



Violent Radicalisation of Convicted Terrorists in Indonesia: Perceived Unfairness, Democratic Values and Legitimacy of the Rule of Law

DEVITA KARTIKA PUTRI 

KEES VAN DEN BOS 

ELAINE MAK 

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article



ARTICLES

ABSTRACT

This paper studies violent radicalisation among people convicted for terrorism in Indonesia. In particular, the paper posits that perceived unfairness, as well as perceptions about democratic values and the rule of law, are important elements that could help explain violent radicalisation in the country. To explore this issue, in-depth interviews were conducted with 40 convicted terrorists in Indonesia. The results reveal that the respondents perceive the law to be unfair and that a democratic system contradicts their religious beliefs. Moreover, the respondents perceive *jihād* to be an obligation superior to the legal constraint from violence. These findings show that some terrorists in Indonesia perceive the country's legal and democratic system as illegitimate. Thus, what convicted terrorists in Indonesia perceive to be fair and how they envision the law played a role in their violent radicalisation. These findings are discussed in view of the country's post-colonial struggle for a democratic identity and rejection of a religiously defined legal system.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Devita Kartika Putri

Faculty of Law, Universitas
Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

devita.kartika@mail.ugm.ac.id

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Acts of terrorism can undermine societies in various ways. After all, the violent behaviours of terrorists can threaten people's lives. Terrorist acts can also lead societies to respond with drastic measures, sometimes with governments feeling forced to prioritise safety measures, relative to issues of free speech, personal freedom and other basic democratic values.¹ As such, terrorism not only harms other people's personal rights and basic societal norms, but it can also subvert key social institutions such as the democratic system and the rule of law by disrupting societal functions, installing alternative views on what is fair and legitimate in society and undermining core democratic values and the rule of law.²

Radicalisation into terrorism is an important issue and can be hard to understand. Terrorism in post-colonial contexts can be even more complex, as it potentially prevents societies from moving forward. This is because post-colonial governments naturally work toward undoing the political authority during the colonial era, which is typically wielded by the displacement of local authorities and dividing the population into different categories of social groups.³ This process of undoing the colonial legacy and establishing a new legal and political system can be more challenging when threats of terrorism exist due to a conflict of ideas on how such a new system should take shape.

Against this post-colonial background of Indonesia's struggle for political identity following independence from Dutch colonisation, this paper studies violent radicalisation in Indonesia. In what follows, we first explain why the Indonesian context is important to study violent radicalisation. Given this context, the paper then delineates important variables that may help understand how violent radicalisation may occur in the Indonesian context. In particular, we will argue that terrorists' perceptions of unfairness as well as their perceived legitimacy of democracy and the rule of law are important variables in making sense of violent radicalisation among convicted terrorists in Indonesia.

1.1. THE INDONESIAN CONTEXT

Independence from Dutch colonisation presented an opportunity for Indonesia to establish its own political identity. In fact, this opportunity was a challenge in itself due to the need to construct a political system capable of gaining acceptance across its diverse population,⁴ encompassing a wide range of ethnic, religious, racial and cultural backgrounds. The decision that Indonesia was to be a democratic state was met with disagreements from those in favour of an Islamic state. The country has since suffered from internal turmoil and political violence,⁵ evidenced in the separatist movement in Aceh and the rise of religiously motivated groups *Darul Islam*, *Jamaah Islamiyah* and *Jamaah Ansharud Daulah*, to name a few.⁶ These groups similarly called for the establishment of an Islamic state of Indonesia.⁷ In time, these movements were later amplified by the claims of social inequality by extremist groups that emerged during the New Order regime under President Soeharto.⁸ These and other historical instances indicate a continuing challenge for Indonesia's democratic and national legal system.

Building on these historical insights, the current article examines violent radicalisation that leads to religious terrorism in Indonesia's post-colonial context. We view violent radicalisation

¹ Clive Walker, 'Counterterrorism within the Rule of Law? Rhetoric and Reality with Special Reference to the United Kingdom' (2021) 33 *Terrorism and Political Violence* 338.

² Kees van den Bos, *Why People Radicalize: How Unfairness Judgments Are Used to Fuel Radical Beliefs, Extremist Behaviors, and Terrorism* (OUP 2018).

³ Penny Enslin and Kai Horsthemke, 'Postcolonial Perspectives on Democratic Education' in Julian Culp, Johannes Drerup and Douglas Yacek (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Democratic Education* (1st edn, CUP 2023).

⁴ Duncan Ivison, 'Postcolonialism and Political Theory' in Andrew Vincent (ed), *Political Theory: Tradition and Diversity* (1st edn, CUP 1997).

⁵ Evan A Laksamana and Michael Newell, 'Political Violence and Counterterrorism: Disputed Boundaries of a Postcolonial State' in Michael J Boyle (ed), *Non-Western Responses to Terrorism* (Manchester UP 2019).

⁶ Sumanto al Qurtuby, *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Saudi Arabia and Indonesia* (Palgrave Macmillan US 2022).

⁷ M Tho'yib, 'Radikalisme Islam Indonesia' (2018) 1 *Ta'Lim: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Islam* 90.

⁸ Ahmad Rizky Mardhatillah Umar, 'Melacak Akar Radikalisme Islam Di Indonesia' (2010) 14 *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik* 169.

as a process of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that motivates people to move from within the boundaries of the law to violently break the law by resorting to extremism and terrorism⁹ to affect the political system of a country. In this context, we define terrorism as a political and violent act of terror committed against the general public or facilities that causes harm.¹⁰ Given Indonesia's post-colonial struggle for a democratic identity and rejection of a religiously defined legal system, we posit that perceived unfairness, as well as perceptions about democratic values and the rule of law, are important elements worth exploring that could help explain violent radicalisation that led to terrorism in the country.

Thus, part of our interest in studying violent radicalisation in Indonesia is rooted in the observation that different extremist groups have long existed in the country since its independence from Dutch colonisation in 1945.¹¹ We study this issue from the perspective that in contemporary Indonesia, state-banned extremist groups strive to establish the Islamic State of Indonesia and thereby seek to implement Islamic law as the exclusive national legislation¹² – drawing inspiration from the *Darul Islam* movement (Islamic state movement) that occurred following Indonesia's independence.¹³

These movements exist despite Indonesia's legal and political system, which normatively works to create a democratic society while maintaining religious values. On the one hand, Indonesia's ideal rule of law intertwines with democratic principles, including tolerance and equality,¹⁴ making Indonesia a constitutional democracy.¹⁵ Such an ideal is thought to be suitable to accommodate the diverse character of Indonesia's population as reflected in the state's motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or 'Unity in Diversity', which refers to the unification of people from different cultures, faiths and ethnicities. The ideal constitutional democracy is embodied in both the state ideology *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. The *Pancasila* consists of five principles that serve as the basis for the Indonesian state and society. In the *Pancasila*, the value of democracy is incorporated in the fourth pillar, which reads 'society guided by the wisdom of deliberation or representation', and, in explaining the foundation for governmental powers and structure, the 1945 Constitution emphasises democratic values by acknowledging that 'sovereignty is in the hands of the people'.¹⁶

