



The existence of local parties in the perspective of banda aceh citizens

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Abstract

The legitimacy of local political parties in Aceh results from a peace agreement between the Free Aceh Movement and the Government of Indonesia. Local political parties provide new hope and alternative for people who previously only voted for national parties. Since participating in the election for the first time, local political parties have obtained the people's mandate to fill legislative and executive powers. But along the way, local political parties experienced a crisis of trust. Parliamentary seat gains declined dramatically over the three election periods. This is the starting point for studying local political parties in a limited scope in Banda Aceh City. Through a qualitative approach, the results of this study describe contextual conditions from the perspective of civil society or city residents. The study results explain the lack of seats for local political parties. Residents see that local political parties have not strengthened as a catalyst in influencing policy and have not appeared unique and specific to distinguish them from national political parties. In the future, the role of local political parties is expected to be more critical in fighting for local democracy substantially.

Keywords: Local parties, Citizens, and Existence

Introduction

The idea of local party was firstly raised in 2003. However, the Henry Dunant Center (HDC) which facilitated the negotiations and dialogue failed to convince the Indonesian Central Government. The negotiation on May 17, 2003 in Tokyo was unsuccessful because the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka - GAM*) fighters before the negotiations were forced to recognize the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia and accept special autonomy based on Law no. 18/2001, and laid down arms. It is possible that GAM refused because the COHA (Cessation of Hostilities Agreement) agreement did not offer political compensation which made them proud. As a result of this refusal, the Megawati government canceled the negotiations—then on 19 May 2003 declared open war against GAM by declaring Aceh to be in martial law and civil emergency status.

Local party discourse resurfaced in the post-tsunami negotiation process on December 24, 2004, which was facilitated by CMI (Crisis Management Initiative) in Helsinki. During the negotiation process the ideas of local parties became a heavy topic and critical debate. The central government ultimately approved local parties as a form of commitment to peaceful and democratic conflict resolution. Local parties were accepted as a political consensus in the Helsinki MoU on 5 August 2005. If the Central Government had rejected local parties as a precondition offered by GAM, the negotiations would have failed miserably. GAM will continue the struggle to secede from Indonesia amidst international attention focused on post-tsunami Aceh.

According to several sources, GAM was very serious in demanding the formation of a local party. Ruslan Razali, as a civilian element and SIRA¹ presidium, who was also present at the negotiations, said the negotiations almost failed because GAM insisted that local parties be discussed and accommodated as a prerequisite for the negotiations.

¹. The Aceh Referendum Information Center (SIRA) is an organization that fights for the resolution of the Aceh conflict through a referendum.

GAM insists that local parties be accepted as substitutes for the idea of Aceh's independence. Thus, GAM, which has abandoned the idea of independence, has political dignity to fight for justice and the welfare of the Acehnese people.

According to Aspinal, there are two reasons behind GAM's strong will towards this local party. *First*, because so far they feel they have a distinct identity that is different from Indonesia. In their view, the formation of local parties will enable them to appreciate the distinctive aspirations of the political system. *Second*, before the negotiations started, it was unlikely that GAM would fight for the idea of independence because Ahtisaari would not talk about Aceh's independence. Thus, as compensation, GAM demanded that it be allowed to form a local party in exchange for the idea of independence (Edwar Aspinal, 2005: 39) ^[4].

Now, local parties have been present in Aceh for three election periods starting in the 2009 general election. There were 6 local parties that have passed the verification to participate in the general election and compete with other national parties. They are the Aceh Party (*Partai Aceh* - PA), the Aceh Sovereignty Party (*Partai Daulat Aceh* - PDA), the Aceh Safe and Prosperous Party (*Partai Aceh Aman Sejahtera* - PAAS), the Aceh People's Independent Voice Party (*Partai Suara Independen Rakyat Aceh* - SIRA), the Aceh People's Party (*Partai Rakyat Aceh* - PRA), and the United Aceh Party (*Partai Bersatu Aceh* - PBA). The party that attracted the most attention was the Aceh Party which represented elements of GAM combatants. The Aceh Party dominated the votes at the provincial level or the DPRA election, obtaining 33 seats out of a total of 69 seats contested.

GAM elite figures in several districts/cities were able to maintain the existence of local parties, especially the Aceh Party. Over time, the space and form of local politics is seen to be fragile. The most contrast is the internal conflict on the

one hand, while on the other hand regulations related to the implementation of the Helsinki MoU and the Law on Governing Aceh - LoGA (*Undang-Undang Pemerintahan Aceh* - UUPA) are not running as they should. The conflicting regulations of a number of regulations related to Aceh's special autonomy has become a dilemma for the Aceh Party as the only local political force at this time. Public cynicism has emerged, for example, regarding the management of oil and gas which is considered not in accordance with the Helsinki MoU. Aceh gets a 30% shared revenue while the central government gets 70% where Aceh should actually get 70% and the central government gets 30%. Central government is considered inconsistent while the Aceh party is considered powerless to fight for the existing authority.

