

## Article

# “Digital Resources Are Not Reliable”: Peer-Group-Based Intellectualism among Muslim Youth Activists in Bima, Eastern Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This article explores the sources of Islamic knowledge among young Muslim activists in Bima, Eastern Indonesia, who are often stereotyped as a hotbed of radicalism, and their religious types to reveal their intellectual dynamics. This article argues that, in modern times, as Islamic tendencies and orientations have diversified, young Muslims in the Bima region engage with many different aspects of the production and use of religious knowledge under the umbrella of Indonesian Islam. Moreover, they actively build peer-group-based intellectualism, fostering patron–client connections in the form of discussion and literacy development through student organizations, and this is influential in shaping their religious identities and religious types. This qualitative research involved 47 young Muslim activists, who are also senior high school and university students, 20 of whom were interviewed in-depth, while 27 others participated in focus group discussions. This research reveals that their sources of learning vary. However, the most critical media in shaping and confirming their religious understanding are the training and discussions held by their respective peer groups and organizations. Their literacy and references are also further developed through these forums. Learning resources accessed via social media are considered essential but unreliable in this digital era. Therefore, in their intellectual development, young persons need teachers and families to act as learning resource providers that co-exist with the literacy obtained through organizations. Such sources and ways of learning form a type of religiosity that is “practical” (embodied in daily practice) for most. Meanwhile, the “ideological” type of religion (fundamental to the Islamization movement) is only found in right-wing activists of Islamic organizations and does not thrive among the young people of Bima, Eastern Indonesia.

**Keywords:** intellectualism; peer group based; student organization; practical; ideological; religiosity



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## 1. Introduction

Several studies have underlined that social media has become the dominant source of religious literacy for millennials and has displaced the roles of schools, teachers, and parents (Syahputra and Hafiar 2019; Briandana et al. 2020). Consequently, there is a concern that their religious understanding is shallow and that their intellectualism is weakly formed, which makes them more vulnerable to extremist and radicalistic thought (Muneera and Ameer 2017; Islam 2019).

To understand current Muslim youth literacy and activism from a different perspective, this study focuses on how local movements and new trends in Islam intersect with Muslim youth activism in Bima, which is located in the eastern region Sumbawa Island, one of the two main islands in West Nusatenggara. Sumbawa is 275 km long and 90 km wide, and its total land area is 133,300 square kilometres.

Aiming to explore the basics and formations of intellectual mobilization among Muslim youth activists in the local Bimanese context, this study contributes to a better under-

standing of current Muslim intellectual movements in pluralistic Muslim societies. With its historical background as the former Bima Sultanate, Bima is considered a Muslim society in the archipelago wherein Islam is embedded in everyday life (Sila 2021). Hitchcock (1996) stated that Bima and the Bimanese show the continued significance of indigenous regional cultures and are exemplars of Indonesian Islam. Thus, Bima offers various local contexts that form particular intellectual practices and identities.

This research refers to the definition offered by van Bruinessen (2013), who distinguishes between conservatism, fundamentalism, and Islamism. The “Conservative” tradition adheres to interpretations based on established doctrines and social rules and rejects reinterpretations made by modernist, liberal, and progressive groups. They usually reject Western feminist based gender equality issues and those who question the authority of established interpretations. Moreover, they refuse a hermeneutical approach to religious texts. Meanwhile, “fundamentalists” are those who base their religious understanding on a literal and rigid interpretation of the primary sources of Islamic teachings: the Qur’an and Hadith. This group is similar to conservatives in terms of rejecting hermeneutical interpretations and movements that defend the human rights of minorities, but they view some established teaching practices as contentious if there is no basis in the Qur’an and Hadith. However, “Islamists”, which we define as “ideological Islam”, see Islam as a systematic and established political system and therefore want Islam to be the basis of the state.

Bruinessen does not give a specific meaning to radicalism but he explains that Salafism, which tends to be conservative and fundamentalist, influences almost all radical movements and organizations in Solo, Central Java. So, in this paper, radicalism means more of a method, that is, if the aforementioned groups resort to violence to realize or maintain their values and beliefs. Moderate is used in this paper in reference to Islam that pays attention to the local cultural context, upholds nationalism, and promotes tolerance and anti-violence for Indonesia’s diversity.

Intellectual movements in Indonesia were initially associated with colonial resistance and the independence movement, which began in the early twenty-first century. The conditions imposed by Dutch rule were central to intellectual movements in pre-independence Indonesia, including the Ethical Policy, the emergence of socio-political and cultural associations, and the growth of study clubs (Niam 2010). In addition, Lapidus (2012) mentioned examples of socio-political and cultural associations such as *Boedi Oetomo*, *Indische Partji*, *Pudjangga Baroe*, and *Taman Siswa*, the latter of which founded 250 schools and created a community of students and teachers to strengthen aspirations to achieve independence. The growth of intellectual groups, in turn, played a significant role in establishing new sovereignty under the Soekarno regime and continued during the Soeharto era.

The involvement of intellectuals in the public sphere motivated them to maximally contribute to the development of Muslim society, including through political processes (Abdillah 1997). However, according to Zarkasyi (2008), Muslim intellectuals progressively depoliticized following the fall of Soeharto, impacting the emergence of various study groups and student organizations on university campuses and many more Islamic political parties (Federspiel 1999).

