Aceh and the Politics of Islamic Identity: Implications for Social and Political Dynamics

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Abstract

Studying the intersection of Islamic identity politics and governance in Aceh is crucial due to its implications for regional autonomy and national cohesion. Aceh's special autonomy, allowing the enforcement of Sharia law, highlights a unique governance model within Indonesia. This issue is underexplored in current research, which often overlooks the nuanced impacts of Islamic identity politics on both local governance and national policy integration. Previous studies have primarily focused on general autonomy or Islamic law without delving into how these elements specifically interact within Aceh's political context. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating how Islamic identity politics influences Aceh's legal and governance systems and its conflict with national policie. Using the theory of political identity and autonomy, the research employs a qualitative approach with a focus on case studies in Aceh, the research employs a qualitative approach with a focus on case studies in Aceh. The main data collection techniques used in this study include online news document analysis and direct observation. The study's findings reveal the complex dynamics between Aceh's local Islamic values and national legislative pressures, providing new insights into regional autonomy challenges.

Keywords
Politics Aceh; Identity; Controversy; Politics Islam; Dynamics Social

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menelaah persinggungan antara politik identitas Islam dan tata kelola pemerintahan di Aceh, yang memiliki implikasi penting terhadap otonomi daerah dan kohesi nasional. Otonomi khusus yang diberikan kepada Aceh, termasuk penerapan hukum Syariah, mencerminkan model tata kelola pemerintahan yang unik di Indonesia. Meskipun demikian, isu ini belum banyak dieksplorasi, terutama terkait dampak politik identitas Islam terhadap pemerintahan lokal dan integrasi kebijakan nasional. Penelitian sebelumnya lebih sering berfokus pada aspek otonomi umum atau hukum Islam, tanpa mengkaji secara mendalam interaksi antara kedua elemen tersebut dalam konteks politik Aceh. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menganalisis pengaruh politik iden-

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titas Islam terhadap sistem hukum dan tata kelola pemerintahan di Aceh, serta konfliknya dengan ke-bijakan nasional. Menggunakan teori politik identitas dan otonomi, penelitian ini mengadopsi pendeka-tan kualitatif dengan studi kasus di Aceh. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui analisis dokumen berita online dan observasi langsung. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan dinamika kompleks antara nilai-nilai Islam lokal di Aceh dan tekanan legislatif nasional, memberikan wawasan baru mengenai tantangan da-lam otonomi daerah.

Introduction

This study focuses on Islamic identity politics in Aceh and its implications for social and political dynamics. This research primarily aims to explore the influence of Is-lamic political identity in shaping policies in Aceh and how these policies affect the socio-political landscape of the region. The focus is on local policies that are deeply rooted in Islamic principles, particularly through the implementation of Sharia law (Törnquist, 2011). The research seeks to explain how these policies, which reflect Aceh's unique Islamic identity, interact with the broader social and political condi-tions in the region. Moreover, the study also touches upon how national policies, which are often more secular or uniform across Indonesia, impact Aceh's political identity and, in turn, the socio-political conditions (Ichwan et al., 2020). Thus, the research is concerned with both local and national dynamics, but with a strong emphasis on how Aceh's distinct political identity, shaped by Islam, influences gov-ernance and society.

The policies referred to in this article include both local and national frame-works. Locally, the research discusses the enforcement of qanuns, which are regu-lations derived from Sharia law, addressing issues such as morality, dress codes, alcohol prohibition, and public behavior. These local policies reflect Aceh's strong Islamic identity and are central to the region's governance. On the national level, the research mentions broader policies that promote secularism and democratic principles, such as human rights protections and legal uniformity across Indonesia. These national policies sometimes conflict with Aceh's localized, Islamic-based le-gal frameworks. The article explores the tensions and conflicts that arise when these national policies are imposed on or interact with Aceh's distinct political and legal systems, and how this affects the region's autonomy.

The social and political dynamics discussed in this article refer to the changing interactions between the people of Aceh, political leaders, and institutions in response to the implementation of Islamic-based policies. On the social side, these dynamics include shifts in public norms, behavior, and values, particularly in relation to morality, gender roles, and community interactions, all influenced by the enforcement of Sharia law. Politically, the research examines how Aceh's Islamic identity influences electoral processes, political decisions, and governance, with conservative Islamic groups playing a significant role in shaping policy outcomes. These dynamics also involve the ongoing tensions between Aceh's desire for local autonomy, rooted in its Islamic identity, and the national government's efforts to maintain a cohesive and uniform legal and political framework. The research could benefit from a more detailed analysis of one specific aspect, such as the role of Islamic identity in electoral politics, to provide clearer insights into the complex relationship between identity politics and regional governance.

