



DIVERGING MITIGATION STRATEGIES OF INDONESIA'S ULAMA COUNCIL IN MAJORITY AND MINORITY MUSLIM REGIONS

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Abstract

Local deviant sects persist across Indonesia's religiously plural regions despite repeated fatwa declarations and enforcement efforts. Prior scholarship has examined MUI's authority and fatwa compliance mainly from a national vantage point, leaving the question of how demographic context shapes mitigation strategy underexplored. This study compares how MUI in Muslim-majority North Sumatra and Muslim-minority North Sulawesi each designs its response to local deviant sects, and asks which approach works under what conditions. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with MUI officials at the provincial, district, and city levels in both regions, combined with fatwa document analysis and institutional reports. Informants were selected purposively. Source and time triangulation ensured data validity; analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model. North Sumatra MUI relies on a structural-corrective approach backed by formal fatwa decisions and close supervision. This proves effective at enforcing doctrinal boundaries but tends to harden resistance and strengthen internal solidarity among targeted groups. North Sulawesi MUI takes a dialogical-educational route, preserving plural harmony at the cost of slower doctrinal change. In both regions, MUI effectiveness hits the same ceiling: government intervention arrives only after formal legal violations occur, stretching the mitigation timeline and diluting preventive effectiveness. The demographic position of Muslims in a region determines which tools are available, which risks are tolerable, and what counts as success. Mitigation strategy cannot be standardized. The study contributes an adaptive, context-sensitive model of religious governance to the comparative study of Islamic institutions in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: *MUI; deviant sects; mitigation; majority-minority; Indonesia; religious governance*

Abstrak

Aliran sesat lokal bertahan di berbagai wilayah plural Indonesia meski fatwa berulang kali diterbitkan dan upaya penegakan kelembagaan terus dijalankan. Kajian yang ada lebih banyak memotret otoritas MUI dari perspektif nasional, sehingga pertanyaan tentang bagaimana konteks demografis membentuk strategi mitigasi kurang mendapat perhatian. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana MUI Sumatera Utara yang mayoritas Muslim dan MUI Sulawesi Utara yang minoritas Muslim merancang respons terhadap aliran sesat lokal, sekaligus mengevaluasi efektivitas masing-masing pendekatan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pejabat MUI tingkat provinsi, kabupaten, dan kota di kedua wilayah, dilengkapi analisis dokumen fatwa dan laporan kelembagaan. Informan dipilih secara purposif berdasarkan keterlibatan langsung dalam mitigasi. Validitas data dijamin melalui triangulasi sumber dan waktu; analisis mengikuti model Miles dan Huberman. MUI Sumatera Utara mengandalkan pendekatan struktural-korektif melalui keputusan fatwa dan pengawasan ketat, efektif menegakkan batas doktrinal namun berisiko mempertebal resistensi dan memperkuat solidaritas internal kelompok yang disasar. MUI Sulawesi Utara menempuh jalur dialogis-edukatif yang menjaga harmoni plural, dengan konsekuensi perubahan keyakinan yang berjalan lebih lambat. Di kedua wilayah, efektivitas MUI bertemu batas yang sama: pemerintah baru bergerak setelah ada unsur pelanggaran hukum, yang memperpanjang proses mitigasi dan melemahkan daya cegahannya. Posisi demografis umat Islam di suatu wilayah menentukan instrumen yang tersedia, risiko yang dapat ditoleransi,

dan ukuran keberhasilan. Strategi mitigasi tidak bisa diseragamkan. Penelitian ini menyumbangkan model tata kelola keagamaan yang adaptif dan kontekstual pada kajian komparatif lembaga Islam di Asia Tenggara.

Kata kunci: MUI; aliran sesat; mitigasi; mayoritas-minoritas; Indonesia; tata kelola agama

INTRODUCTION

Heretical sects are a serious threat to social, religious, and state stability, considering that Indonesia is often seen as a fertile ground for the growth and development of deviant and misleading religious teachings.¹ Their heresy departs from the interpretation and practice of religious teachings that are deviant and not in line with the central teachings embraced by the majority. Concerns are heightened when followers of these heretical sects actively spread their teachings to recruit new members. The presence of heretical sects raises the potential for social division and triggers conflicts between religious communities because they are considered to tarnish or degrade established teachings. Conflict can manifest in social rejection, discrimination, and acts of violence. In multicultural and multireligious Indonesia, this kind of potential division, if not anticipated, can expand and involve various interfaith groups. This situation not only threatens religious harmony but also national stability as a whole. Therefore, the existence of heretical sects that have existed so far is felt to have hurt hearts and offended religious feelings among the people in Indonesia. Heretical sects have often become the culprit or trigger for anarchist acts among religious people in the country.²

Many comprehensive approaches have been used to address the threat of the emergence or spread of heresy. However, the results are still inadequate as new heretical currents emerge in various forms. In 2022, for example, a group emerged Mahfudijanto is indicated to have deviated from the teachings of Islam based on the results of the Pasuruan Regency MUI study because of the beliefs of those who claim to only learn from Allah and do not recognize the existence of the pillars of faith or the pillars of Islam followed by other rituals that are not by Islamic teachings,³ In 2024, there will be news about the existence of a heretical sect that allows or legalises the practice of exchanging spouses on a consensual basis, which is claimed to bring them to heaven. This news became a sensation after the release of a video showing the controversial teachings, which was widely spread through one of the Instagram accounts.⁴

The government has also tried to strengthen regulations and supervise religious teachings that are indicated to deviate from the central teachings of each religion. The government, supervision, and guidance are provided by spiritual leaders and the community, who have tried hard to understand religious teachings correctly according to the proper knowledge. They do all this to mitigate and counteract the spread of heretical teachings and streams, both in the form of lectures, seminars, discussions and digital information, to strengthen the people's faith and clarify which teachings are actual and which are deviant.

However, until now, there are still many heretical sects that have emerged and have not

¹ Muchammad Ichsan, "Penyelesaian Aliran Sesat Di Indonesia Dari Perspektif Hukum Islam Dan Hukum Positif," *Jurnal Media Hukum* 19 no.2 (2012): 15.

² Yulkarnain Harahab and Mr. Supriyadi, "Aliran Sesat Dalam Perspektif Hukum Pidana Islam Dan Hukum Pidana Nasional," *Mimbar Hukum - Fakultas Hukum Universitas Gadjah Mada* 20, no. 3 (2008): 513, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jmh.16293>.

³ Muhajir Arifin, "Awal Mula Aliran Sesat Di Pasuruan Tercipta-Terbentuk Hingga Punya Pengikut," *Detik Jatim*, 2022.

⁴ Azhar Aprianto Yusuf, "Viral Aliran Sesat Bolehkan Jemaah Bertukar Pasangan," 2024.

stopped their activities even though they have been banned, either because they operate secretly or because they move from location to location to avoid supervision. The Hakekok Balakasuta group, for example, a local heretical sect that was established in 2009 in Kasrudin's padepokan located in Sekon Village, Cimanuk, Pandeglang, has been declared heretical by the MUI Fatwa. Even this padepokan was burned by residents for carrying out perverse rituals and violating norms, namely, supernatural marriage and bathing together without proper clothes. However, in 2021, the Hakekok Balakasuta school reappeared, which was passed on by Arya, who inherited the teachings from Abah Edi. The place to carry out these ritual activities in the forest around his residence, Waringin Klung Village, Cimanggung, Pandeglang, has moved from its original place, so the MUI must also reaffirm the fatwa that was issued that Hakekok Balakasuta is a heretical sect because their ritual is contrary to any legal religion in Indonesia.⁵

This problem becomes even more complex when heresy develops locally in areas with high levels of religious plurality, such as in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra. Intense interaction between various religious groups enriches social dynamics, but on the other hand, it also increases the risk of friction if deviant currents appear. If crystallised without proper management, the intensity of this interaction can become a fertile ground for heretical sects to spread their influence. Differences in religious views and understandings also have the potential to be used to cause confusion and trigger conflicts. Situational factors such as majority-minority status, conditions of social frustration, and differences in cultural values often reinforce potential conflicts between religions or between belief groups.⁶ Tensions between groups can quickly escalate when heresy spreads, as they often carry controversial teachings contrary to the majority's beliefs, and sometimes even gain sympathy from other religious groups. This condition is feared to trigger horizontal conflicts that damage harmony between religious communities, which have been a social force in both regions.