The contemporary socio-political mobilization and cultural transformation in the post-Soeharto era interplayed with religious discourse and orientation dynamics, especially among the youth. Several studies have been conducted to show how the changing political circumstances of the 1990s promoted the rapid evolution of socio-religious movements, establishing current trends in Indonesian Islam, such as post-secular Islam, hybrid Islam, Internet Islam, Salafism, and Islamic populism (Zulian et al. 2021). For example, Ibrahim (2018) pointed out that current political change has provided “a time of possibility” for religious creativity, namely “improvisational Islam”, which is defined as unconventional forms of religious practices that mark attempts to reconcile religion with secular liberalism (Zakaria 2020). In addition, Hasan (2009, 2012a) investigates the extent to which this situation has developed an Indonesian Muslim middle class, which demonstrates the

vitality of Islam as a system of symbolism and identity as it is actualized through Salafi activism. The Salafi movement has been organizing various *dakwah* (preaching) activities on university campuses and in local mosques, bringing Islam back to the public space (Hasan 2007) as well as addressing millennials and forming a women's group called *Salafi-Niqabi* (veiled Salafist women) (Sunesti et al. 2018).

Furthermore, these circumstances have created new modes of knowledge production, wherein social media serves as a tool to establish social movements and create identities. Ardhiyanto (2018) has shown that social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are involved in the socio-historical process that underlies the rise of pious youth in contemporary Indonesian urban spaces. Thus, social media has become a productive space for developing religious populism in Indonesia (Solahudin and Fakhruroji 2020). Moreover, Duraesa and Ahyar (2021) highlighted the cultural forms of religious articulation among youth activists, discovering the relationship between Islamic discourse and popular culture that has resulted in Islamic populism/popularism.

Other relevant research about Indonesian and Muslim youth has been conducted from different perspectives and places. Nilan (2006) found that Indonesian youth, represented by the youth in Makassar and Yogyakarta, are mainly influenced by the external global culture and the internal discourses on the traditions deriving from local ethnic and religious practices. Their piety is situated within the flourishing of Islamic revivalism and Western culture, which has affected their ways of seeing their complex worlds. Hakam (2010) investigated a Muslim youth organization called *Remaja Islam Sunda Kelapa* (Muslim Youth of Sunda Kelapa) in Jakarta regarding religiosity, identity, style, and movement. The study shows the diverse identities among the youth and how they manage to move flexibly by offering a good balance between being Muslim and having urban lifestyles. Contrary to the popular discourse on religious movements' potential as political movements, the *Remaja Islam Sunda Kelapa* features a distinctive and, to a great extent, social approach because they do not see religion as necessarily concomitant with a political agenda.

In his study on two Muslim student organizations, *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* (Campus Proselytization Association) and *Forum Mahasiswa Ciputat* (Ciputat Student Forum), Ibrahim (2018) presents the notion of religious creativity, which is defined as unconventional forms of religious practices that mark attempts to reconcile religion with secular liberalism. This titular concept in his work acts as an analytical perspective into the bifurcated community of Indonesian Muslim youths that self-identify as activists of what they perceive to be the "right" interpretation of Islam but whose everyday actions fragment into a complex mass of inconsistencies. Meanwhile, Nisa (2021) focuses on young Muslim women in diverse campus movements in Makassar who are followers of contemporary Islamist and Salafi movements, exploring how they negotiate and shape the public sphere to adjust to their agendas. This study explores the role of university mosques, serving as a public sphere where multiple voices of Islam in Indonesia interact, in accommodating various versions of Islamic understanding and practices, including in producing female "imams" regarding the crisis of mosque authority.

The studies mentioned above insightfully contextualize intellectual mobilization, mainly focusing on changing social processes and the emergence of new modes of knowledge production and religious articulation among Muslim youth in contemporary Indonesia. This study builds on previous research to explain how Muslim youth from different areas of Indonesia seek to establish intellectual capacities and movements in the current context wherein social media has become central to knowledge production.

This study was conducted via observations, interviews, and focus group discussions during the period 2019–2021 involving extracurricular organizational activists in Bima. The main subjects in this study comprised 47 people from senior high schools and university students, 20 of whom were interviewed in depth, and the other 27 subjects were involved in focus group discussions.<sup>1</sup> In addition, other subjects comprising several parents, teachers, writers, and caregivers at Islamic boarding schools were interviewed on their influences on the formation of thoughts and behaviours among youth activists.

## 2. Intellectual Engagement of Muslim Youth in Bima

### 2.1. Historical Background

Bima is an ethnic group in Sumbawa Island in the eastern part of West Nusatenggara, Eastern Indonesia, which includes two administrative regions, namely *Kabupaten Bima* (Bima Regency) and *Kota Bima* (Bima City). The two regions of Bima inherited the territory of the *Kesultanan Bima* (Bima Sultanate) that existed in the 17th–20th centuries; therefore, it is considered part of the Muslim community. Bringing together eastern Indonesia and western Indonesia, Bima is a cultural area with a distinctive character in which cultures of all levels coexist and share the same opportunities in life. The Bima community is an open society to the outsiders. On the one hand, this triggers cultural maturation and enrichment and, on the other hand, makes this an area of intense cultural conflict.