Previous studies have shown several key trends related to identity politics in Aceh. First, Ali's (2019) study identified that changes to national laws often ignore Aceh's specificities, leading to negative reactions from local communities. Second, Ikhsan (2023) emphasized the importance of understanding normative and pragmatic regulations in the context of Aceh politics, pointing out that pragmatic regulations are often used to achieve specific political goals. Third, Sustikarini's study (2019) shows that pragmatic regulations do not always reflect goodness or positive impacts, but are often used as a form of exclusion. The academic discussion of this study aims to understand how political identity in Aceh affects policy and socio-political dynamics, as well as how political integration can be strengthened in the context of special autonomy.

While previous studies have provided important insights, some weaknesses need to be noted. Ali's (2019) study tends to focus on community reactions without explaining the long-term impact of national policy changes on local political identities. Ikhsan (2023) provides a strong theoretical framework but lacks in empirical analysis related to the implementation of normative and pragmatic regulations in Aceh. Sustikarini (2019) successfully identified the role of pragmatic regulations, but did not discuss how these regulations affect the relationship between the center and the regions. This study aims to refine and expand upon previous research by offering a more in-depth empirical analysis of the impact of national policies on political identity in Aceh, while also highlighting the novel insights into the dynamics of identity politics in this region with special autonomy.

This study aims to examine how Islamic identity politics in Aceh influences the region's socio-political dynamics, particularly in the context of local and national policy interactions. The central question is whether the enforcement of sharia law and local qanuns, rooted in Aceh's distinct political identity, creates tensions with national policies and democratic principles. The study hypothesizes that Aceh's special autonomy allows for the preservation of Islamic identity politics, but also leads to conflicts with national governance frameworks that emphasize uniformity

and secularism. The impact of national policies, such as election laws and human rights regulations, on Aceh's political identity is a key focus of analysis.

Specifically, the research seeks to determine if these national policies dilute or reinforce the influence of Islamic identity politics in the region. To answer these questions, the study investigates local political responses to national interventions and explores how Aceh's Islamic-based governance models affect both local governance and broader political structures. The study ultimately aims to reveal how Aceh navigates the balance between maintaining its unique political identity and integrating with national policies. Through this, it seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on identity politics and autonomy within unitary states.

The theory used in this study is identity politics theory and regional autonomy theory. Identity politics theory explains how certain groups or regions form political identities based on values, religion, culture, or traditions that distinguish them from other political entities (Hasanah & Suwandaru, 2023). In the context of Aceh, Islamic identity politics plays a significant role in shaping laws and policies based on Sharia values, recognized as n part of Aceh's special autonomy. This theory focuses on how the collective identity of a group influences political decisions, the legitimacy of power, and interactions with larger political entities, such as the national state (Sustikarini, 2019). Meanwhile, regional autonomy theory discusses the extent to which certain regions are granted rights and powers to govern themselves independently, especially within the framework of a unitary state (Sufyan et al., 2020). These two theories are relevant to understanding the dynamics between Aceh's autonomy and national policies, where the conflict between local Sharia-based laws and national legislation becomes a central issue (Missbach, 2011).

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design. The descriptive qualitative approach was chosen for this study due to its ability to offer in-depth exploration of complex social and political dynamics that are deeply rooted in Aceh's unique context. This approach is particularly well-suited for understanding Islamic identity politics, as it allows researchers to capture subjective experiences, perceptions, and interactions that shape local political behavior. Unlike quantitative methods, which rely on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research provides a nuanced understanding of how Islamic norms and political strategies interact to form the region's identity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This is crucial in Aceh, where religion plays a central role in political life, and where the interaction between normative Islamic principles and pragmatic political goals is often subtle and complex.

Frthermore, by using a case study within the descriptive qualitative framework, the study can focus more specifically on the distinctive characteristics of Aceh. The region's history of conflict, implementation of Sharia law, and semi-autonomous status provide a rich setting for investigating how Islamic identity politics is uniquely expressed and negotiated (Fryer, 2006). A descriptive qualitative

approach also offers the flexibility to adapt the research process as new themes and patterns emerge, which is essential when examining phenomena that are deeply embedded in a specific cultural and historical context (Merriam, 2014).

