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## STRATEGIC EFFORTS OF BINCANGSYARIAH. COM AND ISLAMI.CO EDITORIALS IN SPREADING COUNTER-NARRATIVE EXTREMISM ON THE INTERNET

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### **Abstract**

**Keywords:**

Countering Violent  
Extremism (CVE);  
extremism; internet;  
Islamic media;  
moderation

*The increasing religious enthusiasm of some Indonesians has become a target for extremist actors to spread their ideas and concepts. In fact, extremism can threaten the integrity of the nation and state. This article aims to discover the strategies Islami.co and Bincangsyariah.com used in conducting counter-narratives of extremism through online media. Islami.co and Bincangsyariah.com are moderate Islamic media involved in the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program through the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). This article uses a qualitative approach with content analysis techniques over supported data which are founders of Islami.*

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*co and Bincangsyariah.com as informants. Their published articles consist of counter-narrative extremism themes. The article primarily investigates the methods Islami.co and Bincangsyariah.com use to promote moderate Islamic content in the digital realm. The findings reveal that these sites engage in counter-narrative strategies by scrutinizing the arguments and claims of individuals or groups promoting extremism, thereby highlighting their fallacies. Moreover, they craft and disseminate alternative narratives that represent moderate Islam. As a result, Islami.co and Bincangsyariah.com have successfully exposed the flaws in the reasoning of pro-violence groups. However, further research is necessary to gauge the broader societal impact of these counter-narrative efforts.*

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**Kata kunci:**

ekstremisme;  
internet; media  
keislaman;  
moderasi; Kontra  
Ekstremisme  
Kekerasan

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**Abstrak**

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Meningkatnya semangat beragama sebagian masyarakat Indonesia menjadi sasaran para aktor ekstremis untuk menyebarkan ide dan konsepnya. Faktanya, ekstremisme dapat mengancam keutuhan bangsa dan negara. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui strategi yang digunakan Islami.co dan Bincangsyariah.com dalam melakukan kontra narasi ekstremisme melalui media online. Islami.co dan Bincangsyariah.com merupakan media Islam moderat yang terlibat dalam program *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)* melalui *United Nations Development Program (UNDP)*. Artikel ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik analisis isi terhadap data pendukung yaitu pendiri Islami.co dan Bincangsyariah.com sebagai informan dan artikel yang diterbitkan bertema kontra-narasi ekstremisme. Artikel ini terutama menyelidiki metode yang digunakan Islami.co dan Bincangsyariah.com untuk mempromosikan konten Islami moderat di dunia digital. Temuan-temuan tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa situs-situs tersebut terlibat dalam strategi kontra-narasi dengan meneliti argumen dan klaim individu atau kelompok yang mempromosikan ekstremisme, sehingga menyoroti kesalahan mereka. Selain itu, mereka menyusun dan menyebarkan narasi alternatif yang mewakili Islam moderat. Hasilnya, Islami.co dan Bincangsyariah.com berhasil mengungkap kelemahan penalaran kelompok pro-kekerasan. Namun, penelitian lebih lanjut diperlukan untuk mengukur dampak sosial yang lebih luas dari upaya kontra-narasi ini.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The internet has made the world borderless. Everyone surfs freely and has changed the way people communicate, share ideas, and integrate with many people more quickly than before (Zeiger & Gyte, 2021). Terrorist groups use such opportunities to spread ideology, recruit members both nationally and transnationally, and even collect funds and attack enemies (Do, Gomez-Parra, & Rijkers, 2021; Guadagno, Lankford, Muscanell, Okdie, & McCallum, 2010; Institute For Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), 2015; Munthe, Kharish, & Choironi, 2018; Nuraniyah, 2019). This situation was described by Gery R. Bunt as e-Jihad, whose role is no less important than physical combat (Bunt, 2003). Thus, the internet has provided direct access for individuals to radical and extremist ideologies that are difficult to filter. Freedom and openness characteristics of the internet inevitably allow pro-violence groups to create models of virtual meetings and virtual relationships, to discuss various Salafi jihadist messages, and to provide appearances for material related to violence. Not limited to those kinds of stuff, when someone is committed to jihad, the internet offers broad access to a variety of information about targets right down to weapon designs (Silber & Bhat, 2007; Tahir, Malik, & Novrika, 2020).

Moir (2017) describes the model for recruiting extremist members via the internet, which generally begins with spreading messages on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Apart from being spread through

social media, these narratives are distributed through video games and YouTube (Alava, Frau-Meigs, & Hassan, 2017; Roy, 2008). People who like it will be directed to a secret channel or group that not everyone can access. Everyone who enters will be screened and selected. Apart from that, they also use magazines, and the most popular is Dabiq magazine, which has been translated into various languages, including Indonesian. Dabiq Magazine provides elucidations on ideology, religious justifications for violence, and updates on the accomplishments attained by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The publication is professionally managed and treated seriously (Weiss & Hassan, 2015). To accomplish their objectives, terrorist organizations employ comprehensible and incendiary narratives, thus garnering a substantial audience's attention. This is consistent with the notion that narratives shape the reality of human existence in a world dominated by print and electronic media (Fulton, 2005). Thus, in this context, it can be stated that the internet has become a virtual training camp for terrorist groups (AIVD/Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, 2006).

