

Issues Pertaining to Religious Extremism and Steps to Address them to Ensure National Harmony

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ABSTRACT

Current ideological trends, such as extremist beliefs, have become widespread among certain quarters of the Muslim community in Malaysia, and this development has led individuals to act hugely unabated in religious matters. These groups are responsible for various issues that have generated confusion about true Islamic teachings and threaten national stability and harmony. This study aimed to identify the polemics arising from religious extremist doctrines and relevant measures required to address them, thus ensuring that Muslims remain on the right path in accordance with the principles of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*. This qualitative study collected data from historical documents and current scholarly materials. Content analysis was carried out using inductive, deductive and comparative methods to produce the study's findings. Findings reveal several crises triggered by extremist groups, including exclusivism and fundamentalism, misunderstanding of the *jihad* concept, radical attitudes and fanaticism, inclination toward terrorism and militancy, textualist tendencies, rejection of established religious interpretations, adherence to the tawhid doctrine (three categories), accusations of innovation (*bid'ah*) in matters of scholarly disagreement (*khilafiyyah*), *takfiri* attitudes, and intolerance. Findings also reveal that efforts to curb extremist ideologies require the involvement of all relevant parties, including individuals, families, communities, religious bodies, preachers and leaders. Each entity must play its respective role in its area of responsibility to ensure the well-being, safety, unity and protection of the Islamic faith and lives of Muslims.

Keywords: takrifi, extremism, religion, initiative, harmony, ideologies

INTRODUCTION

The Development of Religious Extremism Ideology in Malaysia

The development of religious extremism in Malaysia began to emerge between the 1970s and 1980s, mainly driven by aspirations to shift towards an Islamic political system and the rise of international Islamic movements. Two distinct waves of extremism emerged around 1979, namely the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet–Afghan War.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, established a Shia Islamic state with the aim of overthrowing the secular administrative system. This revolution inspired many Muslim countries to ignite the spirit of religious radicalism [1].

On another front, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which lasted from 1979 to 1989, marked the beginning of global *jihad*, as Muslim fighters from all over the world united to resist Soviet occupation. This conflict encouraged armed *jihad* that attracted worldwide attention and eventually giving rise to militant groups such as *Al-Qaeda* [2].

These events, both rooted in 'Islamisation' and radical forms of Islamic *jihad*, sparked militant ideologies that later spread across the globe, including Southeast Asia.

Violence usually appears in two distinct patterns, namely intimidation of the public (threats against civilians) and intimidation of the government (threats against the state). Threats against the government is known as *old terrorism*, which emerged from the early 20th century to the late 20th century and was driven by secular, Marxist, communist, anarchist or ethnonationalist motives aimed at gaining and preserving political power. Meanwhile, *new terrorism*, which began in the 21st century and continues until today, frequently uses religion as a justification for violence [3].

This study, based on the explanation above, views both previously mentioned events as forms of *old terrorism* that were driven by political ambitions. Nevertheless, they are also considered part of the early phases of militant movements that has contributed to the extremist groups prevailing today, such as the rise of *Al-Qaeda*, *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), and *Hizbollah* or *Islamic Jihad* [2].

The continuation of global Islamic resurgence coupled with the experiences of *jihad* in Afghanistan had contributed to the emergence of *Al-Qaeda* and *Jemaah Islamiyyah* (JI) between the early 1990s and 2000s. These two groups had carried out innumerable acts of violence resulting in significant loss of life. *Al-Qaeda*, an extremist religious organisation led by Osama bin Laden, espoused a *Salafi-Jihadi* ideology that contradicted the views of established religious scholars. Its understanding of the connotation and application of *jihad* was strictly literal, leading it to champion armed *jihad* against the West with the aim of establishing a caliphate [4].

