

Azyumardi Azra's Middle-Path Islamic Politics: Anti-Violence and Democratization of Indonesia

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JISI JURNAL
ILMU SOSIAL
INDONESIA

p-ISSN: 2808-9529 (Printed)

e-ISSN: 2808-8816 (Online)

Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Indonesia (JISI)

<http://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/jisi>

VOL. 5, NO. 1 (2024)

Page: 71 - 82

Recommended Citation (APA 7th Edition):

Thaha, I., Fadhilla, I., Billahi, S., & Suryani. (2024). Azyumardi Azra's Middle-Path Islamic Politics: Anti-Violence and Democratization of Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Indonesia (JISI)*, 5(1), 71-82.

<https://doi.org/10.15408/jisi.v5i1.39938>.

Available at:

<https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/jisi/article/view/39938>

Article History:

Received: May 08, 2024

Accepted: May 15, 2024

Available online: June 30, 2024

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Abstract. The phenomenon of violence in democratic countries such as Indonesia introduced a new angle in contextualizing modern Islamic political thought. The argument of mainstreaming fasad (violence or conflict) and islah (reconciliation) embedded in Islamic political thought preached by Azyumardi Azra as a part of the moderate Islam project (Islam wasathiyah) is considered a democratization process. This article seeks to examine Azyumardi Azra's thoughts in interpreting the concept of moderate Islam in the context of Indonesia's democratization, particularly regarding non-violence and social harmony. This article uses an interdisciplinary approach combining the interpretation of Islamic political thought, Middle-path political theory, and democratization analysis. It examines the Islamic revitalization formulating an anti-violence stance mainstreamed by Azyumardi that mediates the absolutist dogmatic beliefs and extremist political streams inciting violence. Finally, this article demonstrates how political thought embedded in Islam mainstreamed by Azyumardi benefits to strengthening democratization in Indonesia, moving away from violence.

Keywords: Democratization, Middle-Path Politics, Anti-violence, Revitalization of Islam, Wasathiyah Islam.

Abstrak. Kajian ini berfokus pada diskusi tentang pemikiran Azyumardi Azra dalam memaknai politik Islam jalan tengah (Islam wasathiyah) dalam upaya demokratisasi Indonesia, khususnya mengenai antikekerasan dan harmonisasi sosial. Dengan pendekatan Islam jalan tengah, ia berupaya mencari cara efektif mengatasi praksis kekerasan di Indonesia. Kajian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan merujuk pada data-data primer melalui esai-esai dan buku-buku Azyumardi. Penelitian ini berhasil menganalisis pemikiran Azyumardi dalam merumuskan sikap antikekerasan sebagai gagasan revitalisasi Islam dengan menengahi keyakinan dogmatis absolut dan praksis politik ekstrem yang mendelegitimasi kekuasaan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan, revitalisasi Islam yang dikemukakan Azyumardi merupakan cara efektif untuk mengatasi terjadinya kekerasan sebagai problematika demokrasi di Indonesia, kini dan di masa-masa mendatang. Kajian ini diharapkan dapat berkontribusi bagi penguatan demokratisasi di Indonesia, yang jauh dari kekerasan.

Kata Kunci: Politik Jalan Tengah, Islam Wasathiyah, Demokratisasi, Revitalisasi Islam, Antikekerasan.



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1. INTRODUCTION

The anti-violence thought of Azyumardi Azra, embedded in another commitment to tolerance, accommodation towards local culture, and nationalism, in line with the interpretation of religious moderation introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion Affairs (Kemenag, 2019). Violence—as define also as conflict and terror—that occurs in Indonesian society seen as a disruption to democratization. Azyumardi anti-violence thought traced on his active involvement in the democracy project, linked to state involvement.

In Azyumardi's view, violence or conflict that occurred in society is an indication of a failed state; the state cannot provide public goods to citizens, regarding the security of property and life (Azra, 2020: 161). Azyumardi is concerned that the Indonesian government and its official branches are unable to fulfill the main task. Violence or conflict among citizens that does not receive full attention from the state lead to disharmony.

The Islamic middle-path political thought related to anti-violence put forward by Azyumardi is not in a position to support or promote absolute political stability or political absolutism, but rather mediates absolute dogmatic beliefs which often transform into ideas to delegitimize power (*bughat*) (Azra, 2002: 67-68) and state handling that can lead to a vicious circle of violence.

Azyumardi adopted a legal approach to examining the phenomena of violence and conflict. On his view, if Indonesia is projected as a failed state, it is a logical consequence caused by the lack of law enforcement as something essential. This failure has led to an inability to prevent violence and conflict among different groups of citizens and authorities. Azyumardi considered that the failure of law enforcement authority have an impact on the normalization of the increasing organized criminal thuggery. On his view, this failure can be contagious from one area to another, if the state is not firm in law enforcement (Azra, 2020: 55). The disorientation and dislocation raised Azyumardi's thoughts on *islah* (reconciliation) which seeks to discredit conflict or violence.

