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The Human Nature of Radicalisation: Preventive Policing Beyond Ideology.

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Abstract, *Indonesia has made significant progress in counter-terrorism through intelligence-led policing and strengthened legal frameworks. Nevertheless, preventing radicalisation before it develops into violence remains a looming problem, as the status quo prioritises ideological narratives and surveillance while overlooking the 'innate' psychological vulnerabilities that drive individuals to extremist influence. Drawing on Kumar Ramakrishna's Radical Pathways, mainly through the Human Nature perspective, this paper advances a conceptual model that reorients preventive policing from a threat-oriented focus toward a vulnerability-oriented one. The analysis emphasizes the Manichean mindset and the group-tent idea to explain how fundamental predispositions interact with extremist narratives during the radicalisation process. Illustrative evidence from the Indonesian experience, particularly the case of Jemaah Islamiyah and the Bali bombings, demonstrates how these universal tendencies can be exploited and reinforced in the formation of extremist identities. Building on this conceptual background, the paper positions community policing as the leading sector through which insights from Human Nature can be translated into preventive practice. Rather than replacing intelligence operations or ideological countermeasures, community policing complements current preventive efforts by facilitating early identification, strengthening community resilience, and creating referrals between communities and police psychologists and counsellors. Integrating Human Nature into preventive policing therefore completes counter-radicalisation strategies by addressing the underlying motivations exploited by extremist narratives, thereby contributing to a more holistic approach to Indonesia's Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE).*

KEYWORDS
preventive policing; radicalisation; human nature; psychology; countering violent extremism

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia continues to face persistent terrorist threats. Despite various counterterrorism efforts and the outcome of these measures (Febrica, 2010), terrorist groups have demonstrated resilience. As shown in the study byDemir & Dede (2025) on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), survivability is not limited to the ways of technologies or isolation strategy on their part, but involves innovation at strategic,

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operational, and tactical levels. In Indonesia, these groups continue to adapt their methods, operate covertly while remaining deeply embedded in society, and regenerate after periods of relative silence. Reflecting these ongoing challenges, Indonesia ranked 24th among 163 countries in the 2026 Global Terrorism Index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026).

One of the most prominent terrorist attacks in the past decade involved the ISIS-affiliated Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), which targeted the police. In May 2018 alone, two major incidents occurred in two different cities in Indonesia. JAD-linked prisoners killed five and injured four police officers during a riot at Mobile Brigade Corps Detention Facility (Mako Brimob) in Depok (U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Indonesia, 2018). In the same month, coordinated suicide bombings targeted churches and Surabaya Police Headquarters (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Four years later, in December 2022, a suicide bombing carried out by a former terrorism convict affiliated with JAD again targeted security personnel at Astana Anyar Police Station, West Java Regional Police, resulting in one police casualty (BBC News Indonesia, 2022). In more recent years, between 2023 and 2025, authorities continued to uncover terrorist-related activities, including hundreds of cases connected to terrorism, such as terrorism financing (Febiola, 2026). Specifying on terrorist attacks, BNPT (National Counter Terrorism Agency) stated that authorities had foiled 27 planned armed attacks targeting churches and police officers (National Counter Terrorism Agency, 2025).

As emerging technologies continue to develop, particularly the ever-growing use of social media, terrorist groups have exploited new opportunities. They increasingly target vulnerable individuals, particularly young people, as the trend of young individuals involved in extremist activities continues to rise. This trend is further seen in the finding that 110 children aged 10–18 around Indonesia were allegedly part of the extremist groups (Shinta & Rahmanto, 2026). To address these threats, government authorities have adopted strategies to dismantle terrorist networks through intelligence capabilities and law enforcement (Satria, 2022). Since 2003, following legislative approval, the enactment of the Anti-Terrorism Law and Government Regulation in Lieu of Law (GRL) No. 2 has introduced a new procedural provision that authorizes investigators to use intelligence reports as preliminary evidence under specified conditions (Juwana, 2014). As a result, Special Detachment 88 may arrest individuals

