

# Deviant Thought Movement in Malaysia: Factor Analysis, Spread and Preventive Action

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## Abstract

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*Heretical teachings are a phenomenon that has existed since the early development of Islam and continue to pose a serious threat to the faith of Muslims, particularly in Malaysia. In the current context, the spread of deviant beliefs has become increasingly alarming due to globalization and advances in digital technology. Despite various efforts through the issuance of fatwas and the enforcement of sharia law, this issue remains difficult to contain. This study aims to identify the main factors behind the emergence of deviant thought movements in Malaysia, examine their prevalence patterns particularly through social media and cyberspace, analyze the negative implications for individuals and society, and propose effective prevention strategies. A qualitative approach is used through library research, involving content analysis of scientific sources, official documents, fatwas, and related past studies. Findings show that the main factors driving heresy include a lack of religious knowledge, the influence of charismatic leaders, and the misuse of digital media. Religious institutions such as JAKIM, the State Islamic Religious Departments, and the Mufti Departments are identified as critical pillars in enforcement and monitoring efforts.*

**Kata kunci:** Heretical Teachings, Fatwa, Faith, Society.

## Abstrak

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*Ajaran sesat merupakan fenomena yang telah ada sejak awal perkembangan Islam dan terus menjadi ancaman serius bagi keimanan umat Muslim, khususnya di Malaysia. Dalam konteks kekinian, penyebaran ajaran sesat semakin mengkhawatirkan akibat pengaruh globalisasi dan kemajuan teknologi digital yang memudahkan penyebaran kepercayaan menyimpang secara cepat dan terselubung. Meskipun berbagai upaya telah dilakukan melalui penerbitan fatwa dan penegakan hukum syariah, isu ini masih sulit dikendalikan dan menimbulkan tantangan besar bagi otoritas keagamaan. Studi ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor utama kemunculan gerakan pemikiran sesat di Malaysia, mengkaji pola penyebarannya melalui media sosial dan dunia maya, menganalisis dampak negatifnya terhadap individu dan masyarakat, serta mengusulkan strategi pencegahan yang efektif. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui analisis pustaka terhadap sumber-sumber ilmiah, dokumen resmi, fatwa, dan kajian terdahulu yang relevan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa faktor utama kemunculan ajaran sesat meliputi minimnya pengetahuan agama, pengaruh pemimpin karismatik, dan penyalahgunaan media digital. Peran institusi keagamaan seperti JAKIM, Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri, dan Jabatan Mufti diidentifikasi sebagai pilar penting dalam upaya penegakan dan pemantauan. Studi ini juga mengidentifikasi beberapa contoh ajaran sesat di Malaysia beserta langkah-langkah pencegahan yang menekankan penguatan pendidikan agama, pemantauan media, dan kolaborasi terpadu antara institusi keagamaan, pemerintah, dan masyarakat.*

**Keywords:** *Ajaran Sesat, Fatwa, Keimanan, Masyarakat.*

## **Introduction**

Heretical teachings are not a new phenomenon in the lives of Muslims. Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), deviations in faith have been recorded throughout Islamic history, and Malaysia is no exception. According to Ahmad Syahir and Aini Raudhah (2024), although Islam has grown rapidly and is recognised as the majority religion, history has also recorded the emergence of heretical teachings that deviate from mainstream Islam. The main characteristics of such movements include claims of being God or His representative, the appearance of false prophets, and the use of mystical and psychological approaches to bind followers.

In the era of borderless globalisation and technological advancement, the spread of heretical teachings has become far easier. Social media and digital platforms have become primary vehicles for the dissemination of deviant doctrines that transcend geographical boundaries, making it increasingly difficult for religious authorities to respond effectively (Kamsani, 2024). This challenge is compounded by the fact that heretical movements typically operate covertly and in an organised manner, rendering detection and eradication more complex.

Various heretical teachings have been identified in Malaysia, including Al-Arqam, Ayah Pin, and the Last Dream Journey (PMYT). Religious institutions such as the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and state Islamic religious departments play a strategic role in addressing this issue. This study seeks to fill the knowledge gap in the scholarly

literature by systematically identifying the factors contributing to deviant thought movements, mapping their patterns of spread, and formulating comprehensive prevention strategies.

