Intellectual Discourse

Special Issue on

The Intersection of Theory, Identity, and Security in PCVE (Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism)

Intellectual Discourse

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Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	ʿ
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	ʾ
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
◌َ	a		◌َا، ◌َى	an
◌ُ	u		◌ُّو	un
◌ِ	i		◌ِّي	in
◌َا، ◌َ، ◌َى،	ā		◌َوْ	aw
◌ُو	ū		◌َيْ	ay
◌ِي	ī		◌ُّوَّ	uww, ū (in final position)
			◌ِّيّ	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: http://rotas.iium.edu.my

Pathways of Individual Radicalisation: The Profiles of Malaysian Muslim Violent Extremist (VE) Detainees and Ex-Detainees 2013-2020

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Abstract: Since 2014, the Islamic State (IS) has remained the biggest threat to Malaysia's national peace and security. According to statistics by the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), as of 2018, 328 youths have been arrested in Malaysia for terrorism-related offenses (E8, 2018). Hence, there is a dire need for an empirical study to identify the pathways of individual radicalisation in Malaysia for Muslim VE offenders between 2013 and 2020. The methodology adopted for this research is a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach uses content analysis to analyse books, court cases (MLJ), newspapers, articles in journals and DABIQ magazine. To achieve the aims of this study, the deduction of these theories involves three combined approaches: 1) Hogg, Terry, and Adelman's social identity pathways, encompassing factors such as gender, age, marital status, and residency; 2) Gerwehr, Daly, and Borum's group recruitment pathways, focusing on group expertise and group role; and 3) El-Muhammady's framework of individual pathways, which include cognitive-oriented radicalisation, emotive-oriented radicalisation, faith-oriented radicalisation, and action-oriented radicalisation. These varied theories collectively contribute to the construction of the multi-context theories of pathways of individual radicalisation in Malaysia. In brief, this new understanding will aid in shaping strategic Malaysian Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) interventions to prevent the recurrence

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of incidents like the recent Ulu Tiram attack in 2024. By addressing the specific individual, demographic, group recruitment, and belief system drivers identified in this study, these interventions can more effectively mitigate radicalisation risks and enhance Malaysia's security and resilience against extremism.

Keywords: profiling, individual radicalisation, pathways, Islamic State (IS).

Abstrak: Sejak tahun 2014, Islamic State (IS) merupakan ancaman terbesar kepada keamanan dan keselamatan Malaysia. Menurut statistik Polis Diraja Malaysia (PDRM), sehingga tahun 2018, sebanyak 328 belia telah ditangkap di Malaysia di bawah akta kesalahan terorisme (E8, 2018). Oleh itu, kajian emperik ini adalah bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti profil radikalisasi individu Muslim di Malaysia antara 2013 sehingga 2020. Metodologi yang digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah kualitatif, iaitu menggunakan analisis kandungan bagi menganalisis buku, kes mahkamah (MLJ), akhbar, artikel dalam jurnal, dan majalah *DABIQ*. Bagi mencapai objektif, kajian ini telah menggunakan teori deduksi yang mengabungkan tiga teori iaitu (1) laluan identiti sosial oleh Hogg, Terry, dan Adelman, merangkumi jantina, umur, status perkahwinan, dan tempat tinggal; (2) laluan rekrutmen kumpulan oleh Gerwehr, Daly, dan Borum, merangkumi kepakaran dan peranan dalam kumpulan; dan (3) rangka kerja laluan individu oleh El-Muhammady, merangkumi radikalisasi berorientasikan kognitif, emosi, kepercayaan, dan tindakan. Gabungan daripada ketiga-tiga teori ini telah menyumbang kepada pembinaan teori pelbagai konteks laluan radikalisasi individu di Malaysia. Secara ringkasnya, dapatan kajian ini akan menghasilkan Pencegahan dan Menangani Ekstremisme Keganasan (P/CVE) yang strategik bagi mencegah perulangan insiden serangan Ulu Tiram yang terjadi pada tahun 2024. Dengan menangani permasalahan spesifik yang dikenal pasti dalam kajian ini iaitu individu, demografi, rekrutmen kumpulan, dan sistem kepercayaan, pencegahan ini dapat mengurangkan risiko radikalisasi dengan lebih berkesan serta meningkatkan keselamatan dan ketahanan Malaysia terhadap ekstremisme.

