

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SPECIAL AUTONOMY IMPLEMENTATION: A CASE STUDY OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PROVINCES OF ACEH AND PAPUA

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Abstract. *This study examines the comparison of special autonomy implementation in Aceh and Papua with a focus on development outcomes. The main question addressed is why the same policy produces different results in the two provinces and what problems arise in its implementation. The study uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach by collecting data from scientific journals, books, and official documents related to special autonomy policies. The analysis is conducted by comparing findings from various sources to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in implementation and outcomes. The results show that Aceh demonstrates relatively better performance due to political stability, the presence of local political institutions, and more structured fund management. In contrast, Papua continues to face significant challenges such as development inequality, limited institutional capacity, low public trust, and less effective fund utilization. Special autonomy funds contribute positively to regional economic growth, but their impact on social welfare remains uneven. In Aceh, improvements are more visible in the education sector, while in Papua the socio-economic impact is still moderate and not sufficient to reduce disparities significantly. The findings indicate that the effectiveness of special autonomy is not solely determined by the amount of funds allocated, but also by governance quality, institutional capacity, and local conditions. In conclusion, Aceh shows higher development achievement under special autonomy, while Papua still encounters substantial barriers that hinder the realization of policy goals. **This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a comparative analysis that highlights how governance and local conditions shape the effectiveness of special autonomy policies.***

Keywords: *special autonomy, regional development, Aceh, Papua, governance*

I. INTRODUCTION

Special autonomy is a policy granted by the state to certain regions, such as Aceh and Papua, in order to provide broader authority for local governments to manage their own governance and regional development. This policy was introduced as a response to various political, economic, and social issues emerging in each region, while also aiming to improve community welfare and promote more equitable development. In Aceh, special autonomy was first implemented through Law No. 18 of 2001 and was further strengthened after the Helsinki peace agreement through Law No. 11 of 2006. Meanwhile, in Papua, the special autonomy policy has been in effect since Law No. 21 of 2001. After nearly two decades of implementation, the outcomes of this policy still show differing development results between the two regions (Setiawan *et al.*, 2022). Aceh mempunyai capaian sosial ekonomi yang relatif lebih baik dibandingkan Papua. Aceh has achieved relatively better socio-economic outcomes compared to Papua. Data from the Badan Pusat Statistik shows that Papua's poverty rate remains the highest in Indonesia, exceeding 25% (BPS Papua Province, 2025). In comparison, Aceh's poverty rate is around 14–15%, although it is still above the national average (BPS Aceh Province, 2025). In terms of quality of life, the Human Development Index (HDI) in Aceh is in the range of 72–75 (BPS Aceh Province, 2025), while Papua's HDI remains significantly lower, at around 60–65 (BPS Papua Province, 2025). This disparity indicates that the granting of special authority and large budget allocations does not automatically produce equal

development outcomes across all special autonomy regions.

Previous studies have mainly discussed the effectiveness of special autonomy funds, development inequality, or poverty issues separately. Most research focuses on only one region, either Aceh or Papua, and therefore there are still limited comparative studies that directly analyze both regions using the same development indicators. In fact, cross-regional comparison is necessary to understand why policies that have similar legal bases and objectives can produce different development outcomes. Furthermore, only a few studies have simultaneously linked socio-economic development outcomes with governance factors and regional institutional capacity. Other studies tend to focus more on fund management and development inequality without directly examining the relationship with the quality of regional governance. This situation indicates a research gap in the study of special autonomy in Indonesia. To date, comprehensive comparative studies that integrate the implementation of special autonomy policy with empirical socio-economic development indicators are still limited. Previous research, such as studies by Suriadi *et al* (Suriadi *et al.*, 2024), has focused more on special autonomy funds, while research by (Rahman, 2024) examines development inequality. However, analysis of the relationship between governance, institutional capacity, and development outcomes across special autonomy regions has not been widely conducted. Based on this condition, this study offers novelty by conducting a comparative analysis between Aceh and Papua using a socio-economic development approach measured through

empirical indicators such as poverty rate, respective regions. Through Human Development Index (HDI), education, decentralization, local governments are and health. This study not only compares considered to have a better understanding development outcomes but also examines of local community needs; therefore, how governance and institutional capacity policies are expected to be faster, more influence the success of special autonomy accurate, and more aligned with regional implementation in both provinces. This conditions (Kyohairwe, S., Karyeiya, G., & approach is expected to provide clearer Nduhura, A., 2024). In the implementation insights into the factors that cause of special autonomy in Aceh and Papua, differences in development achievements decentralization theory is used to explain between Aceh and Papua. Such integrative how the central government grants studies are still rarely discussed in previous additional authority to both regions in research, including studies by Yulianti *et al* political, fiscal, and natural resource (Yulianti *et al.*, 2024). Other studies tend to management aspects. Rahman et al. explain focus separately on political stability and that Aceh obtained broader authority in development inequality without directly regional governance after the Helsinki comparing both regions, such as research by peace agreement, while Papua was granted Sufajar *et al* (Sufajar *et al.*, 2025). The special authority as an effort to accelerate research questions in this study are: first, development and reduce socio-economic how is the implementation of special disparities. Through this authority, local autonomy in Aceh and Papua Province; and governments have the opportunity to second, why are there differences in socio- design development programs that are economic development outcomes between more suited to local needs (Rahman *et al*, the two regions. This study aims to analyze 2024). Although both regions have special the implementation of special autonomy and autonomy status, development outcomes explain the factors influencing differences in in Aceh and Papua differ because development outcomes in Aceh and Papua. conditions such as security, fund The findings are expected to serve as policy management, and human resource quality evaluation material for special autonomy and are not the same in each region. This shows contribute to the academic discourse on that the success of decentralization is not regional governance and public policy in only determined by the extent of authority Indonesia. granted, but also by regional institutional capacity, governance quality, and the ability of local governments to manage development budgets (Puspitaningrum, J, 2025). In the case of Aceh, relatively stable political conditions have allowed policy implementation to run more effectively and in a more structured manner. Meanwhile, in Papua, the implementation of special autonomy still faces various challenges such as limited infrastructure, weak bureaucratic capacity, and inequality

II. TINJAUAN PUSTAKA

Teori Desentralisasi

The decentralization theory proposed by Dennis A. Rondinelli explains that part of the central government's authority is transferred to regional governments so that local governments have greater space to manage governance, development, and public services according to the specific conditions of their

in development across regions (Arifin, F, 2024). This situation indicates that decentralization theory does not only concern the distribution of authority, but also explains that regional development outcomes are strongly influenced by the ability of regions to effectively exercise that authority.