### **Literature Review**

Several prior studies have made important contributions to understanding the phenomenon of heretical teachings in Malaysia. Johanizam et al. (2024), employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, found that social media plays a major role in spreading heretical teachings, while the lack of systematic religious education and the influence of charismatic doctrinal leaders are significant contributing factors. Their study also revealed the impact of heretical teachings on individual mental well-being, family harmony, and social stability, calling for a comprehensive prevention approach that encompasses strengthening faith education, monitoring digital content, and active involvement of communities and religious institutions.

Ahmad Syahir and Aini Raudhah (2024) traced the history of heretical teachings in Malaysia from the colonial era to post-independence, identifying that weak grassroots religious education, public ignorance of authentic Islamic teachings, the influence of charismatic leaders, and social pressures are dominant contributing factors. Mystical claims and extraordinary advantages are often employed as strategies to attract and retain followers. The researchers emphasised the need for integrated cooperation between religious institutions, authorities, and the community.

Kamsani (2024) focused on the threat posed by the spread of heretical doctrines in cyberspace to the faith of Malaysian Muslims. He found that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are heavily utilised for mass dissemination of deviant beliefs. The study affirmed the importance of legal enforcement encompassing the cyber dimension, including regulatory reform and strengthened inter-agency cooperation.

## **Methods**

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of library research. Data were collected from a range of relevant scholarly sources, including academic journal articles, official government documents, gazetted fatwas, religious institution reports, and prior studies related to deviant thought movements in Malaysia.

Analysis was conducted through content analysis of all gathered sources. This process involved the identification of key themes, recurring patterns, and significant findings from the existing literature. Sources were selected based on relevance, reliability, and currency, with priority given to publications from academic institutions and official Malaysian religious bodies. The analytical framework applied encompasses theological, sociological, and juridical dimensions to yield a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study.

## Findings and Discussion

### 1. Findings

#### a. Definition of Heretical Teachings

Heretical teachings refer to beliefs or practices that deviate from the teachings of Islam as guided by the Quran, Sunnah, and the doctrine of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah. More specifically, they constitute knowledge or doctrines taught and disseminated, either openly or covertly, that clearly deviate from the truth of authentic Islamic teachings (Kharithah & Zainol, 2024). Allah's Word:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ

*"Indeed, Allah will not forgive the sin of shirk (associating partners with Him), and will forgive sins other than that for whomever He wills."* (Surah An-Nisa: 48)

In Malaysia, heretical teachings are officially identified through fatwas gazetted by the National Fatwa Council or the respective state religious department. They encompass deviations in matters of creed, shariah practice, and moral conduct in a servant's relationship with God (MAIS, 2015). Records indicate that heretical teachings were first detected in Malaysia before the 1950s, with many movements operating secretly, making early detection by religious authorities extremely difficult.

#### b. Factors Contributing to Heretical Teachings

Several interrelated factors drive the emergence and spread of heretical teachings in Malaysia. The most fundamental

is the lack of religious knowledge among the community. Many individuals are swayed by the spiritual or material promises offered by deviant groups, lacking sufficient grounding in the basic principles of Islam to distinguish truth from falsehood (Ahmad & Aini, 2024). Although Islamic education is included in Malaysia's national curriculum, the approach tends to focus more on formal subject instruction rather than a comprehensive study of Islamic creed, shariah, and morality (MAIPS, 2015). This weakness creates exploitable gaps in the population's religious literacy.

Compounding this is the excessive devotion that followers place in charismatic leaders. Such leaders are often perceived as extraordinary individuals endowed with special gifts, such as receiving divine revelation, having a direct relationship with God, or performing miracles. Their influence persists even after death, as followers continue to believe the leader will rise again or continue to spiritually guide their lives. Figures such as Abuya (Darul Arqam) and Ayah Pin employed psychological and mystical approaches to bind followers (Ahmad & Aini, 2024), ultimately giving rise to serious societal problems.

