

## A SPECIAL AUTONOMY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PAPUA AND ACEH CONFLICT IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF SPECIAL AUTONOMY

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### Abstract:

The Indonesian government created the Special Autonomy Policy in 2001 to prevent conflict and accelerate development in regions with distinct historical, social, and political characteristics. However, after more than two decades of implementation, the establishment of Special Autonomy in Aceh and Papua has produced mixed results, particularly in terms of political stability, governance, and national integration. This study begins with the topic of why Special Autonomy has strengthened national integration in Aceh but not in Papua? The goal of this study is to assess the effectiveness of Special Autonomy in promoting national integration and to determine the factors that influence the policy's success or failure based on the local environment of each region. The research technique employs a comparative qualitative approach that includes policy document analysis, literature reviews, and the tracking of empirical data from development reports and political dynamics in Aceh and Papua. The study's findings indicate that the existence of the Helsinki peace accord, political representation channels through local parties, and a somewhat more restricted level of responsibility for Special Autonomy monies all contribute to the Aceh Special Autonomy's success. However, in Papua, there are still development inequities, a lack of avenues for political representation of indigenous peoples, and low trust in the state, resulting in a suboptimal national integration process. This study is unique in that it evaluates Special Autonomy as a tool for reconciliation and trust-building, as well as economic policy and political decentralisation.

**Keywords:** *Special Autonomy, Aceh, Papua, National Integration*

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### INTRODUCTION

Views on decentralisation and regional autonomy have their own place. According to Rasyid, regional autonomy tends to focus on the political side (the

State's political power), whereas decentralisation focusses on the administrative aspect. (Rasyid 2015:94) According to Koswara, there are four (four) considerations for providing autonomy to areas.

First, from a political standpoint, granting autonomy is viewed as preventing the accumulation of power, which eventually leads to tyrannical, totalitarian, and anti-democratic governments; Second, in terms of democracy, autonomy was thought to be capable of involving the people in the government process as well as educating the people to use their rights and obligations in the implementation of daily government; Third, from a technical organisational point of view, autonomy is viewed as a means of achieving effective, efficient, and responsive government; fourth, in terms of management, it serves as one of the parts of administration, a delegation of authority and obligations.

In the aspect of delegation of authority, regional autonomy has been recognized by Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, the details of this are contained in article 1 paragraph (6) as follows; "Regional Autonomy is the right, authority, and obligation of autonomous regions to regulate and manage their own Government Affairs and the interests of local community within the system of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia".

Political decentralisation in Indonesia is an effort to reform politics at the local level in order to realise regional autonomy based on democratisation, empowerment, and strengthening of local wisdom, the acceleration of community welfare through improvement, service, empowerment, and community participation, increasing regional competitiveness by paying attention to the use of natural resources and regional economic resources based on equity, justice, and privilege.

The development of the law in Indonesia in regulating regional autonomy has progressed, and it now regulates specifically (special autonomy) given by four (four) regions: Special Region of Yogyakarta, Special Capital Region of Jakarta, Special Region of Nangroe Aceh Darussalam, and Special Region of Papua (Jalil et al., 2017:4).

In this situation, Nangroe Aceh Darussalam Province and Papua Province differ in the way their local governments are implemented. This is because the national government delegated additional authority to the two provinces. This authority is conferred under the terms of extraordinary autonomy. The important aspect of these two provinces is their historical roots in giving particular autonomy, as well as the birth of the Separatist Movement in both provinces.

Separatism has become a significant and frequently contentious issue in Indonesian history. This movement is frequently prompted by disagreement with the central government's handling of certain regions or groups that are deemed harmful. Separatist movements can take the form of political, economic, or even violent confrontations (Nugroho et al., 2024: 95). Firmanyah defined separatism as a group's predisposition to act in a sovereign territory or country with the goal of separating themselves and building their own independent region (Firmansyah, 2011: 27).

Separatism became a movement carried out by the people of Aceh, with Daud Beureuh as its leader at the time spearheading the Islamic State of Indonesia (NII) in the Aceh region in 1953—the goal of this movement was to demand the comprehensive implementation of Islamic Sharia as well as special autonomy status for Aceh (Salwa, 2024:104). However, at the time, the government led by President Sukarno refused the proposal and dispatched the military to quell the NII revolt (Salwa, 2024:104).