Development Theory

The development theory proposed by Walt Whitman Rostow explains that development progresses through several stages, starting from traditional societies to modern societies with higher levels of production and welfare. Rostow argues that each region may be at different stages of development; therefore, development outcomes across regions are not always the same (Junaedi *et al.*, 2026). In this study, Rostow's theory is used to examine the development position of Aceh and Papua based on their respective socio-economic conditions. After the conflict period, Aceh has shown relatively more stable development progress, particularly in the sectors of education, infrastructure, and regional governance. This condition indicates that Aceh has begun to move toward a more advanced stage of development as economic activities and public services have improved compared to the conflict period (Rahman, D. A., & Abubakar, 2024). Meanwhile, Papua still faces various development challenges such as high poverty rates, limited access to education and healthcare, and uneven infrastructure across regions. This condition indicates that the development process in Papua is progressing more slowly compared to Aceh. Although Papua has abundant natural resources, socio-economic development outcomes have not

been evenly distributed among the population (Kamaluddin, S., Pongtuluran, R., & Juli, L, 2024). Based on Rostow's theory, these differences in development achievements indicate that both regions are at different stages of development, which in turn leads to different outcomes in the implementation of special autonomy policies in practice (Hasbiah, H, 2023). Rostow's theory in this study helps explain that regional development success is not only determined by the size of budgets or natural resource availability, but is also influenced by social readiness, economic structure, institutional capacity, and regional stability in supporting a gradual development process.

Social Justice Theory

The social justice theory proposed by John Rawls explains that state policies should provide fair benefits to all members of society, especially those who are in the most disadvantaged conditions. According to Rawls, development should not only benefit certain groups, but must also reduce social inequality and improve welfare in a more equitable manner (Maulana *et al.*, 2025). Rawls' theory is directly relevant to the implementation of special autonomy in Aceh and Papua, particularly in the distribution of special autonomy funds to the community. In principle, special autonomy funds are allocated to accelerate development, improve public services, and enhance welfare in regions that are still relatively underdeveloped. Therefore, policy success is not only measured by the amount of budget allocated, but also by whether the benefits of development are truly experienced by the wider community (Ham, U., & Octaviani, H, 2022). In Aceh,

development in sectors such as education and infrastructure has shown relatively good progress. However, inequalities in welfare across regions and social groups still exist (Khoerotunnisa et al., 2025). In Papua, issues of equitable distribution are more apparent, as poverty rates remain high despite the continuous increase in special autonomy funds. This condition indicates that the distribution of development benefits has not yet been fully felt by those who need it most (Wardani, I.

S, 2024). The use of Rawls’ theory in this study is based on the view that social justice in the implementation of special autonomy is not merely about budget allocation, but also about the extent to which policies are able to genuinely improve people’s quality of life. If development benefits are still predominantly enjoyed by certain groups or regions, then the objective of social justice within the special autonomy policy has not been fully achieved.

Previous Studies

No	Researcher & Year	Title	Method	Findings
1	Setiawan, H., Choirunnisa, C., & Ningrum, R. P. (2022)	Challenges of Two Decades of Special Autonomy in Aceh and Papua: Distortion or Opportunity	Qualitative (literature review)	Large funds have not significantly improved community welfare, and policies need to be better targeted. UNICEF Indonesia (2022) shows that Human Development Index (HDI) in Papua remains below the national average.
2	Sufajar, R., Sadiyatunnimah, S., Muqaddim, & Cheguevara, C. (2025)	Comparative Study of Special Autonomy in Aceh and Papua	Qualitative	Aceh shows better outcomes due to peace conditions, clearer political systems, and more structured fund management, while Papua still faces various challenges.
3	Arifin, F. (2024)	Asymmetric Decentralization in Indonesia	Qualitative	There is a gap between policy design and implementation due to weak local institutions and poor coordination.

4	Suriadi, H., <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Optimization of Special Autonomy Funds in Papua	Qualitative	Clear planning, improved bureaucratic capacity, and community participation are needed to ensure effective fund utilization.
5	Salmawati, <i>et al.</i> (2025)	The Socioeconomic Impact of Special Autonomy in Papua	Qualitative	Special autonomy has a positive impact, but its effectiveness is limited due to governance and implementation issues.
6	Yulianti, R., <i>et al.</i> (2024)	The Impact of Special Autonomy Funds on Education and Health in Aceh	Quantitative	Education funding shows positive results, while health funding does not show equally strong outcomes.
7	Rahman, S. (2024)	The Impact of Special Autonomy Funds on Regional Economy	Quantitative	Special autonomy funds have a positive effect on regional economic growth.
8	Renaldi Safriansyah, R. S., & Muhammad Asri Bin Mohd Ali (2025)	Pro-Poor Policy Analysis of Special Autonomy Funds in Aceh	Qualitative	Funds are mostly used for long-term development, while direct assistance to the poor remains limited.

