

FLAGSHIP PROGRAMS WITH RELIGIOUS OVERTONES, POLITICAL MOTIVES, AND CHALLENGES IN UPHOLDING THE NORMS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE CITY OF PADANG

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Abstract: *Local governments in the decentralisation era possess the authority to formulate policies based on religious and customary values that live within society. In the City of Padang for the 2025–2030 period, several flagship programmes such as Smart Surau, Subuh Mubarakah, Remaja Masjid Reborn, Dubalang Kota, Sinergi Nagari, and the strengthening of Tungku Tigo Sajaringan have been introduced as efforts to reinforce youth character formation and social cohesion grounded in Islamic and Minangkabau customary values. However, in practice, these programmes have generated discourse related to identity politics and their implications for the fulfilment of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), particularly for religious minority groups. Through qualitative research employing a case study approach and relevant sources, this article discusses the relationship between religion-based policies and local political motives, as well as their impact on religious diversity at the local level. The findings show that these programmes function not only as cultural-religious policies, but also as instruments of political legitimacy based on majority identity. Therefore, strengthening inclusive and equitable diversity governance is necessary to ensure the implementation of the principles of respect, protect, and fulfil regarding Freedom of Religion or Belief in Padang.*

Keywords: *religious decentralisation, identity politics, local governance, Freedom of Religion or Belief, Padang.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The decentralisation that began in the early years of *Reformasi* marked a major shift in Indonesian governance. Law No. 22 of 1999 and its subsequent revisions granted local governments broad autonomy to regulate and manage governmental affairs according to local characteristics and needs. In practice, decentralisation did not merely create administrative room for managing public services; it also opened opportunities for regions to inscribe local values, identities, and norms into public policy. A number of studies show that regional autonomy has emboldened local governments to integrate religion and custom (*adat*) as the moral basis and source of legitimacy for policy (Hadiz, 2010; Mudzhar, 2011). Between 1999 and 2012 alone, hundreds of sharia-inspired regulations were enacted across Indonesian districts and provinces, diffusing unevenly across space and time (Buehler & Muhtada, 2016; Pisani & Buehler, 2017). The integration of religious values into policy has come to be known as religious decentralisation, in which religion becomes an inherent part of local development discourse and, in some cases, a political tool for regional elites.

This phenomenon of religious decentralisation is especially visible in regions with homogeneous demographic compositions, including West Sumatra, which is known for its customary philosophy of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah* (custom founded on sharia, sharia founded on the Book of God, ABS-SBK). Islamic and Minangkabau customary identity serve both as a moral framework and as a source of political legitimacy (Benda-Beckmann & Benda-Beckmann, 2012). The philosophy was even inscribed into national positive law through Law No. 17 of 2022 on West Sumatra Province, a development that recent studies read as a thickening of Islamic identity within the Minangkabau customary structure, with consequences for the management of diversity (Taufik & Taufik, 2023). It is in this context that Padang City displays a policy pattern that increasingly foregrounds religious and customary values in its flagship programmes. The Padang City Government's vision of realising a "Smart City and Healthy City grounded in religion and culture" is not

merely a normative statement; it serves as the operational basis for formulating programmes with an explicitly religious character.

Flagship programmes such as *Smart Surau*, *Subuh Mubarakah*, *Remaja Masjid Reborn*, *Dubalang Kota*, and *Sinergi Nagari*, together with the strengthening of *Tungku Tigo Sajarangan*, make clear that religion is not treated as a private matter but as an instrument of development and of shaping public character. Formally, these programmes are positioned as efforts to improve moral quality, strengthen social resilience, and build community cohesion. From the perspective of political science and policy studies, however, such programmes often carry another layer of meaning: the interests of identity politics, the reproduction of symbolic domination, and the distribution of power based on majority values (Fealy & White, 2008; Mietzner, 2020).

The *Subuh Mubarakah* programme, for example, is regarded as a symbol of state-initiated public piety. Its implementation, which involves schools and students, draws a thin line between moral guidance and obligations imposed by the state on individuals in religious matters. Several informants among students' parents indicated that the programme fosters social pressure, particularly when the performance of worship is framed as a moral obligation attached to a student's status as a member of the school community. If the state encourages or requires particular religious practices, the principle of non-coercion in religion, guaranteed by the Constitution and by international human rights instruments, is potentially violated (Bielefeldt, 2013).

Meanwhile, informants from minority groups, from the Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, and Buddhist communities, stated that these programmes reinforce a public sphere heavily dominated by majority expressions. Although the programmes do not explicitly exclude minority groups, informants described an "imbalanced social atmosphere" that made them feel they did not share equal space in city life. This is consistent with research showing that the symbolic dominance of the majority in regional policy can indirectly undermine the sense of justice and protection among non-majority groups (Crouch, 2013; Buehler, 2013). Quantitative evidence likewise suggests that the proliferation of religious legislation in post-Soeharto Indonesia

is associated with higher levels of religious discrimination (Sumaktoyo, 2020).