Religious values are an integral part of Indonesia's legal and political systems. For example, the 'One and Almighty God' serves as the first pillar of the country's ideology *Pancasila*. Furthermore, Indonesia's legal system is built upon the co-existence of three pillars of law: civil law system, customary law and Islamic law. Under the Constitution, human rights could even be limited on the grounds of religious values. For example, the criminalisation of blasphemy in Indonesia is a limitation on free speech. In the political sphere, religious agendas are included and moderated through the inclusion of religious parties in the political process.¹⁷ Today, Indonesia's political system is described as an open democratic system where there are available means for civil and political rights, including the political participation of the public, including civil society organisations.¹⁸

⁹ Kees van den Bos, *Why People Radicalize: How Unfairness Judgments Are Used to Fuel Radical Beliefs, Extremist Behaviors, and Terrorism* (n 2).

¹⁰ CAJ Coady, *The Meaning of Terrorism* (1st edn, Oxford University Press 2021).

¹¹ Matteo Vergani, Greg Barton and Yenny Wahid, 'Understanding Violent Extremism in Indonesia' in *Countering Violent and Hateful Extremism in Indonesia: Islam, Gender and Civil Society* (Palgrave Macmillan 2022).

¹² Ali Maksum, Priyono Febrianto and Esa Wahyuni, 'Interpretation of Democracy, Pluralism and Tolerance among the Young Activists of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama' (2019) 32 *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik* 275.

¹³ Akh Muzakki, 'The Roots, Strategies, and Popular Perception of Islamic Radicalism in Indonesia' (2014) 8 *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 1; Vergani, Barton and Wahid (n 11).

¹⁴ Jimly Asshiddiqie, 'Demokrasi Dan Nomokrasi: Prasyarat Menuju Indonesia Baru' in *Kapita Selekta Teori Hukum* (Universitas Indonesia 2000).

¹⁵ Jimly Asshiddiqie, *Menuju Negara Hukum Yang Demokratis* (Sekretariat Jenderal dan Kepaniteraan Mahkamah Konstitusi 2008).

¹⁶ The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, art 1(2).

¹⁷ Alexander R Arifianto, 'Islamic Campus Preaching Organizations in Indonesia: Promoters of Moderation or Radicalism?' (2019) 15 *Asian Security* 323.

¹⁸ Amy Freedman and Robert Tiburzi, 'Progress and Caution: Indonesia's Democracy' (2012) 39 *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 131.

The acknowledgement of religious values within the legal and political system has allowed religious movements to participate in Indonesia's democracy, including their voicing of perceived unfairness. For example, when referring to the inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts of the 1998 Poso Tragedy and the 1999 Ambon Tragedy, religious movements have claimed that the state is unfair due to perceived discrimination during these conflicts.¹⁹ Other concerns raised by religious movements include the continuing elitism in politics, corruption and economic hardships.²⁰ Similarly, the development of radicalism in Indonesia has been predicted to be triggered by economic and structural injustices, as well as inequalities that cause dissatisfaction with the government.²¹ These domestic problems are often used as momentum to promote the belief that Indonesia would be better if it were governed by Islamic ways, often citing the religion's orientation toward justice and morality.

Being dissatisfied with the Indonesian context, religious movements have relied on democratic or non-violent means to effect change,²² for example through resolutions issued by religious organisations, or through participation in public elections for parliamentary seats, to have their beliefs heard and taken into account within the political discourse. However, a non-democratic means was also taken by some. For example, some groups chose to violently advocate for their cause to change Indonesia's legal and political system entirely.

Against this background, we study perceived unfairness as well as perceptions about democratic values and the rule of law amongst convicted terrorists in Indonesia, to examine how their perceptions on these issues are connected to their involvement in terrorism. In doing so, we also suggest how these perceptions may fit together within violent radicalisation in Indonesia's post-colonial context.

1.2. PERCEIVED UNFAIRNESS, DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND THE RULE OF LAW IN VIOLENT RADICALISATION

In studying violent radicalisation within Indonesia's post-colonial context, we focus on two aspects in particular. The first aspect is perceived unfairness, and the second aspect is terrorists' perceptions of the Indonesian rule of law and democratic values.

Thus, one way in which we ground our study is by building on the literature that has explored the connection between unfairness and terrorism. For example, Choi argued that terrorism happens when people hold grievances, feeling the lack of a peaceful means to resolve such grievances, exacerbating feelings of political desperation to the extent they view terrorist action as legitimate.²³ Similarly, Saiya argued that terrorism could happen when people feel the lack of avenues to dissent, lack of participation in the political decision-making process, and the curbing of freedom of expression, to the extent that it leaves violence as the only way to voice the need for change.²⁴ Another study also found that, due to their frustrations about the societal system, convicted terrorists are reluctant to participate in politics, democracy and the judicial system.²⁵ Related to this, perceived group deprivation, grievances and injustices that people experience as a group, and significant losses due to general, economic, social and political conditions are factors that drive radicalisation.²⁶ Moreover, terrorists' perceptions of

¹⁹ M Afif Anshori, 'The Radical Islamic Movement in Indonesia: Roots and Factors' (2019) 13 KALAM 217.

²⁰ International Republican Institute, 'Violent Extremism in Indonesia: Radicalism, Intolerance and Elections' (International Republican Institute 2018).

²¹ Anshori (n 18).

²² Saskia Schäfer, 'Democratic Decline in Indonesia: The Role of Religious Authorities' (2019) 92 Pacific Affairs 235.

²³ Seung-Whan Choi, 'Fighting Terrorism through the Rule of Law?' (2010) 54 Journal of Conflict Resolution 940.

²⁴ Nilay Saiya, 'Religion, Democracy and Terrorism' (2015) 9 Perspectives on Terrorism.

²⁵ Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, 'The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization' (2012) 24 Terrorism and Political Violence 1.

²⁶ Fathali M Moghaddam, 'The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration' (2005) 60 American Psychologist 161; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, 'Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism' (2008) 20 Terrorism and Political Violence 415; Arie W Kruglanski and others, 'The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism' (2014) 35 Political Psychology 69; Bertjan Doosje and others, 'Terrorism, Radicalization and de-Radicalization' (2016) 11 Current Opinion in Psychology 79; Kees Van den Bos, 'Unfairness and Radicalization' (2020) 71 Annual Reviews 563.

what is fair can further their acceptance of violent behaviour as a legitimate means to a desired end.²⁷ Violence can appear legitimate or morally righteous if the target of violence is viewed as illegitimate or immoral by their standard of morality.²⁸

Another issue on which we focus in our study is terrorists' perceptions of the Indonesian rule of law and democracy. Here, the rule of law refers to the influence and authority of law within society, particularly as a constraint on how people behave.²⁹ Building on this insight, we examine, in our empirical study, how convicted terrorists perceive the rule of law by asking them to reflect on their law-breaking behaviour, including the legal consequences of their actions that led to their imprisonment.