Al-Qaeda not only carried out terror attacks but also instilled fear in society under the banner of Islam. Meanwhile, *Jemaah Islamiyyah* (JI) was formed in Malaysia in 1990 by Abdullah Sungkar, who was affiliated with *Al-Qaeda*. JI originated from the *Darul Islam* (DI) movement, which had revolted around the 1950s. During this period, DI was also known as *Jemaah Mujahidin* and *Jemaah Islamiyyah*, which were militant splinter groups influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwanul Muslimin*) that had initially gained prominence in Egypt during the 1970s [5].

Al-Qaeda and *Jemaah Islamiyyah* (JI) became increasingly prominent following the events of 11 September 2001 and the 2002 Bali bombing. On 11 September 2001, religious extremist groups attacked the World Trade Centre's (WTC) twin towers, prompting the United States to launch the *War on Terror*. This response contributed to the narrative that all forms of global terrorism are perpetrated by Muslims. As a result, the term *Islamophobia* emerged [6].

The 2002 Bali bombing then triggered a series of subsequent attacks worldwide, including the 2003 J.W. Marriott Hotel bombing, 2004 Australian Embassy bombing, and the 2005 Bali II bombing. At the time, many Muslims believed that the influence of *Jemaah Islamiyyah* and *Al-Qaeda* had diminished because of these attacks. However, this assumption proved inaccurate with the rise of a new form of extremist ideology [7].

Somewhere around 2011 the world was jolted by the emergence of a group even more extreme than *Al-Qaeda*, namely the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS/ISIL/IS), also known as *al-Dawlah al-Islamiyyah fi al-'Irāq wa al-Shām* (DAESH). ISIS gained prominence in several fronts, particularly through its skilful use of the Internet to influence and recruit new followers. In addition, the brutal acts they committed were recorded and disseminated globally to showcase their perceived strength [7].

DAESH, which rose to prominence around 2014, upheld extremist interpretations of *tawhid* and *jihad* that contradicted the principles of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. Their mastery of digital technology enabled them to attack and sabotage nations dependent on modern communication systems. They were capable of conducting intelligence gathering activities through government websites and learn bomb-making techniques through online instructions. DAESH also promoted a political vision of Pan-Islamism as a means to liberate themselves from what they viewed as modern Western propaganda that had infiltrated and dominated Muslim countries [3].

This issue had garnered significant attention as DAESH had become the fastest growing threat in Malaysia. The group was particularly dangerous because it advocated beliefs and teachings that promoted a *takfiri* ideology as well as a rigid and literalist interpretation of Islam, which justified the killing of Muslims and other religious groups who opposed them [8].

DAESH used social media as its primary platform to disseminate its ideology and this posed a significant issue as the Malaysian public is usually highly susceptible to religious influence. Even more concerning is that the

Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) had released data indicating Malaysian citizens' involvement in DAESH-related activities had increased by 200 percent, involving participation and arrests [3].

The influence of *Salafi-Jihadi* ideology has led to the formation of local religious extremist movements such as *Tentera Sabiullah*, *Darul Dakwah* (House of Islamic Call), Crypto Group, Mohd Nasir Ismail Group, *Jundullah* (Soldiers of God), Ibrahim Libya's Islamic Revolution Group, Kedah Mujahidin Group (KMK), Perak Islamic Struggle Group (KPIP), *Al-Ma'unah*, and the Malaysian Mujahidin Group.

The root cause of the emergence of armed *jihadi* groups can be traced to the influence of *Salafi-Wahhabi* thought, founded by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab. While *Salafi-Wahhabi* groups do not engage in militant activities, their literalist, textualist, exclusivist, fundamentalist and traditionalist interpretations of religious texts cultivate rigid political thinking, which in turn has contributed to the development of radical ideologies among *Salafi-Jihadi* groups [9].

Malaysian students pursuing higher education in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia, are said to be highly susceptible to *Salafi-Wahhabi* ideology and rigid political Islamic thought. Upon returning to Malaysia, some of these students had propagated a rather hard-line interpretation of Islam thought, including the promotion of *takfiri* culture. This phenomenon was reinforced by scholars who argue that the Islamic University of Madinah is a major exporter of *Salafi-Wahhabi* ideology, which has produced theologians inclined to spread this ideology worldwide.