Research on counter-extremism narratives on the internet has been carried out by many experts, including research by Abdullah & Alfatra (2019), which explains the narratives of the Duta Damai community in countering negative narratives on social media with opinions and statuses on social media that are in line with their values—the value of religious moderation. Schmidt (2021) who examines the documentary film of Rahmat Islam Nusantara and the struggle to counter radicalism through social media. This research frames Islam Nusantara as counter-radicalism and, in doing so, builds a binary framework between radical and moderate Islam. Next, research by Amit, Barua, & Kafy (2021) on CVE strategies in social media for Bangladesh. Along with that, Ganesh & Bright (2020) also conducted research on communication strategies and moderate content on social media in fighting extremism. Existing studies tend to

focus more on the strategy used on social media to counter extremist narratives. There have not been any studies that focus on looking at the efforts made by websites that have a specific agenda to counter extremism narratives, like those been conducted by the online news portal of Islami.co and Bincangsyariah.com.

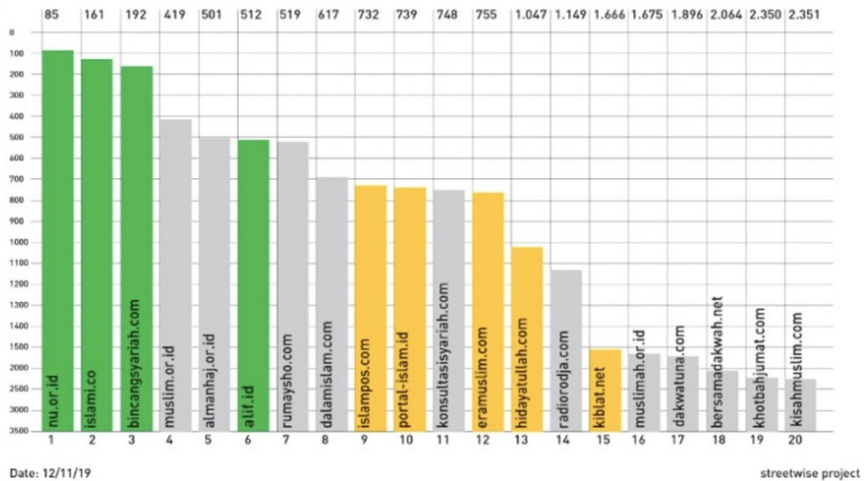


Figure 1. The Top 20 Islamic Websites

Based on the figure above, it can be seen that Islami.co is an online media that regularly publishes the most famous Islamic websites based on assessments from Alexa rank, an SEO consulting site founded by Amazon. Apart from that, this graph can also be used to review and assess the level of extremism on popular Islamic sites. Then, choosing those two media is based on these two considerations. First, the two media outlets are categorized as Indonesia's top 10 Islamic websites. Both were also classified as moderate media by the Streetwise Project Islami.co in 2019 based on data from Alexa.com rankings. Although the Alexa.com ranking website has now been closed, referring to the data from 2019, other ranking websites such as similarweb.com indicate that bincangsyariah.com and Islami.co still fall within the top 100 rankings of websites in Indonesia in the field of community and beliefs. Bincangsyariah.com is

ranked 64th, whether Islami.co is ranked 82<sup>nd</sup>. Second, both websites are still categorized as platforms that regularly publish content compared to others classified as moderate in Streetwise Data Project Islami.co. This is important to do, considering that violent groups in Indonesia still use the internet to recruit, spread ideology, and gain support, even for financial interests, such as the case of Ambon (Bräuchler, 2002). And also *Salafi* groups optimize the use of the internet for their ideological interests (Iqbal, 2013).

This article argues that the involvement of Islami.co and Bincangsyariah.com as Indonesian Islamic moderate media in the CVE program have carried out various strategies to counter extremist narratives on the internet. These two media carry out strict editorial work and not just serve the CVE program as their collaborative activities but as their core focus of these two media. Thus, this article will further explore how the forms of strategy implemented by Islami.co and Bincangsyariah.com counter the narrative of extremism on the internet. Answering that question is important. Apart from being a guide for various parties in carrying out the CVE program, it can also be used or even complemented by other media in carrying out the CVE agenda and fighting narratives of extremism on the internet. As noted by Nasution & Miswari (2017), media is well known for its function as a highly effective tool in shaping public opinion. Despite being presumed transparent and independent, essentially disseminated information is a human construction representing one's understanding before reality. So, it is an inseparable argument to propose that media has become a recruitment tool for pro-violence groups (Saifuddin, 2022; 2023).

## **METHODS**

The qualitative research is an applied approach in this article, which aims to scrutinize applied strategic models by Islami.co and Bincangsyariah.

com on counter-narrative extremism through online media. The data sources of the research are sourced from two datasets: the informants and the online media. The informants mean all founders from both media, Islami.co, and Bincangsyariah.com, namely Savic Ali (founder of Islami.co) and Abdul Karim Munthe (founder of Bincangsyariah.com). Second, online published articles that address counter-narrative extremism issues from both media. Data collected from informants were gathered using in-depth structured interviews following guided instrument questions for collecting data. Data from media sources were collected using documentation techniques. The dataset comprises six published articles, two detailed articles from Bincangsyariah.com, and the remaining four are from Islami.co. Two criteria are utilized in the article selection process: counter-narrative and alternative narratives pertaining to particular issues.

The data analysis section of this article employs qualitative analysis, involving several stages (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Firstly, data reduction entailed the meticulous selection and prioritization of the data obtained from interviewees and the media, per the concerns elucidated in this article. Furthermore, the data will be presented in two formats: interviewee quotations and article citations, which will be appropriately acknowledged in the results and discussion section. Moreover, the content analysis method was employed to interpret the data, wherein descriptive interpretations and meanings of the findings were provided.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Portraying Religious Extremism In Indonesia***

Recently, religious extremism has remained a warmly debated topic. Mostly, it is often reducibly associated with a unidimensional construction of religious violence. Wibisono, Louis, & Jetten (2019) argue that the term “contemporary extremism” has not succeeded in conveying diverse interpretations, beliefs, and attitudes that define the identity of religious

extremists. In Indonesia, the model of “religious extremism” can be analyzed across various dimensions, such as theological, ceremonial, social, and political aspects of religion, based on the diversity of Islamic groups in the country. This analysis transcends approaches that solely associate Muslim extremism with violence. Muslims, or any religious group, have their opportunities becoming extreme in specific dimensions, whereas they may adopt a moderate stance in different circumstances. For instance, one might be extreme in ritual practices but moderate in political views. Subsequently, as underlined by Sedgwick (2010), religion can range from moderate to extreme, whether at the individual or group level. However, it is crucial to recognize that there is not a single continuum but multiple dimensions within religion. The specific constellation of features distinguishing moderate from radical expressions of religion becomes vital when considering how religion is manifested.