suspected of terrorism based on preliminary intelligence reports (Huda, 2023). This reflects a preventive rather than a reactive approach, enabling an early response to potential situations. For instance, if Indonesia's intelligence agency intercepts communications indicating that a terrorist cell or individual is planning an armed attack, authorities may intervene before the usual criminal evidence, such as confessions, physical explosives, or weapons, is obtained. Second, human resource capacity was strengthened through the establishment of a specialized counterterrorism unit within Indonesian National Police in 2003, the Special Detachment 88 (Densus 88). Following its establishment, the unit received training and financial support from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Acharya, 2015). Third, institutional reforms focused on restructuring inter-agency coordination. Through Presidential Instruction No. 5/2002, BIN's authority is empowered to direct, coordinate, and oversee national intelligence operations (Satria, 2022).

Preventing individuals from becoming radicalised into violent extremism requires an understanding of the processes associated with radicalisation. As there is no single factor or universal cause leading to violent extremism, its underlying drivers can be examined from multiple perspectives (Ranstorp & Meines, 2024). One analysis can be found in the Radical Pathways (RP) Framework by Ramakrishna (2009), which explains radicalisation through the interaction of different factors. At the most fundamental level, all individuals possess innate tendencies, including in-group and out-group views, which extremist groups exploit by reinforcing black-and-white thinking. On the other hand, nurture encompasses culture, as individuals acquire biases and prejudices through their social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Ideology then further solidifies and intensifies these learned biases and prejudices, increasing the likelihood of radicalisation (Ramakrishna, 2015).

At first glance, ideology is often assumed as the primary factor underlying radicalisation. This perspective is reflected in the views of Simcox (2025), the UK Commissioner for Countering Extremism, who states that ideology is the “central issue” of terrorist violence. He elaborates that efforts to counter extremism should focus on challenging the ideology that legitimises and encourages violence. Supporting this issue, Holbrook’s analysis of 100 convicted terrorists finds that ideology is “indispensable in understanding terrorists”, the consistent and extensive

use of ideological material is closely associated with individuals' progression towards involvement in terrorist violence (Holbrook, 2025). From this standpoint, in the context of religiously motivated terrorism, particularly the Islamist terrorism, Islamic ideology may contribute to radicalisation by providing a pathway through which eternal salvation is explained and justified, which, in some circumstances, may encourage individuals to engage in terrorist attacks (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Similarly, religion has often been viewed as a key factor in explaining the process through which individuals become radicalised to extremist violence. For example, Silber and Bhatt's model identifies Salafi-jihadi ideology as the extremist religious/political ideology associated with radicalisation (Aly & Striegher, 2012).

Counter-radicalisation efforts in Indonesia are largely based on this perspective, placing ideology as the leading factor and pushing greater emphasis on surveillance and law enforcement measures. Evidence of this approach can be seen in the statement of the Indonesian State Intelligence Agency, which conducted intelligence operations in one thousand mosques across the country and identified that imams in 41 mosques within one area of Jakarta were promoting extremist views to worshippers, many of whom were civil servants employed by nearby government ministries (The Jakarta Post, 2018). Government monitoring has also expanded through emerging technologies, becoming part of Indonesia's counter radicalisation strategy. One example is Indonesia's deployment of drones to map and count mosques as part of efforts to identify locations that may be susceptible to radical influence. As one official stated, "Radical ideology can mushroom anywhere and mosques are one of the easiest places for it to spread" (The New Arab, 2020). Digital platforms have also become an increasingly arena as the spreading of radical ideology is not confined to physical spaces but extends to online channels. Recognising and responding to this development, Indonesian authorities have intensified online monitoring and enforcement. Between 2024 and mid-2025, 11,818 social media accounts containing radical content and disseminating radical ideologies were removed through actions led by the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) (Nastitie, 2025).