Salafi-Wahhabi beliefs can lead to extremist ideologies based on a rigid interpretation of *takfiri*, which justifies *jihad* against fellow Muslims under the influence of groups such as *Al-Qaeda* and DAESH [10]. This concern is consistent with the advice of the Selangor State Executive Council member for Islamic Affairs and Innovation, who stated [11]:

"We send students to study in the Middle East with the intention that they only study. We also ask these students to be cautious because they are exposed to many different ideologies are openly present when studying abroad."

In a similar vein, the Director of the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS), Datuk Mohd Shahzihan Ahmad, stated that the Selangor government no longer sponsors undergraduate students to study in the Middle East [12].

"This decision was made to reduce the risk of Islamic studies students being exposed to influences and elements that could disrupt their thinking and sense of identity while in the Middle East."

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This qualitative study focused on a content analysis of various primary and secondary sources, including historical documents, scholarly works, security reports from various institutions and contemporary academic writings in print or online form. An inductive method was applied in the initial stage to thoroughly examine the data and identify key themes, patterns and characteristics related to the dissemination of extremist beliefs among the Muslim community. Subsequently, a deductive approach was employed to evaluate the findings based on the measures implemented to address extremist ideologies that significantly deviate from authentic Islamic teachings. A comparative method was also used to compare and contrast the attitudes, arguments and approaches of extremist groups with the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah's manhaj*, as outlined by the majority of established Islamic scholars. This enabled the present study to identify notable differences and the elements that cause confusion in the Muslim community. This study produced a more comprehensive, balanced and authoritative analysis through the combination of these three methods in order to seek a better understanding of the religious extremism phenomenon prevalent in Malaysia.

Discussion Religious Extremism Ideology Issues in Malaysia

Religious extremism is an ideology that is increasingly attracting global attention, including in Malaysia. It has given rise to various religious issues that has led to the distortion of peaceful religious understanding for certain purposes, which in turn can result in violent conflict. One of the key aspects of religious extremism is the tendency

to be exclusive and become a fundamentalist in matters pertaining to faith. Exclusivism refers to the belief that only the views and positions of a particular group are correct, while that of all others are outright wrong or misguided. Fundamentalism denotes a rigid and textualist adherence to certain principles. In religious matters, this leads to a strict and literalist understanding and practice of faith, with little openness to alternative interpretations adjusted according to context or time. The combination of these two tendencies produces individuals who are quick to find fault as well as reject and/or oppose those with differing beliefs [13], [14]. The consequences of subscribing to such thinking patterns culminate in a society that is prejudiced, intolerant, coercive in imposing its views on others, harsh, rigid and excessive, which ultimately creates difficulties and burdens for various parties [15].

Extremist thoughts often involve a misunderstanding of *jihad*'s true concept, especially *jihad* that is carried out on religious pretexts. The majority of these groups adhere to the *Salafi-Jihadi* creed, which is considered a form of neo-Khawarij. *Jihad qital*, *jihad takfiri*, or armed *jihad* is advocated and promoted as a means to establish an Islamic state, whereby rulers and individuals who do not follow Allah SWT's *Shariah* principles are deemed guilty and legitimate targets for reprisal, even if they are fellow Muslims.

This ideology tends to appeal to the public because it is juxtaposed as struggling in the path of Allah SWT (*fi sabilillah*) and based on glorifying stories of *mujahid* martyrs as role models who are promised paradise and forgiveness of their sins if they are killed during their *jihad* [16]. *Jihad qital* represents the highest struggle and ultimate goal for extremist groups when establishing the *Daulah Islamiyyah*. This armed struggle began at a global level, led by their leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, with operations centred in Iraq and Syria [15].

Religious extremism is a manifestation of radicalism and it is closely linked to fanaticism, where extreme views lead to staunch rejection of differences in views or opinions. Radicalism is defined as *actions and attitudes aimed at transforming existing ideas in ways that disrupt the customary norms practiced in a society* [17].