Based on a study conducted by Hendy Setiawan, Choirunnisa, and Rahma Puspita Ningrum (2022), entitled *Two Decades of Special Autonomy Challenges in Aceh and Papua: Distortion or Opportunity*, the research examines the conditions of special autonomy after an extended period of implementation. The study aims to assess whether special autonomy continues to provide meaningful opportunities or has deviated from its original objectives. A qualitative approach was employed through a library research method, in which the researchers systematically reviewed a wide range of

academic literature and documents. The findings indicate that substantial fiscal transfers have thus far been insufficient to improve the welfare of communities in Aceh and Papua. Consequently, the existing regulatory framework requires revision to ensure more targeted and effective policy outcomes (Setiawan *et al.*, 2022). study conducted by UNICEF Indonesia (2022) further reveals that human development indicators in Papua including life expectancy, mean years of schooling, and per capita expenditure, remain significantly below the national average, despite more than two decades of special

autonomy fund disbursements. This suggests a persistent gap between policy objectives and achieved outcomes, necessitating a comprehensive and systematic policy evaluation (Setiawan *et al.*, 2022).

A study by Rahmat Sufajar, Siti Sadiyatunnimah, Muqaddim, and Cleorissa Cheguevara (2025) examines a comparative analysis between Aceh and Papua in the implementation of special autonomy. The findings indicate that Aceh has demonstrated comparatively superior outcomes, attributable to the consolidation of peace, a more clearly defined political and regulatory framework, and more structured fiscal management. In contrast, Papua continues to face multidimensional challenges that have constrained the optimization of policy outcomes (Sufajar *et al.*, 2025). A study by Firdaus Arifin (2024) addresses asymmetric decentralization in Indonesia, with particular reference to Aceh and Papua. Arifin's findings reveal a significant discrepancy between formally enacted regulations and their practical implementation on the ground, largely due to the limited institutional capacity of regional bodies and insufficient inter-agency coordination (Arifin, 2024). Furthermore, a study by Hari Suriadi *et al.* (2024) investigates strategies to enhance the effectiveness of special autonomy fund utilization in Papua. The findings underscore the necessity of establishing clear programmatic planning, strengthening the technical capacity of regional apparatuses, and promoting active community participation, so that the allocated funds can generate tangible and equitable benefits for the local population (Suriadi *et al.*, 2024). A study by Salmawati *et al.* (2025) examines the socioeconomic

impact of special autonomy in Papua, revealing a positive association between special autonomy and socioeconomic conditions. Nevertheless, this positive influence remains limited in magnitude due to persisting deficiencies in governance and regulatory implementation (Salmawati *et al.*, 2025).

A study by Reka Yulianti *et al.* (2024) investigates the impact of special autonomy funds on education and health sectors in Aceh. The findings demonstrate that educational funding has yielded favorable outcomes; however, health sector funding has not produced comparable results (Yulianti *et al.*, 2024). A study by Syahrir Rahman (2024) examines the effect of special autonomy funds on regional economic performance, finding that such funds have exerted a positive influence on regional economic growth (Rahman, 2024). A study by Renaldi Safriansyah and Muhammad Asri Bin Mohd Ali (2025) evaluates the extent to which special autonomy funds in Aceh have benefited impoverished communities. The findings indicate that the majority of funds have been allocated toward long-term infrastructure development, while direct financial assistance targeting low-income populations remains comparatively limited (Renaldi Safriansyah & Muhammad Asri Bin Mohd Ali, 2025).

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a literature review method, also referred to as a systematic library research approach. This method was selected given that the research addresses the implementation of special autonomy in Aceh and Papua, which encompasses dimensions of governmental policy, socioeconomic development, and

regional political conditions. Such complex process, the researchers initially conducted a literature search using keywords such as "special autonomy Aceh," "special autonomy Papua," "regional development," "special research findings, policy reports, and autonomy funds," "poverty," "Human Development Index (HDI)," and "regional governance." From these search results, a framework (Creswell, 2014). The data selection process was carried out based on sources utilized in this study were drawn the relevance of content to the research from scientific journals, academic books, focus. Upon completion of the selection official government reports, policy process, a total of 32 sources were obtained, documents, and publications from research comprising scientific journals, books, institutions relevant to special autonomy, government reports, and policy documents, regional development, poverty, and all of which were subsequently analyzed in governance in Aceh and Papua. Literature this study (Nursalam, 2020).

was retrieved through Google Scholar with the assistance of the Publish or Perish (PoP) several sequential stages. The first stage application, DOAJ, digital library involved data reduction, wherein repositories, and official government information directly pertinent to the institutional websites such as the Central research focus was identified and Bureau of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik). concentrated. At this stage, data unrelated to The literature reviewed was limited to the implementation of special autonomy and publications from 2020 to 2025 to ensure socioeconomic development was excluded that the data and discussions remain aligned from the discussion. The second stage with the most current conditions (Afsari, S., involved data categorization, in which the *et al.*, 2021). selected data were systematically grouped

Literature selection was conducted according to thematic clusters, including the based on several criteria. First, sources were implementation of special autonomy, required to be directly relevant to the regional governance, special autonomy fund research themes, namely the implementation management, poverty, education, health, and of special autonomy, economic and social regional development achievements (Zain *et al.*, 2023). The subsequent stage entailed developmental conditions in Aceh and comparative analysis, in which the Papua. Second, sources were required to researchers compared the content across originate from academic publishers, peer- multiple sources to identify similarities and reviewed journals, or official government differences in the implementation of special institutions to ensure the reliability and autonomy in Aceh and Papua. The credibility of the data employed. Third, comparison was conducted with reference to sources were required to present clear and socioeconomic development indicators, accountable data. Fourth, articles or reports including poverty rates, the Human Development Index (HDI), education, health, format to enable comprehensive content and the effectiveness of regional governance. analysis (Reumi, 2023). In the data collection From these comparative findings, the

