of JAD). This research employs a qualitative method through direct interviews with SMA. The findings indicate that terrorism radicalization is a gradual process of transformation involving changes in worldview, identity shifts, and strengthened loyalty to the group, culminating in an individual's readiness to carry out acts of terror. In the case of SMA, social injustice and relative deprivation, particularly towards state institutions, served as driving factors for joining a terrorist group. The study also finds that individual attachment to terrorist groups may be influenced by psychological, social, and emotional aspects, wherein the terrorist group can serve as an ideological "home" for its members, and the "Ustad" within the group may function as an ideological "father." Therefore, deradicalization programs should not only focus on ideology or the fulfillment of economic needs but also consider psychological and social aspects. This is because the driving factors and stages of radicalization for each terrorist group member are unique, thus requiring differentiated handling approaches.

Keywords: Driving Factors, Attachment, Radicalization, Terror, JAD.

Introduction

Radicalism is one of the significant issues in the context of global security and continues to draw the attention of various countries. This is because, although it may also carry a pejorative connotation, radicalism is often discussed in a negative sense, particularly in relation to extremism and terrorism (Dahniel, 2023). Radicalism may arise from misinterpretations of religion, be misused by those seeking to distort religious teachings, or be propagated by individuals promoting deviant religious doctrines (Sahal & Bayuseto, 2022).

In the socio-religious context, radicalism can be defined as actions by individuals or groups that are based on religious beliefs but contradict fundamental principles of humanity (Mustofa & Mahmudah, 2019). Radicalism can also be defined as the embryo of terrorism, as it seeks total change by replacing existing values through violence or extreme actions (Rihadatul Aisy et al., 2019). Radicalism has existed since ancient times, and it has become increasingly severe and poses a greater potential threat in the era of globalization (Nurfadliyati & Kusmana, 2021). The presence of radicalism within a country constitutes a threat, as experiences in various nations have shown that radicalism can trigger conflicts, both vertical and horizontal (Tahir & Tahir, 2020).

Each year, the level of global radicalism is estimated to be escalating at an alarming rate. The 2024 report by the Institute for Economics and Peace indicates an approximate 22% increase in the number of terrorism-related fatalities in 2023, totaling around 8,352 deaths, compared to the previous year (IEP, 2024). In the Indonesian context, based on a 2020 survey by the Wahid Institute, the trend of intolerance and radicalism has shown a tendency to increase annually, with approximately 0.4%, or around 600,000 Indonesians, reported to have engaged in radical actions (Siagian, 2020). Meanwhile, Boy Rafli Amar (then Head of the National Counterterrorism Agency/BNPT) stated that in 2022, Indonesia's Radicalism Potential Index was 10%, reflecting a decrease of 2.2% from 2020 (BNPT, 2022). Although a decline has been observed, the threat of radicalism in Indonesia remains a concern, particularly among groups vulnerable to radical exposure. According to a 2023 study by the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), the most susceptible groups to radicalism in Indonesia are women, children, and youth aged 11–26 years, especially those who are active on the Internet (Sholihin, 2023).

The phenomenon of radicalism, particularly in Indonesia the result of a continuous and massive process of radicalization, as radicalization can be briefly defined as the transitional process from non-radicalism to radicalism (Abbas, 2024). Radicalization can be defined as a process in which an individual or group undergoes a shift in perspective that diverges from commonly held views and carries the potential to involve violence (Ulaş, 2024). In the context of terrorism, radicalization can be defined as the process through which extremist ideologies develop, leading individuals or groups to carry out acts of terrorism or become recruited by terrorist organizations (Awan & Lewis, 2023). Radicalization has two main focal points: (1) the use of violence to achieve specific objectives; and (2) efforts to bring about profound and large-scale societal change that may endanger democracy and involve the use of violence (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009).

The ongoing process of radicalization and the emergence of radicalism pose a significant threat to a nation, particularly Indonesia, as radicalism and radicalization are closely linked to extremism and terrorism. The process of radicalization leading to violent extremism and terrorism constitutes a continuous and dynamic threat, as it generates uncertainty and instability, ultimately resulting in a pervasive sense of insecurity (Moyano et al., 2022). Radicalization can be referred to as the gateway to terrorism, as it has become a tool used by terrorist recruiters to influence individuals into accepting violent extremism (Meleagrou-Hitchens & Kaderbhai, 2017). Numerous studies have shown that various terrorist networks in Indonesia have carried out radicalization, both to recruit individuals as members of terrorist groups and to encourage individuals to carry out acts of terror. In its development, radicalization by terrorist groups has become increasingly facilitated by the presence of the internet, where an individual can become radicalized merely by reading online without ever leaving their room (Huda, 2019).

