

Education the best counter for radicalism

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The spread of radical Islamism in Indonesia has led many people to assume that it has to do mostly with the incorrect interpretation of Islam. Although this assumption may not be totally incorrect, this judgment is misleading. For some people, this could lead to theological accusations of Islam.

Rather, I tend to argue that, in fact, religion, including Islam, has been misused to frame people's disappointment with the state. I share the view of Olivier Roy (2004), who insists that along with global factors, the emergence of radical Islamism is mostly shaped by local peculiarities.

Modernization and globalization are mainstreaming across the world, including in some predominantly Muslim countries. Regardless of some advantages of these mainstreams, in general they have some disadvantages. Indeed, modernization and globalization have marginalized the role of religion. In the Indonesian context, Islam has lost its social authority.

The rise of radical Islamism, however, has not directly connected with Islam as a religious and social system. A number of studies on radical Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) also conclude that there is nothing wrong with the Islamic teachings at some *pesantren* accused of breeding radicals.

In my view, the inability of religious followers to face modernity eventually leads them to such radicalism. Therefore, it is the task of the government to let all Muslims get involved in the mainstream.

The return of some Muslims to *salafism* (which advocates Muslims to return to the Koran and Hadith), in a way, is a sign of Muslims' rejection of modernity and globalization. It is the ideology of *salafism* that restricts the access of Muslims to modern values. Therefore, only higher education can accelerate Indonesian Muslims' move to moderation.

Those who opt for radical Islamism mostly share relatively narrow-minded views. Most of them had no chance to attend university. In many ways, this situation has confined their way of thinking to a single point of view. The limited number of books or knowledge resources, to some extent, has also restricted their insights.

The difficulties in comprehending current phenomena of modernity and the globalized world have forced some Muslims to look back to the traditional values of Islam. *Salafism*, the belief of Muslims during an earlier period of Islam, is perceived as the best generation of Muslims. They believe returning to *salafi* will help them regain their heyday. Undeniably, most radical Islamic groups, including those committed to violence, have embraced *salafism*.

One of the most crucial issues among these people is the notion of *darul Islam* (state of peace) and *darul harb* (state of war). For those who have embrace *salafism* this dichotomy is the best way to comprehend current social and political problems.

In addition, the inability of the Indonesian government to cope with social problems in the last 10 years also has convinced some Muslims of the necessity of sharia.

Along with demands for sharia ordinances in some regions in Indonesia, some Islamists have resorted to violence to achieve their goals. In many cases, the violence involves those having narrow-minded views.

For this reason, the government should not blame Islam for promoting radicalism. Rather, it should provide good and affordable higher education for all. It is only through education that modernization can be viewed as a positive aspect of life, instead of a threat.

Muslims, like other citizens, need higher education to broaden their minds in the era of globalization. Secondary school is no longer enough for them to cope with modernity and the complexities of the global world. Higher education will reduce cultural conflicts between traditional Islam and modernity, and therefore curb radicalism.

Education will not only help Muslims comprehend modernity, but also to take part in the mainstream and lead modernization itself.

In this case, I disagree with Olivier Roy, who says that Islam cannot choose the form of its own modernity. Indeed, modernization is becoming an integral part of life and it is not necessary for Muslims to avoid modernization, but they can pick their own type of modernity that fits traditional and religious values.

In this respect, I do agree with Mahmood Mamdani (2004), who states that a "culture talk" between Islamic values and Western modernity would generate a distinct type of modernity. However, it will not materialize unless Muslims enjoy good education.

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