Furthermore, we view democracy as a principle that citizens are collectively entitled to govern themselves through representation and deliberation.³⁰ Thus, democracy rejects the idea of a system that excludes the representation of some groups in a population. We believe that this understanding of democracy fits into the context that we are studying, where some extremist groups in Indonesia have violently advocated for the installation of Islamic law as a national legal system despite the diverse population that exists in the country. In this regard, our study examines how terrorists view democracy in the context of their rejection of it, in favour of Islamic law.

We also ask whether terrorists' perceptions of the rule of law and democracy, as defined here, can explain their acceptance of violent behaviours. This is because the endorsement of violence has been suggested to be the result of seeking other sources of authority that mirror people's values, including fairness or justice.³¹ For example, fundamentalism, where sacred texts are viewed as a source of supreme authority – providing a system of meaning, a framework for normative behaviour³² and believed to be the solution to solving injustices.³³

We also look into the possibility that terrorists refer to other sources of authority to justify violence. We derived this idea from earlier work that addressed how authorities, including that from definitive religious texts, plays a role in people's attempts to reduce or protect themselves from uncertainty.³⁴ In the current research, we explore the possibility of an alternative belief system behind the endorsement of violence, particularly when such a system conforms with the alleged moral superiority of the violent actors. Indeed, in cases of religious terrorism, the terrorists involved treat their faith as a source of inspiration, legitimisation and worldview that differs from the mainstream opinion.³⁵

Thus, the earlier studies briefly reviewed here suggest that how people perceive the law and democratic values, and their judgement of what is fair, may play a strong role in radicalisation into terrorism. Based on this existing discourse, we see an opportunity to explore where these relations actually fit or play a role in the violent radicalisation process in the Indonesian context we are interested in.

27 Rachel Wahl, 'Justice, Context, and Violence: Law Enforcement Officers on Why They Torture' (2014) 48 *Law & Society Review* 807; Shaun Larcom, 'Internalizing Legal Norms: An Investigation into the Legitimacy of Payback Killings in the New Guinea Islands' (2015) 49 *Law & Society Review* 179.

28 Robert J VandenBerg, 'Legitimizing Extremism: A Taxonomy of Justifications for Political Violence' (2021) 33 *Terrorism and Political Violence* 1237; Julie M Norman, 'Other People's Terrorism: Ideology and the Perceived Legitimacy of Political Violence' [2022] *Perspectives on Politics* 1.

29 Elaine Mak and Sanne Taekema, 'The European Union's Rule of Law Agenda: Identifying Its Core and Contextualizing Its Application' (2016) 8 *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 25.

30 Jeremy Webber, 'A Democracy-Friendly Theory of the Rule of Law' (2024) 16 *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 339.

31 Tom Pyszczynski, Matt Motyl and Abdolhossein Abdollahi, 'Righteous Violence: Killing for God, Country, Freedom and Justice' (2009) 1 *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 12.

32 Ralph W Hood, Peter R Hill and W Paul Williamson, *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism* (The Guilford Press 2002).

33 Smruti Pattanaik, '"Old" Islamists and "New" Radicals: Understanding the Politics of Religious Radicalisation in Pakistan and Its Implications' (2011) 35 *Strategic Analysis* 581.

34 Michael A Hogg, Arie Kruglanski and Kees Van Den Bos, 'Uncertainty and the Roots of Extremism' (2013) 69 *Journal of Social Issues* 407.

35 Saiya (n 23).

In the present article, we argue that how people perceive a country's legal and political system in a post-colonial context matters when studying violent radicalisation there. To study this notion, we conducted in-depth qualitative interviews among 40 convicted terrorists incarcerated in Indonesian prisons. These interviews focus on their perceptions of unfairness in Indonesian society and their views on democracy and the rule of law in the country. By assessing their thoughts on these issues, we hope to gain insights into how convicted terrorists' values and their perceptions of the law and democracy are connected to their decision to violently break the law. We also hope that our findings could contribute to a richer understanding of the role these perceptions may have in violent radicalisation.

2. METHOD

2.1. SAMPLE

The research that we present here is based on qualitative interviews that we held with 40 convicted terrorists in Indonesia. By the time this research was conducted in 2021, 2022 to 2023 there were approximately 400 convicted terrorists in Indonesia. Using purposive sampling,³⁶ the criteria used to select the respondents included the following: First, the respondents were convicted of terrorism under Indonesia's anti-terrorism regulation (namely Law No 9 of 2013 or Law No 5 of 2018). In this way, we had access to data on convicted terrorists according to Indonesian law. Second, the respondents were undergoing or had undergone the deradicalisation programme used in the Indonesian prisons in which they were held in custody. We included this criterion because this study is part of a larger project that focuses on both possible radicalisation processes (leading some people in Indonesia to be convicted of terrorism under Indonesian law) and possible processes of deradicalisation (leading some convicted terrorists to accept democracy and the rule of law and to stay away from violent behaviours). Including this criterion also made it more realistic, we thought, to interview the respondents on issues such as the rule of law and democracy, as these are concepts being discussed in the deradicalisation programme, ensuring that our respondents had at least a basic understanding of these important yet somewhat abstract concepts.

In deriving our sample, the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Human Rights, which oversaw the penitentiary system, assisted us in coming into contact with the prisons where terrorists were being incarcerated and coordinated with said prisons about our research visits. After this, the first author was able to visit the prisons as an interviewer and approach the convicted terrorists.

We were successful in interviewing a total of 40 male convicted terrorists who were members of either *Jemaah Islamiyah* or *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah*. Our 40 respondents were convicted for several terrorism-related crimes, with some of the respondents being convicted for multiple charges: Four terrorists were convicted for committing violent terrorist actions. 23 respondents were convicted of conspiracy, preparation, attempt or aiding terrorism. 13 interviewees were convicted of joining a banned terrorist group, and two interviewees were convicted of financing terrorism. We also interviewed convicted terrorists from the available prisons who were thought to yield rich information on how they experienced the radicalisation and deradicalisation processes.³⁷ In this way, we interviewed two terrorists who were ideologues in their extremist groups (coded R1 and R2).

In our study, we did not seek a representative sample of all terrorist issues in Indonesia, since the research is not intended to reach a generalised conclusion about the entire population of convicted terrorists in the country. Rather, this research is meant to be an in-depth study to seek and analyse the experiences³⁸ of some interesting convicted terrorists about their perceptions of the law and democracy during their time as part of an extremist group. Given the sensitive nature of this research, we do not disclose the location of the prisons in Indonesia.

