

# MORAL PANIC AND POLITICS OF MORAL – THE ROLE OF AUTHORITIES AND MIDDLE-CLASS IN THE GROWTH OF ISLAMIC POPULISM IN WEST SUMATRA

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## ABSTRACT

*This study delves into the nuanced intersection between morality and populism in West Sumatra, specifically examining the emergence of Islamic populism post-Reform. In contrast to prevailing studies that predominantly scrutinize economic inequality and immigration within populist discourse, this research delves into the lesser-explored realm of moral and religious dimensions. Through the analysis of three pivotal factors influencing moral and populist politics, the study underscores the influence of local culture in reinforcing Islamic populism, the social bonds tethered to the cultural and religious identity of the Minangkabau ethnic group, and the synchronization of governmental political strategies with societal religious and cultural ethos. This study using a qualitative approach. The data obtained by interviews, observations, and documentations. Findings illuminate the impact of social connections on individual behavior, societal norms, and institutional frameworks, particularly in guiding and shaping moral behavior. Conformity, entrenched in tradition and religion, holds substantial sway in societal evaluations and restraints. The communal societal perspective, prevailing over individualistic notions, serves as a regulatory force in tandem with community values.*

## INTRODUCTION

Studies on populism generally revolve around economic inequality, immigration and neoliberal policy. Meanwhile, studies on populism based on moral and religious aspects have received little attention. This chapter aims to see the intersection between morality and populism from an in-depth perspective. The authorities, especially the government and religious institutions, are still regarded as the

holder of authority to control society's moral standards. In this chapter, I would like to discuss the moral and political agenda that has strengthened after the Reform. Amid increasing economic inequality, why is morality the main agenda of Islamic groups in West Sumatra? While according to (Parker, 2014), there is no concrete evidence to back the government's concern about moral degradation among youths. Despite the absence of proof, ethical issues remain dominant in public spaces. One issue that dominates the public space is the anti-LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) issue. The issue has

always come under the constant spotlight of politicians, mainly when regional elections are imminent. Why the LGBT issue gets so much primary attention in the discourse of morality is left unanswered despite the long list of rampant occurrences of other civil disorders, such as drinking, prostitution, and drugs in society.

This chapter analyses moral and populism politics by examining three key factors that pose as stimuli: (1) the contribution of local culture in bolstering Islamic Populism in the post-reformasi era, (2) social affiliation in West Sumatra that views cultural and religious identity as the entity of Minangkabau ethnic group, (3) Morality becomes the political agenda of the government that is backed by the society as it is in congruence with religious and cultural values.

The central argument of this paper is as follows. In West Sumatra, the Islamic group adapted and incorporated Islam into their culture. The Islamic and cultural groups collaborate to gain power by utilising morality issues. Andoni (2012) argues that the cultural group tends to benefit from their control over Nagari resources. Still, the religious group can frame morality issues as something to be fought for in the form of ABS SBK. On the grounds of customary and religion, the government negated minority groups, such as the LGBT and non-Muslims, for the sake of political gain, that is, to rally support from the mass. Customary and religious groups also perform support the government. By utilising an identity politics approach, politicians and the Muslim middle class use a customary (adat) approach, especially by using the jargon Adat Basandi Syarak Syariat Basandi Kitabullah or ABS SBK (culture based on Sharia, Sharia based on the Qur'an), which emphasizes the fact that in West Sumatra, customs and religion go hand in hand. The existence of democracy boosts the development of populism because the mobilisation of moral issues is an essential element in attracting voters.

## METHOD

This research using qualitative approach. The data in this research was collected through face-to-face and online interviews, documentation primarily gathered from print media, online platforms, and social media. Informants were selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling

methods. The researcher conducted interviews with traditional leaders, religious figures, political figures, as well as ordinary community members to gather data on moral politics. Initially, between August and September 2019, the researcher interviewed acquaintances to gather background information on West Sumatra's conditions, focusing on individuals with minority backgrounds (LGBT, non-Muslim, and non-Minangkabau). Ten informants contributed to this initial data collection.