Kata kunci: pemprofilan, radikalisasi individu, laluan, Negara Islam (IS).

Introduction

The emergence of Muslim VE groups has significantly impacted the global, regional, national, and local (Malaysian) contexts. Since the 2013 establishment of Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi's Islamic State or IS,

the number of Malaysian citizens joining Muslim VE groups has been rising yearly till 2020. The worrying numbers have propelled this research to hence examine the demographic pathways of Malaysian youth who have been arrested for terrorism-related offences associated with Muslim VE groups. Through this examination, the research seeks to identify pathways of individual radicalisation of Malaysian youth between 2013 to 2020.

As of the beginning of 2018, 328 youths in Malaysia have been apprehended for terrorism-related offenses (E8, 2018). These figures evince the fact that Muslim VE groups in Malaysia are focusing their recruitment efforts on the youth demographic. The fact that the youth comprise an estimated 10 million of Malaysia's 31.7 million population is concerning, given that they constitute the majority (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). As a result, Malaysia's security is anticipated to remain vulnerable to Muslim VE threats so long as the youth, being the country's largest demographic, are not properly cautioned.

In addition, it was estimated that there were 102 Malaysians in Syria between 2013-2018: 37 of them have died in Syria, 11 have returned to Malaysia, and 54 are still in Syria (Berita Benar, 2018). These remaining 54 are of pressing concern for both the government and society, as there is high probability that, upon their return, these returnees will bring with them radical ideologies and behaviour. This was proven when Malaysia suffered its first, and thus far only, IS-sanctioned attack on 28 June 2016 in Movida Club, Puchong. Evidently, one of the assailants had prior military training and residence in Syria (Bernama, 2017).

Hence, in reaction to the Movida club attack, the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) have implemented various measures to address the issue at hand. These measures include the implementation of a white paper for the Prevention of Crime Act 1959 (POCA), the Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA), the Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorism Financing Act 2001 (AMLATFA), the Security Offences (Special Measures Act) 2012 (SOSMA), and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 (POTA). Likewise, the National Fatwa Council of Malaysia have banned Muslim VE groups and their affiliations for promoting misleading ideologies (Arbaiyah & Zarina, 2020). It is also worth noting that the RMP have

gained valuable experience in dealing with communist insurgencies such as Malayan Communist Party (MCP). These initiatives have helped the government prevent 19 terrorist plots in Malaysia between 2013 to 2017. As a result, Malaysia's position on the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2019 has improved significantly—in contrast, 74 out of 138 countries fell four levels lower in comparison with last year's index (Global Terrorism Index, 2019).

However, recent events, such as the Ulu Tiram attack in May 2024, underscore the persistent and latent nature of the violent extremism (VE) threat in Malaysia. Despite the relative lull in major incidents since the Movida Club attack in 2016, this event highlights that the risk has not been entirely eradicated but rather exists in a dormant state, capable of re-emerging under conducive circumstances. Notably, the Ulu Tiram attack sheds light on the critical role of familial influence in the radicalisation process, revealing how deeply entrenched ideologies can be perpetuated within family structures.

The dynamics within families, particularly those with existing radical affiliations or sympathies, can serve as a powerful vector for transmitting extremist ideologies. This intergenerational transmission not only sustains extremist mindsets but also amplifies the challenge of addressing VE at its roots. Such findings call for a more nuanced understanding of the role of social and familial networks in the radicalisation continuum, emphasizing the need for tailored intervention programs that address these micro-level dynamics while fostering resilience within vulnerable communities.

All in all, this research's exploration of pathways of individual radicalisation of Malaysian youth between 2013 to 2020 by addressing various contexts such as social identity theory, recruitment theory, and belief system theory, they provide a more complete perspective, enabling a deeper comprehension of the driving forces behind their radicalisation.

Literature Review

Numerous studies, including those in the fields of psychology, sociology, and criminal justice, have reached a consensus regarding

the significance of profiling. This is due to its ability to determine the extensive pathways of profilers based on the radicalisation process they have identified. Consequently, rehabilitation modules and PCVE programmes for Malaysian youth can be developed in tandem with profiles of Muslim VE detainees in Malaysia.