On December 4, 1976, during the New Order regime, Hasan di Tiro, the head of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), led a rebellion against the Indonesian government with his followers in the highlands of Halimunan in the Pidie Regency area (Salwa, 2024:104). Iran and Libya also provided assistance to GAM, sending 1,000 soldiers (Adryamarthanino: 2021).

On December 26, 2004, the regime shifted, and Aceh was devastated by an earthquake and tsunami. Following 25 days of negotiations, the Indonesian government and GAM members struck a peace deal on July 17, 2005, in Vantaa, Finland (Salwa, 2024:104). On August 15, 2005, the Helsinki accord was reached, bringing the conflict to an end and granting Aceh special autonomy. Aceh is today mostly calm and peaceful (Salwa, 2024:105).

Aceh Province was granted exceptional autonomy under Law No. 11 of 2006, which governs Aceh. The Central Government grants Aceh unique jurisdiction in the sectors of politics, economy, religion, and customs under Law Number 11 of 2006. However, prior to being granted this particular autonomy by the central government, Aceh Province was riddled with conflicts, not just political ones, but Aceh Province was also included in the Military Operations Area (DOM) because to the separatist that existed at the time (Jalal, 2019:13-18).

Then, in Papua, the separatist movement began to disrupt Indonesia's domestic political stability, with the formation of the Free Papua Organisation (OPM) in 1965. The Papua Special Autonomy Policy is inextricably linked to the

region's lengthy history with the Centre. The emotion of unfairness experienced by this area has caused several turmoils in the past, resulting in the process of disintegration. One of the risks to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is the upheaval caused by the Papuan people's reaction to socioeconomic inequality.

This dynamic has resulted in an amusing outcome: despite Papua's abundant natural resources, it is predictable that its progress has been marred by widespread discontent among Papuans over perceived injustices. One of the most extreme expressions of these complaints is the Free Papua Movement's (OPM) long-held objective of secession from the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Pigay, 2001: 359–360). Several underlying elements have contributed to the organization's emergence and persistence.

First, the political aspect, the promise made by the Dutch government to build Papua's dependency after independence from the Indonesian state occurred during the Dutch government; Second, one of the several causes of the OPM revolt was the economic fall in Indonesia, which was bad between 1964 and 1966, producing congestion in the delivery of garments and food for the indigenous Papuans; Third, the psychological aspect, the indigenous papuans's emotions are one of the causes of the OPM rebellion; Fourth, the social aspect, the difference in the appointment of local government officials during the Dutch period, where Irian Jaya officials are appointed from tribal chiefs, as opposed to the Java region, which appoints officials from among the priyayi; Fifth, the ideological aspect, the life of a belief among the indigenous papuans regarding a great leader as a righteous queen (Mardiani et al., 2021:52).

The separatist movement in Papua Province and Aceh Province, with all of its dynamics and conflicts, eventually forced the government to provide a win-win solution in which the provinces remain part of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia but are granted special rights or authorities to facilitate the separatist group's demands.

The Government issued Law Number 22 of 1999 concerning Regional Government, which gave the regions extensive authority to regulate and manage their own household affairs, but the law was deemed ineffective in accommodating the indigenous papuans cultural and customary peculiarities in both government management and development in the Papua region. Finally, in 2001, the Central Government announced a policy on Special Autonomy in Papua Province by Law Number 21 of 2001. On November 21, 2001, President Megawati Soekarnoputri enacted the bill.

In this situation, special autonomy was created primarily as a political tool to prevent disputes that have the potential to divide the nation, particularly in areas with a long history of separatist, such as Aceh and Papua. This policy is more than just administrative decentralisation; it is also a strategy for maintaining national integration by recognising specific areas within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) (Rasyid, 2000:45). Special autonomy serves as a meeting point for the federal and regional governments. On the one hand, the state stays inside the framework of the Republic of Indonesia; on the other, regions gain more autonomy to manage themselves in accordance with their citizens' desires (Asshiddiqie, 2005:103).