³⁶ Ilker Etikan, Sulaiman Abubakar Musa and Rukayya Sunusi Alkassim, 'Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling' (2015) 5 American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics 1.

³⁷ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd edn, Sage Publications 2002).

³⁸ Lisa Webley, 'Qualitative Approaches to Empirical Legal Research' in *The Oxford Handbook of Empirical Legal Research* (OUP 2010).

Halfway through the research process, we began to observe consistent results between respondents, with not much new information or additional insights in the remainder of the interviews. This suggested that we obtained a saturated sample,³⁹ allowing us to conclude that our sample of 40 respondents was sufficient for the current research purposes.

All interviews were conducted by the first author of this paper between August 2022 and May 2023. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance at Utrecht University.

2.2. INTERVIEW PROCESS

Following the proper permissions, the interviewer visited the selected prisons and met with the convicted terrorists to recruit those who were willing to be interviewed. She made sure to introduce herself, her professional background, the research, as well as the intention, scope and terms of the interviews.

Given the sensitive nature of the interview topic and the type of respondent, the interviewer recognised the risk of social desirability bias and the possible tendency of the respondents to tailor their answers based on perceived risks or consequences of admitting to sensitive behaviour.⁴⁰ Thus, she prioritised creating a relationship of trust⁴¹ to allow a conversational space⁴² where the respondents feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences.

For this purpose, the interviewer first emphasised that she was there to learn from their perspectives and not for any kind of reporting to government officials.⁴³ Then, an information sheet and a consent form were handed out to each respondent to read individually. Mindful of the possible implications, for example, the formal language used in the documents could be taken as confusing,⁴⁴ or the candidates might feel intimidated by written documents, the interviewer then explained both the information sheet and consent form verbally to the candidates. This allowed the candidates to ask for clarifications so that all understood the contents of the information and consent documents.

Furthermore, the interviewer emphasised the main principles of the interview namely, the voluntary nature of the process as well as the option to withdraw at any given time; the importance of confidentiality and the respondents' right to privacy; the right to not answer questions if the respondent feels uncomfortable; the right to stop the interview at any given time; and how the data were managed and used for the research.

The interviewer also created an informal and non-evaluative setting in a private room. She was informed that convicted terrorists may not be comfortable being interviewed and recorded if this reminds them of their experience of being interrogated by law enforcers. With this in mind, she did not bring a recorder to most of the interviews – only two of the convicted terrorists were comfortable having their interview audio recorded. During the interviews, the interviewer did not write down every sentence spoken so as not to disturb the flow of the conversations. Instead, she wrote down interesting keywords and phrases that were spoken by the respondents in the absence of an audio recorder. She also brought some snacks and beverages into the interview room. This helped to establish that, in effect, the interviews proceeded similarly to a conversation and to not give the respondents the impression that they were being evaluated. By using this procedure, most of the respondents seemed calm and open when answering questions. Immediately after each interview, the interviewer typed down the interview process to the best of her memory and based on her written notes.

³⁹ Kees van den Bos, *Empirical Legal Research: A Primer* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2020).

⁴⁰ Ivar Krumpal, 'Determinants of Social Desirability Bias in Sensitive Surveys: A Literature Review' (2013) 47 *Quality & Quantity* 2025.

⁴¹ Angela Melville and Darren Hincks, 'Conducting Sensitive Interviews: A Review of Reflections' [2016] *Law and Method* 1.

⁴² Erica Owens, 'Conversational Space and Participant Shame in Interviewing' (2006) 12 *Qualitative Inquiry* 1160.

⁴³ Ruth Jackson and others, 'Factors That Hinder or Enable Maternal Health Strategies to Reduce Delays in Rural and Pastoralist Areas in Ethiopia' (2016) 22 *Tropical Medicine & International Health* 148; Nicole Bergen and Ronald Labonte, '"Everything Is Perfect, and We Have No Problems": Detecting and Limiting Social Desirability Bias in Qualitative Research' (2020) 30 *Qualitative Health Research* 783.

⁴⁴ Liza Dawson and Nancy E Kass, 'Views of US Researchers about Informed Consent in International Collaborative Research' (2005) 61 *Social Science and Medicine* 1211.

2.3. INTERVIEW TOPICS

In terms of the interview design, the interviewer chose to do semi-structured interviews to allow her to explore deeper when the respondents offered interesting answers.⁴⁵ She used a list of topics included in Table 1 as an interview guide, which were aimed at gathering the respondents' thoughts and feelings about the law and democracy in Indonesia, as well as their take on violence.

To further avoid social desirability bias, the interviewer asked indirect questions⁴⁶ and open-ended questions to give the respondents the freedom to share their experiences and perspectives without limitations.⁴⁷ For example, the interviewer did not directly ask the respondents about their beliefs and how they became radicalised. Rather, she asked about the views discussed in prison about religion and Indonesia as a country, and how they differed from those discussed by their groups.

Using this approach, the questions focused on the respondents' experience when joining an extremist group; reflections on their crimes; and their experience in prison, particularly about deradicalisation processes. The interviewer expected that the answers to these questions or the follow-ups could reveal the respondents' thoughts and feelings about the law and democracy in Indonesia. The list of questions can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Topic list.

Why did you join the extremist group?
Were you aware that the group had been legally banned by the government?
How did you end up here? / Why did you commit [the crime]?
Did you consider the legal consequences of your actions?
What was the legal process like for you?
What are your interactions with the wardens like?
What kind of activities do you do in prison?
What kind of views do you learn in prison?
What did you learn from the civic discussion? (democracy, <i>Pancasila</i> , tolerance)
What do you think of those views?
Were the views different from the ones you learned during your time with your extremist group? In what way were they different?
What do you think about the differences of these views?
Did you learn anything about religious teachings? (<i>jihad</i>)
Were the interpretations of <i>jihad</i> in prison different from those by your extremist group? In what way?
What do you think about the differences of these views?

By holding the interviews focused on these topics, 37 respondents were able to share their experiences and their opinions about the issues addressed in the topic list, including their legal convictions. We were unable to acquire relevant insights about legal convictions from three other respondents, either because the respondents were reluctant or because they claimed to have been wrongly convicted but had no problem with the law or democracy in general.

2.4. DATA ANALYSES

To identify and analyse the patterns in the data, we conducted a thematic analysis.⁴⁸ In the initial step, the first author generated codes that reflected direct answers given by the respondents. In the second step, the first author combined codes that were similar to each other, thus creating more general codes. In the third step, she extracted themes from the general codes. In the final step, intercoder reliability of this coding process was assessed.

⁴⁵ Van den Bos, *Empirical Legal Research: A Primer* (n 38).

⁴⁶ Bergen and Labonte (n 42).

