

## Research article

# The Transformation of the Forms of Terrorism During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**ORCID**Laode Muhammad Fathun: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8962-0075>**Abstract.**

The present study analyzes the implications of COVID-19 on the different forms of terrorism. The authors discuss the two types of terrorist acts: (i) the radicalization, recruitment, and funding of terrorism and (ii) planning the place and target of the operation. The authors argue that the COVID-19 policies have failed to inhibit or stop terrorism in Indonesia. This is supported by the four cases of terrorism that took place in the country during the COVID-19 period. Since the purpose of this study was to identify and analyze the social phenomenon, a qualitative method was adopted for collecting the data. The authors conclude that while COVID-19 did affect the financing and operation of terrorism, it helped the terrorist groups to radicalize and recruit new members due to the increasing use of the Internet, people's insecurities during the pandemic, and the radical narrative.

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## 1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the countries that are vulnerable to terrorist activities. Although it cannot be estimated with certainty, at least thousands of active individuals belong to extremist groups. Jenkins[1] stated that Terrorism is the systematic threat or use of force to bring political changes. In Indonesia, there are two kinds of extremist groups, namely the Pro-ISIS and Anti-ISIS. One of the terrorist groups within the pro-ISIS group is Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD). Meanwhile, one of the terror groups from the Anti-ISIS group is Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

In addition, Indonesia is also one of the countries vulnerable to terrorist attacks[2]. The vulnerability can be seen through the terrorist attacks that occurred in Indonesia, such as the Bali Bombing I (2002), the Bali Bombing II (2005) to several recent attacks such as the Sarinah Bombing (2016), the Surabaya Bombing (2018), and the Makassar Cathedral Church Bombing (2021)[3].

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Thus, the discussion on terrorism activities in Indonesia becomes interesting, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Four cases of Terrorism during the COVID-19 period in Indonesia raised new questions regarding terrorism attack activities, especially when various policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricts the movement of people and prevents the crowds, are unable to stop terrorist attack activities. Whereas so far, terrorism groups have always carried out attacks in public places to attract and maintain the necessary publicity, such as the suicide bombings at Plaza Sarinah, Paddy's Pub and Sari Club and the other attacks.

This paper attempts to analyze three points: the influence of COVID-19 on funding from terrorist groups, the influence of COVID-19 on the radicalization process and member recruitment, and the influence of COVID-19 on the operations of terrorist groups.

## 1.1. Theoretical Framework Funding of Terrorism

Money is a source of life for Terrorism[4]. As Freeman[5] stated, the terrorist group spends its money carrying out its functions, such as recruiting, building training camps, and buying equipment for the operations. Freeman[5] stated that there are four sources of the funding of Terrorism, namely state sponsors, illegal activities, legal activities, and support from the community.

## 1.2. Radicalization and Recruitment

Radicalization and Recruitment are two different processes[6]. Radicalization is the initial stage of a recruitment process, whose purpose is to modify individual beliefs that occur in a short time. This follows[7] statement that the members of terrorism groups have been radicalized first. Meanwhile, recruitment is a dynamic and never-ending process. Members of terrorist groups must develop sympathy for radicalized people to carry out terror and violent activities[8]. Furthermore, driving factors cause individuals to participate in a terrorist group, including Individual Existential Anxiety, Social Bonds, and Economic Needs[9].

In addition, there is a pull factor, namely the Radical Narrative. In this case, words like 'Jihad' have been interpreted as radical things, which can be applied in various contexts, namely not only to represent the struggle for justice not only against discrimination and racism but also to support freedom of expression and defend civil society[10].

Furthermore, there are three Radical Narrative elements: Complaints, Perpetrators, and Methods[11].

### 1.3. Terrorism Operations

Following Jenksin's[1], definition of Terrorism, terrorism operations must be carried out utilizing a dramatic, cruel, and well-known attack method to attract and maintain the desired publicity[12]. Thus, terrorism groups must choose targets and locations of attacks based on rational calculations. Terrorism groups need rational calculation to achieve the desired goal. Terrorist groups will choose some public places that are passed by civil society so that they can maintain publicity.

## 2. Discussions

### 2.1. The Implication of COVID -- 19 on the Funding of Terrorist Group

Funding for terrorism groups is one sector that has had a significant impact due to the economic impact of the pandemic. One of the groups whose funding sources have been impacted by COVID-19 is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). When analyzed using the concept of financing terrorism, ISIS uses illegal activity to fund their group. Quoted through Blannin[13], one of the sources of funding for the ISIS group is Oil Sales. They have made various attempts to attack, operate and target oil infrastructure in Libya, Iraq, Egypt. ISIS direct controls oil infrastructure in Iraq, Syria, and Libya operates refineries of various sizes and output capacities, and derives revenue from selling refined petroleum products. Crane[14] calculates that IS revenue from oil sales and refining oil products reached US\$ 40 million per month in 2015. In this case, IS has a superior position because IS sells oil at discounted prices to various traders or traders. Intermediaries in domestic markets in Iraq and Syria, including adversaries such as the Kurds in Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, and agents in Turkey, who then transport the oil and resell it to legitimate markets.

