

Strategies for Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) by Women's Civil Society Organizations in Banyumas Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

The spread of radical ideologies, violent extremism, and terrorism in Banyumas Regency poses a substantial risk, as indicated by the frequent arrests of suspected terrorists in the region over the past five years. Terrorist acts affect both men and women differently, with women and children often experiencing layered victimization. Furthermore, given the shift in terrorist strategies that now promote the active participation of women as both sympathizers and perpetrators. Therefore, inclusive prevention strategies are needed to engage women and gender perspectives in peacebuilding, counter-radicalization, and de-radicalization. The efforts to prevent violent extremism should not be limited to the responsibilities of central and local governments but must also engage civil society organizations. The objective of this study, therefore, seeks to understand the views of women's civil society organizations in Banyumas Regency regarding measures taken to prevent violent extremism. The research adopts a qualitative methodology, employing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) for data collection. The findings of this research are that there are various women's civil society organizations that have undertaken preventive actions against violent extremism, especially in counter-radicalization activities, including religious education or da'wah, workshops and socializations, social community outreach, economic empowerment, and promoting moderate teachings. They also collaborate with several organizations and local governments to strengthen community resilience.

Keywords: violent extremism, preventing violent extremism (PVE), women's civil society organizations, gender

1. Introduction

In 2000, the United Nations acknowledged gender issues in wartime, conflict, and peace processes through the resolution on 1325 Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). Since then, it has been reinforced by nine additional resolutions, including Resolution 1820 in 2008, 1888 in 2008, 1889 in 2009, 1960 in 2010, 2106 in 2013, 2122 in 2013, 2242 in 2015, 2467 in 2019, and 2493 in 2019. Several resolutions related to increasing focus and attention on women's active and effective participation in peacemaking and peacebuilding are resolutions 1889 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), and 2493 (2019). The focus of women, peace, and security issues are across all areas on its agenda, including threats to international peace and security arising from acts of violent extremism to terrorism.

Following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2242 on Women, Peace, and Security in 2015, the UN Secretary-General introduced a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism in 2016. This action plan emphasizes women's crucial role and the need to incorporate gender perspectives in creating PVE strategies. It urges states to prioritize women's protection and empowerment in their approaches to

combat terrorism and violent extremism, ensuring that these measures do not negatively affect women's rights [1].

Resolution 2242 in 2015 specifically incorporates three sections that acknowledge terrorism and violent extremism as areas relevant to the WPS agenda, setting out guidelines and expectations for incorporating a gender perspective and emphasizing women's rights in the governance of these issues. Since the adoption of Resolution 2242, there has been heightened attention within policy discussions at both domestic and global levels to the gender dimensions of terrorism and political violence. This engagement builds on decades of research regarding women's roles in political violence, the gendered aspects of such violence, and the importance of considering gendered power structures and the position of women in efforts to prevent or counter such violence [2].

Violent extremism has become a significant obstacle to achieving sustainable global peace. In South and Southeast Asia, it directly undermines inclusive development by fostering intolerance, causing forced displacement of communities, intensifying cycles of insecurity and conflict, taking advantage of existing inequalities, and hindering the protection of human rights and adherence to the rule of law [3]. Violent extremism is not just a global security concern but also a multifaceted gendered issue involving both men and women, driven by a range of personal, ideological, structural, and context-specific factors [4]. This violence is supported by gender stereotypes that are instrumental in the radicalization and recruitment of men, women, boys, and girls into extremist groups. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate a gender perspective into analyzing terrorism actions and counterterrorism strategies. Many PVE (Preventing Violent Extremism) activities led by women in civil society and social and religious settings often remain unnoticed. However, they significantly influence community members' decisions to avoid fundamentalist activities. Supporting women's political and social participation and leadership holds promise for preventing violent extremism in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. This potential stems from women's unique perspectives and experiences regarding "security" within the family and community contexts [5].

