



The Aceh Party Across Two Decades of Elections: Political Resilience and Institutional Adaptation

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Abstract

Over two decades after the Helsinki peace agreement, the Aceh Party has remained a central actor under Aceh's autonomy-based political system; however, its declining electoral performance and limited gender inclusion raise important questions regarding the organizational resilience of post-conflict local parties. This study examined how internal organizational dynamics and external regulatory pressures shaped the party's adaptation and long-term viability, with particular attention to women's political representation. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study utilized semi-structured interviews with key political actors and analysts, complemented by documentary analysis of electoral data and regulatory frameworks. The findings indicated that elite fragmentation, limited cadre regeneration, concentration of leadership authority, and regulatory constraints undermined organizational cohesion, while the absence of structured gender-inclusive mechanisms restricted broader societal engagement. The study contended that in post-conflict autonomy settings, the durability of local parties was shaped less by their historical legitimacy and more by regularized institutional renewal, their ability to adapt, and the use of inclusive organizational practices. By integrating organizational, structural, and gender dimensions within a single analytical framework, this study offered a more comprehensive understanding of party durability and provided a basis for future comparative research in post-conflict and autonomy regions. It also highlighted the importance of aligning institutional reform with evolving societal expectations to sustain democratic legitimacy over time.

A. Introduction

The durability of political parties born from peace agreements presents one of the most enduring paradoxes in contemporary democratic politics. While peace settlements often create institutional opportunities for former insurgent movements to transform into legitimate political actors, the long-term sustainability of these organizations remains highly uncertain (Hillman, 2012; Budiatri, 2022). Across post-conflict and autonomy-based political systems, parties that initially emerge as dominant representatives of collective identity frequently encounter electoral decline, organizational fragmentation, leadership challenges, and increasing difficulties in adapting to competitive democratic environments (Ikramatoun et al., 2023; Zulfan et al., 2023; Janah et al., 2023).

This contradiction raises broader theoretical concerns regarding party institutionalization, democratic consolidation, and the capacity of movement-based organizations to convert historical legitimacy into durable institutional strength (Scarrow, 2021; Budiatri, 2022). Although symbolic legitimacy derived from conflict resolution may facilitate political entry and early electoral success, its capacity to sustain long-term political relevance remains contested (Barter, 2011). Understanding why some peace-born political parties successfully institutionalize while others gradually lose influence therefore represents an important challenge for contemporary scholarship on post-conflict governance, decentralization, and democratic resilience (Triwahyuningsih et al., 2025; Gunawan et al., 2025; Said et al., 2025).

Aceh represents a particularly important case through which this broader paradox can be examined. Widely regarded as one of the most successful examples of post-conflict political transformation in Southeast Asia, Aceh institutionalized peace through the 2005 Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), which granted the province special political autonomy, including the unprecedented right to establish local political parties (Zulfan et al., 2023; Budiatri, 2022; Syahputra & Baiduri, 2018). Within this framework, the Aceh Party emerged as the principal political successor of GAM, transforming a former armed movement into a formal electoral organization and rapidly converting conflict-era legitimacy into political dominance (Hillman, 2012).

In the 2009 legislative election, the party secured 33 of 81 seats (47.8%) in the Aceh House of Representatives, establishing itself as the dominant force in the province's early post-conflict democratic transition (Muhammad & Saputra, 2022). However, the trajectory that followed reveals a more complex reality. The party's representation declined to 29 seats (35.8%) in 2014 and further decreased to 18 seats

(22.2%) in 2019 before recovering only modestly to 20 seats (24.7%) in 2024. Rather than reflecting ordinary electoral fluctuation, this pattern suggests a gradual weakening of the political dominance that once appeared firmly rooted in the legitimacy of the peace process (Makinara et al., 2025). The case therefore raises a fundamental question: how does a party born from a successful peace settlement sustain its political relevance once historical legitimacy alone is no longer sufficient to secure electoral support? More details regarding the electoral trajectory of the Aceh Party are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Aceh party seat acquisition in the Aceh DPR

Election Year	Number of Seats	Percentage (%)
2009	33	40,7
2014	29	35,8
2019	18	22,2
2024	20	24,7

Source: Processed by authors from various newspapers (2025)