A third and increasingly dominant factor is the misuse of social media and digital technology. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram enable deviant doctrines to spread rapidly and widely, crossing geographical boundaries (Kamsani, 2024). The global mass media landscape, predominantly controlled by non-Muslims, exacerbates this situation, while the diversity of modern devices makes the

infiltration of heretical teachings increasingly imperceptible to the general public (MAIPS, 2015).

c. Agencies Responsible for Addressing Heresy

Malaysia has several key institutions responsible for combating heretical teachings. The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) serves as the primary national-level agency responsible for Islamic affairs, including ensuring the integrity of Muslim faith throughout the country. The State Islamic Religious Affairs Department (JHEAIN) carries out a similar role at the state level, operating under each state's Shariah Criminal Offences Enactment. The National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia (MKI) collaborates with the National Fatwa Council to issue fatwas on suspected heretical teachings, while also conducting research in partnership with JAKIM and JAIN. The State Mufti Department acts as the highest religious authority at the state level, responsible for examining suspected heretical teachings from the perspectives of creed, shariah, and authentic Islamic doctrine, issuing fatwas as official references for religious authorities and the public.

d. Examples of Heretical Teachings in Malaysia

Several cases of heretical teachings have been officially identified and addressed by religious authorities in Malaysia, illustrating the varied forms that doctrinal deviation can take. One prominent case is the teachings of 'Lord Harun' or 'God 2013', led by Harun, who gathered a total of 312 followers from diverse backgrounds. The teachings were disseminated through talks and business-related briefings, characterised by strict

secrecy, the cultivation of emotional attachment among followers facing personal difficulties, and the claim of divine incarnation in Harun himself (Kamarudin & Sharafuddin, 2021). Harun explicitly claimed to be God, as documented in publications he produced, including a book entitled 'Factual'.

Another notable case involves the teachings of Si Hulk. The Johor State Fatwa Committee, on 22 July 2021, issued an official statement declaring the beliefs and teachings of Suhaini bin Mohammad, known as Si Hulk, to be heretical (Kamsani, 2024). These teachings were found to be deviant and contrary to the creed, shariah, and moral principles of Islam, warranting strict action to prevent their further spread.

A third example is Global Ikhwan Sdn Bhd (GISB), the successor organisation to Darul al-Arqam, founded by Ashaari Muhammad (Abuya). GISB perpetuates deviant practices, most notably the use of rhymes and verses glorifying Abuya that carry the belief he will return to life after death, describing his eternal spiritual influence (Ahmad & Aini, 2024). This practice has been condemned by mainstream scholars as excessive veneration, and videos of such practices remain accessible on digital platforms including YouTube and TikTok.

e. Shariah Criminal Penalties

The Shariah Criminal Offences Enactment provides for several categories of offences related to heretical teachings. Section 3 of the Syariah Criminal Offences (Federal Territories) Act 1997 (Act 559) prohibits false worship, with penalties of up to RM3,000 in fines or two years' imprisonment. Section 4

prohibits the teaching of doctrines contrary to shariah, attracting fines of up to RM5,000, up to three years' imprisonment, or corporal punishment. Section 6 prohibits false claims of prophethood, the status of Imam Mahdi, or sainthood, with equivalent penalties. Section 11 prohibits teaching Islamic matters without the requisite credentials, with penalties of up to RM5,000 in fines or three years' imprisonment.

f. Challenges in Evidence Collection

Efforts to eradicate heretical teachings face substantial challenges. From a legal standpoint, Shariah criminal law in Malaysia is constrained by state and federal jurisdictions, while certain provisions such as Section 11 do not clearly extend to the cyber realm (Samudin & Ibrahim, 2022). These limitations have caused numerous cases to fail before reaching court.

The scarcity of witnesses presents a further serious obstacle. Heretical groups operate covertly and in an organised fashion, with followers concealing their identities through secret codes and adopted names (Samudin, 2025). Case studies in Kuala Lumpur, such as the Millah Abraham case, show that witnesses typically comprise only enforcement officers, with minimal public informants. The absence of independent witnesses significantly undermines the evidentiary foundation of prosecutions.