Terrorist groups in Indonesia have long conducted radicalization as one of the means to achieve their objective, namely the establishment of Syariat Islam. One such group is Al-Jama'ah Al-Islamiyah, which, in its General Guidelines for Struggle (PUPJI), outlines the methods for recruiting, indoctrinating, and training new members to ensure obedience and loyalty to the organization (Pavlova, 2007). Al-Jama'ah Al-Islamiyah also has a handbook titled Strategi Kemenangan (Strategy for Victory), which the organization compiled under the leadership of Para Wijayanto. The handbook transformed the strategic approach of Al-Jama'ah

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Al-Islamiyah from an elitist jihad to a mass-based jihad, and from prioritizing violence to emphasizing religious proselytization (dakwah)(Nuraniyah & Solahudin, 2023). The handbook demonstrates that Al-Jama'ah Al-Islamiyah prioritizes dakwah as a means of radicalization to disseminate its ideology in pursuit of the organization's goals.

In addition to Al-Jama'ah Al-Islamiyah, another terrorist group known to be actively engaged in various activities, including radicalization, is Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD). JAD is one of the terrorist groups affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), previously known as Jamaah Ansharul Khilafah Indonesia (Widya, 2020). JAD was claimed to have been established to unify all ISIS-affiliated groups in Indonesia, including Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) and Mujahid Indonesia Timur (MIT) (Borg, 2018). Under the leadership of Maman Abdurrahman, JAD succeeded in recruiting members from ISIS-supporting groups such as the Forum of Islamic Sharia Activists (FAKSI) and the Tawhid Wal Jihad group to become part of JAD, which serves as evidence of JAD's successful radicalization efforts (RSIS et al., 2018).

Over time, JAD has grown into one of the largest terrorist groups in Indonesia. According to research by LAB 45, between 2000 and 2021, JAD carried out approximately 82 terrorist attacks, accounting for 15% of the total 552 terrorist incidents in Indonesia. Meanwhile, groups affiliated with JAD, such as MIT and JAT, collectively conducted around 187 attacks, or 34% of the total terrorist acts in the country (Gindarsah & Widjajanto, 2021). Subsequently, in 2022, a JAD member attacked the Astana Anyar Police Station in Bandung City, resulting in the death of one police officer and injuries to several others(CNN Indonesia, 2023).

JAD has evolved into the primary weapon of ISIS in Indonesia (Borg, 2018) Aman Abdurrahman has played a significant role in its development. He has been actively involved in disseminating writings, translating, and editing various materials, particularly those related to ISIS ideology, in formats such as audio recordings, books, and articles (Arianti, 2017). Aman Abdurrahman's works have become foundational sources for radicalizing JAD members throughout Indonesia.

One example of a JAD network is the group led by xx (name withheld), which once planned to carry out an attack on the xx and xx offices in the year xx using a bomb. The group leader was arrested by Densus 88 before the attack could be executed and was found to have received funding from Afghanistan to carry out the terrorist act. One of the JAD members also arrested in connection with the case was SMA, who was apprehended by Densus 88 in the city of xx in the year xx for planning a Fa'i operation and having knowledge of bomb-making activities.

SMA did not have a strong religious background; however, over time, he became one of the JAD members with strong convictions in the group's teachings, to the extent of being ready to carry out a terrorist act. The significant shift in SMA's beliefs resulted from a continuous radicalization process. Terrorist radicalization is not a simple matter but a prolonged process that involves multiple stages and methods (Hadi Isnanto, 2015). Each member of a terrorist group, including JAD members, is believed to have different reasons that ultimately lead to their radicalization and involvement in the group. The backgrounds and motivations of terrorists are highly diverse, as there are many pathways to terrorism and no single terrorist profile exists (Schmid, 2013).

While existing research has extensively examined the structure and strategies of JAD as an organization, limited empirical work explores the individual psychosocial journey of former

members, especially those without prior religious backgrounds, toward full ideological commitment. This study addresses this gap by tracing the personal, emotional, and ideological transformation of SMA, a former JAD member, through a life-history approach. SMA's case is particularly compelling because his trajectory involved a deliberate process of evaluating and rejecting several other radical or conservative Islamic groups, including NII, Jamaah Tabligh, and Salafi circles, before ultimately identifying JAD as the group that best aligned with his emotional needs, desire for confrontation, and ideological aspirations. Therefore, this study explores the driving factors behind an individual's decision to join a terrorist group and the causes of their sustained attachment to it, using the case of SMA, a former member of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah. Based on this, the research seeks to answer the following question: What psychosocial, ideological, and emotional factors contributed to SMA's radicalization and attachment to the JAD network?