The literature on local political parties in Aceh has largely developed along two analytical strands. Some scholars emphasize the role of the Helsinki peace agreement, special autonomy, and institutional arrangements in shaping the emergence and development of local political parties in Aceh (Hillman, 2012; Budiatri, 2022). Others focus on internal organizational challenges, particularly elite fragmentation, leadership conflict, and declining organizational cohesion as explanations for the party's electoral decline (Ikramatoun et al., 2023; Zulfan et al., 2023). While these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to explain the Aceh Party through either structural or organizational factors. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how these dimensions interact over time to shape the party's long-term political resilience. Most importantly, existing scholarship offers only a partial understanding of how the Aceh Party has evolved across two decades of democratic competition within Aceh's autonomy framework (Hakim et al., 2024; Janah et al., 2023; Nivada, 2022).

A further limitation of existing scholarship concerns the way women's political representation is conceptualized within discussions of party development and institutional resilience. In both local and international scholarship, gender inclusion is frequently approached in normative or quota-compliance terms rather than as an analytical indicator of party institutional quality and democratic depth. In Aceh, women's representation in the provincial legislature reached its highest point during the 2014–2019 period, with 12 female members recorded (Pemerintah Aceh, 2014). A decade later, representation declined to seven women in the provincial legislature (Dialeksis.com, 2024). This downward trend

contrasts with national developments, where women's representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives for the 2024–2029 period reached 127 out of 580 seats—the highest in the country's electoral history (Detik.com, 2024). Although previous studies recognize the importance of women's political participation for democratic legitimacy and party credibility (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019; Aseri et al., 2025), they rarely integrate gender representation into broader analyses of party institutional resilience. Such separation risks obscuring the possibility that stagnation in women's inclusion signals deeper organizational rigidity and declining societal embeddedness.

Taken together, these limitations reveal an important gap in the literature. While existing studies have examined the institutional foundations, organizational challenges, and electoral trajectory of the Aceh Party, limited attention has been given to how these dimensions interact over time to shape long-term political resilience. This study argues that the durability of the Aceh Party cannot be adequately explained through legal-institutional arrangements or elite dynamics alone. Rather, its resilience emerges from the interaction between organizational institutionalization, adaptive capacity, and inclusive representation within a changing democratic environment.

Building on this perspective, the present study advances a two-decade longitudinal examination of the Aceh Party by integrating party institutionalization and organizational adaptation perspectives within a single analytical framework. This approach moves beyond fragmented explanations of post-conflict party development and provides a more comprehensive understanding of how peace-born political organizations sustain legitimacy and adapt to evolving democratic expectations. In this framework, women's political representation is understood not merely as a matter of democratic inclusion but also as an indicator of organizational renewal, institutional quality, and long-term political resilience.

Guided by these considerations, this study examines how the Aceh Party has evolved institutionally across two decades of electoral competition in post-conflict Aceh and investigates how internal organizational dynamics, external structural pressures, and patterns of women's representation shape its political resilience and democratic quality. Through this analysis, the study seeks to clarify the conditions under which peace-born local political organizations consolidate into sustainable democratic institutions or gradually lose relevance within evolving autonomy frameworks.

B. Method

This study employed a longitudinal qualitative case study design to examine the institutional evolution of the Aceh Party across two decades of post-conflict electoral

politics in Aceh. A longitudinal case study was considered appropriate because it enables the exploration of organizational continuity, institutional adaptation, and political change over an extended period while capturing the interaction between historical and contemporary political processes (Lim, 2024; Lavarda & Bellucci, 2022). The study focused on the period from 2009 to 2024, covering four legislative election cycles and providing a basis for examining how organizational dynamics, regulatory changes, and patterns of political representation have influenced the party's long-term resilience within Aceh's special autonomy framework (Crowe et al., 2011; Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Fieldwork was conducted in Aceh Province between January - April 2025. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), observation, and document analysis. Participants were selected using purposive elite sampling based on their expertise, professional roles, and long-term engagement with Acehese politics. The participants included an academic specializing in political institutionalization, a gender and political participation activist, a socio-political analyst, and a political observer with extensive experience in local governance and electoral politics. To strengthen data triangulation, the study also incorporated FGDs involving academics, political observers, civil society representatives, party cadres, and other political stakeholders. These discussions were used to validate and contextualize information obtained from interviews and documentary sources.