Previous studies by Altemeyer & Hunsberger (1992), Simon, Reichert, & Grabow (2013), Webber et al. (2017), Kruglanski, Jasko, Webber, Chernikova, & Molinario (2018), and Williamson, Bishop, & Hood (2014) found that the terms “extremism” and “fundamentalism” are used interchangeably and sometimes provoked such debate. For instance, religious fundamentalism might refer to rigid interpretations of scriptures, while religious extremism is often linked to specific political agendas. Both fundamentalism and extremism have been associated with negative outcomes in various previous studies, such as prejudice (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992), hostility (Koopmans, 2015), or even armed conflict (Cornell, 2005).

Over time, ideologies categorized as extremist have also been defined as motivations for terrorism. This suggests that extremism comprises ideological beliefs that obligate the restoration the political system according to religious norms through violent ways (Arena & Arrigo, 2005). The model of religious extremism stance that transforms into



group-based violence has been proposed by Silber & Bhat (2007), where the process of becoming extreme starts with openness to new ideas and tends to shift worldviews fundamentally. In this process, tragic experiences can lead to a loss of meaning and connection with the initial identity, such as being a religious moderate. Indoctrination processes operated by extremist organizations enhance the adoption of extremist beliefs and norms triggered by tragedy. This approach associate extremism with violence perpetrated as a group member. Another analysis of individual-level extremism operationalizes it as support for specific beliefs, such as the duty to engage in holy war with violence against enemies (Webber et al., 2017) or sympathy for extremist groups and support for their political actions (Simon et al., 2013).

Contemporary religious extremism in the political dimension of Islam is often linked to support for the Caliphate or a lasting Muslim kingdom in various forms from the 700s to 1924 AD, when the last Ottoman Caliphate was dissolved in Turkey. During this period, Islam was associated with a hierarchical, sometimes expansionist, imperial entity state with distinctly adopted religious, legal, and cultural practices known as Sharia Law. More extreme groups advocate radical agendas in extreme political change, such as the resurgence of Islamic empires and borderless states encompassing all Muslim countries. They believe political norms must be fundamentally revised to transform many Muslim countries' currently adapted local political systems.

However, other moderate groups strive to integrate religious values into the current political system, such as democracy and national states (Ward, 2009). Moderate Islam is identified with friendly Islam, neither right extreme nor left extreme (Jati, 2022). In countries like Indonesia, organizations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) fund projects aimed at peacebuilding. The goal is to support moderate interpretations of Islam. The idea is to work through third-

party moderate Muslim countries, foundations, and reformist groups to promote democratic values, women's rights, and tolerance through various grant programs (Freedman, 2009).

### **Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): Recent Developments And Its Critical Evaluation**

Before the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program was globally disseminated, the term "violent extremism" was rarely used in the West. In the literature of the British government, the term extremism generally referred to extra-parliamentary political movements, animal rights activists, environmental activists, peace movements, anti-fascism, Irish nationalism, communism, and Islamic political movements. Until the end of 2004, Islamic extremism in the UK, in official literature, was still understood as organizations that aimed to recruit Muslims to participate actively in street politics. Those who joined these extremist movements might not engage in violence or advocate violence themselves, but they provided space for some individuals to carry out violence. Since 2005, the situation began to change, and the term extremism, which was previously very common, became a key policy focus in the United States, explicitly targeting radical Islam. There is no clear and agreed-upon definition of the term "violent extremism." In fact, according to Kundnani & Hayes (2018), if terrorism remains an ambiguous and objectively undefined concept to this day, the concept of violent extremism is even more unclear and vague.

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is an innovative strategy that has emerged in recent times as a means to combat terrorism. In response to the perceived inadequacy of the military-centric approach adopted by the United States to combat terrorism, CVE was developed. CVE had been implemented in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom prior to its adoption in the United States; it was subsequently introduced in the American context. In numerous nations, including Indonesia, the CVE

program has been implemented and expanded with the assistance of the United Nations. In addition to targeting individuals actively engaged in terrorist networks, the CVE strategy also targets the ideologies that motivate violent acts (Lubis, 2022; Holmer, Bauman, & Aryaeinejad, 2018).

From the perspective of CVE, the battle against terrorism becomes the responsibility of all citizens and cannot be solely entrusted to the security apparatus. It necessitates unity and collaboration among all sectors to mitigate the risks of extremism. CVE is distinguished by its nonviolence, tact, and deliberate rejection of militaristic strategies. The goal of the CVE program is to prevent the emergence of violent actions before they materialize within a region, community, or individual (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018). In essence, CVE employs non-coercive means to deter individuals or groups from adopting extremist views that could lead to acts of terrorism (ICRC, 2017). Nevertheless, according to Kundnani and Hayes, the CVE program remains subject to criticism, partly because policymakers within CVE often claim to take a holistic approach to extremism and address its root causes while failing to define what extremism and its causes indeed entail (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018).