Literature review

The radicalization of individuals into terrorist networks is a multidimensional process that requires an integrated analytical approach. This study employs three interrelated conceptual lenses to examine the case of SMA: radicalization process theories (Moghaddam, Wiktorowicz, Borum), the theory of relative deprivation (Gurr), and group cohesiveness theory (Forsyth). The radicalization process, as depicted by models such as Moghaddam's staircase and Wiktorowicz's stages, often begins with a psychological or social trigger. These initial triggers are frequently rooted in perceived injustice or deprivation, which Gurr defines as relative deprivation. Once individuals begin to cognitively open themselves to radical narratives, the emotional and social pull of the group becomes increasingly significant. At this point, group cohesiveness is vital in reinforcing ideological commitment, strengthening emotional bonds, and sustaining loyalty over time. Rather than analyzing these frameworks in isolation, this study weaves them to explain how psychosocial triggers, ideological framing, and affective group dynamics converged to shape SMA's radicalization and enduring attachment to Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD).

The Concept of Radicalization

Although there is still no consensus on the definition of radicalization, in this study, radicalization is defined as a process in which an individual adopts a social, political, or religious ideology to an extreme degree and justifies criminal acts or violence to realize that ideology (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010). Radicalization of an individual does not occur suddenly but instead follows a long or short process. This process may begin with sensitivity to deviant ideologies, behavioral changes, joining radical groups, and ultimately culminate in the execution of a terrorist act (Tanshzil et al., 2023).

The process of radicalization inevitably causes changes in the individual being radicalized, such as changes in clothing style, lifestyle, and support for radical religious beliefs (Hollewell & Longpré, 2022). As a process, radicalization does not occur suddenly but is driven by various underlying factors. In their research, Vergani et al. (2020) identify several push factors of radicalization, including relative deprivation, inequality, marginalization, grievances, frustration, victimization, and perceived threats to one's group. Meanwhile, the pull factors for individual radicalization include propaganda, group dynamics, experienced and

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charismatic recruiters, material rewards, and the thrill of committing violence (Vergani et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Alex P. Schmid (2013), in his research, explains Quintan Wiktorowicz's concept of radicalization. Based on his study of various individuals who joined extremist Muslim groups in the United Kingdom, Wiktorowicz divides the radicalization process into six stages (Schmid, 2013), namely:

1. Exogenous Conditions: Conditions that drive an individual to become interested in joining a terrorist group.
2. Cognitive Opening: The individual begins to replace previous views with new ones perceived as more truthful.
3. Religious Seeking: The individual starts searching for religious meaning by participating in various religious activities.
4. Frame: Members of the terrorist group attempt to recruit potential members using various methods, propaganda, and religious justifications.
5. Socialisation: Individuals who intend to join the terrorist group begin receiving religious instruction, constructing an exclusive identity, and experiencing a shift in values and beliefs.
6. Internalization: The individual fully understands and embraces the taught ideology.

Only after going through all these stages does an individual join a terrorist group or become ready to carry out a terrorist act (Hadi Isnanto, 2015). Meanwhile, Moghaddam (2005) describes the radicalization process as a narrowing staircase, in which individuals must pass through several floors before committing a terrorist act (Moghaddam, 2005), namely:

1. Ground Floor: Psychological Interpretation of Material Conditions.
2. First Floor: Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment.
3. Second Floor: Displacement of Aggression.
4. Third Floor: Moral Engagement.
5. Fourth Floor: Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization.
6. Fifth Floor: The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms SMA

In addition, Borum's concept of Radicalization into Violent Extremism (RVE) can also be used to analyze how individuals undergo the radicalization process. Borum argues that radicalization is not linear and is not solely the result of ideological internalization but is also influenced by the psychological and social factors experienced by the individual (Borum, 2011).

The Concept of Relative Deprivation

Relative deprivation can be defined as a phenomenon that arises from negative feelings and perceptions of injustice (Faturochman, 1998). In a broader context, relative deprivation can be described as a condition perceived by an individual with a gap between desired expectations and actual experiences (Santhoso & Hakim, 2012). Meanwhile, Ted Gurr (1968) explains that relative deprivation is an individual's sense of deprivation that emerges when they feel their living conditions are worse than what they believe they deserve (Gurr, 1968). This dissatisfaction is not always related to objectively measurable conditions but may also stem

from comparisons or individual perceptions of others or other groups perceived as different (Pettigrew et al., 2008).