⁴⁷ Ronald J Chenail, 'Interviewing the Investigator: Strategies for Addressing Instrumentation and Researcher Bias Concerns in Qualitative Research' (2011) 16 *The Qualitative Report* 255.

⁴⁸ Webley (n 37).

Using the thematic analysis described above, the following themes were identified: perceptions of unfairness, perceptions of the national law and government, perceptions of democracy and *jihad* as a superior form of obligation. The following sections reveal our research findings about each theme identified above. Together, these themes reveal how the convicted terrorists perceive the law and democracy in Indonesia, which may help explain their train of thought when radicalised.

3.1. PERCEIVED UNFAIRNESS

In the interviews, the respondents talked about unfairness on many occasions. In the coding process, their statements on this issue were initially coded as ‘unfair treatment’ and ‘discrimination’. These codes were then combined to form a more general code of ‘unfairness’, thus forming the first theme of ‘perceived unfairness’.

Unfairness was mentioned by 20 respondents. Many of the respondents mentioned unfairness when explaining why they became attracted to join their groups. Some of these respondents claimed to have experienced unfairness themselves. Examples are respondents who joined their group during the conflict in Ambon, Indonesia. When speaking of his experience during the conflict, a respondent claimed that Muslims were being ‘discriminated against’ and ‘treated unfairly’ compared to Christians. When asked by whom and how, he said that the government sympathised and gave more attention, including the distribution of aid, to the Christians. Another respondent recalled how, during the Ambon conflict, he ‘became consumed by the idea that the government is *taghut* for treating Muslims unfairly’ following the 1998 reformation period.

Other respondents did not claim to have a particular experience with unfairness; however, they sympathised with others who did. For example, a respondent claimed that the rich and the powerful ‘seem to always get their own way – through corruption, nepotism and politics’. Another respondent referred to the ‘unjust killings of Muslims in Syria and Iraq’. A different respondent referred to ‘the West Invasion’ that left people ‘to fend for themselves’, and another one spoke of how the Palestinian people were ‘discriminated against and persecuted by the Israelis’. Furthermore, another respondent ‘felt disturbed by the violence and discrimination against Muslims’, for example, ‘the extrajudicial killing of FPI’s followers,⁴⁹ or the discrimination against the Palestinians by Israelis’.

The respondents also mentioned unfairness when explaining why they committed their actions. For example, when asked whether he considered the risk of being criminally sanctioned for his role in planning an attack on a local recreational area, one of the respondents answered that he knew his actions would violate the law, but he felt the ‘treatment against the Muslims was unfair’, and thus his actions constituted *jihad*. Similarly, a different respondent stated that he ‘did not care what might happen’ because he cared more about ‘the sufferings of the Muslims’ and felt the need to act.

Another one also shared a similar reason. When asked whether he considered the legal risks before deciding to attack a police station, he explained that he did consider the risks; however, he felt ‘the Muslims were treated unfairly’ and ‘were always blamed’. He also stated that he knows his actions violated the law, but he felt the ‘unfair treatment’ was a bigger issue, which he ‘thought, at the time, was a justified cause for *jihad*’. Furthermore, a different respondent believed that ‘the law was unreasonable’, referring to how the law allows the law enforcers to arrest and prosecute individuals for joining a group ‘that the government doesn’t like and label them terrorists’. Thus, the respondent did not care for the law, he only cared about the cause of the group, which was to ‘protect fellow Muslims’. He also stated that he was convinced to remain in his group because ‘the law is unfair and justice is non-existent’. In a different context, when asked why he did not believe that a peaceful *jihad* is no longer conducive to being pursued in Indonesia, a respondent explained: ‘Because unfairness is everywhere, corruption is getting out of control, nepotism in the government, while the people are left to fend for their own’.

⁴⁹ Front Pembela Islam or FPI is a banned hardline Islamist organisation in Indonesia.

During the interviews, the respondents gave their thoughts about the workings of the law and how they view the state. These thoughts were initially coded as 'corruption', 'problems of law', 'injustices' and '*kafir/murthad/taghut*' (some respondents label the state with these terms), thus forming the general code 'the workings of law'. Together, these codes form the second theme, namely the 'perceptions of national law'.

Perceptions of the law came up during the interviews with 29 respondents. This topic turned up in the interviews, for example, when the respondents were asked about the differences between the views discussed in prison and within their groups. According to R1, the first stage of radicalisation begins with making people believe in the need to change the social and political status quo. This is done by first dictating how they should perceive the law, state and democracy. Based on his experience, 'when people are recruited, they are first taught to distinguish between "who your friends are" and "who your enemies are"'. Essentially, people who have the same view are friends, and those who do not hate the same people are enemies.

R1 elaborated that the recruits, especially those 'who are used to being prejudicial toward others and calling other people *kafir*' (horizontal conflict), are now introduced to a new doctrine that teaches them that the government is also *kafir* (vertical conflict), hence there is a need to change the *Pancasila*: 'Vertical conflict emerges when people start saying things like the government is *kafir* or *taghut*'. Furthermore, R2 added that one of the lessons taught was that 'democracy is a concept of the liberals which does not conform to Islam' and 'therefore, gives us more reason to uphold the laws on Islam'.

These views were reflected well in the other interviews. When asked how the views in prison about the law, state and democracy differ from what their groups believed, the common answer was that the state is '*taghut*' or '*kafir*'. For example, one of the respondents recalled how he and the other members were always taught that the government is *kafir* and *murthad*. Other respondents labelled the state as 'evil', 'the enemy' or 'Godless'. For example, another respondent shared that his group depicts other people, especially those affiliated with the state, as '*kafir*, evil, someone who denounces God and doesn't care for Muslims or our sufferings'.

When speaking of the law or the government, the issues that appear most were poverty, suffering of the weak and corruption. For example, a respondent expressed that neither he nor the others were sure 'where the state is going with the path that the government is on'. In his elaboration, he mentioned bribery within the government, high-ranking officials procuring public subsidies and poverty.

Another example is a respondent who believed that 'if we uphold the laws of Islam, we wouldn't have all these problems', referring to 'the problems of law and politics' and how 'the law only favours the rich and the powerful while the society suffers from poverty'. A different respondent believed that *jihad* offers salvation from the 'chaos that is happening in the world and Indonesia, for example, poverty, social deviations, discrimination and abuse of power by the government'.

Furthermore, one respondent recalled past cases where government officials who commit corruption are sentenced to a few years and sometimes 'fewer than someone who steals because they are starving'. A different respondent stated that corruptors would often receive the same or lesser punishment than 'old people stealing food for sustenance'.

Another respondent hinted at the disparity in the treatment of law. When asked what he thought of the law, he said, 'maybe I represent a lot of people when I say this, but I think the law is blunt to those in the higher class and sharp to those in the bottom class'. A different respondent gave a similar response when asked the same question, to which he opined that the law is unfair because it does not apply to people in power.