According to Ali (2021), CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) still has weaknesses when applied in Indonesia, and these weaknesses can be categorized into five aspects: firstly, CVE was initially built on a security approach. This movement was designed with a security and tranquility-oriented approach, emphasizing militaristic and armed forces approaches. This approach is likely to face criticism and rejection, especially in a predominantly Muslim country. Furthermore, CVE has a direct nature, weakening its target, and such a movement may not be effective in a majority Muslim country where the population is often familiar with Quranic verses and the Hadiths of the Prophet.

“Because fundamentally, nature of CVE directly is weakening its target, and that will not work in a predominantly Muslim country where people have heard and are familiar with Quranic verses and Hadiths. Principally, it will not work. The approach needs to be different, it has to be educational one of them.” (Personal Interview with Savic Ali, October 5, 2021)

*(“Sebab pada dasarnya CVE itu sifatnya direct, melemahkan target, dan itu tidak memadai, di negara mayoritas muslim, yang orang-orangnya sudah dengar dan kenal ayat dan hadis-hadis. Nah ini kan tidak akan bisa. Harus pendekatannya berbeda, harus edukasi.”)*

The security approach was previously practiced during President Soeharto’s New Order. The outcome was a vehement rejection of this method by civil organizations, society, and students. The security approach threatened the freedom of the people, as they were not allowed to engage in demonstrations, and expressing their opinions was viewed with suspicion. Thus, the security approach only leads to mistrust and segregation. Therefore, CVE will lack cultural and educational approaches.

Secondly, the CVE movement, in its various programs, overly focuses on violent groups, while efforts to promote tolerance among different religious communities tend to be overlooked. Yet, the two are interrelated; the more tolerant a society is, the more the influence of violent extremist groups diminishes. When violence is no longer present, the risk of individuals within the country getting involved in violence decreases as well. Conversely, increasing intolerance in society can lead to the emergence of pro-violence groups in the name of religion, potentially exacerbating conflicts. This thesis can be substantiated by examining Al-Qaeda’s influence on the people of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, many recent conflicts in the Islamic world have been caused by misconceptions and narrow religious narratives. Therefore, to ensure Indonesia remains peaceful, promoting tolerance is imperative.

Thirdly, it is worth noting that CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) has a tendency to classify diverse Islamic movements as radicalism. Nevertheless, not every Islamic movement espouses or engages in acts of violence as radical extremists. Numerous religious movements are categorized as conservative but not revolutionary, in the sense that they do not advocate for violence. As an illustration, the conservative Wahhabi ideology is predominantly followed by the populace of Saudi Arabia. However, within Saudi society, these Salafi beliefs do not inherently translate into widespread acts of violence.

Fourthly, different forms of violence may be unintentionally sown by CVE. A more gentle approach is required when confronting conservative religious movements. Furthermore, pertaining to the fifth point, the majority of campaign funds allocated for CVE collaborations are directed towards civil institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), which are inclusive of additional nonviolent movements. The majority of these funding allocations are utilized by civil institutions to combat pro-violence movements. This is a prevalent phenomenon due to the fact that the proposed collaborations must conform to the technical directives of donor organizations, which possess an initial security-focused perspective. As a result of this disproportionate emphasis on NGOs and CSOs, CVE funding allocation frequently disregards educational institutions. Conversely, academic establishments serve as crucial counterbalances to conservative religious ideologies, movements, and narratives.

### ***Involvement Of Islami.co And Bincangsyariah.com In The Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Program***

Notwithstanding the recognized deficiencies of CVE, it continues to be a widely implemented alternative program utilized to counteract extremism; Islami.co and Bincangsyariah.com are both active participants

in it. Islami.co, established by Savic Ali, a religious scholar (*santri*), reform activist, and former director of NU Online, caters predominantly to middle-class Muslims residing in urban areas who have exhibited an increased inclination towards acquiring knowledge about Islam in recent times. The mission of Islami.co is to distribute ideas and information that promote the development of a peaceful and tolerant society. This is due to the abundance of hateful content and provocative media in the online environment, which has the potential to entice Muslims into a conflict.

Islami.co focuses on introducing basic Islamic literacy to the general public, covering topics such as monotheism (*tauhid*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fikih*), and Sufism (*tasawuf*). The content is created to be accessible and as popular as possible to ensure a broad audience easily understands it. Content is not limited to articles but also includes infographics and videos. Islami.co has assembled a team comprising young graduates of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and alumni of Islamic universities.

Islami.co is one of the media outlets that collaborates with UNDP through the CVE program. A moderate understanding of religious interpretation is a necessity to counter campaigns by violent extremist movements carried out in the name of religion. This is the second reason why Islami.co participates in the CVE program, aiming to correct misleading narratives related to religious interpretations despite being involved in the CVE program.

According to Ali (2021), although CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) originates from abroad, it correlates with domestic challenges. How so? Violence arising from extremist ideologies constitutes an extremely grave act. Moreover, when it is carried out in the name of Islam, it becomes even more dangerous.

“I believe that when it’s associated with Islam, it becomes dangerous because it tarnishes the image of Islam. Islam becomes synonymous with violence. Islami.co, NU Online,

El-Bukhari Institute, and numerous other institutions collaborate with those who are concerned with what is known as Countering Violent Extremism.” (Personal Interview with Savic Ali, October 5, 2021)

*(“Saya kira kalau sudah bawa-bawa Islam, akan berbahaya, sebab citra Islam jadi buruk. Islam akan dianggap identik dengan kekerasan/violent. Islami.co, NU Online, El-Bukhari Institute dan banyak lembaga menjalin kerjasama dengan yang punya konsen dengan apa yang disebutkan dengan Counter Violent Ekstrimisme.”)*

As a media platform aiming to disseminate information and ideas of moderate Islam, it is an inherent obligation for Islami.co to support various efforts in realizing a tolerant Indonesian society, particularly in the digital realm. This is because, based on The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre (RISSC) report titled “The Muslim 500” 2023 edition, the Muslim population in Indonesia has reached 237.55 million individuals. This figure is the highest among ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries globally. The Muslim population in Indonesia constitutes approximately 86.7% of the total population (Annur, 2023).