Since the discussion has focused on the ideological part of radicalisation, it is important to remember that radicalisation is a complex process with multiple layers. Recent studies show that numerous risk factors are associated with radicalisation,

ranging from psychopathological issues and social interaction problems to broader structural conditions (Pandey & Behera, 2026). Consistent with the Radical Pathways framework by Ramakrishna (2009), there is no single explanation that can fully explain the phenomenon of radicalisation. Focusing solely on ideology is therefore limiting. To complement it, it is necessary to take a closer look at an often-overlooked explanation of radicalisation, which is the 'innate' or nature-based dimension. This refers to the aspects of human predisposition. Examining radicalisation from a Human Nature perspective offers an advantage because it provides a more universal framework and has rarely been translated into policing practice, particularly within the Indonesian context.

In the radical pathways (RP) framework, this dimension is represented in the initial layer, or the outer ring, termed 'Existential Identity.' This segment emphasizes the role of human nature in the radicalisation process. This exploration becomes compelling because, despite human diversity, there lies an essential, innate aspect that is biological and instinctual in all of us. This often-subconscious element may explain why ordinary people can enact terrorist acts that appear incomprehensible. By definition, Waller (2007) defines human nature as a universal, evolved psychological structure shared by all humans.

These limitations raise two fundamental questions. First, how can the Human Nature perspective explain radicalisation? Second, how can this perspective be operationalised within preventive policing strategies for counter-radicalisation in Indonesia? This study addresses these questions by proposing an analysis that positions community policing as the operational mechanism for translating the Human Nature perspective into preventive policing, enabling early identification of individual and community vulnerabilities while strengthening resilience against radicalisation, thereby contributing to a more holistic approach to Indonesia's Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To answer the research questions, this study uses qualitative research based on document analysis to explore how the Human Nature perspective can inform preventive policing strategies for counter-radicalisation in Indonesia. This method involves

analysing various types of documents including books, academic journal articles, institutional reports, and digital newspaper articles (Morgan, 2022). Relevant literature and documentary sources were selected from reports and other evidence produced by individuals and institutions whose work is related to Human Nature, radicalisation, with the aim of translating these insights into preventive practices within the Indonesian context. However, this study does not provide a systematic evaluation of specific practices. Instead, it seeks to identify additional approaches to countering extremism taken by the state and non-governmental organisations in Indonesia, as well as the extent to which these stakeholders collaborate to prevent violent extremism and reduce recidivism among terrorism offenders.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Human Nature Perspective on Radicalisation

The idea of radicalisation, often associated with terrorism, is an intricate process with multiple layers, shaped by a wide array of drivers from innate traits, cultural influences, and social values to the indirect impact of the environment. These factors are so diverse and interwoven that identifying a singular cause is practically impossible. One particularly intriguing yet underexplored aspect is the role of human nature. Examining human nature means focusing on humans' inherent predispositions and discussing fundamental human instincts. This sheds light on potential drivers that may contribute to extreme actions, especially within the context of radicalisation leading to terrorism.

Human nature is perceived as an innate psychological structure and fundamental human instincts; it encompasses characteristics of all humans, transcending cultural differences and rooted in our biological evolution (Ramakrishna, 2009). A crucial part of this concept is the inherent Manichean mindset. This mindset reflects human psychology's deep-seated social categorization processes, emphasizing binarity or the tendency to view the world in extreme opposition (Ramakrishna, 2015). Thus, from a Manichean perspective, only two sides exist: good or evil, dark or light. In radicalisation, this mindset manifests as believing that one's ideology or group is righteous while the other is deemed false and unworthy of existence. Waller (2007) argues that forming social bonds and connections, coupled with kindness and cooperation, simultaneously fosters growing hostility towards those perceived as outsiders. The concept of "us" inherently creates a

contrasting "them." It then explains that we naturally gravitate towards the in-group due to the evolutionary benefits of survivability. This inclination dates back to our hunter-gatherer ancestors, who formed alliances for defence (Waller, 2007). However, the downside of this group dynamic is the potential for it to foster violent behaviour and, in extreme cases, mass murder (Ramakrishna, 2009).