In North Sulawesi, for example, a heretical sect on behalf of the Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan (LINI) Sufism school domiciled in Lolak Tombolango Village, Lolak District, Bolaang Mongondow Regency (Bolmong) is suspected of having deviated from the central teachings of Islam with the issuance of the North Sulawesi MUI Fatwa number 02 of 2019 dated August 8, 2019.⁷ In North Sumatra, there is also a school declared heretical by the North Sumatra MUI, namely the Al-Haq recitation group in 2010. There are four reasons why the Al-Haq Recitation was declared a heretical sect. First, the recitation is carried out secretly because the women who are members of the recitation do not inform their parents about the location and whereabouts of the group, let alone other parties. Then, the doctrine was instilled that parents or other people are enemies because they are not study members. In addition, the Al-Haq recitation group does not teach the Quran in its entirety or kaffah. The Al-Haq sect only believes in the Qur'an but does not believe in hadith.⁸ Moreover, finally, the North Sumatra MUI declared the MPPTI recitation group heretical, whose teachings were considered blasphemous, namely, teachings that affirmed that Muhammad was Allah.⁹

⁵ S. Dian Andryanto, "Geger Aliran Hakekok Balakasuta, Ajaran Sesat Dari Pandeglang?," *Tempo.co*, 2021.

⁶ Vassilis Saroglou, "Intergroup Conflict, Religious Fundamentalism, and Culture," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 47, no. 1 (2016): 33–41.

⁷ Endar Yahya, "MUI: Aliran Tasawuf LINI Di Bolmong Sesat," *Media Sulut*, 2019.

⁸ DetikNews, "Dinilai Sesat MUI Sumut Desak Pengajian Al-Haq Hentikan Ajarannya," *detikNews*, 2010.

⁹ (Sci-fi Press, 2023)

This research will explore efforts by the Ulama Council to mitigate heretical flows in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra. These two regions were chosen because of the high religious diversity that increases the risk of the emergence of heretical sects, as well as showing the difference in the situation of Muslims in the majority position in North Sumatra and the minority in North Sulawesi. The research focuses on the mitigation strategies taken by the Ulama Council through education and communication, including cooperation with the government and other religious leaders to strengthen supervision and provide understanding to the community. In addition, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the mitigation strategy and present a more in-depth view of the role of the Ulama Council in maintaining social stability. However, the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) has a very strategic position in mitigating the spread of heresy, mainly because of its strong authority and trust in the eyes of Indonesian Muslims. This position makes the MUI at the forefront of mitigating deviant teachings, both in majority and minority Muslim areas. Through fatwas, da'wah, and education, MUI can enlighten the public about the dangers of heresy and the importance of maintaining the purity of religious teachings.

The importance of this research lies in its contribution to providing a better understanding of the role of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) in mitigating deviant sects as part of efforts to maintain socio-religious stability in Indonesia. Although MUI's fatwas on deviant groups are sometimes regarded as obstacles to religious freedom and even accused of triggering acts of religiously motivated violence, this study offers a new perspective. Its novelty lies in the comparative analysis between the Muslim majority context in North Sumatra and the Muslim minority context in North Sulawesi. This dimension has rarely been explored in studies of deviant sect mitigation. Through this comparison, the study is expected to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of MUI's mitigation strategies in dealing with socio-religious complexities, as well as generate practical recommendations for MUI, religious institutions, and other stakeholders to strengthen efforts in preventing deviant sects. For the systematic structure of this paper, a qualitative method with a juridical-empirical approach is employed, with data obtained through interviews, field observations, and document analysis, tested by triangulation, and analysed using the Miles and Huberman model.

METHOD

This research is a type of field research by taking primary data from field data, certain areas or locations (locus)¹⁰ This research method uses a qualitative method with an empirical juridical approach, namely a study, in addition to looking at positive and Islamic legal aspects also looking at how it is implemented in the field and society. In this context, it is to look at the efforts of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) in dealing with deviant sects and their impact on socio-religious stability in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra. The focus of this research is on the strategy and implementation of deviant sect mitigation by MUI officials in the two regions. The main data was obtained through in-depth interviews with MUI officials at the provincial, district, and city levels in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra, as well as analysis of official MUI documents. The comparative design draws on an assemblage framework that treats Islamic bureaucracies as contingent formations shaped by their specific political, social, and religious histories, rather than

¹⁰ M Amirin Tatang, *Menyusun Rencana Penelitian* (Jakarta: Rajawali, 1990).

as interchangeable formal structures.¹¹

The unit of analysis is the institutional mitigation strategy, operationalized as the set of formal and informal actions each provincial MUI takes in response to identified deviant sects. Focusing on strategic patterns across social, security, and legal approaches rather than on individual actors allows comparisons that hold across the two cases.

North Sumatra and North Sulawesi were selected because each has documented local deviant sects with official MUI fatwa responses, they represent contrasting Muslim demographic positions, and both carry high levels of religious plurality. Comparative survey data across four South and Southeast Asian countries shows that majority-minority status significantly shapes the architecture of Muslim institutional religiosity.¹² Key informants included the General Chairman and Secretary General of North Sulawesi MUI, the Head and members of the Fatwa Commission of North Sumatra MUI, and members of the Religious Research Assessment Team (P3M) in both provinces, all selected purposively based on direct involvement in deviant sect mitigation.

The data collection process involves interviews and observations to gain a comprehensive perspective on the strategies, challenges, and effectiveness of the deviant sect mitigation efforts. Direct observations will be conducted in locations affected by the deviant sect to understand the real impact of these mitigation efforts. Documentation in the form of official documents, annual reports, and MUI fatwas in both regions will also be used for analysis to evaluate existing policies and regulations and their implementation in practice. The data obtained is then tested for validity using source triangulation and time triangulation techniques. Then, it is analyzed using the Miles and Huberman Model, which is divided into three processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.¹³

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical clusters inform the analysis. Rather than functioning as descriptive backdrop, they operate as analytical lenses that directly condition interpretation of the empirical findings.

1. MUI Fatwa Authority and State-Religion Relations.

One close observer of Indonesian constitutional law showed that MUI, nominally an independent NGO, has always maintained a relationship of complex mutual dependence with the state.¹⁴ After 1998, MUI accumulated quasi-legislative powers in halal certification and Islamic finance, a shift described as the *bureaucratization of fatwa*.¹⁵ A subsequent study extended this analysis

¹¹ Banu Senay et al., "Islamic Bureaucracies in Indonesia and Turkey: The Challenge of Comparison," *Religion, State and Society* 53, no. 3 (2025): 165–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2025.2561361>.

¹² Riaz Hassan, "Why Size Matters: Majority/Minority Status and Muslim Piety in South and Southeast Asia," *International Sociology* 34, no. 3 (2019): 307–26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580919835401>.

¹³ M. Yusuf, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif & Penelitian Gabungan* (Jakarta: Prenada Media., 2016).

¹⁴ Tim Lindsey, "Monopolising Islam: The Indonesian Ulama Council and State Regulation of the "Islamic Economy"," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 48, no. 2 (2012): 253–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2012.694157>.

¹⁵ Alfitri, "Bureaucratizing Fatwa in Indonesia: The Council of Indonesian Ulama and Its Quasi-Legislative Power," *Ulumuna* 24, no. 2 (2020): 367–97, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v24i2.412>.

to the domain of blasphemy and deviance: MUI positioned itself as national mufti, drawing the boundaries of orthodoxy, though enforcement depends on state follow-through.¹⁶

A more recent study tracked this authority transformation using Weber's typology, showing that DSN-MUI fatwas moved from traditional to legal-rational authority.¹⁷ Two studies offer a critical counterpoint: MUI's monopoly over *aqidah* fatwa has generated anti-pluralist tendencies that constrain religious freedom.¹⁸ One scholar adds that controversial fatwas do not automatically produce uniform social compliance; their effectiveness is conditioned by context, including the demographic position of Muslims.¹⁹

2. Muslim Majority-Minority Dynamics

Comparative survey data across four South and Southeast Asian countries found that religious orthodoxy is markedly more assertive in Muslim-majority settings.²⁰ Several scholars extend this to the institutional level: in majority Muslim states, Islam interacts directly with democratic governance; in minority contexts, Muslim organizations adopt more accommodative political strategies.²¹

A phenomenological study of social space negotiations in North Sumatra found that the Muslim majority functions as the normative center of sociality, a structural condition that reinforces MUI's institutional legitimacy.²² One caution is worth registering: variation in tolerance and conflict patterns across Indonesian districts is better explained by fragmented religious authority and decentralized state power than by ideology alone, which complicates any simple majority-minority binary.²³

3. Religious Social Control and Deviance Mitigation

Hoffmann defines religious social control as the mechanism by which religious institutions codify acceptable conduct and build norm-enforcement systems.²⁴ MUI's fatwa functions precisely as such a normative instrument, marking deviant groups and mobilizing collective responses. Analyzing Indonesian Muslim responses to Ahmadiyah, one study developed the concept of *liminal*

¹⁶ Stewart Fenwick, "Eat, Pray, Regulate: The Indonesian Ulama Council and the Management of Islamic Affairs," *Journal of Law and Religion* 33, no. 2 (2018): 271–90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2018.23>.