The essence of Azyumardi's endeavor lies in distinguishing dogmatic absolute beliefs from

the inaccurate handling of state responses to violence, which is encapsulated in the idea of revitalizing Islam (Azra, 2020: 67; Azra, 2020: 18). On his view, theological understanding has a potential to encourage religious communities to distance themselves from political values and experiences. His thoughts on the revitalization of Islam emphasizes the accommodation endeavor of diverse socio-cultural forces to shape social cohesion that balances democracy and distance itself away from absolute politics.

2. THEORY AND METHOD

The narrative critical theory developed by Mauz (2009) from previous scholars, Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin (1999); and Robert M. Ellis (2011) is essential for examining Azyumardi's middle-path Islamic political thought. Ellis's middle-path political theory is adopted to examine how Azyumardi's thought contains a political consciousness that effectively overcomes reality and avoids absolute dogmatic beliefs based on metaphysical assumptions. These two theories are strengthened by four conceptual frameworks of religious moderation formulated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs as indicators of middle-path thought (*Islam wasathiyah*): national commitment; tolerance; non-violence; and accommodating to local culture.

Islamic narratives in Azyumardi's middle-path political thought appeared through experiences, religious identity, social contexts, emotions and belief systems, religious texts, and the space that builds the narrator's or character's discourse. By this approach, middle-path politics separates absolutized political beliefs. Politics is always influenced by dogmatic metaphysical beliefs, such as libertarianism, conservatism, Islamism, and Marxism. Absolutized political beliefs distance society from values and experiences. Hence, the theological aspects, including theological experience, can be separated from middle-path political thinking. In this sense, middle-path political thought is a pragmatic attitude, but not in the sense of narrow-pragmatic interests, rather for sustainable interests.

3. RESULTS DAN DISCUSSION

3.1 *Fasad and Jihad: The State and Moral Perfection*

Azyumardi used *fasad* as theological legitimacy in conceptualizing violence or conflict, referring to the verses of the Qur'an, originates from *al-nafs al-syaithaniyah* or satanic desires. On his view, the orientation based on satanic desires, as quoted from Qur'an, must be warned, because it lead people astray (Azra, 2020: 36). In matters of statehood, the state has a role in warning this issues. Violence transcendently is the result of humans being unable to control themselves (Azra, 2020: 37).

Azyumardi's conceptualization on *fasad* is the principle of the state's moral perfection. This explanation is in line with the interpretation of Franz Magnis-Suseno to moral perfection (2016: 456). He stated the government is the controller of moral perfection, by warning its citizens through various regulations, such as laws and regulations to prohibit various acts of violence, such as murder, abuse, rape, theft, robbery, and giving false claim, so that regulations are oriented not to personal interests, but to the inner perfection of citizenship. In this case, it is worth distinguishing how the state has limits to apply individual moral standard and the role of the state in controlling the inner perfection of citizens or social harmony.

Azyumardi put forward the greatest jihad (*al-jihad al-akbar*) to objectify state control over violence. For him, *al-jihad al-akbar* is a prophetic mission in term that the Prophet Muhammad called for a jihad against satanic desires, which plunge humans into disarray or injustice and bring about the destruction of society (Azra, 2020: 37). *Al-jihad al-akbar* is jihad against oneself, then related to the mission of liberating humans from the destruction of society.

Al-jihad al-akbar, for Azyumardi, is not only aimed at citizens but also the state. Because of this, Azyumardi is firm and consistent in his rejection of violence promoted by the state (Azra, 2020: 150), linear with Thomas Hobbes's (2015) thought, it is a necessity in a polity then the inherent tendency in humans to fight against humans (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) can be controlled. However, Azyumardi's transcendent thought limited Weberian-stream requires a state to regulate administrative and legal issues, and have legitimacy over violence (Hanke, Whimster, 2020: 23).

Azyumardi's thoughts on *al-jihad al-akbar* to combat violence or *fasad* in the context of modern politics strengthen the framework of democratization and expand the role of the state. If we refer to the feudal order, the state's claim to its subjects, the people, was limited to the elite, then violent claims could be legitimized. However, limiting transcendent violence strengthens human equality in creating social harmony, and the state has a role in creating social harmony in its policies. Hence, it is a logical consequence that the state's legitimacy of violence, which often appears in the character of feudal states that makes the people subjects is unjustified.

3.2 *Political-Social Islah*

The absence of the state in the process of social harmonization have an impact on the emergence of political identity that triggered through political momentum, as seen in the last few years in Indonesia. Normalization of violence is used by some groups in the name of democracy, giving rise to political and social conditions that are not conducive and unsafe. Azyumardi viewed an unconducive situation full of various kinds of violence—verbal and nonverbal—spreading among society, and faced with the political context, such as the implementation of elections.