The conditions described above greatly impacted the 2014 legislative elections. Of the 81 seats, the Aceh party won 30 seats. The conflict between Governor Zaini Abdullah and his deputy Muzakir Manaf greatly contributed to the defeat of the Aceh Party in the third period of the election. They, as the GAM elites who were in power, not only have different political orientations, for example regarding the Aceh flag, but are also divided in dualism in an effort to maintain the party as a political base. Zaini Abdullah as Chair of the Party's High Council (*Tuha Peuet*) and Muzakir Manaf as Chair of the Aceh Party's Central Representative Council had conflicting ideas in leading the party. Even the maneuver for changing the head of service in the Aceh government structure was considered involving politicking. The changing cabinets caused the Aceh Party as a local party that was initially trusted to finally experience a process of delegitimization.

In 2019 election, the Aceh Party won 18 out of 81 seats. In more detail, Table 1 below describes the Aceh Party's vote acquisition and the representation of other local parties in the Aceh People's Representative Council (DPRA).

Table 1: Local party seats in DPRA

Local party seats in 2009 General Election			
No	Name of party	Party Number	Number of Seats
1	Aceh Party <i>Partai Aceh</i> - PA	35	33
2	Aceh Sovereignty Party <i>Partai Daulat Aceh</i> - PDA	36	1
3	Aceh People's Independent Voice Party <i>Partai Suara Independen Rakyat Aceh</i> -SIRA	37	-
4	Aceh People's Party <i>Partai Rakyat Aceh</i> - PRA	38	-
5	Prosperous and Safe Aceh Party <i>Partai Aceh Aman Sejahtera</i> - PAAS	39	-
6	United Aceh Party – <i>Partai Bersatu Aceh</i> (PBA)	40	-
Total			34
Local party seats in 2014 General Election			
No	Name of Party	Party Number	Number of Seats
1	Aceh Peace Party <i>Partai Damai Aceh</i> -PDA	11	1
2	Aceh Party <i>Partai Aceh</i> - PA	12	30
3	Aceh National Party <i>Partai Nasional Aceh</i> - PNA	13	3
Total			34
Local party seats in 2019 General Election			
No	Name of Party	Party Number	Number of seats
1	Aceh Party <i>Partai Aceh</i> - PA	15	18
2	Aceh People's Independent Voice Party <i>Partai Suara Independen Rakyat Aceh</i> -SIRA	16	1
3	Aceh Regional Party <i>Partai Daerah Aceh</i> - PDA	17	3
4	Aceh Nanggroe Party <i>Partai Nanggroe Aceh</i> - PNA	18	6
Total			28

Source: Processed 2012

As can be seen in Table 1, it is clear that the Aceh Party's seat acquisition has decreased drastically. On the other hand, the number of local parties participating in the selection and qualifying to participate in the election also did not increase.

There is an opinion that the existence of local parties has eroded because civil groups on civil society basis are not partners with local parties. For example, the SIRA Party as a party for activists was claimed to be a traitor because it

founded its own party. This condition affected the support given by public and the civil-political movement. In addition, the political awareness of the actors who neglect to maintain the process of adaptation, orientation, values, behavior, logical and progressive communication, both with the central government and with the people of Aceh itself in particular is very likely to lead to process of delegitimization.

There are a number of other reasons why the Aceh Party as the only local party for the former combatant lost. *First*, they display characterless political behavior. The exclusive lifestyle and political attitude gave rise to the cynicism of the constituents. *Second*, the political resources of the combatants who passed to the parliament were inadequate. This situation causes them to neglect to carry out the legislation, budgetary and supervisory function. *Third*, the involvement of political activists is minimal. In fact, the spirit of the democratic struggle during the conflict period was quite prominent and progressively challenged the reality of the activists. Many parties believe that the lack of activist involvement has caused the Aceh Party to experience a delegitimization process, judging by the number of votes.

However, former GAM and Aceh party combatants still gain popularity even though they are divided into small factions and segments. People still put hope that local parties can still develop although their existence is getting weak. To see the reality in question, this research tries to examine the extent to which the existence of local parties is considered by city residents who are far beyond the influence of the Free/Independent Aceh ideology during the conflict period. Specifically, in a smaller scope, this study wants to explore the perspectives of civil society or city residents in Banda Aceh City. Thus this research can answer the formulation of the problem as follows:

1. How do the people of Banda Aceh view the existence of local parties as a rich source of local-based democracy?
2. How do the people of Banda Aceh view the existence of

local parties as catalysts for the people in influencing development policies?

