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### Awaking Awareness of Communication Patterns in The Cyber Radicalism: Covid-19 Pandemic Case Study

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#### **Abstract**

The high level of internet penetration during a pandemic allows people to be exposed and influenced virtually by radical ideologies. This study aims to provide an overview of the cyber radicalization process and communication patterns during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study utilized the literature review method by reviewing scientific journals, which was accomplished by criticizing, synthesizing, and summarizing the selected data. The results showed that during the Covid-19 pandemic, radical group ideologues spread propaganda via the internet and succeeded in increasing the radicalism sympathize and the number of lone wolves. The radical groups have extraordinary mass communication patterns. They spread radical ideology subtly and greatly influenced the masses. The pattern of intrapersonal communication arises, specifically the internalization of values based on learning, observation, and self-understanding. The radicalism process via the internet is effective media due to its ease, cheapness, and massive and broad spectrum. Straightforward access to radical content found on the internet and social media has led to the emergence of a lone wolf, a person who participates in radicalization by independent process and is not affiliated with any radical groups. This research contributes to completing data on radicalism issues by providing data support in developing strategies to prevent the spread of cyber radicalism.

Keywords: Covid-19, cyber radicalism, communication pattern

#### Introduction

The emergence of Covid-19 has had a tremendous impact on all aspects of human life worldwide. Data shunted by Wolrdometer states that Covid-19 has infected more than six hundred and eighteen million cases and more than six million five hundred and fifty deaths due to Covid-19 (Pramisti, 2020; WHO, 2022). WHO predicts the Covid-19 victims to increase continuously, which refers to the high spread of the virus and the emergence of new variants of Covid-19 cases. Besides, vaccination cannot completely prevent the

spread of Covid-19, so it is still a threat to all citizens worldwide.

The Covid-19 outbreak has become a global pandemic that impacts broader than socio-economic life, but Covid-19 also impacts the homeland security aspect, such as the radicalism issue. At first glance, the global Covid-19 pandemic situation never predicts radicalism issues. However, at crisis moments like Covid-19 outbreaks, it becomes a trigger for the justification of radical concepts. The crisis pushes the emergence of radical movements and extremism during the

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global Covid-19 pandemic in many countries, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia (CTED, 2020; Hinds & Joinson, 2017).

When the world is busy with health and economic issues as the focus of problems due to the impact of Covid-19, the agenda of radicalism and extremism is continuous. Radicalism agenda was finding golden momentum to influence and recruit candidates by exploiting Covid-19 pandemic issues. Radicalism recruitment agenda grows easier during a pandemic because people are more active and communicate in cyberspace following physical and social distancing policies. Recruitment within cyberspace has been a significant recruitment pattern to attract people to join radical groups because it is easy, fast, massive, and low cost (Widyaningsih, 2019). The high number of human interactions in cyberspace via the internet also raises the birth of the Lone Wolf, a radicalized who is not affiliated with any radical/terrorist group and gets the motivation to behave radically through the self-taught process (Barr et al., 2005; Bartal, 2016; Hankiss, 2018).

Themagnitude of the influence of Covid-19 on the country's economic conditions caused the global financial crisis. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects the total global economic losses during the pandemic (2020-2021) to reach 12 trillion dollars. This figure is even far beyond the beginning estimate. Meanwhile, the World Bank estimates that the economy will shrink 5.2 percent this year. This situation means the deepest recession since World War II. Likewise, the Global Economic Prospects released by the World Bank in June 2020 predicts the economy will rebound to 4.2% in 2021 (Pramisti, 2020). Meanwhile,

the S&P Global Rating Agency projects that the coronavirus outbreak spreading rapidly throughout the world will cause economic losses of up to the U.S. \$ 211 billion or around Rp.3,000 trillion (Agustiyanti, 2020).

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic as a nation's crisis and is a severe threat to the sustainability of the State's existence. These problems arise more than the economic and health sectors as the main focus of the impact of Covid-19. Indeed, the impact of Covid-19 extends to all sectors of life, including threats to the nation's ideology by radicalism movements.