Documentary materials consisted of election results, government regulations, party documents, academic publications, and credible media reports related to the development of the Aceh Party between 2009 and 2024. These sources provided longitudinal evidence across four electoral cycles and enabled the examination of changes in electoral performance, organizational structure, leadership patterns, and women's political representation over time.

The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Interview transcripts, FGD records, field notes, and documentary materials were coded iteratively to identify recurring themes associated with party institutionalization, elite fragmentation, leadership regeneration, regulatory constraints, and gender inclusion. The resulting themes were then interpreted through the perspectives of party institutionalization and organizational adaptation to explain the changing trajectory of the Aceh Party within Aceh's post-conflict political environment.

The quality and credibility of the findings were ensured through source triangulation, continuous comparison across multiple data sources, and iterative interpretation throughout the analytical process. Ethical principles were observed by obtaining informed consent from all participants prior to data collection, ensuring the confidentiality of research participants through the anonymization of informants, and maintaining secure data management procedures throughout the study.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents and analyses the empirical findings derived from multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentary materials such as electoral data and regulatory frameworks. The analysis adopts a reflexive thematic approach, enabling the identification of recurring patterns related to organizational dynamics, elite fragmentation, institutional adaptation, and gender representation. To ensure analytical coherence, the presentation is structured in an integrated manner in which empirical findings are first outlined and subsequently interpreted within relevant theoretical perspectives. Rather than separating results and discussion into isolated sections, this study combines them to highlight the dynamic relationship between data and interpretation, allowing each empirical insight to be directly connected to broader analytical arguments. This approach aims to provide a clearer and more systematic understanding of how the Aceh Party's institutional trajectory can be explained through the interaction of internal organizational processes and external structural pressures.

1. Results

This section presents empirical findings derived from interviews, observations, and documentary analysis concerning the development of the Aceh Party over the past two decades. The data reveal recurring patterns related to organizational structure, elite dynamics, regulatory constraints, women's political representation, and recent electoral developments. Table 2 summarises the principal empirical patterns identified during analysis, followed by a detailed presentation of supporting evidence from the field.

Table 2. Summary of key findings

Key Findings	Implications	Selected Source
The Aceh Party has transitioned from an exclusive to a more inclusive structure.	To maintain influence and relevance, broader leadership	Informant A

Key Findings	Implications	Selected Source
Nonetheless, it still relies heavily on central figures like Muzakir Manaf and faces challenges in expanding beyond its traditional support bases.	renewal and diversification of agendas are essential.	
Internal elite fragmentation, factional conflicts, and inadequate mechanisms for cadre regeneration have undermined party solidarity, loyalty, and public trust.	Reforming the organization and enhancing internal management are vital steps to regain competitiveness and cohesion.	Informant B & Informant C
Changes in national political regulations, such as revisions to the UUPA, along with the party's reliance on the central government, limit its strategic flexibility.	The party needs to create flexible strategies to handle central-regional political relationships and legal ambiguities.	Informant C & Informant D
The Aceh Party lacks a clear agenda regarding women's political representation, exhibiting limited development of female cadres and a 14.8% representation rate from 2014 to 2019.	A lack of progress in gender equality initiatives may weaken democratic legitimacy and lead to alienation among progressive or younger voters.	Informant B
The 2024 election showed a decrease in provincial legislative seats, particularly in Banda Aceh, although the party continues to have a strong presence in rural regions.	A more inclusive, urban-focused political strategy is urgently needed to ensure future relevance.	Informant C

Source: Processed by authors from interviews (2025)

Interview data indicate that several participants observed gradual organizational adjustments within the Aceh Party. Informant A described the party as having shifted “from a more exclusive orientation to a structure that attempts to engage broader segments of society.” He referred to adherence to internal party statutes (AD/ART) as part of organizational procedure. At the same time, multiple participants reported that decision-making authority remains concentrated among prominent senior figures. References to central leadership roles appeared consistently across interviews, particularly in discussions of candidate nomination and strategic planning.