3. How do the people of Banda Aceh city critically view the necessity of the existence of local Acehnese parties in the future?

A qualitative approach and exploring perceptions through interviews will answer the above questions. The selection of Banda Aceh City as the research location was due to the consideration of diverse community backgrounds. All ethnicities in Aceh inhabit the provincial capital. The city residents are also well informed, have good knowledge of development of science, cultural characteristics, and have good education and political knowledge which allow this research to be presented analytically. Besides that, during the conflict period, the city of Banda Aceh was also not the basis of GAM's struggle so that the opinions of its citizens were believed to be objective. However, the perspective of the the city residents is the trigger for analysis in confirming the necessity of local parties in Aceh.

Local Party's Seat Gains

The city of Banda Aceh consists of 9 sub-districts and 90 villages. The administrative area of Banda Aceh City is 61,359 ha or in the range of 61,36 km². As for the population, based on the results of the population census in 2019, the population of Banda Aceh City that year was 270,321 people, while according to the release of Banda Aceh Election Independent Commission (*Komisi Independen Pemilihan - KIP*), the number of voters was 159,462 people. The Democratic Party was in the first place. The Aceh Party as can be seen in Table 2 won 6 seats, followed by Aceh Sovereign Party (3 seats) and the Aceh People's Independent Voice Party (1 seat). The composition of local parties and national parties of 10:20 is clearly not significant enough for local parties to influence policy.

Table 2: Seats in Banda Aceh District/City House of Representatives (DPRK) 2009-2014

Name of Party	Electoral region					Number of seats	Remarks
	I	II	III	IV	V		
Democratic Party <i>Partai Demokrat</i> - PD	1	2	1	2	2	8	
Aceh Party <i>Partai Aceh</i> - PA	1	2	1	1	1	6	Local party
Prosperous Justice Party <i>Partai Keadilan Sejahtera</i> - PKS	1	1	1	1	1	5	
Aceh Sovereignty Party <i>Partai Daulat Aceh</i> - PDA	1	-	1	-	1	3	Local party
Party of Functional Groups <i>Partai Golongan Karya</i> - Golkar	-	1	1	1	-	3	
National Mandate Party <i>Partai Amanat Nasional</i> - PAN	-	-	1	1	-	2	
Aceh People's Independent Voice Party <i>Partai Suara Independen Rakyat Aceh</i> - SIRA	1	-	-	-	-	1	Local party
Crescent Star Party <i>Partai Bulan Bintang</i> - PBB	1	-	-	-	-	1	
United Development Party <i>Partai Persatuan Pembangunan</i> - PPP	-	1	-	-	-	1	
Total						30	

Source: KIP Banda Aceh, 2009

In the next round of election in 2014, local party seats fell drastically. Table 3 explains the seat gains for local parties and national parties with a ratio of 5: 25 where the Aceh Party

won 4 seats while the Aceh Peace Party, previously the Aceh Sovereign Party, only got 1 seat.

Table 3: Seats in Banda Aceh District/City House of Representatives (DPRK) 2014-2019

Name of party	Electoral region					Number of seats	Remarks
	I	II	III	IV	V		
Democratic Party <i>Partai Demokrat</i> - PD	1	1	1	1	1	5	
Aceh Party <i>Partai Aceh</i> - PA	-	1	1	1	1	4	Local party
Democratic National Party <i>Partai Nasional Demokrat</i> - NasDem	1	-	1	1	1	4	
Prosperous Justice Party <i>Partai Keadilan Sejahtera</i> - PKS	-	1	1	1	1	4	
Party of Functional Groups <i>Partai Golongan Karya</i> - Golkar	-	1	1	1	-	3	

National Mandate Party <i>Partai Amanat Nasional</i> - PAN	1	-	1	1	-	3	
United Development Party <i>Partai Persatuan Pembangunan</i> - PPP	-	1	-	1	1	3	
Great Indonesia Movement Party <i>Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya</i> - Gerindra	-	1	-	-	1	2	
Aceh Peace Party <i>Partai Damai Aceh</i> - PDA	-	-	1	-	-	1	Local Party
Indonesian Justice and Unity Party <i>Partai Keadilan dan Persatuan Indonesia</i> - PKPI	1	-	-	-	-	1	
Total						30	

Source: KIP Banda Aceh, 2014

The 2019 General Election is known as a simultaneous election which is held simultaneously between the legislative election and the presidential/vice-presidential election. As

Table 4 explains, the seat acquisition for the Banda Aceh DPRK local party is at its lowest point. The Aceh Party as a party created by GAM combatants won only 2 seats.