Addressing gender in preventing violent extremism is also compatible with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially Goal 5, gender equality, and Goal 16, promoting a peaceful and inclusive society. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda envisions a fair, equitable, tolerant, and socially inclusive world that respects human rights, as well as racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. The 2030 Agenda is a comprehensive development framework to prevent violent extremism globally. Attaining Goal 5 and Goal 16 is unachievable in contexts dominated by violent extremism or where inequality and exclusion persist.

According to the Indonesian National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), since mid-2000, more than 50 women have been charged with involvement in terrorism. They were actively involved as direct executors or as part of the support system for terrorist acts such as masterminding bombings, seeking funds, hiding husbands, and so on [6]. The involvement of women in terrorism networks in Indonesia first appeared in late 2016, when female migrant workers began participating in acts of terrorism. In May 2018, a series of terrorist attacks marked the first instance of a successful female suicide bombing in the country that involved entire families, including mothers and young children. As a result of the incident, 10 people were reported dead, and 40 people were injured [7]. In 2022, the head of BNPT explained that women's involvement in terrorist activities has increased over the past 10 years. Women's roles have transformed from supporters to perpetrators. Boy, the head of BNPT, noted that 18 young Indonesian women carry out acts of terrorism [8].

Indonesia issued Law Number 5 of 2018 concerning the Eradication of Criminal Acts of Terrorism to provide criminal sanctions against perpetrators of Terrorism Crimes, including conspiracy, preparation, attempt, and assistance in committing Terrorism Crimes and protection of victims. This law is a revision of the previous law that expands the definition and scope of terrorism offenses. This law includes the criminalization of various new forms of terrorism offenses, increased criminal penalties, expanded sanctions on corporations, and regulations regarding the role of the Indonesian National Armed Forces in counterterrorism efforts. Indonesia has also issued Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia (Perpres) Number 7 of 2021 on the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism (NAP P/CVE) for 2020-2024.

The national plan is a comprehensive framework designed to guide government entities at various levels to combat terrorism-related extremism. This strategic document outlines a series of carefully planned initiatives that serve as a roadmap for ministries, agencies, and regional authorities in preventing and countering violent extremism leading to terrorism. The strategic pillar of NAP P/CVE of Indonesia is prevention, which encompasses Prevention, Law Enforcement and Protection, and International Cooperation.

At the local level, according to the head of National and Political Unity Agency (Bakesbangpol) Central Java, only four provinces in Indonesia have initiated further Presidential Regulations related to RAN PE. East Java, West Java, Central Java, and Central Sulawesi are among them. In Central Java, there are Governor of Central Java Regulation Number 35 of 2022 Concerning Prevention and Handling of Violence-Based Extremism Leading to Terrorism in Central Java Province as a further implementation of the Presidential Decree (Perpres) [9].

In preventing violent extremism (PVE), civil society engagement is essential. According to the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, member states are urged to implement a National Action Plan (NAP) to address violent extremism through comprehensive government and societal approaches. An essential component of this society-wide approach is the engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs). Article 8 Perpres Number 7/2021 of Indonesia also states that the regulation allows ministries, institutions, and regional governments to collaborate and involve community participation in implementing the NAP P/CVE. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are deeply embedded in communities and can help identify and address local grievances that may lead to extremism. Their involvement ensures that prevention efforts resonate with specific cultural and social contexts.

Central Java is one of 5 provinces besides West Java, East Java, West Nusa Tenggara, and Central Sulawesi to be prioritized by BNPT that have warned about preventing the spread of radicalism and terrorism ideology in 2021 and 2022 [10]. Banyumas, a regency in Central Java, is a potential place for the spread of radicalism, extremism, and terrorism, according to the Head of the Community Development Unit of the Banyumas Police, AKP Kusnadi SH [11]. This is evident from the numerous arrests of terrorist suspects in various areas of Banyumas over the past five years. In Banyumas, many civil society organizations are also developing which are active in social humanity, women's issues, and religion. Regarding the violent extremism issue, this research aims to examine the role of women's civil society organizations in preventing violent extremism in Banyumas, Central Java, Indonesia.