In the context of local politics, the integration of religious values into public policy can also be understood as an elite strategy to strengthen political legitimacy. The literature notes that identity politics is frequently mobilised to deepen the emotional bond between leaders and voters, particularly in religiously homogeneous societies (Hadiz, 2010; Mietzner, 2020; Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018). Informants from the team that drafted the city government's vision and mission described religiously nuanced programmes as functioning not only as instruments of spiritual development but also as a representation of a leader's identity, signalling closeness to community values. Religious programmes in Padang therefore have a dual character: they are socio-cultural policies and, at the same time, political strategies that consolidate a base of support.

From a human rights perspective, Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is guaranteed in various international instruments, including the ICCPR, and affirmed in the 1945 Constitution. Article 18 is one of the provisions that Article 4(2) of the ICCPR lists as non-derogable, so it cannot be suspended even in a public emergency. Within that article, FoRB encompasses an internal freedom (*forum internum*: conviction, thought, faith) and an external freedom (*forum externum*: practice, worship, expression). The internal freedom may not be restricted under any circumstances, whereas the external freedom may be limited only on the grounds set out in Article 18(3), namely where a limitation is prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health, morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. The state bears three principal obligations with respect to FoRB: to respect, to protect, and to fulfil. Regional policies that strongly integrate majority religious expression may touch on the third dimension in particular, namely how the state ensures that all religious groups can live their religious lives equally, without discrimination, diminution, or pressure. Studies of sharia-based local regulations in Padang have already shown that such regulations generate problems

for the enjoyment of FoRB at the community level (Rohidin et al., 2023). This is where the relevance of the present study lies.

The shift in local policy paradigms towards an ever-stronger emphasis on majority identity may give rise to several challenges. First, there is the risk of exclusion by design, when policy direction indirectly sidelines minority groups from the symbolic structure of the public sphere. Second, social pressure emerges through majority norms legitimised by state policy. Third, there is the possibility of a single, state-promoted interpretation of religion, which narrows internal pluralism within the majority religion itself. Fourth, indirect restrictions emerge that are difficult to identify but significantly affect the fulfilment of citizens' rights. This study was designed against this background. Specifically, it addresses two key questions: (1) How do political motives shape religiously nuanced flagship programmes in Padang City? (2) How do these programmes affect the fulfilment of FoRB norms for majority and minority groups?

This study matters for several reasons. First, academically, it enriches the literature on religious decentralisation, state-religion relations in Indonesia, and local identity politics. Studies of the integration of religion into regional policy remain dominated by research on Aceh and West Java, so a study of Padang City offers a new contribution to understanding how local authorities define religious relations within the context of Minangkabau *adat*. Recent work on West Sumatra has examined sharia-based regulations and Islamic favouritism at the provincial and *nagari* levels (Rohidin et al., 2023; Taufik & Taufik, 2023), but the flagship programmes of a single municipal administration have received little attention. Second, practically, the study illustrates the risks that religion-based policies pose to FoRB principles and inclusivity. Third, it provides an empirical basis for policy advocacy by civil society organisations, human rights institutions, and academics seeking to strengthen diversity governance that is more sensitive to minority rights (Bagir, 2014).

Accordingly, this study seeks not only to understand the dynamics of religiously nuanced regional policy but also to evaluate how such policy interacts with human rights principles and democratic norms. Padang City is an important case for the national debate on the

limits of integrating religion into public policy, and on how the state can ensure that efforts at moral development do not contradict the principles of equality and freedom of religion or belief for all citizens (Hefner, 2020; Neo & Scharffs, 2021).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design in order to understand in depth how religiously nuanced flagship programmes in Padang City are formulated, implemented, and received by the public, and what implications they carry for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). This approach was chosen because the issues under study concern meanings, values, and social constructions that cannot be adequately explained through a quantitative approach (Creswell, 2013). Padang City was selected as the research site because the local government explicitly integrates religion and *adat* into its development vision and runs a number of religious programmes such as *Subuh Mubarakah*, *Remaja Masjid Reborn*, *Smart Surau*, and *Sinergi Nagari*. The integration of religious values into local policy is part of the phenomenon of religious decentralisation identified in the literature on local politics in Indonesia (Hadiz, 2010; Fealy & White, 2008; Buehler & Muhtada, 2016).

Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, document analysis, and field observation. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to explore informants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding political motives, programme practices, and FoRB implications. Informants came from several groups: policymakers; members of the Muslim community, as the majority group directly involved in the programmes; representatives of minority communities (Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist); and academics or political observers. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, which was subsequently expanded through snowball sampling.

Interviews with government actors focused on the rationale of the programmes and the meaning of religious identity in the city's development vision. Interviews with the majority group explored their

direct experiences of programme implementation, including potential normative pressure on residents. Interviews with minority groups, in turn, helped to clarify how religiously nuanced policies shape their sense of inclusion or exclusion. The perspective of minority groups is important because religious decentralisation has the potential to produce the symbolic dominance of the majority and social pressure on non-majority groups (Crouch, 2013; Mietzner, 2020).