Although special autonomy has been organized in our constitutional system, it can be identified several research problems; (1) conceptual differences between decentralization and regional autonomy, there is confusion in this understanding which has the potential to cause inaccuracies in the implementation of policies; (2) The unequal distribution of regional autonomy throughout Indonesia which causes gaps in the quality of public services, equitable development, and community welfare; (3) Special autonomy is only intended to decrease separatist conflicts, which ultimately lead to regional exclusivity; (4) The occurrence of economic disparities and the fair distribution of resources; (5) Local political participation, which is considered to be part of the integration mechanism, actually causes political segregation that widens the distance from national parties.

Thus, based on the background of the problems that have been explained, research questions can be answered; (1) How is the implementation of the special autonomy policy in strengthening national integration? (2) How is the implementation of Special Autonomy compared in Aceh and Papua? (3) What are the future challenges in the implementation of Special Autonomy in Indonesia?

This paper uses a comparative examination of Aceh and Papua to determine why special autonomy produces different development outcomes despite operating within the same national policy framework. This study makes the case that local political structure, institutional ability, and central-regional interactions influence development outcomes, hence explaining the Aceh-Papua inequality that was not explained in the prior research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of national integration refers to the unity of a nation that inhabits a specific region inside a sovereign country. According to Firdaus and Muammar (2023:166), the concept of national integration evolved as a means of achieving unity within a country by eliminating disparities and strengthening commonalities among distinct groups. National integration has enormous social, political, and economic ramifications.

Drake (1989:16) defined national integration as the process of uniting people from various regions or with various differences, such as ethnic, socio-cultural, or economic backgrounds, into one nation (nation), primarily due to relatively similar historical and political experiences. Furthermore, Anderson (1983: 15-16) stated that as they form one nation, they aspire to a new society, an imagined political community with a strong sense of brotherhood and solidarity, a clear national identity and territory, and the ability to rule.

In terms of political integration, Sjamsuddin (1989:2) defined a vertical dimension as the relationship between the elite and the masses, either between the political elite and the masses of followers, or between the ruler and the people in order to bridge the gap between differences in the context of the development of a participatory political process, and a horizontal dimension as the relationship related to territorial issues.

This study includes multiple relevant studies. According to the first study, "Aceh Special Region Autonomy: A Bridge to Reconciliation or a New Source of Tension" by Dahlan A Rahman et al. (2024: 192), special autonomy can also be a source of new tension due to differences in the interpretation of authority, conflicts of interest among local elites, and welfare issues that do not change. This study offers a very different perspective on Aceh's special autonomy. Aceh's special autonomy tends to open up new conflicts as a result of differences in the interpretation of central and regional authorities, as well as conflicts among local elites, particularly ex-GAM members who are involved in local politics. In some circumstances, central and regional authorities' interpretations of Aceh's autonomy are biased, as evidenced by the Acehnese flag insignia, which remains a source of contention. Nonetheless, this study provides a viewpoint on local political dynamics in Aceh following the Helsinki agreement, which is highly essential for understanding the development of stability in Aceh.

The second study, "The Problem of the Implementation of Special Autonomy Policies for Papua and West Papua Regions with a Public Policy Perspective," conducted by Jonathan Jacob Paul Latupeirissa et al. (2021), concluded that the special autonomy policy in Papua increases public suspicion and distrust. The

application of special autonomy is perceived to be unfounded and poorly understood by the community as a whole. This is because the government pursues unproductive policies that impede the implementation of special autonomy. This study provides a fairly comprehensive picture of the socio-political dynamics in Papua after the implementation of special autonomy, highlighting the problem of widespread misunderstanding of the Indigenous papuans about the privileges of their status as a special autonomy region in Indonesia, special autonomy policies that are not based on social, political, security and community needs, and the central government that is still under control to the special autonomy that has been granted.

Finally, the third study, "Special Autonomy for the Existence of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia," conducted by Eddy Asnawi et al (2021), explained that special autonomy is the last resort to central government politics, preventing regions from seceding from the Republic of Indonesia, and is granted as a government step to defend the region. This research is the most relevant to the research question presented in this paper. However, there is a fundamental difference: Asnawi et al. (2021) conduct a more in-depth review of the granting of special autonomy in Indonesia, which is typically done in response to separatist movements that cause political instability and international pressure that threatens the country's integration. This is considerably different from the subject addressed in this work, which focusses on the efficiency of special autonomy in increasing state integration after implementation.