Intellectual movements in Bima have been contoured by the struggles between various social segments, involving conflicts and integrations. Hitchcock (1996) showed that such conflicts have occurred across three areas: religion, between Muslims and Christians in Mbawa; ethnicity, between Melayu and *non-pribumi* (non-indigenous) such as Chinese; and geography, between lowland and highland dwellers. Prager (2010) found that conflict also occurs within the Bimanese Muslim society involving puritan groups and traditionalists. Most Puritans affiliated with Muhammadiyah, who gained a new vision of Islam from Arabia during their pilgrimage to Makkah, aim to remove Islamic practices from pre-Islamic syncretic influences. Therefore, conflicts often occur between the two groups of Muslims, leading to the hegemony of the puritan group over traditionalists in most areas of Bima. Wahid (2015, 2019) found exceptions to this rivalry in several remote areas, such as Mbawa in Donggo, where they tend to collaborate against the penetration of Christianity.

Such hegemony of Islamic Puritans fosters a particular character of Islam in Bima that is seen as both orthodox (Peacock 1979) and fanatic (Muller 1997). This situation can be seen as part of a conservative turn, as van Bruinessen (2013) signalled, which is a tendency to oppose contemporary progressive and liberal ways of thinking. It is also a form of religious revivalism that is widespread across several Muslim countries, particularly among youth (van Bruinessen 2013). For several Muslim communities in Indonesia, this Islamic orthodoxy has the appeal of being an ordered ideological framework, which serves as a defence mechanism against sociocultural modernization (Kiem 1993). As such, how does this perspective contextualize the rise of the new generation of Muslim activists in Bima?

Bimanese Muslim youth activists, as reflected by most of the informants in this study, demonstrate an enthusiastic approach by involving themselves in student organizations. Moreover, some are active in multiple organizations, combining intra-campus and extra-campus organizations. For example, the activists of *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* mostly have backgrounds in the *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia* (Indonesian Islamic Student Movement), *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* (Muslim Student Association), or *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah* (Muhammadiyah Student Association), while *Forum Umat Islam* consists of activists from *Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia* and *Muslim Student Association*. This involvement in such religious-based student organizations is mainly driven by a need to fulfil and articulate their commitment to Islam as their religion.

Nevertheless, religious commitments vary from one individual to another. Some may perceive that loving Islam also means loving the sublime values of Bimanese culture, where these two elements are embedded. This is why some individuals also intensely engage in cultural communities and discourses to properly interact with socio-cultural progressiveness.

*Halaqah* (religious gathering) and *dakwah* are important categories for the social theological functioning of Indonesian Islam, as shown in this article. *Halaqah* signifies three learning processes: recognizing one's identity as a Muslim; strengthening communal Muslim identity; and jointly striving for Islamic doctrine to be implemented in action (Latif 2010, p. 66). *Halaqah* is one of the *dakwah* activities. Both terms are politically synonymous

with Islamic political movements targeting ideological Muslim activists (Hasan 2012b) but are also practically used by other activist groups.

The intellectual passion among Muslim youth is reflected in their strong enthusiasm for joining organizations to seek in-depth Islamic knowledge and practices. With this knowledge, they become involved in cadre training, follow-up or upgrading, discussions, *halaqah*, Qur'anic recitations, scientific seminars, and advocacy toward social issues. They also access knowledge through open resources, alternating between Bima's minimal public libraries and bookstores. These young Muslims also access books through friendship networks, organizational encounters, and online.

The image of Bima's past as a former sultanate that has implemented Islamic law combined with customary law remains in public memory, including among youth. Thus, imagining the return of the old Bima with an Islamic flair has become a historical romanticism. Erniwati, 23, an activist of *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* stated the following:

It is necessary to do 'jihad' which meant not of sweeping or offering violations toward *kafir* (unbeliever), but of strengthening minds toward Islamic concepts on society. It is needed to seed proper Islamic understanding, maintain Bimanese culture, and revitalize Islamic-customary law that has been applied in the past. (Interview with Erniwati 2020, 3 January)

The idea of returning to Islam also resonates with Muslim youth, indicated by their notion that Islam in Bima has faded and been replaced with contemporary trends of mixed thinking, such as liberalism and conservatism, which have led people to form blurred identities. Young people also experience a crisis of communal identity and feel indecisive within the wider community, leading them to reimagine the path of finding identity through social activism. Therefore, they have inherited the character of the previous decade's generation of Muslim activists who, as Madrid (1999) described, were moderate, influenced by their perception of the past, organizational autonomy, and involvement in the democratization campaign in Indonesia and, hence, need a dialog.

Most of the informants in this study based their involvement in student organizations on the idealization of society. Their willingness to improve the current situation resulted from historical memories transmitted across generations. Consequently, re-Islamization is considered a way out of various contemporary problems of morality experienced by young people. This moral panic has led to the *dakwah* (Islamic preaching) movement among youth (Kailani 2011; Parker 2014). The image of re-Islamization can be perceived in the very high interest of religious schools among the Bimanese and their willingness to attend *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), even though some *pesantren*, as Malik (2017) pointed out, eventually nurture radical thoughts and actions.