Table 4: Seats in Banda Aceh District/City House of Representatives (DPRK) 2019-2024

Name of Party	Electoral Region					Number of Seats	Remarks
	I	II	III	IV	V		
Democratic Party <i>Partai Demokrat</i> - PD	1	1	1	1	1	5	
National Mandate Party <i>Partai Amanat Nasional</i> - PAN	1	1	1	1	1	5	
Prosperous Justice Party <i>Partai Keadilan Sejahtera</i> - PKS	1	1	1	2	-	5	
Great Indonesia Movement Party <i>Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya</i> - Gerindra	1	1	1	1	-	4	
Democratic National Party <i>Partai Nasional Demokrat</i> - NasDem	1	-	1	-	1	3	
Party of Functional Groups <i>Partai Golongan Karya</i> - Golkar	1	1	1	-	-	3	
Aceh Party <i>Partai Aceh</i> - PA	-	1	1	-	-	2	Local Party
United Development Party <i>Partai Persatuan Pembangunan</i> - PPP	1	-	-	1	-	2	
Aceh Nanggroe Party <i>Partai Nanggroe Aceh</i> - PNA	-	-	-	-	1	1	Local Party
Total						30	

Source: KIP Banda Aceh, 2019

The Aceh Nanggroe Party, which also consists of GAM elements, only won 1 seat. In this situation, the local parties do not meet the requirements to form a faction along with the council's equipment in parliament. From the tabulations for the three election periods, it is clear that the existence of local parties has not progressed significantly—where the seat gains for national parties are in stark contrast to those of regional parties.

Causality of Lack of Local Political Party Seats

There are several reasons for the lack of local party seats. The relationship between political parties and their constituents is a crucial issue. This is because the perspective of political parties with the community is quite simple, on the one hand political parties need the votes, while on the other hand the public sees the extent to which political parties are concerned in responding to social problems quickly. Behind this causality, according to a resident who lives in Batoh, Faisal, local parties are less responsive in responding to the situation of the community—it even seems like they don't have community-based party programs and policies (Interview, 02 November 2021).

In reality, political parties are often distant from their constituents – community - as a determinant of electability. Ideally, political parties or party cadres are able to absorb information about the difficulties and problems faced by the community as well as their interests or hopes. There is an impression that local parties are ignorant of actual problems. This was said by Umar, a resident of Seutui who assessed that local parties were very less likely to form sentiments with the community (Interview, 03 November 2021)

In fact, in order for a political party to be accepted, it requires the ability to listen and answer. According to Mirza Syarifuddin, a social activist domiciled in Rukoh-Darussalam, the existence of a party does not require special consideration whether the candidate (legislative candidate) is from a local party or a national party. For voters, there is no

sentiment from local parties or national parties, but what concerns voters are who is most concerned, communicative and responsive to the needs of citizens. Even when local party candidates asked for special attention – ironically they did not get the maximum number of votes (Interview, 05 November 2021).

According to Mirza, the condition for being elected is that a candidate comes from or is domiciled in an electoral district—which is not only populist, but also deeply rooted in the voter base—especially elegant in interacting with community. The label of “*asoe lhok*” or “our people” is not the main prerequisite but the ability to maintain a social ethos is more likely to be chosen than to highlight the intellectual capacity of a candidate. Therefore, according to Mirza, one of the reasons for the decline in local party votes is because there is a gap between the candidates and the local community (constituents).

Another opinion explains the decline in the flexibility of local parties because they are not yet present as social organizations. Ideally, according to Zainal Abidin, they should be present as an organization that voices the interests of its constituents. Having not become a mouthpiece for the Acehnese people at both the city and provincial levels, they were not elected. The impression is that local party cadres—especially candidates for local party elections are not socially friendly—in the sense that they do not play a role as fighters for the fate of city residents (Interview, 02 November 2021). Based on the above perception, the relationship between political parties and their constituents (society) plays an important role in maintaining the existence of the party. According to Cangara (2009), an appropriate political strategy or political marketing is needed to deal with political developments and dynamics in the voter base. Political marketing is urgent in terms of disseminating information about candidates, parties, and programs carried out by political actors (communicators) through various communication channels aimed at voter segmentation with

the aim of changing insights, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior in order to get real voter support.

The Role of Local Parties as People's Catalysts

The prolonged conflict, the earthquake and tsunami that hit Aceh have fostered the togetherness of the Indonesian people and the citizens of the world. The Central Government reacted quickly to encourage conflicts to be resolved peacefully and with dignity within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Apri Rotin Djusfi, 2019: 84) ^[3]. The central government's perspective on Aceh has changed amid international attention following the tsunami which was to end civil and military emergency—and then pushing for peace negotiations and a democratic settlement. The Helsinki MoU peace agreement August 15, 2005 is seen as a memorandum of understanding or political consensus which is full of democratic wisdom.