¹⁷ Muhamad Nasrudin et al., "From Nonbinding to Binding: Legal Authority Transformation of {DSN-MUI} Fatwas within the National Legal System," *Jurnal Hukum Islam* 23, no. 2 (2025): 413–58, <https://doi.org/10.28918/jhi.v23i2.03>.

¹⁸ Syafiq Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulama Council) and Rising Conservatism in Indonesian Islam," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020): 21–35, <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2019.13>; Syafiq Hasyim, "Majelis Ulama Indonesia and Pluralism in Indonesia," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 41, no. 4–5 (2015): 487–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453714566547>.

¹⁹ Mun'im Sirry, *What's Modern about Modern Tafsir?: A Closer Look at Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar, The Qur'an in the Malay-Indonesian World: Context and Interpretation*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315646350-19>.

²⁰ Hassan, "Why Size Matters: Majority/Minority Status and Muslim Piety in South and Southeast Asia."

²¹ Johan Saravanamuttu, *Islam and Politics in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203861325>; Thomas Sealy et al., "South and Southeast Asia: Deep Diversity under Strain," *Religion, State and Society* 50, no. 4 (2022): 452–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2022.2126258>.

²² Suryo Adi Sahfutra, Supartiningsih, and Agus Himmawan Utomo, "Sharing Spaces Between Majorities and Minorities: Negotiations of Muslim Communities in North Sumatra in Shaping a New Multiculturalism from a Social Philosophy Perspective," *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (2025): 92–116, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1345>.

²³ Kikue Hamayotsu, "Conservative Turn? Religion, State and Conflict in Indonesia," *Pacific Affairs* 87, no. 4 (2014): 815–25, <https://doi.org/10.5509/2014874815>.

²⁴ John P Hoffmann, "Religion: Morality and Social Control," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 333–37, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.84036-2>.

status: a heresy fatwa places a group in a zone of indistinction, no longer recognized as Muslim yet not granted full non-Muslim protections, leaving it vulnerable to persecution.²⁵

A more dynamic frame is offered through the *Social Control Identity Motivated (SCIM) model*: when formal social control mechanisms are perceived as ineffective, group members respond through identity management, either disengaging from the mainstream or strengthening internal normative cohesion.²⁶ This explains why the two MUI mitigation patterns produce distinct resistance dynamics.

The Roots of the Emergence of Local Heresies

A heresy is a phenomenon in which individuals or communities adopt beliefs or practices that deviate from society's central teachings or widely accepted values. The term a stream usually refers to a stream of thought or belief among its followers, often built around a spiritual or ideological leader. Meanwhile, heresy describes a condition in which the beliefs or actions are considered erroneous or deviate from the generally recognised truth. *Mainstream*. Deviant schools in the context of Islamic teachings in terms of language will be interpreted as opinions that differ from the truth. Meanwhile, in terms of heresy, it is an opinion that deviates from the reality that the majority of Muslims believe.²⁷ These heresies can arise from various factors, including misinterpretations of religious teachings, manipulation of charismatic leaders, or the influence of extreme social environments.

In English, heresy is defined by the word *Heresy*, which originates in the Greek word *hairesis*, which means the opposing adherents' choice of factions or beliefs. Irenaeus, a bishop and martyr, who gained reverence as one of the Fathers of the Early Christian Church and a Christian apologist, used the word *hairesis* extensively in his treatise, *Contra Haereses* or *Against the Heresies*. Because it is considered not entirely objective, there is an assumption that various non-conformist opinions can be labelled heretical teachings.²⁸ That is why most dictionaries interpret heresy in some sense, first, as a belief or view that is contrary to official or popular beliefs. Second, as the Cambridge Dictionary states, heresy means a belief or view contrary to a particular religion's principles. In other words, a heresy is a belief contrary to official religious doctrine and is believed by the majority of its adherents.²⁹ The term heresy in Arabic is usually a translation of the word *Dhalla-yadbillu*. If translated into Indonesian, the word *Dhalla* means deviation from the truth or deviating from religious guidance.³⁰

Historically, heresies in Islamic society have existed since the early days of Islam, especially after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The heresy at that time was due to the view of some people who argued that the obligation of zakat no longer existed, along with the death of the Prophet, so they were reluctant to pay zakat to the first Caliph, Abu Bakr as-Shidiq.

²⁵ Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Hating the Ahmadiyya: The Place of 'Heretics' in Contemporary Indonesian Muslim Society," *Contemporary Islam* 8, no. 2 (2014): 133–52, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-014-0295-x>.

²⁶ Isabel R Pinto and José Marques, "The Role of Group (In)Efficacy in Controlling Deviance on Group Cohesion and on Social Identity Management Strategies: Social Control Identity Motivated Model," *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 27, no. 5 (2024): 1088–1106, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684302241251749>.

²⁷ Fahrudin Ali Sabri, "Membangun Fiqih Toleransi: Refleksi Terhadap Fatwa-Fatwa Aliran Sesat Di Indonesia," *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pranata Sosial* 13, no. 1 (2018): 145–66, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v13i1.1612>.

²⁸ (Scott, 2021)

²⁹ Cambridge, *Dictionary of American English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 2000).

³⁰ Ahmad Warson Munawwir, *Al Munawwir: Kamus Arab Indonesia* (Surabaya: Pustaka Progressif, 1997), 826.

The caliph later detected this group as a heretical sect, because it had violated the general provision in Islam that zakat is included in the pillars of Islam. Abu Bakr finally fought this group, and he attacked Musailamah al-Kadzdab, who claimed to be a prophet and was looking for supporters willing to spread his teachings. This group of Musailamah ultimately did not find a place in the hearts of Muslims and disappeared on its own.³¹ However, these heretical sects continue to develop in the Islamic world with different forms and understandings. This process began with the emergence of new groups (*firqah*) that can be traced back to the time of Caliph Ali bin Abi Talib. In modern times, the phenomenon of new flows is increasingly fertile. In the Muslim community in India, several new groups that are considered heretical have emerged, such as al-Baabiyah, al-Bahaiyah, Ahmadiyah, and al-Qadaniyah.³²

In Indonesia, various religious schools and understandings of Islam come from mainstream understanding and practice. There are schools with a religious pattern and there are also those with a pattern of thought that has an experience that is contrary to the actual teachings of Islam, it is recorded, among others, that the Inkar Sunnah Movement is a group that does not recognize the sunnah or hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) as the basis of Islamic sharia law around the 1980s; The Isa Bugis Reformer Sect The founder of this sect, Isa Bugis was born in 1926 in the city of Bhakti Aceh Pidie; The Darul Arqam Movement was established in 1968 and is based in Sungai Pancla, Jl. Daman Sara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; The Islamic State of Indonesia (NII), also known as Darul Islam (DI), was founded by Sukarmaji Marijan Kartosoewiryo and was proclaimed in Malangbong-Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia, on August 7, 1949. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad founded the Ahmadiyya movement in 1900 AD in India²⁶. Ahmadiyah entered Indonesia in 1935, and now has branches mainly in Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, West Sumatra, Palembang, Bali, NTB and others; Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (LDII) The Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (LDII) is the new name of a heretical sect that is developing in Indonesia. Originally named Darul Hadiths, which the late Nurhasan Ubaidah Lubis founded in 1951.³³ Several others are in the spotlight of the media that have issued heretical fatwas, such as Lia Aminudin or Lia Eden, the Fajar Nusantara Movement (Gafatar), Islam Jama'ah, and the Al Zaytun Islamic Boarding School. The MUI's fatwas on heretical sects are, for some, considered to be the MUI's quick response to the Islamic religious conditions in Indonesia. However, for others, they are seen as a representation of the firm attitude of the majority group in Islamic history towards minority groups that are seen as deviant or infidel, out of the mainstream.³⁴

Data from the Ministry of Religion from 1960 to the end of the 1990s states that there were only 50 heretical sects in Indonesia then. However, in further developments, the MUI Assessment and Research Commission has signalled that until 2015, there have been hundreds of heretical sects in Indonesia that have been monitored; it is estimated that there are around 600 sects that are suspected of being blasphemous, but that number has decreased, and only 302 remain.³⁵ The Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) also conveyed similar data: Around

³¹ Ichsan, "Penyelesaian Aliran Sesat Di Indonesia Dari Perspektif Hukum Islam Dan Hukum Positif."