Such intellectual journeys also illustrate the openness among Muslim youth, energizing them to continue looking for channels of gaining knowledge and self-maturation from various resources. This explanation indicates that, on the one hand, they have progressive and non-fanatic attitudes, and, on the other hand, suggests there is room for accepting new trends such as the transnational movement, which is increasingly popular among youth. For example, many young Muslims listen to Dr. Zakir Naik, an Indian Islamic preacher and public speaker known for his speeches on comparative religion and Islamic theology. Although his videos are in English, he impresses Muslim youth in Bima because of his *dakwah* actions with a debating approach that influences his opponents into following his call to Islam. The sense of heroism in his *dakwah* performances appeals to young people.

The diversity of backgrounds and levels of commitment to Islam have influenced Muslim youths' understanding of and views on issues. As a result, their religious views tend to be ambiguous or inconsistent, reflecting their intellectual journeys or processes of becoming, which are quite dynamic among the Muslim youth in Bima, and showing the styles and directions of their religious understanding and practices.

## 2.2. The Contemporary Youth Intellectual Odyssey

The above social and educational atmospheres provide a unique environment for the growth of Muslim youth activists in Bima. Re-Islamization lacks direction due to the weak capacities of its authorities and agents. The authority of the *Tuan Guru* (Islamic clergy) in Bima is fading and is not being replaced by the new clergies. The emergence of Muslim scholars in Islamic higher education has not successfully filled the void of religious authority. Furthermore, the rise in the number of religious schools and Islamic boarding schools has not necessarily produced human resources that can form connections between Muslim generations. These circumstances contextualize the rise of new Muslim activists, fostering them to pursue alternative educations with modern nuances. The latter notion allows them to explore religious understanding freely through open resources. Some may have met the need for religious understanding to respond to their current problems; some may still need to.

Family- or community-based teachings and social-media-based teaching play an essential role in providing religious understanding to activists (Wildan and Qibtiyah 2020). Likewise, lectures via television and YouTube content have substituted the *tablig* (public recitations). One of the *Kerohanian* (spiritual) Islam activists we interviewed demonstrated his notion of a proper Islamic attitude by referring to the *dakwah* content on YouTube. He also reads religious books as they can make up for the deficiency in facilities. In addition, Fikrah demonstrated a creative way of gaining religious knowledge by visiting different seniors with excellent home libraries. For him, online resources are beneficial but usually unreliable (interview with Fikrah 2020, 1 January).

Those attending religious schools are more fortunate due to the guidance from educational instructions within the curriculum and textbooks available. If they require references from those books, they have religious teachers who are readily available to discuss with them. For example, *Madrasah Aliyah Negeri* (State Islamic Senior High School) in Bima has installed a group of competent teachers to become students' partners in discussing religious issues outside classroom hours. Jauhari, a teacher in this group, revealed that, in addition to his position as deputy principal, he also acts as a student's conversation partner to deal with his concerns about the lack of Islamic teaching. He sees many students who have a great desire to learn about religion; however, Jauhari states that their understanding will only be complete using social media if it is balanced with other authoritative sources, such as competent teachers (interview with Jauhari 2020, 7 January). Another *Madrasah Aliyah Negeri* in Bima applied a similar notion that focuses on making the program *Iman dan Taqwa* (Faith and Piety) into a student dialog forum. An informant in this study acknowledged teacher–student dialog as influencing their religious understanding and directing how they translate it into their daily lives (interview with Fahri 2019, 29 December).

Religious insight among university students is seemingly conducive to a more independent character, characterized by patterns of understanding provided by the serial training conducted by student organizations. They still connect their understanding with the figures they emulate to maintain intellectual connections. However, they are more intense in conducting internal discussions based on the works of intellectual figures. They also invite seniors as resource persons to these discussions, functioning as a space to communicate and find solutions to various questions in the search for knowledge.

These organizational characteristics have formed the interaction patterns of activists with the wider world and influenced how they think and understand religion. For example, informants with *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* and *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia* backgrounds tended to have an open mind in understanding contemporary discourses. They were more optimistic about issues concerning the Islamic world, human rights, and pluralism because the two organizations have matured with national issues, especially regarding the relationship between the state and Islam, since the development of the neo-modernist style of thought during the New Order. This style of thought revolves around two pivotal role models: Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur) for *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* and Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) for *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*. Barton

(1999) indicated that they have both unified traditionalism and modernism into one path because of their moderate, liberal, and progressive way of thinking. *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam's* version of *Majelis Penyelamat Organisasi* (Council for Organization Saviour) is an exception since it rejects the Pancasila as the single principle of socio-political organizations in Indonesia (Gathmyr et al. 2018; Karim 1997).

This organizational affiliation among students is attractive as it is closely related to the formation of religious narratives and attitudes toward religious and national issues. The chairman of the Student Board at *Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah* (College for Islamic Education Studies), Sunan Giri Bima, a *Nahdlatul Ulama* (Awakening of Muslim Scholars)-based campus, is an activist of *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*. This is a unique situation because *Nahdlatul Ulama*-based campuses are usually not eligible for *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* activists, who are often considered non-*Nahdlatul Ulama*. According to Fikrah, the chairman, he achieved this position because of the similarity of thought between him and another *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* member and those from *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*. The two groups are both intensive readers of the works of Abdurraahman Wahid, Nucholish Madjid, Asghar Ali Engineer, Jalaluddin Rakhmat, Harun Nasution, Ali Shari'ati, and many other progressive liberal thinkers (interview with Fikrah 2020, 1 January).