Volkan (2006) explored this concept by highlighting that when the "shared identity" of large ethnic or religious groups feels "threatened," particularly during collective helplessness and humiliation by 'others,' the group's unity can be disrupted. In such scenarios, group members might respond aggressively, resorting to humiliating, harming, or even killing 'others,' even when their physical survival is not at stake. Lord Alderdice (2007) elaborates on this process, explaining how “the individual self becomes conflated with” the group identity, leading to a predominant “identification” with “fellow group members.” In addition, Terman et al. (2010) note that individuals often deeply integrate aspects of their identity into their group identity. Consequently, perceived threats to the group, be it through the risk of extinction or humiliation, can elicit strong emotional responses in the individual. Human nature plays a significant role in humans' propensity for black-and-white thinking and the importance of protecting one’s group.

Jemaah Islamiyah Case

Jemaah Islamiyah, established in the late 1990s, has emerged as a significant terrorist organisation in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia. Rooted in Islamist ideology, JI is driven by the goal of establishing a pan-Islamic state across the region (Council on Foreign Relations, 2009). The group garnered international attention following the 2002 Bali bombings. JI's operations indicate a profound tendency towards black-and-white thinking and the dissolution of individual identity within the group. The motivation behind JI's acts seems to have been retaliation for the massacres of Muslims by Christians in areas like Indonesia’s Maluku, North Maluku, and Poso, where communal conflicts flared in 1999 and 2000 (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2018). Driven by a sense of revenge for the killing of fellow Muslims, JI's attacks were primarily directed at Christian priests and churches. Recruitment often began with discussions about Maluku and Poso or by showing videos of the violence in those areas (ICG Asia Report, 2002). Individual attitudes within Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) vividly illustrate their

mindset of hostility towards out-groups. For instance, Mukhlas harbored deep-seated animosity towards non-believers, while Samudra nurtured a specific disdain for Americans, as detailed in Ramakrishna (2009). Moreover, Amrozi, Mukhlas's brother and a fellow convicted Bali bomber, demonstrated a profound lack of empathy for his victims, casually disregarding their nationalities by labelling them indiscriminately as 'Australians, Americans, whatever – they are all white people' (Ramakrishna, 2009). This insensitivity to the distinct identities within out-groups, such as various types of non-believers or the diversity among 'white people,' underscores the binary worldview within JI. This extremist perspective fuels their motivation for violence, as evidenced by Mukhlas's proclamation that all Westerners were 'dirty animals and insects that need to be wiped out.' Such declarations reveal the depth of their radicalisation and the intensity of their convictions.

Imam Samudra's justification for the Bali attacks illustrates this further. His emotionally charged rationale for opposing the US and its allies, avenging deaths in various conflicts, and committing to a global jihad against Jews and Christians demonstrates the group's unwavering commitment to their cause (Muhammad & Maksum, 2022). The concept of 'chosen trauma' refers to the profound emotional impact experienced by individuals who feel humiliated or oppressed due to the perceived victimization of their group. Volkan (2006) delves into this notion, defining chosen traumas as enduring intergenerational memories of events that evoke collective sentiments of helplessness, victimization, and humiliation within a group. Naturally, this sense of chosen trauma exerts a strong appeal to those searching for a communal cause, providing them with a feeling of security and a sense of purpose within the ideological framework of the group. Consequently, individuals often submerge their identities into the group's collective identity, described as "group mind." This process of assimilation into the group's framework often extends beyond the immediate circle, as exemplified by Imam Samudra's motives. Imam Samudra, arrested for the Bali bombing, cited his motives as avenging Muslims in various conflicts such as Afghanistan, Ambon, Poso, Bosnia, and East Timor (Abuza, 2003). His actions, driven by a desire to avenge Muslims in global conflicts and opposing Western interventions, demonstrate allegiance to an expansive "group tent." This broader identification aligns with Khosrokhavar's (2010) concept of "humiliation by proxy," where individual grievances are absorbed into a

collective cause, illustrating a seamless transition from personal identity to a shared, expansive group identity even if the distance is thousands of miles away.

