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## Do Personality Traits Play a Role in Supporting Indonesian Islamic State? A Study of Fundamentalist Group Members in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at elucidating the role of *Salafi* ideology and symbolic threat as mediating variables in the relationship between the personal trait of openness to experience and support for the concept of Islamic political system. A sample of 325 members of three fundamentalist groups in Indonesia voluntarily responded to four scales to four scales, i.e., the openness to experience scale consisting of three items, the symbolic threat scale (three items), the *Salafi* ideology scale (five items), and the support for an Islamic political system scale (four items). Structural equation modeling was performed to validate the constructed model of mediation. The results showed a good fit for the constructed model. The *Salafi* ideology and symbolic threat fully mediated the relationship between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system. These findings suggest that openness to experience may

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be a prerequisite for negative political values, thus encouraging the respondents to further support the concept of Islamic political system. Additionally, since openness to experience may lead to negative political behaviors, this controversial and dynamic personality trait warrants further exploration.

#### KEYWORDS

openness to experience, symbolic threat, *Salafi* ideology, support for an Islamic political system

## Introduction

Moderate Moslems are a majority in Indonesia; these people believe that Islam and democracy are not in conflict (Ashour, 2009). Nevertheless, some Moslem groups consider that Islam and democracy cannot be united (Mujani, 2003) and fight to establish an Islamic government and implement Islamic law (Esposito & Voll, 2001). Working to establish an Islamic government is a divine duty for all Moslems to achieve salvation (Wiktorowicz & Kaltenthaler, 2006). The conflict between Islam and the State of Indonesia has been going on for a long time, ever since Indonesia gained independence in 1945 (Barton et al., 2021). The Moslem groups in Indonesia have been recorded to have had a cross-cutting attitude towards the government with various kinds of resistance (Hefner, 2020). The turmoil that occurred in the days of Kahar Muzakkar and Kartosuwiryo is proof that the idea of establishing an Indonesian Islamic state has long been flourishing in Indonesia (Nakamura, 2019; Soraya & Abdurakhman, 2019). The idea of forming an Indonesian Islamic state also did not retreat and remained alive until the post-reformation era, due to the repressive attitude and Islamic deprivation carried out by President Suharto (Zuhri, 2021). After the reforms, the Islamic group re-consolidated itself, including the hardline group. The year 1998 saw the birth of various organizations that would later become the cyclists of terrorist groups in Indonesia, such as *Jemaa Islamiya* (JI)<sup>1</sup> and the Mujahideen Assembly of Indonesia<sup>2</sup> (Mbai, 2014).

At present, there is a notable proliferation of diverse ideas and sympathies towards an Indonesian Islamic state. The Alvares research Centre (Ali, 2017) found that 17.8% of university students and 18.4% of high school students consider the Islamic government as the ideal government for their country. Consequently, 36.2% of the respondents were young people, which also shows a dynamic diffusion of such ideas among various strata of the society (Arifianto, 2020). Recently, this political thought has become a movement to uphold an Indonesian Islamic state, considering violence as part of its strategy (Putra & Sukabdi, 2014) and generating radical movements and

<sup>1</sup> *Jemaa Islamiya* (JI) has been designated a terrorist organisation and is banned from all activities by the United Nations, European Union, United States, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, and New Zealand.

<sup>2</sup> Mujahideen Assembly of Indonesia has been designated a terrorist organisation and is banned from all activities by the United Nations, Indonesia, Malaysia, United Kingdom, United States, South Korea, and China.

terrorism (Muluk et al., 2013; Verhulst et al., 2012). In fact, according to Byman (2015), radical fundamentalist forces in the Middle East brought new jihadist propaganda with a more violent insurgency (see also Gerges, 2016; Winter, 2015). Indonesia has witnessed a series of jihadist terrorist attacks since the Bali bombings in 2002 as the largest terrorist attack here (Pektas, 2021; Solahudin, 2013; van Bruinessen, 2013). On a Sunday morning, a terrorist group supported by *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah* (JAD)<sup>3</sup>, was responsible for a series of bombing in three churches in the city of Surabaya, killing 13 people and injuring dozens (Kahfi et al., 2018). Most recently, there has been a bombing in Bandung sector police station which was also carried out by the JAD network (Alam, 2023). This bombing claimed 10 victims including nine police officers and one civilian (Wibowo, 2022). All these events raise questions about those who support the concept of Islamic political system and whether a certain type of personality does play a role.

