Existential Anxiety and Ingroup Favoritism Leads to Promote Religious Extremism in Indonesia

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Abstract. In recent years in Indonesia, the development of violent religious behavior has been quite worrying. The behavior is predisposed by religious extremism. To overcome the issue, then conducted the study to find whether two vital constructs (existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism) can promote religious extremism. The present research has shown that existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism can promote religious extremism in Indonesia, triggering terror. Therefore,the solution can be proposed. Namely, Indonesian Society needs to pay attention to lived experience in a value-free way (like meditating or self-reflecting); don't make hasty judgments; think based on data and facts.

Keywords: existential anxiety; ingroup favoritism; religious extremism; Indonesian Muslim

1 Introduction

The development of violent religious behavior (one of Indonesia's latest socio-religious issues) is worrying and needs consideration.Last year, which we have recently passed, several acts of terrorism have been committed in the matter of religion.What is even more shocking is that there are more than hundreds of thousands of people connected to terrorist networks who are willing to carry out terrorist deeds [1]–[3].Therefore, a multidisciplinary study to overcome the issue and explain its causes is urgent. One of them is through a social psychology approach in explaining the dynamics of violent religious behavior.

Terrorism (violent religious behavior) results from religious radicalism or extremism (two-term can be used as a synonym)[1].Extremism or radicalism itself is defined as a psychological process in which an individual or a group embraces religious, political, social, or radical ambitions in order to achieve specific goals by rationalizing the use of indiscriminate violence. [4].Other definitions provide further information. Radicalism is a philosophy or school of thought that advocates for violent social and political transformation[5].Thus, extremism can lead a person to acts of terrorism.

Because ofreligious identity, the emergence of religious extremism can trigger religious zeal in overcominguncertainty in self[6].Psychological uncertainty is defined as the unpleasant sensation of being unsure of oneself or one's worldview. According to one central principle, to make meaning of their existence, humans participate in a fundamental "sense-making" process. The "sense-making" process and the people's search for a meaningful place in their lives are challenged by psychological uncertainty. Personal uncertainty is viewed as an

unpleasant experience, and these negative emotions encourage individuals to deal with it[7].It is consistent with the concept of existential anxiety that refers to the worries produced by fundamental risks to humanity's existence, such as fundamental loneliness, death, and meaninglessness[8], [9].Therefore, the researcher has the assumption that religious extremism is caused by existential anxiety that is turbulent within the individual.

Another crucial factor influencing the increase in religious extremism is ingroup favoritism.Ingroup favoritism, also known as ingroup–outgroup bias, ingroup bias, intergroup bias, or ingroup preference, tends to prefer ingroup members over out-group members. This can be exhibited in various ways, including evaluating others, allocating resources, and so on.Many psychologists have studied this phenomenon, and it has been linked to a variety of hypotheses about group conflict and prejudice[10] that will lead to religious extremism or radicalism [11].

Ingroup favoritism can arise because of a bias towards ingroups, which can be formed only because of simple things that are even illogical[12].One of the factors that can create this bias is a religion [13].Adherent religion usually gives a more favorable evaluation of their religious group than followers of other religions [14].A survey shows that Americans who religiously prefer Muslim Americans to atheists. Further research also explains that Christians are warmer to fellow Christians than to Muslims or Jews [15].This issue is also strengthened by research that states that the higher the status of religiosity, the higher the value of ingroup favoritism[13].

Based on the dynamics of the problems that have been highlighted above, the authors hypothesize that existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism affect promoting religious extremism in Indonesia.After the hypothesis is answered, the author will also explain how to overcome existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism, which can help demote religious extremism.

2 Method

2.1 Respondents

Three hundred thirty-three Muslims participated in the study (Male=118, Female =215). For the frequencies of age, there were 270 respondents (81.081%) with 18-40 years of age, 58 respondents (17.417%) with 41-60 years of age, and five respondents (1.502%) above 60 years of age. The author requests the respondent for participation and asks permission to use the data for analysis—the data collected byGoogle form.In the study, the sampling strategy was a convenient sample.

2.2 Design

In this study, the researcher wants to know whether Existential Anxiety (X1) and Ingroup Favoritism (X2) significantly promote religious extremism in Indonesia. Multiple regression analyses will be used in the research with the help of JASP (Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program).

2.3 Instruments

This research will use three measuring instruments, existential anxiety, ingroup favoritism, and religious extremism, with 6-point Likert scales. For the measuring instrument to have good quality, it must be examined for reliability and validity. The statistical software used to test this scale is SPSS 20 and JASP0.16.

Existential Anxiety. The author adopted the General Existential Anxiety scale of The Existential Concerns Questionnaire (ECQ) [8] to measure existential anxiety.The scale consists of nine items with all favorable. The reliability of the scale is strong(α = .940). The method used to test validity is confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The model fit indiceswere as follows: GFI = .915, NFI = .936, TLI = .929, CFI = .947, SRMR = .034 and RMSEA = .115.RMSEA levels less than 0.05 are considered good, values between 0.05 and 0.08 are considered acceptable, values between 0.08 and 0.1 are considered marginal, and values more than 0.1 are considered bad [16].It indicates that the RMSEA indicators are somewhat below the threshold. However, based on all other indices, this sample fits the 1-factor model well. All items have a good factor loadingrange between .758 and .855.