In addition, qualitative research allows for a holistic understanding of the ways in which Islamic identity is constructed and employed by political elites and local actors. This is particularly important for exploring how religious, cultural, and political forces converge in Aceh, as well as how these forces influence local governance, community relations, and responses to national policies (Merriam, B Tisdell, 2016). Through interviews, observations, and document analysis, the descriptive qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore not only the observable behaviors but also the underlying motivations and meanings that drive political actions related to Islamic identity. Therefore, this approach provides a comprehensive understanding of Aceh's political landscape, making it the most appropriate choice for the study.

The main data collection techniques used in this study include online news document analysis and direct observation (Hakim et al., 2024; Nurhakim, 2023). The online news document analysis involved collecting written sources such as laws, regulations, qanuns, and relevant articles from reputable news outlets. These documents provided insights into the implementation and impact of policies related to Aceh's Islamic identity politics. The observation technique employed in this study focused on observing public behavior, societal reactions, and the implementation of Sharia-based policies in everyday life within Aceh. This technique allowed researchers to gather qualitative data on how these policies are enforced and how they influence social interactions and political dynamics. The observation was conducted in public spaces and governmental institutions to understand the real-time effects of the regulations, providing valuable firsthand data on the social and political atmosphere in the region. This combination of document analysis and observation offers a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied.

The process and stages of data analysis were carried out systematically with a thematic analysis approach (Ismail et al., 2023). First, the raw data were collected and then transcribed and organized neatly. Second, the data was analyzed by reading and understanding deeply to identify the main themes that emerged. Third, the main themes were identified, and the researcher conducted a coding process to group the data based on these themes. The data that had been grouped was then interpreted to find patterns and relationships between the themes that emerged. The final stage of data analysis is the preparation of a study report that describes the main findings and provides answers to the previously formulated study questions. This analysis aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of Islamic identity politics in Aceh within a broader social and political context.

Discussion

Special Autonomy in Aceh

Special autonomy has granted Aceh a distinct political identity, setting it apart from other regions in Indonesia. This autonomy has allowed the province to implement policies that reflect its unique Islamic identity, particularly through the enactment of Islamic law (Sharia), which has had a significant influence on its governance structure. However, the province's distinctiveness has also led to a sense of political isolation within the broader national framework. This political detachment is particularly evident in the lack of oversight and coordination between Aceh's government and national authorities. Table 1 shows the various aspects of Aceh's political identity that illustrate how local policies, shaped by Islamic law and special autonomy, differentiate the province from other regions in Indonesia. The table also highlights specific examples and reactions to these policies, underscoring the challenges of implementing and coordinating such policies within the broader national context.

Table 1. Local Policies in Aceh

Aspects of Acehnese Political	Identity Description	Example/Reaction
Policy Specificity	Different policies of the Indonesian government for Aceh compared to other regions in Indonesia	Reactions of citizens and politicians to Law No. 7/2017
Legal Provisions	General guidelines on behavior that judge actions as ethically right or wrong	Enforcement of Islamic shari'a in Aceh
Transactional Approach	Individuals do anything to achieve their desires even if it is not by social rules	Boissevian critique of functional structuralism
Specificity in the Law on Governing Aceh	Law on Governing Aceh that regulates the life of the people of Aceh after the conflict	Aceh flag, hymn, Wali Nanggroe Institution
Implementation of regulations	Difficulties in implementing special laws and regulations in Aceh	Some qanuns passed by the DPRA are not strictly implemented

Power Relationships	Political, intellectual, cultural and moral power operating in Aceh	Some qanuns passed by the DPRA are not strictly implemented
Critique of Political Elites	The inability of Aceh's political elite to maintain their regional political identity	Michels' critique of the cultural hegemony of political power

Source: Author's Compilation

Table 1 shows the complexity of power relations in Aceh, including political, intellectual, cultural, and moral aspects. In the political context, Aceh experienced transitional power influenced by central and regional interests. Intellectual power is seen through the development of education that includes science, texts, linguistics, and other knowledge. In the cultural realm, Aceh has an aesthetic category of conflict that transitions into a peaceful region, showing changes in prevailing values and norms. The moral aspect reflects the view of what is considered good or bad behavior in Acehnese society. These power relations operate based on hegemonic ideologies, where certain ideas are dominant compared to Acehnese specificities. This shows that although Aceh has a distinctive political identity, central power is often superior and dominant. This power creates a cultural hegemony that reinforces leaders' dominance over society, leading to an oligarchy of centralized political power. This table highlights how social and political dynamics in Aceh are influenced by various interrelated aspects, demonstrating the complexity and challenges of managing this regional specificity.

