

Unraveling Cults in West Java: A Socio-Legal Analysis of Teachings, Spread, and Human Rights Implications

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the phenomenon of cults in West Java, a province with the highest number of cult cases in Indonesia. Based on data from the Indonesian Ulema Council of West Java, the province hosts 144 cults. This study focuses on seven regencies: Bandung Regency, West Bandung Regency, Garut Regency, Tasikmalaya Regency, Ciamis Regency, Cirebon Regency, and Cimahi City, examining the distinct socio-demographic characteristics of these regions regarding teachings, spreading patterns, and the vulnerabilities that lead individuals to join cults. The research explores the legal responses and human rights challenges in managing and mitigating the influence of these cults, particularly in rural, economically disadvantaged, and low-education areas. The article argues that cults often thrive in these communities due to the promise of peace and solutions to life's challenges, raising significant concerns regarding the protection of vulnerable populations and the enforcement of legal and human rights standards.

Keywords: Cult, the Indonesian Ulema Council, Socio-Legal

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji fenomena aliran sesat di Jawa Barat, provinsi dengan jumlah kasus aliran sesat tertinggi di Indonesia. Berdasarkan data Majelis Ulama Indonesia Jawa Barat, provinsi ini memiliki 144 aliran sesat. Penelitian ini berfokus pada tujuh kabupaten: Kabupaten Bandung, Kabupaten Bandung Barat, Kabupaten Garut, Kabupaten Tasikmalaya, Kabupaten Ciamis, Kabupaten Cirebon, dan Kota Cimahi, dengan mengkaji karakteristik sosio-demografis yang berbeda dari daerah-daerah tersebut terkait ajaran, pola penyebaran, dan kerentanan yang menyebabkan individu bergabung dengan aliran sesat. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi respons hukum dan tantangan hak asasi manusia dalam mengelola dan mengurangi pengaruh aliran sesat ini, khususnya di daerah pedesaan, kurang mampu secara ekonomi, dan berpendidikan rendah. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa aliran sesat sering berkembang di masyarakat ini karena menjanjikan kedamaian dan solusi atas tantangan hidup, sehingga menimbulkan kekhawatiran yang signifikan terkait perlindungan populasi rentan dan penegakan standar hukum dan hak asasi manusia.

Kata kunci: Aliran sesat, Majelis Ulama Indonesia, Sosial Hukum

INTRODUCTION

In addition to being a province with the highest number of violations of freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia (CRCS (Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies), 2011, 2013; Setara Institute, 2014, 2016; The Wahid Institute, 2015), West Java is also notable for having numerous cases of cults. Between 2001 and 2007, at least 250 cults were identified across Indonesia, with approximately 50 located in the province of West Java, marking it as a significant area for the proliferation of such groups (Yogaswara & Jalidu, 2008). The Indonesian Ulema Council (IUC) of West Java also strengthens this data by saying that 144 cults have emerged in West Java province (Detiknews, 17 Juli 2017).

Several articles highlight that West Java is a significant breeding ground for radicalism and terrorism in Indonesia. This phenomenon is associated with the high levels of poverty in the area, the openness of Sundanese culture, and the historical influence of the DI/TII movement (Djelantik, 2006).

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Received: June 4, 2024; Accepted: August 26, 2024. Published: August 28, 2024

Consequently, internal religious conflicts, including cases of cults, are likely to persist for several reasons: (1). The increasing strength of fundamentalism, radicalism, and even terrorism in the country; (2). The suboptimal religious maturity of the community, coupled with low levels of community participation in fostering internal and inter-religious harmony; (3). The absence of organic laws implementing Article 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia; (4). The inconsistency of government officials in enforcing laws within the community, particularly in conflicts with religious nuances (Hapsin, 2014).