A range of profiling methods can be categorised according to organizational, racial, gender, age (Sahito, Zaman & Slany, 2013), and socioeconomic (Denoeux & Carter, 2009) aspects, as well as pathological (Sahito, Zaman & Slany, 2013), mathematical, psychological, clinical, criminal, geographical, and investigative psychology (Silke, 2015). Furthermore, group profiling (Sahito, Zaman & Slany, 2013) (Denoeux & Carter, 2009) can assist in identifying specific patterns of radicalisation among individuals (Russell and Miller, 1977) (Hazelwood et al., I995), thereby providing insights into the perpetrator's actions at the crime scene (Silke, 2015) through crowd detection (Dean, 2014). Profiling can also provide "useful interview strategies" for individuals suspected of being terrorists, in addition to limiting the scope of intelligence and investigation. The utilization of various profiling techniques has led to the identification of complex and interrelated paths of individual radicalisation.

Profiling is without a doubt the most effective method of law enforcement to combat terrorism, as it increases the rate of successful police investigations and decreases the societal incidence of profiling-related offences (Dean, 2014). Hence, this study proposes that countering the ideological and tactical goals of Muslim VE groups requires comprehending the theories and practises of profiling, with relation to terrorism-related activities and behaviours.

In general, offender profiles have facilitated police investigations through the emphasis on profilers' variables (Silke, 2015). This is consistent with the findings of British police investigators, for whom profiling has improved confidence in their own assessments of the case by 51.6%, and enhanced their understanding of the offence and offender by 60.9% (Silke, 2015). A "pre-rad life" can be identified through knowledge of the pathways of individual radicalisation; this involves identifying the characteristics of an individual's background; pinpointing the transition point; identifying factors that facilitate the transition; and identifying potential enablers and support systems. On the

basis of their consequent outcomes being the prediction and mitigation of the prevalence of terrorist attacks, effective PCVE programs and rehabilitation modules can be developed in accordance with the profile pathways of individual radicalisation, as stated by El-Muhammady (2020) and Jensen (2016).

The result of utilising the diverse profiling methodologies has revealed a consistent terrorist mindset and the psychological motivators (Stewart, 2016) underlying the diverse pathways to individual radicalisation. Factors such as age, personality, work history, family history, social life, and criminal record (Silke, 2015) corroborate the findings of the 2017 United Nations report and the Nation Action Plan reports from Canada, Denmark, Finland, Kosovo, Maldives, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United States, and United Kingdom—they detail several shared significant factors behind the radicalisation of Muslim extremists in each country, including: a firm ideological belief system; involvement in youth groups; a predominantly male demographic; low socio-economic status and educational attainment; unemployment; psychological and emotional vulnerability; inclination towards *jihād* oriented activities; marriage to militants; limited understanding of Islamic teachings; experiences of broken family structures; radicalisation through social media platforms; and influence from family and friends. Existing research further indicate commonalities in the profiles of Muslim extremists who belong to a minority Muslim group, covering traits such as: a history of having endured conflict in their country of origin; membership in a marginalised group; living in a polarised society; subjection to socioeconomic segregation; and racism from the local community. Despite the slight differences in results, the literature review indicates the following factors of the majority of profilers remaining unchanged: being members of youth organisations; hailing from a generally privileged middle-class background; possessing a good educational background; and self-employment. Thus, comprehensive research on the profiling of Muslim VE youth groups is essential for identifying the root causes of problems.

With regard to the emergence of Muslim VE groups in Malaysia, El- Muhammady, Wan Ruzailan, and Muhammad Azimuddin's analysis (2019) of existing research literature on the subject matter identifies external factors influencing their emergence, such as conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and the 2011 Arab Spring; along with internal or

domestic issues, such as the Sunni-Shiʿī conflict, group conflicts, and individual circumstances. Their analysis also reveals the subsequent radicalisation among the Malaysian Muslim youth to be motivated by sympathy towards war-torn countries, the intersection of religion and politics, ideological factors, and personal or psychological issues, which align with previous research conducted by Mohd Khairul Naim and Muhamad Syafriz (2020), as well as Che Mohd Aziz (2016).