researchers identified recurring problem This policy grants broader governmental patterns, inhibiting factors, and authority to regional administrations to determinants influencing the divergence in manage their own affairs in terms of development outcomes between the two governance and development. The primary regions (Kum *et al.*, 2022). Subsequently, the objectives of this policy are to accelerate researchers conducted data interpretation regional development, improve community by constructing explanatory analyses based welfare, and reduce socioeconomic on the results derived from the previously inequality. However, empirical evidence compared sources. At this stage, prior from the field indicates that development research findings were integrated with outcomes in Aceh and Papua remain decentralization theory, development considerably divergent. The substantial theory, and social justice theory to ensure special autonomy funds that have been that the discussion remained theoretically allocated have not been fully commensurate grounded and academically substantiated. with improvements in community welfare The final stage comprised conclusion (Setiawan *et al.*, 2022). Empirically, Papua drawing, in which conclusions were continues to record a Human Development formulated based on the comprehensive data Index (HDI) value below the national analysis and structured in accordance with average, ranging approximately between 60 the research objectives, thereby providing and 65 (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi informed insights into the implementation of Papua, 2025), whereas Aceh registers within special autonomy and the differential the range of 72 to 75 (Badan Pusat Statistik socioeconomic development outcomes in Provinsi Aceh, 2025). With respect to Aceh and Papua (Setiawan & Choirunnisa, poverty rates, Papua still records a 2023). proportion of impoverished population exceeding 25% (Kompas.com, 2026), while Aceh falls within the range of 14 to 15% (Pemerintah Aceh, 2025). These figures underscore the persistent disparity between the intended objectives of special autonomy policy and the development outcomes realized on the ground. This is presented in Table 1 below.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

General Overview of Special Autonomy

Implementation in Aceh and Papua

The implementation of special autonomy in Aceh and Papua has been underway for approximately two decades.

Table 1. Comparison of HDI and Poverty Rates in Aceh and Papua

Indicator	Aceh	Papua
Human Development Index (HDI)	72-75	60-65
Poverty Rate	14-15%	>25%

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh (2025), Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Papua (2025), Pemerintah Aceh (2025), and Kompas.com (2026).

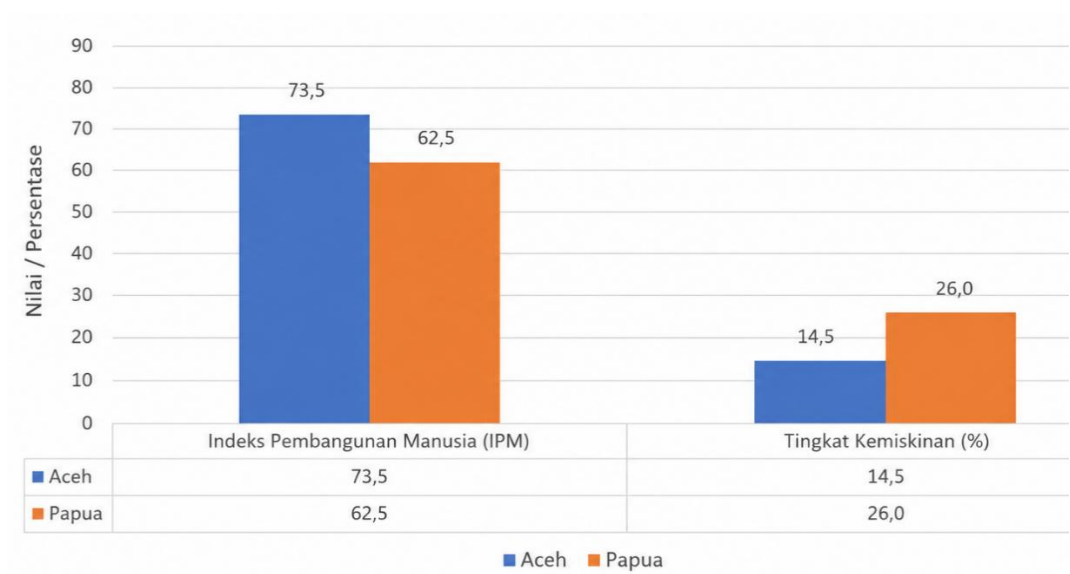
As illustrated in Table 1, of Aceh falls within the range of 72 to 75, socioeconomic development outcomes in whereas Papua remains within the range of Aceh are comparatively superior to those in 60 to 65. These figures indicate that the Papua. The Human Development Index (HDI) quality of education, healthcare, and overall

living standards among the population of of education, healthcare, and quality of life Aceh are relatively higher in comparison to (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh, 2025). Papua. With respect to poverty rates, Aceh With respect to the poverty rate indicator, records a proportion of impoverished Papua records a considerably higher poverty population of approximately 14 to 15%, rate of approximately 26%, accounting for whereas Papua still exceeds 25%. This 64.2% of the total comparative proportion, disparity demonstrates that the while Aceh registers approximately 14.5%, implementation of special autonomy in both or 35.8% (Kompas.com, 2026). These regions has yielded unequal development findings indicate that the implementation of outcomes. Despite receiving equivalent fiscal special autonomy has not produced allocations and special authority from the equivalent developmental impacts across central government, Papua continues to face both regions. Despite both provinces substantially greater developmental receiving substantial special autonomy fund constraints than Aceh. allocations, Papua continues to face

The graph illustrates a notable multidimensional developmental divergence in development outcomes constraints, including infrastructural between Aceh and Papua across two limitations, inadequate equity in public indicators, namely the Human Development service delivery, and weak regional Index (HDI) and the poverty rate. Regarding governance capacity. Conversely, Aceh the HDI indicator, Aceh records a value of demonstrates a relatively more stable approximately 73.5, representing around developmental trajectory following the 54.1% of the total comparative proportion, cessation of armed conflict, enabling regional whereas Papua registers a value of development programs to be implemented in approximately 62.5, or 45.9%. These data a more structured and targeted manner suggest that the quality of human (Setiawan et al., 2022). For further clarity, development in Aceh is relatively higher than this is presented in Figure 1 below. that of Papua, particularly in the dimensions