There are many studies on cults, yet most of them focus solely on doctrines or teachings (Ali, 2023; Gibson, 2000; Picard & Madinier, 2011; Tan, 2012). Research that involves a socio-demographic analysis of the emergence of cults remains scarce. Such an analysis is crucial because the emergence of cults is inherently linked to the socio-demographic background of a region. Different regions within the same province can experience varying patterns of cult development. For instance, one region might have only one cult, while another might have numerous cults thriving. Additionally, cults might persist for several years in one area but only survive for a short period in another. To elucidate these differences, a socio-demographic analysis of the area is essential. There are five reasons why such analysis is necessary:

1. Firstly, cults often attract individuals from diverse social and demographic backgrounds. Preventive measures can be better targeted by identifying the characteristics of those vulnerable to cult influences. For instance, if a cult predominantly attracts youth or individuals from specific socio-economic groups, prevention and intervention efforts can be more effectively directed towards these groups.
2. Secondly, socio-demographic analyses can assist in identifying risk factors that make individuals or groups more vulnerable to cult influence. For instance, factors such as lack of education, economic instability, and social isolation can make a person more susceptible to accepting extreme ideologies.
3. Thirdly, understanding the socio-demographic characteristics of vulnerable groups enables the development of more effective prevention strategies. These strategies might include targeted educational approaches, community development programs, and efforts to increase social engagement within specific communities.
4. Fourthly, socio-demographic analyses can help us understand the motivations behind an individual's involvement in a cult. Factors such as the need for identity, the search for meaning, or social dissatisfaction can strongly drive someone to join and engage in a cult.
5. Fifthly, by continuously monitoring and evaluating the socio-demographic characteristics of cult followers, we can gain insights into how these cults evolve over time and assess the effectiveness of prevention efforts.

To comprehensively address the complex issue of cult proliferation in West Java, it is imperative to not only examine the socio-demographic factors but also consider the broader legal and human rights implications. The socio-demographic analysis serves as a crucial foundation for understanding the nuances of cult emergence in different regions, but it must be complemented by a robust legal framework that addresses the protection of human rights, particularly in vulnerable communities. The intersection of socio-demographic factors with legal vulnerabilities highlights the need for targeted legal interventions that can prevent the exploitation of individuals by cult leaders. Legal frameworks should be designed to provide protection and support for those most at risk, including the economically disadvantaged, the less educated, and those experiencing social isolation. This approach ensures that the legal system not only punishes wrongdoing but also actively prevents the conditions that allow cults to thrive.

Furthermore, addressing the issue of cults requires a multi-faceted strategy that integrates socio-demographic insights with legal, educational, and community-based interventions. The development of effective prevention strategies must be informed by continuous socio-demographic monitoring and legal oversight. Educational programs aimed at increasing awareness about the dangers of cults and promoting critical thinking should be tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable groups. At the same time, community development initiatives should focus on strengthening social cohesion and providing economic opportunities, thereby reducing the appeal of cults as a solution to life's challenges. Law enforcement agencies, in collaboration with local governments and community organizations, must work together to ensure that legal measures are consistently applied and that human rights are upheld in all efforts to combat the influence of cults. This holistic approach is essential for creating a resilient society that can effectively resist the spread of cults and protect the rights and well-being of all its members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Doctrinal Focus in Cult Studies

Adon Nasrullah Jamaludin (2018) study titled "Religious Conflict in Indonesia" offers a critical examination of sectarian and communal conflicts in West Java, including those involving cults. Although the study acknowledges the role of cults in religious conflicts, it primarily addresses the broader context of religious violence rather than delving into the specific teachings or socio-demographic characteristics of cults. Jamaludin's work underscores the tensions that arise from the existence of cults within communities but does not explore how these groups attract followers or the social dynamics that sustain them.

Similarly, Abdul Hamid Ritonga's book (Ed.) (2020) titled "Study and Research of the Indonesian Ulema Council Fatwas on Cults" (2020) focuses on the theological and legal aspects of cults in West Java. This book discusses various fatwas issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (IUC) regarding cults, particularly those that have been deemed heretical based on ten criteria established in the IUC's 2007 fatwa. While this research provides a thorough examination of the religious and legal framework used to assess cults, it does not consider the socio-economic factors that may contribute to the formation and spread of these groups. Ritonga's work is valuable for understanding how religious authorities classify and respond to cults but leaves a gap in understanding the underlying social conditions that make certain regions more prone to cult activity.