This similarity dissolved the classical feud between these two organizations. To some extent, *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* activists can also meet *Pelajar Islam Indonesia* activists because the two groups are ideologically related but differ on how they respond to religious issues of pluralism. *Pelajar Islam Indonesia* in Bima follows the doctrine of *Islam ya'lu wala yu'la 'alaih* (Islam is higher than other religions). In the eyes of *Pelajar Islam Indonesia* activists, this claim of the religious superiority of Islam implies an attitude of struggle to uphold Islamic values anytime and anywhere (interview with Arfa 2020a, 2 January). Meanwhile, such a claim is loosely ambiguous in the *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* circles, where it is understood as an inherent aspect of Islam. However, it cannot be applied in the current Indonesian context (interview with Fikrah 2020, 1 January).

Patron–client relations among these moderate groups of activists (*Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*, *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*, and *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah*) provide an environment that has made intellectual encounters possible. These groups are more fortunate than those of left progressives at *Serikat Mahasiswa Indonesia* (Indonesian Student Union) and *Liga Mahasiswa Nasional Demokrasi* (Student League for National Democracy). The latter group cannot increase activities in universities in Bima, and their number of members has recently been decreasing, with a maximum of a hundred remaining. The lack of strong patrons and supportive environments on campuses in Bima has led to them operating through underground activism, small-scale demonstrations, and mass organizing in small communities (interview with Taufiq 2020, *Serikat Mahasiswa Indonesia* senior activist, 10 January).

This situation is similar to that of right-wing Islamic activist groups such as *Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia* and *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia*, the latter of which is currently prohibited by the government. As a result, many *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* activists have left this organization. In contrast, other groups have metamorphosed into other forms, such as *Muslimah Mbojo* and *Wahda Islamiyah* or hosting anonymous *halaqah* in city parks.

### 3. Religious Types and Narratives

The aforementioned modes of religious literacy have formed two general types of religiosity among Bimanese Muslim youth. The first type involves following a practical religion, consisting of those who have religious knowledge and implement it in their religious attitudes and social behaviour. They are diligent in daily praying, reading the Qur'an, studying religion, helping others, respecting their parents and elders, and the like. Nevertheless, they do not orientate these religious understandings and behaviours toward committing to social struggles, whether through *dakwah* or activism through organizations. This type is mostly populated by the students or alumni of religious schools (Islamic high schools and pesantren) who receive religious teachings through curriculum discipline,

even if they were not raised in religious families. This type also includes the members of religious families who practice religious discipline, even if they attend public schools.

The example of Hanafi represents this type of religiosity. Hanafi grew up in a less religious family. He encountered Islam when he attended the Pesantren al-Kautsar in Dompu and then Madrasah Aliyah, majoring in social studies. During his six years in religious school, he felt his religious passion rapidly increase to a stage of stability (settlement), not changing even though he had attended a secular public college. Later, when Hanafi studied at the *Sekolah Tinggi Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan* (College for Teacher Training and Education) in Bima, he engaged with the religious-based campus organization *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus*, which led him to gradually gain a strong vision of Islam and become a religious abider. He was interested in *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* since he saw that its activists differed from the activists of other organizations, especially in daily religious life. According to him, *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* activists seem more diligent, neat, and well organized. He then felt motivated to follow *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus*'s training series, religious lectures and activities until he finally became the head of *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus*. The influence of *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* was strong in shaping his religiosity because it provided a suitable environment for developing his religious passion. Praying five times a day is no longer a problem for him, and he and his *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* friends have acted as callers to influence other students into becoming obedient in worship. His internalization of this religious teaching is physically expressed in his style of dressing in typical white clothes and maintaining a thin beard. Living in the campus mosque wing has encouraged him and his fellow activists to decorate the mosque with religious images and sounds (interview with Hanafi 2020, 9 January).

Fitriani, a student who grew up in a devout family, especially under her mother's authority, is another model of this type of religiosity. She was introduced to the Qur'an and daily religious practices such as prayer and fasting in childhood, as well as social values such as honesty, being caring, sincerity, patience, and not talking about the disgrace of others. Despite attending non-religious schools, her religious understanding and practice remained constant and grew under family supervision. After high school, she was involved in *Pelajar Islam Indonesia*, the right choice based on her religious background and because of the influence of her brother, a *Pelajar Islam Indonesia* activist. In *Pelajar Islam Indonesia*, her religious interest was strengthened by the religious knowledge she acquired through her family. As a result, she has acted as a religious resource for her friends among *Pelajar Islam Indonesia* activists (interview with Fitriani 2020, 2 January), such that she first understood religion before becoming an activist in religious organizations.

The example of Arfa combines these two models. Growing up in a religiously devout family, wherein his parents were local religious leaders, Arfa's religious environment positively influenced his intellectual development. He has been familiar with the Qur'an and religious education since childhood. Entering elementary school (public school) did not prevent him from knowing the religion due to the religious teachings his parents intensively instilled into him. Referring to this case, Sahertian et al. (2021) may be correct in stating that "there is a mutually influential relationship between interpersonal communication in the family and adolescent religiosity". When Arfa entered *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri* in Bima, his primary interest in religion was nurtured in a place where he could become acquainted with religious teachers who matched his passion. He received significant guidance from the school environment. He should have continued to Pesantren Gontor in East Java but failed. Disappointed at his failure to attend a boarding school, he entered a non-religious-based senior high school instead. Following his growing religious spirit, he was finally called to participate in a student religious organization, *Pelajar Islam Indonesia*, where he became the most prominent member. His religious vision became well established upon studying at Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, where he increased his religious insight and obtained more comprehensive resources for religious understanding (interview with Arfa 2020a, 2 January).