Savic Ali further asserts that in the absence of a society that upholds the values of tolerance and peace, Indonesia risks degenerating into civil strife and becoming a haven for extremist organizations that promote violence and cite the Quran and Hadith to justify their conduct. Islami.co, an Islamic media platform that advocates for a moderate interpretation of Islam, safeguards the calm in Indonesia. As a result, it constructs an Islamic narrative that adheres to moderate religious interpretations (Savic Ali, Personal Interview, October 5, 2021).

The website Bincangsyariah.com is a el-Bukhari Institute affiliate. According to the director of the el-Bukhari Institute, Abdul Karim Munthe, one of the primary objectives of creating Bincangsyariah.com is to provide an online platform that promotes a more comprehensive understanding of Islam. In the present context, inclusivity transcends

social concerns and encompasses matters pertaining to devotion as well. Karim defines inclusivity in worship as recognizing the plurality of scholarly viewpoints, a principle that also extends to matters of worship. The majority of the Bincangsyariah.com team, in addition to Islami.co, are graduates of Islamic universities and boarding institutions or pesantren (Abdul Karim Munthe, Personal Interview, November 9, 2021).

Bincangsyariah.com has been involved in the CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) program and has collaborated with the Center for the Study of Islam and Society at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University of Jakarta (PPIM/ Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta) since 2017-2018. At that time, Bincangsyariah.com proposed a digital jihad program against radicalism. Among its programs was the creation of articles, infographics, and videos, all of which were to be uploaded on the bincangsyariah.com website and its social media channels. The objective of the initiative was to generate one hundred articles, fifty videos, and fifty infographics. The program's concluding report indicates that 202 articles surpassed the intended number of articles. As a result of the duration of some articles, which necessitated their uploading as two to three consecutive articles, the target number was exceeded. However, after the joint program with PPIM concluded, it did not mean that the counter-extremism efforts at Bincangsyariah.com ended. Fundamentally, the creation of content countering extremist interpretations is part of Bincangsyariah.com commitment to present an inclusive and welcoming understanding of Islam.

### **Countering Extremism Narratives Among Islami.co And Bincangsyariah.com**

The employed strategies by islami.co and bincangsyariah.com with a CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) approach involve two main phases.



Initially, they have incorporated content planning into their established routines. The schema for narrating moderate Islam is categorized into three distinct domains within the framework of content planning. 1) Counter-narratives; 2) Entirely new narrative content; and 3) Content serving as an alternative narrative for particular issues. Further, it is sustained throughout the editorial meetings that follow. The intellectual property that is to be published is determined by the editorial board, writers, and video production team, as well as through a series of meetings. Attendees of editorial meetings welcome content-production-related suggestions of a diverse nature. Collaborative efforts with pertinent institutions, content exchanges with other media organizations, or prevalent and extensively deliberated subjects within Indonesian society are all potential origins for these proposals. Alhafiz Kurniawan carried out the first counter-narrative against the doctrinal views of Aman Abdurrahman, the founder of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and a terrorism suspect in Indonesia. This counter-narrative was titled “The Misconceptions of Aman Abdurrahman’s Tauhid Views in the Book Tauhid for the Greatest Happiness [*Kekeliruan Pandangan Tauhid Aman Abdurrahman dalam Buku Materi Tauhid for the Greatest Happiness*]” (Kurniawan, 2020). In this piece, Kurniawan criticized the views on tauhid (monotheism) put forth by the leader of JAD through a book titled “Tauhid/Islamic Creeds Lessons for the Greatest Happiness [*Buku Materi Tauhid for the Greatest Happiness*]”. The target of this counter-narrative was regarding the criteria for a true believer in tauhid, as stated by Aman Abdurrahman, which cited Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab (the founder of Wahhabi doctrine in Saudi Arabia). This source claimed that a person’s Islam and tauhid would not be considered valid unless they opposed believers who committed acts of *shirk* (associating partners with God), even if it involved one’s own father or son. Naturally, such a perspective is considered provocative and highly dangerous.

According to Abdurrahman, those who worship at graves are considered *mushrikun* (polytheists). These individuals self-identify as Muslims, engage in religious observances including fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and pilgrimage, and continue to beseech the spirits of the dead, specifically saintly or virtuous figures, for assistance. Hence, individuals who engage in *shirk* (polytheism) are ineligible to be considered sincere adherents. Moreover, Abdurrahman referenced Sheikh Ali Khudair. Abdurrahman delivered a radical injunction at the end of the chapter: “Attain faith by opposing those who practice *shirk*.”