Relative deprivation arises from a mismatch between expectations and actual conditions. Ongoing disappointment may trigger acts of violence, and the greater the relative deprivation experienced, the higher the potential for conflict or violent actions (Gurr, 1968). Meanwhile, Della Porta (2006) explains that when individuals experience a significant gap between their expectations and reality, it may lead them to join radical organizations (Della Porta, 2006). Terrorism and radicalism can emerge from the frustration of various societal groups, including the poor and those unable to sustain their livelihoods (Anshori et al., 2020).

The Concept of Group Cohesiveness

Cohesiveness refers to the mutual attraction among members within a group, leading them to unite. Group cohesiveness relates to the extent to which group members are bonded to each other and feel a sense of belonging to the group. A group with a high level of cohesiveness among its members tends to exhibit a strong shared commitment (Safitri & Andrianto, 2016). In addition, a group with high cohesiveness will also cause its members to be more enthusiastic, consistently participate in group activities, and feel joy when the group achieves success (Purwaningtyastuti & Savitri, 2020).

Group cohesiveness can also lead members to choose to stay and refuse to leave the group. It can be influenced by the extent to which the group meets its members' needs, the quality of social interaction among members, and the attractiveness of the group or its members (Purwaningtyastuti & Savitri, 2020). Group cohesiveness consists of four dimensions (Forsyth, 2014) :

1. Social forces are the underlying drives that lead individuals to remain in a group.
2. Group unity refers to the sense of mutual belonging among members.
3. Attraction, which refers to an individual's tendency to be more interested in viewing things from the perspective of their group
4. Group cooperation refers to an individual's strong will to collaborate to achieve the group's objectives.

Individuals who have joined terrorist groups tend to lose their personal identity and are more willing to engage in aggressive acts due to the development of a collective identity, making them easily influenced by directives from the group's leadership (Latifa, 2012). Group cohesiveness has triggered bias in the actions of individuals within terrorist groups, including in carrying out terrorist acts, as such actions are driven more by motivation than by rationality (Isnawan, 2018).

The three concepts elaborated above-radicalization, relative deprivation, and group cohesiveness-provide an integrated framework for understanding the complexity of individual involvement in terrorist groups. While radicalization theories (Moghaddam, Wiktorowicz, Borum) emphasize the psychological and ideological progression of an individual toward extremism, the concept of relative deprivation (Gurr) highlights the emotional and cognitive dissonance caused by perceived injustice, which can serve as an early trigger of radical sentiments. Meanwhile, group cohesiveness (Forsyth) explains how emotional bonding, loyalty, and the need for belonging contribute to the individual's persistence and commitment to the terrorist group. In SMA's case, these three perspectives do not stand in isolation. Instead,

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they interact dynamically: social injustice and deprivation initiated his disillusionment, radical ideology provided a cognitive framework to justify resistance, and group cohesiveness sustained his loyalty and transformed his identity. Therefore, this study employs these three conceptual approaches not as parallel explanations, but as mutually reinforcing dimensions to analyze the process of radicalization and group attachment.

Research method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to identify the psychological, social, and ideological factors contributing to SMA's radicalization and attachment to the Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) network. A qualitative descriptive approach allows for an in-depth and contextual understanding of complex social phenomena, particularly those involving sensitive and subjective experiences (Sugiyono, 2013). The primary data were obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews with SMA, a former convicted terrorist who was directly involved with the JAD network. The interviews were guided by an open-ended question framework and conducted securely after the subject's release from prison. In addition to primary data, this study utilizes secondary sources such as court documents, relevant news coverage, government publications, and academic literature.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying, categorizing, and interpreting recurring patterns (themes) related to radicalization, emotional experiences, and group dynamics. To ensure the validity of findings, the study employed data triangulation by comparing interview narratives with secondary sources and relevant literature. Next, regarding research ethics, the study followed strict ethical protocols. Informed consent was obtained from the participant after fully explaining the research objectives, confidentiality assurance, and the voluntary nature of participation. The subject's identity is anonymized to protect personal privacy and legal status.

Result/Findings

SMA is a former terrorism convict who was arrested by Densus 88 in the city of xx in the year xx for planning a Fa'i operation and having knowledge of bomb-making by the JAD group. The bomb was intended to be used by JAD xx to carry out a terrorist attack on the offices of xx and xx. Fa'i refers to the act of seizing property belonging to the state or individuals deemed infidels for the sake of jihad (Asrori, 2019). SMA was later sentenced to xx years in prison by the East Jakarta District Court for attempting or conspiring to commit a terrorist act. After serving his sentence, SMA was released in xx. Before his release, he pledged allegiance to the Republic of Indonesia at xx.