In addition to interviews, field observation was carried out at several activities and public spaces linked to the programmes, such as *Subuh Mubarakah* sessions and mosque community activities. Observation was used to capture social dynamics that do not always surface in interviews, such as patterns of participation, majority norms legitimised by the programmes, and interactions among residents. Observation complemented the narrative data and provided empirical context on how the policies are implemented at the grassroots level.

Document analysis covered the city government's vision and mission, the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), official publications on the flagship programmes, local media coverage, and reports by institutions working on diversity issues. Document analysis revealed how the government frames its programmes, how religious identity is represented in policy, and how the public responds to these programmes. This is important because religion-based policies often function as instruments of identity mobilisation and the legitimisation of local elites (Hadiz, 2010; Buehler, 2013; Pisani & Buehler, 2017).

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, narratives, and causal relationships. Thematic analysis proceeded through repeated reading, coding, grouping into categories, and the derivation of themes such as identity-political motives, the symbolic dominance of the majority, perceptions of inclusion and exclusion, and implications for the respect–protect–fulfil principles of FoRB (Wahid Foundation, 2016). Validity was maintained through source and method triangulation, comparing interview, observation, and document data. In line with research ethics, the identities of all informants are kept confidential, given that religion and politics are sensitive issues. The researchers also practised reflexivity to minimise

interpretive bias during analysis. This qualitative case study design enabled the research to capture the political and social dynamics that shape religious programmes in Padang City and to understand how these policies affect the fulfilment of FoRB for both majority and minority groups.

3. RESULTS

Interviews, field observation, and document analysis point to three connected findings. The city government writes religion and *adat* into its own plans and programmes. Majority religious practice becomes the default in schools and public space. And the religious programmes bring political benefits to local elites and to the customary leaders linked to them. This section reports what the data show. Section 4 interprets them. Figure 1 gives an overview.

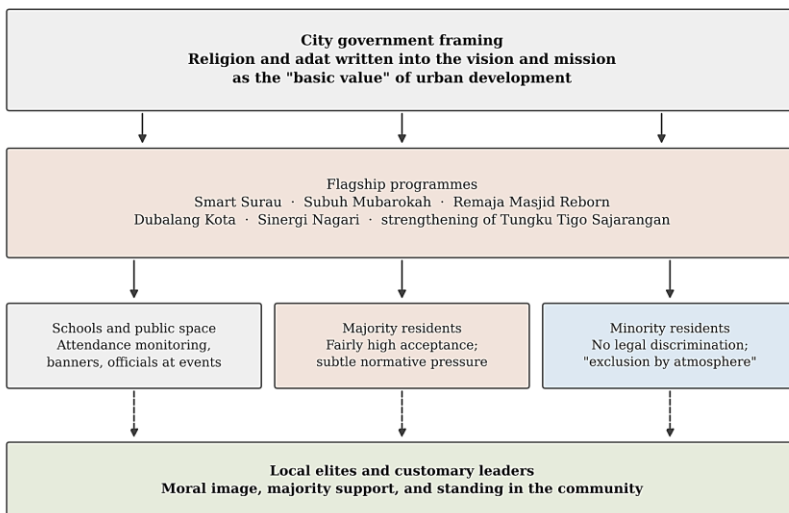


Figure 1. Overview of the three connected findings: how government framing, the flagship programmes, and their effects on residents and elites relate.

3.1 Religion and adat in the city's programmes

Regional development planning in Padang has treated religion and *adat* as its foundation from the start. Official documents describe religion as the "basic value" of urban development, and public policy is

consistently tied to Islamic morality and Minangkabau *adat*. The flagship programmes that follow from this are *Smart Surau*, *Subuh Mubarakah*, *Remaja Masjid Reborn*, *Dubalang Kota*, and the strengthening of *Tungku Tigo Sajarangan*. Table 1 lists the programmes and what the data report about each.

In practice the government is the organiser of these activities. Congregational dawn prayers are mobilised through schools, officials take part in religious events, and the *surau* has been revitalised as a "centre of community development".

Religious symbols are hard to miss. Field observation found banners, billboards, and moral campaign visuals from the government at many strategic points in the city. Government-backed religious symbols also appear in schools, government offices, public facilities, and residential neighbourhoods. Nothing formally prohibits minorities from expressing their identity, yet the overall atmosphere is one of homogeneity in which other identities feel "foreign".

The *Subuh Mubarakah* programme runs intensively in a number of schools. It involves attendance monitoring and coordination among schools, school committees, and sub-district (*kelurahan*) officials. Formally the activity is classed as "spiritual guidance", but the state is involved in a ritual that normally belongs to the private sphere: it organises participation in worship, monitors attendance, and makes attendance part of moral assessment.