Recognition of local political parties in the national political system is a new political attitude and paradigm of the government in viewing Aceh. After enacting Law No. 11/2006 concerning the Government of Aceh, then the Central Government passed Law No.20/2007 concerning Local Political Parties—which is expected to be a new medium for GAM combatants to channel their political talents in defending the interests of the people. Thus, the presence of local political parties is also expected to be able to compete with national parties. Both local parties and national parties carry out the functions of political parties as a means of political education, political articulation, political communication, political socialization, political aggregation, and recruitment—and are ready to contest in every election to gain a parliamentary (legislative) seat.

According to Munthoha (2014), like national parties, local parties in Aceh also have a position as organizations that are authorized by law to gain political power and seize political power constitutionally. It's just that the authority to gain political power and seize political position is very limited, which is only in Aceh (Bertolomeus Bolong & Fredrik Y.A. Doeka, 2014: 60-61).

In such a proposition, local parties should play a role as a catalyst for the people at all levels of district/city government in Aceh. Local parties with all the energy available to them are very competent in influencing policies oriented to people's development. This is because local parties have authority only within the province of Aceh—then it is only natural that local parties fight for the interests of the citizens of Banda Aceh. According to Amri Yusuf, a functionary of the Party of Functional Groups, it can be understood that local parties that were formed from past conflict are more extravagant in fighting for the aspirations of the people of the city. Local parties should be at the forefront as people's catalysts on the constituent base.

According to Amri, the strategic role of national or local parties is equal in defending the public interests of city residents, but in the context of Aceh's interests at the national level, the role of national parties is more dominant (Interview, 28 November 2021). Furthermore, the framing of local parties as a catalyst for the people, according to Syahril, Lamteumen residents, is closely related to the goals of political parties. Both local parties and national parties in the context of Aceh, have a goal of maintaining sustainable peace as a shared responsibility. However, local parties certainly have the privilege of establishing themselves as fighters for solving problems in society in Aceh (Interview, 28 November

2021).

Internal search to understand in depth the programmatic activities of local parties was not possible to conduct due to time constraints. Finally, the role and condition of local parties as people's catalysts is interpreted by a media activist/journalist as follows; *First*, local parties rarely conduct socialization on the basis of their constituents. There should be socialization so that we understand the mission of local parties, especially in the effort to build the city. *Second*, local parties are rarely involved in carrying out social missions—for example, blood donation, aid for the poor, or humanitarian social activities. *Third*, local parties are less resonant (populist) because urban people are less responsive to political life. City people who are busy with various economic activities do not really care about politics because they tend to be understood as dirty, which according to Manshury, the citizens of Banda Aceh are not easily influenced by political parties (Interview, 04 December 2021).

Local Parties as Instruments of Local Democracy

Political scientists argue that political parties are a buffer for the presence of democracy. Of course, local parties are also instruments for strengthening democracy—which is specifically local-based in scope. So one of the functions of local parties in Aceh is to develop the goal of democratic life. According to Fouziah Zakaria, a former 98 activist, the government's peace agreement with GAM was one of the goals of moving armed conflict to a democratic process. The goal is to maintain peace and resume development after the conflict and tsunami. The presence of local political parties is strong enough to make this happen, said Fauziah. Meanwhile the Helsinki MoU, LoGA and the Government Regulation on the local Aceh Party (PP No.22/2007) are a strong foundation for developing local democracy in Aceh (Interview, 04 December 2021).

The context of developing local democracy in Aceh is special because there are local parties. The aim of local parties is to maintain local-based national political integration. In other words, the existence of local parties as far as possible is fighting politically in accordance with democratic rules and principles aimed at defending the welfare of the Acehnese people. So, the local party is a regional representation in defending the political rights of its citizens – said Radhi Irwansyah, a resident of Lueng Bata. The orientation or goal of local parties is not to fight for Aceh's independence as in the past, but to develop democracy according to the Indonesian constitution (Interview, 04 December 2021)

Meanwhile, Jam'an Sofar, a civil servant of Aceh Province, believes that the urgency of the existence of local parties is to strengthen the sense of nationalism. Citizens are still biased in positioning the role of political parties. Local parties are assumed to be *ata geutanyoe Aceh* (belonging to the Acehnese only), while the national parties are *ata awak Indonesia* (only owned by the central government). In fact, both national and local parties are carrying out the orders of the state constitution. So it is strange if the existence of local parties is attacked by various rumors and hoax news. According to him, in the first and second periods of the election, local parties seemed to have been weakened (Interview, 05 December 2021).