This study found that the involvement of SMA, a former Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) member, resulted from an accumulation of interrelated psychosocial factors. Seven main themes were identified in the trajectory of SMA's radicalization and attachment to the terrorist group :

1. Criminal Allegation Incident as the Starting Point of Radicalization

In 2010, SMA experienced a turning point that began his radicalization trajectory. He recounted that he was nearly robbed by two unknown individuals who attempted to seize his motorcycle forcibly. Seeking protection, he went to the police station in East Jakarta to

report the incident. However, instead of receiving assistance, he was arrested and accused of theft. During the interrogation process, he was subjected to physical violence. According to his testimony, the incident left a deep psychological scar and triggered a profound sense of hatred toward law enforcement institutions. He described the experience as “the beginning of everything,” which reshaped his perception of the state and its authorities and led him to seek alternative forms of resistance outside the legal framework. SMA’s decision to respond to the incident through a trajectory of violent radicalization, rather than through legal or political means, suggests that the injustice he experienced did not occur in isolation but intersected with a pre-existing absence of social and familial support, thereby intensifying the psychological impact of relative deprivation.

2. Socioeconomic Background and Social Absence of Family

SMA was born into a poor and dysfunctional family environment. His formal education ended at the elementary school level. From a young age, SMA was placed in the care of his grandmother because his mother worked abroad as a migrant worker, while his father was absent both emotionally and financially. The family's inability to provide affection and guidance caused him to experience emotional isolation during childhood. SMA began working in informal jobs in elementary school to meet daily needs. This situation intensified his social alienation and prompted a search for an alternative community that could offer recognition, meaning in life, and emotional structure—needs the JAD group later fulfilled.

3. The Process of Group Searching and Ideological Selection

Following the criminal incident and a background of social rejection, SMA actively sought out a group he perceived as courageous enough to resist the state. He initially joined the Indonesian Islamic State (NII) network but found it insufficiently militant and misaligned with his aspirations for revenge. SMA then moved to Jamaah Tabligh and Salafi groups but felt equally dissatisfied due to their emphasis on non-confrontational preaching and worship. Eventually, in the year xx (withheld), SMA attended a study session held by the JAD group at a mosque in the Bekasi area. During this meeting, he felt that the content delivered aligned with his views, calls to oppose the state system, reject law enforcement, and the implementation of sharia through direct action. The study sessions were conducted closed, exclusive, and gradual, beginning with general sermons and progressing toward introducing more radical ideology.

4. Personal Transformation and Internalization of Extreme Values

After attending several months of JAD study sessions, SMA significantly transformed its values and behavior. He began wearing long, dark-colored robes, shortened his pants above the ankles, and restricted his food intake to items he prepared himself, due to distrust of halal standards outside the group. His interaction with outsiders was drastically reduced. SMA stated that he no longer wished to associate with people who “do not govern by Allah’s law” and viewed the state system as thaghut (tyranny). He also rejected marriage for several years, believing that jihad in the path of Allah would be rewarded with heavenly maidens in the afterlife. That marriage could distract him from the struggle.

5. Social Cohesiveness and Strengthening of Loyalty to JAD

The JAD group provided ideological instruction and fostered a supportive social ecosystem. SMA stated that he was patiently guided in learning to read the Qur'an, despite being illiterate in Arabic script. There was no ridicule of his impoverished and non-religious background; instead, he felt respected and protected. The ustad within the group was positioned horizontally as both a mentor and an ideological father figure, with no strict separation between teacher and student. JAD offered logistical assistance when members faced hardship and actively built emotional closeness among members. This cohesiveness made the subject feel he had found a new family he had never experienced before, strengthening his loyalty to the group.

6. Militancy and the Intention to Join ISIS

After more than a year of involvement, SMA expressed his readiness to engage in physical jihad. He made three attempts to obtain a passport to depart for Syria, all of which failed. He also tried to cross into the Philippines by sea to join the ISIS affiliate in Mindanao, but was hindered by security patrols along the border area. His desire to leave was driven not only by religious understanding but also by social pressure, as many of his peers had already “migrated to the jihad battlefield.” This moral pressure created a sense of loss and deepened SMA’s feeling of being left behind in the struggle.

7. Reflection, Disillusionment, and Deradicalization

A new awareness began after SMA was arrested by Densus 88 and served his prison sentence. During his time in prison, he experienced disappointment toward other JAD members who blamed one another and no longer demonstrated solidarity. He also began to recognize negative changes in his own behavior, including ideological arrogance and a tendency to judge others.

