# IMPLICATIONS OF LABELLING RADICALISM ON INDONESIA POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY

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Abstract: The words radical and radicalism have commonly been used in social media nowadays and generally associated with Islam leading to a negative perspective of Islam. As a result, Islam is labelled as a radical religion which allows intolerance, and violence. In Indonesia, such a negative labelling has occurred not only to Islam as a (peaceful) religion but also to a certain person or group who are considered by the government buzzers or supporters as the opposition of the regime. Those who criticize the government are often categorized as radicals, anti-Pancasila and pro-Islamic state. In fact, the majority of Indonesian people including Muslims have agreed that Pancasila is the national legal basis for all. Such a labelling has led to polarization among Indonesian people and could lead to the division of Indonesia. Criticism seems to have no place in this country. This paper explains about the terms of radical and radicalism both in general and in the context of Indonesia. Furthermore, the writer will discuss about the use of radical and radicalism labels to a certain person or group and its implications for Indonesia politics and democracy. Finally, the writer also offers several solutions to avoid polarization and prevent this nation from disunity.

**Keywords:** Labelling Radicalism, Radicals, Radicalism, Politics, Democracy

Abstrak: Kata radikal dan radikalisme telah umum digunakan di media sosial saat ini dan umumnya dikaitkan dengan Islam yang mengarah pada perspektif negatif tentang Islam. Akibatnya, Islam dicap sebagai agama radikal yang membolehkan intoleransi, dan kekerasan. Di Indonesia, pelabelan negatif semacam itu tidak hanya terjadi pada Islam sebagai agama (damai) tetapi juga pada orang atau kelompok tertentu yang dianggap oleh pemerintah atau pendukungnya sebagai oposisi rezim. Mereka yang mengkritik pemerintah seringkali dikategorikan sebagai radikal, anti Pancasila dan pro negara Islam. Padahal, mayoritas masyarakat Indonesia termasuk umat Islam telah sepakat bahwa Pancasila adalah dasar hukum nasional untuk semua. Pelabelan seperti itu telah menyebabkan polarisasi di kalangan masyarakat Indonesia dan dapat mengarah pada perpecahan Indonesia. Kritik sepertinya tidak punya tempat di negeri ini. Tulisan ini menjelaskan tentang istilah radikal dan radikalisme baik secara umum maupun dalam konteks Indonesia. Selanjutnya, penulis akan membahas tentang penggunaan label radikal dan radikalisme pada seseorang atau kelompok tertentu dan implikasinya terhadap politik dan demokrasi Indonesia. Terakhir, penulis juga menawarkan beberapa solusi untuk menghindari polarisasi dan mencegah bangsa ini dari perpecahan.

Kata Kunci: Pelabelan Radikalisme, Radikal, Radikalisme, Politik, Demokrasi

### Introduction

## The Term of Radicalism in General

Radicalism is one of the problems facing many countries in the world. Etymologically, radicalism stems from the term "radical". The word "radical" is derived from the Latin, radix or radici. Radix in Latin means 'root'. The term "radical" refers to the fundamentalism, fundamental principles, subject matter, and the essence of various phenomena. In the socio-political concept, radicalism means an understanding which requires change, replacement, and penetration community system to its roots. 1 In addition, it is more frequently used for a negative connotation paticularly political context rather than sociological context. Linguistically, a person or group is called a radical if they want to change the existing situation by breaking down to the roots. Sociologically, a radical likes rapid and fundamental changes in laws and methods of government. Radicalism refers to political doctrines embraced by sociopolitical movements that support individual and collective freedom, and

emancipation from authoritarian regimes and hierarchically structured societies. <sup>2</sup>

Radicalism, particularly political context, is related with extreme views and a desire for rapid social change. It is a concept with a very wide understanding which can affect the sociopolitical conditions of a country. Recently, radicalism is very closely associated with extremism, violence and terrorism. In the broader context, radical movements and radicalism are more commonly found in political movements and groups, addition to social groups. This includes ideological radicals, which are very absolute for certain understandings. <sup>3</sup> Radical nationalism can also be found in many countries, which is often referred to as ultranationalism. Screams, utterances, writings, views, and actions that are excessive contain elements or of absoluteness accompanied by extremities to contain elements of violence in the name of nationalism can be categorized into radicalism. Regional attitudes that are accompanied by extreme understandings and attitudes, which contain chauvinist attitudes, including anti-people