In such a situation, Azyumardi encouraged a process of *islah* or inter-community reconciliation promoted by the state elite, as was seen by Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto who competed in the 2019 presidential election. However, the conceptualization of *islah* is not an attempt to reconcile in the form of a large coalition of fighting elites, rather, it is an attitude of acceptance or tolerance of the democracy results (Azra, 2020: 270).

For Azyumardi, the fight to tolerance or social harmony in democracy is important to prevent violent in attitudes and practices, that will increase the consolidation of democracy. Azyumardi uses the term "political despair" if the attitude is away from democracy. In his view, the attitude of attacking or blaming political institutions, as was done by Prabowo Subianto's supporters in the 2019 presidential election, is not an attitude of maturity in democracy, but rather an indication of the country falling into ruin (Azra, 2020: 271).

To strengthen the conceptualization of *islah*, Azyumardi followed the thoughts of Imam al-Shaykh Muhammad Abd al-Azim al-Zarqani who divided two types of *islah*. The first *islah* is *al-ishlah al-siyasi*, or political *islah* through the restoration of peace and harmony among various political groups. In this context, a commitment to justice, equality between citizens, avoiding lies, stopping betrayal, and rejecting political tyranny are needed to be realized. The second is *al-ishlah al-ijtima'i* or social reconciliation through reducing ta'asub or emotional socio-cultural and political sectarianism (Azra, 2020: 69)

Furthermore, Azyumardi viewed the willingness to commit *islah* as a manifestation of an empathetic attitude towards the reality of humanity, that every human being fall into evil which is detrimental to society and the country. On his view, the realization has to be carried out by the state (Azra, 2020: 272), because *islah* interpreted as reform and renewal. The government will be more solid if creating an effective and efficient system for carrying out various development programs to improve the welfare of its citizens. Azyumardi interpreted well-development cannot be implemented without *islah* process among citizens. Legitimacy in democracy, the attitude of accepting normal results and processes in politics, is essential for state development.

By this framework, Azyumardi promoted an Islamic-based government that is committed to maintaining peace and harmony among citizens and the socio-political, socio-religious, and socio-cultural groups that interact within. Indonesia, which is diverse in its plurality, needs to have a government that is based on Islam in carrying out its development programs. For this matter, Azyumardi is careful in defining *islah*-based governance. He does not define *islah*-based governance as "cattle trade" politics, when the government embraces various political forces into one, including those previously involved in political contestation (Azra, 2020: 70). Azyumardi emphasized the *islah*-based governance needs to be interpreted from the importance of balance, harmony, and alignment between various groups angle. *Islah* in the political sense, is not the creation of a "political choir" in one song, but rather check and balance (Azra, 2020: 71). Azyumardi stated firmly that

this balancing force should be outside the government to exercise control and criticize various steps taken by the government.

In fact, in Azyumardi's view, this balancing force also provides alternative power by contributing alternative concepts in the practice of state development. Hence, Azyumardi offered the concept of loyal opposition to maintain this political balance (Azra, 1999: 27; Azra, 2002: 16). The opposition he offers in the political *islah* process does not delegitimize power. In his view, if this process is realized, the process of *islah* will go beyond a peaceful and civilized life, and also develop *islah* for the progress of society through full democracy which mutually maintains political harmony in the sense of perfect balance. This process maintains optimism about the future of the Indonesian nation, including the future of democracy in Indonesia (Azra, 2020: 271).

In this framework, Azyumardi's thought regarding *islah* is on the one hand to prevent polarization between communities, and on the other hand to maintain democracy with loyal alternative forces or loyal opposition. This diversity of views is a key point in Azyumardi's thought regarding socio-political issues. It straddles the middle-path between polarization and opposition. This middle position enriches wasathiyah Islam in everyday political life which is full of vulnerability to polarization among communities.

3.3 Religious Freedom and Social Harmonization

For Azyumardi, the state must side with religious freedom (*hurriyat al-ta'bir or hurriyat al-ra'y*) (Azra, 2020: 148). He encouraged the state to become an inseparable part of supporting religious freedom. This thought reflected the wasathiyah view of not imposing personal will on the one hand and imposing the will of other parties on the other hand. On his view, freedom of religion is a religious commandment that is firmly stated in Qur'an for humans. This order, by his interpretation, must be conveyed wisely, full of good advice in patience, and not in anger sense (Azra, 2020: 148; Azra, 2020: 56).

Noble teachings regarding the principles of religious freedom, in Azyumardi's view, can distance interfaith communities from attitudes

of violence and conflict. Because of this, Azyumardi is antipathetic toward the type of religious freedom that calls for hate speech. He highlighted the seven types of hate speech contained in the National Police Chief's Circular (SE) Number SE/06/X/2015 concerning Handling Hate Speech in the public domain which was signed by Badrodin Haiti. The seven types of hate speech, namely insults, defamation, defamation, unpleasant acts, provoking, inciting, and spreading false news are sources of discrimination, violence, and social conflict (Azra, 2020: 146).