Religious radicalism is an ideology, mindset or movement that promotes drastic change through violence and threats based on religious grounds that poses challenges for followers of all religions worldwide. Radical ideologies do not merely propagate extremist beliefs but also encourage armed action and violence instead of peace in order to vindicate their beliefs [18]. Radical thought often encourages hostility in communities due to differences in background, beliefs and principles. It serves as the starting point or foundation for extremism when radical ideologies become excessively rigid and fanatical [13].

Religious extremist groups can eventually end up carrying out terrorist or militant-like activities. Terrorism refers to movements or violent actions aimed at instilling fear among the public to achieve specific objectives. Militants are armed groups that employ physical violence to intimidate civilians or to accomplish certain goals by using any form of weapons [19]. Consequently, these groups engage in relentless combat against those they consider to be enemies or individuals committing wrongdoing. Even if they do not kill their opponents directly, they may sometimes expel them as a condition to fulfil the objectives of warfare carried out in the name of religion [13].

These extremist groups adopt a textualist (literalist) and rigid approach in understanding the al-Qur'an and Hadith, often drawing immediate and haste conclusions. In some instances, Qur'anic verses concerning tyrannical rulers are used to justify labelling state leaders who do not share the extremists' views as *taghut* or *thugyan*. Similarly, Qur'anic verses regarding disbelievers are exploited to declare those who do not follow their interpretation of Islam or share their beliefs as *kafir* [20], [21]. In addition, extremists interpret *mutashabih* (ambiguous) verses literally. Verses such as "*yad Allāh*" (Hand of Allah), "*istawā 'ala al-'Arsh*" (established on the Throne) and "*wajh Allāh*" (Face of Allah) are misinterpreted and not properly construed according to established theological principles [16], [22].

Extremist doctrine opposes alternative religious interpretations and rejects any form of modification or reinterpretation. These extreme groups believe that absolute truth is contained solely in the literal texts of religion, especially the al-Qur'an, and they do not recognize the role of reason when interpreting these texts, hence, viewing it as a path to misguidance. Historical records show that Khawarij extremists once rebelled against legitimate authority. Their anti-interpretation stance reflects a rejection of the diverse nature of religious interpretations practiced by recognized Islamic scholars. This mindset continues in modern extremist movements, which tend to adopt an exclusivist approach to literalist texts and declare other Muslim groups as *takfiri* [23].

Extremist groups adhere to the *Salafi-Wahhabi* concept of *tawhid*, based on the *Threefold Tawhid* (*tauḥid al-Rububiyyah*, *tauḥid al-Uluhiyyah*, and *tauḥid al-Asma' wa al-Sifat*) as formulated by Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728H) and Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1206H) [24]. However, ISIS had added a fourth branch, namely *tawhid al-hakimiyyah*, introduced by Sayyid Qutb. According to this understanding of *tawhid*, political authority belongs solely to Allah SWT, and it becomes incumbent to engage in *jihad* to establish a governance system based on Islamic principles [15].

Extremist groups assert that Muslims must return to the al-Qur'an and Hadith while rejecting innovations (*bid'ah*) and polytheism (*shirk*) present in contemporary society. History has shown that *Salafi-Wahhabi* figures, such as Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Wahhab (d. 1206H), propagated teachings that contained violent elements, including the destruction of mosque domes and tomb structures, viewing them as acts of *shirk* and *bid'ah*. He argued that the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had commanded the demolition of elevated graves. As a result, his actions were unpopular among the local population, leading to threats of expulsion [20].