During the pandemic, sources of funding from the IS group were disrupted, one of which was oil revenues. Following the report from the OECD[15] oil prices experienced a drastic decline due to worldwide economic disruption in COVID- 19, which caused a slowdown in production and mobility, which led to a decline in demand for oil. The decline in global oil prices and demand will ultimately affect the funding of the IS group.

In this case, Reardon in Gusovsky[16] states that falling oil prices will eventually reduce IS's income from the oil sector.

## 2.2. The Implication of COVID-19 on Terrorism Radicalization and Recruitment

Many parties believe that groups can use the COVID-19 pandemic to plan their radicalization and recruitment process online [17]. The first factor that causes this is the increase in internet usage during the pandemic. Quoted through the Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers (2020), internet usage in Indonesia increased from 64.8% in 2018 to 73.7% in 2019 – 2020.

In addition to the increasing use of the internet, the pandemic situation is filled with uncertainty, insecurity, and global challenges used by groups trying to implement their propaganda[18]. Propaganda is carried out by linking their propaganda messages with information about an epidemic virus and inciting violence.

In Conclusions, the process of radicalization and recruitment increases as a result of 1) Increased use of the internet and the availability of social media as a platform to spread propaganda messages, 2) Conditions of Anxiety during the pandemic, where the pandemic situation creates new possibilities due to the lockdown policy, which results in the occurrence of a pandemic. Someone feels alone and faces anxiety, and 3) Radical Narrative, where the pandemic is wrapped with radical narratives and propaganda messages by groups.

In the context of ISIS, the group conveyed the Radical Narrative through a talk with the title 'And the Dis Believers Will Know Who Get the Good End,' which Abu Hamza al-Qurashi conveyed as a spokesman for ISIS and distributed to the internet. ISIS calls the Coronavirus the 'Army of God'[19]. Abu Hamza al-Qurashi said that the virus was sent to avenge the suffering felt by Muslims due to the United States and its allies. Support for the 'infidels' is also called by ISIS so that the groups avoid the virus. Through this radical narrative, it can be said that there are three elements in it. The first element is a grievance, which refers to the suffering felt by the Muslim community. The second element is Actors, which refers to perpetrators of the Muslim community, which refers to the US and its allies. Next is the method of violence that is justified for the perpetrators.

### 2.3. The Implication of COVID-19 on Terrorism Operations

As is well known, the COVID-19 pandemic, which in the end restricted people's movement and reduced crowds, was unable to stop the JAD group from carrying out their actions at the Makassar Cathedral Church. In the case of JAD, COVID-19 was used as an opportunity to spread its wings and expand its area of operations[20]. This happens because the government is diverting attention from efforts to fight Terrorism to an effort to deal with the pandemic's impact on health, the economy, and the other sectors.

In addition, the selection of targets and locations in operation in the Cathedral Church was chosen based on rational calculations. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has limited the crowds of people, the JAD group has calculated the schedule of Masses that are most crowded by visitors. So, the group chose the time of transition from the Second Mass to the Third Mass[21]. At that time,

the congregation who attended the Second Mass had finished their service and rushed home, while the congregation who attended the Third Mass began to arrive. So even in a pandemic, the JAD group still took advantage of the situation for dramatic, cruel, and well-known attacks to attract and maintain publicity[12]. In addition to rational timing, the JAD group also chose the location of the attack. Quoted from Andi Widjajanto[22] as the analyst team from Lab 45, places of worship have been one of the three main targets of Terrorism for 21 years in Indonesia.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the operations of the JAD group in the quality of their attacks. As is well known, the JAD attacks in recent years appear to have been poorly planned and orchestrated [23]. Attacks by individuals have begun to increase, such as the attack on the former Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, Wiranto, in 2019 and the attack on the Daha Selatan Police in 2020. This is very different from Plaza Sarinah in 2016 and the bombing in Surabaya in 2018. This is thought to be due to the decentralized organizational structure of the JAD group.

This structure resulted in the formation of small groups, which did not have equal abilities, especially in attack. The absence of a training unit also exacerbates this. Although the group has a centralized strategy, the attacks and operations may not necessarily be adequately executed due to uneven skills.

## 3. Conclusion

The analysis results above show that COVID-19 affects terrorism activities in funding, radicalization, and recruitment and operations of terrorist groups.

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