2. Method

This study uses qualitative research to collect detailed data and reveal implicit knowledge. Qualitative research draws on diverse empirical sources, including case studies, personal experiences, reflective accounts, life narratives, interviews, observations, histories, interactions, and visual texts, which capture significant moments and the meanings inherent in individual lives [12]. The qualitative approach integrates various elements throughout research design, data collection, hypothesis testing, fieldwork, data analysis, and conclusion writing. Techniques like in-depth interviews, content analysis, snowball sampling, and narrative storytelling are employed for nuanced, non-numeric, and contextually descriptive findings. This study utilizes in-depth interviews and a literature review or document analysis.

Data sources in this study include both primary and secondary. Secondary resources are documents and reports from prior research on violent extremism, radicalism, and counterterrorism strategies in the Banyumas Regency. At the same time, primary resources comprise in-depth interviews with stakeholders and community members, especially from several women's civil societies in Banyumas. Using purposive sampling data, the authors choose to interview stakeholders who are relevant to the topic of study. Data analysis follows a narrative method [13], examining how stakeholders interpret the issues discussed. This method, often applied to data from semi-structured or structured interviews, observations, and written sources [13,14], enables a richly contextualized understanding from the research subject's perspectives.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Potential of Violent Extremism in Banyumas Regency

Defining violent extremism remains a continuous task, given the diverse and evolving range of personal and societal contexts, motivations, targets, and characteristics. An individual or ideology can be extremist without necessarily engaging in violence. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe defines Violent Extremism that Leads to Terrorism (VERLT) as radicalization that leads to terrorism as a dynamic process in which an individual begins to see terrorist violence as a viable and potentially legitimate course of action. This process may lead the individual to endorse, support, or participate in terrorist activities [15].

Schmid explained that violent extremism that is developing refers to the beliefs and actions of a person or several people who support or use ideologies that motivate violence to enforce political, religious, and ideological power radically. Extremism is generally understood as a strong belief in a particular view, teaching, or concept, which often gives rise to attitudes beyond reasonableness, for example, by placing other people with different beliefs in positions considered or perceived as wrong or misguided. At the highest level, extremism occurs accompanied by movements that contain violent actions [16]. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) describes violent extremism as the endorsement, participation, preparation, or support for violence driven by ideological motivations aimed at achieving social, economic, and political objectives [17]. While Indonesia's Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 7/2021 defines Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism as beliefs and actions that employ violent means or the threat of extreme violence with the intent to support or execute acts of terrorism.

In geographical terms, Banyumas is a connection between critical areas in Java, linking central and eastern parts of the island. Its proximity to major transport routes allows easy access to neighboring regions, facilitating the movement of people and ideas. This location can make Banyumas a conduit for spreading radical ideologies, as extremists can exploit the high traffic to

spread influence and recruit new members. Being near Nusakambangan Island, where high-profile terrorism convicts are held, also has a unique impact. Nusakambangan is home to convicted terrorists who are often involved in radical networks even from prison. The proximity to Banyumas can indirectly expose the region to extremist ideas, as families of inmates and sympathizers frequently travel through the area, occasionally staying there to visit inmates. These interactions may create informal networks that foster extremist sentiments among locals [18].

However, based on the report of the Bakesbangpol Banyumas regency, some regional leaders have not yet considered extremism and radicalism strategic. Therefore, these issues have not been considered priority activities in budget planning. Furthermore, although there are Perpres Number 7 of 2021 on the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism and Governor Decree Number 35 of 2022 Concerning Prevention and Handling of Violence-Based Extremism Leading to Terrorism in Central Java Province, there are obstacles to the planning stage of implementation in the local level. There are several general challenges at the planning stage of RAN PE (National Action Plan for Women's Empowerment) activities in the regions, as follows; the absence of regulations or policies at the local level as derivatives of Presidential Regulation Number 7 of 2021 which regulates budgeting and the implementation of RAN PE in the regions [19].