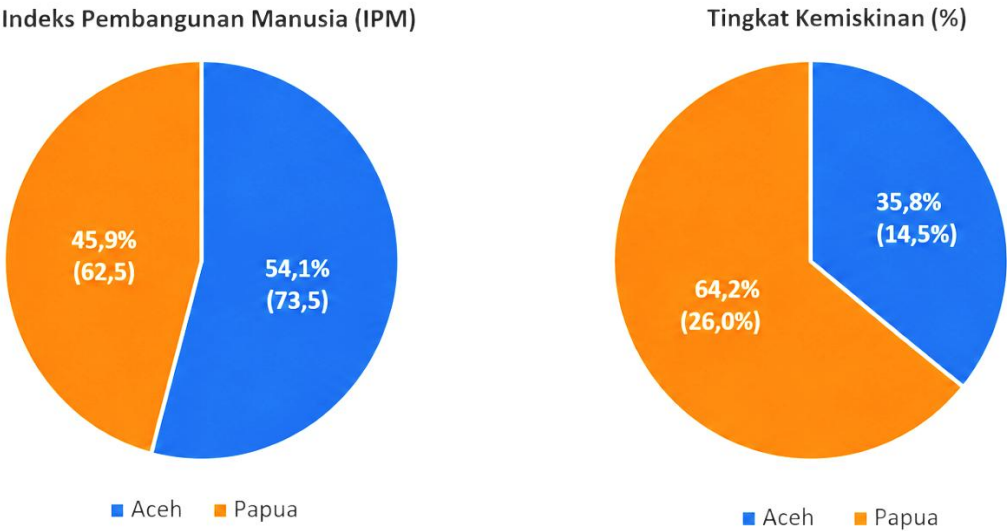
Figure 1. Comparison of Human Development Index (HDI) and Poverty Rates in Aceh and Papua, 2025

Line Chart:



Source: Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh (2025), Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Papua (2025), Pemerintah Aceh (2025), and Kompas.com (2026), processed by the authors using Microsoft Visio 2024.

Pie Chart:



Source: Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh (2025), Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Papua (2025), Pemerintah Aceh (2025), and Kompas.com (2026), processed by the authors using Microsoft Visio 2024.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the rates, Aceh records a proportion of 14.5%, comparison of HDI and poverty rates while Papua reaches 26.0%. These figures demonstrates that Aceh has achieved demonstrate that the poverty rate in Papua comparatively superior socioeconomic remains considerably higher than that of development outcomes relative to Papua. Aceh. This disparity indicates that the Aceh's HDI value reaches 73.5, whereas implementation of special autonomy in both Papua records 62.5, indicating that the regions has not produced equivalent levels of quality of education, healthcare, and overall welfare, despite both receiving special living standards among Aceh's population is authority and fiscal allocations from the relatively higher. With respect to poverty central government. The divergence in

development outcomes suggests that the absence of adequate regional governance success of special autonomy is not solely capacity. Aceh has been relatively more determined by the magnitude of budgetary allocations received by regional administrations. Governance quality, institutional capacity, political stability, and governance structures. Conversely, Papua the effectiveness of development program implementation are among the contributing factors that influence regional development outcomes. Aceh has demonstrated a relatively more stable developmental trajectory following the cessation of armed conflict and the operationalization of the Helsinki Peace Agreement. Greater political stability has enabled development programs and public services to be implemented in a more structured and targeted manner, thereby contributing to improvements in educational quality, infrastructure development, and regional public administration (Yulianti *et al.*, 2024).

From the perspective of Rostow's development theory, Aceh and Papua reflect distinct stages of development. Aceh has begun to demonstrate progress in the public service sector and regional economic development, indicating a more stable developmental trajectory. Papua, on the other hand, continues to grapple with fundamental development challenges, including high poverty rates, infrastructural deficiencies, and limited access to public services. This indicates that the two regions have not reached equivalent stages of development, despite both being subject to the same special autonomy policy framework (Junaedi *et al.*, 2026). From the standpoint of Rawls' social justice theory, these conditions reveal that the distribution of development benefits has not been fully experienced by the broader population segments of the population, particularly among communities residing in remote and impoverished areas. Despite the continued weak oversight mechanisms over the increase in special autonomy fund utilization of special autonomy funds have not yet been sufficient to have thus far been insufficient to development policies (Arifin, 2024). When significantly reduce socioeconomic inequality. This implies that the social justice decentralization theory, these conditions embedded within the illustrate that the devolution of regional implementation of special autonomy have authority does not automatically generate not yet been fully realized, as the benefits of successful development outcomes in the development have not been proportionally

distributed to the most vulnerable and gradual and comparatively more stable underserved communities (Maulana *et al.*, manner than in Papua (Yulianti *et al.*, 2024). 2025).

Conversely, Papua continues to face multidimensional constraints in the implementation of special autonomy.

Comparative Analysis of Development

Outcomes in Aceh and Papua

The degree of success in the implementation of special autonomy in Aceh and Papua can be assessed through several socioeconomic development indicators, including the Human Development Index (HDI), poverty rates, political stability, quality of public services, and equitable regional development (Hasbiah, H, 2023).

Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, Aceh records an HDI value of approximately 73.5 (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh, 2025), whereas Papua registers approximately 62.5 (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Papua, 2025). With respect to poverty indicators, Aceh records a poverty rate of approximately 14.5% (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh, 2025), while Papua remains above 26% (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Papua, 2025). These figures demonstrate that the quality of education, healthcare, and overall living standards among Aceh's population is relatively superior to that of Papua. Aceh's success is reflected in its more stable political conditions following the Helsinki Peace Agreement, the strengthening of regional governance structures, and more directed management of special autonomy funds. These conditions have contributed to more favorable developments in infrastructure, educational services, and healthcare delivery. Furthermore, the presence of local political parties has reinforced community participation in regional governance, thereby facilitating more effective implementation of development policies. The reduction in poverty rates in Aceh has proceeded in a