## **METHOD**

The method employed in this study is qualitative, with a focus on comparative studies. This method was chosen to provide examination of historical differences, political structure, policy execution, and development outcomes between the two provinces receiving special autonomy (Subadi, 2006:10). Furthermore, this technique is expected to reveal the reasons that cause development performance in Aceh and Papua to differ significantly, despite the fact that the two provinces have very similar national policy frameworks. This study employs a descriptive-analytical method, providing a factual picture of the implementation of special autonomy in Aceh and Papua while examining the sources of development inequality from political, institutional, and public policy perspectives (Subadi, 2006:10).

This study's data comes from secondary sources such as government policy documents, statistical data on the development of Aceh and Papua, relevant scientific journals, relevant books, news, and other relevant materials. This study's



data collection methods included literature reviews, document searches, and the compilation of relevant statistical data. Data analysis was conducted in three stages: (1) data reduction (selecting and grouping relevant data), (2) data presentation (compiling tables, narratives, and patterns of variable relationships to present a comparison of Aceh and Papua), and (3) conclusion (identification of determinants of Aceh's relative success and Papua's development stagnation) (Subadi, 2006:10).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Implementation of Special Autonomy Policy in Strengthening National Integration

The wide variances in the implementation of special autonomy, if not handled efficiently by the government, might result in a variety of issues. As occurred in Papua and Nangroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD). In these two areas, there are frequently long-running conflicts inside the region, conflicts between ethnic groups, faiths, and other conflicts, as well as economic progress. (Asnawi et al., 2021:259)

In many Indonesian provinces, the Special Autonomy Fund (DOK) is the primary tool for maintaining and restoring the regional economy. DOK allocation data in numerous provinces illustrates the government's efforts to tailor support to the requirements of each region. Aceh Province, which has historically experienced war, received a DOK allocation of 3.2 trillion Rupiah. This fund is intended to accelerate infrastructure development and increase community welfare. Meanwhile, Papua and West Papua in eastern Indonesia earned 2.6 trillion Rupiah each. This demonstrates a concern for locations that frequently experience unique geographical and social constraints (Firdayani et al., 2024:192).

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs' Directorate General of Regional Autonomy, in 2022, Nangroe Aceh Darussalam Province (NAD) earned 3.6 trillion, while the Special Region of Aceh earned 4.2 trillion. This demonstrates that the government has given special attention to the area in order to promote economic development and recovery in Aceh.

The details of the provinces that received DOK in 2022, according to data from the Directorate General of Regional Autonomy of the Ministry of Home Affairs, are as follows;

**Table 1.** *Special Autonomy Fund in 2022*

Provinsi	Dana Otsus (Triliun Rupiah)
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<b>Aceh</b>	3,2
<b>Papua</b>	2,6
<b>Papua Barat</b>	2,6
<b>Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam</b>	3,6
<b>Daerah Istimewa Aceh</b>	4,2
<b>Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta</b>	3,2
<b>Kepulauan Riau</b>	1,5
<b>Kalimantan Utara</b>	1,6
<b>Sulawesi Tenggara</b>	1,2
<b>Maluku Utara</b>	1,2

*Data from the Directorate General of Regional Autonomy of the Ministry of Home Affairs*

According to the data presented, Aceh consistently receives the most financial support, which correlates with relatively greater sociopolitical stability and improved development outcomes when compared to Papua and Papua Barat, despite all three regions receiving similarly large transfers. This contrast shows that the effectiveness of Special Autonomy is dictated not only by the amount of financing, but also by policy design, stakeholder involvement, and the quality of budget governance. While Aceh benefited from inclusive political participation and robust post-conflict institutional structures, Papua continues to face distrust, unequal growth, and fragmentation as a result of restricted public engagement and insufficient accountability systems. As a result, the data corroborate the study's primary claim that Special Autonomy can only enhance national integration if financial transfers are supported by transparent governance, multi-actor engagement, and contextually understood and socially valid policies.