Current studies in the field of psychology are more focused on the issues of terrorism, radicalism, and extremism. At the same time, little information can be found about Islamic political system supporters. Several investigations were carried out by scholars in the field of Islamic studies (Bunzel, 2015; A. M. Hasan, 2018; Pektas, 2021; Rahmanto et al., 2020) and politics (Gerges, 2016; Joobani, 2017; Poirson & Oprisko, 2015). Nevertheless, the idea and sympathy for the Islamic approach is thought to arise from intrinsic human factors (Kaltenthaler et al., 2018). There are various views on the factors that influence support for this idea, such as political attitudes, identity, and even personality (Rifkind, 2020). Individual differences were considered as an antecedent of the political attitudes of political Islam groups; thus, several psychologists agreed that personality traits have a significant effect on political attitudes and behavior (Gerber et al., 2010, 2013; Moss & O'Connor, 2020; Ribeiro & Borba, 2016; Verhulst et al., 2012). The studies carried out over the last two decades indicate that the Big Five personality traits strongly predict political attitudes (McElroy & Dowd, 2007). Kaufman (2013) claims that the broadest domain of the Big Five personality traits is openness to experience. Openness to experience refers to intellectual curiosity and need for novelty (Denissen & Penke, 2008) as the strongest personality correlate of political attitudes (Furnham & Fenton-O'Creevy, 2018; Krieger et al., 2019; Sibley et al., 2012) relates to ten civic engagement models (Mondak & Halperin, 2008), political participation (Vecchione & Caprara, 2009), political intolerance (Brandt et al., 2015), social liberal support, economic policy, and left party voting (Barbaranelli et al., 2007; Gerber et al., 2010).

Psychologists are still debating on how political predispositions are related to personality traits, e.g., the role of openness to experience. High openness to experience was found to be positively correlated to numerous positive qualities or behaviors, and these include creativity (Kandler et al., 2016; Silvia et al., 2009), positive attitude towards immigrants (Gallego & Pardos-Prado, 2014), equal opportunities (Ackermann & Ackermann, 2015), left-wing political orientations (Furnham & Fenton-O'Creevy, 2018), and minimal prejudice against Africans and Afro-Americans (Flynn, 2005). Those who scored low in openness to experience typically stand firm with their

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<sup>3</sup> *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah* (JAD) had been identified by the United States Department of State as a terrorist organization in 2017. It is also banned by Iraq and Indonesia. It is also listed as a terrorist organization by the United Nations Security Council on 4 March 2020.

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own beliefs, need self-closure (Bareket-Bojmel & Shahar, 2011; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), believe in fundamentalist religion (Carlucci et al., 2011) and authoritarian ideology (Cohrs et al., 2012), adopt conservative positions (Osborne & Sibley, 2015, 2020), and challenge the status quo (McCrae, 1987; 1996; Onraet et al., 2011). Inconsistent results were shown by Swami et al. (2011, 2012) who indicated that high openness to experience has a positive correlation with negative qualities or behaviors, i.e., conspiracist beliefs or intolerance. Swami et al. (2010) also asserted that openness to experience significantly predicted paranormal and extraterrestrial beliefs. Brandt et al. (2015) found that people with both high and low levels of openness are more intolerant of groups whose worldviews conflict with their own.

Psychologists believe that the effect of personality traits on political attitudes is apparently mediated by some variables (Blais & Labbé-St-Vincent, 2011; Gallego & Oberski, 2012). Bakker et al. (2016) also argue that personality alone is not sufficient to predict political attitudes, since political attitudes are an unstable entity. The instability of relationships between personality traits and political attitudes may range depending on the contextual factors affecting the meaning of political stimuli (Gerber et al., 2010). Based on these grounds, Wiktorowicz (2005) stressed the role of openness to experience in shaping radicalization and extremism. Wiktorowicz asserts that openness to new people or novel ideas may encourage acceptance of the norms and standards of other groups, including those sharing radical views.

In the context of Indonesian politics, it was Effendy (2011) who noted that the regime intentionally weakened Islamist political groups during the Old Order (commonly referred to as ORLA, which ruled Indonesia from 1945 to 1965) and the New Order (commonly referred to as ORBA, which ruled Indonesia from 1965 to 1988). These sentiments contributed to dissemination of beliefs in a covert western conspiracy to foment terrorism in Indonesia. These Islamic political organizations resurfaced in 1988 as part of a student-led reformation movement aimed at overthrowing the New Order or ORBA regime (N. Hasan, 2006). According to Bar-Tal (1990) and Pettigrew (2003), the ultimate catalyst for people to abandon democratic norms and support anti-minority policies is their perception of existential threats. This perception exacerbates the symbolic threat, since this reappearance is viewed as a form of protection (Huddy et al., 2007). According to this explanation, the symbolic threat perceived by the Indonesian members of Islamic political groups mediated their openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system as a form of protection for Islamic values.

Since van Hiel et al. (2000) revealed that the correlation between openness to experience and political attitudes is inconsistent, these characteristics require further investigation. In this study, we examine the relationship between openness to experience and negative/positive characteristics or behaviors, confirming Blais and Labbe-St-Vincent's (2011) and Wiktorowicz's (2005) mediating hypothesis regarding this relationship (see also Gallego & Oberski, 2012; Swami et al., 2010). As mentioned above, psychologists agreed that other mediating variables need to be considered to clarify this relationship. The authors of this article suggest that symbolic threat and *Salafi* ideology are the two psychological factors that mediate both openness to experience and support for the idea of an Indonesian Islamic state. Symbolic threat

and *Salafi* ideology as the mediating variables to bridge the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables seem beneficial in explaining how individuals develop support for the concept of Islamic political system.