Long before the Covid-19 outbreak, radicalism had become a common enemy of all countries worldwide and became an extraordinary crime (Widyaningsih et al., 2017, 2020; Wulansari et al., 2018). All countries mobilize their resources and financial resources in carrying out largescale scenarios of preventing and countering radicalism (Bjørgo & Silke, 2018). The country's financial capacity decline impacts reducing the budget to support radicalism's prevention and handling. The limited allocation of State resources forces the State to restructure its budget, which impacts diverting funds to deal with the impact of Covid-19 (UNITAR, 2020).

#### Method

The research was conducted using the literature review method. The first step in a literature review is to find relevant literature on the discussed issue. The data inventory was carried out by reviewing studies related to radicalism concerning the global Covid-19 pandemic situation published in various scientific journals. The literature collection

includes research from various databases on search engines such as Google Scholar, Researchgate, and online and reputable journals indexed by Scopus. The keywords used in the literature search are \* radicalism \*; \*terrorism\*; \* radical group communication patterns \*; \* Lone Wolf \*; \* Radicalism via the internet \* and similar.

The second step after finding relevant sources is to evaluate the data. The data sources that will be selected in this study are those related to cyber radicalism, propaganda and communication strategies in radicalism, hoaxes about radicalism and conspiracy theories during the pandemic, and acts of terrorism during the pandemic. The third step is data analysis and interpretation. This step is accomplished by criticizing, synthesizing, and summarizing the selected data.

This paper provides an overview of the radicalization process during the Covid-19 pandemic era. The research uses data elaboration from various scientific article sources as the method.

# Result and Analysis Intertwined Cyber Radicalism and Covid-19 Pandemic

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 a global pandemic in mid-March 2020, the world's face has experienced significant changes. A Covid-19 pandemic is a global event that has significantly impacted global geopolitical and socio-economic realities and government decision-making and policymaking (Avis, 2020). During the pandemic, it is still difficult to assess the continued impact of Covid-19 due to the uncertainty of national and international responses in the short, medium,

and long term. The global Covid-19 pandemic situation forces humans to make significant adaptations to survive the changing climate. The changes that occur bring potential threats to problems in all sectors of life. The United Nations Peace Council released a report stating at least five potential risks related to radicalism due to the global Covid-19 pandemic (CTED, 2020).

Amid the world subsidence due to the worldwide Covid-19 widespread, it is detailed that at slightest 1 billion understudies within the worldwide populace spend more time online than some time recently the widespread. The serve of instruction and Culture (Mendikbud) arrangement inside Circular Number 4 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Instruction within the Emergency Period of Coronavirus Illness (Covid-19) through a web learning framework consequently has an effect on expanding utilization of web utilization time. Understudies are associated with the web to back the learning handle, but this too implies that they are exceptionally likely to be uncovered to radical thoughts and destructive substance, particularly for understudies who utilize the web without supervision (Hinds & Joinson, 2017). The government approach to actualizing large-scale limitations (PSBB) has restricted space for exercises exterior the domestic and interatomic more utilizing the web. Fear monger bunches utilize this position to uncover radical thoughts. Expanded cybercrime amid a widespread has driven to expanded network between psychological militants and hoodlums.

#### **Propaganda as Communication Strategy**

Various radical groups have used Covid-19 as a provocation in the propaganda

narrative of radical ideologies. Radical group ideologues exploit the latest events to raise hatred against the State because they are assumed incompetent to solve the Covid-19 problem, thus tormenting them. Ideological concepts such as the caliphate were exhaled to prosper the people, following the government cannot give the welfare guarantee. The government faces severe problems defending its people's lives in a pandemic. The limited resources of the State in providing the life-support capacity of the people raises public dissatisfaction. A country with a large population with diverse geographic conditions, such as Indonesia, has more complex problems because the principles of equity and justice are challenging to realize. The government is considered unresponsive and has committed an injustice in managing the crisis period. This urgent condition has converted weaponry for radical groups to provoke the nation ideology because it is considered incompetent to solve problems and fails to bring prosperity to justice and equality (Arif, 2016).