³² Dede Syarif and Moch Fakhruroji, "Faktor Psikologis Dan Sosiologis Kemunculan Aliran Sesat Aliran Quraniyah Di Jawa Barat," *Al-Tabir*, Vol. 17, No. 1 Mei 2017: 49-76, 2017.

³³ Furqon Syarief Hidayatulloh, "Strategi Pencegahan Dan Penanganan Penyebaran Aliran Sesat Di Indonesia Studi Kasus Di Institut Pertanian Bogor," *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 13, no. 2 (2013): 501-24.

³⁴ Dimiyati Sajari, "Fatwa Mui Tentang Aliran Sesat Di Indonesia (1976-2010)," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 39, no. 1 (2015): 44-62, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v39i1.38>.

³⁵ Rajman Azhar, "Ada 302 Aliran Sesat," Bengkuluekspress.com, 2015.

250 heretical sects developed in Indonesia from 2001 to 2007. Of these, 50 thrived in West Java.³⁶ On average, around 35 heretical sects grow locally and nationally annually. The categories of heretical sects are national sects in the form of heretical fatwas issued or that concern the Central MUI, which has issued more than 86 fatwas related to sects since 1975.³⁷ While the Provincial MUI issues the category of local heretical sects, the MUI Assessment and Research Commission's data above show more than 200 local heretical sects.

Local heretical schools still have diverse forms; there are also heretical schools that only develop in one district, such as in Blitar Regency, East Java. From 2001 to 2009, there were five local heretical sects. For example, the Purbokayun School in Bendosewu Village, Talun District, which performs shamanic dhikr rituals. Then, the Podo Bongso stream in Pagerwojo Village, Kesamben District, allows prayers to face any direction. There is also an anonymous school in Wonotirto Village that has an east-facing prayer ritual and allows free sex among its followers. Furthermore, there is an anonymous stream in Bangsari Village, Nglegok District, where prayer rituals are carried out while doing other activities, such as Friday prayers while working or hoeing in the rice fields. In addition, there is a Safaatus Sholawat or Dunung Urip sect led by Suliyani in Ngembul Village, Binangun District, which performs a ritual of worshipping Gabriel or the holy spirit.³⁸

As in other areas, in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra, local heretical sects have also emerged that have received serious attention from the local MUI. In North Sumatra, for example, there has been a development of teachings *Tarekat Naqsabandiyah Kadirun Yahya*, which caused controversy because the practice of dhikr was considered to deviate from the rules of Sufism mu'tabarah, as well as the teachings of the *Ihya' As-Sunnah Stream*, which triggers the unrest of the ummah by reinterpreting the pillars of faith and the pillars of Islam outside the mainstream provisions. Meanwhile, in North Sulawesi, where Muslims are demographically in a minority position, there has been a growing number of *Al-Qiyadah Al-Islamiyah* who claim the existence of a new prophet post-Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, as well as locally-based syncretic teachings that combine Islamic elements with traditional Minahasa beliefs.

This phenomenon shows that heresy is not only a theological problem but also intertwined with each region's social, political, and cultural dynamics. Stark and Bainbridge's sociology of religion research confirms that recruitment in deviant groups often occurs through close social networks, so differences in religious views and understandings can be exploited to strengthen group cohesion.³⁹ Similarly, Isser once explained that the emergence of heretical sects often grew out of the inability of the mainstream social and religious system to meet the emotional and psychological needs of the community, which charismatic leaders then exploited.⁴⁰ This perspective confirms that the phenomenon of heresy is not only typical of Islam or Indonesia, but also occurs in various major religions in the world, each of which has internal criteria to establish a teaching as deviant. Thus, mitigating heresy must consider local factors such as majority-minority status and local social dynamics, while remaining grounded in universal principles of maintaining the purity of religious

³⁶ Ichsan, "Penyelesaian Aliran Sesat Di Indonesia Dari Perspektif Hukum Islam Dan Hukum Positif."

³⁷ detiknews, "86 Fatwa Aliran Sesat Telah Dikeluarkan MUI," detiknews, 2007.

³⁸ A. Mubarak Yasin, "Aliran Sesat Dalam Lintas Sejarah," Tebuireng Online, 2016.

³⁹ Cadell Last, "Why New Religions? The Sociology of Cults and the Need to Belong," The humanist.com, 2012.

⁴⁰ Natalie Isser, "Why Cultic Groups Develop and Flourish: A Historian's Perspective.," *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1991.

teachings.

Local heretical sects in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra can generally flourish, as they often attract their followers by highlighting the personality of their leaders and offering simple solutions or simple understandings to complex problems in life. In a study, the initial spread of heresy was very lean. Recognising its leaders' magic, glory, and strange behaviours is its attraction, so the general public is attracted or fascinated by the teacher. The excess in rhetoric also adds support to influence others., Little by little, two or three people began to be invited to follow his teachings. Over time, people became curious, and this heretical school gained many followers.⁴¹ However, in the end, it often harms and triggers internal conflicts in society, reinforces negative prejudices, and even threatens the security and welfare of the individuals involved because it is difficult to get out of the stream.

Various complex and diverse factors influence the interest in following local heretical sects in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra. One of the main factors is the existence of dissatisfaction or emptiness in religious understanding and practice. Some individuals feel that mainstream teachings can no longer meet their spiritual and social needs and are hard to work with. In such situations, heretical schools are present to offer alternatives that are considered more interesting, with new narratives and solutions that are claimed to be relevant to the personal conditions of their followers. For example, the Thariqallah school in North Sumatra, which has about 500–1.000 worshippers, provides convenience by considering prayer, fasting, zakat, and hajj not as obligations, along with other reasons supporting their views.⁴² Some heresies even promise ease in the forgiveness of sins and redemption (kafarat), so that for those who feel burdened by past mistakes or grave sins, they seem like a shortcut to obtaining forgiveness or liberation from moral burdens. In addition to ideological factors, economic aspects also play a role, for instance, through the lure of business capital assistance or the routine provision of necessities to persuade people to join the group's religious gatherings, even though their teachings are deviant. This finding is in line with Al Makin's analysis, which shows that in several cases of fatwas on heretical movements, socio-economic jealousy has exacerbated social tensions. Coupled with exclusivism within the group, society becomes more easily provoked, primarily when associated with issues of orthodoxy and claims of doctrinal purity.⁴³

Various complex and interrelated factors influence the interest in following the heretical sects in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra. In addition to ideological and economic reasons, social factors also play an essential role. When a person sees their friends or family join a group considered deviant, a sense of community and the need for social support often trumps rational consideration. Under these conditions, heretical sects can form a warm community, offer a sense of brotherhood, and provide personal attention they may not get daily. Even for some people, heresy is a means of searching for identity and the meaning of life. The promise of a deeper understanding of life's purpose, concrete solutions to personal and social problems, and alternative narratives about

⁴¹ Faizah Faizah and Muhammad Thohri, "Strategi Penanganan Paham Keagamaan Menyimpang Dalam Perspektif Dakwah (Studi Pada Kasus-Kasus Yang Ditangani MUI NTB)," *Jurnal Penelitian Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (2018): 14–30, <https://doi.org/10.20414/jpk.v14i1.494>.

⁴² A Malik M Thaha Tuanaya, "Aliran Tariqatullah Di Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara Tariqatullah Religious Group in the City of Medan, North Sumatera," n.d., 95–108.

⁴³ Al Makin, "Abstract : This Article Presents a Study of the Acehnese Religious Identity in Responding to the Issues of Shari' Ah Application in the Province, Christian Mission, Deviant Sects, and Western Hegemony. These Themes Somehow Play a Role in Defining Th" 24, no. 1 (2016): 113–34.

religion is often an attraction that is hard to ignore. This process is often part of the spiritual journey of individuals seeking "enlightenment" outside mainstream Islamic teachings.