Discussion

1. Relative Deprivation and Social Injustice as Driving Factors of Radicalization

Faturochman (1998) defines relative deprivation as a sense of disappointment that arises from negative perceptions and a feeling of injustice. In the case of SMA, relative deprivation emerged after he was accused of theft by a rogue police officer, despite being the victim of a robbery attempt. This incident caused deep disappointment toward the police. It can be identified as a primary driving factor behind SMA’s decision to join a terrorist group, driven by a desire for revenge. SMA’s response to the incident aligns with Gurr’s (1968) assertion that relative deprivation can trigger violent actions in individuals who experience it. The greater the relative deprivation, the higher the potential for conflict or violent acts. In line with this, Della Porta (2006) also states that feelings of relative deprivation may trigger initial interest in radical groups among those who experience it. Thus, SMA’s involvement in JAD can be understood as a response to the relative deprivation he experienced.

Furthermore, this situation was exacerbated by SMA’s challenging childhood background. The various experiences he endured, including economic hardship and the absence of emotional support from early childhood, contributed to heightened feelings of injustice and

neglect, which in turn intensified his sense of relative deprivation. This condition strengthened SMA's drive to seek a place where he would be accepted and acknowledged. Such a place was eventually found in JAD, where the group offered attention, recognition, and a sense of solidarity that he had never experienced before as part of its radicalization efforts.

The situation experienced by SMA indicates that an individual's decision to join a terrorist group is not always solely driven by religious or ideological motives. Religion is not the only reason someone commits an act of terror. Social injustice and disillusionment with state institutions can serve as influential factors that drive individuals to join terrorist groups. This is consistent with the statement by Vergani et al. (2018), who argue that relative deprivation, injustice, and a sense of marginalization can be key drivers of an individual's radicalization into terrorism.

Meanwhile, in line with Borum (2011), SMA's experience can be categorized as grievance-based radicalization, in which he developed a deep sense of injustice due to the police's actions. This created frustration within SMA, which eventually led him to join JAD. However, SMA internalized the group's ideology over time and experienced social dynamics, further strengthening his loyalty to JAD.

2. Analysis of SMA's Radicalization Process

a. Cognitive Opening and Group Searching

SMA's journey from someone with no strong religious background to a devoted member of JAD, willing to carry out a terrorist act, illustrates a long radicalization process influenced by various psychosocial, emotional, and cognitive factors. In Moghaddam's Staircase to Terrorism model (2005), the incident SMA experienced 2010 can be categorized as the Ground Floor stage. Moghaddam explains that most people on the ground floor perceive social, economic, or political injustice.

In SMA's case, the injustice he experienced at the hands of certain police officers triggered a deep sense of disappointment or relative deprivation, which served as a driving factor for him to move to the next stage of the radicalization process. Meanwhile, within the framework of Wiktorowicz's stages of radicalization, SMA's experience can be classified under Exogenous Conditions. The various hardships he encountered—such as injustice, family neglect, and socioeconomic challenges—made him open to new ideological possibilities. In this context, the 2010 incident acted as a significant trigger that made SMA receptive to and accepting of radical ideology from a terrorist group. This occurred because individuals who repeatedly experience injustice and disappointment tend to seek solutions to address their perceived injustices.

The next stage in Moghaddam's staircase of radicalization involves individuals who, after experiencing injustice and disappointment, begin seeking ways to resist that injustice. At this stage, SMA sought out a group that could serve as a vehicle for his mission of revenge against the police. This search began with NII, Jamaah Tabligh, and Salafi circles. However, he perceived these groups as not extreme enough and insufficient to realize his goals until he ultimately joined JAD. This stage illustrates that when an individual faces frustration due to socioeconomic conditions and is simultaneously searching for identity and meaning, they are more likely to become receptive to extreme ideologies that may be perceived as solutions to their circumstances.

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This condition aligns with the Cognitive Opening stage in Wiktorowicz's radicalization process. At this stage, individuals open themselves to new perspectives that are perceived as better and potentially offer solutions to their problems. It also corresponds to the Religious Seeking stage, where individuals start searching for religious meaning by engaging in various religious activities. In SMA's context, both Cognitive Opening and Religious Seeking occurred during his search for a terrorist group. This search demonstrates that SMA was beginning to open himself to new teachings, namely, extremist religious ideologies—even though he previously had no understanding of religion, let alone extremism. Meanwhile, SMA's transition from one group to another reflects his evaluation of different doctrines to find the one that best aligned with his objectives.

b. Ideological Internalization and Justification of Violence

After joining JAD, SMA's exposure to religious propaganda and ideological framing led to a deeper internalization. This section explores how radical beliefs were reinforced and how violence became morally justified.