Extremist doctrine can create '*aqidah* related (faith) issues by declaring other Muslims as *kafir*. This predicament tends to occur because some practicing Muslims lack sufficient knowledge on Islam, which causes them to make inaccurate conclusions [25]. Furthermore, Muslims are labelled as *kafir* by extremists if the latter does not follow Islamic teachings as interpreted by the extremist group. This labelling includes claims of individuals who lack faith or are apostates, those who commit major sins without repentance, Islamic leaders who fail to implement *Shariah* laws (labelled as *kafir*, tyrannical, or sinful), and citizens who obey rulers and follow their directives. Similarly, *Salafi-Wahhabi* teachings declare those who regard *mutashabih* verses as matters of *usul* (fundamentals) to be *kufir akbar* (major disbelief), and those who consider them to be matters of *furu'* (secondary issues) to be *kufir asghar* (minor disbelief) [26].

These groups exhibit arrogance, demean others and show intolerance, while believing that their interpretation of Islam is correct and that of others are totally wrong. They are also known for their strict devotion in worship and their determination to fight perceived enemies. However, it is clear that the intensity of one's worship cannot be used as a measure of the validity of the *manhaj* they follow. The rigorous religious practices of extremists are assessed solely in relation to their relationship with Allah SWT, but this does not necessarily translate into proper conduct toward fellow humans. In other words, even if their outward actions and acts of worship appear commendable, extremist thinking does not prevent *takfiri* attitudes or the justification of killing another Muslim. This is evident in their claim that morally upright non-Muslims could still possess a rightful '*aqidah* [27]. This is consistent with Allah SWT's admonition regarding those who take part of a matter and leave the rest, as mentioned in the verse below.

أَف تُمْنُونَ بَعْضَ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ ۖ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْيٌ فِي
الْيَوْمِ الَّذِي لَا يُنْفَكُ ۚ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُزْجَوْنَ إِلَىٰ أشدَّ الْعَذَابِ ۚ وَمَا أَلِلُّ بِعُقُولِ عَامَاتٍ غَمْلُونَ

Meaning:

..... "So do you believe in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in part? Then what is the recompense for those who do that among you except disgrace in worldly life; and on the Day of Resurrection they will be sent back to the severest of punishment. And Allāh is not unaware of what you do". (Surah Al-Baqarah 2: 85)

Factors And Dynamics of Religious Extremism in Malaysia

There are various factors that contribute to the emergence of religious extremism, one of which is social inequality among individuals. Marginalised groups who have limited access to educational opportunities, employment, and stable economic conditions are more susceptible to extremist doctrines that promise justice. These deprivations give rise to feelings of dissatisfaction and anger, which in turn motivate individuals to seek solutions according to their own interpretations or inclinations [39].

Second, political factors also contribute to the development of extremist views. Disagreement with the government, political system and current administration, as well as feelings of political marginalisation can encourage individuals to adopt extremist ideologies. These groups believe that their voices are not heard, leading

them to seek alternative approaches outside the existing system. This indicates that extremism is not solely a religious issue, but is also influenced by individual dissatisfaction with social and political conditions [40].

Third, young people are the primary targets of extremist ideologies because they are often in a phase of identity formation, emotional instability, social pressure and a strong desire for recognition and acceptance within social groups. Extremist groups target youth through recruitment efforts, religious study sessions and social activities that foster a sense of belonging based on radical ideologies [41].

Fourth, rapid technological development has enabled extremist propaganda to spread more widely and quickly. Mass media is used as a platform to disseminate violence, conspiracy narratives, and calls to join extremist groups. This dissemination easily reaches a global audience, particularly individuals who lack a strong foundation in religious knowledge [15].

Fifth, the influence of religious institutions, particularly weaknesses in oversight and the uneven delivery of religious teachings, creates opportunities for extremist ideologies to manipulate religion. Religious institutions play a crucial role in safeguarding the faith of the community and fostering social harmony [42].

Sixth, misunderstandings of conservative religious teachings and religious extremism contribute to the problem. Conservative teachings aim to preserve traditional religious principles and practices without necessarily considering social influences, but they do not threaten social harmony. Religious conservatism emphasizes adherence to sacred texts, scholars' fatwas and the Sunnah as key guides for individual and societal life. In contrast, religious extremism involves rigid interpretations of religion that can lead to aggressive actions and violence. Extremists often misguide others and label those who disagree as infidels. Therefore, understanding the difference between conservative teachings and extremism is essential to prevent the generalization of conservative practices as extremist and to avoid stigmatizing those who peacefully follow traditional religious principles [3, 43, 44].