Participants noted limited leadership turnover in recent electoral cycles. Statements such as “leadership change has been gradual” and “senior figures continue to play dominant roles” were recorded during interviews. Observational data collected during campaign activities documented the repeated public presence of established leaders at major political events.

Accounts of internal division were frequently mentioned. Informant B stated: “Internal conflicts and divisions among cadres are key reasons for the decline of the Aceh Party.” (Interview, January 2025). The interview evidence suggests that elite fragmentation functions as a mechanism of institutional erosion. Rather than merely generating internal

disagreement, factional competition weakens organizational cohesion, disrupts leadership succession, and reduces the party's capacity to formulate coherent political strategies.

She referred to disagreements among elites that affected coordination and communication. Informant D similarly described instances of factional tension during internal negotiations and candidate selection processes. Several participants reported that disputes among senior figures had, at times, become publicly visible. Interview data also included references to limited formal mechanisms for leadership regeneration. Statements such as “*cadre renewal has not been structured*” and “*training for new leaders remains informal*” were reported across multiple interviews.

Participants also described external political constraints affecting party operations. He noted that “*changes in national political regulations often reduce the space available to local parties.*” Interviewees referred specifically to debates surrounding revisions to the Aceh Special Autonomy Law and adjustments in electoral regulations. Informants reported that shifts in national-level political arrangements required local actors to adjust strategies continually. Observational notes during the research period documented public discussions concerning regulatory uncertainty and centre–regional negotiations.

The issue of women’s political participation was consistently raised across interviews. She stated, “*There is no structured programme specifically designed to recruit and prepare female cadres.*” She further noted that mentoring initiatives for women were limited and largely informal. Participants described male dominance within executive party structures and candidate nomination processes. Documentary data indicate that the number of women serving in the provincial legislature declined after 2019. Interview accounts repeatedly referenced the absence of systematic recruitment, training, or empowerment mechanisms for women within party structures.

Recent electoral developments have been discussed extensively by participants. Informant C stated: “*The results of the 2024 election indicate that the Aceh Party continues to mobilise support effectively in several regions.*” (Interview, January 2025)

He also reported that the party lost all legislative seats in Banda Aceh. Interview data consistently described stronger electoral support in rural constituencies compared to urban centres. Several informants observed changes in voter behaviour, particularly among younger and urban voters. Statements such as “*urban voters focus more on programme clarity*” and “*young voters expect different forms of engagement*” were recorded across interviews. Observational data from campaign activities documented lower levels of visible mobilisation in urban settings relative to rural strongholds.

Across interviews, observations, and documentary materials, recurring empirical patterns included concentrated leadership structures, elite-level disputes, regulatory constraints, limited structured gender initiatives, and divergence between rural and urban electoral support. These patterns were reported consistently across multiple sources of data collected during the research period.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) findings largely corroborate the interview and document analysis results regarding the institutional challenges facing the Aceh Party. Participants acknowledged that the party's historical legitimacy as a post-conflict political actor remains influential; however, it is no longer sufficient to sustain electoral support in an increasingly competitive political environment.

FGD participants observed a shift in voter behavior, particularly among younger and urban voters, who increasingly prioritize tangible policy outcomes related to employment, education, public services, and economic welfare over historical narratives. The discussion also confirmed persistent challenges in cadre regeneration, limited involvement of young members in strategic decision-making, and continued dependence on central political figures.

Participants emphasized the need for greater internal democratization through transparent recruitment, candidate selection, and policy-making processes. They further noted that while the Aceh Party retains a strong rural support base, its declining influence in urban areas reflects insufficient engagement with contemporary urban and youth issues.

The FGD also highlighted the limited strategic role of women within the party and stressed the importance of systematic leadership development for both women and young cadres. Expanding engagement with academics, civil society organizations, digital communities, and local entrepreneurs was viewed as essential for broadening the party's social base.

Overall, participants concluded that the Aceh Party's future sustainability depends on its capacity to strengthen institutional reforms, enhance cadre development, broaden societal engagement, and transition from a party primarily grounded in historical legitimacy to one driven by programmatic performance, inclusiveness, and organizational effectiveness.