There are three perceptions of justice: distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Distributive justice is concerned with the equitable distribution of resources. In contrast, procedural justice is related to giving equal rights to decision-making in resource management, whereas interactional justice applies fair interactions without favoritism (Moghaddam, 2005). The perception of injustice is an essential factor that correlates with radicalism that leads to terrorism (Christmann et al., 2009; Kitzmann, 2018). A related opinion was expressed by Fathali Moghaddam (Moghaddam, 2005) within his theory of Staircase to Terrorism. Moghaddam presents a theory that injustice is the root of terrorism. Justice that has failed to be presented cannot be resisted diplomatically. As a result, violence is an option to fight various forms of injustice they received (Arsyad et al., 2014; Golose, 2010). The spirit of upholding justice then gets legitimacy through excerpts from holy verses that are engineered to support violence (Mohd Adhe Bhakti, 2016). The emergence of communities reinforces radicalism's discernment and has also contributed to creating acts of terrorism.

By evoking emotions of financial hardship and isolation with limited space, hate narratives are constructed to incite individuals to plan attacks and violent acts. With the continuing crisis (after the Covid-19 pandemic), radical groups are taking advantage of events worldwide to legitimize their world judgments, broaden their support base, and recruit new members (UNITAR, 2020). The public frustration during the pandemic was exploited by presenting new prospects about the concept of radical ideology, which was claimed to be more relevant than the primary ideology.

## The Increase in Disinformation (Hoax), Conspiracy Theories, and Propaganda

The pandemic's uncertainty caused many hoaxes to emerge, disturbing and confusing the community. Hoax news spreads quickly on various social media platforms and is often received more than once or from trusted sources to consider the truth (Mastel, 2019). The fake news content during the pandemic is diverse and exceeds health problems. In many cases, hoaxes have an actual contribution to increasing political temperature (Hafez, 2006; Hilmy, 2015; Utami, 2019). This shift of fake news to the realm of politics is then used as propaganda material for radical groups to

blow up issues that have brought down the government's performance. The government is considered thogut, discriminatory, and must be opposed using uproar and confusion news (Widyaningsih et al., 2020). Propaganda is easier to do and gets sympathy and support from many parties or people.

"The lies campaigned continuously and systematically will turn into (as if) reality! Meanwhile, a perfect lie is a truth that twists just a little". Goebbels' theory is the basis of reference for spreading fake news (Hoax) to achieve political goals and power (Doob, 1948; Sellnow et al., 2019). If told continuously, a lie will be regarded as truth; it remains how the anti-government and anti-ideological propaganda works.

Hatred towards different sect groups, resulting in racist speeches, anti-Semitic Islamophobia, campaigns, and antiimmigrants, also often use the Covid-19 issue as a justification. This narrative then develops simultaneously with integrating various conspiracy theories related to Covid-19. Various conspiracy theories regarding the origin and scale of the disease caused by Covid-19 have spread on various online media platforms since Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic (Avis, 2020; Laeis, 2020). The assumption that Covid-19 is a secret biological weapons conspiracy program from China is the most popular conspiracy theory at the beginning of the emergence of Covid-19. The city of Wuhan in China, as the epicenter of the spread of the virus, claimed as proof that Covid-19 was a conspiracy connecting the Chinese government. The statement by U.S. President Donald Trump, who called Covid-19 the "Chinese Virus," further strengthens the notion that Covid-19 is engineering created by the Chinese government as a mass biological

weapon. The counter-reaction to the "China Virus" is the emergence of a conspiracy theory that Covid-19 is part of America's plan in the interests of the hegemony of power (Verdiana, 2020). Another popular conspiracy theory is the intersection between 5G technology and the spread of the virus. One study noted that the 5G conspiracy theory had gained much more significantly than other COVID-19 conspiracy theories. In other research, researchers found that conspiracy theories have a multiplier effect on radicalization (Emberland, 2020).