Azyumardi regretted that hate speech is frequently conveyed in religious pulpits. He highlighted many religious preachers convey hate speech by insulting other groups, both intra and inter-religious. For Azyumardi, such actions are categorized as an abuse of religious freedom (Azra, 2020: 147). Indonesia is a paradise for preachers because it does not require any permission from the state, according to him, there needs to be a regulatory role for the state.

Religious freedom that has no boundaries in wisdom, in Azyumardi's view, will bring society closer to violence and conflict. He gave the example of the controversy over Geert Wilders, an ultra-right wing member of the Dutch parliament, as a case of religious freedom that exceeded the limits of wisdom. According to Azyumardi, Geert's film *Fitna* only sparked excitement and anger among Muslims (Azra, 2020: 150). As if he had anticipated this, the Dutch Ambassador to Indonesia needed to explain that Geert's statement did not represent the Dutch government. To respond the hate speech that can trigger anger and high levels of social discrimination, Azyumardi puts forward an attitude of "*al-akhlaqu al-karimah*". In his view, if such acts of hatred are responded to with anger and violence, they only increase social violence itself (Azra, 2020: 151).

For Azyumardi, management of religious freedom, needs to get the attention of the government. He placed greater emphasis on religious freedom in state-religion relations. Taking the example of violence in Maluku, Azyumardi saw that the factor in continuing the endless conflict was the lack of authority of the authorities. According to him, the officers were on the defensive (Azra, 2002: 207; Azra, 1999: 12). He viewed the conflict as a multilevel crisis,

needs to be approached from various approaches, such as social, economic, and political. Azyumardi even further encouraged that an accommodative attitude towards society regarding religious freedom needs to be followed up in various representative regulations.

Azyumardi viewed religious freedom as giving rise to latent conflict with the issue of "religious race" as the outer layer of conflict (Azra, 2002: 203). However, deeper than that, there is the issue of competition for resources which is another content of the inter-religious conflict. In Maluku, since the 1970s, immigrants from Bugis, Buton, and Makassar (BBM) began to fill the Ambon area. Their arrival changed steply the balance of the community there to a Muslim majority which was previously dominated by Christians (Azra, 2002: 207).

This demographic shift was also followed by a struggle for economic resources. Immigrants dominate economic lines, from the formal sector to street vendors. This economic exclusion then spills over into social-psychological deprivation. Social jealousy increased among Ambonese Christians towards Muslim immigrants. Wild and negative stigmas against native Christians emerged, such as them being seen as lazy workers and those who liked to drink. These stigmas are then responded to and result in conflict escalation.

To overcome this, Azyumardi regretted the government's defensive attitude. In fact, in Azyumardi's thought, the indigenous Christian community and Muslim immigrants have a cultural mechanism in the form of *pela gandong* which is believed by both parties to be a mechanism to reduce conflict. However, the government did not go that far to understand the Ambon conflict. Based on his historical findings, Azyumardi captured the efforts of the Dutch East Indies government which succeeded in embracing the people of Ambonese with a cultural entity approach. For a long time, Maluku has been a cultural entity loosely structured through fairly flexible kinship alliances (Azra, 2002: 209).

Azyumardi highlighted the failed efforts of the Indonesian government since the Soekarno and Soeharto administrations which were loose in approaching conflict issues from cultural

entities. For him, political, social, and cultural monopolization resulted in the paralysis of local traditions.

3.4 Universal Movement Against Terrorism

On Azyumardi's view, terrorism—often intertwined with radicalism issues, has been a rising form of violence in several regions in recent years. In his view, handling terrorism with a spiritual and religious justification is quite difficult and delicate. If the government is not in the right way, the handling of terrorism may get trapped in a vicious circle of violence. Azyumardi regreted that this vicious circle has been created within the state apparatus, creating the impression of state terrorism confronting non-state actors of terrorism. Azyumardi is also disappointed that such views are further reinforced with religious narratives such as the story of Jalut versus Thalut Daud in the Quran or Goliath versus David in the biblical story (Azra, 2020: 118). Azyumardi believed that the religious psychology involved in this violence could create a religious backlash among religious communities, which may then be attributed to the perpetrators of violence.

Because of this, Azyumardi considered a socio-cultural religious approach to address the spread of terrorism in Indonesia. However, as he is concerned, this socio-cultural religious approach faces challenges in the form of the reality in society, which experiences a disorientation of values or a crisis of values with the continued expansion of freedom of expression and the increasing exposure of Indonesian society to transnational practices. Azyumardi rejected approaches that only use local religious figures as "firefighters" when violence problems arise. For Azyumardi, handling such issues is still at an ad-hoc level compared to comprehensive handling of violent practices, especially those based on religion (Azra, 2020: 119).