The second type of religiosity involves ideologically following a religion, consisting of those who have a level of religious understanding regarding certain aspects, which encourages them to engage in social practices and political struggles. This type grows from circles with the dynamics of religious community relations. Syafi, who comes from Labuan Bajo, Flores, is an example of this model. Syafi grew up as a Muslim in Manggarai, where Christianity was the dominant religion. When entering college in Bima, he studied Islam as much as possible since Bima is one of the religious studies sites. He found his field of activism in the *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus*, where he combined Islamic teaching with his experience of religious relations in his hometown in Manggarai. This background led him to treat religion as an ideology. As Syafi stated in the focus group discussion, “Islam is a way of life whose position is above any ideology, including Pancasila (five basic principles of Indonesia); even Islam provides a source for Pancasila” (12 January 2020). For him, preaching Islam for a better life is the most crucial religious task. Therefore, he believes that the *dakwah* doctrine should be implemented through the internal development of the Muslim community and the spreading of Islamic teaching and behaviours to others.

This trend of ideological and religious understanding and attitudes toward Islam is also becoming popular among those newly engaged with religious discourse in college, especially in secular universities (Zein 2012). For those involved in the socialization of religious teachings such as *halaqah* (religious gathering), religion is understood as a social commitment to a better life; hence, it has ideological meaning. In this doctrine, their religious understanding and practice develop in the search for breakthroughs in the problems of social life, including state affairs. This kind of doctrinal understanding was developed among students once they were affiliated with *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia*, although it has yet to lead to radical actions. They expressed a deep passion for constantly improving the quality of their religion while striving to pass it on, rhetorically and behaviourally, to public spaces through *dakwah* (interview with Nurhaerani 2020, 8 January). For example, (Rasidah 2020, 9 January), a Muhammadiyah-based activist and a Qur’anic teacher at *Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu* (Integrated Islamic Elementary School) in Bima, has been inspired by the notion of contemporary Islamic movements. After conducting her Islamic studies in two *pesantren* in Bima, she aspired to be a teacher. She directs her Islamic school to influence people to become *shariah* (Islamic law)-minded, create a *hijab* (veiled) society, and realize Muslim *kaffah* (comprehensive) (interview with Rasidah 2020, 9 January).

This high level of Islamic zeal expressed through various practices of Islamic movements may lead to a political Islam or Islamism, that is, perceiving Islam as a political ideology and instrument for individuals, groups, and organizations to pursue political objectives. According to Turner (2013), this notion is articulated around the social divisions of class and generations, including young Muslims. In such Islamist circles, the idea of Islamic ideology is strengthened, some of which supports the enforcement of *shariah* (Islamic law), establishing an Islamic state, and promoting a caliphate system for the Islamic world.

In addition to the types detailed above, there is also a small group of young Muslims who are interested in Marxist discourse and critical theories through discussions and books. They usually comprise the *Serikat Mahasiswa Indonesia* (United Indonesian Students) and *Liga Mahasiswa Nasional Demokrasi* (Student League for National Democracy). These two organizations occasionally organize activities ranging from advocacies to demonstrations. In Bima, with less than a hundred students, the members of these organizations are decreasing due to the strong position of religious-based student organizations such as *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*, *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*, and *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah* on campuses (interview with Taufiq 2020, senior activist of Serikat Mahasiswa Indonesia, 10 January).

This context may create hidden rivalries between activists, which lead to ideological frictions. However, the differences in ideologies and practices between students have been bridged by the presence of state-based youth organizations such as *Karang Taruna* (Youth Community), *Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia* (National Committee for Indonesian Youth), as well as wing organizations of political parties and hobby communities. However, those

who join such organizations do not always have a single identity due to their roots in Islamic student organizations such as *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*, *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*, and *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah*, or may be involved in *Nahdlatul Ulama* or Muhammadiyah circles such as *Gerakan Pemuda Anshor* (Anshor Youth Movement) and *Pemuda Muhammadiyah* (Muhammadiyah Youth). This segment may foster nationalist religious groups.

#### 4. Religious Knowledge and Other Authority

Religious knowledge among Muslim youth activists in Bima is obtained through family environments, schools, *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools), *halaqah* (religious gathering), and training in organizations, and is complemented with open resources (books, magazines, and newspapers), electronics (television and radio, although very rare), and social media (YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp). The influence of parents or the family environment revolves around the fundamental aspects of religion, including theology (*aqidah*), worship (*ibadah*), ethics (*akhlaqul karimah*), and the sciences of the *Qur'an-Hadith*. Some informants were guided by the assistance of their parents to reach a high level of religious knowledge and understanding. Some others received adequate religious education from their families and then gained religious teaching in *pesantren*, Islamic schools, and colleges.