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Syam, N. (2001). Radikalisme dan Masa Depan Agama; Rekontruksi Tafsir Sosial Agama. (Surabaya, IAIN Press: 5-7)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Jainuri, Achmad. (2016). *Radikalisme* dan Terorisme Akar Ideologi dan Tuntutan Aksi. (Malang, Intrans Publising: 15-16).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Turmudi, Endang dan Riza Sihbudi (ed). (2005). *Islam dan Radikalisme di Indonesia*. (Jakarta, LIPI Press: 27).

outside areas and especially if they often threaten independence when they are not satisfied with the situation, can also be categorized as radicals and radicalism. <sup>4</sup>

Thus, radical understandings in the meaning of extreme, intolerant, and violent attitudes, and actions in reality can be found in a variety of terms, forms, and groups, not only radicals in religion but also radicals in nationalism, including in other ideologies that are all extreme, exclusive, and intolerant and violent. Apart from that, any radicalism containing extremism, intolerance, and violence is not good and is not justified by religious teachings, including Islam. Islam is a middle religion (wasathiyah) and spreads universal values (rahmatan lil-'alamin) on earth. Islam teaches peace, kindness, and the spirit of softness in religion. Even if there are teachings and history of jihad in the meaning of murder (qital) or war (ghozwah) in Islam, it is very limited, strict, and upholds humanitarian ethics in order to defend religion and the people themselves from the arbitrary expansion of other parties. Islam does not justify physical jihad haphazardly, unilaterally, and arbitrarily or anarchistically. <sup>5</sup>

## The Term of Radicalism in Indonesia

Radicalism is an understanding that has the potential to threaten the nation. As stated in the government's goals and targets regarding the use of the term radicalism are: <sup>6</sup>

- 1. Radicalism is aimed at certain groups who in fact intend to replace Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution with another system.
- 2. Radicalism is used to refer to the political activities of certain groups that are extreme in nature, which not only use violent means and impose their will, but also practice terrorism.
- 3. Radicalism refers to groups that actually have anti-democratic attitudes and values.

Radicalism is sometimes difficult to identify. Radicalism can not be seen from the physical appearance or behavior such as having beard or wearing veil or cingkrang pants (above ankles), but from the thoughts and actions. Radical ideology can target anyone and does not recognize the general public. According to the State

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Smith, A.D. (1983). *Theories of Nationalism.* (London, Duckworth: 34).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Zainun, Wafiqatun Niam. (2019). Konsep Islam Wasathiyah Sebagai Wujud Islam

Rahmatan Lil 'Alamain: Peran NU dan Muhammadiyah Dalam Mewujudkan Islam Damai di Indonesia. (Palita: Journal of Social-Religion Research Oktober 2019, Vol.4, No.2, hal.91-106, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Indonesia.go.id. (2021). *Istilah Radikal Harus Diganti?* (Available online on 7 November 2019 and accessed on 5 July 2021: https://indonesia.go.id/ragam/budaya/sosial/istilahradikal-harus-diganti).

Intelligence Agency (BIN), radicalism also has the potential to target young people aged 17-24 years. The reason is that young people are still energetic and are looking for identity. <sup>7</sup>

Head of Sub-Directorate for Victim Recovery of BNPT, Rudi Widodo noted that there are four criteria for someone exposed to radicalism. The four criteria are contained in Law No. 5 of 2018 concerning the Crime of Terrorism. Radical criteria according to Law Number 5 of 2018 stated that the criteria are; anti-Pancasila, anti-diversity, anti-NKRI, and anti-Constitution 45. 8

## Labelling Radical versus Pancasila in Indonesia

In the second period of the administration of President Joko Widodo, Indonesia has focused on fighting Islamic radicalism that could become a threat to the survival of the nation. Islamic radicalism appears to have been a common enemy for the government

VOA. (2019). BIN: Usia 17-24 Tahun Rentan Terpapar Radikalisme (Available online on 12 August 2019: https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/bin-usia-17-24-tahun-rentan-terpapar-radikalisme/5038396.html.
 Accessed on 10 July 2021).

and all people since some terrorist attacks still Jokowi's occur during the administration. A number of deradicalization efforts have been made to contain and prevent the spread of terrorism in the whole country. At the same time, the Jokowi government has been vigorous in campaigning Pancasila as the Indonesian legal basis. 9