In this context, Azyumardi emphasized the need to revitalize the socio-cultural approach to religion by actively providing opportunities for social, cultural, and religious leadership. It is crucial to establish social solidarity among leaders in these domains to effectively address various forms of violence, including terrorism (Azra, 2020: 120). Furthermore, for effective

empowerment, national collaboration among socio-cultural and religious leaders is essential to move away from ad-hoc approaches and embrace a more comprehensive strategy.

Azyumardi asserted that terrorism should not be seen as mere opposition, but rather as the violent delegitimization of power. He categorized the perpetrators of terrorist acts as followers of *Khawarij* or neo-*Khawarij* (Azra, 2020: 134). *Khawarij* is an extremist and radical group that emerged after the time of the Prophet, during a major turmoil (*al-fitnah al-kubra*) which resulted in a civil war in 657 between the followers of Caliph Uthman bin Affan under the leadership of Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan and those of Ali bin Abi Talib and his supporters. The idea of achieving peace between conflicting parties using the Quran was dismissed by some of Ali's followers, who then identified as *Khawarij*, the faction that broke away from the Islamic community. They then carried out various subversive actions by killing state leaders who for them did not carry out God's sovereignty (*hakimmiyah*) (Azra, 2020: 135). In the view of the *Khawarij*, they had apostatized, and therefore had to be fought by any means, including violence.

Azyumardi believed that terrorist groups in Indonesia changing their target operandi, from Westerners to leaders or state officials, is containing this neo-*Khawarij* ideology. They consider that old-style actions do not produce any political consequences, other than public anger. By targeting state leaders and officials, at least political instability will emerge, which they can exploit to achieve the goal of building an Islamic state (*daulah Islamiyah*). For Azyumardi, this neo-*Khawarij* ideology and movement has no place in the understanding and traditions of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* which is adhered to by the majority of Indonesian Muslim society. He believed that the neo-*Khawarij* movement has only a small chance of developing in Indonesia (Azra, 2020: 135-136).

Azyumardi asserted that by casting the issue of terrorism within the framework of democracy, the government becomes an active participant. He criticized the government's handling of terrorism as weak, particularly highlighting the efforts of the police, specifically Densus 88, in capturing movement leaders and retraining former terrorists for deradicalization.

Notwithstanding these efforts, Azyumardi contended that this approach is insufficient as a comprehensive solution. He argues that such measures are ineffective and provide easy opportunities for terrorist groups to regroup.

Azyumardi unequivocally advocated for the implementation of the "universal movement against terrorism," emphasizing the need for a comprehensive, integrated effort from all sectors of society, including the government, social organizations (ormas), communities, and families (Azra, 2020: 133). He stressed the imperative of addressing this issue at various levels—not only nationally, but also locally, regionally, and internationally. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, as a government institution, must prioritize prevention and rehabilitation programs through religious education to provide accurate explanations of various religious aspects, particularly concerning *jihad*. To realize this initiative, the Ministry of Religious Affairs can collaborate with Islamic social organizations to train religious educators to work in prisons and within the broader community. Furthermore, the Ministry of Religious Affairs can partner with the Ministry of National Education to conduct educational outreach in schools, madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools, and even universities (Azra, 2020: 133, Azra, 2020: 202).

Azra emphasized the crucial role of religious leaders in addressing violence and terrorism. Despite acknowledging existing leadership crises in social, cultural, and religious realms, Azra remained optimistic about Indonesia's potential to strengthen social cohesion. Through the revitalization of such leadership, he believed that communities can effectively renew their social fabric. Azra advocated for the transformation of actors and groups into a robust and widespread system that can thwart the spread of violence and terrorism. He stressed that these social-cultural leaders, through their national and local social-religious organizations, possess the moral authority required to prevent violence and promote peace for the greater good of Indonesia. Azra also underscored the importance of the Ministry of Education and Culture, in addition to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in supporting these initiatives. He viewed the active involvement of

the state alongside mass actors and organizations in society as crucial in this regard.

Aside from the cultural approach, Azyumardi also presented a socioeconomic approach to addressing the issue of terrorism. For Azyumardi, terrorism is not only caused by religious factors, but also involves economic vulnerability among its perpetrators. However, he is unfirmly believe that there is a clear correlation between terrorism and the economy, but rather that economically vulnerable communities are more susceptible to exposure to terrorism. Therefore, as a form of prevention, socio-economic empowerment of the relevant communities is crucial, especially for vulnerable youth who are at high risk of being influenced by terrorist ideas. This approach can prevent both the destruction of the country and self-infliction.