The situation of Jemaah Islamiyah offers an analysis of radicalisation within Southeast Asia. The animosity towards out-groups, as particularly demonstrated by figures such as Mukhlas and Samudra, highlights an extremist mindset deeply embedded within the organisation. Such animosity originates from individual predispositions. Furthermore, the public statements of JI's members marked a significant erosion of personal identities, absorbed into the group's collective identity. This shift signals a deep-seated dissolution of individualism, replaced by an extreme group-centric mentality that instinctively seeks to protect its own. This attitude towards group survivability is a fundamental aspect of the radicalisation process. Operating under the belief that their objectives are justifiable and necessary can legitimize violent actions. This rationalisation reflects a commitment to their cause and the psychological processes within individuals and groups who have undergone radicalisation.

Human Nature and Preventive Policing

Applying the Human Nature perspective to preventive policing requires a shift from a predominantly threat-oriented approach toward a vulnerability-oriented one. The focus is not only on identifying which doctrines produce extremists but also understanding the human characteristics and vulnerabilities that may increase an individual's susceptibility to radicalisation. This does not imply reducing law enforcement efforts against individuals or terrorist organisations. Rather, it complements traditional security measures with preventive strategies that address individuals' vulnerabilities before violent extremism emerges. Such an approach is also relevant to the growing phenomenon of lone-actor extremists, whose radicalisation often occurs without direct involvement in a terrorist organisation. From this perspective, human nature factors become important precursors to radicalisation (Dittmar, 2025). Ramakrishna (2009) similarly argues that the Human Nature perspective, conceptualised through the Existential Identity dimension of the Radical Pathways framework, helps explain perceived injustice and group tent identification that may contribute to extremism. This approach is consistent with the understanding that extremist narratives become persuasive not because ideology alone is

inherently compelling, but because they appear to satisfy fundamental human needs for meaning, belonging, and status.

The proposed implementation is that community policing, as a form of preventive policing, provides an appropriate operational mechanism for translating this perspective into practice. Its objective, as set out in Regulation of the Indonesian National Police No. 1 of 2021, is to establish collaborative partnerships between the Indonesian National Police and the community, founded on mutual agreement, to identify and resolve issues that may generate potential threats to public security and order. The regulation further emphasizes promoting legal awareness and strengthening community responsibility for maintaining security and public order within their own communities (Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia, 2021). This function is carried out through *Bhayangkara Pembina Keamanan dan Ketertiban Masyaraka*t (Bhabinkamtibmas), or Security and Public Order Development, one of the Indonesian National Police's community policing officers (Rahanra & Kasihiuw, 2024), with around forty thousand personnel deployed across the country (Purwono, 2023). This demonstrates that the police are not merely an instrument of the state but also part of society and the communities they serve.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of lone-actor terrorism illustrates the importance of this perspective. Individuals may undergo radicalisation without formal affiliation to extremist organisations, making them less visible to conventional intelligence and law enforcement approaches. The 2019 Christchurch attack carried out by Brenton Harrison Tarrant illustrates this condition. According to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques (2019), Tarrant exhibited racist tendencies from an early age, while subsequent life experiences appeared to reinforce feelings of resentment. His manifesto centred primarily on racist, xenophobic, and anti-immigration beliefs rather than religious hostility, and despite the absence of confirmed organisational ties, his case illustrates how individual vulnerabilities and dispositions can culminate in extremist violence.