Kurniawan clarifies the specifics concerning the fallacies held by Aman Abdurrahman. Kurniawan posits that Abdurrahman was profoundly erroneous, fatal, and deceitful right from the inception, including in his own cognitive processes. Abdurrahman frequently ascribed his own ideological interpretation to Quranic verses and referenced individuals who were never acknowledged as authorities or scholars in their respective domains. Abdurrahman often presented verses from the Quran in a fragmented fashion. For instance, he omitted verse 49:10, which stated that believers are brothers, in order to facilitate internal group cohesion and establish a phantom adversary. Abdurrahman made the supposition that all adherents comprised a unified collective. Nevertheless, the entirety of the verse underscores the social heterogeneity inherent in the Muslim community, which is divided into numerous political and social factions. Kurniawan also evaluates Abdurrahman’s interpretations as lacking reference to the explanation of the Salaf scholars. Abdurrahman chose to be the kind of person mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet as someone who interprets the Quran according to his desires, with the consequence of hellfire. Contrary to Abdurrahman’s claims, classical scholars’ explanation did not convey its meaning from Abdurrahman’s perspective. For instance, in the *Tafsir Ma’alimu al-Tanzil fi al-Tafsir wa al-Ta’wil* by Imam Al-Baghawi regarding Q.S Al-Hujurat/49; 10, and the

preceding verses, it contradicts Abdurrahman's *takfir* campaign against the diversity of political aspirations. According to Al-Baghawi, Q.S Al-Hujurat/49;9-10 is evidence that the act of *baghyi* (rebellion against a legitimate authority) does not take a person out of faith. Allah refers to two conflicting groups within Islam as believers. Furthermore, Abdurrahman's actions are deplorable as he interprets the Al-Qur'an without adhering to the methodology of the scholars and without apparent scholarly authority. According to Kurniawan, Abdurrahman should remember that after the death of Prophet Muhammad SAW, the scholars became the inheritors of religious knowledge from the prophets, just as the Prophet delegated the authority and expertise.

Then, the article written by Ibnu Kharish or, popularly known as Ustadz Ahong (2020) with the title "Misuse of ISIS of the Hadith of Imam Mahdi and the Blessing of Syria [*Penyalahgunaan ISIS terhadap Hadis Imam Mahdi dan Keberkahan Syam.*]" Ahong presents the fact that in historical records, the use of end-time hadiths is often misused by pro-violence groups, including those regarding the appearance of Imam Mahdi and the blessing of Syria. This doctrine is used by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). According to Dr. Muhammad Ahmad Ismail al-Muqaddam in *al-Mahdi wa Fiqh Asyrāt al-Sā'ah*, Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Qahthani in 1400 *Hijriah* or around 1979/1980 AD rebelled against the Saudi Arabian government and attempted to sabotage the holy land of Mecca, equipped with complete weaponry. When dawn arrived, the imam led the prayer at the Masjid al-Haram and headed towards the mosque. One of the followers of Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Qahthānī shouted, "Allāhu Akbar, Imam Mahdi has come." They based this on the Prophet's hadiths and claims of dreams among them. Al-Qahthani was the brother-in-law of Juhaimān al-'Utaibī, the figure who mobilized the sabotage of the Masjid al-Haram (Ahong, 2020).

Unfortunately, similar incidents have occurred in Iraq and Syria over the past five years. The group led by Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi, ISIS, claimed to be followers of Imam Mahdi and often carried a black flag or banner. Moreover, this group also utilized hadiths about the blessings of Syria to mobilize Muslims from all over the world to join them. Many were influenced by various countries, including Indonesia. According to the National Counter Terrorism Agency of Indonesia (BNPT), more than 1,250 Indonesian citizens have traveled to Iraq and Syria due to radicalization influences (Halim & Rastika, 2021). After unraveling the misguided narratives related to Imam Mahdi and the Black Banner from Syria ISIS, Ahong then created a counter-narrative to challenge these narratives. Ahong wrote:

“If they were indeed the followers of Imam Mahdi, they should have achieved victory and overcome those they consider enemies of Islam. But what is the current reality? ISIS has disbanded, and there is no news of them anymore. In fact, recent reports from deportees who joined ISIS indicate that they experienced violence, abuse, and torture. However, in authentic hadiths, Imam Mahdi and his followers are portrayed as those who promote equality and justice.” (Ahong, 2020).

*(“Jika mereka benar para pengikut Imam Mahdi, seharusnya mereka mendapatkan kemenangan dan mengalahkan orang-orang yang mereka anggap musuh Islam. Saat ini faktanya apa? ISIS bubar, dan tidak ada kabarnya lagi. Bahkan belakangan kabar dari para deportan yang ikut bergabung dengan ISIS, mereka mengalami kekerasan, pencabulan, dan penyiksaan. Padahal dalam hadis-hadis yang shahih, Imam Mahdi dan para pengikutnya itu mereka yang menebarkan kesetaraan dan keadilan.”)*

Furthermore, Ahong conducted research on the emergence of the black banner forces from Syria. Quoting the opinion of Sheikh Shalahuddin bin Ahmad al-Idlibi in the book *Abādith Fadhāil al-Syām*;

*Dirasah Naqdiyyah*, he concluded that the hadiths regarding the appearance of the black banner are weak and cannot be used as a basis. Ahong also cited the opinion of Sheikh Abdul ‘Alim Abdul Azhim in *al-Mausū‘ah fi Abādits al-Mahdi al-Dhā‘ifah wa al-Maudhū‘ah*, which explains that the hadiths about the black banner are weak. Additionally, the hadiths regarding the black banner that ISIS uses as a basis only provide information and do not constitute a religious obligation to support or form black banner forces. Hadith scholars have already confirmed that these hadiths are unsuitable as references. Therefore, according to Ahong, the various weak hadiths used by ISIS regarding the black banner and the blessings of Syria to mobilize the masses in Syria represent an abuse of Islamic religious texts, especially the sayings of the Prophet. Consequently, Muslims need to be more cautious and diligent when there are groups that claim to represent Islam but exhibit violent actions, both in words and deeds.