These factors of interest align with previous research findings, which stated that two main factors trigger the emergence and interest in heretical sects. Internal factors include low religious understanding and weak Islamic literacy, making people vulnerable to receiving wrong interpretations. This condition is strengthened by fragile economic factors, where material lures or welfare promises easily tempt people with low incomes. External factors include the community's openness to new teachings without an adequate verification or screening process, and the tendency to be interested in new understandings that enter their area⁴⁴. The results of several interviews show that although some conditions are similar, there are differences in the motivation for community involvement in heresy based on the regional context. In North Sumatra, a Muslim-majority region, one's involvement tends to be influenced by social networks and economic advantages. Many individuals initially only participate in activities because they are invited by friends or family, without fully understanding the teachings. Over time, proximity to the group and incentives in the form of economic assistance or business capital make the engagement process faster and stronger.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, different social conditions in North Sulawesi give rise to other motivational factors. In this region, Muslims are a minority group, so the need for social protection and a sense of belonging to a solid community are the primary considerations. Schools that offer a sense of community, warm atmosphere, and familiar Islamic terms tend to attract the public's attention more easily, even if the teachings are not based on true Islamic principles.⁴⁶ A comparison of the two regions shows that the attraction of heresy comes not only from the ideology or teachings but also from a combination of different social, economic, and psychological factors depending on the local context.

Thus, these phenomena have shown that heresy is present not only as a theological deviation, but also as a response to the psychological, social, and even economic needs some people feel. For individuals experiencing a void of meaning in life, social isolation, or financial stress, the offer of a deviant group often seems like a quick and convincing answer.⁴⁷ The narrative built by heresy is usually accompanied by promises of life change, warm community solidarity, and instant solutions to the problems at hand. In this context, the appeal of heresy becomes increasingly complex, as it offers alternative doctrines and wraps them in the basic human need to feel safe, accepted, and have a clear direction in life.

Let us look at the root conditions of people's interest in entering and becoming part of local heretical sects. It appears that the driving factors are greatly influenced by the socio-demographic context of their respective regions. In Muslim-majority areas such as North Sumatra, economic motives and social networks of family or friends are the dominant triggers. In contrast, in Muslim-minority areas such as North Sulawesi, the need for protection and a sense of security occupies the top position. In both regions, weak religious understanding, identity search, and sense

⁴⁴ Hudawalfurqan Lubis, Ansari Yamamah, and Hafsa, "Penanggulangan Aliran Sesat Melalui Fatwa Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama Dan Qanun," *AT-TAFAHUM : Journal of Islamic Law*, Vol. 2 No. 1 Januari-Juni 2018 2, no. 1 (2018): 1–17.

⁴⁵ Asmuni, "Interview with the General Secretary of MUI North Sulawesi, Jul 29, 2024"

⁴⁶ Abdul Wahab Agafur, "Interview with the General Chairman of the North Sulawesi MUI, August 24, 2024"

⁴⁷ Syarif and Fakhruroji, "Faktor Psikologis Dan Sosiologis Kemunculan Aliran Sesat Aliran Quraniyah Di Jawa Barat."

of togetherness are gaps that deviant groups use to expand their influence. These differences in motivational roots require different mitigation approaches, so effective strategies in the majority areas are not necessarily appropriate if applied in the minority areas, and vice versa. The following is a picture that maps the factors of interest.

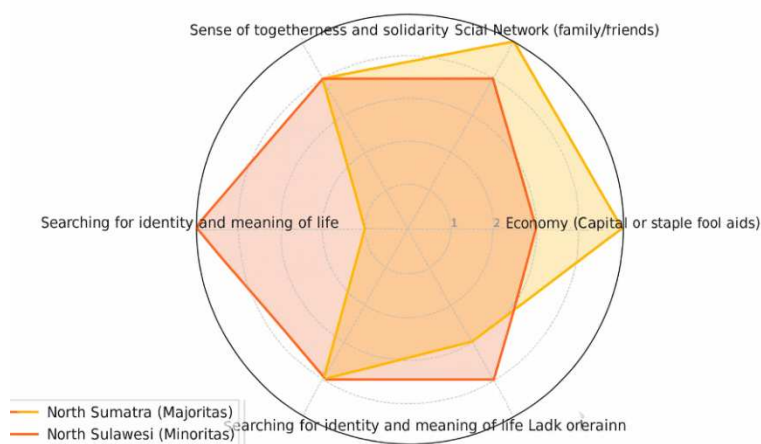


Figure 1. Factors Attracting Followers or Heretical Religions in North Sumatra and North Sulawesi

Source: Data processed (2025)

Based on the data in Figure 1, the radar graph shows a striking difference in the factors of interest in following heretical streams between people in Muslim-majority North Sumatra and Muslim-minority North Sulawesi. In North Sumatra, economic factors, especially capital assistance or necessities, are the dominant drivers. Social networks, such as the involvement of friends or family and a sense of togetherness and solidarity, also greatly influence the decision to join because, in most societies, there is a tendency always to try to maintain one's social identity.⁴⁸ In that part, low religious understanding and the search for identity are relatively high, simultaneously showing that heretical groups can exploit the void of spiritual knowledge to attract followers. On the contrary, the need for protection is almost insignificant because the majority's social position already provides a sense of security.

On the other hand, in North Sulawesi, where Muslims are in the minority, the factor of need for protection occupies the highest position. This reflects perceived social vulnerability and encourages individuals to seek out groups that offer security and safety, even if their teachings are distorted (N. Yusuf et al., 2025). A sense of togetherness, solidarity, and social networks remain strong factors. However, the orientation towards economic influence is lower than in North Sumatra. Interestingly, the factors of searching for identity and meaning in life, as well as weak religious understanding, have a significant role, showing that heretical sects in minority areas can take advantage of the psychological and spiritual conditions of their followers.

Mitigation of North Sulawesi and North Sumatra MUI Against Local Deviant Flows

By definition, mitigation refers to efforts to reduce, correct, or avoid the negative impact

⁴⁸ Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Relasi Antar Umat Mayoritas Dan Minoritas: Studi Masyarakat Tionghoa Di Surabaya," *Harmoni* 20, no. 2 (2021): 276–92, <https://doi.org/10.32488/harmoni.v20i2.499>.

of a risk or disaster.⁴⁹ Mitigation can be interpreted as reducing or avoiding a risk's adverse effect through preventive measures, handling during the incident, or recovery afterwards. In risk management, mitigation is divided into two broad categories: natural disaster mitigation and man-made disaster mitigation.⁵⁰ In this framework, mitigation of heresy is included in the category of man-made disaster, because it is born from deviant religious interpretations and practices that have the potential to cause social unrest. Mitigation of heresy can be understood as a series of efforts to prevent and reduce the influence of deviant teachings through strengthening public awareness, increasing understanding of true religion, and building individual and community resilience from recruitment efforts. This effort emphasises education, counselling, cooperation with the government, religious leaders, educational institutions, and civil society in formulating policies, building an inclusive environment, and law enforcement.

In the Indonesian context, the MUI has formulated 10 criteria for heresy, the primary reference in the mitigation process, so that the steps taken have a normative and authoritative footing for the people. The criteria used as a standard for a fatwa at a school are considered legal. (1) Denying one of the Pillars of Faith and Islam;; (2) Believing in and/or following aqidah that is not by the Qur'an and Sunnah, (3) Believing in the revelation after the Qur'an; (4) Denying the authenticity and/or truth of the content of the Quran; (5) Interpreting the Quran that is not based on the rules of interpretation, (6) Denying the position of the Prophet's hadith as the source of Islamic teachings, (7) Insulting, harassing, and/or degrading the Prophets and Messengers; (8) Denying the Prophet Muhammad as the last Prophet and Messenger, (9) Altering, adding, and/or reducing the points of worship that have been determined by the sharia, such as Hajj not going to Baitullah, obligatory prayer not five times;; (10) Disbelieving fellow Muslims without evidence, shari'i, is like disbelieving Muslims just because they are not part of their group.⁵¹

The Ulema Councils in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra greatly emphasise the importance of mitigating local heresy that grows and develops in their regions. This effort is carried out holistically, using the standard 10 criteria of deviance that the central MUI has set as a reference. Based on this standard, the North Sumatra MUI has issued more than 15 fatwas related to heretical sects. In comparison, the North Sulawesi MUI has established more than two fatwas, all of which serve as guidelines in maintaining the purity of Islamic teachings and socio-religious stability in their respective regions.⁵² However, effective mitigation of local heresy is not enough just by issuing fatwas; instead, it requires a combination of social, educational, and security approaches. This approach differs from the mitigation of fatwas, which was deemed heretical by the Central MUI. Because it is on a national scale, the Central MUI mitigation model is usually more structured and massive, receiving wide attention from the government, the media, the public, and the security forces, so that the impact is more substantial in shaping public opinion. On the other hand, mitigation carried out by the Regional MUI is generally local. It often faces limited resources and political support, so the challenges in dealing with local heresy are more severe.