According to Zulhilmi, efforts to weaken local parties make it difficult for them to develop themselves as the main pillars of local democracy in Aceh. But the most important thing

according to the lecturer of UIN Ar-Raniry is obeying the law. Local parties in their mission to develop democracy based on law within the framework; *First*, fighting for political rights in accordance with the Helsinki MOU. *Second*, implementing the Aceh Government Law within the framework of special regional autonomy, and *third*, carrying out the constitutional mandate of the 1945 Constitution as a special region as affirmed in Article 18 A and Article 18 B - so The local party has strong and constitutional legitimacy. The most important thing is that local parties are agile to gain constituent legitimacy during elections so that they can survive and establish a pro-people government (Interview, 03 December 2021).

Local parties in the corridor of democracy will certainly compete with national parties to confirm their existence. Ironically, the existence of a national-based party was felt to be dominant in the New Order era. This tendency is caused by the unilateral interests of politicians—even dominations are carried out as mere mouthpieces for national interests—while local interests are ignored. So, in the present context, local parties will undoubtedly become rivals with national parties. If national parties in their political articulation and aggregation tend to follow the will of the central government, local parties can counter them, especially if it is detrimental to the regions.

Local parties will have the strong existence if they consistently defend regional interests, reject hedonistic behavior and are pro-people. This is an absolute requirement in the opinion of a resident of Lampaseh Kota, Abdurrahman. On the other hand, he said, ironically, we see local parties in the media displaying divisions among their elites (Interview, 5 December 2021). Based on authors' observation, it is not easy for local parties to influence policy dynamics, considering that local party seats have decreased drastically in each contestation. Minority representation is difficult to form local party affiliations as a counterbalancing representative. Even so, even though the seat gains are minimal, local parties, especially the Aceh Party, as the most influential party today, in the author's opinion, are very likely to appear as a support for democracy that can critically control the course of development particularly in the provincial capital.

As a support for democracy, local parties should be able to emerge as great critics. This was stated by Nazaruddin (Lecturer at Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Universitas Syiah Kuala), who wanted the existence of a local party to establish itself as a critic of Aceh's local governance. Aceh has been labeled as corruption veranda. The large special autonomy funds have not been directly correlated with development that has a significant impact. Therefore, local parties can position themselves as great critics in guarding the development mission (Interview, 05 December 2021).

As guardians of democracy at the local level, local parties are not tired of caring for free and critical public spaces. Local parties are required to be extra in guarding the development process—even if their seats in parliament are not a majority. It is worth taking into account the existence of local parties in terms of their control function from outside the parliament. Their militancy outside parliament will change the public's perspective. Their presence is not just voicing the interests of citizens in their constituent bases—but forming themselves as fighters for democracy who are critical, open and consistent. The problem of poverty, urban marginalized

communities, civilized city and the issue of social vulnerability of urban residents—should be issues of struggle for local parties.

For Murdhani (UIN Ar-Raniry Lecturer), it is very important for local parties to maintain public space so that ideas for change can be continuously discussed. Democracy is not only measured by elections and the involvement of local political actors in obtaining dominant seats – but outside parliament on behalf of local parties, it is crucial to maintain Acehese values (Interview, 06 December 2021). The authors believe that Acehese values related to traditions, customs, history, socio-economics, culture and issues related to the threat of the collapse of peace are important to be articulated as brilliant ideas for local parties. As the name implies local parties, local wisdom values must be the party's mission of struggle. The lack of representation of parliamentary seats does not prevent them from influencing executive policies. Consistently voicing facts and realities will keep the public's memory to them. And, it is a necessity for local parties.

Analysis of the Necessity of Local Party Existence

Imagining the existence of local parties in the future requires more serious and in-depth research. The reality recorded in this study at least gives an initial picture where local parties have not been able to show substantial differences from national parties. This may be due to the absence of a clear political platform, which departs from projective political thinking and calculations. Even so, the local parties are important as the media for Acehese to learn to develop their own political culture which is closer to the line of command, centered in Banda Aceh and not controlled from Jakarta.

The political culture developed by local parties may be in contradiction with Jakarta. Vulnerabilities may emerge as a dynamic. Fundamentally, Aceh's ideologically charged political orientation is important to be formulated as a historical record. Aceh with all of its history is moving forward in order to achieve the civilization it wants. The legitimacy of a constitutionally strong local party may take its own path and develop a unique and special model. Affan Ramli, an activist who is now quite active in strengthening *Adat Mukim*, noted that local parties are very likely to control more progressive and fundamental changes for the sake of maintain its existence in the future. This means that local parties prioritize the function of strengthening Aceh values, pride as Acehese, and do not have to be the same political institutions as national parties (Interview, 07 December 2021).