It is very positive for the Jokowi government and its fanatical devotees to campaign the Pancasila ideology as the Indonesian legal basis, however, netizens may feel that there are too many phenomena where the government and its fanatical supporters use Pancasila to be contrasted with other labels such as radical or radicalism pinned to a person or group they accuse of. In recent times, the label of radical and radicalism seem to be used frequently in social media to identify enemies of the government. In particular, such a labelling is widely committed mostly by pro-government buzzers against anyone who often criticizes government. On the one hand, it is understandable and rational that the government needs to suppress radicalism

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> OK News. (2019). BNPT Ungkap 4 Kriteria Orang Terpapar Paham Radikal. (Available online on 26 November 2019 and accessed on 10 July 2021: https://nasional.okezone.com/read/2019/11/26/3 37/2134712/bnpt-ungkap-4-kriteria-orang-terpapar-paham-radikal).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Detiknews. (2019). *Jokowi Lantang di GBK: Pancasila Final, Rawat Kebinekaan*. (Available online on 13 April 2019 and accessed on 11 July 2021: https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4509092/jokowi-lantang-di-gbk-pancasila-final-rawat-kebinekaan.).

because there have been a series of acts of terrorism occurring in Indonesia in recent times. On the other hand, labelling radical to certain groups haphazardly may be perceived by the public as a stamp for the opposition or government critics. <sup>10</sup>

Silencing universities, community organizations and government institutions being exposed to radicalism is not something new now. This radicalism issue has been used to target students, public figures, religious leaders and even the state civil apparatus who are critical to the government. The consequences for those labeled as radicals can range from dismissal or removal from office or universities to imprisonment. Such a labelling has been used by the government officials when a series of demonstrations in 2019 led by students were accused of being infiltrated by radical groups. This illustrates how the government officials often label certain ideologies to critical parties who are in opposition to the government. 11

Even though such a label has never officially been used by the government, such issues of radicalism were also used by its supporters to attack law enforcement institutions such as the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) for the first time during the Joko Widodo administration. The term radical or Taliban was used after the KPK Employee Forum had been critical of the KPK leadership election process and rejected the revision of the KPK Law since this would merely weaken delegitimize the authority of KPK in corruption eradication. Propaganda about radical issues in this state institution has continued to be blown on social media by the government buzzers or supporters, particularly during the commissioner election process and the revision of the KPK Law. 12 According to the chairman of KPK Employee Forum, Yudi Purnomo, accusation about "radical or Taliban" group within the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) echoed by buzzers or devotees of the government poses only a form of counterattack against

demo-mahasiswa-disusupi-khilafah-upaya-pelemahan/full&view=ok).

<sup>10</sup> RmolBanten. (2021). Bahaya, Tidak Setuju Kebijakan Pemerintah Dituduh Radikal. (Available online on 17 February 2021 and accessed on 25 July 2021: https://www.rmolbanten.com/read/2021/02/17/217 31/Bahaya,-Tidak-Setuju-Kebijakan-Pemerintah-Dituduh-Radikal-).

<sup>11</sup> Tempo.co. (2019). SETARA: Isu Demo Mahasiswa Disusupi Khilafah Upaya Pelemahan. (Avalabe online on 25 September 2019 and accessed on 23 July 2021: https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1252434/setara-isu-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Alinia.id. (2019). *Ada Buzzer dalam Perang Opini Revisi UU KPK*. (Available online on 18 September 2019 and accessed on 25 July 2021: https://www.alinea.id/politik/ada-buzzer-dalamperang-opini-revisi-uu-kpk-b1XmF9nw4).

anti-corruption agencies that have been uncovering major corruption cases without compromise. There is no indication at all that radicals are growing in the KPK. <sup>13</sup>

This seems that the government and its supporters are creating their own enemy as the target to fight. Although it is admitted that the government has never officially used the term "enemy of the state" or "the like", some people may feel that there is an enemy of the state particularly those who are critical to the government and labelled as radicals. The label of radicalism has become a political tool to suppress anyone who is not in line with the government policies and interests. <sup>14</sup> This situation could be considered similar to Donald Trump when labeling the media as the enemy of the people because of criticizing him. <sup>15</sup> This shows that the radical labelling is frequently politicized and used to discredit political opponents.

This reminds us of the George Bush's doctrine after 9/11 attacks in the United States that if you are not with us, you are with the terrorists. In the context of Indonesia, such a doctrine may seem to be applied by the supporters of the government that if you are not with us, you are with the radicals. It is undeniable that this kind of labeling could lead to a polarization of society and be very dangerous because it can divide the nation.