Subsequently, from September 2019 to December 2021, armed with the preliminary data, the researcher conducted additional interviews with diverse stakeholders, including local politicians, merchants, journalists, and religious-based groups and organizations. The inquiries revolved around the ascent of Islamic movements in West Sumatra and the involvement of predominantly merchant-associated Muslim groups supporting Islamic activities in the region. This extended phase of interviews involved an additional 15 informants.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Populism, Religion, and Morality

Following the Reformation, Indonesia witnessed the rise of two dominant forces: the Islamic and Democratization movements (Brenner: 2011). These two forces intersect and significantly impact the landscape of social politics in Indonesia. A key aspect of the reforms advocated by these movements was the need to grant more substantial autonomy to the regions, leading to the implementation of decentralization. In response to the demands for reform, decentralization spirit prompted the creation of regulations tailored to the unique circumstances and people of each region. To address the growing dissatisfaction among regions with the central government, the Habibie Government initiated political measures, including the enactment of Regional Autonomy Law No. 22/1999 and the Fiscal Balance Law No. 25/1999. These laws marked a shift from centralized to decentralized power, providing regions with the authority to independently manage finances, resources, and regional regulations in accordance with their respective cultures.

In West Sumatra, the strength of Islam and adat (local culture) emerged after the reformation period. The growing Islamic group is driven by the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which dominates politics in West Sumatra- PKS made two of its cadres become Governors of West Sumatra in three election periods.

At the same time, the representation of *adat* is represented in LKKAAM (*Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau* Institute). LKAAM is a West Sumatran community organisation formed in 1966. This organisation was formed to accommodate *Niniak mamak* of West Sumatra. At first, it played an active role in purging the influence of the communist in West Sumatra. After the reformation of the LKAAM Institution as a government-formed traditional organisation, in its statutes, it was stated that the purpose of this organization was to preserve the noble values of Minangkabau adat and to develop Minangkabau customary philosophy. attached to religion, primarily through ABS-SBK.

According to von Benda-Beckmann, F., & von Benda-Beckmann, K. (2012), the influential powers of Islamic and local customary law in West Sumatra play a significant role in shaping the regional discourse. The revitalization of customs and the process of decentralization serve as entry points for the strengthening of populism in West Sumatra. This perspective aligns with Simon, GM (2009), who asserted that decentralization fosters the growth of moral politics in Indonesia, particularly in West Sumatra. The transformation of the political system into a direct election system brings forth opportunities for patronage between local elites and community leaders, fostering a sense of public pragmatism that perceives politics as an elite-driven game.

Simultaneously, the revival of local customs contributes to religious revitalization, consistent with the Minangkabau philosophy that regards customs as rooted in religion and religion as grounded in tradition. The outcomes of these reforms have proven advantageous for local elites who leverage identity politics, with local politicians continuing to use identity as a compelling appeal. Similar to other provinces in Indonesia, the population in West Sumatra tends to be mobilized primarily during the approach of elections.

One of the public moral issues that often captures politicians' attention, especially as local elections approach, is the rejection of LGBT people, which contradicts Minangkabau culture. The government of West Sumatra, through the Lieutenant Governor of 2014-2019, Nasrul Abit, said that LGBT is not in line with the customs, culture, and religious values, particularly the

norms of Minangkabau people that were based on ABS-SBK. While homophobic sentiments are common in Indonesia, the government has formalized this conduct in several regions through local regulations. In November 2018, thousands of Padang residents supported the local government's initiative to fight immorality in the city. Mahyeldi, the Mayor of Padang City, initiated this demonstration (DW: 2018). Mahyeldi frequently uses his position as a mayor to carry out anti-immorality programs following PKS doctrine. Scholars such as Hamayotsu, (2013) argued that the strength of the conservatives was not balanced by the liberals, and the shift of demography (argued by Mietzner and Muhtadi, 2018). The authorities, such as the Lieutenant Governor) often used ABS-SBK as the basis for the unacceptability of LGBT in West Sumatra; it is not in line with Minangkabau identity. Such practice is commonly found in Southeast Asian countries, and it serves as the medium to promote a sense of nationalism and push people to build themselves as good citizens (Hoon, C. Y., 2004).

Upon passing through cities in West Sumatra, almost in every strategic corner of the town, you will find billboards containing moral messages, such as: "Stay away from drugs and immorality", "Let's fight gambling and lottery", "Cleanliness is part of faith", "Respect women because heaven is under mothers' feet", "Stay away from drugs, love life. Faith and Taqwa, yes! Drugs, no!", "Be afraid of natural disasters, stay away from all behaviour related to immorality", "Our lives will be brighter and more glorious without drugs!". Slogans containing moral messages are usually followed by photos from authorities, ranging from regional officials, politicians, clerics and traditional leaders. The use of billboards rises along with the approaching of the Local Election of the Head of the Regional. Billboard is considered an effective medium to be recognised by the public.