At the community level, some residents see congregational dawn prayer as more than worship. They read it as a sign of obedience, morality, and social virtue. Interviews suggest that Islamic identity is coming to be treated as a moral prerequisite for citizenship.

Table 1. Flagship programmes and what the data report about each

Programme	Findings reported	Section
<i>Smart Surau</i>	Revitalisation of the <i>surau</i> as a "centre of community development"	3.1
<i>Subuh Mubarakah</i>	Congregational dawn prayers mobilised through schools; attendance monitored by schools, committees, and sub-district officials; officials greet residents and take part in worship	3.1, 3.2, 3.3
<i>Remaja Masjid Reborn</i>	Seen by many Muslim residents as "government concern" for the moral condition of society	3.3
<i>Dubalang Kota</i>	Listed as a flagship programme; no separate findings are reported	3.1
<i>Sinergi Nagari</i>	Brings customary elites into government programmes and widens the government's social reach	3.5
<i>Tungku Tigo Sajarangan</i>	Strengthened together with <i>Sinergi Nagari</i> ; customary leaders gain standing through participation	3.5

Note: Compiled from the interview, observation, and document findings reported in Sections 3.1 to 3.5.

3.2 What officials say and do

Government actors described the programmes as a response to "public aspirations", "the needs of the times", or "the city's identity". Officials interviewed also said they regard religious activities as a way to strengthen relations with residents.

Observation adds to this account. At many *Subuh Mubarakah* events, public officials were seen greeting residents and taking part in worship, and mosques were used as spaces for interaction between officials and residents. Many majority residents, for their part, read the programmes the way the government presents them, as an "affirmation of the city's identity" consistent with their beliefs.

3.3 Majority residents: acceptance and pressure

Acceptance among majority residents was fairly high. Many Muslim residents see *Subuh Mubarakah*, *Remaja Masjid Reborn*, and the revitalisation of the *surau* as a form of "government concern" for the moral condition of society. They place the programmes in a long-standing local tradition and are comfortable with the state helping to revive it. Some informants called the programmes a "reminder" and a "guardian of young people's morals". Majority residents also see the

government as a representation of their culture, which raises their trust in it.

Acceptance sits alongside pressure. Parents of students said that *Subuh Mubarakah* is not entirely voluntary in practice. There is no written sanction for absent students, but schools, teachers, committees, and local officials monitor attendance. Attendance at dawn activities is read as a sign of morality and discipline, and some students feel they must attend to avoid negative judgement.

The pressure reaches beyond schools. Majority informants said that residents who are inactive in religious activities are often seen as "uncaring" or "out of step with community values". Absence from congregational dawn prayers sometimes becomes a topic of conversation among parents or neighbours. Residents who do not take part, whether by choice or because they belong to a minority, meet reactions that range from uncomfortable stares to evaluative remarks.

3.4 Minority residents

Informants from the Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, and Buddhist communities said they do not experience direct discrimination in a legal sense. The government does not prohibit their worship, and no formal policy hinders minority religious activities. What they described instead was a feeling of marginalisation, because majority religious expression dominates the public sphere, and discomfort in public spaces filled with majority symbols and activities.

Several informants said the city "feels increasingly religious" and that schools and community events have taken on an ever more Islamic character. Children from minority families in public institutions are often confronted with activities that do not match their family's beliefs, such as collective prayers, short religious study sessions, or visits to the *surau*. Schools say these activities are universal, but minority informants feel their children are "joining in order to be accepted" rather than by choice.

Some informants said that criticising or questioning the programmes makes them appear "disrespectful of local culture", and some feel unable to criticise government policy for fear of being seen as disrespecting local values. Minority informants also reported a

shrinking space for expression and growing pressure to "blend in" with majority norms. Table 2 summarises the findings by informant group.

Table 2. Summary of findings by informant group

Group	Main findings	Illustrative expressions
Government actors	Programmes presented as a response to public demand; religious activities seen as a way to strengthen relations with residents	"public aspirations"; "the needs of the times"; "the city's identity"
Majority residents and parents	Fairly high acceptance; trust in a government seen as representing their culture; attendance in schools monitored and not entirely voluntary; inactive residents seen as lacking	"government concern"; "reminder"; "guardian of young people's morals"; "uncaring"; "out of step with community values"
Minority residents	No legal discrimination, but marginalisation by dominant majority expression; children join in order to be accepted; reluctance to criticise; shrinking space for expression	"feels increasingly religious"; "joining in order to be accepted"; "disrespectful of local culture"; "blend in"

Note: Expressions are quoted as reported in Sections 3.2 to 3.4.

3.5 Local elites and customary leaders

Government officials attend many congregational dawn prayers and give speeches there. Field observation showed that religious activities supported by the government or attended by officials often become arenas for what can be called the "politics of moral image-building".