According to Moghaddam, after passing through the first stage, individuals enter the second floor, where they begin to direct their frustration, anger, and disappointment toward specific parties perceived as responsible. In SMA's case, his resentment and hatred toward the police were amplified by JAD into a broader hostility toward the state and the system of government. JAD justified SMA's hatred of law enforcement through rhetoric portraying security forces and the government as legitimate enemies and targets of attack in the name of religion. This justification was framed with the narrative that attacks on the state and its system are permissible if motivated by the goal of enforcing Islamic Sharia, rather than by personal revenge or interests. In this context, JAD used religion as a rationale for committing violence. During his radicalization process, SMA also began to view all those outside his group as wrong. The teachings of superiority promoted by JAD and ISIS led to a cognitive transformation in which SMA began to label anyone who did not adhere to their doctrine as infidels.

c. Identity Fusion and Social Isolation

The next stage in the staircase of radicalization is Moral Engagement, in which SMA had already become part of JAD. At this stage, SMA transformed purpose—from initially joining due to a desire for revenge to feeling a sense of obligation to carry out jihad in accordance with JAD's teachings. This condition aligns with the Frame stage in Wiktorowicz's radicalization process, where JAD, by utilizing various religious justifications, intense propaganda, and narratives of jihad, continued its efforts to radicalize SMA.

Various study sessions organized by JAD, particularly those that were exclusive and closed, provided SMA with the space to deepen his understanding of JAD's ideology and expand his extremist views. These activities involved in-depth discussions involving manipulative interpretations of religious texts and the repeated delivery of radical perspectives. The continuous and repetitive propaganda led to a shift in SMA's worldview, transforming him from someone with no religious background into a devout adherent of Islamic teachings as interpreted by JAD.

In addition to successfully using religious narratives as a tool of propaganda, JAD's success in radicalizing SMA was also due to its ability to serve as a "home" for him. JAD

provided support and care like a family, something SMA had long yearned for but never received during his childhood. JAD's success in radicalization also led to drastic changes in SMA's life, such as refusing to eat food not prepared by himself, altering his style of dress, and developing a firm belief in meeting 72 virgins in paradise. These drastic changes resulted from SMA's attachment to JAD and its teachings. They also reflect how individuals align their actions and behavior with the group they identify with, reinforcing the bond between the individual and the group.

At this stage, SMA's loyalty to JAD deepened. The internalization of group identity led him to further distance himself from people outside of JAD, whom he regarded as infidels. The restriction of interaction was also a psychological tactic employed by JAD to isolate its members from the outside world and narrow their perspective, making it difficult to question the validity of JAD's teachings.

This stage is a critical point at which an individual's morality becomes increasingly drawn into the group's doctrine. It illustrates the strength of the emotional and ideological bonds formed during the radicalization process, leading the individual to become an integral part of the group and willing to carry out extreme actions. JAD deliberately orchestrates the entire process at this stage to create absolute loyalty, encompassing moral, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, narrowing the range of choices available to its members, and internalizing the belief that violence is the organization's inevitable mission.

d. Final Readiness and Mission Commitment

Next, in the fourth stage of Moghaddam's staircase of radicalization, individuals within terrorist groups begin to experience cognitive reinforcement, where their worldview becomes compartmentalized into a simplified dichotomy. In SMA's case, he believed that JAD's teachings represented absolute truth, and anyone outside the group was considered wrong. This stage corresponds to the Socialisation phase in Wiktorowicz's radicalization process, where exclusivity within the terrorist group is formed. This compartmentalization is manifested in the Takfiri perspective, which involves declaring others as infidels for not aligning with JAD's teachings. Such exclusivity is believed to be deliberately constructed by JAD through various activities, such as dividing its network into small cells and providing housing for its members, to facilitate the radicalization process and ensure that JAD members are prepared to carry out acts of terror.

The final stage in Moghaddam's staircase of radicalization is the individual's readiness to carry out a terrorist act. This stage aligns with the internalization phase of Wiktorowicz's radicalization process. At this point, the individual is mentally, ideologically, and emotionally prepared to commit an act of terror in pursuit of the group's objectives. Any previous barriers have been effectively eliminated, and the individual becomes convinced that committing a terrorist act is a sacred duty sanctioned by religion.

In SMA's context, his readiness to carry out a terrorist act was demonstrated by his attempts to travel to Syria and the Philippines. However, these efforts ultimately failed due to various technical reasons. His decision to go to Syria and the Philippines illustrates the extent of his attachment to ISIS and JAD ideology. However, SMA's case also shows that an individual's readiness to commit a terrorist act does not stem solely from internal factors but is also influenced by external drivers. This is because, in addition to his religious belief in the

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obligation to perform jihad, SMA's desire to go to Syria was also motivated by a sense of loss after many of his fellow JAD members had already departed for Syria and the Philippines, as well as encouragement from religious instructors (ustad).