In terms of social backdrop, Special Autonomy has a tremendous impact on the local community's culture and variety. The social changes that may arise as a result of the granting of Special Autonomy must be carefully considered, taking into account the relevance of social integration and community network strengthening in promoting regional development sustainability. However, Special Autonomy funding continue to cause a number of complications. According to BNPB (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana) data, the number of social conflict events in areas implementing Special Autonomy reached 1,541 between

2002 and 2022. The social war resulted in 1,709 deaths, 2,500 injuries, and 18,000 displacements (Firdayani et al., 2024:194).

Furthermore, according to the results of a BRIN poll done in 2022, only 56% of individuals in regions that have implemented Special Autonomy comprehend its purpose and benefits. Furthermore, only 36% of the community engaged in the planning and decision-making process for Special Autonomy (Firdayani, dkk., 2024:194). In the aim to strengthen national integration, community empowerment serves as a link between diverse aspects of social life. Community empowerment refers to projects that try to strengthen relationships between individuals or groups within a community, which can be accomplished through a variety of social, cultural, or religious activities. Although cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of the Indonesian nation, this study identifies several challenges in the implementation of national integration, including the limited public understanding of the objectives and benefits of special autonomy, unequal levels of community participation in decision-making processes, the persistently high incidence of social conflict in regions receiving special autonomy, disparities in access to education and health care. Nonetheless, cultural differences continue to be a major barrier to national integration, as indicated by the high frequency of conflict instances in Special Autonomy districts.

Based on data released by BNPT (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana), the number of cases of social conflict in Indonesia in 2022 reached 1,048 cases. 124 cases occurred in Special Autonomy areas in Papua, Aceh, and East Nusa Tenggara. Based on data released by BNPT, the number of cases of social conflict in Indonesia in 2022 reached 1,048 cases. (Firdayani, et.al., 2024:204).

There is also social imbalance, which complicates the process of national integration. Despite receiving Special Autonomy monies, community participation in establishing Culturally Diverse Special Autonomy areas is typically lower. The Special Autonomy area has inferior access to education and health than other areas. This can lead to inequity in development in the Special Autonomy Area (Firdayani et al., 2024:204).

Furthermore, this investigation highlighted various economic difficulties. Local economic resource management faces ongoing problems in terms of sustainability and equitable benefit sharing. To avoid increasing inequities between different community groups, it is critical to ensure a fair distribution of economic gains. According to data given by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), Papua Province's poverty rate would reach 22.44% in 2022. This result is much higher than the national poverty rate of 9.71 percent (Firdayani et al., 2024:205).

Then, Special Autonomy gives the Regional Government more jurisdiction over local economic resources, such as natural, human, and cultural resources. Nonetheless, ensuring equitable distribution of benefits is critical to preventing the creation or worsening of economic disparities among community groups. According to data given by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), Papua Province's poverty rate would reach 22.44% in 2022. This result is much higher than the national poverty rate of 9.71 percent (Firdayani et al., 2024:205).

Furthermore, the political dynamics of special autonomous regions can cause challenges in the interaction between the central and regional governments that get Special Autonomy is a policy that aims to give Regional Governments more authority. For example, in 2022, the central government and the Papua Provincial Government clashed over natural resource management. The dispute is generated by differences in perspectives between the central government and the local government on their respective authority in natural resource management (Agustina, 2022:9)

The principle of integration further emphasizes the continuity between customary law and modern values. Customary law, which is rooted in local culture, plays an important role in dispute resolution and is adaptive. This trait allows it to coexist with other systems such as Islamic law, as reflected in the history of various sultanates in Indonesia (Maskhur, 2020: 21).

Harmonising laws is the first step in the approach of unifying customary law and national legal politics. In this context, integration does not imply subordination, but rather the recognition of customary law autonomy in conjunction with the national legal system. Indigenous peoples retain control over their rights despite being subject to state systems. The state acts as a facilitator rather than a controller. Legal certainty must be viewed as a guarantee for the sustainability of customary law in the setting of robust legal pluralism, lowering state law's dominance and allowing customary law to develop genuinely and contextually (Simarmata, 2019: 300).