2. Discussion

The findings indicate that the long-term resilience of the Aceh Party cannot be adequately explained through historical legitimacy alone. Although the party emerged

from one of Southeast Asia's most successful peace settlements, its subsequent trajectory demonstrates that political durability in post-conflict democratic settings depends on a more complex interaction between organizational institutionalization, adaptive capacity, and inclusive representation. The findings suggest that the ability of peace-born political organizations to survive electoral competition is determined less by their symbolic connection to past struggles and more by their capacity to renew leadership structures, respond to changing societal expectations, and maintain organizational relevance within evolving political environments (Brinke & Keltner, 2022; Baert et al., 2022; Budiatri, 2022; Zulfan et al., 2023).

The Aceh Party initially benefited from strong public support rooted in its historical association with the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and its role in the post-conflict political settlement (Taqwadin & Husaini, 2022; Abdullah et al., 2022). Interview and FGD findings consistently indicate that this historical legitimacy remains an important source of symbolic political capital. Participants acknowledged that the party continues to be perceived as a political representation of the peace process and Acehese aspirations for self-government. However, the findings also suggest that the electoral effectiveness of this symbolic legitimacy has gradually diminished. Younger and urban voters increasingly evaluate political actors based on policy performance, public service delivery, economic opportunities, and responsiveness to contemporary issues rather than conflict-era narratives (Scarrow, 2021; Harnides et al., 2023).

The findings indicate that post-conflict legitimacy functions primarily as an entry resource rather than a permanent source of political durability. Historical legitimacy remains important because it provides symbolic authority and collective memory; however, its political value diminishes when not accompanied by institutional renewal and programmatic responsiveness (Jimenez-Luque, 2021). As electoral competition becomes increasingly performance-oriented, voters appear less willing to rely solely on conflict-era narratives and more likely to evaluate parties according to their ability to address contemporary social and economic concerns (Kim, 2023; Makinara, 2025). In this regard, the decline of electoral support reflects not merely changing voter preferences but a broader transformation in the basis of democratic legitimacy itself (Barter, 2011; Scarrow, 2021).

The gradual decline in the Aceh Party's electoral performance across successive elections reflects this changing political environment. Although the party remains electorally significant and continues to dominate several rural constituencies

(Janah et al., 2023), the loss of support in urban areas such as Banda Aceh indicates an important transformation in voter behavior. FGD participants repeatedly emphasized that urban voters increasingly prioritize programmatic politics over historical symbolism. This trend suggests a broader transition from identity-based political mobilization toward performance-based electoral competition. Similar developments have been documented in various post-conflict political organizations where historical legitimacy gradually loses its mobilizing capacity when not accompanied by institutional renewal and policy innovation (Bertoa, 2019).

Beyond the changing nature of voter preferences, the findings demonstrate that organizational factors play a crucial role in shaping the party's political trajectory (Waeger & Weber, 2019; Jati, 2023). Interviews and FGDs consistently identified elite fragmentation, leadership centralization, and weak cadre regeneration as significant institutional challenges. Rather than functioning as mechanisms of healthy internal competition, factional divisions appear to weaken organizational cohesion and reduce the party's capacity to formulate collective political strategies. Several participants highlighted the continued dominance of senior political figures and the limited opportunities available for younger cadres to participate in strategic decision-making processes (Afrijal et al., 2024; Nastain et al., 2024). These findings indicate that the transition from a movement-based organization into a fully institutionalized political party remains incomplete.

From the perspective of party institutionalization, elite fragmentation should be understood not merely as a source of internal disagreement but as a mechanism of institutional erosion. Persistent factional competition disrupts leadership succession, weakens organizational routinization, and increases dependence on individual political actors rather than organizational structures. Institutionalized parties are generally characterized by stable procedures, leadership continuity, organizational autonomy, and durable societal roots (Ikramatoun et al., 2023; Zulfan et al., 2023). In contrast, the findings suggest that the Aceh Party continues to rely heavily on personal authority and historical symbolism, creating vulnerabilities when confronted with increasing political competition and changing electoral expectations (Gauja & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2021; Hakim et al., 2025). Consequently, electoral decline should be interpreted not only because of voter realignment but also as an outcome of unresolved organizational tensions.

The FGD findings reinforce this interpretation by emphasizing the need for greater internal democratization, transparent recruitment processes, and participatory leadership selection mechanisms. Participants argued that organizational renewal requires the development of institutional mechanisms capable of facilitating leadership transition and cadre development beyond traditional elite networks. Without such reforms, the party may face increasing difficulties in maintaining organizational cohesion and attracting new generations of supporters.