Socio-Demographic Analyses in Cult Research

Suhanah (2015) research on the teachings of Kaharudin within the al-Maghfurullah Foundation in Cirebon Regency, West Java, is one of the few studies that touches upon the socio-cultural impact of cult teachings. Her work explores whether Kaharudin's teachings deviate from accepted religious norms and the resultant community unrest that led to the issuance of an IUC fatwa prohibiting the spread of these teachings. Although the study acknowledges the socio-religious context in which these teachings were propagated, it does not fully engage with the socio-demographic characteristics of Kaharudin's followers or the broader community. Suhanah's research points to the importance of understanding the local socio-cultural environment but does not extend this analysis to a broader socio-demographic framework.

Gaps and the Need for Comprehensive Socio-Demographic Research

Despite the valuable contributions of these studies, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning the socio-demographic analysis of cults. The emergence and persistence of cults in specific regions, such as West Java, cannot be fully understood without considering the social, economic, and demographic factors that contribute to their appeal. Factors such as poverty, low education levels, and social isolation are often significant determinants in the formation of cults, as they create conditions in which individuals are more likely to seek alternative forms of community and identity, often provided by cults.

Moreover, the lack of research on the regional variations in cult activity within West Java highlights the need for studies that examine how different socio-demographic profiles contribute to the differing patterns of cult development. For instance, why might one area within the province have numerous cults while another has only one? What role do socio-economic status, education, and cultural openness play in the resilience or fragility of these groups? Addressing these questions through socio-demographic research could provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors driving cult activity and offer insights into more effective prevention and intervention strategies.

National Legal Framework

The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, especially Article 29, guarantees freedom of religion and belief for every citizen. However, in practice, the implementation of this principle often faces challenges, especially when faced with cases of deviant sects that are considered deviant by religious authorities and the general public. The absence of an organic law that specifically regulates the implementation of Article 29 has created room for diverse interpretations and often inconsistent law enforcement in the field (Hapsin, 2014).

In this context, various fatwas issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) have played an important role in defining what is considered a deviant sect. The book edited by Abdul Hamid Ritonga (2020) entitled "Study and Research of MUI Fatwas on Heretical Sects" documents a number of fatwas issued to assess and determine the status of certain teachings as deviant. The ten criteria used by the MUI, as outlined in a 2007 fatwa, serve as the legal and theological basis for identifying and prosecuting deviant sects. Although these fatwas do not have the binding force of law, they are often used as the basis for legal action by law enforcement and local governments.

Implementation of the Law and Human Rights Challenges

The application of the law to deviant sects in Indonesia is often fraught with challenges, especially related to the protection of human rights. Many cases in which legal action against deviant sects involves violations of basic individual rights, including freedom of religion, freedom of thought, and the right to personal security. In some cases, action against deviant sects is carried out in a manner that violates legitimate legal procedures, drawing criticism from various human rights organizations.

Adon Nasrullah Jamaludin's (2018) study entitled "Religious Conflict in Indonesia" discusses internal religious conflicts, including those involving deviant sects in West Java. This study shows that legal action is often influenced by societal and political pressure, resulting in inconsistent and sometimes discriminatory law enforcement. This is in line with the findings of Suhanah (2015) who explored the community and government responses to Kaharudin's teachings in Cirebon, where legal and social actions were taken to inhibit the spread of teachings considered deviant.