3.2. Preventing Violent Extremism in Banyumas through the Engagement of Women's Civil Society

Preventing violent extremism (PVE) and countering violent extremism (CVE) both refer to approaches for addressing violent extremism, although the terms are often used interchangeably. Prevention focuses on stopping issues from arising by tackling conditions that foster violent extremism. Countering violent extremism, on the other hand, involves implementing strategies to dismantle terrorist narratives and promote positive alternatives, which may also encompass the rehabilitation and reintegration of former violent extremists.

Recognizing that the factors contributing to violent extremism affect men and women differently, P/CVE strategies must incorporate robust gender analysis and a comprehensive gender perspective to ensure effectiveness and sustainability. These strategies should be tailored to meet the socio-economic, cultural, and political needs of all members of society, acknowledging existing gender differences. To tackle the diverse drivers of violent extremism, efforts to prevent and counter it should focus on fostering inclusive and tolerant societies [20].

Meeting goals six on gender equality and 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions requires peaceful and inclusive societies and institutions across all levels. Therefore, governmental, CSOs and local initiatives can support inclusivity by enhancing broad participation in political, peace, and security processes to prevent violent extremism by engaging women's civil society as well. The findings of this research were obtained through in-depth interviews with representatives of women's civil society organizations in Banyumas Regency, including Laeli Mansyur from Muallimat, Eva Lutfiati from Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama, Titiek Idris from Women's Organization Association (Gabungan Organisasi Wanita/GOW) representatives, Zakiah from Aisyiyah Muhammadiyah, Dewi Setiowati from Women Entrepreneurs Association (Ikatan Wanita Pengusaha/IWAPI), Tutut Family Empowerment and Welfare Driving Team (Tim Penggerak Pemberdayaan dan Kesejahteraan Keluarga/PKK), Wiwin Muchtar Wiyono from Dharma Wanita Persatuan and Maful Sugianto from

Forum Public for the Welfare of Women and Children (Publik untuk Kesejahteraan Perempuan dan Anak/PUSPA).

The Authors chose these organizations for several reasons. First, these organizations have a large mass base in Banyumas Regency, Mualimat, and Fatayat NU, part of the Nahdlatul Ulama mass organization, and are quite significant in Indonesia. While Aisyiyah is part of the Muhammadiyah organization. Second, these women's organizations have been established for quite a long time, so there have been many activities and actions carried out in all areas of society and religion, like the PKK driving team. Third, GOW and PUSPA are forums for all women's organizations in the Banyumas Regency, so they are quite representative. Fourth, IWAPI is vital because economic empowerment is also a prevention work for violent extremism.

In the Banyumas Regency, there is no specific policy on preventing violent extremism, resulting in prevention activities being solely carried out by community groups on a self-help basis without collaboration or support from the local government. All representatives of women's organizations also raised this issue. Women's organizations often work independently without significant support from the local government in their activities, including those focused on preventing violent extremism.

Based on our interviews, all informants have the same perspective that radicalism and violent extremism pose significant threats to community security and harmony. Additionally, the informants emphasized the importance of involving women in efforts to prevent violent extremism. According to the informants, the role of women's families and communities at local, national, regional, and global levels is crucial, including in the peace process, especially, due to the increasing number of female perpetrators, active supporters of extremists in the community. Representatives from various religious organizations such as Fatayat NU, Mualimat, and Aisyiyah stated that they had implemented preventive measures against the threat of violent extremism. These activities include disseminating religious understanding through various media, education for members and the community, religious teachings emphasizing the importance of moderate religious understanding, and correct religious beliefs that portray Islam as a blessing for all, fostering inclusivity toward those of different beliefs. Additionally, some organizations like Mualimat and Aisyiyah hold educational gatherings to support religious education. They also work to strengthen social capital, conduct awareness campaigns, and monitor local environments to detect activities that may lean toward violent extremism [21].