In this way, community policing might address the underlying problems that make individuals vulnerable to radicalisation (Sumpter, 2016). Law enforcement officers who maintain close connections with the communities they serve are better positioned to identify individuals who adopt extremist ideologies, become radicalised, and pose a potential threat of violence against people or facilities (Straub, 2020). Integrating insights

from the Human Nature perspective into preventive policing therefore offers a more comprehensive approach to counterterrorism by combining security measures with psychological prevention and community resilience. Operationally, this approach does not require every police officer to become a psychologist. Instead, it encourages police officers to be informed about evidence-based behavioural indicators, identify behavioural changes through routine engagement with their local communities, conduct structured early intervention, and facilitate appropriate referrals to police counsellors or psychologists when cases become more complex or exceed their capacity.

One practical application of this approach is community engagement through psychoeducation on cognitive vulnerabilities associated with radicalisation, including black-and-white thinking and group tent. For instance, Amrozi, one of the perpetrators of the Bali bombings, harboured deep-seated hatred toward the West. While feelings of hatred may arise, psychoeducation can help individuals and communities understand that such emotions do not necessarily lead to a Manichean worldview in which others are perceived as inherently evil and therefore must be eliminated.

Similarly, although it is understandable for Amrozi to feel empathy towards fellow Muslims affected by conflicts in the Middle East and to be distressed by the resulting casualties, it is also important to recognise that Indonesian Muslims have distinct cultural traditions and that Islam consists of diverse denominations. Recognising these differences does not diminish religious solidarity but instead encourages more nuanced thinking and understanding of shared identity. The objective is not to create divisions within the Muslim community, but to equip individuals with the ability to critically evaluate narratives. Contrary to the assumption that differences create divisions, Demmrich & Şenel (2025) argue that emphasizing the cultural and denominational diversity within Islam should be viewed as enriching rather than fostering prejudice or excluding others from the Muslim community.

From another perspective, ingroup entitativity does not necessarily manifest as conflict with or discrimination against outgroups but can instead be channelled in positive directions (Yzerbyt et al., 2000). Building on this idea, preventive policing can encourage individuals or groups who display this vulnerability to direct their commitment towards constructive activities, such as organising charitable initiatives or leading community campaigns that support others through non-violent means.

Moreover, as frontline practitioners, police are well positioned to foster social inclusion and strengthen social connectedness, both of which contribute to preventing violent extremism (Mazerolle et al., 2020). In this role, police officers can therefore design and organise community engagement programmes, as community engagement and connectedness have been identified as potential mitigating factors for those who may be vulnerable to engaging in violent extremism (Cherney & Murphy, 2017). Concrete applications may also include developing partnerships with specific organisations (Fox, 2012) and implementing police liaison programmes that actively engage community members (Cherney et al., 2018). In this way, police are able to translate the Human Nature perspective into practice by identifying individuals or communities and initiating interventions that provide legitimate opportunities to fulfil fundamental needs for identity, belonging, and purpose.

CONCLUSION

The case of Jemaah Islamiyah described in this paper highlights that factors beyond ideology contribute to radicalisation. There is no single pattern or pathway to radicalisation, and it is therefore important to recognise its multiple and complex layers. Often overlooked, the Human Nature perspective considers the innate characteristics of individuals and communities, including how black-and-white thinking leads to rigid perceptions of good and evil, or how the predisposition to identify strongly with groups and share in their suffering, even across great distances, may contribute to radicalisation. The Human Nature perspective therefore complements existing ways of understanding radicalisation and provides a stronger foundation for preventing violent extremism. Rather than focusing solely on threat assessment, this perspective encourages greater awareness of individual and community vulnerabilities. As preventive policing depends on early identification, community policing officers, who maintain close relationships with local communities, may be better able to recognise emerging vulnerabilities and respond before they escalate into violent extremism. In this way, community policing operationalises prevention through sustained community engagement and resilience-building. This perspective complements existing countering violent extremism strategies, including intelligence gathering and law enforcement. This paper contributes by linking the Human Nature perspective with preventive policing through community policing as an approach to counter-radicalisation. As a conceptual study, this research does not

empirically test the proposed framework. Future studies may examine its applicability through case studies, interviews with practitioners, or programme evaluations.

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