Furthermore, research by The Wahid Institute (2015) and Setara Institute (2014, 2016) shows that West Java is one of the provinces with the highest number of violations of freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia. These reports highlight various cases where human rights are violated, including through strict surveillance and harsh legal action against religious minority groups, including deviant sects. The absence of adequate legal protection for these groups often leads to violations of their rights, reflecting weaknesses in the existing legal system.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a descriptive-qualitative method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, literature and documentation studies, and observations. Interviews were conducted with key informants, including cult members with comprehensive knowledge of various issues. These informants encompass institutions (such as IUC, Office of Religious Affairs, and village authorities) and individuals (including cult leaders, adherents, and community members). The purpose of the interviews was to gather data that was not accessible through literature reviews and documentation. Observations were conducted at locations used for gatherings or rituals relevant to the cases studied to clarify the collected data as much as possible. The researchers used triangulation techniques for data collection and tracking to ensure data accuracy. All collected data were processed through editing, classification, and comparison, followed by interpretation to obtain new insights. These insights were then used to compile the research findings analytically and descriptively, revealing the various aspects studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

West Java: The Growth of Cults

There are seven regencies in West Java where the emergence of cults is suspected. These cults continue to develop and persist to this day. The regencies include Bandung Regency, West Bandung Regency, Garut Regency, Tasikmalaya Regency, Ciamis Regency, Cirebon Regency, and Cimahi City. The detailed names of the cults in each regency are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Cults in West Java Regencies

No.	Regencies/Cities	Cults Name
1	Bandung Regency	Aliran Baha'i and Aliran Kebatinan Perjalanan (AKP)
2	West Bandung Regency	Aliran Upacara Ruwatan Solokan
3	Garut Regency	Ahmadiyah Cilawu, Aliran AKI (Amanah Keagungan Ilahi) and Aliran Kepercayaan Sunda Wiwitan
4	Tasikmalaya Regency	Ahmadiyah Singaparna and Ahmadiyah Salawu
5	Ciamis Regency	Aliran Usman Sugiati, Aliran Qur'aniyah
6	Cirebon Regency	Aliran Kaharudin, Aliran Hidup di Balik Hidup (HDH), and Aliran Surga Edn
7	Cimahi City	Ahmadiyah, Sunda Wiwitan and Aliran Gafatar

Source: Results of field observations in several districts and cities in West Java, July-September 2023

The growth of cults in West Java poses a serious problem that necessitates an in-depth understanding of the influencing factors. Based on the author's analysis, several factors may contribute to the proliferation of cults in the region.

Firstly, the diversity of religions and beliefs plays a significant role. Although most of West Java's population is Muslim, the region exhibits substantial religious diversity. Sociologically, West Java serves as

a buffer zone for people from various surrounding areas with different social backgrounds. Due to its high urbanization rate, it has become a cultural fault line where socio-religious groups of various religions converge. Demographically, based on data from West Java Province in 2022, cities such as Bandung, Cimahi, Bekasi, Bogor, and Depok have high urbanization rates. In these urban areas, visible and plural polarizations exist across ethnicity, culture, and religion.

In the researcher's opinion, the plurality (heterogeneity) built upon the mixing of migrants and natives over a relatively short period, as observed in urban areas of West Java, has made it challenging to establish a stable (strong) social system. Sociologically, this new society gives rise to new values and norms, which encourage differences in views (perceptions) and interests. The identity frictions characterizing each group significantly contribute to the potential for conflict within the pluralistic religious communities. Moreover, strong interest factors significantly influence high religious sensitivity, facilitating the outbreak of communal conflicts or conflicts among religious adherents. Both Muslim and Christian groups often strive to assert their different interests, making clashes inevitable. Consequently, religious conflicts frequently arise in West Java.

Additionally, the development of religious beliefs, especially in traditional areas or beliefs such as the Kuta traditional village in Ciamis, the Naga traditional village in Tasikmalaya, and the Pulo traditional village in Garut, contributes to this dynamic. This diversity creates opportunities for cults to develop due to the presence of various spiritual views and differing beliefs.