From a psychological standpoint, Samsilah, Roslam, & Shahanim Yahya (2019) reveal the low levels of sociability, high levels of neuroticism-anxiety, and impulsive sensation-seeking defining the profiles of youth detainees in Malaysia. Additionally, these individuals engage in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques, which involve the deletion, distortion, and generalisation of information they receive (Hanina Halimatun Saadiah & Kapten (B) Sudirman, 2019). Samuel Thomas Koruth (2018) further identifies a variety of factors that influence Malaysian youth to adopt radical ideologies, including interest in religious ideology, peer relationships, and media and internet portrayals of injustices suffered by Muslims.

Studies concerned with improving the perception and understanding of radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism among Malaysian youths detail a number of traits associated with radicalised youth, including: low self-esteem; high narcissism; high cognitive distortion; high aggression; deviation from Islamic teachings; strong inclination towards impulsive sensation-seeking; emotional vulnerability; and a desire for change. These further clarify the inordinate attachments that the youth develop with groups like IS, explained via the four processes of: early exposure via social media; the pledging of allegiance (*bay'ah*) through false information and propaganda; identity formation through training; and subsequent action through armed conflict.

Wilkins and Brown (2009) characterise terrorists as "uncommon" criminals—usually travellers or immigrants, defined by a complex blend of ethnic, economic, and social backgrounds; who excel in evasion and disguise; and hold their religion, nationality, and politics in serious regard. Sahito et al. (2013), referencing Wilkins and Brown, highlight that terrorist profiling reveals proclivities toward revenge, religious and social suppression, conformity, displaced anger onto others, internal guilt, aspirations of toughness and bravery, and attraction to promises

of rewards in the afterlife. These factors, making up the general spectrum of suspected terrorists, greatly assist in the recognition of the individuality of each suspect and their distinct personality traits or psychopathology. It is expected that further analysis of the data and information gleaned from such profiling would preempt escalatory action (Ramond, 2019).

The dissemination of VE ideologies through social media platforms, according to research published by IYRES (2017), constitutes a major cause of youth radicalisation. Sources including Facebook (50.4%), television (49.8%), newspapers (46%), YouTube (35%), blogs (22.8%), Twitter (12.9%), Instagram (9.2%), and other mediums (8.4%) such as sermons, lectures, and published material in magazines or books promoting extreme beliefs, such as *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*—not to mention influence by extremist family members— provide a channel through which the target demographic is exposed to radical figures. Complementing an earlier study conducted by IYRES (2015), this exposure amplifies the prior awareness that a significant proportion of these individuals would already have regarding groups like IS. Specifically, the majority of them (62%) acknowledged IS as an extremist group, while a smaller percentage identified them as an Islamic movement (22%); as mere political propaganda (14%); or simply categorised them under other labels (2%). Therefore, increased overall engagement is crucial to effectively prevent and eliminate these exposures before they take root as causes of terrorism.

All in all, individual profiling aims to assess an individual's potential inclination towards espionage, sabotage, government subversion, terrorist activities, or other actions that threaten national security (Siggins, 2002). Therefore, constructing profiles of individual radicalists in Malaysia becomes essential, as it aids in comprehending radicalisation and violent extremism within the Malaysian context (Malek al Zewairi et al, 2017). Acknowledging that there is no single profile, a multi-causal perspective hence allows for the categorisation of individuals into several groups with a certain degree of accuracy, guiding investigations in the right direction.

Research Methodology

Qualitative methodology was employed to investigate the pathways of individual radicalisation in Malaysia. The qualitative approach

was utilised together with extensive library research consisting of content analysis of various sources, including books, Malaysian Law Journals (MLJ), Country Reports on Terrorism (CRT), journal articles, newspapers, and websites, providing valuable insights into the contextual and discursive aspects of radicalisation. This approach facilitated identification of the peculiarities of specific radicalisation pathways and contributed to the development of multi-context theories. This was achieved through acquiring primary viewpoints from crucial players including detainees, ex-detainees, family members, acquaintances, experts, practitioners, and government agencies. The qualitative methods of non-governmental organisations, including surveys and interviews, also played a contributing role.