Finally, the strategy is carried out to strengthen the capacity of customary law through institutions. The integration of customary norms into state law is challenging, but important, and requires institutional reform and adjustments to norms that are difficult to apply directly (Mehana, 2017: 123).

### **Comparative Study on the Implementation of Special Autonomy in Aceh and Papua Provinces**

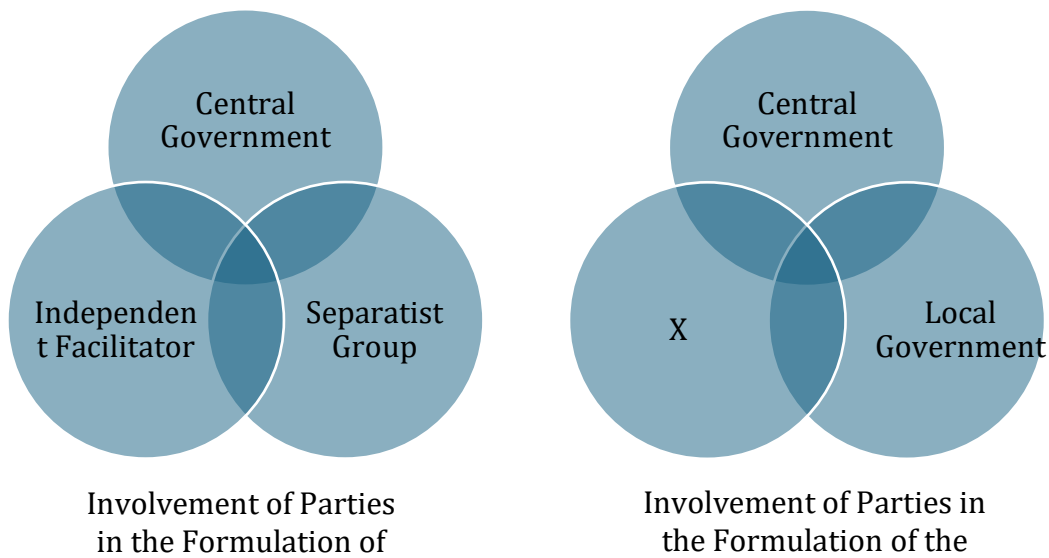
The Reform era in Indonesia, which began in 2008, has had a positive impact on various aspects of national and state life. In terms of government implementation, power in Indonesia is no longer centralistic due to the decentralisation that has characterised political developments in Indonesia since 1998. On the other hand, there is a distinct phenomenon in the context of giving asymmetric decentralisation known as special autonomy. It is noted that just four (4) provinces have acquired special autonomy: DKI Jakarta Province, Yogyakarta Province, Papua Province, and Aceh Province.

The notion of regional autonomy is actually more comparable to federalism; it is understood that in federalism, the concept of original power or residual power is in the sub-regions, whereas in federalism, the concept of regional autonomy is in the sub-regions. In a unitary state structure, the original or residual power is centralised and distributed to local governments (Zahra, 2024: 55).

Decentralisation, or offering an area special authority, is a frequent policy in Indonesia. Since 1950, the federal and regional administrations have had a unique relationship. Why were Aceh and Yogyakarta granted special status? This is because historical causes and the central government have granted autonomy to the provinces of Aceh, Papua, and West Papua, and there is a statute that governs who can exercise special authority (Zahra, 2024:55).

Aceh Province, which was granted special autonomy by the Indonesian government in 2006, has a very good political situation and social stability, even the separatist movement (GAM) that used to exist no longer manifests.

This is different from what happened in Papua. Although Papua Province first gained special autonomy (in 2001) from Aceh Province (in 2006), social stability and development in Papua Province tend to lag behind compared to Aceh Province. This is certainly influenced by many factors, but at least, what is a concern in this paper, can be concluded through a comparison of the schemes below:



**Figure 1. *Involvement of Parties in the Formulation of Special Autonomy***

Based on the two schemes presented above, the author discovered that the disappearance of the separatist movement in Aceh Province has had a direct impact on national stability and integration because of the involvement of conflicting elements, the central government, and separatist groups, which are also aided by independent bodies. In the case of Papua, special autonomy does not result in societal stability since separatist groups persist because the indigenous papuans special autonomy statute does not include separatist groups.

