



## SHIFTING DA'WA MOVEMENT OF TABLIGHI JAMAAT IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the shift in the proselytizing movement of the transnational Islamic group Jamaah Tabligh (JT) in Indonesia which used to not come into contact with the world of practical politics, but since 2017 when the beginning of the Jakarta Regional Election and in the 2019 Presidential Election Tabligh Jamaat have been very actively involved in practical politics. The large number of TJ figures involved as campaigners for certain presidential candidates and participating in the 212 demonstrations prompted this study to specifically look at the involvement of TJ members and figures in identity politics campaigns on social media and in their communities. In addition, this research will also explore their understanding and meaning of democracy and the "Khilafah Islamiyah" in the current context, given the increasingly strengthening discourse on the establishment of an Islamic caliphate under the leadership of Imam Mahdi whom they believe will turn down and give them a *bai'at* in Mecca. Related to the agenda of establishing the Islamic caliphate, there is an assumption that TJ is part of a radical and terrorist group with a disguised style. Moreover, some of the findings of previous studies have shown that TJ members in the UK were shown to be involved in the bombing of train stations in London and Madrid. Therefore, in the Indonesian context, this study aims to determine the response and efforts to countering radicalism carried out by TJ through peaceful proselytizing and anti-violence in their *bayan*, religious sermon. This research will be conducted for three years in five provinces, namely in West Nusa Tenggara, DKI Jakarta, East Kalimantan, East Java, and North Sulawesi by collecting samples from three headquarters in three districts or cities in each province. This research uses qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis.

**Keywords:** *Identity politics, democracy, Islamic caliphate, countering radicalism, Tabligh Jamaat*



## **Introduction**

Tabligh Jamaat is a transnational Islamic movement known for not being in contact with practical politics "a politics" and the agenda of establishing the Islamic Caliphate so that their proselytizing is more accepted in various countries (Noor, 2010; Ali 2010; Horstmann, 2007). Since its emergence in the 1930s in Mewat New Delhi India, Tabligh Pilgrims (JT) has continued to expand its proselytizing wings to various countries including in secular countries such as America, Europe, and Australia whose Muslim adherents are minorities (Sikand, 2006; Tittensor, 2014; Masud, 2000). They have managed to build as many as 180 headquarters around the world, and their adherents are estimated at 20-40 million spread across almost all countries (Abdullah, 1997; Grace, 2005; Janson, 2014). Although their proselytizing patterns are uniform, the dynamics experienced by JT members in certain countries is different including their involvement in politics and acts of radicalism and terrorism. In the UK, Francis, Spain and America for example the TJ group was once suspected of being involved in the bombing of trains and other public facilities (Hedges, 2008; Howenstein, 2006; Pieri, 2015; Shutter, 2009; Scott, 2007). This research focuses on seeing the dynamics of TJ in Indonesia not only related to radicalism and terrorism, but also to identity politics that has threatened Indonesia since the 212 action case in the DKI Jakarta Regional Election and the 2019 Presidential Election.

Tabligh Jamaat in Indonesia are experiencing very rapid development, they have spread across all provinces in Indonesia including in Bali, NTT, Manado and Papua which are known as non-Muslim bases (Noor, 2012). Preliminary surveys show a shift in JT's proselytizing orientation, which used to be very purely for religious proselytizing, but recently since the rise of identity politics, Tablighi Jamaat figures have shown the involvement of TJ figures in the action. Most of his figures supported the 212 action and were involved in the protests, even blatantly becoming campaigners and the successful team of one of the presidential candidates. What TJ figures are doing is certainly out of their proselytizing principles that don't touch political territory. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of TJ figures and members in identity politics and their involvement in practical politics in the 2019 elections.