Figure 1. Pamphlet with Moral Message



Source: Facebook (2019)

### Social Affiliation and The People's

Conformity holds a pivotal position within the cultural framework of West Sumatra. Simon (2012) extensively examines this phenomenon, emphasizing its intricate connections with traditional practices and religious beliefs. There exists a collective push—emanating from individuals, societal norms, and institutional influence—towards the emulation of the ideals of a devout Muslim. This alignment is further underscored by the research conducted by Indrizal, E., Kreager, P., and Schroeder-Butterfill, E. (2009), delineating the eligibility criteria for aid allocation in mosque programs. These initiatives prioritize individuals grappling with adversity who also exemplify unwavering commitment to Islamic principles, potentially marginalizing those less inclined towards religious devotion from receiving aid. Spearheaded by the Forum Ummat Islam (FUI), these programs aim to provide essential support to congregants, fostering communal allegiance, and fortifying their dedication to religious education.

Collective efforts to uphold these values are apparent throughout communities in West Sumatra. For instance, Irsyad, the proprietor of a cellphone store in Bukittinggi, openly acknowledges that he proactively advises and admonishes individuals if he notices actions or ideologies diverging from religious teachings. He recounted an instance involving one of his employees who identifies as gay, where he personally counselled and encouraged the individual to engage in prayer. Irsyad firmly believes that being a part of the LGBT community constitutes the gravest transgression against Allah's wrath, surpassing even other serious sins like alcohol consumption and adultery. This mindset underscores the pervasive emphasis on adhering strictly to religious doctrine within the community. Supervision and evaluation do not come merely from the majority-rule enforcers but also from the antagonists.

In an environment where both majority rule and dissenting voices contribute to oversight and evaluation, individuals navigate stringent regulations, leading to the emergence of a self-censorship mechanism. Amidst this landscape,

Amel, a resident of Padang and a hijabi woman, defies conventional expectations by frequently visiting bars and indulging in weekend revelries with friends. Her reluctance to return home immediately after these outings stems from the fear of parental reprisals over her drinking habits. Engaging in a discussion about societal perceptions of women's morality, particularly among hijabi individuals, Amel astutely observes a noticeable rise in the number of women donning the hijab while actively participating in bar culture.

This observation suggests a notable shift in societal norms and behaviors in recent times. On the one hand, wearing the hijab makes her uncomfortable dancing in the club. She would instead not do it because she believes it is inappropriate for women wearing hijabs to dance at clubs. "I want to, but it is embarrassing", she stated. Amel kept blaming herself during the interview and thought her brain was not functioning. She realised that alcohol consumption violates religious teachings, especially when it was done by a woman wearing a hijab like herself. After drinking, even though she fell unconscious, Amel tried to keep praying and asking for forgiveness for her mistakes. In addition, Parker (2006) also noted that the hijab is a form of self-discipline. The hijab reduces women's mobility, and movement helps them self-discipline and makes women more aware of their bodies. These limitations help women practice their disciplines; forms of punishment are constructed of awareness of themselves. The group of Islamic conservatives in West Sumatra encourages politicians to bring morality into the public sphere. One of the efforts to maintain the community's character is by creating regional regulations to regulate women's clothing.

Simon (2012) posits that robust social bonds are intricately tied to the nuances of a binding tradition. In this context, a Muslim individual's missteps are perceived not merely as individual failings but as communal concerns, with religious ideology taking a backseat to the realization of a pious community. This communal solidarity holds precedence over individual identity. The emphasis is on fostering devout individuals rather than prioritizing religious ideology alone. This strong communal kinship, according to Simon, significantly influences the imposition of collective norms at the expense of individual autonomy. The community's perspective shapes and evaluates individuals, driving the collective belief that obedience isn't confined to

individuals but should permeate the entire community. This ethos motivates community members to correct, monitor, and remind each other, fostering a shared commitment to upholding communal values.