Therefore, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

**Hypothesis 1:** The relationship between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system is mediated by symbolic threat.

**Hypothesis 2:** The relationship between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system is mediated by *Salafi* Ideology.

### **Support for an Indonesian Islamic State**

*Daula Islam*, according to Bunzel (2015), refers to a former unrecognised quasi-state ISIS<sup>4</sup>. It conceptualizes Islam or Islamic law (*sharia*) as the basic framework of political and state experience (Brown, 2001). This ideology is based on the belief and perspective that Islam is an entire civilization in which religion cannot be separated from the state's affairs (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2004). Thus, the secular political form separates religion, and the state is not accepted. Therefore, every Moslem should participate in building an Islamic political system and society (Esposito & Voll, 2001), which idea forces people to seek political power to achieve this goal (An-Na'im, 2003).

The struggle to establish an Indonesian Islamic state has a long history. Indonesian people in the form of *Darul Islam* (DI/House of Islam) and *Tentara Islam Indonesia* (TII/ Indonesian Islamic Army) had rebelled since 1949, during the early independence time (Ramakrishna, 2009). However, although DI/TII failed to achieve its political objectives, the ideology survived and evolved into a new organization, namely JI (Solahudin, 2011).

Islamic revivalist activism that demanded the implementation of *sharia* and establishment of an Indonesian Islamic state had emerged since the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 (Munabari et al., 2020). According to Salim and Azra (2003), post-Suharto political Islamic movements such as *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI)<sup>5</sup>, Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Majelis Mujahideen Indonesia (MMI)<sup>6</sup>, and Islamic Community Forum (FUI) were characterized by the formalization of Islam, demanding the application of Islamic law. HTI is known for its call for an Islamic caliphate, and its legal entity status was revoked by the government in 2017. MMI is also a movement that calls for the implementation of Islamic law in Indonesia. However, MMI does not demand

<sup>4</sup> ISIS has been designated a terrorist organisation and is banned from all activities by the United Nations, United States, European Union, Russia, and many others. We condemn all forms of terrorism, particularly this organisation's activities.

ИГИЛ была признана террористической организацией; любая деятельность ИГИЛ запрещена в России, США, Европейском Союзе и многих других странах. Мы осуждаем любые формы терроризма, в том числе деятельность этой организации.

<sup>5</sup> *Hizb ut-Tahrir* has been designated a terrorist organisation and is banned from all activities in Russia, Bangladesh, China, Pakistan, Germany, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Kazakhstan and "across Central Asia", Indonesia, and all Arab countries except Lebanon, Yemen and the UAE.

Решением Верховного Суда РФ от 14 февраля 2003 г. № ГКПИ 03-116 «Хизб ут-Тахрир аль-Ислами», наряду с 13 другими исламскими организациями, была признана террористической организацией и запрещена в России.

<sup>6</sup> The Majelis Mujahideen Indonesia (MMI), or Indonesian Mujahedeen Council, is an umbrella organisation of Indonesian Islamist groups. The group has been designated a terrorist organisation and is banned from all activities by the United States on 13 June 2017.

the establishment of a caliphate or an Indonesian Islamic state (Shadiq, 2016), and MMI views elections as permitted by Islam. According to some studies, this situation was influenced by the Arab uprising in 2011 that gave rise to the “official Islam” models (Brown, 2017; Mandaville & Hamid, 2018; Pektas, 2019; Robbins & Rubin, 2017).

The government classifies JI, MMI, and HTI as religious extremist organizations due to their rejection of democratic systems and avoidance of democratic politics to increase their political power (Wibisono et al., 2019), as well as their support of the Islamic political system concept. Munabari et al. (2020) state that this political movement consistently campaigns for Islamic law implementation through collective action, such as protests, mass mobilizations, statements on media platforms, and petitions. Discussions around various economic problems, such as rising petrol prices and others (Wijayanti, 2023), are another method used to highlight the government’s inability to address existing issues while at the same time offering an Indonesian Islamic state as a solution. Therefore, this research was conducted among fundamentalist groups who reject democracy to find out the psychological factors that form the basis of their political attitudes. Psychologists have come to a consensus that openness to experience stands out as the critical trait in explaining group political views (Ribeiro & Borba, 2016).

### ***Symbolic Threat as a Mediator of Support for an Indonesian Islamic State***

According to González et al. (2008), a symbolic threat is evident when a group perceives the other group’s norms, values, and beliefs as different from theirs. A symbolic threat is a system of in-group members who perceive the outgroup as threatening since the outgroups have different values. These ideas are viewed as dangerous since they will supersede the way of life of their tribe. The importance of analyzing the factor of symbolic threat is connected with its significant effect on group relations. A high level of symbolic threat is associated with dislike and prejudice towards outgroup members, support intolerant and punitive actions (Huddy et al., 2007), and promote hostility not only towards rival groups but also towards women and homosexuals (Inglehart et al., 2006).