Multi-Context Theories of Youth Radicalisation in Malaysia

The study employed a qualitative research approach to examine the pathways of 42 youth profiles of former and current Malaysian Muslim VE detainees over a period of seven years, from 2013 to 2020. The primary objective of the research was to identify the individual pathways in Malaysia, which revolve around three primary pathways: demographic, group recruitment, and belief system. Demographic pathways encompass variables such as gender, age, marital status, and residency. Group recruitment pathways involve variables related to group expertise and group role. Lastly, belief system pathways encompass cognitive-oriented radicalisation, emotive-oriented radicalisation, faith-oriented radicalisation, and action-oriented radicalisation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed in this research encompasses three distinct theories, which are social identity, recruitment, and belief system. These three distinct theories serve as the foundational basis for understanding the pathways of youth radicalisation in the Malaysian context. This approach entailed studying the profiles of former and current detainees associated with Muslim VE groups from 2013 to 2020. By utilising this method, a set of demographics, group recruitment, and belief system variables were obtained for each profile. This detailed data allowed for a nuanced analysis of the radicalisation process among Malaysian youth.
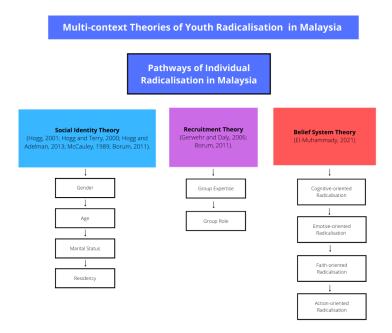
Figure 1: Multi-context Theories of Youth Radicalisation in Malaysia

Figure 1 depicts the pathways of individual radicalisation in Malaysia, utilised in formulating the multi-context theories of individual radicalisation in the country. The deduction of these theories involves three combined approaches:

1. Social Identity Theory

   This section pertains to Hogg, Terry, and Adelman's social identity theory, which delves into individual demographics, encompassing factors like gender, age, marital status and residency (Hogg, 2001; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Hogg and Adelman, 2013; McCauley, 1989; Borum, 2011).

2. Recruitment Theory

   Formulated by Gerwehr, Daly, and Borum, it places emphasis on the recruitment styles within profiles. From this framework, several variables can be deduced, including one's designated expertise and roles within the group (Gerwehr and Daly, 2006; Borum, 2011).

3. Belief System Theory

   El-Muhammady's belief system theory is centred around different facets of radicalisation, including cognitive-oriented radicalisation,

emotive-oriented radicalisation, faith-oriented radicalisation, and action-oriented radicalisation.

These varied theories collectively contribute to the construction of multi-context theories that explain individual youth radicalisation in Malaysia

Findings and Discussion

Based on the 42 identified pathways, the profiles constituted both male and female individuals aged between 15 and 30 years old; encompassing both single and married marital statuses; and residence in the states of Selangor, Terengganu, Kelantan, Kedah, Perak, Kuala Lumpur, Melaka, Pahang, Penang, Perlis, Sabah, and Johor. They exhibited a wide range of expertise, including recruiters, weapon experts, strategists, suicide bombers, executors, social media experts, and money-laundering facilitators. These individuals assumed roles as leaders, followers, and loosely associated members, and adhered to cognitive-oriented, emotive-oriented, faith-oriented, and action-oriented radicalisation inclinations.

Demographic Pathways

Table 1: Demographic Pathways Findings

Item	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	34	81%
	Female	8	19%
Age	17	1	2.38%
	19	4	9.52%
	20	2	4.76%
	21	1	2.38%
	22	4	9.52%
	23	3	7.14%
	24	2	4.76%
	25	2	4.76%
	26	4	52%
	27	7	16.67%
	28	1	2.38%
	29	4	9.52%
	30	5	11.90%

Marital Status	Married	6	14.3%
	Single	33	78.6%
	Unknown	3	7.1%
Residency	Selangor	11	26.2%
	Terengganu	5	11.9%
	Kelantan	4	5%
	Perak	4	5%
	Kedah	4	5%
	Kuala Lumpur	3	7.1%
	Melaka	2	4.8%
	Pahang	1	2.4%
	Penang	1	2.4%
	Perlis	1	2.4%
	Sabah	1	2.4%
	Johor	1	2.4%

Note: The age group in this data was based on the Societies and Youth Development Act (Amendment) 2019 (ACT 668) and ranged from 15 to 30 years old. On a side note, the ages of the detainees in the Figure above were taken on their first day of joining ISIS, which was considered as the day they took bay'ah, or at the date of exposure.

