RSIS COMMENTARY

2 December 2025

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Noor Huda Ismail

RSIS S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

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www.rsis.edu.sg No. 235 – 2 December 2025

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SYNOPSIS

Indonesia is witnessing a disturbing rise in the online radicalisation of minors, with police confirming that 110 children aged 10-18 have been influenced or recruited by extremist networks in twenty-three provinces. The challenge in countering this trend lies in understanding why the phenomenon is intensifying and what it would demand from policymakers, particularly in involving the youth themselves in co-creating prevention strategies.

COMMENTARY

Recent disclosures from the Indonesian National Police underscore an unsettling shift in the country's counter-terrorism landscape. Brigjen Polisi Trunoyudo Wisnu Andiko reported that 110 minors aged 10 to 18 have been exposed to radical ideology and recruited into terrorist networks, with the highest concentrations in Banten, DKI Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, and East Java.

The recruitment of these minors is a subtle, highly digitalised process, beginning on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, and through online games, before moving to private channels like WhatsApp and Telegram. Extremists employ short videos, animations, memes, and music that resonate with adolescent culture, embedding ideology within content designed for entertainment and identity formation. This approach allows gradual indoctrination, exploiting both the cognitive vulnerabilities of youth and the emotional allure of belonging to a community.

Regional and Global Trends

Indonesia's domestic experience mirrors trends elsewhere. In Malaysia, authorities uncovered teenagers involved in pro-ISIS online study groups in 2024, while in Europe and North America, far-right extremist networks have leveraged Discord servers and online gaming platforms to reach adolescents. These international parallels show that child radicalisation is no longer isolated or anecdotal; it reflects a systemic shift in extremist tactics, exploiting digital culture and adolescent psychology. The aim is not only ideological recruitment but also the cultivation of loyalty, obedience, and digital proficiency to further network goals.

Indonesian examples highlight how radicalisation intersects with broader adolescent vulnerabilities. The explosions at State High School 72 of North Jakarta on Nov 7, 2025, are illustrative: A student involved in a bullying-related dispute deployed explosives, raising alarms about how online influences, social isolation, and peer pressure can converge with risky behaviours.

Although not initially a terrorism case, this incident demonstrates how exposure to online harms – including cyberbullying, violent content, and extremist symbolism – can escalate quickly into harmful action. The convergence of bullying, emotional distress, and digital exposure creates fertile ground for extremist messaging, underscoring the need for interventions that address the broader psychosocial and digital ecosystem of youth.

Scholars and policymakers do not dispute that minors are being targeted; the disagreement lies in why these patterns persist and intensify. Extremist actors have adapted to the social architecture of adolescence in the digital age. Children and teenagers inhabit participatory online ecosystems where belonging, status, and identity formation are negotiated.

Gaming guilds, social media subcultures, and short-video platforms provide constant social feedback, while algorithms amplify emotionally charged content, including conspiratorial, violent, or extremist material. Extremist narratives often exploit these mechanisms, embedding ideology within formats that are entertaining, familiar, and socially rewarding. This strategy reflects a longer-term vision: Extremists invest in minors as future recruiters, propagandists, or operatives, cultivating commitment before complete ideological comprehension is required.

The Case for Youth Co-Creation

Responding effectively requires more than traditional top-down interventions. Adult-driven campaigns, lectures, or media content that aim merely to instruct or warn are often ineffective because young people usually perceive them as inauthentic or disconnected from their lived digital experience.

Prevention strategies must instead meet youth in their own spaces, understand the codes of online communities, and engage with the social and psychological incentives that make extremist content appealing. To do so successfully,

policymakers must adopt a *co-creation model,* working with youth as partners rather than designing interventions solely for them.

This approach is not merely normative but reflects international best practice. UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (Youth, Peace, and Security) emphasises the importance of inclusive participation of young people in decision-making processes, including those aimed at preventing violent extremism.

The UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism similarly recommends treating youth as partners and leaders, not merely as "at-risk" populations. The Secretary-General's Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security further highlights the value of intergenerational co-creation, in which youth input, creativity, and lived experience inform the design of programmes to counter extremism effectively.

Transmedia and Youth Engagement in Indonesia

In Indonesia, Ruangobrol.id exemplifies the practical application of co-creation in the P/CVE (Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism) field. Through transmedia storytelling, young people actively participate in creating short films, web stories, and digital campaigns that resonate authentically with their peers. Youth contribute to scriptwriting, visual design, dissemination strategies, and narrative framing, ensuring the content is relatable and credible.

This participation enhances critical digital literacy, builds resilience against online manipulation, and leverages peer-to-peer influence to amplify counter-narratives. Importantly, it transforms adolescents from passive recipients of preventive messaging into active agents of change, capable of shaping the digital spaces in which extremist narratives circulate.

The benefits of co-created initiatives extend beyond content authenticity. Youth engagement fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment, which can counter the emotional and social drivers that initially make children susceptible to extremist messaging. By involving adolescents in creating and sharing content, these initiatives cultivate peer educators and digital trend monitors who can identify emerging risks before adults do.

In Indonesia's digital ecology, where social media, games, and messaging apps dominate everyday life, youth co-creators function as early-warning systems, community educators, and counter-influencers simultaneously.

Yet co-creation must be integrated into a broader ecosystem. School-based programmes can link transmedia initiatives with psychosocial support, anti-bullying measures, and digital literacy curricula. Families and communities must be engaged to reinforce positive narratives and provide guidance in navigating online spaces safely.

Partnerships with technology and gaming companies are essential to flag extremist content, moderate in-game interactions, and promote algorithmic transparency. Through these combined efforts, co-creation with youth becomes a systemic strategy

rather than a symbolic exercise, bridging prevention, education, and community resilience.

Conclusion

Indonesia faces a dual challenge. It must protect children from radicalisation while simultaneously empowering them as agents of resilience. The rise of online grooming and digital manipulation highlights not only the threat posed by extremist groups but also the evolving realities of adolescence in a hyper-connected world. Interventions that ignore the lived experiences, digital fluency, and social influence of youth are likely to fail.

Conversely, co-created, youth-led initiatives, such as those implemented through the transmedia P/CVE programmes of Ruangobrol.id, demonstrate how young people can be central to prevention efforts, countering extremist influence with authenticity, creativity, and credibility. Aligning with UN recommendations and global best practices, Indonesia has the opportunity to empower youth to be both guardians and architects of safe, resilient, and inclusive digital communities.

Noor Huda Ismail is a Visiting Fellow at RSIS and a strategic communication consultant for Southeast Asia with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). He also runs the award-winning interactive community website, www.ruangobrol.id.

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU Singapore
Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

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