Azyumardi also promoted social assistance for suspected terrorists (Azra, 2020: 135), those who are released from prison should not be left without jobs. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Transmigration play crucial roles on it. Early personal approaches can also bring society closer to non-violence values. The effort aims to remove their negative stigma as former inmates and to enhance their knowledge, skills, and capital to start a business (Azra, 2020: 137).

In such bad conditions, former terrorism convicts are more vulnerable to relapse into committing acts of terrorism. For this reason, the Ministry of Immigration also needs to collaborate with ministries that oversee micro, small and medium enterprises (UMKM) and State-Owned Enterprises (BUMN) to facilitate training, distribution of employment opportunities and capital for former terrorist perpetrators (Azra, 2020 : 120). Azyumardi emphasized that a personal approach can provide greater space for the internationalization of deeper understanding. These efforts were put forward by Azyumardi to restore their self-esteem as human beings, so that they have the courage to resist various temptations and brainwashing attempts to take the path of becoming terrorists.

3.5 Containing Self Radicalization

Azyumardi viewed terrorism as a growing phenomenon. Almost every period of government there have been acts of terrorism, since the terrorist act of hijacking the Garuda GA

26 in Bangkok in 1981, the first and second Bali bombs, the bomb at the JW Marriot Hotel, and acts of terrorism that targeted government institutions. Apart from changes in targets, the terrorist movement in Azyumardi's view, is also developing in its subject matter. He gave the example of an act of terrorism carried out by RM (24) at the Medan Police Headquarters which resulted in injuries to several people nearby. Previously, at least until the early 2000s, acts of terrorism were carried out in flocks of wolves movement. However, since the 2010s, a trend has emerged of terrorist perpetrators as lone wolves who carry out their own suicide bombings. As of 2019, there were no less than 46 lone wolf terrorist suspects arrested by the police spread across several regions, such as Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan. Some of them were caught in an ambush, surrendered themselves, or resisted (Azra, 2020: 125).

Apart from changing from gangs to acting alone, Azyumardi highlighted the involvement of women in acts of terrorism. For example, in Bekasi, West Java, the involvement of women in acts of terrorism began with the arrest of Dian Yulian Novita in the Densus 88 operation. Azyumardi placed the involvement of women in terrorist acts within the framework of "feminization of radicalism" or "feminization of radical movements", or "feminization of terrorism". For Azyumardi, this symptom is a "contradictio-in-terminis" or reversal of feminist terminology which refers to gender equality and is not associated with violence, but rather tenderness. Azyumardi discovered the fact that many acts of terrorism carried out by men were encouraged by their wives. The wives of terrorist acts are active in communicating during direct visits and via social media (Azra, 2020: 127).

On his view, ties like this strengthen their practice in acts of terrorism, caused by the oath of allegiance or allegiance between them is no longer carried out through face-to-face meetings, but simply through online networks, such as what the Jamaah Ansharud Dawlah (JAD) network did when carrying out allegiance with the Islamic State (IS). Azyumardi assessed that the spread of radical ideology in contemporary times is faster than in previous times, since religious revivalism gained momentum in the 1980s. There are two factors that make it easier to spread, namely easier and cheaper access to

travel between countries, and more instant access to communication through online media, both through television networks and social media (Azra, 2020: 126).

Azyumardi mainstreamed the government's serious efforts to block social media used by terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), through the Ministry of Communication and Information (Kominfo) seriously. He believed that ISIS and similar terrorist organizations are using the online world cleverly to expand their networks. Therefore, he considered the blocking of radical-oriented websites to be reasonable. In dealing with this issue, Azyumardi emphasized the importance of considering the opinions of religious leaders (Azra, 2020: 150). In his view, terrorism strengthens the relationship between countries and religions by involving religious experts. The involvement of religious leaders who have mastery over various Islamic thoughts and movements is crucial for the state in addressing this issue. He believed that mere site blocking is not enough and that it is necessary to consider the judgment of religious experts rather than just tracking specific keywords such as "ISIS" or "radical," which may target the wrong objectives.

Media content blocking, according to Azyumardi, should involve the wasathiyah Islamic paradigm as the dominant practice of Indonesian Muslims. In this context, the renewal of Islam in Indonesia cannot occur through radical movements, such as the Padri movement in the early 19th century or Darul Islam Indonesia/Tentara Islam Indonesia (DII/TII), but rather through evolution and peacefully. Movements like Padri, in his view, will only lead to failure. Therefore, strengthening Islamic-based organizations is essential and should be empowered by the state, including in considering the blocking of radical sites. Therefore, counter responses through the virtual world should also include the entities of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), Pancasila, and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, which constitute the final commitment of the Indonesian Muslim community. Involvement is crucial because if we approach radicalism retrospectively, radical ideology may infiltrate movements that initially began as evolutionary and peaceful. For example, in the Padri

movement, radical views emerged from the infiltration of Wahhabi ideology brought by individuals who had studied in Arabia within the Syattariyah Sufi order, which was evolutionary.