In this study, the relationship between openness to experience and support for the Islamic political system, as mediated by symbolic threat, focused the authors’ attention closely. The justification for this statement comes from Stenner’s study (2005), which indicates that personal threats act as a contextual factor mediating the importance of individual differences in behavior and opinion. Silber and Bhat (2007) expressed a similar view on the role of openness to experience, stating that becoming extreme begins with an openness to new ideas, including religious ones, which stimulates the process of worldview change. According to Wiktorowicz (2005), while openness to experience is a precursor to negative political behavior such as radicalization and support for the Islamic political system, concept, this process must be followed by negative perceptions or negative experiences in order to progress to negative political attributes.

Additionally, Islamic political groups in Indonesia view liberal democracy as a threat to Islamic beliefs and practices. The democratic system of norms, beliefs, and symbols is regarded as incompatible with Islamic values (Fealy, 2004; Ward, 2009). Numerous Islamic political groups in Indonesia seek to replace democracy with a non-

secular political system; they regard democracy as a *shirk* (infidelity to God) system (Chusniyah, 2012). This situation creates fear that other cultures will eradicate Islam's system, values, morality, and way of life (Sageman, 2004), and also threatens the in-group cultural identity (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2009). Islamic political groups are motivated by the threat to believe in the critical nature of establishing an Islamic state and regulating Islamic society (Chusniyah, 2016a).

Symbolic threat can mediate the relationship between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system, a system that the outgroup perceives as posing a threat, being read as a personal grievance owing to openness to experience. Threat as a powerful mediator has received attention in various Indonesian studies, such as in the case of interreligious violence in Indonesia as well as interfaith contacts (Kanas et al., 2015; Setiawan et al., 2021, 2022). Therefore, investigating whether this same threat will lead a fundamentalist to embrace an Indonesian Islamic state is essential. Despite the absence of a theoretical justification for the specific direction of the interactions, the authors wish to test them in an exploratory manner by verifying the following hypothesis: the association between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system will be mediated by symbolic threat.

### ***Salafi Ideology as a Mediator of Support for an Indonesian Islamic State***

In the mid-nineteenth century, some Moslem intellectuals recognized the imperative of renewing the Islamic world and considered establishing *Salafi* ideas (Frey, 2007). *Salafis* believe that since the *salaf* received their education directly from the Prophet or those who knew him, they consequently possessed a pure understanding of Islam. Therefore, all life decisions must be based on evidence from the *Qur'an* and *Sunna*, as recorded in authentic sayings (*hadiths*) by the *salaf* (Wiktorowicz, 2000). Further research on specific aspects, such as *salafis* with certain people, has not been carried out. Early research on *Salafi* Moslems has been conducted, for example, discussing the roots of *Salafi* ideology (Howell & Lind, 2010), violent acts, and cultural resistance (N. Hasan, 2018).

Although purification of religion initiated by the *Salafi* is a personal matter, not a political doctrine (N. Hasan, 2006), all Moslems are required to re-establish Islamic societies and countries to purify Islam. *Salafi* Moslems believe that God will bless their lives if they adhere to the total Islamic system (Chusniyah, 2016a). According to this Islamic political group, Islam can only be implemented through an Islamic political system (Chusniyah, 2016b). The ideal of practicing Islam perfectly and purely as in the time of the *salaf* can only be realized in the absence of a secular government (Chusniyah, 2012). True Islam entails a lack of fear of *kuffar* or anything inconsistent with the Islamic way of life. This spirit of fearlessness towards the *kuffar* motivates *Salafi* adherents to express their faith more concretely by supporting the concept of Islamic government.

In Indonesia, there is a distinction between the *Yamani Salafi* known to be very extreme and the moderate *Haraki Salafi*. *Yamani Salafi* considers the involvement in all practical politics, e.g., elections, as a heresy (everything that is not exemplified by the Prophet), perversion, and thus *shirk*. *Yamani Salafi* like FKAJ and Ja'far Umar Thalib's *lasykar jihad* were also involved in the Ambon and Poso conflicts (N. Hasan, 2006). At the same time, *Haraki Salafi*, such as *Wahdah Islamiyah*, instructed its



members to participate in the election. The PKS (The Prosperous Justice Party) and PBB (Star Crescent Party) are political parties with *Salafi* ideology but enter as parties that contribute to secular democracy (Sila, 2010). According to *Haraki Salafi*, Islam does not have a standard system in the electoral system; hence, it may adopt electoral systems from the West.