The lack of impartial facilitators is viewed as a serious barrier for the OPM separatist organisation in any future negotiating forum with the government. Finally, the study's findings show that national political stability in Indonesia has yet to be fully realised in Papua, despite the chances provided by Special Autonomy for local governments to administer the province in accordance with community expectations. The continual presence and operations of separatist groups provide a persistent social threat, making it impossible to conclude that Papuan Special Autonomy has made a significant contribution to national integration.

The Papua Provincial administration is divided into two parts: the Papuan People's Representative Council (DPRP), which writes laws, and the provincial administration, which enforces them. To obtain special autonomy in Papua Province, the writers established the Papua People's Assembly (MRP). The MRP understands the indigenous Papuan culture and has particular authority to protect their rights while respecting their customs and culture. Which prioritises

supporting women and strengthening harmony as the mainstream of customs implementation in Papua (Zahra, 2024). Religious life is a manner of living that is founded on one's religious beliefs and activities.

Political agreements is important in regulating Special Autonomy in Papua. In matters such as protecting basic human rights, regarding customs as well as natural culture, creating a good life for the community, and giving freedom to make decisions at the local level have been mutually agreed within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia. Therefore, the presence of Law Number 21 of 2012 concerning the Special Autonomy of Papua, which has 24 chapters and 79 articles.

The implementation of special autonomy in Aceh and Papua demonstrates a substantial disparity between the extensive authorities provided and the actual consequences in terms of public welfare. Law No. 11 of 2006 granted Aceh extensive flexibility, including the authority to establish representative institutions, manage its judicial system, determine a regional flag, and issue regional regulations that could override national laws, while Papua gained expanded authority but did not achieve comparable socio-political stability. Despite these advantages, both provinces failed to turn autonomy and significant Special Autonomy Funds into demonstrable welfare improvements. Papua continues to have the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) and a surge in poverty, and Aceh, despite receiving IDR 27.3 trillion in Special Autonomy Funds between 2008 and 2013, has high and rising poverty rates. Furthermore, significant levels of corruption in both provinces point to poor governance and accountability in the management of public resources. Thus, the comparison suggests that the effectiveness of special autonomy is not determined by the scale of authority or financial support, but rather by institutional capacity, governmental integrity, and policy consistency in ensuring that Special Autonomy Funds are genuinely utilised for development and the improvement of community welfare (Zahra: 2024:56-59).

In this case, Special Autonomy will be fully implemented in Papua by 2022. However, the division in Aceh will be implemented in 2026. However, even after the implementation of Special Autonomy in Papua and Aceh, there are still a number of unresolved issues concerning community welfare. Poverty, a lack of basic facilities such as schools and clinics, a lack of professionalism in local administration, and corruption are major issues in Papua (Zahra, 2024: 58).

## **Future Challenges of Strengthening National Integration for the Implementation of Special Autonomy**

The future problem of enhancing national integration through special autonomy is how these policies can address the socioeconomic inequities that persist in the areas getting special autonomy, particularly Papua and Aceh. The community's development gap has the potential to exacerbate feelings of unfairness and erode a sense of national identity. If the distribution of special autonomy benefits is not equitable, the primary purpose of strengthening national unity may be jeopardised.

Another difficulty is the exclusivity of local politics, which stems from the specific jurisdiction granted by the regions. On the one hand, this can increase public participation in local politics, but it can also cause isolation from national parties. This phenomena is especially visible in Papua, where legitimacy is always separated by national narratives, making national integration a severe challenge.

The next hurdle is the public's empowering of particular autonomy. According to the 2022 BRIN study, only a small minority of people in special autonomy areas comprehend the policy's significance and benefits. The lack of public participation in the planning and decision-making process for special autonomy exacerbates the disparity between state policies and people's expectations.

The present dynamics of the separatist conflict are always problematic, particularly in Papua. Although Aceh has been generally stable since the Helsinki peace accords, there are separatist groups who oppose the special autonomy. Without an open conversation strategy that includes all stakeholders, particularly those who have been outside the formal structure of the state, national integration will be administrative rather than emotional or cultural.