Those who attend *pesantren* or religious schools and universities benefit from a more robust religious atmosphere where they can easily access religious knowledge in textbooks and through the guidance of many competent religious teachers. Their religious knowledge grows faster through this process. In the case of Hanafi, the head of *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* at *Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Keguruan dan Pendidikan*, the mobilization of his religious knowledge began in the *pesantren* and Islamic high school and developed at *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* in college. Even though this college is not religious, the *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* activities and platforms influenced the development of his religious understanding and practices. In Arfa's case, the knowledge that he acquired through his family environment further blossomed when he attended religious school, interspersed with public schooling at the high school level, and then returned to the field of Islamic Studies at *Universitas Islam Negeri* (State Islamic University). This process led to his high level of religious understanding and sharpened his religious vision. He used digital information as a secondary resource only.

"For me information and knowledge through digital is just light information to fill spare time. It does not provide in-depth explanations. Because learning must be based on authentic sources with clear and traceable scientific paths" (interview with Arfa 2020b, March 10).

Religious narratives emerge in the culture of classroom learning in schools, lecture programs and instructions, and other oral-based student–teacher interactions. Religious learning traditions among activists develop in many ways in university environments. Religious-based universities such as *Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah* (College for Islamic Education) and *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Muhammadiyah* (Muhammadiyah College for Islamic Religion) provide students with curricular disciplines in religious studies. Usually, higher education institutions with various religious activities and curricula play a critical role in inculcating values of religious moderation, such as national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and local cultural accommodation (Nasir and Rijal 2021). Meanwhile, non-religious-based universities find an alternative to religious learning through student organizations such as *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*, *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*, *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah*, *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus*, *Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia*, and other small organizations.

These organizations conduct training whereby members emphasize their understanding of Islamic aspects, becoming a mainstream interpretation and a religious identity for cadres (see Table 1). In *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*, for example, there are basic, intermediate, and advanced levels of training, which include the primary material of *Nilai Identitas Kader* (Cadre Identity Values), also called *Nilai Dasar Perjuangan* (Basic Values for Struggle),

which contains a progressive understanding of Islam and national principles based on the platform of thought of the prominent Indonesian Muslim intellectual Nurscholis Madjid (Cak Nur). Hence, Cak Nur seems to be the primary source of the understanding of Islam among *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* activists, wherein his books are intensely studied, and his thoughts energize movements (Sabri 2014).

**Table 1.** Training Levels of Muslim Student Organization.

Student Organization	Training
Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Latihan Kader I</i> (Basic Cadre Training)</li> <li>• <i>Latihan Kader II</i> (Intermediate Cadre Training)</li> <li>• <i>Latihan Kader III</i> (Advanced Cadre Training)</li> <li>• Upgrading Training</li> </ul>
Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (PMII)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pelatihan Kader Dasar</i> (Basic Cadre Training)</li> <li>• <i>Pelatihan Kader Lanjutan</i> (Advanced Cadre Training)</li> <li>• Study Clubs</li> </ul>
Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Darul Arqam I</i> (Basic)</li> <li>• <i>Darul Arqam II</i> (Intermediate)</li> <li>• Plenary</li> </ul>
Lembaga Dakwah Kampus (LDK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Latihan Dasar Dakwah Kampus</i> (Basic Training for Campus Dakwah)</li> <li>• <i>Latihan Manajemen Dakwah</i> (Dakwah Management Training),</li> <li>• <i>Halaqahs</i> (Study Circles/Learning Communities)</li> </ul>

This process fosters the moderation of religious thought among *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* activists in Bima and their fellows elsewhere. Among *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia* activists, there is *Pelatihan Kader Dasar* (Basic Cadre Training) and *Pelatihan Kader Lanjutan* (Advanced Cadre Training), which function to instil the doctrine of *ahlussunnah waljama'ah* (followers of the prophet's tradition and congregation), the orthodox mainstream with a moderate religious ideology that has characterized the members of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (Bustomi 2018). Among *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah* activists, there are three levels of *Darul Arqam* training, namely basic, intermediate, and plenary, which serve to internalize the *Muhammadiyah* doctrine based on modernist reformist thinking. This training process ensures the continuity of moderate religious thought and attitudes from older reformist groups of *Muhammadiyah* and the traditionalist *nahdliyin* (Bustomi 2018).

These official training programs have functioned as strategies to internalize religious and national ideological understanding. The maturation process of religious and national ideological understanding among members of student organizations is developed through discussions and serial upgrading or follow-ups, resulting in a socio-religious vision among students. Such religious understanding has conformed to the Bimanese way of religious thinking. As Sila (2020) outlined, religious moderation in Bima grew within two religious organizations, namely *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdlatul Ulama*, rooted in the Bima Sultanate's dyadic system of power. This dyadic system has served as an umbrella for the opposing tendencies of religious traditions, producing harmony and modernist religious attitudes among young people.

In addition, *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* provides a process that reflects the intellectual history of its activists, whereby they learn to understand religious teachings by participating in the *Latihan Dasar Dakwah Kampus* (Basic Training for Campus Dakwah) and *Latihan Manajemen Dakwah* (Dakwah Management Training) and *halaqahs*, which are held twice a week (on Monday and Thursday). In addition to this training, *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* also facilitates mentoring from seniors and reviews the available literature. *Lembaga Dakwah*

*Kampus's* activists are intensely involved in strengthening the Islamic religion, including belief (*aqidah*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and human interaction (*mu'amalah*).