This phenomenon can also be attributed to several influential factors, including globalization, democratization, the media, and education. N. Hasan (2018) showed that the growth of *Salafism* experienced significant expansion during the period coinciding with the completion of the Suharto regime in 1998. In mid-1997, before the fall of the Suharto regime, Indonesia experienced a severe financial crisis, which had an impact on the socio-political sector and created multidimensional problems (Djiwandono, 2002). The condition of the country was increasingly chaotic: the people were having difficulty meeting basic needs, eventually losing patience and trust in the government. Furthermore, Djiwandono explained that the weakened society tended to embrace the utopia of *sharia* enforcement. At that time, Islamic activism in Indonesia grew and diversified, with various types of Islamic movements emerging, both peaceful and militant *Salafi* groups (van Bruinessen, 2018).

The development of *Salafism* in Indonesia also cannot be separated from the very ambitious global Wahhabization campaign of Muslims from Saudi Arabia (N. Hasan, 2010). The rapid dissemination of *Salafi* ideology can be attributed to the implementation of the *Salafi* mission by its adherents, as noted by Sedgwick (2018). *Salafism*, as expounded by Woodward (2017), has the potential to incorporate elements of Arab cultural tradition into the everyday lives of Indonesian individuals. However, it is worth noting that *Salafi* adherents may also exhibit resistance towards and disapproval of longstanding Indonesian traditions. The pervasive impact of this ideology has significantly exacerbated the conflict with the predominant population of moderate Muslims in Indonesia.

Mulyadi et al. (2023) have presented another observation, indicating that *Salafism* in contemporary times has undergone significant transformations, adopting a more adaptable form of movement that engages in agonism and exhibits a tendency towards pseudo-nationalism. The ideology of *Salafism* possesses the capacity to empower and transform an individual's identity, as it necessitates a departure from the prevailing culture and a sincere adoption of Islamic principles in order to restore one's identity. As posited by Wiktorowicz (2005), the foundation of any endeavor lies in the willingness to embrace novel experiences and ideas. The likelihood of individuals to accept *Salafi* ideologies is positively correlated with their level of openness to experience and the extent to which they adhere to *Salafi* ideology.

To summarize, when individuals have a high level of openness to experience, they are more likely to be exposed to new information, including *Salafi* ideology. *Salafi* ideology is not merely a belief system; rather, it is a belief system that encourages its adherents to take concrete action to manifest their belief by changing a democratic system they deemed to be *shirk*, which explains their proclivity to support a non-secular political system. Based on that rationale, this study investigates the theoretical hypothesis that



individuals who exhibit a high degree of openness to experience support an Islamic political system when confronted with a context of *Salafi* ideology (as a mediator).

## Material and Methods

### Data Collection and Participants

Taking into account the sensitivity of the issue under consideration and the closeness of the group under study, data collection was not an easy process. First, the authors approached MMI leaders (i.e., A) in Yogyakarta to help collect data among their groups in the cities of Yogyakarta, Solo, Sragen, Karang Anyar, and Sukoharjo. Second, the authors contacted the *Jemaah Anshorut Tauhid* (JAT)<sup>7</sup> Surabaya’s leader (i.e., AR) to help collect data in Malang, Surabaya, Solo, Bima, and Jakarta. Third, because HTI as a group had its legal entity status revoked in 2017, the authors contacted the HTI Surabaya and Jakarta social networks (i.e., IY) to help collect data in Surabaya and Jakarta. Before collecting data, the authors submitted an ethical clearance to the college institution. And then, the authors communicated with the congregational leaders to explain the research objectives and provide the questionnaire used for this study. The leaders played a role in conveying the research objectives that had been explained by the authors to the members and assisting in collecting questionnaires. The participants took part in this research voluntarily without rewards, which was confirmed by the informed consent they signed. Data collection was assisted by the leaders of JAT, MMI, and HTI by distributing questionnaires to their group’s leaders, members, and sympathizers. The study enrolled 325 male leaders, members, or sympathizers of JAT, MMI, and HTI groups. Data were collected based on the subject’s identity as a leader, member, or sympathizer of the group. Sympathizers are defined in this study as those actively involved in the group’s activities such as attending the preaching, without being a member. Initially, 385 participants were included in this study. However, 60 participants were excluded during data analysis due to their scores being considered outliers. The following are some sample details: JAT has 123 leaders, members, and sympathizers; MMI has 127 leaders, members, and sympathizers; and HTI has 75 leaders, members, and sympathizers. Data on demography of the participants are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Sociodemographic Characteristic of Respondents*

Characteristics	N	%
Age	16–23	10.8
	24–35	53.8
	36–47	27.7
	More than 47	7.7

<sup>7</sup> *Jemaah Anshorut Tauhid* (JAT) is a splinter cell of the *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), which is designated a terrorist organisation and banned from all activities by the United Nations and the United States.

**Table 1 Continued**

Characteristics		N	%
	Primary school	7	2.2
	High school	179	55.0
Educational level	Undergraduate	115	35.4
	Graduate	8	2.5
	Doctoral	16	4.9

In this correlational investigation, all variables were quantified on a scale rather than using vignettes or other experimental techniques. The selection of participants was carried out based on convenient sampling that relies on the participant's willingness to participate in this research. The study utilized four measures: one as a predictor, two as mediators, and one as a dependent variable. For measurements, a 4-point Likert scale was used. All latent variables underwent confirmation factor analysis. We will go into further detail about the fit measure results for each measurement model.