## Why Is Labelling Radical?

In the perspective of government supporters, adherents of radicalism often become a political tool to gather power to government opposition. be This understanding arose because of politicization of religion that was triggered by hatred towards the government or legitimate leaders. Thus, there is a symbiotic mutualism between politicians who want to use the politicization of religion with the power of radical movements. The radicalism movement group comes from people who are antigovernment. This radicalism is always in the name of religion and created by a

https://nasional.kontan.co.id/news/kata-ketua-wadah-pegawai-soal-isu-radikal-dan-taliban-di-kpk).

Wadah Pegawai Soal Isu Radikal dan Taliban di KPK. (Available online on 7 May 2021 and accessed on 23 July 2021:

<sup>14</sup> Jurnalmedan. (2021). *Ulil Singgung Laporan Terhadap Din Syamsudin: Sekarang Label Radikal Dipakai Jadi Alat Membungkam Sosok Kritis.* (Available online on 13 February 2021 and accessed on 27 July 2021: https://jurnalmedan.pikiran-rakyat.com/nasional/pr-1491427191/ulil-singgung-laporan-terhadap-din-syamsudin-sekarang-label-radikal-dipakai-jadi-alat-membungkam-sosok-kritis).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> BBCNews. (2018). *Media Seen as Enemy of People - Donald Trump.* (Available online on 1 November 2018 and accessed on 26 July 2021:

https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-46057126).

group of people who want drastic social and political reforms using violence. <sup>16</sup>

In addition to the politicization of religion, in fact radicalism is also triggered by intolerance, poverty and ignorance, incorrect religious understanding, social injustice, political dissatisfaction, to hatred and revenge. Thus, eliminating radicals is impossible if it doesn't start from those problems. Apart from that, although the government supporters might give a radical stigma to a person or group, the public can give their own assessment of whether the labeling action taken by the government is appropriate or not.

## **Implications of Labelling Radical**

The embedding of such labelling and demonizing has the potential to increase the length of racial and religious conflict and identity politics. Geoff Wood as quoted by Rosalind Eyben and Joy Moncrieffe in The Power of Labeling: How People Categorized and Why It Matters (2007) explained that the purpose of labeling is to simplify the complexity of something. Another goal is to identify a person or group with deviant behavior. The impact of labeling can form a stigma

on one person or group depending on the response of the community that forms the labeling itself. Sometimes the stigma that is formed is not always positive. This labeling also occurs in politics for certain interests. <sup>17</sup>

By labeling someone as deviant, the stigma that is formed against that person or group is a deviation. This is also what the government supporters want to achieve by labeling certain groups as radicals. Whatever is said or done by those who are considered radicals will be deemed as a mistake or deviation. In some cases, the impacts of labeling can be more severe and worsen the mental health of those who are labeled. In addition to feeling unappreciated, victims also feel discriminated against and rejected by society.

Deputy Secretary General of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU) Masduki Baidowi assessed that labeling was actually acceptable if it had a good meaning. Labelling a person or group with a bad connotation is a bad and leads to cynicism and contempt. Labeling related to politics should be eliminated since the two parties (Jokowi and Prabowo) contesting the 2019 Presidential Election have reconciled. Those who continue to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> AntaraNews. (2021). *Radikalisme dan Alat Politik Penyerang Pemerintah*. (Available online on 28 March 2021 and accessed on 28 July 2021:https://www.antaranews.com/berita/2067726/radikalisme-dan-alat-politik-penyerang-pemerintah).

<sup>17</sup> Geoff Wood. (2007). The Power of Labeling: How People Categorized and Why It Matters. (Earthscan Publications Ltd.)

label radicals to a person or group are deliberately trying to create polarization among the grassroots. There need to be concrete steps to calm the grass root although there is a possibility that this polarization issue will be raised again and common enemy will be created for the sake of the next presidential election in 2024. <sup>18</sup>

The use of the term radical may not mean to offend Islam. However, such labeling is counterproductive for religious harmony and could increase the potential for clashes between religious believers. Not all people at the grassroots can accept such a labelling and be categorized as the Radicalism vis-a-vis supporters of Pancasila. If it is meant to build a narrative for political purposes, there should be no one creating a label with the nuances of ethnicity, religion or race and should not polarize society. Even though, it is only crowded on social media, the statement has a bad impact on religious life in Indonesia. The labelling could bring into conflict through racial elements and has tremendous impacts on the destruction of unity.

18 Tirto.id. (2020). Pelabelan Kadrun: Membungkam Pengkritik Rezim & Memicu Konflik SARA.(Available online on 12 August 2020 and accesses on 25 July 2021: https://tirto.id/pelabelan-kadrun-membungkam-

pengkritik-rezim-memicu-konflik-sara-fXdR).