Political understanding of the laws that apply in society as mentioned by Mukrimin (2023) that in a society there must be two rules, namely normative and pragmatic rules. Normative rules are only general guidelines regarding behavior that provide an assessment of an action or treatment that is wrong or good in terms of ethics and political structures and can be used as a boundary line to the general public regarding the nature of good treatment (Nazaruddin, 2014). This has similarities with the understanding of a functional structural approach that prioritizes morals, functions, roles, and balance. Furthermore, in the understanding of pragmatic rules, it is different from normative rules, which are considered to contain elements of direction or contradiction, which are used by individuals to obtain their goals. Rahman (2023) mentions that pragmatic rules are not a form of treatment that is good or not, has a good impact or not but is often in the form of exceptions.

The political life and laws in Aceh illustrate that informal factors are more important than formal ones. Although Aceh is dubbed as a special autonomous region that has various kinds of privileges with its political identity. Socio-political relations in Aceh with its specificity move with the system that has been applied. The social life of the community is integrated, because it applies and is based on

applicable customs, values, norms, and restrictions. All of this applies and develops within the Aceh Law of Regulations.

The development of the role of individuals and communities in overcoming social and community problems in Aceh is a manifestation of the reality of life in fighting for the specificity of Aceh. However, political demands as Aceh's identity received various awards, such as self-government, Aceh flag, Hymn song, Wali nanggro Institution, and Enforcement of Islamic Sharia regulated in the Aceh Regulatory Law which is translated into qanun which becomes its characteristics that apply in Aceh. Therefore, in line with the development of political democracy, and political identity, the government should not act at will and ignore the interests of the wider community, in other words, they must be ready to receive input from members and the community (Ismail et al., 2023).

Aceh's special autonomy grants it significant control over local governance, including the implementation of Sharia law, a key aspect of Aceh's political identity. This autonomy, grounded in Law No. 11/2006 on Aceh Governance, allows Aceh to enforce Islamic norms and regulations (qanuns), which have become central to the region's socio-political landscape. The establishment of Aceh's unique legal framework reflects the region's efforts to assert its distinct Islamic identity within Indonesia's secular national framework (Kadir et al., 2022). This political identity, shaped by religious principles, continues to influence Aceh's governance and social norms, such as public dress codes and the regulation of moral behavior (Zulkarnaini et al., 2022) As a result, Aceh's autonomy has enabled the region to sustain and develop an Islamic political identity that differentiates it from other parts of Indonesia, underscoring the importance of religious law in regional governance (Sufyan et al., 2020).

Conflicting Tensions Arise Between Local Policies Influenced by Islamic Identity Politics and National Policies

The development of democracy in Aceh following the Helsinki MoU has led to profound changes in the region's political landscape, significantly influenced by advances in science and education. These developments have catalyzed a shift toward a new political focus on local identity and aspirations, particularly evident in the middle class's demand for transparency and fairness in governance. However, this evolving political environment has also given rise to conflicting tensions between local policies shaped by Islamic identity politics and national policies. As summarized in Table 2, these conflicts highlight the complexities of maintaining Aceh's unique political and cultural identity while navigating the broader framework of national regulations. The table illustrates how local qanuns, which reflect Aceh's Islamic values, sometimes clash with national policies aimed at ensuring uniformity and secularism, thereby impacting central-reg.