Secondly, social and economic conditions play a crucial role in the emergence of cults in West Java. Economic instability, inequality, and social discontent create environments vulnerable to cult influence. Marginalized or economically disadvantaged groups are particularly susceptible to radical or extreme messages that offer instant solutions or justifications for their discontent. Many cult members come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in areas with high incidences of cult activity, such as Tasikmalaya Regency, Cirebon Regency, and Garut Regency.

Another significant socio-economic factor is employment. Unemployment can trigger individuals to join cults, as work is essential for fulfilling basic needs. Without employment, people often experience life uncertainty and stress, which, if prolonged, can lead to depression. This condition creates an entry point for cults, offering a seemingly profitable opportunity for recruitment. Cults can exploit this vulnerability by providing solutions and reassurance to individuals seeking relief from their confusion and distress.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, unstable social conditions also contribute to the emergence of cults. Religious conflicts frequently occur in urban areas, creating uncertainty and dissatisfaction with religious practices (Kamaludin & Iskandar, 2022). As a result, many city dwellers relocate to regencies or rural areas in search of peace, as observed in Bandung Regency and West Bandung Regency. Cults often capitalize on social tensions to expand their influence, especially when they can offer narratives or solutions that seem relevant in that context.

Thirdly, technology and access to information play a significant role in the spread of cult teachings. While cult groups may struggle with technology, they leverage other people's networks to access it. The rapid and widespread dissemination of cult teachings through digital platforms, especially among the younger generation, which is more connected to technology, illustrates this point. Through information technology, cults offer solutions or new meanings for life, presenting themselves as problem solvers or providers of alternative meanings. This approach appeals to individuals seeking new directions or solutions in their lives. The lack of access to proper education further exacerbates this issue. Without the skills to critique information, individuals are more likely to accept all information uncritically, making

them more vulnerable to cult influence. Cults exploit this vulnerability by offering simple or attractive narratives that lack in-depth critical analysis.

Socio-Demographic Factors: Teachings and Their Spread

The development of cult teachings in West Java is intricately linked to socio-demographic factors, which play a crucial role in determining the acceptance and spread of cult ideologies. This means that the spread of cult teachings exhibits different characteristics across various regions. Cult teachings that thrive in one area may not necessarily be accepted or developed in another, with their longevity varying based on socio-demographic conditions. To illustrate this, the author highlights some particularly successful cults in certain regions.

For instance, the Aliran Perjalanan Kebatinan (AKP or the mystical journey sect) is a sect that the Bandung Regency highly accepts (Jamaludin, 2021). Socio-demographically, Bandung Regency has a diverse population, encompassing densely populated urban areas as well as more remote rural areas. These varied geographic and demographic conditions foster a wide range of spiritual needs among the population. Consequently, the mystical journey sect (AKP) has become more prominent. The AKP emerged as a response to these diverse spiritual needs, offering a spiritual and metaphysical approach that appeals to individuals seeking deeper meaning in their lives. Amidst the busyness of city life and the pressures of modern existence, many individuals look for alternative solutions or understandings of their purpose in life, and the AKP provides a platform for such spiritual exploration.

In addition, Bandung Regency has a long history of traditional religious practices and beliefs, including the mystical sect. The region's rich and tolerant religious culture has likely created a favourable environment for the growth and development of teachings such as the Aliran Perjalanan Kebatinan (AKP). Consequently, the teachings of this sect have had a long period of survival. Their persistence is often attributed to their resilience and patience in societal opposition. During extreme attacks, followers of this sect may disappear and disperse, but they reemerge and develop when they deem the situation safe. The AKP sect has a long track record, with numerous followers spread across various regions in Bandung Regency.