The government should address and stop the narrative circulating on social media regarding the term radical. Otherwise, society could be divided due to identity politics based on religion. Issues related to identity politics will still persist and the trend on social media will use religious issues to attack certain groups. Not surprisingly, in the next 2024 Presidential Election, the issues of religion or race will be used again.

In addition, there is another danger besides the religious issue, namely the silence of public criticism. Some criticisms of the government have always been addressed with the labeling of Anyone who criticizes radical. the government, regardless of their background, will be labelled as radical. The goal is definitely to make criticism worthless. 19 If the government really wants to implement the values of Pancasila containing the unity of Indonesia, it should not be silent to see this phenomenon. It is the government's responsibility to maintain the quality of criticism and democracy in the public sphere, instead of labelling

Laporan Terhadap Din Syamsudin: Sekarang Label Radikal Dipakai Jadi Alat Membungkam Sosok Kritis. (Available online on 13 February 2021 and accessed on 27 July 2021: https://jurnalmedan.pikiran-rakyat.com/nasional/pr-1491427191/ulil-singgung-laporan-terhadap-din-syamsudin-sekarang-label-radikal-dipakai-jadi-alat-membungkam-sosok-kritis).

critics with things that can actually divide Indonesia.

Not all people who are critical to the government can be considered as radicals, anti-Pancasila and pro-Islamic state as long as their criticisms are not aimed at overthrowing the ruler or regime change. Although the fact states that there is extreme and violent radicalism among a few Islamic groups, such as the insurgency of al-Qaida, ISIS, Jamaah Islamiyah, and similar movements, they do not represent Islam <sup>20</sup> as a religion which loves peace. Thus, it is wrong when religious radicalism is easily pinned to Islam and Indonesian. It is also wrong if a person or group is labelled as radicals just because they are in opposition to the government. Most Indonesian people also disagree with the Islamic movement that carries the understanding and action of upholding the caliphate or Islamic state in Indonesia. The majority of Muslims have agreed that Indonesia is a country formed based on a national consensus under Pancasila as the basis of the state which is in line with Islam. <sup>21</sup>

People criticize the government because they have concerns about the development of Indonesia and betterment of the nation. Unfortunately, accusations of radicalism and Islamic radicalism continue to be very common nowadays since the government is too sensitive and tends to be anti-critic. Criticism is part of democracy which needs to be maintained as it is the mandate of reformation after the fall of Suharto regime. The police as a state apparatus should be tasked to protect and implement the constitution which guarantees freedom of expression, opinion, religion and belief, instead of carrying out repressive actions on a large scale against those who criticized the government. If the police are being used by the state for political purposes such as repression, this could become a threat to democracy in Indonesia. However, this hope may not be realized in the near future because there are certain groups that use religion for political purposes and the misuse of labeling will persist because of practical political interests.

## No Polarization and No Labelling

One of the benefits of eliminating radicalism is to prevent polarization in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Sarah, Colvin. (**2020**). *ISIS is not Islam': Epistemic Injustice, Everyday Religion, and Young Muslims' Narrative Resistance*. (The British Journal of Criminology, Volume 60, Issue 6, November 2020, Pages 1585).

Kompas.com. (2021). Menag Sebut
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https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/03/13/1158 4391/menag-sebut-mayoritas-muslim-indonesia-setuju-dengan-pancasila).

2024 election. There should be no a debate between Islam and non-Islam or Pancasila and Radicalism. All people should no longer use religious sentiments for political purposes. The use of radicalism term could instead foster radicalism in Indonesia because there is a value-reinforcing effect when the term is used at the level of perception. <sup>22</sup>

In addition, all Indonesian people should have objective and moderate position. They must stay away from radicalism in any form that leads to understanding, absolute especially extremism, intolerance, and violence. In addition, the government officials should not be ambiguous and politicize situation by constructing and labelling radicalism only to certain groups who are in opposition to them. Furthermore, the government should not impose doublestandard policy in dealing radicalism in Indonesia as radicalism is not merely about Islam. Radicalism can be outside of religion including radicals in the name of nationalism and other ideologies that produce extremism, intolerance, and even verbal and physical violence.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Tirto.id. (2018). *Sudah Tepatkah Kita Menggunakan Istilah Radikalisme?* (Available online on 23 July 2018 and accessed on 28 July 2021: https://tirto.id/sudah-tepatkah-kitamenggunakan-istilah-radikalisme-cPHG).

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