The *Sinergi Nagari* programme and the strengthening of *Tungku Tigo Sajarangan* bring customary elites into government programmes. These leaders carry strong cultural legitimacy, so their involvement widens the government's social reach. Customary and religious figures who take part in the programmes, in turn, gain standing in their communities.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings fit the notion of religious decentralisation (Hadiz, 2010; Mudzhar, 2011): local governments produce public policy on religious values, and the boundary between public and religious affairs blurs. They also match the literature on post-*Reformasi* identity politics,

which finds that religion often becomes a source of elite legitimacy and a tool for social mobilisation (Fealy & White, 2008; Mietzner, 2020). Scholars place this trend within a wider national conservative turn and a move from democratic cosmopolitanism towards religious nationalism (Hamayotsu, 2014; Bourchier, 2019). In Padang, *Subuh Mubarakah*, *Remaja Masjid Reborn*, *Smart Surau*, and *Sinergi Nagari* carry religious content and also work as a political strategy that strengthens the government's position in local politics. Table 3 links the main findings to the concepts used in this section.

Table 3. Main findings and the concepts used to interpret them

Finding	Concept	Source
Religion written into planning as the "basic value" of development	Religion as a symbol of social legitimacy; "godly nationalism"	Fealy & White (2008); Menchik (2014)
Repeated religious symbols in public space	Performative identity	Jenkins (2014)
Dawn prayer treated as a sign of morality	Governing through culture	Merry (2006)
Officials joining worship and framing programmes as public demand	Symbolic politics; electoral calculation; moral statecraft	Fealy & Platzdasch (2005); Pisani & Buchler (2017); Hefner (2016)
Attendance monitored in schools	Indirect coercion; FoRB protects persons	Wahid Foundation (2016); Bielefeldt (2013)
Inactive residents seen as "uncaring"	Social identity policing; boundary making	Jenkins (2014); Wimmer (2013)
Minority children "joining in order to be accepted"	Majority identity as a norm that is hard to contest; identity threat	Horowitz (2000); Tajfel & Turner (1979)
Hierarchy of identities in policy and public space	Symbolic domination; vernacularisation	Bourdieu (1991); Levitt & Merry (2009)
Customary leaders brought into programmes	Dual authority in Minangkabau society	Benda-Beckmann & Benda-Beckmann (2012)

Note: The table lists the concepts discussed in Sections 4.1 to 4.4.

4.1 How the state builds a religious identity for the city

Presenting religion as the "basic value" of urban development does more than state a policy preference. It lets the government cultivate the image that religious identity is an essential trait of Padang's

urban society. The programmes reflect the relationship Fealy and White (2008) describe, in which post-*Reformasi* regional governments use religion as a symbol of social legitimacy. Menchik (2014) points to a similar logic in "godly nationalism", where a shared theistic identity becomes the basis of national and civic belonging.

The banners and billboards look like simple moral appeals, but repeated across the city they link religion to citizenship. This fits the idea of performative identity (Jenkins, 2014), in which social identity forms through continual repetition and public representation. Religious identity here is reproduced by the state as a way of ordering social life, and not only maintained by the community's own culture.

Schools show the process most clearly. When the state organises participation in worship, monitors attendance, and makes it part of moral assessment, the line between guidance and coercion blurs. The human rights literature treats soft coercion in religious activities as a breach of the principle of non-coercion in Freedom of Religion or Belief (Wahid Foundation, 2016; Bielefeldt, 2013). The 2021 controversy over non-Muslim students being required to wear the headscarf at a public school in Padang, which brought FoRB in the city's education system to national attention, points the same way (Rohidin et al., 2023).

Treating dawn prayer as a sign of morality and social virtue amounts to the state setting a moral benchmark for public life. In Merry's (2006) terms this is governing through culture: the state regulates behaviour by reference to values labelled "local culture", although those values are not neutral. Policy, public space, schools, and social norms all carry the same message, so the construction of Padang's religious identity is a structural and systematic process. Decentralisation gives local governments room to build a collective identity through public policy, as Hadiz (2010) explains for localised religious politics under regional autonomy.

4.2 Religion as a source of legitimacy and mobilisation

Officials' own account of the programmes ("public aspirations", "the needs of the times", "the city's identity") is better read as a framing strategy aimed at building legitimacy. The local politics

literature reports that regional governments often use religion to build a moral image and to present themselves as leaders who are "close to the people" (Buehler, 2013). Pisani and Buehler (2017) add that sharia-inspired regulations are disproportionately adopted during a leader's first term and around election periods, which suggests that electoral calculation is a key driver. The Padang findings follow this pattern.

Religion works for the government in several ways. It gives ethical legitimacy: by tying policy to religious values, the city government makes policy look natural, moral, and in line with local aspirations, and it casts itself as the guardian of citizens' morals. Officials who greet residents and join worship give the impression that the government leads spiritually as well as administratively. Fealy and Platzdasch (2005) call such practices symbolic politics, the use of religious symbols to build government legitimacy.