In the social approach, efforts to mitigate local heresy streams, the first step taken by the

⁴⁹ Herman Ariadi et al., *Mitigasi Bencana* (PT Arr Rad Pratama, 2023).

⁵⁰ (Wakke, 2021)

⁵¹ (June, 2024)

⁵² Darwis "Interview with the Head of the North Sulawesi MUI Office, July 29, 2024" and Muyasir Arief, "Interview with the Chairman of the North Sulawesi MUI Fatwa Commission, August 26, 2024.

Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) in both regions is to research the group of sects with field data and interviews. When the data on heresy is considered sufficient, a fatwa is issued that expressly states the deviation of local schools because they deviate from the actual teachings of Islam. Information about the emergence of heretical sects is obtained more from public complaints, news, and the findings of the MUI itself. Mitigation at the North Sumatra MUI is usually carried out from an early age, before the spread of community unrest or before the unrest spreads.⁵³ In contrast to the North Sulawesi MUI, it only acts when unrest due to heretical activities has spread in the community.⁵⁴ The mitigation pattern in the North Sumatra MUI is reactive and preventive, while it is more reactive in North Sulawesi.

With the issuance of this heretical fatwa from MUI, there has been an official guide to return the public to a straight and pure understanding of Islam. The MUI fatwa describes in detail the errors and deviations of teachings committed by the local group, accompanied by providing evidence based on the Qur'an and Hadith. The issued fatwa will also warn local Muslims against falling into misleading teachings. This step can be considered an emergency measure, such as first aid in a medical emergency, which aims to provide immediate protection and address acute spiritual threats.⁵⁵ With this fatwa, the MUI has clearly identified the heretical group. This fatwa functions not only to protect the ummah from negative influences but also to strengthen the foundation of the true faith in the community and prevent social conflicts in the local community.

As for the recovery steps after the issuance of the fatwa of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), it is to take proactive steps in fortifying the community from the influence of the spread of heresy more widely through comprehensive education and socialisation programs. These programs are designed to increase public understanding and awareness of the authentic teachings of Islam. Through various activities such as seminars, workshops, and public discussions, MUI seeks to provide accurate and in-depth information on the basic principles of Islam, clarify misunderstandings, and counteract distorted doctrines.⁵⁶ In North Sulawesi, related agencies, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, initiated the understanding of the need to avoid the influence of heretical sects, which have a broader reach that can include majority and minority communities. Various digital media and social platforms are also used to reach a wider audience, ensuring that all levels of society can receive these educational messages.⁵⁷ Thus, this mitigation effort not only prevents heretical sects but can also strengthen religious people's belief in the truth taught and avoid horizontal conflicts.

Suppose this social mitigation approach is not practical. In that case, the MUI of North Sulawesi and North Sumatra will use mitigation through a security approach to deal with deviant flows. The Ulama Councils in both provinces understand that, in some cases, security measures may be necessary to protect the community from direct threats arising from sect activities. Therefore, they support law enforcement efforts and monitoring by government and security officials against individuals or groups involved in the harmful spread of heresy.⁵⁸ They also stressed the need for security measures to be carried out proportionately, by human rights principles, and

⁵³ Irwansyah, "Interview with Secretary of the North Sumatra MUI Fatwa Commission, July 29, 2024" and Evra Willya, "Interview with the Secretary of the North Sulawesi MUI Fatwa Commission, August 29, 2024"

⁵⁴ Abdul Wahab Agafur, "Interview with the General Chairman of the North Sulawesi MUI, August 24, 2024"

⁵⁵ Redaksi Detotabuan, "Fatwa MUI ; Aliran Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan Pimpinan Syukron Mamonto Sesat," 2016.

⁵⁶ (Student Activities, 2016)

⁵⁷ (North, n.d.)

⁵⁸ Darwis, "Interview with Head of MUI North Sumatra Office, July 29, 2024"

supported by complete evidence. In security mitigation, the position of the MUI only acts in the normative area, while the execution area remains the government's authority. Scholars only give advice, and the government will follow up on whether a school will be banned or sanctioned based on the law.⁵⁹ Indeed, the position of fatwa is to be a legal opinion given by an Islamic legal expert to answer a question that is not binding. This is different from a binding court decision that must be implemented for the parties to the case.⁶⁰

The MUI in both provinces uses a security approach to mitigate. It cooperates with the police, TNI, and other security agencies to identify and monitor the activities of groups suspected of spreading deviant teachings by being included in the Coordination Team for the Supervision of Religious Streams and Streams in the Community (Pakem). This cooperation provides regular information exchange and coordination to ensure that preventive measures can be carried out effectively and quickly.⁶¹ The involvement of the police and the Prosecutor's Office has been regulated in Article 30, paragraph (3), letters d and e of Law Number 16 of 2004 concerning the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Indonesia, as amended by Law Number 11 of 2021. In addition, there is also Attorney General's Regulation Number PER-019/A/JA/09/2015 concerning the Coordination Team for the Supervision of Religious Streams and Streams Number 5 of 2019 concerning Amendments to the Attorney General's Regulation Number PER-019/A/JA/09/2015.

Suppose the mitigation efforts carried out by the North Sulawesi and North Sumatra MUI through dialogue with the security forces do not receive a positive response from the heretical sect groups, and they continue to spread their teachings. In that case, the MUI, with its authority, will bring the case to the legal realm through an official report to the authorities, such as the police or the prosecutor's office, accompanied by evidence of violations of the law that include acts that disturb the community. The dissemination of teachings that are contrary to Islamic principles, as well as activities that have the potential to disturb security and public order, is prohibited based on the blasphemy article as stipulated in Article 156 of the Criminal Code.⁶²

The implementation of this step has occurred in the case of heretical sects in Langkat Regency, North Sumatra, namely when the local MUI reported to the police regarding the circulation of a viral video of the practice of congregational prayer with female imams and male makmum which reportedly occurred at the Al Kafiyah Islamic Boarding School, because it is considered contrary to Islamic law and has the potential to cause unrest in the community. Hence, it needs to be followed up through legal channels as part of a mitigation strategy to maintain the purity of the teachings while preventing the emergence of social conflicts.⁶³ Similar things have also happened in Protestant religious circles, such as in the case of Pastor Mangapin Sibuea with the "apocalypse" sect in Baleendah, Bandung, who was sentenced to five years in prison under

⁵⁹ Harahab and Supriyadi, "Aliran Sesat Dalam Perspektif Hukum Pidana Islam Dan Hukum Pidana Nasional."

⁶⁰ Mohammad Atho Mudzhar, *Fatwa-Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia: Sebuah Studi Tentang Pemikiran Hukum Islam Di Indonesia 1975–1988* (Jakarta: INIS, 1993), 1–2.

⁶¹ Kejari Tomohon, "Kajati Sulut Buka Rakor Tim Pengawasan Aliran Kepercayaan/Keagamaan Dalam Masyarakat Provinsi Sulut," *JaksaMenyapa.com*, 2021.

⁶² Darwis, "Interview with Head of MUI North Sumatra Office, Juli 29, 2024"

⁶³ CNN Indonesia, "MUI Langkat Laporkan Video Viral Imam Wanita Di Ponpes Al Kafiyah," CNN Indonesia, 2023.

Article 156 of the Criminal Code.⁶⁴ If tabulated, the overall mitigation approach of the North Sumatra and North Sulawesi MUI can be described as follows:

Table 1
Three Mitigation Approaches of North Sumatra MUI and North Sulawesi MUI

Mitigation Approach	Mitigation Steps	Purpose
Social Approach	Issuing fatwas to explain the deviation of certain sects. Education through seminars, workshops, and recitations.	Strengthening the understanding of Islam in the community.
Security Approach	Coordinate with security forces to monitor the activities of heretical flows. Report violations of the law to the authorities.	Maintaining public order and security.
Legal Approach	Use applicable regulations to sanction violators. Prioritising the principle of justice in handling cases of heresy.	Providing a deterrent effect and legal certainty.