*Support for an Islamic political system.* The authors designed a measure as an indicator of an individual's belief about the importance of establishing an Indonesian Islamic state as absolutely important. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to measure the measurement model fitness. This measure consists of six items. Four of the factor loading results were valid, which showed standardized factor loading values ranging from .584 to .848. Two items showed a below standard factor loading, which resulted in this item being dropped from the model measurement. This measurement model goodness of fit indicates an absolute fit (chi-square  $p = .307$ ), average value explained (AVE) is .526, composite reliability (CR) is .814 (no need for additional fit index since the goodness of fit showing the chi-square result is above .05 which means it is an absolute fit).

*Openness to experience.* The authors measured openness to experience adopted from the Big-Five scale of McCrae (1996). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the measurement model fitness. The measure consisted of four items. Three of the factor loading results were valid, showing standardized factor loading values ranging from .476 to .780. One item showed a below standard factor loading value of  $-.060$ , which resulted in this item being dropped from the model measurement. This measurement model goodness of fit indicates an absolute fit ( $p = .250$ ), AVE is .354, CR is .608 (no need for additional fit index since the goodness of fit showing the chi-square result is above .05 which means it is an absolute fit).

*Symbolic threat.* The authors used the factor of symbolic threat for this research to indicate an existing system considered a threat to Islam. This measure indicates an absolute fit ( $p = .175$ ). It consisted of three valid items, with a factor loading value ranging from .645 to .875, AVE is .578, CR is .844 (no need for additional fit index since the goodness of fit showing the chi-square result is above .05 which means it is an absolute fit).

*Salafi ideology.* The authors developed a measure of *Salafi* ideology to indicate the level of an individual's belief in the practice of Islam. This measure indicates a good model fit ( $p = .009$ , comparative fit index, CFI = .976, Tucker–Lewis index, TLI = .960, root-mean-square error of approximation, RMSEA = .069). It consisted of five valid items among six items, which showed standardized factor loading values ranging from .518 to .795. One item showed a below standard factor loading of only  $-.206$ , resulting in this item being dropped from the model measurement; AVE = .498 CR = .829 (no need for additional fit index since the goodness of fit showing the chi-square result is above .05 which means it is an absolute fit).

**Data Analysis**

The authors used structural equation modeling (SEM) to conduct the analysis using JASP statistical software. The model's fit is seen from the chi-square significance and goodness of fit index. Further, to see the mediating role of mediating variables in the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables, the authors assessed the total, direct, and indirect effects. This step is used to determine whether the mediating variable acted as a full mediator or partial mediator.

**Results**

We performed a principal component analysis with Promax rotation and with all items included for each scale in order to check whether different scales measured different concepts. The results of this analysis included four components or factors, which were loaded above .6. Four items which were predicted to belong on the same scale were loaded strongly on the same factor. These were openness to experience, symbolic threat, *Salafi* ideology, and support for an Islamic political system. Initial eigen values generated values of 5.27 (32.95% of the variance) for the first factor, 1.97 (12.28% of the variance) for the second factor, 1.59 (9.93% of the variance) for the third factor, and 1.198 (7.49% of the variance) for the fourth factor.

Furthermore, in the bivariate correlations, all variables were shown to be significantly correlated to one another (see Table 2.). The mean score of *Salafi* ideology was 3.77 ( $SD = 0.36$ ); openness to experience was 2.93 ( $SD = 0.53$ ); symbolic threat was 3.52 ( $SD = 0.65$ ); support for an Islamic political system was 3.52 ( $SD = 0.54$ ).

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables in This Study*

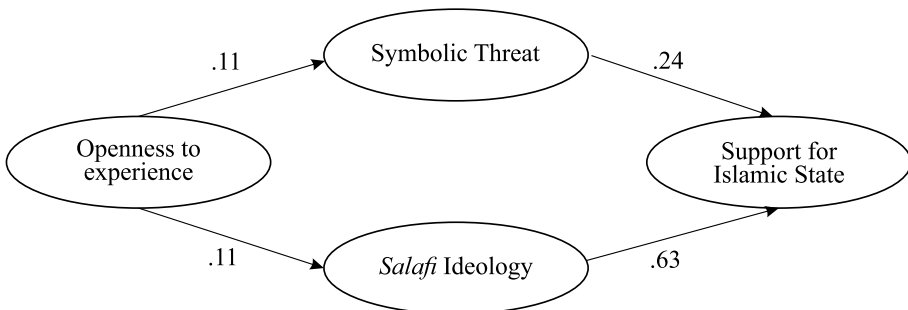
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Salafi ideology	Openness to experience	Threatening system	Islamic state
Salafi ideology	3.77	0.36	–	.14**	.39**	.51**
Openness to experience	2.93	0.53		–	.20**	.14**
Threatening system	3.52	0.65			–	.38**
Islamic state	3.52	0.54				–