It also mobilises support. Religious activities bring leaders into direct contact with residents, and the emotional closeness this produces is hard to reach through technocratic policy. In a religiously homogeneous society it becomes significant political capital. That officials see the activities as a way to strengthen relations with residents points to a close link between religious programmes and electoral considerations, as Mietzner (2020) describes for local identity politics.

It reinforces the political representation of the majority. By putting Islamic values forward as the city's identity, the government signals alignment with the group that dominates Padang demographically, and that group's support grows. Horowitz (2000) names identity congruence between leaders and the majority as one of the key factors in political support, and argues that majority identity often attaches to state institutions in homogeneous political contexts. The trust majority residents place in a government they see as representing their culture fits this argument. Finally, religion carries state power into the domain of morality, through officials taking part in worship and the use of mosques for socio-political interaction. Hefner (2016) calls this moral statecraft, the use of morality by the state to strengthen its political authority. The Padang findings agree: morality and religion do not stand outside politics but belong to the government's strategy for managing legitimacy.

4.3 Acceptance, pressure, and the minority experience

Majority acceptance shows how religion has become a collective moral language and the accepted basis of public life, as Fealy and White (2008) note for Islamic expression in the post-*Reformasi* public sphere. Acceptance does not remove the pressure, though. The parents' accounts of monitored attendance describe what the human rights literature calls indirect coercion, which the Wahid Foundation (2016) identifies as a violation of the non-coercion principle of FoRB. Students take part because of social pressure and not out of religious awareness, so the climate produces compliance rather than conviction.

Bielefeldt (2013) stresses that FoRB protects persons and not religious traditions, so state-sponsored pressure towards conformity falls within its scope even when well-intentioned. Merry (2006) shows how normative pressure can work through educational institutions to produce conformity with majority norms without formal sanctions. Such pressure does not look like coercion, yet it still affects individuals' freedom to make their own religious choices.

Pressure in the wider community works informally. Calling inactive residents "uncaring" is what Jenkins (2014) terms social identity policing, a mechanism that judges behaviour by its conformity with majority group norms. It also shows that in Padang religious identity is a social indicator that affects acceptance in the community, and not just a personal matter. The same mechanisms draw boundaries around who counts as a "good citizen", which matches Wimmer's (2013) theory of boundary making, in which majority groups draw identity boundaries that affirm their normative superiority.

Minority informants report no legal discrimination, so what they describe is better called exclusion by atmosphere. Horowitz (2000) explains why such norms are hard to contest: majority identity often becomes a social norm, and challenging it carries social risk. That is consistent with informants who fear looking "disrespectful of local culture". From a human rights perspective this is a soft restriction, a limit on rights that is not explicit but affects comfort, expression, and psychological security (Wahid Foundation, 2016). The concept of identity threat applies as well (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Minority identity

in Padang is not directly attacked, but the symbolic threat pushes minorities to adapt for the sake of social security.

Majority acceptance and minority pressure together form an asymmetrical identity dynamic. Policies meant to strengthen public morality have exclusionary consequences for some residents, and programmes promoted for everyone fit the needs of the majority more closely. This supports Crouch's (2013) warning that state-initiated moral policies risk widening the symbolic space of the majority while narrowing that of minorities. The result is a division between "ideal citizens" and "other citizens", echoing Hefner's (2020) observation that Indonesian democracy has intensified debate over whether citizenship should be universal or religiously differentiated.

4.4 Symbolic domination and the reproduction of power

At the level of policy, using religion as the single lens for development planning creates a hierarchy of identities. Majority identity takes the normative position, and minority identities get less expressive space. This matches Bourdieu's (1991) idea of symbolic domination, in which the dominant group defines collective norms and other groups must adapt or accept a subordinate position. Taufik and Taufik (2023) describe a comparable pattern of Islamic favouritism in West Sumatra's *Nagari Madani* policy, which channels development facilities and funding mainly to the Muslim majority.

In public space, state power is translated into local cultural symbols so that it looks natural while staying hegemonic. Levitt and Merry (2009) call this vernacularisation, and Padang's public space appears to be going through it.

The benefits flow to elites as well. Foregrounding religious programmes gives the government moral legitimacy and majority support, and in electoral politics religious symbols become effective symbolic capital. Mietzner (2020) makes the same point: identity politics benefits local elites because it creates an emotional bond with the largest group in society. At the local level the strategy works especially well because community identity tends to be more homogeneous and easier to mobilise. When officials speak at dawn prayers, places of worship become a political stage for presenting leaders as religious and close to the people.

Customary leaders add another layer. Bringing them into development programmes extends the government's social reach, and the alignment between customary and government elites reaffirms the model of dual authority in Minangkabau society, in which customary and formal power can reinforce each other (Benda-Beckmann & Benda-Beckmann, 2012). Religion is the medium that binds the two structures. The programmes therefore reproduce religious identity and also strengthen local power networks: political elites gain legitimacy, and customary and religious elites gain standing in their communities.