Table 2. Conflicting Local Policies Influenced by Islamic Identity Politics and National Policies

Aspect	Description
Changes in Political Life	Advances in science and education led to a more democratic political outlook, especially among the middle class in Aceh.
Middle-Class Influence	The middle class's desire for a change in the system of governance that was transparent and in line with the wishes of the people, contributed to the emergence of a new politics in Aceh.
The Peace Treaty	The Helsinki MoU was the result of political struggles and demands that emphasized democratization, individual rights, justice, security, and tolerance.
Political Identity	Aceh's distinctive political identity continues to be reinforced through rules or qanuns, even though they are sometimes imaginative and face political opportunists.
Political Competition	In a democratic climate, there is competition between various parties to gain influence and opportunities in elections.
The role of the people's representatives	People's representatives are expected to truly fight for and maintain Aceh's political identity in government.
Respect for the People	Leaders and representatives must understand and fight for the interests of the people, and be ready to step down if they cannot fulfill the people's aspirations.
Political Dynamics	Aceh experiences unpredictable political dynamics, often influenced by new conflicts orchestrated by central and local political elites.
Policy and Identity	National policies implemented in Aceh must consider the region's specificity and political identity.
Power Relations	Aceh's political identity involves complex power, domination and hegemony relations, with specific normative rules to maintain Acehneseness.
People's Perspective	Acehnese people tend to support leaders who are perceived to be able to provide help and strong support for regional political identity.

Political Battle	Aceh's political identity is a strong political stake in a competitive democratic climate, with efforts to continue to refine regional privileges and specificities.

The advancement of science and education in Aceh has led to a more democratic political outlook, especially among the middle class, who want a transparent system of governance that is in line with the wishes of the people, thus contributing to the emergence of new politics. The Helsinki MoU, the result of a political struggle that emphasized democratization, individual rights, justice, security, and tolerance, has strengthened Aceh's distinctive political identity through rules or qanuns, despite occasional challenges from political opportunists.

In a democratic climate, competition between various parties to gain influence in elections is intensifying (Subekti et al., 2024). Representatives are expected to truly fight for and defend Aceh's political identity and understand and fulfill the aspirations of the people (Ali Mukti et al., 2020). Aceh also experiences unpredictable political dynamics, often influenced by new conflicts orchestrated by central and local political elites. National policies in Aceh must take into account the region's specificities and political identity, which involve complex relations of power, domination and hegemony. Acehnese people tend to support leaders who are perceived to be able to provide help and strong support for regional political identity. Aceh's political identity is a significant political stake in a competitive democratic climate, with ongoing efforts to refine the region's privileges and specificities (Rahim, 2018; Montasir et al., 2023).

Nasrudin (2019) mentions that identity representation is not a matter of right or wrong, but is also the result of the formation and change of overt political recognition. Even political identities specific to Aceh should be subject to ongoing deformation, with maintenance, and reinforcement through regulations or qanuns that further strengthen its distinctive characteristics towards the geographical area of Aceh (Rahmah et al., 2024). Dspite the opportunists, political hypocrites, and intellectuals who disagree. The presence of clear political boundaries in the context of the region, although sometimes Aceh's special political identity seems a little imaginative, regardless of whether anyone recognizes the special identity or not (Abdullah et al., 2023).

Political identity in Aceh is like a blackboard that can be easily erased, so that political will without considering identity can be applied and implemented by implementing national regulatory values in Aceh (Feener, 2013; Ismail et al., 2023). However, in intense and competitive democratic politics, it is important to maintain a consistent political identity as something that has been shared and entrusted through the political power of the Aceh government. Aceh's special political identity as a unique region is regarded as an imagination, a lie, a myth, or simply a fantasy of the Acehnese people who fought against the struggles of political and eco-

nomic injustice as a period of peace (Munhanif, 2016; Nurhakim, 2023). Aceh's special political identity involves complex relations of power, domination, and hegemony, suggesting a superiority in political power (Milallos, 2007).

Islamic Identity Politics and Local Policy Changes

One of the key findings in this discussion is the impact of Islamic identity politics on both social and political dynamics in Aceh. Since the implementation of special autonomy, Aceh has pursued a path where Islamic identity is central to policy-making, leading to the establishment of regulations that align closely with Islamic values. For example, the enforcement of Sharia law has not only affected the legal system but has also reshaped societal norms, particularly in terms of moral policing, gender relations, and public behavior. These changes have also influenced local governance, where policies are often adapted to reflect Islamic principles. The codification of Islamic identity in local regulations has strengthened the role of religious authorities, often at the expense of civil rights and freedoms. This shift has sparked debates over the balance between maintaining Aceh's Islamic character and upholding human rights, with critics arguing that the emphasis on religious identity in policy-making has led to the marginalization of minority groups and a lack of inclusivity. Table 3 shows the key factors driving Islamic identity politics in Aceh and their impact on local policy changes. It highlights how the enforcement of Sharia law and the influence of conservative groups have shaped the political and social landscape in the region, significantly affecting governance and societal norms.