Formal and informal training in student organizations is not the only learning resource for active Muslim youth in these organizations. Other sources of religious learning mobilize their religious understanding to a certain degree and in a certain direction. The availability of learning resources such as via television and the Internet offers an alternative way for them to study religion. Therefore, Muslim youth are familiar with celebrity preachers such as Mama Dedeh, Ustadz Solmed, Arifin Ilham, Syekh Ali Jaber, Ustadz Yusuf Mansur, Ustadz Adi Hidayat, Ustadz Abdul Somad, and Aa Gym. Furthermore, via social media, especially YouTube, they know the names of Ustadz Abdul Somad, Hanan Attaki, Ustadz Firandah, and Dr. Zakir Naik.

These young people do not recognize local Bimanese *dai* (preachers), illustrating how information technology has connected young Muslims to broader (global) trends, including changes in Islamic preaching. Young Muslims may pay less attention to local preachers as a result of this or the lack of preachers using new media to deliver an appealing understanding of Islam.

Literacy activities have recently been blossoming among young Muslims in Bima. Their reading culture grows when they enter college and become activists in student organizations. Among *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* activists that benefit from campus mosques as a home base, a simple mosque library can lead them to religious books. The way they read is either individual or collegial through senior mentoring. Moreover, seniors who gain religious teachings and resources transmit them to juniors through *halaqah* activities, thereby forming religious knowledge. They read diverse books on a range of subjects, including *fiqh*, Qur'anic science, *hadith*, mysticism, and Islamic ethics (*akhlaq*). Islamic magazines such as *Ar-Risalah*, *Hidayatullah*, and *An-Nida* also contour the religious outlooks of Muslim youth in Bima. Young Muslims also read books that are considered heavy, such as the works of Cak Nur, Gus Dur, Koentowijoyo, Ali Shari'ati, Ashgar Ali Engineer, Abid al-Jabiri, and other Islamic thinkers, introducing readers to a progressive and transformative way of thinking.

## 5. Conclusions

The process of ideological establishment among Bimanese Muslim youth activists is influenced by several factors, such as historical background, relationships with student organizations, and students' increasing demands and needs in the presence of massive amounts of information in the media. In addition, religiosity, including ideological views, has grown among Muslim youth in Bima due to education or teaching processes and socialization in families, neighbourhoods, and organizations in which they are intensively involved. Moreover, socio-religious visions, namely of ideals, aspirations, and imaginations of a better life in society and the nation-state, grow simultaneously with religiosity.

Religious life among Muslim youth in Bima is strongly influenced by the intellectual networks that result from patronage relationships between the state apparatus and campus authorities. Strong patronage relationships are less common with hard-liner groups on both the right (Islamist) and left of the political spectrum. The latter group is relatively lacking in patrons; they operate individually and tend to be in friction with one another, for example, between *Serikat Mahasiswa Indonesia* (United Indonesian Students) and *Liga Mahasiswa Nasional Demokrasi* (Students League for National Democracy). Meanwhile, Islamic right-wing activists among university students and senior high school students need a well-established network that connects them with the same level of thought on the outside. *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* and *Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesian* activists do not have close relations with outside Islamist groups, such as *Forum Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Forum). *Forum Umat Islam* can bridge various supporting groups of Islamism, but its figures must also act as patrons. This reveals the insufficient chemistry between young Muslims with Islamist tendencies and networks. The networks among

these circles are influenced by dual-identity or membership tendencies among Muslim student activists on campuses in Bima.

The intensity of intellectual encounters among Muslim youth in Bima differs from one group to another. Due to strong and established patron–client relationships and support from state powers and campus authorities, activist groups such as *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*, *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*, and *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah* have more opportunities to be involved in intellectual forums and encounters at the local, regional, and national levels compared with Islamist groups. This diversity in intensity plays a role in forming their religious visions and insights.

The influence of reading or literacy is another factor that shapes social visions among Muslim youth in Bima. It is a known fact that intellectual curiosity among young Muslims is inversely proportional to the availability of library resources. Therefore, those engaged in or mobilizing religious discourse among the youth fulfil the need for literature in an undercover manner, accessing literature through a network of organizations and friendships. This learning culture is a vehicle for intellectual encounters in the movement of Islamic thoughts and practices among Muslim youth. This style is being practiced in all groups of thought, among both moderates or Islamists.

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## Note

- <sup>1</sup> Twelve students from senior high schools were included, consisting of seven *Organisasi Siswa Intra Sekolah* (Intra-School Students' Organization) members, which included the community of *Kerohanian Islam* (Islamic Spirituality) activists, one *Pelajar Islam Indonesia* (Indonesian Islamic Student) member, and one activist of a hobby community. In addition, fifteen university student informants were included, consisting of activists from the *Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa* (Student Executive Board), *Lembaga Dakwah Kampus*, *Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia* (Indonesian Muslim Student Action Union), the cultural community *Sampela Mbojo* (Bimanese Youth), *Sharing Muslimah Pelajar* (Sharing for Muslim Women Students), *Wahda Islamiyah* (Islamic Unity), and *Forum Umat Islam* (Forum of Islamic Umma).

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