Group Recruitment Findings

Table 2: Group Recruitment Findings

Item	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Group Expertise	Weapon Expert	3	7.1%
	Suicide Bomber	8	19%
	Recruiter	6	14.3%
	Executor	10	23.8%
	Strategist	1	2.4%
	Terrorism Financing	2	4.8%
	No Expertise	12	28.6%
Group Role	Leader	6	14.3%
	Follower	30	71.4%
	Loose Associate	6	14.3%

Table 2 shows that 23.8% (10) of the profiles were involved in executing acts of terrorism, followed by 19% (8) who were suicide bombers, 14.3% (6) who were recruiters, 7.1% (3) who were weapon experts, and 4.8% (2) involved in terrorism financing. Additionally, 2.4% (1) were strategists, and the roles of 28.6% (12) were unknown.

In terms of group roles, 71.4% (30) of the profiles were followers, while 14.3% (6) were leaders, and another 14.3% (6) were classified as loose associates.

Belief System Theory Findings

Table 3: Belief System Theory Findings

Item	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Belief System Theory	Cognitive-oriented Radicalisation	4	9.5%
	Emotive-oriented Radicalisation	6	14.3%
	Faith-oriented Radicalisation	7	16.7%
	Action-oriented Radicalisation	25	59.5%

In Table 3, the majority of these profiles can be categorised under the classification of action-oriented radicalisation, accounting for 59.5% (25). This is followed by faith-oriented radicalisation at 16.7% (7), emotive-oriented radicalisation at 14.3% (6), and cognitive-oriented radicalisation at 9.5% (4).

Discussion

Demographic Pathways

The male profiles, predominantly exhibiting traits associated with masculinity, often sought to portray a hero-like persona, emphasizing dominance and viewing themselves as protectors of the Muslim VE group's ideology. They validated their beliefs through assertive and aggressive actions, driven by a need to prove their strength. They were also prone to risk-taking behavior, with their *syahid* life goals centered around engaging in *hijrah*, *jihād*, and achieving (martyrdom) in war-torn

countries. These masculine tendencies appear to stem from childhood trauma, including experiences of narcissism, low self-esteem, parental neglect, and distant relationships with their families and friends.

This pattern aligns with El-Muhammady (2023), who suggests that narcissism can lead individuals to strive for heroism to compensate for low self-esteem, seeking admiration through *jihād* as a source of pride (Taarnby, 2003), lacking empathy towards others, and feeling humiliated when not receiving the desired attention, a symptom of childhood emotional and psychological damage. In a terrorist context, this trait can be particularly dangerous, leading to aggressive or violent reactions in support of socio-political or religious causes (Hamden, Raymond, 2019). In contrast, the females in the identified profiles primarily joined Muslim VE groups due to *jihād al-nikāh*, which is often linked to facilitating their husbands' involvement.

The single-status individuals are often highly susceptible to recruitment due to their increased availability, limited responsibilities, and tendencies towards anti-social behavior, low self-esteem, and a lack of attachment. These traits often lead them to have ample free time, the majority of which is spent alone. Consequently, to seek validation and fill up their time, they become involved with Muslim VE groups.

In contrast, the profiled married individuals, particularly wives, were emotionally sensitive, with a high level of sympathy. Motivated by their relationship with the *mujāhidīn*, they would often marry them or follow their husbands in *hijrah* and *jihād* in Syria. Functioning primarily as caregivers to their husbands and families, they were willing to bring all their children to Syria in fulfilling their duties as wives and mothers.

The specific geographical or residential locations within the states of Selangor, Terengganu, Kelantan, Perak and Kedah also influenced their radicalisation process. This is due to their high rates of population growth, followed by the establishment of *sekolah pondok* and *madrasah*, and their remoteness or strategic position, particularly as they bordered Thailand, Myanmar, and Indonesia.