Next, from the perspective of social dynamics, several religious extremism groups have been identified in the contemporary era [9]:

1. Jemaah Ansar al-Syariah (2011–present): Led by Mohd Suhaimi Abdullah, this group promotes Khawarij-style preaching, rejects democracy as a form of tyranny (taghut), and practices takfir against Sunni scholars (Ahli al-Sunnah wa alJama'ah). The Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) have detained 20 individuals involved in their extremist activities.
2. ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) (2014–2025): Approximately 200 Malaysians joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq. There have been 30 cases of prison radicalization and 50 youths aged 14–25 detained under the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA).
3. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) (2001– 2020): About 150 members were arrested. Notable incidents include the 2003 JW Marriott bombing in Jakarta, which killed 12 people, and planned attacks on Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). Prominent JI scholars, such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, were also prosecuted.

Measures Initiated to Address Contemporary Ideological Threats in Malaysia

Contemporary extremist ideology has given rise to various issues that not only involve religious aspects but also threaten societal harmony. This ideology must be addressed by all relevant parties to prevent its widespread dissemination, which could become an incurable societal malice.

One preventive measure is for Muslims to firmly adhere to the al-Qur'an and Hadith as a form of guidance in their daily lives. The unity and strength of the Muslim community are reinforced when they follow divine revelation; conversely, neglecting it can become a source of societal division, as intended by the enemies of Islam, including Jews and the West [28]. Understanding the al-Qur'an should be based on a textual approach and must also be connected to and developed with deep spiritual insight. Some of the actual intended understandings of the al-Quran are akin to a Muslim who comprehends the true meaning of a recited prayer and is able relate it to the power of Allah SWT, giving *zakat* serves as a form of humanitarian aid, performing *hajj* symbolizes the unity of the Muslim community and fasting embodies solidarity with the hungry [18].

Another effective method for addressing the threat of contemporary ideological extremism is for Muslims to safeguard their *'aqidah* to prevent deviation. The *'aqidah* management model consists of four stages, namely planning, structuring, influence and control.

Planning refers to the relationship amongst creatures and between creatures and Allah SWT. Structuring focuses on the foundational arrangement, sources and understanding of *'aqidah* that enable the achievement of its objectives. Influence represents the main goal of *'aqidah*, which is to perform good deeds and avoid prohibitions. Control involves the supervision of *'aqidah* to ensure it aligns with *Shariah* principles and reject deviant beliefs [29]. In addition, Muslims need to cultivate critical thinking in order to understand religious teachings and avoid forming exclusivist attitudes. Inclusive religious education broadens one's perspectives on diversity, creating and sustaining peace as well as strengthening compassion in society. Muslims should also practice moderation in all matters to avoid extremism, which is prohibited in Islam [30]. At the same time, Muslims are encouraged to increase their religious knowledge through formal education in religious institutions, such as mosques and prayer halls, provided that teachers or instructors are properly certified and trustworthy [31].

Awareness of the collective well-being of society should be prioritized over individual interests. Therefore, social interaction must be strengthened to convey the importance of communal relationships and prevent communal tension. Positive interactions can enhance societal welfare when individuals care for and support one another [18]. One approach that can help achieve this is through interfaith and intercultural dialogue that builds tolerance, especially in pluralistic communities [32].

Religious education tends to play a crucial role in alleviating contemporary ideological threats. Parents, as primary educators, are responsible for providing early exposure to religious education and guiding children away from religious fanaticism and extremism. Schools, on the other hand, enable students to acquire knowledge, as well as provide a platform for expressing opinions and posing appropriate questions during the learning process [30]. At the same time, religious education must strike a balance between theoretical understanding and social concepts in order for religion can be applied in community interactions. Western ideologies that seek to separate religion from daily life should be critically examined, since religion serves as a unifying force that integrates various principles that bring people together. Malaysia serves as a model for successfully incorporating religion into multiple aspects of governance, including politics, thereby strengthening and stabilizing the nation [33].