### Terrorism Attack: The Visible Communication Patterns

Radical extremists have responded to Covid-19 in various ways. At the beginning of Wuhan's emerges, they considered Covid-19 to directly reply from God for violence against ethnic Uighur Muslims. Intensive anti-Chinese rhetoric on some extremist social media sites does not appear to have been matched by progress in plots against Chinese targets. However, it is gaining a large proportion of attention, nonetheless. Although the central ISIS has called the supporters to strike during the pandemic, ISIS supporters in Indonesia have not focused on jihadi operations. Most ISIS supporters in Indonesia decided to stay at home and wait for the world's end, as is believed in Islamic prophecy. Another group, Al-Qaeda, and its sympathizers via Jamaah Islamiyah (II) forced its followers to use the pandemic as an opportunity to convert Westerners into Islam.

Radical groups use various communication patterns to spread ideology through cyberspace. Radical groups comprehend the role of communicators in supporting mass movements through text

symbolism or news narratives. Provocative news titles will encourage netizens to be interested in reading the news and then following up. Websites designed to carry out propaganda have proven effective in attracting new members. It was recorded that BNPT (National Counterterrorism Agency) found 2,670 content containing radicalism and terrorism throughout 2023 (Ikhsan & Rusiana, 2023). This description shows that radical groups have extraordinary mass communication patterns. They can spread radical ideology subtly and greatly influence the masses.

The pattern of intensive mass communication through reporting various website content that is always up to date encourages sporadic and independent radical movements. In this case, the pattern of intragroups communication is not carried out but rather the pattern of intrapersonal communication, specifically the internalization of values based on learning, observation, and self-understanding.

Post-disaster symptoms intensify the vulnerabilities within a country that radical groups may exploit (Pusponegoro, 2017; Widyaningsih & Kuntarto, 2018). A more extensive study by Berrebi and Ostwal in 2011 sought to assess whether natural disasters impact terrorism empirically. Using detailed information on terrorism, natural disasters, and other relevant economic and demographic variables from 167 countries between 1970 and 2007, they identified and estimated the impact of natural disasters on terrorism. This research shows that disasters have a strong positive relationship with radicalism and incidents of terrorism. The research also concluded that natural disasters primarily affect the emergence of radicalism and acts of terrorism in countries with low to medium GDP per capita, with the effects most concentrated in developing countries. The findings show that countries with high GDP per capita do not experience terrorism after natural disasters. Findings of this kind prove crucial when considering the impact of Covid-19 on radicalization and extremism (Avis, 2020).

Worldwide, the jihadist activity level appears to be quiet, as reflected in the relatively low number of terrorist suspects arrested during the first months of 2020 (Nasir, 2021). However, several actions have occurred in terrorist acts against Poso's police by the East Mujahidin (MIT) group. and the Lone Wolf attack at Daha Selatan Police station, South Kalimantan (Laeis, 2020). On a global scale, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project noted attacks by groups located in Sub-Saharan Africa and affiliated with Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/DAESH) increased by 37 percent between mid-March 2020 and mid-April 2020. A recent increase in ISIS activity was reported in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic (Hasan, 2020).

The low number of terrorist suspects during a pandemic does not mean the radicalization process is deliberate. The number of radical acts of terrorism is relatively low, but the radicalization and recruitment processes are running massively, primarily via the internet (Conway, 2016; Mealer, 2012; Mealer et al., 2017). This recruitment strategy was similar to the disasters following Aceh in December 2004, the Yogyakarta earthquake in 2010, and the Palu tsunami in 2018 (IPAC, 2020; Singh, 2004; Sukma, 2003).

#### **Discussion**

Radical bunch ideologues target the more youthful era by taking advantage of the unsteady condition of youth (Sahri, 2016). Radical belief systems are forcefully carrying out incitements through websites, YouTube substance, and social media to the more youthful era. They are unknowingly impacted by radical belief systems that bolster savagery utilizing social media (Meeus, 2015). The more youthful era is the most target of radical bunches since they have a more expanded reach to proceed radical ideological plans. Understudy bunches are considered modern specialists competent of bringing around alter in radical bunches (Christmann, 2012; Meeus, 2015; Saifuddin, 2011). In a worldwide widespread, the more youthful era is the age gather that uses the web the foremost; their potential to be uncovered to and impacted by radical belief systems is expanding (Bovan et al., 2018). Getting data can be gotten exceptionally rapidly and greatly, which empowers them to get total data. Amid boredom due to the large-scale social confinements (PSBB) arrangement that limits exercises exterior the domestic, the incitement and publicity of radical ideologues by means of the web are exceptionally simple and effective.