3.3. PERCEPTIONS TOWARD DEMOCRACY

The respondents also spoke of religion in connection with democracy. Similar to the other themes, the initial process entails generating codes to directly reflect the respondents' statements on this issue. For example, statements that reflect a preference for Islam over national laws or democracy were coded as 'preference for Islam'. Following this direct coding

process, other initial codes were generated, namely 'democracy as a Western concept', 'Pancasila against Islam' and 'Islam vs democracy'. Together, they form a more general code of 'perceptions of democracy', which is then treated as this third theme.

21 respondents mentioned democracy as an important issue. Some respondents directly expressed that democracy is against Islam. For example, one respondent disagrees with the democratic *Pancasila* since it contradicts Islam. According to him, 'Islam should be the sole basis to regulate every aspect of life, not democracy'. A different respondent shared his group's view, which depicts the state as *taghut* since they adhere to the Western concept of democracy. Furthermore, according to some respondents, since Indonesia's ideology *Pancasila* contains a democratic principle that underlines the importance of deliberation, some respondents mentioned that *Pancasila* is also against Islam, and that makes the people who believe in *Pancasila* as *kafir*.

With regards to why democracy is perceived to contradict Islam, some respondents claimed that democracy 'promotes liberalism' or is 'synonymous with liberalism'. For example, one respondent explained that democracy promotes liberalism, 'as in we can do what we want without control or limitation. Whereas Islam regulates every aspect of life, so there is control'. Another respondent stated that the perception in his group was that 'democracy is *haram* because it promotes liberalism and takes people away from religious values'. Similarly, a different respondent claimed that democracy 'fights for individual freedoms and that's why it is more related to liberalism'. Another respondent gave a similar answer that because of democracy, 'everybody is free to do and say what they want at the expense of religious norms'. Meanwhile, according to a different respondent, 'Islam does not promote liberalism. It promotes welfare and morals'.

Other respondents mentioned that democracy is not suitable for the Indonesian context. For example, one of the respondents shared how his group claimed that democracy is a Western concept and is therefore incompatible with Indonesia's culture. Similarly, another respondent claimed that democracy 'focuses too much on individual freedoms' while Islam and the Indonesian culture are about the 'collective good'. In making his claim, he gave an example of a famous saying in Indonesia called '*gotong royong*' which roughly means helping each other.

Some respondents claimed that democracy is attributable to certain problems. For example, one respondent stated, 'democracy creates laws that are against Islam, allows corruption, poverty, people suffering and discrimination against Ulama'. Similarly, a different respondent claimed that democracy is the cause of corruption, poverty and discrimination against Muslims. Furthermore, another respondent claimed that the result of embracing democracy is the attacks against Islam (referring to blasphemy): 'The reality shows that democracy is complicated, complex and causes lots of problems'.

3.4. JIHAD AS THE SUPERIOR FORM OF OBLIGATION

Statements about justifying killings by *jihad* were coded as 'justified killings'. The initial code of 'attitude toward legal risks' was also produced to categorise recollections about how terrorists respond to the legal risks of their actions. Lastly, the codes 'justified killings' and 'attitude toward legal risks' were combined, forming the general code of 'killing in Islam and the law' and thus extracting the theme '*jihad* as the superior form of obligation over law'.

26 of our respondents mentioned *jihad* as a possible different way of looking at the law. For instance, according to R1, the first stage of radicalisation starts with making people believe in the need to change the social and political status quo by first influencing their perceptions toward the law, state and democracy. We see evidence of this in the discussions above about the convicted terrorists' perceptions of law and democracy. R1 further explained that the second stage is teaching recruits about replacing the social and political system with an Islamic state through means of *jihad*.

R1 and R2 both stated that *jihad* could be implemented through *dakwah* (education) or through force. *Jihad* committed by the *Takfiri* groups usually operates under the pretext that they are facing a war of ideology. In this sense, the groups argue that war does not always have to be an armed confrontation between two sides. Their narrative revolves around the claim that the government is *kafir* and an enemy of Islam with whom they are at war. Any casualties that occur are thus justified.

This claim was reflected in other interviews as well. For example, one respondent claimed he was taught that *kafir* must be killed as they are enemies of God that hampers the creation of an Islamic state. A different respondent was involved in planning a suicide bombing that eventually injured some police officers. According to him, the injuries were justified since, at the time, 'we really believed that the police officers were our enemies'. He shared that during his time in his group, he was taught that killing *kafir* is justified based on *jihad*: 'If you do not commit yourselves to the laws of Islam, then that will make you a *kafir* and condemn you to hell'. A different respondent explained that the justification of killing 'derives from the laws of *jihad*' and that '*jihad* is about fighting against *kafir*'. Another respondent used to believe that 'the laws of *jihad* were higher than man-made law' and that according to such law 'casualties that occur in the context of *jihad* are justified'. Similarly, one respondent described *jihad* as a violent method to uphold the laws of Islam. Hence, the casualties that may arise are considered to be 'collateral damage of *jihad*'.

As part of believing in the obligation of *jihad*, a lot of interviews reveal that one of the significant teachings of extremist groups was positioning religion above state law. For example, R1 shared how his group would convince its followers to believe in their common cause and respect the group's chain of command:

We would ask them, 'are you more scared of the laws of God or man-made law?'
'Which one is better? Obeying ustaz or the government? Ustaz guides you through life and death based on Islam, while the government only concerns with worldly things'
'which one is better, a government and law based on Islam or a government and law based on Western views (democracy and liberalism), which system would allow you to live by your religion?'.

Similarly, R2 shared that 'in cases where it (the state law) contradicts Islam, then, of course, we would uphold the Islamic law and listen to our religious leaders because the 'law by agreement' is, at its core, man-made, while religion is from God'.

The belief that religious authority is above legal authority is reflected in statements during interviews with the other respondents such as 'Islam should be our law', 'the law is man-made, while Islam is from God that is why the law must adhere to Islam' and 'Islam should be the sole basis to regulate every aspect of life – and not democracy'. Additionally, one respondent stated that if the state law and the law of Islam conflict with each other, as a good Muslim, he must choose his religion.

The perception that their religious authority is above the legal authorities also surfaced when the respondents were asked whether they had considered the legal risks before committing terrorist acts. Many of the respondents replied that they did consider the possibility of legal punishment, but eventually chose to uphold their religious beliefs or to fulfil their religious obligations. For example, one respondent claimed to have considered the risk of being arrested or socially condemned for joining an extremist group. But he eventually 'chose to uphold the laws of Islam' instead. Furthermore, a different respondent, who was imprisoned for conspiracy and attempt to murder local policemen, said that he did not care about the legal risks because he thought he was 'following what was ordered by faith': 'I was prepared to do what was necessary to uphold the laws of my faith even if that meant breaking the law'. Similarly, another respondent believed that 'pursuing knowledge about religion was more important' than the risk of being arrested by the police since he 'did not have any regard for the national law because it is considered *taghut* and *syirik*'.