Hence, for Azyumardi, some activists from several Islamic organizations who claim that the government's blocking of radical sites is an attempt to restrict the Islamic movement are making a false claim. These claims are generalizations that need to be reconsidered, as they can attract sympathy or condone the actors of radical ideas through websites containing radical ideologies, concepts, and practices. Azyumardi places defensive claims of the Muslim community as a "besieged ummah". In this belief, terrorist and radical movements are seen as resistance against a foreign conspiracy aimed at destroying the Muslim community. In this context, the government is often seen as a foreign party involved in the conspiracy.

In responding to terrorism that contains a strong narrative of violence, Azyumardi's thoughts reflect the view of Islam as being moderate, strengthening the state as an active subject. In this perspective, we can also see how terrorism serves to strengthen the relationship between the state and the religious community. This relationship is mutualistic; it strengthens the state on one hand and preserves the evolutionary character of the Muslim community in Indonesia on the other. The idea of Islam as an evolving movement is the central point of Azyumardi's thought regarding the necessity of the presence of the modern state as a political practice and the development of the quality of Muslims as the majority community in Indonesia.

3.6 Religion Roles in Civic Education

In Azyumardi's view, state involvement, apart from involving religious leaders and mass organizations, needs to involve the network of campuses in Indonesia. The involvement of scholars in acts of terrorism is another symptom that has received Azyumardi's attention, such as the graduate from the Tarbiyah Faculty of the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta in 2001 who was the mastermind behind the planned bombing in the Serpong area, Banten, or the involvement of several Malang Muhammadiyah Universities (UMM). The involvement of these scholars began in the

1990s to early 2000s when the massive NII movement recruited active students on various campuses in Indonesia.

In considering this matter, Azyumardi explained that these symptoms can be found in various types of campuses, both public universities (PTU) and Islamic higher education institutions (PTAI). However, basing his assessment on various findings, Azyumardi believed that public universities are generally more vulnerable to exposure to radical ideas compared to Islamic higher education institutions, which are accustomed to diverse perspectives on Islam and therefore tend to be more open (Azra, 2020: 105). Essentially, Azyumardi is not questioning freedom of speech on campuses, but scholars who are oriented towards radical movements are concerned about the evolutionary character of Islam in Indonesia.

Azyumardi explained the paradoxical factors behind the presence of radical ideas on campus. The first paradox, the authoritarianism of the Soeharto government has led to the emergence of extreme movements on campus, both from the left and the right (Azra, 2020: 106). Since the early 1970s, right-wing extremist cells have been actively recruiting on campuses. Azyumardi highlights the concept of usrah or kinship as the conceptual framework for viewing this network, which rejects the absolutism of Soeharto. This usrah movement perceives the Soeharto government as thagut or an idol that needs to be destroyed (Azra, 2020: 106). At first glance, this concept appears similar to the left-wing movement that sought to overthrow the Soeharto government, but it is imbued with strong religious elements, leading to the perception that Islam is closely associated with violent ideology. One way this movement rejects the thagut Soeharto government is by symbolically burning national identity cards and refusing to marry through the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), instead choosing to marry through their own leader or amir. This extreme movement not only targets the corrupt government, but also damages relationships with well-established religious institutions.

The second factor highlighted by Azyumardi in triggering this extreme movement was post-Soeharto freedom and democracy which opened space for them to re-strengthen

their position on campus (Azra, 2020: 17). Their movement also found a place when there were not many alternatives due to the decline of leftist movements on campus. Radical groups then embedded their cells on campus more strongly with religious understandings that were very different from mainstream Indonesian Islam and carried out acts of violence and law violations, such as kidnapping, acts of terror, theft, and even attempted treason.

To prevent this movement from growing massively, Azyumardi did not use a repressive approach, like the New Order, and did not give them complete freedom, but instead made efforts to strengthen religious understanding through education. This thought is an evolutionary and peaceful cultural approach in accordance with the characteristics of mainstream Wasathiyah Islam. This kind of understanding is also a counterideological approach that does not approach it with other forms of violence. According to Azyumardi, the revitalization of relevant and ideological courses in higher education needs to be strengthened again, namely courses related to Pancasila, civic education and religion (Azra, 2020: 107).

Azyumardi viewed Pancasila as the basis for the state to have a marginal place in society, including in universities. To provide Pancasila as a counter ideological function to radical understanding, Azyumardi believed that courses related to Pancasila must be placed not as academic discourse, but as ideological discourse, so that citizens gain an understanding of responsibility. For him, changing Pancasila Philosophy into a Pancasila subject is very necessary so that we don't become marginalized. Another course that he thinks is important is the Citizenship course which was mostly abolished after Soeharto (Azra, 2020: 107).