### **Moral Panics and The Authority**

In his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics; The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, Cohen (2011) used the phrase 'moral panic' to refer to his writing in British media in the 1960s that illustrated the deviant behaviour of British youths. The stigma of 'deviant' was labelled by the authorities such as the government, religious institutions, and the media. While Cohen (2011), Parker (2009) argued that the youth that became the object of moral panic in West Sumatra consented, we're committed to cultural and religious values. They did not view themselves as an object of moral panic; they, on the one hand, agreed to the sin of fornication and related problems, yet they did not view themselves as part of the 'threat'. The agreement between the object of moral panic and the authorities occurred as female teenagers realised the significance of holding on to religious and cultural values. Self-acceptance as an object of moral panics signifies a process of conformity; adaptation to the environment. They know their behaviour is being monitored and is a standard of judgment for themselves and their extended family. That personal action will be a reflection of family upbringing and people's dignity. When an act is considered to violate morality, the community's question is, "Whose child is he? What is the occupation of his parents" this question indicates that a person's actions are a communal responsibility, not a personal responsibility. This awareness of conformity forms behaviour that is in line with the values held by the community so that self-awareness appears as an object of moral panic.

Parker (2009) also viewed the significant roles played by the government to regulate morality, mainly through the promulgation of the Pornography Act in 2008. The Law is expected to be able to protect and prevent negative alien influences. Parker viewed that the goings-on in Indonesia indicated that sexuality always served as moral and public discourse, and the authorities had always taken action in the form of prohibition and protectionism. Post-reformist

politics showed that morality had often been the issue roasted by politicians, especially by highlighting the fears of the dangers of AIDS, LGBT, and westernisation.

Besides the government, the media can also be held liable for performing moral panic framing. One of the research projects on how the media contributed to the illustration of LGBT life conducted by Listiorini, D., Asteria, D., Sarwono, B., (2019) depicted the roles of mass media in framing LGBT as the immoral and deviant behaviour that the society must always be vigilant about. Other formal institutions, besides the media, such as religious institutions and the government, had also contributed to sticking 'deviant' labels. In their view, deviant behaviours were unacceptable as they were new or had been around but long gone.

Additionally, the ongoing discourse encourages by media and the authority enactment of laws targeting the criminalization of the LGBT community has resulted in the branding of the LGBT community, as defined by Cohen (Cohen, 2011), as a societal scapegoat, often termed a "folk's devil." With the backing of politicians and religious figures, local authorities have enforced regional regulations centered on political morality. From a societal viewpoint, moral politics serves the purpose of discerning between what is deemed virtuous and what is considered immoral. In West Sumatra, as outlined by Taggart (2000), there has been a widespread effort to shape identity and consciousness around 'who belongs to us' rather than 'who we are'. The implementation of Sharia-influenced ordinances in West Sumatra has facilitated the exclusion of groups perceived as morally distinct.

The table below depicts the rigid response and homophobic actions portrayed through mass media by different entities, with a particular focus on the local authority.

**Table 1. LGBT Discourse from Authority**

| <b>Media</b>           | <b>News Title</b>   | <b>The Discourse</b>  |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Republika.co.id (2023) | The Gerindra Faction Warns the Governor of West Sumatra About the | The LGBT behavior is considered not in line with Sumbar's adherence to Adat Basandi Syarak, |

|                   |  |  |
|-------------------|--|--|
|                   | Threat of LGBT   | Syarak Basandi Kitabullah. According to Gerindra, the Governor of Sumbar should take a stance to address and suppress this social issue related to LGBT.   |
| JawaPos (2018)    | Growing Threat, Padang Commits to Eradicating Immoral Action and LGBT    | The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) virus in West Sumatra (Sumbar) is increasingly threatening. Mayor of Padang, Mahyeldi Ansharullah, affirmed that he and the people of Padang are committed to eradicating the proliferation of LGBT behavior in various areas of West Sumatra. "This commitment arises from the awareness of the residents themselves". |
| Sumbarkita (2022) | LGBT Proliferation Contributes to HIV Cases, What Does LKAAM Sumbar Say? | The need for IT-based monitoring and controlling is crucial to prevent the spread of this LGBT epidemic, which is predominantly facilitated through social media networks and specific applications.   |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Antaranews (2018), Tribunnews (2019), and Viva.co.id (2020) | Sanctions against LGBT individuals should be regulated within the <i>Nagari</i> regulations. LGBT Population Contributes the Most in Indonesia. | West Sumatra Deputy Governor Nasrul Abit from the Gerindra Party has called on villages in the province to enact a nagari (village) regulation to impose sanctions against the LGBT community, including parading them or forcing them to pay a hefty fine |
|---|---|--|