On the other hand, counter-narratives on Islami.co also write and present content from the perspective of former terrorists who have repented. The content may include articles that emphasize that radical or extremist groups have no Islamic values; they only represent deviance and criminality. They may also feature former terrorism convicts expressing regret for their actions, such as Anwar Kurniawan (2021) article titled “The Story of Ex-Terror Convicts Who Became Literate Warrior [*Kisah Eks Terpidana Teroris yang Menjadi Jihadis Literasi*]”, this article tells the life story of Rahman, a former terrorism convict in Indonesia who joined anti-vice organizations like Al-Manar and JAD. The driving motive behind Al-Manar was any form of jihad that they believed constituted enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong (*nabi munkar*). When the public reported the sale of prohibited goods, Al-Manar took action. Initially, a surveillance team was tasked with investigating the facts on the ground. Once the information was verified, they conducted raids. This activity resonated not only in Cirebon but also reached Kuningan and Majalengka.

Since joining Al-Manar, Rahman claimed to have become closer to the JAT group. The JAT group's practice of Sunnah acts made him increasingly sympathetic until he decided to join them. Rahman became familiar with the group and even studied the book "*Tadzkiroh*" by Ustadz Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, co-authored with Aman Abdurrahman. According to Rahman's account, the core teachings involved denying thogut (false gods or tyrants) and having faith in Allah.

"I joined ISIS in Cirebon. Here, there was also an ISIS study group once a month. The sessions were led by Ustadz Junaidi. The instigator behind the establishment of ISIS in Cirebon was Ustadz Lukman, also known as Abu Abdillah, from Tegal, who was a student of Aman Abdurrahman." (Kurniawan, 2021)

*"Saya gabung dengan ISIS di Cirebon. Di sini ada kajian ISIS juga satu bulan sekali. Yang mengisi adalah Ustadz Junaidi. Penggagas berdirinya ISIS di Cirebon adalah Ustadz Lukman alias Abu Abdillah asal Tegal, murid Aman Abdurrahman."*

During his time with JAD, Rahman acknowledged that his critical thinking had been completely paralyzed. He even went through a phase of feeling "absolutely right" and had a strong desire to go to Syria, especially when he heard the news that Rizal and Yadi had landed in Syria. Rahman's motivation to quickly pack his bags and go to a region under ISIS control was driven by the aspiration to establish Islamic Law. Therefore, from 2014 to 2017, along with JAD Cirebon, Rahman underwent *i'dad* or military preparations, which involved activities like swimming, mountaineering, jungle trips, mock battles, and firearms training. While waiting to gather enough funds to travel to an ISIS-controlled territory, Rahman engaged in fundraising and conducted religious studies.

As a result, in 2017, he received an offer from the *amir* (leader) of JAD Cirebon, Agung Brownies, to go to Marawi, the Philippines. The leader of JAD, Cirebon stated that Syria and Marawi were the same. Kurniawan's

article provided detailed insights into Rahman's activities before heading to Marawi. The *amir* of JAD Cirebon assigned Rahman a crucial mission: to assist in facilitating the passage of individuals from Indonesia to the Philippines via Kalimantan-Malaysia. During his assignment, Rahman successfully facilitated the crossing of four combatants. Unfortunately, his fate took a tragic turn. He was arrested in Cirebon, tried in the East Jakarta District Court, and sentenced to 3 years and six months on September 19, 2018. Rahman chose not to appeal the verdict and was subsequently detained on Nusakambangan Island.

Within Kurniawan's counter-narrative, there is a flashback story of Rahman's awakening when he encountered a book that shed light on the companions of the Prophet. He read the book attentively every day. From Salman Al-Farisi's story, Rahman was awakened from his nightmares. After establishing a literacy house for children, he also engaged in proselytizing among the JAD brethren who aimed to establish a caliphate and referred to the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) as a "*taghut*" state. Rahman converted to combatants and followers of JAD:

"We label the Indonesian National Military and Police, whom we consider as *taghut*, as '*ansar al-taghut*'. We may not know whether the president prays or not, but we know that he is a Muslim, he even went on Hajj. Why do we call the Indonesian National Military and Police *ansar al-taghut*? A Muslim leader is not a *taghut* as long as he does not prohibit religious activities. I judge the president outwardly as a Muslim and not a *taghut*." (Kurniawan, 2021).

On the other hand, Savic Ali mentioned that as part of their counter-narrative, Islami.co also presents content that shows victims of bombings and former terrorism inmates shaking hands and apologizing to each other for their heinous actions. This is a strategy aimed at demonstrating that within the violence and brutality of terrorism, there can be an Islam filled with compassion and love. This approach is intended to enlighten

those who have already joined such groups. By doing so, the corruption and deviance of terrorists and other violent radical movements can be avoided,

“We cannot rely on a single approach for all cases. Our content must encompass a variety of perspectives. We cannot be one-dimensional. We have to write various articles. That is the approach we take. Based on the experience of Islami.co, initially, we were very confrontational with these groups. But we shifted our approach. We do not want to completely eliminate them. For example, the Hijrah group, do not obliterate them. People transitioning from secularism to religion, so don't completely confront them. We want to create an impression of religious non-violence,” (Personal Interview with Savic Ali, 2021)

*“Memang kita tak bisa satu pendekatan. Sau konten tak bisa mengambil ragam konten. Tak bisa tunggal. Kita harus menulis beragam tulisan. Jadi begitu pendekatannya. Itukan yang kita lakukan. Pengalaman Islami.co dulu ya, sangat frontal ke kelompok itu. Nah kita geser, jangan dihajar habis. Misalnya ; kelompok Hijrah itu jangan dibabat habis. Wong dari sekuler ke agama, jadi jangan dihajar habis. Kita ingin impresi religious Violent.”*