4.5 Implications for Freedom of Religion or Belief

Under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), FoRB covers the internal freedom to hold a religion and the external freedom to practise it without interference. The first cannot be limited under any circumstances. The second may be limited only under the conditions of Article 18(3), and Article 18(2) separately prohibits coercion that would impair a person's freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief. The programmes examined here operate mostly in the external dimension, so the question is whether the pressure they generate remains consistent with Article 18(2) and with the narrow limitations that Article 18(3) allows (Human Rights Committee, 1993). Indonesia ratified the ICCPR through Law No. 12 of 2005, so these principles apply in national law, and every policy, including religiously nuanced flagship programmes, must be examined against the state's obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil. Those obligations operate within a constitutional framework that itself limits religious freedom, notably through the first principle of Pancasila, *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (Belief in One Supreme God) (Mu'ti & Burhani, 2019; Marshall, 2018).

On the duty to respect, programmes such as *Subuh Mubarakah* potentially violate the principle. The state should not regulate citizens' religious rituals or make a particular form of worship an indicator of morality. In Padang, congregational dawn prayers are monitored by schools and local officials, and residents feel they must conform to avoid negative judgement. This pressure is not always legal compulsion, but it can be categorised as social compulsion that erodes individual

freedom. The Wahid Foundation (2016) holds that social pressure generated by religious policies can have an impact as great as coercive regulation, especially for vulnerable groups such as students and adherents of minority religions. The state therefore does not fully discharge its obligation to respect.

The duty to protect also faces challenges. Minority groups experience discomfort in a public sphere dominated by majority religious symbols and activities, and the city government appears to have put few explicit mechanisms in place to counterbalance this symbolic dominance. That risks worsening inequality between majority and minorities, especially when minority residents feel unable to criticise government policy for fear of being seen as disrespecting local values. The human rights literature holds that the state must ensure that individuals do not suffer discrimination or social pressure because of their beliefs (Human Rights Committee, 1993). In Padang, however, the city government appears to offer little in the way of either psychological protection or inclusive spaces for dialogue. Social pressure on minorities is not prevented by regional policy, so the state does not adequately discharge this obligation either.

The duty to fulfil has not been fully met. The state fulfils it when it provides fair space and facilities for all citizens to practise their beliefs. When public policy accommodates only majority values and gives minorities no expressive channels, the state in effect fails to create equal space for religious life. Padang's flagship programmes do not prohibit minority religious expression, but they tend to overlook the spiritual needs of other groups, so they are not sufficiently inclusive in fulfilling the rights of all city residents. Table 4 sets the three obligations side by side.

Table 4. State obligations under FoRB and what the findings show		
Obligation	What the findings show	Assessment
Respect	Dawn prayers monitored by schools and local officials; attendance read as morality; pressure amounts to social compulsion	Not fully discharged
Protect	Minority discomfort in a public sphere dominated by majority symbols; few explicit counterbalancing mechanisms appear to exist; little psychological protection or inclusive dialogue	Not adequately discharged
Fulfil	Policy accommodates majority values; no expressive channels for minorities; programmes tend to overlook the spiritual needs of other groups	Not fully met

Note: Assessments follow the analysis in Section 4.5 and the Human Rights Committee (1993).

Overall, the implications point to structural inequality between majority and minority groups. Through policies that look neutral and grounded in local values, the state extends the symbolic dominance of the majority and leaves minorities in a less secure and less comfortable position. Earlier studies reached similar conclusions about the risks of religious decentralisation in Indonesia, namely that regional governments tend to adopt policies that favour the majority and risk neglecting inclusivity (Crouch, 2013; Zulfadli et al., 2020; Sumaktoyo, 2020; Rohidin et al., 2023).

4.6 Identity, morality, and power

Taken together, the flagship programmes combine identity, morality, and power. Religious identity is reproduced through cultural symbols and through public policy that reaches into many sectors of life. Morality works as a political language between elites and the public. Power is reproduced through the legitimacy that comes from aligning with majority values. Figure 2 shows how the three elements relate to the groups affected.

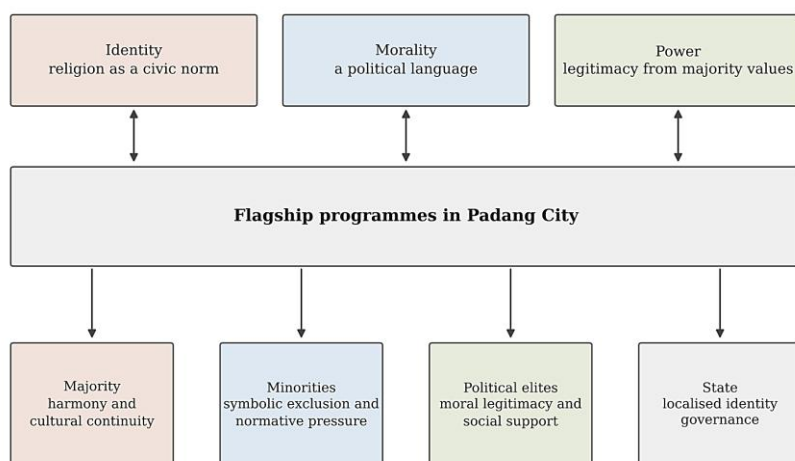


Figure 2. Identity, morality, and power in the flagship programmes, and the groups affected.