For other respondents, the idea of a reward for fulfilling perceived religious obligations or sanctions for failing them outweighed legal risks. For example, when speaking of his role in planning a suicide bomb, one of the respondents mentioned that his group would often encourage the followers to commit *jihad* by promising them that they would be rewarded by angels in heaven. Another respondent who was prosecuted for conspiracy to defect from Indonesia to join ISIS said that he knew his group was a banned organisation in Indonesia. However, the 'promise of heaven was by far more encouraging than the fear of being arrested'. In addition, his feelings of being superior in terms of religious commitment made him believe he was implementing God's law, which he described as 'the right law'.

Moreover, a different respondent considered the possible legal risks, but he was convinced that if he died while fighting for Islam, he would have a *syahid* death. He also expressed his fear of defying God's law because 'whoever defects from God's law is a *kafir*'. Another respondent, who was convicted of attacking a police station, considered the legal risks before committing such an attack. However, he believed that the 'consequences of breaking God's law are much more severe than breaking the national law because God's punishment is eternal'. He also admitted that his commitment to his group was 'very strong' and that it 'outweighs' other considerations. Another respondent admitted that he felt 'superior' and that feeling made him 'unafraid' of the legal risks. When asked what he meant by feeling superior, he said superior in terms of religious commitment.

3.5. INTERCODER RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

The first author conducted an intercoder reliability analysis with an independent scientific researcher to be sure of our interpretation during the coding process. This second coder inspected ten interview reports, or 25% of the data, which counts as an acceptable portion for intercoder reliability.⁵⁰ Since this study is a part of a larger project exploring the effects of Indonesia's deradicalisation programme on perceived legitimacy, the second coder was asked whether he could identify the respondents' differences in perceptions before and after being exposed to deradicalisation regarding (1) issues of unfairness, (2) the Indonesian rule of law and democracy, (3) acceptance of violence, and (4) whether these differences occur following a learning process during deradicalisation. This resulted in the second coder being asked whether he agreed with a total of 40 coding decisions that had been made by the first author. Results of the interrater reliability analysis indicated that the first author and the second coder agreed in 38 of the 40 coding decisions, equivalent to 95% agreement between the two coders. We considered this to be acceptable for the current purposes.⁵¹

4. DISCUSSION

In this paper, we set out to examine how perceived unfairness, perceptions about legitimacy of the rule of law and democratic values fit within violent radicalisation. We did this by interviewing 40 Indonesian persons convicted for terrorism to explore how they view these issues in connection to their past decisions to engage in terrorism. We believe that our findings demonstrate how these issues are important to explain violent radicalisation among convicted terrorists in Indonesia.

Our interviews reveal several main findings. One of them is that perceived unfairness was a topic frequently mentioned by the respondents. Issues that appear the most in this regard are unfair treatment and discrimination. These experiences were based on their personal experiences as well as their observations of others. These issues mostly appeared when the respondents were speaking of why they became attracted to join their groups and why they committed their crimes.

Furthermore, the respondents shared their views about the workings of law and how they view the state. Collectively, they raised concerns of corruption within the government and discrimination in the treatment of law, thus leading some to label the state as evil, the enemy or even Godless.

The respondents also expressed their reservations about the legitimacy of democracy in Indonesia. Their reservation stem from the perception that democracy contradicts Islam. In this regard, the respondents view that some democratic values are not aligned with Islam and that democracy is a Western concept, and thus do not fit within the Indonesian context.

Given their views about the workings of law and democracy, the respondents treat *jihad* as a form of obligation that is superior to the legal constraint of violence. This is seen in how the respondents justify violence as an act of *jihad* and their preferred care for upholding faith over compliance with the law.

⁵⁰ Clodhna O'Connor and Helene Joffe, 'Intercoder Reliability in Qualitative Research: Debates and Practical Guidelines' (2020) 19 International Journal of Qualitative Methods 1.

⁵¹ J Richard Landis and Gary G Koch, 'The Measurement of Observer Agreement for Categorical Data' (1977) 33 Biometrics 159.

In interpreting how they may fit together, we believe that our findings indicate that the respondents, in general, do not view Indonesia's legal and democratic system as legitimate. Perceived legitimacy is known to be the result of a subjective assessment of the rightfulness and justifiability of authorities and their actions.⁵² Thus, our findings suggest that it is important to examine how people, including those convicted for terrorism, normatively view the societal system and how they view the workings of that system. After all, a negative assessment of the system's legitimacy could undermine the law as an authority,⁵³ leading to a decreasing need to obey this social institution that is meant to hold our societies together.⁵⁴

Our research shows signs of rejection of core democratic values and the rule of law among the convicted terrorists that we interviewed for our study. The rejection of democracy, for example, is evident through respondents' claims of societal deviations from respondents' religious values. Considering that some fundamental values in religion are often universally popularised as a basic principle of law⁵⁵ and a source of legitimacy,⁵⁶ it is conceivable, in the context of perceived legitimacy, that people could withdraw their acceptance of democracy if they are deemed to be contradictory to specific religious values. Indeed, our interview results indicate that some respondents label the state as *taghut* or *kafir*. In Islamic teachings, *taghut* describes those who worship entities other than God, while *kafir* refers to infidels. Both designations stem from the same condition of deviating from Islamic values.

Furthermore, the terrorists' perceptions about the rule of law are linked to allegations of unfair treatment, discrimination, corruption and unequal treatment of the law. This part speaks to how the terrorists view the workings of the legal system to be fundamentally unfair.

The respondents' acceptance of violence also seems to be related to their behaviour towards the rule of law. The acceptance of violence can be influenced, among other things, by a person's perceived morality⁵⁷ or religious beliefs.⁵⁸ Our interview results suggest that the respondents' perceived morality may be grounded in their interpretation of religion. As illustrated in the interviews, the respondents view violence and casualties to be consequential to the enforcement of *jihad* or deriving 'from the laws pertaining to *jihad*'.

Violence can also be morally justified when the target of violence is perceived to be immoral.⁵⁹ By extension, this means that violence is perceived to be legitimate when it serves a morally desired end.⁶⁰ In the interview results, the respondents admitted to having engaged in acts of terrorism as a means to address unfair treatment and protect fellow Muslims who suffer. They claimed not to be concerned about the legal risks because they perceive the law to be 'unreasonable' and that 'justice is non-existent'.

⁵² Bruce Gilley, *The Right to Rule: How States Win and Lose Legitimacy* (Columbia UP 2009); Dimitar Toshkov and others, 'Enforcement and Public Opinion: The Perceived Legitimacy of Rule of Law Sanctions' (2025) 32 *Journal of European Public Policy* 550.