The high interest of TJ members and figures in the realm of practical politics in the 2019 elections led this research to explore their views and meanings on democracy and the ideology of Pancasila. At the same time they were also planning the establishment of an



Islamic caliphate by making up for Imam Mahdi who was about to come down to save the human being. It will take place in Mecca when the time has come. The concept of the Islamic caliphate JT is different from the concept of a caliphate built by the terrorist group ISIS, Al-Qaeda, HTI dan FPI, which emphasizes more on the symbol of Imam Mahdi's shop promised in the hadith of the Prophet (Sikand, 2006; Siddiqi, 2012). They will not make up and appoint a caliph outside Imam Mahdi. They believed that Imam Mahdi would be the savior of the world who brought peace. Departing from JT's view, this study also aims to further understand the concept of the Islamic Caliphate that develops in the JT community, what the application of the Islamic Caliphate in Indonesia looks like in the context of Imam Mahdi's leadership, and how they respond and account for accusations of being radical and terrorist groups.

### **Literature Review**

This research is built on the development of the results of previous research that discusses Tabligh Jamaat. I have been doing research in both field studies and literature studies on Tabligh Pilgrims for 6 years from 2015-2021 with various focuses and locations. I argue that Tabligh Jamaat have undergone changes and shifts in proselytizing orientation due to the socio-political factors that developed in their proselytizing area. In the Indonesian context, for example, their figures are partly involved in practical politics in the case of the 2019 elections and play an important role in identity politics campaigns on social media as well as on the ground directly as campaigners for one of the spouses in the 2019 Presidential Election. They also actively voiced anti-Islamic support and supported the 212-action movement. At the same time the discourse of the Islamic caliphate also appeared in their communities and would make up for Imam Mahdi who was believed to have emerged and would become a world leader. So the state of the Art in this study is that Tabligh Pilgrims have undergone a change of orientation in their proselytizing that has incorporated practical political elements and Islamic caliphate campaigns in their communities.

Previous research by national and international researchers on Tabligh Jamaat is more normative in nature discussing the concept of proselytizing, spiritual development, and cultural integration between TJ and local communities. Only a small part discusses the gender and latent potential of TJ as a radical terrorist group. This research will enrich and complement the existing literature gap, especially discussing their involvement in practical



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politics and efforts to establish an Islamic caliphate. This is the novelty of the study. The novelty of this research is also from the sample of the research that was selected, namely five provinces in Indonesia which are the largest base and center of the Tabligh Pilgrim proselytizing movement. Researchers will be directly involved in the field using an ethnographic approach.

Among the scholars who have conducted research on Tabligh Jamaat is M. Imdadun Rahmat (2005) who discusses the global network of the rise of transnational Islamic movements such as Hizbut Tahrir, Jamaah Tablighi and Wahabism which are growing fast in Indonesia. According to Rahmat, this global network has an influence over success at the local level due to their more rational approach and mirror of the existence and truth of the teachings. Although these three movements are both transnational in the frame of Salafist ideology that carries the concept of reform and purification of Islamic religious teachings, the emphasis varies. Wahabi differed from Tablighi in some ways, as did Hizbut Tahrir which focused more on the struggle for the establishment of the Islamic caliphate. Saipul Hamdi (2015) discusses the demazdemication of Islam, the economy of divinity, and social conflict. Hamdi stated that there was an attempt by Tablighi in the demazhabisation of Islam, namely to release the culture of the sect in their religious traditions. Hamdi also saw a change in the economic system in the Tablighi neighborhood that emphasized the "godly" economy, where they believed that God was the source of sustenance and would give that sustenance to worshippers for preaching. Tabglihi often takes the middle ground or relents when friction arises in society. They will not resist and choose to evade or go elsewhere when mosques are closed or attacked by residents.

Meanwhile, international scholars who discuss Tablighi include Haji Abdul Rahman Abdullah's (1997) talking about the history of the Tablighi movement in Malaysia and its relationship with the Darul Arqom organization. The two institutions were able to cooperate with each other in proselytizing including organizing large gatherings or *ijtima'* held in New Delhi. These *ijtima'* meetings are usually attended by three million JT members from around the world. As a form of cooperation, JT leaders from India were also present in Malaysia to witness the proselytizing activities of their members and visit several madrasas in Malaysia. Despite the many challenges faced by JT, the case in Malaysia shows a specific context, where they were able to cooperate with other Muslim organizations. In contrast to Mohammed Ayooob (2008) who discussed the pattern of the Tablighi proselytizing movement



in secular European countries, where its members were not monitored by the Islamic state or Islamic law, they were influenced by the Deobandi sect and the Hanafi sect. Although it developed in a secular country, the Tablighi movement was quite popular and internationally recognized for its spirit of proselytizing and the development of darkness through the construction of magnificent mosques in the UK.