Source: Processed data (2025)

The table 1 is a schematic overview of how the strategic framework of the North Sulawesi and North Sumatra MUI deals with deviant flows through three main approaches: social, security, and legal. The two MUIs carry out the social approach by issuing fatwas and organizing seminars, workshops, and recitations as an effort to make religion a social control, where religion functions as a mechanism for social regulation and community cohesion by involving participation in religious activities collectively that can influence individual behaviour to maintain community norms through informal social pressure.⁶⁵

In the security aspect, the MUI coordinates efforts with the authorities to supervise and prohibit the activities of deviant groups. The MUI tries to maintain privileged legitimacy, which shows how mainstream groups should receive greater protection from the state than deviant groups and be more quickly policed by the security forces.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, in the legal approach, the MUI plays a role in reporting every violation to the competent authorities to receive fair sanctions and have a deterrent effect. In an incident, the North Sumatra MUI once collaborated with the security to prohibit the implementation of the dhikr event that was supposed to be held by MPITTI in Medan on March 15, 2023, because this tradition had been seen as heretical.⁶⁷

The three approaches are carried out in a tiered pattern, starting from the social approach as a persuasive first step through education, dialogue, and the issuance of fatwas to correct

⁶⁴ Veronica Katili, "Lex et Societatis", Vol.I/No.1/Jan-Mrt/2013" 1, no. 1 (2013): 163.

⁶⁵ Melvina Sumter et al., "Religion and Crime Studies: Assessing What Has Been Learned," *Religions* 9, no. 6 (2018): 193.

⁶⁶ Kraig Beyerlein, Sarah A Soule, and Nancy Martin, "Prayers, Protest, and Police: How Religion Influences Police Presence at Collective Action Events in the United States, 1960 to 1995," *American Sociological Review* 80, no. 6 (2015): 1250–71.

⁶⁷ Ahmad Arfah Fansuri Lubis Raja Malo Sinaga, "Digugat Rp 2,5 M, MUI Sumut Tegaskan MPITTI Sesat Ajarkan Muhammad Itu Allah," detiknews, 2023.

deviations. This stage is a priority because it provides a space for coaching without triggering an escalation of conflict. If social efforts do not yield significant results, then a security approach will be applied to monitor the activities of deviant groups more closely. The legal approach is used as a last step through regulatory enforcement and the imposition of sanctions to ensure the deterrent effect, legal certainty, and the implementation of laws and regulations. This tiered pattern emphasises that handling heretical flows is not carried out simultaneously but follows a measured escalation flow to maintain social stability and community harmony.⁶⁸ This tiered handling pattern aligns with the framework of civil society development and Pancasila democracy, which does not directly judge perpetrators of heresy. To this extent, the MUI is an important pillar that strengthens social stability through the legitimacy of fatwas and religious education delivered to the broader community.⁶⁹ At the same time, when the MUI functions as a bridge between the state and the Muslim community, its transformation shifts from Khādim al-Hukūmah (state servant) to khādim al-ummah (servant of the people), with its role as a means of control and social integration.⁷⁰

Analysis of Mitigation of MUI in North Sumatra and North Sulawesi on Local Deviant Streams

Some people see the existence of heretical sects as their human right to exercise their beliefs. However, on the other hand, it threatens peace in socio-religious conditions because it can damage society's harmonious order.⁷¹ This can be seen from how heresy works, which often isolates its followers from the general public by creating closed groups. It is less tolerant of different views or beliefs that will erode social cohesion by reducing the sense of togetherness and mutual understanding. Their actions sometimes go so far as to violate the law or undermine public morality, which in turn can pose a real threat to the safety and well-being of society at large. Members are also made psychologically dependent and overwhelmed by fear, giving rise to the view that the outside world is a threat.⁷² The value of the damage caused by heresy to religious society is very significant and diverse. This damage is not only physical, but also includes social, psychological, and moral aspects that damage the structure of society as a whole.

Followers caught up in heresy often experience mental and emotional manipulation by using brainwashing techniques to control their followers by isolating them from family and friends, and forcing them to obey harmful commands. Because it has been carried away by the current of the orders of the leaders of the heretical sect, there will automatically be moral and ethical degradation of the followers of the sect. Heretical schools often teach or encourage behaviour that

⁶⁸ Ardiansyah, Interview with Vice Chairman of MUI North Sumatra, June 29, 2024"

⁶⁹ Ramdhan Muhaimin and JM Muslimin, "The Role of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) to the Development of a Madani Society in the Democratic Landscape of Indonesia," *Aspirasi: Jurnal Masalah-Masalah Sosial* 14, no. 2 (2023): 225–39, <https://doi.org/10.46807/aspirasi.v14i2.3368>.

⁷⁰ Mukhsin Achmad, "The Indonesian Council Ulama (MUI) and Religious Discourse In Indonesia," *Tebuireng: Journal of Islamic Studies and Society* 2, no. 2 (2022): 123–42.

⁷¹ Umi Sumbulah, "Aliran Sesat Dan Gerakan Baru Keagamaan (Perspektif UU PNPS No. 1 Tahun 1965 Dan Hak Asasi Manusia)," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 6, no. 2 (2014).

⁷² Cecilia Hadding et al., "Being In-between; Exploring Former Cult Members' Experiences of an Acculturation Process Using the Cultural Formulation Interview (DSM-5)," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 14, no. September (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1142189>.

is contrary to the moral values recognised by society.⁷³ Destructive practices such as fraud, violence, and abuse of power by cult leaders can erode public morality and set a bad example for the younger generation. Illegal actions carried out by some heretical sects also threaten the law, public order, and religious image. The case of the dissolution of the Gafatar school (Fajar Nusantara Movement) is a clear example. Since 2016, the Indonesian government has designated it as heretical due to deviant ideology, treason attempts, and kidnapping, which has led to the loss of public support and the delegitimisation of the organisation.⁷⁴

To understand the strategies taken by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in dealing with the phenomenon of heresy in areas with different Muslim compositions, an analysis is needed to compare mitigation patterns in majority and minority areas. This comparison is essential because it can show how the social context, demographic conditions, and position of Muslims in the structure of society directly influence how the MUI formulates the right approach. Thus, the advantages and limitations of each mitigation model can be seen more comprehensively according to the social dynamics behind it.

The discussion of the majority and minority mitigation models applied by the MUI in North Sumatra and North Sulawesi, along with their strengths and weaknesses, can be understood more clearly through the following table. This table illustrates the mitigation patterns carried out and provides an overview of how the MUI adapts its role and strategy to the local situation. Therefore, this comparison is essential as a foothold to assess the extent to which the mitigation taken by the MUI can maintain social stability, reduce potential conflicts, and protect the purity of Islamic teachings amid different societal conditions.

Table 2
Mitigation of Deviant Flows in Minority Majority Areas

Region / MUI	Model/Mitigation Method	Excess	Debilitation
North Sulawesi (Minority)	Dialogue and Preventing	social	Limited in changing the
	persuasive approach	conflicts	behaviour of resistive
	Negotiation with local	Maintaining the harmony	stream members
North Sumatra (Majority)	Socialisation of	of minority communities	Takes a longer time
	religious values	Adapting to local	conditions
	Establishment of fatwas	Effective in enforcing	Lack of social consensus
North Sumatra (Majority)	and strict supervision	the rules, support of the	building Greater public
	Normative and	majority community and	resistance
	repressive approach	state institutions against	Can reduce the social
North Sumatra (Majority)	Education and	violations	acceptance of fatwas
	sanctions		

Source: Processed data (2025)

The table 2 provides a detailed picture of the pattern of heresy mitigation by the Indonesian

⁷³ Ken Cleaver, "The Practical and Ethical Considerations in Labeling a Religious Group as a Cult," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 11, no. 33 (2012): 164–81.

⁷⁴ Enkin Asrawijaya, "Gafatar Dan Dinamika Gerakan Sosialnya," *SASDAYA: Gadjah Mada Journal of Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2019): 61, <https://doi.org/10.22146/sasdayajournal.43887>.

Ulema Council (MUI) in majority and minority areas. This difference is evident when comparing North Sulawesi and North Sumatra, which have different social and demographic conditions. In North Sulawesi, Muslims are in a minority position, so the local MUI prioritises persuasive strategies through dialogue, negotiations with local communities, and socialisation of religious values. This approach was chosen to maintain social harmony amid the diversity of society while preventing horizontal conflicts. Research on the role of MUI in responding to minority streams shows that a persuasive model can maintain inter-religious harmony even though it takes longer to produce a significant impact.⁷⁵ This pattern's advantage is its ability to foster mutual understanding, and it is more adaptive to the local conditions of the Muslim minority. However, it still has some weaknesses, which lie in its limitations in changing the resistive behaviour of the group and the delay in results.