Consequently, the substantial special autonomy funds allocated have been insufficient to generate equitable development outcomes for the people of Papua (Sufajar *et al.*, 2025). When analyzed through the framework of Rondinelli's decentralization theory, Aceh's relative success demonstrates that regional authority can function more effectively when supported by sound governance and sustained political stability. In contrast, Papua illustrates that decentralization cannot operate optimally in the absence of adequate bureaucratic capacity and robust oversight mechanisms (Kyohairwe, S., Karyeija, G., & Nduhura, A., 2024). From the perspective of Rostow's development theory, Aceh reflects a trajectory progressing toward a more stable stage of development, whereas Papua continues to encounter fundamental developmental obstacles in areas such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Through the lens of Rawls' social justice theory, conditions in Papua indicate that the benefits of development and the distribution of special

autonomy funds have not been fully and development realization in several regions of equitably experienced across the population, Papua remaining disproportionately low particularly among communities in remote relative to the magnitude of budgetary areas and economically disadvantaged allocations provided by the central groups (Maulana *et al.*, 2025). government (Sufajar *et al.*, 2025).

The Gap Between Policy Design and Implementation

There is a gap between the design of have been predominantly directed toward special autonomy policies and their physical infrastructure development rather implementation on the ground. Although the than programs with direct and tangible central government has granted broad impact on impoverished communities. authority and allocated substantial funds to Consequently, despite notable Aceh and Papua, the implementation of improvements in road construction and development programs has not been fully public facility development, the reduction in effective. This situation is influenced by poverty rates has proceeded at a limited regional institutional capacity, weak comparatively slow pace. Furthermore, coordination between the central and interregional development disparities within regional governments, and the uneven Aceh persist, particularly between urban distribution of development across regions. centers and remote and geographically As a result, the goals of special autonomy to isolated areas (Rahman, 2024). When improve public welfare and reduce examined through the framework of socioeconomic inequality have not been Rondinelli's decentralization theory, these optimally achieved (Arifin, 2024). This is conditions illustrate that the devolution of evidenced by development implementation regional authority does not automatically in Papua. In a report released in 2025, the yield effective development outcomes in the non-governmental organization (NGO) absence of adequate institutional capacity Indonesian Human Rights Monitor and sound regional governance structures. documented that despite the continued From the perspective of Rawls' social justice annual increase in special autonomy fund theory, this situation indicates that the allocations, numerous remote inland areas benefits of development and the distribution continue to experience severely limited of special autonomy funds have not been access to education, healthcare services, and fully and equitably experienced across all basic infrastructure, including road segments of the population, particularly networks and electricity supply (The among impoverished communities and those Indonesian Human Rights Monitor, 2025). residing in remote and geographically Sufajar *et al.* further reveal that a marginalized areas (Maulana *et al.*, 2025).

considerable number of development programs have failed to operate optimally, attributable to the limited bureaucratic capacity of regional administrations and inadequate oversight of budget utilization. These conditions have resulted in constraints across the stages of budget

Management of Special Autonomy Funds in Papua

The management of special autonomy funds in Papua continues to face significant

planning, implementation, and oversight. Nevertheless, budget realization in The Directorate General of Fiscal Balance of several regions remains suboptimal and has the Ministry of Finance recorded that the not been fully targeted. The Supreme Audit total Special Autonomy Funds and Additional Board (Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan/BPK) Infrastructure Funds (Dana Tambahan has identified persistent governance Infrastruktur/DTI) for Papua throughout the irregularities in budget management, period of 2002 to 2021 reached IDR 99.58 including delays in fund disbursement, weak trillion, comprising IDR 75.53 trillion in oversight mechanisms, programs misaligned Special Autonomy Funds and IDR 24.04 with community needs, and low quality of trillion in DTI. In a joint working session with regional human resources. Consequently, the the Regional Representatives Council (DPD poverty rate in Papua remains the highest in RI) in 2020, the Deputy Minister of Finance, Indonesia, and access to education, Suahasil Nazara, stated that the total Special healthcare, and basic infrastructure in a Autonomy Funds received by Papua and number of remote inland areas remains West Papua had reached IDR 126.99 trillion, severely limited. These conditions indicate with Papua receiving IDR 93.05 trillion and that the effectiveness of Special Autonomy West Papua IDR 33.94 trillion. Despite the Fund management in Papua requires substantial magnitude of these allocations, substantial improvement to ensure that its development outcomes have been assessed benefits are genuinely and equitably as falling short of expectations, as Papua's experienced by the population (Nussy, Y. S, poverty rate remains the highest in 2026).

Indonesia and its Human Development Index

(HDI) continues to register below the national average. The central government has also identified various irregularities in fund management, including approximately IDR 1.85 trillion in Special Autonomy Funds deposited in time deposits, IDR 556 billion in expenditures lacking adequate supporting documentation, and alleged fictitious activities amounting to approximately IDR 29 billion. Additional constraints arise from weak oversight mechanisms, poor regional governance quality, limited human resource capacity among regional apparatuses, and suboptimal allocation of education and health budgets. These conditions indicate that the substantial Special Autonomy Fund allocations have not been fully accompanied by effective budget utilization to improve the welfare of the Papuan population (Norhadini, 2026).

Socioeconomic Impact of Special Autonomy in Papua

The implementation of special autonomy in Papua has produced observable changes in the socioeconomic conditions of the population, particularly in the sectors of education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure development. Regional governments have received substantial special autonomy fund allocations intended to accelerate development and improve the quality of life of the population. Several social indicators have demonstrated progress, including increased school participation rates, expanded educational and healthcare facilities, and road and transportation infrastructure development across several regions of Papua (Salmawati *et al.*, 2025). Nevertheless, the impacts of this policy have yet to manifest equitably. Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics of Papua

Province, the poverty rate in Papua remains above 26%, considerably higher than the national average (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Papua, 2025). The Human Development Index (HDI) value of Papua remains within the range of 60 to 65, indicating that the quality of education, healthcare, and overall living standards Papuan population remains limited and has remains relatively low in comparison to other provinces in Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Papua, 2025). Indonesia reveals that Papua continues to lag behind in various human development indicators relative to the national average, particularly in the dimensions of education, healthcare, and community welfare. This indicates that the impact of special autonomy policy on the socioeconomic conditions of the Papuan population remains limited and has not yet been fully capable of reducing developmental disparities (Hamrun, N. R, 2025).