Religious institutions, as entities responsible for overseeing religious affairs, must actively address contemporary ideological doctrines. Proactive measures must still be implemented in the community although *fatwa* regarding extremism have been issued. Initiatives that can be carried out include field activities, such as conducting awareness programs on contemporary ideologies and building rapport between young people and these institutions, which would enhance engagement between members of religious institutions and youth. In addition, religious departments actively distribute educational materials in the form of pamphlets or social media broadcasts. This approach is crucial, as extremist groups frequently use digital platforms for disseminating their ideology. Religious institutions, therefore, play a key role in raising awareness, countering extremist narratives, and providing early exposure to correct fallacious or erroneous information regarding Islam [34]. Therefore, the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) has published books addressing deviant and misleading Islamic teachings in the state, such as *Fatwa on the alDawlah al-Iraq wa al-Sham (ISIS) militant movement*, and implementing e-certification programs to prevent the spread of extremist ideologies. JAIS also conducts awareness activities, seminars and enforcement initiatives on individuals involved in religious extremism. Other constructive efforts involve large-scale and consistent publication of scholarly materials written by classical Islamic scholars that promote research and religious programs, including *tadabbur* al-Qur'an from multiple perspectives, and leveraging technology in the propagation of Islamic teachings [35].

Government initiatives are crucial in efforts to counter contemporary ideological doctrines, as the state holds the highest authority in a country. These efforts include promoting religious understanding in accordance with *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* principles. The government must also pay serious attention to the youth, as they are the primary targets of extremist groups. Special platforms can be established for youth to express their ideas and opinions through dialogue programs, such as the "*Islamic Students Reject Violence*" campaign organized by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) [15]. The government is also responsible for implementing rehabilitation programs for individuals influenced by religious extremism, which comprises education, counselling and moral support [36]. International cooperation and collaboration also vital in efforts to

identify the causes and impacts of religious extremism. Brunei has expanded international relations by enhancing intelligence, strengthening education and creating awareness of the dangers of religious extremist ideologies. A broad and sustained approach contributes to national stability and upholds universal values [37]. Similarly, Australia has engaged in international collaboration involving the exchange of information and know-how with other countries to counter Islamic extremism in prisons. Such international initiatives can be leveraged to address global challenges faced by multiple nations [36]. Security agencies do play a critical role in curbing the spread of contemporary religious ideological influence. The police can collaborate with higher education institutions to control the dissemination of religious extremist ideologies at the university level. In addition, security forces have been working with the government to monitor the activities of Malaysians on social media and filter content containing deviant religious teachings. This is important because social media serves as a platform for extremists to spread their ideology since it is easily accessible to the public without verification from authentic sources. Furthermore, security agencies can conduct awareness campaigns in schools, universities, mosques, community halls, expos and similar venues through the distribution of brochures and pamphlets as well as hold briefings that highlight the dangers of contemporary religious ideological threats [34].

In a similar vein, the Australian government has strengthened the monitoring of individuals involved in extremism to prevent the spread of such ideologies to the wider community [36].

The Malaysian legislative framework serves as the basis for the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) to initiative action against extremists. The framework includes the Penal Code, Anti-Money Laundering, AntiTerrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001, Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (SOSMA), Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 (POTA) and the Prevention of Crime Act 1959 (POCA).