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The proposed structural model exhibits a high degree of fit: goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = .955; adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = .932; comparative fit index (CFI) = .973; normed fit index (NFI) = .935; RMSEA = .04, thus indicating that it is suitable for explaining the relationship between variables. The path coefficient indicates a significant positive relationship between openness to experience, symbolic threat, and *Salafi* ideology, as illustrated in Figure 1. It indicates that an increase in an individual's openness to experience leads to an increase in symbolic threat. It also applies to *Salafi* ideology, where the more openness to experience an individual possesses, the more open their *Salafi* ideology becomes. Additionally, the symbolic threat has a significant positive relationship with support for an Islamic political system, indicating that the more a system is perceived as a symbolic threat, the more support an individual has for an Islamic state. *Salafi* ideology and support for an Islamic political system have the highest correlation coefficient. It demonstrates that the more individuals agree with *Salafi* ideology, the more Islamic state supporters they are.

**Figure 1**

*Diagram Model With Standardized Coefficient*



The authors decomposed the total effect into direct and indirect effects to examine the mediating role of symbolic threat and *Salafi* ideology. Table 3 demonstrates that there is no direct link between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system, which implies that symbolic threat and *Salafi* ideology can serve as a complete mediator between openness to experience and support for an Indonesian Islamic state. This finding supports the first and second research hypotheses: that symbolic threat mediates the relationship between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system and that *Salafi* ideology mediates the relationship between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system.

**Table 3**  
*Decomposition of Unstandardized and Standardized Direct and Indirect Effects on Support for an Islamic Political System*

Variables	Total Effect		Direct Effect		Indirect Effect	
	Unstan- dardized	Stan- dardized	Unstan- dardized	Stan- dardized	Unstan- dardized	Stan- dardized
Openness to experience	.144	.111	.000	.000	.144	.111
Symbolic threat	.198	.239	.198	.239	.000	.000
Salafi ideology	1.015	.734	.866	.626	.149	.108

### Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings indicate that the relationship between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system is mediated by both symbolic threat (Hypothesis 1) and *Salafi* ideology (Hypothesis 2). This empirical finding corroborates the Swami et al. (2010) study, which demonstrated that openness to experience could result in an unfavorable political attitude/behavior. This finding also agrees with Blais and St-Vincent (2011), Gallego and Oberski (2012) that the influence of personality on political attitudes is indirect, which is why a mediator is required. More precisely, symbolic threat and *Salafi* ideology act as mediators in this study, mediating the effect of openness to experience on support for an Islamic political system. Individuals affiliated with Islamic political groups and more receptive to experience may support and fight for an Islamic state when they embrace *Salafi* ideology. When they consider other values a symbolic threat, they are more likely to support the concept of Islamic political system. The mediation hypothesis in this study is also consistent with the finding by Gerber et al. (2010) that the relationship between personality and political attitude varies according to the political and social context (i.e., symbolic threats and *Salafi* ideology).

The findings related to Hypothesis 1 indicate that members of Islamic political groups more receptive to experience will support an Islamic state mediated by symbolic threat. The symbolic threat is a perception of another group's norms, values, and beliefs as being distinct from their own and posing a threat to their norms, values, and beliefs (González et al., 2008). The symbolic threat means having a negative attitude towards a particular object; hence, it can be viewed as a grievance. The openness to experience trait combined with a complaint, according to Wiktorowicz's (2005) argument, leads to an unfavorable political attitude. Due to the current state of the world, secular lifestyles are perceived as a threat to the integrity of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings (Sageman, 2004). Some of them regard democracy as an incompatible political system with Islam (Ward, 2009). Democracy jeopardizes the religion, values, belief system, ideology, philosophy, morality, and worldview of Islam. Sedgwick (2018) elucidated why this threat is imminent for Moslems, stating that a Moslem's life is not centered around great questions of theology or law, but rather

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around more immediate daily concerns, such as cultivating piety and appropriate habits. Fair and Shepherd (2006) also discovered that the predominance of national and secular identities over Moslems in technological and cultural realities contributed to the emergence of perceptions that Islamic values were under attack. According to Islamic political organizations in Indonesia, the perception of threat has evolved into a sense of Islam's global weakness and defeat.

The results obtained with regard to Hypothesis 2 explain why individuals belonging to Islamic political groups who are highly receptive to experience will support an Islamic state mediated by *Salafi* ideology. According to McCrae and Costa (1986), individuals with a high level of openness to experience are imaginative, curious, receptive to new ideas, thus being ready to reassess values. Islamist political organizations in Indonesia view the *Salafi* doctrine as a new interpretation of the religion's beginnings (Mujani, 2003), which makes its members who are receptive to experience to become curious and search for additional information. According to McCrae (1987), a high level of openness to experience makes people more confident and adaptable when acquiring new information or ideas.