Group Recruitment

Group Expertise

Both executors and suicide bombers are responsible for orchestrating attacks or engaging in warfare; those profiled have carried out attacks

both within Malaysia and conflict-ridden countries like Syria and Iraq. Both groups exhibit specific traits in common, such as the desire for martyrdom, heroism, narcissism, and impulsive aggression—all justified under the banner of "purifying sins."

Recruiters, meanwhile, portray traits distinct from these two groups, such as being charismatic, good listeners, and "exemplifying" Islamic figures in their behavior. These traits are essential as they recruit new members, often from amongst their friends, families, and wives, ensuring success while they engage in propaganda of establishing the Islamic caliphate and helping the marginalised Muslims of Syria and Iraq to disseminate IS ideology using social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and YouTube, as well as through *usrah* circles. After recruitment, executors will begin making use of the new members to arrange plans for terrorist acts—usually done by firstly facilitating travel by contacting the person-in-charge in Syria or Türkiye, and providing military training to the *mujāhidīn*.

Harboring the same traits of heroism and impulsive aggression as the executor and suicide bomber, strategists play the crucial role of facilitating travel for Malaysian militants to Syria and Iraq, often through Türkiye. The brief stop in Türkiye is common practice for Muslim VE groups, mainly to reduce the likelihood of detection by authorities. These individuals often choose to continue their journey using personal vehicles, enabling numerous Muslim VE groups to infiltrate Syria and Iraq without raising the suspicion of higher authorities.

The weapons experts are highly valued for their technological proficiency, and also desire martyrdom just as much as the executor and the suicide bomber. Two cases in particular—where one weapons expert was apprehended while attempting to smuggle arms intended for use by Muslim VE groups in Malaysia, and another was found to be in illegal possession of two homemade shotguns and corresponding ammunition—serve as compelling evidence of their radical inclinations. The heavy punishment, per Malaysian law, incurred by such crimes— whereby the unlawful possession of firearms is a criminal offense, and those found guilty of such acts may face imprisonment—does not exactly deter them from committing the crime. Apart from their expertise, they are especially valued for their involvement in aiding the money-laundering activities of Syrian extremists.

Group Role

The leaders from amongst these roles are appointed based upon traits such as a charismatic leadership style, heroism, narcissism, recognition as an "exemplary" Muslim figure, and a notably high dedication in pursuing *jihād* and martyrdom amongst group members. These traits would prove persuasive in the recruitment and indoctrination of further members to join Muslim VE groups. Within their hierarchical structure—and also for security reasons— the number of leaders were notably less when compared to the followers.

Their followers, on the other hand, all possess the common traits of low self-esteem, less sociableness, the craving for validation and a sense of belonging, high sympathy towards Muslims in Syria, impulsive aggression, and anti-government and anti-Western tendencies. For operational purposes, their numbers are comparatively higher than leaders, which is essential for various tasks including recruitment and execution. The specific subset of women within this group would join Muslim VE groups merely for *jihād al-nikāh*, of following their husbands to Syria for martyrdom. The common traits possessed by these women include limited knowledge about IS, a high level of self-empathy, impulsive aggression, and the desire for marriage.

Belief System Theory

Cognitive-oriented Radicalisation Theory

Cognitive-oriented Radicalisation Theory describes the incipient inclinations of association with extremist groups via exposure to related paraphernalia. Most of the profiles can be classified under this theory, as they were detained in the early stages of radicalisation for their association with images, books, and flags related to Muslim VE groups, as well as postings made in IS-affiliated social media channels.

Their actions typically occur at the mental level and would not yet approach actual violence. The associations described show that these individuals are often motivated by their sympathy for Muslims in Syria who have experienced aggression, ethnic cleaning, alienation, discrimination, and marginalization. In response, their cognitive processes led them to entertain and later support the idea of performing *hijrah* and *jihād* alongside the Muslims in Syria to defend them against perceived enemies.

Emotive-oriented Radicalisation Theory

Emotive-oriented Radicalisation Theory involves the use of strong emotional justifications to rationalise the acceptance and tolerance of violence. This form of radicalisation is driven by emotions like sympathy, anger, revenge, humiliation, and the desire to "get even". Operating at the emotional level, their actions may or may not lead to actual acts of violence. As stated by El-Muhammady (2021), individuals in this category may express sentiments such as, "I feel sympathy towards the oppressed" or "Revenge is the best way to tell the oppressors to stop messing up with us".