Table 3. Overview of Islamic Identity Politics in Aceh

Factors of Islamic Identity Politics	Description	Source
Enforcement of Sharia Law	When Aceh was granted special status and regional autonomy by the government of the Republic of Indonesia in the fields of law and local government. With this enactment, Acehnese identity politics greatly influenced the formation of the legal system of government in Aceh.	https://aceh.tribunnews.com/2021/11/20/aceh-ini-istimewa-dan-khusus
The influence of conservative groups	There is a strong influence of conservative groups on the implementation of policies in Aceh. For example, groups that are influential in political decision-making, fight for policies that are in line with Islamic	https://theconversation.com/tidak-hanya-berdampak-pada-praktik-politik-menguatnya-konservatisme-juga-

	norms, and become a significant force in electoral events.	bisa-menentukan-arah-republik-144424
Changes in social norms and values	Such as changes in sharia law on the use of alcohol and clothing, reflecting changes in behavior patterns and people's views on certain practices that are considered contrary to Islamic teachings.	https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2015/08/150821_indonesia_wapres_syariatislam_aceh
Controversy and debate	This issue is related to the identity politics conflict in Aceh, which includes human rights, individual freedoms, as well as different opinions and aspirations in society that are also highlighted in the development of Aceh's identity politics.	https://regional.kompas.com/read/2022/03/15/141817678/gerakan-aceh-merdeka-penyebab-kronologi-konflik-dan-kesepakatan-helsinki
Controversy and debate	This issue is related to the conflict of identity politics in Aceh, which includes human rights, individual freedoms, as well as different opinions and aspirations in society that are also highlighted in the development of Aceh's identity politics.	https://aceh.tribunnews.com/2023/12/01/konflik-identitas-di-aceh-dari-kekecewaan-menuju-separatisme

Source: Online News

The table above shows several important factors related to Islamic identity politics in Aceh. *First*, the implementation of sharia law in Aceh is clear evidence of the influence of Islamic identity politics. When Aceh was granted special status and regional autonomy, it allowed for the implementation of sharia law that regulates many aspects of people's lives, from alcohol use to dress codes. In addition, the influence of strong conservative groups in Aceh's politics is also very significant. These groups influence policy and political decisions, champion Islamic norms, and are a dominant force in the electoral process, as reflected in sources from The Conversation. *Second*, the changes in social norms and values, such as the prohibition of alcohol use and dress codes, reflect how Islamic identity politics has changed Acehnese people's behavioral patterns and views on certain practices that are considered contrary to Islamic teachings.

Third, another piece of evidence that shows the impact of Islamic identity politics in Aceh is the emergence of controversies and debates related to identity politics conflicts. Issues such as human rights, individual freedom, and societal dissent have been highlighted in the development of Acehnese identity politics. These debates often involve a clash between traditional Islamic values and modern values. The impact on the political system is also very visible, with conservative

Islamic groups becoming the main bastion of power in policy-making, especially in the context of elections. Islamic identity became a highly influential factor in the electoral process, with strong indications that political identity played a major role in determining political outcomes in Aceh Ikramatoun & Amin (2018). This shows how Islamic identity politics affects not only social dynamics, but also the structure and function of politics in Aceh.

Aceh's special autonomy and the prominence of Islamic identity politics have also impacted its relationship with the central government. While Aceh's autonomy was initially seen as a solution to decades of conflict and a way to preserve local identity, the isolation resulting from this special status has created gaps in governance (Stange & Patock, 2010). The lack of national oversight has sometimes allowed local authorities to bypass national standards, contributing to inconsistencies in policy implementation and accountability. In summary, the influence of Islamic identity politics in Aceh has brought about significant changes in local policies, deeply embedding religion into governance (Siswati, 2018; Nurasih et al., 2023). However, this has also led to challenges in ensuring cohesive governance and maintaining a balance between religious identity and civil liberties, which remains a critical area for further attention and policy refinement (Fernando et al., 2024).