The rise of the Solitary Wolf could be a wonder of how the web has ended up an awfully powerful medium in impacting one's contemplations and indeed showing itself in activity (Hinds & Joinson, 2017; Shehabat, 2017; Weimann, 2012). The term Solitary Wolf Psychological warfare itself was defined by Ramon Spaaij, who characterized the characteristics of Solitary Wolf Psychological warfare, which incorporate:

1) being carried out exclusively, 2) not being portion of a fear monger gather or organize, 3) the modus operandi is understood and directed by people without any command (Bjørgo, T., & Silke, 2018). These three characteristics are exceptionally distinctive from fear based oppression controlled through an organization comprising of numerous individuals, an broad arrange, and upheld by implies and executed in a arranged way (Spaaij & Hamm, 2015; Subhan, 2016).

The phenomenon of lone wolf terrorism emerges in various parts of the world. In Indonesia, the lone wolf case has been confirmed by the Indonesian National Police. Radicalism actions are classified into three forms, specifically structural organization, leaderless jihad, and lone wolf terrorism. The structural organization has the characteristics of group leadership held by an Amir (leader) and operational programs within the group. The three programs include i'dad or physical training, ta'lim or recitation activities, and amaliyah activities or charity actions. They use these three terms to communicate among their groups to determine their operational activities.

The three programs are not confessed by other actors, especially the lone wolf terrorist. The lone wolf terrorists work independently at each stage of the process without involving other parties. They go through 3 primary processes: self-selected, self-radicalized, and self-trained. So that these three stages of the process help them prepare and confirm the motives behind the ideologies they believe—the most significant way to uncover a network and terrorist actors is usually detected through communication channels. In contrast, lone wolf terrorist does not use

communication with other parties in carrying out plans for terrorist acts.

The forecast of radical action during the pandemic is evidenced by several cases disclosed by the police, for example, the attack on a lone female wolf who attacked the police headquarters. During the pandemic, law enforcement was also carried out against the network of the Zulfigar Rachman group spread across several provinces, such as Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, East Java, Southeast Sulawesi, and Maluku. In addition, the threat of national terror during the Covid-19 pandemic is a terror attack in a chaotic situation. Terror attacks can be triggered mainly if a crisis in society causes a chaotic situation, for example, PSBB (Large-Scale Social Restrictions), which are vulnerable to being exploited by terrorist groups to cloud the situation. As well as the threat of infected terrorists, this terror identifies a person infected with the virus and then uses that person to infect people (Bio Terrorism Attack) (Jafar et al., 2019).

Ascertaining legitimate narratives of violence in the name of religion in cyberspace is straightforwaed. Numerous psychologicalshattering videos of the young generation are easy to share on various social media platforms. The video influences the younger generation's reasoning to agree with radical ideologies, such as tutorials on assembling bombs to action plans for terrorism, which can easily be found on the internet (Hinds & Joinson, 2017; Mealer et al., 2017). Straightforward access to radical content has resulted in self-radicalization. A person converts radically through a self-taught process (Schuurman et al., 2017; Shehabat, 2017). They learn to be radical independently and not affiliated with any radical groups.

The economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is more devastating than the world's major depression event a century ago. The pandemic has put tremendous pressure on the government budget as its focus has shifted to the pandemic response. As a result, the national counter-radicalism budget may experience priority correction (Avis, 2020; CTED, 2020). This condition wrecks the sustainability of preventing radicalism programs as previously planned. The budget diversion also means the potential for emerging new radicalism movements is increasing. The budget restructuring also contributes to multinational forces engaged in counterterrorism or peacekeeping operations and reduces funding for technical assistance or capacity-building programs (CTED, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemichas tremendously impacted the country's economy and finances (Nicola et al., 2020; Suryahadi et al., 2020). The State's priority is to solve the short-term effects of Covid-19 on the economy and health, which requires enormous costs. As an impact, some programs, such as counterradicalism and deradicalization, are no higher a priority. Given the limited state finances, this is an excellent opportunity for radical extremist groups to plan radicalization programs, recruit sympathizers, and take a sequence of actions.