Muhammad Khalid Masud and friends (2000) and Peter Dale Scott (2007) also saw the Tablighi phenomenon as a successful transnational religious movement in France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Germany and other European countries. It is very important to distinguish between Salafist groups that adhere to violence and non-violence, politics and non-politics and this helps to explain their success in a secular democracy. Nonetheless, Tablighi has been accused of joining the Al-Qaida terrorism group that allegedly used Tablighi to recruit members as terrorists (Scott 2007; Deliso 2007). While there is no clear evidence of Tablighi's involvement in terrorism in Southeast Asia, it is likely that some of their members were recruited by terrorist groups.

Barbara D. Metcalf (2002) and Bubul Siddiq (2010) see Tablighi as a neo-Sufism movement, in which they seek to revitalize one of the teachings of the spirituality of the Prophet Muhammad to achieve "the true self" in the path of Sufism. Alexander Horstmann (2007:109) in his research findings explains that although Tablighi has been accepted in the Thai Nakhon Sri Thammarat community in the Eastern part of Southern Thailand, they have difficulty in adapting and integrating socially and culturally which then often leads to conflict. Faris A. Noor (2012), Eva F. Nisa (2014) and Jan Ali (2014) discuss the history and development of tablighi educational institutions. The writings of Christopher Deliso's (2007: 73-83) indicate that Tbalighi has been used as a tool to strengthen jihadist groups through a network of Pakistanis operating in London. Although it does not touch political territory in its proselytizing, it is very easy to be entered by international terrorist groups. Muhammad Amira Rana (2009), Joshua W. Hedges (2008: 75) mention the involvement of naggota Tabligh in several bombing cases in Europe including the London and Madrid bombings.

### **Reserach Methode**

This research is a qualitative research. The research locations will be centered in five provinces, namely in West Nusa Tenggara, DKI Jakarta, East Kalimantan, East Java and North Sulawesi. In each of the 5 provinces, the central markaz will be taken in each province.



In Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, markaz will be selected at the Great Mosque of Mataram city, in DKI Jakarta Province, Al-jami markaz will be selected in Kebon Jeruk, West Jakarta, in East Kalimantan, centered on JT markaz on the Siring Samarinda River, in East Java centered on the Temboro Madiun markaz, and in North Sulawesi, JT markaz in Manado will be selected. The reason for choosing these five research locations is not only to be the basis of the Tabligh Pilgrim community, but also social, economic and cultural factors that influence the proselytizing and political attitudes of Tabligh Pilgrims.

### **Finding and Discussion**

The 2019 presidential election in Indonesia was marked by an identity politics battle involving various Islamic mass organizations including Tablighi Jamaat. Most of their figures are caught up in the practical political discourse of winning over a particular candidate. They are more supportive of the candidate, Prabowo Subianto, than Jokowi. Their reason is because Prabowo is considered to represent an Islamic group and is supported by scholars. One of their figures was even listed as a campaigner during the Presidential Election and openly supported Prabowo.

The involvement of Tabligh Jamaat in Practical Politics is something new in the religious culture of Tabligh Pilgrims. They never speak politics because they are strictly prohibited in their teachings and ideologies. This is where I noticed a shift in the religious culture of Tabligh Pilgrims. The members and figures of the Tabligh Pilgrims I interviewed acknowledged that they were actively involved because of concerns with the condition of the nation. They are called when Islamic values are insulted by certain groups including those they claim from the government.

In addition to being active in the campaign, JT members were also involved in the 212 actions (Aksi 212) in Jakarta. The Tablighi Jamaat took advantage of their time when khuruj in Jakarta then joined the 212 action. From here they began to get caught up in practical politics. They are very active in discussing the politics in their whatapp group.



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