National policies aimed at integrating regional autonomy within the unitary state of Indonesia often challenge Aceh's distinctive Islamic political identity. National interventions, such as attempts to standardize electoral laws through Law No. 7/2017 on elections, have been seen as undermining Aceh's specific governance arrangements, particularly its Islamic legal system (Wulanda et al., 2021). The central government's efforts to maintain uniformity across provinces sometimes clash with Aceh's attempts to preserve its religious-based autonomy. These policies often result in tensions between Acehnese politicians, who seek to defend regional laws, and the national government, which promotes a more centralized, secular legal framework (Ariel et al., 2024; Nathali et al., 2023). The ongoing negotiation between Aceh's religious identity and national governance highlights the delicate balance required to maintain Aceh's autonomy while aligning with broader national objectives (Ann Miller, 2008; Munjiah, 2023) The implications of these national policies on Aceh's Islamic identity continue to shape the region's political discourse and its relationship with the central government.

Conclusion

Aceh's recognized political identity as a specialty has shown complex dynamics in the Indonesian political context. Important findings in this study reveal that Aceh's specificity is often overlooked in national decision-making, as seen in the passing of Law No. 7/2017 on elections that ignored the LoGA. As a result, Aceh's specificity as a region with special autonomy is threatened by uniform national policies. Aceh's distinctive identity politics, which include the application of sharia law and the en-

actment of qanun, demonstrate the urgent need to maintain political identity in the face of homogenizing pressures from the center (Sufyan et al., 2020). The reactions of the people, politicians and activists in Aceh reflect the efforts to maintain this distinctiveness, despite sometimes facing major challenges from national policies.

Conceptually, this study makes an important contribution to understanding how identity politics and specificity can influence the socio-political dynamics of a region. The approach used in this study combines normative and pragmatic analysis to see ho w regulations and policies can function both as general guidelines and as tools to achieve certain goals. As such, this study adds insight into how strong political identities can survive or even thrive in the context of special autonomy, despite facing challenges from national policies that tend to be homogenized. It is relevant in the broader discussion of regional autonomy and regional rights within a unitary state, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding the dynamics between the center and the regions.

The practical implications of these findings are substantial for policymakers, politicians, and activists in Aceh. For policymakers, the study underscores the necessity of acknowledging and incorporating Aceh's special autonomy in national legislation to preserve regional distinctiveness. Politicians and activists can use these findings to advocate for policies that respect and reinforce Aceh's unique identity, ensuring that regional interests are adequately represented in national forums. Strengthening regional autonomy and maintaining a distinct political identity can be achieved by fostering dialogue between local and national authorities, ensuring that local regulations and cultural practices are preserved while navigating the challenges of national policy integration.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that future research should address. A more extensive and in-depth collection of empirical data is needed to support and expand upon these findings. Future studies should explore the specific impacts of national policies on local politics in Aceh and examine long-term responses from local communities. Expanding the scope to include diverse informants, such as civil society members, academics, and political practitioners, will provide a more comprehensive perspective. Additionally, further analysis is required to determine how Aceh's specificity can be maintained and enhanced amidst evolving political and policy changes, ensuring the continued relevance and effectiveness of regional autonomy.

Authors Contribution

Putri Rahmah Nur Hakim: *Writing-original Draft, article full draft.*
Irwan Abdullah: *Writing – review & editing.*
Lina Marlina: *Methodology.*

Authenticity Statement

We declare that this writing is purely the original work of the author, and the article is free from plagiarism. This article has not been published and is not being submitted to any other journal.

Biography

Putri Rahmah Nur Hakim is a student of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies Program, at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta. Putri Hakim is a university student. Some of her published articles; T*he Controversy of Democracy in Indonesia Presidential Election 2024, Symbolism and Spiritual Wisdom: Bridging Nature, Culture, and Identity in Dayak Architectural Heritage, Mediatization of Clothing Consumption Among Muslim Teenagers.*

Irwan Abdullah is a professor of anthropology at Universitas Gadjah Mada and the founder of IA Scholar. He has contributed greatly to developing various sciences ranging from anthropology, social, and psychology to religious sciences. Some of his works are; *The de-existence of Islamic political parties in general elections: A case study of Indonesia as a Muslim-majority country, Politics of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika in Indonesia's cultural diversity, Communalism shattered: Thirty Years of Conflict Experiences in the Province of Aceh, Indonesia.*

Lina Marlina is a student who is currently completing her Doctor of Philosophy studies at the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology.

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