The effects differ by group. The majority experiences harmony and cultural continuity. Minorities face symbolic exclusion and normative pressure. Political elites strengthen their position through moral legitimacy and social support. For the state, Padang shows how decentralisation can produce localised identity governance that includes one group and excludes another.

These results agree with several studies of religious decentralisation (Hadiz, 2010; Crouch, 2013; Hairunnas et al., 2022; Zulfadli et al., 2020; Taufik & Taufik, 2023), which find that regional governments' promotion of religious identity often involves non-neutral political processes and can produce unequal protection of citizens' basic rights. Padang's flagship programmes are therefore better read as a configuration of identity politics that shapes social structure, majority-minority relations, and the implementation of FoRB at the local level, and less as plain social development policy.

5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that religiously nuanced flagship programmes in Padang City are a far more complex phenomenon than mere religious guidance policies or the strengthening of local cultural values. Programmes such as *Subuh Mubarakah*, *Smart Surau*, *Remaja Masjid Reborn*, *Sinergi Nagari*, the strengthening of *Tungku Tigo Sajarangan*, and

Dubalang Kota operate in three domains at once: as instruments for shaping religious identity, as media for reproducing political power, and as mechanisms of subtle restriction on the diversity of religious expression. This complexity shows that decentralisation in Indonesia gives regional governments room not only to express local values but also to reframe collective identity through public policy that reflects the political and cultural aspirations of the majority.

With regard to identity formation, the study finds that Padang's flagship programmes build a construction of religious identity associated with "Islamic character", which is then positioned as the normative character of the city's residents. This identity is produced through the language of policy, public space, educational institutions, and community activities. The process confirms earlier findings (Hadiz, 2010; Mudzhar, 2011; Fealy & White, 2008) that regional states can use religion both as a development framework and as a device of moral legitimization. This study shows, however, that this construction of religious identity draws a symbolic boundary between the majority and minorities, because the dominant identity is treated as "natural" while other identities are placed in an adaptive position.

From a political perspective, the study identifies that religiously nuanced flagship programmes have electoral and legitimating functions for local elites. The city government uses religious language and symbols to present itself as a moral figure close to the people. Government-facilitated religious activities become an important arena for reproducing the image of pious, approachable, and responsive leadership. This finding supports the view of Buehler (2013), Pisani and Buehler (2017), and Mietzner (2020) that religion plays a significant role in political signalling and power consolidation at the local level. Interaction among elites, customary institutions, and religious institutions produces a mutually beneficial power structure that strengthens political legitimacy through the symbolic networks the government has built.

From a social and human rights perspective, the study finds that these programmes generate normative pressure that is not always recognised by the majority but is keenly felt by minorities. This pressure

takes the form of monitoring of worship through schools, social expectations of participation in religious activities, and an atmosphere of homogeneity dominating the public sphere. Minority residents do not face formal discrimination, but they experience symbolic exclusion and subtle restrictions that affect their psychological security and the expression of their identity. This finding is consistent with the Wahid Foundation's (2016) analysis of the effects of social coercion in religious policy, and it demonstrates the importance of assessing FoRB not only by the absence of prohibitions but also by the quality of the social space that allows every group to practise its beliefs without pressure.

Normatively, the study shows that the state's obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to FoRB have not been optimally realised in Padang City. With respect to the obligation to respect, the state is involved in regulating residents' worship through educational institutions. With respect to the obligation to protect, the state appears to have put few adequate mechanisms in place to prevent social pressure on minorities. With respect to the obligation to fulfil, the state does not provide equal space for all groups to practise their beliefs, because public policy tends to accommodate majority interests. Religiously nuanced flagship programmes therefore carry the potential to violate human rights principles, even when this is not their intention.

On the basis of these findings, the study concludes that Padang's flagship programmes are a configuration of identity politics operating simultaneously at the symbolic, social, and structural levels. They show how decentralisation in Indonesia provides room for forming collective identities that often prioritise majority values over the principle of inclusivity. At the same time, the study underscores the importance of diversity governance that balances the expression of local values with the protection of the basic rights of all citizens.

At the practical level, the study highlights the need for interfaith dialogue mechanisms and human rights-based policy advocacy to ensure that regional development programmes do not create pressure on, or exclusion of, particular groups. Local governments should take human rights standards into account when designing activities based on religious values, especially those involving educational institutions

and public spaces. Civil society and religious institutions also need to act as a counterweight so that public policy fairly reflects the diversity of society (Bagir, 2014; Hefner, 2020).

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