⁵³ Tom R Tyler, 'Psychological Perspectives on Legitimacy and Legitimation' (2006) 57 *Annual Review of Psychology*; Jonathan Jackson and others, 'Why Do People Comply with the Law? Legitimacy and the Influence of Legal Institutions' (2012) 52 *The British Journal of Criminology* 1051.

⁵⁴ Ian Hurd, 'Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics' (1999) 53 *International Organization* 379; Herbert C Kelman, 'Reflections on Social and Psychological Processes of Legitimation and Delegitimation' in *The Psychology of Legitimacy: Emerging Perspectives on Ideology, Justice, and Intergroup Relations* (CUP 2001); Wojciech Sadurski, *Equality and Legitimacy* (OUP 2008).

⁵⁵ Xuan Dong and others, 'The Relationship between Religion and Law from the Perspective of Functionalism and Ideology' (Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2020), Atlantis Press 2020).

⁵⁶ Mulford Q Sibley, 'Religion and Law: Some Thoughts on Their Interactions' (1984) 2 *Journal of Law and Religion* 41; Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler, 'Religion and Legitimacy' in *Bringing Religion into International Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan 2004).

⁵⁷ Norman (n 27).

⁵⁸ Anne Aly and Jason-Leigh Striegher, 'Examining the Role of Religion in Radicalization to Violent Islamist Extremism' (2012) 35 *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 849; Hamdi Muluk, Nathanael G Sumaktoyo and Dhyah Madya Ruth, 'Jihad as Justification: National Survey Evidence of Belief in Violent Jihad as a Mediating Factor for Sacred Violence among Muslims in Indonesia' (2013) 16 *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 101; Jeppe Fuglsang Larsen, 'The Role of Religion in Islamist Radicalisation Processes' (2020) 13 *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 396; Jeppe Fuglsang Larsen and Sune Qvortrup Jensen, 'Everyday Religion and Radical Islamism – A Contribution to Theorizing the Role of Religion in Radicalization Studies' (2023) 46 *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 2521.

⁵⁹ Roger Giner-Sorolla, Bernhard Leidner and Emanuele Castano, *Dehumanization, Demonization, and Morality Shifting: Paths to Moral Certainty in Extremist Violence* (Wiley-Blackwell 2011).

⁶⁰ Norman (n 27).

In accepting violence, our interview results suggest that the respondents held a higher regard for *jihad* compared to national law, perceiving *jihad* as a superior form of obligation or as an alternative system striving for social change over the current system that is perceived to be illegitimate.⁶¹ Such conviction is evident in their expressed preference for the promises of heaven and fear of religious sanctions for failing to commit *jihad* while disregarding legal risks.

A higher regard for *jihad* is also reflected in the respondents' sense of superiority – a common distinction between violence of terrorists and violence of other cases.⁶² Similar to a previous study suggesting that feelings of in-group superiority are linked to one's inclination to exhibit violence,⁶³ our interview results showed that collective feelings of superiority in religious faith made the respondents unafraid of the legal risks of resorting to violence.

4.1. LIMITATIONS

We also acknowledge the limitations of our study. First, our analysis is based on interviews with 40 persons from a population of approximately 400 incarcerated convicted terrorists at the time of the interviews. Although we achieved saturation in our sample of respondents,⁶⁴ we can safely say that our findings do not necessarily represent the thoughts, feelings or experiences of the entire population of convicted terrorists in the country. As such, we acknowledge that future research focusing on different sets of respondents, both within and outside Indonesia, may yield different results.

Second, there is a risk of social desirability bias when interviewing people about their ideology and religious beliefs, particularly convicted terrorists who might be concerned that their responses could influence their evaluation within the deradicalisation programme in prison. However, in light of the measures that the interviewer had conducted, no indications of such biases were detected during the interviews. In fact, the respondents gave various answers, including maintaining their beliefs, and not all of them were willing to answer all the questions.

Third, we investigated the respondents' legal convictions through questions about their experiences during their time with their group, leading up to the commission of terrorism, and their participation in the deradicalisation programme. That being said, we did not ask about their legal convictions before they were recruited by an extremist group. Ideally, insights into their perceptions of law, democracy and *jihad* before they were recruited could further support the analysis of perceived legitimacy because we could then see a bigger picture of the transition in perception from before they were exposed to the ideas of extremist groups.

Fourth, we think that our findings on how perceptions of fairness, democratic values and the rule of law may play a role in violent radicalisation can be interpreted by means of conceptual models that help to convey the relevance of our findings, and that are supported by other studies that ground this research. That said, we do explicitly note that our qualitative data, of course, do not allow us to make any definitive causal claims.

Lastly, given that the interviewer was female, we did not assess the impact of gender in the interview process. That said, the willingness of the respondents to answer questions and speak of their beliefs indicated that they did not reject the interviewer. Even so, we do recognise the potential that analysis of gender impact may bring in future empirical research on terrorists' perceptions, also because in the current research we did not interview female terrorists because these were not present in the available population.

4.2. CONCLUSION

The existing discourse on terrorism shows different models of violent radicalisation that point to psychological or intellectual processes where ideas and violence converge, and conflicts of

61 Michèle Bal and Kees Van den Bos, 'From System Acceptance to Embracing Alternative Systems and System Rejection: Tipping Points in Processes of Radicalization' (2017) 3 *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* 241.

62 J Reid Meloy and Jessica Yakeley, 'The Violent True Believer as a "Lone Wolf" – Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Terrorism' (2014) 32 *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 347.

63 Bertjan Doosje and others, '"My In-Group Is Superior!": Susceptibility for Radical Right-Wing Attitudes and Behaviors in Dutch Youth' (2012) 5 *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* 253.

64 Van den Bos, *Empirical Legal Research: A Primer* (n 38).

beliefs occur.⁶⁵ In this regard, our findings offer important evidence that convicted terrorists' perceptions of what is fair and how they envision the law are core beliefs to understand the radicalisation processes of these persons. Thus, perceived unfairness, democratic values and legitimacy of the rule of law play a role within violent radicalisation in Indonesia.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Devita Kartika Putri  orcid.org/0000-0001-5258-4499

Faculty of Law, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

Kees van den Bos  orcid.org/0000-0003-2777-9344

School of Governance, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Elaine Mak  orcid.org/0009-0003-1970-3777

School of Law, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

⁶⁵ Randy Borum, 'Understanding the Terrorist Mindset' (2003) 72 FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin 7; Moghaddam (n 25); Manni Crone, 'Radicalization Revisited: Violence, Politics and the Skills of the Body' (2016) 92 International Affairs 587; Doosje and others, 'Terrorism, Radicalization and de-Radicalization' (n 25); Van den Bos, *Why People Radicalize: How Unfairness Judgments Are Used to Fuel Radical Beliefs, Extremist Behaviors, and Terrorism* (n 2).

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