Finally, the future problem of improving national integration through special autonomy is linked to accountability in the handling of special autonomy funds. The high rate of corruption in areas gaining special autonomy demonstrates that funds intended to improve people's well-being are frequently squandered by local leaders. If this governance issue is not handled, people's trust in the state will erode, and the nation's integration would face further challenges.

This study provides a significantly different discussion contribution than the three previous relevant studies. Dahlan A. Rahman et al. (2024) investigate political dynamics in post-special autonomy Aceh, with a particular emphasis on



tensions between local elites and the central government caused by differing conceptions of power and unhappiness with welfare performance.

Meanwhile, Jonathan Jacob Paul Latupeirissa et al.'s (2021) research highlights the challenges of implementing special autonomy policies in Papua and West Papua from a public policy standpoint, with the main finding being a decline in public trust in the government as a result of ill-founded policies. In contrast to the two, Eddy Asnawi et al. (2021) investigate special autonomy within the larger context of the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), perceiving it as a government policy to prevent disintegration activities.

This research occupies a different analytical space while filling conceptual gaps that have not been touched by previous studies. The focus is not only on the local dynamics of Aceh or Papua, as well as on normative studies of the integrity of the Republic of Indonesia, but on a comparative analysis of the implementation of special autonomy in Aceh and Papua as an instrument for strengthening national integration. This comparative approach involves economic, social, political, cultural, as well as security and separatist conflict aspects to assess the effectiveness of Special Autonomy as a national stabilization policy. In addition, this study not only examines the problems of Special Autonomy, but also evaluates policy design, the involvement of actors in the policy formulation process, and the implications of Special Autonomy budget governance on national cohesion, thus producing strategic recommendations regarding the direction of future Special Autonomy policy reform. Thus, this research offers the novelty by linking special autonomy policies political actors—budget governance—and national integration in one whole, analytical framework

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that variances in policy design will have varying effects on the implementation of special autonomy. As demonstrated by the cases of Aceh and Papua, differences in the design of special autonomy policies, budget governance, and the involvement of actors in the policy design formulation process will have different effects, both in terms of development output and on the larger goal of maintaining national integration. The main findings of this study show that Aceh is much more socially and politically stable after the implementation of special autonomy due to the existence of key separatist movement actors, the central government, and local elites mediated by independent parties, so that the special autonomy policy that is eventually granted reflects the interests of all actors. In contrast to Papua, the lack of involvement of community and separatist movement actors in the dialogue process, particularly the absence of independent

mediators, has resulted in a special autonomy policy that reflects the interests of the central government and a small number of local actors; as a result, special autonomy is poorly formulated and considered illegitimate.

This study discovered that budget governance is an important determinant of the effectiveness of Special Autonomy, while institutional stability in Aceh allows for more targeted and effective distribution of development benefits, whereas Papua continues to face corruption, local political fragmentation, and disparities in public service delivery, all of which impede efforts to improve national integration. The primary academic strength of this work is comparative analysis, which is used to examine examples in Aceh and Papua. A comprehensive study on national integration demonstrates that there is a very close relationship between policy design models, actor involvement, and budget governance within a particular autonomy framework that influences national stability. Unlike previous research that focused solely on local dynamics or normative aspects of the Republic of Indonesia, this study provides a new framework that can be used to make recommendations for special autonomy policy reform based on community participation, budget transparency, and strengthening customary law pluralism.

Based on the foregoing, it is possible to conclude that the future difficulty of improving national integration through special autonomy rests in the policy's ability to address the social, political, and economic differences that continue to shackle the special autonomy recipient areas. Special autonomy is intended to eliminate tensions and improve national unity; nevertheless, without proper governance and the receipt of benefits, this policy has the potential to lead to new segregation.

Special autonomy will improve national integration if central and regional governments can work together to manage special powers while adhering to the principle of national unity. Active community participation, the inclusion of marginalised groups, and transparency in the handling of special autonomy funds are critical to success. Thus, enhancing national integration must encompass not only administrative factors, but also social fairness, equitable development, political reconciliation, and the creation of more inclusive cultural concord.

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