Most of the identified were females who desired *hijrah* for *jihād al-nikāh*, motivated by an obsession towards the *mujāhidīn* and the desire to become caregivers to them as wifes and mothers. Most of the profiles attributed their quest to the need for self-belonging or a sense of life purpose. Muslim VE groups use narratives that prey upon such inclinations, promising the women empowerment and a sense of purpose through marriage (*jihad al-nikāh*) and facilitating the husband whilst in Syria.

These actions occur at the emotional level and have not yet approached actual violence. These individuals are often motivated by their love towards their husband, children, and future husband who fought in Syria to overthrow the tyrannical government and establish the Islamic caliphate. In response, their emotive processes led them to support the idea of performing *hijrah* to Syria with the husband, children and future husband for *jihād*, where they would then play the role of the wife and/or mother figure.

Faith-oriented Radicalisation Theory

Faith-oriented Radicalisation Theory involves the use of religious or ideological justifications to accept violence. This form of radicalisation operates at the level of faith and ideology, and may or may not lead to actual acts of violence. As explained by El-Muhammady, individuals in this category use their faith or ideology to justify their acceptance of violence.

These profiles believed that performing *jihād al-nikāh* by marrying the *mujāhidīn* is an indicator of the highest level of faith that women can achieve. Their actions—occurring at the faith level, and may yet

approach actual violence—are often motivated by their faith towards Allah SWT. Responding to this, they believe that obedience to the command of marriage, as part of their faith processes, would lead them to marry the *mujāhidīn* in support of the idea of *jihād al-nikāh*.

Action-oriented Radicalisation Theory

Action-oriented Radicalisation Theory entails the use of actions to commit violence, often manifesting as acts of terrorism. This form of radicalisation involves the practical implementation of one's beliefs that result in violence or terrorism. As described by El-Muhammady (2021), it is characterised by the idea that actions speak louder than words: individuals subscribing to this belief system believe in the necessity of concrete action to achieve their goals.

Those identified were detained for their involvement in roles as executor, suicide bomber, recruiter, money-laundering facilitator, and *jihād al-nikāh*. Their actions have occurred at the most dangerous level of radicalisation: acts of violence at this level can have severe consequences for both the civilian and the nation. This is because their actions endorse the use of violence as a means to achieve their objectives, the violence generated making it the most dangerous and impactful type of radicalisation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pathways to radicalisation among Malaysian VE detainees from 2013 to 2020 reveal a complex interplay of demographic, group recruitment, and belief system factors. This study has underscored how radicalisation is rarely a product of a singular influence but often a cumulative process shaped by vulnerabilities, socio-political grievances, identity struggles, and, in some cases, persuasive recruitment tactics. The inclusion of the Ulu Tiram case provides a concrete example of these dynamics, illustrating how radical networks and extremist cells can operate within local communities, often going unnoticed until direct intervention occurs.

By profiling these detainees and examining cases like Ulu Tiram, the research highlights the nuanced ways in which familial, religious, and societal challenges, contribute to the appeal of radical ideologies. This case study offers critical insights into designing more targeted and effective Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE)

interventions in Malaysia. By focusing on early identification, community-based programs, and comprehensive rehabilitation frameworks, stakeholders can mitigate the factors driving radicalisation and support sustainable pathways for deradicalisation and reintegration. Ultimately, a multi-dimensional approach—incorporating community engagement and educational reform—is essential to addressing the root causes and pathways of radicalisation in Malaysia

Limitations and suggestions for future studies

While this study has provided valuable initial insights into the profiles of individual radicalisation in Malaysia, it also has limitations that need to be acknowledged and addressed. Firstly, discrepancy in the information between Muslim media, newspapers and Western sources. This biased have affected the reliability and validity of the profiles of terrorism related offences.

Additionally, there were limitations in accessing data. The researcher was unable to access data from the Malaysian Prison Department, Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), and Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) due to confidentiality concerns. This limited access prevented confirmation of whether the profile details matched those recorded by these agencies, leading to incomplete data collection. Therefore, it is proposed that Malaysia develop its own Profile of Individual Radicalisation to gather data findings and facilitate researchers and policymakers in handling and predicting the terrorism threat in Malaysia.

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