On the other hand, in North Sumatra, where Muslims dominate as the majority community, the mitigation model applied by the MUI is more assertive with normative and repressive patterns. Mitigation is done through issuing fatwas, strict supervision, rule enforcement, and sanctions against deviant groups. This strategy is strengthened with educational activities to instil the correct understanding in the community. According to a study, the issuance of fatwas in the majority areas has been proven to be faster in obtaining the support of the community and state institutions, so it becomes very effective in maintaining the purity of faith and social order.⁷⁶ However, although the approach can quickly reduce the activities of heretics, it still has weaknesses. It risks the lack of social consensus, so at any time, it can cause resistance from groups that feel oppressed.

From the comparison of the two models, it is clear that the majority and minority factors greatly influence the mitigation pattern chosen. In most areas, like North Sumatra, the MUI uses a structural-corrective approach through fatwa decisions and strict supervision. This approach is considered more effective for enforcing rules and protecting the purity of teaching, although it risks triggering social resistance if it is not balanced with good communication. Research on MUI's collaboration with PAKEM in North Sumatra, for example, shows that state support strengthens the legitimacy of repressive actions, but still leaves a problem of social acceptance in some circles.⁷⁷ Thus, despite the differences in character, the mitigation pattern taken by the MUI in the majority and minority areas aims to maintain community stability and the integrity of Islamic teachings.

Although both MUIs have effectively carried out mitigation efforts in the context of the majority and minority, the government's formal mitigation is often slow because it waits for an element of law violation or criminal act first. This lengthy bureaucratic process reduces the effectiveness of early prevention. It makes heretical groups seem innocent in the eyes of the public because they are still given space to carry out activities that cause greater unrest. The government can only act when there has been a fundamental violation of the law. In contrast, the MUI fatwa alone, without clear evidence of violations or crimes, does not have sufficient power to be used as a basis for action.⁷⁸ This situation shows a gap between religious authorities and state legal instruments, which impacts the limited space for MUI to move in, ensuring the community's

⁷⁵ Seth J Hill et al., "How Quickly We Forget: The Duration of Persuasion Effects from Mass Communication," *Political Communication* 30, no. 4 (2013): 521–47.

⁷⁶ Sajari, "Fatwa Mui Tentang Aliran Sesat Di Indonesia (1976-2010)."

⁷⁷ Uly Tasya Simanungkalit and Amir Ilyas, "Pengawasan Aliran Kepercayaan Dan Penodaan Agama: Perspektif Pengakuan Hukum Pidana," *Amanna Gappa*, 2020, 132–44.

⁷⁸ Efan Afturedi, "Interview with the North Sumatra High Prosecutor's Office, July 5, 2024

mitigation effectiveness. The MUI's steps through fatwas, dialogue, and supervision are considered useless, even counterproductive, because sometimes they do not have the support of legal authorities that should give stronger legitimacy.

The case of *Kampung Kasih Sayang* in Lalat Regency, North Sumatra, is one clear example of how firm government action does not always follow the MUI fatwa. This community is led by a figure who is known to have 13 wives, a practice that is contrary to both religious law and state rules. Although the MUI has issued a fatwa confirming the group's heresy, the government has not taken explicit legal action.⁷⁹ This condition shows that fatwas, without supporting evidence of law violations as the basis for prosecution, do not yet have the full power to stop the activities of deviant groups. As a result, the community movement space remains open and even has the potential to cause wider unrest in the community.

Meanwhile, in North Sulawesi, a phenomenon that is no less controversial has emerged, namely the case of Sukron Mamonto. The MUI has declared this figure heretical, but she can still be entered as a legislative member.⁸⁰ This situation shows that there is a considerable gap between religious authorities and state authorities. On the one hand, the MUI fatwa emphasises the error of the teachings brought. However, on the other hand, the formal political system still provides space for figures who are considered deviant to gain political legitimacy. This weakens the binding power of fatwas in the eyes of the public but also creates pseudo-legitimacy for dissident groups, as they can appear as part of the official political structure. Thus, the case in North Sulawesi further emphasises the need for synergy between the MUI and the government so that the fatwas issued do not stop at the normative level, but can have a tangible impact on social and political governance.

The government's delay in responding also allows heretical groups to expand their influence, strengthen networks, and exploit public confusion. This situation weakens the MUI's position as a moral authority and lowers public trust in the state's firmness. Therefore, more intensive coordination and a quick response from the government are needed. Any indication of irregularities must be immediately addressed with measured legal measures so they do not develop into larger social conflicts. Thus, synergy between MUI and the government is an essential key in ensuring the effectiveness of mitigation while sustainably maintaining community stability.

CONCLUSIONS

Heretical sects are a dangerous phenomenon because they not only distort the faith of the people but also have the potential to cause social unrest, tensions between religious communities, and even horizontal conflicts. Therefore, mitigation is an urgent step that needs to be carried out systematically and in layers. Mitigation should ideally be pursued in a tiered pattern through social, security, and legal approaches. Social approaches, such as education, dialogue, and fatwas, are used as a persuasive first step and provide a space for correction without triggering an escalation of conflict. If the social approach does not yield results, it will be followed by a security approach to

⁷⁹ (Alert/ist, 2024)

⁸⁰ (Totabuanews Editorial, n.d.)

monitor group activities closely. In the last stage, the legal approach is carried out through enforcing regulations and sanctions to provide legal certainty and a deterrent effect. This tiered pattern shows that mitigation cannot be done simultaneously but must follow the escalation of the problem measurably.

In addition, mitigation strategies must also pay attention to the demographic context in which Muslims are in the majority or minority position. In minority areas such as North Sulawesi, the social approach is more dominant because it can maintain plural community harmony. In majority areas such as North Sumatra, mitigation patterns tend to be normative and corrective through fatwas, supervision, and stricter sanctions to maintain the purity of teachings. What this study adds is that these macro-level tendencies materialize in concrete institutional design choices, not merely in individual religiosity. The same tool, a heresy fatwa, produces different social outcomes depending on whether the issuing body operates in a majority or minority Muslim environment.

The chronic gap between MUI's normative authority and the government's reactive enforcement posture calls for concrete institutional solutions. Close coordination is needed between MUI and government to synergize social, security, and legal approaches. The government must be faster to anticipate any indication of deviations so that mitigation efforts are not counterproductive but are genuinely effective in maintaining social stability, public order, and the integrity of Islamic teachings. Region-specific mitigation protocols are more appropriate than uniform national templates, and standing coordination mechanisms beyond the existing PAKEM structure would reduce the bureaucratic delays that currently weaken preventive effectiveness.

Two limitations of this study merit acknowledgment. The informant pool is concentrated at the provincial level, so district-level MUI dynamics may introduce variation not captured here. The cross-sectional design also cannot trace how mitigation strategies evolve over time within a single region. Future research could extend this framework to provinces with different plurality configurations such as Maluku or Papua, or to cross-national comparisons involving Muslim-minority contexts in Southeast Asia more broadly.

These findings show that the pattern of mitigation against heresy cannot be applied uniformly but must be adjusted to social conditions, the level of plurality, and the demographic position of Muslims in each region. An adaptive, context-sensitive model of religious institutional governance is not merely preferable. The evidence from these two cases suggests it is the only realistic approach.

IMPLICATIONS

This study offers several important implications for the development of contemporary hadith studies and Islamic education. Theoretically, the findings reinforce the idea that religious literacy should not be understood merely as textual competence, but also as interpretive awareness shaped by social and intellectual contexts. The coexistence of textual, contextual, and intertextual reasoning models among students demonstrates that hadith interpretation is dynamic, negotiated, and socially embedded rather than fixed and monolithic. In this regard, the study supports the

arguments of M. Amin Abdullah and M. Quraish Shihab that religious moderation emerges through interpretive literacy and critical engagement with religious texts. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that Islamic higher education institutions need to strengthen hermeneutical and critical literacy approaches in hadith learning by integrating textual analysis with socio-ethical reflection, contextual interpretation, and civic values. Such an approach may encourage students to engage more responsibly and constructively with religious texts within pluralistic societies.

From a policy perspective, the study highlights the importance of embedding religious moderation literacy as a transversal competence across Islamic education curricula. Collaboration between the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, Islamic universities, and digital literacy initiatives could enhance students' interpretive capacity while strengthening resilience against exclusivism and religious extremism. Furthermore, this study opens opportunities for broader academic exploration in the future. Subsequent research may conduct comparative studies across multiple Islamic universities in Indonesia or employ mixed-method approaches to statistically examine interpretive tendencies among students. Cross-cultural studies are also necessary to investigate how Indonesian models of moderate hadith interpretation can contribute to global discussions on Islamic pedagogy, religious literacy, and moderation in contemporary Muslim societies.

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