On the other hand, Affan realizes that it is not easy for the local parties to develop if there is no high awareness among educated people to be involved and participate in local political entities. The authors also see that the involvement of educated people is a serious issue. It is not meant to reduce the ideology of Aceh, which dogmatically still has efforts to liberate it territorially—but crucially is the issue of loyalty, capacity and goal orientation, which may be engineered into reality. Regarding this matter, Affan stated as follows:

“Local parties will not function much if morally educated people do not take care of them. At some point they have to control it. The issue of Aceh's ideology has been completed. All that's left is the Acehese identity. Because of this, local parties will not talk about the ideology of liberation, unless they play an Acehese identity as a political sale. This includes playing with

Aceh's Islamic identity."

However, according to Affan, the existence of local parties has been absorbed into Indonesian political culture which is joining the mainstream in the imagination about the ability to seize power and share public funds from people's taxes. The large Special Autonomy Fund has been a contest for the elite. The emerging political moral ethic is difficult to distinguish between local parties and national parties which tend to pragmatism in the management of power. As a result, the emerging political culture is not specific and unique—the local party entity should have an agenda for improving public policy as a prerequisite to be more trusted.

It is not easy to maintain the existence of local political parties in the midst of an established national party condition. The newly established local party should adjust to the times. The right strategy with the existing development context in order to survive as well as the neat, stable, independent, and pro-active organizational management are needed as the catalyst and dynamist in voicing pro-people policies. They must appear as democratic agencies with a national perspective, fighting for democratic policies, which have not only succeeded in seizing legislative and executive power, but display charm and appeal as a visionary and progressive socio-political force.

In the future, local parties will not only struggle to win electoral democracy, but will also be able to substantially defend the interests of Aceh and its people. Welfare democracy and justice deserve to be an ideological mission. This is the attraction and allure that distinguishes it from the national party. The presence of awareness of establishing a local party among the elite is important to get suggestions. In this way, the local democracy can grow more dynamically, selectively, independently and is believed to have an impact on Aceh's development. Any Acehnese can form a local party—which is ready to compete to meet the electoral threshold requirements in order to exist sustainably. The elite's willingness to establish a local party is a way of perpetuating the existence of local parties in the future.

Borrowing the term "educated elite" in Affan's view as described above, the existence of local parties is also very likely to be strengthened by the awareness of the "religious elite" as participants. Nirzalim Armia (2007) views that religious elites are still very influential in Aceh's socio-political life. The religious elites here are referred to the graduates of the great dayahs in Aceh. They are seen as charismatic leaders, have a fanatical followers, figures who have strategic and central positions in society. The involvement of educated elites or religious elites in local party entities is quite strategic, both at the provincial and district/city levels in Aceh.

Falevi Kirani, DPRA member of the Aceh Nanggroe Party faction—who is also a former student activist, doubts any strategy to strengthen local parties in Aceh without elite awareness. It is impossible for local parties to survive at the level of Indonesian democracy without the participation of the elite. Local parties will be eliminated for various reasons that influence them without unifying elite in them. However, Falevi sees that the horizontal elite conflict that has surfaced so far should be a cause for concern as the main factor for local parties to become increasingly distrusted.

Another thing is the absence of internal democracy of local parties causing the impetus for democracy to tend to be dramatic and detrimental. The acquisition of local party seats

has decreased significantly since the 2009 election to the 2019 election due to the consequences of elite conflict, one reason is that there is no unifying figure, and another reason is that the internal democratization of the party is problematic. It is impossible for a local party to grow singly from a single strength of the political element of society—for example from the GAM element alone, but comes from various backgrounds of the political power that exists in our society. From the various elements of society, the issue of unity and integrity must be a priority for local parties. Falevi asserted;

"We must unite with local parties for the sake of a nobler Acehnese interest. If we don't unite like now, PA says PNA is a traitor, and vice versa, then we believe that local parties will not last long. In the next election, people will choose personal people within the party itself, not because they are candidates or not from local parties."

Political figures in the Acehnese tradition, as Falevi said, may greatly influence the existence of local parties in the future. That the chosen party is not the party, but the figure carried by the party (Interview, 15 December 2021). The figures are those who deserve to be trusted and followed by their followers. Most crucially, according to Muzammil, the Lamnyoeng resident—this past SIRA activist emphasized that the figures needed could unite or unify. He said again; *"the existence and sustainability of local parties is necessary, parties may be different, be it local parties or national parties, but both love Aceh, and having a unifying figure for the party elite in Aceh is much more important"* (Interview, 09 December 2021).