Among the offences related to extremist ideologies and related activities that can be prosecuted under Malaysian law are:

1. Section 130C of the Penal Code: for offences related to committing terrorist acts;
2. Section 130D of the Penal Code: for offences related to knowingly providing or offering to provide any explosive or other lethal device to a terrorist group etc.;
3. Section 130E dan 130F of the Penal Code: for offences related to recruiting or agreeing to recruit someone to join a terrorist group or participate in a terrorist act, and providing training or instruction to terrorist groups or individuals planning terrorist acts;
4. Section 130G of the Penal Code: for offences related to incitement, promotion, or solicitation related to terrorist acts and groups, and to knowingly encourage terrorist acts, membership in terrorist groups, or provide property/funds for these purposes;
5. Section 130H of the Penal Code: deals with providing facilities to support terrorist acts, making it an offense for building owners, operators of vessels/aircraft, or providers of tech facilities to knowingly allow their premises, vehicles, or equipment to be used for terrorist purposes
6. Section 130I of the Penal Code: deals with directing activities of terrorist groups, making it an offense to intentionally lead such groups;
7. Section 130JA of the Penal Code: deals with travelling for the purpose of committing or preparing for a terrorist act in a foreign country, penalizing individuals (citizens or not) who transit through or from Malaysia with this intent;
8. Section 130JB of the Penal Code: criminalizes possessing, controlling or distributing items linked to terrorist groups or acts, covering physical items like weapons, but also controversial items like literature;
9. Section 130JC of the Penal Code: makes it an offense to build, equip, or dispatch a conveyance (such as a vehicle or vessel) knowing or having reasonable grounds to believe it will be used for terrorist activities or to further the activities of a terrorist group;
10. Section 130JD of the Penal Code: makes it an offense to engage in any conduct in preparation of a terrorist act;
11. Section 130K of the Penal Code: deals with harbouring individuals involved in terrorism, making it an offense to shelter, help or obstruct the arrest of someone known or believed to have committed, planned, or be a member of a terrorist group;
12. Section 130KA of the Penal Code: deals with membership in a terrorist group, making it an offense to be a member of such a group;

13. Section 130L of the Penal Code: deals with criminal conspiracy related to terrorism, stating that conspiring with someone in Malaysia to commit a terrorist act outside Malaysia, or conspiring with someone outside Malaysia to commit an act in Malaysia; and
14. Section 130M of the Penal Code: deals with the intentional omission to give information relating to terrorist acts, making it an offense for anyone who knowingly fails to report a terrorist offense they are legally bound to disclose.

A strategic plan should be proposed to address deviant Islamic doctrines in Malaysia that comprises four core elements, namely prevention, enforcement, rehabilitation and consolidation. The prevention element serves as an initial measure to ensure that Muslims are not influenced by deviant Islamic teachings. This requires collaboration between the community and religious institutions to enhance awareness, facilitate effective communication and implement joint initiatives. The enforcement element involves religious organizations taking action against individuals engaged in deviant beliefs, as well as proposing improvements to future legislation. The rehabilitation element focuses on rehabilitating individuals who have been influenced by deviant teachings. This is guided by the *Policy Paper on the Development of Rehabilitation Modules for Deviant Teachings* (2022) submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The consolidation element aims to build a Muslim identity rooted in *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* in terms of *'aqidah*, *Shariah* and *tasawuf*, thus ensuring resilience against the spread of deviant Islamic ideologies in contemporary times [38].

CONCLUSION

Overall, the issue of extremism in Malaysia, especially in relation to radical Islamic ideologies, such as ISIS and DAESH, has become increasingly concerning, with cases rising each year. Society is easily influenced through social media, especially the youth and lower-income groups who possess limited religious knowledge. Extremists disseminate their propaganda through online platforms, and secret study circles in educational institutions in their attempts to establish terror cells. The government has taken proactive measures through collaborative initiatives between JAKIM, Ministry of Home Affairs (KDN), and the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM), that include the development of a special anti-radicalisation module for foreign workers, monitoring of preachers, social media, and DAESH-related websites, as well as educational initiatives such as seminars and religious sermons promoting moderation to curb the spread of extremist ideology. Dependence on the Internet and socioeconomic factors necessitates continuous initiatives to ensure the nation's security is safeguarded although the threat remains controlled through security intelligence and preventive efforts.

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