The subject of civic education is closely related to strengthening the national perspective. Azyumardi emphasized the importance of the religion course in countering radical ideological understanding. He believed that the religion course should not just repeat theological-normative teachings but should also provide reinforcement of the religious-national perspective that interpreted as a civic education. Furthermore, he oriented the religion course towards strengthening an intellectual attitude towards religious diversity, thus reinforcing

tolerance within and between religions. Azyumardi strategically placed these three courses for internalization into the character of moderate (wasathiyah) scholars. Indoctrinative learning, such as the Pancasila Ideology Education (P4) training, needs to be carried out in a dialogical manner by the New Order regime, involving role modeling and role playing.

In relation to education, Azyumardi explored his thought to revitalizing student organizations—intra and extra-campus—to strengthen the practice of teaching religion as civic education. For him, student organizations has a good potential to serve as a shield against the ideology of radical religious beliefs (Azra, 2020: 108). Azyumardi considered student organizations such as the Student Executive Board (BEM) important for engaging in political activism, such as demonstrations and other forms of protest. However, he highlighted the decline in activism within these student organizations, including the Islamic Student Association—Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI), the Indonesian Islamic Student Movement—Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (PMII), the Muhammadiyah Student Association—Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM), the Union of Indonesian Muslim Student Action—Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia (KAMMI), the Indonesian National Student Movement—Gerakan Mahasiswa Nasional Indonesia (GMNI), the Association of Catholic Students of the Republic of Indonesia (PMKRI)—Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Katolik Republik Indonesia, and the Indonesian Christian Student Movement (GMKI)—Gerakan Mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia, which can prevent the infiltration of radical religious ideologies. Drawing on research from the Center for Islamic Studies and Society (PPIM) at UIN Jakarta and the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture (CSRC) at UIN Jakarta, Azyumardi showed that activism and membership in these organizations can prevent students from being drawn into radical and extremist movements. On the contrary, non-activist university students who tend to be bookworms are at a high risk of being easily influenced by radical indoctrination, because their naive and lack analytical thinking, unlike students involved in activism. Consequently, Azyumardi prioritized religious education as civic education within the student organizations,

recognizing its significant role in combating radical ideologies.

4. CONCLUSION

Azyumardi's moderate Islamic political awareness, regarding his thoughts on anti-violence, served as a converging point the historical demographic reality of Indonesia predominantly Muslim, his experiences in domestic and global movement, and the long-standing idea of democracy developing in Indonesia. Azyumardi positioned Islam as a historical experience that can be accessed by various spectrums, rather than as a politically absolutized belief. In understanding the concept of anti-violence, he prioritized the idea of "Indonesian Islam" as his middle path political thought, holds distinctive attributes in politics and culture.

Azyumardi placed his endeavour within the framework of revitalizing Islam, involving various socio-political forces to form social cohesion. In his view, the revitalization of Islam is an effective way to address the practices of violence as a problem of democracy in Indonesia through Islam as a historical reality of the religion embraced by the majority of the population that serve as a foundation for future democratization in Indonesia.

The intellectual discourse on the revitalization of Islam promoted by Azyumardi is not built upon conflict or war, but rather on the lack of intellectual progress among the Muslim community in Indonesia concerning democracy. Azyumardi argued that a narrow-pragmatic interpretation of Islam within the context of democracy has trapped the Indonesian Muslim community in ignorance. The lack of knowledge or limited education among some Muslim communities in Indonesia sets a boundary for the effectiveness of Islam in shaping democracy. In this context, democratic education becomes a crucial consideration in presenting the middle path of Islamic political thought, that Azyumardi viewed as beneficial. Through democratic education, the middle path of Islamic politics can move towards its ideal point, prioritizing the revitalization of the state and religion in his thoughts.

Azyumardi's thoughts on anti-violence, which are one of the four frameworks of

religious moderation, emphasized the concept of *wasatiyyah* in Islam, reinforcing the state as an active subject. He placed the state as the highest moral authority in fostering social harmony, with state elites as the main subjects of political reform, and religion serving as civic education. Thus, the "besieged ummah" narrative, often drives violent practices, does not become the main discourse for the community when engaging with the state or anything outside the community's beliefs.

Azyumardi clearly referred to the nomenclature of the *ummatah wasathan* (Qur'an, 2:143) as the theological basis for the revitalization of Islam. He defined the revitalization of Islam, an important aspect of the political ideology of the middle path of Islam, as the endeavour of the community to be in the middle. In his view, the middle position is politically the best position (*khayr umur awshatuha*). His transcendent belief in the *ummatah wasathan* served as a measure for assessing the quality of democracy in Indonesia.

The idea of Islam as an evolutionary movement is at the center of Azyumardi's thought regarding the necessity of the presence of the modern state as a political practice and the development of the quality of Muslims as the majority society in Indonesia. The active role of the state as a subject brings mutualistic implications in its relationship with society, strengthening the state's position on one hand and preserving the evolutionary character of the Indonesian Muslim community on the other.

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