Similarly, the teachings of the Sunda Wiwitan sect thrive in Garut Regency. Socio-demographically, Garut Regency comprises many villages that maintain traditional lifestyles and agriculture as the main livelihood (Jaenuri et al., 2019). The region is also rich in Sundanese cultural heritage, with residents holding a strong sense of pride and identity towards Sundanese culture and traditions. This cultural heritage provides a solid foundation for the growth of traditional teachings in this area. Local beliefs are often practised for generations in these rural environments, making the Sunda Wiwitan Faith particularly prevalent in Garut Regency. The same holds for Cimahi City, where local traditions are robust, and the teachings of Sunda Wiwitan are deeply rooted in Sundanese culture and tradition. These teachings offer a means for individuals to strengthen and express their identity as part of a rich local culture and spiritual life in rural communities such as Garut (Kampung Pulo), Tasikmalaya (Kampung Naga), Ciamis (Kampung Kuta), and Cimahi City (Kampung Adat Cireundeu).

In contrast, Tasikmalaya Regency is more notable for the development of Ahmadiyah teachings. The sub-districts of Singaparna and Salawu serve as the primary bases for the spread of Ahmadiyah. While Tasikmalaya is well-known as an Islamic student area, it is also a place where diverse religious sects and beliefs flourish. The region's strong tradition of religious tolerance creates a favourable environment for the growth of Ahmadiyah.

Lastly, Kaharudin's teachings are more prominent in Cirebon Regency. This teaching is particularly strong in this area due to the socio-demographic conditions of Cirebon, which is rich in local wisdom, such as the presence of the sultanate, mystical traditions, and many pilgrims visiting Walisongo's tombs. Kaharudin's teachings blend elements of Islam with local or traditional beliefs and certain mystical practices. Although sometimes referred to as an Islamic sect, its beliefs and practices do not always align with mainstream Islamic teachings.

To understand the socio-demographic characteristics of the followers of the cults mentioned above, the authors examine factors such as education, occupation, and age. In terms of education, most followers of cults in West Java have low educational attainment, with the majority having only a primary school education. A smaller portion has completed high school, while none have attended college. This low educational level is more prevalent among rural populations than urban areas, primarily due to a lack of motivation and financial resources, leading many to prioritize work over schooling.

The level of education significantly influences individuals' perspectives and choices, including their religious practices. People with low education or no schooling typically have simpler lifestyles; they are more communal, practical, emotional, mystical, and irrational. For these individuals, inner satisfaction (peace, calm, prosperity) and solutions to life's problems are more important than other considerations. In contrast, highly educated individuals have different outlooks and choices. For them, the inner fulfilment provided by joining a sect often outweighs concerns about whether the sect is considered heretical or not.

Examining the livelihood levels of cult followers in West Java reveals that most come from backgrounds such as farmers, labourers (including porters, pedicab drivers, and others), scavengers, the unemployed, and those involved in illicit activities (such as drunkards). Livelihood significantly influences one's status and means of subsistence. Rural populations primarily dominate occupations like farming and labour, as employment opportunities are scarce and challenging to secure. As a result, rural individuals often resort to farming or farm labour. Farm labourers typically lead modest lives, often with large families and uncertain incomes. The constant financial strain and the lack of opportunities for economic advancement can lead to confusion, loss of control, and, ultimately, stress. They seek mystical teachings and inner satisfaction to cope with life's increasing burdens. Many join cults to find peace of mind, often seeking amulets, charms, or other spiritual aid. Consequently, cults become a refuge for those seeking wealth, health, success, and other forms of support.

Regarding age, the average age of cult followers is 35 years and above. Most are married, though some are not. This age range represents the productive years during which individuals experience work pressures, life challenges, and other stresses. As a result, they often seek spiritual solace, contemplation, and inner peace to manage their problems. Additionally, most cult followers are men, who generally experience higher levels of frustration and stress due to their roles as family heads and primary breadwinners. This responsibility, coupled with the difficulties in securing a stable livelihood, drives men to seek alternative solutions to their challenges, often through cult membership.

The authors' interviews with several cult followers reveal that they joined the cult to become more patient in facing life's challenges. They reported feeling safe and peaceful after joining the cult, attributing this to the teachings that align with general human ethics. For these individuals, the sense of patience cultivated within the cult leads them towards becoming true human beings, feeling liberated from life's increasing burdens and problems. Most cult adherents seek membership to calm their souls, nurture their feelings, and find peace amidst life's difficulties.