Regarding the awareness of the educated elite as well as the religious elite being involved in local parties, according to Mistaruddin Hasan, a teacher, it is not an absolute. He mentioned that even the behavior of the elite that causes the local parties are less popular. When the social status changes, the elite's way of life changes as well. Without going into more detail, he assessed that there were contrasting differences in behavior between local and national party politicians. In terms of behavior, there may be situations that make it different, while in terms of function, role and goal, all political parties are the same - defending the interests of the people (constituents). However, in terms of their existence, they are both fighting for power—which makes politicians are hostile to each other. Every party has the right to fight, compete and exist and they should not hate and be hostile.

Furthermore, Mistaruddin argues that national parties and local parties both carry the national interest, the interests of the local community, realize political decentralization and the implementation of autonomy as a special region, as well as overseeing Aceh's welfare development policies. When this mission is neglected to fight for, the delegitimization of local parties may affect it (Interview, 09 December 2021). On the other hand, according to the authors, due to impression and psychological situation of the past because of conflicts, local parties are often considered identical with former separatist parties or rebel parties. This labeling has a bad impact. Therefore, it is important to establish the identity of elites and parties with GAM combatants so they they can have good reputation.

It is important that the existence of local parties needs to be seen more persuasively so as not to create an antagonistic

situation that can have a destructive impact. The labeling of separatist parties with various stigmas seems very agitative – of course it is not good if we have agreed to develop local democracy in Aceh. The principle of meaningfulness of local parties is to strengthen regional democratic life, shorten the span of political control, facilitate the aggregation of regional interests, facilitate pro-people political communication channels, fight for the interests of local political identity in diversity, and can strive to encourage broad political participation in the region.

Moreover, local parties also need to build affiliations with national parties so that Aceh political solidarity can be fought through the legislative at the national level. On the other hand, the executive government elected through general elections should not create a dichotomy between national and local parties. The interests of Aceh people at the national level should be followed up, and/or fought for by the elected regional heads. The elected governor is the extension of the central government. Therefore, the political and policy needs in the regions must be fought for to the central government. Coalition or affiliation as a supporting party between local parties – national parties will inevitably occur – on the contrary it is also unethical if local parties are like guests in their own homes, it can even happen the other way around for national parties.

Sentiment of interest is unavoidable when the space for political parties confirms their existence. Governors, regents and mayors as the results of democracy do not see the difference between local and national issues/needs in terms of the interests of local parties or national parties. This means not to hinder, for example, the agenda of the struggle of local parties or other things as part of the struggle of national parties. Whatever the term is, the roles of local parties and national parties are fighting for aspirations, guarding the course of development policies that are just and prosperous as mandated by the constitution. It is wrong if there are still those who position local parties as a threat to the disintegration of the Republic of Indonesia. The legitimacy and repertoire of local parties in the author's opinion is a form of democratic learning where local-based democracy will more strongly strengthen Indonesia's political integration in the future.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the existence of local parties in Banda Aceh City is only a sketch in describing the necessity of local parties in Aceh. In fact, local parties in the current of democracy in Indonesia are a barometer of how important local-based democracy is in the life of a nation. Post-conflict Aceh will be effective in various aspects of development, which is largely determined by the presence of local government through a democratic process that favors the interests of the people. So far, the existence of local parties has only just been dialectical in transition, but local parties have not been able to lead politics that used to be central to something localistic in Aceh. The existence of local parties at the Banda Aceh City level is the simplest we can describe as experiencing a deficit in terms of seat gains.

However, the existence of local parties may be marginalized from the power side where their electability is slowly eroded, while the transition in the context of the democratic struggle certainly cannot be concluded that the existence of local parties in Banda Aceh has faded. The delegitimization of local parties in the political map of Banda Aceh is only a

small sketch of the mirage of democracy in one corner of the former conflict area, which is somewhat not affected by the influence of the ideology of Free Aceh. Regardless of any factors that affect the existence of local parties, it proves that the views of the interviewees are sufficient to understand what issues must be an important note for the existence of local parties in Banda Aceh.

It should be underlined that the existence or absence of local parties in Banda Aceh City in the future is largely determined by figures, city-based consolidation works, the raising of the aspirations of city residents, approaching citizens in humanitarian action programs and being responsive in understanding the crucial issues of the community. The repositioning of the role of local parties will still exist when outside the system if they criticize these basic things. In the context of necessity, the existence of local parties is not only seen as influencing policy from within power. The residents of Banda Aceh expect that local parties in Aceh progressively emerge as balancing parties that are critical and firmly position themselves as representatives of pro-people democracy fighters.

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