Furthermore, life expectancy among the Papuan population remains below the national average, and the mean years of schooling in several remote inland areas remain critically low due to limited access to education. Life expectancy in Papua falls within the range of 67 to 69 years, substantially below the national average of 74.5 years. Furthermore, the average length of schooling in some remote areas is still very lagging, such as in Mountainous Papua where it is only 4.76 years (equivalent to 4th grade of elementary school) and Central Papua recording 6.27 years (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). At the national level, the government, through the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), employs socioeconomic indicators to assess community welfare levels and the success of regional development. One such indicator is the open unemployment rate. Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Open Unemployment Rate (Tingkat Pengangguran Terbuka/TPT) in Papua in 2025 remains within the range of 6 to 7%, higher than that of several other provinces in Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Papua, 2025). These conditions indicate that employment opportunities in Papua remain limited and that regional economic growth has not been fully capable of absorbing the local workforce. When analyzed through the framework of Rostow's development theory, conditions in Papua indicate that the regional development process remains at a fundamental developmental stage, as access to public services and economic services, and educational facilities. These development has yet to progress equitably. From the perspective of Rawls' social justice theory, this situation demonstrates that the distribution of development benefits and special autonomy funds has not been fully realized by the most vulnerable segments of the population, particularly communities residing in remote inland and geographically isolated areas (Maulana *et al.*, 2025).

From an economic perspective, limited and that regional economic growth unemployment rates and interregional development disparities in Papua remain considerably high. Economic development has been concentrated predominantly in urban areas, while remote inland regions continue to experience limited access to transportation, electricity, healthcare to public services and economic services, and educational facilities. These conditions have resulted in the benefits of development remaining inequitably distributed across the Papuan population. Consequently, despite the continued increase in special autonomy fund allocations, the welfare of communities in several regions has yet to undergo significant improvement (Arifin, 2024). UNDP

Impact of Special Autonomy Funds on Development in Aceh

In Aceh, special autonomy funds have demonstrated varying impacts across different development sectors. In the education sector, the impact has been considerably positive, as evidenced by increased school participation rates, the construction of educational facilities, and improvements in human resource quality. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that Aceh's Human Development Index (HDI) value falls within the range of 73 to 75 in 2025, reflecting progress in the dimensions of education, healthcare, and overall living standards (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh, 2025). Furthermore, school participation rates and mean years of schooling among the Acehnese population have demonstrated improvement in recent years, contributing to an overall enhancement in regional educational quality. In the healthcare sector, however, the impact of special autonomy funds has yet to produce outcomes equivalent to those observed in the education sector. Aceh continues to face limitations in healthcare facilities, medical personnel, and access to healthcare services, particularly in remote and island areas. These conditions have resulted in inequitable healthcare service quality and persistent interregional disparities (Yulianti *et al.*, 2024).

The divergence in outcomes between the education and healthcare sectors is attributable to several factors. In the education sector, development programs are more readily implementable, as school construction, educational assistance, and scholarship programs have clearly defined targets and can be directly experienced by the community. Additionally, educational healthcare services

budget management in Aceh is relatively more structured, supported by regional policy frameworks and more effective oversight mechanisms. Conversely, the healthcare sector demands more complex resource requirements, including the availability of medical personnel, hospital facilities, medical equipment, and service distribution extending to remote areas. The geographical conditions of Aceh, which encompasses island territories and remote areas, render healthcare service delivery considerably more challenging to reach than educational services. Furthermore, healthcare development requires a considerably longer timeframe to yield measurable outcomes, given its dependence on service quality improvements, behavioral changes among the population, and the equitable distribution of healthcare workers. Consequently, despite the continued allocation of special autonomy funds, developmental outcomes in the healthcare sector have not materialized as rapidly as those in the education sector. These conditions indicate that the effectiveness of special autonomy fund management in Aceh remains uneven across development sectors (Yulianti *et al.*, 2024). When examined through the framework of Rondinelli's decentralization theory, these conditions illustrate that the success of regional development is substantially influenced by the capacity of regional governments to manage development programs in accordance with community needs. From the perspective of Rawls' social justice theory, this situation indicates that the benefits of development have not been fully and equitably experienced across the population, particularly among communities in remote areas who continue to face limited access to healthcare services (Maulana *et al.*, 2025).

Impact of Special Autonomy Funds on Regional Economic Development

Special autonomy funds, as stipulated in Law No. 11 of 2006 Article 183, constitute revenue for the Acehese government designated to finance regional development, particularly in the sectors of infrastructure, education, healthcare, community economic empowerment, and poverty alleviation. These funds are disbursed over a period of 20 years under an allocation scheme of 2% of the national General Allocation Fund (Dana Alokasi Umum) ceiling during the first 15 years, and 1% during the subsequent five years. Through these funds, regional governments possess greater fiscal capacity to implement development programs and accelerate regional economic growth (Nazaruddin, N, 2024). Empirically, special autonomy funds have exerted a discernible impact on Aceh's economic development. Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics of Aceh Province, the Regional Gross Domestic Product (PDRB) of Aceh has demonstrated an upward trajectory in recent years, particularly in the construction, trade, agriculture, and government services sectors (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh, 2025). Furthermore, Aceh's economic growth in 2024 fell within the range of 4 to 5%, reflecting an increase in regional economic activity. The development of road infrastructure, public facilities, and community economic empowerment programs has further stimulated economic activity across various regions of Aceh (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh, 2025).