Regarding the pattern of the spread of cult sects, two primary methods were identified:

Firstly, internally and closed. Most of the cults that have developed in West Java (in the regencies of Bandung, Garut, Tasikmalaya, Ciamis, and Cirebon) follow a closed or internal distribution pattern. They only communicate with their existing and loyal followers, even if it is just one or two people. Their movements are not publicized through media or other means; no banners or organizational nameplates are displayed on the roads or near their areas. They focus solely on nurturing their current followers. However, many people become curious and interested in observing their activities more closely over time. When followers of the teachings perform rituals privately, this secrecy further piques public curiosity. Eventually, people became interested and joined the sect.

Secondly, self-awareness and family. Another method for spreading cult teachings is by allowing people to come on their own, ask questions, and pledge to become members of the cult. This phenomenon typically happens after individuals have attended once or twice and feel safe and comfortable. They then join the cult with full self-awareness. If, later on, members decide to leave, they are free to do so without any coercion or persuasion. This means anyone joining the cult does so out of their consciousness. Consequently, all the rituals and teachings required of members are carried out with full awareness and genuine intent, originating from their hearts and feelings.

The Pattern of Handling Cults

The handling of cults in West Java involves multiple parties and diverse strategies. In the seven regencies where cults are present, the approaches to addressing these cults include:

1. **Mediation:** This process involves government officials at various levels, including Neighborhood Associations, Community Associations, village authorities, Muspika (Musyawarah Pimpinan Kecamatan or District Leadership Coordination Forum), Muspida (Musyawarah Pimpinan Daerah or Regional Leadership Coordination Forum), FKUB (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama or Religious Harmony Forum), the Ministry of Religion, and the police. Judicial proceedings are initiated if mediation fails to reach an agreement, provided the situation meets the criminal criteria.
2. **Enhanced religious understanding:** Efforts are made to strengthen individuals' understanding of religious teachings to help them discern what is misguided and what is not.
3. **Intensive dialogue:** Regular dialogue among religious leaders, the community, and all societal elements. This way aims to strengthen and establish togetherness. All environmental problems can be identified and resolved collaboratively by fostering regular gatherings.

Legal Framework and Its Implementation in Handling Deviant Sects in West Java

West Java has long been in the spotlight in the context of handling deviant sects in Indonesia. As a province with a significant number of deviant sects, the implementation of law in this region often faces major challenges, especially in the context of maintaining social stability and protecting human rights. Effective law enforcement in West Java requires a deep understanding of the social and cultural complexities that exist in the province.

One of the important instruments in handling deviant sects in Indonesia is the fatwa issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). The MUI fatwa is often the main guide for society and the government in determining the validity of a teaching or religious group. However, the fatwa is not always implemented

consistently, and its impact on religious freedom is often the subject of debate. According to research conducted by Burhani (2014), the fatwas issued by the MUI tend to have a strong influence among the community, but their implementation is often not accompanied by a clear legal mechanism. These fatwas, although they serve as guidelines, do not have the formal binding force of law, and this creates room for diverse interpretations and potential discrimination against certain groups.

Another challenge in dealing with deviant sects in West Java is the inconsistency in the application of the law. In some cases, legal actions taken against deviant sects are often driven by local social and political pressures, leading to uneven application of the law. Research conducted by the ICG (International Crisis Group) (2008) shows that different approaches to law enforcement against deviant sects are often influenced by local political dynamics and pressure from the majority religious group, which can lead to human rights violations. One real example is the case of the Lia Eden group in Jakarta, although not in West Java, this case can be a reflection of how social and political pressures can affect law enforcement. Lia Eden, who claims to be an apostle, and her followers were arrested and imprisoned on charges of blasphemy, demonstrating how the law is used to control and intimidate groups deemed to deviate from generally accepted religious norms (Sakai & Fauzia, 2014).