Subsequently, the counter-narrative explores the meaning of “taghut” as commonly invoked by jihadist groups in the article titled “The True Meaning of Thaghut [*Makna Thaghut yang Benar*]”, written by Aziz (2018a). Aziz begins by discussing the premises and ideas propagated by terrorist groups concerning the interpretation of “*thagbut*.” This interpretation concludes that anything not aligned with their version of “*tawhid*” (monotheism) is considered outside the teachings of Islam. Furthermore, they appear to prioritize attacks on state employees because they perceive them as collaborators and defenders of the “*thagbut*” leaders. Aziz then continues to discuss how the mindset of those who do not adhere to an “Islamic government” is labeled as defenders of “*thagbut*”



(*anshar al-thāghūt*). This binary perspective divides the world into two groups: their own, who consider themselves defenders of “*Tawhid*” (*anshar al-tawhid*), those willing to follow terrorist ideologies, and those who reject it are branded as defenders of “*taghut*.” Among the various interpretations of “*taghut*,” terrorist networks focus solely on one meaning: non-Islamic governance. In his conclusion, Aziz evaluates that the interpretation of “*taghut*” as non-Islamic governance is no longer a doctrine rooted in religious teachings but has evolved into a political movement cloaked in religious justification, even to the extent of declaring others as apostates and justifying the loss of life. Nevertheless, Aziz does not definitively clarify the true meaning of “*taghut*” as suggested by the title of his article.

In another article also penned by Aziz (2018b) titled “Who Deserves to Be Called Thaghut [*Siapakah yang Pantas Disebut Thaghut*]”, Aziz strengthens the argument that the term “*taghut*” cannot be narrowly confined to whether a government is Islamic or not, including those who govern. Starting with a linguistic analysis approach and elaboration on the opinions of both early and contemporary scholars, ranging from Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jauziyyah, Rashid Rida, Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, to Muhammad Asad. Aziz elaborates that among the meanings of “*taghut*” often emphasized by terrorist groups is not adhering to any law other than Allah’s. Aziz finds that this view is adopted, among others, by Muhammad bin ‘Abdul Wahab, a scholar widely recognized as the religious inspiration behind the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The problem lies in the conflict between the viewpoint that laws other than Allah’s contradict principles like Pancasila (the Indonesian state ideology) or the 1945 Constitution, which deem the latter two as entirely unrelated to “Islamic teachings.” Aziz even asserts that if the perspective used is to examine the universal principles (*al-kulliyyaat al-asisiyah*) within the meaning of Pancasila, then Pancasila can be said to encompass the spirit of Islamic teachings, from belief in the One Almighty God to upholding

humanity, fostering unity, justice, and representative governance. Moreover, in the 1945 Constitution, there is an affirmation to eradicate colonialism worldwide because it does not align with the principles of humanity.

### ***Peaceful Narratives Strategy In Islami.co And Bincangsyariah.com***

The theme of peace and coexistence is evident in an article by the editorial team of Islami.co (2020) titled “The Story of the Prophet’s Friendship with Followers of Other Religions [*Kisah Persahabatan Rasulullah dengan Pemeluk Agama Lain*].” In this context, the editorial team aims to educate and promote understanding that Islam is not a religion of war, nor does it encourage hostility towards followers of other religions. From the outset, the interaction between Islam and non-Muslims is characterized by peaceful relations. Conflicts that have occurred are not due to religious differences but rather violations of peace agreements and acts of treachery by states. The friendship of the Prophet with followers of other religions illustrates that he was not antagonistic toward non-Muslims. The Prophet highly respected individuals of other faiths, including his own uncle, Abu Thalib, who remained a non-Muslim throughout his life. Despite this, the Prophet continued to love and care for him. The Prophet maintained a positive relationship with his uncle, and Abu Thalib accompanied the Prophet in his efforts to spread Islam.

Furthermore, an article written by Hengki Ferdiansyah (2021) titled “The Story of the Prophet Praying for a Jewish Man to be Handsome [*Kisah Rasulullah Mendoakan Orang Yahudi Supaya Tampan*]” demonstrates that the Prophet Muhammad co-existed with followers of other religions. The Prophet did not only befriend Muslims but also non-Muslims. This positive relationship is exemplified in a hadith that mentions the Prophet Muhammad once asked a Jewish man for a drink, and the man provided him with water. In gratitude for this act of kindness, the Prophet prayed for the Jewish man’s well-being, saying, “*May Allah enhance your beauty.*”

As a result of the Prophet's prayer, the Jewish man did not experience any graying of his hair until his death. In this case, Ferdiansyah (2021) highlights the fact that the Prophet's actions serve as a positive example that Muslims should emulate. Differences in religion should not be used as barriers, let alone reasons to harbor hatred towards those of different faiths. Religious diversity is a gift from God and does not need to be forcibly homogenized.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **Conclusion**

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the dissemination of extremist ideology on the internet is still occurring on a massive scale in the name of religion. Therefore, a numbers of efforts are needed to prevent the spread of ideology through Counter Violence Extremism (CVE). Bincangsyariah.com and Islami.co are two media that both agree to contribute in creating Islamic content with a counter-extremism and nonviolent stance CVE in the digital space, either in the form of articles in their website or social media content such as infographics or videos. Both Bincangsyariah.com and Islami.co make adjustments in countering narratives. As Islamic websites, both form counter-narrative contents that first authenticate and validate religious opinions from pro-radicalism groups by explaining their weakness in the argumentation or invalidity of religious views from pro-violence groups. The second form presents alternative narratives with several descriptions that can show the weakness of the arguments or the validity of the religious opinions of pro-violence groups.

### **Suggestion**

As a suggestion, it is anticipated that the findings of this study will provide scholarly resources concerning the analysis of electronic media

in the context of counter-extremism, particularly concerning religious extremism. This research is also expected to give novelty to complement other cyber media research results. However, the media has a position to play a role in channeling information to the public, including how messages and content presented as information can influence the public's perspective in viewing religion.

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