According to Wiktorowicz (2005), people are initially motivated by a cognitive opening that makes previously held ideas less specific. Once individuals are open to new ways of thinking and worldviews, a cognitive opening help facilitate possible receptivity to joining a movement and engaging in activism. A crisis or psychological discomfort can be addressed and resolved using people's current belief systems. However, individuals may be receptive to alternative viewpoints where this appears insufficient. The particular crisis that triggers a cognitive opening is unique to each individual. Based on an individual case study of Kamel Daoudi, Basmisirli (2017) stated that he views his search for *Salafi* as an intellectual process of unraveling new ideas in an example that demonstrates an openness to experience. When an individual's identity is entwined with religion or derives its meaning from religion, a cognitive opening may result in "religious seeking," a process by which an individual seeks a satisfactory system of religious meaning through which to interpret and resolve their dissatisfaction.

Interestingly, individuals with a high degree of openness to experience have been shown to value unusual or unique ideas, being intellectually curious and highly imaginative. As a result, they are exposed to a wider variety of information. Openness to experience is greatly influenced by the information being fed to individuals (Flynn, 2005), making negative attribution when such people receive new destructive information.

DiGiuseppe et al. (2014) explained that *Salafi* ideology can be considered an inferential belief in this case because members of this group infer reality based on their perceptions. When members seek to implement Islamic principles in their daily lives, they tend to view democracy as an impediment. This perception leads them to believe that democracy threatens their norms and values, which is why they support the concept of Islamic political system. This ideology fueled the Islamic state movement in the Middle East and has developed into a new area of study and political knowledge for Islamic political groups in Indonesia (Sila, 2010).

For Islamic political groups with a high level of receptivity to experience, the most critical issues are Islamic authority to purify the religion, re-manage Moslem community behaviors following Islam (Frey, 2007), and apply Islamic law in all spheres of life. These can only be obtained through political power consolidation (An-Na'im, 2003). The pure Islamic state is prepared to accommodate Moslems in Indonesia's new ethical, social, and political perspectives. Support for an Islamic political system from Islamic political groups with a high level of receptivity to experience and *Salafi* ideology also becomes the antithesis of what is considered a deviant Islam practice (Chusniyah, 2016a).

According to Wibisono et al. (2019), Islamic extremism in Indonesia has a political dimension that advocates for a caliphate or an Islamic state. These people believe that political norms should be strictly followed to alter the current system, since all aspects of life are already prescribed in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. The symbolic threat experienced by this group also reflects the social dimension of extremism, as they view democracy as a system that jeopardizes their practice of the Islamic way of life.

The conducted study presents interest in terms of socio-demographics, since 64.5% of the research sample were young people aged 16–35 years and 97.8% were high school or university graduates. It shows that young adults are a group that is vulnerable to being affected by radicalization and violent extremism at various levels (Maunah, 2022; Winter et al., 2017). *Salafi* groups spread their messages using the Internet and social networking sites. In Indonesia, Internet user penetration is 143.26 million people, with 66.2% of them belonging to the 13–34-year age group (Affan, 2018). This is also in line with Alizadeh et al. (2017) who screened over 355,000 Twitter<sup>8</sup> messages from followers of nonviolent organizations, comparing them to random users, followers of apolitical celebrities. Extremist followers were found to be more open than non-extremists. In addition, personality profiles characterized by a high level of openness can be the basis for political radicalization, as these individuals quickly spread their opinions.

It can be concluded that the developed mediation model makes theoretical sense and that the empirical evidence presented here provides preliminary support. This study established that openness to experience can significantly affect the tendency of individuals to support an Islamic state when mediated by symbolic threat and *Salafi* ideology. The contextual nature of the relationship between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system is emphasized. When individuals perceive the current system as a symbolic threat or are exposed to *Salafi* ideology, openness to experience has a more significant influence. Through symbolic threat and *Salafi* ideology, this study also examines the relationship between openness to experience and support for an Islamic political system. It can be concluded that the Big Five factor of openness to experience, which has generated considerable controversy, is a dynamic and intricate personality trait requiring further exploration. Complex relationships between this trait and other human qualities, behaviors, abilities, and attitudes deserve deeper consideration.

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<sup>8</sup> Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.



Despite the above, the present study is not devoid of limitations, which consisted in the difficulty of accessing closed sample groups. As a result, the authors were not able to retrieve the data directly, but had to rely on the leaders of each group under study. As a result, caution should be exercised when generalizing and applying the findings. It is recommended that the theoretical models used in this study be validated among mainstream Moslems to determine whether the results are consistent. Consequently, policymakers can strengthen law enforcement to combat the spread of *Salafi* ideology and increase the dissemination of democratic content to expose citizens to a high level of openness to experience. Additionally, the government can increase the intensity of dialogue with members of Islamic political groups to persuade them in the compatibility of democracy and Islam.

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