Human rights are often the victims in law enforcement efforts against deviant sects. On the one hand, the government tries to maintain public order and protect society from teachings that are considered deviant. However, on the other hand, these actions often violate basic individual rights, such as freedom of religion and the right to a fair trial. According to research by Crouch (2011), Indonesia still faces major challenges in balancing law enforcement and human rights protection, especially in the context of handling minority religious groups. In West Java, cases such as the Ahmadiyah are also examples of how efforts to enforce the law can end in human rights violations. Research conducted by Formichi (2014) shows that Ahmadiyah followers are often the targets of violence and intimidation, even though they are protected by the constitutional right to worship according to their beliefs. This shows that the main challenge in law enforcement against deviant sects is ensuring that the actions taken do not violate human rights.

Given the various challenges that exist, legal reform is an urgent need to ensure a fairer and more humane handling of deviant sects. According to Butt (2010), one of the main problems in the Indonesian legal system is the inconsistency and uncertainty of the law, especially in cases involving religious freedom. To overcome this problem, more specific and clear laws are needed that can provide better protection for human rights, while still maintaining public order. In addition, increasing the capacity and training of law enforcement officers to understand and apply human rights principles is also very important. This will ensure that legal actions taken against deviant sects are carried out in a way that is not only effective but also fair and respects the basic rights of every individual.

To address this complex challenge, a multidimensional approach is needed that integrates socio-demographic, legal, and human rights analysis. According to Lindsey (2012), handling deviant sects in Indonesia requires close cooperation between the government, civil society, and religious organizations. This includes the development of public education and awareness programs aimed at reducing socio-economic vulnerability and increasing understanding of the importance of religious freedom. A more inclusive approach should also involve the active participation of local communities in decision-making processes that directly affect them. By involving communities directly in these processes, the government can develop more effective and sustainable strategies to combat deviant sects while respecting human rights.

A relevant example of this inclusive approach is the *bhag-rembhag sabhala'an* method applied in Madura, where the resolution of religious conflicts is carried out through dialogue between the conflicting parties, with local figures acting as mediators. Safi' et al (2024) explain that *bhag-rembhag sabhala'an* emphasizes the importance of finding common ground amidst differences in a peaceful and humanistic manner, rather than resorting to violence. This method demonstrates that local wisdom and a humanistic approach can provide more effective and sustainable solutions in resolving religious conflicts, including in the context of deviant sects.

Dealing with deviant sects in West Java requires a balance between effective law enforcement and the protection of human rights. While the MUI fatwa and other legal actions have played an important role in combating deviant sects, there is a clear need for broader legal reform. This reform should include the development of clearer and more consistent laws, as well as increased training and capacity for law enforcement officials in implementing human rights principles. A multidimensional approach involving various stakeholders is also needed to create a more just and harmonious environment for all citizens in West Java.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that each district in West Java has different characteristics in terms of teachings and patterns of spread of deviant sects. There are variations in the persistence of deviant sects (some persist for a long time, while others only persist for a short time), the number of sects present (ranging from many to just one), the pattern of spread, and the vulnerability of individuals to become followers of deviant sects based on age, education, and occupation. Methods for dealing with deviant sects also vary from region to region. In general, deviant sects tend to develop in rural, agricultural, economically disadvantaged areas, and have low levels of education. Deviant sects are more likely to be accepted in such communities because people are looking for solutions to their life problems, peace, inner calm, and tranquility.

This study provides valuable insights into the socio-demographic factors that influence the development and spread of deviant sects in West Java, as well as the importance of tailoring interventions to local conditions. By understanding the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which deviant sects develop, policymakers and community leaders can develop more effective prevention and intervention measures. In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of legal reform to strengthen human rights protection in dealing with deviant sects, as well as increasing the capacity of law enforcement in understanding and implementing human rights principles. An emphasis on ongoing dialogue, education, and mediation is essential to promote religious harmony and reduce the influence of deviant sects in vulnerable communities, in order to create a more just and harmonious environment for all citizens.

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