The pervasive spread of digital media adds another layer of complexity. Offences committed via social media are difficult to tie to a single jurisdiction for court purposes, while electronic evidence such as videos and digital documents can be easily

deleted or altered (Samudin & Ibrahim, 2022). Inter-agency coordination between bodies such as JAWI, JAIS, MCMC, and the police also remains inconsistent due to the absence of a unified operational mechanism, further delaying enforcement actions (Saifudin, 2025).

## **2. Pembahasan**

### **a. Strengthening Religious Education**

Religious education constitutes the foundational pillar of prevention against heretical teachings. Johanizam et al. (2024) found that insufficient religious education, particularly among younger generations, is the primary factor creating space for deviations in faith. Faith-based education from an early age, grounded in Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah, must be strengthened to build society's resistance to deviant teachings. Samudin (2025) similarly emphasises that public understanding of authentic creed must be reinforced to prevent susceptibility to teachings that contradict shariah.

### **b. Shariah Law Enforcement and Fatwa Strengthening**

Gazetted fatwas and shariah criminal law are the primary instruments for controlling the spread of heretical teachings. The effectiveness of legal sanctions depends on coordination between state religious departments, shariah courts, and other enforcement agencies. Kamarudin and Sharafuddin (2021) demonstrated that intelligence-driven investigation and prosecution through JAIP's Enforcement Division are critical steps in curbing heretical movements. However, persisting

weaknesses such as insufficient investigative expertise and inadequate legal provisions require ongoing attention (Samudin, 2025).

c. Social Media and Cyberspace Monitoring

Social media has been identified as the most active channel for the contemporary spread of heretical teachings. Johanizam et al. (2024) showed that deviant leaders rely heavily on digital platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and messaging applications to influence followers. Consequently, digital content monitoring, the enhancement of intelligence technology capabilities, and enforcement of laws governing the misuse of digital media must form part of the national strategy. This approach requires integrated collaboration between religious authorities, the Communications and Multimedia Commission, and the community (Alya Hanan et al., 2024; Samudin, 2025).

d. Cooperation Among Religious Institutions,  
Government, and Society

Combating heretical teachings cannot rely on any single agency. Samudin (2025) affirms that effective eradication depends on cooperation among fatwa institutions, religious departments, shariah courts, and security forces. The practical example of JAIP's collaboration with other agencies in investigating and curbing the teachings of Harun Mat Saat underscores the value of such partnerships (Kamarudin & Sharafuddin, 2021). Johanizam et al. (2024) further emphasise the role of the community, including local leaders, families, and

mosque communities, as early reporting agents in detecting emerging heretical movements.

e. Enhancing Enforcement Capacity and Professionalism

Weaknesses in intelligence, investigation, and technical equipment have been identified as factors undermining the prevention of heresy. Samudin (2025) notes that JAWI faces insufficient investigative expertise and technology limitations in handling cases disseminated through digital platforms. Kamarudin and Sharafuddin (2021) highlight the need for advanced training for religious enforcement officers, including competency in identifying the characteristics of heretical teachings and managing complex investigative cases. Enhanced professionalism, regular training, and the adoption of modern technology should therefore form part of a long-term strategy to empower religious institutions.

## **Conclusion**

Deviant thought movements in Malaysia represent a multidimensional threat encompassing theological, social, and national security concerns. This phenomenon is driven by a combination of internal factors, such as weak religious knowledge, and external factors, including the misuse of digital technology. Cases such as the teachings of Lord Harun, Si Hulk, and the GISB practices that carry forward elements of Darul al-Arqam illustrate the complexity of this threat.

Effective responses require a holistic approach integrating: the strengthening of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah-

based religious education from an early age; consistent shariah law enforcement underpinned by comprehensive fatwa management; active monitoring of cyberspace and digital content; and synergistic collaboration among religious institutions, government agencies, security forces, and the broader community. The capacity and professionalism of religious enforcement officers must also be continuously developed to keep pace with increasingly sophisticated modes of operation employed by heretical groups.

With a collective commitment from all stakeholders, the integrity of Muslim faith and the harmony of Malaysian society can be sustainably protected from the threat of deviant thought movements.

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