From an employment perspective, special autonomy funds have contributed to labor absorption through regional development projects and increased community economic activity. The Open

Unemployment Rate (Tingkat Pengangguran Terbuka/TPT) in Aceh falls within the range of 5 to 6%, indicating that regional economic development has begun to generate employment opportunities for the population, albeit not yet at an optimal level (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Aceh, 2025). Additionally, several community economic empowerment programs, including small business assistance, vocational training, and local business sector development, have contributed to improving household income levels. Nevertheless, the relationship between special autonomy funds and economic growth has not yet produced fully equitable outcomes. The majority of Aceh's economic growth continues to be supported predominantly by government expenditure and specific economic sectors, while industrial sector development and private investment remain comparatively limited. Consequently, improvements in economic growth have not been fully capable of reducing poverty rates at an accelerated pace. This is reflected in Aceh's poverty rate, which remains within the range of 14 to 15%, higher than the national average (Pemerintah Aceh, 2025). These conditions indicate that special autonomy funds have demonstrated a positive association with regional economic growth, particularly through infrastructure development and the stimulation of community economic activity. However, the effectiveness of these funds continues to be influenced by the quality of regional governance, equitable development distribution across regions, and the capacity of regional governments to develop productive economic sectors capable of generating sustainable employment opportunities (Rahman, 2024). When analyzed through the framework of Rostow's development theory, conditions in Aceh

reflect a trajectory progressing toward a more stable stage of economic development, as regional economic activity and development continue to demonstrate sustained improvement (Junaedi, 2020).

Allocation Priorities of Special Autonomy Funds in Aceh

The utilization of special autonomy funds in Aceh has been predominantly directed toward long-term development initiatives, including infrastructure, education, healthcare, and the strengthening of public services. The Acehese government has channeled these funds toward road construction, educational facilities, hospitals, and various community empowerment programs. Infrastructure development has contributed to increased regional economic activity by improving transportation access and goods distribution. Furthermore, educational development has concurrently enhanced the quality of human resources among the Acehese population (Renaldi & Ali, 2025). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of infrastructure development in reducing poverty has yet to yield fully optimal outcomes. The poverty rate in Aceh has declined gradually; however, it remains within the range of 14 to 15%, higher than the national average (Pemerintah Aceh, 2025). This situation demonstrates that infrastructure development has not yet fully and directly impacted the incomes of the poor. Most development is still concentrated on physical projects, while productive economic programs directly targeting the poor, such as small business empowerment, job training, and job development, have not been fully implemented. Consequently, the benefits of development have not been felt equally by all groups in society.

In Papua, the utilization of special autonomy funds has been predominantly directed toward basic infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and the reduction of interregional development disparities. Regional governments have channeled special autonomy funds toward road and bridge construction, healthcare facilities, schools, and community social assistance programs. However, development implementation in Papua continues to face multidimensional constraints, including challenging geographical conditions, limited regional bureaucratic capacity, and weak budget utilization oversight mechanisms (Arifin, 2024). As a consequence, despite the substantial magnitude of special autonomy funds received by Papua, the poverty rate remains above 26% and the Human Development Index (HDI) continues to fall within the range of 60 to 65 (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Papua, 2025). Interregional development disparities remain pronounced, particularly between urban centers and remote inland areas. A considerable proportion of communities in remote areas continue to experience limited access to education, healthcare services, electricity, and transportation. These conditions indicate that the utilization of special autonomy funds in Papua has not been fully effective in generating equitable community welfare.

When examined through the framework of Rondinelli's decentralization theory, conditions in both Aceh and Papua illustrate that the effectiveness of special autonomy fund utilization is substantially determined by the governance capacity of regional administrations and the effectiveness of development program implementation. From the perspective of Rawls' social justice theory, this situation

indicates that the benefits of development have not been fully and equitably experienced by impoverished communities and those residing in remote areas, both in Aceh and Papua (Maulana *et al.*, 2025).

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of special autonomy in Aceh and Papua has yielded divergent development outcomes. Aceh has demonstrated comparatively superior achievements relative to Papua, particularly across indicators of the Human Development Index (HDI), poverty rates, educational attainment, and regional governance stability. Aceh's relative success is attributable to more stable political conditions, a more directed governance framework, and comparatively more effective management of special autonomy funds. In contrast, Papua continues to face multidimensional constraints, including pronounced interregional development disparities, limited institutional capacity, low human resource quality, and inequitable public service delivery. These conditions have resulted in the impact of special autonomy on the welfare of the Papuan population remaining suboptimal.

This study demonstrates that the success of special autonomy is not solely determined by the magnitude of funds allocated by the central government, but is substantially influenced by the effectiveness of governance, regional institutional capacity, sociopolitical stability, and the precision of development budget utilization. Special autonomy funds have indeed exerted a positive impact on educational development, infrastructure, and regional economic growth. However, the benefits of development have not been fully and

equitably experienced across all segments of the population, particularly among impoverished communities and those residing in remote and geographically isolated areas.

The implications of this study indicate that the evaluation of special autonomy policy must extend beyond an assessment of fund allocation magnitude to encompass the quality of development program implementation and the equitable distribution of development outcomes across regions. This study may serve as a substantive reference for both central and regional governments in improving the governance of special autonomy funds to more effectively enhance community welfare.

The central and regional governments are encouraged to strengthen inter-governmental coordination in the implementation of special autonomy to ensure that development programs are implemented in a more structured and community-responsive manner. The management of special autonomy funds should be more focused on programs directly associated with poverty reduction, improvement of healthcare and educational services, and community economic empowerment in remote areas. Furthermore, the institutional capacity and human resource quality of regional governments should be enhanced through systematic training, oversight, and periodic program evaluation. The oversight mechanism for special autonomy fund utilization should be rendered more transparent and publicly accessible to ensure that development implementation proceeds more effectively and is accurately targeted.

Future research is encouraged to incorporate field-based data and

quantitative approaches so that research findings on special autonomy in Aceh and Papua may yield broader and more granular insights.

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