Ingroup Favoritism. The Ingroup favoritism scale, developed from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale by Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992 consists of 11 favorable items.Individuals who score higher on the Collective Self-Esteem Measure show more ingroup bias than those who score lower on the scale [18].A reliability coefficient for the scale is α = .911. For the model fit indices were as follows: GFI = .961, NFI = .971, TLI = .978, CFI = .985, SRMR = .039 and RMSEA = .056.According to these indicators, the sample has an acceptable fit, and the scale can be used to measure. For factor loading, all items are good in the range between .742 and .960.

Religious Extremism. The researcher adapted the Religious Power Violence and Extremism scale from the Violent Extremism Beliefs Scale (VEBS)[19]. The scale consists of four items with all favorable. For reliability, the scale has a good enough point (α = .870).The method used to test validity is confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The model fit indicators were as follows: GFI = .972, NFI = .974, TLI = .929, CFI = .976, SRMR = .028 and RMSEA = .155. Forthe RMSEA indicators are a bit below the required standard. But according to all other indices, this sample has an acceptable fit. All items have a good factor loading range between .720 and .809.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Analysis

To show the scores and analyze the trends of the respondents in this study, descriptive analysis was used.Based on result, the score of existential anxiety showedmean = 26.883; SD = 11.960; Xmin = 9; and Xmax = 54. For the score of ingroup favoritism showed mean = 54.036; SD = 8.775; Xmin = 22; Xmax = 66. And for the score of religious extremism showed mean = 9.261; SD = 5.244; Xmin = 4; Xmax = 24.

3.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 1 below showsthatthe significance score of the F Test is < .001. It means variable existentialanxiety and ingroup favoritism stimulatingly affect the increase in religious extremism among Indonesian Muslims.

Table 1. F Test Regression Result

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
H₁	Regression	1968.305	2	984.152	45.347	< .001
	Residual	7161.966	330	21.703		
	Total	9130.270	332			

In addition, the value of the coefficient of determination (R^2) must be seen to see the percentage contribution of the independent variable to the dependent variable.From table 2 below, the R^2 score in the study is .216. It means the independent variable (existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism) explained the value of the dependent variable (religious extremism) of 21.6%, and the remaining 78.4% was explained by additional variables that aren't included in this research. Moreover, the role of existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism separately also has a positive effect on religious extremism with successive values of β = .402 (< .001) and β = .299 (< .001).

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination Test Results

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	RMSE
H1	0.000	0.000	0.000	5.244
H2	0.464	0.216	0.211	4.659

According to the study results presented above, the research hypothesis, which states that existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism can stimulatingly promote religious extremism, is proven. In addition, existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism separately are also positively correlated with religious extremism. It means the higher the existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism of an Indonesian Muslim, the higher the religious extremism behavior.Therefore, to overcome religious extremism behavior in Indonesia, the issue of existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism must first be addressed.

Discussing existential anxiety is correlated with all conditions of human beings facing life's givens or ultimate worries of death, loneliness, freedom, and meaninglessness. Whether people are aware of it or not, these givens have an impact on how they interact and react to themselves, others, and the world.Failure to comprehend these existential issues might lead to inauthentic behavior concerning one's primary ideals. As a result, in order to deal with it, individuals must pay attention to lived experience in a value-free way, allowing them to move past existential dread and toward authenticity[20]. For example, a person can self-reflect, contemplate, meditate, or interpret worship.

Continuing with the discussion of ingroup favoritism, culture (collective and individualistic) plays a vital role in the issue.Indonesia is a country with a collective culture different from the individualistic western culture. Collective cultures tend to have higher ingroup favoritism levels than individualistic ones. This is following research conducted by Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, Hamilton, Peng, and Wang (2007) that stated because of their collectivistic culture, Chinese respondents would place a higher value on social groups than Americans (who are more individualistic), and as a result, they would be more inclined to infer psychological qualities based on group membership—that is, stereotype[21].Thus,Handling ingroup favoritism is crucial in Indonesia.

As stated in the introduction, ingroup favoritism has another term: ingroup-bias. This bias occurs because of the human tendency to think heuristically. The human brain is solid but subject to certain limitations. The bias is often the result of the human brain's attempts to simplify information processing. A rule of thumb helps humans understand the world and reach decisions quickly [22].

To overcome the issue, there are two vital solutions. First, don't make hasty judgments. A person's ability to detect and correct errors in a judgment will significantly deteriorate when they make rash decisions. There is no discretion in making hasty judgments.

The following solution it depends on the thinking based on data and facts. By understanding the data or facts in the conditions being faced, cognitively, one can see it in a sharper and broader condition so that mistakes in making judgments do not occur[22].However, to have the discipline of thinking like that, developing literacy must also be supported. But actually, Indonesia is rated 60th out of 61 nations according to a study conducted by Central Connecticut State University in 2016regarding the ability of literacy, just below Thailand (59) and above Botswana (61)[23]. It means Indonesia has a literacy ability issue. For this reason, improving literacy skills must be the focus.

5   Conclusion

The present study has shown that existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism can promote religious extremism in Indonesia, triggering terror.Therefore, resolving existential anxiety and ingroup favoritism in religious communities in Indonesia is vital to overcome this issue.Indonesian people, especially Muslims, can self-reflect, contemplate, meditate, or interpret worship for existential anxiety so that they can be grateful and give meaning to their lives.Meanwhile, to overcome ingroup favoritism, the two crucial solutions can be the answer: don't make hasty judgments and think based on data and facts.

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