Judging from the budget support through the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBN) on the functions of Defense and Order and Security, the development of spending on terrorism has fluctuated. Data in 2016 increased because it was used for constructing the Counter Terrorism Training Center building/building and procuring Counter Terrorism Training Facility Equipment at BNPT. Then, the budget for

handling terrorism decreased in 2018 and 2019 because, in 2019, Ministry/Agency spending on defense and security focused on accommodating the continued development of military defense posture, strengthening Almatsus, and election success. In 2020, spending on terrorism decreased due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, the state budget for prevention and control decreased by more than 50% compared to the year before the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2019, the state budgeted around 650 billion for spending on counterterrorism. Meanwhile, in 2020 the budget has decreased to reach the range of k400 billion per year. This figure will decrease further in 2021 and reach its lowest point until it does not reach the 200 billion marks yearly. The budget for handling terrorism will increase slightly in 2022, but the nominal has not yet touched the 300 billion mark per year (Riyono, 2022).

The pattern of cyber radicalism communication is a strategy radical groups manipulate to spread their ideology through the internet network. Some aspects of the pattern of cyber radicalism communication carried out are: First, the dissemination of information. The Internet helps users to obtain interesting materials, including terrorism propaganda, more easily through certain websites, blogs, social networks, Internet forms, chat facilities, and video streaming.

Second, Web 2.0 Extensions: Web 2.0 media such as interactive websites, blogs, social networking sites, and discussion forums have been used by extremists as a medium for radicalization and extremism in cyberspace. Third, the use of terrorist networks. Terrorist networks have utilized the development of the world of internet technology to conduct target surveys and terrorism financing in

the network. Fourth, the use of social media. The Internet accelerates the process of radicalization, making it easy for a person to obtain radical information and ideology through social media. Fifth, Media literacy extension. Media literacy is an alternative to censorship policies that many say are restrictive.

Cvber radicalism's communication pattern is a serious threat due to the effect of the Internet with interesting materials, including terrorism propaganda (Archetti, 2015). Propaganda is more easily through certain websites, blogs, social networks, internet forms, chat facilities, and video streaming. Steps to reduce the threat of radicalism in cyberspace include developing media literacy to help the public sort out correct and useful information. Several criteria can be used to identify radical sites still active on the Internet. The criteria for identifying active radical sites include having ideological beliefs and fanaticism towards certain struggles. In addition, radical websites are often used to spread terrorism ideology and propaganda through various types of content such as articles, videos, and images.

#### Conclusion

Covid-19 has an enormous impact on economic, social, and political conditions. This effect judging by radicals as evidence of the government's failure to manage the country. The conditions of the global Covid-19 pandemic have caused a global crisis that has a widespread impact on all aspects of life. Radicalism during a pandemic is a serious problem that can threaten the nation's unity. Radical ideologues took advantage of government policies to break

the Covid-19 distribution chain to prove that the government discriminated against certain groups. For example, the policy of closing mosques during the pandemic is considered an anti-Muslim trend. The caliphate ideology advocates found the right momentum to internalize the ideology by validating the primary ideology's failure. The Pancasila ideology (Indonesian primary ideology) was considered to fail to ensure prosperity due to the worsening economic situation, increasing unemployment, and limited public facilities services. These ideologies are trying to lead to the idea that Pancasila is no longer relevant and deserves to be replaced by a more encouraging caliphate ideology. The Large-Scale Social Restrictions Policy (PSBB) and the home learning program have increased daily internet use penetration. This condition causes the radicalization process through the internet to become more intense and massive. Another factor that encouraged radicalism during the pandemic was the reduced antiradicalism budget and deradicalization due to budget restructuring during the Covid-19 pandemic. The reduced budget creates room for radicalism to be more active.

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