The study also highlights the importance of external structural factors in shaping the development of the Aceh Party. Changes in electoral regulations, debates concerning the revision of the Aceh Governance Law (UUPA), and evolving relations between local and national political institutions have collectively influenced the party's strategic environment (Nofriadi et al., 2024). Interview participants frequently referred to the challenges posed by regulatory uncertainty and the growing influence of national political actors in regional politics. These findings suggest that the Aceh Party operates within a complex political framework in which local political aspirations must continuously negotiate with broader national institutional arrangements.

This condition may be understood as a form of dual dependency. On the one hand, the party derives legitimacy from Aceh's special autonomy framework and its historical role in the peace process. On the other hand, its political authority and strategic flexibility remain constrained by national legal and political structures. Such a condition creates persistent tensions between regional political aspirations and central governmental authority. Similar dynamics have been observed in several autonomy-based political systems across Asia, where local political organizations must continuously balance regional identity claims with the institutional realities of national governance. Consequently, political survival depends not only on electoral strength but also on organizational flexibility and adaptive capacity in responding to changing regulatory environments.

One of the most significant findings concerns the limited role of women within the organizational structure of the Aceh Party. Although women formally participate in party activities and electoral processes, their involvement remains largely procedural rather than substantive (Zaini et al., 2023; Crowder-Meyer, 2022; Inayatillah, 2023). Interview and FGD participants consistently noted the absence of structured mechanisms for recruiting, mentoring, and promoting women into leadership positions. The findings indicate that women's participation often functions

primarily to fulfill electoral requirements rather than serving as a meaningful component of internal power distribution.

Importantly, this study argues that women's underrepresentation should not be interpreted solely as a gender issue. Rather, it reflects broader organizational limitations related to institutionalization and organizational adaptation. Political parties that fail to create pathways for women's participation often demonstrate wider challenges in leadership diversification, cadre regeneration, and organizational renewal (Clayton et al., 2025; O'Brien, 2019; Terjesen et al., 2015). In this regard, women's representation functions as an indicator of institutional quality and democratic maturity. The persistence of male-dominated leadership structures suggests that organizational renewal remains concentrated within traditional elite networks, thereby limiting the party's capacity to adapt to evolving democratic norms and societal expectations.

The FGD findings further strengthen this interpretation by demonstrating that women have not yet become a strategic component of the party's long-term organizational development. Participants emphasized that increasing women's representation requires more than numerical inclusion; it requires the transformation of organizational culture, leadership recruitment systems, and decision-making structures. Consequently, strengthening women's participation should be viewed as part of a broader institutional reform agenda rather than as a standalone gender policy.

The findings suggest that political resilience should not be understood as the product of a single organizational attribute but as the outcome of interactions among institutionalization, adaptive capacity, and inclusive representation. Organizational fragmentation weakens leadership continuity and strategic adaptation, while limited inclusiveness constrains organizational renewal and broader societal engagement (Gauja & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2021; Budiatri, 2022). Under these conditions, the party's capacity to maintain political relevance becomes increasingly vulnerable to changing democratic expectations. This interpretation extends existing discussions on post-conflict party development by demonstrating that long-term resilience depends on the capacity to maintain organizational coherence, adapt to political change, and expand inclusive participation (Scarrow, 2021; Zulfan et al., 2023).

Taking together, evidence from interviews shows that the future sustainability of the Aceh Party depends less on preserving historical legitimacy and more on strengthening institutional resilience. Historical legitimacy remains an important political asset, but its mobilizing capacity appears to diminish as democratic competition becomes

increasingly performance-oriented (Ocktaviana & Kamaruzzaman, 2021). Long-term survival therefore requires systematic leadership regeneration, organizational adaptation, broader social inclusion, and the development of programmatic agendas capable of responding to contemporary societal demands. The transition from a peace-born political organization to a fully institutionalized democratic party remains incomplete, and the party's future relevance will depend largely on its ability to address this institutional challenge (Buehler et al., 2021; Sari et al., 2024).