The analysis of SMA's radicalization process illustrates that psychosocial factors, group influence, and ideological doctrine shape an individual's internalization of extremist values to the point of being ready to carry out acts of terror. The stages SMA underwent in the radicalization process—whether viewed through Moghaddam's staircase of radicalization or Wiktorowicz's stages—demonstrate that radicalization is a prolonged process that not only prepares an individual for terrorism but also transforms their worldview and behavior. Radicalization can also create strong emotional bonds between an individual and the terrorist group they are involved with.

3. SMA's Cohesiveness within JAD

SMA's attachment to JAD can be analyzed using the concept of group cohesiveness, which refers to the social forces that bind individuals to a group and enhance their willingness to remain within it (Forsyth, 2014). After joining JAD, SMA strongly consented to the group's behavioral norms, religious interpretations, and strategic objectives. This attachment manifested in ideological alignment and high levels of behavioral loyalty, such as changes in dress code, dietary habits, and daily rituals, reflecting internalization of group norms.

The cohesive environment within JAD—characterized by mutual support, shared identity, and collective goals—created a strong sense of belonging for SMA. This condition is significant considering SMA's prior lack of stable social affiliation. As McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) argued, social affiliation and peer influence are central to consolidating radical beliefs, mainly when the group provides both ideological direction and emotional reinforcement. In this regard, JAD functioned as a unifying structure that substituted prior deficiencies in SMA's social environment with structured group interaction and shared purpose.

Interpersonal dynamics within JAD also contributed to SMA's increased commitment. While JAD leaders disseminated ideological materials, they maintained informal and accessible relationships with members. This non-hierarchical relational pattern fostered psychological proximity between leadership and followers, reducing barriers to ideological acceptance. Horgan (2005) highlighted that trust in leadership figures plays a vital role in solidifying belief systems and discouraging ideological disengagement.

This pattern of high emotional investment and internal conformity indicates affective commitment, a key aspect of group cohesiveness beyond ideological agreement. According to Borum (2011), many individuals remain in terrorist groups not solely due to ideological resonance but because of strong interpersonal bonds and the psychological utility of group membership. In SMA's case, this condition appears to have reinforced cognitive rigidity and reduced his inclination to question group doctrines.

Overall, the strength of SMA's commitment to JAD demonstrates how group cohesiveness can serve as a mechanism of ideological reinforcement and behavioral control. JAD reduced dissent and increased conformity by embedding members in a closed, emotionally supportive environment. This confirms that terrorist group loyalty is often sustained through emotional and relational dynamics, not merely through ideological appeal.

It is important to acknowledge that, as a single case study, the findings presented in this research are not intended to be generalized to all members of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) or similar extremist groups. The pathways, motivations, and psychosocial conditions leading to radicalization vary significantly among individuals. However, this study offers in-depth insight into one possible trajectory of radicalization, particularly from a non-religious background, which may serve as a valuable hypothesis for future research. The narrative of SMA illustrates the nuanced interplay between psychological vulnerability, ideological exposure, and group dynamics. It can inform the design of broader comparative or quantitative studies to identify patterns across multiple cases.

Conclusion

The radicalization process is not instantaneous. It unfolds gradually through psychological, social, and ideological transformations. The case of SMA illustrates how social injustice and relative deprivation, especially toward state institutions, can act as powerful triggers for radicalization. Individuals who perceive themselves as victims of injustice tend to seek groups that offer perceived solutions, as seen in SMA's journey. This study affirms the relevance of Moghaddam's staircase model and Wiktorowicz's stages of radicalization, showing how JAD strategically utilized each phase of dissatisfaction to strengthen SMA's loyalty and transform its worldview.

This research offers a theoretical contribution by integrating psychological triggers (such as grievance and emotional void), group dynamics (such as cohesiveness and identity fusion), and ideological framing into a comprehensive analysis of radicalization. Unlike studies that emphasize ideology as the dominant factor, this paper highlights the significance of emotional bonding and social belonging as key drivers of sustained attachment to terrorist groups. The concept of group cohesiveness—wherein the group functions as an emotional home and the ustadhs serve as symbolic father figures—adds a unique dimension to understanding long-term loyalty within radical networks.

Therefore, deradicalization programs must move beyond ideological reorientation and economic support. They need to address the emotional and social needs that terrorist groups often fulfill. Tailored interventions that consider individual psychological backgrounds and stages of radicalization are essential. A personalized, integrative approach will enhance the effectiveness of deradicalization efforts and support reintegration into society.

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