Chapter 4

ISIS Discourse in Radical Islamic Online News Media in Indonesia: Supporter or Opponent

Fajar Erikha
Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

Idhamsyah Eka Putra
Persada Indonesia University, Indonesia

Sarlito Wirawan Sarwono
Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia & Persada Indonesia University, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand how discourses about Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are supported and/or rejected by radical Islamic groups. Data were collected from two Islamic news website: Voa-Islam and Arrahmah. Both websites are categorised as radical Islamic sites. By using the discursive psychology approach, it was found that when ISIS is viewed as a group that actualised the establishment of an Islamic State, it is praised and supported. However, when ISIS is deemed to have killed other fellow Muslims, it is opposed and its movement is considered to be ‘out of Islamic corridors’. Practical implications of these findings are identified and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an Islamic terrorist group, is currently under great scrutiny as a result of numerous violent acts that have been perpetrated around Iraq and Syria. ISIS has asked other Muslims around the world to join and support its movement. As a result, a lot of Muslims from different countries have joined ISIS.

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Indonesia is one of the most populated Muslim countries in the world (88.2 percent of the 250 million Indonesians; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2009) with the majority identifying themselves as being Sunni Islam. Presently, there are two major schools of thought (madhhab) in Islam, namely Sunni and Shia Islam. Both schools have each further spawned various other schools of thought. Each has a different interpretation of Islam. Normally, differences in thoughts and Islamic law are understandable; as long as the Al-Quran and Hadith are used as the foundation (Okon, 2012), they will still be regarded as being Muslim thinking.

ISIS has branded itself as one of the many schools of thought in Sunni Islam. This is appealing to some and hence, Indonesia is considered as a fertile ground for ISIS to recruit new followers. It is interesting to note that the majority of Muslims in Indonesia are moderate, and most of them rejected ISIS ideology and movement. However, radical groups, which make up the minority, are more aggressive in spreading their ideology. This is why, many Islamic news sites in Indonesia are categorised as radical in nature. To the best of our knowledge, radical groups in Indonesia are actively discussing about the ISIS phenomenon. So far, radical Islamic groups have been found to have different perspectives with regards to ISIS. The present article discusses the discourses about ISIS in radical Islamic online news media in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

ISIS is a state as well as a political-military organisation with an orientation towards militant Salafi-jihadism that is not recognised by the Iraqi and Syrian authority (The Clarion Project, 2015). The name ISIS was used from 2013 to 2014, and changed into ‘The Islamic State’ after it was declared on June 29, 2014. Abu Bakar Al-Bagdadi was officially appointed as the leader of this group (Caliph). The Islamic State originally annexed Iraq and Syria because the two countries are considered to be important for the world jihad movement (Gerges, 2014).

In its journey, ISIS uses the legal interpretation of Islam (Sharia) and imposes its application in areas under its territorial control. ISIS performs extreme and oppressive acts such as suicide bombings, bank looting, and executions against those considered as its enemies – such as the West (e.g., America, Europe), as well as other Islamic groups (in Sunni or Shia sub-schools). Furthermore, ISIS propaganda materials (e.g., execution of all prisoners) have been shared and propagated through print media, Internet, and video.

Terrorism and ISIS in Indonesia

Ever since Abu Bakar Bashir (a former leader of Jemaah Islamiyah and Indonesian Mujahidin Council; currently, a leader of Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid [JAT]) pledged an allegiance to ISIS in Nusakambangan prison on July 18, 2014, ISIS has attracted the attention of the Indonesian government (Feillard, 2014). The Indonesian government immediately took a stand on this matter, and recognise the need to reject, prevent, and combat ISIS ideology.

On the one hand, opposition to ISIS has been seen across Indonesia. Major religious institutions such as Nadlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are supporting the stance adopted by the Indonesian government (“PBNU: Ulama Besar”, 2014; Putra & Sukabdi, 2014). Furthermore, anti-terror Special