Theoretically, these findings contribute to ongoing debates on party institutionalization and post-conflict political transformation. Existing explanations frequently emphasize either institutional arrangements or elite cohesion as the principal determinants of party durability. The Aceh case suggests a more dynamic interpretation in which resilience is continuously negotiated through the interaction of organizational adaptation, leadership regeneration, and inclusive representation. Rather than treating institutionalization as a relatively stable organizational condition, the findings indicate that resilience is continuously reproduced through processes of adaptation and inclusion. This perspective broadens conventional understandings of party institutionalization by demonstrating that organizational stability alone is insufficient for long-term political durability. Parties must also develop adaptive and representational capacities if they are to remain relevant within changing democratic environments (Scarrow, 2021; Gauja & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2021; Budiatri, 2022; Zulfan et al., 2023).

Beyond Aceh, these findings offer broader insights into the challenges faced by post-conflict political organizations operating within decentralized and autonomy-based governance systems. Similar tensions between historical legitimacy, organizational adaptation, institutional renewal, and democratic inclusion have emerged in various regions where former resistance movements successfully entered electoral politics but later encountered pressures for reform and political renewal (Brady et al., 2020; Azlan & Nadzri, 2023). The Aceh case demonstrates that political dominance achieved through symbolic legitimacy is rarely sufficient to ensure long-term durability. Sustainable political relevance depends on the capacity of organizations to institutionalize leadership succession, adapt to changing political environments, and broaden inclusive participation. Consequently, the study contributes not only to understanding the evolution of the Aceh Party but also to wider debates concerning democratic consolidation, party adaptation, and the sustainability of post-conflict political settlements across Asia and other autonomy-based political contexts.

The findings of this study should be considered in relation to the scope of the evidence on which they are based. The analysis focuses on a single local political party operating within a distinctive post-conflict autonomy context, which inevitably limits the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other political settings. In addition, the study primarily draws upon elite perspectives obtained through interviews, FGDs, and documentary sources, while the views and experiences of grassroots voters were not systematically incorporated into the analysis. Although the longitudinal design provides a valuable perspective across four electoral cycles, access to internal factional interactions and decision-making processes remained limited, making it difficult to capture the full complexity of intra-party dynamics. These limitations do not diminish the significance of the findings; rather, they highlight the need for broader comparative and multi-level investigations to further understand the dynamics of political resilience in post-conflict party systems.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the long-term trajectory of the Aceh Party reflects a broader institutional dilemma faced by post-conflict local political organizations: historical legitimacy alone cannot secure sustained political relevance. While the party continues to draw symbolic authority from its origins in the peace process, its endurance increasingly depends on internal organizational cohesion, leadership regeneration, inclusive representation, and strategic adaptation to evolving regulatory and electoral environments. Persistent elite fragmentation, limited cadre renewal, and stagnation in women's political participation illustrate the structural constraints confronting local parties operating within autonomy-based political systems.

The study contributes to the literature on post-conflict local parties by showing that the sustainability of former movement-based political organizations is shaped less by conflict-era legitimacy than by their capacity for institutional transformation and democratic adaptation over time. Through the Aceh case, the analysis extends existing discussions on party institutionalization by demonstrating how concentrated elite control may preserve short-term political dominance while simultaneously weakening long-term organizational resilience, internal democratization, and broader social legitimacy. The findings also provide empirical insight into the challenges faced by local parties operating within decentralized and autonomy-based governance arrangements in post-conflict regions.

Building on these findings, further research would benefit from comparative investigations across post-conflict and autonomy-based political settings to examine whether similar patterns of institutional adaptation and political resilience emerge under different historical and institutional conditions. Greater attention to grassroots voter perspectives, intra-party dynamics, and leadership transition processes may also enrich understanding of how local political organizations negotiate democratic change over time. Such efforts can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which former conflict-based political actors evolve into sustainable democratic institutions.

Finally, the Aceh experience demonstrates that political resilience is not inherited from historical legitimacy but continuously reproduced through organizational renewal, institutional adaptation, and inclusive participation. The long-term durability of post-conflict political parties therefore depends not only on their ability to preserve the legacy of peace but also on their capacity to remain relevant within changing democratic environments.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests, professional affiliations, or personal relationships that could have influenced the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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