Source: Processed media data

Moral anxiety constantly being spread through mass media was later formalised through sharia-nuanced regulations. In West Sumatra, during the rule of Fauzi Bahar as the Mayor of Padang (2003-2013), a regional code on the obligation to wear the hijab for Muslim women was issued to civil servants and public-school students in Padang. One of the reasons for the obligations to wear the hijab, often echoed by officials, is safeguarding and protecting women. According to Parker, L. (2006), the symbolic connection between the hijab and morality is powerful, and the women using the hijab are associated with being good and beautiful women. In societal contexts, behaviors like alcohol consumption, premarital sex, and homosexuality are considered morally reprehensible and viewed as societal ailments necessitating eradication. Interestingly, although these behaviors contravene Islamic teachings, they are often perceived more as personal missteps than widespread societal issues.

Minority groups like non-Muslims, LGBT individuals, and those of Chinese descent routinely face discrimination and societal stigma. Populism, within the framework outlined by Wodak (2015), tends to designate the LGBT community and associated actions as scapegoats for adverse conditions experienced by this demographic. Populists often attribute societal problems to these groups, believing them to be responsible for misfortune and societal discord. Within this socio-cultural context, media and formal institutions play a role in fueling populism, leveraging religion-based



identity narratives. As Hadiz (2018) suggests, politicians strategically cultivate public support, employing populist rhetoric to secure their positions. Fundamentally, populism revolves around a moral and causal division between 'virtuous' citizens and purported 'culprits,' as outlined by Hamelers, Bos, and de Vreese (2017).

In 2018, Padang's government launched a drive to cleanse the city of LGBT activities, led by Mayor Mahyeldi, who associates such behavior with the influence of Satan. As a response, Mahyeldi formed a team for rukyah (exorcism), purportedly to expel 'jinns' from the bodies of LGBT individuals. Interviews with Islamist groups reveal their perceived role as prime movers behind the implementation of Sharia regulations. During campaign seasons, they leverage incumbent politicians to pass laws and secure pledges from other candidates for future enactment. Rather than fostering distrust of elites, populists unify people around shared values, simultaneously antagonizing elites with differing ideologies.

### **Morality and Identity**

Simon (2012) mentioned that the conflict between tradition and religion is a part of protecting the tradition itself. However, the assertion of reconciliation between tradition and Islam has become a standard in Minangkabau ideology. Many conflicts between them are now primarily disregarded in public discussions. Although inconsistencies in Minangkabau traditions compared with Islam, such as inheritance and bloodline, no interviewee suggested any issue regarding the different approaches to this matter in West Sumatra.

Today, differences in tradition and religion have been united by ABS SBK and are inevitably invoked in discussions of morality or social order. This sentence is frequently used by authorities and repeated by the general public to define Minangkabau identity based on Islam. Beckmann (2012) demonstrated that tradition and Islam are the most significant degrees of abstract ideology, with numerous levels of an institutional framework that, of course, require a thorough philosophical understanding. The concept of religious and traditional identity is difficult for most people to comprehend. As a

result, ABS SBK is often mere jargon with no further and more precise explanation. According to Simon (2012), the abstract concept of ABS SBK is so central to Minangkabau ideology that even though it is frequently discussed and used as a shield in every argument to explain the moral politics that are carried out. ABS SBK is commonly brought up without explaining why and how it is enforced. Public policy is often taken based on the ABS SBK in everyday life or conversation in the mass media. Apart from the generalisation of ABS SBK, other identities in West Sumatra should be more frequently noticed. The perception is that they are not part of the community; therefore, they are treated as outsiders. The Minangkabau people identify with the ABS SBK principle. This principle is also the basis of moral politics. In the interview, when I mentioned the implementation of ABS SBK, most informants, who come from various backgrounds, had a favourable view of ABS SBK and believed that ABS SBK needs to be implemented in West Sumatra.