Maful Sugianto, as a male representing PUSPA Banyumas, has dedicated efforts to creating community harmony through grassroots initiatives, including religious study groups and social outreach at the neighborhood level. He also collaborates closely with the Forum for Inter-Religious Harmony (FKUB) in Banyumas; Maful organizes educational gatherings that promote peace and understanding across different religious communities. These activities are designed to strengthen social bonds and counteract divisive narratives that could lead to extremism. PKK (Family Welfare Empowerment) also has implemented educational and social programs that address various community issues. PKK work includes organizing religious study groups, educating the public on child protection and gender-based violence, and promoting the prevention of early marriage and human trafficking. By engaging the PKK teams across all sub-districts, Tutut also involves young

people, raising their awareness about the risks of violence and radicalism. These efforts foster a culture of collective responsibility and resilience among local families [22].

Dewi Setiowati, from the Indonesian Businesswomen's Association (IWAPI) in Banyumas, emphasizes economic empowerment to prevent extremism. Dewi's programs aim to reduce the vulnerability of individuals and families who may be susceptible to radical ideologies by providing opportunities for financial independence. Through economic empowerment, women in Banyumas gain more stability and a sense of purpose, which contributes to community peace and reduces the likelihood of extremism taking root. Titiek Idris, Secretary of the Banyumas Women's Organizations Association (GOW), explains that GOW has led workshops in collaboration with the Agency of Population Control, Family Planning, Women's Empowerment, and Child Protection (DPPKBP3A) to address violence against women and children. These workshops, conducted in partnership with Banyumas's DPPKBP3A, RRI Purwokerto, and the Banyumas branch of MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council), aim to educate and engage various women's organizations in Banyumas, advocating for a non-discriminatory approach that respects diversity. By uniting organizations under the umbrella of GOW, GOW fosters a broad coalition of support for community peace and women's safety, actively countering narratives that could lead to radicalization. Women's Dharma Association (Dharma Wanita Persatuan), collaborates with DPPKBP3A, especially social and population service agencies, to organize social outreach programs. The initiatives are grounded in the belief that women, whether as wives, activists, or mothers, hold a pivotal influence over their immediate environment. Through these socialization activities, Wiwin encourages women to spread values of tolerance and moderation, acting as a deterrent to extremism and fostering a safe community for future generations [23].

The collaboration efforts by these women's organizations are extensive, involving partnerships with institutions such as MUI Banyumas, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, DPPKBP3A, other women's organizations in Banyumas, professional organizations, PKK (Family Welfare Movement), and local village governments. The representatives also expressed a belief that most Muslims in Banyumas are moderate, though radical groups exist and require attention and monitoring to maintain Banyumas' security. Despite these efforts, the activities conducted by women's organizations in Banyumas are still seen as insufficient, highlighting the need for recommendations to policymakers, particularly the government. These recommendations include establishing sustainable collaboration with women's organizations, continuous education, cross-sectoral cooperation on handling extremism, raising awareness on ideologies that should not develop in Indonesia, promoting national and cultural diversity, and creating specific policies on preventing violent extremism in Banyumas as a legal framework [24].

4. Conclusion

Together, these organizations illustrate how women's organizations are intrinsic in creating an environment of counter-extremism in Banyumas. Each organization has a different approach to the issue through religious, family-oriented, economic, or social support messages that readily underline how such women-driven initiatives lie at the heart of community-wide efforts against radicalism and violent extremism. In their multifaceted efforts, these women's organizations stand as role models and guardians of social harmony to show what community resilience might look like when faced with extremism. Their

actions underscore the power of grassroots engagement and the significant impact that women can have in bringing about a peaceful and secure society.

Based on the findings and analysis that have been carried out, suggestions and recommendations related to strategies to prevent violent extremism in Banyumas Regency include the following: there is still a need for more focused and comprehensive cooperation and synergy between women's mass organizations and various local government agencies in Banyumas Regency. Coordination and communication between elements of the local government, community organizations, and the general public are needed, especially for supervising and controlling violent extremism activities. The critical factor is that the perception by local governments to address the violent extremism is urgent in Banyumas. Therefore, it is necessary to issue a local national action plan based on the governor's decree. Thus, the support by the local government for the involvement of women's organizations in policy-making in Banyumas district .

5. Conflict of Interest

The authors need to declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the writing or publication of this article.

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