From a populist perspective, moral politics is needed to distinguish good from evil. In West Sumatra, according to Taggart (2000), it is a populist attempt to construct an identity as an awareness of who is not part of the community rather than who is. Moral politics manifested through the Regional Regulation with a Sharia nuance in West Sumatra provides an opportunity to exclude groups considered morally different. Authorities, such as the Lieutenant Governor of West Sumatra, frequently use ABS SBK as a justification for opposing the presence of LGBT individuals in West Sumatra, which is deemed inconsistent with Minangkabau identity. The West Sumatra Provincial Government, represented by Lieutenant Governor Nasrul Abit, also stated that LGBT is contrary to traditional and religious norms, particularly Minangkabau norms. The ABS SBK discourse has become a space for a dialogue regarding local customs, religion and the State.

The scholars include morality as a part of local custom revitalization by incorporating the concept of Back to Surau as part of local custom reform. In his paper, Biezelfeld (2007) alluded to women as objects of local custom revitalization. This moral regulation is needed to carry out the principle of ABS SBK. Therefore, regulations on women's clothing and the prohibition of community issues such as gambling, LGBT, and adultery would be easier to implement and have a clear basis.

While scholars observe the rise of conservatives as a result of the absence of liberal forces (Hamayotsu: 2013) and demographic shifts (Mietzner: 2020), they noted that the competition between customs and religion in West Sumatra could encourage identity mobilization through an understanding of ABS SBK as Minangkabau philosophy and identity. Its supporters want religious-based regulations to be implemented. They want the government to be involved in all state and social life elements, not only morality. On the one hand, the politicisation of ethics provides a space for tradition and Islam to unite and affirm the position of ABS SBK as West Sumatra's identity. The discourse over ABS SBK has remained unchanged since the Reformation. They considered the historical issue of the battle between tradition and Islam, which has deep historical roots in Minangkabau.

### **Conformity, Morality, and Identity Politics**

Populism issues revolve around religion-based morality rather than social and economic inequality. Social welfare issues are rarely discussed in public, and even the lower class's understanding of economic issues is limited. They believe that the financial hardship and deprivation they face is due to their predetermined fate. This also demonstrates that Islamic populism did not emerge from a grassroots movement and did not involve the lower classes due to their limited political and economic influence. The intersection of religion and populism prompts inquiry into their relationship. Riesebrodt (2010) suggests a somewhat superficial nexus between faith and populism, portraying it more as a continuation of cultural practices rather than sincere religious adherence. This portrayal of devoutness aligns closely with cultural norms, representing a facet of religious tradition. Religious populism gains prominence when it resonates with prevailing cultural values, thereby enjoying broader societal acceptance and consequent growth. This alignment often leads to a sense of estrangement by empowering religious institutions and figures within the populist movement, consolidating their influence over the populace. Moreover, populists seek to cement their ties with religious bodies by influencing or co-opting their doctrinal

perspectives, a strategy notably observed in West Sumatra, where the populist movement garnered government and traditional leadership support by imposing its religious narrative.

Consequently, the politicization of morality has diverted attention away from genuine concerns related to corruption. Kahin (1999), a seasoned researcher in West Sumatra, expresses concern about the escalating corruption in the region. This sentiment is echoed by Oztas (2020), emphasizing how the emphasis on religious doctrines by populists has overshadowed the real issues faced by constituents. While corruption remains a nationwide issue, Kahin attributes West Sumatra's lag behind other regions to deficiencies in its political system. He observes a decline in the region's educational standards and reduced representation of its people in Indonesia's intellectual and political spheres.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Local cultural norms, particularly those rooted in Minangkabau customs, significantly bolster Islamic populism within West Sumatra. Advocates of customary principles often employ Sharia as a legitimizing framework for their positions. This trend is underscored by the implementation of Sharia-influenced regulations. Moreover, the exclusion of LGBT communities, viewed as conflicting with Minangkabau traditions, has been codified through local statutes and societal attitudes, effectively becoming a focal point for politicians leveraging these sentiments during electoral campaigns.

Despite portrayals by authorities and media labeling certain behaviors as deviant, individuals did not necessarily perceive themselves in such terms. Instead, they displayed a commitment to cultural and religious tenets, exhibiting a form of self-adherence to societal norms. This adherence, deeply ingrained within community, familial, and individual identities, mirrors the values instilled during upbringing and community ethos. Ultimately, the interweaving of religion, morality, and identity politics has propelled Islamic populism within West Sumatra, resulting in the polarization of society into distinct 'us' versus 'them' factions. This polarization has been utilized by politicians to consolidate authority and influence public perception, often overshadowing critical socio-economic concerns like social welfare and developmental initiatives.



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